

# Case of the Gold Coast Burglar

The loot was worth more than a quarter of a million dollars—yet it was one small, almost valueless, item that led police to the thief **By WILLIAM T. BRANNON**

THE LIST of the phantom burglar's victims read like a page from the Chicago Social Register.

Each victim lived in a luxurious apartment in a tall building on Chicago's Gold Coast. Loot—which totaled more than a quarter of a million dollars—included expensive furs, jewelry, and cash. In every case, the articles had disappeared during the day when two or more servants were at work in the apartments. And each theft had been from a master bedroom. Yet no servant had heard anything unusual.

"That's easy to understand," said Capt. Maurice Higgins. "All the apartments are thickly carpeted. The pile is so deep that you can walk around in the same room with someone else and not be heard. The servants say that they saw no stranger and didn't know anything was going on."

The servants were quietly checked. Each had been with the family many years and was regarded as trustworthy. The police considered the possibility of collusion with the thief but

then ruled this out. The burglar would have had to be in league with at least two dozen servants in different homes. Until the detectives had spent days watching the big apartment buildings,

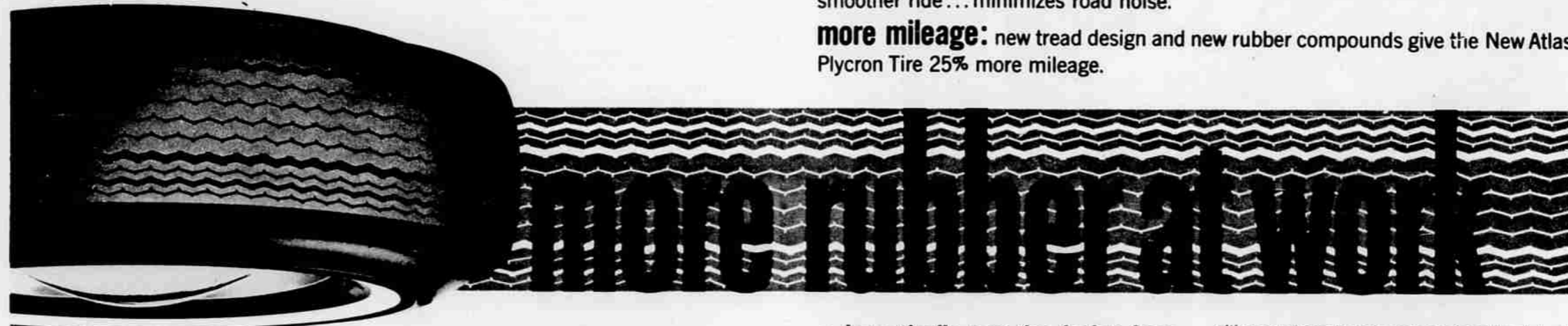
they hadn't understood why a man carrying a load of furs hadn't been noticed. In the late afternoon, servants poured out of the buildings, most of them carrying parcels. During the day,

there were dozens of men making pickups and deliveries from trucks. Realizing that the thief might be wearing a uniform and posing as a delivery man, detectives checked every

one for days. On one day, while they queried every driver who stopped in the area, the thief quietly struck again. Capt. Higgins saturated the area with policemen, and for a few days the

thefts stopped. He withdrew the uniformed officers, and the burglar struck again. Plainclothes detectives had been near the scene, but they hadn't spotted the burglar.

But when Capt. Higgins noted that one of the items taken was a half-filled bottle of perfume—which would have no cash value and would be of no use to a man—he knew then that the burglar was a woman.



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"We've missed something," said Capt. Higgins. He studied the files for hours, then called in the detectives. "Maybe this is a woman. Go back and ask the servants if they saw a woman they didn't know."

This produced results. Several servants told of encountering a nurse who, when spotted, always had the same story: "I'm taking care of a patient in the apartment upstairs. I guess I got mixed up coming in the back way and got in the wrong apartment. They all look alike from the rear."

Several servants who had found the woman entering different apartments gave the same description. They said the woman was of medium height, about 30 years old, and dressed in a nurse's uniform. Her hair was dark and luxuriant, done in a long bob, and parted on the right. Her face was round and full, and her features were attractive. She had long lashes and big brown eyes. She had a flashing smile that revealed even, white teeth.

"Memorize that description," Capt. Higgins ordered, "and try to find her."

Detectives haunted the buildings of the Gold Coast, but several more days passed before one of the detectives spotted her. The woman was arrested and identified herself as Mrs. Grace Hathaway, a practical nurse. She confessed taking furs, jewels, and other articles worth more than \$300,000, most of which she had sold for only a fraction of their value.

IN HER WORK as a practical nurse, she had noticed that maids often left back doors open for tradesmen. She had found it easy enough to slip in on the thick carpeting, pilfer the master bedrooms, and walk out. On the few occasions when she had been detected by a servant, her story that she had wandered into the wrong apartment hadn't been challenged.

New York City police also wanted Mrs. Hathaway on burglary charges, and warrants were forwarded to Chicago. But she was sent to prison in Illinois late in 1957 and the New York charges had to wait.

Had it not been for the alertness of Capt. Higgins when he studied the reports, police might have continued to look for a man and Mrs. Hathaway could have moved on to another city. The case well could have gone into the unsolved files.