

The UNDERCOVER KID

By
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Even though Danny hated to spy on a sweet girl like Sally, it was the only way left to trap a killer

Danny ducked under the swinging fist and threw his Sunday punch



DANNY GARRETT was sitting there in his room, listening to a new radio mystery show called *Midnight*, when he heard footsteps mounting the stairs. He could have told you right away who was coming up the stairs of his rooming house: Mike Ryan and Slug O'Donnel, his two headquarters' detective friends.

The kid, in his youthful and spectacular career as an associate of those headquarters men, had made quite a study of the sounds of people walking. It was only natural, because it was only until quite recently that he had been just another kid shining shoes on the sidewalks of New York. Now he was known as the Shoeshine Kid Detective.

He had often watched people's feet, their shoes, and especially the way they walked.

Take Mike Ryan, for instance, the way he was coming up the stairs. Plodding, stolid . . . *thump, thump, thump* . . . why, you could have pictured him as a detective without even *seeing* him.

Slug's footsteps were lighter and quicker. That was like Slug O'Donnel, who was a tall, thin guy as skinny as a straw. A quick, restless type.

Danny turned down the radio, waited until the footsteps had barely paused outside his door, then called, "Come in, you two."

Mike Ryan's big hulk was first through the opening doorway. A derby was pushed to the back of his head and he was chewing on a black cigar. He was puffing just a trifle, too.

"Hello, Danny," said Mike. "How's it?"

Danny said, "You're eating too much again, Mike, you're getting fat."

Behind Ryan, skinny Slug O'Donnel grinned and said, "You're not kiddin'!" He frowned at Danny. "How'd you know it was us?"

"I could tell," Danny said. Ryan had parked himself on the edge of the bed, and Slug had slumped into the one arm chair, his long, thin body bending at angles like a folding clothes-dryer. The kid's bright blue eyes slid to the alarm clock on the dresser. It was after ten o'clock, and he wondered what brought his detective friends up here at this hour of the night.

"How come?" he asked.

"How come what?" said Slug.

"Dropping up here at this hour?"

"Oh." Ryan took the unlighted cigar out of his mouth, studied it, reached for a pad of matches. "Just thought we'd drop around, Danny."

Danny thought, any other night they'd be down at headquarters playing pinochle. There was something up, he could tell.

He said, "Don't look like two guys trying to be palsy-walsy. What's on your minds?"

"Well," murmured Slug O'Donnel, "we were wonderin' about tomorrow night. You were going to that hockey game at the Garden, weren't you?"

THE kid's face brightened. Every year one of his old customers—a banker downtown—gave him a ticket to this game, the lead game of the season, and Danny had been looking forward to it for weeks. "Sure!" he said quickly. "I've got a ticket—" He paused, his blue eyes clouding.

He knew from the expression on Mike Ryan's heavy Irish face that something was coming.

"You see, kid," started Ryan, "we've got a little job, a tough assignment, sort of. We need your help."

Slug added, "Yeah. It's got to be handled right away, too."

"What?" asked Danny.

"We're trying to locate a guy," said Mike Ryan.

Danny looked at them. He frowned. Then he said, "So do you have to work nights in order to find a person? Why did you ask me about tomorrow night? Nothing in the world is going to make me miss that hockey—"

"This guy we want is a murderer," interrupted Mike Ryan.

"More than that!" put in Slug. "A cop killer. Remember Tommy Shevlin from the D.A.'s office, kid?"

Danny nodded, his eyes clouding. Tommy Shevlin had once been a headquarters man. Recently he had transferred over to the D.A.'s office as a special investigator. He was a longstanding personal friend of Mike Ryan's.

Answering the question in Danny's eyes, Mike said grimly, "Tommy Shevlin was on a case, trailing a guy. Tommy found him. And then we found Tommy—murdered!"

Danny stood up. Though not yet quite fourteen, he was tall and wiry. He had red hair and there were some freckles on his lean face.

Tense, he asked, "And this murderer—you're trying to find him?"

"Exactly!" announced Ryan. "All we know about him is that he usually goes by the moniker of Les Drake. He's wanted on several charges. We have reason to believe he killed a guy even before Tommy Shevlin got to him, and got murdered also. We've got fingerprints, and so if we *do* find this fellow Drake we'll know whether we have the right man or not."

"But you've never seen him?" prodded the kid. "He's never been mugged?"

"Never," said Slug.

"Then how do you expect to pick him up?"

MIKE RYAN put his big hands on his knees and leaned toward Danny. "That's where you come in, kid. You see, this guy Drake has a sister. We figured sooner or later Drake would try to get in touch with her. By watching the sister, we'd nab Drake."

"Sure," agreed Danny. "That should be a simple job. Certainly the New York police department has enough men to handle it—"

"The trouble is," said Slug, moving restlessly up and down the bedroom, "this sister, too, has disappeared!"

Danny sighed and looked hopelessly at his two friends. "Then you're right back where you started from. So why get me all upset about that hockey game? There's no reason why I still can't go—"

He paused, because Ryan was talking again, and what Ryan was saying brought the kid up alert.

". . . and so," Ryan was saying, "this sister of Drake's has a kid—a girl about your own age. Her name's Sally, and the mother has left her at this small town up the river a ways. The kid's going to school there in the village and boarding out at a small rooming house. We've got all the information and we even have arrangements for you to stay there too."

"In fact," said Slug cheerfully, "the woman who runs the place is expecting you tomorrow morning. We've told her your father is an army man, overseas, and that he's a war hero. She also thinks it's swell you're going to board at her place and—"

"Why?" said Danny quietly.

Slug stared at the kid. "Why?" he repeated. "Don't you see? Sooner or later this kid's mother will come to visit her. Or maybe she'll write. Your job is to get chummy with this girl Sally. Keep your eyes open. Watch for the letters sent by her mother. See where they come from. Once we locate

the *mother*, the next step will be to shadow *her*. Eventually Les Drake will visit her, then—bingo—we got him!”

“You leave from Grand Central at 9:30 tomorrow morning,” Mike Ryan said.

Danny’s red hair almost bristled. “So!” he exclaimed. “The two of you had it all fixed up before you even came up here to see me! You certainly take a lot for granted. Why can’t *you* two guys go to that town and do your own shadowing of this girl Sally—”

“Because,” said Slug quickly, “we’d be recognized as coppers in an instant. Imagine Mike, here, in a village of five hundred people, or so! He’s got detective written all over him. We’re figuring that Les Drake *himself* might come to that town, and if he ever spotted us . . .”

They kept talking. Danny argued with them. His heart had been set on seeing that hockey game the following night. Besides, why should he spy on some girl named Sally, who was probably a nice sweet kid—

He said, “I’m not going to do it.”

Mike and his partner kept talking.

ABOUT eleven o’clock the following morning, Danny got off the local train at a small town up the Hudson River. It was a hamlet nestled in the foothills of the mountains near West Point. It was a quiet and friendly little place. The station agent went into explicit detail in telling the kid just how to get to Mrs. Thompson’s place.

Twenty minutes later Mrs. Thompson herself was standing in the doorway of Danny’s second-floor room and chattering like a magpie.

“My goodness!” she was saying. “Your father a major in Europe! It’s proud I am to have you, Danny. On the phone, your uncle said—”

Danny was unpacking a suitcase. He looked at the short, stout woman. There was some flour on her arms and in the house he could smell pies baking. “My uncle?” he said.

“Yes—Mr. Ryan. He said I was to make arrangements about your going to school here and everything. You start tomorrow morning, and you’ll be in the same class with Sally. My, she’s such a lovely girl. Incidentally, she’ll be home soon for lunch and you’ll meet her . . .”

Mrs. Thompson kept talking, and Danny was thinking, *So Mike Ryan’s my uncle now, huh? And they’ve even arranged it so that I’m to go to school*

here in the town. Nice guys!

He didn’t think he was going to like this job at all!

Not that the kid wasn’t intensely interested in detective work. Since that eventful day when he had first met Mike Ryan and O’Donnell when he had been a shoeshine kid down near Centre Street headquarters, and had helped his two friends nab a crook, he had made a reputation for himself as the “kid detective.”

Danny had an unusual ability for spotting clues and remembering people. He had an alert, agile mind and made a thorough study of police procedure. He even carried a special badge given to him by the police commissioner himself. In New York, he was quite famous.

But Ryan had assured him that his name would mean nothing up here in this small village. People up here were not interested in crooks and the goings-on of the New York police department. So they had arranged it that Danny use his own name. That way, he would feel more natural and would be less apt to make a slip.

But the kid still didn’t like this idea of spying on some girl named Sally. From the buildup they’d been giving him about her, he guessed she was some homely-faced kid who was as fresh as they come!

Shortly after twelve noon, Mrs. Thompson called upstairs and told Danny that lunch was ready. He combed his hair, and went downstairs, and that’s when he met this girl Sally.

HE WAS trying to eat his lunch, and at the same time he was watching her covertly. She was a quiet, shy girl with clear gray eyes and a sweet face. There was something about her, and Danny guessed that maybe she was lonesome.

In a way, Danny was a romantic kid. There was a manner about this girl Sally Mitchell that affected him. He wondered if she was happy.

Later, after she had gone back to school, Danny hung around his room. Mrs. Thompson had said something about going down to the village to do some shopping. Danny was to make himself right at home, she called upstairs.

The afternoon mail came while Mrs. Thompson was out. Danny went downstairs and took the letters out of the tin mailbox outside the front door. He had heard the mailman’s whistle blow, something you never heard in New York.

There was a letter for Sally. It was in a woman's neat handwriting, and was from Rochester, New York. There was no return address however. There was no doubt at all that it was from the mother of the girl he must spy on.

Danny stared at it as he placed it with Mrs. Thompson's mail on the hall table. He remembered what Ryan and Slug had told him. They were cops, seeking a man who had killed a cop friend. They had no compunction at all when on a case like that.

They had suggested that Danny get one of Sally's letters while she was out, steam it open or something, and to find out all he could about her mother. Maybe learn her exact address and if anything was said in the letter about this man Les Drake.

And Danny kept staring at the letter, and finally he shook his head. She was a nice kid. He couldn't pry into one of her personal letters.

For two cents, right now, he'd call New York, reverse the charges, and get Ryan on the phone at headquarters and tell him the whole thing was off!

He went out and sat on the top steps of the front porch, chin cupped in his hands. He didn't like this kind of police work. Tangling with a real crook was different; he'd done that lots of times. But spying on a nice girl like Sally Mitchell . . .

The kid had never had a girl, but he thought now that if he ever *did* have a girlfriend, he'd like someone like Sally. That's why he felt the way he did about this . . .

HE SAT there thinking the thing over a long time, and before he knew it Sally was home from school.

"Hello," she said brightly as she came up the walk.

Danny spoke to her, smiling, and watched her as she went inside the house. He saw her look at the letters on the hall table, her face lighting up as she spied the topmost letter, the one postmarked Rochester. She ran up to her room with the letter in her hand.

It was from her mother, all right, Danny knew. And maybe inside that letter was some mention of her mother's brother—Les Drake—who had killed a cop friend of Ryan's. Ryan and Slug were *depending* upon him to find out!

He remembered Mike's explicit plans. Mike and Slug were going to drive up here from New York tomorrow night. They'd arranged to keep a

rendezvous with Danny an hour after dark. He was to meet them just a half a block away, where this street intersected the through State route from New York. You could see the intersection from the porch, because Mrs. Thompson's house was the last one on the street.

Even as Danny glanced toward the corner, which Mike Ryan had so carefully mapped out, a car turned in from the highway and came slowly down the village street. Danny merely glanced at it. He was still thinking about Sally, upstairs. Perhaps she'd come down soon and maybe he could talk to her. Maybe she'd say something about the letter or her mother, and that way Danny could get her talking. She might even say something about this man Les Drake!

The car—a business coupe—that had passed a few moments ago came back down the street. One thing about it caught the kid's attention. The gas ration sticker—that and the New York State license number! There was a detail that bothered him . . .

Behind him, Sally came out on the porch and said, "Would you like to take a walk?"

"Sure," said Danny, forgetting all about the car.

They walked down-street, to the single block that was the shopping center of the village. It led downhill, and you could see the river, the mountains rising up all around the shoreline. Quite a few cars were parked along the curb, and people were shopping. There was a lunch room and a soda fountain two doors away.

Sally talked about school, and the teachers, and what it would like for Danny tomorrow. He watched her fine, oval face, her deep gray eyes. She had soft chestnut hair. She was a pretty girl, and he liked her a lot. He didn't remember a thing she said about the school which he was supposed to attend.

She had to buy some writing paper. Oddly, she never mentioned her mother, which was the one thing in which Danny was interested. Afterwards, he said, "Let's have a soda," and pointed the way to the ice cream store.

He was holding the door for her, as she went inside, when he noticed the car across the street and the tall, lean man who was climbing out of it. He was a dark-haired fellow who was wearing a dark fedora and dark topcoat. He headed into the lunchroom without glancing right or left.

Yet Danny had the feeling the man might have been following them in the car!

"Looking for someone?" asked Sally, who was

waiting for him just inside the store.

"Huh . . . no," Danny said quickly, catching up with her and heading toward a booth.

He was curious about that car.

AFTERWARDS, going out of the store, Sally took a letter from her purse and said, "Mind dropping this in the mailbox for me, Danny?" She nodded toward a mailbox on the corner.

Danny's back was toward her as he stepped toward the mailbox, and for an instant his eyes saw the address on the letter. The words were immediately written indelibly on his quick mind. *Mrs. G. K. Mitchell*—and the location was in Rochester!

Starting up the hill a moment later with Sally, the kid's gaze slid toward the nearby lunchroom. He saw the tall dark man still seated at the counter. He tried to get a glimpse of the man's face, but could not. Then he and Sally were beyond the lunchroom.

Ryan and Slug had said no photograph had ever been taken of this murderer—Les Drake. Thus there was no way of recognizing the man even if Danny *did* see him. How was Danny to *know* him?

One thing Danny could do. He could telephone Ryan in New York and tell him this address in Rochester. Then maybe he wouldn't have to spy on Sally anymore. Ryan and Slug could take over. This was one assignment that the kid didn't like at all.

He walked Sally home, and Mrs. Thompson was there, and so the kid had no chance to get downtown again in order to call New York. Mrs. Thompson kept right on talking, right through dinner even, and afterwards she suggested that the three of them take in the early show at the theater downtown. Mickey Rooney was playing.

Danny made excuses. He had some things to get ready for school tomorrow, he said. He was tired from his trip. Sally looked disappointed and it made him feel like a heel.

But after they had gone, Danny immediately put through a call to Mike Ryan. He caught him in his office at Centre Street headquarters. He told Ryan about the Rochester address, explaining how he felt certain it was the mother's address.

Ryan's voice boomed cheerfully over the phone. "Swell, kid! Swell! That must be it, all right. Who else would she be writing to? We'll get Rochester on it right away. We'll have them assign someone

to pick up her mother and question her. Don't worry, we'll find out about this guy Drake!"

Then Mike added, "Slug and I will pick you up tomorrow night just as we said. You stick around, Danny, just in case you pick up something else. But I think this is all we need. We'll have a line on Les Drake before morning, I'll bet you."

A thought flashed through Danny's mind. "But what about Sally?" he asked quickly. "What if Les Drake comes to see *her*? A dangerous guy like that . . . why, there's no telling . . ."

Mike cut in, "Don't worry about Sally. That's why her mother put her down there to go to school. The kid doesn't even *know* about Les Drake, and we've learned he doesn't know where she is either. It's the mother he'll try to see. We know he's up against it for money, and he'll come to her like he has before. We *know* these things, Danny."

"I hope so," the kid said doubtfully, and after Ryan had assured him they'd pick him up tomorrow night, he hung up.

A HALF hour later, while Danny was sitting upstairs in his room, he noticed a car roll past the house in the dark. Twice again a car passed, and he was positive it was the same one—because there was something too deliberate in the way the person drove by. On this isolated side street, not one other car went by in hours.

It bothered Danny. He thought of Sally downtown there with Mrs. Thompson. Part of their walk home would be along shadowed streets, and he kept thinking of that business coupe with the ration sticker and license plates from upstate. New York State had a system of license tags which designated what county a car was registered in. He had noticed this detail early this afternoon. Funny about that fellow in the car!

Danny slipped on his leather zipper jacket and went out. The air was cool and crisp, and he walked quickly down the side street. But he saw no sign of the car again.

He hung around downtown, watching for it, until Mrs. Thompson and Sally came out of the show. He saw no sign of the coupe or the tall man again.

On the way home, Sally said, "I thought you were tired. We guessed you had gone to bed."

"My goodness, yes," said Mrs. Thompson.

Danny told them, "It's still pretty early. I wasn't sleepy."

Neither was he sleepy later, after Mrs. Thompson and Sally had retired. Danny sat in the darkness of his room, at the window, watching out into the quiet night. He kept thinking that maybe Les Drake had not been able to locate Sally's mother, but maybe he knew where *Sally* was! He might come here, forcing her to tell where her mother was living. A guy like that, a murderer, and Sally such a swell girl . . .

He sat there until long past midnight, but he saw no sign of the car again. Finally, he went to bed.

THE following morning Sally waited for him. She said gaily, "I'll walk you to school. You'll like it here."

Mrs. Thompson followed them to the door. "I won't be here for dinner tonight," she told them. "My sister Nettie has the sewing circle this evening, and I'm going down there for a bit. But I'll be home early. You'll find everything all feed in the ice box."

Danny thought it was nice being with Sally, walking to school with her and, all, but the school business itself bothered him.

In New York he did all his studying alone, at home. Between times he shined shoes or hung around headquarters with his two detective friends.

Somehow, he struggled through the tedious day. There was too much inaction to suit him. At three o'clock, he met Sally and suggested walking home with her.

She said, "Today's my special Red Cross class. I'll be here for an hour or so yet. But I'll see you at home, Danny."

He went home and hung around. He even took a stroll around the village to kill some time.

At six o'clock, Sally wasn't, home yet!

Danny even walked back to the school, and found all the doors locked. He had no idea where Sally might have gone, especially with Mrs. Thompson away for the evening. He didn't even know where Mrs. Thompson was!

He went back to the house, terribly upset, and kept watching for Sally to come home. It was starting to get dark, and the air was colder. Surely she wouldn't have just stayed out, with it cold and all like this!

Restless, he kept going up and downstairs to his room. Sally's room door was open. He glanced inside, at her shoes lined up in orderly fashion beneath the bed, at her dresses hanging up in neat,

fashion in the closet, the door of which was partly open. She was a meticulous girl . . .

Odd then, he thought, that the bureau drawers should be left open in helter-skelter fashion! He stepped across the room, saw instantly that, contents of the bureau had been rummaged through as though by someone seeking something in a hurry. It didn't seem like Sally at all, he decided worriedly.

Then his glance froze on the rug.

Apparently in getting ready for school that morning, Sally had spilled some powder. It had scattered in a fine, thin layer on the rug.

And now, distinctly visible in the thin layer of powder, was the imprint of a shoe. A large imprint, quite clearly defined.

A man's footprint!

Danny's blood ran cold. Someone had been here in the house, probably after Mrs. Thompson had left, and they had been right up here in Sally's room. And a person who had no right to be—because Mrs. Thompson, Danny knew, was a widow!

And why wasn't Sally home yet, and what had happened?

He hurried downstairs again, grabbing his leather jacket from the hall chair, and started toward the front door. *He had to find her!*

THEN footsteps ran across the front porch and the door burst open into the hallway. Sally came in, her usually pretty face strained and frightened. She was panting with excitement.

She cried, "Danny . . . that man . . . he followed me!"

"What man, Sally?"

"After school . . . I was on my way home and it was getting rather late. There was nobody around just at the time and I saw him following me in the car. I was so scared!"

Danny took hold of her hands. They were cold, and she was trembling. He said, "What did you do?"

"I cut through that lane halfway home from school. I saw him driving around and around the block. I hid in that old barn on the Turner place—about half a mile from here—until it started to get dark and I was afraid to stay. Then . . . then I ran all the way home. I was really scared, Danny."

Danny kept holding her hands, and her excitement subsided a little. He asked directly,

"Sally, do you know a man named Les Drake?"

She shook her head. "Why?"

"Never mind," he told her. He was thinking. It was Les Drake, all right, no doubt about it. The tall, dark man he had spotted in the business coupe yesterday. Les Drake had been right here in this house sometime this afternoon and had searched through Sally's room looking for something.

Her mother's address, obviously. And he couldn't have found it, otherwise why had he followed Sally home from school. And Les Drake was a dangerous murderer!

If Ryan and Slug were only here . . .

Danny's glance went to the glass of the front hall door. It was dark outside now. Ryan had said they'd be here about a half-hour after dark, at the meeting place just down the street at the corner of the State road.

He looked at Sally and asked, "How's your nerve? I mean, will you stay here alone for a few minutes?"

Her deep gray eyes held on Danny's face. "Why?"

"Two friends of mine are meeting me soon," he said. "They happen to be— detectives. Look, do this. Go up to your room and lock the door. Don't turn on the light. But if you hear *anyone* come up on the porch, or near the house, switch on your light. I'll be able to see it from the corner. I'll run right back."

"You're sure?" Sally asked worriedly.

"Sure! Now don't worry," He moved toward the front door. "Now lock this door after me when I go out."

A moment later he was moving through the dark shadows of the street. If Mike Ryan and Slug only arrived on schedule, if something didn't delay them, maybe they could help Danny locate this man in the coupe—

He had gone less than a hundred yards when his steps slowed, and he slid into the blacker shadows caused by one of the old elms lining the street.

Just ahead, near the end of the block, a car was parked. It was a coupe!

There was a stretch of woods on one side of the road, empty lots on the other. A desolate section. Danny was positive it was the tall, dark-haired man's car, the one he had seen several times now.

He waited. He wondered if the man was in the car.

Danny glanced over his shoulder, back at Mrs.

Thompson's house, and his blood froze. The light was on in Sally's room. The man was *there*—at the house!

DANNY leaped down the street. There was no thought of danger to himself now. He wasn't even thinking of Ryan and Slug O'Donnell. He was a kid who, when danger came, was not afraid—especially when it threatened a girl like Sally!

On a sudden thought, he drew up short and raced back to where the coupe was parked. He bent down near the license plate in the rear and noted the number. It was the same car all right.

An instant later he was streaking back toward the house. He saw the ladder placed below Sally's window!

He had just reached the front steps when the front door opened and the man came hurrying out. One of the tall man's arms clutched Sally's shoulders. His free hand was clamped over her mouth.

Danny yelled, "Hey!" and slammed toward the man.

The fellow released Sally and spun toward the kid. His fist lashed out and he uttered an oath of surprise. His blow missed the kid's jaw. Danny sank his hard fist into the man's midriff, and there was a grunt of surprise and pain.

The kid was quick. And hard and tough. Sally was crying as she cringed back near the porch rail.

The man tried to grapple with Danny Garrett, but the kid stayed clear, diving in for a quick punch, then sliding agilely clear again. He yelled to Sally, "Run! Get down the street. Get someone!"

The girl started to dodge past them. For an instant Danny's gaze swept toward her, to make certain that she was all right. It was the instant of time the tall man needed.

His fist crashed alongside Danny's jaw. The kid wasn't knocked out, but he staggered backwards. His foot tripped across the topmost step and he went tumbling downward. The back of his head crashed the bottom step and he rolled, dazed, onto the grass.

He tried to struggle to his feet, and his head reeled. He slumped down again . . .

HOW long it was before his thoughts cleared completely he wasn't sure. Seconds probably. Then he was on his feet and running. He heard the car starter turning over down the street. The starter

kept grinding.

As he neared the car Danny saw a blurred form climb out and hurry to raise the hood. There was a soft, angry curse in the night.

Danny was six feet from the fellow when his foot scuffed some gravel in the roadway. The tall man whirled, saw the kid, muttered something and leaped in for the attack. His strong fingers caught the kid's jacket collar and started to twist.

Danny struggled. The leather coat was being twisted tightly around, his throat. A moment more and he would be strangled.

Danny fought wildly. But his strength was no match for the tall man's. The coat collar was gagging him. . . . His thoughts blurred hazily.

He remembered something like a brilliant light striking him in the face. It was a car . . . a car swinging in from the State road. The next moment brakes were squealing and the car was coming to a fast stop.

Danny heard Mike Ryan's voice boom from the car, "Say! What's going on?"

And then Danny got his breath long enough to cry out: "Mike! It's him! Les Drake!"

The rest was all pretty crazy and mixed up. The man released the kid and started a dive toward the nearby woods. Shots crashed out. He heard Mike Ryan calling out, and he vaguely remembered that Slug was there, too.

Also, a woman—a small, trim-looking woman had climbed out of Ryan's car. She stared at Danny, and you could see the resemblance to Sally in her fine features.

She was running toward Danny Garrett.

Danny swung and looked inside the car. Sally was there, all right. The man had bound her wrists with a cord and there was a gag which had been jammed hastily into her mouth. Danny remembered yanking the gag loose. His head was reeling and he was feeling funny.

He heard Sally cry out, "Mother!" and then that's the last thing he did remember.

THEN he was in bed. and big Mike Ryan was there, and Slug, and the girl's mother. And Mrs. Thompson fluttering around in the background saying, "My goodness! Who would have ever thought—"

Danny tried to sit up. Mike Ryan said cautiously. "Better take it easy, kid. You got an awful lump on the back of your head. It's nothing

serious, luckily. All you need is a little rest. . . ."

Danny stared up at them. "That man," he asked, "was he—"

Ryan nodded. "Yes, he was Les Drake! Slug winged him. We've turned him over to the State troopers, temporarily. He'll be taken back to the city to stand trial for that cop's murder."

Ryan turned and looked at the small, nice-looking woman. "Sally's mother has positively identified him. It's Drake, all right."

Danny looked at her. She said, "He was not my real brother. He was a half brother. He was never—any good." She came up to the bed and touched Danny's arm. "You're a brave young man!"

Ryan added, "We checked on that Rochester address, kid." He looked at the woman. "Rochester police learned that Drake had been trying to locate Mrs. Mitchell. She got away just before he found her, and went to the local police. Then Drake ducked town in a stolen car—the one you saw, kid."

Danny said, "I wondered about the car. It had upstate license plates and yet it carried only an A-card gas sticker. I wondered how anyone could drive so far on only an A-card."

Ryan nodded. "He had stolen gas ration books, too." He nodded to Mrs. Mitchell again. "Sally's mother came directly to New York in order to help us. She was afraid of this man Drake. Just recently she learned he was a killer. She got in this afternoon and we brought her up here with us."

Danny said suddenly, "Where's Sally?" And then, worried, "Is . . . is she all right?"

The woman smiled and touched Danny's arm again. "Thanks to you, Danny—yes! She's getting ready for bed. I'll call her."

AND then they had all stepped outside a moment, and Sally came quietly into the room. She was wearing a blue bathrobe over her pajamas, and Danny thought she looked prettier than ever with her hair hanging loose down around her shoulders.

She sat down on the edge of the bed and asked, "How do you feel, Danny?"

He grinned. "I feel swell."

Big Mike Ryan stuck his head inside the room. "Hey, kid," he said, "we're sure lucky. If that guy's car hadn't stalled, he'd of got clean away!"

Danny motioned toward his jacket, which he saw hanging on a chair. "You'll find the rotor in

my pocket. I removed it from the distributor. That way, you can't start a car. A truck driver showed me that trick."

Ryan smiled and said to Sally, "He's a smart boy. He really doesn't need to go to school."

Danny raised up quickly on an elbow and exclaimed, "Wait a minute! I think I'd like to go to

school up here." He realized suddenly that Sally was holding his hand. He thought she was pretty swell.

Mike Ryan looked startled. He started to say, "You'd *like* to go to school . . ." Next he swung hurriedly toward the hallway. He appeared worried. "Hey, Slug!" he bellowed. "Come here a minute!"