

10¢ BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

MARCH



A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

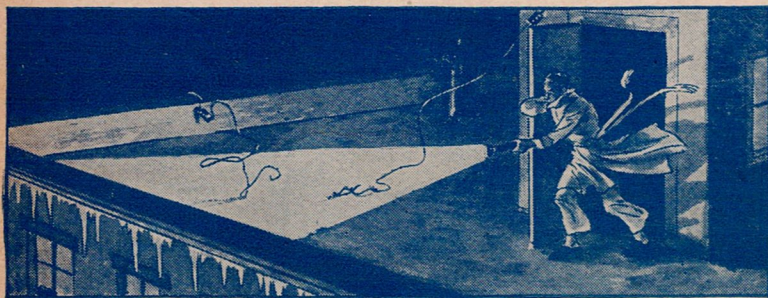
\$2.00
MYSTERY
NOVEL
EVERY
ISSUE!

FEATURING
THE BLACK BAT'S JUSTICE
A LONG BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL FEATURING
TONY QUINN, MASKED NEMESIS OF CRIME

"I CHEATED DEATH ON A SKYSCRAPER ROOF!"

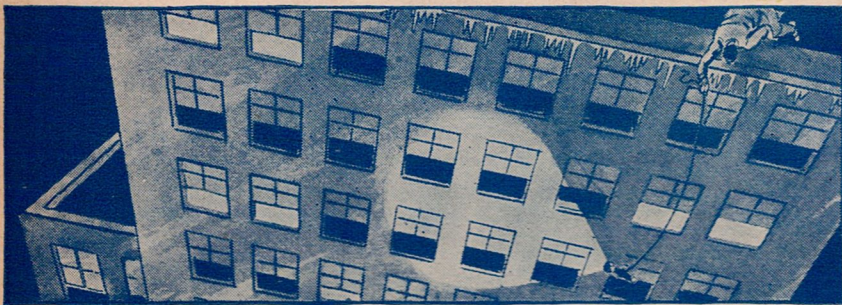


A true experience of ALLEN H. GIPSON, New York City



"ONE BITTERLY COLD NIGHT, my radio went dead," writes Mr. Gipson. "Suspecting that the howling wind had blown down the aerial, I threw on a dressing gown, grabbed my flashlight, and headed for the fifteenth floor roof.

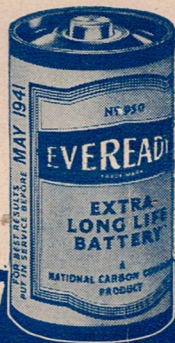
"AN ICY WIND chilled me as I searched for and found the aerial. Making hasty repairs, I started back down. To my horror, I found myself locked out. I battered the door. I shouted. But the wind howled me down.



"NEARLY FROZEN TO DEATH, I had an inspiration. Ripping the aerial loose, I tied the lighted flashlight to it, and swung it over the side of the building. Luckily the light attracted someone in an apartment below. Thanks to those dependable 'Eveready' fresh DATED batteries I was saved.

(Signed) *Allen H. Gipson*

The word "Eveready" is a registered trade-mark of National Carbon Company, Inc.



FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... Look for the DATE-LINE

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC., 30 EAST 42ND STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

Unit of Union Carbide  and Carbon Corporation

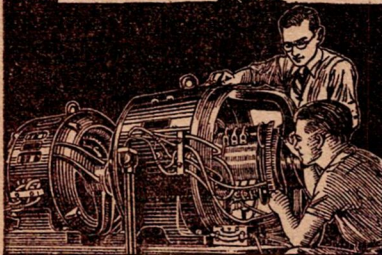


H. C. Lewis

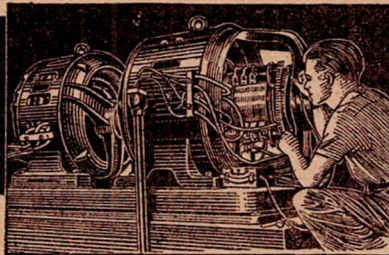
To
TRAIN
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QUICK EASY WAY ELECTRICITY IN 12 WEEKS

by Actual SHOP WORK **NOT BOOKS**



FIRST--You are told and shown how to do it.



THEN--You do the job yourself.



HOUSE WIRING

only one of the many
branches you
"Learn By Doing."



"... Everything was just as stated in literature. And by Coyne's methods plenty of instructions to take care of everything, easy to learn. I really was satisfied with Coyne Training."
J. Halak, Canada



"... Coyne has first class instructors to teach you the simplest things to start with and they have the equipment to show you these things as you advance."
Ben Rickman, S. Car.

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Have you ever dreamed of holding down a steady, good pay job? Have you ever dreamed of doing the work you really like in a job that holds promise of a real future in the years ahead?

Well, we all know that you can't get the good things in life by just dreaming about them. Hundreds of fellows are today holding down mighty fine jobs with prospects of a bright future. They are filling these jobs because they had the foresight to equip themselves with the right kind of training.

Most of these men were only average fellows a short time ago, but the proper training helped to lift them out of the low pay ranks of unskilled workers. The same opportunity is now offered to you.

The great fascinating field of ELECTRICITY offers a real future to many men and young men who are willing to prepare for a place in this giant industry.

Here at my school in Chicago, the world's Electrical Center, you can get 12 weeks' Shop Training in ELECTRICITY and an extra 4 weeks Course in Radio, that can help give you your start towards a better job.

You will be trained on actual equipment and machinery and because of our method of training, you don't need previous experience or a lot of education. Many of my successful graduates never even completed Grammar School. Here in my school you work on generators, motors, dynamos, you do house wiring, wind armatures and do actual work in many other branches of electricity and right now I'm including valuable instruction in Diesel, Electric Refrigeration and Air Conditioning at no extra cost. Our practical shop methods make it easier to learn—First the instructors tell you how a thing should be done—then they show you how it should be done—then you do the actual work yourself.

AN EXTRA
4 WEEKS
COURSE IN
RADIO
INCLUDED

I'LL FINANCE MOST OF YOUR TRAINING

You can get this training first—then if you are short of money you can pay for most of it later in easy monthly payments, starting 60 days after your 12 weeks' training period is over—then you have 10 months to complete your payments. If you need part time work to help out with expenses while training in my shops, my employment department will help you get it. Then after graduation this department will give you valuable lifetime employment service.

Send the coupon today for all details. When I get it I'll send you my big free book containing dozens of pictures of students at work in

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my shops. I'll also tell you about my "Pay After Graduation" plan, how many earn while learning and how we help our students after graduation. Fill in, clip coupon, mail today for your start toward a brighter future.

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• EVERY STORY BRAND-NEW •

BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

Vol. 12, No. 3

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March, 1941

A Complete Book-Length Novel



THE BLACK BAT'S JUSTICE

Featuring Tony Quinn, Nemesis of Crime

By **G. WAYMAN JONES**

When Murder Pays Off in Millions, the Bat Flies into Action to Snarl a Sinister Killer's Web of Doom! Follow a Winged Avenger as He Matches Talons with the Greedy Henchmen of a Grim Crime Combine 16

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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE. Published bi-monthly by Better Publications, Inc., at 4800 Diversey Ave., Chicago, Ill. N. L. Pines, President. Editorial and executive offices, 10 East 40th Street, 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, 1941, by Better Publications, Inc. Yearly \$3.60; single copies, \$1.00; 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.

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PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.



BUT JIM, I DON'T SEE HOW WE CAN AFFORD TO MARRY ON YOUR LOW PAY



MARY'S RIGHT. I HAVE NO RIGHT TO ASK HER TO MARRY ME ON THE MONEY I'M MAKING



LOOK HERE. N.R.I. HAS TRAINED HUNDREDS OF MEN LIKE ME TO MAKE GOOD MONEY IN RADIO. I GUESS I'LL GET THAT FREE BOOK



LEARNING RADIO THIS WAY IS ACTUALLY FUN. I'M ALREADY MAKING \$5 TO \$10 A WEEK IN SPARE TIME. RADIO CERTAINLY OFFERS OPPORTUNITY TO WELL TRAINED TECHNICIANS



YOU CERTAINLY KNOW RADIO. MINE NEVER SOUNDED BETTER

THANKS. YOU SEE, I HAVE TAKEN N.R.I. TRAINING



OH JIM, IT'S WONDERFUL. NOW YOU'RE ON THE WAY TO SUCCESS

YES MARY, AND THERE'S A REAL FUTURE FOR US IN RADIO AND TELEVISION

I Trained These Men

Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

Before I completed your lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined Station WMPC where I am now Chief Operator.

HOLLIS F. HAYES
327 Madison St.
Lapeer, Michigan

Service Manager for Four Stores

I was working in a garage when I enrolled with N. B. I. I am now Radio service manager for the M. Furniture Co. for their four stores.

JAMES E. RYAN
116 Peble Court
Fall River, Mass.

\$10 to \$20 a Week in Spare Time

I repaired some Radio sets when I was on my tenth lesson. I really don't see how you can give so much for such a small amount of money. I made \$600 in a year and a half, and I have made an average of \$10 to \$20 a week — just spare time.

JOHN JERRY
1529 Arapahoe St., Room 17,
Denver, Colorado

DRAFT REGISTRANTS!

If you ARE called, and are then a Radio Technician, you'll be eligible for a communications branch of the service; in line for technical ratings with extra pay.

If you ARE NOT called, you now have an opportunity to get into Radio at a time when the Government is pouring millions of dollars into the Radio industry to buy Defense equipment, on top of boom civilian Radio business. Either way — it's smart to train for RADIO NOW!

I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME in your spare time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

If you can't see a future in your present job, feel you'll never make much more money, if you're in a seasonal field, subject to lay offs, IT'S TIME NOW to investigate Radio. Trained Radio Technicians make good money, and you don't have to give up your present job or leave home to learn Radio. I train you at home nights in your spare time.

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

Radio broadcasting stations employ operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and servicemen. 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. B. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

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

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets—start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course I send plans and directions which have helped

many make \$5 to \$10 a week extra in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. YOU ALSO GET A MODERN PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

Find Out What Radio, Television Offer You — Mail Coupon

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 more than 100 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. 1C09
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Mail this to get 64 page book FREE

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BEFORE

AFTER



Mrs. Elsie Boland of 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. I have not had mine out since the day I got them, except to clean them."



Harry Willoughby, Adairville, Kentucky, writes:

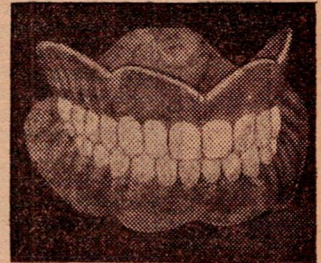
"I have received my teeth and am PROUD OF THEM."

Mrs. Geo. G. Conklin, Bridgeport, Connecticut, writes:

"I received my set of teeth. I wear them day and night. I have good reason to be well pleased with them." Thank you very much."

MADE - TO - MEASURE DENTAL PLATES DIRECT FROM OUR LABORATORY TO YOU!

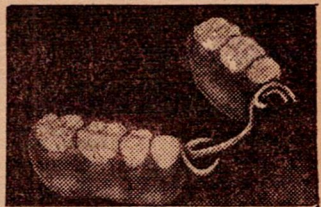
We make to measure for you individually—BY MAIL—Dental Plates for men and women—from an impression of your own mouth taken by you at your home. We have thousands of customers all over the country wearing teeth we made by mail at sensible prices.



HAND-CARVED SET

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.



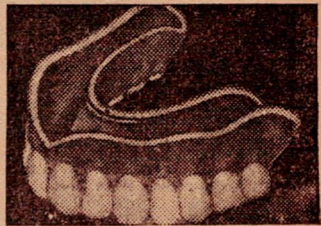
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Make us prove every word we say. Wear our teeth on trial for as long as 60 days. Then, if you are not perfectly satisfied with them, they will not cost you a cent.

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By "accountancy" we do not mean "bookkeeping." For accountancy begins where bookkeeping leaves off.

The skilled accountant takes the figures handed him by the bookkeeper, and *analyzes* and *interprets* them.

He knows how much the costs in the various departments should amount to, how they may be lowered.

He knows what profits should be expected from a given enterprise, how they may be increased.

He knows, in a given business, what per cent of one's working capital can safely be tied up in merchandise on hand, what per cent is safe and adequate for sales promotion. And these, by the way, are but two of *scores* of percentage-figures where-with he points the way to successful operation.

He knows the intricacies of government taxation.

He knows how to *survey* the transactions of a business over a given period; how to show in cold, hard figures the progress it has made and where it is going. He knows how to *use* these findings as a basis for constructive policies.

In short, the trained accountant is the *controlling engineer* of business—one man business cannot do without.

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Small wonder that accountancy offers the trained man such fine opportunities—opportunities well illustrated by the success of thousands of

LaSalle accountancy students.* For example—one man was a plumber, 32 years old, with only an eleventh grade education. Today he is auditor for a large bank and his income is 325 per cent larger.

Another was a drug clerk at \$30 a week. Now he heads his own very successful accounting firm with an income many times as large.

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A credit manager—earning \$200 a month—moved up quickly to \$3000, to \$5000, and then to a highly profitable accounting business of his own which nets him better than \$10,000 a year.

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Why let the other fellow walk away with the better job, when right in your own home you can equip yourself for a splendid future in this profitable profession?

Are you really *determined* to get ahead? If so, you can start at once to acquire—by the LaSalle Problem Method—a thorough understanding of Higher Accountancy, master its fundamental principles, become expert in the practical application of those principles—this without losing an hour from work or a dollar of pay.

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If you are dissatisfied with your present equipment—if you recognize the opportunities that lie ahead of you through home-study training—you will do well to send at once for full particulars. The coupon will bring them to you without any obligation, also details of LaSalle's convenient payment plan.

Check, sign and mail the coupon NOW.

Business Control Through Accountancy



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Name

Present Position

Address

*Names available on request.

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Send the coupon below for details of this sound insurance offer made by the reliable Guarantee Reserve Life Insurance Company. Don't delay . . . do it now; while you and your family are in good health.

QUESTIONS YOU WILL WANT ANSWERED!

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4. Q. Is a Medical Examination required?
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Guarantee Reserve Bldg., Dept. 17-C
Indianapolis, Indiana

() Please send me your
FREE 10-DAY INSPECTION OFFER

NAME.....

ST. OR R.F.D.....

CITY & STATE

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Read this typical letter from one of our students



YES, just like thousands of others, who thought music was hard, this man got the surprise of his life when he tried this easy way to learn music at home. And no wonder! Instead of months of tedious study and practice, he found himself actually playing real tunes in the very first few weeks!

But read this unsolicited letter for yourself: "I didn't even dream that I could actually learn to play without a teacher, because I had always heard that it couldn't be done. I couldn't afford a teacher so I didn't think it would do me any harm to take your course.

"When I received the lessons I took the instantaneous note finder and struck the notes right off. You can imagine my surprise when after three or four weeks I found that I could actually play real tunes.

"Now, when I play for people they will hardly believe that I learned to play so well with just a correspondence course in so short a time. I am getting to the point where even the hardest music holds no terrors for me."

(Signed) *H. C. S., Calif.

FREE PROOF it's fun to learn the U. S. School Way . . . and it costs less than 7c A DAY

Plays on Radio

I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio stations. So thanks to your institution for such a wonderful course.

*W. H. S., Alabama.



Wouldn't Take \$1,000 for Course
The lessons are so simple that anyone can understand them. I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course.
*S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.



Easy to Understand

The manner in which the various lessons are explained is very helpful as well as interesting. It makes one feel that the explanation is being given in person.

*W. W., Florida.



Here's the best news of all! By this easy, modern method, you can now learn to play your favorite instrument, right at home, in your spare time, for less than SEVEN CENTS A DAY! And that covers *everything*, including valuable sheet music. No extras of any kind. What's more, it doesn't take years to learn this way. You learn to play in much LESS time than you probably ever dreamed possible.

It's easy as A-B-C. It's FUN! You learn to play by *playing*. If interested, send at once for the Free Print and Picture Sample that shows HOW and the handsome illustrated booklet that gives complete information. Just mail the coupon. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.) U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC, 2943 Brunswick Bldg., New York, N. Y.

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U. S. School of Music, 2943 Brunswick Bldg., N. Y. C.

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument indicated below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home," and your illustrated Print and Picture Sample.

(Do you have instrument?)

Piano	Mandolin	Trombone	Piano Accordion
Violin	Saxophone	Banjo	Plain Accordion
Guitar	Clarinet	Ukulele	Hawaiian Guitar
Cello	Trumpet	Cornet	Other Instrument

Name

Street

City State.....

Check here if under 16 years of age.

* Actual pupils' names on request.
Pictures posed by Professional models.

BLEEDING GUMS PYORRHEA TRENCH MOUTH

Don't wait until it's too late and lose your teeth. PYRO which has astounded the medical profession. PYRO gets right at the trouble and kills the poisonous germs. One reason why PYRO works so efficaciously is because it actually penetrates the gums, thereby killing the germs inside and out. Remember pyorrhea and trench mouth. If unattended, permits the infection to spread quickly, and before you know it, teeth are rotted and bone construction is destroyed and teeth fall out.

PYRO SAVES YOUR TEETH or NO COST!

You can believe the sworn affidavits of doctors and dentists who have tried this new discovery on most stubborn cases of pyorrhea, trench mouth and bleeding gums.

PYRO was used with startling success many times, in cases that seemed hopeless . . . where everything else failed. PYRO is almost uncanny in getting quick and sure results. It gets to the root of the trouble because PYRO has a penetration of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in 5 minutes and it corrects and heals as it penetrates the diseased areas. If your gums are sore or bleed when brushed. . . If your teeth are loose or pus pockets have formed, order PYRO today for quick correction . . . act now before you lose your teeth entirely.

A DOCTOR WRITES:—

A well-known physician . . . a member of the American Medical Assn., and many other professional organizations, says: "I do not hesitate to state that this solution has saved me from the nightmare of false teeth."



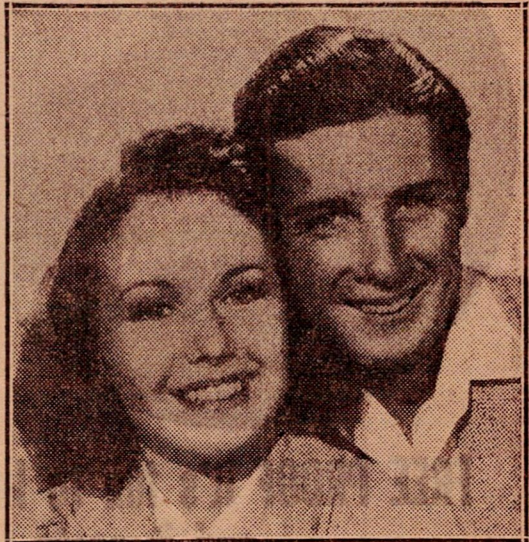
Pyorrhetic Teeth



Too Late!

Read This Proof!

Mrs. W. H. Kirby, 45 East 66th Street, New York, writes: "For a number of years I suffered with an advanced case of pyorrhea, constant treatments seemed only to arrest the disease. I was told I would lose my teeth. Then I heard of this new remedy. Being desperate, decided to try it. Am very happy now. My gums are healthy, teeth tight, and write this hoping that others suffering as I, will try it."



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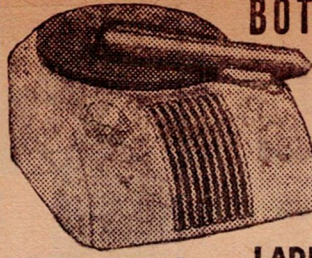
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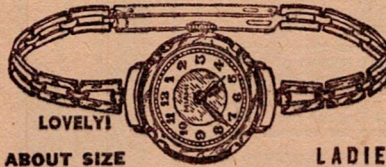
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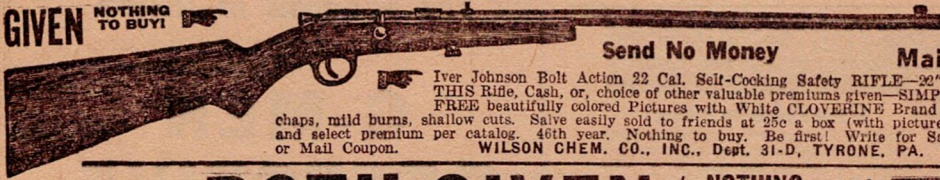
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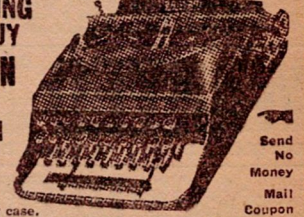
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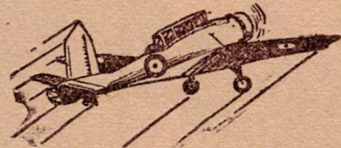
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Inventor

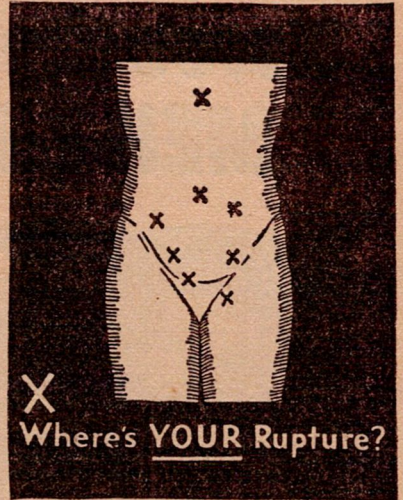
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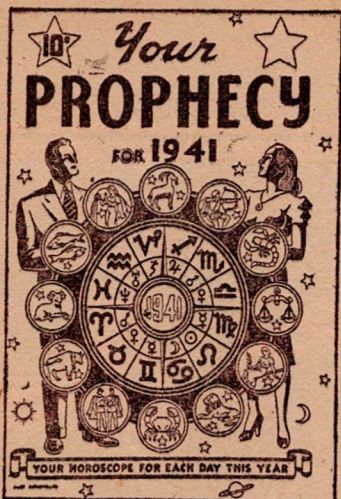
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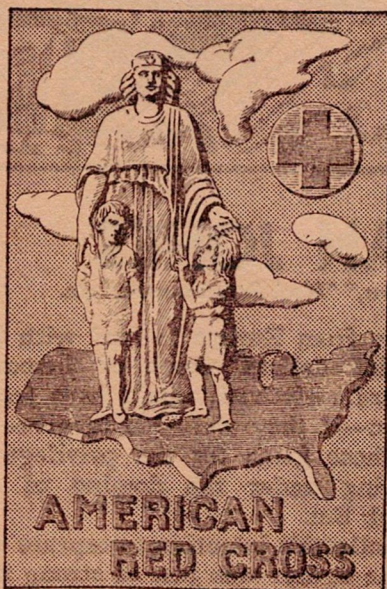


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"I aint" "He don't"
"It's me!" "You was?"
"Can't hardly"



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*They may offend others as
much as these offend you*

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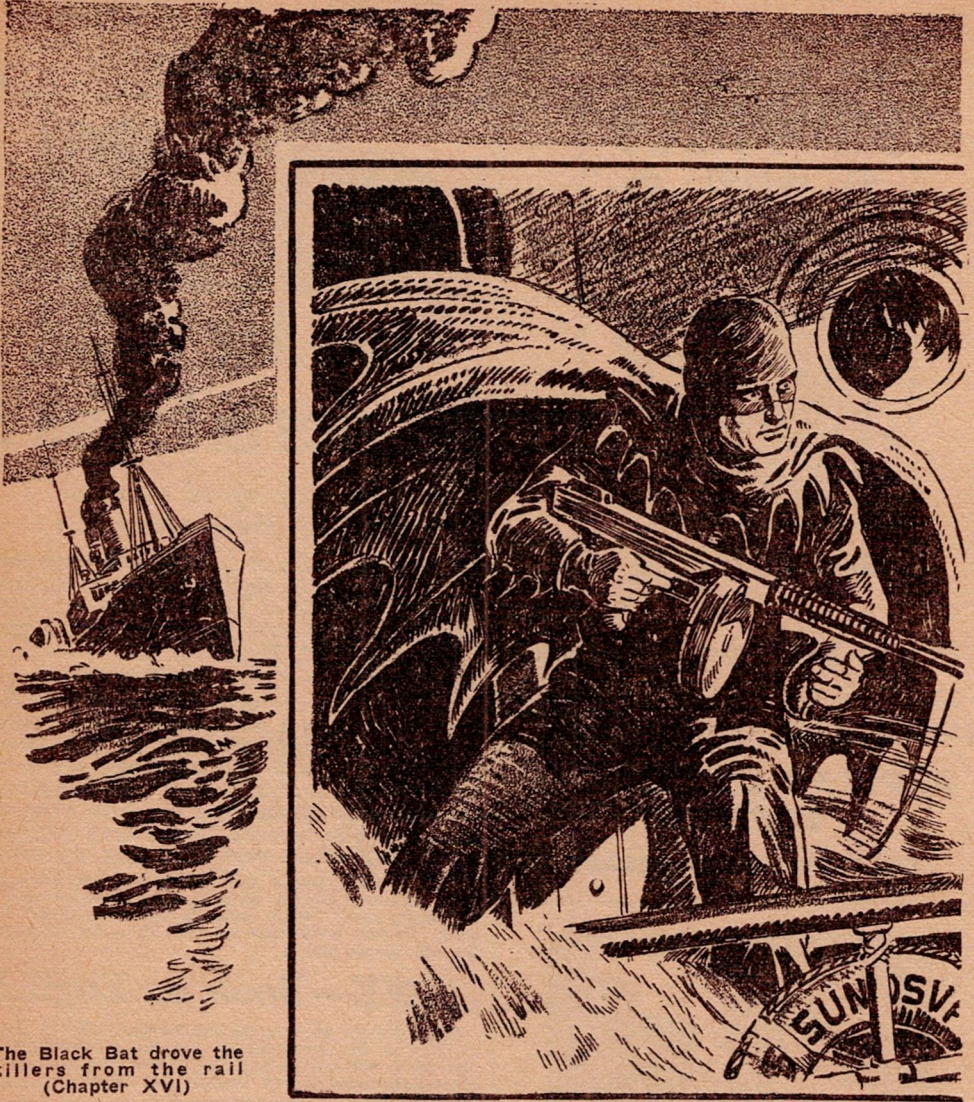
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THE BLACK BAT'S



The Black Bat drove the killers from the rail
(Chapter XVI)

By G. WAYMAN JONES

Author of "The Black Bat and the Trojan Horse," "Black Bat's Triumph," etc.

CHAPTER I

Death in the Sky

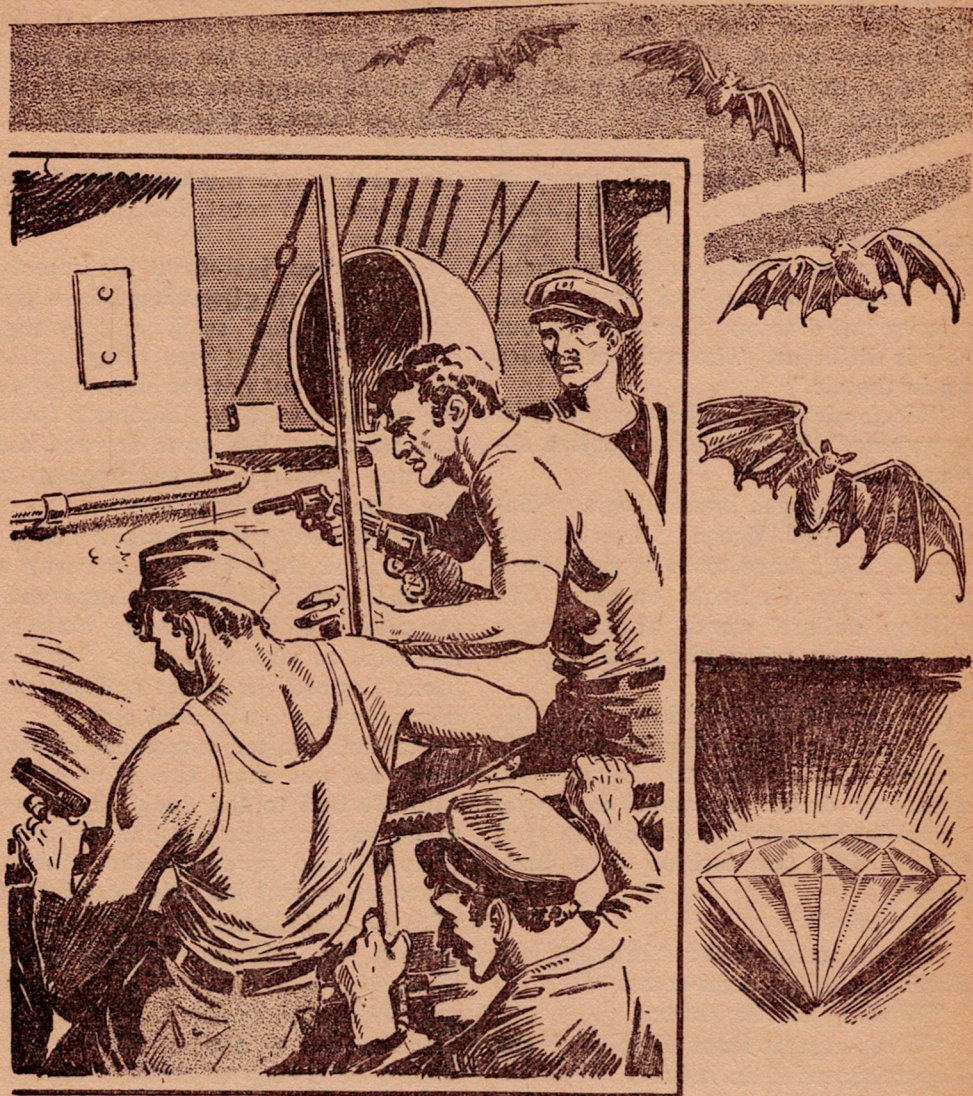
CAPTAIN McGRATH of the Headquarters Squad was a man with a mission. Anything that interfered with it became dull, uninspiring work, like waiting for a

plane from Europe to land with five million dollars' worth of diamonds aboard. McGrath would have freely given—if they were his to give—all of those gems for the privilege of peering under the domino of the Black Bat.

McGrath's intention to capture this crime fighter was just as strong now

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as it had been when he had been a Homicide Squad sergeant. He admitted that the Black Bat's work had given him a lot of undeserved credit, for which he had been lifted up two notches in a year. But McGrath still swore to land the Black Bat.

"No man," McGrath had often stated loudly, "can flout the law even

if he is on the side of the police. The Black Bat is guilty of breaking and entering, of assault, maybe of murder, though I guess it's true that he shoots only when the rats shoot first."

McGrath trundled his bulky form into the dispatcher's office and sat down.

"When is she due?" he asked.

The Winged Avenger Matches Talons With the

"In about twenty minutes." The dispatcher was leaning closer to his instrument board. "I've been trying to raise the pilot. There must be something wrong."

"Don't get excited," McGrath said calmly. "That plane will come in okay. She's flown in the sub-stratosphere all the way from Europe. Now I ask you, who could get at those rocks up there? We've had more than twenty bad diamond thefts lately, but this is different. The rocks are miles up in the air."

"Mechanical troubles can happen anywhere," the dispatcher replied abstractedly.

"Oh," McGrath leaned back. "Mechanical stuff doesn't interest me much. All I have to do is make sure nobody gets his hooks on those five million dollars' worth of diamonds. You tell me when she's circling to land."

He shoved his hat down over his eyes, let his cigar dangle from his fingers and started to dream. As usual, his dream concerned men who wore black hoods and capes that were ribbed after the fashion of a bat's wings.

"Captain!"

The dispatcher's shout brought McGrath out of his semi-coma.

"What is it?" he blurted.

"Weak signals from the plane!" the dispatcher cried in horror. "The pilot can hardly speak. Grab an ear-phone—right over there."

McGrath pressed the phone to his ear. He heard a man's voice, speaking slowly, as if it required great effort.

"Something . . . haywire. Coming in . . . fast. Think I . . . can make . . . it. Everyone aboard . . . dead or . . . asleep. Co-pilot just . . . dropped off. Using . . . oxygen. Can't. . . ."

The last word seemed to occupy the space of a full minute.

McGRATH dropped the ear-phone and raced out of the office. He yelled to the eight-man squad of picked detectives assigned to protect the diamond shipment. Running toward the long dock jutting out into the basin where the transatlantic air liners came to roost, McGrath yelled for boats.

He got them just about the time the plane was seen glistening like a polished silver bar as it cut through clouds. The pilot was bringing her in, all right, but not too smoothly. As the minutes went by, McGrath found that his throat had gone dry and that he was sweating in anticipation of the ghastly certainty.

The plane's wings banked sharply and one of them shot up a spray as it cut through the water. Apparently the pilot used all his waning strength and skill to right the ship. Its pontoons slapped the water and the motors simultaneously died out.

McGrath waited a moment or two, until he was sure the pilot either couldn't taxi to the dock, or refused to do so for some reason. Then he jumped into one of the waiting launches, waved his men to join him with the other boats. As they streaked toward the helpless, drifting plane, McGrath's worries grew by the minute. If engine trouble had caused the plane to land so dangerously its crew should be trying to attract help.

The launch came alongside the plane and one of the detectives clumsily held it fast with a boat-hook. McGrath jumped to the huge wing, made his way across it and finally reached the cabin door. He yanked it open, surprised at its weight. But when he peered inside, he gave a half-strangled cry of horror.

The steward, clad in his white coat, lay sprawled in one of the passenger's seats. A navigator, uniformed nattily in blue, was curled up on the floor. Two men were seated side by

Greedy Henchmen of a Grim Crime Combine!

side aft, their heads touching one another's, their eyes glassy.

"Get a doctor—a lot of doctors!" McGrath yelled.

He reached the steward and slid a hand beneath the shirt. There was no heart-beat. McGrath made similar examinations of the other passengers. All were dead. The two men in the rear of the plane wore steel handcuffs. From their left and right wrist, respectively, a strong chain led down to a black satchel between their legs.

One pilot was slumped half-in, half-out of his seat. The other, with an oxygen tube still clamped between his teeth, held both hands on the controls as if he had managed the descent of the ship despite death.

McGrath traced that length of tubing. It curled around toward the oxygen tank. Near the door, he saw that the tube had been slit by a sharp instrument. McGrath was not a fool. He stuck his head outside the cabin door.



THE
BLACK BAT



They had been chained to five million dollars in diamonds, but it seemed that all precautions had proven useless. . . .

McGrath tried to open the bag, found it securely locked. He picked it up and rattled it. There was a slight sound from outside, but the lightness of the bag indicated that its most valuable contents must be nothing more than air. He hurried forward as rapidly as possible and yanked open the door leading to the pilot's quarters.

"You men in launches, head out to sea and look for a floating parachute! Stop every craft you come across and hold everyone on board. The diamonds are gone!"

HALF an hour later, two police surgeons came into the cabin. They went to work immediately, while McGrath kept officials of the air line out of the way. One doctor slipped his stethoscope down to his neck and slowly sat down. There was a puzzled frown on his face.

"This is just a guess," he announced, "but personally I'd say that all of the victims were strangled, even though there isn't a mark on them."

"How long have they been dead?" McGrath queried.

"Hard to judge. Not long, though—certainly not over an hour. The pilot at the controls probably brought his ship down, but expired before he could taxi to the dock. As soon as you're finished, Captain, we'll rush the bodies to the morgue for autopsy. Perhaps it was a poison. We won't be certain till the autopsy."

THERE was nothing McGrath could do but follow the routine measures. He had pictures taken, directed fingerprint experts to dust every inch of the plane's interior.

It was growing dark when morgue men transferred the bodies to a police boat. McGrath climbed aboard, too. He buttonholed one of the surgeons.

"It must have worked pretty fast, whatever it was, eh, Doc? The way that pilot grabbed his oxygen tube proves that maybe it was gas. What do you think?"

The doctor shrugged. "You've forgotten that this is one of the newest planes. It flies in the sub-stratosphere and its cabins are automatically ventilated and hermetically sealed. When the atmosphere becomes dangerously attenuated, oxygen is automatically released in the cabin. But the pilot may have been using the oxygen tube all along. My suggestion is that something happened to the oxygen supply."

"Yeah." McGrath stared at the dock where Commissioner Warner and a horde of police officials were waiting. "Something happened to five million dollars' worth of diamonds, too. Don't forget that."

Warner jumped aboard and stood with McGrath as the six bodies were whisked into waiting ambulances. Warner was a white-haired, slender and dignified-looking man. His was no political job. He had risen from

the ranks and his promotion to his high office had been expected and deserved. There was hardly a more astute police officer in the world.

"Well, Captain," he asked, "what's your idea about all this?"

McGrath emitted a long sigh. "All I know is that everybody was dead and five million dollars' worth of ice escaped. I can't figure it out. The plane was specially chartered because it could fly higher than those fighting planes and bombers that play tag all over Europe's skies. There was a stop at Lisbon for refueling, but it was done quickly, and those two Hollanders with the satchelful of diamonds didn't stir from their seats.

"There must have been a seventh passenger hidden aboard somewhere. That guy killed everyone else, took the diamonds and parachuted to the water. It must have been arranged so a boat would be waiting to pick him up. But tell me, how did that seventh passenger get aboard? The whole plane was supposed to have been completely searched. What killed everybody, and why didn't it kill the seventh passenger?"

"I can't answer your questions yet," Warner said quietly. "Everything about this plane's departure, passengers and cargo was kept a strict secret. We've succeeded in keeping this from the newspapers so far, but the man to whom the diamonds was consigned has to be notified. That's your job, Captain. He's *Mynheer* Van der Veer. Since coming to the United States a month ago as a refugee, he's been living on Whately Avenue.

"He is an intelligent man and very wealthy, so don't browbeat him or you might get smacked back. And for heaven's sake, Captain, don't stop on the way if you see a shadow that happens to look like a bat. Right now we're faced with a problem that's even more important than the Black Bat. We've been having a wave of diamond robberies that refuse to be solved. They may be linked up with this one."

McGrath saluted and went ashore. Sliding behind the wheel of his police cruiser, he muttered to himself as he drove away.

"This is one swell case for the Black Bat. I'm stuck before I've even started. Those small breaks and now this. . . . Five million bucks! I wonder if he—"

The captain exhaled in weary defeat. Certainly the Black Bat might help, and his ability to see things that were practically invisible to McGrath would be an undeniable help. But McGrath shook off the idea reluctantly. How could he ask the Black Bat to cooperate after the way he had been trying to run him down. Why, if the newspapers got wind of it, he would be laughed right from behind his captain's gold badge!

McGrath thought he knew who the hooded mystery man was, but it was just an idea. He had never succeeded in finding out beyond question. Every time he figured on outwitting the Black Bat and exposing him as blind Tony Quinn, something happened to make such an accusation impossible.

All the doctors had declared that Tony Quinn was totally and hopelessly blind. McGrath had always thought so, too. He well remembered the horrible day when Tony Quinn, one of the cleverest district attorneys ever in office, had been accusing a gangster of serious charges. The crook's men had filtered into the courtroom. In an attempt to destroy important evidence with a corrosive acid, they had hurled the acid into Quinn's face. As a result, he had immediately become blind and his face still bore the horrible scars which the acid had left.

That was one of the reasons why McGrath suspected Quinn of being the Black Bat. The eerie being always wore a black hood covering his face completely, except for slits through which he could see. Was that hood meant to conceal those telltale scars?

McGrath spotted his destination, rolled to the curb three minutes later,

he forgot all about the Black Bat. He certainly had a more important problem.

CHAPTER II

Mynheer Is Dead



CAPTAIN McGRATH lived in a modest suburban bungalow, so he was used to the simpler comforts of life. Places like the mansion which Van der Veer had rented, with its chandeliered ceilings and thickly carpeted floors, always made him snort in contempt. By living in this place, *Mynheer* Van der Veer publicly announced his wealth. McGrath could see at a glance that Commissioner Warner was right. This Dutchman would have to be handled with kid gloves.

McGrath strode up to the porch and jabbed the bell button. The door was promptly opened by a man of about fifty, dressed in a butler's uniform. He glanced at McGrath's badge, bowed slightly and motioned toward a chair in the spacious reception hall. McGrath sat down, twiddling his hat and feeling ill at ease. Then he cocked his head to one side. He could hear voices from a room down the corridor.

"It is the police, *Mynheer*," a rather low, somewhat servile voice said. "I am afraid your theories were right and something has happened to the shipment of diamonds. Shall I show him in?"

"But yes," a booming voice replied. "Are you a fool to keep him waiting? Hand me the report from Amsterdam, quickly. Then bring the policeman in."

McGrath jumped to his feet as a young man hurried out of the room. He was clean-shaven, had light blue eyes. He rubbed his hands fawningly as he stepped before McGrath.

"You have news of the diamonds? Something has happened to them? They should have been brought here long ago."

"I've got news all right," McGrath said. "Bad news. Who are you?"

"*Mynheer* Van der Veer's American manager. My name is Paul Hawley. What has happened? Speak up, man! Those gems are worth five million dollars."

"Well, they're gone," McGrath reported. "Just what happened, I'm damned if I know. Your two messengers are dead and so is everyone else who was aboard that plane. I'd better see the boss, eh? He might be able to help."

"Of course, of course." Hawley was rattled and showed it. "Follow me. He's waiting inside."

McGrath was right behind Hawley as they stepped into a big living room. There was a desk at the far end of it and behind it sat a strange-looking man. He was near sixty, McGrath estimated, but the fiery red beard he wore and the contrasting coal-black hair made his age difficult to determine. He was slender of build and he was engaged in reading the sheaf of stapled papers he held in his hand. Hawley walked over to the desk.

"The police officer, *Mynheer*. He has bad news, I am sorry to say."

Mynheer Van der Veer did not bat an eyelash. He kept on reading the papers as if he were quite alone in the room. McGrath grunted. Big shot or small, Van der Veer couldn't disregard a police captain. McGrath bustled forward.

"Your shipment of diamonds has been stolen. Your agents are dead—murdered. We want you to come down to the morgue and identify them, also to examine the suitcase in which the jewels were supposed to have been placed. Say, will you please—"

McGrath's voice trailed off. His eyes were riveted on Van der Veer's right hand. It was swollen and looked

as though it had been held for a long time on a red-hot pipe. Then the captain noticed that the Hollanders eyes were not shifting from left to right.

He hastened around the desk, laid a hand on the diamond merchant's shoulder. Van der Veer's head slumped down lifelessly, to loll against his chest. The body started to slide out of the chair.

McGRATH grabbed him accidentally, touching the dead man's wrist as he did so. The reflex of horror made him let go, for the flesh was hideously cold. Yet the body was not rigid in rigor mortis. It was quite supple, as though the man had just died.

"Get away from the desk!" McGrath snapped at Hawley. "Your boss is dead. I want nothing touched."

He examined the seared wound on Van der Veer's hand. It was a burn, all right, and a serious one. He looked up sharply at Hawley.

"Okay, you came out of this room a couple of minutes ago. Nobody could possibly have entered it. The only door leads into the hall where I was standing. I know he's been dead for some time, because his flesh is stone-cold. Which means, mister, that you have an awful lot to explain."

McGrath wrapped the telephone in his handkerchief and dialed Headquarters with the end of a pencil. Then he escorted Hawley into the hall again.

"You might as well start talking," he warned. "Van der Veer must have been dead when you came out of the room. So who was that talking in there? Who was the guy with the booming voice? Where did he go?"

"That—that was *Mynheer* Van der Veer," Hawley stammered, his face ghastly white. "I swear it was! He asked me to give him the report on those gems. He wasn't—dead when I left him. In fact, just as you rang, he sat down in that chair. How—how could he be cold and dead now? I don't know what's happened, but I

swear I had nothing to do with it!"

"Yeah," McGrath grunted. "Park, and stay parked. Smoke if you like."

McGrath had seen slippery characters before and murderers who could pretend innocence in a way that would put dramatic actors to shame. Hawley seemed to be one of those. True, he didn't look like a killer. But except in the case of gangster executions, few murderers look as though they have just taken a human life.

"The law says you don't have to talk if you don't want to," McGrath stated. "But it might do you some good if you did. What did you kill him for? How'd you do it and where did he get that burn on his hand?"

Hawley shuddered and closed his eyes.

"I didn't kill him. He was all right when I came out to meet you. He didn't have that burn, either. Why not ask Mankensen? He's the butler. He was talking to Van der Veer not five minutes before you arrived."

McGrath was puzzled. Naturally the butler might be in on this mess, but he could certainly furnish a good alibi for Hawley. McGrath looked around for the bell and rang for him. The butler came downstairs, walking with slow deliberation. Though he glanced at Hawley and was startled by the man's pallor, he turned to McGrath and bowed respectfully.

"When did you see Van der Veer last?" the police captain demanded. "I mean when he was talking and moving around."

"He asked me to prepare a mixture of Holland gin and hot water, sir," Mankensen replied unemotionally. "I was upstairs after the liquor—it's very special, sir, and he keeps it locked in his bedroom cabinet. He gave me the key at that time, sir. When he left me, he walked directly into the library to talk with Mr. Hawley. Why don't you ask Mr. Van der Veer, sir? And am I suspected of something?"

"Your boss is dead," McGrath said bluntly. "His flesh feels as if he's

been dead for hours. You know—cold and clammy."

THE butler closed his eyes as if he were unbearably tired. His set expression of dignified reserve changed to one of extreme sadness.

"I have been with him only a few weeks, sir, but I found him to be one of the most understanding men I have ever had the privilege to serve. Would you tell me what happened to him, sir? He always appeared to be in the best of health?"

"Sit down and relax." McGrath jerked his head in the direction of a chair. "I don't know what killed him. We're waiting for the medical examiner now, but it looks bad for Hawley. He's the only man who could have killed the old bird."

Dr. Thorpe of the coroner's office arrived in a few moments. He went into the library and the others trooped behind him. Thorpe made a long and careful examination. Then he took McGrath aside.

"Damned weird, Captain," he said in a low voice. "I've been at the morgue and I saw them do autopsies on the victims from the plane. This man seems to have died of the same inexplicable cause. Up to the time I left, we found absolutely nothing which might have caused death. There seemed to be a lack of oxygen in the blood, but that was all. We'll know about that soon. But the latest victim? All I can say is that he has been dead for about twenty-five minutes."

"What?" McGrath asked incredulously. "I thought guys not dead very long stayed warm. That stiff is cold as a frozen fish."

"He can't be!" Dr. Thorpe hurried over to the corpse, reached down and touched it. "You're wrong. He is quite warm and there certainly is no rigor present."

McGrath felt the limp wrist and let out a long gasp. The skin was warm. The clammy chill he had felt several minutes ago was gone!

"I can't understand that burn on his hand," Dr. Thorpe said. "It's a serious one, but it could not have caused death—unless he had a very weak heart and the shock of the actual burn was too much for him. There are also minor and less evident burns on his left hand. He'll have to be shipped to the morgue, of course. Looks like you're having yourself a sweet mess of trouble, eh, Captain? Murder seems to be following you around. Do me a favor and stay away from my house."

McGrath brought Hawley into the next room. While a squad of experts examined the room for clues and prints, he asked his suspect countless questions.

"Okay, you told me Van der Veer was alive when you stepped into the hall. I can't prove he wasn't. You claim that booming voice I heard was Van der Veer's. How can I be sure?"

Hawley got up quickly.

"In my office upstairs are several dictaphone records. I can absolutely prove he dictated them, because there were witnesses. You've got to hear them, officer! I didn't kill him. Why should I when his being alive meant the best job I've ever had? Please listen to them!"

McGRATH nodded and followed him upstairs. Hawley slipped a cylinder into the transcriber. Instantly McGrath heard the same booming voice that had come from the library.

"All right," he granted, collecting the records and turning them over to a detective. "You'll have to go downtown, though. Nothing to be afraid of if you're innocent. Get your hat and coat."

"Can I send a cable to Amsterdam?" Hawley asked. "I must report Van der Veer's death and the theft of the diamonds. His offices there have to be notified."

"Sure, you just go along with Murphy. Tell the D. A. everything

you know—and tell the truth! We always find out when a man is lying."

"I've got nothing to lie about," Hawley retorted. "Thanks, officer, for the consideration you've shown me. There isn't a trace of the diamonds, is there?"

"Not even a sparkle. Beat it, will you? I want to think."

McGrath slumped into a chair and tried to figure it out. The mystery seemed beyond comprehension, though he was inclined to believe Hawley. After all, the man had no apparent reason to murder his employer. That booming voice certainly indicated that Van der Veer was alive after McGrath had entered the house. But what had killed him so quickly? What of that strange burn on his hand?

McGrath had already made certain that neither Hawley nor anyone else could possibly have installed a machine by which Van der Veer's voice could be reproduced when in reality he was dead. But that eerie coldness of the flesh had vanished in a space of only a few moments. How?

"This job calls for a dozen dopes like me," McGrath groaned. "Why did they have to assign me to guard those diamonds? I'd rather have the Black Bat chasing me around in circles than be stumped like this and—The Black Bat! Why the hell should I think of him every time I get in hot water? The guy ought to hate me. He probably does, but he always comes through when there's something big in the wind."

"Maybe. . . . Plenty of breaks, and now five million gone. I'll do it! Damn what anyone says. This case calls for the Black Bat. Maybe I'll get a chance to prove he is Tony Quinn, too." McGrath made a wry face. "If I call him into this mess, I guess I can't try to expose him."

He hurried downstairs, gave orders to the detectives to keep the house under guard and to have the butler brought to Headquarters. Then he got his car and drove toward one of the finest residential sections in town.

Captain McGrath felt compelled to do something that rankled deep in his proud heart. He intended to confess his bewilderment and ask help of the man he thought was the Black Bat.

CHAPTER III

A Matter of Cooperation



TONY QUINN sat before the dying embers of a fire, contentedly enjoying the heat, and puffing on a blackened meerschau pipe. Before a acid had been thrown on his face in a crowded courtroom, he had been a decidedly handsome young district attorney. Now the deep scars around his eyes were almost horrible to look upon. His eyes, too, were dead and staring, glassy with the sightlessness of the blind.

Quinn could see better than the average man now, but he knew what it was to be blind. There had been long months of it, but Nature had compensated for the loss of his sight. She had sharpened his other senses, making his auditory, tactile and olfactory powers as keen as those of a jungle beast.

But one lonely night a girl with golden hair and blue eyes had brought him hope where eye-specialists had stated there was none. Carol Baldwin's policeman father lay dying from a gangster bullet. He had made her offer his corneas to Quinn, and an unknown country doctor had performed the spectacular operation. And when the bandages were finally removed, Tony Quinn could see as well in darkness as in light! Nature had indeed rewarded him for his long months of lonely agony.

A dying man had given his eyes so a Nemesis of crime might see a clear path through the dark maze of the underworld. And Nature had made the fingers of civilization's avenger so

sensitive that whatever he touched told strange new stories. His delicate nostrils could identify the most elusive odor. His sharp eyes could sift from deafening clamor the one sound he wished to hear and classify.

To his self-imposed crusade against crime, Tony Quinn brought all the eerie powers of detection of—a black bat!

With all of these sensory aids, Tony Quinn had chosen to pretend blindness so that he might carry on his campaign against the underworld. He preferred anonymity, for it terrorized his enemies more when they realized that anyone could be the Black Bat. Besides his natural desire to avoid publicity, there was also the fact that occasionally he had to employ slightly irregular methods, and acting as a recognized agent of the law would have eliminated those unpleasant but necessary methods by tying his hands with red tape.

Three people soon rallied to the Black Bat's banner. They were also odd avengers of society. "Silk" Kirby had once been a confidence man. He slipped in to rob Tony Quinn one night and stayed to become his valet and general helper. Silk, with his smooth tactfulness and ingenuity—which accounted for his nickname—always remained with Quinn. Carol Baldwin, however, had no outward connection with either the Black Bat or Quinn. A resourceful, intelligent girl, she had often been a great help to the Black Bat.

Then there was Butch O'Leary, a hulking giant of a man who was never happier than when his fists were flying in defense of the law and the aid of the Black Bat. Butch was none too intelligent, but faithful and loyal. What he lacked in brains was overbalanced by his incredible willingness to risk death and his enormous strength.

These three made up the Black Bat's clique of associates. They alone knew of his dual identity and that he only pretended blindness.

Silk Kirby came in with a tray of sandwiches and milk. Quinn always maintained his blind-man pose even when no one was around. He turned his head in Silk's general direction.

"Thanks, Silk. Inactivity makes me hungry, I guess. By the way a car has just pulled up in front of the house. It is a heavy car."

"Really, sir?" Silk started toward the front door. "I didn't hear a thing." He peered through a small window set beside the door. "You're right. It's McGrath. When he shows up, it means bad news. He certainly looks angry at something."

Silk waited until McGrath punched the door-bell a couple of times. Then he opened the door and bowed with exaggerated politeness.

"Captain McGrath, the master will be delighted at your social call. May I have your hat, or don't you ever take it off?"

"Where's Quinn?" the captain demanded. "I've got to see him quick. Out of my way!"

He barged into the living room instead of waiting for a reply. Quinn still sat before the fireplace, his dead eyes staring sightlessly at the embers.

"Sit down, Captain," he offered without lifting his head. "You sounded worried. Is there something wrong? Don't tell me the Black Bat has been up to his old tricks. And please don't make an accusation against me, because I've been right here at home for hours."

"Look, Mr. Quinn." McGrath dropped into a chair. "I know I've been a little rough on you sometimes. That's because I think you are the Black Bat and that you're not blind at all. I still think that way, but this time I'm not coming here to make any accusations. I want your help. I've got to have it!"

"Of course." Quinn turned his head, but his eyes looked far to McGrath's left. "But only as Tony Quinn, attorney and ex-district attorney. For the Black Bat's aid, you'll

have to get in touch with him."

"Maybe you're not the Black Bat, but you seem to be in touch with him. A plane came over from Europe a few hours ago. It was specially chartered to fly two men and five million dollars' worth of diamonds to a guy named Van der Veer. His first name is something like *Mynheer*."

"That is not a first name," Quinn corrected gently. "It has the same meaning as our 'Mister.' Go on."

"Well, the pilot of the plane radioed that he was in trouble. When the plane landed, everybody on board was dead and the gems were gone. The doctors couldn't find out what killed those men, so I went to Van der Veer's place. When I walked into the hall, I heard him talking. I got proof it was his voice. Two minutes later he was dead as an ice-cold mackerel. Then by the time the doctor showed up, he was warm as if he'd just died.

"I haven't got a clue. The suspects I sent to Headquarters are innocent. I know they are. I need the Black Bat's help. I've got to have it, Quinn! Forget all the trouble I made for you. I've been a damned fool sometimes. Give me a break on this. You can have a free hand an—"

"A free hand?" Quinn broke in wryly. "I'd rather have a pair of healthy eyes. Your story is most interesting, Captain. I wish I could help you, but two things prevent me. First of all, I am quite blind. Secondly, I am not the Black Bat. I don't know him, nor can I get in touch with him. I'm sorry."

MCGRATH'S face dropped and he got up slowly.

"All right. Maybe you aren't the Black Bat and this has just been a waste of breath. But if you are— Oh, what's the use? You look blind as a bat to me. I—I'm sorry about that last crack, Mr. Quinn, but this case has got me down. I've been working since early this morning and then the case

has to bust. By tomorrow night I'll be half-crazy, so I guess I'll go home and get some sleep. If I go nuts, I want to do it without being tired. Good night and I hope the Black Bat hears about the case."

As McGrath spoke, Quinn's cane tapped the floor steadily, as if the story made him nervous. Silk, standing out in the hallway with both ears open wide, received a message from those taps. It ordered him to stall McGrath as much as possible outside the house.

When the captain reached the porch, Silk hovered near him, flicking imaginary specks of dust from his shoulders.

"Still think Mr. Quinn is the Black Bat, Captain? Perhaps for the right kind of offer, I might be able to solve that problem for you."

"Yeah?" McGrath brightened. "It's worth ten bucks. Come on, he is the Black Bat, isn't he?"

"For ten dollars"—Silk grinned slyly—"he is not."

"Fifty," McGrath offered.

"Fifty do grow webbed wings—but that's all, Captain."

"Oh, damn it—three hundred! That's all the cash I can raise quick."

"Well, I suppose that will do."

Silk looked around nervously and McGrath took a firm grip on his nerves. He was going to learn the truth after all. He had always suspected this smooth article of a butler was a crook, and McGrath could infallibly detect crooks.

"That's three hundred you owe me," Silk whispered hoarsely. "You want to know if Quinn is the Black Bat? Well, the answer is—no, he isn't."

McGrath blinked, growled an oath and made a grab for Silk. But the wily ex-confidence man ducked easily and laughed in quiet derision. McGrath jammed his hat down, scowled and headed for the car.

"Sucker!" he told himself irately. "That's what he made out of me—a plain, ordinary sucker."



McGrath

"Don't forget the three hundred you owe me," Silk called out. "I answered your question, didn't I?"

McGrath almost ground the teeth off the gears as he started away. His helplessness enraged him. Why couldn't he determine, one way or the other, if Tony Quinn was just a helpless blind man or the Black Bat? McGrath simply didn't know any more tricks. He had held a lighted match close to Quinn's eyes more than once and never got so much as a flicker. Quinn must be blind, all right. Those expensive doctors insisted that nothing short of a miracle could restore Quinn's sight, and McGrath was no believer in miracles.

He headed for home. A man had to sleep sometime, and the cots at Police Headquarters were particularly uncomfortable torture devices. Anyway, he couldn't do much until all the autopsies were finished and toxicologists had examined the bodies for poison.

McGrath turned a corner three blocks from the bungalow he called home. He jammed on the brakes, for two cars blocked the street. They had been traveling in opposite directions when their bumpers tangled.

He groaned and got out of his car. He closed his eyes fast to be sure he wasn't seeing things. An immense figure of a man had loomed up. A girl, neat and pretty, but completely overshadowed by the giant, was arguing fearlessly.

"NOW wait a minute!" McGrath snapped. "I'm a police officer. By the looks of things, both of you were to blame. Call it all off or I'll hustle you both down to Headquarters. And get those crates out of the road. I want to go home."

"Show me your badge," the giant rumbled.

McGrath gulped and decided it might be healthy to produce it, so he did. The giant took one look, grinned sheepishly and kicked at the road with an immense foot. The girl smiled prettily.

"I guess you're right, officer. I was just mad at this big oaf because he shouted at me. I'll forgive him. Perhaps you had better help move the cars."

"Him?" The giant looked down at McGrath. "Haw!"

Casually he ambled over to the cars, seized the bumper of one and lifted the front end almost completely off the ground. The tangled bumpers scraped free. He pushed the other car several feet away with hardly a grunt.

"If that's your car, lady, I'd advise you to get in it and scram," McGrath said. "That big guy could pulverize both of us and I'm too tired to be mopped around. There's been no damage done, so let's just forget the whole thing."

McGrath drove his car between the two others. As his taillight vanished, the giant leaned out of his coupé and grinned from ear to ear. The girl signaled that all was clear.

"Nice work, Butch," she called out. "We stalled him eight whole minutes. Now you get back. He may need your car."

"Sure, Miss Carol," Butch agreed. "And I hope he's onto somethin' big and serious. I'm gettin' covered with dry rot from sittin' around."

"It's big, all right." The girl drove closer to Butch O'Leary's car. "He sounded unusually excited over the phone when he asked me to get your help in stalling the good captain. McGrath doesn't know it, but he's having a visitor tonight."

"Yeah," Butch grunted. "A guy with wings and he ain't no angel. See you later, Miss Carol."

Carol Baldwin took an opposite direction, for it was not so important that she return quickly. She wondered what had excited Quinn. McGrath, actually asking Quinn to help him, indicated that it was serious and baffling. Still, there had been nothing of interest in the newspapers yet. Carol constantly checked all editions of important papers from all over the country. Because of her thoroughness, secret files in Tony Quinn's house bulged with all manner of facts about crime and criminals.

She returned to her apartment, not far away from Quinn's house. She sat down beside a telephone table and waited. When things broke, the Black Bat usually maneuvered his forces through her.

She smiled at the way McGrath had been fooled. Quinn had him delayed long enough to don the Black Bat's regalia and slip out of the house via the secret tunnel that led from the laboratory to the garden-house at the rear of Quinn's estate. There a car was always kept waiting and ready. The Black Bat would have had plenty of time to reach McGrath's home.

Carol's eyes grew bright whenever she thought of Tony Quinn. She was glad that the opportunity had come her way to help him create the Black Bat. But there was also an element of sadness in those memories. Her father had died to turn a helpless blind man into an overwhelmingly efficient Nemesis of crime. She could not have

had both Tony and her dying father, of course, yet somehow it was almost as if she did.

Her father was dead, but his eyes still lived to help society strike back against the ruthless killers and devastators of the underworld. Through Tony Quinn, he remained alive to her. . . .

CHAPTER IV

Battle at Sea



MCGRATH put his car away, walked around to the front of his house and let himself in. His wife was away, so he proceeded directly to the kitchen. There he got himself a glass and swore when he found there were no ice cubes to drop into it. But he headed for the dining room, where the supply of rye was kept. The instant he reached for the light switch, he froze. His hand almost broke the thin glass in its convulsive grip.

"Good evening, Captain," a quiet voice said from the darkness. "We won't need lights, thank you, and I'm afraid you're slipping as a detective. A short time ago I took the ice cubes from your refrigerator and put them in glasses. I mixed a brace of highballs for us. You should have wondered why the cubes were missing."

"The Black Bat!" McGrath said softly. "I can't see you, but if you have a gun in your hand, put it down. This is one time you're as welcome as the drink you say you fixed. Where is it?"

A strong hand grasped McGrath's arm and piloted him safely through the inky darkness until he found that his favorite chair had been pulled up beside a small table. He sat down with a sigh.

"I've been looking for you," he said

as he fumblingly picked up the glass. "How'd you get here so fast, Tony Quinn?"

The Black Bat chuckled. "Still on that tangent, eh? Forget it, Captain. Quinn is as blind as my namesake. Don't ask me how, but I heard about what happened this afternoon. Your department is keeping this matter hushed for the present, so I thought I would come here and see you for the facts. This robbery is obviously more important that a casual glance would indicate. Tell me what happened."

McGrath smiled slyly as he rotated the ice cubes in his glass.

"Mind if I strike a light?" he asked. "I want to smoke."

Before he could be stopped, he scraped a match, held it directly over the glass. Then he raised it to illuminate the man who sat undismayed in a chair beside him. He saw, first of all, the heavy automatic resting in the black lap. Slowly he raised his eyes to survey the weird man who wore a snugly fitting black hood and a cape that gave the illusion of a bat's wings.

"All right," McGrath grunted. "I was just using some of that power of observation you keep accusing me of not having. The ice cubes in my glass are small, and my drink is very cold. It would take some time for the cubes to melt and chill the drink, proving you've been here a long while and that you didn't make tracks for this house right after I left Quinn. That is, if you were Quinn.

"I'll give you the whole story. Brother, I never thought I'd be working with you, but this time all rules have to be off. Five million dollars' worth of jewelry is missing, and seven men have been killed. The past few days we've been having a regular wave of jewelry store robberies, and diamonds have been taken mostly. Warner thinks the big robbery and the little ones tie up somehow."

Continuing from that point, McGrath gave all the details of the case. All through his story, the Black Bat

was so quietly intent that McGrath peered into the darkness to see if he was still there. Each time a word assured him that his eerie visitor had seen his movement and had read the doubt in his face despite the dark.

"Burns on the hands," the Black Bat muttered finally. "Flesh cold one moment, normally warm the next. I won't bluff you, Captain—I can't account for it yet. About the plane, though, your theory seems the only safe one to assume. Someone boarded the ship in Lisbon, killed everyone aboard, grabbed the gems and parachuted into the sea, where he was picked up by prearrangement. A risky affair, Captain—so much so that I can't figure it out.

"Crooks rarely have much nerve, unless it's backed up with a gun. It takes courage to use a parachute, and that's something weasels don't have. We may be dealing with a superior rat, however. I'd like to see that plane, if it could be arranged without a couple of dozen policemen trying to bring me down. Perhaps I may find a clue where you failed to do so."

MCGRATH hesitated, his broad face unhappy.

"I wouldn't mind working with anybody else, but you? Before this is over, you'll probably break every law on the books. Well, I've got to risk it. I'll fix things so the guard at the plane is removed. It will take about an hour. I promise I won't interfere with your work, as long as you don't leave too many bodies strewn around. It's tough trying to explain them.

"Speaking not as an officer sworn to uphold the law but as an ordinary citizen, I wish you luck, whoever you are. Just as long as this case lasts, we'll have a truce, you and I. But when it's over, watch your step because I'll be looking for you."

The Black Bat's quiet laugh was terrifying in the silence of the room.

"We've had our truces before and they usually produced results. And

I'm not swooning in terror of your pursuit once the case is finished. Good night. I hope I didn't make that drink too strong."

When McGrath clambered to his feet, everything began to spin. He grabbed the arm of his chair to steady himself. Then he grinned foolishly, amiably.

"That drink was pretty near straight rye and a tall one, too. But, boy, it sure makes a man forget his troubles!"

Somehow he managed to call Headquarters and give intelligible orders that the guard was to be withdrawn from around the plane. Then he reached his bed and fell across it. McGrath never imagined that the Black Bat had purposely made the drink strong so he would remain out of the picture for the time being. He also gave no thought to the possibility that those ice cubes could have been melted under the hot water tap in his kitchen.

The Black Bat slipped out of McGrath's house silently as a ghost, fled through several neighboring yards. An ordinary man would have stumbled and fallen a dozen times, for the yards were littered with rakes, lawnmowers, chairs and children's toys. Yet those objects were not concealed by darkness from the Black Bat's eyes. He reached the car that he had parked well away from McGrath's house. In a few moments he was driving toward the waterfront.

He had stowed his hood in a pocket and pulled down a black, wide-brimmed hat to conceal his features. Tony Quinn, operating as the Black Bat, was in constant danger of recognition, for every patrolman in the city knew those horrible scars on his face. But it was impossible to keep the hood on at all times.

The trans-atlantic plane had been hauled in, but it was a safe distance from the pier. The Black Bat slipped through the darkness, made sure the pier was not guarded. Noiselessly he dropped into a small motor launch that was moored so conveniently near-

by that he figured McGrath must have provided it. There were oars in the locks and he used these in preference to the noisy motor. He welcomed the slight fog, for it aided him.

As he neared the plane, he suddenly shipped the oars. There was another motor launch tied up to one of the plane's wings. From shore it could not be seen. A furtive flash of light proved that a prowler was inside the ship.

THE Black Bat drew a gun, laid it on his lap and silently resumed rowing. He quietly threw a line around a strut on the opposite side, held his gun ready and stepped onto the wing. His rubber-soled shoes made little noise and clung well to the slippery surface. He crouched suddenly, for a man had stepped out of the cabin, holding something in his arms. Before the Black Bat could move to prevent his abrupt action, the man hurled whatever he had into the sea. Then he started for his motor launch.

"Freeze!" the Black Bat hissed. "There's a gun trained on you."

The mystery man stopped dead, then took a startlingly quick flying jump that carried him into his launch. The motor roared. A gun cracked and the bullet whistled past the Black Bat. Impeded by the narrow footing, the Black Bat was slower in reaching his own boat. But before the mystery man's launch was more than five hundred feet away, he was in swift pursuit.

He opened the throttle wide and the boat skimmed across the water at top speed. Suddenly he ducked, for a jet of flame and the roar of a gun almost coincided with the thud of a bullet against the bow. He raised his head cautiously, rested the automatic against the roof of the small cabin and drew a bead on the fleeing launch. In rapid succession, he sent three bullets through the darkness. A wild curse in a distinctly accented voice

indicated that he had come close. He smiled and fired two more shots.

The fleeing craft adopted a zig-zag course. Occasionally a slug smashed into the Black Bat's launch. They were heading out to open sea and those shots were probably not heard ashore. The Black Bat wondered why this particular direction had been chosen, unless there was a larger craft moored somewhere to pick up the killer.

Then he saw his quarry slow down considerably. With a sharp inhale of elation, he grasped his automatic tighter in his black-gloved fist and prepared for action. It came—but not the way he expected. A rattle of gunfire, a series of flashes from the launch ahead of him turned the odds lethally against him.

The killer, knowing he had no chance to outstrip the Black Bat's craft, was using a submachine-gun to send a fusillade of lead at the launch. The Black Bat flattened to the deck. Suddenly the motor sputtered and died. A bullet had probably ripped the gas-line.

He heard a hoarse, taunting laugh from the darkness as the killer began turning his boat around to put in a few final licks. Even the Black Bat could not face a tommy-gun and live. That realization made his agile mind work desperately. He stripped off his cloak, propped the oars against a seat and draped the robe over them. From a distance it looked like a crouching man. Satisfied, he scrambled down the small companionway.

The killer's craft came along side and the machine-gun ripped a hundred holes in the Black Bat's cloak. The same taunting laugh at last showed that the killer was content. He roared away, but the Black Bat, cautiously watching from below, had caught a glimpse of the man's face. Those uncanny eyes of his had penetrated the darkness and seen a jet-black Vandyke beard and a shock of dark hair.

Slowly the Black Bat put his robe on again, grimacing at the bullet holes.

He was far away from the plane, but he settled down for the long row. That bearded, black-haired killer had won the first round, but the Black Bat always stayed in the ring until the final bell.

REACHING the plane at last, he made sure no one had been attracted by the shooting. Then he boarded the ship once more. What had the mysterious attacker thrown overboard? McGrath had stated that he had examined the ship carefully. Whatever had gone into the sea had certainly seemed big enough to have been noticed.

The Black Bat spent almost an hour prowling around inside the ship. In the extreme darkness, he looked thoughtfully at the slit in the oxygen tube. Disagreeing with McGrath's opinion, the Black Bat believed the tube had been crushed by something heavy and not cut with a sharp instrument. The black satchel, of course, was gone and the baggage compartment revealed nothing of interest. He thrust inquisitive fingers beneath the padding of the various seats without success, then examined every inch of the floor.

"Not a clue," he muttered. "Nothing but that object dumped into the water, and that doesn't do me any good. Looks like McGrath was right. This is a tough nut to crack."

Obviously, without a trace by which to guide his actions, the next step must be to trace the five million dollars in missing gems. They had to be disposed of if the thief wanted to make a profit from his murders. But since they were stones of average size, there was nothing outstanding about any of them.

Van der Veer had owned diamond-cutting plants in Amsterdam. He had been one of the most successful merchants in the world until a man named Hitler blasted normal life and business into minute fragments. Then he had hidden most of his valuable stock

and fled to the United States. His agents in his overrun country had shipped the stones to Switzerland, where they had immediately been placed on board the chartered plane.

"The Nazis!" the Black Bat gritted. "They'd risk a lot to lay their hands on so many gems. Diamonds would be invaluable for making their tools with which guns and parts are machined, or even to be used in international trade."

The Black Bat determined to make an investigation of that phase. Nazi agents had traveled far for lesser sums than this. He returned to the crippled launch and rowed it ashore.

McGrath's orders still held sway and no one was about to intercept him, and the Black Bat was hardly visible in the darkness. Everything he wore was black, so he seemed to blend with all the shadows and become a part of them.

He approached the spot where his car was parked, but the Black Bat was always cautious. Before actually getting into it, he crouched behind a watchman's shack and used the super-sensitive eyes and ears that nature had given him. A private patrolman, assigned to guard the waterfront warehouses, ambled up the pier. The Black Bat heard sudden scampering, as if several people sought better hiding places.

The mysterious man he had chased over the water must have contacted the shore somehow—perhaps by radio—and detailed a squad of men to watch for the return of the other launch, just in case the man in it was not dead. The Black Bat reasoned that they might attack if no one was about. But it was more likely they would merely trail anyone who came from the plane and use their guns in a spot from which escape was less possible.

The shack behind which he was hidden carried telephone wires running down its side. The Black Bat crawled around to the narrow door, examined the padlock on it and drew a small in-

strument from under his cloak. It took him hardly a minute to open the door. He slipped inside, found to his satisfaction that the phone was dial-equipped and had a direct outside connection. He called Carol Baldwin.

"We're up against one of the most difficult cases we have ever encountered," he told her. "Contact Silk at once. Tell him to put on a simple disguise, get into Butch's car and drive to the pier at Clark Street. Have him park at a convenient spot and watch. I'll come out, and unless there is a gun battle, someone will be trailing me. The moment I shake them, Silk must hang a tail on them."

CHAPTER V

Uneven Odds



SILK KIRBY got Carol's call and immediately went to work. He required no more than ten minutes to change into a loud suit and don a tie and shirt that could best be described as flamboyant. He quickly changed his facial appearance with an assortment of pigments and small mechanical devices. His cheeks he made rounder, his nose more predatory and his lips fuller. When he was finished, he looked like a young man from some small town. He used the tunnel which led from the hidden laboratory to the garden house. Butch's battered old coupé was parked at the curb. The registration of this car would have surprised the police, for the name and address on the license was also engraved on a tombstone at the address that had been given—a cemetery. Old as it was, there was plenty of power under that shabby hood.

Silk drove the car onto the river highway, followed it until he reached the street which the Black Bat had in-

dicated. He looked around, doused the headlights and coasted slowly down the gradual incline until he could see the Black Bat's car. Then he backed into a driveway and waited, his eyes glued on the car parked at the pier.

Abruptly a fleet black shape seemed to fly toward that car. The motor roared and the car flashed by the spot where Silk was parked. For a fraction of a second the dashlight was lit. Silk caught a glimpse of a wide-brimmed hat and a driver hunched forward over the wheel. It was the Black Bat!

Silk held his breath. There had been no gun battle. If the Black Bat's suspicions were correct, the criminals would be trailing along any second.

They flashed by in a sleek black sedan. By the dim street lights, Silk saw two men in front and two in back, all leaning forward anxiously. He pulled out of the drive and took up the chase. But he stayed well back, for much depended on his evading detection. The killers would be intent on watching the Black Bat's car and not imagine that they themselves were being followed, but Silk took no chances.

The Black Bat deliberately began heading away from the city, indicating that he actually dared these men to do their worst. When the city lights cast only a red glow over the sky and traffic grew thinner on the highway, his car suddenly gained speed. Silk whipped an automatic from his pocket. It felt comfortingly heavy in his lap.

The murder car was gradually gaining on the Black Bat. That far from the city a blasting fusillade of shots could be poured into the coupé and the murderers be miles away before the shooting was even discovered.

Silk wanted to draw closer so that if the fireworks began, he would have a chance to help the Black Bat. But he had his orders, and they were uncompromisingly explicit. His job was to trail these men after they had shown themselves to be members of the mur-

der mob. Therefore he eased up on the gas slightly and dropped back. At a safe distance he extinguished his lights, leaned out of the window and guided his car by means of the white line in the center of the highway.

He heard the rattle of guns, looked up and saw the Black Bat's car swerve dangerously, straighten out and put on a burst of speed. The sedan continued to gain on it and the bullets were pounding at the coupé at a terrific rate. Silk smiled. Though the coupé certainly bore no resemblance to an expensive armored car, it was just as impervious to ordinary gunfire. An unusually high-velocity rifle bullet might penetrate the thick steel hide, but no other slug could do more than dent it.

A SECOND later, though, Silk became worried. It looked as though the Black Bat had been hit, for the coupé began zigzagging all over the road. It gave a final, screeching turn off the main highway and started up a dirt lane. The murder car turned swiftly after it. Silk bit his lip, debating whether he ought to follow the battle.

He turned off the road and guided the car behind a tree. The branches effectively hid it. Slipping out, he seized his gun and started running toward the spot where the glow of headlights revealed the location of the two cars. When he peered through the brush, his heart was hammering against his ribs.

The Black Bat's car had rolled off the lane and come to a stop with its nose in a ditch. Four men with drawn weapons were warily closing in. Silk lay prone, rested one elbow on the ground. Supporting his automatic on his forearm, he drew a bead on one of the men, ready to blast him into eternity if things had gone awry with the Black Bat's plans and he was still inside that car. In the silence of that deserted wooded section, the voices of the men carried to Silk's alert ears.

"If he wasn't croaked, he'd be lettin' us have it, wouldn't he?" one argued. "The boss says he did plenty of shoot-in' out on the water, so he must have a gun. Jules, you sneak up and open that door. Go on, what're you scared of? We'll blast that crate to pieces if the guy inside tries anything."

The man called Jules carefully approached the car, running forward in a crouch. Finally he reached the side of the car, turned the handle and yanked the door open.

"Hey!" he called back in awe. "There ain't nobody in this jalopy!"

The others ran erect, now that the element of danger was past. When Silk could hear them cursing and quarreling over what had happened to the driver, he smiled. He should have known better than to worry whether the Black Bat's trick had missed fire. Hastily he returned to where Butch's coupé was parked, got in and waited.

After several minutes the sedan nosed out of the lane to his surprise, the driver nosed it away from the city again. Silk held far back, but never lost the two red lights of that car for a single instant. It kept traveling for another four miles and then took a cut-off for five miles more. At last it slowed, made a sharp left turn and proceeded up a private lane bordered by tall trees.

Silk followed at a safe distance, his headlights still out. The trees prevented even starlight from lighting his way, so he had to drive with great caution. When he least expected it, he caught sight of the murder car, which was also traveling at a slow rate of speed. But suddenly the driver stepped on the gas and the sedan roared out of sight. Silk pushed down the gas pedal, gripped the wheel firmly and prayed that he would stay on a road he could hardly see.

He was doing forty-five—a terrific speed for this narrow, dark lane—when all hell seemed to burst loose. Something hit the front of the coupé, flung it back with frightful force.

Silk hit the wheel and the wind was knocked out of him. One tire blew out violently and both fenders and bumper were demolished.

Still dazed by the unexpectedness of the accident and dizzy from the pain of his collision against the wheel, Silk was easy prey for the three men who abruptly surrounded the car. Two carried rifles, the other a nickle-plated revolver. Flashlights almost blinded him. He made a grab for his gun just as the door beside him was jerked open. On impulse, he jammed the gun between the seat cushions. A rifle barrel struck him viciously across the forehead. He groaned once and went limp.

"The sap!" one of the men growled. "When Jules and the boys passed by, we just tightened that big chain and it got him. Now maybe you think the boss ain't smart. It takes brains to figure out that idea. Drag this dumb cluck to the house and we'll find out who he is."

SILK was awakened by being dragged over the rough ground. He didn't betray the fact that he was conscious, for the conversation of his captors might be revealing.

"Maybe this bozo is just some pier cop. He musta seen the boss go out to that plane and followed him. Say, I never told you guys before because I thought you'd turn yellow. The boss told me over the radio that the clothes on the guy in that launch made him think it was the Black Bat. Ain't that a howl?"

A thug shivered.

"Yeah, it's a howl now, but suppose we had tackled the Black Bat instead of this funny-lookin' punk. They'd be holding a inquest over what was left of us in the mornin' and they wouldn't wonder who killed us, either. Right between our eyes they'd find a little seal in the shape of a black bat. If he's mixed up in this business, I'm gettin' out. His lead carries too much poison."



"Get a doctor!" McGrath yelled (Chapter 1)

"Shut up!" the spokesman of the men growled. "Let the wrong guys heard you talk like that and you'll be shoved down an old well or somethin'. The Black Bat ain't no ghost. He can be brought down with a piece of steel any day. Hell, you don't think he's as smart as the boss, do you? Did the Black Bat ever swipe five million bucks' worth of rocks and make dummies outa the cops? Ease him up these steps and don't bust his head yet. We want to hear what he's got to say. There's the other boys waitin' for us at the place."

Silk was thrown on a soiled, rickety old settee, and someone slapped him stingingly across the mouth. He opened his eyes and stared foggily at the seven men who stood around him.

"Wh-what happened?" he mumbled. "I was driving along and then all of a sudden something hit me. Where am I? Who are you?"

"Suppose you answer some questions first."

One of the men stepped forward. He was a rangy, loose-jointed man.

"Let me handle him, Stringy," a thug said.

"I'll take care of it," Stringy grunted. "How come you followed our car up this road? It's private and you musta saw the sign."

Silk thought rapidly. "Well, it's like this. I was heading toward town when I saw a small car start going all over the road. Then it dived into a country road and a bigger car followed. So I just parked and waited. Then I saw this big car come out alone. I figured something was wrong, so I just followed."

"Who told you to follow us?" Stringy demanded. "Talk, you funny-lookin' hayseed, or I'll blast your ears off."

Silk hung his head, thankful for the disguise that typed him as a small town youth with funny ideas as to how the modern man dresses. He had to have a logical excuse and it must sound authentic.

"I'll tell you the truth," he admitted. "After your car came out of that lane, a man crawled from the bushes. He was hurt pretty bad—lots of blood on his shirt and it looked to me like a bullet had smacked him across the forehead. Anyhow, he said he was a cop and I was to follow you. That's what I did. I should have minded my own business."

"Search him," Stringy ordered.

TWO of the men obeyed, obviously enjoying the way they tossed Silk around. Stringy had taken two others aside and was talking swiftly in a low voice. By the malicious grins on the faces of the listeners, Silk knew they were arranging some sort of good-by party for him.

Silk was worried, too, although his bland, rather stupid countenance showed nothing but bewilderment. The Black Bat must have leaped out of his coupé after it turned into the lane. Undoubtedly he had heard and witnessed what had happened and had watched Silk take up the pursuit. But the Black Bat himself was stymied. Butch might have lifted the coupé out of that ditch, but not even the Black Bat could have done it without help. Therefore he was probably miles away, without a possibility of trailing the murder brigade to their hideout.

"Nothin' on him," one of the thugs reported. "What'll I do—bury a chunk of lead in his bean?"

Stringy came back with the other killers.

"Of course not. Look, rube, you butted into something that's very unhealthy. The guy who told you he was a cop wasn't. We're G-men after a gang of smugglers. This is their hideout and the guy you saw was one of them. He shot it out with us and lost. Say, he wasn't wearing a mask, was he?"

"Gosh, thanks for not thinking I meant to gum up your detecting," Silk said. "Nope, he didn't have no mask. Just a gray suit and a white shirt that

was pretty bloody. Don't rightly think he's alive now, judgin' by the way he looked."

"Well, you're willin' to cooperate," Stringy said, "so we're gonna give you a break. Ordinarily we'd stick you right in the can, but we're pretty good guys. A couple of my men will escort you to a path that leads to the road. Your bus is smashed up, so you'd better start walkin'. Next time don't butt into what don't have nothin' to do with hay and seeds. Get it?"

Silk let out a gasp of gratitude and made solemn promises, but inwardly he knew this was just a game. They really intended to take him into the night and blast him. But there was more of a chance dealing with two men than seven, so Silk was pathetically willing to oblige them.

Two men got on either side of him and gripped his arms, yanking him roughly out of the house. They reached the driveway, but turned away from the direction of the main road. Straight ahead Silk could see a starry sky, with no sign of trees.

The whole landscape suddenly seemed to be cut off. As they progressed, he knew why, for pieces of quarried slate lay all over the ground. He was being led to a precipice. In all probability, he would simply be shoved over the edge to crash down on the rocks far below. Then at some future time, when his body was discovered, there would be no evidence of murder.

The pair of guards each kept a hand in a coat pocket. Silk knew they gripped guns, taking no chances that their victim might suddenly realize his danger and try to battle his way out. Actually Silk felt helpless. By seizing one crook, he would expose himself to the attack of the other. For the first time, Silk wished he were Butch. Then he could have tackled both thugs at once.

But he wasn't, and he was powerless in the face of inexorable death, grim doom that might strike any moment.

CHAPTER VI

Picture of a Dead Man

APPROACHING the edge of the old quarry, the darkness prevented Silk from seeing all the details of his doom. But he knew his hunch was right, for they were headed straight toward the brink. Silk determined not to betray the fact that he understood their intentions until they were fairly close to the edge, when the killers would naturally be a little afraid of a rough and tumble fight that might also carry them over. He tensed his muscles and got ready.

Like some great bird that had been startled, a weird object suddenly arose from the tall grass and swooped down on the trio. The thugs gave yelps of terror and started to draw their guns. Silk expertly stuck a foot between the legs of one man and sent him crashing down. He lunged for the other, but the gun held by the gangster slapped Silk across the face. It sent him reeling backward.

The thug, thick-witted and none too brave, decided to get rid of Silk first. He pointed his gun downward. His finger tightened against the trigger. At that moment he heard the rush of sound which announced the arrival of the Black Bat. Torn between the urge to exterminate his helpless victim and at the same time defend himself from an attack by the Black Bat, he lost a precious instant trying to make up his mind.

The Black Bat's gloved fist swept in a terrific blow at the gunman's neck. It was a nerve-paralyzing punch. The thug's gun went off as his finger flexed instinctively, but Silk had hastily rolled out of the path of the bullet.

The first thug was getting up, his gun aiming at the Black Bat. Silk lunged for him, and two men tumbled

furiously in the tall grass. Silk hammered home a dozen punches. At such close quarters he couldn't put much steam into them, though he did keep the thug from using his pistol again.

The Black Bat bent over. Suddenly the thug relaxed, for the muzzle of an automatic was pressed against his head. The threat was bad enough, but not nearly as terrifying as the eerie creature behind the gun.

"The Black Bat!" the thug yapped. "I give up! Don't shoot! See, I dropped my gun."

Silk picked up the weapon. At the house, hundreds of yards to the rear, there was a confusion of activity. The crooks were running toward parked cars. Before the Black Bat could make a move to stop them, they were off. He eyed his two prisoners doubtfully.

"I really don't know what to do with these gentlemen," he said.

"I know," Silk declared. "They were going to toss me off the cliff, so why not hand them some of their own brand of medicine?"

"You—you wouldn't do that! We—we were just gonna scare you, pal. We were—"

"See how they lie?" Silk said disgustedly. "What good are they to us? I say let's get rid of them."

"Unless they cooperate a bit," the Black Bat amended. "How about it, boys? Who leads your mob and what's back of it all? Don't lie, because I know enough about the case to catch you."

THE thugs stared at each other, shrugged defeatedly.

"It's Jules Andrus and—and Stringy. They pay us off. We been collecting a lot of rocks—diamonds. I dunno what happened to the stuff. We ain't seen none of it and there hasn't been a cut, either, except a century apiece a couple of times. That's all we know. Honest!"

"And where were the diamonds kept?" the Black Bat insisted. "And from whom do Stringy and Jules take

their orders? Who provides the cash to finance this business? Not your so-called bosses, because cash would stop all their activities until after they lost it at some race-track or card-game."

"We don't know. That's the truth. Nobody ever said anything about there bein' some big shot, but I guess maybe there is. Jules and Stringy were busted flat when they organized the mob. Right after that, they had dough to pay us that first century note apiece. The rocks are kept in a safe in that house back of us. We just moved in while the guy who owns it is away some place. Stringy opened the box with one of them things a doctor uses to listen to your heart."

"See that they don't try to get away," the Black Bat told Silk. "If they move, you have the right to plug them. I'm going into that house. Bring them inside after I have a few moments alone."

Keeping his gun ready, he approached the wide-open front door. There was no opposition. The crooks—like all their breed—had fled the moment one of them had spotted the Black Bat charging to attack. He looked the house over and noticed the gaping door of a wall safe. It had been cleaned out.

Silk herded the prisoners inside and the Black Bat coldly faced them again.

"These diamonds you've told me about—where did they come from? What kind of places did you rob to get them?"

"Little joints," one of the crooks answered. "Some places we got a couple of grand' worth. One joint gave up twenty grand. The cops are goin' nuts tryin' to bust the robberies. Give us a break and we'll spill everythin' we know, and we promise not to join the mob again. If we do, they'll knock us off anyhow for talkin'. We didn't know you was in on this case. Plenty of the boys will cut loose from the mob now, after they hear you're workin' against them."

"I think you'll be safer in jail," the

Black Bat said judiciously. "Lead them to the car. We'll tie them up. There's a fair-sized baggage compartment in the coupé. It ought to take care of them. If their legs hang out, we'll cover them with a blanket. Riding in a baggage compartment isn't so bad. That's how I got here. I turned into that lane, jumped and let the coupé have her head.

"When the mugs were busy closing in on the coupé, I took their keys out of the ignition, opened the trunk and then put the keys back. I just curled up, let the trunk lid down and stayed there. That was an excellent act you put on for them, my friend and aide. When Stringy plotted your finish, I was just outside the window and I heard what he said. That's how I happened to be conveniently near the edge of that cliff."

The thugs were herded back to where Silk's coupé had been thrown by the impact of that heavy chain. One tire was flat, but Silk enjoyed watching the pair of work-avoiders sweat as they put on the spare. There was other damage but not serious enough to prevent the car from being operated. The Black Bat tied up his prisoners, stuffed them into the fairly commodious rear compartment and fastened them there with more rope.

Then he and Silk headed back to town.

"You can roll right up to McGrath's garage," he ordered. "He won't hear you, unless that shot of whisky I gave him doesn't work as it should. We'll leave our friends as a sort of payment for the headache he'll have in the morning."

QUIETLY their task was accomplished, with the prisoners so tied up that they could not possibly get away nor shout for help. Then Silk and the Black Bat left McGrath's driveway and headed toward Tony Quinn's home, where they used the secret tunnel to enter.

Silk went to the phone immediately and called Carol. By the time the Black Bat had divested himself of his bullet-perforated regalia and freshened up a bit, she arrived.

Quinn put on his smoking jacket, clamped a pipe between his teeth and nodded unemotionally to her. They had worked together for a long time, but he rarely showed the actual affection he held for her. That could not be while the Black Bat fought crime and exposed himself to the bullets of gangsters. Some day he hoped to retire and let the Black Bat and Tony Quinn disappear. Then with no further reason to pretend blindness he

[Turn page]

Private Notes from Mrs. M--'s Diary



1 Suffered all day with a terrible headache. Felt dull, tired and out of sorts. Remembered that I needed a laxative and decided my headache was due to that.



2 Took an Ex-Lax tablet before going to bed. It tasted swell — just like a piece of fine chocolate.



3 Slept like a top all night. Ex-Lax worked fine this morning and didn't upset me a bit. Headache's all gone now and I feel bright as a lark.

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 next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.

10¢ and 25¢



and Carol could enjoy life as they wished. That time seemed more distant than ever just now.

Silk had drawn the window shades and Carol sat down on a foot-stool near the fireplace. She looked up at Quinn.

"Tony, what's it all about?" Silk said I was to bring over all the clippings and information on two crooks named Jules Andrus and Stringy. I've brought what I had. The rest is in your own files. Silk is getting the papers now. Are those two hoodlums connected with a five-million-dollar diamond robbery? Tony, I don't think they possess enough brains, even jointly, to plan a big job like that."

Quinn laughed wryly. "They don't. That's what makes this case so difficult. There is a genius directing their movements. He seems to be concentrating on diamonds—to get all there are, apparently. Why, I can't say. The fact that he resorted to the murder of seven people indicates the stakes are extremely big. Now let's see what we have on our two pals."

They studied the batch of clippings and notations. Jules was the cleverer of the two, with a record of some rather daring jewel robberies. But Stringy was only a hood who used brass knuckles, whose idea of fun was slipping up on a victim to surprise him with a knife in the back. But Stringy was also an organizer and a leader, pushing his men by ruthlessly playing on their fears.

"Well," Quinn mused, "Jules was taken into the fold because he probably knows diamonds pretty thoroughly and wouldn't be tempted by anything that just glitters. Stringy controls the gang needed in these raids. A good working combination, but what I need is the identity of the man who tells them when and where to commit their robberies. Carol, will you take a look in my files and bring me all the recent data on jewelry store breaks?"

Carol returned with the necessary papers. They studied them together.

"Twenty jewelry store breaks in five weeks," Quinn said thoughtfully. "Enough to make the police sit up and take notice, but not to suspect that some gang is specializing in diamonds. I notice other types of gems were taken, too, but only when they simply required picking up without loss of time or energy. Stringy carried a stethoscope around, so he probably has mastered the art of opening the average safe.

"You notice the gang hasn't tackled any of the big firms yet, where guards are employed all night and time locks and burglar alarms are in use. But if this is a concerted effort to grab all the diamonds possible, they'll invade those bigger places in due time. I wonder why they concentrate so single-mindedly on diamonds?"

CAROL smiled and shrugged her capable shoulders.

"Maybe they like the way diamonds sparkle. Or maybe it's because they're so valuable and so easily disposed of. Tony, I agree with you that there is something behind the surface—something much greater than we can estimate now. Yet how are you going to start tracking down this mystery man who heads the outfit?"

"From what those records say about Jules and Stringy, they aren't the type to open up and confess all. According to those men you and Silk captured, Jules and Stringy are the only ones who know the identity of this mystery man, and they aren't even sure about that."

Tony Quinn closed his eyes slowly.

"I know, Carol. The only suspects we have so far are Paul Hawley, who was Van der Veer's American manager, and that butler in the Van der Veer house. I'm going to question them. We don't even know what killed those seven men. Someone—a funny-looking duck with a Vandyke beard and black hair—tried to gun me out. He also threw something big into the sea. He was risking a lot to dis-

pose of that object, so identifying it would go a long way toward solving the case."

"How about divers?" Carol asked.

Quinn shook his head. "Much too deep at that point, and the object has probably been shifted around considerably by the tides. We'd better get some rest now. Head for home, beautiful. I don't want overwork and lack of sleep to give you crow's-feet." He grinned bitterly. "I have all we'll need in this family, and I'm afraid this case is going to add a few more to my unlovely countenance."

CHAPTER VII

The Death Double



EARLY the next day, Captain McGrath stopped his car in front of the morgue. He had gone there to learn the results of the autopsy on Van der Veer. Those odd burns still puzzled him and he wanted another look at the dead man's hands. The morgue's chief clerk looked up and nodded a cheery greeting that somehow seemed out of place in this home of the newly dead.

"That stiff I sent in last night—Van der Veer," McGrath said. "I want a look at him if the body is still here."

"Certainly." The clerk arose to lead the way. "I've heard that the pathologist who did the initial examination says there is no evidence to show why the man died."

McGrath followed the clerk. He didn't like morgues, even this big one, which had the latest equipment.

The clerk seized the handle of a sliding slab in a refrigeration compartment. After checking the number of it with the card in his hand, he pulled the slab out. The instant he raised the sheet, McGrath gave a startled cry.

The face revealed to him had no red

beard! It was the face of a rather old man. Instead of having a head of coal-black hair, this man was bald as an egg!

"That's not him," McGrath stated. "That's not Van der Veer. Mister you'd better do some fast checking to make sure there hasn't been a mistake."

"But that's the man who was brought in from Van der Veer's house," the clerk insisted. "I was on duty when the boys checked it in. I tied a tag on the dead man's ankle. It's there now. Nobody could get in here without being seen. What more proof do you want?"

They hurried back to the office. At McGrath's suggestion, the two attendants who had come for the body were sent in.

"Sure, the guy we put in the basket had a red beard," one said. "I remember because his hair was the blackest I've ever seen, and I never saw anybody with black hair and a red beard."

"Now listen carefully," McGrath pleaded. "You put the body of the real Van der Veer in the morgue wagon. That's a proven fact. Then you started for the morgue. Did you stop anywhere for even just a minute or two?"

The attendants looked at one another speculatively. Finally one shrugged.

"That call came after hours, Captain. We hadn't eaten since noon. We stopped at a lunch cart and had a cup of coffee."

"And lost one corpse and got another," McGrath growled. "Somebody switched bodies, you dopes! The truck you used isn't to be touched. Understand? I'm sending men over to check it for prints, even though I know we won't find any. The guy who is pulling this fancy stuff wears gloves. Meantime look that corpse over again and see if there are any identifying marks. The real Van der Veer had a bad burn on his right hand."

"Wait a minute," the chief clerk interrupted thoughtfully. "So has the corpse back there. At least I think it's the right hand. Maybe you're wrong, Captain."

McGrath marched wearily back into the refrigerator room. This time the sheet was half-removed from the body. McGrath's jaw dropped. The dead man did have a burned right hand, and the burn was exactly like the one Van der Veer had suffered.

"Holy smokes!" McGrath breathed. "Do you think that black hair could have been a wig and the red beard a fake? Maybe instead of switching bodies, those mugs just yanked off the whiskers. Listen, no matter who comes to claim Van der Veer, or even this guy who we don't know, hold him. Phone me. If necessary, wrap a chair around the guy's head. And you might put a man on guard, too, before somebody swipes the whole morgue."

McGrath reported directly to Commissioner Warner, describing in detail exactly what had happened.

"Maybe the Black Bat can figure it out," he concluded hopefully. "You know, Commissioner, I think I've been all wrong about him. He's okay, and what's more, I don't think he is Tony Quinn."

Warner smiled. He had his own opinions about that although, like McGrath, he wasn't absolutely certain. There were times when he was sure Tony Quinn and the Black Bat were the same man, but something always happened to make that supposition impossible.

Warner fished a thick file out of his drawer.

"There were two more jewelry store robberies last night, Captain. They now add up to twenty-two. The newspapers are getting big stories out of it, trying to link these with the theft of Van der Veer's five million dollars' worth of stones. I want some action on this. We can't cover every jewelry hours in town, of course, but I want you to select about thirty fairly small

stores, the kind that can be robbed easily. Post men to watch them twenty-four hours a day. An Edmund Clive of the International Diamond Syndicate was here to see me last night, and he's prepared to raise the roof if we don't do something."

McGRATH made a sour face.

"Oh, sure, one of those guys who thinks all a cop has to do is consult a ouija board and go out and collect the burglars. Let him bark, sir. We're doing the best we can."

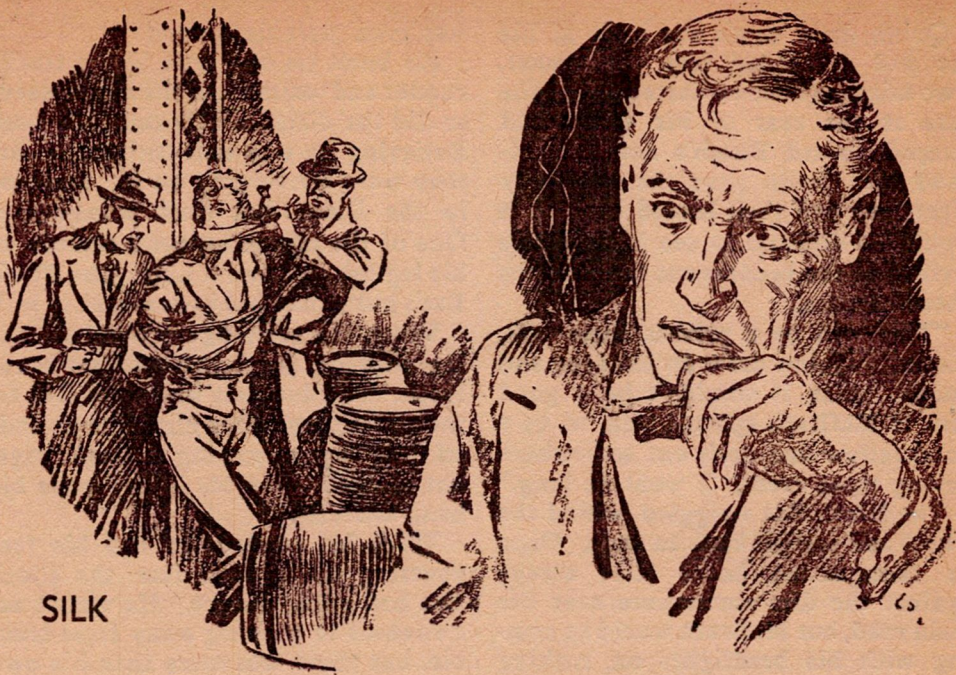
"His bite," Warner said, "happens to be worse than his bark. The man is extremely important and he wields a lot of influence. Therefore, Captain, you will put yourself and your squad on a twenty-four-hour working basis until this case has been cracked. Don't wait for the Black Bat to do it, either. That's all."

McGrath returned to his office, angry but hopeful, for the Black Bat was sure to contact him again. He was a little annoyed at Commissioner Warner's attitude, but he didn't stop to realize that Warner was also being hounded.

McGrath did what he could during the day. Examining the places that had been robbed, he marveled at the slick manner in which the crimes had been performed. The total value of the gems that had been stolen from the twenty-two establishments reached a fairly high sum, and it seemed that the game was just beginning.

McGrath went home at seven o'clock, worried because the Black Bat had not called yet. He was getting ready to prepare a meal for himself when his phone rang. He sped into the living room and answered it eagerly. The Black Bat's voice spoke softly to him.

"Things are beginning to develop, according to the latest papers, eh, Captain? We'd better have a conference—a private one. Be careful. The men behind this plot may be having you watched. Drive to the intersection



SILK

of Blake Road and Sexton Lane. Watch your speedometer. When you are exactly three-tenths of a mile beyond, you will see a side road. Take it. I'll be there waiting for you. Make certain you are not followed. Captain, the truce still goes. Remember?"

"If you were hog-tied, I wouldn't look under that doggone hood of yours," McGrath promised. "I'll be there at seven forty-five on the dot."

He hung up and felt a little better about the whole business. Perhaps the Black Bat could figure out why a substitution of bodies had taken place. McGrath had tried until his head ached. He lit the gas under a pan of water and prepared to boil four eggs—his one specialty in the culinary arts.

Whistling quietly, he walked over to the refrigerator, bent slightly to peer inside and started to open the door. It closed again with a thud. His sagging body had pushed it shut, but he didn't know that. Captain McGrath didn't know much of anything at that moment.

Two scowling men, one of whom

held a blackjack, stepped back and let his unconscious body slump to the floor. The thin man with the sap jerked a thumb toward the back door.

"Get the car as close to the house as you can. Then bring another guy in and haul this side of beef out. Snap it up. He ain't the only bozo we're goin' to smear tonight."

TONY QUINN gave Silk last-minute instructions as he donned his somber clothing and tucked the silken hood and cape into a specially prepared pocket in his coat. He slipped two automatics into their holsters and then raised the trap-door that led from the laboratory to the tunnel.

"Butch is waiting for me," he said. "I intend to make a few calls tonight, so I may need him for a fast getaway. McGrath has given his word not to trap me, but he's only one bluecoat. There are eighteen thousand others. Your job is to stall anyone who comes to see me. Carol is on deck beside her phone. If I need you, she'll call."

"Yes, sir," Silk answered, "and good luck."

Quinn drew down the brim of his hat and descended into the tunnel. Two minutes later he darted out of the gate at the rear of his estate and jumped aboard Butch's new second-hand car. Quinn gave the necessary directions and then leaned back so it would be difficult to see him. They arrived at the rendezvous ten minutes ahead of time.

"This will be a private little talk, Butch." Quinn drew on his robe and hood. "Also it wouldn't be a good idea if McGrath spotted you, so be a good fellow and drift out somewhere among those trees. I won't be long."

The Black Bat wriggled behind the wheel and settled back to wait. Once he thought he heard tires scrape against the dirt somewhere near the main road, but McGrath would be coming with his headlights on, making no attempt to keep hidden. The Black Bat, however, rolled down both windows and kept listening.

He didn't underestimate the prowess of the man who headed this mob, nor of the men who formed it. On impulse he drew one automatic and snapped off the safety. Then he opened the door quietly.

The moment he put one foot on the running board, there were two quick shots. They missed, for the Black Bat had moved a second before they reached him. They hit the side of the coupé and ricocheted off into the night. He took a single leap that carried him off the road and into the brush. The headlights of the coupé were doused, so darkness held sway for every one but the Black Bat.

His keen eyes spotted six men moving toward him, coming from all directions. Apparently they had formed a complete circle to prevent their victim from escaping. Each held a gun ready.

The Black Bat quickly estimated his chances. By shooting his way through one segment of that circle, he might get clear, but the risk was great. Staying put and shooting it out, though,

was even more dangerous.

He knelt on one knee like a track-runner and waited. As the ring closed, so did the distance between each man. Believing he was still inside the car, they were converging on it. Suddenly the Black Bat fired point-blank. One of the killers let out a screech as his leg buckled under him. The Black Bat's bullet had not been meant to kill.

When the eerie figure came streaking through the brush, bedlam burst loose. The five men who were still on their feet raced after him. The wounded thug began shooting at close range, but the pain from his injury made his hand unsteady.

With his head down and his feet covering the ground fast, the Black Bat had a fair chance. He wasn't accustomed to running away from trouble, but there was more than his own welfare to be considered. The fact that these thugs had known of the rendezvous indicated that they had overheard his phone conversation with McGrath. The detective-captain was either in their hands as a prisoner or dead.

CHAPTER VIII

Dangerous Rescue



BECAUSE he could distinguish objects in the dark, the Black Bat's flight was really remarkable. The bullets were less frequent now and wide of their mark. Abruptly two men rose up before him, holding their guns aimed and ready. At no more than a hundred feet, they couldn't miss.

The Black Bat fired from the hip and hurled himself aside. He went down with a crash. The other crooks, far to the rear, heard the commotion and doubled their speed. The two newcomers were cursing and zigzagging

to get closer. They remained huddled together, though, for they knew the reputation of the man they hunted.

Both guns were in the Black Bat's hands now, ready for action now that his only recourse was to shoot his way out. The guns blazed. Instantly both advancing thugs flopped on their bellies. The Black Bat retreated a dozen feet, veered to the left and streaked away. But the crooks were at his heels.

Suddenly his nostrils quivered. There was a swamp nearby—he could smell the characteristic odor. He kept on going until the brush thinned out to the lower shrubs that flourish near the damp ground of a marsh. Butch was somewhere about, too, probably floundering around in the darkness. Once or twice one of the crooks showed a flashlight and the Black Bat promptly fired a bullet dangerously close to the beam.

He saw the swamp, a wide area of marshland, deadly with bogs and extremely dark. He took a leap that carried him from firm ground, across the black swamp and onto a tiny island. Instantly discarding unsafe islands with his uncanny eyes, he jumped from one to another, each time landing on dry ground.

The thugs, unable to see much of anything and not daring to use flashlights, stumbled headlong into the marsh. The muck came up past their knees. They yelled curses and gave vent to their rage by firing bullets in the direction of the slight noises he made.

Deep in the marsh, the Black Bat grinned and started back. He was far more anxious to get clear of the killers and find McGrath than to fight it out with them. They were merely tools in the hands of a dangerous individual.

Before the crooks extricated themselves from the swamp, the Black Bat was nearing the lane again. He emitted a piercing whistle that was answered by the blink of his coupé's

headlights. He streaked toward the car. Butch had it rolling already. He had found that swamp, too, and countless barbed branches that had torn his clothes and flesh.

"Gosh, Boss," the giant grumbled, "when the shootin' started, I ran back, but them mugs seemed to be comin' from everywhere. I figured you knew what to do, so I just laid low. Then I saw you scrammin' and I started after you, but I got lost. Next thing I was back here, so I got in the car and waited."

"The best thing you could have done," the Black Bat said. "Let's get started."

Near the outlet of the lane he saw two big cars half-hidden in the brush. He snapped an order and Butch jammed on his brakes. The Black Bat got out and spent five precious minutes disabling the two cars. Then with Butch at the wheel, they streaked for town and Captain McGrath's house.

"I hope them mugs stumble and bust their necks," Butch growled. "I had a swell chance to smash a few heads and I muffed it. Next time—"

The Black Bat hardly heard his gigantic aide, for he was trying to figure things out. It was clear that McGrath was in trouble. His first move was to clean up that angle, then search out the logical suspects and put them through their paces. If much more time elapsed, the gang would accomplish whatever purpose they were organized for.

BUTCH braked the car to a stop near McGrath's house. The Black Bat jumped out, ran to the back of the house and drew one of his freshly loaded guns. The rear door was ajar. He entered the house cautiously.

The kitchen light still burned and a table lamp was lit in the living room near the telephone table. Detecting the odor of scorched metal, he turned toward the gas stove. A pot was glowing red-hot.

"McGrath was cooking," he mused.

"He was slugged and hauled away. They took care not to leave any traces, but they forgot that the gas was on."

The Black Bat went into the darkened dining room. The only way those crooks could have known of that rendezvous was by tapping the phone wire. But they could not tap the phone which the Black Bat had used, so they had tapped McGrath's.

The Black Bat found the cellar door and went down the dark steps quickly. He located the phone wire. When he traced it, he saw that his theory had been correct. The wire had been tapped and each conversation recorded on a small disc. He bent over the instrument. The recording needle was poised at the outer edge of the disc, indicating that the eavesdroppers had removed the one on which his conversation was impressed.

"They'll be back for this," he muttered stonily. "All I can do is wait and pray that they arrive before McGrath is murdered."

Instead of remaining in the cellar, he returned to the street, where Butch was waiting. He gave the giant orders to move well up the street. Then the Black Bat selected a dark spot behind the house from which he could watch both entrances.

Each minute seemed as long as an entire day. Time was the most important element now. Once the gang leaders knew they had failed to trap the Black Bat, they would wreak their vengeance on McGrath, yet the Black Bat could do nothing but wait.

An hour passed before he saw a car slow up. One man dropped off the running board and for a moment was out of sight. He reappeared from behind a hedge that skirted the limits of McGrath's yard and proceeded directly to the back door. After staying inside for a few moments, he carried out the recording and wire-tapping apparatus. The car had already turned around and slid to the curb as the killer ran toward the street.

The Black Bat vaulted the hedge, raced behind the houses and found Butch ready for a quick getaway.

"That sedan!" The Black Bat pointed to the dwindling tail light. "Don't lose it, Butch. A man's life depends on you!"

The trail led back to the city. Butch had his hands full in the heavy traffic, but he clung to the tail of the sedan as though his own life hung in the balance. The Black Bat had stripped off his hood and cape when they reached the city limits, and put on his wide-brimmed hat. He gave a grunt of surprise when the sedan pulled up before one of the biggest office buildings in town. Two men got out, one still cradling the wire-tapping apparatus in his arms. They disappeared into the lobby.

"Stick around," the Black Bat ordered Butch. "This is a risk that I'll have to take alone."

HE darted into the lobby. Only two elevators are in use and one of these, according to the indicator, was traveling express toward the roof. It stopped at the thirty-first floor. The Black Bat entered the other car and got out at the twenty-ninth floor, making certain that the operator had not noticed him.

He ran up the two flights of stairs to the thirty-first floor and moved silently along the deserted corridors. Most of the offices were unoccupied, but halfway down one of the halls he saw yellow light gleaming from beneath a door. He moved forward silently till he could read the letters printed in gold on the metal surface.

NORTH GERMAN RAILROADS

The Black Bat's eyes narrowed. His hunch that Nazi agents were mixed up in the five-million-dollar theft seemed to be verified. He approached the door cautiously, one hand on his gun.

The door was thick and fitted well. Ordinary ears would have detected nothing but a muffled mumble, but the



CAROL

Black Bat had no difficulty in hearing through the heavy panel. McGrath was there. His name was mentioned in a threatening manner more than once, and the Black Bat heard the thud of a fist against human flesh.

To burst open that door and shoot it out would have been as foolish as it was useless. McGrath would promptly die and there was no telling how many armed men were inside.

The Black Bat moved away from the door and began looking around. He saw a porter's closet, went to work on the lock and soon had the door open. Inside he discovered a window-washer's life-belt. Taking it, he went back toward the office and used that slender keylike bit of metal on another office two doors away.

Sheltered from possible guards, he removed his hat and put on the hood and cape. Then he buckled the window-washer's belt around his middle, opened the window and sprang to the sill. He looked down and grimaced. The street seemed miles below, but height also offered a degree of safety, for no one would be able to spot him.

He attached one strap of the belt to the window hook, gently eased himself out and thrust a foot toward the next sill. He made it with even greater liteness and ease than the men who earned their livings in this dangerous, uncomfortable way. He opened that window as far as it would go. Then he hooked the right ring of the belt, unhooked the left and swung out to gain the window of the lighted room. His foot reached the sill, but he could not swing over to it. The men inside the office would be certain to see him.

The Black Bat had to trust his life to that belt. Letting go, he dangled in free space for a moment. His heart almost stopped, until he realized the belt would hold. He reached up, took a grip on the window-sill and gradually hauled himself up. Supported by his own powerful muscles and the strength of the belt, he was able to peer into the office.

McGrath was seated in a chair. Four men hovered around him menacingly. One was Stringy, the tall, thin murder lieutenant whom the Black Bat had already observed. Two others were run-

of-the-mill gangsters, but nonetheless dangerous. The fourth was the Vandyke-bearded killer whose voice reached beyond the window.

"So you are a stubborn *Dumkopf*, eh? Perhaps more of the same treatment will bring out the truth, *ja*? Who is the Black Bat? Do you prefer to die rather than give us his name?"

MCGRATH'S lips were swollen, his face bloody, but his eyes were clear and defiant.

"Go to hell and get it over with," he muttered. "If I knew who the Black Bat was, I still wouldn't tell. You're going to murder me, anyhow. Go ahead."

The Vandyke-bearded man stepped back. One of the thugs was standing beside a desk and fingering a letter-basket. The bearded leader whirled on him and ejected a string of oaths.

"Stop it! Did I not say we leave no traces that we have been here? Now we waste no more time. Take the stupid pig out. Find an office which is not used. Put him in there and shoot him. Do it quietly. Use his coat to stop the sound."

The Black Bat slowly raised himself a little more. The window was not closed all the way. He eased it up an inch, shoved his fingers under it and waited. Everything depended on getting McGrath's eye now. What the Black Bat intended to do was one of the riskiest tricks he had ever attempted, but McGrath was doomed anyhow and should be willing to take a desperate chance.

When his hooded head was framed in the window, the Black Bat saw McGrath make an almost visible start of amazement. The other men were getting ready to perform their mission of murder. The Black Bat drew himself up even more. Supporting his weight with one hand and the aid of the life-belt, he signaled McGrath.

The detective-captain gulped when he realized what the Black Bat meant, but he was game. The Black Bat

worked the window open wider, using such careful pressure that he made no noise at all. Fortunately there was no wind to cause a draft that the killers might notice.

When he was ready, the Black Bat drew his automatic with his free hand, aimed at the wall switch. He nodded abruptly, at the same instant that his gun blasted.

The office plunged into darkness. McGrath violently shoved a killer out of his way and ducked silently to the window. The Black Bat whispered an order. McGrath felt an arm of steel around him and allowed himself to be pulled through the window.

"Steady," the Black Bat whispered. "They don't know what happened yet, but they'll turn on flashlights in a second. Keep your nerve and don't yell when I swing into space. Grab the sill of the next office as soon as we reach the end of our swing."

The Black Bat planted his feet to one side against the brick wall. He gave himself a terrific shove. The life-belt creaked in protest and for a moment he thought he had been cut in half. Desperately McGrath grabbed the other window and pulled himself through it. He stuck his head out an instant later, reached for the Black Bat's hand.

"Come on!" he whispered urgently.

"Not yet," the Black Bat replied in a low, unhurried voice.

CHAPTER IX

The Black Bat Visits



IN the offices of the North German Railroads, flashlights were cutting swaths through the darkness. When the Black Bat heard someone yell that the window was open, he shifted his gun. Dangling from the life-belt, he

tossed the weapon straight toward McGrath. It sailed through the air and directly into McGrath's hands. Swiftly the captain nodded understandingly.

Two thugs thrust their heads out of the other window. One of them yelled the Black Bat's name and snapped a shot. It went wild, for McGrath had sent a slug through his hand. Howling, the killer pulled back. McGrath kept them inside by a barrage that covered the Black Bat's retreat. The Black Bat was hauling himself up on the strap that was still attached.

"They're coming for you," he said to McGrath. "Never mind me. Cover your door."

McGrath spun around. The door leading into that office was opening, but a well placed shot closed it again promptly. Meanwhile the Black Bat had hoisted himself to the sill and swung across space to reach the German railroad office window again. It was empty now. He hooked the other belt strap, released the one at McGrath's window and pulled himself into the office.

He raced for the door, opened it a crack and saw that the Vandyke-bearded man was gone. Stringy and his two fellow-rats were cautiously edging their way toward the room in which McGrath was besieged. The Black Bat's reserve gun blasted twice. Stringy howled an oath and like three puffs of smoke in a high wind, the trio of thugs vanished.

The Black Bat was swift in pursuit, but he heard an elevator door slam shut and the whine of the motor as the cage dropped. It was a service elevator. The passenger cars were all downstairs.

McGrath stuck his head out. He was still shaky and white.

"D—did they get away?" he stammered.

"Unfortunately. We'd better get out of here, too. Those shots are certain to have attracted attention."

"Sure," McGrath said unsteadily. "I—I'd prefer the cellar. I want to get as close to the ground as possible. That dive out the window—*Whew!* I'm ten years older right now."

The Black Bat slapped him encouragingly on the shoulder.

"Nonsense. Cops go through things like that every day. After the tenth time you don't mind it at all. But we can't stand here chattering like a couple of old ladies over a pot of tea. There's work to be done. Our bearded friend—"

"Did you see him, too?" McGrath gulped. "That's the guy who heads this outfit. He's the real big shot."

McGrath took a firmer grip on his nerves as they approached the elevators. He squared his shoulders and bravely marched ahead of the Black Bat.

"I'm all right now, but I think I'd rather let those mugs gun me out than take a dive through a window again. Did you realize we were thirty-one stories above the hard sidewalk?"

There was no answer and McGrath turned his head. He stopped and gaped. The Black Bat was gone! There hadn't been a sound, yet the corridor was empty. McGrath shrugged and punched the elevator button.

In the lobby, he met four radio car patrolmen who were answering a call to investigate shots fired near the top of the building. McGrath sent them away. He took a taxi home, wondering why the Black Bat had vanished.

HE found out a couple of minutes later. As soon as he stepped into his house, the Black Bat's voice startled him.

"Sorry I couldn't accompany you home, Captain, but it would have seemed odd if you had been walking beside a man whose hood and cape identified him as the Black Bat. So I just slipped away by myself. Now we can have that delayed chat. By the way, I removed a telephone-tap-

ping apparatus from your cellar. I don't think they'll try that stunt again, but one never knows. I advise you to check the line now and then."

McGrath poured out two drinks.

"I'll do the honors this time," he said with a reminiscent grin. "When that mug socked me on the head, I thought at first it was another bang from that drink you fixed for me last night. You ought to know about Van der Veer. His body is missing. On the way to the morgue, the boys got hungry and stopped for a bite to eat. Somebody thought it was a good chance to switch bodies. But Van der Veer had a serious burn on his right hand and the corpse in the morgue has the same kind of burn on his right hand. Only Van der Veer had a lot of black hair and this guy was bald."

"Highly interesting, Captain, but the solution of the case as a whole will also solve that problem. So far, this gang has held the upper hand and we must get off the defensive. When you gave orders that the stratonliner was to be left unguarded, who could have overheard the conversation you had with Headquarters?"

"I talked to Commissioner Warner," McGrath explained. "This afternoon he told me that he had some visitors about the time I called. There was a man named Reicher, a diamond wholesaler who has lost a lot of stock that was on consignment to some of the robbed jewelry stores. Then another man named Edmund Clive came and howled bloody murder about the robberies. I think the commissioner said Clive had something to do with a diamond syndicate."

"The International Diamond Syndicate." The Black Bat nodded. "I've heard of Mr. Clive. Was your friend Hawley also where he might have known what was going on?"

"He was right in the office," McGrath grumbled. "Warner had him brought there so Clive and Reicher could have a look at him. Neither one knew him at all."

"Then we have three possibilities—Hawley, Reicher and Clive. Yet we must also consider the idea that your 'phone may have been tapped yesterday and your orders to Headquarters overheard. Although we may be going off on a wrong tangent, I still think those three men should be considered as logical suspects. Don't bother them yet. Hawley is being held for—"

"No, he's free," McGrath groaned. "He got himself a smart lawyer and Warner had to let him go. We didn't have a single thing on the guy, anyhow. There was no question in my mind but that Van der Veer—or whoever it was that died—was alive when Hawley was with me in the hallway. I wish I could figure out why the corpse was ice-cold one minute and warm the next. It doesn't make sense."

"It will," the Black Bat said calmly. "Everything will make sense when we put the finishing touches on this mob. I'm getting ideas, so I'll be on my way. Thanks for keeping your promise not to try to find out who I am. It must be rather difficult, having me at your elbow like this and not giving in to an impulse to yank this hood off my face."

"Difficult?" McGrath put down the rest of his drink and closed his weary eyes. "That's a mild word, but I keep my promises. I know Warner is laughing at me for actually working with you. I notice he doesn't give me orders not to."

McGrath sighed and opened his eyes. He was talking to himself again. That Black Bat had spread his wings and apparently soared away.

IT had not been quite as easy as that for the Black Bat to vanish. He had the ability to move noiselessly, and McGrath had given him a momentary opportunity.

He met Butch well up the street.

"We are going to visit a man named Edmund Clive," he said. "He lives



Between his eyes would be the seal of the Black Bat (Chapter V)

on Teneyke Road in one of those places that are easy to slip into."

"Do I get some action, Boss?" Butch asked hopefully. "I ain't forgettin' how I missed up back there in the woods. Let's stick around the city, huh? I ain't so good with a lot of trees and bushes around me, on account of I don't see like you do in the dark."

"No action right now, Butch. Clive represents the diamond interests and I can't see him bucking a combine like that, when he makes an excellent living out of them. That's why I'm going to call on him. He may have ideas about what this mob is up to."

The Black Bat easily entered Clive's

pretentious home. The underworld had lost a crack burglar when the Black Bat had chosen to fight instead of joining them. By dint of some quiet prowling, he located Clive's bedroom, closed the door softly behind him and drew a gun. Then he switched on a small table lamp near the bed.

Clive awoke with a startled cry. He saw the gun first and then the weird figure behind it. Clive was no fool. He understood the situation and recognized his visitor.

"So you are the Black Bat." He blinked in awe. "I've got a gun under my pillow if you'd like to get it."

"Thanks." The Black Bat pressed

the muzzle of his automatic against Clive's chest and whisked the weapon from beneath the pillow. "It doesn't pay to take chances even with men who allow their fangs to be drawn. You probably know why I am here. I think it will be to your advantage if you do some talking."

Clive swung his legs off the bed.

"I'm more than willing to. People—even high police officials—don't quite grasp the full significance of what is going on. Since the war began, diamond markets and stone-cutting establishments have been driven to all corners of the earth. In Amsterdam and Rotterdam, the enemy took over whatever gems they could find. There was a lot of loot, naturally.

"The diamond dealers, like everyone else, didn't believe a blitzkrieg really moved like lightning. So diamonds which would normally have been placed on the market are now being used either on machinist's tools for getting out war supplies, or the Nazis are holding them for use in international trade. They are as good as gold, you know."

"I know," the Black Bat answered. "Then you believe that the loss of Van der Veer's five million dollars' worth of gems and the subsequent theft of other stones will affect the diamond market?"

"It already has." Clive started to get up, but a glance at the gun decided him to relax again. "You see, there is also war in Africa, where almost all the best gems are mined. The operators of the mines are taking no chances on continuing work and then having the stones pass into the hands of an enemy. The world-wide diamond market is deliberately limited to keep prices where they belong. The loss of several million dollars' worth of stones will raise the general price per carat."

DID you know Mr. Van der Veer?" The Black Bat asked abruptly.

"Of course. Van der Veer was a shrewd buyer and seller. His business went to pot in Amsterdam, but he saw the end coming and hid his stones before he fled the country. I helped him come to the United States. He confided that he would have his fortune in diamonds shipped here by a chartered plane, just as he did do."

"Then you are positive that it was the real Van der Veer who came to New York?"

"As sure as I am of my own identity. In fact, I called on him only a couple of hours before he was murdered. Why, you couldn't mistake the man. He had an absolutely singular appearance and personality. Besides, there isn't another one voice like his in the world. The man didn't speak. He roared."

"One more thing, Mr. Clive. Yesterday evening you visited Commissioner Warner. While you were in his office, he received a 'phone call. He gave certain orders that Van der Veer's chartered plane was to be unguarded. Did you hear those orders?"

"Yes. I had heard that something happened at the plane. I'm aware that I was in a position to realize what a great opportunity there was to visit the plane secretly. However, I did not do so. Have you considered Mr. Reicher as a possible suspect? He really is a diamond merchant, but he is also a Nazi secret agent. He is connected with the offices of the North German Railroads, which is nothing more than a spy organization. Who would want to travel in Germany today?"

"Then my work in stopping these thieves also acts to your advantage, and the interests you serve," the Black Bat said. "Therefore you should have no objection to keeping my visit a strict secret. You've been very helpful. I'll find out about Mr. Reicher."

"I hope you will be even more helpful," Clive declared. "It's not exaggeration to say that if a few more large shipments of stones vanish and

the number of domestic diamond thefts increase, there will be an actual panic in the diamond market. It doesn't take much to upset the equilibrium of our type of business. If you need my help, I'll be glad to have you—er—drop in like this any time, even though it's not benefiting my heart much."

The Black Bat stepped back and extinguished the bed lamp by the simple expedient of pulling the cord out of the wall socket. In the darkness he silently faded away.

Edmund Clive remained seated on the edge of the bed, slowly counting the seconds. When he was positive that the Black Bat had disappeared, he reached for his telephone and dialed a number. His voice was a whisper when the connection was completed.

"Mankensen? Listen carefully. The Black Bat was just here. He may know more than he indicated and we must watch our step. What we intend doing happens to be our personal affair and we want no interference. Is that quite clear?"

"Quite, sir," Mankensen replied.

He was just as respectful as when his master, Van der Veer, had been alive. Mankensen was, above all else, a good butler.

CHAPTER X

No Way Out



had prophesied. If he failed to accomplish his purpose— He shuddered at the consequences. The regime he served tolerated no failures.

FRITZ REICHER was a shrewd man. Only those gifted with a high degree of slyness are chosen for work as Nazi agents. He was worried, too. Things were definitely not going the way he

Reicher's florid face was suffused in wrath as he crumpled a message into a tight ball and dropped it into his ash-tray. He applied the flame of his lighter to the thin paper and watched it burn. Then he put out the light and stamped off to bed.

As he disappeared from the room, another figure came out of the darkness. The gently blowing curtains before one window indicated how entrance had been effected.

The Black Bat sat down behind Reicher's desk and quietly opened the drawers. They held nothing of any consequence. Reicher was too clever to leave incriminating papers about. But the ashes of that message intrigued the Black Bat. He carefully slid a piece of paper over the ash-tray, held it there with his fingers and picked up ash-tray and all.

Five minutes later he was in the car beside Butch.

"Careful now," he warned. "I'm carrying something so fragile that a breath would destroy it. We'll go back later and see what Van der Veer's house has to offer in the way of clues."

Silk and Carol were eagerly waiting for word from the Black Bat. Carol came over immediately to find him out of his robe and hood and engaged in setting up an infra-red apparatus and a high-speed camera.

"These ashes," he explained, "are what is left of a message which the estimable *Herr* Reicher burned. I couldn't stop him from doing it, but I did notice that the contents of the message displeased him. In fact, he nearly had a tantrum. I'd like to find out what upset him so much. Ink, pencil or typewriter-ribbon marks can be distinguished with infra-red because they absorb the ray varyingly."

As Carol handled the shutter of the camera, Tony Quinn kept rotating the ash-tray slowly, so every portion of the charred paper would be photographed. He left the developing of the prints to Silk and ate a hasty lunch with Carol.

Before they got up, Silk's work was finished. They all bent over the photographs, examining the faint tracery of handwriting.

"From what I gather," Tony Quinn said, "this message reached the United States by short-wave radio from Amsterdam. It was then written and passed on to Reicher. It seems to be concerned with the departure of Van der Veer's chartered strato-liner for the United States. See those three words? They are in German and they mean 'diamonds definitely aboard'."

"That proves Reicher has been checking up, which seems to eliminate him as a suspect to the actual robbery and murders done in the plane. You note I say 'seem,' because we haven't got the entire message. It's enough to involve Reicher, though."

"The nerve of them!" Carol cried. "Following those diamonds halfway around the world. Tony, do you think that Reicher is after those stones and their theft prevented him from carrying out certain plans?"

"Possibly." Quinn nodded slowly. "If he had the gems, he wouldn't be worried about them any longer. Carol, in the morning I want you to investigate a person named Edmund Clive. On the surface he appears to be above board in all his affairs, but it would be a man with his specialized knowledge to head this diamond stealing outfit. Check on his friends, his financial affairs and how he spends his spare time. You'll find facts about him in the files."

"Silk, you stay here. Butch and I are going out to visit Van der Veer's house. Maybe we'll run into his ghost. Oh, yes. Butch, take that camera along. Perhaps we can set a little trap for our ghost."

GETTING into Van der Veer's home would be a more difficult task for the Black Bat than entering Clive's house. Two men were inside and both were bound to be highly nervous after what had happened.

The house was in darkness, which the Black Bat fully appreciated. He went to work on a window, succeeded in moving the latch away and raising the frame silently.

As he slipped into the house, he realized that he was in the same room where Van der Veer had been murdered. He placed the camera on the floor behind a chair and looked around. Fingerprint powder covered everything. Apparently Van der Veer's butler was slipping a bit.

The Black Bat moved out into the hallway and mentally visualized Captain McGrath's actions just before the body was found. Suddenly he drew back into the shadows of a far corner. His keen ears had caught the sound of several feet descending the stairs.

Before the hall lights were snapped on, he retreated to a window. He stepped behind the thick drapes, making sure they reached the floor so his feet would not be exposed. His hand darted toward the gun on his left hip. Jules Andrus, the squat jewelry thief, walked into the murder room. At his side strode the Vandyke-bearded, tousle-haired leader of the killers.

The Black Bat edged out of his hiding place, reached the door and took a quick look inside the room. The murder leader had moved the ornamental fireplace mantel aside. It seemed to work on hidden runners. When the gleaming surface of a wall safe was exposed, he casually manipulated the dial, as though he had done it quite often in the past. He removed something from his pocket, unwrapped it and let the paper fall to the floor. Putting the object in the safe, he closed the door and slid the mantel back in place.

"Nice work," he said in a thick, restrained voice. "A pleasant evening all around. Now see that matters in the closet are working right."

Jules nodded. He walked through the hall without noticing a deeper shadow in the corner of the dark corridor. He stepped up to a closet door,

put his ear against the panel and grinned with satisfaction. There was a medium-sized table against the wall just opposite that door. A long cloth was draped over it, reaching almost to the floor. Jules opened a cigarette box that stood on the table, took out a cigarette and lit it. Then he returned to the room where the bearded man waited.

The Black Bat followed soundlessly almost at his heels. Here was a chance to find out the identity of the ring-leader, an opportunity that might never come again. But he changed his mind abruptly. A car had pulled into the driveway beside the house. At the same moment, someone upstairs called down a warning.

"I think it's the boys, Boss. Want me to come down and let them in?"

The Black Bat darted toward the cellar door, opened it quietly and stood motionless on the stairway landing. The arrival of Jules Andrus' gang changed his plans. Now if he tried to corner the bearded man, he might not succeed. It was better to lie low and wait for developments.

HE heard Stringy's rasping voice and the pounding of many feet in the hallway. The bearded man's thick voice gave instructions.

"Jules, you will have one of your men stay by the door. The Black Bat is abroad tonight and it would not be well if he came at this time. The rest of you come with me. Not in the

study. The stupid police have left fingerprint powder over everything and we must not leave clues."

The voice was muffled a bit after that, indicating that the leader of the gang had led them to some room farther down the hall. Yet a few words were still audible to the Black Bat's superhumanly sensitive ears.

"The Continental Gem Shop—good, very good. Thirty thousand dollars—best haul yet. Now I have plans—easy to get. Mark Freiber and Company next—later on—big job—More gems than you ever saw."

The Black Bat fought down an impulse to take a chance of slipping into the hallway despite the guard who had been posted at the front door. But the risk was too great. Stringy's men were nervous and ready to shoot. Reluctantly the Black Bat stayed where he was, until he heard them shuffling out into the hall. Then the leader spoke again.

"Never mind what is in the closet now. I will see to it later. We have no time to lose. I—"

A sudden bellow from the study made the Black Bat start. There was a concerted rush of feet toward the room. He held his breath, hoping though he knew there was no hope.

"It's a camera hidden back of a chair!" Jules shouted. "How could anybody take pictures—"

"Fool!" the bearded man howled. "It was placed there in a hurry. Take

[Turn page]



care of the one upstairs quickly. The rest of you search the house, shoot anyone you find. Jules, your men take the second floor. Stringy, the first floor and the cellar."

Swiftly the Black Bat slipped down the stairs. Any one of the cellar windows or the door would offer a ready exit if things got too hot. But he did not intend to leave so soon. Something might break that would let him lay hands on the cunning supervisor of theft and murder.

As his eyes penetrated the gloom of the cellar, he groaned. Van der Veer had apparently used the cellar as a workshop for cutting diamonds. The small windows were heavily barred and the door was fashioned of steel and securely locked. Given time, the Black Bat could have opened that lock.

But even before he could examine it, he heard the killers running to search the cellar.

He raced toward the farther and darker end of the basement. There was a long workbench set against the wall, with several vises attached to it. The Black Bat realized that he was trapped, that one of the searchers would be certain to spot him and shout an alarm to the others. They would turn on the lights first of all, which would rob the Black Bat of the advantage of darkness.

DRAWING his reserve automatic, he hastily clamped it in the vise near a corner of the bench. Then he picked up the spool of fine wire he had seen while examining the place. He fastened one end of the wire around the trigger of the gun, unrolled the rest of it, passing the wire around a metal supporting post until he was just behind the cellar stairway.

He dropped the spool. Rushing over to the meter and fuse-box, he grabbed the insulated cable that led in from the street. Just as the door opened upstairs, he yanked the cable, pulling it free.

Instantly every light in the house went out.

"We heard a noise!" one of the thugs at the head of the cellar stairs yelled. "It came from down here. Somebody give me a flashlight!"

"Nuts," Stringy growled. "We ain't got no lights with us. Go on down. What are you scared of? It ain't no army of cops waiting."

UNSTEADY footsteps announced the fact that a couple of thugs were warily entering the blackness of the cellar. One of them scraped a match and held it high. Then his hand was afflicted with sudden palsy and the light went out.

"It's the Black Bat!" he yowled. "He's in a corner and he's got a gun. Lemme outa here!"

"Stay where you are," Stringy called back. "If he's down there, we've got him. Shoot at any sound—"

A terrific explosion in the cellar interrupted him just as he was calling the rest of the men for help. Stringy shouted encouragement.

"That's the stuff, boys! Blast him out!"

"That—that wasn't our guns," one of the thugs quavered. "A bullet just kissed my ear. I gotta get outa here."

But Jules and all the rest of the thugs were coming down the cellar stairs. From the vicinity of the workbench, an automatic blazed flame and death.

One crook yelped in pain and clapped a hand to his side.

The shot drew a fusillade from the gangsters. Jules and Stringy were trying to take command at the same time.

"Rush him!" Jules yelled.

"And be knocked off?" Stringy argued. "That guy ducks bullets. Empty your guns at him, boys. Blast every inch of the cellar."

Though they disagreed on tactics, Jules and Stringy both realized the advisability of keeping well behind their men.

CHAPTER XI

Picture of a Ghost

WHILE the gunmen knew they were facing only one man, they were far from eager to engage in battle. More than anyone else, they feared the Black Bat. All they could do was shoot fast and furiously. No less than fifty slugs smashed against the further wall of the basement.

"Okay!" Jules shouted. "See what's left of him."

The group moved forward cautiously. There was a jet of flame, a deafening explosion in the close air, and they flopped hastily. Even Jules was astonished by this proof of the Black Bat's charmed life. The horrified men pumped more lead in the direction of the shot. When Jules shouted for silence, they stopped shooting. This time no defiant blaze of lead answered. Yelling triumphantly everyone surged forward. The Black Bat ran up the staircase to the first floor.

Two thoughts were predominant in his mind. All this gunfire was bound to draw the police in droves. The bearded man had not been among those in the basement. Therefore he was probably upstairs.

The Black Bat took the steps three at a time, veered left at the second floor landing and slowed down. There were six or seven rooms and all the doors were shut. He could not afford to waste time. If the police surrounded the place, he would be in a bad fix. His truce was only with Captain McGrath.

He heard a window suddenly being shoved open. The sound came from one of the rooms down the hall. He sprinted toward it, found the door locked from inside and threw himself

against it with all his weight and muscle. It required a full minute before the strong panels splintered.

Gun poised, he rushed in. There was a rope made of blankets and sheets hanging over the sill. He looked out and saw a man running frenziedly toward the rear of the house. The Black Bat aimed and yanked the trigger. The fleeing man threw up both hands, tripped and fell. But he sprang up almost instantly. Though his mad run became a slow limp, he was soon out of sight.

The Black Bat started to turn away from the window, but dodged back again. From the cellar stairs at the rear of the house came Jules, Stringy and the rest of the men. They had all had enough and probably knew the police would descend on the place promptly. Somehow one of them had a key to that steel door.

The Black Bat left the room without trying to pick off any of the men. Vandyke was legitimate prey, but the others were only plain and fancy gangsters. They would keep.

He raced back into the hallway. The closet door downstairs intrigued him. Vandyke had said he was going to attend to it himself, so it must contain something of vital importance. The Black Bat did take time to open bedroom doors on his way along the upper floor, though. He flung one open, darted into the room and stepped up to a bed.

There was a man lying beneath the sheets. The Black Bat shook him without getting a response. He whipped off the covers, exposed a dead man dressed in the livery of a butler. The right hand, lying across his stomach, was swollen and seared. The Black Bat picked it up by the wrist. The flesh was ice-cold. The left hand showed more burns.

How could a man be burned so severely and still be as cold as that? His limbs were flexible, too, indicating that the chill of the skin had not yet penetrated the entire body.

The Black Bat went back to his task of searching the various rooms, keeping his ears cocked for the first whine of a police siren. The last room before the staircase revealed another man, lying on the floor. His arms and legs were so tightly bound that the skin was beginning to swell around the ropes. His forehead was smeared with blood and he was unconscious. His pulse was good, however.

The Black Bat knelt beside him. He had never seen Paul Hawley, but he had a reasonably good idea that this was Van der Veer's American manager.

ABRUPTLY a siren howled. The Black Bat raced out, dashed swiftly down the steps and paused in front of the closet which interested him so much. The door was slightly ajar. He flung it wide. Despite the darkness, even the Black Bat's eyes could not penetrate its mystery. A few clothes hung on hangers, several pair of shoes were on the floor and that was all. If this closet contained a secret, it was a well hidden one.

Brakes squealed out in front to the accompaniment of a dying siren. The Black Bat fled to the back of the house, went through the exit like a shot and disappeared in the gloom. He selected a good spot from which he could observe the house without being seen.

Flashlights slashed the darkness. Other police cars howled up. He heard excited shouts when the dead man and the trussed-up manager were found. Then a larger car came to a stop and a man got out. As he ran across the path of the headlights, the Black Bat recognized him. It was Captain McGrath.

He could hear the captain giving orders a few minutes later. Men were dispatched to search the grounds. The Black Bat retired until he saw that McGrath was going to take part in the search himself.

The doughty detective-captain had

trembled in fear when he heard there was a dead man in the house. His relief was so obvious when he identified the corpse that two or three patrolmen looked at him suspiciously.

McGrath headed to the left and the Black Bat went to meet him. As McGrath passed by a lilac bush, he felt a tap on his shoulder. He whirled, gun ready. Then he lowered the weapon and expelled a deep breath.

"I thought we'd find what was left of you some place out here. What happened in there? Hawley is a mess. I've sent for an ambulance already. Can't wake him up. Mankensen, the butler, is dead. Stone-cold, too. Must have been dead a long time."

"Van der Veer was also cold," the Black Bat reminded him. "I don't know how or why they killed him. There was no time to make an examination except to see that his hand was burned. Did you notice it? Was that burn similar to the one on the corpse you identified as Van der Veer and the other you noticed on the substituted body?"

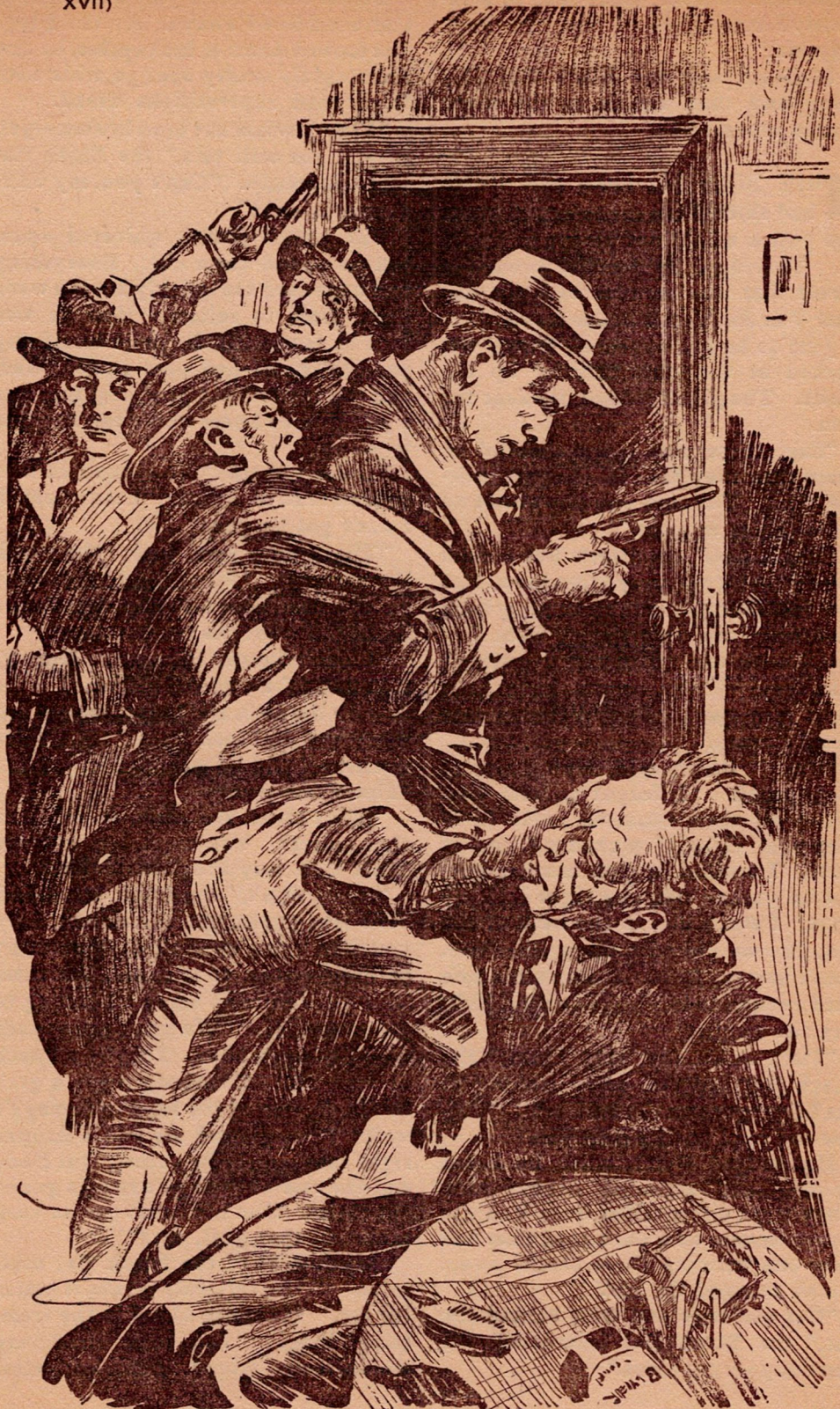
McGrath nodded. "Exactly the same. They roast 'em and freeze 'em at the same time. By the looks of the cellar, they must have rubbed out about a hundred guys. The wall looks like an execution squad had used it for a year or more."

The Black Bat laughed softly.

"Those bullets were meant for me, only I was the little man who wasn't there. I simply fastened one of my guns in a vise, hooked a long wire to the trigger and fired it from a safe distance. Elementary but efficient, Captain. Now do this for me. In the living room, your men may find a camera behind one of the chairs. Don't touch it. There's a clothes-closet in the hall, also. Leave it strictly alone. Don't ask me why. Just do it.

"Now I'll be on my way. Oh, yes. You might conclude your investigation as soon as possible and lock the place up. Don't leave a guard. Our Vandyke-bearded pal plans to return,

The thugs leaped in,
grabbed Butch's arms
from behind (Chapter
XVII)



and when he does, there will be a reception committee of one. So long, Captain."

McGrath saw the Black Bat step away and then vanish as the night closed around him.

THE Black Bat knew that Butch had shifted the car to a spot where the police would not be apt to notice it. Therefore he headed toward a street that was parallel with the one that Van der Veer's house faced.

Just as he had expected, Butch was parked at the curb halfway up the block. The giant opened the door for him.

"Say, there was more shootin' in there than they have in gangster movies, Boss. You sure you don't have no bullet holes in you?"

"Not a one," the Black Bat stated. "We'd better get away from here. Not too far, though. We're coming back here soon, and this time I want you along with me. Too bad I couldn't take you. There would have been some rare sport. I— Wait! I just heard a moan."

"Yeah," Butch said, trying not to look proud. "I forgot to tell you. When all them buzzards come flyin' outa that cellar, I picked off one of them. I wanted to grab another guy, but he pushed this one right into my arms. I stuck him in the back of the bus, like we did with them other two. Don't worry, Boss. I didn't hit him hard enough to kill him outright. He'll live for awhile."

"Turn down that side street," the Black Bat ordered, after looking at the limp figure on the back seat. "Follow the road until I stop you."

He nudged Butch when he heard gasping and groaning behind him. They were a few miles from Van der Veer's house, on a dark road that had only one building three blocks away. Butch stopped the car.

"Get out here and wait behind the car," the Black Bat instructed. "I can't expose my aides."

Butch did himself just as the gangster shuddered awake. As the Black Bat looked down at his captive, he saw the stupidly crafty eyes go wide with fright and superstitious dread.

"Your jaw has not been broken—yet, so you can still talk," the Black Bat said ominously. "Can't you, my murderous friend?"

The thug's mouth quivered open, but no sound came out. Everything had happened too quickly for his weak little brain to follow. Now he was face to face with the most terrifying personality he had ever encountered, and the hard object prodding him was a gun that he knew would not hesitate to go off.

"D-don't shoot!" he yammered in a sudden rush of words. "I ain't heeled. I ain't got no gun!"

"That's your good luck," the Black Bat retorted. "What was in the closet on the first floor of Van der Veer's house? I want the truth, weasel."

"I don't know. Honest! Nobody said nothin' about the closet. I come in with the mob, and before we get set, there was the Black Bat—" His voice trailed off and he amended in horror: "There was you."

"What about the plans to rob jewelry stores? You can't tell me you don't know anything about that."

"But I don't," the killer chattered. "We was gonna get our orders, only you didn't give us no time. I wouldn't be here, either, if it wasn't for them wise guys Stringy hired. I belong to Jules' mob, see? We don't work much with Stringy's boys. They're a bunch of saps, see! Somebody made a grab for Dodo, one of the boys in Stringy's mob. Dodo shoved me and I flopped right into somebody's arms. But Dodo and the rest of Stringy's mob is gonna get theirs. Our boys ain't gonna keep takin' all that guff, see?"

"Mutiny, eh?" the Black Bat muttered. "That certainly makes it easier for me." He spoke aloud to the trembling thug. "You look tired, my white-livered friend. I think it's time

for you to go back to sleep."

Almost gently he tapped the killer on the skull with the butt of his gun. So expert was he that he knew within three minutes either way how long the thug would remain unconscious. At the muffled sound, Butch reappeared.

"He's sleepin' like a baby, ain't he, Boss? Want me to drop him in the gutter?"

"No," the Black Bat said. "Put him in your lap. I'll take the wheel. We can't let Captain McGrath rush out here for nothing. I'll drive by Van der Veer's house. If there are no police in sight, stuff this object into McGrath's car."

SILENTLY McGrath watched the medical examiner replace his instruments in a kit and followed the morgue men as they completed their grim task. Then he cleared the place, made sure the camera was still behind the chair and locked the house. Everything was just as the Black Bat had asked.

McGrath hurried out to his car, opened the door. His Christmas present almost fell out at his feet. McGrath shoved the unconscious man back into the car, spotted a white card fastened to a button of the coat and read it.

LOOK WHAT I FOUND

That was the message, but the signature was a small sticker in the form of a bat with its wings outspread.

"Another punk," McGrath growled. "All he'll know is he's innocent. They're all innocent. We send hundreds of innocent guys to prison and to the chair every year. It's sad."

"You say something, Cap?" a sergeant queried. "Hey, where'd that rat come from?"

"He's a gift from the Black Bat," McGrath snapped. "Eleven of you dumb clucks here and one man gets us a prisoner when none of you even see a shadow. Beat it!"

CHAPTER XII

The Blind Can Only Listen



PARKED in a safe place, the Black Bat waited. Soon he saw the police cars leave the vicinity of the house. When he was sure all had left, he drove back. This time he left the coupé two blocks away. The Black Bat proceeded to the house through neighboring yards.

When Butch sauntered onto the front porch, the door was open. He looked around and entered.

"We'll set up our camera and then wait," the Black Bat said. "If our friend comes back himself, or sends someone else, we'll at least get a picture of him."

He placed the camera on a low shelf of the small table directly in front of the closet door. By cutting a tiny slit in the cloth which was draped far enough down to conceal the camera, he created an excellent little trap. The lens of the camera could catch anything that approached the door. He opened the shutter. In the inky darkness of the hall, the film would catch nothing until someone moved in front of it.

From his pocket the Black Bat removed several small devices. He hooked these up. Now if that closet door were opened more than two inches, there would be an electrical connection between two small dry-cell batteries and a tiny mound of flashlight powder. It would snap the picture of any intruder and at the same time warn the Black Bat of the prowler's presence.

"We'll go into another room and wait," he told Butch. "Follow me. I know the layout."

Butch sank into an easy chair and sighed luxuriously.

"This is the life, Boss. If we gotta

wait for somebody, it's nice to have a soft chair."

"Isn't it," the Black Bat agreed. "That's the chair Van der Veer was found dead in. See that nothing like that happens to you."

Butch came out of it in one jump. He stumbled against the desk and sat down more carefully in a straight-backed chair. Comfort was comfort, but he wasn't flirting with any kind of death that first froze a man and then burned him.

Butch dozed the time away, but the Black Bat was alert every second. Finally he looked at his watch. In half an hour it would be dawn, an unhealthy time for bats. He shook Butch.

"Nothing doing, I'm afraid. Vandyke either is too wary to return or I winged him better than I thought. Bring the car around while I gather up our apparatus."

The Black Bat closed the shutter. As he turned to pick up the flashlight apparatus, he suddenly frowned. The closet door was open a fraction of an inch—not enough to set off the trap, but open just the same. He looked inside. Everything was just as he had seen it after the battle. He shrugged. Perhaps the door had not been closed tightly.

They reached the gate of Tony Quinn's estate just as the sky became gray. Butch parked the car near his boarding house and went to bed. When the Black Bat entered the house via the tunnel, Silk was almost a nervous wreck.

"There was a late news bulletin, about two A.M. It said the police were answering an alarm at Van der Veer's house. There was shooting there. I thought maybe, when you didn't come back, that you had found yourself at the wrong end of a gun at last. The station went off the air right after that broadcast, so all I could do was sit up and hope."

The black clothing came off and Tony Quinn smiled at Silk.

"When anything happens to me, you won't have to wait four hours to find out. Put away the camera and the other stuff."

"Didn't you get a picture, sir? Isn't there anything for me to develop?"

Quinn thought of that partially open door.

"You can try. It's probably a waste of time, but you never can tell. I'll be getting a little rest while you do it."

TWENTY minutes later Silk entered the kitchen, holding a dripping print in his hand.

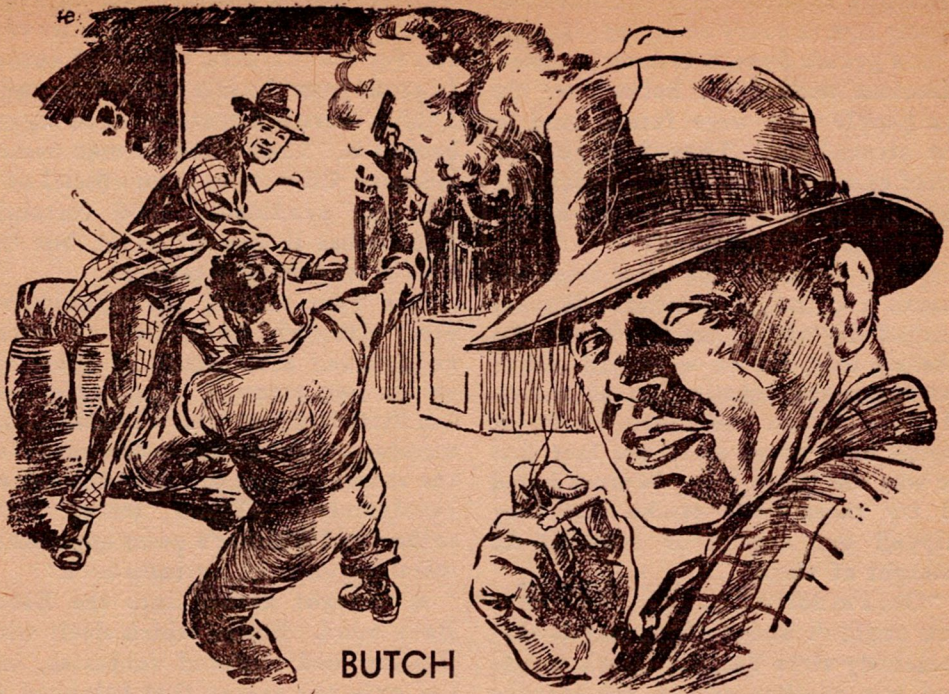
"You did get something, sir! Darned if I know what it is, though. Looks almost like a ghost."

Quinn gazed at the print and gasped. In the darkness, something *had* materialized. A wraithlike object seemed to be climbing toward the ceiling. If a ghost had ever been photographed, this was it. Quinn felt an odd, prickling sensation at the nape of his neck. Van der Veer was dead. The butler had been murdered. The house was a veritable domicile of death and now it had produced a ghost.

He looked closer. That wraith seemed to be coming from beneath the closet door. Did ghosts open doors when they wished their freedom? Nothing in the closet had been disturbed. Nothing which could have formed this weird apparition was there. Where had it come from? Was this what Vandyke intended to return to the house to get?

"Scramble about five eggs for me," Quinn said slowly. "Ghosts give me an appetite. And coffee, Silk. Lots of it. I'll be double damned if I know what this thing is or where it came from. But thinking about it can't seem to ruin my appetite."

In the middle of the afternoon that same day, Tony Quinn tapped his cane inquisitively along the paths that led through his estate. His eyes were dead-looking, his step faltering. Once he almost slipped and fell, and only



BUTCH

Silk's quick rush to the rescue saved him. Quinn didn't have to act this part. He knew exactly how it felt to stumble that way. Those many months of blindness would never be forgotten.

A car pulled up in front of his house. Silk whispered a word of warning and hurried to receive the visitor. It was Commissioner Warner. Quinn turned as he heard him approach and extended one hand a little to Warner's left.

"I'm glad to see you, Commissioner," he said warmly. "Always glad when you drop in. Silk and I have been planning the way our garden will look next year. I can't see the flowers, but I can smell them."

Warner shook Quinn's hand, took his arm and piloted him to a bench in one of the garden arbors.

"You're an amazing man, Tony. Nobody mentioned a word about my identity and yet you called me by name. Sometimes I wonder if McGrath's hunch isn't right."

Quinn smiled and fumbled in his pocket for a pipe. When he had it

going well, he said:

"There are certain recompenses for the loss of one's sight, Commissioner. I've learned to recognize steps. I could identify yours anywhere. You walk lightly and fast. McGrath, though, advertises his career. Did you know he paid me a visit the other day? He insisted that I was the Black Bat and even went so far as to describe an interesting case which had him stumped. I never heard him quite so worried."

"He found the Black Bat," Warner said. "Oddly enough, while he was here trying to convince you that you were the Black Bat, that friendly enemy of the police was in McGrath's own house, waiting for him. The case has progressed, Tony, though we're nowhere near the solution of it. On the contrary, we're in deeper than before. There has been another killing. Van der Veer's butler was found dead last night."

QUINN puffed in silence for a few moments.

"Sounds almost like one of those old

stories in which a house is cursed and ghosts lurk in every nook and cranny."

"It's got me down," Warner groaned. "Doctors worked for hours over the six people who were found dead in the strato-liner. They just got finished examining the corpse which was substituted for Van der Veer's body."

"Corpse? Substituted?"

Quinn removed the pipe from his mouth and looked puzzled. Warner flushed slightly. That had been a deliberate lead, for no word had leaked out about the substitution of bodies. If Tony Quinn had fallen for it, he would have given away the fact that he was the Black Bat. Warner hated to try these little tricks, but they slipped out almost as soon as he thought of them.

"Oh, I'm sorry," he said. "Of course you couldn't know. The fact is that somebody stole Van der Veer's corpse and put another one in the morgue wagon. What makes it so difficult is that Van der Veer and this new body both had serious burns on the palms of their right hands. Now the butler also had a similar burn. Eight perfectly good specimens for autopsy, and the doctors found no trace of poison, no clues which indicated violence. All they've discovered is that the blood seems to lack oxygen."

"One doctor reported it must be a case of strangulation, but how can a man be choked to death without a mark on his throat? Smothered, perhaps, but doubtful. Men struggle when they die that way and inflict bruises upon themselves. Not one of the learned doctors, pathologists or toxicologists can offer a single theory. Examinations of the burned hands show nothing significant."

"How I wish I could get my sight back, my former position as district attorney, and wade into a case like that!" Quinn said fervently. "But then a man must be satisfied with his lot, I suppose. Aren't there any suspects at all, Commissioner?"

"Well, yes. We've had Hawley—

Van der Veer's manager—in for questioning. But he seems to have no reason for the murders, except of course to profit from the sale of the diamonds. I think there is something even bigger behind it. Then there's a man named Edmund Clive, who is an official of a diamond syndicate. He'd certainly know what it was all about, but the man is surprisingly reticent.

"He even resents our questioning him, although he shows up often enough and asks plenty of questions on his own account. Another person—a Fritz Reicher, who wholesales diamonds—claims to have lost many of the stones he sent to various stores on consignment. These stores were robbed and Reicher's gems apparently were not covered by insurance."

A thought flashed into the Black Bat's mind. Stores which dealt with Reicher had suffered robberies, but not only the stones that belonged to Reicher had been taken. There would have been others, too. Reicher or his salesmen might easily have examined these stores and planned the breaks.

"I'VE been following the newspapers closely," Tony Quinn said. "Silk reads them to me every evening and morning. Crime news fascinates me, as it always has. I noticed this morning that there was a small item concerning Van der Veer's secretary or manager. Seems he was nearly killed."

"He was attacked," Warner said. "Darned near had a bad skull fracture. McGrath and I talked to him after he regained consciousness, which wasn't until early this morning. We learned nothing at all. Hawley was the American manager for Van der Veer. He simply insisted that he was in the house with the butler. Someone slipped up behind him and struck him on the head. Later he regained consciousness and heard the butler moaning. Two men he couldn't see struck him again. The next thing he knew, there were nurses and doctors bend-

ing over him looking anxious."

"The killer's mob certainly works well," Quinn said thoughtfully. "They seemed to make no slips at all. You know, I'm very grateful for your visits, Commissioner. When you come calling and tell me about these cases, it gives me something to think about. The days and nights are pretty long and dull for a blind man."

Warner put a comforting hand on Quinn's knee.

"Perhaps there is a reason why I tell you these things, Tony. Often in the past you've mulled over details of various cases and reached some astonishing deductions. The newspapers have been fairly explicit and I've told you everything else we know. See if you can determine why these men concentrate on diamonds. They're raiding jewelry store after jewelry store, robbing diamond-cutting establishments. I've tried to find out and can't.

"Reicher, for instance, is well up on the diamond market, yet he can offer no suggestion. Neither can Clive. Above all people, he should know, being a member of the international gem combine. Think it all over, Tony. I'll drop around in a couple of days and find out if that keen mind of yours has accomplished anything. I hope to heaven it has. Well, there's always work for the police commissioner. Have to run along. Can I help you back to the house?"

Quinn smiled and shook his head.

"I'm inside too much. I like sitting out here. There are more sounds and the air is nicer. Drop in again just as soon as you're able. Sometimes I even enjoy having McGrath call and accuse me of being the Black Bat. Anything is welcome if it can break the monotony."

Quinn remained in the garden house, staring straight ahead and slowly tapping his cane between his feet. He stayed there for ten minutes after Warner's car pulled away. Then he hesitantly walked back along the path in the direction of the house.

Silk came out to meet him.

"Carol and Butch are coming over, sir. I notified them as you instructed. I hope you'll have something for me to do—something with a little excitement. But no quarries, if you don't mind."

"I've called this meeting to arrange the details of our attack against Vandyke, Jules, Stringy and the rest of this vicious mob. They've had the upper hand too long. It's about time we struck a few blows. Pull down the shades in the study so I can enter the lab. Be sure all the door are locked and then join me there."

CHAPTER XIII

Plan of Attack



QUINN kept the point of his cane probing around as he threaded his way between furniture. But after the window shades were drawn, he dropped the pose of a blind man, walked quickly over to the wall. Quickly he opened the narrow, hidden door which led into the laboratory meeting place of the Black Bat's little clique. He smiled warmly at Carol, nodded to Butch and they sat down for Silk to put in an appearance.

"There are a number of peculiar things about this case," Quinn told them. "The greatest mystery is the identity of the man with the beard. He knows Van der Veer's house like a book. I saw him open a wall safe as if he had done it before very often. The murder of Van der Veer's butler is a complete puzzle. I can see no reason for it. If he knew a secret, Hawley must also have been aware of the same thing.

"Why wasn't Hawley murdered immediately instead of being tied up and hit on the head? Perhaps they in-

tended to try making him talk later on and then planned to kill him with whatever ghastly method they use. But we must not lose sight of the fact that Hawley is a suspect."

"McGrath swears that Van der Veer was alive when he was talking to Hawley," Carol objected. "Doesn't that seem to eliminate him?"

"Yes," Quinn answered slowly. "It is a good alibi and McGrath is satisfied with it. However, we also have Herr Reicher to contend with. We know he was interested in the shipment of gems from Holland, that he knew they'd been actually sent on the strato-liner. Reicher is likewise believed to be in the pay of Nazi authorities. Perhaps he is the man with the Vandyke, masking his dirty work so the Nazi regime will not be suspected of stooping so low as to kill and rob for the sake of those diamonds.

"Edmund Clive acts mysteriously, too. The night I saw him, I wasn't perfectly satisfied with what he told me nor with his actions. He deliberately went out of his way to show he trusted me, even going so far as to hand over his gun. He gave me interesting information about how these continued robberies would finally affect the diamond market, yet he has made no such statements to Commissioner Warner. Why not? If he trusts the Black Bat, he must also rely on the police."

Quinn opened a drawer in the lab bench and removed the weird picture which Silk had developed the night before.

"This—whatever it is—was present in Van der Veer's home last night, while Butch and I were waiting in another room. It seems to have an indefinite shape and yet it does look like someone who has wrapped a sheet around himself to resemble the popular conception of a ghost. This picture was taken over a long period of time on an exposed film.

"I left the camera shutter open. In the darkness I don't believe anyone's

form would have registered clearly on the film. It would have seemed to start at one end of the picture and pass over to the other. This visitation appears to rise from the floor and go straight up."

BUTCH peered over Quinn's shoulder and his big body gave a jerk.

"Hey, that does look like a ghost."

"It does," Quinn admitted. "If there is such a thing. Do you believe in them, Butch?"

Butch licked his lips nervously.

"Well, no, I don't. Just the same, I'm scared stiff of 'em."

Butch wondered what his three friends were laughing at. Then a slow grin stole over his big face. He still didn't know, but he enjoyed amusing his more sophisticated colleagues.

"It's time to get to work," Quinn said seriously. "Butch, you will look up Fritz Reicher. Carol will give you his address and all the details we have, including his picture. Get onto his trail and stay there. Make notes about where he goes and whom he sees. Pay strict attention to the time element also."

"Don't you have a job for me, sir?" Silk queried anxiously.

"Edmund Clive is your man," Quinn said. "Like Butch, hang onto his trail. Clive is a slippery sort and I'm certain he is very clever. Be on your toes, Silk."

Quinn walked over to a huge steel cabinet and took out a detailed map of the city when Butch and Silk left through the secret tunnel. He pulled a chair over beside his own and motioned for Carol to help him.

"With the use of directories and phone books," he said, "we'll try to indicate where diamond-cutting firms and jewelry stores of more than minor importance are located. As soon as it's dark, you can get your car. Both of us will make a tour of the city to watch these places. The gang intends

to strike at a place operated by Mark Freiber and Company, but that may not be on tonight's schedule. Freiber's is one of the biggest diamond-cutting establishments on this side of the Atlantic."

Carol nodded and they went to work. They were a splendid team, these two. Both were in love, but neither spoke of the fact. They were fighting death and pillage, preparing to risk their lives so that killers and ruthless crooks might not accomplish their aims.

It was well after dark when their work was done.

Carol's sedan was a low-slung, fast job. A radio under the dash was tuned to the police frequency band. Carol drove. Beside her sat a man dressed entirely in black, his features obscured by a turned-down hat.

"We'll cover all the places," the Black Bat told Carol, "or as many as we can before the excitement breaks. Don't worry. They'll tackle a couple of places tonight. There's a mighty big reason why they want to corral as many diamonds as possible in a very short space of time. Let's have a look at the Freiber place first."

Freiber's gem-cutting establishment was on the second floor of a big downtown building. It looked complacently safe behind its barred windows. Not a light shone in any of the offices.

"Shall I keep on driving?"

The Black Bat nodded. "Cover the northwest part of town first. Most of the bigger places are located there."

They cruised around for an hour. Carol stopped across the street from the Continental Jewelry Company—a lavish store with huge plate-glass windows protected by steel bars. The Black Bat peered carefully into the store.

"Everything seems okay there. Thanks to the eyesight you and your father provided me with, I'm able to see even into the darkest corners of the front part of the store. No one is hiding there. We'll try the other places."

ALMOST a mile had been put between them and the Continental Jewelry Company when the police emergency signal came over the radio.

"Continental Jewelry Store. Burglars now inside building. Signal thirty-two. Signal thirty-two. All cars of precincts below Andover Avenue answer this alarm."

"But I thought—" Carol looked at the Black Bat.

"You thought correctly. The Continental Jewelry Company isn't being robbed. That's a false alarm to draw cars away from another section. Let's see."

The Black Bat spread his map across his knees and studied it. There was no dashlight, but he could read the map as perfectly as though a spotlight were shining on the paper.

"Look, if the cars assigned to this job go to the scene, the entire area around the Gem Import Galleries will

[Turn page]

NO! NO!



TRADE

There is **NO** extra charge for Vitamin A in Smith Brothers Cough Drops. These delicious drops still cost only 5¢. (Black or Menthol)

Smith Bros. Cough Drops are the only d'ops containing VITAMIN A

Vitamin A (Carotene) raises the resistance of mucous membranes of nose and throat to cold infections, when lack of resistance is due to Vitamin A deficiency.



MARK

be unprotected except by patrolmen. Step on it, Carol. That place auctions diamonds as a specialty and keeps thousands of dollars' worth on hand all the time. The gang is going in for the big stuff now, just as I expected they would."

Carol turned the next corner on two wheels, and her foot gradually depressed the accelerator until they were traveling at high speed. She was a cool and capable driver. She ducked in between trucks and buses as she cut through the business center. They reached an avenue and streaked north along it. Two more sharp turns and the Black Bat reached for his gun. Two shots had come plainly to his ears.

Carol stopped. The Black Bat doffed the hat and replaced it with his hood. Enveloped in that eerie cape, he ducked out of the car and raced into a dark alley. The fence at the end of it was no impediment for the Black Bat's muscles were always in excellent condition. He vaulted over this barrier and kept on going.

Soon he was near the delivery entrance of the jewelry auctioning firm. A blaze of gunfire gave him the direction. One man seemed to be shooting desperately and his fire was answered by at least three guns.

The Black Bat went into a crouch and continued running. The lone defender was lying prone behind a big packing case. He fired one more shot and through the darkness the Black Bat saw him hurriedly trying to reload. The crooks realized this, too, probably had been counting his shots. Stringy's voice shouted a command.

"Go get the flatfoot! Rub him out. One of his bullets almost creased my skull!"

Four men started forward boldly. Their kind was always bold when there was no opposition. The Black Bat realized the patrolman could never get his gun reloaded in time to ward off the attack. His two automatics came up and blasted simultane-

ously. One thug went down without uttering a sound, nor did he move after he hit the ground. The others, stunned by this unexpected barrage, retreated. They snapped a couple of shots in the Black Bat's direction, but suddenly fear had made them lose their marksmanship.

The patrolman methodically kept stuffing cartridges into the cylinder of his pistol. He had no time to wonder about the two shots which had saved his life. Then he gave a visible start and glanced aside again. A figure, all in black, crouched beside him.

"Yes, I'm the Black Bat," his eerie protector said calmly. "Are you willing to attack those rats?"

"I'm aching to. Let's go!"

They ran forward, their guns blasting. The thugs shouted in alarm and scurried away. The Black Bat, in the lead, was swiftly approaching the loading platform. He saw that the delivery door was open. Jules and his men were probably inside, engaged in looting the place while Stringy was to keep a clear exit when the job was done.

THE patrolman mowed down one of Stringy's less cowardly men with a well-placed shot. He grunted in elation and looked for another target. The Black Bat had suddenly vanished, but the patrolman had no doubt but that he was somewhere nearby.

Jules and four of his thugs came rushing out of the door, scampered down the steps. The patrolman heard a low, insistent order.

"Shoot!"

He opened up. The shots scattered the five men. Jules, clinging to a heavy sack, wheeled and snapped a couple of blind shots. Then a black form came out of nowhere, apparently flying with outspread wings. It came down on Jules' back with terrific force.

The thug gave a scream of terror and alarm. He tried to maneuver his gun around, but his attacker was too

agile. A blow thumped against his neck, almost snapping his head off. Another smashed into the pit of his stomach, doubled him up. Then he went careening backward from a well-placed punch on the chin.

But Jules was sturdy and tough. His jaw was made of steel, not glass like those of most of his followers. When he hit the ground, he bounded up again, but he didn't rush back into the fight. Unarmed now, facing the Black Bat and well aware of his prowess, Jules took to his heels. The patrolman blasted a bullet after him. It served only to increase Jules' speed.

Stringy's lanky shape had also disappeared and his men were covering the retreat. The Black Bat's guns joined in the rout of the gangsters, barking above the boom of the service pistol in the patrolman's hand.

Police whistles were shrilly sounding an alarm. The Black Bat appeared out of the gloom. The patrolman faced him, gun in hand, then slowly lowered the weapon.

"Orders are that you're to be brought in on sight and shot if you resist," he stated. "The day they were delivered, I was a little deaf. Anyway, I don't even think you're the Black Bat. He's supposed to be dressed all in black, and that suit you got on is certainly the white of an angel's robe to my eyes."

A black-gloved hand reached forward, holding out the sack of gems that had been taken from the store.

"It must be difficult, going through life with such bad hearing and color-blindness," the Black Bat said. "Here is the swag. See that it is put away safely. There is no reason to say anything about my being here. I hope you win your sergeant's chevrons. You deserve them. Any man who will shoot it out with a whole gang of murderers doesn't belong in the ranks. Your friends are coming, so I'll slip off the bandwagon here. Stand just as you are. Good night."

The Black Bat streaked out of the

alley and darted into Carol's sedan.

"The weather was a little warm back there for a few minutes," he said. "I had Jules, but he must be made of rubber: He got away. Two or three of the boys won't be robbing places any more, though. Carol, we've given them their first real defeat, and I don't think Vandyke is going to like it. It seems a bit odd to me. That was the biggest haul they've tried so far, yet the man with the beard wasn't there. Maybe he realizes he is being trailed."

"You mean by Butch and Silk?" Carol asked.

"That's right. If Reicher or Clive happens to be Vandyke and has even a hunch that he's being watched, he'll maintain a very simple life for awhile. Silk and Butch can solve that problem. They are to report at midnight, so we'll go back and meet them. The gang won't try any more breaks tonight—not in the shape they must be in."

RETURNING to the house, he and Carol waited patiently. Silk returned first. They did not ask for a report till Butch came in twenty minutes later. The giant was highly disgusted with his results.

"I follows the guy like you said, Boss. I never seen a mug who likes to walk so much. My dogs are dead-tired. He trotted over to some meeting where everybody blabbed in German. Then he hiked uptown about thirty blocks and went into a little delicatessen. Imagine a dope who'd walk that far for baloney! But that ain't all. He went to three other places—a tobacco store, a newspaper stand and a drug-store. When he walked in, them guys stood up like he was a general. The names and addresses is in my book."

"And you, Silk?" Quinn asked.

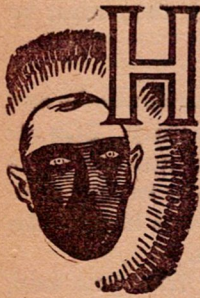
Silk smiled. "Clive wasn't quite so ambitious, sir. He went calling on a party named Norden—a refugee who owns a lot of Swdish and Norwegian freighters. Clive stayed there about

an hour and a half. Then he went straight home. He's there yet, as far as I know."

"Reicher's movements are highly suspicious," Quinn said, examining the addresses in Butch's notebook. "All German places. I wonder if he's laying the groundwork for a coup. This mystery is coming to a head pretty soon. Perhaps Reicher is the man with the beard and doesn't trust Jules and Stringy any longer. After tonight he'll have less confidence in them, so we'll wait and see. I wish I could talk to Hawley. He may have some interesting information, but I can't risk visiting him at the hospital. He's probably guarded, anyhow."

CHAPTER XIV

Anonymous Tip



HAWLEY was being watched. Husky patrolmen sat at his bedside twenty-four hours a day. Hawley's head was still bandaged, but he was rapidly regaining his strength. McGrath had come

to question him twice, but he could offer no additional information.

At eleven-thirty that night, McGrath called and said he could go home, after accompanying his guard to Police Headquarters. He was to study the prisoners assembled there and try to identify them.

Hawley put on his clothes. On the way out he clung to the patrolman's arm, for he was still weak from the terrific blow on the head. A cab was waiting at the door. The patrolman stepped back to let Hawley get in first. As he did so, two men appeared suddenly and a pair of guns were poked into the patrolman's side.

In the act of entering the cab, Hawley was seized and pulled inside. The patrolman was shoved in after

him and the taxi pulled away. All this took no more than a few seconds. The slight fracas was unnoticed even by a group of people less than a hundred feet up the street.

The taxi threaded through a park. Hawley said nothing, but he was white as paper. The patrolman lay huddled on the floor. When he moved, a foot kicked him under the chin.

In one of the darkest sections of the park, the cab stopped. Two of the kidnapers pushed the patrolman out. Hawley heard gun butts crack against the officer's skull and saw him crumple to the grass. Then the taxi darted away again.

"What is this?" he blurted. "Who are you?"

"Be quiet or we shall treat you like the policeman," one of the kidnapers warned. "You will soon find out what this is about."

Hawley was not prevented from watching the route taken by the driver. He realized that these men certainly had no intention of his living to talk again. He shivered. Once he made a grab for the door handle and a hard hand slapped him across the mouth with savage ferocity. He sank back against the seat and tried to resign himself to death. He was not successful.

Finally the taxi, far out of the city, turned off the main highway and followed a well paved side road for about a mile. It stopped in front of a small building that was completely dark. A nudge with the muzzle of a gun forced him to get out.

He raised his arms shoulder-high as he was escorted to the building. One of the men used a key to open the door. Hawley took a quick look around and recognized his surroundings. He was being marched into the caddy-house of some golf club.

They shoved him along a narrow corridor and stopped him when a door barred the way. One of the kidnapers rapped on the panels in a quick signal. A key turned in the lock and the door

opened. At the same moment a weak light was turned on. Hawley's eyes grew wide and round with terror. He balked a little and one of the men at his rear gave him a hard shove that sent him stumbling into the room.

"So," a low voice snarled, "you have come at last, *ja?* That is good, my friend. We have much to talk about. It will be very wise if you do not force me to use persuasive methods. I know several good ones. Tie him up tightly I have been waiting for this day for a long, long time."

CAPTAIN McGRATH went home at three A.M. after a fruitless search for Hawley. He opened the door of his bungalow, hoping he would hear the Black Bat's voice greet him. There was nothing but silence, though McGrath needed the Black Bat far more than at any other time.

He flung his hat on the chair, thought of what his wife might say about that if she were home, and picked it up again. As he hung it on a clothes-tree, he distended his nostrils. If that wasn't ham he smelled cooking, his wife had been fooling him for years.

McGrath drew his service pistol and tiptoed in the direction of the kitchen. Now he could hear the meat hissing in the pan.

"Come in, Captain," the Black Bat's voice called from behind the kitchen door. "You're just in time for a snack."

McGrath shoved the gun back into its holster and pushed the door open. He gasped, for the kitchen was in utter darkness except for the gas flame under a frying pan. Yet the Black Bat moved around without stumbling against any of the furniture. He glanced at McGrath and chuckled.

"I forgot you need light. Turn it on."

McGrath snapped the switch. The kitchen table was set for one. As he watched, the Black Bat slid a thick slice of ham and three eggs on a plate.

"There you are, Captain. Now while you're stowing that ammunition away, let's have all the details about Hawley's kidnaping."

"Is there anything you don't know?" McGrath demanded as he buttered a slice of hot toast. He bit into the ham and a slow smile relaxed his face. "Say, this is good!"

"It ought to be. It came right out of your refrigerator. Don't ask me to dine with you. It's very difficult to eat without removing my mask and you wouldn't want me to do that, would you, Captain?"

"No," McGrath said. "Honestly I wouldn't. When I land you myself—fairly, too—I'll take care of that item. But listen to this. The cop I placed to guard Hawley was found in Sunset Park. He'd been pretty badly messed up, but he could talk. At least three mugs grabbed Hawley. Why? Because maybe he knew something and they were afraid he'd tell me. I've put every available man at work searching for him, but they won't succeed. This guy with the beard is too smart.

"Oh, yes. Thanks for giving one of the boys a hand. Patrolman Cassidy reported to me a couple of hours ago and handed over a sack of jewels. He said you had a hand in it, but of course I couldn't report that or he'd be in a jam. So I just patted him on the back. Now I'll have to slate him for a quick promotion. Maybe he deserves it."

"He's a good man, Captain. Anything else happen tonight?"

"It's been a lovely evening," McGrath said disgustedly. "The only good news I have—besides the fact that you saved those gems—is that the body substituted for Van der Veer's has been identified. Seems the guy had once been picked up in some town out West as a bindle-stiff and they printed him. He was a nobody, so it seems that the murderer used him as easy pickings. We still don't know what killed him."

THE Black Bat straddled a chair. "There's egg all over your face, Captain. What else happened? I can tell by the gleam in your eye that you're saving a surprise."

McGrath wiped his chin, reached into his pocket and dropped an envelope on the table.

"That came by special delivery tonight. Read it."

The message inside that envelope was terse, neatly typed on expensive paper.

May interest you to know that five million in diamonds secretly shipped aboard Swedish freighter *S.S. Sundsvall* due New York tomorrow night.

"Well!" The Black Bat laid the letter down. "That's interesting information. We seem to have a secret ally. Maybe Vandyke's mob is beginning to split up. Have you tried to verify this, Captain?"

McGrath nodded. "There is such a ship and she is due in tomorrow night, but I couldn't find out anything about the diamonds. I cabled. You can't get information anywhere in Europe these days. The answer just said that freighter was carrying general merchandise. I don't like the set-up."

"You think it may be a trap? Of course Vandyke must know you and I are working side by side in this game, so it would be an excellent opportunity to get both of us together. Just the same, Captain, we'll meet that freighter. Five million more in diamonds will just about satisfy Vandyke, I imagine. There may even be a chance of turning this into a trap for him.

"Keep trying to find Hawley. He seems to be a very important cog in this machine. Also see to it that a police launch is left unattended at the same pier where that strato-liner docked. Find out the position of the ship by radio, broadcast the time she'll be twenty miles from port over the police hookup at exactly three o'clock tomorrow afternoon. I'll be listening.

We'll need about an hour and a half to intercept that ship, so all you have to do is board the police launch an hour and a half before she is twenty miles from port. I'll be there."

"You mean we'll go out alone?" McGrath gasped.

"Exactly. I always play a lone hand, Captain. This time you'll be just a means to an end. I'll tell you all about it when we meet."

IT was raining and foggy when the Black Bat slipped aboard the empty police launch the following night. He already knew that all attempts to find Hawley had failed and the man was about given up for dead. Butch was trailing Reicher with the dogged persistence he brought to every job, while Silk clung to the trail of Edmund Clive. Carol remained at home in case things went wrong and the Black Bat needed help. Butch and Silk were to phone in and report every hour.

There had been no more robberies, but the Black Bat had a feeling that this was just a lull before the real storm broke out in all its fury. The mysterious Vandyke was sitting pretty right now. If he managed to land five million in gems from the freighter, plus his loot from a score of diamond-cutting establishments and jewelry stores, he would possess a huge fortune in gems.

None of the stones could be traced, for he seemed to care little for famous big diamonds. News of the loss of all the gems would spread like wildfire. With no more coming in from abroad, the market was bound to rise fast. Any deficiency in supply always raised prices.

McGrath came aboard at nine-twenty. He carried a submachine-gun cradled in his arms, and two extra drums of cartridges hung from one shoulder.

"So this is war," the Black Bat said.

"If I have anything to do with it, yes. I'm taking it on the chin. The newspapers are beginning to ride me,

and the commissioner put me on the carpet. But I held out on all of them. Nobody knows about that tip. Just let me see those crooks try to board the freighter. I'll massacre 'em!"

The Black Bat started the motor and piloted the craft out to sea. McGrath stood beside him, shivering with the rawness of the air. They proceeded slowly because of the thick fog.

"A bad break for us," the Black Bat said. "They can slip up to that freighter and be protected by the fog. Here is the plan. You hail the ship and board her. Warn the captain that he may expect trouble. Then leave, get back into the launch and head for shore. Stand by the marine radio."

"But how about this?" McGrath patted the machine-gun. "And, hell, man, I'm not going to let you take all the risk!"

"Sorry, I insist. It's my belief that there are traitors in the crew. They'll have ways to contact Vandyke. If you remain on board, they'll smell a rat and perhaps stage the robbery after the stuff is ashore. No, you've got to do what I ask."

McGrath agreed reluctantly.

The Black Bat remained silent as he piloted the speedy launch on a course that would cut across the bow of the incoming freighter.

CHAPTER XV

Ship of Despair



NOT long after eleven o'clock, they saw the ship's lights through the fog. The Black Bat pulled for the siren cord and held it taut. The freighter answered with a hoarse bellow from her own whistle. A blinker light signaled that she was heaving to.

"Do your stuff," the Bat ordered. "Give me a chance to slip on board."

McGrath nodded. They came alongside and a ladder was dropped. McGrath tied up the launch, climbed the ladder and returned the salute of the big, blond skipper.

"I have a message of great importance to you and your crew," he told the captain. "Just come over here and I'll give you the details."

He deliberately stood against the starboard rail as he faced the men and held their attention. He made sure none of them glanced toward the port side, where the Black Bat would be slipping aboard.

"We have reliable information that a gang of pirates is ready to board you somewhere near shore. I want you to hold a steady course. Patrol boats will meet you very soon and convoy you to port. If anything happens, defend yourselves. Remember that these crooks won't hesitate to shoot, so it's up to you to shoot first. That's all. I'll see you ashore."

"We take good care of ourselves," the captain growled. "I have good crew. We come through mine fields, sail without lights and think any minute submarine shell us or send torpedo into our hull. Pirates do not scare us."

McGrath went down the ladder to his launch. The Black Bat was gone. He turned the bow of his craft shoreward and wished the Black Bat had been more open to suggestion.

There were hostile eyes watching his departure. Two men slowly turned away from the rail and went below. In a cabin, they found another pair of scowling men engaged in playing rummy. One of the men closed the door.

"The cops," he said. "I think it was that lunk-head McGrath, the guy who's in charge of the case. He warned the skipper, so we gotta watch our step. Stop playing cards, will you? Joe, get the flash and put on the green lens. We're about ready to get goin'. Signal Jules we're set, but tell him about the cop comin' aboard, too."

If he signals back okay, we start things rollin'. I fixed the radio so nobody can yell for help."

Joe dug into a sea-chest and hauled out a big flashlight. He slipped a green filter over the lens, opened a port-hole and looked out. He cursed the fog and glanced back at the man who was studying maps and charting their position. When Joe received a nod, he blinked the flashlight in a signal.

Like a tiny speck in the fog, an answer came. All four men remained silent while the messages were being exchanged. Finally Joe closed the port-hole.

"He says to go ahead. We grab the skipper and make him open the safe right after Jules shows up. The boys will take care of the rest. There's five million in that box, boys."

"Yeah," one of the others grumbled discontentedly. "And they got a habit of stringin' up guys for mutiny on the high seas. I don't like it, five million or only a dime."

Joe raised a fist in a threatening gesture.

"You're cooked, anyhow if we're caught, we squeal, see? Now get on deck, all of you. I'll stick around the cabin, so when Jules shows, I can signal all clear."

The three left the cabin.

UP on deck, the captain drew his heavy coat closer about him and paced the bridge nervously. Then he heard the unmistakable sound of another ship's engines. A moment later there was a bellow from a siren.

"Cutter to port, sir!" the lookout yelled.

A powerful searchlight slashed through the fog. The captain, peering through the fog, saw huge numbers painted on the bow of the approaching craft. It looked like a Coast Guard cutter. It came alongside and a man in an officer's uniform leaned over the rail with a megaphone to his lips.

"Follow us. Area ahead is mined. We're the escort you expect. Do you know this coast?"

"No," the captain shouted back. "Give us a stern light to follow."

The cutter veered away and the searchlight switched its position so the freighter could easily follow. Below deck, Joe put his flashlight away and grinned savagely. He removed a heavy-caliber pistol from the sea-chest and started toward the door.

"I wouldn't," a voice said quietly.

As he whirled around, the lights in the cabin went out. He did not dare to fire, that would start the ball rolling and he was not ready yet. Suddenly a hand closed over his gun-wrist and twisted it brutally. Joe cried out in pain. The gun dropped to the floor. He stooped to fumble for it, but a foot kicked it into a corner.

Snarling with helpless rage, Joe straightened and lashed out blindly with both fists. They hit nothing but air. Abruptly steel fingers fastened around his throat, cut off his breath. He kicked backward, struck out with his fists, and he touched nothing. Those mighty fingers seemed to have no body attached to them.

When the darkness of the cabin went from blood-red to intense black, the fingers relaxed. Joe stumbled away to what he thought was safety and drew in a shuddering breath for a yell. But a hard fist shot out of the blackness and crumpled him to the floor.

The Black Bat picked him up and carried him to a chair. He ripped the sheets off the twin bunks, tore them into strips and quickly bound the crook. Then he rolled the man onto a bunk, shoved a chair into the middle of the cabin and sat down to wait.

In a few moments he heard someone open the door. As the light entered the cabin from the corridor outside, the man who stepped in gave a yelp of fear. He saw a huge figure in black that looked like a big bird of prey about to swoop down on him. He

backed away, trying to muster a scream. Before he succeeded, the bird's wing sprouted a fist that smacked him unconscious.

The other two killers arrived shortly after. The Black Bat rammed a punch at the chin of the nearest, but the agile killer ducked and caught it on the shoulder. Terrified and desperate, they battled like cornered rats.

THE Black Bat hooked one on the cheek and took a staggering blow over the heart in return. But the advantage was on his side, for he could see in the darkness and the crooks could not. He dropped one with a solid blow, whirled and tackled the other. Too scared to give up, the lithe killer, who had ducked the Black Bat's first punch, retreated with swinging fists till his back was against the wall. The Black Bat let him duck a slow, obvious left, caught him on the chin with a murderous haymaker of a right.

Turning, swiftly, he saw that the third crook had recovered and was scurrying to the door. He leaped, brought the killer down in a heap. Scissoring him to his back, the Black Bat disposed of him with a short jab to the chin.

Panting, the Black Bat wasted no time. He searched the men and deftly bound them up. The assortment of

weapons he took from them went out the port-hole.

From the adjoining lavatory he picked up McGrath's submachine-gun and slipped out of the cabin, locking the door after him. He reached the companionway and crept up it cautiously.

He knew the freighter carried a crew of no more than twelve or fourteen men, including the skipper. Four were already accounted for, and the Black Bat hoped to get the rest on his side.

At any moment now Jules would strike. The Coast Guard uniform had deceived the skipper, but not the Black Bat. Jules looked just as much the criminal with a gold-braided cap as when he prowled the night, looking for loot.

The deck seemed clear, and the Black Bat ran lightly across it, heading for the captain's quarters. Now the fog aided him, for none of the sailors, alert though they were, spotted him. The skipper's cabin door was closed and the Black Bat slowly turned the knob. Then he flung the door wide and held his rifle ready.

The captain was seated before his desk. He tipped over the chair as he jumped up.

"Don't move or make a sound," the Black Bat warned. "I'm sorry to show force, but until I'm sure where I stand,

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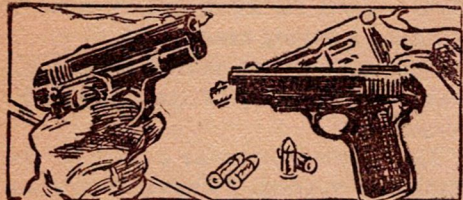


that will be necessary. You have a valuable cargo of diamonds in your safe. There are some dangerous crooks after it. I doubt that you've ever heard of me, so I won't go into detail. I'm the Black Bat, fighting on the side of law and order."

"With a mask on?" the skipper said scornfully. "You try to get the jewels. I do not give them to you."

"I know it sounds unreasonable," the Black Bat said persuasively. "I know I look and act like a crook, but listen to this. I came aboard from the police launch. I work with Captain McGrath. He warned you to be careful and you've just sailed into a sweet trap. The cutter that hailed you is a fake. The man in uniform is Jules Andrus, a killer. His men will outnumber your crew and they won't stop at murder. Open your safe, give me the jewels and I'll get them ashore somehow."

The skipper folded his arms calmly, unfrightened, not even deigning to reply. The Black Bat groaned. Because of the stubborn nature of the



captain, his plans were being delayed. He stepped forward and raised the rifle of his gun slightly.

Suddenly there was a terrific grating sound and alarmed shouts from on deck.

"We're aground—rocks," someone yelled.

"Now do you see I'm right?" the Black Bat asked. "Open the safe before it's too late."

The ship gave a bad roll and heeled over at a dangerous angle. The captain and the Black Bat were both sent crashing against the farther wall, but the Black Bat sustained the impact. The captain, though, lay sprawled out on the floor, unconscious.

CHAPTER XVI

The Black Bat's Claws



ON deck there were shouts and screams of pain. The Black Bat whirled, raced up the tilted companionway and saw four of Jules' murder crew swarming over the rail. Two of the sailors lay prone on the deck. The others held their arms high.

The submachine-gun at the Black Bat's shoulder bucked and chattered. The men boarding the freighter disappeared like magic. There were angry shouts overside as the Black Bat raced to the rail.

Jules' fake Coast Guard cutter was trying to tie up to the freighter. He swept the decks with a burst from the machine-gun. The fake cutter began to drift away.

"Go below and get your skipper!" the Black Bat shouted to the freighter crew. "He was hurt when we ran aground. Put him in a boat and shove off with everyone else. Quick! Those men will try again and they'll shoot you down."

The authority in the Black Bat's voice compelled the sailors to obey him. They carried the captain on deck, eased him into a life-boat. The Black Bat peered through the fog. The cutter was nosing back. Her slim hull could maneuver through the rocks onto which she had so treacherously led the freighter. Half a dozen guns began to spit fire. The Black Bat heard slugs hammer into the hull.

"Lower away and head for shore!" he called out to the sailors.

The davits creaked as the life-boat lowered to the sea. The Black Bat masked this betraying sound by another burst from his gun. The cutter veered off, but this time she did not retreat as far as before.

The Black Bat was now alone. Below were five million dollars in jewels, for which these killers were willing to sacrifice any number of lives. It was a desperate situation. They numbered probably as high as a score, augmented by the crew who manned the fake cutter.

Sweat poured down the Black Bat's face, under his mask. The chill dankness of the air no longer made him shiver. He stood like some weird gargoyle on the sloping deck and knew the probability was that he would be dead before dawn.

The attack came with lethal ferocity. The fake cutter dropped a dory, which circled the freighter and came at it from the starboard side, while the cutter itself covered the port.

The Black Bat went racing across the deck, through the concealing veil of fog. The dory was almost alongside. One of its crew was trying to grab the rope ladder. The Black Bat's submachine-gun pointed downward and he sent a hail of death into the bow of that boat. It shipped water. The men yelled and scurried around in helpless terror. The hull was riddled and the sea began to pour in.

Someone shouted an order and the oars were hastily manned again. The Black Bat smiled grimly, but when he turned away, his smile died. A swarm of Jules' choice killers was coming over the side. The Black Bat leveled his gun, yanked the trigger. The burst died midway, for the drum was empty and the other ammunition was below.

He sprinted across the deck toward the bridge, sprang and seized the railing to pull himself up and over it. Bullets smacked the deck. One ripped a hole in the flowing cape he wore. From the cutter, Jules barked commands and Stringy's strident voice added venomous encouragement.

The Black Bat saw a group of the killers racing toward the bridge. He wrenched open a locker door, reached inside and snatched out a rocket pis-

tol. He crouched, waited until the killers were close by. Then he emptied the gun squarely into their startled faces. The red fire routed them. They fled, screeching in pain from dozens of burns.

THE Black Bat located two more of the signal guns, thrust one into a hip pocket and held the other ready. He jumped to the main deck, scooped up his submachine-gun on the way and went down the companionway ladder in two leaps.

As he unlocked the cabin door, he heard his four prisoners curse him luridly. Swiftly he began inserting a fresh drum of bullets. The other drum he tucked under his arm and hurried back on deck.

When he reached the rail, overlooking the smaller craft almost alongside, he heard voices.

"I tell you we ain't wrong. It is the Black Bat. He flung down offa that stage. We saw him. Honest!"

"You guys are crazy," Jules rasped. "The Black Bat nor nobody else knows about this ship. That's maybe the skipper and you crazy lugs got bats on the brain. Get back there and drill that guy. Snap into it before I lose my temper and do a little shootin' on my own."

"Hey, wait a minute!" Stringy cut in. "You can talk to your own mob like that, but not to my boys. We'll take that guy, all right, but we won't take no guff from you. Come on, boys."

They slung two ladders from the freighter's deck and started clambering up them. Stringy prudently dropped back and permitted his men to go to first. He was always polite when it came to facing death.

"Back!" the Black Bat ordered. "Back or I'll blast everyone of you into the sea."

"The Black Bat!" Jules yapped, while Stringy's men fell all over themselves in their attempts to get clear. "L-look, I got a p-proposition."

"So have I," the Black Bat replied. "Come aboard alone and without guns."

"Listen," Jules countered, "there ain't no use tryin' to kid you. That stuff on board the ship—we'll split it three ways. Two! Is it a deal or do we come up and cut you to pieces?"

"Come on," the Black Bat invited. "That's what I'm waiting for."

"Go get him!" Jules snapped.

"None of his men moved to obey. He ground out curses, seized a rifle and clapped it to his shoulder. The bullet whistled over the Black Bat's head as he aimed his submachine-gun at the wheelhouse of the fake cutter and released a long burst of slugs. He heard glass shatter and the cutter began moving rapidly away. Jules and his men were tough, but the pilot of their craft had had plenty. He was anxious to get out into the fog. Jules started for the wheelhouse with murder written on his cruel face.

The Black Bat realized that he had no more than a few moments to spare. He sent another warning fusillade at the craft. Then he raced for the captain's quarters, where he eyed the old-fashioned iron safe.

Its combination dial was a huge device. With the right tools the Black Bat could have opened it in half an hour, but he had no tools and no half-hour to spend. Gently touching the dial, he turned it. The sensitiveness of his touch, developed during his blindness, served him well. A more modern safe would not have responded to his coaxing, but this one did. The tumblers began falling into place.

Five million dollars in an old box like this! The Black Bat knew that only the war made such flimsy protection possible. There were no modern ships to venture on a daring trip across the Atlantic any more.

HE kept looking at his watch. At any moment Jules would have his craft alongside. If the Black Bat were not on deck to repel boarders,

they would swarm all over the ship.

Then the handle of the safe turned and he swung the door wide. Inside were two big tin boxes. He opened one and saw that it was packed with small boxes, all labeled with the name of Van der Veer. He inspected only one, found it jammed with cotton and jewels.

He seized both boxes and hurried back to deck. Jules' craft hit the freighter with a loud crash, for expert hands were no longer at the wheel. The pilot lay crumpled in a heap, bullet-riddled.

A face appeared cautiously above the deck. The Black Bat pounded a few slugs into the killer's hide. With a yelp, he disappeared. Then a wad of oil-soaked blazing rags was flung onto the after deck. The Black Bat started back to squelch the blaze and a dozen more of the flaming wads was hurled onto the freighter. They were getting desperate.

Leeward, the Black Bat could see lights ashore. All this excitement was bound to be noticed. Real Coast Guard cutters would be shoving off at any moment. The Black Bat judged their position at about ten miles south of New York harbor.

Suddenly he saw four men coming toward him. They were the phony sailors he had attacked in the cabin. Somehow they had gained their freedom. They were armed with guns stolen from the ship's arsenal. The Black Bat sent a burst of fire in their direction, but other shots roared behind him. Jules' men were coming aboard.

The deck was slowly catching fire. The old weather-beaten tub would make a grand blaze and certainly the killers had no intention of putting it out.

Hemmed in, the Black Bat resorted to daring measures. He charged straight toward the rail, shooting as he went. When the crooks disappeared, he changed his course and headed toward the the crow's-nest. He still held

the gems securely under one arm. They impeded his movements, but nothing could have induced him to leave them for the killers to find.

Ships were no mystery to the Black Bat. Before he became blind, they had been his hobby. Knowing freighters like this one, he realized that there was a circular ladder inside the hollow mast, by which he could climb to the crow's-nest. There he would be able to fight off the men and have a chance for his life. By holding them back long enough, sufficient time might elapse for help to come. McGrath would undoubtedly have every police boat available scouring the sea already. The Black Bat remembered the rocket pistol in his pocket.

He started to squirm through the narrow door in the mast, then suddenly dropped flat on deck. Two of the fake sailors were approaching. In the fog they had not spotted the Black Bat. He could have shot them down with one burst, but he held his fire. They divided, one coming directly toward him.

When the sailor saw those outspread wings nothing else mattered for him. The Black Bat had almost bent the gun barrel on the crook's skull.

HE hoisted his captive over one shoulder, entered the mast and began climbing to the crow's-nest. Encumbered by the boxes of gems, he shoved them into a dark spot. From the noise on deck he knew that Jules and Stringy's full complements of killers were aboard and searching for him. The three sailor-crooks were aiding in that search. Soon they hit upon the only place left on deck for him to hide.

He dropped his prisoner on the deck of the crow's-nest and then went down the ladder for the jewels. Getting them, he started up again. But he had to cling to the rungs of the ladder with one hand and fire a warning blast that smashed into the hollow

mast far above the head of a man who held a flashlight. But that was enough. The flash winked out.

Then the Black Bat reached the crow's-nest. The tiny circular platform did not give him much room, hampered as he was by the crook who was slowly regaining consciousness.

"Up there!" Jules' voice sounded a mile away. "Either you come down with those rocks or we set this mast on fire!"

CHAPTER XVII

Butch Comes Through



DRAWING his rocket pistol, the Black Bat pointed it skyward and sent two red flares into the heavens. Peering over the side, he saw preparations being made to burn down the hollow mast.

Guns roared below and bullets hit the deck beneath his feet. He was grateful that it was steel and offered good protection.

But he was unable to drive away the men below, who were piling everything combustible around the mast. Every time he tried to peer over the rail of the crow's-nest, guns blazed away on deck and he had to draw back. His prisoner was still unconscious.

The Black Bat raised his hood and mopped his sweaty face. He had been in tough spots before, but this one made the others seem pale. It would not take long before the mast began to topple.

Jules, intent on murder, did not figure that the Black Bat would be thrown far away from the freighter and that if he had those precious diamonds, they would go to the bottom. His one-track mind could think only that the Bat was going to die this time, that Jules would accomplish what no other crook had ever suc-

ceeded in doing, what he would do.

The Black Bat tried to penetrate the fog for signs of approaching help. There was none. He did not know whether to feel relieved or grow more worried. No matter what happened, it seemed that he was finished now. If help came, he would be taken and the result would be catastrophic. Unless—

He glanced down at the groaning crook near his feet. Quickly he hoisted his prisoner up and pinned him against the mast.

"Come out of it!" he snapped. "Your pals down below are trying to kill you as much as they are me. They don't care if you die just so long as I die with you. There is one way out, if you've got the nerve."

"Wh-what?" the thug gasped in bleary terror.

"Can you swim?" the Black Bat asked. He received a dazed nod. "Good. I have no more use for you than you have for me, but we're facing the same kind of death. Here is your one chance for life. If Jules or Stringy picks you up, tell them you were unconscious when you rolled off here. Put on my robe, climb over the rail of the crow's-nest and jump."

"J-jump?" The thug opened his mouth wide in horror. "But—but I'll be killed."

"No you won't. The ship has heeled over badly. The starboard rail is almost awash. If you simply fell out of this crow's-nest, you'd clear the rail. Which is it—a chance to live or do you want to be burned alive?"

The crook looked over the rail and saw the fire rapidly eating at the base of the mast. Jules was using oil and the thick column of smoke that arose made both of them cough. Abruptly the guns opened up again.

"I—I'll do it," the thug yapped.

The Black Bat stripped off his bilowy cape and fastened it around his captive's trembling shoulders.

"I'm giving you a chance to live, so you've got to help me. They don't

know you're up here and wouldn't care if they did. They'll think you are the Black Bat leaping into the sea. Don't worry, they'll save you because they know I've got the loot on me. If I don't get away, I promise not to tell them what you did."

THE thug stood erect, nervously thrust one leg over the rail of the crow's-nest and the wind billowed out the cloak. The guns below went silent as the crooks waited to see what the Black Bat was up to.

The thug gave one last despairing look at the Black Bat and then jumped. The cloak spread out and he seemed to soar down. Yells went up from below. The diving man cleared the rail with several feet to spare. In a flash Jules shouted orders.

One of the freighter's life-boats was lowered, and as many men as it would hold crammed into it. They were all eager to fish the Black Bat out of the sea and learn his identity. The few who were left on deck crowded the rail, despite the water surging at their feet.

The Black Bat was already down the hollow shaft inside the mast. Smoke made his eyes water and dried his throat, but he securely held the two metal containers of gems. Discarding his submachine-gun, he opened the mast door. A tongue of flame licked in at him. He held his breath, covered his eyes and dived through the wall of fire.

His soft crepe-soled shoes made no noise as he sprinted across the deck. The fake cutter was tied up on the opposite side from which the crooks were working and watching. The Black Bat drew one of his automatics, climbed over the rail and jumped aboard the cutter. A startled member of the crew promptly elevated his hands when the Black Bat motioned with his gun.

"Man the wheel," the Black Bat ordered in a tense whisper. "We're getting out of here."

"Yes, sir." The sailor saluted alertly. "And damned glad I'll be to do it, too!"

The first inkling that Jules had of the Black Bat's escape was the sudden movement of the cutter that had taken him out. Then some of his thugs hauled up the man who had dived from the mast and recognized him as one of their own gang.

Jules emptied his gun at the cutter, now showing her heels at a great clip. The Black Bat, inside the wheelhouse, laughed. He had won again, but it had been the most difficult battle of his entire career. He knew just how dangerous Jules and Stringy were now. They had to be disposed of promptly or capturing the man with the beard would still remain a perilous task.

"Where the devil is Vandyke?" the Black Bat muttered anxiously. "He never sends both gangs out on a job without supervising them, so they won't fight among themselves."

BUTCH O'LEARY was engaged in following Fritz Reicher. His quarry had remained indoor most of the evening, but now he sallied out. By the grim look on his face, someone was going to suffer. Butch trailed him with his coupé and did a neat, careful job of shadowing.

When Reicher turned into the road which led to a golf course that had been closed for the season weeks ago, Butch slowed up. Finally he parked the coupé and proceeded on foot. All of the buildings on the course were dark except the caddy-house, and only a faint glimmer of light came from beneath a black curtain there. Reicher was nowhere in sight, but his car was standing in the shadowy darkness of the club-house.

Butch crept forward, slowly clenching and unclenching his great fists. He felt he had been altogether too idle during this case, and he longed for a chance to sail into a fight with some real opposition. [Turn page]

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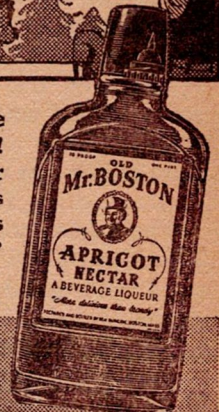
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Peering carefully beneath the black curtain of the caddy-house, he grinned with anticipation. Four men were in the room, gathered around the table, smoking and obviously waiting for someone important. He drew his gun, though he hated to rely on anything but his fists. But the killers were armed, as he could see by the ominous bulges under their armpits.

Butch was huge, but he was also fast. When he sprang into the room, the men were shocked motionless. Unfortunately he also had big feet, and they stumbled over a chair when a hood sprang up and tipped it over in his path.

"Get 'em up!" the giant yelled, undismayed as he regained his balance.

Instead of obeying, the thugs leaped, grabbed his mighty arms from behind. Butch growled, inflated his gigantic chest and his arms flung his assailants away like a dog shaking water from his coat. The killers gaped in awe. Butch closed two dangling jaws with punches that rattled every tooth in the thugs' heads. The other two saw their partners folding up like leaky accordions and wisely decided that this was not a healthy spot. They started to run.

Butch followed them out of the caddy-house and across the green. They made the mistake of running together for moral support. When they looked back over their shoulders, they began to blubber, for with each stride Butch was gaining two feet. The hindmost thug gave a piercing yell just before a great fist came down squarely on the top of his skull. He dropped flat and did not move. An instant later the other killer was smacked to one side and sprawled motionless on his face.

The giant grinned and rubbed his knuckles. Then he began running toward the caddy-house, which suddenly erupted the two recovered hoods, both with drawn guns. Butch changed his tactics. He jumped behind the protection of bushes and

waited. When they were almost upon him, he sprang out and grabbed them both at once.

He held one of his struggling captives in each hand and then practiced his most delightful stunt. He lifted them off their feet and banged their heads together.

A motor roared behind him. Reich-er's car spurted forward, turned into the road and disappeared. Butch dropped his two unconscious victims and hurried into the caddy-house. He heard a faint groan, went into the locker room.

Paul Hawley was strapped to one of the long benches! A cord had been twisted around his neck, like a garrote. He was turning blue.

Butch yanked wide the strangling knot, cut Hawley free and raised him into a sitting position. He had standing orders that whenever he was forced to expose himself to anyone connected with a case on which the Black Bat worked, he was never to give any indication that he was the Black Bat's aide.

"Gosh, what happened?" he asked with an innocent expression in his huge face. "I was just takin' a shortcut home when all of a sudden two guys jumped on me. Then a couple of more came out."

"They—they kidnaped—me," Hawley choked out. "They were going to—kill me. Take me home. I—I just got out of a hospital yesterday—I'm sick."

THE giant didn't doubt that. Caring Hawley in his powerful arms, he glanced at the four men lying on the green. He grinned contentedly as he put Hawley into the coupé and drove him home. Hawley was able to navigate under his own steam when they reached Van der Veer's house.

"If you will call on me in a few days," he told Butch, "I'll reward you."

"Aw, that was nothin'," Butch said

modestly. "Just a little exercise. I oughta thank you for givin' me the chance to get it. So long."

He didn't try to reason anything out. That was for the Black Bat to do. He returned to Tony Quinn's house. Silk was there and came immediately into the lab.

"Oh, it's you," he said despondently. "I thought it was the Black Bat. I'm worried, Butch. He should have been here long ago. Carol has been 'phoning every ten minutes. I hate to keep disappointing her."

"Well, I got news," Butch said, "but it'll keep until the boss gets here. You got any idea where he is? I'll go see if he needs help."

Silk shook his head and sat down. Butch smoked a cigarette, enjoying

ting them. Anything happen while I was away?"

"Yeah." Butch sat erect. "I beaned four guys—Heinies, I think they were. I followed Reicher way outa town to some golf course. He had Hawley there, all tied up and chokin' to death. Reicher got away, blast him, but Hawley is okay."

The Black Bat nodded. "I've been to Van der Veer's house and Hawley was sleeping the sleep of the innocent. So Reicher snatched him, eh? That puts our Nazi friend in a very bad light. However, he'll keep until morning. Silk, fix me a drink and then draw a hot bath. I feel as though I've been through hell's fires."

"Five million dollars—" Silk looked into one of the small boxes, and his

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Column Activity in

THE BLACK BAT AND THE RED MENACE

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the memory of his brief but effective scrap at the golf course.

It was almost four in the morning when a tiny green bulb glowed over the lab bench. Silk jumped to his feet and Butch opened his eyes sleepily.

It was a signal that someone was using the garden house to enter the tunnel.

The Black Bat came up through the trap-door. He was tired, smeared with soot even under the hood, and his cape was gone. He sank wearily into a chair. The two metal boxes under his arm he held out to Silk.

"Heft five million dollars' worth of diamonds, and don't think I didn't sweat five million dollars' worth get-

ting them. Anything happen while I was away?"

"Both of you get as much rest as possible." The Black Bat stripped off his hood and climbed out of his soiled, ripped clothes. "Tomorrow night, with luck, we put the finishing touches on this mess."

"Can I punch Reicher's puss in?" Butch asked hopefully.

The Black Bat grinned. "You may have the chance. Now clear out, both of you. I'm going to call Carol."

Butch stepped over beside the trap-door and made an odd face.

"Love," he opined, "makes me sick." Tony Quinn's shoe missed him by

a deliberate half an inch. The big man casually dropped into the tunnel, yet his head still poked above the floor level.

"You missed, *Boss*. You used to be better than that."

He ducked, but he was a fraction of a second too late.

CHAPTER XVIII

Dog Eat Dog



JULES and Stringy were back in business on the following night. Their forces were somewhat depleted, but they still had enough men to raid the diamond-cutting offices of Mark Freiber and Company. One of Jules' men and one of Stringy's were stationed as lookouts. Each gang leader took another three of his own men with him.

The entrance to the plant was a steel door that gave Jules little trouble. He knelt, placed a sharp-pointed instrument against the steel panel and pounded with a padded wooden hammer until he had punched a fairly good-sized hole in the door. Then he inserted a slender, extremely sharp saw and began to cut. It required ten minutes to saw away enough of the steel to get at the lock inside. A moment later they silently filed into the place.

"Stay near the door," Jules told Stringy. "Keep those dopes of yours away from me—you included. You mugs are saps. We'd have got the Black Bat last night if it wasn't for you. We didn't, and he got our five million bucks' worth of rocks. Wait till the boss hears about that."

"It wasn't my fault," Stringy rasped. His hand significantly dropped into his coat pocket. "You wanta make somethin' outa it?"

"Pipe down!" Jules whispered. "You get dumber by the minute. We're on a job, or didn't you know? Cops have good ears and if we slip on this job, the boss will skin us alive. I asked you to stay by the door while I get the stuff. You don't know a diamond from a chunk of glass, so just shut up."

Jules tackled the safe next. It was a modern affair, but Jules was prepared for that. One of his men hauled out a small bottle of nitroglycerine, handling it with extreme politeness. Jules' men set to work while Stringy kept muttering about the effectiveness of his own stethoscope and how he could open any can with it.

Jules worked methodically, not too fast, and always making certain each step was completed before he tackled the next phase. Of the two, Jules was the far more deadly. He had more brains and was utterly ruthless.

His men hurriedly spread out and searched the various offices until they acquired a good supply of clothing and even a couple of blankets from a cot in one room. Jules carefully piled all this around the safe and then touched off the fuse. The explosion shook the building, but it was fairly well muffled. Even if it drew the police now, Jules did not care. His forces, augmented by Stringy's men, could handle the first batch to show up.

He pried the shattered door away, reached into the big safe and began emptying trays of finished and partially cut diamonds into a leather sack. There were even a few stones which were completely in the rough. They all went indiscriminately into his sack.

"Hey!" Jules called out to Stringy. "Take the rocks. I'll go out first in case there's trouble. If you hear shootin', use the back way and meet me at the hideout. Got that?"

Stringy accepted the sack of gems. Jules signaled his men and they hurried downstairs. Just then Stringy

decided he ought to get going, too. He took half a dozen steps across the middle of the office and suddenly plunged flat on his face. The sack of gems flew from his hand and slid across the floor until they struck the wall.

STRINGY, half-dazed by the sudden fall, clambered to his feet and blinked dizzily. Then he heard Jules calling up an all clear signal. He hastily fumbled around in the gloom, found his precious sack of gems and rushed out.

"You crazy stumble-bum," Jules grated. "Fell on your face, huh? You'd make a swell burglar, you would. All feet, that's you. Got them rocks?"

Stringy reddened and held out the sack. Two cars pulled up and the crooks hastily piled into them. Stringy was in the second car, while Jules and his men occupied the first. Their course took them far downtown.

Jules tried to figure out why the blast had not aroused at least one bluecoat. He had expected to shoot his way clear, yet he had not even glimpsed a single uniform. He didn't like it, nor did he like Stringy. He made up his mind on the spot that they were going to part. He and his men could handle the bearded leader's tasks. Stringy was only in the way.

The hideout was a two-story frame dwelling, not far from the river front.

A rickety staircase led up the outside of the house. Stringy was already inside when Jules arrived.

"We're through!" Jules snarled. "You and your dopes can get outa here. I'll fix things so the boss pays you off okay. Don't worry about that. You didn't earn the dough, but I don't like to hear anybody squawk. Now don't start arguin'. Hand me them rocks so I see what kind of a haul we made."

Stringy glanced at Jules' three aides. Each one stood perfectly quiet, hands dug far down in their coat pockets. Stringy knew what the bulges meant—guns. He knew because he gripped his own weapon in a similar manner and he had four of his own men parked on the other side of the room.

Jules unwound the string from the mouth of the sack and started to throw it away. Then he checked that impulse and looked keenly at the cord.

"How come?" he muttered. "I coulda sworn I used a piece of leather and not string."

He opened the sack and dumped its contents onto the table. Instantly the room sparkled with livid light. Jules' eyes popped wide open. Then they narrowed and he made a covert movement with his left hand. His men saw it and grew tense. He picked up one stone at random and held it in front of the light.

"Stringy, you doublecrossing rat!"

[Turn page]



he gritted between his teeth. "So you pulled a fast one at last, huh? Where are the real stones? These are zircons—the nearest thing to a diamond, maybe, but they ain't diamonds. A smarter guy than me might have passed on them, but you forgot that some of the rocks I dumped into that sack weren't all cut. These are, every last one of 'em. You got an explanation?"

Stringy's lanky form seemed to droop, but Jules knew what that meant. The thin killer was ready to shoot at the blink of an eyelash.

"YOU ain't pullin' nuthin' like that on me," Stringy growled. "Them are the rocks you handed me, and the same sack. If they're fakes, you fixed it and hid the real stuff yourself. Holdin' out on the boss, huh?"

"This ain't the same sack," Jules said murderously. "I tied mine with a strip of leather. This one had a green cord around it. You switched them, you heel. You hid the diamonds. Where are they, or do I have to blast it outa you?"

Stringy had four men to Jules' three, and downstairs were more members of both mobs. They had been long on the verge of fighting among themselves. Stringy's cunning mind figured the odds and decided they were with him.

"Blast away, damn you!" he shouted.

At the same instant he pulled the trigger of the gun concealed in his pocket. Jules sprang away from the table with a bound, but a thirty-eight slug sent him back against it. His three men blasted revenge. Stringy took a pair of slugs through the shoulder before his men began shooting. Excited yells came from downstairs and Stringy shouted orders for his men to tackle Jules' mob. In half a minute the house was a bedlam of noise, swearing, shots and blood.

Jules painfully raised the pistol in

his hand. Stringy, badly wounded, was backing away toward the door. All of Jules' men were down. Only one of Stringy's remained on his feet, and he was incapable of help, for he was trying to stop the flow of blood from a wound high in his chest.

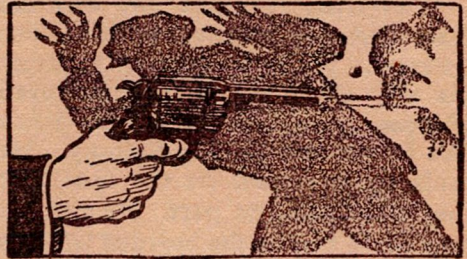
"Here it comes!" Jules snarled.

His gun exploded a fraction of a second before Stringy fired. At the same instant Jules flung himself from the table. Stringy missed. Jules didn't. The lanky thug leaned back against the wall and slowly began sliding down. Jules got up, bared his teeth in a snarl, and took careful aim. Stringy died with a slug through the head.

Jules looked around, scooped up the sack of zircons, for they were worth enough to salvage, and ran to the door.

As he stepped out on the rickety old porch, his blood froze.

Below were cops—dozens of them! All the shooting had not been done by the mob.



They had only shot one another, while the police had sailed in to capture those left alive.

A curse ripped from Jules' lips. He leveled his gun threateningly. Captain McGrath, a submachine-rifle in his arms, shouted a warning.

"Hold it, Jules! Hold it, or I'll drop you!"

Jules had one solitary chance. If he jumped off the back of the porch, he might land on a low slanting roof. His wounded side ached miserably, but he had to take the chance. A bullet from his gun was lodged in Stringy's body, and that alone would

whisk him to the electric chair. So Jules took a chance.

With a wild scream he jumped over the railing, but he was not quite fast enough. His foot caught on the rail and for a second or two he hung head down while McGrath opened fire. Other officers cut loose.

When Jules finally hit the sloping roof of the building over which he had hoped to escape, he did not know it. His body rolled down and plumped onto the ground.

MCGRATH lowered his gun and heaved a long sigh. Then he walked slowly over to where an official car was just pulling up. Commissioner Warner climbed out.

"I got your message," the commissioner said. "What on earth happened?"

"A couple of mobs started fighting among themselves," McGrath explained. "It just happened that Stringy controlled one faction and Jules Andrus the other. They've been working for the bearded killer we're after. From the shouts we heard when we got here, there was an argument about some loot. We've got them all."

Warner shook his head. "They lived as they died—by the gun. It's the justice of retribution, Captain."

"You're wrong," McGrath answered softly. "It's the Black Bat's justice, or I miss my guess. He warned me that there might be trouble tonight, but he didn't say where. Maybe he didn't know at the time. But he 'phoned and we came right down. We were too late, or we'd have got them alive. I guess Stringy is dead, and I know Jules is finished. They were the only two people who might have identified our bearded killer. Looks like the Black Bat slipped a little."

"Yes, it does seem that way, Captain. He would scarcely have planned that the only two persons who might solve the case would die."

A detective-lieutenant stepped up and saluted.

"Stringy is dead, sir. The rest of the mob shoot like they live—crooked. Only fatalities are the leaders, and none of the other men got away. We'll need a flock of ambulances though."

CHAPTER XIX

The Murder That Failed



RU M B L I N G, McGrath turned his submachine-gun over to a member of the riot squad and walked slowly back to his departmental sedan. He slid behind the wheel and drove off.

"Poor, stupid fools," a voice said.

"Yeah," McGrath agreed absently.

When he realized he was supposed to be alone, his car started to zigzag until he finally got it under control again. The Black Bat climbed from the rear seat and sat down beside him.

"They're like a lot of people abroad these days," the Black Bat went on. "They rely on the power of a gun to win their battles, and in the end they all die. They won't listen to reason. They see only their own side of questions. You know what always happens to them."

"I know." McGrath was almost getting used to the Black Bat's sudden appearances. "It looks as if you had a thumb in it."

"I did. The deaths of Jules and Stringy will never make the world bow in sorrow, nor were they any longer useful to me to identify our mysterious Vandyke. But I'm glad those satellites of theirs survived. Some of them may have an ounce of goodness in their hearts."

"Not a gram," McGrath grunted. "They got what was coming to them and they punished themselves. Just

how did it all happen, anyway?"

"I knew they were set to raid the Freiber gem-cutting place, so I got there ahead of them. They were fighting among themselves as they came in. Stringy happened to fall over a piece of cord that I happened to pull taut as he was passing by. When he fell, the sack of jewels scooted across the floor. Stringy picked up a sack, but it was a different one. He didn't know that.

"If he had possessed enough brains to know the difference, he'd never have been a crook. Anyway, the real diamonds are back in Freiber's safe. Oh, yes—better send a couple of men over to guard them. I called Freiber and told him what had occurred, but if anything delays him, it would be best to have a guard."

"I left two men in front of the place," McGrath said. "How come they didn't spot you?"

"You've missed me a few times, too, Captain. Don't be hard on them. Would you mind stopping here? I have a little business which needs attention."

"Sure," McGrath grumbled. "Just as soon as you put five million bucks' worth of diamonds in my lap. You got them off that boat last night and they don't belong to you. I— Hey, is that a gun in my ribs?"

"It is, Captain. The diamonds will keep for the moment. I asked you to stop."

"But what's the idea?" McGrath argued as he braked the car. "Say, you're not turning crooked, are you? You don't intend to keep those diamonds, even though they're five million dollars' worth?"

"It is an attractive nest egg," the Black Bat chuckled. "Well, good night for the time being, Captain. If you are at leisure in about two hours, drop over to Van der Veer's house. You might meet some friends there. Come alone."

"Wait a minute!" McGrath almost shouted. "I forgot to tell you. Haw-

ley got clear last night. Reicher is the guy we're after. He snatched Hawley and tortured him to make him tell where Van der Veer's stuff is hidden. We can't find Reicher. Just before this broke, I got word from the two detectives I assigned to guard Hawley. He's gone again! Reicher's got him. We'll iron out the diamond angle later on, but you've got to help me find Hawley."

"In due time," the Black Bat agreed. "As I said, be at Van der Veer's home in two hours. A pleasant journey to you, Captain, though you can't have your five million dollars' worth of gems."

McGrath's face was purple as he drove away. How could he explain five million into obscurity? The Black Bat had doublecrossed him! He had always thought the Black Bat was not hunting crime just for the sake of excitement. But a five-million-dollar cut! McGrath groaned and did not even hear the angry yells of a truck driver whose vehicle he missed by an inch or two.

THE Black Bat stepped into the darkness of the quiet street and waited. In a moment a coupé drove up with Butch at the wheel. The Black Bat got in.

"Reicher's place," he ordered. "Go as fast as you can without putting a policeman on our rear fender."

Butch let the Black Bat out and then drove to a better spot to park.

The Black Bat approached Reicher's place warily. Stringy and Jules were gone, but Vandyke might not have had all his cards in those two crooked decks. Then, too, McGrath was already suspicious and angry. He might show up too soon. The Black Bat wanted no interference now.

Entrance to Reicher's house was a simple matter for the Black Bat. Gun in hand, he walked directly upstairs, turned left and headed toward the ladder which led to the attic. He went up this cautiously. The intense dark-

ness meant nothing, for his eyes penetrated it easily. He saw a big wardrobe far toward the end of the dusty attic.

He approached it quickly, found the door tightly closed and locked. There was no key, so the Black Bat resorted to the clever little methods which had taken him so long to master. The door opened and Fritz Reicher fell out!

The Black Bat knelt beside him. The man was unconscious but alive, his flesh ice-cold, his pulse low. The Black Bat picked him up. As he turned away, he saw a pale wisp of gray substance gently wafting out of the wardrobe. If he watched it long enough, he knew, it would assume the shape of a ghost, or what was supposed to look like a spectre. He didn't wait, though. Reicher needed attention.

On the second floor, he removed the man's clothes and put him to bed. He forced brandy between the cold lips, packed a couple of hot-water bottles under the covers and massaged the Nazi agent's hands. Soon Reicher opened his eyes. He shuddered like a man with a violent attack of chills as he stared at the weird figure.

"You're safe," the Black Bat said. "You came very close to dying this time. Luck was on your side, though. There were too many chinks in that old wardrobe."

"Cold—I am cold." Reicher chattered miserably. "Listen to me. In my safe is thirty thousand dollars in cash. If you let me go, you take it, ja? I promise to go far away."

"Sorry." The Black Bat rejected the proposal. "Your shirt tails aren't exactly clean, and your methods border on the ruthless side. Bribes don't work much in this country, *Herr* Reicher. I have already notified the F.B.I. that they will find you here."

REICHER tried to get up, but he was too weak. The Black Bat eased him back and covered him again.

Then he took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and calmly chained Reicher to the bed.

"Just to make sure you'll be here when they arrive. That reminds me. If I want to stay out of their way, I'll have to leave. You won't get out of this mess. Incidentally, most of your agents are under arrest right now. You should have realized that the whole world isn't composed of trusting fools. The United States is inhabited by people who have learned to suspect your regime, so your schemes and plots won't work too well here. Good-by, *Herr* Reicher."

The light in the room winked out and Reicher knew he was alone. The chills soon left him and he began to sweat. When he heard someone enter the house through the front door, he shivered again. The F.B.I. agents would not appreciate the fact that Reicher had been up against the toughest adversary in the world—the Black Bat. He knew now that he had fought a losing battle from the very beginning.

The Black Bat watched three F. B. I. men enter the house. Then he hurried to where Carol had the car parked. He got in and for a moment he held her hand tightly.

"The case is nearly over. We've accomplished a great deal of good this time, Carol, and you have done your share. I'm grateful. Now we're off again. I'll have to drop you, for I must work solo now. I'm driving to the Old Well Country Club. I've got to rescue a man named Hawley. The poor chap has suffered a lot during the last couple of days."

"Can you make the rescue alone?" Carol changed places with the Black Bat. "Don't you need help?"

The Black Bat smiled and shook his head.

"Not this time. Hawley's captors are too sure of themselves. A little surprise and— Well, you'll see."

Carol got out near Quinn's home. The Black Bat drove out of the city,

parked and approached the same caddy-house where Hawley had been kept a prisoner before. Suddenly a man appeared in the doorway, whipped out a gun and fired two quick shots. The Black Bat's gun answered and the man turned and raced away into the night. Gun still ready, the Black Bat walked into the caddy-house.

"Help me," a weak voice called from the locker room. "Help me!"

The Black Bat followed the direction of the voice. Hawley was once more strapped to one of the long benches, though not quite as painfully as before. He saw the Black Bat's weird form and for a moment he could only stare.

"I'll have you loose in no time," the Black Bat said as he began to work on the bonds. "From what I've heard, they've been treating you pretty roughly."

"It's Reicher—he's a Nazi spy," Hawley croaked. "Those diamonds that Mr. Van der Veer sent over—Reicher wanted them and others, too—others that I've never heard of— He tortured me—I spent almost two days strapped to the bench—and Reicher had his men watching. Last night someone happened to pass by. He was a big chap. He routed Reicher's men and got me free—took me home. But in the middle of the night, even with a police guard outside the house, Reicher sent more of his men. I was taken again. He means to kill me. You're the Black Bat! You fight for what is right. Get Reicher—get him before he kills me!"

"Just take it easy," the Black Bat soothed. "We'll go back to your place—Van der Veer's, rather. I have a car outside. Can you walk without help?"

(Continued on page 103)

Next Issue: THE BLACK BAT AND THE RED MENACE

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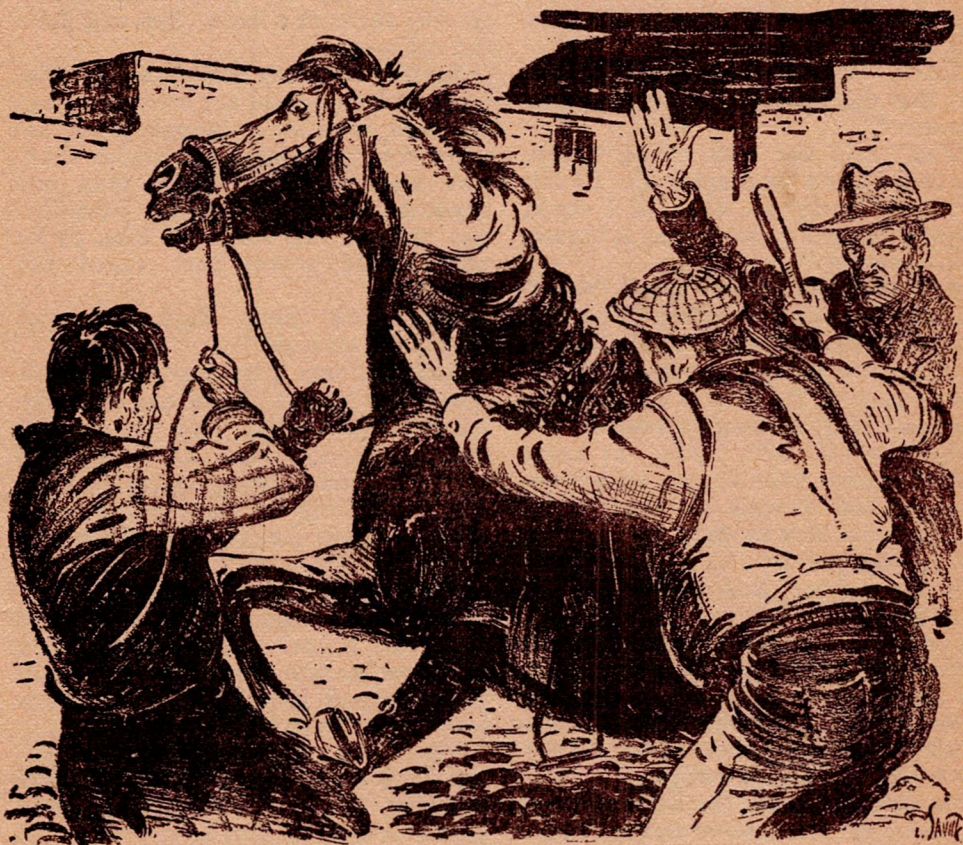


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By **ARTHUR J. BURKS**

Author of "Killer's Hands," "Murder School," etc.



Barb felt the men raining blows on his body

**The Kidnapers of Little Jean Travis Had Dyed the Blue Uniform
of Barb's Master with Blood—but They Hadn't
Counted on a Horse of Another Color!**

BARB had always known that he was something unusual in horses, just as his master was something unusual in mounted policemen. John Carson was a friend and Barb loved him, though it was impossible to let him know just how much. How could you express your love when you could not talk, could only whicker

and rub your nose against a uniformed breast?

And why, tonight, was John Carson staying in that dark alley so much longer than usual? Barb had always been afraid of that alley. There was something sinister, fearful about it. He sensed evil people among the shadows—shadows that might be dangerous to

John Carson. How could Barb know that Carson's long hunt for the kidnapers of the Travis child had led him to a black door in the alley—a door that led to murder? That John Carson had been quite too good a hunter of men? That he had been too successful in finding the hideout of the fiends?

A woman passed and Barb looked after her, knowing just what was coming. She grabbed the arm of the man with her, said excitedly:

"Look, Frank! You know horses. Isn't that the smartest-looking one you ever saw?"

"Yes," said the man called Frank. "He looks like a thoroughbred. I'd say he was a 'barb,' an Arab, if I could imagine one on a police force. A throw-back, probably."

Barb understood the word "barb," not only because it was his name, but because somebody was always using it when he was being discussed. Maybe it was part of the reason he knew he was something unusual in horses. He always walked with pride. It came natural to him. John Carson always encouraged him to walk like that. John Carson knew how to do it, just how to talk to him, just how to give him hints with his knees. But why didn't he come back?

The woman had a soft hand under Barb's nose, and Barb took the sugar, but his heart wasn't in it. He looked away toward that black alley, into which the lights from the street did not shine, and whickered softly.

He wouldn't cross the sidewalk, not yet, at least. His master wouldn't like that. He had always made it plain to Barb that when he was left standing at the curb he must stay there.

A SOUND came out of the alley now that made Barb forget all about the man and the woman. It was a groan, as of someone in pain. Barb would have known the voice anywhere, even when it groaned. There was a note in it which set every nerve in the fine body of Barb to quivering. Something was decidedly wrong in that black place. And Barb could not see the glowing tip of John Carson's cigarette. He hadn't seen it for some time.

And now that the man and the

woman had gone on, Barb had to know. At the worst, his master would scold him. Scolding hurt, when it came from someone you loved, but he might be forgiven if. . . .

There was something wrong in there, something dreadfully wrong. Barb whickered more loudly this time. He'd brought John back from the black area before, by whickering like that, and by pawing the curb a little. But still John did not come.

Barb's hoofs rang sharply on the sidewalk as he stepped up, stretching out his neck with its gorgeous mane, toward that black area—in which shadows were moving. More than one shadow. Nothing happened. John Carson did not call softly to him, as he usually did when Barb dared too greatly:

"Get back there, Barb, old son! That's far enough!"

And that was more proof that something was wrong. Barb had made up his intelligent mind. He put all four feet onto the sidewalk. He crossed the sidewalk, his tail swinging, his head rising and falling to make his mane a spray of silk in the dim light of the dark street.

"Chase that damn horse outa here!" said a voice sharply. "I forgot all about the horse! Somebody is likely to remember him, too! Who could forget a bangtail like that? If somebody sees him come in here—"

There was a rush out of the shadows. But Barb sidled away, disregarding the charging shadows. Man had never struck or injured him in any way, and he did not expect it now. But ahead, in the darkness, he could see his master, sprawled on the dark ground. He could tell the smell of him. And his master lay very still. Moreover, to the keen nostrils of the horse came an odor that any animal knew at once, the odor of blood.

Something terribly hard smashed against the side of the horse. It really hurt. But Barb only winced, and bent his head to nuzzle at the still figure of John Carson.

"Put a slug in that blasted horse!" said a second voice, with hysteria in it. Barb knew nothing of hysteria, but he could understand the note of fear in any

voice, and it was here, in the voice of the second speaker. "Put a slug in him! The damn beast gets my goat!"

"Kill him, and show the whole world just where we put a shiv into his master? You can't hide a dead horse, you fool! You can't shove him into a car and throw him into the river! Drive him out! Hell, a horse can't yell copper!"

The shadows attacked Barb then, with fists and feet, and with a weapon which Barb knew belonged to John Carson, because it had his smell. Nothing with that smell on it had ever hurt him before, as John's blackjack, in the hand of one of the speakers, now hurt him. It struck him on his soft, silken nose. It struck him resoundingly on the head, so that his knees became weak for a moment. And then Barb knew fear for the first time, fear of bodily harm. For just a few moments he forgot about John Carson, and thought only of himself, and of escape.

He whirled for the entrance to the black alley, back the way he had come. He bared his teeth at two men who stood in his way. They flung themselves aside, cursing. He lashed out at the nearest one with his forefeet. Then he blazed away with his hind feet at the other one as he passed. He felt a toe smash into his belly. He felt that blackjack again on his rump, a numbing blow, right where the bone was closest to the skin.

AND then, when he reached the sidewalk, he did something that must have surprised even himself. He whirled back for a swift circuit of the black cul-de-sac. Perhaps he had some dim idea that if he went back just once more, John Carson would rise, climb upon his back, and gallop with him into the street.

But John Carson did not rise. John Carson would never rise again, because John Carson was dead from a knife in his back. He had, at the last, been successful in finding the hideout of the kidnapers of little Jean Travis. But the knife had obliterated his knowledge. He could never tell it to anyone. Never! He had given his life to find the little victim of fiends, but what good would it ever do her now, when her first con-

tact with friends since her disappearance was dead in the alley? Dying, he had severed all contacts with her world, except for a horse. . . .

And what could Barb know about the work of John Carson? How would a horse, even a glorious thoroughbred like Barb, know that John Carson had really been hunting men all those times he had pretended to be stealing a smoke in this cul-de-sac? John Carson's hunting skill had been too good. He had finally discovered that his suspicions were sound—but the kidnapers of little Jean Travis had prevented him from exposing them.

And now, as Barb, whickering fearfully, his ears shot forward, his eyes blazing, his nostrils flaring as he snorted to express his pain and terror, made a swing of the cul-de-sac, they were throwing things at him. Rocks maybe, bottles—and whenever they hit they bit into his silky hide. The places smarted and burned, but there was little he could do about it, except to store away in his brain the idea that hereafter he would keep away from these three men. He would remember them by their smell, and avoid them.

Something struck him squarely between the eyes, and stars flashed in the blackness. The pain was terrific. Barb, this time, knew that he must get out of the alley. That's what the men wanted, and since they were hurting him so much, he was forced to obey.

He plunged across the street, scarcely touching the sidewalk. He knew that the men followed him, but he could run away from their hurting hands and feet. There was nobody on the street now, and Barb could have told them nothing if there had been. He could only run away. But whither? He could go home, but he knew that it wasn't time. It was too early. If John Carson were with him, he wouldn't be going back for a long time yet. And if John were with him he wouldn't want to go back. Now, however, there seemed nowhere else to go.

With terror well behind him, he slowed to a walk. His reins were dragging, and he held his head daintily to one side, so that his feet would not entangle themselves with the reins. That was one of the things he had learned

early, when he had been little, and a long way from here—out on a big farm in the West. You caught your feet in reins, or a rope, and you fell and hurt your side.

Blood dyed his shining coat in several places. The biting hurt made his muscles quiver all around the wounds. And there were many of them. One of the men had struck him with a knife—the same one, though he did not know it, who had struck down John Carson.

Barb was approaching the end of the block. And something deep inside him was saying:

“Go back to your master! It isn’t time to go home yet! Your master won’t like it if you go home now!”

HE didn’t know what to do. But he had some idea of time, built in him by routine patrol, and it was this force of habit which slowed his delicately mincing steps, made him stop at the curb and look back, and whicker softly, anxiously. He champed his bits. A drunken man staggered up to him, held out his hand, palm upward. But Barb, who loved sugar, was not interested in sugar now. He ignored the man. Someone laughed, near the corner. Someone said:

“What you know about horses? Why’n’t you ride him?”

“Think I can’t, eh? Well, I’ll show you!”

And the man who had held out his palm made a lunge for Barb’s reins.

But strangers had just hurt Barb, terribly—though the smell told him that it hadn’t been this man. Still, he swung about, almost spinning on his hind feet, to escape the awkward lunge of the drunken man. And that pointed his head back the way he had come. He scarcely heard the drunken laughter of the men behind him, though he knew that the one who had missed catching his reins had fallen on his face on the pavement.

Barb started trotting, his shod hoofs raising echoes in the darkening street. He liked the sound of the echoes, but memory of what had just happened to him caused him to slow down, proceed warily, his keen eyes and ears alert, the latter pricked sharply forward.

Slowly and more slowly he walked, approaching the spot where John Carson had left him to go into the alley. No sounds came out of the alley. The shadows were gone. A kind of sigh came from the heart of Barb.

Nobody would interfere now if he went to his master. Again he crossed the sidewalk, moving warily. But when he reached the place where he had last seen John Carson there was nothing. John Carson had left without trace, vanished. Barb whickered softly. But nothing struck him. His wounds hurt, but they were his smallest hurt. John Carson had never gone away like this before, leaving him alone.

Barb lifted his head and whinnied. He knew he was not supposed to, but tonight everything was different from other nights, and Barb was sorely troubled. But still John Carson did not answer. If only he would, even to scold Barb severely, Barb would have been happy. But there was nothing. Just the darkness, which wasn’t so very dark to Barb, and the chill of night, and the atmosphere of something in the alley that made all Barb’s terror come back.

It wasn’t something he could analyze, really. He just felt it. And the urge to get away, to go home, was stronger now. Maybe John Carson, in some strange way, had gone home ahead of him. He might find John Carson at the stables. At least, it was the only place he knew to go to—and he would go by the route he always bore John Carson.

There were places where John Carson invariably stopped. Barb stopped at those places, but his master did not appear. Not even the most plaintive whicker could bring him. Each time, when there was no answer, Barb sighed and moved on. And after he had stopped three times, he knew it was no use to look for John Carson anywhere along the route. He’d be at the stables, of course. He *had* to be.

Therefore, since the faster he could reach his master, the happier he would be, Barb stepped out. He trotted first, but in the end he galloped in great winging strides, with his head held aside, and the reins flying as free as Barb’s gorgeous mane. He knew that

the few late strollers stared at him. He heard them exclaim at his beauty. He was accustomed to that. It didn't matter now. Pride didn't matter. Nothing mattered except getting home, and finding John Carson.

BARB'S eyes were wild when he reached the stables. He was panting, and his silky sides were streaked with sweat—sweat not of exertion but of terror. He had had the feeling, near the end, that the men who had abused him in the dark place where John Carson had been lying, were following him, increasing their speed as he ran faster and faster.

Men caught at his reins, but he did not mind them. He knew and tolerated these men. They would know he belonged with John Carson, would do something, surely, to get the two of them back together again.

The men were excited. They did a lot of cursing, asked a lot of questions. They even asked questions of Barb, but he had no answers for them. He only wanted John Carson. But the only way he could ask for Carson was to paw the ground. He did that, but still his master didn't come. Nobody brought him. He heard a siren keening, very soon after he got back, and wondered if all the excitement had anything to do with John Carson. And when anybody came into the stable he turned and whickered for information, but nobody told him anything, and nobody who came in was his master.

Somebody had unsaddled Barb, but whoever had done it had not been as good to him as John Carson. Nobody had brushed him off, or curried him, something John Carson never forgot to do. They had all touched his wounds, and talked savagely, which made no sense to Barb, but did make his wounds hurt all over again.

Long later one man came in, patted Barb's nose and whispered:

"You could give us the lowdown, if you could only talk, Barb! And you almost can! If John Carson ever loved anything on this earth, it was you! And you know where he is, what happened to him, and can't even yell copper for us!"

Barb nuzzled Ross Petersen, who

rode the little bay mare, Elsa, and was a close friend of John Carson. Petersen, with a catch in his voice, went on talking:

"You know very well what I'm saying, but you can't answer me! John was messing with something he didn't tell me about, wasn't he? Was it the Travis kid? He said something about it a few times. He must have got too hot, and somebody snatched him, eh? Or maybe worse!"

Petersen sure hated to say that last. Barb could feel the terror in Petersen, which made his own terror come back, so that he had to whicker to express himself. Petersen swore softly, steadily. Then he went away, and Carson did not come, nor did Petersen come back, nor anybody that Barb cared about, for a long time. Not until a day passed, and night had come again. Then it wasn't Carson, after all that time, but only Peterson, his friend. And Petersen was different. There was a taut grimness about him. A savagery that thrilled Barb to his very innards.

"You're just a horse, so you can't feel much," said Petersen grimly. "You don't even understand when I tell you they fished John Carson out of the river this evening. Something must have scared the murderers, for they didn't make sure that the weights stayed on—and they dropped him in too shallow water. . . . But what's the use of telling you?"

ANOTHER man came in. There were yellow stripes on the sleeves of his uniform.

"Get any silly ideas out of your head, Petersen," this man said gruffly. "First of all, how do we know the killers haven't scrambled from their hideout? Sure, it's possible they're still there. They probably figure John was all alone in whatever he was up to, and maybe they're more afraid of changing their hideout now than of staying there. But I don't want you to take any chances. I'm not going to lose any more cops, understand? Besides, a horse hasn't any sense."

"Maybe so, maybe not," said Petersen, "but if I rode Barb over John's usual route—"

"And him the most noticeable horse on the force! Use your head, Petersen! Whoever killed Carson knows that horse, and would guess you're trying to make the horse give you some hint! If there were the slightest chance of Barb giving you a lead, do you think you'd live a second longer than Carson did? Not a chance! That horse stands out, even in the dark, like a lighthouse. They'll put two and two together, and if you start getting warm they'll drill you first and ask questions afterward."

"I'll give them two slugs, if I can only get one, Sergeant!" said Petersen grimly. "It's a wild, impossible chance. But Barb and John were as close as John and I were. Barb knows every foot of the patrol. And he knows that something happened to him, somewhere. . . ."

"We've been over every possible place. If the horse left footprints, the killers carefully rubbed them out—if it happened anywhere off pavement—so we couldn't follow them back. If it's off his regular patrol, and the horse was manhandled there, he wouldn't go back of his own accord for anything."

"Yes, he would, Sergeant," said Petersen quietly. "He'd go back for John Carson! The horse misses John. Why, he doesn't even eat his hay and oats!"

"Nonsense!" exploded the sergeant, but there was something funny about his voice. "You give the horse too much credit!"

"They get habits, just like men! And whatever it was that John ran into, took some time. Barb was there more than once. Maybe, just maybe, he'll take me there."

"To meet a bullet!"

"Maybe. But Sergeant, if I don't do this, and we never find out who killed John Carson, I'll never be able to live with myself. Why, I'll—I'll be ashamed to look Barb in the face from now on!"

"Aw, hell," said the sergeant. "I know you're going to do it when my back is turned, and I know just how you feel. I'll see you in the river sometime tomorrow! Only, there isn't a chance. We've checked everywhere Carson was supposed to patrol. We've asked questions. Carson evidently didn't stick to his patrol. And how can we tell how far off it he wandered, or

in what direction? It could be anywhere in New York City. The only thing we can do—since he must have taken side forays off his patrol—is to send in cops and start fanning out in all directions. People probably noticed Barb, and might remember where. We might get a lead. But, if I thought you had a chance of getting anywhere with your scheme, I would flatly forbid—"

"Which means," said Petersen, exultantly, "that you've a hunch my idea is a good one! That it will work out! Come on, Barb, we're going places!"

THE man with the stripes on his sleeves went out, swearing. But his swearing would have sounded like praying to Barb, if Barb had known anything about the one or the other.

Ross Petersen was very careful when he saddled and bridled Barb. The beautiful horse trembled with eagerness. This man was often with Carson. Perhaps he was going to get together with him now. Then Barb himself would be with them, be with John Carson!

Petersen was unusually careful with the saddle, almost as careful not to leave wrinkles in the pad as Carson was. And the bridle had to be just so. The bits had to be studied, to make sure that they would not hurt the mouth of the animal. Petersen behaved toward Barb as though the horse had been a bride, or were about to take part in a parade. Barb knew about parades, for he always pranced at the head of them, and people were always commenting on his beauty.

Petersen led the horse outside. Barb knew that Petersen carried more than one of the smelly metal things which belched flame and odors, and that Petersen was very grim and taut, as though he expected trouble. Some of that tautness communicated itself to Barb, and made him both fearful and eager. Fearful of what might lie ahead, eager to have it over with, to get into the midst of it, and kick it to pieces.

"All right now, Barb," said Petersen. "Let's go!"

Barb hesitated. Carson had never started him off in just this way. Petersen rode differently, too. Barb could not feel the pressure of Petersen's

knees guiding him, giving him hints, as he always felt the knees of Carson. He was supposed to go somewhere, but where? It was a safe bet, maybe, to go over the route he usually did, stopping at the usual places. Barb set out.

"Thataboy," said Petersen, scarcely above a whisper, a grim whisper with suppressed fury in it. "Right the same way, understand? Oh, why can't I make it clear that you're to take me right where you left John Carson?"

Barb snorted. His eagerness increased. Petersen didn't know as much about riding as Carson did. Therefore, Barb—well, a lot of it seemed to be up to him. And when Petersen did nothing to make him go in a different direction, follow a different route, Barb stepped out faster. Eagerness built up in him. This route was definitely, and over a long period of time, associated with John Carson. Therefore, John Carson might be encountered somewhere along it. On just such a night as this, too, John Carson had gone away. On just such a night he might come back.

There, just ahead, was where his master usually turned to the right. At first, when he had ridden patrol on Barb, he had ridden straight ahead for several blocks. But that was before he had got the habit of smoking in the black alley. Barb had made the turn often enough to have formed the habit. He turned now, and Petersen whistled softly.

Barb didn't know it, but Petersen knew that this wasn't part of the regular patrol. Petersen shifted in the saddle, and Barb knew that he was doing something with his weapons. Petersen was making sure that they were close under his hands, ready for use.

Barb knew nothing of guns, except that Carson had taught him not to be afraid of them. He only snorted a little when the odor of powder tickled his sensitive nostrils. Maybe the guns would speak again tonight. Things, exciting things, were likely to happen when the guns barked, and flame sped from their muzzles, and the stench got into Barb's nostrils.

Down at the next corner Barb usually stopped. There was a newsstand there, run by a very fat woman. She

always came out with a piece of sugar on her puffy palm for Barb. Barb pricked up his ears now, watching for her. She came waddling out. Barb stopped, nuzzled at the palm.

"I READ about it in the newspapers," the woman said to Petersen. "I'd be lost if the lovely horse never came back. Poor Carson!"

"Did you ever notice where he went, after he left here, Ma'am?" asked Petersen.

"Yes, he went down a few blocks and turned to the right. I always wondered what he was up to. He was always kinda quiet and watchful. Him being a policeman, I thought he was looking for someone. And he never got off the horse here. Seemed to be always in a hurry."

"But didn't want anybody to know it," muttered Petersen, "so he dawdled along. Come on, Barb, you're doing noble!"

Petersen sawed on the reins, and Barb pranced on down the street. His eagerness was mounting still. He remembered very well the last time he had gone this way with Carson. Carson hadn't talked to him that last time, as he usually did. He had been very silent. And Barb had picked his own way. He was being allowed to do it now. And he could feel the tenseness of the man on his back.

Barb, coming to the street where he was to turn right, snorted. He was remembering everything now, everything that had happened that night. Had Carson come back? Would he find him where he had last seen him? He must know. He moved out a bit faster. But Petersen, for the first time, held him in.

Petersen was twisting in his saddle, and Barb could smell that strangely shaped piece of steel more keenly now. Petersen was carrying a weapon in one hand, covering it with the other so nobody would see it. Holding the reins tightly, he was almost in telegraphic communication with Barb.

"Give me the signal, Barb!" said Petersen. "I'll know when you pull against the reins. Let me know, old fellow!"

His very voice made Barb hurt, almost as he had hurt that night when Carson had gone away and left him.

And now, not so very far ahead, was the mouth of that black alley. Barb pricked up his ears, snorted.

"Yes, Barb, yes!" said Petersen.

He could tell that Petersen, in his eagerness, was leaning forward, almost willing him to do something. But he couldn't understand what Petersen wanted. He could only understand that he had come back to the place where he had last seen his master, and that he wanted to see him again, feel his hands rubbing over his silken coat, hear his gentle voice.

PETERSEN slacked the reins now, and Barb, looking back, poking his ears out at Petersen, came to a stop at the curb. How well he remembered it! Into this black alley Carson had gone, and hadn't come back. In here men had mishandled Barb himself, so that the memory of that abuse made him tremble all over.

Petersen hesitated.

"Certainly a swell place for a murder, all right!" he muttered. "No telling what's in that hole. And by now the horse has been spotted, I'll bet! The sergeant was right! If I turn and go away they'll know, and I'll get a bullet in the back, and Barb will drag me away from the spot where he came from. They won't take a chance on my bringing the prowls. But if I dismount, and simply look around, and they think I may not find anything, or they can do to me what they did to John. . . ."

Petersen got off. He hesitated for just a moment. Then, with long strides, he stepped across the sidewalk, went into the black alley. Barb hesitated, too. That alley had fearful associations. But Petersen was a friend who wouldn't hit him with anything, and besides, his master might be in there. So Barb calmly stepped onto the sidewalk, following Petersen in.

And Carson wasn't there. Barb, crowding close to Petersen, was smelling things he remembered—remembered so poignantly that they made him snort fearfully.

"It was here, wasn't it, Barb?" whispered Petersen. "If you could only tell me!"

"Seems to me, copper," said a cold,

savage voice, just as a door opened and Barb caught another smell he remembered, associated with his wounds, "that he's already told you a sight too much! It doesn't pay to snoop, don't you know that? Your pal found that out!"

Petersen stood very straight and stiff, with his guns in his hands.

"Throw down the guns, pal," said that same voice.

"Take them away from me!" said Petersen savagely, and began to shoot.

But even as he started shooting with one gun, he smacked Barb on the rump with the barrel of the other one, hard. Guns were making a terrific racket in the alley, and Barb, remembering his hurts, and wondering why Petersen, a friend of Carson, and one whom he trusted, should also hurt him, whirled and plunged out of the alley.

With a high whinny of fright that was almost like the screaming of a woman, he raced toward the sidewalk. But for the surprise of that blow he had taken from Petersen he might have had time to lash out at that man with the smell he feared.

But even as Barb cleared the sidewalk things were happening, besides that banging and clattering of guns in the alley. Sirens were screaming, and in the street where cars usually traveled in one direction, cars were traveling both directions, fast, noisily.

At the same time, though Barb didn't notice, men were closing in on the alley from all sides. The sergeant had had a lot more faith in Petersen's hunch than he had let on, but he would never have asked anybody, even Petersen, the pal of John Carson, to volunteer to ride right into the men who had done away with Carson. They must have known that the jig was up, or they wouldn't have started shooting.

Barb, caught between the cars, turned back to the alley mouth, where the shooting was dying out a bit, and the alley was filling with men in uniform, who were jumping out of cars and running in, with guns drawn.

Barb looked about for Carson, but still he did not come. Then after a bit Petersen, his uniform all torn, and with that smell of blood on him, came out, staggering, held up between two

men. And three men with manacles on them were being dragged out by men in uniform. Someone was saying:

"The Travis kidnap mob! Can you beat that? The kid's inside, alive!"

Then Petersen was straightening in front of Barb, rubbing his velvety nose gently. Petersen was saying:

"They're only flesh wounds, I tell you! Those hoods couldn't hit me with a handful of pebbles. I want to ride Barb again, tonight, and feel proud!"

"You can't do it! You're as good as dead!" the sergeant said. "You'll fall off and he'll trample on you!"

"Barb! Trample me! Not him. He's practically a thoroughbred, and dollars to doughnuts he knew exactly what was happening every minute. Lift me up. Can't you understand? I've got to let him know I didn't want to hit him. I've got to let him know that I'll be with him, just as John was, from now on—or at least as soon as these bullets are out of me!"

They lifted Petersen up, and men walked beside him, holding his swaying body on. But they needn't have, for Barb, knowing something was wrong

with Petersen, whom he was beginning to like a lot, wouldn't have let him fall off if he could help it. And a horse *could* help it, if he knew how.

He minced along, taking very proud steps, and liking the way Petersen talked to him.

"It's worth it, Barb! Worth getting these slugs in me, just to see Jean Travis alive, like they let me see her! With tears in her eyes, and probably the first smile she's had on her face in weeks! But you, being a horse, wouldn't understand that. You wouldn't understand that finding Jean—and smashing her kidnappers—sort of makes up for what happened to John Carson!"

At sound of Carson's name, Barb pricked up his ears. A soft whicker carried back to Petersen, who spoke in a hoarse kind of whisper.

"It would be funny, wouldn't it, if you understood more than we smart humans think you do? I wonder. . . ."

Barb didn't answer that, of course. But he whickered softly again, in response to the love and admiration in the voice of Petersen.

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THE REUNION

By ALLAN K. ECHOLS

Author of "Dollars to Doughnuts," "Good Money," etc.



"Get out of this neighborhood!" Runt shrieked

The Cops Are the Finger-Men in Spike's Biggest Job—but They Point the Way to the Hot Seat!

TWO plainclothes men sprawled in their own blood on the floor of the cashier's office of the Pratt Manufacturing Company's factory in Rushville. The cashier lay wounded and unconscious before the door of the vault, into which he had thrown the satchel containing the payroll. He had managed to slam the door and spin the combination dial before paying for his reckless courage.

On the street, one flight down stairs, the green-and-white prowler in which the police had arrived stood with motor idling. There was no other car in sight.

Spike Harries, with his gun still in his hand, surveyed the scene of the

abortive attempt at robbery. Then he stepped quickly to the window and looked out. The getaway car was gone. Angrily he bit the corners of his mustache.

"Nuts!" he snapped. "'Dude' run out on us when the cops come."

His partner came over and looked out the window. Panic distorted his narrow face. "Runt" Fayles was not good at thinking in a pinch.

"What are we gonna do, Spike?" he whined in terror.

"We're takin' the cops' prowler car," Spike said. "They gummed up the job for us, didn't they?" He looked angrily at the bodies of the officers. "I only wish they'd been Sergeant

Fogarty—both of 'em. Come on, we gotta get outa here."

Runt Fayles was glad to go. He reached the door quickly, but Spike stopped a moment.

"Wait. Get that guy's tin while I get this one. We might need 'em."

Reluctantly the Runt dug through the pockets of one of the dead officers and found the badge, pinned to a strap of leather. Spike got the other one.

"Now get going," he ordered. "And give it to anybody that comes between us and that car."

Two minutes later Spike rolled the police car away from the curb and turned a corner. He drove leisurely through the thinly populated manufacturing district. Their carefully planned robbery had failed, their get-away man had taken a run-out on them, and they had committed murder in addition to stealing a police car. Spike took this lightly, but the Runt slid down in the seat of the car with a glum and haunted look on his face.

"Switch on the radio," Spike ordered, "so we can tell when the alarm goes out."

THE Runt switched on the radio and they listened to routine calls. Spike drove the car around slowly, not attracting any attention from passing motorists.

"Let's get outa the neighborhood quick," Runt whined. "What are you driving around in circles for?"

"Use your head," Spike answered patiently. "This is the only prowl car in five square miles. If we get out of the district, we'll bump into another one somewhere and they'll want to know what we're doing there. We stay around here till I think of something. You gotta use your head in this racket."

"I don't call it using your head, Spike. After killin' that Pratt cashier and those two cops, we didn't even get a dime for our trouble."

"I still wish it was Fogarty," growled Spike. "He sent me up for

ten years, and I swore I'd meet up with him again. Hey, listen! That's this car!"

"Calling Car Number Six—Car Six," the radio droned. "Go to the office of the Belton Milk Company, at Jackson and First Street. Escort the cashier and the payroll to their plant."

"They'll know something's wrong now!" the Runt howled. "Let's beat it, Spike."

Spike stepped on the gas, but he made no attempt to escape. Terrified out of his wits, the Runt pulled a gun and jabbed it into Spike's ribs.

"Get out of this neighborhood," he shrieked, "or I'll blow you to hell. When we don't show up, they'll—"

"Put that rod away," Spike put in coldly. "We're gonna show up. You damned fool, this is the break of a lifetime. We're going to the Belton Milk Company."

"But what about the cops?" Runt asked in horror.

"We're the cops, ain't we? Don't we have our badges? We're escortin' that payroll. We'll be needin' the dough, after killin' those cops. Know who we got to thank for this tip-off? Fogarty! I recognized that frozen voice of his. Boy, wouldn't he be glad to know what he dropped in our lap—a sweet, big payroll!"

"Yeah, you're smart, all right," the Runt said grudgingly, pocketing his gun. "You use your head."

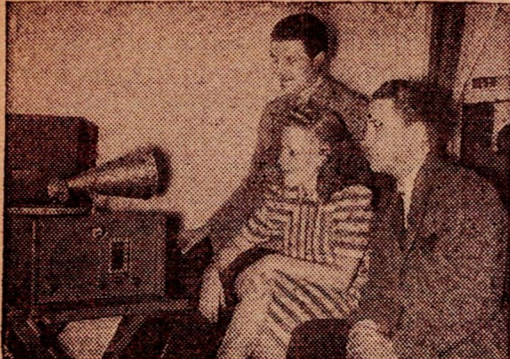
"You gotta in this business. Now just keep your mouth shut and let me do the talkin'. Act gruff and dumb, like a cop."

Spike pulled the car to the curb of the milk company's big delivery plant, touched the siren lightly to indicate their arrival. Then the pair of bandits got out. The elevator operator was standing at the door.

"Third floor and to your right, gents," he said. "Door marked 'cashier.'"

On the third floor Spike led the way to the door, knocked on it. He and Runt entered and stood before

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the desk of a man with gray hair.

"Are you the officers?" the cashier asked.

Spike pulled out his badge and displayed it. The Runt imitated his action. At that instant, a voice behind them spoke with deadly coldness.

"All right, Spike, you and your chum just hold those badges over your heads. Very flattering, Spike. You want to turn and look at your old pal, Sergeant Fogarty. Well, don't."

As the sergeant relieved them of their guns, Spike cursed luridly.

"Now, is that any way to talk to a man you were so anxious to see?" Fogarty asked with mock pain. "I heard you wishing you could see me again, so I planned a meeting."

"You heard me?" Spike blurted.

"Sure. How would I have known you killed those officers at the Pratt Company, unless you had turned on the two-way radiophone, so I could hear you at Headquarters? When your pal said you didn't get a dime out of the job, I thought maybe you'd like a tip-off on another payroll. You always were quick, Spike. Well, it's certainly nice to have a little reunion. How about you and your partner coming up to the house with me—you know, the house with the green door."

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THE BLACK BAT'S JUSTICE

(Continued from page 90)

Hawley nodded and followed him out to the car. Hawley rubbed his chin, apparently thinking of something. He hesitated for a moment before getting in beside the Black Bat. Then he shrugged and maintained silence until they were near the city limits.

The Black Bat chose the darkest, quietest streets possible, for he was still wearing his hood and cape. He had not had the slightest opportunity to remove them.

"I don't know how to thank you," Hawley blurted at last. "Seems that's all I'm doing these days—being grateful to people who rescue me."

"Forget it," the Black Bat said. "If it makes you feel any better, take my word for it that Reicher won't bother you again. Here we are. There's someone on the front porch. Well, it's Captain McGrath."

"A fine cop he is," Hawley grumbled. "Watches the place after I'm kidnaped. Why isn't he out looking for me? Oh, I guess I'm being unjust. The police are only human after all. How did you happen to locate me?"

The Black Bat pulled into the driveway and stopped. McGrath started over belligerently.

"I have my own methods, Mr. Hawley," the Black Bat said quickly. "Clues are left, men talk when they're afraid. Just be satisfied that you are safe. Oh, hello, Captain. I've brought back the twice-missing witness."

"Hawley!" McGrath gasped. "Every one of my men is out looking for you. Are you all right? Who did it?"

"I'm no worse than I was before," Hawley said bitterly. "It was Reicher and a gang of German agents. They think Van der Veer had a lot of other jewels and they were trying to make me tell where they were hidden. All you have to do is grab him. He's responsible for all of it."

Hawley marched up on the front

[Turn page]

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porch and unlocked the door. He turned on the lights and then stepped back in surprise. There was a man sitting in one of the hall chairs, and not of his own volition.

Stout, capable-looking ropes held him there.

Edmund Clive's mouth was gagged, but his eyes revealed the mute fury in his heart.

CHAPTER XX

The Mysterious Vandyke



RELEASING Clive and taking the gag from the captured man's mouth, McGrath groaned in helpless bewilderment.

"How did you get here?" he demanded.

"I was brought here!" Clive shouted. "Somebody dropped a cloth bag over my head. When it was removed, I was tied the way you found me. Aren't these crimes ever going to stop? Hawley, I didn't see you. Why weren't you here? You live in this house, don't you?"

The Black Bat stepped forward.

"He was in a difficulty similar to yours, Mr. Clive. Now that we're here, all but Reicher, I think there should be a few explanations."

"Just a minute. Pardon me, gentlemen."

McGrath took the Black Bat's arm and led him into the next room.

"Listen, you're not going to keep those gems, are you? The commissioner wanted to know where they were, so I told him. You'll be a crook if you don't turn them over. Every cop in town will be looking for you."

The Black Bat laughed. "Haven't they been trying to nab me for months, Captain? Haven't I always been labeled as a crook? We'll discuss the diamonds later. There are more important matters just now."

"What could be more important

than five million dollars' worth of diamonds?" McGrath protested. "Get this. You turn them over soon, or this truce of ours is busted. I don't play ball with crooks."

The Black Bat gravely stepped past the captain and went back to the other men. Clive was massaging his wrists and glaring at everyone in general. Hawley sat on the steps, apparently still weak. McGrath took up a position close to the door, as if to prevent the Black Bat's escape. But the Black Bat pulled over a chair and put one foot on it.

"We'll begin by clearing up the method the killer used to dispatch his victims," he said. "In the first place, the first five million dollars' worth of diamonds never left Europe. The guards who were chained to a valise that was apparently stuffed with gems were protecting a lot of dry ice. During the trip over, the ice evaporated, leaving the boxes which were supposed to contain diamonds mysteriously empty.

"The murders of the plane crew and the two guards are clear enough. Our murderer was very fond of dry ice as a method of getting rid of people who were in his way. We may never prove this, but it is my opinion that there was a great deal of dry ice in that plane. You will remember that it flew in the sub-stratosphere and its cabins were supplied with oxygen.

"If that oxygen were cut off at a certain moment—which could easily be done by regulating the pressure gage on the tanks—then the carbon dioxide from the dry ice would naturally fill the cabin. The passengers and crew simply became sleepy, much as victims of carbon monoxide from automobile exhausts are affected.

"The pilot, however, sensed something wrong and put an emergency oxygen tube in his mouth. That enabled him to land the ship successfully, even though he died immediately afterward."

"Hey, wait a minute!" McGrath forgot everything except the flaws

[Turn page]

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he was sure he saw in the Black Bat's analysis of the murders. "If the diamonds never left Europe, then why did the killer ride that plane? Somebody was aboard, because the pilot's oxygen tube was cut. There was a parachute missing and we had the oxygen apparatus gone over. All okay."

"Certainly it was," the Black Bat said quietly. "When I first visited the plane, our bearded killer was aboard. He took advantage of the withdrawal of the guard, which was made for my benefit. He adjusted the oxygen tanks so there would be no clue. He removed a parachute from the plane and dropped it into the sea. When you checked up, there was a 'chute missing. That would naturally serve to confirm your suspicion that someone had dived out of the cabin before the plane landed.

"The pilot's rubber oxygen tube was not purposely cut. He wanted to see how the passengers were, after the co-pilot collapsed. He got out of his seat, opened the rather heavy door and looked into the main cabin, constantly keeping the oxygen tube in his mouth. But when the door closed, it severed the tube. There are traces of the tubing still on the bottom of the door."

Edmund Clive was openly skeptical.

"I suppose, since you were able to reason all this out, that you can also tell us what become of Van der Veer. I'll even go so far as to wager you'll say he is alive."

"Of course he's alive," the Black Bat answered. "The man McGrath found in the study of this house was not Van der Veer, but a double for him. Van der Veer has always been a crook. You see, I've been in touch with certain authorities in Europe, using your name to get my information, Captain McGrath. I hope you won't mind. Anyway, Van der Veer operated a huge diamond-cutting business, but many of his stones were stolen.

"When his country was overrun by Nazis, Van der Veer fled to the United States. He came incognito and allowed his double to enter publicly. That double was always useful to Van

der Veer. When he traveled around Europe, supervising the theft of diamonds, his double alibied him. Hadn't that occurred to you, Mr. Clive?"

Clive was staring open-mouthed. The Black Bat continued.

"Van der Veer had no use for his double in this country, so he disposed of him by simply placing him in a closet with a quantity of dry ice and sealing it up. The victim, trying to escape the chunks of dry ice, touched them and was burned. He'd just been removed from the closet when you came, Captain. That was why his body was cold on the surface. The internal heat returned before the doctor examined him.

"But the real Van der Veer happened to recall that his double was also a crook and had an international police record. The corpse would be fingerprinted and this secret was certain to leak out. So he stole the corpse and substituted that of a vagrant whom he had picked up several days before. He had used the tramp in an experiment to see if dry ice fumes would really kill."

Captain McGrath headed for the door. "I'm going after Fritz Reicher. He's the man we want."

"But the Black Bat!" Hawley interrupted. "He said that Reicher would no longer bother us. I thought he was dead."

"Let Reicher wait," the Black Bat suggested. "Hear me out first. The body of the false Van der Veer will probably never be found. He was nothing but a stooge, anyway. The real Van der Veer killed him for one big reason, besides the fact that he was now a nuisance. If anything went wrong on the plane, Van der Veer would naturally be suspected. The real Van der Veer, using a short-wave radio, picked up the broadcast stating that the pilot was coming in.

"He became frightened, believing that the passengers were alive and would talk. That was a bad mistake, although it kept me puzzled for a long time. However, once the fake bearded

[Turn page]

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man was accepted as Van der Veer, the real diamond thief went ahead with his plans. He wanted to gather together all the diamonds he could. Two huge robberies and a great number of smaller ones would be big news. Diamond dealers all over the country would believe that there was about to be a shortage and begin to buy.

"There is a shortage already because of war conditions, so that belief was easy to encourage. With the market high, Van der Veer could then sell fast and reap a huge profit. Not, however, with the original five million dollars' worth that he professed to be sending over by plane. They didn't exist to send over. Van der Veer had them at one time, but he sold out, reaping a nice profit. They were not his property but stones he was supposed to be hiding for his clients so the Nazis wouldn't get them."

"I told you about the market inflation from the shortage of stones," Clive put in glumly. "I also sent Captain McGrath an anonymous tip about the new shipment of stones."

"For which I'm grateful." The Black Bat bowed slightly in Clive's direction. "You are a very good actor, Mr. Clive. All I have told you seems to make no impression on you. Oh, by the way, you want to know who your kidnaper was. I confess unashamedly. It was the one way I could be sure you'd be present."

Clive started forward belligerently, but McGrath checked him.

"As a British agent of the International Diamond Buyer's Syndicate, you now realize how Van der Veer fooled you," the Black Bat said. "You don't like to be told what a real mutton-head you are. Mankensen, who was the butler in this house, was also one of your agents. Something you or he did gave his identity away to the killer, and Mankensen died."

"Now Van der Veer—the real one—was distinguished by his strange red beard and his coal-black hair. His beard really was red. Mr. Hawley, you haven't shaved lately, have you? Too many interruptions. Do I really

notice that your whiskers are red?"

Hawley leaped to his feet. He looked around, his eyes flaming madly. Then he took a wild dive for the door. The Black Bat's foot sent a straight-backed chair directly into Hawley's path. The killer stumbled and fell heavily. McGrath seized him and handcuffs clicked on his wrists.

"Stop protesting your innocence," the Black Bat snapped. "Reicher isn't dead. You tried to kill him with dry ice, but you failed. When you escaped last night, you went directly to Reicher's house and surprised him. He's talking to F. B. I. agents. Reicher was after those diamonds, but like everyone else, he thought they were in the United States. He also knew that you were the real Van der Veer.

"Some of your allies in Amsterdam were apprehended by the Gestapo and persuaded to talk. I hate to think what that persuasion was. Reicher was ordered to get the gems and he tried to, in the only way he knew how—by forcing you to tell the hiding place. Even your friends in Amsterdam thought you still had the diamonds.

"You wore a false Vandyke beard and hired Jules Andrus, Stringy and their mobs directing every move they made. When you were trapped in this house, you took off your disguise and had one of Jules' men—whom you were forced to take into your confidence—rap you on the head. But he was excited and did too good a job of it. That man escaped through the window, with one of my bullets in him.

"Then you went to the hospital, were kidnaped by Reicher and, before you could shave off that telltale red fuzz, snatched again by me. I wanted to make sure you wouldn't shave. During that time your hired crooks carried out your plans, but you were never around. If the man with the beard had been Clive or Reicher, he would have been in evidence. You weren't there because you couldn't be, physically.

[Turn page]

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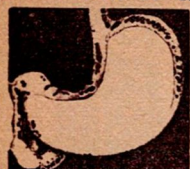
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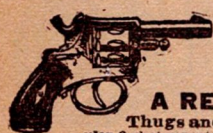
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"The dry ice puzzled me, especially when I got a picture of it fuming out of that closet. You meant to dispose of the stuff that was cleverly hidden there, but you had no chance. You fooled McGrath into giving you an alibi. You were the only living man in the room where the supposed Van der Veer was dead. You merely used the voice which you always used as the real Van der Veer, and answered yourself in the voice you had adopted to fit Hawley."

McGrath looked grim.

"I'll take him away, but you're coming, too. The case is over and so is the truce. You've got five million dollars' worth of rocks. You're holding out, so I'm not giving you a chance to get away with them."

"But, Captain," the Black Bat chided, "if you'll just look down at my right hand, you'll see a gun. You know, I'd hate to shoot you—"

McGrath advanced a step or two.

"I—I always said you were a crook. Now you've proven it. I'll get you, if I'm ninety-five years old when the time finally comes. Oh, I realize you've helped me, but that isn't worth five million. . . ."

The light in the hall suddenly winked out. McGrath lunged forward, but the spot which the Black Bat had occupied was empty now. McGrath thought of Hawley. He darted to the wall, found the light switch and flooded the hallway with light again. Hawley lay on the floor, unconscious.

From the rear of the house a taunting voice made McGrath turn livid.

"Sorry to run out on you, Captain. Hawley tried to get away, so I slugged him. I've been wanting to, ever since the case began. Five million dollars in diamonds. Aren't you envious?"

McGRATH hauled Hawley to his feet. He looked at Clive.

"The dirty crook! Yes, I mean the Black Bat. Help me lug this side of beef out to my car. I'll jug Hawley and then start a hunt for the Black Bat. I trusted him, like a fool."

Clive was still a little dazed by the

rapid events of the last few moments.

"Captain, it's almost worth five million to have Hawley—or Van der Veer—in your custody. The Black Bat was right. I am an agent for the diamond association, which has been trying to pin something on Van der Veer for years. I really thought he was dead this time. He's a vicious, clever fellow. Watch him closely."

Clive opened the door of McGrath's car and helped to stow Hawley inside. McGrath ran around the car and tried to slide behind the wheel. There were two metal boxes on the seat. He picked them up. A small piece of paper was pasted to one. It said:

Merry Christmas. Now do you believe in Santa Claus?

Below the message was the sticker of the Black Bat. McGrath placed the tin boxes on Hawley's lap. Hawley did not know it, though. He was still unconscious. McGrath stepped on the starter and growled an oath.

"The crust of that guy," he said.

Hawley stirred and groaned.

"Aw, shut up!" McGrath bellowed. "The nerve of that guy."

Two pair of eyes watched the car disappear. The Black Bat chuckled.

"Poor McGrath, he didn't know whether to be sore or happy. Now let's get back to the house and explain things to Carol and Butch. You acted like a real disciple of mine at the caddy-house, Silk."

Silk looked proud. "Hawley certainly thought I was one of Reicher's men. The car is over this way, sir. Shall we go?"

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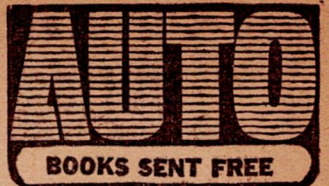
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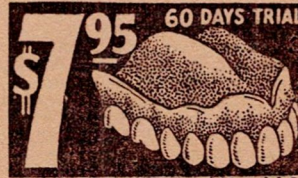
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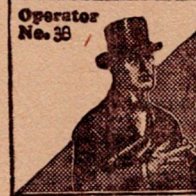
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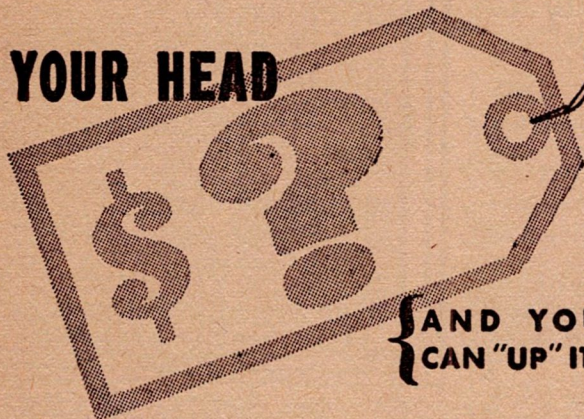


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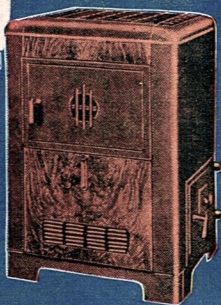
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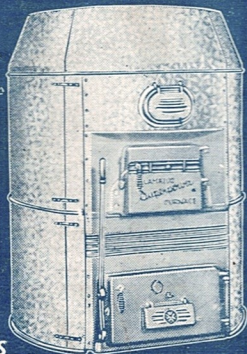
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