



"Drop the gun,
Small!" Carter
commanded

LINED WITH DEATH

By JOHN L. BENTON

*Detective Nelson runs into a slick scheme for loot
and mixes it with a crew of greed-maddened killers!*

STANDING just inside the door of the living room of the big old Darlton town house, Detective Nelson Carter, of Police Headquarters, stared down at the motionless figure on the floor. So this was the end for one man who had lived by the rules of chance—for Joe Hill, one of the last of the big-time gamblers.

A quiet end, too, here where thick walls muffled the sounds of the city for this old brownstone house that seemed to hold itself aloof from the modern world. Light snow drifted down outside the windows, white

flakes against the black of night.

"You found him like that?" Carter asked, in the unconsciously hushed tones of a man speaking in the presence of death. "You didn't touch the corpse?"

He looked at the white-faced, wide-eyed girl—Nan Darlton—who had summoned him here to her home.

"I—I didn't touch anything," she said tremulously. "He was lying there like that when I came home not more than twenty minutes ago."

Her blond hair gleamed in the light from

a discreetly shaded table lamp. Slender hands moved restlessly in her lap. She seemed tiny in the big old-fashioned chair where she had dropped, sitting tensely, and yet Carter knew that she was fairly tall.

She shuddered as she stared, horrorstricken, at the corpse. Joe Hill looked like a giant black crow as he sprawled there on the worn but expensive Oriental rug. The handle of the knife in his back was a dull gray against the black cloth of his dinner jacket. He had not bled much.

"They called him a walking bank," Carter said musingly. "He always carried at least ten thousand dollars in cash on him—sometimes more than that. Yes, one of the last of the big-time gamblers."

"I know," said Nan Darlton. "He was my uncle."

There was faint surprise in Carter's quick glance at her.

"I didn't know that. He lived here then?"

"Sometimes." Nan nodded. "He had a room of his own here, and was always welcome to stay as long and as often as he wished. He hadn't been here lately, though."

Carter walked over and knelt beside the corpse. He searched through Hill's pockets. Keys, change, address book, a gold pen and pencil set, handkerchief—but no wallet, and no money save the change.

"If whoever did this had left the wallet on him," Carter said, as he put everything back in the dead man's pockets, "it might have been believed he wasn't carrying any money tonight."

Nelson Carter stood up, a tall, thin man who gave no outward evidence of the strength in his wiry muscles. That, it was said down at Police Headquarters, was one of his greatest assets—that neither physically nor sartorially did he look like a detective. Nor did he act like one.

Always well-dressed, he appeared more the smartly groomed business man now than detective, in his well-tailored gray suit. His

Chesterfield and snap-brim hat he had left in the hall.

FOR a silent moment he stood over the dead man, looking steadily at the trembling girl. Somehow, to him, Nan Darlton looked out of place here, though this was her home. She fitted much better in the setting in which he had several times seen her before, standing in front of a mike in a Village night club, singing the daring little songs that were making her name known in New York's night life. She must have only returned from the club because she was still wearing an evening gown, and her gray fur coat had been flung carelessly on a chair.

Little things puzzled Carter. Why had Nan phoned him to come the minute she had discovered that Joe Hill had been murdered? Of course, though, he did happen to live just across the street, and he had met her at the Willow Club where she sang. He liked the place, liked to drop in there when he was off duty.

"I know you're wondering why I called you instead of phoning for the police," Nan said impulsively, as though reading his mind. "But I—I didn't know just what to do. Then I remembered you living so near, that you are a detective, and thought you might be able to help me."

Carter nodded. "I did wonder. But I'll have to call Homicide anyway. You understand that, of course."

He had started toward the phone on a table at the far side of the room when the ringing of the door-bell somewhere far back in the house was a startling sound with its insistence.

"It's my maid's day off," Nan said quickly. "Would you mind seeing who is at the door, please?"

Nelson Carter nodded, stepped into the hall, and opened the front door. A little old man stood there, his hat and overcoat powdered with snow. He peered at Carter

worriedly.

"I've lost my cat," he explained, blinking in the light. "He's a long-haired Chinchilla named Sandy. I thought maybe he might have come here and if you'd seen him you'd have let him in because of the cold and all."

"Sorry," said Carter. "I don't believe your cat came here."

"Oh, dear, that's too bad!" The little old man sighed. "Now I'll have to go asking everybody up and down the street if they saw him. John Quinn is my name. I live across the street at seven-twenty-eight. If you see Sandy will you please let me know?"

"I'll let you know. Good night."

Carter shut the door and went back to the living room. The house was so quiet that the rustling noise of the snow against the windows could be plainly heard. As he stepped into the living room he saw that Nan had not stirred from her chair, and that she was more white-faced than before—frightened, too.

"Stand still!" a gruff voice commanded. The voice of one of two hard-looking men standing on either side of the doorway. They were covering him with automatics. He stopped short, and stood motionless.

"Who are you?" Carter demanded, as his glance shot from one man to the other. "Been hiding somewhere in the house. I suppose?"

"Yeah," said the big man on his right. "The dame came home too quick. When we heard her open the front door we ducked without frisking Hill and getting the dough. We heard her talking to somebody, so we stayed hid."

"Then you two killed Joe Hill," said Carter. "For the money he was carrying." He smiled at the man. "Carter is my name. What's yours?"

"Hap Reed," the fellow who not only was big, but apparently brainless, said promptly. Then he scowled, as realization

flickered. "Hey!" he burst out. "You ain't gonna know my name without knowing his too!" He raised a thumb at the man on the other side of the door. "He's Tony Small."

"And am I dumb to team up with a guy like you!" Small muttered disgustedly. "Quit jawin', Hap. Let's get the dough and get out of here. The girl hasn't got it, so this Carter guy must have the wallet."

"Wrong," Carter said coolly. "I haven't the faintest idea where the money is, or what happened to Hill's wallet."

"That's what you say," snapped Tony Small, and moved in on Carter. So did Hap.

Carter moved then, with lightning speed. His hard right caught Small squarely on the chin and sent the man reeling back. Reed aimed a blow at Carter's head with his gun, but missed as the detective ducked. Tony Small leaped forward.

"Let him have it, Hap!" he shouted as he caught Carter by the arms and held him tightly.

Reed's arm flashed up and he brought the barrel of his gun down hard on Carter's head. Carter heard Nan scream, but it faded out as he dropped to the floor unconscious. . .

NELSON CARTER'S first sensation when he opened his eyes was one of freezing cold. He sat up and a small furry animal that had been huddled close to him uttered a plaintive cry. It was a long haired cat. Carter reached out and patted it.

"Must be the cat old man Quinn lost," Carter thought.

He struggled to his feet and saw then that he had been lying in the snow in a vacant lot at the far end of the street on which he lived. Without his hat and overcoat he was half frozen. He dusted the snow off as best he could, picked up the cold, damp cat and walked to his own house.

Glancing across the street he saw that lights were still burning behind the drawn

blinds on the lower floor of the Darlton house. But he had no intention of going back there until he had phoned for the Homicide Squad.

He had just stuck the key into the latch of his front door when a little old man came running down the street, and hurried up the steps.

“You’ve found him!” John Quinn exclaimed delightedly. “You’ve found Sandy!”

“Come in,” Carter said, as he opened the door. “Your cat is nearly frozen, Quinn.” He added ruefully, “And so am I.”

John Quinn followed him into the house and Carter closed and locked the door. He handed the cat to the little old man who gently brushed the snow off the fur of the long-haired Chinchilla, crooning to it. Carter led the way into the living room.

Carter was proud of this remodeled old brownstone house he had bought and fixed over just two years ago. It was a comfortable place, though at times it seemed large for a man who lived alone.

The fire in the grate had died down, but was still burning, and as he poked it up he wondered what had happened to the girl in the house across the street. Evidently those two killers who had naively admitted their names were Reed and Small must have decided he didn’t have dead Joe Hill’s money or they would never have left him lying out there in the snow.

Carter quickly picked up the phone and dialed Police Headquarters. Old Quinn, seated in a chair with the cat on his lap, listened as Carter asked for Homicide, told about the murder of Joe Hill and gave the address of Nan Darlton’s house. He also gave good descriptions of Hap Reed and Tony Small so that the two men could be picked up promptly.

“A murder!” Quinn said awedly as Carter cradled the phone. “And to think I didn’t even suspect anything was wrong

when I rang Miss Darlton’s doorbell and asked you about my cat!”

“You know Miss Darlton?” Carter asked.

“Just casually—by sight,” said Quinn. “The way an old fellow like me without much of anything else to do always notices neighbors without actually knowing them. I have seen you coming in and out of this house often, Mr. Carter. Charming girl, Miss Darlton. I had never spoken to her, though before early this evening. I was flattered when she stopped me on the street and asked me if I knew a tailor who could fix the lining of her fur coat. She had torn it.”

“You told her of a tailor?” Carter demanded.

Quinn nodded. “Dan Grover is his name. He has a shop over on Third Avenue.” He mentioned the address.

Carter went to a window and peered out. He saw a woman wearing a fur coat come hurriedly out of the house across the street alone. It was Nan Darlton—he recognized her blond hair as she passed under a street lamp. Carter wondered how she had managed to get away from the two killers.

“I’ve got to go.” Carter swung around from the window. “Stay here until I come back, will you, Quinn? I want to talk to you. Make yourself at home. Give Sandy a chance to get warm before you take him out again.”

“All right.” Quinn placed the cat down in front of the fire and took off his overcoat. “I’ll stay.”

Carter got another hat from the hall closet and clapped it on as he rushed for the front door. He had no time to look for an overcoat upstairs.

Police cars were drawing up in front of the Darlton house as he hurried across the street. The Homicide Squad had arrived.

“Where’s your murder, Carter?” asked Lieutenant Brady, in charge of the Squad, as he recognized the detective. “It better be good to get us out on a cold night like this.”

“Inside,” said Carter. “It’s Joe Hill, the gambler.”

The front door was unlocked, and he barged into the hall with the Homicide men following him as he headed straight for the library. But the body of Joe Hill was no longer lying on the Oriental rug there. It had disappeared!

“Hill’s body was lying right here!” Carter said, pointing to the spot. “Dead as a door-nail, I tell you!”

“Search the house, men,” Lieutenant Brady ordered. “If Carter says there was a body here it was all right.” As his men scattered to search, he said, “What’s the story, Nelson?”

CARTER told him everything that had happened from the time he had received the phone call from Nan Darlton asking him to come over to her house to investigate a murder.

“Looks plain enough, doesn’t it?” Lieutenant Brady said, when Carter had finished. “Those two guys Reed and Small—if that is their names—followed Hill here, killed him for the dough he was carrying. The Darlton girl came home unexpectedly. The killers got scared, not seeing at first that she was alone, and hid without searching the corpse and getting the money.”

“Looks that way to me,” Carter nodded. “But that business about them not getting the wallet sounds fishy to me. It would only take a second to lift a wallet out of a man’s pocket unless—” He smiled. “Why didn’t I think of that before?”

“Think of what?” Brady looked puzzled.

“Put yourself in Hill’s place,” said Carter. “Suppose he discovered he was being followed just as he got to the house. He would be sure those men were after his money. The first thing he would think of doing would be to get rid of the money so it wouldn’t be found if he was held up, or if he thought there was any chance of anybody

breaking into the house.” His eyes narrowed as he heard Brady’s men moving about searching the house. “Now where would Hill put it? Not outside, of course.”

As Carter spoke, he and Lieutenant Brady had moved into the hall. Suddenly Carter stopped and stood looking at a tall vasselike affair standing near the door—an old-fashioned umbrella stand. There was a man’s big black umbrella in the stand. Carter felt of it. It was still slightly damp.

“This must be Hill’s umbrella,” he said. “He put it in the umbrella stand and dropped his wallet containing the money down in beside it.” He felt around inside the stand. “It’s not here now though. I didn’t think it would be.”

“Why not?” asked Brady.

“Because Nan Darlton must have that money now,” said Carter. “Evidently the two men tried to force her to tell them where the money was hidden, but she couldn’t because she didn’t know. Likely those killers gave her up when they must have decided they had better get rid of Hill’s body fast. The old business—produce the corpse before you can prove a murder. If Hill’s body disappeared they would feel safer.”

“You mean they just left the house with the body, leaving the girl here?” demanded Brady. “All she would have had to do was phone the police or yell for help.”

“The police are here now,” said Carter grimly. “And if your boys didn’t believe me, not one of us could prove there had been a murder in this house tonight. Suppose Nan Darlton told you what had happened. What would you think, Lieutenant?”

“That the dame was crazy,” Brady said frankly. “But if she found the money, where is she? And how did she happen to look in the umbrella stand?”

“I’d say her first impulse was to get out of the house before those killers came back after getting rid of the body,” said Carter. “So when she started to leave, knowing it’s

still snowing, she grabbed up the first umbrella she saw. Hill's. Maybe the wallet was caught in the umbrella. She found the money, then decided not to take the umbrella when she left."

"Sounds possible," said Brady. "Any idea where she might have gone?"

"I think so." Carter nodded. "She would want to hide the money where it wouldn't be easily found, and she asked Quinn about Dan Grover, a tailor. Yes, that's it."

Carter opened the front door. Brady gaped at him in amazement.

"Where are you going?" demanded the Lieutenant.

"To find the girl," said Carter. "And I'd better go alone."

Carter hurried to the tailor shop on Third Avenue, three blocks away, about which old Quinn had told him. It was nearly midnight and most of the shops were dark but he found a faint light still gleaming through the crack of a drawn blind at the front of a store which had a sign reading:

DAVE GROVER, TAILOR
FURS REMODELED
PRESSING AND REPAIRING

The door was closed but unlocked. Carter pushed it open and stepped silently inside. There was a counter across the front room of the shop and clothes hung from hangers on a long rack at one side. He heard voices coming from a rear room behind the counter.

"You'll do as I say," came the voice of Nan Darlton, and she sounded hysterical. "Sew that money into the lining of my coat—and hurry!"

"But I can't do this," protested a man's voice. "You must have stolen the money or you would not be hiding it. This is against the law."

THE detective moved silently around the counter to where he could peer into the back room without being seen. He saw a heavy-faced, thin-haired man with a black mustache seated at a sewing machine. Dan Grover was in his shirt sleeves and he was sewing paper money into the lining of a gray fur coat.

Nan stood behind him, tall and slender in her low-cut red evening gown, and she was holding an automatic in one hand and more paper money in the other.

"Drop that gun, Miss Darlton!" Carter said sharply, as he stepped into the room, his right hand in the side pocket of his coat. "I've got you covered."

Nan gasped and lowered the automatic. The tailor stopped the sewing machine and looked up, startled.

"Mr. Carter!" There was relief in Nan's tone as she recognized him. "I thought you were dead. Those awful men said they were going to kill you when they got you away from the house."

"They intended to let me freeze to death," said Carter. "But I regained consciousness sooner than they expected." He glanced at the money and smiled. "So you did find your uncle's wallet in the umbrella stand."

"How did you know?" Nan looked at him in amazement.

"I just guessed," said Carter.

"And weren't we dumb!" said a hard voice behind him.

He shot a glance over his shoulder. Tony Small and Hap Reed stood there with guns in their hands. Both looked mean and dangerous.

"Good thing we kept out of sight when we saw the cops at the house when we went back there," Small growled. "And trailing you here was a blame fine idea, Carter."

"Get the money, Tony," ordered Reed. "And don't talk so much."

"Quite a haul you're making," commented Carter. "There must be ten grand there, and with the other ten thousand your pal Reed lifted off the corpse when you weren't looking, Tony, you boys should be quite rich."

He was deliberately trying to stir up trouble between the two killers by claiming that Reed had taken ten thousand dollars from the dead man's body. Evidently Small did not trust his partner, for he glared at the big man.

"What's this about you holding out some of the dough?" he demanded. "You sent me out of the room after you stabbed Hill. Maybe Carter knows what he is talking about."

"He's lying!" Hap Reed said impatiently. "Get the money and don't argue."

Small stepped forward, ripped the half-sewed lining of the coat and got the money. Nan still held a bundle of bills in her left hand. The gun in her right hand was hidden by her skirt as she held the automatic down beside her. Carter moved closer to her. Reed glanced at the money in her hand.

"Give me that dough!" he ordered curtly.

Nan flung the money into his face. At the same instant Carter grabbed the gun out of her hand. He fired and Small uttered a howl as a bullet nicked his ear. He turned and ran back into a hallway beyond the back room, but held on to most of the money in his hand.

Reed brushed the money that Nan had thrown at him aside. It slid off his body like green snow. They could hear footsteps pounding up a flight of stairs.

"Small probably will duck out with the money he's got," Carter said. "I'm afraid he doesn't trust you, Hap."

Reed cursed as though he believed the same thing about his partner. He had lowered his gun, for Carter had him covered. The detective stepped forward, and as he moved he slipped on some of the paper money scattered on the floor. He went down

hard, jarring his elbow so that it knocked the gun out of his hand.

"Got you!" snarled Reed, raising his gun and aiming it at Carter. "I'm going to put a bullet in you right now!"

Nan had moved back, and now was close to a light switch that controlled the single green-shaded drop-light burning in the back room. She pushed the switch, plunging the room into darkness just a moment before Reed fired. Carter rolled over, heard the gun roar and a bullet thud into the wall as it missed him by inches.

He heard Reed moving back into the rear hall of the five-story building. Evidently the killer wasn't taking any chances of Carter grabbing up his gun and firing at him in the dark. Again there was the sound of footsteps on the stairs leading to the apartments above the shops on the street floor of the building.

"All right, Nan!" Carter called, as he got to his feet. "Switch on the light."

NAN pushed the button. The green-shaded drop-light cast a white glow over the room. Hap Reed was gone. The money was still scattered about on the floor. The tailor got up from the machine and began to gather up the bills.

Carter examined the automatic he had taken from the girl and decided it was a good thing that Nan had turned out the light. For he saw at once that the automatic was empty.

"I haven't got a gun!" muttered Carter. "And there are no more cartridges in this."

"I've got one!" Grover exclaimed. He leaped to a drawer and drew out a long-barreled revolver. "This is loaded."

"Thanks." Carter put down the automatic and took the revolver. "I'm going after those two now."

He made sure the gun he now held was loaded, then went back and started up the stairs.

He went up as quietly as possible, and reached the second floor hall. Evidently most

of the apartments were vacant or no one had heard the two shots that had come from the tailor shop. For there were no doors open and no curious faces were peering out.

Carter moved along the hall. He paused in front of a door that was open just a crack. Angry voices came from inside. Small and Reed were in there arguing.

“What did you do with the rest of the dough?” Small snarled. “Tell me—or I’ll plug you!”

“There wasn’t any more dough,” whined Reed. “That detective was lying about that, Tony.”

“Says you!” Small cursed to emphasize his disbelief. “This is it, Hap!”

A gun roared, and there was the thud as someone hit the floor hard. Carter flung the door open. He stood there covering Tony Small with the revolver in his hand. Reed was on the floor, clutching a wounded shoulder with one hand.

“Drop that gun, Small!” commanded Carter.

Small foolishly tried to raise his automatic and fire. Carter shot the weapon out of his hand. There were voices downstairs, and then Lieutenant Brady and the men of the Homicide Squad appeared. John Quinn was with them.

“The police came over to your place,” the little old man said to Carter. “They were questioning the people in the neighborhood. I didn’t know where you had gone, of course, but I did remember you wanting to know this tailor’s address. I thought you might have come here to question Dan Grover about something.”

“And you were right.” Carter smiled. “There are your killers, Brady. They’ll tell

you what they did with Joe Hill’s body. I’m sure of that.”

“So am I,” Lieutenant Brady said grimly. “Take them away, boys.”

Carter and Quinn went back down into the tailor shop. Nan was there, talking to Grover. She had what money had been dropped there in her hand. Carter had gathered up the rest before the prisoners had been taken away.

“I’m sorry I forced you to sew that money into the lining of my coat, Mr. Grover,” Nan said, smiling at the tailor. “But I thought those men would never look for it there.”

“The lining is still ripped,” said Grover, as he started the machine and began sewing. “This will only take a few minutes.”

He finished the job quickly. Nan handed Carter the money.

“Please keep this for me,” she said. “I was Uncle Joe’s only living relation—I guess the money goes to me eventually—but you might need it for evidence against those men.”

“Probably.” Carter took the money and placed it in his pockets. “Would you all care to drop into my place for a drink now?” He felt young and more interested in life than he had been for a long time as he gazed at Nan. “That means you, too, Grover.”

“Why, yes,” Nan said as though he had spoken to her alone. “I’d love it.”

Quinn and the tailor nodded. The little old man smiled.

“Besides I must go back and get Sandy,” he said. “He’ll be so interested when I tell him about all this. Murder is so exciting!”