

SNATCH CAR



*John Saxon Takes the Wheel in a Madcap Race
With a Mob of Snatcheteers!*

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

Author of "Hunchback House," "The Cell Murder Case," etc.

JOHN SAXON opened his eyes and found himself gazing up at the stars. His head felt as if tiny hammers were pounding on his skull. He sat up weakly and looked about him. He had been lying on the deck of the Fairchild's palatial yacht that was anchored in the Hudson River off 79th Street.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Saxon. "They knocked me out and snatched the girl!"

He hurriedly got to his feet. In the distance he could see the lights of Riverside Drive gleaming behind the skeletonlike frame work of the Elevated Highway construction job. Faint sounds came to him across the water, but the big

yacht was silent save for the lapping of the water against her sides.

Saxon was worried. Three days ago Samuel Fairchild had received a message demanding a hundred thousand dollars, and warning him that his daughter would be kidnaped if he refused to pay. Frightened, and yet unwilling to pay the sum demanded, Fairchild had not gone to the police.

He had hired John Saxon from a detective agency to guard his daughter Joan for a few days. As soon as he could get his business affairs in shape the millionaire planned to take his daughter on a cruise until the kidnap threat blew over.

"All very nice," murmured Saxon, thinking aloud. "Tonight, when there's no one on the yacht but the girl and myself, we hear a hail from the starboard side. Joan and I look over the rail and see two men and a girl in a speedboat who say they've run out of gas. . . . But I didn't see the guy who crept up behind me and knocked me out."

There was no doubt in his mind that Joan Fairchild had been kidnaped and since she might have been taken anywhere in the city the chance of his finding her was about as good as finding a needle in eight million haystacks.

HE glanced downward. Something blew against his foot. It was a small piece of cardboard. He reached down and picked it up. Even in the starlight he could see that it was a ticket given out by some garage for a car that had been parked there overnight.

It dawned on him that the garage ticket might have been dropped by one of the kidnapers. He drew a flashlight out of his pocket and examined the ticket more closely. It bore the address of a garage on East 91st Street.

He heard the sound of a motorboat and he glanced toward the shore. He saw that the approaching craft was the yacht's tender. John Fairchild was returning, and when he heard that his daughter was kidnaped it would be just too bad for John Saxon.

Saxon felt that he had to act fast. The garage check clue was a slim one, but at least it was something. He leaped down into the motorboat as it drew up alongside of the yacht.

"Miss Fairchild has been kidnaped," snapped Saxon. "I was knocked out and the snatchers got away with her. Head for shore fast!"

The sailor at the wheel started the

motor roaring and kept the speed back toward the pier on the river bank. Swiftly Saxon told Fairchild what had happened.

"And I hired you to guard her!" stormed the millionaire when the private detective had finished.

"I know," said Saxon in what he hoped was a soothing tone. "But don't worry. They haven't taken her far. I'll find her!"

"I won't wait for that!" snapped Fairchild. "I'm going to call the police in on this as soon as we reach a phone." He glared at Saxon. "It's very strange that you get knocked out so easily when you are alone with my daughter. For all I know, you may be working with the kidnapers!"

"Don't be a fool!" exclaimed Saxon.

They reached the pier. Fairchild ordered the sailor to wait while he strode angrily along at Saxon's side. The detective realized that there would be a delay if he waited for the police to question him, and he wanted to reach the garage as swiftly as possible.

The pier was a small one—hardly more than a landing place for small boats. There was no phone there.

They finally reached West 79th Street.

"Leave my car parked here," said Fairchild. "We'll phone from that apartment building and then drive right down to Police Headquarters."

"Did you lock the car?" asked Saxon casually.

"Of course," Fairchild felt in his vest pocket and produced a key.

Abruptly Saxon snatched the key out of the millionaire's hand. He started toward the parked coupe on a run, flung open the door and thrust the key into the ignition switch. The motor roared as he stepped on the starter.

The car rolled away, Fairchild shouting after it and waving his arms above his head excitedly.

Saxon sped directly for 91st Street. He

had decided that he would drive right into the garage and park the car there. This might give him a chance to look around.

He blew his horn as he drove the coupe up to the garage. The door rolled back and a big, sullen-faced man in overalls stood gazing at him.

"Park my car over night," ordered Saxon.

The garage attendant motioned him to drive the car in on the elevator platform. Saxon did so. He noticed that the man was staring at him very intently. The attendant pressed the button that started the lift.

They reached the fourth floor and the garageman stopped the car and drew open the door. Saxon saw there were quite a few cars parked on the floor.

"Hey, Flack," called the attendant, "Find a space for this car."

A second man appeared. He was dressed in overalls and an old cap was pulled down on his head.

"Over there," he said, waving his hand toward an open space between two cars.

SAXON drove the coupe into the space. He switched off the motor and thrust the key into his pocket. He glanced at the car that was parked to the right of the coupe. There was a woman's pocketbook lying on the front seat. A pocketbook on which the initials J. F. were large and plain.

The detective's heart leaped. Joan Fairchild! Those were her initials and he was pretty sure it was her handbag for he had noticed it on the yacht.

"What do you charge for overnight parking?" asked Saxon as he stepped casually out of the coupe.

"One dollar," said Flack.

Saxon thrust his hand inside his coat. His fingers gripped the automatic in his shoulder holster. The gun appeared in his hand.

"All right, you two," he said. "Put your hands up."

The two men raised their hands above their heads. The big man glaring viciously at Saxon.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded. "You ain't gonna get nothin' by holdin' us up. We ain't got no dough."

"Where's the girl?" Saxon's tone was hard. "I know that she was brought here when she was snatched from the yacht."

"Wise guy, eh," snarled the big man. "I figured I seen you somewhere."

Saxon glanced about him. There was a door of a washroom a little distance away. He ordered the men into the washroom, then locked the door after them.

There was a small delivery truck parked near the door of the washroom. The panels of the closed body had "Express Delivery Service" painted on them. Saxon looked around, anxiously searching for some place in which the girl might be held captive. The two men started pounding on the washroom door. Saxon glanced in that direction, wondering if there was some way he could make them talk.

He happened to put his hand on the radiator of the truck. It was still hot!

He hurried around to the back of the truck and opened the doors. Joan Fairchild was lying in the back of the vehicle, bound hand and foot, a gag across her mouth. Saxon swiftly released her.

"We've got to get out of here in a hurry," Joan said, as soon as she was able to speak. "I overheard them planning to come back at eleven-thirty to take me away. There were four of them besides the garage men. They used both a car and the truck to bring me from the yacht. I was in the truck—but one of the men in the car found my pocketbook. I dropped it—hoping someone would find it."

"Come on!" snapped Saxon. "Get in

that coupe—”

“Why—it’s Father’s car—”

“Yeah—er, I borrowed it!”

They got in. Saxon started the motor and drove it onto the elevator. He jumped out and pressed the down button. The elevator started to descend. Saxon heard a crash, realized that the two men had succeeded in breaking open the door of the washroom.

The elevator reached the street floor. Saxon drove the coupe out through the door. Behind him the elevator started up again as one of the men on the fourth floor pushed the button that moved the car from the outside.

“Look!” exclaimed Joan. “Down the street! That’s the gang getting out of that grey sedan!”

Saxon glanced in the direction she indicated. The four men apparently had not noticed the coupe which now rolled up to the curb.

“Duck down out of sight!” ordered Saxon.

The girl obeyed and Saxon sat waiting as the four men approached. One of them glanced at Saxon as the detective sat passively behind the wheel.

“Want something?” the man called.

“No, thanks,” answered Saxon. “Just waiting for my wife.”

The four men disappeared inside the garage.

“Come on,” said Saxon. “We’ll take their car. “It looks faster.”

They raced down the street. To Saxon’s relief the key was in the lock of the grey sedan. He started the car as he climbed in after the girl. He swung out from the curb just as the four gangsters appeared, the two garage men were with them.

Saxon saw two of the men leap into the coupe—for he had deliberately left its motor running. The grey sedan shot down the street with the coupe in close pursuit. Saxon was heading back across town toward the west side.

Driving like a demon, he managed to keep the coupe about a block behind him. Finally he gained the pier. Saxon snatched the key out of the lock of the grey sedan as he brought the car to a screeching halt.

He took the girl by the arm and fairly pulled her with him. They were running across the pier. Behind them the gangsters had leaped out of the coupe. A gun roared and the bullet whistled dangerously close to Saxon’s head.

He saw that the sailor was still sitting at the wheel of the yacht’s tender. A bullet plowed through the windshield of the motorboat. The sailor had half risen and as the bullet creased his thigh he leaped overboard in sudden panic.

Saxon’s automatic was in his hand. He fired, and saw a gangster stagger. The girl had leaped into the motorboat and grabbed the wheel. The automatic in Saxon’s hand roared again as he slid into the seat beside Joan.

“Head for the yacht!” he shouted.

The motor roared and the boat began to cut the water. Saxon fired one last shot at the two men on the pier as he saw them turn back and start running toward the coupe.

“Just what I hoped they do!” said Saxon. “They’re going to try and make a getaway in your father’s car. Every patrol car in the city is looking for that car by now.” He laughed. “You see, your father got the idea that I’d stolen it!”