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**BLACK BOOK**

**ANC**  
**DETECTIVE**



**The LONG AGO  
MURDER**

*A Tony Quinn  
Mystery Novel*  
**By G. WAYMAN  
JONES**

**WAYLAND RICE  
RAY CUMMINGS  
R. SIDNEY BOWEN  
ANTHONY TOMPKINS**

**A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION**

*Reddish  
Cassidy*

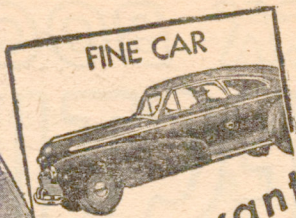
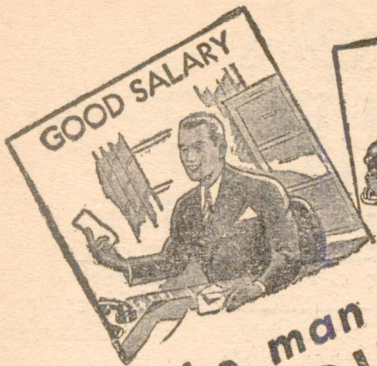
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# BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

Vol. XXIII, No. 2

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

October, 1947

## A COMPLETE BLACK BAT NOVEL



### *The Long Ago Murder*

By G. Wayman Jones

Ten years before, Clyde Ainsley was held as a homicidal maniac—and now he confronts Tony Quinn with a strange and baffling account of crime that calls for swift action! Follow the Black Bat on the trail of a diabolical killer! 11

## A COMPLETE NOVELET

**SHROUD OF GUILT**.....*Anthony Tompkins* 86  
Lieutenant Kenneth Loring sent a man to prison awaiting execution, and then found he had to go ahead and prove the man was innocent!

## SHORT STORIES

**AVERY'S BONES**.....*Wayland Rice* 63  
The skeleton in the pond was certainly that of a man who was slain

**NAIL FOR A NOOSE**.....*Robert Sidney Bowen* 72  
One thing led to another, and Bill Croft never knew where he'd land

**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH**.....*Ray Cummings* 81  
Peter Kinney's girl knows an angle or two to help trap a killer

**NICE MORNING FOR MURDER**.....*Donald Bayne Hobart* 101  
Mugs Kelly finds two cold corpses waiting for him inside his office

## AND

**OFF THE RECORD**.....*The Editor* 6  
A live-wire department where readers and the editor get together

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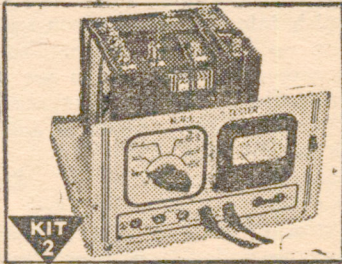


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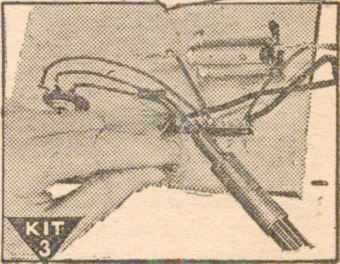
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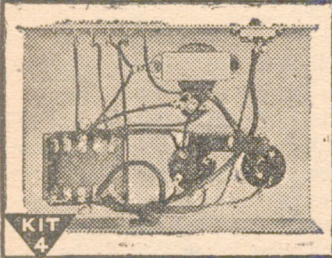
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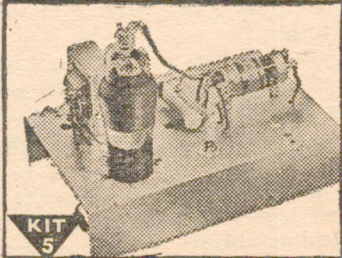
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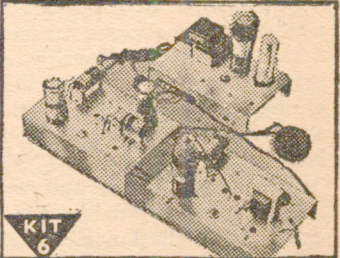
**KIT 3**  
You get parts to build Radio Circuits; then test them; see how they work; learn how to design special circuits; how to locate and repair circuit defects.



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# OFF THE RECORD

## A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

**A** MYSTERIOUS series of murders, in which the victims vanish into thin air, brings Tony Quinn up against the most baffling case of his career in an amazing novel of suspense and thrills, *CITY OF HIDDEN DEATH*, by G. Wayman Jones—featured in the next issue of *BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE!* For excitement, action, chills and more chills—it's the tops!

Not only is Special District Attorney Tony Quinn menaced from the moment he undertakes this dangerous case of the vanishing dead men, but the Black Bat, lovely Carol Baldwin, Silk, and Butch find their lives in peril from a strange unseen killer!

It all started when a chunky, bullet-headed man entered the main office of Tony Quinn. The man was Captain McGrath of the Detective Bureau, who wears a perpetual scowl.

Silk, Quinn's able assistant, greeted McGrath, and showed him the way to Quinn's desk. For a blind man, Quinn had an uncanny sense of perception.

### Six Bullets

"Hello, Mac," he greeted his visitor. "How's it going?"

McGrath bit the end off a cigar. "You know darned well how it's going," he said. "It's not going. It's stalled."

Quinn nodded. "When two days go by after a murder and you still haven't dug up the faintest clue, I guess you are stalled, Mac. What are the facts?"

McGrath puffed slowly on the cigar which he now had lighted. "Two nights ago, John Powell was found dead. He'd been shot through the head twice, through the heart twice, and two more bullets landed in his stomach. Nobody saw it done."

"It was a murder caused by intense hatred," Quinn said. "All that shooting is proof. Yet we can't find that John Powell ever had an enemy in his life. Mac—in interviewing people who lived nearby the scene of the shooting, did you come across an elderly lady named Lydia Barr who lives on the ground floor of number 1125 Wakefield Avenue?"

"I didn't see her, Tony. I talked to her grandson and some old guy in a wheelchair, though. They told me the old lady was too sick to see anyone. And they didn't know a thing about the murder and had never heard of John Powell."

### Rendezvous After Dark

Quinn considered that for a moment. "I wonder why the old lady phoned me to come see her then?" he murmured. "She made it sound very urgent, but was emphatic that I wasn't to appear until after dark tonight. Maybe it does have something to do with the John Powell case. Well, if anything turns up, I'll let you know."

When Captain McGrath had gone, and Silk had closed the door after him, a strange thing happened to Tony Quinn's eyes. They were no longer the eyes of a blind man, but were alive and seeing. Silk, of course, was one of the few persons who knew that Quinn was not really blind and that Quinn was, in fact, the Black Bat—secret fighter against crime.

"I finished my check-up on this Lydia Barr woman who wants to see you," Silk said. "She's over eighty, and her life is practically a history of the northern part of our state. Her father started and built Barrtown. Upon his death, she inherited everything—the banks, or most of them, the three large factories which make all sorts of sporting goods, the library which her family has maintained as a public institution. In short, practically all of Barrtown."

Quinn rubbed his chin. "Who runs the town for her?"

"Her son-in-law, a fellow named Lou Varden. Mrs. Barr is dying now. They say she won't live more than a few days."

Darkness had fallen when Silk and Tony Quinn arrived at the large apartment building where Lydia Barr lived on the ground floor. Silk was acting as Quinn's eyes, for when anyone was around Quinn kept up his pretence of being stone blind.

A young man, who introduced himself as

*(Continued on page 8)*

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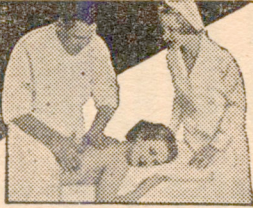
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## OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 6)

Edward Ware, let them in.

"Lydia is my grandmother," he explained. "Frankly, in her condition," she shouldn't be allowed to see anyone. But you're an attorney, and perhaps she wants to make some changes in her will."

### Two Weeks to Live

He led the way across a lavishly furnished room, and they passed a thin-faced, white-haired man who occupied a wheelchair. The man irascibly demanded to know who Quinn was before he let him pass.

"She's half out of her mind," he shouted after Quinn then. "The woman is dying. Even if she is my cousin, she's an obstinate, proud, self-centered woman who doesn't know enough to give up when it's her time to go."

At last, Quinn stood before Lydia Barr herself. The old woman was lying in bed in a room that faced the street.

"So you're blind," she said when Quinn was introduced to her. "Good! I'm glad you can't see me because I used to be a handsome woman and now I'm dried up, withered—like last year's rose petals and ready to blow away."

Quinn chuckled. "You certainly don't sound withered."

She laughed. "First of all, I want you to understand this, Mr. Quinn. I have a cancer, and doctors have given me only two more weeks to live. But before I die, there is something I want you to do for me. You—and a friend of yours."

"A friend of mine?"

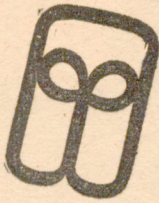
"The Black Bat," she whispered. "I know you work together. My father founded and built up the city of Barrtown. My father controlled its mayor, its banks, schools, libraries, hospitals and—most of all, the large factories. He did a good job, and when he died and I took over, I did a good job. But things are different now. I want you and the Black Bat to go there and clean it up. On the surface, it seems like a good town, but underneath it's shot through with crookedness. It has to be ripped open at the seams and sterilized."

### Witness to a Killing

Quinn whistled softly. "But I have no authority in your city, Mrs. Barr. If condi-

(Continued on page 110)





# Why be a Papuan?

OUR FRIEND, the anthropologist, told us that only a Papuan could have designed these ceremonial masks. We'd have believed him — except for one thing. We know the man who doodled them . . . just traced the outline of a paper clip and shaded to suit.

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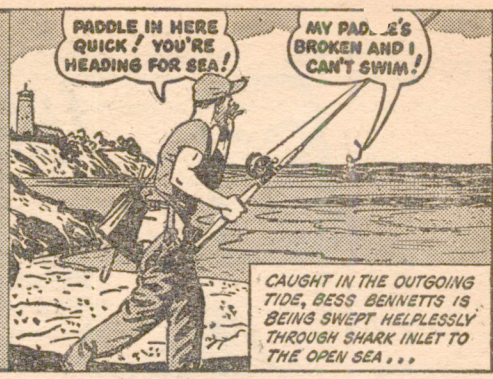
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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Present Position \_\_\_\_\_

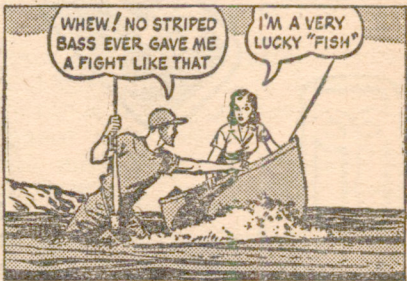
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USING EVERY OUNCE OF HIS FISHING SKILL, LOU YOUNG SLOWLY "PLAYS" THE CANOE AND ITS PASSENGER INTO SHOAL WATER...



FOR THE QUICKEST, EASIEST SHAVES YOU EVER HAD WITH A LOW-PRICE BLADE, TRY THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE KEENER, SMOOTHER FINISHED AND LONGER LASTING. ALSO THIN GILLETTES FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY AND PROTECT YOU FROM THE IRRITATING EFFECT OF MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES



Quinn lunged forward and managed to grasp the gunman around the neck from behind (CHAPTER III)

# THE LONG AGO MURDER

By G. WAYMAN JONES

*Ten years before, Clyde Ainsley was held as a homicidal maniac—and now he confronts Tony Quinn with a strange and baffling story of crime that calls for swift action!*

## CHAPTER I

### *Man with a Problem*

**T**HE man came out of the doorway covertly, like a woodchuck peering around first to be certain everything is safe. He was a tall, gaunt man with a strange pasty hue to his angular features. Nobody could ever claim that he was handsome but despite

this and his furtive manner, there was something about him that demanded respect.

He wore clothes that didn't fit too well, as if he'd grown much thinner of late, but insisted upon wearing his old clothes. They were of a moderately expensive make, neutral in color and did nothing to make him stand out. For which he was definitely glad.

Near the outer fringes of light from

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A COMPLETE BLACK BAT NOVEL

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## The Black Bat Moves Swiftly to Save Victims

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a street lamp he paused and examined his left sleeve. It was soaked with blood. Fresh, red blood and he shuddered visibly.

A policeman sauntered around the corner and the man quietly faded into a doorway and stayed there until the cop walked on by. Then the gaunt man emerged and hurried to the nearest lighted corner. He found a drug store there and a clock in the window indicated that it was slightly after one in the morning.

He fumbled in his pockets and produced a few silver coins, not more than forty cents. He entered the drug store and saw, with considerable relief, that it was quite empty. A clerk bustled toward him.

"I'd like this dime changed so I can make a phone call," the gaunt man said. "And—and a pack of cigarettes too, please."

"Right. What brand?"

"Why-why, it doesn't matter. Just—cigarettes. And how much does it cost to use the phone now? It used to be a nickel."

"It still is." The druggist chuckled. "About the only thing that hasn't gone up. Say, have you been on a deserted island or something? Not knowing how much the phone costs."

"An island?" The gaunt man permitted an odd smile to cross his lips. "Yes. Yes, an island. Isolated, quiet, serene. I wish to heaven I was back there."

He reached for the cigarettes with his left hand, remembered the bloody shirt and dropped that arm stiffly by his side. He used his right hand to pick up the cigarettes and the change. Then he walked to the string of booths and stopped to check through a phone book.

HE OPENED it to the letter Q and rapidly ran a finger down the fine print until he came to the name of Quinn. Anthony Quinn. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully, stepped to the booth door and hesitated. Finally he turned around and went back to the counter.

"Can you tell me if Whiteacre Lane is very far from here, please?"

The druggist shrugged. "This is New York, my friend. No place is very far away if you got cab fare."

"But that's just it. I haven't. Not enough, and I—want to reach a friend of mine."

"He must be in the bucks," the druggist said. "That's a high hat address. You can reach it for no more than a dime or so. Slower than a cab, but you'll get there."

He began explaining directions about busses and finally resorted to drawing a map on a bit of wrapping paper.

The gaunt man followed his directions with quick, alert nods of his head. Then he frowned. "Isn't there a cross-town trolley line?"

The druggist looked up. "Say, you really have been away. That trolley was taken off eight or nine years ago. You've got to travel by bus."

The gaunt man thanked him and went out into the night, cautiously again, investigating every flickering shadow and keeping a sharp eye for blue uniforms. He found the bus station and waited there in another dark doorway. Four other people waited, but the gaunt man was the last to get aboard. He didn't ask about transfers and, once in the bus, he took a rear seat and pulled the brim of his faded hat well down over his eyes.

He made the bus change at the proper point and soon found himself in a very quiet neighborhood. He turned a corner and walked down a dead-end street. The houses were all large, obviously those of wealthy people and the street had trees on it—something rare in the city, even in this rather remote section.

The gaunt man liked the trees. They provided lots of dark shadows and he kept to them, moving on the balls of his feet so his heels wouldn't make any undue sound. At the very end of the street he bent slightly to examine a name-plate fastened to a neat gate. The sign read "Anthony Quinn."

"If he'll only help me!" the gaunt man muttered. "He's got to help me. I haven't a friend in the world, except him, and I'm not even sure of him. Not after what happened."

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## Slated for Death on a Crafty Killer's List!

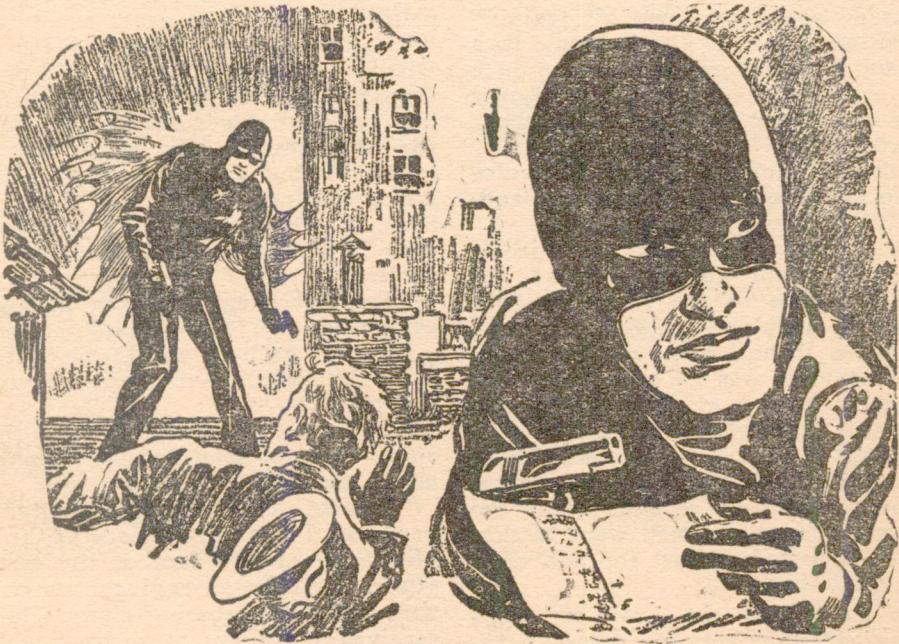
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He pushed the gate open. The house was all dark. He tiptoed along the path, reached the porch steps and mounted them quickly. He crossed the porch and reached for the doorbell. His finger hesitated a second before he pressed the button. During that second he almost gave it all up and succumbed to the urge to run for it.

"Yes, I know. I know! But this is most urgent. I've got to see him. You simply cannot send me away. I can't go to his office. I've got to see him now."

"Come in," Silk Kirby invited and stepped aside. "I'm Mr. Quinn's valet. Just walk ahead of me."

The gaunt man started to do that, but Silk Kirby moved noiselessly up behind



THE BLACK BAT

But he braced himself, reached a hand into his inside pocket and pulled out a long knife. It was stained with blood. He put it back. At least, he thought, I have this if things get too tough. He punched the doorbell.

In about four minutes the door opened and a lithe man peered out at him. The porch light flashed on. The man was about forty-five and he had clear, shrewd eyes. He was dressed in pajamas and a robe.

"I'm looking for Tony Quinn," the gaunt man said. "It's very important."

"He keeps office hours," the man in the bathrobe said. "It's half past one in the morning."

him and suddenly threw an arm around his neck and drove a knee into the small of his back. The gaunt man was much taller, looked stronger, but he was quite helpless in that grip.

**W**ITH a free hand, Silk Kirby rapidly explored the gaunt man's pockets and found the knife. He let go of the man, stepped back and balanced the blade carefully.

"Nice little toy," he commented caustically. "I figured, when you said you couldn't go to the office, that you were some kind of a mug and armed. You'll see Mr. Quinn all right. Maybe a judge and jury too. I—say, this knife is blood-

stained. Who'd you kill?"

"I don't know. I'm—not sure. Please, if you have any sense of mercy in you at all, let me talk to Mr. Quinn. He helped me before."

"Oh, he did." Silk eyed the man critically. "I suppose on another murder rap, eh?"

Silk got his reply and it staggered him a little, though he didn't show it.

"Yes, a murder," the gaunt man answered. "He helped me with that."

From somewhere upstairs a querulous voice demanded: "Silk, what is it? What's wrong?"

"You'd better come down, Mr. Quinn," Silk called back. "A guy is payin' us a visit and he's carrying a knife. A nice knife except that it's got blood all over it and our visitor said something about a murder. Two murders, in fact."

"Take him into the library." The voice was no longer querulous, but commanding. "I'll be down in a moment."

Silk glanced at his guest, bowed ironically and swept an arm toward the further reaches of the reception hall. The man's shoulders sagged, his steps faltered as if he'd mentally convinced himself that it was no use—no use at all. He entered a medium sized room which was lined with book shelves, containing mostly heavy legal tomes. There was a sleek looking desk in one corner, two over-stuffed chairs and, before the fireplace, a large and well worn leather chair. Supported against the arm of it was a white cane.

The gaunt man sat down and kept locking and unlocking his fingers nervously. Silk stood close by, holding the knife and watching him narrowly. There were slow, hesitant footsteps on the stairs, then along the hall and finally a man walked into the room.

He was sturdy looking with dark brown hair, a face that was too rugged to be good-looking, and he moved in a leisurely way, yet with a certain amount of grace that came of keeping his body in excellent physical shape. Around his eyes were deep, almost ugly scars and the eyes themselves were motionless. He sidwiped a table and stopped instantly. Then he smiled, seemed to get his bearings and walked directly to the big leather chair. He sat down in it.

"Now, what's this all about?" he said.

The gaunt man leaned forward. "Don't you recognize me, Mr. Quinn? Oh, I sup-

pose not. We've both changed. Ten years is a long time. A horribly long time for me. I've lost a lot of weight and aged beyond my years."

"No, I don't recognize you," Tony Quinn said. "Not yet. Suppose you tell me why you are here, armed with a blood-stained knife."

"I think I killed a man. I'm not sure. I didn't want to kill anybody, but I'm not sure. He was there—on the floor. The knife was in my hand. He'd been stabbed many times."

"Begin at the beginning," Quinn urged and his voice was quiet and compelling. "Begin ten years ago."

The gaunt man sighed. "You were District Attorney then too. I'd always thought district attorneys were like policemen, rough, domineering, looking for something to pin on a man they suspected, but you were very kind and understanding. That's why I've come back. To give myself up to you because even if I didn't murder this man, I'm wanted."

"Ten years ago," Quinn mused. "I can't place you, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Let me go back and then see if you place the name. I—this valet of yours—I don't like—"

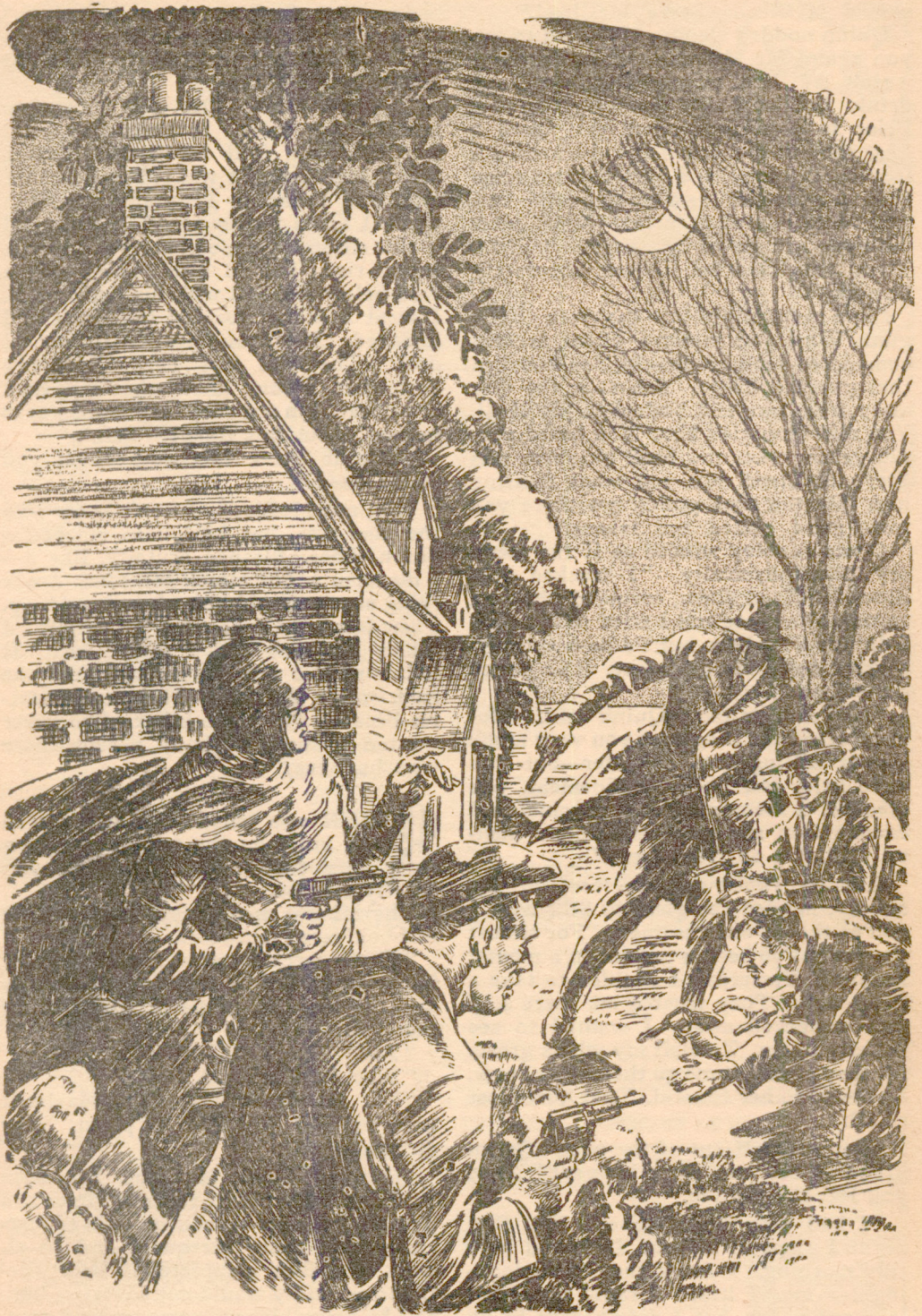
"That's Silk Kirby. He's more than a valet. He's my friend and confidant. Go ahead and talk."

"Thanks. Thanks, I'll be glad to. Ten years ago I was married, one of the happiest men on the face of the earth, I guess. I'd been an engineer for a long time and I was coming along. I'd just received a contract to go back to Honduras on a large job. My brand new wife and I were celebrating. Things went perfectly and it was a wonderful evening. The memory of it has been the only thing that's kept me going."

**T**HE visitor paused. "Silk, bring the gentleman a drink," Quinn said. "Brandy would be best."

"Thanks," the gaunt man said, but he went on talking while Silk walked to a small bar and poured the drink without taking his eyes off the visitor one second.

"We were on our way home," the gaunt man said. "We stepped out of the taxi and then there was shooting. It was some kind of a gang war. The gangsters flourished pretty well in those days. My wife was killed by a man



At the sound of the shot, the three men began dodging for safety (CHAPTER VI)

named McCleod. Steve McCleod."

Quinn nodded slowly. "I'm glad to see you again, Mr. Ainsley. Clyde Ainsley, wasn't it? Yes, of course. Take your drink. Let me finish the story for you. Prior to getting married, you spent a long time in Honduras and contracted a tropical disease there. You'd spent some time in a hospital as a mental case. But you came out of it nicely—until your wife was cut down by gangster bullets. Then you reverted. Went absolutely berserk.

"You ran straight into the teeth of one gun. Why you weren't killed is still considered a minor miracle. You knocked that gunman down. You took the gun away from him and bashed in his skull. You also strangled him. You heard people yelling that the head gangster was Steve McCleod and you went hunting him. By the time police got there you were gone, armed and insane."

Clyde Ainsley winced as if the memory hurt physically. "I tracked this Steve McCleod down, cornered him in a rattrap of a place and I tried to kill him. I did my very best, but I'd been through a great deal. He got away. The police came then."

"And I came too," Quinn said. "Nobody ever held it against you very much—your killing that gangster—but you were held, and under confinement, you cracked. I recommended a psychiatric examination and you were found mentally ill. Go on from there."

Ainsley swallowed the rest of his brandy, handed the glass to Silk with a nod of thanks and resumed. "For almost ten years I've been a patient in a mental hospital. Yesterday I decided to take a little walk. They trusted me there so I just wandered away. I wanted to see the city again. To visit my wife's grave, for they never let me go there, you know. Not even to her funeral. That hurt most of all."

"Get yourself out of the past," Quinn urged. "Tell me what happened since you left the asylum."

"I had very little money. The first night I slept in a barn. I arrived here this morning. I knew they were looking for me. I heard a radio broadcast in a police car, but I didn't want to go back right away. I visited the cemetery and felt better. Much better. I didn't care any more, if they took me back. I'd

had my little fling and then—I saw him."

"You can't mean anyone except Steve McCleod," Quinn broke in. "Where did you see him?"

"I don't know. The city isn't very familiar any more. It never was, as a matter-of-fact. But I followed him. I didn't know what I wanted to do about him, but I had to keep him in sight while I made up my mind. He walked to this cheap section and entered a house. I was right behind him. There was a card below one bell with his name on it. I went upstairs, located the room and knocked. The door opened. It was all dark. The hall was dark. I hadn't noticed it. I don't know what happened after that. I'm not sure. My brain works normally, but this time it—didn't."

"Was it Steve McCleod whom you found dead?"

"No, not McCleod. I don't know who the man was, but he'd been stabbed a dozen times. Slashed brutally, like a— a madman might attack someone. I was lying across an old bed when I woke up. I saw him—the dead man. I thought I'd killed McCleod and I didn't care. It didn't matter until I realized that the man wasn't McCleod. Then it did matter because I'm not a killer. I've never wanted to hurt anybody except those who hurt me."

QUINN was tense. Silk had placed the knife on the table and apparently forgotten all about it. He was quietly excited.

The calmest man in the room was the self-confessed murderer.

"Think carefully now, for this is very important," Quinn said. "You actually saw the name of Steve McCleod below that bell?"

"Yes."

"Was it a printed card?"

"No. Handwritten in ink. Maybe it wasn't a card, just a bit of paper. Why do you ask?"

"Because Steve McCleod has been wanted for a score of serious crimes and hasn't been seen in months. His appearances have been infrequent and he always vanishes completely. Now McCleod certainly would not advertise himself by using his own name under a doorbell. Was the card—or paper—there when you went out?"

"I don't know. I didn't look."



SILK broke in.

"Sir, his left sleeve is bloody. Very bloody."

"Left hand?" Quinn said quickly. "Ainsley, when you throttled that gangster ten years ago, you did it with your right hand. You are right-handed, aren't you?"

"Yes. I can't do much with my left hand. I—say! I wouldn't have stabbed him with my left hand!"

"That's what I'm driving at. This begins to look like a plant to me, Mr. Ainsley, with the real killer either scared or in such a hurry that he forgot to take pains with his frameup."

"Then you'll help me?" Ainsley begged. "Please. I'm completely lost. I haven't a friend or a relative, outside of Laura's folks who refused to have a thing to do with me."

"The Prescotts, wasn't it?" Quinn mused. "Nice people, but a trifle stuffy. They resented their only child marrying you because you were a plain engineer without much of a social background. Yes, Mr. Ainsley, I'll help you, but my help will necessarily be somewhat limited."

"You're the District Attorney," Ainsley cried.

"No, I'm a Special District Attorney and my cases are assigned to me. Besides—I'm blind."

"Blind?" Ainsley cried in undisguised horror. "Blind! I—I'm sorry. I wondered why you acted so strangely and didn't recognize me. I'm a fool. Call the police. Have them come and get me. Let's finish this up."

"Not right away," Quinn countered. "The odd part is that I believe every word you say and I'm convinced you are no longer a mental case. What you did ten years ago is nothing more than I, or any other man, might have done. Your being found mentally unbalanced was—well, a strict coincidence. Naturally you had to be put under care, but you never proved to me that you were a wanton killer."

"Thank you!" Ainsley said. "It's funny how I've maintained faith in you all these years. When I got into a fresh mess of trouble, you were the only person I thought of."

"We'll have to work fast," Quinn said. "Silk, bring the car around front. We're

going to this address where Mr. Ainsley left a dead man."

Silk carefully stowed the knife away in a desk drawer and hurried out of the room.

A INSLEY leaned forward. "Why are you willing to help me this way, Mr. Quinn? After all I'm an escaped mental case and I'm covered with blood. I was armed with a murder knife. I've admitted knowing about a murder. Maybe I did it."

"Maybe you did," Quinn agreed. "I'm not arguing that point. But you saw Steve McCleod. You're certain of that now?"

"Don't you think I'd know him—even after ten years? That night when I had him by the throat. It was the bullets from his gun that killed Laura. I tracked him down. Don't you believe I'd know him? I'd be able to recognize him—anywhere!"

"I'm convinced of it," Quinn said placatingly. "You see, this man McCleod is the first real will-o'-the-wisp killer and criminal I've ever encountered. He simply vanishes, but comes back any time he likes. His crimes are stamped with a peculiar viciousness. I want to get him. If he framed you tonight, he'll stay around. Maybe something at the scene of the crime will give him away. It's a chance I can't afford to miss."

"But what will the police think?" Ainsley asked Tony Quinn with a wry smile.

"They aren't going to know about this. Not right away, because I want McCleod to be thoroughly confused. The more rattled he gets, the more likely he'll be to slip somewhere and I want him. I want him badly!"

"I'll help," Ainsley offered. "I'll do anything you say. Even kill him if you wish. What have I to lose? I'm already adjudged crazy."

Quinn's jaw was thrust out, his apparently sightless eyes stared off into some infinity of blackness, his whole face was grim, and when he spoke it was in solemn tones.

"When Steve McCleod dies, he'll go out sitting down, in the electric chair. Help me, Mr. Ainsley. The car will be around at the front by now."

## CHAPTER II

*Place of Murder*

SILK KIRBY slid the big car to the curb, twisted around and spoke to Quinn who sat with Ainsley in the back seat. "The address is around the corner, sir," Kirby said. "I thought we'd better stop here, where it's dark and

quiet."

"Good," Quinn agreed. "Now, Ainsley, we're not taking you with us. Just give Silk a complete description of how to reach the apartment, then remain here in the car, waiting."

"I'll do anything you say, Mr. Quinn. It's on the third floor, and you have to walk up. Go down the corridor from the stairs. It's the last door on your right. I didn't lock it behind me."

Silk had the car door open and his arm extended. Quinn took it and they walked slowly toward the corner. Ainsley watched them disappear. Then he gave a nervous look around, settled back and lit a cigarette. He kept the glow shielded by palming it and was prepared to either run for it or slip down to the floor of the car if anyone came along.

Quinn spoke quietly as he and Silk approached the small apartment house. "We may be letting ourselves in for something, Silk. I believe Ainsley is telling the truth, but if there's a dead man here, and if Ainsley didn't kill him, the real murderer must be going into a frenzy wondering why nothing has happened."

"Well, we can always say there was an anonymous phone call," Silk said. "It didn't sound too good so instead of bothering the cops, we decided to take a look ourselves. Why do you want to get into this anyway?"

"Because of Ainsley, partly. I hate to see an underdog being whipped to bits. Mostly though, I'd like to catch Steve McCleod. Potentially he is a very dangerous man, a gang leader with brains. He battled his way to the top, until the killing of Ainsley's wife made things too hot. Since then McCleod appears at infrequent intervals, but then he always manages to pull off some crime."

"Where can he hide between those times, though?" Silk muttered. "He has to come out and show himself once in a while."

"That's one of the interesting mysteries. Of course, he may be living in some far away town and only comes here when he gets the urge, or the tip-off, to handle a big job. His work is cunning, well planned and he isn't afraid to murder. He has worried me for a long time now."

"Worried you?" Silk asked.

"Yes, because McCleod's stunts have usually been accompanied by bloodshed and you never know when he'll pop up to strike again. Besides that is the fact that he knows how to vanish. I want to get him before he disappears for good."

Silk gave Quinn's elbow an expert twist and they turned toward the stairs leading to the entrance of the small apartment house. Quinn felt his way along them. At the door, Silk turned the knob. It was locked. Quinn stepped closer. He took an oddly shaped tool from his pocket, inserted it into the keyhole and extremely sensitive fingers maneuvered the bit of metal until it turned the bolt back.

Silk glanced over his shoulder and gave Quinn an unexpected shove into the hallway. "There is a patrolman coming down the street, sir. I don't know whether or not he saw us."

Quinn hastily closed the door. Silk parted the curtains set in the high door window. "The cop is looking this way, but he's still across the street," he said. "I don't think—no, he's moving on. We're safe."

The stairway was evilly illuminated and they went up it slowly, side by side. Though the stairs were unfamiliar, Tony Quinn showed no hesitancy in moving along them.

At the third floor, they peered down the corridor and walked very softly now. They reached the door which Ainsley had described. Quinn dropped a hand to the knob, signaled Silk who promptly drew an automatic pistol and pushed the safety to the off position.

Quinn turned the knob carefully. He opened the door a crack. It was all dark inside. He threw the door wide and stood there, facing the darkness of the small apartment which was not at all

relieved by the faint light from the corridor.

"Is there—anything?" Silk whispered hoarsely.

"Ainsley wasn't lying," Quinn replied. "Turn on the lights. I'll close the door and then we'll quietly search this place. We may want to go away from here without anyone knowing about it."

QUINN closed and locked the door. Silk turned the lights on as he moved from one room to another. He looked in the single clothes closet, under beds and behind large pieces of furniture. When he was certain no intruder was concealed, he relaxed and went back to the living room where Quinn knelt beside the body.

Quinn's eyes were no longer blank and staring, but possessed of life and color and warmth. He had drawn on gloves and he grimly examined the dead man, being careful not to touch the blood which smeared the floor and large parts of the corpse.

"Stabbed a dozen times," he told Silk in a soft voice. "But he was knocked out first by a blow on the head. You can see the bump. Why so many stab wounds? Simply because the murderer wanted this to look like the act of a crazy man—a maniac just escaped from an asylum."

"Who's he?" Silk asked.

"A gorilla named Fink. He used to be a member of McCleod's gang years ago, about the time that Ainsley's wife was shot and killed."

"But couldn't Ainsley have seen him at the fight then? Couldn't he have retained this man's appearance in his mind and finally caught up with him? Maybe he's been thinking, all these years, that Fink was Steve McCleod?"

"Yes, possibly. But did you notice that there was no longer any card or paper below the bell for this apartment? Yet Ainsley saw one there with McCleod's name on it. That was to lure him up here, something hastily prepared so Ainsley wouldn't lose the way."

Silk sat down on the edge of a straight-backed chair. "Then you actually believe everything that Ainsley told you?"

"I think so, Silk. Don't you?"

Silk shrugged. "I'm not so sure. After all, Ainsley had reason to kill this man if he was one of the mob instrumental



McGRATH

in the death of his wife. Besides, Ainsley escaped from an asylum. If he was all right mentally, they'd have let him go, wouldn't they? Perhaps he isn't a liar, but there's no doubt his mind is disordered."

"All true, Silk. I admit it, and yet I believe Ainsley to be in at least fair shape mentally. He made none of this up. I doubt he would have imagined McCleod's name below the bell, or have made that up on the spur of the moment for he wouldn't have been apt to recognize it as a clue, as we did. Besides, he saw McCleod. He's positive of that."

"I wish I was certain," Silk said doubtfully. "What are we going to do about this?"

Quinn was carefully searching the dead man and examining the contents of each pocket before putting everything back.

"Nothing. We can't admit that Ainsley came to us with his confession and we neglected to call the police. We are police, in some sense of the word, but we are still obligated to report anything of this nature."

"I think we ought to call Captain McGrath before he calls on us, sir."

Quinn grinned. "I've never seen you so unsure of yourself, Silk."

"I've never come across something that I doubted as much as this, sir. And it could become very dangerous for us.

Find anything in his pockets?"

"He was well-heeled. Nearly seven hundred dollars, an expensive wrist watch and a one-and-half carat diamond ring. Which indicates Fink was in the money and men of his type seldom are. It may mean nothing and then again, a great deal."

Quinn suddenly cocked his head to one side. "There is someone coming down the hall. If it's for this apartment, step outside and pretend you're a friend of the dead man."

Knuckles rapped smartly on the door. Quinn hastily put out the lights and moved so that he'd be back of the open door. Silk threw his hat on a chair, stripped off his coat and removed his tie. Then he opened the door, but stepped out into the hallway at once and blocked the entrance.

The man who stood there regarded Silk blankly. He was about twenty-eight with medium hair, a full smooth face with a rather receding chin. He wore rimless glasses and stared at Silk through them.

"Yeah, what do you want?" Silk said.

**T**HE stranger hesitated a moment. "I'm looking for a man named Fink. He used to live here. He lived here last month."

"He still does, but he ain't in," Silk said. "Anything you got to say to Fink, you can tell me. I'm his pal. We—ah—work together."

The stranger reached into his pocket and took out a sealed envelope. He handed it to Silk. "Well, I suppose it's all right. Just see that Mr. Fink gets this, please. And tell him somebody will get into touch with him again as usual."

"Okay," Silk nodded. "Who'll I say left this?"

"Well, I'd rather not—"

That was when the sirens sounded. They were some distance away, but the stranger seemed highly agitated by them. He turned and sprinted along the hall. He was pounding down the steps when Quinn came out of the room carrying Silk's hat, coat and tie.

"Police," Quinn said. "We've got to get out of here. Somebody tipped them off. Now do you still possess those doubts? Someone knew we came here and wanted us caught."

"It could have been Ainsley who

tipped them," Silk offered pessimistically.

Quinn didn't answer. The police were already pounding at the front door as Quinn and Silk reached the front hallway. Quinn made no pretence about being blind now. He nudged Silk and led the way to a cellar door. They were barely through it when the landlady appeared to let the police in. They could hear her frightened voice as they hurried noiselessly down the steps to the dark and musty cellar.

Now it was Silk who clung to Quinn's arm, for in the darkness Silk was blind while Quinn was not. Quinn led him, unerringly, around obstacles Silk might have tripped over. They reached the coal bin and Quinn judged the coal chute opening was somewhere at the rear of the house.

He whispered to Silk who promptly made a stirrup of his hands. Quinn was raised until he could reach the iron lid which he pushed up and aside. He stuck his head out and peered through the darkness of the rear court. He took a firm grip, hoisted himself out and then lay flat to drop both hands as far down as possible so Silk could grasp them and be raised to safety.

They climbed a fence, crouched and kept going until they were in an alley and looking out at the sidestreet where the car was parked. Quinn hastily cleaned off as much coal dust as possible, applied a handkerchief to Silk's forehead and hands and then they both hurried along the alley.

The police seemed to confine their activities to the house which Quinn and Silk had just left. Quinn brought Silk to a halt.

"What about our visitor? He gave you something."

Silk took the envelope from his pocket. "He wasn't any mug, sir. Nice, clean-cut young fellow. He seemed afraid, and when he heard those sirens he beat it fast. He gave me this envelope for somebody named Fink. The dead man, I suppose."

Quinn ripped the seal and took out a thin sheaf of twenty-dollar bills. "Three hundred dollars," he counted them. "Nothing else inside. Just a plain envelope. I think our visitor was paying blackmail, Silk. Affix in your mind what he looked like. We may meet him again

some day. Let's get back to Ainsley now."

When they were close to the mouth of the alley, Quinn's eyes assumed their dead and staring expression. Silk took his arm and now it was Quinn who was being led. They reached the car. Ainsley was still in the back seat, nervous and worried. Silk helped Quinn into the car, got behind the wheel and drove off quickly.

As they turned into the avenue, they saw half a dozen police cars parked near the apartment house. Ainsley gave a sharp cry.

"Nothing to worry about yet, Mr. Ainsley," Quinn said, calmly. "Silk and I heard the police arriving and we escaped without being seen. We'll return to my house now and cool off a bit while we make plans. We're going to need some very careful thinking about this."

Ainsley just nodded and wondered, to himself, just how much good a totally blind man could be in a game of this kind. He had faith in Quinn, but it was tempered by the Special District Attorney's affliction.

**A**INSLEY, of course, had no idea that Quinn could see better than any normal person. He was no exception, for only three people knew that Quinn really could see.

About the time when Ainsley was sent to an asylum, Tony Quinn was riding high as the elected District Attorney, and doing an outstanding job. There was considerable talk of running him for governor and he was one of the most popular civic officials in the city and state.

Then, during the trial of a gangster, Quinn had tried to prevent the destruction of certain evidence by means of corrosive acid. During the melee, some of the acid was hurled at him and he'd been struck with it, squarely in the eyes. Blindness ensued immediately.

Quinn, being independently wealthy, had sought a cure for the resulting blindness without the slightest success. He'd traveled all over Europe, visiting noted surgeons and getting no hope at all.

Finally he returned to his home, realizing he was doomed to permanent blindness and determined to make the best of it. Gradually, his sense of hearing be-

came abnormally acute, as did his sense of touch and smell. He discovered how to carry on in the darkness that existed even in daylight.

Silk Kirby proved his worth then. Silk, once an international confidence man, had invaded Quinn's house to burglarize it and, instead, remained to become Quinn's friend and ally.

Then Carol Baldwin came into his life. She came with a proposition made by her father who was a police officer and lay dying of a crook's bullet in the back. Carol's father had followed Quinn's rise as a crime fighter and now he offered him parts of his eyes.

Quinn, seeking any measure no matter how vague or uncertain it might be, accepted the offer. He was operated on by a surgeon who employed a technique which later became standard treatment for this type of surgery. It proved to be a success. For when Tony Quinn, after weeks of waiting, finally removed the bandages, he discovered that his sight was restored to a degree even greater than before. For now he could see in darkness as well as daylight. Some unexplained quirk of nature had provided him with cat's eyes. Even pastel colors were perfectly visible to him in the darkest room. He could move about in gloom as easily as in sunlight.

This phenomenon, added to his already acutely sharpened senses of smell, touch and hearing, made him efficient far above the average man. He decided his mission still lay in fighting crime, but as D.A. he'd experienced all the red tape, delay and exasperations of working within the law. Thereafter he chose to conduct his own peculiar type of campaign against crime in an unorthodox manner.

He became the Black Bat, a legendary figure garbed all in black and wearing a tight hood over his head. The hood was more for the protection of Tony Quinn's identity than for purposes of intimidation, for no surgery could remove those deeply etched scars around his eyes which would identify him at once as Tony Quinn. Besides, he was too well known, and in working with direct methods against crooks, he placed his life in danger.

Silk, of course, knew of his double identity. So did Carol Baldwin who came to help him after her father died.

She became a trusted and valuable conspirator. In time, they fell in love, for Carol was as intelligent as she was lovely. But neither spoke of it much. So long as the Black Bat carried on, Quinn's life was in constant danger. He felt it unfair to Carol to marry her until he ceased to be the Black Bat.

The third member of the little group of aides, was "Butch" Leary, a huge, sheep-dog type of man with a thick neck, a bullet head and massive arms and fists. Though he possessed little ability to think fast, as fast as Silk for instance, he was an extremely valuable man. His devotion and strength were equally great.

Quite naturally, there were bound to be a few who suspected that Tony Quinn could see and was the Black Bat. One of these was the Police Commissioner, who didn't care. Another was Captain McGrath of the Detective Division who did. McGrath had sworn to capture the Black Bat, though he recognized and admitted the fact that the Black Bat often solved cases he was unable to crack. He would battle on the Black Bat's side to the last bullet, but McGrath claimed that the Black Bat's unorthodox methods had violated the law time and time again. Therefore, the Black Bat was a criminal and should be arrested.

Sometimes McGrath became a distinct menace to Tony Quinn. More often he worked hand in glove with the black-hooded man he suspected of being blind Tony Quinn. He endeavored, through every trick he could concoct, to prove that Quinn possessed the ability to see. McGrath had never been successful, though once or twice he'd come dangerously close.

Quinn respected him both as an ally and an enemy. Often he wondered just what McGrath would do, if he did corner the Black Bat and strip the hood from his face. The gamble was too great to take however. The Black Bat stayed out of McGrath's way whenever possible.

In his new role as an anonymous crime investigator, Quinn characteristically set about making his methods almost perfect. He rigged up a laboratory which rivaled the crime lab at Police Headquarters for efficiency and equipment. This lab was secreted in

Quinn's house and reached by a secret door through the book-lined wall of the library.

A second exit was fashioned by means of a trap door set in the lab floor which led into a tunnel. This in turn, wound up below the garden house well behind Quinn's big house. By this means the Black Bat could enter or leave at will, even while the house was being watched. Carol and Butch used it all the time for they maintained no outward connection with Tony Quinn, Special District Attorney.

### CHAPTER III

#### *The Doubting Detective*



**D**URING the ride home, with Silk at the wheel and Clyde Ainsley seated beside Quinn, all three men were silent, engrossed in their individual thoughts. Quinn was thinking that perhaps the Black Bat would have to come in on this. Silk was thinking the same thing—and hoping for it. Ainsley was thinking of the night ten years before, when his wife had died under a hail of bullets, and of the man known as Steve McCleod who had never paid for his crime.

"Mr. Ainsley, we found things exactly as you described them. With the exception of the name card below the bell," Quinn said. "Naturally if you were lured into a trap, that would have been removed. The dead man had been struck on the head. Now tell me just what happened when you entered the apartment."

"There isn't much to tell," Ainsley said. "I tapped on the door. Someone told me to come in, and the lights winked out as I opened the door. I must have been struck, though I don't remember a thing. I have a sore head of course, but no marks or bumps."

"A padded sap wouldn't leave much trace," Quinn told him. "Go ahead."

Ainsley spread his hands in a hopeless gesture. "That's all there is. I woke up, the dead man was on the floor, my sleeve was bloody. I got up, trying to figure what happened, wondering if I'd killed this total stranger by mistake. As a matter of fact, I'm still won-

dering. When I cornered McCleod ten years ago, I could recall nothing of the incident afterwards."

"Then you took the knife," Quinn said. "You left without being seen, because there'd be a man hunt in progress right now if you had been observed. That isn't much to go on. Did you actually see the man you identified as McCleod enter that apartment house?"

"I trailed him there," Ainsley said. "You see, I went to my wife's grave. That was this morning. I came back by subway. When I got off at Penn Station, I didn't know what to do next. I'd about made up my mind to go back to the asylum or tell the first cop I met who I was when McCleod strolled past me and I forgot about going back."

"You wanted to kill him?"

"Yes. I would have killed him if I'd caught up with him."

Quinn sighed deeply. "When you killed that gangster ten years ago, you remembered nothing of the incident afterwards, nor the fact that you had nearly killed McCleod himself, though it came back to you later. Do you think it possible that you walked into the apartment, saw someone there in the darkness and mistakenly believed it to be McCleod?"

Ainsley pressed both hands against his temples. "And that I never was struck on the head? That things just blacked out for me and I killed the stranger? That's what you're trying to say. I'll be honest. I don't know. It may have been that."

"You carried no knife?"

"No, not a weapon of any kind. I never saw the knife before I woke up."

Quinn's cane, between his knees, began to thump a tattoo on the car floor. "You didn't wear any gloves, so you undoubtedly left good prints around the apartment. It won't take the police long to find them, check up and send out an alarm for you."

"What are you going to do?" Ainsley asked.

"I don't know yet. I think I can trust you, Mr. Ainsley. I doubt that you murdered that man. In my opinion McCleod framed the kill on you. Why he did it, I'm not so certain. He could have had several motives. One, because he was afraid of your vengeance and wanted you held until you died. Another, that



The Black Bat's fist came around, the gun went spinning and the thug dropped to the floor (CHAPTER VIII)

he desired the death of this man and used you to blame for the crime. There may be more reasons."

Ainsley reached for the door handle. "Let me out anywhere. I'll give myself up. I've been in enough trouble."

Silk, twisting around, look worried. "You may not have to bother, Mr. Ainsley," he said. "We're being followed and I think it's the police."

Quinn's apparently sightless eyes flicked up toward the rear view mirror. There was a sedan behind them and coming fast. Apparently its driver had selected this more or less deserted part of town to close in.

They were passing along a rather narrow business street and, as it was early morning, even the window display lights were out, making the section dark and dreary. Quinn didn't agree with Silk's theory that there were police in the car. A siren would be sounding by now and if that car had followed them all the way from the apartment house where Fink had been murdered, it would have stopped them long before this.

**A**INSLEY bit his lip and looked as if he might try a break. The car behind finally pulled alongside and a man leaned out. "Police," he said. "Pull over!"

At the same time the driver forged ahead and nosed his car in front of Quinn's limousine. Silk came to an abrupt stop. The two men got out of the car and swaggered over.

"They look more like gorillas, sir," Silk said softly.

It was too late now. The oncoming pair had guns in their hands. One of them yanked open the front door. He peered in.

"Okay, you two, get out. Keep your hands up and don't start squawking. You—in back—get out too."

"What's the idea?" Silk demanded as he slid off the seat.

Ainsley stepped out about the same time. Instantly, one of the men menaced him with a gun.

"Yeah, it's him all right," this man said. "What'll we do, blast him here?"

"Did you ever fire a shot along one of these deserted streets at this time of night?" the other man countered. "It can be heard for miles. We'll take him

along. You in there—I said get out of the car."

Quinn slid over behind the wheel. His eyes stared vacantly out into the night. "I need help. I'm blind."

"That's Quinn," the other man said derisively. "He's blind all right and we don't have to worry about him."

Both men turned their backs on Quinn, secure in the belief that a man without eyes can be no menace. One of the pair stood directly in front of Ainsley and his gun was slanted down but ready to be leveled fast. Ainsley couldn't see Quinn. Silk could and Quinn motioned with his hand to indicate what he intended to do.

Ainsley and his captor stood no more than three feet from the car, and Silk was about five feet from this spot. Ainsley's captor spoke.

"Turn around and walk over to our car. Get in the back seat and don't give us any trouble."

Quinn moved one foot out and set it firmly on the running board. He took a firmer grip on his cane, slid the other foot out and suddenly stepped off the running board. His cane made a wild sweep, missing the gunman by more than a foot. Quinn dropped the cane, lunged forward and as the gunman turned to face this crazy attack, Quinn managed to flail one arm and wind it around the gunman's neck.

At that moment Silk leaped, for the gun covering him had moved to counter this new menace. Silk brought one chopping blow down against the crook's gun hand, his other fist shot upward and cracked against the man's chin.

The thug went down. Silk seized the gun and rushed toward Quinn who was rapidly getting the worst of it. His victim was throwing hard punches to the blind man's middle and when Quinn doubled up in pain, he was hit across the back of the neck with the gun.

Then Silk charged. The gunman stepped back, already extricated from Quinn's clumsy and ineffective grasp. Ainsley was charging up too. The gunman decided he'd had enough, especially after a look at the weapon in Silk's fist. He turned and fled.

The one who'd gone down under Silk's attack was already climbing into his car. He started it off with a wild grinding of gears and a moment later the



deserted street was completely silent again.

Silk helped Quinn to his feet. "Are you all right, sir?"

Quinn smiled wryly. "I guess so. How did I do? I could tell by their voices that they were paying no attention to me and that their backs were in my direction, so I took a chance. I tried to use the cane, aiming at where I thought that thug's voice came from. I missed, but I was pretty sure of his location because he let out a gasp of astonishment. Then I had him, for about ten seconds."

Ainsley sat down weakly on the running board. "I never saw anything so amazing in my life, Mr. Quinn. Without eyes, you were willing to battle those men."

Quinn chuckled. "The way they talked, I judged they were hardly more than dumb thugs. Anyway, they might have decided to execute all three of us on the spot and when a man's life is in danger, he acts, blind or not."

"They were unquestionably McCleod's men. They must have been watching the apartment and spotted us leaving. They were after me. Mr. Quinn, I'm not just in danger. I'm dangerous to anyone around me. I can't allow you to be menaced again."

"Don't worry," Quinn told him. "Help me back into the car. Ainsley, you've got to be hidden somewhere. Drive us home, Silk, as rapidly as possible. I'm afraid of only one thing. That those two men will report the failure of their mission to McCleod and he'll take steps to keep us under observation until he sees another chance to strike. They'll probably watch the house closely. With luck, we may be able to get away before they arrive, Ainsley."

**W**HEN they were back at the house, Ainsley smoked cigarettes with fast puffs as he walked the floor. Quinn sat down for a moment or two, cane between his knees and hands gripping it tightly.

"Ainsley, I'm going to put you in charge of a friend of mine," he said. "She's a girl who is quite capable and you may trust her implicitly. I won't tell you her full name—simply that you may call her Carol. Silk will you get her on the phone? We have to work fast, before the police arrive or Mc-

Cleod's men cover the house."

In a moment Silk turned over the phone to Quinn who quickly outlined the bare facts of the case to Carol Baldwin.

"Mr. Ainsley isn't sure whether or not he is a murderer," he went on. "We do know he did kill one man ten years ago. However, I believe he can be trusted. Every policeman will be looking for him soon."

Silk tapped Quinn on the shoulder. "Sooner than you think, sir. A car just pulled up and it looks like Captain McGrath's service car."

Quinn talked fast then. "Ainsley will come around to your place. Be waiting for him outside. He's tall, thin and wears a dark gray suit and a gray shirt, slouch hat, out of style and a little battered. He will not know your real identity, but you may use the name of Carol with him. He'll arrive very soon. McGrath is here now, looking for him."

"The beach house?" Carol asked. "Is that where you want me to take him? It's the closest and, if we travel fast, we may avoid police blockades at the bridges."

"Yes, take him there. Pretend you rented the place. Say he is your father. Use another name and keep in touch with Silk often. You'll get further orders through him."

Silk already had Ainsley headed for the kitchen and was giving him fast directions on how and where to meet Carol. He let Ainsley out the back door, waited there a second or two until he was certain McGrath had not thrown a cordon around the neighborhood and then hurried back in time to let McGrath in.

Quinn was seated in his usual chair. Beside him, a table model radio played softly. Quinn seemed to be utterly relaxed. McGrath was anything but relaxed. He sat down abruptly. McGrath was a sturdy, chunky, medium-sized man with a bristling mustache, a furious temper and a bulldog determination. He looked like a detective, but assured himself often that he did not.

"All right, out with it!" he began. "This time don't hedge. You and Silk were seen going into that apartment house!"

Quinn turned his head and his sightless eyes stared well to McGrath's left. "What on earth are you talking about,

Captain McGrath?" Quinn asked him.

"About the murder of a rat named Fink, who maybe deserved what he got, but it's still murder. Why didn't you paste one of those Black Bat stickers on him, Tony?"

Quinn sighed. "Mac, in the first place, I'm not the Black Bat and being accused of it every time we meet sometimes becomes boring. In the second place, you're talking in riddles."

"You weren't home all night." McGrath stated. "It's darn near dawn. Why are you awake at this hour?"

Quinn laughed. "Mac, to me the difference between night and day is so inconsequential as not to count at all. I couldn't sleep. I got tired of lying in bed and I woke Silk up with my tossing and turning and grumbling, so we decided to get up and talk awhile until we got sleepy."

"Then you didn't visit an apartment house on Carmody Avenue? You never say Clyde Ainsley, I suppose?"

"Ainsley? The name sounds familiar."

"It ought to be. You had him sent to an insane asylum some years ago. He's the engineer whose wife got shot in a gang battle and who polished off one gangster and nearly finished Steve McCleod. Remember now?"

"Oh, yes. Is he free? Am I supposed to have seen him?"

McGRATH sat back, tried to compose himself and only succeeded in getting red-faced. He took a cigar from his pocket, slowly tore away the cellophane, bit off the tip and applied flame. He puffed twice and then his teeth came down in a crunching bite which finished that cigar for all smoking purposes.

"Yes, I think you did see Ainsley. We found his prints all over the apartment where one of Steve McCleod's boys lay dead, stabbed a dozen times. A cop on the beat said he saw two men entering the apartment house about two o'clock. He thought one of them was blind by the way he walked."

"He *thought* one of them was blind," Quinn laughed. "Mac, don't you instruct policemen never to say 'thought.' It isn't evidence once they use that word."

"Well, he didn't see the faces of the two men. Anyhow, we got a phone call at two-thirteen, telling us there was a

murdered man at this address. Cars were sent and they brought me into it. Now I want to know what your angle is."

"I have no angle, Mac. None at all."

"Ainsley was not here?" McGrath asked too sweetly.

"If he was, I did not see him," Quinn replied.

"That's a neat evasion. You're blind so how could you see him? Now, Tony, this is serious. You went to bat for Ainsley ten years ago. Maybe he did deserve a break then, but now he's an escaped homicidal maniac with another kill chalked up, and you can't hide him."

"You may search the premises."

"Oh, what's the use? He won't be here—now. You knew darned well I'd show up. Tony, since when did you start smoking cigarettes? And a unique brand like this."

McGrath picked up one of Ainsley's cigarette butts from the ash tray. Quinn smiled. "I'll tell you a secret, Mac. Silk doesn't think I know, but he sneaks cigarettes. I smell the smoke quite often. As a perfect valet, he isn't supposed to do this, except in the kitchen perhaps, but I've never said anything to him. Usually he makes sure there are no butts around."

"How did you know I was holding up a cigarette butt?" McGrath demanded suspiciously.

"I guessed, Mac. I'm very clever that way."

"Other ways, too," McGrath grumbled. "Now listen to me, Tony. We've been friends for years. I am firmly convinced this blindness is all an act and that you really can see and that you are the Black Bat. Okay! I've worked with the Black Bat. Helped him just as he has helped me. I've given him breaks. But I swear this—if you're hiding this homicidal nut, I'll give you another sort of break. A clean one, because we're not friends any longer and I'll expose you."

"Mac, you're getting violent. Reason this out. Why should I protect any sort of a killer, least of all a homicidal one? Why would I go to investigate a murder he did and then sit back and do nothing about it? You've simply added a lot of things together and they made four when they shouldn't have added to more than one and a half, so far as my place in this problem is concerned."

McGrath almost bit the cigar in half.

It rolled from one corner of his mouth to the other. "Maybe I play hunches and ride them a long way, but this time I think I'm being pushed around and I don't like it. Take that as a warning. If I'm wrong, I apologize now. If I'm right, watch your step."

McGrath got up, stalked out and headed for the door. As he neared it, he saw Silk suddenly step to the wall and put both hands behind his back. McGrath went up to him.

"What are you trying to hide?" he demanded. "Let's see your hands."

"Not so loud." Silk squirmed and made violent head movements in the direction of the library. He brought one hand into view. There was a half smoked cigarette between his fingers. "Reefers," he winked broadly. "I'm addicted to them. Mac, if you pick up any reefer peddlers, save their stock for me."

"Ahhhhh!" McGrath shouted and slammed the door with considerable violence.

Silk laughed as he headed for the library, but the laughter died when he saw Quinn's serious and worried face. Silk sat down slowly, waiting for Quinn to talk. They held nothing back from one another.

"I don't like it, Silk," Quinn said. "I've a feeling there is much more to this than we can see so far. And a lot more danger than appears on the surface."

"I'm afraid you're right, sir. They rather proved it when they tried to get Ainsley away from us."

"It was all handled quite nicely," Quinn mused. "Somebody phoned the police about the murder. Now Fink had been killed a good hour or so before. Why wasn't the alarm sent then? I think it was because the murderer found that Ainsley woke up too quickly and acted too fast. So he waited, possibly for Ainsley to return. We came instead and we were seen by more eyes than the patrolman's."

Silk nodded. "The murderer wanted us trapped so we'd be forced to tell where Ainsley was. When we got out of there, we must have driven close to some spot where those crooks were hidden and they saw Ainsley in the back seat and followed us."

"All I hope is that they didn't have time to cover this house and spot Ains-

ley leaving," Quinn said. "They'd probably resort to trailing him. That would take them first to Carol and then to an isolated beach house, a perfect spot for murder. I'll worry until Carol phones. Tell her to report often and the first time she fails to do so, we'll go out there."

"What about that young man who gave me three hundred dollars for Fink?" Silk asked.

"I don't know. The most logical thing is to assume that Fink's prosperity came from running a blackmail scheme and this man came to pay off. At the moment, he does not seem important to our work. And Silk—get Butch over here at once."

## CHAPTER IV

### *The Hunt Begins*



IT WAS a good hour's ride to the house Tony Quinn owned on a Long Island beach. Carol phoned five minutes after she arrived. Silk warned her somberly.

Just before dawn, Butch Leary arrived in the secret lab and Quinn went to greet him. Butch, as usual when something began stirring in the field of crime, wore a huge grin that stretched from ear to ear. When he smiled like that, he looked like a punch-drunk, has-been fighter. Quite a number of people had been fooled by that smile.

He had incredible shoulders and everything else about him was built in proportion. He was a human battering ram at times, a fighter who was as deadly as hot bullets, a wrecking machine that worked methodically and with brains. Yet he could also be a kind and tolerant man who liked simple things and wanted nothing better than to be left alone. Until the Black Bat called.

Quinn's hand was lost in Butch's massive paw. They sat down and Quinn quickly outlined the events of the evening.

"I want this dead man, Fink, checked up on. It's very important because I doubt he was merely murdered to provide a means of keeping Ainsley locked up as a lunatic. I believe that when Ainsley stumbled on McCleod, if he did stumble, he started something rolling.

It's just gathering momentum and we've got to stop it."

"You said 'if Ainsley stumbled on McCleod.' Do you think maybe McCleod arranged it?"

"I'm not sure," Quinn answered. "McCleod hasn't put in an appearance for a long time, and his last grandstand play consisted of a bold stickup job that netted him a lot of money and another notch for his guns. He shot down one man wantonly."

"I'd like to bust his neck," Butch said ominously.

"You may find the opportunity. I don't know but that I'm hoping for it. McCleod may have seen Ainsley first. An alarm went out after he escaped from the asylum. If McCleod heard it, he's just clever enough to figure that Ainsley would probably visit his wife's grave—and soon. So McCleod watched, trailed him to town and deliberately let Ainsley see him. Then he lured him to this apartment where he killed Fink, hoping, perhaps, that Ainsley would be blamed for it. What we have to find out is why McCleod didn't want to accept the blame for the kill."

"Yeah, one more sure wouldn't hurt his record any. They could burn him for any of half a dozen murders."

"So find out about Fink and do it carefully. McCleod is no ordinary crook. He appears and disappears at will. Nobody knows who he really is, but for your benefit I'll give you a brief description of him. He's five feet ten—if he stands erect which he seldom does. He goes about bent over. He has a badly scarred chin, a dark complexion, jet black hair, always wears gloves except in summer when they'd be too conspicuous. His clothes are usually shabby. In fact, he resembles a tramp, but don't be fooled. He's one of the most dangerous criminals since Dillinger."

**B**UTCH AROSE. "All I hope is I find him quick. I'd like to meet a guy like that."

Quinn consulted some records from an elaborate filing system contained in the laboratory. He maintained records on all important criminals and Fink was just important enough to be included. From the file came an address, a picture of the man and all the facts about his habits. Butch went away.

Tony Quinn leaned back against the leather divan and surveyed his laboratory. It was complete in every respect that money could make it. Here was every known device used in developing and shaping up clues, in formulating a scientific battle against crime. In this laboratory many murders had started on their last journey. By proxy. The proxy being the faint clues they left behind.

This time there were no clues. Quinn spent half an hour trying to figure out what it was all about. He was as puzzled when he went to breakfast as he had been when Clyde Ainsley appeared with his story. There might be something behind all this, but even if it turned out to be only a routine murder, the work of a master criminal simply eliminating one of his stupider allies, Quinn was interested, for capturing Steve McCleod was an important goal. The longer that killer lived, the shorter the life of some other victim.

At nine o'clock, Quinn left for his office. Carol had reported in twice now. Everything seemed to be fine. Quinn lost some of his worries. At the civic building where his office was situated, Quinn greeted a number of employees. He knew everyone and recognized them by their voices unerringly, so they thought. And, he could have done so. Quinn's many months of real blindness had not been lost to him, and footsteps and voices had become a strong means of identification.

There was a great deal of routine work. Silk occupied a chair in a corner of Quinn's office, always alert against some crackpot who'd come calling with violent intentions, or some crook who thought he needed to square things with the man who'd sent him to prison. There were few dull moments, though it was all considered routine.

Silk kept in contact with Carol who reported that Ainsley acted normally, although he was still badly worried. That there were no signs of the beach house being watched and no prowling strangers in this closed summer community.

Quinn sent for all the files and Ainsley and McCleod, studied the case histories of every known member of McCleod's gang especially that of Fink, who had

died in the apartment house the night before.

Fink's history was mostly blank spaces though he was listed as a dangerous criminal. He'd been arrested only twice. Each time he'd given a slum area address which had been checked up on. Quinn also knew that the apartment where he died was Fink's place and it was not in any slum section, but a good, substantial neighborhood where rents were of medium type. For Fink, this would have been considered an expensive place to live.

For more than seven consecutive years there was nothing on him. Yet a man like Fink, born and bred to crime, would hardly change. Maybe Butch would pick up something on the man. He was due to report at the laboratory right after dinnertime.

Finally Quinn prepared to shut up shop for the day.

"I've got a weird feeling things are too quiet," Quinn told Silk. "On the part of both Captain McGrath and McCleod. Keep a weather eye out. We may be due for some trouble."

Quinn's inter-office communicating system buzzed. "There's a Mr. Gilbert Bonnard and Mr. Bert Coppin to see you, sir," the receptionist said. "They say it's very important."

"Send them in after two or three minutes," Quinn instructed. He flipped off the switch and glanced at Silk. "Better have a look at them. I wouldn't put it beyond McCleod to try a direct approach."

Silk hurried through a door leading into an adjoining office. There he peered out into the waiting room and what he saw sent him back to Quinn speedily.

"One of those men out there is the man who came to Fink's apartment and handed over the three hundred dollars, sir. He's the man wearing the glasses. I never saw the other fellow before. They're about the same age."

"I'll talk to them alone," Quinn said. "Perhaps it's best you're not seen quite yet."

**W**HEN the pair walked in, Quinn was looking somewhat to the left of the door. But he saw them clearly though his eyes seemed to be blankly blind. The man with the glasses came forward. He was as Silk had described him and impressed Quinn as a namby-pampy sort.

The other visitor was slim, moved lithely and knew how to wear clothes. He had pale blue eyes, blond hair and a face that wore signs of dissipation. Quinn got the idea that this man knew night clubs and cafes better than he did his own home.

The man with the glasses said, "My name is Gil Bonnard. I'm with Bert Coppin. He's a nephew of Mr. and Mrs. Prescott. I live at their home too. You may not recall the Prescotts, Mr. Quinn."

"Oh, but I do. Things have happened to bring them back to my memory. That is, if you mean the same Prescotts whose daughter married a man named Clyde Ainsley and whose daughter was subsequently killed in a gun battle between rival gangster mobs."

Coppin sat down, slumping low in the chair and apparently content to leave the talking to Bonnard.

"Ainsley hasn't been captured, has he?" Bonnard said.

[Turn page]



... ITS QUALITY

HITS THE SPOT! ☆

"Not yet. Do the Prescotts know where he is? Or have they seen him?"

"No, sir, but they are very frightened. That's why I came. It's without their knowledge, Mr. Quinn, and I hope what I have to tell you won't get any further."

"Oh, tell him," Coppin interrupted rudely. "He'll probably pinch the lot of us."

Bonnard gave Coppin a withering glance, cleared his throat and went on. "Frankly, Mr. Quinn, the Prescotts hate Ainsley. They never liked him and were against his marrying their daughter. They claim he wasn't mad and should have been punished for his part in the— the matter ten years ago. You recall that of course, in detail?"

"I recommended that Ainsley be sent to an asylum, if that's what you mean."

"Exactly. Since Ainsley's imprisonment in this asylum, Mr. Prescott took certain measures to see that he stayed there. They—ah—involved using pressure, perhaps not the ethical or legal thing to do, but Mr. Prescott has been afraid that Ainsley might get out and take some sort of vengeance upon him."

Quinn said, slowly:

"In other words, Prescott bribed or browbeat someone at the asylum to keep Ainsley there whether or not his mental affliction had been remedied."

"Yes, sir. That's about it."

"All of which could be construed as a criminal act," Quinn commented. "Go on. Tell me the rest of it."

"We're only trying to help you," Bonnard said in an imploring tone. "Mr. Prescott doesn't know we are here, but Bert and I—well, we decided the authorities ought to know the truth. Mr. Prescott has been blackmailed for years because of this, by a man named Fink."

Quinn sat up straighter. "The man who was murdered during the night?"

"Yes, sir. I—I was at Fink's apartment last night too, just before the police arrived, with another monthly donation. Fink didn't come to the door. A rather evil looking, bald-headed man met me and took the money. I thought it might have been Ainsley at first."

"I told you Ainsley didn't look like that," Coppin put in sarcastically. "It wasn't Ainsley."

"Never mind about the man in the doorway," Quinn said impatiently. "It

could have been some friend of Fink who took your money and fled because he couldn't afford to be found there with a corpse. What are you really trying to tell me, Mr. Bonnard?"

"That Ainsley killed Fink. He found out, somehow, that Fink was blackmailing Mr. Prescott. Ainsley wanted to be certain that Prescott really had been keeping him in the asylum when he might have been freed. Fink may have confirmed this and Ainsley lost control of himself. If such a thing happened, and Ainsley knows about Prescott, he'll try to kill him too."

COPPIN arose lazily and sauntered over to the desk. "What Gil is trying to say is that Prescott is now menaced, because Ainsley had a reason for killing Fink and a mighty good one for murdering my aunt and uncle. By telling you all this we realize may get Mr. Prescott into a lot of trouble, but that's better than having him murdered."

"I see," Quinn said. "Mr. Prescott had best come down here and make a full confession of what he has done, and we shall take steps to see that he is protected. Meanwhile, you two should be able to guard him. I'll send a detective if you wish."

"No," Coppin broke in hastily. "I'm in a jam with my uncle now. I'd rather he didn't even know we came here. It was Bonnard's idea anyway. All I wanted was to let you know that Ainsley had a good motive for killing this man Fink."

"I appreciate it," Quinn arose and stretched his hand vaguely across the desk. "I can't tell you what action I shall take on the matter because I must study it first. Meanwhile, guard Mr. Prescott. If you even think you see anything suspicious, let me know or call the nearest precinct. Thank you for coming and being so frank about it all."

After they were gone, Silk came back. He said, "Well, that much is solved anyway, but one thing I didn't like was that mollicoddle's description of me. Do I really look evil?"

Quinn laughed. "Maybe you did last night. Let's go home now. And I've still got that idea we're due for trouble."

Nothing happened on their way home. It was early evening, dusk, and the

street lights were on. Quinn's house was in darkness. Silk parked the car, got out and ran around it to help Quinn out and into the house. They carried on this act scrupulously, always on the theory that unfriendly eyes might be watching.

## CHAPTER V

*Dangerous Visitor*

QUICKLY Silk unlocked the door and Quinn stepped inside. Silk switched on the lights and they walked slowly down the reception hall toward the library. The hall lights winked out. Silk whirled around. Quinn kept right on going.

"Silk, where are you?" he exclaimed.

"Somebody just put out the lights," Silk said. "There's somebody near the door."

"Yeah." A voice came out of the gloom. "Somebody is near the door and he's got a gun and he'd like nothing better than to chop the both of you down. You—big guy—put your hands way up and don't make a play while I frisk you. Quinn, your being blind makes this job a cinch, but just the same I'll be watching you."

A nudge from Quinn told Silk to obey. He was quickly searched, but Silk carried no guns on his person as a rule. He couldn't see the man who had a muzzle pushed against his ribs, but Silk knew who it was. Neither he nor Quinn ever had much doubt about the identity of their visitor.

"Okay!" the gunman snapped. "Into one of these rooms! I don't care which one."

"The library, Silk," Quinn said. "Take my arm, please."

Quinn sat down, reached for his pipe and froze at a sharp command from the intruder.

"I'll look in that humidor first. Wise guys have put gats in places like that and for my dough you're a very wise guy, Quinn."

"You know me, at any rate," Quinn said, mildly. "Shall we make that mutual? Even if you are an old enemy of mine, I wouldn't know because I can't see you."

"Yeah, you're blind all right. When I

snapped off them lights you just kept on walking. I wanted to make sure about it. You—fella—sit down back of that desk and put your arms on top of it. That's the stuff. I want all of your arms on the desk and the first time you move one of 'em, somebody will get hurt."

There were smouldering fires in Silk's eyes, but he obeyed, mostly because they seemed to be at the mercy of this man, but partly because he sensed that Quinn wanted the man to talk.

"Is everyone quite comfortable?" Quinn asked.

"In one minute we will be." The gunman arose, went to a floor lamp and snapped it off. Now only the desk light glowed softly, throwing mostly everything in shadow. The gunman sat down so that he could watch Silk.

"My name is Steve McCleod," he said. "I take it you heard of me."

"Oh, yes," Quinn said. "Of course you have a reason for coming here."

McCleod laughed. His roving eyes caught a glimpse of a decanter and some glasses on a table. He went over and got the whisky and a glass. He poured a glass half full and started gulping it down. He wiped his mouth with the back of a gloved hand. Then he lighted a cigarette, flipped the still glowing match on the deeply piled rug and laughed at Silk's groan as a neat burn appeared on the rug.

"Quinn, I always had a lot of respect for you," McCleod said. "We been on different sides, sure, but you played square. There's something I want to know and you can tell me, but first suppose I say something about myself."

"I'm listening." Quinn's voice was very calm, his sightless eyes seemed to be staring at the wall well to McCleod's left. But those sightless eyes were studying this killer, memorizing every salient feature about him. He was noting the greasy black hair that stuck out carelessly from beneath a battered fedora, the sallow complexion, the scar forming a cradle moon on his chin, and the mean little eyes that glittered like something in a zoo's reptile house. He was taking in every detail of the cheap, uncared for clothing and the run-down shoes.

Most of the professional killers Quinn had ever known were classed as sharp, smooth dressers, hard-boiled and ruth-

less, but never talking out of the corners of their mouths. This man was different, almost a caricature of a deadly criminal.

McCleod had himself another lusty drink, flicked cigarette ashes on the rug and settled back. He seemed to be enjoying himself, but the gun in his hand was steady and ready for business.

"Just so you don't get me wrong, Quinn, I was born tough," he said. "I was also raised tough and I'll die tough. Anything gets in my way," he snapped his gloved fingers, "I push it aside. That goes for mugs or D.A.'s."

"What do you want?" Quinn asked slowly.

"Last night, you and Baldy here, went into a certain apartment building and up to a certain apartment. Only one guy could have sent you there. Clyde Ainsley. Where is he?"

"What do you want with Ainsley?"

"I got me an elephant memory. Ten years ago he killed a pal of mine and nearly got me. I don't forget things like that. Ainsley is out of the asylum. He just killed another pal of mine and—that makes him my business. Where is he, Quinn?"

"I don't know."

McCleod turned slightly in his chair, raised one crooked elbow and balanced his gun on it. The aim was straight at Silk.

"Take your time, Quinn," the killer said. "I'm in no hurry. But if I don't get an answer in the next thirty seconds, I'll send a slug right through Baldy's skull. Maybe that'll grow some hair on him. Just remember, Ainsley was with you last night. I know that."

"He has the gun pointed at me, sir," Silk said. "I think he means it."

"He thinks I mean it," McCleod derided happily. "I wonder what he'll think when I start shooting."

"Put the gun down," Quinn said with a tired sigh. "Perhaps we can talk this over."

McCleod, oddly enough, did lower the gun and Silk began to live again. The killer really was in no hurry. Quinn sensed it and thought he knew the answer. McCleod was keeping them busy while members of his gang went after Ainsley. They knew where he was. Fink's apartment had been watched the night before.

If McCleod had gone this far, he would have carried through and been ready to shadow Ainsley when he slipped out of the house as Captain McGrath arrived. That was why there'd been no spot execution and Ainsley had probably moved so fast they could only keep up with him and not take the necessary steps to murder him.

Quinn was frantically trying to think of some way by which he could outwit this man. It might be done by taking enormous chances, but even if he was successful, it meant killing McCleod for, in taking him, Quinn would have to reveal the fact that he was not blind.

There was one thing to do. Accompanied by prayer, it might work. If McCleod got the idea that Quinn was stalling for time, he'd get out much faster. It was dangerous, for the man was quite capable of shooting both Quinn and Silk with hardly a second thought.

"You did remark that you were in no hurry, McCleod," Quinn said. "Do you mind if I have a pipe of tobacco? There is no gun concealed anywhere near me and, if there was, I'm afraid I wouldn't be a very good shot."

"Okay, light up," McCleod growled. "Only answer my question. Where's Ainsley?"

Quinn picked up his pipe, tapped it smartly and reached for the humidior. His movements were clumsy and he almost knocked it over. He dipped the pipe into the tobacco and took his time tamping it down. McCleod had another drink, finishing what was left in the decanter. Then, that rebellious nature of his caused him to turn the decanter upside down and let the whiskey dribble onto the rug. Silk emitted another groan and McCleod laughed.

Quinn got the pipe going to his satisfaction, finally. He leaned back, puffed a few times. "About Ainsley," he said. "He got away from me."

McCleod laughed. "Oh, sure he did. The guy was in your car all alone while you and Baldy went into the apartment. He was there when you came out, because we saw him in the back seat when you drove away. So after you find out a guy had been bumped, Ainsley took a powder. He'd have blown out of there in a second if he wanted to get away. Talk straight, Quinn. Or don't any kind of mouthpieces talk straight?"

"Oh, yes. We do quite often."



QUINN was deliberately drawing it out, hoping that McCleod would tumble and become suspicious. But the man was thoroughly at ease and showed no inclination to worry.

"For the last time, where is he?" McCleod warned.

"I told him he'd be better off back at the asylum," Quinn evaded.

"Now look—you did one of two things with him. Locked the guy up in some precinct under a phony name, or you have him hidden and the cops don't know a thing about it. If he was locked up,

ed with doubt now. The phone kept ringing insistently. Once Quinn thought McCleod was going to answer it himself. Finally the killer waved his gun.

"Okay, find out who it is and, remember, there's a gun pointed at the back of your neck every second. Baldy, stay right where you are. No tricks because I can plug Quinn before you're even out of that chair."

"Don't I know it," Silk groaned.

Quinn arose, walked with that stiff intentness of the blind and reached the table. He moved his hand slowly until



SILK

you wouldn't be stalling. Say—Maybe you're stalling for a reason."

"Stalling? I?" Quinn asked blankly. "But why should I? McCleod, why do you really want Ainsley?"

McCleod got up and went to the window, backing across the room with his gun level. He took a quick look outside. Silk began raising his arms, but Quinn hastily signaled him not to move. Then the telephone began to clamor.

"Who is that?" McCleod spun around.

Quinn shrugged. "I could tell by answering it."

"Nothing doing. Let it ring."

Quinn put another match to his pipe. "Quite all right with me."

McCleod's sallow features were cloud-

ed with the phone. He lifted it from the cradle.

A booming voice, loud enough so that McCleod heard every word, came from the instrument.

"This is Captain McGrath. What took you so long to answer the phone, Tony?"

But the voice wasn't McGrath's. It was Butch, apparently talking from the lab hidden just off the library.

"I—had a little trouble crossing the room," Quinn said. "What's up, Captain?"

"I'm coming right over. I think you got that man hidden in your house and I'm searching it. No use sending him out because in the next two minutes the whole place will be surrounded. Think it

over, Tony. Use your head. We want Ainsley."

McCleod hastily backed toward the door. He stepped into the hallway, transferred a key from the inside of the library door to the outside, slammed the door and turned the key. A moment later they heard the front door bang shut.

In case McCleod peered through any windows, Quinn waited a full two minutes, head cocked to one side and listening. He heard McCleod's running steps on the walk and knew the man was hurrying away.

Then Quinn sped to the secret door. After opening it and greeting Butch, Quinn passed right by him and went straight to a bank of steel lockers. He opened one and removed the somber regalia of the Black Bat. Quickly he changed to the black trousers, the black shirt and coat. He stepped into the shoes with crepe soles and stuffed the symbolic black hood into an inner pocket, talking rapidly as he dressed.

"That was neat work, Butch. I thought you might be in the lab and I was afraid, if you did hear McCleod, that you'd barge out and try to take him. Silk, see if you can reach Carol at the beach house."

"Barge in?" Butch said. "Not me. I heard the voices and took a quick peek through the door. I figured if I tried to get him, he might shoot you or Silk before I could get my hands on him. Then I figured he'd scare easy so I telephoned and made out I was McGrath."

"No one could have done better. Butch, you and I are going on a little expedition. I've a hunch that McCleod came here to stall me while his men went after Carol and Ainsley. They probably have a terrific start on us, but we might make up for it."

Silk broke in. "I can't reach Carol, sir. The line is out of order."

"Stay on the phone and get in touch with the State Police barracks near the town where I sent Carol and Ainsley," Quinn ordered.

**S**ILK picked up the phone again while Quinn strapped on a shoulder harness and made certain the heavy gun moved in and out of its holster with ease. Silk got the police barracks and Quinn took the phone.

He identified himself, "I have reason

to believe that a homicidal maniac named Ainsley is heading through your district. I suggest road blocks for all important highways. He doesn't know any sideroads and won't be apt to take them. You have a description of the man. It was broadcast early today."

"Right," the trooper answered. "We'll start checking all cars at once."

"Good. Begin close to the boundaries of Rosewood. That's where he is heading, I think."

Quinn hung up and put a wide-brimmed black hat on. This hat shadowed his face enough to conceal the tell-tale scars. He wore it when, as the Black Bat, he had occasion to go out in public. The hood was used when he expected action.

"But you sent those cops to the town where we're headed," Butch said.

"I know the backroads like a book," Quinn said. "McCleod's gangsters probably won't and when they see road blocks, they'll get scared and slow up. That may give us the break we need. Let's go."

Butch was the first to drop into the tunnel leading from the lab to the garden house. He waited for the Black Bat who peered through the darkness, sweeping away all gloom with his uncanny ability to see at night. Certain that neither McGrath nor McCleod had men posted, he signaled Butch and they ran to the side street where Butch had his car parked. In a moment they were rolling toward the East River.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Beach House Battle*



**H**EAVY though the traffic was, Butch maneuvered his fast car in and out of it, crossing the great bridge in fast time and really letting it out when he hit the less crowded highways leading to the beaches.

While he drove, Butch talked. "Like you said, I did some checking on Fink, the guy Ainsley thinks maybe he killed and maybe didn't. Fink was a small-time sort. His idea of big stuff was rolling a drunk for whatever the barkeep left in his jeans. You know the kind of guy I mean."

"Yes, his record indicates as much.

But, Patch, lately Fink seems to have dropped out of circulation among crooks. What's more, he leased that fairly nice apartment. He did it all on blackmail. We know he was being paid three hundred a month, but that wasn't enough. He must have had other victims."

"A few years ago he seemed to get suddenly prosperous," Butch explained. "He began dressing better and drinking more and higher quality stuff. He told a couple of guys that he'd found a soft touch."

The Black Bat said nothing for a moment or two. Butch made a long, sweeping curve, straightened out and gave her the gas again.

"It takes a reasonable amount of brains to blackmail people who will pay off," the Black Bat mused. "Fink didn't seem possessed of so many brains, but it's the logical thing to assume. We have proof of it anyway. How close was he to McCleod lately?"

"Not too close. He ran with McCleod's mob for a long time, but quit when he came into the dough. Oh, he saw McCleod quite a lot, but I couldn't find out that he'd done any work for him. Besides, McCleod is a funny duck. Sometimes nobody would see him for weeks at a time. Then he'd show up, for maybe two or three days and disappear again."

The Black Bat's big hat moved up and down as he nodded in assent. "Yes, I figured that out from records and reports on him. But every time he appeared, he had a big job all set, and it seems as if he only showed up to pull this, take his share of the booty and vanish. I don't like the angle."

"It's goofy," Butch agreed.

"No ordinary crook works that way and McCleod has never shown himself to be out of the ordinary. Oh, he pulls fancy jobs and takes big hauls. I admit that, but his jobs are pulled with a minimum of brain work and a maximum of ruthlessness."

"Maybe he's just lucky," Butch offered.

"It's more than luck. He must spend his time, when away from the gang, carefully planning the jobs, and returns only to pull them off. That means he has an excellent hiding place—or another identity."

Butch scoffed at that one. "But McCleod's mug has been in the papers a dozen times. He's a tough looking mon-

key and people would remember him. Take that scar on his chin. It stands out."

"So do the scars around my eyes," the Black Bat said gently. "Yet I'm not generally suspected of owning two personalities. It could be done."

"Let me lay my hands on him and I promise he'll never get away," Butch said. "I should have busted him—Hey! Look! Cops!"

A mile ahead, at the bottom of the long grade which they had started to travel down, they saw the waving flashlights of the troopers as cars were being stopped.

"There's a road to the left just ahead," the Black Bat said. "Take it and then follow my directions. We can cut around the road blocks. I made sure they wouldn't cover these side roads. And I'm praying that McCleod's men, if they really are after Ainsley and Carol, won't know them either. The road blocks will force them to turn off, but if they do, they'll get lost and waste a lot of time."

The going became both devious and precarious at times. Quinn's eyes, penetrating the darkness to an extent even further than that revealed by the headlights, warned Butch of every turn. Butch lost all sense of direction and simply followed the short, softly spoken commands.

Then they saw the ocean stretching out before them, faintly illuminated by a cradle moon and a few stars. There was a row of small houses that gradually dwindled into a section of cleared public beach. Beyond that point, the shore estates began and Tony Quinn's place was one of these.

**T**HE whole picture was one of loneliness. The season was over and there was nothing left but the sea, the beach and empty houses. In a few weeks it would become intensely cold here.

There were no lights in Quinn's house, which set well back from the beach and was surrounded by thick shrubbery and ancient trees. Butch stopped the car a quarter of a mile away, driving for some time prior to that without headlights and throttling the motor down as low as he possibly could.

The Black Bat removed his wide-brimmed hat and drew on the close fitting hood. Now he presented an eerie, almost frightening appearance. His eyes

shone brightly through the slits in the hood.

"I'm going on up alone first," he said. "If things are clear and Carol unmolested, I'll whistle. Come then, in a hurry. Drive the car into the garage. Otherwise, don't move unless there's considerable action."

Butch nodded, his face bleak. The Black Bat stepped out of the car and seemed to fade into the darkness. One moment he was there, a vague shadow. The next there was nothing. His black clothing was meant to merge with the darkness and make him practically invisible.

He scouted the whole area, cautious against any trick on McCleod's part. The crook could have warned his men to expect trouble. The Black Bat reached the back porch of the house. His hand dropped to the doorknob and turned it gently. The door was locked. He began to breathe a bit easier. He tapped smartly on the panels.

A window curtain was drawn back. He saw Carol's anxious face framed for a moment. Then a flashlight beam hit him full in the eyes and he turned away slightly. There was a rattle of a burglar chain, a key turned and the door opened.

Carol carried out her act well. She wasn't supposed to know the Black Bat, beyond having cognizance of his reputation, and she acted frightened. Ainsley, deeper in the room, held some sort of a club and looked prepared to use it.

"I'm a friend," the Black Bat said. "I'm the Black Bat."

"You look like a holdup man to me," Ainsley cried.

"No, wait." Carol stepped in front of Ainsley. "You've been away for a long time, and you can't know about this man. He really is our friend. He's worked with Mr. Quinn before. He fights criminals just as Mr. Quinn does."

Ainsley slowly lowered the club. "Well, if you say so, but I still don't like allying myself with a man who hides behind a black hood."

The Black Bat laughed. "I assure you, it's necessary," he said. "There is no time for explanations. I have reason to believe that McCleod knows you are here and that his men may be on their way to capture or kill you."

"That's impossible," Ainsley coun-

tered. "Nobody followed us. How would he know?"

"I'm not sure but he or his men could have tailed you here. It wouldn't have been difficult. Once they trailed you here, they'd simply wait for orders. Perhaps you have been under observation all the time. At any rate, take my advice and get out quickly. Go back to Quinn's house. You are to stay there, Ainsley. It's no longer dangerous as the police are satisfied you can't be at Quinn's. So is McCleod, naturally."

"We'd better go," Carol said.

"Just a moment," Ainsley objected. "How can we be sure this is on the level?"

"Quinn sent me," the Black Bat said simply. "What I am doing is at his suggestion. He tried to phone you. There was no connection. Perhaps the man or men left behind to watch cut the phone wires."

"All right," Ainsley gave in. "If Miss Carol vouches for you, I'll do whatever you say."

Suddenly the Black Bat turned and walked half a dozen steps to a window. He peered out.

"Don't make a sound," he warned. "We're too late. Three men are approaching from the back. That means the house is well surrounded. You have a car here?"

"Yes, the one I used," Carol said.

"Good. It's in the garage. I can see it through the doors which you left ajar."

"Now wait," Ainsley protested. "It's dark as ink out there. The garage is well back. Don't tell me—"

"I can see in darkness," the Black Bat explained. "But if you don't follow my suggestions from here on, none of us may see at all. Those men are after you, Ainsley. They'll kill everyone here along with you. There is one chance. I'll draw them away, group them, if possible, and once the path is cleared to the garage, run for it. Drive your car as fast as it will travel and go back to town. Carol, you know the roads. Take the little used ones. The main highways are police blocked. They're looking for someone, and if they see Ainsley, he'll be arrested."

"We'll be ready," Carol promised.

"Ainsley, move quietly to the front of the house and watch and listen. Go now. Hurry!"



CAROL

**A**INSLEY departed and the Black Bat stepped up to Carol. His uncanny vision saw her perfectly, saw her blond loveliness, the clear eyes, the somewhat pert nose and firm lips above an aggressive chin. For a moment he held her close to him.

"You've got to get him out of here," he whispered in her ear. "Somehow I think he knows the secret behind Steve McCleod, whatever it may be. But once on the back roads, get yourself lost. Give me time to clean up here and reach the house so I can receive Ainsley as Tony Quinn."

"Whatever you say, darling. Have we much of a chance?"

"I'll make one, if humanly possible. Butch is with me and he'll help. What do you think of Ainsley?"

"I don't know. Sometimes he acts perfectly rational, and at other times he seems to be trying to remember. He stews a lot, and doesn't say much."

"Be ready to move fast," the Black Bat warned her. "I'm going outside."

He hurried through the house. There was a window in one of the downstairs bedrooms, and through this he could see no signs of the men closing in on the place. He guessed they were concentrating only upon the doors, depending mostly on the element of surprise. He estimated there would be a half dozen of

them, split into two forces of three men each.

The Black Bat raised the window quietly. He listened and his acute hearing detected sounds of hoarse whispering, but it came from some distance away. He slipped out, made his way well to the rear of the place and whistled once.

A peculiar sort of whistle that resembled the notes of a night bird. Butch would recognize it and know it meant danger. He'd come carefully now. The Black Bat crouched there, waiting for him. In a few moments he heard the pad of Butch's big shoes and went out to meet him.

In a moment, Butch was acquainted with the set-up and with the Black Bat's plans. They spotted the raiding party's sedan, parked down the road, and Butch went off to handle this. There was a driver in it, lolling behind the wheel and keeping the motor purring softly for a quick getaway.

Butch crept up behind the car, alongside it and reached through the open window. One big hand closed around the startled driver's throat. Butch yanked the man's head and shoulders out of the window and brought down his other fist in a rabbit punch that could have broken the driver's neck if Butch had wished it so.

All of this was done without the driver uttering more than a faint gurgle. Butch pushed him back into the car, went around to the front of it and raised the hood. He methodically ripped free every wire he could find and for good measure put one immense hand around the distributor parts and smashed them.

This done, he hurried back to where the Black Bat waited after scouting the raiding party. The gangsters were getting set to move in. The Black Bat gave Butch whispered orders that made the big man grin widely in anticipation. They crept forward and the Black Bat spotted the trio set to attack the front door.

Each one had a gun in his hand. All were hard bitten criminals, ready to follow McCleod's orders to the letter. Their absent leader, the Black Bat realized, was a pretty good organizer. After he'd started these men on their way, he'd gone to see that Tony Quinn received no news of the battle at the beach house. The phone wires had been cut. If Quinn tried to talk with Ainsley that way, and received no reply, he was bound to take action, so that was why McCleod had undertaken a large risk in visiting Tony Quinn to keep him occupied. It meant there was something very big at stake.

The Black Bat signaled with one somber gloved hand and Butch stole away. He couldn't see the trio but, with the Black Bat's help, he knew exactly where they were located.

Elevating his gun slightly, the Black Bat drew a bead just above the heads of the three men gathered in a group twenty yards from the house, and fired two quick shots. Instantly the three spread out and fell flat, one of them dropping his revolver in his haste. Two of them stayed that way by choice. One had nothing to do with it, for a second after he was down, Butch landed on him. It required a single blow to put the man away.

**B**UTCH arose, looking for more prey. One of the remaining men fired in the direction of the first two shots. From behind the house came the clamoring voices of the other three men, followed by a banging on the locked door. The Black Bat quickly changed his position, waited until one of the pair in front raised up a trifle and sent a slug smashing into the ground beside him.

"Joe—Maxie!" someone called. "Come around to the front. Watch it! We got company."

The Black Bat smiled tightly. This was what he wanted. He edged away without making a sound. His acute hearing detected the steps of the other three mobsters moving around the house. There were whispers. He bent his head even more. Only two men seemed to be whispering. Perhaps they'd left one behind to guard the rear door.

The Black Bat stood erect, depending on his dark garb to make him invisible and moved toward the rear. Dry twigs, low brush and outspread tree branches were no hazard. He could see them clearly and avoid any noisy contact with them.

At the northwest corner he stopped and peered through the darkness. He heard the faint rattle of the burglar chain. Carol was getting set to go for the car. The Black Bat's grip tightened on his gun. The third killer was somewhere nearby, hidden where even the Black Bat's uncanny sight couldn't spot him. He'd open fire the moment anyone appeared in the doorway and there was no way to warn Carol.

At the front, Butch was keeping the other thugs busy. There were a couple of more shots fired and once the Black Bat faintly heard the impact of a mighty fist against a jaw that must have shattered under the force of the blow.

The key turned in the door, the knob made a little creaking sound. Then Carol stepped out and so did the hidden gunman who had been behind a tree trunk. His gun was level as he waited for Ainsley to show. The Black Bat fired one shot. The gunman screamed, leaned against the tree trunk and slid weakly to the ground.

Carol and Ainsley streaked for the garage. In a moment the doors were wide open, the starter whirred and the car rolled out of the garage. Carol shifted into second and pressed a foot heavily on the accelerator. The car leaped forward.

There were three of McCleod's thugs still on their feet, one of them groggy. They heard the car coming and tried to intercept it, but behind them Butch gave a roar of rage and crashed closer, making all the noise he could. From across the driveway, the Black Bat's bullets kept them down. Two shots were fired

at the car. The Black Bat doubted that either took any effect on the passengers.

Then the trio began running to where their own car was parked. The Black Bat signaled Butch who joined him at once, grinning hugely and rubbing his hands in glee.

By the time the thugs realized their own car was crippled, the Black Bat and Butch were rolling rapidly away from the scene.

"We could go back and take them all," Butch suggested hopefully.

"Not this time, Butch. We were lucky and there is no reason to stretch such good fortune. Anyway, those men couldn't tell us any more than what we know."

"They might give us a line on where to find McCleod."

"No. The police have tried that. They—and I—are convinced that McCleod trusts no member of his band. They haven't the faintest idea where he lives or what he does when he isn't leading them. He's a phantom crook—one of the very few to whom that name can be applied with all honesty."

Butch evaded the police road blocks and, realizing that the Black Bat must reach the house before Carol and Ainsley, kept up a good speed. Close by Tony Quinn's house, he dropped off the Black Bat, watched him fade into darkness and then drove away.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Black Clad Visitor*



AINSLEY, when Silk answered the door, entered the house alone.

"Miss Carol thought it best if she wasn't seen in this neighborhood," he explained.

"So that if McCleod hasn't tied her up with you, he may still remain doubtful."

Tony Quinn, in his comfortable tweeds and seated before the fireplace, just nodded. Ainsley sat down and told what had happened.

"This black-hooded man took over. If it hadn't been for him, we'd surely have been killed. And I thought, at first, that he was just another crook."

"Some people maintain he is," Quinn answered with a smile. "If he was arrested, I suppose it would be my duty to prosecute him and I shouldn't like

that. But getting back to our own problem: What are we going to do with you, Mr. Ainsley?"

"I've thought it all over. If I give myself up, I'll at least be safe and I'll stop putting people like you and Miss Carol in danger. Let them believe I killed that man in the apartment. What's the difference? I'm supposed to be insane. All they can do is put me back in the asylum."

Quinn pondered the idea and rejected it. "That won't do at all. In the first place, I believe you are as sane as I. I am convinced they cured you and that soon you would have been released anyway. Now if you are arrested, they are bound to give you a new sanity test. If you are determined sane, you will go to trial like any murderer, and you might not fare so well."

"You don't think I killed that man?" Ainsley asked plaintively.

"No, but others do. Tell me, did they ever give you any hope of a cure at the asylum?"

Ainsley shrugged. "They tell you nothing. I've been examined fifty times, I guess, the last time about three weeks ago. Also I have no one on the outside to help me, and it takes a petition to make them act."

"And with the proper amount of influence they might not act even if they believed you were sane," Quinn commented. "I don't claim people can be held in an asylum forever, but like everything else, there are certain officials who would be amenable to influence. Did you ever think of that?"

Ainsley shook his head. "Not until now. You refer to my wife's parents, the Prescotts, who never approved my marrying their daughter. Mr. Quinn, perhaps if I went to see Prescott he might be able—"

"Stay away from them," Quinn ordered brusquely. "At least until we get things settled more than they are now. And about giving yourself up—I won't permit it. If influence kept you locked up, that influence might get you a death sentence. What do you know about the Prescotts?"

Ainsley winced as his mind went back ten years. "Frankly, only what Laura told me and that wasn't much. Her father made a lot of money and retired. As a hobby he studied historic gems and became an acknowledged expert on them.

He's all right, I suppose, but puffed up too much about the fact that he has a lot of money and his friends include some of the most influential people in the world."

"And Mrs. Prescott?"

"Laura told me she's sweet and kind, but socially ambitious. Laura always said her mother fostered Mr. Prescott's study of historic gems because it brought him—and her—into contact with kings and princes. With old European titled families and the most important people in this country as well."

"There are no other children?"

"No. Only Laura. They have a nephew living with them. His name, I think, is Bert Coppin. Laura never liked him. Then there is some sort of a protegee, an obnoxious sort of character who is pretty good at art, knows a lot of people and lends atmosphere to Mrs. Prescott's social ambitions. He lived there too. Though I imagine he left or was put out by now."

There was an interruption when Silk answered the phone. He talked briefly and reported that it was Carol. She'd stayed in the neighborhood long enough to see shadowy figures take up posts around the house.

"McCleod's men," Quinn said thoughtfully. "But you got here before McCleod knew you'd escaped his raid on the beach house. He thinks you are here, but he can't be certain. Silk, keep all lights dim. Mr. Ainsley, when you move about, be certain not to cast any shadows, even if you have to creep below the window sills."

**A**INSLEY ran fingers through his already disordered hair. "Mr. Quinn, I can't remain here. The hazard is too great. Not for me. I don't care about myself, but I can't expose you any longer. McCleod hates me because I killed one of his men and nearly captured him. If he did not frame the murder of this man Fink on me, he probably believes I'm responsible for that too. He intends to murder me and he'll kill anyone who stands in his way. Even you."

"I've been threatened before," Quinn said complacently. "You'll stay. After all, keeping you hidden is to my benefit now. Once you are taken and they find out I protected you, I'll have something to explain too. My advice is for you to

get some rest."

Ainsley nodded. "Whatever you say, Mr. Quinn. After what you have done, I can't deny you anything."

"Silk will take you to one of the guest rooms. In the morning we'll hash it all out and come to some decision. And I think a nightcap might do you some good. I'll have Silk bring one up to you later. Good night, Mr. Ainsley."

Ainsley arose and walked closer to Quinn's chair. He impulsively stuck out a hand which Quinn disregarded. Ainsley colored slightly, as if he just remembered that Quinn couldn't see the outthrust hand. He turned and walked away. Silk guided him past the windows so there were no shadows silhouetted.

At the door, Ainsley paused, turned around. "I'm beginning to agree that some outside force kept me in the asylum, Mr. Quinn," he said. "It must have been Prescott. He would have that much influence and—he hated me intensely."

"That can be ironed out too, Ainsley. Just stay away from them."

Quinn sat there alone, for the next ten minutes, his mind going over the events of the last twenty-four hours. They were puzzling because they made no great amount of sense. First there was Ainsley's escape from the asylum, a spur-of-the-moment affair according to Ainsley and motivated only by his desire to visit his wife's grave after ten years. It was possible that Ainsley had no other reason and he deserved the benefit of the doubt, if he was sane. That was another grim angle. Quinn had known homicidal maniacs who were in full possession of their mental faculties except for those few moments when they struck.

Then there was the murder of Fink, a cheap little crook who'd apparently given up his profession and retired to live on the proceeds of some sort of scheme. Blackmail was the logical answer to that, but it must have been for a far larger sum than the mere three hundred dollars sent to him, every now and then, by the Prescotts.

If Ainsley told the truth about seeing McCleod, following him and being tricked into Fink's apartment by a hastily manufactured nameplate in the apartment lobby, it was proof that Ainsley had been framed and was innocent. If that happened to be true, then McCleod



must be the murderer. But what motive did he have? Fink had been one of his men, and had continued to be, perhaps, up to the moment of his death.

There was even a possibility that it was McCleod whom Fink had been blackmailing. But what could Fink have had on McCleod? How could a known killer and gangster be blackmailed? What did he have to lose if Fink did talk? Unless Fink knew where McCleod secreted himself during those long periods when he became inactive. Even so, changing his hiding place was a simpler remedy than murder.

McCleod's desire to wreak vengeance upon Ainsley was an understandable thing. Men like McCleod hated to be vanquished by an outsider. The police were entitled to hunt him down, but when some passerby, like Ainsley, took a hand with definite results, low-bred killers always believe it is within their province to act against such a man.

Yet, the intensity which McCleod had displayed, indicated there could be some greater motive which even Ainsley couldn't fathom. Quinn stirred restlessly when Silk came into the room.

"Silk, take him a drink," Quinn said. "A stiff one, and put in enough sleeping chemicals to keep him quiet for the night. Hold off until after I go upstairs and pretend to retire. I'm going out again, on the prowl."

"Anything I can do to help, sir?" Silk asked hopefully.

"I'm afraid not. Ainsley is your responsibility. And, Silk, should McCleod become really serious and try to get at Ainsley, call McGrath. Tell him Ainsley just gave himself up, perhaps that you drugged him. That is a last resort how-

ever, because McGrath will demand to see me and I won't be here. Help me upstairs now."

QUINN saw Ainsley at the hallway on the second floor, but gave no sign that he did. Ainsley just stood there, a puzzled frown on his face. He seemed to be trying to make up his mind about something. Quinn prepared for bed and even relaxed under the covers for a short time. His door was closed until he felt certain that Ainsley was in his room, probably with Silk who would make certain Ainsley didn't wander.

From one incident, this whole affair seemed to have stemmed—the shooting affray between two rival gangster mobs during which Laura Ainsley had lost her life. From Butch's report it seemed that the affair could have been staged and Quinn wanted to be certain of that. Finding out the truth entailed a certain amount of risk, but he never considered this element when his reasons were important.

He slipped out of the room, made his way downstairs and into the secret lab. There he put on the clothes of the Black Bat, stowed a fresh automatic in a shoulder sling and took along a kit of finely made burglar tools. He phoned Butch to meet him at a spot some distance away. Then he spent a couple of minutes checking the record of a gang leader named Ferroni, with whom McCleod had battled it out that night ten years ago.

The file gave him Ferroni's address and his recent activities. Ferroni hadn't changed any with the years.

[Turn page]

## Backache, Leg Pains May Be Danger Sign Of Tired Kidneys

If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of

pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills. (Ads.)

The Black Bat made his way through the tunnel. From the garden house, he studied the estate. If McCleod had any men hidden, they were at the front of the house. The Black Bat disregarded the car parked on that side street. Reaching it was too dangerous. Instead he took a route through the rear of his neighbors' estates and came out on a quiet, residential street some distance away.

Now the going was riskier still. In his favor was an especially dark night and the hour—well after midnight. Then, at the pre-arranged corner, he waited for Butch who came by shortly slowed and hardly saw the dim form that materialized out of the gloom and hopped aboard.

Butch had discovered where Mike Ferroni, who had been and perhaps still was, a deadly enemy of Steve McCleod, made his present home. It was in a cheap downtown hotel, a building strung in a row with a block of others. All were equal in height and if signs were not provided, and street numbers, it would have been difficult to know which building was which.

A sign, half-filled with Neon gas, spelled out just half of the name of the hotel. Butch parked the car on the street behind the place. The Black Bat put on his hood and placed the wide-brimmed hat over it this time. He vanished down an alley which anyone possessed of normal sight would never have been able to travel safely. It was very dark, littered with rubbish and full of holes where brick pavements had been worn away or destroyed.

The rear entrance was locked, but that gave the Black Bat no trouble. He passed by a deserted kitchen that smelled greasy and unclean, found the narrow stairway and climbed it to the fourth floor. Thanks to Butch's study of the place, he knew every move he had to make in order to reach Ferroni's rooms.

They were at the end of the single corridor and this was not even lighted by the usual dim bulb. It was dark as pitch. The Black Bat moved along it softly, passed a fire stairway door and kept going. The stairway door operated on well oiled hinges, was the swinging type and noiseless. After he was ten feet beyond it, he heard the first soft footfall. The Black Bat reached for his gun and turned around simultaneously. He completed neither action for

the man behind him had moved with the stealth of a cat. There was a gun pressed against the Black Bat's spine.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Moment of Danger*



OW as the gunman's voice was, the tones showed that the speaker was in deadly earnest.

"Freeze," the harsh whisper warned him, "Get the hands up and keep 'em there."

A flashlight beam cut away some of the darkness. The Black Bat raised his hands shoulder high. This was a bad predicament. Apparently Ferroni kept a man on permanent guard duty. Butch had missed him somehow. In a moment that flash would be turned on him, revealing the hooded head, and that would be a complete giveaway. There were very few crooks who didn't know what the black hood meant, and always the mere sight of it called for bullets—fast.

The Black Bat was compelled to take the gravest of risks. He balled both hands into fists. The flash was sweeping his way and the hoarsely whispered command to turn around reached him. He started turning slowly, but before he was completely around, the turn became a spin. One fist came down, a chopping blow that struck the man's gun hand just above the wrist, another that hit his right arm muscles. Either blow would paralyze any trigger finger, but there was always danger that reflex action would cause the trigger to be pulled, especially on a gun with a sensitive mechanism.

The gun thudded to the floor, unfired, and the thug dropped to the floor. For a bare instant the flash swept across his face. The gunman gave a smothered yelp, leaped to his feet and ran. The Black Bat's automatic appeared in his fist. He could have shot the man down easily, but he didn't even dare call an order for him to stop. Following him was the only thing left and the Black Bat went in swift pursuit.

But the gunman knew every nook of the hotel. He fled down the exit stairway and somewhere on the third floor, he vanished. The Black Bat frowned. This was not a pleasant situation. Yet, having

gone this far, he had to see Ferroni. If that gang leader was tipped that the Black Bat was on his trail, he might vanish as efficiently as McCleod.

The Black Bat hurried back to the fourth floor and Ferroni's apartment. He examined the cheap lock, took keys from his pocket and selected one. It did succeed in pushing the inside key out of the lock, but it didn't turn the bolt. The fourth skeleton key did and the Black Bat stepped into a darkened apartment.

Ferroni was fast asleep and snoring gently. The Black Bat pulled a chair beside the bed and tapped Ferroni lightly on the cheek. The gangster grunted, turned his head away for a moment and then his eyes opened wide. So did his mouth, but a gloved hand muffled his shout.

"Quiet, Ferroni. This is one time you don't have to fear the Black Bat!"

Ferroni let out a gasp of astonishment when his mouth was freed. The Black Bat reached over and turned on the bed light for a second. Ferroni, eyes shining in sudden terror, lay back against the pillows, but he didn't cry out. Besides the somber hood he'd noticed the gun in his visitor's fist.

"Is there anyone else in this apartment, Ferroni?"

"No. I don't trust nobody to live with me. What do you want?"

"I'll come to that directly. Do you maintain a guard in the hallway every night?"

"Guard? What guard? Say, what is this all about anyway?"

"There was someone watching in the hallway. If you didn't pay him, he wasn't protecting you but keeping tabs on you. That means one of Steve McCleod's men."

"I didn't know anyone was there."

"Forget him," the Black Bat said, though he was in no mood to forget. That man had made his getaway. In short order he'd bring down help and being trapped in a place of this kind wasn't a comfortable sensation.

"You working on McCleod?" Ferroni demanded. Somehow, under that greasy hair of his, had percolated the idea that the Black Bat meant him no harm.

"Yes. I want especially to know about that shooting affray ten years ago, in which McCleod, or one of his men, shot and killed a woman."

"I ain't talking. You're nothing but a cop."

"You'll talk, Ferroni, or get up out of that bed and accompany me downstairs to the street where I'll cuff you to the pole on which is fastened the nearest police call box. There will be a sign around your neck indicating that you know quite a little about the stick-up of a payroll which happened not too long ago—"

"I didn't do it," Ferroni protested and admitted his guilt in the next breath. "What about that fight?"

"That's what I want to know. What about it! Are you going to talk?"

FERRONI rubbed his sleep-lined face. "The dame got killed by accident. Nobody meant for her to get hurt. My boys were going to clean out a joint across the street. We'd been planning it for weeks. Then we got word that McCleod was going to knock it off first."

"Who sent you that word?"

"I never found out. It was just a phone call, but we didn't take any chances. We hid out and waited. Sure enough, McCleod and his boys show. Now the way he acted busted all ethics to pieces. We'd cased the job and it was ours so we figured, if we couldn't stage the raid, McCleod certainly wasn't going to. The fight started."

"You never discovered who tipped you or how McCleod knew you were ready to stage that job?"

"I never tried. When that woman got it, I figured we were all up to our ears in trouble. Me and the boys powdered and stayed away for weeks."

"When did you see McCleod last, Ferroni?"

"Long ago. I can't remember. What's he up to?"

The Black Bat was standing there in the darkness now, though Ferroni didn't know it. All the amazed gang leader heard was the click of the door latch. He snapped on the light and plunged across the room toward the telephone. He called the desk and told them to get cops, lots of cops.

The Black Bat, meanwhile, had reached the ground floor and was nearing the side door when he saw a sedan roll slowly by. He ducked back. A moment later six men got out of the sedan and very quietly took up posts to cover every possible escape route. They

were not gangsters but police, Captain McGrath's men.

The Black Bat raced up the stairs again. Passing the fourth floor, he heard Ferroni's wrathful roars and kept going until he reached the roof. Once there, he wasn't permitted even to draw breath for behind him he could hear the police coming to the roof also.

They'd soon be on the adjoining rooftops too. The Black Bat ran into the night. His uncanny sight served him well now for he avoided all manner of skylights, low ventilating pipes and loose bricks. He got to a point three rooftops away from Ferroni's hotel and ducked behind a flat chimney. There were police on the next roof and more police behind him.

As yet they had no idea he was close by, but they'd examine every inch of the roofs. The Black Bat was securely trapped. All pretence of quiet was abandoned now. From the street below he could hear McGrath's voice giving orders which meant they were securely hemming in the whole area, and he was doing an effective job of it. For one of the few times in his career, the Black Bat broke into a cold sweat.

Flashlights began sweeping the rooftops and he took refuge behind a skylight, lying prone and snuggled up close. Several detectives and patrolmen were coming his way. He watched them move toward the edge of the roof and look down at the street. One man shouted for more orders and promptly got them. From what McGrath said, the Black Bat knew the buildings in this entire block were filled with police.

He reached one hand up a trifle and felt along the skylight. He hadn't noticed, but it was open about two inches. He raised it a little higher, praying the hinges wouldn't squeal. A flashlight swept his way and he promptly lowered the skylight and lay flat again. They'd start searching the roof in a moment.

The flash moved away. This time the Black Bat worked very fast. He raised the skylight far enough so he could roll over the small projecting frame. With both hands clinging to the edge, he dropped into space and hung there. The skylight rattled a bit when it settled back into its former position and the sound brought running footsteps across the rooftop.

The Black Bat looked down. He was in some kind of a studio. It appeared to be empty. He waited until the voices on the roof grew fairly muted and then he let go.

Knees bent slightly, he hit the floor. There was a hundred and sixty-five pounds of weight in his muscular body and he knew the resultant thud would bring the police in droves, yet he was free for the moment.

HE was up quickly and moving toward the door. He opened it and peered into a dimly illuminated hallway. He'd have been better satisfied if the hallway was completely darkened and that gave him an idea. He stepped back into the studio, unscrewed a light bulb and with one of his burglar tools he shorted the lights.

They must have gone out over most of the building if the resultant shouting was any indication, but darkness wouldn't save him. Every policeman was provided with a flash, though the fact that he could duck into some dark corner was somewhat comforting. Flashlights couldn't be everywhere.

He returned to the door and opened it again. A beam of light was bobbing up the stairway. When the man carrying it reached a turn in the stairs, the Black Bat had a glimpse of his face. It was Captain McGrath, grim-eyed and determined.

Behind McGrath were a dozen detectives. Every exit was sealed off now. The Black Bat retreated deep into the room. For a moment he considered shooting his way out. It might work, abetted by his ability to see in darkness, but he knew he couldn't do it. Gun fighting with gangsters and crooks was one thing, but shooting it out with policemen was something far different.

The police weren't in this for what they'd get out of it, not at sixty to a hundred dollars a week. They were doing what they realized was a dangerous duty and none of them shirked it.

The door opened wide. McGrath was framed in it. His flash crossed the room, moved along the wall and centered on the Black Bat. It stayed there about a tenth of a second and then winked out.

This was a moment the Black Bat had wondered about for years, the instant when McGrath was bound to have him

securely trapped. When the doughty little detective captain could swagger up to him and rip off the hood. McGrath had imagined it too—in his pleasanter dreams.

Through the darkness, the Black Bat could see his face. It was perfectly white.

The gun he held sagged a little and McGrath was moistening his lips. Some men came up behind him.

McGrath stepped back and slammed the door. "Nobody in there," he said,

he'd deliberately turned down the chance.

A few moments later the house seemed to quiet down. The Black Bat made his way to the first floor, located the rear exit and went through it to the alley. A big police car was parked there. The rear door was ajar. He crept in and lay huddled on the floor.

Captain McGrath appeared shortly and got behind the wheel. He backed out to the street, was passed by the police blocking all exits and he drove quickly



BUTCH

"The room is bare. Maybe he did go through the skylight, but that was minutes ago and he moves fast. You men go up and join the boys on the roof. I've got a hunch he'll try that way sooner or later, if he's still around."

"But the guy can't fly even if he is named the Black Bat," someone argued.

"Can't he?" McGrath growled. "You never been up against him as often as I have. Go on, get going. I'm heading for the alley where my car is parked. I've a lead which may pan out. Lieutenant Martin, you take charge."

Under the hood, the Black Bat smiled. McGrath had failed the final test, for all his bragging. The one thing he'd hoped for so long had come to pass and

to a public park. As he entered it, McGrath began to talk.

"There are all kinds of fools in this world, but none as big as me," he muttered angrily. "Okay, you can be more comfortable. And I suppose you wonder why I did this."

The Black Bat climbed over the seat and got beside McGrath. The detective stopped the car in the darkest spot he could find.

"I don't know why, Captain," the Black Bat said. "But I am grateful."

"Now, look, I just saved your neck. You owe me something. I want an answer to one question."

"Now, Captain, suppose I was Tony Quinn," the Black Bat said mildly.

"Would it benefit you to know that?"

McGRATH thought that over for a few minutes. "No, I suppose it wouldn't. But I've never been surer. All right—don't answer that. But you are going to tell me what you're working on."

"With pleasure, because I may need your help before it's all over. This time I was asked to come in on the case. By—Tony Quinn."

"That's like giving yourself orders," McGrath grunted. "So—it's Clyde Ainsley. Listen, I accused Quinn of hiding that escaped homicidal maniac and I think I made a mistake. I felt bad about it because I really got tough. If you're Quinn, what I did tonight makes us even. If you're not, I'm plain stupid."

"Captain, who tipped you that I was in Ferroni's place?" the Black Bat asked.

"An anonymous phone call. I don't like those kind of tips. Perhaps that's another reason I didn't take you. It wasn't playing the game exactly fair—not where you and I are concerned. Tell me more about Ainsley. Where is he?"

"That I refuse to say because Ainsley's freedom is necessary for the moment. The man I'm after is Steve McCleod and from Ferroni I learned that the night Ainsley's wife was killed, the whole thing was a set-up. Mrs. Ainsley was meant to be gunned out. That's what the whole thing was about."

"I'm listening," McGrath said.

"McCleod is the strangest criminal you've had on your books in years. He's absolutely ruthless, hard-boiled and as tough as anything ever brought up in Hell's Kitchen. He knows all the angles, has never been tripped up, maintains a well oiled organization of gorillas. Yet—he strikes seldom. Then he vanishes. Do you know what I'm getting at?"

"He's two people. Is that it?"

"Yes. Under another identity he lives like any normal person. How he disguises himself, I don't know. There are pictures but only as McCleod and that's a disguise: I think that, in his role of a peaceful and law abiding citizen, he keeps his eyes open for something big. Then he reverts to McCleod and strikes hard."

McGrath nodded. "All his jobs have been so carefully planned that there has never been a hitch. That much I'll admit."

"Which is in itself highly suspicious. Any ordinary gangster leader simply couldn't case every job so well. But Captain—what's he after now? Revenge by framing Ainsley? I doubt it. Men like McCleod don't go to such lengths to avenge the death of one of their band. I think McCleod wants Ainsley for another reason."

"And you haven't a line on it?"

"Not a thing and I'm worried. Why did he deliberately cause Mrs. Ainsley to be killed? Why did he lure Ainsley, only yesterday, into a badly framed murder? Why frame it with the killing of one of his own men anyway?"

"I'm glad I did this," McGrath said. "Let you go, I mean. Now get me—this doesn't mean I won't try again and, next time, I may rip that hood off. I make no promises. Not where you are concerned. But, heck, I never even knew there was anything big in the wind."

"You know now, Captain."

"Um—yes, about as vaguely as you. I thought this was simple. I thought it concerned an escaped homicidal maniac who'd breezed out of the asylum to knock off one of the men responsible for his wife's death. I darned near felt sorry for the guy. Is he a part of the deal, do you think?"

"I know it. Though Ainsley himself hasn't the faintest idea what it is all about."

"Look," McGrath mused. "You don't think Ainsley could be McCleod with some kind of a tie-in at the asylum by which he gets clear every so often, pulls his jobs and then goes back without being missed? Wouldn't that be a spot for a killer to hide out though? An asylum."

"It's worth considering," the Black Bat admitted. "Captain, I'll be leaving you now. Again I want to express my thanks and I promise that you will not be sorry."

"Okay, okay," McGrath grumbled guiltily. "But if you want to know the whole truth, my wife told me a thousand times that the day I unmasked the Black Bat was the day she'd poke me with the flatiron. Your kind of glamour gets her. And she says if it hadn't been for you, I'd still be a detective sergeant on some sniveling little detail and getting nowhere. Maybe she's right. At least I can face her when I go home."

McGrath watched the Black Bat fade into nothingness as the night closed

around him. The detective captain started the car, hummed a little and then began to sing. He hadn't felt like singing in years.

## CHAPTER IX

*Murder in the Night*

FROM that park to his home was a dangerous and long hike, but the Black Bat didn't dare call a taxi or even enter a store to phone Silk. Memory of that narrow escape was enough. There wouldn't always be a Captain McGrath in the offing to let him slip away, and the next time, maybe, even McGrath wouldn't see things so leniently. Butch, with the car, was probably worried to death and certainly hadn't tailed McGrath. There was nothing to do except hoof it.

It took him an hour of fast walking because he had to keep to the darker and shadowy streets. McCleod's men might still be watching the house so he took to the neighboring estates once more and finally reached the garden house. A moment later he was in the lab, rapidly changing back to his regular clothes.

As he emerged into the library, he smelled coffee, very strong coffee, and he could hear someone pacing the floor with rapid steps. Quinn picked up his cane and began tapping his way toward the kitchen. Before he reached it, the butler's pantry door swung open and Silk emerged. He staggered toward the dining room table and had to support himself against it.

"He's gone, sir," Silk said. "Ainsley—the rat!"

Quinn dropped the mask of blindness instantly. "Where? How?"

Silk made a wry face. "I fixed him a spiked drink, as you told me to, but Ainsley has more sense than the sanest guy. Him crazy? Ha—like a fox! He wouldn't drink alone. No, sir, absolutely refused to have a drink unless I did and then he—"

Silk swayed slightly and grabbed at the table again. Quinn sprang to his side. Silk went on, though his voice became blurred enough to be hardly more than a mumble.

"Switched glasses. That's what the double-crosser did. He must have sensed

his was loaded. I didn't know until after I'd drunk mine and then it was too late. But the stuff acted slowly. I gave him a fairly good shot. Still, I knew it wouldn't work too fast, so I just pretended to keel over. I wanted to see what he'd do."

Quinn said, "Yes—go on."

"He put me on the bed in his room. Covered me up and gave me a nice mocking salute with a grin a mile wide. Then he just went out. The back way because he either knew, or guessed, those gorillas were watching the place. Soon as he left, I started making coffee and walking my head off so I'd stay awake."

Quinn nodded slowly. "We've both had our troubles this evening. So Ainsley blew, eh? I really trusted him. You did well, Silk. If you'd tried to follow, you'd probably have passed out somewhere along the way and I'd never have known what happened. Are you all right now?"

"I'm so full of coffee I gurgle. If caffeine wards off the full effects of that sleeping drug, I'll be okay. In fact, I doubt I'll sleep for a week. But what about Ainsley? Where has he gone?"

"I think I know," Quinn said. "He expressed a desire to visit his in-laws, the Prescotts. I'm sure that's where he is headed."

Silk whistled softly between his teeth. "He hates those people. What if he intends to—harm them?"

"That's what I'm worried about, Silk. We trusted him, but it seems we were wrong. I've got to get over there quickly. You remain here. Stay awake. I may need you fast. Or better yet—if you feel up to it, come along."

"I'm okay," Silk insisted. "I can take along a thermos of hot coffee. The air may do me a lot of good too."

"Fine. Try to act normally. Bring the car around to the front. Meanwhile I'll have my outfit ready to smuggle out. I'll change to the costume in the car. You can drop me off near the Prescotts. We'd better stay together as much as possible. As Tony Quinn and Silk Kirby, not as the Black Bat and his aide, because McGrath was on the war-path. Tell you about it in the car. Let's go!"

If anyone had the house under surveillance, they were doing a good job of it. All Quinn's abnormal senses heard nor saw anything out of the way. Perhaps McCleod had withdrawn his men. Maybe they'd even captured Ainsley.

Silk helped him into the car and drove rapidly across town. The Prescotts lived on Long Island, in a residential section. During the ride, Quinn changed into the somber regalia of the Black Bat. His other clothes were hidden under a robe on the back seat.

**S**ILK dropped him off not far from the Prescott estate and the Black Bat studied the area for a few moments. Through the inky gloom, he saw the large house, or that part of it which was exposed between the tall and ancient oaks and maples. There was well tended shrubbery all around and the expanse of lawn was soft as velvet. A cement driveway wound gracefully along the mild slope to the porticoed entrance. A path took a straighter and more direct line.

It all represented wealth but not a flamboyant type. The Prescotts knew what they wanted and were willing to spend the necessary money to get it. The Black Bat estimated that they must employ three or four gardeners on a regular basis.

The lower floor of the house was illuminated and two windows on the second floor front were also aglow. There wasn't a sound, just perfect stillness. The Black Bat moved toward the house without breaking that quiet in the least. He was about a hundred yards away when a shot rang out, closely followed by another.

Then a door slammed. The Black Bat couldn't see the front door, but he heard fast steps traveling across the porch and down its steps. The same feet clattered along the cement drive, slowed, hesitated even more and finally stopped.

Then they started again and a dim form came running straight toward the spot where the Black Bat was waiting. His eyes penetrated the darkness, ripped it away and revealed Clyde Ainsley going as fast as his legs would take him. He was pale, obviously shaken.

The Black Bat stepped out. Ainsley gave a sharp scream. The Black Bat seized him by one arm and brought him to a stop. Ainsley was panting so much he couldn't speak for a moment.

Then it came, a blurring of words. "Prescott is dead. Shot by Steve McCleod! I saw him—running away."

"McCleod? Are you positive?"

"Yes, yes. He must have left through the back and ran around to the front. I

heard somebody coming, so I stopped to look for a hiding place. Then I saw him. McCleod! I tell you I wasn't mistaken. He ran straight in front of those lighted windows. I saw him perfectly."

"Why did you come here?"

"I wanted to see the Prescotts. They were my wife's parents. I knew they hated me, but I wanted to explain things. . . ."

"You fool!" the Black Bat snapped. "Someone knew very well you were headed this way and took advantage of the fact. You're going to be blamed for killing Prescott. Now—will you do exactly as I say?"

"I'll do anything. Mr. Quinn warned me I'd get into trouble if I didn't lie low. Sure, I'm a fool. Maybe I'm as crazy as they say I am. Just tell me what to do."

"You can't go back to Quinn's place. I know he was hiding and protecting you. Get away from this vicinity. There's a bus line a half mile north on the highway. Take a bus to the river, transfer to a subway and get off at Times Square. Are you getting all this?"

"I won't forget a thing. I reach Times Square. Then what?"

"Find a second-hand store. They stay open all night around there. Buy a second hand suitcase and some second-hand clothes and put them in the suitcase. Take the subway downtown again to Twenty-third Street and look for a hotel named The Verdi. Check in at The Verdi and sign the register as John Trinity. Go to the room assigned you and don't leave it. I'll tell Quinn where you are."

"I haven't any money!"

The Black Bat pressed some bills in his hand. Ainsley was regaining his normal color. He murmured fervent thanks and then, encouraged by a shove from the Black Bat, he went springing away into the night.

The Black Bat hurried toward the big house. He heard someone prowling and quickly stepped behind a tree trunk. The man he heard carried a flashlight and a shotgun. He was cautious and moved slowly, but seemed game enough to invade the night.

As he passed close to the Black Bat, the shotgun was suddenly jerked out of his hand and his arms were pinned behind him. The flash fell to the ground, but stayed lighted and shone against a thick shrub. Some of the illumination



reflected enough so that the man saw who held him.

He didn't shout, but he didn't stop struggling either, until the Black Bat's gun was nuzzled against his chest. Then he stood there, glaring at the hooded figure.

**I**T WAS Gil Bonnard, who had paid over the blackmail money to Fink and who, later, had told Quinn all about it.

"I take it you're not familiar with crime and the people engaged in fighting it," the Black Bat said. "I'm no crook or killer. I'm the Black Bat."

The spectacled man seemed to wilt in relief. The Black Bat put his gun down.

"You might have told me," his prisoner said. "All I saw was somebody in a mask and—and after seeing Mr. Prescott lying dead, well, it was a shock."

"Prescott is dead then?" the Black Bat asked.

"Yes. Shot twice through the head. Whoever did it tried to break into the safe. At least he did not succeed there."

"Who are you?"

"I'm Gil Bonnard. I live here with Mr. and Mrs. Prescott, and their nephew, Bert Coppin."

"Why did you run out onto the estate after discovering that Mr. Prescott had been murdered?"

"Somebody got out the front door. I couldn't see who it was. I'm a little slow in matters like this. You can't expect an artist to be a policeman, but I swear this—if I'd found that man, I would have killed him, I imagine. If I could, that is."

"Was he stooped, bent over? With a scarred chin, black hair? A slim man?"

"I don't know. I only had a glimpse of him, but he certainly wasn't bent over then. He was running like the wind and doing it in an upright position too. Why? Do you know who did this?"

"I have an idea," the Black Bat said slowly.

Bonnard seemed to think of something. "Say, Bert was yelling. Calling out some name or other. To the man who was running away."

"Was it Steve? Or McCleod?"

"No, nothing like that. Bert would know."

"Ainsley, perhaps? Clyde Ainsley?"

Bonnard bit his lower lip. "Maybe.

Sounds more like it than the first name you mentioned. But look here—I can't just stand around. Mr. Prescott is dead!"

"And being dead, he'll surely remain where he is," the Black Bat said. "But let's go inside."

## CHAPTER X

### *Murder's Motive*



**U**PON entering, the Black Bat gave one single, all-embracing glance around. It showed him that the interior of the house was like the outside, in excellent taste. A Renoir occupied a prominent spot in the large reception hall and

the chairs were deep, honey and comfortable. The dining room, to the left, could have seated a score of people without any trouble and it was done in rich mahogany. The living room had settees, petit-point chairs and two grand pianos, back to back. The lighting was indirect, without the slightest glare. More portraits hung here, mostly those of relatives, though exquisitely done.

Bonnard led the Black Bat deeper into the house until they reached a smaller room fitted out like an office. There the dead man lay, in the center of the floor, in a pool of blood. His face had that ashen grayness of death.

Bert Coppin was slumped in a chair, his back turned toward the corpse and he seemed to be crying softly. He stood up when Bonnard entered, but the question that arose to his lips was checked by a cry of surprise and fear as his glance settled on the black-clad, black-hooded figure behind Bonnard.

"This man says he is the Black Bat," Bonnard said. "I've heard he was something like a detective. He's without authority, but maybe he can help us. Heaven knows we could use some help. Mr.—ah—that is, Black Bat, this is Bert Coppin. He is Mrs. Prescott's nephew."

Coppin knew more about such things as the Black Bat. He instantly went into a nervous recital of the happenings.

"I was upstairs, and Gil was in his studio on the third floor, when I heard two shots. I ran down. Somebody went out the front door—"

"Who?" the Black Bat interrupted him.

Coppin hesitated. "He looked like—"

like someone I once knew years ago, a man named Clyde Ainsley who has been confined to an insane asylum. Of course I must have been wrong."

"No, you were quite right," the Black Bat said. "I saw Ainsley leave here too. But there was someone else. A scarred-faced, stooped and nasty looking character named Steve McCleod. Did you see him?"

"No, sir. Only this man Ainsley. There wasn't anybody else, I'm positive of that."

"What about the back door?"

"Locked from the inside. I checked on that. Of course, there are a lot of windows, but I don't think—"

"Have you called the police yet?" the Black Bat demanded.

"No, I was waiting for Gil to return. I'm no good at this kind of thing. I wanted his advice."

"Advice as to what? There has been a murder, and homicide is always a matter for the police. Who else is in this house?"

"Just Mrs. Prescott—now," Coppin said sadly. "She saw him." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder, not caring to view the corpse again. "She screamed, ran from the room, and fainted in the hallway, and I carried her upstairs. I'm afraid this may kill her. She certainly isn't going to get over it very fast."

The Black Bat went over to the six-foot-tall safe built into the wall. Someone had attempted to pry it open. The surface was scratched and there was a drilled-out hole near the combination.

"What's in there?" the Black Bat asked.

Coppin answered that one. "About a half million in jewels. Now don't say it's plain foolishness to keep gems worth that much around. It isn't, in this particular case, because they are all gems with an historic value. Mr. Prescott was president of a jeweler's association, and he assembled these gems from all over the world and offered them for display at the stores of member jewelers."

"Gems are money to any crook, whether they are historical or not," the Black Bat said. "A thief would rip the stones from their settings, melt down the precious metal and sell the whole thing, maybe not for their actual worth, but he'd be well paid for a night's work."

Coppin nodded. "I never thought of it in that way."

"Are the gems still in there? Can you be certain?"

"I can't," Coppin said. "I saw them several hours ago, but Gil here knows the combination. I guess my uncle didn't—trust me with it as he trusted Gil."

**B**ONNARD walked over to the safe and was reaching for the combination when the Black Bat's sudden call stopped him. He smiled wryly and took a handkerchief from his pocket. He used this and maintained a light touch on the dial so no possibility of fingerprints would be ruined. The heavy door swung open. Bonnard took out three large, flat velvet boxes that looked like big trays. He opened them. Inside lay a fortune in every known precious gem.

"Well, whoever it was, killed Mr. Prescott for nothing," Coppin said.

Bonnard was at the phone. "I'm going to call the police," he announced.

"Wait," the Black Bat said. "Let me do it."

He dialed a number, waited a few seconds. "Mr. Quinn?" he said. "Yes, I want him personally. This is the Black Bat." There was another wait. Then the Black Bat quickly apprised an imaginary person on the other end with a brief outline of the events. He hung up, dialed again and asked for Captain McGrath.

"Captain, in return for a very good favor, I'll present you with a neat murder case," he said "Ainsley's father-in-law was shot a few minutes ago, by Ainsley or Steve McCleod. I'll do what I can to help you."

The Black Bat hung up, turned and faced the two young men. "The police and I have our little differences," he explained. "Therefore I can't remain. Tell Captain McGrath everything and trust Mr. Quinn, who is a Special District Attorney. He'll be here too. Don't touch anything and see that Mrs. Prescott is protected. This may not have been murder resulting from a simple burglary, but a direct and successful attack upon Mr. Prescott for more important reasons than those historic gems."

The Black Bat was at the door as he finished. His gloved hand snapped off the lights. He moved rapidly to the door, was crossing the estate like a deer and close to the car where Silk waited, before either of the two young men realized he was gone.

In the car he gave Silk orders to drive

back toward town. At the same time, the Black Bat changed into the clothing of Tony Quinn.

"Half a mile further on, turn off the highway onto a lane I noticed. Park there with your lights out. After McGrath goes by, follow him."

Quinn clambered into the front seat, put the white cane between his knees and that blank staring look of the blind came over his eyes.

"Silk, whatever McGrath does in the future, he is forgiven beforehand," he said. "He actually cornered me tonight and pretended I wasn't even there. Then he told me how I could get out of a dragnet and later drove me away."

"I still don't trust him," Silk said sourly. "He knows darned well the Black Bat does all of his work."

"No, only some of it. McGrath is as necessary to us as the Black Bat is to him."

"What about the killing, sir?"

"Prescott. He was shot twice through the head, apparently for a safe full of jewels worth a fortune for their historic value and maybe eighty thousand simply as jewels. A very crude attempt had been made on the safe, but the whole thing has a phony note. Furthermore, Ainsley was there. I met him running away. He knew Prescott was dead and he claims he saw McCleod running away too."

Silk yawned. "I think Ainsley is a liar. I'm not forgetting what he did to me either and I've been thinking as much as my drugged brain would let me. There's an answer to this. Ainsley is Steve McCleod. He hides out in the asylum and he's been making a pair of monkeys out of us."

Quinn frowned. "Old, but I heard that theory before. From McGrath. It might

be true. However, I know where Ainsley is—or supposed to be. Later I'll have a talk with him. I—here comes McGrath."

Silk didn't hear the siren for fully two more minutes though Quinn's sensitive hearing had picked it up a long distance off. The police car shot by the lane. Silk backed out and followed. At Quinn's orders he gunned the car to eighty and they were soon riding McGrath's tail.

Both cars came to a stop before turning into the estate. McGrath ran back to see who was following him.

"Well, where'd you come from?" he said.

"The Black Bat phoned me about the murder of Mr. Prescott, Captain. I thought I'd better come out here."

**M**cGRATH laid a stubby finger alongside his nose. "Oh, sure. Did he contact you by mental telepathy? That should be easy between you and the Black Bat. Okay, let's see what it's all about."

Quinn took charge after they reached the house. He questioned Bonnard first, just as if he knew nothing about the case. Bonnard told exactly the same story as before.

"We must consider all aspects of the case, Mr. Bonnard," Quinn stated. "Exactly what is your status in this household?"

Bonnard shrugged. "I haven't any exactly. Mr. and Mrs. Prescott saw some work of mine when I was seventeen years old. I'm an artist. They thought I showed talent and became my sponsors. Patrons is the more suitable word. They set me up in a studio and even

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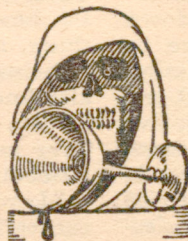
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took me into their own home."

"I see. And have you done any work worthy of their hopes?"

"I have twenty thousand dollars in the bank with as much owed me. Is that answer enough?"

"Oh, indeed. Do you know anything about Mr. Prescott's estate? Who gets what?"

"It happens I do. Mr. Prescott trusted me. I witnessed his will some time ago. His wife gets everything."

"Every penny?"

"That's what I said."

"What happens to you and this nephew—what's his name—Coppin?"

"Yes, Bert Coppin. Nothing will happen to either of us. Mrs. Prescott always said she'd carry on. She will. And it doesn't make any difference to me. I've a profession and I'm going places. I have more orders than I can handle. Coppin, on the other hand, isn't so well off."

"Exactly what do you mean by that?" Quinn asked.

"Ask Coppin," Bonnard retorted. "He's a friend of mine. I'm not making remarks about anyone."

"I'm asking you," Quinn insisted. "Coppin may not tell the truth and it would be better if we knew the truth now, than found it out later."

Bonnard sighed deeply and studied the tips of his shoes. "Have a cigarette, Mr. Bonnard," Quinn said. "Something to steady your nerves. I can't see you, but I recognize nervousness from the way you breathe."

"I don't smoke nor drink," Bonnard said. "My nerves are all right, but I want to see Mrs. Prescott. And I think you people are just balling the whole thing up. I told you, at your office, that Ainsley would do this. It's partly your fault that it happened."

"Send in Coppin, please," Quinn told him. "And don't leave the premises."

Coppin took well over five minutes before he entered the library and sat down opposite Quinn. "You don't have to trick me into answering incriminating questions," he blurted. "Gil told me what to expect. Well, I don't work, I've sponged on my aunt and uncle for years, I drink too much and I gamble too much. I'm in debt and Uncle Richard refused to get me out of it. That's my confession, but note that it does not include murder."

"Did you kill him?" Quinn asked mildly.

"Do you think I'd be here if I had? It was Clyde Ainsley. I saw him leave. He hated the Prescotts because they refused to accept him when he married their daughter. Oh, they knew what they were doing then, all right, and Ainsley proved it by turning into a killer and a maniac. Bonnard and I told you all that before. At your office."

"You saw no one else?"

"The Black Bat asked me that question too," Coppin said. "No, I didn't. I don't think there was anyone else. Why don't you find Ainsley and see what he has to say about it?"

"We're trying," Quinn answered. "I and sixteen thousand officers. You may go now. Not very far though. Thank you, Mr. Coppin."

Captain McGrath came in. "What's wrong with Silk? He's parked in the hallway sleeping like a baby."

"He's tired," Quinn chuckled. "Mac, what do you think of it?"

"Easy. Find Ainsley and you have the killer. There are no prints. The boys dusted everything and the guy who tried to bust that safe was a punk amateur. It would have taken him a week, even if he was prepared to soup the box up."

"You don't think this is the work of a burglar, caught in the act and primed to kill in such an event?"

**T**HE detective stared at Quinn for a long moment.

"Frankly, no. I say Ainsley, though we're not passing up your idea, Tony. Incidentally, the slugs were removed from Prescott's head, and they're thirty-two automatic bullets. Did Ainsley carry a rod like that?"

"Now how should I know?"

"Because he seems to have been a guest at your home," McGrath dropped his voice to a whisper. "Tony, get this. Tonight I gave the Black Bat a break. I'd have sworn I couldn't do such a thing, but—I did. Maybe I'm ashamed of being so soft and maybe I'm not. You also know I think you're the Black Bat. Listen, if you are, remember that break. Give me this business cold. What's it all about?"

"I wish I could help," Quinn said earnestly. "I'm not the Black Bat, Mac. But I would like to know how you're so positive Ainsley was at my home."

## CHAPTER XI

*Stickup*

"It's easy. Ainsley knocked off that mug Fink. On his way from the neighborhood he stopped at an all-night drug store. The druggist won't ever forget him. He wanted to know if it still costs a nickel to use the phone. He didn't know cross-town trolleys had been taken off that section of town eight years ago. He asked directions on reaching the street where you live, and he bought a pack of cigarettes. Didn't care what kind so the druggist foisted off some little known brand on him. The same brand which I saw lying in your ash tray as butts. Come clean, Tony."

"All right," Quinn admitted. "Ainsley did come to me. I did go to that apartment where I saw Fink dead. I saw him through Silk's eyes," Quinn added hastily. "We took Ainsley with us. He isn't with us now."

"He was here tonight at the time of the murder," McGrath insisted. "He had a motive and the guy is nuts. What else do you want?"

"The real murderer. Steve McCleod. He's in this, Mac, right over his filthy head. Wherever you turn, there's McCleod."

"But not here, though," McGrath said tartly. "Nobody saw him around this place."

"Not that we know of, so far, Mac. What about those jewels? Is it safe to leave them here?"

"It is now. I put three men in that room with drawn guns. They'll stay there until tomorrow, when I'll arrange to have the gems put in a safe deposit vault where they belong."

"A very good idea," Quinn agreed. He yawned. "I'm as sleepy as Silk. All this has robbed both of us of our rest, Mac. There's nothing more I can do here."

"Hmf," McGrath grunted. "You ought to be on the force, then you'd know what lack of sleep really means. What do you say, Tony? It's Ainsley. You have to admit it."

"I'm becoming more convinced every time something happens," Quinn said. "We'll see. Wake Silk up and have him come get me, will you, please?"



COMFORTABLY ensconced in the alcove, the next morning, Tony Quinn ate a leisurely breakfast. Silk winced as he watched Quinn drink coffee. Silk was having tea, himself.

"It was all I could do to smell the stuff, after all the coffee I drank last night," he grumbled. "What's on the program today, sir?"

"Routine," Quinn said. "Unless something else happens, Ainsley is holed up and safe enough if he stays put. McGrath will see to it that those connected with the Prescotts stay put too."

"What do you really think about Ainsley?" Silk asked.

"I can't make myself believe he's either crazy or a killer. Which reminds me of something. Before we go to the office, we'll take a run-out to the asylum and talk to the doctors there."

"What about McCleod? You always said he might have been aiming at something big. Couldn't the gems at Prescott's house be his major target?"

"Perhaps. Especially if McCleod knows where to get rid of them, intact. You have to have a good market for those kind of things or, otherwise, they must be torn down and their real value so badly clouded that the job becomes a small time affair, and McCleod is anything but small time."

"If we could only get a lead on his hiding place," Silk sighed. "Get him and I've a feeling the whole thing will be simplified. But he's as elusive as—the Black Bat."

"Who wasn't feeling too elusive last night," Quinn said with a grin. "Let's get started—"

The phone interrupted him. Silk answered it and called him. Captain McGrath was on the wire.

"I'm out at Prescott's," he said. "I wanted to make arrangements for putting the gems in a safe place, but Mrs. Prescott insists that they be placed in her safe deposit vault, and she is equally insistent that either Coppin or Bonnard handle the whole thing. What do you think?"

"They have control of the gems, Mac. You have to do as they say. What's Mrs.



Prescott like?"

"A half-pint of a woman who is plenty aggressive and knows what she wants. At the moment she is highly disgusted that we haven't grabbed her husband's murderer yet. She keeps telling us it's Ainsley, that he always hated the family."

"Then you'd better spend your time hunting Ainsley," Quinn advised. "Be sure their plans to safeguard the gems are good. Then let them have their own way."

"I guess you're right, Tony. I don't want to face that old lady again. She's a hellion, but at the same time she's pathetic in her sorrow over losing her husband. I'll let you know when the stuff is safely tucked away."

Quinn hung up. Silk brought the car around and they drove to the asylum. Quinn was known there and obtained all possible co-operation. The head psychiatrist had some interesting information.

"I know Ainsley's case well. I was house doctor here when he was first brought in and there was a positive diagnosis that he had a shattered mind, though cure was by no means hopeless. I treated him for a long time and he responded well. Two years ago I thought he was ready to be released, but when I suggested this to Mr. Prescott, who happened to be the only relative Ainsley possessed, Prescott blocked the idea. When I tried to go ahead with it anyway, certain pressure was brought to bear and Ainsley stayed. He didn't seem to mind very much though. However, I grasped the idea that Ainsley used to slip away now and then."

"So?" Quinn frowned in disapproval. "Do you permit patients to wander about at will?"

"Certainly not. Ainsley was regarded as being cured. He wanted to do something so we let him help us. He had free rein and wasn't checked in at night. In fact, sometimes we had him doing night patrol duty. He asked for it. We're miserably short of help, as you know very well. And, remember this, all of us considered Ainsley as perfectly sane."

"But he *did* run away. How often, doctor?"

"How can I say? Twice that I know of. Perhaps there were other times when he went over the wall, but got back before he was missed."

"I see. Keep this to yourself for the

moment, Doctor. It isn't going to help Ainsley very much if the news leaks out. Until I'm positive he is the man we want, he deserves the benefit of the doubt."

"Suppose they bring him back? We had to send out an alarm this time."

"Let me know, Doctor. I'll be very interested."

QUINN walked out on Silk's arm. In the car he indicated what he thought about lax rules at the asylum, though he did acknowledge the fact that the type and numbers of the guards there were totally insufficient.

"But think what this will do to Ainsley," he told Silk. "In the first place he's sane, criminally responsible for his deeds. Prescott blocked his release, so he must have hated Prescott, and there's your motive. It's a good one too. If McGrath got hold of it, the bloodhounds would be out."

Silk wagged his head from side to side. "I think Ainsley ought to be turned in, sir. Look at the trick he played on me last night. And he was at Prescott's at the time of the murder. Sure, he says he saw McCleod, but remember this—every time Ainsley says he saw McCleod, nobody else did."

"We'll make certain of him," Quinn said. "When we reach the office, talk with Butch and Carol. Have them go to the Hotel Verdi and watch a man registered as John Trinity. That's Ainsley. The Black Bat sent him there last night."

There was a great deal of work to occupy Quinn at the office. He was deep in it when McGrath was announced. With the doughty captain was Gilbert Bonnard. The artist had one arm in a sling. His shirt was bloody, his face badly lacerated and he walked with a definite limp. Quinn showed no signs that he saw any of this.

"Bonnard was taking the gems to the bank," McGrath said. "He was set upon and darned near killed. There's a nasty knife wound in his shoulder. They used a sap all over his face and left him for dead."

Quinn leaned back in his chair. "Who did it, Bonnard? It was daylight. You must have seen."

"I saw all right. There were three of them, but one was the leader. A stooped man, dirty looking with a foul breath of alcohol. There was a scar on his chin. He said two words. 'Kill him!' Meaning

me. And that's all he said."

"McCleod again," Quinn groaned. "What about the gems?"

McGrath answered that one. "They were in a briefcase which Bonnard carried. My men tailed him, but lost him in the traffic jam downtown. The briefcase was gone. Bonnard, you told me there was something you'd say when we talked to Quinn."

Bonnard smiled. The pain of that facial contortion made him groan. He sat down weakly. "I didn't dare say it before. There were too many around and I don't trust anyone now, after all that has happened. Captain, among your men is a spy. A crook! You put those gems in the briefcase and handed it to me because Mrs. Prescott designated me as the messenger. Right?"

"So what? They're gone, aren't they? I did my best, and I don't like your attitude about spies."

"Someone tipped off this thief."

"You could have done that yourself, or even faked the attack," McGrath said angrily. Then he drew a long breath. "I'm sorry. This business is getting me down. It's impossible that you knifed yourself in the back and banged up your face like that."

Bonnard laughed, deep in his throat without any painful smiling. "I thought you'd say that. Think back, Captain. After you handed me the briefcase, I went upstairs to say good-by to Mrs. Prescott. I did it very briefly. Because while I was upstairs, I transferred the gems from my briefcase to a portfolio in which I carry my paintings. I asked Coppin to take it to my studio, saying that I'd meet him there shortly. So the thieves got nothing but an empty briefcase for their pains."

McGrath jumped up. "Where's your studio? Let's see if Coppin has the stuff."

"I think we'll all go over there," Quinn said.

At Bonnard's direction, McGrath drove to a Greenwich Village apartment. They climbed three flights of stairs to a well lighted, well set-up studio. There were oil paintings around the place, some half finished, some completed. There was one on an easel. Though Quinn's apparently sightless eyes could see none of this, he studied the paintings and recognized the fact that Bonnard really was good.

McGrath paid no attention to the paintings. He pounced on Coppin, who greeted them lazily from the depths of a big chair in which he sat with a highball in his fist. Propped against the wall was a large portfolio. McGrath leaped for it and all but tore the thing open. The three velvet cases were exposed.

COPPIN gaped for a moment. "Did I carry the stuff here? Those are the jewels? Gil, what in the world was the idea?"

Bonnard gave a long breath of deep satisfaction. "Yes, you carried them, Bert. I thought it best, and I was right, because I was set upon and the briefcase in which the crooks thought the gems were concealed, was stolen."

McGrath had all three boxes open. "There's no question Bonnard had a smart idea and it worked," he told Quinn. "But from here on, they go under police protection and I'm getting some of it darned fast."

Coppin seemed astounded to the point of being ludicrous. He mumbled over and over again that he'd carried the gems as if he simply could not believe it. McGrath was eying him with suspicion and Coppin caught the glance and instantly subsided.

He got up, went to a sideboard and fixed another highball. It looked like a triple from where Quinn stood. Coppin downed this without diluting it very much.

Half an hour later, Quinn was back in his office. He seemed highly puzzled. "Silk, Bonnard had a fancy idea but did you see the way Coppin took it? Now how did McCleod know Bonnard was supposed to be carrying the gems? Yes, there were police about, but like McGrath, I have faith in those men with badges. Yet somebody told McCleod, even as to the route Bonnard would probably take. For a little while I wondered if Bonnard wasn't pulling a fast one."

"So did I until he sprung his little joke and proved it," Silk said. "A guy wouldn't frame himself for a thievery job, have his own men set upon him and just turn over a briefcase he knew darned well was empty. I wonder where Ainsley was about that time."

"Carol and Butch are taking care of him," Quinn said.

"Yes, but I doubt they had time to

reach him before this holdup happened, sir. They ought to call in soon. Maybe they'll have the answer."

There were phone calls, all routine business. No word came from either Carol or Butch and Silk began to stew. Quinn tried to think of his regular business, but it was no use for this strange string of events took full possession of his mind.

One thing was certain—McCleod hadn't won out. The gems were safe now, thanks to Bonnard and his little scheme. Quinn was thinking of Coppin when the call came.

He spoke into the phone, knowing this wouldn't be either Carol or Butch because they called in on another and direct wire. This one came through the switchboard. Quinn hung up slowly, a moment later.

"Silk, if this keeps on, I'm going to need some of those sleeping tablets myself," he said. "That was Ainsley. He left the hotel and has been wandering about trying to make up his mind whether or not to give himself up."

"So he was loose, eh? Did he say he was anywhere near the spot where Bonnard was hijacked?"

"No. He told me that five minutes ago he saw McCleod coming out of a building. Ainsley said he became so frightened that he cut and ran for it. Now he isn't sure what building it was, or even the exact neighborhood. Just a midtown office building, he said. He knows that much."

"I think he's lying, trying an alibi, sir."

"No, I doubt it. Because he also told me that there was somebody with McCleod. Bert Coppin! They came out together and were talking like old friends."

## CHAPTER XII

### *The Murder Long Ago*



**B**Y RUSHING through with his work, Quinn managed to leave the office about two hours earlier than usual. He went straight home and into the secret laboratory where Carol was waiting.

"Butch is watching Ainsley," she said. "He gave us the slip this morning, whether intentionally or not,

I can't say, but for two hours we lost him and then he returned to the hotel. He didn't stay long. Lit out and went to a movie. We really had nothing to report on him, Tony, so we didn't run any chances in phoning Silk at the office."

Quinn put a match to his pipe and puffed thoughtfully a moment. "Carol, during the time when Ainsley was free of surveillance, he claims he saw Bert Coppin and Steve McCleod come out of some building together. He says they were friendly and chatting and went away together. Coppin is under strong suspicion right now."

"I wish I could make up my mind about Ainsley," Carol said. "He's either the victim of a lot of bad luck or he's the smoothest operator I ever encountered. What is the evidence against this man Bert Coppin?"

"Somebody tipped McCleod's men that Gil Bonnard would have the gems in his briefcase. Instead, Bonnard secreted them in an art portfolio and asked Coppin to take it to the studio, and Bonnard was set upon and quite badly injured. Coppin, wholly oblivious of the fact that he carried the gems, went to the studio and showed considerable surprise when Bonnard revealed his trick."

"That's hardly enough, Tony, even for McGrath."

"Yes, I know. But Coppin happens to be the wrong one. He's apparently lazy, always in debt. He gambles, drinks—a regular sport. That takes money. But I looked both those men over for any signs of disguise and I saw none. However, that can be explained."

"I'd like to know how," Carol said. "It would take an expert to fool you, Tony."

"It's Steve McCleod who wears the disguise. That stooped posture of his is assumed. The hair can be colored easily and the scar a neat fake, and the complexion could be turned sallow by chemicals which are quickly removable when necessary. Somebody is McCleod. He's no ghost—and neither is he an individual. He's two people. McCleod is the phantom part. That's why he can vanish so easily."

"Does McGrath know that Ainsley saw Coppin and McCleod together? And if that is the truth, there goes your whole case against Coppin. He might disguise himself, but he certainly



couldn't be twins. His guilt consists of knowing McCleod, that's all."

"I thought of that too," Quinn told her. "McGrath will realize McCleod can't be Coppin, but he'll also be darned sure that Coppin knows all about that crook and probably fosters him. If McGrath ever lands Ainsley, Coppin is cooked."

"And the motive bothers me," Quinn went on. "It can't be those gems. They simply aren't worth all this risk and trouble, even for a man like McCleod. There is something else, but it's too well hidden."

"What about this artist, Bonnard?"

"Well—I don't know for certain. He seems okay. There's no doubt but that he is an artist and quite successful. The Prescotts sponsored him; almost raised him, in fact. They weren't people easily fooled. I still believe the solution lies with Ainsley. If I could only think of the right questions to ask him."

"I wish I could help you, Tony, but there isn't very much I can do, except wait here in case something breaks."

"Something may," Quinn said. "If it does, I may need your help."

Quinn went back into the house proper. He sat down in the living room and spent half an hour trying to puzzle out this strange string of affairs. It had begun ten years ago. Apparently the murder of Laura Prescott Ainsley was the initial step. Then it had stopped for ten long years while Ainsley was in an asylum. With his escape, it had started anew and this time showed no signs of stopping. But where did it lead? What was the objective?

He was still deep in the puzzle when Silk admitted Captain McGrath—and Clyde Ainsley who was handcuffed to the detective. McGrath seemed rather proud at showing off his prisoner.

"Well, Tony, what do you think now? This is Ainsley. We nabbed him a short time ago. He refuses to talk except to you so I brought him along. However, he did admit seeing McCleod in the company of Bert Coppin and that settles the whole thing."

"Sit down, both of you," Quinn invited. "I hear the sound of handcuffs. Take them off, Mac. Ainsley isn't going to run away. I wanted to see him. I wanted to ask him where he used to go when he left the asylum several times during the last three or four years."

A AINSLEY gulped and wetted his lips. "I—didn't tell you the truth when I swore this was the first time I ran away. It wasn't the first time I visited my wife's grave. That's where I used to go, but I always went back. I'd have gone back this time too, if I hadn't run across McCleod."

"Tell me about the fight during which your wife was killed," Quinn urged. "Think back. You stepped out of the taxi and helped your wife alight. You were in front of a building where Mr. Prescott maintained offices. What were you doing there?"

"Prescott had offices there?" Ainsley asked. "This is the first I knew of it. But Laura seemed so darned happy that night. She asked me to bring her to that address and said she had a surprise for me. I never found out what it was."

"I shouldn't wonder," Quinn told him. "Because Laura was brought there to be murdered. McCleod knew very well that Laura was coming, and he arranged the whole thing, even to cutting in on another gang so they'd gather in the vicinity and the gun battle could be used as the explanation for Laura's death. But she was meant to die. The whole thing staged to commit a murder that would be considered an accident."

Ainsley was growing paler. "I suppose you can back that up, Mr. Quinn. Yet I can't see any reason why Laura's death would be of value to whoever killed her."

"I'm beginning to," Quinn said, "though it's hazy yet and needs a lot of clarification. Now you saw your wife go down. It did something to your brain. You seized the first gunman you encountered. Where was McCleod all this time, while you strangled the crook who fell into your hands?"

"I don't know, for I never saw him at the scene of the crime," Ainsley replied. "But when I was choking that man, he kept fighting me and begging for his life. It was so dim—so long ago—a million years. He told me the man to kill was McCleod. He told me where I could find him. I suppose I asked him that—and he told me. After he was dead, I guess I went to that address. I found a man there who attacked me instantly. It was McCleod, of course."

"You know Bert Coppin, of course. You identified him this afternoon with McCleod."

"Yes, I met Coppin ten years ago. Laura introduced us. Coppin seemed like a nice boy."

"Did you meet Gil Bonnard? Prescott's ward?"

"No, but Laura talked about him. She liked him very much and intended that I should meet him some day."

"You can't recall the building which you saw Coppin and McCleod emerge from?"

"No, sir. It was below midtown, somewhere. I couldn't stand being alone in a hotel room. I felt as if I were back in the asylum, so I went out. It was a crazy thing to do, but that's me, I guess. I just wandered around. Then I saw a cop eyeing me suspiciously and I became frightened. I moved fast after that, doubling back and trying to see if I was being followed. I just happened to spot Coppin and McCleod and when I did, I was afraid Coppin might recognize me so I ran away without paying any attention to where I was."

McGrath had enough. "This guy is lying, Tony. He says he saw McCleod simply to throw us off. He's McCleod. He's got to be."

"No," Quinn said softly. "I think you're wrong and I think I know who McCleod is. What about Bert Coppin?"

"I'm having him brought here, Tony."

"Good," Quinn said. "Then we'll just relax until he arrives."

Within ten minutes, a detective brought Coppin in. McGrath dismissed the officer who left the house and drove away. Coppin was nervous and plainly frightened.

"Ainsley—take a good look at this man," Quinn said. "Are you positive it was he you saw with McCleod this afternoon?"

"Me—with McCleod?" Coppin cried. "What is this—some kind of a frame?"

"That's the man," Ainsley said.

Quinn addressed Coppin: "You see there is evidence you know McCleod. Who were you with today?"

"Two people," Coppin answered promptly. "Mrs. Prescott's attorney and Gil Bonnard. Ask them. This man is Ainsley who has been certified as insane. Are you going to believe what he says and disregard my story?"

"Possibly not," Quinn said. "What sort of business were you doing at the attorney's office?"

COPPIN didn't answer at once. He hesitated, but finally replied.

"Signing some papers. Mrs. Prescott made a will this morning. There were things in connection with the estate to be handled."

"And the attorney's name?" Quinn asked.

"Lannigan—Hugh Lannigan. Go on, ask him. If I was with McCleod, I certainly didn't know it."

"Where is Bonnard now?" Quinn queried.

"Home, I suppose. We agreed that one of us must always be with Mrs. Prescott. You see the death of my uncle affected her terribly. Last night she said she didn't care whether she lived or died. And at breakfast this morning she said the same thing."

Quinn grasped his cane tightly. His knuckles gleamed white. This was one of the times when he rued the fact that he could not take direct and quick action because it was needed.

"I'm going into the library, Mac, to call this lawyer and confirm Coppin's statement," he said. "I'll be back in a moment."

Quinn tapped his way to the door, down the hall and into the library. He closed the door and bolted it quietly. Then he moved fast, looked up Attorney Lannigan's home number and dialed it. He had the lawyer on the wire promptly.

"This is Tony Quinn, speaking as a Special District Attorney," he said. "What I'm asking you to answer breaks our legal code of ethics, but a life may depend upon your answer. Today you made a new will for Mrs. Prescott. I want to know who the beneficiaries are."

"Why, I can't answer that, Quinn. It's impossible. Did you say a life depended upon it?"

"I assure you of that fact."

"Well, her nephew gets a few thousand dollars. Mr. Bonnard gets the bulk of the estate."

"Thank you." Quinn hung up quickly and his face was grim. He hurried to the secret door, opened it and called to Carol. "This is very important," he said. "Leave the lab, go around to the front and steal Captain McGrath's car. First though, paste a Black Bat sticker on the outside of my front door, and make a lot of noise with the car. Drive it around the block and wait for—the Black Bat!"

Quinn returned to the living room. He

said, "Well, Attorney Lannigan says you and Bonnard were at his office and he seems to know nothing about McCleod. Coppin, who else is at home with Mrs. Prescott?"

"Why, no one. Just Gil."

Quinn was listening for Carol out front though he knew it would take her a little while to reach McGrath's car. He spoke slowly, explaining things as far as possible.

"We know this began with the murder of Ainsley's wife, so there had to be a motive for that, one which exists today, even after ten years. So long as Ainsley was confined to an institution, the whole thing lay quiet and apparently forgotten. Then Ainsley escaped and his escape set the whole affair into motion once more."

"But why?" McGrath demanded. "And how do you connect the ten year old kill with what's happened these last couple of days?"

"It's quite simple," Quinn said. "We begin our later version with the murder of a man named Fink, obviously a black-mailer and just as obviously a man who knew the real identity of McCleod. McCleod paid off until he saw a chance to kill Fink and put the blame on Ainsley. Which he did—somewhat crudely, but it might have worked if Ainsley was captured right away."

"Then we have the killing of Mr. Prescott. What's the motive there? Not the theft of those gems. McCleod went after bigger stuff than that, and jobs that were far more certain of being profitable. So there must be another motive. It can't tie up with Fink's death, but it can with Laura's. The same motivation works for both, with only one more killing needed to complete the cycle and get the murderer what he is after."

Bert Coppin was slowly rising from his chair. The full realization of what Quinn meant had become apparent to him.

"We have McCleod, a crook who comes and goes at will," Quinn went on. "A man whom Ainsley sought out ten years ago and nearly killed, a man whom he saw today with Coppin. McCleod has another identity. He's a born crook and killer, but is able to mask this under a completely different name and life. I first became suspicious of the fact that he wore a disguise when he visited me here. Silk told me that McCleod had

carefully extinguished most of the lights. A crook does that for one reason—to avoid identification."

"I know who he is," Coppin said. "I should have known—"

QUINN interrupted him. "Wait! McCleod quite deliberately threw lighted matches and cigarette butts on my floor. He drank my liquor and poured the dregs from the decanter on the floor. He talked tough and acted tough—and said he was tough. This, I believe, would be in direct contradiction to his character built up under another identity. Crooks who assume new roles always do this on the theory such a complete change of character will keep their real identity better hidden."

"Coppin isn't the direct opposite. He drinks and smokes. But Bonnard—he's the very perfect little man. Yes, Ainsley saw the man he knew as McCleod all right. Ten years ago he attacked McCleod, but when he found him, the killer had removed his disguise so Ainsley knew him only without the black greasy hair, the scar, the stooped posture. He knew him and today recognized him as—Gil Bonnard."

McGrath jumped up. "I get it. Bonnard hid out at the Prescott home. He pretended to be decent and law abiding, but he'd go off on these expeditions into crime. But what he was really after—his big objective—is the Prescott estate. That's why he killed Mr. Prescott, that's why he made things look as if Coppin here was the thief or the thief's agent. Bonnard never wanted those gems and it was a grand gesture to let himself be beaten up by his own men, whom he tipped off, and cleverly arrange it so that Coppin carried the gems without knowing it. That made Bonnard the big, honest hero and gave Coppin a black eye because one of those two must have tipped the crooks."

"You're catching on fast," Quinn said. "But Bonnard still has to murder Mrs. Prescott. He'll find no better opportunity than at once for she stated on two occasions that she didn't care whether she lived or died. Her suicide would not be surprising and she made a new will this afternoon, leaving the bulk of the estate to Bonnard."

A car starter whined out front. McGrath ran to the window. "Somebody's driving off with my car," he yelled. "Lis-

ten, we've got to reach Mrs. Prescott. Now my car is gone!"

He hurried to the door, opened it and pasted on the outside was a black sticker cut in the shape of a bat in full flight. It was the insignia of the Black Bat.

"He must have been listening," McGrath said. "He's probably on his way to Mrs. Prescott now, but I'm going there too."

"So am I," Quinn said excitedly. "You'll save time, Mac, by calling for another car from the police box on the corner."

McGrath signaled Coppin and Ainsley, who hurried out with him. Quinn headed for the lab. He worked with all the speed at his command and in two minutes he was garbed as the Black Bat and moving through the tunnel. He met Carol, who was behind the wheel of McGrath's big car. It raced off into the night.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Not So Tough*



MRS. PRESCOTT, sixty odd years old and feeling ninety, lay in bed propped up against several pillows. Her eyes were red from weeping. Gil Bonnard sat beside the bed. "You've got to sleep,"

Bonnard said. "Please, why don't you try?"

"Sleep? After all that has happened? After the way my own nephew sold us out? Gil, do you think he had anything to do with my husband's murder?"

"Oh, no," Bonnard replied quickly. "We're not even certain he was after the gems. It just looks that way."

"He was after them all right. He used to steal when he was a boy. I know how badly he is in debt and how he needs money. Look out for him, Gil. If he were only like you, how nice it would be! Gil, you can't imagine the comfort Richard and I have had from you. That's why I'm leaving you almost everything I have. I'm sure you will take care of it, while Bert would squander it."

"Please don't talk," Bonnard urged. "Just rest. We can discuss all this later on."

"I'd rather talk. We lost Laura ten years ago, lost her twice. The first time was when that nobody, Clyde Ainsley,

married her. It was his fault that she was killed, taking her to places a girl like Laura had no business going, cheap cafes, out all hours of the night. But you have made up for her, Gil. We'd always wanted a son, anyway."

Bonnard arose. "I appreciate all this, of course, and I'm flattered. I've tried to be like a son to you both, but now I must insist that you get some rest. The doctor left tablets and you're going to take one."

She sighed. "All right, Gil. I suppose I must."

Bonnard turned away, bit his lower lip and went over to a table on which were several bottles of medicine. He picked up a brown bottle, removed the cork and slipped a white tablet into the palm of his hand. The bottle bore the red skull and cross-bones of a poison, but he didn't let her see this.

With his back toward her, he used a handkerchief to wipe off any prints he'd made and through his mind flashed the final points of his scheme. After she was dead, he'd put her prints on the bottle and place it on the table beside the bed. It would be very easy.

He poured a glassful of water from a thermos jug and went over to the bed. Mrs. Prescott smiled her thanks, took the glass in one hand and the pill between the fingers of the other hand. She had the tablet half raised to her lips.

An elongated shadow flitted across the wall and then came to a stop. Mrs. Prescott stared, the tablet still half raised. Bonnard turned quickly. The Black Bat stood just inside the door. His hands were by his sides and he seemed unarmed.

"Unless you wish to die, Mrs. Prescott, don't take that tablet," he said. "It's a poison. Bonnard wants you to die because he's after the estate you have left him."

"That's a lie!" Bonnard cried. "Coppin put him up to this. Don't believe a word he says, Mrs. Prescott."

The Black Bat walked over to the bed, almost disregarding Bonnard. He gently took the pill from the old woman's unresisting fingers.

"It's the truth," he said. "Bonnard is also Steve McCleod, a well known crook and killer. He murdered Laura ten years ago, as the first stage of his plan. With Laura out of the way, he knew you'd begin thinking of him as a son. Then he

killed your husband, because Ainsley was loose and had a motive for killing Mr. Prescott. That left only you between him and the Prescott fortune. When you swallowed that pill, Bonnard would have won. It's the goal he's been patiently after all these years."

"But I can't believe—" Mrs. Prescott said.

Bonnard thrust himself between her and the Black Bat. "It's all a lie. Coppin is responsible."

The Black Bat's hand grasped Bonnard's shoulder and spun him around. The Black Bat extended the tablet. "Prove it then," he said. "Let's see you take this pill. If it is nothing more than a mild sedative, you can't be hurt."

**B**ONNARD backed up a couple of steps. His eyes were blazing behind the glasses. He raised a hand to reach for the pill, but drew that hand back very quickly. It darted beneath his coat and reappeared holding a gun.

The Black Bat hardly seemed to move. There was one shot fired. Bonnard screamed, dropped the gun and clapped a hand to his shattered shoulder. Then he darted toward the door and went out of the room. He raced down the steps and reached the bottom.

At the top the Black Bat had his automatic leveled. "When you take one more step, Bonnard, you die!"

Bonnard stopped short, turned and looked up. His eyes weren't blazing in anger any more. They were filmed with terror.

"Listen, we can make a deal," he cried. "You're a crook, too—sort of. There is enough for two—"

Outside they heard the approach of sirens. Bonnard made a dash toward the door. A bullet whizzed past his head and he stopped again. This time he shuddered visibly.

"Black Bat, don't shoot me. Don't shoot. I don't want to die. I'm afraid to die. Don't shoot—please!"

He was still screaming for his life when McGrath came in, followed by Coppin and Ainsley. McGrath had cuffs ready. As they closed around Bonnard's wrists, the killer sank to his knees and stayed there until McGrath disgustingly jerked him to his feet.

"Like all his breed, Bonnard is a liar," the Black Bat said. "He boasted once that he was born tough, he lived tough

and he'd die tough. Look at him now. He'll talk, Captain. He's right in the mood for talking and go to work on him now. Make him identify every member of the gang he kept all during these years and get them all."

McGrath hurled the killer into a chair. The Black Bat quietly faded out of sight.

He returned to Mrs. Prescott's room and closed the door.

"Everything is all right," he said. "I'm glad I was in time to save your life. Bonnard was two people, kind and gentle as an artist, but ruthless and evil as Steve McCleod. He liked lots of money. He got it with a gun. Bert Coppin is at least sincere, even if he does gamble and drink a little. All he needs is some of the attention you have lavished on Bonnard. And then there is Ainsley, who wronged no one, and was probably more wronged than anyone else. You and your husband hated him because he married Laura and he was a nobody, and you saw to it that he remained in the asylum even after he was pronounced cured. Now you have a chance to make this up to him. Get his release, formally, show him you know you have been wrong."

Mrs. Prescott closed her eyes for a moment. She was on the verge of a reply when she opened them again, only she was alone. The Black Bat had silently vanished.

As silently, he departed from the house by means of a back stairway. Five minutes later he stopped Silk, who was driving up. The Black Bat removed his black clothing rapidly, changed into the garb of Tony Quinn and brought back that film of blindness over his eyes again.

"It's finished—kaput," he said with deep satisfaction. "Mrs. Prescott is alive and Bonnard is burning McGrath's ears off with a confession. Ainsley should find himself a free man before long. I think I showed Mrs. Prescott the error of her ways."

"Bonnard killed Mr. Prescott then?" Silk asked.

"Of course. Perhaps he didn't mean to murder Prescott quite so soon, but McCleod—or Bonnard—took advantage of opportunities. Certainly he meant to murder Prescott before Ainsley was captured, but when he saw Ainsley approaching the house and entering it to try and straighten things out with

Prescott, Bonnard realized he'd never have a better opportunity.

"He killed Prescott. Ainsley saw him afterwards and recognized him as McCleod, because Ainsley had never seen McCleod except out of disguise. The greasy hair, the careless clothing, the scarred chin—all meant nothing to Ainsley. Then Bonnard made a pretense of attacking the safe so it would seem as if some attempt had been made on the jewels. He knew they'd be sent to a safe deposit vault and in the transportation of them he planned a chance to forever remove any suspicion from himself. At the same time he would throw great suspicion upon Coppin and play this up for Mrs. Prescott's benefit. So she'd leave the bulk of her estate to Bonnard, which he'd been after all these years."

**S**ILK nodded, picturing what had happened. Finally he shook his head. "He had nerve," Silk said. "Imagine him actually coming to Fink's apartment and pretending to pay blackmail?"

"Like most criminals he was reputed to have courage only because he'd never been in a situation where real courage was demanded. He broke when he saw the whole thing was up. And approaching us at Fink's was just more of his planning. He was afraid that Ainsley might be suspected, but there wouldn't be enough motive for him to commit such a crime, so he arranged that by making us believe Fink had blackmailed the Prescotts because he knew they'd been keeping Ainsley in an asylum when he should have been freed.

"Actually, Fink had been blackmailing McCleod because he knew his real identity. Three hundred dollars a month wouldn't have paid for Fink's needs.

Not the way he lived. As Bonnard, McCleod was too sure of himself."

"He got away with it for awhile," Silk said softly.

"Yes, until I realized that Ainsley had never seen McCleod in his disguise, but as Bonnard. You recall that he told us he'd never met Bonnard, so there was no association there. It began to dawn on me when I asked myself why McCleod, fresh from a murder ten years ago, would run to some room to hide, a place known to his men who might talk to the police. Of course he went there to get out of his disguise. He did too, only Ainsley showed up. That made Ainsley's death very necessary for Bonnard, but when Ainsley was sent to an asylum and really cracked up, Bonnard knew he was safe. I imagine he influenced the Prescotts to keep Ainsley there. When he got loose, Bonnard knew he'd have to act.

"It fitted in with his plans anyway. He was probably sick of waiting for that fortune and Ainsley, a mad killer, was a natural to take the blame. All Bonnard had to do was stay out of his way. He methodically went about alienating Coppin and finally made it seem as if Coppin was mixed up in the attempted theft of the gems. They were merely stage property to hide the real motive."

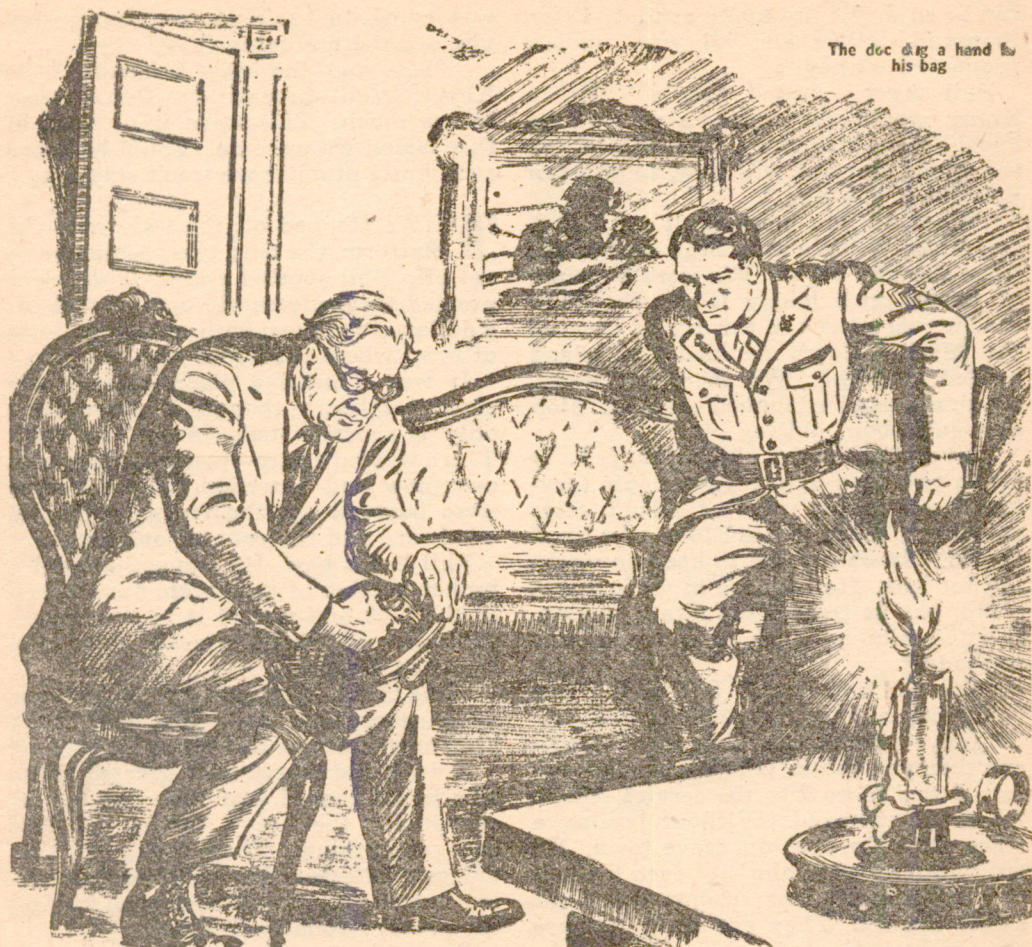
"Didn't Bonnard put up a fight?" Silk asked.

"No. I doubted he would. He talked too much about being tough and those kind never die that way. Well, let's look in on the party. I imagine McGrath is having a headache wondering how I could be at Tony Quinn's one minute and at the Prescott house the next. Keep him wondering. It makes the game more exciting."



FOLLOW THE FURTHER EXPLOITS OF THE BLACK BAT IN  
**CITY OF HIDDEN DEATH**  
 NEXT ISSUE'S EXCITING BOOK-LENGTH TONY QUINN NOVEL!

The doc dug a hand for his bag



# AVERY'S BONES

By WAYLAND RICE

*The skeleton in the pond was surely that of a slain man—and Phil Avery was in trouble up to his neck!*

**P**HIL AVERY hoisted his barracks bag down off the baggage rack and dropped it on the aisle floor. The train was slowing up.

"You can't know how thankful I am that you are spending a few days with me, Jeff," he said. "It isn't that I'm afraid but—well, I simply don't like the idea of living in that house all by myself."

Jeffrey Trent was looking out of the window. A tall, lean young man with sergeant's stripes on his Marine uniform. He had a mobile mouth, dark glossy hair and gray eyes that could become grim on occasion.

"I don't blame you, Phil," Jeff said. "That house hasn't very pleasant memories, but now that you're out of service and able to take care of things the place

can be sold. You're lucky at that. Fifty thousand dollars and all your uncle's property isn't hay."

Phil Avery smiled slowly. "Uncle Elmer would certainly be sore if he knew I'll get his money. I never told you the whole story. I will now, so you can pull out if you like."

"What do you mean, pull out," Jeff said heavily. "We've been in the service since the war began. We were a couple of jokers on a lonely island for more than a year after the war ended because the Marine Corps decided the island needed guarding. We fought together, ate, drank and furloughed together. Stop that guff about pulling out."

Phil Avery nodded. "Thanks, Jeff. It began two days before I went into service. I was on my week's furlough after enlistment then. Uncle Elmer raved and ranted. He wanted me to keep on working for him. He took me in when I was a kid, but he treated me like a servant. I hated him as much as I could hate anybody."

"Too bad he's dead," Jeff said. "You could mop him up in great style now."

"Jeff, listen, please. This is more serious than you think. Okay—two days before I was to go into the service, Uncle Elmer disappeared. Without leaving a trace. Nobody saw him leave town. He took nothing with him, not even his hat. One of Elmer's best friends was Constable Spence. They got along because they were both mean."

"Well, Spence came looking for Elmer. I couldn't say where he went. Spence began to grow suspicious. He had ponds and lakes dragged, he began a sweeping investigation and he told me, the night before I left town, that if Uncle Elmer's body was ever found, I'd be arrested."

"Whew!" Jeff said. "Say, you didn't kill the old guy, did you?"

"No. I haven't the faintest idea what happened to him, though I am convinced he's dead. People in town wrote me. Spence gave up the search, but he came right out and said I'd killed Elmer and hidden the body somewhere."

Jeff nodded. "Without a corpse, the constable was stuck. I guess your uncle is dead all right. It's more than five years now. Phil, forget the whole thing. Pretty soon he'll be declared legally dead and you'll get his money. I suppose that's the motive Constable Spence

was using to back up his theory that you are the murderer?"

"That—and the way I hated Uncle Elmer. Well—here we are. Don't expect to see much. This town is as dead as that island we were on. You'll be bored stiff, but I promise we won't stay long."

**T**HEY stepped off the train onto the platform, the only two passengers to get off. Phil spotted a taxi. The driver greeted them pleasantly enough and for a dollar drove them both to the outskirts of town where the house was located.

It was a massive place without any close neighbors though it stood back only a short distance from the road. There was no estate—just a farm, grown over now and untended. The windows were boarded up, the fence leaning to windward and the gate off one hinge.

Phil had a key. He stepped around a broken section of the porch, put the key in the lock and turned it to the accompaniment of shrill squeals from the rusted mechanism.

"One thing," Jeff said, "we know your uncle never came back. That door hasn't been open since he left town, I'll bet."

A dank and musty odor greeted them. The house looked just the same inside, except for the heavy coating of dust over everything. They took off their uniform jackets and went to work breaking out the window boards and making the place reasonably livable.

There was no electricity, the phone had been cut off long ago, but Phil located a supply of candles. When dusk came, they had the place illuminated fairly well. They dined off canned food which they'd brought with them for just this purpose. Phil carried the dishes into the kitchen and started washing them while Jeff wielded a towel.

"I wonder what happened to the old coot?" Phil said. "I've spent a lot of time thinking about him in the last few years. If he just dropped dead, somebody would have found his body. If he was injured and died, the same thing holds true. Certainly he didn't just go away. Not Elmer."

"But maybe he did," Jeff protested.

"Oh, no. If he cleared out, he'd have disposed of every last thing he owned so I wouldn't get it. He died without a will. I was the nearest of kin, practically adopted, so I'll get the estate. Elmer wouldn't have liked that."



"How about suicide?"

"I doubt it, Jeff. He wasn't the type and he had nothing to commit suicide over. Finances were in excellent shape, he wasn't ill, very surely hadn't broken his heart over some love affair because he thought all women were unnecessary creatures."

"Wow!" Jeff grinned. "What a man. Anybody who feels that way about women just couldn't be human. Maybe Uncle Elmer was a ghost and just dissolved into the air. Maybe you'll hear him rapping on tables come midnight."

There were half a dozen raps—on the front door. Hard knocks, and the knob rattled impatiently. Phil wiped his hands dry and went to the door. The man who stepped into the soft light of the candles was immense, stern looking and wearing a tonsure of gray hair that made him resemble a monk. He had heavy jowls, a barrel chest, a badge and a huge gun strapped under his coat.

"Heard you were back, Phil," the newcomer said. "Thought maybe I'd just drop in."

"Coming from you that's a strange remark," Phil said. He glanced at Jeff. "This is Constable Spence."

"I guessed it." Jeff acknowledged the introduction without offering to shake hands. "Phil told me quite a lot about you, Constable."

"And all bad, I'll wager." Spence smiled widely. "Don't suppose, Phil, you ever heard from your Uncle Elmer."

"Of course not. I'd have let you know if he contacted me."

"Um—maybe you would and maybe you wouldn't. But, Phil, I heard from him. What do you think of that?"

Phil leaned weakly against the wall.

"I think it's great. I know you suspected me of doing away with him. Where is he? What happened to him?"

"Well," Spence said, "he didn't tell me. It came about this way. We drained Lower Pond last week and at the bottom of it we found a skeleton. Yes, sir—just as neat as if he'd been laid out. That's all there was left—only bones. Elmer's bones."

Phil gulped. "Are you sure, Constable?"

"Doc Kramer identified the bones. Said he recognized the teeth and there was a busted something in his right leg that Doc had patched up years ago. No question about identity. Oh, yes—some-

thing else was busted too. His skull. Cracked right open. Elmer was murdered before being thrown into the pond, Phil."

Phil paled slightly as Jeff watched him. Spence reached under his coat importantly and whipped out a pair of handcuffs.

"So," he went on, "I hereby arrest you for the murder of your uncle. We kept the find good and secret because we knew you were coming home and we didn't want you to slip off some place."

JEFF stepped forward. "Now wait a minute, Constable. You found a skeleton—"

"Keep out of this," Spence warned.

"But Phil is my pal," Jeff said.

Spence hit him high on the cheek. The blow had been aimed at Jeff's chin, but it missed. Still, it was a powerful blow and Jeff went staggering backwards. Phil, momentarily unguarded, did a neat pivot and streaked for the door.

He leaped down the porch steps. Spence pulled his gun and fired once. The bullet must have come very close for Phil stopped and raised both hands high. Jeff, smarting under the punch he'd taken, was slowly moving toward the Constable.

Spence swung the gun half around.

"I'm the law here," he warned. "If you try to help Phil get away, I have the legal right to cut you down and I will. Phil—you come back here or I'll put one through your spine."

Jeff stood by, helpless, while Phil was handcuffed. Spence pulled Phil onto the porch, stopped and turned around. He spoke to Jeff.

"Seeing this is a murder charge I'm holding him with orders nobody gets to see him for awhile. So don't waste your time coming to the jailhouse. My advice to you is clear out. You been consorting with a murderer."

"Phil—there isn't a thing I can do now, but I will," Jeff said. "I'm staying until you're out of this mess. Give me verbal permission to remain in the house so this stalwart minion of the law won't throw me out. Because if he tries—he'd better not pull a gun on me again."

"You stay as long as you like," Phil said. "I've got to talk now. If Uncle Elmer was murdered, maybe Wallace Field did it. He hated him like poison."

Spence gave Phil a hard yank.

"You can do your talking to me. Come on."

Jeff watched them drive off. He kicked the door shut and almost blew out the candles. Suddenly he hated this ark of an old house as much as Phil. He went into the living room and sat down to think. He was, perhaps, the only friend Phil had in town. Spence was certain Phil had killed Uncle Elmer and his certainty would be transmitted to everyone else in the village. To help him, the real murderer must be found. Jeff groaned. Trying to find a killer who had disposed of his victim more than five years ago was something to make an experienced detective shudder.

Jeff found his jacket, buttoned it and pulled on his uniform cap. He locked up the house and started walking toward the village. He asked the first person he met where Doctor Kramer's office was and soon he stepped into the doctor's waiting room. There were no other patients and the consultation room door opened almost immediately.

The man who came out peered at Jeff through myopic eyes hidden behind enormous shell-rimmed glasses. He was a short, slim man with delicate fingers and hands. Obviously those of a doctor. He would have looked perfectly at home on a buggy with his black medical bag beside him and racing against time to reach a patient.

Dr. Kramer said, "Ah—a Marine uniform. We see very few of them here. It means you are probably a friend of Phil Avery, eh?"

"That's right," Jeff said. "Phil has just been arrested for the murder of his uncle. Did you know that?"

"I knew Spence was going to make the arrest as soon as Phil returned."

"Do you think Phil killed him?" Jeff asked.

"Come inside, lad. Sit down and be comfortable. If nobody has a belly-ache or a baby, I'll be able to spend a little time with you. No, I don't think Phil killed Elmer. Though why he didn't, fifteen years ago, is more than I can figure out. Elmer wanted killing."

"You identified the skeleton," Jeff said. "Spence told me so. Are you positive, Doctor?"

Kramer went over to a filing cabinet, selected a folder and placed it on his desk. He opened it. Inside was a case history card in Elmer Avery's name and

clipped to it was an old X-Ray plate. Kramer held the plate up to the light.

"I don't know how much you know about these things, young man, but that's a picture of a broken left femur. Thigh bone. A strange, jagged fracture. I compared this plate with the skeleton we found. The dead man had a break exactly like it. In measurement the skeleton compared with Elmer. His teeth were intact and Elmer had never visited a dentist in his life. He used to brag about it."

JEFF felt a sinking sensation. "Then there isn't much question about the identity of the skeleton, Doctor. Spence said he'd been murdered. Is that true?"

"Undoubtedly. His skull was fractured right on top. A fall doesn't bring such fractures, they are either down in back or along the forehead. And the way the bone parted, you could tell it was done with something very heavy, wielded by a man who was very strong. I'm sorry. I wish I could help you because I don't think Phil did it."

"Somebody did—and Phil is the goat. Doc, he told me something about a man named Wallace Field. He was supposed to be an enemy of Elmer's. What of him?"

"Wally Field?" Dr. Kramer stroked his chin. "Well now, I guess Wally hated him enough to bash in his skull. Maybe something to it, but how do you go about proving murder against a man when the crime was committed nearly six years ago?"

"I wish I knew," Jeff said fervently. "And the joy Constable Spence took in arresting Phil, darn near makes him look suspicious. A man just couldn't be that ornery."

Kramer laughed. "You don't know Spence. No, son, in a case of murder we have to look for a motive and Phil's got one. Elmer intended all along to see that Phil got none of his money. He didn't act soon enough and—it will be Phil's some day. Unless he's proven guilty of murder."

"Who gets it in the event Phil is—convicted?"

Kramer fiddled with some papers on his desk.

"I was afraid you'd ask me that," he said, without looking up. "My sister is married to Elmer's cousin and next of kin. But before you get any ideas, un-

derstand this. My sister's husband left her years ago. We don't even know where he is, though he sends her money now and then. Just cash in a plain envelope postmarked from different parts of the country.

"I doubt he was within two thousand miles of this town when Elmer was killed. And even more than that, I'll bet he hasn't the faintest idea Elmer left anything. None of us believed Elmer had much money."

"I see," Jeff mused. "Just the same this cousin ought to be checked up on. Phil didn't kill his uncle, but somebody must have, and to get Phil off I have to get the man who did."

Kramer wagged his head. "I wish I could be of help. Well, good luck anyway. Call on me for anything. I'll go over and see Phil and tell him you're working on the thing."

"Spence told me no one could see him, Doctor."

"I can. Want to bet on it? Spence doesn't scare me."

Jeff walked out, reached the sidewalk and realized he didn't even know which direction to turn. He found a tavern, drank some beer and asked about Wallace Field. He learned nothing more than Kramer had told him. For the sake of keeping the record clear, he also inquired about Kramer's sister and her missing husband.

The bartender was loquacious enough.

"Doc Kramer is a pretty good guy," he said. "Has to be in this town. He don't get paid half the time. His sister is a cripple. Been that way for years and Doc always took care of her. She was okay when she married George Rand and he seemed to like it here. Then she got sick and whiney, I guess. George used to come in here and get himself a skinful now and then."

"When was the last time?" Jeff asked earnestly.

"Oh—long ago. I'm not sure. Five years—maybe six. Anyway George used to talk about how he didn't know how much longer he could stand it. He just went away, though he still supports Annie. She's his wife. Sends her money. Maybe someday he'll come home."

Jeff wandered out of the place, hunted up the town's solitary taxicab and had himself driven back to the house. He lit the candles and started work. On the theory that there might be something in

the house which would give an indication of the killer's identity.

Elmer had been a farmer and at the back of the house, on the first floor, he had maintained one room as an office and den. Jeff thought he'd never seen so much dust, but it gave him some encouragement because he felt certain no one had been through this house for years. Maybe it had never been searched.

He sat down behind Elmer's old-fashioned rolltop desk. It was locked. He sprang the lock easily, rolled up the top and began examining the papers. Most of them were bills, many unpaid and in sizable amounts. He ploughed through correspondence yellowed with age. Elmer had thrown nothing away.

He found one letter which intrigued him. It was from a small village in Manitoba, Canada. Apparently Elmer was interested in renting a cabin and the date was that of the year Elmer had been killed. The writer went into elaborate detail about the hunting and fishing. A big bore rifle was handiest because there were bear. Fishing tackle should be light and flies used for lure. Prices for rental were quoted.

Jeff went upstairs. In the largest room, which had obviously been Elmer's, he found a gun case and a lot of fishing tackle. The guns were all of small bore, the tackle heavy. He shrugged. It didn't mean anything. Elmer was dead and what he had intended doing before his death was of little consequence.

HE PICKED up the candle in its holder and went out into the hallway. Suddenly he was aware that all the candles downstairs had gone out. Jeff ran down the steps, shielding the candle flame with one hand. He reached the bottom, passed the dining room door and barely heard the beginning of the whooshing sound the club made. Instead of coming to a halt, he added impetus to his mad dash and avoided the descending club by nearly a foot.

But in trying to maintain his balance, he removed the hand which had protected the candle and in his forward rush, the flame was doused. Now the whole house was in complete darkness.

Jeff sidestepped swiftly. A gun blazed. He couldn't see anything in its orange flame, but the intruder had fired at the spot where Jeff had been, not where he was now. Again the intense gloom. Jeff

bent, quickly unlaced his shoes and stepped out of them. He kept close to the wall where the old wooden floor was firmest, slithered toward the living room door and passed through it.

He crossed the living room, put his back against the further wall and stayed there. He breathed so lightly that the sound couldn't have been heard two feet away. He remained there, frozen.

It was a trick he'd learned in jungle fighting. An enemy can't shoot at something he cannot locate. The floor squeaked. Whoever had that gun was moving forward warily. Jeff pondered a fast attack but gave up the idea. There was more than his own life at stake now. If he died, Phil might die too. It was better to wait and attack only when there was a chance.

It galled him, but he stayed there, totally inactive. He could hear the man breathing hard in the excitement of trying to figure out where Jeff was hidden. Finally his nerve broke. He retreated rapidly. The door opened, banged shut and Jeff heard the sound of running footsteps.

Now he moved—out of the house and down to the road, pausing only long enough to retrieve his shoes. A car, too far away to be identified, drove off. No lights were turned on and it vanished quickly. Jeff walked slowly back to the house. He felt a little better. The attack meant that he was getting close to something—someone. The murderer couldn't take it and had tried to kill again. There was a lot of satisfaction in that knowledge. Ten minutes ago Jeff had been almost ready to give up.

He got his cap and jacket, locked up and started for the village at a dog trot. He knew where this man Wallace Field lived and he went there. Field was a farmer, well on the outskirts. There were lights in his farmhouse. Jeff walked up to the door.

Field peered through the partly opened door. Jeff said, "I want to talk to you. I'm a friend of Phil Avery's."

The door opened wide.

"Then you're a friend of mine. Because Phil and I hated his uncle with such devotion we became quite close. If it's money you want, to help defend Phil, I'll donate all I can."

Jeff was looking past Wallace Field's square, wide shoulders and centering his gaze upon a holstered gun hanging

from a nail in the hall. Without a word he went to the holster and pulled the gun free. He sniffed of the barrel. It had been fired very recently. The tip of the barrel made a black smudge when he touched it.

Jeff said, "Mr. Field, would you mind telling me what you fired this gun at? And when?"

"Why should I mind?" Field's eyes were getting narrow and cold blue. "Ten minutes ago somebody was messing around my hen house. Ain't the first time. Out here we don't wait for the law to come. We take more direct action. I saw somebody running away and I blasted at him."

"You've been here all night, though?"

"Yes. Why do you ask? Say, you look at me as if I were a criminal."

"I'm wondering if you are," Jeff replied frankly. "About half an hour ago someone waylaid me at Phil's house and whoever it was fired one shot at me. One bullet has been fired from your gun. You've got a story to account for it, but—can I believe the story? Was anything missing, for instance?"

"I heard him before he could actually grab any chickens. Thieves know me around here. They know doggone well I start shooting fast."

"Some day that's going to get you a lot of trouble, Mr. Field. Let it go for the time being. Do you believe that Phil killed his uncle?"

"Always did. Elmer used to beat him up regular—until Phil got too big to handle. Then he just refused to let him eat. Worked him like a horse. Phil killed him and he ought to be praised for it, not hung."

"There's a difference of opinion on that, Mr. Field. Why did you hate Elmer so much?"

Field eyed Jeff narrowly. "Now see here, I'm starting to think you suspect me. It was Phil, I tell you."

"If you can prove it, go ahead. If you can't, stop accusing him. And answer my question or I'll believe you are hiding something."

**F**IELD'S voice grew surly.

"Ain't any of your business, but I don't mind telling. Elmer cheated me. Out of seven acres of good soil. He cheated others the same way. Those days we didn't plant so much, but when Europe started needing food, we looked

around at some of the land we hadn't used in years.

"We got together and Elmer took charge. He said he had the various tracts of land tested and most of 'em was worn out. No good except for maybe hay. Then a stranger showed up and started buying. He offered pretty good prices, so we sold."

"That's an old one," Jeff commented. "Elmer made you believe the land was worthless and you unloaded on a stranger who seemed to be offering too much. Then it turned out the stranger represented Elmer and the land was perfectly suited to grow crops. Elmer just bamboozled the lot of you."

"All right, so he did. We get to trust people around here. Elmer was a crook."

"How long was it between the time all of you found out he cheated you, and the time he disappeared?"

"No more than a week. Constable Spence was all for locking Phil up then, on suspicion. But we told him if he did that would be his last year as constable. We held a meeting and figured if Phil killed Elmer, we weren't sorry and he deserved a break. We thought maybe, seeing he was going to war, he wouldn't come back. He never knew anything about that. We kept it quiet so he wouldn't worry."

"I imagine he'll be very grateful," Jeff said, but the sarcasm was lost on Field. "It begins to look as if Elmer had so many enemies, half the town must be suspected of his death."

Jeff walked out, ambled slowly down the road and went over the whole affair in his mind. One thing he would never believe and that was Phil's guilt. Therefore he had to consider other suspects. Field was a good one. Dr. Kramer's brother-in-law was also high on the list and Jeff considered Constable Spence seriously until he wondered if it was his own dislike of the man that made him suspect him.

On the surface he liked Kramer's brother-in-law as the most logical suspect. The man had disappeared about the time of Elmer's death. Maybe Elmer had cheated him, too, and been killed out of revenge. It was worth looking into.

There was one other thing—a pure hunch, but he meant to follow it. In the village he made a long distance phone call and had to wait around for half an

hour before it went through. What he learned made him grin cheerfully. He went around to Dr. Kramer's house.

Kramer was glad to see him.

"Have you learned anything?" he asked.

"Enough so that somebody tried to gun me out," Jeff said. "It happened at Phil's house and I'm wondering if the intruder wasn't hunting for something. How about coming back with me and helping me look?"

"I'll be glad to," Kramer agreed. "I'll drive you out." He picked up his black bag. "Better take this. Never can tell when it might be needed."

They reached the house, went inside and Jeff lit the candles. He sat down in the living room. Kramer poked about rather haphazardly until Jeff called him over and pointed to a chair.

"Sit down, Doc. I think I know just what happened that day when Elmer was killed."

"You do? That's more than anybody else knows. Tell me."

"Your brother-in-law vanished about the same time. I believe he came here to see Elmer about a neat gyp game Elmer had worked on several people in town. There was a fight and your brother-in-law struck him. Perhaps he didn't mean to kill him, Doc, but he did and when he found it out, he carried the body to the pond, waded out and anchored it down so even grappling hooks wouldn't pick it up."

"Have you any proof?"

"Some. When I tell the police—and it will be the State Police, not Constable Spence—they are sure to ask you about those letters your brother-in-law sends. He might be traced through them and I shall insist that Phil not be tried until a determined effort is made to find George Rand."

**K**RAMER rocked slowly back and forth, holding his medical bag on his knees with both hands. He seemed to have aged considerably, though the poor light might have helped to give that illusion.

"I might as well admit," he said slowly, "that I thought of the same thing. But George can't be traced. I—never showed any of the letters to my sister. She isn't well and she worries too much. I figured that if George wasn't heard from again, she'd get over it faster."

Jeff nodded. "You'd be a poor brother and worse doctor if you didn't consider your sister's health first. But murder has been done and such considerations go by the board. I discovered a couple of odd things here. Elmer, after his grand gypping of his neighbors, figured it might be wise to go away for awhile. He was in contact with a very small village in Canada where he wanted to rent or buy a cabin.

"Now the man who wrote him advised bringing along a rifle with a big bore and only light fishing tackle. Elmer had several guns, but the big bore rifles are missing. So is his light fishing tackle."

"He must have sent the stuff ahead," Kramer commented.

"No—because it would have been returned. That angle interested me enough to phone the village where Elmer wanted to go. It seems, Doc, that somebody did arrive and not only bought the cabin, but settled down there. Only he said he was a friend of Elmer's and his name was—you guessed it—George Rand."

"So that's where he is," Kramer exhaled slowly.

"George Rand? Your brother-in-law?" Jeff asked.

"Well, who else?"

"George Rand—or what is left of him—is lying at the undertakers. Doc, you simply switched an X-Ray plate of Rand's thigh over to Kramer's case history. Because you knew some day the body would be found.

"Rand came to see Elmer about being cheated. They got into a terrific fight. Elmer killed him. Not premeditatedly but in the heat of a fight. He became panicky. Now Elmer was no intellectual genius. He wouldn't have been positive whether or not Rand was dead so he'd have to call someone. Who, but a doctor? And you were the only medical man for miles.

"So you came here, realized that it was probably Rand's fault, that he wasn't much good anyway and you decided to help Elmer. Together, you concealed the body. Elmer then picked up a few things he needed for his trip and went away. From then on, you faked those letters. In fact, I doubt there ever were any. How am I doing, Doc?"

"You're making an old man crave a drink," Kramer said. "Have one with me and I'll tell you the whole story."

He opened his medical bag, dug a

hand inside and brought out a gun, not a bottle. His hand was steady as a rock.

"I wish I didn't have to do this," he said. "But a desperate man knows no other way to protect himself except by silencing someone who could ruin his life."

Jeff didn't move a muscle.

"You're going at this all wrong, Doc. Yes, you were mixed up in it, but that isn't murder. You merely tried to help out a friend. Rand was the aggressor. We can prove that easily enough. Elmer was a fool to run away. You were not wise to help him, but your crime is not too serious. If you kill me, you become a murderer and you'll get no mercy at all."

"Go on," Kramer urged. "I think you're talking to save your own neck, but it's interesting."

"I'm willing to forget your first attempt on my life. When you waylaid me, fired a shot and then beat it for town. There you attracted Field's attention because you knew he'd shoot at you and I was bound to investigate him and maybe see the discharged gun. It nearly worked. However, I know why you did all this."

"Do you?" Kramer grunted.

"It was for your sister. You didn't want her husband mixed up in anything like this, even if he was the victim in the end. I believe any jury would take that into consideration. Furthermore, you're all done anyway. Elmer is being arrested in Canada now and he'll talk. You'd be better off if you admit the whole affair now, before he opens up and maybe accuses you."

Kramer digested that. "Everything happened as you said. Rand was the aggressor, but Elmer, after having cheated so many people, was afraid they'd take it out on him and refuse to believe anything he said. That's why he ran away. Yes—my part was small and based upon a physician's regard for a very ill patient. Suppose I do admit it all? Will you back me up?"

"I'll be glad to," Jeff promised. "All I want is for Phil to be freed."

Kramer slowly put the gun into his bag.

"I'd have never permitted his conviction. Let's go tell Spence."

"The State Police would be better," Jeff advised. "They've got enough intelligence to see things your way."

"Of course. The barracks are not far. I'll drive you there."

**A** RATHER astounded State Police lieutenant listened to Kramer's confession, had it typed and Kramer signed it. Canadian authorities were contacted and they already had a statement from Elmer which concurred with Kramer's.

The State Police lieutenant shook his head. "I'll have to lock you up, Doc. On an open charge."

Jeff lit a cigarette, leaned back and said, "Make it accessory to murder, Lieutenant. Kramer only told part of the story. He helped for a very specific reason and a selfish one. Consideration for his sister didn't enter it at all. He waited patiently until the skeleton was found. Then he promptly identified it as Elmer."

"He knew Phil would be arrested and probably convicted of the crime. Phil was Elmer's legal heir, but no convicted killer is permitted to enjoy the fruits of his crime. Elmer's estate would have gone to the next in line. That happened to be George Rand, who was married to Doc's sister. He'll never come back because we know he is dead. The estate will then go to Doc's sister. She is very ill, won't last long, so Doc gets the estate in the end."

Kramer's lips compressed and his eyes

grew wide in hate. Jeff laughed at him.

"Would Elmer dare come forward? Not him. He was legally dead and wanted to remain so. Perhaps he and Kramer even had an agreement whereby Elmer would get part of the estate back. But Rand is dead. Elmer killed him. Kramer helped to conceal the crime. Nobody can take that back."

The lieutenant seemed to agree.

"You took quite a chance telling this to Kramer," he said. "Especially when he carried a gun in that bag of his."

"There was no other way to make him admit the truth," Jeff said. "I had to let him know I was aware of the facts, let him open up because he figured he'd kill me anyway, and then talk him out of it. No man wants to become a killer if there is any other measure of escape. I showed Kramer one and he jumped at it."

The lieutenant said, "I'll get that dumb constable on the phone and make him release Phil. You know, you'd make a pretty good cop if you're interested."

Jeff shook his head. "I've got another idea. I planned to study engineering, but after talking Kramer into surrendering I think I'll be a lawyer. I figure if I can talk a crook into giving himself up, I ought to be able to talk a jury into seeing my side of things."

"Practice in another state, will you?" the lieutenant grinned.



*Newspaper reporter Mike Lloyd turns detective when he encounters the strange case of the walking corpse in*

## SUDDENLY IT'S MURDER

By

WAYLAND RICE

*A Gripping Complete Novelet Coming Next Issue!*



The ground was soft clay, but hard digging

# NAIL FOR A NOOSE

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

*One thing led to another—but Cliff Croft never knew where the path was leading him until it was too late!*

**I**T STARTED with a Manhattan cocktail. It was too early to go have dinner, and too late to do anything special. So I dropped into the Blue Lounge to linger around with just one. Another time and I would have had several, but there was a big game on up-town that night and I wanted the head to be clear and sharp.

So I ordered one at that bar and was

lingering over it when a very nice voice said, "Hello, Mr. Croft."

I turned around and she was as soft and soothing as her voice. I knew right off that I had met her before, but I just couldn't place where. I smiled anyway.

"Why, hello! How are you?"

"Jane Hunter," she said, and twinkled her eyes at me. "You don't remember, do you, Mr. Croft? At the Pines last



Thursday? You were nice enough to help me get Ted out of there, and into a cab. Incidentally, Ted is definitely off my list for keeps."

It all clicked with a rush then. On Thursday I had been trying my luck at The Pines, located a few miles out of town. The upstairs part, of course, where not everybody is allowed. A young lad and this girl had been there, she having fun with a roll that would choke a horse, and the young lad getting plastered. Eventually he had passed out cold, and I just happened to be closest, and not playing at the moment. I had helped her get him out the side entrance, and whistled up a taxi for them.

The girl had been almost in tears. Not in embarrassment, but in anger at the punk who hadn't been able to hold it. Just a passing Boy Scout deed by me, and I had forgotten it by the time I got back to the second floor.

"Oh yes, of course, Miss Hunter," I said. "Glad to have been of service."

"Well, you were awful sweet, Mr. Croft," she said. "And when I saw you just now, I—"

She paused as I made the appropriate wigwag to the bar tender, but took it up almost instantly.

"Oh no, no thank you," she said. "I really can't stop. What I wanted to say is, that I'm having a little cocktail thing at home tomorrow afternoon. Fiveish, and just a few people in. You were so awfully nice, and—Well, will you come? I'd love to have you?"

**I**T WAS a shock, but the kind of shocks I like. To give you an idea what I mean, the Hunter kid had been given a cool million on her twenty-first birthday, and it was more or less public knowledge that she would receive a couple of times that, at least, on her twenty-fifth.

Her widower father was Carleton Hunter, a very eccentric multi-millionaire. At least, it was said he was a complete screwball when it came to antiques, curios, and such. Show him something that caught his fancy, and he'd spin like a top, and you could name your own price.

So for me, a professional gambler, to get invited close to that kind of a set-up was indeed something.

"Thank you very much, Miss Hunter," I finally managed, "but—"

"Don't be like that!" she protested. "I know what you're thinking, and it's silly. You're a professional gambler, so what? You're a gentleman, and I'm sure you're fun, and I like you. Please come."

"I'll try," I hedged. "Fact is, though, I do have an—er—business appointment late tomorrow afternoon, but—"

"Break it," she cut in again. "At least postpone it. I must run, now, but I'll be expecting you. Five, or later. Bye."

Off she tripped, leaving me feeling very good. Of course I had no intention of showing up at her shindig. I know my side of the street, and I never step off the curbstone. However, it was nice to be invited to mingle with the plush and platinum set. I finished my Manhattan, and went out and had a quiet dinner.

Twelve hours later there was fifteen hundred dollars of my money that wasn't my money any more. Four other lads had taken it away from me during a session of fifty-dollar-a-chip dealer's choice. That left three hundred dollars in my bank, and a great sinking emptiness inside of me. I had expected the night's work to turn out the other way around.

I mean, I felt that I was due, and had made plans to leave the very next day for Florida, and the nice pleasant pickings to be had down there during the season. But with only a three-hundred bankroll, and the jinx dogging me so close, I'd be a fool to sit in on so much as a parchesi game.

And so, I did something I would not normally have done, or even dreamed of doing. I put on my very best suit and went to Jane Hunter's cocktail thing. Why, I cannot explain, because I do not even know myself. The aching thrill of marked contrast, perhaps. Cliff Croft, the temporary pauper, rubbing elbows with the biggest money in town.

Anyway, I went, and I more or less enjoyed it. The Hunter kid seemed genuinely pleased to see me. And her friends were very polite and pleasant, even though they were probably thinking things. Yes, all in all, it was an experience I really enjoyed . . . until Carleton Hunter collared me during one of the two or three times I was standing all alone by myself. He instantly popped at me, was I interested in curios, and such? And to be a polite guest I said,

why yes, I was. I wish with everything that I had given him a very blunt, no!

The next thing I knew we were in his little study-den, a room crammed full with items that to trained eyes were no doubt priceless, but to mine were junk.

"Sit there, sir," Hunter said and indicated a chair by an old fashioned safe, "and I will show you the most exquisite bit of ivory carving you have ever seen."

I sat down while he squatted in front of the safe. I swear to God that I just happened to notice by accident, but I saw Hunter take hold of the combination dial knob and turn it three markers to the right so that the number thirty was under the little arrow. Then he twisted the door handle and swung it open.

Inside, one section was made up of little metal drawers. He opened one and took out a wad of cotton. From inside the cotton he produced about three inches of polished ivory. It was carved in the shape of a row of elephants. He held it up for me to see, like a kid displaying his very first Christmas toy.

"Look at that, sir," he almost drooled. "Perfect! I bought it from a man who had just recently returned from the Belgian Congo. He got it from the chief of a tribe that will be completely extinct in another fifty years. He said that this piece is the only one of its kind in the world."

**C**ARLETON HUNTER went on talking, and I sat there both hypnotized and fascinated. Not, however, by Hunter's words, nor the hunk of carved ivory he held in his hands. On the contrary, it was something else inside that safe. A stack of loose money on one of the many shelves.

It was right in front, and in plain sight. The top bill was a fifty. Now, in my business I've seen many stacks of money, and at a glance I can come very close to how much is in a stack this high, or that high. The stack in Hunter's safe I judged to be twenty-five thousand, or more.

Twenty-five thousand, or more! I tried to push the truth away, but it wouldn't go away. It kept repeating itself again, and again, and again. And a hundred and one other thoughts circled endlessly in my head, merry-go-round style. I felt myself trembling, and it took everything I had to tear my eyes from that stack of money, and give at least part

of my attention to Hunter's rambling recitation on the bit of ivory in his hand.

And as I half listened, and didn't retain a single word of what he said, I sweated inwardly for him to get it over with, and put the thing back into the safe. And close that safe door. That's what I wanted most; to see him close that safe door. Was it possible? Was there just the chance?

He finished his story at last. I looked, gestured, and murmured words to indicate how impressed I was. He beamed happily at me, and put the bit of ivory back into the cotton, and the cotton back into the little safe drawer. When he started to close the safe door I had the insane urge to yell, or at least to leap to my feet and dash from the room.

I did neither. I sat there stiff, and watched the dial combination as he slapped the door shut. It was something like fireworks exploding in my head when I saw the number dial move so that the number thirty was three markers to the left of the arrow.

Instantly, I thought of my own post office box that is opened on the combination system, too. For a long time I had worked the entire combination each time I opened it until one day I noticed that the little arrow on the turning knob moved two markers to the left when I closed the door. And by turning the arrow just two markers to the right I could open the door without bothering to go through the hole combination.

Anyway, a few minutes later Hunter and I walked back into the room where the party was rolling along. Me, I felt as though I was walking on eggs, and if I took a heavy step the firecrackers would blow off the top of my head. However, I guess I didn't show what I was feeling, because I talked with people, and they talked with me without giving me any funny looks.

But what we talked about I have not the faintest idea. Every face I looked at was an opened safe with a stack of twenty-five grand, or more. Either that, or it became the number thirty that needed only to be turned three markers to the right so that it was directly under the little arrow.

Crazy, insane? Certainly! I make no effort to deny it. I can only say it was some kind of hidden force I had never dreamed before existed. It took com-

plete possession of my brain and my thoughts, to the exclusion of all else. Twenty-five thousand, or more, by simply turning the number thirty three markers to the right and under the arrow!

A dream? A wild, crazy, and totally unrelated coincidence? I did not know, but I did know that I had to find out for sure—or eventually fly apart in small pieces.

And so later I skillfully arranged it, I thought. I was chatting with Jane Hunter. I told her about her father showing me the carved bit of ivory, and how beautiful I thought it was, and so forth. And I expressed a little embarrassed wish to see it again.

The kid assured me that such a wish would make her father my friend for life, and certainly I could see it again. So she rounded up her father, and he was tickled pink that I should take such an added gratifying interest in his junk. So, once again we went back into his study-den.

I did not sleep that night. I suffered mental tortures beyond words. I hit the very topmost pinnacle of elation, and the bottommost depths of self disgust. But through it all, like a rug weaver's shuttle, slid twenty-five thousand, or more, in cold cash. All that money just for the taking. I had twice seen Hunter open that old fashioned safe, the same way each time. And I had gathered, too, that he always kept a good supply within easy reach so that he could buy at once anything presented to him which struck his fancy. In short, sometimes the "seller" did not want a check. He wanted cold cash—in his hand. Twenty-five thousand, or more! The loss of that amount to one of Hunter's wealth would be comparable to my losing a deck of cigarettes.

Less than three hundred dollars in my bank, and a temporary bad luck curse on me. And all that loose money in Carleton Hunter's old fashioned safe! Well, I plead nothing. I fought my battle all night long, and came up with the decision to get that money. And so, I made my plans. I made them in much the same cool, calculating way I make them when lads as sharp with cards as I are seated about the table.

**I** TOOK a week, and carefully studied the habits of all those in the Hunter

household. Of Carleton Hunter, of his daughter, of the middle-aged housekeeper, and of the butler. Unobserved I watched all their comings and goings. I learned that Thursday evening was Hunter's evening at home alone with his mess of priceless junk.

The butler left at noon and returned at eight the next morning. The housekeeper left at six, and came back at midnight. Jane left at cocktail time, and came back in the wee small hours—when she did come back.

Did I say a week? I stretched it to three weeks to be absolutely sure. Then I picked the next Thursday evening as my time, and arranged for Hunter to be out of his study-den for at least five minutes.

That was the simplest of all my arrangements. On that Thursday morning I dropped into a public stenographer's office where you can have letters typed, your mail received, and phone calls made, and taken, for you. I gave the woman Hunter's number, and said I wanted her to phone him at exactly seven o'clock, and say that Los Angeles, California, was calling and for him to hang on, please.

I explained that I wanted her to keep him waiting five minutes, at least. Longer, if necessary. I said it was a joke I was playing on a friend, and the laugh would be worth the ten dollars I gave her. She accepted the money and we closed the deal.

I wasn't worried about her. She didn't know me from Adam, and would never see me again. I would make sure of that. Besides, if the thing did hit the papers, and she added up two and two, I doubted she would tell anybody the answer for fear of getting herself implicated some way that wouldn't help future business. No, that arrangement was very simple.

Well, came that Thursday evening, and it was so easy. It was about the easiest thing I ever did in my life. A minute before seven I was at the Hunter house back door. My car was parked four blocks over. I heard the phone in the library ring. I waited ten seconds and entered the house. It was so easy. I went through rooms not connected with the library, and straight to that study-den. I used my handkerchief on the safe. So very easy, but there was a moment when my heart did zoom up

and press hard against my back teeth.

Carleton Hunter either didn't care to talk with anybody in Los Angeles, or he was impatient to get back to whatever he was doing. Anyway, I heard him bark at the public stenographer to call him when she was ready, that he wouldn't wait.

I was just closing the safe when he banged up the phone. I guess I traveled faster than I had ever traveled before, indoors. In the back entryway I caught the skirt of my jacket on a nail or something, and the sudden half stop almost threw me on my face. I kept my feet, though, jerked my jacket free and scooted out. Half an hour later I was in my small apartment . . . sweating copiously with nervous relief.

My guess had been close. The amount was twenty-six thousand five hundred dollars. Counting it made me a little giddy in the head. With that roll, and my bad luck spell spent, what I couldn't do down Florida way! It was a wonderful, wonderful feeling. But I did not let it run away with my thoughts and dreams for long. I had planned as carefully for after the event as I had for the before part. I would take no chances at all. Not a single one.

I carefully hid the money in the apartment. In small amounts, and in places no one would ever guess. Then I set myself to wait things out a week, or maybe two, or maybe even longer. I would not attend a single "game," several of which I knew were going to be held. No, my three hundred bankroll wasn't enough, and Cliff Croft would not flash big money.

Better let it be thought that I was simply riding out my spell of bum cards and no pots. I'd just take it easy around town, and presently quietly slip away. The detective boys are no fools, you know. Hunter might just mention that he had opened that safe twice in my presence.

And the law boys, knowing that I was a high stakes gambler—Well, make your own conclusion. Me, I decided to play it safe from every conceivable angle, even though I was dead certain I had not slipped up by so much as a hair.

Waking up next morning was the most pleasant thing in my life to date. All that money within my reach. I went directly to the apartment door and collected the morning paper. Not a word of

any robbery at the Hunter house. That made me feel even better. I shaved, dressed, and went out to eat. I wore a different suit, but I took along the jacket of the suit I'd worn the night before. There was a half square inch of the cloth that had been torn out by that nail, or whatever it was.

But I knew a place down the street where they did invisible mending, and as that suit was practically brand new I took the jacket there. They said it would be ready in a week, and that suited me fine. I left my name and address, and went out and had the biggest and nicest tasting breakfast I'd ever had in my life.

The noon papers didn't carry a word of the robbery. Nor did the early afternoon sheets. I read them all and guessed that Hunter either didn't want the publicity, or else he had not yet noticed the loss. Anyway, I felt better, and better, and better. It had all been so wonderfully easy, and so simple.

**A**T THREE o'clock my apartment door bell rang I suppose it was my guilty conscience, but the innocent ringing of that bell made me jump a foot out of my chair, and my face to break out in a cold sweat. I recovered myself in a moment, though, and answered the ring. A timid looking, middle-aged man, who looked slightly familiar, stood holding his derby hat in his hand just beyond the threshold.

"Mr. Croft, sir, may I come in and speak with you? I'm Henry."

"Henry?" I echoed, striving to place him.

"Yes, sir," he said with a meek smile.

"Mr. Carleton Hunter's butler, sir. May I come in for a moment, please?"

It was a completely cockeyed development descended out of a clear blue sky. But I showed nothing in my face, and played it as it should be played. I stepped back and held the door wider.

"Certainly, Henry," I said. "Come in."

He walked in slowly, but I was watching his eyes. They seemed to dart in every possible direction, and all at the same time. At a gesture from me he went over to a chair, seated himself on the edge, and held his hat with his two hands on his knees. I dropped easily into another chair, and smiled with eyebrows raised.

"Yes, Henry?" I murmured.

The meek smile looked like it was painted on his face. But not so his eyes. They were sharp, and keen, and as steady as poised dagger points.

"I will come right to the point, Mr. Croft, sir," he said. "I saw you take that money from Mr. Hunter's safe."

Years of gambling experience came to my rescue instantly. I did not start, or even flinch. I just looked at him, and lowered my brows to a frown.

"I beg your pardon, Henry?" I said softly.

He lifted one side of his derby hat and let it drop in an irate gesture. "Please, Mr. Croft, sir!" he said. "I was coming downstairs to answer the phone, and I saw you enter through the kitchen. I knew what you were up to. You see, sir, for ten years I have been expecting some one to do exactly what you did. Rob Mr. Hunter's safe, sir."

I stared at him in blank amazement. Actually, though, clammy hands had reached up and pulled me down from the heights into icy waters.

"What in the world are you talking about, man?" I asked with studied patience. "And be quick about it, before I throw you out of here!"

His meek smile remained the same, and so did his sharp, steady eyes. "I would not do that, if I were you, sir," he said simply. "My proposition is very simple. Give me half the money you stole, and no one will be told the truth."

"Really?" I echoed, and made it very mocking.

"Yes sir," he said, and bobbed his head. "Refuse, and I will have you arrested, and sent to prison."

I leaned forward, made my expression stern, and my voice tight. "I'll give you just one minute to take that back, and get out of here!" I clipped at him. "Who in the devil do you think you are, coming here and making such an accusation?"

"I am the man who saw you steal that money, Mr. Croft, sir," he said without batting an eye. "Yesterday was my day off, but I returned a little after six to get my topcoat. It was getting chilly. Mr. Hunter did not know that I had returned. I went in the back way, of course, and up the servant's stairs to my room.

"As I was coming down later, I heard the phone ring. I was about to go down

the front way to the library and answer it, when I saw you cross the kitchen. I followed you, keeping out of sight, and saw what you did, sir. That is the truth."

"And it never occurred to you to try to stop me, or at least raise an alarm?" I sneered at him.

"It did, sir, but I decided, no," he replied instantly. "You see, Mr. Croft, sir, I've known for a good ten years that Mr. Hunter kept large sums of money in that safe. And that he never really locked it until just before he retired for the night. I've often seen him take some out to pay for some art object he was buying. And, I've often seen Miss Jane help herself, when it was too late to cash a check at the bank. A million times, sir, it would have been every easy for me to help myself, but I never dared. I am not a courageous man, sir. But, when I saw you last night, I knew that I could get you to give me—Well, at least half of it."

I LAUGHED, as though it was all suddenly very funny to me. It wasn't. My heart was a melting chunk of ice that sent icy shivers clear down through me to my toes.

"You claim you saw me, eh?" I murmured. "And just who would believe you?"

"Mr. Hunter, and the police, sir," he replied.

I laughed again, but it was forced. "You're wonderful, Henry!" I exclaimed. "You freely admit that for ten years you've known how simple it would be to steal that money in Mr. Hunter's safe. And yet you expect people to take your word that you saw a stranger sneak in and steal it? You're mad!"

"Oh, but I could prove it, sir," he said. "I could prove that you stole it."

"How?" I snapped the word out before I could check myself.

"A bit of cloth, sir, from the jacket you were wearing," he said. "And the nail in the kitchen you caught your jacket on. I could say that you escaped before I could do anything, but that I found the bit of cloth hanging to the nail."

The whole inside of me had sort of dropped away, but I knew I wasn't showing a thing in my face. I waved a hand toward my bedroom.

"Go in and pick out the jacket you say

I was wearing," I ordered. "Pick it out, and let us see if there is a small piece missing. Why, you little—!"

I stopped because he was shaking his head.

"The jacket is not here, Mr. Croft, sir," he said, as though making an apology. "Ever since early morning I have been out in front of here, trying to summon up the courage to come in and speak to you. So I saw you leave and take the jacket to that mending shop to have it repaired.

"Of course, sir, you could very easily get it away from there and destroy it. But—they would remember for the police, sir. They would recognize the bit of cloth, you know. And, of course, they have your name and address. Don't you see, Mr. Croft, sir?"

I didn't say a thing. My tongue was paralyzed. A mighty turmoil raged within me, and my whole body felt as though it were encircled by broad steel bands that were growing tighter and tighter. Trapped in that aching fog I heard him go on speaking.

"I am utterly fed up with being in service, sir," he said. "I've always wanted to get a little place of my own in the country, but I have never been able to save enough. Now, I have my chance, and I am going to grasp it. Oh no, nothing so obvious, of course. I would remain in Mr. Hunter's service for a year, or perhaps two years longer. And then give him my notice. Mr. Croft, sir, I want half what you stole from that safe. I insist!"

My brain, thank God, was beginning to function again by the time he stopped talking. I thought that perhaps I saw a little light. A way to permanently scare the rabbit in him.

"You forgot one little item in your nice clever plans, Henry," I said. "You! If I split with you, *that* will make you as guilty as I am, in the eyes of the law. What's more, I'll bet that when Mr. Hunter notices the loss he'll think about you. In time, anyway. And the cops certainly will! Well, when they find out you came back to get your topcoat, so you say, and didn't let Mr. Hunter know you were there—what do you think *they'll* think?"

When I was barely half way through my little speech I knew I was just throwing words down an empty rain barrel. He held that same damnable meek smile

on his face, but he was starting to shake his head slowly.

"You do not know Mr. Hunter, sir," he said softly. "He is not only eccentric, but quite absent-minded, too. Because of his great wealth all his life, sir. Money is simply something he gives other people for things that strike his fancy. Miss Jane is quite a bit the same way, too. Mr. Hunter, sir, would not look at it as a robbery. He would think he'd spent it the day before, and had forgotten about it. Or think that Miss Jane had helped herself because she was short. No, Mr. Croft, sir, he wouldn't think a thing about it—*unless* I confronted him with the truth. You see?"

I saw, and all too clearly. This little rabbit with the brain of a cobra had me completely at his mercy. There wasn't a move I could make, except to stall and gain time to think.

"I see," I murmured. "Maybe you're right, but maybe you're not. I'll think over your proposition, and let you know."

"Sorry, sir," he said with a sad shake of his head. "I can't afford to let you do that. I'll take my share, now, and the two of us will say no more about it."

"You think I have it here?" I sneered at him.

"Then we will go wherever you have hidden it," he said quietly. "But mark you, sir, I mean to have my half. There must be no trifling. Such a perfect opportunity may never come again to me. I hope you understand, sir?"

I started to nod absently, and then froze. He had once more lifted his derby hat. I did not know where it had come from and maybe it had been there hidden in his other hand all the time. But it was there, now. A small, ugly little gun, of a type I had never seen before in my life. And, of course, its snub-nosed barrel was pointed straight at me.

**T**HE sight of that gun did something to me in my head. It sort of reversed my thoughts, and sent them whirling around in the opposite direction. A plan, the like of which I would never have dreamed of otherwise, took form and definite shape in my brain. In one lucid flash I saw my complete escape. My complete, *perfect* escape.

"Well, if you are not lying, sir, shall we go?"

His voice dragged me away from my

thoughts. I got up slowly, like a terribly defeated man. Then a thought came to me.

"Yesterday was your day off," I said. "Yet you say you've watched this place since morning. Won't Mr. Hunter . . . ?"

"Mr. Hunter, and Miss Jane, left early this morning for New York, sir," he said. "There is only Mrs. Parkins, the housekeeper, and my comings and goings are no concern of hers. No sir, no one knows I came here, and if you are a sensible gentleman no one will know that I have been here. Quite simple, you see, sir?"

Yes, *quite* simple! Only we were not thinking of the same thing. But there was one more item.

"That little piece of jacket cloth?" I said.

"I will mail it to you—later," he said placidly. "The nail, too, if you wish?"

I half nodded, and took my hat from a nearby table. "All right, you win," I said, and gave him a sick smile. "But, it isn't here. If you'd followed me last night you'd know where. We'll go in my car and get it."

"Certainly," he said and rose, too. "But, no trifling please, Mr. Croft, sir."

He had his derby on his head, and his left hand was empty. The right was out of sight in his jacket pocket. I nodded silently and led the way out of my apartment. We went all the way down in the self-operated elevator to the basement garage where the building tenants keep their cars. At their own risk, incidentally, as the management employs no attendant. The electric eye system opens and closes the outer doors for you.

Stepping out of the elevator I snapped on the light switch and walked over to my parked car. My brain was racing as it had never raced before, but inside of me there was a sort of mad, crazy, grim humor.

I mean, two days before I had had a flat, and it was the meanest one I'd ever changed. Left me covered with road grease from head to foot. In my rage I had locked the trunk shut without tossing in the lug wrench with the jack. Rather than bother unlocking the trunk I had tossed the lug wrench on the floor in back.

Henry walked around to his side and got in. I opened the door on the wheel side, took out my keys, and dropped them. I stooped over, picked up the

keys with my left hand, and darted my right in back of the seat and grabbed up the lug wrench off the floor. Then I started to get in.

He was watching me, with his right hand still sunk in his right jacket pocket. His eyes going wide told me that he saw what was happening. But he saw it too late. Every ounce of my strength was behind the swing, and the heavy end of the lug wrench hit him on the back of the neck, at just about the hair line.

The sickening sound made my stomach revolt, but I beat it off. He didn't make a sound. He simply slumped forward against the glove compartment in the dash. I dropped the wrench, got all the way in behind the wheel, and then using both hands jammed his little body way down out of sight. Whether he was dead yet, I did not know. I didn't care. He would be eventually. Yes, eventually everything would be wonderful!

I started the car and drove out onto the street. I never drove more carefully in my life. I knew exactly where I was going, and I headed out there as though I had all the time in the world. Once when I stopped for a red light, and there was a policeman standing not ten yards away, my heart crowded up into my throat to choke me. But I was soon all right again when the light changed to green, and I carefully drove on.

**I**T TOOK me almost an hour to get to my destination. It was on a side lane leading off the main highway through some woods. I timed it so that there was not a car in sight when I turned off. I drove a quarter of a mile, and parked. I got out, and pulled him out.

No blood showed on the back of his neck at all, but he was stone dead. I made doubly sure of that, and then I went around to the trunk, opened it and took out the little shovel I carry in case I get stuck in snow drifts.

I carried the shovel, and dragged Henry to a spot about twenty yards in among the trees. The ground was soft clay, but it was hard digging. And it was messy. My shoes became caked with the stuff before I had him buried and covered up.

When I tossed on the last shovelful something seemed to be released inside of me. I wanted to laugh, but I didn't. But it was wonderful. He'd said Hunter

would never attach robbery to the missing money, but if Hunter *did* the missing Henry would of course explain all. And the cops would certainly have to look for him forever, and then some.

Perfect! And then something else seemed to happen inside of me. My whole body went blazing hot, and then icy cold with shuddering terror. I wanted nothing but to get away from that spot. And action was instantaneous. I threw the shovel on the back seat, and got into the car and turned it around. I raced back along the lane and onto the highway on the way back to town.

One hundred yards on the main highway, and then the wail of a siren slapped against my ears. And in practically the same second a state trooper streaked by, bellowed at me, and cut over in front. The only thing I could do was to brake to a stop. He got out and came back to my side of the car.

"Can't you read signs, Mister?" he barked.

"Signs, Sergeant?" I murmured innocently.

"Yeah, the stop sign on that lane you wheeled out of!" he snapped. "What do you think they're there for? It's guys like—"

He stopped, and winter set in my heart. He was looking at the clay-soiled shovel in back, and then he was looking at my clay-caked shoes, and the cuffs of my pants. His eyes narrowed.

"Just what were you doing up that lane?" he demanded. "It leads nowhere."

I said the craziest thing that could possibly have popped into my mind. "Digging up some wood plants for my garden, Sergeant."

"Yeah? This time of year? Get out of that car, Mister. We'll go back in mine, and you can show me where you were digging."

His hand was resting casually on his holstered gun, and my brain was on fire. I had no thoughts. I guess it was a part of me I never knew about that functioned. I pushed open the door and got out. And I swung my right fist for his chin. I hit him flush and he toppled over backward. Before he landed I had turned and was racing for the woods on the right. But he was too tough, or I hadn't caught him just right with my fist.

"Stop or I'll shoot!"

I ran faster. I guess he was the type who would rather be sure than take a chance and save the state money. His bullet caught me in the right shoulder, spun me around, and dumped me down a great big black hole filled with utter silence. When I came to I was in a hospital bed, and there was a uniformed policeman seated on a chair by the door.

The rest is blurred memory that doesn't change anything. They found Henry. That led to Hunter's home. That led to the money that wasn't in the safe any more. They found it all, of course, in my apartment. One thing they got wrong, and I didn't bother to correct them. They decided at the trial that Henry and I did it together, and I did away with him so that I could have it all.

Well, I've put it all down just to see if there was a loophole for me. Just a tiny one, to maybe get me a retrial. But there isn't. So—the watch they let me keep says I've got two hours left. Two hours to—No, the blasted thing's stopped! So it's less than that. How much less I don't—Yes, I do! It's nothing. It's *now*! The two guards, and the prison padre, are at the cell door. Its now . . . *now*! Oh dear God, all because of a nail! One cursed nail sticking out! If *only* I'd—



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## TRIPLE DETECTIVE

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The dress wound right around his head and arms

## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

By RAY CUMMINGS

*Psychiatry is too deep for Detective Peter Kinney, but his girl friend knows an angle or two that helps trap a killer!*

**S**O FAR as I'm concerned, psychiatry is pretty deep stuff. I'm just a routine Police Detective. Peter Kinney by name. Maybe I'm too normal a guy to appreciate psychiatry properly. If I dream about a nice bottle of Scotch, so what? I'm willing to let it go at that. Maybe my subconscious mind is itching to get seventeen more bottles and lose a weekend. If it is, I can't help it, so why worry?

Personally, in my work with criminals, I like to catch a guy with bloodstains on his pants and his fingerprints on the murder knife. Give me that, and I wouldn't bother to probe into his mind to find out why he did it, and if it happens he killed just to get the eighty-two dollars in his victim's pocket, and his watch, that's fine. That's the kind of evidence and motive I can understand. I never have tangled much with psycho-

logical stuff. But once I did. And it sure worked out peculiar.

In this case of the murder of Norma Manning, the beautiful model who was found in her walk-up apartment with her head bashed in, it was my girl friend, Jane Johnson, who rang the psychiatry angle in on us. It was a nice warm, sunny Sunday, about eleven o'clock in the morning. I had the day off. Jane works for one Dr. Robert J. Hasland, who if you don't know it, is a very high-class psychiatrist. This was Jane's day off too. So we met, with the idea of roaming in the park and having lunch.

As luck would have it, between Jane's house and the park, is the Police Station. We were passing it, with me thinking how wonderful it was for me not to be going in, when who should come rushing out, but Captain Grant.

"Well, hello!" he said. "Just the fellow I want to see. I phoned your place a while ago."

So what could I do? I introduced him to Jane, who is tall and willowy, a swell looker if I do say so myself. The boss was appreciative of that, and polite, but he wasn't too pleased because he had this murder on his hands; and it was the sort of case where the police have to do something—or pretend to be doing something fast. A beautiful model. Three pretty prominent men suspects. Hot-headed, jealousy motive. All three of them with the same motive, pretty obvious. So one of them did it, but which one? That's the sort of set-up that's just grand for the newspapers, but it puts the police on a spot.

"We've got to turn up something," Grant was telling us. "I just thought you might have some ideas, Pete."

"Me?" I said.

"Come on out with me to her place," Grant said, and his glance somehow seemed to imply that he wished Jane would go and jump in the lake. "Duffy rounded up the three men, and we got all the dope on this Manning girl's affairs from the woman who lives upstairs. Duffy's got the men out there now, and I'll be doggoned if any one of the three of 'em has any decent alibi for what he was doing last evening."

"She was killed last evening?" I said.

"Yeah. Somewheres between nine and twelve, probably. Wasn't discovered until her maid came this morning. So now we have these three guys, but how can

you drag it out of 'em? Maybe we ought to send down to New York for a lie detector machine, or something."

If it had been a rainy Tuesday, I wouldn't have minded so much, because it sounded sort of interesting at that. It was then that Jane came through with the idea that what we needed was the talents of her boss, the psychiatrist.

"One of those men has guilt in his mind," Jane said. "Dr. Hasland can find it and get it out. You'd be surprised how he can delve into the human mind and find all sorts of queer things. I'm just the receptionist, but I've heard him at work."

"Where is he?" Grant said. "We'll give him a ring!" You've known how a dying man will grab at a straw. Grant was like that, I guess.

Anyway, we went into the Station and Jane phoned him. This being Sunday morning and the doctor having no clients, or patients whatever you call them scheduled until the afternoon, he was very glad to oblige. So he'd take his car and meet us right away at the apartment of this murdered Norma Manning.

We took Grant's car, and we got there first. The newspaper hounds had already been there, and Duffy'd gotten rid of them, which was a blessing. Duffy was very busy with two or three of Grant's men. Lewis, the fingerprint man, was working around. The body hadn't been touched. Doc Phelan was supposed to look it over, but I guess he was playing golf, this being such a swell day. Anyway, he hadn't showed up yet.

"So what do we do now?" Duffy greeted us. He took an inquiring look at Jane.

"A friend of mine," I said. "She has nothing to do with this."

Duffy skipped it. "I been questionin' them three men," Duffy told Grant. "They're getting pretty annoyed, bein' held here an' accused."

"Oh they are?" Grant said. "Too bad."

If there ever was an open and shut case, up to a point, this seemed to be it. The murdered Norma Manning lived in a three family walkup, out near the edge of town. It was a detached building, neighbors wouldn't hear any commotion in it, most likely. It was small; one family on each floor. Norma lived on the second floor, with one apartment under her, and one over her. She lived in nice

homey, modest style with her widowed mother. But her mother was away now, visiting a sister in Albany, so Norma had been there alone. The people underneath were away for the summer. The people overhead, a middle-aged couple, had gone to the theatre last night, being out from eight-thirty to midnight, so that had left Norma Manning alone in the building.

"This woman upstairs," Duffy was explaining, "she knew Norma very well. Good friends. Norma told her everything. This Mrs. Allen, she invited Norma to go with them last night, but at eight o'clock Norma was dressing. She said she had a date with one of her fellers. He was gonna call and take her out."

**WE WENT** into the living room and I got a look at the corpse. The room showed signs of a struggle. A table was slued around, the rug was scuffed up, and a chair was overturned. Norma had put up a fight, all right until she got bashed on the head with a heavy silver candlestick. It lay on the floor beside her now, and a scarf from the table was with it.

"See what we mean?" Duffy said. "That fight took place during the evening, when she was alone here, or it would have been heard by the people upstairs."

"This bird had his mind on fingerprints," Levis said. "He took that scarf and wiped off the murder weapon."

"Nobody happened to see him come and go," Grant said. "We've questioned all the neighbors. So there you are."

The body lay on the scuffed rug beside the overturned chair. Norma Manning was tall, slim, the athletic glamour type, if you get me. I guess you've probably seen her a lot in ads of swim suits and stuff like that. She was fully dressed now, quite evidently ready to go out with the man who was coming for her.

Jane was with us as we stood looking down at the corpse. Nobody had stopped Jane, so with a sort of fascinated horror and awe, she was beside me. She described what Norma was wearing for her date as a sheer black dinner dress, with nylons, and with black spike-heeled shoes with platform soles. Anyway, it certainly was a swell outfit. That girl, so tall and slim, must have looked sort of regal. She was pathetic now, crum-

pled here on the floor, with that bashed head in pretty horrible shape.

"See, they were evidently just ready to start out," Duffy was saying. "Then an argument started. He got mad. Maybe he cuffed her. Then he lost his head, grabbed that candlestick and whanged her. Not once but several times, by the look of it."

You bump into quite a few killings like that. This fellow maybe had no idea of hurting her when he arrived. But one thing leads quickly to another when you get started, especially with a few drinks in you. And all of a sudden this fellow found he had killed her. Mrs. Allen, the woman upstairs, had told Duffy and Grant that Norma was a fine girl, straight as a string, but she had one failing. She liked to make men jealous. Play one against the other. Anyway, there was plenty of evidence from her and other people who knew Norma, that the model was only going out now with three men. They were all three crazy about her, wanted to marry her. One came last night. He evidently called for a showdown, and in the argument, Norma got killed.

"We got 'em here in one of the bedrooms," Duffy said. "An' whichever one of 'em did it, he sure is a fine actor."

It was then Dr. Hasland arrived, and we brought him in, showed him the layout and told him what we were up against.

"Why yes," he said. "After I have talked with them, Captain Grant, I shall be glad to offer you my opinion."

He was younger than I had expected, about thirty-five. He had sparse sandy hair, and big horn-rimmed spectacles. He looked studious and very earnest.

"Okay," Grant said crisply. "Give 'em the works."

That seemed to puzzle and startle Dr. Hasland. "The works," he murmured.

"He means, do your best," I said. "Don't spare them."

We trooped into the big bedroom; it was the one Norma's mother occupied when she was here. The three suspects were sitting, apparently mostly in gloomy, antagonistic silence. Two of them were in big wicker chairs. The third was on the edge of the bed. Jane and I stood against the wall, as Captain Grant crisply introduced Dr. Hasland.

"Your name is John Blake?" Dr. Hasland said quietly, as the man on the bed

stood up to shake hands. "Your business?"

"I'm a stock broker," Blake said. "Junior partner." He smiled sourly. He was a big, lanky fellow, over six feet, slightly stooped, with wide, thin shoulders. His hair, prematurely gray at the sides, gave him a distinguished look. His manner was self-possessed, sort of resignedly ironic. But he was tense, and nervous. All three of them were, you couldn't miss it.

"I suppose," Blake added, "whatever you're going to do to me, I've got to submit to it."

That would have brought a snappy retort from Captain Grant, but Dr. Hasland checked it with a gesture.

"Those of you who are innocent have nothing to fear from me," the doctor said calmly.

That set them back on their heels. It made Grant chuckle, but the psychiatrist was deadly earnest. "So I trust you will all be co-operative," Hasland added.

They sure would. I'm here to tell you, all three of them couldn't do enough to assure everybody of their cordial desire to help. The second one was named Peter Rollins. He described himself as the ace salesman of a big hardware company. He was a short, somewhat chubby fellow, red-headed and with a jolly look to him. But he was serious enough now.

"Of course, of course," Rollins said. "Surely I don't want you to think I have anything to hide. I've told everything to Captain Grant, and this Sergeant Duffy here."

"Thank you," Dr. Hasland said.

The third man was an actor, and he sure looked it. His name was Alan LeRoy. He was in rehearsal now, he told us, the lead in a new drama. He was a smallish, very dapper, very handsome fellow, carefully groomed, but not foppish. He was manly enough, and I guess likable enough too, by the looks of him.

"This will be very interesting," he said. "We get psychoanalyzed? I've heard of that, of course, but nobody ever did it to me before."

So there they were. The big, lanky broker, John Blake, the red-headed, chubby little salesman, Peter Rollins, and the dapper, handsome actor, Alan LeRoy. The bedroom was tense, you could say electric, while Dr. Hasland questioned them. Then at last he had finished. He studied the notes he had made.

You can imagine how those three men felt. You could almost see them gulping, and they all seemed to get the idea they ought to say something.

"Well, let's have it," Blake said. "You started with me."

The little salesman, Rollins, lighted a cigarette. "Shoot," he said, with a very sad attempt at being jocular.

LeRoy produced a handsome cigarette case, gesturing to all of us to have a cigarette, but everybody ignored it. "Well, now for the verdict," LeRoy said.

There was a moment of silence, then Dr. Hasland said quietly:

"I can confirm absolutely, what you have told me, Captain Grant. Scientifically, there is no question but that these three men were in love with Norma Manning, and that all three of them were jealous in the extreme."

He paused, and then he added, "Also, I find that all three of them are of the temperament capable, under these circumstances, of killing her."

"Sure!" Duffy blurted out. "That's what we figured. But which one of 'em did it?"

Dr. Hasland smiled slightly. "It is up to you to accuse. In the case of these three men, psychologically I find no choice."

I took a look at Jane. Women are certainly more practical than men. Jane's face was wrinkled into a little knot with thought.

"Pete, there ought to be some way I could figure this out. I've been with Dr. Hasland so much," she murmured. "I've learned a lot from him."

"Sure," I whispered skeptically. "Just think up some new psychological angle."

Maybe that did it, at that. "Some new angle!" she echoed. And then her face changed. It changed all in a rush, as though out of darkness she had suddenly been plunged into broad daylight.

She gripped me. "Pete!" she whispered. "I've got it! This problem isn't the psychology of the three men. It's the woman!"

"The woman?"

"Sure. Norma Manning. The psychology of what *she* would do. That's the secret."

Then she was jumping up, pulling me after her. We were near the door. Nobody seemed to notice us, and before I realized it, she had me out in the apartment hall. To say that she was excited

wouldn't describe her condition at all. She was just about incoherent.

"Pete, take me to Norma Manning's bedroom."

It was right here across the hall, with the door standing open. Nobody was in it. "What the devil?" I demanded.

"Pete, listen—no, wait!—Lemme look."

She made for Norma Manning's clothes closet, flung it open. I will say that model had some swell outfits. Coats and hats and every kind of dress you ever heard of were there, all neatly racked. And underneath the clothes I could see rows of shoes, slippers, sandals, just about everything.

JANE was shaking with excitement, as she bent down over the shoes.

"See? She has them here. All kinds."

"Sure," I said. "So what?"

"See? Low-heeled shoes and sandals. You could wear them on a date. Look at the different kinds, all flat, low-heeled."

Well, for a minute you might have thought she'd gone nuts. Then she jumped up, facing me. Her eyes were blazing with the excitement of it.

"Pete, I know which man came here last night!"

"You—what?"

"Sure, I do! Listen, Norma Manning was wearing shoes with spike heels. A good three inches. And not only that, but with platform soles. Remember?"

I remembered it, all right. I remembered thinking how regal she'd look, a tall girl like that, in such shoes.

Jane was pulling me toward the door of the bedroom. "No woman would wear shoes like that, Pete, unless she was going out with a tall man! There's nothing a woman hates more than being taller than her escort. She'll do anything to avoid it."

I got it! That little salesman and the dapper actor were only about Norma's height!

"John Blake, the broker!" I said.

"Sure," Jane said. "He's six feet three, at least. The only one who fits. She just *couldn't* wear those spike heels with the

other two. A woman would rather be caught dead."

"We've got him! That Blake fellow!"

In our excitement I guess we were talking pretty loud. Anyway, as we went through the door into the dim apartment hall, I was aware of a shadowy figure lurking there. It was Blake, and he probably heard just enough to scare the wits out of him.

He ripped out a startled oath, and made a lunge. I guess with an unreasoning panic on him, he must have figured he could get to the hall door and escape.

He might have made it, but Jane seized one of Norma's dresses which was here by the bedroom door on a chair. She flung the dress, and by chance it hit the plunging Blake in the face and head. You can't run too well in a dim hall with a filmy dress slithering around your face and head. Blake staggered, cursing and flailing his arms at it. Which is when I nailed him. The dress didn't stop my fist from connecting neatly with his jaw. He staggered and went down.

I was on him, pummeling the fight out of him, with Jane squealing for me to be careful and not let him hurt me, when Grant, Duffy and the others came on a run. They yanked him out from under me, and with Jane babbling at them how we had spotted him, they went after him with questions. We were right on the lack of premeditation. He was just madly jealous, got into a fight with her and before he knew it, she was dead. Simple as that.

Well, the sudden windup to the thing certainly caused plenty of excitement. They were all telling Jane she was sure a high class psychologist. Even Dr. Hasland was enthusiastic.

"Shucks," Jane said. "Any woman would know that. I just didn't happen to think of it at first."

She was standing beside me. She grinned. "Look what I have to wear with you, Pete," she said. She drew herself up and her eyes and mine were squarely on a level. She held out one foot and wiggled it coyly.

"See," she said. "Baby-toed flatsies!"

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# SHROUD OF GUILT

By ANTHONY TOMPKINS

*Lieutenant Kenneth Loring sent a man to prison awaiting execution—and then had to prove the man was innocent!*

## CHAPTER I

### *Confession*

**T**HEY led Edward Conlin away in handcuffs, a living dead man. The judge and jury had just condemned him. He looked as if he'd hardly live until the due processes of the law snuffed out his life in the electric chair.

The district attorney, who had personally handled the trial, slowly packed his things in an expensive briefcase, picked it up and walked over to where

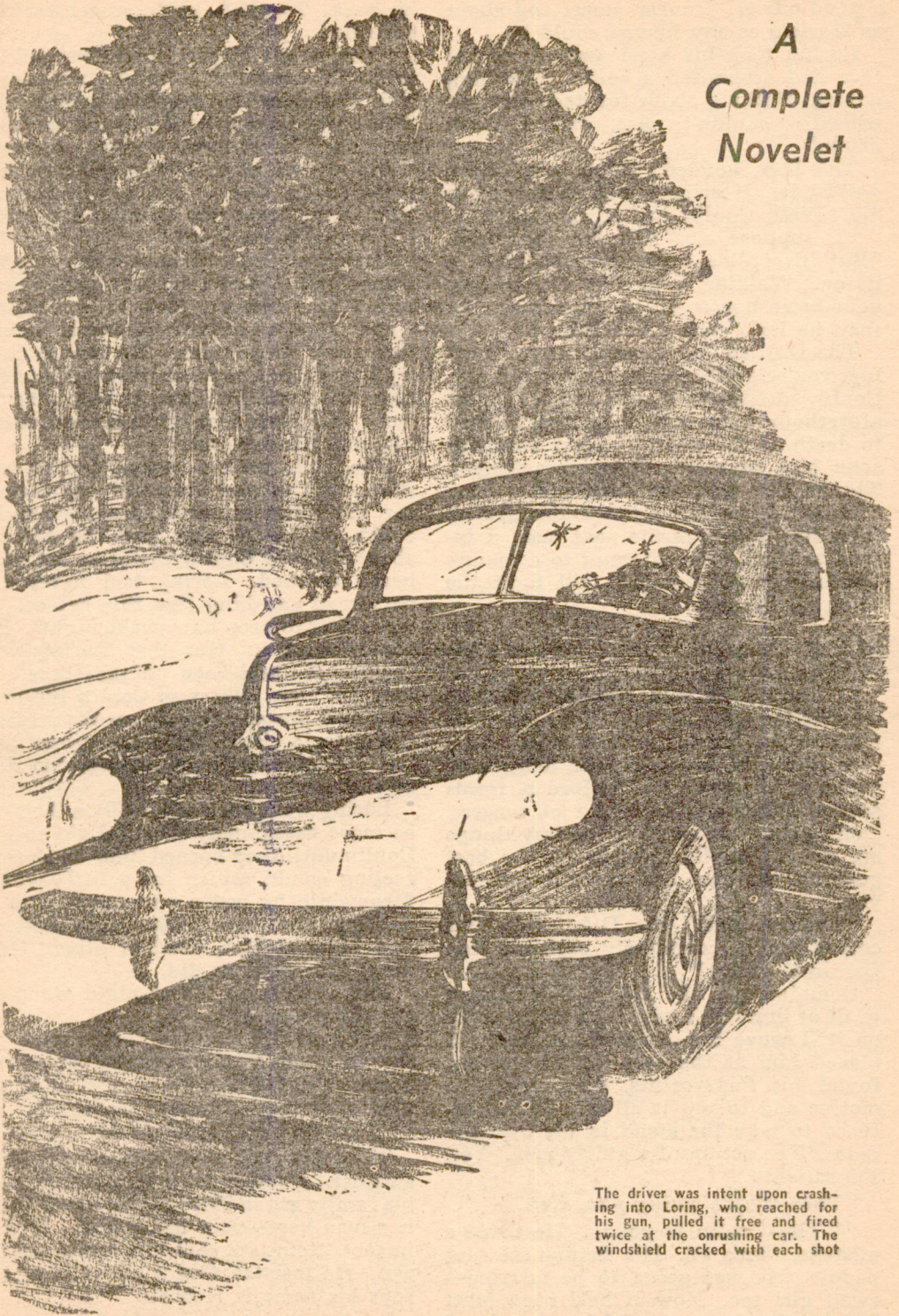
Lieutenant Kenneth Loring still sat, slumped in his chair with a hand over his eyes. The D.A. sat down beside him.

"Something wrong, Loring?" he asked, without a great amount of interest.

Loring was a man of medium build with hair grey at the temples and thin on the top. He had brown eyes, large and deep-set. He'd been a police officer for seventeen years and there was a mild thickness around his middle, but the D.A. and everyone else connected with law enforcement, knew that Loring was



A  
Complete  
Novelet



The driver was intent upon crashing into Loring, who reached for his gun, pulled it free and fired twice at the onrushing car. The windshield cracked with each shot

a good officer. Honest, smart and about as fearless as any human could be.

Loring took his hand away from his face and attempted a smile. "Nothing wrong. Nothing about fourteen straight whiskies couldn't cure, and I don't drink."

The D.A. nodded. "Gets you down, doesn't it? Hearing a man sentenced to die. Well, Conlin had it coming."

"I suppose so," Loring admitted. "But it's still a rotten way to make a living. Walking your feet off, tearing your brain apart—all to kill a man. At that, he isn't such a bad fellow."

The D.A. smiled complacently. "Loring, you're getting soft in your old age. Conlin deliberately and with malice aforethought, strangled Dr. Sam Jordan to death so the worthy doctor wouldn't send him to prison for embezzlement. Things like that are done often. Too often—and we must put a damper on them to discourage the next man. I intend to block every attempt to commute Conlin's death sentence. I'll fight the thing all the way."

**F**OR a moment Loring hesitated before he spoke.

"I know," he said slowly. "There's an election coming up. Your name is high on the list for governorship and a case like this, involving the murder of a man as important as Dr. Jordan, forms several rungs on the ladder of success. Don't get me wrong. It's the way things are done. You'll probably be the best governor we ever had and I'll vote for you."

"Thanks, Ken," the D.A. said. "Of course you're completely satisfied that Conlin is guilty?"

Completely. The thing didn't seem to fit at first. But when I went to work on it, I wove him a shroud of guilt. I placed him at the scene of the crime, found his fingerprints, discovered the motive and to top it all off, Conlin refused to take the stand in his own defense. The action of a guilty man. Yes, I'm satisfied."

"Then what's eating you, Ken?"

"Well—Conlin is young. He made a mistake, that's all. His family are nice people. He was going to be married—swell girl too. Now if he'd been Matt Hebert, for instance, I'd be cheering."

The D.A. arose and fumbled in his pocket for cigarettes. Loring handed up

his pack. The D.A. held a match for the detective.

"You've got Hebert on the brain," he said. "Personally I think he's dead. You shot him that night a month ago. There was enough blood found to show he must have been badly wounded. Certainly he needed surgical care and there isn't a doctor, crooked or honest, who would treat him without reporting it. Hebert is too hot."

Loring sighed. "I hope you're right. Funny thing, how I came to hate a man like I hate Hebert. He's a born killer, a cheat, and an all around crook. I sent him away three times. He always said he'd make me pay for that. He tried. Give the devil his due. It was nothing more than luck that made my bullet hit him and his miss me."

The D.A. walked away. Loring sat there in the now deserted courtroom, for ten more minutes. He wished he could get rid of that rankling feeling about Edward Conlin whom he had just heard doomed. Loring had never experienced anything like this before. It was going to keep him awake nights. He could sense it. Not that Loring was squeamish—he'd been on the force too long for that. Nor was Conlin the first man he'd placed squarely on the road to the electric chair. Only the others had left him cold, without feeling, one way or another.

Loring went back to his office. There'd be more cases, more work. He'd forget Conlin until they burned him. Then that feeling would return for a little while. Meanwhile he had a permanent case if nothing else had broken. He had to find Matt Hebert, dead or alive. He'd never rest until he did.

It was close to ten at night when he got the phone call.

"This is Dr. Pollard," the voice on the wire said, "I'm speaking from the home of a Mr. Argyle at eleven-forty-nine Lakeview Avenue. Got that?"

"I got it. What's the trouble, doctor?"

"The Argyle home is closed up for the summer. I understand Mr. Argyle and his family are in Europe. However there is a man here—very badly hurt. Dying, in fact. Someone shot him, quite awhile ago. He insisted that I phone you. He says his name is Hebert."

Loring closed his eyes and murmured a prayer.

"Doc—that man is a killer. Can he



move? Can he get away from there?"

"Hardly, Lieutenant. I doubt he will live much more than an hour. He says he has something to tell you and that you must come along. I—rather think it best to cater to his whim."

"I'll be there as fast as I can travel, Doc."

Loring hung up, hastily donned his shoulder sling and reached for his hat. Then he hesitated. This could be a trap, set by Hebert. He was quite capable of such a cute trick. Loring looked up Dr. Pollard, called his home and finally satisfied himself that Pollard was an honest man and would be no party to such a scheme on Hebert's part.

Loring used a police cruiser with plenty of siren. Lakeview Avenue was a long way out. He thought, as he drove, that Hebert had found a good hideout for himself in a house deserted for the summer. He still wondered if it could be a trap of some kind.

**T**HE Argyle house was set back from the road and a winding driveway led to the front entrance. A car, with a doctor's emblem beside the marker plate, was parked there. Someone was sitting on the steps and arose as Loring pulled up. The detective pulled his gun and levelled it.

"I'm Dr. Pollard," the man said. "I've been waiting for you. There are certain things you must know about this before you go in to see that man."

Loring climbed out of the car, gun in his fist. "Doc, I'm sorry," he said. "but Hebert has been gunning for me for years. I've got to be sure you aren't part of some scheme. Turn around so I can frisk you."

Pollard was sixty, rotund and a typical family physician. He didn't resent being searched. Loring satisfied himself that the doctor had no weapon.

"The patient has a gun," Dr. Pollard said. "He's dying, is getting weaker, but he can still shoot straight. He swears he will not kill you. All he wants to do is make a confession."

"If he started confessing all his crimes, we'd be here until Christmas, Doc. I smell a rat, but if he's as bad as you say he is, I think I can take a chance."

"He has a bullet through his chest. He didn't have it attended to and the infection is all through his system. It

would be quite useless to remove him to a hospital or to attempt any form of treatment. He's too far gone."

"Lead the way, Doc," Loring said, and kept his gun ready.

They entered the house, walked upstairs to the bedrooms and into what looked like the master bedroom. Hebert was there all right, propped up in bed. His face, shoulders and arms were distinctly yellow from the action of the deadly toxins. His right hand rested on a night table, pulled very close. He had a gun in that hand. It lay flat against the table, but it was pointed at Loring.

Hebert laughed harshly. "Come in, Lieutenant. Put your gun away. I'm not going to shoot unless you make me. Doc—you can scam. My pants are hanging over that chair. In one pocket is a couple of grand. Take all you want. Take the whole roll and I'll go down in history as a very generous patient. Go on, Doc, and then get out of here while I talk to my little pal."

Dr. Pollard hesitated. Loring kept his gun trained on Hebert.

"Go ahead, Doctor," he said. "Take your fee out of his money. You earned it. Then wait outside in your car. And Doc—take enough."

Pollard peeled some bills off a thick roll and departed somewhat hesitantly. Hebert was grinning. His free hand indicated a chair.

"Loring, take a load off your feet. What I've got to say will need a few minutes. Get this—I don't intend to shoot you. I know I couldn't get a bead before you plugged me. Just stay ten feet away, that's all I ask."

"I know I'm dying. The doc says I won't live another hour and I can feel the Old Boy's hot breath on my neck right now. Before I pass out, I want to tell you about a murder job. The neatest little murder you ever heard of. Will you promise to stay quiet and just listen, Lieutenant?"

"Yes," Loring said. "But if you move that gun, I'll shoot."

Hebert chuckled. "I got one of your slugs in me now. That was good shooting, Lieutenant. Just like the old wild west. We stood there, drew, and started pulling triggers. Maybe I rated being the one who was hit. That makes no difference now."

"Get on with it," Loring urged. "You're in bad shape."

"Don't I know it? Lieutenant, I don't mind dying. I thought they'd eventually burn me anyhow and this way is better. When you're dead all your troubles are over, but yours will just start when I croak. You'll wish you were dead a thousand times."

**K**EN LORING'S eyes narrowed. Whatever it was that Hebert was to tell him, he had the feeling it would be the truth. The dying man was breathing hard. Apparently he'd stored up all his strength for this final moment and it was going fast.

"I was finished when your slug hit me," he said. "I guess I knew it then. I didn't dare call a doc. Not until I was sure I was a goner. Then I crawled to the phone. I also crawled to the street and mailed a letter. That was this morning and it's already been delivered. That's important. Remember it. Lieutenant, they sent Conlin to the chair today, didn't they?"

"Yes," Loring said with growing horror.

"Good. He'll die all right. They'll burn his britches off. The night it happens be around my grave, Lieutenant. Listen good and you'll hear me laughing."

"I think you're crazy," Loring said abruptly.

"I'm as sane as you are," Hebert countered. "Listen—Conlin didn't kill Dr. Jordan. He mugged him up and left him unconscious. Then he beat it and that's when I and another guy happened along. You see this other guy wanted me to help him tap Dr. Jordan's safe.

"We did too—and you never even knew it. We got thirteen grand out of it. Dough the Doc had been holding out from taxes. The guy with me sized things up fast. He told me to finish what Conlin had started. So I just strangled the Doc. It was a cinch. For that I got all the dough."

Loring laughed. "Hebert, it won't work. You've hated me for years. I'm directly responsible for your death. I wouldn't believe a word you say. Go on and describe the murder scene. So what? It was described in every newspaper. Conlin was found guilty and he is guilty."

"Says you," Hebert grinned. "Lieutenant, there were a couple of things no newspaper ever printed. Which

didn't come out in the trial and which only investigating police—and the murderer—could know about. For instance, Jordan's coat had the lining ripped out. Am I right?"

Loring nodded. That horrible feeling was growing more intense.

"Sure," Hebert went on. "We wanted to find the combination to his safe. He was forgetful and had the combo sewed into his clothes. We found it. That's how we opened the safe without leaving a trace. Another thing—the phone was off the hook. Right, Lieutenant?"

"You were there," Loring said hoarsely.

"Sure, me and my pal. Jordan was clawing for the phone when we found him. Lieutenant, don't get up. I'll shoot if you move. You're staying until I croak or pass into a coma. One or the other and nobody can make me talk again."

Loring carefully aimed the gun he held. Hebert laughed at him and Loring had to mentally acknowledge his impotence.

"Go on—put one through my head," Hebert said. "What's the difference? I'm dying anyhow. Relax, Lieutenant. Enjoy yourself because from here on you worry."

"What's the pitch, Hebert?" Loring asked.

"It's simple. Two things are going to happen. Conlin is going to die an innocent man and you put him in the chair. How does that make you feel? Do you think you can convince anybody that he is innocent—that I made a deathbed confession? Do you think the D.A. will believe a word of it—when he's using the case as a springboard to the governor's mansion? Lieutenant, you're sunk."

Conlin dies an innocent man—you think," Loring said. "What's the second brain child you hatched?"

"That letter I managed to mail. Loring, I'm slipping. I can feel myself going. Come a little closer . . . closer . . ."

Loring got up. He no longer bothered with his gun. Hebert's hand slipped off the night table. There was no longer any danger of his opening fire. The man was very obviously dying.

Hebert's voice became a weak cackle. "The letter . . . sent it to my pal. Guy who was with me and who told me to knock off Jordan. Yeah . . . him. I told

him . . . in letter . . . I was going to . . . confess the whole thing . . . to you. I told him he'd better . . . bump you off or you'd get . . . him. Like you . . . me . . ."

Hebert's eyes closed, but he was still alive and conscious. He began to laugh. It sounded as if it came from the very depths of Hades with a backgrounded symphony of a million devils joining in. The laugh grew weaker, stopped, and was replaced by a rasping sound. Loring ran out of the room and called Dr. Pollard.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Guilty or the Innocent*



LORING told his story and the district attorney heard him out. He said, "Lieutenant, Conlin was tried and found guilty. He offered no defense, didn't even take the witness stand. He had motive, opportunity and no alibi. He refused to talk even to help himself. Every action was that of a guilty man. Hebert is a crook—a killer of the worst type. What he told you was for the express purpose of getting revenge. He thought you'd worry for years over the fact that you may have sent an innocent man to the chair. It seems he was right."

"You'll do nothing, then?" Loring asked quietly.

"Why should I? To do so would only establish the fact that I was as much to blame as you for convicting an innocent man. If I thought he was innocent, things might be different."

Loring arose. "Thanks anyway. I'm going ahead with it until I'm certain beyond the slightest doubt."

The D.A. gave him a sour glance. Loring returned to where his car was parked, drove to Headquarters and established the fact that Edward Conlin had already been taken to prison. Loring then undertook the long drive upstate to where the prison was located.

His authority succeeded in breaking prison rules and he was escorted to a small, bare room. Ten minutes later Edward Conlin was led in. Loring arose and advanced slowly on the condemned man.

"Conlin, I'm the man who arrested you and probably did as much as anyone

to convict you," he said. "At the moment you are less than a hundred steps from the electric chair. Your appeal will be denied, no application for clemency will be granted. You'll be dead in less than twelve weeks."

"Does that surprise you?" Conlin asked stolidly.

"Drop your resentment. I want to help you. Cops are paid to apprehend the guilty, but they're also supposed to make certain the people they nab really are guilty. I've had doubts about you—vague ones. You refused to testify at your own trial which is an admission of guilt. I think you're holding back for some reason. Did you kill Dr. Jordan? You can answer now. It won't incriminate you any further, and it might help. Did you kill him?"

Conlin gave no indication of hope. "Yes—I killed him. Everything was right. I stole some of his money and he was going to send me to jail. I tried to argue—to plead with him. It was no use. I lost my head and grabbed him by the throat—"

"How long did you choke him?"

"I don't know. Things were hazy. I let go finally and he fell to the floor."

"Did you feel of his pulse? Did you make certain he wasn't breathing?"

"I—got out of there. I was scared."

"Whom did you phone before you left? The receiver was off the hook."

"Phone? No one. The phone was on its cradle last I knew."

"Why did you rip out the lining of Dr. Jordan's coat after you killed him?"

Conlin shook his head slowly from side to side. "You and all the other cops asked me that a thousand times. I didn't rip the lining of his clothes. Not unless I did it without knowing. Why should I have torn his coat?"

Loring turned away. He wanted to give this man hope. To tell him there had been a confession to the crime for which he'd been convicted. But it was impossible. Conlin had been through enough without that. For there wasn't an inkling of proof yet—not a shred, and to lend a man fresh hope and then have it vanish—Loring decided against it. Conlin had told him all he knew. That he believed he'd killed Dr. Jordan, but he hadn't made certain of it. Therefore Matt Hebert's story had the elements of credibility.

The prisoner shuffled toward the door.

Loring called him to a halt. "You worked for Dr. Jordan. You were around his office a lot. Who would know the identities of people who hated him?"

CONLIN'S dejected shoulders perked up a bit. "Lieutenant—you've got a reason for asking me all these questions. It can't be to harm me for a condemned man is beyond all other punishment. Therefore, you've got a lead on something. You're trying to help me."

"Just answer my question," Loring suggested, "and start helping yourself. You never did at the trial."

Conlin was quivering with excitement now. "There's Mary Mitchell—the office nurse. All visitors had to pass her. She even recognized the voices of lots of patients over the phone. Lieutenant, what are you trying to do? Tell me. I've got to know."

"I'm trying to see that justice is done," Loring said slowly. "If you killed Jordan, you'll die for it. If you didn't, I want to find out before it's too late. Don't summon too much hope. The odds against you are fantastic."

He hurried out before Conlin could ply him with any more questions. During the long drive back to the city, Loring thought it all over. If he abandoned the whole thing, nobody would ever doubt his judgment. If Conlin was found innocent after his execution, he had no one to blame but himself for he'd evaded questions, lied and hampered all avenues of investigation. Loring knew why now. Conlin had been convinced of his own guilt.

Mary Mitchell lived in one of the tall downtown apartment buildings. Once very fashionable, it now catered to people in more moderate circumstances and sprawling suites had been chopped into several smaller ones. She recognized Loring at once.

"Come in, Lieutenant," She stepped aside for him.

She was well past forty, thin and prim looking. Her apartment was homey and comfortable. Mary Mitchell had never gone to any extreme in showing sorrow for Dr. Jordan.

"He was a good employer," she explained. "I took complete charge of the office and I knew how to stall people and refuse house calls nicely enough so that patients were not antagonized. Dr. Jordan, you know, had other in-

terests. But I can't say I ever liked the man."

"Miss Mitchell, suppose we assume that Edward Conlin was wrongfully convicted of killing Jordan," Loring said. "Upon such a supposition we must begin our investigation all over again and I want to do just that."

"But he is guilty—" she started to say.

"Yes, I agree," Loring cut in. "Even Conlin himself thinks he is guilty, but there are certain phases I must run down. I particularly want to know who hated Jordan. I mean hated him enough to kill him."

She stared off into space. "There's no reason why I shouldn't answer. I liked Conlin. He chauffeured the doctor and did all sorts of odd jobs. He stole money, but Jordan was a penny-pincher and paid him little enough. Yes, people hated Dr. Jordan. John Rowley openly threatened to kill him one day about six months ago."

"Who is this Rowley?" Loring asked.

"A scientist of some sort. He maintains a laboratory and invents things. Dr. Jordan paid him a meagre sum for an article that proved to be very valuable and then refused him a share in the profits. Rowley is a small man with big glasses, but I'd never seen such hatred in a man's eyes as that which shone through those lenses."

Loring made a note of the name. "Anyone else?" he asked.

SHE winced. "I'll be breaking professional silence, Lieutenant, if I talk any more."

"When a man's life is at stake, I think professional silence can be disregarded," Loring told her.

"There is a patient. A man named William Fletcher. Dr. Jordan treated him for a stomach ailment, but Jordan wasn't interested in the case and at the time he was over his head in commercializing some of the inventions he bought. I would say that Dr. Jordan was careless. Fletcher had a malignant tumor and it went beyond the stage of cure. If Dr. Jordan had diagnosed the case properly, Fletcher might not be doomed. He came in one day and I had to pull him off the doctor. He was a virtual madman and I have never blamed him."

"Anyone else?" Loring asked.

It was amazing how many angles there were to run down. Possibilities which had existed all along, but no one thought of them with a man like Conlin practically convicted of the crime.

"No, Lieutenant. Dr. Jordan's brother-in-law came to the office a lot, but you'd hardly suspect him and he was dependent upon Dr. Jordan for money. He imagines himself too ill to work. His ailment is plain laziness. In fact I doubt he could have aroused enough ambition to kill anyone. Now Philip Brockway—I'm sorry. That was a slip."

"You wouldn't want to continue with that slip of the tongue, Miss Mitchell?"

"I'd rather not. Unless—you find my information absolutely essential. It has nothing to do with anyone else you mentioned."

Loring had enough. He thanked her, returned to his car and drove to the home of the late Dr. Jordan.

### CHAPTER III

#### *Dangerous Trails*



IT WAS indicative of Dr. Jordan's wealth for the place was ample, set far back with a curving drive to the door and even by night showed how well kept it was. Loring stopped some distance from the porch because there was a car parked directly in front.

He approached, walking softly on the cement pavement, not trying to conceal his approach but making little noise anyway. He reached the bottom step and looked up. The front door was wide open and only a screen door in place.

A hall light illuminated the two figures just inside the door. A man and a woman, with their arms around one another. Loring quickly moved back. He waited three or four minutes and the pair came out on the porch. The man was tall, black-haired and sleek. The woman Loring knew and he thought that Mr. Jordan's grief for her dead husband had abated quickly.

The man got into the car parked before the door, switched on the lights and backed up. Then he stopped, got out of the car and walked over to Loring's. He looked keenly at the registration plates which gave no indication it

was an official car. Then he peered around the darkness and finally got back into his own car and drove off. Loring took its plate numbers.

Mrs. Jordan answered the door and behind her slouched Toby Barron, her brother who had been characterized as lazy by Miss Mitchell, the nurse. By his casual amble, drooped shoulders and sullen face he looked the picture she had described.

"Why, it's Lieutenant Loring," Mrs. Jordan exclaimed when she saw her visitor. "What in the world brings you here?"

Whoever the departing guest had been, Loring didn't blame the man much. Mrs. Jordan was alluringly trim, skilled in the art of makeup with plenty of natural beauty besides.

Loring sat down in the spacious living room. "We're a little puzzled by certain new aspects of your husband's murder," he explained. "Things have cropped up and we've renewed our investigation. I particularly want to know who profited by his death. You, of course, Mrs. Jordan, were his heir. Was there anyone else? Like your brother, for instance?"

She shook her head. "I was the sole heir. Everything he had is now mine. You seem to be casting insinuations, Lieutenant. I don't like it."

Toby Barron gave a short laugh. "Alicia, they have the murderer in a death cell properly convicted. The Lieutenant is obviously trying to clean up some loose ends. Of course he means nothing and I certainly don't resent him asking these questions."

"Thanks," Loring said. "I most certainly do not intend to hint that Mrs. Jordan had anything to do with the doctor's death. As you said—these are loose ends. Do you know John Rowley, a scientist? Or William Fletcher, who was one of Dr. Jordan's patients?"

Neither did and said so. Loring already knew that Jordan had rarely talked business at home. There seemed to be nothing further to gain so he got away as gracefully as possible. He'd already checked the addresses of his two suspects—Rowley and Fletcher—and decided to visit the sick man first.

Fletcher had his own home in a suburban area across the river. A neat place, not big but substantial looking. A woman with very myopic eyes let him in and finally led him upstairs to a room

where Fletcher lay in bed. It was plain that the man was extremely ill. His face already had the greyness of approaching death. Loring sat down beside the bed.

"I'm the Homicide man in charge of investigating Dr. Jordan's murder. We already have our man convicted but there are certain aspects of the case which do not satisfy us. Mr. Fletcher, I know you are very ill and I hate to make you undergo this. Say the word and I'll leave at once."

**F**LETCHER'S tight lips spread in a slow grin. "I'll be darned." He laughed shrilly. "You found out that I blame Jordan for my condition. Which I do. If he'd been competent and careful, I wouldn't be this way today. Now do you want me to tell you whether or not I killed him?"

"If it would help your conscience any," Loring said. "And you might also tell me where you were the night when Jordan was strangled."

"I didn't kill him though I meant to. I don't mind admitting it. At first I thought of going to his office and shooting him, but I became too weak. Then I thought I'd call him here and shoot him while he examined me. I even have the gun."

He raised one hand weakly, managed to open a night table drawer and tried to lift out a heavy automatic. He couldn't quite manage. The gun fell back into the drawer and his arm dropped to the bed.

"I don't know where I was the night Jordan died. I wish I'd been there. Believe me, I'd have been the best coat holder you ever saw and considered it an honor to help the murderer in any way possible."

Loring excused himself, started downstairs again and mistook a stairway leading out of the house. He corrected himself and found Mrs. Fletcher in the living room. She was eager to talk and while blaming Jordan no whit less than her husband did, she stated in very certain terms that if she believed her husband had been serious about killing off the doctor, she would have stopped him if it meant calling in the police. She recalled that on the night of the murder he'd been at home.

Loring gave up. He walked down the path to where his car was parked. As he reached for the door, the bullet

crashed through the window. Loring whirled around, ducked and did a nose dive toward the dense hedges bordering the yard. His own gun was in his fist. He crawled toward the path. The gun flamed again and Loring saw that whoever shot at him, did so from the window of the sick man's room.

The third bullet came even closer. Somewhere in the distance Loring heard a prowling car siren start up. The officers in the cruising police car must have been near enough to hear the shots. He raised his head cautiously, but it was too dark to see anything.

The lights in Fletcher's room had gone out.

Loring stood erect, raced down the path and up onto the porch. Mrs. Fletcher, frantic with excitement, let him in. Loring rushed past her, pounded up the stairs and felt the breeze from the open door he'd almost gone through by mistake a few moments before.

He hurried into Fletcher's room. The man's body was twitching. His head and shoulders were covered by a pillow hastily pushed down as if to smother him. Loring yanked it off. He called to Mrs. Fletcher to get a doctor quickly. The radio cops who responded were sent prowling to look for whoever had done this.

Fletcher was conscious before the doctor arrived. On the floor beneath his window lay the automatic he'd exhibited to Loring. There were three slugs missing. Fletcher's story was simple enough to be true—or simple enough to be the lies of a shrewd man. He claimed that someone stepped up to the bed from behind, pulled the covers over his head, yanked the pillow out and pressed it down on his face. Loring let the physician take over and went downstairs.

He asked Mrs. Fletcher one question more. "How well off are you and your husband? It's very important that I know."

"Why," she said, "we're not millionaires, but there's enough. Some might even say we were quite wealthy. I'll be frank and admit my husband's money runs to six figures."

"Good," Loring said. "I hope they can do something for him. What happened tonight was not an attempt on his life, but upon mine. There is nothing for you to worry about."

## CHAPTER IV

*Men With Motives*

THERE were no signs of a prowler and Loring drove back to the city. There he checked with the motor vehicle department and discovered that the car which Mrs. Jordan's visitor had used was registered under the name of Philip Brockway, the name which the nurse had uttered and then decided not to amplify. There was also a criminal record on Philip Brockway with his picture attached so Loring made an easy identification. Brockway had been arrested for running gambling houses, on suspicion of larceny and suspicion of homicide.

The facts of the last charge showed that one of Brockway's enemies had been hit by a car and left to die. Brockway's sedan had shown signs of striking something, but he promptly brought forth witnesses who swore to an accident in which Brockway had been involved, accounting thereby for the bent fender. The whole thing smacked of collusion, but there hadn't been evidence enough to convict and Brockway had finally been let go.

Loring telephoned Mary Mitchell, the nurse. She would have the answers. There was no reply and Loring felt considerable apprehension. Enough so that he used the siren on his car. He rang Mary Mitchell's bell, waited about one minute and then crashed the door.

The nurse lay face down in the middle of the living room. The back of her head was smashed and a heavy metal vase, blood-stained, lay beside her. There were no signs of a fight. Loring cursed bitterly, put through a call to the Homicide Bureau and stayed around long enough to learn the vase bore no fingerprints.

He questioned other people living in the building. No one had seen any visitor or heard any loud voices. He called two detectives, gave them Philip Brockway's name and last known address.

"Pick him up," he ordered, "and hold him incommunicado. I'll be at Headquarters as soon as I can. And if you nail him at his home, you might see to it that the door is left unlocked. I want to look the place over."

Loring felt particularly low as he departed. The murder of that nurse hadn't been anything he could have prevented, but he'd liked her and her death might make the case unsolvable.



JOHN ROWLEY also lived in a more or less suburban area. There were huge apartment houses nearby, but a few ancient private dwellings as well. Rowley occupied one of these and the moment Loring stepped inside, he knew that Rowley also used the premises as a laboratory. The place reeked of chemicals.

Rowley was sixty, one of those small men with a firecracker temper and an antagonistic attitude. He didn't like Loring's presence and told him so.

"The murder of Dr. Jordan is wide open and you're very high on our list of suspects," Loring said. "We know that you threatened to kill him."

Rowley quieted down instantly. He also sat down slowly, unhinging himself bit by bit.

"Yes—I threatened to kill him. The nurse heard me," he said. "She is the only one and she must have told you. I meant it too—at the time. Jordan cheated me and boasted about it afterwards."

"He made a lot of money out of your invention," Loring said. "Money you undoubtedly needed."

Rowley gave a cackling laugh. "Don't judge my finances by this place. I'm an old man and a bachelor. I don't go for fancy stuff and I didn't need the money. I'm a rich man. It was the principle of the thing that made me so angry."

"Suppose you tell me where you have been for the last three hours, Mr. Rowley?"

He frowned. "Right here. Quite alone. I don't know what has happened, but if I need an alibi I haven't got one."

"And the night of Jordan's murder?"

"That was long ago. I can't recall. It's likely I was here then too—and without witnesses to back me up. I like solitary life. I don't want people around when I'm working in my laboratory. I happen to be working now, Lieutenant."

Loring grinned. "I'll take the hint. Oh yes, what bank would back up your statement about not needing money?"

The inventor told him, half angrily, and slammed the door when Loring went out. The detective drove to the apartment house where Philip Brockway lived. He occupied a penthouse suite and

was considered wealthy by the sleepy night clerk on duty. Loring took the elevator upstairs and found his two detectives camped in the corridor. Brockway hadn't come home.

"Stay with it," Loring ordered. "If he doesn't show up by morning, send for two relief men. I'll radio a general pickup order for him too. And watch yourselves, boys. He could be a killer."

It was well after four when Loring finished his report and headed for the little white cottage where he lived alone. He let himself in, pondered making coffee and decided against it. He'd need as much sleep as possible to be fresh the next day and it was already dawn.

He thought about the affair while he undressed and brushed his teeth. He thought about it in bed, staring up at the dark ceiling. It was no use trying to sleep and he wished he'd never bothered to come home. Gradually though, he dozed a bit and succeeded in putting most of the complex questions out of his mind.

He heard the heavy thump, sat erect and blinked sleepily as he reached for the gun in a shoulder sling hanging from the back of a chair close by. There was a roar. Flaming particles of some highly combustible chemical went hissing to all parts of the room. One struck his arm and seared it painfully.

This was no ordinary fire that resulted. It was a blaze abetted by war-discovered chemicals which were meant to consume anything they encountered in a minimum length of time. Loring found his shoes and hurled them out of the window.

He scooped up his trousers and coat, managed to get the shoulder sling off the chair and headed for the window. The curtains were already blazing and there were half a dozen miniature fires eating at the windowsill.

**W**HEN they merged, there'd be no escape. Passage to the door was blocked by a sheet of the hottest flame Loring had ever encountered. He clambered through the first floor window, slipped into his clothes and put on his shoes.

Neighbors had heard the explosion. Lights were on in nearby houses and someone called that the fire department had already been notified. Loring waited until they arrived and told them about

the chemicals. They got it out by using smothering blankets of chemical clouds. Water only seemed to add to the fury of the flames.

The bedroom was gutted, but otherwise the house hadn't suffered too much. The phone was still in working order. Loring called Headquarters and had two men dispatched to check on John Rowley and bring him in. That fire had been the work of someone well acquainted with combustibles and an inventor with a lab was an ideal suspect.

They found pieces of the bomb. It was a simple affair as they reconstructed it. Just a tin can with some sort of an attached detonator like a hand grenade. There wasn't enough left to be of any aid in tracing the lethal bomb.

At Headquarters they had John Rowley waiting in his office. Rowley admitted knowledge of fire bombs and that he owned the necessary ingredients to make one. He angrily denied being responsible for the attempted murder, but he had no alibi. Loring ordered him held.

Then, when it was after nine in the morning, he did some checking with banks. Rowley hadn't exaggerated his financial worth nor had William Fletcher's wife. They were very well off. Philip Brockway, too, was wealthy enough though the sources of his income were highly questionable. He still ran gambling places and would dabble in anything profitable whether it was within the law or not.

Brockway was brought in shortly afterwards. He was self-assured, sneering and demanding an attorney. He claimed that he'd been at one of his outlying places, refused to identify it further and claimed his car broke down in a lonely spot and he couldn't find help. Loring sent out men to check this statement. Then he really went to work on Brockway.

"You and Mrs. Jordan are more than casual friends," he accused. "And I don't mean since the doctor's murder. He paid little attention to his wife, but you did. Are you going to marry her, Brockway?"

"That's none of your business and I won't answer any questions until you let me send for my lawyer," Brockway raged.

Loring decided Brockway required cooling off. "The murder of Dr. Jordan has been re-opened," he said. "We're



looking for a new suspect and you add up, Brockway. You're in love with his wife—or the doctor's estate. Maybe both. Now you seem on your way to getting them. I could sew you up on a murder rap right now. I will do just that unless you talk."

Brockway's eyes opened very wide and for a moment he had a hard time removing a fear induced paralysis that gripped his throat.

He clutched the arms of his chair tightly and bit his lip.

"Listen, copper, I didn't jump Jordan," he said finally. "It didn't matter to me whether he was dead or alive. Like you said, he paid no attention to his wife.

"She met me at one of my gambling places. We liked each other. Sure she inherited a lot of dough. About half of what I'm worth. Maybe Jordan knew she was seeing me. I don't think he'd care much. The only person he liked was himself. I didn't knock him off. That's straight, copper."

"Maybe," Loring said, "Mrs. Jordan was a bit impetuous."

**B**ROCKWAY'S eyes blazed. "If I thought I could get away with it, I'd bust you one, Loring. Listen, I've calmed down. Maybe I don't operate exactly under the law, but I'm no cheap crook any more. I don't have to be."

"You were locked up on suspicion of murder before," Loring then reminded him.

"Okay, I was. But they let me go. Think that one over, copper. They had nothing on me."

Loring arose. "I'm still going to hold you. Squawk all you like. And you might start thinking up alibis. For the night Jordan was murdered and for last night. From nine o'clock right through until dawn. When you decide to talk, let Sergeant Grady know."

Brockway slid as far back in his chair as possible. He lost most of his arrogance. "Listen, copper, to alibi myself for last night and maybe the night Jordan was killed, means telling you about certain things I can't reveal without giving away the location of—well, one or two of my joints. That's where I was. I work all night—every night."

"Suit yourself," Loring shrugged. "With your record and reputation you really need an alibi. And don't forget—

Sergeant Grady will check it very carefully."

Loring reported to his inspector's office and related every detail of the case. "Two attempts have been made on my life. Just as Hebert intended. He tipped the real murderer off so he'd kill me. That's what Hebert really wanted. Whether or not Conlin fries made little difference to him. And now I'm convinced that Conlin is innocent. That he attacked Dr. Jordan and thought he'd killed him. You can't burn a man for attempted murder."

The inspector was old, wise and patient. "You're probably right, Loring. We're not working against a deadline. Conlin won't be executed for weeks and we already have enough to get a stay if necessary. Whom do you think did it?"

"I don't know—with any degree of certainty, Inspector. My suspects all look good with the exception of Fletcher who didn't have strength enough to even lift a gun, let alone get out of bed and shoot from the window at me. I am convinced that he is telling the truth."

"And Rowley? The inventor?"

"He has a good motive—he threatened Jordan's life. He admitted he knew the murdered nurse heard his threats. He could have made the fire bomb and he has absolutely no alibis at all worth mentioning."

"We'll keep him on ice. What of Brockway?"

"He was seeing Jordan's wife and freely confesses to that. He could have killed Jordan to clear the way for marrying the widow. She could even have done it on her own, or with Brockway's help. He'll break down pretty soon and establish his alibis. They'll be good too—unless you keep him from making contact with any of the wise boys who work for him."

"We can hold him forty-eight hours, Loring, and that will be done. But what if he clears himself?"

Loring spread his hands in a gesture of resignation. "I expect him to. We have three suspects, but not one fills the bill. Not the way I want it. So I'm starting out again. This time with Mrs. Jordan and her brother. He has no motive that I know of so far and he doesn't seem the type, but you never can tell. He's lazy and being lazy is an art and comfort that he might commit murder to retain."

## CHAPTER V

*The Third Attempt at Murder*

RS. JORDAN wore a pale blue housecoat and her blonde hair was sleekly arranged in an upsweep. She wasn't happy to see Lieutenant Loring and showed it. Toby Barron, in the background as usual, didn't indicate pleasure, displeasure, or anything else. He smoked a cigarette through a long ivory holder and the lids of his eyes were lazily half lowered.

"Mrs. Jordan, the murder of your husband is wide open again," Loring said. "We are now convinced that Conlin did not kill him."

"You convicted Conlin," Mrs. Jordan countered.

"The best of us make mistakes, Mrs. Jordan. In this case we were lucky enough to try and rectify it before Conlin was executed."

Toby Barron took a puff on his cigarette, blew the smoke slowly in a cloud directed at Loring.

"Lieutenant, I have deeply sympathized with Conlin ever since he was arrested," he said. "In fact Conlin and I were good friends. He drove me about quite often—until the doctor put a stop to that. I talked with Conlin after he was first arrested. He confessed to me that he had killed the doctor. I believed him. I still do."

Loring nodded. "The complicating feature of the case is that Conlin honestly is convinced he did murder the doctor. Mrs. Jordan, where is Philip Brockway?"

"Philip?" Her eyes were wide open with a light of sudden horror in them. "He—he has nothing to do with this. Nothing at all, I tell you."

"When did you see him last, Mrs. Jordan?"

"I don't know. A day or two ago I think—"

Loring glanced at Toby Barron. "If you don't mind, I think Mrs. Jordan would rather talk to me privately. I won't need you again."

Toby shrugged, arose and casually ambled out of the room. He closed the door behind him. Loring turned to Mrs. Jordan once more.

"You have known Brockway for some

time," Loring said. "You probably are aware of what he is and it isn't my job to warn you against him. But Brockway was once suspected of murder. He had a good reason for killing Dr. Jordan. You are that reason. Do you want to co-operate with us or shall I just go ahead without any regard to how you become involved?"

She suddenly broke into a fit of sobbing. Loring waited patiently until it passed. She dried her eyes.

"I'll help," she said, "because I shall never believe Philip killed my husband. He had no reason to. My husband cared very little what I did. He lived only for himself and I was merely something to show off. He was a close-fisted, arrogant man. I have never grieved for him. He treated my brother abominably and said he was lazy and not ill. Toby is ill. He can't work. I promised my mother I would take care of him."

"I see," Loring reflected. "Brockway, incidentally, has been here after the moment he learned we were hunting for him. You might as well admit that."

"All right, he was here. Yes, I hid him, but he became tired of it. He left and I thought he was going to give himself up. I haven't heard from him since."

"Miss Mitchell knew of your attachment for Brockway, didn't she?"

"Yes," Mrs. Jordan admitted. "She was a prying busybody. When I learned she had been mur-murdered, I became very frightened. Philip and I had talked about her just before it happened. He swore he did not kill her. Can't you see—Philip has changed. He told me all about his past. I know it is unsavory and his hands are not entirely clean now, but he is not a murderer."

Loring arose. "Thank you, Mrs. Jordan. You've been very helpful."

SHE clutched at his arm. "You don't think I killed my husband? Philip said you might start thinking that. . ."

He smiled at her. "I know, without the slightest question, that you did not kill him and that you are in no way willingly involved in this. Don't worry. I'll be back if anything further develops."

His car was still parked in front. Loring got in and drove off. Mrs. Jordan stood on the porch until he lost sight of her in the rear view mirror. Once on the highway, he stepped on the gas hard, did a little praying and got the speed up to

seventy. Five miles from the house, he slowed up and looked for a side road he knew of. He turned into it, came to a stop and wiped perspiration from his forehead. Then he got out and started inspecting the car very carefully. It took him no more than two minutes to find the slow leak in the rear left tire.

He opened the back of the car, dragged out the jack and the tire changing tools and put on the spare as fast as he could do so. He tossed the tools on the back seat, turned around and headed toward town once more. Scarcely five minutes had been consumed in the operation.

Three miles further along the rather lonesome highway, he pulled well over to the side of the road and got out again. He slipped the jack beneath the rear axle, but didn't jack the car up. He laid the tire tools on the road and bent toward the wheel as if he was hard at work making the tire change.

He heard the car coming, but didn't turn around. It traveled at a fast clip, but the motor revved up to its highest pitch as it drew closer. Loring suddenly straightened, whirled and saw Philip Brockway's sedan bearing down on him. The driver was intent upon crashing into him. Pinning him against the police sedan. Loring's right hand reached for his gun, pulled it free and he fired twice at the onrushing car. He saw the windshield crack with each shot.

Loring gave a sideward jump that carried him clear. The big sedan gave a crazy lurch, straightened up and missed the police car by an inch. It kept going down the highway.

Loring was after it quickly. The police car was souped up for speed and he rapidly gained on the fleeing murderer. He also had the advantage of a siren which cleared aside the little traffic he encountered. Gradually the distance between the two cars dwindled. Loring reached for his gun again, held the wheel with his right hand and poked the gun out of the window with his left. He was no southpaw, but his second shot punctured the rear window.

The sedan ahead lurched wildly, but it didn't slow down. Loring aimed at the gas tank and spotted a trail of gasoline. Yet that wouldn't stop the killer for miles. He tried for the tires.

Brake lights flashed. The killer was going to try and make a turn. At this dizzy speed it would be impossible, but

the killer was desperate. Loring's car weaved as he applied brakes too, but he didn't attempt that turn. The killer did, without a chance of making it. Brockway's big sedan rocked once and fell over on its side. The momentum kept it going, cutting down small trees and shrubs off the side road.

Loring finally brought his car to a stop, shifted into reverse and backed up fast. He jumped out, gun ready. He saw a hand reach through the toppled car window. It clutched weakly at the window frame. Then a head appeared.

Loring levelled his gun. "Push both hands through, Toby, and make sure they are empty," he said. "I've got a perfect bead on you."

**H**ALF an hour later Toby Barron sat in the inspector's office. One wrist was cuffed to the arm of the chair he occupied. He was a snarling, defiant man now with no trace of that indolence which had characterized every move he'd made so far.

"He's the man who killed Dr. Jordan and Mary Mitchell, Inspector," Loring said.

"Good," the Inspector approved. "Can you prove it?"

"I think so, sir. Toby had no apparent motive, but it was there. Dr. Jordan probably threatened to throw him out of the house. Jordan wasn't fooled by the pretended chronic illness which forced Toby into a life of indolence. Mrs. Jordan did not know—or wouldn't let herself believe it if she suspected. Toby didn't want to lose his soft life. Though I'll say this much—he didn't have murder on his mind when he and Hebert went to Jordan's office.

"They were after money. Cash which Jordan kept on hand. Money he didn't deposit because he was holding it out of his taxes. Only someone very close to Jordan would have known that. Hebert was a safe cracker. Somehow Toby met him.

"They went to the office and found Jordan there, sick and half dead from the strangling Conlin had started, but never finished. Jordan was trying to use the phone to call for help. That's why it was off the cradle. Toby sensed what it was all about—or Jordan told him. Toby then convinced Hebert to finish what Conlin started and if he killed Jordan, he could have all the money.

"Hebert didn't mind. He killed Jordan under Toby's direction. They ripped the doctor's clothing in a search for the combination he kept sewed into his clothes. They found it, took the money out of the safe and slipped away quietly."

"How did you get onto Toby's trail?" the inspector wanted to know.

"By a simple process of elimination. Hebert told me about the money he got. Now Hebert and the man behind him originally went to get that money because Hebert's associate must have needed it. Yet, this associate was willing to give it all to Hebert if he killed Jordan. Therefore he must have known very well that he wouldn't require that money if Jordan was dead. So we have Toby—whose sister would inherit the doctor's fortune and take good care of him from then on.

"Also, none of the other suspects needed money. At least not the few thousands which Hebert got and his associate was originally intent upon getting. Fletcher is wealthy. So are Rowley and Brockway. Eliminate Mrs. Jordan and the only suspect left is Toby. Besides, he knew I'd seen Mary Mitchell and he was aware that she knew a good deal. Just how much he wasn't certain, but he decided she had to be silenced. Whoever killed the nurse was well known to her and she trusted him. There was no evidence of a fight.

"But he had to kill me, too, because Hebert had written him that I would know most of the story and I was bound

to re-open the case. Toby followed me to Fletcher's and used a back stairway to get in. He overheard me talking to Fletcher, knew that the man had a gun and had used it to shoot at me when I left the house.

"Next he prepared a fire bomb—or bought one somewhere. That was to throw suspicion upon Rowley. I guessed that he'd try to kill me again and if he followed the pattern he'd already set, it would be by a method which Brockway might use."

"The auto accident—hit-and-run stuff?" the inspector asked.

"That's it. I let Toby think that Brockway was free and hiding. Brockway had been holed up in Mrs. Jordan's house. His car was in her garage. I figured Toby wouldn't miss a chance like that and I deliberately gave him full opportunity to get set. He made a slow leak in my tire, planning that when I was forced to stop to change it, he could flatten me, park Brockway's car somewhere and let him take the blame."

The inspector grinned. "Good old Hebert. If he hadn't tried to get his revenge on you this way, an innocent man would have gone to the chair."

"Not too innocent," Loring argued. "Conlin meant to kill Dr. Jordan and just fell short of it. He should be tried for attempted murder though he has suffered considerably already. But Toby's crime was far more cold-blooded. He gambled his life against a continued existence of ease. He lost the gamble. His kind always do."



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I stepped up for a closer look  
at the gents cluttering up my  
office



## NICE MORNING FOR MURDER

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

*The girl who kissed Mugs at his office door was a perfect stranger—but so were the two cold corpses waiting inside!*

**I**T WAS one of those rare days when I decided to arrive at the office bright and early. Well, I'm not so sure about the bright part of it. There are some people who admit that I'm nice in a gruesome sort of way, but I never was a worm who waited around for the early bird. Not "Mugs" Kelly, and that's me.

So when I stepped into the elevator at nine-forty A.M. the operator stared

at me, blinked and then looked again. He knew me, so I was sure it wasn't my face. After all, I may be ugly, but my pals get used to me and find there is a kind heart beneath the rugged exterior. I also happen to be big and tough, which is no disadvantage to a private detective like I am.

"What's the matter, Joe?" I asked the elevator operator. "Have I got egg on my chin?"

"It's seeing you in the early dawn like this that fills me with amazement, Mr. Kelly," said Joe, who was one of those brainy lugs who spent all his time reading good books. "You don't usually appear at the office before noon."

"My family was haunted by actors," I said. "That's why I go to bed late and get up later."

"So that's it," said Joe as the elevator reached the tenth floor. "And one of those actors must have been playing in a horror picture, and then you were born."

"Flatterer," I said as I stepped out of the car. "I'll bet you tell that to all the gargoyles."

I walked along the corridor until I reached the outer door of my office. Since I haven't a beautiful secretary who watches over me as a mother never would, there was a blank silence from behind the glass panel. I took out my keys and admired the way my name was painted on the door.

**S**HOVING the right key in the lock, I was just about to open the door and step into the office when a tall, slender redhead came around the corner of the corridor. Her face brightened and she smiled when she saw me.

"Harry darling!" she said as she rushed toward me, and I was glad she wasn't one of those dames with a voice that sounded like she was talking down a well. "Darling, darling!"

Before I had time to register what it was all about she threw her arms around me and kissed me squarely on the lips. Then she abruptly drew away from me. She looked closely at me and then shook her head and seemed embarrassed.

"I—I made a mistake," she said. "You're not Harry Lawrence."

"Or even any of his distant relations," I said coldly. "You made two mistakes." I handed her the .38 revolver she'd dropped into the side pocket of my topcoat when she'd thrown her arms about me. "I don't need this gun. I've got one of my own. That's mistake number one. Pulling the mistaken identity gag on a lug with a face like mine is error number two."

"I never saw that gun before," she said, staring at the revolver in my hand. "How dare you say it belongs to me!"

"Let's not play games," I said sternly. "There was nothing in the pocket of my

topcoat until you dropped the gun into it, and I felt the weight of the thirty-eight." I glared at her, and with my face, a glare is a scare. "Who did you kill and why try to frame me with the murder?"

At that, her mouth opened and closed and she looked like a pretty fish. What with the meat shortage being pretty well over, I wasn't much interested in sea food. I stepped forward and dropped the gun into her purse. It was one of those shoulder-strap bags and she hadn't noticed it was still open.

"It's not my gun," she repeated. "And I didn't kill anyone."

Automatically she searched in the bag, found a handkerchief and drew it out, then snapped the purse shut. She dabbed at her eyes with the handkerchief, but I wasn't much impressed by the crying act.

"We'd better go into my office and talk this over." I turned to the door. The key was still in the lock. "This way, please, Miss."

I swung the door open. There are no windows in my outer office, so it is dark even in the daytime. I stepped over to the light switch. Behind me the door slammed shut. I hit the light button, turned on the lights and then headed for the door, but I was too late. The hall was empty. The redhead had disappeared.

"Not one of your brightest moments, Kelly," I told myself. "You let her get away—but it might have been worse." I looked at the calling card I'd lifted from the dame's purse when I dropped the gun in. "So her name was Dorothy Carson. How nice!"

I closed the outer door of the office from the inside. As I did so, I found the lock snapped back. I hadn't needed my key. The door had been unlocked all of the time.

"That's funny," I said, being a guy who had a habit of talking to myself, though I must admit that most of the time the conversation was both dull and one-sided. "I'm sure I locked the door when I left last night."

I took off my hat and topcoat and hung them up. Then I picked up my mail—both letters—and looked them over. They weren't very exciting, so I tossed them aside.

Whistling musically, but slightly off key, I headed for my private office. The door was closed so I opened it, and then

I just stood there looking. The more I looked, the less happy I felt about the whole thing.

There was a gray-haired man seated at my desk and he had a neat bullet hole right in the middle of his forehead. Sitting across the desk and to his right was a young dark-haired guy, and he had also been shot. I had never seen either of the men before.

I recovered from a slight spell of seasickness, and then stepped in to have a closer look at the gents who were cluttering up my office. Not being gifted with second sight I couldn't be sure they were actually dead until I checked for pulse and heartbeats and found none.

**T**HERE was something about the silence that made me feel that if I dropped a marble it would sound like a bowling ball hitting the floor. In the stillness, the click of the catch as the outer door of the office opened seemed loud.

I swung around, reaching for the gun in my shoulder-holster, but I didn't draw. I stepped out of the private office with my right hand still under my lapel, and closed the door behind me with my left.

There was a big, fat, bald-headed man standing just inside the outer door of my office. He smiled at me and seemed all set to be merry and bright all over the place, but I wasn't in the mood.

"Mr. Kelly?" he asked in one of those bass-drum voices. And then as I nodded, "I'm Throckton J. Quigley. Doubtlessly you've heard of me?"

"No," I said flatly. "Should I know you, Mr. Quigley?"

"Of course," said Quigley. "I'm rather well-known in my own way." He laughed with unbecoming modesty. "I'm an art collector."

"I used to have a few pin-ups myself," I said.

"No, not that sort of art!" Throckton J. Quigley looked shocked, and with his face, the expression covered a lot of territory. "I collect great paintings."

"Oh, like *La Gioconda*, *The Sistine Madonna*, *Odalisque* and *The Laughing Cavalier*," I said. "Personally, I always thought *The Cavalier* was Peter Paul Rubens' best work."

"No doubt of it," said the fat man quickly.

I smiled my sweetest were-wolf smile. For a famous art collector, Quigley

struck out on the first pitch. Even I knew that Frans Hals painted *The Laughing Cavalier*, and not Peter Paul Rubens.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Quigley?" I asked.

"My life has been threatened," said Quigley with all the emotion of a man ordering boiled eggs and toast for breakfast. "I need the services of a private detective."

"Sit down, Mr. Quigley," I said.

He sank into a chair with a stout man's usual cautious regard for strange furniture. I picked up the extension phone on the desk in the outer office. I'd had the desk and phone placed there when I first moved in, thinking that some day I just might have a secretary. I dialed police headquarters.

"Lieutenant Dawson, Homicide," I said over the phone when I got the number. Throckton J. Quigley blinked as he heard me. "Hello? . . . Lieutenant Dawson? . . . This is Mugs Kelly . . . I want to report a couple of murders . . . Yes, that's right. I just found the bodies in my office." I gave the address. "All right, I'll be here waiting for the Homicide Squad."

**Q**UIGLEY rose from his chair as I hung up. He kept glancing at the closed door to the inner office, and he looked like there were lots of other places he would rather be than where he was now.

"Who—who was murdered?" he stammered.

"To be truthful about it, I don't know," I said. "Both are perfect strangers to me. I arrived at my office and there were the two men dead all over the place." I shrugged. "But while we're waiting for the police to arrive, suppose you tell me why you feel your life is in danger, Mr. Quigley."

"All right." Quigley again slowly seated himself in the chair. "As I told you before, I'm an art collector." He smiled. "I wasn't thinking when you said Rubens painted *The Laughing Cavalier*. It was Frans Hals' work, of course."

I didn't like the way he looked at me when he finished speaking. He was smarter than I'd thought, and I had a hunch that given the opportunity one T. J. Quigley could also be dangerous.

"Go on," I said, sitting at the desk, and

speaking in my best professional manner. "What's the rest of the story?"

"I happen to have an extremely valuable painting that was smuggled over here from Europe," Quigley said. "How and where I got it is my business."

"Yours and some tough custom officials," I said. "But keep talking, Quigley."

"All right. There is a certain man who wants that painting—wants it badly enough to threaten to kill me if I don't turn it over to him." My stout visitor tried to look frightened but he wasn't convincing. "That's why I require the services of a private detective to protect me. So I came to see you."

"That's mighty white of yuh, pardner," I said, feeling a touch of horse opera stealing over me. "They went that-away."

"Huh?" Quigley stared at me and blinked. The resemblance to a large toad was repulsive.

"Never mind," I said. "Who recommended me?"

"Why, an old friend of yours that I met at my hotel last night," said Quigley. "A Miss Dorothy Carson."

"How nice!" I said. "It just goes to prove what I've always believed—if you stand at the corner of Broadway and Forty-second Street long enough, your feet are going to get awfully tired."

Since Dorothy Carson was the name of the gal who had kissed me and tried to present me with a nice .38 revolver out in the hall, I was all ears. Of course I usually am, but that's beside the point. Can I help it if somebody in my family must have been haunted by a donkey, or maybe it was a rabbit?

The important thing was that Miss Carson had recommended the services of her dear old college chum, Mugs Kelly. Such being the case, I wanted to know more.

"You mean that Dotty Carson sent you here?" I said, looking soulful. At least that was the expression I hoped my rock-bound countenance revealed. "Was she slender, red-headed and quite a dish?"

"She was and is." Quigley nodded. "A dish with cream and sugar."

I was sitting so I faced the outer door and the fat man had his back toward it.

I reached for my gun as the door slowly and silently swung open. Quigley glared at me like he had swallowed

his bubble gum.

At the moment, the stout lug was the least of my worries. I was still watching the door, and had a feeling something was going to happen. It did. I snapped the automatic out and fired as I caught sight of a hand holding a gun. It was a .38 revolver and it was aimed at Quigley.

My aim was good, and the bullet from my automatic made a mess of the hand holding the gun. The door slammed shut as I rushed toward it, but by the time I got it open the person with the wounded hand had disappeared.

"What—what's all the shooting for?" Quigley demanded dazedly.

"Somebody was going to take a shot at you," I said turning to my rotund pal. "I've got an idea somebody doesn't like you."

"I don't like them either," said Quigley.

**T**HAT didn't seem like quite the right answer, but out in the corridor the doors of an elevator opened. There were heavy footsteps and gruff voices. The boys from Homicide were arriving.

In a few minutes the place was cluttered up with detectives and men in uniform. A crowd gathered out in the hall. The people who had offices on that floor of the building hadn't thought the roar of my gun was the sound of somebody mailing a letter.

Lieutenant Dan Dawson was among those present. He was a stocky, gray-haired man who had been on the Force for twenty years, and he knew his job. Even as a boy I had learned it didn't pay to make faces at policemen, so Dawson and I got along all right. He didn't send for me to solve any murders, and I didn't try to get him to kill any parking tickets for yours truly.

Dawson went into the inner office and looked at the two dead men. An assistant M. E. started going over the bodies and then the lieutenant came out and looked at me.

"What happened, Kelly?" Dawson asked.

I took him over in one corner and gave him the whole story from the meeting with Dotty Carson out in the corridor to the hand holding the gun that I had messed up with a bullet.

Dawson listened until I had finished. Then he looked at me and sadly shook



his head. "Even you haven't enough imagination to think up a yarn like that," he said. "It sounds like the truth, Mugs, much as I hate to admit it."

"That makes two of us," I said. "I'm not used to having nightmares this early in the morning. Besides, there are a few little details I would like to know."

"Such as?" asked Lieutenant Dawson.

"Such as, who are the two guys who got murdered in my office, what they were doing here in the first place?" Why the girl planted the gun—or rather tried to plant the gun on me?" I looked over where Quigley was being questioned by a detective. "And just where our fat friend fits in all this?"

"Greedy, aren't you?" Dawson smiled.

A detective came out and handed him some identification papers that had been found on the bodies of the two men. Dawson looked the stuff over and then frowned. He handed me a neatly typed letter. It was addressed to Ward March and it read:

Dear Mr. March:

If you will be at my office at 9:30 a.m. on October 6th I will have some information that I am sure will prove of great interest to you.

Sincerely yours,  
Mugs Kelly.

"Lovely, lovely," I said. "Only I didn't write that letter, Lieutenant."

"The other dead man is George Baker, and he got a letter just like that one," said Dawson.

"I hate to sound dull by repeating myself," I said. "But I didn't write that letter either."

"You've got a typewriter?" asked the lieutenant.

"I have." I nodded. "And I've got a hunch you'll find those letters were written on my machine."

"Careful, Kelly." Dawson frowned. "In admitting that, aren't you sticking your neck out?"

"I found the door of my office unlocked when I got here this morning," I said. "Probably it could have also been unlocked yesterday morning and someone got in and used my typewriter. I didn't get to the office until noon yesterday."

[Turn page]

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"That's possible," said Dawson.

I glanced out into the hall. The police had managed to chase most of the people away who had been out there, but I saw Joe Harvey, the elevator operator who had brought me up this morning, peering into the office. He was a thin, sandy-haired guy, and he had his right hand in the pocket of his gray uniform coat.

"That's it," I said. "But I don't know why yet?"

**D**AWSON looked at me in amazement. It was obvious that what I said didn't make any sense to the lieutenant.

"What—" he began.

"Never mind, tell you later," I said, rushing to the door. "Hey, Joe." I called. "Come here a moment, will you?"

"Sure, Mr. Kelly," said Joe Harvey. He came to the door. I smiled at him.

"I know you are always reading books, Joe," I said. "And you told me that you liked detective stories."

"That's right, Mr. Kelly." Harvey seemed puzzled. "What about it?"

"Want you to meet a friend of mine, Joe," I said, nodding to Dawson who stood beside me. "Shake hands with Lieutenant Dawson of Homicide."

Harvey started to draw his right hand out of his pocket, and then frowned and hesitated. Dawson was quick on the uptake and he extended his right hand.

"Glad to meet you, Lieutenant," said Joe Harvey. "Sorry I can't shake hands with you, but I hurt my right hand closing the door of the elevator a little while ago."

"Let's see that hand," Dawson said sternly.

Harvey drew his hand out of his pocket. There was a deep gash across his fingers that evidently had bled quite a bit, but had stopped now.

"So that's what the bullet from my gun did," I said, looking at Harvey's hand. "I thought it was worse than that." I glared at him. "But why did you want to kill Quigley when the two of you were working together?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. Kelly," said Harvey sullenly.

I glanced over my shoulder. Quigley was watching us anxiously, but the stout

man was too far away to hear what we were saying.

"Yes, you do, Joe," I said. "You had a pass key. You got into my office yesterday, wrote letters to Ward March and George Baker asking them to be at my office this morning. Probably you brought them up early this morning. When they found I hadn't arrived yet, I'll bet you told them that I told you to ask them to wait in my office."

"So he talked." Harvey glared at Quigley. "You couldn't know all that unless Quigley has been blabbing."

Christmas in June! Here was Joe Harvey sticking his neck out up to his ankles, and I had talked him into it. I had just been guessing, but Harvey was being Santa Claus' uncle.

"Then you admit that you did everything that Mr. Kelly has suggested?" said Lieutenant Dawson, glaring at the elevator operator.

I waited breathlessly as Harvey hesitated before speaking. Now that I had forced him into it, I was just waiting for Harvey to confess his part in the two murders.

"You admit everything?" repeated Dawson.

"I do not!" said Harvey firmly. "I merely said that Mr. Quigley talked, that Mr. Kelly couldn't know so much about it all unless that fat tub of lard had been blabbing."

Harvey spoke loudly. Quigley had been edging closer, and when he heard the crack about a tub of lard he knew we were talking about him.

"That's the man who has been bringing me warnings that I would be murdered if I didn't turn over that painting," said Quigley, pointing at Harvey. "I think he must be the go-between."

My mouth opened and closed, but I said nothing at great length. I was trying to think, and it was even harder than usual. Here I had it all set that Harvey had used my typewriter and written the letters that had brought March and Baker to my office to be murdered. Harvey had nearly admitted it.

But now here was Quigley claiming that Harvey was the one who had warned him that if he didn't hand over the smuggled picture he would be murdered.

[Turn page]

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**I** MUST have been just asking for it—for I looked and there she was out in the hall. Dotty Carson in person—and I'd much rather had a photograph.

"I came back Mr. Kelly," she said when she saw me. "I just had to see you about that gun." She looked at Quigley and seemed surprised. "Why, Mr. Quigley," she said. "Then you finally did get here."

Quigley said nothing, and looked quite unhappy doing it.

"You see, I met Mr. Quigley last night, Mr. Kelly," said Dotty. "I told him that I needed the services of a private detective. He gave me your name and address and recommended you very highly."

"How nice," I said. "Then what?"

"I came to see you earlier this morning," said Dotty. "The door of your office was unlocked, so I walked in." She shuddered. "Then I saw the two men. They looked like—like they were dead."

"They were," I said. "In fact, they still are."

"I started out of the office," went on Dorothy Carson. "And then—"

"No!" I interrupted. "Don't tell me you saw the murder gun lying on the floor, or something, and picked it up. Don't tell me that, Dotty."

"But that's just what I did," said Dotty. "I ran out into the hall. I was frightened, and when I saw you, I pretended you were an old friend and tried to get rid of the gun by slipping it into your pocket. I didn't know who you were then, Mr. Kelly."

"And I'm beginning to wonder who I am now," I said.

"This has been quite entertaining," said Lieutenant Dawson. "But now let's get down to business." He looked at Quigley. "What was this picture that was smuggled into the country, and which is so valuable?"

"Why it is—it is," Quigley was stammering. "I can't remember the name of the artist, or the title of the painting."

"I didn't think you could," said Daw-

son dryly, "since I'm sure there is no such painting." The lieutenant looked at the papers that had been taken from the bodies of the two dead men. "According to what I have learned about them, March and Baker ran a gambling club."

"They did?" I said in surprise. "Well, what do you think of that?"

"I also know that there were I O U's in March's pocket signed by Throckton J. Quigley, and they total around twenty thousand dollars." The lieutenant looked at me. "Take it from there, Kelly."

"I get it," I said. "Quigley owes March and Baker twenty grand. He hasn't the dough, and they are getting tough. They give him a certain length of time to pay up or else. Quigley gets Harvey to write the letters to March and Baker that brings them to my office this morning."

"All right as far as it goes," said Dawson. "But how about the other people hearing the shots on this floor?"

"Nobody comes to work on this floor before ten a. m.," said Harvey. "I brought those two guys up a little after nine. I wrote those letters all right. Quigley paid me fifty bucks to do it. He said the whole thing was just a joke on Mr. Kelly. I didn't know it was going to be murder."

"Good," I said. "So March and Baker go in my office and wait for me. Quigley appeared and shoots and kills them. He beats it, leaving the gun behind. Maybe he has to duck in a hurry for fear Dotty Carson will see him and recognize him."

"Then why did he come back and tell you he wanted to hire you?" Dawson asked. "I know, but I want to see if you do, Mugs."

"Because Quigley didn't get a chance to sneak his I O U's out of March's pocket," I said. "He hoped to find a chance to do that while he was pretending to need me." I looked at Harvey. "But I still don't see why you were trying to kill Quigley when I shot you in the hand, Joe?"

"I wasn't going to kill him," said Harvey. "I opened the door and covered him with the gun so I could tell you he was the killer, but you shot at me before I could say anything."

[Turn page]



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It all worked out the way murders often do. Quigley got foolish and tried to get away. I socked him on the chin and knocked him out. He broke when they put him in jail, and confessed the whole thing. It was just the way I had figured it out, with a little help from Lieutenant Dawson.

You know what? Dotty Carson turned out to be a secretary looking for a job, and she thought working for a private detective would be exciting. See that beautiful redhead sitting at the desk in my outer office? You do, eh? Then you've got better eyesight than I have. Mugs Kelly still does his own typing, and the Carson gal is working for the president of a big corporation.

Sure, she is quite a dish. But I don't want any gal who picks up the murder weapon working for me. That's just asking for trouble when you are a private detective like I am.

## OFF THE RECORD

*(Continued from page 8)*

tions are that bad, the governor might be persuaded—"

"The governor, my hat," the dying woman snapped. "He could send a hundred investigators up there and not learn in a month what you could in a day. So this is my proposition, Tony Quinn. You want to know who killed John Powell? Well, you clean up my town and I'll tell you who did it. And I can tell you—for I saw the murder committed!"

Quinn exhaled slowly. "So you do know that."

"I saw it all through the window here. And I can prove it. I've read every newspaper. There was nothing printed about the viciousness of the attack on Powell. Nothing about how many bullets were fired into him."

And old Mrs. Barr went on to recite details that only a person who had seen the killing could know. Yes, she certainly had seen the killing, Quinn knew then. But she vowed she would not tell him the killer's name until after Quinn and the Black Bat had done her bidding—cleaned up her town.

Threats and coercion, Quinn soon realized, could do nothing toward making her talk before then. After all, how could you threaten a person who was going to be dead in two weeks? So, having no other choice, Quinn undertook the assignment she offered.

No sooner were Quinn and Silk outside, however, than they noticed something was amiss. "Hey—our car has been moved," Silk said. "It's way down the street."

"Watch it, Silk," Quinn whispered. "I don't like this."

Playing his game for all it was worth, Tony Quinn held tightly to Silk's arm and allowed himself to be piloted along the street. He knew, of course, why the car had been moved. Obviously, somebody wanted him and Silk to be forced to walk down the street and expose themselves to attack.

The attack came when they passed the service entrance to one of the big buildings nearby. Quinn heard the padding footsteps behind them. He nudged Silk, who turned quickly, but a trifle too late. The man who approached was already swinging a club which looked like a baseball bat.

The club clipped Silk a glancing blow and he went down, out of the battle. The man swerved to encounter Quinn, and Quinn could not restrain his surprise at the man's startling appearance. There was a hood drawn over his head, a bed pillow cover with two small slits torn in it for eyes!

Near the hem of the pillowcase, Quinn glimpsed small, dark markings. He threw himself forward and grabbed the man then. For those small, dark markings, he knew, were a laundry mark, and if he knew what the mark was, it might help identify this murderous attacker.

But Quinn had erred, and now he knew that even if he read the mark it was likely to do him no good. For if the man hit him with that club, Tony Quinn would be dead. And the man was swinging that club right now with deadly intent. . . .

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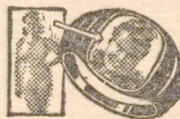
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## LETTERS FROM READERS

**P**LEASE drop us a letter or a postcard, telling us your opinion of the stories in this issue of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**. We'll print excerpts from the best letters from time to time—but whether your letter sees print or not, we'll appreciate your writing!

This is **YOUR** magazine. Your valuable comments, criticisms, and ideas have helped make **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** the fine magazine it is. So keep your letters rolling in. Here are a few right out of the mailbag:

Last winter when I vacationed in Miami Beach I became acquainted with Jack Kofoed's writings in the *Miami Herald*. When I got home there was no Kofoed stuff in the local papers. Then I happened to buy copies of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** and **THRILLING SPORTS**, and there he was. I hope he continues to write for you because I sure like his stories.—*Harold Drachman, Brooklyn, N.Y.*

I have been reading your magazine, **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**, for quite some time now and I have found it to be a very interesting item in reading pleasure, especially the Tony Quinn novels.—*Clifford C. Nelson, Columbus, Ohio.*

The amazing True Crime story is a grand addition to **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**. However, I agree with two of your readers who'd like a humorous story and true stories about police methods and how detectives work. I think Tony Quinn's stories should be shortened somewhat.—*Mrs. C. Techlin, Seymour, Wis.*

That story **THE MURDER PROPHECY**, by G. Wayman Jones, sure was the best yet. It sure was a thrilling story, and that Tony Quinn has every other detective I know beat by a mile. Will McGrath ever find out that Quinn really is the Black Bat?—*Timothy J. Haverstroh, Jr., Lake Charles, La.*



One of the best features of your magazine is the true crime story you run in each issue. I really enjoyed the last one titled **THE GOOD LORD BARRINGTON**, by Leo Marr, also the short story, **POST-HYPNOTIC**, by Samuel Mines.—Peter Berkley Wilson, Boston, Mass.

Some of the scientific methods that Tony Quinn uses, on occasion, I think may be open to question. But the author certainly achieves an interesting story—Prof. Titus M. Hoolihan, Victoria, Texas.

By the way, did you notice the way the glass was falling out of the car-door window in the opening picture for **THE MURDER PROPHET**? The Black Bat's bullet would have knocked the glass into the car, not out of it! Is your face red?—Joe Titterton, Miles City, Mont.

Can't wait for your next issue. I like the idea of having a dog featured in the Black Bat stories, as a couple of your readers have suggested. Once I read a story about a detective who carried a small monkey around in his pocket. The little animal proved an able assistant on more than one occasion, and able to get into places the detective could never break into. We folks who live on farms love animals, and I'm sure everybody else does too, and would like to read about one in the Black Bat. Good luck!—Mrs. H. X. Hopstetter, Topeka, Kan.

Can't we have a little more love and romance in the stories? If not in the Black Bat novels, then in the shorter stories—Roy Paul, Blue Hill, Me.

**BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** is exceptionally fine, For it to come out oftener I pine, But with one thing I won't agree, And that's to mix romance with the mystery!—Freda Courtney, Jr., Appleton, Wis.

Well, friends, that's all the letters for this time, but we'll be back next issue with a whole bag more. Here's hoping a letter from YOU is among them. Thanks to all of you who have already written. Please address all letters and postcards to The Editor, **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y. Good luck, everybody—and so long until next issue!

—THE EDITOR.

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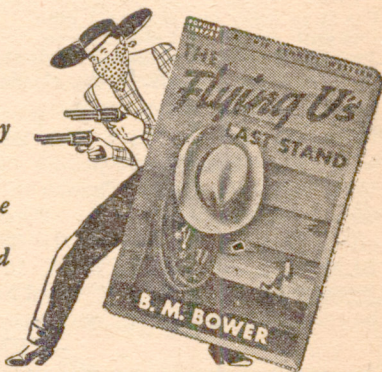


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