

The PHANTOM 10¢ DETECTIVE

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**MURDER
STALKS
A BILLION**
A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL
FEATURING THE
WORLD'S GREATEST SLEUTH

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION



'I TALKED WITH GOD'

(Yes I Did - Actually and Literally)

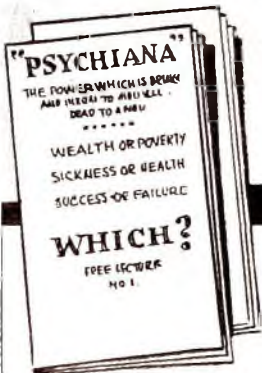


DR. FRANK B. ROBINSON
Founder "Psychiana," Moscow, Idaho

and as a result of that little talk with God, a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily, once you learn the secret. And when you do—well—there will come into your life the same dynamic, pushing Power which came into my life. The shackles of defeat and fear which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and now?—well, I own control of the largest circulating afternoon daily newspaper in North Idaho. The largest and most modern office building in my City, too. I drive a wonderful Cadillac limousine, and I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it. Moreover, my beautiful family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, about 13 years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, ill-health, or material lack in your life—well—this same Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how hopeless your life seems to be—all this can be

changed. For this is NOT a human power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there are no limitations to the God-Power, are there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought these good things to me, might come into your life, too. Well, I have written two booklets and I have given them away, FREE, by the millions. As a matter of fact, my strange, almost unbelievable story has been told in 67 different countries, and in every city, town, village and hamlet in America. It has been written up by such outstanding periodicals as TIME, NEWS-WEEK, MAGAZINE DIGEST, and scores of other magazines and newspapers. You may have these two booklets, and you may also have illustrated circulars and letters telling what is being accomplished by your fellow men and women, who, too, have found the Power which comes from talking with God. To get them, without any obligation at all, fill in and mail to me your name and address on the form below. The name and address is Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 969, Moscow, Idaho. If you ask for your copies of these booklets today, they will be sent you as soon as we receive your request here in Moscow, Idaho.



... TWO BOOKLETS FREE!

Fill in your name and address plainly. Mail to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Moscow, Idaho.

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

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(969)



J. E. SMITH
President
National Radio Institute
Established 25 Years

I WILL SEND A SAMPLE LESSON FREE to PROVE I can Train You at Home in Spare Time for GOOD RADIO JOBS

I Trained These Men



**Chief Operator
Broadcasting
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"Before I completed your lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast operator's license and immediately joined Station WJPC where I am now Chief Operator." **HOLLIS F. HAYES**, 327 Madison St., LaPeere, Michigan.

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"I am making around \$50 a week after all expenses are paid, and I am getting all the Radio work I can take care of, thanks to N. R. I." **H. W. SPANGLER**, 126 1/2 S. Gay St., Knoxville, Tenn.



**\$5 to \$10
Week in
Spare Time**

"I am engaged in spare time Radio work. I average from \$5 to \$10 a week. I often wished that I had enrolled sooner because all this extra money sure does come in handy." **THEODORE K. DuBREE**, Horsham, Penn.



Here is a quick way to better pay. Radio offers you the opportunity to make \$5, \$10 a week extra in spare time a few months from now and to prepare for good full-time Radio jobs paying up to \$50 a week. **MAIL COUPON.** Get my Sample Lesson FREE. Examine it, read it—see how easy it is to understand. See how I train you at home in spare time to be a Radio Operator or Radio Technician.

**REAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR BEGINNERS
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Broadcasting stations (\$82 in the U. S.) employ thousands of Radio Technicians with average pay among the country's best paid industries. Repairing, servicing, selling home and auto Radio receivers (there are 50,000,000 in use) gives good jobs to thousands. Many other Radio Technicians take advantage of the opportunities to have their own service or retail Radio businesses. Think of the many good-pay jobs in connection with Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio and Public Address Systems. N. R. I. gives you the required knowledge of Radio for those jobs. N. R. I. trains you to be ready when Television opens new jobs. Yes, Radio Technicians make good money because they use their heads as well as their hands. They must be trained. **MAIL THE COUPON, NOW!**

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Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a part time Radio Technician to make good money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments that give you valuable, practical experience. You also get a modern Professional Radio Servicing Instrument. My fifty-fifty method—half working with Radio parts, half studying my Lesson Texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

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**J. E. Smith, President
Dept. 1N09, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.**



BROADCASTING STATIONS (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. **FIXING RADIO SETS** (lower illustration) pays many Radio Technicians \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week extra in spare time.

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Vol. XXXVII, No. 3

DECEMBER, 1941

Price 10c

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*Spydom's Crimson Undercurrent Sweeps the Phantom Detective
into a Baffling Sea Mystery when the Fate of Free France Hangs
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Painter Ed Fry is Confronted by Two Deaths of the Same Name

JEWEL BAIT Benton Braden 99
Biß Barnes and Jennie Hale Go Fishing for Big Game

AND

THE PHANTOM SPEAKS A Department 10
Join FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM! Coupon on Page 13

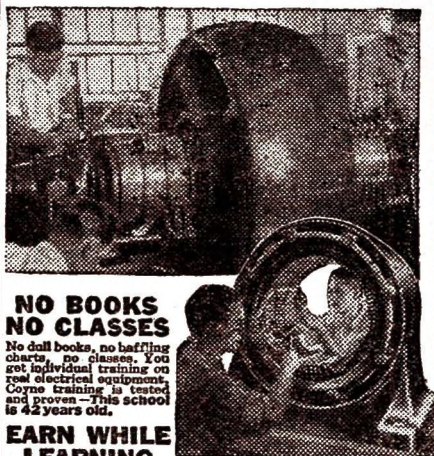
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Don't let lack of money hold you back. If you are between the ages of 16 and 40, you can get this training first and pay for it in 12 monthly payments—beginning 60 days after your training period ends. You'll be amazed at how little money you need to get Coyne training. If you need part-time work to help out with living expenses while you train, my employment department will help you find it. Lifetime employment service after you graduate. Mail coupon for all the facts.

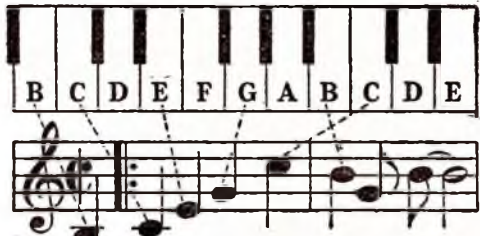
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EASY TO
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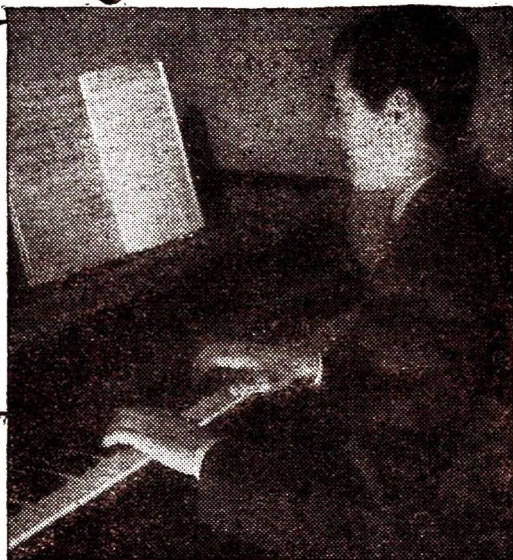
Play the melody of "KISS THE BOYS GOODBYE" — right now!



so dad-dy let me stay out late

Just strike the notes indicated above, and you'll be actually playing the melody of the popular hit tune of Paramount's picture, "Kiss the Boys Goodbye," starring Mary Martin and Don Ameche.

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**Prove to yourself how easy it is
to play the piano or any
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SIT DOWN at a piano right now and see how easily you can pick out the melody of "Kiss the Boys Goodbye," following the simple diagram above. And you can do the same thing with other popular melodies, too, when you use the wonderful "Note-Finder" that guides your hands on the keyboard.

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Give me just this
and I'll prove I can make you
A NEW MAN!

I'M "trading-in" old bodies for new! I'm taking men who know that the condition of their arms, shoulders, chests and legs—their strength, "wind," and endurance—is not 100%. And I'm making NEW MEN of them. Right now I'm even training hundreds of soldiers and sailors who KNOW they've got to get into shape FAST!

Only 15 Minutes a Day

Are you ALL MAN—tough-muscled, on your toes every minute, with all the up-and-at-'em that can lick your weight in wildcats? Or do you want the help I can give you—the help that has already worked such wonders for other fellows, everywhere?

All the world knows I was ONCE a skinny, scrawny 97-pound, weakling. And NOW it knows that I won the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." Against all comers! How did I do it? How do I work miracles in the bodies of other men in only 15 minutes a day. The answer is *Dynamic Tension*, the amazing method I discovered and which changed me from a 97-pound weakling into the champion you see here!

In just 15 minutes a day, right in the privacy of your own home, I'm ready to prove that *Dynamic Tension* can lay a new outfit of solid muscle over every inch of your body. Let me put new, smashing power into your arms and shoulders—give you an armor-shield of stomach muscle that laughs at punches—strengthen your legs into real columns of surging stamina. If lack of exercise or wrong living has weakened you inside, I'll get after that condition, too, and show you how it feels to LIVE!

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Atlas*

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Almost two million men have sent for and read my book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It tells you exactly what *Dynamic Tension* can do. And it's packed with pictures that SHOW you what it does. RESULTS it has produced for other men. RESULTS I want to prove it can get for YOU! If you are satisfied to take a back seat and be pushed around by other fellows week-in, week-out, you don't want this book. But if you want to learn how you can actually become a NEW MAN, right in the privacy of your own home and in only 15 minutes a day, then man!—get this coupon into the mail to me as fast as your legs can get to the letterbox! CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 77 M, 115 East 23rd St., New York City.

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\$7⁹⁵
to \$35

by
MAIL



Posed by a Professional Model

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BEFORE



AFTER



Mrs. Elsie Boland of Norton, Kansas, writes:

"Enclosed find two pictures. One shows how I looked before I got my teeth; the other one afterwards. Your teeth are certainly beautiful. I have not had mine out since the day I got them, except to clean them."



Harry Willoughby, Adakville, Kentucky, writes:

"I have received my teeth and am PROUD OF THEM."



Mrs. Geo. G. Conklin, Bridgeport, Connecticut, writes:

"I received my set of teeth. I wear them day and night. I have good reason to be well pleased with them. Thank you very much."

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We make to measure for you individually—BY MAIL—Dental Plates for men and women—from an impression of your own mouth taken by you at your home. We have thousands of customers all over the country wearing teeth we made by mail at sensible prices.

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Make us prove every word we say. Wear our teeth on trial for as long as 60 days. Then, if you are not perfectly satisfied with them, they will not cost you a cent.

WITH MONEY - BACK GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION

We take this risk. We guarantee that if you are not completely satisfied with the teeth we make for you, then any time within 60 days we will immediately refund every cent you have paid us for them. We take your word. You are the judge.

HIGH-GRADE MATERIAL AND EXPERT WORKMANSHIP

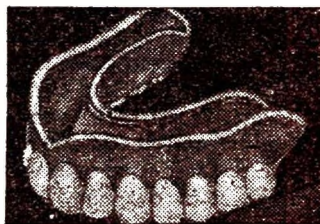
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NAME.....

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(Print Clearly)



DEEP sea fishing is a sport that provides adventure for the wealthy, the near wealthy, and the vacationists out for a good time at the Florida Winter resorts. Miami Beach is one of the centers for this activity, and naturally when a cloud is thrown over the deep-sea fishing fleet, it is likely to cause some misgivings among the local business-men and vacationists alike. When this cloud resolves itself into the cloaked weapon of a callous group of murderers the threat is even more far-reaching.

It was a murder menace against this background that plunged me into the case which Robert Wallace is going to tell about next month in **MURDER MOON OVER MIAMI**—a complete book-length novel packed with excitement, suspense, and dramatic impact from start to finish.

Vanishing Fishing Boats

There didn't seem to be a reason in the world why expensive fishing boats should head out into the Gulf Stream with their gay parties of fishermen, never to come back. None of these boats carried anything of real value that would tempt a modern pirate. There might have been some point in attempting to kidnap the wealthier fishermen, but this angle did not crop up at all.

The boats merely vanished, once they had left Miami Beach behind them and journeyed over the horizon.

Naturally the local police did everything in its power to solve the mystery of these disappearances, and even the United States Coast Guard took time out from its Neutrality patrols to investigate, but all of these searches were in vain. My own difficulty with the case, one which ran from the center of the lively, bustling vacation capital of Florida to the fastnesses of the jungle and the depths of coral islands and isolated key, proved a real challenge to me.

A Chain of Murder

"Corpse Cay" is a sinister name, and at first seemed to be merely intended as attractive local color for tourists. But as the murder chain in **MURDER MOON OVER MIAMI** developed and unraveled, I sensed that the Corpse designation might

not be entirely a matter of innocent description. The island might harbor all sorts of horrible activities. None of the people I encountered in Miami seemed to know. Folks just didn't go to Corpse Cay. There was a story current that the Corpse Cay was the center of a whirlpool current that brought flotsam and jetsam from the open sea and cast it up on the beach.

My investigations in the vicinity of Corpse Cay revealed a number of interesting and romantic things. They involved the security of some of the most honored names in southern Florida, especially a family headed by a prominent jurist. This judge was being threatened by a criminal he had sentenced to prison; a criminal who had succeeded in breaking jail.

It Looked Simple, but—

If this had been the only complication in the case, the solution might have been much simpler than it actually was. But we in the criminal investigating field know a case that appears simple, seldom is when it comes time to run down the culprits and round up enough evidence to convict them. But I'm afraid that is as much of a hint as I can give you about what you're going to find in **MURDER MOON OVER MIAMI**. You'll have to follow me through the ramifications of this baffling crime chase—and see for yourself next issue.

Be sure you're on hand for the January issue of **THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE**

(Continued on page 12)

don't **Worry** about **Rupture**

• Why put up with days . . . months . . . YEARS of discomfort, worry and fear? Learn now about this perfected invention for all forms of reducible rupture. Surely you keenly desire—you eagerly CRAVE to enjoy life's normal activities and pleasures once again. To work . . . to play . . . to live . . . to love . . . with the haunting Fear of Rupture banished from your thoughts! Literally thousands of rupture sufferers have entered this Kingdom of Paradise Regained. Why not you? Some wise man said, "Nothing is impossible in this world"—and it is true, for where other trusses have failed is where we have had our greatest success in many cases! Even doctors—thousands of them—have ordered for themselves and their patients. Unless your case is absolutely hopeless, do not despair. The coupon below brings our Free Rupture Book in plain envelope. Send the coupon now.

Patented AIR-CUSHION Support Gives Nature a Chance to CLOSE the OPENING

Think of it! Here's a surprising yet simple-acting invention that permits Nature to close the opening—that holds the rupture securely but gently, day and night, at work and at play! Thousands of grateful letters express heartfelt thanks for results beyond the expectation of the writers. What is this invention—How does it work? Will it help me? Get the complete, fascinating facts on the Brooks Automatic Air Cushion Appliance—send now for free Rupture Book.

Cheap—Sanitary—Comfortable

Rich or poor—ANYONE can afford to buy this remarkable, LOW-PRICED rupture invention! But look out for imitations and counterfeits. The Genuine Brooks Air-Cushion Truss is never sold in stores or by agents. Your Brooks is made up, after your order is received, to fit your particular case. You buy direct at the low "maker-to-user" price. The perfected Brooks is sanitary, lightweight, inconspicuous. Has no hard pads to gouge painfully into the flesh, no stiff, punishing springs, no metal girdle to rust or corrode. It brings heavenly comfort and security—while the Automatic Air Cushion continually works, in its own, unique way, to help Nature get results! Learn what this patented invention can mean to you—send coupon quick!



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Inventor

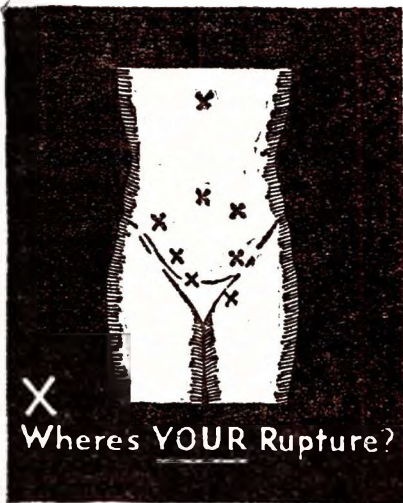
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THE PHANTOM SPEAKS

(Continued from page 10)

—and MURDER MOON OVER MIAMI.

Letters from Readers

Just before sitting down at my typewriter to jot down these thoughts concerning next month's novel, I had a chance to go over some of the fine letters you folks have been sending in. It's a real pleasure to know that I am not only doing a real service in the matter of crime solution and investigation, but that the stories of my exploits are also providing you folks with entertaining relaxation. Keep those letters coming in, and be sure that I'm more than glad to have them.

Here's one from Clark Danforth of Ashland, Kentucky:

Sure got a big kick out of the last issue of THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE. THE BLACK GOLD KILLERS is the sort of a story I can always go for. That Empire State Building must be a wow of a building. I like the authentic background in your stories and the air of authenticity that surrounds them.

Mary Foster of Minneapolis, Minnesota, has this to say:

Glad to see that Muriel Havens is taking part in the Phantom stories. I'm the kind of a reader that likes to have good he-men heroes, but I think that the women also ought to have an opportunity to do something worthwhile in stories of this type. After all, they do have policewomen, don't they?

They sure do, Mary, and here's hoping the law-abiding gals will be just as good Phantom fans as their big brothers. Now comes a missive from Elmer Considine of Los Angeles, California.

THE THOUSAND ISLANDS MURDERS was my first Phantom Detective novel, but I can promise you here and now that it's not going to be my last. I used to think that most of these detective magazines were rather uninteresting, but I'm glad to say that the Phantom Detective was a pleasant surprise to me. Keep Richard Curtis Van Loan working along the same lines as at present.

There are a myriad others—many of which we'll let you glance at from time to time in coming issues. You may feel sure that all of these letters help us in shaping our future case histories, and we like to have our readers' reactions, whether they come in sealed letters or postcards.

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Don't forget those letters and post cards. Keep them coming. Send your communications to the Editor, THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y. Thank you.

Let's meet again in this magazine next month. So long!

—THE PHANTOM.

THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE



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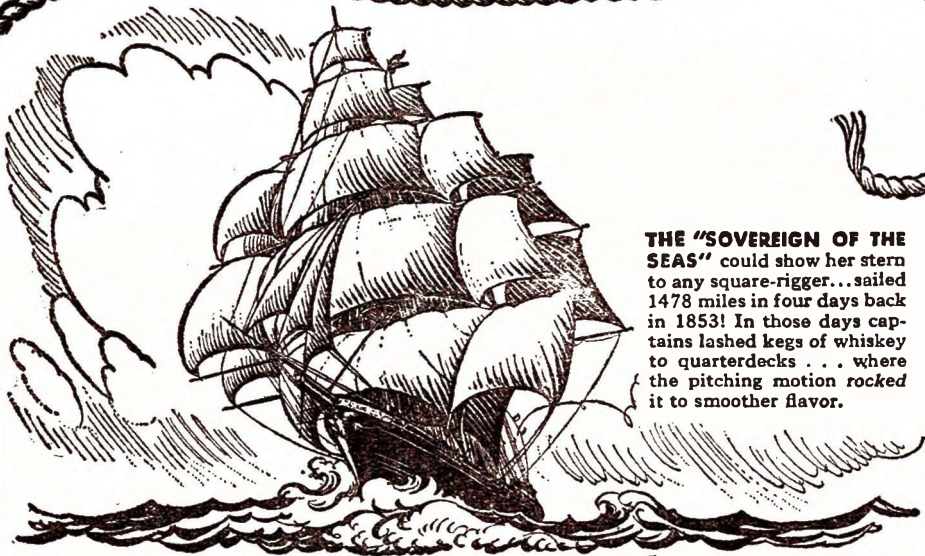
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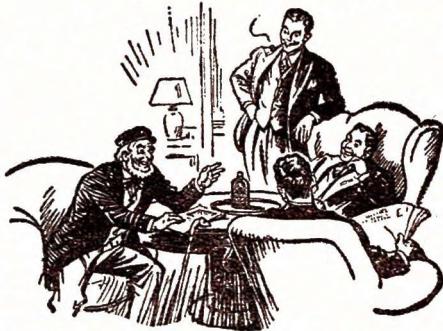


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Van could hear the girl's hoarse, gurgling breath (CHAPTER XIV)

CHAPTER I

THE SEA WON'T TELL

"ATTENDEZ! Everyone! There is a billion in gold!"

Shouted in French, the words were cut off as with a knife. A solid blow crunched like metal on

bone. A deep, soul-chilling groan, a comparatively quiet splash was heard.

Two white hands were briefly thrust upward, drifting away on a gray-green sea. A pallid face showed vaguely.

A man had cried out strangely into the Caribbean night. But he never

Spydom's Crimson Undercurrent Sweeps

would furnish details about "a billion in gold." He had disappeared into a sea that never has been known to tell its secrets.

"Lecoque was most injudicious!" a voice said calmly. "I, Captain Latore, have seen nothing, Lamont. *Vive la Francaise!*"

The man who had gone into the sea was casually, perhaps unfeelingly dismissed from mind, and the official record. Except for a few more words from the man called Lamont.

"One Frenchman's hand should never be set against another," he said. "Since the other war of honor, when I was but a boy, I never have been guilty of the blood of another, and never before of my own countryman. *Vive la Francaise!*"

Metal grated. There was the gurgle and the high smell of running oil in pipes. These connected two drifting ships. One was a monster liner, looming high and proud above the sleek, greyhound lines of the other.

The smaller ship was sharp-prowed. At its stern a triple wake poured phosphorescent fire from three propellers. Such a light cruiser could show its heels to most ships. But if it were armed for battle, the guns must have been light and well camouflaged.

Only those of the crew attending oil pipes linking the ships, and the uniformed commander were on the deck of the liner flying the tri-color of France. The commander bulked large as he leaned over the rail.

"Captain Latore," he called, "we can spare but four tons. We must make the island to transfer our passengers for the States. I have hope that none aboard heard that one cry out."

"We have suspected, Captain Jardine, that the man who unfortunately fell into the sea was not of the Free French," replied Captain Latore. "But we must have more oil quickly, Captain Jardine, so that we may reach a safer haven."

"*Oui*, Captain Latore. You will send the emissary with my ship? He will transfer at the island with others who are bound for the States!"

"Pierre Lamont, who is to be greatly trusted, Captain Jardine," said the cruiser commander, "will make his way to New York City, and there contact friends of freedom. He comes aboard your ship now."

A SLIGHTLY built, active figure came up the Jacob's ladder to the deck of the liner, a grimly serious fellow with jet-black hair and glistening, dark eyes. He touched his peaked cap to Captain Jardine.

"I am Pierre Lamont, Captain Jardine," he said simply. "I am at your command, and deeply in your debt for this service you are doing our country."

The liner captain saluted Lamont on the cheeks.

"It is unfortunate that one should have cried out about the billion in gold," he said. "It is well that all of my passengers have been warned to stay below during the blackout. I hope that none heard."

The fuel oil having passed from the larger ship to the smaller one, the pipes were withdrawn. The grappling mechanism that had held the vessels together was unlocked.

The light, speedy cruiser vanished like a wraith of the sea, leaving its triple trail of phosphorescent fire upon the lonely Caribbean. The Gar-

The Fate of Free France Sways in the

the Phantom into a Baffling Sea Mystery!

gantuan bulk of the liner shivered and rumbled, moving more slowly, a stately craft, bound for some island port where passengers would transfer to coastal ships which would carry them to the surer freedom of the United States.

Pierre Lamont had not the appearance of a man who had just been compelled to end the life of a fellow

necting pipes that had tapped the fuel of the liner's tanks to supply this mysterious ghost cruiser. They had heard, and seen everything.

"Dupre, we must never speak of this," one of them whispered. "We did not hear a man fall into the sea, nor hear his words when he cried out that there was a billion in gold on that fast cruiser!"



THE PHANTOM

countryman as he moved with the liner captain toward his quarters. But the captain's hope that none of his passengers had witnessed that, or had heard that outcry of the now departed friend of the Laval and Hitler regime in his beloved France was futile.

Two passengers who stood under a life-boat had been close to the con-

"*Oui, oui*, Chaumon," agreed the other. "Only perhaps we should remember this Pierre Lamont who just came aboard. We might need such a friend in New York City, and—"

Chaumon was a big Frenchman, with broad shoulders. His hands shot out. Gripping Dupre by the shoulders, he lifted the man's feet from the deck as he shook him.

Balance as Modern Pirates Create Panic!

"That is the talk of Vichy!" he grated harshly. "I will hear no more of it! I do not know, and you do not know any of this! A billion in gold? A man thrown into the sea! Absurd! Ridiculous! Remember that!"

Dupre, set down hard upon his heels, spoke weakly.

"Surely, Chaumon, *mon ami*, you misunderstand. It is only that if Monsieur Pierre Lamont should need our services in New York, for what he seeks, we should be ready to aid him."

Chaumon growled, as if somewhat appeased.

"See then, Dupre, that is the way of it, if we should meet Pierre Lamont in New York City. In the meantime, we must hope to find the job of singing, which we will sorely need."

HE STOPPED short as bells clanged inside the liner. The vast ship moved forward, but the throbbing of its engines ceased.

Commands of officers came from loud-speakers along the decks.

"All topside! All preservers! Take stations at boats assigned! No lights! No cigarettes! There is no danger! We are too far in western waters! We make only the drill!"

A sizzling, fiery streak of phosphorescence hissed along the sea, bellying such assurance.

Even before the startled, rushing passengers caught the sound of the ripping explosion, they felt the thud and the sudden heeling over of the liner.

A second, then a third torpedo found their marks. One rapid-fire gun on the high fore deck punched a chain of futile shells into the sea where there was no visible target. Perhaps the periscope of a submarine was there, and perhaps it was sliding under the sea to join the man of the pallid face and the white hands.

But, miles away by this time, a gray, ghostly cruiser was churning

a high bone in its teeth, making better than thirty-seven knots per hour, which in land miles would better forty miles per hour.

Life-boats rattled down as the liner settled and fire broke out. Some made the boats, and some died in the sea.

A dozen life-boats were sucked down by the sudden plunge of the stricken liner.

Three life-boats pulled toward the closest land, an island not far off the coast of Haiti. In one of these boats was Pierre Lamont. He wore a bitter smile.

The last words of Captain Jardine who had stayed with his ship, came to him.

"I should have pumped the gold ship's tanks full," Captain Jardine had said solemnly. "Now the fuel oil is wasted. But you must fulfill your mission. Success, Monsieur Lamont. *Vive la Francaise.*"

Lamont had gripped the captain's hand, and all he had said was, "*Vive la Francaise,*" only adding, "A free and more glorious France."

IN THE same boat with Pierre Lamont, the big Frenchman, Chaumon, glanced at Lamont's white, stern face.

Then he looked at the narrow features and the sharp little eyes of Dupre.

He liked what he saw in the face of Pierre Lamont. He disliked the glint in Dupre's eyes.

"A billion in gold is a stupendous amount," Chaumon muttered. "Inspiration to treachery and murder, or to loyalty and sacrifice, depending upon the man's nature."

That fast cruiser, he knew, like some ghost ship, was out on the vast, dark ocean somewhere, continuing to dodge its enemies above and under the sea.

It carried a billion in gold, bait for the sharks of the deep, or the wolves of the land.

CHAPTER II

STRANGE WITNESSES



WITNESSES to the strange murder were odd figures. They were four, two women and two men. They looked like Okies from the "Grapes of Wrath" play. In fact, they were directly from the stage of "Cotton Road," one of the long-run shows of Broadway, and had come to the Hudson River waterfront in their costumes and make-up.

Ina Lou, younger of the two women had come to find Homer Kent, principal owner of the show, and her fiancé. She had told others she feared for his safety.

Homer and Fred Kent were the Kent Brothers Oil Company. Their offices, loading wharves and big storage tanks were here on the waterfront. Outside, a score of tanks that loomed starkly contained the lifeblood of power for many ships at sea.

At this unusual hour, young Fred Kent was alone in his brother's private office. He had the furtive air of a man who knew he should not be here. He was puzzling over some papers from his brother's desk.

Fred Kent's clear eyes were troubled. Homer had been acting queerly. There had never been a secret between them, until now. Something was troubling Homer Kent that he was keeping to himself.

Fred Kent's hand unwittingly touched a spring concealed under the edge of his brother's desk. A drawer shot out. Some folded papers showed. Fred Kent swore. He had not known about that drawer.

"I've never before intruded into Homer's private affairs," he muttered. "But this may be for his own good."

He was lifting papers out of the

drawer when a sinister voice filled the room.

"Don't move! Drop those papers!"

Fred Kent dropped the papers—but he shut the drawer with the single movement. He ducked as if expecting a shot, but none came. Two bulky, heavy-jawed men closed in.

Young Kent looked about helplessly. He could hear the rumbling of engines on ferry switch tracks a block away. He had timed his visit so the night watchman would be at the other end of the storage yard.

Seeing that both ruffians held automatics, and that their eyes were about as friendly as those of trapped rodents, Fred Kent lifted his hands.

"You've made a mistake, gents," he said calmly. "We don't keep cash on hand here. As for what little I have on me, you are welcome."

A voice like steel rubbed on steel spoke from near the doorway.

"Unless we are mistaken, you have sufficient on you, Kent. We have come to find only a date and a place. And if you're a good fellow and play ball, it will be worth plenty to you."

At once Fred Kent knew that he was being mistaken for Homer Kent, head of the Kent Oil Corporation. And it naturally followed that these holdups might be seeking the very thing that had puzzled him, a secret that had been worrying his brother.

He temporarized. Perhaps these violent visitors might reveal something of what he had not been able to discover.

"And how do I know you'll keep your word, if I give you the date and place?" he said, without the slightest idea of what they might be.

He could not see the leader back in the darkness. All he saw was the flash of brilliant stones in the dim light—diamonds or other jewels on the man's fingers.

"You don't know," the leader said promptly. "Only what is at stake is so great that even a trivial split could buy out your whole corporation!"

Fred Kent shook his head. All he knew was that his brother had been distraught for days. He had imagined it might be that "Cotton Road" was beginning to fall off when its returns were sorely needed to bolster up the heavy expansion their oil concern had begun.

Or it might be the new government emergency regulations that virtually took their business out of their hands.



CHIP DORLAN

Or it might be their failure to obtain the fuel oil and gasoline needed to fill increasing orders.

But this was something else. A place and a date? Worth a huge amount of money?

Of enough attraction to bring these gunmen in a raid on the isolated offices?

"And if I give you the name and the date?" felt out Fred Kent. "What then?"

One of the gunmen suddenly peered closely at Fred Kent's face. He swore violently.

"Hey, Diamond! We've got the wrong egg! This ain't Homer Kent!

But maybe he is in the know, anyway!"

Fred Kent then made a fatal mistake.

"Certainly I am. But I'm not talking. You'll have to see my brother."

The thug leader called "Diamond" spoke slowly.

"To what part of the mountains are you sending the trucks? And when do they pass through Belleville? That's all we want to know, and we'll guarantee not one driver will get a scratch."

Fred Kent still held the idea he might trick his visitors into betrayal of something that his brother had been withholding from him.

"Well, that isn't exactly set yet," he said slowly. "We will learn the exact time and the place just before the trucks are to leave—" He got no farther.

"So you don't know a thing about it!" snarled the man marked only by the scintillant flash of brilliant stones. "But now you do know too much about us! Okay, Pete! Quick! There's a car stopping!"

Youthful Fred Kent had been a college athlete. His eyes had been fixed upon the gun hand of the rough-featured man nearest to him. He made a clean, lurching side dive.

A spiteful crack, not much more than the snapping of a lead pencil, came from the pocket of the other gunman. Fred Kent turned slowly, teetering back to his heels.

WHEN he fell, there was a blue hole under one ear that did not bleed. The death bullet had been accurate and of small caliber.

"You always leave your mark, Dude," approved the man with the diamonds. "Give that drawer he had open the once-over."

Diamond came into the circle of light. He was a solemn, black-haired man, with a long face that would have befitted a deacon or an undertaker.

One of the gunman started prying

at the hidden desk drawer. He swore, as it was without result.

"Hurry!" Diamond said sharply. "Here, give me that rod, and I'll smash it!"

The smashing was not accomplished. A car had stopped outside, among the oil tanks. Steps sounded on the concrete walk.

CURSING, Diamond gave up his effort to open the drawer

"Quick! Out! Anyway, we've left Homer Kent a nice sample of what to expect! It'll help soften him up!"

Four people came hurrying openly along the walk that curved in just below the Hudson River Parkway. They first appeared where the walk circled an immense, silver sphere, shining in lights from the parkway above it.

This seemed to be a miniature of the perisphere that for two years had been a feature of the New York World's Fair, but it was a pressure tank containing tons of the highest octane gasoline, the type employed for airplanes.

Of the four approaching the office where young Fred Kent lay beside his brother's desk, with a blue hole under one ear, two were women. One was so big she waddled. The other was so small and slim that she seemed elfin.

All wore ragged, ill-fitting and torn clothes.

"I'm tellin' you, Ina Lou, it's unbefittin' for you to be galivanting like this to meet the man you're goin' to marry," said the big woman in a heavy bass voice. "According to the stars—"

"Sure, sure, Martha," said the girl in a silvery voice. "I know the stars indicate that calamity is about to overtake me. As for coming to find Homer, it is a daring thing to do, I'll admit. What will the gossip columns say about Ina Lou, of 'Cotton Road,' meeting Homer Kent with only her godmother Martha, old Whickers, and

Slowboy to keep the proprieties? It's scandalous. We should have brought the marines."

The oldest man of the pair snickered, his opening mouth showing where front teeth had been. Evidently he was old Whickers. The vague light showed a face as wrinkled as any human face could be, and what little hair he had was snowy white.



STEVE HUSTON

The younger man, who had been called "Slowboy," let out a cackling laugh that might have been expected from a weak-minded youth.

"Ina Lou, you still oughta listen to me," said Slowboy. "I won't keep you pining and wondering where I am. I don't like Homer Kent, and I never will, even if he does pay our salaries."

INA LOU laughed merrily. Old Whickers caught her wrist.

"Psst!" he warned. "Lookit—over on the other side of that big metal ball."

Three furtive figures were filing from the office, placing the metal tank

between themselves and the four on the walk. But all that could be seen distinctly under a light beside the metal tank, was the gleaming flash of

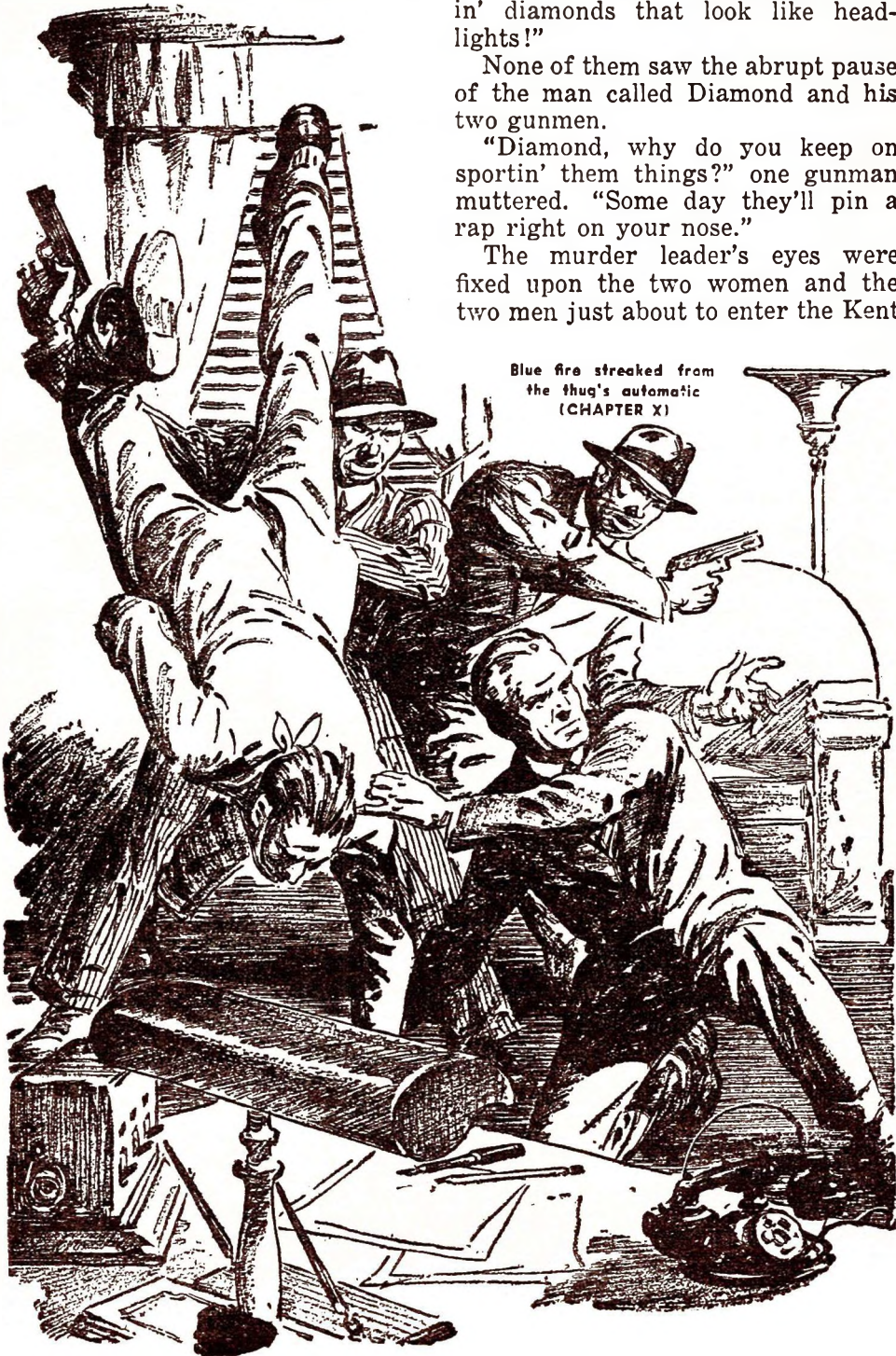
stones upon one man's hands. Then the unexpected prowlers disappeared.

"Sakes alive!" Martha, the big woman cried out. "One of 'em's wearin' diamonds that look like headlights!"

None of them saw the abrupt pause of the man called Diamond and his two gunmen.

"Diamond, why do you keep on sportin' them things?" one gunman muttered. "Some day they'll pin a rap right on your nose."

The murder leader's eyes were fixed upon the two women and the two men just about to enter the Kent



Oil offices. There was killer intentness in his black eyes, speculation.

"That's Ina Lou from 'Cotton Road,' and them three stooges that's always trailing her around," he said. "We can't turn on the heat here, and besides, that girl may be the best bet in putting the pressure on Homer Kent."

DIAMOND and his two gunmen moved on quickly, silently. Their car was speeding away when old Whickers pushed open an unlocked door in the Kent Oil offices.

Ina Lou screamed once. Old Martha promptly clamped a hand over her mouth.

Old Whickers, was the first to find

the bullet-hole under the ear of the dead man.

Whickers' eyes went about very shrewdly. They held on the desk where marks showed that an effort had been made to pry open a drawer.

"Thank the Lord is wasn't Homer," said Whickers. "Not saying I'm lacking sympathy for his brother. Ina Lou, you and Martha had best get back to the car. I'll be calling the police."

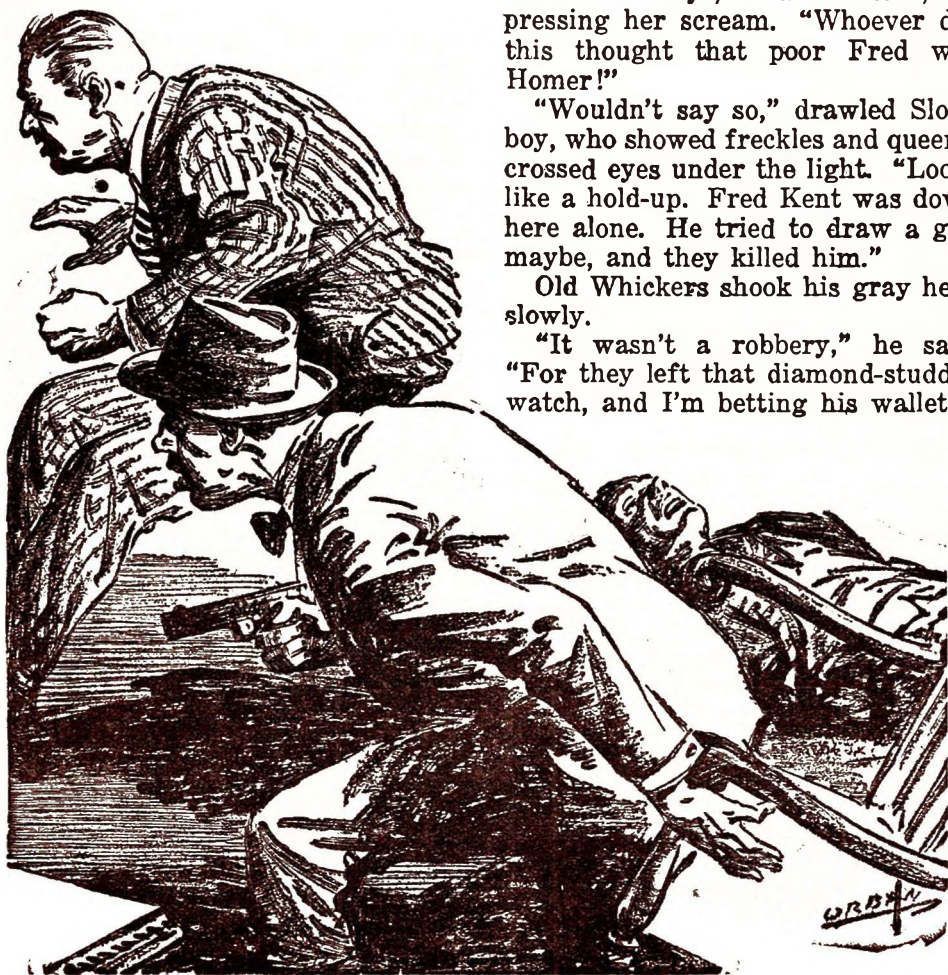
Ina Lou had an arresting face. It was pretty, but strong and purposeful, too. Her eyes were like green zircons, and her hair was a natural auburn.

"I know this has something to do with what has been wrong with Homer for days," Ina Lou said, repressing her scream. "Whoever did this thought that poor Fred was Homer!"

"Wouldn't say so," drawled Slow-boy, who showed freckles and queerly crossed eyes under the light. "Looks like a hold-up. Fred Kent was down here alone. He tried to draw a gun maybe, and they killed him."

Old Whickers shook his gray head slowly.

"It wasn't a robbery," he said. "For they left that diamond-studded watch, and I'm betting his wallet is



still in his pocket. No, they wanted something else."

Old Martha, holding Ina Lou in her arms, was rolling her eyes as if invoking the mysterious.

"All of us had best be going," she said. "And if we're smart, we'll not say a word about what we saw outside."

"Well, I'm calling the police," Whickers cut in impatiently, "and we're telling all we know. We did see that one killer who must have been wearing a flock of rocks. We—"

Rubber squealed as a car was pulled up outside. A tall man came dashing in. His wide eyes took in the little group, the still body on the floor.

"Freddie! Freddie!" he cried, kneeling beside the body. "I didn't believe it! When they phoned me, I thought it was some horrible joke! And you—"

He was staring at the others as if he had not seen them before.

"Ina Lou!" he cried, then leaped to his feet, to take her into his arms. "Why did you come here? What did you see? Whickers! Did you get a look at the killers? Someone called me—told me my brother was dead, and he laughed! Laughed!"

"MR. KENT," Whickers said, "We have a show going on in an hour. We saw three men here, running away, but none of us were near enough to identify any of them. I think we had better go, before the police hold us up."

"Yes, yes, Whickers," said Homer Kent. "I'll call the police myself. Later you may be wanted. I can't understand this."

Utter pain was in his voice but in his deep eyes and handsome face, was something that gave the lie to what he said.

Homer Kent *did* understand why his brother had been murdered—and he was afraid!

CHAPTER III

MURDER IN THE SKY



TWO moving stars of red and green high over Long Island Sound were the riding lights of a continental passenger plane coming in from the west. The night was clear and the landing field in sight for the pilot

and the five men and two women passengers.

Two men in a small car, parked at one side of the airport landing runway, were expressing their satisfaction that the plane was coming in from Washington on time. They could not know that another pair of men who were also watching the plane were sure the plane would not land safely.

"Phantom," one of the first two men said, "if it were any other reporter but Steve Huston, I would say he has been seeing Fifth Columnists in his sleep. But when Steve says he has come upon a plot that threatens many lives, and involves the staggering sum of a billion in gold, I have to put credence in it."

The speaker was Frank Havens, the rugged, middle-aged publisher of the New York *Clarion* and a chain of nation-wide newspapers. Steve Huston was the ace reporter of his New York newspaper. For several days, the red-headed reporter had been running down a story that there had been some mysterious, unusual activity among certain leading oil magnates of the country, in which it was rumored that a cold billion was involved.

"A billion in gold is quite a bit more than pocket change," said the man whom Frank Havens had addressed as Phantom. "And you tell me that of all curious places, Steve

Huston has been getting most of his information from show people, some of the members of that 'Cotton Road' cast?"

"Right, Phantom," said Havens. "It seems that Steve at last has a serious affair of the heart. Her name is Penny Lake. She's understudy to Jewel Madison, the society actress, the 'Ina Lou' of Cotton Road. I understand that Penny Lake was to meet Steve in Washington to give him some information she had picked up."

The Phantom was not exactly staggered by even such a figure as a billion in gold. As he now appeared, he was a rather seedy-looking individual in a loose sack suit and a slouch hat. But when he was not engaged as the Phantom, in running down major crimes, and in seeing that justice was done, he spent his own inherited fortune as if it might be somewhere around a billion, rather than a mere million or so.

He was in reality, Richard Curtis Van Loan, playboy and cynical society sportsman. Frank Havens, who virtually made him the world's most famous manhunter, was the single living person who knew his real identity.

A friend of the Phantom's dead father, Frank Havens had first interested the bored, carefree young Van Loan in a newspaper murder case. Since then, Dick Van Loan had perfected himself in all the arts and science of criminal detection.

Physically he approached masculine perfection, and had been trained in both Oriental and Occidental methods of fighting. His laboratory had enabled him to perfect scores of advanced police devices that put him ahead of other detectives.

Called "the man of a thousand faces," he could make himself the double, in appearance, voice and manner, of anyone with whom he had once had contact. Ventriloquism, hypnotism, and other arts enabled

him to meet any and all of the cleverest criminals on their own grounds.

HE WAS known wherever law was administered throughout the world; known and liked. He was likewise known wherever the brainiest crooks assembled; known and feared.

The conversation between Frank Havens and the Phantom, however, was no more intriguing than that between the other two men in a car that was parked near a boat-house, on the shore of Long Island Sound. From within the boat-house came the pulsing of an idling boat's motor.

One of the men raised a heavy, long-fingered hand, and great diamonds flashed with myriad colors.

"There she is, Spud," said the be-diamonded man. "Right on the dot. Now if Ackers has his plans working, it won't be long. Right over the Sound," he said.

"But Diamond," said the other man, who had slaty eyes, "suppose we get there too late, and he doesn't free himself from the chute?"

"In that case," said Diamond, "we make sure that he doesn't free himself from the chute."

The slaty-eyed man swallowed hard, staring at Diamond's long, solemn face.

"Because, Spud," said Diamond, "if one body is missing when the bodies are found in the plane, that man might be remembered from the Washington end. We wouldn't want that, would we?"

The other man's slaty eyes widened. Plain enough what he was thinking. In a murder mob like this—suppose the time should come when he, "Spud," was on the short end of the same kind of a deal?

The green and red lights of the plane were low now. The ship was directly above the wide Sound. Something like a murky cloud appeared against the star-filled sky between the plane's riding lights.

"That's it!" announced Diamond. "Come on, we'll do a bit of cruising!"

In the Phantom's car, Frank Havens and Dick Van Loan saw the smoke billow out between the green and red lights of the Washington plane.

"Good glory!" shouted Havens. "It's an explosion! Dick, I should have called Steve Huston off of this trip! He said he was convinced that two oil men who would be on the plane were not intended to reach New York! But he could not explain why!"

In that plane they saw, Steve Huston had been sitting. The young reporter was rusty-headed, freckle-faced and stubborn of chin. And his engaging grin had fooled many who made the mistake of trying to trade punches with him.

The slim girl beside him was slightly snub-nosed, but it was so much a Judy Garland kind of nose, and the rest of her was so perfect, that the nose was scarcely ever noticed. The nose wrinkled when she looked at red-headed Steve Huston.

They were just passing over the lights of Manhattan, with the dark streak of Long Island Sound showing.

"I wish I hadn't got you into this by eavesdropping," said Penny Lake. "Only it has thrown us together a lot, and I guess I like that."

"You better like it," growled Steve. "Two weeks ago you heard a man talking in the wings of the theater, when he thought no one was around. And you heard him say that any oil man who came here thinking he would grab that big contract might not even arrive. Since then, two oil men from the West have disappeared strangely while driving to New York."

PENNY LAKE nodded her well poised head.

"You don't know who was doing the talking," said Steve, "because you didn't see the speaker. Then you hear

the same voice again in one of the dressing rooms, saying that Leonard and Traynor, the big oil men up there in the front seat, will not reach New York."

Penny was still nodding.

"I can't identify men by their voices," she said. "Maybe I'm tone deaf. Anyhow, the man was wrong, because we've already reached New York."

"But you did hear him say something about a billion in gold, didn't you, Penny?" asked Steve.

"I certainly did," said Penny. "He said there was a cold billion in it for the one who played it right. But it seems hard to believe there's that much money in the world."

"Well, as soon as we land," said Steve, "I'm tackling Leonard and Traynor. If there is anything like a billion in the offing, I'll smoke it out of them."

Penny Lake smiled, looking at Steve as if she believed he could accomplish anything. Which was all right with Steve.

Steve had carefully studied every passenger. The oil men were obviously avoiding each other. The other men were students. A fifth man was scholarly looking absorbed in a book. The women passengers were too obviously of the social type to arouse any suspicion.

Steve felt the surge of motor power ease off. The big plane was gliding now, high over the Sound. The man with the book got up and walked toward the front of the plane.

Just then the stewardess opened the pilot's door, which is usually kept locked, glancing in. And then it happened so fast that Steve had no chance to reach for the automatic holstered under his arm. The man with the book thrust the stewardess to one side. The man threw the book into the pilot's cabin, then snapped the door shut.

As the man turned, Steve was on his feet.

"Sit down!" shouted the man harshly, and Steve Huston was looking into the bore of a gun. "Don't anyone move!"

He was backing toward the door. His coat seemed to split and the packed folds of a parachute appeared back of his hips. The man freed a catch of the door and jammed his weight against it.

Steve Huston dived then, throwing himself at the gunman and hoping for the best. He heard the vicious snap of the man's weapon. A red-hot finger ran along the back of his neck, but he was reaching to grip the man's ankles.

Then it seemed as if the gliding plane had hit the Empire State Building or something else equally solid. That was the pilot's cabin splitting apart, with the violence of an explosion.

The door burst open. Blue flames and smoke rolled into the cabin. Steve's hands missed their hold upon the wrecker's legs, and next it seemed to him as if his eyes had been burned out.

He was but vaguely conscious that the saboteur had forced the door open and propelled himself into space.

The women were screaming shrilly. The pretty stewardess was rolling in the slanted aisle, trying to extinguish fire that had converted her into a human torch.

Steve heard Penny Lake cry out, then he was being slammed from seat to seat as the big plane went into a gyrating spin.

Steve fought to his feet and got one arm around Penny Lake, holding her steady as the plane continued its crazy, screaming dive.

Steve Huston never knew how he forced his way to the plane door, wedging it partly open so fresh air could blow on Penny Lake's face. As the plane spun, he could see the dark water of Long Island Sound rushing up to meet the doomed ship.

CHAPTER IV

REWARD FOR MURDER



THE instant of that first burst of smoking flame from the continental plane, the Phantom went into action. His car motor roared.

"Steve was right, and he's on that plane!" groaned Frank Havens.

"And Penny Lake's with him!"

The publisher could see little if any hope for the passengers of what suddenly had been converted into a gyrating, flaming coffin.

Tongues of fire shot out from the spinning ship.

The Phantom was turning his battered old coupé in the minimum of space. Its powerful motor roared. As the coupé leaped into life, hitting the first side road from the airport toward the Sound, Van said tightly:

"That could not have been a motor or a fuel tank explosion. It mushroomed from the pilot's cabin. It might have been a set time bomb, but I have another idea."

Havens was clinging to any hold he could find as Van made the coupé do sixty on a road built for wagons hauling dirt.

"What can we do, Dick?" said Havens despairingly. "Everyone in that plane must be dead! Look!"

Even above the roar of their own car, they could hear the resounding crash as the burning plane landed in the Sound. When they reached the shore, Van leaped to the ground, running down over the rocks to the edge of the water. Havens stumbled after him.

"There's what I mean!" exclaimed Van pointing into the murky sky. "See that little light? Flashing on and off?"

Havens saw the light. It came on and off at five second intervals, and

each time it was a little lower and farther to the northward.

"Unless some passenger was lucky enough to get a parachute, which isn't likely, there's the murderer who set off that blast!" declared Van. "He's due to land in the water, not far from the middle of the Sound, and I've a notion that's exactly what he planned to do."

Van was running along the shore as he talked. Havens was breathing heavily, but keeping pace with him.

"If only Steve—"

Havens said that much and stopped. It was unlikely that Steve Huston would have got hold of a chute. It was more unlikely that he would have used it unless the other passengers were similarly equipped.

Sirens of coast guard and police boats were wailing out in the Sound. Large and small vessels were making their way toward where the plane had dropped. But all that could be seen now was a spreading pall of smoke.

Van saw that the flashing light, such as might have been made by the flicking of a cigarette lighter, was close to the water. He looked around for a boat of any kind, but the shore was only blank rocks. Swiftly he stripped his coat and shoes.

"Someone in a boat surely will have seen that light," Havens said, "but I don't hear any motor up this way."

"With that explosion and the fast fall of the plane, it is doubtful if the police or anybody else would be on the lookout for a chute," said Van. "And that's just what that chutist may be depending upon."

As the Phantom took to the water, Frank Havens continued along the shore where presently he found a leaky rowboat with one oar. Pushing the boat into the water, he paddled out.

VAN swam with long strokes. Only champions could distance the Phantom, and but few of them could equal his ability as a diver.

He kept an eye out for the little light. It did not appear again, but suddenly he heard the throbbing of a small boat's motor and caught the light of its exhaust. It was making toward the spot where the parachute must have dropped.

Van was half a mile from shore when he heard the crack of a shot that could have come only from a small-caliber gun equipped with a silencer. It sounded dead ahead, not far away.

The motor of the boat he had heard had been pulsing along at a moderate speed. Suddenly it awakened with a roar. Van could just make out the dim whiteness of its wake.

The tangled, floating chute was deeply sunken. In another few moments it would have been dragged under. But when Van reached the mass of silk and cord, he was instantly aware that this was a new type of parachute.

"From its fineness, that chute could be packed under an average coat," he thought, swimming around it. "And there's only one reason for it to be sinking. The occupants of that motorboat must have rescued the chutist, and attached a weight to sink the thing, or else—"

Van dived. Under the chute he came upon the body of the man still fastened in the chute harness. As Van brought him to the surface, he knew the man was dead.

Van put his flashlight upon the dead man's face. The features were heavy above a thick neck, but the man had long, tapering fingers and a pointed beard. He seemed above the average type of mob killer.

"French, I'd say, from the cut of his beard and hair," decided Van, "though it was unlikely that any other plane passenger had survived, to confirm or deny his having been aboard the plane, or to tell what happened."

Van's heart was heavy at this thought. Steve Huston who had been

a passenger had been more than an occasional aid to him. He had been a loyal friend.

Van uttered a sharp exclamation as his light touched the dead chutist's neck. There was a little blue hole under one ear. The bullet that had killed the man had been of small caliber, but it had pierced the throat and emerged on the other side of the jagged flesh wound.

"Reward for murder," Van muttered. "This fellow was alive when that boat arrived. The shot I heard was a neat and final pay-off without a kick-back."

Frank Havens called out, paddling along in the old boat he had commandeered. He and the Phantom lifted the corpse into the rowboat. There, Van quickly searched the dead man's pockets.

"Look here, Frank," he said abruptly. "What's this?"

A soggy card was stuck in the lining of the dead man's vest. It was only after Van applied a chemical from his body make-up case that dimly penciled words were brought out. One line read:

See Big Dan at Club Nineteen. Do not approach anyone. Play the Number Four roulette table. You will win the five grand.

"Club Nineteen," said Havens. "Big Dan Spade? That doesn't sound reasonable. Spade is notoriously crooked as a politician, but he never has gone in for murder or mob stuff."

Van smiled grimly. "I have an idea," he said studying the face of the corpse, "that someone may see a ghost shortly. And that someone was in the motorboat that replied to the chutist's signal light. Perhaps it was believed cheaper to remove a killer than to have him win five grand. I think I will be playing table Number Four, at Club Nineteen, Frank."

THE words had scarcely left his lips when a series of roaring explosions broke out not far away. A beam of blinding light shot across the Sound, catching and holding the small, drifting boat in which Van, Havens and the corpse were riding in its dazzling radiance.

"They've fished Ackers out, blast 'em!" a voice shouted. "A'right! Give 'er the gun!"

The blinding searchlight seemed to leap straight at the flimsy rowboat. The speed-boat came on with a roaring rush. Van's hand moved with the speed of light. It was filled with the heavy automatic from under his arm.

His racketing shots were as fast as a machine-gun burst. The blinding light went out with a blue flash of flame. A man screamed with pain and the speed-boat swerved. Its wash narrowly missed capsizing the smaller boat.

Van had caught Havens, rolling him into the water, so that both were clinging to the edges of the rowboat.

[Turn page]

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He was just in time, as lead clipped splinters that stung their faces.

"That got 'em!" exulted a voice. "C'mon, make sure that corpse has gone to the bottom!"

"Swim low and deep—drift with the tide, Frank," directed Van.

As he spoke, he pulled the dead chutist into the water. Quietly, he went under, carrying the corpse with him.

* * * * *

Steve Huston had often faced what he had thought was his last moment on earth. Frequently working with the Phantom, nearness to death was not unusual.

But this time Huston was convinced there could be no last second reprieve. He was bitterly sick, with Penny Lake held firmly in the crook of his arm. Her eyes were closed. She had passed out from shock and the horror of death that had come to other passengers in the spinning plane.

Steve was glad it was this way. He hoped Penny Lake would know nothing of the final crash. Even as the plane's side-slipping gyrations dizzied him, he kissed her cold lips.

One second the sky seemed to be below the opened door of the flaming coffin to which Steve clung, and the next the water of the Sound replaced the sky. Suddenly there was a splintering, rending sound.

"There goes the port wing, an' the last chance for a pancake," Steve thought grimly, for he had been hoping desperately that the ship might stall at the instant of its final plunge and lessen the force of its collision with the water.

Now the tearing off of one wing caused a skidding motion. The weight of the three motors in the nose turned the fuselage to lessen its frightful whirling. Sky and water appeared to be fused into one mass, filled with stars.

Huston could not have told whether he consciously jumped with Penny,

or if he was thrown clear as the remaining, wide wing slipped into the water of the Sound. The impact seemed to pulverize his bones and turn his muscles to jelly.

The cold darkness of deep water closed over him. He was sinking, yet he was conscious that one arm still encircled Penny's soft body. Undoubtedly Huston was but seconds under the surface, but never before had his thoughts so speeded up, recalling all that Penny had confided in him about hearing unnamed men discussing a mystery that dealt with oil, with a billion in gold, and with two oil men from the West who had already been killed in automobile accidents.

STEVE'S speeded brain caught at one elusive thought he had overlooked. Penny had said she could not identify the men by their voices, but she mentioned that one had a French accent. Had she been holding anything back?

Steve queerly recalled that some members of the "Cotton Road" cast were of French origin. Two French singers had recently been added to the cast.

"Chaumon and Dupre," came to Steve.

And what was another angle he had been overlooking? Yes, it was about Homer Kent, the backer of the show. It was said that Kent favored actors and actresses from stricken France, because his mother had been a Frenchwoman. His father had married her in Paris during the World War I.

None of this made sense to Steve now, although as death seemed to be pressing closer, his mind had startling clarity.

All of that passed when again he was looking up at the stars. A great ache in his lungs was being eased by cold, fresh air. Something gave his head a cruel bump. . . .

A few minutes later, choking over

a hot drink, Steve Huston looked at a kindly face under a coast guard's peaked cap.

"You're lucky, fellow," said the guard. "Too bad about the others though."

"You mean I'm the only one?" Steve gulped.

The guard smiled, jerking his thumb.

"Not quite," he said. "We had to pry the little lady loose from your arm. You'd just about choked her, trying to save her life. She'll be all right, so take it easy."

From the way he felt Steve Huston knew now that Penny Lake was more than just a passing fancy. The others in the plane—he couldn't think of them. He would be a long time getting the pretty stewardess out of the back of his mind. If he ever did.

CHAPTER V

MEET THE CORPSE



PERHAPS twenty minutes later, a motorboat came alongside. Steve Huston really came to life then. Frank Havens' brusque voice was better than any stimulant he had been given.

"I will always believe in miracles after this, Steve," said Havens. "Thank God you and Penny Lake are safe!"

A limp and sodden corpse was being lifted onto the coast guard cutter's deck. A man with straggly light hair appeared from the water and climbed aboard. Huston was staring at him when the man pulled the lobe of his left ear gently.

"The Phantom!" breathed Steve. "Score one. That dead man is the fiend who blew up the plane!"

The Phantom's tug at his ear lobe was a signal he always used for Steve. Havens, Chip Dorlan, his youthful

protégé, and others to whom he wished to identify himself when appearing in a new disguise.

"I judged the dead man to be the saboteur and killer," said the Phantom.

"He was, Phantom," Steve said quietly. "And remembering now that he looked like a Frenchman, I have something more to tell you about Frenchmen, Phantom."

He did not get a chance then, because the commander of the guard boat came over.

"I'm Captain Rogers," he said. "I know you, of course, Mr. Havens, and Steve Huston here, but this gentleman with you . . . and what is this about the dead man you brought aboard?"

Van acted so quickly that others nearby missed his movement. He produced and palmed a gleaming object—a pure platinum badge in the shape of a domino mask, and set with tiny diamonds.

"The Phantom!" said the guardsman. "I might have guessed that, you being with Mr. Havens. You know this dead man to have been responsible for this terrible thing?"

Captain Rogers, like other law enforcement officers everywhere, evinced the heartiest respect for the Phantom. That domino badge was known throughout the world. Wherever and whenever its platinum and diamonds flashed, it was like serving notice on the perpetrators of a crime that their day of reckoning was at hand. For officers of every branch of law enforcement had come to know the Phantom as the Nemesis of the cleverest killers and of the craftiest of society's despoilers.

"This dead man was the plane wrecker," the Phantom said quickly, so that only Captain Rogers heard. "I heard him called Ackers by men in a speed-boat. He was shot after he landed in a chute. But his executioners may not be sure he is dead. For the present, I ask that the recovery of

the body be kept secret. And I would like to be alone with the corpse in your cabin, Captain Rogers."

The captain stared curiously at the Phantom, but nodded. He had the corpse moved into his own cabin as the boat turned toward the Manhattan shore.

The great skill of the Phantom was never more fully or more quickly demonstrated than when he was alone with the corpse.

A small mustache and a pointed beard gave the corpse a foreign appearance. The features were heavy. Van was thinking that the frightful tragedy of the plane could be connected with sabotage in line with the war, as he produced a new contrivance of his own for making up. It had the shape of a halved human skull and face. It was quickly made to duplicate the features of the corpse.

When Van slipped it together about his head, its snug fit was perfect.

HE WAS thinking as he worked deftly. Of all the nations in the war, France was the most divided. In New York were Free French who hated Hitler, while other Frenchmen in Vichy and Paris had helped to betray their country.

Also in New York were other Frenchmen who were adherents to the traitorous cause of the Fifth Columnists who had originally aided in the downfall of their country. And fierce hatred existed between these two groups.

Van knew that oil supply was one of the biggest elements of the war. Any and all factions of all the nations recognized America's oil as the possible life-blood of the battle fleets that must eventually win.

This startling tragedy of an American continental plane might be simply an offshoot of the struggle for the sorely needed oil. But that something more murderous, more criminal was linked with this Van was convinced. And the key to the real motive for the

gruesome murders in the sky might be in the soggy card he had taken from the dead man's pocket.

"Anyway, this Ackers will not be expected at Club Nineteen," Van mused. "It will be interesting to see if table Number Four is ready to pay off five grand should Ackers appear there as a player."

Van's flat make-up case was spread before him. He studied his new head mask in his make-up mirror, moving his hands expertly, until his own face was a replica of the dead man's in every detail.

At the last, he slipped in thin eye-shells of pale blue. These covered the normally brown orbs of Richard Curtis Van Loan.

The dead man had been near to Van's size and the Phantom was satisfied when he had donned the clothes from the corpse. His rap on the door summoned Captain Rogers.

If the captain had seen a dead man arise and walk, he could not have been more dumbfounded. His eyes rolled from Van to the corpse on the floor of his cabin.

"I see it, and I don't believe it, in spite of all I've heard of you, Phantom," he said. "All you need now is a wound."

Captain Rogers stopped short, staring, as the Phantom turned his head slightly. For there was the undeniable mark of a bullet. And on the other side of his neck was an apparent wound that had been taped.

"That death bullet could have followed a slightly different course, through the dead man's neck, Captain," he explained, "and the man could have survived. It is always well to be realistic. Some man believes he inflicted that bullet wound."

Steve Huston and Frank Havens came into the cabin. They had long since ceased to marvel at the Phantom's impersonations. Steve was supporting Penny Lake.

"I'm against your idea, Phantom," Havens soberly announced. "I have

been talking with Miss Lake. It would seem that all of the plot resulting in the plane tragedy, and possibly in other deaths of oil men may have originated in the Old Forties Theater, and that some of the cast of 'Cotton Road' may be implicated. You are taking a chance on being killed on sight if you go to Club Nineteen."

Van smiled a little. Havens always talked like that, but it never changed the Phantom's plans.

"I'll shift into some other clothes and be hanging around the club, Phantom," Steve Huston said briskly. "This is my story, and I'll follow through."

HAVENS pulled Steve's coat collar to one side. There was a red and ugly furrow made by a bullet along the back of Steve's neck.

"Your assignment will be to attend to that wound, Steve," said Havens. "After that, if you're okay, I believe I will join you for the last act of 'Cotton Road' tonight."

It was at just this point that the guard-boat radio picked up a special news bulletin. The announcer reported:

"It is believed that at least two men who may be responsible for the murder of Frederick Kent in the Kent Brothers offices made their get-away by motor-boat from a dock on the Hudson River. All police have been warned to be on the lookout for a green and red boat equipped with a high-speed outboard motor. No description of Kent's murderers has been obtained. Police are convinced that a mysterious mob killer suspected of other racket murders in the past fired the death shot. A small caliber gun was used.

The death wound was under the left ear.

"In at least three other murders that are not believed to have had any connection with the Kent death, or with each other, the same sort of small-caliber bullet wounds were in-



FRANK HAVENS

flicted. The identity of the unerring gunman has never become known.

"Homer Kent, backer of the famous 'Cotton Road,' discovered his brother's body. Kent is being closely questioned. Some members of the 'Cotton Road' company are reported to have visited the Kent Oil offices at about the time of the murder. Among these are Jewel Madison, the star singer of the company.

"The police believe the murder was committed by hired killers who have been employed in the other murders mentioned. The theory is held that the gunman in this case is only a murderer for a price paid by those desiring the death, and that he may be a member of a murder syndicate that has been operating for considerable time."

"Four other murders?" thought the Phantom. "All by a small-caliber bullet under the left ear, as Ackers was killed. And that furnishes an entirely new plan."

He was watching Penny Lake, understudy to Jewel Madison in the "Ina Lou" rôle. The girl's hands clenched. She was staring at Steve Huston. When she spoke it was as if she were putting some inner thought into words.

"It has come," she said. "They meant to kill Homer Kent. He is the one who knows about the billion in gold."

"Who said Homer Kent knew about a billion in gold?" Van asked quietly. "Who told you that? And where is this billion?"

"Why, I—" Penny Lake hesitated, as if awakening from a dream. "I just heard it, I guess. I don't know why I said that. Homer Kent isn't threatened by anyone, so far as I know."

The Phantom glanced at Huston's puzzled face.

"It doesn't matter," he said quickly. "You've had quite a shock, Miss Lake."

But the Phantom was convinced that Penny Lake had been shocked into her exclamation concerning Homer Kent knowing about a mysterious billion in gold. He was sure she had been surprised into speaking the truth when she had said that the life of Homer Kent, producer of "Cotton Road," was in danger.

YET it was instantly obvious that she was suddenly afraid. She must know much more than she had revealed to Huston.

But the shocking news of the murder of Fred Kent, and of the nearness of members of the "Cotton Road" company to that crime, had hit Penny Lake with devastating impact. Suddenly she had been ridden by a secret fear, overcome by terror, though she had tried to conceal it.

Van's conjecture was that Penny Lake would probably cease to be a reliable medium of information. And the change had come over her after hearing the radio bulletin that had mentioned that Jewel Madison and other members of the cast of her show had been at the scene of the murder.

Could that mean that Penny Lake knew something that made her suspect who were the murderers? Why had she so instantly believed that

Fred Kent had been killed in mistake for his brother, Homer?

Was her sudden fear and denial inspired by loyalty to Jewel Madison? Or was it through some fear for herself?

"It would be loyalty," thought Van. "Penny had little fear for herself when she was giving Steve information that appeared to concern only persons outside of the 'Cotton Road' show."

CHAPTER VI

MURDER PAY



JUST as the guard boat was landing, Steve Huston drew the Phantom to one side. Van could see that Steve had been hard hit by the little actress, Penny Lake, but he was puzzled and disappointed by the girl's sudden change, her apparent fear since she had learned of the murder of Fred Kent.

"You should know this, Phantom, although it may be groundless suspicion," said Steve. "Penny has insisted that she has not known the men who were discussing a plot against oil men, and an unbelievable billion in gold at stake. But now since this murderer from the plane you are impersonating is without doubt a Frenchman I believe you should know there are two French actors singing in 'Cotton Road'—Chaumon and Dupre. I also happen to know that Fred and Homer Kent had a French mother. It may or may not tie up with tonight's murders, and Penny's reason for being afraid."

"That angle can wait awhile," said Van. "Undoubtedly it has some bearing upon the crimes. In the meantime, Steve, I am paying a little visit to Club Nineteen. I may be in the peculiar position of collecting five thou-

sand as a murder pay-off, and I expect to see Big Dan Spade, the politician."

Steve's teeth clicked together. His eyes were hard.

"He's one tough number, Phantom. And smooth. He owns Club Nineteen all right, but it can't be proved. The club is run by Diamond Ronder, and Big Dan Spade only hangs around. There have been killings that the police have known were of great advantage to Big Dan, but never a shred of evidence that he had any direct hand in them, or that Diamond Ronder had either."

"Someone must have slipped then in giving Ackers a note that mentions Spade," said Van. "And this angle about Homer Kent being partly French may mean nothing."

"There is another angle I don't like, Phantom," Huston said reluctantly. "'Cotton Road' is about to close its run. And Jewel Madison has been singing at Club Nineteen after the show. Wherever she goes, you'll find Homer Kent. I don't know why Jewel, who is real society outside the show business, should appear at Diamond Ronder's club. She is to be starred in a new show that Homer Kent is making ready for next season."

"This is becoming rather crossed up," Van said quietly. "Perhaps it will be best just to take one item at a time, beginning with what may come out of a supposed corpse appearing at Club Nineteen for a little game of murder pay-off."

A police squad car racketed onto the landing wharf. Gruff, red-faced Inspector Thomas Gregg, came striding over as he spotted Frank Havens and Steve Huston.

The Phantom quickly made his difficult rôle known to Inspector Gregg, although he did not go into details.

"I'll put some of the boys on the club, Phantom," said Gregg. "If something can be pinned upon Big Dan Spade, I'd like to have it."

"I prefer a lone hand for the time,

Inspector," said the Phantom. "There must be no intimation of police activity."

For the first time Inspector Gregg noticed the apparent yet inconspicuous blue hole under Van's left ear and the taped bandage.

"Great gravy, Phantom!" he exclaimed. "That bullet-mark. It isn't real, is it?"

"Merely realistic, Inspector." Van smiled. "It was the murder pay-off for Ackers. I had intended the wound to make my appearance at Club Nineteen more interesting. But after the news bulletin telling of a suspected small-caliber gunman who gets his victims under the left ear, I have a new and better plan. It seems the Fred Kent murder and Ackers' blasting of that plane may be closely connected, even if a murder syndicate is being employed."

"By glory!" exploded Inspector Gregg. "That wound *would* be identical with that of Fred Kent! The Ackers' bullet will match up."

"If it were not at the bottom of Long Island Sound," said the Phantom. "But I have an idea that this particular killer can be baited into making another try."

"It's risking too much, Phantom!" declared Inspector Gregg. "If the killer should happen to be in Club Nineteen he would not dare permit the man he will believe to be Ackers to get away."

"Exactly," said Van. "That makes the plan more perfect. Also it gives me a chance to try out something I have only recently perfected. I hope to be shot at, and to collect that bullet. I have every idea of living to bring back both the bullet and the gun that fires it."

LONG association with the Phantom had taught Inspector Gregg one thing—if the Phantom said he would bring back a bullet and the gun of the killer who fired it, it was a ten to one bet that he would do just that.

"You intend to risk a deliberate attempt to kill you?" said Gregg.

"I hope to be shot at, and that the gunman's aim is accurate." Van smiled again. "If he fails to hit me under the left ear, I may collect a serious wound. . . ."

The smart impressario of the floor show at Club Nineteen had converted his feature act into a replica of the third act of the long popular "Cotton Road," since Jewel Madison, society actress, the "Ina Lou" star of "Cotton Road" had become a singer at the club.

It was a novelty that was rolling in business. "Cotton Road" was a daring play. The "Ina Lou" of the show was at the moment, Broadway's leading star of song.

At one o'clock the act was on. It was a riotous singing act. The music was savage and filled with drums. Cymbals clashed. The orchestra was concealed by the club director's conception of a cotton patch "way down in Georgia."

The Phantom walked into the club at a moment when the crash of drums and the rhythm of voices were at their height. It came to him that if there ever was a moment for murder in a night-club, this would be it.

"Anyone might easily be shot right now, without the sound being noticed," he thought. "Especially if a gunman with a good eye employed a small-caliber gun, with or without a silencer."

While the club tables were filled, and patrons were being turned away, Van had at once become aware that every visitor was put under the keen scrutiny of cold, critical eyes.

Two men on the door had such eyes. Another man stood near the check room. Still another was in a waiter's uniform, but evidently concerning himself only with entering guests.

The Phantom had waited until this hour to appear. He had used the time to duplicate the dead Acker's clothes with some garments of his own. His

coat and vest could be swiftly reversed, converting them into both another color and another cut. For he might find it necessary to drop the rôle of Ackers at a second's notice.

It was his plan to get inside the club before he could possibly be identified, in case any of the keen-eyed boys happened to have been acquainted with the murdered Ackers. For to his mind any of those cold-eyed men observing incoming patrons might have been in the murder speed-boat on Long Island Sound. And those who had been in the speed-boat could not be sure that Ackers was dead.

As he removed his topcoat at the check room, Van knew he had been spotted. The watchful attendant stared at him as if seeing a ghost. Then the man moved swiftly to the head-waiter and the other waiter by the inside door.

Four guests had just been turned away.

"Everything's taken," Van heard the head-waiter say apologetically. "Can't admit anyone now without reservations."

Van saw the idle waiter move slowly around the side of the crowded dining space. The head-waiter was observing Van closely as he stood in the check room.

THEN he saw the other two men reach a side table. A black-haired man with a long, funereal face looked up. The solemn man moved hands that reflected the dim lights from huge, glittering diamonds.

"Diamond Ronder," was Van's thought. "It is an even bet it is not too crowded for me to be admitted."

Those who had just been turned away were watching as Van walked coolly up to the head-waiter.

"Your table is waiting, sir," the head-waiter said loudly. "You were lucky to make your reservation early."

At this moment the banging drums



As Van brought the parachutist to the surface, he knew the man was dead (CHAPTER IV)

of the floor show act reached a crescendo of thumping, accompanied by a savage cadence of singing voices. Van saw Diamond Ronder leave his table, walk to one side and disappear through the heavy draperies of a door that appeared to lead toward what might be dressing rooms.

But the two men who had spoken to Ronder stayed where they were, their eyes turned much too obviously upon the singers. The face of the head-waiter was a blank.

Van judged the time had come to make his bold play. He had been spotted as Ackers, and he was sure there would not be a table in reserve, at least not here among the diners.

"I'll see Big Dan Spade first," he said abruptly.

The head-waiter nodded.

"I am following instructions," he said. "You will go first to the table reserved. You will see Mr. Spade later, I understand. Come this way."

The head-waiter parted the draperies at the side. The door through which Diamond Ronder had disappeared opened at the waiter's touch. Van could see only a dimly lighted corridor.

His eyes went back to the two men who had first recognized "Ackers." They had not moved. But another man was seated at the table which Diamond Ronder had left, a slender

man, faultlessly dressed. He had a drink before him, but he was giving it no attention.

Van could detect his hard, glittering eyes fixed upon him with all the cold deadliness of a snake about to strike.

And Van swiftly read in the man's features the sharp lines of disbelief, as if he were trying to puzzle out how Ackers could be at Club Nineteen.

"It's more than an even bet he does not believe I am Ackers," thought Van. "He is sure that when he turns on the heat his victim will not be walking around afterward. But he will wait. They are intending to play out the hand, perhaps in the back room."

ALL AT once it became apparent why police raids — Inspector Gregg had spoken of some unsuccessful ones upon the club's gambling layout—had met with no success. The head-waiter paused beside what appeared to be a blank wall, pressed his shoulder to the wall. A whole panel moved back silently. There was another short corridor, then a door. A ramp led downward.

The gambling room was one of the most elaborate Van had ever seen. His eyes sought the tables. Six roulette wheels were operating.

Full play was swinging on all tables, and at the other games in the room.

Van quickly decided that there were underground exits, and that all evidence of gambling could be quickly concealed.

He found what he thought must be the No. 4 table, for the head-waiter was leading him directly to it. The waiter touched the shoulder of a player.

"Special reservation," he said. "Sorry, I'll find you another place."

Van looked into the cold eyes of the croupier. There was no start of surprise. Merely a nod and a little smile.

"How many?" the croupier said.

CHAPTER VII

CHIPS FOR DEATH



VAN slipped into the vacated chair and bought chips. His hand was steady as he placed the three stacks in front of him. There was nothing to indicate that he was other than a regular player. Who could

have guessed that a supposed murderer had just seated himself to collect in this queer, prearranged manner for commission of such fiendish murders as those that had occurred in the plane explosion over Long Island Sound?

Van placed his first chips on thirteen. The croupier's ferretlike eyes followed the movement of his hands. Then the little eyes snapped to a man seated in a raised chair that overlooked all of the huge underground room.

The look-out climbed down from the chair. The wheel was spun. Thirteen paid off. Van merely stacked the chips again on thirteen.

It was impossible to study all of the immense game room. As in the main club, heavy drapes swayed along the walls. There were half a dozen red lights, probably marking ready exits in case of a raid alarm.

Players near him hushed their voices as he won again on the thirteen. Van rubbed his fingers softly over the side of his neck. He had a feeling of sensitivity at a spot just under his left ear.

But the sensitive spot was in his mind rather than on the skin for he had removed the expertly made wound when his better plan had come to him. His left side was turned toward the raised chair which the watcher had left.

Now as the wheel spun, Van saw another man ease himself into the

high chair—the dapper man he had seen sitting at Diamond Ronder's table, the man he had believed might be the mysterious gunman whose unerring aim had baffled the police in several murders, including that of Fred Kent. Yet in this taut interval, the Phantom gave no evidence that he was aware that his neck just under his left ear was a perfect target.

He did not catch it if the croupier gave a signal, though other players at his table did move aside. Perhaps they were simply interested in watching his winnings and looking for better vantage points.

Suddenly a player not far from Van spoke as if in surprise.

"Look! There's Homer Kent! You wouldn't think he would be here tonight, with his brother—"

Van glanced up to see a tall man with a square-jawed face. Homer Kent's eyes were handsome, but they appeared too brilliant in their deep sockets even at his distance. With another man he was moving toward a small table at which drinks were being served.

The man who had exclaimed at Homer Kent's appearance here was still talking, but he had dropped his voice. Van, however, could read lips as easily as he could hear spoken words.

"He's with that Frenchman, Pierre Lamont again," the man was saying. "And that Rod Sherman was outside in the club. Maybe Kent doesn't want his Ina Lou to have too much freedom, and is keeping an eye on her."

Van gave the dark featured Frenchman with Homer Kent a swift, but thorough study. Pierre Lamont seemed to be an unusually serious man. Or perhaps it was his sympathy for Kent in his grief for his brother had set his features in a grave mask.

Van permitted his chips to ride, surreptitiously watching. Kent's back was turned as he sat down at the table. Van could see Pierre Lamont's lips, could read the words he uttered.

"It's certain now, Kent, that the plan has become known," said Lamont. "We cannot wait longer. As soon as we get the signal, we must set the time and place."

Homer Kent nodded.

IT FLASHED into Van's mind that the words just spoken could be connected with Penny Lake's sudden fear when she had learned the news of Fred Kent's murder. And he was not forgetting the mention of Homer Kent keeping an eye on Ina Lou, or Jewel Madison, his fiancée. And of the man who had been called Rod Sherman.

Van did not need to be informed about Rodney Sherman. For some time the name had been heard along Broadway. As Dick Van Loan, the Phantom had met this newcomer a few times.

Sherman's penchant for playboy spending along the White Way outdistanced that of Van Loan himself. Sherman's yacht, the *Barracuda* which for several months had been anchored in the Hudson, was one of the finest craft of its kind ever laying off Manhattan.

The Sherman parties had become famous or notorious, according to the point of view of those who spoke of them. Van now recalled a publicity yarn about a party on the Sherman yacht for the cast of "Cotton Road." And now, apparently, the names of Jewel Madison and Sherman were being linked.

"A strange interlude in a little game of playing chips of death," Van thought.

But the interruption in his strange gamble occupied but a few seconds. As Van resumed his play, perhaps it was the sly movement of the croupier—or it may have been the Phantom's trained instinct—that warned him he might at any time expect the small-caliber bullet he was deliberately inviting.

He was set and ready, on edge for

action. Yet he could not betray himself until a killer's gun actually sent its unerring lead at the plain target he was making of himself.

What preliminary would there be? How would the dealer in death seated in the watcher's chair cover himself?

The answer to that came with the sudden crashing of drums.

The heathenish music of the "Cotton Road" act outside suddenly beat through the underground gambling room.

A loud-speaker here had been switched on.

As he had entered the club Van had thought that music could cover any sound of shooting. Now the rich contralto known to theater-goers and radio listeners as that of Jewel Madison swelled through the room.

Van saw Homer Kent quickly turn his face. And he read a quick oath upon Kent's lips, as if the man were cursing because his singing star's voice was being heard here.

Van kept his eyes determinedly away from the dapper man seated in the look-out's chair. But his right hand slid from the table casually, down to his side.

He did not hear the slight crack of the silenced gun. The shot was drowned in the staccato noise of the drums.

It was the strangest moment that had ever come to the Phantom in all his varied career. He had been expecting the bullet. The impact of it was a sharp blow upon the side of his neck just under his left ear. And before anyone could possibly have seen any slight smoke that might have come from the gunman's small weapon, the lights went out. The snapping of the light switch must have been timed exactly with that shot.

The Phantom had expected something like that, too. But the next moment even the savage music failed to cover the hard, sharp crack of Van's own automatic. In the darkness a man

screamed. It was high and filled with pain.

VAN was already on his feet, hurling himself through the opaque blackness. The outline, position and distance to the watcher's chair were all fixed in his mind.

Men were cursing all around him. Women were screaming. The little red lights still glowed over the emergency exits, but gave no illumination in the big room as Van hurled himself toward that killer.

"The police!" a harsh voice cried. "Get out! Swing the tables! Step on it!"

Then Van's hard shoulder hit the stand upon which the watcher's chair was set, sent the chair crashing over.

His groping hands missed the dapper man who had posted himself there to fire a murder bullet. But one arm of the chair was wet, and it was splintered.

Van rolled quickly, questing the floor about the chair. But the man he knew he had hit was no longer there. But Van's hand did encounter the metal of a small gun. He felt a silencing cylinder as he thrust the weapon into his clothes.

"Dude!" A voice called the name softly. "Where are you? Dude! What happened to you? Listen! Ackers' gone. You must have missed."

Van tensed, ready to spring at the sound of a reply, but there was none.

"The lights!" another voice was shouting then. "Someone's been shot!"

Van's neck was paining where the bullet had hit. Queerly enough, he knew the lead was imbedded, but he was smiling a little in the darkness. However, he could not afford to be trapped now when the lights were turned on. He could hear players jamming the emergency exits under the little, red lights, but made no effort to escape with the crowd.

Instead, he rolled until he came in contact with one of the big tables. He



Van had bounded over the big desk as a falling trap door was shooting Big Dan to safety (CHAP. VIII)

was concealed under it while continued cries came for the lights. Quickly he felt for the wiring for the row of lights edging the tables. One wrench of a powerful hand tore the insulated wire free and he stripped it down to the copper with a twist of fingers that fastened with the grip of steel pliers.

He was holding the bared wire in contact with the metal rim of a roulette wheel when someone finally threw the switch. There was a blinding, blue flash. The flame from the bared wire and metal seared Van's face and, oddly enough, that split-second blaze from the short-circuited wire hurt more and did more damage than had the bullet under his left ear, the bullet that was still firmly imbedded.

"The fuse has gone! Hey! Somebody bring a torch!"

Men were milling around, kicking at the tables.

"Kent—Kent—where are you?" he heard a voice cry in a low tone, and speaking French. "Keep down! They may try again!"

That must be the voice of the man called Pierre Lamont who had been with Homer Kent. Plainly the Frenchman feared for Kent's safety, and for some reason believed all of this had been intended as an attack upon the owner of "Cotton Road."

From the instant the short-circuited wire had blown the fuse, Van had been working fast, huddled under the table in case lights were brought too soon. He was making a remarkable transformation.

The identity of Ackers, the plane destroyer, was erased from the mask that seemed to be the Phantom's own face. Swift work with his fingers and his features thinned. New eye-shells were slipped in, and they gave him a mild appearance. Ackers' light hair disappeared and sparse gray hair replaced it.

When Van had quickly turned the coat and vest that had seemed like

Acker's clothes, he was ready for the lights. He was a man completely changed except that the gunman's bullet was still imbedded in his neck. It would remain there until he wished to produce it.

THERE was no magic whatever connected with the phenomenon of the bullet remaining under his ear without having done serious damage, except perhaps the magic of Van's own genius. For what had appeared to be the skin of his neck and head was simply the covering of a new type of plastic Van had evolved after long experiment.

For months he had worked at odd times in his modern crime laboratory, producing combinations in plastic that would, he hoped, eventually replace all of the cumbersome bullet-proof material ever used by the police and others.

This plastic mask had been a complete success with the small-caliber bullet. For its outer layer was so made as to retain the lead, while the inner layer was impervious to penetration by any average caliber gun.

Even with this protection, few men other than the Phantom could have so stiffened the neck muscles to resist the sharp impact. He had been bruised and dizzied a little by the shock, but that was all.

CHAPTER VIII

BIG DAN'S DEFIANCE



BY THE time the lights came on, Van was set, watching first for the appearance of Pierre Lamont and Homer Kent. And he saw Pierre Lamont.

The Frenchman was looking about, his cool eyes search-

ing the floor and the vicinity of the tables.

"Have you seen Homer Kent?" Van heard him ask an attendant. "He was right here when the lights went out. Then someone hit me, and I was knocked down. When I came to myself, Kent was gone."

"I haven't seen Mr. Kent," the attendant said. "Guess he went out with the crowd. Funny, I thought the cops were raiding. But the emergency signal was cleared right after the lights went out."

Van was beside Pierre Lamont. He watched Lamont's eyes as he spoke, commenting as might any other casual bystander.

"I know Mr. Kent," he said. "I was right back of him, and it seemed to me that he cried out and that some men grabbed him as they pushed by me."

No man could read another man's eyes more thoroughly than the Phantom. And something like quick fear, even something of hopelessness came into Lamont's gray eyes for all of their coolness.

"Thanks," he said. "But you must be mistaken. There would be no reason for any attack upon Mr. Kent."

"But I thought I heard you say in French for Mr. Kent to keep down for they might try again," Van said quickly.

There was instant, steady menace in Lamont's gray eyes then. Here was a dangerous man, Van quickly decided, one who would permit nothing to stand in his way, a man who would kill if he felt it justified.

"You are an American," Lamont said in French challengingly. "It would be well if you forget what you think you heard me say. It might be better if you forget that you know French, at least in connection with what has just happened."

"We shall probably meet later, Pierre Lamont," Van said quietly. "I heard your name mentioned. You might find it advisable to have me as a friend. In the meantime, possibly Homer Kent has gone to join Miss

Madison, perhaps to make sure that he is the one to escort her from the club."

He turned abruptly, leaving the Frenchman. But he was not sure that his words would not invite sudden violence. Lamont, however, did not move.

"And he isn't the man to let me get away with talk like that unless he is desperately determined to avoid serious trouble except where it can become a finish fight," thought Van.

Pierre Lamont was still watching as Van moved toward the hidden corridor through which he had been conducted into the gambling room. And there he was abruptly blocked by the head-waiter.

"Okay, Mister," said the head-waiter. "Take one of the other exits. No one goes back through the club."

He was standing in the draped entrance to the corridor. Behind Van men were still moving around, without doubt still quietly searching for the missing "Ackers."

Van's right hand shot out. The head-waiter was powerful, with bruiser hands. He started one fist in a short punch, but his arm fell nerveless.

Van had him gripped by the side of his neck. As his fingers tightened the man groaned and his knees started to buckle.

"You're taking me to Big Dan Spade," Van said quietly. "I understand he has a private room here and that he will be here at this hour. He won't like it if he finds out you refused me."

THE HEAD-WAITER led the way along the blind corridor. He did not open the wall leading to the main club, but turned to another hidden door. Van released him suddenly as he saw the well-known features of "Big Dan" Spade, reported to have political power that successfully defied police authority.

Big Dan was seated behind his

desk. He was a florid man. His chief bids to distinction at the moment appeared to be a violent red necktie and an equally red carnation in his buttonhole. His big hands fiddled with a bunch of keys as he leaned back in a swivel chair.

As the door had opened to the waiter's signal, the Phantom's quick eyes had caught the exit of another man through a side door of Big Dan's private office. And in that swift instant he had recognized Rodney Sherman, the yacht-owning spender of Broadway. Sherman, the party man and rival of Homer Kent had been closeted with Big Dan.

"Well, what's all this?" Big Dan said gruffly, glaring at the headwaiter. "Who is this man you've brought here? You know my orders about coming through that door?"

"He had no choice," said Van, before the waiter could reply. "I brought him along for company. I heard you usually were around Club Nineteen, and thought it might be a good idea to get acquainted."

"You thought what?"

"I said it might be well for us to get acquainted," said Van. "I understand that, like those of your kind, you hide out and let others face the music when there's trouble. Sure, I know, you won't admit owning Club Nineteen, and it's always up to Diamond Ronder to do the explaining, but I happen to want my information from the top."

Big Dan's fat hand was reaching under the edge of his desk.

"I wouldn't call the boys, Spade," Van said calmly, "until we have a little talk about this second attempt to murder a man who had already been murdered."

Big Dan's hand became motionless.

"A cop, huh?" he said. "One of the snoopers? I've never seen you before, and I probably won't see you again, so what's this about a two-time murder?"

Of all crooks, killers or otherwise,

the political brand of fixer was the type for whom the Phantom felt the greatest contempt. He hated men who could cover themselves by influence that reached into high places. Though the Phantom seldom troubled directly with the political type, unless their greed lapped over into the actual channels of crime.

Often he had encountered politicians who were known instigators of every brand of crime up to and including murder, but always keeping just inside the law. Inspector Gregg had admitted he wanted, more than all else, to get something on Big Dan Spade. Yet even the murders that might have been charged to this man's door, were covered by the influence he could wield in the proper places.

The moment that Big Dan Spade thought he had guessed correctly, his contempt for the police and the law was in his voice.

"Well, I asked you a question, copper?" he snapped. "I usually get answers. What do you think you know about a murder? Not that I'm interested, but I don't like snoopers breaking into my office. I rent this room here because it's private, and that happens to be my only connection with Club Nineteen."

The Phantom spoke slowly, choosing his words with deliberation.

"You're not a very good liar, Spade. Suppose you tell me what happened a few minutes ago to a gunman called Dude? I understand he has a smashed arm, his gun arm I believe."

BIG DAN'S hand again snapped down to the edge of his desk. But it stopped abruptly.

"Don't do it," Van said quietly. "I asked about a man called Dude? He goes around shooting helpless victims under their left ears. That's where he shot Fred Kent. And that's where he got Ackers. Or perhaps you'll tell me you don't know Ackers?"

"Listen, copper, I don't know what

kind of a dumbhead you are," Big Dan said slowly, "but there might be some others around the club who'll be right glad to see that you don't leave, unless I give them the word. . . . Sure, I know Dude, and I know Ackers. But what they are doing now, or what they have done while hired out to others doesn't interest me."

"You're telling me that you hire out men like Dude and Ackers?" said Van. "You aren't admitting that?"

"Why not, copper? I get jobs here and there for lots of the boys. I always advise them to stay out of trouble, and if they get careless, it has nothing to do with me. The cops have tried plenty, and they've always found me clean."

"About as clean as any other sewer rat," said the Phantom. "I don't happen to be of the cops, and this is one time you are about to discover you're far from clean. About Dude—I smashed his arm after he shot a player known as Ackers at one of the tables, and I shot after the lights went out. Moreover, the bullet Dude fired tonight, and his gun already are on the way to the police, to be compared with the bullet that killed Fred Kent."

Even though he despised Big Dan's type, Van was forced to admire the man's sheer nerve. For Big Dan lay back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"Now ain't that too bad, copper!" he roared. "If that's your only reason

for forcing your way in here, you can take a powder now. This is probably one of Inspector Gregg's tricks. He never knows when he's licked."

"That's right—Gregg never knows when he's licked," agreed Van. "But this isn't one of his tricks. I thought of this one myself."

Spade's big hands fumbled with his keys. His confidence seemed colossal. Big Dan Spade was plenty smart, too—smart enough that, no matter what murder he was responsible for piling up, he had a system whereby the law could not touch him.

Van debated this swiftly. Inspector Gregg had spoken of a murder syndicate. Big Dan had almost admitted how it might operate. Then there was that gambling table pay-off for Ackers.

As a political boss, Big Dan had said he got the boys jobs here and there. And that he always told them to be careful.

Much more than that would have to be pinned upon him before the law could take hold. For once the Phantom had trailed murder of the vilest kind directly to its source, only to discover that Big Dan Spade still could laugh at the law.

"You're pretty sure of yourself, Spade," he said. "So I'm letting it ride this way for tonight. But when I have finished, I'll know whether Big Dan Spade can sit back and hire out the boys to commit other men's crimes

[Turn Page]

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NOW ON SALE 10c EVERYWHERE

when he knows there happens to be a clean billion in gold in sight?"

Van was moving to one side as he spoke. He had seen one little black hole in the wall, then another. He was convinced that death was in each of those little black holes, but it would not be released by Big Dan Spade until the political boss was sure he was no longer safe, personally.

BUT the words "a clean billion in gold" snapped all the scornful confidence with which Big Dan had been talking. He reared up from his chair.

"Now I know you!" he grated harshly. "No one but the Phantom—"

On the last word Big Dan seemed to drop feet first. And from the little black holes spurted snaky lines of bluish smoke that spread instantly into mushrooming clouds enclosing the Phantom.

Big Dan had vanished behind the edge of his desk as if snatched downward by some invisible force. But as fast as he had been, Van had been a split second quicker. He had bounded over the big desk as a falling trap-door was shooting Big Dan to safety.

Van turned his head in mid-air as he sprang. He realized then that but for his ability to hold his breath and close his lungs against that spreading blue vapor, his life would be snuffed out.

The head-waiter who had been compelled to bring him to Big Dan's secret room went down as his contorted face was wreathed by the blue gas. His hands went out and his arms became as stiff as those of some Christmas doll.

No doubt but that the man had died instantly. And that had been the death planned for anyone who came too close to Big Dan's slimy business!

With that picture of the stricken waiter in his mind, Van landed upon the fallen trap-door just as a powerful spring was snapping it back into

place. His weight forced it downward. His feet slid and a black space was rushing up.

The Phantom had one automatic in his hand before he hit bottom. His fall was broken as if by a springy mattress. As he fell, he collided with the bulky body of Big Dan who was on his hands and knees in the darkness.

The Phantom shot out a fist, aiming in the darkness. Soggy flesh cushioned his knuckles. Big Dan grunted an oath.

Brilliant, flooding light flashed on. Van was looking at three men. Each held a rod centered upon him.

"Here's your answer, Dude!" one man growled. "This is the mug that won't stay dead!"

"He'll stay dead this time!" snarled a venomous voice.

The dapper Dude once more was holding a small-caliber, long-barreled target pistol, of the type that Van had found in the gambling room. The weapon was aimed at a spot below the Phantom's left ear.

Dude fired before he had finished speaking. Van felt the hard impact of the bullet. This time he fell, face forward. His fall took him down behind Big Dan's portly figure.

The Phantom now had four enemies in a small room that must be far underground. They were so placed that to cut all of them down was more than even the usually unerring Phantom could undertake with any chance of winning.

None saw his hands move. They were as quick as light as he lay partly concealed by Big Dan's body. His fingers moved some plastic on the neck of his strange mask. A blue hole and another wound appeared.

PERHAPS Van would not have been fast enough to perform the quick feat of deception he planned if there had not come a sudden interruption. A cursing man stumbled through a hidden door, propelled

backward into the room by a punching fist. The serious Pierre Lamont followed the fist.

Perhaps Lamont had not expected to walk into a ring of guns. He was given no time to pull back. In spite of a profane order from Big Dan, one of the men snapped his rod around and fired.

Pierre Lamont's hand went to his breast as he fell forward. If he were not dead, he lay very still.

Big Dan looked down at the Phantom.

"You got him that time, Dude," he said. "But I wanted Lamont to live awhile."

Big Dan had seen a blue bullet-hole under Van's left ear.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT DOES PENNY KNOW?



LOVELY Penny Lake, understudy to Jewel Madison, was with Steve Huston as the curtain fell upon the last act of "Cotton Road." Frank Havens had left them, saying he intended to call Chip Dorlan and have

him arrange to contact the Phantom.

"It seems to me the Phantom will have use for Chip," Havens had said. "I have an idea that he'll want some of the cast of 'Cotton Road' kept under surveillance. I wish he had not gone to Club Nineteen alone."

Chip Dorlan was the Phantom's youthful protégé. He was a thin-faced, fighting youth. His first encounter with the Phantom had been in San Francisco two years before when the Phantom had saved Chip's innocent brother from execution at San Quentin. Chip thereafter had remained with the Phantom. He had come up the hard way, and that was the way he worked and fought.

"Want to tell me something more

before you go home?" Steve said to Penny Lake, as the curtain fell. "If you're afraid of trouble for Jewel Madison, which seems likely, or for Homer Kent, I'll keep mum and help you."

The life seemed to have gone out of the usually vivacious girl.

"There's nothing more, Steve," she said, with a sigh. "Only please take me to Club Nineteen. I must see Jewel after she does her number there. It may be important."

Penny and Steve had been sitting in one of the lower boxes. As they were preparing to leave, Steve saw the curtain pulled back at one corner. A man's face appeared briefly. He was looking directly at Penny.

Steve identified heavy features, the big figure of one of the "Cotton Road" singers — Chaumon, a Frenchman. But why was he looking so intently at Penny, marking her movements?

"One of the men you heard talking about that dream billion in gold wouldn't be Chaumon, would it, Penny?" asked Steve.

The girl's face whitened.

"I've told you I wouldn't know," she said. "Please, let's be on our way, Steve."

Steve Huston had his own car. It was but a few blocks from the Old Forties Theater to Club Nineteen. As he drove, he tried to think of some way in which he could break the coldness in which Penny had encased herself.

As Steve Huston turned from busy Lexington Avenue in the direction of the club, he was unprepared for the sudden turning of a sedan in the street ahead of him. His brakes failed to prevent his bumper jamming into a fender of the other car.

He was climbing out to swear at the other fellow, when a big man came suddenly from behind the stalled sedan. A fist like a sledgehammer blurred under Huston's ear.

As Steve went down he rolled, attempting to reach his gun. A hard

toe cracked on his wrist and Steve abandoned the idea suddenly.

"What the thunderation?" he snapped, trying to get to his feet.

He was suddenly assisted to stand erect. But the man who helped him had a snub-nosed gun jabbed under his armpit.

"You will get into the car quietly," the man said, with a trace of accent. "You will not be hurt, but no talk."

Penny Lake was being assisted into the sedan. A hand was clamped over her mouth.

"You will not believe it, but we are trying to save Miss Lake's life," said the man beside Steve.

THEN Steve saw that he was Chaumon, the French singer. He got into the sedan. There was a glint in Chaumon's eyes that said he would kill any man quickly if he thought it necessary.

As the sedan moved away, Steve Huston saw three other men in the car. They were speaking in French, in low voices. Huston could not make out enough of it to understand.

The sedan rolled north in Third Avenue, turned at Fifty-ninth Street and headed toward the Hudson River.

"What's this all about?" demanded Huston, his anger boiling. "You can't get away with stuff like this in New York!"

"It is the easiest city in the world to get away with stuff, as you put it," Chaumon said suavely. "I am afraid you already know more than is good for you. You will get out at the next corner. You will have company for a little while, then you will be free to go."

Huston debated his chance of starting a fight. He might attract attention and have the sedan stopped. Also, he might collect a bullet in his ribs. Chaumon's tone and his eyes told Steve that one life more or less would not stand in the way of this man.

"Would it be any good to ask where

you are taking Miss Lake?" asked Steve.

"It would not be any good," Chaumon said calmly. "Already you have endangered her life by hearing too much. We intend to see that she doesn't talk any more."

Huston had about decided against risking sudden action, but opportunity came along and fairly propelled him into it.

The sedan driver overshot the stopping mark at Seventy-second and Broadway. A traffic cop whistled and walked over.

Steve Huston let Chaumon have all he could put behind a stiff punch. He opened his mouth to yell. How Chaumon rapped his head with the gun without the policeman seeing it, Huston was in no condition to know.

As Steve Huston sagged against him, Chaumon said pleasantly:

"We are very sorry, Officer. My friend here has had too much, and he has been causing us trouble."

Penny Lake was staring straight ahead. In her eyes were stark fear. But it was evident the fear was not for herself. She said nothing as the lights changed and the sedan moved on. . . .

Steve Huston came back to a bad smell and a headache. Also he felt as if someone were bumping him up and down.

The smell he quickly identified as oil. He was in a bunk that was being jarred by the movement of a boat through choppy waves.

When he attempted to move, he discovered that his hands were tightly secured to an iron ring back of his head.

"Steve! Steve! You all right?" The voice was Penny Lake's.

"Sure—sure!" grunted Steve. "I always like to take trips this way. Unexpected, and not having to plan anything in advance. . . . Say, you're in on this!"

Penny was standing beside the bunk, bending over him.

"I knew nothing of it until it happened," she said quietly.

"Chaumon means well. I think he is trying to save my life, as he said—and yours, Steve."

"I suppose he goes around cracking the skulls of his friends to show what a good guy he is!" growled Steve. "Now what is all this?"

"I can't tell you any more, Steve. You'll have to be patient. You're safer here than in the city just now. I told you too much."

"So Chaumon is the guy you heard planning all the murders," said Steve. "Penny, untie my wrists. I'll get out of here. I guess you're just a double-crosser, but I won't make you any more trouble."

PENNY did a funny thing. She bent over and kissed Steve.

"I want you to cause me trouble, Steve darling," she said. "But if you were free you couldn't get away. We're outside New York harbor, and it would be a long swim back."

"Let me talk to Chaumon!" demanded Steve. "If he'll talk, I will," said Penny. "I'll call him."

She did not call Chaumon. It seemed as if the smelly boat had suddenly run upon a rock. Apparently it was another craft. Shouts and oaths floated down into the forecastle. There was fighting outside, above. A hatchway door burst open.

Chaumon, the big Frenchman, came hurtling down the few steps. Blood was oozing from a cut between his eyes. He landed and lay still on the floor.

"C'mon!" commanded a harsh voice. "Here's the *Clarion* guy an' the dame! Get 'em out before the other mugs wake up! We'll find out how much the dame has spilled, and how the Phantom got this thing lined up before Dude rubbed him out!"

Steve was sick at those words, even if he did not quite believe the Phantom had been killed. It was not the first time he had heard that one. And

somehow the Phantom always managed to show up alive.

There was a flash of hands at the top of the steps. Steve could see headlight diamonds waving about. His spirits dropped a few degrees.

"Diamond Ronder," he thought grimly. "Maybe the Phantom has run into something."

Two tough boys freed Steve and pulled him to the deck of what he now saw was a small oil tanker. Several men were sleeping or laid out.

Steve Huston had all he could do to restrain his fury as he saw Diamond Ronder gripping Penny Lake's arm to bring her along. They were pushed overside and down into a small, black cruiser, probably the craft that had stopped the tanker.

Five minutes later, Diamond Ronder faced Steve and Penny Lake in the cruiser cabin.

"Okay, Huston," he said softly. "You'll have one chance to talk, you and the girl. If you decide to keep your lip buttoned up, you will have a long, cold ride back to town. We want to know the time and place that has been fixed?"

"If I knew of any time and place, which I don't, I'd see you burn before I'd tell you," said Huston. "Big Dan Spade sent you on this dirty job, just as he sent that other rat on that plane to kill innocent people?"

"Too bad, too bad," Diamond Ronder said mournfully. "That won't get us places. Either you know the time and the place, or you know when the signal will come through. If you don't, the dame does. It won't be funny riding out there on a surf board while we're giving the motor the gun."

STEVE was studying Penny. He knew nothing of a time or place or a signal. In fact, he had not the slightest idea of what Diamond Ronder was talking about.

But there was a furtive watchfulness in Penny's bright eyes that

Steve did not like. Did Penny Lake know what Diamond Ronder meant?

Steve was afraid she did, and it seemed certain when she said quietly:

"If you will let Steve Huston go, and I know he is safe, I will tell you what you want to know."

"So you have been kicking around with that gang of Free Frenchies long enough to find out?" said Diamond Ronder. "But it's no dice on Steve Huston being turned loose first. You talk now."

"I'll not say one word while he's a prisoner," said Penny. "There's nothing you can do can make me talk."

Diamond Ronder looked at the girl steadily.

"We have to do this before daylight gets us," he said. "Okay. You've asked for it. It will be too bad if you're not tough enough to take it. This old ocean is plenty cold in December."

CHAPTER X

SIGNAL TO THE DEAD



STEVE HUSTON was clinging to the surfboard that was slipped over the cruiser's stern. Penny Lake was beside him. The board submerged them at first, then it lifted. The cruiser picked up speed.

Icy spray slapped over their bodies. Penny's thin dress was scanty protection for her. The girl's white hands clung to the rope that held her on the board.

Huston himself was becoming numb. The cruiser slammed the surfboard along, jerking their bodies cruelly.

The reporter was compelled to shout to make the girl hear.

"For Pete's sake, Penny! If you know anything, why don't you tell

them! If you don't drown, you'll die of pneumonia!"

Her words came faintly as the grinding spray hammered like small shot at their faces and bodies.

"I don't know what they're talking about, Steve. I was only bluffing."

"Bluffing to make them turn me loose, Penny?"

He saw her nod, then one of her hands was slipping off of the rope. Steve caught at her wrist, but missed.

At intervals a searchlight had been played back over them. It was dark now. Huston could see the rows of lights that marked the shore-line of Brooklyn near Coney Island. The Staten Island lights were obscured by the fog and darkness.

Steve Huston knew the tide rips run swiftly and treacherously here in the channel that entered New York harbor. In that cold water, he would stand little chance of swimming, and none whatever of saving Penny.

He called out, but Penny did not reply. He saw her other hand slip from the rope. He hung on with one hand, grabbing at her dress.

Steve's closing fingers held a bit of cloth that tore off. Then Penny was gone without a cry. Heartsick, more hopeless than he had ever been, Steve Huston let go of the surfboard and was instantly submerged.

The breath seemed to be driven from his body by the hard impact with the water. He kept going deeper and deeper, and the numbness throughout his muscles prevented him from fighting.

Subconsciously he uttered the name "Penny." Salt water filled his throat chokingly.

* * * * *

"YOU croaked him okay that time, Dude," said Big Dan Spade. "But blast it all, you've bumped Pierre Lamont, too. That was an out we might have counted on as a last resort. Now it has to be the other one or nothing. We'll leave them here

until Diamond brings up the meat wagon."

Big Dan was looking at what he believed was the blue bullet-hole under the Phantom's left ear. And another jagged flesh wound showed on the other side of the throat.

"Punched right through that time," said Dude's cold voice.

The killer was standing beside Big Dan. He bent lower, a glint of appreciation in his eyes for his own deadly marksmanship.

"I believe he's the same egg that played he was Ackers out in the gambling joint, only I don't see how I missed him," said Dude. "Maybe the smoke got in my eyes. I never like to pull a job where there's a lot of smoke."

"Then he would have your other gun, Dude," said Big Dan. "Better lift it. Would be bad if that got into Inspector Gregg's hands."

Dude put a hand down beside the Phantom. During all of this time there had not been so much as a flutter of Van's breathing. It was an attitude approaching suspended animation, which but few men had ever learned to hold.

Dude sent one probing hand toward the inside of Van's coat. And something like a steel trap snapped onto his wrist. He was using his left hand, his right arm being bandaged to his side. The usefulness of the right hand had been permanently impaired by a bullet the Phantom had fired on a remembered aim in total darkness.

Dude started a surprised squawk. It ended in a scream of agony. The killer would be a long time turning the heat upon another victim, if he lived. For as Van twisted once, Dude's arm cracked like a dry stick. As he landed on his back, Big Dan recovered from the sudden shock of a corpse putting up a fight, and jumped feet-first for Van's stomach.

The Phantom's hard head was his weapon as he came up, driven by all the power of his heavily muscled legs.



Steve hung on with one hand and grabbed at Peasey's dress (CHAPTER XI)

Big Dan doubled like a suddenly punctured balloon.

Van let Big Dan have it then. His fist was a blur of speed just before it clunked solidly upon Big Dan's jawbone.

Three amazed gunmen saw all of this happen so fast that their rods remained hanging idle in their hands. The one who first recovered the use of his faculties was the unluckiest.

Blue fire streaked from an automatic that had slipped into Van's hand from one sleeve. The slugs must have crossed each other. One whiffed past Van's ear, and he dropped to the padded floor as the remaining pair of gunman started shooting wildly. He was rolling and twisting, a poor target for rats accustomed to have the broad backs of their victims presented at the opening of back alleys.

Van did not shoot wildly. He fired but two more shots.

The room became quiet. Only the heavy breathing of Big Dan who was out, and the groaning of Dude, with his freshly broken arm, could be heard.

In spite of the padded room, the shots appeared to have been heard. Van heard heavy blows, as if police or firemen might be swinging axes.

HE GLANCED at the suffering Dude. He could find but little sympathy for the killer. Then he paused briefly beside Big Dan Spade.

"So the police have never had anything on you, Big Dan," he muttered grimly. "Too bad to have that record broken."

The attack upon hidden doors from the outside became louder. Van gave his attention to Pierre Lamont. From the size of the stain spread upon the bosom of Lamont's white shirt, it seemed that the Frenchman was writing finis to whatever his career might have been.

But Lamont's gray eyes opened. They were clearly sane. There was a bitter smile on his lips.

"You're the Phantom," he said huskily. "I've heard of you, and when you spoke to me out in the other room, I should have known. I'm glad you're here."

"What can I do, Lamont?"

"Perhaps a great deal, perhaps nothing, but there is one thing. Have you a radio receiver with power enough to pick up a signal anywhere within two thousand miles?"

"Anywhere in the world," said Van. "What is the signal?"

Lamont was growing weak. Blood flecked his lips. He was speaking little above a whisper.

"The signal—yes," he said. "Homer Kent must get it, and he does not know when to be ready. I held that back."

"Where is Homer Kent?" asked Van. "Or don't you know?"

"I don't know—I'm afraid they've got him. But the signal, before—before I pass out—listen—between five and seven this morning—French—my initials—PL—PL—then the time—the place—I must trust—Phantom—billion in gold—find Homer Kent—signal—"

The Great Keeper of all radio called the signal then. Pierre Lamont, loyal to his last breath to whatever cause he was committed, had given his faith into the keeping of the Phantom.

Van placed Pierre Lamont's hands peacefully across his breast. The little smile was still upon the Frenchman's lips, but it was no longer bitter.

Inspector Thomas Gregg barged through a shattered door at the head of a squad with axes and guns. They had no use for their guns. Van whirled, and his hand shot up to his ear-lobe in the signal which Gregg also knew.

"Phantom!" he exploded. "Great glory! You're all right?" Then he grinned wryly, looking at the bodies, at the helpless, moaning Dude, and at Big Dan Spade. "You make one clean job of things Phantom!"

"Only defend myself, Inspector," said Van. "This man was Pierre Lamont. Whether he was straight or otherwise, he was a man in a million. They got him. I would advise, Inspector, that you take Dude out first."

As the crippled Dude was being removed, Big Dan Spade pulled himself to a sitting position, blinking.

Van was peeling plastic from the neck of his strange mask. Under this plastic was this, flexible steel. He extended the rubbery plastic.

"In this little neck warmer, Inspector Gregg, you probably will find one bullet that matches the slug that killed Fred Kent," he said. "I collected two bullets, and it became necessary for me to uncover the made-up wounds I had under the plastic."

BIG DAN SPADE'S confidence in his own power could not be kept down for long. True, there were white lines around his mouth as he saw the gunmen upon whom he had depended, but Big Dan believed that, as always, he was personally in the clear.

"The Phantom had luck," he said. "I told him that some of the boys of the club would be lying in wait for him. They were, and I tried to prevent Dude's attempt to kill him, but I was too late. I'm glad everything's okay."

"So everything's okay, is it?" belowered Inspector Gregg. "And what about all of these gunnies doing your murdering, and this dead Frenchman here? I can held you for—"

"For what, Gregg?" cut in Big Dan. "The Phantom will tell you I didn't have a gun at any time, and I would have stopped the shooting if I could. I don't know exactly what all of this jam is about. How about it, Phantom?"

Inspector Gregg uttered an expressive oath.

"I might have known you'd slick yourself out of it," he said with dis-

gust. "Some day I'll get something on you that will keep any mouthpiece from prying you out of jail."

"That will be the day," Big Dan said scornfully.

The quiet voice of the Phantom fell upon Gregg's raging disgust and Big Dan's self-confident smartness.

"On the contrary, Big Dan Spade, this is the day," he said. "Inspector, I have said that you have a bullet in that plastic that will match the Fred Kent murder slug. I would not be sure who fired that bullet or the other one in the plastic, but a few minutes ago Big Dan tried jumping on my stomach and fell over me. It seemed to me he had some weapon concealed under his coat."

"That ain't so! I never had a—"

Big Dan shut up with a groan as Inspector Gregg slammed him with a fist that had been long aching for just that sort of a punch. Gregg nailed Big Dan's wrists as he went down. He darted his hands under Big Dan's coat.

"So for once you slipped!" exploded Gregg. "I suppose you were just keeping these rods for your boys!"

Big Dan's eyes were about as expressive for a moment as those of a dead fish. Gregg was holding two small calibered target pistols. On one was the cylinder of a silencer.

Big Dan sputtered oaths.

"It's a trick! Them rods belong to Dude! He's the one—"

Gregg seemed to take pleasure in slapping a hand across Big Dan's mouth.

"Now isn't that just dandy!" he said. "I've got you dead to rights, an' you try to pass the rap along to another guy! All us dumb cops know is what we see! It'll take more than your mouthpiece and your own bail bondsmen to give you your next whiff of fresh air, Big Dan!"

"But Phantom—listen! You know—"

"Like the dumb cops, I know only what I see," Van said calmly. "I'm

surprised myself, seeing that you bragged only a little while ago that you had been hiring out killers, but you knew how to keep yourself clean."

For the first time in his politically rotten career, Big Dan Spade was up against something he could not beat. He could only stare. "Thanks for coming along, Inspector," the Phantom said. "For the present I have other business."

CHAPTER XI

OUT OF THE SEA



RARELY did the Phantom resort to the method that had placed Big Dan Spade safely behind bars, at least temporarily. Charged with suspicion of first degree homicide, no mouthpiece or bondsmen could

free the political boss.

"And that will undoubtedly save other lives," mused Van, as he drove swiftly toward the East Bronx. "Too bad justice cannot be as effectively applied to other such instigators of murder."

It was a little before daylight, nearly five o'clock. Van pulled his coupé up before a building that looked like an abandoned factory.

When he unlocked a system of complicated bolts that held a heavy door, he was apparently a stooped, mild old man who peered near-sightedly through glasses. But he was entering one of the world's best equipped laboratories.

Out here he was known as Dr. Paul Bendix, a reticent sort of scientist who used the old building for experiments. His neighbors would have been amazed to have seen the furnishings of that building.

Only the Federal Bureau of Investigation had a more complete laboratory for the study of crime. The

equipment graded from a great electronoscope that would magnify thousands of times, to a library of all the world's best books on criminology.

Van was not now concerned with these. He went directly to a complicated panel of dials and hook-ups. When he turned a switch, there was a murmur of great power coming from a concealed dynamo, pouring super-power into a short-wave listening set. It was of the type that could "fish for signals" all over the world. Only the big New York stations had other such sets in this area.

Van touched special controls. Above the building slender steel shot up, carrying special aerials. Being close to water, the receiving aerials were capable of bringing in signals from any other short-wave radio set in the world.

Van turned a dial, slipped on a headset. He first heard a smooth voice speaking from London. Next there was a burst of weird tribal music that came from some spot in Africa.

Van got Berlin and heard a blast in German at the latest world happenings displeasing to Hitler. He was ranging, listening, swinging the dials, especially attempting to pick up messages from the sea.

Van's expression was bitter as he got an SOS.

"Water is coming into the cabin," an eerie voice from the sea was saying. "We cannot last much longer! It was an aerial bomb—"

Grim death and gay life alternated in the head phones. But Van kept swinging for messages from the sea. It was now nearly six o'clock.

"Some time between five and seven," he mused. "On the signal PL. Pierre Lamont. Right or wrong, there was a man who died gallantly."

Then at last it came in faintly, as if powered by a weak generator.

"PL—PL—PL—"

Van nerves tightened. Was he about to be given a key to the strang-

est murder mystery he had ever encountered? Was he about to learn the truth concerning a fantastic billion in gold? Or was all this simply some cover-up for smuggling crooks?

Whatever it might be, the Phantom was convinced that what he was about to hear might be the means of saving lives. Many already had died in this mysterious cause. It seemed fated that others must die.

VAN threw a switch.

"PL—PL—PL—come in," he said in French.

He was hoping for a reply that would give him an identification. Something more than a time and place, as Pierre Lamont had suggested.

Then it came, in French.

"PL—PL—must hurry—cannot wait—twelfth date—two in morning—about nine miles east by south Orient Point—confirm, PL—confirm, PL."

Van never had taken a stranger message. His brain was seething with questions he dared not ask. Any slip now might destroy a chance to follow up the break that had been given him by Pierre Lamont.

He confirmed the message from the sea. The twelfth of the month was three days away. Orient Point was at one extreme eastern horn of Long Island. Montauk was at the other.

That meant that a vessel was to be there, nine miles east by south. Undoubtedly another craft was expected to meet it.

"That probably solves the problem of murdered oil men," mused Van. "Several were contacted by those wanting oil. Someone did not want those from the West to get in on the deal. That means Homer Kent himself, or someone who is sure that Homer Kent can be controlled while the other oil men could not.

"Homer Kent could be involved, or other oil men eliminated because strong pressure can be brought to

compel Homer Kent to play along. The ship wanting oil could be a submarine, or a raider. This may be the business of war."

But he was thinking of the fantastic report of a billion in gold, and of the murder of Fred Kent.

"The next business is finding Homer Kent," he decided. "In the meantime it might be well to round up Steve Huston and find out if anything new has broken."

He was putting in a call for Huston when a low buzzing signal sounded. Chip Dorlan was standing outside the laboratory door.

"Phantom!" burst out the thin-faced Chip. "Steve Huston and that Penny Lake, the actress, have been kidnaped! The police got the report too late. Before they could run it down, it seems that Steve and Penny Lake had disappeared off the earth. I wish there weren't any girls, Phantom! They're always getting someone into jams."

Van smiled a little, although this latest news was a shock.

"It is certain Steve and the girl were seized, Chip?"

"The police found Steve's car a block from Club Nineteen," said Chip. "There had been a collision. There was a report that a man and a girl were taken into a sedan that stopped Steve's car."

"A block from the club?" mused Van. "That would mean Diamond Ronder. Yes, Penny had some reason for fear. She must have been trying to reach Jewel Madison."

Still as Dr. Bendix, the Phantom was striding toward his coupé.

"Where are we going?" asked Chip.

"We are probably inviting trouble," said Van. "I mean to pay a surprise visit to the well known 'Ina Lou,' of 'Cotton Road.' And it might be well to discover if she knew a man who died only two hours ago."

Van parked the coupé in a quiet street. Working from the secret compartments of the car he converted his

face into the serious, dignified features of the dead man of whom he had spoken.

HALF an hour later he was pushing the buzzer of an apartment on Park Avenue. He was a distinguished figure. For he was appearing to Jewel Madison at eight o'clock in the morning in the person of the murdered Pierre Lamont.

The first buzz brought no response. Then Van saw an impeccable figure suddenly appear at the end of the corridor, as if the man had come up the stairs instead of the elevator.

Seeing Van before Jewel Madison's door, the man ducked from view. But that one glimpse had been sufficient for the Phantom. The man who had been about to make this early morning call was the yacht-owning Rodney Sherman.

Van might have followed Sherman personally, but Jewel Madison's door opened suddenly. A roly-poly woman with a huge face looked at him with penetrating eyes.

It was easy to identify the "Martha" of the play "Cotton Road," even without her make-up. She was of a type that Van suspected might smoke a pipe in real life as well as in the play.

He expected sharp inquiry, or a rebuff, but Martha smiled as if she had expected him.

"On the tenth is Ina Lou's propitious day for encountering unexpected adventure and a fortunate time to meet with strangers," she intoned in a sing-song voice. "Not that you are a stranger, Pierre Lamont."

Recalling that Martha was the star-reading grandmother of cotton-picking share croppers in "Cotton Road," Van smiled.

"I will not detain Miss Madison long," he said. "But it is important that I see her immediately."

In the famous play, "Ina Lou" was a wild, bare-footed girl with a complex for getting her man. But Jewel

Madison herself was a languid, beautiful, but bored young woman of Park Avenue. She appeared so quickly that the Phantom was convinced she had not retired since leaving Club Nineteen.

"Unexpected, Monsieur Lamont, but a pleasure," she said, extending a small hand that was cool and pleasing. "I don't often have visitors at this hour."

Van wondered about that. Would Ina Lou be wearing such a fetching dress, with little rubies in her ears, if she had expected to be retiring quickly? But he made no mention of having seen Rodney Sherman outside.

"I am concerned, Miss Madison," he said, "with knowing whether Homer Kent accompanied you from Club Nineteen last night, or if you have seen him?"

Van did not appear to be scrutinizing the girl, but he was studying her wide eyes, like green zircons. If she had said in words, "There is someone behind that door," he would not have got it more quickly than he did when the green eyes flicked toward a door momentarily.

"Why, yes, Mr. Kent escorted me home as usual," she said. "And I received a phone call from him only a minute or two ago. There couldn't be anything wrong?"

"Why, no, Miss Madison," Van said. "Only Mr. Kent left me rather abruptly, and I was not sure he had left Club Nineteen. By the way, would you have been expecting someone else about this time?"

Sudden hot flushes in the girl's cheeks informed Van he had hit home. Ina Lou's tone, however, was indignant.

"That is scarcely a reasonable question, Mr. Lamont," she said. "No, I was not—"

INSTINCT that accompanied his extraordinary powers of observation doubtless saved the Phantom's life. The door toward which the girl's eyes

had turned had to be opened a crack before a gun could be fired.

The vicious snap came quickly though. Van did not make the mistake of ducking or trying to dodge the bullet from the exploding weapon. He hurled himself in a long, low dive toward the partly opened door.

He hit it before the door could be closed. He was out of position, however, flat on the floor as the door slammed open. Nevertheless, his heavy automatic was in his hand.

There was a confusing sway of the draperies over one window. Van saw a man's leg and planted lead in it with unerring aim. The man cried out, but Van heard him go scuffling across the window sill.

"No— No!" came Jewel Madison's anguished voice. "Don't shoot again! Please!"

Then both she and the heavy Martha were upon Van before he could rise. With such gentle force as he could apply he got the clawing women to one side.

"Homer—Homer!" Jewel cried. "You are hurt!"

Van was somewhat amazed to see the draperies parting. The tall, brilliant-eyed Homer Kent was crawling back through the window from the fire-escape.

Homer Kent's hands were empty, and he was supporting himself by clinging to the draperies. Van sprang past the man he had wounded.

It was six stories to the ground down the fire-escape, but Van saw no one. He turned back.

"For heaven's sake, Lamont!" Kent said. "You're quick and careless with your gun! That fellow who tried to kill you would not have got away from me if you hadn't pegged me in the leg!"

Van said nothing for several seconds as he gave attention to Kent's leg. Luckily the bullet had inflicted only a flesh wound. Homer Kent must have been hiding in the room ever since Van had entered.

CHAPTER XII

HATE'S CROSS PATTERN



THE Phantom knew that Jewel Madison, lovely society girl, the noted "Ina Lou," must have been lying when she had said that Homer Kent had been with her only a few minutes after coming from Club Nineteen. This did not concern him especially. That Homer Kent, wanting sympathy in his grief for his murdered brother, might have remained talking with Ina Lou and Martha, who seemed devoted to her, would be reasonable.

The attempt upon his life, believing him to be Pierre Lamont, was another matter. It was not impossible that another man could have gone down the fire-escape while Van had been disengaging himself from the two women. It was entirely possible that Homer Kent had been attempting to catch an intruder.

Kent had no weapon. But Van wondered if a paraffine test would show that Kent had just fired a gun? He had his own methods by which to obtain such a test without Kent suspecting it.

Pulling the draperies aside, he saw a pair of gloves, made of heavy, surgical rubber—and knew instantly that a paraffine test would not bring out indication of burned powder upon Kent's hands.

"You didn't see the man come through the window, Kent?" he asked. "He knocked you out?"

"That's right," said Kent. "And when I came to I was just in time to see someone going through the window. I went after him, and then you got me."

Van's thoughts jumped to another matter. He appeared to be Pierre Lamont. As such, an attempt had just

been made upon his life. Pierre Lamont had been killed at Club Nineteen. And Homer Kent had vanished from the gambling rooms when the lights had gone out. And Pierre Lamont had said he had been knocked down by someone he had not seen.

Lamont had been deeply concerned for the safety of Homer Kent. Then Lamont had been seized by Diamond Ronder's killers, or those of Big Dan Spade, and had been shot down ruthlessly. Yet it appeared that Homer Kent had not been apprehensive for Pierre Lamont's safety, and had not even remained at the club to make inquiries.

Word of Lamont's murder had not yet gone out by radio. The Phantom was sure of that. So when he had appeared here in the person of Pierre Lamont, an attempt had been made upon his life.

This was an intriguing combination. Then add the presence outside of Rodney Sherman, said to be making a bid for Jewel Madison's hand, and it was a tangle to tax the imagination and deductive resources of even the famous Phantom.

For the present Van chose to accept Kent's somewhat dubious story of the murderous intruder. He could see no evidence of a blow that could have knocked Kent out, but a sap might leave no mark.

"I think we should have a talk alone," he said. "The time for something that both of us understand has passed. Because of the excitement at the club, I was unable to receive a certain signal. You did not know its time, Kent, so we must make new arrangements."

In the back of Van's mind was, "Why did Kent leave Lamont at the club? Could he have been double-crossing Lamont and have known that Lamont had been seized? Had Lamont been mistaken in believing that Kent did not know of the time an important short-wave signal was to come from the sea? ,

Or more probably, knowing of such a signal but not the time to fish for it, might not Homer Kent have been keeping someone listening constantly for such a signal?

A GAIN loomed the thought of where Rodney Sherman fitted into the picture. Or was the yachtsman merely concerned with the charms of the lovely actress?

"You were about to tell me the time you speak of," Homer Kent said calmly, "when that trouble came and the lights went out. I tried to find you, but failed. After the lights came on one of the club employees told me he had seen you leave."

Van nodded. But he was thinking that if Homer Kent had been playing double, and someone had been keeping tuned in on short-wave, fishing, he might have been given that signal.

It was then that he noticed the table telephone near the window with a small memoranda pad attached to the stand.

"I judge we had best postpone further conversation, Kent," said Van. "You should have that wound looked after. It may mean a few days in bed."

"You know well enough I have no time to waste resting," Kent said testily. "But we should talk this over a little later, at some other place. Miss Madison is tired."

Van's observation at that minute told him two things. Jewel Madison was not in the least tired. And without betraying herself openly, she was deeply interested in whatever might be between Homer Kent and Pierre Lamont.

Van was convinced that the girl was unaware of Kent's involvement in what might be international scheming. But it was in her eyes that she was afraid of something. And probably Fred Kent's murder was still keenly in her mind.

"Homer, darling!" she said. "You'll be careful, won't you? Mr. Lamont,

what has made Homer so unlike himself these past few days? Once he was interested only in 'Cotton Road' and his oil business. Now he seems to have forgotten both."

"I'm sure you have no reason to be anxious, Miss Madison," Van assured her, but still in her eyes he could recognize something of the same fear he had seen in Penny Lake's eyes.

No one had detected Van's quick movement as he had managed to place himself unobtrusively near the telephone stand.

"All right, Kent," he said, "I will be going. I called only because I was concerned about your disappearance from the club. It appears that someone is worried about my health, but in the reverse. I'm sorry I made the mistake of shooting you."

In Van's hand as he moved toward the door was the top, blank sheet off the telephone pad. Homer Kent might or might not have received a message in that room. But if he had, and it had been the signal from the sea, it was unlikely that he would have trusted his memory when a pencil and pad were at hand.

Van was halfway to the door when the radio that had been playing low music, suddenly blared out a news bulletin.

"Special bulletin. Big Dan Spade was arrested early today on a suspicion of homicide. Pierre Lamont, a French refugee, was found murdered at Club Nineteen shortly before the arrest."

Homer Kent may have been astounded, but he was quick-thinking, and fast with his hands. He was standing beside a table where a drawer was open. His hand snapped up. It held a revolver leveled steadily at the Phantom.

"Put them up, you! You're as perfect in make-up as any man I have ever known, but you are not Pierre Lamont!"

Van never made a mistake in men. Some would shoot. Some would bluff.

The coldness of Homer Kent's brilliant eyes was proof he was the shooting kind.

Van laid his cards on the table.

"I'm the Phantom," he said quietly.

"I was with Pierre Lamont when he died. When you ran out on him at the club, I was interested in knowing why, Kent. I also wished to discover how deeply Miss Madison might be involved in a queer transaction between you and Lamont."

Kent's gun did not waver.

"I've known it, Homer!" the actress said tensely. "It's what cost Fred his life! You've been lying to me about what you were doing! Fred was killed! Now Pierre Lamont! You will be next!"

"Never mind that," said Kent. "I want to know if this impostor is the Phantom." His eyes held Van's. "If you are, I have nothing to conceal that you should know. But that does not mean that I have to divulge private business between myself and Pierre Lamont."

VAN'S hands went to his face. Moulages slipped from place. His hair turned as if by magic from deep black to silvery gray. His shoulders seemed to shrink. His voice changed to that of a man well beyond middle age. Then he palmed a glittering, domino mask badge of platinum in his hand. The tiny diamonds of the badge threw out scintillating lights.

Kent slowly put down his gun.

"I have heard of some of these things about you, Phantom," he said, "but I've never believed them until now. Well, just how deep are you in this, and why?"

"The odd deaths of some oil men on their way to New York, the killing of your brother, and some startling information that has come out of your 'Cotton Road' company are some of my reasons," said Van. "Moreover, a good newspaper friend of mine and Penny Lake, of your own show, have been abducted."

There was sincerity in the grieved cry of Jewel Madison.

"Penny? Something has happened to Penny? Homer, you've got to do something!"

"I'll do all that is humanly possible to find her," Kent said firmly. "Phantom, what would you advise?"

Van chose his words with slow, deliberate intent.

"Just in case it was not you who tried to kill me when you thought I was Pierre Lamont, I may help you," he said.

Kent exclaimed angrily, but Van silenced him.

"Wait a moment, Kent," he advised. "I wish to examine something I picked up."

He palmed the square of paper he had taken off the telephone pad, held a peculiar tube slanted toward it. This was a powerful rumbascope of his own devising. It followed the principles of the larger electronoscope, being a thousand times more effective than the ordinary microscope.

Faintly traced lines leaped out distinctly:

NINE MILES EAST BY SOUTH
ORIENT POINT 2 AM TWELFTH

With honest intention or otherwise, Homer Kent had received and copied the same signal from the sea that Van had fished from the air waves!

THE Phantom smiled, placed the paper and the tube in his pocket.

"Yes, I have reason to believe you might have wanted to kill Pierre Lamont, Kent," he said quietly. "I think we will not wait for a talk . . . No, don't move for that gun again."

Without appearing to move either hand, the Phantom held his small automatic pointing at Homer Kent's stomach.

"We will go out together, Kent," he said. "In spite of some damning circumstances, I'm still giving you the benefit of a doubt until we go into this."

The Phantom had not expected trouble to come from the massive, slow-moving Martha.

He went to his knees under a blow that seemed to crack the back of his skull.

He had not seen Martha's quick movement behind him, or the heavy vase she had brought down with telling effect.

What happened for the next few minutes in the apartment of Jewel Madison was beyond Van's conscious knowledge.

CHAPTER XIII

RUN OF THE TIDE



IT WAS partly the run of the tide, and partly the indomitable courage and fighting spirit of Steve Huston that saved his life. Fighting his way to the surface against the icy chill of the channel, he fancied he

saw Penny Lake's bright dress.

He compelled his numbed arms to move heavily, swimming toward the spot. The circular swing of a boiling tide rip forced him back. Penny Lake, if it was she, was being carried away from him.

"Getting myself out won't be worth a hoot if Penny goes," he thought desperately. "That crazy little dame pretending to know something and getting herself tortured just to save my worthless hide!"

Suddenly a high, white shape loomed out of the morning fog and darkness. Steve heard bells jangling. The white shape appeared to hold stationary for long minutes, then it was swallowed.

He heard bells jangling faintly again. The white shape was gone. It might have been a cruiser painted white, or a yacht.

"They might have seen Penny and

picked her up," he thought hopefully. "And now—"

The tide rip continued to drag at his nerveless body. He did not know whether it had been minutes or hours when his feet touched welcome footing.

The vagary of the channel tide had carried him to shoal water.

Steve Huston lay on the rocks a long time before he could beat new life into his congealed muscles. To his amazement he found himself in the shore suburb of Seagate, near Coney Island.

Steve called Frank Havens. The amazing events of the night had just come to the publisher, who was holding off for a time at the request of Inspector Thomas Gregg.

"Big Dan Spade is pinched, and the Phantom fixed it to make it stick!" exclaimed Steve when Havens told him. "Now I do believe in miracles. I'm hoping some miracle has saved Penny, but you'll have the *Clarion* start the harbor police looking for a black cruiser, a stray oil tanker, a small one, and Diamond Ronder, won't you?"

"Sure, Steve," promised Havens. "We'll do all we can to find Miss Lake for you. In the meantime, get some rest."

"Okay, Chief," said Steve.

Steve Huston's idea of rest brought him into Park Avenue shortly before nine o'clock. There had been no word of Penny Lake being rescued.

"Jewel Madison has some answers to all of this screwy set-up," Huston told himself. "Penny buttoned up her talk the minute she heard Fred Kent was killed and imagined Jewel was in danger. A little early morning talk-talk may jolt Miss Madison before she wakes up to what I'm after."

Steve was too much newspaperman to have himself announced. Not at that hour in the morning. He entered the building from a side entrance. Which was why he missed seeing Chip Dorlan cooling his heels in the

Phantom's coupé where he had been waiting for nearly an hour.

"Yassah, 'at's Miss Madison's place," said a colored maid Steve encountered on the sixth floor. "But you is too late to see her, Mister. Miss Madison and 'at fat Martha moved out, bag an' baggage, less'n ten minutes ago. I'm goin' in there to clean up right now."

BEFORE the disgruntled Steve could reach the stairs, he heard the colored maid scream. She was backing out the door of an apartment. When Steve rushed to that door, the Phantom was the last person he expected to see. But Van was slowly getting up from the floor. The gun in his hand had evoked the maid's hysterics.

Five minutes later, the Phantom and Steve Huston had traded information.

"I suppose you'll have Homer Kent and Jewel Madison rounded up right away, Phantom?" asked Steve.

"On the contrary, I am anxious that Kent, Miss Madison and Martha stay at liberty, and that they be informed they have nothing to fear from me," said Van. "Things look bad for Homer Kent, but I haven't forgotten that Rodney Sherman was on his way up here, and ducked. Kent may be only a victim of circumstances."

"I'll never get your reasoning, Phantom," said Huston. "You put Big Dan Spade away so easily he'll never recover from it, even if he misses a date with the hot seat. And you have Homer Kent open and shut, and you do nothing. Say? It couldn't be that Homer Kent had a hand in the killing of his brother, Fred?"

"If he was trying to kill Pierre Lamont, as all the circumstances seem to prove, then I would say it is possible. But I think bigger stakes are involved. Homer Kent has had someone fishing for short-wave radio messages from the sea. He has picked up

one mysterious signal. Without doubt, he has that same listening post on the job steadily, in case there might be some sudden change in the plan. We're sending Homer Kent his 'Ina Lou', and Martha a message."

"What will Chip Dorlan and I be doing to stay in the game?" Huston asked.

"You said Chaumon, a 'Cotton Road' singer, led the first kidnapers of Penny, Steve," Van said. "He knows you, but does not know Chip. I'll have Chip on the Hollyhill House where the most of the cast stay. And, Steve see if you can pick up Rodney Sherman. He may go out to that yacht of his, the *Barracuda*."

Van produced a tiny camera from his clothes. He dusted the edge of the table where Homer Kent had stood. The camera clicked. Van had taken fingerprints for some reason of his own.

"Rod Sherman's yacht?" Huston said suddenly. "Phantom, there was a big, white boat stopped where Penny disappeared. You bet I'll get a line on Rod Sherman!"

Hastening back to his Bronx laboratory, it was not long before the Phantom was in front of his super-powered short-wave set. He was sending out a call, instead of fishing. He wished this signal to cover only the New York area.

"PL—PL—PL," he repeated. These call letters would mean something to whoever might be listening for Homer Kent. "This is for HK and IL—HK and IL—Phantom talking. HK, you will not be annoyed—IL and M, the show must go on. If right, I'll work with you."

Amateurs and larger "fishing" stations that might pick up this cryptic signal would not understand it.

Van repeated it over half-hour periods.

"I hope Kent gets the idea," he muttered. "If he is behind the Pierre Lamont murder, the message will do no good. But if he happens to be a

victim of circumstances, I'll soon know."

VAN produced the heavy surgical gloves he had found in the room where an intended murder shot had been fired. He had a small print he had taken just before leaving the hastily vacated apartment of Jewel Madison.

The print was a photograph of the edge of a table. Where Homer Kent had rested his hands before he had jerked the gun out of a drawer.

Van turned the surgical gloves inside out. He used a special dusting powder, then applied the searching power of his rumbascope.

"And that makes it just about certain that 'Cotton Road' will go on tonight, and that Ina Lou will appear," said Van. "Homer Kent did not wear those gloves. Kent must have been telling the truth about a man going down the fire-escape."

One element in the Phantom's make-up nearly always carried him to just conclusions. In this case, his keen respect for a man who, dying, had carried on to his last breath for whatever cause or friends he had, had won the Phantom's undying regard for Pierre Lamont. Lamont had tried to make sure that somewhere at sea those who trusted him would not be let down. Now that it was apparent that Homer Kent had not tried to kill Lamont, Kent became a part of carrying out Pierre Lamont's last loyal desire.

The Phantom was ready now to give Homer Kent every benefit of the doubt. If Kent was intending to carry on as Pierre Lamont wished, then he had the Phantom's whole-hearted backing.

"Which would appear to indicate some rest," the Phantom decided, "with the next act of this tragedy to be the show of 'Cotton Road' itself."

On a cot in his laboratory, Van restored his vigor with a few solid hours of sleep. . . .

It was not unusual for Richard Curtis Van Loan, cynical playboy and lavish spender, the despair of designing society mothers, to occupy a box at any show, as this night he had selected "Cotton Road."

Nor was it out of the ordinary for Dick Van Loan casually to drop into another box to greet friends. One of the occupants of this second box was Muriel Havens, daughter of Frank Havens. Muriel was a picture of

Havens whose deep, gray eyes met Van's with understanding. For both knew that Muriel was occupying this box tonight at the direct request of the Phantom.

She had been directed to become friendly, if possible, with Rodney Sherman, yacht owner, who always had an eye out for the prettiest girls at hand. Why she was to do this, Muriel was unaware, just as she was unaware that in talking with Dick

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charm, with her cloud of dark hair and her bright-eyed smile for Dick Van Loan.

"Hello, lazy," she greeted. "You shouldn't bother a poor working girl."

"Working?" questioned Dick Van Loan, a bored smile lighting his brown eyes. "You? What—"

"Run away, Dick," said Muriel, laughing, "and find some other playmate. What I'm doing is a deep, dark secret."

Dick Van Loan glanced at Frank

Van Loan she was in conversation with the mysterious Phantom who was a magic figure in her life.

SHE knew Dick Van Loan as what others believed him to be. She knew the Phantom only in various disguises. None but her father could have told her that Van Loan and the Phantom were the same. Havens was often vastly amused, knowing that Muriel was half in love with Dick Van Loan, and half with the Phan-

tom. In fact, Muriel often struggled trying to make up her mind between them.

As for the Phantom, he deliberately put away all serious thought of any woman being involved in the constant danger of his career. Though there were times that he knew he thought perhaps too much of Muriel for his own good.

As Van left Muriel and Frank Havens to return to his own box where he was entertaining a group of his society friends, his eyes swept over the crowded house. With the publicized word of Penny Lake's disappearance, and the murder of Fred Kent striking so close to the show, "Cotton Road" had packed them in tonight.

Van believed his short-wave assurance to Homer Kent and Jewel Madison had been sufficient to allay any fear of reprisal from the Phantom. He was sure of that when he saw Kent appear in an upper box opposite him.

Kent was studying the faces of the big audience, and Van smiled. He was sure Kent was wondering if the Phantom was there somewhere?

As for Kent suspecting the playboy, Dick Van Loan—that was absurd. Such a suggestion would have got a laugh from any of Van Loan's friends.

CHAPTER XIV

HIS BEST DISGUISE



DICK VAN LOAN was talking with his party when he saw Rodney Sherman come into one of the boxes not far from Muriel Havens. Van smiled as he saw Muriel catch Sherman's eye, and Sherman appear a moment later in the box beside the girl.

Van, apparently, was watching the orchestra coming into the pit, but he saw Muriel Havens drop her opera glasses.

Rodney Sherman bent low, retrieving the glasses.

Van could see the rich yachtsman's face distinctly. Sherman went in for a trick mustache. His blond hair was short and brushed straight back. Van closed his eyes, and in his analytical brain a picture formed. Sherman's mustache appeared to be extended to points that were waxed and turned sharply upward. His blond hair was even shorter, and stood up like rows of bristles instead of being combed smooth.

"And he does have a lot of money to spend, without anyone seeming to know much about his origin," murmured Van. "Well, I may be guessing wrong. All of his fancy for Jewel Madison may be only a pose. He likes publicity and playing for 'Ina Lou' is one way to get it."

When the curtain was raised, Van was positive that his radio message had been accepted. The opening set was a cotton field. The ragged, dirty-faced Ina Lou, with her torn dress showing her shapely legs, and her impudent Southern drawl, was not in the least reminiscent of Jewel Madison, society darling.

Jewel Madison was more than a singer. She was a great little actress. Even at the rising of the curtain the audience got a kick when Ina Lou scrambled quickly out of the arms of a youthful share cropper, a cotton picker, whose cross-eyed stare at the audience was a laugh in itself.

Seated on a pile of cotton sacks, was fat Martha. In her sing-song voice she was telling what the stars said. Cotton pickers were busy in the rows.

After getting a laugh from the audience by her scramble from the arms of the cross-eyed character known as "Slowboy," Ina Lou burst into song. Her throaty contralto

had a real Georgia swing and accent:

Lawdy, how long will de cotton grow?
Lawdy, de pickin's come mighty slow—

Other voices swung into a spiritual type of chorus. Van's eyes went to one big cotton picker whose bass voice rolled in a deep undertone. He might be a suspected abductor, and his business of the previous night may have been far from lawful, but the voice of Chaumon, the Frenchman, was full and resonant.

Van found he was comparing the big Frenchman with the dead Pierre Lamont. There was a physical similarity, and there was something deeper. It was of the spirit.

Chaumon's head was held proudly, defiantly, as if he might be expecting the law to step into his life at any moment, and he was ready to face it.

Van glanced at the program. A tenor near Chaumon, a small, quick man, was listed as Antone Dupre.

Once, Van saw Chaumon glance toward Dupre. It seemed to him the eyes of the two men clashed. Van put his glasses on Chaumon's face during a pause, and saw Chaumon was speaking low to Dupre. Van's ability to read lips brought him the astounding words:

"I will keep on watching you, Dupre. If this goes wrong, I will break you to death with my bare hands."

Dupre's lips moved. Van read:

"I have but to speak, and you will be in the hands of the police."

BOTH singers spoke in French, but Van read the words clearly.

"I believe I'll manage to have a little visit with Chaumon between acts," Van decided. "In the meantime—"

Van arose, slipping quietly along the boxes. He was carrying opera glasses that were identical with those belonging to Muriel Havens. Muriel did not know when her father deftly removed her glasses and substituted an identical pair that Van slipped to

him, unseen by the girl. As Van wrapped Muriel's glasses, which Sherman had retrieved from the floor, in a handkerchief, he was smiling.

"Muriel would be furious if she knew I already have them," he thought. "She will go through the show without using the other glasses because she wants to preserve possible fingerprints."

Suddenly Van saw Homer Kent leave the opposite box and go out, probably toward backstage. Van turned his attention to the play. Ina Lou brought laughter, after some dramatic lines, when she gave Slowboy a resounding slap that staggered him.

Fat Martha had some more to say about the stars, then Van's eyes were suddenly upon old Whickers, the male star. The old man was threatening to give Ina Lou an old-fashioned tanning with a peach tree switch.

The show, as a play, did not make much sense. It did get laughs, though, and the music was rated as tops. And the show had been running for nearly seven years.

The first act was nearing its climax. Old Whickers was sniveling and whining because he had been soundly smacked by fat Martha for tanning Ina Lou. The close of the act saw the performers swinging back into the phony cotton rows.

Ina Lou had been picking in the row nearest to the audience. Just as the closing song began and Ina Lou started going through the motions of picking cotton, Van noticed that old Whickers appeared to step out of the line of script. He suddenly caught Ina Lou and thrust her back to the second row. Slowboy stood uncertainly for a minute, shrugged, moved into the row vacated by Ina Lou.

It appeared to be only a part of the business of the play, but abruptly a little bell of danger rang in Van's brain. And when he saw fat Martha start waddling across the stage, that seemed out of keeping with her part.

Van would have said that for some reason old Whickers and fat Martha were suddenly coming to the fore to defend Ina Lou from some unseen danger.

Ina Lou's voice rang out, high and clear, above the chorus. The heavy bass of Chaumon rumbled. Dupre's tenor lifted.

Cross-eyed Slowboy had been singing, too. He suddenly paused, looking at a bit of cotton he had just pulled from one of the rough, hard bolls. He was still looking at his hand when he fell.

The audience roared, at first. It seemed to be a part of his clumsiness. But when the actor lay crumpled on the stage, one of the girls nearest to him screamed.

Van was out of his seat instantly. Back of the box he took a domino mask from inside his coat. His face was covered when he reached the door leading down to the stage.

Here he could hear a changed note sweep over the audience. The scream of the actress had been taken up and it went through the house.

WHEN Van reached the wings, memory was clicking. He had seen "Cotton Road" several times, and knew there was no business in the first act where Ina Lou moved out of the spot, the row of cotton nearest the audience.

Old Whickers had forced the switch. Fat Martha had been moving toward the girl, and that was not in the act either.

Van reached the wings just as the curtain came down. He heard the wheezing voice of old Whickers.

"Martha, you stay right by Ina Lou! Slowboy's dead!"

"Slowboy isn't dead!" another actor shouted. "His eyes are open! He's trying to talk! Hey, don't touch him!"

His face masked, his coat swiftly closed, Van pushed through the crowding cast behind the dropped cur-

tain. He heard Homer Kent's hard voice calling out the usual question from in front of the curtain.

"Is there a doctor in the audience?"

Probably several would respond.

The stage folk gave way as Van reached the fallen Slowboy's side. They scarcely seemed to notice his domino mask until he had bent over the actor.

Van had some of the cotton from Slowboy's hand. He had seen a slight, bleeding scratch. He had turned to the roughly pointed boll from which



the cotton had come when the bulk of Chaumon, the singer, confronted him.

"Here, you can't do that!" Chaumon protested. "Who are you! What's the mask for?"

Van's reply was low and edged.

"I have what I want, Chaumon. As you value the lives of your friends, keep away from me."

Van looked around quickly, but he did not see Jewel Madison.

"Chaumon," he said sharply, "take me to Ina Lou's dressing room quickly! It may be life or death!"

Chaumon's dark, unfathomable eyes were hard.

"I don't know you! What is your right?"

"If I am correct," Van said, so only Chaumon could hear, "you would be a friend. I saw Pierre Lamont killed. I sent the instigator of his murder behind the bars. Now hurry, Chaumon."

Chaumon's big right hand made a quick sign. Then his huge arms swept back others.

"This way," he said. "I know now. You are the Phantom."

Van nodded, moving with silent speed back of the wings. His eyes missed nothing as members of the cast began to run into their dressing rooms.

"Has Slowboy been poisoned?" Chaumon asked. "Will he die?"

"No," said Van. "He probably will live. But it may be many months before he can speak, if I have judged correctly. His vocal cords will be paralyzed for a long time."

"Now I see it!" exclaimed Chaumon. "That was the cotton row that Ina Lou should have been picking when it happened."

The Phantom nodded, his eyes upon a gold star on one of the doors, Ina Lou's dressing room. Martha must have taken her there.

Then a girl's voice screamed terribly. The cry came from behind the golden star. There was but one scream. Chaumon was at Van's shoulder as he hit the door. It had been locked inside.

"There's another door at the back!" shouted Chaumon.

But Van's weight had smashed the star's door with the force of a battering ram. It burst open. All of the lights inside the dressing room had been smashed, but the outside light dimly revealed a girl in a torn and ragged dress.

Van's hand encountered warm blood as he felt for the girl's heart. Chaumon went on through the room. His weight hit a rear door, but it resisted him. Evidently it had been quickly blocked by a trunk on the outside.

Chaumon plunged, carrying door and trunk with him in his second try.

Van could hear the girl's hoarse, gurgling breath. He bent low.

"Can you hear me?"

"Yes—yes. He—it was dark—I saw—diamonds—diamonds—"

Van could tell the words had come on her last breath. Her life had flowed out from the knife wound that had come close to piercing her heart.

CHAPTER XV

VANISHED INA LOU



NEW bulbs—two of them—gave the Phantom light. He was thinking that at last Diamond Ronder himself might be a direct killer. The front for the owner of Club Nineteen had often been suspected as heading murderers, but had never been pinned definitely on a death rap.

Old Whickers was in the room beside the Phantom.

The actor's teeth were blacked out for his lead rôle.

"I guess I saved Ina Lou that time," he mumbled, "but I was so all-fired busy thinking of her I didn't notice Slowboy go into that front row of cotton."

The dead girl on the floor was not Ina Lou. In the play she was Marianna, Ina Lou's share-cropper sister. Van had a crumpled paper from the dead girl's hand. He had quickly deciphered its scrawled lines.

Ina Lou:

See you at Club Nineteen. Have real party arranged. Don't fail me. The old boat is decorated in your honor.

Rod.

Looking around, the Phantom quickly decided that two, perhaps three men had been lying in wait in this dressing room. He found a dropped roll of tape and a black hood with a draw string that might have been intended to be placed over someone's head.

"If the trick on the stage should fail—as it did—they were evidently prepared to kidnap Ina Lou," he said to big Chaumon who had come back through the broken door empty-handed. "Or perhaps they intended to seize her, even if she had been hit by the drug that put Slowboy out."

Chaumon's face was a set mask, as if carved from dark stone.

"This business tonight will be paid for," he said. "You know of that paralyzing drug, Phantom?"

"Yes," said Van. "Of the common marihuana or *cannibis indica* family, but not quite the same. Its effect may last for weeks, but it is seldom fatal."

He studied Chaumon's cold eyes, thinking of what Chaumon had said to Dupre, shortly before the felling of Slowboy and the murder of Marianna—"I will keep on watching you, Dupre. If this goes wrong, I will break you to death with my bare hands."

Van turned suddenly to old Whickers.

"You knew the stuff was on the cotton boll, Whickers. How?"

Whickers' filmy eyes turned upon Chaumon. There was more than a little fear there.

"I wasn't sure," mumbled Whickers. "But one of the actors put something from a small bottle on some of that cotton, while the singers were moving about. I thought of that being Ina Lou's spot just in time."

"Which actor?" snapped Van.

"Why—well, it wouldn't be ethical—"

An expressive French oath came from Chaumon.

"The devil with ethics!" he said then. "It would be Dupre, none other."

"And would that be why you told Dupre you would break him to death if something went wrong, Chaumon?" Van asked instantly.

Chaumon stared at him. "You heard that, Phantom?"

"No, I was in a box, Chaumon. I saw it. Was that it?"

"This was part of it," said Chaumon slowly. "But exactly the opposite of what I meant. It is now my duty to kill Dupre quickly as soon as I can find him."

"He has disappeared?"

"I have looked everywhere. He was

gone before the trouble broke. I wish I had known he had set that trap for Ina Lou. I repeat, that is a part of what I meant by things going wrong. But I am not privileged to tell you any more."

VAN had Chaumon to one side. The dressing room was filled now with infuriated actors and hysterical women.

"What has all this to do with a billion in gold, Chaumon?" Van shot at the Frenchman. "And isn't this a direct drive to intimidate Homer Kent?"

"You know of that, Phantom?" Chaumon, asked in a hoarse whisper. "As I said, I shall kill Dupre. I shall kill him slowly and with pleasure, just as Pierre Lamont killed one—" He clamped his teeth tight.

"Go on," demanded the Phantom.

"If one removes a rat of the sewers, the act should be forgotten," said Chaumon.

The Phantom nodded. He was thinking of Big Dan Spade. Only he could not quite forget that Big Dan was not actually guilty of the murder for which he was being held. He would attend to that later.

Homer Kent pushed into the room, his face white and strained. He did not see the masked Phantom as he bent over the murdered girl.

"If I knew who did this!" he said tensely, his hands clenched until his knuckles whitened. "I swear now that I put the avenging of this girl's life in the same oath I have sworn for my brother!"

The Phantom never missed sincerity. It was in Homer Kent's voice.

"Mr. Kent," old Whickers said unexpectedly, "just before Marianna died, she spoke of seeing diamonds in the darkness. It was diamonds we saw after your brother was killed."

The Phantom had a thought of his own then. Diamonds pointed straight to Diamond Ronder. Perhaps too directly. Some other person might be

employing diamonds to have them seen, so that later blame for murder could be pinned on Diamond Ronder.

Homer Kent's eyes suddenly lifted. They rested upon Van's masked face, upon the domino of black that effectually covered the features of Richard Curtis Van Loan.

"The Phantom," Kent said quietly. "I thought you would be here. What do you make of it? You know much that should not be discussed here, but this murder, and that out there on the stage, are open matters."

"It would seem that you have been harboring a murderer, or at least a spy in your company, Kent," the Phantom said. "The singer, Antone Dupre, has disappeared. What would you know of him?"

"Dupre! So that's it! It's where everything—"

Chaumon touched Kent's arm.

"Not here," he murmured in French. "You must see now that Ina Lou is safely guarded, then we must have a confidential talk with the Phantom. Perhaps we can tell him something, and perhaps nothing that he doesn't already know."

It was at that moment that the police arrived. Inspector Thomas Gregg had one look at the Phantom and his mask, then mumbled with satisfaction.

"Do you only smell out murder, Phantom?" he asked. "Or do you just mumble words and murder comes to where you are?"

Van swiftly recited what he had learned. He presented the Rodney Sherman note to Inspector Gregg.

"There are probably prints on that note, and I have others on opera glasses, Inspector," he said. "It might be well to have both checked with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Not that Rodney Sherman could be suspected in this tonight, seeing he sent a note to Miss Madison about a party after her Club Nineteen number—"

Van's final words carried a slight emphasis. It was not lost upon the

acute perception of Gregg's trained police mind.

"Good alibi, that note, Phantom," he muttered.

"That's what I mean, Inspector," said Van in a low voice. "It might be well to learn if Sherman is giving a party on his yacht in the Hudson after midnight."

OLD Whickers who had stepped out, was back in the doorway of the star's dressing room.

"Mr. Kent! Chaumon! Who has seen Ina Lou and Martha? They started back here when the curtain dropped! I have been to every dressing room! No one has seen Ina Lou or Martha!"

The Phantom was moving swiftly from the room, out into the wings. Everything had been happening so quickly as to create complete confusion among members of the company and the stage-hands.

Gregg had police spotted here and there. But Van recalled that for minutes after Slowboy's drugging, and Marianna's murder when she had run upon lurking kidnapers, several means of exit had been wide open for killers and kidnapers to escape.

Van made for the side exit, looking around for the old doorman who should have been there. Inspector Gregg was behind him.

Van found the old doorman. But he never would tell who had passed him. His skull had been crushed in.

Inspector Gregg uttered an expressive oath behind the Phantom.

"We should have rounded up Diamond Ronder and every last rat that has ever been fed by Big Dan Spade!" he roared. "Only we haven't had the slightest line on Ronder or any of his hottest boys since we took Big Dan over! Now he bobs up here!"

Again it came to Van that suspicion was being directed too closely to Diamond Ronder. That note from Rodney Sherman interested him deeply. Could some other killer have

been flashing diamonds to put the finger on Ronder?

At that moment, Van saw fat Martha. She was motionless near one of the back wings of the big stage. Instantly he was moving toward her noiselessly.

He was close when he saw the fat woman's lips move. She was uttering soundless words.

"Look out! Ina Lou's gone! Man up above trying to escape! I can't talk!"

"Martha's eyes rolled with fear. Van did not move his head, but he saw the furtive figure crouching on the catwalk sixty feet above the stage. The man was apparently trying to make his way to an open skylight that gave exit to the theater roof.

Fear for the fate of Ina Lou, possibly for herself, had kept fat Martha from speaking.

The Phantom did not appear to notice the figure on the catwalk as he stepped casually to one side.

The Phantom's ascent to the high catwalk of the Old Forties Theater was to become an epic story of the New York Police Department.

Van believed the man seeking escape from the open skylight must be one of the killers, possibly the murderer of Marianna. Certainly he must be associated with those who had kidnaped Ina Lou, and killed the old doorman.

Van moved warily, convinced that the fugitive would be armed. If the killer gained the roof, he might descend to some street anywhere within a long block.

The Phantom passed behind a wing. Here swung the ropes that operated some of the set, dropping down from the flies.

IT WAS Chaumon, the big Frenchman, who suddenly saw Van swinging upward with amazing speed. The Phantom's full, hard weight was upon his arms. Yet he was paying out rope below him as if the

rope were slack and he was solidly upon the ground.

Van reached the catwalk. He heaved himself upward. The walk was but two feet in width. He landed on his feet, balancing himself lightly. The killer was crouched flat upon the walk, directly under the open skylight that gave him an edge for quick escape.

Martha screamed. Big Chaumon cursed.

CHAPTER XVI

DEAD MEN CAN'T TALK



EVEN the Phantom could not duck a bullet by dropping down where there was but the narrow catwalk between him and sixty feet of space. When the killer's gun belched fire, sidestepping was impossible.

So he neither dropped nor sidestepped. He sprang directly upward with a leap as swift as a panther's. Lead nipped at his feet, but his unexpected action disconcerted the gunman.

The killer then made the mistake of attempting to gain his feet, when he might have made more certain of his aim by remaining flattened on his stomach.

After Van's jump, his toes scarcely seemed to touch as he alighted. His next jump was almost like that of a man letting go of a flying swing.

The gunman's rod was rimmed with spitting flame. But the killer was in an awkward position. When Van's body hit him both were hurled flat.

The gunman screamed as he slipped off the catwalk. But Van's fingers were twisted into his collar, and Van was balanced across the catwalk. For five seconds or more, the killer remained suspended, turning slowly.

Van saw big Chaumon directly below. Inspector Gregg was there also, roaring. Stage-hands and police had caught up a square of stage canvas and were stretching it as a life-net.

Van had time to glance into the writhing features of the man he had nailed. He was looking at Antone Dupre, who according to old Whickers, had planted a paralyzing drug to trap Ina Lou.

Van let go his hold. Dupre landed in the canvas below and bounced high. The next time he came down, he rolled to the floor. Van was on his feet, but he was held by the sudden shouts, and the commotion below.

He saw Dupre being whirled high above the head of big Chaumon. Police were attempting to reach the pair, but none was in time to prevent Chaumon carrying out the threat he had made before Van.

There on that stage, with police and others ringing him in, trying to interfere, Chaumon broke to death the singer, Dupre, as he had promised he would. When he tossed Dupre from him, the man apparently had nothing but jelly for a spine.

The Phantom slid down a rope. Inspector Gregg had Chaumon by the arm.

"I have to take you in for this," said Gregg. "He may have had it coming, but we don't work our executions that way over here."

There was a calm, bitter smile on Chaumon's lips as the Phantom reached him.

"It would be much simpler if you handled your killers that way," said Chaumon. "I regret that I must be detained. It is of serious importance that I should be free for another forty-eight hours. After that, well, I shall come in myself, as I will have no further urgency for my time."

"Sounds just plain nuts to me!" said a policeman harshly. "Come on! You heard the inspector."

The Phantom intervened. "I believe that *Monsieur* Chaumon is a man of

his word," he said. "I back my faith in him by taking responsibility for his appearance in forty-eight hours. Now what has Martha to tell?"

MARTHA was sobbing, talking incoherently.

"Two men seized Ina Lou," she said. "I guess I was too fat for them to handle. They said if I uttered an alarm within ten minutes I would be shot. One of the men was masked, but he had big diamonds on his fingers. They said I could say that Ina Lou will be safe, but that she will never sing again in 'Cotton Road'. You know, when Fred Kent was killed, I saw diamonds shining in the darkness."

Van saw there was no more to be gained from Martha. At last he got Chaumon to one side.

"All right, Chaumon," he said. "Except for my interference, you would be locked up. Isn't it about time to come clean? You had more than a desire for vengeance in killing Antone Dupre. Dead men can't talk. What is it you wanted kept secret?"

"Come into my dressing room," Chaumon said quietly. "A time comes when a debt of gratitude may be greater than all else."

Often a sixth sense of impending danger had saved the Phantom. He was on guard, although he liked this big Frenchman. There was something forthright about the man that did not indicate deception.

Van walked into Chaumon's dressing room, alert for a sudden move. There was something under all of this, in the deliberate killing of Dupre to close his lips, that made Van certain that Chaumon would not divulge what he knew.

His guess was one hundred per cent. Chaumon was ahead of Van, entering his small room. He was still turned away as Van closed the door behind him. Then Chaumon struck.

The big Frenchman whirled, one huge fist snapping upward. And be-

cause Van had paid attention to his warning sixth sense, he rolled with the surprise punch and shot over a right cross with an impact that even Joe Louis could not have withstood.

Chaumon's knees buckled. As he went down, a faint smile made his broad mouth both humorous and sad.

"All right, Phantom, you win," he said, moving his jaw with one hand. "I cannot tell you all that you wish to know, for I am honor bound against that. But I know you are always for the right, and that is enough for me. We will go together."

Van grinned a little. "That isn't quite enough, Chaumon," he said. "Where do we go together, and why?"

"I go tonight to blow up a boat," Chaumon said, as calmly as if he had said he intended having some pie and coffee. "It cannot wait now. It would have been done before this time, but it would have given too much time to prepare another craft. But when I destroy this one boat, and the one who has planned to use it, everything will be completed. I will be free then to surrender myself to your police who will doubtless understand that I have acted only in a just cause."

The Phantom had listened to many fantastic proposals. Never before had he heard a sane, apparently law-abiding man coolly declare he was preparing to bring about a fatal explosion. It might have seemed incredible, but Van had to remember that Antone Dupre was dead because this same Chaumon had said he would kill him.

"**P**ERHAPS we should discuss this," suggested Van. "After all, we have certain laws against some forms of violence. I don't believe our police would understand as readily as you imagine, Chaumon."

Chaumon shrugged.

"Understand, or not, Phantom, I have only my duty to perform, and I must not delay," he said. "It is what you would do, if you understood all that is at stake. I do not intend to kill

anyone who should not be removed."

"But I should know more about your plans, Chaumon, if I am to help you," Van protested, though he was assured that Chaumon was a man of his word and intended to do exactly what he said.

Big Chaumon smiled.

"Why not, for you are just," he said. "I have some little flasks in a belt around me. They contain a high explosive. I am convinced that enemies of my people, the Free French, are aboard a yacht called the *Barracuda*, in the Hudson River. That yacht should be destroyed, with all on it."

This was fitting in with Van's own ideas concerning the yacht *Barracuda*, and its owner, Rodney Sherman, but he scarcely favored Chaumon's violent impulse.

"Perhaps you are correct, Chaumon," he said. "But you might be mistaken. I am responsible for you to the police. I ask your word that you will go to the Hollyhill House and wait there for me one hour."

"That is fair enough," said Chaumon. "I will wait one hour. After that, I intend to blow up this boat. . . ."

The Phantom passed nearly an hour of intense activity. First he contacted Chip Dorlan. That loyal youth had been keeping continuously upon the trail of Chaumon, the Frenchman.

True, Chip had been slightly sidetracked by the events in the theater, but he was still waiting to pick up Chaumon when he would appear.

"Stick to him, Chip," directed Van. "Especially see to it that he is warned if others follow him. He just killed a man."

"A murderer?" Chip perked up with interest. "Gee whiz!"

"Rather an executioner, Chip," observed the Phantom.

Van made an effort to contact Steve Huston who was supposed to be shadowing Rodney Sherman. Steve was missing.

In only a short time Van was again in the Bronx. In his laboratory he glanced at his super-power short-wave listener.

"If I could only know what other short-waves are fishing the air for calls from the sea!" he mused. "It may be that those who should not be informed have been successful in picking up that strange signal. Well, there is one way to learn that."

Van intended taking that way. Tonight's events had added up his deductions. He now was convinced that all of the murders and other crime had been directed at, rather than by one man—Homer Kent, oil man and producer of "Cotton Road."

Van was planning to become the direct bait that might bring him into direct danger of extinction, but it was one sure means of getting at the truth.

HE DUSTED and studied the opera glasses which Muriel Havens had tricked Rodney Sherman into handling. He compared the prints with those in the surgical gloves found in Jewel Madison's apartment, gloves of the man who had tried to kill him.

The Phantom then made a quick card of the fingerprints. He dropped this into a sensitive machine at the end of a long steel file. A little motor buzzed. Then a white card appeared from a slot.

That steel file had the prints and records of many notable criminals. Its system was similar to that of the F.B.I. file machine.

Van studied the card he held. His lips moved and formed names that had the same initials.

"Rodney Sherman—Rudolph Schermell—"

He knew now the past identity of Rodney Sherman, yacht owner and playboy. The F.B.I. would also have that record.

"And now it remains to be determined just how Homer Kent may be tied up with all of this," decided Van.

The answer to that might have a great deal to do with his own safety in the next few hours, and upon it might depend the lives of others and the solution of the mysterious murders.

Once more the Phantom's deft hands worked from his make-up case. When he drove from his laboratory, he was in every detail the tall, brilliant-eyed, hard-voiced Homer Kent.

CHAPTER XVII

ONE KENT TOO MANY



HOLLYHILL HOUSE finally came into sight after Van had driven there by an indirect route. He stopped at several places, entering cigar and drug stores, and one restaurant in the vicinity of Club

Nineteen. "Which just about makes it sure I have been seen by some who know and may be interested in Homer Kent and his various movements," he thought as he parked near the Hollyhill House.

His hope was confirmed. He was convinced that a car which pulled up behind him had been trailing, and two hard-eyed men came into the Hollyhill House lobby as he delayed before entering an elevator.

The Phantom kept a close eye upon Chaumon as the Frenchman opened his door to his rap. If there was something between Homer Kent and this French actor who had so calmly broken Antone Dupre to death, now was the time to discover it.

"I did not expect you, Mr. Kent," said Chaumon. "But come in."

Chaumon closed the door carefully, turning the key in the lock.

"You probably have been followed here, Mr. Kent," said Chaumon. "Have you heard anything of Miss Madison?"

"No," said Van, realizing that Chaumon was ill at ease.

That might be because Chaumon had expected the Phantom alone. He wondered if Homer Kent would know that Chaumon was planning to blow up a boat? Chaumon's next words set Van to thinking fast.

"I am worrying about Jewel Madison as well as Penny Lake," said Chaumon. "I wish I could be sure where they have been taken."

"If I had any idea of that, Chaumon, I wouldn't be here," said Van. "You killed Dupre. I thought you might know more than the others. At least, why did you kill Dupre?"

Van had to take a chance on feeling out Chaumon. He got unexpected results.

"We can quit pretending, Phantom," he said. "I think I know something of what you have in mind, and it is dangerous. You are one great detective, and as Homer Kent you are perfect. It happens that Homer Kent and Whickers talked to me on the phone less than a minute before you arrived. They are still at the Old Forties Theater."

Van smiled. "Would you care to accompany me, Chaumon?" he said. "I have given my word to look after you."

But Chaumon appeared to have a one-track mind.

"I intend to blow up that boat," he insisted quietly. "That must be done before daylight, otherwise I might have trouble. I would not like to have any trouble with your police. It would be embarrassing at this time."

Van knew then that he must take extreme measures with the determined Frenchman. As justified as the man might be in blowing up the *Barracuda*, perhaps removing permanently some of those upon such a boat, this was a little beyond the Phantom's most violent methods of administering justice.

He gave Chaumon no warning. The Frenchman was big and fast, but he

did not see the fist that socked him squarely upon the button. Van's arm ached with the force of the punch.

FIVE minutes later Chaumon was securely bound. He would be safe for the remainder of the dark hours.

Van examined a row of crystal flasks fastened to Chaumon's belt. There seemed no doubt these contained high explosive, as the Frenchman had said, so it seemed best to the Phantom to remove this temptation from Chaumon. He was about to do this when a voice spoke behind him. He dropped Chaumon's shirt, concealing the belt as he turned.

A little man stood there, his eyes squinting along an odd weapon.

"Just a minute, Kent!"

The weapon had a long barrel, with sliding sections similar to a telescope. There were two other pairs of eyes and two more similar weapons pointed at Van.

Evidently the three, hard-eyed men had entered quietly from an adjoining room, or they had come through one of the windows with a fire-escape outside.

Van had the instant thought that perhaps Chaumon was a party to this unexpected ambush. The men could have been concealed in the adjoining room, listening.

"Well?" Van drawled. "You seem to hold all the cards. What's wanted?"

The last person that Van expected to see here came through the doorway—the funereal-faced Diamond Ronder.

Van instantly noted something that partly confirmed a theory he had formed. Diamond Ronder was not wearing his diamonds. Perhaps he laid them off when out on a killing job. That made it more likely that someone might be trying to implicate Ronder in more killings than he had really committed.

"We are going for a little ride, Kent," said Diamond Ronder.

Without attempting to guess what

the strange telescope weapons might be, the Phantom was in splendid position to have drilled Diamond Ronder before any man could have crooked a finger. But he had not converted himself into Homer Kent to avoid the men now in the room.

Van decided to bluster some. "You can't get away with this in the Hollyhill House!" he said angrily. "You wouldn't dare start shooting up here!"

Diamond Ronder almost smiled.

"These little gadgets don't make any noise, Kent," he said. "We'll get away with it. All right boys, let him have it. And cut Chaumon loose. We'll take him along, too."

"But wait—"

A sinister hissing suddenly filled the room. There were no signs or smell of gas. Van just had time to see Diamond Ronder clap a masklike contrivance over his face, and to see that the other men also had these masks before the room started whirling around him.

He imagined he was on a giant, spinning top. Centrifugal force hurled him off. He landed with a force that jarred him. His head rapped a hard wall. That snapped his eyes open.

It was the shortest dream the Phantom had ever experienced over

a lengthy period of time. The time must have been extended, for he was looking up at cold, winking stars in a shifting sky.

Then he felt nauseated. It was not the sky, but the earth that was swaying. Water slapped near him and cold-spray doused his face.

MEN'S voices murmured nearby. Van recalled vaguely that he had succumbed to something entirely new in the form of gas. Invisible, odorless, it had erased his consciousness instantly and completely.

From the swirling sound of a propeller and the steady hum of a motor, Van realized he was in a launch of some size, in the bottom of a cockpit. The men talking were in a cabin, but no light was visible.

Van tried to sit up. Although completely conscious now, and without the slightest pain beyond the faint nausea, he discovered that his muscles were flaccid and his nerves now seemed to have no more contact with his brain than so many dead strings.

Then a man lying beside him moved. Van's heard a hoarse whisper: "Coming around, Phantom?"

The man was Chaumon. Van tried to reply and discovered his vocal cords were paralyzed. Chaumon must

[Turn Page]

ZING!

RING!

CLING!

Whisk Off Tough Beard Easily With Smooth-Shaving PROBAK Jr. Blades...

Twenty For A Quarter!

RECEPTACLE FOR USED BLADES INSIDE!

PROBAK JR. BLADES

20 FOR 25¢

4 for 10¢

have escaped the strange, drugging gas. Chaumon had been bound and possibly the Frenchman had been removed from the Hollyhill House without being put under the gas.

"Let me see your eyes," said Chaumon. He saw Chaumon's face above him. "You're all right," the Frenchman said. "Now you know why I have to blow up that boat. It can throw that stupefying gas to cover an area of a mile or more, and knock out everything alive."

To Van's consternation, Chaumon was arising quietly, was listening to the voices in the dark cabin.

"This is my best chance, Phantom," he said. "I hope you have luck. I can make shore from here easily. We're still in the Hudson if you want to know. *Au revoir*, Phantom. Inside of an hour from now I'll blow that boat to Kingdom Come."

Never had the Phantom been in such a spot. Powerless, speechless, he watched Chaumon's big body slip silently over the side of the moving launch. There was not the slightest splash as he disappeared.

Minutes passed. Every effort Van made to find some responsive nerve was a failure. He could see lights passing on a bluff. He judged this must be the New Jersey shore, not far from the Palisades.

Suddenly the launch swung alongside an old wharf. Its motor was cut off and it glided all the way under the floor of an old warehouse.

Lights came on. Van first saw Diamond Ronder. Then half a dozen other men were crowding into the cockpit.

Diamond Ronder swore slowly, heavily.

"I told you to put that fool Chaumon under the gas!" he said. "He's gone. Kent! How long ago did he. . . Hmmp! I forgot. You're about as much use as a corpse until we give you a shot."

A heavy door slipped down into the water, closing the small launch un-

der the warehouse floor. One of the men came out with a hypodermic gleaming in his hand. There was no sting as the needle entered the Phantom's arm.

CHAPTER XVIII

KEEP THEM ALIVE



K EENLY aware of all that had been happening, Rodney Sherman expressed deepest anxiety as he came aboard the palatial two hundred thousand dollar yacht *Barra-cuda*. He was speaking with Inspector Thomas Gregg and Frank Havens. He apologized for the noise made by his guests at the party below.

"I heartily wish I had called it off under the circumstances," he said, rubbing his wisp of a mustache. "This business about Jewel Madison takes about all the joy out of everything. You know, of course, I sent her a note inviting her to the party after her number tonight at the club?"

"We know, Mr. Sherman," Inspector Gregg said gruffly. "It is just a matter of checking up on little details. Your note is an alibi. Not that anything or anyone has connected you with tonight's affairs, except for you having been competing with Homer Kent for the Ina Lou, of 'Cotton Road.' But where there are alibis, it's always nice to see that they're good."

Sherman bristled, but tried to cover it with a short laugh.

"I guess I can't get sore over police routine," he said. "I shall send my guests ashore right away. I'm as worried about Jewel as Homer Kent is."

Inspector Gregg and Frank Havens climbed the gangway. The party was a little wild and a little loud. Frank

Havens identified a dozen of the society set.

"I guess that's that, Inspector," said Havens. "I'd like to know though what the Phantom has been doing. He walked out of the theater, and that was the last of him."

"Also of that fellow Chaumon," said Inspector Gregg. "I hope the Phantom didn't make a mistake about him. . . ."

And it was at about this time, that life was returning to the Phantom.

And in a small stateroom, two young women sat facing each other bleakly. They sat on single, white beds. The stateroom had but one door, and but two port-hole windows through which nothing larger than an alley cat could have passed.

The droopy-eyed man seated in a chair leaning against the one door half dozed, but his eyes never quite closed.

"For heaven's sake," Jewel Madison exclaimed impatiently. "How long do we have to be kept here? If no harm is intended, why doesn't that Diamond Ronder let us go?"

The small, charming Penny Lake replied to her. She was wrapped in a gay blanket, it being evident that she lacked proper clothing.

"I'm glad enough to be alive," she said. "Don't you know, Ina Lou, what this is all about?"

Penny, as well as everyone else in the cast of "Cotton Road" had called Jewel Madison by the name of Ina Lou ever since they had worked together in the show. The girls looked oddly alike, only Jewel Madison was more languid than Penny who was a brisk, vivacious girl.

"I'm afraid," said Ina Lou. "I'm sure Slowboy is dead, and I would have been if he hadn't taken my place tonight."

"Forget it, sister," growled the man in the chair. "Nothing's gonna happen to either of you dames. You just got to wait until the boss brings this Kent guy to his senses. As soon

as Kent says the word, you'll be turned loose."

"I wish I could believe that," said Ina Lou. "If that's true, why doesn't Homer get here?"

"He'll be along," said the guard. "Providing he sees the light and does as the boss wants. In case Kent don't think enough of you dames, the boss'll bring him here to put on the pressure."

"Diamond Ronder wouldn't dare do anything to Homer Kent!" flared Ina Lou.

The fat face of the man at the door merely showed a derisive grin.

"Anyway, while I don't know where we are, it happens that the Phantom is working with Homer Kent," said Ina Lou. "By this time he is probably nearby."

"The Phantom?" the guard ejaculated and added an oath.

The stateroom prison for the two girls seemed deep in the hull of the boat. From the solid construction, it appeared that this section of the vessel had previously been employed for restraining prisoners.

Jewel Madison and Penny Lake could see a narrow, rough space. In this was a long box which, while they did not know it, housed the propeller shaft. Slender steel cables ran over pulley wheels above the shaft housing, the cables that operated the rudder of the craft upon which they were being held. . . .

* * * * *

SATISFIED that Rodney Sherman was actually giving a party to which he had invited the missing Ina Lou, Inspector Gregg, with his policemen and Frank Havens, departed from the costly white yacht.

The *Barracuda* was anchored in the Hudson, almost directly across from the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument near West Ninetieth Street. The boat had occupied this berth for several weeks.

Scarcely had the police launch

started toward Manhattan than a small rowboat appeared near the *Barracuda*. In it were two figures. They held the small boat outside the circle of light cast by the brilliantly illuminated yacht.

Chip Dorlan and Steve Huston were in the rowboat. Huston had come upon Chip Dorlan only a short time before. Chip had been directed to keep an eye upon Chaumon, and he had.

Now, as Chip had seen it, Chaumon was somewhere on a launch where he had been taken with the man Chip believed to be Homer Kent, and had no idea was in reality the Phantom. While ranging the waterfront, seeking a boat, Chip had encountered Steve Huston.

Not for one minute had Huston abandoned the idea of finding Penny Lake, if she were alive. Now there was a direct reason for Chip and Steve being close to Rodney Sherman's yacht.

"I didn't know that Jewel Madison had been kidnaped," said Steve. "But not long ago some men helped a veiled woman from a car on Riverside Drive, and brought her to a boat at the foot of Eighty-sixth Street. I'm sure the boat headed for Sherman's yacht."

"If I only knew what became of the Phantom!" complained Chip. "But he said for me to watch Chaumon, and I did. Now how would that launch have disappeared with Chaumon and Homer Kent?"

"There are good places along the Jersey shore to hide a boat," said Huston. "And . . . Look! Isn't that a man swimming?"

The movement in the water was a man. Chip pushed their boat closer to the stern of the yacht. A figure was seen to swing onto an anchor chain.

The man went up the chain with trained skill. Apparently he waited to avoid any crew member on watch, then he was briefly outlined in the light as he heaved himself over the rail.

"Chaumon!" exclaimed Chip. "Chee, Steve! He must've swum all the way across the river! Now what do we do?"

THE little matter of what they should do was abruptly taken out of their hands. A low motor-boat, almost silent, and fast, came around the yacht. A searchlight sliced the night.

It was useless for Chip and Steve Huston to attempt to get away. Two men in the cockpit of the motor-boat raised slender snouts of guns that covered them. A hard voice gave a command. "Hold it! So you're wantin' a closer look! You'll get it!"

The motor-boat swung alongside the yacht. Steve Huston kept silent, but Chip protested. Hard knuckles cracked his teeth. Both were lifted into the motor-boat. On the yacht's deck the party was still riotously noisy.

What appeared to be wide doors into the hull were opened for the motor-boat. When the craft slipped in, it could be seen that the yacht was unusually equipped. It contained an inside dockage space for four motor-boats.

Chip and Steve Huston saw a weapon that looked like a telescope. Three men slipped small masks over their faces. Chip and Steve saw nothing come from the telescope instrument. They simply became insensible to all that surrounded them.

They did not know when they were put into a roughly finished stateroom somewhere near the stern of the palatial yacht, which would not have been suspected of having such quarters.

"Good work!" one of the youths' captors said. "By the time the boss is ready, we'll have a full cargo of rats to go for the ride!"

The men did not know that somewhere on board the yacht was a gigantic Frenchman. They had not seen the swimming Chaumon climb aboard. They might not have been so assured if they had known of Chau-

mon's oft-expressed determination to blow up a boat before daylight. Or that this same Chaumon was wearing a belt of blasting death. . .

* * * * *

The Phantom had as good a working knowledge of strange drugs as most expert chemists. Without time for analysis, he had been fairly sure that Slowboy, the actor in "Cotton Road," had been paralyzed physically and vocally by some variation of the powerful *alpha eucaine*, a narcotic similar to chloral hydrate.

Now he was reviving quickly after an injection. He judged that benzedrine or some related drug was being used as an antidote for the gas that had rendered him unconscious, then left him paralyzed. And out of this knowledge, the Phantom took hope for the fate of Jewel Madison. Slowboy had received what had been intended for her, so it was evident the intent was only to cause paralysis.

Especially, reasoned Van, to still her singing voice, the great asset of Homer Kent's "Cotton Road." Then, with Penny Lake either dead or a prisoner, someone would have a powerful whip over Homer Kent. If Jewel Madison could not sing, his show must close ahead of time. Also, it would be useless to go ahead with plans for another big production at the Old Forties Theater, with Jewel as the star.

The Phantom's reasoning from this point was quick and sound. Someone had killed Fred Kent. Someone had wanted to know "a time and place." And through Pierre Lamont, Van was convinced that he knew of the time and place wanted.

"About nine miles east by south of Orient Point at two A.M. on the twelfth," repeated Van softly.

He had picked that up on his own powerful listening set, and Homer Kent also had been informed of it from some other listening post.

But others wished to know of the

same time and place. And they had not been able to listen to the short-wave signal.

That would be because they were uninformed that there was to have been such a signal.

All of this whirled through Van's brain as he felt life come back into his nerves and muscles. He was looking at Diamond Ronder's mortician face, and at Ronder's tough men.

CHAPTER XIX

GREED OF A WOMAN



RIMLY Van took in his surroundings under an old warehouse. The water was closed off by a gate, and walls extending down the pilings all around into the river.

There was a strong odor of burned gas. Van's quick eyes detected what appeared to be a fleet of at least fifty small, high-powered boats. They were ranged around the walled space, and some of the motors evidently were being tuned up.

"Interested, Kent?" exclaimed Ronder, watching Van's eyes.

Van's rôle of Homer Kent was perfect.

"Of course," he said, in Kent's voice. "It looks as if you have a submarine-chasing mosquito fleet. Only the boats don't seem to be carrying guns."

Diamond Ronder smiled solemnly.

"Seeing it won't get you anything, Kent," he said. "Those boats don't need guns. Remember the gadgets that sent you bye-bye? Well, each of those boats has the same gadgets, only ten times larger. They could stop and put the biggest liner out of commission in five minutes."

The Phantom recalled what Chaumon had told him. About a gas that could paralyze everyone, every living

thing within a radius of a mile or more.

Van knew that many new gases had been tried since the start of the war in Europe. He could himself have formulated a gas, on the order of liquid chloral hydrate converted into spraying fumes, that would be paralyzing, at least temporarily.

Diamond Ronder was studying him closely.

"You're probably guessing, Kent, what all those mosquitoes will be used for?" he said. You can imagine how invisible they will be on a dark sea, especially if they are surrounding a vessel that may have good reason for being blacked out."

Van nodded. "I can see that. Only you have first to find a vessel that would make it worthwhile."

Ronder's voice hardened to a cutting edge.

"That's where you come in, Homer Kent," he said harshly. "The boss is sure you know of such a ship, and that you intend to have a load of oil meet that ship. So it's up to you to tell us when and where that is to be."

"Suppose I have not yet been given such an order, or other parties have been hired for the job," said Van. Then he made a guess. "Pierre Lamont was dealing with others, you know."

Diamond Ronder laughed shortly.

"Sure, Kent, there were other oil men invited in by Lamont, and they might have taken on the job of fueling that ship down in the Gulf or somewhere else. The boss didn't want that. Not when he could tie you up here, and he could not control outside oil men. Dupre kept the boss tipped off, so those other oil men met with bad accidents."

Diamond Ronder seemed only killing time, waiting for a signal from his boss.

"Suppose you had the time and place, which I don't know yet myself," Van said, "how could your little gas boats attack a submarine?"

"Sub, huh!" grated Ronder. "It's a surface boat. And we'll have men planted with explosive bombs of the gas on your oil tanker when it starts the refueling job. That will get them, if the little boats miss."

A low murmur came from a short-wave radio set inside the launch. Ronder went into the cabin and came out.

"We move, and if you let out a squawk, Kent, we'll make it unpleasant for you," he said. "When you see what may happen to your one and only Ina Lou, you'll sing a different tune. All right, boys! Slap the blinders on him."

Blindfolding the Phantom accomplished little. His ears and other senses told him when the launch seemed to enter the side of some vessel. He was sure it was a yacht, and that the yacht was Rodney Sherman's *Barracuda*. . . .

JEWEL MADISON, the society actress, sat staring at the Phantom strangely. When he had been brought into the little stateroom where she was being held with Penny Lake, she had cried out, "Homer, darling!" She had put her arms around his neck and kissed him.

Perhaps the Phantom was not as expert with kisses as he should have been. At least, he had no means of knowing how Homer Kent would have greeted Ina Lou.

The danger point was past, however. And suddenly there was no longer reason for the Phantom to speculate upon the man who had probably been behind all of the murders, and all of this plot to control Homer Kent from the beginning.

Rodney Sherman came into the stateroom, smiling. He paid little heed to the surprised outcry of Jewel Madison.

"I guess you've known all the time that I have been in this, Kent," said Sherman. "So we'll come right down to cases."

Though the Phantom was here in

the rôle of Homer Kent, he had already fixed the status of Rodney Sherman. Now he again pictured that wisp of mustache, as it might appear with longer, waxed points, and the smooth, blond hair as it would be if short and bristly. There was none of the reckless gaiety of the Broadway playboy in Sherman's light blue eyes now. They were killer-cold, proof of Van's own filed record.

"Yes, I've known you were in this, Sherman," he said. "I have only been waiting to make sure you had a personal hand in the murder of my brother, Fred."

"As for that, Kent, I can assure you I regretted it, and that it was a mistake," said Sherman. "But that has nothing to do with our business tonight. I think you know what I want."

"Yes, I know, Sherman," said Van. "You want the time and the place for refueling a boat in which you are interested. If I knew that, I would not give it to you."

Sherman rubbed the tip of his finger along his mustache, and seemed to be curling long ends that were not there.

"I don't go in for torture, old man," he said pleasantly. "But circumstances sometimes are compelling. Let's put it this way. You are to deliver oil, contrary to national and international law. Now, nothing is to prevent you doing that. We have been informed you are to receive a hundred thousand or more for a few tons of oil worth less than ten thousand dollars, because of the risk involved."

Van was tense. Here was irrefutable evidence that the story of a billion in gold might not be greatly exaggerated.

"But," continued Sherman, "we have a better offer. You deliver the oil on schedule, giving us the time and place. We are so sure of what we can do, and what we will gain, that we can agree to pay you a million. In fact, as a guarantee of good faith,

half of it can be placed in your hands before the deal is completed. And that's some price for oil."

Van apparently debated this. He could see a greedy light come into Jewel Madison's green eyes. But in the equally green eyes of Penny Lake was something else.

"Mr. Kent," Penny burst out, "you would be accepting money for murder! For the murder of your brother, and those poor people burned to death on that plane!"

Diamond Ronder's long fingers cracked cruelly across Penny Lake's red lips. Van restrained himself with an effort. He must play out this part.

"I can only refuse, Sherman," he said. "There's no way you can learn what you are after."

RODNEY SHERMAN'S smile was unchanged, perhaps a little colder.

"Your Ina Lou will not sing again in 'Cotton Road,' if you refuse, Kent," he said. "What happened to Slowboy can happen to her in the next few seconds. Penny Lake will also lose her voice. And that means your show will close, and you will have no star to open one next season."

"Then there is the expansion mortgage on your oil company. You wouldn't know I am in position to call your notes on that. So you see, you can have a million, and do nothing but speak a few words, or you can be a ruined man within the next twenty-four hours. Even if you did collect for delivering that oil, and we cannot cash in on it, the government will be tipped off in such a way as to finish your business and you personally."

There it was, cold turkey—ruin or a million for Homer Kent! All of it revolving around the singing voice of Jewel Madison whose zircon eyes were now staring at Van.

The Phantom could read the greed, the avaricious soul behind her eyes. The words "ruin or millions" seemed

to do something to her beauty, to put a brand upon her charm.

Not so with Penny Lake. Penny was looking at the actress she had apparently idolized in the part of Ina Lou. Something like unbelieving scorn came over Penny's pretty features.

"Homer, darling," Jewel said, "do you intend to refuse your chance, to risk my voice, perhaps my life? You can't do that."

"Mr. Kent, please!" cried out Penny Lake. "Even if it means all of our lives, don't you listen to them!"

"Remove that little fool!" ordered Rodney Sherman sharply. "How about it, Kent?"

Before Van could reply, the stateroom door opened. One of the yacht officers pushed in his head.

"Mr. Sherman!" he exclaimed. "We have a skulker on board, sir! I saw him myself, and then he got away! I think he slipped in among the stores aft, sir!"

Sherman emitted an oath.

"Perhaps a river thief, Hanler," he said. "But when you round him up, I'll have a look at him."

"No, sir, he isn't a river thief, Mr. Sherman," said the officer. "I had a look at his face before he ducked. He is that French singer, Chaumon, from Mr. Kent's show."

Van's skin tingled. Chaumon was aboard the yacht! And Chaumon had but one fixed purpose—to blow up this boat before daylight! What was more, the Phantom had learned the unswerving character of the big Frenchman, knew that Chaumon might carry out his violent idea at any time. All the more so since he had been pursued, and might fear he would be caught before he could accomplish his fixed purpose.

Van's position as Homer Kent held him off for a moment in delivering a warning. Yet the yacht must be saved. Sounds of merriment, of a party on deck came through a ventilator. Those innocent people would

all be sacrificed. Besides, there were Penny Lake and Jewel Madison to be considered.

The time had come to drop the rôle of Homer Kent. The Phantom took in the position of each man in the room with a lightning glance. His hands were slipping toward twin automatics.

Diamond Ronder, the cold killer, would be first. Van would try holding Rodney Sherman as hostage for an escape.

Behind the yacht officer called Hanler came a shout. Hanler stepped to one side.

"Where are they? I tell you I know! I've given you the true time and place! Now you'll let Ina Lou and Penny Lake go free!"

CHAPTER XX

INA LOU AT HEART



OLD Whickers, the queer old man of "Cotton Road," was pushed into the stateroom. Beside him was fat Martha, her eyes blinking. She extended her big arms toward Ina Lou.

Ready for a lightning move, the Phantom was effectually blocked for the moment. Old Whickers was held by two men. Another man had one of the telescope gas guns aimed and ready.

"Just what is this?" demanded Rodney Sherman.

"We ain't keepin' quiet any longer!" shouted old Whickers, his sunken eyes upon Ina Lou and Penny Lake. "One of them French boats ain't worth the life of Penny, it ain't. I heard Inspector Gregg say Rodney Sherman might be in on this, and right away I got me an idea. I know what time an' place Homer Kent is meetin' that—"

In his excitement, old Whickers

had been looking at Rodney Sherman and Diamond Ronder. Now his old eyes fell upon the Phantom in the rôle of Homer Kent. He gasped and shook his head.

"It can't be you, Mr. Kent!" he exclaimed. "I left you gettin' that oil tanker started out to meet the French boat! You couldn't have beat me here! I found that note with the time an' place on it. . . . Listen! You ain't Mr. Kent!"

Van attempted to move sideward, but he had the choice of putting Penny Lake, Jewel Madison and Martha in the line of fire in that small stateroom or of making a try for the door.

He drove for the door. His automatic sputtered fire as he jumped, removing two of Diamond Ronder's boys. Van tried to get a bead on Diamond Ronder, but that smart killer dropped, rolling behind the three women.

It was the officer, Hanler, who dizzied Van with a blow from a swinging gun. Then two other men hurled their weight upon him.

"The Phantom?" Rodney Sherman swore, then he smiled evilly. "Well, it was a good game, but this is better. What a round-up! Now Whickers, if you want Ina Lou and Penny Lake free, what is this you know?"

Old Whickers looked at the Phantom.

"I have to do this, Phantom," he quavered. "Penny Lake is my daughter. It's like this. Homer Kent's oil tanker is meeting the French boat nine miles east by south of Orient Point at two o'clock in the morning, the eleventh, which is tomorrow."

Van was firmly held. For a moment his spirits arose. Whickers had named the wrong date, a day ahead. Then his hope faded.

"How would we know you're telling the truth, Whickers?" asked Sherman. "You say Kent has started a tanker out to meet the French boat?"

"That's right," said old Whickers. "I heard Chaumon and Pierre Lamont talkin' a few days ago about getting a radio signal. And they said that whatever time was given by the signal, it was understood that the time of the meeting would be just twenty-four hours earlier, in case there were listeners."

Diamond Ronder swore heavily.

"Sherman," he said, "that spot off Long Island is a long way for the tug and the garbage barge! The small boats have to make it out singly! They would draw attention any other way, and it's slow going if they hit rough water! Of course the yacht—"

"Shut up, Ronder!" rapped out Sherman. "All right, Whickers, I have to count on you telling the truth!"

"Then you're letting us go, Rodney?" asked Jewel Madison. "And I think you ought to give Homer Kent something of what you were promising. I was sure from the beginning that this fool here was not Homer."

VAN had never seen more bitter disgust than was now in the eyes of Penny Lake. She had made an effort to reach old Whickers. Then she had her arms around him.

"Dad, I'm sorry you did this to save me," she said. "I'd rather be dead than have anything happen to any of my friends."

Old Whickers looked at Rodney Sherman.

"You're setting us free, Mr. Sherman?" he said wistfully.

"You fool!" spat out Sherman. "Free you to spill all you know? That may come later, much later! But now this yacht is moving and you're going with it! Diamond, see that the Phantom and the others are battened down safely!"

Van could be grateful, for but one break. Surrounded by men with guns and gas gadgets, the prisoners were left unbound. They were hustled from the stateroom along a passage-

way, which ended up in the extreme stern.

Here there were only solid timbers, with no port-holes. A solid door of teakwood, unbreakable, closed off a bulkhead to shut them in. The yacht's steel plates sheathed this innerwork.

Van saw Steve Huston and Chip Dorlan, apparently sleeping peacefully on two bunks. He noticed the propeller shaft housing, the steel cables to the rudder, and the other evidence that but one way out existed—the heavy door through which they had come.

His guns had been swiftly removed, and even if Van had wished to take a chance on using them, there would have been too much danger to the others.

Rodney Sherman stood in the doorway as it was about to close.

"Thanks again, Whickers," he said tauntingly. "Even if Penny Lake doesn't go free, you will have the pleasure of being with her on her last ride."

He paused, looking at the Phantom.

"I have had a suspicion, Phantom, that you have come close to knowing who I really am," he said. "I can't take any chances. To make your coming hours pleasant, you need not worry about the yacht taking part in any battle at sea. In fact, I am sacrificing this two-hundred-thousand-dollar boat as a decoy for other possible ships, while a real fleet of stingers spell the finish for one fast French cruiser. For what's a mere yacht or two when compared to a billion in gold? It's too bad you don't know all that is about to happen."

All of the time, Chaumon had been in the back of Van's mind. He now understood the cruelty and ruthlessness of Rodney Sherman, whose real name he did know.

Van's excellent records had supplied the name and some of the record to fit the picture in his mind of a waxed mustache, bristly, short hair, and a recent number in a Federal

prison—Rudolph Schermell, German birth, international spy, renegade from at least two countries, radical agitator.

Too late now this knowledge to help him or the others. But Jewel Madison, who must have been a real Ina Lou at heart, was beside Sherman.

"Take me with you, Rodney," she pleaded. "Homer has been a fool to refuse the real fortune he might have had."

Sherman's hard, blue eyes had no love or respect in them. He had merely the look of a man who would accept Jewel Madison simply because she was beautiful.

He permitted her to pass through the door.

AT THIS moment, Van wished Chaumon could, somehow, make good his threat to blow up the boat. That might give them a chance. But his wish was blasted. Four men shoved Chaumon into the bulk-headed prison. Two of the men had broken noses. One had lost his front teeth. Chaumon was bloody and bruised. He had not been easy to take.

"This Frenchy threatened to blow us all sky high when we caught him," said one of the men. "I guess he was trying to find our powder magazine."

Van was grimly silent. Chaumon's captors had not discovered the deadly belt of explosives.

"Too bad you didn't blow us all up, Chaumon," said Sherman. "It might save your friends from roasting. They'll go now with this yacht. Batten them in, boys."

The Phantom caught a glimpse of Diamond Ronder behind Sherman. Van spoke quickly, for he saw that Ronder's diamonds were once more on his fingers.

"It couldn't be, Ronder, that Sherman had been borrowing your diamonds or wearing imitations to pin a few murders on you if anything goes wrong, could it?"

"What's that?" Diamond Ronder's voice was curiously hard.

"He might want you to take a rap, or he might rub you out, Ronder," said Van, but he got no farther.

He thought there had been the quick sound of a blow as the bulkhead door slammed shut, but he could not be sure.

The Phantom was certain that his words had hit home. It might accomplish nothing, but he had created a suspicion between Diamond Ronder and Rodney Sherman that might in the end work to some advantage.

Big Chaumon stood there, looking ruefully at the Phantom.

"I'll take the belt, Chaumon," said Van, extending his hand.

Chaumon slowly unbuckled the belted flasks and handed them over. But he did not give up easily.

"I'll blow up this boat yet—you'll see," he said.

CHAPTER XXI

FLAMING DECOY



FOR hour after hour, the powerful motors of the *Bar-racuda* sent life pulsing along the shaft that ran through the bulk-headed prison. The Phantom could judge the yacht's speed and its location fairly well by its movement.

The craft passed from the Hudson into the harbor. Swells hit it heavily in the Gate. The open sea gave it both roll and pitch off the south shore of Long Island.

Chip Dorlan and Steve Huston had recovered. Huston was doing his best to comfort Penny Lake. The girl's spirit seemed broken by Jewel Madison's selfish treachery.

Old Whickers sat bowed and silent. Fat Martha mumbled some jumbled stuff about the stars.

Big Chaumon was silent, but his eyes seldom left the Phantom.

"It is better to be blown up than to burn slowly, Phantom," he said after a long time. "And I shall not die until I have made a last fight for my people."

Chaumon's people—the Free French who continued to stand out against Hitlerism and slavery.

"It seems to be meant for us to burn," said the Phantom. "Fire bombs undoubtedly have been set so as to start a fire that will draw patrol boats and planes away from the scene of the intended piracy."

"That is what I learned while I was hidden," said Chaumon. "The motors will be the last to be hit by fire. And you know of the little boats?"

"Yes," said Van. "I heard discussion of the plan while I was in the launch. Homer Kent's oil tanker is lying off Orient Point. But Kent's crew has been replaced by Sherman's men, who will use paralyzing gas bombs while those on the French cruiser are trusting they are to be refueled. The burning yacht is merely a decoy. Throwing away a quarter of a million in a yacht as a gamble for a billion is not bad odds. There is a billion in gold on that fast French cruiser, and it is poorly armed."

"Not a billion, Phantom," said Chaumon with forthright honesty. "The figure is nine hundred and eighty-five millions, four hundred and seventy thousand, to be exact."

Van was compelled to smile. "The difference would scarcely be important," he said. "You heard all of the plan?"

"Yes. Two hours before the agreed time for Homer Kent's tanker to meet the cruiser, to fuel it for a getaway dash to the Pacific, Sherman will have this yacht stationed just a few miles away.

"Sherman, Diamond Ronder and the others will desert the yacht. Its steering apparatus is to be locked on

a course due south. Its motors will be left running at high speed, giving it more than twenty-five knots per hour."

Van nodded. "Clever. Patrol boats and planes will naturally want to rescue those believed to be on it. It will draw all attention in that two hours far from the place where the French cruiser is to be fueled, and the gas attack made."

"The fire will reach the secret powder magazine," Chaumon said simply, "so why not blow the ship up now, Phantom? The explosives in my belt will exterminate all of the rats before they can leave."

"There are a few of us here that still have hope," Van said laconically. "We object to being exterminated."

"But it will stop the attack upon the cruiser and save nearly a billion in gold for my people to carry on their fight," said Chaumon. "It is a worthy cause." Big Chaumon was a simple and direct soul.

THE yacht motors slowed, stopped. It was stiflingly hot in the bulkheaded space.

Sherman did not come to the prison of death, even when night fell, and Van was checking the passing hours. It must have been about midnight, two hours until a French cruiser with nearly a billion in gold was taking a chance on getting the oil to carry it to safety. The Phantom believed the *Barracuda* must be somewhere close to that secret fueling place. He could picture the fifty or more little wolves of the sea, the boats armed with bombs for throwing.

By this time, the heavy, stupefying gas would have been released from bombs, or possibly poured into the cruiser through the pipe connections used for refueling.

"They will not let it go at that," thought Van. "Sherman will want all of the witnesses annihilated. He will not want any survivors to tell of the hijacking of that billion in gold.

Even Diamond Ronder and his killers are not likely to survive after Sherman has used them."

He thought of the cross angles. How Big Dan Spade had hired out Diamond Ronder and his gunmen to Rodney Sherman. How Homer Kent's show, "Cotton Road," and his financial difficulties had been meant to compel Kent to cooperate with the gold pirates.

And the Phantom knew at this minute that the only hope was that his own acute brain, his resourcefulness, and some luck could prevent Rodney Sherman and the killers from accomplishing the greatest single robbery in all history!

The seizure of a billion in gold that could be converted into even greater value when melted down and sold in the United States. The theft from a free people desperately determined to carry on, to eventually restore their enslaved country.

Faint sounds of Rodney Sherman and the others leaving the yacht came into the bulk-headed prison. Van produced a pocket compass from his make-up case. The yacht's course was set due south. That meant it was traveling nearly thirty miles per hour directly away from the stage where a play of piracy and murder had been set.

Van saw that the steel rudder cables had ceased to move. The pilot wheel had been set on the course. The motors throbbed with power. The yacht quivered with speed.

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Chaumon. "Phantom, soon it will be too late! Give me the belt!"

Crying out madly, he suddenly flung himself upon the Phantom, his big fists flailing. But Van had been set for that. His eyes signaled Chip Dorlan as he countered Chaumon's attack.

That fight was brief. Van's fists blurred. Chip Dorlan was upon the fallen Chaumon promptly, and binding his huge arms and legs.

"Phantom, is there no way out?" old Whickers pleaded. "For myself I do not care. I am old. But Penny!"

Whickers darted here and there, clawing desperately at timber as tough as iron, until his hands were bleeding. Fat Martha mumbled. Chaumon was conscious, but helpless, his eyes blazing hopelessly.

"You are with our enemies, Phantom!" he shouted madly.

For twenty minutes the yacht had been rolling and pitching, driving steadily southward on its set rudder.

Penny Lake and fat Martha were coughing, choking with the smoke and heat.

"Phantom!" cried the reporter. "Can't we blow out the hull?"

"Not yet, Steve," Van said quietly. "Listen!"

The motor of a plane suddenly droned outside. Then another.

Old Whickers suddenly joined Chaumon in madness.

"Curse you, Phantom!" he wheezed. "You'll let us all die! I want my Penny to live! Next season

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Then by the one small light bulb near the steering cables, Van saw the smoke come. It began seeping through tiny cracks high in the bulkhead. And through small slits where the rudder swung, he saw the red glow begin to spread.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried Chaumon. "The yacht now is burning, Phantom!"

THE Phantom was watching the time and his compass. Even Steve Huston grew doubtful that the Phantom could do anything, as more smoke filtered in. The heat was increasing on the other side of the bulkhead.

she would be the star! She is a greater singer than Jewel Madison!"

Old Whickers threw himself at Van, clawing. Quickly Penny had her arms around her father. Van saw the girl's clear, green eyes as she glanced at him.

"You will save us, Phantom," she said confidently. "But it must be soon. My Father is weak and old."

Now there were other sounds. The vibration of engines came through the yacht's hull. The *Barracuda* had been driving south, flaming, for more than an hour. It was most unlikely that any of the alarmed guardsmen

or patrol pilots could closely approach the blazing yacht.

Then when tongues of fire started licking through at the top of the bulkhead, Van moved swiftly. His powerful fingers caught the swivel links holding the rudder cables in place. He twisted slowly. One link gave way.

"What are you trying, Phantom?" demanded Steve Huston. "It's hotter than the hinges of Hades in here now! We can't last!"

"We'll last," assured Van. "Everyone lie down, breathe what cool air there is."

An amazing thing was happening then. For the Phantom was performing one of the most incredible feats of his career.

Setting his strength against the rudder cables, he bowed his shoulders. The rolling and pitching of the yacht changed slowly.

Sweat burst from Van's forehead. He was watching the compass he had placed upon the floor. As the yacht came around, he was actually swinging its weight upon the rudder, where the steering mechanism itself required vast leverage to change the vessel's course.

Chip Dorlan and Steve Huston sprang then to Van's side.

"By glory!" shouted Steve. "I see it now! If we can only hold out without being roasted alive! The yacht is a flaming ship of fire, carrying a warning to all patrol boats! We came south for half an hour!"

"And if we can hold out driving north for another half hour," Van said between set teeth, "we will send Sherman's own decoy of fire directly upon what he had hoped would be the scene of a billion dollar crime!"

Two planes above the burning *Barracuda* continued to thrum and dive outside. The coast guard and the patrol pilots must be completely puzzled. They had been following a burning ship, and now that ship had turned and was retracing its course.

The fire broke through the top of

the bulkhead, but by this time Van had lashed the rudder cables, holding the yacht upon its course. Still it must cover miles before it would carry the patrol planes and the coast guard cutters into the area where the billion dollar attack was about to be made.

Then Van saw that fat Martha was unconscious. The heat had become unbearable. Old Whickers was trying to shield Penny Lake from the searing flames.

All the time the motor-driven propeller shaft had been throbbing with speed. Every minute had carried the yacht back closer toward the spot where it had been abandoned.

Then the shaft suddenly ceased to vibrate.

"That ends it!" groaned Steve Huston. "Phantom! We can't get out! Even if we have saved that cruiser, we haven't a hope!"

CHAPTER XXII

A BILLION IN GOLD



MOMENTARY, only, was the cessation of power. The driving shaft to the powerful, high-speed propeller took up its whirling again. It throbbed like a live thing under its box casing.

All of the time the Phantom had been considering every possible means of escape from the solidly walled prison. He thought of the belt of high explosive flasks he had taken from Chaumon.

"But use of these would be suicidal," he decided grimly.

Then his eyes went to the quivering box of the propeller shaft. The yacht was now meeting a head wind. When the stern lifted, the propeller raced. The stern supports of rudder and propeller shivered each time.

Without a word of explanation,

Van was opening an emergency tool box set near the drive shaft casing. Seconds later he was ripping loose the wooden boxing of the drive shaft.

"Give me a hand, Steve," ordered Van. "Tear loose all of the boxing. Unscrew the grease cups of the shaft. There's some sand along the bottom planks. Scrape it up and pour it into the oilers where it will hit the shaft."

Steve Huston knew little of mechanics, but he did understand that sand instead of grease would not be good for a propeller drive shaft revolving at full speed.

Then he stared at the Phantom. Van was turning a wrench on the bolt heads that held the shaft bearings in place.

"If only the motors keep turning it," he said tightly. "There's nothing more disastrous than a propeller on the loose, either on a plane or a yacht."

As the bearings were loosened by the heavy wrench plied by the Phantom, a slight wobbling was created in the whirling shaft of steel. Suddenly it seemed as if a thousand hammers were pounding at the rising and falling stern.

Van gave the bolts more turns, loosening the bearings more.

"Everyone get as far forward as possible!" he ordered. "Keep down and away from the shaft boxing. If the steel breaks, it may be murderous."

Steve Huston and Chip Dorlan stuck close to Van until he ordered them away. He gave the farthest aft bearing bolts a final turn. Something like a small earthquake rocked the yacht.

Van knew that the drive shaft was only part of an inch off its true center, but that was sufficient. The holding timbers at the stern, and the iron braces were splintering and ripping loose. Each time the stern lifted on the sea, it was like the attack of a thousand horses of power.

Into this bedlam of sound and fury,

created by Van's clever freeing of the whirling shaft, came the reports of guns. The staccato *rat-a-tat-tat* of machine-gun fire joined in.

"Attack!" shouted the Phantom. "At least we have drawn the patrol boats and planes to the scene! Only I fear we are too late to prevent the gold being taken from the French cruiser! It depends upon our own escape and quick action whether Sherman's piracy succeeds or fails!"

The Phantom was certain that when the paralyzing gas was poured into the billion dollar cruiser by the killers aboard Homer Kent's oil tanker, that Sherman's first act would be to start the transferring of the tons of gold.

THE smoke was growing thicker in the bulk-headed prison. The crazily gyrating drive shaft was acting as if it would split the trembling yacht. Outside, the propeller was spinning off center.

Fresh air and spray broke through where the wild shaft suddenly smashed the stern timbers and plates. Steve and Chip were quick to cheer, but Van silenced them.

There was a ragged hole that gave fresh air and the red glare of the burning yacht. But it was still too small for anyone to pass through.

The propeller gave one final, mighty crash, bending the shaft. It snapped off and dropped into the sea. The freed shaft spun weirdly for a few seconds, then tightened in the bearings that remained intact and stopped the motors dead.

"What now?" yelled Steve Huston. "That's all it will do, and it's not enough!"

Van could see the rough sea outside. Some water slapped through into their prison. The sounds of guns was louder.

"Everyone get back!" Van suddenly commanded sharply. "Down behind the ribs and away from the broken end!"

He was pulling one of the high explosive bottles from Chaumon's death belt.

"No, Phantom, no!" cried Huston. "You'll blow yourself to bits!"

Van's smile was grim. He was gambling his own life against escape for the others. The heat was growing more intense each moment. More water was coming into the break where the propeller had torn loose. The Phantom sighted upon the jagged timbers at the side of the small break, and hurled the high explosive flask with unerring aim. He threw himself back and down while the flask was in mid-air.

All calamity ripped through the compartment. Van felt as if his ribs had been caved in. His lungs appeared to collapse.

But the sharp sting of the explosive fumes was a powerful stimulant. Blinded temporarily, Van groped his way to the others. He could feel the rush of welcome air through the break made by the final blast upon which he had risked his life.

"Get Martha and Penny out!" he called. "I'll free Chaumon! Keep the women afloat! You'll be picked up!"

Quickly freeing Chaumon, Van thrust old Whickers into the Frenchman's care. The oily swells outside lifted the escaping prisoners as they went into the sea, with the Phantom the last to make the leap.

The blazing *Barracuda* was heeling over, starting to go down by the head. Van glimpsed a coast guard cutter circling the yacht. He swam swiftly to Steve Huston.

"See that all get on the cutter, Steve!" he directed. "I have other business!"

Any other man might have been satisfied with having brought about the escape of the prisoners, and too exhausted to attempt more. Not so the Phantom. And now the amazing Phantom was swimming against the

boisterous sea. He could see the gray shape of a slender cruiser. Near it floated a small oil tanker.

A COAST guard boat and a plane were near the two crafts, and Sherman's mosquito fleet was darting around.

"And the coast guardsmen and the patrol haven't the slightest idea why they came upon what looked like a battle at sea," Van thought grimly. "They know nothing of the billion in gold. Sherman and his killers probably have had time to be well on their way with the gold before the patrol boats and planes arrived. And there is one way they might escape with it!"

Van lifted on a roller. He was near the drifting oil tanker and a coast guard cutter. The patrol planes were dropping flares. Machine-guns were still picking off some of the small motor-boats laden with killers.

Then Van saw the shapes for which he was searching. They were beyond the line of shooting—innocent-looking, unsuspected vessels. For one was an old garbage scow, the other was a small tug towing the scow slowly along, proceeding on a course that would bring the tug and barge into the Gate and New York harbor.

Van hailed the patrol plane afloat near the apparently deserted cruiser and oil tanker. He knew these craft were not deserted. They were filled with unconscious, stupefied men.

The plane pilot taxied over the rough water as he saw Van's bobbing head and shoulders. Van climbed onto a wing close to the cabin.

The flares were dying, but Van's eyes were fixed upon the blacked-out space where he had last seen the tug and the barge. He wasted no time. His platinum badge identified him to the startled patrol pilot.

"Hold down!" he instructed. "Taxi along southeastward! You'll come to something quickly! It would be well for the gunner to be prepared!"

The plane nosed swiftly along. The bulky, clumsy shape of the old garbage scow loomed up suddenly.

"Hit them with a light!" directed Van. "And look out for trouble!"

The pilot sliced a light beam into the rolling darkness. It picked out the lumbering barge and the small tug. At that, the rapid reports of a machine-gun burst out. Segments of the wing under Van's feet were chewed off.

Spider webs appeared in the pilot's window. Before the plane's machine-gun could reply, the plane was within a few yards of the tug and barge.

Then Van's right hand lifted. A glittering object flashed through the plane's searchlight beam. It seemed as if the squat stern of the small tug was lifted by a giant hand, tipping the vessel upon its prow. The tug heeled over, propeller and rudder torn away. The blast shook sea and sky. Again with unerring aim, the Phantom had hurled one of Chaumons's death flasks of high explosive.

As the tearing explosion heeled the tug forward, the old garbage scow rolled sideward in the heavy wash of the sea. The plane's pilot, virtually taxiing blind because of the hail of machine-gun slugs raining into his front glass, swung the ship.

There was a ticklish moment when

the plane's wing scraped the side of the rocking scow. The Phantom jumped. Jolted and confused by the explosion, the machine-gunner nevertheless swung his slim-snouted weapon directly upon the flying figure of the Phantom.

Had Van remained erect, landing upon his toes, the whistling hail of lead would have caught him squarely. But he turned with the acrobatic twist of a diver doing a one-and-a-half in mid-air.

He had the sensation of falling, with the breeze of lethal lead fanning his face. But he struck the deck on the flat of his hands.

Again the killer attempted to change the direction of the deadly chopper. He could not have gone down more quickly had it been his own stream of slugs hitting his knees instead of the Phantom's steel-muscled body.

Van himself was partly stunned by the impact. Splinters furrowed from the barge deck stabbed his face. On both sides of the open carrying space of the scow flashes of bluish fire sent tongues laden with lead darting toward him.

There was no counting the number of gunmen who were making a last desperate stand. Van had no time to

[Turn Page]

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gain his feet before the hot barrel of the machine-gun was in his hands.

The gunner of the partly disabled plane apparently had been silenced.

The machine-gun jolted in Van's hands. The flashes of killers' guns were suddenly erased. There were splashes in the sea, and some slumped figures left along the rim of the scow's open space.

The machine-gun clicked upon an emptied drum.

For the moment, the scow's narrow side decks were clear. Van could see the boxing of an open hatchway at the far end of the barge. Dropping the machine-gun, Van crouched, running lightly along the side, making for the hatchway.

His face was numbed where it had been stung with bullet-ripped splinters. Unarmed now, except for two little flasks of high explosive still in Chaumon's belt, Van gripped one of the terrible missiles.

"Sherman and Ronder—if Ronder is still alive—would be with the gold," was in his mind as he balanced the high explosive in his hand.

He slowed, became wary. Except for the rolling wash of the sea there was no sound. Yet Van could not believe that the suddenness of his surprise attack had exterminated all of Sherman's gunmen.

A high-pitched scream came from the open hatchway. Van promptly tossed the deadly flask into the sea. The voice was that of Jewel Madison, Ina Lou of "Cotton Road."

There was but the yawning, black hole that formed the square of the hatchway. From this came the cold, hard voice of Rodney Sherman.

"Stay back, or I take the girl with me! Rudolph Schermell knows how to die!"

Sickness went through the Phantom. For in that yawning black hole came the quick flash of a gun. Its light was instantaneous, then gone, and there was a screaming groan of death.

Perhaps none but the eyes of the Phantom could have caught that other flash, illuminated for the tenth part of a second. A gleaming incandescence that was other than gunfire.

Van's instant realization of what had happened, and his lightning timing of his own action were based upon that odd flash of cold fire. For he was sure the glitter could be none other than the reflection of diamonds upon the fingers of Diamond Ronder.

And without doubt that scream had been Ronder's death cry.

VAN was jumping feet first, even before the split second light was gone. He was hurtling down into the blackness when the gun exploded again. Something like a red-hot finger ran along his left arm.

One shoulder encountered a soft body that fell to one side. Van could not know in what position his feet had caught Rodney Sherman who was wielding his flaming gun. He went down into the darkness, a blow of metallic force crashing the side of his skull.

Dizzied, entangled by the flailing arms of his unseen enemy, Van jabbed short punches with both fists. His knuckles sank into flesh and brought grunting response.

But Sherman was a trapped, desperate animal now. Foreseeing only death were he captured, he was battling to take with him the man who had blocked perhaps the greatest robbery in history.

Van felt the cold muzzle of the gun jabbed into his neck. Only his instinctive, lightning reaction caused the fire and lead to furrow the flesh instead of penetrating to a vital spot.

Both men were down now, and Van felt water rising, engulfing them. Sherman struck again and again with his free hand, still trying to make the gun reach a mortal contact.

Van could hear the gurgling rush of the water. Sherman, international

criminal and killer, failing in his greatest coup, intended not only to die, but to sink nearly a billion in gold in the sea as his final gesture.

Once more the cold gun touched Van's flesh near his jaw. This time he was prepared for it. It was his fist, with all of his trained power behind it that smashed the gun away, even as it exploded. Smashed it straight into Rodney Sherman's face.

Sherman became as limp as a sack. In the following minute, Van fought

with the body of Diamond Ronder. The boss killer who worked for Big Dan Spade would never talk. He had been shot in the back.

Rodney Sherman was conscious as he was brought up in the grip of guardsmen. The Phantom held the Luger pistol with which Sherman had attempted to take others with him in death.

"What is all this?" exclaimed the coast guard captain. "I'm told you're the Phantom!"

*Tarpon, Bonita and Swordfish, the Tigers of the Sea, Hide
the Crime Secret the Phantom Must Solve*



IN

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his way through the fast rising water, found the opened seacock and closed it.

Van was lifting Jewel Madison to the barge deck when one of the coast guard cutters came alongside.

"I'm Captain Bascom," announced the cutter's commander.

Van saw Homer Kent standing beside the coast guard's captain.

Steve Huston, Chip Dorlan, Penny Lake, Chaumon and old Whickers were coming from the cutter onto the scow, as guard sailors came up

"Right!" Van said grimly. "Captain Bascom, I want you to meet Rodney Sherman, who is actually Rudolph Schermell, saboteur and international agent! He was in the act of making away with nearly a billion in gold!"

"A billion?" gulped Captain Bascom. "That's a little steep, isn't it, Phantom? You're sure!"

"As sure as I am that Sherman, or Schermell just shot Diamond Ronder, boss of killers, in the back to silence him. It was a little plan Sherman

had all along. There have been several murders. And Diamond Ronder was seen, and was being used by Sherman, with the intention of pinning the crimes upon him in the end if anything went wrong. And I see you have Homer Kent and some others on your boat, Captain. They will be interested, so they might come aboard."

THE sullen Rodney Sherman stood helpless in Van's grasp. A woe-begone, haggard young woman appeared from the hatchway. Jewel Madison.

Homer Kent was brought aboard with Chaumon and the others whom the Phantom had saved from the yacht.

"Phantom, you?" Homer Kent said. "I'm glad. My oil tanker was seized. I was made a prisoner. They killed my crew, and had gas bombs ready when they contacted the French cruiser. It was all over quickly, I guess, for I passed out awhile."

Jewel Madison moved toward Homer Kent.

"Homer, darling!" she cried. "It has been terrible! I'm so glad that you are all right!"

Homer Kent's brilliant eyes were hard, uncompromising. The girl extended her white hands imploringly. But he put her roughly from him.

"I'm afraid you've learned to live the rôle of Ina Lou," he said. "It is no time to discuss it now, but next season the Old Forties Theater will have a new show, thanks to the Phantom. After what Penny Lake has gone through she'll have enough publicity to make her Broadway's biggest star."

Captain Bascom's men were bringing up small boxes. They had immense weight, as small as they were. The coast guard captain wiped perspiration from his forehead.

"Gad, that I should have lived to see so much gold in one place, Phan-

tom!" he exclaimed. "It's all stacked down there! What a trick! That old garbage scow could have sailed right into the Hudson with a billion in gold, and never have been suspected. Man! I never expected to be responsible for a billion!"

"It is not a billion," said Chaumon quietly. "It should be nine hundred and eighty-five millions, four hundred and seventy thousand, to be exact. Of that, our Free French owe Homer Kent a good reward for his loyal effort to aid us."

That's close enough to a billion to have me dizzy," said Captain Bascom. "I suppose this money will not be frozen, when its ownership is established, and I'm sure Homer Kent deserves plenty for saving it."

"Not one penny, after the lives it has cost," Kent said firmly.

The Phantom had been watching Penny Lake. She had been with old Whickers who was becoming more lively. Penny left her father and went over to Steve Huston.

"We've had a lot of fun, Steve," she said. "But I'm afraid—"

"Yeah, I know," said Steve, and kissed her. "It's always that way with me. When it comes to dames, they're here today and gone tomorrow. Best of luck, Penny."

"Rodney Sherman, alias Rudolph Schermell will be handled by the Federal government," the Phantom said to Captain Bascom. "In a way, he has been most useful. Because of Sherman, one killer, Diamond Ronder, has been removed. A politician, an instigator of murders, he was too smart to commit himself. He will undoubtedly serve a long stretch for homicide he did not commit. It's unfortunate that Sherman probably will only be interned, now that the billion in gold has been saved for his rightful owners, to be employed against their enemies."

Big Chaumon looked sad.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed. "Only interned! I should not have waited.

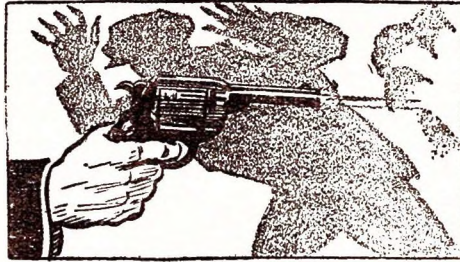
I should have blown up that boat when Sherman was still on it!"

FOR the first time in all the history of great gold shipments to the United States, nearly a billion in gold moved through New York harbor all in one consignment.

A billion in gold! And all that

thousands of ferry passengers saw was an old garbage scow powered by a coast guard cutter.

However, they stared at the patrol convoy of coast guard cutters and circling planes. No other garbage scow in all history had ever sailed past the Statue of Liberty with such majesty.



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Lead Poisoning

ALLAN K. ECHOLS

Author of "Fair Game," "Good Money," etc.

With Two Deaths of the Same Name Facing Him, Painter Ed Fry, Makes a Quick and Decisive Choice—For Neither!

FROM his perch on the scaffold where he was repainting the empty second-floor-front apartment, Ed Fry could see the sidewalk across the street. Only half consciously, he had seen a bareheaded young man in tweeds walk into the small jewelry store. His own troubles were too many for him to pay any attention.

It was hot in the apartment, and the fumes of the paint bit into his nostrils and gave him a headache, as they had done for years now. Ed knew what was wrong—lead poisoning. Slowly he was being poisoned, and as susceptible as he was to it, it wouldn't be long until he was dead—if he didn't give up this trade in a hurry.

He dipped his brush in the half-filled five-gallon bucket sitting on the board between his two ladders, and spread another yard of flat ivory on the ceiling. If only he could get Kitty and the two babies out to some village where they could get plenty of sunshine and fresh milk, maybe he could raise a few chickens, do a little painting now and then before the chickens began to produce.

The shot that barked across the street was not loud—but it *was* a shot, not a car backfiring. Ed Fry looked out the window. The bare-headed man was coming out of the jewelry store in a hurry. He had a

gun in his hand. He looked both ways, then darted out across the street.

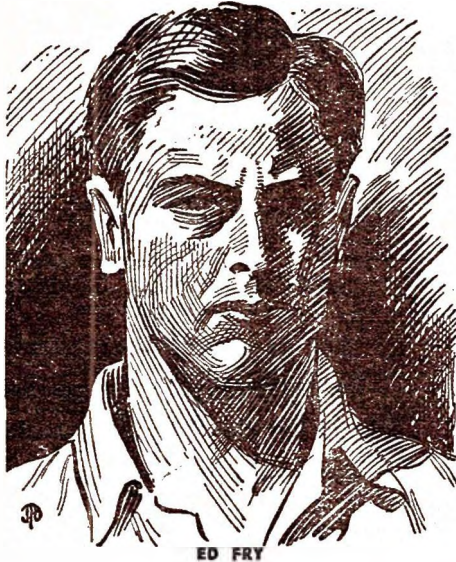
Fry saw his face, young and white, and excited. A hold-up that had somehow missed fire, had thrown the lone robber's plans out of gear. The man disappeared from Fry's sight, and a youngish man ran out of the store shouting for the police.

It all seemed far

away to Ed Fry, though, and the whole thing didn't seem real.

He saw people running toward the store, saw arms waving and people talking, then he turned back to his work. In the light of his own troubles, the robbery of a little jewelry store didn't interest him much. After all, he was facing death, and he had a family of three who were going to suffer when he couldn't make a living for them.

If he only had enough money to get out of this city and get a start in



ED FRY

a good, healthy village. He'd work with a pick and shovel, anything to escape the prison of their cold-water-flat existence. But the absence of money was a lock which fastened him to the death which was sure to overtake him from this poison of white lead.

The pain in Fry's head made him dizzy as he worked overhead. The fumes rose upward, naturally, and he couldn't keep the doors and windows open because dust would settle on the fresh paint.

That was why Ed Fry noticed that a door must have been opened. He didn't hear it, but he felt a draft of air, and when he looked down to dip his brush into the bucket he saw the man standing there.

Fry froze, standing on the board perched high between the two ladders. He was looking down into the muzzle of a gun whose barrel seemed as big as a stovepipe. And, looking at him in cold speculation, was the white-faced, black-haired young man in the tweed suit. The face didn't look so young now. It was shaved close, and powdered, but it was hard, and the eyes were like ice. Ed Fry knew the type. He had seen too many of this kind standing around the cigar stores where the bookies hung out near the telephones not to know.

Fry wiped the sweat off one of his hands on his overalls, and gripped the brush a little tighter with the other as he straightened up. A trickle of ivory paint, thick like cream, dripped onto the newly varnished parquet floor.

The siren of a police car screamed in the distance, grew louder, and came to a whining stop down under the window. The cold young man in tweeds listened, but did not turn his face away from Fry, standing high on the board. It was as though he wanted to give the painter plenty of time to realize the gravity of the situation before he spoke.

Which was just what Ed Fry was

doing, while his gaze was focused on the man with the gun. Thinking. . . . It was a funny thing, too, and Fry almost laughed. He had been looking in that window only last night, thinking of what he could do with the money represented by the diamonds nestling under a blue light, diamonds in little blue velvet boxes. And idly he had noticed the silver plaque stating that the store was protected by some association or other which had a standing reward out for . . . Funny, that thought. . . .

The white-faced man's gun made a weaving motion, and he spoke in a low tone.

"Get down off that ladder."

"Why?"

It wasn't an intelligent answer, but all Fry realized was that he was facing a faster kind of lead poisoning, and the thought was a little confusing in its suddenness.

"Because I'm taking your place," said the gunman. "Get down and get those overalls off."

SO THE man had figured he couldn't get away, so he was going to stick it out inside the police cordon, disguised as a painter. Not a bad idea, Fry thought, if the man he stole the clothes from didn't squawk—didn't live to squawk.

Fry heard an ambulance pull up and saw a couple of men in white go inside the store, while the cops made a lane for them through the crowd. One of the men in white was carrying a rolled-up stretcher. That wouldn't be for the jeweler's clerk, because he had been able to run out and shout for the cops.

Fry looked back at his captor.

"Did you kill Uncle Benny?" he asked.

The man had come closer, still keeping away from the window, and now his head was just about on a level with Fry's feet, and he was pointing his gun almost straight upward at Fry's chest.

"You got the idea," he said coldly. "And you better use it. That old bird got stubborn and he got a dose of lead poisoning—just like you'll get if you got any notions about getting stubborn. You're trading places with me. While you wait in that closet, I'll be wearing your clothes and doing your painting. Either that, or—"

"I've already got lead poisoning," Ed Fry argued. "You might get it yourself if you fool with paint."

The man smiled coldly. "I'll take my chances. That punk of a clerk got a good look at me and the cops'll have this block sewed up so tight I couldn't get through with a cannon. So we're stayin' right here till the heat's off. Get down! Before I—"

"All right!"

AS FRY started to get down, his foot shoved the big paint bucket before him. The bucket toppled over, landed bottom side up over the killer's head like a big diver's helmet. Two gallons of creamy paint smothered him and ran down his tweed suit like thick milk. The five-gallon bucket rested upside down on the man's shoulders while its viscous liquid choked him.

He dropped the gun and clawed at the bucket. He crashed it to the floor

and stamped around in circles as he tried to claw the paint out of his eyes.

The paint saturated his hair, filled his ears, and ran down to fill the collar of his shirt. His gasping breath made thick bubbles of paint at his nostrils, and at every curse it ran into his open mouth. He wrestled with the liquid like a hypnotized man wrestling with an imaginary opponent.

Fry was on the floor now, and the man's gun was in his hand, its muzzle boring into the fellow's back. Fry placed a big wad of paint rag in his captive's hand.

"Here, wipe it out of your eyes," he said, "so you can see to walk downstairs and across the street. You and me are going to get cured of lead poison right quick. The cops'll see that it don't have time to work on you. And I want the address of that Jeweler's Protective Association. They've got a standing reward that'll cure me. . . . Say, you happen to know how much they get for chicken farms around Vineland, New Jersey?"

But the killer must not have been interested in chickens, because he didn't answer. He only cursed, and dripped paint along the hall and down the steps. But Ed Fry didn't care. He wouldn't be here to clean it up.

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We left Mabel on the floor to come out of it

Biff Barnes and Jennie Hale Are a Good Pair to Tie to When They Go Fishing for Big Game—But When They Get Tangled in Their Own Line, There's the Devil to Pay!

JENNIE HALE and I were planted at a table at the Blue Moon and we were both hoping that these crooks would fall for the scheme. It was all a plant. I'm a cop and so is Jennie, although in this pale blue evening gown that she's wearing tonight you'd never guess it. Jennie looks like a deb and that's the reason she was assigned on this detail.

Jennie had on a lot of jewelry that was mostly paste, but good paste. Some of the smaller diamonds were real and it would take an expert to appraise what she was wearing at less than fifty grand. Those diamonds were the bait. Tonight we were posing as out-of-town buyers—Mr. and

Mrs. Joe Helwich of Keokuk, Iowa. Some of those buyers who had been robbed before had been spotted first at the Blue Moon, so Jennie and I were planted here to see if the crooks would bite again.

I'm "Biff" Barnes and just a rough-and-tumble cop and why I was put on a detail like this I don't know. I don't look like a hick. I got on my thirty-five-buck tuxedo that I had pressed Christmas and as I only wore it once since it hasn't got more than a couple of wrinkles in it. I guess Jennie was picked because she is a looker and plenty smart.

We were sitting there, trying to look like we were awed by cafe so-

ciety when a big guy and a dame start to crowd by our table. Only the big guy suddenly stopped and smiled like he had found a long lost friend.

"Say," he said, "didn't I see you at the Minerva Dress Company today? Aren't you Joe Helwich of Keokuk? I'm George Tucker of Kokomo. The Tucker Emporium."

I grimaced and figured this was a tough break. Here we were all set to nab some crooks and these hicks had to butt in on us and crab the play. This big red-faced George Tucker had yokel written all over him. I was going to tell him he had made a mistake and that I had never heard of Joe Helwich when Jennie kicked my shin hard under the table. And she beamed like she had found some old friends.

"Why, of course, Mr. Tucker," Jennie gushed. "We were just sitting here enjoying this marvelous atmosphere—only a little lonesome. Why don't you two sit down and join us?"

I stared for a moment. I thought Jennie was crazy. But I got it—by the time Jennie and this Tucker had got the introductions all straightened out. This big red-faced George Tucker and the smooth looker that he introduced as his wife, Mabel Tucker, were plants, too. Jennie Hale had spotted them the minute Tucker had made his first crack.

It was reasonable enough when you figured it through. Jennie and I had walked into the Hotel Breshire two days ago and registered—with Jennie's Aunt Hetta along, though nobody knew why that was but us. We had been Mr. and Mrs. Joe Helwich from that moment on. We had toured the wholesale houses and Jennie had displayed her diamonds right and left because it was suspected that some employee of one of those houses was tipping the crooks to prospects.

GET it? These crooks were playing the same game right back at us. This "George Tucker" and his dame

in black satin were using the same gag. Pretending to be buyers from the sticks so they could get acquainted with us and grab Jennie's sparklers.

"Yes, sir!" this George Tucker said expansively. "It's just like meeting folks from home running across you here. I guess these city people are all right, but I don't understand 'em. They ain't like us folks from the Middle West. Yes, sir, we sure are glad to meet up with you."

"We are, indeed," Mabel Tucker agreed quickly. "I was getting so lonesome that I was ready to take the first train home."

Well, I almost laughed in their faces. Because I could see plain enough now that this red-faced Tucker is the biggest kind of a phony. And he was all set to take us. It was a laugh to me when I thought of what a big surprise he was going to get when he made the play for Jennie's rocks.

They're not going to leave Jennie and me tied up out behind a billboard somewhere, like they did a couple of other buyers. And there was a kill on one of those jobs, too. That isn't so hard to believe because I could see behind this good cheer front that George Tucker is putting on. I got a hunch that he was plenty tough. And this dame in green that he was palming off as his wife had eyes as hard as ten-penny nails.

Jennie was already chatting with Mabel like she had known her all her life, so I forgot my bruised shin and started laughing at the joke that Tucker was spilling. I came right back at him with that one where the goat walks out on Hitler and Tucker laughed so hard that the people at the other tables gave us understanding glances. It was plain enough to them that we were four hicks out painting the town red.

We had a couple of rounds of drinks, then George Tucker made his first crack.

"Helwich," he said, "this place is

all right, but the last time I was here in town I found a little spot where there was really something doing. Mabel and I had the time of our lives down there. We talked about it all winter. What say we run down there and give it the once-over? It's only about a ten minute ride."

"That's okay by me, Tucker," I said. "I don't know much about these places. We'll leave it to you. I guess you know the town pretty well."

"That's right, Mr. Tucker," Jennie chimed in. "I had a hard time dragging Joe out tonight because he's a little bashful about the night spots. I don't see why we should sit here all night in one place."

"That's exactly the idea, Mrs. Helwich," Tucker said heartily. "Folks like us that only come to the city once or twice a year ought to see all we can while we can. You just leave it to me. And from here on out you folks just call us George and Mabel."

So we pulled out of the Blue Moon and piled in a taxi. I didn't mind it a bit when Tucker did all the talking. I wasn't forgetting that somewhere along the line something unpleasant is slated to happen to me and Jennie, and for all I knew it might happen right in this taxi. So I was ready. If this George Tucker and his slick dame tried to pull a rod on us while we were in the taxi I was set to cool him so fast that he wouldn't have known what had happened to him. That's where I shine. Jennie may have the brains, but when it comes to mixing it in a free-for-all I can take it and hand it out with the best of them.

But that wasn't the play. George and Mabel just sat back against the cushions and poured on the Kokomo stuff. I've never been in Kokomo or even in Indiana for that matter, so he was on safe enough ground. I couldn't have disputed him if he had said the

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Kokomo city hall was built out of platinum. I just kept my eye on him, watched to see where he was taking us.

I wasn't too surprised when he ordered the cabby to stop on Fillman Street. The neon sign on the dump said, "Green Owl." We got out of the taxi and went in. The minute I got inside I had a pretty good idea what was going to happen to us. This was a clip joint if I ever saw one.

There was plenty of room in the place and it was getting a good play—from a certain class of people. The lights were low, and a four-piece orchestra was blaring away in a corner. The waiters had on greasy coats and the hostess looked weary.

GEORGE TUCKER led the way in like he owned the place. Maybe he did for all I knew. The table we got was off to one side and next to a wall. No lights directly over it.

"Just wait till they get to going in here," Tucker promised. "You'll see something then. They got a floor show that is plenty hot."

I could guess that. The show would be hot—and punk like everything else connected with the place. There was no telling what might be connected with a joint like this. I figured I might as well be ready for anything. I knew I could take care of myself, but I was a little bit worried about Jennie. If things started to pop I might be ganged and have a hard time protecting her.

We had hardly settled in our chairs when the lights went even lower and the floor show came on. Five girls pranced out and fell all over themselves. A two-hundred-pound Amazon came out and started a ballad. Even George Tucker winced a little when she hit a sour one on the first three notes.

"I guess this place ain't what it used to be, Joe," he said apologetically. "It's been a year since I was here, and the whole place is different. Must have changed management or

something. Yes, it's gone to pieces. So we'll just have one quick drink and blow. Waiter!"

Tucker lifted his hand and there was a waiter standing by the table before you could count three.

"Four Old-fashioneds," Tucker said, and added, "Is that all right with you?"

But the waiter was gone before any of us had a chance to open our mouths. Tucker grinned feebly, and went into another old joke.

I grinned back at him—but I was hep now. I knew where the play was coming. It was coming in the drinks. It was all set. That waiter had been too fast for a dump like this. Right now he was back at the bar getting those drinks and adding a hopper to them. If Jennie and I swallowed that stuff all they'd have to do would be to strip her of the rocks and make a quick getaway in the confusion.

I tried to give Jennie the eye. But she and Mabel seemed to be completely absorbed in feminine chatter. They both had their handbags open and were pawing for lip sticks and powder puffs. That's the way with dames. Crooks or cops they're all alike. They had those bags crammed with an assortment of junk and they had to finger forty different things before finding what they wanted.

I was glad Jennie didn't have her gat in that bag or this Mabel Tucker might have spotted it. Jennie had her gat in a holster on her right leg.

The way things were breaking she wasn't going to need that gat. When the pinch came I'd have to knock her drink out of her hand, pull both my gats, and call the play right there.

This George Tucker was a cool article. He was rambling right along in his role of a bumpkin.

The waiter came back in a few minutes and carefully placed the drinks. Right at that moment the house lights went off. A big spotlight played on the dance floor and a dame in a veil drifted out into it and began to do her stuff.

The break was that the Tuckers were seated with their back to the dance floor and they turned around to see what was going on. I only needed two seconds' leeway and I had it. I switched those drinks so fast that there wasn't a chance for the Tuckers to catch me at it. Mabel got Jennie's and George got mine. When they turned back I had my glass up and was taking a good swallow.

There was a wide grin on my face now, and nothing phony about it. I had a big laugh coming. These two smart crooks was going to get their own Mickeys. I gave Jennie a quick glance and she was smiling, too. George Tucker picked up his glass and downed a big gulp.

"Yes, this place has gone to pieces," he said wisely. "We'll just polish off these drinks and blow. I know another place that a salesman told me about yesterday. He said it was tops and he ought to know."

"Anything you say, George," I said cheerfully. "All you got to do is pick the spots and we'll tail along."

I could see his eyes on me as I tilted my glass and drained it. I could see that he was getting a bit nervous about it too. Those drinks were going to take effect in a few minutes and there couldn't be too much delay in getting us out of the place. He didn't have connections to finish the job here. Probably he just had that waiter fixed to dope the drinks.

"Well, let's go," he said jerkily, as Jennie finished her drink. "This place kinda gets on my nerves. Let's go now."

That suited me fine. Because I could handle this pair a lot easier where there weren't so many people around. And I could send back and get that waiter later, before he tumbled that anything had misfired. The four of us got up, picked our way among the tables, got our things, and went out to the street.

A taxi pulled right up and we piled in. The Tuckers and Jennie sat three

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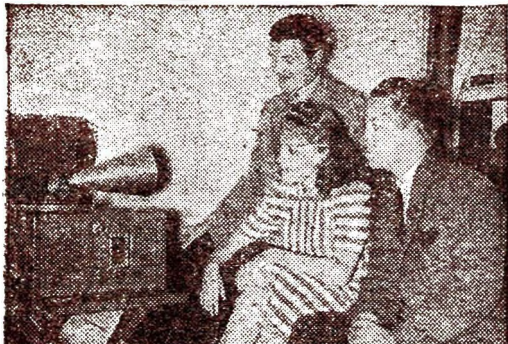
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abreast in the seat while I pulled out the little seat, the one right in front of Tucker. This was going to be funny. Because I knew the Tuckers were going to stall until we passed out.

That's what *they* thought. But George Tucker was going to be a mighty surprised man when those drinks began to take hold. Probably he would go for a gat when he found out that the drinks had been switched on him, and that his brain was beginning to play tricks on him. But I was sitting right over him, watching him like a hawk, and it was going to be a cinch.

Tucker had mumbled something to the driver as we got in and the cab pulled out. It was pretty chilly and the windows were closed. That suited me because cold air might have made the drinks work slowly. The glass partition between the driver and the rear was closed and the heat was coming in strong. I figured it wasn't going to be long until Tucker started getting woozy.

I had to smile a little when I saw Mabel put a handkerchief up to her mouth and nose. The foxy she-crook was beginning to get a little sick. Right away Tucker goes for a kerchief, too, and puts it up to his face. It was their own medicine and I hoped it would make 'em both good and sick before they passed out. They probably wouldn't tumble that they had drawn the doped drinks until they were so far gone that they wouldn't be able to make a move.

Jennie didn't seem to be worrying any. She was at the right and she seemed to be resting her head against the window pane there. She would know that I could handle 'em without any trouble from here on out.

It looked like Mabel was really getting sick now. She had that handkerchief pressed hard against her mouth and I thought I saw her choking a little. I almost laughed out loud.

In another minute they were both going to pass right out, and wouldn't they be surprised when they woke up.

My nose itched a little and I rubbed it. Something seemed to be irritating my eyes too, and brought tears to them. The air in the cab seemed pretty stuffy. I straightened my shoulders and took a good deep breath. All of a sudden I didn't feel too good. I was getting a little dizzy. The smart thing to do was roll a window down.

I lifted my right arm to roll down the window. My right arm felt like lead. I tried to move my left arm. I got it up but it felt like it was partially paralyzed. I couldn't figure out what was wrong with me. Surely that dumb waiter hadn't doped all the drinks and we were all going to pass out in the cab.

I COULD see George Tucker watching me. Yes, he was watching me like a hawk and he still had that handkerchief pressed tightly over his nose and mouth. I got it then—at the last minute. That smooth pair was holding their handkerchiefs over their faces so they wouldn't get too much of that stuff that was coming in the cab. Those weren't ordinary handkerchiefs. They were treated with some chemicals that would neutralize gas.

"Jennie!" I yelled. That is I thought I was going to yell but all that came out of my throat was a croak. "Jennie! Gas!"

I couldn't be sure that she even heard me. At least she didn't seem to move. But I moved. I tried to get to a gat. I saw Tucker pull down his handkerchief and jump toward me. I lunged toward him and tried to cool him with a wild right. But I moved in slow motion and Tucker nailed me with a right instead.

I yelled at Jennie again and tried to rough it with him. Maybe I did manage to poke my left into his face.

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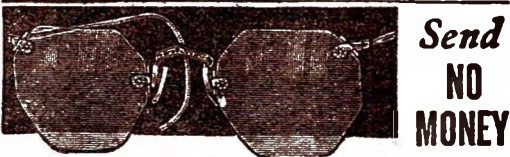
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Then I saw his gun coming down at my head. I tried to duck it, but I was too far gone. I was fading fast. At that last instant I knew what had happened. Those drinks hadn't been doped at all. These smart crooks had taken us down to the Green Owl to make sure that they weren't being watched or tailed.

The driver of this cab was one of the mob. The big play had been to get us into this cab. Once in, Tucker had given a signal and the driver up front had turned on the gas. And I had gulped the stuff in and hadn't noticed it at first because I was so sure that Tucker and his dame were going to fold up. Now I got it! That gun connected with my cranium and I passed out of the picture. . . .

Either my hat had protected me some, or it had been a glancing blow. I knew I was still in a car when my brain began to work a little again. I was in the car but I wasn't resting comfortably on any cushions. I was on the floor boards and a pair of big feet were perched on my chest. I tried to shake my head a little to clear it. I got a whiff of fresh air and it helped a lot. The voices that had been a distant murmur came closer.

"We're almost there." That was Tucker speaking and his voice still sounded far away. "You got all her stuff? We'll dump 'em behind that billboard, the same one we used last time. Okay, Lefty. Stop in the next block. You get out and help me lift this yokel out. Then we'll come back for the girl."

"I got all her stuff." Mabel said that. "She's still out cold. Hasn't moved. But make it snappy."

The cab rolled to a stop. The driver was getting out. Tucker shifted his feet off my chest and climbed out, too. Then he reached in and got me by the shoulders. I was still so befogged I couldn't even begin to put up a fight. Tucker pulled me out of the cab to the ground. The driver

picked up my feet and they moved with me across a dark lot. I couldn't see but I could guess they were carrying me in behind a billboard. I didn't know whether I could move much or not. But I was going to have a try at it when they laid me down on the ground.

It was a scream that changed the situation. A high piercing scream.

Tucker yelled when he heard it, and they dropped me. I heard their feet pounding away. I tried to get up on my own feet but I couldn't make it. I heard more yells and a quick burst of shots. There was something going on out there but I was so dizzy I couldn't figure it out. I got up on my knees as I heard two more shots. I heard running feet again and two figures came at me in the darkness. I tried to get up and make a fight of it but one of them clipped me on the jaw hard and I went right back to dreamland. . . .

I MUST have been out considerably longer this time. The first I knew was when somebody was throwing water in my face, plenty of it. I was drenched. I opened my eyes. There were a dozen people dancing around in front of me at first, but when my eyes finally came into focus I saw that there were just three of them. The two Tuckers and the cabby.

I was lying on the floor. When I tried to move I found that my hands and feet were tied. The trio stared

[Turn page]

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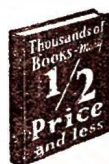
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down at me and they didn't look too happy about the whole business. Tucker stooped down and took hold of my hair and shook me.

"Snap out of it, guy!" he ordered.

I didn't say anything, and I guess my eyes looked so glassy he didn't do anything about it. I moved my eyes a little and what I saw didn't look encouraging. This looked like a room in a house or an apartment, but there wasn't much furniture in it. All I could see were three cheap chairs and a table. Tucker took a pitcher from the table and emptied it in my face. I sputtered and he nodded his head.

"So you're coming out of it," he said with satisfaction. "It's about time. I got a few questions I want answers for. What's your name?"

"I'm Joe Helwich," I told him. "From Keo—"

"Don't give me that Iowa stuff!" he cut in sourly. "We've found out better than that already. Dames from Iowa don't carry gats in leg holsters. That one you had with you pulled a fast one on us and cracked down on us when we tried to chase her. That was the tip-off. She wasn't no farmer's daughter." He turned and scowled at Mabel. "That cousin of yours isn't so bright," he said to her. "Spotting her as a sucker."

"You can't blame Emma," Mabel snapped back at him. "They came into Warburg's and spent three hours buying dresses and suits. The girl wore her rocks and acted just like you'd expect the wife of a department store owner to act. Emma thought they were on the level. So did you till she pulled that rod and cut loose on you and Lefty. You fell for them, too."

"Yeah, I did," Tucker growled. "They fooled me. But I ain't fooled now. They were planted at the Blue Moon—because we had started a couple of other jobs from that spot. They knew who we were the minute we gave 'em the big hand. Cops! That's what they are. You ain't denying that now, are you, fella?"

"Sure I'm a cop," I told them. "And if you hadn't shot that gas to me I'da mopped up on all three of you."

"You ain't a very smart cop"—Tucker grinned—"or you'd guessed that we didn't maneuver to get you in that cab just for the fun of it. You sat there like a big sap until you were in a fog. That little dame was smarter than you. She must have tumbled to the gas. I don't know why it didn't get her. Maybe it did and she just came out quick. While Lefty and me were carrying you out to the billboard she smacks Mabel one and beats it, then guns Lefty and me when we tried to run her down. She got away all right. But that ain't going to do you any good."

I didn't like that last crack. I figured I was in for it. They were talking a little too freely in front of me. That meant that they intended I should never get a chance to tell what I was hearing.

Mabel came over and dangled the stuff that Jennie had worn in front of my eyes. "How much is this stuff worth?" she asked.

"A lot," I answered. "It was the best paste we could get hold of. I expect it's worth two or three hundred bucks."

She spat at me and kicked me.

"What did you expect?" Tucker asked her. "You might know by this time that cops wouldn't be toting around real rocks for a come-on."

[Turn page]

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I had a laugh coming. Not only because of the phony stones but also because of the livid little welt that I spotted on the right side of Mabel's head. That was easy to figure. They had left Mabel in the cab with Jennie when they had carried me to the billboard. Jennie had socked Mabel and run for it. It was Mabel who had screamed when Jennie had started to work on her.

"We better start movin'," "Lefty" put in nervously. "That little dame might be smart enough to spot us."

"Not a chance," Tucker scoffed. "She got away all right. But we know there was no tail on us when we drove away from the billboard, and she ain't got a chance to get next to this place. And even if that dame can pick us out from pictures they'd have to find us before they could do anything. No, we're in the clear. All we got to do is get rid of this dumb cop and beat it. But we'll move him out back, Lefty. You get him by the shoulders and I'll take his feet. You get the weights ready, Mabel."

I winced a little at that weight business. That meant that I was going to be sunk somewhere in the drink, sunk in a hole where my body might never be found.

Lefty came around and caught hold of my shoulders. Tucker bent down to get my feet. My feet were tied together—but Tucker made a mistake there. I was a bit more awake than he suspected. I pulled my feet back as he reached for them, then shoved them forward together with every ounce I could put behind them. The heel of my right shoe caught him flush on the jaw and the sound of that impact was music in my ears. Tucker went backward and over like he had been hit with a sledge-hammer. He settled in a heap.

Mabel shrieked and kicked at my head, then ran to Tucker.

"He's hurt bad!" she moaned. "His jaw is broken."

"It's going to take more than cold

water to bring him around," I told her. "Those solid oak heels of my Number Elevens have come in handy before. I wouldn't be surprised that he's going to chew with a lower plate from here on out."

She got up and glared at me.

"A lot of good that's going to do you," she flared. "You know where you are? You're in a bungalow that's right on the edge of City Lake. The back door is just forty feet from the water. The water is more than thirty feet deep there. Now guess what's going to happen to you! Lefty, you go out and get the things to weight him down with!"

Lefty went out. Mabel went back to Tucker and tried to revive him, but her big boy friend wouldn't open his eyes. She came over and tried to kick me in the head. I jerked my head away and snapped at her ankle as it went by. She jumped back, scared.

I figured I was doing pretty well for a guy who was supposed to be helpless—until I saw Lefty coming in with the stuff. He had a jack and two heavy wrenches and some wire. He went to work on me but he was cautious about it. He got the wire around my midsection and then tied the tools to it.

"Be careful," Mabel warned. "I'll open the door and you drag him out by the shoulders. Drag him right across the yard and let him slide off that big rock into the water."

She went to the door and opened it. I saw her backing out into the darkness. Then Lefty got me by the shoulders and started pulling me, and it swung me around so I couldn't see her any more. I slid over the door sill and bounced down some steps. He started to drag me across the grass of the back yard. I tried to let out a yell but his hold on my collar choked me so that all I could get out was a squawk.

He tightened his hold and lifted my shoulders a little higher. That gave me a little traction on my heels and I flipped myself over to the right

[Turn page]

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and jerked out of his arms. I tried to roll away from him but he jumped on me and held me. I got out a good loud yell but with only a wild hope that anyone would hear it.

"I got a rock," Mabel snarled. "I'll shut him up. I'll beat his brains out. Let me sock him."

"Drop that rock! And both of you put your hands up!"

That voice came from the darkness at the left, and it belonged to Jennie Hale. Lefty hesitated just a fraction of a second, then charged into the shadows where Jennie was standing. Jennie fired two quick shots and Lefty folded up.

Mabel had frozen for a moment. She turned and tried to run. But I had wiggled around and I kicked out and knocked her feet out from under her before she could get started. Jennie stepped in and put the gun right in her face.

"Get up!" she ordered. "Get up and untie him! You try any tricks and I'll slap you silly with this gat."

Mabel used some fancy words on us but she untied me when Jennie prodded her a little. We took a look at Lefty and then marched Mabel into the house. Jennie socked her once more for luck, after a good look at me, and we left her on the floor to come out of it.

"You better go somewhere and find a phone," I told Jennie, "while I stay here and keep the peace."

"There's a phone here some place," Jennie replied.

"How do you know?"

"I got a copy of the order to install it and a receipt for the installation payment. It had the address on it. That's how I found the place."

"Where'd you get hold of that?" I asked her.

"I spotted it when Mabel and I were putting on a little make-up at the Green Owl. You know, when we had our handbags open on the table. I saw some carbon writing on a bit of paper. You were so busy switching those drinks that you didn't see

me dive into her bag and grab the paper and shove it in my dress. I didn't know what it was, but I hoped it might identify them later."

"How come you didn't get gassed as much as I did?" I questioned her.

"There was some cool air coming through a crack on my side of the cab," Jennie explained. "I noticed it when I first got in the cab. I thought there was something funny about the way Mabel was holding that handkerchief to her nose. When I began to get a little dizzy I leaned my head against the window pane and got the full effect of that fresh air. I was a little befuddled when you had that mixup with Tucker. But after he cooled you with his gun they rolled the windows down and I began to come out of it. I slumped against the cushions and played dead.

"When Tucker and the driver carried you to the billboard I got to my gun and hit Mabel with it. But I only got in a glancing blow and she screamed. Tucker and the driver were after me before I had more than got out of the cab. I ducked back into a yard and shot at them. I guess I missed, but they didn't try to close in on me. I saw them carry you back to the cab, but I couldn't open up on them without taking the chance of hitting you.

"As soon as I got to a light I looked at that paper. It showed that a phone was being installed at this address under the name of Mrs. Hayward. It took me quite a while to get a taxi in that neighborhood. When I finally got one I came right on out here. I had the taxi stop a block away and sneaked up to the house. Their driver was getting something out of the car—those weights I guess. I was just about to take a chance and come in when the door opened and they dragged you out."

"Swell, Jennie," I told her. "You find the phone and call in. Then hunt me some aspirin. A lot of aspirin. I got three different headaches."

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BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Prices
28x4.00-21	1.85	1.85
28x4.50-20	2.85	2.85
30x4.50-21	1.95	1.95
30x4.75-19	1.85	1.85
32x4.75-20	2.10	2.10
28x5.00-19	2.25	1.05
30x5.00-20	2.40	1.05
32x5.00-20	2.40	1.15
32x5.25-18	2.45	1.15
32x5.25-19	2.45	1.15
32x5.25-20	2.50	1.15
32x5.25-21	2.80	1.15
32x5.50-17	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-18	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-19	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-20	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-21	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-22	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-23	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-24	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-25	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-26	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-27	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-28	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-29	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-30	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-31	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-32	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-33	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-34	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-35	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-36	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-37	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-38	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-39	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-40	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-41	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-42	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-43	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-44	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-45	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-46	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-47	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-48	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-49	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-50	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-51	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-52	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-53	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-54	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-55	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-56	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-57	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-58	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-59	2.75	1.15
32x5.50-60	2.75	1.15

TRUCK TIRES

Size	Tires	Prices
30x6.00-20	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-21	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-22	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-23	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-24	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-25	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-26	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-27	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-28	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-29	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-30	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-31	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-32	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-33	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-34	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-35	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-36	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-37	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-38	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-39	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-40	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-41	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-42	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-43	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-44	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-45	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-46	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-47	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-48	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-49	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-50	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-51	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-52	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-53	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-54	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-55	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-56	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-57	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-58	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-59	3.10	3.10
30x6.00-60	3.10	3.10

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES

Size	Tires	Prices
30x8.00-20	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-21	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-22	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-23	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-24	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-25	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-26	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-27	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-28	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-29	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-30	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-31	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-32	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-33	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-34	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-35	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-36	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-37	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-38	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-39	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-40	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-41	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-42	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-43	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-44	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-45	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-46	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-47	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-48	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-49	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-50	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-51	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-52	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-53	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-54	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-55	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-56	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-57	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-58	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-59	4.50	4.50
30x8.00-60	4.50	4.50

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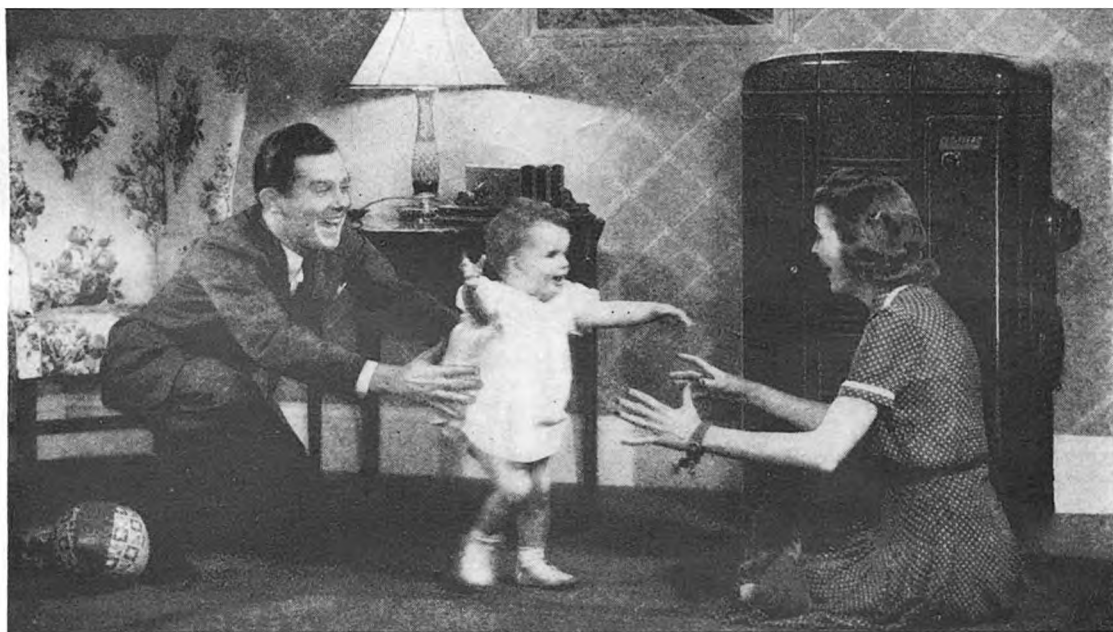
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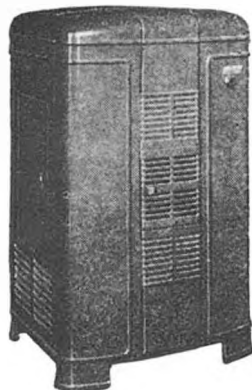
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