

DEC.

# The PHANTOM DETECTIVE

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10¢ WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS DETECTIVE THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE # DEC. 1934

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Radolph Betarcki



THE CASE OF THE POISON FORMULA  
A Full-Length Mystery Novel  
By ROBERT WALLACE



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*Dated*



**"Clancy, I think you done that on purpose!"**

**AT LAST**—you can buy *all* the fresh, *dated* "Eveready" flashlight batteries you need! Your dealer has them now, in the size that fits your flashlight.

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Name .....

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Vol. XLVI, No. 3

EVERY STORY BRAND NEW

December, 1945

*Featuring the World's Greatest Sleuth  
in a Full-Length Novel*

# THE CASE OF THE POISON FORMULA

By **ROBERT WALLACE**

Taken from the Case-book of Richard Curtis Van Loan  
(Profusely Illustrated)

*When death-dealing drugs are insidiously substituted for an elixir of healing, the resulting chaos and tragedy call for the Phantom Detective's keen wit and fighting courage. Follow the exciting exploits of Richard Curtis Van Loan as he battles to foil a sinister lethal conspiracy*

11

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*Forrest Hunter takes the trail of a portrait-stealing racketeer*

AND

**THE PHANTOM SPEAKS** **A Department** 6  
*Join FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM, our club for readers!*

Next Issue: The Phantom in DOOM ON SCHEDULE, by ROBERT WALLACE

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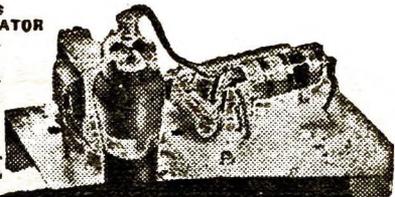
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Let me send you facts about rich opportunities in Radio. See how knowing Radio can give you security, a prosperous future. Send the coupon for **FREE** 64-page book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." Read how **N.R.I.** trains you at home. Read how you practice building, testing, repairing Radios with **SIX BIG KITS** of Radio parts I send you.

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The Radio Repair business is booming **NOW**. There is good money fixing Radios in your spare time or own full time business. Trained Radio Technicians also find wide-open opportunities in Police, Aviation, Marine Radio, in Broadcasting, Radio Manufacturing, Public Address work, etc. Think of the boom coming when new Radios can be made! Think of even greater opportunities when Television, FM, Electronics, can be offered to the public!

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The day you enroll I start sending **EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS** to help you make **EXTRA** money fixing Radios in spare time while learning. You **LEARN** Radio principles from my easy-to-grasp Lessons—**PRACTICE** what you learn by building real Radio Circuits with Radio parts I send—**USE** your knowledge to make **EXTRA** money in spare time.

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# The PHANTOM SPEAKS



**I**MPROVEMENTS in railroading comfort, speed and efficiency have been of interest to travel-minded Americans ever since the good old days when James Watt and George Stephenson cooked up the idea of putting a steam engine on a flat car and making a train locomotive out of it. More and more of our friends and neighbors are seeing this great continent of ours on the plush seats of coaches and Pullmans, and their safety is an important responsibility of railroad executives.

Knowing that this is the case, I was particularly amazed when I learned of the plan of a criminal ring to jeopardize the safety of scores of people by tampering with railroad equipment. This was a type of cold-blooded murder that particularly demanded all of my criminal investigation talents.

## A Threat Against All Riders!

On the face of it, a small train wreck on the obscure Maine and Vermont Railroad might not sound important, but this in actuality was the beginning of a threat against all train riders throughout the country. History has shown that millionaires seldom take time out to make important inventions. This sort of thing is done by the little fellow or the small business man who has ambitions extending into the more prosperous fields.

This was the case with the Maine and Vermont Railroad's research engineers. They developed a type of safety switch that increased revenue by permitting connecting line trains of larger associated companies to go over their tracks without delay. They also opened up a new era of safety for all these companies by offering to license their discovery.

Such a transaction may sound like something that would be bound up in a good deal of official red-tape, and of small interest to criminals. But railroading is big business,

and most criminals are interested in anything that has millions of dollars attached to it, and certain criminals saw such a prospect for anyone who could win control of the Maine and Vermont Railroad and the patents to the safety switch which the company owned.

Business tycoons often can maneuver matters of this kind through channels of their own, but the menacing threat of crime is usually much more direct and ruthless. Therefore, when the Green Mountain Express plunged from the rails and caused extensive damage and loss of life, I was called into action.

The trail that led through this pattern of criminal sabotage and cold-blooded killing makes exciting reading. Robert Wallace has chronicled all of the incidents in the Phantom Detective novel lined up for the next issue. It's called DOOM ON SCHEDULE, and the title sure puts the finger on the way things developed in New England!

## A Gigantic Plot

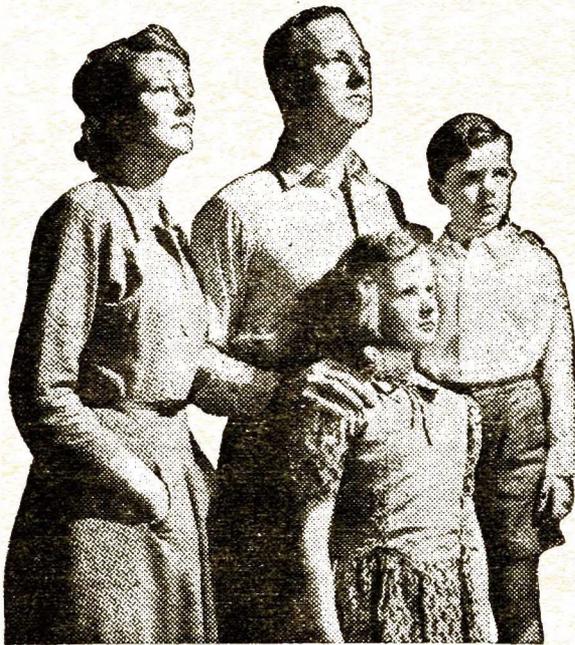
Sudden death and financial loss was the doom scheduled for the Maine and Vermont Railroad and its executives by a desperate criminal band, but when I moved in on the case, with the help of Steve Huston and Frank Havens, as well as the great power of the newspaper chain owned by Mr. Havens, the doom took a new path, one scheduled for the top-flight killers and parasites who spawned the whole crooked plot.

Huston first ran into the complications while on his vacation. Mr. Havens and I had a good laugh when he tried to explain that even on a fishing trip you could run into big scale murder. But it wasn't so funny after we had learned the details behind this plan to take over the network of transportation systems extending from the Atlantic to the

*(Continued on page 8)*



# What's ahead ?



A world of rapid changes and new economic problems, that's certain. Just as surely, however, there's *one* thing that will be unchanged. In the near future and the long future, the important positions will be held by *trained men*.

You want security for your family . . . freedom from financial worry . . . your own home . . . perhaps your own business. The surest route to them is specialized *training* that pays out in promotions and increased income.

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Name.....Age.....Home Address.....  
 City.....State.....Position.....Working Hours.....A.M. to.....P.M.

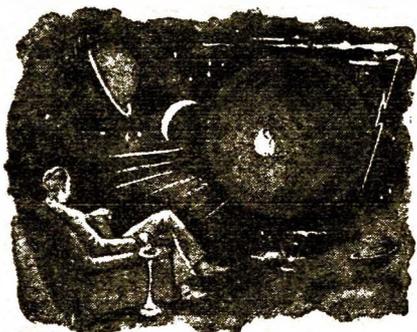
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**GEO. H. R. WAGNER**, 125 W. 86th St., N. Y.

## THE PHANTOM SPEAKS

*(Continued from page 6)*

Pacific. I don't have to emphasize what might happen if our railroad empire was subjected even to the slightest taint of criminal influence.

That was one reason I jumped into the case at once, and put all of my energy and experience into the job of solving the case and solving it quickly. Just how I succeeded along these lines is the story behind **DOOM ON SCHEDULE**. I hope you're going to like it.

### Friends of the Phantom

**L**AW enforcement is one of the prime factors in making and keeping our United States the great Nation it has been for the past one hundred and seventy years. We all support our officials conscientiously, but at the same time, there are any number of people who feel that law enforcement is rather remote from them, and unconsciously they are weakening the efforts of good citizens to keep this country the place we want to live in.

We believe that most right-thinking folks like to feel that they are a part of the law-abiding community. A good many of our readers have agreed with us, and through the past few years we have gathered them together in a group known as **FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM**. This united spirit pays real dividends in your own community, and helps in other ways.

If you'd like to become a **FRIEND OF THE PHANTOM**, send us a letter of application, giving your name and address, age and sex. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope for the return of your membership card. Phantom Emblems are also available for those who wish to have them. They are optional, however, and it is not necessary for a member to have one of them to be in good standing. Should you want one, however, they are available at a nominal charge of fifteen cents to cover mailing and handling of the attractive bronzed badge.

Membership in **FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM** carries with it no privileges in regard to local or Federal law-enforcement bodies. The club is solely a get-together for right thinking, law-abiding readers of this magazine.

### Our Mail Bag

**D**URING the past month, our mail man has been bringing us the most recent quota of communications, in between his more important job of getting ready for Christmas packages. Many of the letters are extremely

*(Continued on page 79)*

# MUSIC LESSONS

## for less than 7¢ a day!



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"I've always wanted to play the piano accordion," writes "H. E. from Canada. "But thought I'd never learn it. Then I read about your lessons. I don't know how to express my satisfaction."



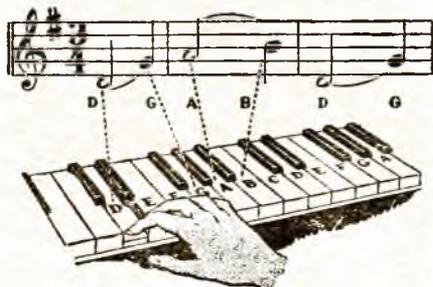
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"Enclosed is my last examination sheet for my course in Tenor Banjo. This completes my course. I have taken lessons before under teachers, but my instructions with you were by far the best."—A. O. Mann.

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From the above diagram you can see for yourself how easy it is to learn by this Print and Picture method. You simply look at the music and diagram and see which notes to strike. In a few minutes you will find yourself playing the famous "Merry Widow" Waltz."



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YOU SAY you'd love to learn music but can't afford a private teacher? Then listen to this . . . You can now learn to play your favorite instrument — as thousands of others have — for LESS THAN SEVEN CENTS A DAY! And that small sum covers everything — including sheet music! It doesn't take long, either. You can learn to play quicker than you ever dreamed possible!

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The secret of this method that has taught thousands to play is simple. It's based on the fact that the lessons not only tell you what to do, in the printed instructions. They actually show you — with large, clear pictures — what positions to take—every move to make. You read how to play a tune — you see how to play it—then you play it and hear how it goes. A teacher at your side couldn't make it more clear.

### NOTICE

Please don't confuse the U. S. School of Music method with any system of teaching music "by ear" or by trick charts. Our method teaches you to play by actual notes — not by any trick or number system.

### Print and Picture Sample — FREE

If you're really interested in learning music quickly and easily—and with little expense, send for our Free Booklet and Free Print and Picture Sample today. Don't wait. Fill in the coupon now—checking your favorite instrument. U. S. School of Music, 29412 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y. Forty-seventh year. (Est. 1888.)

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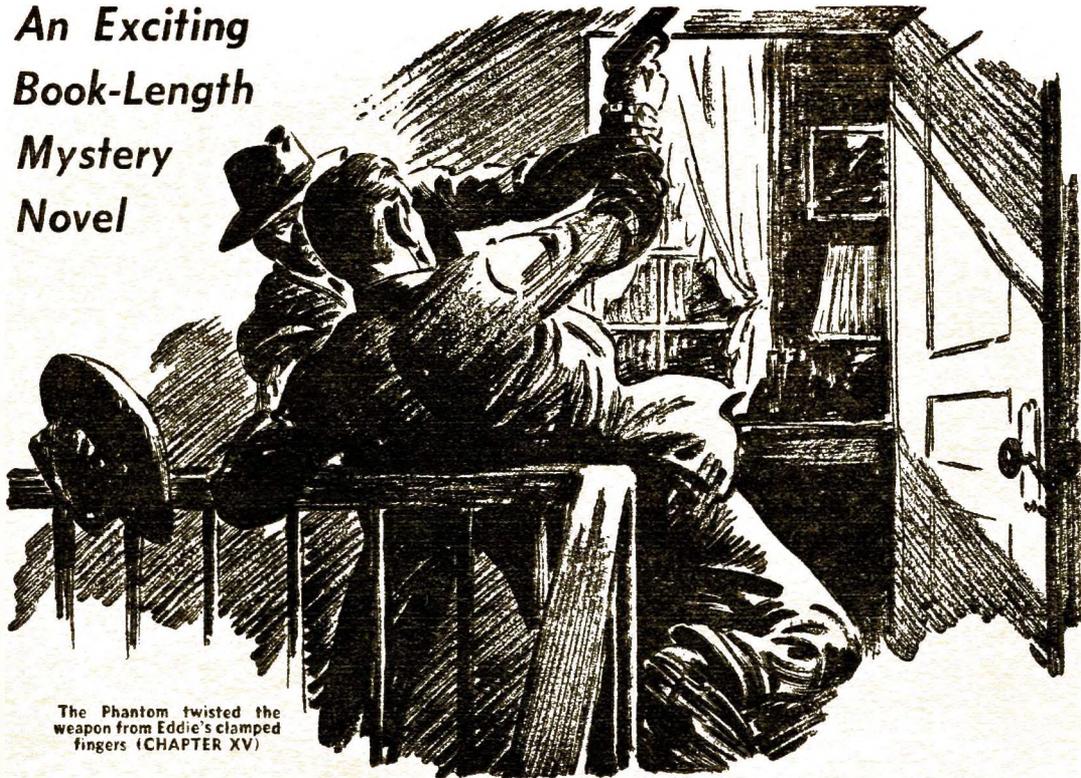
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Book-Length  
Mystery  
Novel



The Phantom twisted the weapon from Eddie's clamped fingers (CHAPTER XV)

# The Case of the POISON FORMULA

By ROBERT WALLACE

*When death-dealing drugs are insidiously substituted for an elixir of healing, the resulting chaos and tragedy call for the Phantom Detective's keen wit and fighting courage!*

## CHAPTER I

### PURVEYORS OF DEATH

**B**RAKES squealing, the taxi cut into Washington Square through the Arch from Fifth Avenue. It drew up before one of the dignified old houses on its north side. Before the cab had come fully to a stop the fare, a stout, agitated man with a red face and the bright, snappy eyes of a terrier, had the door open.

"Wait!" he directed the taxi driver.

Brownstone steps led to a vestibule door of plate-glass. Over a neat brass name-plate

that said "Dr. Lester Maitland," the man stabbed at the bell button with an unsteady finger.

The door was opened. A pretty, brown-haired girl in the crisp white uniform of a nurse looked out.

"Good afternoon. Mr. Drake," she murmured. She seemed surprised to see the man. "Won't you come in?"

Drake cut her short with an inarticulate exclamation of impatience. He started to push his way past her.

"Where's Maitland?" he demanded. "I've got to see him at once! Don't tell me he's busy. What I've got to say to him is more

# THE WORLD'S GREATEST SLEUTH BATTLES

important than anything he's doing! Tell him I've got to see him—before the police come down on him!"

The girl's brown eyes widened. The smile on her curved red lips seemed to freeze and grow stiff.

"The police!" she echoed incredulously.

"That's exactly what I said!" snapped the man Drake. "Tell Maitland I'm here!"

The girl turned and hurried down a short hall as the man moved into a small waiting room off the hall. She went through her own little cubicle, through a large, empty waiting room and into Dr. Maitland's office.

This was a spacious, gleaming white room which was equipped with every device known to modern science, in its eternal combat with disease. For the past year, however, Dr. Maitland had used it only infrequently. He had given up nearly all of his practice, for he had been devoting all of his time to the laboratory and his experiments.

As the pretty nurse hurried in, Dr. Rodney Heath, Dr. Maitland's young assistant, glanced up from the portable typewriter he was using. He caught the girl's hand as she was passing him and pulled her over to him. For an instant his arm went around her, his lips brushed the brown tide of her lustrous hair.

"Vicki!" he said, concerned. "What's the matter? You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"Where's Doctor Maitland?" Vicki Marsh asked him, her husky voice choked in her throat. "Andrew Drake's outside! Something terrible's the matter, from the way he's acting. And he said the police are coming here!"

**H**EATH abruptly released the girl, his attractive young face shadowed. With narrowing eyes he stared at her.

"What would the police be coming here for?" he said, his voice low.

"I don't know!" she cried. "But hurry! Get Doctor Maitland!"

For a minute longer Heath hesitated, then he turned toward double doors at the room's end. He opened them and disappeared from view beyond them.

The minute she was alone Vicki Marsh walked quickly to the portable typewriter Heath had been using. Swiftly she leaned over to see what had been written on the sheet of paper in the machine. The breath she drew, when she saw the words, was deep and rasping. She stood stock-still for a moment, brows furrowed in thought. Finally she wheeled around and started back to the waiting room and the agitated Andrew

Drake she had left there.

Beyond the double doors through which Dr. Heath had disappeared, he climbed a short flight of stairs. These led directly to the laboratory foyer where a small yellow light indicated the lab was in use. The light was Dr. Maitland's signal for privacy. When it was on it meant he was not to be disturbed. But with hardly a glance at it, Heath opened the door and walked in.

"Didn't you see the light, Rodney?" Lester Maitland asked. He had been boiling acid in a Fowler-L test tube, but shut off the burner. "What is it?"

"Mr. Drake is here, Doctor," said Rodney Heath. "Miss Marsh says he wants to see you at once."

"Tell him I'm busy," Maitland said shortly. "He knows I see no one without an appointment."

Maitland came out from a maze of apparatus-filled tables and cabinets. A man of medium size, he more than made up for his lack of height by his bearing and dignity. A shock of silver hair thatched his rather large head. He had the high, intellectual forehead of a scientist, deep-set dark eyes, a jutting nose and a wide, firm-lipped mouth.

"Mr. Drake says this is of the utmost importance, Doctor," Heath spoke fast. "He—he said something about the police being on their way here to see you."

Maitland frowned, slowly removing the heavy rubber gloves he wore.

"Police?" he repeated, and made a gesture with the gloves. "Tell Mr. Drake I'll see him in a few minutes."

Heath nodded and turned away. For a minute longer Maitland stood there, a frown deepening on his wrinkled face.

His mind went back over the past few months, and his connection with Andrew Drake, owner and president of the rich Octagon Chemical Company. Drake had purchased the formula for Maitland's latest discovery, a new medicine he called Benecin Five.

A remedy for the common cold, Benecin Five, went beyond all other prescriptions of its kind. Through the medium of exhaustive tests and experiments Maitland had proved it to be an almost infallible cure. It was as nearly a perfect one, he knew as human skill and the present knowledge of medicine and the argumentative causes of the common cold could make it.

From the first, Drake had been highly enthusiastic over the demonstrated results. Drake had believed Benecin Five was destined to play a highly important role in the

# TO FOIL A SINISTER LETHAL CONSPIRACY!

unceasing war science waged against disease. For the ordinary, so-called "common cold", with its familiar and decidedly unpleasant symptoms, had been declared by unquestioned authorities to be more destructive to the economic welfare of the nation than many other more complicated, and more serious ailments.

Medical journals and the newspapers, particularly the *Clarion*, owned by Frank Havens, noted publisher of a string of such papers from Coast to Coast, had heralded Maitland's discovery, praising the research physician for his work. Various manufacturing chemical companies, when the news had broken, had vied with each other in



THE PHANTOM

their efforts to purchase the marketing rights to Benecin Five.

But Maitland had turned the formula over to Andrew Drake's company because he believed its distribution would be wider and more complete than any other. The doctor wanted every sufferer to be able to obtain Benecin Five—in the smallest community, as well as in the largest city.

**T**HE Octagon Company had done that with Dr. Maitland's earlier discovery, a

medicine called Vanolene. This was a preparation designed to combat the far-reaching effects of rheumatism. It had been so successful and so well distributed that now, after considerable time had passed since its discovery, Vanolene had become a household word.

From the sale of it Andrew Drake had made a fortune.

Slowly, still deep in thought, Maitland took off his white cover-all apron, put on his coat and, leaving the laboratory, went down to his office. Vicki Marsh had returned, and was waiting for him. He glanced about the room with satisfaction. It was pleasant here. The late afternoon sun slanted through the draperies at the window and the noises of Washington Square seemed remote and hushed.

"Ask Mr. Drake to come in, Miss Marsh," the doctor said. "Then you can go. Tell Doctor Heath I won't need him any more today, either. By the way," he added, as the girl turned to the waiting room door, "did Stanley come back?"

"No, Doctor," she murmured. "You gave him the day off, you know."

She opened the door. Drake had not waited for her to return and was just outside.

He swiftly pushed a belligerent way into the office.

"Do you know what's happened, Maitland?" he said hoarsely, shaping a course for the Doctor's wide desk. "Do you know what kind of trouble I'm in—you're in?"

Before answering, Maitland glanced over at the door. Brown-haired Vicki Marsh stood there, listening curiously. He signified she was to leave, and waited until she had closed the door behind her before he turned to the irate man before him.

"Now you can tell me what this is all about," he said calmly.

"All about?" Drake exploded, and drew in an unsteady breath. "It's about plenty! Your fool-proof, perfect panacea for colds has kicked back! On the market only a short time and already Benecin Five has poisoned people all over the country!"

"Poisoned?" Maitland's silvery head jerked up abruptly.

Before he could speak again, Drake hurried on:

"That's what I said. Your formula blended whatever secret drugs you used into a fine lethal combination! You're a murderer! So am I, for having anything to do with it! It will be a miracle indeed if we don't get the chair!"

## CHAPTER II

## SHAPE OF SHADOW



EVERY drop of color drained out of Dr. Lester Maitland's face. As if he had been struck a physical blow, he slumped down in his swivel chair at the desk. Staring incredulously at the man before him Maitland leaned forward.

"Impossible!" he said firmly.

"If Benecin Five was compounded from my formula, exactly as specified, it could not be lethal!"

"Now you're trying to tell me it's my fault!" Drake interrupted, with an angry snarl. "That won't work, Maitland! I can prove that each ingredient in the formula was checked and rechecked before being used! You've ruined me! You've ruined your own reputation—forever!"

Dr. Lester Maitland lifted a hand. "One minute, Drake," he said. "Do you have the formula with you?"

"No, of course not!" snapped the manufacturer. "What do you think I do—carry such things around with me? And what has the formula to do with it anyhow?"

"Everything!" declared the doctor positively. "If Benecin Five has 'kicked back', as you say, only one thing can have happened. My formula has been tampered with or changed!"

Drake's eyes popped. "You mean—"

"Get the formula and let me look at it. You meet me at six-thirty at the Blue Pheasant, down the street—with the formula?"

"I'll be there!" Drake's jaws closed with a click, as he got to his feet and stalked to the office door. Maitland went with him and let him out onto the street. A few minutes later Maitland heard Drake's taxi pull away. The doctor turned from the front door and walked back to his office. Miss Marsh, the nurse, and Dr. Heath had left. John Stanley, the houseman who had the day off, wouldn't be back until late. Maitland was entirely alone in the house.

He sat down at his desk, thoughts crowding through his mind. Vague recollections of the offers that had poured in on him when the first news of Benecin Five had become public property, returned to make him speculative. Finally, out of the confusion of these rememberings, one recollection began to take definite form, and an idea that something should be done about it.

Reaching for a telephone directory, Maitland tore a slip from a white memo pad, put on his reading glasses and picked up a pencil. He ran his finger down the names under the W's in the book until he found the one he

wanted. When he had it he jotted a call number on the slip of paper and dialed the number.

"Worley Drug Company," a woman's voice said, when the connection came through.

"This is Doctor Lester Maitland. I'd like to speak with Mr. Worley."

There was a look of determination on his face when he finally cradled the phone. . . .

Andrew Drake was only a few minutes late, keeping his appointment with Dr. Maitland at the Blue Pheasant. The stout, florid-faced manufacturer had recovered some of his composure, but his eyes still snapped when he sat down and handed Maitland a folded sheet of paper.

"This is the formula that was in the briefcase the day I picked it up at your house," he said, challenge in his tone. "The day Doctor Heath handed it to me in your waiting room. It's exactly as it came to me."

Maitland smoothed out the paper. Holding it to the small glow of the table light he studied the typewritten lines. Watching, Drake saw the doctor's face change as he read. A furrow creased his brow, lines from nose to mouth deepened as his face grew set. He looked up abruptly.

"Just as I thought, Drake," he said positively. "This isn't my formula!"

"It's the one I got from you!" declared Drake. "You can't tell me—"

Maitland looked across the table steadily. "Someone who knows medicine has changed it!" he said flatly. "Changed it with diabolical cunning. No wonder it broke down. This is the work of a fiend, Drake! Foisting a thing like this on innocent people is—murder!"

Andrew Drake ran a fat finger around the edge of his collar. A dew of perspiration made his red face glisten. He tried to say something, but words refused to come. Choking, deep in his throat, he drew in a hard breath and made a hopeless gesture.

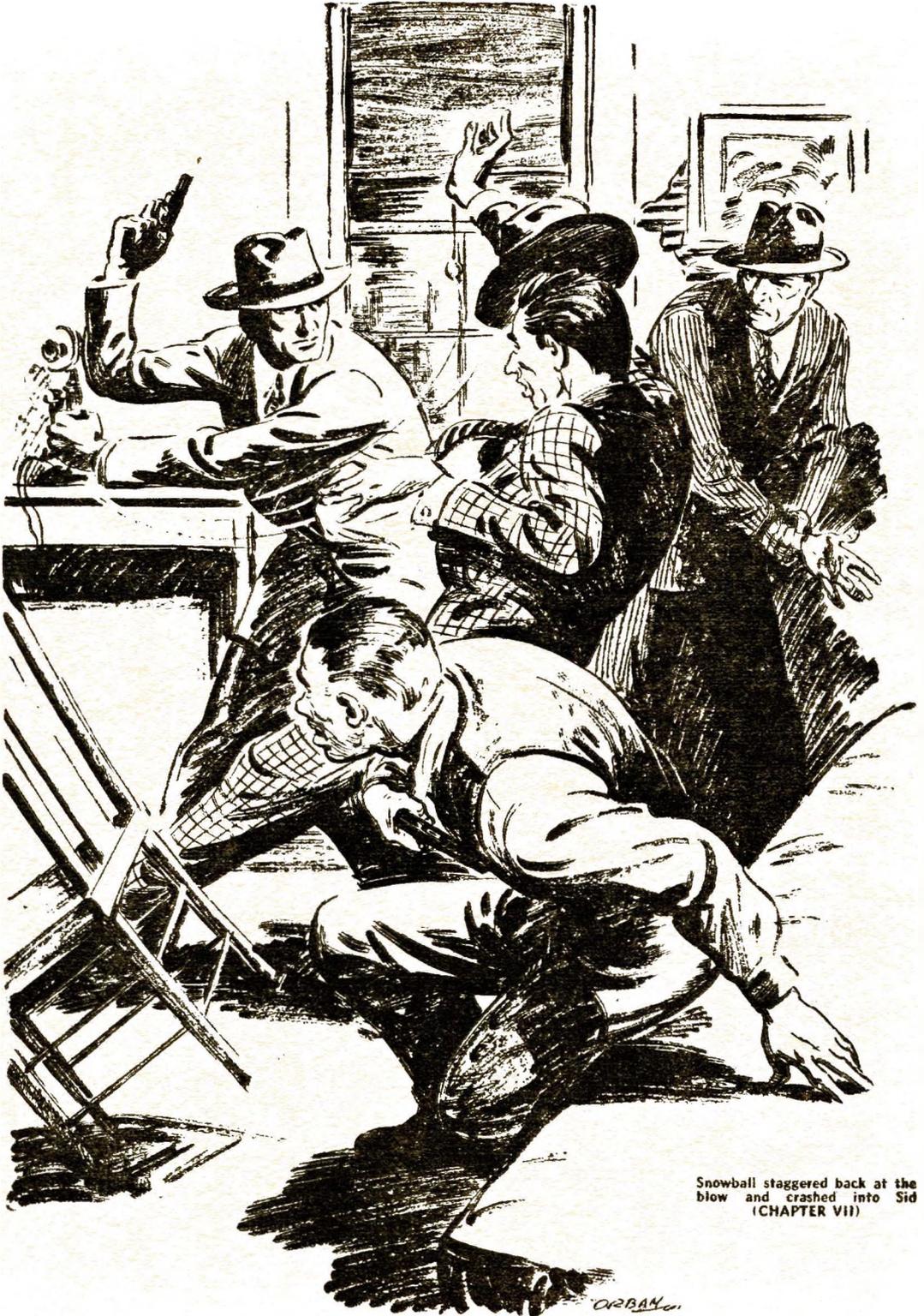
"What are we going to do?" he asked hoarsely.

**M**AITLAND folded the formula and put it in his pocket. His aristocratic face was like stone when he raised it and looked at the man opposite.

"I'm going to get in touch with Frank Havens immediately," he said grimly. "He's a friend of mine, an old friend."

"You mean the publisher of the *Clarion*?" Drake expelled the breath he had held, in a gusty wheeze. "What can he do? We don't want any more publicity. This thing is going to break in the papers any minute, as it is! And it's going to be bad—bad!"

"Havens," Maitland reminded Drake, as if his words were self-explanatory, "is the contact between crime and the Phantom Detec-



Snowball staggered back at the blow and crashed into Sid (CHAPTER VII)

ORBAY

tive!" He got up from his chair. "And this, if there ever was a case worthy of the Phantom's talents, is it! I'll telephone Havens now."

He was back in five minutes, looking slightly relieved. Drake, slumped in his chair, stared up at him apathetically.

"What did Havens say?" he mumbled.

"He'll get in touch with the Phantom—tell him what's happened. Havens thinks this matter is important enough even for a detective as famous as the Phantom to look into. He'll find out what's happened, how the formulas were switched, who is back of all this!"

Drake smiled cynically. "You've got a lot of confidence in him, Maitland. Well, I hope it isn't misplaced. I hope your celebrated Phantom can keep us both out of the chair! Personally, I don't feel so confident—or any too good. . . ."

It was close to nine o'clock when Dr. Maitland went up the brownstone steps of his old house in Washington Square. Moonlight painted the windows with a silver brush. He fumbled for his keys, found the one to the front door and snapped on the hall light. His bedroom suite was on the second floor, in the rear of the house, and he had moved toward the stairway leading to it when he paused. He listened for a minute for some sign that might tell him John Stanley, his houseman, had returned. But nothing disturbed the heavy, tomblike silence that seemed to fold heavy wings over the place.

The last thing Maitland did every night was make sure the laboratory windows were closed. That was Stanley's job, but the man was careless and sometimes forgot. Maitland went down the hall, through the waiting room and into his office.

Moonlight, lancing in, gave the gloom a spectral glow. It was bright enough for Maitland to see his desk. He stopped there to put his reading glasses down on the blotter. Something white attracted his attention. A handkerchief was on the rug, not far from the desk. A small, crumpled handkerchief, probably dropped by Miss Marsh, the nurse.

Maitland was about to stoop to pick it up when he suddenly stiffened.

Behind him stood a tall, glass-fronted and glass-shelved cabinet. In it he kept a complete set of surgical instruments, souvenirs of his past, things he had not used since he had given up his practice and gone in for laboratory experimentation. From a point close to the cabinet, suddenly Maitland's strained ears detected a sound.

The sound of breathing, slow and deep!

Quickly he turned. "Who's there?" he called sharply.

His voice came back to him in a fluty echo. For some reason Maitland felt a strange chill begin to creep up his spine. Never, in his en-

tire life, had much of anything frightened him greatly. But he was frightened now, shaken inwardly by some eerie threat for which he could find no name for or understand.

"Who's there?" he repeated, more sharply.

Still no answer. Nothing but the breathing, which now was quickening to a faster tempo. Fascinated, and held motionless by the peril of the unknown, Dr. Maitland saw a shape of shadow move out from the side of the cabinet. A crouching shape, with an outstretched hand gripping something that glinted significantly in the moonlight.

The doctor tried to cry out, to wheel around and dodge the lengthening shadow gliding across the floor toward him! But he couldn't shake off the queer paralysis that rooted him to the spot. Then, in the next frantic heartbeat, an arm curved out of the silvery murk and fastened around his neck. At the same moment the hand with the glinting object dropped down, then came up at an angle in a short, sweeping arc!

Without a sound Maitland pitched forward.

The shape of shadow, hand empty now, waited motionless for a round of hurrying seconds. Then on quick, quiet feet, it moved toward the waiting room, the hall, and the front door beyond.

## CHAPTER III

### INTERRUPTED WEEK-END



HE dance at the Indian-Harbor Yacht Club was coming to an end. The name orchestra that had been brought up to Connecticut from a Manhattan night spot, finished off the evening with the thump of drums and the catcall of a clarinet. Flushed and starry-eyed, Myra Thayer looked up at

her last partner, pouting a little.

"We just start to have fun and they turn it off," she complained. "Can't you do something about it, Dick?"

Richard Curtis Van Loan, who had been the lovely girl's dance partner, laughed.

"Sure," he said. "We can come back next week. This orchestra is scheduled to play here Friday night again."

Myra shrugged and laughed back at him, clinging to his arm as they moved toward the coat room. Like so many other girls of her age and social position, she had a great admiration for Dick Van Loan. He was so attractive, so charming, so witty and worldly. It seemed a shame that having all that money his father had left him had made him an idler, a playboy and dilettante.

Many of Myra's friends had expressed the same thought, and further had offered an

opinion that if the fascinating Richard had put his mind to it and gone into some profession he would have been a bright and shining success. As it was, his one fault, so far as most of his friends and acquaintances were concerned, seemed to be that he had so much money that all he had to do was amuse himself, to find something more and more to en-

tertain him and fill in the hours and days of the crowded, date-filled existence he led.



tain him and fill in the hours and days of the crowded, date-filled existence he led.

Myra's father, Reginald Thayer, Chairman of the Board of one of the largest railroad systems, had been slightly caustic whenever she had brought up the subject of young Van Loan. "A loafer, my dear," Thayer had insisted. "A male butterfly. Not a serious thought in his head."

Thayer himself was a self-made man who had hacked out his millions by sheer driving power. He had had no father to leave him a vast fortune, as had been the case with Van Loan. So Thayer was always contemptuous of those who had inherited their fortunes and drifted pleasantly through life.

"I don't mind you going dancing with him," he told his daughter, "but don't get any romantic ideas. Richard Curtis Van Loan is one man I don't want for a son-in-law."

Myra was thinking of that now as she and Van Loan were waiting in line for their wraps. The dance had been an informal affair at this yacht club which was only about three miles from the Thayer estate. And Van was Myra's guest—or, rather, her mother's, for Mrs. Thayer had asked Dick Van Loan down for the week-end. Myra was looking forward to three exciting days of his companionship, and this dance had been the beginning of what she was sure would be glamorous hours.

What her father had said she discounted

by half. He would not hold out against her. He never did. She was an only child and what she wanted she usually got. And she wanted Richard Curtis Van Loan. Not for a week-end—but for always!

Van, perfectly aware of what was going on in her busy young mind, found himself secretly amused. Myra was so obvious. He liked her in a casual, friendly way. She was a swell dancer, she played sharp golf, fair enough tennis, and could sail a boat like a boy. But marrying Myra was the furthest thing from Van Loan's thoughts.

There were reasons, which only one man in the world knew, outside of Van himself, which denied him all thoughts of matrimony, though none could ever have guessed that. There were times when he sometimes felt a yearning for domesticity, for a life with the "one girl." But always he had sternly forced such thoughts from his mind, even when he was with Muriel Havens, the girl who unknowingly held his heart, and whose father was the man who held his secret—the reason he would not marry.

And certainly, he thought. Myra would have realized what little chance she had ever to be Mrs. Richard Curtis Van Loan, if she knew how even now he was unconsciously comparing her with Muriel Havens. But Myra was an amusing companion, he admitted. Van looked forward to a pleasant week-end.

Van and Myra got their things finally, and strolled onto the club-house porch. The driveway was filled with departing cars. To the left the harbor made a semi-circle, paved with moonlight. Yachts were at an anchor there, among them Reginald Thayer's *Buccaneer*—well named, Van thought. Smaller craft bobbed on the water.

Van had time only for a glance at the harbor before Myra pressed his arm, and said: "Here's Joseph with the car. Dick."

A BIG limousine, with its radio going, had wheeled up from the parking space. Joseph, a dark-skinned chauffeur who had evidently been dozing to the radio's music, touched his cap and got out to open the rear door.

Van handed Myra in, and followed her. The interior of the car had a garden fragrance supplied by roses in a silver wall vase. The upholstery was soft and yielding. But as Van sank down beside the girl, all thoughts of the car's luxury was swept from his mind by the quiet voice he heard coming out of the radio's speaker under the cowl. A voice that was saying, almost monotonously, and with clocklike regularity: "Calling the Phantom Detective! . . . Calling the Phantom Detective! . . . The Phantom is wanted."

Joseph wedged himself under the wheel

and shut the door.

"For goodness' sake, close that thing off, Joseph," Myra said plaintively. "Phantom Detective? How anyone can listen to those silly blood-and-thunder serials is beyond me."

"Yes, Miss Myra," the chauffeur murmured.

The intoning voice was snapped off. Joseph shifted gears and the car headed for the tall gates at the end of the drive.

It was too dark for Myra to see Dick Van Loan's face. Had she been given a good view of it, though, the expression on it might have perplexed her. For, at the first words he had heard coming out of the radio, Van's eyes had suddenly narrowed and his mouth had tightened. At the same moment his tall, athletic figure had seemed to grow tense and taut.

He replied absently to something Myra was saying after the radio was snapped off. But he was not really conscious of his own words, for his mind was far way from the scented car, the girl beside him, and the road over which the tires hummed.

At that moment Richard Curtis Van Loan's thoughts were back in Manhattan. They were centered on the tall peak of the *Clarion* Building. For he knew that at its very apex a red light was burning, the private signal that Frank Havens blazoned the night with whenever he summoned the Phantom Detective across time and across space!

As the only one man in the world knew the identity of the Phantom Detective, Frank Havens, millionaire owner-publisher of the *Clarion*, was also the possessor of Richard Curtis Van Loan's closely guarded secret—that Dick Van Loan, known only as a Park Avenue playboy, Gotham's most eligible bachelor, and a social butterfly, was in fact the famous Phantom, menace of the underworld and Nemesis of crime whose name and famed exploits were blazoned nationally and internationally.

Amazing as it seemed, Dick Van Loan's very success in the rôle of the world's most famous detective, was due in no small part to this dual personality. The gilded life he led was a perfect shield for the activities of the Phantom. Behind its nacreous shimmer he could move freely, deady and unfailing, in his unceasing battle against the elements of the underworld that again and again were pitted against him unsuccessfully.

And now, once again, his special talents were being called into play. For Frank Havens was calling him!

Van's mind worked fast. It was not going to be simple, slipping away from the silken bondage of the pampered young lady beside him. He realized well enough how much Myra Thayer had looked forward to this week-end, and he sensed the plans she had

made to draw him into her net.

In this case, ordinary excuses would not work. He could think of no excuse that would be sufficient to lessen her disappointment. But he had to get away. That had to be done, and done rapidly. Manhattan was miles to the south, it was well past midnight, and the insistent radio call had been imperative.

A dozen thoughts came to him, only to be discarded. By the time they reached Sundial Court, as Reginald Thayer called his place, Van was still without any tangible idea of how to make a graceful exit.

He smiled ironically. When in his rôle of Phantom Detective, he was never at a loss for split-second decisions. Now, as Richard Curtis Van Loan, fearing to offend a gray-eyed girl, he floundered mentally like one of the fish hauled out of the blue waters of the harbor behind them. Yet he reminded himself again that he had to do something and do it swiftly.

**M**YRA, high heels tapping on the polished foyer floor, swung around when they went in to the house.

"Jepson has had a fire started in the library!" she exclaimed eagerly. "Cozy, isn't it, Dick? Let's sit by it for a while. You can't be tired enough to want to retire right away." She smiled, her red lips turning up at the corners provocatively. "You see, I know something of your reputation, Mr. Van Loan. You never turn in until sunrise, they say . . . Well, hardly ever."

"Just a minute until I run up to my room," he said. "Want to refill my cigarette lighter. Can't seem to get used to any other than my own."

He didn't wait for a reply, but turned and hurried down the hall toward the stairs. But he did not climb them. Instead, he stopped short when, near the paneled dining room, he heard voices in the butler's pantry adjoining it. With a glance back over his shoulder, he hurried into the darkened dining room, across it, and to the swinging door. Pushing it open, he looked in. "Jepson?" he said to the butler in a low tone.

"Yes, Mr. Van Loan." Jepson turned.

"Can I see you for a minute?"

A bill changed hands after the butler had stepped into the dining room where Van whispered some quick but concise instructions. He had known he would have no difficulty with Jepson, for Van was a keen reader of character. At first sight of the Thayer butler he had catalogued the man—one who would not object to making a little money on the side. Probably Jepson was doing a profitable business with the grocer and the butcher, the liquor dealer and the caterer who provided the Thayer household with its many necessities.

That was an old, established custom with many such servitors, as well as with yacht captains and stewards. With many it had come to be looked upon as quite legitimate, as earned perquisites of the particular job, in fact. While Van had never agreed, he of course knew of the custom and in his work as the Phantom it often was—convenient.

Van slipped out of the dining room and upstairs. Returning in a moment with his lighter obviously displayed, he went back to the library. He didn't have long to wait. He was hardly seated beside Myra before the fire when Jepson loomed up in the door, coughing discreetly.

"Begging your pardon, Mr. Van Loan," he murmured. "But there was a telephone call for you a few moments before you came in."

"For me?" Van asked curiously.

"Yes, sir. And very urgent, I was informed. A matter of illness, I believe. You are to call this number."

Jepson took a scrap of paper from his pocket.

Myra's gray eyes darkened with dawning frustration. But she said nothing when Van



FRANK  
HAVENS

excused himself to go to the telephone. After all, illness was something no one could rail against. She drew her symmetrical legs up under her, cupping her chin in the petal-pink palm of her hand while she waited for him to come back.

One look at Van's face was enough to make Myra sigh disappointedly when he returned.

"Well, let's have it, Dick," she said.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," he told her apologetically. "But I've got to leave immediately. He's very ill. Crisis expected before morn-

ing. I've asked Jepson to pack my things and get my car out. Myra, I can't begin to tell you how sorry I am. But," he added cheerfully, "there'll be other week-ends, lots of them."

It wasn't until he had said good-bye in his usual ingratiating fashion, and his big black car had left Sundial Court, that Myra remembered she hadn't asked who the "he" was who was so desperately ill.

## CHAPTER IV

### METAMORPHOSIS



DICK VAN LOAN, at the wheel of his car, drove with lightning speed. There was no other car in existence that he knew of to equal this specially made, super-charged job, with its bullet-proof glass, and the secret tonneau he had designed himself, to hold some of the Phantom's changes of costume and make-up materials. Those were things which might be needed when there was not time for more leisurely preparations, and a swift change of rôle was called for.

Along the parkway now the black car flashed like a meteor in flight, the motor humming, with its aviation-type gasoline. Connecticut dropped away and he was soon over the New York line.

He stopped on the road south of White Plains when he reached an all-night garage. From there he telephoned Frank Havens.

His old friend, the original sponsor of the Phantom Detective, had been waiting in the *Clarion* office.

"Where are you, Phantom?" he asked eagerly. When Van explained, Havens told him crisply: "Good! I was sure you would get the hurry call. I'll be waiting for you at Toni's."

"Be with you in thirty minutes," Van promised, and hung up.

Before driving back to the parkway again, he stopped the big car on a stretch of deserted road. Driving in off the shoulders, Van cut the motor and lights and went around to the rear of the sedan, got in, and closed the door after him.

There he drew the shades, touched the button that automatically lowered the secret compartment that fitted into the rear of the front seat. The flick of another switch turned on indirect lighting. He settled himself before the built-in dressing table with its mirrored lid that let down like a shelf, and went rapidly to work.

It was necessary, even for an appointment with Frank Havens, that Richard Curtis Van Loan disappear before the Phantom put in an appearance. Neither of them ever took any

chances on anyone suspecting the identity of the Phantom, or tying him up in any way with the wealthy Van Loan.

A master of the make-up art, since he had schooled himself in that, as well as in many other lines that would aid him in his detective work, Van swiftly worked a metamorphosis. The handsome face of Richard Curtis Van Loan faded out under the deft strokes made by the skin-pastel pencils he used with experienced certainty. Reflected in the glass, a new face began to emerge.

It was the countenance of a man in the late thirties, perhaps, one with a touch of early gray at the temples, but with no outstanding characteristics to impress themselves upon any onlooker and so warrant a second glance. It was the first face that had come to mind with Van, in whose brain were uncounted such countenances upon which he could call at a moment's notice—as befitted an artist in make-up who had earned the title of the Man of a Thousand Faces.

Artful lines, simulating wrinkles, went around the corners of his eyes and ran from nose to mouth. A plastic denture, feather-light and perfect-fitting, gave a new expression to his mouth.

From the wardrobe compartment under the cushions of the rear seat, Van then took out a rather seedy gray business suit. He slipped into it, after folding and putting away the garments he had worn at the yacht club dance, pulled on a worn felt hat, and studied his reflected image with critical intentness.

He nodded, satisfied. Now for the other essential items of his disguise. His automatic, with the clip filled, was ready for its shoulder scabbard. His well-made domino mask he kept rolled in one pocket and in another one, a hidden one, was what was perhaps the most important thing of all in his work.

That was the small disk of platinum set with diamonds in the form of a tiny domino mask. This was the Phantom's own badge of identity—his trade-mark that police all over the world, before the war, and now in every place where the Phantom's services were called upon, had learned to respect.

Finished with the disguise that made an entirely different man of him, Van pushed the make-up table back into place. Answering to pressed buttons, the lights went out, the shades up.

Under the wheel again, he touched the starter and the car thrummed off toward the cement strips of the motor parkway and the slumbering city at its termination. And to whatever new adventure in crime lay ahead to be solved by the Phantom Detective.

True to the promise he had made over the phone, it was no more than some thirty minutes later when the Phantom entered Toni's where Frank Havens was awaiting him. The

Sixth Avenue restaurant and grill was fairly convenient for Havens whenever he had to meet Van Loan on emergency matters, and preferred to have a rendezvous outside of his office. For this reason the publisher maintained a private room on the second floor where conversation was possible without the chance of being overheard or listened in on.

**T**ONI, the urbane proprietor, had become accustomed to Havens' "friends." They were of all types and descriptions, and Toni supposed, when he gave the matter a thought at all, that the publisher was contacting them as the sources of some news information. But what Toni didn't know was that each man who appeared there was always the same man—the Phantom.

Toni led Van to the floor above when he asked for the *Clarion* publisher, knocked on a certain door, and when Havens called out, he opened it.

"Party to see you, Mr. Havens," he said. "Okay to send him in?"

"Please, Toni."

Toni made a ceremonious bow and the Phantom, amused, passed him and went into the private room. Toni shut the door from the outside, and Van waited until his footsteps died away.

Frank Havens, studying the seedy, shabbily dressed man who had come in, nodded approval when the Phantom gave him the old identification signal. That was the apparently unconscious pulling of an ear lobe.

"A clever disguise, Phantom," Havens complimented. "No one could ever possibly recognize you!"

They shook hands and Van dropped down in a chair across from his friend. A single glance was enough to show him Havens had an anxious, worried look.

"What's happened, Mr. Havens?" he asked.

"Phantom," Havens said—he never called Van by his right name when in his Phantom rôle, "you know I never summon you unless it's a matter of vital importance. Well, I think this is. It concerns an old friend of mine, a Doctor Lester Maitland. Possibly you've heard of him."

"Many times," the Phantom said promptly. "Maitland is the physician-scientist who gave the world Vanolene, one of the most efficacious remedies of its kind for the after effects of rheumatism. I have heard that Maitland retired from active practice some years ago to devote all his time to research. He is probably one of our most brilliant men of medicine. He'll go down in history with Madame Curie and Pasteur, for he's a magnificent crusader in the war against disease."

"Maitland's in trouble, serious trouble," Frank Havens continued. "He telephoned me early this evening, explaining what had hap-

peared and begging me to get in touch with you. I promised him I would."

"What has happened?" the Phantom repeated, keenly interested now.

"Just this," Havens answered, and went on to explain everything Dr. Maitland had told him concerning Benecin Five and its unfortunate break-down.

The Phantom listened without comment. Medicine had always interested him, and he had a deep-seated knowledge of chemicals. Chemistry in all its branches always had been one of his hobbies. Had he chosen the science as a profession, he would have gone rapidly to the top of its ranks. And like so many other millions of readers of papers and magazines, he was fully aware of Maitland's latest discovery. He had read all the glowing accounts of the benefits to be attained from Benecin Five.

That had been before it had been put on the market.

As he listened to what Havens said now, his eyes narrowed. Switched formulas! A poison drug instead of a beneficial remedy! Some arch-fiend working in a cloak of secrecy to ruin a man whose life's work had been one of devotion to the cause of humanity! Some devil, not caring if, during the process, he was responsible for the deaths of innocent thousands. The Phantom's mouth hardened.

"Those are the particulars," Havens concluded. "Maitland wants to see you as soon as possible. He has the altered formula, the one Drake used in his drug house. He called me again after he had met Drake early this evening, and told me he had it. He is waiting up for you, because I had an idea you would want to see him, Phantom. Not only because I ask you to, but because of the enormity of this crime, the facts that hundreds of helpless people have already been poisoned, due to the evil forces at work—and no telling what other murder may be done."

"I'll see Doctor Maitland immediately." Van got up. "But surely warning has been issued to those handling the medicine, hasn't it?"

"It has been broadcast from every radio station in the country." Havens shook his head. "But there are people who haven't heard it, who may never hear it. People in small towns or country places who don't have time to listen to the radio to any great extent, and are pretty isolated. Naturally, the sale of the product has been stopped. But even so—"

"I understand." The Phantom nodded. "What about the newspapers? I haven't seen anything in them about Benecin Five's failure."

"You will—tomorrow," Havens promised grimly. "The F.B.I. wanted a few days' black-

out on the news. But the *Clarion's* first edition, in the morning, will carry the story. Steve Huston"—he mentioned a young reporter whom the Phantom knew well and liked—"did an excellent job on it."

A FEW more words and the Phantom left Frank Havens and Toni's. His next stop was Washington Square, Dr. Lester Maitland's house.

The Square, washed with moonlight when he reached it, had an Old World appearance. The march of business had encroached upon its venerable purlieus, but the row of houses the Phantom approached, after he had parked his car a street away, had all the charm and dignity of an earlier day. It didn't need much imagination to go back to that time when the city was young—to hear the clatter of hoofs on the cobbles, to see gaslight behind ornate lace curtains, and catch in retrospect the leisurely air of peace and well-being this place once had known.

The Phantom went up brownstone steps. He glanced at a well-polished brass name-plate, pushed the bell above it and stepped into the vestibule, the door of which was open. Through the glass in the upper half of the hall door he could see that a light burned in the hall, but no one came to answer his ring.

Again he rang the bell, listening to the far-off echo of its peal. When it was obvious he was not to be admitted, the Phantom's brows went together in a thoughtful frown.

Doors, however, never barred his way when he felt it imperative to enter a place. He slipped a hand in his pocket and drew out what he called his master-key. This, the ingenious invention of a famous Viennese locksmith, was a key that solved the secret of every lock into which it was inserted.

The Phantom's fingers twirled the adjustment on the key's shank that spread its flanges into the wards and tumblers. Pressure told him when to stop. He turned it, the lock clicked over, and the front door of Dr. Maitland's house swung open on its well-oiled hinges.

Pocketing the key, the Phantom stepped inside the hall, stopped still, and strained his ears. No sound except the night breeze at the windows disturbed the heavy, leaden silence. He went down the short hall, opened a door that led into what was apparently a large waiting room and again stopped, to look curiously around the place.

Off to the left was a shallow alcove containing a desk, telephone and closet. The door of the closet was open. The moonlight, coming in the windows, made it light enough for the Phantom to see without using his flash. A nurse's crisp white uniform hung there.

He moved his gaze to another door. That, the Phantom decided, must open into Dr. Maitland's office.

It did.

Entering the office, the Phantom switched on his torch. For in the room the draperies were drawn at the windows and the gloom banked up in impenetrable shadows. Slowly the Phantom's beam of light roved around until it found the wall switch. He shrugged. There had been a light on in the hall, so there was no reason why there shouldn't be a light on in here.

The Phantom snapped the switch and blinked as electricity dawned in a green-shaded desk lamp and a circular, ceiling fixture that threw off clear, indirect lighting.

Waiting until his eyes became accustomed to the brightness of the dazzling white room, he looked around—and stiffened. His gaze, keen and narrowed, had darted to a foot protruding beyond the edge of the desk. He drew a short, quick breath.

There was a man lying crumpled on the floor there, a man with silvery hair and an ashen face! A man who, the next instant, the Phantom saw had been murdered.

## CHAPTER V

### SCALPEL



**C**AREFUL to touch nothing, the Phantom moved in closer to the body on the floor. An ugly welter of blood made a small pool on the rug. Then the Phantom, mouth grim, recognized the murdered man as Dr. Lester Maitland, whose face had been pictured

many times in the newspapers and medical journals. The man who might have saved the doctor had come too late.

The Phantom breathed faster, his mind crowded with what Frank Havens had told him at Toni's concerning the poison formula. Was what he looked at now another sample of the handiwork of those responsible for the failure of Benecin Five? Had the same forces reached out to silence Dr. Maitland?

While the Phantom asked himself the dire questions, his strained gaze took in the details of death. He saw at once that the doctor had been stabbed with a scalpel. It appeared plain that the surgical implement had been taken from a glass-shelved cabinet which stood in the rear of the desk, for one of its doors was slightly ajar. The scalpel had been driven at an upward angle into the cardiac regions, and the Phantom knew that death must have been instantaneous.

The position of the death weapon interested the Phantom. Someone who knew the most vulnerable spot into which to drive the keen implement had directed its course into

the doctor's body. And the Phantom's wide medical knowledge told him that the blood which was oozing from the wound was probably nothing in comparison with the internal hemorrhage the thrust of the knife had caused. Also, there was hardly a question but that it would be found that the scalpel had been wiped clean of the prints of the fingers that had gripped it.

The Phantom, who had been kneeling beside the body as he made his swift examination, got to his feet. It seemed certain to him that Dr. Lester Maitland had been dead for some hours.

He ran his eye around the office. Where there was murder, there were always clues. No one in the world had as yet committed the perfect crime. There always were clues left by a killer, no matter how careful his plans, no matter how minutely each detail had been executed. It was as if Fate, not to be cheated, left certain signs and guideposts for a clever brain to find and follow.

The Phantom picked up from the floor a small, crumpled handkerchief. Delicate perfume drifted from it. He spread it open, noticing a faint dab of lipstick, and the initial "V" in one corner. He put the handkerchief in his pocket, and checked the windows. Each was closed and locked. The killer, therefore, must have come into the room through one of the doors, either the door opening into the waiting room, through which the Phantom had come himself, or through the now closed double doors on the west side of the office.

And whoever had entered must have done it silently, and have surprised the doctor, because there had been no struggle, nothing disturbed, except that the swivel desk chair was overturned. Maitland must have done that when the knife struck him and he collapsed.

The Phantom started a systematic investigation. First, Maitland's pockets. He was recalling that Frank Havens had told him that the doctor, on the telephone, had said that Andrew Drake had given him a copy of the formula from which the spurious Benecin Five had been compounded. But there was no formula in Maitland's pockets.

The Phantom moved to the desk. Only a pair of tortoise-rimmed reading glasses and a slip of paper from a memo pad were on the blotter. On the paper was a penciled telephone number. The Phantom helped himself to that and went on with his search.

In minutes more he turned up something of extreme interest to him—a piece of broken eyeglass lens which he found close to the glass-shelved cabinet. It was half under the rug, glinting in the light.

The Phantom eased it out and examined it intently. Not Maitland's glasses. His were intact, on the desk. The killer's?

Studying the piece of lens, the Phantom saw that it was faintly tinted, the kind of lens especially prescribed for a pair of very near-sighted eyes. He added the bits of glass to the crumpled handkerchief in his pocket, then turned his attention to the pair of doors across the room.

Opening them, he saw a short flight of stairs that led up to a laboratory. The Phantom went up the stairs and entered the lab, his torch on again. All around him were varied scientific apparatuses which Maitland had used in his experimental work. An elaborate and complete set of paraphernalia to gladden the heart of anyone interested in therapeutics.

FOR an interested minute or so the Phantom steeped himself in the atmosphere of the laboratory. In a way, it was almost like a shrine to him, remembering that from this place had come Vanolene, one of the great medical discoveries of the age. Here, too, Benecin Five had been born—not the deadly formula that had reached the market after it had been tampered with, but the cure that was to have set a crown on all of Maitland's past achievements.

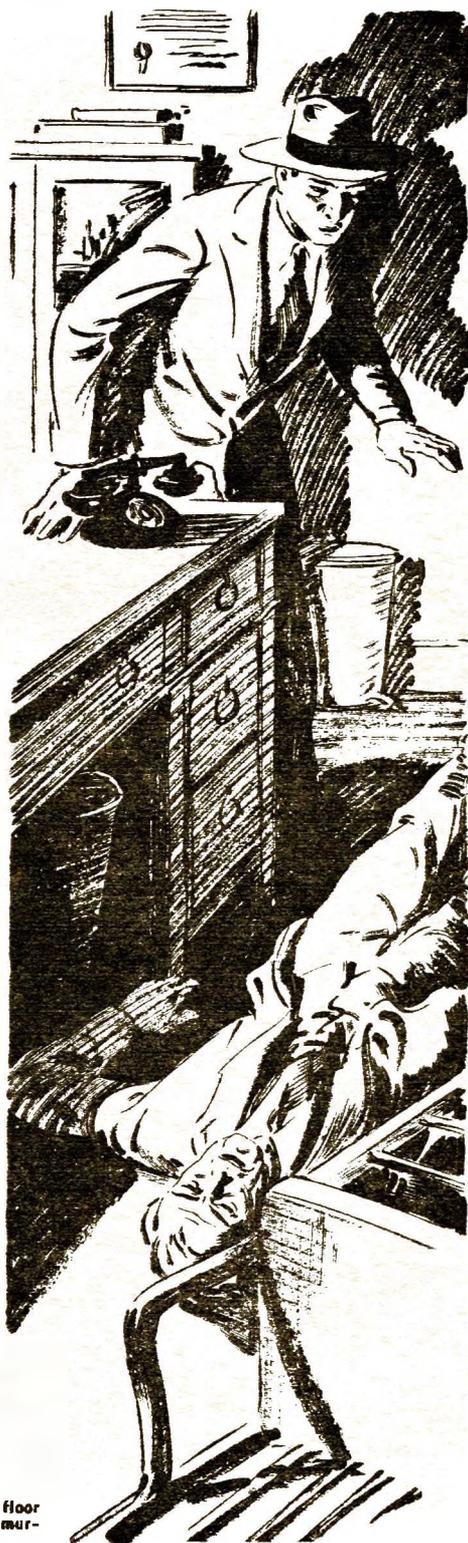
Standing there motionless, the Phantom vowed that the murdered man in the office below would not have died in vain. His greatest triumph, diabolically altered though it had been, would some day return in its original form, to aid humanity as Maitland had planned it would!

Meanwhile, the Phantom saw the path of retribution he meant to follow stretching out ahead of him in its twisted, shadowy labyrinth. It wouldn't be easy, penetrating the black curtains cloaking the nefarious forces that had already struck twice. Once, with the switched formula. Now, with the deadly scalpel! Still, the Phantom welcomed the challenge to pit his wits against those who had sought sinister satisfaction for some fancied wrong, frustration, or loss of prestige by destroying a man's good name and reputation.

Switching off his torch, the Phantom jerked up his head. A sudden sound had come to him through the night's quiet—the wail of a police prowler's siren turning into the Square and coming closer.

The Phantom wheeled around. The police? Inspector Gregg and his men? But, if so, how did they know about the man on the floor behind the desk? Who had notified them?

Quickly and quietly, the Phantom made up his mind. There would be no time for him to identify himself to Gregg, to make



A man was lying on the floor  
—a man who had been murdered (CHAPTER IV)

lengthy explanations, go through the ordinary police business routine. He had to work swiftly on other matters without delay.

He listened again. The car had stopped directly in front of the house and now he could hear voices. He swung around to one of the casement windows in the laboratory. With catlike agility, he went over the sill. Lowering himself with one hand, he used the other to pull the window shut. Then he let himself go, dropping into the soft loam of a flower bed that paralleled one side of the house.

Several wooden fences that enclosed the back yards of the adjoining houses had to be scaled before the Phantom found an open alley that led him through to the street. But he made it without having been discovered.

Two blocks away he found a drug-store that was still open. He slid a nickel into one of the booth telephones and called Steve Huston at the small hotel the *Clarion* reporter called home. He explained little, merely asking Steve to go to the Green Spot, a tavern in the Times Square district, where he would be contacted by the Phantom Detective who would explain then.

Leaving the drug-store, the Phantom drove his big car uptown, through the sleeping city. . . .

Only a few early morning regular customers of the Green Spot were in the place when the Phantom parked at the curb outside the tavern and entered it. A juke box, in a rear room, blared blatantly as he sauntered to a table, ordered beer, and waited.

Five minutes later, Steve Huston arrived.

The *Clarion* reporter evidently had dressed in a hurry, but his eyes were bright with anticipation as they looked around at the men in the place. They finally caught sight of a man in a seedy gray suit, and settled on him as the man tugged his left ear with his right hand. Steve Huston knew that identifying signal as well as Frank Havens, his employer, knew it. With a grin, Steve dropped down in a chair at the Phantom's table.

The reporter's pulses drummed. He liked nothing better than these summonses from the Phantom, coming unexpectedly, to furnish him with thrill and excitement. On many occasions the great detective had made use of Steve Huston. And, small though Steve considered his services to be, he had the satisfaction of knowing that the Phantom himself had always called them valuable contributions to the cases he had solved. That, in itself, was reward enough for whatever danger Huston might be called upon to face.

Beyond that, however, it put him in a position to gather news not available to his competitors. And Steve, whose newspaper career was of paramount importance to him, exulted in the opportunity offered him, in return for assisting the Phantom.

**C**ONCISELY, and rapidly, the Phantom acquainted Steve with the facts in the murder of Dr. Maitland. As he talked, Steve's excitement grew, increasing by leaps and bounds. Before the Phantom had finished Steve excused himself to hurry to a telephone and call the *Clarion's* night city editor, to give him the tip on the murder in Washington Square.

He hung up before the city editor could hang the assignment on him, and hurried back to the Phantom's table. Dropping into his chair, he bent tensely forward.

"What a break, Phantom!" he exulted. "Front page stuff sure. The rag already has the poison formula story that I covered—and now Maitland's murder! They must tie together, of course. Or do they?"

"You newspaper boys are all alike," the Phantom chided. "The story first, with you. No matter that the world has lost a brilliant scientist. Serve the gory facts while they're still hot to the morbid-minded public, and pat yourself on the back that you beat the other papers to it."

"That's the system," Steve admitted blandly. "Give the readers what they want. We can't help murder, but we can report it as we find it." He broke off. "Must be important when you get me out of the hay at this time of night. What can I do? How can I help?"

"First," the Phantom said, "you can give me your coverage on the Benecin Five breakdown. Mr. Havens had already told me you had been assigned to the story which will be in tomorrow's *Clarion*. But I can't wait for that particular edition of the morning's paper. What are the facts?"

Briefly, but clearly, Steve supplied the particulars. Listening intently, the Phantom mentally pigeon-holed the important points. He would forget none of it, for his mind was like a filing cabinet. Into it went all the important grist to be used at some future time. The chaff was discarded impatiently.

Lining up the essential and salient facts, as Huston gave them to him, the Phantom nodded. One of the first things he learned from Steve's narrative was that the handkerchief he had picked up in Maitland's office must belong to Miss Vicki Marsh, the doctor's nurse. Huston had the set-up in the late physician's Washington Square household at his fingertips.

The Phantom took the small piece of linen from his pocket and pushed it across the table. Steve picked it up and sniffed.

"Smells good," he said. "What is it—I mean, whose wipe?" He spread it open. "V? V for Vicki, and Vicki for Marsh, the doctor's nurse!"

"Exactly." The Phantom nodded. "First thing tomorrow I want you to check with the

Bureau of Registered Nurses, Steve. Get all the information on Miss Marsh that you can, including her address. Give it to Mr. Havens and he'll put it through to me."

"Right. What else?"

"This." The Phantom handed Huston the piece of broken lens.

"Somebody's cheater?" Steve frowned.

"Drop in at the Townsend Optical Company," the Phantom directed. "You can save me a lot of time. I want you to find out, if possible, who this lens was made for. That means you'll have to check back to the optician's shop where the owner of the glasses took his prescription to be filled. It's a high-powered lens. Crooks-tinted, and an ordinary optician couldn't handle it. He would send the prescription to the Townsend Company for them to make the glasses."

Steve nodded. "I'll take care of it. Anything else?"

"That's all, for the present."

Huston glanced at his watch, then at the Phantom. Curiosity as to the detective's real identity had never bothered Steve. He knew, of course, that the Phantom was a close friend of his employer, Frank Havens, and he knew that the Phantom was always in disguise, that never once had he really seen the man's face. But even that did not pique the reporter to any great extent. Being allowed to help the Phantom, sometimes, more than made up for what he didn't know about the man.

"Guess I'll mush down to Washington Square," Huston said, as he pushed his chair back and got up, "and see what the good Inspector has gathered on Maitland's killing. Might as well have taken the assignment, at that, but it'll be a change to see somebody else working." He grinned. "Read the *Clarion* in the morning for full particulars."

## CHAPTER VI

### WARNING



ROUND ten o'clock the following day the Phantom sat in on Inspector Gregg's quiz show. He went back to Dr. Maitland's Washington Square house and, after a talk with Gregg, seated himself unobtrusively in the rear of the room to watch and listen.

First, Gregg talked with Dr. Rodney Heath, Maitland's laboratory assistant. The Phantom liked the man's looks, but he didn't care for Heath's answers. The young doctor seemed evasive, not entirely frank.

According to Heath, he had left the house the previous afternoon while Dr. Maitland had been talking with Andrew Drake in his office. He, Heath, had not returned, had not known anything that had happened until he

had been contacted by the police, then later had seen the news of the murder in the newspaper.

"You haven't any ideas as to who might have killed Dr. Maitland?" Gregg, bluff and aggressive, asked the question bluntly.

Heath shook his head. "Not one, Inspector."

A few more queries having to do with Heath's association with Maitland, and the Inspector turned to a pretty, brown-haired girl. While Heath had been talking, the Phantom had noticed, her eyes had never left the young doctor's face. Bent forward, she sat still and tense. She was Vicki Marsh, the Phantom knew, the nurse whose handkerchief he had picked up from the office rug beside the body of Dr. Lester Maitland.

As in Heath's case, she had little to offer about her employer's death. She had left the house a few minutes after Heath, she told Gregg, and knew nothing about what had transpired after her departure.

Gregg turned next to Andrew Drake, owner of the Octagon Chemical Company. Most of the belligerence Drake had exhibited the day before had evaporated, leaving the man pale and shaken. He told of dining with Maitland at the Blue Pheasant, and went on to say he had met the doctor there for the express purpose of giving him the formula which had been used by the Octagon Chemical Company in the manufacture of Benecin Five.

Gregg didn't probe into the formula angle. The Phantom knew why. The *Clarion*, as well as all the other papers in town had come out with black headline stories concerning the poisoned drug. But that was a matter for the F. B. I., already working on it, and the Inspector carefully avoided the issue.

The last person Gregg quizzed was John Stanley, Dr. Maitland's houseman.

Small, quietly dressed and anxious to cooperate in every possible way, Stanley appeared to be the perfect servant. He had pale hair, which was parted precisely in the center, a rather sallow complexion, and a nice speaking voice.

Yesterday, he explained, he had been given the day off. He had left at ten in the morning. When he had returned, well past midnight, he had found the police at the house—his employer dead. His voice trembled slightly when he answered the final questions.

The Phantom waited for the Inspector until he had finished, wanting a word with him. Already he had identified himself to the Inspector to whom he had shown his jewel-studded badge in the form of a tiny domino mask. Gregg, as was always the case, was only too willing and ready to supply the Phantom with any information he wanted, and eager for his help. The Phantom drew

the police official aside.

"One thing puzzles me, Inspector," he said. "Who tipped you off to Maitland's murder?"

Inspector Gregg cleared his throat, and shrugged. "That's one for you to figure out, Phantom. The tip came in to Headquarters over the telephone—some man calling to say we'd find a body up there. Usually we don't like to have to pay attention to stuff like that, though of course a routine investigation must be made. Such phoned tips come from cranks and pranksters, mostly. But this party sounded on the level—and he was."

The Phantom nodded. "Anything else? How about the scalpel?"

"No prints. What we picked up around the office belonged to the nurse, to Heath, and to Maitland himself. Looks to me like the killer wore gloves. He must have taken the scalpel out of the cabinet, but there wasn't a print on it. And no clues!"

Thanking the Inspector, the Phantom left.

From the same drug-store where he had telephoned Steve Huston in the early morning hours, the Phantom put a call through to Frank Havens in the *Clarion* office. The newspaper publisher had been expecting to hear from him.

"I've got some news for you—from Huston," Havens said briskly, as soon as he heard Van's voice. "Can you meet me at the Trianon at one o'clock?"

"I'll be there."

**T**HE Phantom hung up and went out into the sunny street, deep in thought. So the killer—or killers—after having done away with Dr. Maitland had called Inspector Gregg to tell him about it. The Phantom's mouth tightened. That telephone call had a sardonic reason behind it. It could have been, the Phantom thought, that for some reason the killers wanted Maitland's corpse discovered by the police instead of a member of the doctor's household. Or, just as possibly, someone wanted it to be found in time for the news to make the morning front pages, tying up with the story of the poison formula.

The Phantom's face darkened. Whoever the actual killer was, and the forces that were back of him, they weren't quite as clever as they thought they were. A smart murderer would have handled the thing differently. He would have erased Dr. Maitland, but in such a way as to make it look like suicide. Suicide prompted by the failure of the doctor's latest discovery.

In his luxurious, sky-high Park Avenue apartment, the Phantom pondered his problem. All around him were his treasures—a prayer rug from Persia, pictures he had collected, *objets d'art*, wall tapestries and furniture gleaming dully in the sunshine. But Van hardly noticed them. His mind centered on

Heath, on the way the young doctor had spoken, his manner when Gregg had questioned him.

Then his thoughts turned to Vicki Marsh. Intuitively he felt that both Vicki and Dr. Heath knew more than they had divulged. Finally, with a shrug, he took the piece of memo pad he had picked up from Maitland's desk, smoothed it out and looked at the telephone number written on it. He dialed it after another minute, heard the wires humming until a woman's voice spoke in his ear:

"Good morning. The Worley Drug Company."

The Phantom put the telephone back in its cradle. His brows drew together. Worley Drug Company? And Maitland must have telephoned the company sometime the previous day. He filed that away in the back of his mind, noticed the hour, and saw that his appointment with Frank Havens was near.

In his bedroom, as charming and tastefully furnished as the other rooms in his suite, Van Loan pressed a button cleverly concealed behind the head of his bed, and a section of the wall swung back. This opened up a secret room which contained a small but well-equipped laboratory fitted out with the various devices necessary for his battle against crime. Here were types of infra-red and X-ray machines, microscopes, a complete wardrobe and arsenal. This room was only a miniature of the Phantom's bigger laboratory uptown in the Bronx, where he was known as Dr. Bendix, an eccentric old scientist, but it served its purposes well, when it was not expedient to make the long trip to the Bronx.

Also, in Van's bedroom, in locked drawers of his triple-mirrored dressing table, he had bottles and jars in vast array, containing every possible aid to make-up. And in such variety that his preparations for perfect disguises would have made a Hollywood make-up artist envious.

His disguised face now, however, was all right for the purpose he had in mind, but the shabby suit he wore would not do for the Trianon's dining room. The Phantom replaced it with well-tailored tweeds. Like all of his suits, it was made with secret pockets for his mask, his insignia, and certain small tools for which he often found use in an emergency, as well as a sleeve recess, for a small, but deadly arm gun.

He transferred the contents of the pockets of the gray suit to the tweed outfit, made sure his automatic was in its shoulder sling and, for good measure, added a small sap which fitted into the lining of his coat. Then, stepping back into the bedroom, he let the wall panel slide into place and left the apartment, going to the rear of the building by the private elevator which allowed him to leave unseen.

That morning, when he had gone down the brownstone steps of Maitland's house, he had felt curious eyes staring at him from the knot of the morbidly curious on the pavement in front of the doctor's house. Watching eyes, evidently taking in the details of all those who went in or came out in order to describe them or be able to identify them.

Now, again, when the Phantom entered the Trianon's foyer, he had the same impression. He let his glance move over those who were idly waiting there, but had time for no more than a brief look before he saw Frank Havens coming toward him, then greeting him.

"I have a table reserved," Havens said. "This way."

VAN sat down at the table and shook out a snowy napkin. Havens had picked a place far enough away from the other diners to make conversation private, and Van wasted no time before asking his questions. "Steve checked on the broken lens?" he queried.

He had already seen that the *Clarion's* publisher had some kind of important information for him, for Frank Havens looked inwardly excited. But in answer to this question he shook his head.

"He's checked on it," he said, "but hasn't any information yet. Steve did better with the Nurses' Bureau."

"What did he find out?" Van asked.

"That the Vicki Marsh registered with them died six months ago—about the same time this Miss Marsh entered Maitland's employ!"

Van let that sink in. "Did Huston manage to get her address?" he asked slowly.

"I have it here!" Havens said triumphantly, and handed over a slip of paper. "What do you make of that?"

"Nothing—yet. This case has many facets, Mr. Havens. An interesting one, with unlimited possibilities. But all that is actually known, so far, is that somewhere in the blackness behind it stands a heartless killer. A man who deliberately attempts to poison

innocent people for some crack-brain motive—to be as charitable as possible. Which I am not inclined to be. A man who had Doctor Maitland done away with so he wouldn't talk. I'm confident that Maitland knew—or at least had his suspicions as to the identity of the person responsible for the phony formula."

"I'm counting on you to clear it up, Phantom," Havens said in a low, guarded voice.

"Sometime soon," Van told him, "you can arrange for me to meet Andrew Drake. I want to talk with him."

"I'll do that at once," said Havens, and was about to add something else which he broke off as their waiter approached.

"Begging your pardon, Mr. Havens," the waiter said. "This was left at the desk a few minutes ago."

The man bowed and laid an envelope at Havens' place. The publisher picked it up. It was unsealed and Van Loan, watching, saw his old friend's expression change rapidly.

"Something urgent?" he asked.

"Read it. It's more for you than for me."

Van took the note, his gaze sweeping over the inked words, half-written, half-printed. They said:

Havens, call off the Phantom! This time he's up against an unbeatable combination. We know every move he'll make, and how to deal with him in advance. Fair warning!

With a thin smile, the Phantom read it. Old stuff, he thought—trying to toss in a check-mate at the start. He glanced up and across at Frank Havens, the man whom he trusted above all others in the world, the man who had been his father's friend, and because of whose urgings to try his hand at detective work, when Van had been bored to extinction by idleness, had been responsible for the birth of the Phantom Detective.

"Who wrote that?" Havens said anxiously.

"Probably," Van said, "the same gentleman who telephoned Inspector Gregg early this morning to tell him about the body of

[Turn page]

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Dr. Maitland in the Washington Square house." He got to his feet and added, his voice low, "Time to get busy, Mr. Havens. Thanks for getting me Vicki Marsh's address. I think I shall make a call there at once."

When Van drove to the address written on the slip of paper that Havens had given him, he found that it was a house which stood in a row of business buildings between Broadway and Eighth Avenue, in the upper Thirties. The Metropolitan Opera House was not far distant. The street swarmed with pedestrians, traffic, sidewalk peddlers.

Turning into the street, he gave the house a curious glance as he passed it slowly. The basement, he saw, was occupied by a furrier. The first floor windows were lettered with the name of a music teacher who called his place the Windsor Studios. The two floors above were probably given over to small apartments. The Phantom walked to the corner, turned, and made a leisurely way back.

Steep steps led to an open door, a half-vestibule with four mail-boxes on one side. Three had names in their slots, the fourth was empty and stuffed with advertising matter. The name "Marsh" was under the top box. The Phantom went into a carpetless hall.

**F**ROM behind closed doors came the rasping wail of a violin playing a scale over and over. The Phantom continued on up the flight of stairs to the second floor. There were two apartments there, neither occupied by Miss Marsh. On the top floor the door of one apartment was slightly ajar, and Van saw that it was a vacant one. He knocked on the other door.

There was no answer. He tried again, and when there still was no response, he walked into the vacant apartment next door. A rear room window opened onto the ledge of a fire-scape. The Phantom glanced out. If he attempted to gain entrance to Vicki Marsh's apartment in this way, in the bright sunlight, he would be a target for all eyes looking from the windows of the houses on the next street.

He shook his head and went back to Vicki Marsh's door. His master-key admitted him and he stepped into a typically furnished apartment.

The Phantom found himself in a bandbox living room. A small hall led out of it, past a kitchen and bathroom and into a bedroom. There he looked around with interest, breathing in the same delicate perfume that had been on the girl's handkerchief. His gaze went to the bureau, lingering briefly on the photograph of a man in an oval silver frame. Young and attractive Dr. Rodney Heath smiled out of the frame.

About to return to the living room, the

Phantom suddenly froze. Out in the hall he heard voices, footsteps on the bare boards, then the rasp of a key in a lock. Quickly the Phantom stepped back and into a closet, pulling the door almost shut after him. Silk whispered in his ears, the swirl of sachet almost choked him as he pressed against the clothing hanging there.

From the living room, he heard Vicki Marsh say:

"Sit down, Rodney. Don't you think it was foolish meeting me today? How do you know we're not being watched?"

"I don't know. But I had to see you!" The doctor's voice was thick and husky.

"If it's that same thing—"

"It is! You've got to talk to your uncle! You know what I heard, what I told you!"

The girl's voice rose unsteadily when she interrupted him.

"Never mind him. What about yourself? You're not in any position to cast suspicion on anyone!"

"Vicki!" The man sounded shocked. "What do you mean? What are you saying?"

"You know perfectly well!" There was a secret note in her voice the listening Phantom didn't miss.

From the footfalls that followed Van knew that Heath had risen from his chair and moved over to the girl. The Phantom had to strain his ears to hear what he said.

"Vicki, I love you! I love you more than anything in the world! We can't have this thing come between us!"

"It has, Rod!" she said firmly.

"You mean—"

"Nothing will ever be the same again! Never! I don't want to talk about it. Please go, Rod! Please—you must!"

A few minutes more and a door opened and closed. Heath's steps on the stairs died away. The Phantom heard Vicki Marsh's choked sobs in the other room.

He pushed the closet door open, stepped out, and filled his lungs with air that was less perfumed.

## CHAPTER VII

### IN AND OUT



**W**HEN the Phantom loomed up in the living room doorway, Vicki Marsh was sitting on a small couch, her pretty face buried in her hands. She must have felt his presence for abruptly she looked up, wide-eyed. Her face was blank, though most of the color had drained out of it.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

The Phantom displayed a badge like those used by Inspector Gregg's plainclothes men. He had often found that such an official

badge, in its own way, could be as helpful to him as his own jeweled mask-plate. The girl looked at the badge, parting her red lips as if to help her quickened breathing.

"The police!" she exclaimed.

"I'm sorry if I startled you," the Phantom said, and made his tone gentle. "I came up to ask you a few more questions. You weren't home, so I went up on the roof to wait. I came down a moment or so ago and, seeing the door open, I took the liberty of coming in to see if you had returned."

Some of the girl's lost composure was restored. The Phantom sat down, waiting for her to pull herself together. She did, after another minute or so.

"But I—I told the Inspector everything I knew, this morning," she protested. "What other questions do you want to ask me?"

"You're Vicki Marsh?" he asked.

"Naturally."

"But Vicki Marsh died six months ago!" the Phantom said quietly.

Again the blank look came into her wide eyes. She drew back on the divan, the breath in her throat choked and uneven. She pressed a hand over her heart.

"You know?" she murmured.

"Who you really are?"

She drew another hard breath and leaned forward.

"I'm really Vicki Marsh, too," she said swiftly. "My mother—you must be thinking of her—died while I was taking my nurse's training. Six months ago. I—I needed a job badly. Doctor Maitland knew my mother. She had worked with him in the old days at the hospital. He knew me, and after her death he gave me the job before I had finished my course."

The Phantom looked at the sudden tears that filled her eyes. She winked them away, as he said:

"What did Heath mean about your uncle? Who is he, and what part does he play in the case of Doctor Maitland?"

The lashes went down over the pools of her eyes. Abruptly she seemed to draw into herself. She shook her brown head.

"I—don't know what he meant."

"You mean you won't tell me?"

She didn't answer, and the Phantom got up from the chair where he had been sitting. He stood over her, and looked at her narrowly. She returned his gaze almost challengingly.

"I've told everything I know!" she said defiantly.

"Not quite, Miss Marsh," he told her flatly. "Think it over. Doctor Maitland was your benefactor. Last night he was stabbed to death with a scalpel. Are you going to keep silent and defeat justice? Are you going to stand by and let the doctor's killer get away

with it?"

Her curved red lips trembled. She seemed about to say something, but thought better of it and closed her teeth with a click. The Phantom shrugged.

"I think that's all, Miss Marsh—for the present!"

He let himself out. The thin wail of the violin came eerily up the well of the stairs. On the floor below a man, holding a folded newspaper, was in front of one of the doors. In the half light, the Phantom noticed his height and thinness, the slouchy felt hat he wore and the extreme drape of his blue coat and wide trousers.

He turned as he heard the Phantom come down the steps. The newspaper dropped from his hand and the gun it had masked came suddenly into view. The Phantom stood still, lifting his hands, as the snub-nosed automatic bored into his chest.

"All right, snooper!" the tall, thin man growled. "Just stay put while I see what you're wearing in the way of artillery!"

A deft left hand reached in under the Phantom's jacket and jerked his automatic clear. The man dropped it in his pocket, satisfied it was his captive's only gun. In the half light the Phantom had the impression of an angular face, cold hazel eyes and a thin-lipped mouth with a scar at one corner.

"You've got the wrong man," he said. "You don't want me."

"I want you!" the man said firmly. "Look! There's a car at the curb. We're getting into it. All the way downstairs and out you'll have my little liquidator pressed up against you. Don't do anything that will make you stop breathing permanently."

THE Phantom didn't reply. He didn't entirely dislike being stuck up in this hall. He recalled the feeling of having been watched in the Trianon. Now he knew he had been right. Probably he had been tailed from the hotel—after the warning note had been delivered, and those who feared the Phantom were moving in for action. At least, though, this was something tangible, something that opened up dark, hidden doorways.

"Get moving!" ordered the thin man.

Down the stairs and out to the steep stoop steps, with the squeaky violin music following them all the way. At the curb the Phantom saw a dark blue sedan, with a man lounging at the wheel. The man who had captured the Phantom was close against him, the snub-nosed gun almost entirely concealed by the sleeve he had pulled down over it.

They crossed the pavement, the man at the wheel leaned over to open the car door, and the Phantom got in and sat down.

"Any trouble, Snowball?" asked the driver.

The thin man laughed. "He was like Mary's lamb, Eddie. . . Take it easy. Watch the lights. I don't want any flat-headed flattie telling us to pull over. Not with this party aboard."

The Phantom crossed his legs comfortably, studying the driver. The fellow was short and stocky, a hard-faced youth, typical of his kind. Like Snowball, Eddie wore fancy clothes—a wide, chalk-striped gray suit and a fantastic necktie. Like Snowball's hat his also was wide-brimmed, and set at a jaunty angle.

From what the Phantom could see of Eddie's face it appeared to be pale and pock-marked, but not as white as the waxy, aquiline face of the man who kept the gun on Van. In the light, the Phantom now saw that Snowball's skin was almost transparent in its unhealthy pallor. Against the chalk-white skin the little scar stood out lividly.

There was no conversation as the car wove a devious way through the traffic, always in the front ranks when the lights turned red, always away in the van when they glowed green. Downtown—east—and finally to a region close to the East River, with the majestic span of one of the lofty bridges rising above it.

Eddie cut the car into a narrow aperture between a sprawling brick building on a corner and a garage next door. The name on its grimy windows read "Corrigan's" and from its swinging doors and beer advertisement placards, the Phantom recognized it as one of those waterfront stubes which are such a perfect setting for a crime incubator. He felt a trifle disappointed. Surely those who had had a secret hand in changing the Benecin Five formula, and in the murder of Dr. Maitland, should have been of a higher caliber than persons who frequented this district.

The car stopped in the rear of the tavern, a cluttered space filled with empty beer kegs and refuse cans.

"Out!" Snowball growled, and his gun backed up the order.

The Phantom shrugged and got out of the car. A scrawny cat yowled and sprang away as Eddie aimed a kick at it.

A door opened in one of the houses backing up on the recess and they entered it. A clammy, musty odor emanated from the dim corridor they traversed. Eddie, in advance of Snowball and their prisoner, flung open a door. Prodded by Snowball's gun the Phantom crossed the threshold and went in.

He found himself in a cheerless, shabby room. A narrow cot was in one corner and a man reared up from it, yawning prodigiously. He was a typical underworld character, moronic-looking, with over-large ears and small, dull eyes. The fact he needed a shave didn't help his appearance any. He attempted a

grin, but it disappeared when Eddie said disgustedly:

"Don't you ever do anything but sleep, Sid?"

"Sure." Sid chuckled. "Once in a while I take a nap." He turned his dull eyes on the Phantom. "Who you got there?"

Snowball paid no attention. "Clean him," he directed Eddie. "Then I'll phone."

Eddie nodded, and with professional fingers went to work on the Phantom's pockets. He missed the sleeve gun and the domino plate-mask but came up with the same badge the Phantom had used during his visit to Vicki Marsh.

"A fly cop, Snowball." Eddie tossed the shield over to his partner. "A plainclothes snooper!"

Snowball glanced at the badge and narrowly eyed the Phantom who saw that the man had expected a more important catch. Finally Snowball nodded and gave his gun to Eddie.

"Keep him quiet," he ordered.

SID continued to stare apathetically, scratching his head occasionally, while the Phantom himself thought fast. Obviously, he decided Snowball was the man in charge. But it appeared plain to him as he watched the man with the waxy skin dial a number on a telephone across the room, that Snowball was working for someone else. The usual set-up.

The Phantom waited anxiously to hear what the conversation would be about. He would have given a lot to have known the identity of the man Snowball was calling.

"Clipper?" A respectful note colored Snowball's tone when his call was answered. "Yes, I know you said not to call you up, but I've got something."

The Phantom couldn't hear the voice in the receiver, but from Snowball's expression it was evident he was being bawled out for making the call.

"Look!" he insisted. "I was watching the dame's house when I saw this party go in. I picked him up on the way out and brought him down here. He's a dick, one of Gregg's plainclothes snoops. What'll I do with him?"

Sid licked his lips and rubbed his beard-stubble against the back of his hand. Eddie's heavy-lidded eyes flickered from the Phantom to Snowball, then back to the Phantom again.

The instructions given Snowball appeared to be brief and to the point.

"Yeah, sure," he said, placatingly. "I'll take care of him. Okay. And I'll go to work on the old bozo after I see you. . . Tonight, same place? Right?"

He hung up and grinned crookedly.

"Clipper's orders, kid," he said to Eddie.

"We've got to dump this snooper for keeps."

Sid sighed. "That means I've got to dig a hole, huh?"

Snowball frowned. "We'd better take him outside."

"How about the store-room?" Eddie suggested.

The Phantom went into action before the little man got an answer from Snowball. The sleeve gun, with a single shake of his arm, slid accurately into his hand. He squeezed the trigger, snapping a shot at the automatic Eddie held. The lead pellet did just what the Phantom intended. Searing Eddie's knuckles, it whirled the rod out of his hand. Eddie yelped with surprise and pain as the Phantom, wheeling, cracked a hard left into Snowball's twisted mouth.

Behind the blow was a world of power, all the Phantom's coiled-spring strength. He could feel Snowball's teeth bend under the impact. The man staggered back and crashed into Sid who was making an effort to get up off the cot. Like a flash of light the Phantom streaked for the door.



STEVE HUSTON

Across the keg-lined recess he sprinted out to the avenue beyond. Diagonally across from Corrigan's tavern, he sighted a two-story building, the lower floor of which was given over to the office of some barge and towing concern.

He made that his goal, going in after a backward glance showed him the three characters he had just left had not yet reached the street.

CHAPTER VIII

FRIGHTENED MAN



SETTING at a desk to the left of the entrance through which the Phantom barged so abruptly was a gray-haired man. He gave the Phantom a quizzical stare as Van shut the door.

"Something I can do for you?" he asked mildly.

The Phantom laughed softly. "You can let me use your phone," he explained briefly. "Police business. I want a taxi and I want one in a hurry."

The man got up. "Help yourself." He indicated a telephone on a desk across the room. "Any way I can help?" He broke off. "If it's a cab you want, there's one coming down the street now."

Halfway across to the telephone, the Phantom stopped.

"Flag it for me, please, will you?" he asked. "Tell him to pull up and wait just beyond your door. I'm expecting some people to come out of the alley across the street. I'll wait in here."

Fortunately, the gray-haired man got the idea without any further questioning. He went out in a hurry, and the next minute the Phantom saw the taxi wheel to the curb and stop. The man spoke briefly to the driver, then came in. "All set," he said.

"Thanks a lot," the Phantom said, but his hawklike gaze didn't shift from the cut between the tavern and the garage opposite. "Unless I'm mistaken—" He stopped, then said quickly. "Here they come now!"

The men headed for the car in which they had brought the Phantom downtown, and piled into it. The starter whirred, the car nosed a way into the street, and turned north. Before it had gone half a block the Phantom was in the taxi waiting at the curb, and rapping out instructions.

"Follow that car! Don't let it slip you."

He pushed a ten-dollar bill into the taxi-driver's hand as an incentive. The driver pocketed the money and grinned.

"Trust me, buddy," he said confidently. "When it comes to following heaps, I got bloodhounds looking like stuffed moles!"

He was as good as his word. If Snowball and his two pals knew they were being tailed, they did nothing to shake off pursuit. Their dark blue sedan made its way uptown without their trying any tricks. Still keeping to the East Side avenue, it passed Cooper Square and turned into a side street several blocks beyond. There it pulled in before the open door of a building with a sign that read, "ACE TIRE RECAPPING SERVICE," and stopped.

Passing the car, the Phantom saw Eddie and Snowball get out. Eddie had wound a handkerchief around his right hand and was holding it gingerly with his left. Sid, at the wheel, was lounging indolently, munching on a match stick. The Phantom took a good look at the place the two men entered, then leaned forward.

"All right," he told his driver. "Let's go on uptown. I'll tell you where to stop."

In a Sixth Avenue drug-store, some fifteen minutes later, Van called Havens. As always, when a case was shaping up, the *Clarion's* owner was standing by, waiting for word from the Phantom.

"I was hoping to hear from you," he said, when Van murmured a word that identified him. "Steve has some information on the broken eyeglass lens."

"Good. Is he there now?"

"I'll call the city desk and find out," Havens said. "But perhaps you'd better tell me where you want to meet him."

"The Green Spot, in a half hour," the Phantom said. "How about Andrew Drake?"

"I've arranged an appointment for you with him," Havens explained. "Tonight at eight-thirty."

"Have your car at the Pilgrim Club," Van said. "I'll see you there."

Van rang off and, satisfied that things were beginning to move, went on across to the Times Square district and the Green Spot.

In the rear room, at a table in a corner that would be safe from eavesdroppers, he ordered beer and waited for Steve Huston. The *Clarion* reporter was punctual, as usual when meeting the Phantom was concerned. Scarcely thirty minutes had elapsed before Huston arrived.

The Phantom got down to business the moment the waiter brought more beer and left them alone.

"What did you learn about the piece of lens?" he asked.

"I got the dope about an hour ago," Steve said. He sampled his brew, then went on: "The Townsend outfit ground that lens, as you suspected. It was sent to them by an optical shop on Seventy-second Street—the Lawrence Company. I went up there and waited around while they went through their old books. Finally I got the information. The glasses that piece came out of were made for a Doctor Everly Abbott, about three years ago."

**D**R. EVERLY ABBOTT? Something stirred in the back of the Phantom's mind. Abbott—Dr. Everly Abbott. He repeated the name to himself several times before it came to him as suddenly as a thunder-clap. He remembered that ten years ago a Dr. Everly Abbott had been one of New York's

most prominent bone specialists. He had been connected with the Hargrave Foundation Hospital, new at that time, and his career had been exceptionally brilliant.

Then what? The Phantom's brows drew together.

Digging deeper into his retentive memory, the Phantom recalled other details. He remembered that Dr. Abbott had gone to Europe for a long vacation after a reported breakdown from overwork. And from that time on, Dr. Abbott had faded out of the picture in the realm of medicine.

And this broken piece of lens found in Maitland's office belonged to a pair of eyeglasses that had been made for the former bone specialist!

"Me, the busy bee," Steve Huston was going on. "The address the Lawrence Company gave me was over in the East Sixties. But Doctor Abbott hadn't lived there for three years. That didn't throw me, though. I kept right on buzzing. I got a series of forwarding addresses from all the places where he had ever lived in the city, and it was quite a collection."

"Moved around a lot, eh?" said the Phantom.

"I'll say. It was like going down a flight of stairs. The places got cheaper and cheaper as I went along. This Abbott's one medico who must have started at the top and worked his way down. Here's his last mail address."

Steve had jotted it down on the back of an envelope. He passed it across the table and the Phantom, though his face was expressionless, felt his pulses click as he read the address. For Dr. Abbott's last address corresponded with the number of the house the Phantom had visited earlier that afternoon—the place where he had spoken to Dr. Maitland's nurse, the place from which he had been kidnaped! And to make it doubly significant, the words "c/o Marsh" were underneath the street number!

"Marsh?" the Phantom murmured thoughtfully.

Steve Huston finished the contents of his glass and reached over for the Phantom's.

"Any tie-up in the Marsh name, Phantom?" he asked. "I mean, that being the monicker of the good-looking nurse who used to work for Maitland, the one I got the data on at the Bureau."

"It dovetails," the Phantom answered.

Huston whistled softly. "Looks like you're up against a gang of fake nurses and phony doctors."

The Phantom shook his head. "Not exactly. Vicki Marsh is on the level, despite what they told you at the Bureau. The woman who died was her mother, whose name also was Vicki Marsh. This Doctor Abbott, if he is the genuine Abbott, is very much the real thing,

too. I have reason to believe," the Phantom added, recalling the conversation he had overheard between Heath and the girl, "that Abbott may be Miss Marsh's uncle."

Huston stared. "Then what gives?"

"That's all for the present." The Phantom dropped a hand to Huston's shoulder when he got up. "You've been a big help, Steve. I might need you again—soon."

"I'll be ready," Huston assured him.

The Phantom said good-by, went outside, and headed for his Park Avenue penthouse apartment in a roundabout way. . . .

The Havens' car was parked a short distance away from the entrance to the Pilgrim Club when Van Loan reached it at the designated hour. Making sure he had not been followed, he opened the rear door of the car and got in. Havens, sitting there waiting, looked at him anticipatively.

"What news, Phantom?" he asked.

"Not too much. But I'm on my way. This afternoon I made the acquaintance of three thugs in the employ of someone they called Clipper. They seem decidedly interested in Miss Marsh and don't welcome police interference. In fact," he added, with a short laugh, "they're so rabid on the subject of law and order, that they were going to put me out of their way—for keeps. Believing, I was one of Gregg's operatives. But I'll tell you all about that later. It isn't important now. I got away. . . . What about the Benecin Five investigation?"

Frank Havens shook his head. "There was nothing more on it up to the time I left the office. But you know how the F. B. I. works. Secretly and without fanfare."

"When this case breaks," the Phantom said slowly, "we'll find the switched formulas were the keystone of the reason for Maitland's murder and for all that results from here on. Let's have that talk with Mr. Drake. I'm anxious to see if he can shed any illumination."

**H**AVENS drove uptown as far as the Seventies and turned in toward the Hudson River. All the way, Van kept watching the rear to see if they were followed. After the warning note that had been given Havens at the Trianon, and the narrow escape the Phantom had just had himself, he took no chances. Whoever it was who was dueling with him in the dark was not overlooking any bets.

But no car had followed them, and no suspicious loiterer was on the street to pick them up and keep an eye on them here when Havens stopped the car in front of a private house close to West End Avenue. They got out, and Havens led the way to the door of a dark-windowed dwelling. He rang the bell and after a long wait a butler peered sus-

piciously out at them through the opening in a door fastened with a brass chain.

It took the publisher a minute or more to convince the servant that they had an appointment with his employer.

"Come in, gentlemen," the butler said then, and turned apologetic. "You'll pardon me if I seem suspicious. Orders," he explained, with a cough, "are orders. This way, if you please."

When they were guided into a study on the second floor, Andrew Drake got up from a deep-seated leather chair. The Phantom noted a significant bulge in the right-hand pocket of Drake's brocaded dressing gown. Evidently the owner of the Octagon Chemical Company was taking no chances either.

Havens introduced the Phantom, and Drake offered a fat, slightly moist hand.

"Please sit down," he said. "Make yourselves comfortable. You'll pardon me if I seem a trifle nervous. The events of the past hours have completely upset me."

"I can understand that," the Phantom said, and smiled slightly. "In fact, they have upset you so completely that you keep your front door chained and a gun in your pocket."

"They killed Maitland! My turn may be next!" Drake's terrierlike eyes snapped. "But they won't find me unprepared! They won't stick a scalpel in me!"

"Who won't?" the Phantom quickly snapped him up.

Drake gave him a swift look. "Why, whoever it was who killed Lester, of course!" he said. "They got him, so why wouldn't they try to get me? We were in this Benecin business together." His guard seemed to come up. "What was it you wanted to ask me about, Phantom?"

"The real and the fake formulas."

"But I've already told all I know to the F. B. I."

"You haven't told me," the Phantom said quietly. "How was the formula delivered to you?"

"It wasn't delivered," Drake said, a little shortly. "I stopped at Doctor Maitland's house myself to get it. He had left it in a brief-case, in Doctor Heath's care. Heath handed me the brief-case and I took it directly to my office."

"No chance it was tampered with after you got it?"

"Certainly not! The brief-case never left my possession. The minute I reached the office I put it in the safe. Any change made in that formula was done before I got it."

The Phantom glanced briefly at the silent Havens before he asked:

"Wasn't it a rather unusual procedure—rushing Benecin Five into production without testing the formula?"

"Not at all!" Drake's red face grew more

florid. "Maitland did all that before turning the formula over to me. He had used it in the clinic of one of our largest hospitals. It had been proved to be practically infallible in the cure of common acids. After results like that, why should I have wasted time in my laboratory making further tests?"

"Was that the procedure you followed with Vanolene?"

"Exactly. Maitland handed me the formula, I manufactured it, and it was placed directly on the market."

"And you made a fortune!" the Phantom remarked.

Drake glared. "Why not? Vanolene is the only product of its kind in the world! I'm in business to make money. Why shouldn't I have capitalized on it?"

"No reason at all. Mr. Drake," the Phantom said soothingly. "However, there might be those jealous of your success with it. Did you ever think of that?"

"No. Why should I?"

"Because it might be an angle leading to a motive in the care of Benecin Five. . . . You know the Worley Drug Company?"

"Know it?" Andrew Drake barked a nervous laugh and the Phantom saw Havens look up quickly. "Of course I know it. Joel Worley's my closest competitor. He would have given his left eye to have obtained the manufacturing rights to Benecin Five. I certainly wish now that he had."

A few further questions, and the Phantom saw that there was not much more to be learned from Andrew Drake. He gave Havens a signal and they got up to leave. Drake went as far as the head of the stairs with them.

"You'll have to excuse my temper," he said. "It gets out of control easily these days. My attorney tells me he can prove I'm innocent of whatever charges the Government may bring against me, but how do I know he's right? Doctor Maitland can't back me up now. Sorry I couldn't give you more information."

"You've given me enough," the Phantom murmured. "Thanks and—good night."

## CHAPTER IX

### NEWS FLASH



HAVENS looked inquiringly at Van when they were back in his car.

"Learn anything?" he asked.

"That Andrew Drake's a badly frightened man," Van said, and added, with a faint, grim smile on his lips as he remembered the corpse in Dr. Maitland's office, "And I can't say I blame him."

As Havens started the car and asked Van

where he could drop him, through force of habit he snapped on the hourly news broadcast the *Clarion* sponsored. Before the Phantom could reply the voice of the news commentator coming from the radio's loud speaker, interrupted:

"I have a late news flash. Direct from headquarters, on the murder of Doctor Lester Maitland. Doctor Rodney Heath, Maitland's former laboratory assistant, has just given himself up. Heath has confessed that he killed Doctor Maitland, but beyond that refuses to talk."

The Phantom abruptly turned off the radio.

"You can take me as far as my garage, Mr. Havens," he said. "I'll need one of my own cars tonight!"

"You're off to clinch Heath's guilt?" Havens asked.

A faint, sardonic smile touched Van's lips. For a minute he didn't answer. Then he said:

"I'm off to prove Doctor Rodney Heath's innocence! The truth is that he's covering for someone else, trying to take the rap for a crime he had nothing to do with!"

Night had fallen when Van, who had seen to it at the garage that his super-charged car was fully serviced and ready for any call he might make upon it, drove the big machine south through Manhattan's streets and avenues. From Inspector Gregg he had learned that the patrolman on duty at Dr. Maitland's Washington Square house had been withdrawn. Now, pending the disposal of the Maitland estate, the physician's home would remain untenanted.

The Phantom was playing one of his hunches. In his mind, Heath's "confession" had accented the matter of the changed formulas. From the first, the switch had impressed itself upon Van Loan. It represented Problem One to him. He felt that until it was cleared up the road ahead that would lead to the doctor's murderer would be blocked. He hoped the removal of the policeman from Maitland's front hall would accelerate events, a hope that was virtually a certainty, for the Phantom was seldom wrong in his deductions.

This time he believed his downtown trip would bear fruit.

A block away from the Square, Van parked the car, locked it and walked toward the Arch. The promise of rain before morning made the air moist and cool. Once or twice he glanced back over his shoulder to make sure none of Snowball's busy helpers had been planted in the neighborhood to watch. But he saw nothing suspicious, his nerves telegraphed no danger warning.

A few pedestrians wandered along the north side of the Square. Across from the dark house, the Phantom idled in the mark

until he had a clear coast, then again went up the brownstone steps and into the vestibule. He waited there for a few seconds, glancing out through the plate-glass door, as if to catch a glimpse of someone who might be vitally interested in his movements and sliding toward him through the shadows.

But he saw no one. Then, for the second time, his master-key opened the inner door of the Maitland home.

The Phantom closed it noiselessly. He stood in a tomblike silence that beat against his ears in velvet waves. At that minute he asked himself if his hunch were correct. But it must be, he thought. Finally, with a shrug, he turned on his flash and started toward the stairs.

Tonight his interest was not in either the office or the laboratory. He was finished with them, but he couldn't help thinking that what he had found on his first visit was like a beckoning finger leading him on now through the dark.

The Phantom had reached the staircase when instinctively his fingers pressed the button of his flashlight. Like a small sun going under a black cloud, the torch in his hand winked out. His head jerked around, his gaze cutting the gloom separating him from the front door. At the same instant he felt a grim satisfaction. He hadn't been wrong! Like a

pawn manipulated by the fingers of Fate someone was at the door, fitting a key into its lock!

**T**HE Phantom saw a head and shoulders framed against the outer dimness. A blurred impression of a hat and a smear that was a face. Swiftly Van faded down the short hall, taking up a position near the entrance to the big waiting room.

The front door's latch clicked. The door opened and the man the Phantom had glimpsed came in as quietly as he had himself. The fellow shut the door, hesitating a moment before moving forward. The Phantom knew that he, too, was listening. Reassured, and without the aid of any light, the man started up the stairs. When he reached the landing above, the Phantom followed.

The carpet was heavy enough to muffle his footfalls completely. Like a shadow moving through space, the Phantom went up the stairs.

The man ahead of him did not stop on the second floor. Faint sounds indicated that he was continuing on and up to the top story.

The Phantom, in close pursuit, was three steps from the third landing when abruptly a yellow shaft of light sliced the complete blackness. A cough, low and racking,

[Turn page]

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sounded. Then came the creak of a door, and footsteps on the floor of one of the several rooms that opened off the upper hallway.

The Phantom moved in. His gun replaced the torch in his right hand, his finger ready on the trigger. In the room the second visitor to Dr. Maitland's house that night had propped his flash on a chair, its beam directed at and falling on the front of a green-painted chiffonier. The man was hunched before it, his tense attitude similar to that of a safe-cracker about to go to work.

As silently as a shadow the Phantom moved nearer to the open door, rested a shoulder against the wall, and watched.

The flashlight propped on the chair fell only on a pair of hands that reached for the chiffonier's bottom drawer. The man's face was still shielded by the dark. His head was turned away from the door.

Fascinated, the Phantom watched every move. The hands outlined by the beam of light were smooth and well-cared-for, slender, with square-cut nails. They opened the drawer and began removing an accumulation of haberdashery. Piling it on the floor, the hands rooted in under the brown paper lining. The man gave a grunt signifying satisfaction.

When the hands came out of the drawer again they held a long manila envelope. Quickly they folded it in half and a whispering sound told the Phantom the envelope had been slipped into a pocket. Just as swiftly, the hands began to replace the articles taken from the open drawer.

Another minute and the man straightened up. Using a foot to close the drawer, he bent over to pick up his light.

"Don't move!" The Phantom's voice had a whip to it. "I'll take that envelope!"

As rapidly as the Phantom had switched off his own torch when he had first become aware of the key in the lock downstairs, the light the man held went out. A rasping breath, packed with the shock of surprise, was simultaneous with the room's blackout. The bed creaked as the man went past it.

Before the Phantom could gauge the angle and fire, a body catapulted against him.

The impact of the collision drove the Phantom back from the doorway. He smacked into the balustrade along the landing. One of the smooth, slender hands he had been watching ringed his pistol wrist in a frenzied grip. The other clawed at his throat while a knee, manipulated by a man who undoubtedly was skilled in close-in brawling, began to pump pistonlike into the pit of the Phantom's stomach.

The fury of the onslaught put the Phantom on the defensive. But only for a moment. Like an abating storm, the ferocity of the attack dwindled. The Phantom took all

his unknown assailant had to offer, then put on the pressure. His superb strength wrenched his wrist free of the gripping fingers. His left arm went around the man's neck in a bone-breaking half-circle. Breath rattled in compressed lungs. The Phantom applied more power to his crushing embrace, waiting only seconds further for the pay-off.

The man in his power began to squirm futilely. His gasps, deep and labored, were like torn sobs. Vainly he tried to pull himself away, to escape the paralyzing vise. But that was an impossibility, for the Phantom had acquired the knowledge of his grip from an East Indian wrestler, and once in it, the struggles of his victim were like those of a rabbit in the coils of a boa—useless and hopeless.

**A**NOTHER half-minute and the man went as limp as a rag. The Phantom dragged him through the open door of the room, snapped on a wall switch and threw him on the bed.

"Now—the envelope!" he demanded.

He leaned over, staring into blinking red-rimmed eyes in a pain-twisted face drained of all color. But the Phantom recognized it. His assailant was John Stanley, Maitland's houseman!

The Phantom let that disclosure sink in, fall into place in the preconceived design he had mentally drawn. Stanley, of course! Who was in a better position in the Maitland household to have engineered the switched formulas?

In the eyes peering up at him sudden understanding began to blend with the stark fear in their depths.

"The Phantom!"

The two words Stanley uttered were sibilant and fraught with meaning.

"So you've been told I was on the case?" the Phantom said. "That makes things easier. Now—the envelope! Or shall I take it myself?"

Stanley's hand swept rapidly to his pocket. The Phantom took the envelope, slit its sealed flap and drew out a sheaf of several typewritten pages.

One glance was enough to show how correct his reasoning had been. He was holding the original formula of Benecin Five—Maitland's formula, the one that should have been placed in Andrew Drake's hands.

"Talk!" The Phantom's voice was inexorable.

Stanley's red-rimmed eyes kept on staring, but a glaze came over them. It was as if the man realized the impossibility of trying to ward off the inevitable, the futility of trying to cope with the Phantom.

"What do you want to know?" he mumbled, his voice smothered.

"Start at the beginning and tell me how

you got mixed into this." The Phantom tapped the typewritten pages in his hand.

Stanley closed his eyes. In the same dull, automaton-like tone, he supplied the information the Phantom wanted.

One afternoon in a Village tavern, Stanley explained, the same Snowball the Phantom had encountered, had scraped up an acquaintance with him. He had been surprised how much the waxy-skinned man knew about Dr. Maitland and Benecin Five. Stanley had met Snowball two or three times after that. Then, one afternoon on his day off, Snowball had propositioned him.

"He asked me," Stanley said huskily, "how I'd like to make five hundred dollars. I needed the money, badly." He coughed. "I—I've been trying to save up enough to get out of this climate, to go to Arizona. Five hundred meant I could do it. Snowball told me all I had to do was substitute an envelope he would supply for the one Mr. Drake was to pick up at the house. I knew Mr. Drake was going to call for it. I had heard Doctor Maitland talking about it on the telephone."

Stanley went on to explain how he had made the switch, sneaking into Maitland's office when the doctor was in the laboratory, taking the original formula and replacing it with the one Snowball had given him. It had been done with only a few minutes to spare. He had hardly made the change, so Stanley said, before young Dr. Heath had come in, picked up the briefcase and delivered it to Andrew Drake.

"I didn't know they were going to poison people!" The man's husky voice wavered, and he gulped, plainly terrified. "I wouldn't have done anything to harm anyone, no matter how much I was paid! And I didn't have the slightest idea Doctor Maitland would be blamed for people who trusted him being poisoned! You've got to believe that!"

"Who's the man back of Snowball?" The Phantom's tone was like ice.

"I don't know. I never saw him. Oh, I knew there must be somebody—bigger than Snowball—but Snowball made all the contacts."

"Why didn't you disappear when you got paid off?" the Phantom asked.

"I—I haven't been paid yet." The red-rimmed eyes flickered.

"But you kept the formula," the Phantom said. "You weren't destroying it until you got your money. You were holding it over them, weren't you?"

The man on the bed didn't answer. The Phantom's face grew thoughtful. Finally, Stanley lowered his feet to the floor and sat up.

"What are you going to do—turn me in?" he quavered.

"That would take a load off your mind,

wouldn't it?" The Phantom smiled thinly. "As long as this formula is floating around your life isn't worth much, is it? No, I'm not turning you in. I can't have them know you're under arrest—yet. I have other plans for you. Come on, pull yourself together and we'll get out of here."

From the moment he had found Stanley, the Phantom had made a decision about the former servant's disposition. In midtown Manhattan the Man of a Thousand Faces had a secret hideout, an old-fashioned private house he had rented and kept for emergencies. Its caretaker was one "Skip" Nolan, an ex-prizefighter friend of Huston's who had become a greater friend of the Phantom's, and who was completely trustworthy and loyal. The hide-out house was an ideal spot in which to park Stanley for the time being.

His gun covered the man when they went down the stairs, and he said nothing more until they reached the front hall.

"I've got a car around the corner," the Phantom told Stanley then. "We're going uptown in it. I wouldn't try any tricks, if I were you. I'm something of a conjurer myself, as you may have heard."

"Yes, sir," Stanley said docilely.

## CHAPTER X

### FURTHER INFORMATION



IN THE reception room of the Worley Drug Company, a blond girl with bright blue eyes and lips too red to be real, sat at a glass-topped table. The suite of offices was on the twentieth floor of a lower Park Avenue building.

The Phantom looked around as he went in the next morning. Glass cabinets, set flush with raspberry-colored walls, containing samples of the drugs and cosmetics the concern manufactured, were the main furnishings, he noticed.

The girl's blue eyes roamed over the Phantom when he stopped at the receptionist's desk. It was plain she was not impressed by the seedy gray suit the caller wore. She elevated her tip-tilted nose a trifle when he asked to see Mr. Worley.

"Have you an appointment?" she asked coolly.

"Yes," he said. "The name is Edgren."

The girl spoke into an inter-office communication box as the Phantom glanced idly at the glass cabinets placed around the room. A half-hour earlier he had phoned Worley that he was coming. He had told the man he had important business to discuss and had piqued Worley's curiosity enough to be granted an interview.

"Mr. Worley will see you right away."

The girl pressed a button that brought in a page in trim livery.

"Take this gentleman to Mr. Worley," she told the boy.

The page led the Phantom down a hall where, in glass-enclosed offices, people were busy at work, and up to a slate-gray door with Worley's name gold-leafed on it. The boy opened it and the Phantom walked into a room that looked like something out of a decorator's dream. A modernistic note, expressed in black glass against slate-gray walls, gave the place a somber severity, framing a circular desk in its exact center, at which Joel Worley sat.

The Phantom had trained himself to register quick impressions. A single glance took Worley in, completely and all at once. The man was average, the Phantom saw. Average in height, and looks, in dress, and average in personality. There was nothing outstanding about him, nothing to distinguish him from thousands of other business men of his type.

It was only when he spoke that Van noticed the authority in his manner. His delivery was crisp. It was evident he was used to doing the talking and having people listen.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, as soon as the caller entered his presence.

The Phantom flashed a duplicate of the police badge of which Eddie had relieved him in the house back of Corrigan's tavern. He watched Worley narrowly. The man at the desk frowned slightly as he took in the badge, and gave the man who had produced it a more intent stare.

"I'd like to ask you a few questions, Mr. Worley," the Phantom said. "I'm working on the Maitland case."

"Sit down." Worley kept his eyes glued on the man he believed to be connected with the police. "Terrible thing. I was deeply shocked when I heard about Maitland's death."

"Doctor Maitland telephoned you the day he was killed. Is that correct?" The Phantom dropped into a chair. Worley had neglected such an invitation.

"Yes, he telephoned me that afternoon," the manufacturer said.

"Was it a private matter?" asked the Phantom.

"Not exactly. I don't mind telling you about it. You see, I had had a bid in for the rights to Benecin Five. Maitland called to tell me he wasn't at all satisfied with the production arrangements he had made with Drake's company. He hinted that there had been some sort of trouble. He said that when it was straightened out he was going to take his contract away from the Octagon people

and give it to me. He wanted me to come down to his Washington Square house and see him that evening. But I had a business date in Philadelphia and couldn't make it."

"You went to Philadelphia?"

"On a late afternoon train. I didn't return until the following day. I stayed at the Marley-Belmont. Room Seven-o-three. The records there will bear me out. Just for your information, of course. I suppose all this is called for, as a matter of routine."

The Phantom jotted the information down and put pencil and paper away.

"One thing more," he said then. "I'd like your opinion of Mr. Andrew Drake. I'll keep what you may say confidential. Just how does he stand in the drug business? I mean, what kind of a reputation has he?"

Joel Worley smiled faintly. "It's hardly fair to ask me about one of my competitors. Particularly, if it's a person I have reason to dislike. You're sure you will keep it confidential?"

"Naturally," said the Phantom. "I believe you can take the word of the police in such matters."

"Then," Worley said, leaning forward slightly, his voice suddenly sharp, "you might do well to check on Andrew Drake's activities the night Maitland was murdered! From what Maitland told me on the telephone, Drake was highly incensed at what had happened to Benecin Five. He held Maitland responsible."

**T**HE Phantom nodded, but did not comment.

"I think that's all," he said, and got up. "Thanks very much, Mr. Worley."

"You're entirely welcome," said the manufacturer, affably. "If there's any other information I can supply, please don't hesitate to call on me."

Thoughtfully the Phantom left the offices and crowded into a descending elevator. Reaching the street, he took a taxi uptown and alighted in front of the house from which Snowball had forced him at the point of a gun on the occasion of his first visit.

He wasn't sure, but it sounded as if it were the same violin, playing the same squeaky scales in the Windsor Studio, when he went up the stairs. He knocked on Vicki Marsh's door. After a minute or two heels tapped over to it. The door opened.

"Oh!" she said, recognizing her caller.

"This time," the Phantom said, smiling, "I won't step out of a closet. I'll come in the right way—if I may."

Her brown eyes were damp from weeping, and filled with a troubled light. She hesitated a fraction of a second before opening the door wider.

"Come in," she said.

It was not a very gracious invitation. The Phantom understood why when he entered the bandbox living room. He caught the reek of alcohol and heard deep snores emanating from the bedroom beyond. Vicki Marsh, ill at ease, watched while the Phantom walked down the little hall and looked in through the bedroom door.

A man, fully dressed, lay across the bed, his legs dangling over the edge of it. Wispy gray hair pressed against a pillow. His face was gaunt, deeply lined. His mouth hung open and the silver haze of his beard stubble showed up plainly in the morning sunshine.

The Phantom noticed that the man's clothes were unpressed and shabby, his shoes cracked and unpolished. After a second glance that showed him the telltale nose mark left by the habitual wearing of eyeglasses, the Phantom turned back to the girl.

"Your uncle, Doctor Abbott?" he asked, though it was more of a statement. When she nodded silently, the Phantom went on, "I came up to ask you about him."

"Yes?" she said weakly.

"Where are his glasses?"

Vicki Marsh's troubled eyes widened. It was obvious the question had startled and surprised her.

"His glasses?" she repeated.

"He usually wears them, doesn't he?"

"Yes. But I—I don't know where they are. I don't believe I noticed he was not wearing them."

"Perhaps I can tell you where a piece of them was found," the Phantom said, his tone grim now. "Half a lens, on the floor in Doctor Maitland's office—a few feet from his dead body!"

The Phantom waited for her reaction. It came in the quick intake of a fluttering breath, a look of pain that crossed her young face.

"You don't think that Uncle Ev killed the doctor?" she said breathlessly.

"I'm merely asking how the broken lens happened to be there," the Phantom told her. "Do you know, Miss Marsh?"

Her slender fingers trembled on the arms of the chair in which she sat. The Phantom saw she was valiantly fighting to keep herself under control, to match his cool manner with some degree of calm. It was a hard fight, but she finally won it.

"My uncle was an old friend of Doctor Maitland," she said wearily. "They worked together years ago. At the Hargrave Foundation Hospital. You might have heard something about my uncle's splendid reputation in those days before—before—"

The Phantom knew that she didn't want to say, "Before a nervous breakdown was given as an excuse to cover the drink habit

that had overtaken him," but he knew now that such was the truth. It explained what Steve had said about Abbott starting at the top and working down. It also explained the once renowned surgeon's exit from the world of medicine.

"Yes," he cut in, "I know. Go on, please."

"For the past few years Doctor Maitland has been very kind to my uncle. Uncle Ev was in the habit of calling at the house in Washington Square. He was always welcome, too," she added defensively. "Doctor Maitland was the only person who remembered Uncle Ev as he had been."

"But that doesn't explain what the piece of his eyeglasses was doing on the floor," the Phantom persisted.

"He must have dropped his glasses and broken one of the lenses when he stopped in last week," Vicki Marsh said. "Though of course I can't be sure about it. He—Uncle Ev hasn't been living here with me. He uses this as an address for his mail, but he doesn't come here often."

"What has he been doing?" asked the Phantom.

"I don't know, exactly. Odd jobs—in chemical companies, mostly. He just managed to get along—with Doctor Maitland's help."

**K**EENLY the Phantom searched her young face. He had no reason to doubt her sincerity. Yet his intuitive powers told him she was holding something back, keeping something in reserve.

"I suppose you heard that Doctor Heath gave himself up and confessed that he murdered Maitland," he remarked.

Vicki Marsh's eyes brimmed with tears. She turned her face away, her lips trembling.

"Rod didn't do it!" she said in a muffled, subdued voice. "I know he didn't. He couldn't have done it!"

"And you haven't any idea who did?" The Phantom's smooth, almost casual tone turned her face back to him.

"No!"

"The last time I was here," he went on, "you said you had told me everything you knew. Doctor Heath made some reference to your uncle when I overheard him talking to you. You told me you didn't know what he meant. You weren't exactly truthful, were you? What are you trying to hide?"

"Nothing!" she declared defensively. "I feel as badly about Doctor Maitland's death as one he befriended can feel! But I don't know who did it! All I know is that Rod Heath *didn't!*"

"Then why does he say he did?" persisted the Phantom.

She wheeled around on him.

"I'll tell you why," she blazed. "It's because of *me!* He thinks I'm implicated in

some way. He thinks I had something to do with changing the formula. He never said it in so many words, but I'm sure of it! He's trying to protect me!"

The Phantom smiled thinly. "In that case I'd better stop down at the Tombs and see him. I happen to know who switched the formulas."

"You know?" Her eyes widened. "Then it wasn't Rod?"

The Phantom got it the next instant. "No, it wasn't young Heath, as you had believed!"

She drew back. "You know I thought that?"

"Yes. I was quite certain you did."

"I must have seemed pretty obvious about it then," she said ruefully.

"What made you suspicious of Heath?" he asked. "Was it because he had the brief-case in charge before Andrew Drake got it?"

"I didn't want to think he did it," Vicki Marsh cried softly. "but I couldn't see how anyone else could have managed it."

SnORES continued from the bedroom. But the Phantom did not glance in that direction as he fingered his worn felt hat.

"You forgot the other member of Doctor Maitland's household," he said dryly.

"John! It was John Stanley!" Her voice shook.

The Phantom nodded as he moved toward the door.

"Suppose I come back later," he suggested. "I want to ask Doctor Abbott a few questions. I think he might be able to help the investigation. What time do you imagine he'll be feeling well enough to talk to me?"

"Tonight." The defensive note was in her voice again. "He'll feel better then. But he really needs his sleep now."

With a word of thanks the Phantom left. This time when he went down the stairs his hand unconsciously moved close to the gun under his coat. But there was no one on the second landing, or on the stairs, to stop him. The Phantom went out and into the sunshine.

He looked both ways up the street, his sharp eyes carefully scrutinizing the building entrances for anyone who might be watching for him. He momentarily probed the cars parked along the curb. But he saw no one.

A taxi took him across to Park Avenue and onto a side street not far from his penthouse apartment. He left the taxi and walked to the rear of the building. His private elevator whisked him to his sky-high suite. There he telephoned Frank Havens briefly.

"Dick Van Loan, Mr. Havens," he said when Havens answered. His tone was indolently bored. "I've been wondering if you wouldn't like to have a snack with me. Say, at one, at the Pilgrim Club?"



RIM and stuffy, the Pilgrim Club's dining room might have been a mid-Victorian set in technicolor out of a Hollywood costume film. The heavy brocaded draperies at the windows, crystal chandeliers, burgundy-colored rugs and heavy mahogany furniture formed a fitting

back-ground for the ancient waiters, gray-haired men who had grown old in the service of the place.

The air of formality in the Pilgrim's Club always amused Richard Curtis Van Loan whenever he had occasion to dine there, which was infrequently. The ponderous dignity of the Club, its stuffed-shirt members, the conversation that never seemed to rise above whispers, to disturb the sacred confines, appealed to his sense of humor. He always had a diabolical desire to scream, just to see what effect it would have upon those who came there daily, at exact hours, to nod over the *Wall Street Journal*, or to discuss social functions, past and present, with bated breath.

Even now, with rationing, the Club served its meager meals with all the eclat of previous banquets. Van Loan and Frank Havens, at a table in a corner where their discreet conversation could be carried on without being overheard, studied the embossed menus like scholars of an Epicurean school, before giving their orders.

The minute the elderly waiter shuffled away, Havens gave Van a quizzical glance.

"What's happened?" he asked curiously.

Wedging a cigarette into a black ebony holder and fitting his well-tailored figure more comfortably to the straight-backed chair, Van supplied his friend and mentor with all the information he had to the moment.

Havens, listening, drew a breath of satisfaction.

"Good work, Dick," he murmured, and added, certain that the three other diners in the room were well out of earshot, "The Phantom can always be depended upon."

"Suggest to Gregg," Van said. "that he keep an eye on Miss Vicki Marsh."

"Meaning just what, Dick?"

"She knows something," Van said flatly. "Something that she won't come out in the open with. I've given her every possible chance to get it off her mind, but she refuses to talk about whatever it is she knows. I want her watched—where she goes, whom she sees, and what she does, reported back to me fully."

"I'll give your message to the Inspector," Havens promised. "What about her uncle?" "I haven't made up my mind," Van told him. "He's either the harmless tosspot the girl makes out he is, probably living off Maitland's charity, or—something else. I hope to find out which tonight, when he emerges from the stupor I left him in."

"And Doctor Heath? You still say he's innocent."

"He is. I'm sure of that. But," Van added, crisply, "he hasn't told everything he knows, either. I think I'll leave him where he is, safe under lock and key, for the time being. His 'confession' is going to be a big help to me in my investigations. For one thing it's going to take a load off the mysterious 'Clipper's' mind. He and his hoodlums will feel free to operate, to go on and finish what they have begun."

"What about Andrew Drake, now that Worley has pointed a suspicious finger at him?" Frank Havens inquired.

Van shrugged. "I'm not considering Drake, for the moment. My main objective now is to use Snowball to reach out for the man who hires him. When I have him I'll have the man whose brain evolved the plot to destroy Benecin Five as well as the killer of Doctor Lester Maitland! After I've learned that man's identity the other pieces in the puzzle will automatically arrange themselves."

Havens sighed. "What possible motive could anyone have that would make him poison innocent people and end the career of a man like Doctor Maitland? Why, Dick, it's inconceivable!"

"Murder," Van answered shortly, "is always inconceivable, except to the assassin. To me this case looks like the work of an egomaniac. Everything that has happened has been plotted and directed by a warped mind. A cunning foe, Mr. Havens. The worst type of criminal to hunt down. But one"—he spoke slowly and thoughtfully—"who must be exterminated like any mad dog!"

**T**HE luncheon, drawn out with the usual Club etiquette, lasted almost an hour. Havens said good-by on the sidewalk as they emerged from the building, and hurried back to the *Clarion* office. Van, strolling leisurely up Park Avenue in the sun, stopped to buy a flower from a peddler before sauntering back to his apartment building and taking one of the regular elevators to his penthouse.

There, in the secret nook behind the sliding bedroom panel, Richard Curtis Van Loan disappeared and the same face the Phantom had worn from the beginning of the Maitland murder case soon looked out at him from the triple mirrors of his dressing table. He put the featherweight dentures into place, pulled

on the shabby gray suit, put on another tie, and flicked a brush over the worn shoes he had donned in place of Richard Curtis Van Loan's custom-made footwear.

Checking to make certain he had everything necessary for his next steps, he left the apartment as the Phantom. Going to the main floor by his private elevator, he went out of the building and made his way across town to his secret hide-out. Every foot of the way he was doubly careful that no tail who had previously seen him in this particular disguise had him under observation.

He didn't want to be forced to give up the place he leased in midtown Manhattan. It was too convenient and handy to be relinquished. But give it up he would have to, if the underworld came to know that the Man of a Thousand Faces was using it as a citadel in his unrelenting war against crime.

It was a three-story house, as old as time. Van had rented it furnished, but that didn't mean much, for its appointments were nothing to brag about. Its usefulness, however, made up for what it lacked in decorative beauty. Reaching the place, he went through the house fronting the street, across a small courtyard to another house directly behind it. He stepped down into its areaway, rang the bell twice, then once, and waited for Skip Nolan to answer his signal.

The man who opened the grille-basement gate had a gun in his right hand. The ex-leather pusher never took any chances, signal or no signal. Burly, bullet-headed and with most of his teeth missing, Skip Nolan would have been unattractive even to his own mother, but his saving grace of loyalty always made him look pretty good to the Phantom.

His clothing was nondescript. A sweater was tucked into a pair of shiny serge trousers. Sneakers, once white but now a murky gray, covered his large, flat feet. He needed a shave badly, and his face was none too clean. But there was a twinkle in his eye and a squareness to his jaw that more than balanced his lack of sartorial elegance.

"Oh, the Boss!" Nolan said, with a grin, and stuck the gun in his belt. "I was hoping you'd roll around."

"Any trouble?" asked the Phantom.

"No." Skip shook his bullet-head. "It's so peaceful I'm worried. All the little fellow you brought here does is kip—sleep to you."

The Phantom laughed softly. "Keep watching him," he said. "Though I don't imagine you'll have any trouble. This is his port in the storm, and he probably knows it. I imagine he's glad to be undercover."

"Yeah, I'd be, too," Nolan chuckled, "with that flock of gorillas waiting to scalp me."

Stanley was in the back parlor, when the Phantom entered, listening to the radio. To be on the safe side, Nolan had handcuffed

him. John Stanley looked more obsequious and harmless than ever. But, studying him, the Phantom couldn't help but remember how the man had fought with him, with what savagery and skill. He frowned, had a few words with Stanley, caught Skip's glance, and went into the front room with Nolan.

"I was going over the little lug's pockets," Skip said. "You know, just to while away the time. I guess he was on the level about lammings to Arizona. He was loaded with Tucson's Chamber of Commerce literature. I found something else, too. This."

He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a folded piece of paper. The Phantom opened it and found he was looking at a map drawn in pencil. It was a rough sketch of some country place, if the markings on it meant anything.

A HOUSE on the map was designated by a square, a wall by a circular line, trees by crosses, and a road by two parallel lines. The only wording on it was printed in the left hand corner. That said, "Hope Harbor." "Mean anything?" Nolan queried.

The Phantom shook his head and went back to the other room. Shutting the radio off, he showed Stanley the map.

"What's this?" he asked.

The man's eyes lifted to meet the Phantom's gaze.

"Snowball gave it to me sometime ago," he answered readily. "He said I was to keep it on me—that I might need it some time."

"Whose place is it?"

"I don't know. Snowball never told me."

"And you never asked him about it? Weren't you curious?"

Stanley shrugged.

"I figured it was none of my business," he said. "If Snowball wanted me to know what it was, he'd have told me. I got no ideas of my own about it."

The Phantom knit his brows. There was a ring of truth in what Stanley said, though not much surface sense to it. He folded the map and put it in his own pocket.

"I don't think he was lying," Skip said confidentially, when the Phantom was ready to leave. "About the map. Maybe those smart operators didn't give him any information when they planted it with him. Maybe they figured they might have to meet him there sometime and if they did, they could tell him where to go, over the phone. Then when he got there he could use the map to spot the house."

"You should have been a detective," the Phantom laughed. "Simple as that, eh?"

"Well—" Nolan shrugged modestly.

"You'll hear from me shortly, Skip," the Phantom said, and let himself out of the house.



ON the other side of town, Vicki Marsh sat tensely motionless for a long time after the Phantom had left her. She twisted her damp handkerchief nervously. Everything her visitor had said came back to her, repeating itself over and over.

The thought of Rod Heath was torment. Vicki was sure, as she had told the Phantom, that the young doctor had confessed to the murder of Dr. Maitland because of her. Rod thought she had something to do with the changed formulas, the death of Maitland.

The irony of it tightened Vicki's soft red lips. Rod Heath had an idea that her uncle, Dr. Abbott, was mixed into the case somewhere and that she was protecting her relative. That was another reason for Heath's having given himself up to the police.

The snoring in the other room had dwindled to a monotonous minor key. Vicki raised her brown head and looked down the hall, reminded of her uncle. Why should Rod think her Uncle Ev had a hand in that murder? Merely because he had called at the Washington Square house one late afternoon and had had a bitter argument with Dr. Maitland? She winced as she remembered that. But surely Rod must have known her Uncle Ev had been drunk that day, that he had not been responsible for the things he had said.

She half-closed her eyes, spreading out the handkerchief in her lap. That time in the Maitland home of which she was thinking had been an unpleasant session. Her uncle had shouted and raved. He had been almost incoherent, but as she had tried to quiet him, he had mumbled something about Vanolene. Vicki had not understood what he had meant, but finally she had managed to get him in a taxi and away from the house.

But Rod had heard it all, had heard the old man's threats. So had John Stanley. They hadn't meant anything, she was sure. Just drink-inspired, bellicose rantings.

The tightness left her mouth and her red lips trembled. Out of his cups, there was no one in the world as gentle and understanding as Uncle Ev.

She was worried about him now. He hadn't told her where he was living, and for days she wouldn't see him. Then, like this morning, he would pop in on her early, usually liquor-soaked. Vicki had felt an inner dread. Lately, Dr. Abbott had sunk deeper into the depths where he had fallen at the time he has disappeared from the world that had known him as a great surgeon.

Another thing that troubled her was the fact her uncle seemed to have plenty of money. Money enough to keep him supplied with drink, and to buy her presents. One of them was in on her bureau now. Uncle Ev had brought it that morning, a small fob watch that looked expensive. Where had the cash to buy it come from? She decided that when her Uncle Ev was straightened out she was going to have a serious talk with him.

But how long it would be before he came out of his stupor was a question. Tiptoeing to the bedroom door, Vicki Marsh stared in at him as the Phantom had done. Her uncle wasn't a pleasant sight and she was shuddering a little as she turned her gaze away. The wreckage of a man who had once stood at the pinnacle of success was a sad sight to look at.

VICKI went back to the living room. She noted the time and made up her mind. She would go downtown and make an attempt to see Rod Heath. Inspector Gregg would tell her how to go about it. She had to see Rod, had to tell him that she knew why he was sacrificing himself and she had a plan. If Dr. Heath refused to tell the Inspector that he was innocent, she would threaten to complicate matters further by making a confession of her own. It wouldn't be true, of course, but it might serve to bring Rod to his senses.

Thinking about young Dr. Heath, Vicki drew a quivering breath. She had been so sure that he had been mixed up in the changing of the Benecin Five formulas, and what the Phantom had explained about that brought a wave of self-reproach to her. It made her all the more steadfast in her determination to get Rod out of jail. She also would ask him to forgive her, beg him to forget that she had ever for an instant doubted him. And then perhaps things between them could be as they had been before tragedy struck.

Vicki put on her hat, collected her handbag and gloves and patted powder on the circles

under her eyes. She looked in on Dr. Abbott before she left the apartment. Her uncle lay in the same position as before. The raucous snoring had ended though, and his breathing was deep and even again. He should be himself once more before long.

Vicki pulled the shade at the window to keep the sun out of his face. Leaving the apartment then, she locked the front door and started down the stairs.

Her destination was the nearest subway station. Out in the street, Vicki turned west. The sidewalk was crowded and, after a minute, she had an impression that a man was walking along a few feet behind her. She noticed it because he seemed to keep the same pace, slowing down when she slowed, quickening his gait when she walked faster.

Finally, close to the corner, Vicki stopped and turned around.

"You're following me!" she said accusingly.

A short, stocky, hard-faced youth met her indignant gaze. Vicki noticed his chalk-striped gray suit, fantastic necktie and wide-brimmed felt hat. His face, pock-marked and pale, was not attractive. He moved closer to her as she finished speaking and dropped his voice to speak to her.

"You're Miss Marsh?" he asked confidentially.

Vicki's brown eyes widened. She looked at him harder, trying to remember where she could possibly have seen him before—if ever. But before she could say anything to him he went on hurriedly:

"Look. I've got a message for you from Doctor Heath."

Vicki's lips parted. "You . . . Who are you?" she demanded.

"My name's Eddie. I'm with a law firm, across the street from the Tombs. I saw the doctor a couple of hours ago and he asked me to get in touch with you."

Vicki's heart began to beat faster. All at once a queer tide of relief flowed through her.

[Turn page]

# Can't Keep Grandma In Her Chair

**She's as Lively as a Youngster—Now her Backache is better**

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up

nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (A.M.)

"Tell me what he said," she begged eagerly. "What is the message?"

Eddie smiled thinly. "Look lady," he said. "It's kinda long. I can't spill it here in the street. I've got a car parked around the corner. Let's step around there, sit down, and I'll tell you everything he said."

A little doubtful, Vicki nodded and let him lead the way. A dark blue sedan stood at the curb, several yards in from the corner they rounded. Another man was at the wheel. Vicki had the impression of a wax-white angular face and a thin-lipped mouth with a scar at one corner. Cold, hazel eyes turned in her direction. The man seemed to probe her with a fast, searching gaze.

Vicki's doubts increased. She started to hesitate, but Eddie had the rear door of the car open and was helping her in before she could do anything about it.

"Sit right down, Miss Marsh," he said. "Make yourself to home." He nodded toward the waxy-faced man. "This is a friend of mine, Mr. Ball."

The man he indicated nodded curtly and started the car. Eddie shut the door behind him and dropped down beside Vicki. At the same moment Vicki, her pulses drumming, caught a glimpse of the gun Eddie had trained directly upon her!

"What does this mean?" she choked.

He cut her short with a low laugh, pushing the gun closer to her, as he ripped out words from the corner of his mouth:

"Look, babe! We're going places—all three of us! Any noise out of you and you'll never see Heath again—or anyone else! Sit quiet and relax, and nothing will happen to you. Get the idea?"

\* \* \*

**W**HEN the Phantom left his midtown hide-out, leaving John Stanley in the capable care of Skip Nolan, he had a couple of telephone calls to make. One was to Inspector Gregg, the other to Steve Huston.

Finished talking with Gregg at some length, he called the *Clarion*, and as luck had it, Huston was there. To Steve the Phantom made one or two requests, rang off, and went back to his Park Avenue apartment as usual when he was in character, in a roundabout way.

For the moment, he had to mark time until Dr. Everly Abbott was in a fit condition to be questioned. Van was confident that the former surgeon could tell him something he wanted to know, something he had to know.

From his apartment he telephoned Vicki Marsh twice during the afternoon. There was no answer, either time.

Finally, when darkness came, Van got busy. Leaving his own home, he headed directly for the shabby house where Vicki Marsh had her home.

For the third time he went up the steps

of the house on the cluttered side street. There was a light in the furrier's window, but the Windsor Studio was dark and silent. The Phantom smiled. There was always something to be thankful for in a world of few blessings. This time, when he went into the uncarpeted hall, the scales of future Zimbalists were mercifully hushed.

A man was lounging on the front steps. One glance was enough for Van to spot him as Gregg's plant, the man he had asked Havens to have the Inspector supply to keep tabs on the Marsh girl. The plainclothes man gave the Phantom a stare as he passed him and went up the steps, but made no attempt to stop him.

No light showed along the sill of the door to the Marsh apartment. No one answered his ring. So once again the master-key came into use, for the Phantom did not like this set-up. He opened the door and stepped into the murk of the dark apartment.

For a moment he stood motionless, listening to the scrape of a shade in some window, stirred by the night breeze. And as he stood there his eyes narrowed. His nerves began to contract, an unfailing secret signal that all was not right. He reached for his flashlight finally as, thin and eerie, a faint moan came to him out of the pitch black somewhere ahead of him.

A dozen strides took the Phantom to the bedroom door. His torch stabbed in, zigzagging until it found the light switch. That snapped on double wall sconces that lit the bedroom like stage footlights, giving clear illumination to a scene that made the Phantom bend quickly forward.

Dr. Abbott was still on the bed. But this time there was a difference. The counterpane under him was red with blood. His near-sighted eyes were open, peering up at the ceiling. One hand was at his throat, the other was pressed to his chest, and that hand was sticky with the ooze it had tried vainly to staunch.

The Phantom hurried to him as another faint moan was wrenched from pain-twisted lips.

The Phantom drew Abbott's hand away from his chest. A glance was enough to tell him the old man had been shot—shot at close range, probably with a silenced gun. There were powder marks on his grease-spotted vest, on the unclean shirt he wore. Sensitive fingers felt for Abbott's pulse. The beat of it was so faint that the Phantom knew it was only a question of minutes before Dr. Abbott would be dead!

"What happened?" the Phantom asked anxiously. "Can you hear me, Doctor Abbott? I'm a friend. I'm a friend of your niece. Answer me—say something!"

The glazed eyes left the ceiling with an ef-

fort and rolled in the Phantom's direction. The twisted lips moved slowly. With a great effort the gravely wounded man tried to form words. He managed to get out:

"Shot! They—" He broke off, his face graying. The Phantom felt for the pulse again. It was almost gone, the faintest tick running out, like a watch that needed winding.

Hastening to the bathroom, the Phantom soaked a towel in cold water. Returning with it he worked swiftly, realizing it was a race with the Grim Reaper. The cold shock of the towel helped momentarily to revive a spark of consciousness in the old man on the bed.

"Who did it?" asked the Phantom. "Who shot you? Try to tell me, Doctor Abbott! For Vicki's sake!"

Once more the shapeless mouth struggled to speak. Words came, slow-spaced, low, so faint that the Phantom had to strain his ears to catch them. It was ironical that this was what he had come here for—to question Abbott. But it was fortunate for the Phantom's chance to right a wrong that luck had been with him. Another few minutes and the man would have been beyond all earthly means of communication.

**N**OW, in that brief span, with his dwindling strength, Dr. Abbott croaked out broken sentences—enough for the listening Phantom to patch together and understand. The effort, valiant though it was, ended a few seconds later.

Behind him, the Phantom heard a door open. He paid no attention, for it all was centered on Dr. Everly Abbott whose life's cycle had run out. A rasping gasp came from the wounded man's lips, and he was dead. The Phantom dropped the wrist he held as, from the doorway, an authoritative voice said:

"Start reaching! Walked right in on you, huh? That's the way the Chief likes his murders—with the lugs who do them standing over the bodies!"

The Phantom straightened up slowly, elevating his hands.

"Do you mind if I turn around?" he asked. "I'd like to see whose company I have the pleasure of."

The voice chuckled tightly.

"Sure, anything you like. But try any tricks and you'll be deader than that one on the floor."

"I think you've made that plain enough."

Slowly, the Phantom turned. The man he had passed downstairs stood there, holding a regulation Department gun, and drawing a bead on him. The Phantom remembered now having seen the man several times at Headquarters, and recalled his name.

"You're one of Gregg's men, Mayo?" he

asked coolly.

"That's right," growled the plainclothes man. "Now just keep your hands up while I find a telephone and do a little calling. Walked right by me to come up and kill this old character, did you?"

"Just a minute. Before you call, I'd like to identify myself. I happen to be working on a case that brought me here. It also was at my suggestion that you were sent here to watch Miss Marsh."

Mayo gave him a puzzled glance. "You did?" he grunted.

Risking a shot from the gun trained on him, the Phantom's fingers quickly went into the secret pocket and produced his domino mask-plate. Mayo stared at it a moment, and slowly put his gun away.

"The Phantom!" he said. "Well, that's some difference."

The Phantom brushed his mumbled apologies hurriedly aside.

"How long have you been stationed here?" Van asked.

"About an hour and a half. The Inspector sent another man—Tom Bullard—up early this afternoon. Tom didn't even get a sight of the girl. I took over, waiting for her to show up."

"Who passed you while you were downstairs?" the Phantom asked. "I mean, who came in?"

"A couple of women and a man." Mayo's brows went up. "Man was a short, stocky character in a chalk-striped suit. Come to think of it, I don't remember him coming out again."

The Phantom nodded. He recognized that description. Short, stocky, chalk-striped suit. That would be the wolfish Eddie whose acquaintance he had made under not exactly pleasant circumstances.

"He did go out, though," the Phantom said. "He left that way!" He pointed to the window.

Mayo's jaw dropped. "You mean he bumped this old bird and lammed by the fire-escape?" When the Phantom nodded, the plainclothes man looked worried. "That ain't going to do me much good, when the Inspector hears I let a killer walk past me and disappear! But how did I know what he had in mind? I was sent to check on a dame. Nobody said nothing to me about murder."

"How did you happen to check on me?" the Phantom asked. "Do I look suspicious?"

"No." Mayo shook his head. "And I wasn't checking on you. I thought maybe I'd come up and ring the bell here, just to see if the doll was in. You left the door open, so I just came in."

"Call the Inspector," the Phantom directed. "I want to take a look around this place."

## CHAPTER XIII

## THE CLIPPER



**R**AISING the flapping shade, after Mayo had headed for the telephone, the Phantom saw that Eddie had had a choice of either of two ways in which to leave the building. The fire-escape ledge, stretching to the vacant apartment adjoining, was close enough to the roof coping to make that an exit, in that direction. Or he could have gone down to the first floor and dropped off into the basement's yard. Whether he had used the roof or the backyard was immaterial. The fact that he was gone was sufficient.

Eddie, trigger-man for Snowball's outfit, had done his job and faded.

In the living room, Mayo was talking on the telephone. The Phantom bent over Dr. Abbott's body. He searched the pockets of the man's worn suit. Keys, a bent package of cigarettes, a folded-over card, a thin roll of bills and a handful of coins. The Phantom made sure that was all, noticed the half-obiterated label of the exclusive tailor who had long ago made the now shabby suit, before he looked at the card more closely.

On one side of it Andrew Drake's name was engraved. On the other, was some writing which read:

**Ev:** I must see you immediately. The Phantom has been brought in on the case and you know what that means. Get in touch with me at once.

It was signed "A.D."

Van read it again, put it in his pocket and raised his head as Mayo came back into the room.

"The Inspector's starting up right away," the plainclothes man said. "He told me to ask you to wait for him."

The Phantom shook his head. "Sorry, but I can't. Give my respects to Gregg and tell him I couldn't stand by. I have a couple of murderers to catch tonight and time is slipping past. You might say I'll telephone him at Headquarters—later."

Van took a cab across town to the garage where he kept his cars. As usual, all of them had full fuel tanks and were ready for instant use. Slipping in under the wheel of the big black sedan, which was nearest the street ramp, he drove off, making his Bronx laboratory his first destination.

The death of Dr. Everly Abbott, together with what the ex-surgeon had choked out in his dying moments, had opened a dark door wider and let in one ray of lucid light. But there were still things the Phantom had not been able to get Abbott to reveal in those

final seconds, and one of them was a matter that had taken him up to the Bronx-Westchester line.

A thrust of the Phantom's queer-shaped, specially made key into a special multiple lock opened the door of the laboratory in this house where, to the people in the neighborhood he was known as Dr. Bendix.

Van went directly over to his map case. The drawers were on rollers. Lights which he switched on illuminated the flat, indexed charts so powerfully that every line, every name and every shading was revealed to him in crystal clearness. Government cartographers kept the Phantom's maps minutely up to date. No community, hamlet or town, was too small or inconspicuous to be overlooked.

Fifteen minutes elapsed before the Phantom found what he wanted. He made a mental note of it, pushed the steel drawer shut, and turned off the high-powered lights. Then, dropping into a chair, he took out the card he had removed from the dead Abbott's pocket and studied it thoughtfully.

With him he had another note which had been written on a sheet of paper. He went across to his desk and laid the note and the card side by side and set about making the Langley-Carter Comparison Chirography Test. Van had contributed some final touches to that himself, and now it stood him in good stead.

It was the work of only a minute or two before he found that the hand which had been responsible for the note had also written the message on the back of Drake's card.

The Phantom straightened, understanding in his gaze.

With a shrug he extinguished the laboratory lights, let himself out, and went back to his car. Thirty minutes later he stopped near the corner of an East Side street, parked, locked the sedan and looked around for some place that had a public telephone.

He found a phone in a tavern, got Inspector Gregg on the wire, talked for a few minutes and laid out his plans for the remaining hours of the night that were ahead of him. Satisfied, and confident that the case of the poison formula was in its final stages now, the Phantom rang off and went back to the street.

**T**HE neighborhood was squalid, the block deserted except for a couple of sailors, whistling as they made their way down the opposite pavement. On foot, Van walked along until he was across from the building where the Ace Tire Recapping Service did business.

Its doors were shut now, the office windows dark. The Phantom cut across to it, keeping a sharp lookout for anyone who might show an undue interest in his movements. But he

failed to see anyone who might have been stationed as a sentinel to tip off the arrival of the law or anyone else who might be too curious about the place. To the Phantom the coast looked clear in all directions.

To the left of the office a concrete runway ended in a yard where cars and trucks could be driven in for service and repairs. The Phantom slid along through the thick shadows until he found a rear door at the end of the shop there.

The door was locked, but yielded readily enough to a single turn of his master-key. He went in, breathing the acrid smell of rubber, oil and gasoline. When his eyes were able to distinguish objects in the murk, he saw vulcanizing machinery around him, piles of tires waiting to be worked over, long tables heaped with tools.

He skirted them all cautiously, continuing on until he reached a sliding steel door. That opened into a large whitewashed garage. Several light delivery trucks stood parked there. One, a panel job, faced the street doors, ready to roll out at any given minute.

The Phantom made his way in between the cars, catching sight of another door at the far end of the place as he moved along.

And the moment he saw that door he knew a surge of expectancy. The building might look dark and untenanted from the street, but before him a smear of light lay along the cement floor below the edge of the door! From beneath his feet, voices crept up in a thin monotone.

The Phantom opened the door and looked down a flight of stone steps. A faint glimmer of light, coming from the right at the end of the flight made the Phantom draw his automatic and start warily down the steps.

The stairs led into a cement-like passage, with a room on either side of it. A quick glance and the Phantom went through a half-open door and into a store-room blanketed with gloom.

His torch showed him steel drums, piled from floor to ceiling, crates, boxes, parts of machinery. The light flickered around and finally came to rest on a fireproof door on the east side of the place.

Moving close to it, and standing there taut and expectant, the Phantom listened, straining his ears to catch the conversation going on in the lighted room on the other side of the steel-faced door! And instantly he recognized the first voice he heard—Eddie's voice, low and filled with satanic amusement.

"Easy as getting a chorine to take a mink coat, Clipper," Eddie was saying. "I walked right by the dick staked out on the front steps. He tossed me a look. I threw it back and he didn't open his yap. If he had—" He laughed. "One sap who'll never know how close to an undertaker he was."

The Phantom's mouth tightened and his nerves tingled. *Clipper!* So only a fireproof door separated him now from the warped brain that had spawned the poison formula! Only a few feet distant was the man who had engineered the deaths of Dr. Maitland and the elderly Dr. Abbott! Statue-still, the Phantom continued to eavesdrop.

"What else?" the voice he heard speak now was expressionless, ice-cold.

"I went upstairs," said Eddie. "The flat next door to the Marsh layout was vacant and wide open. The bedroom window of the Marsh flat was up—to let out the whisky fumes. Abbott was laying on the bed, just coming out of the ether. He tried to sit up. That made it easier—I hate shooting down."

"He was dead when you left?" asked the icy voice.

"When I gun 'em they're finished," Eddie bragged. "I never do a sloppy job."

"And there was no trouble?" the questioner persisted.

"Not any," Eddie said gleefully. "I went down the fire-escape ladder, dropped off in the courtyard and was out of the neighborhood, all within a few minutes." He laughed again. "And that dumb cluck on the front steps, looking at the stars, waiting for the gal to come back!"

"Pay attention." The cold voice quickened. "Here's what I want you and Sid to do next."

**H**E gave his instructions concisely, clipping them off curtly. The Phantom didn't miss a word. Cloaked in the gloom of the store-room, his mind worked fast.

"Okay," Eddie said. Judging from the clink of a glass against a bottle that the Phantom heard, Eddie had poured himself a drink. "I get it. Sid drives me down to Corrigan's. That right? We make the pick-up and head for the island. We dump the stuff at Riley's place and finish at the Harbor."

"You've got the map," the man Eddie had called Clipper cut in. "You can't miss. Follow the shore road through and you hit the property before you get to the water. Big stone wall, iron gates, with a bronze eagle over them."

"We'll find it." Eddie's confidence made his tone carelessly cocksure. "Just so long as Snowball expects us, everything will be okay."

"Get upstairs and warm the wagon," the Clipper interrupted, apparently speaking to someone else in the room.

"Right away." That was the moronic Sid's voice. The Phantom recognized it, and the yawn that blurred his words. "I'm gettin' sleepy down here. What I need is fresh air."

The shuffle of his feet sounded on the floor. A chair was pushed back.

"You ride inside the truck, Eddie," the

Clipper went on.

"Meaning I'm 'hot'?" asked Eddie. "Don't worry, Clipper. They'll never pick me up. This Phantom," he sneered, "the lug who never misses. He can write this one off. There's always a first time and this is his! All I want is half a break, and I'll get away with anything."

But the Phantom was not interested in what Eddie wanted. Swinging around, he made his way quickly back to the stone stairs. From the garage above he caught the rumble of an overhead door being raised. Then, as he was half-way up the steps, the noise of an automobile engine came to him.

The Phantom moved faster. When he reached the top of the steps he saw that Sid had opened the way to the street. The delivery truck the Phantom had noticed a few minutes previous, had its lights on. Its exhaust smoked as Sid stepped up the motor.

The Phantom knew he didn't have any time to waste. Another moment or so and Eddie would be coming along. What he had to do had to be accomplished in the next seconds.

The dull-eyed, big-eared Sid, with the cab door swinging open beside him, sat hunched slightly forward, his foot rocking on the gas pedal when the Phantom slipped up on him and grabbed him before he could turn his head or open his mouth. Fingers of steel dug into Sid's throat.

Like a clerk taking a package from a shelf, the Phantom lifted Sid from the seat. Smothered, wheezing sounds choked in the man's constricted throat. Using the butt of his automatic, the Phantom struck. Once was enough.

Crumpling in that unrelenting grip, Sid lost all interest in what was going on.

From the direction of the stairs the Phantom heard footfalls. Eddie! He made a rapid transfer. Pulling Sid's cap off, the Phantom put it on and, in the light of the tail lamp, saw what he wanted. A few feet distant was the iron rim of an open grease-pit. Sid went unceremoniously into it in the next breath and the Phantom climbed up on the seat of the delivery truck.

He switched off the small bulb on the instrument panel, jerked the peak of Sid's cap lower over his eyes, shut the door and was lounging at the wheel when Eddie paused briefly beside him.

"Okay, kid," Eddie said. "Burn rubber."

Eddie opened the door at the rear and climbed in, to ride out of sight according to the Clipper's orders. The Phantom eased off the brake and the truck rolled out to the street.

Eddie made his way up to the back of the front seat and squatted on the floor directly behind the Phantom. Puffing on a cigarette, Eddie said:

"Better take Third Avenue to Canal."

"Yeah, I know."

The Phantom gave a perfect imitation of Sid's lazy tone. Always a master of mimicry, more than once his ability to duplicate a voice had meant the difference between the success or failure of some important mission upon which he had embarked. In fact, so great was his talent for mimicry that had the Phantom so chosen he could have become a leading character actor, using this tonal art to perfect any kind of rôle.

How much like Sid's laconic drawl the Phantom's was, was demonstrated when Eddie said:

"Sweet racket—cases of untaxed liquor. Fred Riley's ringing in on it, too. Sid. Plenty of legal tender. We make the Clipper happy and this job ought to string out for a while."

"Yeah, sure," the Phantom said, in such a perfect imitation of Sid that Sid himself would not have been sure he was not answering Eddie.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE PHANTOM DRIVES A HEARSE



FROM the conversation the Phantom had overheard in the basement of the tire-capping place, he knew that their first destination was Corrigan's tavern, in the shadows of the majestic bridge that spanned the river there. After that, 'Riley's,' and Hope Harbor.

How narrow the margin of luck was that had given him the map in John Stanley's pocket, impressed itself upon the Phantom now. Breaks of that kind, he was sure, pointed the way to ultimate victory. Long experience had taught the Phantom that no matter how careful and scientific deductions were, luck always played a major part in the final analysis.

And this was luck, pure, if not so simple! Luck that had taken him to the cellar of the building they had just left. Luck that had sent Sid up alone to warm the truck. Luck that the Phantom had been to Corrigan's and knew the alley that led to its rear yard. He didn't have to arouse suspicion by asking any questions of Eddie.

Reaching the place, he drove the truck in close to the pyramids of empty beer kegs. He cut lights and motor and, while Eddie scrambled out through the rear door, kept his right hand within short range of the gun under his coat.

But there was no need to use it—yet.

"Stay put," Eddie said over his shoulder and disappeared into the tavern.

A minute or two passed, then Eddie and another man came out. They were carrying

cases. They began to load them into the truck. The Phantom counted twenty of them before Eddie and his companion finished their work. Tensely, then, he awaited the next move.

"One thing more." Eddie's voice in speaking to the man with him had the same satanic quality that had been in it when the Phantom had first heard him speaking in the cellar room. "Come on, Lew. Let's get it over with."

Both turned and went across to the building into which the Phantom had been ushered at the time of his other visit to the neighborhood. It was too dark for him to see much more than their shapes of shadow. A cat sprang past, clambered over the refuse cans and made the top of the fence. With his hand still ready for a lightning draw, the Phantom kept his gaze on the curtain of murk ahead of him.

Two or three minutes passed. Then Eddie and the man the gunman had called Lew came back to the truck. They were carrying something—something, the Phantom saw, that was covered with a blanket. Close to the truck, Eddie's chuckle sounded as he said: "You don't have to be so careful, Lew. He can't feel anything now. Toss him in."

A body!

The Phantom's eyes narrowed. A body under the blanket, to be removed from Corrigan's to a less congested spot for permanent disposal! But whose body? To the Phantom's ears came the slam of the doors as they were shut and then Lew's directions:

"All right, Sid. Turn your lights on and back out. I'll give the street a gander to see if it's clear. Start moving!"

Whose body? The Phantom asked himself the question again as he put the gear lever in reverse and rolled slowly to the street beyond. Eddie had taken up his former position back in the truck, using one of the liquor cases this time as a seat. The red tip of his cigarette was visible in the rear-view mirror. "You're okay, Sid," Lew told the Phantom. "So long. Take it easy."

The Phantom went west, then north and onto the approach to the same bridge that reared up over Corrigan's. He took the truck lane there. There was little traffic. Some passenger cars went briskly along on the upper level, but at this time of night only a few trucks rumbled down the center section of the span.

Thoughts ticked through the Phantom's mind as he drove. A short time previously he had been within striking distance of the Clipper. He hadn't struck then, but he'd had his reasons for not moving in at that time. First, before he caught the big fish in the turgid crime pool, he had to net the minnows. And to that end he had made his plans.

Over the bridge and on down a principal Long Island highway, the truck rolled. Eddie didn't have much to say until Manhattan dropped away, behind them. Then he stretched and struck a match for a fresh cigarette.

"No nodding off, eh, Sid?" he asked.

"Me?" drawled the Phantom. "Naw."

"You ain't been down here before," Eddie observed, after a minute or two. "How come you know the way?"

"Snowball told me once," said the Phantom.

THAT appeared to satisfy Eddie.

"We'll deliver the liquor last," he said. "Get rid of the stiff first. We'll drop him right in Snowball's lap."

"But the Clipper said—"

"Yeah, I know. Drop the booze off first. What difference? I'd rather be picked up riding with bottled goods than keeping company with a corpse. Wouldn't you?"

"Sure."

"Always look out for yourself first, I say." Eddie began to grow philosophical. "Take this lug for instance, the one I've got my feet on. He was trying to take care of himself, but he didn't do such a good job. And now look what's happened to him. He's stopped breathing—forever. See what I mean?"

"I get you," mumbled the Phantom.

"He didn't keep his guard up," said Eddie. "I'm always fixing an out for myself in case there's a slip. You'd better learn to do the same thing."

"How?" the Phantom asked ingenuously.

Eddie laughed. "By taking a leaf out of my book," he said, as if proud of himself. "Orders are orders. Okay. But you've got to use your knob, too. Like now, for instance. Maybe we'd pull into Riley's and unload. And maybe while we were doing it some nosy cop would angle up and take a peek at this heap and see what's in it. Then where'd I be—with a dead punk for cargo?"

"I guess you've got somethin' there," the Phantom agreed.

"Watch your speed and keep your eye out for the turn-off," warned Eddie. "Though I'll be darned if you don't seem to know more about it than I do. Snowball must have sprayed you plenty with directions."

In the studious glance the Phantom had given the map in the Bronx laboratory, his mind had photographed the main roads leading to Hope Harbor. The place, evidently an aristocratic development a short distance below Manhasset, occupied a finger of land that stretched out into Long Island Sound. The road the light delivery truck rolled along should, after more time, show a marker on the left side. There, the turn-off would have to be made.

The Phantom watched for the sign at every traffic light. A couple of more miles and he found it, slowed, went left and straightened out on a narrow macadam road. The truck began to pass the close-clipped green lawns and shrubbery of sprawling estates.

Eddie sat up on his liquor case seat and peered ahead.

"Watch for a high stone wall," he instructed, "and iron gates with an eagle on top of them."

The road ran on with few twists, and the air blowing against the Phantom's face took on a salty flavor. The moon, obscured by scudding clouds, swung suddenly free of them and the countryside sprang into sharper view.

A half-mile further and the Phantom saw the high stone wall, the iron gates of which Eddie had spoken. Eddie snapped his cigarette away.

"Here we are, Sid!" he said. "Right on the button."

A red cement driveway circled past formal gardens, moon-silvered in the night, tennis courts and the shimmer of a swimming pool. The house sprang up, a large, many-winged place of squat chimneys and windows. The Phantom stopped the delivery truck a few feet beyond the front entrance. Off to the right he caught a glimpse of a parked car, a familiar blue sedan. He had taken an unpleasant ride in that himself not long ago.

"What do you want me to do?" he mumbled, forcing a yawn in Sid's best manner.

"You?" Eddie got out of the truck. "Nothing—till I check with Snowball. He'll know what to do with the stiff. Catch yourself a nap, kid. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Eddie moved away and disappeared in the gloom. The Phantom waited until he heard a door open and shut somewhere on the north side of the house. Quickly then, the Phantom climbed over the top of the seat and crouched beside the blanket-covered body laid out on the floor of the truck between the liquor cases.

His torch focused as he reached to pull the blanket clear. In the beam of the light he held, a face appeared—a blanched, dead face with open, staring eyes and familiar features. The Phantom clamped his teeth on the exclamation that rose to his lips.

At that moment, bending forward, his gaze sharp, but his mind full of quick worry, the Phantom asked himself what had happened to Skip Nolan. Something important and not good, he was sure, to have let the prisoner in the midtown house get his handcuffs off and escape.

For the body under the blanket was that of John Stanley!

Staring at Stanley, the Phantom felt the

irony of the situation. It had been from Stanley that he had obtained the map that had taken him to this place. He had driven a hearse down, never dreaming that the body picked up back at Corrigan's was that of Dr. Maitland's former servant!

The Phantom snapped off the torch and, climbing over the front seat, let himself out of the delivery truck.

He didn't know how Stanley had slipped Nolan's guard, but the rest of it was fairly obvious. Once clear of the Phantom's hide-out, however it had been accomplished, the little man must have headed straight for Snowball, to get his payoff. And he had got it, not in the form of cash, but in a lead slug that had closed his mouth forever. The Phantom was nodding to himself as he circled thick clumps of shrubbery and cut in toward the house from its south side.

Heavily leaded windows barred his progress. But not for long. The Phantom was expert in negotiating any and all types of man-made obstacles. Windows were the least of his troubles. His stout, serviceable jack-knife went to work on the nearest window, after he made sure no burglar alarm system protected it. The lock rasped back and the Phantom stepped up and into waves of opaque murk.

From the feel of tiles under his feet, and the smell of earth and plants, he knew he was in a conservatory. He went along quietly, threading a way between pot-filled tables until he reached a door. Opening it, he saw that the way led across a wide hall and into an elaborate kitchen. The kitchen was big enough to have served a club or small inn. The moonlight glinted on nickel and chromium and copper, on a massive electric refrigerator, on rows and rows of polished pans and pots.

From there a swinging door opened into a butler's pantry. There were two exits from which to choose. One door led to a dining room, the other to the rear hall of the house. The Phantom selected the latter, crossed it, and ducked into the first room he came to.

That proved to be a library. He risked a light, putting his torch into action. Its round yellow eye roamed over four walls of books. Books whose ornate bindings and gold-leafed titles made a riot of color. At random, the Phantom pulled out the first book his hand touched.

It was a first edition of France's "Penguin Island," beautifully bound in hand-buffed leather. But the Phantom was more interested in the book-plate on the inside of its front cover than in the binding. For the book-plate would identify the owner of the sprawling house, something at which he had not as yet made a guess.

He held his light steady and cracked the

volume open. The book-plate was Gothic, done in black-gold-and-red. The owner's name was in illuminated brush work:

ANDREW DRAKE

The Phantom put the book back and, his face expressionless, continued on to an adjoining music room and so out to the main front hall.

Voices there drew him back into the deeper shadows.

They came from a landing above, where a spiral staircase reared like a corkscrew to the upper regions. There was no carpet, and slabs of marble made the steps the Phantom went up, his fingers tight around the chilly steel of his automatic.

Neither Snowball nor whoever else was in the house made any slightest attempt at secrecy. Lights gushed warmly out of the card room from which the voices came. Still, the Phantom thought, why should they muffle their voices or lock any doors? Here, safely remote from Manhattan with its myriad dangers for them, they felt secure from any interruption.

From, for instance, a night visit by the Phantom Detective!

## CHAPTER XV

### TWO FOR THE CHAIR



AN had hardly reached the landing before he darted across it and into a dark room. Snowball came out of the card room, and with his shadow preceding him, Eddie trailing after him.

"So I'm expected to dig a grave for Johnny?" the waxy-faced man was saying, and his tone was full of disgust. "What does the Clipper think I am? Come one, Eddie. We'll go outside and I'll talk to Sid."

"If you can wake him up by now," Eddie put in. "He's had a chance to get in a good one."

"He ought to be good with a shovel," Snowball said, as they passed the room where the Phantom stood motionless, framed by the dark. "He was on WPA long enough before he got in with us."

They started down the stairs.

"We've got to speed it up," the Phantom heard Eddie saying as their footfalls sounded on the marble steps. "I've got twenty cases of nose-paint in the truck. Got to leave them at Riley's."

"We'll take care of Johnny first," Snowball said, and their conversation faded out hollowly as they headed for the door.

The Phantom looked into the card room

from which the two men had emerged. Snowball had been amusing himself playing two-handed bridge. Cards were spread out on the top of a Chippendale table. The Phantom's gaze switched from the pasteboards to something that glinted on the floor. Leaning down he picked it up—a bronze hairpin.

For an instant the Phantom considered it thoughtfully, his eyes narrowing. It was significant. So much so that he wheeled around and went back to the landing. His flash stabbed into each of the rooms along it in swift succession. Time was of the utmost value now. Whatever he did must be done before Snowball and Eddie woke up to the fact that something disturbing had happened to their plans. They wouldn't be suspicious when they didn't find Sid—not for a few minutes. Then they would begin to think fast. And when Eddie mentioned—which he likely would do—how accurately Sid had followed Snowball's directions and driven down, the chalk-faced thug would know it hadn't been Sid who had played chauffeur that night. When they happened they would start gunning for him!

The Phantom's torchlight went into the middle room in the line of rooms, and a smothered sound whipped against his nerves. His light beam fell on brown hair, on two wide, frightened eyes and a gag that was fastened over Vicki Marsh's red lips!

Besides the gag, there was a thin length of line that bound her wrists, circled her waist and lashed her ankles. She lay on a tufted chaise-longue, in a bedroom where the moon made a futile attempt to penetrate the brocaded draperies masking the casement windows.

The Phantom hurried across to her. His jack-knife again went into play. He slashed the thin line, after he had removed the gag, and helped Vicki to sit up. The pain brought when the blood circulated through choked-off veins made her exclaim softly. He chafed her slender wrists, hastily whispering while he worked:

"Pay attention, Miss Marsh! You know me—you should. I called on you twice. I'm working with the police—"

"Yes, I know!"

"Those men who brought you here will be back—looking for me," he told her. "I want them, both of them. For the chair! You'll have to help."

"How?" Her low voice was dubious, but earnest. "I'll do anything on earth I can."

He explained in as few quick words as possible. He had hardly finished when he heard a door bang open downstairs, then heard footsteps clattering on the marble stairs. He glided to the door in time to see Snowball and Eddie coming up determinedly, snub-nosed guns in hand

The Phantom's mind worked as swiftly then as it ever had in his life, as instantaneously he decided what to do. He crouched by the door. The two men went past him, so close he could have reached out and touched them. Vicki Marsh, following his directions, was lying prone on the floor behind the chaise-longue. The Phantom's left hand groped for and picked up a heavy glass ash-tray from a convenient night table. He let it drop with a disconcerting crash on the polished floor between the rugs.

"What was that?" Out on the landing Snowball whirled around, staring at the open door.

"In there!" Eddie's yelp was sharply staccato. He had also whirled toward the door.

**S**NOWBALL piled in first. As he crossed the threshold the Phantom let him have it. He duplicated the fast, bludgeon-like blow with which he had put Sid out of business when he had hauled the moronic driver off the truck's seat. There was just sufficient light to make Snowball a good target. The tall, waxy-faced man pitched forward without a sound and collapsed like a broken-open bag of potatoes.

Eddie, in the act of following Snowball into the room, instantly thought better of it, and stopped. He tried to shoot as the Phantom lunged through the door at him. But the Phantom moved with panther swiftness. He had Eddie's arm before the little trigger-man could angle his gun for a shot. The Phantom twisted the weapon from Eddie's clamped fingers and tossed it away. It fell on the marble steps and bumped down them with a metallic clatter.

But Eddie was not through. He choked out an oath and, using feet and knees, started to fight with the ferocity of a cornered rat.

For the third time that night the butt of the Phantom's automatic was brought into play, and broke that up. Throwing Eddie off balance with a wrench of his shoulder, the Phantom arced the knock-out blow, picking a spot to the left of Eddie's temple. It was a cracking blow, just glancing enough to keep from killing the man, but powerful enough to fold him up like a worn-out accordion and spill him face-down, on the landing.

"All right, Miss Marsh!" the Phantom called. "Lights, please."

Electricity dawned in a trio of dainty shaded lamps. Pale and shaken, Vicki Marsh stared numbly at Snowball, sprawled on the bedroom floor. The Phantom collected the tall man's short-barreled gun, frisked him deftly to make sure he carried no more artillery, and then went into the hall and did the same with Eddie.

He piled the guns on the damask counterpane of the bed and helped himself to the

thin length of line with which the girl had been trussed up with. It had been cut, but that could be remedied with some expert knots, and there was enough of it to serve the Phantom's purpose admirably. He went to work on Snowball first, rolling the man over on his back.

No man could have improved on the Phantom's method of securing a prisoner he had taken. A few strategic knots and Snowball was as helpless as if he wore handcuffs and leg-irons. Finished with him, Eddie came in for the same treatment.

The Phantom gave his work a final glance, and nodded his satisfaction. He got up, looked at his watch, and shifted his gaze to Vicki Marsh's pale face.

"I think," he said to her, "that we'll load these gentlemen into the truck I drove down in and take them back to town. Inspector Gregg will be happy to see them. Suppose you wait here until I make the transfer."

She nodded silently. With Vicki Marsh now any suggestion or order of the Phantom's was perfect. He carried Snowball out and put him in the truck. He came back for Eddie. Meanwhile, Vicki had turned out the lights in the card room and come down the stairs. Still wan and shaken, she made no comment when the Phantom piloted her through the heavily carved front door, down the portico steps and out to the waiting truck.

He helped her to the front seat, got in himself on the other side, turned on the lights and kicked the starter.

"Now," he suggested, when they were driving between the iron gates and out onto the shore road, "tell me what happened to you, Miss Marsh."

Vicki explained briefly, but clearly. She told of how Eddie had accosted her on the street and lured her to the car. After Eddie had pulled the gun on her in the blue sedan, she said, she had been driven to the lower East Side of the city. There, in a building back of a tavern under one of the bridges, Eddie and Snowball had bound and gagged her. All afternoon she had been kept prisoner in a small, dirty room, with Snowball continually telling her they intended to fix it so she wouldn't interfere with their plans.

"What else, Miss Marsh?" the Phantom prompted, when she stopped with a shudder at the memory of that experience.

"It was almost dark when Eddie left," she said. "He had been gone sometime when there was a knock on the door. Snowball, who had spent the afternoon playing cards in the room with me—when he was not threatening me—got up and opened the door. I had a brief glimpse of the man who had come to see him. He was—"

"Yes, I know," the Phantom cut in. "He was John Stanley."

THE girl's brown eyes widened. She looked at the Phantom in blank wonderment. She swallowed hard, then picked up her story.

"Snowball went out, locking the door behind him," she said. "He was gone an awfully long time. When he came back again he was with someone he called Lew. It was entirely dark then. Lew and Snowball carried me out and put me in the same blue sedan in which I had been taken there. I—I was driven down here and—then you came."

The Phantom, his gaze on the unwinding road, nodded. There were two things on his mind. One he had to tell her as gently as possible. The other was that John Stanley was riding with them right now, but he would keep that from her.

He waited until Vicki Marsh seemed more herself again before he spoke to her. And until sounds from the rear of the vehicle indicated that his two birds of prey were regaining consciousness.

"I've got to tell you about your uncle. Miss Marsh," the Phantom began slowly then.

Her red lips parted quickly. He heard the sibilant breath she drew, cast a side glance at her and saw the fear that leapt into her brown eyes.

"He—he . . . Nothing's happened to him?" she asked tremulously.

"Hold tight, Miss Marsh," he said softly. "This isn't pleasant, but you've got to know. Eddie shot Doctor Abbott—killed him!"

The girl seemed to go limp for a minute. She bowed her head. No tears came, but her soft lips twisted convulsively. The Phantom said nothing while she fought the storm wrenching her heart. When she appeared to have gained some control of herself he went on, in the same quiet, gentle voice:

"Would you like to hear the rest? I think you may as well know now, and have it done."

Her voice was a ragged sob.

"Yes, please," she said. "Go on. I must know."

"You must have known that Doctor Abbott saw Doctor Maitland a short time before Maitland was stabbed to death with the scalpel."

"Yes." Her voice sank to a thin whisper. "But—he didn't do it! Uncle Ev—he couldn't have done such a thing!"

"A long time ago," the Phantom resumed, when a sob ended what else she would have said, "Abbott and Maitland were the closest of friends. You told me that yourself. What you didn't tell me was that your uncle, as misfortune and drink robbed him of his career, was obsessed with the idea that Maitland had stolen the formula for Vanolene from him. You knew that?"

Vicki Marsh inclined her head. "It was all

he talked about—when he was drinking," she admitted. "It wasn't true, of course. It was all due to liquor. I tried to reason with Uncle Ev, but there wasn't any use. He was positive that Doctor Maitland had stolen Vanolene from him and was the cause of his downfall."

"Which," the Phantom pointed out, "made him a willing victim, a tool for this man they call the Clipper—this man whose planning mind is behind the switched formulas and all else that has resulted from that tragedy."

"What do you mean?" Her harassed gaze met his.

"I mean," the Phantom told her, "that Doctor Abbott's obsession must have come to this man's attention. He knew if he went about it in the right way he could ultimately use Doctor Abbott for his purpose. He did, feeding the flames with drink and money. The twisted notion that Doctor Lester Maitland had reaped the glory of the Vanolene discovery that should have been his, goaded Doctor Abbott on to the scalpel and the crime he committed!"

Vicki Marsh pressed her slender hands over her face. The Phantom hated the bluntness of his statement. But it was far better for him to tell her now and have the shock over and done with than for her to read in the morning papers about what her uncle had done.

They were closer to the city now, as the Phantom concluded his breaking of the sad news to Vicki Marsh. The moon still rode high and in its shine Manhattan's tessellated skyline, with its towers and minarets, was like something out of a fairy tale. But to those two riding in the truck there was nothing of such a tale's beauty and glamour.

"I'll drive you to a hotel," the Phantom told Vicki, after a few moments of silence. "You must get something to eat and get some rest. Tomorrow you'll feel better."

"I'll never feel better," she said listlessly.

"Tomorrow, Doctor Rodney Heath will be released," he said. "You're in love with him. He's in love with you. It will be hard for a little while—forgetting about your uncle. But you will and you and Doctor Heath will be closer to each other because of this."

More minutes passed, and then they were on the ramp that led to the bridge. Vicki lifted her haggard eyes to the Phantom.

"Who is the Clipper?" she asked forlornly. "This man who made my uncle a murderer?"

For an instant the Phantom didn't answer. Then, face grim, he looked down into the face of the girl beside him.

"You'll know tomorrow," he said. "Everyone will know tomorrow. Tonight—before dawn—I'm unmasking him, dragging him out into the light so all can see who he is and know what he's done!"

## CHAPTER XVI

## PHANTOM'S PREY



**Q**UICKLY the Phantom drove to Police Headquarters, as soon as he had left Vicki Marsh at a small hotel for women, where she would be safe. But he did not linger there long. Leaving the delivery truck in the custody of one of Gregg's assistants, he flagged a taxi and hurried up to the street where he had left his parked sedan.

For the first time in hours his mind felt free. Vicki Marsh was no longer in danger, and in one swift thrust he had cracked down on the characters playing minor rôles in the drama of the Maitland murder, ending their menace for all time. He knew that Dr. Everly Abbott had been the murderer of Dr. Lester Maitland. He also knew that the little trigger-man, Eddie, had shot the old ex-surgeon, and that Snowball had killed John Stanley.

There remained now only the trapping of the man who was responsible for the poison which, in the guise of Benecin Five, had been distributed throughout the length and breadth of the country. Now the Phantom wanted the man in whose brain had been formed the plan to send Dr. Abbott on his murder mission, the man who had warned the Phantom to keep clear of the case, and who had been instrumental in other deaths, as well as in having Vicki Marsh snatched.

Van drove the big sedan to his midtown secret hide-out. This was the first chance he'd had to find out what had happened to Skip Nolan, and how Stanley had escaped—only to be killed. He stopped a block away, force of habit making him cautious. Though he reminded himself that now there was really no need to look back over his shoulder, to wait for his nerves to telegraph the warning that he was being followed. Neither Snowball nor Eddie would ever again be in a position to do any tailing.

The old-fashioned house behind the one facing the street presented dark windows when the Phantom went across the court to it. This time he didn't bother to use the basement bell for a signal. He went up the front steps two at a time, unlocked the front door and closed it behind him with a slam.

"Nolan!" he called loudly. "Skip! Are you here?"

For a minute there was no answer. The heavy hand of dread reached out to touch the Phantom. If anything had happened to Skip, if Stanley, staging his getaway, had killed him, it would be a terrible blow.

"Right here, Boss," an answer finally came, as the door of a rear room opened and the

ex-prizefighter loomed on the threshold.

Nolan was not a particularly pretty sight. Plaster decorated one side of his face in a crisscross pattern. The former leather-pusher was holding a piece of ice to his right eye. When he removed it to shake water from his hand, the Phantom saw the deep purple edging the optic. Nolan showed in a sheepish smile the spaces where teeth once had been. "What happened to you?" With a breath of relief, the Phantom walked into the back room.

Nolan avoided the Phantom's gaze. Still grinning, he shuffled his big feet and scratched his bullet-head.

"You mean the embroidery on my pan?" he finally asked. "I picked that up at the corner drugstore. Clerk there used to do map work for a plastic surgeon. He said I won't show a scar."

"That's something." The Phantom tapped Nolan on the shoulder. "Tell me about Stanley, Skip."

Nolan's smile disappeared. "You can tar and feather me for that one, Boss. The dirty little so-and-so! Comes chow time and he says, real pleading-like, that if I'll take off the cuffs I won't have to clean his vest. That he'll eat like a perfect little gent."

"And so?" prodded the Phantom.

"So I fall for the line," confessed Skip, shame-facedly. "Me, the Number One sap of the city. Me, with a heart of gold—and a head of lead. I get the key, unlock him, and the minute I do he goes to work. I'm not expecting that—and I don't have a chance. He holds one cuff and swings the other, trying to cave my roof in. I catch it right in the face. It's worse than getting slugged with brass knuckles. Then he socks me in the eye and for good measure pastes me with a chair. I can handle 'em when they fight fair—I can even slug it out with 'em—but when they begin to use flyin' handcuffs, I quit. And I did!"

"Lucky he didn't kill you," observed the Phantom.

Skip Nolan shook his sore head. "Maybe," he said. "Anyway when I come around he's gone and I'm bleedin' all over the place. Boss, I'm sure sorry. I'd rather take another beating just like that one than tell you the little monkey's on the loose."

"He isn't," the Phantom said calmly, and Nolan's gaze swung around to him in amazement. "This was his port in a storm, as I said," the Phantom added. "He didn't have enough intelligence to realize it. So he walked out and got himself expertly killed."

The former prizefighter's jaw dropped. "No kiddin'! Bumped, eh?" Nolan shook his head. "I suppose I ought to be glad, but I don't know. He had a lot of character and, boy, did he have strength! Him—a man who

was trying to make out he had lung trouble!"

A FEW more words and the Phantom went upstairs. As he did in his Bronx laboratory, and in the secret room in his Park Avenue suite, he kept a make-up table and wardrobe here. He shut the door behind him and turned on the indirect lighting in the magnifying mirror on the dressing table.

He was surprised to find that his disguise had stood up well. There was no need to change it. It required only the touch of a skin pastel pencil here and there to point it up, and make it as perfect as it had been when he had first assumed it.

With a glance at his watch he left the room, said goodnight to Nolan and hurried away.

When he reached Broadway his gaze unconsciously moved to the pinnacles of the tall buildings huddling to the south. So many times he had done that in the past, looking for a signal, and so many times he had seen one.

Suddenly the Phantom's hands tightened on the wheel of the black car. High overhead, seemingly suspended between earth and sky, a red light now burned atop the *Clarion* Building!

The Phantom pulled in out of the traffic. Once more Frank Havens had blazoned the night with the familiar tocsin! Once more the newspaper publisher was calling the Phantom Detective across time and space.

A few doors from where Van had stopped his car he saw an all-night drug-store. He went into it and used one of the telephones, dialing a number he never had to search for in the directory. A wire that led directly to Havens, to the man who, while the Phantom was on a case, never rested. The wires hummed and buzzed before the call was answered at the other end.

"Hello?" he heard Havens' voice say then.

"The signal!" he said quickly. "I saw it only a minute ago!"

"Thanks heaven, Phantom! I've been trying to locate you everywhere." Van heard the gusty sigh of relief Frank Havens expelled, before he went on, "The plainclothes man you asked the Inspector to shadow the person you wanted kept under surveillance has been telephoning me every twenty minutes."

"Where is he now?" asked Van.

"He just phoned from some place called the Roulette Club, a night resort on Fifty-first Street. Your man's there!"

"Thanks." The Phantom smiled thinly. "I'll have news for you presently, Mr. Havens."

"But, Phantom—"

"One thing more," Van interrupted. "Who's Gregg's plant? How will I know him?"

"His name is Bullard, and—"

"I know him! You'll hear from me later."

Van hung up and hurried back to his car. The Roulette Club? He knew the place, by sight and reputation. One of those second-rate jive resorts that had mushroomed into existence to snare its share of the easy entertainment money in circulation. And it was only a few blocks from where he had telephoned.

He swung the big car down one side street, came around another and headed for 51st. The place he wanted there was between Broadway and Seventh Avenue.

The Roulette Club was almost at the corner. Cars were parked in a long line on either side of its entrance when the Phantom rolled his super-charged job in behind the last one and climbed out. A minute later he nodded affably to a colored doorman who, in gold-braided livery, was flashing a welcoming smile with gleaming teeth almost as bright as the crawling neon sign over the arched doorway. "Good evenin', suh. Yo's a little late, but things is still stirrin' inside."

"Thanks," said the Phantom. "I'll go in and sample the mixture."

He left the doorman barking a laugh and stepped into a constricted foyer. There were the usual three telephone booths to the right, the tobacco counter where the cigarette girls filled their baskets and kicked in with the take, and the coat-check counter, in a shallow recess behind a flight of stairs that went up to the private dining rooms above.

Much glass, covered with brightly colored near-silk, partitioned the foyer off from the main portion of the place. From two entrance aisles, at either end of the glass wall, the beat of a band rose above the shuffle of dancing feet, laughter, the rattle of crockery and blend of voices.

A man with his hands folded behind his back was standing near the telephones when the Phantom went into the place. He needed only a glance to recognize Bullard. Even if he had not known this man the Inspector's plainclothes detective had cop written all over him. Big, brawny, with a jaw that stuck out like an awning on a bungalow, Bullard was typical of those men in the Bureau who had fought their way up from the bottom. Men who had earned the status and pay of detective after a long period of pavement-pounding and club-swinging.

THE Phantom moved over to him. Bullard's frown was erased when the Phantom spoke in a low, tight voice.

"I just finished talking with Mr. Havens. You're Bullard, Gregg's man. You know who I am?"

Bullard's expression changed. Respect and admiration were mingled in it. He nodded while the Phantom slipped a key into his hand.

"Our man's here?" Van asked.

"Third table from the left of the band stand," said Bullard.

"Alone?"

"All by himself."

"Good. Here's what I want you to do. My car's parked near the corner. Big, black sedan. You have the key. Open it up and get in. I'm trailing the man I want out of here. Keep the engine idling. I'll flash you the minute he gets under way."

"Right." Bullard retrieved his hat from the brassy blonde at the check counter and went out.

The Phantom, from the second aisle in, picked out the table where the man he was after was seated. And he knew now that it was the Clipper who lounged there, a glass before him. His attitude was one of comfortable relaxation, and indolent enjoyment. But that, the Phantom was certain, must be only a front. Far behind his carefree attitude, his sinister brain was probably busy hatching new evil.

But why was he here in this shoddy night spot? To the Phantom it looked as if the Clipper was deliberately marking time, waiting for someone, or for something he expected to happen.

In the smoke-hazy light, the Phantom scrutinized every detail of his prey. He had absorbed each particular when a hard-faced waiter captain barged up to him.

"Single?" he murmured.

"No," the Phantom said. "I was looking for someone."

"Okay." The waiter's tone indicated what he thought of "lookers."

He walked on and the Phantom kept his gaze glued on the Clipper. After a few more minutes the man he was watching gave indications of having had enough. His finger went up for his check.

The Phantom saw that it was time for action and faded into one of the telephone booths. He was there, fumbling with a dead receiver, when the Clipper came out from behind the glass partition, lingered long enough to get his hat, clapped it on and, without looking to the right or left, headed straight for the entrance.

The Phantom flashed Bullard a signal while the man in whom he was interested climbed into a taxi and started off. Gregg's man pulled the black sedan up to the middle of the street when the Phantom slipped out from between the parked cars and climbed in.

"What a car!" Bullard's exclamation was full of approval. "What does this run on—electricity? I just touch the pedal and I feel like I'm flying."

"Watch that taxi ahead!" the Phantom said sharply. "Don't let it get away."

"Don't worry." Bullard grinned. "I didn't ride in a squad car for six years without learning a few tricks."

The Phantom pushed himself further back on the leather seat, to relax for a moment, while he could. Bullard was doing all right at the wheel, so he decided to let him stay there. Traffic lights slowed them down until they were on Broadway, going uptown.

"You've been tailing him since I telephoned the Inspector?" the Phantom asked the Headquarters detective then.

"Yes, sir." Bullard nodded. "Inspector Gregg gave me a typed report on the description you supplied. I had a job locating him, but I finally picked him up when he was leaving his house. I've stuck with him ever since, and that includes hanging around in half a dozen taverns along the main stem."

"You won't have to do much more tailing tonight," the Phantom promised. "He's headed for his last stop-off!"

If the driver of the taxi carrying the Phantom's quarry knew he was being followed he did nothing about it. Making no effort to dodge the black car hanging in its wake, the cab went along at a leisurely speed, finally turning off Broadway and going west. At the foot of the street the Phantom saw the shine of the Hudson River in the fading moonlight, the black battlements of the Palisades, gaunt and gray in the pale first light of morning.

The cab began to slow down. Another minute and it stopped midway along the street. "Pass it," the Phantom directed Bullard. "Pull around the corner and park there. I'm going in after him. You get in touch with Headquarters immediately. Have the Inspector throw a net around the neighborhood in case anything goes wrong."

## CHAPTER XVII

### FACE TO FACE



**B**EFORE his car had ceased moving, the Phantom was out of it and hurrying back to the side street down which he and Bullard had driven. The taxi was waiting for the fare's return. The driver's head was tipped back against the seat and his cap was over his eyes.

The Phantom went up well-swept stoop steps and into the vestibule of the house.

There was no need for the use of the master-key. Not only was the inner vestibule door unlocked, but open. The Phantom moved into darkness that was broken only by a faint glimmer of light at the head of the stairs beyond.

His foot touched a body on the floor. He

leaned over swiftly, snapping on his torch long enough to recognize the butler who had admitted Frank Havens and himself when they had called on Andrew Drake here the other night.

The man was not dead, though. He had only been knocked out. His pulse was strong and his breathing regular.

The Phantom straightened up and shot a quick glance at the stairs. A sudden stab of apprehension went through him. Was he too late? Had the time it had taken him to reach this house been just time enough for the Clipper to add one more victim to his list?

Suddenly, from the study on the floor above, Andrew Drake's muffled cry was loud in the quiet.

"You can't! What good will killing me do you?"

Then another voice, the one the Phantom had heard in the cellar room giving directions to Sid and Eddie:

"I've waited a long time for this, Drake! You were warned! In a few minutes the Phantom will be here! I kept myself on view all night to give him a chance to follow me! I'll get you now, Drake—the Phantom Detective when he arrives!"

The Phantom, who had started up the stairs, took the remaining steps in three long leaps. The study door at the top of the flight was half-shut. He tore it open, and yellow lamplight beat against his eyes. For an instant he had a confused impression of Drake in silk dressing gown and slippers, slumped in a deeply upholstered chair. The man's thin hair was disheveled. His usually florid face was gray with terror, the terrierlike eyes glazed with dread.

But the Phantom gave Drake no more than that one fleeting glance. His gaze fastened on the man who, a yard away, was bent forward, with the .38 in his hand trained on the man in the chair.

"Drop that gun, Worley!" the Phantom thundered.

Joel Worley, head of the Worley Drug Company, swung around. A thud on the floor followed the release of the weapon in his hand. He raised his arms and the Phantom saw that his lips were twisted into a thin, faintly derisive smile.

"The Phantom—on schedule!" Joel Worley sneered.

The Phantom, covering him, drew his brows together. He was puzzled at the man's ready obedience. He stared hard. The other day, in his modernistic office at the drug company, Worley had looked to be an average man. Now, with the lamplight in his face, the man's sinister malevolence was diabolically apparent. It was written in his venomous gaze, in the defiant set of his head, and plain in the tenseness of his posture.

Still puzzled, the Phantom kicked Worley's .38 across the floor. Drake, wheezing, collapsed in the chair altogether. Warily watching for any trickery, the Phantom moved in closer to Worley.

"So I've got you—Clipper?" he snapped. "Three murders on your list and two more coming up! Not to mention the people you tried to poison with the formula you substituted for Maitland's Benecin Five!"

Worley laughed. "I told Maitland if he didn't let me market it, he'd regret it to the last day of his life! But he wouldn't listen—the fool!"

"And when he telephoned you that day," the Phantom went on, in grim accusation, "and you knew from the way he spoke that he was suspicious—you had to have him eliminated. Liquidated by the drink-crazed Doctor Abbott whom you were holding in readiness for just such an emergency."

"Exactly." Worley laughed again. "But how did you tie me in? I'm a trifle curious."

"Your eagerness to plant the fact that you were in Philadelphia, before I had questioned you at any length." The Phantom saw Drake try to get up, then sink back in the chair, nervelessly. "You even supplied the name of the hotel at which you had stopped in Philadelphia, and your room number there. Then there was your record which I had dug up. Six years in an Illinois penitentiary for practicing medicine without a license."

Worley shrugged. "Too bad the work you've put in isn't going to pay off, Phantom! Except for what satisfaction you may get from my admission. Yes, I arranged for Drake to market a poisoned product. I had Maitland killed to keep him quiet. Abbott went the same way for the same reason. Stanley tried to chisel and got his. And now," he added softly. "Drake is going, because I've always hated him and his company—and you!"

AS Worley spoke that last challenging word, the Phantom heard Andrew Drake's smothered exclamation. It was synchronous with a footstep behind the Phantom. The expression in Joel Worley's glittering gaze turned to one of blazing anticipation.

"All right, Sid!" he shouted. "Let him have it!"

The Phantom's lightning-swift side step saved his life. The vicious swish of the sap intended for his head bounced off his shoulder. It threw him back against the desk as Worley started for his fallen gun and Sid, from behind, leaped on the Phantom like a cat.

Under the impact of Sid's driving body, the Phantom wilted to his knees. Sid got a throttle hold on his throat, hanging on like

a bulldog. For that instant the Phantom's gaze was full of colored sparks, and the room whirled around him fantastically. Faintly, as if from a distance, he could hear Drake's throaty scream. His fingers unclamped from the automatic, the gun fell out of his limp grip.

In a split-second of torture, he knew that Worley was standing off in a haze-dotted spectrum—waiting a chance to scoop up the .38 and use it. Worley, master of murder, ex-convict—the man whose brain that had created this phantasmagoric pattern of violence!

Worley, fighting to win!

The Phantom understood other things also. Sid, crawling out of the grease pit where he had been dumped, had been held as an ace in reserve. No wonder Worley had been so ready to drop his gun, so willing to talk. He'd had Sid waiting and watching outside until the Phantom should arrive, was in the study—until the payoff could be arranged!

Suddenly the Phantom's gaze became normal. The colored lights left it. He saw Worley, standing on an Oriental scatter rug, reaching for the .38. Only heartbeats, breath-takes were left. For once Worley had the gun, the case as far as the Phantom was concerned would be definitely closed. The chapter would be finished, the book shut. The book of the Phantom's life!

Bent under the weight of the clawing burden on his back, he drew in a deep breath. With the speed of light Worley's hand was moving closer and closer to the butt of the glinting gun. Propped on his own palms, in spite of the weight of Sid's body on his back, bearing him down, the Phantom pushed his hands over the surface of the polished floor. His fingers drew close to the fringed edge of the rug, touched it, fastened over it.

Another burning breath and he braced himself, using his knees and back to hold the weight on his shoulders. It had to be done with smooth, dexterous skill. It was his only chance. The Phantom called on all of his superb strength and gave the rug a heave.

Joel Worley's legs flew out from under him as the rug was yanked free, and the man crashed down on his back. Drake screamed again, but the Phantom hardly heard it, for now he was putting into play the most deadly of all bone-breaking, protective holds known to the art of self-defense. He had to get Sid off his back!

The Phantom used judo—the Jap-invented body-smashing technique that made it possible for a one-hundred-and-ten-pound person to conquer a two-hundred-and-forty pound adversary successfully and with child-like ease.

Sid yelped with pain as the Phantom's hands went into action. He let the Phan-

tom's throat go, desperately trying to save himself. But he didn't have a chance. The Phantom, in command now, had a grip of steel. A sinuous move, a jerk of his shoulders and Sid sailed through the air, to smash into a series of bookshelves, carom off them and drop in a broken heap behind a tall chair.

The Phantom had his own gun out and ready the next instant, but the weapon was not necessary. Outside, the stairs echoed to the pound of ascending feet. Before he could draw another breath the study door was banged open, and Inspector Gregg, with several of his men, piled in, guns drawn. Behind them the Phantom caught a glimpse of Frank Havens' anxious face, and of Steve Huston, his eyes bright and expectant.

"Phantom!" The Inspector was beside him the next second, while his men covered everyone in the room.

Joel Worley was sitting up, sweat trickling into his piercing eyes. Across the room the big-eared Sid writhed convulsively finally opening his seamy lips to let a gasp of pain escape. Drake, deep in the chair, seemed to have passed out completely.

The Phantom gestured in Worley's direction.

"Your prisoner, Inspector!"

Half an hour later, in Drake's front parlor to which the Phantom had retired with his friends, he looked from Steve Huston, who was scribbling busily, to the owner-publisher of the *Clarion*, Gregg, with his men and the two prisoners the Phantom had turned over to the police, had gone. The wail of the prowling cars' sirens had faded in the distance and once more the staid, respectable street outside lay peacefully quiet in the calm of the early hour. Curious people who had been drawn to their windows, door, and the street, had retired to their sanctuaries.

"Don't forget," the Phantom said to Huston, "to include Miss Marsh's kidnaping. That's not a separate story. Worley didn't know what Doctor Abbott, her uncle, might have told her. He couldn't take any chances, and probably was planning to dispose of her, too. Murder is like a rolling ball of snow, you know. Once it gets going it picks up victims along the way."

Frank Havens, his face showing weariness from the strain he had been under, looked up.

"What about the card of Drake's that was in Abbott's pocket?" he asked.

"An obvious plant, Mr. Havens," the Phantom said. "Different writing from the warning letter handed you at lunch, but my tests showed it to be penned by the same person. You see, in Worley's warped brain was a fantastic desire to implicate Drake. He even went so far as to rent Drake's summer place, through Snowball, to use it for an out of town hide-out, and as a transfer point for the

untaxed liquor business the gang was mixed up in."

Huston stopped writing to reach for another sharpened pencil.

"Doctor Heath's been let out," the reporter murmured. "He and Miss Marsh are going West. The doc told me he has a chance to take charge of a small hospital in Minnesota. Looks like all's well that ends swell."

"Benecin Five," the Phantom said thoughtfully, "will come back again—as Lester Maitland planned it. It will take its place beside Vanolene, one of the really great medical discoveries of this day and age."

"A monument to Maitland's memory!" Havens said softly.

The three men were finished here now, and they moved out into the hall. Robert, the butler, still a trifle groggy from his encounter with Worley, but grateful to be alive, opened the door for them.

"Mr. Drake asks to be excused, sir," he murmured. "The doctor has given him a sedative and he feels much better. Good-night, gentlemen."

"He means," Steve Huston said, when they reached the street, "'good morning.' Me? I've got to blue-streak to the office and the first edition that's being held for this story."

He whistled for a cab that was cruising by, and ducked away. The Phantom led Frank

(Concluded on page 80)



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Vic Larkin let Bagley sag to the floor

# P.S.—MURDER!

By DAVID X. MANNERS

*An ex-con has a slick plan for evading a death rap*

**V**IC LARKIN was worried. "Yeah, George Bagley bought a gun," the pawnshop owner told Larkin. "I sold it to him this morning. He looked as if he had blood in his eye."

Vic Larkin swung angrily out of the pawnshop. The chill October wind, sweeping up Fourteenth Street didn't cool the heat of his thoughts. He walked to the corner of Sixth Avenue and headed south, moving rapidly.

Vic Larkin's mouth tugged downward. He knew George Bagley had bought a gun for only one purpose. Bagley was a rat. But a cornered rat. And that kind would fight. Bagley had finally got up spunk enough to try what he should have done long ago—if he were a man, and not just a cheap facsimile of the same.

"And I told him not to get wise ideas," he muttered. In the cold air, his breath left a vapor trail over his shoulder.

George Bagley was going to kill him.

George Bagley's studio was on the top floor of a ramshackle red-brick walk-up on Gay Street. From the opposite side of the narrow, winding street you could see the skylight windows of the studio. Vic Larkin crossed the street to the building, shoved

open the door—which was unlocked—and started up the stairs.

He muttered in his beard as he climbed, about how sorry he was his little interlude of living in Greenwich Village, thanks to that disguising beard, was about to come to an end. The whiskers had concealed his whereabouts pretty well. While cops the country over had been looking for "Scar" Larkin, Scar had no longer been Scar.

With the thought, Larkin's hand went to the full, red-tinged whiskers. No place else in the country could a man wear a beard and be less conspicuous than in New York's art colony, where anything went—particularly beards, which were just now the rage.

Wanted for a variety of crimes, including jail-breaking, and with the reputation of being the smartest operator east of the Mississippi, Vic Larkin had rented a studio in the Village six months before and had started painting canvasses. He had found it a lot of fun, for he'd had a yen to paint ever since a con in Utah State Penitentiary had interested him in art. But it took money to live, even as an artist, and George Bagley had been providing that money—up to now.

**V**IC LARKIN paused when he reached the top landing, waiting to catch his breath after the four-flight climb. He rapped on the door, then rapped again when there was no answer. It was dank and chilly there in the hall. He raised his knuckles to pound on the door again, but changed his mind and tried the knob.

He thrust at the door. It came open three inches. Then a safety-chain stopped it with a jerk.

But the door was open enough for him to see inside—to see George Bagley's thin, waxen face swing around from where he had been hunched over a slanted, drawing table, writing something.

Larkin could not help but grin. Bagley looked like something you found when you turned over a damp rock. He was small, bloodless, and seemed to be made out of thinly-stretched dough, instead of flesh. His head had the shape of a large-topped egg, and his hair was thin and greasy.

He sprang to his feet, swiveling away from the desk, and the movement reminded Larkin of the way a rat might spring around when cornered. Bagley even showed his teeth in a sort of ratlike snarl.

"Let me in," Vic Larkin demanded.

"No!" said Bagley. "Go 'way!"

Larkin grabbed the knob and shook the door till it sounded as if the safety-chain was going to pull its screws.

"Let me in!" he said, as if he meant business, and his powerful, domineering tone cowed Bagley.

Vic Larkin smiled. He felt relief that was like nourishment to a hungry stomach. He should have known better than to worry about Bagley ever killing anyone. Bagley was the kind who ran out on trouble. He was not one to stand and face it.

George Bagley slipped off the restraining chain. Larkin thrust by him and blustered into the studio. It was a large, high loft, with skylight windows at its north end. Paint splatches were all over the floor, completed canvasses were racked and stacked alongside the walls, and a couple of uncompleted paintings were on easels in the middle of the floor.

Larkin found a bottle of rye and a jigger glass. He smelled the glass. He looked at the unstoppered whisky bottle.

"So the old master's taken to drinking, huh?" he taunted. "Make-brave. Trying to get up nerve enough to be a man, huh?"

"I—" Words suddenly failed George Bagley. He looked sick.

Vic Larkin tossed off a drink. Bagley, he thought, always looked sick whenever he. Larkin, came around. Larkin liked it that way. He had never felt toward anyone the way he felt toward Bagley. It gave him a

keen pleasure to worry the poor lug, to make him sweat and squirm. Vic Larkin understood suddenly how a cat could get pleasure out of toying with a mouse, or how a dog could enjoy baiting a bull. The sense of power it gave was more potent than a shot of gin before breakfast.

"You got the dough?" Larkin demanded.

That was the way with Bagley. You never asked anything of him. You demanded it—and you got it.

"No," Bagley choked out. "I haven't." His eyes were a trifle wild. "And if I did, you wouldn't get it!"

"Oh?" Larkin jerked a little laugh. "You're ready to go back to Utah State Pen?"

Bagley's eyes shuttled to the right and to the left, back and forth. Larkin could not help but remember how much more a person Bagley had seemed in prison. It was he who had interested Bagley in painting. It was the two of them who had escaped together.

"I'm ready for anything!" Bagley declared.

"Your wife's left you," Larkin reminded him. "That means you should be able to spare more money. There's more you can borrow against that trust fund that keeps you going."

Larkin let his eyes rove over the studio. It had been clean and neat when Mary had been there, before she had "found out" about Bagley. Now old letters and papers cluttered everything. The floor was filthy with cigarette butts and just plain dirt. Sweepings littered the apron of the fireplace, which was crackling, the only heat in the chill, draughty room.

George Bagley's breath was coming short.

"A lot of things have happened since you began coming around, Larkin." His thin shoulders twitched. He was getting a little hysterical. "I don't know why I've taken what I have from you. All right—I made a mistake once. But I'm not a criminal!"

"You needed money once," Larkin reminded him. That had been before Bagley had come into his inheritance. "You let an accident racket lawyer use you."

**L**ARKIN knew how it had been done. A grating-iron had been used to give fake "lacerations." A board placed alongside the arm and struck with a mallet had given "multiple bruises."

Bagley had pretended to have been hit by a millionaire's car. He had sprayed a bulb full of tomato juice in his ear as he lay in the road. The tomato "blood" over everything had made Bagley look so badly hurt that it had been supposed the rich man would gladly settle for as much as ten grand with the racket lawyer, to keep the thing hushed up.

But Bagley's lawyer friend had picked a

millionaire who had been the sucker once before in the same fleece stunt. Bagley had abruptly found himself in Utah State, with a number instead of a name.

"You got ten more years in stir coming to you," Larkin reminded. "All I got to do is spill the word, and you go back. Isn't it better to cross my palm with a little lucre?"

"No!" Bagley shrieked. "It's more than I can stand! You'll never get another cent out of me." He whirled and grabbed a gun off his tilt-topped desk. "I'm going to put a stop to this!"

Larkin dived and grabbed Bagley's arm before the disraught artist could bring the gun around. Bagley's arms were skinny, and he seemed only half Larkin's size, but he had the strength of a maniac.

Larkin suddenly discovered that he had caught a Tartar. Lashing with his free hand, Bagley caught Larkin's beard. He yanked and Larkin felt hairs come out with the roots. Bagley kicked and clawed and struggled to bring his gun up into firing position.

Larkin twisted, and forced the gun back. Suddenly there was a fiery, jolting explosion. Bagley went limp. He had unintentionally squeezed the gun's trigger himself, and the bullet had smashed into his head!

Vic Larkin let him sag to the floor. He didn't like the thought of being responsible for the death of anyone, particularly a poor lug like Bagley. Now he had to get rid of the body.

Larkin looked himself over. He hadn't been splattered by blood. Nothing was likely to point to him as the killer, and if he were smart he would keep it that way.

Pulling over a chair, Larkin propped Bagley's body in it. Larkin knew how these things were done. Cops were not dumb, he had found out. On occasions they could be super-smart. So he had made it his business to know everything a cop knew—and maybe a couple tricks more that weren't yet in the books.

This was going to be a perfect suicide set-up. It already had ten things in its favor. Those ten things were the fingers clasping the gun in Bagley's hand. Once Larkin had thought it possible to plant a gun in a dead man's hand successfully. In books on forensic medicine he had found out different. You couldn't make a dead man clasp anything, but if he happened to be clasping anything when he died you practically couldn't pry it loose with a sectional jimmy. That was because of what was called "cadaveric spasm"—and that was the way Bagley was holding that pawnshop gun now.

Larkin smiled with satisfaction. He knew all the angles. With a pocket file, he cleaned Bagley's fingernails. "Sub-ungual deposits," they called such cleanings in the books. But

smart coppers could find under fingernails, blood, and hairs, and skin that a murder victim had clawed off his killer, and that was often enough to cook that killer's vitamins.

Larkin gaped as he found a few strands of long, red-tinged hair in Bagley's left hand. He took them and threw them in the burning fireplace. If the police had found those hairs the smart devils could tell from just what part of a body the hairs had come. Hairs from the head had a round cross-section. From the torso, they were oval. From the beard, they were triangular, with concave sides. They would have known that those hairs in Bagley's hand had come from a man's beard. A red beard.

Working quickly, Larkin checked all details. He had to be smart to outwit the coppers. But he would outwit them all right, so long as he knew what would be in their minds. Now all he needed was a suicide note. He looked for a piece of paper, and a piece on the floor, one that had evidently blown off the desk, caught his eye.

He picked it up, then whistled long and low.

"So that's why the poor lug bought the gun!"

George Bagley had bought the gun to kill himself with it! On this paper in Larkin's hand was a suicide note. He must have been writing it, Larkin realized, when he had come in. The draught had blown it on the floor. It read:

**To Whom It May Concern:**

I have taken my own life. I know it is a crime to take one's own life, but I can't face things any longer.

May God forgive me for what I have done.

George Bagley.

Vic Larkin propped the note up on the desk in a spot where it could not be missed. He wiped his fingerprints off everything he had touched.

There was only one more detail to be considered. He might have been seen coming into the building.

**TO COVER** himself, it would only be necessary to report to the police that he had come up to the studio and found Bagley dead. But from the books, Larkin knew, whoever reported finding a body was immediately subject to hot-and-heavy suspicion, and his own record wouldn't bear up under it.

So he would merely skip. Anyhow, winter was coming on, and it would be pleasant to spend the next months in the sunny south, or in Mexico. He knew a little art colony in a spot called Acapulco, where the tropics and mountains came down to the sea. He could continue his painting

Larkin had closed the studio door behind him and had started down the stairs, wondering how he would finance the trip, when he heard a car pull up in front of the building. Footsteps beat on the stairs below. The tense, eager faces of three bull-necked police officers swung into view on the landing below.

The heart all but jumped out of Larkin's mouth. Panicked thoughts raced through his quickly groping brain. Had someone heard the gunshot, called the police?

"Where you goin'?" demanded the police sergeant, leading the three.

Larkin stared at them blankly.

"We just got a call that if we came here we'd find a dead man," the sergeant expanded, irritably.

"That's right," Larkin said.

So that was it! Bagley had written his suicide note, then called the police. The typical pattern of a suicide!

"A man did kill himself," he said hastily. "He must have called for you before he done it. I just got here and found him."

Vic Larkin led the way into the studio. One officer took up a stand near the door, as if guarding that means of escape. The other two officers moved quickly, carefully, about the dead man in the chair.

Abruptly the sergeant swung around, glaring at Larkin.

"Why'd you do it?" he demanded.

The abruptness of the confrontal momentarily startled Larkin.

"Do what?" he said. "This man killed himself. I came up here just a couple minutes ago, and I found him. I was just going down to phone you when I met you on the stairs."

"This is no suicide!" said the sergeant, in a tone that brooked no contradiction.

Larkin would have smiled patiently, wearily, but this was no occasion that called for smiles.

"There's a suicide note," Larkin said. "I saw it. It's on the desk. I guess that will explain things."

Both men turned toward the desk. Vic Larkin also stepped toward it. He did a double-take. The note was gone from where he had left it propped up. He felt a strong, cold draught sweeping across the room, and suddenly remembered he had picked the suicide note up off the floor where it must have blown in the first place.

His eyes traveled to the floor, along it. The draught had caught up a small scrap of paper, was carrying it irrevocably toward

the fireplace! But the note was nowhere in sight.

A cold sweat broke out on Larkin's brow. He pointed wildly at the fireplace.

"That draught!" he said. "It must have blown the suicide note off the desk. It must have blown it in the fireplace!"

The police sergeant's harsh laugh grated. "Listen, bud," he said. "We've got the goods on you. We got the experience to know when a man's committed suicide, and when he's been popped off by a killer. There's only one mistake you made, or we might believe you."

Larkin felt the skin tighten on his scalp. A mistake? What mistake? He had made no mistake. He listened to the blue-coated sergeant like a pupil to a teacher.

The sergeant pointed at the dead man's face.

"Suicides are fussy about where they shoot themselves," he said. "In the head—maybe. In the mouth—that, too. But never, never, in all police records have we yet found a gent to pop himself off by shooting himself through the eye!"

Larkin felt a momentary jag of relief. The sergeant was bluffing. A point such as he had just made would never stand up in court. The copper was only trying to frighten him.

"There's a note, I tell you!" he cried desperately. "Maybe it blew in the fire. If it did, maybe it can be saved and reconstructed. It—"

A cry from one of the two investigating officers interrupted.

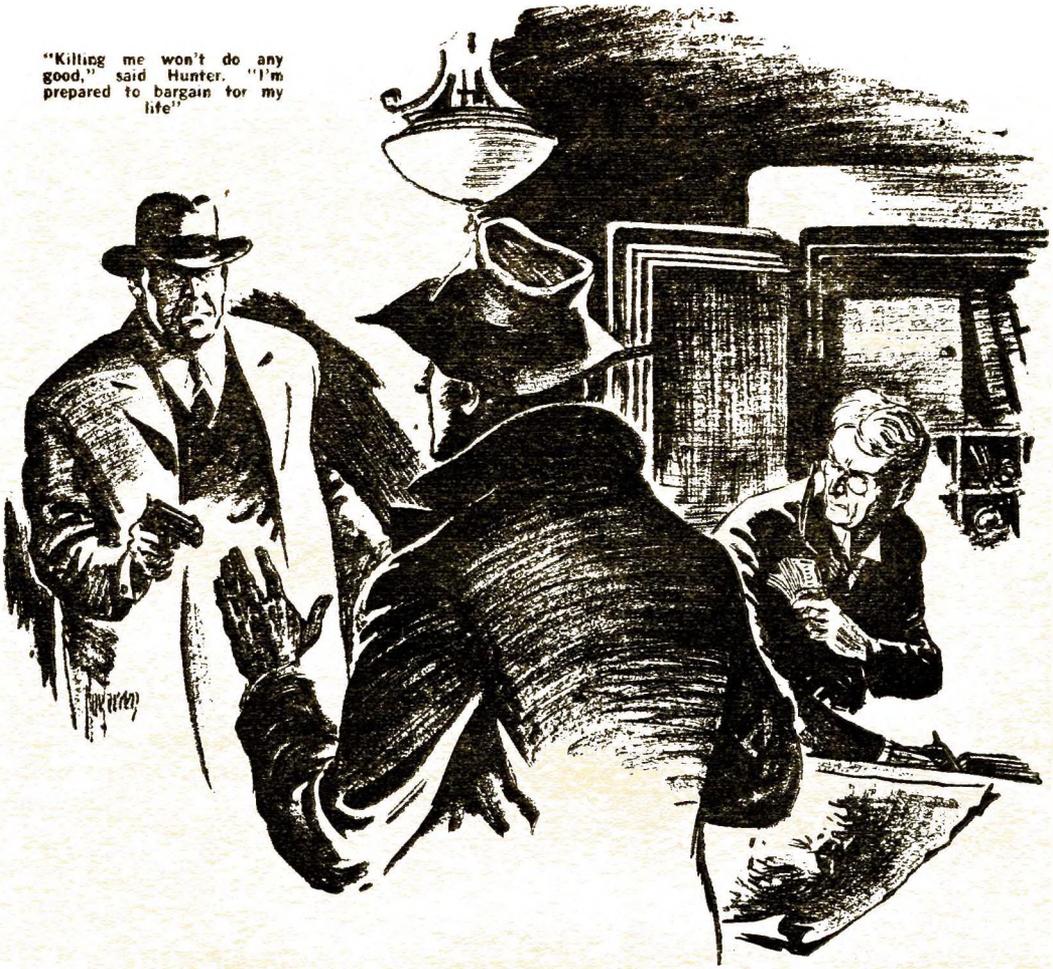
"There is a note, by gravy!" he shouted. His voice and hand trembled with excitement, as he waved the sheet of paper. "And it was right here on the desk. We've got our killer, Sarge!"

Larkin craned for a look as the sergeant took the note. He saw Bagley's scrawled words, and in them he read his doom. There had been a second page to Bagley's crazy note—a second page which he had overlooked because the page he had found on the floor had seemed to be complete. And the second page read:

P.S. Vic Larkin is responsible for my death. That red-bearded devil blackmailed me until I could not pay. Now I know he intends killing me. Vic Larkin is guilty of my death.

Vic Larkin heard the words as the sergeant droned them aloud, and they echoed in his mind, as he knew some day soon a death warrant would be echoing there.

"Killing me won't do any good," said Hunter. "I'm prepared to bargain for my life!"



# DEATH IN OILS

By ANTHONY TOMPKINS

*Forrest Hunter, brilliant insurance detective, plays along with the crooks on the trail of a portrait-stealing racket!*

**T**HE TINNY, rattling sedan pulled up directly behind the morgue wagon which was parked, with several other police vehicles, outside a sedate and expensive-looking city home. The driver got out of the rolling junk heap. He was about thirty-five. A cigarette with a long ash drooped dejectedly from the corner of his mouth. His shoes needed shining, his tie was frayed and his hat looked like something picked up in a Bowery gutter.

Yet he was a man to command respect. Perhaps it was the cut of his jaw, firm and resolute. Or it could have been his gray eyes that seemed so mild yet could flash with sudden fire. At any rate, two patrolmen moved to intercept him. The cigarette wagged as he spoke. Ashes fell across his vest. A detail to which he paid no attention at all.

"Look, pal," one cop held his arm. "Inside is nothing but a man with his head blown off. If you work in here, or you're a friend

of the deceased, take my tip and don't go in."

The cigarette wigwagged.

"My name is Forrest Hunter and don't laugh or I'll clout you. My father just had a sense of humor. Who is in charge?"

"Captain Regan," the cop replied and added, 'sir' for some reason he couldn't fathom.

"Then go tell him I'm here." Forrest Hunter commanded mildly. "I'll bet you a good cigar I get in."

One of the cops went off on the errand and returned with even greater respect in his eyes. Forrest Hunter was immediately passed through the door. He strolled down a large reception hall, and proceeded to a room where men were gathered. He didn't even look at the corpse on the floor. He walked straight up to a big gilt frame hanging on the wall against a black velvet backdrop. The frame was crudely empty.

"Hunter," Captain Regan of Homicide Squad approached with outstretched hand. "Boy, this job must be more important than I figured on when they sent you."

The cigarette burned Hunter's lips. He dropped it into an ash tray.

"The fact is, Captain," he said, "I'm not interested in the murder. That's your job. But a painting was swiped here. The man who died was probably trying to protect it, but to me, even he's incidental. You see, this makes the ninth very valuable painting to be stolen in the past five months. All of them were insured and I want to get them back. The idea is that the insurance companies might not like to keep on paying my salary unless I keep on producing results."

Regan grinned.

"As if you didn't. Hunter, they tell me you never muffed a case yet even though some of them required a year to finish up. That's quite a record—if it's true."

Hunter winked.

"Sure it's true, but I don't touch anything unless there is a good chance that I'll complete it. You cops can't be so choosy. Now what's the lowdown?"

Regan shrugged.

"Not much to go on. The burglar entered the house by a window—as usual. He applied fly paper, used a diamond cutting tool, lifted out part of the window and reached in to turn the lock. The dead man is Oscar Powell who owns this house. He must have been aroused, came down here and caught the burglar red-handed in the act of stealing the picture."

"Portrait." Hunter corrected mildly. "They cost more when they're called that."

"Okay, portrait then." Regan conceded. "The burglar was armed, took one shot at Powell and got him smack in the head. So the burglar became a killer and fled with the

pic—I mean portrait. No prints, no shoe marks outside. Not a blasted thing to go on."

Hunter nodded.

"Except where the killer-burglar disposes of the portrait. You can't peddle a masterpiece like it was a chunk of cheese. I've been in town about a month, quietly working on this. What do you think of Jacques LaVelle who runs an art shop downtown?"

REGAN pursed his lips. "I'm a Homicide man, but I did hear some of the boys talking about LaVelle. They think he's a high-toned, hot-shot fence, but they can't prove it. Can you?"

"Sure, if I tried." Hunter smiled thinly. "I think he's a crook too, but I wonder if he's big enough to handle deals like this. Mind if I ask the corpse a question or two?"

"Go right ahead." Regan grunted. "I've been trying to make him talk ever since I got here, but his speech is impeded by a chunk of bullet in his brain."

"He'll talk to me," Hunter said calmly. "Perhaps not out loud, but all cadavers of murdered people have something to say."

Hunter went over and dropped to his knees beside the corpse. The fact that it was a grisly mess didn't disturb him in the least. He glanced at the dead man's right hand and saw ink on the fingertips. Just tiny smears. He noticed that the dead man wore an expensive bathrobe over ordinary pajamas and that there was a mild odor of brandy on his lips.

Hunter arose.

"Unless he entertained the burglar, he had company. I'm going through the rest of the house."

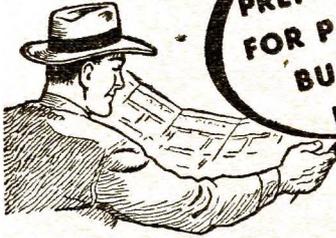
Hunter found nothing in the downstairs room. He already figured the two elderly servants could tell nothing at all except being awakened by the single shot. But upstairs Hunter found a small study. There was a set of glasses with accompanying tray and decanter on a large desk. Also there were two richly bound volumes. One of these books lay on the desk close to its matching chair. The other volume was across the desk, almost falling off the corner of it.

They were books on art, exactly alike and both opened to the same page showing, in color, the reproduction of a famous painting. Hunter bent over and studied the four glasses on the tray. Each fitted into an especially carved-out cranny. Two of them were scrupulously clean, the other pair had a little dust in the bottom.

Captain Regan came in and Hunter sat down behind the desk. "I've got a couple of answers," Hunter said. "Powell wasn't in bed when he heard someone downstairs. He was in this study. His pajamas weren't even wrinkled so he couldn't have been asleep.

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He wore an expensive robe indicating that he had a guest whom he thought quite a lot of because he had cheaper lounging robes. He had been writing something, but there is no indication of that fact from the appearance of the desk. He served his guest and himself a drink of brandy from this decanter."

Regan chuckled.

"The dead man said quite a mouthful, didn't he? In a quiet sort of way."

Hunter went on as if there hadn't been the slightest interruption.

"The guest wiped out the glasses and removed prints. Certainly Powell didn't do it. A man who thinks he is being robbed doesn't stop to dilly-dally. His guest was interested in art because he had been studying a book on the subject. A twin book to the one which Powell seems also to have been looking into. They are both open at the same page."

"All of which tells us what?" Regan demanded.

"Powell's guest arrived very late, was expected and Powell let him in. The guest didn't want any trace of his presence to be seen so you can safely, I think, put down the mysterious guest as the murderer. The burglar was either associated with him or it was sheer coincidence. I don't believe the latter theory at all."

Regan nodded heavily.

"I haven't had time to go through the whole house or maybe I'd have noticed these things too. Perhaps you're right. If the mysterious guest wasn't involved, then the burglar did the killing. Personally, I go for that theory."

Hunter slowly turned the pages of the volume in front of the dead man's chair. Then he came back to the page which had been originally opened. He read several paragraphs and his eyebrows went up slightly, as if he'd been mildly surprised at what he read.

Arising, he walked over to the bookcases containing as many volumes on art as an up-to-date library. He selected one book, sat down again and turned the pages of the heavy volume. Then he looked up at Captain Regan.

"I've read quite a little on art," he explained, "and I thought I recalled that Oscar Powell's portrait was called 'Brother In Brown'. It's the painting of a boy. Now this boy had a sister, a twin, and the artist painted her too, calling that carvas, 'Sister In Brown'."

"All of which adds up to what?" Regan asked. "Me, I'm better acquainted with characters like Louis the Lug."

Hunter laughed.

"Well, these two paintings go together. Apart, each is worth plenty but both as a unit, would bring far more. Now the bur-

glar who has been performing these jobs either knows art or he has someone to coach him. He's got 'Brother In Brown'. Want to bet he'll go after the boy's sister?"

Regan whistled sharply.

"Say, that's a real lead. All we have to do is find out who owns 'Sister In Brown' and lay a trap for our man."

Hunter walked toward the door.

"That's right." He paused to light a cigarette and grinned at Regan. "Well, I've done all I can here. Guess I'll shove off."

"Now wait a minute," Regan implored. "What about the portrait of that twin? Who has it? Look, Hunter, there's been murder done. As you say, a killing is none of your affair, but it's mine and we should work together. You know something."

"All I know," Hunter grinned, "is that your headache needs two aspirins while mine needs only one—I hope."

He went out to his old car, got in and drove away. He stopped to check on the address of a certain Sigmund Jaynes, found it listed and drove there directly. It was a house similar to that belonging to the late Oscar Powell. Hunter rang the bell and an elderly man let him in.

**H**UNTER came directly to the point. He showed his credentials and had Jaynes phone Captain Regan at Police Headquarters for verification.

"The fact is," Hunter said. "I think you're going to be robbed tonight. You'll be number ten and if this keeps on, the insurance premiums on masterpieces are going prohibitively high. I want your permission to stay here and wait for the burglar."

Jaynes shuddered.

"You're perfectly welcome to the task, Mr. Hunter. I heard on the radio that a man was murdered tonight by a killer who robbed him of a portrait. Just be very careful when you open fire so that no bullets hit the portrait I've got. That one!"

He pointed to a large painting on the wall of the living room. It seemed to glow with inner fires. Hunter stepped up to it.

"That's worth a fortune," he said. "Is this one done by that artist who used powdered rubies in his paint?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Jaynes said. "A portrait to me is valuable only so far as its cash worth is concerned. I don't know much about them."

Hunter was looking around the room, selecting a spot where he might conceal himself. "Don't worry about any shooting," he explained. "I don't intend to stop the burglar. Frankly, I want him to get away so he'll lead me to the man who pays him to

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do this work. I want to get back the other stolen paintings, you see."

Jaynes didn't like the idea, but he stopped arguing the matter when Hunter told him the burglar might arrive at any moment. Jaynes hurried upstairs to warn the rest of his family. Hunter stepped behind heavy velvet drapes, made certain his shoes did not show and began to ache for a cigarette one minute after he'd taken refuge. All the lights in the house were out. It was a little after midnight. Hunter contented himself with holding an unlighted cigarette between his lips.

More than an hour went by. Then Hunter suddenly heard a scratching sound. In a few moments glass broke with a gentle noise and a stream of fresh air filtered into the room. The window was raised next and shortly after, Hunter peered through the tiny slit he'd cut in the drapes and watched the burglar at work.

The man was a burly, rough-looking type, but light on his feet and very fast. He knew exactly what he wanted and approached the portrait with a knife in his hand. It required two minutes to cut the painting from its frame. The burglar rolled it up carefully and departed through the same window.

It all required a very short space of time. Hunter was going out the front door a second after the burglar had disappeared. A car engine started down the street. Hunter ran to where his own car was parked.

Hunter now trailed the burglar's coupé craftily until it pulled up to the curb in front of a cheap little hotel far downtown. The driver got out. It was the burglar all right. Hunter breathed a bit more easily.

He didn't make any mistakes. By going into the hotel he might reveal himself. He felt that the burglar would be out shortly, for the simple reason that holding a recently stolen painting is too dangerous. He'd want to get rid of it fast. Also, he'd parked in a half hour zone. Burglars fresh from a job aren't particularly keen about attracting the attention of the police even on such a minor thing as a parking violation.

Hunter was right. In ten minutes the burglar came out although Hunter had a difficult time recognizing him. He wore a well cut, expensive looking suit, a natty topcoat, and a black homberg. It was odd the way clothes made that particular man. He now looked like a prosperous merchant or professional man.

Once again, Hunter used tact and caution in trailing the crook. He showed no surprise when the burglar stopped along a street occupied by fashionable antique shops and art galleries. He got out of the car, held something under his topcoat and hurried

down the block. He stopped in front of an art dealer's bearing a sign which indicated the shop was owned by one Paul Hampton.

Hunter whistled softly. Hampton was one of the more important dealers and carried a reputation for honesty and conservatism. His clients were among the wealthiest people in the city.

The crook rang a night bell. A weak light was turned on and the door opened. The crook walked in with an important swagger. The door closed. Hunter moved carefully up to the door. He knew that the crook had been led into a back room to carry out whatever business brought him there.

Hunter possessed a hunch that the night lock hadn't been put on the door. He stepped up to it, after a quick look around. The burglar alarm system was bound to be off also because the art dealer would still have to let the thief out.

Hunter carried keys. They were prized tokens he'd taken from the best thieves in the world and retained for his own use. The building was rather old, the lock none too modern and opening it was a simple matter. He closed the door behind him and stalked his way through the dimly lighted place toward the back room door. That door was ajar slightly and he could hear voices. What these voices said was extremely interesting to Hunter.

There was a low stool, no more than four or five inches off the floor, placed along the way to the door. Hunter's foot deliberately kicked it. The stool made a terrific clatter. To Hunter, a clap of thunder couldn't have made a more welcome racket.

**F**EET scurried, there were urgent and harsh orders and finally a door slammed. Hunter stepped into Paul Hampton's office and found the art dealer pale and shaking with excitement. Hampton was over fifty, gray-haired and distinguished looking. On his desk lay the portrait just stolen from Sigmund Jaynes' home.

"What the devil is this?" Hampton demanded.

"Who was the man leaving by the back door as I came in?" Hunter said.

"None of your business," Hampton snapped. "But it is my business to know how you got into my store. I locked the door."

"I opened it with a master key," Hunter explained. He produced his credentials again. "Now will you answer my question?"

"Forrest Hunter." Hampton whistled. "You're big time. Of course I'll answer. That was Sigmund Jaynes who just left. He came here with a portrait I know he pur-  
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chased some time ago. Seems he needed money badly and was willing to sell the portrait at a sacrifice. We were dickering when you made some silly racket out there Jayne evidently didn't want anyone to see him on this mission. He told me if his enemies knew how flat he was, they'd clamp down and ruin him completely. So he left."

"Jaynes." Hunter replied, "is home in bed. Or more probably pacing the floor worrying over the loss of that portrait on your desk. The man who brought it here is a crook. I watched him steal the canvas, trailed him here and rather hoped it would be to a shop where stolen portraits are bought as a matter of course."

Hampton's eyes went very wide.

"You don't believe that I—?"

"No," Hunter said. "I think that crook was making a little money on the side. He had a smooth scheme, posing as Jaynes and trying to sell the canvas directly to a regular art dealer. I'm only sorry he got away. He knew very well someone was outside, didn't he?"

"Well no, but perhaps he suspected it," Hampton explained. "The funny part is, that we had already come to terms. I have cash, which he insisted upon, in my safe. I was going to get it when he ran out so darn fast, that he left the canvas behind."

Hunter pursed his lips.

"He was certainly in a big hurry. Mr. Hampton, will you cooperate with me? It's only fair to warn you that this burglar has already murdered a man and he'll kill again. But if he left the canvas and still possesses the idea that you'll do business, he's bound to come back. The man was jittery. He'll realize that perhaps he jumped to conclusions. Perhaps he'll figure that a cat or something made that noise in the store."

"I was just about to tell him that," Hampton said. "You see, I really have a cat and actually did think it had made that noise."

"Good," Hunter replied, with an odd smile. "Then we'll work fast. The crook isn't far away. Find your cat and take him out to the sidewalk. Then look around as if you hope your customer didn't run too far and might even see you. Turn on the lights in the store and wait outside. Leave the canvas here. If the man returns, bring him into this room."

Hampton shivered.

"I'm not used to this sort of business, but I suppose it has to be done. All right, I'll do it. Wait here."

Hunter unrolled the canvas while he waited. It was Jaynes' portrait all right. He was still studying it when Hampton returned. The art dealer shrugged his shoulders.

"I saw no one. I'm afraid your hunch didn't work, Mr. Hunter. Sorry!"

"It's okay," Hunter sighed. "I'm used to slip-ups. Nobody's fault. The breaks were in that killer's favor. I'll try to trace him."

"Reach," a harsh voice ordered. "Get 'em up. Both of you. Fast!"

Hunter swore softly but obeyed the command. The burly crook had come back. Maybe he'd never even left. Anyway, here he was and in his hand was a thoroughly businesslike gun of large caliber. At least a .45. It was held steady and there was murder in the eyes of the crook.

"A dick," he scoffed. "Okay, so long as I got the drop on you, Hampton, you're a fool. I'd have sold that portrait cheap. Now I'll take it back again and all the cash you have too. You said there was some in that safe in the corner. Open it. Get going."

Hampton backed up a little, his hands half raised.

"I think I'd better," he wheezed with a side look at Hunter. "This man means business."

The crook laughed and backed up toward the wall where he could easily cover both men. Hunter didn't move. He saw to it that the crook wouldn't make him change positions because he stood beside the desk. On it was a bronze bookend, heavy and substantial. It could easily be used as a weapon. When Hampton got the safe open, the

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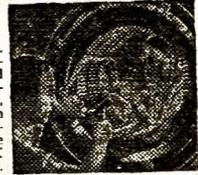
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crook was bound to watch him so he wouldn't conceal any cash. When that happened, Hunter was prepared to go into action.

It happened too, just as he hoped. The crook turned his gaze on Hampton as the safe door swung open. Hunter dropped one hand, seized the bookend and had it raised. There was a single shot. The bookend seemed suddenly possessed of electricity. It fell from Hunter's numbed fingers and he knew what had occurred. The crook's bullet had hit the bookend.

"Playing cute, eh?" the crook jeered. "Okay, I was going to let you have it anyhow."

He took a few steps forward, turning his back on Hampton who stood there with a sheaf of money in his fist. He took three side steps very quietly. Hunter saw him and knew he was up to something. Hunter stalled. There wouldn't be much time. This crook was primed to kill.

"Killing me won't do you any good," Hunter said. "I'm prepared to bargain for my life."

"How can a man bargain when he don't even hold a deuce card," the crook jibed. "Anyway I don't trust dicks. Especially insurance company snoops. The way to settle lads like you is with a slug and that's what you're going to get."

"But I know where there are hundreds of thousands of dollars in art objects for the mere taking and you could—"

FORREST HUNTER tried hard not to look directly at Hampton as he spoke. The art dealer had managed to open a drawer quietly. He was taking out a gun.

As the crook levelled his pistol for the murder shot. Hampton elevated his weapon. He pulled the trigger. He fired three times and each slug smashed into the crook's head. The man slumped to the floor. Hampton aimed the gun down and viciously emptied it before Hunter reached him.

"Holy Smoke," Hunter yelled, "you don't have to be a one-man firing squad."

Hampton seemed to snap out of it.

"I—I don't know how many times I shot. All I could see was—that man ready to kill you. I—I had to kill him. I—suppose I did."

"Nobody was ever any deader," Hunter replied. "Thanks. You saved my neck and I—"

Hampton's knees buckled and he slumped. Hunter caught him, dragged the art dealer to a chair and put him in it. Then he went to the front of the store to let the police in. An hour later, Hunter was studying the

meager possessions in the dead crook's hotel room. Hampton was with him. The art dealer had recovered his wits although he was still badly shaken. Among the dead man's things were several articles of jewelry. Each one, under a jeweler's glass, showed scratches. They were numbers carved into the metal the way pawnshops mark the articles they take in.

"This is a break anyway," Hunter said. "All these articles have numbers fairly close. That means they probably came from one shop and Pawnshop Squad records may give us a lead. Want to come with me, Hampton, while I check?"

Hampton looked around the room and shuddered again.

"I certainly do. I'm afraid to be alone since that—that happened. The thief may have had pals. You don't mind if I go along?"

Hunter smiled at him.

"As far as I'm concerned, you can do anything, my friend. I owe you my life. Maybe it isn't worth much to the world, but it sure means a great deal to me. Let's go."

Police Headquarters supplied the needed information. Hunter knew that these articles of the dead crook had all come from one place. It was a large pawnshop, not far away from where he lived, which was run by Jacques LaVelle.

"This LaVelle," Hunter explained to Paul Hampton, "is a crook. We've always known it. I think he was even the man behind our defunct burglar. Someone had to be. That mug wouldn't know a portrait from a charcoal drawing and anyway, someone behind the scenes knew exactly who owned valuable paintings. LaVelle got around plenty."

"Don't you think," Hampton said nervously, "that it may require more men than just you and I to get him?"

Hunter chuckled.

"Perhaps," he said. "Anyway I stared death in the face once tonight and that's sufficient. Some of my police friends are going after LaVelle. Suppose you and I go back to your shop and wait for results?"

"Excellent," Hampton answered obviously relieved.

Back in the art dealer's shop, Hunter

[Turn page]

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looked again at the stolen canvas.

"The way that thing shines," he said, "I'm wondering if it was done by that artist who used crushed rubies in his paint. There was such a man, wasn't there?"

Hampton nodded.

"Cortenzo, an Italian painter tried it, but it cost far too much. No, this one is done with regulation paint, but the hand that created it was a master's."

They talked about painters and paintings for half an hour. Then the phone rang. It was Captain Regan at Headquarters.

"We broke into LaVelle's place, but too late," the policeman's voice came over the wire. "He gathered together all his cash and best gems and ran out. We've issued an alarm for him. And those things the dead crook had were recorded in LaVelle's books. They were pretty valuable things and it seems the mug had 'em in hock with LaVelle. He got 'em out this morning. An entry says he paid back his debt plus interest."

"Thanks," Hunter said and hung up. He turned to face Hampton.

"Well, LaVelle ran out, but it doesn't make so much difference to me. I've still got you."

Hampton frowned.

"What in the world do you mean?"

"Oh, come off it," Hunter said tartly. "You're the man who visited Oscar Powell. You were in the house when he was murdered. I think you copped a lot of the other stolen portraits too. You'd know who had them and when they were sold. That dead mug also knew you weren't above buying hot stuff or even taking it yourself. You even admitted to me you were going to pay him for it."

Hampton blinked.

"I don't follow you, Mr. Hunter."

"Listen, you went to Powell's home to get that portrait yourself," Hunter said. "The man you killed beat you to it. Maybe you contacted him afterwards and told him to bring the portrait to you. But he brought Sigmund Jaynes' instead because he'd already gotten rid of Powell's. Perhaps you even worked with the crook, I'm not certain."

Hampton was slowly growing redder and redder in the face.

"Can you prove any of this?" he demanded. "Or am I just going through some silly inquisition with your hopes based on the idea that I'll crack?"

"Oh no," Hunter replied. "For one thing, you knew the name of the painter who used crushed rubies in his paint. That isn't ordinary information. I doubt that there are ten art experts know who that

painter was. But you and Powell were reading about it, in twin books, the night he was killed. Those books were both open to the same page and the whole story of the ruby paint was explained. You knew the answers because they were fresh in your memory. Come on now, admit it."

ALMOST painfully it seemed, Hampton took a long breath.

"All right," he said. "I did buy stolen portraits. I even got a couple myself. They have been disposed of and I won't tell where. You're a very smart man, Hunter. I sensed that I was finished when you came into this mess. That crook knew me all right. He saw me one night when we were after the same portrait. LaVelle sent him. Of the two of us, LaVelle is the smarter because he recognized the handwriting on the wall and fled."

"Well," Hunter said, "I guess that's that."

"Except for one thing," Hampton leaned across his desk. "You owe me something, Hunter. Your life. That thug would have killed you if it hadn't been for me. Now I'm demanding you repay the debt."

Hunter whistled.

"Maybe you're asking too much."

"No—I'm not. I want only twenty-four hours start. Then you can turn the dogs loose. You can take back Jaynes' portrait. That will be a feather in your cap at least. Twenty-four hours' start, Hunter. In return for your life."

Hunter lit a cigarette and puffed on it for several minutes while he thought it all out.

The case wouldn't be finished with Hampton's arrest. True, the crimes would cease but Hunter's job was to locate those other portraits. He had an idea that Hampton was a smooth operator as well as a clever liar. The art dealer wanted a head start on the law so he could get the portraits he had stolen. Hunter decided to play along.

"I'm not a cop," he now told Hampton. "My job is to get as many stolen objects back as possible. Also to put an end to crime waves like this which have cost the insurance companies too much. So if I leave here and don't tumble to the fact that you are involved until—say tomorrow night—how can I take any action against you?"

Hampton thrust out his hand.

"Thanks," he faltered. "I thought you were that kind of a man, Hunter. Square about things. I've hurt no one, except their pride perhaps. Insurance companies plan their business to take losses of this kind. I've no sympathy for them. I did save your life. Giving me a break evens things up."

Hunter arose.

[Turn page]



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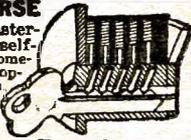
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"Well, I'll be on my way. Just remember this. You can't get away with it—never. If there aren't regular police to nail you, there are insurance company detectives, the F.B.I., private detective agencies. The odds are all against crooks, Mr. Hampton. Furthermore, I give no guarantee that you won't be caught. In twenty-four hours I'll put through a report and they'll start tracking you down."

"With twenty-four hours grace," Hampton said, "I'll have all the start I need. Thanks again, Hunter. We're even now. I won't even protest if you grab me yourself."

Hunter walked out of the store and strolled leisurely down the street, his forehead puckered in deep thought. There seemed to be something he should have remembered but couldn't. It bothered him too, letting Hampton get away because no man had ever escaped Hunter before. He'd have a rotten time trying to explain all this if Hampton really got clear. And it preyed on his mind—the trick he was playing on the man who had saved his life.

Then, very suddenly Hunter came to a full stop. His cigarette dangled more listlessly than ever while a slow grin came over his face. He ducked into a doorway to think. Then he retraced his steps back toward Hampton's shop.

He kept muttering, "He turned his back. Disregarded him entirely—"

He took up a position where he could watch both the alley, leading from the back of the store and also the front entrance. The shop was dark and stayed that way for a full hour. Then Hampton came out. Hunter let him get a good start before he took up the trail. The art dealer didn't hail a taxi and seemed to have a definite destination.

It was a public park where he sat down and smoked a cigar until daylight. Then he lit another, walked a bit and sat down again. At ten minutes of nine he headed toward a large bank. Hunter followed.

The art dealer went to the vaults, signed a completely different name on the register and opened one of the largest safe deposit boxes. He removed half a dozen carefully rolled up and wrapped objects. From a pocket he took a folded cloth case, opened it wide and thrust his loot into it.

Grasping this by the handle, he started to walk out of the booth he occupied. Then, on second thought, he returned, looked around and drew a gun from his pocket. Deftly, he inserted the weapon into the case too.

He climbed the stairs, started across the bank lobby and someone fell into step with him. The art dealer came to an abrupt stop

while a pink color slowly flooded up his cheeks.

"I thought," he said. "I was to be unmolested for twenty-four hours. Only about eight of those hours have passed."

"I know." Hunter smiled and didn't let go of his arm. "I'm seeing you off. My car is right outside. Captain Regan has become suspicious of you. Seems the gun which killed Oscar Powell fired the same kind of bullets into that crook you killed to save my life."

Hampton bit his lip.

"There must be some mistake."

"We'll assume so." Hunter grunted. "Meanwhile, you're a marked man. That's my car at the curb. Get in and keep down. In a hurry now. This section is swarming with police."

The art dealer raced across the sidewalk and popped into the car. Hunter lit another cigarette and followed at a more sedate speed. He drove away.

"Lie on the floor," he told the art dealer who was in the back of the sedan. "Don't raise your head. A radio car might cruise by. Sure you killed Powell. I've known that for some time. You visited him to keep him busy while that mug swiped the portrait. But Powell had good hearing and went down to investigate. You shot him.

"Naturally the crook took the blame for that, but the crook also knew he could pin it on you. And so the usual little scheme of blackmail unfolds. You told the burglar to rob Jaynes' home that same night. You had to work fast before he could write down what he knew and hide the letter or give it to a pal in case anything happened to him."

**PAUL HAMPTON** was learning more than he had bargained for.

"You knew that Jaynes had the twin of Powell's painting," Hunter went on. "Anybody with a knowledge of art would guess the killer was bound to try and steal Jaynes' portrait, so you sent that thug there, with a pretty good idea, a smart detective would be waiting for him. You hoped I'd either fight it out with the crooks or follow him. You were prepared in case the latter happened, by ordering the thief to dress like a gentleman in order that you could pretend to be fooled by stating he claimed to be Jaynes himself, selling the portrait secretly.

"When I appeared, you had arranged something for me to trip over if I entered unannounced. I saw through your game right there and then. I seemed to swallow your bait. The thug concealed himself. You told me a likely story. The thug came back and was really prepared to kill me. He turned his back on you, paying very little attention

[Turn page]

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to you because he trusted you. He didn't realize that you'd set two traps. One for me and one for him."

"Trap?"

Hampton was busily opening the cloth case and trying to locate the gun he'd put there.

"Keep your head down," Hunter repeated. "Trap is right. You wanted to kill your thief friend because he knew too much and you had to do it in such a way as to be exonerated. Therefore, you allowed him to get set to shoot me and then you let him have it. All six slugs in the gun—to insure the fact that he'd be very dead.

"You didn't do me any favors. You didn't save my life. You cared not one whit whether I lived or died so long as the thief could never talk again. You had paid off the thief earlier, but it was only the first installment he demanded. With that money he went to Jacques LaVelle and got some of his things out of hock. You knew that too so you tipped LaVelle to get moving. You informed him that the cops were on their way. LaVelle was a crook too, but small-time compared to you."

Suddenly, Hunter stopped the car, just as the art dealer freed the gun and started to raise it. He lifted himself off the floor, so he might aim better. Then he blinked in amazement for there were two guns poked in his direction. One thrust through each window of the back doors. Hampton made an ineffective attempt to raise his weapon, but one of the others crashed down on his head. He felt the gun wrenched out of his hand.

Then he was jerked erect. Captain Regan headed the squad of police who surrounded the car. Backgrounded was Police Headquarters. Hunter, behind the wheel, turned and grinned.

"I never owed you a thing, Hampton," he said. "I told Regan I'd drive you to Headquarters and I did that, exactly. Regan, be careful with that carrying case. There's a fortune in portraits in it—and my reputation besides."

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## THE PHANTOM SPEAKS

(Continued from page 8)

interesting, and they give the editor and myself a real insight into just what our readers think about crime and punishment, and Mr. Wallace's descriptions of how the Phantom Detective works.

We'd like to publish dozens of these letters, but for the time being we are merely sampling them, running several in each issue. First of this month's batch is from Harold Perlis of 2326 Sherbrook Street, Pittsburgh, 17. Pa.

Harold says:

I have just finished reading the August issue of THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE. The story, "Killer Portfolio" was very exciting and kept me in riddles till the last page, which is the way I like detective stories. After reading the letter of Miss Shepard of New York, I agree with her in leaving Muriel Havens just where she is. I have already reserved the next issue so I wouldn't miss "Death to a Diplomat."

Thanks Harold. We're glad "Killer Portfolio" was the kind of a yarn you like, and we're going to try and keep all the stories that way. One of the curious things about this old mail bag was your mention of Miss Shepard, of New York. The one who wrote to us in our August issue lived up on 93rd Street, but here, right alongside of your letter is another missive from Miss Patricia Shepard of 311 West 102nd Street, New York, 25. N. Y.

Patricia seems to think the best way to get rid of crime is to get rid of the criminals. She says:

I have read your latest issue, and I think the story is very good. I have been a reader of your magazine for a long time. I certainly hope the Phantom keeps up his good work in getting rid of the enemies of the people. There is an old saying, "Crime does not pay." The Phantom proves this in rounding up the criminals he does.

Okay, Patricia, we'll agree with you that the fewer criminals we allow to run around loose, the more chance there is of keeping this country the law-abiding place it is.

You'll note that Harold Perlis mentions reserving his copy so he wouldn't miss the story he wanted to read. Mrs. Robert Curry of Route No. 3, Box 800 G, Stockton, California, solves her problem another way. She writes:

I enjoy THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE very much when I can get it. There are times, however, when this is impossible. Do you take subscriptions?

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[Turn page]

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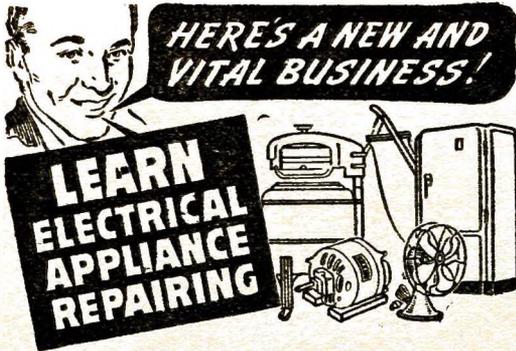
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the Circulation Department, Mrs. Curry. The problem you mention has been widespread. We just weren't able to publish enough copies of the magazine to supply the demand, because of Government paper and other restrictions during wartime, but now of course the situation will rapidly improve. Yes, we take subscriptions.

For the time being we will have to close up the mail bag, but we'll go over some more of the letters and postcards together in our next issue. In the meantime, remember that we're looking forward to hearing from you. Address your letters, postcards, and brief notes to The Editor, THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York, 16, N. Y. Thanks again. Be seeing you next time.

—THE PHANTOM.

**THE CASE OF THE POISON FORMULA**

(Concluded from page 59)

Havens to the corner and the parked sedan. Bullard had left it to join the Inspector for the downtown journey.

"I'll drive you home, Mr. Havens," Van offered.

The *Clarion's* publisher got in and looked up at him.

"Good work, Dick," he said simply, but his tone spoke volumes.

Over the tops of the tall buildings to the south the new day was beginning to dawn. Van watched the lights in the sky change colors. When blue turned to red he wondered how long it would be before that same color blazed again at the pinnacle of the *Clarion* Building, summoning the Phantom Detective once more to the eternal war he waged against crime. How long?

But all he said, in the bored, indolent tones of Richard Curtis Van Loan, society idler and dilettante, was:

"Almost morning, Mr. Havens. And I have such a full day. Luncheon with the charming Miss Thayer, a matinee and a dinner party tonight. This life! I really don't know how I stand up under it!"

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