



A Crime Action
Novelet
By
ANTHONY TOMPKINS

There was a sharp crack above him. "Someone's shooting at us!" Bill cried. "Take a quick breath."

NOW I LAY ME DOWN TO DIE

A Keen-Eyed Hospital Orderly Named Bill Matches Wits with a Diabolical Murderer!

CHAPTER I

Without Money

TWO men stepped into the seventh floor room of General Hospital. They were prosperous-looking men and one had a large package under his arm.

"Orderly!" he called.

The white-clad attendant, who occupied a chair beside the bed, looked around and jumped to his feet.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"How is the patient?" one of the two men asked, with a smile.

"Doing fairly well, sir," the orderly advised. He dropped his voice as he stepped up to the visitors. "She has been here a week now and there should have been more of an improvement. Poor kid. She isn't suffering any longer from that bump on the head, but she's still frightened half to death. Her memory is about the same, which means she has none."

The younger of the two visitors shook his head sadly. "Whatever frightened her must have been something pretty ghastly. By the way, my friend is Larry Larkin. He's in business with my uncle who is the patient in the next room. I'm Tom Girard, in case you have forgotten and I think your name is—"

"Bill," the orderly said, and smiled.

He was a tall, well-built man. There was gray in his temples and he had a firm chin and clear brown eyes.

"Just Bill, Mr. Girard," he repeated. "How is your uncle, by the way? I helped to check him in last night and today, I understand, they kept him quite busy with blood tests, X-rays and all the rest of the routine.

Girard sighed deeply. "He's none too well. They diagnosed his trouble today. They're going to operate on him in the morning. I was called back to town. Larkin made all the arrangements when the old boy became ill."

The orderly stepped aside and the two men walked over to the bed. On it lay a tow-headed girl about eight years old. Her eyes were glued

on the big package which Tom Girard carried, and which he extended toward her.

"Something for you, Susie," Girard smiled. "For being a good little girl and doing as the doctors say."

She took the box, but didn't try to open it. Instead, she just stared at the two men, then looked at the orderly who nodded and winked. Susie at once went to work on the cord, raised the lid of the box and lifted out a large doll. It was easily worth thirty or forty dollars, and it quite took her breath away.

"Like it, Susie?" Larry Larkin asked. "I helped pick it out."

"I love it." Susie held the doll close. "Thank you very much. I won't mind what the doctors do to me now. It's such a nice a doll."

"Almost as big as you are," Larkin chuckled. "But not nearly as pretty."

GIRARD walked over to the door where the orderly waited.

"Larkin told me a little about that girl," he said, "but I had no idea it was this bad. What in the world happened to her?"

"No one is certain," Bill replied. "She was found, unconscious, near the river a week ago. Quite apparently she had been struck on the head, but before that she must have been horribly frightened. When she regained consciousness, she couldn't remember what happened, but by the stark horror in her eyes you could tell it must have been bad."

"Hitting a child like that," Girard grunted. "Whoever did it ought to cut rock for about ten years. Has she been identified?"

"Oh, yes," Bill replied. "The Missing Persons Bureau did a neat job on that. Susie's parents are hard-working people employed in a war plant. They haven't the remotest idea of what happened to her. They work nights and Susie often played near the piers after dark, though she had been warned not to . . . Oh say, since you and Mr. Girard are here, I think I'll go down and get a tray of medicines. Susie has a mild opiate scheduled. She doesn't

sleep. I imagine that somewhere, far back in her mind, are traces of whatever ghastly experience she went through. It keeps her awake."

Bill went to the elevators, rode down to the pharmacy and met another orderly who was just coming out, carrying a tray of medicines. Two loaded hypodermic needles were on the tray.

"Hi, Bill," he said. "This is your tray. I was just going to take it up. Hypo labeled Number One is for that kid. Number Two is for Mr. John MacKenzie, next door."

"Thanks, Cooper," Bill said.

He didn't like this pimply-faced youth much. Though he had nothing definite against him except for Cooper's shifty expression and his incessant wise-cracking.

Back on the seventh floor, Bill encountered the resident physician, who was making his rounds. They entered the room where John MacKenzie lay. MacKenzie was a man of about sixty, but with the constitution of a man much younger. He nodded curtly when the two men entered.

"What kind of stuff do I get now?" he complained. "I've been tapped, jabbed, dosed and photographed so much I feel like a laboratory specimen."

The resident doctor was young and confident. "Just a mild opiate, Mr. MacKenzie. To relax you a bit for the operation in the morning. Bill, alcohol swab."

Bill soaked a bit of cotton in alcohol, handed it to the doctor, then picked up Hypo Number Two. He passed this over. The doctor made a deft insertion and shot the plunger home. There was some good-natured kidding back and forth, then they left.

Larkin and Girard were saying good-by to Susie. Bill closed the door behind them. Susie took her shot cheerfully, snuggled closer to her big doll and closed her eyes.

Bill and the resident doctor went into the hallway.

"Doc, do you believe that girl will recover

her memory?" Bill asked.

"Of course," the doctor nodded. "Children her age can be frightened into a shock which resembles amnesia and probably is true amnesia, but they always come out of it. She'll recover any day now, and probably give up all the details of whatever frightened her almost to death. Just the same, keep an eye on her. I'll give the night nurse definite instructions. And be sure MacKenzie goes to sleep. I ordered a pretty stiff shot for him, but some of those burly boys resist the stuff."

"I'll look in later," Bill said. "Thanks for everything—about Susie, I mean. I like the kid. Worry about her too. You see, I keep wondering if the people who scared her are afraid she will recover and talk. Whatever she witnessed must have been bad. Perhaps a murder. Those people might not want her to get better . . . Oh, go ahead and chuckle. It's probably foolish enough to rate a laugh."

"Watch her anyway." The doctor grinned. "See you later on."

Bill had a number of routine duties, and went about them. Susie slept well. It was after visiting hours now and the great hospital had become quiet. At ten o'clock a patient in Room 709 died. Bill and a nurse were assigned to take the corpse to the hospital morgue. Shortage of help required the personnel to perform all sorts of duties.

The nurse was young and attractive. Her name was Janet Crane. They rode to the cellar, wheeled the stretcher to the morgue, and Bill opened the door. He snapped on a light. There were two bodies waiting for the undertakers. Bill hardly gave them a glance. After six months of this work he had grown accustomed to death, and accepted it stoically.

ON THE way back, Nurse Janet Crane was frowning.

"Odd," she said. "Half an hour ago there was only one cadaver down there. The second one looked familiar to me."

Bill stopped in his tracks. "Wait a

minute!" he exclaimed. "He looked familiar to me, too. I'm going back."

Nurse Crane waited for him. When Bill emerged, his face was grim. He took Janet's elbow and piloted her to the elevators.

"He was familiar all right. That second cadaver was Cooper, one of the regular orderlies here. I saw him alive and hearty not an hour ago. He was bringing a tray of medicines to my floor. First time he ever did a favor for anyone."

"It is Cooper!" Janet gasped. "No wonder he looked familiar. Bill, what on earth happened?"

"Killed him, you mean?" Bill asked. "A knife. One of those big hunting knives the boys use on Japs as a rule. It is still in his back. Somebody stabbed him and put his body in the morgue, hoping it wouldn't be discovered for a while. Janet—he was murdered and murder needs a reason. I wonder . . . Come on!"

The elevator never seemed to ascend so slowly. Bill was no gentleman when he pushed ahead of Janet and bolted out of the lift. He raced down the corridor, followed by Janet. Bill opened the door of Susie's room and snapped on the light. The child was asleep—or seemed to be. Bill put a hand gently against her forehead. Then he felt of her pulse and he seemed to wilt with relief.

"She's all right, Janet," he whispered.

"But what on earth made you think she wasn't?" Janet asked.

"I thought," Bill said slowly and, with an abashed grin, "that Cooper was murdered by the people whom Susie saw and who frightened her into a shock. Thank heavens, I'm wrong."

They left the room quietly. "Bill," Janet said, "we've got to report about Cooper."

"I'll handle that—and keep you out of it as much as possible. This doesn't look as though it will be any too pleasant. You drop in on MacKenzie, will you?"

Bill made his way to the hospital

superintendent's office and told him about Cooper, lying stabbed to death in the morgue. The police were notified and the superintendent went into action himself. Bill returned to the seventh floor.

He found Janet standing outside MacKenzie's room and her face was drawn and white.

"Bill!" she exclaimed. "It's MacKenzie. He's dead!"

Bill choked and hurried into the room. It was true enough. MacKenzie appeared to have died in his sleep. Bill went to the telephone and called the pharmacy.

"There were two hypodermic needles used on the seventh floor earlier tonight," he said. "They were labeled One and Two. If they haven't been cleaned yet, don't clean them. The police will be properly grateful if you do as I say."

CHAPTER II

Scene of the Crime

TWENTY minutes later a burly, shaggy man named Roberts took charge. He was a Captain of Detectives and he knew Bill.

The two men stepped aside and Bill offered his suspicions.

"This little girl, Susie Lee," he said, "saw something, and someone tried to kill her to keep her quiet. Instead of dying she suffered a temporary loss of memory, due to shock. Now I believe the people who tried to silence her are still trying. It's my contention that Cooper, the murdered orderly, was paid to help. He brought the tray of medicines to me, something he never did before. He could have switched a hypo for one loaded with poison and then got mixed up in telling me which hypo was which. He was that dumb. The poison was meant for Susie, but MacKenzie got it instead."

Captain Roberts pursed his lips. "Sounds logical. As I understand it, Cooper was a dope.

The hospital authorities claim they'd never have hired him if it hadn't been for the acute shortage of orderlies . . . Then you believe the murderer killed Cooper to keep him quiet?"

"That's right," Bill said. "They're doing a post mortem on MacKenzie, so we'll soon know the truth."

An hour later, the surgeon in charge of the autopsy reported that MacKenzie had died of a slow acting poison injected directly into his blood stream. An examination of Susie showed that she was heavily drugged. The stiff shot meant for MacKenzie had been administered to her.

"It won't do the child any good either," a doctor said, and frowned. "All that morphine will keep her under for hours, and when she does wake up, she'll be undergoing a definite set-back."

"Too bad," Bill commented, with a sad shake of his head. "Susie might have cleared the whole thing up. Now all we can do is wait. Captain Roberts, I suggest a guard be posted in Susie's room and the door kept closed and locked from inside. There may be another attempt on her life."

Roberts agreed, vehemently, and went to make the arrangements. The nurse, Janet, temporarily relieved of her duties, stood beside Bill.

"You've personality plus, Bill," she said to him in a low voice. "The Captain acted as if he'd been taking orders from you all his life."

Bill grinned. "I've known him slightly for some time. Oh, oh! Here come MacKenzie's nephew and his business partner. This isn't going to be pleasant."

Bill seemed to take charge automatically, and the hospital superintendent and the doctors had no inclination to interfere. They seemed vastly relieved. Bill stopped the two men.

"I'm terribly sorry," he sympathized. "Your uncle received a hypo of poison which was meant for Susie."

Tom Girard's eyes blazed in fury. "It's

plain incompetence!" he flared up. "I'm going to sue this hospital."

"Now just a moment," Bill protested. "Someone was bound to die from that poisoned hypo. If not your uncle, then Susie."

"What do I care about that—that girl?" Girard stormed. "She means nothing to me except that I was sorry for her. My uncle is dead, and I loved him!"

Larry Larkin took Girard's arm. "Easy, Tom," he warned in a low voice. "It's nobody's fault except the murderer's. Comfort yourself with the thought that your uncle was an old man and ill. He couldn't have lived many years more, while Susie has a whole lifetime ahead of her. I'll swear that if your uncle had his choice, he would have chosen to die in her place. And remember, he was my partner for a long time. I liked him too, and I shall miss him as much as you will."

Girard rubbed moist eyes. "I'm being a little abrupt about this, I suppose. There is some comfort in knowing that Susie is alive. But the shock of it all . . . I'm unnerved. Larry, let's go somewhere and get a drink."

"I wish I could join you," Bill said. "Thanks for being considerate. The hospital wasn't really at fault. What happened was not due to carelessness on anyone's part. It was deliberate murder."

"You're right, of course." Tom Girard nodded and Larkin assented vigorously. "And look—take care of that child. If my uncle died that she might live, I don't want anything to happen to her."

"Don't worry," Bill assured him. "A police guard has been arranged. Unfortunately, she received a heavy dose of narcotic and her recovery will be delayed. We probably won't really know what happened to her for days, although I intend to try and do something about it."

"We're with you all the way." Larkin offered his hand. "Call on us—for anything."

BILL walked over to where Janet stood, listening to the whole conversation. She shook her head from side to side solemnly.

"Bill, you're a wonder. No diplomat could have handled that situation more delicately. The hospital owes you a vote of thanks."

Bill smiled down at her. "Somebody had to do it. I've been friendly with both those men, so why not me? Janet, I meant what I said when I told them I intended to do something about Susie. This attempt to kill her failed, by a miracle. The next one—and there will be a next one—may not. So before the murderer can go into action again, I'd like to clear the thing up. Want to help?"

"Of course," Janet said eagerly.

"Good," Bill told her. "Go to the dormitory and change to street clothes. I'll meet you in the reception room. We're going to the place where they found Susie. And bring along a flashlight if you have one."

"Sounds interesting," Janet said. "I wonder if they'll let me off duty."

"Leave that to me." Bill winked at her significantly. "I know some ropes. Fifteen minutes then—in the reception room."

Janet had never seen Bill in civilian clothes and she was somewhat amazed at his distinguished appearance. She knew that his topcoat was worth over a hundred dollars, and his suit was of a similar type. Bill gave her no time to comment on this. He hurried her to a taxi which was waiting for them in front of the hospital.

They left the cab near the pier on which Susie had been discovered, bloody and unconscious. Bill waited until the taxi disappeared. Then he piloted Janet out onto the pier. He walked to the edge and looked over into the black water. It was a dark night and he gratefully accepted the flashlight which Janet had brought.

At the very edge of the pier, Bill went down on one knee, used the flash and studied every inch of the wooden surface. He called

softly to Janet and she hurried to his side. He pointed out several small stains.

"That's blood," he explained. "Perhaps Susie was attacked here and the murderer's intention was to throw her into the river. We can't be sure. This could be someone else's blood, of course. After all, Susie witnessed a crime and I imagine it was murder."

"Then if that isn't Susie's blood, perhaps we'll find traces to show where she really was, Bill."

He arose and they faced one another. Bill's smile died and he put both hands on her shoulders.

"To look at you a man would never guess you were practical enough to be a nurse. And now you come up with a bright idea like that. You've a lot of brain matter under that blond hair of yours, and you happen to be a very pretty girl. Did you know I've watched you so often that I've actually felt embarrassed sometimes?"

"I'm glad you have, Bill," Janet said gently. "I—find you rather amazing, too. A little above the general run of orderlies. Did I say a little? I meant that you're more of the type our greatest doctors are."

"Thank you." Bill drew her a bit closer. "Now we'd better forget our own personalities and see what we can do for Susie. Look for more bloodstains. That's your good suggestion and we'll do it now."

They prowled the pier carefully. Bill rounded some sort of a tool shed erected on the side of the pier. Behind it was a narrow ledge forming the edge of the pier. Janet heard him gasp and when he appeared, he was holding a battered, cheap little doll.

"I found this against the side of the shed," he explained. "I'm willing to bet odds it's Susie's. But there were no bloodstains and there should be. I saw her when she was brought in. She was drenched with blood . . . Janet, there is a boat of some sort right below the spot where I discovered the doll. I'm going to jump down into it if you're game to stay

here and keep guard."

"I'm not afraid," Janet smiled. "Not so long as you're close at hand. Go ahead."

HE DISAPPEARED around the edge of the shed. She heard a thump as he landed in the boat. Bill snapped on the flash, after he had regained his feet. A wry expression crossed his face. There was a narrow ladder affixed to the pier and leading right down to the boat. He had missed it in the darkness, and had risked a broken leg making that jump.

Using the flash again, he studied the boat. It was in drydock of some sort, for it didn't sway under his weight. A rather old craft, probably used for fishing trips. There were seats along the rail. He went over these carefully, concentrating upon those directly beneath the spot where he had picked up the doll. He saw the dark brown stains and even a few strands of short, light brown hair. The same shade as Susie's. Bill glanced up at the pier and frowned. A new idea was beginning to dawn on him.

"Bill!" Janet's voice froze him. "Bill! someone is—"

Her words ended in a scream. There was a rush of feet on the pier, then Janet came hurtling over the edge. Bill didn't hesitate. Without pausing to remove coat or shoes, he leaped into the water and began swimming.

CHAPTER III

Guns Covering

BILL couldn't see Janet in the darkness, but she was crying out and he soon reached her side. He got an arm around her and started swimming back. There was a sharp crack above him and at the same instant the water, a couple of inches from his head, rose in a tiny geyser.

"Someone's shooting at us!" Bill cried. "Take a quick breath."

He dived and pulled Janet with him. He

realized that she wasn't a good swimmer and kept a tight grip on her. It was difficult, swimming beneath the water and holding her too, but he managed somehow. When his lungs threatened to burst, he knew Janet's must be giving her agony also. He bobbed above the surface, taking her along. Both of them dragged in fresh air.

Another crack of a gun indicated the killer was still waiting. Bill and Janet went under once more. When he decided he was beneath the pier itself, he came up again. Nothing had ever looked as good as the protecting ceiling of the pier. He wound an arm about a pillar and gasped for air. Janet lay weakly against his arm and shoulder, but she was all right.

Someone ran along the pier, toward the street. Faintly, Bill heard a car engine roar and tires ground against the pavement. He looked about, saw a ladder and swam over to it. Janet was able to climb the ladder under her own power and was even waiting at the top to give him a hand.

"I—I didn't see him," she said, her teeth chattering with cold, "until he was right behind me. I never saw what he looked like. Bill, what in the world was he trying to do?"

"It's rather obvious, Janet," Bill said grimly. "He pushed you into the water, knowing darn well I'd go after you and he'd have a chance to kill us both. It was only luck that he happened to be a poor shot. Even so, he came pretty close. We'd better get out of here. Just one more minute while I get that doll . . ."

Bill dropped Janet at the nurses' dormitory. He parked his car, entered the hospital and went to the locker room. There he was glad to change to his white uniform. He hung up his clothes to dry, then hurried to the seventh floor. The door of Susie's room was locked, but a patrolman, gun in hand, let him in. Susie was still sleeping that drugged, heavy slumber, but she was all right.

"Be mighty careful," Bill told the cop. "That girl holds the secret to a murder, I'm

sure. They'll try to silence her again."

"First," the cop said, "they got to take me. Believe that. Sweet little kid, isn't she? A little while ago she was talking in her sleep. What do you think she said?"

"Anything important?" Bill asked quickly.

"Plenty important to her. She was saying her prayers. You know—'Now I lay me down to sleep' . . ."

Bill shuddered. "Poor kid. The way things are going she might have said, 'Now I lay me down to die.' Watch her, Officer."

Bill went to the public telephone booth in the corridor and dialed Police Headquarters. He soon had Captain Roberts on the wire.

"Captain," he said, "I want you to send divers to the end of Pier Sixty, East River. That's where Janet was attacked. Have them scour the bottom of the river for a body. I'd be willing to bet you'll find one. And Captain, I want to be there, too. Meet you at the pier."

He hung up, turned, and saw Janet standing there. She seemed to be amazed.

"Bill, you actually ordered the Captain to do that," she said. "I thought detective captains rarely took orders."

He grinned at her. "It's my personality, Janet."

She stepped up to him, after a quick glance around. "It really is a personality, Bill. You've got me falling in love with you. Did you realize that?"

He nodded and the smile died on his face. "I've been hoping for that. Janet, there's no time now for me to tell you how I feel. But I will later. If you will listen to an orderly who should really be hopping to your beck and call."

"You're the most amazing man I've ever met," Janet said. "Bill why did you want the river bottom searched?"

"Because Susie saw a murder committed. I'm sure of it, and I'm fairly sure the body is in the river, probably weighted down. We'll know in the morning. Susie was hiding behind the shed."

Janet's eyes went bleak. "And the killer threw her into that boat and thought he'd killed her, too. Bill, get that man!"

"I intend to," he said. "Now run along and take care of your patients. I've another phone call to make and this one is highly secret. Tell you about it later."

HE STEPPED into the booth and when he got his connection, he talked for fully fifteen minutes. When he emerged, he was smiling tightly. Certain wheels had been put into motion, and they were going to grind a killer down to size.

Half an hour later, Bill appeared at the pier and found it no longer deserted. A police launch anchored alongside, a diver was preparing to slip off the pier, and his attendants were busy with the air lines and the compressor.

Captain Roberts greeted Bill warmly.

"I don't know what this is all about, Bill," he said, "but if you say so, there probably is a body under the water. At any rate, we'll soon know, unless it wasn't weighted down and has floated away."

Bill took the Captain's flashlight and sprayed it across the bloodstains on the pier.

"Take a closer look, Captain. These bloodstains were not made by dripping blood, but by blood that was smeared. I think the murderer brought his victim here, already dead and bleeding. He placed the body on the pier and tied weights to it. Luckily it hasn't rained since that night and the evidence is intact. But, as you say, let's wait and see."

The diver grasped a powerful underwater light, climbed down the ladder and vanished amidst a cauldron of bubbles. Within five minutes he was signaling for a rope. One went down and then the diver came up. His helmet was removed.

"I found it, sir," he told the Captain. "It's weighted with a lot of old scrap iron. I think the fellow's throat was slit. A line is attached. Just haul him in."

Roberts gave the orders and soon they were all staring down at the flabby, chalk-white face of a dead man. Roberts emitted a sharp exclamation.

"Take his prints," he ordered. "I think I know who he is though. Even a whole week under water couldn't alter that face any too much. If I'm correct, that man is Goober Williams, so named because he had an incessant craving for peanuts. Wait just a minute."

Roberts turned pockets inside out and discovered a few water-logged peanuts. He ordered one of his men to take the prints and check at once. Then Roberts faced Bill.

"Furthermore," he said, "if that is Goober Williams—and I'm fairly sure of it—I know who killed him. We'll settle this case in no time flat."

"Good," Bill nodded. "But how are you so sure of the murderer's identity?"

"Goober," Captain Roberts explained, "was a stool pigeon. A useful man to us, even if he was pretty low. Some weeks ago we arraigned an all-around gorilla named Benjy Stoddard on a burglary charge. Goober was going to testify against him. Benjy was out on bail—still is, and we know just where he is, because I've been afraid he might try to run out. Benjy has been suspected of slitting throats before this and he is usually armed with a razor-like knife. Oh, it's Benjy all right."

"At least," Bill said, "you can pick him up on suspicion and hold him until Susie recovers. If it wasn't too dark when the crime was committed, she may identify him. Or you can convince Benjy she is bound to."

Roberts wagged his head. "Benjy is tough. We'll see. Let's drop over to Headquarters, confirm his identity from the fingerprints, then look up Benjy."

The prints proved that the victim was "Goober" Williams. Captain Roberts studied some reports on the bail-free Benjy Stoddard and, with four well-armed men, he and Bill

drove swiftly to the cheap little hotel where Benjy was known to be staying.

One patrolman collared the desk clerk to keep him from signaling Benjy. The others went upstairs, but Bill lingered in the lobby for a few minutes. He had a brief talk with the desk clerk.

"It's no use hedging," he said. "We know Benjy is here. You can save yourself a lot of trouble by answering a couple of questions."

The clerk shrugged. "I should have known better than let a mug like Benjy in here. What do you want to know?"

"Has Benjy gone in and out much? Was he, for instance, out of his room in the past twenty-four hours?"

"Not Benjy," the clerk said. "He ain't been outside his room in a week. I think he is half crazy. He wakes people up yelling. He keeps his door locked, and we have to bring up his food, smokes and newspapers. Benjy is scared stiff of something."

"Hm," Bill mused. "That's interesting. Thanks. I'll do my best to see that you aren't involved."

BILL went to the floor where Captain Roberts and his men were busy forcing a door. They all had guns in their hands. The door went down under one final assault. Inside the room was Benjy. A dried-up little man with a nasty expression under ordinary circumstances, but right now he was too scared to look formidable.

He was cowering in a corner, shivering like a wet, cold and whipped pup. He stared at the guns covering him and the men behind them, as if he had been mesmerized. Then he began to laugh. A high-pitched cackle. Roberts approached warily and put handcuffs on him. The click of the mechanism and the feel of cold steel, made Benjy snap out of it. But he was still terror-stricken.

"Okay, okay, I killed Goober," he chattered. "I'll talk. I'll say anything if you take me out of here. I dumped Goober in the

river. He was dead when we got there. I listened to him die in the back of the car I was using. I tied weights to him and dumped him over and then, after the water closed around him, I heard him scream. It came up right from under the water and Goober was dead. He couldn't scream, but he did scream, and I been hearing it ever since. In my sleep, when I'm awake. I can't get away from it. Lock me up, only keep him away from me!"

"Well," Roberts said, as he watched them take Benjy out, "that was a break, he killed Goober, tried to murder the kid at the hospital, stabbed the orderly, and now's he gone off-balance. I wouldn't wonder. Screams coming up out of the water!"

"Captain," Bill said, "Benjy did hear something. Susie fell off the pier just after Benjy threw his victim into the river. Susie screamed and Benjy thought it was Goober. The scream haunted him, but for us it only means a lot more trouble."

"How come?" Roberts queried with a puzzled frown.

"Benjy didn't see Susie or he'd have known she did the screaming. So why, then, should he have wanted to kill her? He hasn't been out of his room for a week, so how could he have been at the hospital? We've been following a wrong trail, but it's veered off into the right channels now. Take me back to the hospital and on the way I'll outline a little plan."

CHAPTER IV

Reflection of Murder

IT WAS morning when Janet awakened Bill in the hospital room he had borrowed for a short nap.

"Captain Roberts is in the superintendent's office, Bill," she said. "Larkin and Girard are there, too, both of them furious because Captain Roberts ordered them to come here."

"Oh, good." Bill rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"I'll be right down. Plan to be on hand too, Janet. We've a murderer to unveil."

Bill, in his white uniform which was somewhat wrinkled and bedraggled from having been slept in, entered the office a few minutes later. He nodded pleasantly to those already there, went over to a telephone and dialed a number.

"Excuse me, folks," he said happily. "This will require only a moment. . . . Hello—hello, Dan. Well, how did it all come out? Is that so? I'm not especially surprised. . . . Thanks a lot, and keep on digging. We'll need all the facts."

Bill hung up, walked over to a chair parked against the further wall and sat down. He bestowed upon every one a particularly sunny smile that lingered on Janet longer than on the others.

"Last night," he said then, "I was with Captain Roberts when the body of a murdered man was removed from beneath the pier where Susie had been injured. He was a police informer, and the man who killed him is now under arrest. . . . Isn't that so, Captain?"

Roberts nodded heavily. "I got him under guard in my car outside. I figured we should take him up to see Susie. I know the kid is still drugged, but Benjy doesn't know it and maybe he'll break down. He must have seen her, or he wouldn't have made that attack upon her. Likely he thinks she is dead, so the sight of her may crack him."

"Excellent," Bill commented. "I'll go with you. He stepped over to Larkin and Girard. "I figured you two would like to be in on this. Seeing that our friend Benjy had your uncle and your business partner murdered in cold blood."

"I certainly would like to be in on it," Larkin said harshly. "I'd even like to see them burn him."

Bill wagged his head. "That's going a bit far. I'll be right back. Ready, Captain?"

In five minutes Bill and the police officers returned. Roberts had the confessed killer chained to his wrist and he handled him none

too gently. Bill stalked behind them, his face a cold mask. They all entered an elevator and went to the seventh floor. Janet entered alone, to see how Susie was. She signaled for them to enter. Susie was still in a drugged sleep.

"Janet," Bill said, "the doctors told me last night that Susie would have to be fed this morning. Don't you think a glass of milk or something like that would help give her strength and make her recover faster?"

Janet didn't think so. Susie had been fed a short time before that hypo had been administered. But something about the way Bill asked that question seemed to require an affirmative answer, so she went and got a glass of milk.

Bill took it, placed it on a bureau near the door and promptly seemed to forget all about it. He dragged Benjy Stoddard over beside the bed. The crook and killer looked down at the child without betraying a twitch.

"Cool customer, isn't he?" Girard whispered.

"They'll warm him up properly," Larkin grunted.

Bill nudged Benjy. "Ever see her before?"

"No," Benjy declared. "Kids all look alike to me anyhow."

"This girl," Bill said, "saw you killing that man and throwing his body into the river. Didn't you try to kill her?"

"No," Benjy gulped. "But if I'da seen her, I woulda bumped her sure."

Bill waved his hands. "There you are, Captain. A real nice confession which will be backed up by Susie's testimony when she recovers her memory. Janet, you can feed that milk to Susie now."

Janet picked up the glass and approached the bed with it. Bill was watching Larkin and Girard intently. He suddenly made a dive for the bed and took the glass from Janet's hand. He walked up to Larkin.

"You look peaked, Mr. Larkin. In my opinion you need this milk more than Susie does."

"I detest milk." Larkin backed up a little.

"Drink it!" Bill snapped. "Drain that glass, you killer. Drain it and prove at least part of your innocence. Or take it as the easy way out. That glass of milk is poisoned and you know it. Captain, search Benjy again. The side coat pocket away from you."

CAPTAIN ROBERTS took out a small, slim vial. There were some colorless drops of liquid still clinging to its side. Bill sniffed of the contents.

"Poison all right. Now I suppose, Larkin, you'll say that Benjy had this on his person, slipped it into the milk and hoped that Susie would get it and die."

"What else?" Larkin shuddered. "Have you gone insane, trying to make me drink it? I've had quite enough of this. A hospital orderly can't make me step around. Why, I could buy and sell a gross of men like you."

"Not at the present moment you couldn't," Bill declared. "You're in the process of selling every darn thing you own. Why? To clear up the deficits that exist in your business with the late John MacKenzie. You brought that vial of poison here. You put it into the milk which I conveniently left for you. Benjy couldn't have had the poison because outside, in the car, we searched him so thoroughly he couldn't have concealed a much-folded postage stamp. In fact, I saw you slip the vial into his pocket. See that mirror across the room? It was like a movie, watching you in it."

Larkin was pale and dry-lipped. "But what sheer rot this is!" he protested. "Why should I want to kill the child?"

"If MacKenzie had died a natural death, it would have been all right," Bill said. "If he was deliberately murdered, it wouldn't be, because the police were bound to investigate his firm in searching for a motive. But if he died as the result of a murderer's accident, it would be listed practically the same as a natural death so far as you were concerned. No investigation would have been made. It

would require the Probate Court weeks to audit the business and by that time you could have made good or fixed up the books.

"So, when you learned MacKenzie was going to get better soon after his operation, and would be back in the office, you knew something had to be done. But what—with a measure of safety for you? Then you came to the hospital and made arrangements for MacKenzie. Girard was out of town. You knew all about Susie, and how it was expected she'd identify her assailant when she recovered her memory. The newspapers have been full of it.

"This made her a target for the criminal who apparently had struck her down, especially since it was assumed she had witnessed a crime being committed. You arranged to have MacKenzie put in this particular hospital and in the room next to Susie's. That suited your well-made plans.

"Then you contacted Cooper, the orderly who would have done anything for money. He arranged the hypos so MacKenzie would get a fatal injection of poison, apparently meant for Susie, and Susie would get MacKenzie's heavy dose of narcotic. So MacKenzie seemed to have died because of a murderer's accident. Of course, Cooper knew too much to live. He'd have blackmailed you."

Tom Girard backed away from Larkin.

"So that's where he went that night! He insisted upon driving his own car here while I drove mine. Later we were to meet at a social affair. Larkin came rather late."

Bill nodded. "Certainly he did. He returned here, lured Cooper into the cellar and stabbed him. Then he put the body in the morgue. It looked as if the murderer we thought Susie had seen was responsible. But Susie didn't suffer at the hands of Benjy here. Benjy told the truth. He didn't even know that Susie existed.

"What really happened was that Susie was playing with a doll on the edge of the pier, but protected by a tool shed. She witnessed part of

the crime wherein Benjy disposed of the body, and it affected her terribly. She tried to get away, as a child would, but she slipped and fell off the pier into a boat. Her head struck a seat on the boat. I found her blood and some of her hair adhering to the seat.

“I realized then, that the murderer on the pier hadn’t seen her or injured her. So the whole motive for killing her was out. I looked for other motives. Girard was the only heir of his uncle’s estate. Large enough to murder for. Larkin had no motive, so I sent auditors to check the business. That’s why I had Captain Roberts bring both of you to the hospital this morning. I didn’t want Larkin to know what was going on in his office.”

“By whose right did you do that?” Larkin bellowed. “A menial hospital orderly taking charge like that! It required a court order to examine books that way.”

“I know,” Bill said. “I gave the order myself. In writing. This morning I knew it was you, because the books were off and you had a motive too. But I also realized that since Benjy had been caught, you’d have to kill Susie so her true story might never be told. Therefore, the milk, so you might poison it. You seemed to be an expert on poisoning. Not on shooting though. It was you on the pier trying to kill Janet and me. I’d told you I meant to investigate things and you followed

us. If we had died, the blame would be attached to Benjy.”

LARKIN made a half-hearted attempt to get out of the room. He ran smack into two husky detectives outside. Girard seemed stunned, but he recovered his wits enough to ask a question.

“Bill,” he said, “you just said you issued the order to have Larkin’s accounts gone over. How in the world could you issue such an order?”

Captain Roberts was gaping. “How? Good heavens, man, don’t you know that Bill is a Supreme Court Justice? The youngest one on the bench, and before that he was the shrewdest District Attorney we ever had? He can order practically anything.”

Bill felt a tug on his arm. Janet was looking up at him, her face scarlet.

“Oh, Bill!” she said in a weak voice.

He grinned. “I’ll talk to you later. Janet— if you had known I was a Supreme Court Justice, you’d never have given me a tumble. It’s always been that way. I’m a volunteer orderly, trying to help out because of the war. I insisted that my identity remain a secret. I wanted to help, not be pampered. I even worked regular, full time hours to maintain that illusion.”

“But—but—” Janet leaned against him weakly. “You win, Bill. Mr. Justice Bill.”