

10¢ BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

NOV.

MAGAZINE

THE BLACK BAT STRIKES AGAIN

A LONG BOOK-LENGTH
NOVEL FEATURING
TONY QUINN,
A NEW NEMESIS
OF CRIME

By G.
WAYMAN
JONES



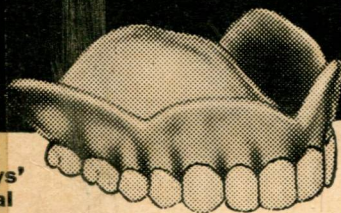
A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

Enjoy BEAUTIFUL Natural-Looking FALSE TEETH

LOWEST PRICES
SEND NO
MONEY



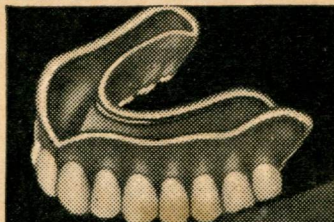
60
Days'
Trial



Mouth Comfort!

ELSIE E. BOLAND,
Norton, Kansas, writes:

"Enclosed find two pictures. One shows how I looked before I got my teeth; the other one, afterwards. Your teeth are certainly beautiful. They look more natural than some that cost three and four times what I paid for mine."

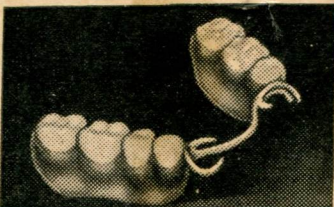


UNBREAKABLE ROOFLESS



**FIT-RITE TEETH
BY MAIL**

We make to measure to fit you individually—BY MAIL—the World's No. 1 FIT-RITE Dental Plates for men and women—from an impression of your own mouth taken quickly and easily by our FIT-RITE improved method. We have thousands of enthusiastic satisfied customers all over the country wearing teeth we made by mail at sensible prices.

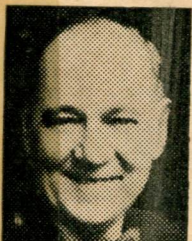


UNBREAKABLE PARTIAL



MRS. MARTHA A. WEBB, Jacksonville, Florida, writes: "My plate is not only a perfect fit, but a beautiful piece of work. I took my own impression under your instructions without the least difficulty. I could not have duplicated my

plate here for less than four times the price you charged me."



MR. RAYMOND MILLS, Elgin, Illinois, writes: "It affords me great pleasure to inform you that I have experienced no difficulty in using this plate with comfort and without the assistance of any dental adhesive. I am now able to masticate different varieties of food,

as well as raw apples and hard candy, just as well as I did with my natural teeth. During the trial period, not a single sign of gum soreness developed."

AT ROCK-BOTTOM PRICES

If you find out what others have paid for theirs, you will be astounded when you see how little ours will cost you! By reading our catalog, you will learn how to save half or more on dental plates for yourself. Monthly payments possible.

ON 60 DAYS' TRIAL

Make us prove you can't beat our fit, work or price. Wear our teeth on trial for as long as 60 days. Then, if you are not perfectly satisfied with them, they will not cost you a cent.

With Money-Back Guarantee of Satisfaction

No money need be risked. We guarantee that if you are not completely satisfied with the teeth we make for you, then any time within 60 days we will immediately refund every cent you have paid us for them. We take your word.

Try **FIT-RITE**
MADE IN THE U.S.A.
False Teeth

TO EAT WITH PLEASURE . . . TO LAUGH
HEARTILY . . . TO LOOK YEARS YOUNGER . . .
TO GUARD YOUR HEALTH . . . TO SPEAK
DISTINCTLY . . . TO ENJOY LIFE!

OUR dentures are set with life-like, pearly-white, genuine, porcelain teeth; constructed from finest materials, with expert workmanship, to give life-long service. We make all styles of plates. A dentist who has had many years' experience in making and fitting dental plates, that look right and fit right supervises the making of each plate.

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW
**FREE UNITED STATES
DENTAL COMPANY**

Dept. E-82, 1555 Milwaukee Ave.
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Send, without obligation, your **FREE** impression material, catalog, and easy directions.

NAME

ADDRESS

(Print Clearly)

FREE

IMPRESSION MATERIAL, catalog with new low prices and easy directions. Don't put this off. Do it TODAY! CLIP COUPON OR WRITE.

Nowhere Else Can You Obtain Genuine FIT-RITE False Teeth

← We Also Repair or Reproduce Old Plates—48-Hour Service →

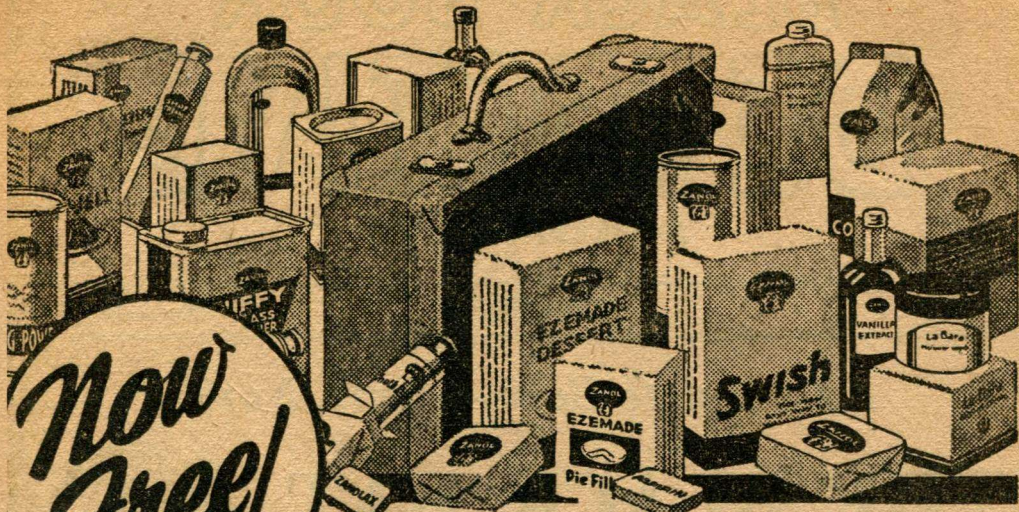
UNITED STATES DENTAL COMPANY

THE WORLD'S LARGEST LABORATORY MAKING DENTAL PLATES ONLY

DR. G. M. COLLINS, CHIEF OF STAFF

1555-1557 MILWAUKEE AVE., DEPT. E-82, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

THIS BIG MONEY-MAKING OUTFIT...



Now Free!

Get Started At Once On a Fine Paying FOOD ROUTE

would you like to have a fine business of your own—a simple Food Route on which you can make good money your very day? Here's your big chance if act now. To an honest, reliable or woman in any open locality, I will give—FREE—complete business equipment containing absolutely everything needed to run a fine-paying neighborhood Food Route. You don't d me a penny. If you want to er yourself—want cash to spend—ney to save—the means to live in ifort—let me show you your big nee.

Without any previous experience, can now own a simple, pleasant, ified Food Route—a profitable all-round business of your own, in ch your home is your headquarters. training course required.

Be a Food Distributor

complete valuable Display Outfit I give you FREE is absolutely ou need to run a fine-paying neighborhood Food Route. And I am willing extend liberal credit so you can la splendid business on my capital. od Distributors make good money

because they handle daily necessities that people simply must buy. You will distribute our guaranteed, uniform high quality products fresh from our own pure food kitchens and laboratories. You will make calls on your list of regular customers, take orders, make deliveries, and pocket a liberal share of every dollar you take in.

Splendid Cash Profits

You owe it to yourself to write and see what wonderful success so many others have enjoyed with this simple money-making Plan. Let me mail you full particulars—then you can judge whether you want to start right in making money at once. You can devote your full time or part time.

Everything You Need —FREE

I will give you FREE a complete valuable Display Outfit, including a big assortment of regular full-size packages. Without your sending me one penny, I will also give you a simple-sure-fire Plan which anyone can fol-

low. I will give you advertising material and positively everything else you need to make good profits your very first day. I will help you every step of the way.

In addition to your fine cash earnings, you can get food products and over one hundred other daily household necessities for your own use at wholesale price—so you save money as well as make money.

Get Full Particulars —NOW!

This is a sincere offer made by a big, reliable, old-established company operating from Coast to Coast. Write at once for full particulars. Unless you take advantage of my remarkable Free Outfit Offer now, you may be missing the very money-making opportunity you have been looking for. Strike out for yourself! Be independent! Make money! Enjoy life! Remember—you don't send me a penny. Just fill out and send the coupon and I will mail you full particulars. Do this TODAY!

E. J. MILLS, President
7974 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, O.

MAIL COUPON
for Full Details of FREE OFFER

E. J. MILLS, President,
7974 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Without the slightest obligation on my part, please mail me full particulars about your offer of a Complete Free Outfit, so that I can start making money at once on a Local Food Route of my own.

Name.....

Address.....

(Please print or write plainly)

• EVERY STORY BRAND-NEW •

BLACK BOOK

DETECTIVE

MAGAZINE.

Vol. 10, No. 1

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November, 1939

A Complete Book-Length Novel

THE BLACK BAT STRIKES AGAIN



Featuring Tony Quinn, Nemesis of Crime

By G. WAYMAN JONES

A Series of Mass Murders Sets Tony Quinn, the Lightning-Fast Nemesis of Crime, on the Trail of a Satanic Ring of Insurance Killers Who Make a Profitable Business of Slaughter! Follow the Black Bat as He Comes to Grips with the Most Vicious Gang of Criminals He Has Ever Encountered!.....14

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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE MAGAZINE. Published bi-monthly by Better Publications, Inc., at 4690 Diversoy Ave., Chicago, Ill. N. L. Pines, President. Editorial and executive offices, 22 West 48th St., New York, N. Y. Entered as second-class matter November 14, 1933, at the Post Office at Chicago, Ill., under Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1939 by Better Publications, Inc. Yearly, \$6.00; single copies, \$1.10; Canadian and foreign, postage extra. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the names of any living person or existing institution are used, it is a coincidence. Manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope and are submitted at the author's risk.

Read our companion magazines: Popular Sports Magazine, Popular Western, G-Men, Thrilling Western, Thrilling Detective, Thrilling Adventures, Thrilling Love, The Phantom Detective, The Lone Eagle, Sky Fighters, Popular Detective, Thrilling Ranch Stories, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Startling Stories, Strange Stories, Thrilling Mystery, Texas Rangers, Popular Love, Everyday Astrology, Detective Novels Magazine, Range Riders, Thrilling Sports, West and Masked Rider Western Magazine.



I jumped from \$18 a week to \$50 -- a Free Book started me toward this **GOOD PAY IN RADIO**

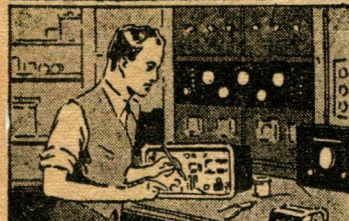
**HERE'S
How it
Happened**
by S. J. E.
(NAME AND ADDRESS
SENT UPON REQUEST)



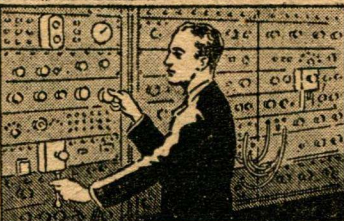
"I had an \$18 a week job in a shoe factory. I'd probably be at it today if I hadn't read about the opportunities in Radio and started training at home for them."



"The training National Radio Institute gave me was so practical I was soon ready to make \$5 to \$10 a week in spare time servicing Radio sets."



"When I finished training I accepted a job as serviceman with a Radio store. In three weeks I was made service manager at more than twice what I earned in the shoe factory."



"Eight months later N. R. I. Employment Department sent me to Station KWCR as a Radio operator. Now I am Radio Engineer at Station WSUI. I am also connected with Television Station W9XX."



"N. R. I. Training took me out of a low-pay shoe factory job and put me into Radio at good pay. Radio is growing fast."



Find out today how I Train You at Home to BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN

**J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 25 Years**

**Many Make \$5, \$10 a Week Extra
in Spare Time While Learning**

**Fixing Radios while learning and equip you
for full time work after you graduate.**

THIS IS A YOUNG, growing field with many, offering many good pay spare time and full time job opportunities. And you don't have to give up your present job to become a Radio Technician. I train you right at home in your spare time.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my course in Radio and Television; shows many letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postcard —NOW!

**J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. 9M09, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.**

**Why Many Radio Technicians
Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week**

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and service men. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, Commercial Radio; loudspeaker systems, electronic devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

MAIL NOW • Get 64 page book FREE



**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 9M09,
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**

Dear Mr. Smith: Send me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio" which points out Radio's opportunities and tells how you train men at home to be Radio Technicians. (Write Plainly.)

NAME..... AGE.....
ADDRESS.....
CITY..... STATE.....

A Money-Making Opportunity for Men of Character

EXCLUSIVE FRANCHISE FOR AN INVENTION EXPECTED TO REPLACE A MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR INDUSTRY

Costly Work Formerly "Sent Out" by Business Men Now Done by Themselves at a Fraction of the Expense

This is a call for men everywhere to handle exclusive agency for one of the most unique business inventions of the day.

Forty years ago the horse and buggy business was supreme—today almost extinct. Twenty years ago the phonograph industry ran into many millions—today practically a relic. Only a comparatively few foresighted men saw the fortunes ahead in the automobile and the radio. Yet irresistible waves of public buying swept these men to fortune, and sent the buggy and the phonograph into the discard. So are great successes made by men able to detect the shift in public favor from one industry to another.

Now another change is taking place. An old established industry—an integral and important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—is in thousands of cases being replaced by a truly astonishing, simple invention which does the work better—more reliably—AND AT A COST OFTEN AS LOW AS 2% OF WHAT IS ORDINARILY PAID! It has not required very long for men who have taken over the rights to this valuable invention to do a remarkable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

Not a "Gadget"— Not a "Knick-Knack"—

but a valuable, proved device which has been sold successfully by business novices as well as seasoned veterans.

Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never dreamed of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by dealers of great corporations—by their branches—by doctors, newspapers, publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to convince a man that he should use an electric bulb to light his office instead of a gas lamp. Nor do you have to sell the same business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at that very moment—and the desirability of saving the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

Some of the Savings You Can Show

You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for \$11 which formerly could have cost them over \$200. A building supply corporation pays our man \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,600! An automobile dealer pays our representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense of \$88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. There are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these field reports which hammer across dazzling, convincing money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

Profits Typical of the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, \$5.83 can be your share. On \$1,500 worth of business, your share can be \$1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth \$6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth \$67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

This Business Has Nothing to Do With House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. Selling is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever size the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

EARNINGS

One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A Connecticut man writes he has made \$55.00 in a single day's time. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$5 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

No Money Need Be Risked

In trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. If you are looking for a business that is not overworked—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or fact into which you can set foot—regardless of size—the necessity but does not have any price cutting to coo with as other necessities do—that because you do the sales in exclusive territory is your own but that pays more on some individual sales than many in a week and sometimes in a month's time—if such a looks as if it is worth investigating, get in touch at once for the rights in your territory—don't because the chances are that if you do wait, someone will have written to us in the meantime—and if it out that you were the better man—we'd both be it. So for convenience, use the coupon below—but send it by away—or wire if you wish. But do it now. Ask

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Dept. 4047M, Mobile, Ala.

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F. E. ARMSTRONG, Pres., Dept. 4047M, Mobile
Without obligation to me, send me full information on your proposition.

Name _____

Street or Rural _____

Box No. _____

City _____

State _____

1937
1938
1939
1940

Now
is the time!

**Business is Searching
for YOU, if**

RIGHT now, in many lines, there is a search for really *good* men—managers, leaders—men who can take charge of departments, businesses, branch offices, and get things humming.

As always, there are not enough ordinary jobs to go 'round—but rarely before, in the history of American business, has there been so much room at the *top*! And new jobs are being created by the business pick-up in many lines—jobs that pay splendidly and that open the way to lifetime success.

Ordinarily, there would be plenty of men to fill these jobs—men in junior positions who had been studying in spare time. But most men have been letting their training slide during these dark years of depression . . . "What's the use?"—You have heard them say. Perhaps there has been some excuse for sticking to any old kind of a job one could get the past few years—but the door is wide open for the man with ambition and ability **NOW!**

And don't let anyone tell you that "Opportunity Only Knocks Once"—that's one of the untruthful sayings ever circulated. Op-

portunities flourish for *every* American every day of his life.

Far more to the point is to be ready—to be *prepared*—to make yourself *interesting* to the big-time employer—and LaSalle offers you a short-cut method of qualifying for opportunity jobs in accounting, law, traffic, executive management, and kindred occupations.

LaSalle Extension is 30 years old—averages over 30,000 enrollments a year—60 American firms each employ 500 or more LaSalle-trained men—surveys show that many LaSalle students attain 40% salary increase after graduation—10% of all C.P.A.'s in the U.S.A. are LaSalle-alumni.

Why not find out what LaSalle has done and is doing for men in *your* position? Send and get the facts; see what LaSalle can do for you, personally!

There's no question about it—business is picking up—jobs are looking for *men*—the time has come for you to *qualify* for prosperity. Mail this coupon today!

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earnest about my success and I would like to have your special—without any cost or obligation to me—about my opportunities for success training in the business field I have checked:

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☐ Modern Salesmanship
☐ Commercial Law
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☐ Expert Bookkeeping

☐ Industrial Management
☐ Modern Foremanship
☐ Business Correspondence
☐ Business English
☐ Effective Speaking
☐ C. P. A. Coaching
☐ Stenotypy

Ask for one of these booklets—or a similar one on your own field of business. They are free!



Name.....Age.....

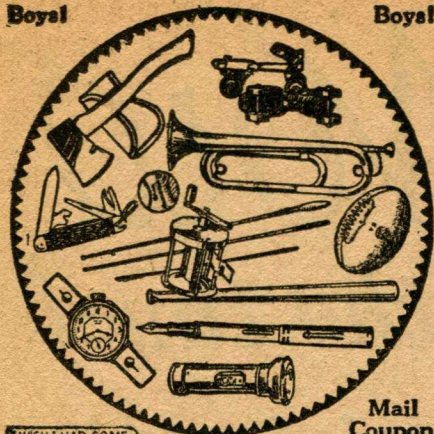
Position.....Address.....

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ΔΗΜΟΣΙΟΓΡΑΦΟΣ
Γεραίου 19 — ΑΘΗΝΑΙ

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Boys!

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Mail
Coupon



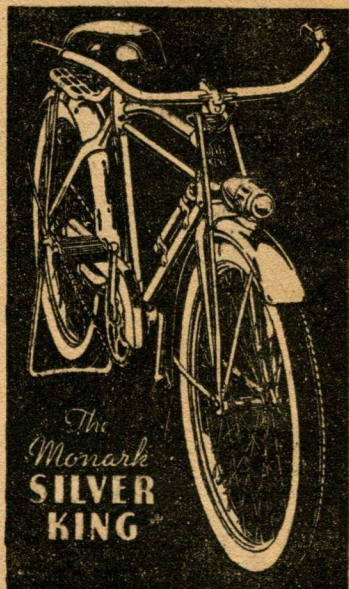
HOW proud you'll be to own this swift new bike or any of our 300 other big prizes. You'll MAKE MONEY while you earn them, too. It's easy to start. Need not interfere with school. Just deliver our popular magazines to people whom you secure as customers in your neighborhood. Some boys earn a prize such as a model airplane or a compo-pearl knife the first day. Perhaps you can, too. Hurry! Mail the coupon NOW.

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The Crowell-Collier Publishing Co., Springfield, Ohio
Dear Jim: Start me earning MONEY and PRIZES at once.

Name..... Age.....

Address

City..... State.....



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WORKS ON 110-Volt Light Socket. This marvelous Dynamic Power Welder does the work of much higher priced types. It is RETAIL, easily portable. WELDS Cylinder Blocks, Bumpers, Fenders, Tanks, Farm Machinery, etc. Will also solder and braze on the lightest material. Works on iron, steel, tin, brass, copper and all other metals. Men without previous experience can make as much as \$5.00 on a one hour repair job. In a year's time, a Dynamic-Welder COSTS YOU LESS THAN 6 CENTS A DAY

Go into business—Open a welding shop now. **AGENTS**—Make big profits selling to garages, factories, janitors and machine shops. Write today for our 10-DAY TRIAL OFFER. **DYNAMIC WELDER COMPANY, 2226-HS SILVERTON ROAD, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.**

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WANTED AT ONCE! Mother, Home, Love, Patriotic, Sacred, Comic or any subject. Don't delay — send us your original poem today for immediate consideration. **RICHARD BROS., 74 Woods Bldg., CHICAGO, ILLINOIS**

See

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CANDID CAMERA CATCHES CO-EDS

In Every Issue of

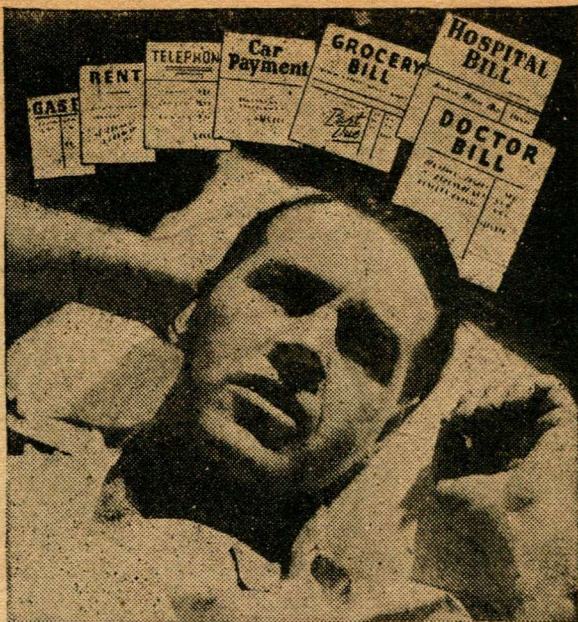
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GAYER AND GRANDER THAN EVER

**15c
AT ALL STANDS**

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What Would It Mean
To YOU To Get Up To
**\$150.00
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Pays Cash For Common Sicknesses And All Types Of Accidents

This policy covers sicknesses common to men and women, covers all types of accidents as happen every day in or by automobiles or trucks, on street, at home, on the farm, in factory, while at work, etc. Benefits payable from FIRST DAY, as explained in policy.

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Here's our sensational offer. Write, giving your age, and the name and relationship of your beneficiary. We will mail you Actual Policy on 10-days' FREE INSPECTION. No obligation whatever. Act now.

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UP TO \$150.00

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accident.

\$100.00

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It's here! The hottest, most sensational, most gripping selling idea of the age! **THE PICTURE RING** — the ring men and women everywhere, rich and poor, young and old want to wear and keep their whole lives long. Why? Because on this beautiful ring is permanently reproduced any photograph, snapshot or picture of some loved one. Yes — reproduced clearly and sharply and made part of the ring itself so it can't rub off, come off or fade off. This sensational new idea is making an unbelievable hit. Men and women—even those without an hour's selling experience — are taking dozens of orders a day and making dollars of profit by the handful. And now, in your territory, YOU can cash in big, every day, with this exciting sure-fire profit-maker and earn money so easily, it will seem more like play than work.

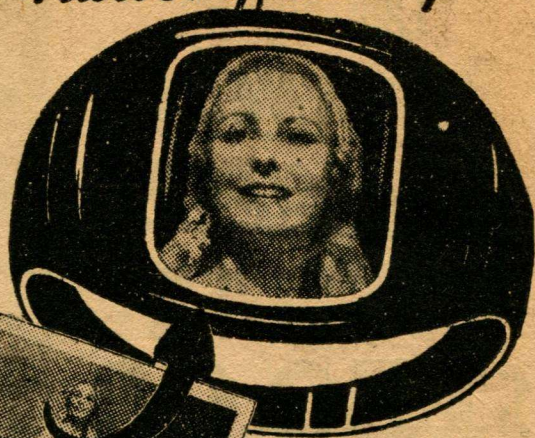
SELLS TO EVERYONE!

A Treasure Remembrance Its Value Beyond Price!

Once women carried pictures of their loved ones in lockets; and men carried them in watch cases. Those days are gone, but the desire to carry the portrait of a loved one is as strong as ever. Not until the amazing secret process for transferring pictures to rings was discovered, was it possible to revive this grand old custom and to satisfy the hunger of every human being to express again this grandest of all sentiments. How mothers and fathers will welcome this opportunity to wear a ring with the most precious setting of all — a picture of their beloved child. How happy every man and woman will be to keep alive the memory of a departed one by carrying with them always, night and day, this beautiful Picture Ring.

Order Your Sample Ring Now! You Don't Risk a Penny!

Never before has anything like this come your way. No competition from anyone — no looking for prospects (they are all around you) — no carrying a big stock or putting any money into goods. Simply showing your sample ring a few times a day, if you only start with your friends and neighbors, will be enough to give you an endless chain of orders. We cut away all red tape and are ready to send you a **SAMPLE RING** at sensationally low special wholesale price of only 48c. The minute you take it out of its beautiful Gift Box you are ready to go after the orders. Rush the coupon below for YOUR sample ring NOW! That's all the outfit you need. It will do all your selling for you. And we make it easy for you to obtain this sample **ABSOLUTELY FREE OF A PENNY COST** under our liberal offer.



Beautiful Permanent Picture Ring Made

From Any Photo or Picture

For only \$1.00 retail—look what you offer. A made-to-measure onyx-like ring adorned with the most precious setting in the world—a reproduction of the picture of a loved one. The ring itself can't tarnish. It will wear forever with ordinary care. The picture of the loved one is clearly, sharply reproduced with surprising faithfulness and becomes an inseparable part of the ring. It can't wear off, rub off, or fade off.

Make Pockets Full of Dollars Just Wearing Ring!

Can you imagine a more novel, more unusual gift than the Picture Ring? How can any man or woman find a more beautiful way to express loving sentiment than giving a wife, a child, a parent, a friend, a sweetheart a Picture Ring with the donor's portrait expertly reproduced! What a surprise! 10 orders a day is an easy goal—20 orders a day are not too much to expect.

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Hundreds of customers write they wouldn't take a fortune for their rings if they couldn't get others. \$5.00 and even \$10.00 would be a small price for the **PICTURE RING**—but as a special offer we send you the beautiful **PICTURE RING**, made from any photo or picture you send for only 48c! Don't wait. Rush the coupon at once for the sample ring on our **NO RISK** plan and see for yourself what a whirlwind money maker this is for you. **ACT RIGHT NOW!**

MOTHER

HUSBAND

BABY



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RING SIZE

Enclosed is photo. Please rush my individually made Picture Ring and starting equipment. Will pay postman 48c plus few cents postage. It is understood that if I am not entirely satisfied, I can return ring within 5 days and you will refund my money in full.
Hand Tinted in Natural Life Like Colors. 10c Extra

Name.....
Address.....
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PICTURE RING CO.

DEPT. B-26

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CINCINNATI OHIO

NOTE: Rush coupon of paper enclosed copy of letter of inquiry. Order on each ring. Rush coupon below for YOUR sample ring NOW! That's all the outfit you need. It will do all your selling for you. And we make it easy for you to obtain this sample ABSOLUTELY FREE OF A PENNY COST under our liberal offer.

for All

Every body

Cash or on

YOU

ING

or

f

Ballon Tires

Headlight; Horn;

Tool Box; Coast

Brake. Yes, fully

equipped. Chro-

mium plated parts.

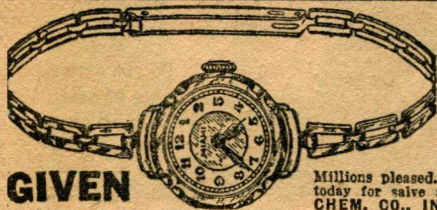
What a Bike! A

brand new sporty

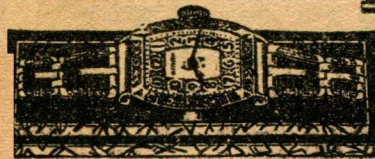
bike for ambitious

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 Everybody gets a premium or Cash Commission. ~~15~~ BIKE or other expensive Premiums YOURS for SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE big colored pictures of the most famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE for CHAPS, CUTS, BURNS, SORES, etc., which you easily send to friends by enclosing a box (with picture FREE) and remitting as explained in catalog sent with goods. SPECIAL: Every order shows 20 Premiums for returning only \$3 collected. Constant users—please write. Millions pleased. Pictures sent free. Salve sold everywhere. Call. Be FIRST! Mail coupon Now! Wilson Chem. Co., Inc., Dept. TA-31, Tyrore, Pa.



GIVEN



Standard size regulation guitar. Regulated—fretted ebony-finger-board—pearl position dots. A MARVEL Yours for **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** beautifully colored art pictures (correct size for framing) with our **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE** used for burns, cuts, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends and neighbors at 25c a box (giving picture Free) and remitting as explained in premium catalog.

SPECIAL—Choice of twenty premiums for returning only \$3.00 collected. (44th yr.) Be first. Send today. Also many kinds of Musical Instruments and other valuable premiums Given. —We trust you. Mail coupon.

WILSON
CHEM. CO., INC.
Dept. TG-31,
TYRONE, PENNA.



GIVEN

Send no money—Nothing to buy
—MAIL COUPON! Size 9 x 9 x 3
complete with cord, plug, switch
and speed control. Plays 10" re-
cords. Mellow tone! Have fun!
POPULAR! YOURS—Easily sell
WHITE CLOVERINE
SALVE to friends at 25c
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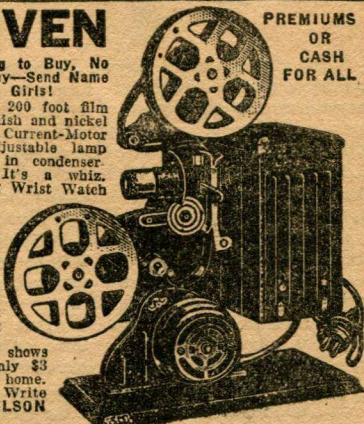
BOTH GIVEN

or Cash Commission, Nothing to Buy, No
Risk—No Cash—Send No Money—Send Name
—Mail Coupon—Boys! Girls!

ELECTRIC PROJECTOR — 200 foot film capacity—all steel, wrinkle finish and nickel trim. 110 volt motor. AC Current-Motor rewind. Tilting device. Adjustable lamp socket. Special bulb, built in condenser. Shows good size picture. It's a whiz.

LADIES! GIRLS! Charming Wrist Watch
—about size of dime—Dainty—
Attractive—Beautiful—
EITHER Movie or Watch

YOURS for SIMPLY GIVING
AWAY FREE beautiful pictures
 with our famous **WHITE COVER-**
LINE SAVING uses for **CHAM-**
BURNS, SORES, etc., which you
 easily sell to friends at 25c a box
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SPECIAL: Catalog of 100 premiums shows
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BE FIRST. Customers waiting. Write
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**PREMIUMS
OR
CASH
FOR ALL**

BOTH GIVEN

Or Big Cash Commission—Nothing to Buy—No Risk—Send No Money—Send Name—Mail Coupon—BOYS! 22 Cal Bolt Action self-cocking Safety Iver Johnson RIFLE, 22 inch LADIES GIRLS! Beautiful, sturdy, American made neat size  EITHER Rifle or Watch YOURS for \$1 FREE big colored pictures with our famous WHITE CHAPS, BURNS, SORES, etc., which you easily sell (FREE) remit as per premium catalog. Wilson Chem.



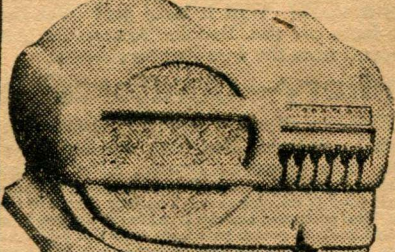
GIVEN! Send No Money!

GUITAR GIVEN

Standard size regulation guitar. Regulated—fretted ebony-finger-board—pearl position dots. A MARVEL Yours for **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** beautifully colored art pictures (correct size for framing) with our **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE** used for burns, cuts, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends and neighbors at 25c a box (giving picture Free) and remitting as explained in premium catalog.

SPECIAL—Choice of twenty premiums for returning only \$3.00 collected. (44th yr.) Be first. Send today. Also many kinds of Musical Instruments and other valuable premiums Given. —We trust you. Mail coupon.

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AMAZING RADIO GIVEN

OR BIG CASH COMMISSION
SEND NO MONEY

NOTHING TO BUY! NO RISK — NO CASH

**Send Name
and Address**

Automatic tuning Super-
heterodyne—AC-DC—No
aerial or ground needed.
Dynamic speaker. Tunes
American broadcasts. Built
in antenna—tubeless
position tuner plus regular
tuning knob. Amazing!
Yours for SIMPLY GIV-
ING—CASH, FREE but
fully colored art pictures
with our **WHITE CLOVER-
INE SALVE** used for burns,
cuts, chaps, sores, etc.,
and for all well known
and neighbors at 25c a box,
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premium catalog. Special
offer—send 3 premium
for returning only \$3 col-
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TODAY—WE TRUST YOU.
MAIL COUPON NOW!
WILSON CHEM. CO., INC.
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TYBONE, PENNA.**

MAIL COUPON NOW
WILSON CHEM. CO., INC.,

Dept. TG-31, Tyrone, Pa. Date.....

Gentlemen: Please send me 12 beautiful art pictures with 12 boxes **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE** to sell at 25c a box (giving picture FREE). I will remit within 30 days, select a premium or keep cash commission as per new premium plan catalog sent with order, postage paid.

Name.....

RD..... Bx..... St.....

Town..... State.....

Print Your Last Name Only in Spaces Below

WRITE, or PASTE COUPON on a POSTAL CARD or MAIL COUPON in an envelope TODAY!

don't Worry about Rupture

• Why put up with days . . . months . . . YEARS of discomfort, worry and fear? Learn now about this perfected invention for all forms of reducible rupture. Surely you keenly desire—you eagerly CRAVE to enjoy life's normal activities and pleasures once again. To work . . . to play . . . to live . . . to love . . . with the haunting Fear of Rupture banished from your thoughts! Literally thousands of ruptured sufferers have entered this Kingdom of Paradise Regained. Why not you? Some wise man said, "Nothing is impossible in this world"—and it is true, for where other trusses have failed is where we have had our greatest success in many cases! Even doctors—thousands of them—have ordered for themselves and their patients. Unless your case is absolutely hopeless, *do not despair*. The coupon below brings our Free Rupture Book in plain envelope. Send the coupon now.

Patented AIR-CUSHION Support Gives Nature a Chance to CLOSE the OPENING

Think of it! Here's a surprising yet simple-acting invention that permits Nature to close the opening—that holds the rupture securely but gently, day and night, at work and at play! Thousands of grateful letters express heartfelt thanks for results beyond the expectation of the writers. What is this invention—How does it work? Will it help me? Get the complete, fascinating facts on the Brooks Automatic Air Cushion Appliance—send now for free Rupture Book.

Cheap—Sanitary—Comfortable

Rich or poor—ANYONE can afford to buy this remarkable, LOW-PRICED rupture invention! But look out for imitations and counterfeits. The Genuine Brooks Air-Cushion Truss is never sold in stores or by agents. Your Brooks is made up, after your order is received, to fit your particular case. You buy direct at the low "maker-to-user" price. The perfected Brooks is sanitary, lightweight, inconspicuous. Has no hard pads to gouge painfully into the flesh, no stiff, punishing springs, no metal girdle to rust or corrode. It brings heavenly comfort and security—while the Automatic Air Cushion continually works, in its own, unique way, to help Nature get results! Learn what this patented invention can mean to you—send coupon quick!



C. E. BROOKS,
Inventor

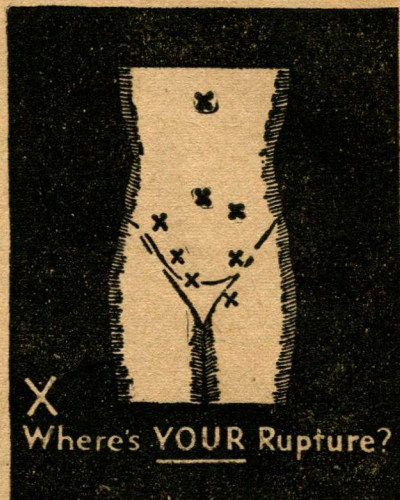
SENT ON TRIAL!

No . . . don't order a Brooks now—FIRST get the complete revealing explanation of this world-famous rupture invention. THEN decide whether you want the comfort—the freedom from fear and worry—the security—the same amazing results thousands of men, women and children have reported. They found our invention the answer to their prayers! Why can't you? And you risk nothing as the complete appliance is SENT ON TRIAL. Surely you owe it to yourself to investigate this no-risk trial. Send for the facts now—today—hurry! All correspondence strictly confidential.

FREE! Latest Rupture Book Explains All!

Sent You in Plain Envelope Just Clip and Send Coupon ➔

Brooks Appliance Co., 480-J State St., Marshall, Mich.



PROOF!

Proof of the value and outstanding merit of the BROOKS APPLIANCE is clearly shown by the fact that over 9000 doctors have ordered it for themselves or their patients. One doctor alone has ordered for his patients over 400 Brooks Appliances. Follow your doctor's advice! If he says you have a reducible rupture and advises a proper-fitting support, don't subject yourself to further delay, which may prove dangerous, but send us your name and address immediately. Stop Your Rupture Worries! Enjoy the comfort, freedom of action and physical security which this made-to-order appliance will give you.

Mail This Coupon NOW!

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO.
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Without obligation, please send your FREE Book on Rupture, Proof of Results, and TRIAL OFFER—all in plain envelope.

Name _____

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State whether for Man ☐ Woman ☐ or Child ☐



OFF THE RECORD

THE personal emotions of Tony Quinn, ex-district attorney, with whom you are all by now familiar in his role of that daring crime fighter, the Black Bat, are for the most part overshadowed by his glamorous exploits. The notes he has recorded in his case book, from which G. Wayman Jones has drawn these Black Bat novels, deal with the events and complications arising from the criminal deeds of greedy, murderous scoundrels. But interspersed at times in this impersonal case book are some extremely interesting personal touches. We have selected one of these illuminating excerpts that throws a peculiar sidelight on the next Black Bat novel:

Since that fatal day in court when, in the performance of my duties as district attorney, I was blinded by the searing acid thrown into my eyes, I have had a new and deeper sympathy for those poor people deprived of any part of their natural physical endowment. I have lived and suffered under the handicaps of these hapless beings, and even though I have been fortunate enough not to have been troubled by the thought of money, I realize only too well the financial as well as physical and moral hardships that they endure.

The miracle that restored sight to my eyes has not dimmed my comprehension of their difficulties, and the fact that mention of a cripple or a blind man usually brings to mind a picture of a desolate beggar or peddler saddens me immeasurably. Their plight is tragic.

Is it any wonder then that my feelings were aroused to their deepest pitch when I discovered that such poor, misguided, bitter men had been banded together by a diabolically cunning devil for his own ruthless, heinous schemes? Is it any wonder that the Black Bat entered the case with a more than

(Concluded on Page 113)

Arrest Him, Officer!

I'LL HAVE COMPLETE FACTS ON THE OTHER FELLOW TONIGHT!



Follow This Man!

SECRET Service Operator No. 38 is on the job... follow him through all the excitement of his chase after the counterfeit gang. See how a crafty operator works. Tell-tale finger prints in the murdered girl's room that help him solve the great mystery! **BETTER** than fiction because every word is **TRUE**. No obligation. Just mail me the coupon and get—

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THE BLACK BAT STRIKES AGAIN

By **G. WAYMAN JONES**

Author of "Murder Calls the Black Bat," "Alias Mr. Death," etc.



A Complete Book-Length Mystery Novel

CHAPTER I

Graveyard Murder

A CAR pulled up to the cemetery gates at ten minutes of one in the morning. Three men clambered out. All wore high boots and they proceeded to drag out several shovels and picks.

One of them stepped up to the cemetery gates, took a key from his pocket and opened them. Another rolled the car through. Then the gates were closed and locked. Slowly the car wended its way around the many turns of the cemetery road until the driver threw a spotlight on a serried rank of tombstones. But only briefly, for the

*One of the thugs dropped his gun and
clawed at his shoulder (Chapter IX)*



A Series of Mass Murders Sets Tony Quinn, Lightning-fast Foe of Crime, on the Trail of a Satanic Ring of Insurance Killers Who Make a Vast Profitable Business of Slaughter!

moment he saw what he wanted, the light was doused.

Assistant District Attorney Lew Scott, one of the trio on some odd nocturnal mission, picked up a shovel and a pick.

He was an eager young man, ambitious, honest and well liked. He faced one of his companions, a man smaller and thinner than himself and much more nervous.

"For the last time," he said softly, for the cemetery seemed to demand whispers, "you are sure? We'd be the laughing stock of the city if you happen to be wrong—and there might also

be a nice little lawsuit in connection with this."

Jim Fisher, the man addressed, licked his lips and loosened the collar around his throat. The third man joined them before Fisher could speak—Dawson, an assistant coroner, as young and alert as Scott.

Apparently, therefore, this grave-digging party was highly legal, even if stealthy.

"I've a signed exhumation order in my pocket so we can go right ahead," Dawson said. "I'll perform a rough autopsy on the spot, the moment the coffin is opened. The body has been in-

tered only two days so that will be easy to do. All I need are samples of the hair, nails and the stomach lining. It won't take more than fifteen minutes for my share of the job."

Jim Fisher walked over to the car and sat down on the running board before he answered Scott's question.

"I'm positive," he stated with grim finality. "Ralph Galvin is dead—in that grave. The doctor claims he died of a chronic stomach ailment. I've been away, as I told you. As soon as I got back and found out what happened, I sensed that something was not right. Galvin never suffered from any stomach trouble. Why he used to boast of how strong his digestive organs were."

LEW SCOTT nodded. "Yes, yes. You've told us that a dozen times. What I want to be certain of is that letter you got from Ralph Galvin. You destroyed it, remember. You have no written evidence."

Fisher shrugged. "Ralph mentioned that he'd discovered there was an insurance policy on his life that he didn't even know about. A policy to the tune of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. In the first place Ralph couldn't afford a policy as large as that.

"And he certainly would have had to undergo an examination to take out a sum of insurance so huge. I thought nothing of it until I returned and learned that Ralph had died—suddenly. I think that whoever insured him without his knowledge must have provided a substitute for the medical examination and then killed Ralph to collect."

Assistant District Attorney Scott peeled off his coat and vest.

"Very well. It seems to me a clear-cut case and we have the right to go ahead. Perhaps I should have consulted the deceased's family first, but if things are as you indicate, Fisher, we'd only be throwing in our hand face down. Apparently someone in the family stands to collect and before we

act against that person, we must be absolutely certain that Ralph Galvin did not die a natural death. Man the shovels, boys. We'll exhume the body, give Dr. Dawson a chance to make an examination, then we'll bury it again until his routine is finished. If you are right, Fisher, we'll officially exhume it tomorrow for the second time. . . . Let's get it over with."

All three attacked the newly filled grave with vigor. It took them almost two hours of back-breaking work to expose the surface of the metal lid of the outer casket. District Attorney Scott hauled himself out of the grave, hurried over to where the car was parked and took a gasoline torch from the trunk. He lowered himself into the grave again, pumped air into the torch and lit a match to it.

Applying the flame to the sealed lid, he melted away the lead that made the outer casket air-tight. With chisels, the other two men carefully opened the copper box until finally they raised the lid out of the grave. Ropes went down next and Fisher passed them beneath the casket. Carefully they hauled it up until it was swung out and placed on solid ground.

Scott used a screw-driver to open the casket, lifted up the lid and exposed the body within. Fisher shuddered and turned away hurriedly.

Only Coroner Dawson was used to this kind of grisly work. He handled it as a matter of course. From a doctor's kit he produced the necessary instruments. Snipping a lock of the dead man's hair, he carefully placed it in an envelope and sealed it. Then he cut portions of the finger-nails and stored them in another envelope for examination later.

A wind had sprung up as they worked. Dr. Dawson put the envelope containing the lock of hair on the ground. It was lifted by the wind and carried off a dozen feet. Scott scampered after it. He caught it as it fluttered down on another grave. He

pulled a broken flower pot out of the ground and thrust the envelope inside it. To further insure its safety, he turned the clay flower pot upside down.

"That will hold it until we're ready to go," he said. "Now Doctor, while you perform the actual surgery, I think I'd like to talk to Fisher again."

DAWSON nodded and selected his instruments. He began working deftly. Near the car Jim Fisher was trembling despite himself.

"I'm not a coward," he defended himself, "but this business is nerve-racking. Wouldn't be so bad if I didn't know the man, but Ralph and I—Well, we'd been pals since we were in the first grade. I tell you he didn't die a natural death! If it had been an accident—or pneumonia—or an infectious disease, I wouldn't have questioned it. But chronic stomach trouble! Good heavens, that's impossible!"

Assistant District Attorney Scott drew the collar of his suit coat around his throat. It lacked only about two hours of dawn and the night had become chilly and raw.

"I know," he told Fisher softly. "That's why I fixed up this secret exhumation. If we're wrong, no harm has been done. If you are guessing right—we've got a nice murder case right in our laps. I haven't told anyone what we intended to do. Neither has Dawson, and I know you have not. From a study of the symptoms that Ralph Galvin betrayed, Dawson has already judged that he may have died of arsenical poisoning. Victims of that drug act as if suffering from chronic stomach ailments, especially if the poison is administered over a period of time—as is usually the case in insurance murders. Those sample the doc is taking will tell the story one way or another. I . . . Fisher, listen! Did you hear something?"

Fisher nodded. "Yes. Sounded like someone prowling around those bushes north of here."



The Black Bat

"Doc!" Scott called softly. "Hey, Doc—come over here."

Dr. Dawson ambled over and grinned broadly when Scott voiced the belief that they were being observed.

"Nonsense. Your nerves are jittery. It's the atmosphere that's got you. Who in the world would be prowling around a cemetery this hour of the morning except a trio of ghouls—like us?"

He laughed at their discomfiture and headed back toward the open grave. Suddenly he clapped a hand to his chest. A low, strangled groan came from his lips. He reeled a step or two, carried more by his momentum than his muscles. He half turned around, as if to beg aid. Then he crumpled and fell heavily.

Assistant District Attorney Scott leaped from the running board of the car where he had been seated and sprang toward the fallen doctor. Fisher, eyes bulging in horror, saw Scott stop dead and slowly, like the work of a slow motion camera, fold up and topple to the ground ten feet from where Dr. Dawson lay.

Fisher gave voice to a wild, shriek-

ing yell. There had been no sound, yet both these men had dropped as though a silent spectre had snatched away their lives. Fisher raced over graves, vaulted a tombstone and tripped over a projecting pot of flowers. He scrambled up with a choked sob and raced on.

Something smacked into the ground near his feet and lent impetus to his flight. Then he felt something else hit him between the shoulder blades. A searing, agonizing pain gripped his whole body. He staggered another dozen steps before he collapsed. Vainly he tried to pull himself erect, clawing at the edge of a stone for support. He turned his head to look back.

A FIGURE—only a dark blob of shadow—was standing fifty feet behind him. A rifle was at the man's shoulder. It made no sound, but a bullet from it found a target in Fisher's body. It smashed through his left lung, penetrated his heart, killing him instantly. He fell, draped over the tombstone, a hideous nightmare of horror.

The murderer walked calmly over to where Dr. Dawson lay, moved him with his foot and saw the blood oozing from a wound directly over the heart. His lips curled in contempt. He proceeded to where Assistant District Attorney Scott was sprawled on the ground. Scott's body twitched. Life was not quite extinct.

As calmly as though this were on everyday occurrence, the murderer raised the rifle slightly and sent a slug smashing through Scott's head.

Pulling off the gray gloves on his hands, the killer grasped the silencer on the end of his rifle and unscrewed it. He thrust this into his pocket, shoved the rifle under his arm and went over to the exhumed body. He picked up the envelope Dr. Dawson had left there, examined it and put this into his pocket also.

He spent twenty minutes going over the ground carefully, searching for the

slightest clue that might give him away. Then he walked swiftly back to the row of small trees forming a hedge beside the cemetery road. The night swallowed him up with no sign that he had been there except the four bodies he had left behind—one cold in long death, the other three still warm and bleeding.

There had been no witnesses. Only the dead could testify against this living monster. It was close to the absolute perfect crime. Only one slight detail remained, and the killer knew nothing of that.

CHAPTER II

Phantoms of the Night



IN A spacious house located in one of the better sections of the vast city, a man sat before a fireplace. He wore a smoking jacket and held a cane between his knees. His eyes were blank—like those of a blind man—and around his eyes were deep, horrible scars etched by corrosive acid. The man was about thirty and except for the scars, good-looking. He had a well molded chin, and lips that could smile warmly or grow thin and bitter.

Tony Quinn spent many hours in just this position, for to all intents and purposes Tony Quinn was blind. A dozen prominent doctors had testified to that and gave him no hope of recovery. Once a promising young district attorney, Tony Quinn had fought a physical battle in a courtroom to protect vital evidence against a grasping gangster. Acid, meant, to destroy that evidence, had been splashed into Tony Quinn's eyes, blinding him—for life, according to all the doctors he had visited.

But Tony Quinn was not blind.

Those blank, staring eyes could see perhaps better than any pair of eyes in the world. By the cooperation of a dying man who had also fought crime and been made a cripple by criminals, Tony Quinn had been given new eyes. The operation had been performed in secret and except for the doctor who had accomplished what other surgeons refused to attempt, and three other persons, no one realized that Quinn could see.

One of those who knew was seated in a straight-backed chair at Quinn's side now. A mass of newspapers lay at his feet. Norton Kirby, known as "Silk," was an ex-confidence man who had come to rob Tony Quinn and remained to become his staunch friend and ally. Silk wore the quiet livery of a servant.

"Something, isn't it, sir?" Silk mused. "Imagine—Assistant District Attorney Scott, Assistant Coroner Dawson and this Jim Fisher, all murdered in a graveyard beside a recently exhumed corpse. Sounds like a ghost story. You knew young Scott, didn't you?"

Tony Quinn nodded sadly.

"He began his career in my office when I was the district attorney. A nice boy, Silk. And clever, too. There were great things in store for him. Now he's been murdered. Why? The police don't know—no one seems to. It can't be just an act of revenge, else why was Dr. Dawson also murdered, and this man Jim Fisher?"

"Silk, they were up to something. They exhumed the body of Ralph Galvin for a purpose. Someone murdered them so they might never voice their suspicions. For a man to shoot down three people ruthlessly means that what they were suspicious about must have been a vast thing. Read me that part—about what the police think."

Silk cleared his throat and began where he had left off. That part of the news story read:

Commissioner Warner has taken personal charge of the investigation into the gruesome

some cemetery deaths that have stirred the city. There are no clues as yet, according to the police, but they are making a thorough and intensive investigation.

The body of Ralph Galvin, apparently exhumed by the three murdered men, has been taken to the Stanley morgue for further examination. The only theory offered thus far indicates that Jim Fisher, a friend of the dead Ralph Galvin, must have suspected that all was not right with Galvin's death.

In the pocket of the assistant coroner was an exhumation order. Assistant District Attorney Scott apparently had accompanied the other two men so that he might also test some story which Jim Fisher may have told.

An autopsy has been performed on the body of Ralph Galvin. Coroner Williams states that death was natural, that there is no indication of violence and none of poison. It is his expressed opinion that if Scott and Dr. Dawson were hoping to find some incriminating evidence in the body of Galvin, their hopes would have been blasted.

"THAT'S ENOUGH." Tony Quinn held up his hand. "Silk, there's far more to this than appears on the surface. I knew Lew Scott, remember. He wouldn't have gone off half cocked on some crazy story told him by a stranger. Exhuming a body is serious business and Scott knew that. I think—he paused for an expressive moment—we ought to have a look at that body in the morgue, Silk. Then a trip to the cemetery would be in order. The police are pretty routine sometimes. They may have missed something out there."

Silk didn't answer. He arose, walked over to the windows and pulled down the curtains. Then he made sure the doors were locked. Finally he doused the lights in the room.

"Ready, sir," he said simply.

Tony Quinn arose, thrust his cane beneath one arm and walked rapidly toward the west wall of the room. Though everything was steeped in darkness and Silk had to maneuver his way slowly, Tony Quinn moved as rapidly as though the room were brilliantly illuminated.

There was a reason for this. Tony Quinn could see as well in darkness as he could in light; perhaps even better. That operation on his eyes had ren-

dered them more acute and given them a penetrating power over darkness.

A section of the wall slid back. Quinn and Silk vanished into a white-tiled room lined with shelves and racks containing chemicals, apparatus and books on every conceivable phase of fighting crime. For Tony Quinn's adopted mission in life was a battle with all the elements of the underworld and those crooked men and women who occupied high stations in life.

Quinn opened a small cupboard and took from it a black suit, a pair of black gloves, black crepe-soled shoes and a peculiar hood. He donned the clothing swiftly and then placed the hood over his head. It came well down over his shoulders and was attached to his arms so that when he raised them, the cape arrangement seemed webbed and wing-like. He cast a weird shadow against the white-tiled wall—the shadow of a giant bat.

Tony Quinn pulled the hood from his Bat. He had adopted the name and insignia of this nocturnal creature because a bat is supposed to be blind and operates only in darkness.

"You had better stay here," he said to Silk. "Police Commissioner Warner usually drops in when he gets a headache over such crimes as this one. If he calls, tell him I'm asleep and that you don't wish to awaken me. Tell him I've been despondent over my blindness and haven't slept in days. That will stall him until I get back."

"Yes, sir," Silk answered with a tinge of sorrow in his voice. "But I thought, sir, considering the fact that we haven't had much excitement lately, that you might—"

Tony Quinn, in fact, was the Black head, shoved it in his pocket, and grinned.

"Silk, old boy," he placated, "unless I'm very wrong, there will be a great deal of work for you before we close this case. I don't play hunches, but there's a strong supposition in my mind that the man or men who killed those

three haven't finished their work yet. Hold the fort. I'll be back in a few hours."

QUINN donned a floppy-brimmed hat, drew it well down over his scarred features, then pulled a lever set in the wall. A part of the floor slid back to reveal a ladder leading into a passage hewn out of the earth. He waved to Silk, slid down the ladder and crawled along the passage until he came out in an enclosed garden summer house, far to the rear of his estate. This formed a perfect way for him to come and go as the Black Bat.

He slipped through the garden gate, looked up and down the silent street and saw no one. As he moved through the gate he kept close to the high wall and his black clothing blended so well with the darkness that he was practically invisible.

When he turned a corner he saw a coupé parked at the curb in front of a rooming house. That coupé was always left there for just such emergencies. It was registered in the name of one Jack O'Leary, better known to the Black Bat as "Butch." O'Leary was one of the three persons who knew Tony Quinn's nocturnal identity.

Quinn took a key from his pocket, unlocked the car door and slid behind the wheel. He rolled down the cross street, pulled his hat low and turned into a well lighted avenue. Now his nerves began to jingle. If he were stopped for any reason and spotted in these black clothes, there would be suspicions. Almost every patrolman in the city knew Tony Quinn and firmly believed he was blind for life. If they saw him driving a car—well, Tony Quinn hated to think of the results.

Therefore he was most careful about how he drove, meticulously obeying traffic signals and keeping well within the speed limit. He drove far uptown and parked the coupé along a dark side street. After a careful look around he stepped out, swept off his hat, threw it

into the coupé, and donned the mask of the Black Bat.

The private morgue to which the exhumed body recovered from the cemetery had been taken was just around the corner. He cut through a neighboring yard, stepping over obstacles that would have tripped any man with normal eyesight. Even the slender wires of a croquet set were as plain as telegraph poles to Tony Quinn's eyes.

He came out behind the one-story building which housed the morgue. No one was on duty, for who would ever be expected to enter a morgue? True,

article would have been superfluous. The Bat saw everything plainly.

The corpse was covered and rested on a slab in one of the small autopsy rooms. He drew back the sheet, exposing the body. For ten minutes he examined it and finally gave up. There were no clues here. If this once had been Ralph Galvin—and certainly it had been so identified—then Lew Scott



A steel-like hand hauled him down (Chapter III)

the exhumed body had been of great importance in a triple murder case, but now the autopsy was completed, the findings reported and the corpse only waiting for reburial.

The Black Bat crept silently to the front of the building. He made a swift examination of the door lock and had it open in three minutes. The manipulation of locks was one of the many fascinating branches of criminology that Tony Quinn had studied so intently.

He closed the door behind him softly. He carried no flashlight, for such an

must have erred in exhuming it.

The Black Bat slipped out of the morgue, reached his car and drove straight to the cemetery. He climbed over the high fence, dropped lightly on the ground and proceeded to search for the scene of the triple murder. It wasn't hard to find for the grave still yawned open.

FOOTPRINTS were useless, for police and cemetery employees had trampled the ground into a mire. The Black Bat stood beside the grave and slowly turned around. His eyes

swept over the ground, missing nothing. He saw a broken flower pot standing upside down on a grave about twenty feet away. Otherwise this grave was neat. Flowers near the headstone had withered and died days before, but they indicated that the grave was cared for and that visits were fairly frequent. Therefore, why the broken flower pot spoiling the otherwise tidy grave?

The Black Bat strode toward the plot. He saw where the broken pot had been taken from the ground, literally ripped out, for soil had also been raised with it. He turned the pot over and, half buried in the dirt, he saw the soiled white edge of an envelope. Eagerly he picked this up, ripped open the sealed flap and saw a lock of hair.

Thrusting this into his pocket, the Black Bat felt a quiver of excitement course through his system. Someone had cut that hair from the head of the corpse and Dr. Dawson was the most logical person to have done so. In making tests for certain poisons, the hair is frequently used. And the Black Bat knew that the body of the supposed Ralph Galvin, now at the private morgue, did not have a lock of hair snipped off!

He had examined that body well enough to be certain. Anyhow, when a thorough autopsy was performed in a morgue, with all facilities at hand, examination of the hair would not be necessary. Therefore a substitution had been made! The corpse in the morgue was not the one exhumed by Dr. Dawson! Why? Galvin's family was considered one of the best. They were honest in all their dealings and were definitely not the type to insure a close relative, kill him for the insurance and then commit a triple murder so that their crime might not be discovered. Nevertheless, the Black Bat was sure that for some grim reason Galvin's body had been stolen.

He walked back to the open grave and looked into it. Something stirred at his feet and he glanced down. There

was a puff of dust arising from the dry top soil, and the report of a gun. Instantly the Black Bat gave a leap that carried him over a high tombstone.

NOTHING happened, but the Black Bat wasn't one to wait for attack. He believed in the element of surprise to overcome his enemies. Ducking from behind the tombstone, he ran very lightly over the grass in a crouch.

He knew the exact direction from which the slug had come and made a half circle of the area.

Then the Black Bat saw them. Two men, crouched at the side of a vault, were trying to penetrate the darkness and spot their masked victim. One of them spoke in a hoarse whisper, every word audible to the Black Bat's sensitive ears.

"I tell you I had a look at that guy. He's got a hood on. I know he has or I woulda seen his face, wouldn't I? Dorkey, I got a hunch that was the Black Bat! If you ask me, we oughta lam outa here as quick as we can."

The other man snarled an oath.

"The Black Bat ain't no better than any ordinary guy. What can he do that we can't? I hope it is the Black Bat because he's gotta show himself sooner or later and then—*blam*—he goes down with a couple of nice silent bullets in his back."

CHAPTER III

Doubled in Death



THE Black Bat smiled tightly and crept forward again. He was within a dozen yards of the two men when the frightened one discovered he had to do something to relieve the tension. He snapped on a flashlight and sprayed the beam toward the

open grave. The other man snarled a warning and reached for the flash. It dropped to the ground and its ray struck the Bat squarely.

He fired from the hip. His bullet crashed through the lens of the flash and a curtain of darkness, deeper than ever, closed down over the graveyard. But the brief moment of light had been enough. Two slugs screeched past the Black Bat's ear. His own guns blasted twice, the reports so close together as to seem almost one.

The heavier of the two assassins folded up. All his joints and muscles seemed to have turned into soft wax. With a yelp of terror, the other man fled. Instantly the Black Bat was after him. The man leaped for the cemetery fence, clawing at the top wire. He pulled himself up frantically, a steel-like hand gripped his ankles and hauled him down.

He put up a short fight, trying to administer a jabbing uppercut, but it sailed through air. A fist buried itself in his stomach and he doubled up with a grunt of pain. He felt both his arms seized, then he was pinned against the fence. His worst fears were realized as he looked up and saw the somber hood covering his captor's head, saw the winglike cape that cast an eerie shadow—the shadow of a bat!

"Don't hit me no more!" he quavered. "I—I can't stand it. Don't hit me."

"Your name and where do you come from?" the Black Bat demanded. "Speak fast. All this shooting may draw the police. I haven't time to waste with you."

"Joe Hudson," the thug gasped. "I come from Frisco, honest. Me and Dorkey was to blast anybody that came to the grave at night. We was paid a grand to keep watch. I dunno who paid us. There was a guy named Bishop who runs a hock shop on Carmody Avenue. We were told he was a right guy and we went there to buy us a couple of heaters. He offered us this job. That's the truth, so help me! I

wouldn't lie to you."

"I don't believe you would," the Black Bat said quietly. "Anyway if you have, you'll be sorry. I'll leave you here, tied up. But if I find no such man exists as this Bishop, you'll talk when I come back—plenty! Stand against that fence, spread your arms and legs as far apart as possible. Now—hold it."

With a coil of fine silk cord he took from his pocket, the Black Bat tied Hudson's wrists to the wire fence, then fastened his ankles. He didn't bother with a gag.

"You'll keep for a while," he said. "I'm going to see if your pal is beyond any help."

Only a cursory examination was necessary. The thug called Dorkey was dead, a bullet drilled squarely through his heart. The Black Bat returned to Hudson and tested the fellow's bonds to make sure he could not escape. Then he pasted a black sticker on the man's forehead—the cut-out image of a black bat with wings outspread.

THAT'S just to remind the man who hired you that he has some competition," he said grimly. "It will also help you to explain to the police just how your pal came to be killed. And—mark this—when you get out of jail, make tracks for the Coast. If I see you again, I won't tie you with rope—I'll weight you down with lead."

The Bat scaled the fence easily and raced to his parked car. He knew one pertinent fact anyway. Dr. Dawson had examined the body of Ralph Galvin all right. He had snipped a lock of hair from the corpse—and that clue rested in the Black Bat's pocket.

Now he had to investigate this pawnbroker named Bishop. And find out why the Galvin family had identified a double as their kin.

When he was safely behind the wheel of his car the Black Bat stripped off his hood. So far he saw no signs that the shooting affray in the cemetery had

been heard. The place was far from any habitation and no police guards had been posted anywhere nearby.

The pawnshop of Monty Bishop was a frowsy-looking place, surrounded by cheap restaurants and antique shops. A night light burned above the safe and the place was closed for the night. The Bat parked his coupé in a convenient spot, made sure he was unobserved, and crossed the street to plunge into an alley beside the pawnshop. At the rear he discovered that Bishop lived behind his store. Lights were burning in two windows.

Drawing his hood well down over his head, the Black Bat edged toward one of the windows and peered through the dirty curtains. What he saw made him spring into action. A man was lying across a bed. His face was pallid, his outstretched arms twitched and his entire body apparently was racked by pain.

The Black Bat didn't take time to force a door. Instead he smashed a pane of glass with the butt of his gun, reached in and opened the latch. He swung over the sill and rushed to the man's side, lifted him onto the bed and made a swift examination. The man was dying fast, obviously poisoned. His face was purpled from congested blood, his lips were blue and his eyes bulging.

He tried to talk but no sound came from his gaping mouth. Vocal muscles were already paralyzed. The Black Bat could do nothing. It was too late for antidotes and he couldn't give one anyway, for he had no idea whether the lethal dose had been an alkaloid or a metallic poison.

Bishop died three minutes after the Black Bat reached his side. The murderer had acted with amazing speed to silence the man before the Black Bat arrived.

With a sigh the Bat turned away. His best clue obliterated. Whatever lay behind all this murder, it was supervised by an efficient, far-planning

mind. One who killed at will.

A frugal supper was on the table, stone cold now. The Black Bat examined a dish of gruel from which Bishop had apparently eaten his last meal. He scooped some of it into a small bottle and stowed this away. Then he began a careful examination of the premises. He expected to find nothing, so was not disappointed when his search was completed. Bishop's food might have been poisoned hours before—and by some casual so-called "friend" who possibly had a logical reason for calling.

THE Black Bat moved toward the door—and suddenly stopped. A man's shadow had passed across the window. For only one fleeting second, yet the Black Bat saw it. Drawing his gun quickly, he spun around when he heard the front door of the store being battered down, and heavy, running footsteps. Men were closing in from the front and someone was on guard outside the only other exit. From the bold manner in which they operated, they obviously were police.

The Bat waited no longer. His gun lanced flame and the overhead light crashed out. The room was plunged in deep darkness. Then someone smashed down the back door. As the man came through, the Black Bat scrutinized him and groaned inwardly. It was Detective-sergeant McGrath of the police—McGrath who had taken an oath that he would bring in the Black Bat dead or alive. Someone had tipped him off. Someone who knew the Black Bat would visit Bishop, find him murdered, and be placed in a precarious position.

McGrath had sailed through the door with gun ready.

"Got you, Bat!" he gloated. "There's no getting away this time. Reach high or I'll drill you."

He saw a shadowy form flit across the room, then take more formidable shape as it was etched in silhouette against a window. McGrath did not

shoot. He wanted the Black Bat alive. He wanted to rip that damned hood from his face and expose Tony Quinn. For McGrath would have bet his last dime that Tony Quinn was the Black Bat.

Even McGrath's commissioner laughed at that one. Tony Quinn was blind. How could a sightless man perform the escapades attributed to the Black Bat? But all the arguments had not swayed McGrath's stubborn conviction that he was right.

Raising his gun high, he charged. He brought the weapon down hard and his heart jumped in elation as the butt found a vulnerable spot. His victim dropped heavily and lay still.

"Lights!" McGrath yelled. "It's okay to come in, boys. Somebody get a bulb. The Black Bat put a bullet through the one in here. But I've got him! I've got the Black Bat this time! Step on it, will you? Get some lights in here and gather around. This is the night of nights!"

Someone supplied a bulb and the room was flooded with light. McGrath, gun still held ready, for he knew how tricky the Black Bat could be, knelt beside the hooded figure. He turned the limp form over, grasped the edge of the hood and took a long breath. The supreme moment was at hand. The Black Bat would be revealed and Sergeant McGrath could now turn his own brand of scorn on those who had scoffed at his theories. He ripped the hood up and over the man's head.

McGraw's jaw dropped wide. He blinked, then deliberately closed his eyes for half a minute. When he opened them again, he saw that he had not been wrong in what he had thought he had seen. The face beneath that hood was the face of Bishop. The pawnbroker! McGrath gulped and swore. Bishop couldn't be the Black Bat! That was out of the question. Yet here he was, hood and all. There had been only one man in the room so far as McGrath knew. He drew back



Silk

his hand to slap Bishop to consciousness, but paused sharply and bent closer. He blurted an oath.

"This guy is dead! He can't be the Black Bat anyway!"

A YOUNG probationary patrolman elbowed his way forward, eager to be of help.

"You're right, Sergeant! Know what I think? The Black Bat was in here and he put that hood over Bishop's head and let you slug him—let you wrestle with a dead man while he escaped through the back door. Say, that guy certainly is clever—" he said, excitedly.

"Ya-a-ah!" McGrath yelled. Who's asking for your advice? Why are you pack of damn fools standing around like a bunch of morons? Somebody call the coroner! Somebody get the fingerprint boys and the Homo Squad. I didn't kill this guy. He was dead when I slugged him. But I'll get the Black Bat if it takes me the rest of my life. He can't get away forever—not with tricks like this he can't. And I'll find out who tipped me that the Bat would be here tonight. I'm just getting warmed up."

"Steamed up, you mean," one patrolman muttered as he turned away. But he was careful that McGrath did not hear him.

CHAPTER IV

The Bat Moves In

MCGRATH had another shock half an hour later. When he returned to his squad car, he found a Black Bat sticker pasted to the rear view mirror. Gears clashed as McGrath started away from the curb. It was bad enough to be tricked—but in front of a whole detail of cops! Nothing could be worse. He vowed that next time he even had a glimpse of the Black Bat, he would shoot—and shoot to kill.

He cooled off considerably on his way back to Headquarters. It was best if he passed this off lightly, without betraying the rage that surged in his heart. The desk lieutenant seemed to have heard the news. He snickered when McGrath came in.

"Sergeant," he said with a wide grin, "Commissioner Warner wants to talk to you."

"Yeah!" McGrath ground out. "That's all anybody does is talk—talk, talk, about the Black Bat. I'm the only man who even tries to go out and get him. What's my reward, I ask you? Like a bunch of sapheads, you all laugh at me. Well, one of these days you'll laugh in the other direction because I'll drag the Black Bat in here and line him up in front of the desk. What's more, when you book him, the name will be Tony Quinn!"

McGrath swung down the corridor to his office. He composed his features before he reached for the doorknob. McGrath didn't feel any too good. Commissioner Warner was something of a marvel at handing out subtle cracks about efficiency. McGrath was in for a tongue lashing and he knew it.

Commissioner Warner was seated behind his desk, chewing on a cold

cigar. His face was lined with worry and thought. He looked up, almost wearily.

"Come in, Sergeant. Sit down. What happened at Bishop's?"

McGrath gulped. "Well, the Black Bat was there all right. No question about that. He—he shot out the lights and then he threw a dead man into my arms—Bishop. He'd put his damned hood on Bishop's head and how was I to know it wasn't the real Black Bat? Anyhow—he got away. But he's going to have a hard time explaining Bishop, Commissioner. Somebody fed that crooked hock shop dealer enough poison to kill a mule. Maybe you got other ideas, but I think the Black Bat's gone in for murder—just like I always said he would. Sooner or later them playboys who think they're Robin Hoods get too gay, and what happens? A bump-off—and not in self defense either. You don't poison a guy when he starts to haul off and paste you one on the nose."

Commissioner Warner nodded somberly. "I'm afraid you're right, Sergeant. We've another example of this. About thirty minutes ago someone discovered a man lashed to a cemetery fence—yes, the same burial grounds where the triple murder was committed. This man has been identified as a cheap little crook from the Coast. He wore a Black Bat sticker on his forehead—and a knife through his throat.

"There was another dead man on the premises—shot by a forty-four caliber gun. The kind the Black Bat carries. It looks as though he's reverted to type. I never thought he'd come to the point of lashing a man to a fence and then murdering him in cold blood."

ABOUT the same time that Commissioner Warner was admitting that perhaps Detective-sergeant McGrath's prophecies had turned out to be true, the Black Bat had once more become Tony Quinn. But not blind Tony Quinn, for he was at work in his white-

tilled laboratory, preparing an apparatus for use in doing a Marsh test for arsenic. He talked to Silk as he worked.

"I can't puzzle it out, Silk. Those men at the cemetery were not to watch for anyone who might come looking for clues. That means the killer who placed them there knew that the police, with all their searching, had missed something. I think I have that right here—in this envelope."

Silk looked into the envelope and grunted in surprise.

"Hair?" he asked.

Tony Quinn nodded. "Exactly. My theory is this. Dawson, the assistant coroner, clipped a tuft of hair from the body of Ralph Galvin which he had helped to exhume. For some reason we'll never know, he put this envelope containing that bit of hair into a clay flower pot and turned it upside down. Now the murderer would naturally examine the corpse of Galvin, after he had disposed of the three living men. He'd notice that a tuft of hair had been removed and he'd look for it because this would be a vital clue for the police to find. When he didn't find it he must have worked fast to obtain a substitute body and then hide Galvin's corpse."

"But hair," Silk protested feebly. "What good is that, sir? I thought you had to test parts of the stomach."

Tony Quinn smiled and shook his head. "Not with an arsenical poison. Once it goes through the system, portions are taken up by the hair roots and passed right into the hair itself. We'll soon know."

Silk crossed his legs and leaned back, looking up at the ceiling. "I'd have given a year's pay to be able to see McGrath's face after you tossed him that dead man."

Tony Quinn chuckled. "I didn't see his face. When I realized he had me trapped, I removed my hood, drew it over Bishop's head and held him upright until McGrath came with his gun swinging. Then I simply ducked out



Carol

the door before McGrath had a glimpse of me. He was too busy gloating over his capture."

Quinn lighted a Bunsen burner beneath the small glass retort. He dropped half of the hair clippings into a solution and attached a long glass tube to the retort. In a few moments gas was evolved. Then he touched a match to the end of the glass tubing which had been drawn out into a fine nozzle. Light blue flame sputtered and as the supply of gas was intensified, it became steady, burning with an almost colorless light. Carefully cleaning off a piece of porcelain, Quinn held this in the tiny flame and watched it grow dark with smudge. He shut off the apparatus.

"And there you are," he told Silk. "Arsenic without the slightest doubt—and plenty of it. Ralph Galvin's body was filled with the stuff. His stomach ailment may have been chronic, but only because somebody had been feeding him poison over a period of time."

"But I thought they'd tested Galvin's body," Silk began.

QUINN shook his head. "Galvin's body was spirited away and another corpse put in its place. No—don't tell me that Galvin's family identified him. I'm aware of that, but—

either they deliberately lied because they wanted to protect themselves, or they were forced into it. That shall be your job, Silk—to discover what made them lie.”

Silk arose eagerly. “I’ll begin at once, sir. A little disguise I used before will do the trick.

Quinn frowned. “It will have to be done cleverly, because if the Galvin family is menaced we can’t afford to risk their lives. So you do this, Silk. Find out what company carried the insurance on Ralph Galvin. Go to his father and take the part of an insurance company’s investigator. Act as though this was just a matter of course. If he asks questions, tell him you work independently, that the company insists on getting two reports. That will account for any other investigator having beat you to it.”

Silk headed for the secret door leading into the study. He tensed suddenly, for a crimson light began flashing. Instantly Quinn drew on his smoking jacket, picked up his cane and darted for the door. He slipped over to the fireplace and dropped into the big chair which was his accustomed seat.

Silk straightened his coat and walked sedately to the front door. He opened it and was brushed aside by Police Commissioner Warner. The commissioner was alone, but there was an unholy purpose written on his face.

As soon as he strode into the room he stood before Tony Quinn, looking down at him in sudden embarrassment.

“You’re excited, Commissioner,” Quinn said softly. “What’s wrong? Why don’t you sit down?”

Warner crossed over to a chair and dropped into it. He put both hands on his knees and leaned forward, eyeing Quinn’s blank eyes sharply and telling himself he was an intolerable fool. Certainly this man was blind. Hadn’t a dozen doctors testified that his sight would never be recovered?

“I suppose I’m an idiot, Tony,” War-

ner said. “I came here, all hot about you. Sergeant McGrath, as you know, insists that you are the Black Bat. Sometimes I’ve been inclined to think so too, but I’ve never permitted myself to dwell strongly on that point, for up to now the Black Bat has been of great help to me and my department. But tonight—tonight, Tony, the Black Bat has ruthlessly murdered three men. Two anyway. I’m not so sure about the last one. We found one of his victims lashed to a cemetery fence. There was a Black Bat sticker pasted on his forehead and a knife in his throat.”

Warner’s eyes narrowed as he snapped the last few words. If Tony Quinn were the Black Bat, he would show excitement over this. Muscles would twitch, his fingers would become nervous and tap the arms of his chair. Then Warner relaxed with a sigh. Quinn’s facial muscles had not moved a hair’s breadth. His fingers rested lightly on the arms of the chair and his vacant, staring eyes looked just over Warner’s right shoulder.

He spoke gently.

“I’m sorry to hear that. Because Sergeant McGrath has insisted on maintaining that I am the Black Bat, I’ve naturally become interested in the doings of this man. However, don’t you think it would be a difficult task for a blind man to tie someone to a fence and then stab him to death? Can’t you see how impossible it would be for someone who had no eyes to commit murder or prowl around during the night as this Black Bat does?”

Warner made a wry face. “Of course I’m wrong. I *know* you can’t see. I don’t mind admitting that in the past I have had a sneaking regard for the Black Bat and I even hoped it might be you, Tony. Now I’m glad this is quite impossible. Murder is a one-sided game—the police hold all the cards. From now on the Black Bat will be fired upon at sight—fired upon by men who will have instructions to kill him.”

Still Tony Quinn's expression did not change.

"Too bad," he murmured. "But, as you say, murder is murder. No man has the right to commit it—except in pure self defense. You're all wrought up, Commissioner. Those cemetery murders are getting you down. I can tell it."

"And why shouldn't they?" Warner demanded. "An assistant D.A., an as-

murdered. I tell you, Tony, this has me guessing. I can't tie it up with anything. There are no loose threads, no pointing fingers, not even an anonymous phone call from a crank. We're stymied, myself and every one of my highly trained policemen."

Warner jammed on his hat.

"I'm sorry I bothered you, Tony. When I'm wrong, I'm the first to admit it. If that fool McGrath comes around



Galvin lowered his hands a trifle and Antal snarled a warning (Chapter XIX)

sistant coroner and a young man of mighty good reputation are all slaughtered in a cemetery, with the only witness a corpse that they had dug up. What does it mean? Why did they exhume the body? Why were they murdered?

"The corpse showed nothing suspicious. There was no more reason for those three men to exhume the body than there was reason for their being

pestering you, throw him out."

Silk held the door open and after Warner reached his car, Silk gave a long-drawn-out whistle.

"Say, it looks like something!"

Quinn did not move. Curtains were raised and there was no telling who might be watching. Above all things, Tony Quinn knew he must not give the slightest indication that he could see.

"It does, Silk," he said. "That little crook Joe Hudson was alive when I left him lashed to the fence. I did paste the sticker between his eyes, to let the world know that the Black Bat was taking a hand. But I didn't kill him. The man who hired Hudson and his killer pal must have reached the cemetery after I left, found Joe Hudson helpless and murdered him, knowing the blame would be placed on the Black Bat. He learned from Hudson that I was headed for Bishop's and he beat me to it. This means we've got to get the wheels going, Silk. We must work fast. And very, very carefully—for our friend Sergeant McGrath will be watching us."

"Hadn't I better warn Butch and Carol?" Silk queried. "Just to put 'em on guard."

Quinn nodded. "And to prepare them for action. Slip out the tunnel and see Butch personally. This phone may be tapped. Have him tell Carol, and be sure you aren't observed. When you come back, I'll have a plan formulated."

Silk disappeared through the secret door. Tony Quinn sat back, letting his head rest against the back of the chair. His eyes were wide open and starkly blank, but his mind was pounding home facts, registering little details and storing them up for the future.

CHAPTER V

Silk Meets Danger



OF ONE thing Tony was sure. What Warner and his police department thought to be only a series of baffling murders was in reality but the beginning of more trouble. There would be ramifications to reach into the depths of the underworld represented by such

characters as the murdered Joe Hudson, his pal Dorkey, and Bishop, the pawnbroker.

The tentacles of this crime series would lift upward into another world where men and women like Ralph Galvin and his highly respected family moved. And over it all would lord a cunning, vicious beast to whom human life was as nothing. A clever being, quick to turn the misfortunes of others to his own benefit. When his hireling had been overpowered by the Black Bat, he had thought fast enough to pin murder on the shoulders of the night marauder. Quinn was beginning to acquire a certain reluctant respect for this man.

His agile mind began planning, lining up what he already knew with probabilities. It would be necessary to use all his forces in this game of life and death. Silk would be a natural to investigate the Galvin family. He had the poise and smoothness to deal with people of that kind.

Quinn thought then of Butch O'Leary, a man mountain of strength and weight. A slow thinker perhaps, but a vast menace when he got rolling.

Then there was Carol, in all her loveliness; Carol who had entered his life so mysteriously and given him back his sight. Quinn's mind went over the past, slipping easily into it. At Carol's request he had gone secretly to a small Mid-western town where a country doctor had performed an operation that the greatest surgeons in the world had refused to try. Carol's father had been a police officer. He had been shot in the back and in the head and was a blind paralytic, slowly wasting away.

It had been Carol's father who had donated portions of his blind, but healthy, eyes so that Tony Quinn might see again. The bullet that had smashed into his brain had severed optic nerves, but though the eyes could no longer see, they were intact. By some strange freak of Nature those eyes, parts of which were grafted to

Quinn's eyes, gave Quinn the power to see in darkness as readily as in daylight. There was no accounting for this phenomenon except that it might have been Nature's method of repaying Quinn for the months of blindness that he had endured.

Then Carol's father had died and she had come to demand that Quinn allow her to take part in his campaign against crime. Her quick wit made her a valuable ally and between the two a warm friendship was ripening into love.

Those three knew that Tony Quinn was not blind and that he had become the Black Bat. They would carry that secret to their graves.

WHEN Silk climbed out of a rented car about mid-morning the next day, those who knew him would never have recognized him. The quiet, thin servant of Tony Quinn had become a red-cheeked, loudly dressed individual. He strode up the sidewalk to the big mansion of the Galvin family and kept his finger on the door buzzer until a pretty girl admitted him.

"From the insurance company," he told her. "I'd like to see the whole family. It's very important."

A man with white hair and worried, tired eyes came out of a room. Silk recognized him instantly. This was Peter Galvin, retired banker and the father of Ralph. Peter Galvin motioned the girl away.

"You are from the insurance company?" he said to Silk incredulously. "But I thought everything was already agreed upon. Your man, who saw me yesterday afternoon, assured me that there would be no more delay in paying the policy."

"Double check, Mister," Silk said with the air of a man who didn't like to be contradicted. "I've got to see every member of your family—all of them."

Peter Galvin nodded somberly, motioned Silk into a huge living room, then summoned the other members of

the family. They arrived one by one and Silk, apparently engrossed in studying a file of papers, eyed them individually. There were four—Galvin's wife, her mother, Galvin's youngest son and a daughter still in her teens, the pretty girl who had opened the door.

"Is this all of you?" Silk asked suddenly. "I thought—"

Galvin sat down fearily.

"I can't see why all this fuss is necessary," he complained. "My daughter Elaine isn't here. She—she couldn't stand all the publicity and went to her aunt's for a rest. Now what is it you wish?"

"Wait a minute," a man's voice belated.

Silk looked around. In the doorway stood a beetle-browed, narrow-eyed man. He was well dressed, but it took more than clothes to distinguish him from the underworld to which he obviously belonged. He had one hand deep in his coat pocket and Silk sensed that a gun was trained on him.

"Just who is this guy?" the man in the doorway demanded. "Before we tell him anything. I'm calling the insurance company. I think we got a crook on our hands. Galvin, phone the company and be damned quick about it."

Galvin sprang to obey and the way he acted made Silk think that he and his family were utterly dominated by this black-browed thug. Tony Quinn's reasoning seemed to be working out.

Galvin returned in a few moments, white and shaken.

"Th-the insurance company tells me that they have no representative of this man's description and that they are prepared to mail me a check for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars today. He—he must be a fraud."

"Yeah, that's what I figured," the burly man snarled. "Listen, you—I'm Galvin's secretary, see? My name is Collins and what's yours? The right one, I mean."

Silk only crossed his legs and leaned back in his chair. Because he could think of nothing to say, he wisely kept his mouth shut. If Collins hadn't gripped a gun, Silk might have made a dash for the door. That was hopeless. He would be cut down with a bullet before he took a dozen steps.

HE HAD failed the Black Bat. The only thing to do now was remain quiet, refuse to disclose his purpose in coming to this house, and pray that his disguise would not be penetrated.

"So you're dumb, huh?" Collins snarled. "Well maybe you'll open up to the cops. Stand up, wise guy, and elevate your mitts. Hold 'em just like that while I give you a frisk."

Collins found no gun. He sifted through the blank pieces of paper in the brief case that Silk carried and hurled them on the floor. Then he jabbed Silk with his gun, marched him into the hallway and picked up the phone. He dialed a number.

"This is the Galvin residence," he said. "There's a phony here who says he's from the insurance company, which is a lie. Send a couple of boys down to pick him up, and make it snappy."

Peter Galvin moved nervously to Collins' side.

"Don't you think we might handle this without the police?" he asked, and his voice trembled slightly.

Collins showed his teeth in a wolfish grin.

"I'm taking charge of this rat. You keep out of it. He's a fake and the cops can take care of him. What are you trying to do—protect him? Is he a pal of yours?"

"I—I never saw him before in my life," Peter Galvin quavered. "I swear it!"

"Then shut up," Collins barked.

Silk leaned indolently against the wall and smiled slowly.

"For a secretary, Collins," he drawled, "you show doggone little re-

spect for your employer. If I were Mr. Galvin, I'd push your teeth right down into your mouth and fire you without pay."

Collins stepped close, which was exactly what Silk had hoped for. A man of his ilk would try to gun whip his victim as the worst possible kind of punishment his warped brain could conceive. Collins had just that idea in mind. But as he raised his gun, Silk suddenly lost the indolent attitude he had assumed. He went into a crouch and smashed home a savage punch to the midriff.

Collins howled in pain, brought the gun down, but only succeeded in crashing it against Silk's shoulder. Silk grinned slightly, brought over a short right hook and drove Collins' nose awry. Blood spurted from it and Collins reeled back. He tried to raise the gun, but Silk was much too fast for that. He seized the gun hand and gave the wrist a hard twist. The gun landed on the floor.

From the living room came the screams of the three women. Peter Galvin was backing up, hope shining in his eyes. Then Collins, sensing that this human tornado was getting the best of him, clipped off orders.

"Galvin, konk him with something! Bean him with a chair. Do it, or you know what'll—"

He did not get much further for Silk brought his jaws together in a teeth-grinding blow. Collins roared and lunged for Silk, who sidestepped easily. He was not paying much attention to Galvin. The older man was just as much menaced by Collins as Silk. He should welcome this battle and the overpowering of the thug.

But Collins' words had had a strange effect on Galvin. He had turned pale and wild-eyed. Suddenly he picked up a chair, raised it and brought it down on Silk's skull. Silk collapsed to his knees. Collins, though half groggy, was quick to take advantage. His cowardly kick clipped Silk just under the

jaw. Silk keeled over and lay still. . .

He awoke in a moving car, but when he opened his eyes, only darkness met his stare. He almost screamed, thinking he had gone blind. Then he realized that he was enveloped in some kind of heavy canvas sack. Barely enough air was seeping through to keep life in him.

HE REALIZED that to struggle now would only bring about quick retaliation from his captor—or captors. So Silk wisely decided to play possum. Sooner or later something would happen to give him a break and then, too, he doubted that Tony Quinn would have let him follow out this scheme without some kind of protection.

Silk estimated that the car was driven along for about thirty minutes after he regained consciousness, but that meant nothing for he had no idea how long he had been out nor in what direction he was being taken. He could hear mumbling voices, but the enveloping sack prevented him from discerning any words.

Finally the car stopped and he was hauled out, sack and all. Two men, apparently, dragged him over the ground and bumped him up three or four steps. A door slammed and there were more voices. Then the sack was opened and draped down over Silk's shoulders in such a way that he was as much a prisoner as if steel cables bound him.

He blinked in the light and glanced around. He was in some kind of big house that was well furnished. Four men stood before him, gazing down and grinning broadly, but not in mirth. Their harsh faces showed only a sadistic gloating.

One of them was a scrawny, ungainly type with loose fitting clothes and a hatchetlike face. He seemed to be in command.

"I guess," he decided, "we'd better turn this baby over to Gringo Joe, eh, boys? Gringo can make anything talk

from a tree to a mummy. Cart him down cellar."

CHAPTER VI

A Trap for the Bat



SILK was yanked to his feet and dragged across the room to a small, narrow door. One of the men opened it and a steep flight of steel stairs was revealed. Silk was propped up at the head of the steps and given a violent shove. He rolled down the stairs, bruising himself badly with every turn. He heard the door above slam shut and mocking laughter from behind it.

Silk sat up slowly and started to peel off the strangling sack. He looked around the room and saw a long white table against one wall. Then his gaze traveled to the left and his muscles suddenly froze. A man was seated in a straight-backed chair that was tipped until it slanted against the wall. A man? To Silk he seemed more like some monstrosity out of the past.

He was huge and had primitive features. His eyes were piggish and definitely pink. His lips were fat and ugly. He had arms that were covered with as much hair as an ape's. His waist was narrow, his chest barrel-like. Here was a man possessed of an unbelievable brute strength and a tiny brain that probably would function in a bestial manner to match his appearance.

Silk struggled out of the sack and stood up weakly. He was still reeling from the effects of that fall and his head felt as though a ton weight had dropped upon it.

The brute rocked his chair forward until it creaked under his weight. He raised one hand and crooked his finger.

"So I have a nice fresh customer, eh? Come here, my little one. Come closer

so that I may see just how tough you are."

Silk doubled his fists, puny things against a monster such as he now faced.

But Silk had rare courage. There was no element of fear in his make-up. Yet he knew that little beads of sweat were standing out on his forehead. This man reeked of a horrible menace.

The brute sniffed in contempt.

"Thin and scrawny," he decided. "Now turn around and look at that table. Look, I say, or shall I take out your eyes and bring them over there?"

He arose as his voice became a bullish roar. Silk turned his head. On the table were various wooden forms and some tools. They meant nothing to him.

The brute drew closer and suddenly one huge paw flicked out. It closed around Silk's throat and lifted him as if he were nothing but a small rag doll. Like an automaton, the beast carried Silk over to the table and set him down.

"That long box"—he pointed to the object—"is my own little invention. You put the arm in it, full length. Then I pull the box apart maybe three or four inches. Next I take the steel hammer and bring it down. The bone breaks like a matchstick, you understand? The longer box is for the leg. I can break it in five places so you will never walk again.

"Now look at that steel box at the end of the table. It is large enough for you, no? If you are put into it, with the metal door closed and then little hammers banged on the outside, just above your ears, you will go mad within three hours. You will be a nervous wreck, fit only for a hospital. Now do you begin to understand why you should tell me everything?"

Silk tensed and prepared to spring on this giant. He knew how futile his strength was, but anything was better than submitting to these medieval forms of torture.

SUDDENLY he crouched and drove the most powerful blow he was capable of into the pit of the big man's stomach. His fist hit what seemed to Silk like a panel of steel. It drew only a loud howl of derision from the monster. Silk felt himself seized in a vise-like grip. He was lifted off his feet and swung up on that bench. One arm was forced into the long, boxlike affair and strapped there. The giant held him down with one hand and picked up a hammer.

"I shall break it just above the wrist first," he announced gleefully. "It hurts the most there. Then if you do not talk, I shall break it again—and again until there is no arm left. But perhaps the tongue—now it wags a little bit, eh?"

Silk gritted his teeth and closed his eyes. It was too late now for the Black Bat to intervene. And even if he came, what could he do against this monstrosity? It was better, Silk decided, that he should die than have the Bat appear.

The hammer came down in a testing blow, but it brought a spasm of agony to Silk. He bit his lower lip until the blood ran. Over and over again in his mind pounded the thought that he must not talk. No matter what happened, he must not give way!

* * *

In Peter Galvin's big house, Collins slammed the front door shut with a grunt of satisfaction. Silk had been carried out and thrown into the back seat of a sedan that was now pulling away from the curb.

Peter Galvin touched Collins' arm.

"I—I don't like this. Those men didn't look like detectives and that wasn't a police car. What are you up to?"

Collins sneered and struck the older man across the face with the flat of his hand. Then he snorted in contempt and walked up the stairs. At the top he turned around.

"You mind your own business and

stay healthy," he snarled. "Then somebody else will stay healthy too, get me? And stop that blubbering or I'll knock you stiff."

He set his jaw aggressively and swaggered down the hallway to his room. This was the life Collins enjoyed—bossing around a millionaire



"You're covered!" a girl's voice cried. "Drop that gun!" (Chapter IX)

and his whole family. Telling them where to get off. And they would behave. Collins knew that.

He opened the door of his room, muttering about fools who stuck their heads into a trap. As he turned around, his mutterings ceased and were replaced by a long-drawn-out gasp. A man was seated in a chair near the bed. He was tall, well built and completely encased in black. The hood over his

head flared out below the shoulders until it looked like the ribbed wings of a bird.

"The Black Bat!"

Collins managed to get out those two words. Then his hand started toward his pocket.

"I wouldn't do that, Collins," the Bat said quietly. "Not unless you believe suicide would be preferable to a long term in prison—or possibly the electric chair."

Collins gulped and stared at the automatic resting lightly against the Black Bat's thigh. He raised one hand and nervously massaged his throat.

"YOU—you're in the wrong house. This is Peter Galvin's house. I—I'm his secretary. I—I—"

"Be quiet," the Black Bat said. "And don't make me laugh. Secretary, did you say? Why man, you couldn't compete with a two-year-old child in a spelling bee. But you can talk a little. Supposing you tell me just where your two good friends took that insurance investigator."

"They weren't pals of mine," Collins mumbled. "They—they were cops. That insurance guy was a fake. I—I—"

"Where did they take him?" the Black Bat went on relentlessly. "And while you're at it you might also tell me on whose payroll you happen to be. Don't say Peter Galvin's. You're here only to see that he and his family stay in line. I want the truth."

Collins sat down weakly and rubbed his hands. The weight of the gun in his pocket gave him no confidence at all. This was the Black Bat who faced him; the Black Bat who could shoot faster than any man and outthink any clever brain.

Collins' eyes flashed around, looking for an avenue of escape. He saw the window open behind the bed. That was how the Bat had gained entrance. Collins estimated his chances of taking a long jump and a header out the win-

dow. It was only eight feet to the ground; the rear of the estate rose up high.

"I asked you a question," the Black Bat reminded him.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Honest, I—I just work here. Listen, I ain't no crook. I'm on the level, I tell you. Ask Galvin. He'll say the same thing."

"Galvin would say any words you put into his mouth," the Black Bat countered stonily. "You hold some cudgel over his head. I'll ask you about that later. Right now—where is that insurance investigator?"

The Black Bat's gun came up and centered on Collins' chest. The crook shivered, for those glittering eyes from behind the mask spelled sudden death.

"I can't tell you just where they took him." He licked his lips as he spoke. "But I—I got a road map marked out in case I wanted to go there too. It's in the pocket of my other suit, in the clothes closet."

Collins could not see the twist of the Black Bat's lips. All he was concerned about was that the Black Bat was falling for what he was saying. Falling hard. Collins suddenly acquired a new regard for his own quick wits.

The Black Bat walked up to Collins, took the gun from his pocket and searched him for sleeve or leg weapons. Then he walked over to the closet, opened the door and stepped inside.

Like a flash Collins was out of the chair. He slammed the closet door shut, heard the spring lock snap, and went out the window as though a ghost was on his tail. He landed in a clump of bushes, tore his clothing and his flesh, but got up instantly, raced to the garage at the rear of the house and climbed into a fast roadster. He shot out of the driveway, turned right and gave her the gun.

Collins didn't see another car start away from the curb, a block north of Galvin's house. He only felt a sense of relief he had never experienced before.

"If I had had a roscoe, I'd a gunned the Black Bat out," he told himself. "That guy ain't so clever—falling for an old gag like that."

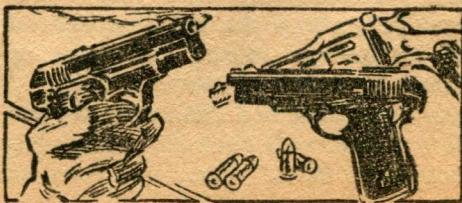
THE pursuing car kept a good distance back, but right on the trail. The man behind the wheel was a huge individual with a bent nose and a decidedly cauliflower ear. His hands were miniature hams, with fingers abnormally thick. Butch O'Leary was just as powerful as he looked. Slow-witted perhaps, but tenacious. Nothing short of a serious accident would stop him from following Collins.

But Collins suddenly sensed the presence of a trailer. By glancing in the rear view mirror he saw the coupé turn when he did, speed up as he stepped on the gas, and slow when he decided to take things easy. Collins gulped and a wave of fear crept up over him.

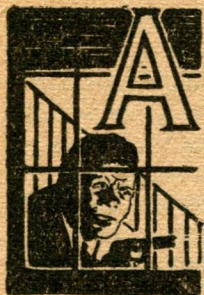
Maybe this was the Black Bat! But no—how could that be? The Black Bat was still locked in that closet, unless he had smashed down the door and that would have attracted Galvin and his family.

Collins decided to make absolutely certain that he was being followed. At the next corner he swung right, made a similar turn at the following street intersection and did a complete loop around the block. The pursuing car was right behind him.

Collins headed out on the highway again and brought his foot down to the floorboard. He left the pursuing car far behind and with a flourish he leaned on the horn and shot by another car—a sedan—doing about fifty-five. As he whizzed by, he had a glimpse of the driver—a decidedly pretty girl.



CHAPTER VII

Swing to Action

AFTER a couple of miles Collins eased up. He did not want a run-in with a motorcycle cop, for then that coupé might catch up with him. He noticed that the sedan with the girl driver hung in the distance, but Collins paid no attention to her.

He would have if it had been possible for him to watch that girl. She held the trail easily, having taken over when Butch was discovered. The Black Bat left few things to chance. He wanted Collins to rush to the hide-out and he wanted him trailed. Therefore, if Collins suspected he was being trailed he might not go to his original destination, so Carol Baldwin had been following well behind Butch. When Collins made his several turns around a block, she knew what he was up to and stepped on the gas to race well ahead of him.

Butch dropped back and let Carol take over then.

Collins suddenly slowed and turned into the driveway leading to a large house that was the main part of a big country estate. He stopped beneath a portico, shut off the motor and got out. He saw the girl's sedan whizz by, but thought nothing more of her.

Inside, he gave a brief version of what had happened to the gaunt leader of this wolf pack.

"What could I do?" Collins spread his hands in a gesture of resignation. "He had the drop on me. Then he took my roscoe. I shoved him in the closet, locked the door and jumped out of the window. What's he able to do anyway? Not a thing. If he puts the pressure on Galvin, the old fool won't talk. Not so long as we got the kid safe.

Say, that fake insurance investigator showed up okay, didn't he?"

The gaunt man nodded.

"He's down in the cellar—keeping Gringo company. In a few minutes he'll start talking. I think he's a police spy."

"Sure he is," Collins agreed. "Only the Black Bat was worried about him. But that's nothing. The Black Bat works right in with the cops, don't he? We'll know soon as Gringo does his stuff."

"Yeah," the gaunt man said, "but just to be sure, I'll put a couple of boys outside to watch. I hope the Black Bat does find this place. Gringo would make a dead birdie out of him in about five minutes. Now I got to make a report. You take over."

"Okay, Antal." Collins used the gaunt man's name for the first time. "Nobody will be snooping around when I get through."

Antal walked upstairs, entered a room and locked the door. He went over to a dictaphone machine, sat down and adjusted a record. Then he picked up the mouthpiece and spoke in a monotone. This is what was recorded:

Everything is going just as we planned. There has been a slight interruption from the Black Bat, but he has been thrown off the trail. Galvin gets the check in the morning. He will cash it and turn the sum over to us. Then we shall dispose of his daughter and tell him she is still being held so he won't talk to the police. A false insurance investigator appeared at Galvin's and Collins captured him. He is now in the hands of Gringo and when he talks, I shall report his story by the usual means. May I compliment you on that scheme for throwing the blame on the Black Bat? It has worked out so well that the police have issued orders that the Black Bat is to be shot on sight. We must hope that he will be, for he is the only man I fear. I shall await your further orders by the usual methods and there is certainly nothing to worry about at the moment. Within three months, at the most, we shall clean up to the tune of several millions of dollars.

Antal shut off the machine, slipped the record off the rotator and carried it into another and smaller room. He

remained in there for about twenty minutes. Then he came out with a neatly wrapped package, addressed and properly stamped.

He summoned one of the men, handed him the package and issued brief orders.

"Take the car Collins drove here in. Drive to the city and mail this from the Central Post Office. Return the moment you have finished."

The messenger took the package without comment. He had done this same thing many times before. Each time he examined the wrapper and noticed that it was carefully sealed, so he stemmed his curiosity and never tried to find out what was inside. . . .

* * *

THE Black Bat, locked in the closet, remained there for about three minutes after Collins made his escape. Then he merely reached down and turned the latch. Collins had not remembered that most clothes closets equipped with spring locks can be secured from the outside, but opened from within without the use of a key.

Gun in hand, the Black Bat went out of the room and down the stairs to the first floor. He heard women sobbing and the steady beat of a man's feet as he nervously paced the floor. The Black Bat stepped into the room, gun lowered, and his other hand gesturing for silence.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," he said in a soothing voice. "Sit down, Mr. Galvin. There are a few details I must know."

"But Collins?" Galvin gasped. "He—he . . . That mask. I don't know—"

"Collins is gone and he won't be back." The Black Bat laughed softly. "Furthermore I'm betting that he is burning up the highway between here and the place where they have your daughter held prisoner."

"How did you know she was a prisoner?" Galvin cried and arose half angrily. "If this is some kind of a joke,

if you're a member of this damned outfit that's been bleeding me, torturing my wife and family, I—I'll stand for no more of it, I tell you. I refuse to—"

"Hush, Peter," Mrs. Galvin said. "This man may wear a mask, but I think he means to help us." She turned to face the Bat. "There is no use in holding anything back. Yes, they have my daughter Elaine a prisoner somewhere. They threaten to murder her unless we obey them. Ralph died, a week ago. He died suddenly, but for several weeks before he had suffered from stomach pains. The doctor signed the death certificate that death resulted from a chronic stomach condition—gastric ulcers."

The Black Bat pulled out a chair and straddled it. He placed his gun on a small table and motioned toward it.

"I am trying to help you—all of you. I know the trouble you are in, but I'm certain we can remedy these conditions. My gun is at your service if you wish to turn me over to the police."

Peter Galvin waved thoughts of the gun aside.

"No—I'm ready to talk. I couldn't stand much more of this suspense anyway. I think that my son Ralph was murdered. After his death, we discovered that he had taken out an insurance policy five months ago and named me the beneficiary. It was for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars—and incontestable. Then this man Collins came and told us that my daughter Elaine had not reached her aunt's and that she was a prisoner. Unless I obeyed orders, he said, she would be murdered. The first order was for me to hire this scoundrel Collins as my secretary."

"And Collins then forced you to go to the morgue and identify the body of the man found in the cemetery, as your son. Yet it wasn't. That man was a stranger to you, wasn't he?"

Galvin lowered his gaze to the rug.

"Yes. It was the most despicable thing I've ever done. But what choice

did I have? There is Elaine—in danger every moment. I had to do it.”

THE Black Bat nodded his masked head. The phone rang and Galvin started for it, but the Bat signaled that the call was for him. He answered and a girl's voice talked briefly.

“Butch dropped back and is returning for you. They have a place on Route Eleven. Watch for telephone pole numbered eight-nine-seven-two-one-three. Check your speedometer and the house is just three-tenths of a mile further on. It's pretty well hidden from the road. No signs of Silk.”

“Thank you,” the Black Bat said quietly and hung up.

He could not talk to Carol with the Galvin family within earshot. He returned to the living room and offered them no explanations.

“Be assured,” he told Mrs. Galvin, “that your daughter is still alive. Until that insurance check is paid over to Collins, they wouldn't dare murder her. And if you wish to aid me in effecting her rescue, please do not consult the police nor anyone else. Not even your attorney. At the moment I'm rather badly wanted through something that is no fault of my own. I'm the Black Bat.”

He heard the chorus of gasps and smiled behind his mask. These people, living a quiet decent life, would not have heard of the Black Bat frequently. The police were far from being enthused about publicity of that sort.

The Black Bat picked up his gun, stuffed it into a holster and made his way to the rear door of the house. He stepped out into the semi-darkness of late afternoon and within half a minute a car shot into the driveway. The door opened and the Black Bat got in beside Butch.

Butch backed out of the drive again and pointed in the direction toward which Collins had fled.

“He was a smart guy,” Butch said. “He spotted me and I'm good at tailin'.

But Carol was behind me and she shot ahead. Collins zipped right by her and never tumbled. She called, huh?”

“She called,” the Black Bat said. “There is no time to be lost, but don't exceed the speed laws. If we were stopped, the delay would be much greater than that involved by taking our time. Silk is in that place, Butch. I'm afraid they may be working over him, trying to make him talk.”

“They won't,” Butch declared confidently. “Not Silk. Y'know I like him. He's a little guy and he can't fight no-how, but just the same there's somethin' under his skull. And he's right—every way. If they hurt him, I'll bust a few heads, I will, and no foolin'. Say, boss, what's it all about? You know yet?”

The Black Bat had donned his floppy-brimmed hat which concealed the mask over his head. The advancing darkness aided him also and he felt reasonably safe.

“I'm not sure,” he told Butch. “So far it's a plot to cheat an insurance company. Anyway I'm only interested in saving Silk now. Silk and a girl who will probably be held a prisoner in the same place. Slow up—drive closer to the telephone poles so I can see the numbers.”

Half a mile further down the highway, the Black Bat ordered Butch to head into a lane lined with overhanging branches, where the car would be well hidden. He got out, removed the wide-brimmed hat and motioned Butch to follow. The darkness was intense now, but that only aided the Black Bat, for there was no darkness to his eyes.

HE SAW the big house, nestled in the middle of a grove of high pines. Then the Black Bat signaled Butch to drop flat. A man with a rifle across one arm was slowly pacing the outer edge of the spacious lawn. The Black Bat's hand rested on Butch's arm for a moment and his lips barely moved as he whispered:

"Stay right here! I'll draw him this way and leave the rest to you. Don't let him make a squawk."

Butch nodded eagerly and massaged his big hands. The Black Bat slipped away into the darkness until he crouched just behind a bush along the beat which the guard paced. As the man sauntered by, the Black Bat made a sibilant sound through his teeth. The guard spun around.

"Yeah?" he asked hoarsely. "Is that you, Trip? What's up?"

He received no answer. Gun under his arm, finger tight against the trigger, the guard began reconnoitering. He did not want to give an alarm—just in case he was wrong. Antal had not been too good-natured of late.

The guard thought he heard a rustling in the brush to his left. He turned toward the sound. Something huge and ghostly rose up behind him. An arm curled around his neck, throttling him, while another hand gripped his gun hand with such force that he was unable to pull the trigger.

Gradually the guard's struggles ceased and he lapsed into unconsciousness. Butch grunted, laid him down gently and proceeded to tie and gag him. This done, he looked for the Black Bat, but there was no sign of the man he worked for.

Butch knew his orders in a case of this kind. He squatted and waited.

CHAPTER VIII

Ruse Against Ruse



CIRCLING the house, the Black Bat spotted the second guard. This man was wary and not to be drawn into any trap. Nervous, too, for he had not seen his fellow guard at the front of the house.

The Black Bat suddenly stood erect

and started to leap toward the man. But a bit of dry wood crackled under foot. The guard spun, gun spitting a hail of death. The Black Bat dropped instantly and the bullets snarled over his head.

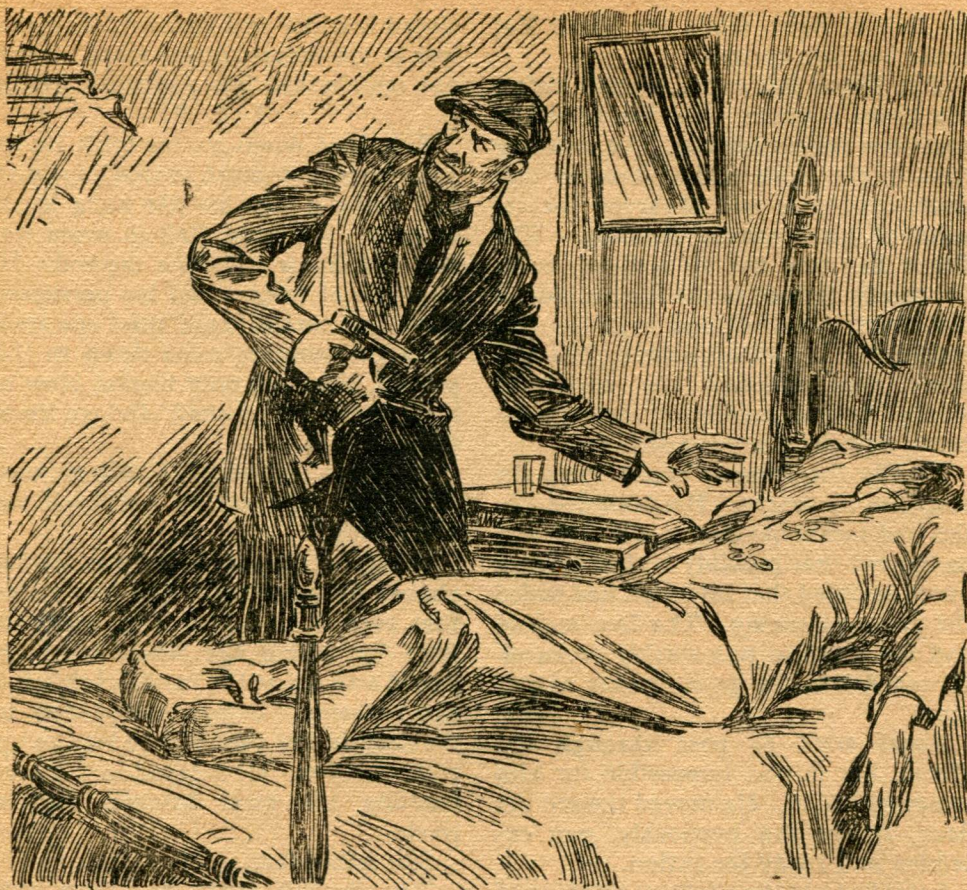
Then another shadowy form loomed out of the darkness. It was Butch, drawn to the spot by the gunfire. He landed on top of the guard, knocking him flat, and wrenched the rifle from his grasp. He measured him with a short right and sent him reeling into the brush.

But now men were streaming out of the house, all well armed with guns and flashlights. The guard yelled to indicate his direction and then did a stupid thing. He charged Butch. The guard figured on getting in one savage kick to the belly. Fair tactics were no part of his career. His left foot shot upward. Butch swayed aside, reached down and seized the leg. He lifted the man, spun him in a grotesque adagio dance and then let his head smash against a tree trunk.

Someone fired and Butch ducked out of sight. He made tracks for the denser undergrowth of the forest behind the house, but pursuit was close at his heels. He lost his pursuers, after a few moments, and paused to glance back. He saw a barely distinguishable form climbing a porch pillar. It was the Black Bat. While the occupants of the house were busy trying to locate the prowler, he had taken advantage of their excitement and found a way into the house.

When he reached the porch roof, he flattened himself against the side of the building and sidestepped to a window. It was partially ajar and a moment later he had slipped into a bedroom.

The estate outside was agleam with lights as the searchers tried to track down Butch. They had discovered one guard at the foot of a tree, possibly with a fractured skull. They spread out, intent on making a wide search. Two men were sent to the highway to



Antal pointed his gun down toward the man on the bed (Chapter XIV)

watch for the culprit.

The Black Bat grinned behind his mask. If one of these men found Butch, it would be to his own sorrow. Butch was a past master at the art of lying in wait and leaping with a suddenness that brooked no defense.

The Black Bat opened a door slowly. A muffled, harsh voice reached his ears and he headed toward the source of it. He listened at one door and a few words were distinguishable.

"—and you will administer the lethal dose tomorrow. Two days later have one of your women present herself to the insurance company as the beneficiary. There will be no delay in paying the benefits of the policy. Then that woman—disposed of in—usual manner. No—"

The Black Bat flicked down the safety of his gun, turned the knob slowly and hurled the door wide. He leaped through it, gun ready. But there was no one in the room and that mechanical voice had ceased. But a steady buzzing sound reached his ears. He saw a compact play-back machine with its record still spinning. The Bat moved toward it.

Then the lights went out and a second later a door opened a crack. A jagged streak of orange flame followed in the wake of a bullet meant for the Black Bat's heart.

BUT by plunging the house in darkness, the intended killer had practically done the Black Bat a favor. For the killer was now himself handicapped

by lack of light, while the Black Bat could see just as well.

The Black Bat's gun blasted twice. He heard a groan, then the sound of some one falling heavily. An ordinary man might have rushed toward that door, opened it and observed the results of his accurate shooting. The Black Bat was not an ordinary man. He merely tiptoed to the further side of the room, crouched and kept his gun trained on the half-open door. His sensitive ears detected the sound of steady, hoarse breathing; not the labored breath of a wounded man.

Finally the gunman could stand the suspense no longer. His intended victim had not responded to the ruse and he figured that possibly he had slipped away, satisfied that his bullet had ended the life of an enemy. The door opened and the gunman was starkly revealed. It was Antal, the gaunt leader of this mob.

Antal tried to peer through the gloom, but it was impossible for him to see anything. He moved toward the door, slowly and cautiously, gun extended and ready for action.

Antal had not the slightest warning of what happened to him. He only heard a swish that ended in an exploding crash against his head. He slumped to the floor. Before unconsciousness took him, he managed to scream one word: "Gringo!"

The Bat had no time to examine the man he had downed, for there was still Silk to worry about. He crept down the stairway. No one was around and he guessed that the sound of the shooting had not reached the outside where the other members of the gang searched for Butch.

The Black Bat tried various doors and saw no trace of Silk. Then he heard a stifled scream and loud, raucous laughter. He moved toward a small steel door that gleamed almost brilliantly through the darkness—to his eyes alone. It was locked, but the key was there and he opened the door,

closed it softly and listened. Someone was at the bottom of the steps. Someone who looked like a gigantic gorilla.

* * *

Silk, held down on the table by the superhuman strength of this huge man, had realized that his life hung in the balance. He must stall in some way and Silk knew only one method. He was glib of tongue and his persuasive ways had turned more than one trick.

As the hammer came down in that painful, although only testing blow on his forearm, he groaned. Gringo leered down at him.

"I—I can't stand this!" Silk moaned. "I'll talk. Let me up. I'll tell you everything."

Gringo's repulsive features looked almost disappointed. Silk knew then that even if he talked, even went the limit by telling the whole truth, he would still die at the hands of this savage monster. Gringo seized him by the necktie and yanked him into an upright position. He stepped back a pace, fondling the steel hammer suggestively.

Silk talked fast.

"It's like this, see? Me—I'm a right guy. But I work alone and I didn't know I was cutting in on anybody else's racket. So I read about this business with Ralph Galvin and I says to myself, here's a chance to make some soft dough. I was going to spill a fancy line to the old guy—tell him his kid was alive and all that stuff. Then, for a nice juicy fee, I'd get him back. Understand? Once I had my hands on the dough, he'd never see me again."

GRINGO turned his head expectantly toward the further wall. Silk followed his gaze and saw a small amplifier hooked to the wall. It buzzed for a moment and then Antal's harsh voice came from it.

"He's lying, Gringo. That's the poorest story I've heard in years. Give him one more chance. If he doesn't talk, break his arm and then break

every bone in his body until he opens up. I'll be listening."

Silk realized that the whole cellar was wired, that Antal could listen to every word spoken in this torture chamber. He repressed a shiver and his agile mind worked swiftly. Bluff was the only possible way out now. Sheer bluff!

"All right," he said. "I know when I'm licked, but you can't blame a man for trying. I'm a private detective, hired by the insurance company to make a thorough investigation of Ralph Galvin's death. And I might add that if you mugs plan to lay your paws on that money, you've got another think coming. No report from me—no dough from the company. We're stale-mate, brother."

"Also, if I'm not heard from by ten o'clock tonight, the police will come looking. They'll go to Galvin's and force the truth out of the old man. You haven't pulled any wool over my eyes, my unseen friend. Not by a long shot. Galvin is being bamboozled into paying that money over to you. That's why he obeyed Collins and slugged me with a chair—me, who was trying to help the poor old guy."

The amplifier clicked and buzzed. Antal's voice reached them with more orders.

"Give him pen and paper," he said crisply. "Make him write a report that everything on the Galvin case is on the level and that the payment should be made on schedule. The message is to be placed into an envelope, left unsealed and addressed to the proper authority at the insurance company offices. I'll see that it reaches there within the hour."

Gringo leered at Silk. "You hear? Walk over to that little table and use the pen and paper in the drawer. Write as he says and do it quick, less'n I lose my temper and break your arm."

Silk sighed. He wrote two drafts of his supposed report, making them as long and detailed with fake news as

possible, and when he finished each one, he swore and ripped it to shreds. He started the last one, writing slowly, praying for time so that the Black Bat might swing into action if that was possible.

Then, he couldn't stall any longer. Gringo was getting impatient and that raucous voice over the loud-speaker would open up at any moment. Silk scrawled a fake name at the bottom of the report, folded it and then addressed an envelope to a mythical person. Gringo took it with a snarl. He faced the microphone.

"It is done, Antal. You will send for it?"

"At once." The loud-speaker broke into life. "And if it does not meet my expectations, you may dispose of your friend as slowly and painfully as you wish. It is my opinion that he is a fraud anyway, for I am sure the policy is to be paid at once. Still, we must take no chances."

Silk sat tensed in his chair, awaiting the slightest break in his favor. Though he knew that physical battle with this monster would have the same results as tackling a bull elephant, gone mad. Gringo climbed the steps, paying absolutely no attention to Silk. There were no means of escaping from the sound-proofed cellar. The only exit was the door at the head of the steps.

GRINGO handed over the envelope, but for a brief instant he was busy, grinning at the messenger. During that instant, Silk ran lightly across the room, scooped up one of the small steel hammers and held it behind him. He was back near his chair when Gringo turned around to eye him suspiciously. Three or four minutes went by; then the amplifier carried the terse message of Antal.

"The message is satisfactory. I think this man has finally told the truth. Guided by the report I now have, the insurance company will promptly pay

its debt. You may kill him, Gringo. He is no longer of any use whatsoever to us."

Gringo's big mouth opened and he drew a long breath of satisfaction. He extended his great hands and moved toward Silk. Suddenly he dived. Silk dodged the rush, but landed against the torture table and instantly Gringo was upon him.

The big man moved with amazing ease for all his hulk. One of his hands rested on the table for a second and Silk took advantage of that.

He brought down the small steel hammer with all the strength he could muster.

Gringo gave a long-drawn-out howl of agony. Tears rolled down his cheeks and he was convulsed by the pain that shot up his arm. Then he growled with rage.

The injured hand dangled limply at his side, but with the other extended, he grabbed at Silk's arm and caught it in a viselike grip. He hurled Silk against the wall, knocking him half senseless by the force of the tremendous heave.

Before Silk could gather his spinning wits and get up, Gringo had the fingers of his sound hand curled around Silk's throat. He lifted him like a rag doll and hurled him on top of the table. He picked up one of the hammers and raised it.

Then the amplifier blasted the sound of a shot.

There was silence for an instant, then Antal's voice screeched.

"Gringo!"

Gringo banged Silk's head against the table and left him there, unconscious. He moved toward the stairway, extinguishing all the lights in the cellar. He heard the door open above him and stealthy steps begin the descent.

Gringo snarled in the darkness and prepared to finish off this latest victim with one gigantic sweep of his mighty arm.

CHAPTER IX

Brute Strength—and No Brains



GRINGO saw a black-clad trouser leg emerge out of the gloom, and reached for it. But that leg was suddenly jerked out of range. Something hurtled above his head and landed lightly on the cellar floor. He whirled, and ran into a straight-arm jab that smacked him squarely on the chin.

An ordinary man would have been knocked cold by it, but the massive muscles of Gringo's frame resisted the blow effectively. He reached in the darkness and his good right hand landed on a substantial shoulder. He drew his victim closer.

The Black Bat felt those mighty fingers close on his shoulder and from the pain realized instantly that they were powerful enough to break every bone in his arm. He had his gun, but was too close to use it now. Anyway, most of the feeling in his right arm was gone. The gun dropped to the floor.

Gringo growled with pleasure, forced the Black Bat back through the darkness until he had him pinned against the wall. But strength was already flowing back into the Black Bat's arm. He raised it suddenly and struck a mighty blow squarely against the giant's throat.

Gringo felt that one. It turned his string of lurid curses into a choked gibber of pain. He let the Black Bat go momentarily and backed up. Instantly the Black Bat moved in. If he could land another of these blows, he might dispose of the man. The Bat realized that he was up against an opponent who was nearly a superman in strength and weight.

But Gringo was ready. He thrust out his arm stiffly and caught the Black

Bat under the chin. The blow that hurled him backward made him lose his balance. He fell heavily. In a flash Gringo was kneeling over him, one hand raised to smash the Black Bat's skull like an eggshell.

"His hands!" The voice that came from the table was barely recognizable as Silk's. "He can't stand hurting his hands!"

The Black Bat squirmed free as Gringo's dull-witted mind slowly took in the meaning of Silk's words. Gringo started to arise too, as the Bat sprung up, but he had to support himself with his good hand against the floor to do so. Instantly the Black Bat raised one foot and ground the heel of his shoe onto that huge paw.

His heels were crepe, but he exerted plenty of weight and Gringo screeched in agony.

Silk was down off the table, staggering drunkenly forward to do what he could to aid the Black Bat. Gringo scrambled up, but in the darkness he could not see the Black Bat swiftly drawing an automatic from a shoulder holster. He did, however, see Silk's form loom up in the darkness. Quickly he gripped Silk about the throat and raised him off his feet.

"This man—your friend," he growled to the Black Bat. "Lie down on the floor—quick—or I break this man's neck with my fingers!"

The Black Bat had his gun raised. Silk was being held up as a shield, but what Gringo did not know was that the Black Bat could see. The automatic jolted once. It was one of the few times in the Black Bat's career that he sent a prayer speeding with the bullet. He knew how quickly this giant might carry out his threat. One convulsive grip of those fingers and Silk would be dead.

The bullet struck Gringo in the temple. He drew his massive frame erect, opened his mouth to screech, but no sound came. Slowly his fingers relaxed their grip and Silk tumbled to the floor.

Gringo followed him later, landing with a crash that shook the house.

THE Black Bat sped to Silk and helped him up. Silk glanced at the dark bulk of the giant and shivered.

"Another two minutes and he'd have broken me in a little pieces. That was a close one."

The Black Bat nodded, walked over to the table and examined the paraphernalia on it.

"Silk, turn on the lights so you can see this too. Does it mean anything to you?"

Silk turned on the lights and hurried back to the table. He looked once at the instruments of torture, then closed his eyes. "I know what they mean, sir. That gorilla was getting ready to use them on me."

"Yes, I realize that," the Black Bat said. "But look at this layout. It's the type of thing that insurance gypers use. They get their suckers insured, then break their arm or leg with these instruments. Probably use an anesthetic. The policy holder collects and the gang takes a cut. Silk, I'm beginning to understand many things. This mob is well organized. There is a keen mind to direct every move they make.

"It's an insurance swindle racket on a huge scale. Insuring young Galvin for a quarter of a million proves this also. They are handling his case differently, though—and cleverly. Plain extortion or ransom might not get them anywhere. So they make sure Galvin is provided with money—and there they are. This Jim Fisher, who was found shot to death with Scott and Dawson must have suspected, or known something. Scott exhumed the body secretly. He probably figured that in that way he would arouse no suspicions so that the gang might spread out and get away. There will be others involved—scores of them. Such a gang as this couldn't be organized so well unless the boodle ran into millions."

"You're right," Silk agreed. "This

gang is equipped with every modern thing all right. There's even a microphone rigged up down here and an amplifier to transmit the messages of the skinny guy who bosses this job. He yelled to Gringo, and that saved my life."

The Black Bat hurried up the stairs.

"There is a girl held here also," he said as he went along. "Peter Galvin's daughter. She is to be held hostage until Galvin comes through with the benefits of his son's insurance policy."

The Black Bat opened the door, found the house still steeped in darkness and stepped into the hallway. A man moved silently across his range of vision. The Black Bat could even tell the color of his hair and his clothing. The Black Bat raised his gun quickly, but it was too late. Lights flashed on. Two men were standing before him, guns pointed at his heart.

"Hold it!" one of them snapped. "You busted up this outfit nice and neat, but you're all done now, Bat. This is where the payoff comes—and to your pal as well."

Silk had his hands raised shoulder high, but was tensing to leap straight into the fire of those weapons before the Black Bat could move. Silk owed his life to the Black Bat and he meant to repay the debt if he died for it.

Fingers grew white against the triggers of the leveled guns. Cold-blooded murder was starkly vivid in the eyes of the two killers.

AN EXPLOSION suddenly roared out, but it was not from the two murder guns. One of the thugs dropped his weapon and clawed at his shoulder. The other shot a swift, fearful glance around, pale and shaken at this death that had come from an invisible hand.

"You're cornered!" a girl's voice cried. "I can see you but you can't see me. Drop that gun!"

The thug's gun thudded to the floor and Silk pounced upon it. The Black

Bat moved forward.

"Take them into the other room," he ordered Silk. "Tie them—tight—so they'll keep until the police get here."

Silk gestured with his gun and both men marched ahead of him. As soon as the door closed, the Black Bat extinguished the lights in the hall. Quick, eager footsteps clicked through the house. A girl's soft, warm arms went about the Black Bat's neck. He held her close.

"Carol, you didn't obey my orders and get away from this spot after you phoned me," he said admonishingly.

She looked up at him, able to see only his dark outline.

"How could I leave when I knew what you were up against? Butch has been keeping all the others busy somewhere in the forest. There hasn't been any more shooting so I suppose he's put them to flight. But I saw these two slip back and enter the house. I watched them through a window, then when the trouble started I slipped through it and shot. They knew you were in the cellar and they hid, waiting for you to come up. I—I never shot anyone before. It isn't so—nice."

The Black Bat patted her shoulders, then held her at arm's length.

"You only nicked him," he said. "Jail doctors can fix him up quickly enough. And I'm grateful, Carol. You returned my sight once. Now you've saved my life. I used to think you had no place in my work. I've certainly changed my mind on that score."

Carol laughed happily.

"You'll more than think so when you find out what I've got," she said. "After I phoned you, I came back. The car that I followed here came out with a new man at the wheel. He had some kind of package and I was curious. I followed him, slipped ahead and parked my car off the road. Then I—I hitch-hiked. He picked me up. I—I'm afraid I rather encouraged him. Then in a nice quiet spot I stuck my gun into his ribs, took the package and made

him get out. I imagine his feet are terribly sore by now. We were miles from anywhere."

She brought the package from a hiding place outside the front door. The Black Bat took it, examined the seals and glanced at the address. The written words loomed up as though they were spotlighted:

To Ronald Tunick—
2397 Belmont Drive

"Carol," the Black Bat said quickly, "he is the president of the Security Insurance Company."

He ripped away the seals ruthlessly and hauled out a cotten wrapped object. It was a dictaphone record. His eyes lighted up.

"Got it, Carol! The boss of this infernal scheme transmits his orders by a recording. The records are played off by that skinny lieutenant I knocked cold. He's still upstairs. Let's get him."

THE Black Bat raced up the steps, gun in hand. He stepped into the room where he had left Antal. The gaunt man was gone!

"Slipped through our fingers!" the Black Bat groaned.

"I know him," Carol said excitedly. "They call him Antal. I watched him before you came. He was outside for a few minutes. He—he's a horrible looking man."

"And as bad as he looks." The Black Bat nodded. Then he drew a sharp breath. "There's a girl here. Must be! Perhaps that crook abducted her again. Help me search. We've got to find her!"

But they were stopped before the search even began. Butch strode into the house with one man slung across his left shoulder and another tucked beneath his right arm. Butch was grinning from ear to ear. The Black Bat turned on the lights.

"We played tag long enough," Butch said gleefully. "I kept 'em away from the house long as I could. One of them

birds jumped outa the window and lammed. He had a car hidden and he picked up three more of them bozos. But I nailed these two—and did they talk. Say, boss, one of 'em says there's a girl locked up in a secret room. It's off one of the bedrooms upstairs."

"Great!" the Black Bat cried. "Take those two in where Silk is busy with a



couple of more of the same breed. Help him tie them up. Carol, upstairs with you. I'll find the girl."

They searched all the rooms. The Black Bat tapped on walls, examined mouldings and floors, but there was no sign of the hidden room. Then he turned out all the lights.

"Carol," he directed softly, "follow each wall and tap it with your fingers. Not too loudly. I think we may have a reaction."

Carol obeyed and then the Black Bat gave a low cry of relief. To his sensitive ears had come a faint call and tapping in answer to Carol.

Hurrying to the wall the Black Bat went over it carefully in the darkness. It was a papered wall, but he found that one edge of paper overlapped another. He ran his sensitive fingers over the edge and found a slight projection. He pressed it and a section of wall sprang inward to offer about two feet of space for admittance.

Carol slipped through before the Black Bat could prevent her.

"She's here—and safe!" she called back. "But they've abused her terribly. She's been struck across the face—many times. She needs a doctor!"

CHAPTER X

Tony Quinn—At Home

QUICKLY, Carol helped a trembling girl of about nineteen into the room. She saw the Black Bat's image cast a grim shadow of a wing like ghost against the wall—and screamed. The Black Bat moved toward her.

"You mustn't be afraid," he said soothingly. "We came here to rescue you. Within the next hour you'll be home. . . . Carol, is your car handy? Then take her back. Just help her to the door and then get away."

The Bat watched Carol help the half-starved, nearly prostrated girl out of the house. Then he turned into the room where he had battled Antal. Butch and Silk joined him a moment later and the Black Bat showed them the recording that Carol had lifted from the messenger.

"This lieutenant, in command of this place, sent a message to his leader. In a moment we'll know what that message was."

He slipped it on the play-back machine and turned it on. The record scratched for a moment and then the strains of "Silver Bell," an old recording, filled the house with music. The Bat gaped and sat down slowly.

"That's the oddest thing—unless that recorded music has a message contained between the notes."

He played it as slowly as possible and then as fast as the machine would go. Only the ancient tune rankled in his brain. He removed the record and examined it closely. No message was scratched on its sides or in the hollow of the cylinder.

Carefully rewrapping the record, he searched the room. He found several other records, all of them smashed, but

there was a good sized chunk of one left. He slipped this on the machine. It scratched out:

. . . Singleton is ready. Seventy-five thousand-dollar policy. Get to work . . . according to plan . . . kill Collins. The fool . . . snooping . . . knows too much. . . .

The rest was spoiled by great cracks in the surface of the record. The Black Bat reached for a telephone on the desk. He got a rural operator and was quickly connected with the Police Department. He asked for Detective-sergeant McGrath.

"This is the Black Bat," he announced calmly. "Now don't have hysterics. I know you want me for murder, but I didn't kill that man. He was alive when I left him. Listen to me, will you? A mile past the junction of White River Road on Highway Eleven, you'll find a dead man and four prisoners. They won't talk if you rubber hose them because they don't know anything, but I imagine you'll find they have records sufficient to put them away for a time. The dead man in the cellar tried to murder me. I was forced to kill him. Yes—I said forced! Also, this outfit is part of a gigantic insurance ring swindle. They insure people, kill them and collect on the policies by devious ways. Commissioner Warner should be—"

But the Black Bat suddenly realized he was talking to someone else. He heard the slight click as the connection was switched over. By now Sergeant McGrath was calling every law agency in the vicinity and throwing out a dragnet for the Black Bat. He hung up, gestured to Silk and Butch and they sped out of the house. A car was parked at the rear of the house and in a moment they were racing away from the city—not toward it.

The Black Bat knew that McGrath would put barriers across the highway and stop every vehicle. He realized also that McGrath was apt to speed personally to the home of Tony Quinn.

DETECTIVE - SERGEANT MCGRATH was a peculiar personality. He was as honest as a man could be and whole-heartedly devoted to his duty. But he was possessed of one obsession—to run down the Black Bat and expose him as blind ex-District Attorney Tony Quinn.

The car, driven by Butch, swept down a cross road and came out on an alternate highway leading into the city. They saw no patrols, but when they neared Quinn's home, the Black Bat touched Butch on the shoulder.

"Stop two blocks from the house. Silk, you get out. If McGrath is prowling around, stall him until I slip in through the tunnel passage. And remove your disguise, now."

Silk nodded. He removed all traces of his make-up and smoothened his clothing. Then he tilted his chin at just the right angle as befitted a gentleman's gentleman, and strolled nonchalantly down the street.

McGrath, with four patrolmen, was seated on the front porch. As Silk approached, McGrath jumped up and grabbed him.

"Okay, there's no use lying. Quinn isn't in that house. I've been banging on the door for five minutes. The Black Bat's loose, too, and you'd better know where Quinn happens to be or I'll know he's the Black Bat."

"But Sergeant"—Silk pulled himself free—"I'm afraid you're quite wrong. The master is in the house. He rarely answers the door when I'm not there. You know how sensitive he is about his affliction."

"Affliction, my foot!" McGrath belated. "He can see just as good as you or me. Better, if the stories I hear are correct. I know he's the Black Bat. I know he was twenty miles from here less than twenty-five minutes ago and I've got the roads covered so he can't get back. I'm going in that house and stay there until he shows up. Then maybe we'll see what kind of an excuse he can offer for a blind man taking a

walk all by himself at night."

Silk shrugged, walked up on the porch and had some difficulty in finding his key. McGrath scowled at him.

"No use stalling. I've got men thrown around this whole house. Quinn isn't inside because he's out, being busy as the Black Bat."

Silk opened the door, turned on lights and McGrath pushed his way past him. He strode into the living room and directly up to the chair which Tony Quinn habitually occupied. There McGrath stopped short and his face began to grow crimson, in a wave of color that mounted from his neck up and over his whole face. Tony Quinn was seated in the chair. His head was resting against soft cushions and he was fast asleep.

Silk elbowed McGrath out of the way with a disdainful glance.

"I could have informed you the master was here, but I knew you wouldn't believe me. He didn't hear you because he is wearing ear stoppers, to cut out all sound. Watch!"

Silk gently pulled a plug of especially prepared substance from Quinn's ear. Quinn stirred and his head jerked erect. He didn't try to face those in the room, but there was a look of alarm on his scarred face.

"Who is it?" he demanded. "Who is in this room?"

"Sorry to have startled you, sir," Silk said smoothly. "But Sergeant McGrath was outside when I returned from my usual constitutional. He insisted that you were out somewhere flying around in the guise of a bat."

QUINN'S lips parted in a smile. "So sorry, Sergeant," he said.

"I hate to disappoint you, but some day you'll learn I am not the Black Bat. I've been at home all evening. It is evening, isn't it? But of course—Silk served my dinner hours ago. A blind man, with a horribly scarred face like mine, doesn't enjoy himself outside very much. Sometimes I wish I was

this Black Bat person you speak of. Now you want my alibi, I suppose. I haven't any. I spent the afternoon writing at my desk over there. Some law work—the only thing that keeps my mind off myself and keeps me from cracking up."

McGrath walked over to the desk. He noticed that Silk had his back turned. Deftly McGrath folded one sheet of paper on which Quinn had been writing. He stuck this into his pocket and returned to face Quinn.

"I'm wrong, this time," he acknowledged grudgingly. "But I still think . . . Oh, what's the use! If I bothered you, I'm sorry. Good night."

He strode out of the house, whistled for his men to break up their cordon around the place and was off. Silk rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"I was watching him in a mirror, sir. I wonder what he swiped that bit of paper for?"

Quinn kept on staring blankly at the fireplace.

"He isn't missing a trick, Silk. He hopes, one of these days, to force the Black Bat to write. He'll have a sample of my handwriting and then—handcuffs."

Tony Quinn yawned and went to bed. . . .

With the morning, Quinn resumed his accustomed spot in the living room and while he acted the part of a blind man, his mind went over each minute detail of the bizarre events that had transpired during the past two days.

He was lost in thought when the doorbell buzzed. Silk admitted Police Commissioner Warner. Though Warner did not know it, Quinn appraised him swiftly. Warner looked harried and worn. He showed lack of sleep and the nervousness that comes with fatigue. Warner sat down and rubbed a hand over his eyes.

"Something is wrong, Commissioner," Quinn said. "Can I help?"

Warner sighed. "You have no eyes, Tony, but you certainly know what's

going on. Help me? If you only could! Listen to this. Last night the Black Bat fought a tremendous battle against odds that startled everyone who knows. We rounded up several wanted men, found a dead gorilla in the cellar and evidence that the house was used as a sort of laboratory by a gang of insurance swindlers. The Bat put us on the trail and we've done some investigating. There were crews working in cemeteries all night. We've uncovered twenty-two cases of murder for profit and in every case the beneficiary, who received a substantial sum, has vanished."

Tony Quinn sat erect. His cane beat a steady tattoo on the polished floor.

THERE'S a connection then, between those deaths and the murders in the cemetery—the night that Scott was murdered," he mused. "Have you investigated that angle?"

"We've run a fine comb through it and found murder. Murder without clues. Last night Peter Galvin came to my office and confessed that the body he identified as his son was that of a total stranger. He told me that his daughter had been kidnapped and held as a hostage, that a thug was placed in his house to watch over him. Until he turned over the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars that was due on the policy covering his son's death, the girl would be held.

"Then—well, it seems the Black Bat took a hand last night. I think Galvin knows something about the Black Bat's activities, but he won't be tricked into admitting this. His daughter actually saw the Black Bat and some kind, beautiful girl took her home after the Black Bat rescued her."

Tony Quinn chuckled softly and Warner growled something under his breath.

"I realize now, Commissioner, why Sergeant McGrath came blundering in here last night," he said. "He still thinks I'm the Black Bat and I suppose

he hoped to find me out. I wasn't."

Warner sighed. "Oh, I know. He came to me this morning with the whole story. Said he wanted to get the jump on you in case of a formal complaint. You know, Tony, the last time I was here I condemned the Black Bat, said he was a murderer. I'm sure I was wrong. I know I was wrong! If only you were the Black Bat! I need help—desperately. I need someone who can operate without all the red tape of the law. If I've ever hoped before, I hope now that the Black Bat can hear me."

Tony Quinn's face didn't move a muscle.

"You know, Commissioner," he said quietly, "that a bat has abnormally large ears. He might hear around corners."

Warner arose and put a friendly hand on Quinn's shoulder.

"I also know that bats are—blind. If you think of any way to help, just call on me, Tony. I—"

The doorbell buzzed again. Silk announced the visitors with a voice that almost reached a falsetto in his excitement.

"Mr. Hugh Morgan and Mr.—Ronald Tunick!"

CHAPTER XI

A Collector of Recordings



RONALD TUNICK!

The man to whom that musical recording had been addressed by Antal. Tony Quinn had to restrain the impulse to turn and look at this man.

He satisfied the desire when Tunick was shaking hands with Warner. He was a portly man with graying hair and keen, darting eyes. His companion was slender, animated and eager—the go-getter type.

He was carefully dressed and carried a briefcase under one arm.

"You are aware, Commissioner," Tunick said, "that I am the president of the Security Insurance Company. This man is Morgan, my ace agent. He's one of the best insurance solicitors in the business. Headquarters told me you were coming here and I took the liberty of dropping in. Ah—this is Mr. Quinn."

Tunick held out his hand. Tony Quinn didn't move. Warner whispered something and Quinn smiled.

"No need to whisper the news, Commissioner. I know rather keenly that I'm blind. Glad to know you, Mr. Tunick—and you, Mr. Morgan."

Tunick mumbled something about being sorry and Quinn waved his hand.

"I suppose," Quinn said, "that you are here about these insurance murders. The commissioner was just telling me about them. Very interesting."

"And costly," Tunick grunted. "Every few minutes we learn that we've paid a claim on a man murdered for the value of the policy. Three-fourths of the cases so far happen to be our clients. Morgan wrote several of them—the largest ones unfortunately."

"But I only deal in large amounts," Morgan put in smoothly. "I was hoodwinked somehow, but I'll be double damned if I know how. I've prided myself on being most careful in this game."

"Something has to be done!" Tunick shouted hotly. "The public won't stand for mass murder like this without an arrest. Put your best men on the case, Commissioner! Stop at no expense. This is murder—mass murder!"

"Every man on my force is working on the case, from the newest rookie to the most seasoned detective," the commissioner assured. "We're doing all we can, Mr. Tunick. Have patience."

While they talked, Quinn's cane tapped continuously, as if he were deep in thought. But those taps carried a

message that only Silk understood. From his post at the door, he decoded the message, waited three or four minutes, then stepped into the room.

"Sorry to interrupt, gentlemen, but the master asked me to tell him when a certain radio program went on." And he added in an undertone that almost made Quinn break out in a grin: "It's his only solace."

Silk snapped the switch and a dance orchestra blared a hot number. Quinn seemed to relax.

"Wonderful band," he said. "I love music—good, modern music—and the peppier it is, the better it suits me."

Tunick growled something and then spoke louder.

"I hate that brand of so-called music. It's Tin Pan Alley. I like the old ones. In fact, I make a hobby of collecting old recordings. I pay fancy prices for them, too, and get my money's worth. There's an advertisement in several newspapers asking that old time records be sent to me."

"I'm sorry," Quinn said. "Turn the radio off, Kirby."

SILK snapped the switch again and discretely withdrew. In the hallway he mopped his forehead. Things were getting hotter than that music. So Tunick collected old records. Like the recording of "Silver Bell," sent him by a murderer named Antal.

Tunick talked for twenty minutes, recounting the cases that had been so far uncovered. Several of the deaths were attributed to chronic illnesses and found, upon autopsy, to have been poisoning. Others involved drownings and still others automobile accidents with fatal results that now began to look like staged "accidents."

Quinn absorbed all this information and realized with a cold chill, that he was probably fighting the most vicious gang of killers this country had ever known. When the trio departed, he called in Silk.

"We can't lose any more time," he

said firmly. "I can't operate very well in daylight so it's up to you, Butch, and Carol. Phone them from outside. All three of you search every hospital in town for a patient named Singleton—probably dying or dead last night. Find out all you can about him and notify me at once. Snap it up, Silk."

For the rest of the day Quinn fretted at his enforced idleness, but he did not dare swing into action. It was too dangerous, especially with McGrath on the warpath. Silk returned in time to prepare dinner, but with no results.

At nine o'clock there was a tap on the other side of the secret door. Silk quietly moved about, drawing the curtains. Tony Quinn rested his head against cushions that Silk arranged. It looked as if a blind man were going to rest for the evening.

But when the curtains were finally drawn, Quinn jumped up and entered his laboratory. Carol was there, seated on one of the high stools, with a pleased expression in her eyes.

"Carol!" Quinn cried. "You've found him!"

"His full name is Montgomery Singleton and he used to be a broker," she said promptly. "He has wads of money and he's been free with it. A week ago he was in a mild sort of an accident and got a metal sliver in his arm. Dr. Lawrence Luddy treated him, but he developed an infection and—he's on his way out. They gave him forty-eight hours more to live and one of the internes even went so far as to put his arms around me in sympathy. I'm Montgomery Singleton's woman of mystery. He's in love with me and he doesn't even know it."

Quinn peeled off his smoking jacket and grinned.

"Out with the light, Carol. I'm changing into costume. Dr. Lawrence Luddy is about to have an after office hours' visitor whose only ailment is an unholy desire to ask a lot of questions."

When the lights came back on, Tony Quinn had disappeared and a resolute

man with flaming eyes drew on black silken gloves. He thrust his hood into a pocket, examined two automatics and stuffed them into holsters.

Carol stepped up to him.

"Tony—please be careful. These men are no ordinary killers. They're fiends! I've read all about what the police have discovered so far."

Quinn laughed lightly.

"The Black Bat usually returns to his nest in the cave, Carol. Thanks, anyway, for worrying about me. You go back to your apartment and stand by for orders. A smart, beautiful girl like you isn't to be left out of this game."

He waved to Silk, opened the passageway and vanished.

DR. LAWRENCE LUDDY maintained luxurious offices on the second floor of the medical building. He was a middle-aged, well fed person inclined to be cantankerous and fussy. It was ten o'clock. His nurse had gone and his last patient had been treated and sent home.

Dr. Luddy yawned and removed his white jacket. Then he heard the door of his outer office close. He swore softly, damning patients who thought

they could make an office call at any time of the night. He opened the door, intent on administering an opinion along these lines. But instead he blinked and slowly raised his hands.

The man in his outer office was dressed in black and wore a hood with a cape that made him look like a fantastic bird. There was an automatic in his hand.

"I'm sorry for both the gun and my costume," the intruder apologized, "but the weapon is to prevent you from creating a scene. The mask for my own protection. I am known as the Black Bat."

Dr. Luddy backed away a few steps.

"You're wanted for murder! Why are you here? What do you wish of me?"

"Sit down!" The Black Bat draped himself on the edge of the doctor's desk. "All I want is information. You performed a minor job of surgery on a man named Singleton, didn't you?"

Luddy nodded mutely and then, with an effort, found his voice.

"Yes—yes I did. A piece of metal entered his arm and I removed it. He developed tetanus despite the fact that I gave him a shot of anti-toxin. It

[Turn Page]

**MR. WRIGHT
FOUND OUT
HE WAS
WRONG!**



MR. WRIGHT: Gee, this stuff is awful! Why do all laxatives taste so bad?



MRS. WRIGHT: All of them don't. Ex-Lax tastes like delicious chocolate.



MR. W.: Ex-Lax? That's O.K. for you and Junior, but I need something stronger!



MRS. W.: No, you don't! Ex-Lax is just as effective as any bad-tasting cathartic.



LATER!
MR. W.: I sure am glad I took your advice. It's Ex-Lax for me from now on.

MRS. W.: Yes, with Ex-Lax in the house we don't need any other laxative!

The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet *gentle*! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.

10¢ and 25¢



happens in such cases sometimes."

"Only this time," the Black Bat said softly, "it happened too conveniently. Singleton took out an accident insurance policy three weeks ago. It pays a quarter of a million dollars in the event of accidental death. Singleton is now dying. You know the family. Who will collect?"

"Why—why I suppose it will be his sister. He isn't married and she would be his heir."

"Doctor,"—the Black Bat's eyes regarded the medical man critically—"would you mind showing me the instruments you used in removing that sliver of metal from Singleton's arm?"

Luddy shrugged, arose and walked over to a cabinet. The Bat watched him intently. He didn't trust this man.

Luddy removed an oiled silk kit, opened it and spread out scalpels, ranging from minute ones to the large knives used in major amputations.

"I keep them sterilized with an antiseptic solution," Luddy explained. "The removal of a splinter of metal involves no chance of infection if done properly."

"Then you didn't sterilize any instrument before operating on Singleton?" The Black Bat nodded. "I thought not—without offense to your ability, Doctor. I agree that instruments, properly kept and handled, do not require sterilization for such minor work. Have you a microscope?"

Luddy nodded, opened a cabinet drawer and took out a high powered instrument.

"Suppose you take a culture from these scalpels," the Black Bat said. "Stain them and see what you get. Believe me, sir, this is not just a hobby of mine. I think that Singleton was deliberately infected and the only way that could have been done was through your instruments."

LUDDY turned pale. He jumped up, arranged slides and staining solutions. In five minutes he had his eye

glued to the microscope. The hand controlling the mechanism shook slightly.

"You—you're right," he said tensely. "Every one of these scalpels contains an invisible layer of some soluble substance infected with streptococci. Good heavens! If I'd used these instruments on anyone else, the same thing would have resulted. Thank God, I had no occasion to use them. Now what's to be done? I—I don't know—"

He opened a drawer in his desk, as he spoke. It was a wholly innocent motion, but the hand that deposited the microscope slides in the drawer also seized a small pearl-handled pistol. He brought it up, in line with the Black Bat's chest.

"Drop your gun!" he snapped. "Drop it or I'll kill you."

The Black Bat's automatic fell to the floor. Dr. Luddy let it remain there as he arose and herded the Bat toward a davenport. He motioned that he was to sit down and keep his hands high. Then Luddy backed up toward his desk and the telephone on it.

"I understand quite a few things, Mr. Black Bat. You're a crook. This happens to be blackmail. I suppose for a certain sum you'd have held your tongue. Oh, I know you could have ruined me professionally. Singleton will die—there isn't a chance for him. But I see through your smug little scheme. You couldn't possibly have guessed that my scalpels would be infected unless you had done it yourself. I'm going to turn you over to the police!"

"Doctor,"—the Black Bat's voice was very calm—"you are making a grave mistake. How do you suppose your reputation would resist the idea that you have known Singleton a long time and that you've been courting his sister for several years? If she inherits, then you, too, inherit—provided you marry her. I'm only trying to protect you, to find out if you can give me a lead as to who infected those scalpels.

It must have been done before Singleton had his accident, because I'm sure that was staged."

"As though I'd fall for that line!" Dr. Luddy sneered. "You're going to be handed over to the police—immediately."

Luddy raised the phone and dialed the number. He gave the police operator a cryptic idea of what was wanted, then hung up. The Black Bat's hands were high. He had arisen and now stood with his back against the wall, near the office door. Against one shoulder he could feel the light switch. He made a motion, as if shrugging in despair.

His shoulder blade raised the switch and the lights went out.

Dr. Luddy pulled the trigger and hurled a slug through the glass panel of his office door. That was the only



shot he fired. The Black Bat was upon him, wrenching the gun free, forcing the doctor toward the davenport. He pushed him into it.

"That was foolish," he said. "Now stay where you are. Don't move. When the police arrive, I'll let them know just where you stand. Not a sound out of you."

Dr. Luddy, wide-eyed in terror, sat primly erect, hands extended. He heard someone bang on the outer office door and realized that the Black Bat had locked it. Then the door was crashed in. Heavy feet stamped across the waiting room and pushed open the door of the consultation room where Luddy sat.

"D-don't turn on the lights!" Luddy half screamed. "It's the Black Bat! He's got me covered. He'll shoot!"

CHAPTER XII

Busy Bus Boy



FLASHLIGHTS broke the darkness, swept the whole office and then the lights were turned on. A uniformed man eyed Luddy with a critical eye. There was no one in the office. A window was open about an inch, but no human being could have crawled through that space.

"W-what happened to him?" Luddy gasped. "He—he was right over there. The lights were out. He put them out. I had him covered, but he got the best of me."

"Sure, sure," the sergeant said soothingly. "Now just what did the Black Bat want of you?"

Luddy looked up eagerly. "He said that I had—"

There he stopped. His face was bathed in perspiration. He dry-washed his hands until they hurt. If he ever tried to explain, they'd lock him up, probably charge him with murder, involve him in this huge ring that was killing off victims to collect on their insurance.

Something, whipping swiftly, like a snake leaping out of a coil, struck the window. The police rushed over to it. They saw nothing and turned back.

"Well?" the police officer demanded.

Dr. Luddy looked at the rug. "I—I guess I must have been wrong. My nerves, they're ready to break. Please leave me alone. I—I'll be all right. I'm a doctor. I know about these things."

The blue coat jerked his head toward the door.

"Plain nuts," he whispered to the other men. "If he wasn't such a big shot, I'd drag him in. But he doesn't look violent. We'll take a chance and let him go."

They descended to the lobby, walked

back to where the police car was parked at the curb. The driver got behind the wheel. Then his eyes grew round. He pointed with a finger that trembled slightly. There was the miniature image of a black bat pasted in the middle of the windshield.

"Back to Headquarters," the police officer snapped. "This job belongs to Sergeant McGrath. He's the baby who likes to get on the Black Bat's trail. Me, I'd rather monkey around with a buzz saw on my left and a man eating lion on my right. Let's go!"

From the nearby doorway, the Black Bat watched the police car rush off. He was still panting slightly from the exertion of his escape. In the darkness he had used a coil a light, but strong, silk rope to effect his escape. By passing it around a radiator pipe, he had quickly lowered himself to the alley, then whisked the rope out of the window, leaving no trace as to how it had been done.

A bitter rankling in his heart for Dr. Luddy's deliberate doublecross made his plaster that sticker on the windshield. It would start things going, announced the fact that the Black Bat was still working against Dr. Luddy.

The Black Bat entertained something far stronger than a hunch that Luddy could have told more than he did. His actions made him a definite suspect. Who could plan such murder any more smoothly and easily than a doctor? Luddy would bear some further investigating on the Black Bat's part.

One thing he did know—that Singleton had been deliberately murdered. Cleverly, and with all the efficiency that the murder ring displayed in every one of its cases. The Black Bat continued to keep Luddy's building under observation. If Luddy came out in a hurry, he wanted to know where he went.

A SLEEK three-thousand-dollar limousine slid to the curb. A man got out, carefully adjusted his tie, drew

his coat neatly together and buttoned it. Then he bent down and ran two fingers along the already immaculate crease in his trousers. This done, he walked importantly toward the office building lobby and vanished inside.

The Black Bat's eyes gleamed. The visitor was undoubtedly heading for Dr. Luddy's office. All the other physicians and surgeons who maintained offices in the building had gone for the night. And the newcomer was Alexander Paradon, Attorney-at-Law. A shyster, but smooth as satin, with a brain that could outthink almost any other attorney he ran up against.

He did not dabble in various forms of law. He specialized—in handling insurance claims. Paradon had become the deepest and most vicious thorn in the side of all insurance companies that they had encountered in their extended histories.

Now Paradon was visiting Luddy; unquestionably called there in a hurry. The Black Bat whistled softly and decided that things were beginning to take shape. It was too dangerous to eavesdrop. Luddy would be suspicious and then too, Lieutenant McGrath might come flying to the scene at any moment.

The Black Bat slipped through the night, reached his car and drove away. He removed his mask, donned his wide-brimmed hat and left the car in front of Butch's boarding house. Then he made his way along the quiet street, beside the wall of his own estate. Making sure he was unobserved, he slipped through the gate, proceeded along the secret passageway that led from the garden house and into the laboratory.

Silk was waiting when Blind Tony Quinn tapped his way to the chair in front of the fireplace.

"Nobody called, sir," Silk reported. "Is everything quite all right?"

Quinn sighed. "It's all wrong. I haven't the least idea who is behind this murder ring. Suspects—oh, yes. There's this Dr. Luddy I just visited.

He either unknowingly infected Singleton or he's as cool a killer as I've ever seen. His sending for Paradon is another thing I don't like. What's Paradon mixed up in this for? Except for a massive fee. And so far as I can figure out the only people who profit are the leaders of the ring and they get one hundred percent."

"Pardon me, sir," Silk said, "but when Tunick, the president of that insurance company was here, I watched him closely. He seemed a trifle nervous and that special agent with him—Morgan, wasn't it?—kept running his fingers through his hair and watching the door to see if anyone spied."

"I noticed that too," Quinn said thoughtfully. "From newspaper accounts and from what Commissioner Warner said, most of the policies were with Tunick's company. And Morgan had written up three-fourths of those."

"I don't like it," Silk said. "To make matters worse they've had the jump on us every time. There's no telling how many more murders they will commit."

TO an observer who might be peering through a window, Tony Quinn seemed to be casually talking about everyday affairs. His face showed none of the turmoil within him.

"We won a single round, Silk," he said. "We broke up part of his gang at any rate. And we have that dictaphone record. I don't know what it means or how it can possibly carry a message, but I do know that this Antal, second in command of the gang, sent his messages that way and received them in the same manner. I heard one of his records playing when I slipped into the house. Those records give us our only lead so far.

"They are addressed to Tunick, which is highly significant, and he has admitted collecting old recordings. We have the address to which they are mailed, but the thug from whom Carol hijacked our recording, has probably admitted what happened to his su-

periors. Now they'll use a new address or method of sending them."

Silk leaned forward. "Let's suppose that recording went through, sir. In the usual manner—to that post-office box of Tunick's. We could watch, see who came for it and trail the man. Maybe that mug Carol outwitted decided it would be healthier if he took a trip to China."

Quinn let a slow smile come over his face.

"We think along the same lines, Silk. Prepare the package. Forge the seals and mail it in the original wrapper. Tomorrow morning you disguise yourself—the banker type this time, because they already know your other method of concealing your identity. Trail the man who comes for the package and have Butch follow you. Carol will be somewhere in the background just so there will be no slips. Now I think we ought to eat. A two-inch steak would be just about the thing."

Silk grinned. "It's on the fire, sir. I anticipated this. . . ."

The next morning Silk's closest friend would not have recognized the man who seemed to have difficulty in writing out an application for a foreign money order in the Central Post-office. Silk had turned into a pompous, overbearing man in a white-edged vest, white spats and glasses that dangled from a black silk cord around his neck. He wore a derby, a tailored coat and striped gray trousers.

For an hour Silk had been there, watching the post-office box where the recording had been placed. At ten-thirty a familiar figure ambled into the post office and Silk's eyes narrowed. It was Morgan, ace agent for the Security Insurance Company. He looked around, eyeing each individual. His gaze passed right over Silk, but it registered the appearance of the white-haired banker.

Morgan took a key from his pocket, opened the lock-box and pulled out a sheaf of mail. He carefully sorted it,

tied a piece of cord around the stack of envelopes and then picked out the package which Silk had mailed.

Though he watched narrowly, Silk could not see that Morgan betrayed any undue surprise. He simply thrust the package into his coat pocket, heedless of the bulge it made, and ambled out.

Silk gave him about two minutes, then followed. He picked up Morgan's trail easily. The man walked rapidly along the busy street and Silk, far in the background, felt reasonably secure. Morgan turned into a cafeteria, tipped his hat to the blond cashier and selected a table in a far corner. He placed his stack of mail on the table, took the package from his pocket and put that on the top. Then he picked up a tray and started serving himself at the food bars.

SILK was outside the restaurant, but he could watch every movement the insurance agent made. He kept his eyes on the package. A white-coated bus boy, tray full of dirty dishes, approached the table while Morgan was busy at the counter. He swabbed the table and Silk saw one of the cleverest sleight of hand tricks it had been his privilege to observe in years.

A package, the exact counterpart of the one that Silk himself had mailed, deftly replaced the original. The bus boy slipped the one he had stolen into a hip pocket that seemed to have been especially created to receive the bundle.

When Morgan returned to his table, he saw nothing amiss. Butch sidled up to Silk without showing any recognition. Silk's lips barely moved.

"Bus boy, now cleaning table in west corner. Watch service entrance of restaurant. Trail him. Send Carol over."

Butch leaned against a hydrant, inserted a wooden match between his lips, chewed on it thoughtfully for a moment, then ambled off. It was done with a neatness and dispatch only

rivalled by the way that bus boy had switched packages.

Carol came along two minutes later. To her Silk gave other orders.

"That smooth little guy just getting up with the mail in his hand. Watch out—he's slippery. Carry on."

Carol paused to look in the window of a hat store. When Morgan emerged, she turned away and followed him. Silk waited another minute, then went into the restaurant.

He walked up to the blond cashier and didn't blame Morgan for giving her the eye.

"Mr. Morgan of the Security Insurance Company promised to meet me here," he murmured. "I don't know him. Will you point him out?"

The girl said, "Sorry, Mister. He just went out this minute. Say, didn't I see you in front of the window a minute or two ago. Why just think, he was in here—right over in that corner—and you were out there."

Silk clucked his tongue. "Think of it. Now that you mention it. I do remember seeing a handsome man at that table in the corner. He left his mail on the table when he went for his food. I thought it most careless of him."

The cashier flashed Silk a knowing look.

"Well, he does that every day, just the same. I sort of keep my eye on his mail, but there ain't no crooks around this rest'runt, Mister. We run a decent place. His mail is just as safe on the table as if a mailman had it."

Silk gave her a big smile and tipped his hat.

"I can readily see that, or you wouldn't be working here. Well, I'll catch up with Morgan later on. Thank you very much."

So Morgan made a habit of leaving his mail on the table. It was too damned careless a gesture to be on the level. He was getting rid of that recording, without actually contacting the agent who came for it.

Silk began walking rapidly in the direction which Carol had taken.

CHAPTER XIII

A Nice Old Lady



WHEN Silk met Carol she was coming back in a rush. She stopped him deliberately.

"Silk, we've got to chance an open contact like this," she said hurriedly. "I don't know what to

do. That awful man, Antal, is in the lobby of the insurance building. When Morgan went in, I saw Antal watch ever so carefully. I think he's up to something."

"I think they are in cahoots if you should ask me, Miss Carol," Silk said. "Morgan just passed that recording to a pal. Did it mighty neat too."

Carol's hand gripped Silk's forearm.

"That isn't the worst of it. Sergeant McGrath is also watching the building. And Antal has several men parked outside. It looks to me like a kidnaping and if McGrath tries to stop them, he'll be killed!"

Silk said "O-o-o-h!" very slowly, then went on: "McGrath is a nuisance, but I know the master wouldn't want him hurt. Here's the angle. You tell the master. Don't use a phone. Go to the house personally. I'll watch out here. If anything happens, I'll phone. Have to take the chance. Run along now."

Silk ambled toward the insurance company's massive structure. He saw McGrath across the street, eyeing the place suspiciously. Silk knew what McGrath was after. He had become just as suspicious of Morgan and Tunick as he was of the Black Bat. The policies of the murdered men had not been distributed to enough companies. Practically all of them were insured by

Tunick's firm. Either someone was making a sucker out of Tunick or the president of the firm was milking his own business to the tune of millions.

Silk had seen morning papers. The list of murders increased almost hourly, with the police working with frantic speed to uncover something—anything—so the newspapers would be satisfied.

Five minutes after Silk took up a concealed post where he could watch proceedings, a woman of about sixty came out of the building. Tightly clutched between her wrinkled fingers were several documents that looked like insurance policies. She was dressed in mourning and the lines of her wrinkled face showed that she had suffered severely in the immediate past. She was such a simple soul, even trying to smile through her tears, that Silk, who knew every angle of the sob sister business, realized that she couldn't be a fraud. She was much too genuine.

Then he saw Antal emerge and give a covert signal. The car full of his gunmen began moving slowing down the street. Silk burst out into a sweat of horror. They were after the old woman. They were going to snatch her.

Suddenly another complication arose. McGrath had straightened up. He knew Antal, had recognized him as a wanted man, and was swinging into action. Silk saw him reach for his service pistol. There was going to be a gun battle and that old lady would be in the middle of it. Silk caught a hard breath and began running.

At that moment Sergeant McGrath let out a lusty yell for Antal to stop. The gaunt killer turned with a snarling curse. McGrath rushed toward him, but in his concentration on the killer, McGrath missed the slowly moving car filled with gunmen.

Antal's lips parted in a sardonic scowl and he raised his hands. McGrath drew out handcuffs and approached Antal warily. Two men jumped out of the car. Both held

clubbed guns. A pedestrian screamed. McGrath, caught between two fires, started to bring his gun down to stop the advancing killers.

ANTAL swung into action then. His big fist struck McGrath at the nape of the neck. The doughty detective-sergeant swayed like a drunken man and hit the sidewalk. Instantly the two gunmen picked him up, dragged him to the car and hurled him into it. A police whistle shrilled somewhere and Antal began racing toward the old woman who had drawn back against a store window to get out of harm's way.

Silk met Antal with a terrific thump. It seemed like an accidental collision to any observer, but Silk's two fists smashed a pair of healthy blows to Antal's belly. The gaunt killer let out a roar of pain, swayed around, gripping his middle and emitting a string of curses.

A patrolman swung around a corner and Antal hesitated, torn between the desire to snatch the old lady or run for it. He decided on the latter. So far as he could see, no one had suspected his intentions and the old lady could wait until a more opportune time. Antal jumped into the moving car and it roared away, taking the next corner on squealing tires.

Silk moved to the old lady's side and tipped his hat.

"A nasty rumpus, madam," he said. "I can see how it has affected you. May I offer you a lift?"

The old lady clutched at Silk's arm. "Oh yes—you're so kind. Why, I—thought for a moment that I was really going to be hurt. That awful-looking man seemed to be coming for me. Of course it's just my imagination, but I'm so upset—"

Silk piloted her to a taxi. He did not ask where she lived. That could come later. Silk's mind was reeling under the swift turn of events. While he hated to let McGrath be kidnaped, he

would have hated himself more if anything happened to this kindly old lady. McGrath was a police officer, paid and trained to face danger. This woman would be as helpless as a two-weeks-old babe in the hands of men like Antal.

Silk changed cabs twice, watching carefully to see that he was not followed.

"Just a habit of mine," he explained away his actions. "I like to ride and I like taxi drivers. By changing I'm able to give them all a little business."

Silk gulped and called himself a fool. If she swallowed that line, she was as naive as any person he'd ever met. She swallowed it all right.

"That's very kind of you. But you don't even know where I live, but it really isn't much further. I can walk."

Silk shook his head. "I wouldn't think of it. I'll see you right to your door, madam. If I'm not too inquisitive—you've lost someone dear, haven't you?"

She smiled wanly. "My grandson—Charlie's boy. He was hit by a car only day before yesterday. The funeral is tomorrow—from the undertaker's chapel. Now I'm all alone except for another grandson. My daughter's boy. But let me tell you who I am. You've heard of Arnold Bannister? I'm Beulah, his widow."

Silk almost jumped off the taxi seat. Beulah Bannister was a comparatively wealthy woman. Her late husband, a tire manufacturer, had left her comfortably well off. No wonder Antal had laid crafty plans to snatch her.

Then Silk thought of those papers the old lady held tightly in her hand. Silk knew how to handle people of her kind. All the old polish and suaveness of his confidence man career oozed out of every pore.

"I'M SO SORRY," he said gently. "My name is Smith. I lost my dear ones years ago. If I could only be of some help to you. Oh, I know you have attorneys and men who

would fight to get a part of your money, Mrs. Bannister. That's not my way. I like people for themselves. By the way—those papers in your hand. They look valuable. Hadn't you better place them in your purse? Here—let me do it."

She surrendered both her purse and the papers. Silk folded them once, but his keen eyes ran over the details on the title page of the first documents. He closed his eyes and shook his head. This old lady's grandson had been insured against accidental death to the tune of two hundred thousand dollars—and that was only one of the insurance policies she held!

A servant ran out to open the taxi door. The woman shook hands with Silk and bestowed a friendly smile on him.

"I won't ask you in now, Mr. Smith. Things are so off balance, with the boy's death and all. I would appreciate your coming to tea some afternoon—in about a week. I won't mind, you see. We are old people, you and I. We've grown to expect death, even if it comes to our dearest ones and not ourselves. I won't be impairing the boy's memory if you come for a friendly chat some afternoon. Good-bye—and thank you ever so much."

After she left, Silk found that his eyes were moist. Then, to the amazement of the taxi driver, he snapped a searing oath.

"If they've got plans to harm that old lady, I'll wring their filthy necks," he told himself. Then aloud: "Driver, take me to Union Station. . . ."

At home, waiting for Silk, Tony Quinn paced the narrow confines of his laboratory nervously. Delay irritated him and he should have heard from Silk hours ago. It wasn't like Silk to permit so much time to pass unless something had happened to him. Something he could not get out of.

Then there was McGrath. Despite the bulldog tenacity he used in trying to connect Tony Quinn with the Black

Bat, Quinn liked him for it. McGrath lent a certain spice of excitement to life. And he was honest, fair and as good a policeman as existed.

Carol had arrived with her information and departed to hurry back to the insurance company building and watch for further developments. Suddenly the signal light, wired to the front porch, winked to indicate someone was approaching the door. Quinn picked up his cane, assumed the staring gaze of a blind man and hurried back to the living room. But it was only Silk who arrived. Silk, as alarmed as Quinn had ever seen him.

"Have things happened!" He doffed his hat and slipped out of the disguise. "No need to worry about McGrath watching, sir. He's been snatched—taken by Antal and his gunmen. Where? I don't know, sir. There was an old lady—charming person. Antal was ready to snatch her when McGrath butted in. I hustled the old lady off and who do you think she was?"

"Stop asking riddles," Quinn said tartly. "I've got to find McGrath. Oh, I'm sorry, Silk. I know you did the right thing in protecting the woman. Out with it. Who was she?"

"Mrs. Beulah Bannister—and her grandson died yesterday, hit by a car—" Silk paused and a horrified expression came over his face. "I—I just thought of something, sir. The grandson was killed by a car. He was insured for over two hundred thousand dollars. She was cashing in on his policies. Oh, what a sap I've been! She must be part and parcel of the gang."

QUINN whistled thoughtfully. "Maybe Silk. But it doesn't sound quite right to me. We'll have to look into it."

Silk looked puzzled. "The death of her grandson does smack of these devils who operate the insurance racket. Only I—I can't see how they'd have any hold on her, sir. She's such a nice

old lady. She did mention another grandson, her daughter's boy. He's all she has left."

Quinn rubbed his chin. "We'll have to watch her, Silk. Maybe for her own protection. But first I must find McGrath before they kill him. They'll take their time about it and try to find out what McGrath has up his sleeve. He won't talk, so he won't be murdered at once. But we've lost the trail. Carol told me about the package and the bus boy. I haven't heard from Butch yet, but he'll report as soon as he knows anything. But we must find McGrath, then investigate the death of Mrs. Bannister's grandson. Silk, I believe we're beginning to close in. If I have my way, the rest of the innings will be ours."

Silk went to his rooms to completely eradicate the disguise.

It was an hour later when the phone rang. Silk answered it and stiffened to attention. Butch was calling, so excited that he could hardly talk and complicating things by pretending he was the manager of a laundry calling.

"The bundle you reported — Mr. Quinn's—well, it—it's gone. It must have been delivered to some other address, see? Maybe the party at two-three-five-six Boulevard Drive got it by mistake, see? I'm gonna find out if that's what happened, see? And I'm busy—gotta be traveling, see?"

Silk hung up quickly. He raced into the living room, but Tony Quinn, in his pose of a blind man, did not turn a hair.

"It was Butch—he disguised the call. He mentioned the address at two-three-five-six Boulevard Drive, see? I mean—sir." Silk blushed at the slip of the tongue.

Quinn grinned broadly.

"Butch evidently imparted some of his excitement to you, Silk. Anyway it's what I've been waiting for. And, damn it, I must keep on waiting. It will be dark within an hour. I must restrain myself until then. It won't be

safe for me to prowl around until I'm in my own element — darkness. Get some coffee, Silk. And see to my guns. I've a feeling they'll go into action tonight."

CHAPTER XIV

To Save a Policeman



JUST as soon as it was dark enough to venture out, Tony Quinn's personality slipped from him. Gone were the stark, staring eyes of a blind man. His resigned, almost morose look vanished.

As the Black Bat he became alive and alert. His nerves were tingling, his eyes shining brilliantly.

He gave Silk instructions to contact Carol at once and have her call on old Mrs. Bannister. She was to ingratiate herself in the old lady's favor by some pretext or other. Carol could decide the circumstances, for she was clever enough to know where to draw the line. She was to be armed and ready for trouble. At the first sign of developing danger she was to call the police and stand by Mrs. Bannister.

"And you, Silk, will have to chance a caller here at this house. If anyone comes, we went for a drive and I'm walking alone in the park. Remind me to make a habit of that when we're not busy on some case. It's a good alibi and we need 'em. Conceal yourself and watch both Mrs. Bannister and Carol. If that skinny Antal shows up and tries to strike, shoot him. It's the only way to handle cornered rats. I'm depending on you, Silk, old man."

Quinn drew on the floppy hat, slid down the ladder to the tunnel and in five minutes was behind the wheel of the car that Butch kept parked for his convenience.

He headed west and turned up Bou-

levard Drive. The name was more or less facetious for it was nothing like a boulevard. There were no trees at all—only dirty factory smokestacks rearing their heads above the squalid tenement houses, most of them empty because of government housing projects being carried out in the vicinity.

The number Butch had given proved to be a boarded-up old place that looked as though a good windstorm might blow it down. The Black Bat drove right by the place, slowly, for he knew that Butch was somewhere in the vicinity and would recognize the car.

Ten blocks away the Black Bat turned around and came back. Before he neared the house, Butch jumped from a place of concealment and waved his hand. The Black Bat stopped and picked him up.

"There's five of 'em," Butch reported excitedly. "I tailed the bus boy from the restaurant to this joint, and I been watchin' the dump ever since they dragged McGrath inside. Boy, they sure didn't handle him gentle! That big punk, Antal, took an awful swipe at the poor guy—damn near knocked McGrath's head off—and all for nuthin'."

"We'll give them a taste of their own brand of medicine," the Black Bat decided. "You have my permission to knock as many of their heads together as you can. With one stipulation. Antal belongs to me."

Butch made a wry face.

"I knew they was a catch to it, Chief. I been wantin' to bust that guy ever since I first laid eyes on him. But how do we start? They got a couple of hoods parked at windows upstairs and they got tommy-guns. I know, because even if the windows are all boarded up, they got 'em on hinges so they swing out. They loosened one for quick shootin' and the wind banged it wide open. I saw the stutter gun, see?"

"I think that we'll steal a police car," the Black Bat said judiciously. "Under

the circumstances—rescuing a police officer and all—we should feel free to use department equipment. What do you think, Butch?"

BUTCH'S jaw hung slackly down. "Sure, Chief. Sure—anythin' you say. But a police car—what are we gonna do with it? Drive it through the front door?"

The Black Bat grinned. "No, but we'll use it to drive those mugs to the front door. Keep your eyes peeled for a radio car. And Butch, be gentle with the patrolmen that we'll have to put out of commission temporarily."

Butch's grin spread all over his face.

They picked up a radio car in an outlying section, trailed it to a call box where one patrolman got out and phoned in. As he walked back to the car, he heard a shout from behind one of the houses that lined the street. It was distinctly a call for help.

"Let's go, Bill!" he snapped. "Sounds like trouble."

They left the car at the curb and raced down the street. A man was standing in a driveway waving his hands excitedly. They rushed up to him.

"There's a dead guy in my garage," Butch gulped. "I just went in and there he was, all—"

"Where?" both patrolmen chorused.

Butch pointed and they headed for the place. They took, perhaps, three steps before two massive hands gripped each man by the nape of the neck. Butch raised both of them off their feet and before either could gather his wits, he banged their heads together. Then Butch put them down carefully, found their handcuffs and used both pair to cuff wrists and ankles.

He tied efficient gags between their lips and carried them to the garage which the Bat had discovered to be as vacant as the house it belonged to. Butch put both men down, arose, and then bent down again to loosen their

collars. They seemed a little blue in the face. Butch made a sympathetic sound with his tongue.

"Too bad. Imagine how them babies are gonna feel."

Then he closed the garage door, snapped a rusty padlock in place and ran to the street. The radio car pulled up with the Black Bat at the wheel. He sent it roaring back to Boulevard Drive and parked at an intersection. There the Black Bat fell to work with a screw driver, a wrench and a pair of pliers. Butch watched him mutely, unable to understand what all this fuss had to do with rescuing McGrath.

At last the Black Bat was finished. He set the dashboard clock carefully, tested a few wires and then drove the car to within twenty feet of the apparently abandoned tenement, traveling the last couple of blocks without lights. He shut off the motor, signaled Butch to work quietly and both slipped out of the car, darted between two of the old tenements and reached the squalid courtyard in the rear. The Black Bat spoke low-voiced warnings from time to time and saved Butch several nasty falls over sagging clothes lines and tin cans.

"We've got two minutes," the Black Bat announced in a whisper. "Butch, you can't see him, but there's a man in the second floor window. That's where they'll be—on that floor. Now, here is the idea. They'll all rush to the front of the house. When that happens, I'll climb the porch and get in that window from which a gunner is now peeking. Those boards will be on a hinge, as you indicated. I'll get in easily. As soon as I vanish, you count up to fifty—slowly. Can you count that high?"

"Huh!" Butch said. "I can go as high as a hundred. Okay. Then what?"

THE Black Bat smiled and drew his hood over his shoulders.

"Then you see what can be done

about that locked door. Take it apart and go to town, Butch. No shooting unless absolutely necessary. There will be plenty of excitement without that. Ready?"

Butch had no time to reply. From the street came the sudden wail of a siren. It grew and grew in intensity until the eerie screech seemed to enter their blood. The Black Bat, watching the window above carefully, saw the gunman vanish. Although there was no more than a two-inch crack in the boards, the Black Bat was able to spot the guard's movements.

"Now start counting!" he ordered Butch in a whisper.

The Black Bat rushed across the yard, gave a leap and wound both arms around a porch pillar. He shinnied himself up expertly, reached the porch roof and darted for the window. He pulled back the boards that were nailed to what was practically a storm window, and stepped inside. Whipping out his gun he looked through the darkness. There was no one in the room.

Hurrying on, he reached a long hallway off which several empty apartments led. From the front of the house he could hear harsh orders being given in Antal's raucous tone.

"Each man take a window and use them tommy-guns," the gaunt man was saying. "Blast as many of the police as you can. I'll take care of this wise guy Headquarters man in the back. Remember, make your slugs count. Drive 'em back and then we'll smash out of the cellar where the car is hidden. It's a damn lucky thing we were set for this but I'd give my shirt to know how the police spotted this joint."

The siren was wailing away at a great clip. It sounded as though a hundred radio cars were converging on the scene. Echoes of empty buildings can give deceptive sounds.

The Black Bat merged with the darkness and waited. In a second or

two Butch would come barging in. That would be the give-away. The Black Bat saw Antal, his gaunt, skinny frame plainly visible in the darkness as he hurried toward one of the tenelements. A heavy pistol was in his hand and murder was in his eyes.

Antal pushed open the door, hurried into a bedroom and stood over McGrath. The detective-sergeant's face was the color of raw beef from the slugging he had taken. Somebody had taken off his clothes which were draped over a nearby chair and he was in bloody pajamas too small for him. Blood caked his lips and matted his hair. But his eyes were defiant.

"So they caught up with you, Antal," he said coolly. "And you're about to gun me. That won't do you much good. You're slated for the chair and it's little matter if it's for my murder or someone else's. You've killed enough men in your day."

"So," Antal snarled. "Still wise, huh? Okay—I'll give it to you right in the belly so you'll be in misery for days and then you'll croak anyway. Maybe they'll get me, but you'll die, wise guy."

Antal pointed his gun down towards the man on the bed. His finger tightened against the trigger. Suddenly he became aware that one of the hinged windows had opened. A gray sort of light had drifted into the room. Antal raised his eyes—and felt the first wave of pure terror he had ever experienced.

Silhouetted against the further wall was the shadowy image of a giant bat, with wings outspread like great talons ready to close about its prey. In all his mad career Antal had never seen anything more sinister.

HIS hand holding the gun trembled. His whole body broke out in a cold sweat. Palsied fingers let go of the gun and it clanged to the floor. He felt a cold breeze—like the wings of death—fan the back of his neck. Antal opened his mouth for a convul-

sive scream of terror. But a black-clad arm circled his neck, snapped his head back, and a fist crashed against the point of his jaw.

As Antal lapsed into unconsciousness he vaguely heard a terrific crashing sound. Butch had broken in the door.

Thugs, torn between the desire to protect themselves from the front or to see what was going on in the rear, gave way to panic. They fled for the cellar, but their paths crossed with that of Butch.

A tommy-gun spat once, a brief round. The thugs were slammed mercilessly against walls, or picked up and swung like clubs to crash against the heads of their own mates.

Butch was in action and he loved every minute of it. Big, brutal as only Butch could be when aroused, he moved about with amazing speed.

Upstairs the Black Bat knelt beside McGrath.

"They didn't handle you any too gently, Sergeant," he said. "Please bear with me if I have to be quick. That devil's din outside is bound to draw a lot of police and I don't care to meet any more than you, many thanks just the same."

McGrath's face was a study in contrasts. One moment he looked as though he would like to tackle the Black Bat, weak and hurt as he was. The next he looked as though he would like to hang a medal on his chest and shake his hand.

From below came Butch's hoarse bellow.

"All clean, Chief!"

"Beat it!" the Black Bat called back. "Travel fast."

Butch did not pause to question the Black Bat's methods. He scurried out into the back yard and leaped over a fence. In half a second he was gone from sight.

The Black Bat stripped off the tight wires that bound McGrath. The detective-sergeant tried to arise, but his

arms and legs were temporarily paralyzed. He groaned and sank back on the floor. The Black Bat hastily stripped off the pajamas and somehow managed to get him in his clothes, then lifted him, like a child. He headed for the door. Antal, on the floor, groaned and clawed at the wall near him.

"That guy," McGrath said. "He's wanted. Wisconsin wants him on a charge of murder and I want him to resist arrest so I can paste his nose around to the back of his rotten head."

"Sorry." The Black Bat scampered down the stairs with McGrath slung over his shoulder. "Antal is the only man who will lead us to the real brains of this murder gang. I'm coming back for him."

CHAPTER XV

The Truce



HELPLESS, McGrath lapsed into silence. There were sounds of activity in front of the house now. Other police cars, drawn by the howling siren, had arrived. The Black Bat dashed down the cel-

lar steps and discovered a sedan down there, headed straight toward one section of brick wall. He put McGrath into the front seat of the car, ran over to the wall and made a quick examination.

"Looks like the real thing," he said as he slid behind the wheel, "but it's only lightly put together for just such an emergency. Hang onto your hat, Mac. Here we go! I haven't time for Antal now, because he won't do me any good if those police arrest me."

The sedan shot forward just as Antal stumbled into the cellar. He saw the car crash through the wall as though it had been made of flimsy paper. Bricks toppled from masonry pur-

posely put together with weak cement. The car ripped a vast hole through the wall, turned in the rear yard and headed down the driveway.

There were several shots, and shouts for the car to stop. Antal began running. He, too, went through that hole and vanished into the darkness before police could surround the place.

"Fine thing," McGrath grumbled as the sedan shot between the thin line of patrolmen. Bullets smacked against the bullet-proofed glass window. "Me, running from my own men. But you're head man, Bat. I'm in your hands and I don't qualify that statement at all."

"Thanks for having faith," the Black Bat answered.

"Hell!" McGrath snapped. "It's not that. My arms and legs won't move. Those wires cut off all circulation. Say, what siren was that anyhow? The boys didn't show for ten minutes after it started to wail."

The Black Bat chuckled. "I swiped a radio car, arranged the wiring to the dash clock and set it so that the siren would go off after I had time to slip into the house. It drew the guards away from the rear."

McGrath could not conceal his feelings.

"Nice work," he complimented. "And believe me I never thought I'd be handing out any compliments to the Black Bat."

The Black Bat lost any chance of pursuit, for this sedan had plenty of power under her bullet-dented hood. Finally he turned off the road and up a quiet lane. He stopped the car and doused the lights.

"Like a couple of sweethearts on Lover's Lane, Sergeant," he said gleefully. "But we'll talk instead of neck. You've got to be reasonable for the time being. We're in this together or I'd never have bothered to save you from Antal and his precious mob."

"It's a truce," McGrath agreed. "But it only lasts until we finish this talk, get me? After we part this time,

"I'll hunt you down, Bat. I'll track you down if I'm old and feeble when I finally land you. Go ahead—what do you want to know?"

The Black Bat rolled down a window. He regarded McGrath intently a moment. Then he said:

"We know an insurance murder ring is in operation. We know that a great number of people have been killed so their insurance could be collected. We know that Antal is first lieutenant for some warped-brained monster who wants to roll in wealth at the expense of as many human lives as becomes necessary. That's all—so far. Have you any ideas?"

MCGRATH shook his head.

"Nothing but a lot of suspicions that peter out every time we try to get something concrete."

"What about Dr. Luddy and Paraddon, that shyster attorney?" the Black Bat asked.

McGrath emitted a whistle of surprise.

"So you did pay Dr. Luddy a visit! We thought he was off his track. I don't know about him. We once suspected he might be back of a big drug syndicate, but the Federal boys cleaned up the mess and there were no ties to Luddy. Paraddon—I didn't even know he was interested, but that's something to work on. That guy would gyp his grandmother out of her admittance card to a home for the aged."

"What of Peter Galvin?" the Black Bat asked. "Has he been approached again? He was paid that policy and Antal certainly wanted to lay his hands on the check."

"He's staying under cover," McGrath said. "We've got four men posted around his house. If Antal shows there, he'll get his head blasted off. And is Galvin sore? Says we're interfering with his happy home life. Say, that guy hasn't had a happy home since he found out there were such things as blondes. And say, we found a torpedo

named Collins in that house where you battled yesterday. He was shoved in a closet. Somebody put a gun right against the back of his head and let him have it. Know anything about that?"

"Antal, Sergeant. He received his orders to kill him." The Black Bat sighed. "Our little conference has come to naught, Sergeant. I leave in your hands the guarding of Galvin and his family. We'll go back to town now and I'll drop off at a convenient spot."

McGrath was massaging his hands slowly. Without looking up, he spoke.

"Okay. But don't get any funny ideas that I'll stop trying to run you down. I'm grateful for the way you risked your neck to save mine. I—I guess I've never said that to anybody before. Just the same I mean it. And—I don't think you killed that hoodlum we found lashed to the cemetery fence. I don't think I ever believed it, but sometimes it helps a guy's ego along if he thinks the worst of his—er—enemies."

"I didn't kill him," the Black Bat said sincerely. "I left him there, tied, and with one of my calling cards pasted on his forehead. The man who murdered him also murdered Lew Scott, Assistant Coroner Crawford and Jim Fisher. He killed them so they wouldn't expose the operations of the insurance ring. Ralph Galvin's body was spirited away and a stranger put in his place. However, I know that young Galvin was poisoned—with arsenic. You slipped up there, Sergeant. One of the three men who were killed concealed an envelope with a tuft of hair snipped from Galvin's head. It showed that there was plenty of arsenic in his system."

"Hmmm," McGrath muttered. "So you're a chemist along with other things. Very well. We part when you say so and then the truce is over. I won't meet you under circumstances like these again because, after all, I am

a law officer with an oath of office to uphold. You're a criminal—an outlaw."

The Black Bat laughed and nosed in to the curb.

"This is a nice desolate spot and not so far from civilization that you'll get flat feet in walking back. Also it will prevent you from contacting Headquarters and throwing out a dragnet for this car."

MCGRATH got out.

"Thanks again," he said. "I'm grateful. Two minutes—two minutes hell—two seconds more and I'd have been dead. I still think you made a mistake in letting Antal go. He's bound to keep under cover from now on."

"Antal"—the Black Bat leaned out of the car a trifle—"will watch himself, but I happen to know that he will also show his fine hand soon. He's got to, and I also know where he'll strike. Good night, Sergeant. And happy hunting for—the Black Bat."

In the rear view mirror the Black Bat saw McGrath start hiking, shaking his head from side to side like a sorely puzzled man. But the Black Bat had no notions about McGrath relaxing his vigilance. If anything, he would stick closer than ever to the Black Bat's trail. . . .

Butch was impatiently waiting in the secret laboratory when the Black Bat reached his own home. He slipped out of his encompassing black clothing and donned his usual gray tweed trousers, his white shirt with a gay bow tie and the smoking jacket. He tamped a pipe full of tobacco, lit it and leaned back comfortably.

"What happened to McGrath?" Butch asked. "Didn't he put up an argument?"

"With the man who saved him from death?" The Black Bat laughed. "No, Butch, we had a truce, but it's ended now. He may even call here to see if Tony Quinn is home, but the signal

will warn me if he or anyone else approaches."

Butch scowled. "I know McGrath's got a right to live, see? But he's out to get you. All we did was save him so he could keep on lookin'. But"—Butch's face lighted up—"did I have fun! Say, one of them bozos figured he could knock me cold with a right to the jaw. I just stuck out my chin and let him paste me. I didn't blink. But he did—when I banged his noggin against one of them fancy stairway posts. Busted it, I did—the post, I mean. What's next, Chief?"

"Sleep for you, Butch. And don't get me wrong. Rescuing McGrath was the only decent thing we could have done. And it did provide me with something to chew on. Without knowing it, he gave me a tip. A meager one, but enough. We'll see if it grows to man-size before we sail in. Good night, Butch. Stand by for orders in the morning."

Butch ambled over to the hidden door like some well pleased Great Dane. He did not bother to use the ladder leading into the tunnel. He just jumped. After all, it was not more than two feet deeper than Butch's own hulk.

When he was gone, Quinn picked up his cane and went into the living room. He sat down and permitted that staring look to come over his eyes like a film. He was blind Tony Quinn again, the ex-district attorney who had been rendered wholly useless to the world by the cowardly actions of a gangster.

He was still seated there, intent on the problems circling through his mind when he heard a tapped signal on the other side of the secret door. He arose and walked over to a window. Suddenly he raised it and although any watcher would have believed a blind man was just trying to get a breath of fresh air, the Bat was listening intently.

The slightest movement in the brush, the faintest breathing of an excited person hidden in the darkness, would have warned him. Satisfied that no one

lurked outside, he closed the window, locked it and drew the shade. Casually he repeated the performance with all the other curtains. Then he went to the laboratory door, opened it and took both of Carol's hands.

"I DON'T know what I'd do without you, Carol," he said simply. "When there is brain work to be done, I depend on you."

Carol smiled and pressed his hands warmly.

"You underestimate Silk, darling. He's doing a rather good job too. And Butch—why he's as faithful as any man can be. But listen to what I've discovered. I went to Mrs. Bannister's—and Tony, she's the nicest old lady I've ever met. That boy who is to be buried in the morning—she lived for him. It was an awful blow, but she is transferring her affections to another grandson—Newman Recor, his name is. Her daughter's boy. Not that she didn't love him before. That woman loves everyone."

"Listen, Carol," Quinn said quietly. "Have this in mind as you tell me what happened. Mrs. Bannister will inherit a large sum of money by reason of her grandson's death. Granted that she is well off already, some people don't know when to stop. Is she capable of planning murder for money?"

Carol's laugh warmed Quinn's heart. Laughter had gone out of his life before she entered it. He had lived in somber darkness until she came. Carol was like a tonic to him. His eyes, no longer filmed with the stare of the blind, told her this. She flushed just a little.

"Mrs. Bannister wouldn't kill a canary bird for a million dollars if she was starving to death. No, Tony, I give you my word that she is just as nice as she looks. But the grandson—Newman Recor. He is an undiluted heel."

Tony smiled. "I gather you don't like him. Who does he hang out with?"

"The only people who will have anything to do with him are those who want to profit by the spending money his grandmother gives him. Tony, I went to Mrs. Bannister and lied myself blue in the face. I hated to do it, but there was no other way and, after all, we are trying to help the poor old soul. I told her that her grandson, the one who is being buried in the morning, was in love with me and that we planned to be married. Do you know what she said?"

Quinn shook his head.

"That I could come and live with her, just as though we had been married." —Quinn lit Carol's cigarette.

"What I'm getting at is this, Carol," he said. "If Mrs. Bannister profited by her grandson's death and he was murdered—of which I'm reasonably certain—then someone else wants to cut in on her money. That can be done only through an intermediary. Now if this other grandson you've described inherits her estate and he is under the domination of the man behind this murder ring—well, we've got something to work on."

CAROL'S eyes grew wide in horror. "You mean they'll deliberately kill that nice old lady? They'll murder her just so that nit-wit of a grandson can get her money? Tony! No warm-blooded human being would do such a thing."

Quinn smiled crookedly.

"I'm not talking about warm-blooded, human beings, Carol. It's cold-blooded, merciless killers we're dealing with. Think! They've already killed thirty people that we know of so far. Would one more life make any difference? Not to them, and our aim is to stop them from carrying out their plans. Mrs. Bannister's fortune, increased largely by the insurance policies, would put them all on Easy Street, wind up their operations. She's a last resort, a final blow.

"But when they strike, we'll be wait-

ing to take up some of the slack so Mrs. Bannister won't have to suffer. Phone Butch when you get back to your apartment. Tell him to join Silk and say they are to keep their eyes open. I'm making a little call about four A. M. when the going is clear. In the morning I'll prepare to outwit those killers and land them where they belong. In the electric chair."

CHAPTER XVI

Secret of the Recordings



DUMBLY Quinn helped Carol down the ladder. When she was gone, he called himself all kinds of a fool. He should have taken her in his arms and told her of the love that filled his heart.

Yet—he couldn't. The Black Bat's career was too hazardous, and if he slipped back into the old routine of Tony Quinn, blind man, he would cheat her out of the best part of life. Out of youth and romance and love.

He looked in a mirror at the hideous scars buried deep in his face. Carol was used to them, or even she would flinch. He had seen men do it; men who did not know he could see. No, until the Black Bat's work was done Carol would be—just Carol. There was no solution to this problem.

Quinn stumbled back into the living room and rested until it was time for him to act again. Then he donned the black clothing of the Black Bat, slipped out of the house and made his way by devious routes to the spot where he had parked Butch's car when they had hijacked the police radio cruiser.

He drove through the business center of the city, now quiet and deserted, for it lacked only about two hours of dawn. Making sure that no patrolmen

were in the vicinity, the Black Bat turned sharply and rolled down a delivery driveway to the rear of the Security Insurance Company's huge home office building.

Donning his hood he crept softly toward the service entrance. He got in easily, crouched in the darkness until he saw watchmen pass by on their rounds. Then he reached the stairway and went up it, making no more sound than a ghost.

He stopped in front of Ronald Tunick's private office, quietly forced an entrance and moved toward the big desk occupying one corner of the room. The fact that he needed no light in connection with his work helped greatly. Twice watchmen paced by the door without pausing. The Black Bat went to work swiftly. In one drawer which he skillfully unlocked, he discovered a sealed package, similar in size and with the same brand of wrapping paper that had been used for the bundle sent by Antal. He shook it, heard the muffled thump of a record cylinder and proceeded to open the package carefully.

Removing a record, he thrust it into his pocket, then made his way to the office of Tunick's private secretary. There he found a dictaphone machine. He appropriated a record which he placed in the package instead of the one he had found there, then retied the package deftly until only close examination would show that it had been tampered with.

He went through the papers in Tunick's desk, found a personal checkbook and discovered that Tunick was overdrawn almost five hundred dollars. A curt notice from the bank indicated that no more checks would be honored without a deposit.

Then, between the back pages of the checkbook, the Black Bat saw something that really made his eyes widen in surprise. It was a check, made out to Peter Galvin for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars covering payment of his son's insurance policy.

The Black Bat turned it over. The check had been endorsed in favor of Tunick—for value received. He drew a sharp breath. What was this check doing here? Had Galvin after all paid over the check as demanded by the insurance ring? If so—

The Black Bat replaced the check and arose. He walked softly to the door, listened a moment, and when he was certain that the way was clear he slipped out.

HE reached his car without incident and got behind the wheel. As he felt for the starter button, he suddenly froze. High up on the side of the insurance company's building, a man was slowly being lowered from a window. He sat in what seemed to be a painter's chair. The descent was checked just outside what the Black Bat knew to be Tunick's private office. The man raised the window without any trouble and eased himself inside.

Ordinary sight would never have been able to follow the events of the next two or three minutes, but the penetrating power of the Black Bat's eyes enabled him to watch the intruder return to the window, stuffing a package into his shirt. Unquestionably it was the package containing the record that the Black Bat had left in place of the real one—which was now in the Bat's own pocket.

The man climbed into his precarious seat, waved a hand and was rapidly raised to another window two stories above Tunick's office. The Black Bat did not wait to see any more. There was no question in his mind but that underlings of the murder ring had maneuvered this stealthy bit of burglary.

The Black Bat did not want underlings, and he had an idea that the record which he had appropriated might provide a lead to the man behind this grim business. Also there was no time in which to attempt a roundup of the men in that building. The moment

it was discovered that the record was a fake, the whole gang might swing into action.

Driving back home, the Black Bat parked the car in the usual place and in the security of his laboratory, he went to work. First of all he made a careful examination of the record, checking it especially for fingerprints. But he knew that Antal and the man who paid him were both clever enough not to leave such significant clues. He found nothing on the record.

Then he went into another room, carried a play-back machine into the sound-proof laboratory and inserted the record. He turned on the machine and groaned aloud as the melody of an old air greeted him. The music was as ancient as the tune. Just another one of Tunick's collections.

But the Black Bat's methods were amazing in detail. He was certain that this recording was a message of some sort. He placed it on the laboratory bench and lined up several standard dictaphone cylinders beside it. First of all, he compared the records. There seemed to be no appreciable difference until he weighed them. The one he had taken from Tunick's office was almost fifty grams heavier than the others.

He used a pair of fine calipers to measure the thickness of the records. Tunick's was thicker; only a matter of fractions, but bulkier nevertheless.

He took down text books and studied the composition of dictaphone records until he knew every process involved in their manufacture. Then he lit a Bunsen burner, held one of his own records in the flame for a second and nothing happened beyond a little smoke. He dared not risk their destruction by fire so he started an electric furnace and thrust the same record inside.

After five minutes he removed it with a pair of tongs. It was intact. Then he shoved Tunick's record into the furnace and through the glass win-

dow he saw an amazing transformation take place. The whole outside of the record seemed to melt and slide away like an orange peel. Quinn's breathing was fast as he fished the record out and wiped off the melted substance.

HE LET it cool and saw the tiny grooves inscribed on it by a recording machine. He knew now how Antal sent his messages without fear of detection. The real message was inscribed and overlaid with this substance similar to the record itself. Then the transcription of a genuine old record was put on it.

The man to whom the message was being sent had only to melt off the surface and play the recording underneath!

Quinn slipped the record on the machine, snapped the switch and Antal's raucous voice greeted him.

I advertised, as directed, in the personal columns of the *Star-Chronicle* so you'd know I couldn't send these records through the usual source. One messenger, and his record, disappeared. I haven't been able to find out what happened, but I think the Black Bat had a hand in it. The record showed up today, mailed to the regular post-office box just as I'd sent it. Morgan picked it up on schedule and it was lifted in the usual manner, but the bus boy brought it to me because he figured it was a set-up. The Black Bat is working hard and he's busted up plenty of my boys. However I have five new gorillas coming in from Philly tonight and we're set to play the trump card. Things are ready at the old lady's. The kid is ready to play and fell for our line like the sucker he is. We get him an alibi, snatch the old lady and dump her in the bay. We'll make it look as though she either knocked herself off or fell in the drink by accident. The kid inherits and we take him for all he gets. Then his lights go out. I'm having one of my boys put this record in Tunick's office, as you instructed. It'll be done after hours, but if Tunick should happen to blow in, he'll just think it came in the regular mail. At dawn we take the old lady and clean up. I took care of Collins all right, but I think it was a mistake. He wasn't a snitch and I can't figure what he knew to make him so dangerous.

The record ended and Quinn shut off the instrument. There were no windows in this laboratory and he hurried

into the living room. Gray dawn was just filtering through the windows. Dawn! The zero hour when Mrs. Bannister was to be kidnaped and murdered!

Silk and Butch were on guard, true. But would they be able to stop the crime? Quinn had no time to lose. It would be highly dangerous for the Black Bat to operate by day, but this time he had no choice. The murder ring was depending on cleaning up after this job. The millions in it would put them all in the financial high brackets.

He left his hood off, but drew the soft hat well down over his face to hide the scars, grateful that it was still too early in the morning for the city to have awakened.

He drove straight to Mrs. Bannister's mansion home. As he rode by it, he saw no sign of Silk, nor of Butch. The Black Bat's heart almost ceased to beat. Either of them should have recognized the car and given a signal of their presence.

It meant but one thing to the Black Bat. Mrs. Bannister had been already snatched and Silk and Butch were either on the trail, or had been kidnaped too!

* * *

SILK, hidden in the darkness outside Mrs. Bannister's home, had welcomed dawn with sheer relief. Butch was parked on the other side of the house and he, too, would be grateful for the gray light. Now it would be much easier to watch.

Silk stretched, yawned, and tried to work off the chill that had settled in his bones. Then he paused. A car had stopped half a block up the street and he saw indistinguishable forms slip through the gray dawn toward Mrs. Bannister's house. Silk drew a gun and snapped off the safety. But when he saw that there were four men, he held his fire.

Butch also saw the approaching men but, like Silk, he kept under cover. Not

that either man bothered to think of his own danger. It was Mrs. Bannister of whom they thought. This mob would strike fast if things happened. Silk groaned and wished the Black Bat were at his side.

Two of the men, with guns in their hands, took up a position on the front porch, concealing themselves from the street by standing behind high shrubs. The other two, with the gaunt Antal in the lead, stepped up to the front door, used a key and entered.

They were gone about three or four minutes and when they emerged Antal held old Mrs. Bannister cradled in his arms. By the way her arms and legs sagged limply, Silk knew that she was unconscious.

A wave of hatred such as Silk had never before known surged up within him. He drew a bead on one of the gunmen, but wisdom overcame pure impulse. Shooting would only endanger Mrs. Bannister's life now. The best thing was to follow and watch for the slightest opening.

One of the crooks gave a low whistle. The car, parked up the street, rolled to the curb in front of the house. Half a minute later it pulled away. The kidnaping had been done quietly and expertly.

Silk did not hesitate for a second. Racing toward the rear of the house, he signaled Butch to hurry, and tried to open the garage doors. Huge staples, held with padlocks, prevented him.

Butch grunted, pushed Silk out of the way and seized one of the locks. He heaved, his mighty shoulders bringing every muscle into play. Gradually he pulled the big staples out of the wood. He opened the door. Silk nodded his thanks.

"Find the Bat," he told Butch in a whisper. "Tell him what's happened, and act fast. I'll follow the car. When I find out where they are taking Mrs. Bannister, I'll phone. Beat it!"

Butch moved away. Silk climbed

into Newman Recor's flashy roadster and prayed that he would not awaken anyone in the house when he tramped on the starter. The motor responded smoothly. Silk shot out of the garage, turned right, and saw the kidnap car vanish around a corner five or six blocks up the street. Silk took the next turn, came out on an avenue and picked up the trail.

It took him well out of the city and gradually he realized they were heading for the harbor. Silk gulped and broke out into a cold sweat. It was easy enough to steal a car, but if they went aboard some sea-going craft, he would be in a tough spot. Silk did not know much about sailing and stealing a boat was a little beyond his depth.

When the sedan slowed, turned and entered a garage at the rear of a once exclusive yacht club, Silk stopped his own car and got out. He began running, veered to the left, and reached the end of a pier. From there he could see that a trim yacht was tied up to the dock in front of the yacht club.

"Steam up?" Antal emerged, calling. "Good! We sail in two minutes."

CHAPTER XVII

Silk Is Trapped



NEASILY Silk realized that he would have no opportunity to warn the Black Bat. There were no phones around, and he had only two minutes anyway.

Stripping off his coat, he kicked off his shoes and lashed his gun around his neck with his tie. Extra cartridges were in his trouser pocket and he did not believe he would be in the water long enough to spoil them. Climbing down a ladder, he slipped into the water. Never a strong swimmer, Silk kept close to the docks.

As he neared the yacht, he dived and swam under water until he thought his lungs would burst. Then he bobbed up again and discovered that he was under the stern of the yacht. He seized a rope dangling overside and went up it like a monkey. There was no one on deck when he shoved his head over the rail. The crew was below, getting ready to sail.

Silk patted on bare feet across the deck, listened for a second at the companionway and when he heard nothing, he slipped down it, selected a cabin and hid in its narrow clothes closet.

Two or three minutes went by. He felt the ship tremble as engines throbbed. He heard voices and the sound of someone in the cabin. Silk pushed open the door a crack. Antal was placing Mrs. Bannister on the bed. Her wrists and ankles were taped with adhesive, but her eyes were open and shining in terror.

Antal strode toward the door.

"She'll keep," he growled. "One of you mugs stay outside this cabin and see that nobody gets in. We're heading out to sea until we're sure nobody is on our trail. I sort of have a feeling that house was being watched, and I'm taking no chances."

SILK spent the next five minutes in loading his cartridge clip with comparatively dry bullets. Then he crept into the cabin and tiptoed over to where Mrs. Bannister lay. Silk was in the same disguise he had assumed the day he had first encountered the old lady. She recognized him instantly and mild reproach shone in her eyes. Silk smiled at her reassuringly, bent down and put his lips against her ear.

"I'm not one of these crooks," he whispered. "I saw them take you and I followed. Don't be afraid! I'll get you out of this mess."

She moved her head up and down in a token of understanding. Silk snapped a bullet into the magazine of his gun and went back to his hiding

place. After a few moments he heard the cabin door open and his heart pounded with excitement. A man was slowly advancing toward Mrs. Bannister, a glittering knife held high. On his face was a scowl and his eyes shone with the light of murder.

Silk slipped out of the closet, gun ready.

"Slow up!" he said softly. "Drop that knife or I'll drop you."

Then, to Silk's horror, the would-be killer, turned around with a broad grin. Silk sensed his danger, turned his head and groaned. Antal and two of his men were crowded in the doorway, guns covering Silk. He had walked into a well planned trap!

Antal strode forward. He wrenched the gun out of Silk's grasp and whipped him across the face with it.

"Of all the saps!" he exulted. "You swim out here, crawl on deck, and forget all about the nice trail of water you left behind. I figured you'd be hiding in here and you'd maybe be armed. So I framed this phony bump-off with a knife, because I knew it would draw you out. Now you'll go into the drink with the old lady. Only they'll find her floating around, and they won't find you because I'll put enough weights on your legs so you'll stand on the bottom of the ocean until you rot."

Silk said nothing. A little blood oozed out of the corner of his mouth from a badly cracked lip. The left side of his face was swelling rapidly as a result of the cowardly blow Antal had administered.

All he prayed for was one chance to take Antal by surprise. If he only could, Silk promised himself he would dispose of the gaunt, evil-faced killer for good.

Two of the crooks bound Silk hand and foot. He was flung on the floor and left there.

"Mr. Smith," a feeble voice called. "Mr. Smith."

Silk turned his head. He recalled

that he had given Mrs. Bannister that name. She was looking at him sadly, but without a trace of fear.

"They are going to kill us, aren't they? You shouldn't have tried to protect me. I'm an old woman. Dying isn't so hard for me."

"We're not dead yet," Silk said savagely. "Something will happen. It's bound to."

But in his own mind Silk felt sure that they were both doomed. How could help reach them? No one knew where they were headed except Antal and possibly the captain of this yacht.

MRS. BANNISTER sighed in despair.

"I—I don't know what to think, Mr. Smith," she said tremulously. "My grandson's funeral is this morning. I can't understand why they took me away. If it's ransom they want, why don't they say so? I haven't much cash—my holdings are tied up in bonds—but I'll pay all I can."

Silk turned his head away. He did not want her to see his face for Silk realized what it all meant. There would be no ransom; not when they could murder her as easily as they could a two-day-old kitten. With her death proved, after her body was discovered, Newman Recor, her precious grandson, would come into the insurance money and the rest of her estate, and from him it would swiftly pass into the hands of whoever had directed this mad scheme.

Time dragged past. Then the cabin door opened. Two men stepped in. Both of them held rusty chains. They let them fall to the floor with a crash. Antal ambled into the cabin and eyed Silk with a fishy stare.

"I don't know what your angle in this business happens to be," he snarled, "and I don't care. Maybe you're a private detective set to guard the old woman; maybe you're from the police, or are a stooge for the Black Bat. I know you ain't the Black Bat

because he's a bigger guy than you. Anyway, what's the difference? You're going overboard. . . . Boys, drape them chains on his ankles and let's get started. There's a thick fog that will hide anything we do. Damned lucky we sailed into it."

Silk was turned over on his stomach. The chains were passed around the rope that lashed his ankles tight. He did not dare glance over to the bed on which Mrs. Bannister lay. It was tough enough dying, without seeing the agonized expression that was bound to flood her wrinkled features.

Silk was dragged up on deck. Distantly he heard a ship's whistle hoot dismally as it sounded its way through the dense fog. The yacht was stopped and was drifting, her motors silent. Then a piercing shriek cut the fog—the high-pitched whirr of a siren aboard a police launch.

Antal turned pale.

"Dump this guy over! Hurry! Then heave the old lady into the drink. Me and the boys will take the launch back to shore. You members of the crew stick. Say Mrs. Bannister jumped overboard. Say she took a dive in the drink before you could stop her. Got all that?"

The man in the uniform of the captain nodded curtly.

"They'll never get wise," he mumbled. "And don't use the motor of the launch. Put those huskies of yours at the oars and muffle them with your coats. If the police hear you paddling, they may try to spot you. And you better hope this fog don't lift. I'll take care of all the rest of it."

Antal gave Silk a painful kick in the ribs. He motioned toward his men.

"Heave him over, then get the old lady. Snap it up!"

* * *

NEWMAN RECOR was about twenty-two, pasty-faced, underweight and plenty worried. He tossed uneasily in his sleep and finally opened his eyes. At that moment a hand

dropped on his shoulder and the business end of a gun was centered over his heart. But it was not the gun that made Recor's heart crawl in terror. It was the man behind the gun.

"The—the Black Bat!" he gasped hoarsely. "Wh—what do you want?"

"Talk in a low voice," the Black Bat ordered. "No one knows I am here. Neither is anyone aware that your grandmother has been kidnaped. She was chloroformed. I found evidence of that in her room. You are the one person who will profit by her death. You know who kidnaped her and where she is to be taken. Speak—you weak-kneed little toad! Where is she?"

"I—I don't know what you're talking about!" Recor gulped. "Did—did you say she was kidnaped?"

"Listen!" the Black Bat said with a trace of a snarl in his voice. "You know what's happened. Well, I also know one way to prevent men like Antal from cashing in on your grandmother's death. They intend to collect from you. If you're dead, your grandmother's estate will be disposed of to various distant relatives. In that way Antal and his mob will get nothing. So I could outwit him by killing you."

"No!" Recor cried. "No—don't kill me. I'll tell you what I know. They aren't going to kill her. Just take her to an island where she'll be safe until after I can get some of the estate. Everything is fixed for me to clean up quickly. Paradon—"

Recor's features went bleak at that slip of the tongue.

Paradon, was it? The Black Bat grimly decided that Paradon was going to have an opportunity to use his gift of gab in convincing the Black Bat of his integrity.

"Where is that island?" the Black Bat snapped. "What pier do they sail from and in what craft?"

"Roscoe Bleacher's yacht," Recor gulped. "He's away and the crew has been bribed. My grandmother has Mr. Bleacher's permission to use his

yacht, and they're going to say she went for a sail and fell overboard. But she won't be harmed. They promised me that."

"They're going to murder her," the Black Bat said stonily, "and make you the sucker. Can't you see, you stupid fool? By having knowledge of this mess you'll be guilty of murder as much as they are. They'll have you more under their thumbs than ever before. They'll bleed you of the entire estate. Now get up—walk over to that desk and draw me a map of the location of this island. Also write a description of that yacht. Hurry! We haven't much time."

A significant nudge of the gun and Recor jumped out of bed. Hastily he drew a crude map showing the location of the island, and scribbled a short description of the yacht.

The Black Bat swept up the piece of paper, stood before Recor a moment and delivered an unvarnished opinion of cowards. Then he stepped out the door, ran through the house and out into the rear of the estate. He cut through several other yards and reached his coupé.

There was someone inside. The Black Bat whipped out a gun. He moved closer, finger tight against the trigger. There was no time to be lost now. He would brook no interference from anyone, including Detective-sergeant McGrath.

BUT it was Butch who waited in the car. Butch, clasping and unclasping his hands, heedless of the perspiration that dropped down his face.

"Boss!" he choked. "I thought you was never gonna show up! We musta crossed. I went to the house lookin' for you. Listen—Silk is tailin' Antal. He snatched the old lady. Silk said he'd call, but there ain't nobody to get his call now. I dunno what to do."

The Black Bat hauled out the map which Recor had drawn. It was crude

enough to be almost undecipherable. He took a pencil from Butch's pocket and hastily wrote clearer directions.

"Take this," he instructed Butch. "Get it into Sergeant McGrath's hands as soon as possible, and without showing yourself. I've asked his help for the first time, but it's necessary now, for we must, to save Mrs. Bannister's life. He'll mobilize the harbor police and the coast-guard cutters. We'll need every boat available to shove off and find the yacht before those devils murder her. Get going!"

CHAPTER XVIII

Murder on the High Seas



NODDING, Butch jumped out of the car and lumbered up the street. He hailed a taxi when he hit a main thoroughfare and was driven to the vicinity of Detective-sergeant McGrath's home.

Butch realized that if he showed himself, and McGrath got a good look at him that he would be of little use to the Black Bat from then on. For McGrath would center all his attentions on running down Butch. Therefore he resorted to the only means he could devise to warn McGrath and at the same time remain anonymous.

Creeping around to the side of the suburban bungalow, he found the window to McGrath's bedroom, and hastily tied the message to a huge stone. He backed up, flung the rock accurately and sped away as it smashed through the window.

The Black Bat, meanwhile drove to the dock where the yacht of Roscoe Bleacher, the wealthy sportsman, was usually tied up. He expected to see no trace of it and was not surprised to find it gone.

Looking around for some means of

taking to the sea himself, he noted a private yacht club up the river a short distance. The Black Bat parked his car near the club, raced down the pier and quickly selected the fastest craft he could find—a sleek, high-powered racing boat, as swift a craft as rode any sea.

A watchman saw him, yelled an order for him to stop, but the Black Bat had the motor sputtering before the guard could open fire on him. He gave her the gun and the prow of the little craft rose up out of the water while her motor hummed smoothly.

He let the craft out, heading down the river. A dense fog was closing in and the Black Bat swore softly. Fog would protect the murderers and hamper him and the police. That is, if McGrath acted in accordance with that written message—which he hoped the sergeant would.

GRADUALLY the fog closed in, deeper, more clinging. Then the shore was only a vague line. The Black Bat was far out now, and if the sea became rough, he would have a difficult time of it with this small craft.

Then he saw a vessel ahead—a trim white and brown yacht which he identified instantly as Bleacher's. He had only a glimpse of it before the fog closed down, hiding it from his sight. He heard a distant, dismal wail and then a high-pitched siren.

The Black Bat's jaws snapped shut with a click. McGrath had certainly lost no time. The police were closing in, too. This was going to be the riskiest assignment the Black Bat had ever encountered, for he would be caught between two fires—the police and the crooks.

The Black Bat cut off his motors suddenly. The momentum of his speed kept the small boat racing along until the bulk of the yacht loomed up. Dimly he made out several forms on deck. They were swinging an object, preparatory to hurling it overside. In a

flash the Bat was on his feet, stripping off his hood, kicking off his shoes. Then he was diving into the sea, swimming with long, muscle-wrenching strokes.

There was a sinister splash about a dozen yards away. The Black Bat took a long breath and dived after it. He saw a murky object heading for the bottom. The Black Bat went after it like a fish, reached out and gripped the object firmly. Then he saw that the object was a man, and that heavy chains held him in a death embrace.

While his lungs clamored for air, the Black Bat went to work. Even as he and the man were heading fast for bottom he had a knife out, slashing at the ankle ropes. The chains came loose. The Black Bat and the man had gripped began rising swiftly. As their heads cut the water, the Black Bat saw whom he had saved.

"Silk!" he sputtered. "Are you all right?"

Silk spat a mouthful of water.

"Ye-Yes!" Then he screeched: "Mrs. Bannister! They're throwing her over too! She can't swim."

"You can," the Black Bat panted. "There's a little speedboat somewhere in this fog. Find it and have her set to run for it."

The Black Bat clapped Silk on the shoulder, veered and began swimming back toward the yacht. Those aboard had no knowledge that Silk had been rescued. The thickness of the pea soup fog had kept that fact from them.

The Black Bat heard a scream that was suddenly muffled as though a giant hand had slapped across the victim's mouth. There was a splash. Something white hit the water and began to sink. The Black Bat dived again. In half a minute he had reached the side of the old lady. She was unconscious, probably from a brutal knockout punch. The Black Bat carried her to the surface, pillowed her head in the crook of an arm and floated, waiting for Silk to appear.

The yacht was getting under way again. He heard muttered oaths, then the sound of clumsily handled oars. The Black Bat had a vague glimpse of a speed launch. Antal and his band of cutthroats were deserting the yacht, leaving it to the crew to explain what had happened.

A hoarse voice bellowed an order for the yacht to heave to. Then a machine-gun spattered the fog in a grim warning that the order was to be obeyed.

DRIFTING with the racing boat, Silk saw the Black Bat, with his burden, through the fog and came alongside. He helped take Mrs. Bannister aboard. The Black Bat clambered over the gunwale and quickly drew on his wet mask. He placed the old lady in a comfortable position and felt her pulse. It was none too strong.

"Full speed!" he called to Silk. "We've got to get this poor woman to a warm place. That will be up to you when we get ashore. I'll pilot this craft back to the pier where I stole it. My car is parked nearby and I'll try to reach it or lay low until darkness."

"But where will I take her?" Silk asked.

"To Carol's apartment. She's unconscious and she'll remain so for some time. Freshen your disguise, tell her it's your home, but don't tell her the address, and keep her in one of the back rooms where she won't be able to see the street. I'll be along as quickly as I can."

Silk swept the craft toward shore.

"But won't her people worry about her?" he asked.

The Black Bat's fists clenched.

"That's exactly what I want them to do. One person in particular. . . ."

Almost two hours later the Black Bat entered his home through the secret tunnel. He found Silk smiling and happy.

"Mrs. Bannister is coming along fine," he reported. "I gave her a hot

drink and Carol put her to bed. She thinks Carol is my sister, sir. She doesn't know where she is."

"Find me dry clothes."

Tony Quinn had stripped off the mask and hood. The last hour had been a precarious one for he had been forced to drive through traffic and take his chances on being stopped.

Silk got the clothing quickly—duplicates of the black outfit which Quinn stripped off. Quinn accepted a drink of brandy gratefully, downed it in easy stages and studied his problem from every angle.

"We're nearing the end of someone's rope," he told Silk. "The only trouble is direct evidence. There isn't any, and no chance to uncover any, it begins to look like. I've one ace in the hole, but it may turn into a deuce. We've got to consider several people. Take Tunick, for instance. Those recordings are mailed to him. He collects old phonograph records, which are similar to the modern dictaphone records. He even advertises for them.

"He may be doing all this just to be able to get the messages that Antal sends to his employer. Then Morgan picks up the records at the post-office. Makes a practice of it. They are taken from him by stealth, but perhaps he knows this. Perhaps he sets the stage so they can be taken easily."

"I understand that." Silk frowned. "But what's the idea of them in the first place?"

"The leader of this insurance ring doesn't even admit his identity to his own men," Quinn explained. "I'm betting that Antal has no idea for whom he works. The loot is probably held in some safe place or shipped to the leader of the mob by some method as roundabout as they use for their messages. The head man can conceal his true voice and make no actual contact with this men. He's playing safe, Silk."

"What about this Dr. Luddy? He tried to hand you a doublecross and

anybody on the level would have worked with you."

TONY Quinn rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"It's puzzled me, that angle. And his calling in Paradox looks funny too. We also have to consider everyone else connected with the case. Mrs. Bannister, her grandson Recor, and even Peter Galvin. There is so much at stake in this game that the most innocent person may prove to be the blackest."

Silk was facing a mirror and peeling off his disguise.

"What about grilling young Recor, sir? He must know something."

Quinn tapped his fingertips together thoughtfully.

"There is something else, Silk. Do this as soon as you are out of disguise. Take a cab, got to the offices of the *Star-Chronicle* and get me copies of each issue for the past two weeks. On your way back, tell Carol to leave Mrs. Bannister alone at eight o'clock. I'm going to call on her. She'll be able to stand the shock of seeing a masked man, won't she?"

Silk nodded. "That lady is tough—real pioneer stuff, sir. All she feels bad about is missing her grandson's funeral. I'll go directly, sir."

After Silk returned with a sheaf of newspapers, Quinn spent an hour reading the "Personal" columns and carefully checked the items. His lips parted in a slow smile as he inserted a fresh dictaphone record on his machine. He picked up the mouthpiece and began talking in a mechanical, disguised voice. This done, he carefully wrapped the recording, addressed it and called in Silk.

"There is still time to make the late editions of the *Star-Chronicle*," he told Silk. "Insert this ad for immediate publication. Then deliver this package. Meanwhile I'll pay Mrs. Bannister a visit."

An hour later Mrs. Bannister started

up in amazement when she saw the somber black-hooded man silently move before her range of vision.

"Please"—he held his hand toward her—"I'm not here to harm you, Mrs. Bannister. People call me the Black Bat. I assure you I mean only to help."

She relaxed and heaved a great sigh.

"I—I've been through so much today, without really understanding what it was all about, that you did frighten me. But I'm not afraid of you. I can see your eyes through that mask. They are honest eyes and your voice has a ring of quality. How can you help me?"

The Black Bat sat down on the edge of the bed.

"AN ATTEMPT was made to murder you today. Your grandson was killed in an accident only a short time ago. He was heavily insured. I have reason to believe that you were to be murdered so that the insurance on your grandson's life would go to your other grandson, Newman Recor."

"All very true so far," she agreed. "What's next?"

"Your living grandson has not had the best of companions. I believe he is under the domination of someone who has forced him to abet this kidnapping of you."

"Then you think my own grandson wanted to have me murdered?" she asked incredulously. "Nonsense! It's not true!"

The Black Bat bowed his head slightly.

"He might have believed you were only to be held temporarily, Mrs. Bannister. I'll tell you this much—he certainly aided me in finding you. Tell me, how much insurance was involved? What assets have you that are easily convertible?"

Mrs. Bannister leaned back and smiled.

"You'll be as surprised as the next

man. I'm supposed to be fairly well off. I am—on paper. In actual cash I have only enough to live on—very well of course—but I can't throw my money away. My grandson was insured for almost half a million dollars."

"And all of it with the Securities Insurance Company?" the Black Bat persisted.

Mrs. Bannister smiled. "Why not? I own half that company. My husband bought into it years ago. I've watched it grow from a small concern into one of the finest in the world. I don't publicize the fact that my only assets lie right in that company."

The Black Bat's eyes glittered. He arose.

"Thank you, Mrs. Bannister. You are in quite safe hands now and I suggest that you remain here until we have captured the man or men responsible for your narrow escape with death. Until we do that, your life will be endangered."

"I'll stay," she said. "I like it here. Most comfortable house I've ever been in, except for my own. And that Mr. Smith is so kind to me. Then the charming girl who says she is his sister, and isn't. They think they're fooling me. Well they're not. Neither are you, crawling in through a window when you could have used the door as well as not."

The Black Bat's lips twisted into a grin. No wonder Silk had been smitten with this old lady. She was astute, keen-eyed and wholly lovable.

"You're guessing badly, Mrs. Bannister," he told her softly. "But I'm glad you'll stay. Perhaps in a few hours it will be quite safe for you to go home."

She sat up, very erect.

"Young man, that mask doesn't deceive me for one minute. Oh, I don't know who you are, I'll admit, but you are honest and I trust you. There is one favor—please?"

He nodded. "Anything."

She leaned forward and spoke in a

confidential whisper to the Black Bat.

"When you meet that awful skinny man they call Antal, slug him for me. He almost broke my jaw."

She sank back and watched the Black Bat step to the window and vanish as completely as a summer breeze. Her eyes sparkled.

"Remarkable young man. He'll teach that worthless grandson of mine a few manners too." Then she closed her eyes slowly and added fervently, "I hope."

CHAPTER XIX

The Chase Closes In



EATING his hasty meal, Tony Quinn glanced through the other late evening newspapers that Silk had brought him. Silk took care that all curtains were drawn so that no one might observe a blind

man avidly perusing the newspapers.

The evening editions told of Detective-sergeant McGrath's quick work in sending out harbor police launches and coast guard cutters to stop the yacht. The crew maintained that Mrs. Bannister had either fallen or jumped overboard before the yacht hove to after being signaled by a police boat. But Mrs. Bannister's body had not been found yet, though a thorough search had been in progress all day.

Commissioner Warner indicated that five new cases of murder for profit had been uncovered, all of the insured covered by Tunick's Security Insurance Company. There was a boxed item indicating that a meeting of the board of directors of the company was scheduled for this evening and the outlook was for a complete reorganization of the firm. Quinn scanned the list of directors and he gave a short gasp.

Dr. Lawrence Luddy was one of the

more prominent members!

At ten o'clock, Silk, well disguised, ambled into the lobby of the insurance company building, took the elevator to the tenth floor and walked down six flights. He had a good look at the office two stories above Tunick's private office. He hurried back to the tenth floor, rang for the elevator and descended. The Bat was waiting in a car parked along a quiet, dark street.

"I got it, sir," Silk reported breathlessly. "And what a lead it's turned out to be. The office you said that guy on a bos'n's chair swung out of, to go down and get into Tunick's office, is rented to Attorney Paradon. His name is on the door in nice, new letters."

"Paradon," the Black Bat reflected. "Then he is in on it. Luddy must be too. But he has a reason, being a director of the company. What on earth are they after?"

"That's easy, sir," Silk broke in. "They're behind it all. They engineer these killings and they get the profits."

The Black Bat shook his head slowly.

"Wrong that time, Silk. They are mixed up somehow, but they didn't hire Antal or direct these murders. I know who did that."

"You—know?" Silk gulped. "But who? How do you know? How did you find out?"

"There is no time for explanations now. Silk, here is your detail. You are in the same disguise as when you met Mrs. Bannister. She is certain to have told Recor, her grandson, what you looked like when you first met her. He'll readily believe you are just one of the mob if you hand out a line with your customary skill.

"Go to the Bannister home. See Recor and tell him he's got to start getting things ready for the big pay-off. Tell him his grandmother is dead and they'll find the body when Antal gets good and ready to have them discover it. Rub it in—be as tough as you can. Say that unless he delivers on the line

and within twenty-four hours he'll take the rap. And remind him he is just as guilty of his grandmother's murder as any other member of the gang."

"But he couldn't lay his hands on that estate so quick," Silk protested. "She can't be declared legally dead until they find the body, or a number of years pass by."

QUINN shook his head. "Recor won't think of that. Not if I have him properly catalogued. He'll go into a rage. Better have a gun ready, but don't hurt him. I want that boy aroused until he's prepared for anything. It's important."

"Yes, sir," Silk answered. "Shall I walk, or will I drop you off somewhere and go on with the car?"

"Drop me off near Galvin's home," the Black Bat ordered. "That's where the show-down will take place."

Silk started the car.

"I'm beginning to get it, sir. Galvin has had two hundred and fifty thousand dollars paid him on his son's insurance policy. Antal and his boss want it. They'll grab some other member of the family and force him to pay. But how are you so sure it will happen tonight?"

"Because," the Black Bat said, with a slow smile, "I've planned it that way."

Silk dropped him close to Galvin's home. Then he sped away to fulfill his part of the game.

The Black Bat, hood in place, guns ready, made his way across yards until he was at the rear of Galvin's home. He prowled around until he was certain no one else had the house under observation. Then he vanished in the darkness to await developments.

They came within thirty minutes. The Black Bat's supersensitive eyes caught a glimpse of a shadowy form slinking toward the rear door. As the intruder approached, the Black Bat recognized Antal. The gaunt killer had a heavy revolver in his fist and the look on his face spelled murder. Antal was

coming to collect his cut, or else.

Antal moved along beneath a window, raised his head a few inches and peered inside. The Black Bat heard the hammer of the killer's revolver draw back with a click. Then Antal drew the brim of his hat way down, squared his bony shoulders and advanced toward the back door.

The Black Bat crept forward, slipping one of his automatics out of its holster. If Antal meant business, so did the Black Bat. At this stage of the game mistakes would be forever unalterable.

Then a car door banged on the street. Antal ducked hastily, ran several yards from the house and made his way forward to see if the callers were headed for Galvin's home. The Black Bat went too, but only to a point where his eyes could penetrate the darkness and make out the features of the three men who walked up the path to the front door.

Ronald Tunick, president of the Security Insurance Company was in the lead. His shoulders drooped, his face bore the resigned look of a defeated man. Behind him, aggressive and cocksure, were Dr. Lawrence Luddy and Paradon, the shyster attorney.

Paradon rang the bell with his cane. The door opened and Galvin appeared. Apparently he had been preparing to go out or had just come in, for he wore hat and coat.

"Come in, gentlemen," he said politely. "We'll have a drink and then discuss our business. My family is out of town. We'll be quite alone. I sent for you so we might have a final show-down on this ghastly business."

Suddenly Antal burst from his hiding place behind the hedge. His gun covered the quartette and his voice was a snarl of hatred.

"Yeah," he ground out bitterly, "let's go in and talk it over! I'm cutting myself in on this deal, too. I'm a smart guy, understand? I know what's going on and if one of you squawks, I'll drill him. Move!"

THEY went into the house too fast for the Black Bat to swing into action. The door slammed and he heard a burglar chain slip into place. He had a glimpse of the men as they passed by a window with a drawn shade. Antal still held all the cards and he was playing his hand cunningly.

The Black Bat ran lightly to the rear of the house and approached the back door. It was locked and he reasoned that if the front door was supplied with a burglar chain, the back door would be similarly equipped. And the Black Bat had no tools to overcome that difficulty.

He tested windows, found them all locked. He could not simply break into one of them for Antal, forewarned, would open fire without even caring who might be on the way to interrupt the party.

There was one other method, barring the risky idea of climbing a tree and trying to jump through mid-air and grasp one of the second-story windows. For there were no convenient porch roofs to this house.

The Black Bat ran swiftly to the cellar hatchway, raised the cover and dropped it in place after him. The intense gloom that shrouded the tiny cellarway only served to make things clearer for the Black Bat. He saw the cheap lock on the cellar door. From his kit of miniature tools, he took a tiny pair of pliers, inserted them into the keyhole and grasped the key on the

other side of the door. By applying pressure and firmly turning the key the bolt slid back. He swung the door wide, stepped into the cellar proper and heard angry, muffled voices above him.

The stairway to the first floor loomed up and he climbed it, blessing the silence that his crepe soled shoes lent him. Noiselessly opening the door at the top of the steps, he slipped into the hallway and edging his way along the wall until he reached the heavy portieres decorating the door to the room where the men were assembled.

He drew one curtain away until he could peer into the room. Paradon and Tunick sat on a leather davenport, their hands resting on their thighs. Dr. Luddy occupied an overstuffed chair that all but swallowed him. Galvin, white and so obviously shaken that he had forgotten to remove his hat or coat, was seated behind a desk, his back toward the Black Bat. Antal menaced all of them, but most of his attention was on Galvin.

"This time," Antal was thundering, "I'm going outa here with plenty of dough. Galvin, you got paid off. Two hundred and fifty grand. We damned near got it, and if the Black Bat hadn't stuck his nose into my affairs, you'da paid it over without a squawk. Well, pay it over now!"

"But I haven't got a quarter of a million dollars in cash," Galvin quavered. "I—I can't possibly pay you."

[Turn Page]

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"No?" Antal shouted. "Well I got some private dope, understand? I know you got that dough here—in cold cash too. You wanta get a slug in your kneecap—just for a starter? Come on! Get that money out and hand it over."

Galvin's hands shook violently. He lowered them a trifle and Antal snarled a warning. Galvin made a despairing gesture.

"But—but the money—it's in my desk. How can I get it if you won't let me?"

"Okay," Antal snapped. "Get it, and remember I'm watching you every second. One phony play and I'll drill you through the head. Get busy!"

TOSSING aside his hat and coat, Galvin crossed the room and slowly pulled out the desk drawer. From his position near the door, the Black Bat caught the gleam of a gun just under Galvin's outstretched hand. Galvin was going to shoot it out. The Black Bat's own weapon came up and he drew a precise bead on Antal's head.

Suddenly Galvin thrust his hand into the drawer. It moved as fast as the tongue of a serpent. There was an explosion. Antal's weapon went off, but as he fired Galvin had slipped out of the chair and sought protection behind the desk.

Antal, his tall, gaunt frame erect as a ramrod, pivoted very deliberately, like a soldier going through his drill in slow motion. Then he uttered a long-drawn-out sigh and toppled over like a tall chimney with its base blasted out with dynamite.

Galvin arose, gun still smoking in his fist. He mopped his forehead with a handkerchief and sank back into his chair. Dr. Luddy hurried over to where Antal had fallen. When he straightened up, his face was grave.

"Dead. You got him right between the eyes, Galvin. That was a good piece of work. Anybody know who this gunman was?"

Galvin nodded. "Yes—yes. I know

him. My daughter Elaine described him and he matches the description perfectly. He is the man who kidnaped her, held her while I was being bled out of the money Tunick paid me for my son's insurance coverage. I—I don't feel very well, gentlemen. This has been an exhausting experience. I—I'm glad he's dead. He mistreated Elaine—starved her. I'm sure he meant to murder her after I paid him the money."

"And you know what I think?" Paradon broke in. "He also killed your son. He had him insured first, then he murdered him so you'd collect the insurance and he could get it from you with more murder."

Dr. Luddy swung on Tunick.

"Now I'll tell you what I think. You're behind it all, Tunick. You, the president of the Security Insurance Company, hired this killer. Retained him to commit murder so your company would pay off. Your pet agent, Morgan, wrote the policies, faked them too, I'm wagering. He used doubles for the medical examinations. Then, after a short time, your hired assassins did their bit. You knew to whom and when those policies would be paid. You knew when to strike."

Tunick heaved a vast sigh and leaned back against the cushions of the davenport.

"Gentlemen," he said, "tonight I'm a ruined man. The insurance company I helped to build is no longer mine. I signed my resignation as president and withdrew from the board of directors. However, I'll be damned if I'll admit engineering these murders. You have to call in the police to account for the death of this crook. Call them in—make your accusations before them. If they believe you, I'll surrender. I can't fight or argue tonight. I tell you I'm on the verge of a breakdown!"

Paradon picked up the telephone. He eyed Galvin.

"Keep Tunick covered," he said. "I'll get the police here and let them

learn what we've discovered. That's why we brought you here, Tunick—to show you up, make you confess. If there was any way we could have kept the facts from the public, we would have done so. This will completely ruin the Security Insurance Company. We'll have canceled contracts, lapsed policies and no new business at all. Tonight I became a director of the firm. I wanted to maintain the reputation of the company—but I see now how wrong I've been. You can't circumvent murder."

He dialed the police and gave them a terse message. Then he hung up with a bang. Galvin, the gun shaking slightly, kept it trained on Tunick.

Suddenly every light in the house winked out.

CHAPTER XX

All the Cards—Face Down



BREAKING into the sudden silence there was a sound of a scuffle in the middle of the room. Then the shadowy form of a man began running madly. Running as if death was at his heels.

There was an explosion. The shadowy figure uttered a shrill screech of pain, but went on. He reached the front door, tried to open it, but the burglar chain blocked him. He whirled and, despite his wounds, ran up the staircase to the second floor.

"Galvin!" Dr. Luddy's voice was hoarse with excitement. "Shoot him! Get him!"

The indistinct form reached the top of the steps and for a second was silhouetted against the two windows at the landing. A gun blasted. The shadowy form stopped dead, sagged against the window, then slowly sank to the floor.

A siren howled outside. Heavy footsteps announced the arrival of the police.

Sergeant McGrath was the first through the door. At his heels came Commissioner Warner. Someone went down cellar and replaced a blown out fuse. The lights came on. Galvin, still clutching the gun, surrendered it eagerly to McGrath's outstretched hand. Paradon ran up the stairs and looked at the man lying there; looked, without touching him. He saw blood on the man's face and that was enough. He descended the steps slowly.

"He's dead all right. No question about it. You got him through the head, Galvin—just as you got that other one."

"Other one?" McGrath yelled. "What's going on here? Mass murder?"

Galvin sighed. "Not murder, Officer. I shot in self defense and there are two witnesses—Attorney Paradon and Dr. Luddy. The man in the other room is named Antal. He kidnaped my daughter and came back here tonight trying to get money out of me at the point of a gun."

"If it's Antal," McGrath said, "nobody will blame you much, Galvin. Who is the guy at the top of the steps?"

"Tunick—Ronald Tunick, president of the Security Insurance Company. Paradon, Dr. Luddy and I had evidence enough to send him to the chair. Somehow the lights went out and he broke for it. I—I shot him down. After all, he was responsible for the death of my son."

Commissioner Warner took charge. He herded everyone into the spacious living room and took the center of the floor himself.

"Now I'd like an explanation," he said. "You three men indicate that Tunick was the leader of the murder-for-insurance ring. Can you prove it?"

Paradon jumped to his feet.

"We have absolute evidence, Commissioner! We suspected this for a

long time. I rented an office above Tunick's. Tunick claimed to be a collector of old phonograph records. He received many of them through the mail. We suspected that some of those were more than they seemed. Last night I took my life in my hands and Dr. Luddy lowered me two floors from my own office, so I might invade Tunick's. I selected that method so there would be no clues to show I had been there. If I was wrong, I wanted to be sure before I called in the police.

"Well, I found a record on Tunick's desk. It was neatly packaged, but I knew what to look for. That record is now in my office safe. It was from this



man, Antal, who lies dead at your feet. It gave Tunick instructions that he was to prepare the loot for a cut. Isn't that evidence enough? With Tunick's final move in trying to escape? That was the act of a guilty man."

COMMISSIONER WARNER signaled McGrath. The detective-sergeant gave soft orders to the men in the hallway. Two of them entered the room and took up positions near the front window.

"If Tunick was the guilty man, as you indicate," Warner said softly, "how is it that a young man named Newman Recor came to my office a few moments ago and told me a weird story about the murder of his grandmother? She

was Mrs. Bannister, if that enlightens you. Recor states that he was forced to help in this murder, and that he doesn't believe Tunick was behind the killers. He told me that he—"

Warner ceased speaking abruptly. His eyes were wide, his mouth slightly open. Against the further wall was the huge image of a bat! It seemed to have poised in flight and become an unflickering design on the wall. Warner turned around slowly. The others, aware of a new presence, turned too.

The Black Bat stood just inside a window. Two guns were in his hands and the eyes behind the mask glittered brilliantly.

"If each of you will remain exactly as he is now, on one will be hurt. Sergeant McGrath, you might pass the word to your men in the hallway that if they try to open fire, I shall be forced to shoot, much as I dislike doing so."

Galvin stepped forward.

"This man is the Black Bat," he said. "He may be wanted by the police, but I classify him as a friend. He saved my daughter's life."

Commissioner Warner stepped forward a pace.

"It's all right, Bat. You have my word that there will be no shooting. My men will govern themselves according to those orders."

The Black Bat relaxed a trifle.

"Thank you, Commissioner. First of all, I might state that Ronald Tunick is not dead. Galvin's bullet hit the wall, not him. I pulled Tunick down and slugged him. If he looks dead, it's because of a superficial wound he received as he fled to the front door."

McGrath started for the hallway.

"I'd better put cuffs on him," he said.

"Wait!" the Black Bat called out. "Keep your handcuffs for someone else. Tunick is not the killer. I've been here for some time. I saw Galvin kill Antal and it was in self defense. However, I also saw Galvin kick a wire over there near his desk. That shorted the lights. Then he stepped up to Tunick and

whispered to him to run for it, that he was giving him a break." He turned his head slightly. "Why then, Galvin, did you try to kill him?"

Galvin grew ruddy. "I did no such thing! Tunick simply ran for it when the lights went out. How can you stand there and testify to such events that transpired in darkness?"

"Because I can see in the dark," the Black Bat said. "I can also hear exceptionally well. The game is up, Galvin. You're guilty of murder—mass murder. Commissioner, if you'll bring in young Recor, he may have an interesting story to tell."

McGrath moved toward Galvin, ready to pounce on him if he tried a getaway. McGrath could not figure out how in the world Galvin was the killer, but the Black Bat had not gone wrong yet. McGrath was taking no chances.

YOUNG Recor came in slowly. He saw the Black Bat and shivered. Then, so fast that his words tumbled over one another, he blurted the truth.

"I was framed into this! A man I met in a night club got me into a card game and the others were in league with him. They cheated—took every cent I had. Then one of the players made an accusation. I had a gun. I took it out. Someone grabbed me, but the gun went off. The card sharp was on the floor—dead. They told me I'd go to the chair for it unless I obeyed their orders. I tell you I couldn't help myself! They threatened to tell the police about the killing. I don't believe now that man was dead at all. I believe it was all a frame-up! I saw Galvin at the night club when it happened. I think he engineered the whole thing."

Galvin clasped both hands in front of him and assumed the expression of an undertaker.

"This young man is somewhat mad," he said. "Did it ever occur to you gentlemen that my son, my own flesh and blood, was murdered by this ring?

Have you thought of my daughter being kidnaped and held under cruel conditions so I would pay over the money my son's insurance policy provided? This is sheer drivel and I warn you it won't end here."

"You're right there, Galvin," the Black Bat said in a voice tinged with sarcasm. "It will only end when they march you from a death cell. You are not Ralph Galvin's father—nor Elaine's. Their father died years ago. So many years ago and so far from here that the fact was never known in these parts. You married his widow and her children took your name. There is a group photograph in Mrs. Galvin's room that shows her, the children and her first husband. I've checked further, through some old diaries I found in a chest. They'll convict you, Galvin, if your only defense is your relationship with Ralph and Elaine."

Galvin's eyes grew wide and terror-ridden. He walked slowly over to his desk and sat down; picked up a round paper weight and began to toy with it. McGrath watched him narrowly.

"You hired Antal through some intermediary, now dead probably," the Black Bat went on. "Antal didn't know who you were. You insured Ralph, then killed him. You had Elaine kidnaped and had Collins put in your home as a guard, to watch you. That was to throw all suspicion away from you for both the benefit of the police and the gunman who worked for you. But you sent Antal a phonograph record ordering him to murder Collins because he snooped and knew too much. That was a bad mistake. Collins could only snoop in your house, Galvin. He found out you were the mystery man and held it over your head. There could have been no other reason for eliminating him."

"You wanted to frame Tunick and you had Antal send those records to him. Morgan, picking up Tunick's mail, was unknowingly subjected to theft. The record containing the mes-

sage was lifted and another one, really an old record of the type that Tunick collected, was substituted. Morgan carried the messages without knowing it."

Galvin said nothing but there was a look akin to madness in his eyes. Commissioner Warner seemed stunned.

BUT why?" he asked. "Why should Galvin do all this?"

"At first Galvin only wanted to profit by murdering for insurance," the Black Bat answered quickly. "Then he rigged up a scheme to take over the whole insurance company. You see, he couldn't buy the necessary control with the money he had made from his other insurance-murder frauds, because that might have cast suspicion on him. He wasn't supposed to have so much money. But with the insurance from his stepson's policy he could do so. Not in straightforward fashion, of course. That would be too obvious. Therefore, he had the cover-up of his stepdaughter's kidnaping and the pretended extortion demands. He never intended to pay that ransom money. He'd have conveniently arranged for the girl's escape, I'm sure, if I hadn't rescued her. But it would look good, and he'd have been able openly to keep the money from the policy without any suspicion. As he did.

"Tunick paid him a quarter of a million dollars in full on the claim of his son's death. Galvin paid that money back to Tunick, who was on the verge of bankruptcy, for certain investments that gave Galvin firm hold on the Security Insurance Company. Not, as I first thought when I saw the check, for extortion demands. I wondered about that later, because I realized that Galvin hadn't been forced to pay the ransom, after all. Then if the check were for something else, he must have made previous negotiations with all intentions of paying—before he even had the money!

"To get the controlling interest, Galvin had Mrs. Bannister kidnaped and

apparently murdered. Recor would inherit and among the assets of the estate were more bonds which would give Galvin complete control of the insurance company. Dr. Luddy was a director in the firm and he also believed that Tunick was guilty—inspired by Galvin's secret accusations. Paradon was in on it. He wanted a cut. Young Recor, in desperation, went to him for advice and, keen-minded as he is, Paradon saw just what this was all about."

"I committed no crime," Paradon yelped. "There is nothing on me. I'll talk. From what Recor told me and my own knowledge that Galvin was trying to corner a controlling interest in Security Insurance, I suspected it was Galvin. Then when Galvin actually bought Tunick's bonds, I knew. So did Dr. Luddy. There wasn't much we could do, without any tangible proof, so we decided to cut ourselves in, that's all. Galvin was a man of modest means. He needed money so he insured and murdered his stepson."

"That's enough," the Black Bat snapped. "It ought to provide disbarment proceedings against you, Paradon. And you, Dr. Luddy—did it ever occur that Galvin was framing you into a neat little trap by infecting those instruments and faking that accident with Singleton? You operated on Singleton. He is dead. Galvin could hold that over your head, tie you up with the murder ring if necessary and in that manner keep you down. You'd have felt his wrath before long."

"It—it's unbelievable!" Commissioner Warner mopped his face. "Of course things tie up and we'll develop evidence enough to convict, but Galvin—"

THE Black Bat spoke again. "Galvin is a peculiar person. He has a dual personality. One part of him exists for pleasure. Sergeant McGrath tipped me off about that angle not many hours ago and it sent me thinking. I had Galvin checked and

found that he has two existences—one connected with gambling, women and wine; the other, a home-loving family man. When Jim Fisher returned and suspected something wrong about Ralph Galvin's sudden death, Galvin found it out and murdered those three men in the cemetery. He substituted another body for his stepson's and disposed of the real corpse in some other grave, I presume."

Galvin arose unsteadily.

"I want to confess," he said. "I—

Then he raised both hands. He still held the paper weight with which he had been toying. The Black Bat saw that Galvin's right forefinger was thrust through a ring fastened to the weight.

Galvin's voice arose to a shriek. "All right—I killed them! I fooled all of you stupid morons. I'd have taken over the insurance company in a few months and then I'd have operated on the level. What if I did want money? Lots of it?"

McGrath advanced grimly. Galvin backed away a step.

"Don't come any closer," he shrieked. "This is a grenade I'm holding. I've kept it for just this purpose. You can't shoot me fast enough so I won't be able to pull this ring. We'll all go to hell together—the Black Bat along with us! I'm willing to die if he goes out too."

Suddenly young Recor went into a tackling dive. At the same moment the Black Bat's gun spat. Galvin's left hand, clutching the bomb, fell to his side with blood dripping from it. The bomb started to slip away from the pin. Recor made a grab for it with both hands. He twisted Galvin's wrist until it went numb and with the other hand he kept that bomb from being separated from the pin.

McGrath swung a blackjack. Galvin slumped to the floor and Recor cautiously removed the deadly bomb.

"That was a brave bit of work, Re-

cor," the Black Bat said without tremor in his voice. "You've rather redeemed yourself. As a partial reward I'll tell you that your grandmother is alive, well, and by this time safely in her own home. Go to her, tell her what a fool you've been and make amends. Govern yourself like a man and if there is any punishment coming for your part in this, take it with your chin out."

Recor's eyes were shining happily. He could not talk. He could just nod his head violently.

The Black Bat faced McGrath.

"At your feet, Sergeant," he said, "is the wire that Galvin shorted. Pick it up and see what I mean."

McGrath stooped and seized the wire. Instantly the lights went out. When McGrath got them back on, there was no sign of the Black Bat.

CHAPTER XXI

McGrath Names Himself



LACID and patient, Tony Quinn, in his smoking jacket and tweed trousers, sat before his fireplace. His eyes were filmed over like those of a blind man. Silk sat beside him, apparently reading a news-

paper.

"But Antal," Silk asked, "how come he went there? You said he didn't know that Galvin was the big boy behind the murders."

Tony Quinn chuckled softly.

"Galvin used to contact Antal by a recording. He'd advertise in the newspaper giving an address to which the recording had been sent. It was always one of these professional mailing addresses. Antal simply went there and got the recording. I had you insert an ad in tonight's paper. It indicated that Antal might find a new record at a certain address. He did—one that I

prepared myself in the laboratory.

"I faked Galvin's voice well enough and gave Antal the news that Galvin had cashed the insurance check and had the cash at his home. Antal was to get it, keep it all for his share in the proceedings. I indicated that things were so hot the whole affair had to be dropped temporarily. That brought Antal to Galvin's in a big hurry. I hoped to overhear Galvin admit to Antal that he was the mystery man, but Tunick and the others showed up too soon.

"Therefore Galvin, figuring that Antal knew who he was and was trying to hijack him, used a gun. Antal got what was coming to him. That day Collins had you snatched—remember how Galvin slugged you with a chair? I couldn't imagine anyone in Galvin's position doing that. It made me suspicious. The rest of it I've told you."

Silk nodded and grinned. He started to say something when the phone rang. He answered it, spoke briefly and returned to Quinn's side with a puzzled expression on his face.

"That was McGrath," he said. "He wanted to know if you were in. Said he was on his way here."

Tony Quinn's face grew stark with horror.

"Silk, I slipped! It just occurred to me. McGrath has a sample of my handwriting, stolen from this room. I sent him a message—an urgent one to help me save Mrs. Bannister. I was in a hurry and I didn't think. He also has a sample of the Black Bat's handwriting. If he has compared them—"

Silk broke out in a cold sweat. Someone tapped on the secret door. It was Butch. Silk told him what had happened and Quinn ordered Butch away in a hurry.

"McGrath will have nothing on you, Butch," Silk hastily assured. "Tell Carol to lay low, too."

Butch vanished and two minutes later McGrath arrived. He walked into the living room and sat down beside

Quinn. He put a cigar between his teeth, bit off the end and threw it into the fireplace. Then he fumbled around in his pockets for a match.

Quinn stared straight ahead. Silk, in the hallway, prayed silently. It looked like the end of the Black Bat.

Then McGrath talked.

"Well Quinn," he said, "the Black Bat cleaned up another mess. You know, I swore I'd get him some day and I shall. When that day rolls around, you will walk into a nice neat little cell. However, I suppose you'll deny being the Black Bat and I couldn't prove you were. At that, I may even be all wrong and you really are blind. Sometimes I'm not sure; sometimes I am. This happens to be one of the times when I can't figure out how you could possibly do it."

TONY QUINN'S face betrayed none of the turmoil seething within him. At any moment McGrath would produce handcuffs, slap them in place and—exit the Black Bat.

McGrath fumbled again for a match and could not find one. He slipped a hand into an inner pocket and took out two pieces of paper. He spread these out on his knee.

"Wonder what I'm carrying this junk around for?" he said in a steady voice. "A bad habit of mine, carrying notes in my pockets until they rot."

He rolled both papers into a long tapir, stepped over to the fireplace and set fire to it. He lit his cigar and threw the still burning papers into the smoldering logs.

"Well," he said, "guess I'll be on my way. Funny thing about me. I like to pay my debts."

Tony Quinn spoke to him for the first time.

"I have no doubt of that, Sergeant. You're an honest man. Some day, I hope, you'll catch this Black Bat red-handed."

McGrath smiled. "Sure I will. He can't get away with it forever."

McGrath nodded to Silk and walked through the door. On his way to the car he was muttering to himself.

"I'm a damned fool. A stupid damned fool. I should have compared the handwriting and made sure, even if I didn't use the information. But handwriting experts don't always agree. Maybe it wouldn't have done any good anyhow. Still— Boy, I've gone soft. Soft and foolish."

He got behind the wheel of the car. His jaw dropped an inch, his cigar tumbled into his lap. Across the whole center of his windshield were Black Bat stickers.

Behind a hedge, Butch was barely able to restrain the horse laugh that surged up within him.

McGrath ground out a salty oath. He stepped on the starter and pulled away. "Oh-h-h, what a fool I am!" he groaned. "If this ever gets out . . . Fool, that's me! Jackass, nincompoop—double damned fool!"

Then he frowned. "I wonder! I wonder if he is the Black Bat! Those stickers—he couldn't have put them on the windshield. And his eyes didn't show any recognition of those papers. I wonder if I could have caught him at that!"

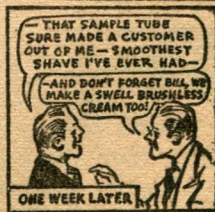


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A Complete Book-Length Novel Featuring Tony Quinn on the Trail of a Sinister League of Beggars
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**YOU PEOPLE
MUST BE CRAZY
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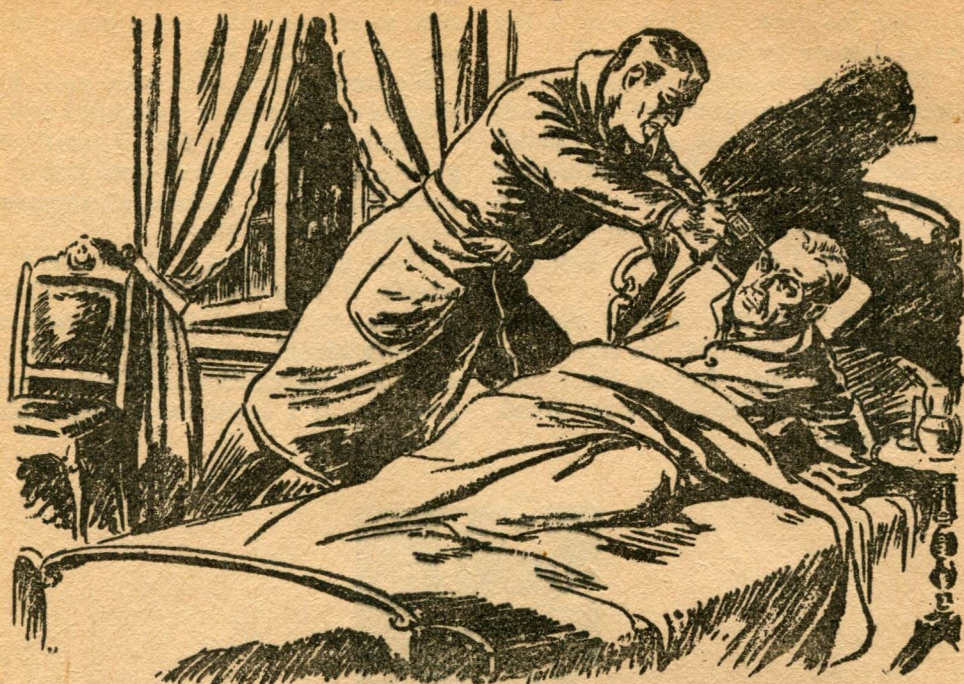
Lambert Pharmacal Co., Dept. 88, St. Louis, Mo. Please send me free and postpaid your large sample tube of ☐ Listerine Shaving Cream; ☐ Listerine Brushless Cream. (Check whichever is desired.)

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City _____ State _____



**CLIP
THE
COUPON**

The Crime Bug Gets into Joe Thompson's Head—but Murder Goes Straight to His Stomach!



"Relax!" I growled at John Bixby, as he turned pea green.

JUST TAKE IT EASY

By HENRY S. LEWIS

Author of "A Knight at an Inn," "The Boys from Burma," etc.

WELL, I suppose some guys would say I'm a sucker and maybe they're right at that.

I don't wear green shirts any more. They took the two-carat sparkler off my finger. And they shaved my head until I look like one of the Three Stooges. But at least I get three squares a day, I can sleep nights and they let me spend plenty of time in the library. I even heard through the grapevine that they'll let me off in a couple years.

So Joe Thompson's a squealer, eh? If you'd been in my shoes, brother, you'd have done the same thing. I'll give you the whole story, and you can decide for yourself.

It all began back in March, 1933. They had a "bank holiday," see, and when the money-bags opened up again, a lot of small-town vaults stayed shut. So old Smithers called me into his office at the First National.

"Joe," he said, "Uncle Sam is putting me out of business because I loaned too

much dough to keep my neighbors from starving to death. They're appointing a conservator to wind up the bank's affairs. That means—"

"Yeah," I told him. "Only a few people will be kept on, and I'm only here a couple of years. Okay, Mr. Smithers—thanks for breaking it to me yourself."

So that was that. I didn't starve to death. Out my way, a guy can always get a job picking peaches, peddling from house-to-house, washing dishes. Only it takes something out of a fellow, see. Something that maybe never comes back again.

Well, that's how matters stood when I drifted into this one-horse burg they call Hillsdale. The short-order cook at the local bean pot had just lit out for the Coast, so that gave me an in. The Greek liked the way I fried hamburgers, so he put me on at ten bucks a week.

Trouble was, the Greek didn't buy such hot supplies, and pretty soon I began losing weight and looking like a walking hangover, what with all that work and the bum food.

ONE night around eleven Mike Diruta comes in with some of his boys.

"Howdy, gentlemen," I said, knowing damn well I was a liar. "What'll you have?"

"Champagne and squabs," Diruta sneered. "And I mean the imported stuff, get me?"

"Sure," I grinned. "How'll you have it, friend—Piper-Heidsieck or Mum's?"

His jaw stuck out and his face got nasty. "Wise guy, eh?"

"I know my way around. That's more'n you can say for a lot of guys nowadays."

He decided to take it. "Okay, greaseball. Only watch your lip when customers are around. Hamburgers 'n coffee. Put relish on mine."

They liked the way I dished 'em up, and Diruta gave me a quarter tip.

"You know how to serve 'em up," he admitted, smacking his lips.

"Everybody's got his own racket today, Mister," I grinned back. "That's the only way to make a living."

He didn't know quite how to take that. He knew that I'd guessed what his game was, but he was too smart to let on. So he just said something under his onion breath, picked up a toothpick and followed his boys out.

After that Diruta and his mob began showing up regular. I fed 'em enough hamburgers to supply the French army on summer maneuvers. Then one night the boys went out single file, but Diruta stayed behind.

He looked me over with a practiced eye.

"This racket don't agree with you so hot, Joe. I could use a smart young feller in my game."

I jerked my head toward his slap-happy shooters outside. "I don't doubt it."

His face got tough as hell. Then he scowled. Then that mug of his got back to normal, and he actually looked sheepish.

"Damn it, I wouldn't take that stuff from anybody else but you. That's what I like about you, kid. You've got brains."

Tomorrow was Saturday, and the Greek would be doling out the ten bucks again, in dirty one-dollar bills.

"What's your proposition, Mike?"

So that's how it all began. We kicked around the state for a couple of months, knocking off cigar stores, cracking safes in hick town general stores, picking up a few hundred bucks here and there. The take wasn't large, but it was substantial.

Mike Diruta bought another seven-passenger sedan just in case our Buick was hot. Bo Herman got himself a portable radio. And I blossomed forth like a rainbow with the jitters, to make up for the slacks and sneakers I'd had to put up with since the bank folded.

So things were rocking along, the

gang taking in about five grand a month, when we blew into Evanstown one night and I ran up to see my kid sister.

A smart girl, Mary. The kind that can always get along, and I mean the straight way. She opened the apartment door, took one look at me and her eyes narrowed even as she kissed me.

"Why, Joe! When did you get into town? You haven't written me in a month. A fine way to treat your only sister!"

But the shadow in her voice told me her eyes knew what they'd seen.

"Well, I'm going to make it up to you now, Mary." I laughed, and hugged her again.

WE went into the apartment and then she kind of pushed me away from her and took a good second look. Her face got like a mask and her eyes were stern.

"Joe, what have you been doing to yourself? You look like a prizefighter on his night off."

I avoided her eyes. "Oh, I've been around, kid. Not doing too bad for myself, anyway. Good enough so's you can quit work from now on, Mary."

Well, she wanted to know just how good I was doing. One thing led to another, and in a half-hour she threw open the door and gave me a look I remembered for a month.

"Good-by, Joe. I—I hope nothing happens to you. But I don't want to see you again. I swear I'll turn you over to the police if you come back. I mean that, Joe. You're the first crook in the Thompson family!"

So that was that. I got pretty tight that night, and Mike was sore as hell because I had to case a pretty big men's clothing store the next morning and I was as groggy as a groundhog.

The job came off okay, anyway, and we beat it out of town with a couple of motorcycle cops eating our dust. When we got to Harrison we picked

up another car, quick, and that ended the trouble—until next time.

Mike Diruta got a brainstorm, see? He was plenty good in his own heist racket, but when it came to a little real skull practice, he couldn't boot the pigskin over the goal post.

"We've been suckers," he told us. "Too much small stuff. You got to advance in this racket, get me? That's why we're going in for the big time."

Big time, nuts. But there wasn't anything I could do about it. Anyway, the set-up was the estate of John Bixby, the automobile magnet, and the prize was the negotiable securities and his wife's jewelry he was supposed to have hidden around in a wall safe some place.

Mike had taken quite a fancy to me by now. I kept his books for him, saved him money on long trips, and he thought I was the best "business manager" he'd ever seen.

So he gave me the special honor of putting the bee on John Bixby. We broke into the Bixby mansion around midnight, after casing the joint for a week, and I barged into the motor magnate's private bedroom and planted my roscoe on his sleeping brow. Only I was sure I had the safety catch on. I don't like murders. They're too permanent.

Like I figured, the roscoe did the trick, and he woke up with a yelp, turned pea green and began to stutter and get jittery.

"Relax!" I growled. "Otherwise, the stock market will be fluttering tomorrow. All we want from you, Mr. Bixby, is the combination to that wall safe of yours. So just come with me, nice and peaceful."

By now the rest of the house was raising a rumpus, and I heard a couple of thumps as the boys turned on the heat. Me, I never went in for hitting people over the head with a gat.

"Step on it, grandpa," I snarled. "Let's get this business over with quick."

SO Bixby jittered down the long circular stairway, stumbled into a huge walnut-paneled den, shoved a big portrait aside and went to work on the wall safe.

When he got it open, Diruta brushed him aside like a fly, smacking the old guy's head against a sideboard and cutting his scalp. Bixby almost fell down, but managed to hold on.

I didn't like it, but Diruta wasn't paying us any attention. He was too busy rooting like a pig in that miniature vault, hauling out enough gilt-edged bonds to choke a horse. When he got to the little leather jewelry boxes, he got to something he could really understand, and he let out a whoop.

"Take it easy, Mike!" I warned. "We'll celebrate later. Right now we'd better scram quick!"

Bixby, mopping his scalp, had got his wits back now. He gave us a look that would have roasted an Eskimo.

"That's right, you thieves!" It sounded like Harvard, but it was straight stuff. "You'd better celebrate while you can, because it won't be for very long, I can assure you!"

Mike stuffed the loot in a handbag and then walked up to Bixby.

"Tough guy, eh? Big money man that makes everybody jump through a hoop! Well—jump through this!"

He took a poke at the poor guy. Bixby was lifted straight up into the air, at least a foot. His head snapped back like his neck was broken. In fact, it was. But the worst part was, when he landed on the floor his forehead smacked like a billiard ball against a corner of that sideboard and it made a hole in his skull an inch across.

I took one look at him and my stomach got sick. Then I turned on Mike.

"You damn fool! You've killed the guy! It wasn't enough to steal his—"

A couple of shots blasted my words to ribbons. Only the slugs weren't from Mike Diruta. They came straight from the caretaker's rifle. The guy was popping at us through a window.

Only I didn't think much about that then. All I knew was, one minute I was all in one piece, and the next my right arm felt like a red-hot poker had been run through it.

The thing hurt like hell. I let out a yelp and the next I remember Mike was dragging me out to the car and exchanging shots with the caretaker.

I must have passed out, because when my eyes came open we were speeding like the devil through farm country, and somebody was holding my head. I saw a dirty towel wrapped around my arm, and then the thing began to throb like an African drum.

"He's comin' round. Kid's lost a lot of blood," said Mike Diruta.

The way he said it, I knew he'd forgotten the way I talked to him over Bixby's corpse. The excitement must have kicked it out of his two-bit brain. Only I didn't forget. I couldn't.

The car raced on through the night and pretty soon it was dawn. My arm felt like it had been torn off, and my stomach kept heaving inside me. But with all that pain and shock, I still couldn't get that picture of Mike slugging John Bixby out of my skull.

The more I thought about it, the sicker I got. And when the only possible answer began to percolate in my brain, I knew all at once I had the right number if only I could get to a telephone.

I caught a couple of snatches at the road signs as we whizzed by in the dawn. "Mike—" I said weakly.

"Yeah, kid?" he grunted. "Hurt pretty bad?"

"Uh-huh. Awful bad, Mike. Listen, we're heading for Evanstown, huh?"

"That's right. Have to ditch this car."

I LOOKED at that big tough mug of his. "You got to get me to a doctor, Mike. I can't stand this pain much longer. I used to work in Evanstown, Mike. Know a doctor there. He'll fix me up, and keep his trap shut."

Mike didn't say anything for a couple of minutes. Then:

"Okay. But he's gotta do the job quick. What's this guy's name? Where's his office?"

I gave him the dope and then dozed off. It must have been around nine-thirty when the car turned down a side street in Evanstown, and Mike woke me. "Sure you can trust this guy?"

"I couldn't trust you any more, Mike."

He helped me out of the sedan, and the boys stayed inside while I stumbled on his arm around the corner and up the sidewalk to a rambling old house. There was a sign at the window.

EDWARD REIMAN, M.D.

HOURS: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Ed himself came to the door, because it was a few minutes before his morning schedule and no other patients had shown up yet. "Why, Joe!" he exclaimed. He saw the bloody towel. "My God, man, what's—"

"Just an accident, Ed," I said quick-

ly. "This is my friend Arthur Harris," I lied, nodding at Mike, "and he got me here quick as he could. I was out at his camp getting ready for some hunting, and the rifle I was cleaning went off."

Ed was much more worried about the wound than how I got it. He rushed me inside, stripped off my jacket, took off the towel and began to probe for the bullet.

I turned my head a little and there was Ed Reiman's nurse, reporting for work a couple minutes before ten. I didn't bother to keep my eyes on her, and besides that damn probe was giving my nerves a sleigh ride.

When I was about ready to scream, Ed finally got the bullet out and stood up, mopping his brow.

Something about Mike's face must have caught Ed's eye as he glanced at the dumb ox just before wrapping on the bandage. Because he gasped:

"Joe, there's something funny about all this. This fellow with you isn't named Harris. He's Mike Diruta! I

(Concluded on Page 112)

"I TALKED WITH GOD"

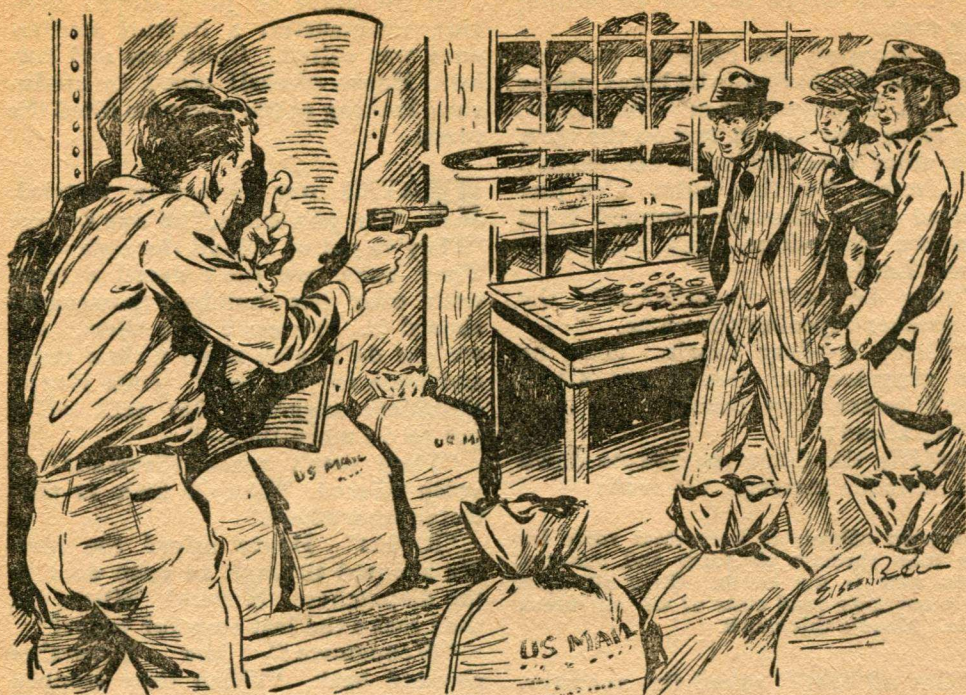
(yes, I did—actually and literally)

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do—well—there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine, I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest,

unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well—this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be—all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 711-11, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was.—Advt. Copyright, 1939, Frank B. Robinson.

Death Holds the Throttle as No. 64 Hurtles Onward to Certain Destruction!



Instantly Winters began firing under cover of the shield.

THROUGH TRAIN TO HELL

By **WELDON F. SHEERER**

OUT of the dark of the night, over humming wires, the terse message of a block-station operator came hurtling in to the office of the Lake Shore Railroad dispatcher.

"Unable to deliver orders to east-bound passenger train Number Sixty-four. Engineman disregarded caution distant signal. Speed probably near ninety miles an hour. Some confusion evident aboard train. Brake-man or conductor not in sight to catch order."

The dispatcher whistled. "Something up," he growled. At once, grabbing up the nearest city telephone, he dialed the residence of the division trainmaster. Presently a sleepy voice sounded in the receiver.

"Hayes? This is Meyers. I said Meyers — third track dispatcher. There's something gone haywire on Number Sixty-four. The New York Limited. I've just had a message from the operator at Logan. He says they're running wide open. Missed his orders and disregarded a caution

signal. Yeah. You'll be right down—okay. We ought to hear something else soon."

He dropped the receiver back on the hook and took up the block phone headset. The operator at Lime Center, five miles past Logan, was on the wire. His voice crackled with excitement.

"Listen! Get this right. I've just picked up a message dropped from Number Sixty-four. It's signed by 'Scar' Lewis!"

"Scar Lewis?" Incredulously the dispatcher repeated the name.

"That's it—Scar Lewis. Must be the gangster the G-men are after! You'd better copy this!"

"Go ahead!"

Swiftly the dispatcher wrote down the ominous message. It read:

Instruct officials to keep clear route for this train through all yards and stations. Train now in my hands. Keep all dicks away and keep road clear or we will wreck train. Handle this quick.

"Got all that?" asked the operator.

"Yes!" barked the dispatcher. Fuming, he dropped back into his chair. Now he understood. Scar Lewis! His picture had covered the newspaper front pages for days. He was wanted on a dozen charges. For weeks Federal agents had been on his trail, but always they had failed to corner him. And now his gang was strong enough to tackle anything; he had just stolen a train. You knew what Scar Lewis would do now. Passengers would be robbed and killed, mail cars rifled. Dominated by gunplay, the train would become a cyclone of destruction.

Calm again, Meyers whirled back to his work. Before him were a hundred things to be done. Phones rang. Once more the wires came alive with speeding messages. From far and near, the attentions of a constantly increasing number of anxious men converged on the dispatcher's office and the speeding train. It was by one station, now another. And always it passed at break-neck speed, silent, like a maniacal ghost. Where it would stop, just what the next moment would bring, what new message of

terror or disaster, no one knew.

In the office of John Hayes, division trainmaster, a hurried conference was called. Collarless and hatless, Hayes himself stood in confusion, looking at the men who filled the room.

HAYES was obviously worried. "I'm powerless," he was saying. "They've got us behind the eight-ball. They know we can't derail a train with over two hundred passengers aboard it. We can't stop them. All we can do is give them a clear track and hope for the best." John Hayes' shoulders sagged. "But still we've got to do more than—"

"They won't reach Cleveland," a voice offered. "They'll have to take water somewhere."

"Right!" Hayes seized the idea. He shouted through an open door to the dispatcher. "Meyers! Where did they make the last stop for water?"

"Woodstown!" the dispatcher shouted back. "When they stopped there, the conductor was out to grab his orders!"

"That means that Lewis and his gang must have taken over the train after it left there. They can probably run halfway from here to Cleveland without stopping. And I'd bet ten bucks if they stop any place, it will be at Sand Hill. It's the one place that's out in the open and away from things. Nothing much there but the water station.

"Better phone that to the Federal agents. Maybe they can get there in time. I could call out the track gang we have there, but they wouldn't be able to do anything. It would be like sending them to war without guns!" Wearily the trainmaster sank into a chair.

"I've done all I can," he said hoarsely. "Now it's a job for the G-men!"

* * * * *

Sand Hill, a few miles from Lake Erie, had been named without due consideration to its locality. There was no hill, only a few scattered houses set down by the railroad track, together with the telegraph

office, a section tool shack, and the water tank. There was sand, yes, but it was in a hard soil from which in many places the limestone rock projected. Dreary and desolate, it stood alone in the night.

In the telegraph office the operator threw away the core of the apple he had been eating and moved to answer the block phone. The dispatcher was calling. His first words galvanized the sleepy operator into attention.

"I've got a long message for you—something you've got to do and do quick. Better take notes as I talk, so you won't forget. Listen—about two-thirty tonight Number Sixty-four, the New York limited, was held up at Woodstown. Maybe after it left there. Anyway, Scar Lewis and his gang are on it and they're running it hell-bent-for-election out your way. They've gone through here. Ought to be out there in less than a half hour. Got that? Now, this is where you come in.

"The G-men are working on this, but their nearest man is stopping at a vacation place on the lake—Terrace Beach, it's called. You know the place? Good! His name is Winters—Greg Winters. The only way he can be reached is over the local line you have in there. Call Winters and get him there as quick as you can. Tell him it's been doped out that they'll have to stop the Limited at Sand Hill for water. It's his only chance to get on it—Okay, you've got that? Then get busy!"

Unhesitating, with the words of the dispatcher ringing clear in his ears, the operator swung about and was out of his chair with a bound. In a single step he had crossed the little room and jerked up the receiver of the box telephone which hung on the wall. Furiously he rang the bell for a full half minute, then listened in tense silence.

THERE was no answer. He rang again, longer; and then still once more. And then, like a whisper—it was so slight that the man thought he might have imagined it—he heard the voice of the telephone girl.

"Listen!" he cried. "Get me Terrace Beach—quick! I'm calling Greg Winters. If he hasn't a phone, get anyone there—Yes! It's a matter of life or death! Hurry!"

There was another wait. Time had shifted into high gear; now every second counted. Finally, after precious minutes had slipped by, Greg Winters himself, answering calmly and distinctly, was on the wire. Hurriedly the telegraph operator repeated the message that had been given him.

"You say you're at Sand Hill?" asked Winters. "How far is that from here?"

"A little over nine miles—straight down the highway."

"Okay—I'll be there in ten minutes."

Greg Winters hung up the receiver. He knew the task which confronted him. As a special operative for the F.B.I., Department of Justice, his work had taken him into almost every state of the Union. Time and time again he had faced situations which demanded his every ounce of strength, his coolest, quickest thinking. A dozen times his life had hung by a thread, and each time he had come through smiling. But this—this was the climax of his entire career.

Over a chair by his bedside hung a pair of tennis slacks, a shirt; on the floor was a pair of canvas shoes. Flinging off his pajamas, he grabbed up the things and slipped into them. He had no time to waste in searching for other clothes. In less than a minute he was dressed and had pulled out of the bureau drawer a heavy Colt automatic and two extra clips of cartridges. The cartridges he dropped into his hip pocket. Then bounding out of the room and down the stairs, he ran across the lawn to the garage.

The garage doors were open, and in the gloom a large touring car stood waiting. Greg Winters slipped behind the wheel, flicked on the lights. Gears crashed; the car leaped forward. With a growing roar it swept out through the night to the open road.

"Ten miles." With set face, Winters repeated the distance he had to go. "That means I've got to average

better than sixty—a lot better!"

Deliberately he tramped down on the accelerator. As he watched the speedometer pass the seventy-mark, a thrill of elation ran through him. Now the vacation plans which he had had to abandon so suddenly meant nothing. Once more he was back in his element. Danger? He would have laughed. Like a hound catching the scent of the quarry, he was caught up with the mad spirit of the chase. The speedometer showed seventy-five, then eighty, and the shadowy landscape whirling by became a dark, confused blur.

Winters smiled grimly. Searching with one hand in the pocket of the car door by his side he brought forth a crumpled package of cigarettes. Without taking his eyes from the white ribbon of the roadway, he shook out one of the cigarettes, found a match, lighted it.

Briefly, in the flare of the match, Greg Winters' face was revealed. It was the face of a man not yet in his thirties, smooth-shaven, almost youthful, but it held a look of grim determination. In his eyes burned the fierce light of anticipated battle. He was hunched low over the wheel, and his whole body swerved and rocked with the rhythm of the speeding car.

"I'll make it," he said aloud after a few minutes. "I can't have more than a mile or two to go."

RELUCTANTLY then the G-man began to ease the pressure of his foot on the accelerator. Almost imperceptibly the speed of the car began to slacken. Presently, a long way ahead, his eyes picked out a tiny cluster of lights. When they came nearer, he knew he was approaching Sand Hill. Two branches of the railroad crossed there; he could see the dim red lights of the crossing target. His foot slipped off the accelerator and sought the brake pedal. He began to ease it down. Half a minute later he had skidded the car to a stop by the railroad block office.

Lying on the seat beside him was the automatic. As Winters grabbed it up and jumped out, he saw that he

was just in time. The block operator ran out to meet him. Down the tracks beyond Sand Hill had appeared the headlight of an approaching train. Ghostlike, it came on without a sound of whistle or bell. As it rounded a curve and swung in toward them, they could see the lights of passenger coaches. It was the New York Limited!

Swiftly Winters considered. He knew that Scar Lewis would not be likely to abandon the train in open country. Doubtless, the gang had planned on getting through Ohio and into northern Pennsylvania, where they would be afforded convenient mountain hideaways. It was to be expected then, as the railroad officials had also believed, that lack of water would force the train to a stop at Sand Hill. If so, the G-man had a chance of getting aboard it, but he would have to slip up quietly, without being observed. A single incautious move might betray him. In a moment he had formulated a plan.

"Get inside!" he shouted to the operator. "Tell them I'm getting on the train!"

He was away then, dropping down off the railroad track into the ditch. He wanted to avoid being caught in the beam of the locomotive's headlight. Through the ditch he made his way, half running, half stumbling, toward the water tank, which stood a few hundred feet down the track.

Winters was right. The train was slowing up. They were going to take on water! Creeping along in the shadows, he was within a stone's throw of the engine as it ground to a stop by the water tank. Two gunmen were in the cab of the engine, one covering the sweating engineer, the other hurrying the fireman, who was back on the tender working frantically to get the water in. In the stillness of the night, Winters could clearly hear their voices, the hiss of steam, the groan of the engine tired by its long run, the rush of the water pouring into the tender from the tank.

Silently, crawling on his stomach, Winters wriggled his way upward out of the ditch. Clumps of weeds and

sweet clover covering the bank hid his progress. At last, dirt-covered but satisfied, he lay concealed a dozen feet from the tracks.

A little further away, their figures outlined by light streaming from an open baggage-car door, stood two men. Their backs were turned to Winters, but he could hear their voices.

"G-men! That bunch of school-kid punks! I've plugged two already and I'll plug a few more if they mix in this job. No damned G-man will do me in!"

"That's what Dillinger said," the second voice whined. "They got him, though. And they've got a bunch of the rest, too. I tell you, we can't get away with this—it's too risky."

"Too risky, eh? Well, listen, you! You're goin' to stick with us—see? If you go yellow on me I'll drop a bullet through your dirty hide! Get me?"

SUDDENLY the man who had spoken first turned and looked toward the engine. Winters smothered the exclamation which rose in his throat. He knew that face! The scar which a bullet had gouged across it from lip to ear, giving it a perpetual leer, was a living trade-mark. It was Scar Lewis!

Instinctively Winters tightened his grip on the automatic in his hand. One shot, one quick blaze of darting flame, and Lewis would be out of the way. But the G-man drew back; he dared not fire. He could get Lewis, but that would spoil his plan. He knew that if he played his cards right, he could wipe out the entire gang. He was taking a long, desperate chance, but it was worth it.

At that moment there was a shout from the engine. The spout of the water tank, dripping with water, was swung out away from the tender. In a burst of escaping steam, with its drive wheels slipping furiously, the engine began to move. The coaches began rolling by, picking up speed with every turn of the wheels. Scar Lewis had walked toward one of the Pullman cars to the rear and swung himself aboard. In a few seconds the

train would be gone, plunging madly on into the night.

But still Winters waited. When the next to the last coach was abreast of his hiding place, he scrambled up out of the weeds. He dropped the automatic inside his shirt and stood poised, waiting.

As the last car swept by him, he broke into a run along the rough stone by the tracks. Then, leaping up, he grasped frantically for the hand-hold at the side of the closed car door. His feet were jerked out, his fingers began to slip. For a moment of nerve-racking suspense he hung by his arms. Then, with a supreme effort, he drew up his feet, found a toehold. His grip on the rod tightened, held. Breathless, he looked back along the tracks.


Despite the pain in his arms, which felt as though they had been jerked from their sockets, a short cry of triumph escaped Winters' lips. Now at least he knew that his first move had been successful! But ahead were greater perils. He was aboard the train, but now his position was doubly unsafe. He was playing a dangerous game. The slightest slip, and one of Scar Lewis' men would shoot him down without warning. He had no knowledge of the number of men in Lewis' gang or what their next desperate move would be. He could only proceed with the utmost caution.

Bit by bit then, buffeted by the wind, Winters worked his way around the corner of the coach. There was no observation platform, only a half-vestibule, with closed doors at the sides and one open to the rear. As he clung by the side door, he had been able to see that his way was clear. But now, although he could have climbed over the metal gate which barred the rear door, he did not do so. Instead, moving as quickly as his perilous position permitted, he climbed up on the gate, grasped a ridge of the roof, and pulled himself up to the top of the car.

"Lucky!" he muttered as he felt the car roof under his feet. "A few good breaks like that may pull me through."

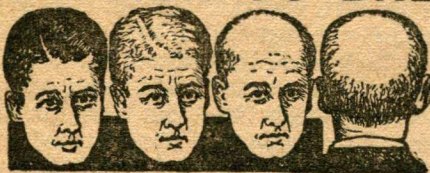
He took a few steps forward over the top of the swaying coach. Seven

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(Continued from page 101)

cars separated him from the engine. He was glad now that he had worn rubber-soled shoes. What little noise they made as he went ahead from car to car, would be muffled by the pounding of the wheels on the rails and the roar of the engine. The footing offered by the curved roofs was slippery and insecure.

TWICE, in his haste to cover the distance to the engine as quickly as possible, he was almost swept off by the force of the wind. Each time, bruised and shaken, he crawled back to his feet with new determination.

At last Winters reached the coach nearest the engine. Slowly, with the automatic in his hand, ready for instant action, he crawled over the roof. Presently, over the top of the tender, he was able to look down into the cab of the locomotive. He could see the engineer at the throttle. Beside him, holding a gun at his back, was one of the gang. At the other side of the cab, sitting at the window, was another mobster. He was half-turned in the seat, so that he could look out the window and yet keep his gun on the fireman, who stood before the fire door.

Winters was prepared to shoot, and shoot quickly. Like a panther stalking his prey, he crept forward a few more paces, waited. As he had foreseen soon the fireman was ordered back on the tender to rake down more coal. The two gangsters moved closer together. It was the moment Winters had been waiting for. With deadly accuracy the automatic in his hand spoke twice, sharply. Streaks of flame cut through the darkness.

Straightening as with intense pain, one of the gangsters stood swaying on his heels; the face of the other went white, the gun falling from his grasp. Before Winters could leap down to the tender and get to the cab, they had both collapsed into miserable groaning heaps.

"Don't stop the train!" Above the roar of the wind Winters had to shout his instructions to the startled engineer. "Slow down to a safe speed,

but keep going! If we stop now, we won't have a chance! I'm going back to get the rest of the mob!"

Nodding to indicate that he understood, a tired smile lighted the dirt-streaked face of the engineman.

"Good luck!" he cried.

Winters did not hear him. He had leaped back from the cab to the tender and was scrambling up over the coal. He was determined that nothing should stop him now. Sweating, bruised, he knew that his chances of coming through alive were slim, but he gave no sign. Unceasingly his brain was possessed by the thought that he must not fail.

He felt certain that the roar of the engine had muffled his shots. If they had not been heard, luck would be in his favor; there would be a possibility of catching the rest of the gang off-guard.

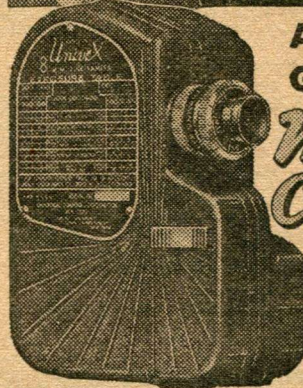
Breathing hard, Winters climbed down between the tender and the first coach. Beneath him, the wheels clicked with fierce revolutions on the rails. Nimble he stepped over the three-foot chasm between the couplings. Then, for a moment, he hesitated. Before him was a door leading into the train. It might be locked. Again, it might swing open to sudden death. Carefully he placed his hand on the metal knob and slowly turned it. When he saw that the door was unlocked, he threw it open with a quick shove, at the same moment stepping back out around the doorway.

Nothing happened. After waiting a few seconds, the G-man ventured a quick glance inside. He could see no one. He stepped around the corner and found himself in the baggage coach. About him were piles of trunks, bags, crates. Half-way through the car, he stopped abruptly. Before him, lying bound and gagged on the floor, was the baggageman. Quickly he jerked the gag from the man's mouth and began to untie his bonds.

WHEN he was free, Winters questioned him rapidly. "Have they been in this car lately? Any of
(Continued on page 104)

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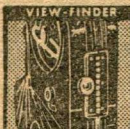
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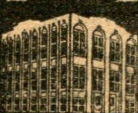
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(Continued from page 103)

the gang?"

"Not for a half hour or more." The man spoke in a dazed voice.

"How many are there besides Lewis? Talk faster."

"I don't know exactly. Eight—maybe ten."

"The door leading into the next car—will it be locked?"

"It couldn't be. That's the mail car. I heard them prying the lock off after they went through here."

"Good!" Winters' eyes narrowed; a half smile curled over his lips. "I don't think they'll be expecting me."

As he rose to his feet, he swept a glance over the car. Near one of the side doors, its cover thrown open, was a heavy metal chest about three feet long. Evidently a strong-box, it had been rifled by the gang, and the papers it contained were now strewn over the car floor. Looking at it, Winters was seized with a sudden inspiration. He strode across to the chest and beat on the cover with his knuckles. From the dull reverberation it gave forth, he knew that the steel was invulnerable.

"Quick!" With a swing of his arm he called the baggageman to his side. "Help me! I want to get the lid off this!"

Unquestioning, the baggageman leaped to obey. From a corner of the car he brought forth a wrecking bar. Winters grabbed it from his hands and attacked the cover. To his surprise he was able quite easily to tear loose the rivets which held the hinges. Obviously, the chest had been designed more for protection from fire than to prevent theft. A few well-directed pulls with the wrecking bar, and the job was done.

Taking up the cover by the handhold which was placed exactly in its center, Winters was now in possession of a satisfactory bullet-proof shield. The baggageman, despite his previous fright, was compelled to grin in admiration when he caught the idea. It was typical of the quick, resourceful thinking which had pulled Greg Winters through many a hazardous situation.

"Get forward into the cab of the engine," he said to the baggageman.

"There you'll be safe. Any moment now this place is likely to be filled with flying bullets."

He picked up the heavy shield then and moved forward. Going straight to the end door, he threw it open, and stepped across the narrow opening between the two cars. Then, crouching behind the shield, his automatic ready, he turned the knob of the door leading directly into the mail car.

As the door swung open, he saw four men standing about a table on which were piles of jewelry, watches, rolls of bills. Their backs were turned to Winters, but as the door opened, letting in a rush of wind, they whirled instinctively. Instantly Winters began firing.

Two of the men went down before they could reach for their guns. Angry shouts rang out; blue smoke cut through the air. Thrown off balance by a sudden lurch of the coach, Winters lost his aim. As he struggled to regain his position a fusillade of bullets struck about him. The two remaining gunmen had dropped down behind piles of mail sacks. Blindly, Winters returned their fire. Acrid smoke was biting into his nostrils; he saw one of the men turn over in a spasmodic convulsion.

The whang of bullets striking the shield before him was like the crash of hammers on an anvil. With deadly deliberation he turned slightly, aimed again. His hand tightened on the automatic; a tongue of flame lashed out.

AS the bullet found its mark, Winters' eyes slitted. Quietly, without an outcry, the last of the four men raised up on one knee, then fell prone on his face. For the moment the battle was over.

"That makes six gone so far," Winters muttered. "I wonder how many more there are."

Before relaxing his position he quickly dropped the empty cartridge clip from his automatic and slipped in a full one. The barrel of the gun was hot, smoking. With a backward kick of his foot he slammed the door shut behind him.

He had reloaded the gun not a mo-

(Continued on page 106)

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(Continued from page 105)

ment too soon. This time his shots had been heard. Cautiously, someone was pushing open the door at the far end of the car. In tense silence, Winters waited. Then the door opened wider; a man carrying a gun came through it.

Winters was ready to fire, but he came within an inch of waiting too long. With incredible swiftness the man recoiled, in the same instant shooting blindly from a hip position. Winters felt the bullet rip through his sleeve. Then he himself fired, missed, fired again. The man crumpled up on the floor. Inert, lifeless, his gun thrown a dozen feet away from his body, he lay in a sprawling, bloody heap.

As Winters pushed aside his shield and arose, a sardonic light gleamed in his eyes. Without stopping to catch his breath he moved forward, stepping warily over the bodies of his victims. Seven of the hated Lewis gang had gone to the hell they so richly deserved! How many more were on the train, he could only guess. Doggedly, squaring his jaw, he was prepared to carry his grim mission to the end. Scar Lewis was still alive. He must not be allowed to escape.

Fighting to calm himself, Greg Winters made his way into the vestibule of the next coach. The door had an upper glass partition, and he was able to see in through it. Inside were terrified, white-faced passengers. But of Lewis and his gang—or what was left of it—he saw nothing. He tried the door, found that it was locked.

At once Winters grasped the situation. After being robbed of their valuables and money, the passengers had been locked in the coaches with a key taken from the conductor. In that way, Lewis had contrived to leave his gang free to protect themselves if the train were attacked. Some had gone ahead to the engine and the mail car. Evidently the others, including Lewis, were somewhere at the rear of the train.

Fuming at this turn in his plans, Winters was forced to retrace his steps through the mail and baggage coaches. With every muscle aching, he was compelled again to climb up on

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the top of the speeding train and creep back over the slippery roofs of the swaying cars. Again the wind lashed viciously at him; hot, swirling smoke seared his face and eyes. Shaken, his head throbbing, the distant red lights which glowed at the end of the train seemed fully a mile away.

When finally he reached the last coach he dropped to his knees, breathing deeply. He knew that now his most crucial moment was at hand. Like a soldier waiting to go "over the top," he steeled himself for the final effort.

Cautiously then, crawling along on his stomach, he reached the very end of the train. By stretching out over the curved edge of the roof, he was able to look down into the open vestibule. There was no one in sight. Again his way was clear.

ONCE again, as when he had climbed up, Winters dropped his automatic inside his shirt. He needed both hands to get down safely to the floor of the car. Slowly, grasping the
(Continued on page 108)



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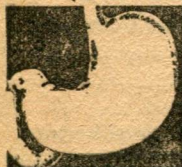
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(Continued from page 107)

edge of the roof with an iron grip, he let himself down until his feet touched the gate below. Then he swung in and dropped to the floor.

Stepping aside into the shadows, he waited a moment. When he felt certain that he had not been heard, he soundlessly approached the coach door, turned the knob, and quickly moved inside. The automatic was back in his hand, his finger on the trigger. As he closed the door there was not even the faint click of the latch to betray his presence.

He was in a Pullman sleeper. Dimly lighted, the narrow aisle in which he stood led into a corner to his left and then ahead past the curtained door of a washroom. Grimly he nerved himself to move forward a step or two. Then, from the washroom, he heard rough voices. Someone cursed. There was the crash of a bottle breaking against metal.

Flattened against the aisle wall, Winters listened with bated breath. Once more he heard the cringing whine of the man who had stood in the darkness with Scar Lewis back at the water tank at Sand Hill.

"It ain't that I'm not stickin' with you, Scar. You know that. I'm just askin' for what's comin' to me. You wouldn't cut me out now, would you? I gotta have dough—bad."

"So you gotta have dough, do you? And you want what's comin' to you?" There was a merciless, sneering tone in the voice of Scar Lewis. "Well, by God, I'm gonna give you just what you got comin'! I'm gonna smash you just like I smashed that bottle a minute ago! Stand up, you yellow dog!"

"Scar! No!" Suddenly the whine of the first man turned to a ringing, accusing shout. "You'll kill me! I know you'll do it! You'll plug me just like you picked a fight with Mullen an hour ago and plugged him! Why? Because you don't want to divvy up, that's why! You couldn't cut out Mullen, so you plugged him! That's why —"

He was cut off by a harsh cry from Lewis. Shots rang out. Waiting in the aisle outside, Winters heard a

BEST FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS IN

sharp scream of pain, then the clump of a heavy body falling to the floor. The curtain of the door was partly drawn back. He edged closer and stole a quick glance inside.

"Get 'em up! Drop that gun!" The commands snapped from Winters' lips. Scar Lewis, in the act of rifling the pockets of the man he had murdered, jerked himself erect. Slowly his hands went up. With a clatter his gun dropped on the floor.

"Now! Get into the corner there! Face the wall!"

There was a moment of tense silence while Lewis stepped into the corner indicated. Winters' teeth were gritted so tightly that his jaws ached. Without relaxing his aim on Lewis' back, he moved around to the window at the side of the room. It had been opened a few inches. Two guns lay on the floor. Deftly he kicked them together, then threw them out the window.

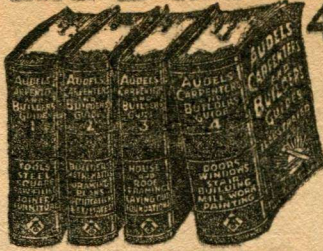
At that instant the car lurched sharply. Winters was spun around like a dry leaf. The room was small; only a half-dozen feet separated the two men. Instantly Scar Lewis sensed his opportunity. With a sudden twisting plunge he was upon Winters, grasping for the gun. Back and forth, then over the body of the man on the floor they stepped and swayed in deadlocked fury. Biting, kicking, struggling desperately, they toppled over and went down with a crash.

As they fell, the gun was knocked from Winters' hand. Lewis was on top; he raised up and lunged back to reach it. Winters saw the move and struck out with his feet. His heels, hitting with the force of sledgehammers, struck full in the face of Lewis. Under the impact, like a stunned beast, Lewis tumbled over backward; his head struck the steel wall with a sickening thud. Senseless, he slid to the floor with his eyes fixed in a deathly, unseeing stare.

Exhausted, Winters lay for a moment without moving. Then he raised himself and climbed unsteadily to his feet, picked up his gun. Scar Lewis was dead. With an involuntary shiver of revulsion the G-man looked down

(Continued on page 110)

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(Continued from page 109)

at him. Even in death the face of Scar Lewis remained fixed in the hideous leer which had branded him as a hated scourge of the nation. Only a few men, Winters reflected, would ever see it again.

Sweating, his shirt torn to shreds, his face and hands blackened, Winters himself looked like a madman. He felt keenly the grip of fatigue, but he breathed deeply and pulled himself together. Then, dropping to his knees, he went through Lewis' pockets until he came upon a ring of trainmen's keys.

In a moment he had found the particular key he wanted. Opening the doors with it as he went, he stumbled forward through the coaches. Passengers, thinking him one of the gang, cringed away from him. At last, satisfied that the entire dread Lewis gang had been wiped out, he stepped through into the baggage coach.

He observed then that the train was slowing down. Going to one of the sliding doors, he braced himself and threw it open. Outside were the multi-form tracks of a vast railroad yard. Wan streaks of pale yellow gold were appearing in the sky. Presently the train jolted to a stop.

As he dropped down out of the car and began walking toward the engine, Winters heard someone shout his name. The voice had a familiar ring. Wraithlike in the early morning mist, figures loomed up before him. One of them he recognized. It was his division chief, Diehl, from the F.B.I. office at Detroit.

"Winters! Are you all right?"

Like a wave, weariness bore down upon Winters. "Yes—okay," he answered thickly. "You can call off the men. It's all over."

Incredulously Diehl's eyes widened; his jaw dropped. "You mean—you got them all? Lewis, too?"

"All of them," repeated Winters dully.

"Well, I'll be—" In a flash Diehl's amazement gave way to a shout of admiration. "Say! Maybe you've been laying down on me! Any one man who can finish up a gang like that ought to have tougher assignments!"

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Laughing, he put his arm about Winters' shoulders. "You're in the Cleveland yard," he went on. "The engineman dropped a message telling us to be prepared for a stop here. I've been following the Limited with a plane, so I had everything ready. Anyway, that's all for nothing now. You've got a good vacation coming. You deserve one. And I'll see that you get it, too!"

Winters mustered a dry smile. "You know, Chief," he said, "I think you forget easily. I was taking a vacation when you called me out on this job."

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JUST TAKE IT EASY

(Continued from Page 96)

saw him one night at the police station in St. Louis when I was an interne sent there to treat a prisoner. And he was the prisoner!"

Mike stared at Reiman.

"Hell, yes!" he snarled. "I remember now. That was ten years ago! I'd got clipped while breaking into a house. Only this doctor guy wears glasses now and—"

Mike pulled out his roscoe. He jabbed it into Ed's back. Ed never turned a muscle.

"Take it easy, Diruta," he advised. "I never forget a face or a name. I should have kept my mouth shut."

I was thinking the same thing. Myself, I never said a word. All at once I caught something in the corner of my eye at the doorway.

Mike didn't see anything until that hoarse command was barked out.

"Drop that gun, and drop it quick!"

Mike jumped back a foot, jerking his head around to see the big harness bull with his gat out, the nurse's scared face peeking over his shoulder.

Mike snarled like a cornered ape and swiveled his roscoe at the cop. But the blue coat wasn't taking chances. He let go with three slugs, fast, and they caught Mike square in the bread basket. He gave a kind of "Ooof!" and slipped to the floor.

I heard the sound of revolver shots from somewhere outside on the street. Sure, those were cops outside. They came after the mob car from two sides, and only tough little Bo Herman got out alive—and he had two slugs in him.

So that's the story, and you can make anything you like out of it. What was that? Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah, I got only five years for turning state's evidence.

Huh? Oh, the nurse. Yeah, a smart little trick. They don't make 'em any better. The minute she saw me, she ran for the cops.

How'd she know me? Don't be stupid. That was my kid sister Mary.

BEST FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS IN

OFF THE RECORD (Concluded from Page 13)

ordinary fury in his heart for the black leader of this league of the damned?

Yes, we felt the same way after reading this touching commentary by Tony Quinn. And when we read the complete book-length novel, **BLACK BAT'S CHALLENGE**, by G. Wayman Jones, to which it refers, we understood those few paragraphs even better. You will, too, we're sure, when you read it in the next issue.

A League of the Damned

For league of the damned it certainly could be called, that organization of misguided cripples swept into the fold of a daring, cunningly woven web by a fiendish human spider.

To smash that criminal web, and snare the monster who wove it was no easy task. But the Black Bat is no ordinary person—and the proof of it can easily be obtained in the exciting, tense novel **BLACK BAT'S CHALLENGE**.

Among the interesting letters that we have received and read with pleasure is one from the Midwest:

Dear Editor:

I have read your Black Bat stories with a great deal of enjoyment. His fight against crime is splendid, and it is with a feeling of regret that I lay down your magazine after completing one of these novels—regret that we haven't a Black Bat to deal with such organizations as these pseudo-patriotic Fascists, or the spy rings that are beginning to flourish in our midst.

Has the Black Bat ever been called upon to combat any such band?

John P. Stone
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

We're glad to say that among the notes on the Black Bat's career are a group dealing with an organization similar to the one Mr. Stone has in mind. In the near future, G. Wayman Jones will work on these notes.

In the meantime, write us regularly. We take all your criticisms and suggestions into consideration. A post card is as welcome as a letter—and a knock as welcome as a boost. So keep them coming! Thanks to you all.

—THE EDITOR.

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28x4-50-20	3.35	1.00	32x4-50-20	3.95	1.25	34x4-50-20	3.95	1.65	36x4-50-20	3.95	1.75
30x4-50-21	4.0	1.00	32x4-50-21	4.25	1.25	34x4-50-21	4.25	1.65	36x4-50-21	4.25	1.75
30x4-70-19	4.5	1.25	32x4-70-19	4.75	1.25	34x4-70-19	4.75	1.65	36x4-70-19	4.75	1.75
30x4-70-20	4.5	1.25	32x4-70-20	4.75	1.25	34x4-70-20	4.75	1.65	36x4-70-20	4.75	1.75
30x4-80-20	4.5	1.25	32x4-80-20	4.75	1.25	34x4-80-20	4.75	1.65	36x4-80-20	4.75	1.75

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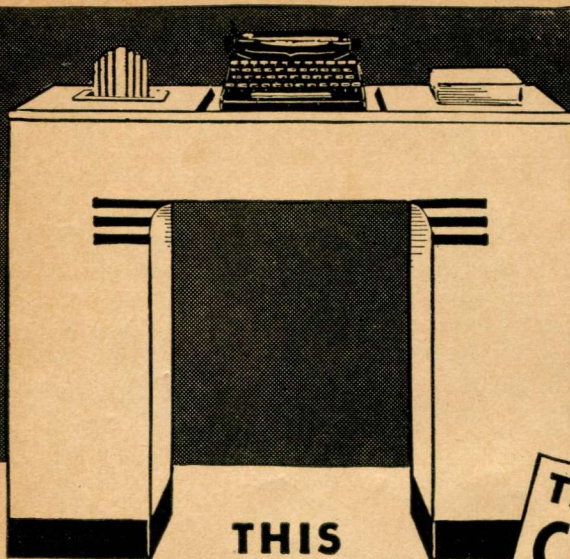
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