

OUT of the NIGHT

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CHAPTER XXI
A breathless silence fell upon the room. Every eye was fastened on Mrs. Downey; every ear on her disclosure. Cilly wondered if other hearts beat as furiously as her own. She moved a little to the left in her chair, not so directly behind the woman. She dreaded missing a word of her story.

"Yes, Mrs. Downey?" Sergeant Dolan asked.
"That isn't all I know, sergeant," Mrs. Downey repeated. She was sure of herself now; her words were a ring of conviction. Lured by the ring of conviction, she turned to her mother's back. "I know what Lucille doesn't want me to tell you," Mrs. Downey said, with maddening complacency.

"It was about 4 o'clock in the morning. I was so upset, I tell you, I couldn't sleep much more that night. I kept hearing that girl's scream over and over again. Lucille was up, too, until about 2 o'clock, but I gave her one of my sleeping powders—she had to be to school in the morning—and she fell asleep.

"I stayed awake. I was afraid to take a powder myself for fear something else might happen. I had the funniest feeling, sergeant. I kept thinking if I fell asleep I might walk in my sleep and fall out the window just as that poor girl had fallen. I tell you, I'll never forget it . . .

"Sergeant Dolan tapped impatiently on the desk with his pencil. "I guess it must have been about 6 o'clock," she went on. "I know I looked at the clock at 20 minutes past 4, and this was some time after that. I was out in the kitchen getting a drink of water—the water was always colder there than in the bathroom—and I heard the door of the next apartment—that's 4-B—slowly opening. I can always tell because the door squeaks a little.

"Well, I thought it was a funny time for Mrs. Wheeler to be going out. Even if she were sick or something, the drugstore would be closed. I was a little worried about her. Living there all alone like she does, I knew how frightened she must have been, just like the rest of us. I tell you, if I didn't have Lucille, I wouldn't have stayed in that apartment alone that night. No, sir. I'd rather have slept in the subway. So I thought I'd better get up and see what was going on. I went to the door to tell her so.

"And then, just as I was about to unlock the door, I heard a low voice in the hall. It was only a whisper, but it was a man's voice—you know how loud a man usually whispers. So I just opened that little peep-hole on my door to see if the man was really coming out of Mrs. Wheeler's. He was, all right. I could see him plain as day, with the hall light shining right in his face. He was still whispering. I heard him say: 'Everything will be all right, Helen. Nobody'll suspect . . .'

Sergeant Dolan straightened, his pencil poised in midair.
"You're sure you heard that, Mrs. Downey? You're sure those were the exact words?"
Mrs. Downey pressed her lips together. "I'm absolutely certain, sergeant," she said emphatically. "Mind you, I didn't stay up out of a sound sleep like I do sometimes. I didn't imagine this. I was as wide awake then as I am now, and I saw that man as plain as day, and I heard those words. 'Everything will be all right, Helen,' he says, 'nobody'll suspect.' . . . I tell you, I wish I knew then that there'd been a murder committed!"

"Mrs. Downey, would you recognize this man if you were to see him again?"
"Indeed I would. . . . Why, I saw him as well as I see you sitting here, sergeant. I recognized his face the minute I saw it again."

"That?"
"As if an electric shock had coursed through the room, every person stiffened to attention. Mr. Corbett slipped the arms of his chair fiercely. Mr. Hunter leaned so far forward in his chair that his wife had a restraining hand on his arm. Every eye was glued on Mrs. Downey.

"Where did you see him, Mrs. Downey?"
"In this morning's paper," she stated. "He was in the picture taken at the poor girl's funeral yesterday. He was standing right in front of the camera. Oh, I knew him all right."

"These muscles relaxed for the moment, there were a few deep breaths drawn. None of the men who had been at Amy's funeral. "That paper was this in, Mrs. Downey?"

"In the NEWS, sergeant. I like to read the NEWS—it's so much more interesting. . . ."
"Martin, run out and get a copy of today's NEWS," Dolan snapped. "Thank you, Mrs. Downey. You've been very helpful."

An interminable silence followed Martin's departure from the room. The scratch of Sergeant Dolan's pencil, as he made nervous little marks on his pad, sounded like the ticking of a bomb. Mrs. Shaw's breath was coming in short, spasmodic wheezes; this emotional suspense was no tonic for asthma. They heard of perspiration stood out on Mr. Johnson's pale forehead.

though he blotted them frequently with a moist handkerchief. Mr. Corbett's beady little eyes darted excitedly from one person to another. Cilly felt them on her and she looked up suddenly, her face a mask of cold anger. A sneer twisted Corbett's lips and he shifted his eyes quickly.

The clock on the wall ticked off the seconds with nerve-wracking regularity, marking the swift, uncontrollable flight of time on the road to eternity. Like the ceaseless chant of a jungle tom-tom, it hypnotized the eardrums, and each beat grew louder and more intense until one longed to silence it with a shriek.

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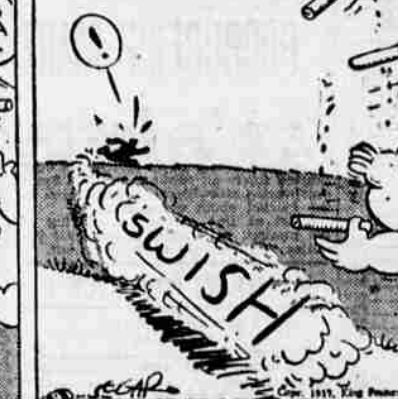
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BRITAIN'S MEDITERRANEAN REPAIR SHOP

Strategic port of call and "repair shop" of the British fleet in the Mediterranean is Malta, British colony situated between Europe and Africa off the coast of Sicily. Ever a vital holding, it assumed new and grave importance with the rumblings of submarine warfare in the Mediterranean.

Actually Malta consists of three islands: Malta, 91 square miles; Gozo, 20 square miles; Comino, one square mile, and a group of uninhabited but dangerous rocks. Here is one of the most magnificent natural harbors in the world and therefore a prime factor in defense.

A floating dock was installed in 1925 capable of lifting the largest ships in the British fleet. An air-drome has been built at Hal Far, suitable for main line airways. An air force likewise has been established here. During the World War, the islands were of inestimable value.

In 1921, by Letters of Patent, Malta emerged from the status of Crown colony to that of a quasi-dominion status. This form of self-government allows control of local affairs. Typical Maltese stamp is the 1901 issue picturing Valetta harbor.