

# The PHANTOM DETECTIVE

10¢

AUGUST

THIRTEEN  
CARDS  
OF  
DEATH



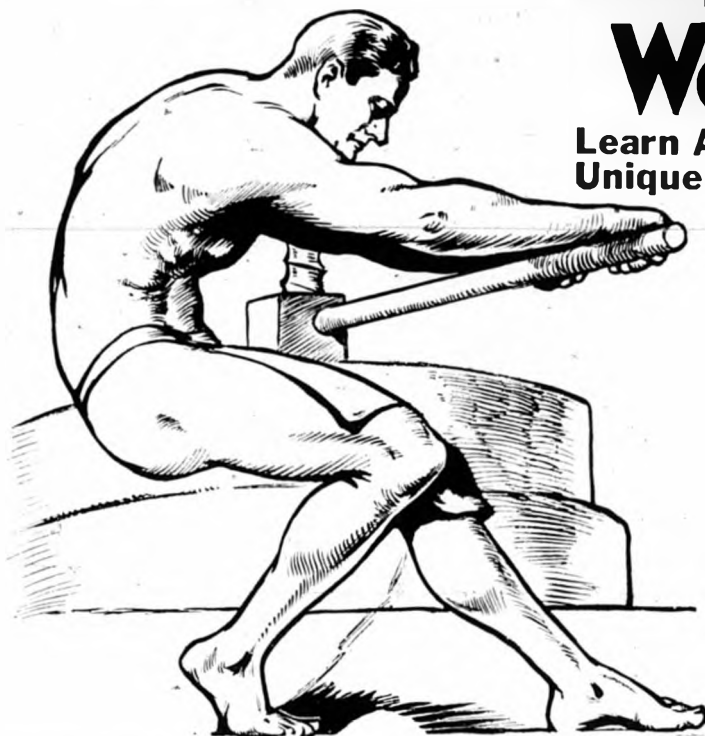
G. WAYMAN JONES  
ROBERT WALLACE  
KERRY McROBERTS

A Full  
Book-Length  
Novel Featuring  
the Phantom Detective



# STOP YOUR Rupture Worries!

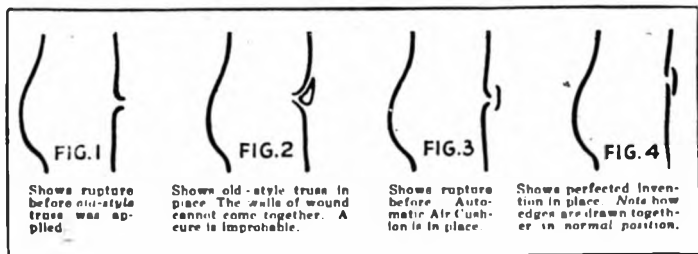
**Learn About My Perfected Unique Rupture Invention!**



Why worry and suffer with that rupture any longer? *Learn now about my perfected rupture invention.* It has brought ease, comfort, and happiness to thousands by assisting Nature in relieving and curing many cases of reducible hernia! *You can imagine how happy these thousands of rupture sufferers were when they wrote me to report relief, comfort and cures!* How would YOU like to be able to feel that same happiness—to sit down and write me such a message—a few months from today? *Hurry—send coupon quick for Free Rupture Book, PROOF of results and invention revelation!*

**Mysterious-Acting Device Binds and Draws the Broken Parts Together as You Would a Broken Limb!**

Surprisingly — continually — my perfected *Automatic Air Cushions* draw the broken parts together allowing Nature, the Great Healer, to swing into action! All the while you should experience the most heavenly comfort and security. *Look!* No obnoxious springs or pads or metal girdles! No salves or plasters! My complete Appli-ance is feather-lite, durable, invisible, sanitary and **CHEAP IN PRICE!** Wouldn't YOU like to say "goodbye" to rupture worries and "hello" to NEW freedom . . . NEW glory in living . . . New happiness—with the help of Mother Nature and my *mysterious-acting Air Cushion Appliance?*



## BROOKS RUPTURE APPLIANCE SENT ON TRIAL!

My invention is never sold in stores nor by agents. Beware of imitations! You can get it only from my U. S. factories or from my 33 foreign offices! *And I'll send it to you on trial.* If you don't like it—if it doesn't "work"—it costs you NOTHING. But don't buy now. Get the facts about it FIRST! Write me today. I'll answer in plain, sealed envelope with amazing information Free. Stop Your Rupture Worries—send coupon now!

**MAIL COUPON QUICK For Free Rupture Revelations!**

CONFIDENTIAL COUPON  
for RUPTURE SUFFERERS

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Marshall, Mich.

Rush me your new Free Book,  
amazing rupture method revelation,  
Proof of results, *all without*  
obligation, and in plain, sealed  
envelope.



C. E. BROOKS, Inventor

Name .....

Street .....

City .....

State .....

State whether for Man ☐ , Woman ☐ , or Child ☐

# 10643 MEN HAVE TAKEN MY COURSE

★ This Is the Actual Record  
as of December 31, 1932

**YES SIR!** More than 10,000 men have taken my course in Physical Instruction... think of it... 10,000 men who have gained big developed muscles, broad chests and strong legs by spending just a few minutes each day following my instructions. It makes me feel mighty proud to think that I am responsible for the physical fitness of this vast army!

Many of these men were sickly boys when they first came to me... too weak to raise their fists... TODAY they take their place with the many thousands who have doubled their strength and are proud of their prowess! Many of my pupils have won fame as Strength Athletes... winning great honors at the Olympic games.

**WHAT ABOUT YOU?**... Do YOU know the courage, strength and health that comes with physical development? I am sure you too would like to add 2 inches to each of your biceps... 3 inches to your chest... and have big muscular arms, a broad powerful back and legs that will be columns of power for speed and endurance. Give me 15 minutes a day and I will do just that. I will give you a he-man's physique that men will respect and women admire!

Read my guarantee that is unqualifiedly given to every pupil who enrolls —  
"I WILL GUARANTEE TO ADD AT LEAST...

**3 INCHES TO YOUR CHEST** | **2 INCHES TO YOUR BICEPS**

or it won't cost you one penny!" Signed: **GEORGE F. JOWETT**

And you are to be the sole judge—can anything be fairer than that? All I want to do is to get you started on my secret method of muscle building! But... once you've started, it's easy, for when you see your muscles growing bigger and stronger everyday... when you feel yourself getting more pep everyday... when you get up in the morning feeling like a million dollars you'll thank me for all I have done for you!

Don't wait any longer, get going NOW... Try one of my test courses first... it will give you the big URGE—

Send for "MOULDING A MIGHTY ARM" a Complete Course for 25c.

It will be a revelation to you. You can't make a mistake. The guaranty of the strongest armed man in the world stands behind this course. I give you all the secrets of strength illustrated and explained as you like them. You, too, can get an unbreakable grip of steel and a Herculean arm. Try any one of my test courses at 25c. Or, try all six of them for only \$1.00.

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I WILL INCLUDE A FREE COPY OF

"Nerves of Steel, Muscles like Iron", it describes my rise from a puny boy to be one of the world's strongest athletes. It explains all of my secret methods of development... it is brimful of pictures of famous strong men. It will re-awaken within you that desire for a strong powerful body, and it will show you how easy it is for you to be as strong as I am.

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George F. Jowett: Your proposition looks good to me. Send, by return mail, prepaid, the courses checked below for which I am enclosing \$\_\_\_\_\_

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Vol. II, No. 3

August, 1933

Price 10c

—A Full Book-Length Novel—

## THIRTEEN CARDS OF DEATH

By G. WAYMAN JONES

Taken From the Case-Book of Richard Curtis Van Loan

(Profusely Illustrated)

*Thrills, Action, Suspense and Mystery in an Exciting Novel of the Phantom Detective's Daring Campaign Against a Sinister, Masked Band of Fiendish Masters of Murder and Crime. . . . . 10*

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### PHANTOM FEATURES

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Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk.



Every  
Good  
Boy  
Deserves  
Fun



# LOOK! Easy as A·B·C to learn music this way

**JUST** see how easy it is! The lines are always E-G-B-D-F. Memorize the sentence, *Every Good Boy Deserves Fun*—and there you are! Whenever a note appears on the first line, you know it is *e*. Whenever a note appears in the second space, you know it is *g*.

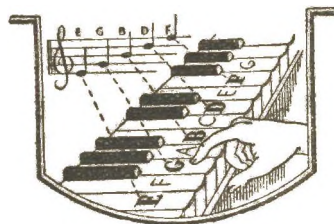
And the spaces—just as easy to remember. The four spaces are always F-A-C-E. That spells “face”—simple enough to remember, isn’t it? Thus whenever a note appears in the first space, it is *f*. Whenever a note appears in the second space, it is *a*.

You have learned something already! Isn’t it fun? You’ll just love learning music this fascinating way! No long hours of tedious practice. No dull and uninteresting scales. No “tricks” or “secrets”—no theories—you learn to play real music from real notes.

You don’t need a private teacher this pleasant way. In your own home, alone, without interruption or embarrassment, you study this fascinating, easy method of playing. Practice as much or as little as you like, to suit your own convenience, and enjoy every minute of it.

**You learn from the start—Previous training unnecessary**

So clear and simple are these fascinating “music lessons” that even a child can understand them. You do not lose a minute with unnecessary details—only the most essential principles are taught. Clear, concise, interesting and attractive—that is how each lesson is presented to you. And at an average cost of only a few pennies a day!



## The surest way to popularity

Don’t be just “another one of the guests” at the next party you go to. Be the center of attraction! The most popular one at a party is always the person who can entertain—and there is no finer and more enjoyable kind of entertainment than music.

Never before have you had such a chance to become a good player—quickly—without a teacher. And this method does not mean that you will be able merely to read notes and play a simple tune or two—but it means you will become a capable and efficient player. Many of our pupils now have positions with professional bands and orchestras.

## No alibis now for not learning to play your favorite instrument

Like having a phantom teacher at your side every minute, encouraging you, teaching you, smoothing the way so that it becomes so much easier, so much quicker for you to master your favorite musical instrument.

You simply cannot go wrong. First you are told how a thing is done, then by graphic illustrations and diagrams you are shown how, and when you play—you hear it.

Don’t be afraid to begin

lessons at once. Over 800,000 people learned to play this modern way—and found it as easy as A-B-C. Forget that old-fashioned idea that you need special “talent.” Just read the list of instruments in the panel, decide which one you want to play, and the U. S. School will do the rest.

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Our wonderful illustrated Free Book and our Free Demonstration Lesson explain all about this remarkable method. They prove just how anyone can learn to play his favorite instrument by note in almost no time and for just a fraction of what old, slow methods cost. The booklet will also tell you all about the amazing new *Automatic Finger Control*.

Act NOW. Clip and mail this coupon today, and the fascinating Free Book and Free Demonstration Lesson will be sent to you at once. No obligation. Instrument supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 3938 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

Thirty-fifth Year (Established 1898)

**U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC**  
3938 Brunswick Bldg., N. Y. City

Please send me your free book, “How You Can Master Music in Your Own Home,” with inspiring message by Dr. Frank Crane, Free Demonstration Lesson and particulars of your easy payment plan. I am interested in the following course:

Have You ..... Instrument? .....

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

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Piano	Viola
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## OPENED TO EARNEST MEN



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## FOUR \$15 SALES DAILY PAY \$280 WEEKLY

### INSTALLING NEW BUSINESS SPECIALTY ON FREE TRIAL— MAKING TREMENDOUS CASH SAVINGS IN OPERATING COSTS FOR THOUSANDS OF CONCERNS THROUGHOUT THE U.S. AND CANADA

#### \$4,707 Savings For One Kansas Store in Two Months

Sanders Ridgeway of Kansas invests \$88.60 and saves \$4,707.00 between April 6th and June 29! Bower Lumber and Ford Co., West Virginia, invests \$15, report savings well over \$1,000.00! Fox Ice and Coal Co., Wisconsin, save \$3,564.90! Baltimore Sporting Goods Store invests \$45, saves \$1,600! Safety Auto Lock Corporation, New York, invests \$15, saves \$686.45! With these and scores of similar results to display, our representatives interest every business man, from the very smallest to the very largest. No one can dispute the proof in the photo-copies of actual letters which our men show.

#### NO HIGH PRESSURE— SIMPLY INSTALL— SELLS ITSELF

Here is a business offering an invention so successful that we make it sell itself. Our representatives simply tell what they offer, show proof of success in every line of business and every section of the country. Then install the specialty without a dollar down. It starts working at once, producing a cash saving that can be counted just like the cash register money. The customer sees with his own eyes a big, immediate profit on his proposed investment. Usually he has the investment, and his profit besides, before the representative returns. The representative calls back, collects his money. OUT OF EVERY \$75 FIRST-CLASS REPRESENTATIVE DOES, NEARLY \$60 IS HIS OWN PROFIT. THE SMALLEST BE MAKES \$5 ON A \$7.50 INSTALLATION. Our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They are getting the attention of the largest concerns in the country and selling to the smaller businesses by the thousands. You can get exclusive rights. Business is GOOD, in this line, in small towns or big city alike! It's on the boom now. Get in while the business is young!

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Without obligation to me, send me full information on your proposition.

Name .....

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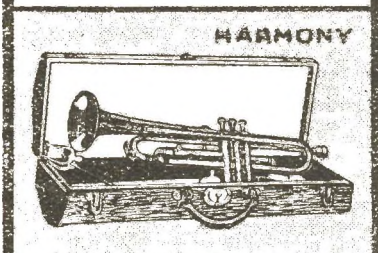


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ON EASY PAYMENTS



No. 1 — "TONEKING" CONCERT GUITAR: Professional model, grand concert size. Arched top and smooth back design; acoustically perfect. Rich dark mahogany finish, shaded to golden amber. Selected spruce top; white tortoise edge top and back; adjustable with strings and full equipment. Has features of \$50 outfit. \$14.75 \$3.50 Deposit. Bal. \$1 Weekly.



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No. 2 — "HARMONY" B♭ TRUMPET, long model, length 19 1/2 inches. Perfect intonation, light action piston valves, pearl top piston buttons, reinforced diamond keys. Quick change to A. Engraved bell. Plated lined case, 3-ply veneer Koratol covered. Nickel plated corners, back and clasp. Music rack and silver plate Bach model mouthpiece, slide grease and auto included.

Balance

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M. CARLI

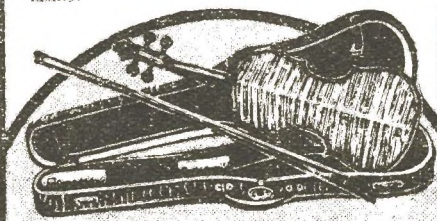
No. 4—M. CARLI PIANO KEY ACCORDION, 12 bass, 2 octaves, Full Chromatic. Professional Style. White Parlelette finish. 25 piano keys, 12 basses, 15 fold leatherette bellows, genuine steel reeds; inlaid with Rhinestones and encased with gold; leather shoulder strap, and case.

Balance

\$32.50. \$8.00 Deposit. \$1 Weekly.

Play a musical instrument and get more out of life. You will be popular . . . you will be the life of the party . . . you will be the center of attraction . . . with the fellows—and the girls. Making money . . . BIG money is another advantage. You can join an orchestra or form your own as LEADER. The radio also offers you a golden opportunity. They're always LOOKING for new talent. Here's a road to fame and fortune. RUDY VALLEE, PAUL SPECKT, BUDDY ROGERS, PHIL BAKER, HARRY REISER, NICK LUCAS, SOUSA, and thousands of others have bought instruments from New York Band. You, too, can reach the top.

It's easy! And the finest way to start is with an instrument from "New York Band." Ask your musical friends. THEY KNOW what fine quality these instruments are. They'll tell you what sensational values THESE ARE. But don't wait until it's too late. These offerings are for limited time only. Start now . . . fill in the coupon . . . THIS MINUTE. The sooner you start, the sooner you'll play . . . the sooner you'll begin to earn money.



No. 3—ADVANCE STUDENT'S VIOLIN OUTFIT. Stradivarius model, full size. High grade workmanship, with beautiful selected curly maple back and sides, even grained spruce top, fine ebony trimmings throughout. Varnish of rich golden red color. Case imitation leather, full flannel lined. American lock. Box of fine quality, Brazil wood, highly polished. Rosin, instructor, extra set of strings, chin rest and mute.

\$12.95.

\$3.00 Deposit.

\$1 Weekly.



Reference: Manufacturers Trust Co., N. Y., or your own banker.

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6 MONTHS COURSE OF  
PROFESSIONAL LESSONS

No matter what instrument you buy, we give you, FREE, a COMPLETE course of instructions. This home study course is the finest ever devised. It is simple and easy . . . and QUICK.

**Guarantee!**

After a few lessons you can play complete numbers. At the completion of the full course you will be as efficient as a professional.

FREE CATALOG of all musical instruments on request.

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**New York Band**  
INSTRUMENT COMPANY

111 East 14th Street,  
New York City, N. Y.

Gentlemen: Enclosed find

..... (amount)  
for which please send me

Model .....

I will pay balance of.....

..... at rate of  
\$1 weekly.

Name .....

Address .....

Street .....

City .....

State .....

Box .....

R. F. D. ....



# What Will You Do With \$3500.00 cash If I Give it to YOU?



## I'LL PAY \$250.00

Just for the winning answer to this question I am going to give \$3,500.00 to some deserving man or woman who answers my announcements. You may be the one to get it! But, before I give it to anyone I would like to know what the money will be used wisely. What will you do with this fortune if I give it to you? Just answer this question—tell me in a sentence of 20 words or less what you would do with the \$3,500.00—nothing more to do toward the \$250.00 cash prize! Sounds easy? It is easy! Nothing "fancy" is needed—just tell me in plain words what you would do with the \$3,500.00.

## 20 Simple Words Win \$250.00

Nothing more for you to do! Costs nothing to win—nothing to buy—no selling. This \$250.00 Prize given just for an answer to my question.

There is no way you can lose. Simply tell me what YOU will do with \$3,500.00 if I give it to you. The prize for the winning answer is \$250.00. Just sending an answer qualifies you for an opportunity to win \$3,500.00 in final prize distribution. Think what an amazing opportunity—why, many people work hard for a life-time without ever having such a vast amount of money as you may now win.

**RULES:**—Only one answer accepted from a family. You must be over 16 years of age and reside within Continental U. S. \$250.00 given for best answer to "What Will You Do With \$3,500.00 if I Give it to You?" Answers must be postmarked not later than Sept. 16, 1939. Judges will consider answer only for practical value of the idea. Construction, spelling, and neatness not considered.

Just Sending Answer Qualifies You for Opportunity to

# WIN \$3,500.00

Some say I am wrong. They say that the people who get money from me will spend it foolishly. Now I want to find out. I am going to give away over \$6,000.00. Someone is going to get \$3,500.00 All Cash. If I gave you the \$3,500.00 what would YOU do with it? Tell me in 20 words or less. Think, NOW, How You Would Spend \$3,500.00! Would you start a business—invest in bonds—pay off a mortgage, or buy new furniture? Just sending an answer qualifies you for the opportunity to win \$3,500.00. If you are prompt I'll send you a \$1,000.00 Cash Certificate AT ONCE! Here is an opportunity of a lifetime. Rush your answer today. Yours may be a winner.

**TOM WOOD, Manager**  
Dept. W-704-F, H-O Bldg., Cincinnati, O.

**BE PROMPT! . . . I Will Send You One thousand \$1,000.00 Cash Certificate AT ONCE!** EXTRA dollars If you are prompt and win first prize in final distribution. So don't delay. Every person who takes an active part will be rewarded in cash. Write your answer and rush it to me. Use coupon and send in letter or on one-cent post card. Send no money. I will send you \$1,000.00 Cash Certificate at once.

## YOUR PRIZE COUPON

**TOM WOOD, Manager.**  
H-O Bldg., Dept. W-704-F, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
If you give me the \$3,500.00 prize, I will use it as follows:  
(Write your answer plainly in here, in 20 words or less)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
TOWN \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_





## AGAIN *the* PHANTOM TRIUMPHS!

Hunted, hated and feared by the denizens of the underworld, Richard Curtis Van Loan—the Phantom Detective—marches bravely forward in his lone wolf war on crime.

His task is never-ending. Again and again he triumphs—yet each victory leads but to more difficult problems, more powerful foes.

And among the most formidable enemies of his entire career are those whom he faces in this month's exciting full book-length novel: **THIRTEEN CARDS OF DEATH.**

A novel so thrilling, so gripping and all-absorbing that it will hold you breathless from the first page to the last.

Start it now—join the world's greatest sleuth on the perilous trail of the most diabolic human fiends that ever menaced law-abiding citizens!



# Thirteen Cards



*Thrills, Action, Suspense and Mystery in an Exciting  
Full Book-Length Novel of the Phantom Detective's  
Daring Campaign Against a Sinister, Masked Band  
of Fiendish Masters of Murder and Crime*

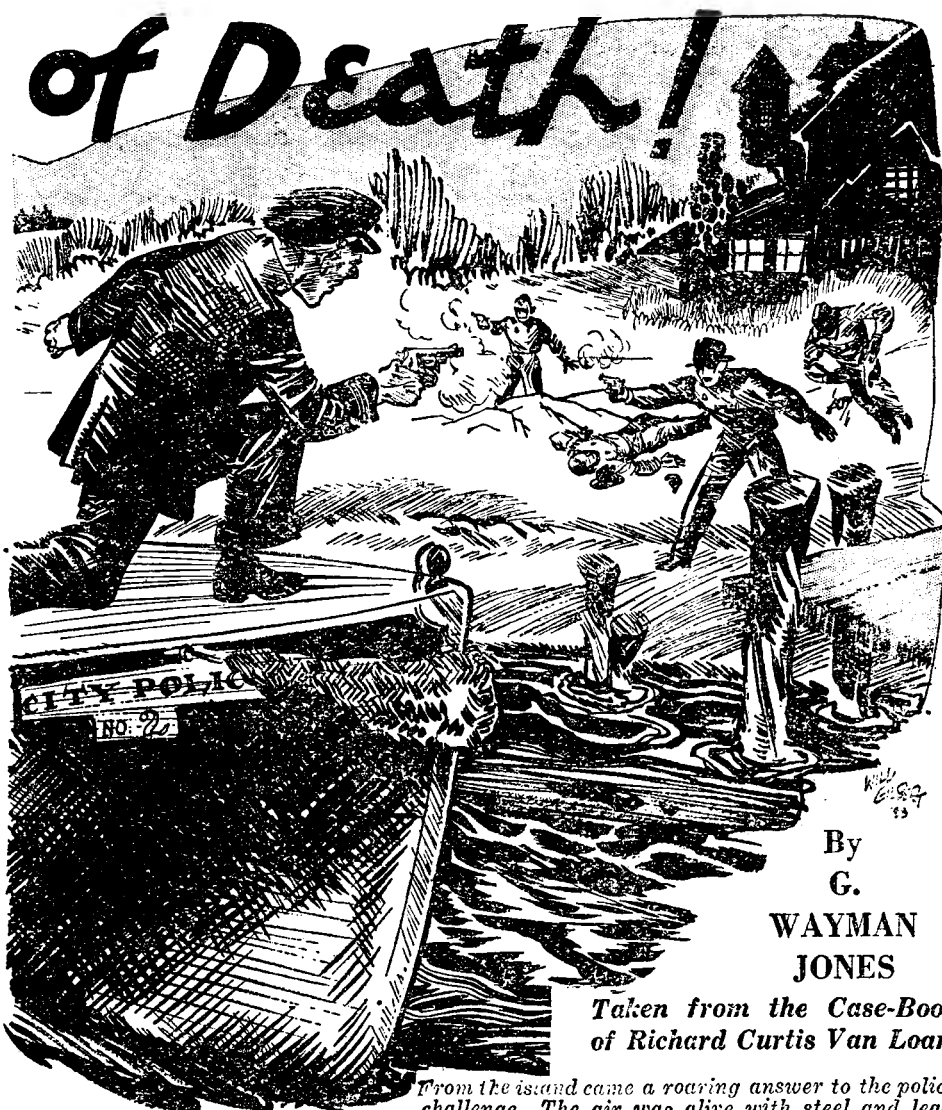
## PROLOGUE

**D**EATH lurked in the shadows of the room. Invisible, intangible, yet permeating the very atmosphere with his gaunt and fleshless presence. His unseen scythe was raised, ready to strike, ready to cut down his victims, ready to execute the fiendish plans of the

cunning distorted brains that were gathered in the chamber, preparing to institute their campaign of avarice and slaughter.

A single white light hung suspended from the center of the ceiling. A single shaft of illumination flung itself down upon the black cloth which covered the long table. In the background, ebony drapes





By  
G.  
WAYMAN  
JONES

*Taken from the Case-Book  
of Richard Curtis Van Loan*

*From the island came a roaring answer to the police  
challenge. The air was alive with steel and lead.*

hung over the walls, enveloping the room in a slimy darkness, eerie and impenetrable.

Six figures sat on each side of that black topped table; and at its head, more gaunt and terrible than the others was another, whose very bearing stamped him as their leader; whose black flashing eyes which peered from behind the mask he wore marked him as a man of destiny, a man who shall wrest more from life than ever he surrenders to it.

Face up on the table, directly before each individual, was a playing card. Thirteen hearts turned their red and white faces up toward that garish light. Thirteen hearts from the Ace to the King lay upon the black cloth; and stamped in crimson upon the sleeves of the sinister group were the insignia corresponding to the numbers of the card before them.

At the far end of the long board stood a tremendous drum-like object. It had no top, and inside it were



myriad slips of white paper, folded neatly over in the manner of lottery tickets. The man at the table's head—the dominating figure with the ace of hearts stamped red and menacing upon his sleeve, rose in his seat and addressed the others.

"It is done," he said in a low rumbling voice. "There are exactly five thousand, six hundred and seventy-two of them. Fully ninety per cent of them will come to terms. As for the others—"

He paused for a moment. The twelve listeners took his meaning clearly enough; and back there, invisible in the infinite shadows of that chamber of death, the Reaper grinned horribly, and his bony fingers flexed about the handle of his scythe.

The speaker continued.

"Each of us shall attend to one of them. If he proves amenable to our demands so much the better. If not, you shall strike quickly and mercilessly. Terror must be struck into the hearts of the others. Decisive action taken now will make our task simpler later.

"In this drum I have their names. Each slip of paper bears a name. We will draw. The thirteen of us will draw. The name that each draws shall be his personal victim. Action shall be taken within the week. I shall call your names in order. The King of Hearts!"

A BLACK-GLOVED hand stretched forth. On its sleeve was emblazoned the emblem of the king of hearts. The black fingers took a slip of paper from the drum, then withdrew. "The Queen of Hearts!"

A second black hand stretched itself toward the drum. The fingers were slimmer than those of the first hand. And they trembled almost imperceptibly as they hastily snatched a slip of paper from the

cavernous receptacle. "The Jack of Hearts!"

Twelve times that rumbling voice called a card; twelve times black sinister fingers stretched forth and selected a slip of paper.

"Now," continued the voice of the Ace of Hearts, "you have the names and the addresses. You know what to do. Are there any questions?"

A grim, significant, eerie silence was his only answer.

"Good. And now you know what you seek?"

Again there was an instant's silence, then it was broken by a surge of voices, like waves breaking upon some desolate and rocky shore.

"We know what we seek."

The gleaming black eyes of him called the Ace of Hearts glanced around the table at the dozen who had sworn to follow him. He spoke again.

"And with what do you reward him who fails to render to you what you seek?"

Again came that maddening silence that seemed to shriek of evil. And then as if they were one, twelve voices lifted themselves up and spoke the dread name of the fourteenth person in that room; the fourteenth person that none of them could see, that none of them could hear, yet of whose presence they were all acutely and fearfully aware.

"Death," they said in a chorus that sounded like the blasphemous chant of a Black Mass. "Death!"

## CHAPTER I

### DEATH TAKES TWO

RICHARD SUMMERS sat alone in his luxurious library. An expensive cigar was in his hand, and a rare first edition in his lap. He read quietly in the solitude of the huge room. Relaxed from his banking cares of the day, this distinguished multi-millionaire bachelor



browsed over his book, well content with life.

The big grandfather's clock at the far end of the room melodiously chimed the hour of midnight. Summers, engrossed in his book, did not hear it. Neither, for that matter, did he hear a soft footfall near the French windows which opened out upon the garden.

Beyond the radius of light which was shed by the reading lamp, a figure stood near the window. It was clad in black, and an ebony mask obscured its features.

Something gleamed dully in a black-gloved hand as it glided noiselessly across the room. It was standing less than two feet away from the banker when he became aware of its presence.

**R**ICHARD SUMMERS looked up. His brow corrugated, then his eyes dilated in mingled fear and amazement. For a full minute the masked figure and the banker stared at each other. At last the latter found his voice. "Who are you?" he said. "What do you want?"

By way of answer the intruder brought the revolver in his hand slowly upward until its muzzle pointed directly at the other's heart. Then with his left hand he thrust a piece of pasteboard out toward Summers. "Do you recognize that?" he demanded.

The banker's frown grew deeper. He stared at the card in the black figure's hand. It was an ordinary playing card—the three of hearts. For a moment Summers did not answer. By now his first shock had departed, leaving him calmer. He was by no means a timorous man, as his many enemies could well testify, and now that his first wave of surprise had passed, the inherent courage in the man asserted itself.

"What child's play is this?" he de-

manded testily. "I see that you're holding an ordinary playing card in your hand. To be specific, it's the three of hearts. That much I recognize. But if there's any more significance than that to it, I fail completely to understand it."

Steely blue eyes behind the other's mask flashed grimly.

"Tell me," he said softly, "have you not seen the counterpart of this card within the past twenty-four hours?"

Something clicked in the back of Summers' brain. He sat upright in his chair. "Yes," he exclaimed. "The letter. The—"

"Exactly," said the voice in tones filled with menace. "The letter. And why did you not obey its instructions?"

Summers nodded slowly.

"I remember now," he said. "The three of hearts was in that letter. I thought nothing of it at the time. I get lots of crank letters. Every prominent man does. I threw it away."

The masked man nodded.

The revolver in the man's hand still held its steady bead on the banker's heart.

"It's not too late," he said. "You may yet comply with that letter's terms."

A peculiar glint came into the banker's eyes.

"And if I don't?" he asked.

The black figure did not speak, but the barrel of his weapon moved almost imperceptibly.

**S**UMMERS nodded. "I see," he said. "Very well, I suppose you win. I think I can take care of you with what's in that desk. Do you mind if I walk over to it?"

"Go ahead," said the other. "But any trick will spell immediate death."

Summers rose from his chair and walked steadily across the room to-



ward the huge mahogany desk in the center of the floor. The peculiar glint in his eye became more pronounced as he approached it.

He reached down and opened the desk drawer. His hand reached within. Then came out again.

He whirled around on his heel to face the intruder, and as he did so the metal of a revolver flashed in the light of the room. His right hand held the butt of an automatic and even as he swung around his finger constricted upon the trigger.

**T**WO staccato reports ripped through the room. Two jagged spurts of flame leaped like chain lightning from the muzzles of two guns. But the weapon in the grasp of the black figure uttered its sinister report an infinitesimal fraction of a second before that of the banker.

One bullet buried itself in the tapestry of the eastern wall, the other ripped searingly through flesh, thudded into a living, pulsating heart and stopped its beat. Richard Summers slumped to his knees. The gun fell from his hand and clattered harmlessly to the floor. Blood rushed from a gaping hole in his breast. He pitched face downward on the thick oriental rug.

The shadowy figure glided silently, swiftly across the room toward the French windows through which he had entered. Into the night he evanesced, the black of his raiment merging into the blackness of the evening. Then he was gone, leaving no trace behind him, save an ordinary playing card which lay on the rug near the murdered banker. It was *the three of hearts*, the murderous visiting card that had been left by the first grim messenger of the thirteen who had vowed to deal swift and sudden death to those who dared defy them.

And of those thirteen whose

names had been selected from the drum, it was destined that ten of them should capitulate to the demands made upon them. Ten of them, when confronted with the dire threat that the organization whose symbol was a crimson heart had delivered to them, rendered up that which was asked of them. Three of them did not. And of those three, two died upon the same night, within the same hour.

One of these was Richard Summers, the banker, of Summersville, Illinois. The other was Trent Wells, the copper king of Montana. These men never knew each other. Their trails which merged in death had never crossed in life. They were a thousand odd miles apart when the Reaper swung his silver scythe and cut them down, yet they died for the same reason, in the same manner, for the same cause.

And the third man of that chosen thirteen who did not accede to the demands made upon him, heard of the demise of the other two, heard of the playing cards which had been found beside their prostrate, lifeless bodies, heard of these things and was afraid, terribly afraid.

And it was his fear, his overwhelming terror, that eventually proved the thing which placed the thirteen heart murderers in jeopardy, which brought the Phantom himself into the game to struggle with one of the most terrible enemies of his career.

This third man's name was Norwell Rains, and he lived in Hollywood.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CLUTCHES OF FEAR

**I**T WAS said by his enemies that Norwell Rains possessed infinitely more money than brains. This may have been true, but it was certain that the women of America





*Gaunt and fleshless, death hovered menacingly over the room!*

would not have subscribed to this belief. For Rains was the most popular matinée idol on the screen.

He was tall and handsome, with an almost perfect physique, which

successfully concealed the smallness of his soul. In his meteoric rise to fame he had amassed a fortune of well over two million dollars; and that fact coupled with his good looks



more than compensated him for the many failings which he possessed.

His secretary brought him the letter containing the jack of hearts. It came to light half way down a pile of fan mail. The secretary, regarding it as something of a joke, handed it to his master. Rains took the card in an over-manicured hand and looked at it with a puzzled expression marring the perfection of his brow.

**T**HEN he read the letter and his face grew pale.

"The police," he said to the secretary. "Martin, have you notified the police?"

"I just opened the letter, Mr. Rains," said Martin. "Do you want me to notify the police?"

Rains gulped. The hand which held the letter trembled slightly.

"Of course," he said in a thin strained voice. "Phone the police. Then call the studio and tell them I shan't be able to work today. I'm—indisposed."

The secretary bowed, left the room. Rains fell into a huge leather armchair and read the letter again. What he saw there was apparently not reassuring. His face was ashen now. His eyes distended. His nostrils quivered, and his sensual lips were parted, as he stared alternately at the card in his hand, then at the letter.

He was not a brave man physically. He had little taste for combat, and the slightest suggestion of bodily injury made him feel ill. Crank letter or no crank letter, Norwell Rains was not the man to take chances. This, undoubtedly, was a case for the police.

He sighed, lit a cigarette with shaking fingers. Then he threw the letter aside and picked up the morning paper, striving in this way to take his mind off the missive that

he had just read. But the thing that leaped to his eyes from the front page set his heart to thumping harder than ever, set him to staring once more at the letter, fear and panic stamped indelibly in his eyes.

The secretary returned from the telephone to see his employer glaring at the paper as though it were an evil unclean thing.

"What's the matter, sir?" he asked.

Rains pointed a trembling finger at the headlines.

"Look," he said. "Read that. Look. Two men have been murdered. Two men. A banker and a copper magnate. Murdered, and by their bodies were found playing cards. The trey and the nine of hearts."

Martin looked at the paper in a bewildered manner.

"Don't you see," screamed Rains. "The trey and the nine of hearts. Now I get this. The jack of hearts. Don't you see, you fool? They plan to murder me. They'll kill me as they killed those other two! Did you get the police?"

The secretary nodded.

"They'll be here immediately, sir," he said. "No harm can come to you."

**R**AINS did not answer. His vocal chords were paralyzed by the terrible apprehension which welled up in his breast. He was still sitting there when Inspector Harlow of the police department entered the room. Then with an effort he broke the thrall of terror which held him in its grip, and with a quivering voice, quite unlike that which had thrilled the moving picture fans of America, he stammered out the story. Then he handed the inspector the card, the letter and the newspaper.

Harlow examined all three cur-

sorily, but thoroughly, then said: "There's nothing to be alarmed at, Mr. Rains. You have been threatened with death unless you comply with the demands listed in this letter. There is no danger."

"No danger!" shouted Rains. "They threaten to kill me and you say there's no danger!"

"They won't kill you," said Harlow soothingly. "As a matter of fact, they've been considerate enough to let us know when they'll make their attempt. They say that if you have not obeyed their instructions by midnight they shall kill you on the stroke of twelve. Well, armed with that knowledge, it will be easy enough for the police to protect you."

**P**ERHAPS," said Rains with gray lips. "Perhaps that is what Summers and Wells thought. Perhaps that is what their own police told them."

"Now, Mr. Rains," said the inspector earnestly, "there's no need to become alarmed. I'll have this house surrounded by police all day. At midnight, the guard shall be doubled. Myself and half a dozen of my most trusted men shall sit in the room with you. Isn't that assurance enough?"

Rains swallowed hard.

"I've got money," he shouted in a voice two points this side of hysteria. "I want the best protection that money can buy. Further, I want the writer of this letter arrested. You may protect me tonight, but I can't go on the rest of my life with a death threat over my head. Who's the best detective in America? Do you know?"

The inspector nodded.

"Yes, I know," he said gravely.

"Then get him. To hell with the cost. Get him. I don't care about money."

"Neither," said the inspector quietly, "does he."

Rains stared at him.

"What do you mean? Who is this detective that doesn't care for money?"

Harlow met the frantic man's eye squarely for a moment.

"They call him the Phantom," he said quietly.

Into Rains' eyes there came a faint gleam of hope, almost of courage.

"The Phantom," he repeated. "I've heard of him. Get him, Inspector. Get him at once."

Harlow shrugged. "I'll try," he said. "But as I told you, the Phantom isn't interested in your money. He's a rich man in his own right. Besides, there's only one man in America who knows his true identity. I'll have to get in touch with him."

"Then do it," said Rains. "Do it at once. I'm sure that he can get the villains who have threatened me with this terrible thing."

"Very well," said Harlow. "I'll do my best, and I'll have a cordon of police thrown about the house at once."

He turned and left the room, leaving the matinee idol of the country a sorely worried man. His poise and nonchalant attitude had deserted him. The virtues which had been foisted upon him by a high-salaried press agent had fallen from him, and he was, at this precise moment, merely a rather cowardly young man who was experiencing the fright of his life.

### CHAPTER III

#### MIDNIGHT PERIL

**I**T LACKED some twenty minutes to twelve the following night. The small platinum clock on the mantelpiece of Norwell Rains' living



room ticked the minutes away with relentless monotony. Every light in the room was turned on. The shades had been removed from the bulbs and the powerful electric light shed a garish revealing luminosity about the room, banishing shadows from the remotest corner.

THE actor sat huddled up in a Morris chair at the center of the room. Surrounding him were five police officers, none of whom possessed a rank lower than that of a sergeant. Half a dozen patrolmen stood about the room. The windows and door were closely guarded.

In the hall outside were a score of armed men in uniform, and below in the street and in the garden was another score of policemen, keeping the vigil over the life of Norwell Rains.

The little clock on the mantel ticked three hundred more times. The actor glanced at it nervously. Then he looked up at Inspector Harlow, who stood at his side.

"Where ~~is~~ he?" he whispered. "Where is the Phantom? He promised to come, didn't he?"

Harlow nodded.

"I received a message that he would be here before midnight. He was to fly from New York. But don't worry, man. Good God, what *can* happen to you? You've got a miniature army surrounding you."

Rains shuddered but said nothing. Despite the extraordinary precautions taken to safeguard him it was apparent that his nervousness remained with him. It was equally apparent that the Phantom's tremendous reputation made Rains feel that he could breathe easier when the celebrated detective arrived.

The platinum clock pounded out ten minutes more. Its hands indicated five minutes to twelve.

A footfall sounded outside in the hall. Rains sat bold upright. Harlow's hand dropped instinctively to the .32 in the holster at his side. The policemen exchanged significant glances.

A gentle tapping came at the outer panel. Rains blanched. Harlow, hand on gun, crossed the room.

"Who's there?" he called.

A policeman's voice from outside in the hall answered:

"It's the Phantom, sir."

Rains' eyes lit with hope as Harlow opened the door. The others stared curiously in the direction of the portal to watch the scourge of the underworld enter.

A tall figure clad in immaculate evening clothes stepped in. A silk hat was on his head. His carriage and bearing were those of a gentleman. The upper half of his face was obscured by a black silk mask through which his eyes gleamed intelligently.

HARLOW shut the door behind him. Rains, staring at the masked figure, seemed to have regained his confidence.

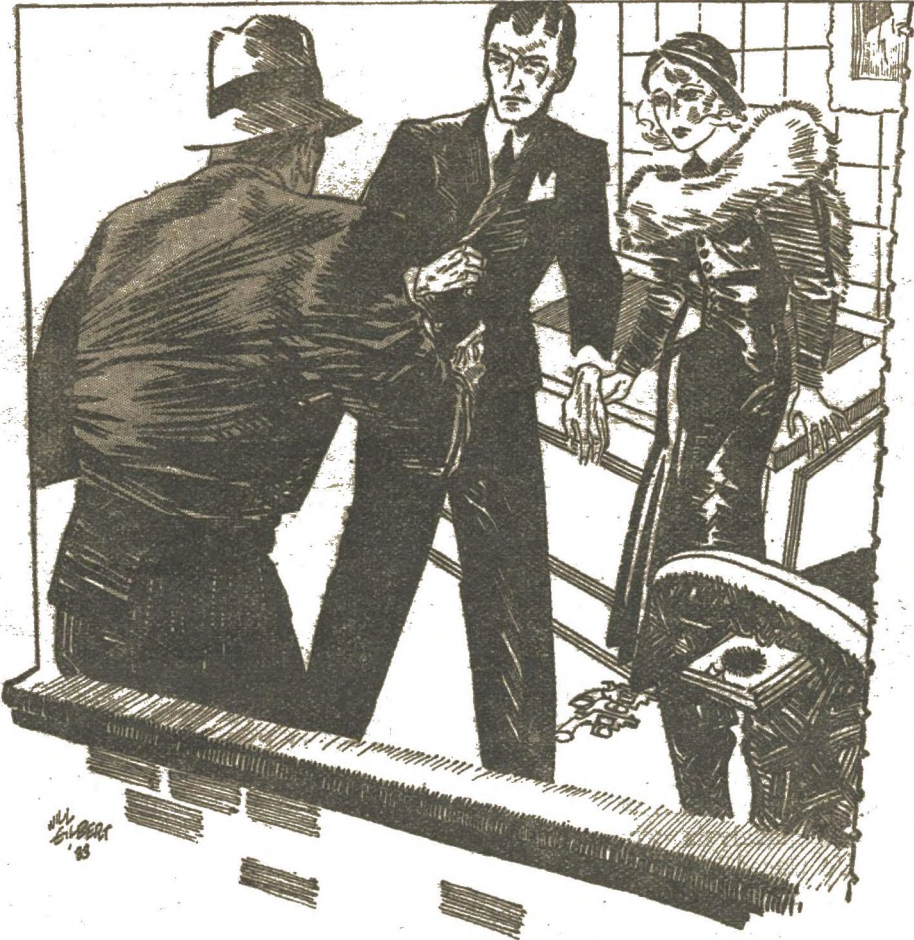
"Thank God, you've come," he said. "For heaven's sake catch these devils who've threatened my life."

The masked man inclined his head slightly.

"I shall do my best," he said quietly. Then he turned to Harlow. "Midnight, they said. Didn't they?"

Harlow nodded. The Phantom walked around the room, taking close stock of the entire situation. The room was filled with police. He paused for a moment by the window and glanced out. It was some fifteen stories to the street. He turned back to Harlow, a faint smile upon his face.

"I'd say that Mr. Rains was as safe as the President himself," he



*"You have defied us," he said, "and for that you die."*

observed. "It's impossible to get to him here."

Harlow nodded, and Rains breathed a sigh of relief. The color flowed back into his cheeks and his complexion was normal once more. The little hand of the platinum clock edged over toward the hour. Then it struck.

And as the first muffled chime reverberated through the room, an electric tension filled the air. Despite the fool-proof precautions which had been taken, there flashed to the mind of every man present the picture of two dead men, with

playing cards of the heart suit lying at their sides.

The policemen stood alert and vigilant, their hands hovering above their holsters. Rains sat upright in his chair breathing loudly. The Phantom alone seemed calm. He stood between the window and Rains' chair. He had taken a slim automatic from his pocket, and the bright light of the room was reflected in its metal barrel.

The little clock had struck eight times, when Harlow relaxed. He was the first to realize that the tension that gripped him was engen-



dered solely by nerves. After all, it was impossible for anything to happen to Rains here. It was impossible for the enemy to get to him.

The clock tolled its eleventh stroke—and then it happened!

The Phantom suddenly galvanized to action. Even as the last stroke of midnight echoed through the room, he flung himself before the actor, his revolver in his hand. Before a man could divine his purpose, his finger had constricted on the trigger. The automatic poured a steady stream of lead into the actor's body.

**B**LOOD stained his expensive suit, and ran crazily down upon the floor. Then without releasing his finger from the trigger, the masked man who had called himself the Phantom turned the muzzle of his weapon and shattered the chandelier overhead. The room was plunged into darkness.

Now, at last, Harlow broke the surprised paralysis which gripped him. He raised his voice.

"Get him, somebody. For God's sake, get him! Don't let him leave the room."

But above the scuffle of swiftly moving feet, above the febrile excitement of the room, there came a mocking laugh.

"Those who defy the Thirteen Hearts shall die! Nothing shall stop that death. No one can stay our hand."

There was a sudden crash. Glass shattered. For a single instant, silhouetted against the moon outside, Harlow saw a tall figure clad in immaculate evening clothes leap to the window sill, leap through the jagged frame into the space beyond.

Harlow's pistol was jerked up in his hand. But before he could fire the figure had dropped out of sight.

Now half a dozen flashlights were clicked on and their white beams illuminated the room. Harlow knelt down beside the riddled body of the actor. His breast was riddled with steel. He slumped forward in his chair, still, silent, inert.

And on his lap, where Harlow was certain it had not been when the lights went out—was the jack of hearts. Harlow came to his feet.

"Well," he said grimly, "even if they did get Rains, that fellow certainly did for himself. He must have killed himself when he landed below. Besides, we've got enough men down there to stop a regiment. Let's investigate."

The policemen quitted the room and hurried downstairs. A moment later Harlow was interviewing his men below. They regarded him blankly. One of them said in answer to his questions:

"No, sir. We were standing directly below that window. Nothing came out of it. Nothing fell to the ground. I'm sure of it."

Harlow screwed up his brow.

"It's a clean getaway," he said. "A clean getaway and a miracle."

One of his assistants at his side spoke gravely.

"If the Phantom himself has turned criminal, sir," he observed, "we're up against the toughest job of our lives."

Harlow nodded soberly.

**Y**OU'RE right," he said. "If the Phantom has gone over to their side, if he belongs to the Thirteen Hearts, God help us all. But still, somehow, even though I saw it with my own eyes, I can't quite believe it. I can't quite believe the Phantom has turned traitor to himself and the rest of the world."

But whatever Harlow may have thought, the fact remained. The Phantom, Harlow told himself, had

kept his rendezvous as he had promised. The Phantom with his own hand had shot down the man the Thirteen Hearts had vowed to kill. He had leaped out into space and never come to earth, had vanished completely in the night.

And though it was a warm California night, perspiration stood out on Harlow's brow.

#### CHAPTER IV

##### THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

**T**HE WHITE stone building stretched its massive granite shoulders high above the city and towered arrogantly from its Park Avenue base over the rest of the municipality, as if completely conscious that the rentals of its apartments were the highest in town. Below the metropolitan traffic streamed through the granite canyons, while above a soft summer night caressed the urban scene.

In a luxuriously furnished penthouse high on the roof, there sat a man. He was bent over a desk studying a newspaper. A quizzical frown played upon his brow as he digested the startling headline that leaped to his eye; the headline that told him of the Phantom's perfidy, of how the masked sleuth had turned traitor to the law and had joined forces with the underworld at last.

The press was in a furore regarding the matter. The Phantom's exploits were well known. His adventures were respected, and now that he had turned against the forces of law and order, the country trembled. The police of a hundred cities were alert, ready to pit all their resources, all their courage and brains against the Phantom, whom they now believed, incredible though it seemed, had turned his talents to the

other side; who, apparently tiring of throwing his strength, courage and inimitable sleuthing facilities on the side of the law, had deserted and gone over to the enemy.

But the tall young man in that Park Avenue penthouse knew that the papers lied. He knew that public opinion was wrong. He knew that the Phantom had not killed Norwell Rains. And though there may have been others who believed with him that the Phantom was innocent, there were but two living persons who knew that fact positively and apodictically.

**T**HOSE two men were the killer and the Phantom himself.

And the man in that penthouse was not the killer! Though he was known to the renting agent of the apartment, to the exclusive society of New York, to a hundred clubmen acquaintances as Richard Curtis Van Loan—that man was none other than the Phantom himself!

With the exception of Frank Havens, the newspaper publisher, not a man in the whole world knew that Dick Van Loan, playboy and wastrel, was the greatest sleuth that lived.

Born to ample wealth and luxury and left an orphan at an early age, Richard Van Loan had celebrated the advent of manhood with all the prodigal vices that youth dreams of. His life had been an empty, purposeless thing until the war.

In that titanic struggle where most men lost themselves and their dreams, Van Loan had found himself and his own career. Gazing eye to eye with Death in the clouds as part of his diurnal duty in the flying corps, he had found life a dull and deadly thing after the Armistice. The fleshpots had lost their savor. The old pleasures seemed hollow and empty. Life, in short,



had become a deadly bore, which could be relieved only by the final adventure of death.

AT the suggestion of Havens, his father's lifelong friend, he had solved a murder mystery for the publisher's string of papers, after the police had failed. In that adventure he had discovered that this was the one profession, the one career he could follow that fed the necessary amount of spice to his jaded nerves.

Sleuthing gave him a lifelong continuation of the excitement that the war had offered him. So, throwing himself whole-heartedly into this new venture, he became the Phantom.

However, his rise to the peak of his chosen profession was not a simple thing. He builded on a solid foundation, and it was to that fact that he owed his life many times over. Disguise he had studied and practised until not an actor that ever trod the boards was his master.

Languages he spoke like a professor. Ventriloquism and hypnotism were no secrets to him, and only the incomparable Lombroso, himself, had devoted more time to the study of criminology. In short, Dick Van Loan, the playboy of the clubs, had developed into a serious student. And though he took pains that no one should notice the change in him, he was no longer the jaded, carefree scion of gold that he had been for the first twenty-odd years of his life.

Of course, he had discovered early in his career that there were certain sacrifices that must be made upon the altar of the path he had chosen. He paid the price of his double life. The things which the normal man prizes and works for were denied the Phantom. Home, domesticity, feminine companionship

were not for him. His duplicity precluded that.

No, the ordinary items of life for which the average man strives mightily were not for him whom the world called the Phantom. He had chosen his path, and he must follow it, alone and lonely, no matter where it lead, until the grim reaper himself cut him down at the end of the trail.

Now on this particular night following the murder of Norwell Rains, Dick Van Loan had returned from a hunting trip near the border. Arriving home with the latest editions of the papers tucked under his arm, he had donned a dressing gown and relaxed to read the news of events which had occurred since he last saw a paper some six days ago.

THE first item that leaped to his eye from the headlines was the startling story that the Phantom himself had turned traitor to the law, that he had aligned himself with the underworld and with his own hand shot down the famous Hollywood star.

His brow corrugated as he read the story of Rains' death. He realized that whoever had concocted this scheme was diabolically clever. The criminal had accomplished two things at one fell blow. First, by appearing as the Phantom, the killer had easily obtained access to Rains' house, well guarded as it was. And, second, he had put the Phantom at a frightful disadvantage, should the detectives take his trail and attempt to capture him.

For now the police were no longer the Phantom's allies. He was a hunted man. And this fact would render it infinitely more difficult for him to track down the real criminal, inasmuch as Van Loan would be compelled to evade the long arm of

the law while he was exonerating himself.

He read the news story again. It mentioned the fact that Rains had asked for the Phantom's protection. It also mentioned that a long distance call had been put through to Frank Havens asking him to use his influence to get the famous detective to take the case.

Van's frown grew deeper. It was impossible that Havens should have slipped up. The publisher knew that he was away. There must have been a leak somewhere. Perhaps Havens had never even received the message.

Van reached for the telephone and put through a call to Havens' home. The butler answered and said that neither his master nor Muriel, his daughter, were in the house. Van hung up, deciding to call later.

HE relaxed in his chair and smoked a long black cigar meditatively. He needed no further summons to take this case. He was compelled to do so as a means of self-protection, in order to exonerate himself from the ugly murder charge that was facing him.

In the story he had just read, he had noted the two other deaths similar to that which had struck down Rains; the fact that the three death cards were hearts of different denominations. He had noticed these things and now he wondered.

Who was this mysterious gang who were committing wholesale murder? What was their motive? Apparently their leader was a man of diabolical ingenuity. The impersonation of the Phantom to achieve one of the killings demonstrated that.

He smoked slowly, lost in thought.

Then as his eyes fell upon the desk again, he noticed a pile of

mail there—a pile which had accumulated since he had been away.

WITH a perplexed frown still upon his brow, he stretched forth his hand and picked up the top letter from the pile before him. Still engrossed in his own thoughts, he ripped open the envelope and withdrew its contents. Then, as his eye looked at the things which he held in his hand, the frown grew deeper and his heart picked up a beat.

For there before him was an ordinary playing card—the queen of hearts. The symbol of death which had been left at the side of the murdered men of whom he had just read in the newspaper. Van placed the playing card upon his desk and turned his attention to the typewritten message which had accompanied it. He read it slowly.

*To Richard Curtis Van Loan:*

*Before eleven o'clock on the eighth of the month you will throw one hundred thousand dollars in cash from your automobile, exactly nine miles out of Bergton, New York. You will throw it into the bushes at the side of the road. Then drive on.*

*If you fail to have done this thing by midnight of the eighth, you shall die as others who received this warning and did not heed it, have died.*

*The Thirteen Hearts.*

Hastily he glanced at the postmark. The message had been mailed four days ago. This was the eighth, and the ticking clock on the mantelpiece told him that it was already within three minutes of the time which the note had predicted as his death moment.

He flung open a drawer of the



desk and withdrew an automatic. Then lighting a cigarette, he returned to his thoughts, augmented by his new knowledge. From his outward bearing no one would have dreamed that he was a man who waited for such a grim visitor as Death.

So, the Thirteen Hearts, who had already slain three men, had threatened him. Quite evidently they were unaware of the fact that he was the Phantom. Had they known this, they probably would have slain him without the formality of making a demand for money. No. For some reason that he did not know, the gang had selected him as a victim of their blackmailing scheme, little realizing that they had threatened the man whom they had impersonated yesterday when Rains had been murdered.

THE letter he had received cleared things up a little. The motive of the gang was at least apparent now. It was simply a tremendous blackmail plot backed by a campaign of terror; and there was no way of knowing from how many of their victims they had already collected.

They had killed three men with such vicious despatch and savagery that the bulk of those with whom they had communicated had undoubtedly acceded to their terms.

And now, for some ironic reason, they had threatened the Phantom himself, though, it appeared, they had no knowledge of the fact that Richard Curtis Van Loan, millionaire clubman, was that dreaded scourge of the underworld.

His sharp ears heard a faint click in the hall. His hand tightened on the butt of his automatic. His eyes narrowed slightly, but he gave no other indication of his alertness, his tenseness. The little clock on the mantel chimed the hour of midnight.

A soft footfall sounded from the foyer. Van Loan leveled his weapon at the doorway, expecting any minute to see the brutal, evil face of the killer of the Thirteen, the man who had come to snuff out his life as the price of his daring to defy the blackmailers.

THEN, of a sudden, he saw the gleam of metal appear through the doorway. A slim gloved hand held a revolver firmly. Then the figure itself entered the room. Dick Van Loan gasped with surprise as he saw that figure closely.

For instead of being a desperate murderer as he had suspected, it was the figure of a woman, slim and blonde, dressed in a trim suit. Silently he dropped his weapon into his pocket, then rose to his feet to greet his fair intruder with a smile.

She advanced across the room, the gun held firmly in her hand. Some four feet away from him she stopped and regarded him with wide blue eyes. He returned her gaze debonairly, with an air of gallantry. Then he spoke, and his voice held a faint bantering quality.

"Good evening, madame," he said. "And are you usually in the habit of entering strange men's apartments without the formality of ringing the doorbell?"

Her face remained impassive. Her eyes remained cold under the warmth of his smile.

"When I come on this sort of business, I enter without formality," she said icily.

Van Loan raised his eyebrows. His smile grew broader.

"Indeed," he said, much in the manner of one speaking to a recalcitrant child. "And what may that business be?"

"Death," she said in a tone as ominous as the word which she had spoken.

Van's smile left his face, and his voice dropped its mocking note.

"Do you intend to kill me?" he asked.

Her lips were tight red lines against the pale background of her fragile face. She nodded her head.

"But why?" he asked. "Why should you come to kill me?"

For answer, she thrust her left hand into the pocket of her suit. She extended an oblong piece of pasteboard toward him. He looked down to see it was the queen of hearts!

"You have seen that before," she said.

Van glanced toward the desk, where the counterpart of the card lay, face upward.

"Yes," he admitted. "Only a few moments ago, when I opened your letter. But I'd still like to know what you have to do with it."

"I am the Queen of Hearts," she said simply. "It is my duty to kill you because you have not done as our letter demanded."

## CHAPTER V

### THE VANISHING MAN

VAN regarded her with serious eyes. It seemed impossible that this girl, this blue-eyed, white-faced girl with her incredible air of ingenuousness could be a killer, that she could be mixed up with the Thirteen Hearts who killed in cold blood.

Still, in his adventurous career, he had seen many strange sights, and he was worldly enough to know that things are not always what they seem. "So," he said slowly, "it is your duty to kill me."

She nodded.

"Then," he said with the same slow deliberation, "it is quite obviously my duty to prevent you from doing it."

It was as if the last word that he spoke was a signal from his brains to his muscles. Even as the syllable left his lips, he flung himself to one side and ducked. His left hand shot up and gripped her slim white wrist even as her finger constricted upon the trigger, even as the savage steel from her weapon ripped through the room and found its internment in the far wall.

HIS right hand had dropped with incredible speed to his coat pocket, and now it appeared again, holding his automatic firmly. His left hand forced her wrist down until the muzzle of her revolver pointed toward the floor. His automatic now aimed unwaveringly at her heart.

"Will you kindly drop your gun?" he asked softly.

She obeyed. Her gloved hand opened and the weapon fell with a dull thud to the expensive rug. Van fixed her with his eyes. If he expected her to break down, to throw herself upon his mercy, he was badly mistaken. She looked at him calmly and it seemed to him that a mocking light lurked in her eyes.

"So," she said evenly, "what now?"

Van shrugged. "The police, probably," he said. "However, I might forego that if you'll do a little talking."

"Talking?" she repeated. "What do you want me to talk about?"

"The Thirteen Hearts."

The mocking light in her eyes grew more pronounced. Her lips curled.

"I don't betray my friends," she said shortly. "And besides, you underestimate the resourcefulness of the Thirteen Hearts. You have claimed your victory too soon."

"I've checkmated you for tonight," said Van. "And that's enough for the time being."



"Ah," she said with a little throaty chuckle. "But have you?"

He frowned. She seemed so confident. Her manner was jeering, as if she yet had a trump card to play, a trump card that would turn the game in her favor once more. Now her ironic eyes traveled past him to the huge double window at the far end of the room.

For a moment he almost turned around, then he smiled at himself for coming so close to falling for an old, old trick. Of course, there was no one there. It was impossible for anyone to be there. The street was seventeen stories below that window, and it was impossible to gain the roof, save through his own apartment. No, she was merely striving to divert his attention so that she might again get the drop on him.

He had thoroughly convinced himself of the soundness of his reasoning, when all his logic was shattered by a cold, hard voice from the rear.

It said: "Put up your hands, Mr. Van Loan, or you're a dead man."

**D**ESPITE his surprise, he obeyed. He had learned early in his career that when such an order is given, it is better to act at once and investigate afterwards. The automatic fell from his fingers, fell to the floor and lay beside the weapon of the girl. Then the voice spoke again.

"You may turn around now."

He turned slowly. There, seated on the sill of the window, was a man. A man clad entirely in black. Black gloves encased his fingers. A tight black suit was on his body and a black mask covered his face. The only splash of color on his drab outfit was a crimson heart on his sleeve, beneath the letter "A".

For a full moment Dick Van Loan

spoke no word. An anxious bewilderment was upon him. How had this man come here? How had he gained that window? Was the Thirteen Hearts privy to miracles that would permit them to defy seventeen stories of space and appear at their victim's windows? He thought for a moment of the mysterious disappearance of the false Phantom in Hollywood.

Now the man in the window was speaking again.

"You have defied us," he said, "and for that you die. You die as others have died before you. You can not escape the Thirteen Hearts."

Van's brain clicked on all cylinders. Despite the peril of the situation, he could vaguely see in it an opportunity to gain some knowledge of the mysterious Thirteen. A sudden illuminating plan came to him.

**H**E feigned abject terror. His calm, confident air suddenly vanished. His hands trembled at his sides. His eyes opened wide. And when he spoke, his voice held a vibrant terror, a pitiful appeal.

"Don't shoot," he said quaveringly. "Give me a chance to explain. Give me a chance."

"You had your chance," said the girl coldly. "And you failed to take it. Now you can take the alternative."

"But," said Van tremulously, "it wasn't my fault. I just got back to town. I only got your letter a few minutes before you came in. Give me a chance. I'll come through. I'll have the cash for you tomorrow."

"Yeah," said the man in the window. "How about that play you just made? How about the gun you just pulled on her? How about taking her own weapon away from her?"

"You can't blame me for fighting for my own life," said Van. "I'll

not only fight for it, but I'll willingly pay a hundred thousand dollars for it. For God's sake, give me a chance! If you don't, I lose my life and you lose the money. If you don't believe me, you can check up on my story downstairs. The superintendent'll tell you that I only returned home tonight."

A SILENCE gripped the room. A silence that seemed to whisper of impending doom. At last the girl spoke.

"Maybe he's right. If he's lying, if he's stalling, we can get him as easily tomorrow as tonight. Besides, as he says, we'd sooner have the money than the corpse."

The black-garbed man considered this for a moment. Then slowly he nodded his head.

"All right," he said finally. "You'll get telephoned instructions as to how the payment shall be made. And don't try any double-crossing. The police can't help you. If you read the papers, you must know that we've already proved that much."

Van nodded. It seemed that fear made it necessary for him to fight for his voice.

"I know that," he said in a husky whisper. "I know that. I won't double-cross you. I swear it."

"Okay," said the man. Then to the girl: "You get out. I'll keep him covered until you're gone."

The girl turned her steel-blue eyes upon Van.

It seemed to him now that there was something of contempt in them as she regarded his apparently abject fear. Then she silently turned on her heel. Her footsteps fell softly on the rug as she disappeared into the foyer. Van heard the metallic click of the outer door as it closed behind her.

He stared at the figure on the



*Their guns pointed grimly at Van*



window sill, and wondered if the man would leave in the same mysterious way as he had come. Then before his very eyes the miracle happened!

Without a word, the man swung his leg over the sill. For a moment it seemed as if he were suspended in space. Then he sprang out into the night, the darkness of his apparel blending with the sable of the evening.

Then he was gone!

## CHAPTER VI

### FIGHTING FOR LIFE

**V**AN gasped in amazement, then raced to the open window. He stared out into the night. Below, the lights of the Metropolis twinkled merrily. Above, clouds obscured the sky. Yet there was no sign of him who wore the emblem of the Ace of Hearts. He had vanished completely into thin air, as mysteriously as he had come.

But despite his amazement, he realized that if he were to seize the opportunity which the moment offered, he must work swiftly. He paid no more attention to the weird disappearance of the figure on the window sill. He turned hastily and raced to his desk.

There he withdrew something from the top drawer and thrust it into his pocket. Running to a closet he jerked an old pair of trousers and a coat from a hanger, and, flinging off his dressing gown, donned them breathlessly. Then, providing himself with some cash, he crossed the room and entered a private elevator. In another minute the small steel car was dropping him swiftly to the street below.

He emerged into the avenue in time to see the girl leave the front door of the apartment house and

enter a taxi. He breathed a prayer of gratitude to the Fates for this kind turn. Then springing to the running board of another cab, he said quickly:

"Follow that cab. Stick tight to its trail and there's twenty dollars in it for you."

The chauffeur needed no more stimulus than that. His foot jammed down on the accelerator. The wheels turned, and the cab raced recklessly through the streets.

Inside the cab Van withdrew the make-up box which he had thrust into his pocket upstairs and proceeded to draw the stick of grease-paint swiftly and deftly across his features.

When the cab had gone ten blocks, the face of Richard Curtis Van Loan would have been unrecognizable to his closest friend. His complexion had lost its freshness and assumed a yellow jaundiced hue. His nose was broader, having been thickened by tiny pieces of wax. His mouth was large and ugly.

In short, once again, his adept skill in the art of make-up had completely disguised his features.

**T**HE brakes whined protestingly as the cab came to a full stop at the curb. As Van peered through the front window of the cab he saw the girl alight from the car before him, pay the driver and disappear into the doorway of an old brown-stone house at the side of the street.

He sprang from his own car, and flung the driver the promised twenty. As the cab rolled away up the street, he scrutinized the brown-stone house with narrowed eyes, as his alert brain mapped out a plan of campaign.

Entrance through the front door was impossible. Undoubtedly, the gang had a man on guard there. He glanced down to the basement. Two

steps below the street level an iron-grilled door led into a darkened corridor. He decided to try that doorway.

He descended into the concrete court. From his pocket he produced a bunch of skeleton keys. He fitted one to the lock and without much difficulty succeeded in turning it. The grilled door swung open.

For a moment he stood upon the threshold, peering into the darkness. He could see nothing. He could hear nothing. Yet he knew well enough that in that gloom ahead a savage, merciless death lurked, ready to pounce with cruel lethal claws upon an intruder.

His right hand had closed about the butt of the automatic in his pocket as he entered the corridor and silently closed the iron door behind him.

**S**ILENTLY, like a tiger on the trail of prey, he crept along the concrete passageway. Apparently the gang did not use the basement. He knew he must search for the stairway that led to the upper part of the house.

Then, of a sudden, he stopped dead. The automatic came from his pocket and was held firmly in his hand, pointing straight ahead. For there, twinkling through the chink of a half-opened door, there shone a line of brassy light.

Slowly he advanced. On the threshold of the room he peered through the crack of the door. The room itself was empty. Bare of furnishings and with no sign at all of any humanity. He was about to enter, when a voice trickled into his ear, and something hard and metallic rammed itself into the small of his back.

The voice said: "Put 'em up. Drop that gat and turn around so I can get a look at you."

Van did all three things simultaneously. Then he found himself gazing into the black eyes of a black-clad figure who was wearing a mask. A .38 stared at him like an unwinking Cyclops.

**T**HE voice spoke again, and there was a contemptuous mocking triumph in it.

"So you've got this far, eh? Whoever the hell you are. Well, before you die, you can talk. Who are you? And how did you get here?"

For a full moment Van stared at his captor without speaking. The man wore the crimson heart insignia upon his sleeve. The emblem was surmounted by the numeral ten. This then was the Ten of Hearts, who for some reason had been wandering about silently in a dark basement.

"Well, come on. Start talking. Don't stall."

The Ten of Hearts moved a step nearer. His weapon prodded Van's stomach.

And now Dick Van Loan realized that conversation was useless. To pretend that he had entered this locked cellar by mistake would never get by. Even if the gang had not the slightest idea who he was they most certainly would not let him live. Already he had had evidence enough of their ruthlessness.

No. He must gamble. Somehow he must overpower this man. Somehow without the firing of a shot. But to do that he must first have the muzzle of the weapon which threatened him removed from its vulnerable target.

"Wait," he said at last. "I'll talk. But not to you. I'll only talk to the big guy. I'll talk to the Ace of Hearts, but no one else."

Beneath the black silk mask of his captor a surprised glint showed.



For a second he hesitated. Then he said:

"Okay. Come with me. Turn around. Go through that room toward the stairs."

VAN turned and entered the empty room. At the far end of it a narrow flight of stairs ran to the upper part of the house. With hands upraised, he crossed the room.

The muzzle of the other's gun no longer pressed his back. From the sound of the footsteps he estimated that his captor was at least two feet behind him. He tensed his muscles and steeled his nerves, realizing that his desperate effort for escape must come before he gained the top of that stairway.

Suddenly he turned. Turned with the agility of a beast of prey. Turned with such swiftness, such adroitness that the trigger finger of the man behind him was momentarily stayed. And that moment was enough for him, whom they called the Phantom.

As he pivoted on his heels, he ducked and threw his body to the right, banging his torso against the wall at the side of the stairway. His right hand shot out and gripped the wrist of the hand that held the gun.

His left clenched itself into a fist and swung in a short, sharp arc through the air.

It landed with a dull, sickening thud against the side of the other's jaw. The man spoke no word, uttered no cry, as his knees buckled, and he tottered on his feet. Van's right arm prevented him from falling.

The detective took the gun from his nerveless fingers, then dragged him down the staircase to the bare room at the bottom of the flight. He laid the prostrate figure on the floor, then with swift, dexterous

movements, proceeded to strip the black garment from his body, to take the black silk mask from his face.

It was the work of but a moment to attire himself in the clothes and mask which he had purloined from the other. Now he dragged the unconscious figure from the room. An old piece of clothesline he found in a corner served adequately as bonds to truss him up. Van Loan left him lying in the darkness of the corridor.

Then, arrayed in his garb, with the black mask obscuring his features, with the captured .38 in his pocket, he boldly mounted the stairs to the upper part of the house. And as he went, he was aware of a surge of triumph in his breast. For now that Fate had been this kind to him, it would appear that the menace of the Thirteen Hearts was almost at an end.

As a matter of fact, as Van gained the upper floor, he made the mental note that if things continued to break for him as they had in the past two hours, this would be the shortest adventure in his case book, the most swiftly and easily solved crime that had come into his hands.

However, he was destined to reverse that opinion before the night was many minutes older.

## CHAPTER VII

### GRIM GATHERING

WHEN the Ten of Hearts entered the assembly room of the gang, the others were already gathered there. At the head of the table Van saw the man who had disappeared so mysteriously from his apartment window less than an hour ago. Seated around the table in order, from the Deuce to the King, were the others.

Silently, though with a beating heart, Van took his place at the table, sitting down at the place where the pasteboard before him showed the upturned face of the card whose counterpart was stamped on the sleeve of his own black garment.

No sooner had he seated himself than the grim, dark figure at the end of the table rose and addressed his men.

"Thus far," he said in a deep, booming voice, "we have been remarkably successful. Of the thirteen whom we communicated with, nine have paid in full. Three refused outright, and those three are dead. The other one we have given forty-eight hours of grace, inasmuch as he did not receive our letter until a short while ago."

HE paused for a moment, then continued:

"We have already netted nine hundred thousand dollars, and tomorrow when the victim selected by the Queen of Hearts pays his assessment, we shall have an even million. And that is just the beginning. In a short time we shall draw again. We shall select thirteen more names. This time, now that the world has learned that we mean business, that we strike swiftly and surely, we shall undoubtedly realize a larger percentage of collections. In short, we may safely expect money exceeding one million dollars on each occasion that we draw those thirteen names from the drum."

There was silence in the room, silence broken only by the breathing of its occupants, as they greedily contemplated the fortune that was about to be delivered into their hands.

Van glanced about him with eyes that were narrowed beneath his mask. It was impossible to rec-

ognize any distinguishing features of his fellows, so completely covered up were they in their masks and black raiment.

But already a plan was fomenting in his mind. Here he had the whole gang dead to rights. The only thing that remained was to contrive somehow to get a message to the police. Then of a sudden the Ace of Hearts spoke again, and the purport of his words riveted Van's whole attention.

"And now," came that deep booming voice, "we come to the matter of the Phantom."

Every eye at that table was on the speaker at that moment. The dread name of the Phantom attracted their attention as a magnet.

"There were those of you," went on the speaker, "who protested at my plan for killing Rains. There were those of you who claimed that my scheme of disguising myself as the Phantom and shooting him down was madness. That it could only result in the Phantom taking our trail. And you were afraid because he whom they call the Phantom has never yet failed."

THE speaker's eyes momentarily met Van's. The latter felt his pulse pick up a beat, yet he gave no sign that the leader's words meant infinitely more to him than to any one else in that room.

"But this is the time he shall fail! He can not outwit us. Thus far we have had no word of him, but if we do, I promise you we shall deal with him as we have dealt with the rest of our enemies. So much for that. Now we shall have the reports of the members. We shall start with the Deuce of Hearts."

At the end of the table a man whose sleeve bore the numeral two stamped above a crimson heart rose. He walked to the head of the table and handed the speaker a sheet of

foolscap. The Ace of Hearts took it, read it slowly, then waved the man back to his seat.

"The Three of Hearts," he announced.

A second man rose and this time the same procedure was repeated.

As this was going on, Van's brain was clicking on all its cylinders. When his turn came, he would be caught with no paper to turn in. And inasmuch as he had not the slightest idea as to what his paper was supposed to contain, it was impossible for him hastily to scrawl some false report and hand it to the Ace of Hearts.

But even yet he might turn this moment to his advantage; this might be the break that would provide him with the opportunity to summon aid to apprehend the whole gang.

Sonorously the leader of the fiendish mob called out the numbers of his men. Then at last Van's turn came.

**T**HE man at the head of the table turned his blazing fanatical eyes upon Van.

"The Ten of Hearts," he called.

Van stood up. His eyes met those of the arch criminal, yet he made no move to leave his place at the table.

"Well," said the Ace. "And your report, Ten, where is it?"

With the eyes of the dozen people in the room riveted upon him, Van spoke in a clear, resonant tone. And his voice, when it issued from his throat, was the voice of the man tied up in the cellar.

"I have not put my report on paper," he said quietly.

"No? And why not?"

"It was far too important. I dared not run the risk of writing it down. It is for your ears alone."

The silence in the room became acute. The eyes that stared at him

became filled with wonder. The Ace of Hearts spoke harshly:

"Why do you say this? Do we not trust each other? Do you suspect treachery here?"

"It is not that," said Van. "It is only that the news I have for you concerns one who is more dangerous than anyone else who may threaten us. He is capable of causing treachery anywhere. He is capable of almost anything."

The man at the head of the table snorted contemptuously.

"And who," he said with a mocking air, "who is this perilous wonder of whom you speak?"

"I speak," said Van gravely, "of the Phantom."

**A**N audible gasp ran through the chamber. Van stood there, tense and still. This was the thing on which he had gambled. The criminal's natural fear of the name he had mentioned.

He hastened to follow up his momentary advantage.

"Yes," he said quickly, "it is news of the Phantom I bring. I dared not commit it to paper in case it might be stolen from me. He is a dangerous man, a relentless enemy. What I have learned is for your ears alone."

Now the mocking light had gone from the eyes of the leader of the Thirteen Hearts. His eyes shone gravely through his mask. His tone was chastened as he answered:

"Very well," he said. "Come with me to the anteroom and tell me what you know of the Phantom. In the meantime, the others of you will remain here until we return. Come, Ten."

Van left his chair and walked to the head of the table, where he was joined by the other. Then he followed the leader into a small room off the larger chamber. The Ace of





*Dangling the hemp in his talons, Foo Chang advanced with fiendish hate stamped on his cruel features.*

Hearts closed the door and turned the key in the lock. Then with anxious eyes he turned to face Van.

"Now, what is it," he said, his tone betraying the apprehension in his heart. "What is it you know? Is the Phantom on our trail?"

Van nodded.

"He is. And he is closer than you imagine at this very moment."

The blackmailer licked his lips nervously.

"Well, speak up, man," he said, with impatience. "What do you know? Where is the Phantom?"

Van's right hand descended to his pocket. The .38 appeared suddenly in his hand. His voice was grim and cold as he spoke.

"He is here," he said abruptly.

"Here to take you and your gang to justice. *Put up your hands!*"

The lower half of the man's face was suddenly ashen. His eyes, which glittered through the holes in his mask, were evolved to startled, abject agates. Slowly he raised his hands, and Dick Van Loan noticed that those hands were shaking as he lifted them.

"What does this mean, Ten?" he demanded in a shaken voice. "Have you turned traitor?"

Van grinned at him.

"Ten is lying in the basement," he told him, "trussed up like a young turkey. I took his place to have the honor of attending your meeting."

The other gasped audibly, then

his eye lit up with sudden hope. Van caught the glint there, and reading what was in his mind, hastened to disillusion him.

"You're thinking that I can't get out of here because I'm outnumbered," he said. "You forget that you told your precious gang of murderers to wait until you returned. They'll stay there all right. At least long enough until you and I leave the house and dig ourselves up enough policemen to conduct a raid on your headquarters."

For a moment it seemed as if his words had shattered the other's desperate hope, but then at the mention of the word *policemen*, his eyes had lit up again. Van paid scant attention to this phenomenon, however. There was speedy and perilous work to be done, and the successful capture of the gang depended on the despatch with which it was accomplished.

VAN thrust his revolver into the other's ribs.

"Come on," he said. "Lead the way out to the street; and make sure you choose a route upon which we shall meet none of your gang. The slightest false move on your part spells a death as merciless as that which you have delivered to your own victims."

With a futile gesture of despair, the master-mind of the thirteen blackmailers turned around and walked slowly toward a door at the opposite end of the room to which they had entered. Van, his .38 drawing a dead bead on the center of the other's back, followed less than two paces behind.

The black-clad man led the way into a dimly-lit corridor. The pair of them walked slowly down its bare length. Some few paces ahead of them a door appeared. Then suddenly the man in front stumbled.

He flung up a hand to steady himself. That hand touched the wall.

Then there reverberated through the house the alarming clanging of a bell. Van took a swift step forward. On the wall near the point where the captive's hand had struck was an electric bell. It was this he had touched with his fingers, giving the warning, the alarm to the others.

In an instant the house which had been so silent, so quiet, became a bedlam of maniacal action. Footsteps sounded on the creaking floors. Men shouted orders. Van, realizing that he had been tricked by his prisoner, jerked him back swiftly as the Ace of Hearts essayed to take advantage of the confusion and run through the door ahead.

"No you don't," said Van grimly. "You'll stay right here in front of me. Your comrades aren't so liable to shoot when they see I'm using you for a shield. All right, keep marching now."

With his left hand firmly gripping the other's collar and his right thrusting the .38 into the middle of his back, Van forced his prisoner forward. As they passed through the door he saw a number of the gang in the foyer outside.

The metal of guns flashed in their hands as he advanced.

"Don't shoot," Van warned them. "At the first overt act, your leader dies. My gun is touching his body now. Let us pass and he shall remain unharmed. Attack, and he dies."

Boldly he marched forward, still keeping his living shield in front. For a moment the men before him hesitated. A low murmur swept over them as they considered this situation.

Then, as they still pondered the answer to this dilemma, Fate and an alert member of the gang took a hand.

A sudden staccato report ripped through the air. Van heard the familiar whine of a bullet as a jagged piece of steel whizzed over his head and buried itself in the concrete of the wall.

Without releasing his grip on his victim's collar, the Phantom half turned his body. His finger tightened on the trigger of his weapon. A second report echoed through the corridor. A screech of pain attested to the accuracy of his aim, and the dark figure in the rear crumpled and fell to the floor.

But although the foeman's shot had not taken effect, the damage was done. That single shot had detonated the indecisive spark which was flickering in the breasts of the men in the foyer. And now that the signal for battle had been given, they joined the fray.

**H**ALF a dozen revolvers were suddenly uplifted. Van jerked his captive backward and slammed the wooden door. Lead and steel hurled themselves at the wooden barrier, ripping holes in the panel. Van, never releasing his hold on the man he had taken prisoner, beat a hasty retreat to the rear.

Once the Ace of Hearts tried to trip him. Van recovered his balance and jammed him roughly in the ribs with the muzzle of his .38.

"Don't try that again," he warned, "or else—"

He did not complete the sentence, but the threat in his tone was enough. The Ace ran docilely at his side.

They gained the foot of the stairs just as the raging mob from the foyer battered down the door and charged in murderous pursuit.

Swiftly Van dragged the other down the steps to the basement, intending to leave the house through

the same iron grilled door through which he had entered it.

The pair of them gained the basement just as Van heard the tramp of footsteps upon the head of the stairs.

A voice yelled: "There they are!"

A reverberating barrage of revolver shots came down the stairway. The Ace ducked low and an expression of alarm escaped his lips. Van turned, and, constricting his finger on the trigger of his own weapon, held it there hard until a dull click told him that the weapon was empty.

Then, taking an even firmer grip upon the collar of his prisoner, he literally dragged him through the basement toward the door. Into the street he emerged in time to slam the iron gate shut behind him in the faces of the onrushing mob.

Fortunately there was a lock on the outside. He fastened it and reflected gratefully that this piece of fortune should hold them there until he could find a policeman. Curses and shots followed him as he raced up the basement steps to the street level, never once relinquishing his grip upon the leader of the Thirteen Hearts.

At the far corner, idling beneath a street lamp, he caught sight of a policeman. He shouted loudly, then said in a quieter tone to his captive:

"Come on, you. This is your finish."

**T**O his surprise the Ace did not demur. Instead, he turned toward the startled officer with alacrity. Before Van could divine his intention, he jerked the black mask from his face and raised his voice in an alarmed cry.

"Police! Police!" he shouted.

For a moment Van thought the man had gone mad. Why on earth



he should assist the Phantom in his own apprehension was beyond the detective. But the Ace's next words made it only too clear to him. The blackmailer now waved frantically to the policeman who was running toward them.

"Help," he yelled. "Quick, officer. I've got the Phantom! He's wanted for murder. Hurry or he'll get away!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CHASE

**I**N AN instant Van saw through the other's strategy. True, he had momentarily forgotten that the world believed that he, the Phantom, was responsible for the murder of Rains; that the police of the entire country would be looking for the masked man whom they once considered their ally.

But even then things could have been straightened out had it not been for the sudden panicky alarm of the officer.

As soon as he heard the name of the Phantom, his hand flashed to his holster and withdrew his heavy service .45. Perhaps his immediate reaction was engendered by the fact that the Phantom had proved himself a redoubtable enemy.

Perhaps, now that he believed the Phantom had betrayed his allies and was now aligning himself against the police, he would prove as deadly as he had been when on the side of law and order.

In any event it seemed clear that the officer was about to take no chances. He spoke no word. He uttered no challenge. Yet, suddenly, from the muzzle of his gun two jagged zigzags of flame ripped into the darkness of the night.

For a single instant, and for one of the few times in his entire adventurous career, Dick Van Loan

was absolutely nonplussed. Here he stood, within an ace of capturing a gang of blackmailers who menaced the whole nation; and the very person who should have been aiding him was charging down with a drawn revolver shooting madly, and shooting to kill.

In vain he shouted in alarm to the policeman, then he raised his hands in a token of surrender. But before the onrushing patrolman could notice the gesture, the unmasked blackmailer had yelled: "Watch him. It's a trick. He's armed. He's got a bead on you now!"

This last speech was all that the thoroughly unnerved policeman needed. Now he would not have holstered that gun for all the money in the world. Not he. He knew the Phantom's reputation for squirming out of tight spots.

Van Loan hesitated no longer. To remain where he was was the act of a madman. Besides, even if he paused to reload he could not shoot down the policeman. He could not kill a man for an honest error, even if it had been made by a none too bright mind.

The one thing that he could do was to beat a hasty retreat. Either that or stand his ground and fall a victim to one of the policeman's bullets. Further, he realized that the gang was powerful. If he did fall into the clutches of the law, it might be difficult to prove at this time that it was not really he who had slain Rains. And during that time it was inevitable that the police would discover his identity.

**H**E heaved a sigh, then galvanized to action just as the policeman came so close that even excitement could not ruin his aim.

With a sudden thrust he shoved the blackmailer directly into the

path of the charging cop. For an instant the two bodies came into rough contact. There was a dull thud as they fell to the pavement together.

And at precisely that moment of impact, Van Loan turned on his heels and fled like a maniac down the street. Before he reached the corner, he heard two more staccato reports following him up the street.

A metallic clanging followed as the steel-jacketed rounds struck the pavement and ricocheted crazily against the wall of a building. Then the piercing shriek of a police whistle shattered the stillness of the night. The reverberations of a nightstick pounding on the concrete echoed and re-echoed in his ears.

HE turned the corner and raced uptown. Two blocks away he dared to twist his head around hurriedly. The sight he saw gave him no reassurance. Half a dozen blue-coats had rallied to their comrade's aid by now.

They were strung out behind him like cross country runners, and as they passed beneath the brassy light of a street lamp he could see the reflected light in the metal of the weapons they held in their hands.

And now before him he again heard the shriek of a whistle. Up ahead, two more minions of the law, having heard the signal for help, were cutting him off from the front. A voice thick with Erin's brogue rammed itself into his ears.

"Stop! Or I'll shoot!"

Van did not stop. But by the same token, neither did he continue. He turned suddenly and disappeared into the entrance of a dilapidated tenement house which fronted the street. He bounded up the stairs like a rubber ball.

Before he gained the roof he heard the heavy pounding of the

policeman's boots upon the stairs. He emerged onto the roof, and breathed hard for a moment. Then he raced to the edge, seeking some manner of escape. The top of the next house was a sheer drop of some twenty feet, and between it and the abode on which he stood was six feet of space.

Yet he did not hesitate.

Tensing his muscles, he sprang into the air. For what seemed an eternal moment he hurtled through space, then with tremendous impact his feet struck the roof of the adjoining building.

No sooner had he landed than he heard shouts behind him. Shouts which in an instant were punctuated with revolver shots. The gravel on the roof top spurted up as bullets nosed their way into it. Van raced across the roof and disappeared into the kiosk leading to the stairs.

He realized, as he fled down the steps, that this was one of the most difficult dilemmas he had ever been in. Now he was being pursued by enemies whom he could not fight. He could not shoot down duly accredited servants of the law who were merely discharging their duty. No, if he was to escape, he must rely solely on his wits and the agility of his legs rather than the steel death which lurked in the chambers of his gun.

Then swiftly he had an idea.

WITH the officers some twenty feet above him, and with his slightly better speed, he would reach the street, perhaps, a full minute before they did. Well, it would be fast work, but perhaps that minute was margin enough for what he intended to do.

With a swift, savage gesture he whipped off the coat and trousers that he had donned over his other clothes before he had left his apart-

ment. Then, even as he continued his mad rush down the stairs, he took a small box from his pocket containing a special preparation which, when he applied it, removed the makeup at once from his face.

He arrived at the ground floor, and his hastily wiped-over features were now those of Richard Curtis Van Loan.

He breathed deeply as he gained the street, then staggered slightly along the pavement. He had just passed the doorway of the tenement where he had taken sanctuary when the policemen poured into the street.

ONE of them hailed him harshly. "Hey, there, you!"

Van Loan turned around, a foolish, fatuous grin upon his face. He looked for all the world like a bewildered young drunk who is wandering home by some devious and none too certain route.

"H'lo," he greeted them. "Wash this?" The finest out for an airing?"

One of the policemen came closer and scrutinized him sharply, then recognized him. The policeman now spoke with courtesy.

"Hello, Mr. Van Loan," he said. "Did you see anyone come out of that house next door?"

Van regarded him gravely for a moment, as if having some difficulty in compelling his befuddled mind to comprehend the question. Then he shook his head.

"Not a soul," he said emphatically. "By the way, officer, where am I? Can you tell me how to get home from here?"

The policeman explained tersely how Van could reach his apartment, then he turned back to his fellow officers.

"Come on," he said. "He must still be inside."

With a rush they left the street

and charged into the tenement next door. Van reeled along the street until he found a taxicab. Once inside, his drunken air left him and a grim, worried look came over his face.

For now he realized what he was up against. The Thirteen Hearts were foemen worthy of his metal. They fought with their minds rather than with clubs; and Dick Van Loan realized that tonight's work, with the police hot on his trail, had come closer to ending the colorful career of the Phantom than any other single adventure he had ever had.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PRISONER

IT WAS almost daylight when he reached the apartment of Frank Havens. Despite the hour, he had no qualms about awakening the publisher.

The stunt that the Thirteen Hearts had perpetrated in having their own man disguised as the Phantom kill Rains was having dire consequences. There was a great deal about that to be explained, too.

If the Phantom had been admitted to Rains' home without question, it stood to reason that he had been expected. Probably a message had been sent to Havens for him, inasmuch as it was generally known that only through the publisher could the Phantom be reached.

And if that were true, the Phantom had been betrayed. Havens had never received that message. Somehow, it had fallen into the hands of the Thirteen.

Further—and now a cold apprehension gripped his heart—was it mere coincidence that Richard Van Loan had been threatened by the gang? Or had they the slightest idea that Richard Van Loan was the



Phantom? Besides, how did they select their victims? Was it merely haphazard or was there some definite plan that they followed?

Having come in contact with the mind that ruled the destinies of the relentless gang, Van was inclined to believe the latter. However, no matter what happened tomorrow, he realized that he must see Havens now.

Perhaps the publisher could explain how the message to the Phantom had been sidetracked. Perhaps through the medium of his papers and political influence, he could call the bloodhounds of the law off the Phantom's trail until the detective had had an opportunity to prove himself innocent of the crime which was marked up against him.

AS his taxi drew up at Havens' mansion, he was rather surprised to see a light burning in the library window. Then as he paid the driver he felt rather reassured.

Good old loyal Havens! Knowing full well that something was in the wind, he was sitting up, anticipating this call from his friend, the Phantom.

With a smile on his lips, Van mounted the steps to the house and rang the bell.

Maynard, the butler, opened the door and regarded him peculiarly. Van grinned at him as he entered the hall.

"Hello, Maynard," he said. "I see the boss is up."

Maynard's expression grew odder by the moment. He stammered for a moment, then the years of training asserted themselves.

"Mr. Havens is not in, sir," he said.

It was Van's turn to register surprise.

"Not in?" he repeated. "Why are the lights on, then? Who's up?"

"Miss Muriel, sir," said the butler.

Van tossed his hat on the hall tree, and briskly entered the library. He stopped dead on the threshold at the sight that met his amazed eyes.

A slim brunette girl sat on a luxurious divan with her head buried in her hands. Her body shook with sobs from time to time. Van regarded her with a puzzled frown on his brow.

This was Muriel Havens, the girl who, at times, Van realized, he cared for more than anyone else in the world—the girl whom he would have asked to marry him, had not his activities in the Phantom's rôle precluded a domestic life.

And now as he looked at her broken with grief, a strange and alien apprehension tugged at his heart. Swiftly he crossed the room and knelt at her side.

"Muriel! Muriel! What's wrong? What's the matter?"

She lifted a tear-stained face to his.

"Oh, Van," she said, "I'm so glad you're here. It's Dad. They've arrested him."

"Arrested him?"

THE vague apprehension in Van's heart crystallized into something definite.

The girl nodded sadly.

"Yes. About an hour ago, they took him away. They're holding him as a material witness. I phoned the district attorney. But he only says he's sorry; that the law doesn't permit him to grant bail to a material witness in a murder case. Although he hinted he might do it somehow if Dad would only talk. Only, of course, he won't do that."

Van's brow was creased in a frown.

"What murder case?" he asked.

"And why should your father refuse to talk if he can bring a killer to justice?"

"It's the Phantom," explained Muriel weakly. "You must have read about it in the papers, Van. The Phantom killed a man in Hollywood. The police are looking for him. They know that Dad's the only living person who knows the Phantom's true identity, so they're holding him until he reveals who the Phantom is, and he'll never do that."

A COLD icy hand stretched forth from nowhere and laid its frigid fingers on Van's heart. This was a development that he had not anticipated. So they had taken Havens to force him to identify the Phantom.

This was a pretty mess now. Indeed, the Thirteen had builded far better than they knew when their leader had evolved his plan of impersonating the Phantom.

His face was a mask, however, as he looked at the girl. No sign of the tumult within him showed in his bland, impassive countenance. His apparent indifference seemed to annoy her.

"Oh, don't just stand there and look at me," she said irritably. "Do something. Go and see Dad. See if he can suggest anything."

Van nodded and stood up. This last suggestion was as good as any other idea under the circumstances. Perhaps he could snatch a moment alone with Havens in his cell. Perhaps he could learn something which would enable him to evolve a plan to set the publisher free.

"All right," he said reassuringly. "I'll go and see him at once. In the meantime, cheer up. We'll get him out, somehow. I'll let you know the minute anything happens."

He turned on his heel and strode

from the room, a worried frown creasing his brow.

Another taxicab took him to police headquarters.

As the vehicle sped through the deserted streets of the metropolis, his brain worked furiously, essaying to concoct some scheme which would free the publisher. Too well he knew police methods in important murder cases.

Though he by no means doubted Havens' loyalty to himself, he was nevertheless worried. He knew the relentless questioning that the publisher would go through; the lack of sleep, the worry as the police brought all their wits to bear to force him to talk.

At police headquarters a sleepy-eyed desk sergeant regarded him suspiciously.

"Why do you want to see Havens?" he demanded. "Who are you?"

"I'm his lawyer," he answered.

The sergeant grunted, and then scrawled something on a piece of paper; then he handed Van over to a guard who conducted him down the cell block, opened a door, then locked him in with his client.

HAVENS, white of face and haggard, peered through the darkness of the cell. Relief spread itself over his features as he recognized his visitor.

"Van," he said gratefully, as he wrung his hands. "Thank God you've come. Now what's it all about?"

Van shrugged.

"I don't understand all of it," he said. "Save that it's a blackmail scheme. What I can't quite understand is how they dared to arrest such an influential person as you."

Havens smiled mirthlessly.

"Van," he said, "you can't imagine what a panic they're in. They

seem to have forgotten all your good work of the past, or perhaps they remember it too well, and they contemplate terrible things now that they're convinced that the Phantom has gone over to the underworld.

"They insist I tell them who the Phantom is. The district attorney

sage from Hollywood asking for me on the Rains' case?"

A grim smile came over the publisher's face.

"That seems to be the whole crux of the matter," he said. "I claim I didn't. But the telephone people and the police claim I did. It seems



*For a single instant, silhouetted against the moon outside, there was a glimpse of the killer.*

was polite but firm. Offered an immediate release if I told them. But said he had to hold me without bail as a material witness until I talked. I didn't improve my case by telling him to go to hell."

Van nodded slowly.

"I see," he said quietly. Then he added: "Did you get a phone mes-

they traced the call. It was person to person and they claim that I answered the phone. They didn't give me much chance to do any investigating. They seem to prefer to believe that you and I are mixed up in this affair. It's ridiculous, but there you are."

Van nodded his head slowly. In

the back of his head there persisted the picture of Muriel at home weeping her eyes out while her father was held in this cell.

"Was there anyone else that could have taken that call?"

Havens shook his head slowly.

"I don't know who," he said at last. "Of course, Winters, my confidential secretary, is usually in my office. But I've trusted him for four years. Besides, what possible motive could he have? He certainly couldn't have known that Rains was going to call."

Van remained silent for a moment. Then:

"Have they annoyed you much?" he asked.

**H**AVENS' smile grew reminiscent and wan.

"Plenty," he said. "They've been at me ever since they brought me in. I've protested again and again that you're innocent and that my revealing your identity will ruin your career, but it appears that when the police get an idea they stick to it."

Again Van nodded, and again the wistful picture of a heart-broken girl came to his mind. He glanced at the other man swiftly.

"Well," he said, "time enough to fight our enemies later. In the meantime you must get out of here."

Havens shrugged.

"They won't let me out."

Van's face grew grim.

"They're not going to have anything to say about it," he remarked.

"Now take off your clothes."

Havens stared at him.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm staying here," said Van. "It's you that's going out. You're going out as Richard Van Loan. I'm staying here as Havens. It'll be easier for me to get out than for you."

Havens' eyes went wide apart, his shoulders shrugged in dubious gesture.

"Er—why, no that's impossible," the publisher stammered. "You mean that I am to change clothes with you and go out as Richard Curtis Van Loan?"

Van nodded, and smiled wanly.

"But even then," Havens protested, "it wouldn't be possible. I don't look like you. The ruse would be discovered and both of us would be held here in jail interminably." Havens shook his head emphatically, pounded his clenched fist into the open palm of his other hand. "No, that won't work."

Van smiled again, confidently. He took the make-up box from his coat pocket.

"Go on, strip off," he ordered. "I'll take a chance on that."

He eyed the publisher keenly, the smile faded from his countenance and in its place came a look of stern command.

As if hypnotized by the penetrating glare and moving with the motions of an automaton, Havens began to strip off his clothes. Van had his off in the twinkling of an eye.

While the publisher was donning Van's raiment, the other went to work with his make-up box.

**S**WIFTLY Van applied the stick of grease paint to Haven's countenance, achieving a miracle which made the older man's face suddenly become ten years younger. Then, after he had completed the job on Havens, he hastily donned the publisher's clothes and proceeded to make his own features look like those of the other.

It occurred to him as he put the finishing touches on the task that there was something most important that he must tell the publisher.



"Listen, Frank," he said. "You may call Muriel and tell her that you're safe but pledge her to secrecy. As for the rest, you must stay indoors as much as possible, and at all times remember that you're Dick Van Loan. Go to my apartment. Make your home there. But look out for—"

A heavy footstep on the flagging outside interrupted him. The guard thrust his face up against the bars of the cell.

"Sorry, sir," he said. "But the sergeant says you'll have to leave now."

Before Van could protest he had opened the door, and gently seizing the bogus Van Loan by the arm took him from the cell and clanged the metal gate shut once more, leaving the Phantom, the man who had put countless criminals behind the bars, in precisely that dilemma himself.

## CHAPTER X

### A DASH FOR FREEDOM

**F**OR a long time Van Loan sat still and silent. True, he had intended to escape from this jail all the time, but now as he realized how important was the thing he had been about to say to Havens when the guard had interrupted, he knew that he must effect that escape immediately.

For tonight was the night that the Thirteen had threatened to kill Richard Curtis Van Loan, if he refused to accede to their telephoned demands for money. Well, in the first place, not being at home, he would never receive their message. That in itself would probably be translated as some sort of a trick by the leader.

And now that Havens had taken his place, it would be the publisher whose life was in danger.

The day was long and monotonous. Hours of incarceration passed by on leaden wings.

Yet he dared make no move until the friendly cover of night had descended on the city.

**A**T last, there tolled into his waiting ears the distant chimes of a tower clock striking ten. He braced himself for a mighty effort. Of course, he was still armed, being in possession of the weapon he had carried when he had entered the cell. Posing as Havens' lawyer, he had not been searched.

Yet he realized that perhaps his weapon was not destined to do him much good. That all depended on the bluff that he could work. For he knew he would not shoot down one of the officers. If he could bluff them into believing that he would, so much the better. But suppose someone called that bluff?

He walked to the door of the cell and listened tensely. Save for a few scattered snores of early retirers there was no sound.

In a low voice he called the guard. The man approached his cell, his heavy bunch of keys jangling at his belt.

"Well," he growled, "what is it?"

"Water," said Van. "Will you get me a drink?"

The guard went off mumbling to himself and a moment later returned bearing a tin mug filled with water. He approached the bars of the door, and thrust it through the opening to Van.

But Van never took it.

Instead his hand shot out and gripped the guard with a bulldog's clutch at the jugular. His other hand flashed downward to his hip pocket and produced an automatic, whose muzzle pressed up against the startled officer's uniform at the heart.

"Don't move," said Van in a low whisper. "Don't make a sound. In fact, don't do anything except fit the right key to this lock and open the door."

The guard's face was suddenly ashy white. His eyes were bulging agates of surprise. A stunned paralysis was upon him—a paralysis which was broken as the automatic prodded angrily into his body.

WITH a shaking hand he selected a key and fitted it into the heavy lock upon the door. With a slight click it turned. Van hastily emerged from the cell.

"Now," he said, "walk in front of me to the door of the tier. Once there, you will unlock it. Understand?"

Apparently the man understood. He marched silently and sullenly along the grim corridor to the steel exit at the end of the passageway. Then he repeated his process with the key.

Suddenly, even as the door was swinging open, the man turned desperately. He threw his body to one side to miss the flaming bullet that threatened him from Van's weapon and wielded the bunch of keys about his head with all his strength. Then he brought them down like a knob-kierrie.

Van saw them coming. Had he so desired he could have simply pressed the trigger of his automatic and ended the reckless fellow's career then and there.

Instead, he sidestepped. He was swift enough to escape the impact of the metal on his head, but not swift enough to miss it entirely. The jangling bunch of keys swept through the air and struck him full force upon his shoulder.

He staggered back under the impact. And now the guard unleashed a bellow for help.

Van realized that this was one of those frequent occasions when discretion must prove the better part of valor. He did not wait to parley or to view the situation further. He turned and flew like a maniac through the grim stone corridors of the jail.

Now behind him he heard excited shouting as the guard's comrades rushed to his aid, rushed to overpower the prisoner who had dared escape. Van realized full well that the guard would lose no time in informing the others that the escaped man possessed a gun; and he knew that the policemen would come shooting to kill.

Before him a flight of iron steps loomed up. He bounded up them in three leaps to find himself in the visitors' room. Fortunately it was empty.

The door leading to the room from the cell block was unlocked and ajar. Van slammed it shut behind him and shot the heavy iron bolts. Then he made his way across the darkened room to the other exit which led to the outer gate of the jail.

Already he heard excited shouts behind him as the guards rallied to prevent the escape. On the outside of the door of the visitors' room he heard a bolt shot. A peep-hole opened in the door, and a voice demanded: "What's going on in there?"

THE sentence ended upon a minor note as the speaker found himself gazing into the business end of a revolver.

"Open that door," said Van tersely. "Swiftly and silently or else—"

The guard's face paled. He did not wait to hear what dire thing would happen if he refused. The key rasped in the lock. The door opened. A flying armed man raced

through the door, down the iron stairs. Behind him now came the pack in full cry.

Van realized full well that the most hazardous part of his undertaking still lay before him. At the main gate there were at least two men, two men selected for their toughness, their ability to cope with just such an emergency as this.

Still he did not hesitate as he charged down on the last lap of his mad dash for freedom.

**G**UN held firmly in his hand he raced toward the huge towering steel portals that opened on the street.

He caught the glint of a metal badge on the breast of one of the gatekeepers.

The guard peered through the darkness.

"Who's that?" he demanded.

Van charged out of the shadows, his revolver a sinister threat held in his hand.

"Open that gate!" he cried.

His answer was a single staccato report. A bullet whined over his head. Now he dared not hesitate. He flung all caution to the four winds. His weapon was lifted above his head. Ere the man could fire another shot its barrel swung through the air and struck the guard on the temple. With a groan the man collapsed.

Van bent over him and snatched up the heavy bunch of keys that were dangling at his belt. As he straightened up he heard the clatter of footsteps on the flagstones of the yard as the fallen man's partner came rushing up to the rescue.

Two more bullets sang a savage threnody over his head as he inserted the big key into the lock. From somewhere a siren shrieked its warning of an escaping prisoner. From the staircase behind came the

tramp of many feet, the shouts of many men.

Van swung the heavy gate open. As the light of a street lamp filtered in through the oblong of space, a terrific barrage of revolver fire spat viciously through the night behind him.

Still he did not return the fire. Though the air about him was thick with flying lead and steel, he could not defend himself. He could not shoot at these men. After all, they were his allies, not at all responsible for the grave error they were committing.

He gained the street with a sigh of relief. He turned the first corner to which he came and scurried like a frightened rat toward the water front with the idea of losing himself in the winding alleys that faced the docks.

Behind him came the police, hot on the trail of the man they thought was Havens. Van ducked into a narrow lane. Piled up on the curb before a restaurant were boxes of rubbish. He flung himself into their midst, and buried himself beneath the distasteful filth.

He held his breath as he heard the pounding feet of the police clatter by on the pavement a moment later. For a long time he remained there, then at last when he estimated the coast was clear, he cautiously thrust his head out from the debris.

**CAREFULLY** he climbed out of the mess and set off in the direction from which he had come.

A few moments later a racing taxicab was carrying him uptown to a furnished room in the middle part of town which he rented to provide him with a hiding place in just such an emergency as this.

As the cab slithered through the streets he glanced at his wrist watch. It was almost eleven o'clock. He

must hurry. There was work to be done within the hour.

## CHAPTER XI

### RENDEZVOUS

**A**LL DAY long, Frank Havens wandered about the town feeling for the first time in his life like a homeless man. Even though he was disguised as Van Loan he dared not return to his own residence. Or, for that matter, he was precluded from frequenting any of Van's own haunts.

True, Van had worked wonders with his features. True, even his intimate friends would not have recognized him. But Havens fully realized his own limitations. He knew that he could not ape Van's voice nor his mannerisms.

He knew that the only thing for him to do was to keep well out of sight of everyone who knew either of them.

He even avoided going to Van's apartment until late that evening. He was afraid that an embarrassing conversation might arise with one of the employees of the apartment house.

He did, however, call up his daughter. In a guarded message he told her that he was free and safe. But further than that he told her nothing.

At about a quarter to twelve he decided that he would go to Van's apartment. By now it was late enough to avoid any casual callers. He hailed a cab and headed uptown.

He went up to Van's penthouse in the private elevator. He admitted himself with the key he always carried. As he entered the apartment, a faint scent came to his nostrils, a vague exquisite scent of the kind which would be affected by a woman

of culture. At the moment he thought nothing of it.

He turned on the light in the foyer. He entered the living room. Then he stopped dead on the threshold and gasped.

For in that darkened living room stood two people. One of them was a girl, a pretty girl, whose beauty was rendered into a hard cruel thing by the bitter resolute expression on her face. The second person was a man. A man armed with a revolver, a man wearing a mask, a man upon whose sleeve was imprinted the symbol of the Ace of Hearts.

The man spoke first.

"You've avoided our telephone calls all day. You've played us false. You've rewarded our grant of mercy with treachery, and for that you shall die."

For a moment Havens was too stunned with surprise to reply. He stood there gaping. The masked man turned to the girl.

"All right," he said. "He's your assignment, you know. Let him have it."

With a steady hand the girl opened her bag and took from its disordered depths a small pearl-handled automatic. With a firm grip she leveled it at Havens.

With death staring at him so closely, the publisher's brain leaped to action. Time was the thing he must fight for. Time, while he grappled with this strange thing into which he had walked.

"Wait," he said in a husky tone, "wait a minute."

**H**IS voice was hoarse and indistinct, like that of a man who has a bad cold. He realized that inasmuch as he could not simulate Van's voice, this, perhaps, was the next best thing.

"Wait?" said the masked man, a



rising inflection in his tone. "We've been waiting since last night."

Havens' brain raced. It was evident enough now that whoever these people were it was Van Loan that they were after. From the man's words they had delivered some sort of a threat the previous evening; and now as Havens' gaze became riveted on the crimson heart that each of them wore upon the sleeve, he realized that these were members of the gang which was black-mailing the country, the gang which had caused his own arrest, which had caused the police to take the Phantom's trail.

CAN—I—have some more time?" he stammered weakly. He could think of nothing else, no other words which might stay the death that had come so suddenly upon him. The only alternative to this fate was to reveal his own identity, and that would, by inference, reveal the identity of the Phantom, and Frank Havens, true to his trust, was prepared to shed his life's blood rather than betray his friend.

"Time," said the masked man. "You've had more time than any of the others. Three of them were killed on the instant. You, I gave a day's grace. Now you die!"

The girl glanced at him. He nodded his head slightly. Her finger tightened upon the trigger.

Havens stood perfectly still. His face was ashen and a cold sweat ran down his forehead. He felt a tremble in his knees, yet he made no outcry, he made no appeal for mercy. He was not ready for death, yet if it must come he would try to meet it as he knew the Phantom himself would.

But her slim black gloved finger never pressed that trigger. Her eyes stared at Havens and beyond. Her jaw dropped. Her face was sud-

denly pale beneath its rouge. She uttered a single syllable.

"Oh!"

The man with the ace of hearts looked swiftly in the same direction as the girl. His eyes widened. He made as if to swing the weapon in his hand in the direction of the foyer, but before he could complete the move, a cold, hard voice spoke.

"Move and you die!"

The man froze to immobility. The voice spoke again.

"Drop your weapons."

Two impotent revolvers fell with a dull thud upon the luxurious carpet. The masked man found his voice at last.

"The Phantom!" he muttered in a low, hoarse whisper.

Relief flooded Havens. Now that the muzzle of the vicious automatic no longer was trained upon his heart he turned slowly.

Standing in the door near the entrance to the room was a man. A man dressed in immaculate evening clothes. He wore a silk hat. A mask obscured the upper half of his face.

"Yes," he said grimly, "the Phantom, and it would appear not a moment too soon."

For a moment he regarded his prisoners. There was a tense silence in the room. The Phantom addressed Havens.

"Pick up their weapons," he said. "Then call the police. I'll keep them covered. Now is our chance to clear ourselves from the charges they have caused to be brought against us."

HAVENS nodded. Briskly he crossed the room. On the way he stooped and picked up the weapon that had dropped from the girl's fingers. Then he continued across the room to the side of the masked man.

As he bent down to retrieve the

latter's revolver, his body was, for the fraction of a second, between the Ace of Hearts and the gleaming barrel of Van's gun. The arch blackmailer was swift to note this fact. He also noted that directly behind him on the wall was the electric light switch.

His black-sleeved arms moved like chain lightning.

One shot out behind him and touched the electric light button, the other swung viciously at Havens' jaw. The publisher gave a groan of agony and tumbled over on his back. In the darkness Van heard the girl utter a little gasp.

**H**E cried out in a stentorian voice:

"Don't move or I'll shoot!"

Yet both he and the Ace of Hearts knew full well that he did not dare press the trigger in that darkness for fear of hitting Havens. Van backed swiftly toward the foyer. There was another switch located on that wall which controlled the same lights. Further, it was the only exit from the room.

His hand groped along the wall, touched the button and flicked it on. The darkness flew as abruptly as it had come.

Van's eyes widened as he stared across the room. The dark-robed figure of the Ace of Hearts stood by the window. In his arms he held the clinging figure of the girl. Already one of his legs was slung across the sill.

Van gasped.

He had entirely forgotten the criminal's amazing trick of springing out into thin air.

"Stop!" he cried again.

The only answer was a mocking laugh. The man's other leg drew itself up. Van's finger constricted on the trigger of his weapon. Two staccato reports ripped through the

room at precisely the same moment that the other threw himself from that seventeenth story window sill.

The steel bullets whistled out into the night. But the man and his living burden had entirely vanished. Van raced across the room. He stared out the window. The night beyond was pitch black. And in its ebon atmosphere he could see no sign of the black suited Ace of Hearts.

Once again the leader of the gang had performed his incredible disappearing trick. He had vanished, completely, and into thin air, leaving not the slightest trace behind him. And to complicate the feat this time, he had taken the girl with him.

Van turned from the window. Havens still lay unconscious on the floor. Van crossed the room, poured a stiff drink of brandy from the sideboard decanter and forced it through the publisher's lips.

He lifted him to a chair. Havens stirred, opened his eyes.

"What happened?" he asked thickly.

Briefly Van told him of the leap into space which the Ace of Hearts had perpetrated. When he finished his recital Havens looked grave.

"We're up against a tough proposition, Van," he said. "This man, whoever he may be, is dangerously sane. Apparently he has none of the weaknesses of the average criminal. In fact, he's so sane that I suspect he's not a professional crook at all."

**V**AN considered this statement.

"Perhaps you're right," he said. "He was diabolically clever in the manner in which he made both you and me fugitives from justice. That hampers me more than anything else he might have done."

Havens nodded. The pair of

them took cigars from an ebony box on the desk and smoked meditatively, while they considered the desperate situation in which the foe-man had placed them.

Havens broke their reverie by reaching for the phone.

"I'm going to call Muriel," he explained. "She doesn't know where I am, but she insisted that I phone every few hours to let her know that I'm all right."

Van nodded abstractedly, while the publisher put through the call. He remained lost in his own thoughts while Havens conducted a protracted conversation. At last he hung up and turned excitedly to Van.

"Something's happened," he said. "I don't know whether it's a trap or not, but it may be a clue."

VAN stared at him eagerly. Unfortunately he had completely lost the trail of the gang of black-mailers, and he was willing to clutch at the slightest vestige of anything that would once more set him after the murderous crew.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Muriel has a note which came for me. It says to inform the Phantom that if he desires to know something about the Thirteen Hearts he will go to the Golden Peacock tonight and speak to a man wearing a white ribbon in his lapel. He must go alone, however."

Van's eyes crackled.

"Where did she get this note?"

"Winters, my secretary, gave it to her. It was delivered to him at the office, and marked extremely personal, to be opened by Frank Havens only. Knowing I was in jail, he took it to her."

"Who, outside of your daughter, have you told that you were out of prison?"

"No one."

Van's eyes narrowed. His face



*The revolver in the man's hand still held its steady bead on the banker's heart.*

grew thoughtful. Havens stared at him in a puzzled manner.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Simply this," said Van. "The papers were full of news of your arrest. Further, it stands to reason that any one familiar with or interested in this case knew that you had been taken in by the police."

Havens still stared uncomprehendingly. "So?" he said suggestively.

"So," said Van deliberately, "if this person knew you were in jail, why should he address a note of that sort to your office?"

Havens whistled softly.

"You see," went on Van, "I, who the police believed was Havens, only escaped an hour ago. The papers haven't reported that yet. But this person, whoever it was that sent

that note, knew damned well that you were already out of jail. That's why he sent it to your office."

Havens digested this for a moment, saw the inevitable truth of the theory, then shook his head miserably.

"That's a shame," he said. "I thought perhaps we had gotten hold of something which would put us on the right track."

"Well," said Van with a grin, "how do you know we haven't?"

Havens shrugged.

"After your deductions," he replied, "it seems quite obvious that the whole thing's a trap. We'll have to lay off."

"No, we won't," said Dick Van Loan grimly.

**Y**OU mean—you mean that despite the fact that it now looks very odd, to say the least, you mean that you're going to the Golden Peacock?"

"That's exactly what I mean. We can't afford to pass up the slightest thing. Even if it is a trap it will bring me into contact with the gang. Besides, do you realize that if I fail to bring this gang to justice, that both you and I are hounded men for the rest of our lives? To us, anyway, this is the most important thing I've ever handled."

The publisher nodded slowly.

"You're right," he said at last. "We'll go to the Golden Peacock at midnight tomorrow."

Van smiled at him.

"We?" he said.

"Why not?" said Havens. "I'm in on this, too."

"All right," said Van. "But we'll have to take it easily. Of course, I can go as Dick Van Loan, that's safe enough. But I'll have to daub a little grease paint on you, so that no one will know that you're Frank

Havens, that desperate fugitive from justice."

"Okay," replied the publisher. "We'll sleep on it, and remember that tomorrow night at the Golden Peacock, the Phantom has an assistant."

Van smiled appreciatively as he poured himself a drink from the decanter on the table.

## CHAPTER XII

### CABARET MURDER

**T**HE Golden Peacock was situated in one of the winding side streets of Greenwich Village. Over the entrance multi-colored electric lights were cleverly arranged in the semblance of a peacock's tail. At the head of a short flight of steps there stood a gorgeously arrayed commissionaire.

A continual stream of taxis slithered up to its doors, giving ample evidence of the popularity of the cabaret, and from the curtained windows there came the sound of raucous music, the high-pitched laughter of the revelers within.

It was almost five minutes to ten when a cab drew up at the entrance and two men stepped out. One was Frank Havens, the publisher; the other, Richard Curtis Van Loan. A casual observer would have immediately categorized them as a pair of clubmen out for a night of mild dissipation.

Havens paid the chauffeur, and, pausing for a moment on the sidewalk, lit a cigar.

"You go in first, Van, and have a look around. Inasmuch as it's well known that I am aware of the Phantom's identity, it might engender some suspicion in the mind of the man who wrote that note if we enter together. I'll smoke this cigar out here, then come in. I'll



pretend that it's a casual meeting."

Van nodded and headed for the door. But it was destined that the arrangement suggested by Havens was never to be consummated.

Even as Van reached the bottom step of the flight which led to the entrance of the cabaret, the doors were flung violently open, and a thin, dark man hurled himself into Van's arms with a force and speed that indicated that all the hounds of hell were snarling at his heels.

It was Margo, proprietor of the Golden Peacock. His eyes were bulging like black marbles, and his olive face was stamped with an expression of utter horror.

"Police!" he cried excitedly. "Get me the police!"

Van took hold of his arm and steadied him, as Havens came rushing up the steps.

"What's wrong?" he asked the frantic Italian. "What's happened?"

"Murder!" said Margo, flinging his arms to heaven in a gesture of appeal. "A man has been killed right in my busiest hour. Get me the police."

**T**HE commissioner fled to do his employer's bidding. Van and Havens exchanged significant glances, then hastily entered the cabaret, anxiety and apprehension in their hearts.

The interior of the cabaret presented a remarkable study in suspended animation.

A bare moment before, all had been sound and movement—laughter, gay voices, the throbbing wail of the saxophone had vibrated the atmosphere. But now in that dread, ominous silence a butterfly could have been heard to rustle its wings.

The orchestra had broken off in a hideous crash of discord. The half-dozen Negro musicians sat mute and fearful, as though carved of ebony.

Men and women in evening dress sat speechless at the tables, their faces white and drawn.

Sprawled face downward in the center of the dance floor was the figure of a man in evening dress. His arms were outflung and one leg was twisted grotesquely over the other.

He did not move.

**T**HE headwaiter's voice rang through the room. "No one is to leave, please. Keep your seats, ladies and gentlemen."

A woman shrieked, then fainted. A pale-faced drunkard, sobered by this sudden turn of events, lifted a tumbler of whiskey to his ashen lips and drank deep.

It was upon this tableau of drama that Van and Havens entered the room. Behind them came a stolid patrolman whom the commissioner had brought back with him. At his side stood Margo, explaining excitedly what had happened.

"There," said the little Italian. "There! There was no sound, yet he fell, shot through the back. He was crossing the floor when, pouf! down he went."

The patrolman took a little book and a pencil from his pocket and began asking routine questions, pending the arrival of his superiors from headquarters.

Dick Van Loan stared at the fallen body of the man on the floor. The figure lay face downwards, and there was a bullet hole through his dinner coat just below the shoulder blade. It was undoubtedly a case of murder. The wound could not have possibly been self-inflicted.

"I don't know who it is," blabbered Margo to the policeman. "He is a stranger. I never saw him before."

The policeman grunted and knelt at the side of the prostrate figure.

Slowly he turned him over so that the garish colored lights from above shone down upon his face; and as his dead, impassive features were so callously exposed to the light, Havens grasped Van's arm in a frenzy of excitement.

"My God!" he ejaculated. "It's Winters, my secretary!"

VAN stood staring down at the corpse like a man in a trance.

His eyes were not on the face, rather they gazed fixedly at the man's coat lapel.

"Yes," he said to the publisher. "And that's not all, Frank. Look at his coat lapel!"

Havens' eyes followed Van's gaze and for the second time in as many minutes he uttered a gasp of surprise.

For Winters was wearing a white silk ribbon, neatly tied in the right lapel of his dinner jacket. Undoubtedly it had been Winters who had made a rendezvous with the Phantom, only to keep it with Death, himself.

Now Inspector Finley of Headquarters entered the room followed by half a dozen men. Van knew him slightly, and bowed as he entered. The inspector glanced at the bloody body on the floor, then his gaze embraced the entire roomful of people.

"Let no one move," he said. "The man who committed this crime must still be on the premises."

A police surgeon who had come in with the police, bent down over the injured man. He glanced up sharply.

"This man is still alive," he said. "But he's sinking fast."

The inspector bent forward eagerly.

"Is he able to talk?"

The surgeon looked dubious. "Perhaps a shot of dope will keep him

going long enough to name his assailant."

"Good." The inspector beckoned to Margo. "Take this man to a private room. I want to question him."

Margo issued staccato orders to his waiters, and a moment later the inspector's eyes fell on Havens.

"You come along, too," he said. "If he talks, I'd like to have a witness outside of the department."

Havens joined the group who followed the bearers of the wounded man up the stairs. Van watched him go and smiled to himself. Little did the inspector realize that the man he had taken to accompany his men as a witness was the man that the entire police force of the town was looking for.

For a moment he stood where he was and reviewed the situation. Undoubtedly Winters had been shot by a gun with a silencer. The slight sound that that weapon would make would have been effectively covered by the blare of the orchestra.

He realized, further, that the killer was in all probability still on the premises. The inspector's men had arrived swiftly and the exits had been well guarded.

HE looked up as he saw a group of men entering the door of the cabaret. The policemen already inside greeted the newcomers with respectful salutes. Van recognized the commissioner himself. The official, after asking a few questions, climbed the stairs to join the inspector in Margo's private office.

Van's brow narrowed as he did some fast thinking. At least half a dozen detectives in plain clothes had entered with the commissioner. Some of them had followed him upstairs while others were now questioning the guests of the cabaret. This circumstance gave Van a

chance to do a little investigating on his own hook.

In his pocket he had a police badge that he usually carried with him. It was extremely unlikely that the uniformed man on guard at the kitchen door knew every Headquarters man by sight. He resolved to try a bluff in order to get by and search the rear part of the cabaret. In the excitement the police had not yet done that.

He walked boldly across the floor to the door which led to the kitchen. As he was about to enter the policeman moved forward as if to stop him.

HE took the badge from his pocket, flashed it and said: "Headquarters."

The patrolman saluted and stepped aside. Van passed through the door swiftly, his hand upon the gun in his hip pocket.

He found himself in a white-washed cellar lined with boxes of foodstuffs. Peering into the dim light of the basement, he thought he made out something white and moving flash past an aperture in the slightly open door ahead.

Probably the chef, he reflected, as he started to cross the room toward the door.

He had not taken two steps when he heard something hum past his ear like an angry wasp. A faint popping sound came to his ears. There was a hideous jangle of shattered glass as a shelf of dishes behind him was devastated by the bullet.

Then his alert eyes saw the muzzle of a revolver with a silencer attached, jutting out from the door jam. Again he heard that ominous popping sound. Desperately he threw himself to one side, and as he did so his own revolver spoke a savage word of death.

The revolver in the door jamb disappeared. Van heard the sound of hasty footsteps in the next room. He raced across the cellar and pushed his way recklessly through the door.

On the floor at his feet lay the body of the chef, slugged into unconsciousness. Hastily he stared around the room. There was no sign of any presence.

Already he heard voices raised in the main dining room of the cabaret. In a moment the police would be in here to investigate that shot. Whatever he decided to do he must do swiftly.

At the far end of the kitchen were three steps leading downward. Evidently to the street in the rear, an exit for the disposal of the garbage.

He tried the knob. The door was locked. As he thrust his shoulder against it, he heard a faint mocking laugh from outside. Then for the third time in as many minutes he was aware of that low puffing sound as of gas striking the air with terrific force.

Miraculously a hole appeared in the panel of the door. A bullet whined across the room and buried itself in the far wall. Now, from the other room, he heard voices distinctly.

"Someone went into the kitchen," one said. "He had a headquarters badge."

"Let's see," said another.

A DOOR opened. Feet pounded on the concrete floor.

Van raced from the kitchen and, keeping well concealed in the shadows of the cellar, he worked his way in the opposite direction to the running feet.

Suddenly he found himself at the bottom of a narrow staircase. Silently and slowly he mounted. Be-

hind him he heard the policemen's expressions of surprise as they found the unconscious figure of the chef in the kitchen.

His hand touched a door knob. He turned it, and passed through to find himself on a carpeted mezzanine that overlooked the dance floor. The mezzanine was empty, though some distance down it he saw an open door.

Without making a sound he walked down to that open door. Silently he stood on the threshold of the room, keeping his body well out of sight as he peered through the crack of light that was formed by the edge of the unclosed portal and the wall.

A strange sight met his eyes.

L YING on a couch at the far end of the room was Winters. Blood stained his coat and dripped crazily down to the floor below. Around him stood the disguised Havens, the police commissioner and the inspector. Winters was talking.

"I want to make a clean breast of it before I die," he said. "The Ace of Hearts who leads the gang killed Rains. He impersonated the Phantom. The Phantom is innocent. That's why I made a rendezvous to meet him here tonight."

The inspector scribbled some hasty notes in his little book. Van's heart skipped a beat with sheer happiness as he listened to this confession. Havens' face was a masterpiece of sheer bewilderment as he stared at his dying secretary, the man whom he had trusted.

Winters took a deep breath and continued:

"I was the Six of Hearts. And I can betray the Ace. I have the evidence. I have the—"

He sank back exhausted. His face was white, bloodless. Eagerly the commissioner bent over him. He took a flask from his pocket and

poured a drink down the dying man's throat.

"Go on," he said breathlessly. "You have the evidence, Winters. Where is it?"

The stricken man stared at him with glazed eyes. His lips moved slowly. He spoke like a man in a trance.

"He couldn't do that to me. I'll betray him. He can't have—"

He broke off his incoherent sentence. His head dropped back like a broken reed. A horrible gurgle came from his throat. An awed silence came over the room, as death himself, unseen and intangible, entered.

The commissioner straightened up with a sigh.

"Tough," he said. "A minute longer and we'd have had the clue which would have solved the Rains murder and probably a number of others."

The inspector nodded.

"We certainly owe the Phantom our apologies."

The commissioner frowned.

"We sure do," he said. "And now with things left like this we need him more than ever. I wish he were here now."

A soft, quiet voice spoke behind him.

"He is *here* now, Commissioner."

THE commissioner inhaled sharply and turned on his heel. Instinctively his hand dropped to his hip. The inspector stared around with dilated pupils.

Only Frank Havens remained calm. He smiled faintly as he moved his eyes to gaze at the figure upon which the attention of the others was focused.

For in the doorway of that room stood the Phantom!

Van Loan, realizing that the dying man's words completely absolved



him from complicity in the Rains murder, had with characteristic incisiveness, come upon a plan. In the instant of its inception he had whipped his black silk mask from his pocket and jammed it over his eyes.

Now calmly and coolly he stepped into the room.

**T**HE commissioner found his voice. "My God!" he said. How did you get here?"

Van smiled.

"I came to keep a rendezvous," he said. "But I find myself keeping it with a dead man."

"We almost had it," said the commissioner. "He had almost told us enough to—"

"I heard him," said Van. "And inasmuch as he's cleared Havens and myself, I think he may have told us enough to work on. If you have no objection to my coming in on the case."

"Objection!" roared the police head. "I was hoping to heaven you were here when you so suddenly announced yourself. Have you any clues? Any ideas?"

"Not a clue in the world," said Van. "But plenty of ideas."

"Close that door," said the commissioner to the inspector. "Good. Now let's hear what you've got."

The door slammed to.

"Listen," said Van. "Somehow I want you to get Winters' body out of here unseen. I want the story given to the press that he was only slightly wounded and has returned home."

The commissioner frowned uncomprehendingly.

"Why?" he asked.

"It's simple," said the Phantom. "I shall take his place. I shall return to his residence disguised as Winters. Now undoubtedly the gang knew that he was about to be-

tray them tonight. That's why they shot him. As long as they think he lives they'll be out to get him. If I take his place, it'll be me that they come to."

Havens shook his head.

"They'll kill you," he remarked with concern.

Van shook his head.

"We'll have to gamble on that. At any rate, I'll be expecting them."

A light broke over the commissioner's face.

"It's a grand idea," he said. "Thank God you got here, and that Winters removed every vestige of suspicion from you before he died. I'll send twenty of my best men with you."

Van shook his head.

"No, thanks," he said simply. "I prefer to work alone. I may have a better chance that way. If you'll take care of the body of Winters and the newspapers, I'll get started now."

The police chief shrugged.

"As you will," he said.

He bent down and hastily rifled the dead man's pockets. Then he handed Van a business card.

"This is his address," he said.

Van took the card and thrust it in his pocket.

"Thanks," he said again. "If you don't hear from me within forty-eight hours, you'd better investigate."

**H**E turned on his heel and walked to the door. Behind him the commissioner's face had expanded into a wide grin of relief, as he thanked his lucky stars that once again the Phantom had taken the trail.

But had he known, had he possessed the slightest idea of the jeopardy, the perils that the masked sleuth was about to undergo ere he reached his dangerous journey's

end, his smile would not have been so broad, so beaming.

## CHAPTER XIII

### TREACHERY

**M**OST of the guests at the suburban hotel at which Winters lived had retired when Van reached the place. He stopped at the desk, picked up his key and the elevator took him up to the fourth floor. He walked slowly along the dimly lit corridor until he came to the room bearing the numeral 408.

Here he hesitated for a moment, then inserted the key in the lock. Then again he paused for a cautious moment. He flung the door open and stepped to one side as he did so. Simultaneously, he whipped an automatic from his pocket.

It was quite possible that the Thirteen already had a man ambushed in the room to make short shrift of the traitor that had escaped them at the Golden Peacock.

But as he stood there tensely for a moment, he heard no suspicious sound; no movement. He fumbled for the electric light switch, and in an instant the room was flooded with friendly light. A swift glance about the chamber assured him that all was clear. He stepped within, closing and locking the door behind him.

The room was simply furnished. He took the precaution of glancing under the bed, and investigating the interior of a bulky closet on the far side of the room. Then he crossed the room and lifted the window shade.

Without, the skeleton framework of an iron fire escape met his eye. It zigzagged from the roof of the building to a paved yard below. Immediately he surmised the most

obvious method of the attack of the Thirteen Hearts. The fire escape offered the most convenient entrance to the room. However, on second thought he came to the conclusion that for one as resourceful as the Ace had proved himself to be, this method of access was perhaps too obvious.

A swift glance at his wrist-watch showed him that it was almost one o'clock. And now he prepared for his lonely vigil. Skillfully he arranged the pillows beneath the sheet in such a manner as to give the impression of a sleeping figure.

Next he switched off the light, pulled down the shade half-way, and squatted at the end of the bed in a position that gave him an unrestricted view of both the door and the window. In his hand, loaded and ready to unleash a hail of bursting lead, was his trusty, redoubtable automatic.

The door was, of course, locked. But the window he had left open at the bottom in order that he might more easily hear the sound of a foot-step upon the fire escape. The night was not dark, and a silvery gray from a new moon filled the room with an eerie half-light.

For a long time he waited. Wearily and dully the hours passed. Cold and cramped he sat up against the wall, every nerve, every sense in his body alert, keen, ready for any danger that the Fates might bring.

**H**IS left arm ached where the bullet had ripped the flesh, and as the moments ticked past he found it increasingly difficult to keep his eyes open.

Then it came!

Tap—tap—tap!

A firm, deliberate knocking at the door. There was nothing furtive or secretive about the sound. It seemed merely intended to arouse the oc-

cupant of 408 without disturbing the other residents in the hotel.

Dick Van Loan was wide awake on the instant; keen and alert, he glided across the wall to the door. Yet he took good care to stand to one side of it as he spoke.

"Who's there?" he asked in a voice drugged with sleepiness.

"The bell captain. I've an urgent message for you, Mr. Winters."

Van hesitated for a moment. Despite the genuine sound to the speaker's voice, the circumstances of this early morning call had all the earmarks of an unelaborate trap.

SWIFTLY he moved a chair over toward the door. He climbed upon it, and peered through the transom into the hall. Below him he saw the figure of a man dressed in the uniform of a bellboy. In his hand he was holding an envelope.

Van stepped down, and for another instant hesitated. Perhaps this was a bona fide message for Winters—a message that would provide him with an important clue in his pursuit of the Thirteen Hearts. Still on his guard, he flicked the light switch and unlocked the door.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir," said the bellboy. "A man just left this for you, said it was important that it be delivered immediately."

Van glanced down at the envelope. It was addressed to Winters. He ripped it open, and caught his breath sharply as he examined its contents. On a slip of paper were scrawled the words:

*Dead rats can't squeal. We've come for you.*

*The Thirteen.*

Underneath was stamped that awesome symbol of death—a crimson death!

Dick Van Loan raised his eyes and found himself staring straight into the yawning muzzle of a squat .38.

He was trapped!

Despite all his precautions he had been bluffed by one of the oldest tricks in the world.

"Put up your hands," snapped the pseudo bellboy, tightening his finger suggestively on the trigger of his revolver. "One word out of you, Winters, and you die."

There was death in the man's voice as he spoke, and his eyes glittered cruelly as he regarded the man whom he considered had been a traitor to the gang. White with mortification, Van raised his hands slowly above his head, and stepped backward into the center of the room. He had been outmaneuvered. His daring plan had recoiled upon his own head. But that it had succeeded in its main object—that of making contact with the Thirteen, was apparent in the next moment.

There was a stealthy step in the corridor, and a tall black figure appeared in the doorway. As Van glanced at the newcomer he saw the familiar insignia of the Ace of Hearts imprinted on his sleeve.

The thin cruel lips moved beneath his mask. He spoke in a threatening, rasping tone.

"Well, traitor. We meet again. You know the penalty for attempting to betray the Thirteen."

VAN looked into those dark merciless eyes and experienced a sensation of repulsion, as if he was gazing at some evil, horrible thing. He almost forgot the part he was playing as he stared at this sinister face.

Here, he realized, was criminal abnormality at its lowest and most debased type. A man utterly without mercy, without morals, without

any humanitarian instinct. A killer, as cold-blooded, as cruel, as venomous as a preying tarantula.

The Ace spoke again.

"I'm not killing you now, Winters," he said, "because I want some information from you before you die."

Van found his own voice. He spoke in an excellent imitation of Winters' own tone.

"Do you think I'm fool enough to tell you anything when I know you'll kill me as soon as I give you the information you want?"

**T**HE dark figure laughed a horrible laugh.

"Since you ask me," he said mockingly, "I think you will. You seem to forget the tricks of Foo Chang."

Van said nothing. Never having heard of either Foo Chang or his sinister tricks, he had not the slightest idea of what the man was talking about. However, he realized quickly enough that the Ace would hesitate at nothing to force information from this man whom he believed was a traitor to his murderous organization.

"Yes," continued the Ace. "Before you die, Winters, you'll tell me where those papers are."

Van decided to gamble on a prodigious bluff. Of course, he had no more idea where the papers were than he had of *what* they were; still, he tried a shot in the dark.

"Those papers," he said calmly, "are now at Police Headquarters."

The Ace laughed again.

"Don't try to bluff me," he said menacingly. "You know damned well that if you had given those documents to the police, you wouldn't be here now. You'd be in a cell. Well, we've wasted enough time in conversation. We'll finish this little chat at our own headquarters. All right. Bring him out."

He shot the last three words at his henchmen, who had remained silent during this colloquy. Now, the man with the gun stepped forward and prodded the muzzle of his weapon into Van's breast.

"Come on," he growled. "Let's get started."

For a second Van glanced down at the unwavering muzzle which aimed at his heart. He realized full well that if he once was captured, if once he was taken to the headquarters of the Thirteen, a savage, tortured fate would be his.

In that instant he resolved to gamble on a single turn of the dice.

He gathered his legs beneath him and flung himself desperately to one side, grabbing for the revolver which he had left at the end of the bed upon opening the door. The rug slipped beneath his feet and he crashed to the floor. Even as he did so, a bullet crashed over his head and left a smear of gray lead on the iron bedpost.

He rolled over, his outstretched hand groping for the butt of his weapon, expecting every moment to feel searing hot steel rip through his flesh.

**A**GAIN the room echoed with staccato reverberation. Again he heard lead scream over his head with a whining hum like a banshee's wail.

And now his hand closed about the butt of his own automatic. He did not pause to aim at either the Ace of Hearts or his henchman. Instead he swung the muzzle of the revolver toward the single light which blazed from the center of the ceiling. He pressed the trigger once. A thin tinkle of shattered glass mingled with the roar of the guns.

In the darkness he came to his feet. He rushed toward the door. In the confusion, the other's gun



was silent. He heard the Ace snarl:

"Don't kill him, you fool. Take him prisoner. Stand by the door so he can't get out and then strike a match."

But Van rendered that order impossible of being carried out. He hurled himself at the doorway. A hundred and seventy pounds of sinew and muscle threw itself up against the man with the gun. He staggered back, and fell to the floor.

IN the grayish light of the room, the Ace swung a revolver butt viciously in the Phantom's direction. Van sprang to one side and took the blow on the shoulder. At the same time he swung out with his left fist. It landed on the side of his ebony-clad adversary's jaw. The man reeled back.

By now pandemonium reigned in the hotel. Shouts were heard from the elevator. Somewhere a police whistle blew.

Van raced down the hall like a maniac. Disregarding the elevators, he leaped down the stairs. Behind him he heard the Ace cry out:

"Quick! After him. The boys will nail him downstairs."

Van continued his rush toward the lobby with these words of the Ace still ringing in his ears. Apparently the man had more members of his gang waiting below. The Phantom would have to elude them also.

He thanked his lucky stars that he had driven his car out here with him. Even now it reposed behind a clump of bushes on the hotel grounds. If he could reach that he had better than an even chance of escaping the enemy.

Through the lobby he raced. At the door a porter with more courage than discretion essayed to stop the crazy flying figure who tore like

an express train toward the street. For his pains he received a stunning blow behind the ear which knocked him to his knees.

The flying figure of Winters raced out into the night beyond.

A second later he sprang into his own powerful roadster, stepped on the starter and heard the motor roar to life. He jerked it into gear and pressed the accelerator down hard.

As the redoubtable car shot ahead as if propelled by some invisible hand, he saw two figures emerge from the hotel and race toward a svelte limousine parked outside the door of the hotel.

Down the road raced Van's car, her headlights shooting white beams down the highway. Already in the mirror he could see the glowing eyes of the limousine in pursuit.

## CHAPTER XIV

### "TAKE HIM ALIVE!"

THREE staccato reports sounded from the rear. He passed through a breathless moment, praying that a stray bullet would not riddle his tires. Then he jammed the accelerator all the way down.

Like a stone from a giant catapult the roadster leaped ahead over the dirt road, stones and dust flying like hail from beneath its spinning wheels.

Again a legato crackle sounded behind him as the pursuers emptied their guns. Like lightning, jagged flashes of flame stabbed into the night from the muzzles of burning revolvers. Van gripped the wheel grimly and wondered where the Ace's reinforcements were.

He was shortly to find out.

His windshield shattered as if it had been made of papier mache as a

screeching piece of lead rattled through the glass. Yet the roadster kept on, gallantly, fearlessly.

Then of a sudden his headlights revealed something black and bulky ahead, lying across the road. It was a car pulled sideways to block the way.

This, then, was where the Ace had posted his allies in order to cut off any attempt at escape by the gang's victim!

Van sensed the impending crash, yet he dared not hesitate. To do that was to invite certain capture by the car behind, and as long as there was a desperate fighting chance Richard Curtis Van Loan was not of the ilk that quits.

**L**IKE a flash he jerked at the steering wheel, and with a terrific wrench, forced the plunging roadster round in a sharp sweep. The car canted violently, the loose road surface flying up from beneath its tortured tires, as cool and intrepid Van drove the bounding Jugernaut directly into a ditch.

With a thud the wheels leaped into the gully, and the chassis jumped bodily as it waitzed crazily through the little trench at the side of the highway. For a second it skidded violently on the wet grass, and for a moment Van thought he had lost control of the reeling vehicle, but then, after a snorting plunge, the tires held firmly once again on rough ground.

For an instant the car rolled like a fishing smack in a storm at sea, careening crazily like a Ferris Wheel gone suddenly mad.

But with a sickening lurch she righted herself, and swung clear of the ditch to gain the road again. Behind her the bullets of the evil Thirteen spat venomously through the air, as if cursing the escape of their quarry.

Now as he raced down the road, the headlights in the mirror became dimmer. Apparently the Ace's car had stopped to parley with the other. Van breathed a sigh of relief, lifted his foot slightly from the accelerator and slackened speed.

He had gone a mile or so at the relatively easy speed of forty miles an hour when suddenly there flared again in his mirror the blazing white headlights of a car in the rear. Apparently the Ace had rallied his men once more and was charging down to take the traitor.

It was also evident that the car which had been used as the barrier was capable of more speed than the one which the Ace had used when he had started.

Again Van's foot jammed down on the accelerator, as he realized the recurrence of the peril in his wake. Trees and telegraph posts whirled by him in flashing alignment, as the roadster roared down the highway.

**H**E could tell by those ever enlarging lights in the mirror that the car behind was slowly creeping up upon him despite the fact that he was coaxing a couple of miles more per hour than had ever been built into the roadster's engine.

Ahead of him a strange glow gleamed in the sky, as the twinkling lights of New York cast their myriad reflections into the heavens. There lay safety. If he could once enter the city limits, he could easily evade his pursuers. Yet in each mile that he traveled the car behind gained fifty yards.

Twice he narrowly averted a smash-up as another car sped out of a crossroads. Then of a sudden a legato roaring at his side took his attention. He glanced sideways sharply to see a pounding motorcycle at the side of his car. Its

rider waved him over to the curb with a familiar imperious air.

For a moment Van hesitated. True, perhaps this man was a policeman, but on the other hand it might well be one of the Ace's men who was trying to stop him by a ruse. He gestured to the man, thinking that if he was a genuine officer he would show his badge.

The motorcycle rider's hand went to his pocket but instead of drawing forth the shield of authority, he pulled out a heavy revolver.

That was enough for Van. He gave the car all the gas she could take. She jerked ahead. Then obligato against the sound of his engine there sounded three crashing reports. Flame and steel hurled themselves forth from the muzzle of the cyclist's revolver.

**T**HEN came another explosion, an octave lower than the other three. Van's tire went flat with an ominous hissing sound. The roadster swerved violently to one side. Van took his foot from the gas and jammed down the brake. With a protesting screech, and an arid stench of burnt brake bands, the car came to a jerky halt.

He sprang from the car, his own revolver in his hand, prepared to deal mercilessly with the man on the motorcycle. Then as his feet hit the ground he was blinded by a pair of glaring headlights which came around a bend in the road.

The flashing illumination in his eyes caused him to lose sight of the motorcycle. His ears heard the grinding of brakes, the tearing of tires as the other car came to a halt. Then he heard the familiar voice of the Ace of Hearts shouting to his cohorts:

"Take him alive!"

Van set his teeth, his lips were a thin grim line as he resolved that

if he must be taken by the Thirteen, it most certainly would not be alive.

He put his back up against the body of the roadster, in order to render ineffective an attack from the rear, and held his gun firmly, before him.

Though halted, the headlights of the other car still shone brilliantly in his eyes. He heard the crunch of many feet on the road at his side. Swiftly he aimed his gun and pressed the trigger.

He heard an alarmed shout and a scream of pain. He held his fire again for a moment and waited. Of course, he realized that with that gleaming halo of light flung about him he made a perfect target for the enemy. But he depended on the fact that the Ace of Hearts wanted some information from the man he believed was Winters, ere he dared deliver the death stroke.

No shot was returned to him from the darkness. Then as he stood there, tense and alert, he was abruptly aware of a clicking, metallic noise behind him.

**H**E swerved around swiftly, realizing that someone was approaching from the rear, through the other door of the roadster. His gun came up. From the corner of his eyes he saw a dark object scrambling over the car's seat. His finger tensed upon the trigger.

But that shot was never fired. He was an infinitesimal fraction of a second too late.

Something swung viciously through the air and struck him hard at the base of the skull. He felt his senses reeling. Rough hands seized his throat. He was flung savagely to the ground. That was his last conscious knowledge. An enveloping blackness fell about his eyes and his brain was numb.

## CHAPTER XV

## FOO CHANG

**S**LOWLY the blood throbbed back into the tortured brain. He stirred, and opened his eyes, to find himself in Stygian blackness. He felt bruised and sore. His muscles throbbed with pain. His hands running over his body found his clothes ripped in a score of places.

Where he was he had not the slightest idea. With an effort he revived that portion of his mind which was dedicated to memory. Then he blinked slowly as he oriented himself.

Undoubtedly he was now the captive of the Thirteen. He recalled with a shudder that the Ace had threatened him with torture in order to get him to disclose a fact of which he had no knowledge. He realized grimly that the worst was yet to come.

However, despite the both literal and figurative blackness of the situation, the inherent fighting spirit in his heart asserted itself. As long as life remained in the Phantom's body, as long as his mind was capable of functioning, he was a dangerous enemy.

For a long moment he lay upon the floor, breathing deeply, recuperating his strength. Then he came to his feet with the intention of examining his black prison.

Slowly, swinging his hands before him like tentacles of a blind octopus, he groped his way about the ebony dungeon. He had not gone more than a few feet before he encountered a table. He came into violent collision with the piece of furniture and knocked it spinning.

Now he changed his direction, set out at a fresh angle and eventually found a wall that felt as if it was made of damp cement.

Following this, he made a rapid tour of the room, and established the fact that he was incarcerated in a small room of unplastered walls with, apparently, no windows.

Once his groping fingers came into contact with the knob of a door, but investigation proved that it was securely locked and bolted.

He ran his hands through his pockets in search of his flashlight. But it was gone. Gone as was everything else which he had been carrying. The thorough search to which he had evidently been subjected had not even left him a match.

He stood perfectly still in the center of the room and listened intently. For a long time he heard nothing, then a faint melodious sound came to his ears. It was so vague, so indistinct that he could not place it. It sounded like a distant song carried by the wind from infinity.

Then something bit at his nostrils. Something which roused up a vague memory in his mind. It was a pleasant odor and one which he had smelled before. It was a perfume. A perfume whose scent desperately essayed to unlock a bolted portal of his memory.

He shook his head in annoyance as he failed to place this thing. Then he dropped to his knees and placed his ear to the floor. Now the scent became stronger as did the faint sound of melody. Yet neither of them had power enough to stand definition nor analysis.

**P**UZZLED, he waited for a short while, and then crawling on his hands and knees, began a minute examination of the floor of his cell. At length somewhere in the center of the floor, his fingers encountered something hard and cold, which seemed to be imbedded in the floor itself.

When he touched the object it stirred slightly in an inanimate way. When he let it go it fell back with a slight clink. Still more puzzled he stretched his arm out until his hand touched the floor a yard away from where he knelt.

The surface which his finger tips encountered was hard and rough, undoubtedly concrete, yet the thing on which he was kneeling had the unmistakable feel of wooden plank-ing.

Again his hands felt the floor carefully. Now they met with a clearly defined ridge in the floor running in rectangular form about him. It formed the perimeter of the wooden space upon which he knelt. Then it flashed to him. This must be a trap door! The small metallic object was a lifting ring.

He hunted for the ring once more; but as he found it a sudden sound made him pause. Something unseen went scudding past him in the darkness. It passed so close that he could almost feel the air disturbance caused by its movement.

For a moment he remained paralyzed with a tense alertness, then as a shrill squeak came to his ears he recognized the motion for what it was, that of a scurrying rat who made its home in this dark fetid dungeon.

Finding the ring again, he tugged on it with all his strength. The boards creaked but did not move. Again and again he tried it. His fingers ached as the metal of the ring cut cruelly into his flesh.

Then desisting for a moment he ran his nails around the perimeter of the square door, and dug the dirt of years from the crevice. His fingers were black with dirt, as he returned to his task of tugging the door loose from its frame.

Then, of a sudden it gave. The trap moved half an inch. Hope

surged into his heart, and he took a deep breath preparatory to summoning up his last ounce of power to jerk the door from its moorings on a desperate chance at freedom.

Then suddenly he dropped the ring and sprang to his feet. The sound of footsteps on the other side of the door came to his ears. He stared in the direction of that door and waited.

The lock turned raspingly, and an oblong of light precipitated itself into his cell as the door of the dungeon was flung open. Van stood staring into the snapping eyes of the Ace of Hearts!

THE criminal stood upon the threshold. In his left hand was a flashlight which shattered the gloom of the prison and in his right was a snub-nosed automatic which drew an unerring bead directly on his prisoner's heart.

For a long moment the pair of them stood there staring steadily at each other. The blackmailer's lips were distorted into a malevolent smile. The man whom he thought was Winters returned his gaze.

The Ace of Hearts walked forward.

"So," he said, "you've come out of it. All right. Now you can talk. You made an appointment tonight with the Phantom, didn't you? You intended to turn over those papers you stole from us. All right, you didn't have those papers with you when we found you. You didn't give them to the cops or they would have made a pinch. Now, where are they?"

Van's eyes narrowed.

"I don't know," he said truthfully enough.

Something flared in the other's eyes, something evil and wicked, something which hinted definitely of death.



"You can save yourself a lot of trouble," he said ominously, "if you talk now."

Van shrugged.

**Y**OU'VE already said you're going to kill me after I talk," he said coolly. "What percentage is there in my talking at all?"

Again the other grinned horribly.

"You forget Foo Chang," he said.

"If you talk now you at least get the mercy of a bullet. If not—"

He left the sentence unfinished, apparently secure in the knowledge that his victim was familiar enough with the Chinaman's methods to make delineation unnecessary.

Van thought swiftly. It seemed to him that the only possible way out of this spot was to convince the other that he had already told his story to the police, that he had already given them the papers; and somehow to concoct a story that would dispose of the other's argument, that had he done so he would have been at once arrested.

"Anyway," he said, "you're too late. The police know everything. As a matter of fact, I'm surprised they haven't come here yet."

His heart bounded as he saw a flicker of apprehension come to the other's eyes.

"You're lying," snapped the masked figure. "You're trying to run a bluff."

Before Van could reply, he stepped back into the hall without and lifted his voice.

"Foo Chang!" he called loudly.

There was a slither of slipped feet in the hall, then behind the Ace there appeared another figure. It was that of a huge Chinaman whose eyes glinted with evil pleasure as he regarded his victim. In his claw-like talonous hands he held a thin piece of hemp. Van saw it, and repulsion came to his heart as he rec-

ognized for what purpose it was to be used.

Before this he had seen strong, courageous men wilt beneath the torture of that rope. When it was affixed about a man's forehead, and tightened by an inserted piece of wood used as a lever, the torture that this innocent appearing device was capable of was beyond all human imaginings.

"Now," said the Ace, catching his eyes again, "will you talk?"

Van was aware of a sensation of grim despair enveloping him. How could he talk when he had not the slightest vestige of the knowledge that his captor wanted from him? And to tell the truth, to admit that he was not Winters, but the Phantom, himself, was to invite a death as sure, as certain, as if he kept his mouth shut.

He remained standing there immobile and silent.

An incredulous sneer crossed the masked man's full, cruel lips,

"You have either forgotten the methods of Foo Chang," he said slowly, "or you have learned courage, Winters. Well, we shall see which."

**H**E shrugged and shot a sidelong glance at the Chinaman.

"All right," he said. "Go to it."

The Chinaman grinned and nodded mutely. He took a step forward and entered the cell, fiendish and pleasureable anticipation stamped indelibly upon his repulsive features. Dangling the hemp in his talons, he advanced toward Van.

"You come here," he purred slowly.

Van glared defiance at him. If he must die, better far to fall a victim to the weapon in the Ace's hand than the slow torture of the Chinese.

"Come and get me," he challenged.

His eyes narrowed as he saw the

masked man's finger imperceptibly tighten on the trigger of his gun. But the Ace's shrewd brain controlled his murderous emotions.

"Take him," he said to the Chinaman. "Make him talk, or you'll get some bullets yourself."

Van backed up a pace. If he was to come to conclusions with the Chinaman it was not a bad idea to try to keep the Oriental between himself and the lowering automatic which still kept its unwinking eye gazing steadily at his heart.

For an instant the Chinese crouched, his huge body bent forward, his almond eyes half closed, and his bony fingers working in febrile excitement. Just at the other side of the trap door stood Van, his shoulders squared, his body poised, ready to take immediate advantage of whatever opportunity offered itself.

Then with a muffled exclamation in his own language Foo Chang sprang with an agility amazing in one of his bulk. A human arrow from an invisible bow, he launched across the room like a jaguar pouncing on his prey.

**HIS** clawed fingers, long-nailed and clutching, slashed at Van's face as he landed. Even in that moment of battle, Van noted with satisfaction that the Ace's gun could not fire now without its deadly lead ripping through Foo Chang's flesh before it reached his own.

Van sidestepped swiftly and his right fist crashed into the yellow evil face of his assailant. He heard the Ace chuckle in amusement.

With a curse, the Chinaman staggered back, then almost instantly recovered and returned to the attack. Now his hemp was held before him, his eyes grew cunning as he sought an opening that would permit him to drop the strong

thread over his adversary's head.

Warily Van evaded the cruel rope which could strangle the life from his body, and as the Oriental advanced once more, he smashed a stunning left into his jaw. Now the Ace took a step forward as if to end this horseplay, as if he had been amused long enough and was now ready to enforce docility from his prisoner.

**BUT** before he could speak a word the Chinaman, leaning breathlessly up against the wall, went suddenly beserk.

An animal snarl of rage rolled from his lips. He took a half pace forward.

His right arm moved in a peculiar jerk. The gleaming blade of a knife slipped down from his wrist to his hand.

The bony yellow fingers closed about its jade hilt. Forgetting his hempen cord, he shot through the air toward Van.

The blade swept through the air with a strange hissing sound like that of a rattler about to strike. Van sidestepped swiftly. The steel ripped his coat. As he moved he struck out with all his strength, but his frenzied blow just grazed the Oriental's ear.

Carried forward by the force of his own inaccurate blow, he found himself off balance for a moment. From the corner of his eye he saw that murderous blade lift itself, then swing downward again. He heard the Ace's voice.

"Don't kill him, you fool!"

Again Van jerked to one side, but this time the blade ripped into his flesh, into his arm. Blood deluged his coat sleeve. The yellow man turned while off balance, his eyes agape with the madness which was upon him. Deaf to the commands of his master, who stood be-

hind him threatening with his revolver.

"Lay off," cried the Ace of Hearts. "Let him alone or I'll plug you!"

Then the vengeance of the yellow man upon the white who had humiliated him, who had evaded and struck him was not to be denied. Again he sprang toward his victim, and Van was ready for him.

He had a fair shot at the saliva covered yellow jaw before him. His right moved like a steel piston. It did not move far, but it carried all Dick Van Loan's weight and strength behind it. The Chinaman catapulted across the room as if thrown there by dynamite.

**T**HE knife fell from his nerveless hand and clattered impotently down upon the concrete floor. His eyes were glazed and his knees bent slowly like pliable steel. Then with a faint groan he crumpled and fell.

For a moment the Ace of Hearts switched the gleaming bulb of his flashlight away from Van, played it on the fallen yellow body of his ally, to learn how badly injured the Chinaman was.

For a single instant Van was concealed in a friendly shadow, and he took full advantage of that instant.

He bent down low over the trap door. He seized the metal ring in his hand. He flung it open. He had not the slightest idea where it led, but the knowledge that it turned away from this black hole was enough for him.

At his feet a hole blacker than the blackness of his cell gaped ominously. Then at precisely the same moment that the Ace switched his flashlight back, he plunged through the yawning hole at his feet.

His enemy's yell of alarm, and his enemy's gun sounded simultaneously. The Ace's cry was lost in the jar-

ring reverberation of the automatic. Flame seared the darkness of the room, crooked, jagged flame that conjured up the hell to which it would send its victims.

Two lead slugs crashed deafeningly into the wall beyond. And Richard Curtis Van Loan dropped like a plummet through space as black, as uncharted as the pit itself.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A CLEVER PLAN

**H**E landed on something hard but mobile, something which slipped beneath his feet and gave him no foothold. Then he fell. His hands, coming in contact with the substance upon which he was standing, showed it to be coal. He was in the basement of the house.

He scrambled down to the bottom of the pile, just as the flashlight from above penetrated the darkness of the cellar. Another shot rang out and the bullet ricocheted off the concrete floor. Van wasted no time in looking behind.

Before him he saw a door. Like a flying beast he raced through it. Beyond was a short flight of steps which led to the upper floor. Up the steps he charged blindly, trusting to luck to show him an exit from this house of death.

He reached the next floor without seeing anyone. Then from somewhere he heard a voice cry out: "Winters has escaped to the cellar. Everybody after him."

He heard the pounding of a number of feet from above and behind. He realized that to remain in that corridor was suicide. He advanced a pace forward. At his left was a door leading off the hall. Without hesitation he opened it, slammed it behind him and stood breathless in a small room.

A high-pitched gasp sounded in

his ears. He turned swiftly and stared wide-eyed. The slim figure of a girl stood in the center of the room. She gazed at him strangely. The perfume that he had smelled in his cell came strongly to his nostrils now; and now, when it no longer mattered, he placed it.

It was the Queen of Hearts!

FOR a long moment they stared at each other. Van, knowing full well that this girl was as relentless and merciless as the men with whom she cast her lot, expected little consideration at her hands.

At any moment he realized she would give the alarm. One shout from her would bring the whole mob charging in here after their quarry. Yet she did not make an outcry. Her eyes were fixed upon his face. They were vaguely moist as if she had been crying. Her firm little chin quivered slightly. Then her mouth opened as if she were about to speak.

Van, unarmed, realized the futility of attempting to still the girl. He stood there, his back against the door, resigned to his fate, ready once again to be delivered into the hands of the gang. Then the girl advanced a step toward him and Dick Van Loan received the surprise of his checkered career.

She flung her arms about his neck. Tears streamed unashamed down her cheeks. Her lips moved close to his ear.

"Oh, George," she whispered, "can't we get out of this trouble some way? I feel as if it's all my fault. Please forgive me."

Van fought down his surprise as his mind grappled with this strange turn of events. He decided to let the girl do all the talking for the time being. He had a great deal to learn about this situation. She continued:

"I understand that you did it all for my sake, George. But you didn't have to steal the records. You didn't have to go to the Phantom. We could have run away together. Then he couldn't have found us. But now—"

Slowly the truth filtered into Van's brain. In the febrile excitement of the past ten hours he had completely forgotten the identity which he was simulating. He had overlooked the fact that outwardly, he wore the appearance of Winters.

Now it became apparent that this girl cared a great deal for Havens' dead secretary. And as she babbled on of him, Van came to realize that probably the Ace had made advances to the girl which Winters resented, and because of that the perfidious secretary had decided to betray the gang to the Phantom.

Outside he could still hear the footsteps of the searchers. Someone said:

"He must still be in the basement. He wouldn't dare come upstairs."

There was a low rumble of voices and footsteps died away again.

Van's heart now was stimulated by new hope. With the girl believing he was Winters, with her willing and ready to aid the man whom she loved, there was still a last desperate chance remaining to him. He put his arm around her and spoke softly.

"But what can we do?" he asked.

SHE looked up at him. "Did you really see the police?"

He thought swiftly, then said:

"Yes. They let me go on the promise that I'd get them the papers in the morning. I refused to tell them where they were unless they released me."

She thought for a long moment, then her eyes lit up.

"Listen," she said. "I think we can make a deal. It's impossible for me to get you out of here. You'd be shot the moment you went out in the hall. Let me talk to *him*. I think we can fix it up. He's deadly afraid you've talked too much. If we can refute what you told the police, if he can get back his papers, he'll let you go. He'll even lay off me."

Van shrugged his shoulders and made a gesture which implied that he was leaving everything to her.

**A**S indeed he was. She certainly knew what it was all about, she knew the temper of the gang, the motives and the reactions of their leader. If there was a way out she could lead him to it with infinitely more ease than he could find it himself.

Knuckles rapped sharply on the door. A voice said: "Ruthie, open up."

She shot a swift glance at Van. She squeezed his hands.

"Just a second," she said.

The voice, which Van now recognized, spoke again.

"Is Winters in there?"

She hesitated for a fraction of a second, then said:

"Yes. He wants to see you."

A mocking laugh came from outside.

"I want to see him, too," said the voice.

The girl's face paled slightly, yet her chin was firm and her head held high as she walked across the room and flung the door wide open.

The Ace of Hearts, still arrayed in his mask and black garments, entered the room.

Behind him came a quartette of his cohorts. They were armed but unmasked.

The last man to enter slammed the door behind him. The Ace re-

garded his recaptured prisoner with mocking eyes.

"So you want to see me, do you? You didn't seem so anxious to stay in my company a few minutes ago. In fact, you half killed Foo Chang getting away."

Van remained silent. The girl uttered a little gasp, and said in accents of horror:

"Foo Chang. Oh, you didn't—"

"No," said the Ace. "We didn't, but it wasn't our fault. He fought like a cornered rat. But this time I'll take him properly. I'll burn every inch of skin off his body if he doesn't talk. Now, what do you say?"

Still Van said nothing.

The girl came forward. She stood very close to the masked man. It seemed to Van that his snapping eyes softened slightly as he looked down at her. Perhaps, if anyone could influence this perverted criminal, it was she.

"He'll talk," she said simply. "And furthermore, he'll undo all the trouble he's caused. I have a plan."

The Ace raised his eyes. They met Van's squarely.

"All right," he said. "Go ahead—talk."

"But," said the girl, "if he talks, if he gets out of the jam he's got you in, you've got to give him an even break."

**T**HE masked man shot a glance around at his armed guards. He looked at the tip of the barrel of the weapon in his hand.

"I don't have to bargain," he said shortly. "Talk, Winters, and take your chances."

Now the girl was silent, and, taking this as his cue, Van began to speak.

"As I've already told you," he said evenly, in perfect imitation of



the dead Winters' voice, "I've talked to the police. True, they haven't got your papers. They released me in order to permit me to get them after I refused to go on with the deal if they held me. They know plenty now."

HE paused, waiting for the girl to throw him a cue. Even now he had not the slightest idea of what she had in mind. Of what the plan she had mentioned consisted.

The Ace snarled and took a pace forward.

"Good," he snarled. "You've told me enough to sign your own death warrant. What you've told the police can't be wiped out. But if they don't know where those papers are, I've got nothing to lose by plugging you now!"

The hand that held his gun moved slightly. Van set his teeth grimly and stood stock still. The girl advanced and seized the masked man's arm.

"Wait," she said. "What he told the police can be wiped out. They can be made to believe it was a lie."

The Ace of Hearts eyed her keenly.

"What do you mean?" he asked suspiciously.

"It's simple," she said. "Send him back there. Send someone with him. Someone to tell the police that he's George's lawyer. That he's brought him back to admit that what he told them is lies. You can get a phony doctor's certificate attesting to the fact that George is a pathological case, merely seeking notoriety. He won't produce the papers, anyway. That'll help the story along. Do you get it?"

The Ace of Hearts considered this silently for a moment. Van's face remained impassive, but inwardly

he was aware of a surge of admiration for the girl's astuteness. This, indeed, was an ideal plan.

With his supposed lawyer, with a doctor's certificate that his sanity was not all it should be, and with no documentary evidence to back up the yarn he was supposed to have told the police, there was no reason why Headquarters should not believe that Winters was simply one of the myriad cranks with whom the department comes into daily contact.

Yet a faint, imperceptible smile crawled over his features.

He could not help wondering at the consternation which would reign here had the gang the slightest idea that outside of clearing the Phantom in the Rains murder, Winters had told the police precisely nothing at all.

Yet through all this profound planning of the girl's he saw an excellent chance for himself. If one of the mob should escort him to Police Headquarters to repudiate his supposed confession, he would have a perfect chance to escape. Not only to escape, but to apprehend the man who was with him.

Now the masked man nodded his head.

"It's a damned good idea," he said. "Will you do it, Winters?"

Van nodded.

OF course you haven't much choice in the matter," he went on. "The man who goes as your lawyer will have his hand in his pocket all the time. That hand shall rest on a gun butt and at the slightest hint of the double-cross you get it. Do you understand?"

Van looked as contrite as possible. He said in a weak apologetic tone: "I understand."

"But wait!" The girl thrust herself before the leader of the band.

"What do we get out of it? You've got to make a deal with us."

The Ace looked at her with his snapping eyes.

"What do you want?"

"Let us go. Both of us. Swear you won't annoy either of us again."

He eyed her shrewdly.

"If you both go, if I don't have you under my eye, how do I know you won't betray me?"

"We won't," she cried, desperate sincerity in her voice. "I swear it."

The masked man smiled coldly.

"Your oath's not worth much to me. Let Winters go through with this. Then let him return my papers. After that we'll talk business."

The girl swallowed hard. It was apparent that she was by no means content with this arrangement, but as the Ace himself had pointed out, he was not compelled to bargain when he held all the trump cards in the deal.

## CHAPTER XVII

### GAS!

**T**HREE svelte black limousines pulled up outside the building which housed the police department.

It had already been arranged by telephone that the district attorney should be present in the police commissioner's office to meet Attorney Carson L. Downes, who had an exceedingly grave matter to discuss with both officials.

It was apparent from the number of men who comprised the escort that brought the lawyer to his destination that he was a man of some importance in the community.

Three cars holding a dozen odd men parked at the curb outside the Tombs, and the lawyer and one other man stepped out. As they stepped to

the curb a heavy bearded man leaned from the window. He spoke in a voice that was familiar to Dick Van Loan, though his face was different than it had been on other occasions. The voice, though not the features, was that of the Ace of Hearts.

"Now, remember," he said to the lawyer, "give me the signal at the slightest hint of any funny business. We know what to do if this is a frame. As for you"—he turned to Van—"if you try anything, first I'll kill the girl, then I'll kill you. Play square in there. Then give me those papers, and you've got a chance at an even break."

Van nodded, but said nothing. The Nine of Hearts, who for the moment was masquerading for very excellent reasons under the pseudonym of Carson L. Downes, thrust his hand in his right coat pocket. Something hard and metallic stuck itself into Van's ribs.

"All right," said the lawyer. "Let's get going."

They walked away from those three parked cars toward the building. A moment later an elevator whirled them upward.

As they approached the commissioner's office Van reviewed the situation in his mind. He had come here, he had acceded to the girl's plan in order to effect an escape from the hands of the murderous Thirteen. But he realized that even now, on the threshold of police headquarters, it was not as easy a proposition as it seemed.

**F**IRST, there was that gun in his escort's pocket. Undoubtedly the man had his orders, orders that demanded he shoot and shoot to kill at the slightest hint of any overt act on Van's part. Even though his own life be lost, it was inevitable that he would follow the orders of

his fearful master, the Ace of Hearts.

Then again, there was the girl. No matter what her motive had been, no matter if she did believe that she was aiding the man she loved, the fact remained that it was solely due to her efforts that Van had been given this single chance of his life. He could not send her to her death.

The Ace had said that she would die if anything went wrong. Well, it seemed that the only answer to the whole problem was for Van to make his move so swiftly, so unexpectedly, that the police could raid the house from which he had just come.

**B**UT the Ace had perhaps anticipated this very thing. And it had been for that reason that Van had been blindfolded before he left the house.

There was but one way to overcome that difficulty, and that was to seize the Nine of Hearts, capture the supposed lawyer and make him talk.

But suppose he did not talk?

Van shrugged his shoulders, and wondered if he really had gained anything by managing to leave the house, by actually achieving entrance into the one building in the whole city where he should be absolutely safe.

As they stepped from the elevator he grinned at the bitter irony of it all. Here he was about to enter the office of the commissioner of police, to meet the district attorney, yet all the while he sat there beneath the very eyes of the men who were sworn to uphold the law, a terrible death hovered over his head.

The office to which they were led was on the fourth floor of the building. Its big windows, which completely replaced the wall on the

street side, afforded a lucid view of the avenue below. As they entered the office, Van shot a swift glance through the glass panes. At the curb he saw the three limousines parked, motionless, quiet, awaiting whatever signal it was that his companion had been warned to give in case anything untoward happened.

The commissioner frowned as they entered. He nodded to them both. The district attorney raised his eyebrows when he saw the man with the lawyer.

The two newcomers seated themselves at the commissioner's gestured invitation.

"Well," said the police official, "it was a rather strange request you made over the phone, Mr. Downes, and now that I see whom you've brought with you it's even more strange."

He glanced swiftly at Van, a swift shrewdness in his eyes.

"Of course," he went on, "I had no idea what it was that you wanted to see me about. But now that you've brought Mr. Winters with you—"

He gestured and broke off. He had accented the name ever so slightly, and he glanced again at Van. The latter, after making sure his guard's eyes were not upon him, winked broadly at the commissioner, then he lowered his gaze and stared significantly at the man's right-hand which still remained in his coat pocket, firm upon the butt of the weapon which still held Van in subjection.

**B**OTH officials caught the glance. The district attorney said softly: "And what is it, Mr. Downes?"

Mr. Downes, as he called himself, cleared his throat.

"This man is my client," he began. "That is, his family retains

me to look after his affairs. Now, I understand he came to you yesterday and related some cock and bull story. What it was, I don't quite know. But it's false."

The commissioner raised his eyebrows.

"False?" he repeated faintly. His eyes watched the lawyer's right hand intently.

"Yes," continued the other. "You see, this man is not quite responsible for his actions. He—"

THE police commissioner leaned over toward the bogus lawyer.

"Will you have a cigar?" he asked as he tendered a box toward him.

Downes, suspecting nothing, reached forward with his left hand. The commissioner offered one to the district attorney, then ran his fingers through his vest pockets.

"I never seem to have a match," he complained.

The district attorney took up the cue at once.

"Don't seem to have one myself," he remarked. They both stared at Downes.

The latter shifted uncomfortably then thrusting his left hand into his pocket, he withdrew a book of matches. The commissioner was now leaning back in his chair, and in order to pass him the package the bogus lawyer was compelled to lean far forward.

At that moment the commissioner's eyes again caught Van's. The crook's body was bent forward. The muzzle of the gun in his pocket was for the moment aiming in the general direction of the far wall. That moment was enough for Van.

His left hand shot out sharply and caught the lawyer by the right wrist, forcing his hand down. The man stood up swiftly. The hand in his pocket jerked violently in Van's grip. There was a sudden staccato

explosion, and the stench of burning cloth as the bullet tore its way through the fabric of his coat. The bullet ate its way viciously into the floor.

At the same moment the door of the office burst suddenly open and two plainclothes men stood there. Swiftly they entered the room and pinned the bogus lawyer's hands down at his sides. Then respectfully they waited for their superior's orders.

Rage and fury glared from the captured man's eyes. His face was a distorted grimace. One of the plainclothes men thrust a hand into the bogus lawyer's pocket and tore the gun from his grasp. The district attorney glanced at Van, a broad grin on his face.

"Well," he said, "what now?"

"It's all over," said Van easily. "If you'll send your men downstairs to those cars parked at the curb, you'll pick up the whole gang of them."

The commissioner rose to give the necessary orders. Then of a sudden Downes, with a terrific jerk of his body, broke free from his guards. Before anyone could stop him he raced across the room to the large windows.

ONE of these he flung wide open with his right hand while with his left he dove in his pocket and produced a brass whistle. He placed it to his lips and blew a single piercing blast upon it.

Then, before he could repeat the signal to his comrades below, one of the policemen had snatched it from his hand. The commissioner looked at Van.

"What's that mean?" he asked.

"Probably a signal to run," replied the Phantom. "Hurry your men."

The commissioner strode swiftly

from the room to cope with this emergency. Van and the district attorney walked over to the window. Below them the Thirteen Hearts were piling from their cars.

But to Van's utter amazement, the gang of blackmailers, instead of retreating hastily by way of response to their ally's signal, came charging madly toward the door of the building which housed police headquarters!

NOW, he noticed that beneath their arms the eleven men carried large bulky packages. Van's own astonishment was reflected in the face of the district attorney.

"What's the idea of that?" he demanded. "Are they saving us the trouble of getting them? Are they running right into the jail for us?"

Van frowned, then shook his head.

"I don't know what they're doing," he answered shortly. "But whatever it is, it spells trouble."

He turned to the plainclothes men, who still held the figure of the bogus lawyer.

"In the meantime," he suggested, "you'd better get him to a safe place, until we find out what all this means."

The district attorney nodded corroboration of this order. The policemen dragged Downes from the room, but as he went he shot a malevolent glance at Van. His mouth curled into a bitter, contemptuous smile.

"There's no safe place in this building," he said. "I'll be out of here within the hour, and so will you, Winters. Only you'll be going to a worse fate than prison."

The guards dragged him away. The district attorney's face showed grave concern.

"What's he talking about?" he asked. "Is it just a bluff?"

"The Thirteen Cards of Death

don't bluff," said Van soberly. "I've had enough dealings with them to learn that much."

The commissioner of police returned to the office.

"I've got a score of men downstairs," he said. "We ought to get them before they have a chance to get away."

Van glanced out the window again. The limousines were empty.

"They're not even trying to get away," he said. "They're coming in here."

The commissioner glanced at him as though he had gone suddenly crazy.

"Coming in here?" he repeated. "What for?"

"We'll know that in a minute," said Van. "Give me a gun."

The other whipped open a drawer of his desk and handed Van a .38. Then the two worried officials followed Van from the room.

He raced down the stairs toward the low floors which held the cells. Far, far below him he heard excited voices. Someone said: "Put up your hands."

A hoarse laugh seemed to be the answer. Then the familiar tones of the Ace of Hearts said sinisterly: "We've come for our traitor. Don't try to stop us."

VAN increased his speed. On the face of things it seemed ridiculous that eleven men would dare to invade police headquarters to kidnap a man. But then of a sudden he understood!

From below came the horrible sound of a man gasping for breath. There was an alarmed shout.

"The rats," said a voice, "they're using—"

The sentence evolved to an inarticulate gurgie.

Something bit acridly into Van's nostrils. The membranes of his



nose quivered sensitively, then his heart stood still.

It was gas! Mustard gas!

## CHAPTER XVIII

### DEATH WALKS BY

**F**OR a moment Van stopped dead on the stairs. Again when he had considered that he had trapped the blackmailing gang beyond all escape, the resourcefulness of their diabolically cunning leader had checkmated him.

He realized now that the Ace of Hearts had taken little chances with the treachery of the man he thought was the renegade, Winters. No, before they had come here to police headquarters, the signal had been agreed upon.

It had been prearranged that in the event of any double-cross that whistle blast of the bogus lawyer's would tip off the gang waiting below. And when that tip came, they were ready. Ready with their lethal deadly gas to invade even as redoubtable a stronghold as the police station itself.

And now they had come.

Again and stronger the deadly fumes bit into Van's nostrils. He had recognized the odor for what it was. This was no mild tear gas, that merely reduced its victim to innocuous though painful suffering. This was mustard gas!

And Dick Van Loan had seen its effects more than once on the battle-scarred fields of France. He turned to the commissioner who stood behind him.

"Gas masks," he shouted. "You must have some here. Where are they?"

"Downstairs. On the second floor. Quick! Let's try to get them out."

Together they raced down the stairs into the yellow cloud that was

slowly filtering its way up. Van held his breath until it seemed that his very lungs must burst.

As they went they passed prostrate forms in blue uniforms, policemen who had succumbed to the deadly fumes. Suddenly the commissioner clutched Van's arm and pointed.

"The masks are in there," he gasped. "You—get—them. I can't go—on."

He gripped the banister of the staircase to prevent himself from falling. Van leaped the last three steps and fled toward the door which the police chief had indicated.

His hand was on the knob. He was about to enter, when he heard a footstep behind him and a rough hand spun him about.

He found himself gazing into the unwavering muzzle of a colt. The man who held it resembled some gigantic ogre of a fairy tale.

A gas mask covered his face, and from behind the brown goggles two vicious, threatening eyes bored into the Phantom's. A gesture of the gun barrel made the man's meaning clear enough. Van stepped back from the door. The colt prodded him in the back. Docilely he marched before his captor.

**H**E dared not breathe. Dimly as if through a psychic screen he saw indistinct forms about him crumpling to the ground beneath the savage attack of the lethal mist.

Within his breast was a leaden sensation of utter and complete despair. Once more he had been balked by the Ace of Hearts. The man could not be stopped! He left nothing to chance. Now Van could see it plainly enough.

The Ace had decided that if through some unforeseen circumstance there was a slip-up, he was determined to get Winters out of

the clutches of the police before he could reveal the hiding place of the papers which he prized so highly.

And he had succeeded.

Mad as the scheme may have sounded, ridiculous as it appeared, to dare invade police headquarters when the whole force was combing the country for the blackmail ring, the Ace of Hearts had done it—done it as ruthlessly, as boldly, as successfully as he had done everything else to which he had turned his evil bloody hand.

It seemed to Van that his lungs were bursting.

For a full three minutes now he had held his breath. Before his very eyes men were dying, falling stricken by the strangling atmosphere about them.

**H**IS flesh felt as if live coals were upon it, as the gas created red and ugly blotches upon it. Behind him the gun still prodded him in the back as he slowly made his way down the stairs toward the door, toward the clean fresh air of an outer world.

He never quite knew how he got into the limousine. All about him the universe was hazy, indefinite. His skin pained him horribly and cruel red blotches appeared upon his hands and face.

A bitter burning pain seared his lungs. Careful as he had been the insidious poison had seeped slightly into his nostrils, down into his very being.

He was aware of a sudden jolt as the car in which he was lying gave an abrupt jerk and shot ahead. He was also aware of a bitter vindictive voice saying: "I'll make him talk this time if we tear him apart limb from limb!"

Someone laughed shortly in answer, and said: "You're too good to them. If you'd made that gas

full strength, you'd have killed half the police department."

The Ace of Hearts grunted.

"It's not necessary," he replied. "We have nothing to fear from them. If we can beat them with our wits, we don't have to kill. But as for this—"

He jerked a thumb toward Van and finished the sentence in a volley of profanity.

Dick Van Loan reclined against the cushions in the rear of the car more dead than alive. The gas, it seemed, had stultified his mind as well as his body. For the time being he was rendered incapable of thought.

A vague relief came over him and assuaged some of his remorse as he realized from the conversation that the gas attack had not accomplished the wholesale slaughter which he had at first believed it would result in.

But despite that he was under no delusions as to the treatment which would be accorded him this time when the Ace of Hearts proceeded to make this traitor talk. Now, to his crimes he had added a second betrayal. And as a guerdon for this, death awaited him.

Death in itself he did not fear. He had felt the Reaper's fetid breath hot upon his neck before this. But he realized full well that of all the dooms he had ever faced, this one might well be the most brutal, a slow tortured death, administered by the ruthless, the savage, the inhuman Ace of Hearts.

**W**HEN he regained enough of his senses to orient himself, he found he was in a large room. It did not look familiar to him, though he had seen the figures about him before.

The whole membership of the Thirteen had gathered to watch him

die. Eleven masked men stood before him. In their center was the tall dominating figure of the Ace of Hearts himself. At his side, tremulous and with a pitiful pleading quality in her voice, stood the Queen of Hearts.

"But there must have been some mistake," she was saying in a weak voice pregnant with suffering. "I'm sure he wouldn't double-cross you. He had everything to live for after you promised you'd let us alone. He had nothing to fear from you. He couldn't have done it, I tell you. He couldn't!"

SHE concluded her desperate appeal in a frenzied shriek. Her eyes were agates of horror, as she made her appeal for the life of the man she thought was George Winters, the man whom she loved, for whom she was willing to risk everything, even the mighty wrath of the Ace of Hearts.

Roughly, brutally, he thrust her aside. His voice was harsh and forbidding.

"He's guilty. There was no mistake. He overcame the Nine and talked to the police. For that he shall die. But first he shall give me those documents. Foo Chang shall flay him alive, shall perpetrate on him every single torture which his foul mind is capable of concocting."

Van leaned back in the chair in which he sat and blinked his eyes. Now, for the first time since he had left the police station, he was functioning normally. The effects of the gaseous fumes had gone now, and save for a throbbing headache, and a weary lassitude of his muscles, he was none the worse for his hideous experience.

Now his mind worked rapidly. He saw clearly enough that unless immediate steps were taken his death was a matter of moments. He re-

solved that if Foo Chang came with his tortures, he, Van, would make a speedy end of things.

He would throw himself unarmed upon the Ace.

That would compel his swift death. He would fight them tooth and nail until the life had been beaten from his body. That at least, was preferable to the Oriental's searing tortures.

The Ace of Hearts turned to his men.

"Get the Chinaman," he ordered. "The rest of you bind him. Bind him tightly so that Foo Chang may work more easily."

"No!"

It was a monosyllabic scream and it came from the white lips of the girl. She seized the arm of the masked man who wore the insidious insignia of the Ace of Hearts upon his sleeve.

"No," she said again. "Wait. Listen to me!"

The man looked down at her and that which was in his eyes was not a pleasant thing to behold.

"Look," she said. "Let me speak to him alone. I can make him reveal the hiding place of that which you want. Then if you must—" She paused for a moment as a sob threatened to shatter the words in her throat. "Then if you must, kill him. But for God's sake don't let that Chinese devil manhandle him."

"He's earned Foo Chang's attention," said the Ace of Hearts, his voice surging with a terrible hatred. "He deserves exactly what he's going to get."

DON'T," she pleaded. "If he tells you where those papers are, that's all you want to know. Kill him, but don't torture him. Please, please do this for me."

She laid a slim hand on his arm and her eyes were wet with tears.

He regarded her steadily for a moment.

She met his gaze with courage.

"Very well," said the Ace of Hearts. "I shall give you three minutes alone with him. That is all. When I return you shall tell me where those papers are. Then I shall kill him. Do you understand?"

"I understand," she said dully.

The masked man turned, made a sign to his cohorts. Silently they followed him from the room.

The door slammed behind them and Van was alone with the girl. She crossed the room and regarded him with eyes that mixed the emotions of love and bitterness. For a moment she looked at him, and then she spoke.

"You shouldn't have done it, George. I would never have gone to him, no matter what influence he brought to bear. You should have trusted me."

VAN said nothing for the obvious reason that there seemed to be nothing to say.

She went on hastily:

"I prepared for this while they were gone. Now, listen to me. We've only got three minutes. In that closet over there, I've a ladder hidden. You can prop it up against the wall, smash the skylight and escape that way. But hurry!"

Her last admonition was warranted. Completely stunned with amazement at the turn events had so swiftly and suddenly taken, Van sat still and stupefied in his chair.

In a single instant he had been given a chance for his life. This girl, whatever her faults may have been, was proving loyal to the man she loved. She seized him by the shoulder.

"Hurry!" she said again.

But he did not move. Even though

his life was at stake he was not prepared to let this girl sacrifice her life in order to save his. He shook his head slowly.

"What about you?" he asked. "They'll kill you if you let me go."

She smiled a smile pregnant with wisdom beyond her years.

"No," she said. "He won't kill me. He—he likes me too much."

She snatched up a revolver from the table and pointed it at him.

"You fool, will you go?"

Van rose to his feet. If he could escape and bring help at once there was little chance that the Ace would harm the girl. Perhaps she was right, he liked her far too much to injure her, no matter what she did to his plans.

"All right," he said hastily. "Where's the ladder?"

She led the way across the room to a closet. Between them they dragged out the ladder and placed it up against the wall. As he stood on the bottom rung she handed him the revolver.

"Here, take this, you may need it."

He took it and thrust it in his pocket. Hastily he mounted the rungs. The girl, pale and anxious, steadied the ladder from below. As he reached the top he swung back the hand which held the revolver. It swung through space and struck the glass with a shattering blow.

AIR rushed in through the gaping hole. Glass fell upon the floor. An errant fragment cut deep into his cheek and blood ran crazily down his chin.

"Good-by," she whispered.

"Good-by," he said, and there was an infinite gratitude in his tone. He resolved at that moment to see that no matter what happened to the gang to make it his business to be sure that the girl received special

consideration and leniency from the state.

He pulled himself up into the frame of the skylight, and at that moment the door burst open. The Ace of Hearts, followed by his murderous horde, rushed into the room.

He glanced around the room and his eyes opened wide.

"You fool," he cried to the girl. "Where is he?"

Van remained suspended where he was, not daring to move lest that movement should attract their eyes to him.

The girl faced the masked man defiantly.

"I've got him out," she said. "After all, I love him."

"You fool," cried the Ace again. "That's not Winters. I just had word from one of my men at the morgue. Winters is dead!"

**I**N his agitation his eyes lit on the ladder for the first time. He stared up toward the skylight. His eyes met Van's. A revolver flashed to his hand and three shots ripped through the room.

Van waited no longer. Like an agile ape he pulled himself through the opening. His feet found the roof and he scrambled madly over the tar paper. Behind him he heard two voices projected through the skylight.

The girl screamed: "Not George? It must be George. It—"

A man snarled: "I tell you Winters is dead."

"Then who—who is that? Who is that that we all thought was George? Who could look so much like him?"

And as the Ace of Hearts replied, Van heard fear in his voice for the first time since he had known him.

He replied with a throb in the words:

"It's the Phantom!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### A CLUE

**R**ICHARD CURTIS VAN LOAN sat once again in his penthouse, high above the sleeping city. Meditatively he smoked a pipe as he thought gravely and deliberately of the situation which confronted him.

Despite his fortunate escape from the murderous hands of the Thirteen Cards of Death, he was no nearer bringing the blackmailing gang to justice than he had been before. As a matter of fact, he was even further away than before, to the solution of the case, for he had completely lost the trail.

Within an hour after his escape from the house of terror, he had phoned the police and a raiding squad had been dispatched post-haste to the building. But when they arrived the Thirteen had fled, and now that forty-eight hours had passed, neither the police nor the Phantom had a single clue that would lead them to the lair of the Ace of Hearts and his ruthless killers.

There was but one thing, and neither the Phantom nor the Ace of Hearts knew its location: the stolen papers which Winters had purloined from his chief. Winters' hand in the matter was clearly defined now.

Secure in his position of Havens' confidential secretary, it had been he who had received the call from Hollywood. It had been he who had communicated this intelligence to his chief, furnished him with the necessary information with which to concoct his diabolical plan to brand the Phantom as a murderer.

It was also evident that Winters and the girl—she who was known as the Queen of Hearts, loved each



other; and that the leader, the sinister Ace, had attempted to win the girl for himself. At this development, Winters had rebelled.

Realizing that, alone, he could not hope to cope with the evil genius who led the Thirteen Hearts, he had decided to betray him, to deliver him into the Phantom's hands in order to protect the woman he loved.

But that plan, that treachery, had cost Winters' his life. In some manner the Ace of Hearts had learned of his henchman's contemplated betrayal and had taken Winters' life as forfeit.

VAN frowned and his teeth gripped his pipe tightly as he reviewed things in his mind. True, past events were made exceedingly lucid by subsequent developments. But that fact in itself did him little good save to explain certain points of the mystery which had remained obscure.

Even now there was still one angle of the enigma that was far from satisfactorily explained. That was the matter of the Ace's mysterious disappearances.

Twice in Van's own presence and once after the Rains murder, the leader of the gang had made his escape by that mad leap into the air from a high window.

And he had lived!

In some mysterious manner he had sprung out into the night, sprung to what seemed certain death, yet he had come to no harm. In some occult manner he had perfected a mastery of space.

Van sighed. On more than one occasion it had seemed to him that the Thirteen Cards of Death had played their last hand, but each time he had been completely outwitted by that sinister masked gang.

For three days now he had racked

his aching brain for some method of tracking down the ominous organization, for some move which would again bring him into contact with the Thirteen Hearts—and this time triumphantly.

But he had come upon no solution. A sensation of futile despair surged over him, as each idea he developed led into a mental *cul-de-sac*.

He came out of his reverie as the outer bell of his apartment rang six times. There was a short wait between each tinkle of the bell. It was the prearranged ring that Frank Havens used. Van rose and went to the door.

A moment later Havens followed him into his study. An eager light shone in his eyes, and his face was alight with suppressed excitement. Van regarded him with an inquiring look.

"Why the late call?" he inquired. "You look as if it's important."

"It is important," said Havens. "Look at this."

He threw a crumpled piece of paper upon the desk. Van picked it up, straightened it out, and read it swiftly.

*Tomorrow at midnight you shall die unless you capitulate to the demand we made upon you yesterday. If you decide to accept our terms, follow out telephoned instructions. If you fail you die tomorrow at precisely midnight.*

*The Thirteen Hearts.*

VAN'S eyes lit up as he read this missive. Perhaps this was the break in the case; perhaps this was the clue that would lead him to victory over the nefarious gang of blackmailing killers.

He turned to the publisher eagerly.

"Who received this?" he asked.

"Ward Rochamber," said Havens. "He communicated with me immediately. Said he dared not tell the police. He dared not defy the gang. He said that if I could prevail on the Phantom to guarantee him protection he would not pay the money. But if you refused to help him he would pay rather than rely on the law to protect him."

Van's brow corrugated into a frown.

"Rochamber?" he repeated slowly. "Who is he?"

Havens shrugged. "Frankly," he replied, "I don't know. I never heard of him until tonight. I expect that he's merely a wealthy man worthy of the attention of the gang. They seem to investigate their victims pretty thoroughly in a financial way before they send in their *billet doux*."

A PECULIAR light came into Van's eyes. Something clicked in his mind.

"So you never heard of him," he repeated slowly. "Now, you have a pretty wide acquaintance with wealthy and prominent people, Frank. Are you sure you've never heard of this Ward Rochamber?"

Havens shook his head.

"Positive," he said emphatically. "I racked my brain when I got the message. I haven't the slightest idea who he is."

Abruptly Van changed the subject. To a casual observer it would have seemed that he was no longer interested in the identity of the latest quarry of the Thirteen Hearts. However, from the faraway expression in his eyes, Havens knew that the keen brain of the Phantom at last had something tangible, something definite upon which to work.

"Have you discovered anything about Winters?" he asked.

Havens thrust his hand into his pocket.

"I searched his desk and belongings pretty thoroughly, as you suggested. But I found nothing other than personal effects that mentioned nothing about the gang. I brought this along to show you, though, because it wasn't quite clear to me what it meant. Here."

The publisher handed him a torn card. It was an ordinary filing card such as is used by thousands of commercial firms. Van glanced down at it. On the fragment of it some writing was legible. He read it aloud.

"From George Winters, received five dollars, for—" He paused for a moment. The line ended there. Below it were the words, "*For one year.*"

His eyes grew more dreamy than before. He sat down at his desk again and inhaled deeply on his pipe. Havens watched him intently.

"Well," he said, "and what shall I tell Rochamber? Will you help him?"

Dick Van Loan looked up at him. On his face was a faint smile of triumph. In his eyes was a dancing light.

"I certainly shall," he said emphatically. "I think that perhaps the Ace of Hearts has overplayed his hand this time."

Havens stared at him eagerly.

"You mean you've figured out something? What is it?"

Van smiled.

"I'LL let you know in due time," he said. "I'd rather keep it to myself until I'm sure I'm right."

Havens shrugged.

"All right," he said. "Then I'll run along now and leave you to your masterminding. Shall I tell Rochamber you'll be there? He wants no one to know if you are to be. He insists the

police shall have no word of the affair."

"Tell him I'll be there," said Van. "And that the police shall know nothing of it."

"Good," said Havens, his eyes lighting up. "Well, good-night."

He crossed the room.

"Oh, by the way," Van called after him, "will you hand me a book from the bookcase there?"

Havens turned and smiled.

"I thought you were scheming with yourself," he observed. "Are you so sure of your plans that you can read for the rest of the night?"

Van smiled quietly.

"I'm not exactly reading for pleasure," he said. "The book I want is that bound volume of income tax reports that I got from the Government."

## CHAPTER XX

### THE KNIFE

A TERRIFIC storm lashed savagely at the New Jersey coast. The Atlantic rose furiously and crashed her foaming breakers on the rocky cliffs with tremendous force. The night was black, ominous, and overhead the sky was a deep sable cloak from which no star cast its light, from which no moon shed its silver beams upon the earth.

Along a steep cliff there suddenly appeared a light which pierced the blackness for an instant.

Then it was gone. On a narrow road which fringed the rocky precipice an automobile crawled along at a snail's pace without lights. Its tires crunched on the stone bed of the road.

At its wheel sat a solitary figure, a solitary figure who wore a black silk mask, whose face was grim and

expressionless as he continued his hazardous journey.

At last the car stopped, stopped at the entrance to a small rickety wooden bridge. The bridge ran out from the cliff into the darkness and apparently disappeared somewhere in infinity. However, the masked figure who stepped from the car knew that at the far end of that swaying wooden structure there stood an island, and on that island was the residence of Rochamber.

FOR tonight the Phantom was keeping his rendezvous.

Swiftly he went about his work. From the car he took a small rocket pistol. In its barrel he thrust a small length of rope which in turn was attached to a thicker cable. Then, calmly, with the pistol in his hand, impervious to the lashing rain, he sat on the running board of the car and waited.

A few seconds later there came from the east a jagged flash of lightning ripping across the sky. Timing his movement exactly with the flash, the masked man pressed the trigger of his pistol. A rocket flared into the air toward the island, and as it traveled carried with it the line which uncoiled with a hissing sound like an angry snake.

Now the Phantom returned to his car. Carefully he drove it toward the bridge, across to the island. He stopped it again at the other side, and on foot returned to the center of the swaying portage.

The wind howled in his ears; the rain pelted in his face. Yet instead of deterring him, the assault of the elements seemed to contain some significance which he regarded favorably.

"The weather clinches it," he muttered to himself as he knelt in the center of the bridge. "This is a better break than I expected."

For some little time he remained kneeling there, then at last he straightened up and walked back to the point where he had left his car. He waited there in silence for a moment, his eyes straining through the night, his ears tense as he listened.

**T**HEN he heard the thing he was waiting for, saw the thing happen. There was a dully thudding roar as the nitroglycerine which he had planted at the bridge's center exploded. The sagging transverse cracked itself up in the middle and cracked in twain. Wood and debris filled the air.

The Phantom sighed.

Now he raced up the shore of the island. Searching carefully, he found the line which he had shot across the raging waters a few moments ago.

He pulled in the thin line until the heavy cable to which it was attached was in his hand. Now he laboriously climbed the rocky cliff on the island. Half way up, he stopped and made the cable fast. Then, despite the savage pounding of the elements, he stood straight up and stretched himself. A smile of confidence was on his face.

The Phantom had made his plans; he was ready for the struggle to the death with the Thirteen Cards of Death. Let the blood fall where it may!

But still there was one thing to be done. He clambered down from the cliff until he reached the very edge of the slashing sea. Now, walking slowly, he proceeded to circle the entire island. The isolated body of land was about two miles in circumference, and during that walk the Phantom came across some dozen boats of various kinds.

Each time he found a craft a steel knife in his hand slashed at its painters, and the boats were cast

adrift. With that task complete he was ready; and some full three hours after he had arrived at the now devastated bridge he approached the big house which stood in the center of the island, the home of Rochamber.

Van approached the house silently. The porch was dark, and though a light burned dimly within the house, there was no sign of life there. He took an automatic from his pocket, while his left hand held a flashlight before him.

He tried the door. It opened and he entered the room. The hall was deserted. He walked down the corridor until he saw an open door. There he entered.

The flashlight in his hand sent its beam of light into the square glass of a mirror on the other side of the room. Standing before the glass was a tall, dark man, clad in a dressing gown. In his fingers was a string of pearls. On the dresser was an open jewel case. As he entered the man straightened up. He greeted the other with a tremor in his voice.

"The Phantom!" he exclaimed. "Thank God, you've come. I've been hiding my valuables just in case—"

**H**E did not say in case of what, but his bearing indicated that death was the thing he feared.

"Thank God, you've come," he said again, wringing the sleuth's hand. "I did not dare to trust anyone but you."

Van returned his greeting. Then he glanced at his wrist watch. It was lacking but twenty minutes of twelve. He examined the room carefully, then he turned to Rochamber.

"Who else is in the house?" he asked.

"No one," said Rochamber. "I dismissed the servants for the evening. I live here alone."

Van nodded. His cursory examination showed him that there were a number of exits from the room. Six windows and two doors. For a moment he wondered at the man dismissing his servants on a night when it seemed that he might be in dire need of them. Then something striking his senses drove that thought from his mind.

Something fragrant floated into his nostrils. A vague and pleasant aroma was wafted to him. As he smelled it, he stood stock still in the center of the room. Something stirred within his memory. He had smelled this perfume before, and he remembered vividly the circumstances attending his last consciousness of it.

**Y**ET he said nothing of the things in his mind. He was silent as certain vague suspicions crystallized into definite damning things. Beneath his mask an imperceptible smile wreathed his face. Again he glanced at his wrist watch. The hands indicated that it was now within two minutes of midnight.

Rochamber turned to him anxiously.

"It's almost time," he said in a husky whisper. "Are you ready?"

Van nodded.

"I'm ready," he said, and there was a grim, sardonic note in his tone. "Now," continued Van, "you, Mr. Rochamber, stand on the far side of the room with your back to the wall. I shall remain here directly opposite you, though some fifteen feet away."

Rochamber looked at him for a moment, then silently obeyed his orders. Van took up his position against the wall. His right hand reached toward the shoulder holster beneath his left armpit and from it he withdrew a heavy .38.

He held it steadily in his hand as he gazed across the room, his eyes

staring from behind the holes in his black silk mask directly into the dilated pupils of the white-faced Rochamber opposite him.

The large hand on Van's wrist watch moved implacably toward the zenith of the dial. Uneasy silence seemed to permeate the room. At the far side stood Rochamber, dilated eyes fixed on the Phantom. Fear stamped indelibly upon his countenance as his appealing glance was focused on the one living man whom he believed could save him from the lurking peril which threatened him.

From somewhere outside came the reverberating boom of a striking clock. Rochamber, back against the wall, opened dry lips and breathed audibly.

His nostrils widened.

Van's hand tightened slightly on the butt of his revolver. His eyes were hard and cold, like frozen marbles. His face was grim and merciless, no kindness, no humanity showed there.

For the Phantom was waiting for the foe, waiting to come to grips with the Ace of Hearts for the last time!

**H**E had evolved a theory at last, evolved a theory that should spell the end of the nefarious gang of killers.

He knew that there still remained a remote chance that he was wrong. But that matter would be settled shortly, in something under ten seconds now.

The tolling clock without boomed forth its chronological message. Mentally Van counted the chimes, as did the other two men in that room. As the last stroke of midnight came to his ears, his muscles flexed. He knew well that his life would be saved by his own physical agility in the next instant.

Now it happened!



And Dick Van Loan, fully expecting the development, was ready for it.

From somewhere came a swift, dull click.

Simultaneously with that metallic sound the lights went out. The room was plunged instantaneously into an ebony and eerie darkness. Rochamber's harsh breathing was the only audible sound.

At the second that those lights had been extinguished, Van moved swiftly, silently, to one side. In the infinitesimal part of a moment he had moved three lithe paces to the left of the spot where he had been standing when the lights were extinguished.

His left hand dropped to his pocket and whipped out a flashlight. His finger pressed its button and a shaft of white light cut through the darkness.

**I**N its beam of illumination something glittered, something metallic moved with the speed of a bird through space, flashed in the light of the electric torch, and with a dull hum struck the wall.

The beam of light followed in its wake and came to rest, casting a halo of illumination on the wall, framing the quivering hilt of a knife that was imbedded cleanly in the panel.

At the far end of the room Rochamber was shrinking up against the wall. Stark fear seemed written upon his countenance, yet a close observer would have noticed a light in his eyes that appeared somehow to belie his apparent panic.

He stared at the vibrant hilt of the knife that was stuck in the wall at the very point where Van had been standing when the lights were so mysteriously extinguished.

"Good grief!" said Rochamber. "What happened? Who put out those lights? Who threw that

knife? Shall I phone the police and have the house searched?"

Van shook his head slowly.

"No," he said. "That won't be necessary."

Rochamber looked at him.

"Do it," he cried. "Get the police. There's a killer here in my house. Search the house!"

Again Van shook his head.

"There is no one in this house," he said slowly.

Rochamber stared at him in amazement. Then he found his voice first.

"No one here?" he exclaimed. "Then who threw that knife?"

"The Ace of Hearts," said Van easily.

Rochamber shuddered at the mere mention of the dread name, but his eyes held a peculiar light.

"But," he objected, "you say that there's no one in the house. Or do you mean that by now he's escaped?"

"He's still here," said Van evenly.

His eyes met Rochamber's and the latter regarded him strangely.

"What do you mean?" he asked in a voice husky with fear. "Where is he? Show him to me."

"Certainly," said Van. The hand that held his .38 tightened slightly on the revolver's butt. He raised his left hand and pointed directly at Ward Rochamber.

"There," he said dramatically. "You are the Ace of Hearts!"

## CHAPTER XXI

### A CONCLAVE OF DOOM

**F**OR the instant following this sudden accusation Rochamber's face was a mask of immobile muscles. His eyes alone showed emotion.

Then slowly his lips were distorted into a bestial snarl. Hate

and murder shone from his face. The cringing fear which he had been simulating dropped from him like a discarded garment. He took a step forward. An inarticulate growl left his lips. He glared balefully at the Phantom.

Then swiftly as a rattler's strike, his hand plunged down to his hip pocket. His fingers touched the butt of an automatic. He jerked it out into the air, but Van, seeing the flashing gesture of his gun arm, was ready for him.

The Phantom took a single step forward and before the other could level the muzzle of his weapon he brought his own gun barrel down upon Rochamber's head.

The man reeled backward and the automatic left his nerveless fingers as he fell to the floor. Van lost no time in bending over his prostrate form. Deftly he ran his fingers through the man's pockets.

**F**INALLY he withdrew a piece of paper. Some handwriting was on it. Van studied it for a moment, then smiled grimly.

"That clinches it," he murmured.

He thrust the piece of paper in his pocket, and started toward the door of the room. Thus far all his plans were working well. If he finished this deal as auspiciously as he had started it, this evening's events might well spell the end of the Thirteen Cards of Death.

Then, just as he was about to leave the room, the telephone jangled shrilly. For a moment he hesitated. Then with a shrug of his shoulders he walked toward the instrument.

In a perfect replica of Rochamber's voice he said: "Hello!"

Another voice trickled to him over the wire.

"This is the Jack of Hearts. Is that job finished yet?"

"It's finished," replied Van.

"Good," said the other. "I'm down here at the meeting room with the others. I'll drive up for you."

Before Van could demur, the other had hung up.

For a moment the Phantom stood there lost in deep thought. His original plan had been to leave the island via the swinging cable which he had strung from the cliffs to the shore. But the Jack of Hearts would be here at once. It would be impossible for Van to reach the spot where the cable swung before the other man arrived here and found the Ace unconscious.

With characteristic boldness Van made a quick decision.

He raced into another room of the house. Feverishly he searched every closet he found. Then at last in the bedroom he found what he was after—the black menacing robes of the Ace of Hearts. Swiftly he struggled into them, and no sooner had he completed his task than he heard a ring of the outside bell.

He stopped long enough to bind the prostrate Rochamber's arms and legs, then he strode arrogantly out to meet the Jack of Hearts. The latter greeted him eagerly.

"Is it over, Chief?"

Van nodded. The Jack of Hearts led the way into the stormy night. Before the house a coupé waited. Into this climbed the Phantom, and a moment later he was traveling toward the meeting place of the Thirteen Cards of Death!

**T**HE Thirteen Cards of Death were already gathered when the man who wore the garb of their leader entered the room in which the conclave of doom had assembled.

As the tall dark figure with the crimson heart emblazoned on his sleeve entered the room, an awed

hush came over the occupants. There was utter silence as Van took the place of the Ace of Hearts at the head of the table.

As he seated himself in the chair a feminine voice pregnant with a terrible hate came to his ears.

"Is he dead? Is the Phantom dead?"

Van nodded his head gravely.

"The Phantom is dead," he said in perfect imitation of Rochamber's harsh booming tones. "As all those who defy the Thirteen Cards of Death must die, so is the Phantom dead."

A low murmur swept the table. From his seat Van could see the flashing bitterness in the girl's eyes.

"I'm glad," she said. "At last George's death is partly avenged. It was the Phantom's fault that he was killed."

Van said nothing, though he failed to see how anything, save perhaps feminine reasoning, could connect him with Winters' death. He merely shrugged and kept his counsel.

AND now on his left a man bearing the numeral nine upon his coat sleeve rose from the table and addressed Van.

"And shall we draw tonight again," he asked. "Shall we draw another thirteen from whom we shall collect our ransom?"

"Yes," said Van, "we shall draw, if your hands are steady and ready to strike. For we shall slay those who defy us."

A low hum filled the room as the Thirteen audibly concurred with their master's sentiments. Number Nine left the table for a moment, then returned with the tremendous drum that held the names of the potential victims of the Thirteen.

He placed the drum on the table, re-

turned to his seat and waited for Van to draw.

Van rose slowly. He withdrew his hand from the drum. He unfolded a slip of paper. His lips opened as he prepared slowly to read the names, planning to stall for as much time as possible. Then, he stiffened like an animal who has suddenly become aware of danger.

AT the front part of the house there came a faint rasping sound as of a key turning in a lock. A heavy footstep sounded in the hall.

The Thirteen exchanged significant glances. More than one hand dropped beneath the edge of the table and came to rest on the butt of a revolver. Van's own weapon was in his fingers. His heart picked up a beat.

Then swiftly a disheveled figure appeared in the doorway. His hair was awry, and smeared with blood. His eyes stared wildly and a terrible hatred lived within them. Livid with rage and fury he stood in the dim light of the doorway and glared at the assembly.

As one man the Thirteen Hearts rose and leveled weapons at the intruder. Some one spoke.

"Who are you?"

The voice came back from the doorway, harsh and booming, with a touch of shrill rage in it.

"Who am I? I am the Ace of Hearts!"

Van stared across the room at the distorted, evil features of the man who had called himself Rochamber. Now the eyes of every person in the room turned to Van.

The Phantom's pulse raced rapidly. Whether or not any of them save the Queen of Hearts knew the real identity of their leader he did not know. Yet he realized that the genuine Ace of Hearts should have little trouble in proving his identity.

Again a voice ripped through the tense silence.

"Then who is this?"

"You fools! That is the Phantom!"

A gasp swept that room. A gasp of surprise, and contained in it was more than a hint of terror. For a moment all of them stood immobile. It was that moment that gave Van a chance for his life. He whipped his .38 into view.

"If anyone moves," he rasped, "he dies!"

The girl's voice hit his ears.

"It is the Phantom, you fools! Kill him, or we shall all be put to death!"

THE desperate appeal in her tones rallied them. The deep voice of Rochamber shouted a mighty oath. Half a dozen revolvers were turned toward the man who stood calmly, fearlessly at the head of the table, clad in the ominous garments of the bloody Ace of Hearts.

But though a dozen barrels pointed at him, it was his own weapon that spoke first.

The dread silent room was suddenly reverberating with the detonations of Van's spitting revolver. Lead, steel, and flame flung themselves across that table at which had been plotted such terrible things.

A man screamed and fell, blood gushing from a jagged hole in his throat. Five revolvers crashed their reports through the air. Van ducked low until his head was barely on a level with the table top. Then, firing as he went, he retreated to the door behind him.

Something bit his arm, ripped into the flesh and left a stream of blood in its wake.

Now he gained the door, fired a parting shot and ran madly up the stairs behind him. The Ace's voice followed him.

"Get him quick! Kill him!"

Feet rushed across that room, feet

bearing men who carried death in their hearts and in their hands, men who were bent on exterminating the enemy who had tracked them down again, who had frustrated their final desperate plan to send him to his doom.

Up the stairs Van raced, reloading his revolver as he did so. For a second he paused on the landing and sent three well directed shots humming angrily through the air toward his enemies.

Pandemonium ran riot through the building. The girl's thin voice shouted imprecations until tears rendered her words inarticulate. Shots and powder smoke filled the air.

Still the gang came on!

The wound in Van's arm throbbed painfully now. Blood dripped down from his sleeve and stained the floor as he fled and fought his running battle.

Then of a sudden he pulled up short.

THE hall ended abruptly. He had taken a wrong turn. In a moment the gang would turn the corner and he would be trapped. With a grim fixed smile on his face he swung around, prepared to sell his life as dearly as possible, prepared to inflict as exorbitant a toll as he could before he fell, pierced by the bullets of the Thirteen Hearts.

His hand was firm on his weapon. There were now five shots left in the magazine. He resolved inwardly that five men would die before the Phantom came to the end of the long, long, trail.

Now they came!

A voice shouted triumphantly: "There he is! We've got him!"

Ten other voices took up the cry.

"Death to the Phantom! Death to the Phantom!"

Van's finger constricted on the trigger. Two jagged flashes left the

barrel. Two men rolled over the floor, screaming in agony from their wounds.

And now, there came up, shouting, from the rear of his men, the Ace of Hearts himself.

"Leave him to me," he cried in a voice of thunder. "I shall kill him myself."

The pack, led by the Ace, closed in.

Then in an instant, Van saw a means of escape. At his very elbow was a small window. As it was covered by a black shade, he had not noticed it before. There was neither time to raise the shade nor to open the window. But even as the Ace of Hearts tensed his finger on the trigger of his gun, Van hurtled through the air.

His body struck the window with a terrific crash. Glass shattered itself about him. His hands were held before his face to protect him from the flying fragments. Something scratched his flesh. Blood flowed from a dozen superficial wounds.

The steel from the Ace's gun flung itself snarlingly over his head. Someone shouted in alarm. Van felt himself fall through space. The storm slashed at his body. From the jagged window frame above, a score of shots followed his descent.

"Downstairs," someone cried. "He can't get off the island."

VAN hit the ground with a sudden jar. Swiftly he recovered his balance and ran like a deer through the night. Behind him he heard shouts and shots.

Straight toward the shore he sped. Before him the pounding of the ocean drowned all other sounds. Over treacherous footing he raced until at last he reached the spot where he had made the cable fast.

He did not hesitate a moment. He flung himself at the line, seized it with his hands and threw his body

off the cliff with a push of his legs. Now he was dangling in midair, moving swiftly hand over hand over the roaring chasm below.

The friendly darkness enfolded him. His swaying body could not be seen from the island. He realized that he had escaped the vengeance of the sinister organization of death once again, unless they located the cable before he reached the mainland.

HE had almost attained his objective when he heard a mighty shout which came to his ears above the pounding of the waves, above the slashing storm of the night.

He felt the cable jerk and sag slightly. He realized that one of the cohorts of the Ace had started out on the same perilous journey via cable.

With a sigh of relief he pulled himself up on the jagged cliffs of the mainland. He whipped a steel cutting scissors from his pocket. Its blades opened and closed about the cable. Like a flailing snake it dropped into the waves below and with it went a man the Phantom could not see.

From the raging inferno some seventy feet below there came a faint agonized cry of terror, as Neptune and Death rose arm in arm from the waves to claim a human life.

Van stood still for a moment, breathing heavily. His arms ached from the terrific strain that had been put upon them. His lungs inhaled the fresh cold air gratefully.

The Phantom was free again!

Free to keep the rendezvous he had made that morning with the commissioner of police, free to lead the boats he had asked the law to anchor along the coast in case of need. Well, the need was here now.

On the island the gang was safely marooned. Their bridge was shat-



tered and broken. Their boats were cut adrift; and to attempt to swim on this evil night was to drown. The man who ventured forth in that raging sea was as good as dead.

Dick Van Loan paused for yet another moment to regain his breath; then, like Mercury himself, he sped along the tops of the cliffs to the point where a fleet of police boats awaited him.

## CHAPTER XXII

### UNDER FIRE

SIX boats hugged the rockbound shore, tugging at their anchors as if impatient to thrust their prows into the beating waves and break their tethers. The incipient dawn stained the black of the night to a cold gray.

The sea hissed angrily, and her waves reached up like beating arms and crashed against the hulls of the six vessels.

On the bridge of the largest, trimmest of these, stood a man anxiously eyeing the shore.

From time to time he turned his head and surveyed the six police boats which he had caused to be anchored here in response to a message from the Phantom.

Now he glanced down at his wrist-watch, and spoke to an aid who stood near-by.

"He's overdue," he remarked. "He said he'd be here at dawn."

The other man scanned the jagged shore.

"He'll be here," he replied. "He's never failed us yet, sir."

The Commissioner shrugged.

"True. Though I wish I knew what he was working on. I wish he'd told me something of his plans. Then in case something has happened to him we could quickly go to the rescue."

The Inspector gripped the Commissioner's arm tensely. With his

other hand he pointed toward the shore.

"Look!" he said.

The Commissioner's eyes followed the direction of the other's outstretched finger. Some three hundred yards away, rendered almost invisible by the opaque light of the early morning, a solitary figure slowly came toward the anchored vessels.

The Phantom was approaching!

Five minutes later, a breathless man, wearing a disheveled black suit and a black silk mask over his eyes, climbed up on the bridge of the flagship of the fleet of police boats.

The Commissioner greeted him eagerly.

"Thank goodness you're here," he exclaimed. "What's up?"

"The Thirteen," said Van grimly. "Or what's left of them. They're trapped a mile up the coast on an island. The island where Rochamber has his home."

The Commissioner's eyes widened.

"Rochamber!" he repeated. "But he got a warning from the Ace."

"He is the Ace," said Van grimly. "But let's get going fast before the storm abates enough to permit them to swim to safety. I'll explain it all to you later."

THE Commissioner gave an order to the skipper of the flagship. Signal flags were hoisted on her hal-yards. With a rattle of their chains the anchors were hauled up. Engines trembled violently. Steel screws thrashed savagely at the sea.

And the gallant craft set off toward the island to deliver the death blow to that murderous organization, which had so arrogantly called itself the Thirteen Cards of Death.

It was almost dawn when the six police boats crawled through the raging waters of the Atlantic and approached the island where the Ace of Hearts had maintained his secret

headquarters. The red rim of the sun thrust itself over the horizon and bathed the ocean in an eerie pastel light as the redoubtable prows of the vessel staunchly ploughed through the foaming waves.

The Phantom stood on the bridge at the side of the Commissioner of Police.

"It's an ignominious end for such an arch fiend as the Ace of Hearts," commented the Commissioner. "We'll simply overwhelm them, and they'll have to surrender without a fight."

Van shook his head slowly.

"I don't think so," he replied. "Rochamber will fight until death. He's got courage despite his vices. We're going to have trouble before we land."

And even as he spoke his words were verified. The island was now within a scant two hundred yards of the approaching vessels. Suddenly in the dim dawn there streaked from the land a jagged red flash. A legato roar sounded in their ears.

"Machine-guns," cried the commissioner. He turned to an aide who stood near-by. "Have the men prepared for action?"

The flagship flashed a signal. Men lined the decks of the vessels. The ominous barrels of Lewis guns thrust themselves over the sides.

**T**HEN like an exploding hell reverberating above the crashing of the breakers, the guns on the decks of the police boat shouted their staccato message of death. The dawn was shattered with the sounds of battle.

From the island came a roaring answer to the police challenge. The air was alive with steel and lead. Flame seared the coolness of the morning. Death, himself, walked upon those waters.

The Phantom sprang from the

bridge and raced to the bow of the vessel where a staunch one-pounder thrust its nose out over the sea. In a single gesture he loaded it, and pulled the lanyard.

A crimson flash leaped into the air, and the shell ripped through space toward the nefarious island. Earth and debris flung themselves into the air as the shell landed.

Then of a sudden the deck about Van was riddled to a sieve with machine-gun bullets. On the shore shouting to his men, Van made out the sinister figure of the Ace of Hearts.

**H**E was pointing to the easily visible figure of the masked Phantom in the prow. Now every weapon on the island was leveled dead at the form of the hated foe who had brought the gang to the end of the trail.

Van threw himself flat on the deck. Over his head steel flew through the air with a whine like a banshee's wail and with as ominous a prognostication.

Despite the veritable hail of fire which swept down upon them from the murderous machine-guns on the shore, the gallant ships kept on, breasting the fury of the waves and the angry death that was in the searing lead which deluged their hulls.

But now the bulwarks of the flagship touched the piles of a dock which jutted forth from the island. A skillfully thrown line encircled a post. The vessel bumped the pier. The commissioner leaned over the bridge as if to give an order, but before he could speak, the Phantom had taken command.

He sprang down from the bow of the ship, and placed himself at the head of a platoon of police.

"Come on," he shouted. "Follow me."

A sweeping blue flood surged forth from the vessels behind the masked man. In the face of the wave of bullets which greeted them they pressed on, their advance covered by a devastating barrage from the ships.

On they charged until they reached the rocky barricade behind which the survivors of the Thirteen Cards of Death were making their last desperate stand. Without hesitation Van sprang down into the makeshift trench. His men, without pause, followed their intrepid leader.

Van stood stock still as he landed on the bottom of the barricade. Slowly he replaced his revolver in his pocket and stared at the terrible scene of slaughter that met his eyes.

Of the diabolical gang but three remained. The others lay in a huddled bloody heap upon the ground, as the death which they had dealt so freely came at last to claim them.

The three who still lived stood a little distance from Van. From their abject attitudes it was evident that there was no fight left in them.

**T**WO of them stared dully at the drawn guns of the police, then flung up their hands in despairing surrender.

But the third man did not surrender. A snarl distorted his lips as he glared balefully at the masked man who had frustrated him. Hate and murder shone from his evil eyes. His hand dropped to his hip. In an instant it moved upwards again and now it held a grim .38 in its fingers.

But the Phantom was not unprepared. Though Rochamber's move had preceded his own by a fraction of a second, his own flashing gesture was completed an instant before the other's.

The two weapons spoke as one. Two steel jacketed bullets whirled through the air, passing each other in flight. One of them tore through the Phantom's left arm; the other thudded into a human breast, ripped through the flesh and ate its avid way into a black ugly heart.

The Ace of Hearts staggered backwards. His hands clutched his throat. His jaw fell open, his eyes were dilated, glazed. He fell to the ground, blood spurting from an ugly hole in his chest. He turned his head slightly as he lay there, and in that last moment of his life, spat a fearful curse at the man who had ended his nefarious career.

**T**HEN his head fell back. A horrible gurgle emanated from his throat, and The Ace of Hearts died as he had lived, with an oath upon his lips and hatred in his heart. He lay there, a still, inert corpse, a gory sacrifice to the evil he had created.

Then suddenly there appeared around the end of the trench a figure—a figure upon whose sleeve there appeared the crimson symbol of the sinister society.

At Van's side a policeman raised his gun. His finger tensed upon the trigger. From the corner of his eyes Van saw the man's gesture. Swiftly he brought his hand down upon the other's wrist.

The hand that gripped the gun dropped. The gun blazed forth. The bullet buried itself harmlessly in the soil. Now the figure came closer, and the Phantom stepped forward to meet the Queen of Hearts.

She regarded him with moist but courageous eyes. She indicted the over-zealous policeman with a nod of her head.

"You saved my life," she said evenly.

Van nodded.

"You saved mine once," he answered gravely.

For some vague reason which she herself did not understand, her eyes filled with tears.

"Well," she said brokenly. "This is the end, I guess. I'll take my medicine."

"Yes," said Van again as if he had not heard her. "You saved my life once and I'll do my best to see that leniency is shown you."

She flashed him a glance of gratitude and they walked toward the ship together.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE MYSTERY CLEARS

**I**N THE little cabin off the bridge of the police flagship, three figures were sitting. The Queen of Hearts, her eyes moist, and her jauntiness thoroughly gone, stared moodily out at the raging sea, seeing perhaps, in the turmoil of the waters, an analogy to her own troubled life.

The Commissioner regarded Van curiously.

"Well," he said. "I'm still in the dark. First, what on earth made you think that Rochamber was the Ace of Hearts?"

Van smiled.

"A number of things indicated that," he replied. "I knew the gang selected its victims from the Government income tax report of those who made a million or over a year. Rochamber's name was not on those lists."

"I still don't see it," said the Commissioner.

"When I didn't find him rated as a wealthy man—though he was wealthy enough unofficially—I suspected that it was a trap. That Rochamber was the Ace himself and his appeal to the Phantom was merely a plan to trap me. It was only

the fact that I suspected his trick that saved my life."

Briefly he related to the Commissioner the episode of the thrown knife in Rochamber's house, and how he had sidestepped it.

**A**S he finished the police chief nodded sagely.

"Still," he said, "I don't see how you could be sure at all. That is until after the knife was thrown."

"Winters' stolen papers gave me enough verification."

The Commissioner stared at him.

"You mean you found those papers?"

Van nodded.

"Yes. The torn card that Havens found in Winters' desk was a receipt for the rental of a safe deposit box. It took me a little while to figure it out, for the only legible words on the card stated that something had been rented for five dollars a year. The only thing I could think of that was that cheap was a deposit box, so I investigated and finally located the bank which issued that card."

"Whew!" said the policeman. "What was in the papers?"

"Plenty. I'll turn them over to you for the trial of the captured members of the gang. They contain the names of all the gang, all their past criminal records, all the gang's plans past and future. It's damning evidence. A lot of it is in Rochamber's own writing, although I was unable to get a specimen of that to clinch it until I searched him tonight."

He paused and lighted a cigarette. The Commissioner surveyed him admiringly, then another thought occurred to him.

"But how did he work those disappearing acts? That was the most mysterious part of the whole business."

Van frowned.

"I don't quite understand that my-

self," he said. "In the papers there's some mention of Rochamber's expertness as a trapeze man. That probably has something to do with it. Exactly what I don't know."

"I know," said a voice behind them.

They both turned to regard the girl, whose presence they had almost forgotten.

"I know," she repeated. "He was an expert at acrobatics. Whenever he wanted to use that trick he planned it days in advance. Some of the gang rented or planned entrance to an apartment below the one where he intended to be. They had a huge net attached to steel frames. They hung it out the window, and when he leaped out he landed in that. Then they pulled him in."

"So," said the Commissioner, "that was it!"

"That was it," she said evenly and returned to her sullen contemplation of the more sullen sea. The Commissioner made some notes in a little book. Van strolled aft to the poop. A strange moodiness had come upon him.

Once again he had been triumphant. Once again he had overcome an enemy that threatened society. But now that the chase was over, now that the excitement of the battle was

done, his nerves had undergone a sudden reaction.

He knew that, now, until some other evil genius of crime should claim his attention, he would be discontented with the normal routine of living. Now he stood there staring moodily at the approaching skyline of New York, tired and enervated, wondering how he could unearth enough excitement to relieve the prosaic existence of the ordinary man, wondering what adventure the future held in store for him.

**B**UT had the Phantom included clairvoyance among his other talents he would have spent no time speculating on the dullness of this civilization.

For at this very moment, there was a man—a man, far away in Haiti, who was already perfecting an iniquitous, gigantic plan of evil; a plan the frustration of which would tax the Phantom to his utmost, which would call into play all the talents, all the courage that he possessed.

But being unaware of these things, the man the world knew as the Phantom merely sighed wearily — and the bullet scarred vessel continued through the gray seas toward New York.

#### **NEXT MONTH:**

*The Phantom Detective's Gripping Combat with  
The Black Admiral, Arch-Criminal, in*

## **CITIES *for* RANSOM**

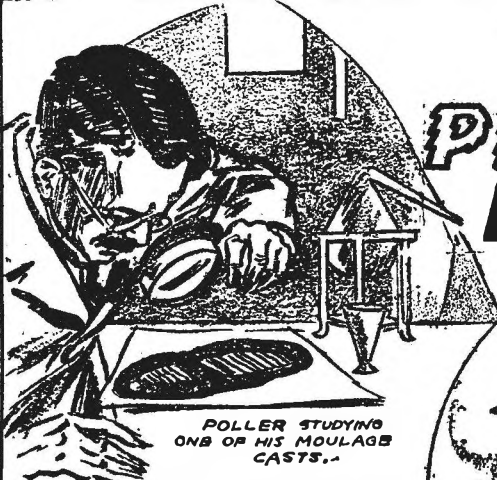
*A Full Book-Length Novel*

*Taken from the Case-Book of Richard Curtis Van Loan by G. Wayman Jones*

**A Thrill on Every Page of This Fast-Moving, Action-Packed Novel  
of a Methodic, Nefarious Plot for the Wholesale Pillage and  
Destruction of a Great American Metropolis!**



# True PHANTOM FACTS

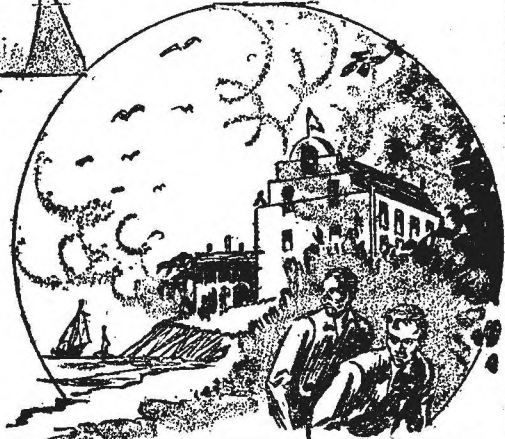


POLLER STUDYING ONE OF HIS MOULAGE CASTS.

**ALPHONSE POLLER**  
FAMOUS DETECTIVE OF VIENNA,  
IS THE INVENTOR OF THE NEW  
COLLOIDAL SUBSTANCE CALL-  
ED MOULAGE.

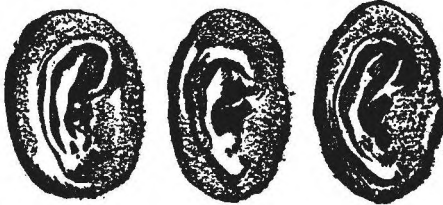
THIS GUM SUBSTANCE OF  
HOMINIT IS NOW USED TO  
MAKE IDENTIFICATION CASTS  
AND TO PRESERVE PERMA-  
NENTLY PERISHABLE BITS  
OF CRIMINAL EVIDENCE,  
SUCH AS FOOTPRINTS IN MUD  
AND DUST OR TEETH MARKS  
IN CANDY AND FRUIT.

THIS SYSTEM IS NOW  
COMING INTO UNIVERSAL  
USE IN PREFERENCE TO THE  
OLDER AND MUCH CRUDER  
METHOD OF USING PLASTER  
CASTS FOR SIMILAR PURPOSES.



## A PRISON WITH NO LOCKS OR GUARDS

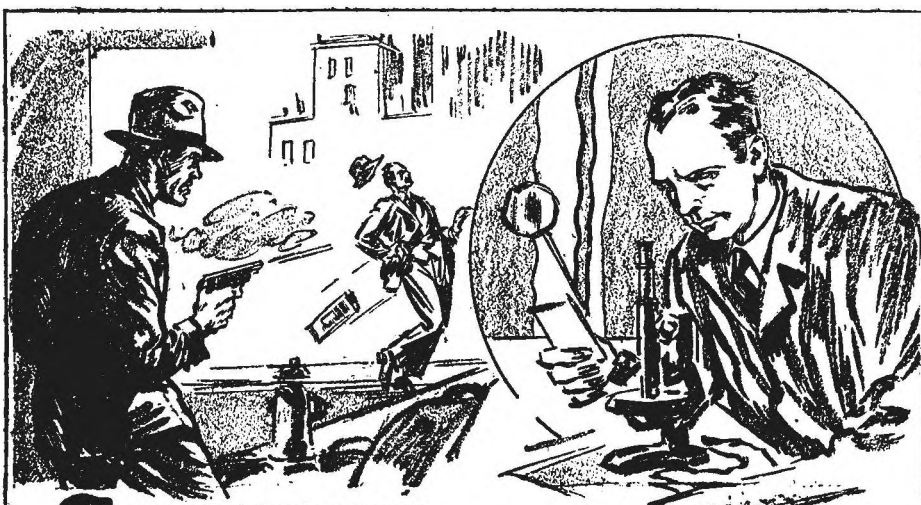
—IS BEING USED IN THE ISLE OF PINES,  
CUBA. THIS NEW TYPE OF PENAL IN-  
STITUTION BEING TRIED OUT IN AN  
EXPERIMENTAL WAY HAS BUT ONE  
RIGID RULE TO TAKE THE PLACE  
OF LOCKS AND GUARDS — ALL  
ESCAPED PRISONERS ARE TO BE  
BROUGHT BACK DEAD.



NO TWO HUMAN EARS ARE  
ALIKE — AND NOW THE VIENNA  
POLICE ARE TAKING "MOULAGE" CASTS  
OF EARS OF ALL CRIMINALS AND KEEP-  
ING THEM ON FILE, LIKE FINGER-PRINTS



*"True Phantom Facts" is an Exclusive Regular*



**M**URDERS ARE COMMITTED  
IN THE UNITED STATES TODAY  
ON THE AVERAGE OF ONE  
EVERY NINETY MINUTES.

**C**LOTHES MAY OFTEN  
BETRAY GUILT!

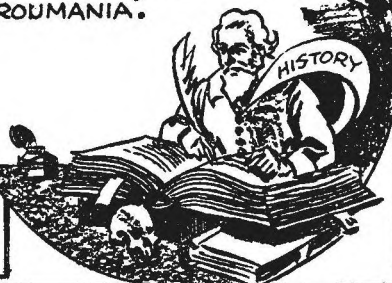
E. CARLTON HOOD, OF THE  
SCIENTIFIC CRIME DETEC-  
TION BUREAU, RECENTLY  
MADE AN ANALYSIS  
OF THE DUST FROM THE  
TROUSERS OF SOME  
SUSPECTED COUNTER-  
FEITERS THAT DIS-  
CLOSED PARTICLES  
OF CERTAIN METALS  
AND CHEMICALS  
USED IN ILLEGAL  
METHODS OF MAKING  
MONEY.

HIS FINDINGS LED  
TO THEIR CONVICTION.



**J**AIL BREAKING IS  
NOT A CRIME IN  
TEXAS IF THE PRISONER  
ESCAPES WITHOUT A GUN.

**C**APITAL  
PUNISHMENT WAS  
ABOLISHED IN THE YEAR  
OF 1874 IN SWITZERLAND,  
PORTUGAL, HOLLAND AND  
ROUMANIA.



*Monthly Feature of The Phantom Detective*

# Gambler's Handicap



## *Detective Banahan Runs Into Some Tough Customers on the Gory Trail of a Kidnaped Jockey*

By **ROBERT WALLACE**

*Author of "The Trail of Death," "Four Men of Power," etc.*

**D**ETECTIVE BANAHAN crept slowly through the drizzling darkness of the deep grass pasture at the Oakmont track. Inwardly he burned with rage at the fate which had called him to the racing park from a warm bed.

Outwardly he was drenched to the skin, for the rain was the kind that penetrated.

Ahead of him dimly he could now make out the sketchy outlines of the first stable with here and there a thin crack of light where stable boys

or trainers were sitting up guarding their charges.

Hunched low as he walked, Banahan searched the gloom. Now and again he could hear the sound of a voice. Horses, those keen thoroughbreds who would draw thousands to the track that very afternoon, stamped and kicked nervously in their box stalls. Only the "mudders" would have a chance.

Suddenly Banahan dropped to his hands and knees in the wet grass, his eyes fixed on three muffled figures pasted against the end of the stables.

He was still too far from them to make out what or who they were, or what they were talking about.

**A** FOOT at a time Terry Banahan moved forward. He could see the arm of one figure moving, gesticulating, and heard a voice low and complaining.

These three might belong to the Sure-Thing Syndicate; might be members of the gang.

Banahan watched them for a moment, saw them edge to the corner of the stables and, one at a time, look up along under the front shed, where in fair weather half a hundred velvet muzzles protrude from stalls.

The detective drew his revolver and shoved it up his sleeve to keep it as dry as possible. Then, rising stiffly, he started toward the spot where the three lurked in the semi-darkness.

"Hey!" he called out as he went. "Stay where you are."

The three slunk back against the building for an instant, then, without replying, fled swiftly along the end of the stables and swung around the corner, out of sight.

Terry Banahan plowed through the tall grass as fast as he could, reached the harder ground, and raced to the corner of the stables. He had the gun in his hand, but held his fire when even in the darkness he might have a fair chance to bring one of the fugitives down. Shooting like that, in the dead of night, might ruin some poor stable's chance for a victory, might send one of the high-strung, nervous bundles of horseflesh into a tantrum.

Standing close to the corner, Banahan waited, watching narrowly for a movement, a sound, other than the stamping or snorting of a horse. A door might open. All Banahan wanted was sight of a head. But

nothing disturbed the dismal silence along the row of stables.

"I'm in it, I guess," he said to himself, squirming in the clinging wet of his clothes. "This thing is more than just a report."

Stalking back toward the other row of stables, he looked here and there at the cracks of light. Then, keeping to the shelter of the overhang, he walked quietly until he came to a door, the upper half of which stood partly open. A small light gleamed inside, and Banahan looked in.

A small, narrow-shouldered elderly man sat on a cot by the wall. Behind him on pegs hung pieces of horses rigging—bridles, martingales, halters, saddles. Light from a single electric bulb threw strange stringy shadows over the wall.

The man was reading a magazine. Somewhere in the room, Banahan could hear snoring, but the snorer was out of sight.

"Whis-s-s-t!" whispered the detective. The man looked up, squinting. "Where's the Ten Eyck stable, Mister?"

"On the other side," came the reply. "Number Five. Ask for Jim."

**B**ANAHAN grunted his thanks and went away, crossing the wide street to the shelter opposite. "Must be Kattersby," he said to himself as he glanced at the number on the stable beside him.

Walking leisurely, he glanced right and left, making a note of the occupied stables, keeping an eye on his step, spanning puddles. He heard the unmistakable drawling note of a negro crooning to a blue-grass colt, and stopped. Then to his ears came the shrill sound of someone whistling. Short, sharp and sudden it came. Like a signal.

Alert instantly, Banahan leaped forward. Running lightly a few

steps, he found himself in front of Stable Five. The door to the tack room stood half open.

"Mister Kattersby," called Banahan. He swung the door out and looked into the room. "Jim Kattersby!"

He called, then saw the man, half on the floor, half on the cot, in the corner.

## II



OLD Jim Kattersby was known wherever barriers are sprung. He was Moreland Ten Eyck's horse trainer. Thousands of followers of the sport of kings were looking for Jim Kattersby to send the winner to the post that day in the running of the Woodward Memorial Handicap.

Terry Banahan had seen pictures of the great Arrow Head in the papers, had heard of the horse many times during the season. Now he stood beside the groaning Kattersby and saw the long sleek muzzle of Arrow Head hanging over the stall door.

"Kattersby!" said the detective. "What happened? Come on, old-timer; tell a feller!"

The gray-haired trainer groaned and his arms reached out, moving in groping circles. Banahan had him propped up against the wall on a bundle of blankets and was frisking him for wounds.

Kattersby's eyes had opened. He was staring at the younger man, dazedly.

His lips moved soundlessly, as if trying to form words. Arrow Head, moved in his stall, snorted without warning and Terry Banahan swung quickly, dropping the trainer upon the blankets. It was the snorting of his charge as much as any efforts of the detective that aroused Jim Kattersby to his senses.

"Sid," he cried. "They took Sid. He's gone."

ANYBODY who followed the horses or read the sports pages knew that where Jim Kattersby was, where the great Arrow Head pawed with his fleet hoofs, there, too, was Sid Culver, the jockey.

Banahan shook the old trainer gently. "Where?" he asked, trying to force words from Kattersby. "Who took the kid? I'm from Headquarters."

The old man's hand stretched out weakly, as if pointing. Terry Banahan followed the line and saw a water pail with a dipper floating in it.

"Water, eh?" he said, stepping over and scooping some up. "Here, take a drink. We've got to hurry."

Kattersby drank like a famished man and water dripped from his gray mustache as he lifted his face to the detective.

"It's the Syndicate gang," he cried out. "They came here—two of them—surprised us."

"Yes," cut in Banahan. "What for?"

"They're out to make a killin'," declared the old horseman, now afire with the spirit that made the Ten Eyck entries fight to the wire for years. "Tried to make us pull the Arrow tomorrow—today. The handicap, yuh know. And a wet track. They'll shake the books all over the country at post time. See it? The Arrow is a mudder and they've got it fixed to scratch a coupla entries that'd give their outsider all the trouble."

"What outsider?" demanded Banahan eagerly.

"Gun Echo," said Kattersby, staggering to his feet. "A gray gelding they been holdin' back this meetin'. He's web-footed. They can make a killin'. What's your name?"



"I'm Banahan," said the detective. "They sent me out here on a phone call from Ten Eyck. Said there was talk of bad business here tonight."

"Bad business," repeated Kattersby. "Hell, I'm ruined! That horse never went to the Post without Sid Culver on his back."

"You mean he won't run for another jock?" queried Banahan.

"Nobody's ever been able to get speed out of him," said Jim Kattersby. "They've lived together, eat and sleep together; the horse knows Sid. He needs him as much as he needs a leg."

"Listen," said the detective. Sounds of footsteps reached the ears of both of them. Banahan drew back against the front wall of the tack room. The feet came nearer. Terry remembered the whistle he had heard.

OLD Jim Kattersby scrambled softly to the drawer of a dilapidated bureau and drew out a huge horse pistol. He stood with his face to the door, the gun hanging in his fist.

Silently two men entered the tack room. They were clad in slickers, dripping.

"Hello, Jim," said the first.

Kattersby raised a hand, holding the gun. "Oh," he said, "we thought—"

The two men looked around, saw Banahan with his revolver centered on their belts.

"Banahan," said the second man, stepping forward. "We been lookin' for yuh."

"Sid's gone," said Kattersby. "Old man Ten Eyck'll—"

"We heard a whistle," said Tarbell, the first of the two racetrack police. "We were over near the main gate keepin' an eye on that parkin' space."

"You're too late," said Terry, his tone hard as steel. "And so was I. How many ways can people get into this track?"

"If you know them," said Tarbell, "there's a dozen."

As they stood there the sound of a motor and the shriek of brakes shattered the dull patter of the rain outside. Almost at once there were hurried footsteps approaching the stables. Tarbell, with a gesture, sent his mate to the door.

"Looks like Ten Eyck himself," said the lookout. "His chauffeur's with him."

For his years Moreland Ten Eyck made a good job of running through the rain with his Jap driver at his heels.

He burst into the dim-lit tack room, sweeping his hat from his white head.

"Jim!" he said, rushing over to Kattersby. "Why, Jim—we saw the door open as we swung in—what's happened? — didn't Headquarters send a man?"

Kattersby pointed to Terry, and clutched nervously at his employer's sleeve. He was trying to fight down the mixed emotions that blazed in his keen blue eyes.

THE kid," he blurted. "We fought 'em as hard as we could, Morey, but they got Sid. He's gone."

Moreland Ten Eyck's shoulders sagged but he threw an arm around his trainer and chewed his upper lip savagely, glaring around at the three lawmen.

"I knew it," he said. "Something told me—but Sid—he couldn't hurt a fly. Why he—"

"I'm Banahan," said Terry, stepping up to the horse owner. "All I knew about this was that crooked gamblers were trying to put this handicap in the bag. I was sent here to find out how serious it was."

We never thought it would be black-jack stuff, Mister Ten Eyck."

"Black-jack!" snapped the sportsman. "Why, this racing game is being black-eyed by gunmen and sure-thing gamblers. Every meeting casts more hideous reflections on the sport, on the honesty and sincerity of men like myself who love horse racing for the race itself. Why, I was called—mind you—Moreland Ten Eyck—called on the telephone early this morning—and told to pull Arrow Head in the handicap—and to watch my step if I did not."

Banahan kept looking about the room as he listened. Now he raised a hand, halting the owner of Arrow Head.

"That's what they said," roared Kattersby. "They wanted me to send the horse out under a pull. And when I told them to go to hell, they cracked me over the head. The kid piled in, and I heard him fightin' them as I went out."

Banahan nodded, letting the situation sink in, and wandered around the room, examining the place.

**A**LONGSIDE the opening of the horse's stall he stopped and leaned close to read a strip of paper which hung from a nail head.

"What's this?" he said half to himself as he took down the paper and walked to the light, which dropped from the ceiling on a wire.

"Keep your face shut," he read. "We'll keep the kid until after the race. You scratch the Arrow at post time and if you blab to the dicks before that you can kiss Culver by-by. We mean business."

"Well," said Banahan to the silent faces around him. "They'll kill Culver if you let this news get out before post time. They must know the boy is the only one can ride the Arrow."

"Everybody knows it," declared Ten Eyck bitterly, his eyes staring dully at the clotted blood on Kattersby's head. "We're helpless, damn them."

At the door Banahan spun around. He motioned to the two race track policemen.

"Come on," said the detective. "I want help."

### III

**W**ITH his flash in one hand and gun in the other Banahan led the way to the end of that stable row.

Stopping under the projecting shed, Banahan drew his companions toward him.

"Where is this Gun Echo's stable?" he asked. "We go there first."

Tarbell answered. "On the other side of the next row over," he said. "I'll show you."

The three ran through the rain to the opposite row, cut around the end of the building and turned down to the right. All the stalls were not occupied. Banahan, the last of the three, looked into each lighted crack as he passed.

"Here," said Tarbell, stopping. "In there."

Banahan ran his hand over the lower half of the door, flipped up the hook and pulled the door open. Followed by the two raincoated police, he walked in.

"Don't get up," he said as three men arose from squeaky chairs. "Who's the trainer of this horse?"

He motioned to the stall opening, where a black muzzled gray gelding head poked into the tack room.

"I am," said a short, bulky man, rather good-looking in a fat way. "What's the idea, Tarbell?" He turned to the track policeman with a nasty expression on his smooth

face. "We got to race this afternoon."

"You're—"

"Jimmy Conselyea's the name," said the Gun Echo man. "What's yours?"

Banahan unbuttoned his coat and flipped a lapel. "That's mine," he said coldly. "Who owns this horse?"

"Say," growled Conselyea, turning to a burly giant at his elbow. "What right have you got bustin' in here this time o' night an' cross-examinin' me? This is a racin' stable; ain't no police court."

"I'll tell you, then," said Banahan, jerking his gun from beneath his coat. "Get over there—against the wall there. You, too. All of you."

"Frisk 'em," he said to Tarbell.

Conselyea and his two companions cast fierce scowls over their shoulders, but they edged up to the wall and lifted their elbows.

**T**ARBELL went over them swiftly. On the big brute he found a pearl-handled revolver. The third man, a tall, slender, sallow-faced individual, delivered a small automatic.

"I'm not particular about finding out who owns this nag," he said to the trainer. "But I'm telling you this. And let it sink. Gun Echo don't run in the Handicap unless I find out who gives the orders—who's the man that's been holding him back in the last five starts."

"I give the orders," snapped Conselyea, his mouth screwed in a knot with rage. "And he's never been pulled. Are you tellin' me that I'm crooked?"

"I'm telling you that if Gun Echo hasn't been under wraps," declared Banahan, "then you're a damn fool to think you can match speed with horses like Arrow Head and On File, or any of them. I've got you dead to rights, pal. So come through.

Who makes the killing on this race?"

"I don't know a thing about it. I run this horse to suit his owner."

"Who owns him?"

"None of your business."

**O**KAY," said Terry Banahan, stepping nearer. "On your feet. All of you. We'll take you into town—you two for carrying concealed weapons—and you," the detective tapped Conselyea on the shoulder, "for aiding a swindle."

"I can't leave the horse," begged the trainer. "You can't take me—"

"I'm taking you," said Banahan. "That's the proof. Come on."

"Wait a minute," whined Conselyea. "I'd get killed if I left the nag. My stable boy's—"

"Who owns Gun Echo?" snapped Banahan. "Talk."

"The West Farms," answered Conselyea.

"Not enough," said Banahan. "Don't mean a thing. Get me, mister. I want the low-down. Who passes the word?"

"I'll get killed. They'll kill me. It ain't my fault, officer."

"Who?" Terry Banahan saw his man weaken, knew he was ready to spill over.

The whole atmosphere of the room was tense. Tarbell and Jensen, the other policeman, were covering the two gunmen. Conselyea almost shrank into his shadow. He tried to speak and all his throat would offer was a squeak.

"I don't know who he is," he spat out finally. "All I know is he tells me when."

"What does he look like?" demanded the detective.

Conselyea described the go-between. Medium height, would be taller if he stood erect; light hair, brows and lashes very light; dark brown eyes, small mouth. Never seen without a cigarette hanging from his

lip. Sharp face. Might be an albino, except for the brown eyes.

"Okay," said Banahan. "I'll remember him. Take those two," he pointed to the gun toting pair, "and turn them into the sergeant over at Rockford. Tell him I'll see him. And you, Conselyea—I'll see you before they go to the post. Come on, Tarbell."

Banahan was first out in the rain. The track detectives came with their prisoners, and started across the grass through the paddock toward the track entrance.

"And don't let them get to a phone," called Terry Banahan, turning, alone in the drizzle, to catch a fleeting glimpse of a figure darting around the corner of the third row of stables.

#### IV

**W**HEN Banahan reached the spot there was no sign of life. He listened for a moment, tiptoeing along beneath the overhanging shed. As he came abreast of the fourth section he noted that the upper half of the door was open, creaking softly in the wind. But there was another sound.

It was as if someone, some man, stepped against an object in the dark. Banahan whipped out his flash. The place was littered with rubbish of all sorts; old riding gear, pieces of blankets, newspapers, cans and a battered trunk. The door to the box stall stood open.

Banahan gripped his gun and walked in. He seemed to sense the presence of someone near him, yet his flash showed nothing. As he neared the box stall door, there was a swift movement near the trunk and Banahan swung around, heard the scramble of feet, soft as velvet. The flashlight threw a wide circle across which a cat flew toward the

open door. And in that flash the detective fell from a blow that almost tore the ear from his head.

There was little fight left in Terry Banahan, but he staggered drunkenly around to face the figure that piled onto him like a roof falling in. His gun was chopped from his hand by a whistling crash on his lower arm. Toppling backward, he flung hands and feet in a mad effort to hold his own. But the first blow on the head had settled him.

"A copper, eh?" said the man who now stood in the dark. "Well, that'll fix your wagon, yuh rat." Then he was gone, after a brutal kick.

The badly beaten detective lay for some time until his natural recuperative powers stirred the life in his limbs. With a groan of pain he rolled over on the floor.

He put a hand to his head and felt a trickle of blood behind his ear. The ear itself was swollen badly. His ribs—faintly he recalled that final kick—burned with the bruises. Maybe cracked.

"I'm too tough," said Banahan in a whisper, and almost the first thought that came to his consciousness was Conselyea's description of the man he wanted. "The Gat!" mumbled the detective. "Alias Nelson—alias—" Banahan stopped short as the facts assembled themselves in his rapidly clearing brain. "It's the Gat! And—that means Packey Oliver, the gambler—Big-Shot Oliver."

**F**EELING himself for wounds, Banahan rose slowly to his knees. It was dark in the tack room, only grim grayness filtering in from a small window rather high up in the wall. He felt for his black-jack. Must have dropped it somewhere earlier in the night out in the grass. He had to have something.

Groping, he found his hat and put

it on his head, the pain of contact making him flinch. Then he softly started a search for something he could use as a weapon. With all the junk that his hands encountered there was nothing. Small bits of reins, worn saddle pads, rags. He came to the trunk, eased up the lid. Then, lest he run his hands into danger, he drew out a match. Making a quick light, he hooded it with his hat and peered into the trunk. Old newspapers, faded racing charts, a cracked photo of a proud mare with foal and a single racing stirrup.

"A bit of gas pipe is what I could use," mused Banahan as he lifted the stirrup from the trunk.

He hefted the thing in his fingers, like a boy would swing a slingshot. Then he stood up. Somebody was standing outside the tack room, talking in an undertone.

## V

**T**ERRY BANAHAH crept noiselessly over to the door and flattened himself out against the wall with the stirrup strap looped over his wrist.

Outside one man was talking close against the building.

"Get him away from here," Banahan heard him say. "If he's dead an' anybody finds him there may be a fuss. This clean-up on the long-shot'll raise a holler anyways. Come on."

Somebody shoved the bolts back. The door was pulled open and the detective, determined to take at least one of the thugs with him, froze against the wall. A sharp beam of light stabbed into the tack room. Behind it promptly came a man's head. Banahan swung the stirrup in a short fast arc.

"Stick 'em up," he shouted as the light fell and he heard the thud of the falling body. There was the

echoing crash of a gunshot, a blinding flash, and Detective Terry Banahan was fighting, locked tight against the body of the second prowler.

**W**ITH a vise-like grip on the wrist of the hand that held the other's gun, Banahan battled silently, smashing with his left fist into the other's body, feeling the crunching blows of the other man's bludgeoning fists as they bumped along the face of the stable. For fear that the first man might regain consciousness and come to his pal's aid, the detective fought like a tiger, dragging his enemy back again to the open tack room door, where the two fell in together, panting, using hands and feet. Rolling across the body of the first man, they came to a sudden halt against the wall amid a pile of refuse.

Banahan fought free of a grip around his throat, grabbed now with both hands on the gun fist of the thug and snapped the arm around where a quick twist and a smash to the jaw sent his enemy's head against the wall with a dull thud. The gun slid from twitching fingers and Terry sprang to his feet with the weapon ready.

Banahan found a couple of reins, or halter straps, and quickly bound his prisoners. When he had both secured, he pushed the flashlight into the conscious man's eyes.

"Where's the Gat?" he demanded. "I'm giving you a chance to come clean. Where's this guy they call the Gat? Name's Nelson. Talk!"

"I dunno," stammered the man.

"Where's Packey Oliver hang out?" fired Banahan quickly.

"Search me," said the man with the light in his eyes.

"I'll search you," said Terry, jamming the fellow's own revolver against his throat. "I'll search you with this. You came looking for it

and you're getting it. Where is the guy I want?"

"Waitin' fer yuh," came the answer. "They'll kill yuh sure, an' I'm givin' you a break. Keep away from them guys, copper."

The bunch was primed for a killing. Banahan realized this. It was either a killing in the betting ring or a murder. Little Sid Culver would be the victim and racing would take another beating in the public prints.

"You're giving me a break, eh?" sneered the detective, "and I'm giving you a tip. I'm pulling the trigger on this gun, and I don't know how far back she's got to go before she jumps. Listen!"

**B**ANAHAN'S gun drew back from his adversary's throat to where the light from the flash made the gun look as big as a cannon. The man's eyes were fixed on the vicious weapon. He saw the cylinder begin to move, ever so little, saw the trigger dragging back, saw the steady, iron fist that gripped the trigger, fingers like claws of red-hot steel. He heard the sliding click of the ratchet. The pal beside him groaned and stirred.

"Wait!" cried the man. "Don't kill me. I'll—I'll talk."

Banahan leaned forward. "Say it," he ordered. "Where are they? Where have they got this jockey?"

The answer came in the form of a gunshot. Somewhere out there around the track, a gun was fired. Banahan spun and dived out the door. It was just beginning to break light in the east. The detective raced into the open beyond the stable end. He saw Moreland Ten Eyck with his Jap chauffeur. They had just run from Arrow Head's stall and Ten Eyck was pointing toward the far turn of the track.

Four men were running swiftly,

dragging another away from the grand stand, where a single figure stood, leveling a pistol. Banahan saw the flash, heard the bark, saw one of the fleeing men turn and fire. Then he was running to the paddock fence where he vaulted and went on. Behind him came the Japanese calling out to take Mister Ten Eyck's car.

Tarbell met him at the stand. He was panting as if from great exertion. "It's them!" he shouted as Banahan came up. "They've got Culver. I saw them come out of the tool shed under the stand, but they had a head start. I was afraid to shoot to kill 'count of the jock."

As they turned back toward the parking space Banahan heard the roar of a motor across the track.

"Get two guys in that third row of stables," he told Tarbell, then turned to the Jap at his side. "Come on, pal. This is our last chance. Make this car roll."

"Okay," replied the Jap, stepping into the low-hung black coupé. "You want to follow?"

"No," said the detective. "Catch 'em."

Terry Banahan jumped into the car beside the Jap. The little Jap started the motor, raced it twice with a wide-open throttle, gave it the gun and sent it around in a hair raising curve to shoot out through the race track gate.

## VI

**D**AYLIGHT was creeping over the countryside now, and the car ahead was holding a terrific pace. Mile after mile they shot along the road, straightening out the turns, taking them at fifty, and Banahan sat forward watching the masterful handling the little Oriental was giving that high-powered road wagon. Slowly,



surely, they were overhauling the gambler bus.

"Time her now, pal," said the detective. "Just keep 'em in sight. I want to give those gents a chance to make a break."

"Okay." The Jap's shining black eyes never left the road. He poured gas into the motor with the smoothness of an artist. Terry marveled at the skill, while he kept his own eyes on the rear window of the fleeing machine.

THE road was full of turns, snaking through long stretches of wood, then out into the open country, between fence rows of farm lands and sparsely settled suburban communities.

"You ain't afraid?" said Banahan to the Jap. "If those birds start shooting you might get hit."

"I am armed," came the reply. "I do a little shooting myself."

"Good!"

Like a thunder storm they roared into the shaded road, tearing along through the ruts of the first machine. Banahan saw the curve ahead and unconsciously reached his hand toward the Jap. But the little man never flinched. They rounded the curve on all four wheels, sweeping half the road surface into the ditch as they passed.

Straight ahead of them the road unrolled, but there was no sign of the fugitive machine. Banahan noted the dark old house on the left as they flew past. There was no sign of life there. And no car to be seen.

"Gone," said the Jap, and gave the gas to her again. "We'll catch up."

For some distance he let the Jap burn the mud. Then they shot out of the woods and Banahan laid a hand on the driver's arm.

"Pull her over in here," he said,

as they dipped into a hollow. "Quiet. Careful of the brakes."

"This bus never squeaks," the Jap said, guiding the car to the left of the road and swinging it off into a brush-rimmed clearing. "What now?"

"Now," said Detective Banahan, "I'm walking back. Back to that old deserted house we passed in the woods. You didn't see any auto tracks here, did you?"

The Jap glanced backward into the road, then at Banahan.

"Never thought," he admitted. "Pretty smart."

"You wait," said Banahan, "I'm sneaking up through the trees. My friends will not expect me. In an hour you can drive past, and if everything's okay I'll signal you to stop an' pick me up."

THE Jap shook his head. "No, no, no. I am with you. I go 'long now." He whipped a neat automatic from his pocket, shoved it back again, and winked. "I am very interested in this detective game."

"You'll lose interest quick," said the detective, "if you bump into one of those slugs. But it's up to you."

Banahan started off with the Jap behind him. Sticking close to the brush-choked roadside, he walked cautiously, slowly, toward the old house in the woods. When they saw the wood thinning out between them and the house, Banahan turned into the rain-soaked underbrush.

"Look." The Headquarters man pointed between the trees, through a narrow opening. The Jap followed the direction, and saw the mud-caked sedan where it was hidden behind a ramshackle old shed.

"Careful, now," Banahan called softly as he crept from tree to tree. The place was as still as the virgin forest, with only the occasional twittering of birds.

In the event that something unforeseen should happen Terry Banahan made a note in his address book of the car's make and license number.

"You may get hurt, my friend," warned the detective, as they started toward the back of the house. He noticed that the Jap neither replied nor held back. He was close at Banahan's heels.

All the shutters of the house were closed, but Banahan was sure he saw a tiny light sifting through a window of the third floor.

Running swiftly across the space between the old barn and the rear of the house, the two men reached the shadow under the stool. Here a cellar window swung ajar. They listened there a moment, then Terry squirmed in and let himself down. The Jap followed, and together the pair groped toward the stairs.

Banahan was going up against a showdown.

## VII

AT THE foot of the stairs Banahan removed his shoes. He motioned the Jap to do the same. Sock-footed, they slowly went up, opening the door at the top with the same meticulous caution that a safe man would use to feel for the tumblers as he fingered a crib. On the first floor they stood, listening, to voices coming down from above. Banahan motioned again and looked at the gun he held. The Jap slid his own from his pocket and his beady eyes glittered.

Pantomime was best. Neither made a sound. Banahan heard the jumble of voices in argument above. One, a sharp acid tone, seemed the leader's. Banahan judged this to be Gat Nelson's.

"—fool o' him," the words floated

down in groups . . . "Miles away by now . . . tell yuh, we're sittin' pretty. . . . This nag'll breeze home . . . to Packey . . . he'll clean up a half a million bucks. . . . Naw . . . hell with the jock . . . croak him."

BANAHAN heard enough. Creeping along the hall, he looked up. There was another door near the top of that flight. The Jap was prowling like a cat. Terry saw him in the rear, motioning upward. A back stairs, too. The detective nodded and held up his hand.

"What's a jock?" said someone else. "Waddeyuh wanna bump him for? Them kids on'y does what they're told. All we want is the dough anyways."

"Shut yore yap!"

Banahan's gun drove three bullets into the panel of the second floor door, and the detective stepped back out of range.

The crashing thunder of the gunfire echoed in the dark, dank house. Then all was silent, stiff, heavy stillness.

"Come down out of that," called Banahan, "and come easy. We have you covered and we'll rivet you on the first false move."

"Go home an' blow your brains out," yelled the acid tone above. "You cops can't shoot."

Banahan grinned, but there was no humor in his face.

"We can wait," he called back, "and if we have to wait too long we'll put a match to this dump an' cook you to the bone."

"Go on, chase yourself," bellowed the gunman upstairs.

For answer Detective Terry Banahan left the Jap to watch the spot and he himself returned to the cellar. He had seen an old galvanized wash-tub there. In a few minutes he was back, silently setting the tub close by the foot of the back stairs.

In it he had packed a huge wad of inflammable materials, scraps. With a match he touched it off.

Standing away, he and the Jap now watched it blaze up. Smoke rose in clouds from the damp rags and moulded paper. Thick black curls climbed up the back stairs. It wasn't long before Banahan heard them moving around, cursing, swearing, damning the police and their luck.

**A** GAIN and again the detective and his little companion fed fuel to the flames. Smoke grew thicker in the house, seeping through cracks in the second floor door. The crooks were trying to force the old, unwieldy, nailed down shutters open. Banahan heard them dash to the floor above. Heard them cough and sneeze and curse.

Every now and then he called for them to surrender.

Noon came and still they were holding out, hurling oaths at Banahan while he paced the floor, keeping an eye on all four sides of the house. He had all the ground floor windows open to watch. It was one thing to be a brave copper and another to be dead. To rush up those stairs shooting meant only one thing. He might get one or two of them, but he wouldn't last long.

"We can go back in the woods," suggested the Jap, "and shoot them as they come out."

"We would get about five yards out of here," said Banahan, "and they'd get us. We're trapped as bad as they are. It's a showdown, pal."

Minutes passed now, packed with a tense, rife quiet. Banahan thought he heard careful footsteps.

Somebody was finally shoving up a front window in an upper story. They heard the landing of a heavy body on the porch roof. Then the old deserted house was the

scene of as fierce a gun battle as a copper ever faced.

"Look!" It was the Jap shouting.

Banahan saw a man jump from the porch roof. Saw the Jap drive a bullet into him as he struck the ground and turned to shoot. Another gangster plunged down the back stairs firing before him. Feet were rushing overhead toward the front stairs. The detective backed swiftly into the living room and sent a shot at the gunman who dived with a crash through the back door. Down the stairs came two more, snarling like caged beasts and pouring lead before them.

"Come an' get it," yelled Banahan, crouched in the middle of the floor. His gun snapped down on the first thug who stumbled, caught at his stomach, and fell forward. The second man vaulted the banister and fired from mid-air. Banahan heard a scream and saw the game little Jap fall forward on his face, his gun bouncing across the floor. In the hall that fourth man was either hiding or washed up.

**T**HE detective looked at the Jap, sprawled face down, then at his left sleeve, that seemed all awry. Blood dripped from his own forearm. Wet clothing stung his leg and he rubbed a hand down his thigh to bring it away smeared with his own life fluid.

"Nelson!" he shouted loudly. "Come on, Gat!"

There was a long silent wait. Then the voice from above.

"I'm comin'," called Gat Nelson in a wavering voice. "But I gotta have your promise I can see my lawyer. You ain't no double-cropper?"

Banahan crept cautiously into the old dining room and from there peeked out into the hall. Another

half inch and he would have died from a gunman's bullet. The lead tore a ragged splinter off the door frame as that fourth bird leaped for the door. Ethical or not, the Headquarters man pinned him to the floor with a clean shot in the middle of the spine.

"Come on, Gat," said Terry Banahan. "That was one of your tricky pals. I let him draw the first card."

"No dirty work, now," argued the craftiest killer on Packey Oliver's pay roll. "I'm comin' in."

Down the stairs came the Gat, as he was known in underworld lingo. His hands were only half raised as if he were entitled to that liberty. Banahan's gun was lowered as Nelson reached the floor and approached.

"Turn around," said Banahan. "I'll frisk you."

Nelson's cruel sharp face wore a grin. He started to talk, and turned. There was a quick moving of feet and a short, brief tableau that lasted as long as it takes a man to wink an eye; two shots almost like a single bullet. Gat Nelson fell sidewise, clawing at his heart, and the gun he had snaked from a shoulder holster, slid, smoking, across the floor.

"I heard about you," said Terry Banahan. "Double-crosser, huh? The little Jap had more guts than you."

### VIII

**B**ANAHAN went through the house from cellar to attic, but found no trace of Sid Culver. He closed the front door and hurried back to the car, saw it undisturbed. Then he searched the tumbling shed. He still had the old barn to look at and he was getting shaky on his legs. At the door which hung from one rusty hinge,

the detective braced himself and drew in a deep breath.

Holding it painfully, he listened for a repetition of the sound. Some one groaned or spoke as if locked in a closet.

He was taking no chances this time. Loading his gun, he stalked the sound.

"That you, Culver?" he called out. "Culver!"

It was a big barn with horse and cow stalls, feed bins and wagon space. Up above was a huge hay mow. At Banahan's call there was a muffled answer, and Terry heard a scraping on the littered floor. Reckless now, he dashed into the darkness.

**T**HERE, in an improvised prison, lay Sid Culver. Banahan had shot through the locked door. The jockey was bound firmly and gagged. Banahan yanked out his watch, glanced at it hurriedly, whistling, and dropped to his knees. With a knife he cut the bonds and tore the gag from Culver's face.

"We can make it, kid," yelled Terry Banahan. "Come on, you're ridin' the Arrow in the Handicap this afternoon."

But little Sid Culver couldn't get up. His muscles wouldn't respond. He tried to climb to his feet, tried to work his jaws to speak. Banahan's face fell. Oliver's killers were things of the past, but the long shot could win without Culver to ride the favorite. Banahan plunged back into the house and threw himself down beside the Jap.

The little yellow man groaned as the detective began searching his pocket for the car key. Terry found the key, felt the heart beat of the Oriental, and with a grim smile picked up the chauffeur and carried him out to the barn.

There he lay his burden on the

floor and shouted to the dazed jockey.

"Be back in a flash," he yelled, and started running as fast as his legs would carry him down the road.

Panting with the effort, he reached the mud-caked Ten Eyck car, jumped in and swung it out on the road. He was fighting now for time. For time and the life of a game little Jap. The roar of the motor echoed like the rattle of lightning.

**SID CULVER** was leaning, half erect against the bar door frame as the car came to a sliding halt. The detective swept up the jockey and tossed him into the seat, then ran back for the Jap. It was a close fit, three of them, and the yellow man still unconscious.

A swift glance at his watch and Banahan backed the machine out onto the road, spun the wheel, kicked gas into the engine and away. Thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy—five—six. Pain of bruises, sting of the damp clothing against wounds, all were forgotten now. It was race.

"Stretch your legs, kid," he spat at the jockey. "You gotta ride that old Arrow Head. Flex your arms. Don't worry. I'll get you there. Hold the Jap up a little, will you. He's tippin' over."

Several times they were near death, but always the grim-faced copper snatched the car back onto the path. Two miles outside of Oakmont Track, Detective Banahan caught up with a motorcycle policeman. He waved him the signal for

an open road and they bore down on the track gate with a shrieking siren heralding the approach.

There was a rush toward the hot car. The cops held the crowd back. Banahan saw the horses being led into the paddock. It was the Handicap. Old Jim Kattersby and Ten Eyck saw the machine and came running.

"The Arrow runs!" yelled the trainer jubilantly. "Sid! What's the matter, Sid?"

"Give me a hand, Pop," shouted Culver. "I'll be all right. Get me over to the tack room and into my silks."

**TERRY BANAHAN** shouted over the hum of voices and called a couple of specials to get the Jap to the doctor's office. Ten Eyck stared into the car, saw the blood on the wheel, the slash on Terry's leg. The big horse owner made a few silent signals to some men who clustered about. Banahan was too far gone to argue as they lifted him out and carried him over to the track hospital.

The blare of the band rocked the stands. The thousands that lined the track saw only the thrilling race, the color, heard the fearful din as the thoroughbreds hit the stretch. Only a paltry few at Oakmont knew that the man who won the Handicap, who lay sprawled a scant hundred yards away on a surgeon's table and grinned while deft hands bandaged his wounds, was Detective Terry Banahan. And to Banahan it was just another brush with death.

**Robert Wallace is a Regular Contributor to THE PHANTOM  
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# *The* SEVERED THUMB



*An Exciting Story of Bank Robbery and a Poker Chip  
Clue that Led to A Criminal's Capture*

By **KERRY McROBERTS**

*Author of "The Prowling Creature," "The Corpse on the Road," etc.*

**P**OLICE SERGEANT MULDOON peered through the thick plate-glass window into the dim shadows at the rear of the bank.

"If there's anything wrong, it's an inside job," he commented.

Again he tried the door. Tight as a drum. The automatic time-lock had not been disturbed.

"An inside job," he repeated.

Left in charge with three of his men while the Burglary Insurance Inspector, who had received the alarm from the Kingsbridge National, rushed off to telephone a superior officer who held special keys to the

front door of the bank, Muldoon was impatient. He wanted action.

At that moment, Inspector Harris returned. "Crestway will be here in a few minutes," he announced. "It's best we wait for him," he added.

Ten minutes later Inspector Crestway arrived in a taxi. The door was quickly unlocked. Muldoon and the three patrolmen, with Harris close on their heels, rushed into the bank. Lights were turned on. But no sulking figure showed itself. No crash of glass, or sudden explosion of a revolver. Not a single familiar incident to make Muldoon and his men feel at home.



Only a ghastly, limp bag of bones that lay by the side of the safe door! A crushed, broken figure that had once been a man.

Muldoon approached the body, turned it over with his broad toe, revealing the terror-fixed face of John Waters, the bank watchman.

**F**OR a moment he stared stupidly from the body to the open masonry door, stooped to look through the opening into the space beyond.

"What's that?" he exclaimed, as he caught a quick motion and a glint of light in the dim interior. Gun in hand, he took a step forward.

"That's the safe itself," Inspector Harris said sharply. "It's one of the new whirling safes. The light that startled you was reflected by the spinning steel. It whirls like a top after it is wound up and set to stop at a certain hour in the morning. It is absolutely burglar-proof. Even the motor that runs it and the time-lock regulator are inside it. We can all be mighty thankful the safe is still whirling. That shows it hasn't been opened."

"What's the dope?" queried Muldoon. "I never heard of a spinning safe."

The inspector was examining the intricate lock on the vault door to see how it had been opened. "It's a new invention," he explained. "It's just been installed here. You see, the safe is completely inclosed in this vault of masonry. In the old days a good gopher man could melt any steel safe door with an electric current or an acetylene torch, if he could get to the door itself. On this type safe, your gopher can't keep his electric drill or torch directed on any one spot. It's impossible for him to melt or bore his way in!"

"There's no way of stoppin' this baby, then?" As he spoke, Muldoon

poked his finger in toward the revolving mass of metal.

"Be careful, Sergeant!" The inspector jerked the officer's arm back by his sleeve. "You've heard of people having their fingers nipped off by an electric fan. This will do the trick, too—only a thousand times better."

"Look! Here's where they got him!" came an interrupting cry from one of the policemen, who had been examining the body of Waters.

"And here's—" Another officer who had been scanning the floor stooped to pick up a small object from beside the safe. The thing was mottled red, and badly discolored—about three-quarters of an inch square at the top and two inches long. At the bottom clung clots of blood.

"A finger, huh?" Muldoon grunted, thrusting his eager face close to the gruesome thing.

"Yes. It's a thumb!"

**I**NSPECTOR HARRIS was on his knees, beside the night watchman's body. "Look!" he indicated. "Waters' thumb's gone!"

"Bit off, prob'ly," said Muldoon, stooping to examine the hand the inspector held up. "Plucky guy, that Waters. Prob'ly put up a stiff fight 'fore the other guy got him."

He pushed the corpse of the watchman, with his broad toe. As he did so, a bunch of keys came to light. Inspector Harris pounced on them.

"What's Waters doing with keys to the vault that contains this safe?" he cried. He let the thumbless hand fall back to the floor in his astonishment.

"I said from the first it was an inside job," announced Muldoon.

"That's how he lost his thumb," agreed Crestway. He deftly fitted the keys in the vault door. "Got his hand in the way of the safe. It

clipped the thumb off. Careless, don't you think, Harris?"

"But he couldn't have been alone on the job," said Harris. He leaned again over the body on the floor. "Here's a hole in the back of his head. It's where someone hit him with a pipe or a gun, or some tool."

Sergeant Muldoon kicked a heavy, smashed flashlight that lay near the dead man's head. "It's Waters' lamp, all right," he said. "When his thumb was cut off by the whirling safe, he fell back in the surprise of it—and landed square on his own lamp. That's what it did for him."

"Then what's this trail of blood?" Harris pointed to a scattering of red drops across the floor in a wavering line to the signal-switch set in the wall.

**S**ERGEANT MULDOON shrugged his shoulders. "Waters did the job," he said with finality, waving his hand about the big banking room. "If there'd been anybody else in it with him, where are they now? They're not here. Nobody's got away by the door—nor out between any of the bars. Talk facts!"

Facts were talked until early morning. And all of them pointed straight toward the guilt of the night watchman—the duplicate keys to the vault, the severed thumb, the fact that all the windows were secured and the bars in place, and the street door untampered with.

The manager of the Kingsbridge National had been informed at once of the watchman's attempt and his death. He arrived within the hour, heard the detailed story, quite agreed with Inspector Crestway and Sergeant Muldoon that Waters was guilty, relocked the vault door, and dismissed the police in an effort to hush up the matter.

As the whirling safe had proved

an efficient guardian of the funds in its trust, public confidence could be best preserved in that way. There had been no loss to the bank—except the lucky loss of a dishonest night watchman.

So the case rested—until shortly before nine that morning, when Inspector Harris again arrived at the scene of the attempted robbery.

"I want to take another look at the safe," he announced.

**F**RANK WALES, the cashier-manager, led the way to the vault. In the revealing light of day, Harris' steel-gray eyes moved deliberately, calmly, as he took in every detail of the room. He examined the safe again. There were streaks of blood on the metal surface.

"The body of Waters—has it been removed?" he inquired.

Wales led him into a private room where it had been carried. Harris scanned the corpse in a quick, comprehensive glance. "Where is the missing thumb?" he asked.

Wales pointed to a small table on which lay a group of objects taken from the watchman's pockets, and the severed thumb. Harris turned it over between his fingers, went to the body and examined the blood-clotted hand of the corpse, compared the broken thumb with the thumb still intact.

"Kindly send a messenger with this digit to Dr. Haldeman," he said to the cashier. "You have his address. Ask him to cleanse it thoroughly, restore the skin where it has been bruised, and put some of his liquid glass mixture on it, so it can be handled and examined. Have him take off a print, send it to the Identification Bureau, see what they've got at Police Headquarters. Tell him to send the thumb to my office within two hours."

Harris made a casual inspection of the personal effects taken from the dead man's pockets. He asked abruptly:

"Where's his watch? Wasn't there one in his pocket?"

"Probably wasn't carrying one," Wales answered vaguely.

"He must have had a watch, all right," Harris remarked. "It's gone." He examined the inside lining of Waters' vest-pocket. "It's lined with chamois. See where the weight sagged it, and the wearing, blackened the skin. But no matter." He stepped to a corner wash-basin, rinsed his hands. "Now," he said, "have the janitor bring me a long ladder. I will see if I can crawl through the middle ventilator back there—the one with the glass missing."

"What?" Wales stared up at the three narrow slits of windows in the rear of the open banking-room, twelve feet from the top of the bookkeeping cages. The windows were secured with bars. At first glance, he could see no difference between the middle window and the other two. All were the same size, about a foot high and less than eighteen inches wide.

"There's no glass in that middle window," Harris remarked. "It looks dull compared to the others. It caught my eye the moment I came in just now. The pane has been cut out around the edges, with great precision, so that the warning wires along the frame were not interfered with."

AS the janitor set up the ladder against the rear wall, Harris stood for a moment inspecting the slight trail of blood extending from the vault to the signal-box. A moment later he mounted the ladder. When he reached the top, he rubbed

his fingers along the edge of the sill, then flattened his palm against the ornamental bars that covered the aperture. As he did so, the grating of bars fell out.

Harris thrust his head quickly through the hole. Looked down to the ground twenty feet below. Glanced up at the overhanging bank roof. It seemed as impossible for anyone to have reached the ventilator from there as from the ground. The only other way this window might have been gained was from the adjoining building, a vaudeville theatre, more than twenty feet away. There were no signs of a ladder or rope outside.

Wriggling back through the window, Harris descended to the floor. With a "See you later" to Wales, he hurried out to the rear of the building. He stepped into the twenty-foot gap between the bank and the vaudeville house, picked up the steel grating which had dropped from its window-frame. The corroded metal showed the marks of the steel jimmy that had wrenched it free from its fastenings. He glanced at the wall of the theatre opposite.

A FIRE-ESCAPE jutted out about two feet beyond the line of the building, almost opposite the middle window, and ended in a wire-enclosed platform about two feet below the narrow ventilator. The flicker of an idea flashed in Harris' steel-gray eyes. He made his way into the theatre.

Standing on the narrow platform at the base of the fire-escape, he saw that it was of the self-adjusting, counter-balance type—an arrangement that permits the lowest section to connect with the ground only when actually required. The lower section, approximately sixteen feet long, folded up tight against the

side of the fire-escape. It was balanced by weights in such a way that when a person stepped out onto the platform, the ladder slowly descended in an arc and went down with the weight, readily righting itself afterwards.

WITH a quick eye, Harris calculated that an agile man could run out rapidly to the end of the descending ladder, hold on to the protecting hand-rails and, if he were wonderfully dexterous of limb, reach out and catch at the ledge of the middle window opposite. He would have to be more than dexterous to be able to hold on while he jimmied the bars loose, cut the glass from the frame, wormed his body through that small opening.

Harris climbed the fire-escape stairs to the theatre roof. Inspected the door leading below. Found it securely locked from the inside. He searched everywhere for certain traces he hoped to discover, but found nothing. Then hurried down the fire-escape again. He entered by the iron-shuttered window that had been opened for him, asked the janitor to take him up the inside stairway. Harris examined the padlock on the door opening to the roof.

"Is this used much?" he asked his guide.

"Not very often. Only when my woman hangs her washing out, and sometimes when there's a parade or something like that."

"Then you live here in the building?"

"I'm superintendent here. There's my room." The man pushed open a near-by door, indicated the bare hall with three or four rooms leading off it.

As Harris looked in, a harsh, shrill voice called out:

"Hello! What are you up to now?"

Tracing that raucous voice to a huge wicker cage sitting in one corner, Inspector Harris saw a sedate, grim-faced parrot blinking at him.

"Make a good watch-dog, that parrot," he observed.

"Sure would," the man grinned. "But I ain't much need of him here."

"By the way," said Harris, "where do you keep the key to that door?"

The janitor pointed to a nail on the kitchen door. "Right here," he said. "My woman keeps it handy to hang out her clothes."

"I see," said Harris. He was stooping beside the corner cage.

"Hello, Polly!" he called out.

"Hello, yourself!" the parrot cackled back. "Beat it, you bum! Carajo!" it screeched. Then added a great string of assorted oaths.

"Don't pay no attention to him, sir," said the janitor nervously. "He don't mean nothin' by it. Some of the boys teaches him that talk."

"The boys? What boys do you mean?" asked Harris.

THEM that always hang around behind the stage, sir. Some o' them old friends of mine, in a manner of speakin'. Billy Yates, that used to do a song an' dance here, an' Cal Swenger—he had an animal act one time. An' Mex Acuna, him that billed himself The Great Zapo—that's 'frog' in spiggoty language. They belong to the buildin' as much as I do.

"Most of 'em seen better times an' they can't get away from stage props. They come up here for a little friendly game of pinochle sometimes, an' a quiet drink." He winked. "It's a happy-go-lucky place here, sir."

"I see. Play poker, too?" asked Harris, taking out his pencil and working a white poker chip along the bottom of the parrot's cage toward the wires. The parrot screamed,

snapped at the chip with her beak. Harris managed to extract it finally, held it up for the janitor to see.

"There ain't none of 'em plays poker here," the janitor announced as he scratched his head wonderingly. "Don't know where she could 'a' picked that up. It weren't here yesterday—I cleaned her cage last night."

"Any of the boys play poker anywhere?" queried Harris quickly.

"Some of 'em do, I suppose. They got plenty time on their hands—Mex Acuna, for instance. He ain't had an engagement for more'n three years."

HARRIS stepped to the door, made a mental note of the relative position of the parrot's cage and the key hanging on the nail. He slipped the janitor a half-dollar, thanked him, hurried abruptly down the stairs.

A short while later he had the information he desired.

Slade Connors, a "picker-up" for a gambling house in the theatrical district, one of Harris' acquaintances, looked at the distinctive counter handed him. "They use those at Joe Cantrell's and Doc Kelley's," he announced finally. "Most likely this came from Cantrell's place. There's only two rings on 'em at the Doc's—this chip's got three."

Hurrying over to the office, Harris found a small, neat package awaiting him. It was the thumb from Dr. Haldeman, the bruised skin nicely replaced, and the whole covered with a glass-like substance which made it easy to handle and much less disagreeable. Under a strong light he studied the glass-encased thumb carefully. Methodically, he traced an outline of the digit on a piece of paper, made comparison with several prints and sketches in a book of photographs and drawings of thumbs and other fingers.

Finally, below the drawing he had made, he wrote: "Classification: Clubbed Thumb. Characteristics: Wilful, brutal, unreasoning, uncontrollable temper, vicious, unbalanced, partial insanity, lack of reasoning powers."

He picked up the white poker chip. Two deep wrinkles joined the corners of his nostrils and his lips as he smiled broadly. "It ought to be easy," he said softly, dropped the thumb and poker chip into a loose outside pocket and strolled out of the building. He'd try his luck at Joe Cantrell's gambling joint tonight. It might be just possible—. He glanced at his watch.

At a dirty-windowed, apparently vacant four-story dwelling in the upper Fifties, covered with weather-worn "For Sale" signs, and looking as though it had been without a tenant for years, Slade Connors and his friend Harris paused at the basement entrance. They rang a seemingly useless bell, and waited until a tiny peep hole in the door had been opened and Conner's face had been recognized by the lookout. The door opened. Harris stepped in. His duty as Harris' sponsor completed, Connors departed for other fields.

THROUGH the bare basement, Harris was taken upstairs. Things were different here. Deep-napped carpets caressed the feet. Glancing for only a moment at the group of men playing poker at a round table, Harris went on up to the second floor where there was a roulette layout. Eight players were already seated on high stools along the table, opposite the croupier.

Harris took a seat on a stool at the extreme end of the table beside a thin man bent over a small stack of chips, his greenish eyes

glinting continually back and forth between the pile of white chips he had placed on the red space before him, and the bouncing marble.

"Black wins!" cried the croupier.

THE thin man uttered a vicious oath, and turned his haggard, vice-lined face toward Harris. "Better not sit near me," he snapped. "I'm a Jonah. Had thirty dollars when I came. But I got a slim stake left now—damn 'em—and here it goes!" He clapped down the remaining chips on the black.

"Black wins!" cried the man at the wheel again.

The man beside Harris gave a grunt of surprise. "Carajo!" he mouthed. He jerked out both hands to pull in his slight winnings, then changed his mind, leaving all the chips on the black.

Harris noted in the flash of a second, before the greedy hands were pulled back, that the left one was encased in a glove, and that the thin-faced man sunk his gloved hand deep in his coat pocket immediately afterward and did not remove it again. On the next play he lost his little pile, and with another vile oath pushed back his stool in savage disgust. A waiter standing at his elbow inquired softly what he would drink "on the house."

"The house can go straight to hell!" the man shouted. He smashed his ungloved fist against the tray. One of the players, evidently one of the "cappers", swung round and caught the excited man's arm.

"That stuff don't go here, Zap!" he warned with threatening emphasis. "Get going—you. Come back when you feel better."

"I'll go and come when I feel damn good and ready!" the other shouted, flinging himself down again on the stool.

No one paid the slightest attention to him after that. The wheel rolled on. Harris had won and lost with the others. Finally his stack of chips grew very low. A waiter came to him with a sandwich and a glass of beer. He pushed back his stool and looked idly on as he munched his sandwich, chatting meanwhile with the pasty-faced youth on the other side of him, who had also ceased playing for a few minutes. Harris picked up a white chip from his stack.

"A little white chip like this," he said to the young fellow at his side, "with the same three circles and all, once trapped a murderer."

"How was that?" The man at his side was languidly interested.

"The guy I'm speaking of was a gambler in one way or another all his life," began Harris. He moved back slightly. The thin-faced man at his left could plainly hear what he was saying. "He started as a boy turning handsprings, wriggling out of strait-jackets, and things like that. He got so good he went on the stage as a contortionist. And he was a good one. But his success went to his head. Then booze got him. He dropped down till he was just a hanger-on behind the scenes at a vaudeville house where he used to work."

THE thin-faced man was leaning toward Harris, blinking his sickly, greenish, red-rimmed eyes at each sentence Harris uttered.

"Finally," Harris continued, "he got a big idea. Some guy suggested he rob a bank. He'd never tried anything that big before. Then this pal got pinched doing another little job, something like that. The guy I'm speaking of got hold of the keys his pal had, bought 'em or stole 'em, I don't know—and the combination to a safe. He even failed at that.



But—on account of his ungovernable temper—he succeeded doing one thing. He committed murder.”

Harris was watching the thin, drab-faced gambler hunched on the stool beside him. The man was trembling and had turned his green eyes away.

**W**ELL, he escaped through the door to the roof of the vaudeville house where he was accustomed to hang out. When he went to replace the key he had stolen from the rooms of the janitor—trying to cover his tracks—there was a parrot in the hall where the key was kept. In the excitement of his escape, the man had remembered to replace the grating from the bank window—he had remembered to replace the key—but he had forgotten the parrot.

“The bird heard him steal into the room, and hollered out: ‘What are you up to now!’ Quick as thought, the murderer reached in his pocket and pulled out the first thing his fingers struck. He pushed it into the cage to distract and silence the bird he had overlooked. It happened to be a poker chip—a white poker chip like this.”

“Shut up—damn you!” screamed the trembling, thin-faced man, leaping to his feet in a burst of uncontrollable rage and crashing his fist on the table. Great drops of perspiration stood out on his pasty forehead.

Harris stepped back, smiled, reached into his side pocket and produced the chip he had rescued from the parrot’s cage. “Here is the identical chip I was telling you about,” he remarked, looking straight at Mex Acuna. “You are the man I referred to—the murderer!”

The wild-eyed man staggered back from Harris in horror, slipping his ungloved hand behind his back. Suddenly, with a yell, he

lunged at Harris, jerking a long knife from a narrow pocket beneath his belt, the bare edge of the wicked blade gleaming in his grasp.

The alert detective side-stepped quickly, caught the madman’s wrist. But the other was too dexterous for him. With a sudden twist he slashed the blade through the fleshy part of Harris’ arm. Harris leaped for his throat, but two powerful arms locked around his neck, and he was dragged to the floor.

The slight, wiry-muscled man, eyes aflame, thin lips chafing madly, wielded his weapon demoniacally, endeavoring to strike at Harris’ prostrate form through the ring of arms that were holding him back—for the croupier and two cappers had hurled themselves at the blood-lusting maniac simultaneously. He wriggled and fought like a great, frantic, twisting eel. Finally, the group secured wrestling grips on the madman’s slippery, skin-creeping limbs, wrested the knife from his hand, floored him, kept him down.

“My Gawd!” Joe Cantrell yelled as he stepped into the room with two of his henchmen, taking in the cause of the trouble at a glance. “Is that wild man loose again? Who worked him up? What’s the trouble?”

Harris caught his arm firmly, spoke low in his ear.

“Sure, we’ll get him out of here for you—quiet like, if—”

**T**HE proprietor turned and glared at Harris. “Where’s your proof that Max here is a murderer?” he asked bluntly.

Harris coolly took from his pocket the glass-coated thumb. He dropped it into the gambler’s pink palm. “Remove the glove from his left hand and you’ll see!” The thin, malignant-eyed man on the floor was squirming again, endeavoring to

loosen the grip of the eight strong arms that held him.

They were unable to remove the glove until the doughty little owner stepped over, and delivered a deliberately, sense-snuffing blow cold-bloodedly, directly in the fear-frozen face of the writhing, twisting man.

THEY snatched off his glove, and exposed a wadded bandage attached to the hand where the thumb should have been. Cantrell ripped that off with a brutal jerk, and disclosed an unsightly wound, freshly dressed.

"It's his thumb all right," agreed the gambler hesitantly. "But how does that prove he did for the Kingsbridge National watchman this morning? I read in the papers that the watchman lost a thumb, but—What's the dope?"

Harris took the proprietor aside. He explained quickly.

"I'll give you the straight of it," he began. "Then we'll take him out quietly, so your place won't get a bad name. There were two thumbs nipped off at the time of that attempted robbery this morning. One was the watchman's. The other belonged to Mex Acuna.

"From the beginning, it was evident that nobody but a regular eel like our friend here could wriggle through the little window in the bank where they found the glass cut out. On a sill of the window there were little threads where a rope had rubbed. In fact, Mex here used two ropes—one tied high up on the fire-escape of the theatre at the rear of the bank, which he used to swing back when he made his getaway—the other to hold the grating in place as a sort of anchor while he slipped down inside to get at the night watchman, before tackling the safe door.

"He managed somehow to tie up

the watchman—probably he was half-asleep when Mex pounced on him. There were marks on Waters' arms and legs—showing that he had been bound. His watch, too, was missing. Then Mex went to work on the vault door. He opened it with the key and combination he had probably bought from a friend, who wasn't able to use it himself. There was a new whirling safe in that vault—only recently installed. Acuna didn't know about that. In his surprise he probably pushed in his hand to feel for the door—and got his thumb nipped off clean."

"And the watchman's thumb was taken off, too?"

"Just as Acuna's thumb was nipped off by the safe, the watchman broke loose from the ropes and got across to the signal-box in the wall near-by. Mex sprang out on him, caught him, crashed in his skull with the butt of his gun, dragged him back toward the safe door. He did some fast thinking just then, helped out by the pain in his thumb. He realized all in a flash that his attempt to rob the safe was a failure—that the police would soon be coming in response to the watchman's last-minute alarm. All of a sudden he decided to make things look as if the watchman himself had done the job.

He took off the ropes, smashed the watchman's heavy flashlight, and put it alongside the watchman's head. The keys, too. Then—to make it even surer—he carried the body to the side of the safe, stuck the dead man's thumb against the whirling steel. It was clipped off neatly, and dropped. It had all worked fine, so far. But when he groped around in the dark to pick up his thumb, he got Waters' thumb by mistake—leaving his own behind

*(Concluded on Page 128)*

# The TIP-OFF



*An Old Hand at Sleuthing Like Corrigan Has More Than One Trick Up His Sleeve, As This Gripping Story Will Prove*

By PRESTON GRADY

*Author of "After Midnight," etc.*

IN THE East Fifties, Corrigan paused under a projecting sidewalk canopy. The building, except for the marquee, was no different from the imposing residences which flanked it. There was nothing about it to indicate that it was the headquarters of a powerful liquor syndicate.

Outwardly, Corrigan was calm.

He glanced up and down the dimly lighted street.

A drunk approached from the corner, lighting a cigarette between cupped hands. When the drunk went

by, Corrigan spoke without moving his lips.

"Half an hour," he said.

The drunk kept going.

Corrigan squared thick shoulders and walked to the grilled doors.

When he pushed the button and entered a foyer, a derbied sentry who also looked like a detective came into view.

The derbied man's attitude plainly said: "Scram, flatfoot!" His eyes glittered. But his mouth said:

"Hello, Corrigan. Why so friendly? I thought the boss had it fixed

so you guys wouldn't be worrying us."

Corrigan moved ahead and the house man stepped in front of him.

It happened before the sentry knew he was in danger. Corrigan's right arm, hanging limply by his side, suddenly stiffened and his knotty fist flashed upward to the corner of the jaw beneath the slanted derby.

The hit man, his face gone dull and stupid, subsided like a wet rag to the floor.

Corrigan stepped over him, turned to the right, and began moving his feet around on the rug in front of a large inner door, at the same time grasping and turning the knob. After a moment he pressed his left foot down hard and the door cracked open.

He took one long step into the doorway, caught a glimpse of three figures ahead of him, and looked back over his shoulder.

"The kids are fine, Frankie," he said casually. "Thanks for asking. Be seeing you."

His left hand pulled the door shut behind him and he faced into the anteroom. Sharp-angled mirrors created a modernistic brilliance there.

**T**HREE tuxedoed hirelings eyed him speculatively.

"I want to see Hildreth," he said.

Two of the men assumed glassy stares. The other turned to a massive steel-bound portal and held it open for Corrigan to enter. The big detective went through and the house man followed him into the vastness beyond.

The four-storied structure, once the home of a prominent banker, had been converted into a vaulted salon. Gleaming chromium set off a color scheme of black and red. On

the mezzanine an orchestra played softly, and below men in full evening dress were sitting at a table with exquisitely gowned women.

It was midnight, and other customers sat on high chairs around the bar, drinking and laughing, some of them shrilly. All the chairs were occupied.

Passing to the left of the bar, the house man led Corrigan to a small stairway. They ascended and turned into a corridor, back toward the front of the house. Before a heavy oak door, the escort stopped and knocked.

"Come in," said a voice.

**W**HEN the door was opened by his usher, Corrigan entered alone. The door was closed behind him.

The room was not large. It was richly furnished, yet it seemed ordinary after the magnificence of the salon below. Directly opposite, two high windows afforded a view of the street.

On the left a closet door stood slightly ajar. Near it, against the wall, was an elaborate radio-phonograph. And at a flat mahogany desk in the center of the room sat a carefully groomed man of about forty, whose face, even while calm, suggested deadly possibilities.

"Good evening, Sergeant," the man said. "To what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

"Never mind the high-hat stuff while I'm around," Corrigan directed, slicing outward with one hand. He was silent for a moment, and his jaws tightened. Then he added:

"I want the man who killed Padilla."

If Hildreth was impressed, he gave not the slightest sign. He might have been acting in a play. He took a cigarette from a gold case, lighted it slowly and blew thin

streams of smoke from his mouth and nostrils.

"The man who killed Padilla?" he echoed.

"Yeah," said Corrigan.

"But you have the advantage of me, Sergeant," Hildreth purred. "You see, I didn't know Padilla was dead."

Corrigan pondered. He took a sharp breath.

"Look here," he plunged. "You're a crook, Hildreth, and you boss one of the niftiest mobs in the country. But you've always been as much on the square with us as a mobster can be. No back-alley stuff. Now you've struck it rich, and I ain't kicking, even if I ain't on your pay roll."

"This is the swellest speak in town. That's all okay by me. Especially since you don't allow no rough stuff, inside or outside the house. But one of your punks has bumped off Padilla, and I want the murderer. I came to you because I wanted to give you a chance to shoot square, like you've always done."

**H**ILDRETH crushed out his cigarette on a silver tray.

"Honestly, Sergeant, I didn't know Padilla was dead," he said.

"Well, it's barely possible you didn't," Corrigan admitted, brows furrowed. "Just barely possible. It happened just a little while ago. Time I heard it I headed this way."

"Where was it?" asked Hildreth.

"In the apartment of Niccolo's moll," Corrigan said.

"Oh."

"What do you mean, 'oh'?" the detective pursued.

Hildreth's eyes grew beady. "I mean you think Niccolo did it," he said.

"That's right," Corrigan affirmed. "Well, what else?"

"I was just marveling at the amazing cleverness of you police,"

replied Hildreth. "Padilla was found shot—ah—he was shot, wasn't he?"

"Yeah."

"Well, Padilla was found shot in the apartment of Niccolo's woman, and you immediately stand ready to send up Niccolo for the murder."

Corrigan looked unpleasant. "I said, to hell with the high-hat stuff, Hildreth. It's open and shut. There's no getting around it. You know and I know that Niccolo is as jealous and hot-headed as they make 'em. Padilla had been hanging around his moll. Niccolo found him there tonight, and he shot him."

"If that's the case," Hildreth argued, "why didn't Niccolo kill the woman, too?"

"He didn't happen to find her," said the detective. "She heard someone come in and she slipped into another room. She says she heard this person come into the bedroom and talk to Padilla in a low voice."

"She won't say it was Niccolo, but that's beside the point. She heard the shot, and then she heard someone go out. After she found the body, she called the station house."

"And you believe everything she said?"

**S**URE. The elevator operator confirmed it. He remembers the passenger, and his description fits Niccolo."

Hildreth smiled and interlaced his fingers over his middle. "You police work pretty fast, don't you?"

"We have to, in this town. Yeah. I got the part about the elevator operator over the telephone—talking from the joint on the corner just before I came in here."

"So you were pretty sure about Niccolo before you came to see me?"

Corrigan moved over to one of the windows and stood looking down

into the street. "That's the size of it," he said, rubbing the tip of his nose with a horny finger.

A minute passed in silence. Corrigan took an old-fashioned watch out of his vest pocket, looked at it absent-mindedly, and put it back. Hildreth got up and drummed his fingers on the desk, looking at Corrigan with a curious expression.

"Niccolo is one of my best boys, Sergeant. He's never killed anyone before. And, mind you, I'm not saying he has now."

**T**HE detective spoke slowly, meditatively, over his shoulder:

"That's the bunk, Hildreth. Niccolo is a rat, and you know it. He's gunned out half a dozen men in his time. Besides, he's a cop-fighter. I've always wondered why you kept him. We've been trying to pin a rap on him for a long time. One way or another. Padilla was a rat, too. The same kind.

"This town'll be a lot better off with both of them out of the way. You might say, kind of, that the cops are glad this murder happened. It disposes of two of our worst enemies. Understand?"

Corrigan was looking down through the window. He turned and looked back into the room, at the big radio-phonograph. He walked over to it and inspected it, casually lifting one of the gadgets.

"You're still a square shooter, aren't you, Hildreth?" he asked.

"I try to be. As much as I can in this business."

"All right," said Corrigan. "I just saw Niccolo getting out of a taxi down there on the street. I imagine he's coming up here to see you."

"Well?"

"I'm going to get into this closet over here"—he nodded toward it—"and leave the door open just

enough to see you. I want you to be sitting there when Niccolo comes in, just like you always are. Don't say anything except 'hello.' Let Niccolo talk. I'm betting that he'll spill it."

"But you're asking me to—" Hildreth passed a hand nervously over his mouth.

"That's right. I'm asking you to let Niccolo spill what he knows. I promise you, though, that I'll come out at once if he doesn't mention about Padilla. The murder is the only thing I'm interested in."

Hildreth sat down weakly.

"Very well, Sergeant. You've been on the level. So I'll do it for you. Because I don't believe Niccolo did it. Padilla was too clever to be caught in such a situation."

**M**AKING adjustments on the radio-phonograph, Corrigan said:

"I see this thing has got a home recording trick on it. And it's near enough to your desk to catch a voice there without extending the mike. I'm turning it on."

There was a knock on the door. Hildreth started to say something, thought better of it and checked himself. His hands clenched.

Corrigan stepped into the closet, behind the door.

"Come in," Hildreth called.

The outer door opened and Niccolo entered, kicking the door shut with his heel. He was darkly handsome. His hair was black and thick and wavy. He was slim, but his shoulders were broad. He wore a dinner jacket.

"Well, Niccolo?" Hildreth said.

"Gimme a drink."

Hildreth reached to a bottom drawer and drew out a bottle and a glass. Niccolo poured himself a drink with fingers that shook a little. He gulped the liquor.



"I just killed Padilla," he said.

"Why?" Hildreth asked, without moving an eyelash.

"Found him in my frail's apartment. I let him have it, and came straight here. You'll have to steer the dicks onto somebody else. I think—"

"I think that now you'll fill your reservation in the Big House," said Corrigan, coming out of the closet with his gun leveled. He moved over by the radio-phonograph.

"Keep your hands on the table, Hildreth," he ordered.

Eyes shifting between Niccolo and the gang boss, he reached out with his left hand to the recording device. His forefinger caught and was pierced by the needle, and the sharp pain caused him to look aside.

A gat appeared to leap from under Niccolo's coat into his hairy paw, and then it exploded in a blinding flash.

The hot lead clipped Corrigan's ear; his own revolver spat fire. The bullet took Niccolo neatly in his gun arm, and the mobster's weapon dangled and dropped from his fingers.

"Ugh!" Niccolo gasped.

CORRIGAN'S gun roared again, and this time the slug ate into Hildreth's shoulder at the same instant that the gang lord's automatic, which had been grabbed out of a desk drawer, blazed away.

The two shots sounded as one, but Corrigan's fire was barely enough ahead of Hildreth's to spoil the mob king's aim. Ducking, the detective heard lead zoom by his side and crash into the wall. He let go once more and blasted the automatic out of Hildreth's hand.

Then Corrigan did a curious thing. Wordlessly, and with his eyes blazing like a tiger's, watching his two disarmed enemies, he

reached his left hand into his vest pocket and drew out the watch.

While he hesitated before looking down, Hildreth slowly half rose and broke out: "For—"

The mob boss stopped, mouth agape, as the hall door whipped open. Three plainclothes men from Headquarters stood on the threshold, guns pointing.

Corrigan holstered his revolver and bit off: "All okay." He was breathing hard. "A long chance, but it worked. Exactly half an hour since I gave you the high sign."

HE took the record out of the machine tenderly. "I got evidence, and bozos, what evidence! How about downstairs?"

"In the bag," said one of the plainclothes men. "We've got two more men down there nursing the punks."

Niccola shivered, clutching his wounded arm.

"You dirty rat—" he began.

Corrigan hit him with the back of his free hand, across the mouth. The mobster stiffened, then all the fight went out of him and he whimpered.

Lips in a thin line, Corrigan handed the record to one of the Headquarters men, got cuffs from another and put them on Niccolo.

Hildreth stood up behind the big flat desk. There was a dull splotch on his coat, but it was safely high up on his shoulder. His attitude carried a question.

"Come on, Hildreth, get going," snapped Corrigan. "I could have plugged you when you took a couple of shots at me, just then. But I've got you for assault and attempted murder and I think we can make it stick—even though you've beat many a rap before."

(Concluded on Page 124)

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The big detective began to leave with his prisoners.

"Wait a minute," Hildreth said, "I admit I'm licked. You've outsmarted me and you won't have any trouble pinning the rap on Niccolo, but—"

"Yeah," agreed Corrigan, and fingered his bleeding ear.

"But I don't understand part of it yet," Hildreth went on, growing calm. "A while ago I was almost certain you were kidding me about the murder. And then when Niccolo came in, he said he had 'just killed Padilla.' Said he came straight to me."

CORRIGAN chuckled. "Well, Hildreth you sized me up right. I was kidding you about the murder. It hadn't happened when I started talking to you."

"No?"

"No. You see, I just had an idea that maybe Padilla was going to be shot, and I came to see you. Stalled around a while. Kidding you."

The mob chief touched his injured shoulder reflectively. "One more thing, Corrigan. There's something else I can't understand. Who could have tipped off Niccolo that Padilla was with the woman?"

Corrigan grinned.

"Can't you imagine?" he said. "I did. Yeah. Sure. I did."

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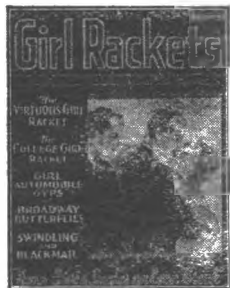
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**W**HEN a nation's rulers are corrupt — when a city's guiding hands are in the mire of graft and dishonesty—it is reasonable to assume that crime will be rampant.

With competent, sincere persons at the helm, a municipality, state or nation can succeed, to a great extent, in conquering the pernicious, grasping octopus of crime.

I do not mean that crime can be entirely eliminated, but I have found in my long years of experience in the role of the Phantom Detective that it can be checked to a considerable degree.

However, let the reins of government fall into unworthy hands, and at once the tentacles of crime tighten their grip—threatening the lives and safety of innocent, honest citizens.

When Leslie Nadal, a devoted public servant, became mayor of Metropole City, he pledged himself to give the best in him—to provide wise, worthy and able leadership.

But the previous occupant of the mayoral office had left a grim heritage—

For it was during Brandon's reign that the Black Admiral—a fiendish, nefarious criminal—had arisen!

Dedicated to the spreading of death and destruction, this monster planned to wreak havoc—seeking complete control of Metropole City as a necessary step in the consummation of his sinister plans for loot and power.

It was this arch-criminal I was called upon to combat. This inhuman killer whom Leslie Nadal could not cope with, whom all Metropole City

feared. The Black Admiral's imperious demands could not be met without robbing the community—without giving up every vestige of pride. And they were always accompanied with dire threats of wholesale death terrible enough to make the bravest man's blood run cold.

The Black Admiral had Metropole City in his grasp—

A blight had descended upon a prosperous, progressive community—

A blight so frightful, so menacing that the very thought of it sent fear into hearts that had never known fear before.

The Black Admiral—whom I encountered both in Haiti and in Metropole City, and bent all my efforts toward capturing and bringing to justice—had a myriad of servants at his beck and call, ready to do his every evil bidding.

How I strove to break his power—using all the resources at my command in a desperate, concentrated effort to vanquish his lawless band—how I endeavored to bring peace again to Metropole City and banish the gory figure of the Grim Reaper from within its limits—will be told in next month's exciting full book-length novel from my case-book:

### CITIES FOR RANSOM

Packed with action! Replete with thrills!

This novel will keep you reading with bated breath from the very first page to the last as you join in the perilous pursuit of one of the most inhuman criminals that ever got a strangle-hold on humanity.

Dont miss CITIES FOR RANSOM.

Suspense, mystery, excitement, adventure—it has everything that you want in a detective story, and more.

Your welcome letters show me just how much you liked the previous stories from my case-book that have appeared in this magazine. Thanks for all your kind words.

Grady L. Allsbrook, of Scotland Neck, N. C., writes as follows:

No use to argue the point at all, as to what are the best detective stories being written today. The Phantom Detective stories are the best, and everybody who reads them knows it.

THE ISLAND OF DEATH has been the most thrilling to date. Next to that, THE SCARLET MENACE. As you are getting better each month, I am certainly looking forward to the next issue!

And Lee Williams, of Keiser, Arkansas, writes this:

I have been reading your magazine since it started.

THE ISLAND OF DEATH is beyond comparison—it held me spell-bound. It had thrills, action, and everything else. Let's have more like it—keep up the good work!

Lack of space prevents the printing of more of your letters—but I want to acknowledge some especially interesting missives from the following readers:

Harold Markins, Hollywood; Johnson Colby, Hartford, Conn.; Helen Ross Harwood, Montreal; John S. Walters, Tampa, Fla.; Harrison J. Brooks, New York; Edwin Morton Haley, Chicago; R. R. Jones, Cleveland, O.; and Martin Salters, Nashville, Tenn.

Heartiest thanks! And I'm looking forward to hearing what you think of THIRTEEN CARDS OF DEATH. Let me know—each and every one of you!

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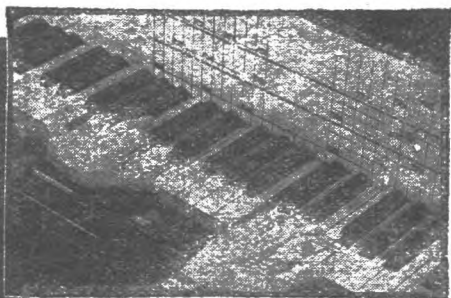




# New Amazingly Easy Way To Play PIANO... *by Ear!*



**NO NOTES! Beginners Play Pleasing  
Chords and Harmonies in First Five  
Minutes, Play Songs, Dance Music in  
Few Weeks! Simple as Childs Play!**



**How New Method Puts  
Fingers Right on Notes!**  
Simple, easily understood, chord-finding charts  
stand upright at back of keyboard. Colored  
blocks are located directly over notes to be struck.  
By reading up, line after line, whole songs are  
played in any key you wish. Any child can fol-  
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**REAL FUN...  
FAST PROGRESS—  
playing songs al-  
most before you  
know it!**

**H**ERE'S good news for you  
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sick of being just one of the  
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Teaches you rhythm, time, how to com-  
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transpose into any key. And—it actual-  
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Normal, sex-satisfied young people are torn apart because they lack sex knowledge.

#### WHAT EVERY MAN SHOULD KNOW

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Glands and Sex Instinct  
To Gain Greater Delight  
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#### WHAT EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW

Jaws of Perfect Mating  
What to Allow a Lover  
to do  
Intimate Feminine Hygiene  
Prostitution  
Birth Control Chart

How to Attract and Hold  
Men  
Sexual Slavery of Women  
Essentials of Happy  
Marriage  
The Sex Organs

Knowledge is the basis of the perfect, satisfying love-life. Step out of the darkness into the sunlight... end ignorance, fear and danger today! Money back at once if you are not completely satisfied!

**576 DARING PAGES  
106 VIVID  
PICTURES**



Don't be a slave to ignorance and fear. Enjoy the rapturous delights of the perfect physical love!

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Know *how* to enjoy the thrilling experiences that are your birthright... know how to attract the opposite sex... how to hold love.

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**IS SEX IGNORANCE  
DRIVING THE ONE YOU  
LOVE INTO THE ARMS  
OF ANOTHER?**

Let "Sex Harmony" teach you how easy it is to win and hold your loved one!



THIS BOOK NOT SOLD TO MINORS

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# BLADDER WEAKNESS.. GETTING UP NIGHTS.. PROSTATE GLAND FAILURE..

## Which of These "AFTER 40" Troubles Is Yours?

TODAY thousands of men, once resigned to suffering from these common signs of so-called "old age" praise a new treatment which they say has worked wonders for them.

In millions of cases, doctors say, "bladder trouble" is only another name for weakness of a vital male gland which often fails when men pass 40. Only a few realize the real reason for getting up nights and day-time frequency, because there is no pain at all from the gland itself, to give warning. Millions spend untold sums on pills that cannot possibly reach the real cause of the affliction.

### Quick Relief Without Pills!

That is why so many thousands of men praise this utterly new treatment which is known as Thermanalaid. Thermanalaid is entirely drugless. It is unlike any similar treatment, for it applies a powerful, yet harmless, natural healing force that penetrates the ailing gland itself.

Already it has brought unspeakable relief to thousands of recognized cases of prostate gland trouble.

It has stopped so-called "bladder" symptoms in thousands more who did not previously recognize their real ailment.

Which of these "after 40" ailments is yours? If you are getting up nights, too; if you are bothered by heavy, draggy foot and leg pains; quick exhaustion and frequent mental depression, you, too, should suspect degeneration of this vitally important male gland.

### Neglect Threatens Lives!

Do not neglect these symptoms. Do



not tell yourself: "Oh, but prostate gland failure is a serious disease; it cannot be attacking me." One of the highest medical authorities in America has stated flatly that if you are over fifty the chances are more than equal that prostate trouble is attacking you.

### New Confidential Book Now Free

Protect yourself now! Learn at once how this simple, entirely drugless home treatment often ends the need for pills in less than a week; read the confidential reports of men who were once doomed to premature old age and lives of miserable semi-invalidism. Now a startlingly frank book, fully illustrated, explains the true facts about this "after 40" trouble-making gland and shows how millions are fooled by its tricky symptoms. Send for it today, and learn also about our generous money-back agreement, insuring you quick and satisfactory relief or no cost. Simply mail the coupon now to W. J. Kirk, President, The Electro Thermal Co., 1268 Morris Avenue, Steubenville, Ohio.

If you live west of the Rockies, address The Electro Thermal Co., 500 Wm. Fox Bldg., Dept. 12 V. Los Angeles, Calif. In Canada, address The Electro Thermal Co., Box 12 V, 53 Yonge St., Toronto, Canada.



**W. J. KIRK, President,  
The Electro Thermal Co.,  
1268 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio.**

Without obligation to me, please send me your book, "Why Many Men Are Old At 40," with details of the Thermanalaid Treatment, and your generous money-back agreement.

Name .....  
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City ..... State .....

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Gentlemen:  
I have had my Thermanalaid about three weeks. It has stopped the desire to get up frequently at night. The fatigue and weakness on arising in the morning are gone, as well as the pains in the back, legs and feet. The restful sleep I am enjoying now is worth more than the price of the Thermanalaid many times over. Yours truly,  
**J. H. LIPSCOMB.**  
Robbins, Tenn.