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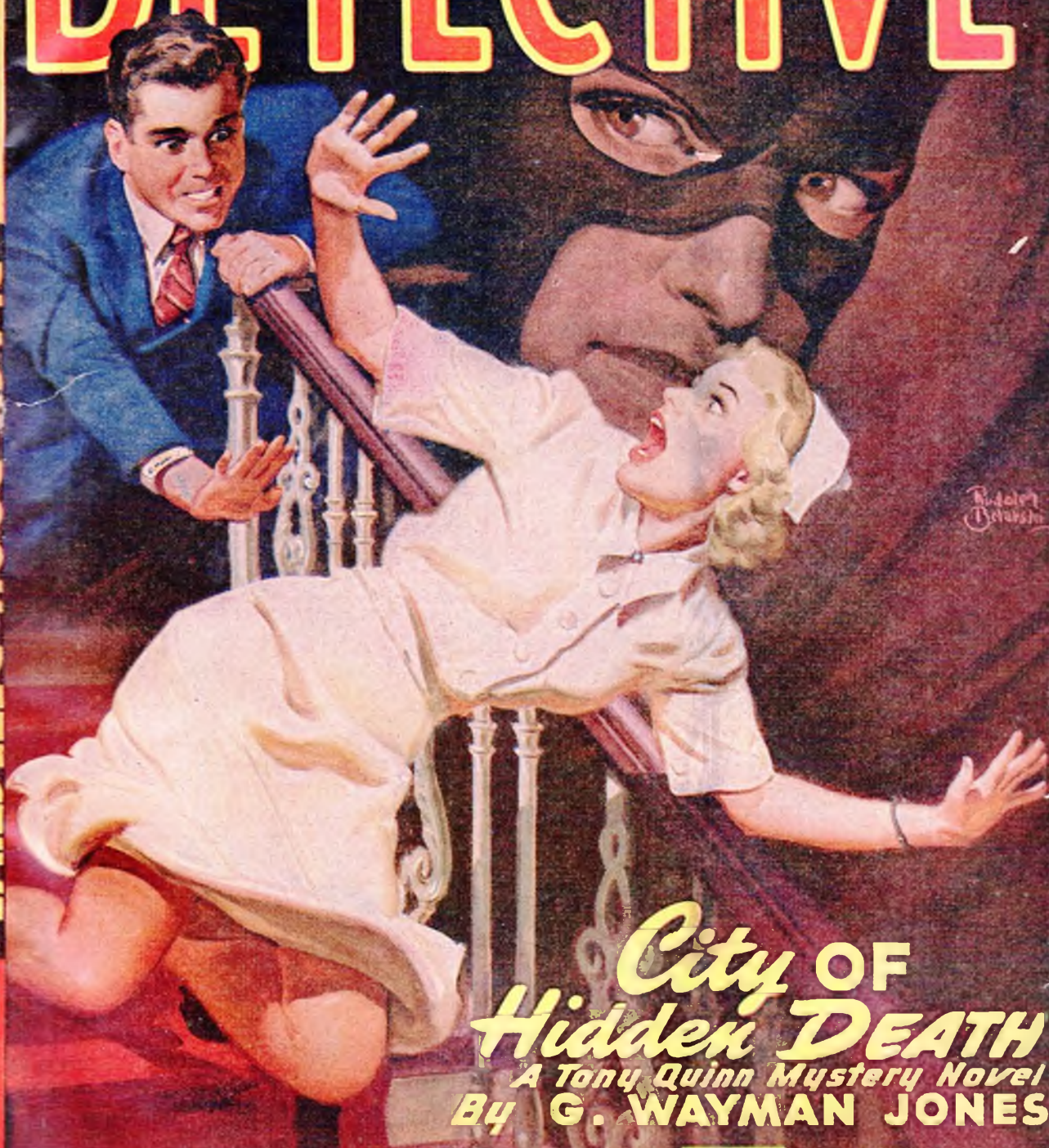
CITY OF HIDDEN DEATH
A COMPLETE BLACK BAT NOVEL

BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

DEC. 1947

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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

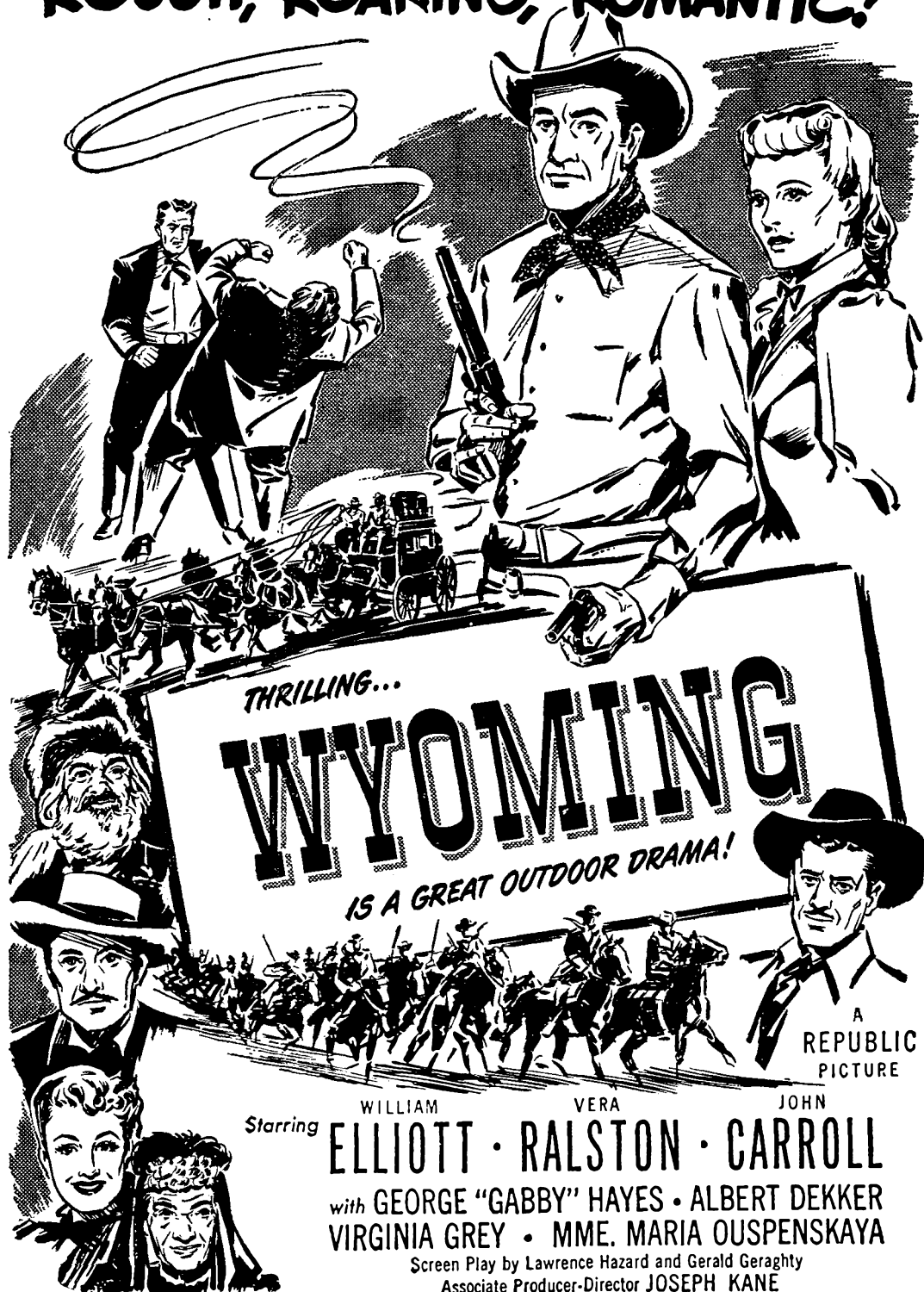


City of
Hidden Death
A Tony Quinn Mystery Novel
By **G. WAYMAN JONES**

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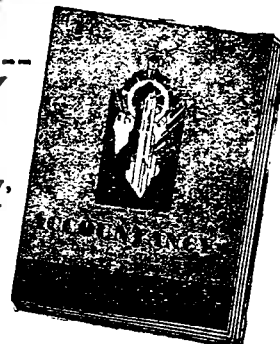
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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

Vol. XXIII, No. 3

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

December, 1947

A COMPLETE BLACK BAT NOVEL



City of Hidden Death

By **G. Wayman Jones**

Barrrtown looked like a model community of good repute—but underneath the righteous, innocent expressions of its leading citizens, Tony Quinn saw the ugliness of crime! Follow the Black Bat as he battles a mysterious—and unseen—menace! **13**

A COMPLETE NOVELET

- SUDDENLY IT'S MURDER.....***Wayland Rice* **60**
Mike Lloyd was no detective, but when the corpse of a murder victim disappeared into thin air, he felt that he had to solve the riddle!

SHORT STORIES

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Blackmailing is Gus Conant's game—but he doesn't stop at murder
- THE MURDERER STANDS MUTE.....***John L. Benton* **85**
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John Worthingham Rawls puts murder on the theatre program
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In the strange killing of Tony Larkin, Destiny has the last laugh!

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

BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE. Published every other month & copyrighted 1947 by Better Publications of Canada, Ltd., 36 Toronto Street, Toronto 1, Ontario, Canada. Application for entry as second-class matter pending at the Post Office Department, Ottawa. Entered as second-class matter June 30, 1947, at the Post Office at New York, New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879 (Sec. 523, P. L. and R.). Subscription (12 issues), \$1.80; single copies, 15 cents; foreign postage extra. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes and are submitted at the author's risk. In corresponding with this publication, please include your postal zone number, if any. Dec., 1947. Printed in Canada

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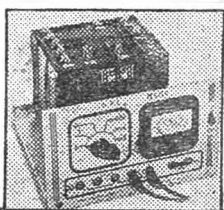
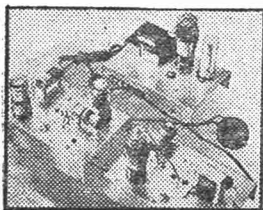
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OFF THE RECORD

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

WHEN a man dies under seemingly normal circumstances it's quite simple to get a death certificate and go ahead and bury him. When, however, the man who dies happens to have been the key witness in sending a ruthless killer to prison, and now stands as the one obstacle to that killer's freedom—it's a slightly different matter.

Furthermore, if the murderer could, by some mysterious means, kill while he was still behind prison bars, how much more dangerous would he be to anyone else who opposed him—after he had been released, and was free to come, go, and act as he pleased?

That's the ticklish circumstance that confronts Tony Quinn, the famous, "blind", Special District Attorney, in the great new Black Bat novel, *THE COILED SERPENT*, by G. Wayman Jones. It's a powerful story of suspense, spine-chilling thrills, and action, Action, ACTION.

Tony Quinn, more than ever, is dependent on the unswerving devotion of his loyal helpers, beautiful Carol Baldwin, rough, tough Butch, and clever Silk—or he, too, will fall victim to a strange curse that, once the ball starts rolling, leads to murder and more murder.

A MEDICAL MIRACLE

It all begins when wealthy manufacturer, Walter Frazier, lies desperately ill in an oxygen tent. Some days before, he had suffered a cerebral hemorrhage, and he was still as close to death as a man could be and still breathe. Yet, strangely enough, he was on the road to recovery!

"It's amazing," Dr. Fleet told the ill man's wife. "But it seems that the clot of blood that was bringing pressure on his brain is now being absorbed. Your husband is going to get well!"

Mrs. Frazier smiled with wonder and

joy, and the doctor turned to his patient, moving aside the flap in the oxygen tent so the man might hear.

"Frazier, you old faker," he said, "I'll let you stay under this tent and save you the trouble of breathing very hard for a couple more days. But you're going to get well."

A LEGAL VISITOR

The doctor then examined the automatic apparatus on the oxygen tank and, taking Mrs. Frazier's arm, led her downstairs. Hardly had they come into the living room, however, before a visitor arrived. He was a lanky man of about forty, and Mrs. Frazier introduced him as Ira Blake, an attorney who had been trying to see her husband for the last four or five days.

"Seven years ago," the attorney explained, "Mr. Frazier was instrumental in sending a client of mine to prison. At the moment, I am trying to effect the release of this convict. His name is John Dubin. Of the three surviving witnesses who identified him as the man responsible for a rather brutal murder, two have about made up their minds they were wrong in their identification. Your husband is, therefore, the only person who stands in the way of this man's freedom."

However, on being told that he couldn't see the ill Mr. Frazier for at least a week, Attorney Blake readily acquiesced and left. Dr. Fleet, too, took his leave, but hardly had he left the house than a frantic call from Mrs. Frazier brought him back.

For she had gone into her husband's room and suddenly found—that he wasn't breathing!

A quick examination with a stethoscope proved she was right. The doctor straightened with a sigh.

"He's gone," he said simply. "And I

(Continued on page 8)

WHICH ONE WOULD YOU PICK FOR THE JOB?



Dear Sir:

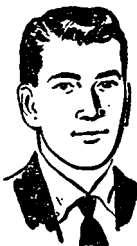
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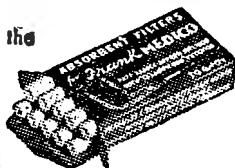
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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 8)

was so certain he'd pull out of it. Just one of those things."

Mrs. Frazier seemed stunned, bewildered. "But it was so fast. Was he getting enough oxygen?"

Dr. Fleet went to the oxygen tank and turned the control off. "He was getting oxygen. Though, if he had been deprived of it, we could expect something like this to happen."

Mrs. Frazier pointed. "Look," she gasped. "That book on reptiles on the table beside his bed. I was reading from it to him. He liked for me to read all sorts of things to him. He seems to have reached out for it."

THE COILED SERPENT

Dr. Fleet picked up the book. To do so, he had to straighten out the dead man's fingers, for they had crumpled between them one of the pages of the book.

"That page which Walt crumpled in his fingers," Mrs. Frazier said. "It shows a snake of some sort, coiled and ready to spring. Walt meant something by it. He used all the strength and effort he possessed to get that book off the table and open it to the page he wanted. Because it should tell us something."

Mrs. Frazier suddenly recalled having heard the vague sound of footsteps upstairs. Sound of those footsteps, more than anything else, had caused her to hurry upstairs again to her husband's side, and that was when she had found him dead. Quickly, now, she hurried toward a door that lead toward a back exit. That door, which under all circumstances had been kept locked, was now unlocked.

"I'll phone the police," Dr. Fleet said.

But Mrs. Frazier checked him with a motion of her hand. "No—not yet," she said. "We can wait."

And that was a serious mistake. . . .

Several days later, the hearing was held before the parole board regarding the prisoner named John Dubin. Dubin was represented by his attorney, Ira

(Continued on page 10)

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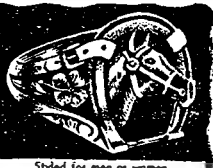
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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 8)

Blake, and was opposed by Tony Quinn. But Quinn, apparently, preferred not to make much of a fight of it, much to the surprise of his aide, Silk Kirby, and the disgust of Captain McGrath of the Detective Bureau.

"Tony," he accused, "you're letting that killer walk right smack out of prison. What's the idea? I don't get it."

"Have patience, Mac," Quinn said. "You'll understand."

OUT ON PAROLE

A few moments later, just as Quinn expected, the chairman of the board announced that John Dubin was free on parole. Dubin walked up to Quinn and stuck out a hand. Then he smiled crookedly.

"I forgot you're blind, Mr. Quinn," he said in a fairly loud voice. "I just wanted to say I got no hard feelings. You had a job to do and I guess maybe you thought what happened was right."

His hand closed around Quinn's and pumped it heartily. He moved just a trace closer and dropped his voice to a whisper.

"And the next time we meet, you blind bat, I'll kill you. So stay out of my way."

Quinn's expression never changed. But to himself—surprisingly—he was chuckling. This was part of his game. This was exactly how he wanted it!

Such is the amazing beginning of THE COILED SERPENT, featured Black Bat novel in the next issue of BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE. Dubin is a crafty, bestial killer without one redeeming feature. Why would Quinn want him set free? And what of the mysterious death of Walter Frazier—had Dubin really manipulated that while he was still in prison? And what of the picture of the snake about to strike that the dead Frazier held clutched in his death-stiffening hand? Did it point out a killer?

A BAFFLING CASE

Tony Quinn soon finds himself confronted by a case even more baffling than

(Continued on page 110)

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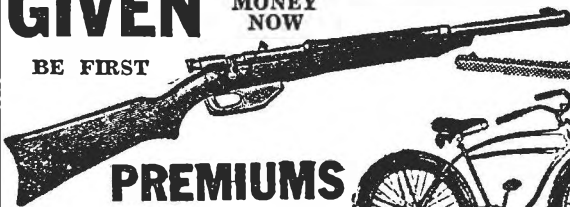
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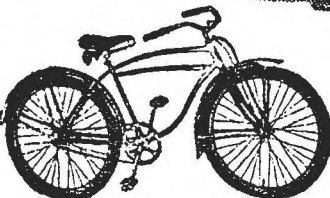
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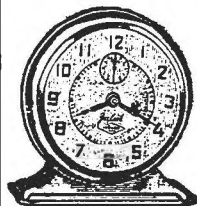


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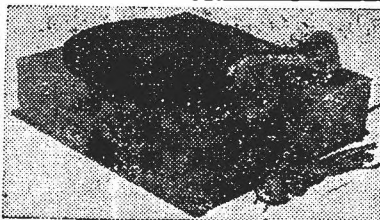
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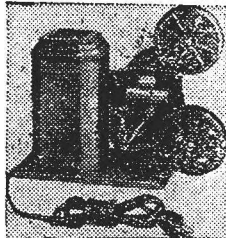
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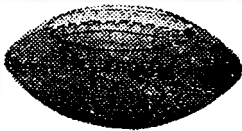
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IT LOOKED LIKE TROUBLE UNTIL . . .



HIS TAXI, NEWLY EQUIPPED WITH TWO-WAY RADIO, JOE DOUGLAS IS REPORTING TO HIS GARAGE AT THE END OF A LONG DAY BEHIND THE WHEEL WHEN HIS REAR VISION MIRROR SHOWS . . .



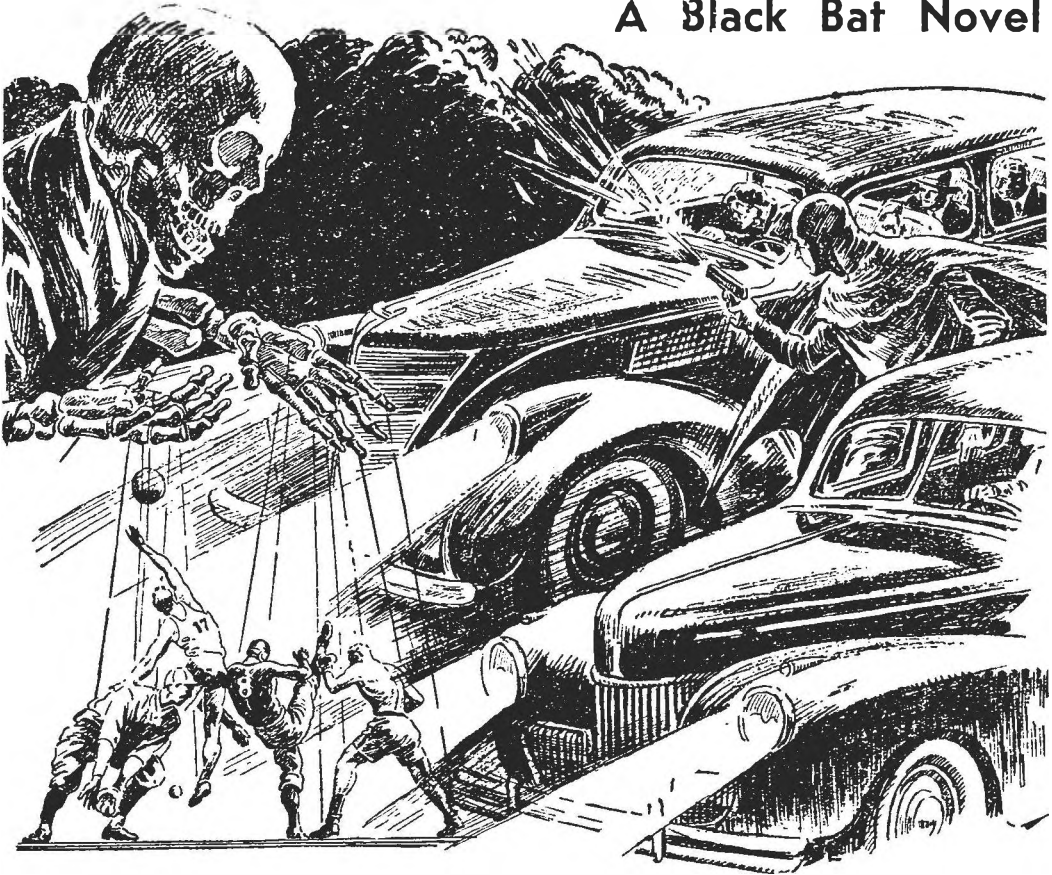
LEAVING THE OPEN RADIO MIKE ON HIS LAP, JOE REPEATS THE UNSUSPECTING THUG'S INSTRUCTIONS . . .



. . . TO HIS GARAGE, WHERE THE SUPERINTENDENT RELAYS THEM TO THE POLICE



A Black Bat Novel



Silk stepped on it and shot away as the Black Bat moved to the running board of the other car (CHAP. X)

CITY OF HIDDEN DEATH

By G. WAYMAN JONES

Barrtown looked like a model community of spotless repute, but underneath the righteous and innocent expressions of its leading citizens Tony Quinn saw the ugliness of crime!

CHAPTER I

The Bargain

THE MAN who stepped out of the elevator was chunky. He had a bullet-head and a closely-clipped mustache below a nose with flaring nostrils. His clothes were correct, as correct as any twenty-eight-fifty men's shop could make clothes for that price. He

wore a derby, set squarely on top of his head, and a perpetual scowl.

In his pocket was a leather case in which he kept a gold badge that read: DETECTIVE BUREAU—CAPTAIN.

His name was McGrath, and he was one of the most energetic, honest and determined men on the biggest local police force in the world. He maintained that he looked like a banker and nobody could persuade him that he looked more like

The Black Bat and His Aides Pit Themselves

a cop than a movie version of one.

The door he approached was lettered: ANTHONY QUINN, SPECIAL DISTRICT ATTORNEY. McGrath's features seemed more determined than ever as he stepped into the main office and nodded agreeably to the staff. He was instantly admitted to Tony Quinn's private quarters.

The man who opened the door for him was of medium stature, with unusually clear blue eyes that were deadly cold. His smile of greeting was unctuous and he bowed slightly.

"Hello, Silk," McGrath grumbled and kept on going until he stood facing the desk.

Behind it sat a rather odd-looking man. Sturdily built, and very well dressed. His eyes were staring—those of a blind man—and around them were deep pits, as if they'd been seared there by acid or fire.

This was Tony Quinn, blind attorney who was now a special district attorney in charge of handling cases which were apt to give the D.A. himself, a nightmare of headaches. Quinn's record in solving these difficult tasks was excellent. For a blind man it was almost uncanny.

"Hello, Mac," Quinn said. "How's it going?"

McGRATH sat down and chewed the end off a cigar. He applied flame, his eyes riveted on Quinn's face every moment. "You know darned well how it's going," he said. "It's standing still—stalled, and I can't see a single chance of pushing it."

Quinn nodded. "I thought we'd find that, Mac. When two days go by after a murder, and we don't dig up the faintest clue, we begin to realize that perhaps this case will join the select few in our unsolved file. Give me a rehash of it."

McGrath puffed slowly. "Two nights ago John Powell was found dead in front of 1121 Wakefield Avenue. He'd been shot through the head twice, through the heart twice and two more bullets landed in his stomach. The heart wounds were contact. The others were fired into his body as he lay across the sidewalk. Nobody saw it done. Nobody heard the

shots. They came from a small caliber pistol and may have sounded like six fast backfires."

Quinn said, "We can, and have, assumed it was a murder caused by intense hatred. All that shooting is proof. But we can't find that John Powell ever had an enemy in his life. He was one of the few men who are universally liked."

"There's no trail—nothing," McGrath said. "Not a soul was on the street. I've interviewed everyone who lived close by the scene, and they swear they saw or heard nothing. There isn't a known motive or the remotest suspect. This one is never going to be solved, Tony."

Quinn leaned back. "Perhaps you're right, Mac. I doubt even the Black Bat could find a clue."

"Is he going to try?"

"Why ask me? I'm not the Black Bat, even though you insist that I am. The Black Bat, Captain, has two excellent eyes. In fact I've heard he has the ability to see in utter darkness. Now, me, I'm stone blind. I live in darkness."

"Let's skip it," McGrath said quickly. "I've batted my head against the stone wall of this murder for two days. I'm in no mood for arguing and I'm sure the Black Bat wouldn't get far with it either. What's the next move?"

Quinn shrugged. "Is there any? You can't investigate a clueless, motiveless crime. Mac, in interviewing neighbors did you come across an elderly lady named Lydia Barr who lives on the ground floor of number 1125 Wakefield Avenue?"

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

Quinn reached for his pipe, and lit the heel that was in it. Through the haze of resultant smoke, he said, "I wonder why the old lady phoned me to come see her then? She made it sound very urgent and I wasn't to appear until after dark tonight. Of course it may be something else, but living so close to the scene of the crime—well, I'll go see her anyway."

McGrath rose. "Let me know if she has any dope, Tony. I'll be home. My

Against an Unseen and Mysterious Menace!

wife says she hardly knows me any more, I'm working so much. See you."

He walked out. Silk Kirby closed the office door, sat down in the chair which McGrath had occupied, and smiled. A strange thing happened to Tony Quinn's eyes then. The blank look slowly disappeared and the eyes seemed alive and healthy. He reached for fresh tobacco without fumbling.

Silk Kirby said, "I finished my check-up on the Lydia Barr woman, sir."

she went back to using the name of Barr because it was so well known in that town."

QUINN rubbed his chin. "She seems to be the end of a dynasty, then. Who runs the town now?"

"Her son-in-law. Fellow named Lou Varden. He's capable, efficient and honest. At the present time Mrs. Barr lives near the scene of the murder which occurred two nights ago. I doubt very



THE BLACK BAT

"Good. What did you find out, Silk?"

"Her life is practically a history of the northern part of our state, sir. She's over eighty. She was born in Barrtown which her father had started and built up. Upon his death she inherited everything. The banks, or most of them. The three large factories which make all sorts of sporting goods, the library which her family had maintained as a public institution for years. In short she was Barrtown. She'd married when quite young, had two children of whom only a daughter survives. She has a couple of grandchildren. When her husband died,

much she knows anything about it. This John Powell, so far as I could determine, had never even been in Barrtown and knew no one there."

"Mrs. Barr might still have seen something," Quinn argued.

"I didn't finish, sir. She's dying. They say she won't live more than a few days."

Quinn said, "We'll have dinner out tonight. A leisurely one, and then we'll pay a call on Mrs. Barr right after dark, as she requested."

Silk sighed. "I hope she knows something about the murder, sir."

"She'd better or we're sunk, Silk. John

Powell was an important man with considerable influence. You heard what McGrath told me. There isn't a speck of a clue."

Someone began opening the office door and Quinn's eyes instantly went blank and blind looking. A clerk brought in some papers. Silk accepted them, settled down and read them to Quinn who picked up a dictating machine mouthpiece and began talking into it. Silk Kirby acted as his eyes, when anyone was around, for Tony Quinn had to keep up this pretence of being stone blind.

At eight-thirty Silk pulled up in front of 1125 Wakefield Avenue. It was a residential section of huge apartment buildings. Lydia Barr lived on the ground floor behind heavily-barred windows.

A man of about twenty-six let them in. He had pink cheeks, a smooth complexion and rather small blue eyes and looked like a perennial juvenile. He introduced himself as Edward Ware.

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

He led them through a beautifully-furnished living room of brocade-seated chairs and divans, of twin grand pianos and an organ. The floor was covered by an amber colored rug with piling that crept up around the ankles. Whatever Lydia Barr was, she wasn't poverty stricken.

Quinn held Silk's arm with one hand and kept a white cane slanted out to encounter unexpected obstructions with his other hand. They passed a thin-faced, white-haired man who occupied a wheel chair. Quinn, of course, pretended that he hadn't seen the man.

The occupant of the wheel chair had an irascible voice. "Edward, who are these people?"

The young man stopped and Quinn bumped into him, murmured a word of apology and let Silk help him to move aside.

Edward Ware said, "This is Attorney Quinn. Mr. Quinn, this is Bernard Rogers, a cousin of Lydia Barr."

Quinn murmured some polite phrase. Rogers glanced at him. "Blind, aren't you? What good is a blind lawyer? Who said Lydia wanted to see him?"

"She did," Ware said. "She told me

to expect him."

Quinn's features were set in stern lines. "Lydia Barr phoned me and made this appointment, Mr. Rogers. I'm sorry you don't approve of an attorney who cannot see. Perhaps Lydia Barr does not feel the same way."

"She's half out of her mind," Rogers said angrily. "The woman is dying. She is an obstinate, proud, self-centered woman who doesn't know enough to give up when it's her time to go. Well, take them in to see her, Edward. I'm sure I have no business with a blind man."

They entered a room which Quinn saw at once had two windows on a level with the street out front. From these windows the murder of John Powell could have been seen as nicely as a fifth row aisle seat at a play.

The room was illuminated by a dim table lamp. It showed a woman lying in bed. She looked a hundred. Thin, wasted and frail. Her white hair was carefully fashioned into pigtails with ribbons on the ends of them. Her eyes were closed and she breathed very lightly.

"Grandmother," Edward Ware said softly, "Mr. Quinn is here."

THE old lady didn't open her eyes. "Get out, Edward. Get out and stay out. Who is this man with you, Mr. Quinn?"

Tony Quinn noticed that her eyes were slitted now. He said, "His name is Kirby, madam. He works for me, and is my friend. I'm totally blind and I must have someone to accompany me."

"All right, if you trust him, then I suppose I can. Kirby, make yourself useful. Walk softly to the door and yank it open. If my grandson, my cousin, or any of the servants are listening out there, give them a swift kick. Close and lock the door, put your back against it and stay there."

Silk suppressed a smile as he helped Quinn into a chair beside the bed. Then he obeyed her command. Nobody was listening outside the door.

Lydia Barr pulled herself into a sitting position. Her eyes were wide open now. They were faded, watery, but still keen enough to appraise this man who sat beside her.

"So you're blind," she said. "Good! I don't mean that the way you're probably thinking I do. I'm glad you can't see me because I used to be a handsome woman



The Black Bat bowled them over with uncanny accuracy. How he could see in the dark they did not know
(CHAP. XII)

and now I'm dried up, withered, like last year's rose petals and ready to blow away."

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

She laughed. "First of all, I want you to understand this, Mr. Quinn. I have an inoperable cancer. The best doctors money can buy have given me about two more weeks of life. Before I die, there is something I want you to do for me. You, and a friend of yours."

"A friend of mine?"

"The Black Bat," she whispered. "Oh, I know he works with you. That kind of news gets around. Between the two of you, what I want accomplished, can be done. There is grave danger, especially for you, because you are blind and your opponents are utterly ruthless."

"Please go on," Quinn said and showed none of his disappointment. He had been practically convinced that Lydia Barr would provide the badly needed break in the John Powell murder case. Now it seemed she had summoned Quinn for purely personal reasons.

She said, "I'm dying, that's true, but I have more energy left than I let them know. I can still get up and walk about, after a fashion. But, to our business. My father founded and built up the city of Barrtown. When he began, it was occupied by two hundred and fifty people. Now there are more than a hundred and fifty thousand souls living there. My father controlled its mayor, its banks, schools, libraries, hospitals and, most of all, the large factories. When he died I took over all of it and did a good job, if I do say so myself."

"I can well imagine you did," Quinn acknowledged.

"Thank you. Things are different there now. I want you and the Black Bat to go there and clean it up."

"Clean it up?" Quinn asked vaguely.

"That's what I said. I can give you no details. On the surface that town is a model of civic efficiency, but underneath it's shot through with crookedness. It has to be ripped open at the seams and sterilized. That is what I want you to do."

Quinn whistled softly. "But such a matter isn't for me to undertake. I have no authority in your city. If conditions are that bad, the governor might be persuaded."

"The governor, my hat," she snapped.

"He could send a hundred investigators there and they wouldn't learn a thing except to believe I'm out of my mind. Perhaps you believe that too, Mr. Quinn. I'm not. I'm quite sane and I know what I'm doing. Barrtown needs to be cleaned up. You're the man to do it. You and your friend the Black Bat. You have two weeks to find out what is going on there, uncover the man or men behind it and expose them to justice. Two weeks—because by then I'll be dead and I won't be able to pay you as I intended."

"Pay me?" Quinn frowned.

"You don't think I'd ask you to do this for nothing, Mr. Quinn? Oh, I know you're a wealthy man and need no money. I don't intend to pay off in cash. You do as I say, come back and prove to me you have been successful—and I'll tell you who murdered John Powell."

Quinn exhaled slowly. "So you do know that."

SHE NODDED briskly. "I can't sleep. What good is sleep to me when that's all I'll be doing until eternity pretty soon? Nights I sit in the window and think. That night I was there. I saw John Powell come into view and the person who killed him was there too. Want me to prove I know this?"

"I'd be interested."

"I have read every newspaper. There isn't a line about the viciousness of the attack on Powell. Nothing about how many bullets were fired into him. Well, there were six. The killer emptied the gun. First the killer shot Powell through the chest—twice. Then he stood over him and fired two more bullets into his head, the last two into his middle. It was a revolver, not an automatic. The time was 3:52 A.M. John Powell wore a light gray topcoat, a brown suit, brown shoes, tan hat."

"That's enough." Quinn held up his hand. "You saw the crime committed all right. It's your duty to tell me who the murderer is. You know that."

"What do I care about duty?" she countered quickly. "I see in this a method of cleaning up a city which is as much a part of me as my own head. I can't get this done by ordinary means. Hiring private detectives would do no good. I've thought of you, and the Black Bat, a thousand times and wondered how I

could get you interested. Now you'll do my bidding or you'll never find out who killed John Powell."

"I could place you under arrest." Quinn said half-heartedly.

She laughed. "Arrest me? Mr. Quinn, I'm beginning to think you're more of a fool than your record indicates. Arrest someone who will die in a matter of days. You're wasting time. Take it or leave it."

"What, exactly, is wrong up there in Barrtown?"

"That's for you to find out. I won't tell you because I can't. There are reasons. And it's better if you cut the first spadeful of dirt. You'll be more apt to continue the investigation."

"Suppose you die while I'm up there?" Quinn said.

"That's your hard luck. You could try praying for me to last a couple of weeks. I'll last, Quinn. I've got more will power than you can imagine. I'll last because I want to see my town properly cleaned up and put back into its former position. You will do this for me?"

"It looks as if I have no choice," Quinn said. "You refuse to give me any leads at all?"

"I'll send you to my son-in-law. What he does to help you is his affair. Perhaps he doesn't even know what is going on. I'm tired now. You'd better go. Don't come back until you can tell me Barrtown is fit to live in once more."

She lay down, closed her eyes and dismissed the visitors. Silk came to help Quinn and they were halfway across the room when she spoke again, without moving anything but her lips.

"Be careful. They know everything. They'll know you're coming and they will try to kill you. Don't relax your vigilance for a single instant or you may be dead before I am."

They left the room. Nobody was outside to meet them. Silk led Quinn to the front door. As he opened it, he said, "Boy, is that old lady nuts."

"No, Silk. Her mind is as clear and sharp as yours or mine. She's a crafty old lady. Something is wrong at Barrtown and she's blackjacking us into going there. She knows who killed John Powell. I'm sure of it because she isn't a bluffer."

"Do you mean you'll go to this town?" Silk asked incredulously.

"Yes, I think so."

They were at the street door when Silk came to an abrupt halt. "Hey, our car has been moved. It's way down the street."

"Watch it, Silk," Quinn whispered. "I don't like this."

CHAPTER II

The Spy



LAYING his game for all it was worth, Tony Quinn held tightly to Silk's arm and allowed himself to be piloted along the street. His cane tapped the sidewalk, too, and he gave every appearance of being totally blind. Whenever danger threatened, Tony

Quinn had to exert every effort to act his role. Once it was established that he could see, circumstances would rapidly point him out as the Black Bat, that hooded crime fighter who was wanted by both the police and the men who lived by wits, guns and plunder.

The street, for all its fancy residents, wasn't too well lighted. Small trees, not more than ten or twelve feet high, had been planted and their outspread branches were thick with foliage and obscured what little glow came from the street lamps.

The car evidently had been pushed down the street, but not otherwise molested. Why, Quinn asked himself, should anyone have wanted to move the car? The answer was quite simple. Somebody wanted him and Silk to be forced to walk down the street and expose themselves to an attack.

It came when they passed the service entrance to one of the big buildings. Quinn, whose hearing was abnormally acute, heard the service entrance door open and then padding footsteps overtake them. He nudged Silk who turned quickly, but a trifle too late. The man who approached was already swinging a club. It looked like a baseball bat. The club clipped Silk a glancing blow, slid off the side of his head and landed against his shoulder. For Silk, that was an abrupt end to the battle. He went down.

The man swerved to encounter Quinn,

who had backed up until he struck the side of the building. Quinn stood there, cane half raised, staring eyes wide in the fear only a blind man can endure under circumstances like this.

"Shell out your dough," the attacker spoke in a hoarse whisper. "Come on, you mole, hand over your money or I'll bust your head wide open."

He stepped a little closer, certain that Quinn was blind and could see no move he made. The club was upraised. As he approached, Quinn saw what gave the attacker such a startling appearance. There was a hood drawn over his head. A bed pillow cover with two small slits torn in it for the eyes. A simple and effective mask for all its crudeness.

Quinn saw something else too, minute dark marks near the hem of the pillow case. That would be a laundry mark. He had to get closer to make it out. With a shout for help, he threw himself forward. For a blind man he acted just right. He missed the attacker except for his shoulder, but the blow put the man off balance. Quinn's arms went around him and held tight.

He could have maneuvered a trifle and broken that man's back if he chose, but that wouldn't be in keeping with his blindness. So he contented himself with holding the man there for a second or two while his eyes studied the marks on the slip.

Then he was given a hard shove back. Whoever was behind that hood, was no weakling. Quinn caromed against the building wall. But his shouts had drawn some attention. Up the street a woman was screaming for the police.

The attacker closed in, club upraised again. There wasn't much question but that he intended to commit murder. Quinn's cane started a fast arc, low and aimed at the man's legs. It hit the left leg and then, as if quite by accident, slipped between both legs. Quinn gave it a hard twist.

The club sailed toward him, but the attacker was falling as he swung. The club missed and its wielder fell heavily. Running feet could be heard. Moreover Silk was trying to get up and Quinn stood there with his back against the wall, swinging his thick cane back and forth.

The hooded man got up, glanced around and then raced for an alley. He went down it as fast as he could travel.

Once he tripped, cursed and fell, but was up again.

QUINN, fumbling around, located Silk and helped him up. Silk was dizzy and massaged a swelling lump on the side of his head. A patrolman ran up and recognized Quinn at once.

"He went down an alley," Quinn said. "I heard his steps on the sidewalk, and then they echoed between walls. There is an alley nearby, isn't there?"

The cop said there was and hurried down it, his flashlight stabbing the dark. Quinn spoke softly to Silk.

"It was nothing but a cheap stickup, which the whole thing was staged to resemble. That is for the patrolman's benefit. For yours, it was a deliberate attempt to murder me. Now, what do you think of old Lydia Barr's story?"

"Right now," Silk said mournfully, "I can't think. My head hurts too much. I'd better get you home, sir."

When the policeman returned from a fruitless search, Quinn explained what had happened, classifying it as a holdup man's work. Then Silk drove him home.

He parked the car in front, helped Quinn out and led him along the short path to the porch. This was an exclusive neighborhood and the foot of a dead-end street. The house was in a small estate, set back about a hundred feet and well shielded by trees and shrubbery.

Silk unlocked the door. Quinn entered, used his cane to move toward the library which was far down the hallway. There he waited until Silk drew the window shades and then Quinn moved rapidly toward a book-lined section of wall. He touched a hidden control and a narrow door opened. He passed through it and into a large, white-tiled crime laboratory.

This was the headquarters of the Black Bat and its existence known to only two people beside Quinn and Silk. Once Quinn had really been blind. As a crusading district attorney he'd battled crime savagely and created an excellent reputation as both a prosecutor and investigator.

Then he'd tried to defend certain documentary evidence against attack by crooks and been blinded from acid thrown at the evidence he was trying to preserve. Quinn had gone instantly blind from the searing corrosive.

He'd resigned as D.A. and set out to find a surgeon who might cure him. Being wealthy, he had traveled the world over in search of such a doctor, but had met only discouragement. Returning, he had settled down for a lifetime of darkness, but he'd tried to make the best of it. He had learned Braille. His fingertips had become his eyes. With them he had learned how to distinguish objects.

Slowly he had taught himself how to differentiate between footsteps until he could recognize people before they spoke. But all of this was a poor substitute for the life he'd formerly led. Silk had helped a great deal. Once a smooth and notorious confidence man, Silk had first approached Quinn with the intention of robbing him, but had remained to become his servant and best friend.

Then Carol Baldwin had come into Quinn's life. She had appeared at the house one night with a strange proposition. Her father was a police officer who lay dying of a gangster's bullet. He'd followed Tony Quinn's career intently, and now, on the brink of death, believed he might be of some help. A doctor had agreed to transfer parts of the corneas of Carol's father's eyes to Quinn's acid-eaten eyes.

Quinn, desperate enough to attempt anything, underwent the operation and it proved to be successful. Since then, many cures have been effected by similar processes, but Tony Quinn's cure was kept a strict secret.

As District Attorney, Quinn had learned, the hard way, that the law's red tape ties the hands of the investigator, but never the criminal. So he had become the somber-garbed, black-hooded criminologist known as the Black Bat, a man as daring and ruthless as the best crook, a crime fighter who battled criminals with their own weapons. He broke the laws often and without the slightest qualms.

He had assembled this crime lab and studied criminology in all its ramifications until he was a master at it. In his role of the Black Bat he dressed in jet black clothing with a tightly fitted hood over his head. While this lent a spectacular effect, it was primarily intended to shield the tell-tale, acid-caused scars around his eyes.

Carol Baldwin joined his band and proved that she was clever and cour-



McGRATH

ageous. She was also possessed of a rare beauty and Tony Quinn had fallen in love with her long ago.

The fourth member of the little band was a brute of a man named Butch Leary. While his mental powers were not as acute as Silk's, for instance, Butch was faithful and a powerful ally. He looked like a pug and was one. He had practically no neck and a massive head that seemed to sit squarely in the middle of enormous shoulders. His arms were long, and his hamlike hands were incredibly powerful. Butch was no man to tackle with bare hands.

IN THE course of tracking down criminals, two individuals had come to suspect that Tony Quinn was the Black Bat. The Police Commissioner was one of these, but he realized the astounding benefits resulting from the Black Bat and was content to let him operate.

Captain McGrath, on the other hand, had taken an oath to run down the Black Bat, expose and arrest him. He was confident that Tony Quinn was the marauder in black and accused him of it frequently. But McGrath had no proof and, sometimes, a great deal of doubt. Quinn enjoyed McGrath's insistent checking on him, was wary of his suspicions and very often declared a truce and worked beside the doughty, fighting detective.

The Underworld knew and feared the

Black Bat—respected him, too, as a man who kept his promises of either help or revenge. They knew he was a crack shot, an expert with a knife, and he could fight with the best of them.

They did not know that the Black Bat also possessed the ability to see in darkness as well as in daylight. That was a phenomenal side-result of the operation on his eyes. How it came about was unexplainable, but he could move in complete darkness and spot any impediment which might have trapped a man with normal sight. He could read fine print in a blackened room, distinguish faint colors. This, added to his increased sense of hearing and smell, made him a formidable enemy even without his fists or guns.

Now Tony Quinn hurried to a steel locker in the lab and removed one of the somber outfits. He stripped off his own clothing and donned the regalia of the Black Bat. He slid an automatic into a shoulder holster and a compact kit of fine burglar tools into a pocket.

As he dressed, he explained for Silk's benefit. "I've got to know whether or not someone at Lydia Barr's home wants to prevent any investigation of Barrtown. If that man who attacked us came from her apartment, we may expect trouble and also realize that there is something radically wrong in that town."

"But how can you tell?" Silk asked.

"I closed with that footpad, or whatever he was. He wore a pillow slip as a hastily fashioned hood and mask. The slip carried a laundry mark. If I see similar marks on laundry in the Barr apartment, we can be certain the attacker came from there. He could be that grandson or the cousin in the wheelchair. Perhaps he's using this act merely as a prop to hide his real activities. Or one of the servants may be planted there as a spy. We've got to know."

"I'll drive you," Silk offered.

"Fine, but first contact Butch and Carol. Have them come to the lab and wait until we return. We'll use the coupe."

The hood, which distinguished the Black Bat, went into Quinn's pocket and he placed a wide-brimmed hat on his head.

Silk made his phone calls. The Black Bat opened a trap door, dropped into a tunnel and made his way beneath the rear of the estate, to a garden house

where the tunnel came out. He and Silk stood there in the gloom while the Black Bat's uncanny sight surveyed the neighborhood. When he was certain no hostile eyes were watching, he left the garden house, hurried to the side gate and went through it.

A cheap, rather dilapidated coupe was always parked at the curb of this side street, which was more of a lane than a thoroughfare. No one else used it except Quinn. Silk got behind the wheel and they drove quickly to the vicinity of Lydia Barr's apartment.

Along a dark section of the street, Silk pulled over to the curb and the Black Bat got out. He was a dim shadow crossing the sidewalk and then he was swallowed up completely by the blackness of an alley—the same alley down which the attacker had disappeared.

By following it, Quinn learned that anyone from the Barr apartment could have used this means of exit or entrance. All that was necessary was the scaling of a low fence. A simple task except for a man like Bernard Rogers, confined to a wheelchair.

Quinn entered the apartment building through the service entrance, made his way to Lydia Barr's door and used a slim bit of metal on the lock.

This was a noiseless, though none too rapid, operation. He pushed the door open a crack and stood there listening intently. Not a sound reached him. He stepped into the reception hall and moved softly toward the living room. He crossed it, reached the door of Lydia Barr's room and opened it.

He saw her sitting in a chair beside the window. He didn't want to alarm her for he realized that she hadn't lied about her physical condition. So he tapped softly on the wall.

"Lydia Barr," he said, "please don't make any outcry. I'm the Black Bat."

SHE GAVE a visible start of excitement. "Ah, then Quinn sent you. I was sure he would. Though I wasn't certain Quinn had been convinced when he left here. Now let's got down to business."

"Exactly." The Black Bat carried a chair over and sat down beside her. She peered through the darkness to make out the sleek outlines of his hooded head.

She said, "Are you convinced I'm not

a foolish old woman gone balmy on my death bed?"

"I think you're a practical woman, blackjacking Tony Quinn into acting for you. I respect that sort of a person. He summoned me and after listening to his story, I never doubted your good intentions. Nor does Mr. Quinn, now. You see, somebody tried to kill him when he left this apartment."

"No!" she exclaimed. "Then it's as I feared all along. They have somebody watching me. They never did trust me because I know too much, and they're afraid because I'm honest and they are not."

"What's it all about?" the Black Bat queried.

She gave him a slow grin. "I'll tell you nothing, and for an excellent reason which I will likewise not divulge. But in Barrtown is a ring of crime that outdoes anything New York has to offer. Both in magnitude and in profits. In cleverness it has no equal anywhere. Certain men control the town and use it for their own benefit. How, is for you to find out."

"You are not being very generous with information," the Black Bat complained mildly.

"I can't talk too much. And remember this. Work fast, because I haven't much longer to live and my end of the bargain is the truth about a murder that took place outside my window. If I'm dead, naturally I won't be able to relate what took place."

"Quinn told me," the Black Bat said. "It's a hard bargain, but he accepted it and so will I. Quinn is going to Barrtown. I'll be there also. But we must have something to start on."

"Very well. I'll give you this warning. The men to watch are the Mayor, the Chief of Police and his whole force of men, the city's corporation counsel who is a smart lawyer, and a real estate man named Deering who owns more property in that town than I do. I have a son-in-law, Lou Varden. He lives with my daughter. Then there is my brother, Duke Barr. Perhaps he will put you on the right trail. But he is not to know I sent you."

"Very well," the Black Bat arose. "As for yourself, I think you will keep your end of the bargain—if you can."

"If I am alive, I'll tell Quinn who shot John Powell to death."

"Perhaps you may not live as long as you think, now that someone here realizes you are sending Quinn to Barrtown. If this person was willing to risk an attack upon Quinn, he may also attempt to kill you."

She laughed harshly. "Anyone who would kill me quickly would be doing me a favor. I have absolutely nothing to lose. But you're right, of course. I probably do need protection. Not for my sake, but for Quinn's. Can you suggest something?"

"A nurse. A girl I trust and who has done a little work for me in the past. She is capable and certainly has plenty of nerve. She'll be armed and she is a crack shot."

"I'd like to meet her," Lydia Barr chuckled. "Send her along. She reminds me of myself in the days when I was young."

"Do you suspect any specific person in this household?"

"I suspect them all. My grandson is a lazy, pampered hellion who can locate more trouble in one evening than anyone I've ever known. He expects to inherit a lot of money from me. Or maybe he knows all the strings I've attached to his inheritance. If he does, he's apt to obey the commands of the crooks from Barrtown."

"And—how about your cousin, the invalid?"

"I don't know," she said slowly. "Bernard seems to like his wheelchair too much for an invalid. He can get out of it, but for how long I'm not sure. We have a male chef also, who used to work in a gambling house I ran in my day. He'd be very amenable to a little bit of bribery."

"I'll remember them," the Black Bat promised. "Now I think I'd better leave. The nurse will arrive in the morning. Say the doctors sent her and insisted you keep her."

Her age-wizened head moved up and down slowly.

"Yes—and I shall. I'll be grateful for her services."

She suddenly realized she was talking to herself. The dim blob which had been the Black Bat, was gone. She leaned back, began to rock gently, and a slow laugh came from between her thin, colorless lips. Old, dying Lydia Barr was content.

She was fighting back at last.

CHAPTER III

City Without Crime

THE Black Bat moved silently through the apartment. He located the linen closet and opened it. Inside were sheets, towels and pillow cases. On them were laundry marks identical with the one he'd seen on the hooded man's mask.

This indicated that he had come from this apartment.

The Black Bat stepped into a study and closed the door. He went to the phone and dialed long distance. Speaking in a whisper, with his lips close to the transmitter, he said, "A long distance call to Barrtown was made from this number a short time ago. May I have the charges and the time?"

He waited a few moments and then got his information. Somebody had phoned Barrtown at 9:05, talked for eight minutes. The Black Bat was given the number to which the call had been made. He hung up and left the apartment by the same route he used to enter.

In three minutes he was at the mouth of the alley, pressed against the building wall where the shadows were thickest, and waiting for Silk to drive around the block.

Silk hardly saw him until the car door opened and the Black Bat was inside. He gave Silk an outline of what had happened.

"So," he concluded, "we know we are not wanted in Barrtown and the spy at the apartment thought the matter urgent enough to transmit to somebody in that town. Which means we are going there. Openly, and if our intentions are guessed or known, let them be."

Butch and Carol were waiting in the lab. The Black Bat stepped behind a screen and removed his dark clothing, replacing it with the tweeds Tony Quinn usually wore. Then he sat down on a leather divan beside Carol and quietly informed her and Butch as to what had happened.

Carol listened with intense interest, nodding now and then to show she understood what her mission was to be and its importance. Butch was given very

different orders.

"Drive up to Barrtown tonight," Quinn said. "Check in at a moderate hotel and tomorrow move around as much as possible. Act like a crook on the make for a good job and try to contact other local crooks. See what the reaction is to that. You'll find Silk and me at the biggest hotel in town. But don't approach me directly. Silk will be looking for you in the bar."

"I'm on my way," Butch said. "I think I'm going to like this job. Crooked politics is the kind of stuff I like to bust."

Quinn smiled. "Trouble is, Butch, we're not certain what we'll find there, but you get a line on things the best you can."

Butch left the lab by the tunnel exit, slipped away from the neighborhood and proceeded to the garage where he kept his car. He drove to his tiny apartment, packed a bag, and an hour after he'd been given his orders, he was rolling upstate toward Barrtown.

It was dawn when he reached it. From atop a hill overlooking the city, Butch realized that this was no small town easily dominated by a band of avaricious crooks. It was a city, and a roadside sign attested to the fact that Barrtown had a hundred and forty-three thousand citizens. A mob which ruled a community of that size had to be clever and ruthless.

Besides that, Barrtown was the amusement center for all the farms, towns, villages and small cities within seventy-five miles.

Butch rolled on into town, put his car up and checked in at a cheap hotel. He dozed until late morning and then went out on the prowl. He looked up cheap taverns and bars, faked a lot of drinking and passed out hints that he wasn't averse to making an easy dollar or two.

One barkeep swabbed the moist bar with a towel and leaned closer. "Pal," he said, "take my advice and blow. No rough stuff in this burg. You keep asking around and you might get your skull caved in."

Butch made a derisive sound. "Yeah? Show me the guys who want to try. What's the matter? Is there a monopoly or something?"

"Nix. There's just one answer. No crime. Mugs are tossed out of town fast and if they come back, it's just too bad. We ain't had a burglary or stickup in

nine years. Get that? Nine years! The only guys who see the inside of our city jail are traffic violators and some poor slob who helps himself to the bosses' catch. But no violence. Not here."

"You're off the beam," Butch grunted. "There ain't a town like that any place. There's an angle to this. What is it?"

"Look, pal, I been in stir myself. That's why I'm tipping you off. There ain't any angles. This just happens to be a good town. You try to pull anything and things happen fast. To you, my advice is blow. Don't even stop to get your shoes shined."

BUTCH turned on his heel and stalked out. He spent an hour checking on the bartender's incredible story and discovered it hadn't been wild imagination. Barrtown really was a good city. Crimes of violence were practically an unknown quantity.

Newspapers in the public library attested to this fact. The cops were burly, rough looking individuals, but they were beautifully uniformed. Clothes were clean and pressed, gloves were spotlessly white on the traffic men.

Butch discovered only one thing which might be construed as illegal. A man could lay a bet on anything that ran, fought, wrestled, wielded a polo stick, a golf club, a baseball bat, or a tennis racket. It was all done openly, right under the noses of the cops who didn't seem to care.

Butch drifted back to his hotel finally. In a little while he had to get in touch with Silk, but he had little to offer in the way of information. If this city was dominated by a gang, there was certainly no evidence of it.

Butch unlocked the door of his hotel room and stepped in. There he froze. Two men were waiting for him, one seated on the bed, the other occupying a chair. They were both burly and looked like fighters. Both displayed some concern over Butch's size though.

Butch made a natural mistake. He thought he'd broken the ice by his inquiries and these two had been sent to initiate him into the way crime was run in this city.

Butch stuck out an enormous fist. "Well, well, boys, I'm glad to see a couple of right guys."

One of the men arose and took Butch's fist. Then he raised one leg and pinned



For Silk that blow was the
end of the battle
(CHAP. II)

a knee against Butch's middle. Butch tore his hand free, wound up a punch, but didn't deliver it. He'd been held just long enough for the second man to get around behind him and ply a heavy blackjack.

He used plenty of strength behind the blow and Butch went down.

There were cuffs encircling his wrists when he woke up on the floor. He moved his head and saw two pair of feet planted beside him. One foot kicked him on the temple, and for a moment he thought he was heading back into the blackjack induced dreamland.

He steadied his spinning senses and sat up, unmolested this time. "What's the idea?" he demanded. And then he pretended to notice the cuffs for the first time. "So that's it. Coppers."

"Yeah—coppers," one of the men snapped. "While you were bye-bye, we printed you and right now the files are being checked. If there's a record, smart guy, you do a hitch that'll turn you into an old man."

"Smart guy," Butch grumbled. "That's me. Say, what kind of a town is this? A guy makes a play and bingo—the cops are on his tail. I don't get it."

"You will. I'm Sergeant Lanahan and my friend is Detective White. We're a reception committee. We'll show you the whole town—on your way out of it."

The phone rang and Lanahan answered. He listened mostly and then hung up. "Okay, so you never served time or been pinched. Not in this state anyway. Get up, you big lunkhead. Pack your bag. We're leaving."

Butch wondered if he could take both of them while his hands were cuffed. He decided against it. Mostly because he'd learned what he wanted to know, and even if he was kicked out of town, he'd soon be back. By attacking this pair, his return might be made more difficult.

He decided to play it close.

They took him downstairs and put him in a police car. They drove to the garage where his own car was parked. He noticed it had been thoroughly searched. A uniformed cop, picked up from his beat, drove Butch's car, following Lanahan and White to the outskirts.

When they passed the city line, Lana-

han stopped the police car.

He reached into his pocket and took out the blackjack. He bent it, slapped it against the heel of his hand and grinned at Butch.

"You look like an unreasonable guy to us. The kind who has to be shown besides told. Take him, Joe."

Lanahan started to pound him about the face with the blackjack, but Butch managed to reach out and fasten both hands around his throat before Detective White in the back seat plied his sap. He used it energetically and with a will.

Things became hazy, but still Butch held on.

Lanahan, at least, was going to remember a few things too and not just by being told.

Lanahan wasn't slapping him any longer. He was tearing at Butch's hands and getting nowhere. Then White landed a hard one. Butch's head lolled to one side and he started slipping down. Lanahan breathed for the first time in a full two minutes. Then he got out of the car, dragged Butch out and over to a ditch.

THERE was a highway fence in front of the gully and they propped Butch up against it. Then they went to work with their fists.

Finally they tossed him over the fence and left him there. Lanahan, out of sheer hatred, let the air out of two tires of Butch's car.

Somewhat vaguely, Butch was thinking things. There was dirty water in the gully and it felt good. He thought that Barrtown was a wonderful spot to live, but not healthy for an outsider with ideas about larceny.

He got up, at last, staggered over to the car and studied the two flat tires. He grinned out of one side of his mouth. It wasn't a grin that indicated any amusement. If Sergeant Lanahan could have seen that smile, he wouldn't have slept for a week.

Butch got out a pump and went to work. He felt a million years old, sore from head to foot and his clothing was plastered with blood. His head ached hard and his eyes were as bleary as a common drunkard's. But Quinn would want a report and Lanahan or not, Butch was going to get back. He had plenty to tell.

CHAPTER IV

Reception Committee

QUINN made all of the necessary arrangements to take a few days off. By late morning he and Silk were driving upstate. Carol had already reported, by outside phone, that she was installed in the Barr household and been generally accepted as

a nurse with no suspicion directed toward her.

Quinn said, "Silk, it's the darndest thing. This town we're going to happens to have one of the best law enforcement records in the country. It's well and efficiently policed, taxes are medium, elected city officials go back into office every election day and appointed employees settle down to their jobs as if for a lifetime. In most cases it seems to be. Local elections, even when tied in with state and national elections, are a thing apart. No local candidate rides into office on the coat tails of a governor or senator."

Silk pursed his lips. "You know, sir, the name of that town is just odd enough to stir my memory. In the old days, when I operated as a confidence man, I worked it twice—with very unsatisfactory results. All I recall about the place is the fact that it was the bettingest town I ever came across."

"Betting? On what?"

"Sports mostly, sir. The town is sports crazy and it used to draw customers from every outlying area. Miles of it."

Quinn was watching the countryside as they whizzed by. Here, in the privacy of the car, he made no pretence of his ability to see.

"In a way," he said, "that can be accounted for and explained. The town has three huge factories and every one of them is engaged in the manufacturing of sporting goods. They make baseballs, footballs, bats, tennis rackets, playground equipment. It's natural that people who work in these factories have an earnest interest in sports."

"Lydia Barr's father started those factories. Is that right, sir?"

"He began the whole town and, at one time, owned the whole place from its banks down to its pool rooms. The family still owns most of it."

"But what," Silk asked, "is Lydia Barr's game? What does she want cleaned up in a city that's run honestly and is clean?"

"There must be something. Furthermore, Lydia Barr knows what it is, but she has a good reason for her reluctance to talk. She wants us to discover this crime, or whatever it is, and wipe it out. She heard, or guessed, that the Black Bat worked with me and she informed me that she expected the Black Bat to take a hand. She also issued a pretty grim warning about the danger involved."

"And somebody in her house knows you're on your way," Silk mused. "That makes it bad if they do have something to hide. You don't think, sir, that Lydia Barr's mind might be slipping? After all, she is very, very ill."

"Her mind is as clear as a bell. And she has us over a barrel. It's a strange way of solving our purely local murder of John Powell. But she knows the killer, saw him commit the deed and to make her talk, we must satisfy her that conditions in Barrtown have improved."

"How can you improve a perfect town? That's what I'd like to know."

Quinn disregarded that sally. "She also told me of two relatives. Lou Varden who is married to Lydia's daughter, and her brother Duke Barr. We may contact them, but not right away. We'll simply check into a hotel, sit tight and see if they make the first move. If they try anything, we may be able to determine from their actions, just how desperate they are."

The largest hotel was a fifteen story edifice bearing the name of Barr Inn. Half the places in town used the name of Barr in some fashion. Quinn eyed the policemen carefully.

"Nice looking group of men," he said. "Tidy and efficient. You can tell a lot about a town by its cops. These boys are right on their toes. And those I have seen so far, appear to have one thing in common. Did you notice?"

"They looked like just cops to me, sir."

"They're all big men. Powerful and athletic. Several have broken noses and cauliflower ears are as common as

badges. I'd say they were, for the most part, old-time athletes. Boxers and wrestlers. That may mean something."

THEY were gracefully received at the hotel and assigned a suite of rooms on the fourteenth floor. The moment they were installed, Quinn sent Silk on an exploring mission. Silk reported that there were two stairways leading to the rooftop, an emergency fire escape ladder leading off the roof and down to within close range of the adjoining building which was four stories lower in height.

After dinner in the dining room, which was comparable to some of the best New York had to offer, Silk and Quinn went for a stroll. On Silk's arm, holding the white cane with his other hand, Quinn moved along slowly and while his blank eyes were those of a blind man, they observed many things. For one thing, he'd never seen so many slot machines in his life. Nor machines that got a bigger play. There were so many he judged they must be protected by local ordinance.

After half an hour of this, they turned back. Along a busy street, they passed a large building and it seemed that some sort of a meeting had just broken up. Men streamed out onto the sidewalk, making walking difficult. Quinn was rudely shoved and Silk got himself caught between two men. He was pulled away from Quinn's arm. Silk wrested himself free and in doing so drove an elbow into somebody's midriff.

Instantly a big hand dropped on his shoulder and he was spun around. A tough looking pug frowned at him and muttered something about not liking being shoved around. Silk tried to escape. He realized this must be some sort of a trick. Quinn was still moving, being pushed along by the crowd, and Silk was helpless to serve him.

Silk tried to extricate himself again, but he was quickly pinned against a wall and lectured at length about manners on the streets of Baratown. Quinn, meanwhile, allowed himself to be carried along by the throng. He saw a man move up to him. The man was carrying a tin cup with a looped wire attached to the handle. This he wrapped around a button on Quinn's coat. Before he took half a dozen more steps, someone dropped a coin into it. Then more coins

clanked into the bottom.

Quinn stopped abruptly with a puzzled look on his face. He passed a hand down the front of his suit and encountered the cup. A burly man came close. "Okay, buddy," he said, "I feel good tonight and I'm no cheap skate."

A five dollar bill went into the cup. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the street was fairly clear. A uniformed patrolman on the next corner saw Quinn apparently for the first time. He left his post and moved fast toward the blind man.

He took Quinn's arm. "Look," he said, "I hate to do this, but we've got an ordinance against begging. This is a pinch so just take it easy. Hey—you really blind?"

"I'm terribly confused," Quinn said nervously. "I'm no beggar. Someone seems to have hung a tin cup onto my clothing and people are putting money into it. But I assure you I'm not a beggar."

"Yeah, yeah, it's okay," the cop said in a kindly voice. "We'll just amble over to headquarters and you can explain to the lieutenant."

A car pulled up as they walked down the street. Two men jumped out. Both had cameras and they quickly maneuvered into position. Flash bulbs popped, and then the men were gone.

"Boy," the cop said, "what a town. Notice what those reporters just did?"

"I'm afraid I didn't," Quinn said in a plaintive voice. "I can't see."

"I forgot. Well, the reporters assigned to cover local crime never have anything to do. They got to earn a living so they play up little arrests. Like the one I'm pulling on you. They just took your picture."

"Oh—that's bad. Very bad," Quinn said.

"What's bad about it? Even if they're not very good pictures, you won't be able to see them. Anyway, before they're published, you'll be out of town. We just don't go for grifters here, even blind ones. Nothing personal, mind you."

QUINN maintained a stony silence until he was led into police headquarters. It was a large, well appointed room. There wasn't even the usual smell of antiseptics which had filled every police station Quinn had ever been in.

And there seemed to be a large number of people about. The patrolman led Quinn up to the desk. He saluted the lieutenant. "I found this guy panhandling, Lieutenant."

The lieutenant didn't appear very interested. "Bail two hundred dollars. Lock him up."

"Just a moment," Quinn said tightly. "It's customary to allow a prisoner time to reach into his pocket and produce the bail set. And courteous to permit a prisoner at least a word of explanation."

The lieutenant still looked bored. "What's there to explain? You were begging, and that's a misdemeanor in this town. Don't worry, you'll be treated well."

Quinn removed a leather case from his pocket, reached out and felt along the edge of the desk. He snapped open the case. The lieutenant gulped, his eyes widened and he gasped aloud.

"Well! Imagine that," he said. "A New York D.A.'s badge. Listen, where'd you get this?"

"My name is Quinn. I'm a Special District Attorney. I doubt very much, that you can make a begging charge stick, sir."

Someone ranged himself alongside Quinn. A tall, expensively dressed and important looking man. He had thinning gray hair, a narrow face and mild blue eyes.

He said, "Somebody pulled a boner, Lieutenant. I've seen photos of Tony Quinn. This is he. Blind or not, he happens to be one of the smartest D.A.'s in the business. If you wish, I'll vouch for him or even go his bail."

"There's no bail. No charge or any-

thing else." The lieutenant took Quinn's hand and folded the fingers around his badge case. "All I can say, Mr. Quinn, is that I'm sorry, and this is an apology from the whole police department. Now I wonder why that tin cup was hung on you? Maybe it was just a joke. Some people get the funniest ideas about what is humorous."

"Don't they," Quinn said tightly. "Now I'd like to go back to my hotel. My valet seems to have disappeared."

Silk came pounding into headquarters, his face crimson, his nostrils flaring in anger. He went up to Quinn's side and glared at everyone around. The tall man who had sided with Quinn, nodded pleasantly.

"Everything is quite all right," he explained. "There was just a little mistake. I'm Matt Deering. In the real estate business and on the police commission incidentally. Which fact makes me thoroughly ashamed of what has happened. Mr. Quinn, if all is forgiven, I'd like to have you meet Chief Long, head of our local Police Department."

A bulky man in civilian clothes seized Quinn's hand and wrung it energetically. "My, my," he chuckled, "what will happen to me when I go down to your bailiwick, Mr. Quinn? I'm very sorry."

"It's quite all right," Quinn said. "I'm happy to meet all of you."

He shook hands with a little man who had sandy hair, a sandy mustache and wore sandy-colored clothing even to shirt and tie. He proved to be Felix Felice, the city attorney. He joked wonderingly about whether Quinn intended to sue the city.

Quinn noticed Silk give a sudden start

[Turn page]



...ITS QUALITY

HITS THE SPOT! ★

and turn quickly toward the door. Then he subsided and his impassive face indicated nothing wrong. Finally they managed to tear themselves away, but Matt Deering insisted on providing a police car and in riding to the hotel with Silk and Quinn.

DEERING was smooth if he was dishonest. Clever, if honest. He said, "We're very proud of our city, Mr. Quinn. I'd like to take you around and explain the various things we've done here. Do you happen to be interested in boxing?"

"I used to be, when I had my eyes," Quinn smiled. "Even now, with Silk along to explain things, I imagine I'd find it fascinating."

"Good! Excellent, because we're holding a state championship heavyweight match tomorrow night at our stadium. Tickets were sold out days ago, but I can scare up a couple. Good ones—with my compliments. I'll send them around."

"Thank you, Mr. Deering. I'd like to attend. As for showing me the town, well—I'd prefer to take it in my stride. No conducted tours."

"Of course," Deering said affably. "Anything you want. Call on me any time at all."

He shook hands in the hotel lobby. Silk took Quinn's arm and piloted him toward the elevator.

Silk spoke without moving his lips. A whisper that only Quinn's highly sensitive ear could hear.

"Coppers. Planted here. I can pick 'em out a mile away. We moved into something, sir."

They reached their suite and the moment Quinn was comfortably seated, Silk began an intense inspection of the room.

He reported that there were no indications of microphones yet.

Quinn said:

"What startled you at headquarters, Silk? I saw you jump."

Silk didn't draw the window shades. They faced a court and there were many windows from which they might be observed. Silk began unpacking the suitcases and being careful about it to try and judge if they'd been searched. He spoke while he worked and kept his back toward the windows. There were such things as lip readers who could

very likely be provided with power field glasses.

He said, "I saw this man and I thought he looked familiar. Then he spotted me and got out of there fast, because he knew darned well I'd recognize him as Roper Sterling. An old time con man and one of the best. His nickname, Roper, fits."

"In the con game a roper is a man who is good at roping the mark. In our lingo that means lining up a victim for a touch. Roper Sterling could make a man hand over solid gold for its equivalent weight in lead and convince him he was getting the best of the deal. And Roper never bothered with anything but the very biggest stuff."

"Hmm," Quinn murmured. "Interesting. Mainly because he was an accepted member of the group at headquarters. And how did you like their neat trick to make a fool of me?"

"I thought the whole thing was a plant, sir, though I can't seem to understand the significance of it."

"Photographers took a picture of me being led away by the cop and with that tin cup hanging off a button on my suit. They'll print it, big and clear. They'll also print an apology, but everyone will get a laugh out of it. A D.A. being pinched as a blind beggar. Oh, they'll laugh all right. And how can I conduct an investigation, gain confidence of people who might help me, when they'll think of that photo?"

"So that's it." Silk had a sour expression on his face. "Neat work."

"Effective too. We've run into something, Silk. It's invisible now, but mighty big. In half an hour I'll go to bed. You can saunter around the lobby and look for Butch, but be careful how you contact him. Be sure to lock up well and you might leave the key on the inside of the door. Turn it with a pair of our special pliers so the door seems locked from inside. If they come hunting, that will stop them and they'll be certain I'm inside."

"You're going to start things moving right away, then?"

"The Black Bat is going to fly high, Silk. And don't forget this. In our own town we're constantly menaced by Captain McGrath. Here, it's a hundred times worse. Let them discover that Tony Quinn is the Black Bat and we're finished."

CHAPTER V

Telephone Number

SILK stepped into the corridor, looked around and then moved up close to the door. A pair of fine pliers went into the keyhole and grasped the key. He turned it. Now a prowler would be certain that Tony Quinn was inside the room.

At that moment, however, the room was empty and the Black Bat was maneuvering across the roof top for a quick descent along the ladder to the roof of the adjoining office building.

Silk took the elevator to the lobby, bought a newspaper and some cigarettes and then strolled into the bar. This was where he'd meet Butch if the big man were able to keep the date.

Butch was there, hunched over the end of the bar and giving a pretty good imitation of a lone drinker who liked only his glass for company. Silk sidled up to him.

He saw Butch's battered face and winced at the sight of it. Both he and Butch were trained to speak with a minimum use of their lips. Butch's didn't seem to move at all.

He said, "What a party! They threw me out of town. No crooks allowed here, but there's something wrong. You get a line yet?"

"No. They've taken clever action against our friend. We're being watched. You can reach our suite through the building next door. Get to the roof, spot a fire ladder and climb to the roof of the hotel. We're in 1420."

Silk picked up his glass, eyed Butch as if he didn't like to be near him, and went to another part of the bar. Butch meanwhile was studying the big bar mirror. He caught the reflection of Sergeant Lanahan, the detective who'd all but maimed him for life.

Butch rubbed his chin. There weren't any specific orders on how to act, and he was glad of it. He put the glass down very carefully, walked across the crowded room and touched Lanahan's shoulder. The burly detective looked around and his face drained of color. He

reached for the gun under his arm.

Butch's fingers closed around Lanahan's right wrist and twisted it. He ripped open the detective's coat, sending buttons in all directions. He pulled out the gun, broke it open and threw the bullets far away. Then he handed the gun to a bystander.

"When he wakes up, give it back to him," he said amiably.

Lanahan was struggling, but Butch's grip was secure. Butch pushed the detective against a table, grinned widely and held him there a second or two.

"Me," he said, "I don't like guys who use saps. I don't like guys who enjoy busting a handcuffed man's skull open. I don't like you, but I owe you something. And I pay my debts."

He dusted Lanahan's nose with a gigantic fist, pulled back the hand and drove in one punch. Lanahan rocketed ten feet away and sat down on the floor. He didn't topple over. Somehow he was balanced, but he was totally unconscious.

Butch pulled down his sleeve, looked around the room and then strolled out. In the lobby he saw two men coming at him. Butch drove into a charge. With both hands, he stiff-armed the pair and sent them hurtling aside. Then he sprinted onto the street, toward the office building next door and was inside before anyone reached the sidewalk. Butch felt good. The aches and pains in his body had subsided the instant his fist smacked Lanahan.

SILK got out of there, too. He realized Butch would probably head for the suite and he'd never get in. Silk rode to the fourteenth floor and unlocked the door. He sat down to wait and wondered what luck the Black Bat was having.

That shadowy figure was then in the act of burglarizing a house on the outskirts. The nameplate indicated this was where Duke Barr, the brother whom Lydia trusted, lived.

Duke Barr, about ten years younger than his sister, was a substantial, important looking man. He was bald, wide-faced and had a ruddy complexion. He wore shell-rimmed reading glasses and was hard at work over the desk in his study. He saw a shadow materialize on the further wall and sat erect. One hand moved toward the middle desk

drawer where there was a gun.

"Don't be alarmed," a quiet voice said behind him. "I'm the Black Bat."

Duke Barr turned around slowly. He scanned the black-clad figure and there was no trace of fear in his eyes. Like all the Barrs, he was afraid of nothing.

"What do you want?" he asked. "Frankly, I don't like talking to a man who hides behind a mask."

"There are plenty of people in this town who wear masks," the Black Bat said. "You can't see the mask, but they are there, shielding the truth inside them. They consist of righteous and very innocent expressions. Underneath is something highly sinister."

"Why are you here?" Duke demanded.

"Your sister sent me. Lydia Barr."

Duke's attitude changed. He leaned forward. "All right. If she sent you, there's a reason for your being here. My sister is a remarkable woman. Hale and hearty at her age. In full possession of her mental facilities."

"Mentally she is very sound, Mr. Barr. Physically, she is dying. Have I passed your little test?"

"Apparently." Duke reached for a cigar. "Is she suffering?"

"She won't admit it if she is. As you know, she hasn't much longer to live, and before she dies she wants this city cleaned up. She implied that you could be trusted."

Duke put flame to the cigar and puffed slowly on it for a full minute. Through a cloud of smoke he said, "Lydia has always insisted something is wrong here. Myself, I don't believe it. Nor does Lou. Lou Varden, my brother-in-law who really gets around. Still, Lydia has never been a fool. Have you learned anything?"

"I arrived only a very short time ago and came directly here, Mr. Barr. I hoped to get some information out of you. Your sister gave me no indication of what to expect."

"Do you wish me to call Lou? He lives here also."

"I think," the Black Bat said, "that a conference is in order."

Duke arose and walked to the closed door. He turned and shook his head doubtfully. "I wish you'd remove that mask. Talking to you is like doing business with a phantom. But I suppose you have reasons. I'll get Lou."

He returned in three minutes accompanied by Lou Varden. Lou was about forty-five, slim, serious faced and tolerant looking. His manner was brisk and efficient. He had thick brown hair and dark, shrewd eyes. For one bare instant he seemed alarmed at the sight of this black-clad, black-hooded man. Then he recovered his poise and sat down.

"So you are the Black Bat," he said slowly. "I thought you were nothing more than a legend. Of course, you can't expect me to trust you. Anyone could hide behind a mask."

"Lydia Barr implied you would be co-operative, Mr. Varden. I'm here to find out what is wrong with this city. I intend to do so, with or without your help. It doesn't make a particle of difference to me where the trail leads or against whom I have to take action."

VARDEN glanced at Duke. "You know, Duke, I believe him. Mask or not, I think we should do all possible to assist him."

"In what?" Duke asked impatiently. "He comes here and says he wants to uncover something sinister in this city. Do you know of anything wrong?"

Varden crossed his legs and ran two fingers along the crease in his trousers. "Our city, Black Bat, has the lowest crime record in the state, maybe the nation. Our taxes are not excessive. Our people seem to be happy and prosperous. Now does that give the slightest indication of anything wrong?"

"It does not, and I admit it. Your city officials are elected over and over again with hardly any opposition. Municipal financial statements are in perfect order. There is no graft."

"Then what do you expect to find here?" Varden demanded.

"Whatever worries you, and Duke Barr and his sister. The reason why one of the cleverest confidence men in history happens to be very friendly with your so-called excessively honest Police Department. Why, when crime is at such a low ebb, you have the longest list of missing persons I've ever seen for a city this size. In five years more than thirty people have vanished and never been found."

"People vanish everywhere," Duke objected.

"But there is usually a concentrated effort to find them," the Black Bat said.

"Here they are reported missing, some routine questions are asked and that ends it. Why?"

Varden uncrossed his legs. "You're a detective of sorts. Why don't you find out? Duke and I don't know."

"I intend to, and it seems, without your assistance. Lydia was wrong in having faith in you two."

"Now see here," Duke protested, "our family began this city and built it up. I'd do anything within my power to

"Perhaps. I don't remember," Duke said. "Most of our young men are athletes. We import a lot of people good at sports too. The city is sports crazy, but you can't blame them. Their livelihoods depend upon sports. The more we can promote here, the better."

Varden started to say something, but at that moment the lights went out. Duke gave a sharp cry and jumped to his feet. Varden didn't move. They heard a window open and then there was



SILK

see that the people are protected. But they are. You can investigate for years and find no one with a complaint. How can we help you under such circumstances?"

"By telling me the identity of someone who disappeared recently. That would be a starter."

Duke shrugged. "We don't know these people. They aren't important. I recall that a man named Hanray dropped out of sight a couple of months ago. He worked at the snow mill. We call one of our factories by that name because it manufactures sporting goods for winter use. He was an amateur boxer and did some wrestling too. Not very good at either."

"And the others? Were they athletes too?"

silence. After a moment Duke went to the light switch beside which the Black Bat had been standing. He snapped it on. They both blinked and looked around the room. They were the only people in it.

Varden said, "He makes dramatic exits. What do you think, Duke?"

"I don't know," Duke said. "Personally he frightens me."

"Do you think Lydia really sent him?"

"No, I don't. She has more sense. But that man, whoever he is, can turn this city inside out. I'm not sure whether or not I look forward to the prospect."

"Nor I," Varden commented. They both walked out of the room and as their voices receded, a figure in black stepped from behind full length and

heavy draperies.

The Black Bat went over to the desk at which Duke Barr had been working. He bent down and looked at the telephone on the desk, especially at the phone number placed under its plastic shield.

It was the same number someone from Lydia Barr's apartment had phoned.

CHAPTER VI

Corpse Bait



THE Black Bat kept to the darker streets. He felt safer in this town than in New York for, as Tony Quinn, he wasn't as well known here. With the hood replaced by the black hat, he looked like any ordinary citizen from a fair distance. At

closer range, the all black clothing would have aroused some interest, but the Black Bat took care that no one came too close.

He found a small tobacco store, closed for the night. He stepped into the doorway, manipulated the lock with a slim piece of flexible metal and soon had the door open. He went in, relocked the door behind him and moved unerringly through the darkness to the phone booths. There he checked the phone book for the name of Hanray, unusual enough so there wouldn't be many. There was only one. He also found a city map and studied it, getting a good idea how the city was laid out and the location of Hanray's last address.

He wondered how Silk and Butch were getting along, but resisted the temptation to phone the hotel. The wire might be tapped. It was after midnight now, and about all he had to guard against were patrolmen. People seemed to retire early here.

On his way to the Hanray address the Bat saw posters announcing the fight bill at the stadium. He passed that building on his way, and marveled at the size of it. And through his mind filtered the idea that everything seemed to hinge on sports. The welfare of the town, the amusement of its citizens, the fact that some of the missing people

were engaged in sports.

He guessed that while gambling houses were strictly taboo, there was probably more betting here than anywhere. Almost every night some sports event was in progress. He recalled the many slot machines and wondered about them. If more important gambling wasn't allowed, why these machines? Was the control of them that mysterious something which caused Lydia Barr to force an investigation? The Black Bat doubted it. While slot machines were a source of enormous profit, he had an idea the stakes behind whatever was wrong with this town, would be much greater.

Hanray's address proved to be in a modest, quiet section. The street was lined with small one-family homes. The yards were cluttered with toys, sprinklers and canvas chairs. It was a typical workers' settlement, clean and friendly.

At this hour nothing stirred. The Black Bat was practically invisible as he slipped through the darkness. He stopped behind Hanray's white and brown home, to tuck the black hat away and replace it with the hood. He also took time to check his gun.

He knew every move he made from now on was filled with danger. The spy at Lydia Barr's apartment had phoned the house where Duke Barr and Lou Varden lived. Both of these men knew the Black Bat was very apt to investigate this man Hanray, who'd been missing.

The Black Bat found a window open at the rear of the bungalow. He raised it higher, swung up and over the sill and found he was in a living room. It was dark and empty. He reached the tiny hallway and saw two hats hanging on a clothes tree. One was battered and oily, as if worn to work. The other was a cheap felt, fairly new, and both were the same headsize. Whoever wore them had a small head.

The Black Bat moved toward the rear of the house again where he knew the bedrooms were located. One had the door wide open and someone was stretched out on the bed. The Black Bat stepped up to it and awakened the sleeping man by gentle taps on the cheek.

THE man opened his mouth to let out a screech, but the Black Bat's

gloved hand covered his lips. He said, "Take it easy. I'm not here to harm you. I want to help in finding the Hanray who disappeared."

The Black Bat removed his hand. Though the darkness he was examining this man carefully. It was now two in the morning and if he was a hard working sort, he must have been in bed for three or four hours. Yet he didn't look too sleepy. Being awakened like that would naturally make any man wide awake, but there'd be traces of sleep in his eyes, at least faint marks of the pillow on his face.

"Who-who are you?" the man asked.

"The Black Bat. I want to find Hanray, the man who vanished. Are you related to him?"

"Brother. How come you're interested in him?"

"There is no time for questions. What were the circumstances under which he disappeared?"

"He-he was a boxer. Never got further than the prelims, but he was fairly good. Five weeks ago he battled Ziggy Trent. He lost. He never came home. Just disappeared. He told me he tried to win real hard, but Ziggy was too good for him."

"He did," the Black Bat commented dryly. "Now if he vanished right after the fight, how did he happen to tell you he tried to win? Do you know where he is?"

"No. No, I don't know. He disappeared, that's all."

"I think you do know. Your brother is afraid of something. You're afraid of the same thing. He might talk to me, and I can remove the cause of this fear. Where is he?"

"You ain't a cop or anything like that?"

"I assure you any police officer would be delighted to arrest me. Talk!"

"He's hiding at the old inn just over the city line. It's called the Iron Kettle, but it got on fire a couple of years ago and it was never fixed up. Honest, I can't tell you anything more. I bring him stuff to eat. He won't say a word to me. Just says it's better if I don't know."

"Thank you," the Black Bat said. "Keep this quiet."

He stepped out of the room, closed the door and hurried toward the window through which he had entered. On his way he glanced at the hats in the hall-

way. They certainly were not meant to fit the head of the man he'd just interviewed. There was a mild grin tracing the Black Bat's lips.

This alleged brother was someone planted there. The Black Bat was being tricked into a visit to this abandoned inn at some outlying section. He saw the garage at the rear of the house and entered it. There was a cheap sedan inside. Its radiator was very hot. With another grin, he opened the garage doors, got behind the wheel and stepped on the starter. He drove away, made plenty of noise doing it and went around the block. When he came past the house again, it was still in darkness. The man he'd talked to must have heard the car being stolen and yet he'd raised no alarm.

The Black Bat remembered from his study of the map, how to reach the North Highway out of town. He and Silk had driven into town via the South Highway and he'd noticed no abandoned inn so he reasoned it was to the north.

When he passed the place, it was at a fifty-five mile an hour clip but he had a good look at it—a two story wooden structure with its rear gutted by fire. He pulled off the road half a mile further on, left the car there and made his way across fields and pasture land to the rear of the inn.

EVERYTHING was eerily quiet. He drew his gun and snapped the safety to the off position. Getting into the place was simple. The whole back of it seemed to be wide open.

The Black Bat purposely knocked down an old burned through board. Then he ducked and his eyes swept out over the night enclosed area to the rear. He saw nothing move. If this was a trap, they were being very cagey about it.

He was soon blocked by a closed door. One that seemed to have been installed since the fire because it bore no traces of the flames' ravaging. And it was stout. The Black Bat turned the knob and discovered the door was not locked. He opened it and picked up a bit of charred wood to use as a wedge. This held the door wide in case he had to make a fast exit.

Then he saw the man seated near one of the front windows. He was merely outlined, and to average eyes would have been unrecognizable. The Black Bat made out his features, hair

coloring and even the color of his wide open and staring eyes.

The man seemed to be quietly waiting, but the Black Bat knew he was dead. Quite automatically, the Black Bat started toward the corpse, but stopped cold. In approaching, he'd come within range of the window and he had an idea once his silhouette flashed across the window, that would be the signal for all hades to break loose.

Therefore, he doubled up and kept below the window, even resorting to a crawl as he neared the body. The man had been stabbed to death, and he was a stranger. The Black Bat managed to rifle the pockets. He found enough to identify the man as Roper Sterling, the con-man whom Silk had recognized.

Sterling, the Black Bat guessed, was a better con-man than a psychologist, for the moment he revealed that Silk would and probably had, known him, he was doomed. Now, more than ever, the Black Bat realized that some very important scheme lay behind the camouflage of perfect government and a crimeless city that represented Bartown.

There was nothing among the dead man's possessions which revealed in the slightest what this scheme was. One thing was quite certain, Hanray could not be hiding here. The chance that he'd committed this kill was remote. In the first place, anybody like Roper Sterling wouldn't have made a rendezvous of a deserted, burned out building. Secondly, Hanray would have left some trace of his presence and there was none.

The Black Bat backed away quietly. From a distance he surveyed the scene again. Somehow this was a trap and ready to be sprung. He was meant to give away his presence by tripping a signal of some sort. His uncanny vision penetrated the gloom, looking for whatever trigger had been arranged.

Then he noticed that the corpse was seated in a chair which tilted backwards a trifle. Under the front leg of the chair were bits of wood. If it was approached from the front and the corpse handled from that angle, the chair would tip over. Only the fact that the Black Bat had worked from the side and operated with gentle hands, had saved him from setting off the alarm.

Someone would be outside, waiting and watching. When the corpse moved, so would the lurking killers outside.

It was crude but effective enough, the Black Bat realized.

He reached the door which he had left open and peered outside. If the place was surrounded, the men hugged the ground hard for he saw no signs of them. They were probably concentrated at the front of the place and depending upon quick action to get the Black Bat, rather than attempts to surround him. Perhaps they even knew of his proficiency in spotting situations like this and took pains that no clues would be scattered around for him to detect.

The Black Bat saw an old keg lying on its side. He moved it into position and set the thing rolling in the direction of the chair. A nudge would topple it over. Then he raced away into the night, as silently and invisibly as a spectre.

He was fifty feet away when the guns opened up. The deadly chatter of machine-guns, was interspersed with the duller boom of riot rifles, and all the bullets were concentrated upon the vicinity of that front window.

THE BLACK BAT laughed harshly as he kept on running to where his car was parked. The trap had been sprung without a victim and it would take those men a little while to discover that fact. While they were discovering it, the Black Bat had something to do.

Driving away at high speed, he located a side road, went down it and cut back to the main highway. In fifteen minutes the car was parked near the home of Hanray, the missing pugilist. The Black Bat used the same means of entry.

This time there were lights in the kitchen and the front hall and a third hat hung from the clothes tree. It matched the others in size and was also worn and dirty—a second work hat.

Taking no chances, the Black Bat drew his gun, opened the kitchen door and after the man at the kitchen table had a look at him, the lights went out.

"Keep your voice down and don't move," the Black Bat warned. "Take your hand off that bread knife. I can see every move you make. I'm the Black Bat, and this is the second time I have been here tonight."

"The—second?" the man questioned vaguely.

"On my first visit I found someone supposedly asleep in your bedroom. Do



CAROL

you keep boarders?"

"Somebody asleep. . . . Look, no one was in here."

"You work late, don't you? If you'd returned earlier or my first visit had been later, I think you'd have been knocked out. There was such a man here and he sent me on a chase which ended in a trap. You are the real brother of the fighter called Hanray?"

"Yes. He is my brother Bill. I'm Hank."

"Good. What happened to your brother?"

"I don't know. I think he ran away. Before his last fight he was scared of something. Acted very nervous and for awhile I didn't think he was even going into the ring."

"What happened the night of the fight?"

"I don't know. The odds were on Bill. He wasn't so bad. Not a first rater maybe, but okay for the next to last bout. He stopped one after about two minutes of the first round, and he went down like a log. He ran smack into the punch. It wasn't even meant to floor him, but it did."

"And the betting was all on your brother?"

"No. The heavy stuff went on the other guy. My brother was getting a little old,

flabby and winded easy. But I figured he could take this palooka without much trouble and so did he—at first."

"Do you think he lost the fight purposely?"

"No, sir. The way I see it he was ducking a left jab and ran smack into a roundhouse right. One of those punches wound up and swung more for effect than the damage they do on account of the other guy can see 'em coming a mile away."

"So your brother may have lost the fight accidentally and the betting was on him. What odds?"

"Three to one. What are you driving at, mister?"

"I don't know yet, but what you have told me may provide the opening wedge. Your brother didn't come home that night?"

"I never saw him after they lugged him out of the ring."

"No letters, phone calls? He had no specific reason for ducking out of sight?"

"None. I waited a couple of days and then I told the cops. They said they'd look around for him and hinted he might be hanging around bars and staying drunk after being beaten like that. Only he didn't drink. He acted like he did, but that was because he'd been punched around too much."

"Very well," the Black Bat said. "Now understand this. If certain people know I have interviewed you, or even guess it, I wouldn't give a dime for your life. I haven't been here, you have no idea someone was in your home posing as you. All you do know is you came home from work, made yourself something to eat and then went to bed. Nothing happened."

"Sure. I understand. And I'm taking your advice. I read enough about you to know you don't bluff or lie. You think my brother was knocked off, maybe?"

"I'm quite certain of it."

"And I had a feeling all along. Yes, sir, I said Bill never stayed away like that. I figured maybe he was dumped in a lake or something. I don't want any of the same treatment so I'll be careful— Hey—hey, where are you?"

Hank Hanray had been talking to himself for the last minute or two. He shuddered, snapped on the lights and went back to his food. But he had no appetite. He sat there, staring at the table.

CHAPTER VII

Man Who Lied



VIA THE roof and ladder route, the Black Bat was soon at the hotel. Silk and Butch were waiting tensely.

Stripped of the somber regalia which Silk promptly secreted in a cleverly constructed slot in the largest suitcase, Tony Quinn sat down and relaxed. He

gave them a full story of what had happened.

"I didn't see the men who sprung that trap," he added, "because the neighborhood was distinctly unhealthy, and I went away as fast as possible. But because of the types of guns used, I'm sure they were local police. It would have been a perfect set-up. The dead con-man and the Black Bat riddled. The local cops could say they were tipped that the Black Bat had murdered a man. That he was trapped, fought back and was exterminated."

"They certainly mean business," Silk said acidly.

"Indeed. Butch, what happened to you?"

Butch related his experience with the two detectives. Quinn thought that over, adding it to his store of information.

He said, "They don't want crooks and crime here under any circumstances. You asked around, acting like a crook on the make. This was reported and you were escorted out of town on a figurative rail. They're trying to keep the town as crime free as possible and doing an excellent job of it. They have a reason for this."

"I know what it is," Silk said. "They want no competition."

"In a way, yes. Mainly though they wish to keep the citizens happy and contented. Appreciative of good government so the same people will be elected to office over and over again. Why? The official positions of these politicians are necessary to the promotion of whatever scheme they operate, and I think I know what it is."

"If you ask me," Butch broke in, "it has to do with sports. I never saw such a sports nutty town in my life. Mention a fighter's name and six guys will give you odds on his next scrap."

"Yes, that's quite correct," Quinn admitted. "I believe that your confidence man friend, Silk, was brought here to supervise or organize the crooked angles of the scheme. His usefulness was used up long ago and when he offered danger because you might know him, he was sacrificed."

Silk smoked quietly for a moment. "Sterling was perfect in rigging big stuff, laying the groundwork for some colossal gyp. He knew just how people would react, and he could pick a sucker better than any man I ever knew. In some way the people of this town are being gypped and they don't even know it."

"We're going to tell them," Quinn said quietly. "As soon as we have the facts. Which are sadly lacking to date. Their plans concern sports. The massive arena, the very natural instinct for sports in this town, all add up to this. There have been an unusually large number of people reported missing of late. Almost all of them men and a large number were fighters or wrestlers. I think they were probably done away with."

"But you can't hide all those bodies," Butch protested.

"You could if you had the right kind of backing. Remember, these people run this town and supervise everything in it. That probably includes cemeteries."

"I ran across a crematory yesterday," Butch said. "Big place near one of the graveyards."

"Then, possibly, we have the answer. We need the proof. Getting it will be hard and dangerous. They know we're here and why we came. They have already pulled a few strings and they'll go much further to stop us. Therefore, we have to take the initiative."

"You name it," Silk offered hopefully.

"There is a fight tomorrow night. Butch, you have to move carefully. It was bad business slugging Lanahan, but I hardly blame you. Silk, you will help. Both of you will wander around tomorrow, getting the low-down on the fight. I want to know what sort of men are fighting the main bout. What the odds are and who the favorite is. The quicker I have that information, the faster we can plan our strategy."

Silk shook his head from side to side. "It would be risky for me to ask too many questions, sir. Unless you mean I should put on one of those disguises I used to wear in the old days when I made my living as a con-man."

"That's exactly what I mean, Silk. You wore those so often they became second nature to you. They are more of a personality than a disguise. So get them out. You will recall I told you to bring them along."

"They are in the same secret slot with your black clothes," Silk said.

"Good. Butch, you'd better stay here for the night, but get going before dawn. Find a hideout until things begin buzzing around town, and then start your campaign. Report here after dark but early enough so that we can take measures if we decide tomorrow night's fight has anything to do with what we're trying to find out."

WHEN Tony Quinn woke up the next morning, Butch was gone and Silk was busy supervising a room service waiter who brought two breakfasts. It was after ten o'clock. Quinn took a shower, put on a robe and sat down to eat. He rumbled his already mussed hair and grinned at Silk.

"You slept late, sir," Silk said.

"We're on a vacation. Besides, I'll bet you weren't up too early yourself."

Silk passed over the morning newspaper after first glancing at the window shades to be certain they were drawn far enough so no prying eyes could see blind Tony Quinn reading.

Squarely in the center of the front page was the shot of Tony Quinn, held by a cop and with the tin cup hanging from the coat button. It wasn't a very flattering picture and the expression on Quinn's face was pathetic.

"My gosh," Quinn grunted. "Do I look like that? And the article! Silk, it's a brief masterpiece of sarcasm. It relates how I was hauled to the police station, how I received official apologies and then, as the final punch, it goes on to say that the police were quite proper because I am a blind man."

"Nasty stuff," Silk opined. "The editor who passed that has a heart made of dry ice."

Quinn laid the newspaper down and tackled his grapefruit with gusto. "The editor of that newspaper, Silk, is part and parcel of this whole scheme of things. They'd be certain to have the papers on their side. Read the sports pages."

Silk opened the paper and whistled. "Say, fully one half of this rag is devoted to sports! Two full pages on the fight tonight. Seems this man Maloney is the favorite. His picture and that of Hudak, his opponent, are side by side. Between the pair I'll take Firpo."

Quinn looked intently at the pictures. "This man Maloney seems familiar. I can't place him, but he's been around and not in very good company. Well, he outclasses Hudak in weight and measurements anyway. They make that plain enough."

Silk turned the page. "Tomorrow night wrestling and basketball. I wonder if the movies do any business in this town?"

Quinn sipped his coffee, lit his pipe and leaned back. "Suppose," he said, "you find out. Work it this way. Disguise yourself, slip out and return as a prospective guest. Check in and in that way we'll have a room for Butch and also provide you with a reason for being around when you're disguised."

Silk arose. "I'd better walk out of here as myself. Then, if you have visitors, you can say I'm on an errand. I'm

already wearing the clothes of my other identity beneath those I have on. The makeup I can apply in any deserted place. Now what are my orders?"

"The same as last night. Find out all you can about tonight's fight. Try laying bets on either man. Substantial ones. See how fast they are taken and with what kind of enthusiasm. Get talking about the fight Bill Hanray was in some weeks ago, just before he vanished. I'd like details of that too. Take Hanray's side and see what happens."

Silk was gone fifteen minutes later. The waiter came for the table and Quinn let him in. He watched the man handle the table and dishes and got the idea this was the first time he'd ever done this sort of work. There was a suspicious bulge on his hip and he might as well have been wearing his detective's badge. He was very slow and tip-toed twice to peer into the bedroom. Finally he was gone and Quinn enjoyed a quiet laugh.

He turned on the hotel radio, sat down and smoked peacefully. Any observer would swear this was just a blind man listening to his favorite radio programs.

Quinn scarcely heard them. His mind was busy going over the whole string of weird events from Lydia Barr's strange offer to solve the murder of John Powell if her home town was cleaned up. A city that, on the surface, needed less cleaning than any municipality Quinn had ever known.

He thought of the way a spy in Lydia Barr's household had warned somebody that Tony Quinn was investigation bent. Someone who lived at the Barr residence and could be Duke Barr or Lou Varden who had married into the Barr clan.

They'd gone into action immediately, making a fool out of Quinn so that he'd be hampered in his investigation. Who would have confidence in a blind man who'd been mistakenly arrested as a beggar and then found to be a District Attorney?

MORE direct action had been taken immediately after the Black Bat's visit to Lou Varden and Duke Barr. It placed one or both of them under a cloud of suspicion because only they knew the Black Bat was bound to call on Hanray. The evil influences at work here had then callously killed one of their own number to provide bait for a trap and a good motive for the police

to wipe out the Black Bat as a murderer.

Lydia Barr, he felt certain, held the whole secret behind those thin, tight lips of hers. She must have a substantial reason for not granting either Quinn or the Black Bat the boon of her knowledge. She even insisted they begin from scratch. Why? The answer to that question would go a long way toward a solution.

Quinn turned his thoughts in line with the sports this town boasted. That they had something to do with the designs of avaricious men, was evident now. It was natural that a city of this type, dependent upon the manufacturing and sale of sporting equipment, would be sports mad. He believed the city always had been.

But he wondered why crooks with a large scale plan would stop at other forms of thievery. They were in an envious position to milk the city dry. He was certain most city officials were either in the pay of the gang, or an integral part of it. They dominated everything and yet chose to make their city almost crime free except for their own crooked plotting.

At one-thirty, Quinn picked up his cane and went down to the dining room. A bellhop escorted him there and every movement Quinn made was that of a blind man. He sat down, asked the waiter to read the menu and ordered lightly.

He was in the midst of his meal when he saw Lou Varden enter, look around and then walk rapidly over to the table.

The visitor said, "Mr. Quinn, my name is Lou Varden. Lydia Barr is my mother-in-law. May I sit down?"

"Of course." Quinn stretched out his hand vaguely. Varden took it in a moist hand-shake. He pulled out a chair and sat down. He ordered a sandwich and coffee, put both elbows on the table and leaned across it.

"Mr. Quinn," he said, "I talked to my mother-in-law this morning. She knows you, doesn't she?"

It was a trick question. Quinn answered it in line with some fresh planning he'd done. "Yes, I do know her. A remarkable woman. I'm very sorry to know that she is so ill."

"Don't feel sorry for her," Varden urged seriously. "Few people have lived as she has done. But I'm told you have a specific reason for visiting our city."

"That's quite true."

"Do you mind telling me what that reason is, Mr. Quinn?"

"Perhaps I do. Why should you ask?"

Varden pursed his lips for a moment. "Because this is my city, Mr. Quinn. Yes, mine. My wife's people founded it and brought it up to its present important status. Anything that has to do with Barrtown or its people, concerns me. And when a New York District Attorney, noted for his handling of important crime cases, pays us a visit, then something is in the wind."

"Your mother-in-law told you nothing?"

"Only that you swore her to silence, and she was respecting her oath. She told me what information I wanted must come from you."

"Did you ever know a man named John Powell?" Quinn asked bluntly.

Varden sat erect, as if someone had prodded him hard in the back. His face became gray, his eyes haunted. He recovered his wits by sheer will power.

"I—do not know such a man," he lied.

CHAPTER VIII

The Black Bat's First Move



QUINN carefully felt for his coffee cup, raised it to his lips and drank. He said, "I'm here in connection with the murder of John Powell. Official business, and I am not in a position to release my information. I'm sorry."

"Someone in Barrtown murdered this

man, then?"

"Perhaps. Let's say the trail led here, and I followed it."

Varden nodded heavily. "I'll have our police department cooperate in every way, Mr. Quinn. Every city official is at your service. But how is my mother-in-law involved? Can you tell me that?"

"She lives close by the scene of the crime. I thought she might know something. Evidently she did not. As for being helped by your police, no thanks. I've already enjoyed their assistance."

"Yes, I know." Varden flushed a dull pink. "I'm sorry about that."

"Tell me," Quinn asked, "why you have undertaken to talk with me and not Lydia Barr's brother. She referred me to him, incidentally, and I intend to see him soon."

Varden said, "Because I'm a closer kin to the Barr family than Duke. He isn't really Lydia's brother. Her father adopted him when his parents were killed in a factory accident. Duke legally uses the name, but insists that all family matters be handled by Lydia, my wife or myself."

Quinn asked Varden to signal a waiter for the check. Then he added, "Consider the whole matter closed, Mr. Varden. I may not need any help from anyone."

Quinn paid the check and began to arise. Varden put a hand on his shoulder and urged him back into the chair. "I've one more question to ask, Mr. Quinn. You know the Black Bat, of course."

"Yes. It so happens there is a warrant for his arrest which I hope will never be used. The Black Bat has been

[Turn page]

Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

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

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights,

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

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

of very important help to me. Why do you ask?"

"The Black Bat is in town. He visited Duke and me last night. Is he working on this Powell murder case too?"

Quinn showed surprise. "Why, not to my knowledge. The case happens to be more or less routine, something the Black Bat seldom takes a hand in. Did he ask about Powell?"

"No. And I'm not at liberty to tell you what he wanted to know. I'm sorry you don't want to cooperate. We could help you."

"Perhaps, though I doubt it. Will you lead me to the elevators, please? My man is doing a bit of work for me, and I'm alone."

Quinn left Varden a frowning, deeply-puzzled man. Back in the suite, Quinn was puzzled too. Knowing that Duke Barr wasn't a blood relation was interesting, but he thought that Varden had been almost eager to impart this news. At any rate, he had them guessing.

Half an hour later, Quinn had another visitor. The Chief of Police who offered his excuse for calling as a formal apology for the tin cup incident. But he soon got around to the Powell murder, admitting that Varden had told him about Quinn's mission.

"I don't want to seem officious," the Chief said, "but up here you have no authority, Mr. Quinn. No standing and no right to go about questioning our citizens. You understand it is for their protection that I insist you inform me of your intended actions."

Quinn laughed. "When I'm ready to make an arrest, I'll certainly let you know, Chief. I don't intend to upset the routine of your department. And I'd like a favor in return for the mistake your men made last night."

"Whatever you like." The Chief looked hopeful.

"Someone asked me if I'd enjoy attending the fights tonight. I would but tickets are hard to get."

"Would you tell me what enjoyment a blind man gets out of a fight?"

"Not at all. I could see once, years ago. I was a fight addict in those days. I like to hear the slap of leather. Besides, my man gives me a rapid-fire description of what goes on. A blind man, chief, can enjoy many more things than you'd imagine."

The Chief got up ponderously. "I'll

see that a pair of the best are sent at once. And don't forget—see me if you run into any difficulties with this murder case. I'd hate to think there was a killer loose in town. We haven't had a murder in years. There was one last night, but just beyond our city limits so it isn't our headache."

Quinn turned on the radio again. Before long Silk would return with news. Then, immediately after dark, Butch would appear. That is they might return. If they muffed, they were very likely never to be seen again. Quinn hadn't forgotten that amazingly long list of unsolved disappearances.

He also began to realize that the murder of John Powell, until now completely alien to what went on in Barrtown, had taken a sudden turn and seemed directly connected. Perhaps the secret behind it explained Lydia Barr's reluctance to talk.

WHEN Silk returned, he had sore feet and meagre information. "I checked into the hotel as C. C. Rodney and I've got the key to Room 1021. I disguised myself as that straw-haired, sun-tanned country boy. I toured the city and bet—small sums in keeping with my disguise. The odds are on Maloney three to one. You can bet on Hudak and there seems to be some activity there, but Maloney is slated to win."

"Any specific reason why, Silk?"

"Hudak has broken training. He's been around town drinking and chasing generally. He broke training camp four days early and was well oiled as recently as last night. The wise boys figure it will show up. Anyway, Maloney out-classes him."

"What about other recent fights? Did the favorite always win?"

"Fifty-fifty. I looked for any chance of fixed fights and I can't find any, sir. If crooks backed all these exhibits, their man would always win. The one with the long odds. That hasn't been consistently true."

"But it did happen?"

"Oh, yes. Many times. Lots of money changed hands after every fight. They take their sports seriously here."

"What about other sports?"

"Just the same. Heavy betting and always a favorite. The odds are not even very often."

"Well, Butch will be along soon. Per-

haps he learned something more definite. He knows the fight racket and how to get about with the people who live by it."

Quinn went on to tell Silk about his visitors. At seven, Butch returned and was enthusiastically grateful for the room Silk had rented. He reported substantially the same as Silk.

"Hudak busted training plenty. But for my dough Hudak is the best man. This guy Maloney is a punk. The way he won his last three fights looked like set-ups to me. Hudak wins the hard way and he took an awful beating his last bout. Busted training then too."

"He must break training very openly," Quinn mused. "That's a suspicious angle. What else on Maloney?"

"It cost me a little dough," Butch grinned, "but I found an old-time boxer and fed him booze all afternoon. He

acter and crooked as a pig's tail."

It took Silk twenty minutes, but he returned with the necessary information. Chuck Malloy had been released from prison a year and a half ago and then promptly dropped out of sight in violation of his parole. No amount of searching had uncovered a trace of him, and he had four more years to do because of his failure to report.

He'd been sent up with a gangster-killer named McHale who was still in prison.

Quinn slapped the arm of his chair. "The break we needed. The chance to prove what I think is happening in this city. Butch, can you get to Maloney quickly—and privately?"

"Sure, with some luck. He has never been fussy about who he sees. I know where he lives. Of course, it's kind of close to fight time so he may have a lot

Next Issue: THE LOTTERY RACKETEER, a Novelet by Nels Leroy Jorgensen

talked a lot. From what he said, Maloney did time once and right after he arrived in town, he had some plastic surgery done on his face. Funny too, because he wasn't half as battered looking when he showed up. Ever hear of a guy having his nose busted and his ears spread all over his face and paying for it?"

Quinn said, "Silk, hand me this morning's newspaper and a pencil. Hurry. I've got an idea."

Quinn blacked in new outlines for the pugilist's ears and straightened his nose with a few lines. Then he studied the picture from several angles. Finally he reached for the telephone, hesitated and took his hand away.

"It's probably tapped. Silk, go to the lobby, buy a newspaper and see if you can slip into a phone booth. Or wait—they won't have the line to that room you took today wired. Go down there. Phone McGrath. Tell him who you are and ask if he knows what ever happened to Chuck Malloy. Get a complete file on Chuck and get it fast. We're working against time."

Silk hurried away. Butch became very intense. "You think this guy Maloney was Chuck Malloy, maybe?"

"I'm sure of it. The face looked familiar, but those blossoms for ears and the twisted nose threw me off. It's Chuck all right. He used to be a ham fighter. In between stickup jobs. A mean char-

acter of the boys around him and he'll be leaving for the stadium in about an hour or so."

Quinn said, "Do this. Take a chance and leave the hotel openly. Go to a phone outside and call Maloney. Tell him you're Steve McHale and you just got out of prison. Tell him you need money and you've bet heavily on him. That he'd better win. That you are sending one of your best boys around to see that he wins. The boy will be you. Maloney will be too excited to detect any similarity in the voice you use on the phone and the one you use as McHale's boy."

"But I figure that Maloney is bound to win anyhow," Butch said.

"This is a colossal gyp, handled so carefully that a hundred and fifty thousand people get taken for a ride any time the gang wishes it. And they haven't the faintest idea they've been cheated. The build-up is not for Maloney, but against Hudak and I think Maloney has orders to take a dive."

"You mean all the fights and the rest of the sports are rigged?"

"That's what I think and we may prove it. Once we do, then our job is to track down the mastermind behind it. But first we must make certain of our ground and that becomes your job."

"I'm on my way," Butch said. "And I know just how to handle this bum."

CHAPTER IX

Fixed Fight

BUTCH left the hotel without being stopped and he took elaborate pains to make certain he wasn't being tailed. Then he stepped into a phone booth and called Maloney.

"This is a pal of yours," he said.

Maloney's reply was laconic. "Hang up, punk. I'm not giving out any tips." "Maybe you would to me, huh, Chuck?"

Maloney gasped. Then he said, very deliberately, "What's this Chuck stuff?"

"My pal. Chuck Malloy. I got half a mind to turn you in. There's a four year stretch waiting for you, Chuck, and no busted nose or cauliflower ears are going to make any difference. Not so long as you got ten fingers and they make prints. Know what I mean?"

"Who is this?" Maloney wasn't so sure of himself now.

"Steve McHale. Now listen, I got out of stir a couple of days ago. I had a little dough put away, but not enough. I'm putting it all on you—to win in not more than six rounds. You wouldn't let an old pal down, Chuck?"

"Get the dough. Listen, I can't talk over the phone. Come up here and see me."

"Tell you what," Butch said, "I'll send along my favorite boy. He could tear you in half without trying. Tell him. But about the fight, my dough is placed and I'm not moving it. You better win, Chuck, or some boys in blue are going to put ink marks all over your fingertips."

Butch could almost hear Maloney sweating. He hung up, chuckled, and hailed a cab. He paid the driver off far from Maloney's apartment and took a bus to a point close by.

The apartment lobby was full of avidly talking fight fans who were waiting for Maloney to show up. Butch got through them, climbed three flights of stairs and brushed aside a pair of ex-pugs who blocked the door. He rapped hard on the panels. Maloney's voice wanted to know who it was.

"Steve sent me," Butch said. "About them tickets."

The door was unlocked. It appeared that Maloney had ejected everyone from his handlers down. He locked the door after Butch came in.

Butch said, "You know, pal, Steve didn't like the way you acted on the phone. He says you always could fight so he put five grand on you. Now if you happened to lose."

Maloney sat down and rocked slowly in the agony of his own thoughts. He looked up. "Tell Steve to get that dough off me. This is a fix."

Butch's eyes narrowed. "It's too late to switch. The only switch can be made by you. Don't take a dive. Get it?"

"Sure, but it's worth my life not to. The whole thing is rigged. I have to hit the canvas in the ninth. That's the way it's got to be."

Butch studied the tips of his fingers. "Steve is in town with about seven of his boys—including me. Now we all hate old pals who double on us. And we know how to hate a guy. You ought to remember, Chuck. Now be a good boy and bat the ears off this bum you're fighting. You can do it."

"But I can't," Maloney wailed.

"Steve says you can and Steve knows fighters. He checked up. Hudak is a bum."

"Hudak is putting on an act," Maloney cried. "So the suckers will bet on me. I smear Hudak all over the ring until the ninth and then I accidentally get in front of a steam roller he's throwing wild. He wins, but by an accident, see? It's got to be that way."

BUTCH got up. "So long, Chuck. Tomorrow morning you'll read the papers on how you lost the fight on a fluke. Tomorrow night you'll read 'em all about how some guys with badges threw you in the sneezer on a parole jumping charge. No bail for that. You go back without even a trial. Your pals can't help."

"Either way I turn it's the finish," Maloney said.

"You make up your mind," Butch said. "Of course, going to prison ain't like losing your life. If that's what the other boys have in mind. But before you go up, I think Steve will pay you a visit. With all his boys. Me too. I put five hundred on you, Chuck. I'd hate

to lose it. I'd be sore enough to take you apart little by little. Won't be much left for the parole boys to pick up, but if that's the way you want it."

Butch walked out, glanced casually at the curious eyed handlers outside and then continued on to the stadium. He had a ticket, was one of the first to enter and made it his business to find a spot from which he could easily slip down the aisle and reach any corner of the ring. He had an idea that if Maloney saw him, he'd think twice about losing the fight.

Hudak swaggered down the aisle to be greeted by cat-calls. It was clear he wasn't the favorite.

Hudak was a huge, big muscled man who looked slow. He waved clenched hands above his head, seemed to enjoy the boos and finally went to his corner. Then a vast cheer went up. Maloney was being led down to the ring. His smiles of greeting were sickly and once behind the ropes he seemed to be looking for someone. At that moment Butch ambled down the aisle. He didn't wave or call out or smile. He just let himself be seen.



BUTCH

There wasn't sufficient time for Maloney to check up and learn that Steve McHale was still behind bars. The man was so rattled he'd believe anything and Butch knew he'd put it over well.

Half an hour before the first preliminary, the stadium was packed. Well down to the front sat Silk and Tony Quinn. There were a lot of curious glances at Quinn and some smirks. The propaganda of those front page newspaper pictures had been effective.

The preliminaries didn't drag. They were good fights and fast. The crowd was getting its money's worth. The semi-final was over and the packed auditorium seemed to draw a community breath.

The two fighters shook hands, listened to the instructions and retired to their corners. The bell rang and they came out warily. Hudak lived up to his appearance. He was slow, throwing huge, clumsy swings—dangerous if they connected, but the kid in the first prelim could have stayed away from them without any trouble. Maloney was much faster, with a smooth left that kept jabbing at Hudak's face. Before two minutes were up, he'd opened a gash alongside Hudak's face.

At the end of the second, the cash customers were booing and yelling for action. Maloney's punches were being planted wherever he wanted to put them,

but there was nothing behind them. Hudak grew bolder by the fourth round and started swinging like an ox. Once he hit Maloney just over the heart and staggered him back against the ropes.

A mighty sigh of despair went up from the crowd. Their money was on Maloney, and he was turning into a bum. Butch moved closer to Maloney's corner during the minute between rounds. He made certain Maloney saw him and then he turned on his heel and went out. Taking long, angry strides as if he was in a hurry to report that Maloney was double-crossing his old pal and ex-prison mate.

SOMETHING happened when Maloney saw Butch stalk out. He came from his corner with a rush even before the bell died away. He pushed Hudak against the ropes and methodically began chopping him down. Short, vicious punches that put a ludicrous expression of pain and bewilderment on Hudak's battered face.

The fight wasn't sour any longer and the crowd howled its head off. Hudak bounced off the ropes, swung one of those crazy loops and Maloney ducked it. Hudak was looking silly now. That wild right he'd thrown should have connected, according to all the plans. Maloney was supposed to punish him and make it look good, then stick his chin in front of a punch and dive.

It didn't work that way. Maloney was in it to win because he was more afraid of Steve McHale than he was of the crooks who staged these fights. Hudak fell into a clinch and he seemed to be yelling something in Maloney's ear.

Maloney shook his head, and pushed Hudak away and doubled him up with a straight right to the stomach. Then he carefully thrust out a slow left, moving Hudak's head into position. Maloney's right cocked, aimed and let go. Hudak hit the ropes, slid to the floor and sat there, eyes glazed, chest heaving while the crowd screeched its collective head off.

The referee made the count slow. He could have tallied a thousand for all the good it would have done Hudak. His handlers finally dragged him off and Maloney stepped to the middle of the ring. The referee raised his hand and Maloney responded to the cheers with the most reluctant smile a winning fighter had

ever shown.

They hustled him away then and the stadium began to empty. The cash customers had enjoyed their money's worth. The jabbering was still intense. Silk and Quinn were among the last to leave, for a blind man has no business being crushed in a mob.

Quinn's own car was parked directly out front, by special courtesy of the Police Department. Silk helped him into it, got behind the wheel and drove away. He cut down one rather dark and very quiet street. Quinn climbed into the back seat, shed his outer clothing and replaced it with the Black Bat's outfit.

"Butch," he told Silk, "will watch Maloney until he reaches his home. There I'll try to take over. What happens from now on must involve a lot of luck on our side or Maloney will pay for what he did tonight."

"Do you mean that he'll be slated to disappear?"

"I do. They'll hardly try to take him at the stadium. Too many people around. And he'll probably be accompanied home, but if I know Maloney, he'll insist on being alone once he is safe at home. Because he's going to run out if he can. That's why I have to be there before he arrives."

The Black Bat left Silk not far from where the fighter lived. Within five minutes he had picked the lock of Maloney's apartment door and was inside. He saw two bags packed and ready for a quick getaway. The Black Bat entered the bedroom, loosened the electric light bulbs in the bed lamp and the overhead light and then crouched down behind a big, overstuffed chair.

CHAPTER X

Ride to Death



HE DIDN'T have long to wait. The door opened and Maloney came in. With him were half a dozen friends. Maloney pushed them out into the hall.

"No celebration tonight," he said. "Hudak plastered a couple of good ones and I don't feel so hot. To-

morrow we'll do the town right. So long, boys."

Maloney closed the door, walked half way across the room and turned. He went back, opened the door again and called out, "Hey—you. I want to talk to you."

The Black Bat saw Butch walk in. Maloney locked the door, fumbled in the kitchenette and produced a bottle. He killed an eighth of it in one long gulp and passed the bottle to Butch.

"You stick around," he said. "I may need help. You got me into this. I was supposed to take a dive and I didn't, because Steve had dough on me and Steve is my friend. Understand?"

"What are you worrying about?" Butch wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and put the bottle on a table. "Anybody gets mad at you for winning, Steve and his boys will back you up. What's here but a lot of punks."

"Punks!" Maloney shrieked. "Listen—the guys who run these fights don't fool around. You do like they say or something happens."

"What, for instance?"

"I—don't know for sure. But it happens all right. Now we're getting out of here before they send a committee over to see why I won the fight."

Maloney hastily threw a few more things into one of the bags, closed it and reached for his hat. There was a gentle tap on the door. Maloney froze and turned perfectly white. Butch began making fists out of his big hands.

The Black Bat stepped out of the bedroom. He held a gun in his hand. He moved up behind Maloney and swung the gun once. Maloney started to fall. Butch seized him and held the man erect.

"In the bedroom," the Black Bat said. "Then you open the door and tell those men Maloney skipped out. We need him. He's so frightened he'll talk his head off."

Butch carried the big fighter into the bedroom, propped him against the closet wall and closed the door. The Black Bat stepped out of sight. Back in the living room. Butch picked up the whiskey bottle, yelled some angry incoherent words and the insistent knocking on the door stopped. Butch unlocked it. Three men came in.

One of them said, "Hello, Maloney."

Butch sat down heavily. They were

mistaking him for the fighter. It seemed best to follow through. He raised the bottle to his lips and mumbled a greeting.

The spokesman for the trio eyed Butch's face, still battered from his encounter with Lanahan and the other detective. He said, "Hudak rammed home a few, huh?"

Butch said, "Do I know you guys?"

"Not yet, but you will. Get up, Maloney. A certain party wants to have a talk with you."

Butch got to his feet. For a moment he considered piling into the three of them but one man, a slim runt, had his right hand deep in a coat pocket and he wagged the pocket suggestively.

Butch thought he'd better go along. He put on his hat and walked out, closely followed by the trio. The Black Bat gave them two minutes, slipped out himself and used a rear exit. Silk was cruising about and the Black Bat waited impatiently. He saw Butch get into a sedan and two of his captors ranged themselves on either side of him. The runt got behind the wheel.

As their car slid away from the curb, another rolled up to take its place and one man got out. It was Duke Barr. He looked curiously at the disappearing sedan and then walked into the apartment house.

SILK came around the corner. The Black Bat signalled, took a long chance and ran out to meet him. He settled down beside Silk.

"Follow that sedan just turning the corner. Don't miss, Silk, because Butch is inside. A committee mistook him for Maloney. It seems that the big boys here don't use local talent when an execution is called for."

"They won't get away," Silk promised.

The Black Bat never took his eyes off the sedan ahead of them. It proceeded up an avenue and seemed to be heading for the outskirts. The Black Bat drew his gun and rolled down the window beside him.

He said, "Maloney is still inside his apartment, but I'm worried about him too. Duke Barr just went in. If he happens to be the boss of this crooked outfit, we may lose Maloney. But Butch is in trouble too and he's far more important."

The sedan picked up speed as it neared the city limits. The Black Bat's lips tightened beneath the hood. He said quietly, "It's time. This has to be done fast. Pull alongside and if they won't stop, crash them. We'll have a hard time explaining how Tony Quinn's car got mixed up this way, but with Butch in danger we can't take any chances."

Silk nodded, leaned over the wheel and the powerful motor began to throb. The men in the sedan realized what was happening. They put on a spurt of speed, but Quinn's car was souped up and there was no getting away from it.

One of the crooks threw a bullet at the car. Silk gave it a full gun and was alongside. The Black Bat could see into the car easily. Butch was doubled up. One of the men was edging back, pointing his gun at Butch's head.

The Black Bat shot him through the chest. He put two bullets past the driver's head, smashing the windshield. The car began to careen wildly, but Silk swerved with it avoiding any contact.

The driver of the kidnap car saw a figure in black climb onto the running board, saw the hood and the menacing gun and stepped on the brake. The Black Bat waited until both cars were moving slowly. He moved to the running board of the sedan. Silk stepped on it and shot away. Possibly he would get away before any of the men could fix Tony Quinn's machine in their minds for later identification.

The Black Bat, gun level, said, "You two—step out with your hands clasped on top of your heads."

They obeyed. The Black Bat lined them up, stepped behind the pair and extracted their guns. Then he gestured in the direction of the cemetery a hundred yards down the road.

"I'm giving you a chance you don't deserve. If you show up in this town again, you'll live exactly up to the moment I see you."

They raced away afoot. The Black Bat climbed into the back seat of their car. Butch was groggy from a blow across the head, but he was coming out of it and trying to untangle himself from the dead man who had fallen across his back.

The Black Bat hauled the dead man away. He helped Butch transfer to the front seat. Butch managed to summon a weak grin.

"I wasn't expecting to be slugged so soon. I figured it was about time to take them and then I got it."

"Start driving back, if you feel able," the Black Bat said.

"I'm okay," Butch told him. "I never was out completely. It was just that I couldn't even lift a finger. That boy knew exactly where to slug me or he was plain lucky. We were almost at the end of the ride. I heard them say there'd be nothing but ashes left."

The Black Bat hauled out the dead crook, placed him beside the road and affixed a small black sticker in the center of his forehead. It was shaped in the outline of a bat in full flight. The symbol of the Black Bat.

He climbed into the car and Butch drove off. The Black Bat said, "They were going to take you to that low building over on the right, Butch. It looks as though anyone who double-crossed the gang was taken there, murdered and reduced to ashes. It's a crematory, probably city owned and operated. A handy method of removing enemies or traitors without leaving a trace."

Butch shuddered. "Those guys aren't fooling. Not when they rig up stunts like that."

"No, they aren't fooling. Because they have built up one of the biggest gyp games on record. We'll talk about that later on. I think this is Silk coming up behind us now. I'll transfer to my own car. You drive this sedan into town, abandon it and then go back to Maloney's place. If he is there, take him away to a safe place and hold him. Contact Silk and we'll be around later to try and make him talk. I doubt he knows very much, but we can't afford to let any opportunity pass us by."

IN HIS own car again, the Black Bat switched back to the clothing of Tony Quinn. Silk made a wide detour around the outskirts of the city and came back to it from a completely different direction. They passed a motorcycle cop who rode beside them for a short distance and eyed the car with open curiosity.

A hotel employee put the car in the garage and Silk piloted Quinn to their suite. Once again Silk inspected the rooms, searching for a microphone. He told Quinn that the room had been searched.

"By someone who knows how to do it, too," he said. "It would take an expert to tell our things had been gone through, but I'm an expert. Especially when I arranged everything so I would know. And, incidentally, how are we doing with this case?"

Quinn sat with his back toward the windows. He said, "Not too badly. We threw a real scare into them tonight by proving their methods aren't infallible."

"Suppose you tell me just how they work it, sir. I think I know, but there are a lot of little things missing."

"The cleverness of the scheme lies in its simplicity. Here we have a city operated by a crooked administration, but so neatly I doubt a handful of citizens even suspect. First the crooks gained control. It wasn't done in a hurry, but well planned. Then they proceeded to really clean up the place and give it an envious safety and crime record. But all the while they built up an undercover organization to handle the sports."

"The fights, baseball, football and basketball games are all fixed?" Silk asked.

"Every one. Some are fixed so the citizens will win a little. I expect that phase of it came from your confidence man friend who was called in to lay the ground work. This is nothing more than a perpetual con game on an enormous scale. Like all things of this sort, arrangements are made for the suckers to make a killing now and then. The crooks can afford it."

"Even before they took over, this city was dependent upon sports for its living and everyone here is a sports fan. So it was easy to organize properly. The crooks forego looting the city treasury because what they'd get there is peanuts compared to the cut from crooked sporting events."

Silk nodded. "They draw on the whole countryside as well as the city itself, sir. But tonight Hudak was built up as a bum, yet he was supposed to win the fight by connecting with one of those crazy swings he threw all over the ring. You made Maloney win. I suppose the crooks lost a bale of money on that one."

"They did. By making Hudak such a poor bet and yet taking all the money on Maloney they could get, gave me an idea of what was going on. The good citizens see nothing wrong because the

city operates these fights and they trust their city officials. Why not—when they have such an excellent administration, such low taxes and all the benefits they have received for so long. It's blinded them by the very glow of the honesty their elected officers show. And yet, by these fixed fights, the crooked element must have cleaned up millions. Without a hitch! With no recriminations! Few mistakes and those remedied by simply getting rid of whoever made them."

"And who," Silk asked, "do you think is behind it?"

Quinn wagged his head. "That I cannot answer. The corporation counsel, the chief of police, the mayor—everyone connected with the government has a finger in the pie, but I wonder if even they know which hand actually directs them."

"No clues of any nature, sir?"

"Only that the spy planted at Lydia Barr's apartment in New York made a phone call to the Barr residence here, apparently for instructions which brought about the initial attack on us. We've got a pair of suspects at either place. The grandson, Edward Ware, and the crippled cousin Rogers, who live in New York. Lou Varden, the son-in-law, and Duke Barr who is supposed to be Lydia's brother and isn't."

"Isn't? I thought—"

"Most everyone believes Duke is a blood relation of the Barr clan. In fact, he is an adopted son. Lou Varden told me that as if he wanted me to know it. Varden also told me something else though he didn't realize it. I asked him if he knew John Powell, who was killed in front of Lydia Barr's apartment. Varden was convinced of my blindness and took no pains to hide the surprise and anguish that filled his eyes."

Silk, in the act of brushing a coat, dropped the brush with a clatter. "Do you mean there is a tie-up between our murder and what goes on in this town?"

"I've always thought so, Silk. In my opinion John Powell was on his way to visit Lydia Barr and somebody stopped him—with six bullets. The attack wasn't half as vicious, with all those slugs fired into him, as it was definite. The murderer wanted to be very certain Powell couldn't even murmur a word when he was found."

Silk picked up the brush and went to work again. "Varden or Duke Barr," he

said slowly. "Take your choice, I guess. And that fresh kid Ware or the crabby cripple Rogers."

"And little in the line of clues," Quinn reminded him. "Lydia knows the truth and she won't talk. Why? Answer that one and you'll find a finger pointing straight at the man we want. Because there is only one real leader. The spy living with Lydia just follows orders."

Someone scratched on the door. A signal Butch often used, but Silk took no chances. He draped a coat over his arm and held a gun beneath it. Then he unlocked the door. Butch came in, breathless and excited.

"I went back for Maloney, like you said," he told Quinn. "Only I didn't bother to bring him along. On account of somebody slit his throat. I found him in the clothes closet—dead."

Quinn was silent for a moment. Then his eyes blazed. He said, "Butch, go get Hudak, the man who lost the fight. Smuggle him into your room and knock him cold if he objects."

CHAPTER XI

Tottering Empire



BEFORE Tony Quinn finished breakfast the following morning, Duke Barr was announced and Quinn had him sent up. Duke accepted a cup of coffee and studied Quinn closely for a moment.

"I've a confession to make," he announced.

"When you showed up here, I had an idea you lived on past glories and a reputation created before you went blind. I've changed my mind. I think there is very little that gets past your attention."

"Some things do," Quinn said softly. "The color of roses in the early summer, the winter-killed leaves on the trees, even clean white snow. I miss very much, Mr. Barr."

"I mean practical things. You came here searching for the murderer of John Powell, didn't you? You visited my sister and tried to make her tell you. Maybe she knew and maybe she didn't. I doubt she'd have talked. The night you visited her, Lou received a phone call

from the house so we've known your mission all along."

"Just as you knew John Powell for some time," Quinn hazarded.

"True. He was a friend of mine. Casual, not close, but we liked one another. He bred race horses as a hobby and ran a number of them at our track. He didn't like their performances, and said so bluntly."

"Were the races fixed?" Quinn asked.

"I don't know. I just bet on them. Races can be easily fixed no matter how good the precautions against it. I want the answer to just a single question. Do you think I killed John Powell?"

"Should I think so?"

Duke shrugged and put down his coffee cup slowly. "I'm not kidding myself, Quinn. You know much more than you pretend. For instance, you know I was in New York the night of the murder. So was Lou Varden for that matter. We'd both visited Lydia, left her house together and then went our separate ways. I attended a movie. I have no alibi. Lou may have. I never asked him."

"Why should you have murdered John Powell?"

"There's no reason. We were friends. I had nothing against him. I owed him no favors, and he was not indebted to me."

"Why should Lou Varden have killed him?"

"Ask Lou. I can't answer for him, though I'll say I know of no reason."

Quinn smiled. "Mr. Barr, in my opinion you have been propagandized by a reputation that perhaps isn't all in keeping with its professed greatness. Meaning mine. I did come here to investigate the murder of John Powell, and I think I shall find the killer. But you are under the impression that I think you had something to do with it. Frankly, I've never had such an idea."

Duke whipped out a white handkerchief and mopped his forehead. "Whew!" he said loudly. "I'd have sworn you were breathing right down my neck."

Quinn picked up the morning newspaper. "There is one question you can answer for me though. What were you doing in front of Maloney's home just prior to his murder? The Maloney whose killing is described on the front page this morning."

Quinn rolled the paper and slapped it against his knee, blank eyes staring well to Duke's right. Duke fidgeted slightly.

"You move about, Mr. Quinn. I was interested in Maloney. I thought he was a pretty good fighter. When he won last night, I decided to take him under my wing. I went to his home. I found his apartment door open, but there was no one inside. I waited around for five minutes or so and then left."

"Where did you go then?"

"Home. I thought Maloney could wait until today. Martha was there. Lou's wife. I kept her company until Lou returned around one in the morning. May I ask why this murder in-

is in Butch's room, the one I reserved. Butch says he never met a fighter who was such a bum. I—rather imagine Hudak put up an argument and got the worst of it. I haven't seen him."

Quinn put the tips of his fingers together and raised his eyes toward the ceiling. "Hudak is our hole card. Dumb enough to fall for the trap I have in mind. Go downstairs, amble along the street and make sure you aren't tagged. Duck into some store and telephone Captain Dubin of the State Police. Tell him to bring along a dozen men—in civilian clothes. Men who aren't known in this town. Dubin is to come here to see me the moment he lands in town."



"Cover the Arena! Let Anybody Come in Who Wants to, but Don't Let Anybody Come Out—Alive!"

THOSE were the orders from the man behind a startling series of gruesome crimes—and his henchmen hurried to obey. In the arena was Carol Baldwin, bound and gagged—and the criminals had made certain that the Black Bat and other interested parties

knew she was there. Therefore, they expected company, and plenty of it—to walk right into a death trap!

This is only one of the dangers threatening the Black Bat in *THE COILED SERPENT*, by G. Wayman Jones, next issue's exciting complete book-length novel. It's an amazing mystery involving a gigantic conspiracy of loot and murder—a baffler that will make your hair stand on end and keep you gripping the sides of your chair tightly! Look forward to Tony Quinn at his sleuthing best on a case which is one of the high-spots of his entire career!

terests you? It can't have anything to do with John Powell and this isn't exactly an area your authority covers."

"There may be a connection," Quinn said. "At any rate if you stick to that story and can back it up, you haven't much to fear. Have you heard from Lydia?"

"She's weaker. She has a nurse, which helps. I was considerably surprised that she finally relented and let them provide care. Well, I'll be going. Very much relieved in my mind too. Thanks for the coffee, Mr. Quinn."

WHEN the door closed on him, Quinn called Silk. "What about Butch and Hudak?"

"Butch brought him here before dawn. Through the service entrance and Hudak

is in Butch's room, the one I reserved. Butch says he never met a fighter who was such a bum. I—rather imagine Hudak put up an argument and got the worst of it. I haven't seen him."

"The most amazing thing about it is the fact that a hundred and fifty thousand citizens have been skillfully duped into thinking this is the most honest and reliable city government in the world. It is, so far as the actual governing is concerned, because the crooks get all they want from all of these fixed sports events."

Dubin nodded. "There have been a few complaints and theories about fixed fights and races here. We investigated, got nowhere, and forgot the whole thing. Now it seems we made a mistake."

"Your entire force wouldn't have got far, Captain. Things are too well cov-

ered up. The clean government is a mask of course. No crooks or big gambling are allowed here. Not because the thieves who run this city object to gambling on cards, wheels and dice. Not at all, but they simply don't want the populace spending money on such things. The more cash around, the heavier the betting on these sports affairs, the bigger the take when such an event is rigged."

"You have an idea, perhaps?" Dubin was hopeful.

"I think so. It will require work on the part of you and your men. First of all, I want the telephone in this suite changed so there is an outside wire. I want it possible to connect several outside phones to this new wire also. Those of the Police Chief, the Mayor, the Corporation Counsel, the editors of the two largest newspapers, the phone in Lou Varden's factory office and the one in Duke Barr's office. All this must be done by late this afternoon. Can you do it?"

"With the help of the phone company, yes," Dubin answered. "Most of the work can be done right on their master switchboards at the phone exchange."

"Good," Quinn said. "And trust as few phone company men as possible. You might hook in on my wire, yourself, and listen. It's going to be very interesting."

"I'll let you know the moment the stage is set," Dubin said.

Quinn and Silk took a stroll immediately after Dubin left. Two men followed them all the way, but withdrew after they returned to the hotel.

"Good," Quinn said. "They are content to watch us only when we go out. Now we'll wait for word from Captain Dubin."

At three forty-five Dubin phoned. The hotel switchboard was by-passed, he reported, and it was possible to ring up the various people Quinn had mentioned.

"Fine work, Captain. Keep the wire open. In a short time, I'll signal by raising my phone. When I do so, get all those other men on the wire. They won't hang up, I assure you."

Quinn sent Silk to Butch's room with orders to bring Hudak up. This was done via the fire stairway and the operation went unnoticed. Hudak was well tied up and sported a swollen jaw which hadn't come from Maloney's gloves. Butch had scraned knuckles on his right hand.

They sat Hudak in a chair very close to the phone. Silk moved behind him and quietly lifted the phone off its cradle. Hudak didn't notice; didn't see that the instrument was placed so that it would pick up anything he said.

Quinn was seated opposite Hudak and bending forward so his voice would go into the phone too. He said, "Hudak, you took a bad beating last night."

HUDAK'S language wasn't the type customarily allowed over the telephone. Butch slapped him across the top of the head. Hudak slumped lower in the chair.

Quinn said, "It was arranged that Maloney take a dive last night. You'd come out the winner with a crack at something bigger. But Maloney double-crossed you. Is that correct?"

Hudak's language was still objectionable. Quinn silenced him. "You can talk to me or go the way Maloney went. He was killed last night. Did you know that?"

Hudak was suddenly interested. Silk handed him two newspapers. The fighter read the articles, looked bleak and threw the newspapers on the floor.

"Now you know what happened to Maloney because he double-crossed you. But Hudak—supposing Maloney didn't pull the double-cross? Supposing you did? You were supposed to hit him and failed to do so. Maloney was blamed, but the people who slit his throat know better by now. They'll be after you next. Do you wish to talk about it?"

"I don't know what it's all about," Hudak growled, but there was a tremor of uncertainty in his voice.

Quinn said, "If you are turned loose, you won't get more than ten feet out of this place before they'll pick you up. Silk—take Mr. Hudak to the bedroom window which overlooks the street. Let him see for himself that there are men waiting and watching for him."

Hudak went, mainly because Butch propelled him. When he returned, he looked bleaker than ever. Silk reported, "Those same two men are out there, sir."

"You see Hudak." Quinn's voice was calm. The lulling sort he used on juries so often. A soothing, compelling voice. "If you tell me the truth, I'll see that you are protected. If you don't, we'll have no other course open but to let you go free."

CHAPTER XII

The Final Meeting

Hudak had recognized the pair in front of the hotel. What he didn't know was the fact they were watching Quinn and didn't even realize Hudak was in the neighborhood.

The fighter was weakening. Quinn went to work on him. He told how Maloney had been found, what he looked like huddled in the clothes closet with his throat cut. He mentioned the crematory on the city's outskirts. He told of all the fixed fights, and how sometimes the men involved in them disappeared and were never heard from again.

Hudak broke. He knew little except the fact that he'd been ordered to throw several fights and to break training openly for his bout with Maloney. He told how Maloney was supposed to shove his chin in front of a roundhouse and go down for the count, but Maloney never did that. Hudak swore he'd carried out his part of the bargain. What happened was not his fault. He told how his entire local boxing career had been handled by a real estate operator named Deering and that he took orders from him.

Quinn was satisfied that every word had gone over the wire clearly. At the end of it Silk quietly replaced the phone on its hook.

Five minutes later, half a dozen state police arrived and took Hudak in tow. They carried drawn guns as they brought him out to a waiting car.

Silk watched the proceedings from the bedroom window.

Quinn talked to Captain Dubin briefly. Then he rubbed his hands, and told Silk and Butch what his plans were.

"Whoever listened to that conversation must realize now that, with Hudak in State Police custody, their scheme may be running out. Hudak mentioned only Deering, the real estate man, but the others will wonder if Hudak knows who they are, too."

"But they know you were questioning Hudak," Silk said. "They'll figure maybe the whole thing is a set-up."

"That's what they'll think, only they won't be certain. They will also believe some friend arranged things so that my questioning Hudak was literally broadcast by telephone. The fact is, they'll be so excited they won't give any time to thinking of much beyond saving their empire of crime. They'll call a meeting. That's the logical thing to do. And that's what we'll be waiting for."



MAYOR Sylvester of Barrtown didn't retain much of his official dignity as he slipped into the locker room of one of the big high schools. He was a furtive, terror-filled figure. Deering, who sold real estate, arrived next. Then came all the others.

There were fourteen of them when they were all finally assembled. The locker room contained no windows and only two doors. The entry and the door to the shower room. A husky detective was placed on guard duty outside.

The meeting was called to order by the man who dominated and led this strange assembly of thieves. He began questioning each member. Finally he addressed them.

"We should have killed Quinn the moment he arrived. Or even while he was on the way here. But he worked too fast. We were unable to get set, and then it was too late. Putting him out of the way once he'd established himself in town would have been disastrous. We'd have had every state policeman, New York City cop and F.B.I. man on our necks. For many years we've worked our little scheme and no one ever tumbled. No one who lived to tell about it."

Deering spoke up. "But Hudak talked. He mentioned my name. How do I wriggle out?"

"We'll find a way," the leader said smoothly. "Our first objective is Hudak. And if we fail there, which is possible so long as Quinn has the reins, we can eradicate all traces of our success, stand pat on the record we have accomplished in governing Barrtown and defy Quinn to prove anything. Hudak is nobody. He has no real evidence. We're safe, I tell you."

Mayor Sylvester wasn't satisfied. "What I want to know is who rigged the telephone system from Quinn's room so that we all listened in? Was that a favor or was it part of a trap?"

The leader started to answer that and stopped. The door to the outside was opening. Framed in it was the burly

detective supposed to be on guard. In the center of his forehead was a sticker fashioned in the shape of a bat.

He stood there for a moment and then toppled forward. His descent became faster and faster until he hit the cement floor with a crash. All eyes followed him down. Then there was another figure in the doorway. A man clad all in black with two guns in his hands. A man who spoke in an even, unexcited voice.

"Gentlemen, it was kind of you to oblige me by assembling in one spot."

As the Black Bat finished speaking, every light winked out. Silk, at the master switch, had accomplished that on the signal of hearing the Black Bat's voice.

Deering was the first man to break. He started running toward the door, depending on the darkness to shield his movements. A bullet ripped through his shoulder.

Someone in the crowd had a gun and opened up with it. But the doorway was empty one split second after the Black Bat fired the first shot. He was somewhere in the room. Everyone froze. Then the Mayor, who had his back against the wall no more than a dozen steps from the door, started shuffling in that direction.

"Sorry, Mayor," the Black Bat's voice seemed to come from several directions. The acoustics of this almost empty, high ceilinged room were helpful.

But Sylvester was certain that must be a bluff. How could he be seen in that intense darkness? He crouched slightly and started to spring. He went down with a bullet through his leg.

The Black Bat said, "Let me warn you. I can see every move made in this darkness. Mr. Felice, if you fire that gun you are holding, I'll knock it out of your hand with a bullet. You may never have the use of that hand again. Think twice."

THEY were all grouped together. The Black Bat didn't like that. He was watching the leader of the group narrowly. The atmosphere had an electric tension to it. If the leader managed to get behind the others, he'd be in position to make a break for the door and the man seemed to be maneuvering in that direction.

Silk was busy calling Captain Dubin at the moment and someone had to hold

these other men here even if one of their number escaped. The Black Bat knew that if he stalled the leader long enough, Silk would be ready for him and Silk had been warned to shoot first and shout his commands to stop afterwards.

"Varden," the Black Bat said. "Lou Varden, you'll be the first man to take a slug if anybody moves. Killing you won't bother my conscience much."

Lou Varden, Lydia Barr's son-in-law was scowling, but he stopped that slow movement toward the door. He said, "Hold everything, gentlemen. This is the Black Bat—a worse crook than we are and not half as clever because he brands the men he kills. He is in no position to testify against us. All he can do is hold us here until Quinn arrives. But we can also defy Quinn. There is no proof against any of us. Hudak's word against ours is a laugh. We've nothing to fear."

"What about the penalty for murder, Mr. Varden?" The Black Bat's voice came out of the gloom.

"What murder? To prove homicide you require a corpse. Have you one? Maloney's perhaps. I defy you to show a shred of evidence against any one of us. We're all alibied and not by one another. We took good care of that."

The Black Bat said, "I don't refer to the murder of Maloney. The killing I have in mind was done in New York City. The shooting of a man named John Powell who caught onto your beautiful racket here and was ready to expose you. The man whose death Tony Quinn is investigating. That corpse lies in the New York City morgue. It hasn't been cremated, as all your other victims were. What of him, Mr. Varden?"

Varden took his chance then. He suddenly stepped behind one of the men beside him, wound an arm around his neck and dragged the man backwards toward the door. Varden held a gun in his free hand. The Black Bat fired one shot and missed. Varden opened up as the Black Bat leaped aside. The bullet sang unhealthily close.

The Black Bat fired two more shots, mainly to warn Silk. He could have killed the man Varden held and then shot down Varden, but he held his fire when there was no hope of getting the leader without hitting his captive.

Near the door, Varden flung the man aside and leaped. The Black Bat snapped

two fast shots. One of them sent Varden reeling until he hit the corridor wall. But he recovered and kept going. Silk missed him by a minute.

The Black Bat raced along the walls, keeping away from the other men. He reached the door, went through it and slammed the door in place. He locked it from the outside and then hurried out into the night. Distantly, he could hear sirens screeching. Captain Dubin and an augmented force of troopers were closing in.

Silk came into view. The Black Bat sped toward him. "Varden got away. He knows I can prove he killed John Powell. He knows Lydia Barr will talk now that the city is cleaned up. So he'll try to kill her. We've got to get there as quickly as possible to stop him."

They raced toward the spot where Silk had parked the car. The Black Bat was stripping off his regalia as Silk sent the car roaring away. Again in the clothing of Tony Quinn, he drew down the mantle of blindness over his eyes. Two State Police cars roared by. A third was moving not quite so fast. At Quinn's orders, Silk blinked his lights and slowed up. The two cars met, side by side on the highway.

Quinn said, "Captain Dubin?"

"Right here," Dubin said. "I lagged behind a little to meet you as you suggested. Are we too late?"

"You'll find them trapped in the locker room of the high school. I had very little to do with it. The Black Bat put in an appearance and cornered the lot of them. There was some shooting. I don't exactly know what happened. So far as I know, the Black Bat is still there."

"We won't catch him," Dubin said. "I'm not even interested because there's one man I'd hate to lock up. Thanks, Mr. Quinn. This is a real clean up. The whole organization in town is breaking to bits. We've superseded the regular police and troopers are patrolling until we completely weed out the dishonest local cops."

"Good," Quinn said. "My work is done here. The leader of them is Lou Varden. He's a slippery customer, but I presume the Black Bat trapped him as well. I'll contact you later. Right now I have a murder case of my own to solve."

"Good luck with it," Dubin said. "And thanks again."

SILK rolled away, not too fast. Not until the police car was out of sight. Then he pushed his foot level with the floorboard and bent over the wheel.

It was a long drive to the city. Varden was surely on his way already with a good start.

Quinn said, "I told Butch to phone Captain McGrath, say he was the Black Bat and request that phone communication with Mrs. Barr's apartment be cut off. So that Varden wouldn't have a chance to contact his spy there. He'll try, and then realize if Mrs. Barr is to die, he'll have to do it himself."

Silk squeezed another four miles out of the sedan already doing eighty. Quinn kept talking.

"What a slick scheme they had!" he said, "I wonder how many years they got away with it? Fooling a hundred and fifty thousand people in Bartown, to say nothing of the victims from surrounding areas. It took patience and careful planning. First to establish themselves as models of good government so that their supervision of sports would be unquestioned. Why would anybody in his right mind even suspect that civic officials who constantly lowered taxes, kept crime out of the city, maintained an efficient and handsome police force, would back the fixing of sports?"

"Even if someone sensed a gypping and raised his voice, it would be like crying out in the middle of the Sahara. No one would listen because the shouting would sound like the raving of a madman. Suppose they fixed two out of three fights, races, wrestling matches, baseball, football and basketball games? People who gamble on sports hardly expect to win all the time."

"Varden and his men saw to it the good citizens won now and then. It was well worth the sacrifice. Perhaps they garnered no more than say fifty dollars out of each person living in Bartown. I'm including everyone, children and non-gamblers too, just for effect. The profits would be three quarters of a million dollars. Add to this the people from surrounding areas and you'd triple that figure. And most of the people bet far more than fifty dollars a year."

"Of course there were expenses. Fixing the contestants came high, but once fixed they stayed that way—or else. The high list of missing persons, mostly athletes, gave me my first inkling of what

might be going on."

Silk, watching the road, made no comment. Quinn asked, "Am I boring you, Silk?"

"Keep talking," Silk pleaded. "I listen and forget to think of what would happen to us if a tire blew. Did you know Varden was behind it?"

"Yes, from the moment he reacted to the name of John Powell when he felt secure in the belief I was blind and wouldn't notice. He was too relaxed, too sure of himself in the company of a blind man. It wasn't evidence. Not much was, though once I had him on the end of my hook, I knew I couldn't be wrong. One other item tripped him up though even he couldn't imagine what it is. I'll tell you about that later. If we're in time to save Mrs. Barr, I think she deserves to know first that she really put me on the right trail without knowing it herself."

"If we're in time," Silk said stonily. "I had to slow down to fifty-five when we went through that last town. It's a darn good thing you've got an official plaque on the back of this bus. Otherwise, we'd be trailed by half a hundred motor cops by now."

They were silent for about ten miles, covered in hardly more than as many minutes. Silk's knuckles gleamed white as he clutched the wheel, and he seemed to be frozen there. They left the outskirts of a small town and began rolling once more.

"I should have sent Butch on ahead," Quinn berated himself. "But naturally I couldn't foresee Varden's escape. How much longer do you figure, Silk?"

"When we top the next grade, we should see the glow of lights from New York. Then we slow down some. Did Varden have a fast car?"

"A low slung coupe. Perhaps not souped up, but very fast looking, and he had a ten minute start on us. Next time we hit a straight stretch of road, I'm converting back to the Black Bat. There may be plenty of action called for when we reach Mrs. Barr's place and it wouldn't seem right for blind Tony Quinn to shoot it out with Varden and his assistant."

"Who do you think worked from inside Mrs. Barr's place?" Silk asked.

"Most likely it was Eddie Ware. Young and brash. Lazy and wanting money which Varden would willingly

supply. Hold her steady. I'm crawling into the back seat."

CHAPTER XIII

The Story of Murder



CAROL BALDWIN, clad in a nurse's uniform, stepped to Lydia Barr's bedside and smiled down at her. "Comfortable, Mrs. Barr?"

"No," Lydia answered. "I'm too worried to be comfortable. Haven't you heard a word from the Black

Bat?"

"He can take very good care of himself," Carol assured her. "Don't worry."

"What about Quinn? He's stone blind and pitting himself against men who have no compunction against murder. What can a blind man do? I should have told him the truth and not sent him up there. Trouble with Quinn, he forgets he's blind."

"I know Mr. Quinn also," Carol said calmly. "He is blind, but he keeps well protected. Now suppose you close your eyes and try to sleep."

"Sleep? I'll be sleeping forever in a few days. At my stage of life you just don't pay any attention to the rules. I'll not sleep until the Black Bat returns."

"Sometimes he never comes back," Carol warned. "When his work is done, he simply vanishes."

"I'll haunt him if he doesn't come back and tell me what happened. I liked that man even if he did wear a mask. I wish I'd known him years ago. I'd have made him remove that mask. That is, if you weren't around."

"Why me?" Carol humored her.

"Because you're in love with him and he knows it. So do you. Every time I talk about him, your eyes get soft and blurry. And when he told me about the nurse he'd send, his voice went down a notch or two and lost its harshness. You don't fool an old woman like me very easily, my dear. What time is it?"

Carol glanced at her watch. "Nearly eleven."

"Turn on the radio," Lydia Barr ordered. "Things should be happening up

there any night. They can't delay too long or I won't be here. Both Quinn and the Black Bat know very well I want to live and enjoy the finish of this. Make a city of hidden crime out of Barrtown, will they? Not while I still breathe."

News flashes came on shortly. They began with a story of the events in Barrtown and continued with them while the old lady chortled in glee. Carol frowned. By now she should have had some direct word from Quinn or Silk or Butch. She recalled that the phone hadn't rung in hours.

She left the sick room, crossed the living room and went up to the telephone in the study. The wire was dead. She cradled the instrument and looked up to find Eddie Ware staring at her from the doorway. He said, "How about it, beautiful? Did you arrange for the phone to be cut off?"

"I—wanted to call my home," Carol said. "The wire seems to be dead."

"It's been dead for some time. Very mysterious too. And, beautiful, you're no nurse. Who sent you here? Not Dr. Gordon because I asked him, and he was very, very surprised to learn you were taking care of the old woman."

Carol slowly arose. She picked up her purse, which she took care never to forget. It held a .32 automatic and she knew how to use it. Ware suddenly leaped. Carol did her best to get the purse open, but Ware rapped her across the eyes and Carol reeled backwards. Before she could recover her balance, Ware was behind her and pinning both arms.

"Well, well," Ware said, "so I was right. Just a snooping spy, eh? I heard the news broadcast too. I know that they've probably got Varden and the others. I know the phone is cut so I can't be contacted. But you won't tell them about me. You won't stop me from getting out of here. I presume you'd like to go on living?"

Carol kicked at his ankles and drew a shout of pain. Ware's grip tightened and she was propelled across the floor and up the staircase.

"When we get upstairs, you can yell your head off, beautiful. Lucky, isn't it, that the old woman rented a duplex apartment? As I told you, all I want to do is get clear. But I'll kill you if you stand in my way."

Carol relaxed. "I'll be good," she promised.

"That's fine," Ware said. "Walk up the stairs ahead of me. I'll be holding your arm. When we get to the top, stop and let me go ahead of you."

Carol mounted the stairs slowly. There was no stalling Ware and she had no faith in his promises that she wouldn't be harmed. At the top step she halted.

"Now turn around," he ordered. "Put your hands behind your back. I'm going to tie them with my necktie. There is no use yelling. I sent the servants away and Rogers was taken to a lecture by some friends."

Carol turned. The purse under her arm dropped down and she grasped it by the handle. At that moment she felt Ware's hand in the small of her back. She was given a hard shove, but Carol had expected this. Her free hand clutched the bannister, breaking the impetus of the shove. She twisted half around and the heavy purse flew upwards. It struck Ware on the chin.

The surprise on his face was funny. The blow stunned him. Carol swung the purse again, this time at his ankles. Tottering on the edge of the landing, Wade toppled forward. Carol flung herself to one side and he hurtled past. He made two somersaults on his way down and didn't move after he landed.

Carol raced down, leaped over him and went for the door. It opened before she could reach it, and Varden stood there with a gun in his fist. Carol had never seen Varden, but she sensed who he was.

Varden said, "You seem to be in very much of a hurry, nurse. And what have you done to Eddie? Violent sort, aren't you? Drop that purse. By the sag of it, I suspect it contains a gun and that you're really an agent of either Tony Quinn or the Black Bat. Let me assure you, they are both rushing around Barrtown in a hunt for me."

Carol let go of the purse. There was murder in Varden's bloodshot eyes. She said, "What—are you going to do?"

"Take me to my mother-in-law. I want a very brief talk with her, and I shall make it one-sided. In fact, I won't talk at all. Neither will she. Take me to her."

Carol bit her lip, contemplated a frontal attack, gun or no gun, and knew she'd be dead before she moved a foot. Sacrificing herself would help no one.

Then the doorway was filled by a fig-

ure in black. A calm voice said, "Varden, you can turn around shooting or drop your gun and surrender. I'm not especially fussy about how you want to end this. It's up to you."

Varden chose the hard way. He pivoted, his gun flaming and he died before he was quite turned around. The Black Bat stepped inside and quickly closed the door. He bent, examined Varden and then held Carol close for a moment while he peered through the window. The shots didn't seem to have created any alarm. Six shots had been fired out on the street not many nights ago and no one had heard them—or investigated.

Carol said, weakly, "He was—going to kill her, Mrs. Barr. He'd have killed me too."

"I know," the Black Bat said. "What happened to Ware?"

"I knocked him down the stairs. I don't think he's dead."

The Black Bat said, "It's your cue to get out of here. Fast! I'll take care of Lydia Barr. And Ware too. Meet me at the lab. Butch will be there. Silk is waiting outside. On your way now."

CAROL fled. The Black Bat examined Ware and tied him up securely. Then he walked to the bedroom where Lydia Barr was frantically trying to get out of bed. When she saw the eerie form in black, she lay back with a long sigh of contentment.

"Why in thunder didn't you sing out and tell me you won that shooting match? Is my son-in-law dead?"

"He wanted to shoot it out," the Black Bat said. "It's finished. What you demanded of Tony Quinn is accomplished. The criminal element in Barrtown is cleaned out. Every last one of them."

"Good. Very, very good. Smart, weren't they?"

"Smart because they were contented with what they could get by fixing sports. If they'd looted the city treasury, they'd have been exposed long ago."

"And Varden. You had evidence on him?"

"No. Not the kind to hold until he gave the show away himself. I tricked the lot of them into a meeting. Varden was in command. You knew it was Varden all along. You also knew he killed John Powell in front of this house. Because Powell had discovered the truth when horses he bred lost races he knew

they couldn't have lost honestly. Powell was the type to come to you before he went to the police. Varden knew it, headed him off and shot him."

"I saw it happen," Lydia Barr said slowly. "I was sitting in the window waiting for him. He'd phoned. I think that brat of a grandson of mine listened in. I wanted to tell Mr. Quinn just what happened, but I couldn't bring myself to."

"Yes, I know." The Black Bat sat down beside the bed. "Quinn told me about your attitude. It puzzled him. Me too, until I realized your holding back the truth was my main clue."

"How in the world did you figure that out?" she demanded.

"I was puzzled between Varden and Duke Barr. When I learned that Barr wasn't really your blood brother, he came even more under suspicion. And he had weak alibis, or none at all, when things happened. Then I realized you had identified the man I wanted simply by holding back his name."

"You're guessing and doing a bad job of it," she said.

"No. Not at all. You always fought your own battles. Stood on your own two feet. You simply are not the type to protect Duke Barr, if he was the criminal because Duke would have shown poor gratitude for what you and your father did for him if he looted Barrtown. That put Duke out of it, left Varden, but without a clue. Then I also realized that your position not only cleared Duke but fastened the blame on Varden. You would hardly protect him either but—you would protect your daughter."

She mustered a smile. "I knew you'd be too smart for them."

"Naturally," the Black Bat went on, "you would hardly want your daughter to know that you had turned in her husband. Even though you saw him kill Powell. You Barrs always stood firmly together, protecting one another."

"That doesn't include my son-in-law. Nor even my grandson now."

"It does include your daughter. She'll never know. You won't have to make any statement about what you saw out the window. Ware is a weakling. He'll talk his head off—and there was a faint fingerprint on one of the shells inside the gun. Not much to go on, but I think Quinn can match it up with Varden's

prints. Enough to keep you out of it at any rate, so that it can never be said the Barrs didn't protect their own."

"And the city we built," the old lady said quietly. "I think it was more for the city that I did it. It was the only way. To force you to break up those criminal elements by withholding the identity of Powell's murderer until you did. Because I believed that in cleaning up my city, you would also solve the Powell murder without help from me."

"I'll tell Quinn," the Black Bat said.

"Stuff and nonsense," Lydia Barr laughed. "You're Tony Quinn. And that pretty nurse knows it. I tested her several times. Her eyes softened when I mentioned the Black Bat and when I talked about poor, blind Tony Quinn. She isn't the type to be in love with two men."

The Black Bat's laugh resembled Quinn's voice now. "You're very shrewd," he admitted.

Her withered hand rested on his for a moment. "Don't worry, your secret stays with me and I won't be here much longer. I've fought death until now. I'm sick of fighting. I'm nearly eighty-five and I've seen and done everything. I'm

ready for whatever lies ahead and not afraid."

"I can believe that," the Black Bat said softly.

"But I simply wouldn't give in until the situation in my city was cleaned up. I didn't know how it could be done and then that precious son-in-law of mine murdered Powell right in front of my eyes and gave me the hold I needed."

"Now my daughter has no idea I was behind it. Ware will talk—yes, indeed. He's a coward. He'll solve the Powell murder for you and without bringing my name into it. I won't have betrayed my daughter. No one in my family has ever betrayed another and some of us have done some fancy things. You didn't build cities on humility and charity. And we built Barrtown."

She closed her eyes. The Black Bat arose softly and left the room. She'd keep his secret, as she had kept Varden's. He found Ware showing signs of waking and hammered home a single hard punch to the jaw. McGrath would take care of him. He bent beside Varden and affixed one of the Black Bat's stickers to the dead man's forehead, then went out into the night where Silk waited.



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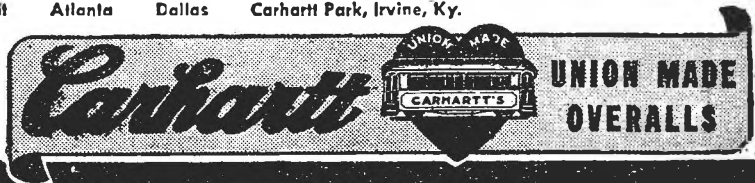
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George's face became a crimson mask, and he staggered, slowly sank toward the floor

SUDDENLY IT'S

CHAPTER I

Summer Night Kill

AT ONE o'clock in the morning, this section of the great city looked like a sleepy little town. Streets jammed with traffic by day were now canyons, deserted except for an occasional taxi. In another hour the last traces of monoxide and oil fumes would

drift away and for a little while there'd be just fresh, clean air to smell. The daytime heat had vanished, too, although Mike Lloyd removed his hat and mopped a moist brow.

He was used to the nighttime. As a reporter on a night shift, he had come to like the silence and peace and cleanliness. Though all too frequently it was punctuated by violence that made the next morning's news columns.

This was Mike Lloyd's night off and,

ANN MASON

Mike Lloyd was no detective, but when the corpse of a murder victim disappeared into thin air, he felt he had to solve the riddle in this baffling crime novelet!



MURDER

By WAYLAND RICE

as usual, he couldn't sleep. He walked casually toward the corner drugstore, the only shop showing lights. It was a perfect night for an ice-cream soda. Beer, he thought, would have been better, but with a couple of schooners under his belt he'd never get to sleep.

He was tall, rangy and moved with long, sure strides. His face was lean, too, with dark eyes and black hair. He opened the door to the drugstore, sauntered in and only glanced at the man

who sat at the small soda fountain toying with a plate of ice-cream. He certainly didn't seem to be enjoying it.

Fred Morely, who'd owned this store for the past two months only, knew Mike fairly well. He came from the rear of the store, smiling a greeting.

"Plenty hot, isn't it?" he asked conversationally. "How's the newspaper racket?"

"Always good, Fred. Somebody invariably decides the night is too peace-

ful and goes to work on the problem. Only tonight I'm off. How about a game of pinochle."

"Sure," Fred said. "It's very quiet tonight. See that guy at the fountain? He likes ice-cream. That's his fifth double portion, but the way he eats it I'd say it would be his last. Come on in back."

"Let's have a coke first," Mike said.

Morely went behind the counter, mixed the drink and handed it to Mike. "A nickel," he said. "If you please."

Mike gave him the coin and smiled. One thing about Morely, he never presented one on the house. Morely stepped over to the register. The nickel teller was still showing. Morely threw the coin into its proper slot and slammed the register drawer shut.

"Carry it into the back room," he suggested, "and let's get this game going."

THERE was a bridge table in the room just to the rear of the prescription department. Mike carried over a chair, found the cards and started shuffling them. Fred Morely was peering through the glass window in front of the prescription counter. He seemed to be worried about something. Mike heard the front door open, but it didn't close. He half sensed the trouble that was ready to turn this serenity back into big town excitement. Mike got up too and looked out.

The man who entered was a weird looking character in what seemed to be a purple shirt, a red tie and a light blue sports jacket with tan trousers. He looked like a rainbow. There was a straw hat tilted well down over his eyes.

He glanced at the man eating ice-cream and then looked hard in the direction of the three booths where there was table service. He couldn't see into them and he called, somewhat harshly:

"Ann! Ann, are you here?"

Fred Morely walked out to the front of the store and the newcomer turned toward him. He said, "Have you seen anything of a girl about twenty, blonde, nicely stacked—blue eyes. She'd be dressed in a white suit."

"Sorry," Fred Morely replied. "Hasn't been anybody in here like that. Wait around if you like."

"No," the man said. "No, thanks. I—I'd better be going."

He turned sharply and headed for the

door. The man at the fountain stopped shovelling ice-cream into his mouth, rotated on the fountain stool and there was a long-barreled revolver in his hand.

He said, "George—how are you, George?"

Then he fired twice. George's face became a crimson mask. He staggered back a step or two, fell against a counter and slowly sank toward the floor. Fred Morely just let his knees act like hinges and he ducked behind the counter. Mike Lloyd burst out of the back room.

The man with the gun trained his weapon toward Mike. It was hard to see much of his face because his hat brim was pulled so low. The gun was very steady.

"Hold it!" he said sharply. "Now you wouldn't want to get a slug through the puss too, would you?"

The man backed to the door, opened it and sidled out. He flashed past the window and that was all. Fred Morely unhinged his knees and stood up. His face was ashen. Mike started to maneuver past him.

Fred said, "Mike—get on the phone. Use the one in the back room. Step on it."

Mike glanced at the form lying face down on the floor. He recalled what that face had looked like after the gun spoke, hurried to the back room and hastily dialed.

"Let's have Anderson," he ordered crisply. There was a moment's wait. "Andy? Mike Lloyd. There's been a killing at Morely's Drugstore around the corner from where I live. I don't know the facts yet, but you could run a bulletin. One man shot another—through the face. It was cold-blooded, premeditated murder. The killer was waiting in the drugstore. I'll turn in other facts as soon as I get them. Sure—in time to make the next edition."

Mike hung up for a moment and then dialed the nearest police precinct. He contacted Sergeant Higgins, whom he knew, and made another brief report. Then he hurried out to the store proper. He came to an abrupt halt. The dead man was gone. Fred Morely was bent across the counter as if he'd suddenly experienced a wave of weakness.

Mike said, "Fred! Fred, what happened? Who took him away?"

Fred had a glassy stare. "Took him away, my eye. The guy got up and

walked out. Just walked right out the door. There was a car close by. I heard it start. He must have had it waiting."

"Now hold on," Mike argued. "I saw that man hit. Twice—both times smack in the face. That was a Colt's Woodsman the killer had. A target pistol used only by guys who hit what they shoot at. It doesn't throw a big bullet so you have to be good with one of those. Both slugs hit him. He was dead, Fred. Dead as a man could be."

"He got up—walked out," Fred said. "I didn't even see any blood on his face. Look at the floor. No blood there. Maybe we dreamed it all."

SERGEANT HIGGINS, fifty, bulky and very efficient, had a gleam in his eye that seemed to indicate he believed the same thing.

"A guy plugged twice through the face falls down and doesn't move for awhile. Then he gets up and strolls out. Mike—were you drinking ice-cream sodas or Scotch?"

There were more repercussions. Higgins only half believed the story. When Mike phoned Anderson back, he was again accused of drinking too much but the story was already on the presses. A brief bulletin that would have to be backed up. Mike walked away from the phone and straddled one of the high stools at the prescription counter. Fred Morely was removing his white coat.

"I had enough for one night," he said. "I'm closing up."

"Wait a minute, Fred. Come clean now. That guy didn't get up and walk out. He was carried away and any traces of blood mopped up. All this happened while I was telephoning. Tell the truth—he was carried out."

Fred mopped his face. "Mike, I tell you what I saw. I can't say anything else."

"He didn't get up and walk out," Mike reiterated. "You're holding back for some reason. But I can't make you talk. And what's worse, I can't even figure your angle because I've known you only a short time. But your story is a lie, Fred."

"Get out of here," Fred mumbled. "Can't you see I want to close up."

Mike walked out, kept going to the corner and then came to a stop. He stepped into a darkened doorway and stayed there. He saw the lights of the

store dim and then go out. He heard the door slam and a key turn. Then Morely walked off with short, fast steps that gradually faded. Mike didn't move for five minutes. Then he approached the store and took shelter in its darkened doorway.

Twenty more minutes went by while he thought the whole thing was going to fizzle out. There wasn't much to go on. Mike knew there had been a murder and the body had been carted off. Fred Morely knew this too and must have witnessed the scene. But Fred seemed grimly determined to stick to his story. Sergeant Higgins half believed him, even granted there might have been a shooting, but there was neither corpse nor killer to prove the tale.

Without one, or both, of these elements, Higgins was hardly inclined to go much further. Cops have enough to do without chasing phantom murder victims. If the dead man walked out, there hadn't been a killing. Just a shooting affair which didn't demand as deep an investigation as an out-and-out murder. Whoever carried off the corpse was well aware of this fact.

Mike possessed one faint hope. The murdered man had expected to meet a girl named Ann, a blonde, dressed in white. She hadn't appeared, but she might. Mike put a cigarette between his lips, reached for a match and decided to do without the smoke.

Half an hour went by. He spent that time trying to figure out why Fred had actually witnessed that murder and then made up a wild yarn about the victim arising to walk out of the store. It was incredible and quite impossible. Fred had seen those two bullets hit. He knew the man had to be dead. True, there hadn't been a speck of blood on the floor and no signs that Fred had hastily mopped any.

THEN Mike Lloyd saw her. The blonde dressed in white. It was a white linen suit and as she passed beneath a street lamp, he noticed that she was pretty, about twenty and she moved with a studied grace. She approached the drugstore and when she made out the name on the sign and saw that the place was darkened, her shoulders drooped noticeably. She had been sadly disappointed.

Mike stayed in the deep shadows of

the doorway. He whispered hoarsely, "Ann. Ann—over here."

She turned quickly and her shoulders straightened again. She walked in his direction. Pausing, she whispered:

"Where are you? I can't see—"

"In the doorway twenty feet ahead. Saunter past, very close. Don't come into the doorway. You'd be seen in that white suit. There's been a little trouble and you're very late."

She walked slowly, not turning her head but speaking so that he could hear.

"I know. I arrived some time ago, but there were policemen around the store. I wasn't sure—so I went away and then returned."

"That was a wise move," Mike whispered. "Now, what did you wish to tell me?"

She came to an abrupt halt. "Tell you? Why—why, you asked me to come down here so you could tell me about—your voice seems different. You're not the man—"

Mike stepped out then and with one motion seized her white handbag. She let go of it out of sheer surprise. He opened the bag, dipped a hand into it and encountered an envelope. There was a name and an address on it. He put this into his pocket.

She came at him with the fury born of anger at being tricked. She snatched the purse, drew it back and slapped it across his face. It was well laden, heavy, and the blow stunned him. He recovered his wits in time to see her sprinting toward the corner. Mike started after her, but a heavy car swung around the corner, slowed and stopped. A uniformed policeman climbed out.

Quickly the girl slowed her running steps and turned them into a nonchalant walk. She passed the policeman without a glance and kept on going. Mike didn't move. He didn't want the cops in on this yet. He'd been laughed at once tonight and he meant to see this thing through alone.

He walked in the opposite direction because Fred Morely lived that way and he wanted to talk to him. Mike stopped beneath a street lamp, took out the letter and read the address.

"Miss Ann Mason, 1123 River Drive, City."

In the envelope was a bill for a woman's hat. The price of seventy dollars made Mike whistle sharply. The girl

had looked like class and this bill from a very fashionable shop was pretty good proof.

CHAPTER II

Man With Two Names



HE REACHED Fred Morely's hotel, a modest place catering to bachelors mostly. He had been there before, as Fred's guest when they wanted to finish their pinochle session, and he was known to the desk clerk.

"Fred show up yet?" he asked. "He left me a short time ago and said I was to meet him in his room."

"No, sir." The clerk yawned sleepily. "I've been here all the time and he hasn't come in. Maybe he will."

Mike had his eye on the key in Fred Morely's mailbox. He looked around the lobby, saw that it was deserted, and lazily lounged against the desk. The clerk was also switchboard operator after midnight and if a call came, he'd have to enter the telephone operator's cubbyhole, from which he'd be unable to see the desk or the mailboxes.

A call came some five minutes later. The clerk vanished and Mike hoisted himself up until he lay across the marble-topped desk. He fished out the key without making a sound, slid back to his feet and was lounging again when the clerk returned.

"Look," he said, "I was thinking that Fred might have passed through while you were at the switchboard. I'll go on up and see if he's there. Don't bother to phone. I'm killing time anyway."

The elevator operator was asleep in his car. Mike woke him and was taken to the eleventh floor. He waited until the car dived again for the lobby, walked swiftly toward Fred's door and knocked. There was no answer and no light shone beneath the door. Mike used the key, let himself in and switched on the lights.

For a moment he held his breath while he searched the two rooms. He had been apprehensive about finding Morely there—dead. The suite was unoccupied. Mike went to a cheap walnut desk with a single drawer, pulled a chair over and sat down.

He rummaged through the drawer without finding anything of interest. There was a trunk in the surprisingly spacious clothes closet. The trunk was not locked.

Mike raised the cover, lifted off the empty top tray and started to examine the papers and odds and ends of clothing in the bottom. There was a single document that made him blink. It was a diploma from Phoenix College of Pharmacy. Not surprising, because Fred was a pharmacist, but the name on that diploma wasn't that of Fred Morely. It was made out to one Theodore Small. Mike appropriated it.

He continued the search without tangible result, left the key on the table beside the bed and slammed the door, locking it behind him. He went down, told the night clerk Fred wasn't in his room and that he wouldn't wait.

He was wondering about the police car which had stopped in front of Fred's store and hurried back. Sergeant Higgins was there, inside the store and on one knee while he watched a technician apply a chemical to the floor.

Higgins grunted when Mike appeared, got to his feet and took Mike to one side. "Seen anything of the guy who runs this store?" he asked.

"I've been hunting him too, Sarge. I went to his hotel, but he didn't show up. There's something funny about all this. Why did you come back if you didn't believe what I told you?"

"Well—" Higgins gave him an abashed grin. "I got thinking that a crime reporter can't afford to be a liar and you'd never exaggerated before. Then the patrolman on the beat called in and said he'd found some blood spots on the sidewalk. Not just drops, but definite smears. I thought maybe, if we checked the floor where you said the body fell, we'd discover blood had been cleaned off it."

"Did you, Sarge?"

"No. Not a trace. Can you account for that, Mike?"

Mike closed his eyes and thought back. He'd seen the man sink toward the floor. It would have been a perfectly natural gesture for him to have thrown an arm across his face as he dropped. A last automatic gesture, trying to stop the sudden pain or to shut out the sight of the killer with the gun.

"He might have fallen so that his face was nestled against one arm and the sleeve picked up any blood," Mike said.

"That must have happened because there was blood all right. Now Fred is missing. Sarge, I'm going to use the back room phone. Maybe I can locate him."

THE Sergeant didn't seem to care much what Mike did. The reporter went to the back of the store, dialed the operator and asked for Long Distance. He wanted to talk with the night editor of the Allendale Times. The connection went through and Mike identified himself.

"I'm interested in a man named Theodore Small who graduated from that college in your town in June 1939," he explained. "If you know anything at all, let me have it."

"Know anything about Teddy Small? I'll say I do. He graduated all right and opened up a store about ten miles from here. A year later there was a murder. Some jealous husband poisoned his wife and Teddy Small sold him the stuff that did the trick. Furthermore he knew darned well what the guy was going to do with the poison and a judge thought Teddy Small might get wise to himself if he served about four years in the pen."

"Do you recall what he looked like?"

"Sure. I was a legman in those days and I covered the trial. At that time he was five feet nine or ten, medium built with light brown hair. I can't remember what color his eyes were."

"Nice going," Mike said. "Now—did you ever hear of anybody named Fred Morely?"

"Morely? Sure—because Morely owned the drugstore which this Teddy Small bought. Morely died and his wife sold the place."

"Let me know when I can do something for you," Mike said. He hung up, walked over to the prescription counter and took down the diploma that hung there. It was in the name of Fred Morely and from the same college as the one listed on the diploma he'd found in Morely's trunk. Under good light and at very close range, he saw that the date had been altered.

Theodore Small had been sent to prison, very likely had his pharmacist's license taken away from him and he'd forged this one which probably came into his possession when he took over Morely's store. Mike began seeing a certain amount of daylight.

He tucked the diploma back into his

pocket, whistled softly and left the store. Higgins was getting ready to lock up anyway. Mike hurried to the vicinity of his apartment where he kept his car in a public garage. An attendant got it out for him and he drove straight to River Drive and the address on Ann Mason's envelope.

It was an apartment house, as he had expected. One of those fashionable places with a panelled lobby, indirect lighting and soft, colorful chairs and divans. Also a clerk who was far more alert than the one at Morely's place.

Mike said, "I want to see Miss Ann Mason. I know it's very late and people should be asleep, but Miss Mason isn't. She can't have been home more than a few minutes."

The clerk laughed. "She isn't home at all. She went out about midnight and hasn't returned. You can wait if you like."

"Thanks." Mike reached into his pocket, removed a ten-dollar bill and wound it around one finger. He held that finger in the air as if he were testing the wind.

"Ann and I have been acquainted only a very short time. What's her family like? Would I get kicked out, do you think?"

The clerk looked him up and down, politely and efficiently slipped the ten-spot off his finger and grinned.

"Chum, her kind wears two-hundred-dollar suits and yours is about thirty-eight fifty. I know because I wear that kind too. What's the gag?"

"Okay. I'm a reporter," Mike said. "Ann Mason is mixed up in something that might make a big yarn, but I'm checking to see how important she and her people are. We have to play it safe."

"I don't blame you. Ann lives here with her stepfather. As I get it, he didn't have much when he married Ann's mother and when she died a couple of years ago, he came into half of what she left and it was plenty. Ann got the other half."

"Is that all there is to the family—Ann and her stepfather?"

The clerk grinned. "If you'd rate a stepbrother who is in the clink right now, as a member of the family, he'd make it three. The kid got himself tied in with a bad gang some time ago and he's doing a three to five stretch. He

isn't a bad kid, just one of those wise guys who don't grow up until they're about forty. Brother, could he swill booze."

"What does the old man look like?"

"Man alive, you want plenty for ten bucks. His name is Paul Jonay. Ann never was adopted by him. He's six feet two, bald as an egg and skinny."

MIKE sighed. Certainly Paul Jonay was not the man with the Colt's Woodsman who'd plugged the other in the drugstore. Neither did the victim answer to Jonay's description. But Mike had something important. Fred Morely was an ex-con. Ann's brother was a convict right now. Chances were good they'd been at the same prison. Perhaps there was some sort of a tie-up there.

Mike went over to one of the comfortable chairs, sat down and tried again to figure it out. There simply wasn't an answer because he didn't have enough to go on.

Half an hour later he saw Ann's stepfather enter. There was no mistaking him, for the clerk had done a good job in describing the man. Paul Jonay stopped at the desk, listened to the clerk's whisper and then turned slowly to gaze at Mike.

Jonay had very cold, very blue eyes and a thin, uncompromising line to his mouth. He came over and stood looking down at Mike.

"Well," he asked, "would you mind telling me why the press is interested in my stepdaughter? Or do I presume too much?"

Mike arose. "You've got a right to know, I guess. There was a murder downtown right after midnight. A man was killed, and so far is unidentified because his body disappeared."

Jonay curled a lip. "There was a murder, the corpse vanishes—what are you trying to give me? A radio serial for kids?"

"Look, Mr. Jonay, I was there. I witnessed the killing. I saw a man named George—that's what the murderer called him anyway—go down with two slugs through his kisser. I went to the back of the store to phone. When I returned, the body was gone."

Jonay's contemptuous grin faded. "But how is Ann involved?"

"The dead man came there to meet Ann Mason. He asked for her by name

and later on Ann showed up after waiting until the excitement blew over. That's why I want to talk to her. Before the cops do. They might not be quite as understanding as I'd be."

Jonay frowned darkly. "Ann phoned me a short time ago. I've been at a party and she knew I was there. She said she wouldn't be home tonight and she would explain tomorrow. I thought it odd, but now, after listening to your story, I feel that Ann must be in some dreadful danger. I think we ought to call the police at once."

"There's a phone right behind you," Mike suggested.

Jonay blinked slowly a couple of times. "No." He changed his mind. "No, that

He pushed open the doors and stepped from the air-conditioned luxury of the apartment house lobby to the sweltering heat of the street. Then he turned and abruptly went back. The desk clerk saw him coming and his eyes were very wide and large.

"What's eating you?" Mike asked.

"Nothing. Nothing at all. I just—feel a little tired. You wanted something else?"

"Yes, I feel I only got about nine dollars' worth. This girl—Ann Mason—does she have a steady boy friend maybe?"

"Well—there's her father's attorney. Nice looking guy and he comes here quite often though it could be in re-

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wouldn't do at all. We can't be certain Ann is mixed up in this and if she isn't, dragging her in would be a serious error. There are a lot of girls named Ann. Your murder victim might have been calling someone else."

"What makes you think he just used the first name of Ann?" Mike asked. "When I told it, I mentioned Ann's full name."

"Good heavens, you don't mean he did use both names?"

"No, he didn't, but you assumed an awful lot that time, Mr. Jonay. However, I don't want the cops in on this any more than you do. Not right away, because they got the impression I was missing a wheel some place with that story of the disappearing dead man. So we'll let it ride. When did you see your son last?"

Jonay bit his lower lip. "You really get around, don't you? As a matter of fact, I haven't seen him for months and I don't intend to. Good night—whoever you are."

JONAY turned and walked briskly to the elevator. Mike took another direction and headed for the sidewalk. His wrist watch told him it was after two o'clock. He felt no twinge of tiredness. He never felt tired until eight in the morning, but he did realize this wasn't exactly a night off.

lation to the estate. It isn't settled yet."

"But no drooling, fog-eyed swains?"

"Uh-uh. She's not that kind of a doll. Never gives me a second look, for instance."

Mike thought Ann Mason showed good sense, but he didn't comment on it. He might need this cluck again. Mike went out to the street once more and broke out in a big sweat right away. He walked toward his car. The street was deserted except for two men coming toward one another. Mike had the door of his car open when the man facing him stepped closer.

"Mister, can you tell me how to get to Blakely Boulevard?"

"It's six miles away," Mike said. "You'll need a cab. Busses don't run there this time of night and the cabbie will know—"

"But my friend wants you to take him there," a very soft voice whispered in his ear and at the same time he felt the uncompromising hardness of a gun poked against his back. The smooth voice went on. "So just get into the back seat, friend, and you can tell my pal Joey just where to go. He'll do the driving. Got any objections, friend?"

"Not me," Mike declared fervently. "I only object to things that listen. Not dumb creatures like a—gun, for instance?"

"You catch on fast. Get in."

CHAPTER III

The Gray Man

MIKE obeyed. There wasn't anything else he could do. So far he had seen only the man who faced him and this individual was broad-faced, with prominent red veins along his nose and a substantial whiskey breath. He got behind the wheel.

The man with the gun was something else. A mousey sort, dressed all in gray even to the shirt and shoes, which were suede. He had glittering eyes. The eyes of a killer mirroring nothing in the way of mercy or kindness. A bad egg—smart and crafty. The kind who would pull a trigger with no more compunction than he'd use in drinking a glass of liquor. Mike settled himself in the seat. The car pulled away smoothly. Joey may have looked like a boob, but he knew how to drive.

Mike said, "My name is Lloyd. Glad to know you."

The gray man grinned. "Got nerve too. I like a guy with nerve. You can call me Lennie if there is any occasion to speak to me, which I doubt there will be. Get this—we tell you nothing. Not one word, so don't waste time trying to pump me. I'm a well gone dry. I can keep my yap shut and I hope you can too."

"Like that?" Mike grunted.

"Just like that. I got one more thing to say. I'm not certain whether or not you're supposed to be bumped. Maybe you're not, because we got no orders one way or another. But if you squawk or make a pass at that door, I'll make up my own orders and you won't like them."

"I probably wouldn't," Mike agreed. He closed his eyes and leaned back, apparently quite at ease and relaxed. In reality he was set to spring into action if there was even a faint opportunity. He doubted there would be one. The Gray Man was clever enough to handle almost anything that came along.

Mike wondered who had arranged this pretty little deal and what it all meant. If they wanted him dead, why hadn't he simply been shot there on the street?

After all, whoever was behind this didn't mind plugging a man in the face inside a drugstore just off a public street. It looked as if they had plans for him.

Ann's stepfather could have been responsible. There'd been time enough for him to reach a phone and send for this pair of hoodlums. Jonay had been a bit too suave about the whole affair anyway. Mike opened his eyes, twiddled his thumbs and glanced at the Gray Man now and then. He might as well have been looking at a statue. The Gray Man didn't even blink his eyes.

They were heading downtown and apparently meant to stay within the city limits, for the driver passed all possible cut-offs. Finally he turned into a dismal street, slowed and made a quick swing into an alley. The car stopped and the Gray Man's gun poked Mike suggestively.

He climbed out of the car. The driver was already on the ground, a huge revolver in his fist. Mike raised his hands slightly and followed the driver, who backed toward a door. He opened this with a key and the rank smell of stale beer drifted out to greet them.

Behind that door was a squalid looking room furnished with a table and four wooden chairs. A single overhead light, swinging from an improvised cord, illuminated the place. There were a couple of ancient calendars tacked to the walls, treasured more for the so-called art they represented than as a means of telling the date.

Mike sat down. So did the Gray Man and he kept that gun ready. Here, in good light, Mike took a better look at them. Neither was the man who'd been eating ice-cream at the drugstore fountain and who had plugged the fellow called George.

Joey, with the red-veined nose, was intent upon adding a few more veins. He disappeared through a door, but returned in a moment carrying a full bottle of whiskey and two glasses. He removed the cork with his teeth and they made grinding noises against the metal bottle top. He poured two drinks. The kind which could floor an average man. He handed one to the Gray Man.

"Here's to our guest's very good health and may he keep on living on account of blood makes me sick to my stomach," Joey toasted, raised the glass high and swallowed its contents in two gulps.

Even Mike's throat convulsed at the sight. The Gray Man sipped a little and put the glass down. He looked at an expensive wrist watch and then moved toward a telephone which was attached to the wall. He was expecting a call.

"Look," Mike said, "seeing I'm here, and seeing I get tired holding my hands in the air, will one of you birds frisk me and make sure I'm harmless. Then I can relax."

"You been frisked," the Gray Man said. "I did it when you were climbing into the car. You never knew it because I didn't mean that you should. Go ahead and relax."

"Could I have a drink?" Mike asked very politely.

"Give him a drink," the Gray Man ordered. Joey shrugged, went out front to the bar, returned with a fresh glass—a small one—and half filled it. Mike took a sip. He wished he'd never asked for the drink. It was cheap stuff and fiery as a red pepper.

TEN MINUTES of awkward silence elapsed during which Joey gurgled two more of those elephant-sized shots. He poured another and Gray Man promptly put his hand over the top of the glass.

"Take it easy, will you? We're working tonight and our guest is too quiet for me. We need four eyes on that guy."

The phone rang. The Gray Man jumped up as if he had expected the call, hurried to the instrument and grunted a one-word greeting. He listened intently, half turned around so he could watch Mike. His gun was slanted a little, but could be brought up before Mike took half a breath. Joey turned his back on the Gray Man, sneaked the drink off the table and, with a broad wink at Mike, killed it.

The Gray Man said, "Uh-huh, I got that. We keep him on ice. Noon tomorrow. Sure, it'll be easy but if you want me in the morning, you'd better send another man around. You know how Joey is. Okay—I'll expect him at nine. Set? Of course I'm set. Okay—see you tomorrow."

He hung up, returned to his chair and sat down as gracefully as a ballet dancer.

"You can really relax, friend," he said. "We don't shed your blood unless you make a play to get out of here. Tomorrow you can go home."

"How nice," Mike answered. "A man couldn't ask for more. Joey, how about a little more of that rotgut?"

Joey obliged by pouring a third of the small glass and taking advantage of the situation by slopping another tumbler full for himself.

"Joey, so help me, if you go to sleep, I'll slap you silly," the Gray Man said. "We're working. Lay off the stuff." He glanced at Mike. "Trouble with Joey is he never knows when to cut it out. He's a pig with booze."

Joey took offense to the extent of mumbling something, but he also moved his chair back farther and pushed the bottle to the edge of the table within easy reaching distance. Twice, while the Gray Man watched Mike, Joey quietly eased the bottle to his lips and drank as silently as possible.

The bottle was more than half empty and Joey was getting a happy expression in his eyes. If wishes came true, the Gray Man would have been a heavy drinker too. Mike was wishing that, but the Gray Man took a dainty sip now and then, more to wet his throat than to get any effects.

Mike tilted his chair back against the wall, parked his heels against the lower rung and closed his eyes. He was actually dozing when the phone rang again. It startled him so that the chair came down with a bang that made even booze stupefied Joey give a jump.

"Keep your eye on him," the Gray Man told Joey. "If you can see at all. You've been hitting the bottle and thinking I didn't know it. I ought to massage your face with the flat of my gun."

The Gray Man walked to the phone. This time he seemed to be getting different orders and Mike didn't like it. He could not know what was being said by the caller, but the Gray Man shifted his glance to Mike and those eyes became hard and deadly. The gun came up a bit to almost a level.

The Gray Man said, "It'll cost you five hundred more. You heard me. Five Cs happens to be a cheap price. I get it before I tackle tomorrow's job. Good—it'll be over in a couple of minutes. Yeah, I'll call."

He hung up the phone. Joey seemed to have caught the gist of the instructions too, for he reached for the bottle and tilted it to his lips. The Gray Man walked over, tore the bottle out of his

hand and put it on the table.

"I said, no more, you glutton. We've got a job to do and it's tough enough for two sober guys." The Gray Man faced Mike. "Stand up, friend. The deal is changed. You get it. Don't ask me why because I don't know. I never ask questions of the guy who pays me. Stand up!"

Mike arose slowly. "Can't a man even have a choice of dying on his feet or sitting down? That's what you're going to do, isn't it? Shoot me?"

"Yes. There's nothing personal in this. Not one thing, friend. It's just another job to me. Just another job."

HIS EYES said he liked this kind of job. They were killer's eyes now, narrowed and icy cold. He was working himself up to the pitch necessary for his finger to start pulling the trigger. Behind him, Joey stood like a big dumb ox, eyes very wide in anticipated horror—or whatever feeling would pervade that thick skull.

The Gray Man walked closer, to a point about five paces away from Mike. The gun was level with Mike's heart. Mike felt his own flesh crawl. The hot, sultry evening was redhot all of a sudden. He could feel sweat oozing out of every pore, though he began trembling a bit. He'd never faced death before. Not this kind of savage, unadulterated, determined death.

He said, "It's tough—this way. Give me another drink. Before Joey swills it all down."

The Gray Man's eyes darted to one side, but he couldn't see Joey. He turned his head slightly to see if his orders were being disobeyed. Mike gave a jump the moment the Gray Man's eyes were shifted clear of him. Not a jump straight at the man, but offside.

The gun roared—and missed. Mike was considerably surprised though he had no time even to realize he'd been thinking that. He was in close, and somehow he had the Gray Man's gun arm under his own left arm. He looped a right fist upwards. It connected with a chin that gave a mild cracking sound. The gun went off again and Mike got the odor of burning cloth. His own sleeve or the side of his coat, he imagined.

He dropped the right, brought it up again and the Gray Man went reeling

off. Joey was closing in, trying to draw a bead, but he was too drunk. Mike kicked a chair in front of him and Joey tripped over it. The Gray Man was getting up. Mike leaped toward him, came down on the floor with both feet and raised his right shoe. He kicked out, as hard as he could kick. The Gray Man uttered a very small moan and sagged back against the wall which had been supporting him.

Joey was getting untangled from the chair. Mike hurled another at him, flung the door open and dashed into the alley. His car was still there. He got behind the wheel, murmured a prayer and stepped on the starter. It responded. He didn't take time to turn around, simply backed out of the alley as fast as if he'd been in first gear.

CHAPTER IV

Death in the Window



NOW Mike was on the street. He shifted nervously, stepped on it and got out of there fast. He was no coward, but against those two killers he'd have little chance. The Gray Man would now assume there was a personal element in his vindictiveness and Joey, while a blundering idiot, still had a gun.

There was also little sense in calling the police. By the time they got there the back room of the bar would be straightened up and deserted. Just another case like that of the disappearing dead man.

A good five miles away, Mike drove into a park. He took cigarettes from his pocket and needed both hands to hold the match to the butt. He was still trembling and he wished he had some of that cheap whiskey Joey loved so much.

Gradually the trembling ceased. He began breathing easier, not with every muscle of his diaphragm. The hammering inside his chest subsided to a gentle patter. He killed the cigarette in four lusty drags, flipped it away and lighted another.

Then he sat back to do some thinking. There were weird phases to this business, but the weirdest was the person who had

phoned the Gray Man twice. The first time he gave orders that Mike wasn't to be harmed, only held until noon tomorrow. Then he'd phoned again and given a command to kill Mike.

Why? Could the caller be the man who'd been eating ice-cream in the drug-store and suddenly realized his prisoner was also one of two witnesses who might identify him? That fitted smugly enough; but somehow Mike wasn't satisfied with it.

In such an event the assassin would have ordered his death on the spot. Perhaps come down to do it himself and be certain. No, there was more to it than that. Paul Jonay, perhaps? He could have set this trap. Or that rather vague lawyer the apartment clerk had talked about? Or—Ann Mason herself?

Mike didn't know, couldn't figure it out. He didn't have enough to go on and right now there were very few angles which he could check on and improve his knowledge. Ann Mason was the best bet. Perhaps she had come home. It was already dawn and time was running out. Mike drove back to the vicinity of the fashionable apartment house, but he parked on a side street and used the delivery entrance.

This entailed walking up enough stairs to make his nerves start on another rampage. At the top he had to sit down and compose himself again. He crushed out a comforting cigarette beneath his shoe, shook himself and walked briskly down the corridor, looking at the neat name plates beside the doors.

There weren't very many apartments on any floor in this house. The one bearing Jonay's name was well to the front. Mike paused and listened. There was light coming from beneath the door, but no sounds. Mike put a finger against the bell.

Jonay let him in. He took his time answering and he wore a silk robe, rumpled pajamas and tousled hair. He had a sleepy, half irate expression on his face and began venting his rage at the sight of Mike.

Mike pushed him into the apartment and kicked the door shut. "Where is Ann Mason?" he demanded. "Unless she is found, somebody will die this morning. Ann knows the answers."

Jonay gave him a curious look. "What are you talking about?"

"This morning, before noon, some-

thing is scheduled to happen. It concerns Ann some way. What are her plans for this morning? What is she going to do, whom will she see, where will she go? Talk, man, we haven't much time."

"Wait a minute," Jonay said. "I'll get dressed. Ann is staying at her attorney's house. She phoned me around three this morning."

"Step on it," Mike advised. "I'll be in the lobby. There's a party down there I owe a little something to."

The desk clerk really gaped when Mike walked out of the elevator and toward the desk. Mike stepped close, reached across the desk and grabbed the clerk by his crimson and yellow tie. He jerked him half across the desk and planted a healthy punch against his eye.

"I can keep this up all day long," Mike said. "I will, until you talk. You set that trap for me last night. Somebody paid you. You accepted ten bucks from me to sing and you'd do it for other people. So open that money-hungry mouth of yours and start talking. For free this time."

THE clerk made one sustained attempt to get away and received a poke on the nose for his pains. He subsided and lost all his belligerence.

"Honest," he said, "I don't know who paid me. All I was supposed to do was check on phone calls that Jonay and Ann Mason received or sent. And if they had any visitors, I was to call a certain number."

"What number?" Mike demanded.

"It's a phone booth someplace. Finding it wouldn't help you. It started when I got a call one night and a man told me I'd get twenty dollars for every item I reported. I had plenty of use for the dough so I did it. I'd get cash in the mail the following day."

"Ann Mason called Jonay at three this morning. Did you tap that call and make a report?"

"Yes," the clerk moaned.

Mike hit him again, left him dangling across the desk and went to meet Jonay, who was somewhat awed by what he'd witnessed of the procedure. Outside, they entered Mike's car and Jonay gave an address. Mike explained the events as they rode across town.

Ann's attorney was a small man with bright eyes and a bird-like manner. Ann

came to meet her stepfather and her greeting was cordial. It was clear they got along well. Then she saw Mike and gave a visible start.

"That's the man who—who snatched my purse."

Mike said, "Okay, I am that man, but it was for your own good. Listen to me carefully. Time is precious. There's a killer—a grim, cold-blooded, professional gunman with a mission to perform this morning. I know he intends to murder someone, but I don't know who his target is and I think you do."

"I?" Ann cried. "But how in the world—?"

"Last night—at that drugstore to which you were headed—a killing took place. A man named George walked into the place and asked for you. He even described you. Another man sat at the soda fountain. He had a gun and used it on George. The killer got away.

"I ran to the back room to phone and the druggist was intimidated into doing nothing while the dead man was removed. We don't know who he was, but he did have a date to meet you. For heaven's sake, Ann, can't you see I'm telling the truth? I want to help you."

"Please, Ann," Jonay said, "tell him whatever it is. Perhaps this whole thing is aimed at you."

"No, it is not," Mike put in. "It would be simpler if that were true, but when Ann phoned you at three this morning, your conversation was listened in on by the desk clerk. He reported what he heard. The killer knows where Ann has been, but he has made no attempt to reach her so we can rule her out as the victim."

Attorney Pike got himself between Mike and the girl. He waved an admonishing finger before the reporter's nose.

"I think this is some sort of a scheme by which you hope to profit—"

Mike picked him up bodily and deposited him in one of the big chairs. The attorney's wife gave a mild scream and ran to his side. Mike turned to Ann again.

"What I have to know is why you had a date with George at the drugstore. And what you, and everyone concerned with you, are doing this morning. By noontime it will be all over. You can ask questions afterward. Just answer mine now and help me save someone's life."

"I—didn't know the man I was supposed to meet except that his name really was George," Ann said. "He phoned me and said he had something very important to tell me. He couldn't come to me, but I agreed to meet him at the drugstore. He named that odd hour, saying it was safer."

"And what else did he say? Please, Ann, think."

"He told me, as our conversation ended, that he didn't go for murder. He spoke of it as if it were an afterthought, the words trailing off. I tried to get him to say more but he hung up."

MIKE groaned. He'd hoped for a very definite clue in connection with her intended midnight meeting with George.

"You have things planned for this morning," Mike said. "They concern other people. It has to be that. What do you intend doing before noon?"

"Why—why, not very much. I'm to attend a hearing at Probate Court with reference to my mother's estate. I suppose that's all."

"Who is going to be there?"

"My stepfather, Mr. Pike, my attorney, and my stepbrother."

"The one serving time?" Mike demanded.

She flushed slightly. "Yes. They are bringing him down for the hearing. Mr. Pike thinks his testimony is necessary."

"Mr. Pike does, eh?" Mike glanced at the attorney. "Maybe Mr. Pike arranged the whole thing. We're going to see. Now go about your business as if nothing happened. There isn't a thing wrong that you know of. I haven't been here at all. Got that?"

"You—know who is to be—killed, then?" Ann asked in a shaky voice.

"I do—and I'll stop the killing if I can. There isn't a particle of use in bringing in the police. The killer would merely call it off temporarily and try again when we wouldn't be ready for him. Jonay, stay close to Ann. If there is any shooting, duck fast."

Mike hurried away, drove to the next corner and entered a tobacco store just opening for business. He used the phone booth and got Sergeant Higgins out of bed. He gave him a long story, hung up and returned to his car. His next stop was at the hotel where Fred Morely, alias Theodore Small, lived.

This time there was nobody on the desk. Mike knew the clerks often stepped out for a smoke and some air. He vaulted the desk, made his way to the switchboard cubbyhole and picked up all the small slips on which phone charges were made for every outgoing call. He jammed these into his pocket.

He made his way to the elevator and rode to Morely's floor. He knocked hard on the door. Nothing happened for a moment and he knocked again. Morely's voice was nervous.

"Who is it?"

"Mike Lloyd. Open up, Fred. You're in a mess of trouble and I'm the only person who can help you."

The key turned, Morely opened the door a crack and peered out. He was disheveled, worried and a deep frown crinkled his forehead. Mike went inside and sat down.

"Okay," he said, "let's have it all. The truth this time."

Morely shrugged. "I couldn't help it, Mike. They had me pinned against a wall. Don't make me tell what it is they have on me. But I had to say the dead man got up and walked out. Sure—two guys came in and carried him away. They both knew me. They knew what my secret was. I was told what to say and—and I did."

"How about last night? Where were you?"

"Walking the streets," Morely groaned. "Trying to think things out and getting nowhere. I'm all tangled up in something I did long ago. I have to do as they say. Mike—I'm packing. I'm going to leave town. They'll probably kill me if I stay."

"What are they after?" Mike wanted to know.

"Honest, I haven't any idea. The guy who used the gun last night—he was a complete stranger. I think he was a paid gunman, but I'm not sure. I'm not sure about anything except I've got to get out of here fast."

Mike arose. "Maybe, by this afternoon, your worries will be over. I've been working hard and I have a good idea what this is about. If you like, you can come with me and see the finish."

Morely shook his head. "What's the use? The end of those guys will be only the beginning of the end for me. Mike—be a pal. Don't bring me in on this. Just let me start travelling."

"But you won't have to," Mike argued. "If you do run away, the cops are bound to get you sooner or later. This way you just own up, clear your record and it's over with. Fred, you're coming with me if I have to knock you cold first."

Morely nodded. "I guess you're right at that. Let me get my hat and coat."

CHAPTER V

The Time Grows Short



HEY hurried downstairs, out to the street and into Mike's car. He didn't have very far to go. Before long they came into sight of the various imposing structures which formed the city's public buildings. People were streaming in and out of the various courthouses. Mike pulled up across the street from one of the largest of these buildings.

"I know a few things, Fred," he said. "I know your right name is Theodore Small and you did time."

Morely shrugged. "So you know! Anybody could find out, I suppose. What are you going to do about it? Blab the whole thing in the story you'll be writing?"

"Maybe. You see, last night I was picked up by a couple of hard characters and taken to a cheap cafe's back room. One of the pair who snatched me was a plain stupid drunk. The other was smart, but not half as smart as he thought. They got tough, Fred. Very tough. They pushed me around and the biggest one grabbed me by the throat. Like this!"

He suddenly had Morely's throat and pinned him against the seat. Mike's other hand darted beneath the druggist's coat and snaked out a heavy automatic. He flipped the safety off and pushed the gun into Morely's ribs before he let go of him.

"Ever think what it felt like to die, Fred? Did you ever stand helplessly waiting for a man to shoot? I did—last night. I know how it feels and you're going to find out."

Morely looked puzzled. "Mike, have you gone nuts? I packed that rod in

case—well, I felt I needed a gun.”

“Sure you do, but I’ve got it now. Fred, you knew the man at the soda fountain. You knew why he was there—to get George before he could meet Ann Mason and spill what he intended to sell—or give—to her. You knew the killer so well that you didn’t even charge him for all that ice-cream he was eating and, Fred, that takes mighty close acquaintanceship! I’ve never known you to give away a penny.

“You soaked me for the coke last night and rang up my nickel. The previous sale was also for a nickel and if that killer had paid up after each serving, as you usually insist, the register would have shown a larger figure than five cents.

“You’re a tightwad, Fred, and it tripped you this time. Nobody hauled that dead guy out. Nobody but you, Fred. You lugged him to your own car and parked him in the back seat or the trunk. That’s why you wanted to get away so fast. That’s why you didn’t return to your room. The dead man had to be dumped somewhere.”

Morely’s attitude was changing. He snarled, lowered one hand and then lifted it again when the gun poked him painfully.

“Keep ’em up, Fred,” Mike warned. “Nice and high, like I had to do last night. There’s another angle that worked against you. The killer who had me at the point of a gun received one phone call which ordered him not to kill me. You figured I wasn’t worth killing and I was a good alibi in case things turned against you. I could swear you didn’t kill George.

“Then there was a second phone call and I was to be rubbed out. You discovered I’d swiped the diploma issued in your right name and spotted the phony which you swiped from the store you formerly owned. You knew I was getting too close and I was better dead. I didn’t die, Fred. But you’re going to!”

Morely gave a harsh laugh. “Who are you trying to kid, Mike? You couldn’t shoot me in cold blood. You’re not the type.”

“In a few moments a car containing some prison guards and a prisoner named Jonay will pull up before that courthouse. Somewhere in the neighborhood, two killers are waiting. Probably with a telescope-sighted rifle. They intend to

get Jonay.

“Why, I don’t know. There wasn’t time to go into that, but they are after him. He is the only person connected with this who hasn’t been close enough to you, or your gunmen, to be rubbed out before now.”

“Look,” Morely protested. “You got this all wrong and I’m on a spot. Supposing what you say is right? Supposing somebody does get knocked off. I’ve nothing to do with it.”

“Oh, you’ve got plenty, Fred. Because if young Jonay is gunned out, you’ll be dying too, as he sinks to the ground. When your killers fire at Jonay, I start pulling the trigger. That’s the situation, Fred. To save your own life you must tell me where those two killers are holed up. It’s impossible to search every place within rifle shot of this courthouse. So you’re going to tell me—or die when Jonay dies. It’s up to you.”

“Mike, this is crazy—”

“It’s as straight as you’ll find the road to hell, Fred. You used your room phone to contact those killers. The desk clerk made a record of the calls. I know what time they were made. I was right there when they came through and that’s the exact time written on the hotel charge slips, along with the right number.

“You wanted to act the part of a man caught in the middle, only there is no middle. You’re both ends, but there’s no squeeze, Fred. Not unless you’re ready to die.”

MORELY said nothing. His partially raised hands became tight fists. He looked keenly at Mike and saw grim determination. Minutes went by. Mike never relaxed his vigilance and the hand which held the gun was untiring.

Morely’s arms started to shake a bit. Mike smiled tightly.

“The strain is tough, Fred,” he said. “Any moment now, young Jonay will appear and die like George died in your drugstore. George, who didn’t believe in murder, knew you intended to knock off young Jonay and was going to sell out.

“Only George was either stupid or unlucky. He made the date to meet Ann Mason at your store. Maybe because he thought you were a right guy, being an ex-con. Maybe he came to you with the proposition and you suggested using the

store as a meeting place. He had no idea you were head man. The time is getting short, Fred. Where are those killers?"

Morely shook his head savagely and gritted his teeth. More minutes passed. A few pedestrians stared into the car, but the gun was hidden and while Morely had his hands raised slightly, it could have been a natural gesture. Anyway, the pedestrians saw plenty of cops around. They seemed to be everywhere.

Then a large sedan slid to the curb. Morely stared at it. A uniformed prison guard climbed out. The gun prodded Morely's ribs harder. Mike wasn't watching the tableau in front of the courthouse. His eyes were on Morely.

"When the kid drops, you're on your way," Mike said between his teeth.

Morely gave a shriek. "He's on the third floor directly across from the courthouse. He'll shoot the minute the kid shows. Mike—don't kill me. Mike—don't. Please don't—"

Mike yanked the gun away. Morely's arms came down and he uttered a growl. The gun came down to, striking Morely across the forehead. He wilted and moaned. Mike leaned out of the car window. Sergeant Higgins came out of a doorway. "Right across the street, third floor," Mike shouted.

Higgins blew a whistle. Men armed with tommy-guns appeared from parked cars. One of the guns rattled briefly. Then men pounded toward the entrance of a building just down the street. There were some more shots. A few moments of silence followed.

A pair of uniformed cops emerged first, followed by Joey, who staggered as if he was still feeling the effects of the bottle he'd finished the night before. Higgins came over to the car.

"The other one—a guy dressed all in gray—wanted to shoot it out. He did and we won. This mug is talking. I guess we can take Morely off your hands now, Mike. We know what it's all about—or can guess. Jonay and Morely served time together. Morely told Jonay about plans he was making to revive a dangerous mob.

"Jonay was with him then, but the kid got religion and backed out. Morely was afraid he'd talk, discovered Jonay was being brought down here for a court hearing and decided to wrap him up for good."

"I thought it would be like that." Mike climbed out of the car, took a firm grip on Morely and pulled him to the sidewalk. "Make him tell where he hid that body, Sergeant. And who he paid to kill the man. I'm going to phone in the story and then explain things to Ann Mason and the Jonays."

"Sure," Higgins grinned. "If I was your age and the girl involved was a trim blonde, I'd want to do the explaining too. But, if Morely hadn't cracked, all of us would be explaining to the Commissioner. I was never so scared in my life."

"Morely was bound to be yellow," Mike said. "He hired men to do his dirty work and only cowards do that. Thanks for believing in me."



When Black Burton answers the call of his reporter friend, Joe Pryor, he runs into a nest of rackets within rackets and comes face to face with grim, baffling murder in

THE LOTTERY RACKETEERS

A Complete Novelet by NELS LEROY JORGENSEN Next Issue!



After luring Mike Malloy out to this deserted spot, Conant must have pushed him over the cliff

Without Evidence

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

Blackmailing is Gus Conant's game—but he doesn't mind a slight detour into murder when it looks safe enough!

HE DIDN'T look very much like a cop. He was tall and lean and he had a springy step that went more with the winner of the tennis finals than with the owner of a sergeant's badge. His name was Bill Malloy and he was looking, with slightly wrinkled nose, at that same last name printed on an office door. The first name was Mike

and underneath this inscription were two words *Private Investigations*.

Bill Malloy walked in. There were three girls in the outer office. The place was fitted with green leather chairs, neat mahogany desks, some good copies of masterpieces and a crime library that filled part of one wall.

The receptionist moved forward to in-

tercept him, but quickly stepped aside. She'd tried to stop him before. Bill Malloy grinned down at her, crossed the office and opened the door marked *Private* without knocking.

Mike Malloy was tilted back in a swivel chair, his feet were on the desk and his eyes were tightly closed. Gentle snores came from his sagging mouth. Bill slammed the door behind him.

Mike Malloy opened one eye. "Oh, it's you, my good worthy brother William. Take a load off your feet. I'm very busy, but I always have time to talk to the Law."

Bill sat down, chuckling. "I guess I know the reason you quit the force five years ago, Mike. They didn't provide an office private enough for you to sleep in. How's business?"

"Not bad." Mike laughed and slid his feet off the desk. "Not bad at all. But you didn't drop in to ask about that. What's up?"

"Look, why not give up all this and come on back?" Bill said. "The department needs men like you, Mike. Fooling around with divorce stuff, tracking down missing people, peeking through keyholes—what sort of a life is that?"

Mike winked. "A great life. I make more dough in a month than you make in a year. Why, right now I've got an assignment—"

"Which involves a blackmailer named Gus Conant," Bill interrupted. "Mike, lay off him. We're after that guy too. But there are enough of us to take care of him and only one of you. He's poison. Deadly poison."

MIKE just grinned. "They say I've got toxic fangs too. Good gosh, Bill, you don't think I'm afraid of the man?"

"No. Not that at all. I know you better. In fact you're liable to underestimate him. He's got all sorts of underworld connections. He hires gunmen for his jobs. We think we know of at least two cases where he paid for murders. The man is dangerous."

Mike said, "Bill, I've got a client who has been paying him for years. He's sick of it, even to the point where he'll go to court, if necessary. And I have another client, brand new, who is also being tapped by Conant. They're going to have a meeting soon and if I can, I'll trap that guy. I'll take care of two clients

at the same time and hand you the smelliest blackmailer that ever existed."

Bill wagged his head. "You're only one man. Conant is an expert in this stuff. If you stumble, you'll get a slug through the brain."

Mike laughed. "Look who's talking! You're afraid I might run into a slug. What about you? What of those two escaped convicts you've been assigned to track down? Chuck Torgo and Big George Farr are ten times more dangerous than any blackmailer. The chances are, I'll go to your funeral before you attend mine."

Bill arose. "Okay. I can't budge you. Nobody ever could. However, if you take my warning about Conant, I'll feel better. Pack a rod when you corner him and use it. Let me know if you need any help."

"You'll be the first to know," Mike said, smiling reassuringly. "So long, Bill. When I drag down two fees for getting Conant, I'll buy you a drink. Which is more than you'll be able to afford even if you grab those two ex-cons. All you'll ever get is a pat on the back or maybe an elevation to Detective Lieutenant which must carry at least five bucks a week more pay."

Bill walked out. Before the day was over, he wondered if Mike wasn't right, if being a private eye, working on your own time, wasn't better. Bill had walked the streets until his feet burned. He had talked to stool pigeons, co-operative citizens, to bartenders who might have served the pair of escaped convicts a drink. He had spent hours looking for just one slight trace of the pair—and found nothing.

It was disheartening work. There was no glamour in being a detective. It was just plain hard labor with emphasis on the feet. Before he had dinner and dropped into a movie, the weight of his gun, torch, sap and handcuffs felt like a ton.

He checked into Headquarters by phone. No word had been received about the two convicts except that everyone was still positive they were in town. Bill went home, to the two-room hotel suite he occupied alone. He read the newspapers, smoked a lot and thought hard trying to determine just where a pair of crooks like Torgo and Farr would hole up.

The phone rang. A man who an-

nounced himself as David Kinley, a well known broker, was on the wire.

"Sergeant," he said, "I've been trying to locate your brother Michael. His office doesn't know where he is and he doesn't answer his home phone. I thought perhaps he might be with you."

"I haven't seen him since this afternoon," Bill replied. "Is there anything I can do?"

"No," Kinley said slowly. "No, I think not. You might tell him to call me up. I'm a client of his. And tell him that Conant was here. Just left, in fact. Mr. Malloy wanted to know."

Bill grunted acquiescence and hung up. At eleven-thirty he went to bed. At twelve-fifteen the phone rang again and this time he knew it was important by the way the operator at the downstairs switchboard kept the bell humming.

It was Inspector Delaney at Headquarters. "Bill, I've got bad news," he said. "Very bad. Your brother Mike was found at the bottom of a cliff. He's dead. I'm going out there. Be ready for me in ten minutes."

Bill's hand felt clammy after he hupped up. He sat on the edge of the bed for a moment, trying to smoke an unlighted cigarette. Usually he had pleasant blue eyes, warm and fun-loving. Now they had changed. They had become chill and hard—hard as flint. He hurled the cigarette on the floor, jumped up and shed his pajamas. In three minutes he was dressed. In six he was on the sidewalk, pacing up and down and cursing Delaney for being so slow.

THEY used the siren in getting out of the city. Delaney sat beside Bill in the back seat. A uniformed driver snaked the police sedan through traffic and really let it out when he hit the highway.

Delaney said, "It's tough, Bill. At ten o'clock a fellow and girl pulled off the highway and drove to the edge of this cliff. To look at the moon, no doubt. They saw Mike's car. There was nobody in it. The motor was running and they got suspicious. They looked over the cliff and saw him lying on the rocks below. A doctor got there fast. He said Mike had been dead no more than twenty minutes. Couldn't tell if it was murder or accident. Head caved in. Might have resulted from the fall. You know anything?"

"Yeah," Bill said slowly. "Yeah. It was murder and Gus Conant did it. He wouldn't have delegated anybody else for the job. Killing a cop, even a private eye, is bad stuff. He couldn't afford to have anybody else know."

"Conant, eh?" Delaney squinted out into the passing darkness. "Now there's a tough one. He'll be alibied and white-washed like a farm fence."

"He's taken care of it already," Bill said. "That's why I know it was him. A certain man he's been tapping, phoned me at ten o'clock and said he was trying to find Mike, that Conant had just left his house. The man is lying. Conant made him lie as partial payment of blackmail. We'll never break the guy down. He's got too much to lose. Conant knows a safe one when he sees it."

They reached the cliff. Bill talked to the young couple who'd discovered the crime. He examined Mike's car and ordered fingerprint men to go over it. He was quite certain that Mike had come to this remote spot with a client and that this client was supposed to meet a black-mailer for the payoff near the cliff. He knew that the whole thing was nothing more than a lure to get Mike into position for a quick and clean kill. Finding the fake client might help some but it still remained a hopeless proposition.

There might be something in Mike's office as a clue, but Bill doubted it. Mike kept few records until a case was closed. Bill talked to the doctor who'd arrived soon after it happened.

"It could be murder, yes," the doctor admitted. "Hard to tell. He—landed on his head. Some of the crushing blows could have come from an instrument in the hands of a killer. But how can we be sure?"

Bill snorted. "A doctor couldn't be," he said. "A cop might be. He was my brother and I know he was murdered. Thanks anyway, Doc."

Bill Malloy didn't go to the bottom of the cliff. He couldn't do anything to help there. Instead he began looking around the desolate area. It was eight miles from town, rather far off the highway and the quarter moon didn't do much to relieve the darkness. It was hot, too, and sticky.

Bill stood beside his brother's car. Men were working on it for prints. They weren't finding any, not even Mike's. Bill saw something against the

faint moonlight. It looked like a wraith, spiraling up toward the night sky, a thin, flimsy column of something.

He moved toward it, finally, barking shins on boulders and getting his face slapped by branches. He paid no attention to all of the bumps because he discovered that the wraith was nothing more than smoke coming from a chimney of a small shack, a dilapidated place, but in a direct line with the scene of the crime.

In fact, being close to the edge of the cliff too, anyone in the shack would have had a clear view of Mike's car and what happened in or near it.

Bill listened outside the partially opened door a moment, heard nothing and pushed the door wide. It sagged so much that it scraped against the floor. He threw the beam of his torch around the single room. It contained two old chairs, a rickety table, some old horse blankets on the floor and an ancient wood stove.

On the table were a few cracked dishes, two opened tins of food. On the stove were pans containing the food, which was hot and still moist. Whoever had been in this shack had departed in a hurry, and hadn't been gone long.

Bill's eyes grew narrow. A rapid departure, with food abandoned on the stove, meant the occupants had been scared into leaving. Probably someone had seen the crime committed and were in no position to be caught, even as witnesses.

SERGEANT MALLOY found cigarette butts, two empty whisky flasks and, carelessly thrown into a corner, a cheap wallet. He opened the wallet. It contained no money, but there was a driver's license behind a cellophane window. Bill whistled sharply. The license was made out in the name of Frank Bartell and, Mr. Bartell had been foolish enough to pick up a couple of pedestrians three days ago. Foolish because the pedestrians had turned out to be Chuck Torgo and Big George Farr, intent upon putting distance between them and the prison from which they'd taken French leave.

They had taken the corpse away when Bill returned to where Mike's car was still parked.

"Nothing on him which gives us any sort of a clue," Captain Delaney said.

"The Medical Examiner came, took a look and said it was accidental death. To make him change his mind we've got to provide evidence, Bill, and I don't see any."

"No car tracks, besides those made by Mike's car and the bus owned by the people who found the body?"

Delaney shook his head. "Not even good tracks from those cars, Bill. The road was pretty well grown over with grass. You can't take impressions off stuff like that."

Bill got into his dead brother's car. "I'm going back to town, Captain. If there are no clues here, I might find some there."

Delaney put a restraining hand on Bill's shoulder. "Now, Bill, I realize he was your brother and you loved him very much. I know very well that you suspect Gus Conant of either committing this crime or engineering it. But remember—no rough stuff with Conant unless you have something definite to go on."

Bill smiled coldly. "I'm a cop, sir. I loved my brother, but I also respect the badge I wear. If I bring in Conant, I'll book him and have the proof to go with it. Roughing him up wouldn't do any good. He's tough and can take more than I'm able to hand out."

"Good!" Delaney's eyes beamed approval. "Keep on using your head and try to stifle the emotions this has brought upon you."

Bill stepped on the starter. "That doesn't mean, sir, that I won't get Conant, because I will. Dead or alive, I don't care which, but I'll get him."

Bill drove back to the city, a trifle too numb to think. Two ex-convicts had more than probably witnessed the killing. But how could they talk? Especially since a guard they'd struck, in making their escape, was now dead. Even the escaped men didn't know about that. Bill, like everyone else, thought it wise to keep quiet the fact that the pair were now murderers and headed for the chair. Two men like Torgo and Farr wouldn't go back to face death. They'd fight it out and there was no telling how many policemen would be killed.

Right now Bill Malloy was delighted that the news of the guard's death hadn't come out because a plan was slowly forming in his mind. Not the kind of a plan a cop should be thinking about, but when a cop's brother is the murder vic-

tim, anything ought to go, especially with a rat like Gus Conant.

Bill pulled up in front of a large English type house far back from the street they called Acres Road. Conant lived in style. He was no cheap blackmailer, but a highly intelligent purveyor of crime and agony. Bill walked up a path of carefully placed stones, mounted to a large porch and rang the bell, almost hidden under ivy that climbed up the wall.

The man who opened the door looked cool and neat and well poised. He wore gray flannels and his hair was brushed straight back from a rather narrow and pointed face. He held a thin cigar between his well manicured fingers.

"Yes?" he inquired.

"I'm Sergeant Bill Malloy," Bill said. "You've seen me before. Also a reasonable facsimile in my brother Mike."

"Malloy!" Conant stepped back from the door. "Come on in. I couldn't see you so well out there. How are you—and that brother of yours?"

"I'm sick, mentally, and Mike is dead," Bill said softly.

Conant's eyelids dropped just a trifle. "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't like Mike. Naturally, how could I with him on my tail as often as he could be? But I've never wished death even upon my worst enemies. Sergeant, are you under the impression that I killed him?"

"Oh, no!" Bill walked into a very comfortable living room. He reflected that being a blackmailer paid off far more handsomely than being a cop. "Not at all, Conant. I have no impression of the fact that you killed Mike. I just absolutely know that you did."

CONANT sat down. "I was afraid of that. Mainly because—say, when did he die?"

"I'll ask the questions, foolish as the whole procedure may be," Bill said. "Where have you been since six o'clock this evening?"

Conant rubbed his chin, took several puffs on his cigar and bit his lower lip. "At six I was dining at the Club Royale. I went alone, but I'm known there. You can check. I left about seven-thirty or quarter of eight. From then on until about eleven I—just walked around."

"Kind of a long hike," Bill observed dryly. "As a matter of fact, Conant, you're not saying where you went be-

cause you want me to get the idea your alibi is a type you'd be reluctant to go into detail about. That would go big with a jury, if you were ever indicted."

"It might be something like that," Conant said. "Frankly, I was with someone, but details might result in embarrassment all around. Believe me, Sergeant, I did not kill your brother."

Bill arose. "You wouldn't refer to a man named David Kinley as your alibi? He phoned me at ten o'clock and quite casually told me you'd just left him. Which alibis you because Mike was killed fifteen minutes before ten, a long distance from here. Therefore the alibi would hold."

"I'm not talking, Sergeant."

Bill said, "Conant, you're a shrewd article. I haven't the slightest respect for you as a human being, but I admire your coolness and the way you prepare a crime. Personally, you're rotten all through. Every blackmailer is. He has to be."

Conant smiled. "I don't even resent what you're saying, Sergeant. I know how upset you are. If my brother had been killed, I wouldn't be thinking too clearly either. Nor selecting my words too well."

Bill's voice had icy edges to it. "But this is one time, Conant, that you slipped for there happens to be a little shack by the spot where Mike was tossed over the cliff. Two men were in that shanty and they had an excellent view of the scene."

Conant's eyebrows elevated fast. "So? Is it a pinch then?"

"Not yet. I've got to locate that pair first and they don't want to be located. But they will be, eventually, and they'll talk because I'll be in a mighty good bargaining position so far as they are concerned. Maybe they won't want to rat on a guy like you because they're rats too. Maybe they'll be afraid of you but—they'll be more afraid of what I'll do to them. I wouldn't take any trips, Conant. Not any at all."

Bill stalked out of the house, returned to his own car and wondered what sort of an impression he'd created. He drove away but stopped again at the nearest open store. There he entered a phone booth and called Headquarters.

"I want four men," he said. "New boys who aren't known. I want one dressed in tuxedo, two in business suits and the fourth as a workman of some

sort. Men who can tail Conant and not be spotted no matter where he goes. I'll cover him until they arrive. Each man in his own car. Step on it."

Bill went back to the vicinity of Conant's home, parked and waited until the quartette of detectives arrived. He gave them explicit instructions and was gratified at their intelligence and willingness. Then he left Conant in their hands and drove to the apartment house where David Kinley lived.

It was late, but Kinley was fully dressed and looked as if he expected company. He was a gray man—gray of hair and face and clothing. He had fat little fingers, stained by nicotine, and a rather apologetic, retiring manner for a business executive.

Bill showed his badge. "You phoned me tonight. Asking for my brother Mike. Remember?"

Kinley wetted his lips. "Oh yes, of course. I haven't found him yet either."

Bill remained standing after he entered the apartment. "You were a client of Mike. You are being blackmailed by Gus Conant and you wanted Mike to haul you out from under without bringing down on you, all the evidence Conant holds. You're taking a devil of a way to do it, Mr. Kinley."

"I—don't seem to—understand." Kinley looked like he needed a drink. Two drinks.

"Mike was murdered tonight. At that time you'll tell me Conant was here at your home. But it won't work, Kinley, because I'm getting evidence on him and when it's complete, you'll have to tell the truth."

KINLEY just looked at Bill and pretended not to understand.

"You speak in riddles," Kinley complained half childishly. "Conant is just a name to me. He—he wasn't here this evening. I didn't mean to give you that impression over the phone."

Bill snorted. "You were mighty careful that I did get that impression. If I pick up Conant on suspicion of murder, he'll squawk. He'll say he was here at your house. Then, very reluctantly you'll admit that was the case. What was he here about? Oh, just some business deal, and Conant will back you up. Certainly two gentlemen like you and Conant wouldn't be talking blackmail. Oh, no! He's got you over a barrel, Mr.

Kinley. He's forcing you to alibi him and the worst of it is, he'll succeed because you're in no position to deny him a thing."

"I'm sorry," Kinley said, and strangely enough sounded as if he meant it. "I wish I could help you."

Bill eyed him critically. "Supposing I nailed Conant without your help. Nailed him good, I mean. Would you come forward and bust his alibi to bits? Provided, of course, that whatever Conant has against you is never made public?"

"Sergeant, I'm a business man, and I'm open to all sorts of deals," Kinley said. "I really mean it when I say I wish I could be of help. Your brother was a friend of mine. I liked him."

"Okay, Mr. Kinley. Keep thinking about it because when I avenge my brother's murder, I'll free you from the yoke Conant has put upon you and a lot of other people like you. When that happens, I'll need your help, and fast. Good night. Stay away from Conant."

Kinley didn't reply, didn't even move to escort Bill to the door. Bill returned to Headquarters, avoided Captain Delaney and sat down in his own office. Reports from the four shadows would start coming in soon.

At one o'clock the first one arrived. Conant had left his home and driven to a night club. He'd indulged in liquor rather heavily for him, but hadn't got drunk by any means. He'd gone for a little ride in the country and, oddly enough, close by the spot where the murder had taken place. He hadn't stopped.

At five in the morning, further reports came. Conant had gone home, made a good show of preparing for bed and put out all the lights. A half hour later he'd almost slipped past the watchers, but they'd got his trail. He proceeded to a garage where he rented a car. This time he drove close to the murder scene, hurried toward the darkness and the cliff and spent about twenty minutes in the shack.

"Good," Bill approved. "He's sniffing the bait. Did you tap his phone?"

It was tapped. Conant wouldn't be making or receiving any calls now, without their being recorded. Bill went over to an old leather couch in his office and lay down to rest. He didn't sleep. He kept thinking too much about Mike.

By the following afternoon, the reports were coming fast. Conant was extremely busy. He seemed to be touring all the tough spots. Waterfront areas, cheap cafes and dives. Things were working fine.

At nine that night, Bill took over personally. They were decent about it at Headquarters. Nobody asked any questions or stuck their oars in. Mike had been Bill's brother and Bill could handle it any way he liked. If things soured, he'd take all the blame, too, which worried Bill about as much as the flick of a fly's wings.

Conant emerged from his home at eleven. He got out a roadster and roared toward town. Bill stayed far behind him, but was all ready for any sort of double-cross. If Conant had the slightest suspicion he might be tagged, it was going to be hard work.

Conant turned a city corner very fast. Bill saw the brake lights go on as he approached the same corner. Saw them continue to glow a short distance down that very dark street and knew that Conant had stopped. Bill did some fast figuring. They were well uptown, too far from the haunts where Conant's mission should take him, and further on down that same side-street was a subway station.

Bill whizzed past the corner. A quick glance showed Conant's car already parked. He was playing tricks, but Bill had a few too. He used the siren a couple of blocks further along. That had been a local subway station which he was certain Conant headed for. Bill pulled up at the next local station on the downtown side.

HE LEFT the car there, dived into the subway and made the train. He stood behind a pole as the cars slid past and he saw Conant in one of the crowded middle ones. Bill got into the last car and stayed there.

Conant switched trains at the express stop and Bill was hard put to stay out of sight. Fortunately the platform was crowded and he succeeded in avoiding Conant's darting glances. The blackmailer left the subway far downtown.

Bill shadowed him carefully. So much depended on Conant's ease of mind now. The blackmailer stopped in a bar and emerged through a side door. That didn't fool Bill. He was right after him, a good

distance away but prepared to close that distance the moment it became necessary.

They passed a newsstand. Conant didn't stop, but Bill dropped a coin and seized a paper. There was a boxed item on the front page stating that the prison guard had died and that Torgo and Farr were now wanted for murder committed while they made their escape from prison. The chair was practically automatic in a case of that kind.

Bill threw the paper away. Conant was moving slower now. Bill stalked him with all the skill eight years of police work had drilled into him. He knew which shadows might conceal him and which were deceptive. He had to think as Conant thought, even before the blackmailer did. It was almost necessary to contemplate the man's moves before he even knew what they were to be.

Finally Conant came to a dead stop. It was along a street which was silent as a tomb. Pretty soon an express highway was going to be constructed at this point. All of the five-story tenement houses had been condemned and were empty, awaiting the wrecker's crushing tools.

Conant lighted a cigarette and sat down on the crumbling outside steps of one house. Then he flipped the cigarette into the street, arose and let his right hand move slowly beneath his coat. It came away empty, but he'd been making sure a gun was ready for fast work.

Conant crossed the street fast, marched up the stairs to one of those houses and tried the door. It was locked. He stood there for a moment and then went around to the back of the building. Bill didn't follow all the way, just far enough to hear Conant pry a window open. It scraped loudly.

Bill didn't go around the corner. He just waited a long moment. Then he retreated hurriedly and ran down the street to the nearest call box which he'd located on the way. He gave some terse commands over the phone and then sped back to the house.

This time he made his way around to the back, found the window Conant had used and crawled through it himself. He stood there, in the silent, evil-smelling tenement listening very intently. There wasn't a sound. He sniffed. Someone had been smoking a cigarette in here and not long ago. Conant? Hardly,

because a cigarette could easily give him away.

Bill retired to a corner, put his back against it and drew his gun. There was a scraping sound somewhere. It got closer and turned into clearer footsteps. Someone came into the room though Bill couldn't see who it was.

"That window is open," a voice said harshly. "Chuck, did you leave it open?"

Another man entered. "Not me. You couldn't lock that window, but it was shut all right. We'd better get out of here. I never liked this rat-trap anyhow. I didn't like the way you sent out word so we'd get dough either. The woods are full of two-timing lying stool pigeons."

"They don't sing on us," the other man growled. "Not now they don't, when we got the chair facing us. But you're right. It's time to move on, dough or no dough."

Bill heard the pair going up the stairs. He gave them two minutes and then followed, moving slowly and carefully. Yellow light came from beneath a closed door. Candle light. Bill wiped sweat off his face. Conant was somewhere in this building. He might be well aware that he'd been tailed here. Maybe he wouldn't show at all. But he had to. There was no other way out.

Bill couldn't let these two murderous convicts escape. Not while he still carried a badge. Not even if it meant that Conant would escape. Bill moved toward the door and drew his service pistol. He grasped the knob firmly, turned it all the way and kicked the door wide open.

BIG George Farr and Chuck Torgo whirled around. Torgo was poised to go for a gun that lay on an old box ten feet away.

"Don't do it!" Bill's gun covered both of them. "You're washed up, both of you. If you want to eat lead, that's okay too. Make a move, boys, and you get it! It's up to you."

Torgo was obviously stalling. It was hard for Bill to watch both of them at the same time.

"How'd you find us, flatfoot?" Torgo said. "I want to know."

"You were careless," Bill replied. "You needed cash bad and you sent out the word. Sometimes that kind of a word travels too far. It happened to reach the ears of a friend of mine who had a

mighty good reason to give me a hand. It had to be a mighty good reason, because he jumped at the chance. Maybe you boys can give me a hint why he was so eager."

"Maybe we could, but that ain't saying we will," Torgo retorted. He was getting primed to go for the gun. Farr had one too, somewhere in his clothes. These two men would far rather die in a gun battle than be dragged to the chair. They were sure of that and knew that Bill was also aware of the fact.

Then there was a step behind Bill. Conant's voice spoke softly. "Drop the gun, Sergeant. I've got one lined up with the back of your neck. You two—move a muscle and you die!"

"What's the idea?" Bill demanded. He lowered his gun hand until it was rigid by his side. "I thought you were on my side, Conant. After all the work you did lining things up, I was sure—"

"Shut up!" Conant screamed. "That's a lie. Not that it makes any difference. Drop the gun, Sergeant."

Bill flashed a quick glance at Torgo who stood about six feet directly in front of him. Bill's fingers relaxed and the gun started sliding out of his grasp. At the last moment he curled his wrist and flipped the gun straight at Torgo.

At the same instant Bill jumped sideways. Conant's gun went off. The slug missed Bill and hit Torgo in the chest. He was fumbling with Bill's gun which he had expertly caught. Big George was whipping out a weapon from his hip pocket.

Conant, watching all that went on, saw three things at once. Bill was unarmed and in no position to attack instantly. Torgo was going down, so Big George was the only potential danger. Conant shot him through the chest twice, shot him deliberately. The gun started swinging in Bill's direction.

"Look out!" Bill yelled.

Conant whirled. Torgo wasn't down. He held the police pistol rigidly. He fired it four times, so fast it sounded like the explosions of an automatic rifle. He fired all four slugs straight into Conant's chest.

The blackmailer staggered, fell backwards and hit the wall. His left hand groped air, hoping to find some support. His right held the gun, but he couldn't raise it. His face was the empty face of an old, old man. One leg doubled under

him. He tried to talk, tried to scream, but there wasn't a sound from his throat.

He curled up on the floor and then toppled over on his face. Torgo, still standing, swayed drunkenly. He pointed his gun at Bill and fired, but Bill was moving very fast. He made a sliding leap toward Conant, hit the floor on his stomach and as he whipped past the dead man, he snatched the gun out of his hand.

Torgo fired two more times, at a very elusive target, and missed. Bill didn't. Torgo let go of his gun, staggered to one of the soap boxes and sat on it, both hands clutching his chest. He was talking, in a low, wheezy sort of a voice.

"The rat! He brought cops here so we'd get killed before we could talk. Yeah, talk about him and the way he bashed in that guy's skull. Yeah, and tossed him—off—the cliff!"

Torgo was falling from the box and, like Conant, he clutched at air. Maybe a dying man sees things to grab at, Bill thought. Torgo hit the floor about the same time the squad hit the door downstairs.

Captain Delaney came in and stood at Bill's side.

"Nice work," he said, "getting those

two killers. But how did Conant get involved?"

"They saw him kill Mike," Bill said slowly. "Conant found it out. He knew they were dangerous. He was afraid they might use their information to strike a bargain with us. So Conant, with all his underworld connections, started a hunt for the pair and found them."

"But they're all dead," Delaney said. "How come?"

Bill looked down at Conant. "He had to kill them. There was no other out for him. Meanwhile, the convicts had learned the guard had died and they were done for, so they had to kill anybody in their way. I was the only unarmed man in the room. If there was any shooting to be done, Conant had to aim at those two and they at him. I could come later."

Delaney nodded somewhat glumly. "I see. Nice the way it turned out. We got rid of two undesirables, and that rat, Conant, was killed. He paid for Mike's death although, if we had nabbed him, he'd have laughed at us and walked out a free man. Funny how fate works these things out, Bill."

"Yeah," Bill said quietly. "Fate is funny that way."

*"Nobody Ever Seen the Masked Angel's Face—and He Ain't
Ever Lost a Fight Yet!"*



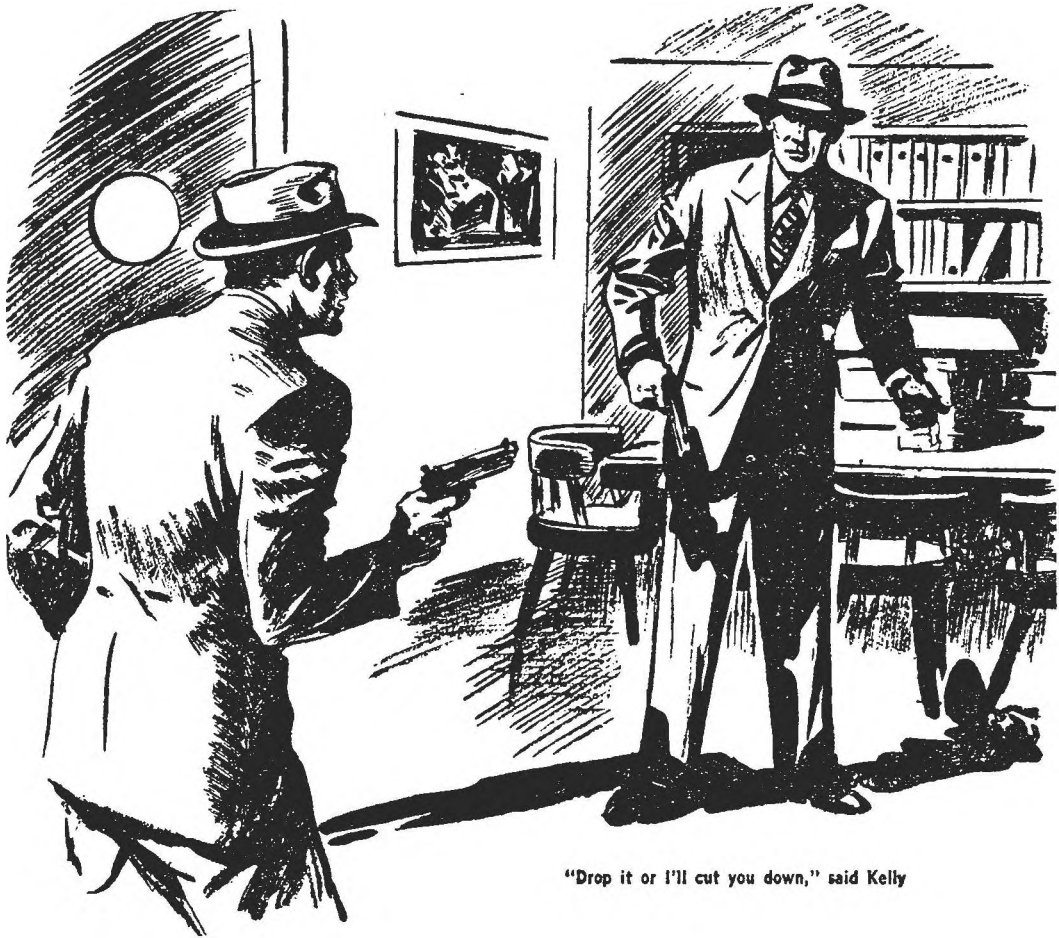
THAT WAS the excited comment of Hoppy Uniatz when the fighter known as the Masked Angel jumped into the ring for his battle with Torpedo Smith. Simon Templar, the Saint, smiled tolerantly at his side-kick's enthusiasm. But later in the fight, when Torpedo Smith went down and didn't get up, the Saint's smile faded. He was sure it was murder—not the accidental result of a prize-fight.

From that moment on, the Saint's eye was on the Masked Angel—and it was a matter of Saint versus Angel in one of the most unusual and puzzling mysteries in which Simon Templar has ever starred!

As the Saint's investigation continues, the problem becomes more and more complicated—and it's plenty dangerous every step of the way, for many attempts are made on Simon Templar's life. There's a smashing climax packed with surprises. And both the Saint and his famous creator, Leslie Charteris, are at their sterling best in *THE MASKED ANGEL*, a brand-new complete full-length "Saint" novel by Leslie Charteris in the Winter issue of—

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"Drop it or I'll cut you down," said Kelly

The Murderer Stands Mute

By JOHN L. BENTON

Mike Kelly stumbles into dark pathways of blackmail and hate—until sightless eyes suddenly flash light!

LIEUTENANT Michael Kelly came down the wide museum steps, paused at the bottom for a moment and then lit a cigarette. Finally he walked along the sidewalk for half a block and stopped beside a parked car containing four men.

"I cased the reading room," Kelly said. "It's closed and nobody is in it so far as I can see. However, we'll take no chances. Anderson—you cover the west door. Martin—take the rear. Cas-

sidy, keep your eyes peeled on the east door. Wagner, stay with the car and plant her smack in front of the museum. There are other men inside and around the place. They'll take orders from you four."

Wagner was fifty, big, and scoffing at the whole idea. "Mike, you're paying too much attention to a silly phone call. What did it say? Just a voice telling you there'd be a killing in the reading room of this museum at four-thirty."

"It wasn't what that voice said, Wagner," Kelly clipped. "It was the way the guy said it. Like a tax collector telling you how much you owe. There wasn't a shade of a doubt in that voice. I'm going inside. Watch it now."

He returned to the museum. A few people were wandering about looking at the exhibits. The reading room was part of a little-used wing. Leather covered swinging doors cut it off from the rest of the museum.

Kelly walked toward a very thick marble pillar and got behind it. His watch indicated that in five minutes this anonymous caller's prediction should come true. There were detectives posted at every exit and several were mingling with the people inside the building. Nobody covered the reading room, though. Kelly was certain he could do it alone and not scare away any would-be murderer.

PROMPTLY at four-thirty, he saw a tall, slim young man walk briskly toward the reading room. He was clean-cut, so far as Kelly could see. The man's hat brim was turned way down covering his face. But his clothes were good and he walked with a springy step that indicated sound health and determination.

Kelly let him go past. After all, there was nobody in the reading room and murder required two people. When the second person appeared, it would be time to move in. Kelly stayed behind the pillar. The young man pushed open the swinging doors and disappeared inside.

Then Kelly heard a stern voice, a shout and this was followed by two quick shots. He raced for the doors, swung them wide and slammed inside with a gun in his fist.

There was a man on the floor, all sprawled out in the undignified posture of the newly dead.

The man on his feet was the young fellow Kelly had watched enter the reading room.

"Stand where you are," Kelly spat. "Drop that gun. I'm the law. Drop it or I'll cut you down!"

The young man let go of a .45 automatic and slowly raised his arms. Kelly moved around until he could face him. He approached warily, kicked the heavy automatic to one side and then stuffed his own pistol back into its holster.

"I think," he said, "you'd better start talking."

The young man, with his hands still raised, began to stutter. "You-you really are a-a detective?"

Kelly showed him his badge. The young man gave a very faint sigh, his arms came down and his whole body seemed to follow along. He fell inertly across the man he'd killed, but he only stayed there a second. Just long enough to get a hand beneath the dead man's coat and whip out the gun nestled there.

The young man jumped to his feet. "Sorry, officer, but this happens to be how it is. I don't want to get caught quite yet. Walk over and face the wall. Put the palms of your hands against it, move your feet back and put all your weight against your hands pressing the wall."

Kelly took a look at cold blue eyes and a white, set face. This man was on the verge of the jitters. The type who might shoot, though he'd be sorry for it afterwards.

"I see you know how to make a man foolishly incompetent in the easiest way," Kelly said. "You don't want to talk?"

"I haven't anything to say. Not a word. There are a few questions—but no time. And understand me, I do know about making a man a prisoner. I learned it in the Army and I know how to handle a gun. No funny stuff. I honestly would hate to shoot, but I will."

Kelly nodded. "I believe you would. Okay, I'll assume the position."

He walked to the wall, faced it and put out his arms. Then he leaned forward until he was completely off balance and only supported by his hands against the wall. The young man stepped close, slipped a hand over Kelly's shoulder and extracted the service pistol from its holster. He tossed it as far away as possible.

"Stay like that," he commanded.

Kelly heard him tiptoe toward the door, heard the door swish slightly as it opened. The young man would be backing through it, keeping his eyes on his prisoner—and backing smack into half a dozen cops who'd been warned by the murder shots.

There was a brief scuffle of feet, a thump followed by a sigh and then the scraping of a body against the tiled floor. Kelly pushed himself erect, went over

and got his gun and then walked to where three of his men stood above the prisoner, sprawled out and unconscious, with a trickle of blood running down the middle of his forehead.

"Take him in," Kelly said. "Somebody phone the M.E. and make a report to Headquarters. This kid sees nobody and the charge is murder."

Kelly went to where the dead man lay. He turned him over and wrinkled his nose. The murder was getting a nasty aroma already. The victim happened to be one Monte Cheever, a man accomplished in all forms of crime from sneak thievery to blackmail; from dope peddling to picking pockets. Kelly searched him without finding anything of interest.

Half an hour later, he'd cleared things with the Deputy Medical Examiner, put two detectives on duty in the reading room and hurried back to Headquarters.

THE young murderer was brought in to Kelly's office. Kelly offered him a cigarette, which he gratefully accepted. "You acted as if you had a few brains," Kelly said, "but you disproved the whole idea in not thinking I had friends along. Now suppose you tell me what it's all about and just who you are."

The young man regarded the glowing end of his cigarette before looking up directly at Kelly. There was no fear in his eyes. "Who I am and what I am, makes no difference," he said. "Why I killed that rat is also beside the point. I did kill him; I freely admit it and I'm ready to pay for it. What more do you want?"

Kelly shook his head. "Like that, is it? What branch of the Army were you in?"

The young man just smiled crookedly.

"Going to take the attitude of a mute now?" Kelly asked.

"No—only when you ask questions I don't want to answer. Ask me what kind of a day it is and I'll tell you. Ask me anything you like so long as it does not concern this murder I just committed—or me. Just to get it off my chest, I killed that rat for a mighty good reason. But why I killed him is my business and so is my identity. Now you can bring on the spotlights, the rubber hoses and all the stuff I've read about."

Kelly laughed. "Read about is cor-

rect. We don't do things like that, really." He lifted his phone and made a call. "Callahan, this is Lieutenant Kelly. You printed the kid we just brought in. Put a man on the next plane for Washington and have the prints checked through the F.B.I. They'll be in the file of military personnel. Have your man phone me the instant he has made the identification."

Kelly hung up and somberly regarded his prisoner whose fingers shook slightly as he brought the butt of the cigarette to his lips. Kelly threw him the pack.

The young man said, "Lieutenant, I forgot all about the fact that they printed me when I went into service. All right—I can't refuse to divulge my identity. I'm Fred Whelan. I was a paratrooper captain. I killed that man in the museum because he seemed to typify everything rotten I've ever known. He just looked as if he ought to be killed. You see, I'm not well. Mentally, I mean—"

"Stop it," Kelly said wearily. "You're as sane as I am. You went to the museum reading room to meet that punk Cheever and you plugged him the instant you saw him. We were tipped off there'd be a murder in the reading room. Cheever must have been hiding somewhere. I looked the room over before you got there and I didn't see him, but I watched you go in. There wasn't a word spoken—just a yell from Cheever and then two shots from that howitzer you packed."

"Now let's be sensible. Cheever was a man who was doomed to be gunned out some time or other. I imagine there must have been a hundred reasons why he should die that way, but I'm only interested in the one which affects you. How about it?"

"It's a beautiful day," Whelan looked wistfully toward the window. "We used to have this kind of weather in France and then Germany. Only we hardly appreciated them."

"I'm beginning not to appreciate you," Kelly snorted. "Maybe with time to think, you'll realize the seriousness of your position. Meanwhile I'll see what we can dig up about you."

Kelly had him taken to a cell. Then he phoned the Veterans Administration and got a quick line on Fred Whelan. He was twenty-three, single and lived at an address which Kelly quickly estimated as a boarding house. That neighborhood had little else, but they were all

nice and respectable places. Fred Whelan's mother was alive—no address. His father had died two years ago. No cause of death given.

Kelly hung up, hurried to the records division and checked through the files. What he found there made him whistle. Fred Whelan's father was a suicide. He'd stolen a huge sum of money from his employer, realized the game was up and had sent a bullet crashing through his brain. The total of his defalcations amounted to almost two hundred thousand dollars and what happened to it was a complete mystery. As much an enigma as Fred Whelan's motive for killing Monte Cheever.

KELLY ordered a car brought around and drove himself to the address where Whelan had lived. It was a boarding house, just as he'd guessed. He talked to the landlady, who was intelligent and capable.

From her he learned that Fred Whelan shared a room with Vincent Raynor. It was really a suite of two rooms. Whelan and Raynor seemed to have become friends immediately after Whelan had moved into Raynor's quarters. Whelan hadn't found a job yet, and was living on money from his Army pay. He led a quiet, clean life, drank very little and there were no women so far as the landlady knew.

Kelly went to the third floor and knocked on the door. Vincent Raynor let him in. Raynor was about thirty, neatly turned out in a dark purple lounging robe and slippers. He closed his eyes tightly when Kelly told him what had happened.

"Murder," he said softly. "Murder! So that's what was on his mind. I knew there was something, but murder—Lieutenant, I can't believe it."

"I saw it happen," Kelly grunted. "What made you think he was up to something?"

"The way he used to stare into space. And the way he tossed at night and yelled in his sleep. Sometimes I'd glance at him when he didn't realize it and I saw hatred in his eyes. He never told me much. Only that his mother is very sick in some upstate hospital for incurables. His father killed himself a couple of years ago when Fred was in the service."

"I know that too," Kelly said. "But maybe not all the facts, and I feel the

death of his father has something to do with the murder Whelan just committed."

Raynor sat down slowly. "I know the facts. I work at the office where Fred's father was employed and from where he embezzled a great deal of money. That's how Fred and I came to team up in this apartment. He came to me for information, I learned he had nowhere to live and invited him to stay with me."

"Tell me more about his father's death," Kelly asked.

"It isn't pleasant, even to recall," Raynor grimaced. "Two years ago the firm was in the midst of a strike. The plant was closed up and we moved office operations to town. That's how Fred's father got away with stealing so much money. Oh, there isn't any doubt but that he did it. He even admitted the whole thing to Mr. Abbott."

"Who is he?"

"The plant manager. The books couldn't be properly checked with some of them in the city and some at the strike-bound factory so the old man had an easy time of it. At any rate Fred's father claimed he'd taken the money to pay for the medical bills his sick wife was building up."

"Two hundred thousand dollars?" Kelly scoffed.

Raynor sighed. "That's what we all thought. Anyway we never had a chance to ask him where the money was. He walked out of the office and half an hour later he was dead. He shot himself through the mouth. Fred came home on emergency furlough but had to go right back. He'd signed up for duty with occupation troops."

"Suppose we go see Mr. Abbott," Kelly said. "I want to be absolutely certain that Fred's father did steal that money. Naturally I don't doubt your word, but it should be confirmed."

Raynor hurried into the next room to get dressed. Half an hour later he directed Kelly to the fashionable section where Hugh Abbott lived. Abbott himself let them in. The factory manager was a pompous, bald-headed and gimlet-eyed man of about fifty. He listened to Kelly's story.

"I suppose we might have expected something like that," he said. "Fred killing a man and brazenly refusing to tell why or anything else about the crime. His father was a stuffy, bull-

headed man, too. Why, we had him red-handed and at first he refused to admit anything. Then he confessed. Verbally, but in front of witnesses. Before Raynor, myself and my nephew Ralph Conklin. Ralph is here in the house. I'll fetch him if you like."

CONKLIN was an insipid looking person in brown slacks and a loud sports jacket. He looked lazy and almost disinterested, but Kelly's eyes were trained to look for the almost hidden points and Conklin's eyes were a giveaway. He was putting on an act, but his eyes told that he was worried about something. But his story jibed perfectly with Abbott's and Raynor's. Kelly knew that Fred's father had been a thief.

"All right, gentlemen," Kelly said finally. "I have the background I need, though I can't seem to tie in the murder with anything concerned with the thefts Fred's father committed. We'll see anyway."

"You won't make him talk," Abbott said. "He's stubborn."

Kelly winked. "We have methods. No strong arm stuff. That's passé. Now we use hypnotic drugs that almost put a man to sleep, but not quite. He can answer questions and he tells the truth because he can't think hard enough to lie. I've seen them work. Then we have a lie detector. Science is a wonderful thing. Raynor, can I drive you back?"

Kelly dropped Raynor off at his home and continued on to the cheap downtown hotel where Cheever had lived. The room had already been sealed and there was a plainclothesman guarding it. Kelly went in and started searching the place.

He knew just how Cheever's cunning mind would think and he looked for clever hiding places. Cheever had been just a bit too prosperous. His suit was new and cost a hundred dollars if Kelly was any judge. He had been wearing twenty dollar shoes and a silk shirt. His kind would run to silk shirts.

It took a long time, but Kelly found what he wanted. An eight inch section of the baseboard was loose and behind it lay a recess that should have made an excellent hiding place, but there was nothing in it except a lot of dust. It was the molding itself which contained the papers and the money.

Cheever had carefully cut away the

surface of the baseboard, hollowed it out and matched it to another piece of wood, equally thin and hollow so that there was a fair-sized space between them. Into this he'd put the papers and the money and then sealed the two pieces together. It was a trick drug addicts sometimes used and Cheever had known enough to have adopted some of their tricks.

The money consisted of nine one hundred dollar bills. There were two documents. One was a crudely printed letter on a piece of cheap paper. A blackmail letter. It read:

I know everything and I can make a deal with the cops. So you better come through like I tell you. I ain't no hog but I want enough to pay me for the way I helped. You know how to reach me.

Kelly half expected something like this, but the letter wasn't very enlightening. It could have been either a copy or a first draft. It carried no address, no signature and the facts it was concerned with were extremely vague. The other strip of paper was simply Cheever's way of keeping his books. It showed payments of one hundred dollars every ten days. Whoever Cheever blackmailed had been worried enough to meet the payments regularly.

Kelly sent this evidence to Headquarters via the detective on guard duty. Then he set out for home. He knew he wouldn't sleep. He rarely did when faced by a problem such as this. But in the peace and quiet of his home, he could think straight. Martha helped too. She was gifted with a keen analytical mind and an intense interest in all the cases Kelly was assigned to handle.

It was after one in the morning and Martha, his wife, would be in bed, but the night-light in the front hall was burning. Kelly turned into the driveway, coasting down the slope so as to make as little noise as possible. He got out, opened the garage doors, returned to the car and drove into the garage.

After that things were vague. He thought he shut off the ignition. He knew he extinguished the lights. Then a mountain, which Mohammed would have envied, dropped on his head.

KELLY moved one arm—or tried to. A couple of fingers flexed and that was all. He coughed and wondered what

was wrong. Why was he lying here on the garage floor beside his car. Why didn't he get up and go into the house where he belonged. He coughed again and opened his eyes. Things were blurred, he thought, and then realized he was in total darkness. The car motor was going.

He knew what that meant. It registered somewhere in a remote part of his brain which still functioned, but he couldn't do anything about it. He didn't care any more. It was pleasanter to just drift off. The sound of the car motor grew fainter and fainter.

Then he heard a scream. It seemed to come from two million miles away and grow in intensity until it rang against his ear drums and he wished it would stop. Fresh air reached him. He inhaled a couple of times and began scratching at the cement floor with his fingers. More pure air, and a throbbing began in his head. His brain worked again. He tried to sit up. Someone helped him. Lights flashed on. He looked into the worried face of his wife.

Twenty minutes later he was sitting on the running board of the car, holding his temples and wishing the banging would stop. He said, "Martha, I don't know what happened. I stepped out of the car and something fell on my head. If it hadn't been for you—"

She shuddered. "It was so odd, Mike. I thought I heard you coming toward the house about twelve-forty. You know the noise your shoes make on the gravel. But you didn't enter the house. I guess I dozed then. Finally I thought I heard your car roll down the drive. The next time I woke up, I knew too much time had elapsed and you should have been in the house. So I went to look."

Kelly kicked at a five gallon tin can. "That's the last time I save anti-freeze fluid through the summer," he vowed. "And the last time I store anything on the rafters."

Martha gave him a still worried smile. "It's odd though, Mike, how the garage doors swung shut. There wasn't much of a breeze. And I thought you always turned off the ignition as soon as the car stopped."

Kelly rubbed his scalp. "Boy, I feel like somebody hung over for a week. I always do turn off the ignition. This time, I suppose I didn't. How about a cup of coffee—strong? I think it would

do me a lot of good, too."

She helped him into the house. Kelly didn't express his thoughts because Martha worried too much about his job as it was. But that tin hadn't fallen on his head. He'd been slugged and the tin placed beside him afterwards. The garage doors just didn't accidentally swing shut nor did he, this one time, neglect to turn off the motor before getting out of the car.

One of those things might be construed as an accident, but not all three happening at the same time. Still it had been a close shave with death and he knew it. He also guessed he was hard on somebody's heels. It must concern the odd case of Fred Whelan the paratrooper captain who murdered a cheap, black-mailing crook and refused to talk about it.

In the morning Kelly took a couple of aspirins and felt worse. He ate breakfast, phoned Headquarters and told them he was going to work directly from his home and the job would take him out of town. By noon he was parked in front of the Gaylord Home for Incurables, some sixty miles upstate.

A doctor was very co-operative. He said, "Mrs. Whelan is doing well enough, but she'll never be completely cured. Look, are you going to tell her what the boy did?"

DETECTIVE KELLY thought that one over carefully.

"Not if it would harm her in any way," he said finally.

"It would. She lives on dreams now. There's nothing else left, and the boy is her biggest dream. We know her husband killed himself and was a thief. We know some of the money he paid us for her care was stolen. But she doesn't. Mrs. Whelan thinks her husband was killed protecting company funds. That he was a hero. The boy backed that up. Naturally she comes into contact with no one not briefed in all the facts."

"Tough," Kelly said slowly. "Doc, I need a favor. A peculiar favor, but very important too."

"Certainly. Anything I can do—so long as it won't upset any of my patients."

"This will only upset a killer, Doc. I want you to send a wire to Fred Whelan at his Park Place address, so that it arrives about eight o'clock tonight. In the

wire tell Fred that his mother has just passed away and you are waiting instructions from him."

Kelly returned to Headquarters by four and spent an hour going over the reports of the Identification Bureau and the Medical Examiner's autopsy papers. He had a brief interview with Fred Whelan who smiled, thanked him for more cigarettes and refused pointblank to say a word about the crime.

At six-thirty, Kelly was at the morgue waiting. Vincent Raynor, Ralph Conklin and Hugh Abbott arrived in one car. Abbott was angrily contemptuous of the whole affair.

"What's the idea, Lieutenant?" he said. "Looking at a corpse in this place is no dinner appetizer."

"I know," Kelly agreed, "and I'm properly sorry, but it's necessary. I want you to look at the body of Monte Cheever, the man Fred Whelan shot. He was hit through the head and isn't a very pretty sight, but I'm sure you men can take it."

Conklin moved back a couple of paces. "I don't like this. I don't like looking at dead people."

Abbott took his arm. "Come on and stop being a sissy. A corpse can't hurt you. Let's get it over with."

Kelly led them into the morgue. Abbott was unimpressed, Conklin shivered like a leaf and Raynor looked around with dull eyes. Kelly lined them up before one of the big recesses which looked so much like a giant filing cabinet. Then he pulled out the slab.

Abbott uttered a cry of horror. Conklin's eyes opened very wide and he seemed fascinated by the cadaver. Raynor gulped, moved away a little and then quietly folded up in a heap.

Kelly said, "Okay—that's all there is to it. Help me with Raynor. Conklin, give me a hand."

Abbott's nephew was staring at the now closed slab. He shook himself. "Oh—oh, I didn't hear you, Lieutenant. Sorry. Gosh, Raynor can't take it at all, can he?"

Kelly got Raynor over to a chair. He looked up at Conklin. "I thought you'd be the one to cave in. Suppose we take Raynor home. I guess his evening is spoiled."

"Mine won't be too pleasant," Abbott grimaced. "What was the idea, Lieutenant? I didn't know that man."

"We have to follow all kinds of leads," Kelly said. "If one of you did know him, it would have meant considerable progress. Ah—he's snapping out of it. How do you feel, Raynor?"

Raynor shuddered. "If I look like I feel, I belong here. Get me out, will you? I guess I'm an awful sissy, but I never could stand anything like this."

They all rode to Raynor's apartment in Hugh Abbott's big car. There Kelly prepared some coffee, added a spot of brandy to it and soon Raynor was feeling much better. Conklin mixed some highballs. Nobody spoke about going to dinner again.

"Well," Abbott said impatiently, "where are you heading with this case, Lieutenant?"

KELLY shook his head. "Darned if I know. I can't even tie murderer and victim up in any way. Yet Cheever must have done something to Whelan at one time or another. Something Whelan won't talk about. In fact, he won't talk about anything for fear he'll slip and the truth might leak out. I'd hoped one of you might have identified Cheever, but that's finished with."

"What's going to happen to Whelan, do you think?" Abbott was more at ease and had lost most of his belligerency.

"If he'd give us a good reason for killing Cheever, he might get off with a life sentence. As it stands now, this is first degree murder. He'll probably offer no defense. He did make a weak attempt at claiming he killed Cheever because he simply had to shoot somebody. War neurosis stuff, but it won't work. His medical history shows nothing of that nature. Besides the murder was very deliberate."

Abbott crossed his legs. "I've been meaning to ask—how did you happen to nail Whelan so quickly?"

"Through an anonymous phone call," Kelly explained. "A man's voice that said there would be a murder in the museum reading room at four-thirty. Sounds weird, doesn't it? Maybe it was Whelan. He acts as if he expected to be captured and doesn't care. Perhaps he wanted to be arrested, or maybe stopped from committing this crime. I don't know. The whole thing is a bust because he refuses to talk."

They were sipping a second drink all around when the telegram came. Raynor

studied the envelope. "It's for Fred. Do you think we ought to open it?"

Kelly took the wire and ripped open the flap. "I'll accept responsibility. We'd have to read it anyway, before he was allowed to receive it. I—oh, brother, is this going to make the kid feel tough. His mother just died."

Abbott whistled sharply. Conklin put down his glass and slumped deep in his chair. Raynor groaned and began to pace the floor.

Kelly put the wire on a table and Abbott took it for a moment. Then Abbott said, "What are we going to do? Who is to tell him?"

"Me, I suppose," Kelly said. "Of course, if there are any volunteers. . . ."

Raynor came to an abrupt halt. "I'll tell him. I'm closer to him than anyone else. Only let's get it over with. If I have too much time to think I may weaken."

"We'll leave now," Kelly said.

"I'll drop you off," Abbott finished his drink. "Then I'm going someplace and try to forget the whole thing. Man, I felt awfully sorry for Fred's father. I guess I rode the old boy when we found out he was a thief. But what I felt for him is nothing compared to the way I feel right now."

Twenty minutes later Kelly and Raynor walked into Headquarters and proceeded to the lieutenant's private office. Kelly sat down, scanned the telegram again and rubbed his nose.

"I'll have Whelan brought into a visitor's room. Hand it to him easy, Raynor. With this added to the strain he is already under, he might crack. I'll stick around if you like."

Raynor shook his head. "I'd rather you didn't. I can handle Fred. I've come to know him pretty well. Let's go, Lieutenant."

Kelly led him to a small room furnished with two flimsy chairs and a small, plain table. Then he sent for Fred Whelan and watched him enter the room. Kelly threw away the cigarette he was smoking and gave a signal. Neither Raynor nor Whelan knew it, but that room was wired and could be visually observed as well, through cleverly concealed crevices.

Ten minutes later Fred Whelan emerged and walked slowly down the corridor toward the cell door. He passed by an office. A hand reached out and

yanked him into a darkened room. The door closed softly, lights turned on and Lieutenant Kelly was facing him.

"Hand them over, Fred," Kelly said.

"Hand what—oh, what's the use anyhow?" He reached into his pocket and took out a pair of white capsules. He smiled crookedly. "It would have been a neat way out, Lieutenant. Save a lot of trouble all around."

"Did Raynor tell you your mother was dead?" Kelly demanded.

WHELAN'S face was transformed into a mask of grief.

"Mother—dead?"

"Now wait a minute. She isn't, but Raynor thinks she is and that's what he was supposed to tell you. Sit down, Fred. You don't know it, but I've been very busy on this mess. I visited the hospital where your mother is a patient. She's doing okay."

"But you said Raynor thought mother was dead. It doesn't make sense."

"When you know all the angles it makes a lot of sense, Fred. Listen to me. Someone tipped us that there would be a murder at the museum. Even named the time. Cheever was already there, hiding in the reading room. You came in, saw him and opened fire. I don't think Cheever expected to meet you. He thought someone else was coming. Someone he was blackmailing. And you believed that Cheever was your deadly enemy though you'd never laid eyes on him before. Shall I tell you why you hated him, Fred?"

"You're talking crazy," Whelan insisted.

"Oh, no. Raynor convinced you that Cheever was responsible for your father's death. That it was Cheever who got him to steal the money and then kept the bulk of it. Maybe even killed your father. Fred—Cheever did kill your father!"

Whelan took a long breath, but still remained mute. Kelly shook him hard. "It happened this way. Your father stole some money. Not very much. No more than he could have paid back easily. He needed it for your mother's hospital expenses. But to get this money, your father had to mess up the books. Raynor found it out and messed them up even more and took nearly two hundred thousand dollars out. Your father turned into a thief because of sheer necessity.

Raynor was a thief because he chose to be. Fred, you've got to talk."

"No," Whelan said. "Not yet, but I'll listen."

"That's to the good, anyway. Raynor knew that when the final analysis was made of the books and all that money discovered missing, your father would deny having taken so much. Raynor knew your father had already admitted being the thief, but he'd made no admissions as to the sum stolen.

"So your father had to die and Raynor had to hire Cheever to kill him, because Raynor can't stand the sight of blood or death. He proved that a little while ago when he fainted as I made him look at Cheever's corpse."

Whelan was getting tight-lipped and harsh lines were tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"Raynor simply couldn't have killed your dad," Kelly went on. "I reasoned that anyone who hired a punk like Cheever to do some dirty work was either a fool or driven to it by force of circumstance. Raynor never was a fool.

"Cheever did it and then proceeded to blackmail Raynor to the tune of ten bucks a day. I found a record of the transaction and also a copy of the blackmail note Cheever had written to Raynor. Fred, will you open that mouth of yours now?"

"When I came back from overseas," Whelan said, "Raynor looked me up. He said my Dad had been murdered and he knew who did it. He claimed Dad was in cahoots with this crook and the crook got all the money and had to silence Dad. Raynor said he actually saw the murder committed and he showed me a picture of Cheever. He said he'd fix it so I could meet him."

"Ah, now we're bringing the threads together," Kelly grunted. "Raynor sent you to the museum. He also told Cheever to be there. You must have told Raynor you'd kill Cheever. Didn't you?"

Whelan nodded. "I was half crazy. My service automatic was in my bag. I began cleaning it. Raynor knew what I meant to do. I hoped to kill him, stay silent and never even be identified. My mind was confused. I forgot about fingerprints. I hoped my mother wouldn't hear of it. Lieutenant, you meant what you said about her?"

"She was doing fine this noon, Fred. Now understand this. I had the doc send you a wire to Raynor's apartment saying she was dead. I figured it this way—the man who engineered all this knew you'd never talk so long as your mother was alive. Because if you did, she might hear the whole story of how your father was a thief. But if she died, you'd no longer care and you'd talk your head off. The faked news of her death nearly flattened Raynor and he knew he had to do something. I left a channel wide open for him."

KELLY lighted a cigarette and pulled smoke into his lungs.

"He told me I was going to the chair. He said he was afraid someone would question my mother. He said there was only one thing to do—and he gave me those capsules."

Kelly nodded. "The rat had them ready and waiting. Raynor tipped me about the murder so I'd be there and nail you cold, which I did. Raynor wanted you out of the way, and if he got rid of you by having you kill that blackmailing Cheever, so much the better.

"Raynor even tried to kill me last night. One of those things which would have probably been listed as an accident."

"Thanks," Whelan said fervently. "I almost made a complete fool of myself. Of course I killed Cheever and I expect to pay for that, but if Raynor pays for engineering the murder of my father I won't shed any tears. Not even if I get the chair."

Kelly rubbed his chin, "Look, Cheever was packing a gun. Chances are he'd have rubbed you out if he recognized you. You went there to kill him, but you shot in self defense. You won't get off, but there are extenuating circumstances."

Kelly winked, then continued, "I wasn't sure who was behind it until Raynor offered to break the bad—and faked—news of your mother's death. Then I knew."

Whelan jumped up. "Raynor—he'll get away!"

Kelly grinned. "No he won't. He's locked in that room and probably wondering what it's all about. Suppose you and I go tell him."



NO EXIT!

By RAY CUMMINGS

John Worthingham Rawls puts murder on the program

THERE was no one who saw John Rawls as he entered the little alley behind the Pantheon Theater. He was sure of that. It was late in the evening, a Monday. The small cross-street was dimly lighted and almost deserted. The narrow alley ran between the blank walls of two warehouses and opened into a small areaway behind the theater.

Rawls knew the place well. A flight of stone steps, with a few barrels standing beside them, led down into the dark cellar of the theater. He knew that the

cellar door at the bottom of the steps was supposed to be locked, but mostly it wasn't.

John Worthingham Rawls was an incongruous figure as he furtively darted through the cellar door and carefully closed it after him. He was a big fellow of twenty-eight, tall, dark, sleek and handsome. By profession he was an actor, and he looked it—immaculately dressed, with dark wavy hair and the look and bearing of one who is well aware of his masculine appeal.

One would have expected to see him entering the Pantheon by the stage door. But Rawls was well known there. He knew that he could never get by without old man Jake Hargiss seeing him. And no one must see him here tonight!

The cellar was almost dark. Rawls was just a blob of shadow as he crossed it and mounted the small flight of iron steps that led up backstage. Now he could hear the distant strains of the orchestra, familiar music as the third act of the big musical show was nearing its end.

Valdora would be out there on the stage dancing now. He had sat in her dressing-room so often just at this time, waiting for her, and hearing this same music. Or he had sat out in the auditorium, watching her lithe exotic figure in her specialty dance which was featured in the show.

A crash of cymbals faintly wafted to Rawls as he neared the top of the iron steps. In his mind was the vision of Valdora out there in the dance—the red flowers in her dark hair, the brief Oriental costume wrapping her, in the deep purple of the spotlight. Now with that crash of cymbals she was raising the glittering dagger, pretending to plunge it into her heart, wilting down in death as the music rose to its climax.

RAWLS could hear the applause. For a moment he stood in the darkness at the top of the steps to be sure there was no one in the little corridor branch here, with the door to Valdora's dressing-room only a few feet away.

Rawls knew he had about five minutes now while the girl lay there at the center of the stage, crumpled in the purple spotlight and the act proceeded to its close. Rawls was tense and grim. But he had faced all the horror of this thing he had to do, so that now there was only the cool, calm determination to get it done.

There was no one in the corridor branch. In a moment more Rawls darted across it and into the dressing-room. No one was here. Ruby, the young girl who was Valdora's maid, had been sick for three days, and the dancer had insisted she would rather get along without her than have a substitute.

The dressing-room was dark. It had just this one door, and one window which was a few feet above the areaway fairly close to the cellar stairs where Rawls

had entered. The window was screened. Its lower sash was up, for this was a warm summer evening.

With the door closed, Rawls stood tense, drawn up against the wall with the door beside him. Just a few minutes now, and the thing would be over—just one minute, in here alone with the girl, and that dagger. Then in only a matter of seconds, he would be out the way he had come!

His whole life would be changed. He wasn't really an actor. He didn't have what it takes, and he knew it. A year had passed now since he had a job; and with Valdora the dancer—who was just plain Nettie Smith except that she had talent maybe, and a lot of luck—loaning him money. She did it because she loved him. Why not?

But now there was Gloria. The Van Allen heiress. She loved him too. It wasn't hard for women to love the suave and handsome John Worthingham Rawls. Gloria and her socialite dowager mother, with half a million between them, both of them were crazy about him. There was a stake worth playing for, that half million!

Rawls' mind swept back to this afternoon—how the venom in Valdora's dark eyes had flashed as she disclosed that she knew he was engaged to Gloria. For months he'd stalled on marrying this little Nettie Smith. He'd promised, sure, when you get tangled up that way what else can you do? . . . Inevitably now, there would be no marrying into the Van Allen millions! Not with Valdora queering it.

If only there were some other way to silence this dancer! But Rawls knew there wasn't. He knew it as surely as he knew he was standing here grim and desperate. Desperate, because his whole life would be wrecked. The chance of a lifetime that had come to him, and only this jealous, venomous girl to wreck it with her claim upon him!

Suddenly Rawls was aware that the chatter of the girls in the wings as they trooped backstage was drifting into the silence of the dark dressing-room. The act was over. Valdora would be here in a moment. He stood like a shadow against the dark wall. He heard her hand on the doorknob. The opening door was a slit of dim yellow light as with a patter of bare feet she came in, and with a click closed the door after her. She

was reaching for the wall light-switch. "Nettie—" he murmured.

There was enough light from the area-way and the alley so that she could see him as he came toward her. She was carrying the dagger in her dangling left hand.

"Quiet, Nettie!" His finger was to his lips. "Listen—I'm sorry what I said this afternoon—"

"John—"

"Sure—you were right—I realize—" His hand clicked the spring lock of the door beside him. He saw the startled look on her face. Her eyes, framed by lashes beaded with mascara, were wide as she stared at him. Don't let her make any noise now! More than everything she mustn't scream! He kept repeating the thought.

Just a second or two as he had planned it. She must have believed he was throwing his arms around her to sweep her up and kiss her. But she felt him snatch the dagger. She stiffened and sucked in her breath. Her cry was a gurgle under his hand pressing her mouth. Then the long sleek blade of the dagger slid between her ribs.

NO MORE to it than that, a moment of chaos and horror when it seemed to the panting Rawls that he was holding up the limp sagging thing by clinging to the buried dagger. A wilting, crumpling dead thing now, with horrible contorted face and blood welling out onto the bare ribs. Then Rawls had dropped the dagger handle and staggered back.

An outpouring of sweat bathed him, chilled him. In the dimness he saw the limp thing go down. But it wasn't dead, not quite! Blood was gurgling at the mouth now, and with it, as though by a last gasping breath, came a choked scream! Ghastly, horrible. Just one, and then on the floor with a little ray of glow from the window illumining it, the thing that had been Nettie Smith twitched for an instant and then was motionless.

Rawls stood numbed with horror. That scream could have been heard backstage. It was heard. His escape by the door was cut off. Instantly he realized it, because now out in the little cross corridor, the cries of a group of the girls sounded. A man was with them, spreading a turmoil of alarm out there so that in another moment they were pounding on the

dressing-room door. Pounding and calling.

The stricken Rawls recognized the voice of Mackenzie, the stage manager. Then the weight of his body thudded against the locked little door. Rawls' heart seemed to jump into his throat and stick. He was trapped in here red-handed. But the door resisted Mac's efforts to break it.

Get out of here! The window—your only chance, the window— The panic-stricken Rawls had the wits to stoop, wiping off the knife handle with a scarf-end of Valdora's costume. Then he dashed for the window.

But he now found that the lower panel of the wire screen was fitted into a nailed frame that could not be raised. Frantically Rawls fumbled in his pocket for his penknife. He snapped open its blade, slashed the screen—a long vertical cut down its middle, and a horizontal one crossing it at the center.

That would do it! Outside the window, the areaway was dim with shadow. The long narrow alley that led from it was a little brighter, with the yellow glow of the distant cross-street at its other end. Too late to escape this way! The alarm backstage had spread so that already men had run out the stage door and were coming in the alley from the street!

In that horrible second, the trembling Rawls knew he was trapped here in the dark dressing-room! He could shove through the cut screen, drop into the areaway, but by that time the oncoming men would see him, grab him, even if he tried to duck into the cellar through the areaway door. Trapped!

Thoughts are instant things. As he stood there in the room, hesitating at the cut screen, Rawls knew that he had only one desperate thing to do. With the darkness of the dressing-room behind him, he knew that the men in the alley could not yet see him.

Swiftly Rawls bent the four big triangular flaps of the cut screen inward, in toward the room. It made a hole big enough for a man to climb into the room from outside in the areaway. Instantly he turned and called.

"Nettie! Nettie, what's the matter?" With a cry of horror he rushed from the window, stooped over the dead thing on the floor. His voice mingled with the turmoil out in the corridor and the

sounds of the men who were shouting out in the alley.

"Nettie—Nettie—" Rawls gasped it, turned, dashed for the dressing-room door. He unlocked it, flung it wide. Somebody found the wall switch. The room flooded with dazzling light. In the midst of the turmoil Rawls was gasping: "I heard her scream! I cut the window—came in. Look! She's stabbed—get a doctor—an ambulance—"

Then presently the men outside were climbing in the window. And they all saw that Valdora was dead. Somebody already had phoned for the police. . .

MOPPING his face with his handkerchief, Rawls was talking.

"I was passing out in the street," he was saying, "on my way here to the theatre. I knew that this would be the third act intermission. I heard the scream—ran here to her window. I could just see her lying here on the floor."

It was all a babble of everybody trying to tell the Police Sergeant what had happened. Mackenzie, the stage manager, was here. He was a small man, in shirtsleeves with vest dangling unbuttoned. He was always an excited, vehement little fellow. There were three or four stage hands, and out in the corridor the awed group of chorus girls milled around, trying to get a look into the room.

Rawls knew he was in a nasty spot. But what difference? Murder is a matter of cold proof. Whether they believed Rawls or not made no real difference, not in the end. What Rawls was saying was entirely possible. The men who had come running from the alley couldn't say that he hadn't dashed ahead of them and cut the screen, so that they had climbed in through the hole just a moment after he had cut it and come through.

Sergeant Dorgan was a big, red-faced fellow with a bristling crop of hair like a brush. He had three or four uniformed men with him. A fingerprint man had arrived. He was bending now over the crumpled body of the dancer.

"Seems like no fingerprints on the knife handle," he said.

A foxy killer, who had wiped off the knife handle maybe. So what? From out in the corridor one of the policemen who had been prowling around, came back. He told about the cellar stairs and

the lower cellar door which was unlocked.

"Killer could have gotten in that way," Sergeant Dorgan said. "Stabbed her and escaped the same way."

"That he sure didn't do," little Mac put in. "Maybe he got in that way, but not out! Nobody got out through this door! I was right at it. Me and some of the girls."

From the corridor several of the girls babbled to agree with him. The killer hadn't gotten out the door, and he couldn't have gotten out the window because Rawls had found the screen uncut, and had cut it.

Then where was the killer? No exit from this room. Or was there any killer? Maybe she had committed suicide. Somebody suggested it. Rawls was tense, cold inside. But he was trying to act puzzled like the rest of them.

"Suicide?" Rawls murmured. "Why, that could be so, couldn't it? That's her knife. She uses it in her dance."

"But we heard the killer in here!" Mac expostulated. "His panting breath, his footsteps—"

But in all that excitement, maybe they were mistaken.

"An' wiped her fingerprints off the knife handle?" the fingerprint man said sarcastically. "Sure. Suicides do that."

It was as though Rawls already were accused. All these horrible eyes staring at him so that he was having to defend himself. Hold steady now! They can't prove you didn't cut the screen and climb in! That's all that counts! . . . Rawls' thoughts steadied him.

"You don't always leave fingerprints when you grab something, do you?" he said. "If she killed herself—"

"Not with that angle of blow, an upward thrust from around on her side," Dorgan said. "A contortionist couldn't stab himself with a knife thrust like that!"

Not suicide. Then a killer was here! If he wasn't here, how did he get out? They were all looking at Rawls as though he ought to tell them! Hold steady now! Don't let them bluff you!

"So he was here," Rawls said. "How the devil do I know how he got out? Are you trying to tell me I'm a liar? There wasn't anybody here with her when I cut the screen and climbed in. Here's the knife I cut it with."

(Continued on page 108)



There was dried blood on the scalpel Benny took from his pocket

SIX DAY MURDER

By JACK KOFOED

Tony Larkin was dead and Benny O'Dell had killed him—and so had Liz Shore—but destiny had the laugh on them both!

THE six day bike riders circled the track in Madison Square Garden, strung out in single file. Their multi-colored jerseys were soaked with sweat. Their shoulders sagged with weariness. It was four o'clock in the morning, and there were only a few hundred spectators scattered through the acres of empty seats.

The two o'clock sprint series was over,

and the men were worn out. They pedaled slowly. Some nibbled on sandwiches, or drank out of water bottles. One even held a newspaper with his left hand, and steered with his right. Most of them wore bandages on their arms and legs.

Benny O'Dell slumped in his seat, hat pulled low over his eyes, a cigarette dangling from his lower lip. He wasn't

asleep. His eyes followed the monotonously circling line of riders. Benny had been a six day bike star himself, once upon a time. They called him the iron man, because he had had so many spills, and always came back.

Those falls had broken his knees and collar bone, and fractured his skull several times. The accidents finished him, but he never became quite accustomed to being an onlooker instead of a participant, who always drew the cheers of the crowd.

The finish came one night when Tony Larkin was making his first real bid for fame. The boys were jamming like mad. Benny tried to sneak through between Tony and Pietro Corri. Tony swerved in, his wheel skidded, and he smashed into O'Dell. They were near the top of the track, and Benny pitched headlong on the flat on his head. For a week the doctors didn't think he would live, but he did—though he was never quite the same again.

Benny often suffered from pains in his head, and his memory wasn't what it had been. He couldn't think very well. Something had happened tonight, something important, but the details avoided him. O'Dell didn't worry about it. The incident would come back sooner or later.

The cigarette burned out, and he lit another. Directly opposite where he sat, on the edge of the track, was a little booth in which one member of the riding team rested while the other was on his bike. There were fifteen of these little cubicles, but Benny was interested in only one.

A MAN lay on a cot in the booth, loosely stretched out, eyes closed, and covered by a damp cloth. Benny didn't need to see the half hidden face. It was sharp-nosed, with a jutting chin and with muscle creases from each nostril's flange to the corners of the mouth. A livid scar ran across the forehead, and was lost in the curling black hair. A strong, hard face, with no compassion in it, and much raw courage.

Benny hated the man who lay there. The man was Tony Larkin, the best six day rider America had ever produced. Most of the good ones were Belgians and Italians and Frenchmen, but Tony was better than any of them. He was better than Benny O'Dell had ever been.

Besides, O'Dell always thought Larkin had deliberately ridden into him that night, which was silly, but that was what he thought. The vague memory curdled in him. He had always wanted to get even with Tony, though he had never quite figured out how to do it. Something had happened tonight along that line, but he could not quite remember what.

He was punch drunk. At least, that was the kindly way to put it. Fighters got that way, and people expected it. They never thought the same thing could happen to six day bike riders, though six day bike riders take more punishment than almost any other athletes in the world. Even the strongest can absorb just so much, and then they crack up.

Benny's cigarette burned his lips and he threw it away. He was looking at Tony Larkin's powerful legs, scarred from ankles to knees, and trying to recall other reasons why he hated the man so much. There must be some, but he couldn't recall them. All he could think of was how much he wanted to see Tony dead. That would settle the score, whatever it was.

A blond girl slipped into the next seat. Her hair was frowsy and she needed lip-sticking, and a touch of powder on her small and shiny nose. Sitting around the Garden for hours on end doesn't help a girl keep tidy and feminine.

"Hello, Benny," she said. "Gimme a cigarette."

The old bike rider fumbled for the crushed packet in his coat pocket, without taking his eyes from Tony Larkin's muscular legs. He didn't look at the girl, because he was too busy thinking how he hated Larkin, and wondering what it was he had done that night. But, try as he would, he could not quite put his finger on it.

"It's awful late," the girl said. "Why the devil don't you go home, and hit the hay?"

This time he looked at her. He had been drinking pretty heavily, and the liquor merged with the fogginess of his mind, and made everything pretty hazy. He knew the blonde from somewhere. Maybe she was one of the tomatoes who patrolled Eighth Avenue. There were plenty of them, and since Benny walked up and down the street twenty or thirty

times a day, he had come to know most of them by sight. No, that couldn't be. He knew her better than that. Then it came to him. She was Tony Larkin's girl, Liz—sure, Liz Shore. How could he have forgotten?

"Look at 'em," Benny said, pointing to the circling riders. "About this time in the old days somebody'd start a jam, even if there wasn't a two dollar ticket in the house. Them guys are sissies. They want union hours, or somethin'. Even Tony Larkin. Busted up as I am now, I could run rings around them monkies."

"Go on home," said Liz. "You're all wore out."

Benny settled deeper into his seat, and lit another cigarette. There was some liquor left in the half pint bottle on his hip, but he wanted to save it for the moment when he remembered what he had done that night. He couldn't recall, but he would soon, and then he would need the whisky. That was for sure.

Let's see now, he thought. I was down there in the infield, visiting around the booths, all except the one where Larkin lived. I was talkin' with Goosens and Linari and that Senegalese, Nefatti. Nice boys, but why don't they learn to talk English right? Then, Beckman took a spill that opened up his skull, and I went down with the doctor, and watched the doctor sew him up. Boy, what a lot of tools them doctors have! Nice shiny knives and scalpels and things.

The memory of that made things a little clearer for a moment. Benny remembered how he looked at the tools while the doctor sewed up Beckman's head, and Beckman cursed like a longshoreman. Nobody watched Benny. He was a character, and had been a great rider before he became punchy. That's why they gave him the run of the place. So, quite unnoticed, he stole a little, sharp pointed knife, and slipped it into his pocket. He could feel it right there against the packet of cigarettes. He must have taken it because he thought what damage it could do to Tony Larkin's thick and corded throat.

LIZ ran her fingers through her blond hair and looked at Benny O'Dell.

"You been up to something," she said accusingly. "I can tell. It ain't good, whatever it is. You better watch yourself. If they don't clap guys like you in

jail, they put 'em in the bughouse."

Benny scratched his nose.

"Tony won't bother me no more," he said. "He won't bother nobody no more."

Liz turned her blue eyes to the booth across the track. She saw the wet cloth covering Larkin's eyes, and the thick muscled legs. None of the handlers were around at the moment. Most of them had gone downstairs to eat, or take a nap.

"You crazy bum," she said. "Tony couldn't help smackin' into you the night you had the big spill. How can you hate a guy for somethin' he couldn't help. Now, if you had the reasons I got—"

Yeah, why did he hate Tony so much? Benny squeezed his eyes shut, and tried to think. It wasn't the crash altogether. There must have been something else. It had to do with a woman. Liz Shore? No, it couldn't be her. He didn't like blondes in the first place, and least of all hard boiled ones. A woman! Ah, now it was coming to him.

'Way back, when he was a top notch rider, he had married Coral Bain. She was slim and young, and had hair like midnight in a coal mine. Benny loved her very much. Tears ran out from under his lashes when he thought how they had loved. It was funny he had forgotten, but that's the way his head was.

They had been married about five years when Tony Larkin rode his first race, and Coral was in the Garden every night. Benny had to admit to himself that Tony was sensational, and he was darned good looking. Coral kept talking about him. At first Benny didn't mind, but then he became suspicious.

"You know," Benny O'Dell said to Liz Shore. "I was crazy about my wife. She took care of me when I got hurt, and she could cook the best pancakes. She shouldn't have gone off with Tony."

Liz had been watching the riders on their slow procession around the track, and tapping her slippers nervously on the concrete floor. Now, she turned to Benny O'Dell.

"Look, dopey," she said, "Larkin never had anything to do with your wife. You got everything mixed up in that stupid skull of yours."

Benny fumbled for the pack of cigarettes in his pocket, and felt the cold steel of the scalpel he had stolen. The blade was sticky, but he didn't think anything about that. He was trying to

pin down the importance of what the blonde had said.

The old bike rider rubbed his hand across his forehead. Why couldn't he get that dizzy feeling out of his brain, and think things through? He wasn't crazy. They couldn't say that about him. But, if Coral hadn't run off with Tony Larkin, why wasn't she with him now?

"Maybe you're right, Liz," he admitted slowly. He drew a long sigh. "I can't get anything clear. I don't even remember what happened to Coral. What did happen to her?"

The girl looked compassionately at him.

"I'm sorry I got mad at you, Benny," she said. "Don't you remember? Coral didn't run off with anybody. She—she—died—"

"Died?" His glance was vacant.

"Sure. She was killed in an automobile accident on the Westbury Turnpike. Tony came, and told you. In some way you got the idea that he ran off with her, or somethin'."

Benny looked at Larkin's legs on the cot. They had something to do with what he was trying to remember. But, it was impossible to think of two things at the same time, and what Liz had said about Coral confused him badly.

TONY LARKIN'S partner, the Italian, Ruggerio, began looking toward the booth. His riding time was up, and he wanted rest. One of the trainers came up to the booth, and waved to Ruggerio as a signal that he would awaken Larkin. He lifted the damp cloth from Tony's eyes.

Liz Shore and Benny O'Dell sat looking at this little by-play, and they were suddenly very tense, as though something extraordinary was going to happen.

The trainer put his hand on Tony's face, then slowly replaced the cloth. He stood there for a second, as though puzzled and uncertain what to do. Then, he pulled down the booth's curtain, and started to walk away. By this time Ruggerio had circled the track again.

"Hey," he called. "Whadda heck! Whose dees Lokkin teenk he is—Caruso? Get heem out here."

"Sure," said the trainer, "sure, Rug. Just a couple a minutes. Tony ain't feelin' so good."

Ruggerio waved in a disgusted sort of

way, and rode on. The trainer stood looking at him for a moment, and then disappeared.

"What do you think's wrong, Benny?" Liz asked.

Then, Benny O'Dell began to remember what had happened. The fog cleared away, or, at least, shredded so he could piece together certain incidents and happenings. The starting point was downstairs, when the doctor was sewing up Beckman's scalp, and Beckman was yelling bloody murder, and cursing like an old time cavalry sergeant. That was when Benny stole the scalpel. It was razor sharp, and he thought how easily he could kill Tony Larkin with it.

What happened then? O'Dell remembered that he walked out of the clinic, or whatever you call it, cuddling the scalpel in his coat pocket. He went upstairs to the infield. People said hello to him, and he said hello to them. Nobody paid much attention, because they knew he was punchy, even if he had been a great rider one time.

Benny had it all mapped out. The two o'clock sprints were over, and spectators were pouring out of the Garden. All the riders wanted to do was take it easy, and so did the handlers. They were whipped down with fatigue, and not inclined to notice much. When Tony lay down on his cot, he would fall asleep immediately. First, though, he would pull down the curtains of his booth to shut out the light. That was what Benny O'Dell counted on.

He would walk casually up to the back of the booth, lift the curtain, and drive the scalpel into the sleeping man's throat. Nobody would be watching him. Nobody watched anybody at that time of night. He would just drift away. Maybe Larkin would thrash around, and fall out of the booth in front of the few people who were left in their seats. But no one would know Benny O'Dell had killed him. That was funny—and that's the way it should be.

Thinking about it now, though, it seemed something must have gone wrong. The trainer had pulled up the curtain, and Tony Larkin just lay there. True, his legs had not moved, but. . .

"Tony's dead," Benny O'Dell said to Liz Shore.

The blonde stared at him. Her eyes were expressionless as marbles, but there was a rasping sound in her voice. She

couldn't seem to quite make up her mind what was the proper answer.

"Dead?"

"Yeah," said Benny. "I killed him. I stuck a knife in his throat. Look." He glanced cautiously around, and brought the scalpel out of his pocket. There was a smudge of dried blood on the blade.

Liz's eyes grew wider. "You got a drink on you?" she asked.

Benny took the half filled pint bottle from his pocket, and Liz gulped hungrily at the tepid liquor. Then, she began to laugh a little hysterically.

"What's the matter?" O'Dell asked.

"Matter? You killed him! You! That's funny."

The old bike rider rubbed his head confusedly. "I don't know what you mean, Liz, that it's funny I killed him. I thought you was his girl."

"I was—sure, I was, but he gave me the brush. Nobody gives me the brush without gettin' it back double. But, you wasted your time if you stuck that thing in his throat. I put poison in the last bottle of coffee they sent up to him from the kitchen—enough poison to kill a horse."

BENNY grinned. It was a loose grin, without amusement, puzzled. He was always puzzled, so there was nothing strange about that. But, there was a little resentment behind the grin. Nobody else had a right to kill Tony Larkin, because nobody hated Tony as much as he did. Then, he began to have the feeling that he had beaten Liz. Betcha all the tea in China, Larkin was dead before he even had the chance to drink that poisoned coffee. Why tell Liz? Let her think she did it, if it made her happy.

"Howja do it?" he asked, pretending an interest he did not feel "You musta been pretty cute."

"It was easy," Liz said, sobbing a little. "I pal with Thelma Dupree, whose husband works in the kitchen. She got him to switch thermos bottles. I told her Tony liked brandy in his coffee, but they wouldn't let him have it."

The trainer came back with three other men, including the doctor. The latter bent down under the curtain and stayed there a moment or two. Then, he pulled out his head, and said something out of the corner of his mouth. The others rolled Larkin onto a stretcher. Ruggerio

jumped off his bike in front of the booth. He had a long lantern jaw, and bulging eyes that made him look like a surprised fish. His sallow skin turned pale, and his hands shook.

Benny O'Dell felt mixed up. He was glad Tony Larkin was dead, and he was glad he had killed him before Liz Shore had the chance, but, strangely enough, he was sorry, too. It wasn't good to die, especially when you were as young as Larkin was.

"I'm gonna get outa here," Liz said, giving the nearly empty bottle back to Benny O'Dell. There were practically no spectators left, except a couple of sleepy reporters in the press box. They were arguing about which one should go down, and see what was wrong with Tony Larkin.

Benny reached up, and pulled Liz into her seat.

"There ain't no use hurryin'," he said, "Tony's dead, and now that he's dead I wonder why I wanted to kill him."

"I know," Liz said. "I know why both of us did. Tony was always hurtin' somebody, whether he meant to or not. When he knocked you over in your last race, he didn't intend to do it because he might have hurt himself. But, he fixed you good, anyway. Maybe he didn't want to hurt me, but he found another girl he couldn't stay away from, and—oh, the devil with it! But," and she cried again, "I'm sorry he's dead."

Benny shook his head.

"It's funny about people," he said. "I never hated anybody in my life except Tony. Even with him stiff, I'll keep hatin' him, but it won't be the same as if he was alive." His voice became querulous. "I don't want to think about him now. It wears me out."

Liz didn't say anything. Her hands were shaking. The riders continued circling the pine track. Apparently they didn't know what had happened to Tony Larkin. Ruggerio had gone down after the stretcher. He was one of the best of the European pedalers, a cold, self-centered man, who would probably shed no tears over his partner's ending.

"I'm scared," Liz said. "Maybe Thelma 'll tell the cops I had her switch the thermos bottles. The cops grab anybody when there's a murder. You get third degreed to hell and gone, even if you didn't do anything. I don't want nothin' like that. I bruise awful easy."

You oughta seen the way I looked after Tony slapped me around a coupla times."

"He won't do that no more," said Benny. "I'm still kinda fuzzy, Liz. I can't remember. Tell me honest. Didn't Tony take Coral away?"

"No, you crackpot!" Her voice was shrill, and echoed in the almost empty auditorium. "But he would have if he wanted her, the louse. He was made to hurt people—but he could be awful nice when he wanted to." She began to cry again.

"Then, why did you poison him?" Benny asked wonderingly.

"Shut up," she said between tight lips. "What do you want to do, tell everybody in the place? He doublecrossed me. That's enough for any woman, ain't it?"

JOHNNY BRADY, the Broadway cop, sauntered up the aisle, and sat down beside them. He had a sad look on his face. Benny liked Johnny. Whenever wise guys started to rib him, Johnny took his part, and shooed them away. Once, a toughie took a punch at the old bike rider, and Brady knocked him colder than a flounder on ice. Yeah, Johnny was all right, even if he was a copper.

"Hello, John," Benny said, with that smile of his, which wasn't quite a smile. He was beginning to get a little afraid, himself. There were butterflies in his stomach. He had forgotten what Liz had said about poisoning Tony Larkin. All he could think of was that there was a knife in his pocket with blood on it, and there must be a slit in Larkin's throat. They would say he had murdered Tony—and they'd beat him, and shove him into a cell, and then put him in the chair. He began to tremble.

"I've got bad news for both of you," the copper said.

Benny O'Dell blinked his eyes, and rubbed his hand across his mouth. Liz fumbled in her bag for a lipstick, and when she had it in her fingers, seemed to forget that she wanted it. Her daubed mouth trembled.

"It's about Tony Larkin," Brady said.

"He's dead," Benny O'Dell said. "I saw them carry him out."

"Yes, he's dead. I know you didn't like him, Ben, but you'll be sorry, any-

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way. And, Liz—it's tough on you, bein' his girl and everything."

"She wasn't his girl any more," said Benny vacantly. "Tony gave her the air. She's glad he's stiff."

Liz gave the old bike rider a murderous stare.

"Shut up, you idiot," she snapped. "You hated him. Everybody knows that. I loved him."

"There's nothing to argue about," Johnny Brady said. "It's just sad it had to happen. What a rider he was!"

Benny felt in his pocket for the cigarettes, and his fingers touched the blade of the scalpel. The detective was just playing with him. They could not have failed to see the wound in Larkin's throat. Fifty people would say they had seen Benny O'Dell around, and they all knew how he hated Tony Larkin.

That was the trouble. He had talked too much about hating Tony. Everybody knew it. Johnny Brady knew it, and Johnny Brady just sat there and didn't mention it.

It was pretty funny, at that, Benny thought. Maybe he had killed Tony without any reason. Maybe Larkin hadn't really wanted to crash into him that time. Liz had said he hadn't cared anything about Coral, either. If those things were true, there wasn't any reason for hating or killing. That's what Liz said, anyway. But, even if there hadn't been any reason, they would send him to the chair for killing the six day bike rider in front of everybody in Madison Garden.

In his cloudy way, Benny tried to be cunning. He couldn't stand the thought of the chair. There was clammy sweat on the palms of his hands, and in his armpits and on his forehead. Somehow or other, he had to get out of this. Liz had said she poisoned Tony. She was just as much to blame as he was, even if she had been too late.

He started to say something about that, but then, whatever clearness was left in his poor and battered brain, said: "You can't do that. Liz ain't a bad girl, and ropin' her into this won't help you. They'll see that wound in his neck, and unless you say somethin', they won't look into his stomach."

"I'm crazy," Benny thought, "crazier than a hoot owl. They don't electrocute

balmy guys. They just send 'em away. That won't be so bad. It won't be no worse than walkin' up and down Eighth Avenue, puttin' the bee on guys for a buck here and there. And thinkin' about Tony Larkin all the time, and hatin' him until my skin crawls. But, Liz, she's young and no nuttier than most dames. I'll keep her covered. I won't say nothin' to Johnny Brady about her."

There must have been three or four minutes of silence. The riders were still wearily circling the track. Only one reporter was left in the press coop, and he was fast asleep, head on arms. Johnny Brady sat there and waited, and Benny could feel him waiting. Maybe Liz could, too.

Finally Liz said through stiff lips: "What did Tony die of?"

BRADY puffed a little cloud of cigarette smoke from his nostrils. His expression did not change.

"You tell me," he said.

"All right," Liz said shrilly. "I'll tell you. He was murdered. Benny snuck down, and rammed a knife in his throat. When he did it the curtain was down over the booth, and from the front nobody could see him."

Benny thought the girl was pretty much of a heel, saying a thing like that without even being asked. But he knew how people get when they are scared. Panic does things to your insides. Liz was so frightened she couldn't think of anything but herself. So, he smiled at her in that soft, indefinite way he had.

"That's right, Johnny," he said. "You know I hated Larkin. Everybody knows it. What he got wasn't no more than he deserved." He looked at the chain of riders dragging itself around the track, and sighed. "I guess this is the last six day bike race I'll ever see."

Johnny Brady leaned back in his seat, and hoisted his long legs over the top of the seat in front of him.

"You're a funny guy, Benny," he said. "Why are you so anxious to pin a rap like that on yourself? Sure, you hated Tony Larkin, but that doesn't prove you bumped him off. If guys went around killing everyone they didn't like, New York wouldn't be any bigger than Hoo-

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sick Falls inside of six months."

"But, I did it," the old bike rider insisted. He took the scalpel out of his pocket. "I stole that when the doc was fixing up Beckman. Look. There's blood on it. It's gotta be Tony's blood, because I wanted to kill him. I'm—I'm kinda hazy about what happened, but I know I stuck that knife into him."

The detective grinned.

"You didn't," he said. "I was down there in the infield all night. I saw you, and you weren't within twenty feet of Tony's booth. Besides, he didn't have a knife wound on him when they laid him out on a rubbing table downstairs!"

Benny O'Dell looked at the copper with tired and puzzled eyes. "I was pretty sure I did it," he said.

Liz tugged at his arm. "Gimme another drink," she demanded. Benny tilted up the bottle until the last gurgling drops had run down her throat.

"KAY," she said, "now I'll talk. I ain't scared no more. Look, John, this poor bum was just tryin' to cover me up. I don't know why, and I guess he don't, either, but that's the way it was. I killed Tony Larkin, because he walked out on me."

Brady yawned and scrubbed knuckles through his close cropped hair.

"I've been on homicide for ten years," he said, "and this is the first time I've seen two people trying to beat each other to the electric chair. So, you killed him, eh? How did you do it, Liz, by remote control?"

"With poison. I put it in his coffee."

"They don't let women downstairs."

"I gave the thermos bottle to Dupree," she said. "He thought there was brandy in it."

"I know all about that. Dupree told me. He thought somebody was trying to drug Tony."

"Then you had me pegged all the time?" Liz asked dully.

"Not exactly. Dupree emptied the thermos down the sink, and sent up some hot milk, instead. Larkin wasn't stabbed, and he wasn't poisoned, either."

Benny O'Dell had been listening, but he could not quite put the pieces of the puzzle together in his addled mind. He thought he had killed Tony, but it

seemed he had just imagined it. Now, all he wanted to do was go some place, and sleep for a long, long time. He didn't hate Larkin any more. There was a great calm inside him.

The shadow of tears left Liz's eyes. Her voice became strident, instead of edged with misery.

"Wash it up, copper," she said. "If the coffee was poured down the sink you can't finger me for tryin' to kill Tony. If he wasn't stabbed, you ain't got nothin' on Benny, even if there is blood on the knife."

"Benny cut himself, and didn't even notice it in the state he's in," Brady said absently. "Look at the palm of his hand."

"Blast it, hurry up!" Liz cried, almost hysterically. "If Tony ain't dead, why do you want to play around with us?"

"I don't," said Johnny Brady. "I'm just going to see that Benny is given a nice, comfortable home for the rest of his life. There's nothing I can do for you, Liz, but you'll have to get hold of yourself. Nobody ever straightened things out with knives and poison. And, I didn't say Tony Larkin wasn't dead. Nobody could be more dead."

"Who killed him, then, if we didn't?" Liz was drawn taut with emotion.

Johnny Brady pulled his long legs from over the top of the seat in front of him, and rose.

"Nobody Killed Tony Larkin. He had a heart attack. It's lucky for you—because, if he hadn't, sooner or later one of you would be facing a murder rap. Come on, Benny, let's go."

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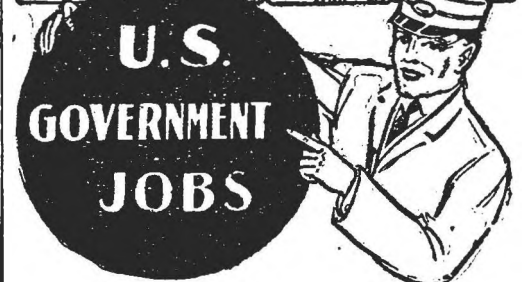
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NO EXIT!

(Continued from page 97)

Dorgan took a look at the penknife blade. Then he held a magnifying glass over it and looked again.

"Okay," he said. "That's the knife that cut the screen all right. There's some of the green paint from the screen-mesh, here on the blade."

Proof that Rawls was telling the truth. He had cut the screen. . . The excited babble in the room went on. Sergeant Dorgan seemed making no effort to stop it. He ignored it, went over to the window. Out in the corridor the girls were milling around, excitedly telling each other how they had heard the scream, and come running here with Mac ahead of them. A policeman stood at the door, barring them.

In the midst of it all, Rawls stood against the wall, trying to ignore the glances that were flung at him. Old Jake Hargiss the doorman was here.

"Did you let Mr. Rawls backstage tonight?" one of the policemen asked him.

"Didn't see him," Jake said. "He often comes 'bout this time. Not tonight." Jake was positive. "I never left my desk there by the door," he added, "Nobody gets past me."

"I told you I was late tonight," Rawls said. "I was just arriving when I heard the scream."

No way to disprove it. He was perfectly safe. But what was Sergeant Dorgan doing there at the window? His back was to the room. He seemed to be examining the four big triangular flaps of the cut screen that bent inward. Then abruptly he turned back to the room. A cold thrill of fear like a shudder shot through Rawls. Why was Dorgan looking so grim?

"What—what is it?" Rawls stammered. Steady now! Take it easy! Don't be frightened!

"You cut the screen all right," Dorgan said. "Your penknife blade proves it. So you stood outside and cut it?"

"I told you that," Rawls said. He was aware that the room was suddenly

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silent, expectant. Dorgan looked so grim, triumphant, abruptly menacing. "Do I have to go all over it again?"

"No, you sure don't," Dorgan said. "You cut the screen with two long slashes and you bent the flaps inward, into the room. But you weren't standing outside, when you did it!"

"That's a lie!" Rawls gasped. "You can't prove—"

"Can't I? Come take a look." He shoved Rawls to the window. "You don't even need a magnifying glass to see it."

"See-see what?" Rawls stammered.

"When you cut into wire mesh," Dorgan said, "all the little prongs of the cut wire are bent in the direction of the knife-thrust."

Numbly Rawls stared. Wire screen composed of tiny squares. His knife blade, cutting through them, left the tiny ends of the cut wire all bent at an angle.

"If you'd been outside," Dorgan was saying, "those little prongs would be bent toward the room. But they're not! They all bend from the room toward the alley! We've got you, Rawls."

Proof of mathematical certainty. Rawls stood mute. He knew that there was nothing he could say.

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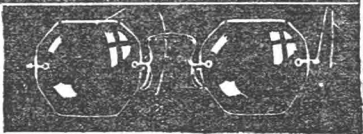
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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 10)

he had at first believed, a case so strange, so eerie, that you readers are going to call this the best Black Bat novel yet. And the Black Bat, too, is soon on the job in this exciting yarn, using every weapon he knows in the battle against sinister forces to whom murder is but a trivial affair. Lovely Carol Baldwin's first assignment is to get a room in Dubin's hotel, and make friends with him. And Butch—Tony fixes it for Butch to go to the penitentiary that Dubin has just left—on a mission so dangerous that even hardboiled Butch's blood runs cold.

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Also in the next issue of BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE there will be an exciting crime novelet, THE LOTTERY RACKETEER, by Nels Leroy Jorgensen, and many other highly dramatic stories and features. Thrills and chills on every page make the next issue swell reading. For tops in detective and mystery stories—it's BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE!

LETTERS FROM READERS

THANKS for all the friendly letters and cards you've sent our way this past month. To those of you who are reading BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE for the first time, let us explain that this is the column where you readers help run the magazine by telling us what kind of stories you enjoy most—or least—and what you want kept the way it is—or changed. Whatever it is you have on your mind about BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, let us know, and before you know it, you'll be seeing your ideas and your name printed in this magazine, on this page.

So—welcome to our new readers, and to you long-time fans of BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, if you haven't written us yet, why not do so today? And if you've written before, let's hear from you again. Like this faithful reader who is paying us a return visit:

I wrote you a letter about a year ago, but I can't help writing again to tell you how

much I enjoyed that man Tony Quinn, the blind fighter against crime, in the story DEAD MAN'S PLUNDER. I was also glad to see another story about Mugs Kelly, by Donald Bayne Hobart. That guy sure is funny. Leo Marr's true story was swell—I forget the name of it, except that it was about a corpse that suddenly became too lively. —Roy Rivera, Glendale, California.

Although I'm not a very old fan of your magazine, I want to take this time, nevertheless, to tell you that I think BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE is superb, especially the stories of your main hero, the Black Bat. I've always enjoyed stories dealing with the hero battling crime outside the limits of the law under the protection of a mask or hood.

May I ask a favor of you, one that would please me greatly? Would it be possible to have your cover artist reproduce on the cover of a forthcoming issue, not the usual action-type cover illustrating a scene from the Black Bat novel, but instead a posed portrait of the Black Bat himself in hooded regalia; I mean a full front view type of portrait showing him from head to about the waistline, with hands at his side, and his body arranged so that the usual wording on the cover is not written across his body. In this way I could cut the unmarred portrait out and place it in a suitable sized frame. If this could be done, you would be making me the happiest fan you have. —Robert N. Federowicz, Lorain, Ohio.

Thanks for your nice letter, Robert. And what do you other fans think of his suggestion? Would you like to have a portrait of the Black Bat on the cover? If so, write us and let us know. If enough of you want it, we'll be happy to arrange it. But we won't know whether you want it unless you write.

You have asked for criticisms, but try as I might, I can only think how swell your stories are, and that goes for Tony Quinn, Carol, Silk and Butch. I would like to obtain past issues from other faithful readers. —Jerry Stier, Avon, New Jersey.

I have been a reader of Tony Quinn for six years now and I really enjoy his stories very much. I never miss a book if I can help it. I like the short stories too. I just finished reading DEAD MAN'S PLUNDER and sure enjoyed it. I read every one I can, but I feel [Turn page]

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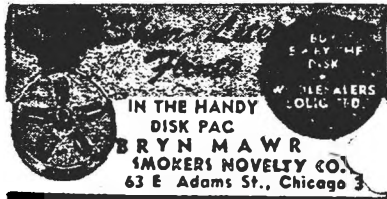
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like the other readers do. When are Tony and Carol going to be married? I think it would be very nice if they did.

I like Butch and also Silk. I think Carol is very brave, to go out alone and take the chances she does.—Mrs. R. Monnig, Syracuse, N.Y.

It's only the women who want Tony and Carol to get married anyway. Love has no place in a mystery story like the Black Bat. Keep things the way they are—and keep women out! —Jack Tinker Jr., Aice, Texas.

What I want to know is, how do these people in your stories go around breaking down doors—like the policeman on the cover of the issue that has DEAD MAN'S PLUNDER in it? I'm six feet four inches tall and weigh 190 pounds, but I can't splinter a door like that. I've tried it. Why, the policeman in the picture didn't even get his tie mussed or his hat knocked off! Fooey! —Alvin J. Whiteheart, Clarksville, Tenn.

That's a good idea about getting a Seeing Eye dog for Tony Quinn. I agree with the other readers who wrote about it. There could be a lot of exciting stories with a dog in it. —G. C. Craddock, Arkadelphia, Ark.

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the lottery racket. This is an evil thing that should be exposed, so why doesn't one of your expert writers put his talent to it? —*Pearl Mae Sukeforth, Wilton, Conn.*

Thanks for your suggestion, which was a good one, Miss Sukeforth. And writer, Nels Leroy Jorgensen has written a swell story on the subject for our next issue. It's a novelet called **THE LOTTERY RACKETEER**. Let us know how you like it.

We'll close our department on a poetic note this time:

Tony Quinn takes the prize
As the smartest detective,
Though he has no eyes;
While the Black Bat, in each new sequel,
With Butch and Silk, have no equal;
But my favorite of all,
Yes, even more than Quinn,
Is lovely, daring Carol Baldwin.

—*Prof. Paul Jasper, Gulfport, Miss.*

Thanks, everybody, and please remember to write. Do it today. Kindly address your letter or postcard to The Editor, **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y. So long.

Be seeing you again next issue!

—THE EDITOR.



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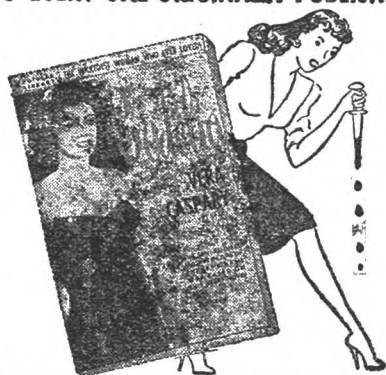
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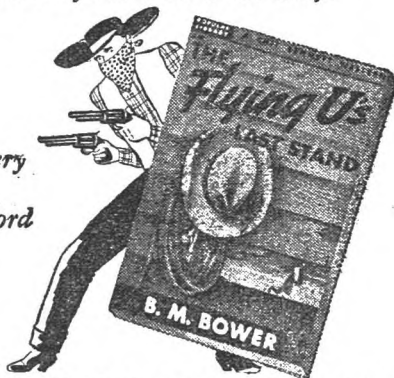


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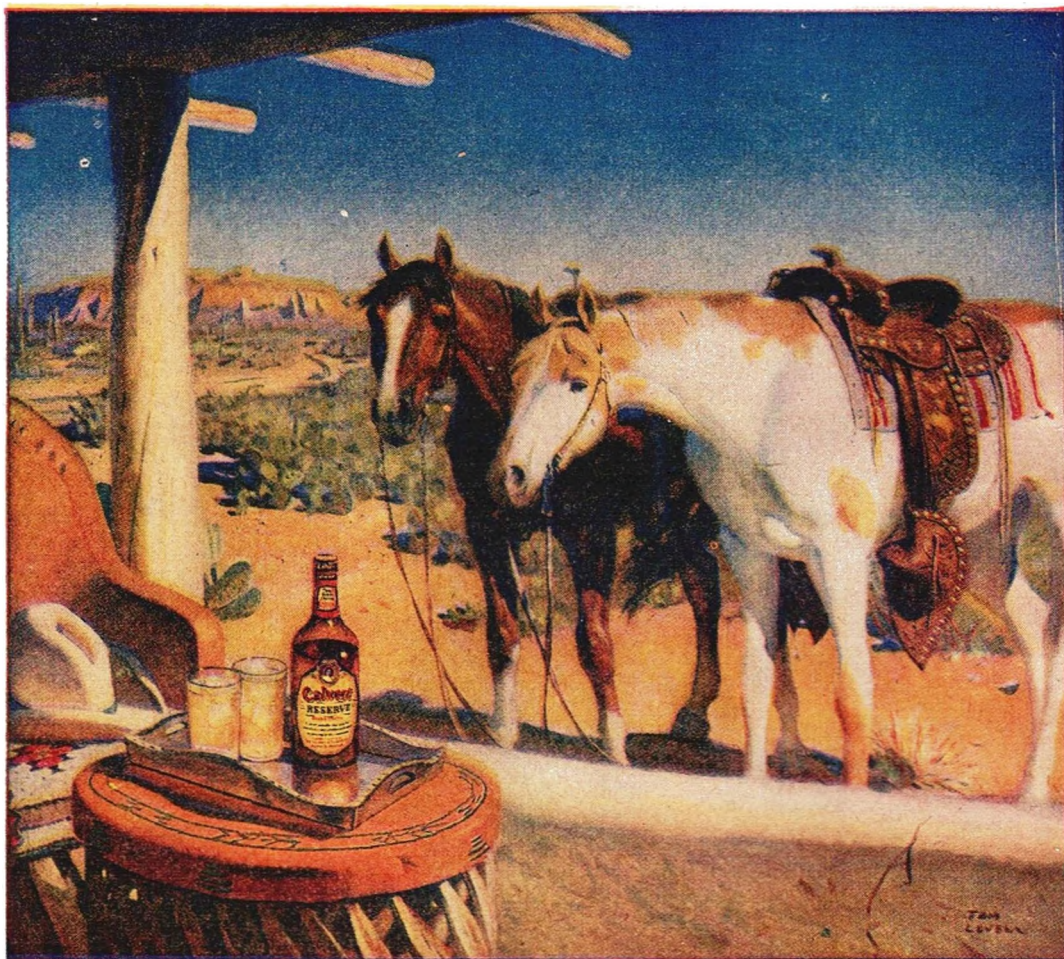
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