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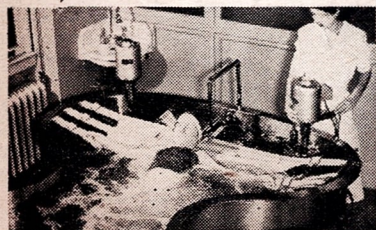
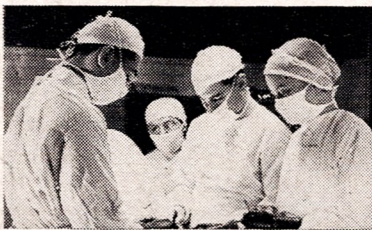
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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

Vol. XXVII, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Fall, 1949

A COMPLETE TONY QUINN NOVEL



THE DENNISON DOCUMENTS

By G. Wayman Jones

When a dead woman strangely disappears and a man with everything to live for kills himself, Quinn tackles a weird mystery—putting his life in the balance as the scales tip for grim, sinister doom! 11

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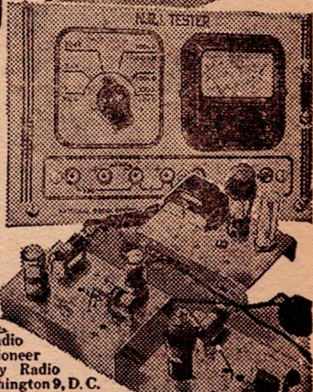
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OFF THE RECORD

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS
AND THE EDITOR MEET

THE phone call was for Tony Quinn, the famous "blind" Assistant District Attorney. Tony picked up the instrument, and said hello. The voice that answered him was a weird monotone.

"Quinn," the voice said. "You might like to know that a blind D.A. often has bad accidents. You wouldn't like anything to happen to you. Stay in New York City. There's enough there to keep you busy."

The phone clicked. Quinn hung up slowly, thoughtfully.

The call had come to Tony Quinn in a wealthy upstate town where a crime trail had led him. It was a strange crime too. There were so many unexplained and peculiar things about it that Tony was beginning to wonder if it wasn't the oddest case he had ever undertaken in all his perilous years.

First, a man had confessed to a murder, of which Tony was certain he was innocent. There was definite proof that the man could not have committed the crime. Then, after confessing the killing, the man had attempted to commit suicide. He had fired a gun at his temple, but, by some miracle, had not been seriously injured! But the gun he used and the suicide note he swore he wrote strangely disappeared. And when the man was lodged in a jail cell for safekeeping, though under lock, key and guard—he was murdered!

Trouble Ahead

On the ride back to New York, Tony Quinn told his loyal helper, Silk, about the threatening phone call. Tony was certain that it was not one criminal he was up against, but many.

"I don't like it," Silk commented. "They know our moves as we're making them. This thing is being run too slick. It's big,

and important, and the men behind it won't scare easily."

They were silent then as they entered the Saw Mill Road, leading into New York City. A light truck with a closed body hooted for Silk, who was driving, to get out of the way, and he obediently moved over.

Then Tony gave a startled cry. "Silk—that truck. No trucks are allowed on the Saw Mill Road. It's a trick of some kind. It—"

Silk was swerving the sedan when the first flash of flame came from the tiny windows set high in the back door of the truck. A rifle bullet knocked a piece out of the open ventilator window, passed inside the sedan and ricocheted crazily before it bedded down somewhere in the upholstery. The second shot went wild, for Silk had the sedan actually off the road now and was guiding it toward the shelter of some low shrubbery set on the otherwise smooth hillside. At the same time that he fought the wheel, he was drawing a gun from a shoulder rig.

The Getaway

The truck had stopped and was backing. They were apparently intending to get very close before opening fire again.

Silk pushed the safety off, leveled the automatic and began firing a fusillade at the back of the truck. The bullets smashed through the thin paneling. Somebody screamed. The truck backed up wildly, made a crazy turn and rolled off. Silk was frantically trying to get a fresh clip of bullets into the automatic. "It's no use now," Quinn said. "They've gotten away, but I think you winged one of them, at least."

"They—weren't fooling," Silk panted. "They meant that—about the phone call. . . ."

(Continued on page 8)

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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 6)

"Apparently they did," Quinn said. "I didn't have a chance to see any of them, but they'd be hired men anyway. Let's go home before they set another trap."

When Silk pulled up in front of Quinn's house, Tony stepped out of the car and thrust a hand into his pocket where he held his automatic ready. Silk took Quinn's arm and they went up onto the porch. Quinn unlocked the door, drew his gun and stepped back.

He kicked the door wide. Nothing happened. The house was quite dark.

Quinn had his head cocked to one side. "Nothing stirring in there, Silk," he said. "I think we can go in."

Silk turned on lights, closed the door and heard Quinn gasp. Silk hurried into the long, spacious living room. Quinn was standing beside a table and fumbling for a pipe and tobacco.

A Sinister Message

Quinn said, "Look at the long mirror above the mantel, Silk."

Silk stepped over to it. Someone had drawn crudely and in what seemed to be brilliantly red nail polish, just four words.

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LETTERS FROM READERS

WE start off this time with a couple of letters that celebrate the Black Bat's tenth year of publication. It's been a wonderful ten years, and we hope to bring you many more fine Black Bat stories, in keeping with the standard we have set, in the decade which lies ahead.

Dear Editor: Just a brief note to congratulate **G. Wayman Jones** and **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** on the Black Bat's 10th Anniversary, which is celebrated this year. It's been a most enjoyable ten years on my part, and of all the fifty odd yarns, the first one **BRAND OF THE BLACK BAT** was one of the best. Incidentally, a 10th Anniversary issue would be an appropriate one for a cover picture of the **Bat**. Anyway, here's for another happy and successful ten years!—**Jerry Stier, 141 Summit Ave., Avon, N. J.**

Thanks, Jerry, for your good wishes. And here's a letter from a fan in the Buckeye State who has just about all the early Black Bat novels we published.

Dear Editor: I've enjoyed reading the stories of the Black Bat ever since they began, and I really want to congratulate **G. Wayman Jones** on his consistently fine stories. The guy is amazing. I have all the issues of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** from the beginning of the **Tony Quinn** novels in 1939 to the winter issue of 1945 except vol. 17 no. 1.—**Bernard Seme, 5444 Hill Street, Maple Heights, Ohio.**

The next fan not only has a good word
(Continued on page 129)

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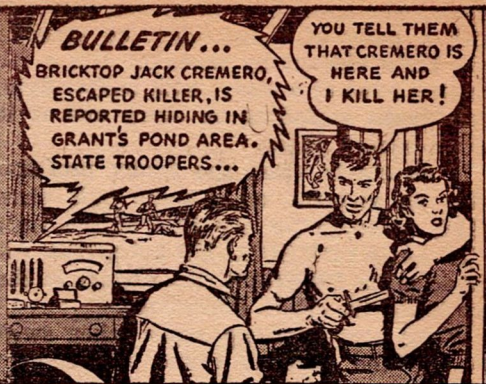
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...and then things happened fast!!



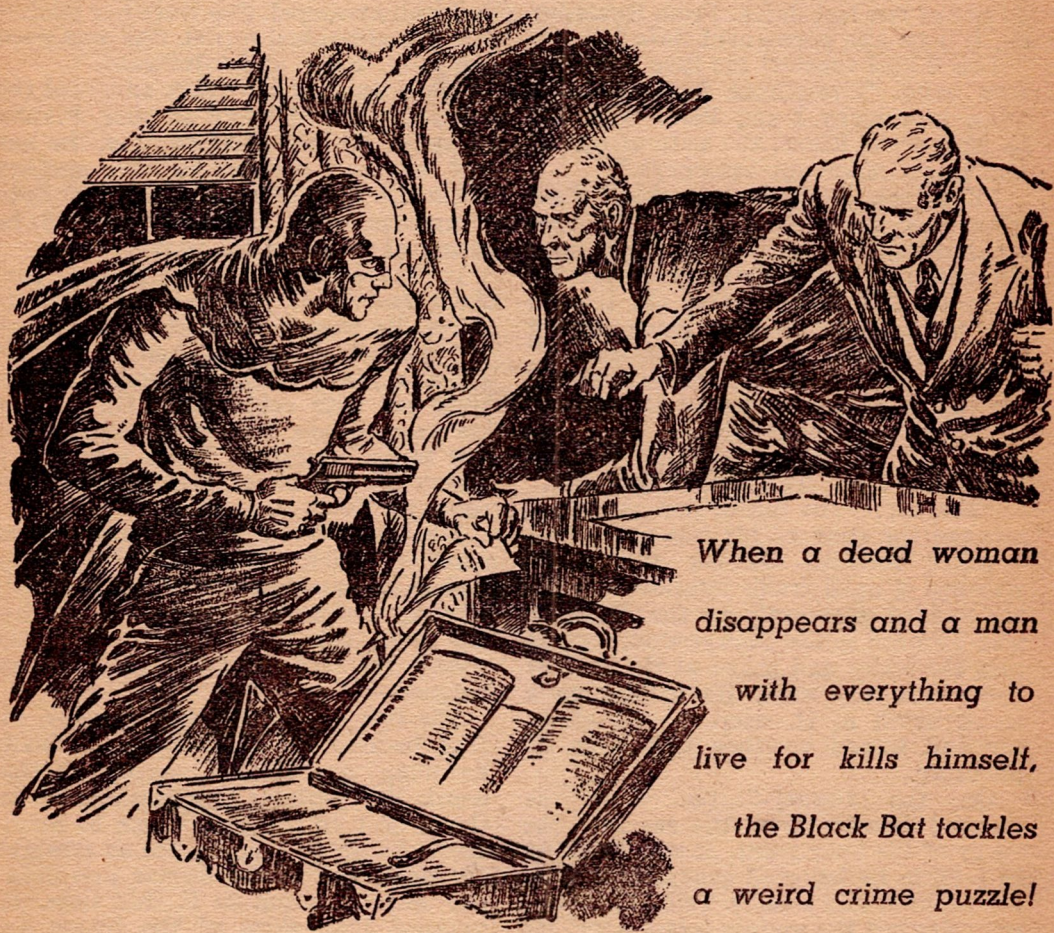
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the *Dennison*

Documents



When a dead woman disappears and a man with everything to live for kills himself, the Black Bat tackles a weird crime puzzle!

a Tony Quinn novel
by **G. WAYMAN JONES**

CHAPTER I

One Bullet

STREAMLINED and sleek, the car was expensive. So were the occupants in the back seat. The chauffeur pulled to the curb before the black onyx

decorated entrance of one of New York's fanciest apartment houses.

The man in back kissed the girl lightly on the cheek. He was tall, handsome

Tony Quinn Puts His Life in the Balance When

and the gray in his temples gave him a distinguished appearance. It was easy to see that his suit and topcoat were tailor-made by experts.

He said, "Eight-thirty it is, Lois. That gives you two hours to dress, which indicates that I'll make a kindly and understanding husband. This will be one of our last dates. From Saturday on, it'll be one permanent date."

Lois Lloyd touched his face with her slim hand. "Sometimes I wonder if I know how lucky I am, Paul. Why, I'll be Mrs. Paul Riker, the wife of one of our most important attorneys."

"The luck is all on my side," Paul Riker told her with a grin. "I'll send Fred around to pick you up. We'll have a cocktail in my apartment before we leave for the party. After all, I want you to get used to the place, seeing you'll live there from next week on."

Riker climbed out of the car, tipped his hat and then spoke to the driver.

"Fred, have your dinner, then call for Miss Lloyd at eight-thirty and bring her here. Take her home now."

"Yes, sir." The uniformed chauffeur touched the peak of his cap.

Riker watched the car pull away, watched it until traffic swallowed it up. He nodded pleasantly to the doorman who hovered in the background, walked into the lobby and asked at the desk if there was any mail. He picked up a small batch of it, went to the elevator and talked weather talk with its operator.

On the twenty-fourth floor, he stepped directly from the car into the foyer of his apartment. It was fitted up in a style he believed comparable with his position and wealth. Two big bronze urns flanked the mosaic inlaid door. He unlocked it, passed straight into a medium sized living room—a large one for a New York apartment—and carefully placed his coat and hat on a chair.

He walked to a small bar, made himself a highball and measured the whisky judiciously. He never indulged in too strong drinks. He stood beside a Renoir, which he never tired of studying, raised the glass slightly to the woman in the picture and smiled. This was life as it

should be lived and in a few days there'd be lovely Lois to share it.

LOIS was his idea of perfection too, as everything he ever obtained was perfect. Women didn't come much more beautiful. At least Riker hadn't seen many eyes as blue, hair as light brown and well arranged. She wore her clothes like a professional model. She was good company, witty and intelligent.

Riker finished his drink and read the evening papers for half an hour. Finally he arose, put his glass back on the bar and was half tempted to have another drink. He decided against it. He'd have a martini with Lois and there'd be plenty of liquor at the party.

In his bedroom he undressed partially and went into the bathroom to shave. He wasn't satisfied until his face was smooth and pink. Then he stepped under a hot shower, scrubbed and finished off with cold water. He got out his new tuxedo, laid it across the bed and began dressing. There was a dull streak on his shoes and he promptly removed this.

His tie gave him some trouble and he muttered mildly when the phone rang just as he had the ends almost perfectly aligned. He walked briskly to the living room, sat down and picked up the phone. He said "Hello" and then just listened.

His lips seemed to grow thinner, his face became somewhat bleak. Finally he hung up without saying another word. For perhaps five minutes he sat there, deep in thought. When he finally arose, he didn't stand quite as straight. He went over to the Renoir and didn't pay any attention to it this time. He grasped both sides of the frame and gave a twist. The picture tilted to the left, something clicked and the portrait swung outwards. There was a shiny wall safe beneath it.

Riker spun the combination with steady hands, pulled the small door open and took out the sole contents of the safe. A long, brownish-red and heavy envelope embellished with several wax seals. He closed the safe, re-stored the portrait to its normal po-

the Scales Tip for a Baffling Murder Mystery!

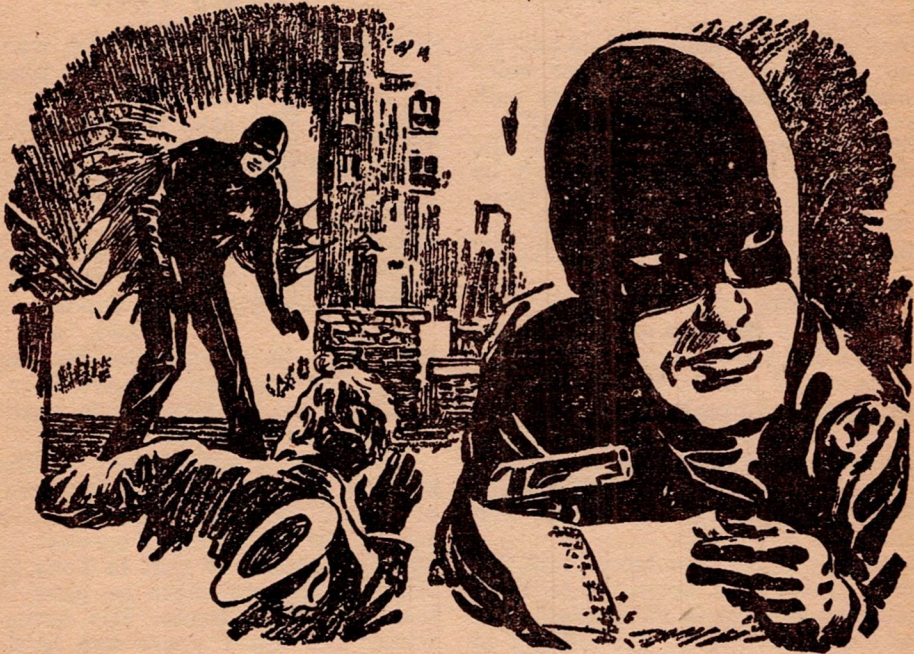
sition and walked over to a desk.

He sat down, silently weighed the rather thick envelope in one hand and then reached for a pen. On the outside of the envelope he wrote: *The Dennison Documents*. He propped the envelope against the desk lamp, arose and returned to the bedroom. There he inspected his tie, found it satisfactory and slipped into his midnight blue jacket.

Someone said, "No, sir. Who is calling, please?"

"Tell him it's Paul Riker—and—you'd better say this is most important."

In a few seconds a rich, calm voice greeted him. Riker said, "Hello, Tony. I'll wager you're no more surprised to hear from me than you would be to get a phone call from Mark Antony. And like him, I'm asking you to lend me your ear for a moment. I realize you



THE BLACK BAT

From a top bureau drawer he took out a .38 automatic and snapped a shell into the firing chamber. He shoved the gun into a hip pocket, smoothing the coat down over it. His watch indicated that Lois would arrive in slightly less than an hour.

Riker went into the living room again and used the phone. He had to look up a number in the book. It was a very easy number to check. Under the letter Q there were few names. His manicured nail stopped below the name of Anthony Quinn.

Riker dialed, leaned back and almost smiled a trifle. He said, "Mr. Quinn, please. Is this Mr. Quinn?"

don't especially care for me and I don't blame you. Years ago, when we were running for the office of District Attorney on different tickets, I said some things about you I've really been sorry for."

"Forget it," Quinn chuckled. "We're all prone that way. What's on your mind, Mr. Riker?"

"I want you to do me a favor, Tony. I know you can be relied upon. As quickly as possible have your man drive you to my apartment house. Come right up without announcing yourself. It's the twenty-fourth floor suite. You will find my door unlocked. Walk into the living room. You will find a desk

in the northwest corner and propped against the desk lamp is an envelope I have just inscribed 'The Dennison Documents.' I want you to have that envelope, Tony. Do you understand?"

"Of course," Quinn replied. "What's in it? All the black facts of your life?"

"Not my life, Tony. But someone's. Open the envelope on the spot, read the contents and then act upon them. Don't waste a single moment. Possession of those papers will place you in considerable danger, I'm afraid, but I'm sure you can take care of yourself. I've never encountered such a self-sufficient blind man as you."

"Thanks," Quinn said. "I'll do exactly as you say. Something in your voice indicates the importance of this call. Where will you be when I arrive?"

"I'm—not too certain." Riker's lips curled slightly in derision. "I won't be here, that's sure. And thanks, Tony. You will know what to do when you examine the contents of that envelope."

RIKER hung up, sat back and whistled a tuneless air. He looked at his watch again. Forty minutes before Lois would arrive. He returned to the bedroom and brushed his hair with a pair of military brushes. He always had trouble with the ends so he applied a bit of dressing. The full length mirror showed him faultlessly turned out, well polished and handsome.

He got his black Homburg from the dressing closet and spent more than five minutes putting it at precisely the proper angle. Homburgs are difficult to adjust and not any man can wear them well. Riker was rather proud of the fact that on him they looked excellent.

He took time to run a buffer over his nails and then gratified vanity by another long look into the full length mirror. He closed his eyes and sighed deeply before turning toward the bathroom. At the door he paused, changed his mind and walked slowly to the living room. At the bar again he poured himself a huge drink. Almost a ten ounce glassful. It went down hard. He wasn't accustomed to drinking this way and he had an idea the stuff would hit him like a hammer.

He corked the bottle, rinsed the glass and wiped it dry. He looked once more at the Renoir and told himself for the thousandth time since he'd bought it,

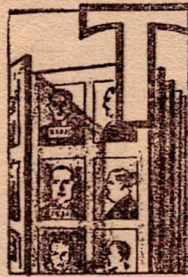
that such things were an essential part of his life. His head began to swim and so did the portrait. The whisky was taking a grip.

Riker walked very briskly this time to the bedroom, across it and into the bathroom. Without the slightest hesitation, he pulled the shower curtain aside, stepped into the tub and pulled the curtain back in place.

Then he blew his brains out!

CHAPTER II

Missing Papers



THE man who was just returning the phone to its cradle had the blank eyes of the blind, but his features were highly mobile and indicated that he was deeply puzzled. Tony Quinn was slightly more than of average height, his weight exactly right.

He looked, and was, physically fit except for his lack of sight. His face would have been considered quite handsome if it wasn't for the deep scars around the eyes.

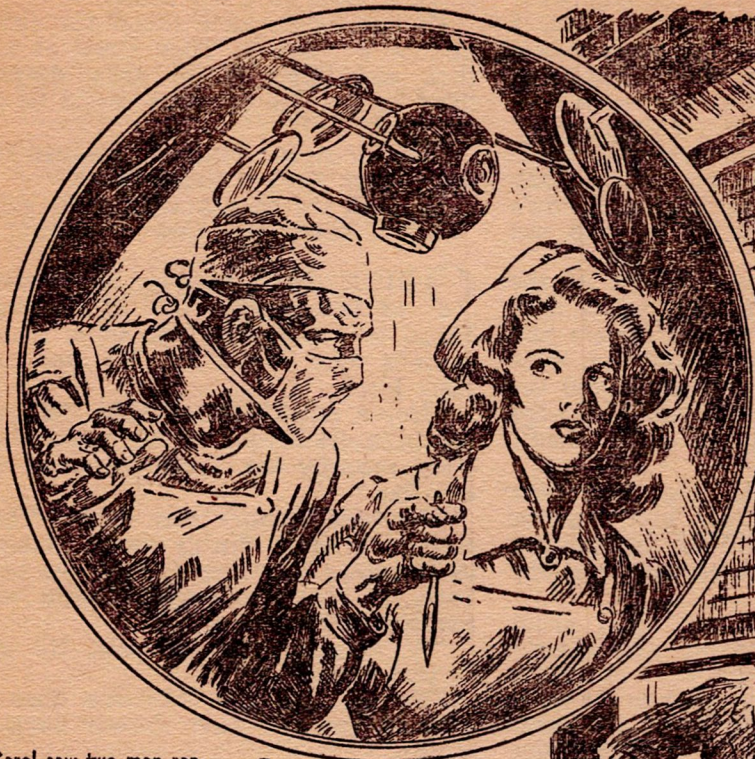
Behind him and slightly to the left stood a bald-headed, narrow-faced man of about forty-five. Quietly dressed, solemn, he looked like a servant, but he was far more than that to Tony Quinn. Merely standing there he gave the illusion of smoothness. His name was Kirby and many years ago he'd been dubbed "Silk." It was a name that went with his character and his former profession. There'd been few more expert confidence men before or since his hey-day.

Silk Kirby asked, "Is there something wrong, sir?"

"I don't know," Quinn frowned. "That was Paul Riker. He was before your time, Silk. That is, before you wound up here working with me. When I was younger and cocky and running for the office of District Attorney, Paul Riker opposed me. He darned near won out too and never, since that day, have I discounted any man."

"I've heard of Riker. He's become a rather important and successful corporation lawyer, hasn't he?"

"Very successful. He struggled hard,



Carol saw two men ransacking the room, paying little attention to the dead woman
(Chap. VI)



figured that this D. A.'s job would give him the impetus for a swift rise. When he lost it, he said a few uncomplimentary things about me. Since then, I doubt we've met half a dozen times. Bring the car around, Silk. We're going to do as he requested. There was an urgency in his voice that I can't deny."

Silk nodded, slipped into a coat and seized his hat on the way to the back door and the garage behind Quinn's home. In three minutes he was out front.

Quinn left the house slowly. At the top of the porch steps, his white cane fanned the air until he was certain just where the railings were and how close to the edge he was. He descended the stairs, walked along the path and kept his cane moving slightly as he thrust it out ahead of him.

Silk had the gate open and took Quinn's arm. He helped him into the front seat, ran around the car and got behind the wheel. Quinn gave him the address.

"I can't make up my mind about Riker." Quinn stared unseeingly straight ahead. "There were overtones of absolute discouragement in his voice and yet his words were those of a care-free person. There is to be an envelope on his living room desk for me. I'm to act upon its contents. They are called, according to Riker, 'The Dennison Documents.' I can't imagine what they are."

"He'll tell you," Silk said reassuringly.

"No, Riker won't be there. He is leaving his door unlocked for us. There's another strange thing. Step on it, Silk. I've a feeling about this I don't like."

When Silk wheeled the big car to a stop directly in front of the apartment building, Quinn climbed out himself, but stood on the sidewalk waiting for Silk. He took his arm and Silk led him into the building. The elevator whisked them to the twenty-fourth floor and they stepped into the foyer. Silk grasped the door knob and turned it. The door opened easily. He rapped his knuckles against the panel, but no one called out or came in answer to the knock.

"Find the living room, Silk," Quinn instructed, "and take me there."

"In here, sir," Silk said. "It's a nice

place. I approve of Mr. Riker's taste. Ah—the desk. Careful, sir, you're skirting close to a big chair."

Quinn's white cane found the chair and he avoided it. They stood at the desk and Silk's frown grew deeper. "Did he say the envelope would be on the desk, sir?"

"That's right. Propped against the desk lamp. Isn't it there, Silk?"

"I don't see an envelope," Silk said. "Shall I check the desk drawers?"

QUINN didn't answer. Silk looked at him quickly and Silk's blood began to run faster. The blind man's nostrils were flared out, his face had gone bleak.

"Never mind," Quinn said. "A gun has been discharged in this apartment. Very recently too. Let's see what we can find."

Silk took Quinn's arm again. They entered a small dining room, glanced at it briefly and then located the bedroom. It was also empty. Quinn was audibly sniffing now.

"We're getting closer, Silk. No one in this room?"

"No one, sir. The bathroom door is open. I can see that shower curtain closed."

"Look behind it," Quinn said quickly. "Go—by yourself. Hurry!"

Silk left Quinn standing in the middle of the floor. He entered the bathroom, seized the shower curtain and pulled it aside. His gasp told Quinn what he'd found.

Silk called back, "A dead man, sir. There's a gun in his hand and a bullet through his head. No pulse, but the flesh is still warm. He's five ten, a hundred and sixty. Dark hair peppered with gray."

"That's Paul Riker. Silk, check the premises again and be very certain no one is here. Very certain!"

Silk first locked the front door after a check of the foyer. Then he examined every room and every closet. He returned to the bedroom where Quinn was still standing.

"We're alone, sir," he reported.

"Good." Quinn hung the white cane over his forearm. A miraculous change came across his face. Those blank staring eyes suddenly became alive, bright and alert. He walked quickly into the bathroom and examined the

corpse. Without moving it very much, he searched the pockets, but found nothing of interest. Then he began to examine the whole apartment. Silk helped him and they were expert in their work. Nothing looked disturbed in the slightest manner when they were finished and yet nothing had been missed.

"If there's an envelope like the one he described," Quinn said, "it must be very well hidden. Personally I don't think we're the first people on the scene. Someone else came and got that envelope, Silk."

"But—Riker? Why did he—die?"

"I don't pretend even to guess, Silk."

"It is suicide, isn't it?" Silk asked.

"I didn't take time really to check."

"There isn't the slightest question about that," Quinn declared. "It's a self inflicted wound. There are even powder smudges on Riker's hand. Whatever those papers concerned, they were meant to be turned over to me as the last gesture of a desperate man. Riker must have been involved somehow, planned that I'd find the documents and act upon them. They would involve him so he took the easier way out."

Silk shrugged. "Then all we seem to face is the simple act of theft. You can hardly class it as burglary, since the apartment door was unlocked and the envelope in plain view."

"And yet," Quinn mused, "a dead man wanted us to have those papers. They must have been very important since Riker killed himself because of them. Silk, telephone Captain McGrath at Police Headquarters and have him come over. He might as well bring along the usual parade from Homicide too. Just in case there is more here than meets our eyes."

Silk made the phone call, hung up, and turned around in the chair. He opened his mouth to say something and closed it again quickly. Quinn had signaled for silence and in a second or two, Silk heard the elevator door open and then close. On the heels of it came a knock.

INSTANTLY that blank, blind look came over Quinn's eyes. He huddled forward a bit in his chair and both hands gripped the crook of his white cane. He was a blind man again. At a nod from him, Silk opened the door

and Lois Lloyd started to walk in.

"I'm right on time—" she began gayly and then stopped short to stare at Silk. He bowed slightly. "Who—are you?" she went on.

"This way, miss," Silk said in his most unctuous tone. "Mr. Riker will be with you in a moment. Meanwhile, I'm sure you'd like to talk to Mr. Quinn."

"This is so—strange," Lois Lloyd said in a puzzled voice. "Paul was to be ready. Just a drink and we were to go."

"There have been some change in plans, miss." Silk led the way to the living room and brought the girl before Tony Quinn. Silk slid a chair close to her. She sat down very slowly.

"There is something wrong," she said. "I can almost—feel it."

The apparently blind man said, "My name is Quinn. I'm with the District Attorney's office. Would you mind telling me who you are?"

"The District Attorney's office!" She gasped the words. "I don't understand. What's wrong? What is it? Why isn't Paul here?"

"Your name, please," Quinn insisted.

She threw back her head. "I am Lois Lloyd. Paul and I had a date to-night. We were out together all afternoon, at the races. I was to be here at eight-thirty. Paul sent his car for me. Please! Tell me what is wrong."

"Paul Riker is dead," Quinn said softly. His eyes seemed to be looking to the left of the girl.

She rose to her feet, one hand went to her throat in a convulsive gesture. She didn't say anything for a moment and then she began to sway. Silk was at her side instantly and he helped her sit down again.

"It—can't be," she said hoarsely. "It simply can't be. Paul and I—we were to have been married this Saturday. I don't believe it. This is some sort of a grisly joke."

"I wish that's all it was," Quinn's voice was kindly. "Paul killed himself, Miss Lloyd."

She bit her lower lip until the lipstick was badly smeared. For a moment Quinn thought she was going to faint. The rouge stood out like red signal flags on cheeks gone deathly pale.

Lois recovered her wits with considerable effort. She said, "I shall never believe that Paul took his own life."

Good health, money, and he was in love with me. Everything has been prepared for the wedding. Mr. Quinn, Paul did not kill himself."

"I'm afraid you're wrong, Miss Lloyd. Of course, until the police arrive, we can't be positive. They'll soon know. I wish I could spare you all this."

She was studying him intently. "You're blind, aren't you? You're that special District Attorney who handles all sorts of sensational cases. Paul spoke of you once. He didn't seem to like you very much. What are you doing here? Why did you come?"

"Paul sent for me," Quinn told her. "He didn't mention suicide, of course, but he said he would leave an envelope for me on his desk. The door would be open and my getting that envelope was a matter of the utmost importance. Did you ever hear of the Dennison Documents, Miss Lloyd?"

"Dennison Documents? No. No, I'm quite certain that Paul never mentioned them."

"I see. He didn't act worried or unsure of himself this afternoon?"

"Quite the contrary, Mr. Quinn. He was gay and talking of nothing except our wedding. You can ask Fred Tormay. He is Paul's chauffeur."

Quinn said, "Silk, go down to the street and fetch Riker's driver here. Don't tell him what has happened. Simply say that Riker wants him."

"Yes, sir." Silk hurried to the door.

Quinn looked vaguely in the direction of the girl again. "I knew Paul quite well," he said. "We had our differences, especially when we were both after the District Attorney's job. Paul wasn't the type to kill himself unless the reasons were terribly important. As you say, he had everything to live for. I'm going to need your help, Miss Lloyd."

She was searching her purse for a handkerchief. "Anything, Mr. Quinn. If Paul is dead, I know he was murdered."

SILK returned with both Fred Tormay, the chauffeur and the apartment elevator operator in tow. Silk rarely needed full instructions about what to do. Questioning the elevator operator was an obvious necessity.

Silk said, "Here is Mr. Tormay, sir. And I brought the elevator operator."

"Good!" Quinn's head didn't move. "For your information, gentlemen, I am with the District Attorney's office. Mr. Riker is dead. The circumstances are somewhat peculiar and I want a few questions answered."

"Dead! The boss—dead?" Tormay looked helplessly at Lois Lloyd.

Quinn said, "Silk, one of these men seems doubtful. Show him."

"Yes, sir." Silk took Tormay's arm and led him from the room. He knew what Quinn really wanted was to get this man away while the elevator operator was being questioned.

Quinn asked, "And who is left? The elevator operator or the chauffeur?"

"I'm Ballini," the elevator man said. "I run the elevator. I took you up."

"What time did you take Mr. Riker up?"

"I ain't too sure. I'd say it was around half-past five, maybe six."

"Are there any other elevators in the building?"

"Sure. Two of them go only to as far as the fifteenth floor. That's where the building is all spread out and there are lots of apartments. Above that, there is only one apartment to each floor. Those are the ones I serve."

"Fine. Between the time you took Mr. Riker up and when you took me up, did anyone else get off at this floor?"

"No, sir. I'm positive. I keep track. There was nobody in between."

"Thank you," Quinn said. "You'd better get back to your job. The police will be here shortly and they don't enjoy walking up nine flights of stairs."

Silk brought Tormay back. He was ashen and looked as if he needed a drink. "It-it's pretty—awful," he gulped.

"Death usually is," Quinn commented dryly. "You were with Riker all day?"

"I drove him to his office and then went home until noon. I picked him up, went around to get Miss Lloyd and then I drove them to the track. After that I drove them home. We got here at six o'clock. He told me to bring Miss Lloyd home, have dinner and pick her up again to be here at eight-thirty."

"That checks," Quinn sighed. "It seems everyone is telling a straight story so far. Mr. Tormay, where did Riker keep an envelope containing the Dennison Documents?"

"Envelope? I don't know. I just drove for him. I was never in the apartment much. First time I ever heard of anything called the Dennison Documents."

"All right," Quinn said patiently. "Sit down somewhere. The police will want your statement in writing. Miss Lloyd, Paul killed himself over something that has to do with these mysterious documents. And they are missing. They were apparently stolen—after Paul was dead. By someone who probably found Paul and yet raised no alarm because he didn't want to be seen or known. We have a crime here—that of theft. Solving it may enlighten us as to why Paul took his life. Therefore, I want all the help you can give me."

"But I can't tell you anything more," she sobbed. "Paul refused to discuss business with me. He has a secretary. Perhaps she knows. Please, let me alone now. I—can't stand much more of this."

CHAPTER III

Double In Black



QUINN waited quietly until the police arrived. They were led by Captain McGrath, a short, huskily built man with a closely cropped mustache and a bulldog jaw. McGrath had pounded beats, taken charge of precinct desks, ran his legs off in the detective bureau

and slowly forced his way upwards until he was a captain. Plain persistence and a never-quit attitude was largely responsible. McGrath wasn't keenly intelligent and admitted it, but his methods were thorough and relentless.

He listened to Quinn's statement, made a quick examination of the corpse and then put a police stenographer to work. When he had taken Lois Lloyd's statement, Quinn had Silk drive her home. Tormay told a straightforward story without deviation from the one he'd related to Quinn. He was also dismissed with a warning not to leave town.

McGrath sat down opposite Quinn. "It doesn't amount to much, Tony. Maybe there were certain papers which

Riker wanted you to have and somebody else got, but in there—that's suicide and don't let anybody tell you different."

"Silk described the scene," Quinn replied. "I agree with you. But Riker brought me into this after he had decided to kill himself. I want to know his reasons. I want to locate those documents if I can."

"We'll do everything possible!" But McGrath sounded pessimistic.

"Round up Riker's secretary and have her open the office. Check the files for the name of Dennison. Question the secretary about it. Get a list of his office visitors for this morning and question them. Let me know as soon as you learn anything, Mac. Or you reach a dead end."

"I'll do that. Maybe, around midnight I'll be finished. Want me to send you home in one of the radio cars?"

"I'll wait for Silk. And try to trace the gun, Mac. Handle this as if it were a murder instead of a suicide. It could be murder at that," he added musingly.

McGrath emitted a long sigh. "Tony, it's suicide. Take my word for it."

"The act itself—yes," Quinn agreed. "But Riker wasn't ill, his finances were okay according to his fiancée, he was happy and he intended being married this Saturday. A man doesn't usually kill himself under such conditions. Therefore he was forced into this act and the man who did the forcing is a killer to my way of thinking. We couldn't burn him, but we might make him uncomfortable."

The arrival of the Assistant Medical Examiner required McGrath's presence in the bedroom. Quinn remained where he was, cane between his knees, hands resting lightly on it and his mind went back to those crusading days when he'd battled Paul Riker because he thought Riker wouldn't handle the office of the District Attorney either capably or honestly.

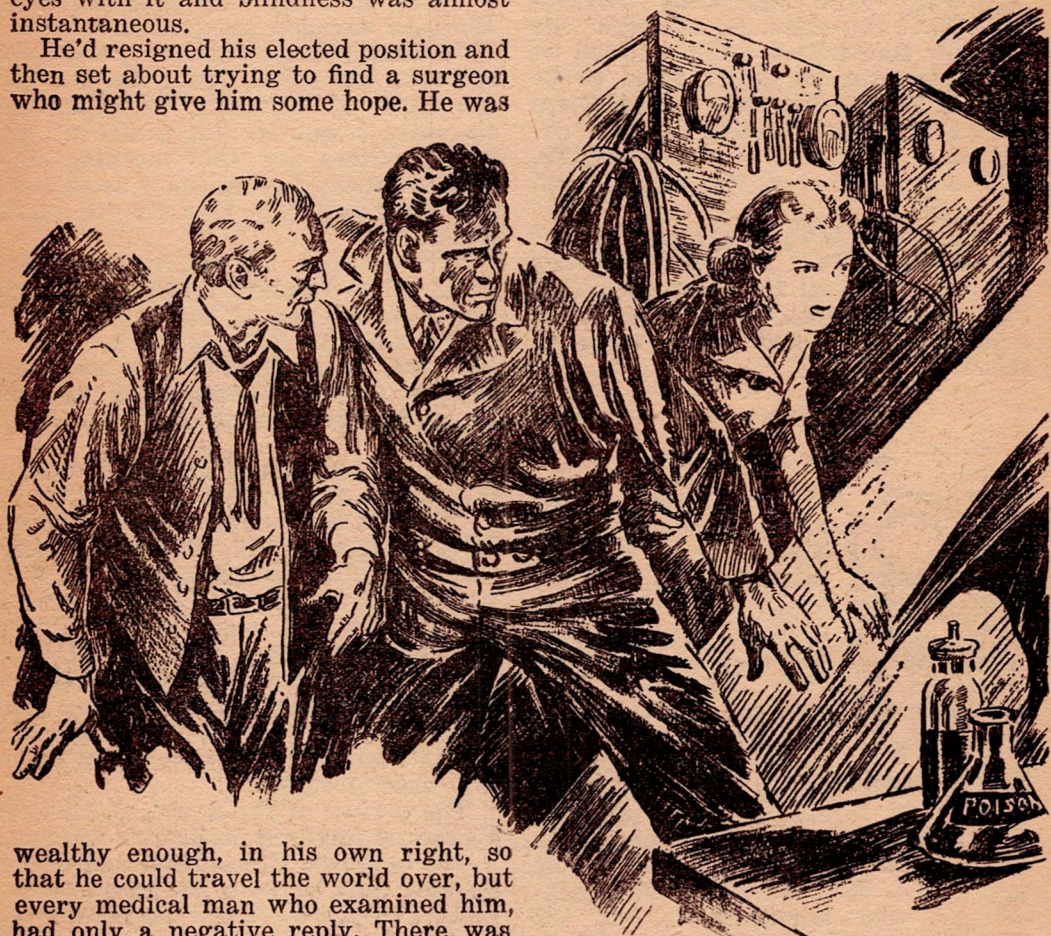
He'd been sure of that then, in those more youthful days. Perhaps he'd been right too. Quinn's mind drifted onward through the years. He'd been a good D.A. and there'd been a great deal of talk about putting him up for the governorship.

Then had come that black day in court when friends of a man on trial

tried to destroy certain evidence by hurling acid upon it. A foolish, vain gesture and when it was over, the evidence was intact and Tony Quinn was a blind man. In an effort to save the evidence from destruction, he'd moved straight into the path of that powerful acid. He'd been struck squarely in the eyes with it and blindness was almost instantaneous.

He'd resigned his elected position and then set about trying to find a surgeon who might give him some hope. He was

that his hearing became much acuter, his sense of touch tried to recompense for the loss of his sight. He felt those mysterious vibrations that help to protect a strolling blind man when he is about to bump into some solid object. He learned braille and how to identify people by their voices and footsteps.



wealthy enough, in his own right, so that he could travel the world over, but every medical man who examined him, had only a negative reply. There was no hope.

Silk Kirby, ex-confidence man and gentle crook, had tried to rob Quinn's home. It was an act of desperation, but it turned into a lucky day for both Silk and Quinn. Silk had given up his crooked ways and become Quinn's servant, ally and friend.

DURING the months that followed, Quinn also gave up hope of ever seeing again and settled down to learn the ways of the blind. He discovered

It all helped, but he still felt the loss of his sight keenly. Then a girl named Carol Baldwin, petite, blonde and very lovely, came to see him with a strange offer. Her father was a police sergeant in a midwestern city who had followed Tony Quinn's career as a crime fighter. Sergeant Baldwin lay dying from a criminal's bullet and he wished to donate healthy portions of his eyes to Quinn. A surgeon thought he might accomplish the job. Some work of this nature had been successful.

Quinn immediately seized the chance. The operation had been performed and

weeks when he waited for the sutures to heal. He meant to return to his fight against crime, but in a novel fashion. As D.A. he'd learned by bitter experience how red tape can tie up an investigation and even get a criminal off scot-free, Quinn determined to battle criminals in his own unique way.

By pretending to be still blind, he could adopt another identity and work

The needle was poised and Palen's lips drew back in a grimace of horror at sight of it (Chap. VIII)



Sergeant Baldwin died soon afterwards. Quinn returned home to wait the allotted weeks before removing the bandages. When he did, he could see again. In fact his sight was better than that of any normal person for, by some freak of nature, he found he could see as well in darkness as in broad daylight.

Quinn made many plans during those

under that. Work with a ruthlessness no police officer could get away with. He created a costume consisting of all black clothing and a hood that fitted snugly over his head. The hood was important because it was the only way he could effectively conceal those tell-tale acid-etched scars around his eyes.

He went out to fight the underworld

and in short order became known as the Black Bat, a mysterious individual who cared nothing for rules. He broke laws almost as often as the crooks he fought. He killed when killing was necessary, he burglarized homes and offices without a ripple of his conscience. He made criminals talk when no policeman could get them to utter a sound.

Quinn also studied all the aspects of criminology and set up a laboratory hidden in his home. It was a lab as complete as any and reached by means of a trap door hidden in the garden house behind his home, and a tunnel leading from that to the lab. This enabled him to come and go as he pleased.

Silk, of course, became actively involved and so did Carol Baldwin, who had been so instrumental in helping Quinn get his sight back. She quickly proved that she was resourceful and courageous and Quinn promptly fell in love with her besides. Some day he planned to marry her, but not until his work as the Black Bat was finished. He was constantly in danger and for Carol to share that every day was unthinkable so far as he was concerned.

One other person joined the ranks of the Black Bat. An enormously built man appropriately named Butch O'Leary. While Butch lacked Silk's keen brain and ability to talk fast and smoothly, he made up for it in devotion to the Black Bat and in his abnormal strength.

Those were the Black Bat's band. They fought beside him and were willing to die for him if necessary. No one else guessed that the apparently blind Tony Quinn not only could see, but was the marauding Black Bat as well.

Captain McGrath had his suspicions and a perseverance which never let him stop trying to prove that Quinn and the Black Bat were the same person. According to McGrath's way of thinking, the Black Bat had violated a thousand laws and wasn't much better than the crooks he hunted. There was a warrant out for the arrest of the Black Bat and McGrath had sworn to serve it. He gave Quinn some bad moments, but for the most part only served to keep him alert and watchful.

BUT the suicide of Paul Riker and the theft of those mysterious Dennison Documents seemed to lack the

importance which would have brought the Black Bat into this case. An explanation might be easily obtained from Riker's secretary and finding the thief who stole the dead man's papers would be a routine police procedure.

When Silk returned, Quinn took his arm and they went out to where the car waited. Silk drove directly home and Quinn posing again as a blind man, caned his way into the house alone while Silk put the car away. Quinn sat down, still trying to puzzle out that weird phone call and the suicide. There seemed to be no answer with only the facts at hand so he gave up, mentally handing the whole affair to Captain McGrath.

Yet, he couldn't get this strange business out of his mind. Quinn realized there was nothing for him to act upon, either as D. A. or in the more direct role of the Black Bat. He did, however, check through a college annual to find Paul Riker's name and by this means he learned that Riker was forty-four years of age and had graduated from a good law school in 1929.

He'd been born in a town named Kellogg, about fifty miles upstate. He'd progressed quickly, being elected Prosecuting Attorney in that town within two years after his graduation. Then he'd become a City Court judge not long afterwards. From there he advanced to the legislature and that sent him on his way to even bigger things in New York City.

Riker's progress had been what newspapers call meteoric. His only defeat for public office had been at the hands of Quinn himself and from then on Riker seemed to forego any elected office and set about building himself up in regular law practice. With his background, friends and associates it took him only a short time to get started. If his manner of living was any indication, he'd been extremely successful.

He'd never married. His parents died when he was still in high school and it appeared that he didn't come of wealthy people. All of this seemed to be of no particular interest and Quinn put the book away. He sat down in his library to smoke a pipe and see if he could derive some inkling of what the Dennison Documents meant. If they were legal papers, they should be on record somewhere. He determined to have Silk

do a great deal of checking in the morning.

At twenty minutes after ten, Quinn called Silk and had him bring his coat and hat. Quinn walked out of the library and down the hallway to the front door. He acted the part of a blind man to perfection, for rarely, even in his own home, did he risk dropping that role.

Customarily he went for a walk about this time. Just a slow stroll for a couple of blocks along that quiet residential street where he lived. Neighbors were accustomed to seeing him tap his cane, stop at the street corners to listen intently and then go on very cautiously. Nobody ever helped him. They sensed that he would have been offended if they had.

Quinn saw a car two blocks up the street. It was pulled in to the curb directly beneath a large oak tree, one of the rarities of this bustling island of cement and steel. The lights were out and the driver seemed to have selected the darkest possible spot. There was someone in the car. Quinn's apparently blind eyes saw the figure, but he could make no identification at this distance. Ordinary sight wouldn't even have detected the dim shape behind the wheel.

Quinn kept going, slightly puzzled, more than a little worried. Parked cars were unusual on this street. Of course it might be a boy and a girl who'd chanced upon the place and thought it isolated enough for some innocent love-making. Yet Quinn felt that he would have seen a second person.

There was always this tension present in his life. The eternal knowledge that someone might have ferreted out his double identity and would lay in wait for him. He knew that the underworld had long ago posted a very substantial reward for the man who exterminated the Black Bat.

QUINN was half tempted to turn back abruptly, but curiosity got the better of caution and he went on.

He was almost opposite the car when things began to happen.

"Quinn," the man in the car called out. "Tony Quinn!"

The seemingly blind man came to a halt and his head bent successively in several directions, as if he were trying to place the location of the speaker.

"Quinn," the man called again in a hoarse whisper. "Walk forward, just as you were walking."

Quinn started up again until he was abreast of the car. Then the man peremptorily commanded him to stop. Again Quinn seemed to be trying to locate the voice.

The man said, "Tony Quinn, there is a gun pointed at you. Stay exactly where you are and listen to me."

"Who is this?" Quinn asked plaintively. "I'm blind."

"I know that. It's only because you are a blind man that I can afford to take this risk. You can't see me and I doubt you have ever heard my voice before. You cannot see my car nor take its marker plates down. So I'm quite safe."

"Yes, yes," Quinn's voice had grown irritable. "What do you want with me?"

"This is a warning, Mr. Quinn. Don't dig any deeper into the suicide of Paul Riker. Don't try to find the Dennison Documents. If you do, we shall be forced to kill you."

"Now wait a moment," Quinn protested. "This is no joke—I can tell that by your voice. But trying to intimidate a District Attorney is a serious offense."

"I realize that, Mr. Quinn. But you can't see me. There is no way for you to get at me. I repeat, your first move to investigate the Dennison Documents will be your last. We absolutely mean business. Now stay right where you are. If you call for help, I'll be compelled to shoot you."

The man started the car, pulled away from the curb and did a U-turn. His car took the next corner and vanished. Quinn never moved, but there was a faint smile on his face. He'd been close enough to see the man in the car and to identify him. Also he had the marker plate numbers seared into his mind. But what he'd learned by this strange encounter only served to deepen the mystery of Riker's suicide.

Quinn turned and walked slowly back to the house.

NEXT ISSUE

THE BLACK BAT

in

MURDER TOWN

by G. WAYMAN JONES

CHAPTER IV

Under Observation

SMOKING calmly, Tony Quinn told Silk what had happened. "The man in that car amazes me. His name is Roy Hendricks and he happens to be a stock broker of considerable wealth and influence. We've never met formally, but I used to see him around and I learned who he was."

Silk wagged his head. "I can't make much of it, sir. First a prominent attorney kills himself and now a wealthy stock broker warns you not to monkey with the case or those mysterious documents."

Quinn leaned back, let fragrant smoke curl around his face and spoke through it. "We know that Riker returned to his apartment around six-thirty and there was nothing on his mind except a date with Lois Lloyd and the fact that he was going to marry her this week. The elevator operator noticed nothing depressed about him. An hour and a half later Riker killed himself. After phoning me about those papers. Now what could have happened during that time? The elevator operator says he took no one up or down. Of course climbing twenty-four flights of stairs is no mean job, but it could be done. Yet, I feel that whatever happened to make Riker want to take his own life, came over the telephone."

Silk shrugged. "As I see it, Riker was mixed up in something very crooked and knew the jig was up. He killed himself, but he didn't want others involved to get away so he called you about the papers."

"Perhaps. But the papers were missing and, if others were involved, they must have them or know that they are not in my possession. Why then, would a man like Hendricks take such a chance as to stop and threaten me on the street? Someone got the papers—true—but everyone involved doesn't realize that."

"I wonder," Silk mused, "if the man who got them would have murdered Riker?"

"It seems to me Riker realized he was

at the end of his rope. Possibly he knew he'd be killed. If so, whoever has the documents now, may have a tiger by the tail."

Quinn reached for a match and paused. He moved his head slightly and said, "Someone is coming, Silk. Wait now. . . . A car door closing. Footsteps . . . on the porch stairs. It's Captain McGrath."

Silk said, "Those ears of yours still hear things ordinary people can't detect. I'll let him in."

McGrath gratefully accepted the drink Silk offered him. He raised the glass. "I'm off duty as of now. Here's to you, Tony."

"Thanks, Mac. Now what about Riker and those documents?"

"Nothing to it. I don't know *why* Riker bumped himself off, but men *like* him sometimes have reasons we *never* learn. I checked through his office, questioned his secretary and everybody working in his office. There were seven people employed there. I examined his files, talked to close friends and—not a soul ever heard of the Dennison Documents. If they existed, and Riker had them, his secretary swears there would have been some reference on file because Riker was a very meticulous guy."

"I'm afraid, Mac, Riker might have kept the existence of these papers a secret. What about his apartment?"

"Nothing. We're all satisfied he killed himself. The only thing that puzzles me is the fact that he had a well hidden wall safe and when I got a man to open it, the safe was empty. Now why should a man go to all the trouble and expense of installing a wall safe and then not use it."

"He did use it," Quinn said. "That is where he kept the Dennison Documents."

"What makes you think such papers even existed?" McGrath derided. "Maybe Riker did phone you about them, but a man bent on suicide is hardly ever in his right mind."

"But Mac, someone else is interested in those documents. Not more than half an hour ago I was taking my usual evening walk. Someone in a car parked just up the street, hailed me. I was warned not to cry out as a gun was trained on me. You may be assured I kept perfectly quiet."

"Uh-huh," McGrath said with more

interest. "What did he want? Those blasted papers?"

"Exactly. Well no, not exactly. He seemed to take it for granted that I didn't have them. His reason for stopping me was to issue a warning. If I dug any deeper into Riker's suicide or tried to find those papers, I'd come to a quick and violent finish."

"The fool!" McGrath grumbled. "All he did was stir up something that was ready to die. Telling you not to check on a crime is like telling a bull not to charge anything red. Who was he?"

QUINN laughed softly. "Now how would I know that, Mac? I couldn't see him. Why, he even commented on the fact that he felt perfectly safe threatening a blind man."

McGrath's eyes narrowed slightly and he finished off what was left of his drink with a single gulp. He put the glass down carefully. "Tony, you know I'm convinced you are not a blind man. I can't prove it. Maybe I don't even want to way down in my heart. But if you know this guy in the car, tell me who he is so I can yank him into my office and make him talk. It isn't necessary that you admit seeing him. Just say his voice was familiar and you placed him by it. I'll shellac the truth out of any mug who threatened you."

"To my knowledge," Quinn grinned, "I never heard his voice before and I assure you, I did not see him."

The tough detective captain snorted something and arose. "Okay, I've got to accept that. It leaves us right where we were when you found Riker's body. We have nothing to act on. So what do you intend doing about it?"

"Just sit tight and wait," Quinn told him.

"Wait for what?" McGrath demanded. "For this man with the threatening ways to act against you? How can he, if he means what he said? The threat only goes into effect if and when you dig deeper into the mystery and how can you do that without a single clue?"

"I'll make one," Quinn said quietly. "At least this man will think I'm still working on it. Tomorrow I intend to run down anything and everyone bearing the name of Dennison."

McGrath sighed. "You like to make things tough for yourself, Tony. Well, I'll put a couple of men on your trail."



McGRATH

"Oh, no," Quinn objected quickly.

"That will scare him off. I want him to think he has a chance and I'm not afraid, Mac. Silk will never be far off and he carries a gun and he can use it."

"I'm going home," McGrath grunted. "You get any more cases like this, wish 'em on some lieutenant. Not an Inspector, because he'll just turn 'em over to me. See you tomorrow."

Silk let McGrath out and remained near the door as the detective captain swung his car around on the dead end street. Then Silk padded back to the library.

"You might be making a mistake in not allowing McGrath to have his way," he said. "The house is already tagged. When McGrath turned his car, I caught a glimpse of a man diving for the cover of the hedges across the street. Afterwards he took up a position behind a tree."

"Well," Quinn said enthusiastically, "that is interesting. Let's give the gentleman an exasperating night. We'll go to bed."

Silk did an especially good job of locking up. He peered out into the night from a darker room, but he couldn't see the shadow now. The man apparently had found a darker spot to hide in. Silk opened a living room drawer, took out a .38 automatic and checked it carefully. Then he went upstairs to bed.

CHAPTER V

The Fake Mr. Dennison

MORNING brought no signs of an observer outside the house though neither Quinn nor Silk had the slightest doubt but that he was there. By daylight, such a man would be more cautious and would have found himself a better hiding place.

They didn't even see the beginning of the chase, but before Silk had covered a dozen blocks, Quinn said, "We've picked up company, Silk. That black sedan so badly in need of a wash job. It's staying far behind but I've an idea it would catch up quickly if we started a few tricks."

"Shall I draw them out, sir?"

"Of course. But in such a way that they won't realize we're wise to them. Take a few corners rather short and see what happens."

The evasive tricks Silk used were extremely simple but they served to show that the dirty black car had no intention of letting them get away. Once the black car approached close enough so that Quinn had a glimpse of the driver in the rear view mirror.

"Odd," he said in a puzzled voice.

"There is one man in the car. A hard looking and hard bitten character, I'd say. Yet, so far only kid gloved gentlemen have entered the scene. All right, Silk, head for the office."

The black sedan double parked in the next block when Silk pulled to the curb in front of the large public building where Quinn's office was located. Silk helped Quinn across the sidewalk and up the wide granite staircase to the entrance. Quinn acknowledged greetings from police officers on duty, from clerks and from a janitor who was sweeping off the steps. He called them by name, eliciting no surprise because they'd learned that blind Tony Quinn recognized his friends by their voices and footsteps.

Quinn's office was always a busy place and this morning there were already five people waiting to see him. Quinn played his part of a blind man to the hilt here, even to having Silk

open and read his mail aloud. He attended to a few minor details and then sent for the first visitor. She turned out to be a witness who didn't want to go into court until Quinn sold her the idea that she'd be treated kindly and with all respect.

The second visitor was a man with a beef that Quinn took care of in routine fashion. Silk kept looking at the wall clock. Finally he said, "You're due in court in twenty minutes, sir."

"All right." Quinn reached for the PBX system switch and snapped it on. He called his secretary. "Will you please tell my visitors they'll have to return after three this afternoon. I've got to be in court."

"Yes, Mr. Quinn," she replied. And a minute later she called back. "There is one man here who says it is very urgent that he see you."

"I'm sorry," Quinn replied. "There's a judge, jury and a crowd of witnesses waiting."

"His name is Dennison, Mr. Quinn," the secretary interrupted. "He simply won't go away."

"Send him in," Quinn murmured and snapped off the switch. "Did you hear that, Silk? Dennison! Now if only he is the man about whom those documents were written and named for!"

Silk let the man in. He was short, none too well dressed and had a thin face. He was smirking as he approached Quinn's desk. "Thanks for letting me in. But I guess maybe, since I'm a taxpayer, you couldn't do much else. You got time for me?"

"Yes, Mr. Dennison—if you make it short."

"Of course, I can come back."

"No, no," Quinn said. "What did you want to see me about?"

"Well, I live at two-thirty-four White Street. Next door is a punk who sleeps daytimes. Nights he keeps his radio on. And he's got three dogs that bark their heads off. When I ask him to shut off the radio and muzzle the hounds, he doubles the racket. I want him pinched."

Quinn heaved a sigh. "Take it up with the precinct police station nearest your home. Your neighbor will be warned and if he still creates a disturbance, we'll have him into court."

The man named Dennison bobbed his head up and down, still smirking as he arose. His hands were on the edge of

Quinn's desk. The Special D. A. reached out a hand. It hit the side of the desk lamp and then, as if he'd lost his balance, Quinn's hand came down on the desk hard—exactly on top of his visitor's fingers.

THE man named Dennison yelped in sudden pain and pulled his hands away. Quinn apologized profusely and Dennison began laughing. "It's okay," he said. "You got to make allowances for a blind man and anyway I ain't hurt. You lock up that neighbor of mine and I won't sue you, Mr. Quinn."

He laughed as if it were a huge joke and went out. After he was gone, Quinn walked around the side of the desk, bent a bit and studied the edge surface. There was a fairly good set of prints on it.

"Mark off this spot with stacks of books," he ordered Silk. "After I'm in court, fetch a man from the Fingerprint Bureau and have him develop and photograph the prints our Mr. Dennison left behind him."

"So that's why you fumbled and pinned his hand down," Silk grinned. "But why did you want his prints? A squeal like his amounts to nothing."

Quinn said, "Silk, I'll wager that all is serene around two-thirty-four White Street and this man never lived there at all. No more than his real name is Dennison. He was sent here for one reason. To see if I'd respond to the name of Dennison. Somebody thinks Riker may have talked to me and mentioned the name of the documents. If, at a busy moment, I let a court trial wait to see a man named Dennison, then I'm interested in that name. I could be wrong, but I don't think so. If you size up our visitor, he's a type who'd never come to the authorities for any sort of help. I'm even betting he has a record—and that's why I took his prints. The desk top was freshly cleaned and oiled, few people touched it and so—our phony Mr. Dennison left his real calling card."

Silk quickly built a barrier of books and relayed word to the outside office that the desk wasn't to be disturbed for any reason. Then he took Quinn to the courthouse across the street, returned and put into motion the first steps by which he hoped to identify the visitor.

Before Quinn's trial was adjourned

for noon recess, Silk was at his side. Silk whispered, "You were right. Those prints belong to Stanley Palen, a small-time crook."

Quinn nodded and signaled that Silk was to wait. When recess was declared, they went to lunch at a nearby restaurant, talked only office talk and paid no attention to the man who had strolled behind them from the courtroom and taken a table halfway across the restaurant. He was the same man who'd followed them in that dirty black sedan.

When they left, so did he, but the shadow seemed content to observe Quinn enter his office building and let it go at that. He'd be there when Quinn came out. In the privacy of the office, Silk handed Quinn a police record card concerning Stanley Palen, alias Dennison. It was the adolescent and adult police diary of a man who didn't know the meaning of honesty. All were small crimes, the record of a petty thief.

"We'll check on Mr. Palen later," Quinn said. "This afternoon, when court convenes, you step out and go to the Bureau of Vital Statistics. It's close by, fortunately. Go through all sorts of records for the name of Dennison. Death, birth, wedding records. See if anything unusual happened to anyone named Dennison recently. If you have time after that, go to the *Globe* offices and check through their morgue records."

Neither Quinn nor Silk expected much from such a flimsy clue as only a name. The few interesting possibilities which Silk ferreted out blew up at the first study of them.

They were followed home and placed under observation again. Quinn made his plans after dinner. He said, "Our friend Mr. Hendricks, needs investigating, of course, but it has to be done in such a manner that he doesn't suspect for a moment that I was able to see and identify him. But even more urgent than that, I'd like to find out whether or not Hendricks and these men who have been following us, are part of the same mob."

"Maybe," Silk offered hopefully, "if we took them for a nice long ride and got clear of them, they might be forced to report to whoever pays off for watching us."

"Exactly what I was thinking, Silk. Phone Carol and Butch to come to the

laboratory at once and to be very careful about it. Be sure to tell them the house is under observation. Then we'll rig something."

FOR half an hour Quinn sat alone in his library, considering this strange case from all angles. It concerned the disappearance of certain documents of which there wasn't even any proof they had actually existed. And if they did exist and had been stolen, it seemed in all likelihood, they'd be destroyed by now.

Yet an important man like Roy Hendricks actually made a threat of violence if any pursuit of those documents should be made. He'd been vehement about it and given an ominously clear warning. Hendricks, Quinn already knew, was either a millionaire or neighboring upon one. His business dealings were aboveboard, he had many friends and stood high in social activities. Why would such a man risk approaching a District Attorney with such a warning?

And, Quinn wondered, were these men now engaged in watching every move he made, hired by Hendricks? Or was Hendricks as much of a hireling as they? Where did Stanley Palen, who gave his name as Dennison, come into the picture? And if Paul Riker had these dangerous documents, why did he take his own life?

The fact that Riker had taken the pains to dress himself faultlessly before putting a bullet through his brain was also an interesting phase of a case that rapidly became as intriguing as it was mysterious. So far nothing had occurred which was vital enough to bring in the Black Bat. Furthermore, even operating as the Black Bat, Quinn still had insufficient evidence to begin work on.

When he knew that Carol and Butch must be in the lab, he called Silk, who pulled down the window shades in the library. Quinn arose, hooked his cane on his arm and dropped the post of a blind man. He walked quickly to what seemed to be only a book lined wall. Under Quinn's manipulation of a control well hidden behind the rows of books, a narrow door slid open. He walked into the white tiled laboratory.

It was large, completely hidden and contained everything needed in the Black Bat's fight against crime. There

were shelves of scientific reference books, filing cabinets containing records of criminals along with their photos and fingerprints. As Special D.A. Quinn had ready access to police files and he'd increased his catalogue of crooks tremendously by copying and secretly photographing police records.

Lab benches and cases were filled with shining instruments. Microscopes and spectrosopes, blood analysis apparatus, all the equipment required for the study of ballistics. A great deal of money had gone into the creation of this lab and Quinn considered it well spent.

Carol Baldwin was there and came quickly toward him. He took her into his arms and held her tightly for a moment. She tilted her head back to look up at him for she barely reached his shoulders.

"Butch will be here any minute, Tony," she said happily. "We spotted the lookout and I came on alone first. What in the world is happening?"

"Practically everything short of murder," Quinn said, "and we may even have that. Let's sit down and wait for Butch. He'd better be in on all the details too."

They occupied a small leather divan and Quinn lighted cigarettes for both. They puffed silently for a few moments and then Carol sighed. "Tony, how much longer do you think we can get away with this? Meeting here, in secret. You living under two identities, one of them the most dangerous in the world."

"I don't know, Carol. Have you been getting worried?"

She leaned her head against his shoulder. "Tony, darling, I've lived with worry so long now. Every criminal dreams of killing you. The police maintain a constant vigil for the sight of you."

"I know," he said softly. "But the satisfaction of helping justice more than repays us for the danger we go into."

"I'm not arguing that point, Tony. I wouldn't want you to stop this but"—her voice took on a tinge of desperation—"how much longer can you get away with it?"

"That doesn't concern me," Quinn said slowly. "I know the dangers and the risks I take. Your father took them too—he died because he fought the same battle we're fighting. He gave me

back my sight so some part of him would continue the fight."

CAROL sat up straight and crushed out her cigarette. She gave him a wan smile. "Just forget all I said. If I had to return to the prosaic life of a stenographer, I'd know what I was missing. Just promise me not to take chances. That if it comes to a choice of exposure as the Black Bat or—death, you'll let them rip that black hood from your head."

"That is a promise," Quinn said. "I made it to myself long ago. And you're worrying too much, especially with the sort of job we have on hand. I'll give you some of the details. . . ."

Quinn's head cocked to one side and he smiled. "Butch is on the way. I can hear his shoulders rub against the tunnel walls. We should have cut it wider to accommodate him."

There was a trap door in the lab floor and through this came an enormous head, followed by shoulders that had to be lifted through one at a time and even then with difficulty. Butch hoisted himself out of the entrance easily, once the upper part of his body was clear for he tapered down at the waist. He had long, thick arms and mighty fists. His head seemed to rest directly upon his shoulders without the benefit of a neck. For all his ominous size and build, he possessed a likeable smile and was as amiable as a Great Dane.

"They sure got this place bottled up," he grunted. "One guy in front, another gorilla on the street back of the house. Each of the mugs has a car parked and ready to travel. What's up? Is somebody onto you, Tony?"

"Nothing like that," Quinn said.

"They're watching Tony Quinn, the D. A. and have no idea they're also putting something of a crimp in the Black Bat's activities. It began when a lawyer named Paul Riker phoned me and asked me to come to his place after a sealed envelope containing what he said were the Dennison Documents. Silk and I went there, found Riker dead—"

Carol interrupted, "You said this case didn't concern murder."

"It doesn't—yet. Riker had killed himself. The documents, as you may easily guess, were missing. There didn't seem to be much to the case. The only crime was that of theft and we weren't even certain what was stolen because the documents have never been explained."

"And then what happened?" Carol asked with half a smile. "Something did—to bring us all together again and cause men to watch this house."

Quinn said, "Don't take any high score for that deduction, Carol. A short time after Silk and I returned from Riker's place, I took my customary evening walk alone. I ran into a chap who warned me that if I stuck my nose deeper into Riker's death, I'd have it snipped off along with the rest of my head. He wasn't fooling."

"But Tony—a direct approach like that. Was the man an idiot?"

"No, he firmly believed that I couldn't see or identify him. If I'd really been blind, that would have been true, but I knew him. His name is Hendricks and he is an important and wealthy broker. If my interests in the case had waned somewhat, they came back then with a big bounce."

[Turn page]

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"What do you want us to do?" Butch asked. "Me, I'd like to grab those two gorillas and wring their necks tenderly."

"The time isn't ripe for that," Quinn said. "I want to know if Hendricks sent these men. So, Silk and I will draw them off. They'll trail us and we'll lose them. If they are simple mugs, they'll hardly be able to think out their next move and I hope they'll get into contact with the man who pays them. That's where you and Carol come in. Because when they lose us, I'm hoping you won't lose them."

"The coupe is parked two blocks away." Butch moved toward the exit. "Give us time to reach it and get set. That old crate may not look like much, but there's nothing on wheels that can get away from it. Ready, Carol?"

It was a spring night, warm, and humid with a storm threatening. There were neither moon nor stars—a perfect night for the operations of the Black Bat.

BUT it was Tony Quinn, blind and tapping his way along with a cane, who left the house half an hour later. Silk had already driven the big sedan around and was waiting. When Quinn came through the gate, Silk took his arm and piloted him to the car. With Quinn inside, Silk ran around the car and got behind the wheel.

He pulled away as if he were in a hurry.

Silk headed uptown, staying on well traveled avenues. That made it easier for their shadow to tail them, but it also simplified matters for Carol and Butch. Somewhere, well to the rear, would be a rather dilapidated coupe badly in need of a paint job, but souped up and able to overtake almost any car. The registration plates were genuine, but the name to which they had been issued would be impossible to trace.

Tony Quinn said quietly, "All right, Silk, show them your stuff."

Silk smiled and nodded, then promptly stepped on the gas. The big car shot forward and from the line of traffic at the rear, one car cut out and picked up speed. Silk took a corner very fast, surveyed the block into which he'd turned and swung into a driveway between buildings. The other car shot by, slowed and then nosed around the next

corner. Its brake lights winked on and shone even after the car was out of sight.

Silk backed out of the driveway doubled back, heedless of the fact that this was a one-way thoroughfare.

"We didn't lose them," he chuckled. "They know we pulled in somewhere. But wait until the next time I try this. I know where there is a driveway that runs between a couple of skyscrapers and there is another exit to the rear street if you just keep on going. There's where we'll duck them."

WHEN they reached the corner and turned south this time, they were soon picked up by the other car. If Carol and Butch were still on the trail, they kept out of sight.

So far neither Quinn nor Silk had seen a trace of the coupe.

Ten minutes later Silk cut a sharp corner and just beyond it was the alley he'd described. So close to the corner that it was barely necessary to straighten out the car after it turned. He rolled into this alley, shut off his lights and Quinn's abnormal eyesight took over the guidance of the car.

He soon directed Silk so that they came out on another street where Silk stepped on it, made the corner and rolled away fast. This time nobody picked up their trail.

Quinn said, "There was only one man in that car. The other must still be around the neighborhood where we live. So we'll take a little ride over the bridge to Long Island and see where my threatening friend, Mr. Hendricks, lives."

It proved to be a large suburban dwelling set well back on a beautifully landscaped estate. The home of a wealthy man, expensively kept up and in excellent taste.

"He does all right for himself," Silk observed dryly. "Can you imagine a man like that threatening a D.A.?"

"Hendricks must have a mighty big reason for taking such a chance," Quinn agreed. "Carol's next assignment is a check on him. All I know about the man so far is that he's rich. What I want to find out is where that money came from. You can head back now. I'd like to be waiting for any call from Carol and Butch. If they discover anything important, the Black Bat is going to move in."

CHAPTER VI

The Dead Lady

WHEN Silk had dodged into that alley and lost his shadow, Carol and Butch laughed at the discomfiture and uncertainty of the man who'd been on the trail. He rode around the block several times, finally parked and investigated each of the alleys on foot. At last he drove away, moving west across town. They stayed well behind him, but never lost sight of the car. When the shadower pulled up, Butch headed in toward the curb and parked too. The driver got out, slammed the door to show his disgust over the whole situation, and walked into a rather imposing building, its three stories rather dwarfed by neighboring towers.

Carol got out and strolled casually past the place, rounded the block and came back to join Butch. "It's an undertaking parlor," she said. "The Hudson Chapel and Funeral Home. The licensed mortician is somebody named Williams, but that doesn't mean he owns the place."

Butch looked up and down the street. He spotted the flashing neon sign of a tavern. "I'll be right back," he told Carol. "When you want information, the best place to get it is from a bartender. This will only cost me the price of a glass of suds. Keep your eye on that funeral home."

Butch needed only ten minutes. When he returned, he was frowning. He closed the coupe door and faced Carol. "Know who runs that joint? I mean who really runs it and takes the profits? A nice, fun-loving character named Joe Alphin."

"The old-time bootlegger?" Carol asked.

"The one and only. Ought to be a handy business for a man like him. Kill 'em and bury 'em. Simplifies matters. Now what do we do?"

"Stay here and see if anything develops. I don't like this, Butch. Alphin never played for pennies and there's more than one murder chalked up either to his gun or his active direction."

"I can take care of any gangster like him," Butch declared confidently. "The notches on his gun don't faze me."

"But he stopped being a gangster long ago," Carol said. "He makes his money smoothly now, without any friction with the law. A funeral parlor like this certainly must pay handsomely, but it's also a very good cover-up for illegal activities. I think I'd better give Tony a ring."

"Hold it!" Butch warned. "That same guy is coming out."

The man who'd shadowed Silk and Quinn hurried to the car he'd parked, left the door open and started the motor. In a moment a sleekly thin man emerged.

Butch said, "That's Alphin and he's in a hurry. There's no chance to call Tony now."

They took up the trail of the other car and followed it to Long Island. It finally stopped before a small bungalow which was part of a quiet, modest residential street. Both men walked briskly into the house without knocking or being admitted. The door had been apparently unlocked.

"Now I wonder what this is all about?" Carol mused. "Butch, pull over and wait for me. I'm going back and see what I can see."

This time a tall man with a black bag emerged and briskly stepped to the sidewalk, turned right and headed for a car parked in front of the neighboring house.

Carol promptly dodged behind a hedge and crept forward a bit until she was almost opposite a street light. Through the foliage she was able to get a clear view of the marker plates. They were in the MD classification, indicating the car belonged to a doctor. Carol noted down the numbers.

Then she resumed her trip to the bungalow, entered another yard and stepped over a low hedge. She was behind the house now and there were lights in one of the windows. If this bungalow was like most of its kind, that would be the bedroom.

Carol slipped up to a position directly beneath the window and stayed there quietly listening. She couldn't hear a sound. Raising up slightly, she stood with her back flat against the wall and then slowly risked a look through the window.

WHAT she saw made her eyes grow wide and her breath come in gasps. Two men were in the room, both busily engaged in ransacking the drawers. Neither one paid any attention to the woman who lay in bed. Her closed eyelids, chalk colored face and the absence of any other movements showed that she was dead.

Carol got away from there as quickly as possible. Butch recognized, from her white face, that something had happened. She told him briefly.

"Those two we followed are searching the place. The man who left may be a doctor and Butch—there's a woman about forty-five years old lying dead in that house."

Butch whistled and shifted gears. "Now we've got to call Tony fast. Maybe he'll be in time to surprise those two buzzards."

Carol made the call though they had to drive more than a mile to reach a public phone. She made a brief report of what she'd seen.

Quinn's voice came over the wire. "Go back there, Carol, and watch the place. I'll be along as soon as Silk can drive me over. If those two men leave, follow them. Otherwise stay put until you hear from me."

Carol and Butch were parked well down the street fifteen minutes later. Carol studied the bungalow intently. "Someone extinguished the lights," she said. "Maybe they left while we were busy phoning."

"We can't be sure," Butch argued. "I think we'd better stay until Tony arrives. You sure that woman was dead?"

"She looked it, Butch. And those men were calmly searching the room while she lay there. I knew we'd run into murder before this was over!"

"Maybe it wasn't murder," Butch said. "You told me the guy who left drove off in a doctor's car. The woman could have just—well, died. The doctor called Joe Alphin because he is an undertaker. This whole thing might not have anything to do with the case."

"It's murder," Carol insisted stubbornly. "It's always murder when the Black Bat gets mixed up in something. And that woman—even in death she was pretty. And what I saw of the house is spotless and neat."

Carol was the first to see Tony

Quinn's sedan turn the corner, pull in to the curb as it slowed and then roll on again. Neither she nor Butch had been able to see anyone leave the car. But when it passed by, only Silk was inside.

The Black Bat, clad in somber clothing from head to foot, had an almost uncanny ability to blend with the darkness and become practically invisible. He crossed the rear yard of the house next door. While the gloom would have slowed any average person to a stumbling crawl, he moved rapidly, for his amazing sight swept away the darkness. He stepped over a coiled up garden hose, vaulted the hedge lightly and approached the back door of the house.

It was locked. After a quiet and careful test to determine this, he put his ear against the panels and heard no sound at all. He recalled that Carol had told him the front door was apparently unlocked and he made his way around the small house.

It was midnight but lights in neighboring homes were on. He slipped up on the porch, walked on crepe-soled shoes to the door and found that it was not locked.

THE house was darkened, but that didn't matter to him. He stepped into a small but nicely furnished living room. Everything seemed to be brand new.

The rug was cushiony beneath his feet, as if the nap hadn't been trod upon very much.

Carol had said the dead woman was in a rear bedroom so the Black Bat made his way there. The house had only one bedroom. In it he found an unmade bed, but there was nobody in it. If the room had been searched, things were neatly back in their places.

The Black Bat grunted in exasperation and searched the rest of the house. He discovered a few interesting things, but no signs of any corpse or intruders. He took a small pencil flashlight from his pocket, hurried to the porch and signaled briefly. In a few moments Carol joined him while Butch remained in the car as lookout.

"There is no dead woman in here," the Black Bat said. "No live one either. Take this flash. Use it as little as possible and see if the bedroom is the same one where you saw the corpse."

THE Black Bat took her arm, led her down the hall and stood beside her in the bedroom. Carol snapped on the flash and gave an audible gasp as she saw the empty bed.

"This is the room," she whispered. "There was a dead woman in that bed. I'm sure of it. I don't imagine these things."

"I didn't imply that you had," the Black Bat spoke in a soothing voice. "It's obvious that while you and Butch went to a phone, the body was removed. But we know who was here, and we have the registration number of the car which drove away while you watched. We're not exactly facing a blank wall, Carol."

She gripped his arm tightly. "Oh, Butch was probably right. That really was a doctor who left here and Joe Alphin came here with one of his men to take the body away. After all, he is an undertaker."

"We've got to prove that," the Black Bat said. "Furthermore we want to know who this woman was. You're good at pretending to be a reporter. Start canvassing the neighbors, tell them you're from one of the local newspapers and that you want to write an obit. Get all the facts you can. Tell Butch to meet Silk around the corner and when you're finished, you go to my car too. Leave the coupe. I'll need it."

"Of course," she replied. "Where will we meet you?"

"Two miles down the highway leading to the city are crossroads. One is a minor road to some village. Park down that and wait. I'll be there as soon as possible."

He let her out and watched her walk down the street to where Butch waited in the coupe. The Black Bat closed the door quietly and went back to his work. What interested him most was the clothes closet in the bedroom. It was a large closet and well filled.

A cross bar was hung with six men's suits. All conservative and all brand new. There were six pair of shoes neatly arranged in racks. None of them had ever scraped on pavements. There wasn't a scratch in the varnish covering the leather.

Investigating further he discovered one of the two bureaus was filled with shirts and underwear and socks. Some garments had labels pasted on them,

some were pinned up. None had even been unfolded, let alone used. There was no old clothing at all.

He examined the living room to make certain his first impression of its newness had been accurate. There was no doubt but that the contents of the room had been installed within the last couple of days. And it was expensive merchandise, hardly the usual type in bungalows of this kind.

The Black Bat returned to the bedroom and searched the second bureau. That one contained feminine clothing. None of it new and all of it of average quality. He found a metal compact that was rather badly scratched and he determined that someone had erased the initials formerly engraved on its surface. He appropriated the compact.

There was a black purse which contained a little money, another and cheaper compact, a leather cigarette case, a couple of keys, a plain handkerchief and an ordinary lipstick. There were no letters, no identification cards. On the outside of the purse he found six small holes in the leather, indicating that at one time rivets had passed through these holes, fastening down metal initials.

Whoever this woman had been, she'd taken peculiar pains to remove any form of identification. The medicine cabinet contained the usual array of drug store bottles which are only cleaned out every third annual housecleaning day. Each prescription had been filled by a local drug store and the doctor's name was Bryn. The Black Bat mentally filed away that information.

YET there was nothing else of interest in any of the rooms, but the Black Bat believed in being thorough. He located the cellar door and descended the steps. His eyes penetrated the darkness easily and he approached a long workbench upon which were set up brand new tools. A small lathe, a power saw, a grinding wheel. There were racks of the finest tools money could buy, some in their original wrappings.

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

elaborate preparations?

The Black Bat opened a drawer in the bench. It was empty but the drawer was much shallower than he expected it to be and slipped entirely out of its slide, slid from his hand and crashed to the cement floor. The Black Bat bent to pick it up and froze there.

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

The Black Bat drew a .38 automatic from one of his shoulder holsters, moved the safety to the off position and started climbing the stairs. Undoubtedly whoever was in the house had heard that drawer hit the floor. The man was probably hidden somewhere, hoping another intruder might become alarmed and go away.

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

CHAPTER VII

Night Shots



CAROL BALDWIN hurried down the street to where Butch waited in the coupe. She opened the door, but didn't get in. She said, "Butch, Silk is waiting around the corner. Tony will want to use this car. You're to wait with Silk while I do a little ferreting among some of the neighbors around here."

"Okay," Butch grumbled. "But I hope I get into this pretty soon. Who was the dead woman?"

"We don't know. She was gone, Butch."

"Look," Butch said in a kindly voice, "maybe she wasn't dead at all."

"I know what I saw, for I've looked upon death too many times not to recognize it," Carol answered. "She didn't walk out of that house. I'll hurry with this job and meet you as soon as possible."

Carol crossed the street, walked onto the porch of the house directly oppo-

site the bungalow and rang the bell. She carried a press card in her purse. When the door was opened by a tall, angular woman, Carol flashed it.

"We just received word that a neighbor of yours died," she began.

Carol was in luck. She'd chosen first, the most garrulous woman in the neighborhood and, apparently, the one with the longest nose and the biggest ears.

"You mean Mrs. Comstock, poor soul. Yes, she passed away a short time ago. Why should a newspaper be interested in her?"

"We're interested in everyone," Carol answered. "May I come in, please?"

"Of course," the woman stepped back. "Perhaps you know something about Mrs. Comstock's life before she moved here? We've all been so curious."

Carol smiled and shook her head. "I'm after information, not giving it. Frankly, I have none to give. As a routine procedure the death of Mrs. Hannah Comstock—"

"Hannah?" the woman interrupted quickly. "Her name was Margaret. At least we thought it was, and we called her Maggie—in a friendly sort of way. Was her real name Hannah—maybe?"

Carol opened her purse and pretended to check the name in a small notebook. "I'm sorry. It is Margaret. Now, if you'll help me with this I'll get back to the office in time to make the morning edition. Did Mrs. Comstock live alone?"

"Oh, yes. She never had any visitors. Not many anyhow. Every once in a while a man would come to see her. Always around midnight, but he never stayed more than five or ten minutes. And then—her doctor."

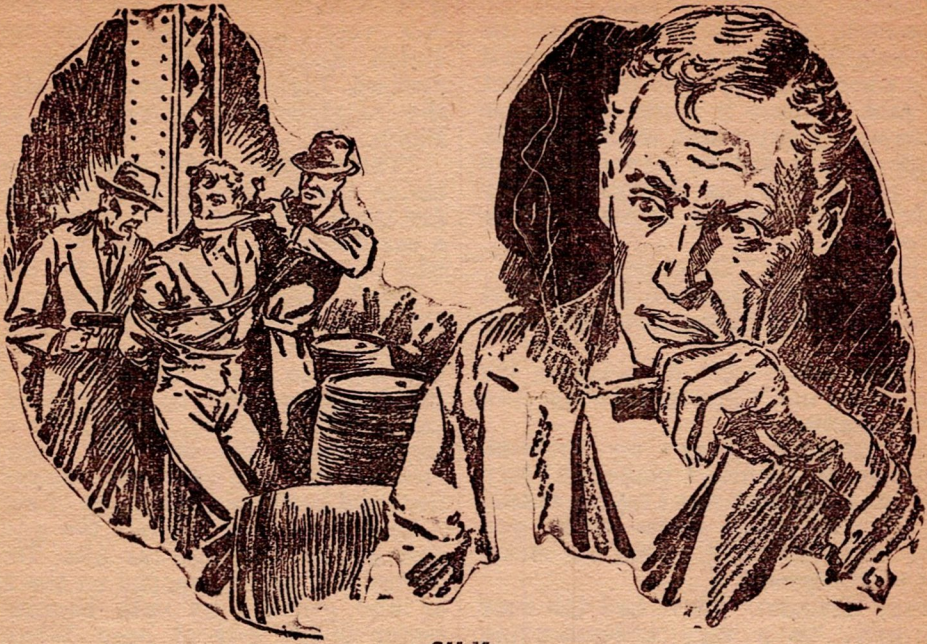
"Oh, yes. What was his name again?"

"Dr. Bryn. He's from the city. It must have cost her a pretty penny to bring him all the way out here. Did she leave much money?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Carol replied. "She had relatives, of course?"

"If she did, she never spoke of them. Once she said there wasn't anybody. I'm telling you, Maggie was a woman of mystery. That's what she was—a mystery woman. She just moved in about ten or twelve years ago. Paid cash for the house. You didn't hear of any mortgage, did you?"

"No. Where did she come from?"



SILK

"She never said. When we talked about the past, she just looked wise and said nothing. Sometimes we almost hated her. But really, Maggie was kind and gentle."

"Mystery woman," Carol chided, estimating this would bring out plenty of information if the garrulous neighbor had any. "Now why should you call her that? Perhaps her past was too sad to speak of. There are people like that, you know."

"That may be, but when a woman goes off twice a month as regular as the first and fifteenth of the month come up, then she has more than the past on her mind."

"You might be right, about her having a mystery in her life," Carol acceded, shrewdly judging this woman to get the most out of her. "How long would she be away?"

A VIGOROUS nod came from the gossip neighbor. "Two days, always. Just two days. She'd leave early in the morning and come back two mornings later. She always packed a big bag. Too big for a two-day trip. It was heavy when she left and light as a feather when she came back. I tell you if I didn't know Maggie had a bad heart and was expected to die, I'd say she'd been murdered."

"Oh, that's nonsense!" Carol derided. "Who was with her when she died? Perhaps that person can give me some information on Maggie's past."

"I was there. I saw her die. I phoned Dr. Bryn when she asked me to. Maggie never had a telephone. I'm suspicious of people who don't have phones—when they've enough money to pay for them. It means they don't want to have anything to do with the rest of the world. My phone is a godsend to me."

"I can imagine," Carol agreed sweetly. "Was she alive when Dr. Bryn arrived?"

"She died half an hour before he could get here. I was with her and I tried to get her to talk about herself. But she seemed so sleepy she couldn't say much. Dr. Bryn came to my house—to that very phone over there—and called the undertaker. A man named Alphin. Never heard of him. Can't be such a very big place. But then she won't have a very big funeral, what with no friends beyond those who live in the neighborhood. And no relatives. Can you imagine anyone without relatives? There should be at least a cousin or something. That's why I tried to make her talk."

"Thank you." Carol backed away in a signal she was preparing to leave. The woman promptly stepped forward

to maintain the same distance.

She said, "If you're going to ask the other neighbors a lot of questions, you'd better come back here and tell me what they said. Because it might remind me of something important about Maggie, though heaven knows, a woman who lived as quietly as Maggie simply couldn't have anything important happened to her."

"I'll come back," Carol promised.

"Be sure to do that. I'll try my best to think of something else that may help you."

A male voice from deep inside the house called out, "Tessie, shut up. You talk too much."

She grimaced. "That's my husband. He thinks we shouldn't bother to learn about our neighbors, but I say we should because you never know when you might be living right across the street from a murderess."

"Your husband," Carol had the door open now, "is a very understanding man. Thank you and good night."

Carol beat a hasty retreat from questions fired at her with bulletlike speed. She went down the walk, reached the street and was almost at the corner when she heard the first shot ring out. She wheeled, opened her purse very fast and dipped a hand inside. Her fingers curled around the butt of a small but very efficient automatic which she knew how to use with expertness.

There were two more shots, fired so close together they almost sounded like one. Then three more, evenly spaced. They all came from inside the bungalow where Carol had seen the woman called Maggie Comstock lying dead. Carol could identify guns by their sound. These were shots from a revolver, cracklingly clear. An automatic doesn't make quite so much noise. Besides they were a smaller caliber cartridge than those the Black Bat carried.

That meant someone else was doing the shooting and not the Black Bat.

Carol looked behind her. She was closer to the corner around which Silk and Butch would be waiting. She noticed a car parked almost opposite from where she stood—a car which hadn't been there a few moments ago. There was more than an even chance that it belonged to whoever was doing the shooting.

CAROL whirled and started running very fast toward the corner. Butch and Silk had already been aroused. Lights were going on all over the neighborhood. Carol ran up to Butch.

"Those shots," she panted. "From inside the bungalow and Tony didn't fire them. I'm sure of it. Butch, there's a car down the street. Maybe the man who was shooting will head for it."

Butch didn't need any instructions. He started running and those long legs of his covered distance at a remarkable clip. He saw a figure emerge from the bungalow and sprint toward the car. Butch crouched, crossed the street fast and got the car door open. He crawled into the back seat, closed the door and bent low to keep out of sight.

In a matter of seconds the gunman was getting into the car also. He slid behind the wheel, stepped on the starter and growled an oath because the motor didn't take at once. When the motor roared into life, he meshed gears with a blood curdling grate of metal against metal. The car started with a jerk, gained speed quickly and took the corner on screeching tires. The driver straightened out the wheel, bent over it and began driving as fast as he dared.

Butch made no move until they were well away from the neighborhood. He tensed to raise himself and go into action, but a wailing siren sent him back to his crouch. A radio car whipped past and then another. But he had no time to wonder about what happened to the Black Bat. Whatever it was, this man was responsible.

Butch suddenly leaned over the front seat. His long right arm shot past the driver and turned the ignition key. The driver let out a wild yell and reached under his coat. Butch's fist had been poised above the man's head. It came down now, exactly like a sledge hammer.

The driver was pushed off the seat and wedged down against the drive shaft by the blow. Butch seized the wheel, held the car on a more or less even keel and clambered into the front seat. He pushed down the brake pedal, swung the car to the curb and brought it to a stop.

Then he dragged the half-conscious man from under the wheel. The man's eyes were wide open but glazed. He

still retained some possession of his wits though all he could do was mutter curses.

Butch said, "Shut up!" And he tapped him on the chin. The eyes became more glazed, the muttering ceased. Butch pulled a revolver from his prisoner's shoulder holster, sniffed of the barrel and knew it had been recently fired. He broke open the breech and six empty cartridges were automatically ejected into the palm of his hand.

Six cartridges, any one of which might have held the bullet that could have killed the Black Bat. Butch's face was a mask of fury. He seized his prisoner by the neck and shook him, until he realized this would only prolong the period of unconsciousness.

He removed the man's necktie and used it to bind his wrists. He took the belt and wound that around the man's legs. Then he ripped a generous portion out of the faintly purple shirt the man wore, used part of it for a gag and the rest as a blindfold.

There was one thing Butch knew. If the Black Bat lived, he'd return to the lab and when he did, this gunman was going to be there. If the Black Bat didn't return? Butch's hands closed into mighty fists and there was cold murder in his eyes!

CHAPTER VIII

Truth Serum



NOISELESSLY the Black Bat was moving softly toward the bedroom when he heard that rhythmic clicking sound again. He risked a look into the darkened room and saw no one. The sound came from inside the clothes closet. He passed the closet door,

which was wide open, brought his gun to a level position and stepped into the closet.

As he did so, he realized he'd fallen for an old but usually successful trick. His eyes pierced the darkness to show him one of the new suits tied to the electric light cord by its hanger and it was swinging back and forth, hitting the walls lightly.

The Black Bat started to turn. The

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

The Black Bat, without an instant's hesitation, spun around, dropped his gun and seized the cross bar on which the clothes hung. He pulled himself up onto it, winding his legs around the slim wooden bar. It brought him well off the floor and to a height almost equal to the top of the door. The bar sagged under his weight and crackled a warning of its weakness.

All this required a matter of seconds and he wasn't one too soon for as he cleared the floor, the man in the bedroom began shooting. He placed his bullets so they were almost bound to hit the man he'd locked inside. Two came through the door, followed by two more which slammed through the flimsy wall and were meant to catch the victim no matter which end of the closet he sped to.

The gunman fired one more shot through the door and then a final one through the wall again. As the last shot rang out, the Black Bat felt the cross bar sag more, creak and then snap. He landed on the floor, atop some of the clothes. The thud shook the whole house.

The Black Bat heard wild laughter from outside the door and then the sound of scampering feet. The gunman believed that thud was made by the falling body of his victim.

The Black Bat scooped up his gun, returned it to its holster and set about getting free. Those shots would bring police on the double and he didn't want to be here when they arrived. From an inner pocket he took a flat kit of the finest burglar tools. He selected a tiny pair of pliers with long, thin flat noses. He inserted this instrument into the keyhole, gripped the key and turned it.

He stepped out of the closet and his eyes swept the room. Nothing had been disturbed. He hurried out to the living room and there he instantly spotted what this gunman had come for. The only old piece of furniture in the room was a rather elaborate desk, too big for the room and completely out of place here. Yet it had occupied one of the important corners.

Now, toward the back of it and along the side, a small panel was open. Some

sort of a secret compartment, probably built into the desk by the man who was expected to work with all those fine tools in the cellar of the house.

A clever job, even if it was home made. The space behind the panel was exactly big enough to accommodate the steel box it had once contained, but which now rested on top of the desk. It was a strange box with a heavy lock, but this had been ripped away by a jimmy of some kind. The Black Bat raised the sprung lid. The box was empty. He forced it back into the hiding place, snapped the secret door and took a fraction of a second to admire the handiwork which had created this hiding place.

Then he sped for the back door and in a moment he was vaulting hedges and hurrying to a spot parallel with where Butch had left the coupe. He had little time to spare because he could already hear the distant wail of sirens and the whole neighborhood was wide awake now.

He ducked beneath a couple of lighted windows, reached the front yard of a house and sprinted across it. If anyone watched, they might have seen a blur in the darkness and that was all. He had the motor going quickly and whipped around the corner.

HE saw Tony Quinn's sedan parked with Silk and Carol standing beside it. The Black Bat gave one toot of his horn and waved a black gloved hand at them. In a moment they were following him and when they reached a sideroad, he pulled into it and they drew alongside.

The Black Bat was already peeling off his somber regalia while Silk opened a hidden compartment in the sedan and took out the tweeds Quinn usually wore. Carol promptly turned her back, between firing questions at the Black Bat.

Two hands seized her shoulders and turned her around. The arms went about her for a moment. Then it was Tony Quinn who stepped back and the look of the blind clouded his eyes.

"We've got to move fast, in case any of us were seen," he said. "Silk and I left the house openly and we must return that way. You'll have to drive the coupe. Park it a few blocks from the house, come to the lab and be careful. The house is probably still watched."

"I'll be there," Carol said, "with plenty of questions to ask and some interesting information to tell. Tony, I nearly fainted when I heard those shots and saw that killer run out of the house."

"You saw him?" Quinn gasped. "Who was he? What was he like?"

"Butch will give you a better picture. The last I saw of the man he was driving off in a big rush, but he didn't know that Butch was in the back of his car. By this time I imagine the killer has discovered he had a passenger."

"That's fine," Quinn said. "Because I think that gunman stole something. Perhaps the Dennison Documents. At least he was after something important and he knew all about a secret hiding place. Get going, now. Don't waste any time, but watch out you're not seen."

Silk backed the big car out of the side road, waited until he saw Carol appear in the coupe and then set a swift pace back to the city. When he finally pulled up before the house, Quinn got out, swung his cane lightly and walked until it struck the gate. He opened this, passed on through and along the path to the porch. He climbed the stairs, tapping each step with the cane first. He let himself in and after the door closed, he stood listening. There appeared to be no invaders. He removed his hat and coat, walked down the dark corridor to the library and made his way to the chair in front of the fireplace. He was sitting there when Silk came in and turned on the lights.

Silk immediately drew the library shades, checked the front of the house and the back and reported that he saw no signs of any stake-out. "Maybe we shook them for good," he offered.

"Let's hope so," Quinn said heartily. "Take a look in the lab. If I know Butch, he'll be there with one pretty groggy gunman in tow. Make certain the man is blindfolded."

Silk passed through the secret door and Quinn heard him laugh, heard Butch's rumble of a voice. Quinn arose and walked into the lab himself. The gunman lay prone on the floor, his face flat against it with one of Butch's huge feet astride his neck. The man was moaning and moving feebly. Every time he tried to get up, Butch's foot came down harder.

"It's okay to talk," Butch said cheer-

fully. "Tony, I'm glad you're all right. I figured maybe this guy plugged you."

Quinn made a motion not to talk so much. Butch laughed. "I got his ears blocked. He can't hear, talk or see. If I had my way, he wouldn't breathe either."

Quinn laughed. "Very good, Butch. This man came close to gunning me out tonight. I want to know who sent him. But more than that I want to know what he did with whatever he took from a steel box in that bungalow."

the coupe. If he had anything on him, he must have thrown it away as he came out of the house."

QUINN rubbed his chin. "We'll have to find out, and men like our prisoner are apt to be a trifle stubborn. I know who he is. The name is Stanley Palen and he visited my office yesterday giving his name as Dennison just to see how I'd react to it. Therefore, we know he is in on this Dennison Document deal. Before we remove the ear plugs,



CAROL

Butch flipped the man over on his back and began searching him. "I gave the punk a frisk already, but I didn't find anything. Maybe I missed it."

Butch gave up finally. Quinn bent beside the man and joined in the search. Then Quinn arose, walked over to one of the lab stools and propped himself atop it.

"Odd," he said. "This man knew the secret hiding place of a steel, fireproof box. He got it out, jimmied the lock and yet—there's nothing on him which he could have taken. You didn't see him approach anyone, Butch?"

"All I know," Butch said, "is that Carol gave us the high sign. When I spotted this monkey, he was running toward his car. There wasn't anybody else on the street. No other cars except

the gag and the blindfold, let's arrange a psychological setting for his benefit. Silk, give me a hand. Butch, you watch our man."

Quinn carried a very bright, swivel lamp over to a corner of the lab. He placed it so the brightness illuminated one corner of a lab bench. On that he set up a weird apparatus, a monstrosity of a chemist's genius. At the end of the apparatus was a long, coiled glass tube and from this poured a slow stream of dark brown gas. Harmless but colorfully frightening.

Then he laid out a kit of surgical instruments which he used in examining certain types of clues. They glistened sharply in the light. Next he lined up a dozen large reagent bottles, all plainly labeled with the word POISON. On a

piece of folded gauze, Quinn placed the largest hypodermic needle he owned.

"That ought to make him wiggle," Quinn said, laughing. "Imagine how you'd feel if a blindfold was removed and you first saw the man you thought you'd just killed. Then all this paraphernalia set up. Unless his nerves are made of tempered steel, he's going to crack. All right, Butch, carry him over here and prop him against that chair. Don't remove any ropes or gags. I'll be right back."

Quinn walked swiftly to a steel locker and removed a duplicate set of the Black Bat's regalia. He put on the clothes quickly, adjusted the hood and then he heard Carol coming through the tunnel. He helped her into the lab and told her in a few words what he intended to do.

Carol, Butch and Silk retired to the darkness of the lab. Only the one bright light was on and it shone directly over Palen's shoulder. The Black Bat bent down beside the man and removed the ear plugs with a pair of forceps. Then he released the necktie which bound his wrists behind his back.

"Palen," he said in a low voice, "you can remove the blindfold and the gag. You're covered and I'll kill you if you make a move to get away. Your feet will stay tied."

Palen raised his hands, loosened the blindfold and as it dropped from his eyes he pressed hands tight over them to shut out the bright light. When they became accustomed to the brilliance, he dropped his hands again and his eyes went very wide at the sight of the formidable apparatus set up for his benefit.

He turned his head slowly and saw the black-clad, black-hooded man who sat before him with an automatic resting carelessly on his lap. Palen turned a sickly color and began gurgling under the gag until he got enough of his wits back to remove it.

He licked his lips, stared at the Black Bat and then shifted his gaze to the apparatus. The brown curling fumes seemed to intrigue and terrorize him.

"Wh-what are you going to do?" he gulped. "I-I ain't done nothin'. Honest, it's all a mistake."

"It was no mistake when you entered a certain house tonight, heard me in the cellar and set a trap that you sprung quite cleverly. It was me you

shot at and tried to kill, Palen."

"Y-you!" Palen gasped. "Look, I didn't know who it was. I only meant to scare you so I could make a getaway. Honest!"

"Stop using that word for it doesn't become you," the Black Bat said. "What did you take out of that steel box, Palen?"

"Wh-what steel box?"

The Black Bat arose and went over to the lab bench. He picked up a plug of cotton, dipped it into a beaker containing alcohol and bent over Palen. He ripped his coat sleeve open with a scalpel, tore the shirt sleeve away. Then he rubbed the alcohol soaked cotton on Palen's forearm. He straightened, picked up the huge hypo and thrust the needle into a bottle of amber colored fluid. The needle sucked up the fluid rapidly and the Black Bat withdrew it.

PALEN uttered a shriek. "No, you ain't going to poison me! You can't do it. That's scopolamin—truth serum. It's like poison. It'll be murder."

"Ah," the Black Bat said, "that's a better word. It fits you, Palen. But this won't be murder, quite yet. You know, of course, that I'm the Black Bat. You also know that I've killed men who deserved killing. Maybe you heard that when they are found, there is a sticker on their foreheads—a cutout of a bat in flight. I like to brand the man I have to kill. Don't make me brand you that way, Palen."

"But I don't know anything. You got the wrong guy."

"You were in that bungalow. I saw you. You locked me in the closet, did your best to kill me and then ran out after opening a steel box which you removed from a secret compartment. You ran to your car, but you didn't know that I'd escaped, beat you there and merely took you over."

"The—the stuff in that needle!" Palen tried to crowd himself into the corner. "I've seen it work. It's poison. I know it's poison. Ask me anything. Go ahead, ask me. I'll talk. I don't want any of that stuff pumped into me. I'll talk if you promise to give me a break."

"Who sent you to that house tonight, Palen?"

The needle was poised and Palen's lips drew back in a grimace of horror. He talked in a whining voice.

"If I tell you, I'll be bumped. That's the truth. Maybe I ought to let you do it because I'll go out easier than having my throat slit."

"We'll go at this from a different angle," the Black Bat said. "What was in that steel box?"

"Nothin'. It was empty. That's the truth. I swear it. I was told where to look for it and the box was there okay. Locked up tight and all. I jimmied it in two seconds but the box was empty. You got to believe me."

"What was supposed to be there?" the Black Bat demanded.

"An envelope. An envelope with seals on it. A red envelope, that's all I know."

The Black Bat frowned behind the hood. Palen, of course, referred to the envelope containing the Dennison Documents, but how had they come into the possession of the dead woman?

"All right," the Black Bat said, "I do believe you. There wasn't time or opportunity for you to get rid of this envelope and it wasn't on you. Now, who paid to have you pull this little job?"

"I won't tell that. I can't. You want to see me dead?"

The Black Bat shrugged. "You wouldn't look too bad that way, Palen. Take your choice! The truth serum or —talk."

Palen struggled to sit upright. "Look, if I tell you, do I get a break? Will you promise not to say you even snatched me and made me talk? So I can go back to the guy and tell him the steel box was empty and I did my part okay?"

"That," the Black Bat said, "is a deal."

Palen took a long breath. "Okay. The guy's name is Hendricks."

"Very interesting. What does this Hendricks look like?"

"About fifty, maybe. Gray hair, part bald. Medium size, five feet eight or nine. That's all I noticed."

"How did you meet him?"

"I was picked up for rolling a drunk, but the cops didn't have anything on me and the magistrate let me go. When I walked out of the courtroom, this guy Hendricks put the arm on me and bought me some drinks. Then he propositioned me."

"All right," the Black Bat said. "Tie the blindfold over your eyes and put the gag back into your mouth. You'll wind up on a park bench. When you do,

get out of town and don't come back. The next time we meet, Palen, you won't get another break."

CHAPTER IX

The Doctor Makes a Call

IN his own clothes again, Tony Quinn shared the davenport with Carol. Silk sat opposite them and Butch had gone off to dispose of Palen.

Quinn said, "It's been quite a night and not over yet. I've still something which needs attention. So Carol, if you'll tell me what you

learned about that dead woman, perhaps we can get on with this."

"Her name was Margaret Comstock," Carol said.

Quinn pursed his lips. "That was the name she used. I doubt it was her real name and I think I can prove that in half a minute. I appropriated an old metal compact from her dresser. There were initials once engraved upon it and someone chiseled them off. Maybe I can bring out the original inscription."

Quinn took the compact from his pocket, went over to a large magnifying apparatus and placed the compact beneath the lens. He turned a powerful light on it and narrowed his eyes. The first initial H was fairly clear. Quinn dipped a pipette into a bottle of acid, drew up a small portion of the acid into the tube and let it run out slowly, over the surface of the compact. Almost at once the corrosive substance ate into the metal, biting quickest into that part which had been once engraved.

The rest of the inscription was clear enough when Quinn washed off the acid. He faced Carol and Silk. "Her initials were H. V. O. That doesn't help much, but it shows she was living under a false name. Now, Carol, what else did you learn?"

"That she had no friends or relatives. That her doctor was named Bryn and he went all the way out there from the city. Twice a month, on the first and fifteenth, she left her home with a large, loaded suitcase. Two days later she returned and the suitcase was much lighter in weight. She never told anyone

where she'd been but she never missed one of those trips."

Quinn walked over and sat down beside Carol again. "That's extremely interesting because it jibes with a mystery I uncovered in the house. Mrs. Comstock, or whatever her name was, recently purchased several men's suits, shoes and haberdashery. She refurnished part of the house and spent a lot of money doing it. Even set up an elaborate hobbyist's workshop in the cellar. Now what sort of man would come out of her past, join her once more and require all new clothing? And what sort of person would she go to see on a very regular schedule and obviously bring things to?"

"A convict!" Carol and Silk chorused.

"Exactly. A convict could only be visited on certain days. Would enjoy fruit and cake which could easily fill up part of a suitcase. Mrs. Comstock spent one day reaching her destination, saw her convict friend the following morning and then came straight home."

"And Tony, this convict must be about ready for release. That's why she had all that new clothing prepared for him."

"Of course," Quinn agreed. "At last we have some sort of a lead. Now, was there anything else those neighbors offered?"

"I talked to one woman. I'll bet she knows the history of everybody on that street. She mentioned that Mrs. Comstock had been ill for some time with a heart condition and her death was no surprise."

"Probably not to certain other parties either," Quinn mused.

"Tony, I think you're wrong on that.

Mrs. Comstock managed to call this neighbor across the street. When she got there, Mrs. Comstock was quite bad so the neighbor returned home and phoned Dr. Bryn who promised to come right away. Then she went back to the Comstock house and put the woman to bed. Mrs. Comstock died while the neighbor was there. She seemed to be in a partial coma. Dr. Bryn arrived some time later. He made an examination, went over to the neighbor's house and phoned an undertaker named Alphin. Men from this undertaker's came and removed the body. That's how it disappeared between the time I saw it and you reached the house, Tony."

QUINN stoked his pipe and Carol lighted a match for him. He puffed slowly for a few moments. "Let's sum it up," he said. "We have one dead woman, identity unknown. We have one convict, also identity unknown. We have mysterious papers called the Dennison Documents which were stolen from Paul Riker's apartment and were somehow supposed to reach this unidentified woman's home and yet were not there when Palen burglarized the place. We are sure this woman lived under an assumed name and that there is a convict associated with her. At least we can be quite certain of that. We are told she died a natural death, but of that we have no definite proof. So I believe we should settle that first."

"But how?" Carol asked. "The neighbor will swear Mrs. Comstock died of heart trouble."

"An autopsy," Quinn said. "Though I can't understand just how to arrange for one. So far as the law is concerned, it never heard of Mrs. Comstock. There was a shooting at her home tonight, but she was already dead when that happened. We can't order an autopsy unless there are suspicions."

Silk said, "You could look over the report of the shooting and have a detective go into the matter of Mrs. Comstock's death on the assumption that gunmen might have been in the house before and frightened the woman to death."

"Except for one thing," Quinn said. "Mrs. Comstock died on Long Island and the jurisdiction of my office doesn't extend that far. But you're right about supplying a reason for an autopsy. I'll see what I can do in the morning."

"Then we've done all we can do tonight?" Carol asked.

"You have," Quinn told her. "The Black Bat has a couple of calls to make. Not particularly dangerous ones and I'd prefer making them as Tony Quinn, Special D. A. but it's impossible. I can't even show any suspicion of the people involved without indicating I've a pipe line to the Black Bat."

"Tony," Carol said almost as an afterthought, "there's one more thing. It may not mean much but I'm intrigued. I've done a little checking on Paul Riker and Lois, his intended wife. She's a beautiful woman, Riker was a hound for publicity and yet I couldn't find any

announcement of the engagement or the wedding. Lois never allowed her picture to be printed in any newspaper."

"That's very interesting," Quinn agreed. "Follow it up if you have a chance. Carol, this is one of the reasons I like you working with me. You see things from a woman's viewpoint. Run along now. You need rest."

Carol said determinedly, "No, Tony, I'm staying. I can rest right here until you return. Butch will be coming back here too."

With that Quinn retired behind a screen, put on the Black Bat's clothing again and had Silk meet him in the coupe which Butch left parked on the dead end street beside Quinn's home.

As Silk pulled away, he said, "I'm sure the house is no longer under observation, sir. Butch and Carol agree with me."

The Black Bat adjusted the wide brimmed hat which he wore when driving through populated streets. It shadowed his features enough to hide those giveaway scars around his eyes and attracted little attention. The hood was only worn while the Black Bat was actually on the prowl.

The Black Bat said, "Those shadows were posted to see if Tony Quinn knew anything and was taking action. The men, or man, who sent them, realize that Paul Riker spoke to me, but they don't know how much Riker said. Therefore they have to be careful. You checked the home address of Dr. Bryn for me. I want to go there first."

It was now in the early morning hours. There were few people abroad and most of the towering apartment buildings were dark. Dr. Bryn had his office and living quarters on the ground floor of one of these buildings. A small

light shone on his nameplate beside the entrance.

The night bell was a familiar note to Dr. Bryn, but he usually grumbled when someone rang it. He grumbled now as he pulled on a dressing gown and stepped into slippers. He entered his office, passed through it and crossed the waiting room to the door. He removed a burglar chain, turned a bolt and pulled the door wide.

HE saw a tall man, all in black standing there. A rather large hat obscured his face. Dr. Bryn stepped back. "Come in, sir. What's the trouble?"

Under the more certain light in his office, Dr. Bryn saw his visitor somewhat better. Saw the close fitted black hood that covered his head under the hat.

Bryn gave a visible start of either plain surprise or fear. Then he sat down slowly. "You're the Black Bat," he said. "What do you want with me?"

"I want the facts concerning a Mrs. Comstock who died earlier this evening, Doctor."

Bryn showed no surprise, though he tried to inject a measure of it into his voice. "But why on earth are you interested in that poor woman's passing? It was merely a case of myocarditis. She had it for a long time and I told her weeks ago she was living on borrowed time."

"How long had you treated her, Doctor?" the man in black asked.

Bryn went over to his desk, sat down and pulled a filing case toward him. He went through it and removed one of the cards. "I saw her first about one year ago. She had an attack on the street in

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front of my office and simply walked in for help. I took her on and made occasional trips to her home."

"Whom were you to notify in case of her death?" the Black Bat asked. "She must have told you that."

"But she didn't. Frankly, I thought there was some dark secret in her past life. She told me so often, that she had no one, I grew suspicious. A person who reiterates the same thing is turning a denial into a positive admission. I believe there was someone close to her, but she'd run away from this person."

"She paid you regularly, Doctor?"

"Never failed, and she didn't mind my fees which were rather high because of the distance I had to travel. I never knew her to plead poverty."

"Did you know," the Black Bat asked, "that there was a shooting in her bungalow after her body had been removed?"

"Why—no. No, I hadn't heard. What in the world was it all about?"

"I doubt even the police know, Doctor. Do you intend performing a post mortem on Mrs. Comstock?"

"Certainly not. There is no need for it." Bryn paused and eyed the black-hooded figure intently. "Or is there? Do you know of a reason why an autopsy should be done?"

"Not yet, but I think you'd be on the safe side by performing one. If you refuse, I'll arrange matters so that a medical examiner does it."

"This is all very silly," Dr. Bryn said tartly. "Mrs. Comstock died a perfectly natural death. I'd been expecting it for weeks. Show me the least suspicious thing about it and I'll arrange a P. M. But you can't. She was merely a sick woman, living quietly alone. I won't be bamboozled into this. Not even by a man who hides behind a hood and who is known to be very dangerous."

The Black Hat backed toward the door. His gloved hand snapped the light switch, plunging the room into darkness. He moved noiselessly to a window and turned the lock. Then he passed through the doorway into the waiting room where he again turned off the lights. The outer door opened, closed quietly and an elaborate silence descended over the doctor's suite.

Bryn snapped on his desk light, remained seated for a few moments and finally arose to walk slowly into the

waiting room. It was quite empty. He opened the hall door and peered out. There was no one in sight. Bryn returned to his consultation room and picked up the phone. He dialed a number he was quite familiar with.

"Hello—Alphin? Bryn here. Now listen carefully—remove that body at once. The Black Bat has been here and he is threatening to arrange an autopsy. Yes, yes, I know you can't bring a body to the crematory at this time of night without arousing suspicion, but you can put it in one of your service trucks and keep it on the move until a decent time tomorrow. Work fast!"

The man on the other end of the wire grunted an annoyed assent. Dr. Bryn hung up and only then permitted himself to slump deep in his chair and begin wiping the perspiration from his face. Suddenly he sat erect. There was a cold breeze blowing against the back of his neck. He swiveled around in his chair. The window was open about a quarter of an inch, yet he knew he'd closed it before locking up earlier in the evening. What if the Black Bat had found an opportunity to raise the window so that he might slip back and listen?

Bryn walked over to one of his medicine cabinets and helped himself to a bottle of whisky. He poured a husky slug and downed it in a gulp.

CHAPTER X

Black Bat at Bay



As the coupe rolled past, Silk saw it, signaled and promptly got aboard. The Black Bat was at the wheel. Silk chuckled as he settled back in the seat.

"You were right about Dr. Bryn. When you unlocked the window, I was already outside and waiting. As the doctor followed you into the waiting room, I raised the window just a little. Bryn promptly came back and phoned someone named Alphin. That's the undertaking firm run by Joe Alphin, the ex-racketeer, isn't it?"

"We're going there now," the Black Bat said. "Did he reach Alphin?"

"Yes. And told him to remove Mrs. Comstock's body at once, put it aboard a service hearse and keep it moving until morning when it could be brought to a crematory without arousing any suspicion. They certainly don't want a post mortem done on her."

The Black Bat said, "If we're in time, we may see them drive off with the body. Otherwise we'll have to institute a police hunt for it and that means bringing Tony Quinn into the picture. I don't want to do that except as our last possible resort. Move fast, Silk."

The coupe rolled uptown at a speed just short of attracting attention. They reached the avenue where the funeral parlor was located and as they rode down it, they saw a service hearse coming in their direction. As it passed by, the Black Bat had a good look at the two men on the front seat.

"Joe Alphin and one of his men," the Black Bat told Silk. "Drop me right here. While I go ahead to see if I can dig up any clues in the funeral home, you trail that hearse. Call the house whenever you get a chance and stay out of Alphin's way. He's not the gentle type."

The Black Bat swung the car to the curb and alighted. He faded down a driveway beside the funeral home while Silk promptly turned the coupe around and started after the hearse.

The Black Bat walked onto a loading platform at the rear of the place and approached the door. He grasped the knob hard and turned it. Then he slowly grew rigid and raised both hands. There was a gun pressed firmly against his back.

"That's right, Black Bat," a voice said softly. "Remain as you are while I extract your fangs. And please don't try to make any foolish moves. I don't want to kill you, but I will."

A hand reached over the Black Bat's shoulder and a gun was slipped out of the holster under his left shoulder. Again the hand came back to continue the search and his second gun was taken. The hand slid down along his clothes then, seeking more weapons and finding none.

The man said, "Good! That's much better. Now open the door, Black Bat, and step right in. There is no one here. No one alive, at any rate. Alphin may have some of his reposing rooms in use.

Go on, open the door! I unlocked it some time ago."

"You knew I'd come here?" the Black Bat asked.

"Of course. You visited Mrs. Comstock's home and got shot at there by a rather stupid man. That was sufficient to make you investigate the poor woman's death and the trail would eventually lead you here. I merely got set and waited for you. You couldn't see me, even with those eyes of yours that see everything in darkness. I knew that and took precautions. I didn't think you could see through that packing case on the platform and I crawled inside of it."

The Black Bat had the door open and he walked into the receiving room. The gun nudged him and he kept going until he reached a glass door marked *Private*. It opened under his touch and he entered a comfortable office, equipped with large leather chairs.

THEN, for the first time, the Black Bat had an opportunity to see who held that gun on him. He thought he'd recognized the voice, but now he was positive. Roy Hendricks didn't seem to mind that those shining eyes beneath the black hood scrutinized him carefully.

"Sit down, Black Bat," Hendricks said. "Just keep your hands on the arms of the chair is all I ask of you. Then we'll have a little talk. My name is Hendricks. I'm a rather important stock broker with a fairly substantial fortune at my command. I won't ask you to introduce yourself, of course."

"May I ask why you don't rip this hood off my head and see who I am?" the Black Bat asked. "You have me covered. Frankly, I've never been quite so much at the mercy of an enemy."

Hendricks laughed. "But I'm not an enemy, Black Bat. Look here—suppose I remove that hood. Suppose I find out who you are. Very well, from that moment on I'll be a doomed man. You'll have to kill me. The very success of your work depends upon concealing your true identity; otherwise you'd be open for attack any time of the day or night. So—unless I want you on my trail, I'll have to shoot you down. I'd hate to do that."

"What are you driving at?" the Black Bat asked.

Hendricks kept his gun trained on

the hooded man as he walked to a desk in the corner. There he picked up a piece of blank white paper, found a large envelope and placed these near the edge of the desk. Next he appropriated a blotter and onto this he squirted the contents of a fountain pen comprising part of the desk set.

"Just step here," Hendricks told the Black Bat. "I'll show you how we can compromise so neither of us will be in danger from each other. Remove your right hand glove."

The Black Bat eyed the gun, lifted his gaze to Hendricks' face and saw a man very determined to have his own way even if he was required to start shooting.

"My fingerprints," the Black Bat said softly. "You want them. Perhaps they are on file, perhaps their impressions have been taken. But I assure you, Mr. Hendricks, that so long as these fingerprints are in your possession, you won't live a very safe nor pleasant life—nor a very long one."

"We'll discuss it after you ink your fingers and press them on that piece of paper."

The Black Bat shrugged and obeyed. Hendricks, carefully watching his prisoner, picked up the still damp blotter and handed it to the Black Bat.

"I'm not sure," he said, "if your prints got on this when you inked the fingers. So you'd better keep it. Now we'll fold this piece of paper and insert it into this envelope. I came quite prepared, Black Bat. I even have a piece of sealing wax."

He placed the envelope and sealing wax on the desk, motioned toward it with his free hand and kept the gun always level with the Black Bat's chest.

"You may mark that paper on which your prints are impressed, in any way you like so you can be certain there's no substitution. Then you may seal it in the envelope yourself. Use the wax on it. I'll provide my ring—a signet ring—which you may use to impress in the wax. When you have prepared the envelope to your entire satisfaction, I shall take it."

"You hold the four aces," the Black Bat said. "I suppose once you have these prints in your possession, I shall be expected to earn the right to get them back intact."

"That's it. Please understand, Black

Bat, that I hold no enmity for you." Hendricks began pacing the floor but always facing the man in black and always keeping his gun on him. "I'd much rather not know who you are. I want to go on living, you see, and I'm quite familiar with your ability to get out of scrapes and—well, reverse your position. So long as I have your fingerprints, you can't get at me. I'll be safe—and so will you, because I shall return them to you eventually."

CALMLY the Black Bat sat down at the desk and prepared the envelope. He melted the blue wax, let it drop onto the envelope in several places and promptly pressed the flat of Hendricks' signet ring against the soft wax.

"How can I be certain you won't slip a double on me when we finally settle up?" the Black Bat asked. "With this ring you can prepare another envelope exactly like this one."

"Keep the ring," Hendricks urged. "Now hand me the envelope. I shall write an address on it, place a stamp in the corner and then leave you here while I mail it. You won't go away, Black Bat. You won't dare."

Hendricks laughed as he carefully printed a name and address on the envelope. He affixed a stamp and then quite calmly walked out of the room. He was safe enough. So long as he retained possession of those fingerprints, the Black Bat remained his prisoner.

While Hendricks was gone, the Black Bat sat quietly in the darkness and thought it all over. Hendricks wanted something. He needed the services of the Black Bat to get it. He'd set a trap, simply by guessing right and using his head. He'd rendered the Black Bat comparatively harmless. Hendricks was a clever man and not the scary type.

It was a situation demanding tact and patience. Killing Hendricks would get the Black Bat nothing except eventual exposure when the envelope with those prints in it was found. Hendricks had labeled them the fingerprints of the Black Bat so there'd be no wondering about them. As a matter of fact, it was to the Black Bat's benefit to keep Hendricks from all harm.

There were no angles or loopholes. He was completely trapped, utterly at the mercy of this man. And yet, Hendricks showed no signs of being vindic-

tive about it. He was merely acting like a business man who wanted something and was getting the best help available to do the job.

When Hendricks returned, he placed both of the Black Bat's guns on the desk. He smiled. "You see, I'm even returning your weapons, fully loaded. You can see that I'm no longer menacing you with my gun. We don't need to keep one another covered now, Black Bat."

The Black Bat slid the guns into their holsters. "You're rather an amazing man, Mr. Hendricks. I admit you've got me and no one ever succeeded in forcing my hand before. I've got to do as you say, so I'm waiting to hear the proposition."

"Good." Hendricks lit a cigar. "Relax, Black Bat. Alphin ran away with the corpse of Mrs. Comstock. That idiot, Dr. Bryn, phoned him you'd be here. Alphin won't be back tonight and he took the only man on duty with him."

"Then Dr. Bryn and Alphin are not working for you or with you?" the Black Bat asked.

Hendricks laughed. "You're underestimating me. I wouldn't have anything to do with such stupid people. We're all after the same thing and I intend to get it first. Black Bat, what do you know about the Dennison Documents?"

"Paul Riker had them. They were stolen from him."

"Do you know what the Dennison Documents really are?"

"No, I do not."

"Good. It makes things easier. Our good friend Joe Alphin has them, Black Bat. Oh, not here. They're well hidden and Alphin is no man to tangle with. I'm not in his class, but you are far above it. Get the envelope containing those documents from Alphin, bring it to me and I will return your fingerprints. I'm even willing to add a substantial bonus. Say—ten thousand dollars."

"What makes you think I'm interested in money?" the Black Bat queried.

"Why are you in this business—wearing a mask and risking your life?" Hendricks waved a hand and laughed heartily. "Because of the glory? What glory—when your identity is a secret? For fame? An anonymous man cannot become famous. Because you are a

crusader? Nonsense! Those people died out years ago. You're in this for money and somewhere along the line you get it. The police rarely find out you've profited and those who could know are usually dead. I've been following your career. I often thought I'd like to have you working with me."

"We'll talk money later," the Black Bat said. If Hendricks believed he'd accept cash, the man might be less suspicious and wary. He'd be convinced he'd subjugated just another crook who could be bought.

"Whatever you say." Hendricks got up. "I don't care how you get possession of the documents or whom you have to kill to take them. All I demand is results and I'm inclined to be a trifle impatient with this particular business. Work as fast as you can."

"What do these documents concern?" the Black Bat asked.

HENDRICKS turned on him swiftly. "They will be sealed. If you break the seals or tamper with them, our little bargain ceases and you will be turned over to the police. Alphin will not have opened the envelope, but he has it."

"Very well," the Black Bat agreed. "I'll work on him. Do the best I can as quickly as possible. Shall I communicate with you directly?"

"You will phone me each day. Say that your name is Blanchard. If I need you for anything else, or I want a personal consultation, we'll make the arrangements. The first day I don't hear from you precisely at six o'clock, will be the day I'll forward your fingerprints to the police."

"Quite satisfactory," the Black Bat said. "I repeat, you're an amazing man, Mr. Hendricks."

"You're no ordinary chap yourself." Hendricks beamed. "I'll leave first. You can look around here if you like, though I know Alphin too well to think he'd hide those documents in such an accessible spot. Call me tomorrow. Good night, sir."

The Black Bat watched Hendricks walk casually through the rear door of the undertaker's establishment, make his way to the street and amble to the corner where a taxicab was parked. The broker got in and was promptly driven away.

The Black Bat returned to the safety

of the darkened driveway and wondered what he should do. It was the first time in his career that he had been taken so completely. Hendricks had him, and Hendricks knew it. The Black Bat sighed, and headed back to the funeral home office with the intention of using the phone to call Butch and having him drive out.

CHAPTER XI

An Attack



LIKE a somber shadow he slid back through the rear door of the funeral home. As he moved, the Black Bat was conscious of the dismal silence of the place. The back door opened into a store room in which there were caskets still in long wooden crates and boxes. They were piled in neat rows all around him leaving only a passageway through the store room to the office beyond.

He was glad that the chapel and the embalming room were on the other side of the office. He had no desire to go there now. Those keen eyes that could see so well in what would be darkness to other men lingered on an empty packing case on the loading platform from just outside the door. Behind that case Roy Hendricks had lurked to catch the Black Bat unawares and stick a gun into the black clad man's back.

The Black Bat reached the door of Joe Alphin's office, and he remembered what Hendricks had said. That Alphin wouldn't be back tonight and he had taken the only man on duty with him. The Black Bat decided that meant the funeral home would be deserted until morning at least.

But had Hendricks been right in being so certain that Alphin had not hidden the envelope containing the Dennison Documents somewhere in this place? The Black Bat found himself wondering about that. Hendricks had said that the Black Bat might look around if he liked, but Hendricks knew Alphin too well to think he'd hide the documents in such an accessible place.

"Yet a smart man might do just that," the Black Bat said softly. "In a place

too obvious to be considered. It has been done before."

With this thought in mind he decided to take a good look around and at least convince himself that Hendricks had been right. Finding those documents had become vital to the Black Bat now. They meant that he would have something to offer in exchange for those fingerprints that Hendricks now had in his possession.

In the office the Black Bat calmly switched on the light. He glanced at the desk, at two metal filing cabinets in one corner of the room. There were pictures in heavy gilt frames on the walls. He lifted these one by one, hoping against hope that an envelope might drop out from behind them, but there was nothing there.

Then suddenly he paused and stood listening. From the direction of the store room he had heard what sounded like a footstep. Just one step and then again the silence. One black gloved hand reached for his gun as he waited. Out there in the darkness a board creaked beneath someone's weight.

The Black Bat moved. Swiftly and silently he reached the light switch. A jab of his finger and the office was plunged into darkness. He heard what might have been a startled gasp from the store room. His gun was in his hand as he reached the door.

He slid to one side, his back against the wall at the left of the door. The Black Bat had no intention of being trapped twice in one night. He stood staring into the darkness, and he saw a shadowy figure move. Where the face should have been was a pale blotch, and the Black Bat realized the other man's countenance was hidden by a white handkerchief. Only the eyes were visible beneath the brim of a soft hat.

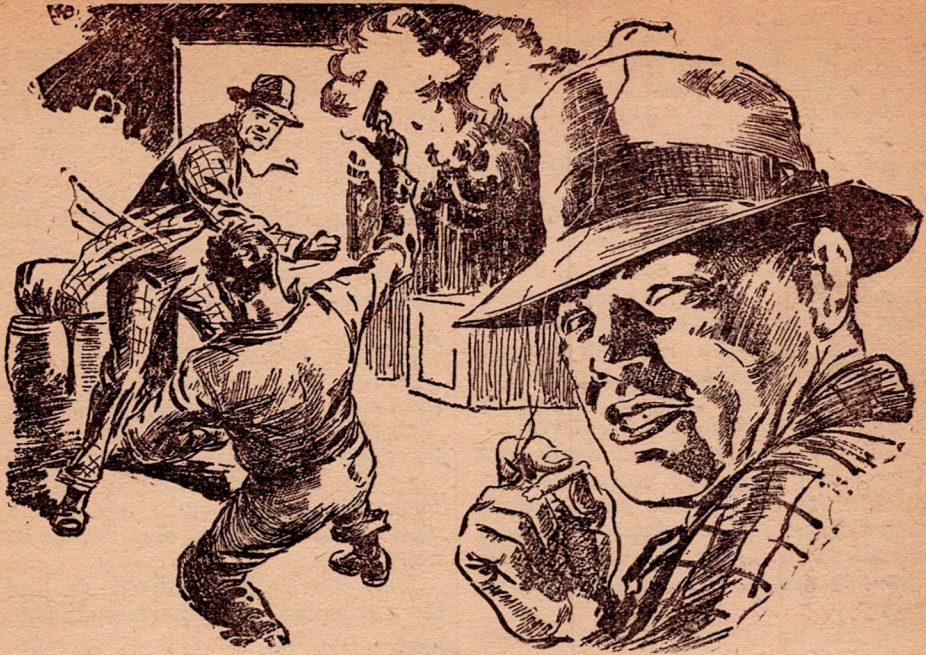
"Stay where you are!" the Black Bat said softly. "I've got you covered."

The other man stopped and stood motionless, trying to peer through the gloom. He saw no one for the Black Bat's hood and dark clothing made him part of the shadows.

"Who are you?" he demanded. The voice of the man in the white mask sounded strangely like the hooting of an owl.

"Suppose you start talking first," the Black Bat said. "Who are you?"

"My name doesn't matter," the other



BUTCH

man said. "I was looking for the undertaker. The front of this place was dark, but I came around to the rear hoping there might still be someone here. I found the back door opened and saw a light burning beyond this room so I stepped inside."

"Why were you looking for the undertaker?" asked the Black Bat.

There was something vaguely familiar about the voice. He wanted to keep the man talking, hoping that if he heard more of that voice he would really recognize it.

"My—my poor uncle. He died suddenly just a few hours ago. I wanted to try to make the funeral arrangements as soon as possible."

"So you came looking for the undertaker with your face masked," snapped the Black Bat. "Do you really expect me to believe that yarn?"

A GASP of surprise came from the fellow in the white handkerchief. "You can see in the dark!" There was awe in the other man's voice. "You must be the Black Bat!"

"That's right," said the Black Bat. "Suppose you tell me the truth. What are you doing here?"

"All right, I will. I saw Alphin and another man drive away from here

earlier tonight in a truck. I live in this neighborhood. There's been a lot of talk about Alphin keeping a good bit of cash in his private office. I thought this might be a good chance for me to try and lift some of that dough. I didn't know there was anyone else here when I sneaked in the back door."

The Black Bat did not think the second string of lies was much better than the first had been, but he had no intention of telling the other man that.

"That sounds more like it," the Black Bat said. "In a case like that I can understand why you are wearing that mask."

"Yeah."

Abruptly the other man's hand flashed up. The bright light of an electric torch gleamed straight in the Black Bat's eyes. It blinded him for a moment, and in that moment the other man leaped at him.

A hard fist landed on the Black Bat's jaw with such force that it knocked his head back against the wall. He recovered quickly and lashed out with his free hand, his right still held the gun. He knew one quick, carefully aimed shot would prevent any further attack upon the part of his foe, but he had no intention of firing. The sound of gunfire would bring the police to the funeral home and he did not want that.

His fist caught the other man in the chest and knocked him back. The flash fell out of the man's hand and went out as it hit the floor with a thud. Now the darkness was to the Black Bat's advantage, for he could see far better than could his foe.

Deliberately he thrust his gun back into the holster so that both hands were free. Then he moved in, pounding at the other man with rights and lefts—driving him back toward the rear door. He was trying to make his foe groggy enough so that the Black Bat could reach out and snatch off that handkerchief mask and learn the man's identity.

Though the man had talked quite a lot the Black Bat still was unable to recognize his voice. He was sure he had heard it before but just where he could not recall. The Black Bat ducked the wild swings aimed at him, and kept on pounding.

There was no doubt in his mind that he was winning the fight when the unexpected happened. He tripped over a small box and went down hard. Before he could scramble to his feet, his foe turned and ran, heading for the open back door. He was clawing at his mask, pulling it away from his face as he disappeared outside.

The Black Bat got up swiftly and raced to the door. He peered out, but there was no sign of the other man. He had vanished.

"Now who was he?" the Black Bat muttered. "And what did he really want?"

He decided there was no use wasting time standing around there wondering about the identity of the intruder. The Black Bat hurried back to the office, picked up the phone and called his home. Butch answered and the Black Bat ordered him to drive out and pick him up.

"Be there just as quick as I can make it," Butch said over the wire, and the Black Bat hung up.

He decided against any further search for the documents here. Probably Hendricks had been right after all. Joe Alphin had them stored away in some really safe place—and it wasn't this office.

The Black Bat hurried through the store room to the rear door. When he reached the door he found it closed and locked. The lock was the old fashioned kind that could only be opened from the inner or outer side with a key, and now

that key was missing.

Evidently the man in the white handkerchief mask had sneaked back and locked the door from the outside. But why? What did he hope to gain by doing that? The Black Bat was puzzled. The action on the other man's part didn't make sense. All the Black Bat had to do was walk to the front door of the funeral home—which had a snap lock—open the door and step out.

THEN suddenly the Black Bat discovered the reason for the other man's action. In the distance came the wail of police car sirens, the sound steadily growing louder. That was it! The man in the handkerchief mask had phoned the police and told them they would find the Black Bat in the funeral home.

The Black Bat realized he had better get away from there fast. Once the police arrived on the scene and surrounded the place escape would not be easy. There was no time to be wasted in picking the lock on the rear door even though he had the tools to do it.

He swiftly made his way through the darkness to the front door of the building. Before risking opening the door, he peered out through a window. There was no mistaking that uniformed figure standing in front of the door. The police had already arrived. The Black Bat was trapped!

As he watched a patrol car rolled up to the curb and came to a stop. The officers in the car leaped out and joined the other policeman in front of the Funeral home. The Black Bat ducked back out of sight. He heard the rumble of voices coming from outside as the three officers talked, but he could not distinguish their words.

There was no chance for him to try and slip out of the building now. He would have to find some place to hide. His keen brain worked swiftly as he considered the situation. He hurried into the chapel. Here he found a coffin resting on a stand. The casket was empty. He saw that the inside of the casket was lined with black cloth and an idea struck him. It was dangerous but the Black Bat was used to taking long chances.

Five minutes later four policemen entered the funeral home with guns in one hand and flashlights in the other. They had found the place locked up, but one of

the officers happened to have a pass key with him that unlocked the front door.

They searched the place thoroughly, switching on the lights in the store room, the office and other parts of the building and finding no one there. They were annoyed, disgusted and vociferous by the time they reached the chapel.

"I'd like to get my hands on the crackpot who phoned in this call," one of the policemen said loudly. "There is no sign of anybody around here and nothing has been disturbed."

"You're right, Casey," another officer said. He found the light switch to the chapel and pressed it. Nothing happened. "Hey, the lights won't turn on in here."

"Maybe a fuse burned out or the light bulbs did," said the patrolman who had spoken first. The white beam of his flash circled the room. "Nobody here anyway, so it doesn't matter."

The light swept over the casket, lingered for an instant on the figure lying in the coffin. Where the head should have been there was only blackness. The light moved away swiftly.

"A stiff without any head," said the patrolman who held the flashlight. "I'm getting out of here."

"Me, too," said another officer. "Let's go. If the Black Bat ever was here he sure isn't around now."

Talking among themselves they headed for the front door. They stepped outside, locking the door behind them. In the stillness of the funeral home the sound of the police car motor was loud as it started up and rolled away. Then all was silence.

For nearly five minutes nothing happened. Then the figure in the casket in the chapel sat up. Swiftly the Black Bat pulled his black hood around so the eye-holes were again in place. Lying there with the hood reversed so that it covered all of his face even his eyes it had blended with the black lining of the casket and created the illusion at a quick glance that a headless body had been lying there.

In brighter light, or even a closer look, the trick would not have worked. The Black Bat had realized that when he had carefully turned all the bulbs in their sockets so that the lights in the chapel could not be switched on.

"By morning if not sooner those officers are going to start wondering what

Alphin is doing with the body of a headless man," the Black Bat said softly. "He will have quite a time explaining what became of the corpse."

After assuring himself that there were no longer any police around the Black Bat left the funeral home by the front door. He closed the door behind him and heard the snap lock click into place. Then he swiftly made his way through the shadows until he found the spot a block away where Butch was waiting with the car. Silk was probably still trailing the undertaker's service hearse with the other car.

"So you made it," Butch said in a tone of relief as the Black Bat climbed in beside him and they drove away. "When I got here and saw those police at the funeral home and knew the Black Bat was probably inside, I nearly had a fit. How did you manage to get away?"

"I'll tell you all about it when we get back to the house," said the Black Bat. "It's a long story and right now I'm tired."

CHAPTER XII

Blackmail



PROMPTLY Tony Quinn procured the necessary ingredients for a cup of coffee and Carol brewed a pot of it over a bunsen flame in the lab. Silk was still out in pursuit of Alphin and the body of Mrs. Comstock.

Quinn told Carol and Butch about the whole affair while they sipped coffee. It would be dawn in a couple of hours and they were all tired.

"This Roy Hendricks," Quinn said, "is about the most startling criminal I've ever encountered. First of all, he nailed me as the Black Bat. Did it by exquisite simplicity. He knew I had been at Mrs. Comstock's and that I'd normally visit Alphin as soon as I discovered he was the undertaker who had removed the body. So—Hendricks secreted himself at the rear of Alphin's place, guessing the Black Bat would use the rear door to get in. He didn't set an elaborate trap for me. There were no gunmen posted, no pits dug—just Hendricks, comfortably at ease inside a large

packing case. When I appeared, all he had to do was take a single step, push a gun against my back and—there I was."

"But Tony," Carol protested, "you can't trust that man and he has your fingerprints. They are on file, aren't they?"

"Oh yes," Quinn assured her emphatically. "If Hendricks sends those prints to the F.B.I.—well, the results won't be too good. They can't convict me, of course, but any suspicion besides McGrath's, that Tony Quinn was the Black Bat—and our style would be properly crimped. Also Hendricks would be positive who the Black Bat is."

"Then you've got to get those prints back. He may photograph them—substitute others and retain the originals."

"No, Carol," Quinn said. "Hendricks will keep his word because he is afraid of the Black Bat. He'd rather not know his identity and he needs the Black Bat. I'll get my fingerprints back by turning over the Dennison Documents to him."

"Tony," Carol said quickly, "he'll destroy those papers the instant he has them. They must consist of something very evil, something which could destroy Hendricks."

"Yes, I agree," Quinn said. "But getting back my fingerprints is even more important than reading those documents. Naturally, if I can do so, I will. If I can't, because of the seals, I shall hand them to Hendricks, get my prints back and then proceed to steal the documents again."

"I got no faith in the idea." Butch wagged his big head solemnly.

"That makes two of us." Quinn laughed. "Well, what have we got? This mysterious Mrs. Comstock was undoubtedly murdered. Dr. Bryn had a hand in it. So did Joe Alphin. It seems that someone stole the Dennison Documents from Paul Riker's apartment and, somehow, they came into the possession of Mrs. Comstock who concealed them in a very clever hiding place. Now this cheap crook named Palen, knew of that hiding place. Yet, when he opened the steel box it was empty. Palen says he worked for Hendricks. I don't believe him. I think Palen was sent by Alphin and I think I know why. As for the man in the handkerchief mask—I think he came to the funeral home to see Alphin—suspected someone was in the place and decided to

investigate—but didn't want to be recognized."

"I'm beginning to see your line of reasoning," Carol said slowly.

"Not me." Butch poured himself more coffee. "I don't get it."

Quinn explained patiently. "The Dennison Documents were hidden in this desk of Mrs. Comstock's. She is dead. Perhaps Dr. Bryn made her talk before she died. By the use of a drug to bring on narcosis. Remember how Palen immediately assumed he was getting a shot of scopolamine? He'd seen it used. That may explain why Mrs. Comstock died and explain her strange behavior with the neighbor who tried to help."

"But why should this mug Palen," Butch asked, "sneak into the house and open that tin box when the stuff it contained had already been swiped? And Palen must have known it, seeing his boss did the taking."

QUINN said, "Alphin wanted Hendricks to know the documents had been found. With the steel box in its secret compartment, it might never be discovered and Hendricks would never be certain the documents were no longer hidden somewhere in Mrs. Comstock's home. But if the jimmed steel box and the secret compartment were shown, then Hendricks would know."

"Is it a blackmail scheme, Tony?" Carol asked.

He spread his hands in a gesture of hopelessness. "What else—though I'm not sure. The documents mean harm to someone. Things have got to tie together soon. We've a few leads to work and maybe we'll find a clearer trail when these are tracked down."

"The fact that Mrs. Comstock was using a false name, that her initials were H.V.O. and she expected a convict to arrive and live with her soon, should be of some help," Carol said.

"I'm going into that in the morning," Quinn said. "But not until I obtain possession of that red envelope. I haven't forgotten how Hendricks risked a lot to warn off Tony Quinn. I'm wondering what he'll do if Tony Quinn really starts to bear down. Especially if Hendricks has the documents or knows he is about to get them."

Carol shook her head sorrowfully. "This is the first time you've spotted your crook before you knew the motive,

and the first time that you couldn't take direct action against him. As a matter-of-fact, it's the crook who is calling the plays and you who does the hopping."

"Don't rub it in!" Quinn grunted. "I've got to get off that hook quickly. Hendricks isn't a patient type. He says Alphin has the documents and Hendricks should know. And we've got Alphin, if he didn't give Silk the slip."

"Just how?" Carol asked.

"Alphin is trying to keep the body of Mrs. Comstock out of sight until tomorrow when he can bring it to the crematorium and have it destroyed before an autopsy can be performed on it. And we know where Alphin is. That's why I've asked you to wait here until we hear from Silk and plan our course."

Silk phoned in shortly after four in the morning. He said, "I'm up in Connecticut. Alphin drove his service truck around until he and the driver got tired. Then they checked into this auto court and they're both sound asleep. They're in an outlying cabin because the owner of the camp refused to let them park the hearse near the other cabins."

"Good work," Quinn said. "I'm sending Butch up to meet you. Show him the set-up and then fade. Come back here. We're in something of a spot and we've many plans to make. Butch will know exactly what to do."

Silk described the route and promised to meet Butch. Quinn gave the big man very precise instructions. "You have a private detective's license. Use it if you must. Represent yourself as having been hired by an insurance company to check the death of Mrs. Comstock. Let Alphin take the bait and when he's swallowed it, hand him the sinker."

Quinn went on talking for another five minutes. Butch repeated most of what he had to do and then hurried away. Butch reached the vicinity of the auto camp well after dawn and spotted Silk parked beside the road.

Silk said, "I wish I could handle this. I'm better at conning a man than you, Butch, but I'm known as Tony Quinn's servant and I can't get mixed up in this without dragging him in too. Remember, the secret of convincing a mark—the fellow you intend to gyp—is by talking him half to death. Never giving him a chance to more than think of what you're saying. It ought to work. Alphin is no mental genius."

"It better work," Butch grumbled, "because if Alphin gets wise, I'm going to handle him in my own way."

"Don't whatever you do, break his neck until you have those documents," Silk implored. "And keep in mind the fact that he has a gorilla with him who will be heeled and willing to shoot."

"If," Butch rubbed the knuckles of his right hand, "he gets a chance, I'll see you, Silk. Soon as I get anything I'll call in."

SILK drove away, more worried than content with matters. Butch had told him enough of the Black Bat's predicament to show they were playing with dynamite. Butch wasn't noted for smoothness or tact. All Silk could do was pray.

Butch, meantime, studied the small cottage in which the pair slept. The service truck with its grim cargo, was parked directly outside. Butch approached the place, grateful that it was very early in the morning and no one stirred. He found the door locked but, like most of these places, the lock and the door itself were flimsy affairs.

Butch carefully put his shoulder against the door. Apparently he didn't exert himself much for his body hardly seemed to move, but the door snapped open as though it had been hit by a battering ram.

There were twin beds in the shack. Both occupants sat up. Butch recognized Alphin at once and concentrated on the mug who was in the other bed. Before either man was fully awake, Butch stood between the two beds. He swung his fist in a very short uppercut. The thug who was scrambling to get at the gun under his pillow, just fell down and lost all interest in things material.

Butch's other arm stretched out and as Alphin got a gun free of the bed covers, the huge hand gripped the ex-racketeer's wrist, gave it a slight twist and Alphin gasped in pain. Butch plucked the gun from paralyzed fingers and put the weapon in his pocket. Then he searched the other man's bed and appropriated his gun as well.

Butch shoved the other man over until he almost fell out of the bed, sat down alongside him and faced Alphin. He rubbed his chin and studied the mortician-gangster intently.

"I don't know," Butch said. "Maybe I

ought to just smack you one, heave you into that hearse outside and cart you to Headquarters."

"What are you talking about?" Alphin tried bluffing. "I figured this was a stick-up. But you're no holdup man. What's the gag?"

Butch kept on rubbing his chin. Behind him, the other crook groaned and stirred. Butch, without turning, brought a fist down on top of the crook's head. The groan and restlessness stopped at once.

"It's a pinch, Alphin," Butch said. "I'm a private eye, earning the money an insurance company is willing to risk because they think Mrs. Comstock didn't just lay down and die. They think she was sort of persuaded. I had my doubts until I found out you'd blown with the body. That you wanted to get it cremated fast, but no crematory would accept it in the dead of night without being suspicious."

"How much?" Alphin demanded. "I know it's a touch. That's okay too, if you don't come down too heavy."

Butch grinned. "The fact is, I don't want dough, Alphin. I can get all the dough I need. Get this—I think an autopsy would show that Mrs. Comstock was murdered. You're involved enough to get tossed in the can and kept there for a long, long time. Dr. Bryn may keep you company, but he doesn't look like a very good gin player to me."

"Okay," Alphin snapped. "I'm licked and I know it. What do you want?"

"The Dennison Documents." Butch surveyed his fingernails and wondered when he'd get that manicure he promised himself every time he entered a barbershop.

Alphin was too much of an old time gangster to show any surprise, but his eyes seemed to burn with more hatred than ever. "How are you hep to those? What kind of a private dick are you? I thought you said this was an insurance deal."

"It is," Butch declared fervently. "With the Dennison stuff on the side."

"Who told you I had them?" Alphin demanded.

BUTCH continued to study his nails. "A guy in your position don't ask too many questions, punk. All I want from you is a straight answer."

"Hendricks," Alphin groaned. "I

might have known he'd move in fast. Look, you phony private shamus, the answer is nothing doing."

"Suit yourself," Butch said. He arose, walked to the door and opened it. He threw back his head, opened his mouth and the yell started deep down in his chest.

"Close the door," Alphin shouted. "What kind of a sap do you think I am? I didn't mean it."

Butch shrugged. "It makes no difference to me either way. Let's have the papers."

"It's not as easy as that," Alphin said. "I don't lug a million bucks around. The envelope is in the vault of the Security Trust Company. I can get it right after nine o'clock. How do we work it?"

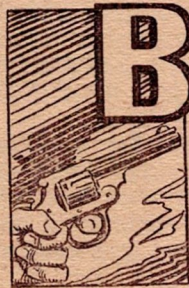
"Easy," Butch said. "I ride with you in the truck. We park, we go into the bank and you hand me the envelope. Then I go out alone. After that you can stick up the bank if you like."

"We'd better get started," Alphin said. "I can't afford to waste any time getting rid of the cadaver. We'll let my friend finish sleeping it off. He's nothing but a lunkhead anyway."

"Whatever you say," Butch told him. "Only some place along the way I'm calling Hendricks before he turns every cop in the county loose on it."

CHAPTER XIII

The Red Envelope



BUTCH took the precaution of obtaining possession of the service car's ignition key. He went to the office of the cabin camp, paid the bill and used a phone booth. He dialed Tony Quinn's home and promptly reported the circumstances.

"Alphin will pull a double-cross," he said. "I can feel it in my bones. He went along on this ride too easy. Oh yes, he said the papers are worth a million. Guys like Alphin play the limit for stakes like that."

"So long as you have the body of Mrs. Comstock," Quinn said, "you've got Alphin. Play it out. But play it his way, if he gets the drop somehow. Let's see what happens. Only make certain that

service truck is parked on a side street and the ignition unlocked."

Butch hung up and returned to the truck where Alphin was waiting. Butch handed him the key and they climbed aboard. Along the way, Butch threw the two guns he'd taken, over a bridge and into a river. He was humming like a man without a care on his mind.

Alphin said, "I could pay off better than Hendricks, pal."

Butch laughed long and loudly. "Hendricks," he derided, "has more dough in his petty account than you have all told. Don't be funny."

"Well you can't blame a man for trying," Alphin sighed.

They reached the city limits at about eight o'clock and by half past were well downtown. Alphin indicated the bank where he maintained a safe deposit vault.

Butch said, "Swing the corner. There'll be plenty of parking space at this hour and anyway, who is going to bother a hearse?"

Alphin didn't answer, but turned the corner and parked as he was ordered to do. The moment he had the truck straightened out at the curb, Butch leaned forward and twisted the ignition key. Twisted it twice, though Alphin didn't notice that. The switch wasn't locked.

"I'll hang onto the key," he told Alphin. "Now all we do is wait for the bank to open. I've got to admit you're taking this like a gentleman. I thought you'd put up a big fuss."

"Not even a million bucks is worth going to the chair for," Alphin said softly. "The most important thing in my life is to get rid of that dead woman right behind us."

At one minute after nine they walked into the bank. There was a stairway to the vaults in the basement and Alphin went down first. He signed the registry book, showed his key and was escorted to the rows of boxes. The master door was opened. Alphin slid the long, flat box out, cradled it over one arm and walked into a private room. Butch was right behind him.

Alphin said, "I hope you know what you're doing, pal. Because this is the hottest thing in town right now. And I'm not the kind of a guy forgets a hijack like this either."

"Yeah," Butch grunted. "I'm im-

pressed. Open her up."

Alphin raised the lid, dug a hand into the box and suddenly whirled around. There was an automatic in his fist. He drew back his lips in a half gloating smile, half snarl.

"Big guys always come dumb," he said. "And you're one of the biggest I ever met. I'd let you have it right here, in the belly, except that bank guards don't like any shooting around the premises. So you'll just start hiking, pal. Right straight out to the hearse and this time it's carrying a double load."

Butch said nothing. He watched Alphin stow the large red envelope into his pocket. On that envelope depended the future of Tony Quinn. Butch almost risked a slug through his body then, just to get at the envelope, but he knew Quinn's orders were to follow anything like this through. Wait for any sort of a break and never play it fast, without thinking.

Alphin pocketed the gun, but walked alongside Butch so he could feel the weapon digging into his side. The gleam in Alphin's eyes indicated he'd cheerfully shoot, even at the risk of being trapped inside the bank. He wasn't the type of a man who could stand being outwitted, even if it was only for a few moments.

THEY reached the street, turned the corner and Butch gave a loud, raucous laugh. The hearse was gone. Alphin looked wildly up and down the street. Then he dragged himself over to the building wall and leaned weakly against it.

"Seems like we're both full of tricks," Butch told him with a grin. "Now how about that envelope?"

Alphin nodded. "I should have known Hendricks would think of everything." He reached into his pocket and took out the envelope. He turned it over in his hand once. "Okay—take it," he went on. "And be careful of those seals. If they're busted, I'll get blamed. Hendricks might as well not have the envelope if the seals are broken."

"Yeah," Butch grunted noncommittally. He didn't trust himself to comment because the meaning of the seals meant nothing to him. Butch tucked the envelope into his pocket. "Anyway, thanks."

"Where's my truck? I leveled with

you. Now where's the truck?"

Butch glanced around. There was no one in sight. He gripped Alphin by the throat. "Sure you leveled, like you level with everybody. You'll find the truck, when we're good and ready to turn it over. So long, and much obliged for the envelope."

He brought Alphin's head forward and then drove it back against the side of the building. Alphin sat down suddenly and Butch walked away. He found a traffic cop around the corner and pointed out Alphin who was decorating the sidewalk.

Butch said, "A lush, officer. But he was mumbling to himself about some murdered woman. You better check up."

He watched Alphin loaded into a radio car and then Butch joined Carol, who was parked just around the corner. He showed her the envelope.

"Good," she said. "Tony and Silk are driving that hearse to Captain McGrath's house. He'll find it and a note from the Black Bat telling him what to do."

Butch tapped his hand with the envelope. "Carol, do you really think the boss will hand this over to Hendricks? After all, the whole case depends on it and that mug I just took it from, practically admitted committing a murder to get it."

"What else can he do?" Carol asked. "Hendricks has his fingerprints. He won't double-cross the Black Bat because he knows he'd die very suddenly if he did. No, Hendricks will play his part of it fairly enough. Up to a point. Myself, I can't see him selling back those prints so easily."

"The envelope is worth a million bucks," Butch commented dryly.

"Even so, Hendricks must be a vain man. He'll enjoy having this hold over the Black Bat. Tony isn't convinced, but I'm judging Hendricks as a woman would judge him."

"You're usually right," Butch sighed. "I mean all you women. It's the main reason why I never got married. Where do we go now?"

"To the lab. I've had a good rest and you can nap there. Tony has to be in his office soon and he's really going to put on some pressure."

"For what?" Butch asked. "We got the blasted Dennison Documents."

"Yes, but what are they? We can't

open them and find out. If the seals are broken, all deals are off."

Butch turned the envelope over and studied the seals. "I'd bet half of what these are worth that the boss could read what's inside without leaving a trace. I saw him slide a wire into the corner of an envelope once, roll up the letter around it and pull it out without even breaking any of the glue that stuck the flap down. Put it back the same way too."

"I know," Carol agreed. "I think he could too, but he doesn't seem interested. All he wants to do is get those fingerprints back. And, I suppose, that is the main thing. Nobody wins all the battles. Our score has been pretty good. We can afford to lose this one."

"Ha!" Butch grunted. "You're making some mistake if you think the boss will stop once he has the prints back. That's when he'll really start bearing down."

BY NOON that same morning, Tony Quinn had already interviewed more than thirty people whose names had been found in Paul Riker's files. He'd sent for Roy Hendricks too and the man was probably getting impatient and a little worried after having been made to wait for two hours.

Quinn was seeing these people in groups of four and Hendricks was to be included in the next one. Quinn called Silk over when the last group left.

"We're about set. You know just what to do, Silk. Use the private outside phone in the next office. Put the call through just as any regular call and we'll see what happens. All right, bring Hendricks and three others in."

Silk walked toward the door. "Riker's intended wife and his chauffeur, Tor-may, are in the private waiting room, sir. They just arrived."

"Hold them there," Quinn ordered. "Dr. Bryn will be along soon too. He doesn't know that Alphin is in custody and the autopsy on Mrs. Comstock's body has been performed. Later, we'll bring all of these people together and see if there's an explosion."

Silk sent in three of Paul Riker's former clients and—Roy Hendricks, who didn't like being in the presence of Tony Quinn. Hendricks had too clear a memory of stopping blind Tony Quinn and ordering him to stay out of this.

Quinn asked routine questions of every person, saving Hendricks until last. He wanted to know if Riker had ever mentioned the name of Dennison, if the former clients had heard it at any time when they were at Riker's office. They were asked to explain their business with the dead attorney to see if their statements checked with what Riker had in his files.

Finally Quinn called Hendricks' name. Quinn said, "Mr. Hendricks, you were more of a friend of Mr. Riker than a client although he had your name in the files. As Riker's friend, I'm hoping you might help us out. What are the Dennison Documents?"

Hendricks wetted his lips. He didn't want to utter a word, but he was trapped and knew it. He said, "Sorry. Never heard of them. Riker and I just came from the same town. We were friends there, but we rarely met here in New York. I'm sorry but I can't help you."

Quinn said, "Gentlemen, you may all go except Mr. Hendricks. He is to remain."

"But why?" Hendricks asked. "Look, I'm a business man. These are business hours."

"And murder is always murder," Quinn told him flatly. "You'll stay. Riker's death may have been suicide, but someone else connected with this affair was murdered. Mr. Hendricks, repeat these words: 'There is a gun pointed at you. Stay exactly where you are and listen to me.'"

"What in the world for?" Hendricks gulped.

"Please repeat those words," Quinn urged. "It's important, Mr. Hendricks. You're not afraid, are you?"

"Afraid of what?" Hendricks muttered. "The whole thing is so silly." He cleared his throat and spoke the words in a firm voice. "Now may I go?" he begged.

"Not quite yet." Quinn snapped on his PBX switch and said, "Send in those others, please."

The phone rang. Quinn fumbled for it, listened a moment and then handed the instrument in the general direction of Hendricks. "For you, sir."

Hendricks frowned. He was expecting no call here. He took the vaguely proffered instrument and barked a greeting. A soft, half whispering but very plain voice spoke to him.

"This is Mr. Blanchard. I have those items you desired. They are now in my possession and I would like an appointment so that I may turn them over to you."

"Call me again at six tonight—at my home," Hendricks ordered. "And—it certainly didn't take you long."

HE HUNG up, gave Tony Quinn a quizzical grin and settled himself in his chair to wait. Hendricks didn't seem quite so worried. Lois Lloyd came in first, followed by Fred Tormay, who wore an inexpensive neat suit instead of a chauffeur's uniform this time. Dr. Bryn trailed behind them and Bryn looked as if he hadn't slept in many hours. Silk was the last to enter and he closed the door behind him.

"Everyone is here, sir," Silk announced.

"Good." Quinn's blind eyes seemed to be staring at Lois Lloyd. She moved nervously and kept pulling at a lace handkerchief between her fingers. Tormay was impassive—the perfect servant whether he was driving his master or being questioned in a D.A.'s office. Dr. Bryn had his eyes tightly closed and he was apparently trying to snatch a few winks and, at the same time, show his contempt for these proceedings.

Quinn said, "I called all of you here because you are directly involved in the suicide of Paul Riker, the disappearance of certain documents and now—in a murder case. This murder stems from Paul Riker's suicide. The police, this morning apprehended a man named Alphin, an ex-gangster who has been running an undertaking parlor lately. Alphin had been attempting to have the body of a Mrs. Comstock legally cremated. An autopsy was performed. The woman was supposed to have died of a heart condition—as Dr. Bryn here, stated on the death certificate he filed."

Bryn opened his eyes. "I'll stay with that diagnosis, Mr. Quinn."

"And you'd be right in a way," Quinn said. "But the heart attack which killed her was induced by the hypodermic injection of a drug commonly known as truth serum. It has a tendency to depress the heart and Mrs. Comstock's was depressed enough without it. How can you account for your snap diagnosis now, Dr. Bryn?"

Bryn arose. "There is an explanation.

Mrs. Comstock was an old patient whom I expected to go out any day. When I arrived, she was already dead and therefore exhibited to me none of the symptoms a victim of scopolamin or any other hypnotic would have shown. I had no reason to suspect anything wrong."

"Very well, Doctor," Quinn said. "Miss Lloyd, hasn't anything come to your mind concerning those missing documents? You've had plenty of time to think it over."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I've tried to think, but I'm sure that Paul never even mentioned the name of Dennison to me."

"And you, Mr. Tormay?" Quinn asked.

THE chauffeur shifted his feet. "No, sir. As I told you, I was strictly an outside man. Just a driver. Mr. Riker never took me into his confidence."

Quinn picked up a pencil and rolled it between his fingers. He had just heard the voice of the man with the handkerchief again. It had been Tormay's. His blind eyes were centered on the desk top. He said, "Miss Lloyd—and you, Mr. Tormay—will recall that when Paul Riker was found, he was fully dressed. In tuxedo, perfectly tied bow tie, freshly shined shoes. He was even wearing a Homburg. Have you any idea why he should dress up to kill himself?"

"He didn't," Lois Lloyd said quickly. "He dressed for his date with me and then—then whatever happened—well, it happened."

"Very well," Quinn sighed. "I'd hoped one of you might be of help. Dr. Bryn, a detective captain named McGrath would like you to call at his office. Miss Lloyd, and you, Tormay, may go now. Mr. Hendricks, I'm sorry to have kept you. Good day."

Hendricks moved over and put his hands on the desk. He looked down at Quinn who seemed utterly oblivious to his presence. Hendricks asked, "Mr. Quinn, have I the right to know why you detained me? Why you had me repeat those weird sentences about having a gun?"

Quinn smiled. "Of course. I wanted to study your voice and compare it with another voice I heard not long ago. We blind men have to depend upon voices for identification. I—believe I was in error but, if you don't mind, let me or the

police know if you intend to leave town. That's all, Mr. Hendricks."

AFTER the door closed on the last of them, Silk dropped into a chair before the desk. "How did Hendricks take it when I called and said I was Blanchard—the new pseudonym for the Black Bat?"

"Smugly satisfied," Quinn said. "I've got him guessing though—and worried for fear I have placed his voice. Also I've an idea Hendricks has a brand new thought in his brain. One that won't take long to hatch. Things are going to pop, Silk. We've really stepped up the heat."

Silk nodded.

"With everyone aware that Alphin is jugged, they'll always fear he'll talk. Maybe he will at that."

"McGrath has been pounding him all day," Quinn said. "Alphin admits he was taking the body for cremation and has produced what he professes is Mrs. Comstock's will, ordering cremation. McGrath hasn't too much on him and Alphin is sitting tight."

"Hendricks won't be," Silk chuckled. "I think you scared him plenty. What do you think he'll do?"

"Get possession of the documents first of all," Quinn said. "After that—who knows?"

Silk leaned over and methodically straightened out some papers on the desk.

"You're going to hand Hendricks the envelope, sir? Unopened?"

"Yes. The seals strictly prevent me from tampering with the contents. But let's not worry about that because it won't make much difference. I'll learn what's inside sooner or later."

Silk wagged his head. "I wish I could figure out how they got from Paul Riker's apartment to that secret hiding place at Mrs. Comstock's bungalow. Of course she was connected with it. That's why she was murdered."

"No, Silk," Quinn said. "She was murdered for another reason just as important as the possession of the documents. She knew what they were and that happens to be fatal knowledge. At any rate we'll soon know what Hendricks intends to do. Also, because it's a nice afternoon, we'll take a trip to this upstate town where Riker and Hendricks came from. It might be interesting."

CHAPTER XIV

Clue of the Bronze Statue

ELLOGG was a town of medium size, strictly industrial with the usual small green in the middle of Main Street and graced by a bronze statue of someone holding a book with one hand and raising the other arm high.

The Police Station was in City Hall and the chief did desk work as well as directed his force. He knew Quinn and was glad to see him. Quinn was escorted around behind the desk and given a comfortable chair.

"What brings a big shot D.A. like you up to my town?" the chief asked with a grin.

"Just a hunch," Quinn said. "And—a perfect afternoon for riding hunches that require auto trips through country like this. What did you know about Paul Riker, an attorney recently a suicide? He hailed from this town."

"Riker? Sure, I know him. Good family and all. Dead now, of course. He pulled out of town about ten or more years ago. Kellogg simply wasn't big enough for him. Had a good record here and nothing ever came back about him which would blacken his name."

"And a financier named Roy Hendricks?"

"Know him too. Smart guy. Never trusted him though he stayed strictly within the letter of the law. Made a lot of money, I understand. Not surprised either. He had a knack of making it fast."

"You're not much of a help," Quinn smiled. "How about a Mrs. Margaret Comstock? I think the name is phony. Perhaps her real initials are H.V.O. Does that sound familiar?"

"Not off-hand. The name of Comstock doesn't ring any bell. I'll run the initials through my files if you like."

"Do that," Quinn said. "Meanwhile Silk and I will walk over to the hotel and have a late lunch or early dinner, whatever you want to call it. We'll be back in less than an hour."

They left the car in front of Headquarters and ambled slowly down the busy street. Quinn's white cane was

slanted out before him. Silk held his arm, skilfully piloting him through the crowds.

They passed the little green and Silk felt a tug at his arm. Quinn had slowed up a bit. He said, "Silk, we're going over and sit down on one of those benches below that statue. Lunch can wait."

Puzzled, Silk obeyed orders and in a few moments he was seated beside Quinn and staring at the bronze statue.

Quinn said, "That's a fairly modern bit of public art, Silk. I grasped that fact when I noticed the modern clothing worn by the figure. Now, from the inscription, I gather that this is a statue of Frank B. Kellogg. He used to be Secretary of State and is famous for being co-signer and originator of the peace pact known as the Kellogg-Briand Pact. It was signed, I think, in Nineteen-Twenty-Eight. This statue was erected to the memory of Mr. Kellogg and his attempts to bring about a permanent peace."

"You certainly wouldn't call him a success at it," Silk grunted.

"No, that's true. But Mr. Kellogg has an odd bearing on this case, Silk."

"The Dennison affair? But I don't see how?"

"Riker and Hendricks both came from this city of Kellogg. Both were deeply implicated. Very well. Now we find that the city of Kellogg has honored a many who tried to bring about peace. In 'Twenty-Eight, Silk. The town appears to be named after him. Now take a look at the buildings in this business center. How old would you say they are?"

"Old enough—some of them fifty years," Silk frowned. Then his furrowed face smoothed and he gave a sharp whistle. "I see what you mean, sir. This town is very old. More than a hundred years old, but it's named after a man who was born, according to the inscription on the monument, in Eighteen-Fifty-Six and died in Nineteen-Thirty-Seven. So how could a city older than he was, be named after him?"

"That's exactly it," Quinn said musingly. "Also, the cornerstone for that monument was laid in Nineteen-Thirty-Seven. The year Frank B. Kellogg died. This city honored him with this large and imposing statue, but Kellogg wasn't born here, never practiced law here nor

came out of local politics. He was honored simply because he was a man of peace. I think this city did more than erect a statue to his memory."

"They changed the name of the whole doggone city to honor him," Silk guessed. "I'll be right back, sir. There's an old-timer sunning himself on another bench."

SILK went over and sat beside the man. He spent three or four minutes there. Then he came back to Quinn's side. "Can you guess what I learned, sir?"

Quinn grinned. "That the name of this city was once Dennison."

Silk's smile didn't fade. "That's right. But the reason why they changed the name—now there is something. Seems a couple of centuries ago, a man named Dennison founded the town. Built the factories, built the town. Control of things passed on from generation to generation until the Dennisons had petered out and—the Van Ostens were left. John Van Osten was the direct descendant of the original Dennison all right, but he wasn't a true Dennison. He ran the family fortune down, sold the estate and finally found himself broke flat."

"That old boy must have known the town history to give all that in such a short time," Quinn commented.

"He knew it. So does everybody else because the worst thing that ever hit the town originated with John Van Osten. Naturally, being broke and a failure, the town officials decided something ought to be done for him so he was given a job. Over a period of a few years he became City Treasurer. Are you beginning to see the light, sir?"

"How much did John Van Osten tap the municipal funds for?"

"Take a long breath," Silk advised. "It amounted to two million bucks. He did it by phony purchases, rigged books, fake payrolls. But he slipped, as all his kind do, and he was caught. They sent him to prison for twenty-five years but, they didn't get much of the money back. John Van Osten thought that because his ancestor had created the city, he was entitled to loot it and live like the Dennisons used to live."

"The picture," Quinn said slowly, "is complete. The contents of the envelope known as the Dennison Documents, con-

cern that colossal looting of the treasury."

"Colossal is right," Silk grunted. "Taxes had to be trebled, payment of bonds reneged on. The city nearly broke under the strain of it. And they got so doggone sore they changed the name of the city. So they'd never again have to be reminded of the Dennison family."

"The woman who died as Mrs. Comstock had the initials H.V.O. Those were her real initials. I'm betting her right name was Von Osten to match the last two initials. The man in prison, for whom she bought new clothing, refurbished the house and installed a hobbyist's dream in the basement, is John Van Osten. Get me to the nearest telephone, Silk."

From a drug store booth Quinn telephoned the State Prison. He was a good friend of the Warden and got his information quickly. The warden said, "John Van Osten was released yesterday. Nobody expected him to ever walk out of here, Tony. When he came in, he was suffering from a disease the doctors said would be fatal."

"But he lived," Quinn said. "How did that happen?"

"Oddly enough, the war saved him. A lot of our boys contracted the same ailment in the South Seas and a great deal of work was done on curing the disease. Van Osten heard about it and volunteered as a human experiment. He risked his life, got himself practically cured and also won a pardon. That took some time though, because the doctors wanted to keep checking his condition."

"Thank you, Warden," Quinn said. "Thanks very much, but I'm inclined to think that Van Osten is the victim of a new disease. Probably lead poisoning."

Silk piloted the sedan home at a fast clip and when he stopped behind the police car parked in front of Quinn's house, they saw Captain McGrath sitting on the porch.

Quinn got out, crossed the sidewalk and fumbled with the gate. He walked up the path and finally McGrath stopped his close scrutiny of the supposedly blind man and arose to help him climb up the stairs.

"I tried to reach you by phone," McGrath explained, "but nobody seemed to know where you'd gone. So I took a run over here—just in case. Well, you know!"

QUINN permitted himself a smile. "Yes, indeed, I know, Mac. If the Black Bat suddenly took wing somewhere and I was unaccounted for, you'd have a few difficult questions for me to answer. But something is wrong. What is it, Mac?"

"That Lloyd girl—the one who was going to marry Riker. She was found late this afternoon in her apartment. She'd been badly beaten up and was unconscious. She was sent to the Parkside Hospital and I tried to get her to talk. She says she doesn't know who or what hit her."

"Thank you for telling me that, Mac," Quinn said. "I've always had a feeling Miss Lloyd might be in danger. How is she? Very badly hurt?"

"She'll be in the hospital for a couple of days, barring a fracture possibility. She wasn't just knocked out, Tony, so somebody could escape from her apartment. She was methodically beaten."

"I'll try to run up and see her tonight," Quinn said. "She may talk to me. How about some dinner, Mac? Silk and I have been riding in the country and we've worked up a nice appetite."

McGrath shook his head. "I've been working around a hospital all afternoon trying to make that dame talk and hospitals always dull my appetite. Anyway, if I don't show up at home, the wife always gets sore. She thinks because she roasts a beefsteak I ought to stop chasing some killer, sit down and eat it and then go back to work. Thanks anyway."

Quinn said, "After I talk to Miss Lloyd I may request a guard for her. We'll see."

"Whatever you say," McGrath agreed.

CHAPTER XV

Rendezvous



ONE minute before six, Tony Quinn picked up the phone in the library and dialed Roy Hendricks' home. Hendricks answered promptly.

Quinn said, "This is Blanchard, Mr. Hendricks. You wanted me to call about an appointment for this evening."

"Yes, I'm amazed and very pleased at the way you've handled

this detail. I realize you cannot expose yourself too much so I leave the rendezvous up to you."

"At nine," Quirn said, "be in your car—alone. Keep circling the five hundred block on Western Parkway until you see my signal."

"Fine. I'll be there. Please have that envelope with you."

Quinn hung up. He said, "Silk, get Carol over here quickly and have Butch stand by. First of all I'm going to visit Lois Lloyd at the hospital and openly bring Carol with me. I'll explain to the hospital authorities that she is connected with the D.A.'s office. They'll provide her with a uniform and she'll both guard Lois Lloyd and try to gain her confidence."

"Do you think the Lloyd girl knows anything?" Silk asked.

"She wasn't attacked that way for nothing, Silk. Someone tried to make her talk. Whether she did or not, I don't know."

"Then she must have lied to you," Silk offered. "She claimed Riker never told her a thing."

Quinn said, "Of course she lied. Riker was going to marry her. He'd hardly hold much back so far as his intended wife was concerned. Perhaps she was hesitant about talking purely out of fear. She did think that Riker had been murdered and I doubt she's ever been convinced otherwise."

"And after you leave the hospital?" Silk asked.

"I'm going to meet Hendricks, hand him the documents and get my fingerprints back. Then we've a very specific job cut out for us, Silk."

"I know," Silk said. "I've been thinking about it. We've got to find John Van Osten, the convict who got out of prison yesterday. He must have been snatched the moment he set foot outside the prison walls. Do you think they've killed him, sir?"

"It all depends," Quinn said, "on who nailed him. Alphin's crowd would profit more by keeping him alive but Hendricks would have to kill him on sight. Because John Van Osten knows what the contents of the Dennison Documents are. Whatever those papers mean, they must be dangerous to Hendricks. Riker killed himself because he couldn't face the consequences."

Silk phoned Carol and arranged to

pick her up. Within a short time they were on their way to the hospital.

Quinn said, "I don't like to have you work openly with me, Carol, but in this case it's necessary. You're on the D.A.'s staff. No matter what happens at the hospital, you must very quietly fade out of existence when it's over."

"The hospital, Tony?"

"Lois Lloyd is there. She was attacked this afternoon and badly beaten. I want her watched both for her protection and to see who calls on her. Can you act the part of a nurse?"

"I think so," Carol smiled. "Provided they don't assign me to morgue or surgical duty. I did some war work as a Grey Lady and I'm familiar with the routine."

"Good! I've always had a feeling that this girl knows more than she admits. As a matter of fact, I've had her sewed up very tight with the early developments of the case and, what happened to her this afternoon, may be partly my fault."

"Your fault?" Carol asked. "But how could it be?"

"I, more or less, made an enemy of hers see how she could be dangerous. Try to make Lois trust you. Get her to talk about Riker. She might let something slip which will help us."

Hospital officials, well acquainted with Tony Quinn, arranged for Carol to take over the immediate shift as Lois Lloyd's nurse. Quinn, meanwhile, went to the room which Miss Lloyd occupied alone. She was rather heavily bandaged about the face and head. There were brilliant blue and black marks around her throat and her wrists were swollen and badly discolored.

Silk said, "Miss Lloyd has certainly been beaten up, sir. Quite badly I should say."

QUINN sat down in the chair which Silk guided him to. "Miss Lloyd," his blank eyes stared straight ahead, "you know who did this and you know why. I want a truthful answer."

"But Mr. Quinn," she raised her voice to a high pitch of excitement and worry, "I swear I don't know. After I left your office I did some shopping. Since Paul's estate hasn't been settled yet, Tormay drove me around in Paul's car. He let me out in front of my apartment house, I rode upstairs, unlocked the door and stepped in. Someone came out of the powder room in the foyer, slipped up

behind me and I was struck. They say I must have been struck many times but I never felt anything after the first blow."

"Your apartment was not robbed, Miss Lloyd. The assailant was hidden there when you entered and had an opportunity to loot the place yet nothing was touched. Therefore, the attack had personal reasons behind it. You must have some idea what they were."

She turned her face toward the wall. "Please, Mr. Quinn, I've told you all I know. And I'm tired—and ill. Please!"

Quinn sighed deeply. "All right, Miss Lloyd. Silk, we'll leave now."

Carol entered before they were gone. She was dressed in a nurse's uniform and looked trim and efficient. Quinn and Silk walked slowly down the hospital corridor. A man who passed them by suddenly came to a halt and followed them.

"Mr. Quinn," he said. "Oh, Mr. Quinn. I'm Fred Tormay. You know—Riker's chauffeur."

"How are you Mr. Tormay?" Quinn extended a hand blindly and Tormay took it. "Are you here to visit Miss Lloyd?"

"Yes. I only just heard she'd been beaten up. Who did it, Mr. Quinn? You're the D.A. You ought to know. Who did it?"

"But I don't know. Miss Lloyd refuses to say much. Look here—perhaps she might talk to you. Try it and if you learn anything call me at once. She does seem to trust you a great deal."

"Well, it's only because Mr. Riker trusted me too." Tormay looked a trifle sheepish. "I like that girl. Mr. Riker would have wanted me to take care of her and anyway, I haven't anything else to do until I find a new job."

"Good luck," Quinn said.

Silk drove home and Tony Quinn went at once to the laboratory where he changed to the regalia of the Black Bat. He made certain a pair of guns were in perfect working order, checked his small flat kit of burglar equipment and gave Silk orders to stay close to the phone.

"Carol may call," he explained, "or I might run into some difficulty with Hendricks and need help. You'd better have Butch standing by too."

"We'll be ready, sir."

The Black Bat picked up the red envelope and shook his head sadly.

never thought I'd be blackmailed into surrendering evidence to a man I know very well is a killer."

Silk said, "He's going to try and con you out of those documents, sir. Get them from you without giving up the fingerprints. Men like Hendricks never keep their bargains."

"He'll keep this one," the Black Bat said grimly, "or wish he had. I'll be back as quickly as possible."

The Black Bat descended into the tunnel, made his way to the garden house and from that point studied the estate to make certain it wasn't being watched. Then he crossed to the gate leading into the dead end street beside the big house. The coupe was parked there.

The Black Bat drove to the rendezvous spot, got there ahead of time and made certain Hendricks hadn't set a police trap to go off in his face. Promptly on time, he saw Hendricks appear and begin circling the block slowly. Hendricks didn't even see the shadowy form that moved like a blurred ghost from an alley across the sidewalk and moved straight up to Hendricks' sedan.

THE Black Bat pulled the car door open as he jumped onto the running board. Then he sat down beside Hendricks.

"Keep going straight," he suggested. "At the end of this street are nothing but warehouses, deserted at this hour. We won't be disturbed there."

"Good," Hendricks approved. "I want a quiet place because there's something I must talk over with you. How did you gain possession of the envelope so quickly? Or is that a trade secret?"

"You might say that I don't care to discuss my methods," the Black Bat said dryly. "You brought along the envelope containing my fingerprints, of course?"

"Naturally." Hendricks found a dark spot and pulled over. He kept the motor going but set the brake and then held out his hand. He smiled blandly. "The documents, Black Bat."

The hooded man placed the red envelope in Hendricks' hand. The broker turned it over quickly, thrust it beneath the dash light and studied the seals.

"Very good," he said. "Excuse me just a moment or two."

Hendricks stepped out of the car, ripped the envelope open and shook out

a number of thin sheets of paper. These he crumpled into several loose balls, placed them in the gutter and applied a match. When they were burning well, he thrust the red envelope into the flames. In a couple of minutes the papers were reduced to ashes and these Hendricks proceeded to grind into dust. Then he got back into the car.

"That takes care of a menace I've had hanging over me too long. You did your part very well. Now, now! You don't have to point a gun at me, Black Bat."

"The envelope containing my fingerprints," the Black Bat said stonily. "And don't tell me you burned them out there."

"Put the gun away," Hendricks ordered crisply. "To be frank, I didn't bring your fingerprints. There is one more thing I want you to do for me."

"You agreed to turn those prints back to me."

"Agreements?" Hendricks snapped his fingers. "Between men like you and me, Black Bat, what are agreements? You'll have your prints within the next few hours. Quite intact too. I won't double-cross you on that score. Put the gun away, I said," his voice became brittle. "Shooting me would only mean the full disclosure of who you are."

"What else must I do to earn those prints?" the Black Bat asked. "And this time, Mr. Hendricks, you will turn them over or I'll kill you and take my chances on exposure."

"It's a simple little job for a man like you." Hendricks smiled as the Black Bat slid his gun back into its holster. "One you should have done on your own hook long ago. I'll arrange everything."

"What is it?" the Black Bat demanded again. "Stop selling me the idea until I know what it is."

"Very well." Hendricks took a long breath. "I want you to kill Tony Quinn, the blind Special District Attorney."

Behind the hood, the Black Bat barely stifled a gasp of astonishment. He said, "Nothing doing. Quinn is honest. I've had a few dealings with him and I like him. Besides, when the Black Bat begins killing off important men like Quinn, the thrill of the chase in this game fades fast. Because I'll be the one who is chased from then on. Mr. Hendricks, I won't do it. You'll give me those fingerprints!"

"Just a moment," Hendricks said. "I

repeat, either you kill Tony Quinn—and do it while I'm present to see him die—or I'll expose you. There is nothing you can do to fight me. Oh, you can put a bullet through my head of course, but that won't save you. Anyway, what's another killing? And why balk just because the victim happens to be a public servant of some importance? You'll kill him, Black Bat. You'll kill him tonight."

THE Black Bat didn't answer but a slow settling of his shoulders indicated surrender. Hendricks laughed harshly.

"I'll get Quinn to Lookout Point on a good pretext he won't question. I'll give you a perfect shot at him. Shoot him in the back. What difference does it make? He's blind and can't see it coming anyway."

"What has Tony Quinn on you?" the Black Bat asked softly.

"Nothing. Not one thing, yet. But I warned him not to pry and he has insisted upon doing so. He's clever—I don't underestimate him—and therefore he's got to die. Then you shall have those fingerprints back. I swear it."

"Am I supposed to believe you, after the way you've already reneged? There will be just one more item—and then another and another."

Hendricks shrugged. "What do you intend doing, Black Bat? Killing me is no answer. You have to do as I say—earn back those fingerprints. After Quinn is dead I'll have no further use for you."

The Black Bat said nothing for several minutes. He slumped lower in the car seat. "How will you arrange the Quinn killing?" he asked.

"That's better," Hendricks cried. "After all—what's one more murder—to a man like you?"

"Give me the facts," the Black Bat said tightly. "Before I succumb to an overpowering urge to kill you and take my chances."

Hendricks caught the deadly gleam in those eyes shining through the slits in the hood. He shuddered for they were the coldest, most merciless eyes he had ever seen.

"I'll bring Quinn to Lookout Point. Right over to the edge, so he can't run for it blindly and get away by sheer luck. He'll have that man of his with him. Watch out for him. We'll time it

at two this morning. I think that's all, Black Bat."

The hooded figure made no move to get out of the car. He turned to face Hendricks. "I'll go through with it. I've no alternative except to do as you demand but, if you want to be alive tomorrow, you will be very certain that those fingerprints are in my possession before dawn."

Hendricks laughed. "I'm not afraid of you, Black Bat. But it's a promise. This one I swear I'll keep."

"You won't want me to—perhaps—murder Lois Lloyd also?"

Hendricks bit his lower lip. "What do you mean by that?"

The Black Bat seized Hendricks by the wrists and shoved his sleeve up along his forearm revealing a number of deep scratches. He said, "I noticed these. They come from the pointed nails of a woman. Lois Lloyd was almost killed this afternoon but she fought you off, didn't she, Hendricks?"

"Get out!" Hendricks reached past the Black Bat and opened the car door. "Get out before I lose my temper and do something I'll be sorry for. We'll settle our affairs tonight, Black Bat. You'll kill Quinn and I'll return your fingerprints. After that we start off even and if you interfere with me I'll kill you."

Hendricks watched the Black Bat fade out of sight in the darkness. Then he laughed but it had a hollow note in it and his hand shook as he raised a match to the cigarette between his lips.

CHAPTER XVI

Blue Flame



CAROL BALDWIN hustled in and out of Lois Lloyd's room as often as possible without, she hoped, making it evident that she had more than a nurse's interest in the patient.

Lois was properly grateful for all the attention she received but Lois only talked about common-place things and refused to follow Carol's line when she tried to bring up the matter of who had inflicted these injuries on Lois. Nor would she say a word about Paul Riker.

Fred Tormay had put in an appearance right after Quinn and Silk went away. Tormay sat by the bedside, stiffly and uncomfortably, not knowing what to talk about. Carol, primed on what her duties were, proceeded to take Lois' temperature. She had a fever thermometer case clipped to her uniform, removed the thermometer from it and stepped up to the bed. She didn't look at the thin glass tube nor try to shake the mercury column down. She merely inserted it into Lois' mouth, waited a full minute and then checked the reading. She entered it on the chart hanging at the foot of the bed and went out. She didn't see Tormay biting his lips and frowning darkly.

She saw Tormay depart fifteen minutes later and soon visiting hours were over and the hospital grew quieter. Carol did her best to make Lois talk but the girl refused to comment on either who had caused her injuries, or about Paul Riker in whose death Carol pretended interest.

At eleven-thirty Carol watched Lois' room from the drug closet just down the hall, and wondered if this was worthwhile. Lois impressed her as a shrewd, wily sort who was not likely to do any talking to anyone. Of course Tony Quinn had said there was a dual purpose in Carol's work. Probably the most important part was to guard Lois against another attack. Leaving her apparently unguarded might draw a murderer, but if Captain McGrath planted detectives around the premises, Lois' deadly enemy was hardly apt to risk another attempt to get her.

It was well after midnight when Carol arose from her chair in the closet, replaced cigarettes and matches in her pocket, and hoped that Lois hadn't heard the starchy rustle of her uniform. For Lois had stepped into the deserted hall, looked around carefully and then ducked back into her room before the floor nurse spotted her.

Every few moments Lois checked the corridor until finally even the floor nurse had gone off. Lois, in soft slippers and a negligee, promptly hurried to the stairway. Carol wasn't far behind her. Lois went up five full flights to the top floor. As Carol came onto this floor she saw the door of the main surgical theatre swing shut and a moment later lights went on.

Carol wished then that she was carry-

ing her purse and the gun it contained. She moved up to the door and listened without hearing a thing. She opened the door a crack. The lights apparently came from the operating theatre and this ante-room into which she peered, was illuminated only by the light from above the operating table.

Carol stepped inside and closed the door softly behind her. She moved past cases full of shining instruments, by the sterilizing machines, now cold. She almost coughed as she stopped before one row of open shelves on which were lined cans of ether, ethyl chloride and other anesthetics. The smell of ether rivaled the odor of the antiseptics.

The door to the main operating theatre swung slowly open, the light winked out, and Carol faded into shadows of the ante-room where she crouched behind an examination table. Lois came out stealthily, kept going and disappeared into the hallway.

Carol took down a can of ether from one of the shelves and removed the stopper. She held this behind her, approached the main operating room and saw that it was in total darkness. Yet Lois must have had some impelling reason for this midnight visit and Carol believed she met someone in this room. Someone who was still there.

THE door opened quietly. Carol walked on, wondering where the light switches were located. She came to a full stop to listen. She was fairly certain that she could hear what sounded like muffled breathing. Her hunch had been right and now her objective was to get out of here, raise an alarm and gather in whoever lurked in this darkness.

She took two or three steps toward the door and then the dome lights above the operating table came on. Their brilliance blinded her completely, caused her to stumble against a white enameled stool at the head of the table where the anesthetician sat during surgery.

Gradually her eyes became accustomed to the light and then she saw the man coming toward her. He wore a surgeon's gown, successfully covering his clothing, and a surgeon's mask concealed his features very well. In his right hand he held a large scalpel and he was moving in for the kill.

He blocked any hope of escape

through the one door. Carol backed up quickly and the man increased his speed too. Carol let go of the can of ether, as if she was so paralyzed with terror that her fingers were unable to hold it.

The man in the surgeon's mask paid no attention to this. He kept moving on, closer and closer and the scalpel was now raised high enough for a quick, fatal thrust. Carol stopped, just beyond the widening pool of ether that flowed out of the can. The man in the operating gown didn't notice. He was too busy watching her.

"What do you want?" she asked. "Who are you?"

"Where is Van Osten," the man behind that mask demanded. "Where has Hendricks got him? You work for Hendricks. He sent you here. You're no nurse and the way you handle a fever thermometer proves it."

"Who?" Carol asked in all honesty, "is Van Osten?"

"Do you think I'm a complete idiot?" the man derided. "I want Van Osten. Hendricks is the only person who can possibly know where he is. You can save your life by talking and in no other way. This operating room is sound proofed, nobody comes here at this hour of the night unless there is an emergency and I'm gambling there won't be. Well? Do you answer me or do I give you just a taste of this little sticker I'm holding?"

Carol said, "I—I'll tell you." She reached into the pocket of her uniform. Now her life depended upon the swiftness with which she acted. If this masked man realized what she was about to do, he'd get out of harm's way quickly and no longer be reluctant about using that scalpel.

Carol had a book of matches in her hand. She ripped one free, scraped it and snapped the tiny torch at the feet of the masked man. The match flame went out and Carol's hopes died with it. The masked man guessed what she was trying to do and he gave a great shout.

But while the match flame had gone out, enough of a spark lingered at the head of the waxed length of paper to ignite the fumes from the spilled ether. Blue flames exploded upwards, like a wall between Carol and the killer. He screamed, stamped his feet to try and shake off the flames but his shoes were soaked with the highly inflammable chemical and all he did was splatter

more of the blue flames.

Carol saw him tear at the operating gown, yank down the surgeon's mask and she saw Fred Tormay's horror-stricken features. Then Carol was out of the room. She crossed the ante-room, ran into the hallway and sped for the floor nurse's desk. She used the phone on it and in a few moments the elevator stopped and three orderlies got out. They ran to the operating room, burst into it and there were sounds of a brief but violent struggle.

Carol appropriated the elevator and went down to the floor on which Lois had her room. She straightened her uniform, walked briskly to the room and opened the door.

Lois, propped up against the pillows, stared at her. Carol smiled a little. "It's me," she said. "I don't wonder at your surprise though, after the way you lured me into that operation room so Tormay could make his attempt to kill me."

Lois gasped, "Fred? Where is he? What has happened to him?"

"Why," Carol asked, "is that important to you?"

"Answer my question." Lois suddenly swung her legs off the edge of the bed. "Answer me, you rotten spy!"

LOIS didn't quite know what happened but, when her wits cleared, she was back in bed and Carol was standing over her. Lois tried to speak but her jaw ached and she suddenly recalled that small but highly efficient fist that had sped toward her chin.

Carol said, "Lois, it's no use. Tormay is under arrest and so are you. That means the whole game is over and you have lost."

"We've lost nothing," Lois raged. "Suppose Fred did scare you tonight. All he wanted from you was the truth about Hendricks. You work for him. You can't deny that."

"But I do," Carol said sweetly. "I'm employed by Mr. Quinn, of the D.A.'s office. Lois, your story is that you were engaged to Paul Riker and you were to marry him in two or three days. Yet, I found not a line of this in any newspaper. Riker liked publicity and your type isn't averse to it unless there are reasons. Are there reasons, Lois, why you didn't want any engagement and wedding announcement made?"

Lois, sitting erect, slowly let herself

fall back against the pillows. She bit a heavily carmined lip and studied Carol intently with those cold eyes of hers.

"Why should I make any statements?" she asked. "You've nothing much on me nor on Fred."

"Fred," Carol said softly, "won't mind if you talk."

Lois sat erect again. "He's been hurt. He's dead! You're keeping that from me. Fred is dead! He is, I can sense it! Quick! Tell me the truth. Take me to him. I don't care what happens to me but I've got to see Fred!"

"He's your husband, isn't he?" Carol asked gently.

"Suppose he is? Take me to him. Please!"

"Relax," Carol said. "Fred is all right, unless he thought he could lick three men, all bigger than he. I doubt he battled them. Fred only liked to challenge women."

Lois sighed, closed her eyes and then began to weep. Carol let her cry it out. Finally Carol said, "Well, I got my answer. You couldn't marry Riker because you were married to Fred Tormay. You couldn't afford to risk having your picture and Riker's in any newspaper because your friends would recognize it and wonder what you did with your current husband. I guess that's about all there is to this phase of the matter, Lois. You can get up and put on your clothes now. In a few minutes you'll be taken to the prison ward at Bellevue—if you really need hospitalization."

When McGrath and a squad arrived, Carol had quietly disappeared but McGrath had Tormay and Lois. He wasn't inclined to ask how or what, for both of them were talking.

CHAPTER XVII

Ambush



DELIBERATELY Tony Quinn replaced the telephone, leaned back and glanced at Silk. "Carol," he reported, "practically pried this case apart. Fred Tormay came to see Lois. Somehow he guessed that Carol was a plant. Lois lured her to the operating room where Tormay was

waiting. Tormay wanted to know where Hendricks was keeping Van Osten. He believed that Carol worked for Hendricks."

"Carol is all right?" Silk asked quickly.

Quinn laughed. "She's fine, but Tormay and Lois aren't so hot. It seems Carol got Lois to admit that Tormay is her husband."

Silk sat down heavily. "The old dodge. They were playing Riker for a sucker. Then it was Hendricks who attacked Lois? They were all after the same thing—the Dennison Documents. But wait—Hendricks knew the Black Bat had those documents. Why did he go after Lois for them?"

Quinn said, "Silk, one small item escaped you. When Paul Riker phoned me he said he had just inscribed the envelope with the words, 'Dennison Documents.' Hendricks forced me to get an envelope from Alphin but that envelope, while it held the Dennison papers, was not inscribed."

"There were two of them," Silk said slowly.

"That's right. Riker had one and the dead woman, whose body Alphin was trying to dispose of, had the other. Her copy is the one Alphin got and I, in turn, presented to Hendricks. So there is still a copy undestroyed, so far as we know."

"But where in the world is it?" Silk asked.

"I think Lois and Tormay will know. That is why Hendricks beat Lois up. He was trying to make her tell where those documents were hidden. The way I see it, Riker never suspected her nor Tormay. Not until just before he killed himself. Then, somehow, he found out the truth. He wanted me to have the documents so Lois and Tormay would be cheated out of whatever they hoped to make from them. Riker knew Lois would return to the apartment. Perhaps Tormay had arranged things so that Riker would probably get the envelope from a hiding place neither he nor Lois had ever been able to locate, and try to escape. Tormay would be waiting in case Lois' wiles failed to extract the envelope from Riker."

"They didn't figure Riker would take his own life," Silk said.

"That must be it," Quinn said. "When Riker didn't come out in a big hurry, they went to the apartment, using the

stairway. They found the envelope prominently left for me. They also found Riker, I suppose, and got out of there fast."

"Where does Hendricks fit in then?" Silk asked.

"I didn't know what it was all about," Quinn said. "I told a straight story, involving those documents and Hendricks heard of it, naturally. He learned that Riker had spoken to me on the phone, wondered how much I knew and if I had those papers. So he threatened me."

Silk groaned. "All of which brings us back to the problem of the Black Bat's fingerprints and Hendricks' demand that the Black Bat kill Tony Quinn. Talk about asking for the impossible. What are you going to do?"

Quinn grinned slightly. "Attempt to make Hendricks believe that the Black Bat did kill Quinn. Butch should be in the lab about now and we have plans to formulate. In a bit more than one hour I'm due to set a trap for myself with fatal results. Personally, I don't go for that kind of fun."

Quinn picked up the phone, called Headquarters and got Captain McGrath on the wire. McGrath said, "I was just about to phone you, Tony. Did you arrange for the arrest of Lois and Fred Tormay?"

"I had something to do with it, yes," Quinn admitted. "Did they talk?"

"Not very much. They're smart operators and know their way around a police station. Tormay is an ex-con. Worked in the prison hospital as an orderly for a long time and was released only ten months ago."

"Hold them anyway, without bond," Quinn ordered. "Tormay, at least, is involved with Alphin and that means he is mixed up with the murder of that woman on Long Island. Mac, I called you for another reason. Hendricks telephoned me a little while ago and says he can tell me something of great importance to this case. I'm to meet him at Lookout Point at two o'clock this morning, an hour from now."

THE police officer gave a frown, then nodded several times emphatically.

"I always had a feeling Hendricks knew more than he let on," McGrath grumbled. "Are you going to be there?"

"Of course, but, I'm worried. I think Hendricks is baiting a trap for me."

"Why in the world would he do that?" McGrath demanded.

Quinn said, "Because he's the man who warned me, on pain of death, not to investigate the Dennison Documents. I recognized his voice and I'm afraid he's tumbled to that fact."

"I'll be there," McGrath said quickly. "If he tries anything I'll cut him down with lead."

"Good, but don't be too hasty. Conceal yourself near the approaches to the spot. Give Hendricks a chance to talk to me. He may want to dicker. Silk will be close by and ready."

"I don't like the idea," McGrath stated grimly. "A blind man walking into a trap like that. Facing a man who threatened him with death already. I tell you, I don't like it at all."

"But you'll do as I ask, Mac. That's an order. Just be there—and wish me luck. See you later."

Quinn walked briskly into the lab where Butch was waiting. Ten minutes later Butch left in a hurry. Silk brought the car around front and it was blind Tony Quinn who caned his way off the porch, down the path and into the sedan.

They reached the rendezvous spot five minutes before the appointed time. It was a weird place for such a meeting at this hour of the morning. Lookout Point was rightfully named, for it was on the outskirts of the city and atop a cliff. Below, the giant city sprawled in its semi-sleep, for such a city never entirely sleeps. Most of the reddish glow from the countless Neon signs had disappeared from the overcast, making the darkness more intense than ever.

As Silk swung the car to a place in the parking circle, the headlights swept to the edge of the cliff. They picked up Hendricks, standing alone near a fringe of trees and shrubs. This wasn't one of the important parks of this city but it was a fairly large one and mostly used for picnics. The trees and shrubs were kept up very well.

Quinn opened the car door, stepped out and into the glare of the headlights. There was only clear space between him and the spot where Hendricks stood waiting. Quinn brought the end of his cane down, tapped it a couple of times and took two steps.

Flame leaped out of the darkness. A gun crashed three times. Fast shooting, like that of someone very familiar with

the art. Quinn spun half around. His cane went hurtling off. He sidestepped a pace or two. One knee caved in and he went down sideways. First to his left knee, then to his right and finally he fell forwards on his face.

Silk was instantly at his side. A shout of rage came out of the darkness and Captain McGrath and two detectives came charging down in the direction of Hendricks. McGrath stopped long enough to see that Silk had turned Quinn over and the blind man's face was smeared with blood.

"I'm taking him to a hospital," Silk cried. "You get Hendricks."

"I'll kill him," McGrath shouted.

The detective sped off in the darkness. His men had already reached the spot where Hendricks had been standing. There was no sign of him. McGrath gave orders calculated to cover as much territory as possible and he sent one man back to the police car to notify headquarters by radio, and have them dispatch enough men to close in the whole area.

McGrath heard Silk start the sedan, back around, and go off in a big hurry. McGrath shuddered. Quinn's face had been perfectly white where it wasn't smeared with blood. Three shots had been fired. Perhaps all three had found their mark. McGrath's rage mounted to heights he never knew he possessed.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Framer Framed



HENDRICKS, waiting in the darkness, glanced at the luminous dial of his watch and grew impatient. Quinn would be here soon but there were no signs yet of the Black Bat. Of course the hooded man might be lying in wait already but Hendricks wanted to be absolutely certain.

There was a low whistle to his right and Hendricks turned quickly. He saw a form materialize out of the darkness and stand, silhouetted against the edge of the cliff for a moment. Hendricks couldn't repress the shiver. The Black Bat looked bigger and more deadly to him than ever. Then he recalled the fin-

gerprints which whittled even this black hooded man down to a size that made him anything but dangerous. Hendricks watched as the form moved away to be swallowed up by the gloom once more.

A few moments later he saw the headlights of Quinn's car, watched it stop and saw the blind man step out. Hendricks got set. He let Silk see him in the beam of the headlights, see that he was unarmed. Quinn started toward him.

The shots came from directly behind Hendricks. He was startled, but morbid fascination was greater and he stood there, watching Quinn go down slow and hard. Then Hendricks realized that the shots had been fired so close to the spot where he stood that Silk might decide he had done the shooting.

Hendricks started to turn around. A giant hand reached out, thick fingers curled around his throat. He was jerked backwards until his spine hit the trunk of a tree. Then he was bent over slightly, suddenly yanked upright and the back of his head hit the trunk of that tree with a crash that made the darkness turn into violent spinning lights. Hendricks felt himself sinking. He couldn't stand up, his legs refused to hold his weight. The rough trunk of the tree rubbed against his clothes. He tried to turn and grab at the tree for support but he didn't quite make it.

When Hendricks woke up he was seated in a coupe which was stopped at a very dark spot. He opened his eyes, tried to focus them but saw nothing except the outlines of the car window. He turned his head. There, stark and clear, was the profile of a man in a tightly fitted hood. Hendricks gave a scream which a black gloved hand cut off almost before it began to well from the man's lips.

"You shouldn't have killed him," the Black Bat said calmly.

"Killed? I killed whom? What do you mean? What are you trying to tell me, Black Bat? If this is a double cross, so help me, I'll fix you!"

"The murder of a well liked man who also happens to be the District Attorney, will get you nothing short of the electric chair, Hendricks. They'll burn you and all your money won't stop them."

"I didn't kill Quinn. You did. You shot him. If you claim I made you do it, nobody will believe that."

"You were seen doing it," the Black Bat told him smoothly. "Captain McGrath and some of his men were hiding here too. Quinn was suspicious of you and asked them to be on hand. The flame from the gun came from right beside you, Hendricks. They'll swear you did the shooting. The gun has already been found. It has your prints on it. I framed you, Hendricks."

Hendricks gave a strangled curse. "All right, maybe you did. But you framed yourself. Because I wasn't fool enough to bring those fingerprints with me. No, I guessed something like this was going to happen."

"You never had the remotest suspicion," the Black Bat said. "You left the fingerprints somewhere else because you had another job for me to do. My next assignment was to kill and hide the body of Van Osten. You had to get rid of him too, and what could be easier than to make me do it for you."

"The fingerprints are where the police will find them," Hendricks declared. "You can't do anything to me."

THE Black Bat said, "Listen carefully, Hendricks. Captain McGrath sent for re-inforcements and about fifty policemen are combing this park. We're right in the middle of it. All I have to do is kick you out of this car."

"If they capture me, I'll tell them where to find the Black Bat's prints," Hendricks warned.

"I forgot to inform you of one other fact," the Black Bat said. "McGrath held Tony Quinn as his greatest friend. Most of the men looking for you feel the same way. I've heard them talking. They aren't going to take you prisoner, Hendricks. You're too wealthy and you might buy your way out of the electric chair, or stall for months and months. They're going to handle you like a cop killer. You're to be shot down. When you leave this park it will be in a morgue basket."

"No," Hendricks cried. "No, Black Bat! Get me out of this. Get me out of it and I'll give you those fingerprints. I swear I will!"

"We'll go get them together," the Black Bat said. "And if you lead me on a wild goose chase, I'll arrange for you to be trapped by half a hundred armed policemen. I can do it, Hendricks. And if you get killed, how can you tell them

where the Black Bat's fingerprints are? I'll find them eventually."

"I'll take you to where they are. I'll give you money. Lots of money. Just get me out of here." Hendricks was pleading frantically. The sounds of the searching police were closer.

The Black Bat silently shifted into second, stepped on the gas treadle and pulled away slowly. He reached a paved park road, stepped hard on the gas, left the road and raced down a grassy slope to another exit. Shots ripped the night after him. A couple of bullets hit the car somewhere. They heard the twang as metal collided with metal. Then they were out of the park and racing along a deserted street with Hendricks doubled over in terror.

Fifteen minutes later, the Black Bat was driving at a moderate clip along one of the avenues. "I'm waiting, Hendricks, for an address," he said.

"The Hotel Bonton," Hendricks groaned. "Van Osten is there and so is the envelope containing the prints. Take the envelope, get rid of Van Osten for me and I'll give you a hundred thousand dollars. I'll even go higher."

The Black Bat didn't reply. He knew where the Hotel Bonton was located. Despite its name it was a shabby little place, ancient and off the busier sections. The Black Bat pulled to the curb.

"Your hotel is around the corner," the Black Bat said. "I'll give you ten minutes to return with the envelope and Van Osten." Deliberately he let his voice grow hard and menacing. "If you don't show I'll merely phone the police and tell them where you are. Then I'll go after you myself and there'll be a gun in my fist!"

"You wouldn't dare," Hendricks said weakly. He tried to keep the defiant attitude he had shown from the first, but failed. "I'm sure of that."

"No, you're not. You're done, Hendricks. Washed up. Killing Tony Quinn capped your career. You'll be hunted down; you will lose everything you own because you'll never be able to go back to it. All that money!"

"I'll—get the prints and—and Van Osten," Hendricks said nervously. "You'll do business with me. I know you will, otherwise you'd have let the police kill me. Wait right here. I won't be long."

Hendricks hurried down the street,

keeping close to the building line and worried that he would see a blue uniform. He was frightened, far more terrified that he had ever been before in his life. The Black Bat had left no doubt in his mind that he was wanted for the murder of Tony Quinn—that his own life was in danger if he were caught by the police.

He darted into the hotel, and then paused and took a quick furtive look around the dingy, deserted lobby. There was no one around but a bellboy sleeping on a bench, and the night clerk reading a paper. The clerk did not even glance up. Hendricks breathed a bit easier and made his way to the lone elevator. It took him to the tenth floor.

IN front of Room 1007 he paused, looked around anxiously. There was no one in the corridor. He tapped on the door in a signal. A key turned, the door opened and Hendricks started to go in. A hand touched the small of his back, gave him a terrific shove and he went catapulting into the room. He tripped, fell on his face and stayed there, moaning. He expected to hear Captain McGrath's voice telling him to get ready to take it.

"Get up!" commanded the voice of the Black Bat.

Hendricks sat up, a feeling of relief sweeping over him. At least it wasn't McGrath or the police. He looked at the black clad man, at the gun that the Black Bat held menacingly in one gloved hand, and Hendricks found himself almost wishing it had been McGrath who shoved him after all.

Huddled in a chair in one corner of the hotel room sat a man who looked ninety. His face was thin, cheeks sunken. His hair was scraggly and uncombed. His eyes were set in great hollows. He gazed at Hendricks and at the Black Bat with a torpid sort of indifference as though nothing mattered any more.

"Hendricks, get the envelope with those prints," the Black Bat said harshly. "You said they were here. If you lied, I'll kill you."

"I'll get them," Hendricks cried frantically as he struggled to his feet. "I didn't lie. They're—they're in the lining of your suitcase, John. Go fetch it, please."

"You are John Van Osten?" the Black Bat glanced at the frail little man.

"Yes, yes, I'm Van Osten." The little man did not move. He just sat there staring. "You're the Black Bat. I heard of you up there in prison."

"Then you know better than to do anything foolish," said the Black Bat.

"Of course. I'm not going to try any tricks. I swear I'm not. I'm tired of the whole thing. All I want to do is go back to my wife." For the first time Van Osten showed some interest and animation. "She's waiting for me, you know. She has a nice house and she's fixed up a woodworking shop for me in the cellar. That's all I want. All I've been planning on—waiting for. The money doesn't matter any more. I'm through and I know it."

"The suitcase," the Black Bat said, and his voice was strangely gentle. "Please get it, Van Osten."

"Of course. Right away."

VAN OSTEN got out of the chair, went to a clothes closet and took out a cheap suitcase. He opened it and placed it on a chair beside the Black Bat. A gloved hand passed gently over the lining of the suitcase and extra-sensitive fingertips found the spot where the envelope was hidden.

The Black Bat ripped the lining away. He removed the envelope, studied the seals intently and then ripped it open. The sheet of paper inscribed with his prints was there, intact, even to the mark he'd placed on it for identification. He studied the edges of the paper for any signs of thumbtack marks in the event the page had been tacked down to be photographed. There were none. He felt certain that Hendricks actually had meant to abide by his promise to return the prints intact.

"You have them now, just as I told you that you would," Hendricks said as he stood watching.

"That's true," the Black Bat said. "But I'm going to feel even safer."

He struck a match and quickly burned the sheet of paper, rubbing the ashes with his foot until there was nothing left but a black smudge on the bare floor. Then he faced Van Osten.

"I want you to wait here and tell the police your story," he said. "All of it. How you, Riker and Hendricks looted the treasury of the city of Dennison. How you went to prison while Riker and Hendricks enjoyed your money."

Van Osten smiled wanly. "But they'll make it good." There was confidence in the little man's voice. "They promised, and I trust them because they took good care of my wife all these years."

"Riker is dead," the Black Bat said. "He killed himself because he couldn't face the consequences."

Hendricks was slowly backing toward the door, trying to find some way to make a last attempt to get away.

"I didn't know about Riker," Van Osten said slowly. He looked at Hendricks. "You should have told me, Roy."

"Afraid I have even worse news for you, Mr. Van Osten," the Black Bat said. "Your wife is also dead."

"Oh, no, no!" Van Osten protested. "That can't be. It just can't. Maggie was all I lived for during those years in prison. We have so many plans now that I am free." He sank weakly down on the bed. "This is some sort of a crazy joke, isn't it, Black Bat? It can't be really true."

"I'm sorry," the Black Bat said sincerely. "But it is true. Mrs. Van Osten is dead. Tormay, an ex-con to whom you told your whole story was morally responsible for her death."

"Fred Tormay?" Van Osten asked. "He seemed a man that I could trust. How could he have brought about Maggie's death?"

"That's a long story," said the Black Bat. "You'll probably learn all about it later." Van Osten did not appear even to hear him. The little man's sunken eyes were fixed on Hendricks' face.

"Why didn't you tell me these things, Roy," Van Osten said. "The last time we talked you said that soon I would be going home—home to Maggie. Funny my wife's name was Helen, but she liked me to call her Maggie. She took the name of Mrs. Margaret Comstock while I was in prison. I—I didn't mind." The little man frowned. "Why didn't you tell me she was gone, Roy?"

"There was just one reason," said the Black Bat when Hendricks did not speak. "The greed of a ruthless man who wouldn't let anything stand in his way. Hendricks kept all this from you because he didn't intend turning over your share either. He was going to murder you. Part of his deal with me was the provision that I kill you."

"No!" Van Osten looked at Hendricks as though the man had suddenly turned

into a large and deadly snake. "But I always thought he was my friend—that I could trust him more than anyone."

"Of course you can trust me, John," Hendricks said suddenly. "Why should you believe all the lies this man has been telling you?"

"But he is the Black Bat," protested Van Osten.

"And who is that?" demanded Hendricks. "Some glorified crook and killer who hides his identity behind that black hood and those black clothes he wears. You have known me for years, John. Always been sure that I was your friend. Why should you doubt me now?"

The Black Bat was amazed at the sudden change in Hendricks' attitude. The gray haired, partly bald man apparently was no longer frightened. There was an air of authority in his voice and manner that made his words convincing.

"It's a good bluff, Hendricks," the Black Bat said coldly. "But it won't work. How can you explain your intention of not turning over his share of the money to Van Osten, or that you planned to murder him?"

"Show him what you keep under the pillow there, John," Hendricks said. "He will be surprised."

The Black Bat turned to watch as the little man reached under the pillow. Behind him Hendricks moved swiftly and the Black Bat felt a gun barrel jab into his back.

"Since I'm wanted for the murder of Tony Quinn," Hendricks said coldly, "killing the Black Bat won't put me in any worse spot. Drop your gun if you don't want to die this instant."

The Black Bat let his gun drop to the floor with a little thud.

CHAPTER XIX

Explanations



VAN OSTEN reached under the pillow and his hand came out holding a small automatic. The Black Bat stood motionless with Hendricks' gun plodding him in the back.

"This is what I have kept under my pillow ever since I have been here at this hotel," Van Osten said, nodding to the automatic he

held. He sounded almost childish. "I didn't think I would ever need it, but Roy thought I had better play safe." The little man smiled a strange sort of a smile. "He's my friend, you know."

"That's what you think!" the Black Bat said bitterly.

"It is a very nice gun." Van Osten snapped off the safety catch in the automatic. "I used to be a pretty good shot back in Dennison. The police there had a target range set up and I would go and shoot with them. Used to make a lot of bull's eyes, too. Remember, Roy?"

"I remember," Hendricks said curtly.

"Maggie used to be proud of my shooting, and the wood working jobs I did," Van Osten said. "You really should have told me about her—her passing away before this, Roy!" The automatic in the little man's hand was suddenly aimed directly at Hendricks' forehead as he stood behind and a little to one side of the Black Bat. "You'd better drop your gun before I kill you, Roy. It might go off and hurt the Black Bat."

"John!" shouted Hendricks. "Have you gone crazy? Put that gun down!"

IT WAS all the chance that the Black Bat needed. He whirled and a gloved hand came down, caught Hendricks' wrist and gave a quick hard twist. The gun dropped out of Hendricks' hand and he gave a howl of pain. Swiftly the Black Bat reached down and grabbed both guns up off the floor.

"You know what?" Van Osten was examining the small automatic. "I forgot to put the clip in this gun—it isn't even loaded."

Hendricks turned and ran to the door. He grasped the doorknob and had the door half open when a figure in black hit him hard. The guns were no longer in the Black Bat's hands. Hendricks was pulled away from the door, flung halfway across the room.

"I think I'm going to enjoy this," Van Osten said as he sat on the edge of the bed calmly watching.

Hendricks scooped up a straight backed chair and flung it. The Black Bat ducked the missile easily and felt a little better about what he was going to do.

Methodically, calmly, and with a great deal of pleasure, he cut Hendricks to pieces. He hit him with short, chopping blows until the financier doubled up and pitched to the floor. Then the Black Bat

stepped to the telephone and called Police Headquarters.

"This is the Black Bat," he told the Headquarters operator. "Captain McGrath is hunting for a man named Hendricks. Tell him he can find him in Room Ten-Seven at the Hotel Bonton and with Hendricks will be a man who can explain everything McGrath wants to know."

"Including the end of a beautiful friendship," said Van Osten dryly.

* * * * *

Not long afterward, Tony Quinn sat in the secret lab in his home. Carol was beside him with Butch and Silk listening avidly. There was a neat bandage around Quinn's forehead.

Quinn said, "This began, of course, when Van Osten looted the treasury of the town of Dennison. Riker and Hendricks helped him do it but Van Osten accepted the blame because he was ill, thought he'd die soon and was only worried about his wife. He made Riker and Hendricks sign affidavits certifying to their guilt and these were backed up with papers also proving it. Riker retained a copy and Van Osten secreted another in that trick desk at his home. A desk which, he told his wife, should never be disposed of. These papers became the Dennison Documents.

"But Van Osten didn't die. Instead, he offered himself as a laboratory experiment in the disease he suffered from. Because of the war and the fact that so many soldiers contracted the same sickness, a cure was found. Van Osten benefited, became well and was promised his freedom after scientific studies on him were completed."

"And that's where Fred Tormay and Lois began," Carol added. "I wondered why an attractive girl like Lois never allowed her picture to be in the papers. Especially when she was engaged to marry a man as well known as Riker. I wondered if it was because she couldn't stand the publicity. Of course we know now that she was married to Tormay, and both of them were trying to discover where Riker kept the copy of that document."

QUINN said, "Van Osten has related his part. Tormay and Lois broke down and filled in certain gaps. Alphin, Dr. Bryn and Alphin's gangsters are singing beautifully. Van Osten said that

at one time he was on the verge of death and that he liked and trusted Tormay, who was an orderly in the prison hospital. He told Tormay most of the story. Tormay and Lois then put their plan to work when Tormay was released. But the thing got out of hand. Riker fell for Lois, insisted they marry and Lois couldn't say no."

"Who persuaded Riker to kill himself?" Silk asked.

"Tormay. He phoned, pretending to be Van Osten just out of prison. He told Riker that he knew everything that went on and that Lois was working for him. He proved it by telling Riker things only Lois would have known. The plan was for Riker to become thoroughly disillusioned and frightened so he'd run out on Van Osten and take his copy of the documents along. But Riker didn't do that. He phoned me instead. When Riker didn't come out of his apartment, Tormay and Lois went in—using the stairway to reach his floor. They found the envelope, took it and hurried away.

"Tormay planned to use the documents as a basis for blackmail and enlisted Alphin's help. Hendricks was approached and he became panicky enough to try and intimidate Tony Quinn, whom he believed also knew the truth or was on the verge of learning it. He forced the Black Bat to get one copy of the papers from Alphin, but I knew by then that there were two sets of papers.

"Alphin murdered Mrs. Van Osten to get the other copy. Hendricks agreed to pay up provided the envelope wasn't opened and its secrets read. Alphin had studied the papers obtained from Riker so he could easily hand over the sealed envelope which he got from Mrs. Van Osten. I doubted a man of Alphin's type would refrain from breaking the seals, but I had even better proof that there were two sets. Riker had inscribed his envelope. There was no writing on the envelope Butch got from Alphin."

"Tony," Carol said, "we know that Hendricks attacked Lois. He was after the second set of papers. But how did he guess that Lois was involved?"

Quinn said, "I'm afraid I gave him the idea. I said that it seemed odd Riker should take the trouble of fully dressing himself before taking his own life. Hendricks grasped the same thought that I'd been worrying about. That Riker, a fastidious man, wouldn't want to be any

the less neat in death, especially when he believed Lois would probably be the first person to see his body."

"Well, anyway," Butch grinned, "we've got Captain McGrath really jumping this time. He thinks you were shot by Hendricks and Hendricks denies this and says the Black Bat shot you. Van Osten backs him up, in part, by swearing the Black Bat was at his hotel room when Tony Quinn was supposed to be home getting over the scalp wound he suffered. McGrath's happy enough now, with all those prisoners, but wait until the excitement dies down and he begins thinking."

QUINN laughed. "I hope he doesn't decide to have this phony wound examined. It's only a series of scratches I got when I hit the gravel in that parking space."

Silk closed his eyes and shuddered. "Next time someone has the Black Bat over a barrel and something like this has to happen, we rub out the man who holds the sword over us. That's easier on the nerves than seeing you go down, sir, just as if you'd been shot. Then seeing all that blood. . . . I thought Butch had accidentally hit you."

Quinn said, "Even easier than that is the idea of not getting under anyone's thumb again. Hendricks really had me for awhile. Right now, there is little on him. He killed no one; the looting of the city treasury took place so long ago that the statute of limitations is in effect. However, under civil laws, everything Hendricks owns can be taken from him and by the way he battled to save it, I think that will be almost as severe punishment as the death penalty."

Silk leaned back, closed his eyes and sighed in sheer ecstasy. "They put us through a wringer this time, sir, but it will be worth going through all that. When Captain McGrath tries to tell us how the Black Bat and Tony Quinn were upon the same scene at the same time and the Black Bat apparently tried to kill Quinn—well, all that has happened will seem worthwhile."

"I think we all agree," Quinn said. "But even more worthwhile is the fact that a blackmail scheme was broken, Mrs. Van Osten's murder avenged, and a man who tried to duck out of his responsibility for a monstrous crime, is going to pay for it after all."

Thubway Tham's Cousin



"What's all this?"
Seth demanded.
"Cousin Sam, you
want me to smash
this feller?"

*Tham's hayseed cousin
makes things go haywire—
but it ain't hay that
the little dip is after!*

IT was ten in the morning when Thubway Tham, the little pickpocket who usually worked in the subway, descended the squeaky stairs in the lodging house conducted by Nosey Moore, the retired

burglar, where Tham had been a tenant for a long time.

Tham lived on the third, and top, floor of the building. Mr. Moore had his office on the landing on the second floor, where

By JOHNSTON McCULLY

he sat behind a battered rolltop desk and watched the comings and goings of his lodgers with a wary eye.

This was not a measure on the part of Mr. Moore to prevent lodgers delinquent in their rent from slipping out with their baggage without paying arrears. In Mr. Moore's establishment, no tenant was ever in arrears. He paid in advance and on the nail, or he never got in, let alone slipped out. Few of them ever had any baggage anyhow.

Tham did not feel so well this morning, which happened to be a muggy one in midsummer. His had been a night of dreams because he had eaten overmuch and unwisely late the evening before at a feast spread in Nosey Moore's apartment by another lodger—a burglar who had made an unusually good haul.

Tham went slowly down the stairs and stopped, yawning, at Mr. Moore's desk, and Nosey removed the paper from in front of his face and peered at Tham.

"Good mornin', Nothey," Tham greeted.

"'Mornin', Tham. Say, there's been a man here lookin' for you."

Tham flinched. What man known to the city police would not flinch at such a remark? His mind became extremely agile instantly as he thought back over the events of the last few days. Had he made some disastrous mistake? Was the Law after him?

"What thort of man?" Tham asked Nosey. "Did he look like a flatfoot?"

MR. MOORE laughed a moment. "Nothin' like it," he said, when he had regained control of himself. "He looked like a country jake. In fact, he admitted he was one. Tham, I told him you weren't up yet, and he said you must be sick to stay abed so late."

"Tho late? It ith only ten now."

"His type gets up before sunrise, Tham, if I'm any judge. He was very interestin'. Said he was your cousin."

"What?" Tham gulped.

"That's right. I wrote down his name." Mr. Moore bent over his desk. "Here it is. His name's Seth Seeley, and he's from some town up in the Maine woods, I gathered. Said he's the son of your Aunt Maggie, who died a year ago."

"Maybe it ith true," Tham admitted. "I did have an Aunt Maggie there, and she died thome monthth ago. Tho hith

name is Theth Theeley, huh?"

"That's what he said, Seth Seeley."

"That wath my aunt's married name, all right—Theeley. My mother'th thith-ter. Well, well."

"He had a big box with him, Tham, and said it was filled with truck he'd brought for you. I told him he could leave it here, but he wouldn't trust me. He lugged it away with him. Said he'd come back in a couple of hours. Hist! Here he comes up the stairs from the street now."

Tham glanced down the stairway that led to the street. Up it came a man, tall and thin, who had a very prominent Adam's apple which seemed to move ceaselessly. He had on a hickory shirt and overalls pulled down over painfully new boots which squeaked at every step he took. He had a large, uneven, sand-colored mustache, and his hair was in need of cutting. His eyes were a pale blue.

"My goodneth!" Tham muttered.

The man approaching carried a huge paperboard carton lashed around and around with heavy rope. He stepped up to the counter and put down the carton, removed his battered hat and wiped the perspiration from his brow, cheeks and chin.

"Gettin' hot," he announced. "Prob'ly be a scorcher by the middle of the afternoon. Good for growin' crops, though."

During all this, thoughts had been chasing one another around and around in Tham's mind. First, this relative had dropped in at an inopportune moment, for Tham was broke except for a couple of dollars. Second, he had planned to go forth into the subways and replenish his purse, and he certainly could not do it with this yokel at his elbow and hope to pass unnoticed when he "lifted a leather." But he had no time for additional thoughts.

"Here's Tham," Nosey Moore said, pointing.

Seth Seeley's mouth split in a wide grin as he extended a gnarled hand eloquent of toil, and the grin revealed about six missing teeth and the remaining ones badly tobacco-stained. His hand met with Tham's, and his grip made Tham wince and almost double up.

"Time we got acquainted," Seth said. "It's somethin' for me to have a reg'lar city feller for a cousin. Made up my mind I'd run down and make you a visit.

Brought a box of stuff for you from the farm."

Nosey Moore was grinning. Tham was deathly afraid that other lodgers would be coming down the stairs.

"Glad to meet you, Theth," Tham said. "We'll go upstairs to my room."

Get this yokel under cover—that's the thing, Tham thought. Hide him from unfriendly eyes and let him talk his head off while Tham grunted monosyllabic replies and did some thinking. He had to find a way out of this problem.

SETH SEELEY untied and opened the box he carried as soon as they were in Tham's room with the door securely locked. Upon Tham's lowly couch and the somewhat-rickety table, Seth piled home-canned fruit in glass jars, home-made pickles, two huge Hubbard squash.

There was a long woolen muffler the defunct Aunt Maggie had knitted—and it was a flaming red that could have been seen for at least three city blocks by a man with bad eye trouble, not quite the thing for a pickpocket who wished to pass through crowds unobserved. And there was a pair of mittens to match.

Nor was that all. Seth had brought a set of moose antlers which he told Tham he could fasten to the wall for a hat and necktie rack. And in a box at the bottom of the carton was a home-made pumpkin pie a foot in diameter and two inches or more thick.

"My girl, Ellie, baked that, but I raised the pumpkins," Seth explained. "Me and Ellie have been goin' together for nigh onto ten years. Fixin' to get married one of these days, when we get a mite better acquainted."

Tham was incapable of speech by that time. All he could do was blink rapidly. But finally speech came to him, weakly.

"I don't keep house, Seth," he said. "What can I do with that canned fruit and pickles and that squash?"

"Get yourself an invite to dinner and give'm a jar of that fruit or pickles, and they'll 'vite you agin," Seth explained.

"Might work it that way," Tham lied to him.

He began putting the stuff away in dresser drawers, rolling the big Hubbards under his cot. He wasn't worrying about the muffler and mittens. He could stow those away, this being mid-summer. And the pie could be eaten right in the room.

"Haven't had breakfast yet," Tham explained.

"You city fellers!" Seth said, grinning. "Late nights."

"If you want to, Theth, you can rest here while I go out and get a bite."

"Rest? Gosh, I ain't tired. I want to see the town. I'll go 'long with you and have a cup of coffee."

They went to the little restaurant just off Madison Square where Tham usually breakfasted. As they went along the street, making slow progress because Seth had to examine everything in every show window, sundry gentlemen of Tham's ilk, who knew him well, winked. Tham had a good thing in tow, they supposed, the lucky stiff!

Tham took coffee and doughnuts and Seth had a cup of coffee.

"I'll have to go back to the house," Tham said. "Forgot to bring my money. Nothey Moore kept it for me. I ain't workin' right now, Theth, timeth bein' tho bad, and tho I can show you the town."

"The subway's one of the things I want to see," Seth declared. "Saw the one in Boston, but it ain't much compared to the big New York subway. I go to Boston two or three times a year."

"I'll show you the thubway—know it from one end to the other," Tham replied. If he could get into the subway jam, Tham was thinking, he might be able to lift a leather even with Seth Seeley at his elbow. He didn't want Seth to know he was a professional pickpocket, and go back home and tell all his dead aunt's relatives and friends so.

"I've got plenty of money with me," Seth said, pulling out an old wallet with a string wound around it. "How much you want?"

"Jutht a little till I can get back and thee Nothey Moore."

Seth slipped him a twenty from a fat wallet. "That do?" he asked.

Tham nodded. He noticed the wallet was well packed with currency. If Seth hadn't been a relative—! But he tore his mind away from that thought.

LEAVING the restaurant, they wandered to Madison Square, with Seth sunburning his tonsils as he looked at the high buildings. And there they ran into Detective Craddock, Tham's old enemy. Craddock looked Seth up and down and then grinned at Tham. Crad-

dock, too, thought Tham had picked up a yokel for a victim.

"How goes it, Tham?" he asked.

"Oh, tho, tho," Tham replied. "Craddock, thith ith my couthin from Maine, Theth Theeley."

"Indeed?" There was a twinkle in Craddock's eye. "Does he know it, Tham?"

Seth thrust his way forward belligerently. "Are you callin' my cousin Sam a liar?" he demanded. "I could take you to pieces in about five minutes! I could—"

"Go thlow, Theth," Tham begged. "It ith all right. Thith is Craddock, a politheman."

"He ain't got a uniform on," Seth protested.

"They won't let 'em wear a uniform in New York till they've been on the Forth a year and made good," Tham informed him, grinning at Craddock. "Thith man Craddock—he ith tryin' hard to make it."

"He oughta have a badge or somethin'," Seth declared. "How does anybody know he's a policeman?"

"He don't want 'em to know it," Tham said, almost choking. "He's afraid thomethin' might happen and he'd get mixed up in it."

"That's enough!" Craddock snapped.

"Craddock, I wath jutht tellin' my country couthin that I am out of a job at prethent," Tham said, appealing to Craddock with the expression of his face. "He jutht got in from Maine thith mornin', and ith goin' to vithit me awhile. Thee? Tho, bein' out of a job, I can show him the town."

"Good idea, Tham," Craddock said. "About you being out of a job for a time and all."

"I want to see the subway," Seth put in.

"Oh, Tham can show you that," Craddock said. "He knows the subway from one end to the other. Where are you stopping, Mr. Seeley?"

"Oh, he'll bunk with me," Tham replied. "Good-by, Craddock. Tho nithe to have then you again."

Tham led the way as he and Seth crossed over to Broadway and started a stroll to Times Square. It was slow even for a stroll. Seth had to look at everything and ask a multitude of questions. Tham began wondering how long Seth intended staying in New York and

hoped the stay would be a short one. Everybody they passed grinned at Seth's appearance, and a few made what they thought were humorous remarks.

At Times Square, they descended to the crowded platforms of the subway and caught a shuttle train for Grand Central Station. The great station itself did not appeal to Seth—he had inspected it thoroughly when he had arrived in it from Maine. So they shuttled back to Times Square again.

"We will take a long ride downtown," Tham told Seth. "I'll show you the Thtatue of Liberty."

"Great! I've always wanted to see that," Seth informed him.

"The thubway may be crowded about the time we come back," Tham warned.

"I like big crowds," Seth replied. "They make a man feel like he's somewhere. If I like New York enough, I'll coax Ellie to marry me right away and come to New York to live."

"No farms hereabouts," Tham warned him. "You'd have to thettle out in Long Island or over in Jerthey. They raith chickenth and garden thtuff over in Jerthey."

Tham guided Seth aboard a downtown express. The car was jammed as far as Penn Station, but after that they had seats. Their neighbors listened while Seth discoursed on crops and the weather up in Maine. Downtown, they left the subway and walked over to the water's edge and looked across at the Statue. There was little mist, and the Statue could be seen clearly.

THAM noticed that Seth kept looking at those around him continually, and inquired about it.

"Oh, I know this city life," Seth told him. "I'm watchin' all the time for pickpockets. Don't want to let one of 'em get near me. I'm carryin' quite a roll. Sold some timber just afore I started here."

"Keep that wallet in your pocket," Tham cautioned. "Take a couple of billth out of it and keep 'em theparate in your vetht, and uth that when you have to thpend money. Never flash a roll."

"I reckon you know all about it," Seth said. "I'll take your advice."

Tham flinched at the words, and wished for the hundredth time that Seth was not a blood relative. He'd have that stuffed wallet in no time at all.

They returned to the subway and caught an uptown express. The car they were in filled rapidly. Tham began looking around for a prospective victim, as he would have done had Seth not been standing beside him.

They gave up their seats to two elderly women and hung to straps. Tham glanced up and down the car. And on the rear platform he saw Detective Craddock.

He guessed that Craddock had been tailing him since their meeting earlier in the day. Perhaps Detective Craddock thought there was something fishy about this hick cousin from Maine. The unusual, Tham knew, always gained Craddock's attention.

Seth was hanging from the strap ahead of him, and people were jostling them, and Tham gave him little attention. Uptown they dashed, and finally came to Penn Station.

"Let's get off here," Tham said to Seth. "You'll want to see this. Follow me."

He battled his way to the door and managed to get out of the car with Seth at the last instant. On the jammed back platform of the car, Craddock was unable to make it. Tham grinned at him as the doors closed and the train dashed on.

He took Seth through Penn Station on a sightseeing tour, but at the same time he was looking for a prospect. Seth seemed to love to bore into crowds. He carried Tham just where Tham wanted to go.

It was in front of the ticket window that Tham saw a man who would be a likely victim if he happened to get into the subway. He stood in a cleared space with a flashily-dressed woman of about thirty. He was slightly inebriated, and his talk carried.

"The best of everything—that's me, baby!" he was telling the woman beside him. "I've got to be busy until dinner time. Glad you came to meet me, sugar. Can you take care of yourself until I can pick you up at your apartment about eight?"

"Well . . . I might go shopping—if I had any loose change," the woman said. "Easiest thing in the world, baby!"

Tham watched the man take a thick wallet out of his left hip pocket. He opened the wallet and plucked out several bills and handed them to the wom-

an, and Tham did not doubt the bills were of large denominations.

"Plenty more where that came from," he told the woman, laughing. "It's sucker money, sugar. I made a lot of it out in the Middle West selling rat traps they called houses to veterans. What a bunch of suckers! So much down and so much every month for life. Discounted all the paper and got the cash. Let the banks worry."

The woman laughed and patted him on the shoulder. Tham inspected the pair closely. He knew instantly the type to which the woman belonged. And the man was well-dressed, fat, prosperous-looking, the thick-steak sort Tham especially despised. The man and woman continued their conversation, but now so they could not be heard, and Tham supposed they were making plans for meeting later and spending the evening.

"Now there's a right fancy-lookin' girl," Seth said, when he noticed her.

"That girl ith a fanthy tramp," Tham informed him. "You keep away from her kind. Remember your Ellie up in Maine."

"Yeah, but a man's entitled to one fling afore he settles down," Seth declared.

"Maybe tho. but not with that kind," Tham persisted. "That woman would have your roll and the gold fillingth out of your teeth inthide half an hour. That little roll you've got wouldn't be tip money where that girl would lead you. Get thmart!"

"Anyhow, she's a good-looker," said Seth.

"Tho ith a cobra, if you like thnaketh," Tham replied.

The woman laughed again and hurried away from the man, and he picked up a fat briefcase and headed for the subway platform. Tham drifted after him with Seth at his side.

IF SUCH a man did not grab himself a taxi, it meant he was in a hurry to get far downtown or far uptown on business, Tham decided, and Tham was a good judge of human nature. If the man's mind was on settling some business, he would be concentrating on that instead of taking an interest in those near him. A man in that state is doubly easy for a dip.

Seth walked along beside Tham,

keeping up an endless chatter. Tham kept within a short distance of his prospective victim. They wound up on the subway platform, and the man with the fat wallet took up a position that indicated he was waiting for a downtown express.

That was all right with Tham. He would explain to Seth later that there was something downtown he meant to show him and had forgotten, perhaps the City Hall. And Tham knew the train would be crowded at that hour.

"I am goin' to take you on another thubway trip," Tham told Seth. "We'll catch the next expreth."

Tham edged closer to the man he was after. The train roared into the station, and they got into a car. Tham was only a couple of feet behind the fat man by this time, and Seth was treading on Tham's heels.

And Detective Craddock, who had doubled back from Times Square and had picked up Tham on the subway platform by rare good luck, was only a few feet behind them all.

Tham allowed the swaying of the train to bump him gently against the fat man, and he made sure the thick wallet was still in the other's hip pocket. Anyone who would carry a wallet in a hip pocket deserved to be robbed, Tham thought.

He glanced at Seth, to find the latter gawking at the advertising cards along the side of the car. The fat man was swaying continually with the motion of the train, and bumping against Tham at intervals.

It was a long ride to Chambers Street, where Tham had decided to get the wallet and leave the train. And he knew there would be a rush through the aisle when the station was reached, for young men and women crowding the aisle and sitting on the seats were chattering, and their talk exposed the fact that most of them worked for a large firm in that district, and were on their way to the firm's establishment after an annual meeting of some kind at a hotel far uptown.

The fat man began talking to the man in front of him as they bumped together. "Always hate to ride the subway, but it is okay when a man's in a hurry," he was saying. "Have to brush elbows with the common mob, as they say."

"That's right," the other replied.

"Hanging to a strap like a penniless beggar, bumping and swaying—it's a nuisance. You'd think somebody would find a better way of getting around town. How's business with you whatever you're doing?"

"So, so," the other admitted.

"Just got in from a trip out in the sticks of Iowa and Kansas. Did pretty good there. The old money belt's loaded with dust, as they say."

"Good for you!"

Tham was glad the attention of the fat man was centered on somebody. He bumped the fat man again and got no attention or complaint. He did not exist, as far as the fat man was concerned, and that was the way Tham liked it. He glanced at Seth, swaying from a strap on the other side of the aisle and gawking around at the passengers. The train was nearing the stop.

At the first surge of passengers toward the exit, Tham would do his work swiftly and in an expert manner. He braced himself, turned and touched Seth on the shoulder.

"We get off at thith thtop, Theth," Tham said. "Be ready to make it quick. We'll have to plow through the crowd."

"Where are we goin', Cousin Sam?" Seth wanted to know.

"I'll take you to the Thity Hall, Theth. And you can thee the lower part of Broadway where they have the paradeth."

"They havin' a big parade today?" Seth asked.

"I don't know," Tham replied. "They're generally havin' one."

THAM turned aside, and Seth gawked at the passengers again. The train suddenly slackened for the stop, the cars rocked and swayed, and those in the aisle bumped against one another as they clung desperately to the straps.

Just as the train stopped, the fat man swung aside slightly, which meant he was not getting off here, and Tham lurched against him. Tham's right hand did its work. He got the wallet and transferred it to his own coat pocket, then bumped past the fat man with Seth behind him, elbowing others out of his path.

As he went through the door to the platform, a roar came from behind him,

and he knew Craddock's voice instantly.

"Stop, Tham! I've got you this time!"

Tham whirled aside and turned. Seth was a few feet from him. And Craddock, determination in his face, was lurching forward between him and Seth.

"Once too often, Tham," Craddock said, as he grabbed him. "Told you I'd get you some day. Sorry to spoil your family reunion, but you're going to the jug this trip."

"Wh—what—?" Tham gulped.

Great fear had seized him. He had not had time to remove the currency from the wallet and "ditch the leather." Craddock would find the wallet in his pocket. The train had rushed on, but no doubt identifying papers were in the wallet and it could be returned to its owner after being used as evidence.

Tham gulped. Craddock was holding his wrists and forcing him back against one of the pillars in the station. He yanked him away from that and against a tile wall. Gulping, his eyes bulging with astonishment, Seth followed.

"What's all this?" Seth demanded. "Cousin Sam, you want me to smash this feller?"

"Stand back," Tham urged. "Keep out of this. It's the cop we met in the Square, remember? I think he's gone crazy."

"I'll show you how crazy I am when I frisk you," Craddock exploded. He had beckoned a uniformed man who happened to be on the platform, and the policeman hurried forward.

"Craddock—Headquarters," the detective told him. "Saw this man lift a leather on the train. Was tailing him. Stand by and be witness to the frisk."

"You let go of me, Craddock!" Tham bellowed. He was trying frantically to free himself and dash away. He could

reach the stairs easily enough, get away and toss that damning wallet aside somewhere. He had a vision of a cell in the big house up the river—

"Stand back there with your hands up!" Craddock ordered.

Tham gave up. This was the end. Caught at last. That wallet would put him into prison. Craddock leered at him and explored Tham's pockets.

Craddock's hand went into the wide coat pocket into which Tham had put the wallet—and came out empty. Tham gulped again. Had the wallet fallen out of his pocket in the scuffle? In the train aisle, had he dropped it on the floor when he had thought he was putting it into his pocket? He remembered that he had worked swiftly and that there had been considerable jostling.

Courage returned to him.

"Craddock, I am gettin' thick of thith thort of thing," Tham complained. "You are alwayth grabbin' me and thearchin' me and findin' nothin'. Your eyethight mutht be bad, Craddock. I am goin' to have thome friendth of mine thee the Commissioner about thith."

CRADDOCK finished his futile frisk. "I know danged well you got a wallet off that fat man—saw it with my own eyes," he said.

"If I did, where ith the wallet? Want me to thtrip right here in front of folkth?"

Seth barged forward. "Let's do somethin' about this, Cousin Sam," he suggested. "This man has no right to do what he did! I'd sue him. He's got no uniform on even."

"Shut up!" Craddock yelled at him. "All right, Tham. I'll get you yet."

"You ain't heard the lath of thith,"

[Turn page]

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Craddock," Tham warned. "I am goin' to Thity Hall now to show my couthin' the plathe, and maybe I'll go to Head-quarterth while I'm down here and thay a few thingth."

"On your way!" Craddock roared. "Break it up and let this man through," he added to the crowd that had gathered.

Tham ascended to the street with Seth by his side. They went into the open air, and Tham led the way toward City Hall.

"That was a close one," Seth said, his voice low.

Tham glanced at him. "What do you mean clothe?"

"You was mighty clumsy, Cousin Sam. I saw it from the corner of my eye. No wonder that cop saw it, too."

"What are you talkin' about?" Tham demanded.

"That fat wallet. I saw you get it. Knew you were goin' to try it by the way you was watchin' the cuss. If it hadn't been for me, that cop'd tossed you into jail and you'd have been in bad trouble. You goin' to do that kind of business, you've got to be clever, boy."

Tham goggled at him. Such talk from a country cousin with hay in his hair!

"I muht have dropped that wallet when I thought I wath puttin' it into my pocket," Tham said. "I sure wath thcareed when Craddock grabbed me. Thought the leather wath in my pocket—"

"Let's hire one of them taxicabs and ride home to your room," Seth suggested. "I like to ride in 'em. I'll foot the bill."

HALF dazed, Tham found himself in a taxi with Seth and rushing along the street. They got out of the cab in front of Nosey Moore's place and ascended the rickety stairs.

"Been seein' the sights, Tham?" Mr. Moore asked, grinning.

"Theth and me—we've been showin' 'em to each other," Tham replied.

They went on to Tham's room, entered, and Tham closed and locked the door. Seth sat down on the cot and be-

gan emptying his pockets. He exhibited a sheaf of currency to Tham.

"This is what was in the fat guy's wallet," Seth said.

"What ith that you're thayin'?" Tham gulped.

"I saw you lift the wallet, and saw that plainclothesman startin' for you, Cousin Sam, so I lifted the wallet out of your pocket as we started for the car door, got the stuff outen it and dropped the wallet on the floor."

"Well, I'll—I'll—" Tham stammered.

Seth Seeley was taking more folding money out of another of his pockets. He put it on the cot, and a couple of pocket watches beside it. "That's my own haul," he announced. "'Bout as much as was in the wallet you got. Want to split it?"

"You—you—" Tham gulped again. "You were pickin' pockets?"

"Sure. I go to Boston two or three times a year, like I told you, and do it there. It's a cinch. Me lookin' like an honest country jake, nobody thinks I'd lift a wallet I drive my old truck and take bum eggs and get ten cents a dozen more from them Boston women 'cause they think the eggs are right fresh, comin' from a farm and bein' delivered by a farmer."

"Well—well—" Tham almost choked.

"I'll have to show you a few pointers, Cousin Sam, if you're goin' to keep in the business. You'll get yourself caught, if you ain't careful."

"Lithten, Theth!" Tham implored. "I've got a reputation of bein' the cleveretht dip in New York. I've never been caught, and never will be." He fingered the money on the cot. "All right, Theth, we'll thplit thith," he agreed. "And we'll make a little deal. Long ath you are vithitin' me, neither of uth will lift a leather. We'll jutht do the town."

"All right. I don't mind a little vacation," Seth replied. "But I like to keep my hand in."

He began separating the money into two piles, and Tham watched him open-mouthed and wondered at the things that can happen in this world.

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE

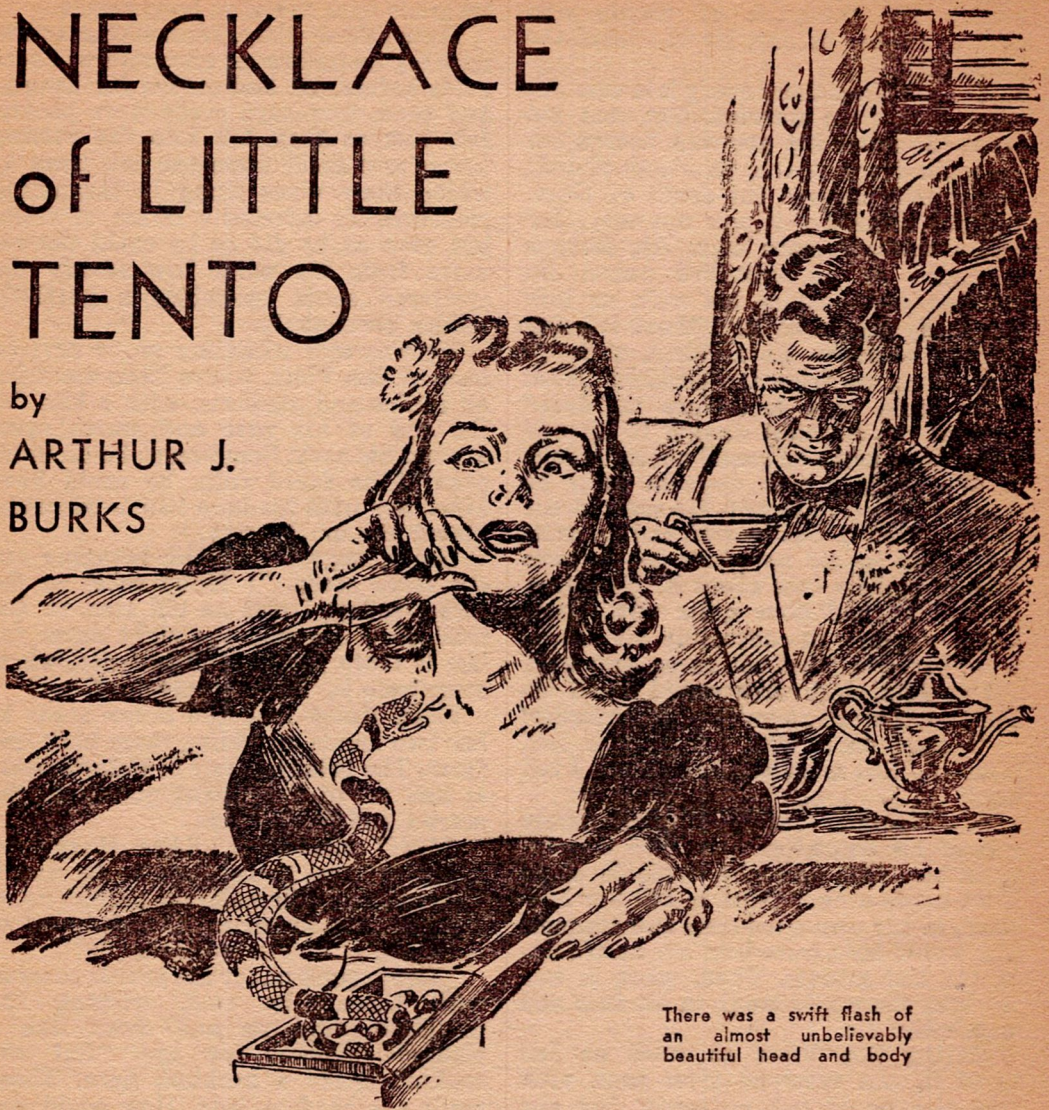
MURDER TOWN

An Exciting Complete Black Bat Novel

By G. WAYMAN JONES

NECKLACE of LITTLE TENTO

by
ARTHUR J.
BURKS



There was a swift flash of an almost unbelievably beautiful head and body

NO observer unless he were a real psychic, would have realized that Jed and Nora Haley hated each other with a hatred that knew no bounds. When they sat at table they were the soul of courtesy to each other. The Brazilian cook and the Brazilian maid commented on it to each other and to everybody else.

"*Senhor* and *Senhora* are the most perfectly in love people ever to visit our

country. Our poets should write songs about them."

Everyone regarded Nora and Jed's cool mansion on the point of land extending far out into the broad Tapajos between the Amuri River and the heights of Boim a perfect haven of peace. Jed had visited the Tapajos when he had been a young man. When success came he built the mansion called, with not much originality, Boa Vista, on the

Murder Is a Game That Two Can Play!

spot where, twenty years before, he had swung his hammock of nights and cruised timber by day. He had loved the place then.

He took Nora there every late summer after they were married. But each hid from the other his growing hatred for his mate. Nora desired the death of Jed; Jed equally desired the death of Nora. But for those two it was not easy. Jed Haley was a famous man. His fortune depended on an unsullied name. He couldn't just murder his wife, or hire somebody else to do it, without it being a costly business. An accident, now . . .

He must contrive the accident. Even if he could have had Nora murdered without the slightest danger to himself or his good name he would not have done it. When the proper moment came he wanted to do it himself. He wanted her to know that it was he who had committed it, but he did not want her to have time to make a fuss about it. He rather fancied he had done quite well, these last few years, in concealing his hatred from her. She must not guess, and walk out on him. A divorce would crash his company's stock as quickly as a murder.

"I must do it with finesse," he told himself. "She must not guess until I tell her."

Say that her hatred of him merely echoed his hatred of her. Who can explain how such mutual hatreds develop? Nora made up her mind to kill her husband, in her own good time and manner. She would hide from him her desire until the last minute. Then, when it was too late, she would laugh in his face and watch him die.

Hating Boa Vista as much as Jed loved it, she resolved after each visit that she would not go again, but she always went. This time would be the last, for this time she would find a way to end it. It must be done with great finesse, too, for an exposed murderer would hardly be permitted to inherit property. No one but Jed himself must ever know.

It is possible that fate sometimes steps in to aid murderers, especially if the prospective victims have it coming to them. Perhaps fate intervened the day Jed, hunting small doves in the jungles, saw a number of *tento pequeno* seeds and thought they were a coral snake, partially buried in the leaves. He brushed away the leaves with a cautious

toe and noted the baked-bean-sized scarlet seeds with the ebon larger ends.

He whistled softly. With all his timber cruising he had never encountered these seeds before. He had an eye for beauty, and these iron-hard seeds were beautiful, just as they fell into the rotting leaves and mold from the tall trees to which their vines clung in strangling embrace. He selected a dozen of them, but even as he did so he could not remove from his mind how closely the scattered seeds resembled a partially hidden coral snake.

He was still whistling as he arrived back at Boa Vista, where Nora met him, all smiles and gladness, with a kiss for the end of his nose and warm arms around his neck. Sometimes, he thought, even if he faced ruin, he could have killed her with his bare hands when she kissed him on the nose.

"Look, sugar," he said, bringing out the *tento* seeds. "I found these in the forest today. I met an old man on the trail back. He said the right name for 'em is *tento pequeno*, little *tento*, whatever *tento* is. 'Paint' probably."

Nora Haley took the dozen seeds in her two hands, dribbling them back and forth. The brief journey in Haley's pocket had added a brilliant polish, to the scarlet and black seeds.

"Jed!" she cried. "Are there any more? Please, there *have* to be more! These things will make the perfect necklace, strictly Brazilian. I've dreamed of just such an exotic necklace!"

"The ground under the tree is covered with them," he said, wishing she wouldn't jump up and down like a pleased child at her age. "But you couldn't make a necklace here. Those seeds are hard as iron. How could you possibly pierce them?"

"I'll find a way, or you'll find a way, but get me more of the little *tento*. Jed, you must have *known* I'd want enough for a necklace!"

She never overlooked a chance to upbraid him, not savagely, but with an air of martyrdom, as if she wanted him to feel like a heel. Years ago he'd felt just like that. Now he knew it was just one of those silly habits she could not or would not break.

"There is plenty of time," he said, "and I always enjoy the jungles." He wanted to add that he enjoyed spending as much time as possible away from her.

"I'm going with you, just to make sure we collect enough," she said.

She went with him, and he had everything he could do to repress the almost irresistible urge to kill her there under the tree as she squealed and clutched at the worthless seeds with her vain, greedy hands. He remembered how he had imagined the scattered seeds a half-seen coral snake, and a wish began to grow in him, a picture, a hope. If fate, just this once, would come to his help! If coincidence would place just one small coral snake here among the leaves, and Nora would pick it up . . .

BUT fate bided her time. Nora was not satisfied until all his pockets were bulging with the little *tento* seeds. Her face was flushed with excitement. He realized that she was still pretty, though she was nearing forty; but he hated even her prettiness because it was so shallow, vain, and covetous. She never thought, any time, of anything but herself. She stayed with him, he knew, because he represented financial security. He stayed with her because his financial kingdom could not exist with scandal.

Pleased as a child with a new toy she knew would cause plenty of comment back in New York, Nora almost forgot that she was going to murder her husband if ever she got a good chance. Instead, much to his distaste, though he appeared to fall in with her mood, she clung to his arm, and was very happy, kittenish—and silly.

"People at home will think I'm wearing a coral snake around my neck!" she said. So she had noticed it, too. Maybe that would make some difference. Difference? Difference in what? Just where was his mind leading him as he walked back through the jungles with his already doomed wife?

Wind whispered through the jungle crowns. Leaves rustled underfoot. Soon Nora would be part of the soil and mold. He knew what horror it would strike in her if she had any idea she would be buried on the rim of the jungle in this foreign land. She'd said as much once.

"Just promise me one thing, Jed. If I die in Brazil, please let me be buried in the United States. My soul would never rest in peace anywhere else."

He had promised because it hadn't seemed to matter much, then. Now, well, maybe there would be a chance to tell

her, as she died, that he was going to break that promise.

So they arrived back at Boa Vista and Jed retired to his study as he so often did to lose himself in his books and his writing. Before he entered the study, however, he spilled the little *tento* seeds into a small tin box from which Nora had removed the few jewels she had brought with her to Brazil. No sooner had he filled the box than Nora had taken it with her into their bedroom.

Scarlet and black . . . scarlet and black . . . the appearance of the inside of that box, almost filled with *tento* seeds remained between his eyes and the printed page so that he had to read the page again and still understood nothing at all. He sat back, thinking, the book open on his knees, and he did not know the title of the book nor the name of its author. Scarlet and black . . . scarlet and black.

He rose, tiptoed to the door of his study, opened the door a crack, and listened. He could hear Nora spilling the seeds back and forth in her greedy hands. He could hear her gurgles of delight—as if she were five years old instead of forty. He could imagine her, in the seconds when she was not handling the seeds, holding three or four, as many as she could manage, up to her neck, to give herself some idea of how the necklace would look when, back in the States, she got the seeds pierced and strung.

Jed Haley returned to his study and closed the door. Lighting his pipe with great satisfaction, he opened one of his favorite books, crossed his knees, leaned back and began to read. Now that he knew what he was going to do, he could concentrate on reading. Only one sharp thought lanced his mind.

"I must go hunting again tomorrow," he said to himself. "Tomorrow and every day until—" He hesitated after that word, then went on—"until I find some more '*tento* seeds' for my Nora, of course!" It was a jest that pleased him.

Nora carried her box of seeds out to a big rock under a shady tree, where she often sat to plan murder as she looked out on the peaceful Tapajós—and hated the river as much as she hated her husband. There Esmeralda, her *caboclo* cook, found her.

"*Senhora*, about supper" she said. "Oh, seeds of the little *tento*! Where did *senhora* find them?" Without waiting

for an answer Esmeralda jabbered on. "It is almost impossible to find so many *tento* because the children love them so and know where all the trees and vines are to be found. They gather them to play with. Indians make necklaces of them. Some Brazilians make rosaries, but the priests do not much approve because the seed is deadly poison."

"Deadly poison!" exclaimed Nora, her whole body shocked as the thought flashed through her mind that perhaps Jed hated her as much as she hated him, and had maneuvered her into handling these seeds in the hope that she would die of the poison. "But you are joking, of course. Children play with them, you said?"

"Yes. The seeds are very hard. Only the heart is poison, but it is deadly, as I said. It is safe, too, because they are often swallowed without the slightest harm. Children swallow them by the dozens and they simply do not digest. Nobody worries about the poison because it is not reachable. Of course, there are magicians and witches, who know how to dissolve the seeds so that the poison will work. My father and mother, though he is not a magician and she is not a witch, know the secret. I'll ask them, if you wish to know."

"Heavens no!" said Nora laughing. "I do not wish to know. I'll feel a lot better to know that as long as I don't have the secret my scarlet-and-black 'pearls' are quite harmless."

"Just the same," said Esmeralda, "I'll find out. *Senhora* always wishes to know everything, so maybe she might like to know this strange *tento* secret."

Nora did not deny her again. It suddenly flashed to her mind that it might, some day, be better if Esmeralda did not remember this bit of conversation.

THE next morning Jed Haley went hunting again, remaining away past his lunch time. It was during this interval that Esmeralda, chattering away about trivialities, told Nora how to dissolve the *tento* seed and free the *abrina* in it. Was *abrina* really deadly? Would it kill a human being? How many seeds were required? Nora dared ask none of these questions, but more freely than if she had, Esmeralda gave her the answers.

"Just one seed's heart will kill a powerful man, almost before he can say

'tento pequeno!'" laughed Esmeralda, then chattered on, "I've always thought if ever I killed my husband, though, I would use two or three seeds, just to make sure!"

"Don't talk like that, even in fun," cautioned Nora. "One does not joke about things like that."

"Well, then, my mother said," went on Esmeralda, as if she hadn't heard the rebuke, "and my father confirmed it, that if one dropped the seed into hot tea flavored with the *mangericao* would dissolve the *tento* without a trace, even of taste."

Nora Haley pressed her hand against her mouth to keep from crying out.

Mangericao! the word echoed through her. "Why Jed wouldn't think of drinking tea down here, much as he loves it, unless it were flavored with *mangericao*."

Now she knew. She knew how to kill her husband without leaving a trace. With no doctor within seventy miles, the body would have to be buried before any official action could be taken. Esmeralda, if Nora just waited a week or two, would forget all about their conversation for Esmeralda never remembered anything she heard or said. Nora knew this must be true because Esmeralda told her the same tales over and over again, some of them a dozen times. No, she would not remember.

Jed was irritable when he came home late that afternoon. He hadn't bagged so much as a wild turkey, and Jed hated not to find even one specimen of whatever he hunted, for he hunted with an intensity which could not brook frustration.

"No more *tento* today, darling?" asked Nora.

He barely shook his head.

"No doves, deer, tapir?" she persisted.

"No!" he snapped at her. "Besides, I wasn't hunting *doves, deer, tapir,*" he mimicked her. "I'm hunting something very special," he continued, changing his tone to deliberate gentleness. "I'm hunting something special *for you!*" he added. "Never mind what, it's a secret. I want to surprise you."

Silly fool! she thought. Wanting to surprise her, keeping back some asinine secret like an imbecile. Oh, well, let him play his moronic games for a few more weeks. After that, dressed becomingly in black, she would go home and forget

this horrid place and all it meant. By the time Jed's will was probated she would be able to dress as she pleased, and spend as much of his money as she wished to.

The days passed quietly by as Nora experimented with tea and tento seeds and *mangericao*. It worked, too, for she soaked crackers in a cup of the hellish brew and fed the mixture to fish off the point. They turned belly-up before one could say "Jed," and the river's current swept away the dead fish, removing all the evidence remotely suggesting Nora's little murder experiments.

Jed went out every day, apparently ranging far and wide, returning to Boa Vista more testy each day. Nora almost softened in her deliberation to murder him when she realized how very much he wished to find the "surprise" he had promised her. Maybe he loved her after all. Otherwise why should failure to find the "surprise" cause him such disappointment.

But before two more weeks had passed, Nora knew she could wait no longer to put her murder plan into operation. And Jed, in the meanwhile, must have found what he was looking for. When he came into the house that day he was all smiles.

"I found it!" he exclaimed. "But we'll talk about it after tea. I'm ravenous! Let's have *goiabada* cakes with *mangericao* tea for a starter. It's a special occasion. Tell Esmeralda, will you?"

Nora's heart hammered with excitement. The fool was *asking* for it, *specifying mangericao*-scented tea! The time had come. Her cheeks were flushed with excitement as, laughing at him, she hurried to the kitchen. Jed Haley meanwhile seized the opportunity to slip into the bedroom, lifted the lid of Nora's "jewel" box, and dropped into it the open end of a small leather sack he had been carrying on his trips for almost two weeks. Out of the sack poured softly something that looked like little *tento* seeds, but which fell among the others without sound. Jed Haley lowered the lid quickly, tightly, and returned to the dining room.

Husband and wife, smiling, courteous, apparently much in love, talked of various matters until the cakes and steaming tea arrived.

"Don't wait, Esmeralda," said Nora Haley, "I'll pour this time."

She poured. Jed Haley did not notice

the two *tento* seeds which went into the tea without sound and vanished without trace. Nora had practised, expecting she would have to do it before his eyes. He did not watch her because, naturally, he did not suspect she intended to murder him.

They ate their cakes and talked with their mouths full and laughed because it sounded silly. Jed Haley lighted a cigarette.

"Now," he said, "for your surprise. It will look good with your *tento* necklace!" he chuckled. "Get the box and I'll show you!"

NORA actually ran into the bedroom. He had never seen anyone in such a hurry to be murdered. She brought the box back to the tea-table. He wanted to see her face when it happened, when she *knew!* She would open the box, thrust in her hands because it was her habit . . .

She returned to the table and noticed that Jed had not yet touched his tea. As she put the tin box on the buffet her eyes, fixed on him, were filled with questions, like those of a child. Turning from him, she pulled off the lid of the box, thrust in her hand.

There was the swift flash of an unbelievably beautiful head and body. Nora uttered a little scream, jerked back, and stared at two punctures in the palm of her hand. The coral snake crawled out of the box, fell onto the floor, utterly lazy and beautiful in its movements now that its work was done.

Nora stared at her husband in ghastly disbelief. He smiled at her.

"A deadly coral snake, my sweet," he explained calmly. "That's what I've been hunting for you! It *does* surprise you, doesn't it? And to know that the man you love has been trying for *years* to think of a way to kill you that was safe? It will also surprise you, I think, that I can sit here, calm, undisturbed, and watch you die!"

Nora could not utter a word. Too stunned to think, she could only stare at Jed Haley like a woman hypnotized. Her expression seemed to please Jed Haley, for he grinned at her widely.

Then, his hand steady and confident, he raised the cup of delicately scented *mangericao* tea and slowly drained it, never taking his gleaming eyes off his dying wife.

By **ELIZABETH
STARR**

Jordan and Boice,
with my owl-eyed
daughter between
them, both jumped
to their feet



A for ALICE

—and also for Atom Bomb, which is no more
explosive than Alice once she's in action!

THERE are all sorts of troubles that a man can have in this life. But if you want my opinion, a teen-aged daughter is the worst of them, and is probably the only thing with which no man can cope.

Now I want to make it perfectly clear that Alice, being my little girl, is a great source of pride to me, and at times I even feel a reluctant fondness for her. I suppose she's cute, if nothing else. But her age is against her. From a father's

point of view, seventeen is an appalling age, and the whole affair of the Graham murder can be used as an example.

When I got the call from headquarters, Alice and I were just finishing dinner. Indigestion is a detective's occupational ailment. I remember groaning when the phone rang, because we were only halfway through dessert, and I had whipped up quite a good dessert. I've become a fair cook since Alice's mother died, and I take pride in it. But when I heard the chief's voice, I knew I'd have to go, because it was a murder. He was calling from the dead girl's apartment. The coroner was there, and the fingerprint boys, and a suspect they'd rounded up. I was supposed to come right away.

"But, daddy, a murder! How divine!" Alice beamed as I told her. "You almost never get a murder!"

"This must be my lucky night," I said drily.

Her round face glowed, oblivious to irony. "Mine, too!" she breathed. She dashed out of the room.

Well, that seemed pretty cryptic, but I didn't give it a thought. You learn not to. I just got my hat, and shouted out goodby to Alice. I was nearly through the front door before I realized that she hadn't shouted back.

"I'm going now!" I called loudly. The house gave back a sense of emptiness.

I decided that Alice had rushed to go to the movies with another girl, or maybe with Eddie Bickle who lived next door.

It was quite a shock when I got out to the car and found her sitting complacently in the front seat.

"Just where do you think you're going?" I asked her, in as menacing a way as possible.

"Now for heaven's sake," she said calmly, "don't take that attitude. I only want to view the body and make my deductions. I should think a father would want his daughter to take a little interest in his business. I should think you'd be pleased."

"Well, I'm not. Just get out of the car. Go do your homework."

I had the door of the car open for her, but she didn't stir except to open her purse and take out her glasses. The glasses have heavy horn rims, the kind she insisted on, and they always give her round face a weirdly intellectual look,

like the face of a baby owl. She looked at me. "Homework," she said. "Homework. I should think a middle-aged man would know that there are other ways of learning besides doing homework."

Before I could get my mouth open, she went on hastily, "Can you imagine the stir there'd be in my composition class if I wrote about solving a real murder? I can see it all now. Psychological questioning of the suspects. Bafflement on every side. Blood."

"If you think I'd let you—" But I realized that argument was fruitless, and I couldn't waste any more time. "All right. All right, all right," I said irritably, clambering into the car. "You can come and say hello to the chief, and then leave and take the trolley home."

Alice squealed excitedly. As we pulled out of the driveway, she murmured under her breath, "A murder! Oh, brother!"

WHEN we reached the dead girl's apartment, the chief greeted me absently and began shooting the facts at me before he really took in the presence of Alice. Then he broke off suddenly and stared at her, and at me. "What's the kid doing here?"

We three were standing in the cramped hall of the apartment, that had all the rooms branching off from it. We could hear voices coming from the rooms, and as soon as the chief looked at her, Alice moved rapidly down the hall. Over her shoulder she tossed back casually, "I'm just helping!" and vanished through an open doorway.

The chief didn't give me a chance to get hold of my daughter and throw her out. He was too tense to pay attention to such things, and I suppose he figured that Alice would go home in a minute.

"Anyway," he went on to me in a low voice, "as I say, this girl, Paula Graham, had a good enough reputation. Only thing was, they all say she liked to play one man against another. Liked to make 'em jealous. I think it's one of the three guys I've got in there now."

"Three?"

"The one I told you about on the phone, and the one who discovered the murder. And another one we got hold of since I called you." The chief pushed his fingers through his upstanding crest of grayish hair, shaking his head. "It's one of those cussed simple things. We

found the girl in the kitchen with a kitchen knife through her, no fingerprints on the knife. No complicated stuff to sink our teeth into. Personally, I think we'll be wrestling with this for weeks until maybe somebody just breaks down. There's not a clue."

"I'll take a look at the body."

The chief nodded, and clipped briskly down the hall, his energetic small body nervous-looking as he walked. I followed him into a kitchen that was fairly large for an apartment house. It was clean and shining, with a table set for two near the open window. The remains of a dinner were on the table, scraps of food left on the plates, an inch or two of coffee in the cups. On the floor, lying partly under the sink, there was a sheet-covered figure.

The chief pulled back the sheet. The body of Paula Graham lay in an oddly relaxed and graceful position; the face, with the eyes closed, had the look of normal sleep. She had been a very pretty girl, small and dark-haired, about twenty-two years old. The prettiness and naturalness of her body made the red-stained front of her dress more gruesome, the torn hole in cloth and flesh more vividly horrible.

"Do the boys know if the knife came from this kitchen?" I asked.

The chief pulled the sheet back over Paula Graham's body. "They're pretty sure of it. The handle matches one of the other knives, seems to be part of a set. The murder knife is the only thing in the place that hasn't got fingerprints all over it, fingerprints of at least two of the suspects. Except the silver and china on the table of course. The murderer was smart enough to get rid of those.

"Paula must have been quite a girl, if you suspect all three of them of a jealousy motive."

"Just two. The third is somewhat more subtle. Like to talk to them now?"

"Sure."

For the past few minutes I had forgotten the jaunty presence of my daughter in the apartment, so when we went down the narrow hall again and into the living-room, it was distinctly unpleasant to see her ensconced comfortably on a sofa between two murder suspects. She glanced up as I came in and then dropped her eyes instantly, not giving me any chance for the silent, threaten-

ing look I wanted to give her.

She was smart enough to know I wouldn't want to start an argument before the chief, or before the three men who were supposed to be scared to death of me. There's something pretty silly about a hard-boiled detective pleading with his teen-aged daughter to go home. I decided to try to forget she was there.

I looked at the two men on the sofa, and at the third, who was sitting in an armchair near the open window. The room was softly lamp-lighted, and at first glance there seemed nothing distinguishing about any of them. They were all in their twenties, all with their eyes locked on me; all intensely nervous, of course. A cop sat languidly in the corner with arms folded, but the atmosphere was conducive to nerves.

I asked, "Which one of you found the body?"

The young man in the armchair raised his hand a little, almost like a scared kid in school. He seemed the youngest of the three.

"I did," he said.

HIS name was Jack Dougherty. He was a slim, white-faced young fellow with reddish-brown hair and dark eyes, rather boyish and nice looking. He did not even try to smile at me, lost as he was in the acute anxiety that most suspects seem to feel, whether innocent or guilty. He had come to call on Paula. The apartment door was partly open. He had found the body in the kitchen, and had immediately called the police.

I turned to the other two, and when I questioned them, right off the bat I bumped into something that I had never run into before in a murder case! The two men on the sofa apparently had airtight testimony against each other—and the testimony was exactly the same! The men were Donald Boyce and Cliff Jordan. Neither, as it happened, had any satisfactory alibi for suppertime tonight.

Both had been in love with Paula Graham and wanted to marry her. Each one said that she had accepted him, and that she had invited the other to come here and have supper with her tonight, and take her out somewhere. During the evening she was going to tell him that things were all off between them, and that she was going to marry his rival! It supplied the obvious jealousy motive.

A sudden burst of rage in which Paula's supper companion here had seized the knife and killed her!

But which one had come? How could you dope that out? Donald Boyce, a tall blond young fellow with the look of an athlete, insisted that he and Paula were engaged, that Cliff Jordan had come and was going to take her to the movies.

"I didn't like her to see him again," Boyce said. "But she—"

"That's a lie!" Cliff Jordan burst out. He was a smallish, dark-haired fellow. His face was flushed red with anger. "Paula told me that Boyce was coming here and they were going swimming! He often took her swimming at a big indoor pool. I wanted her to let me break the news to him! I didn't want her to go out with him!"

Jordan and Boyce, with my owl-eyed daughter between them, both jumped to their feet. Jordan's face was darkened and twisted. He ignored his big, blond rival. "He's quite an athlete, this Boyce," Jordan went on violently. "He can swim and play tennis, and kill a woman all with no trouble at—"

Suddenly the two were lunging at each other, but the cop and I grabbed them, quieted them. And then I found out that the third one—that young kid Jack Dougherty who said he had come after supper and found the body—himself had a fine and dandy motive for killing the Graham girl!

"Paula Graham took Boyce away from my sister," Dougherty said. "They were engaged. Then she got interested in Boyce—my sister loved Boyce! She—"

So Dougherty had come tonight to remonstrate with Paula! To tell her to let Boyce alone!

Now how would you pick from three suspects like these? They were all three sticking to their stories. Which one had had supper with Paula here tonight? Had Cliff Jordan come to take her to the movies? Or had Boyce come to take her swimming? Or had Dougherty come and argued with her about his ditched sister? The chief was outside phoning. I was still shooting questions at the three young men and had hardly noticed that Alice had quietly sneaked away.

Then Alice came back. She grabbed my arm, whispering, "Please come with me a minute, daddy! It's important! Really!"

I glanced down into the earnest, upturned, be-spectacled face and saw that she meant it. Her blue eyes, behind the glasses, were big and lighted like lamps. She even made me feel some of her excitement.

"All right." I turned to the others. "You three can stretch a little, walk around. Just don't leave the apartment."

I FOLLOWED Alice as she led me quickly out of the room and down the hall, to the kitchen. Then I noticed for the first time that she had three or four little bottles in her hands; but they were driven out of my mind by seeing Paula Graham's body again, the sheet pulled back, and realizing that Alice had exposed the body; had seen blood and death at its ugliest, for the first time.

"Don't worry," she said quickly. "I'm okay, and I just had to look, and try to help. Now listen—you've been trying to find out who Paula was with when she was killed, natch. Who she had dinner with here, aren't you? One of those men would have taken her to the movies afterward. Another one would have taken her swimming. Another might have just sat here and argued all evening. So Paula was planning on doing one of those three things, wasn't she? She didn't expect to get killed."

"That's right. But I don't see what you're—"

She interrupted me breathlessly, "I know what Paula was planning to do this evening."

She straightened the little bottles in her hands and knelt down beside Paula's body. "Look!" she said excitedly. She held one of the bottles near the dead girl's mouth. I saw that the thickish red liquid in the bottle exactly matched the color of the lips. Then she swished a pale yellow bottle, and said, "Hair Lacquer! A special kind! Oh, don't you see? Paula was wearing waterproof makeup—the kind you wear when you go swimming!"

She thrust one of the bottles at me, and I saw the label: FOR AQUABELLES—MERMAID MAKEUP—WILL NOT COME OFF IN THE WATER!

Alice was rushing on, "I noticed that her hair was lacquered in place so I looked in her bedroom and found this stuff on her bureau! It matches up perfectly! Cliff Jordan was telling the truth! Paula was going swimming with Boyce!"

"Then—" But I never finished what I started to say. At that moment, there was a faint gasping sound out in the hall, and scrambling footsteps. I dashed out, and saw Boyce making down the hall for the door of the apartment!

I shouted, ran, and lunged. Then I was on Boyce with his fists hitting at me, struggling with him in the small hall. He was gasping out, "All right, I killed her! Damn you, I killed her!" He didn't seem to know what he was saying, or how hopeless it was for him to escape.

He was too intent on getting through that door to realize that several people, by now, were overhearing his confession, as he repeated it wildly, and that we had him, for the murder of Paula Graham.

I don't know if you can imagine what my home life was like after that. But in a way, I didn't mind Alice being so pleased with herself, even though it made her pretty scornful of me. I figured to myself, this kid is probably a genius.

That's why I say a teen-aged girl is the most maddening and unpredictable thing in the world. Because the next time I was called for a murder, I thought she'd get steamed up again.

"Well, I got an A in composition class for that Graham murder," she said. "But this time—" Her blue eyes widened dreamily. "This time I think I'll write about love!"

And she rushed next door to go to the movies with Eddie Bickle!



"I Am a Murderer — and I Deserve to Die by My Own Hand . . ."

THAT was the substance of the strange suicide note which Paul Garvin wrote just before he pulled the trigger. But oddly enough, the fatal shot didn't kill him—and when the police picked him up and took him to headquarters, he had an incredible story to tell—involving an unknown blackmailer and a mysterious murder . . .

Captain McGrath didn't believe Garvin's story, especially when a certain very important corpse couldn't be found. "You're a liar, or crazy, or both," McGrath told Garvin bluntly.

But the keen eyes of "blind" Tony Quinn saw something all the others had missed. "Garvin isn't bluffing or kidding," the Black Bat said. "He's telling us the truth and I'm going to follow up his story—"

The trail led right to MURDER TOWN in the gripping novel of that name by G. Wayman Jones coming next issue—a novel that brings you Tony Quinn at his fighting, sleuthing best as he probes the strange mystery of the suicide that didn't take—and its curious aftermath of widespread violence! For a feast of thrills and action, look forward to—

MURDER TOWN

By G. WAYMAN JONES

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE!

DEAD DOGS TELL TALES



The collie flung itself between the pair

*A true story of scraps of paper which
forged an unbreakable chain of guilt!*

by ROBERT WALLACE

DAVE CARVALHO was on vacation. His usually vibrant frame relaxed against the warm sand. His dark, probing eyes were veiled in contemplation of the sea. I ought to come down here more often, he thought. A man gets tired of forged wills and crime.

"Well, if it isn't Carvalho, greatest handwriting expert in the world!" exclaimed a voice above him. "What are you doing in my bailiwick?"

Carvalho blinked, shifted his gaze upward. It took him a moment to recognize the rather portly man who was grinning down at him. "Oh, hello,

From the Annals of David Carvalho, Handwriting Expert!

Weeks," he greeted. "First time I've seen you in a bathing suit. I didn't know District Attorneys were allowed to expose themselves like that."

Ed Weeks surveyed his paunch ruefully. "Maybe this one shouldn't. But Long Beach is home to me, and the boys would sure raise a snicker if I paraded the beach in white tie and tails."

He dropped to the sand beside Carvalho. "I haven't seen you since the Rice case, Dave.* That's quite a while ago, isn't it?"

Carvalho nodded. "Almost six years. It was a pretty simple affair. The forger forgot one of the most elementary principles in handwriting: Don't make your copy too perfect."

"Simple, eh? I was only an observer then. But I'm here to tell you I've never seen a more brilliant exhibition of scientific genius and plain horse sense in my whole career."

Carvalho shrugged. He was used to enthusiastic praise. Descendant of an eminent Portuguese-Jewish family that had come to America before the Nineteenth Century, he was world famous. From Scotland Yard to Timbuctoo law-enforcement officials clamored for Dave Carvalho when a bit of handwriting was in dispute.

"I wish we'd have some occasion to use your talents here in Nassau County," Weeks was saying regretfully. "But we just run into the usual crimes. Nothing spectacular. Ugh! Who's throwing sand?"

Collies At Play

The District Attorney twisted angrily around. Two handsome, white-ruffed collies raced past, their paws spraying sand in all directions. "Those dogs ought to be kept off the beach," he exclaimed. "They—oh, I know them. They belong to Dr. Wilkins."

"They do," agreed a cultured, well-modulated voice. "And I'm truly sorry they've caused you any annoyance, Mr. Weeks."

A tall, unusual-looking man bent solicitously toward the District Attorney. He seemed oddly out of place on the sun-scorched beach. Among a welter of bronzed bare limbs, he alone wore a

tightly buttoned cutaway morning coat and striped pants, choker collar and square-crowned derby. Just now the derby was in his hand, disclosing a pinkish-bald expanse of scalp, fringed with tufts of white hair. A neat white beard and gold-headed cane completed the strange ensemble.

At his side, faded blue eyes filled with regret, stood a little old lady, dressed in old-fashioned flounces and poising a sedate parasol against the sun.

They're out of some story book, thought Carvalho, as he scrambled to his feet.

"It's all right," Weeks was mumbling. "Dave, this is Dr. Walter Keane Wilkins and Mrs. Wilkins. The good doctor retired from practice some years ago to join us here in Long Beach. Their home is one of the show places on the Island. And this is Mr. David Carvalho, who you've heard is without doubt—"

Carvalho nudged him surreptitiously. It annoyed him to be introduced as a celebrity.

Weeks was quick on the uptake. Without a break he flowed smoothly on: "He is doubtless to join our colony once he meets more of the nice people we have around."

Mrs. Wilkins dimpled. For all her age and soft white hair her face was smooth and young. "That's a pretty compliment. I do hope, Mr. Carvalho, he's telling the truth about your joining us."

The collies came racing back. The sand sprayed up again. "Come here, you bad boys," cried Mrs. Wilkins.

The sleek animals frisked around the couple. Mrs. Wilkins patted the larger dog. "Duke, you ought to be spanked," she scolded. Then she smiled to Carvalho. "They're really spoiled. But, you know, we have no children."

"They're really wonderful companions," Dr. Wilkins chimed in. "Watch this, please."

He lifted his hand threateningly, as though he were about to strike his wife. Instantly Duke began to bark. The doctor swung again. The collie flung its body between the pair, shrilling anguish, almost hysterical.

"You see," said the old doctor. "Duke allows no one to touch Mrs. Wilkins. Not even me!"

"How about the other dog?" asked Weeks.

"Lady? Oh, she knows I'm fooling."

*Editor's note—See Forger's Nemesis, BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, Sept., 1948.

The doctor turned to his wife. "Well, my dear, we must finish our promenade."

The District Attorney and the handwriting expert watched them walk sedately up the beach, the collies frisking about them.

"They're a curious pair," said Weeks. "Keep to themselves most of the time. By the way, Carvalho, you're staying in Long Beach a while?"

"Another week. I'm at the Dorset House."

"Good! I'll look you up in the morning. So long."

Phone Call Summons Carvalho

But it wasn't morning yet when Carvalho was awakened from sleep by the strident sound of the telephone. It was pitch black outside as he reached for the instrument.

"Hello! Hello! That you, Carvalho?"

"Yes, Weeks! What's the matter?"

"Plenty. You remember the Wilkins couple we met on the beach? Well, she's been murdered."

"Murdered! That sweet old lady?"

"Right. I want you to dress and get down here as fast as you can to the Wilkins home. Corner Main and Third."

"But it's one in the morning! I'm no policeman and I don't—"

Carvalho stopped talking, for Weeks already had hung up.

The Wilkins house was silhouetted black and grim against a crisscross of flashlight beams. Inside, lights glowed and heavy footsteps echoed through the rooms.

Someone was moaning in a strange monotone.

"Hello, Carvalho. It's about time you came!"

"That's a fine way to greet me, Weeks. What have I got to do with this?"

The D. A. looked slimmer in his clothes than on the beach. His eyes glittered with the chase. "I don't know if you have," he breathed. "So far it looks like a murder committed in the course of an ordinary robbery. But it may be an unusual case."

Two men raised dark bulks from the grassy lawn. One was a policeman. The other pushed a stethoscope into his vest pocket. "She's dead enough, Mr. Weeks," he spoke in professional accents. "Her skull was crushed in by



DAVID N. CARVALHO

some blunt instrument. She died instantly."

"How long ago, doctor?"

"About half an hour, I'd say."

A police sergeant came up. "Here's the weapon, Mr. Weeks." He extended a two-foot section of lead pipe.

Cones of light darted out to bathe it in radiance. Dark-red ooze smeared one end, and interspersed were sticky white hairs.

Dave Carvalho stared down at the huddled gory form that lay on the grass. Anger leaped in him. "Have you caught the murderer?" he asked Weeks harshly.

"Not yet. But we will."

"Where's Dr. Wilkins?"

"Poor fellow, he was also knocked down by the marauder. Luckily his stiff derby saved him from the full force of the blow. Want to see him?"

"Yes, please."

Room Is Disordered

They went inside. The living room was a shambles. Chairs overturned, closet door open and garments strewn in a trail across the floor.

In a massive, overstuffed chair, head bowed in hands, ruddy scalp glistening in the glare of lights, was Dr. Wilkins. His body shook and quivered, and low

moans rose in a dreadful refrain. The collie, Lady, nestled her long snout against his knees as if to comfort her grief-stricken master.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Wilkins," said Weeks gently. "But here's Mr. Carvalho. You met him on the beach. Would you mind telling him what you told me. He's—uh—connected with the office of the New York District Attorney."

The bereaved doctor raised his head, looked dully at Carvalho. His ordinarily immaculate suit was rumpled and torn; his tie was askew. Tears streaked his face and beard.

"It's a horrible story, Mr. Carvalho." His voice quavered. "We had been in New York to see a show, and a bite after. Coming into the front yard I noticed a dark shadow move behind the window of this room. We always left a night light on in the hall when we went out. My wife was—was afraid to enter a dark house."

He covered his face again; then resumed. "I told Mrs. Wilkins to go down the street and get help while I investigated. I tried the door. It was unlocked. Foolishly I threw it open, started to go in. Something hit me on the head. Everything went black then. When I came to, I—I—found my wife dead there on the grass. I staggered to a neighbor's house and they called the police."

"Did you miss anything?" asked Weeks.

"Yes. My watch is gone, my diamond stickpin, about forty dollars in cash. What was taken from the house I don't know yet."

Carvalho had said nothing this far. But the sleep had fled his eyes. They glowed with the avid luster of the chase. "Where is Duke, your other collie, Dr. Wilkins?" he inquired softly.

A look of sadness spread over the doctor's face. "Duke—poor Duke is dead. That vile assassin stabbed him in the throat so he wouldn't give the alarm."

"Hmm!" Carvalho stroked his neatly barbered beard, and relapsed into silence. But his sharp eyes flitted to the sodden animal shape stretched out in the farther corner of the room; shifted to the crushed crown of the derby that lay as evidence on a nearby table; and slid over the bald expanse of skin that crowned the doctor's head.

"Any other questions, Mr. Carvalho?" Weeks asked deferentially.

The expert shook his head. "Then we'll leave Dr. Wilkins to get some sleep," continued the District Attorney. "I'll have some of my men stay on to clean up and do the usual."

As they walked through the soft, clean night later, Carvalho asked abruptly: "Any ideas about the murderer, Weeks?"

"Eh? Why, of course. Some professional out on a burglarizing job. The Wilkinses got home too soon, unfortunately, and he murdered to make his getaway."

"You noticed that Dr. Wilkins' scalp was literally in the pink of health? A blow that knocked him unconscious should have at least left some bruises."

"Yes, I noticed that." Weeks chuckled. "Between you and me the old man must have thought discretion was the better part of valor. He played dead to avoid being really bumped off. I suppose you can't blame him."

"And the dog, Duke?" Carvalho persisted. "Why was he killed?"

"That's simple. The murderer was afraid he'd give the alarm."

"What about Lady, then? I understood the two dogs were both in the same room."

Dogs Puzzle Expert

The D. A. paused a perceptible moment. "Duke was the more aggressive. No doubt Lady hid under a couch. Now look here, Carvalho, you can't be implying somebody is lying."

"I'm implying nothing." They were passing the next house. It was lit up. Carvalho indicated it with a wave of his hand. "I assume that's the neighbor to whom Dr. Wilkins carried the alarm?"

"Yes. But we've already got their story."

"Mind if we step in a moment? They seem still awake."

They were; a badly frightened elderly couple. Carvalho brushed aside their voluble rehash of their original testimony, asked them just one question: "Do the Wilkinses' collies bark very much?"

It was the wife who answered. "They certainly do. As a matter of fact we've complained about them to Mrs.—Mrs. Wilkins. I'm sorry now."

"Both of them?"

"Yes, both of them. Why, every time

the butcher boy or the iceman would come into the yard, you could hear those dogs a mile away."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Smith."

The D. A. was manifestly uneasy as they went out into the night again. "You're wrong, Carvalho!" he finally exploded. "It's quite mad what you're thinking. Dr. Wilkins is a highly respectable, retired practitioner."

"Is there a will?"

Weeks gave a relieved snort. "I might have known it. Every specialist gets hipped on his own subject."

"Perhaps," Carvalho admitted. "But is there?"

"I certainly didn't ask the old man tonight. But I'll tell you this: we searched the premises from top to bottom. Not a scrap of one."

"Hmm." Carvalho walked a little further. He seemed to be thinking aloud. "Of course it might be in a bank vault, or in a lawyer's hands. By the way, there wouldn't be some other establishment the Wilkinses owned?"

"Yes, there is. A town house in New York City. They spend part of the winter there."

"Then grant me a little favor, Weeks, without asking why or wherefore. Get that house opened and carefully searched. First, for a will. Second, for any specimens of Dr. Wilkins' handwriting."

The D. A. stopped in his tracks under an electric arc. For a long minute he stared at his companion. Then: "All right, Carvalho," he growled. "But if anyone else had asked me to pull a stunt like that, I'd refuse."

Will Is Scrutinized

The next evening Weeks strode into Carvalho's hotel room, flung some papers on the table. "You've missed your vocation being just a handwriting expert. I could use you on my staff. Here's your will and some medical reports Wilkins wrote."

Carvalho sniffed like a bird dog, picked up the will with long, sensitive fingers. He leafed swiftly through the pages. "Hmm! So Mrs. Wilkins left her whole estate to the good doctor, eh?"

Weeks stalked around the room. "Yeah! And I've already made inquiries. All the money was hers. He didn't have a dime to his name."

"It still doesn't mean anything," Carvalho reminded him. "It's quite normal for a loving wife to leave everything to her husband."

He picked up the handwritten medical report, checked the writing against that in the will. "No, they're completely different," he decided. "Whoever else wrote the will, it certainly wasn't the doctor." Then he started, and the glitter that Weeks had come to know so well flashed into his eyes. "The date! The date."

"What about the date?"

"It's a forgery. It's *not* in the same style as the rest. And—and I *think* there's been an erasure."

Carvalho snatched up his coat, started to put it on.

"Where are you going?"

"Back to New York. This requires laboratory work. In the meantime, hold on to our good friend, Dr. Wilkins."

Weeks picked up the receiver, called the Wilkins place. "I've got a man stationed there," he explained while waiting for the call to be put through. "Not that we were holding him in any way. There was no ground— Hello! Hello! McCarthy? Listen, I want you to— What?"

The receiver buzzed with excited words. When Weeks finally hung up, his face was grim. "The bird has flown. Dr. Wilkins got cold feet and lit out for parts unknown." His jaw set. "But we'll get him!"

It was long months, however, before Wilkins was found, in a telephone booth in New York City, his beard shaved off, his clothing shabby.

Meanwhile, Dave Carvalho had tightened the net around him that finally delivered him intact to the electric chair. Chemical tests proved conclusively that the date had been written in a different ink from the rest of the will, over the most careful erasure of the former one. The writing itself showed perceptible differences from figures actually made by Mrs. Wilkins herself, and damning similarities, in spite of attempts at disguise, to Dr. Wilkins' own.

Doctor Mistreated Wife

A thorough inquiry disclosed that the seemingly benign doctor had early shown the cloven hoof to his wife. Immediately after marriage she had made out the will leaving everything to

her husband. But ensuing quarrels convinced her to make a new will in favor of her relatives, and cutting off the doctor without a cent. That later will was discovered.

When Dr. Wilkins found out what she had done, he determined on desperate measures. Somehow he had laid hands on the original will and changed its date so that it would supersede the one which cut him off. Then, coming home with his unsuspecting wife from an evening in town, he snatched up a lead pipe previously secreted in the yard and killed her with a single terrible blow. Then he crushed in the crown of his own derby, ripped his garments, and staggered over to his neighbor with a story of a mysterious marauder.

"Everything's okay," admitted the D.A. as Carvalho unraveled the tangled skein of events, "except one thing. Why

did he kill the dog, Duke, and leave Lady alone?"

Carvalho smiled. "That was the single item which first aroused my suspicion."

"I don't understand."

"You forget the little scene we witnessed on the beach the same afternoon; that byplay of Wilkins pretending to strike his wife and Duke hysterically barking, while Lady never bothered. Duke had to be killed, or he would have aroused the neighborhood. Wilkins would have done better to have killed them both."

Carvalho's smile grew reminiscent. "My grandfather was a great student of the Jewish Talmud. He used to quote a saying from that storehouse of wisdom.

"'A man who is crooked in heart leaves signs and portents for the understanding to read.'"



THE CRIME QUIZ

HERE'S your chance to see how much you know about crime! Give yourself 10 points for each question you answer correctly. A score of 60 is good. 80 ranks you as an amateur detective. If you are 100 per cent correct—you're a super-sleuth! The answers are on Page 130—if you must look!

1. Court is called to order with the traditional cry of "Oyez!" What does the word mean?
2. To a criminal, is a can-opener—a. something used for opening beer? b. a writ of habeas corpus? c. a safe-cracking tool?
3. If an automobile is traveling along a straight line on a dusty dirt road, how many tracks will it leave, and of which tires?
4. Is a pepper-box—a. a cheap restaurant? b. an obsolete type of pistol with a group of barrels that revolve? c. a coroner's bag?
5. Why is black powder—black?
6. What is the most common method used in committing suicide?
7. "Gat" is a familiar nickname for a gun. Can you give another?
8. Will the stomach continue to digest food after a person dies?
9. What did Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son steal?
10. Will a bullet in the heart always cause instant death?

Drane started for me, jerked to a sudden stop when he saw the .38 in my hand



YOU DIE FOR ME

By MORRIS COOPER

What can a private eye do with a dame who outsmarts him?

HARLAND DRANE fingered the lapel of his pin-striped suit, spoke in a clipped tone that could be heard by the girl at the cigar counter.

"I want you to be my bodyguard for a couple of weeks."

"Make like you don't know me," I said.

"It's worth fifty bucks a day to you."

The girl at the cigar counter had her mouth open now, and a customer turned

his head to look at us. "Listen, Drane," I clipped, "I'd be willing to toss twice that much into a kitty to defend a guy who'd plug you!"

I started toward the elevator and he tagged along.

"Still got a chip on your shoulder?" he asked.

The elevator operator held the door for me. I spoke to Drane. "I hate your

insides! Is that plain enough?"

He telegraphed his punch, and the right I crossed to his jaw sent him skidding across the marble floor of the lobby.

"Okay," I said to the operator, "let's go."

"Gee, Mr. West, that was Harland Drane!" The kid was staring at me with eyes the size of eggs.

"So what? A rat's a rat!"

He kept staring at me and I had to nudge him when we reached my floor.

I pushed through the door that read: "Steve West, Investigator." Bertha was sitting behind the receptionist's desk, leafing through a magazine, and I wondered for the umpteenth time if Hollywood really had anything that could hold a candle to her.

She looked up and waved a hand at me. "Got a mad on?"

"Just ran into Drane," I said, tossing my hat at her.

She let go of the magazine and caught it, and said, "What did he want?" as she dropped his hat into the wire basket labeled "Hold."

"My services."

"I hope you slugged him," Bertha said calmly.

"That I did." I started for her, but she pointed to the door of my private office. "You've got a nervous female waiting for you."

"Who is the dame?"

"Said her name is Mrs. Doris Childers." Bertha answered. She stuck her tongue out at me when I winked and closed the door of my office.

"I'm Steve West, Mrs. Childers." I sat down at my desk, my back to the window.

The thick veil that straggled from her hat blurred her features, but I could see the thin, red scar that ran in a crooked arc from a corner of her mouth to the cleft in her chin. She took a deep breath, and I thought of someone getting ready to dive into an ice-cold pool of water.

"I'm going to kill a man," she said evenly.

Her voice was as calm as though she were giving me the recipe for her favorite cake.

"Why tell me?" I asked.

She opened a shiny black purse and took out some worn bills. Carefully she smoothed them, and one by one laid them on my desk blotter. Five bills,

each good for whatever you can buy today for a hundred bucks.

"That's a lot of money."

"You'll earn it," she answered.

I locked at the five hundred dollars and sighed to myself. Aloud I said:

"What you want is a lawyer. Not a private detective."

"I know what I'm doing, Mr. West," was her reply.

Even through the veil I could see traces of the thick makeup that made it difficult to distinguish her features. She sat quietly, waiting for my answer. Bertha had called her "Mrs.," but I didn't see a wedding band on her finger. I guessed her age in the middle thirties, and she still had a fine figure.

"Well?" Her voice was flat, even. Through the veil I had the impression that her eyes were a cold gray. Her lips were full, and pale without lipstick. I had a vague notion that somewhere before, I'd seen her.

"If you want me to fix an alibi for you," I said finally, "you've come to the wrong boy."

Mrs. Childers moved her head from side to side. "I told you I was going to kill a man. What I want you to do, Mr. West, is prove to the police that I committed the murder."

A PRETTY .32 gun in her hand stopped my motion toward the inter-office communicator. It was pointing right at me, and the soft, white hand that was holding it wasn't a bit nervous.

"I haven't much time, Mr. West," the lady said. "Will you take the case?"

"Who's the man you're going to kill?"

"I'll phone you his name after I leave. I'm taking no chances on your reaching him before I do."

The .32 was still steady, still thumbing its nose at me.

I had a sudden notion. "Maybe this murder has already happened."

She tongue-wetted her lips. "No, there wouldn't be time—" She stood up. "Yes or no?"

"All right, Mrs. Childers. If you kill him!"

She laughed, and it sounded like one of those artificial things that are sometimes demanded by polite society.

"Turn around, Mr. West," she ordered, and the .32 in her hand added authority to the invitation.

Maybe I could have wrestled the gun

from her. But what was the point? She wasn't going to shoot me as long as I stood still, and if I started something—Well, brother, a gal's finger on a trigger is just as strong as yours.

I heard the hall door open and I listened for the closing click of the latch. There wasn't any, and after a few seconds I turned my head. Mrs. Childers was gone and the door was open. I looked out into the corridor, but there was no one in sight.

I came back into my office and buzzed for Bertha. She floated in with that million-dollar figure of hers, walked around the desk, and sat on my lap.

"How'd I do, Steve?" she cooed.

"Fine," I said. "Fine! The one time I would have liked to have seen your ugly puss, you didn't butt in."

"Guessed wrong again, huh?" She put her arms around my big neck and kissed me.

Before I go any further, I might as well tell you that by virtue of a marriage license and a city judge, I've got the privilege of using Bertha to balance my income tax.

She saw the century notes on the desk and took one arm from around my neck. Her fingers flicked them together with one fluid motion, folded them, and tucked them away in the safe-deposit box that started about six inches below her chin. Then she put the arm back around my neck and kissed me again.

"What address did Mrs. Childers give?" I managed to ask when she came up for breath.

"None," Bertha answered, running the palm of her hand over my chin. "You need a shave."

"How long did she wait?"

"About an hour." She roughed up my face.

"She could have looked through everything I have here."

"What's there to look at? Besides, I only let her in here about ten minutes before you came."

"You're wonderful," I said. "What a Mata Hari you'd make!"

"Really think so, Steve." She started to close-cuddle when the phone rang. I beat Bertha to it.

"Steve West," I growled into the phone.

"This is Mrs. Childers," came the answer. "The man I'm going to kill is Harland Drane!"

There was a click in my ear as she hung up the receiver.

I broke Bertha's full-nelson and stood up. She caught the edge of the desk in time to prevent her from making a dent in the carpet.

"Call Al and tell him to get to Harland Drane's place in a hurry," I told the loving wife.

Lots of people say I married Bertha just because her brother is a police lieutenant—and one of the bright boys of homicide. But she knows better. I think.

"Drane's home," I told the cab driver when I made the street. "And don't worry about any tickets."

NO SMART hackie in our town needed to be told Harland Drane's address. He'd shot up from nowhere in the past few years, like a weed in a garbage dump. Drane knew I hated his insides after a couple of run-ins we'd had over some of his shady deals, and I was surprised at him trying to hire me to pack a gun for him.

Personally, anyone that gave him lead poisoning would be doing the community a favor, but I couldn't sit by and see anyone get hung with a rap for murdering him. Especially a client.

My cab and the police car pulled up in front of Drane's in a tie. For a guy with all his dough, Drane didn't put on much of a front. The house was a modest two-storied affair in a quiet residential district.

Al Clark looked down on my five-foot ten frame as we took the front stairs.

"Bertha sounded like an advance agent for an undertaker," he said.

I jabbed my thumb against the buzzer and before I could take it off, the door opened. "Dive" Malone looked at us from a pair of cold, fishlike eyes. They'd hung that monicker on him because he had acted as though a canvas ring were a swimming pool. He looked over my shoulder and spoke to Al.

"You guys are quick! I just finish giving the cops a buzz."

"So Drane got it," I said. "Where's he at?"

The ex-pug looked at me as if I were crazy. "In the library." He nodded his head, and his bristlelike crew haircut pointed to a door at his right.

I elbowed my way past him and turned the knob. Against a background

of books that didn't look as if they were often opened, sat Drane—a very much alive Mr. Harland Drane.

Drane rubbed a paw over a chin that still showed red from the sock I had given him. He nodded his head to the side of the open door, and Al and I looked around it. The body lay on the floor, one leg crumpled out of sight, and little left of its face. It looked as though someone had gone to work with a tommy gun.

Even through the drying blood I could see what was left of the scar that ran from mouth to chin. It wasn't a pretty sight.

"What happened?" Al said, looking at Drane.

"Dive let her in when she fed him a line about having an important message," Drane said. "As soon as we were alone, she pulled that"—he pointed to a .32 on the floor near the body—"but I got her first."

"Thought Dive was your bodyguard," Al questioned. "How come he let anyone with a gun get near you?"

"Dive is my secretary, lieutenant. And you generally don't associate guns with ladies."

"Is that what you wanted to hire me for?" I asked. "Protection from a lady?"

There was a smile on Drane's face. "Did I want to hire you?"

"You got your gun mighty fast," Al said.

"I always keep it on top of my desk. Lots of people don't like me."

"You could have shot her once," Al came back.

Drane nipped the end off a cigar with his teeth.

"Sometimes I get excited and forget to stop until the gun is empty," he mouthed around the cigar.

I looked at what was left of the face. "Pretty good shooting. You didn't even stop after she was down."

The tip of Drane's cigar glowed a bright red for half a dozen seconds.

"What kind of a dig is that?" he said finally.

I nodded to the .45 on his desk. "That your gun?"

"That's it. If it's any of your business, I'm a crack shot. Even if it's a lady I'm shooting at. Only, the way I look at it, no lady goes around carting a gun and

pointing it at people."

"Why didn't you shoot to wound her?"

"I don't believe in giving anyone more than one chance to kill me," he answered. "Even a lady I never saw before."

I looked at the rough, chapped hand that lay inches from the .32. When Mrs. Childers had been in my office, I could have sworn that her eyes were gray. What was left of one of them now was a deep brown.

"I got a couple of things on my mind," I said, turning to Al. "See you in my office."

"Okay, Steve. I got a couple of things on my mind, too!"

There was an angry look in Drane's eyes, and the grin on his face had changed to something that was beginning to look like puzzlement.

WHEN Bertha came back to the office, her face still had that green look that doesn't come out of a bottle. She stuck her tongue out at me and said:

"You, Steve West, are a heel! Why, oh why, didn't I keep plugging away at that newspaper switchboard? I never knew when I was well off!"

"I know, honey, but I had to make sure. Al showed you the body."

It was a statement, not a question. That mildewed look on her face was answer enough.

Bertha nodded her head gingerly, as though any sudden motion might loosen it.

"And was I right?" I asked.

"Uh-huh." She took off her hat and coat and walked to the closet. "It wasn't Mrs. Childers."

"What you mean," I told my ever-loving wife, "is that it wasn't the same woman who came to this office."

"Stop talking in riddles!" Bertha took a couple of aspirins out of the bottle in my desk drawer and went over to the water cooler.

"I know I've seen her somewhere before," I said, and leaned back in my chair.

Bertha crumpled the paper cup and flipped it into the waste-basket. Then she came over and sat on the edge of the desk, kissed me, and asked. "Which one?"

"The gal who came to see me."

She took a file out of her purse and began to work on her nails.

"Why worry about it?" she said. "She didn't kill Drane."

"But she's still my client."

"Which one?" The question was beginning to sound monotonous.

I reached into Bertha's purse for a pack of cigarettes. "Whichever one is named Doris Childers."

"But I told you she isn't the same one that was here!" Bertha cried. "Heck, the hardest thing that gal who trotted into your office ever did with her hands was to wrap them around an Old-fashioned. The woman that Drane shot must have been a laundress or a scrub-woman!"

"The way I look at it, my client is the dead woman."

The door opened and Al walked in. He got a gander at Bertha's still pale face and grinned.

"If you can look at that husband of yours, sis, I don't know why anything like a stiff should bother you." His grin faded when he looked at me. "Okay, Steve, I'm waiting."

I told him the story.

When I finished he said:

"It looks as if someone wanted to give a little backing to the story that this woman was gunning for Drane."

"My hunch is that he messed up her face so I couldn't be sure it wasn't the same woman who came to see me. With all that shooting, it's funny that the scar wasn't touched."

"Could be," Al agreed. "But how are you going to get a jury to believe that?"

"I still think the whole thing was a setup just so I could identify the dead woman. Half a dozen slugs from a .45 would leave nothing at all that could be recognized as a face—unless someone were mighty careful where those slugs went."

"I couldn't take a guess like that to the D.A.," Al said.

"Are you holding him?"

"On what? He claims self-defense, and we can't prove different. Your story about the woman seeing you only helps him out."

"I'm willing to bet it was murder," I said.

"Drane throws a lot of weight where it counts, Steve. It'll take more than [Turn page]



Norman Rockwell



Al Parker



Jon Whitcomb

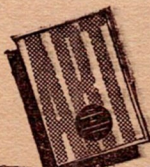
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what you've got to pin this on him as murder. His story is just simple enough to get by."

I watched Bertha work on her fingernails. "What about the woman who came to see me?"

"Even if you do find her, there's still something missing."

"What's that?"

"A motive!" Al shot at me.

When we said goodnight to the elevator operator and left the building, Bertha told me:

"I want to eat at that spaghetti place around the corner."

"One of these days, I'm going to buy you a cook book," I said to my beloved.

"And get yourself a new secretary?" she cooed.

"I can do that, too! I said.

"Over your dead body!"

I looked at the posters outside the theater. "Have to see that play some night."

"You've been looking at those pictures for a month," said Bertha.

"You ought to stop eating spaghetti. Then I wouldn't pass here so often."

I looked at some of the stills. There was a blowup of a blonde and I kept staring at it.

"Something out of your past, Steve?"

"That is Myrtle Rogers—alias Mrs. Harland Drane," I said, and pointed to the blonde.

Bertha looked at the picture. "And that's the babe that added five hundred dollars to our income tax." She snickered.

"What," I asked, "is so funny?"

"You! Every night for a month you've kept looking at these pictures, and when the original sits in front of you, you don't tumble."

"Rats!" I said, and my tone was not elegant.

BERTHA stayed at home with a headache and a bottle of aspirin. She claimed the spaghetti was doing things to her stomach.

When I pushed open the frosted-glass door of his office, Al had news for me.

"Got a rush fingerprint classification check from the F. B. I.," he said. "The dead woman was Doris Childers. Did a five-year stretch for blackmail. Released a couple of months ago."

I told him about Myrtle Rogers. Al shook his head. "You and Bertha must have been dreaming. Rogers got tangled up in an auto wreck and she's been in a hospital over a week. Enough bandages on her to wrap a mummy."

"Yeah. What hospital?"

"A private rest home on the edge of town. I saw her."

"Since when," I asked, "does the bright boy of homicide go around investigating traffic accidents?"

"Drane thought maybe some of the lads who don't like him might have tried to bump her."

I reached across Al's desk and helped myself to a cigar.

"Something smells," I said.

Al laughed. "It can't be that cigar. You haven't lighted it yet."

"Are you sure you saw Myrtle Rogers?"

"Course I'm sure." His eyes narrowed. "I didn't see her face, if that's what you mean. It's all bandaged up. But I talked to her—and I know her voice."

"What did the medical examiner say about Childers?" I questioned.

"Filled out a D.O.A. Nobody can pin him down until he's got his autopsy results. But in between hedging, he did admit that she couldn't have been dead more than half an hour or so before he saw her."

"Which means she was killed in Drane's house," I said.

"Sure! You didn't have an idea she might have been dragged in from some other place, did you?"

"Just wanted to check," I watched cigar smoke curl to the ceiling. "I wonder if there's any way we can find out if Myrtle went for a little stroll today?"

"I can't get your point," Al said. "If Drane wanted anyone knocked off, he's [Turn page]

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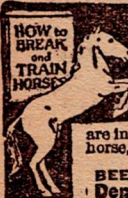
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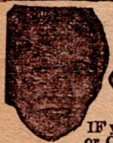
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got plenty of boys who work for him."

"Maybe he didn't want too many people getting ideas."

"Such as what?"

"Such as why a big noise like Drane wanted this babe bumped," I said. "They might have dug and come up with some dirt."

"What dirt?"

"That's what I'd like to know," I said, and flicked cigar ash off the front of my shirt.

"You've got more questions with no answers. Maybe you ought to send them in to a quiz program."

"Maybe." I stood up. "What say we pay Myrtle a little visit, Al? Without flowers."

We drove to the rest home, and the gateman made us wait while he phoned up to the house. The three-story affair looked neat, and the lawn glistened in the moonlight. An iron fence ran around the grounds, looking as discreet as an iron fence can look.

"You going to keep us here all night?" Al demanded.

The gateman waved us up the driveway," then. I could feel his eyes following us as we drove the couple hundred feet to the house.

A fussy little guy with a Vandyke that looked out of place met us at the door.

"I am Dr. Saunders," he introduced himself. He kept rubbing the palms of his hands together. "What can I do for you?"

He didn't invite us in, but I pushed past him anyway, into a soft-carpeted reception hall. Al followed me. Dr. Saunders gave an irritated tug at his beard and closed the front door.

"Perhaps we'd better go into my office." We followed him into an expensively furnished room. "Now, gentlemen"—he walked around his desk and sat down in a leather chair—"perhaps you will tell me the reason for your visit at such a late hour."

"It's about Miss Rogers," Al said.

SAUNDERS looked at him, and his face brightened. "Ah, yes, now I remember. You were the police officer who called here shortly after Miss Rogers was admitted."

"We'd like to see Miss Rogers now," Al insisted.

"It's rather late," Saunders said, frowning.

"This is official business," Al told him. He leaned his six feet over the doctor's desk.

"It's rather late," the doctor repeated. "Wouldn't tomorrow do just as well?"

"What I have to see her about is important. Will you please ask her to come down?"

"Heavens, Miss Rogers won't be able to leave her bed for another two weeks at least!" Saunders threw up his hands. "And then she'll have to have a lengthy convalescence."

Al threw a I-told-you-so look at me. "Still that bad?"

"She's improving," Saunders answered. "We hope to be able to take some of the face bandages off soon."

"Couldn't we just see her for a moment?" I stuck an oar in. "It's really very important."

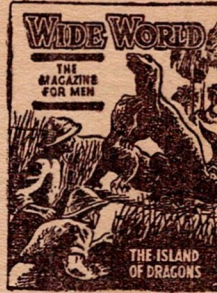
"Very well." Saunders stood up. "If [Turn page]

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you gentlemen will wait here, I'll go up and see if she's awake." The phone rang and Saunders put the receiver against his ear. "All right," he spoke into the mouthpiece, "I'll see that a bed is prepared. I'll call you back."

"A new patient," he said, and cradled the phone. "I'll have to get ready for her. If Miss Rogers can see you, I'll send an orderly down."

I finished grinding out a cigarette when a white-coated attendant opened the door.

"Dr. Saunders is sorry," he said, "but he says you'll have to come back tomorrow."

There wasn't anything we could say to that. So we beat it. Al let me off near Drane's home.

"I'm going to tell him about being hired by Doris Childers," I said.

"Why?" Al questioned.

"Just a hunch."

"Okay, Steve. I'm going back to headquarters."

"How about stopping at the apartment and telling Bertha I'll be pretty late? She had a nasty head and I don't want her waiting up for me."

"Can do," he agreed. "It's on my way."

I ran into the beat cop just before I hit Drane's house.

"Hello, Steve," he greeted me.

"H'ya Dugan? How's the kids?"

"Swell!" He waved his nightstick at Drane's place. "Lots of excitement there."

"Anything doing now?"

"Naw! The boys are all gone. Only thing I heard was an ambulance go by about fifteen minutes ago. Guess the driver must have hit the siren button by accident. I didn't see it."

I waved goodnight and headed up the stairs. Dive opened the door.

"You again," he growled. "What do you want this time?"

I stuck my palm against his chest and pushed. "Your boss. And no lip!"

Drane came into the hallway and stared for a moment.

"What's going—Oh, it's you, West," he said. "What do you want now?"

"Just a couple more questions."

"I told the cops everything I know," he said and turned into the library.

I followed him.
 "That's a cute gadget," I said, pointing to a small-bandage on his face.
 "Cut myself shaving," was his explanation.
 "This time of night?"
 "I shave when I feel like it!" He turned cold eyes in my direction and jabbed a thumb at the door. "Out, shamus! We've got nothing to talk about."

"Maybe." I plopped into a chair. "Maybe I've got a story to tell you."

"Yeah?"
 "Do we need that punk here?" I asked, looking at his bodyguard.

Dive started for me, but Drane stopped him short with a curt: "Wait outside."

The ex-pug was muttering under his breath, but he beat it, slamming the door after him.

"Now," said Drane, "let's hear what you've got to say."

"I'm working for the dead woman." I gave it to him straight.

"I didn't know ex-cons were in your line," Drane sneered.

"They're not. But she came to me today with a story about bumping off a guy."

Drane kept looking at me, but didn't say anything, and I talked some more.

"She wanted to make sure the world knew she was the gal who committed the murder. Phoned me after she left my place to give me the name of the Joe who was due for lead poisoning."

"Who was he—?" Drane rasped.
 "You!"

DRANE started for me, jerked to a sudden stop when he saw the .38 in my hand.

"Come on," I said. "I'd like to see if I can empty this before you fall down."

"Why the devil didn't you spill that story this afternoon? Would have saved me answering a lot of useless questions." His eyes narrowed. "Or are you and that dizzy wife of yours trying to hold me up for blackmail?"

I stood up. "Another crack like that, and I'll shove this gun down your throat!"

"Anything else?" Drane's voice was soft.
 [Turn page]

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"Not now. But so we don't get off on the wrong foot, I want you to know that I think that little act of yours was just plain murder!"

"Why?" Drane laughed. "What kind of a motive would I have had?"

I could still hear that laugh of his as I left the house. It was so sure, so self-confident. Just like a guy with five aces up his sleeve.

Something that Drane said came back to me. He'd referred to Doris Childers as an ex-con, and unless he had a direct pipe into Al Clark's office, that was something he shouldn't have known. That fact hadn't been mentioned in the accounts that had broken in the morning papers.

I don't know what it was—maybe a cloud passing over the moon, maybe a hunch. But I turned my head and the blackjack skidded skin off the left side of my face and landed with paralyzing force on my shoulder. This was outside Drane's house.

The blow sent streaks of pain down my arm, and I twisted away, pawing with my right hand for my shoulder holster. A handkerchief over the lower half of his face and a pulled-down hat shielded the face of my attacker. He came after me again, blackjack poised.

I lashed out with my foot against his shin, and a howl broke from his lips. My hand felt agonizingly slow as it fumbled for my gun.

"Take off that mask, Dive," I taunted. "It doesn't hide your voice!"

Dive growled and came in again, crouching. I knew I'd be no match for him with my bunched-up shoulder. I brought my gun down on him just as his head crashed into my stomach. I heard the crunch of bone as I keeled over and banged my own noggin against the concrete. . . .

Al was looking at me when I opened my eyes. I was lying on the couch in his office at headquarters. The room spun when I sat up, and he slopped some whisky into a paper cup.

It burned the whole way down, but it cleared my head.

"Did they get him?" I asked. "It was Dive."

"He was right beside you when Dugan came up," Al said, nodding his head.

"What kind of a story did he try to feed you?"

"No story," answered Al, taking the empty paper cup from my hand. "Your gun caved his head in like an empty egg-shell. He's coroner's bait."

My left shoulder still felt sore, and when I ran a hand over the back of my head, I could feel an adhesive plaster.

"What about Drane?" I queried.

"He wasn't home. Besides, we can't hold him responsible for Dive's actions." There was a flat note in his voice.

"What's wrong, Al?"

"I don't know. It's about Bertha."

I got up and grabbed him by the lapel of his coat. "What's happened to her?" I was more than anxious.

"Take it easy, Steve," Al said. "Nothing yet, as far as I know."

"Where is she?"

"That's what's got me worried. I found a note she left in the apartment for you. Said she was going to the newspaper where she used to work, and play detective. I checked there and found she'd been to the morgue and gone through the file on Drane. She looked pretty happy when she left, and Pop Brunton said she was mumbling something about having found a motive."

"That all?" I asked.

"That's all. I looked through the file, but I can't figure out what she found."

"If Drane does anything to her," I said, "I'll fill him with lead!"

"I've got an alarm out. Maybe she's just following a lead."

"Maybe."

I THOUGHT back to that crack Drane I had made about Bertha and I holding him up for blackmail. There was no reason for him to mention her name. I told Al all that had happened, but he didn't have any new ideas.

"Dive could have been sore at you for calling him a punk," he said.

"Maybe. And maybe Drane thought I knew more than I do." The thin wail of a siren reached through the door. "What's that?"

"Just one of the prowling cars checking its siren before it pulls out of the garage. A new regulation."

"Oh!" And then I remembered what Dugan had said about an ambulance,

[Turn page]

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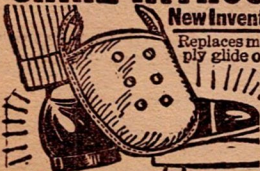
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and a couple of things clicked in place.

"Listen, Al," I said, excited now. "I know where Bertha is!"

"Where?" he said tense.

"Remember Saunders telling us about getting ready for a patient? A woman?" Al nodded, and I told him about the ambulance Dugan had heard. "I'll bet everything I have Bertha was that patient!"

* * * * *

The windup was short and sweet. Drane tried to put up a fight and I emptied my gun before he hit the floor, but I don't think he ever knew it.

We found Bertha, trussed up like a holiday turkey, on a bed in Myrtle Rogers' room in the rest home.

"Barged in the wrong place again, huh?" I didn't bother answering before I kissed her.

When Myrtle Rogers started to talk, she spouted faster than a ten-second radio commercial.

Drane had been married to Doris Childers and they had figured out a gag to defraud an insurance company. They'd killed a woman, palmed her off as Doris Childers, and Drane had collected from the insurance company. But, while Doris Childers was hiding out, Drane had met Myrtle and fallen in love. So Drane had gone to Doris' hideout, shot her, and left her to die.

Only Doris didn't die. But before she could find Drane, she'd made a try for some quick dough and landed in the clink. When she came out, she showed up at Drane's home and put the bite on him for plenty. Drane didn't want any of his trigger boys gunning for her, because they might find out she was his first wife—who was supposed to be dead.

So he cooked up the phony auto accident to give Myrtle an alibi while she visited me and pretended to be Mrs. Childers. Drane had braced me with an offer of a job, knowing I'd refuse.

Then, when I came out with the story that Doris Childers had said she was gunning for him, no one could say that he had bribed me to tell a yarn like that. They'd put Childers down as a crazy, and the whole thing would blow over.

But Bertha had lighted a match under the whole deal.

"I thought there might be something

in the file on Drane," she explained, "but all I could find was a notice in the vital statistics column about his marriage to Myrtle Rogers being his second one."

"Don't tell me," said Al, "that that little notice tipped you off to the whole deal?"

"Uh-uh," answered my beloved, "but I figured I could pull a bluff."

"What kind of a bluff?"

"I just walked in on Drane and told him I knew all about his first wife. Then," Bertha smiled sweetly, "he came at me and I scratched his face. But Drane was no gentleman. He clipped me on the jaw."

"That," I said to Al, "is your sister?"

"That," Al said to me, "is your wife!"

"Guessed wrong again, huh, Steve?" she said sweetly.

What can you do with a dame like that? So I did it!

OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 9)

to say for the Black Bat, but for each of his loyal helpers as well.

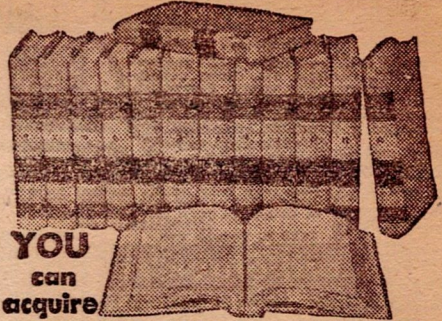
Dear Editor: I have just finished the latest issue of BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE. I have been reading it for the last three years, and boy, I'm telling you there is no other book of stories for me. I believe that Tony Quinn is just the man to mete out justice to the underworld. His role as the Black Bat sure puts him over all the way. I also like Butch O'Leary, who never forgets a favor done to him. He is a real helper to Tony Quinn. I like Carol Baldwin too, who sticks by him no matter what the cost. Then there is Silk Kirby, who is, I believe, closer to the Black Bat than anyone else.

As for Captain McGrath of the Homicide Squad, he knows that Tony Quinn is the Black Bat, but also he knows that he just can't prove it. If he could capture the Black Bat he would stand a good chance of becoming a man well up in the Police Department. Hope that Tony and Carol can be man and wife, as they both think a lot of one another. Please keep on putting out BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE and you'll have one reader for life.—Frank H. Dailey, Marion, Ind.

This fan has a different view about Tony and Carol. How many of you agree with him?

Dear Editor: I not only think Tony and Carol shouldn't get married, but I think that the stories would be much better if Carol were left out all together. Tony should keep his mind

[Turn page]



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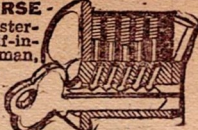
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strictly on business.—Myron V. Hoy, Manchester, N. H.

Shall Carol be left out of the stories? That is a question that you readers alone can answer.

Dear Editor: I was in the drugstore recently, looking for a good magazine, when I spotted your BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE. The hooded face in the upper right-hand corner caught my eye, and I took the book down from the shelf. I saw that it featured a Tony Quinn novel. Now I had never heard of Tony Quinn, and was curious as to why he wore a mask. I scanned the story briefly, and discovered that he was the Black Bat, a mysterious figure. I thought to myself that this story might be okay, so I bought the issue.

I can truthfully say that THIRTY-ONE DEADLY GUNS was a wonderful story! The plot was excellent and the action was fast. Orchids to G. Wayman Jones for an unusual and highly entertaining story. If all the future yarns are as good as THIRTY-ONE DEADLY GUNS, you will have many pleased readers.

In your "Off The Record" column, you stated that you would put the Black Bat's picture on the cover if you received enough requests for it. Well, here is one from a new reader. His picture should appear part of the time, if not all the time.

Back to the stories again, Thubway Tham is the funniest character I have encountered in a long time. I read his stories in both issues. Here's a little idea of mine. Why not cut out one of the short stories and put in an article or feature about the Black Bat or the Phantom Detective? Or maybe some more letters? You must receive hundreds, yet you print only a few. Food for thought, gentlemen!—Whit Taylor, 903 W. Oregon, Urbana, Ill.

We'll be back next issue with many more letters, Whit. Address all letters and postcards to The Editor, BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York, 16, N. Y. See you all next issue, and until then, thanks to everybody—and good luck!
 —THE EDITOR.

Answers to Questions on Page 114

1. Hear ye!
2. A safe-cracking tool.
3. Two tracks—and of the rear tires only.
4. An obsolete type of pistol.
5. Because of the charcoal it contains.
6. Drowning.
7. Rod, heater, betsy, roscoe—to name a few.
8. Yes, for about twenty-four hours.
9. A pig.
10. Not always.

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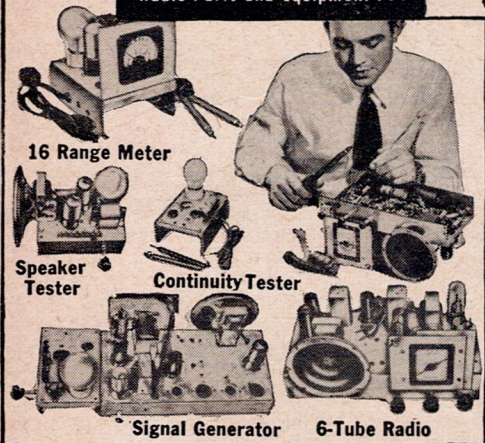
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