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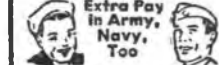
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The PHANTOM SPEAKS



JIM HENDERSON was a staid, successful businessman—a broker. On the several times I met him in the company of Frank Havens, he would have seemed to me the last man on earth anyone would have expected to see in tights of a sickening green, topped by a crimson jacket. The sort of outfit most people would have declared they “wouldn’t be found dead in.”

Don’t get an idea that Jim Henderson went to his brokerage office in any such regalia. It was, instead, the costume he wore at amateur shows put on by stock brokers. The “Broker Follies” was an institution, a yearly affair, in which many of the boys took part. They were so bad they were good; so ridiculous they were screamingly funny.

But things didn’t end on a humorous note the night Jim Henderson was murdered. His green tights and crimson jacket became a shroud, and memory of their gaudiness sent chills of horror through all the well-to-do men who were present at the Follies.

The way Jim Henderson died was fantastic. Dozens of us in the audience saw him pick up the rubber stage prop knife from the box held by a man in blackface and wearing a woolly wig. We all watched as Jim bent the rubber blade, did all sorts of tricks with it. Then suddenly he drove the rubber knife into his chest in a comic, melodramatic suicide.

Comedy Becomes Tragedy

But it wasn’t comic. It was the real thing! Jim Henderson fell to the stage, his life’s blood dripping from the wound made by the rubber knife. You’ll say that was impossible. Others have said the same thing. Even eyewitnesses wouldn’t believe that the rubber knife was a murder weapon.

But that and a number of other fascinating

problems tied up in the mystery are solved in Robert Wallace’s story of one of my most famous cases, “The Rubber Knife Murders.”

I was deeply interested, working on the case of “The Rubber Knife Murders,” and I’m sure you’re going to find it thrilling and exciting, reading about this crime chase. You all know just how masterful Bob Wallace is when it comes to getting the incidents and clues down on paper entertainingly and dramatically. He’s done one of his first-rate jobs on this story.

You’re going to get a kick in seeing how Steve Huston works with me to follow a lead that goes down to the New York waterfront and even out onto the waters off Long Island Sound and Ambrose Light.

Even after Henderson’s death, he has an important part in the working out of this curious mixture of clever plotting and cold-blooded killing. You might say that this contribution of his paid up somewhat for his association with a group of people who almost invited death from hidden killers. That particular involvement had ramifications that were startling in their promise of international complication.

A Clever Crime Chief

Representatives of some of the allied countries of the United Nations were implicated to such an extent that for a time I was wondering just how these people could possibly have a connection with any such a melange of murder. When you find the answer to this angle of the problem in “The Rubber Knife Murders” you’ll see just how tricky and underhanded are those people who attempt to capitalize upon every current suspicion or misunderstanding. The possibilities will appall you.

(Continued on page 10)



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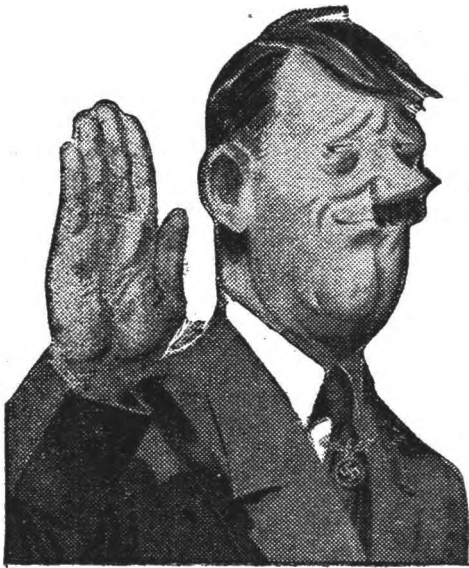
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Hate the Catholics!
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Frontier Asthma Co. 69-M Frontier Bldg.
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THE PHANTOM SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

It's the kind of a story that will really make your spine tingle, and I certainly hope you will approve of—and like—the way I went at it, and the results that were obtained. "The Rubber Knife Murders" were really worked out by a clever crime chieftain who called himself Mr. Blackout, and his method of assembling his hirelings and giving them their orders so that they would not be overheard by the police or any private investigators was both original and adequate for his purpose.

Remember—there are real thrills in "The Rubber Knife Murders," in the forthcoming issue of THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE Magazine.

Are You a Friend of the Phantom?

Many readers of this magazine get a freshened interest in life and a brand-new viewpoint on things in general through corresponding with other members, and sharing their desire for law-enforcement with their neighbors in person. I'm glad to know that this is so. It makes the task of crime-fighting that much more satisfying to any detective. Many have asked me how they, too, can help in some way to combat crime in our great country.

For ten years now, I've been trying to weld my reader group into a force that will be a real moral weapon in the hands of local communities and their officials. This force has been growing in that time, and its importance is constantly increasing. Law-enforcement is doubly important now when the need for every American's loyalty and cooperation is so great.

Our group is known as The FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM. This is a fraternal organization, and every reader, whether interested in criminology or who has a desire for decent, law-abiding life is invited to affiliate himself with our club.

Remember, however, that this club has no association with any other group, and membership does not carry with it any special privileges with respect to Federal or local law-enforcement bodies. When you sign up, you are sent an attractive membership card. You may have a club pin, too, if you wish it—that's entirely optional with you, and is not required for membership. The coupon printed in this department will tell you how to get either, or both.

There are no dues nor fees.

We want all of you readers to become members of The FRIENDS OF THE

PHANTOM. Just fill out the coupon and forward it to us.

Out of the Mail Bag

Letters and postal cards have been coming in to me rather heavily in the past few months, and I'm sure glad to have them, especially since a good many of them include suggestions for improvements in our magazine and its further development. I'm delighted to see these comments and criticisms. They are a big help to Mr. Wallace and myself in handling the various stories from my case-book, and also are an aid to the writers of other features in the magazine.

Here are some of the letters I particularly liked. You'll note that they come from a variety of readers in all parts of the country. First of all we hear from Buffalo, New York.

Dear Phantom:

Recently bought six copies of **THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE** (besides my own, of course) and sent 'em on to men in Army camps. I find this procedure is welcomed; and that *The Phantom* is, also!

It would be my suggestion to add a regular department devoted to unusual crime and criminals. A page devoted to the odd and queer and strange. Of course, I would think of that, since I'm writing detective scripts (and others) for comics magazines, and have just created a new kind of detective which a comics will shortly launch forth under my name! However—a real notebook of crime ought to be attractive, especially if you tell, briefly, some methods used and plots followed by actual criminals; or how a detective solved, cleverly, some really baffling case!

There are many odd facts still unpublished by detective magazines—such as that a tendency to crime much more than to insanity, is inherited. That old-time Chinese debtors started fingerprinting when I.O.U.s were thumbprinted by them! Warm weather causes more crimes than colder weather. Blood tests can't prove that a certain man is father of a certain child, but it can show the accused man could not be the father. A page of such oddities in cartoon, might go; yet I think a case-book of two to four unusual criminal methods would be doubly welcomed. Think it over.

My hobby is reading detective stories, particularly **THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE**, while I'm also Identification Officer in a warplant so that, taking fingerprints, etc., I am naturally interested in subjects such as you publish. Most heartily,

Montgomery Mulford.

Buffalo 9, New York.

Thanks a lot for your suggestion, Mr. Mulford. We'll put it on the file for early attention. Our next letter comes from out in the tall corn country.

Dear Phantom:

Thought I'd drop a line to your dept. I think **THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE** is okay, but got a brainstorm on how to improve it. If my ideas don't meet your fancy just ignore me. I'll get over it. In the first place after you finish the main story of the P. D., the others are a let-down. You could make the magazine a one-story magazine or get some real pep into the others. Besides this, why not have a department for showing and discussing the Phantom's various equipment such as make-up kit and guns, etc. I still think the magazine's okay, and don't be too mad at me for suggesting improvements.

Wayne Bliven.

510 Virginia St.,
Sioux City 12, Iowa.

Don't worry about our not liking your comments, Mr. Bliven, we're glad to have
(Continued on page 94)



**"I'm TIRED of being
just a Bookkeeper**

**I'm going to be an Accountant
—and make REAL money"**

WRITE TO

LASALLE

EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A Correspondence Institution

Dept. 2329-H

Chicago 15, Ill.

I'd like to prepare for a good accounting job.
Send me your free booklet and full details about
your training.

NAME _____

POSITION _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY AND STATE _____



I Have Lived Before--

Says Aged Lama

CAN WE RECOLLECT OUR PAST LIVES?

IS THERE a strange familiarity about people you have met for the first time? Do scenes and places you have never visited haunt your memory? Are these proof that the personality—an immaterial substance—can survive all earthly changes and return? How many times have you seemed a *stranger to yourself*—possessed of moods and temperaments that were not your own?

Prejudices, fears, and superstitions have denied millions of men and women a fair and intelligent insight into these *yesterdays of their lives*. But in the enigmatic East, along the

waters of the once sacred Nile, and in the heights of the Himalayas, man began a serious search beyond this veil of today. For centuries, behind monastery walls and in secret grottoes, certain men explored the *memory of the soul*. Liberating their consciousness from the physical world to which it is ordinarily bound, these investigators went on *mystical* journeys into celestial realms. They have expressed their experiences in simple teachings. They have disclosed whereby man can glean the true nature of self and find a *royal road* to peace of mind and resourceful living.

This Fascinating NEW Book Free

Today there is no greater—or more respected—perpetuator of these ancient teachings and startling truths than the Rosicrucians (not a religious organization). Let them send you a free copy of the book, *The Mastery of Life*. It explains how you may receive, for *fascinating study* in the privacy of your home, this useful knowledge which will enlarge your mental vision. By means of its simple principles, you can learn to remove doubts and fears and to establish self-confidence in these troubled times. It will reveal how to exercise the powers of self—which perhaps have remained a mystery to you. *Write today*. Use the convenient coupon below. Don't delay!

The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)

SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.

Write J. S. L.
THE ROSICRUCIANS, AMORC
San Jose, California

Please send me the free, sealed book. I am interested in knowing how I may obtain the masterful Rosicrucian teachings.

Name.....

Address.....

The Phantom swung at
the big man who was
wielding the deadly
axe
(CHAP. VI)



MURDER OF A PLASTER SAINT

By ROBERT WALLACE

When evil, swift-striking death stalks the town of Bradford, the world's greatest sleuth embarks on the dangerous trail of criminal conspirators who operate behind a sinister cloak of mystery!

CHAPTER I THE GOLDEN SAINT

IT WAS a little Connecticut town called Bradford. It lay, sleepily, in the hollow of two small mountain ranges. On a week day it was like early Sunday morning in the city. On Sunday, it was even more quiet.

The man who lay sprawled on the floor of that small brass foundry was quiet, too. Ominously quiet, in the opinion of the man and the pretty girl who, in walking past the closed foundry, had idly glanced through a window. Naturally they had stopped to investigate.

"He's dead," the man said to the startled girl. "I'm sure of it. He can't be

AN EXCITING COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

A Statuette in a Dead Man's Hand

asleep. Not lying like that on a dirty factory floor. Muriel, hand me one of those rocks. I'm going to break a window and go in."

This day, Frank Havens, who had just spoken to his daughter, Muriel, did not look much like the prominent and wealthy newspaper publisher he was, the owner and controller of big dailies strategically placed from one end of the country to the other. One of them was the well-known New York *Clarion*.

In spite of his looks at present, though, and his somewhat undignified announcement that he meant to break a small-town foundry window with a rock, Frank Havens was an important man. As a usual thing he looked the part of a man-of-affairs, with his iron-gray hair, his steady eyes, and rather bulky body that was always faultlessly clad.

Right now, however, he wore a pair of old trousers, run-down sport shoes, no tie nor hat, and he needed a shave. His summer home was only two miles east of this particular foundry, and whenever he was staying there, as he was now, he liked to forget formality.

Muriel, his daughter, was young and lovely, as dark as a beautiful gypsy with her black curls and dark eyes—and clever, too. In more ways than one she was as efficient as one of the new type machines that turn out shells and grenades. In a riding habit, such as she was now wearing, she was something to look at.

Muriel passed her father one of the medium-sized round stones he had asked for. He smashed the window, pried away broken glass and reached through to twist the latch. He slid the window wide and started to hoist himself up.

"Let me go," Muriel said. "I'm much smaller than you. I'm not afraid."

"Here," Havens said, "I'll give you a boot up. Just open the door and let me in."

Three minutes later Frank Havens was kneeling beside the sprawled-out figure.

"He must have been a watchman here," Havens said. "This isn't a big foundry, but I imagine it's doing war work and this man probably was kept on duty Sunday and nights. He was

wearing a uniformed cap and there's a gun in his pocket. Must have had a heart attack."

HAVENS gently raised the body—and instantly let it down again with a sharp exclamation of surprise. The dead man was lying on a knife, with the pointed end of it buried to the hilt directly above his heart!

"Murder!" Havens breathed softly. "That means we must notify the police. But don't go for the telephone yet, Muriel. I want to look closer into this thing. Why in the world would anyone murder a watchman in a small place like this?"

He began a search of the dead man's pockets. Muriel touched him on the shoulder.

"Dad," she said uneasily, "isn't there something in the police regulations about moving the body of a murdered man?"

"There is," Havens answered and went on searching. "I was once upon a time a reporter. That was a long time ago, Muriel, but I learned what it's necessary for a newspaper owner to know—that no good reporter lets a story escape him, police regulations or not. Now what in thunder is this?"

Between the fingers of his right hand he held a two-inch-high, splendidly created little statue of solid gold.

"It looks like—like a religious emblem!" Muriel exclaimed. "Like one of those saints they have in churches."

"That's exactly what it is," her father declared.

He shoved the little image into his own pocket and continued to search. "This man has been dead for some time," he observed. "His body is cold. Rigor has set in, too . . . Ah—here is his name and a permit to carry a gun. I was right. The permit lists him as a watchman. His name was Tom Sayre. He was a local man, too."

Muriel seemed to have no fear of being in the presence of a man who had been violently slain. Instead, she seemed to be thinking deeply, as if trying to discover a reason for this strange death onto which she and her father had stumbled.

"Dad," she said abruptly, "that statue reminds me of something. Does Rufus

is the Key to a Baffling Crime Problem!

Rutledge still live in town? He might be able to tell you something about this statue—at least, he's supposed to be one of the master craftsmen at creating religious statues."

"I thought of the same thing." Havens arose and dusted off his knees. "Yes, Rufus Rutledge maintains his studios here. His son lives with him. Rutledge is a peculiar person—an eccentric—but he's famous enough so that when he makes demands on his customers he's certain to get whatever he wants. That golden statuette couldn't have come from anywhere but Rutledge's studio—I'm

tramps and makes cars proceed slowly in the town limits. Kearny's specialty is writing speeding tickets. He wouldn't know where to begin with something like this."

"Dad," Muriel said with a touch of excitement, "you're not intending to call in the Phantom, are you?"

Havens shook his head. "Hardly, my dear. The Phantom works on big stuff, as you know. This is probably just an ordinary, run-of-the-mill murder. No, we'll contact the State Police after we talk to Rutledge and learn what we can about the golden statue."



THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

sure of that. This watchman may have stolen it. Anyway, Rutledge should be able to tell us something about it. I think we'd better go see him."

"Before we call the police?" Muriel asked.

"Police? In Bradford?" Havens chuckled. "Sure you must know, Muriel, that the entire force is composed of a constable named Jim Kearny who hates everybody, including himself. The only reason he gets reelected every time is because he keeps the town free of

THEY carefully closed the door of the foundry and walked briskly along the quiet road for two miles. A sharp bend in the road revealed Rutledge's home and studio directly ahead. Beyond it—and at a considerable distance—was a ball of silver atop the mountain range. It glittered like white-hot fire and compelled both Havens and his daughter to turn their heads away.

"Old Oberthaler's observatory is something of a menace when the setting sun hits it," Havens said. "Well, here is Rutledge's place. I know him, so we can probably get our story and phone it to the *Clarion* in short order. When I give you the signal, you slip away. Phone the office and ask for the rewrite man. Give him all the details we have, even though most are vague. Then telephone the State Police."

Havens found Rutledge's door equipped with a bell pull and he gave it a yank. They stood there waiting for three or four minutes and Havens finally reached for the pull again. But the door opened as his fingers closed around the pull.

Seated in a wheel-chair, and wrapped in a blanket that covered his body from the waist down fairly well, was a young man with massive shoulders, a thick neck and a huge, perfectly proportioned head. Young Andrew Rutledge would have been unusually handsome except for the perpetual scowl that marred his looks.

"What do you want?" he snapped, before he looked up. "Oh-oh, I'm sorry," he said then quickly. "I didn't recog-

nize you at first, Mr. Havens. But I certainly recognize that lovely daughter of yours. Come in. Dad isn't home, but perhaps I can play understudy for him."

Havens felt a sharp pang of uneasiness that tied up with his finding that corpse on his Sunday afternoon stroll. Rufus Rutledge, the celebrated sculptor, missing. At least temporarily. Could his absence have anything to do with the murder?

"Where has your father gone?" Havens asked, without glancing at Muriel. He knew she was as startled as he, and of course would be absorbing all the details. "When will he be back?"

Andrew Rutledge smiled a little, maneuvered his wheel-chair from the doorway and again insisted that they come in. He rolled along ahead of them, handling the chair as a veteran racing driver handles his car.

When they were comfortably seated, Andrew Rutledge answered Havens' questions.

"Dad went to New York yesterday morning. He didn't say when he'd return. He rarely tells me anything, but I expect him tomorrow, perhaps. He hardly ever is gone much more than a couple of days. Why do you ask, Mr. Havens?"

Havens took the golden statue from his pocket. "Do you recognize this?"

Young Rutledge shrugged, without much interest. "It belongs to my father. He calls it his lucky token. Years ago, in Paris, he made a tiny plaster saint as a sample of what he could do. It put him over and he became successful from then on. So he cast the little plaster saint into solid gold and kept it with him always. I didn't know he'd lost it, but he'll be grateful to you for finding it."

"I found it," Havens said soberly, "in the pocket of a murdered man. A watchman down at the brass factory just beyond the knoll. I think I'd better keep it for the police. Muriel, you had better phone the State Police about what we discovered."

"There is no telephone here." Andrew Rutledge seemed to have become almost sullen. "Dad never would permit one. Says it interferes with his work."

"I'll find one some place else," Muriel said.

She knew this was her signal to get the story in about the murder, the golden saint and the fact that Rufus Rutledge was missing.

AFTER she had gone, Havens sat down again.

"Look here, Andrew," he said seriously, "I want a little talk with you. About your father. I happen to know that if he were dead, you'd be anything but sorry. You hate him, don't you?"

"Yes—if you want to be so direct about it, I do hate him. Do you know why? I used to act as his model for the statues he made—and still makes, without me. Once he was creating a big one and it was standing on a scaffold that was weak. I told him so and he reminded me that he was the sculptor and I was just a model who could do nothing but look like one. Maybe I never did have many brains. He wouldn't let me go to school. He needed me to model all the time. Well, he made me go closer to the statue on the scaffold while he stood off to compare his work. The scaffold broke down, and it left me—like this!"

Andrew Rutledge swept the blanket away and revealed that his body stopped at his hips. He had no legs at all.

"It was his fault!" he said vehemently. "His carelessness! His insistence on doing a job better than anyone else, even when it involved risks. He could have waited to have the scaffold fixed, but no—that statue had to be installed on such-and-such a day when important people would be at the church. So I lost my legs."

Havens didn't want to comment on that.

"What I'm really getting at is this," he said. "Your father, from what I know of him, wouldn't take ten steps without this golden statue. Certainly he wouldn't go to New York with the intention of doing business without it, for he believes implicitly that it is his good luck fetish." He paused, then asked abruptly: "Andrew, do you think your father is dead?"

"He's too mean to be dead," Andrew retorted. "Heaven wouldn't have him and Satan wouldn't want to be replaced by him. He'll never die. That's how I feel."

Havens arose. "That reply evades

the question. I, at least, do not feel easy about your father, and I want to know where he is stopping in New York, where he can be reached."

"I wouldn't know that." Andrew Rutledge leaned forward slightly and as he said the next few words, he emphasized each one by tapping a finger on the arm of his wheel-chair. "If I were you, I wouldn't pry. Old men should keep their noses out of other people's business."

Havens just smiled. "You're bitter, Andrew, over what happened years ago. However, I've no reason to remain nor to pry deeper. I shall turn the golden saint over to the State Police when they arrive. Good night—and if your father should return, I think he'd save himself a lot of trouble by contacting the State troopers."

Havens walked out, shaking his head in bewilderment. This seemed to be such a simple case, but he was stumped. He had been making a stab in the dark that perhaps Rufus Rutledge had been murdered, because of that little gold statue that had been in the possession of another man. There was no other slightest reason to hint that the sculptor was dead, or even missing.

That watchman was dead all right, though. Why? And how had he come by the gold statue? If by any far-fetched chance Rutledge had been his killer, the last thing on earth Rutledge would have done would have been to leave that good luck emblem which would have been as plain identification as his fingerprints smeared all over the place.

Havens walked briskly along the deserted road. It was rapidly getting dark and he wanted to reach his home before real night fell. The private road leading from the highway to his summer home was long, winding, and deeply shadowed by thick-leaved trees even in daylight. Havens didn't have a flashlight, for he had hardly expected to have been gone so long.

HE WAS within a quarter of a mile of his own estate when he heard a car coming up behind him. He stepped to the side of the road. The car stopped and a hatchet-faced man opened the door. It was Jim Kearny, the constable.

"I want to talk to you," Kearny said



in a tone conveying mixed authority and sarcasm. "I hear you been takin' the law into your own hands, Mr. Havens. That don't go here—no matter how much money you got, or how many newspapers you own."

"I'll talk to you later," Havens said. "Unless you want to give me a ride home and talk while you're driving."

"No, sir," Kearny snapped. "This is an official car and I ain't supposed to take riders unless they're my prisoners. I been down to the foundry. Poor Sayre is stone dead—murdered. But you know that. You were there before me—you found him. Somebody saw you come out. You and that daughter of yours. And nobody knows better than you it's against the law not to report a murder soon as it's found out, and that you can go to jail for touchin' a corpse."

Havens gave a weary sigh. "If I'm under arrest, then let me get into that official car and ride downtown."

"I didn't say you were pinched," growled Kearny. "But I will say that if you weren't so big—financially, I mean—you'd be in the clink now. I especially don't like it because you phoned the State troopers instead of coming to me."

"Who told you I phoned the troopers?" Havens asked quickly.

"Ain't saying. Now see here, Mr. Havens, I won't warn you again. I can be a friend to a man or an enemy and

them I hate don't get along so good around here. Suppose we just shake hands, call everything off, and you tell me just what you found down there in the foundry."

"I don't have to shake hands and be friends to tell you that," Havens said coolly. "I'm willing enough for you to know all I know—which isn't much. I happened to be going by the foundry with my daughter. We looked in through a window out of plain curiosity and saw a man was lying in the middle of the floor. Naturally I thought he might be ill so I broke a window and we went in. The man was dead—murdered. Murder isn't in your line so I had the State police notified. Is that all you want?"

"Wel-l-l—" Kearny hesitated. "That wasn't exactly details. I want to know the time, what window you looked in. Was anybody around?"

Suddenly Havens got an idea that Kearny was stalling him purposely. Wasting time, holding him here for some purpose of his own. Havens shrugged.

"I'll tell you all I know when the State police arrive," he said shortly. "I'll be going back to the foundry to meet them there. You'll be there because you also have jurisdiction in town and you have the right. Until then, good night, Constable."

Havens watched the constable's car vanish in a swirl of dust down the road.

As he turned into his own driveway it was now so dark that he couldn't see more than a few yards. Havens frowned, deep in thought. The only person who knew he'd sent Muriel to telephone was Andrew Rutledge. Had the young man immediately rolled his wheelchair to a phone and contacted Kearny?

How? There was no phone in the Rutledge house, and if he had called Kearny—why? And why hadn't Kearny mentioned the golden saint? If Andrew Rutledge had phoned he must have told him about that too. Havens automatically patted the object in his pocket.

IN TOTAL darkness, he went on along the long driveway leading to his home. Bordered as it was by those thickly foliated shade trees it was as dark as pitch.

He hadn't heard the slightest warn-

ing sound when something came down from the lower branches of one tree, two arms wrapped around his neck and pulled him to the ground as the attacker dropped. The arms held him firmly until his struggles almost ceased.

Then the attacker proceeded methodically to smash one punch after another into the face of his half-conscious, helpless victim. They were vicious blows with murder behind them, but the attacker overdid things. He made too much noise. Suddenly Muriel Havens' voice came through the darkness and the light of a flash swept down the driveway.

CHAPTER II

SIGNAL FOR THE PHANTOM



IN THE baroque garden of one of the ultra-smart estates on Long Island, a party was in progress. A patriotic party which would net Uncle Sam a great deal of money. Guests were mostly people of wealth but, because of rationing restrictions, there were few cars

parked on the estate. An attendant watched the handful.

On a platform, in the glare of a spotlight, nationally known actors and actresses were being presented to the audience by a slender, sleek man faultlessly dressed in evening clothes. He looked as though he had been poured into them, and his appearance even put some of the screen heroes to shame.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" This suave man had one hand raised and it held a wisp of a handkerchief. "You all know who donated this handkerchief to be auctioned off. You have seen her on the screen, enjoyed her acting. Now, any one of you can have this intimate souvenir—it's even perfumed—for a little matter of ten thousand dollars. I'm offering the first bid in that sum. Any one want to go higher? And remember, some day you get your money back with interest. Meanwhile, it's doing a job for Uncle Sam. How about it, folks?"

There was some eager bidding and the price went to fantastic heights and kept climbing under the smooth-tongued

urgings of this master of ceremonies. In the audience, two middle-aged men had kept out of it except to comment.

"First time I ever saw Richard Curtis Van Loan do anything more strenuous than lift a cocktail," one of them said.

The other laughed. "You're a little new here, Ed. Van Loan looks and acts like a playboy. He is a playboy, I suppose, with too much money, but don't let him fool you. He's a smooth talker and smoother on a polo pony, the very devil to beat in tennis, and as for chess, we all back away from the boards when he shows up."

"I didn't mean to say anything derogatory," the first man commented. "Van Loan is a nice chap. It's just that—well, he so much 'belongs' in glittering affairs like this. The man doesn't work at anything, does he?"

"No-o-o, he doesn't." His companion shrugged. "Why should he, with everything he wants? Hey! Look at that! He jacked up that two-dollar handkerchief to nearly twenty thousand. Boy, what he could do with a movie actress' sarong!"

Richard Curtis Van Loan accepted a check from the buyer of the handkerchief and turned to the next guest who was proffering a wallet for sale. He had not began his selling talk when a servant walked up on the platform and spoke softly in his ear.

"Sir, the attendant who is taking care of your car says the radio seems to be on and it's making quite a din. He can't shut it off and perhaps it might damage the radio or your battery."

For one fleeting instant Richard Curtis Van Loan's eyes were no longer smiling, but grim and earnest. For he alone knew the meaning of what he had been told.

"Thank you," he said. "It's a tricky radio. I'll be over immediately."

Van Loan arranged with someone else to take his place and hurried to where his car was parked. He climbed behind the wheel, nodded to the attendant, and found the switch which cut the radio.

When the attendant was out of earshot, he turned the switch on again, slid back a tiny panel and revealed a tuning dial. He began moving it a bit. The squealing ceased and a voice droned

a few words over and over again.

"Calling the Phantom . . . Calling the Phantom. . . ."

The voice was that of a monitor atop Frank Havens' *Clarion* Building in New York, and it was starting certain wheels rolling which would put a master crime hunter into action.

VAN LOAN called the attendant back and handed him a bill.

"Please tell my host that I suddenly remembered another engagement," he told the man. "Say that I'm very sorry to leave like this, that it is important."

He backed the car up, headed it toward the street and, once out of sight of the house, he stepped on it.

Within the city limits, he stopped in at an outlying drugstore, having left the car half a block away. He walked into the store, purchased a pack of cigarettes and made his way to the phone booth. With a quick look around to be sure no one could overhear, he dialed a number.

The same voice which had been coming over that radio on its special wavelength, greeted him.

"This," Richard Curtis Van Loan said, "is the Phantom. I caught your signals. What's up?"

"Please give the number of the telephone from which you are calling," droned the answer. "Remain there a few moments. Miss Muriel Havens is calling and wants to speak with you direct."

The Phantom hung up promptly and tried his best to figure out why Muriel had called instead of her father. He had a feeling that something had happened, something not altogether pleasant.

Soon the phone rang and Muriel's voice came over the wire. She knew Richard Curtis Van Loan and liked him, but she hadn't the vaguest idea that he was the Phantom Detective.

"Phantom," she said, "I'm calling at my father's suggestion. He has been injured. Late this afternoon he and I discovered a murder. Not an important one from some viewpoints, I suppose, though everybody's life is important. The thing is that in this case the victim was in possession of a golden statue which belonged to a famous sculptor named Rufus Rutledge."

"I know of him," the Phantom said. "He is famous. Go on."

"Dad was on his way home after talking to Mr. Rutledge's son, because Rufus Rutledge himself is in New York—or so his son said. At any rate, Dad was attacked along the dark driveway to our summer home. He was badly injured and I think the attacker meant to kill him. But I heard the scuffling and when I ran toward it with a flashlight, calling to Dad, the man was frightened away."

"The golden statue," the Phantom asked quickly. "Was it gone?"

"Yes—stolen by the attacker. Ap-



parently he wanted it badly—badly enough to commit murder to get it. Dad is home, under the care of a local physician. He is in no danger, but there was a near concussion and several sprains that just missed being fractures. Dad wants you to come out."

"I had determined to do that," the Phantom said grimly, "the moment you told me he was hurt. Go back to him. Tell him this. I'll be there as soon as I can make train connections. You'd better meet me at the station. I'll come as Dr. Blanding, a specialist for whom your father had you phone." He gave Muriel a swift and brief description of how he would look. "Is that clear?" he asked.

"Quite. I'll meet every train that

comes in until I see 'Dr. Blanding.' There aren't many trains. Hurry, please. I'm afraid that—the murderer will come back. Dr. Clay is here now, but he can't remain here. He's the only physician left in town. The draft took the others and he is very busy."

"I'll be there as soon as possible," the Phantom promised and hung up.

He walked out of the store with long, determined strides. Twenty minutes later, he put his car away and walked across the street to the towering Park Avenue apartment building where he maintained an elaborate penthouse.

A PRIVATE elevator took him up. He was already removing his clothing as the lift ascended. When he left it he walked through a richly furnished living room and into his bedroom. There he opened a secret door which led into a large closet that contained every possible disguise that he might ever have reason to assume. Clothing, hats, ties, various accessories—everything was there.

Selecting a suit, shirt and hat in keeping with the character of an important physician, he took them from the closet and laid them on his bed. Then, sitting down before his specially made triple mirrors over his big dressing table, he unlocked drawers that contained more kinds of make-up in bottles, jars and boxes than even the most versatile theatrical artist would use.

Choosing what he wanted, he went to work with deft fingers. In remarkably short order every trace of Richard Curtis Van Loan was gone, and the face that looked out at him from the triple mirrors looked perfectly to be that of a prosperous physician. He had added years to his appearance.

In a vest pocket of the clothing he donned were two clinical thermometers. A stethoscope was carelessly jammed into one side coat pocket.

He took a physician's bag from the big closet, opened it and filled it with equipment. Not the instruments of a doctor, but the articles necessary to the investigation of crime.

As he made a final check in the mirrors, certainly no vestige of Richard Curtis Van Loan, playboy, remained. Anyhow, he was far from being what one of the men in the audience at the

garden party he had just left had believed.

Van was no idler. He maintained the appearance of being one so that no suspicion would be turned his way. But for years now he had been the Phantom Detective whose life was strenuous, whose very name was a challenge to criminals.

Only one person knew his dual identity—Frank Havens. The publisher had helped him into this strange, anonymous profession.

Once, at Havens' suggestion, Van had tackled a case which had the police up in the air, and had solved it so successfully that he had known he had found his life work. At that time newspapermen, unaware of his identity, since he had worked in disguise, had dubbed him the Phantom Detective. And it was as the Phantom Detective that Van since had battled all manner of crime from one end of the country to the other.

His exploits were legion, and well-known. Police gladly worked with him when he asked for their assistance. Crooks kept out of his way, for they had long ago learned that it was healthier to toy with nitroglycerin than with the Phantom.

Van Loan had studied this adopted profession thoroughly. He had made himself a master of disguise, and made use of everything of which he had learned to alter his appearance. He didn't have to use mechanical contrivances to any great extent, except perhaps to alter the shape of his nose or mouth, for he stepped fully into any character, helped more by his thorough knowledge of the type he was portraying than even by the perfect disguises he assumed.

He knew all the scientific approaches to solving crime, had accumulated a complete file on important crooks, and was familiar with all their tricks. He had his own crime library, and a laboratory in the Bronx—where he was known as an old scientist named Dr. Bendix—that was second to none except that of the F.B.I. in Washington. He was a crack shot with any kind of weapon, an expert on ju-jitsu, and his activities as a millionaire sportsman and athlete kept him in perfect physical trim.

Usually a new case gave him a lift mentally. He was more than eager to

come face to face with whoever was plotting some fresh crime wave, or had fashioned some new wrinkle on how to live without working.

This time, however, it struck closer home. Frank Havens was as near to him as a father is to his child. The Phantom took the attack on Havens as a personal matter, and he sensed that big things might develop from what now seemed an insignificant case.

He had checked on the train schedule, and now as he left his penthouse, he knew he had little time left to make the train he wanted. His private elevator took him to the side entrance of the big building. It looked like a tradesmen's entrance, but it was never used except by the Phantom.

Van got a taxi at the corner for Grand Central, and made his train all right. Once in his seat he relaxed a bit. He leaned back and tried to puzzle out what things were all about, from what little Muriel had told him.

But he realized he had to know more—much more.

CHAPTER III GRAVE OFF ASHES



MURIEL HAVENS saw the somewhat pompous man step off the train, spotted the stethoscope and physician's bag and hurried up to him.

"Dr. Blanding?" she asked.

"Yes," the Phantom acknowledged. "I'm Blanding. How is your

father, Miss Havens?"

"He needs you," Muriel said, and she didn't mean for professional reasons. "He keeps asking for you, Doctor. I'm sure he has a great deal of faith in what you can do for him."

They got into Muriel's car and she drove off. A few people on the station platform watched the car vanish. In a matter of minutes in that small town word would go abroad that a famous specialist had been called in to treat Frank Havens.

"You acted the part very well, Muriel," the Phantom told her.

She laughed briefly. "I acted the part?"

Phantom, I've seen you in the guise of about every type of person I can think of, but you really almost smell of disinfectants this time. You're perfect."

"Thank you," the Phantom said. "Perfect except for one thing. If a real doctor asks too many questions, I'll be stumped. My medical knowledge doesn't go too far. Now, about your father. Give me every detail."

"There isn't much." Muriel turned into the highway leading toward the vicinity of her home. "Dad and I were taking a walk this afternoon. We saw a little brass foundry and looked in a window. We saw someone lying on the floor, so Dad broke in. The man was a watchman named Sayre and he had been murdered. Stabbed through the heart."

"And the golden saint?"

"It was in his left-hand coat pocket. Dad discovered it. We decided that because of its perfection Rufus Rutledge would probably be its owner or know something about it, so we went there. Andrew Rutledge, his son, said it was his father's property. The sculptor, incidentally, wasn't home. He's supposed to be in New York, but nobody knows just where he is, nor when he will return home."

"A father usually tells his son such things," the Phantom said quickly. "Is there anything wrong between Rufus Rutledge and his son?"

"A great deal," Muriel said flatly. "Andrew is resentful about what he believes his father did to him once—gravely so. Andrew has no legs. They were amputated some years ago as the result of the collapse of a scaffolding holding one of his father's statues. Scaffolding and statues fell on Andrew. He blamed the accident on his father's carelessness and makes no pretense about hating him."

"This promises to be interesting," the Phantom declared. "Your father is in no danger, Muriel?"

"No—although at first it looked pretty bad. He'll be in bed for days, however, and he has suffered a lot. The man who attacked him was evidently perched in the branches of a tree bordering the driveway to our house. He jumped down, knocked Father to the ground and then started hitting him. I frightened the man anyway, but neither Dad nor myself even had a glimpse of him."

Muriel entered the driveway to the house and stopped in front of the door. The Phantom helped her out, took his professional bag and they walked in. She led him straight to one of the upstairs rooms where her father lay in bed.

FRANK HAVENS grinned weakly from beneath several layers of bandages that covered most of his face.

"My facial beauty has been ruined," he chuckled. "Phantom, sometimes I think I made a mistake calling you in on anything like this. It's small stuff, obviously."

The Phantom sat down at the bedside. "Sometimes small things grow into monsters, Mr. Havens. I've a feeling something important is behind this one. Otherwise, why were you attacked? After all, you're an important man, and the attack was bound to create a great deal of attention."

"Whoever slugged me was after the golden saint," Havens said. "He got it, too, darn him! Phantom, I've been lying here thinking this business over. There seems to be two obvious conclusions."

"I know," the Phantom said. "You believe Rufus Rutledge has been murdered, too. The watchman stumbled on the crime, somehow, got possession of Rutledge's golden saint, and was killed himself. As an alternative, this watchman stole the golden saint and for some reason greater than mere theft, Rutledge murdered the watchman and disappeared."

"Unless," Havens pointed out, "Rufus Rutledge returns from New York and has an air-tight alibi. He may have lost the golden saint, you know. It doesn't seem reasonable he would have left the saint in the murdered man's possession. It would have been a dead give-away."

"That little statue is very important to somebody," the Phantom mused. "Otherwise, there would have been no attack upon you. Rufus Rutledge would merely have claimed it and that would be the end of it all. Was there any particular significance to the golden saint?"

"It was Rufus Rutledge's lucky token," Havens said. "He created it, in plaster, as a sample of his work when he was just getting started. The sample was so good it gave him the break he needed, and from there on he really



The Phantom was blinded by the glare of the spotlight (CHAP. VII)

went places. So he cast it in gold and carried it as a good luck piece."

"Hm," the Phantom said. "That means Rutledge wouldn't have been careless with it. He'd never give the thing away nor loan it. Frank, I think Rufus Rutledge is dead."

"If he is," Havens said, "it makes a case important enough for you. Rutledge is famous and his work is comparable to that of almost any sculptor the world has ever known. Where do you intend to start?"

"At the foundry," the Phantom said. "I'll need the use of your car. For as long as possible I'll keep up this pose of being Dr. Blanding. The deception can't last, but, at least, I'll have time to look around. What's your local doctor like?"

"Clay? All right, I guess. Nothing outstanding. Why?"

The Phantom chuckled. "Because when I meet him, he'll begin talking medical terms and while I can carry on to a certain extent, he's bound to go beyond me. That, Mr. Havens, will complicate matters. Therefore, I think we'd better let him in on our secret."

"I wouldn't trust him too far," Muriel moved up to the bedside. "He's crafty-eyed, in my opinion, and a couple of hours ago I caught him rummaging through your desk, Dad."

"You did?" Havens tried to sit up, but the Phantom put a restraining hand against his chest. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Because I didn't want to excite you," said Muriel. "Perhaps it was nothing more than idle curiosity."

"Maybe I'm wrong about him," Havens grumbled.

The Phantom arose. "Nevertheless, I can't carry my deception long unless I stay out of his way and that's obviously impossible. Before he does learn who I am, however, I'd better get as much work done as possible. I'm going to the foundry if Muriel will describe its location and furnish me with a car."

SHE did both and in a short time the Phantom was outside the factory door. It was locked, but locks meant little to him. He had made a special study of them and carried instruments with him that would open practically any door. This one gave way in a few seconds.

He took a flashlight from his pocket, walked through the foundry office and into the sand- and spelter-laden foundry proper. He found the spot where the dead watchman had lain in death. It was outlined in chalk—the work of State Police investigators.

There were scores of footprints in the thin film of dust on the cement floor, but nothing in the way of a clue. The Phantom shut off the flashlight and leaned against one of the molders' benches to think.

A watchman had been killed. Unless this crime was directed straight at the man for a personal reason that murder had been committed for another reason that was plain. The watchman had seen or heard too much. There had been a gun in his pocket, besides the golden saint, according to Havens, so the killer must have been someone the watchman knew. Someone who had struck so fast he'd had no chance to draw his gun and defend himself.

The Phantom tried to puzzle out just what that watchman could have known which was important enough to cause his murder. The foundry, he already had learned, was a profitable venture and recently had been bought by a large manufacturing firm, but was still operated by local people. That it had anything to do with the crime was doubtful.

That left only the fact that the watchman had either discovered his fatal knowledge outside the plant or that something had happened right here, in the foundry. The Phantom quickly discarded the first theory. A murderer would hardly be apt to invade a factory and attack an armed victim. He would strike elsewhere and make the job easier. Therefore, something had occurred in the foundry itself and the watchman murdered immediately upon his discovering the secret.

Rufus Rutledge was missing. Obviously, considering the golden saint, all this had something to do with him. The Phantom had to assume that Rutledge was either dead or that he had disappeared of his own volition. The former idea seemed the more logical.

The Phantom walked briskly toward the row of smelting furnaces at the far end of the room. He cautiously tested the first one for heat. These furnaces, he knew, retained heat for a long time

after the fires were dumped, but that particular one was stone cold. He went on down the line of a dozen more furnaces. The seventh one was good and warm.

Below the Phantom's feet was a heavy iron grating. He lifted this to gain access to the pits beneath the furnaces, the pits into which the fires were dumped. Heaps of cinders and slag presented quite a problem, but he concentrated upon a comparatively small area—that beneath Furnace Number Seven.

His flash swept the pile of burned-out fuel. Heedless of the damage to his clothes, the Phantom thrust one hand, wrist deep, into the soft powdery substance. He kept fumbling around until his fingers encountered something hard. He drew this out, shook the dust off it and stared—at a human bone! It looked like a forearm bone.

Eagerly now, he started searching the whole pile of cinders. He was sweating profusely and covered with dust half an hour later, but had some definite results to show for his work. Piled up in the pit were many more bones. He knew now, without the slightest question, that someone had been murdered, the body cut up and thrown into the blazing heat of the Number Seven furnace.

THAT explained the motive for the watchman's murder. He must have found the murderer performing this gruesome task. Just how the watchman happened to have had Rufus Rutledge's golden saint in his possession it would be hard to say, but the fact indicated strongly that Rutledge was, in all probability, the victim of this atrocious crime.

The Phantom spent a few more minutes going through the cinders, but he found nothing more in the ashes. Hoisting himself up out of the furnace pits, he set about sifting the sand and dirt piled on the floor about the furnace.

In what was just about the last seiveful, he discovered something that glinted faintly in the ray of his flash. He picked the object from the debris, cleaned off the dust and blinked.

He was holding a diamond of at least ten carats in size. A perfect stone that sent myriad rays of colored lights into the darkness beyond the rays of the flash.

He dropped the stone into his pocket, wrapped the bones in a piece of cloth he had found in the factory, and was trying to dust off his clothes when his keen ears caught a warning sound—a strange clanking sound. He spun around, one hand darting for the gun under his arm-pit. The flashlight swept across the darkness of the foundry.

There was a heavy crane fitted on tracks just overhead and used in lifting the crucibles of metal from the furnaces and transporting them to the mold lines. It was equipped with a chain and hook that must have weighed a quarter of a ton and that chain was whipping toward him in a murderous arc.

A breath later would have been too late. The Phantom threw himself flat and with such force that the wind was knocked out of him, but he succeeded in avoiding the swing of that heavy hook and chain. They whizzed just above him, clanked and clattered and came back again so that he was compelled to stay there on the floor. At the slightest raise of his head he would have been brained.

When the swing of the chain slowed, he rolled over quickly, scrambled to his feet and raced to the further end of the room where the terminal end of that crane had been located. He noticed that the track tilted toward the furnaces to provide an angle for pouring off the crucibles. Anyone could have quietly opened a window at the far end of the room, reached in and grasped the chain. By manipulating it he could have started it swinging and sent the crane down along its track to become a terrific weapon of murder.

The windows were all closed, but the Phantom discovered one was not locked and the dust on the window-sill had been brushed against. He was certain now that an attempt had been made to kill him. That complicated matters not only by placing his life in peril, but by the fact that someone had seen him. That person would know that the eminent Dr. Blanding would hardly spend his time in the furnace pits, and therefore readily assume that Dr. Blanding was someone else.

The killer would also obviously know that Frank Havens would probably call on the Phantom, for it was common knowledge that Havens was the Phantom's only contact.

CHAPTER IV COPPER BULLET



BACK at Frank Havens' home, the Phantom met Dr. Martin Clay. The local physician was a short, bulky man with closely-cropped hair that stood up like that of a Prussian officer. He shook hands with a moist grip, but a strong one.

"Well, what do you think of our patient, Doctor?" he asked Van. "And please don't think I'm resentful because you were called in."

The Phantom laughed. "Frankly, Doctor, you have nothing to resent. If I treated Mr. Havens, I doubt he'd get well fast. You see, I'm not a physician."

"Not a—doctor?" Clay gaped. "But I don't understand."

"He is the Phantom," Havens said. "He is merely posing as a doctor. I called him in to help solve this mystery of ours, but I didn't expect he'd reveal his identity quite so soon."

"It was necessary," the Phantom said. "I need Dr. Clay's help." He smiled apologetically as he added, "Anyway, if he is the murderer, or associated with him, he'd learn my identity soon if he didn't know it now. Someone knows it already, and that someone just tried to kill me."

Dr. Clay didn't hear anything beyond the Phantom's veiled suggestion that he might be the murderer. He started to violently protest the matter.

"I didn't accuse you, Doctor," the Phantom said. "I merely stated that it made little difference if you knew who I was. Will you come downstairs a moment? I've a bag of bones I want you to examine. I think they are human bones."

"What on earth have you been doing?" Havens exclaimed. "Robbing graves?"

"In a way, yes," Van said soberly. "Though this grave happens to be in the ashes beneath one of the furnaces in that foundry. The murderer's first victim was burned in Furnace Number Seven. I presume the corpse had been carved up. Tomorrow, I think the State Police should take charge of the foundry, keep it closed, and make an examination for bloodstains."

"Then the watchman was killed because he saw the crime!" Havens cried. "Who is the victim? And can you identify him with nothing but a few bones?"

"I'm afraid we can't," the Phantom said. "However, I also found this in the sand and dirt about the furnace. Must have rolled from the victim's pocket. It's a huge diamond, easily worth twenty thousand dollars. It proves the crime was not committed for profit anyway. Take a look at the diamond. You, too, Doctor. It's rather outstanding. Ever see it before?"

"Yes!" Dr. Clay shouted. "Yes, I've seen it many times. It was set in a ring worn on the third finger of Rufus Rutledge's right hand. I've seen it there often, and only a day or two ago I heard him mention, down at the drug store, that he wished we had a jeweler in town, because the stone in his ring had fallen out and he wanted to wear it in his ring, not in his pocket. He used to be my patient until—"

"Until what, Doctor?" Van prompted.

Dr. Clay shrugged. "I might as well own up. Rutledge and I got along fine until a few months ago. He was a hypochondriac, imagining all sorts of illnesses and demanding attention by the hour. What with every other doctor in town called by the armed forces, I couldn't waste time, and I told him so. When he persisted in calling me in the middle of the night, I jacked my fee good and high. That stopped it, but we had quite an argument."

THE Phantom rotated the diamond between his fingers.

"A man who can afford to buy diamonds like this shouldn't squawk at paying a doctor's fee."

"Rutledge was impossible," Clay said. "He'd buy all manner of things for his personal use. Lived right up to a fancy income, but when it came to paying for services, he stalled as long as possible. Frankly, if he's dead, I can't feel too sorry."

Dr. Clay and the Phantom went downstairs and the sack of bones was opened. The Phantom spread them on a table.

"Take a look, Doctor. We've got to be sure they're human bones."

Clay examined several of them, clucking his tongue as he worked. Then he looked up.

"There are two hundred bones in the human skeletal frame. Quite a few of them are here. I've found here a common tibia, or leg bone. An inferior metatarsus, part of the foot, and a piece of cranial frontal bone. No question about it—these are human bones."

The Phantom gathered them up. "But whose bones, Doctor? Though I know it's impossible for you to tell."

"Why Rufus Rutledge's, of course," Dr. Clay declared half derisively. "He's missing—at least he's not where anyone knows him to be. That's his diamond. His golden saint luck piece was found in that foundry and he'd hardly stir without that. Said it did him more good than all the medicines I ever prescribed. And"—he shrugged—"there certainly are enough people who would have enjoyed killing him."

"I know about his son," the Phantom said. "Who else hated him?"

"Every man who ever worked for him," Dr. Clay answered promptly. "He was inhuman in his demands. He needed strong men to shift his statues around, but the only man who worked for him more than two or three months is a half-baked grounds-keeper who doesn't know the difference between being perpetually bawled out and being praised."

The Phantom sat down slowly and accepted a cigarette from Dr. Clay.

"Doctor," he said, after a moment, "as the only practitioner in town, you can answer this question if anyone can. I noticed that the foundry where that murder was committed is in a sort of valley. On the knolls surrounding it are a lot of dwellings. Do you happen to know if anyone living in those houses is sick? Quite seriously, or with a chronic condition which prevents much sleep?"

"Why, yes," the doctor said, but looked puzzled. "Mrs. Curtin is troubled with insomnia and is ill besides."

"Will you take me to see her—now?" The Phantom arose.

Clay was still mystified, but willing, and soon the Phantom was talking to a gray-haired woman who was eager to help any friend of Dr. Clay.

"No, I didn't sleep well on Saturday night," she told him. "I was awake at dawn. I'm positive of it."

"Did you happen to look in the direction of the foundry?" asked Van.

"Now that you remind me, yes, I did.



Moose advanced toward Muriel threateningly
(CHAP. X)

There was smoke coming out of the chimney and I thought it odd because the shop doesn't operate Sundays, and this was Sunday morning at five o'clock. Exactly five. I remember because I take my medicine on the hour and I looked at the clock."

VAN thanked her politely, listened while she complained of fresh symptoms to Dr. Clay, then they departed. In Dr. Clay's car the Phantom gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"We've set the time when the murderer was at work," he said. "Five A.M. Sunday morning. That's when he got the roasting ovens started. While we're at it, Doctor, where were you at that precise hour?"

"Home in bed and sleeping like a log." Dr. Clay grinned. Then the grin faded and was replaced by a worried look. "Say—do you suspect me?"

"Why not?" The Phantom grinned back at him. "You were here, and by your own admission you didn't like Rufus. You have no alibi beyond being home in bed. But I wouldn't worry about it, Doctor. You have shown none of the possible reactions of a guilty man—and I have encountered too many of them to be easily fooled."

Dr. Clay managed a sickly smile. "Now I know why crooks are so afraid of the Phantom. You just don't miss a trick. Want to go back to Havens' place?"

"Not yet. Drop me at the railroad station. I won't keep you any longer, Doctor. I can get a cab from there."

The Phantom did not immediately take a cab, though. He stopped long enough to question the station agent who was on duty all night.

"Yep." The station agent sniffed of a cigar which the Phantom had given him. "Rufus Rutledge went to New York on the four-ten Saturday afternoon. He came back on the three twenty-five Sunday morning, and when he got off the train he seemed to be in a huff. There was a cab at the station, but he passed it up and started walking in the direction of his home. That's the last I seen of him, like I told the State Police today. I expect Rufus is either good and dead or he killed poor old Sayre up at the foundry. S'pose you're a State policeman, too? One of them detective ones

who don't wear a uniform?"

"Thank you." The Phantom answered no questions. "Was Rutledge alone? Did anybody else get off the train here?"

"Rufus was always alone. Too ornery to have company much. Yep, some others got off. Don't know who they were. Maybe folks on their way to see Old Man Oberthaler who has the observatory on the mountain. You can check on them at the hotel."

The Phantom hired one of the two cabs waiting at the station, had the driver drop him not far from Havens' house and waited until the taxi disappeared. Then he turned and walked rapidly in the direction of Rufus Rutledge's studio.

It was a two-story building apart from his house. The Phantom passed up the house temporarily, went to the studio door and opened it with a simple tool that performed feats of magic in his hands.

The studio was dark and he used his flashlight sparingly. He didn't want interference from anyone. By day he could examine the place closer, but sometimes it was better to carry along an investigation of this type unexpectedly.

The first floor contained Rutledge's workshop, a spacious room with several partly-finished plaster saints on their individual pedestals. Two were completed and he stopped to admire the skillful work. Rutledge was undoubtedly an expert and it was no wonder his work graced some of the largest churches in the country.

He thought it odd that a man of Rufus Rutledge's temperament and character could create such exquisite reproductions. Detail was fine, the statues were life-size for the most part, and in the semi-gloom of his flash they seemed to be actually alive.

SUDDENLY the Phantom gave a start. The statue before him was somewhat different from the rest. Its quality and workmanship was exactly the same, but there was a hole through the plaster. A hole directly over the heart—a bullethole! There was no question about it.

The Phantom walked to the back of the statue and discovered that the bullet

hadn't come through. He went to a work-bench, helped himself to some tools and went to work digging that bullet out of the plaster saint. It took him twenty minutes. When he was done, he rotated an odd bullet between his fingers. It was made of copper. Probably it had been subjected to a hardening process because the slug had not mushroomed out and that plaster had been hard.

"Now I wonder," the Phantom asked himself mutely, "why anybody would want to murder a plaster saint? This business is developing some side issues that are most interesting."

He stuffed the bullet into his pocket, decided he had done as much as possible here and headed toward the door. The way was clear, so he shut off his flashlight.

Outside, it was as dark as it was inside. Ordinarily, he would never have known the door had been opened, but he felt a cool breeze rush through it and hit him in the face. Someone was coming in, stealthily, and probably with murder in his heart!

CHAPTER V

BIG MOOSE



FOR a bare instant, as the Phantom snapped on the flash, the intruder stood revealed. He was an awe-inspiring sight. Huge, with long hairy hands, a stubble of black beard across a receding chin and a wild look in his eyes.

With a crazy shout the man lunged forward, swinging high over his head an axe he held in his hands. There wasn't much question about what he intended to do with it.

The Phantom had no opportunity to reach for a gun. That axe was swinging toward his head. Trained, well-developed muscles went into action. He lithely ducked under the swing, heard the deadly weapon whiz over his head, then he lunged toward the big man.

The Phantom didn't try to pull him down. The fellow was too big for that. It would have been like trying to pull down an oak tree. Instead, his right fist

smashed into the pit of the man's stomach. That drew a loud *whoosh* of pain and the man was momentarily stunned.

He made one more attempt to get that axe into play, but the Phantom followed up the effects of the midriff punch too fast for him to get into action. Van shot home another and as the big man reeled backward, the Phantom planted an uppercut on the point of his attacker's chin.

That did it. The big man staggered back a few steps, then his knees buckled. The wildness left his eyes and was replaced by a glassy look. As he fell, the axe dropped out of his hand.

The Phantom approached his victim carefully, just in case the big fellow was playing dead dog. If those thick arms ever encompassed him, he would suffer broken ribs, at the least. But it seemed the brute had a glass chin. He was out cold.

The Phantom searched him carefully, found two pocket knives with broken handles, a score of half-smoked cigarette butts which looked like snipes, some loose tobacco in one coat pocket, and precisely seven cents in pennies.

The Phantom glanced at the axe, grunted in surprise, and picked it up. The head of that axe was blood-stained. Old, dried blood that looked much like rust.

The big man finally stirred, opened his eyes and started to get up. He saw the Phantom standing there, holding the axe, and the brute cowered back.

"I could have put you away for a long time for what you tried to do to me," the Phantom said.

"You're a thief!" the big man blubbered. "You was robbing the studio. I got a right to hit you. I work here. It's my job to see nobody steals things."

The Phantom eyed him narrowly. The man gave the impression of being moronic, but there seemed to be a certain amount of uncannily shrewd intelligence in those deep-set eyes of his.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I'm Moose. That's all—just Moose. And I'm going to call Constable Kearny. You're a thief! I'll call him. I will unless—unless—"

"How much?" the Phantom asked quickly.

"Ten dollars," came the prompt answer. "That is, if you didn't take any-

thing. I guess ten dollars ain't too much to pay for what you did to me."

The Phantom hefted the axe. "I'll give you twenty if you'll sell me this axe and tell me where you got it. Twenty-five!"

The Phantom regarded Moose intently. The big brute was a lot more intelligent than he looked to be, and he had the heart of a Captain Kidd.

VAN reached into his pocket and took out a twenty-dollar bill and a five. He handed these to Moose, who carefully scrutinized them, folded them into the tiniest possible wad and tucked the money into a watch-pocket of his trousers.

"You can go," Moose said. "I ain't telling Constable Kearny. I don't like him anyhow. He's always wantin' to put me in jail for being a bum. I ain't no bum. I work for Mr. Rutledge and he pays me. I do the handy work. I—"

"What about the axe?" the Phantom interrupted.

"Oh, it's yours. You paid for it, Mister."

"Where did you get it? I also paid five dollars additional for that information, and if you think I'm not going to get it, guess again, my friend. I'll pound it out of you and take that money away."

Moose clapped a protecting hand over the pocket where he had put the money.

"I found that axe down near the foundry," he said quickly. "It was in the bushes. I needed an axe so I took it. That's honest, ain't it? She was just stuck in a log on the ground. Wasn't nobody around. Didn't look like it belonged to anybody."

"All right," the Phantom said. "You may go now, but don't start telling how you ran into a thief. I was in the studio on business. . . . By the way—is there much hunting around here? Much shooting, I mean."

"Everything is posted," Moose said, shaking his head. "No huntin' at all. No shootin'."

"You haven't heard a shot—or something that might have been a shot? That would be sometime yesterday or the day before."

"Ain't heard no shootin'. I been around here, too. If I don't work, Constable Kearny will put me in jail."

Then, suddenly, and as if his mind

had just delivered the thought, Moose turned and fled. He dived headlong into the brush surrounding the area of the studio and vanished.

The Phantom wrapped his handkerchief around part of the axe handle so as to not spoil any fingerprints on it, then walked back into the studio. Apparently Andrew Rutledge had heard none of the talking or the scuffle. At least he hadn't put in an appearance on the porch with his wheel-chair.

The Phantom returned to the workroom where that punctured saint stood, imposing and so lifelike in the gloom as to make it seem almost dangerous. With a second look the Phantom's perspective was better. He shot the ray of his flash on the bearded face of the statue, noted the long hair, the square cut beard, the thin shoulders and the simple robe.

He reasoned that because of its perfection, someone must have modeled for this statue. Not even the imagination of as great an artist as Rufus Rutledge could have imagined the fine details of that face.

The Phantom moved quietly out of the studio, skirted the house and went down the road to where his car was parked. A few moments later he was sitting beside Frank Havens' bed, telling him and Muriel just what he had discovered.

Havens smiled beneath the bandages.

"That man you tangled with is known simply as Moose," the publisher informed. "No one knows who he really is. Does odd jobs, but for the last year or two most of his work has been done around Rutledge's studio. I've always regarded him as an idiot, but idiots can be dangerous. You're probably lucky he didn't sneak up from behind and succeed in clouting you with that axe."

THE Phantom placed the axe across the bed.

"Which reminds me of something else which is quite interesting," he remarked. "There's blood smeared all over this axe. It's nicked pretty well, too, as if it had been used in great haste and with gross carelessness. I don't know if this is human blood, but the murderer must have used some sharp-edged instrument in cutting up Rufus Rutledge's body before it was stuffed into the furnace. I've an idea this is that tool. I can

readily find out by applying a simple test. I shall do so later."

"Finding a plaster saint who'd been shot through the heart," Havens said, "or where a heart would have been in a human being, is even more astounding than the discovery of the axe. What do you make of it, Phantom?"

"As yet, not a thing. I cannot understand why anyone would shoot a statue. By the way, I noticed the dome of an observatory up on the mountain. Hadn't seen it before. What is it—a private observatory?"

Muriel had the answer to that. "You noticed the moonlight glowing against the dome," she told him. "If there wasn't a moon, you would never have seen it. Old Otto Oberthaler owns it. He used to be one of the most prominent astronomers in the country until he re-

imagine Oberthaler was one of the first to condemn Hitler and what he stood for. More power to the old boy."

"Oberthaler is all right," Frank Havens put in. "He's quite old, whiskered like a Santa Claus, and never leaves the estate which surrounds his observatory. I'll say this much for him, though. He must be doing pretty well for a man practically living in retirement and as a hermit. He built the observatory only three years ago. On donated funds I've heard, but the donor has always remained anonymous. I imagine Oberthaler still gets a little income from his books, and from other donations."

"Men of science, like Oberthaler, should be granted money to carry on," the Phantom said. "But as for Oberthaler living as a hermit, you're wrong. He has visitors. A number of astrono-

"Don't Move! Keep Your Hands Where They Are—"

THE PHANTOM uttered the warning and then moved forward, ready for anything. But still the occupant of the chair remained silent. The Phantom snapped on lights and gasped. The man was dead! Again the mysterious rubber knife had taken toll—in **THE RUBBER KNIFE MURDERS**, complete book-length mystery novel by Robert Wallace, packed with breath-taking thrills!

COMING NEXT ISSUE



tired about six or seven years ago. Wrote a lot of books and used to lecture."

The Phantom nodded. "I know of him. Some of his astronomical findings made history. He used to be one of the most prominent scientists in his line, then suddenly he dropped out of sight. I wonder why."

"I can tell you that, too," Muriel said. "Oberthaler is a German. The old type of German. When Hitler warmed up to his attempt at World conquest, Oberthaler jeered at him first. Then, as most of the German people blindly followed the paper-hanger Oberthaler got to feeling ashamed of his nationality, of his name, of himself. He stopped his writings and lectures, and since then has devoted himself to research alone."

The Phantom nodded slowly. "Yes, I think I recall that now. Made quite a fuss in the newspapers at the time. I

mers come to visit and consult with him. I've learned that much from the villagers."

"I didn't know that," Havens shrugged. "But I can see why it is perhaps necessary for him to break his seclusion. After all, he must make known what he has discovered in his work. Phantom, do you think he has anything to do with this business?"

"Hardly—if he is the kind of a man you describe. But we don't know about the astronomers who visit him. Several arrived in town last night, so the station agent says, and took rooms at the hotel. Just out of curiosity I think I'll check on them."

HAVENS pushed himself up against the pillows.

"Phantom," he asked, "haven't you the vaguest suspicion as to what this is all about? Are there no good suspects?"

"Yes, there are," the Phantom replied. "We have Dr. Clay, for instance, who admits he hated Rufus Rutledge. And, mind you, a doctor could do a pretty good job of preparing a corpse for cremation in that furnace. There didn't seem to be any blood spilled, although the actual — ah — carving may have been done elsewhere."

"For my money I think that fool constable has something to do with it," Havens grunted. "Not directly, perhaps, but as an abettor. I swear he delayed me along that road so the men who attacked me had time to get set, and to have darkness as a cover."

"Constable Kearny is a good suspect," the Phantom admitted. "We also have Moose, the mysterious moron who may not be as stupid as he acts and looks. Then, there is Andrew Rutledge."

"Not fratricide!" Muriel Havens exclaimed, shocked.

"It is rare, fortunately." The Phantom smiled at her. "However, we must accept all possibilities. From what I know of him, Andrew hated his father with a fury that probably was built up over the years. Soared high enough so that he lost his powers of reasoning — and murdered Rufus."

"But he is a cripple!" Frank Havens protested. "A man without legs."

"True," the Phantom admitted. "If he were normal, I expect the police would have him locked up by now. Have you seen any of the State troopers, Mr. Havens?"

"There is a Lieutenant Brady in charge," Havens said. "Good man. Efficient and a plugger, but he's getting no place. After all, how can we expect he would when you're stumped?"

"Such compliments!" The Phantom grinned. "And who said I was stumped? Four suspects without alibis. Or good ones, at any rate." He got up from his chair. "I'll look in later. Muriel, will you see me to the door?"

She followed him onto the porch and the Phantom spoke in a low voice.

"Because we still don't know what this is all about, we must assume the attack on your father had motives beyond the recovering of the golden saint," he told her. "Mind you, I don't believe there are other motives, but just in case — keep the house closed and locked. Be sure of whom you let in."

"I'd already made up my mind to do that," Muriel answered simply.

"Good. I'll return as soon as possible."

The Phantom walked down the path. When he was still within the boundaries of the porch light, he turned and waved. Then he was gone in the darkness.

Muriel leaned against a porch pillar and sighed. The Phantom was the strangest man she had ever known. He appeared in so many disguises she was never certain about him. She had no inkling of who he was and she was sworn not to ask or pry.

She knew the relationship between the Phantom and her father and was proud of it. Her father and the Phantom made a wonderful team. A deadly team so far as killers and crooks were concerned. Yet sometimes she wished the Phantom would allow her to take more active parts in the cases than he did.

She went in, closed and locked the door. Then she made a methodical check of all windows and other doors.

CHAPTER VI

PETER WHAT'S-HIS-NAME



THE Phantom drove his borrowed car to the village. For a town the size of Bradford, it sported a rather large hotel. The Ayer House it was called, and was quite well and favorably known. It was five stories high, of modern brick construction and because of the fishing, hunting and golfing nearby, it did a good business during the various seasons.

The Phantom parked his car, walked into the fairly large lobby and saw, with considerable satisfaction, that it was empty. He went up to the desk and a white-haired man spun the old-fashioned book-type register around.

The Phantom registered and paid for a room in advance. He hadn't intended to stay over, but he could phone Frank Havens and explain.

As he wrote down the fictitious name, Dr. A. Blanding, he studied the listing of guests. There had not been many who had registered this week until Sun-

day and then about eight had checked in. On Saturday there had been two, and after the name of one was a notation indicating he had been given the regular commercial traveler's discount. The Phantom disregarded this name.

The other Saturday signature definitely interested him. The signature read "Peter Lakeland." The "Peter" had been written in a flowing hand. The first four letters of the last name were likewise bold, as if the signer were accustomed to writing the name. But the last four letters were cramped and stiff. Obviously they had been added on the spur of the moment.

Whoever had written this signature, in the Phantom's opinion, was named Peter, plus the first four letters of the last name, which made it Lake. Perhaps there were additional letters in the name—letters which might make it Lakemore or Lakeman, for instance. Certainly not Lakeland.

The signer had evidently started to write his real name, had suddenly decided against it, but had proceeded too far to stop short, so he had merely added "land."

"Glad to have you here, Doctor," the clerk said affably. "You came to see Mr. Havens, I understand. Terrible thing that happened to him. How is he?"

"Fortunate that he was not killed," the Phantom responded, then suddenly changed the subject to say, "I couldn't help but notice a name on your register. A Peter Lakeland. I knew a man by that name and he was from New York, too, just as your guest is. Is Mr. Lakeland about fifty, short and stocky, getting bald?"

The desk clerk smiled. "No—he's six feet tall and sixty years old. Has pure white hair and a regular barber shop trio mustache—also white. Funny thing about Lakeland. He checked in early Saturday night, went out about midnight, and never came back."

"Perhaps he was tired of the town," the Phantom suggested, "and just took a train back to the city on the spur of the moment."

"Oh, no. He left his Gladstone bag here. A good one, too. We haven't touched his room yet. He may be back and there is enough equity in the bag alone to pay any charges. Tell you what—I'll give you the room next door to his.

If he returns and you hear him moving about, you can call on him and see if he is your friend."

"Thank you," the Phantom said. "That's good of you. Rather crowded, aren't you?"

The clerk shook his head. "Not so much. If it wasn't for those star-gazing fellows, we'd be just about empty. Six of 'em checked in yesterday. They're astronomers."

"What on earth are they doing here?" the Phantom asked. "Holding a convention?"

"Oh, lots of astronomers make periodic trips to see old Oberthaler," the clerk informed. "He's pretty good, I guess. Lives on top of the mountain and has a big telescope with a silver dome. These men stay here a couple of days, have their confabs with him, then leave. Pretty soon another batch shows up for the same routine. They come from all over the country, too."

THE Phantom saw an excuse to swing the register around and study the names and addresses. In a remarkably retentive mind, he stowed away the six names and addresses.

"They certainly come from everywhere, don't they?" he commented, as he righted the register. "Is there a phone booth here? I want to call my office."

The clerk pointed to one in a corner. The Phantom walked over, idly glancing at a man who had just entered and dropped into one of the lobby chairs. This man returned the casual glance and didn't move until after the Phantom had entered the phone booth. Then he got up, walked slowly toward the steps and suddenly bolted up them, not waiting for the elevator.

The Phantom called Frank Havens' newspaper office and asked for Steve Huston. Steve was an alert, red-headed Irish reporter who often worked with the Phantom, but had no idea as to his real identity. Steve was always eager to help with anything, and this time was no exception.

"I'm an old friend of yours," the Phantom said. "Remember me?"

"You bet!" Steve said heartily. "Mr. Top Hat and Tails, isn't it?"

Steve referred to the fact that on many occasions the Phantom donned

evening clothes in carrying out his work. Evening rig, somehow, he had explained, always gave him an added confidence in himself.

"I knew you wouldn't forget," the Phantom said. "I want a favor, Steve. I'll give you six names and addresses. They're the names of men who profess to be astronomers. I want to know if there are such people, or whether assumed names have been used. Directory references would be sufficient, but there is no New York directory where I am now."

The Phantom gave the names and addresses he had memorized from the hotel register. He held the wire while Steve worked fast.

"All okay here," the redhead shortly reported. "Every one listed. Big shots, too, judging by the addresses."

"Good. Now see if there is a Peter Lakeland listed."

"Nope," Steve answered, after a moment or two. "Not in the city directory. Some Lakelands, but no Peter. Can I meet you wherever you are and give a hand?"

"Perhaps later," the Phantom said. "I may be in New York shortly and I'll look you up. Have a list of all the astronomers you can dig up, will you, please? The important ones, especially. And do some more checking on Peter Lakeland—suburbs and so on."

The Phantom hung up, but remained in the booth for a moment and pondered the news he had received. The guests really were astronomers then. Authentic and above-board scientists. Their visit to this village was motivated by sound reasons. Oberthaler was assisting many of the best star readers in their studies of the heavenly bodies.

Peter Lakeland puzzled him. It seemed too much of a coincidence that he should arrive some time during the night of Rufus Rutledge's murder, then disappear so suddenly that he left expensive baggage behind. Perhaps that Gladstone bag of his might give some clue as to why he had come to this little Connecticut town. The Phantom decided to find out.

He got his key, went to the designated room and laughed off the desk clerk's apologies because their only night bell-hop had been drafted the day before and they hadn't been able to replace him. A

bell-hop's absence made the Phantom's work easier. There would be one less person prowling the halls.

HE ENTERED a comfortable room and sat down for a few moments. Finally he put an ear against the wall of the next room which had been assigned to Peter Lakeland. He heard nothing, stepped into the hallway and made sure he was unobserved as he examined the lock of the room next door. He got the door open without making any noise, pushed it wide, and reached for his flashlight.

As he did, there was a scurrying of feet. A heavy blanket suddenly enveloped him, but the Phantom had been prepared for attack. He threw off the blanket and at the same time stepped directly into the doorway to block it as an exit.

Free of the blanket he was just in time to see a leg go out of the one window in the room. Rushing to it, he looked out. A man, holding a Gladstone bag in one hand, was edging his way along a two-and-a-half-foot ledge just below the window. Obviously that bag was the one Van himself wanted, and just as obviously the thief was trying to reach one of the other rooms with it.

The Phantom never hesitated. He slipped through the window, got a firm foothold on the ledge and, with his back against the wall, started sidestepping as fast as possible.

There was no great degree of danger so long as he didn't lose his balance. The ledge was comfortably wide. He started to gain on the thief and called out softly for him to halt or be shot. That was bluff, because the Phantom had not drawn a gun.

The man he pursued was half-hidden by the darkness. The center of town never had been strongly illuminated and, being near the coastline, under war conditions it was darkened almost completely. Shaded street lamps cast no glow at this height.

The man ahead was afraid. The Phantom judged this by his slowness. In a moment or two Van would reach him. Perhaps he might not only capture a thief, but also would solve the whole mystery of two murders as well.

The Phantom was now convinced that Peter Lakeland had something to do

with the crime. Perhaps Lakeland himself was making a surreptitious visit to his old room because he didn't wish to be seen.

Then things happened. The man on the ledge knew he was in danger of being overtaken and captured. Furthermore, he was scared stiff. The Phantom could tell that by the way his feet shuffled cautiously across the ledge. Certainly the thief didn't look forward to a battle on a ledge five stories above a paved street.

"Mike!" the thief called out hoarsely. "Mike, I'm trapped!"

The Phantom's heart missed a beat. This thief had help and if it was the type of assistance a crook usually calls on, the Phantom was going to find out what it felt like to have his back against a brick wall while someone made a target of him.

CHAPTER VII

RUN-IN WITH HICK LAW



ON THE street below, a car motor whirred into life. The Phantom hesitated. He didn't know whether to make his way back to the window through which he had emerged or to keep going after the man with the Gladstone. He decided upon the latter, determined

to take his chances.

The car slid from the curb directly in front of the hotel, shot across the street and stopped. A strong spotlight was turned on. It swept the building with an inquisitive ray. The light fastened upon the escaping thief for a moment or two, then flashed in the Phantom's direction.

At that precise instant a gun cracked. So did some bricks dangerously close to the Phantom's head. The bullet-chipped particles bit like angry wasps into his cheeks. Somebody was shooting at him from one of the windows and Van felt like a wooden duck in a shooting gallery.

He had no opportunity to fire back because the spotlight was blinding him now, and anyway the gunman was well concealed by darkness. Forcing himself to think coolly, the Phantom recalled

that every window he had passed had been closed and he didn't recall hearing any one of them being opened. The shooting came from a window on the same level with him so it must originate at the same window through which he and the thief had made their exit.

Moving as rapidly as possible under the circumstances, the Phantom began his chase of the thief again. He was the most important. He and that Gladstone bag.

The two men were close enough so that the spotlight also illuminated the thief. He had turned a pasty white color and seemed to be frozen in one spot on the ledge. In a few seconds the Phantom would have him. Once he had yanked the precious and mysterious bag from the thief's grasp, he could smash a window and crawl to safety. The Phantom's hopes rose higher.

Then a man on the street called out an order.

"Drop the bag, you fool! Drop it! We'll get the thing. Drop it—quick!"

Without hesitation the thief swung the bag out and let it go. It sailed down, hit the street with a muffled thump and the Phantom emitted a groan. He was not only beaten to the draw, but in a sadly-precarious position as well.

With the spotlight still fastened on him he was a perfect target, but the gunman hesitated to shoot, probably because he didn't want to hit the thief who was also on the ledge. Now, with the bag safely in the hands of those below, the shooting was bound to start again.

"Get that guy!" the same voice roared from the street. "Burn him off that ledge and step on it before the whole town wakes up!"

The gun threw a brilliant flash of crimson flame. The bullet it dispatched burned past the Phantom's face. Another inch closer to the building and he'd have been plummeting down, dead before he hit the street. The next bullet was almost bound to get him. Even a wound would do the trick by jarring him off the ledge.

The Phantom killed rarely, and then only because there was nothing else to do in order to save his own life or the lives of others who were innocent of wrongdoing. Such a situation was at hand now. He either had to kill or be killed. With a deft motion he whipped

cut an automatic from a shoulder holster and quickly sidestepped back toward the window which framed the gunman.

In the reflected glow of the spotlight, he saw the man leaning far over the sill, trying to balance himself and shoot accurately at the same time. The gun he held was pointed squarely at the Phantom.

THE Phantom's automatic, with its muzzle slanted toward the sky, came down suddenly. As it did so, his finger pushed the safety off. The automatic roared—just once. The Phantom was a master at the art of snap-shooting and he didn't miss.

The killer's gun went off, too, by reflex action of dying muscles only. The bullet went wild. The Phantom's slug crashed into the murderer's jaw, took an upward course and created permanent oblivion for this armed bandit. He slumped through the window, arms dangling over the sill. The gun he had held crashed on the ground below.

Without a second's hesitation the Phantom turned his automatic streetward and fired two quick shots. The first one hit metal, with a clanging sound. That would be part of the car. The next smashed the spotlight and the Phantom quickly flattened himself against the brick wall. Sudden darkness after that brilliance caused him to go temporarily blind, and there was still plenty of danger in falling off the ledge.

When his eyes accustomed themselves to the darkness again, he twisted his head toward the direction of the thief who had been ahead of him. He was gone, apparently, through a window. The chances of getting him were slim indeed. The automobile on the street below pulled away with a wild clash of gears.

The Phantom started edging back toward the window with a dead man now draped across its sill. It took a little time and he had to move cautiously. The shooting had aroused the hotel. Lights were on and cars were stopping at the entrance below.

The Phantom reached the window and maneuvered the corpse aside so he could crawl through. As he got his head and shoulders into the window, he looked at the business end of a large pis-

tol. Behind it was the grim, hard-bitten face of Constable Kearny.

Constable Kearny never quite knew how close he was to death at that moment. The Phantom's automatic was still in his hand and ready for action. He didn't know Kearny, but by sheer luck—for him—the constable identified himself in a three-word statement.

"You're under arrest!"

The Phantom kept on crawling through the window. The gun suddenly pressed against the back of his neck.

"Drop that automatic, you killer!" Kearny roared.

The Phantom let go of his gun, finished crawling through, and stood erect. Kearny backed away a couple of paces, his big revolver steady, his beady little eyes shining with the fires of excitement.

"Got you!" he gloated. "Got you cold! Heard the shooting and just happened to be down the street. Saw you kill this poor fellow, whoever he is."

"Constable," the Phantom said, "I've got my hands in the air. Search me. You'll find a small pocket under my coat. It contains a leather case. Remove it and open the case."

"What kind of a sap do you think I am?" Kearny sneered, with an aggravating laugh. "You just want me to come close."

"Then have someone else do it while you cover me. There are others in the hall. Only hurry! When you are convinced I'm no murderer, you'll help me throw out a net to stop that car which left here a few minutes ago."

"Listen to him," Kearny derided. "He's got a leather case and it'll make me help him. Him—a killer I saw commit murder with my own eyes!"

"If you don't make sure of my identity," the Phantom said in a low, deadly voice, "you'll wish you had been two hundred miles away from this town before morning. Get that badge case."

"Badge?" Kearny's deriding voice went down a notch. "Why didn't you say you was the law? Mind you, no tricks now. Keep 'em high. I got my finger on the trigger."

KEARNY threw back the Phantom's coat, maneuvered around and located the small pocket. He removed the leather case, opened it and a million

tiny rays of light emanated from the jewel-encrusted badge. It was the Phantom's badge, fashioned of priceless gems and of such definite value that it could hardly be duplicated by anyone who merely wanted to pose as the Phantom. A badge well-known and authoritatively recognized by police agencies all over the world.

"What's this?" Kearny blinked. "It don't say you're an officer. It's just a lot of diamonds in the shape of a mask. That don't mean anything to me."

"It means I'm the Phantom Detective," assured Van. "Kearny, unless you want suspicion to get hot on the back of your neck, lower that gun and let me explain. You recognize that badge. Every law officer does."

"I don't recognize no badge unless it says Police Department on it—like mine does," Kearny said flatly. "I ain't falling for no tricks either. You keep them hands up while I get my cuffs out. It won't hurt you to be locked up for a little while. Then if you're okay, I'll let you go."

The Phantom's eyes narrowed. This, man, to all intents and purposes, was stalling. Killing time so those crooks in the car could get beyond any possible highway blockade and reach New York. There they would be safe.

As the Phantom considered tricking Kearny into turning the gun away for a second and then attacking him, several men in uniform brushed past the bug-eyed hotel guests who were assembled in the hall. They were State policemen and the man in charge wore the bars of a lieutenant.

"Lieutenant Brady"—the Phantom recalled Frank Havens' saying that was the name of this trooper—"I'm the Phantom, and this stupid . . . Oh, dog-gone it, look at the badge Kearny is holding, will you, please?"

Lieutenant Brady took the badge from Kearny and glanced at it. He said something in a low voice and Kearny reluctantly stowed his gun away. The Phantom dropped tired arms and stepped forward.

"I'm not sure what this is all about," he explained, "but this room was rented by a man who vanished the same day of Rufus Rutledge's murder. He may have had something to do with it. I was after the missing man's Glad-

stone bag to see if I could find anything that would tie the man up with the crime but some crooks got it first. I was forced to kill this man in the window, or be killed myself."

"Naturally," Lieutenant Brady said, "I believe you. I did learn that a car scooted out of here pretty fast, just before the shooting. I'll call the barracks and have them stop all cars. There won't be many at this time of night."

"Hey—wait a minute," Kearny objected. "I'm the law here, and this man shot someone. I got to lock him up, Phantom or no Phantom."

"Try it," the Phantom said grimly. "Take those handcuffs out of your pocket and step over here. I'll wind them around your neck! Kearny, this isn't the first time you gave evidence of stalling. For your own discomfort you might know that I'll check on you."

Kearny did not reach for his handcuffs, and he did not step closer. In fact, he decided that his presence in this room was obviously unwanted. He backed to the door, turned and squeezed through the crowd, muttering something under his breath.

CHAPTER VIII

SIX BULLETS



LIEUTENANT BRADY

who had gone out to telephone, returned after a few moments.

"I sent out the alarm," he told the Phantom, "but it's probably hopeless. They had a pretty good start."

"Thanks to Constable Kearny," the Phantom grunted. "Thanks, anyway, Lieutenant. You probably saved me from an unpleasant mix-up with Kearny. My patience was just about exhausted when you showed up. May I have my badge now?"

Brady handed it back. They went over to the window-sill then and dragged the body into the room. One of the troopers closed the door in the disappointed faces of the guests. The Phantom knelt beside the corpse, turned it over and searched the pocket. There was nothing in the way of identification.

The Phantom arose, stepped away and studied the dead man's blood-smeared face intently for a moment.

"I think," he said, "we'll find this man is known as MacLeland. I'm pretty sure I recognize him, but fingerprints will tell the story, for if he is MacLeland, you'll find a nice fat file on him."

"He's new to me," Lieutenant Brady admitted, and gave orders to have a fingerprint expert sent over. "What's he specialize in, Phantom?"

"He used to be an unusually slick confidence man. He'd handle anything from the old-fashioned badger game to passing counterfeit money. I've never heard of his resorting to violence before and maybe I'm lucky he had never had much such experience. Only the fact that he was a poor shot saved my neck."

"But what in the world has a confidence man got to do with the murder of the foundry watchman and the killing of Rufus Rutledge?" Brady demanded, plainly puzzled, and somewhat exasperated also.

"Ah," the Phantom said, "there you have me. But all these things form another piece of the jig-saw puzzle. When we get enough of them, we'll have the true picture, and know what actually was at the bottom of those killings."

The Phantom checked the contents of the room which had been rented and briefly occupied by this mysterious Peter Lakeland. Bureau drawers were empty, search of the medicine cabinet in the bathroom drew a blank, and there was nothing on the floor in the way of a clue. Then the Phantom glanced into the waste-basket.

It contained three or four sheets of blank hotel stationery, crushed into a ball. He carefully set these aside for the attention of the State Police fingerprint expert.

The bottom of the basket seemed to be empty until he jiggled it. Then several articles there rattled loudly. The Phantom scooped up six bullets. They had steel noses and were .38 caliber.

Lieutenant Brady whistled softly. "Bullets, eh? Maybe you're right, at that, and the tenant of this room was mixed up in the murders."

"As far as we know, Lieutenant," the Phantom mused, "no guns were used. Sayre, the watchman, was stabbed to death. Of course, we can't be certain

just what killed Rufus Rutledge—but I've a theory about these bullets that I believe holds water."

Lieutenant Brady straddled one of the uncomfortable, straight-backed hotel chairs.

"I'm more than willing to listen if you want to talk, Phantom," he said. "You don't have to, of course. I realize that you play a lone hand most of the time, still our orders are to cooperate with the Phantom in any manner he wishes."

The Phantom sat down on the edge of the bed. "I've no reason to hide clues, Lieutenant, but I wouldn't advise outlining them to Constable Kearny. I paid a visit to Rufus Rutledge's studio. I discovered that a newly finished plaster statue of a saint had been shot through the heart. Yes—look amazed. I felt that way, too, when I found it. I dug the bullet out of the plaster and here it is."

LIEUTENANT BRADY rotated the odd slug between his fingers.

"This is made of copper," he exclaimed. "And it didn't mushroom. Those plaster statues run pretty hard, don't they?"

"Yes. Apparently this copper was subjected to some hardening process, for ordinary copper is fairly soft and certainly would spread out. However, the most important thing is the caliber of the bullet. I'd say it was a thirty-eight. Wouldn't you?"

Brady nodded. "I see what you're getting at. This Peter Lakeland, who rented this room, took regular bullets out of his gun and replaced them with copper bullets. The calibers agree and I believe we can assume that is what happened."

"Exactly," the Phantom said. "Now if we only knew why, we'd really have something. Lieutenant, I leave the rest of this up to you. Identify the body of the man I was forced to shoot. Have New York police check on his movements if they can. Try to determine what kind of a car was used in the getaway and what the men in it looked like. I'm going to find out, downstairs, just how at least two killer-crooks came to be loose in this hotel."

In the lobby, the Phantom found himself the object of many pairs of curious

eyes. The desk clerk knew his identity, for the news had traveled fast. He was almost pathetically eager to help.

"I swear I don't know how that man who was shot got into the hotel!" he protested. "I saw him from the door and know he didn't register here. In fact, sir, every guest we have registered is in the lobby now and I took the liberty of checking each one against my register. They are all here."

"You did well," the Phantom complimented him. "Now—are you in the habit of allowing strangers to have access to the premises?"

"No, sir," the clerk answered promptly. Then he amended this positive statement. "Of course I can't watch everyone who comes in. Those men could have entered and concealed themselves somewhere. Not in any of the rooms though. They are inspected or cleaned every day, and naturally are kept locked."

The Phantom turned and surveyed the group of guests who had pressed quite close.

"I wonder," he said, "if any of you ladies or gentlemen gave shelter to the crooks. Mind you, I'm making no accusation, but those men were hidden somewhere."

There were protests all around. The Phantom waved them off.

"I was merely expressing an assumption," he said coolly. "Meanwhile, all of you will have to remain here until Lieutenant Brady is through with his investigation. I hope you will not be unduly inconvenienced."

Outside, the Phantom found his car intact. He drove it straight to the home of Rufus and Andrew Rutledge. It was early morning, but time meant little to the Phantom.

He was pleasantly surprised to find lights going. He rang the bell and heard the approach of a wheel-chair. When the door was opened Andrew Rutledge looked up at the Phantom with anger in his eyes.

"I know this is an unholy hour to intrude," Van said quickly, "but it's quite necessary. I'm the Phantom."

Andrew Rutledge was slightly taken aback at realization of the identity of his dawn caller. He rolled his chair aside.

"Come in," he invited, though it was a little ungraciously. "Don't tell me

you're working on the murder of my father? I didn't think he was important enough to interest the Phantom."

IN THE living room, Van accepted a chair and a cigarette, held a match to Andrew's smoke and they both settled back.

"But he was that important," the Phantom said then. "Rufus Rutledge was one of our foremost sculptors. His work is represented in almost every big church in the country. I've admired many of his creations. Your father was important because of his craftsmanship. He'll be missed."

"I suppose so," Andrew agreed, almost reluctantly. "There's no use holding anything back from you. I've heard how you work, so I imagine you know I didn't like my father much."

"Yes—I know that. It's unfortunate, Mr. Rutledge, but of no particular consequence in this case."

"No consequence?" Andrew cried. "You'd think so if you heard what people are saying. They insist I bumped off the old man! I had motive enough too."

The Phantom laughed. "People forget many factors. For instance, the foundry watchman was also murdered—by a knife thrust into him at a downward angle while he was standing on his two feet. Now, how in the world could anyone expect you, a man without legs, to accomplish such a crime? And if you didn't murder the watchman, you didn't murder your father, because the two killings go hand-in-hand. One occurred because of the other."

Andrew breathed a great sigh of relief.

"You've made me feel a lot better," he admitted. "I didn't kill my father, of course, though I won't deny I thought of it a good many times . . . What did you want to see me about? I'll talk to you—tell you anything you want to know that I can. But those State troopers tried to handle me the wrong way. I won't stand for being browbeaten."

"And Constable Kearny?" asked Van. "I suppose he used his familiar tact in dealing with you?"

Andrew shrugged. "Kearny gave me no trouble. He's a friend of mine. A little dumb, but otherwise okay."

The Phantom made a mental note of that admission. Then he said:

"What I really came here for was to ask if you or your father ever knew a man named Peter Lakeland. I may be wrong on the last name. It might be Lakeman or Lakeson or Lakely or even plain Lake. I'm not sure."

"Never heard of him," Andrew said promptly. "I'm sure my father never did either. I handled most of his correspondence, so I'd know if he had been in touch with a man of that name. Why?"

"Peter Lakeland," the Phantom explained, "registered at the local hotel the night before we discovered the murders. He vanished that same night. Now for something of even greater importance. I have already examined the studio behind the house. I didn't ask your permission, because I wanted a free hand."

"The place is yours any time you want it," Andrew waved his cigarette carelessly.

"Thanks. I found a newly completed statue of a saint. A man with a rather outstanding beard and flowing hair."

Andrew grinned. "That would be St. Anthony. My father did it for a Mrs. O'Connor who was to present it to a Midwestern church in memory of her husband. Was there anything wrong with it?"

"Not with the craftsmanship. That was superb—but have you the foggiest notion why someone would have shot that statue of St. Anthony through the spot where his heart was supposed to be? And used a copper bullet to do the shooting?"

"Shot the statue?" Andrew gasped. "Copper bullet? My gosh, no. I never even knew it had happened." Suddenly he threw back his head and roared with laughter. "St. Anthony," he explained between gasps, "was supposed to be my father's masterpiece. He spent months looking for the model. And now—now someone has put a bullet through it. I tell you, Phantom, it's a good thing my father is dead because this would have killed him anyway—much more painfully."

THE Phantom wondered what manner of man Andrew Rutledge could be. He found amusement in macabre things

all right. He decided to cut off the gleeful laughter by a pointed question.

"Andrew," he said, "after Mr. Havens left you, why did you get in touch with Constable Kearny? Why did you tell him the whole story of the murder of the foundry watchman, and even about the golden saint which Havens had in his pocket?"

Andrew Rutledge stopped laughing. He stared at the Phantom for a moment as if cannily sizing him up.

"Havens had no right to interfere," he said then, resentfully. "After all, he's nothing but a newspaperman. Sure, he owns the papers, but he grew up in the field and will always be a reporter. I didn't want my name nor my father's bandied about in print."

"Calling Kearny wouldn't have prevented that," the Phantom reminded.

Andrew shrugged those massive shoulders of his.

"I did it on the spur of the moment," he said, "and without thinking. Anyway, Havens should have given me that golden saint. It was my father's property, and if my father was dead, as Havens seemed to think, the saint was *my* property."

"It was also a clue to a man's death," the Phantom explained, "and Mr. Havens meant to turn it over to the State Police. They would have given it to you—later. Now, I think you told Mr. Havens there was no telephone in the house. How then, did you communicate with Kearny?"

"There's a phone in the studio," Andrew grew unexpectedly sullen. "Do I have to go through this third degree?"

The Phantom disdained an answer to that.

"Have you any idea who might have overheard your conversation?" he went on. "Someone did listen in. He got ahead of Havens, waylaid him and nearly murdered him just to get that golden saint."

"No one overheard," Andrew snapped. "The only man around was that idiot called Moose."

"And did Moose stay around after you phoned?"

"No. But that's not unusual. He drifts all over. Sometimes I wonder if I'll let him stay on. He's useless. Dad kept him because Moose would take his ravings and cursing. The poor sap

didn't know any better. My father used him as a football and mostly paid him what a football is full of—air."

CHAPTER IX

MANHATTAN MISSION



DURING the conversation, the Phantom had studied Andrew Rutledge intently. He remembered Frank Havens' description of his attacker. A man with powerful arms—that was all he could recall. Andrew Rutledge certainly filled the description, and

the Phantom wondered about those broad shoulders and powerful muscles.

As a man bereft of his legs, Andrew might have been expected to be thin and puny. Instead, his arm and shoulder muscles were so well-developed as to make it seem he used them far more than would a man with all his limbs.

The Phantom idly toyed with an ash tray on the arm of his chair. Suddenly, the tray went over. With apologies, the Phantom bent to scoop up the debris and as he did, an envelope slid out of his inner pocket and fell behind the chair.

Apparently, the Phantom didn't notice the loss and Andrew Rutledge said nothing about it. The Phantom asked a few more questions about Rufus Rutledge, then bowed out. He drove his car a few hundred feet, left the motor idling and ran back to the house. He quietly stepped up to a window looking into the room where he had left Andrew.

As he watched, Andrew seemed to have his head cocked as if to listen for the motor of the Phantom's car. Then, probably satisfied that his visitor was gone, Andrew quickly rolled his chair over to where the Phantom had dropped the envelope.

With a quick look around, one that reminded the Phantom of a cat about to dip a paw into the goldfish bowl, Andrew Rutledge put both hands on the arms of his wheel chair, gave a mighty heave and moved to the edge of the chair. Using his hands again, as a man

with legs uses his feet to descend a stairway, Andrew climbed off the chair, swung himself across the floor and scooped up the envelope.

The Phantom saw him open it with fingers so eager they shook. Then Andrew exploded with a curse, balled the empty envelope, and hurled it across the room. He lifted himself, via his hands, returned to the chair and climbed into it. He arranged the robe, settled back and kept growling curses.

The Phantom knew now that Andrew Rutledge was an exceptional cripple. He also knew the answer to the powerful arm muscles. Andrew was quite accustomed to moving about this way. Also, he showed a most peculiar curiosity concerning the Phantom. . . .

The Phantom used Frank Havens' car further that night. First of all, he checked with Lieutenant Brady of the State Police and learned that the man he had killed really had been Max MacLeland, expert confidence man. Then the Phantom drove to New York.

Police there always had worked closely with him and they soon produced MacLeland's record. It included the man's last known address.

This turned out to be a boarding house. Wishing to attract no attention to the fact that he was on the trail of the men who had attempted to murder and had succeeded in stealing the mysterious stranger's baggage, the Phantom decided to enter the place without invitation.

He opened the door as easily as if the little steel instrument in his hand had been a pass key. It was a fairly large rooming house and a register was kept on a table in the hallway. MacLeland was shown to have occupied Room 2B.

Finding that room was simple, and opening the locked door just as easy. The Phantom did not switch on lights, but used his flash instead. He whistled in surprise when he located many elaborately done brochures. All of them concerned the science of astronomy and bore the advertisement of one Samuel Martin who claimed to a vast knowledge of the science, as well as expert in applying it to what he declared to be the allied science of astrology.

The Phantom was not half as interested in Samuel Martin, astronomer-

astrologer, as he was in the fact that a confidence man like MacLeland was mixed up in the same business. What could MacLeland have known of astronomy? What interest could he have had in a scientist like Oberthaler, or his astronomical discoveries?

In his mind's eye the Phantom could suddenly see that glistering round turret of the observatory belonging to Otto Oberthaler. And that place of mystery on a mountain top dominated the whole scene of the murders.

But there was more work to be done in town. Leaving the boarding house unseen, the Phantom went to the Missing Persons Bureau, identified himself to the captain in charge and made his request.

"I'm looking for a man named Peter Lakeland. Now the last part of his last name may be different. I'm pretty certain of the Peter Lake part, and I'd like to know if this man has been reported as missing."

"I'll try to find out, Phantom." The captain made a phone call to the filing room. The answer came back promptly.

"Sorry," the captain said, "there isn't anyone by any name like that on our lists."

The Phantom took a heavy folder from his pocket and carefully drew out the wrinkled papers he had found in the wastebasket of Lakeland's room. Lieutenant Brady's fingerprint experts had produced some fine sets of prints—all from the same man—from these papers.

"Then will you run these through your files, Captain?" he asked. "Those of known criminals and missing men?"

This required longer, but developed the same reply. There were no such prints on file.

"Then I'll leave the prints here," the Phantom said. "Also please make a record of the name. If anything turns up about this man, please make a note of it. I'll phone in from time to time."

The captain offered his hand. "You know darn well we'd do anything for you, Phantom—and without asking a lot of questions too. Rest assured, if a report turns up, we'll get the details for you."

Next, the Phantom visited the swanky Hotel Lorenz. He knew, from information he had received in Connecticut, that

Rufus Rutledge always made this his New York headquarters.

The night manager on duty was properly impressed by the Phantom's badge which he promptly recognized.

"Anything I can do to be of assistance, sir," he offered. "I know all about you. We had a Police Chief's convention here last year and I heard a great deal of talk about the Phantom Detective—and his badge."

"Your giving me the information I want must be strictly confidential," the Phantom said. "It concerns Rufus Rutledge. You probably read about his murder and the disposition of the corpse in the furnace. Rutledge stayed here often, and you probably know something about him. Just give me your impression of the man."

The night manager brought the fingertips of both hands together gently and assumed a thoughtful expression.

"I know it isn't right to talk harshly of the dead," he said, "but as far as we're concerned he won't be missed. True, he rented our most expensive apartment, but there was little profit. Sometimes when we finished repairing the damage, we lost money."

VAN showed his surprise.

"As bad as that?"

"Precisely. Rufus Rutledge would check in at, say, two o'clock. By two-twenty he would be roaring drunk and so would every one of his friends. We used to know when he was coming because those so-called friends would begin assembling. He demanded the utmost in service, tipped so lavishly our employees got high ideas and thought everyone should do the same thing."

"Hmm," the Phantom mused. "He lived for weeks in a dull little town, working on plaster saints, but apparently made up for lost time when he hit the city. These friends of his—what types of people were they?"

"Mostly impoverished playboys who knew a good thing when they saw it. Sometimes Rufus hired an entire orchestra and our ballroom for an evening. Several times he hired a whole chorus. The only thing I'll say for him is that when we overcharged him—as we often did, to try and get rid of him—he paid the bill with a smile."

"Did you ever hear any talk about

astronomy—or astrology—from these friends of his?"

"Astronomy? Astrology? No-no. The talk usually concerned new cocktails, blondes and amusement. The only stars that bunch saw were those induced by alcoholic hallucinations. Usually, toward the end of the session however, Rufus would kick out his guests, sober up and have the place cleaned. Then he'd interview clients who wanted to buy his statues. Quite an imposing list of people from all over the country."

"Anyone named Pete Lakeland or a name similar to that among them?"

"Lakeland? I hardly think so. I'm good at remembering names, too. My job makes it necessary. I'd say, definitely, there were no Lakelands."

"Thank you," the Phantom said.

He walked out of the hotel and strolled down the deserted street. It would be dawn in two hours, but there was plenty of time to get back to the village before daybreak. The Phantom sat down on a bench in a small park.

Oddly enough, the first thing that came into his mind was that little golden saint by which Rufus Rutledge had set such store. Why had it been stolen? What did the statue signify? And why had the man who wrested it from Havens gone to the extreme of trying to kill him? Did the statue contain some scratched message? Was it hollow, concealing some dark secret?

That statue had a great deal to do with the case, but there was not the slightest clue as to why it was so important.

Then there were the suspects. A motley array, from Dr. Clay to the guileful, apparently half-witted Moose. Clay hated Rufus and admitted it. The dissection of a body without spilling much blood could be the work of a man skilled in those lines—a doctor.

Moose was a blank. He was not intelligent enough to arrange for such a neat disposition of the corpse. His manner would have been to kill and let the body lay where it dropped. Still it was true that, armed with an axe, he could have dismembered the corpse easily enough.

Constable Kearny was next on the Phantom's list of suspects, and Kearny had definite possibilities. Most certainly he had detained Havens until the at-

tacker could get set. Just as certainly he had blundered by arresting the Phantom and wasting time so the crooks who stole Peter Lakeland's Gladstone bag had had time to get away.

ANDREW RUTLEDGE admitted that Kearny was his friend and likely would do almost anything for him. That put both Kearny and Andrew on the top rung so far as suspicion went. Andrew, it seemed, was always careful not to exhibit the fact that he could get around with comparative ease, but his strength indicated he had learned long ago how to handle himself.

As for Andrew being the murderer of his father, the Phantom rejected that idea. Perhaps Andrew had a motive, being the only heir—and he hated his father. Yet it was extremely doubtful that he had murdered him.

Van thought of the link between the killings and Otto Oberthaler's observatory. Was that link strong enough to stand up under an investigation? After all, Oberthaler was an important well-known man. A sensitive person with considerable character and highly regarded. For him to be involved in an affair like this was incredible. Yet astronomy did seem to have some bearing on the whole affair.

The Phantom had a hunch that the crooks who had raided Peter Lakeland's room had been hiding on that same floor—and most of the rooms had been rented by those astronomers who had come to see Oberthaler. The crook who stole the Gladstone and went out the window had used one of two or three windows in order to reach Lakeland's room and the rooms of which these particular windows were a part happened to be occupied by astronomers.

The Phantom decided that before long he would pay Oberthaler's vast estate and his huge observatory a little visit. He arose, walked back to where his car was parked and drove back to Bradford. It was daylight when he rolled along a mountain road not far from the observatory. Not a nice dawn, for it was raw, foggy and gray.

The Phantom rounded a sharp bend for which he had to slow to a crawl. Suddenly he slammed his foot down on the brake. He had heard a scream from somewhere near the edge of a cliff. The

rather muffled scream of a woman. He recognized it. That was Muriel Havens calling for help!

CHAPTER X

WITH MURDEROUS INTENT



AN HOUR before dawn Muriel Havens awoke from a restless sleep. She had lain down fully dressed, with the idea of keeping a careful watch as the Phantom had suggested.

She looked in on her father, saw that he was comfortable, then freshened up and went

downstairs. Every door and window was closed, and she felt the need of fresh air, so she peered through a little window set alongside the front door, saw that no one lurked nearby, and opened the door wide.

She sat on the porch for about fifteen or twenty minutes, her mind busy with the strange things that had been happening, and the strange man who was investigating them. So often she had wondered who the Phantom really was. Her father knew. She was sure of that, but Frank Havens could be tight-lipped, and Muriel had never made any attempts to pry this information out of him. She realized the Phantom's need for complete anonymity.

She wondered what he looked like under the assortment of disguises to which she had long since grown accustomed. He was young—no doubt of that, for he possessed the stamina of a young man. He was smooth, highly intelligent, too, and she felt that he belonged in white tie and tails.

Muriel had a cigarette between her lips and was ready to strike a match when she heard the low hum of an approaching car. She quickly moved to the door, opened it a crack and stood there, ready to dart inside if the car turned toward the house.

It kept going, however—and the car was in complete darkness. Not even the low beam of a headlight nor a tail-light showed. Muriel kept listening. It was easy to keep track of the car in the deathly quiet of the early morning hours of this serene little town. She

heard the car slow up, but not quite enough to be coming here, for the tires made a squealing sound as the wheel was turned. That car was heading toward Andrew Rutledge's house.

For hours, Muriel had been fed up with her inability to help on this case. A car, traveling without lights at this hour of the morning, and heading for the Rutledge place interested her. She decided to take a chance and investigate.

She made certain a key to the house was in her pocket, closed the door and heard the snap-lock click. Then she hurried to the road, walked along it as fast as she could travel without being noisy. Soon she stood behind a giant fir, overlooking the Rutledge house.

It was getting light now, and she recognized the car as being the "official business" car of Constable Kearny. What was he doing here so early? As she watched, Kearny emerged from the house, got into the car and drove off. Soon after—just about the time that Muriel had decided that her hope of discovering anything was a flop—she saw Andrew Rutledge wheel himself onto the front porch, maneuver the chair and rattle down the steps with it. He did this so skillfully that she assumed it was not the first time he had done that.

Andrew rolled along a path that led toward a trail which ended at the edge of a cliff. Across the ravine was Otto Oberthaler's property.

Muriel started after Andrew, wild thoughts running through her brain. Maybe he was going to meet someone who had made an appointment through Constable Kearny. Maybe Andrew was murder-bent. Or maybe he intended to roll himself and the wheel over the cliff!

Muriel knew those cliffs. She had played there as a child. Quite vividly she recalled a shelf of rock beneath one overhanging, jagged cliff. She used to clamber down, by means of some sturdy vines that grew over the edge, and hide there.

Andrew certainly headed in that direction and he was wheeling along as fast as he could make the chair travel across the bumpy trail. It was almost miraculous the way he maneuvered the wheel-chair.

Muriel stepped into the trail herself. It wound around so many corners that Andrew would never see her and the open trail was much easier on stockings and shoes than the brush. Muriel shivered. It was raw and cold. She was proceeding through a section of the trail tightly hemmed in by towering evergreens. They made the narrow passage dark and dreary. An ideal spot for a murder.

The trail made one of its characteristic twists and Muriel came to an abrupt stop. A man was standing there, blocking her way. A huge brute of a man who grinned at her crookedly. She knew him. He was Moose, the supposedly half-witted handyman who was one of the Phantom's suspects as a double killer.

Moose began advancing toward her. Muriel looked wildly about for some means of escape. She could only dart into the thick forest growths at the cost of torn clothing, but she decided that was all she could do. Moose's smile had slowly died away and become a deep, black scowl.

"You're the one," he growled. "You and your father and that man who beat me up. You're the ones."

"What do you mean?" Muriel backed up a few feet, trying to get opposite an opening in that veritable wall of trees.

"You're the ones who want to put me in jail. Like Constable Kearny. I won't stand for it, do you hear me? You can't put me away. I ain't crazy."

Muriel didn't even have time to wonder about what had happened to Andrew Rutledge. This towering man, in disreputable clothes, coarse and ungainly, was dangerous. For some reason he imagined people were trying to lock him up. With his one-track mind almost anything could happen.

Muriel took a couple of side steps toward the opening in the wall of trees. Moose let out a yowl of rage, reached up and broke off a thick branch of a tree. He made a heavy club of this by snapping the thinner end across his knee.

"You run away and I'll kill you!" he warned. "I ain't goin' to be locked up. I'll kill everybody first." [Turn page]

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Muriel suddenly acquired a horrible idea.

"Moose," she said, "was Rufus Rutledge going to put you away too?"

Moose laughed. "You're tryin' to make me say I killed him. Well, I ain't sayin', but Mr. Rutledge liked me. I was his friend. Maybe you killed him. Or that man who beat me up. I'll kill him some day. I swear I will!"

He advanced a couple of paces, swinging the thick club and looking for all the world like some giant Neanderthal man on the warpath. Muriel quickly appraised her danger. She might get away from him, but only temporarily. He knew these mountains better than she did, and with his long legs he could outrun her easily.

Yet she knew how impossible it was merely to stand here and wait for him to act when and how he wished. The man must be mad, obsessed with a persecution complex, and now he had a victim to take it out on. A scream welled up in her throat, but she smothered it. Once he knew her terror, he probably would charge with the club swinging.

Muriel turned suddenly and made a headlong dive for the opening. She acted so swiftly that Moose didn't quite comprehend what had happened until she had disappeared. Then he gave vent to a roar of rage and crashed through the brush in pursuit.

MURIEL knew there was no stopping now. She had given him an excuse for murder by running away. She had to keep going! But where? At any moment she might become lost, and being stalked by a maniacal killer was a terrifying thing.

To turn back toward Rutledge's house was out of the question. She would have to cross wide-open areas where Moose would spot her and overtake her quickly. The only route open lay in the direction of the cliff, but that was decidedly dead-end.

Terror lent speed to her steps and she was heedless now of such prosaic things as torn clothes.

Then Muriel thought of that shelf of rock below the edge of the cliff. If she could reach it before her pursuer caught sight of her, she might hide there and have a ghost of a chance. If he found

her, he would have to descend via the vine and possibly she would have an opportunity to knock him out with a rock. At any rate the shelf offered the best refuge, and she sprinted toward it.

She wore sensible walking shoes, which was fortunate, but she realized the leather heels were biting into the soft earth and leaving a trail. When she saw the cliff directly ahead, she kicked off the shoes and raced on in her stockinged feet.

For a moment she was panic-stricken for fear the vine was no longer there, but then she saw it, larger and stronger than ever. She dropped flat, seized the vine and tested it briefly. Looking over the edge of the cliff she saw the familiar ledge, dropped overside, and lowered herself as rapidly as possible.

The shelf was wide. Even if the vine broke, she would only drop a few feet and land safely. She didn't drop, but no sooner had she let go of the vine than Moose yowled in rage somewhere on the cliff above.

Muriel shivered and drew herself flat against the cliff wall, hoping he would not look over the edge and see her. He was directly above, probably hunting around like a hound. His savage mutterings reached her. She hardly dared to breathe, but her mind remained cool enough to consider the fact that Moose might have been posted on the trail to intercept her. Andrew could have known she had followed him.

Then Muriel barely smothered a sharp cry of consternation. On the brink of the rock shelf was a white handkerchief. It had been tucked up her sleeve and had fallen out when she slid down the vine. If Moose saw it—

She dropped to hands and knees, twisted her head and looked up. Moose was just above, but apparently stumped. He knew she was somewhere about, but if she could get that handkerchief, the chances were good that he would grow tired of the hunt and go away.

She was within reaching distance of the handkerchief and her fingers closed around it. Then her heart sank. Moose let out a roar of delight. She glanced up and saw him looking down at her, his wide face grimacing in hatred.

Suddenly he withdrew, but she knew that was only temporary. There was something on that brute's mind. She

found out what it was a few moments later. A big rock smashed down on the shelf, splintered and threw jagged pieces at her. Moose was just beginning to have his fun.

Frantically, Muriel considered her chances. They seemed terribly slim. True, the road wound near this section, but at this hour it was improbable that a car would come by. Yet there was a chance.

Another rock crashed down. Moose could keep this up all day. He might loosen the shelf or break it off with an especially heavy missile, but even if this didn't happen, sooner or later he would try to make that descent via the vine. So far, such an idea had not seemed to occur to him, but it would.

There was a moment of hushed silence while Moose was searching for more rocks. During that moment, Muriel heard the distant sound of an approaching car. She realized the time was past to stick it out and act the part of a heroine. Therefore, she resorted to a woman's instinctive method of protecting herself.

She screamed!

CHAPTER XI

FOREST GRAVE



AN heard that scream again. It was like a clarion call to the Phantom who instantly drove his car into the clumps of brush from which the scream had come. He found a fairly open space and stepped on the gas. Within a few yards of the cliff's

edge, he stopped, jumped out and began running. Down below there was where that terrified girl had been screaming.

Muriel!

Then he saw Moose and at the identical moment the burly killer spotted him. With a roar of rage, Moose darted for his club, lifted it and charged. The Phantom didn't move. Not until Moose was almost within striking range. Then he agilely leaped to one side. Moose lumbered by and the Phantom stuck out his foot.

Moose tripped on it and, with a wild

yell, hit the ground. Before he could get up, the Phantom had leaped on him. He wrenched the club out of the big brute's hand, smashed a couple of hard blows to the face and jumped up.

Moose got to his feet awkwardly and stood there, rubbing a jaw that already had begun to swell. The pain did something to his canny, but warped brain. He let out another animal roar and made a dive for the Phantom.

This time the Phantom didn't move at all, but met the onslaught with fists that kept Moose away, prevented those long arms from encircling him and crushing the life out of him. He continued to weaken Moose by a series of punches, but couldn't quite get the right angle for a knockout.

Then Moose came at him, wide open. The Phantom's fist hit the big man on that glass jaw of his, and the impact of the blow jarred the Phantom clear to his toes. It jarred Moose even more. He reeled back, still on his feet, but something had happened to him. He kept opening and closing his mouth. His thick arms hung limply at his sides.

The Phantom maneuvered to get in another punch, but then he saw that was unnecessary. Moose was simply out on his feet. He toppled forward like a giant oak and was still, once he was sprawled out on the ground.

"Muriel!" the Phantom called. "Muriel, where are you?"

There was a weak cry and he saw a head come over the edge of the cliff. Muriel called his name in relieved tones.

He leaped forward, grasped her hand, and pulled her to firm ground. She looked intently at the recumbent Moose for a second, shuddered, then moved close to the Phantom as if for protection against the brutal Moose even though he was unconscious.

In a surprisingly short time, Muriel had regained her nerve, and rapidly told the Phantom just what had happened. The Phantom's face grew dark with rage.

"Moose," he said grimly, "needs a lesson. And the only one he'll understand is taught the hard way. He'll come out of it soon, but I'll make him remember us for a long time."

"Phantom," Muriel cried, "I believe Moose killed Rufus Rutledge! He hedged when I accused him of it, but he seemed

to become twice as crazy. He could have done it without a motive of any kind. The man is mad!"

"No," the Phantom said quietly, "I doubt that. Moose has a one-track mind, but he's quite sane. I've an idea he was sent to keep you from seeing where Andrew Rutledge went. And is Andrew going to have a hard time explaining this away!"

Moose stirred and groaned. His eyes opened and he sat up, blinking stupidly. Then he distinguished the Phantom standing close by, fist doubled and anger in his eyes. Moose crawled back a few feet on his hands and knees.

"Don't hit me!" he pleaded. "Don't hit me!"

"Get up!" the Phantom snapped. "Stand on your feet and fight—because whether you do or not, I'm going to—"

"I'll tell you something awful important if you don't hit me!" Moose whined. "I'll tell you where there is a dead man."

The Phantom lowered his fists. "Dead man? Who?"

"I don't know," Moose mumbled. "But he's in a grave—a new grave too. The dirt is fresh. I know where it is and if you don't hit me, I'll tell you."

"Show me that grave," the Phantom said, "and I won't hit you again. But if you're lying, if this is a trick—"

"It's no trick. There is a grave. Somebody is buried there. I'll take you there for—twenty dollars!"

THE Phantom had no time to argue. He might solve the whole mystery if he knew who was in that grave. He tossed two ten-dollar bills in Moose's direction. The big man picked them up, wadded them carefully and tucked them away. Then he turned and started walking rapidly toward the foothills.

The Phantom and Muriel followed. Muriel had almost to run to keep up, but she had found her shoes, so the going was not so bad.

Moose kept up that rapid pace for about fifteen minutes. Then he came to an abrupt halt.

"It's in them pines some place," he said. "I ain't sure, but if you let me go ahead, I'll holler when I find it."

"Get started," the Phantom ordered crisply. "And remember—no tricks. I've got a gun."

But the mention of a gun didn't seem to impress Moose much. Apparently he was more afraid of the Phantom's fists. He walked stolidly ahead, gradually increasing his pace until Muriel and the Phantom were fairly well behind. Then Moose broke into a swift run. He plunged into the fringes of the pine grove and vanished.

"I should have known it was a trick," the Phantom grunted. "Well, Moose won't get away with this one. He's dangerous and I'll have Lieutenant Brady's men round him up. Are you hurt, Muriel? I've had no time to ask how you came out of your ordeal."

And now she didn't have time to answer. For at that instant, from deep within those pines, a shot rang out. Just one—followed by a grim silence. The Phantom jerked his automatic out of its holster, took Muriel by the arm and ran into the grove. It required at least ten minutes of searching before they found the victim.

Moose lay on his face. There was a neat hole drilled through the back of his head.

Alert against further attack by the murderer, the Phantom made a quick examination of Moose. He was stone dead. The bullet was still inside his skull somewhere. His face was unmarred, except for the bruises inflicted by the Phantom's fists.

"Whoever did this," the Phantom said as he arose slowly, "had an excellent chance of getting clear. Impossible to spot anyone in these woods."

"But why on earth should anyone want to kill Moose?" Muriel asked.

"I think I know the reason," the Phantom said. "Moose couldn't stand punishment. Pain cut him down to the size of a pygmy. When he offered to bargain so I wouldn't hit him again, he was telling the truth about that grave. He was overheard, and killed before he could show it to us."

"But he did say it was in this pine grove somewhere," Muriel reminded him.

"I know, and in a moment we'll start hunting for it. Moose wasn't lying, Muriel—and he knew too much. Maybe he was working hand in glove with the murderer and didn't realize it. Keep your eyes and ears open. I'm going to search Moose's body."

The Phantom found his twenty dollars and, in the same pocket, he found more money. Tiny little wads, but many of them. He spread the money out on a rock and counted it.

"Yesterday," he said in a puzzled tone, "Moose had exactly seven cents until he bled me for a little. Now he has two thousand dollars. Moose knew the murderer all right, and he was paid to keep his mouth shut. Another reason for his death. Moose wouldn't have lasted ten seconds under a third degree . . . Which reminds me. Lieutenant Brady must be told of this."

"Meaning I should go after him?" Muriel asked, with a tight little smile. "All right. I'm not half as much afraid of the killer as I was of Moose. But what about the grave he spoke of?"

"We'll hunt for that first. Then I'll take you part of the way back to where I left my car."

AFTER they began to prowl through the pine grove, it was not long before they stood beside a grave.

The earth had been freshly dug and a few ineffectual attempts had been made to cover up the newly turned soil. Muriel spotted a rusty old shovel which had been thrown behind a clump of bushes.

"I can find the car all right," she said. "I know you want to stay here and I—I'd rather be somewhere else when you start digging."

Muriel started off.

The Phantom grasped the shovel and hefted it. "If you even think you hear anyone, come back fast. Otherwise, bring Lieutenant Brady here and Dr. Clay also."

"Dr. Clay?" Muriel turned and asked. "I thought you suspected him of being implicated."

"I do," the Phantom replied. "But I'll need medical advice if there is a corpse buried here and Clay is the only man around who can help me. Even if he dug this grave, he can't refuse to come nor to tell the truth about what we find under the dirt. If Constable Kearny is around, bring him too. I'd like to see his reactions."

Muriel hurried off. The Phantom removed his coat, stuffed the automatic into his belt and picked up the shovel.

He began digging.

CHAPTER XII

CLUE—WITH NUMBERS



NEWLY replaced earth above the grave was soft, so that the Phantom's progress was swift, although the hole that had been dug was deeper than he had thought it would be. He kept a wary eye out for trouble, but whoever had murdered Moose apparently had not lingered after the deed had been committed. He seemed to have had no wish to tangle with the Phantom, or to take a chance on the automatic Van carried.

The Phantom had been digging for a time, when he turned up an extra deep spadeful of earth. A sharp, acrid odor assailed his nostrils, and he quickly climbed out of the trench. That last spadeful contained a white, powdery substance with which he was acquainted.

"Quicklime," he muttered tightly. "There's a corpse here all right, and whoever buried it wants to make identification impossible."

He dug some more, but he was careful not to come into contact with the quicklime. He had almost uncovered the grisly remains in the grave when Lieutenant Brady, Constable Kearny, Dr. Clay and several troopers came crashing through the forest. Muriel was showing them the way.

"I stopped to tell Dad what was up so he wouldn't worry," she called out to the Phantom.

Lieutenant Brady came up, and stood staring into the grave.

"Isn't that quicklime?" he demanded.

"It is," the Phantom told him. "I've dug around it pretty much. We'll take turns wading into the stuff. Let's get it over with."

Working fast, before the lime would eat into their shoes, the Phantom and the troopers worked industriously. And beneath the quicklime and dirt, they found a human skeleton. It was laid out quite decently and had not been merely dumped into the grave.

Dr. Clay looked down at the uncovered bones.

"Badly eaten," he grunted. "Any idea

how long this corpse has been in the grave?"

"By the looks of the quicklime I'd say only for a short period," the Phantom said. "A good soaking rainstorm would dissolve most of the lime and run it down into the earth beyond the depth of the grave itself. I understand there hasn't been a rainstorm here for five days—this grave is new."

"But who in the world was buried here?" Lieutenant Brady asked.

"I'm hoping we can find a ring, or teeth—anything which might serve as identification," the Phantom said. "If necessary I'll sift every inch of soil."

Dr. Clay stepped into the grave for a closer examination of the bones. The Phantom saw him frown, thrust a hand against the side of the grave and pull out what seemed to be a man's handkerchief, weighted down with something.

"What's this—what's this?" Clay asked excitedly. "Just happened to see the edge of the handkerchief."

The Phantom took it, unwrapped the handkerchief and revealed an expensive old-fashioned pocket watch. It was intact, not having come into contact with any of the quicklime. He opened the back of it, and on the inner case were two initials—"P.L."

"Peter Lakeland!" The Phantom exhaled sharply. "That's who I expected it would be. Doctor, will you do your best to find out if those bones indicate any violence? Bulletholes, fractures—"

"I've already looked," Clay said. "As much as possible, that is. I find nothing to indicate this man died a violent death. Of course he did though, otherwise why should he have been buried here secretly? He could have been poisoned, strangled, shot through soft tissues or stabbed where the weapon wouldn't come into contact with bone."

"Well," Lieutenant Brady sighed, "we've found Peter Lakeland, even though we haven't the vaguest idea who Peter Lakeland is."

THE Phantom was holding the watch so that a ray of sunlight through the trees, fell upon it. His eyes narrowed slightly as he carefully rewrapped the watch and put it into his pocket.

"I'll keep this, if you don't mind," he said. "It's the best thing we have found yet in the shape of a clue."

"The numbers on the watch, eh?" Brady said. "It can be traced. 'You've got something, Phantom.'"

The Phantom made no comment, but he heartily wished Lieutenant Brady had not been quite so astute. He had wanted to keep a secret. Now he had to make the best of it, but commenting on the value of this clue wouldn't help.

He walked over to where Constable Kearny stood, sullenly taking in everything.

"This morning," the Phantom said quietly, "you drove to Andrew Rutledge's home at a strange hour and without lights on your car. Whatever you told Andrew caused him to roll his wheelchair out of the house and through this forest. I want to know what you told him that made a legless man take such a difficult and dangerous trip."

"Now wait a minute," Kearney snarled. "You're the Phantom, and you're pretty smart. You got a darn nice-looking badge too. But that doesn't make you a lawman, and I don't have to answer your questions if I don't want to. Just thought I'd make it clear."

The Phantom called Lieutenant Brady over. "Lieutenant, if I requested you to place Constable Kearny under arrest and hold him incommunicado without bail, would you do it?"

"I would consider it a pleasure," Brady answered promptly.

"Okay," Kearny gave in, "I'll talk. It didn't amount to anything anyhow. Mr. Oberthaler, at the observatory, always telephones me when he wants something. He figures because I'm the constable I'm his servant as well as the public's. He asked me to go see Andrew Rutledge and tell him he wanted to see him—to meet him at the usual place. He told me to tell Andrew if he didn't show up, then Andrew couldn't sell the statue of St. Anthony."

"Why couldn't he?" the Phantom demanded. "What hold has Oberthaler on Andrew Rutledge?"

"Now I only acted as a messenger," Kearny protested. "I will say, though, that I've seen Andrew get sore before, but never like he did this morning. I thought he was going to throw a chair at me. If he could have laid his hands on it from his wheel-chair, he would have. Taking his mad out on me like that."

"And the lights on your car?" the Phantom asked.

Kearny shrugged. "It was almost dawn. I could see okay. Didn't need lights, and my battery is weak. I was trying to save juice, that's all."

"A logical answer," the Phantom admitted. "I'll take your word for it. Now about this meeting between Oberthaler and Andrew. Did they meet often?"

"Oberthaler doesn't more than barely know Andrew, but he used to meet Rufus quite a lot. Oberthaler goes down some stone steps built into the side of the cliff, crosses the ravine and comes up on the other side. I don't know just where. Oberthaler won't let anybody set foot on his estate."

"I rather think Mr. Oberthaler will change his mind about that," the Phantom said grimly. "That's all, Constable. I might add that I intend to question Andrew about this, so for your own sake, I hope you're telling the truth."

DR. CLAY was still trying to discover something from the bones in the open grave. He looked up suddenly and the Phantom happened to catch his eye. The Phantom wondered whether some of the lime had eaten into Dr. Clay's ankles to account for that peculiar expression on his face, or whether Dr. Clay had suddenly become worried and afraid.

He and Muriel left the others to complete the task, Brady promising to have a complete report as soon as possible. Muriel drove the car and at the Phantom's suggestion she headed for Andrew Rutledge's house.

"Phantom," she asked, "is all this business leading to the murder of Rufus Rutledge? It seems to me more and more things complicate that investigation, and that we're really getting away from it."

"Everything stems from the murder you and your father discovered in that foundry," the Phantom told her. "One murder often leads to another. Killers can't stop once they get started and the law begins to close in. They have to keep going, and too often that means more murders to cover up the original one."

"Have you any inkling as to who this Pete Lakeland was?"

"Not yet, but I have an excellent

chance of locating him now. The numbers on the watch are clear. It's a fairly new watch too, even though its old-fashioned. Expensive, also, and there will be records. Through the manufacturer I can trace it direct to the retailer and he will most certainly know who purchased it. The engraved initials will help him remember, even if he doesn't keep records."

Muriel remained silent until she maneuvered an especially bad corner. Then she said:

"I noticed that look on your face when Brady spilled the beans. Too bad. Now everybody there knows about that clue, and if one of them happens to be the murderer—"

"I know." The Phantom sighed. "Brady talked before he realized what he was saying. Two suspects—Dr. Clay and Kearny—were present, and I didn't like for them to hear. Kearny is a stubborn fool. There isn't much question that he is mixed up in the business one way or another, but perhaps he isn't even aware of it. Dr. Clay is different. He's brainy, and would keep far in the background."

Muriel turned into the driveway to the Rutledge home and the studios. She came to a stop.

"I'll stay in the car," she said. "I don't particularly like Mr. Andrew Rutledge."

CHAPTER XIII

RECEPTION COMMITTEE



WITH a nod, the Phantom got out of the car and walked up on the porch of the Rutledge home. He noticed that a wide board had been dragged across the ground, then tilted until it fell across the steps so that a wheelchair might be piloted up onto the porch.

Before he could announce himself by knocking, Andrew Rutledge yanked the door open and glared at him.

"I heard you coming," he said. "What are you after this time?"

"Information," the Phantom said, "and I should strongly advise you to give out with it. Kearny told me about

bringing you a message this morning. You met Oberthaler. Why?"

"A purely personal reason, having to do with finances," Andrew said surlily. "The fact is that Oberthaler can stop me from selling my father's masterpiece. I can plug the hole in that plaster saint. It's the face that counts most and that wasn't damaged. But Oberthaler, the thick-headed idiot, doesn't want it sold."

"Why not? And how can he stop you from selling it? I understood the statue was already contracted for."

"I've talked enough," Andrew snapped. "You and the rest of the snoopers waste my time and get nowhere. How about the murderer of my father? Where is he? Why don't you concentrate on getting him, instead of bothering me? My business with Oberthaler was purely personal, I tell you. I won't talk about it and—good-by."

He slammed the door and the Phantom could hear him muttering curses as he wheeled himself away. The Phantom shrugged, went back to the car and got in beside Muriel.

"A helpful soul." He grimaced. "Within his rights, though. Even Brady couldn't make him talk unless we tied him directly with the murders somehow. He did, however, back up Kearny's story about meeting Oberthaler. I think I should like to meet Oberthaler myself."

Muriel laughed softly. "If you can get to Herr Oberthaler, you are indeed the best detective in the world. You've been told that the famous astronomer went into complete seclusion some years ago. That was pretty much an understatement. The estate is fenced and I wouldn't be surprised if the fence is charged with electricity. He lives there all alone, has his food delivered and left outside the gate where he also leaves money to pay for it. Except for a few glimpses of him as he walks across the open fields, nobody has seen him for months."

"There are ways and means," the Phantom said.

He smiled, for he had reason to believe that quite a number of people recently had been in close contact with Herr Oberthaler. That, of course, Muriel did not know, nor did he tell her.

"I'll have to wait, though," he said.

"Finding out who Peter Lakeland was was even more imperative. It may take me some time to accomplish that, and I may have to go some distance away. Let's go to the house and see your father. Dr. Clay promised to meet me there as soon as he completed his study of that corpse in the quicklime, and also the body of Moose."

Dr. Clay appeared at the Havens home an hour later. He did not seem quite as cordial as he had been before, but he did have information. Rather startling news.

"Nothing further on the unidentified bones," he said. "I did a partial post mortem on Moose. Dug the murder bullet out of his head, thinking you might want it. Odd-looking thing. I'd say it was made of some kind of hardened copper."

Dr. Clay opened his fist and extended another of those copper bullets. The twin of the one which had smashed into the plaster saint!

THE Phantom made no comment, but he was amazed when he saw the copper bullet. He had about made up his mind that Peter Lakeland was the man who had fired those strange bullets, but if Peter Lakeland was in that quicklime-filled grave, he had not shot Moose.

After Dr. Clay left, upon finishing an examination of Frank Havens, the Phantom made a phone call to the manufacturer of that watch. He ascertained that it had been sold a year ago to a jeweler named William Crane whose place of business was in Toledo. The Phantom made a second call, reserving accommodations on the early afternoon express plane to that city.

"Finding out who Peter Lakeland was may result in learning what his connection with the case has been," he explained to Muriel and her father. "I'm leaving on the twelve-fifty-five plane. If anything develops here before I'm off, phone me at the airport."

The Phantom had just risen, when suddenly he stopped short. Downstairs a door had been closed softly, but he had heard it nevertheless. He rushed to a window overlooking the front of the house but saw no one. Racing downstairs, he found no one there.

He was frowning as he went slowly

back upstairs. If anyone had been listening they might have heard him talking to the watch manufacturers. And he had repeated the name of the jeweler he had jotted down the name and address in Toledo. However he had only mentioned William Crane's name—not where he was located.

"No one around—it may have been the wind," he told Havens and Muriel. "My greatest worry is that a band of crooks may be mixed up in all this. If they can find out the address of the jeweler I'm going to see, they might beat me to him. And there would be another murder."

Havens nodded. "Murder always gathers momentum and leads to more bloodshed."

"Dr. Clay should have left before you heard that door close," Muriel commented. "I didn't hear him go though."

"Neither did I," said Havens.

"He might have been listening," the Phantom thoughtfully agreed. "Clay is an odd duck. I wonder if it's just a form of super-inquisitiveness that keeps him around, or the fact that he knows I suspect him and may be worried stiff. However, it might also have been Kearny. We can omit Andrew Rutledge. No matter how good he is with that wheelchair, he couldn't have managed to get away from the house as fast as our eavesdropper did. If there was one. Dr. Clay might have left the door open and a breeze closed it."

The Phantom breakfasted, rested for a little more than an hour, and felt refreshed. He could get more rest on the plane.

He drove Frank Havens' car to New York and left it in a garage near the airport. He was stepping aboard his plane fifteen minutes before the take-off time when a steward touched his arm.

"Dr. Blanding?" he asked.

"Yes," the Phantom said. "I'm Dr. Blanding."

"You're wanted on the phone, sir. It's urgent."

"Thank you," the Phantom said. "How did you find me so quickly?"

"The young lady who is calling said you would be taking the Toledo express and described you to the operator, sir."

The Phantom handed him a generous tip and hurried to the phone booth. Two

well-dressed men engaged in quiet conversation were standing some distance away. Van did not pay any particular attention to them as he stepped into the booth, pulled the glass door shut, and picked up the receiver.

"I was afraid I'd miss you," Muriel's voice came over the wire when he spoke. "About twenty minutes ago the phone rang. Some man who refused to give his name asked for the Phantom. When I asked to be given a message he said if you'd call two-seven-one on the village exchange you'd get some valuable information. He insisted I get in touch with you immediately."

"Thanks, Muriel," the Phantom said. "I'll call at once."

HE HUNG up, waited a moment, then got long distance. The connection to the village was promptly made. A man's voice answered—a familiar voice. Constable Kearny's voice.

"No, I didn't leave word anywhere for you to call me," Kearny said, in answer to the Phantom's question. "The less I see or hear from you, the better I like it."

He slammed up the receiver. Van also hung up, he realized he had no time to call Lieutenant Brady and start him checking on this. The loud-speakers were calling the Phantom's flight. He raced toward his plane and got aboard twenty seconds before the hatch was closed.

The Phantom didn't relax much on the flight to Toledo. He was much too concerned with the most recent developments. Why had Muriel received that phone call? If Kearny hadn't made it, why had the caller given the constable's number? What was it all about anyway?

Van's eyes narrowed slightly as he stared fixedly at the two well-dressed men he had seen near the phone booths. Both were passengers on this plane.

Mentally placing himself in the position of the murderer or an agent of the killer, he reviewed what had happened since the finding of the grave filled with quicklime.

Suppose someone had been listening when he had made the two phone calls from the Havens house, one to the manufacturers of the watch, the other to make his reservation on the plane for

Toledo? Unless the listener had checked on the first number he heard Van call, and discovered it was to a firm of manufacturing jewelers, all he would know was that the Phantom was making a quick trip to see a man named William Crane. If he had checked, he would likely guess the reason for Van's proposed call on William Crane.

Also there had been plenty of time for the killer to phone New York and contact one or two men who might be working with him and have them get reservations on the Toledo plane. It was so well-known that the Phantom was a master of disguise that the murderer would realize he would be taking a long chance in trying to describe "Dr. Blanding" to his New York aids. The Phantom might be in another disguise altogether.

In that case the phone call that Muriel had received was obviously a ruse to get her to call the Phantom at the airport and deliver a phony message. The killer's men, if they had been at the airport, could have been waiting for that, knowing that Muriel Havens would have to describe the Phantom in order to get him to the phone.

It would have been simple for them to watch the Phantom enter the booth to answer the call, and then discover from the steward who had been called to the phone. And they could have learned he was the man who was receiving a long distance call from Bradford. There were ways by which this could have been done.

The Phantom knew that he might be mistaken. The two men he had seen near the phone booths might not have been interested in him in the least. But he was not taking any chances. If they had been sent to follow him to Toledo he was determined to shake them off his trail as soon as he reached that city.

Van closed his eyes and pretended to be sleeping. But he had never been more wide awake in his life than he was throughout that trip, his brain working at mile-a-minute speed.

WHEN the Toledo airport appeared below and the plane came in for a smooth landing, to his surprise the two men on whom he had been keeping an eye showed no interest in him. They were the first to leave the plane.

As the Phantom and the other passengers got off, several men quickly surrounded the plane. One of them was a pudgy individual in plain clothes, and in his derby was a badge with the words—"Captain of Detectives."

"Sorry, folks," he said. "All of you will have to remain aboard for a little while. We received a phone call from New York that someone among you is a thief. No description was given, as a New York detective and the victim of the thief are arriving on the next flight. If you are innocent, you have nothing to fear."

There was a chorus of protests from the plane passengers, and the Phantom frowned in exasperation. When these men circled the plane he'd got set for battle, sure they were after him. But it was fairly obvious that they were detectives all right. The car from which they had climbed bore the seal of the City of Toledo.

"Captain," the Phantom said to the pudgy man, "may I speak to you for a moment—privately?"

"Sure. I'm Captain Johnson of the Detective Bureau. Listen, my friend, if you're the man we're after and you want to confess, this is the time to do it and save these people a lot of trouble."

"It has to be private," Van insisted stubbornly.

CHAPTER XIV

SECRET OF THE WATCH



CAPTAIN JOHNSON took the Phantom's arm and led him toward a car pulled up behind the official sedan. He stopped beside it. The Phantom reached into his pocket and took out his jewel-encrusted badge.

"Holy smokes!" Captain Johnson whistled as he recognized it. "The Phantom, eh? Have you been trailing the crook we're after?"

"No," Van said, with a smile. "I'm on the trail of much bigger game. All I want is to be released."

"You're free as the air." Captain Johnson waved his arm. He glanced

at a man who had just appeared and hurried over to him. "What it is, Sergeant?"

"Just got a report from New York," said the officer who also was in plain-clothes. "That crook has been caught. He wasn't on this plane after all. Shall I tell the boys to dismiss the passengers?"

"Of course." Johnson glanced at the Phantom as the sergeant hurried away. "You seem to be in an awful rush. If I can be of any help just say so."

"Perhaps you can," the Phantom said. "I may be racing against murder. Will you have me taken to Waverly Place?"

"I'll take you myself." Johnson opened the door of the car. "Get in—this is my own sedan. I let the boys use the Department car. Waverly Place, eh? Just where? That's a pretty long street."

"I'll show you when we get there," the Phantom said as he climbed in beside Johnston. "And thanks very much."

As Captain Johnson drove away from the airport, along a busy avenue that led to the city, the Phantom asked casually:

"How is my old friend Inspector Clark these days?"

"The inspector's fine." Johnson chuckled. "And he'll certainly be glad to see you."

"I'd be delighted to see him," the Phantom said quietly. "Tell me, was it hard to steal a detective captain's badge and a police car, Mr. Johnson?"

The stocky man glanced at him, suddenly wary and dangerous.

"I don't quite get you," he said.

"Inspector Clark died two years ago," snapped the Phantom. "You're a crook sent to meet me and find out where I'm going! I—"

Johnson acted fast, and recklessly. With a savage jerk he sent the car skidding off the road before the Phantom could reach for his gun, the wheel, or even for Johnson's throat. At the same instant Johnson smashed his foot down on the gas pedal.

The car missed a truck by the scantiest margin. It climbed the curb, shot across the sidewalk and hit a brick wall head-on.

The Phantom was thrown forward by the impact and stunned for a few seconds. Johnson had been braced. He

even had the door beside him partly open and had hurled himself clear just before the crash. He landed heavily, but managed to scramble to his feet and dart toward the nearest parked car. It was unlocked, by the good fortune that crooks seem to encounter now and then. A moment later he was driving furiously away.

Other cars stopped and people came over to help the Phantom. He shook the cobwebs from his brain, found that he had not been hurt, and asked one man to drive him to Waverly Place. He was still a little dazed, so he did not see the car that followed—a car in which the two well-dressed men who had been with him on the plane were riding.

When the Phantom spotted the jewelry store of William Crane he thanked his volunteer driver, jumped out and rushed into the store. The car containing the two men sped swiftly by and disappeared around a corner.

AS the Phantom barged through the door of the jewelry store a startled man behind the counter reached for a burglar alarm switch. Van was enough to startle that man, for he was disheveled, there were scratches on his face and blood all over one hand.

"Wait!" The Phantom spoke swiftly as he saw the salesman's instinctive act. "Are you William Crane?"

"Y-yes, I'm Crane."

The Phantom whirled and slammed the door. He locked it, turned, and laid his badge on the counter. Crane watched him, motionless and wide-eyed.

"I'm the Phantom," Van said hastily. "And I have reason to believe you're in danger. Certain men intend to kill you, to keep you from giving me some vital information."

"Oh!" There was relief in the jeweler's attitude and he bobbed his head excitedly. "We'll go into the back room. I know that badge. It was discussed at the last jewelers' convention. Amazing piece of work—"

"Never mind the badge or the jewels!" snapped the Phantom as he snatched up the badge and stuck it into his pocket. "Your life's more important! Hurry!"

In the back room the Phantom was glad to see a washbowl against one wall, with hot and cold running water. He

washed the blood off his hand, and the cut was no longer bleeding.

His next move was a puzzle to the jeweler—for a moment or two. For it was to remove a flat plastic kit from an inner pocket, open it, and set up a small mirror on a work-bench before which he sat down. He glanced with a grin at the awed jeweler who was vaguely beginning to understand, and proceeded to build a new set of features upon his already disguised face. As he worked he told Crane just what he wanted, the reason for his visit.

"Here is the watch," he said. "Do you recognize it?"

Crane took the timepiece and examined it. Finally he nodded.

"Yes, of course," he said. "I got it specially for Mr. Peter Lakely."

So that was the name, the Phantom thought, as he carefully used a crayon-like substance to change the contour of his mouth. He was listening for some sound outside the locked front door of the shop. He knew the killer's men might have trailed him to this place, though he had not seen the two men who had followed him.

If anyone had, he thought, they must guess that by now he had been able to get the information he wanted from William Crane. That should convince any would-be killers that any attempt to take the jeweler's life now would be utterly senseless. But there still was danger of them trying to kill both Crane and the Phantom in order to silence them forever.

"And just who is Peter Lakely?" asked the Phantom.

"Why, he's a mine owner. Has a copper mine somewhere out West. He's a metallurgist, too, and always fooling around with copper. Pretty interested in astronomy, too, I've heard. His wife was, also, they say. The two of them used to study the stars together, with a big telescope."

The Phantom began to see some light on the subject of copper bullets—and on some other things also.

"Give me more details about Lakely," he urged. "If anyone tries to enter the store, don't move. I'll be finished in a minute or two. Go ahead about Peter Lakely."

"Well, he's a widower. A wealthy man, and unless he's riled, a nice fel-

low." Crane frowned. "He's got the most violent temper I ever saw though. Goes berserk sometimes, especially when he's been cheated or made a fool of by someone. He lives on Madison Drive—a big house. His son and a married daughter also live there."

THE Phantom was rubbing a powder into his hair which changed it, miraculously, to a lighter shade. It matched that of the jeweler perfectly.

"Lakely lost his wife two years ago and it broke him all up," Crane went on. "He's always talking about building some sort of an observatory or something like that—turning it over to the public in her name so she'll always be remembered."

The Phantom exhibited none of the elation that was beginning to surge through his brain. He knew who the vanished guest of the village hotel was now. He knew the man had been wealthy and had been interested in astronomy. That brought Otto Oberthaler into the picture again.

William Crane gave a sudden startled exclamation.

"Why—why you look like me! Exactly like me. It's amazing! You look so much like me I wouldn't be sure which was which, if we were looking in the same mirror."

"Just what I intended." The Phantom smiled. "I'm doing this for two reasons. Primarily to save your life, if you are still in danger—and there is a good chance you may be—but also to help me solve a murder case. Certain people would gladly kill you to keep you from telling me who purchased that watch."

The Phantom completed his makeup, carefully checked it against the jeweler's features, then picked up his hat. He carried the hat into the store. He went to the front door and unlocked it. Then, certain he was not observed, he put the hat down on a small table near the door.

He quickly drew his automatic and slid it under the hat. Next he removed the harness and holster, concealed them under the counter and felt that he was ready to face the phony Captain Johnson or any of his men.

The Phantom reflected on the cleverness of the trick at the airport. The

fake police captain had procured a badge somehow and his men had stolen a police car. But Johnson had wisely realized the police might be hunting that car so had invited the Phantom to ride with him in the sedan without markings.

As soon as Johnson was sure he had found the man he was seeking he had given a signal and another of his men had appeared in the character of a police sergeant to announce that the crook the supposed police were seeking was not on the plane. And the Phantom had deliberately played right into Johnson's hands by accepting the man's offer to drive him to his destination.

From what Van had seen of Johnson and the other men working with him he knew they were no cheap gang of crooks of the gangster type. Also he was sure they were not part of a large mob.

If any of these men appeared at the jeweler's store—as the Phantom was sure they would—they would not come rushing into the place with guns. They were too clever for that. Besides they would want to know whether Crane had as yet given the Phantom any information about who had bought the watch. And the Phantom himself, an exact double of William Crane, was there to oblige them.

The real William Crane was well hidden. The Phantom's badge was concealed on his person where no searching fingers would be likely to find it. He studied a pocket with pamphlets concerning the jewelry trade and even tucked away some old receipted bills of the jeweler's.

NO MORE than five minutes after all preparations were completed the Phantom saw a big car slide to the curb out front. Two men got out of the back seat, but the driver remained behind the wheel. The Phantom watched the two men with interest as they strolled across the sidewalk—the same two well-dressed individuals who had traveled on the plane with him from New York to Toledo.

One was thin and pale-faced; the other short and stocky. They entered the store with a casual air and walked over to the Phantom who was standing behind a counter.

"We want to look at some watches,"

said the thin man, as he leaned against the counter. "A friend of ours named Peter Lakely bought a watch in here some time ago. At least we think this is the store. We want another just like it."

"This is the store," the Phantom said, and his voice was exactly like that of William Crane. "But I'm afraid I won't be able to fill your orders. The war, you know, Mr. —ah—"

"Nash," said the thin man. "George Nash. And this is Mr. Brown. You are William Crane?"

"Oh, yes." The Phantom nodded. "I'm sorry about the watches. If there is anything I can show you, gentlemen?"

CHAPTER XV

ANGRY MAN WITH COPPER BULLETS



GEORGE NASH glanced at the stocky man, and Brown nodded. Both dropped their right hands into the side pockets of their coats, and the Phantom knew those disappearing fingers were clutching guns. His attitude apparently did not change, but he was

tense and wary.

"Suppose you tell us what you told the Phantom," Nash said, his voice low, but cold and menacing. "We know that he has been here."

"The—the Phantom!" Van stammered, carefully keeping in character. "Why should he want to see me?"

"Don't stall," growled Brown. "Where is the Phantom now? We didn't see him leave."

"But he did," said Van. "You can search the place if you don't believe me. He was talking to me and then the next thing I knew he had disappeared. He—he's uncanny, that's what!"

Nash walked to the rear, glanced into the back room and saw no one there. The rear door of the store opened out into an alley, and the door was standing wide open.

"What did you tell the Phantom?" Nash turned back to Van. "Speak up!"

"I didn't tell him anything," said the Phantom, but he made it obvious that he was stalling. "Not a thing."

"Too bad," said Nash. "Now we'll have to take you along with us to a place where we'll have time to question you. We haven't time to fool around here. Customers might be coming in, or the patrolman on this beat might be curious."

"You mean you're going to kidnap me?" demanded the Phantom nervously. "But I haven't done anything."

"Don't argue," said Nash. "We both have guns and we'd hate to use them—but I'll put a bullet through your head if you don't obey orders."

"All right—I'll do what you say." To the letter the Phantom was showing all the nervousness and fear that might have been expected of Crane under the circumstances. "Don't shoot me!"

"Okay," snapped Brown. "Where do you keep a record of all sales for the last couple of years?"

"In the—steel filing cabinet right beside the safe. Everything is there," answered the Phantom.

"Get the stuff, Brown," ordered Nash. "Every scrap of paper. Put it in that traveling bag I see back there at the end of the counter, and make it fast."

Brown got the traveling bag and opened it. It was full of clothes and he dumped them all out on the floor.

"Looks like Crane just got back from a jewelers convention," he remarked, as he filled the bag with the papers in the small filing cabinet. There were not a great many of them. "All right—that's that."

Nash had been busy searching for the Phantom—but he had not even found Van's gun. Brown closed the bag and picked it up. The two men marched the Phantom to the door.

"May I take my hat?" he asked.

"Sure. I'll get it for you."

Nash reached for the hat. As he lifted it, he saw the automatic beneath it.

"Bad boy!" He smiled mockingly at the Phantom as he dropped the gun into his left-hand pocket. "You're likely to get killed playing tricks like that."

The Phantom said nothing as they ordered him out into the street. At his request they let him lock up the store, then they made him get into the rear of the car with Nash seated on one side of him and Brown on the other. Nash spoke to the driver and the big sedan pulled away from the curb.

THE car headed for the slum area and stopped in front of a cheap hotel. The Phantom got out, escorted by Nash and Brown, and all three walked up three flights of stairs.

Van was led into a room where two men in shirtsleeves were playing gin rummy. They glanced up, not too interested.

"Sit down," Nash told the Phantom. "Take off your coat if you like. You'll probably be here for some time."

"Then you—you're not going to kill me?" asked the Phantom anxiously, still playing his part well.

"Not unless you make us do it," said Nash. "We're not killers. We just want to have a confidential chat with you about what you told the Phantom."

Van dropped into a chair and sat there studying the four men. The two in shirtsleeves he was sure he knew. Their pictures were on file in his secret laboratory. They were crack confidence men. The type who could put over a phony oil or gold-mining stock deal with a smoothness that would leave their victims visualizing huge fortunes for the sum they had invested.

Undoubtedly Nash, Brown, Johnson and what others were working with them were in the same racket. Confidence men rarely accept other crooks in their schemes.

So far, the Phantom mused, although he was at present a prisoner, his trip to Toledo at least had brought tangible results. Now he knew who Peter Lakeland was. Also he had discovered that somehow a gang of clever confidence men were involved in the case he had been investigating back in Connecticut. Those results made the trip worthwhile.

Despite the fact that he was unarmed the Phantom did not intend to stay around much longer. He had discovered what he had wanted to know, and had saved the life of William Crane, the jeweler, as well. He had not the slightest doubt that these men would eventually kill him—or Crane as they thought him to be—for they had taken absolutely no precautions to hide themselves nor the hideout where he was being held.

"I—I don't feel so well," he said suddenly. "My heart—not as good as it should be the doctor said last time, he checked."

He got slowly to his feet, swayed for an instant, then staggered. Nash caught him as he seemed about to fall face-forward to the floor.

The Phantom regained his strength with remarkable speed. And, as he pulled himself out of the thin man's grasp, the two automatics he had deftly snatched from the side pockets of Nash's coat were in his hands.

"All right, boys!" he snapped as he reached the door in one leap, covering the four men in the room with the guns. "We've played around long enough."

"Tricked!" muttered Nash disgustedly. "Careful—don't try to use your guns. This guy is the Phantom. You know how he can change his appearance. We snatched the wrong man and didn't even know it."

"Your error!" The Phantom chuckled. "Now three of you lie face down on the floor. Nash, you rip the bed-sheets into ropes. Snap it up or I'll send a little persuader to give you some speed."

Nash went to work and within minutes three of the men were firmly tied and gagged. The Phantom finished the job by himself tying and gagging Nash.

Van stepped out of the room, closing the door behind him. He took the elevator to the lobby and hurried to a phone booth. He called Police Headquarters, identified himself, and gave them the name of the hotel.

"In Room Three-sixteen you'll find four men," he said over the wire. "They were implicated in the theft of a detective captain's badge and a police car or at least know who did it. Hold them—murder charges may be filed."

HE REMAINED in front of the hotel until police cars pulled up. Then he called a taxi and was driven straight to the home of Peter Lakely. Here the Phantom expected to discover clues which would lead him to a murderer and some kind of a fabulous plot to gain money easily and in huge quantities.

Lakely's son was willing and glad to talk.

"My father has been missing for five days," he told the Phantom. "He went to New York on some personal business. It must have been important, because he was certainly in a hurry. We haven't heard from him since."

"Did your father ever experiment with copper bullets?" the Phantom asked bluntly.

"I'll say he did." Young Lakely smiled. "He was trying to find a new type of bullet and a new way to harden copper. He used to buy lead cartridges, remove the slugs and insert his copper ones. Then he'd blast the dickens out of targets in the cellar. How did you know this? It was supposed to be a state secret on Dad's part."

"I found two of his bullets," the Phantom said, and his voice grew gentle and sympathetic as he looked at the young man. "I'm afraid something has happened to your father. I'm not sure, but the facts point that way."

"You mean he—he's dead?" Young Lakely stared at the Phantom anxiously.

"Yes." The Phantom nodded somberly. "And if he is dead, then it was coldblooded murder!"

"Murder!" Young Lakely turned white, then got a grip on himself. "I had a feeling that something terrible had happened to Dad!" he burst out. "This—this is a terrible shock! But I'll try to bear up."

"It's a relief to see you take the news bravely," said the Phantom. "Because, now that you know, I want you to give me some rather confidential information."

"Of course," said Lakely. "Anything you wish."

"I know your father was interested in astronomy. How deeply did he go into the science?"

"He didn't make a deep study of it. He and my Mother both used to watch the stars through a telescope. But my father's real interest was more that of a man who likes to help promote science. Dad supplied an awful lot of money to help some famous astronomer build himself a new observatory."

"Was the astronomer named Otto Oberthaler?" demanded the Phantom.

"Yes—that's the name." Lakely nodded. "It was odd enough to stick in my mind. Dad gave him almost two hundred thousand dollars for the project. He said he got his money's worth, too. He inspected the observatory right after it was built and was enthusiastic about it."

"I'm grateful for the information you've given me." The Phantom arose

and offered his hand as young Lakely also got to his feet. "I hope this will help me run down the men who murdered your father—if he is dead. We'll be certain in a short time. Oh, yes, one more thing. You're positive your father was upset when he left for New York?"

"He was so darned sore he could hardly talk," young Lakely said positively. "Sputtered all over the place. That was right after we had a house guest. A man named Lloyd Harrison whom Dad met at some convention on the West Coast. They found they had a mutual interest in promoting science and scientists, so when Harrison came here to Toledo on business Dad invited him to stay with us. They had sessions that lasted far into the night."

"And Harrison? Was he angry, too?"

"I'll say he was, but I guess he didn't have a violent temper like Dad. They didn't tell me what it was all about, but it wasn't hard to see that Dad had been gypped somehow. Whenever a fast one was pulled on him, he kept quiet about it and took care of things personally." Lakely looked anxiously at the Phantom. "Do you know why he may have been killed?"

"Probably because he gave Otto Oberthaler two hundred thousand dollars," said the Phantom grimly. "But I've got to check further to be sure."

VAN walked to the door, promising to send word as soon as he had definite news for young Lakely. The taxi was waiting outside and it took Van back to the airport with time to spare. He phoned Police Headquarters and learned that all four men he had captured, as well as others in the gang, had been arrested.

"They're a smart bunch," the detective-lieutenant told the Phantom. "Not a cheap gunman in the whole crowd. All confidence men. Slick types who know how to keep their mouths shut."

Aboard the plane, on his way back, the Phantom dozed. He felt satisfied that his quick trip to Toledo had been successful. On the phone he had tipped off the police to tell William Crane that the jeweler was safe now. He regretted having left his make-up kit locked up with the watch in the jeweler's safe, but he had others just like it in his penthouse apartment in New York.

When the plane landed at La Guardia Airport the Phantom returned to Richard Curtis Van Loan's penthouse. He left the car a block away, and was not noticed as he entered the building by his private door, and used his private elevator to get up to the penthouse.

Here he removed the disguise of the jeweler and built up a fresh countenance of Dr. Blanding. Then he got another make-up kit and hid it in his clothes. A short rest, some good food, and he was ready for anything that might happen.

He returned to Frank Havens' car and drove back to the quiet little village which overnight had turned into a hotbed of murder and crime.

CHAPTER XVI

VISIT BY NIGHT



EARLY in the evening the Phantom reached Frank Havens' country home. He found the newspaper publisher sitting in a chair in the living room and looking much better. Muriel was with him and Lieutenant Brady had dropped in. The State

Police officer had a brief report to make to the Phantom.

"We went over that bloodstained axe which Moose claimed to have found," said Brady. "It was human blood on it, all right. Certainly it was the weapon used to dismember the body of Rufus Rutledge, if not to murder him. The only fingerprints we found were those of Moose."

"I was careful to wrap the handle of the axe with a handkerchief when I brought it here so I wouldn't leave any prints." The Phantom nodded. "I doubted you'd find the prints of the killer. He is much too clever for that—probably wore gloves. What about my little trio of suspects?"

"We've got our eyes on them," Brady said. "Constable Kearny is puttering around the grave. Looking for clues, he says. It keeps him busy and where we can observe him, so we haven't interfered."

"And Dr. Clay?"

Brady frowned. "It's odd about him. He worked like a Trojan helping us get those bones out of the grave. Burned himself with quicklime, too. He took the bones to his office—but now both he and the bones have vanished."

The Phantom lit a cigarette. "Hmm," he said between puffs. "Imagine taking a trip with a skeleton for a companion. Where did he go?"

"We traced him to the railroad station, where he bought a ticket for New York. He had a big suitcase and handled it as if it contained dynamite."

"Bones, of course," the Phantom said. "But before this case is ended these bones may prove to be dynamite—for the murderer."

"Then you've found him?" exclaimed Muriel. "You know who is behind all this?"

"Well, yes, in a way," the Phantom said thoughtfully. "I'm not positive yet. I need proof that will stand up before a jury." He changed the subject abruptly. "How is Andrew Rutledge behaving himself?"

"He's sitting tight," Lieutenant Brady answered. "Hasn't been out of the house."

"For my money," Havens broke in, "I'd say Andrew was the man who attacked me. Oh, I realize it sounds fantastic for a legless man to leap out of a tree, knock me down, steal the golden saint and darn near murder me before getting away. But we know now that Andrew gets around remarkably well and the man who assaulted me was powerful. He had strong arms and big shoulders. Andrew fits that description. I'm inclined to believe it was he who murdered his father."

"No, he didn't," said the Phantom. "I'm sure of that." Van stared at the glowing tip of his cigarette. "Odd, isn't it, how the golden saint was so important at the start of this case and has never entered it again. Not in any way at all."

"That's right," Havens nodded. "I nearly got killed because I had it. A little golden luck piece for which someone was willing to commit murder. What do we do now, Phantom?"

"I guess the next move will be a visit to Otto Oberthaler and his observatory," said the Phantom. "I intend to go there now."

"Let me go along, Phantom!" Muriel begged eagerly. "I've a real reason for asking. It's because I remember Herr Oberthaler now. Once he came to the college I attended to lecture. I remember that well now."

"Then you'd know him if you saw him?" The Phantom was suddenly interested. "Is that so, Muriel?"

"I'm sure of it! I remember the little finger of his left hand had the first joint missing. I noticed that at once and it fascinated me when he waved his hands around. He couldn't change that, or possibly have changed much anyhow."

"It's getting dark." The Phantom glanced out of a window. "You'd better get into something practical if you want to come along. Dark slacks, for instance. We'll have to prowl around."

"I'll be ready in a few moments," Muriel promised and hurried upstairs.

"Is it all right?" the Phantom asked Havens.

"Of course. I could hold a wildcat here easier than I could hold Muriel right now." Havens grinned, and then his expression grew serious. "What do you expect to find at Oberthaler's place, Phantom? If you think he's mixed up in this, you must be wrong. Oberthaler has an excellent reputation. He's a famous scientist. Why, the man is held in the highest regard by everyone."

"I know." The Phantom nodded. "But reputations change and so do characters. At any rate, if Oberthaler is honest, he can explain many things."

WHEN Muriel hurried into the room, she wore a dark, tailored slack suit and sturdy walking shoes. But Van was not ready to leave yet. All of them continued to discuss the case until it was completely dark.

Lieutenant Brady held strongly to the opinion that Andrew Rutledge had murdered his father, and was all but prepared to make an arrest. He also believed that Constable Kearny was actively mixed up in the affair.

"I don't doubt but what Kearny is one of the principals," the Phantom admitted. "But I also believe the constable doesn't know what it's all about. In plain English, Kearny is a lunkhead easily imposed upon, for all his blustering ways."

"Look here, Phantom," Brady pleaded,

"if you know what is behind it all, why don't you tell us?"

"All right," the Phantom said. "It's the stars. Millions of them. The moon, the planets. They all look down on murder. They all know the secret and so will you in a short time. If Dr. Clay returns, hold him for me and don't let him talk—not even to you." He rose to his feet with a smile. "Coming, Muriel?"

He and Muriel drove to the edge of the cliff where Moose had cornered her. Even the memory of the experience brought shivers to Muriel. With their flashlights they located a well-constructed stairway cut into the stone wall of the cliff.

They descended the stairs and discovered a well-worn trail across the ravine to where more steps led to the top of the opposite cliff.

"One thing we know is that these steps were used a great deal," the Phantom commented. "We also know that Rufus Rutledge and Oberthaler were

his way out on a limb and hung by his hands for a second. He dropped, rolled over and got back on his feet. Muriel followed him. As she let go, the Phantom caught her deftly. For a few moments she was held tightly by him and smiled up into his eyes.

"Phantom," she whispered, "if you'd show up looking like the same person two or three times, I think I could grow to like you more than would be good for either of us."

"You may be right." The Phantom laughed softly. "To be candid, I'd enjoy that more than I should say, but—it's impossible. So long as I have to keep my anonymity and fight killers, I've no right to allow anyone else to share the risks. Maybe some day—"

He put her down, and they walked, hand in hand, along a fairly wide path leading toward the massive observatory building. At close range and in the gloom it had a formidable appearance, looming like some monstrosity in a nightmare. There was no moon, but

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friends. In fact, Rufus is believed by many to have been the only person outside of a few strangers who have come here from a distance, who has seen Oberthaler at close range for some time. However, we shall see him ourselves soon."

They moved forward until a high steel fence barred any further approach to the observatory. They followed the fence to a sturdy gate that was locked.

"I could pick that lock," the Phantom said softly, "but I'll give you odds the fence is either wired to stun or kill an intruder, or wired to produce signals that company is coming. Let's look for some other way of getting past the barrier."

That required only a few moments, for both soon spotted a tree with thick branches that overhung the fence.

"Almost too good to be true," the Phantom said. "I'll go first. It's quite a drop so I'll catch you. No noise now. We want to surprise Oberthaler and perhaps even keep him from knowing we've been here, if necessary."

The Phantom climbed the tree, worked

enough stars were in the sky to reflect against the dome and give it a weird color.

They were still some distance from the building when a searchlight's beam was snapped on. It darted down the path, centered on them and held, moving as they moved. The light practically blinded them until they reached a twist in the path. Then, for a few seconds, the spotlight didn't penetrate.

"A bright welcome if not a warm one," the Phantom grunted. "I thought that tree was a little too tempting. I'll wager he had it rigged to flash a warning. Close your eyes! Here comes that spotlight again."

They moved on, careful not to look directly at the white beam. When they were within a dozen yards of the entrance to what seemed to be the living quarters the light went out. For a few moments they found it hard to see in the darkness, but their eyes quickly became accustomed to the gloom.

A door opened and a bearded man stood there, plainly visible in the glow from the room behind him.

"St. Anthony!" the Phantom said, staring.

"I thought his name was Oberthaler," said Muriel, in a small voice.

The big, bearded man seemed strangely menacing as he stood there motionless and silent, his eyes fixed on the shadowy forms of his two visitors.

"So Oberthaler posed for Rufus Rutledge's last statue!" the Phantom said, so softly that the man in the doorway could not hear him. "The one which was plugged through the heart with a copper bullet! Steady now—don't let him think we suspect him. We're just looking for information."

The Phantom advanced several more paces. The man in the doorway silently watched him.

"Mr. Oberthaler?" the Phantom called out.

"Yes," came the prompt reply. "I don't like visitors. Please go away."

"I'm sorry," the Phantom said. "This is most important. I'm the Phantom Detective, here in Connecticut on a matter that interests everyone around here vitally. There have been four murders in the village and you may be able to help me discover who is guilty of the crimes."

"Four murders?" Oberthaler seemed taken aback by the news. "I talked with Andrew Rutledge yesterday. He told me his father was dead—that someone had killed him, but he did not mention anyone else. I suppose I must see you, under the circumstances. Come in and bring the young man with you."

"This is Muriel Havens, Mr. Oberthaler. Her father is the publisher and she is not a young man. Look more closely."

Oberthaler pushed down a pair of brass-rimmed glasses and peered at Muriel as she approached.

"Ah, yes," he said. "Pretty too, isn't she? Perhaps I'll be glad you came. It's been so long since any young person has been here. Please—this way."

Muriel followed the Phantom through a steel door. They entered a room which seemed to be fitted up like a formal club room. It was clean, expensively furnished, but still had a cold look. Muriel had an idea she knew how a condemned man must feel when he walks into a lethal gas chamber. The room was as chill and forbidding as that.

CHAPTER XVII

ROOM OF SHADOWS



ERR OBERTHALER offered chairs to the Phantom and Muriel and sat down himself.

"I don't see many people or have much to do with the outside world," he explained. "This is my world here—where I can study the stars, seek in the heavens for truths

you cannot find on earth."

"I know," the Phantom said. "You are, perhaps, one of the most famous astronomers in the world. Your observatory seems to me—a layman as far as astronomy goes—to be splendidly equipped."

Oberthaler nodded. "I have been fortunate. The observatory was erected for me. Paid for by the funds of a kind gentleman who wanted to help further the science of astronomy. His name, if you wish to check, is Peter Lakely and he lives, I think, in Toledo."

The Phantom switched subjects adroitly.

"You talked to Andrew Rutledge yesterday, you say. Do you mind if I ask what the conversation was about?"

"Andrew is a fool," Oberthaler said harshly. "He thinks of nothing but what he can get from the estate of his dead father. Much against my desires and only because Rufus Rutledge was the only close friend I ever had, I permitted him to fashion a saint after me. He said I looked like Saint Anthony."

"When Rufus didn't come to see me two nights ago, as usual, I was afraid something had happened to him. So I telephoned Constable Kearny and learned he was dead—murdered. So I of course had known before Andrew gave me the details. I did not wish my image to be proclaimed and exploited as the last word of a great artist. I forbade Andrew to sell the statue."

"Well," the Phantom said, "that at least ties up with what Andrew told us."

"Phantom"—Muriel rose—"do you mind if I leave now? I want to bring the car around to this side of the mountain. Crawling up and down that ra-

vine isn't my idea of fun. Not at night."

"I'll meet you at the bridge," the Phantom said. "I won't bother Mr. Oberthaler much longer. Run along."

Muriel proffered her hand and Oberthaler took it awkwardly, like a man who has been away from things so long these ordinary social amenities were strange. Muriel left promptly. This was all in accordance with a prearranged plan of the Phantom's.

Muriel was not going for the car, but was to wait at the turn in the path where the shadows were thickest. When the Phantom arrived, he would be in the glare of Oberthaler's strange spotlight, but for a few seconds the turn in the path would hide him.

There he intended to drape his coat over Muriel's shoulder's put his hat on her head and send her on to the gate. Oberthaler would never realize it was Muriel and not the Phantom who was leaving.

She reached the turn and stopped. Her heart was pounding furiously. The Phantom had some scheme in mind and she had an idea it might put an end to all the mystery. But she also was sure now that Oberthaler's part in it, if he even had one, was just that of an innocent dupe. She had positively identified the man as the great scientist who had addressed her class.

All at once, as she was thinking, she heard something move. Muriel started to run. A weird object came out of the brush with a crashing sound. It was a wheel-chair and before she could move, Andrew Rutledge's strong fingers fastened around her wrist.

"So the Phantom did it!" Andrew said angrily. "He talked to the old man and probably learned the truth. Yes—the truth! But *you* won't broadcast it! I've got a gun in my other hand. Unless you want me to shoot you, then lay in wait for the Phantom, obey my orders."

"Wh-what do you want me to do?"

Muriel's only thought was for the Phantom. He would fall headlong into a trap if Andrew waylaid him.

"Walk ahead of me," ordered Andrew. "Not too far ahead, and don't try to dodge because I can shoot faster than you can move. Get going—or I'll let you have it here. The Phantom won't hear the shot. That place in there is practically sound-proofed."

MURIEL walked ahead of the rolling wheel-chair which Andrew handled with amazing skill. Under the cripple's commands she found that they were heading for the cliff.

Smooth rock was under her feet and the dark abyss of the cliff ten yards ahead when Andrew called a halt. He began to laugh, and there was a note of maniacal fury in the chuckles. Far below, she could hear the roar of a deep, fast river.

This was not the cliffside up which she and the Phantom had come, but much further down where the river catapulted into the ravine over a falls. Muriel shivered, but in her heart she was glad of one thing. The Phantom didn't have to face the fury of the legless maniac.

"Do you know what I'm going to do?" Andrew barked, then answered his own question. "I'm going to climb out of this chair, hop to the edge of the cliff and jump. Yes—jump!"

"But why?" Muriel asked.

"You ask me that," Andrew derided. "That old man at the observatory knows I did it! My father expected it, and he must have told the old fool. My father told him everything, but Oberthaler is a fool, too. His mind is too filled with the stars and the planets for him to sit down and think about anything that's happened on earth." He laughed crazily. "I suppose you'd like to know—before I take the leap."

Muriel tried to speak, but her vocal cords felt frozen. Somehow she had an idea that Andrew didn't intend to leap alone. He still held the gun. She could see it outlined against the light-colored rock of the opposite cliff.

"I'll tell you," Andrew said. "I killed my father! I've been intending to kill him for years, but I never had the chance until I became friends with Moose. He'd do anything for money. He held the old idiot while I killed him. Then we burned the body in the furnace, but that nosy watchman had to come back and see us, so he died too."

"You killed your father?" Muriel gasped.

"Certainly I did. What do I care? There's nothing for me to live for. I'm only half a man, and he was responsible for that. Lakely found it out, too. He was at the house when Moose and I re-

turned. He saw the bloody axe and Moose was talking about the crime before we realized Lakely was inside. So we killed him, too, and Moose buried him."

"And then you killed Moose?" Muriel managed to ask weakly. Her fear was so great now that she was almost numb.

"I said Moose would do anything for money, didn't I?" snapped Andrew. "He bled me—blackmailed me for two thousand dollars and you don't blackmail a murderer more than once. Yes, I shot him—with Lakely's pistol. That's the story. There are a few discrepancies, but you've heard enough and the rest doesn't make any difference."

"You—you are going to kill yourself?" Muriel cried.

"What is there for me to live for now? Andrew rolled his wheel-chair back close to the edge of the cliff. "Do you think I'm going to wait for the Phantom to grab me? Do you think I'll let them put me in the electric chair? I'd rather go over the cliff." He lowered his voice. "But first there is one more thing I must tell you. Please come closer."

His tone was almost pleading, and Muriel moved nearer to the chair. She stood within a few feet of him, but still out of reach.

"What else do you want to tell me?" she asked.

THE chair shot forward, and before she realized his intention Andrew dropped the gun and caught her arm with both hands.

"I'm going to die!" he said harshly. "But not alone! You are going with me!"

Muriel struggled to break free as he held her with one hand and with the other sent the chair rolling back closer and closer to the edge of the cliff. She stumbled and fell and as she dropped to the ground Andrew released his grip on her wrist.

She raised her head just in time to see the chair roll back, then vanish as it went hurtling down over the edge with Andrew Rutledge in it.

Muriel staggered to her feet as from below there came a crash and the sound of splintering wood when the chair broke on a rock at the edge of the stream. With horror in her eyes, Muriel fled.

CHAPTER XVIII

KILLER OF FOUR



UNAWARE that anything had gone amiss with his plans, the Phantom, in Oberthaler's study, was taking his leave.

"I thought," he told the elderly scientist, "that because you were a friend of Rufus Rutledge you might be able to provide a lead to his murderer."

"I wish I could." Oberthaler spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "He was my good friend. I would avenge his death if I could. Rufus was a strange man to have as a friend. His temper was quick and he dominated everyone he came into contact with. People didn't like him. I did, because I admire frankness. Even if it hurts sometimes."

"Well"—the Phantom moved toward the door—"I don't believe there is anything to keep me here. I'm sorry you couldn't help."

"So am I," Oberthaler said, with a sincerity that rang true. "I shall miss Rufus very much."

The Phantom was walking toward the door when he turned suddenly and faced the astronomer.

"One more question, please. This Peter Lakely who provided the money to build this observatory. Did he know Rutledge?"

Oberthaler had his hands clasped and the Phantom noticed that he was nervously dry-washing them.

"I—wouldn't want to answer your question, Phantom," he said. "I don't feel that I have the right. I—"

"I'm afraid if you don't answer it," the Phantom said, "that your serenity here will be badly shaken. The police aren't inclined to heed a man's request for strict privacy."

Oberthaler understood what Van meant, and answered.

"Lakely was my benefactor," he said. "Rufus Rutledge was my close friend. You place me between two fires, but I must answer honestly. Lakely hated Rufus Rutledge. Don't ask me why. I think it was because

of a financial matter. Lakely possessed an evil temper, far worse than Rutledge's. Perhaps, if you find Lakely, you will find the answer."

"We're looking for him," the Phantom said. "Thank you—and good night. I hope you will not be bothered again."

"Good night," Oberthaler said. "I won't operate the light. You can find your way."

As the Phantom walked down the path, he wondered why Oberthaler had decided not to use the spotlight. But it made things easier, for the Phantom had no intention of leaving without a better look at the observatory.

The Phantom reached the turn in the path and slowed up. He hissed a signal for Muriel, but she didn't appear. The Phantom's face became stern and grim. He drew a flashlight from his pocket, masked the lens with his fingers and used the narrow resulting ray to sweep the ground.

He saw where Andrew's wheel-chair had crashed out of the brush, saw the marks of its rubber-tired wheels and followed them down the path to the big steel gate. It was wide open. The Phantom hastily examined the mechanism, recognized it as a simple electric lock and promptly cut the circuit with that sharp bit of steel he carried. Now the gate could be closed, but no amount of electricity would keep it locked.

The trail of that wheel-chair was easy to follow, so easy that the Phantom wondered if it had been deliberately made so. He likewise noted the marks of Muriel's leather heels as the ground became softer.

HE WAS moving toward the north end of the cliff when he heard someone crashing through the brush ahead of him. Then Muriel appeared, running as though all the hounds of Hades were at her heels. She raced toward the Phantom.

"Andrew," she panted breathlessly. "He went over the cliff in his wheel-chair! Tried to take me—with him."

"Easy, Muriel," the Phantom said gently. "Get your breath, and then tell me about it."

She slowly relaxed, then told him what had happened and everything that Andrew had said.

"He confessed," she finished. "He was the murderer."

"I'm not so sure of that, despite Andrew's confession," the Phantom said. "Want to go home now? Or do you feel up to a little raid on the observatory?"

"But I thought this finished everything!" Muriel looked up at him with a puzzled expression. "After all, Andrew confessed."

"Certainly." The Phantom nodded. "But he was lying. He probably didn't care what happened to him. He knew that no matter how things worked out he was implicated too deeply to be cleared. Andrew thought if you testified that you had heard him confess being the murderer it would clear the real killer and stop any further investigation."

"But why should Andrew protect the murderer so greatly that he was willing to kill himself and try and take me with him?" demanded Muriel. "It sounds insane."

"It was, to an extent," said the Phantom. "A last ironical gesture of loyalty to the man Andrew hated. . . . Well, anyhow, I came here to investigate the observatory and I intend to do just that."

"Then I'll go along," Muriel said stoutly. "I'm not backing out now."

"Good! The quicker we got there, the better. I fixed the big gate so it wouldn't lock."

They found the gate closed, but the Phantom's gentle push opened it. They went through, ready to duck instantly if the big searchlight was turned on again, but it remained dark. They left the path half-way toward the big place and circled around to the back.

"I'm going to enter through one of the windows," the Phantom explained in a low voice. "Your job is to wait outside the window and if anything happens to me, slip away and get help. But don't leave until you're sure it's necessary."

"You act as though you believe Oberthaler is mixed up in all this killing," Muriel whispered. "But he can't be. I recognized him, even if I didn't get a chance to see if that little finger was missing. He's the real Oberthaler, and his only interest is in science. How could he be involved in murder?"

"Wait and see." The Phantom smiled as they reached a window. "Now here is where you stay. After I'm inside, I'll close the window part way, so you can listen and look. Just be careful."

The great building was dark. The Phantom used his steel implement again and a moment later he was inside, silently closing the window halfway.

Drawing his flash, he placed the palm of his left hand over it, allowed two fingers to spread a hair's breadth. With this tiny ray to guide him, he crossed the room and made his way to the observatory proper.

He passed through an unlocked steel door into the high domed telescope room. The huge instrument was dully revealed by a single weak electric bulb which hung from the ceiling high above. The shadowy, circular walls gave the impression of vastness and desolation. The webbing of girders which formed part of the roof sent crazy shadows down across the floor.

THE Phantom walked up to the telescope, saw how splendidly everything was equipped. The revolving power instruments, the cameras, spectroscopes, the Geiger counter—other intricate measuring and timing devices. Here was an observatory as complete as anything the Phantom had ever seen.

A door, well behind the skeletal frame of the telescope, attracted his attention. He walked toward it and no matter how softly he tried to make his steps, each one echoed and reechoed with startling clarity. The door, of steel construction, was securely locked.

Once more the Phantom put his lock-picking mechanism to work, but this time he had a job which required all of thirty minutes. Finally the door swung open. A tiny black button sprang outward from the door jamb when the pressure was released—and the Phantom knew the meaning of that. It was a signal to announce elsewhere in the place that the door had been opened.

The Phantom uttered a groan. He had wanted a little more time.

Inside the room which was now revealed were rows of steel filing cabinets. He opened a few at random, examined the files within, and then saw a desk with a smaller steel cabinet on it.

He didn't care how much noise he

made now. The alarm had been given, but it would take Oberthaler three or four minutes to traverse the length of this place before he reached the telescope room.

The Phantom smashed the small filing cabinet on the cement floor and broke it open. Inside were a number of cards. He looked rapidly through these, then straightened up, reaching for his automatic, as he heard a faint sound behind him.

"Don't move!" came the voice of Oberthaler, and it was grim and menacing. "I've got you covered."

The Phantom's fingers drew away from his gun as he swung around. Oberthaler stood a short distance away, light gleaming on the nickel-plated revolver in his hand. His eyes were smoldering fires of hate.

"I happened to be close to the telescope room when the alarm went off," the bearded astronomer said, and the very quietness of his tone made him seem far more dangerous than any blustering would have done. "I slipped out of my shoes and came in silently."

"It seems I'll have to answer the questions this time," the Phantom said.

"No—there will be no more questions." Oberthaler shook his head. "I can't figure out how you returned. The signals would have told me if you had come through the gate or via the tree. You didn't climb the fence or the electric charge would have killed you. Therefore I must assume you're clever, and highly dangerous to me."

"Especially since you know I've just examined some interesting records," the Phantom said softly. "You're running a racket, Oberthaler. These files contain confidential information about hundreds of prominent people who might fall for the wiles of your various confidence men and fake astrologers who claim to be working astronomers."

"Interesting," Oberthaler said, a mocking note in his voice. He stroked his beard with his left hand and the first joint of the little finger appeared quite intact. "You may keep talking."

"Up to now your plan has only started. The victims are being gradually built up to a point where they invest money to further the science of astronomy. Your small group of confidence men get these rich people in-

terested. Your fake, but well trained astronomers pass the word around that you are doing amazing work—as do real astronomers who have come to visit the laboratory. The confidence men follow up these leads. And it all began with one gigantic swindle.”

OBERTHALER laughed, but there was no mirth in the sound.

“I’ll lay you odds you can’t describe it,” he challenged.

“Can’t I?” the Phantom smiled. “Before this observatory was built, you contacted six of the wealthiest people in the country. Men who knew the importance of astronomy. Some were scientists in other fields. You convinced them that astronomy was as important a science to the welfare of humanity as medical research, let us say. As worthy of donations as scholarship funds for colleges. They came through—to the tune of thousands. All told, each one paid in the vicinity of a hundred and fifty thousand dollars to erect this observatory. You even kept record of the donations.”

“Is that against the law?” Oberthaler asked mildly.

“It is when you informed each one of these people that he alone had supplied all the funds for this building and this equipment,” said the Phantom. “You sold the same thing six times over and pocketed five-sixths of the total take.

“You erected the observatory. Oh, yes, that would make it safe. Each individual lived in a different part of the country from any of the others and the likelihood of their meeting was remote. Probably you sold each the idea of turning over the money to you to build the observatory and letting the donor remain anonymous.”

“Why should the donors have been willing to remain unknown in the background?” asked Oberthaler, as though curious, but not quite certain what the Phantom was talking about. “Explain that, please.”

“You convinced them that they were benefiting the science of astronomy by not having their names connected with the building of the observatory,” went on the Phantom. “A secret gift to humanity that would make them feel good when they thought about it. These men were not fools. They didn’t just

give you all that money and get nothing in return. The cards in that file show that you gave every one of them a faked deed as sole owner of this building. Even if they did meet you were certain that they would not talk. Very clever, sir.”

Oberthaler shrugged. “But what has all this got to do with the murder of Rutledge and those others you say were killed?”

“Everything,” snapped the Phantom. “Peter Lakely and Lloyd Harrison were two of those six men, and they met. They learned that they’d individually built this observatory, that therefore it had been paid for twice. They didn’t know it had been paid for six different times.”

“I wanted to learn how much you did know before I decided to kill you,” remarked Oberthaler pleasantly. “I’ll have to do it now.”

“Just as you found you had to kill Peter Lakely when he came here to expose you,” the Phantom said quietly. “I don’t know exactly what happened, but you must have aroused him to such an extent he was ready to murder you. At any rate, he somehow entered the studios of Rufus Rutledge. There he saw the statue of Saint Anthony, and in a dim light it was a perfect likeness of you. So he opened fire, put a bullet through the plaster saint.”

“Wasn’t he an idiot though?” Oberthaler laughed, but the gun in his hand did not waver from the Phantom’s heart. “All right. I’ll admit that when Lakely came here trying to see me I got frightened and went to Rutledge’s place. Lakely followed me—and shot the statue thinking it was me.”

“And then you found your chance and killed him with the axe,” said the Phantom. “You dismembered the body somewhere and probably carried it to the foundry in a sack. You started the furnace, it was Sunday morning and you felt safe again.

“But the watchman returned unexpectedly. You thought he’d be gone all day, because it was Sunday. You had to kill him, but there was no time to cremate his body, too, so you left it there.”

“That’s enough,” snarled the bearded man. “I’ve heard all I want—and now you die, Phantom!”

The Phantom saw death staring at him out of those eyes that glared above the gray beard. He tensed, ready for Oberthaler to pull the trigger of that shining revolver at any instant.

"Andrew killed himself tonight," the Phantom said. "He confessed to a witness that he was the murderer we've been seeking, then went hurtling over the cliff, wheel-chair and all."

"What?" Oberthaler demanded dazedly. "You mean that—that Andrew is dead?" He felt in his pocket with his free hand as though to assure himself that something was still there. "No, you're lying! That can't be true."

"It is true, Rufus Rutledge," said the Phantom grimly. "And that little gold saint in your pocket won't bring you any more luck now!"

CHAPTER XIX KILLERS DIE HARD



SILENCE lingered in the telescope room as the Phantom's ringing words died away in an echo. Then suddenly Rufus Rutledge, who had posed as *Herr Otto Oberthaler*, the scientist, laughed satanically. Yet it was not the senseless mirth of a crazy man.

"You fool—to have come here alone and to tell me all this!" he roared. "No matter what happens crooks always will remember me as the man who killed the Phantom!"

As Rutledge's finger tightened on the trigger, the Phantom's right foot came up with lightning speed. His toe hooked in the drawer of the small file. The drawer struck the bearded man squarely in the face and knocked him back, just as the revolver roared.

The bullet missed the Phantom by inches as he leaped to one side. He hurled himself at Rutledge before the sculptor could recover and shoot again. Van had not gone for his own gun, for he wanted this killer alive.

The two men went down together, hitting the floor so hard that it jarred the breath out of them for a moment. The nickel-plated gun went flying out of Rutledge's hand, to slide into the shad-

ows beneath the huge telescope.

The murderer squirmed and twisted, and talonlike fingers clutched the Phantom's throat. They tightened—pressing deeper into the flesh and cutting off Van's wind. But he got one hand free and smashed a rocklike fist against Rutledge's jaw.

The killer's grip on the Phantom's throat relaxed as Rutledge went limp from the blow. Van leaped to his feet, snatching out his automatic as he stood over the motionless killer.

Thoughts raced through his mind in that brief moment. It had been almost an hour since he had left Muriel waiting outside the window. Was she still there, or had she gone for help by this time?

The window at which she waited was some distance from where he was now. He had crossed a room and gone in through an unlocked steel door to get into this high-domed telescope room. Voices would not carry that far, but if she was still there Muriel would have heard the shot.

A warning of danger swept over the Phantom. It was strange that he should feel that, with the killer lying senseless at his feet, yet he could not shake it off. There was menace in the very stillness that engulfed the observatory like a smothering blanket.

He listened tensely. Ears less keen than his would have detected nothing, but he caught the sound of stealthy footsteps, steadily drawing closer. They came from beyond the door by which he had entered the telescope room.

If Muriel had been watching through the window outside the other room the Phantom was sure she would have tried to find some way to give him warning. She could have seen that someone stalked him and dared risk a scream which would have brought the Phantom out, ready to face his foe.

A feeling of relief that was anticlimatic held him as a thin, hawklike figure loomed in the doorway. Jim Kearny, the constable.

"I came lookin' around here," Kearny said. "Found the gate open and decided I'd better talk to Oberthaler. Then I heard a shot. What's goin' on here?"

"I've caught the murderer," the Phantom said. "It was Rufus Rutledge"

"Yeah?" The constable looked as if he thought the Phantom had suddenly

gone crazy. "Then where is he? I don't see nobody but Oberthaler, and it looks like you killed him."

THE Phantom did not take his eyes off Kearny, and kept his automatic ready.

"Rutledge has been masquerading as Otto Oberthaler for some time now," he said flatly.

"Why was Rutledge pretendin' he was Oberthaler?" demanded Kearny. "If he was doin' it."

"It's too long a story to tell you now," the Phantom said impatiently. "Obviously Oberthaler died some time ago. Rutledge was probably visiting here at the time, so Rufus buried the old man and took his place for reasons I'll get into later with Havens and Lieutenant Brady. Now I—"

He broke off abruptly. His ankles felt as if they had been caught in steel traps as Rutledge's strong hands gripped them and tightened. The sculptor gave a vicious tug and the Phantom fell flat on his face on the floor, though he did manage to protect himself to some extent by using his arms to break the fall.

He managed to pull his ankles free and rolled over. Rutledge scrambled across and grabbed up his nickel-plated gun. He whirled, aiming at the Phantom as Van leaped to his feet, his own automatic still in his hand.

The two shots merged almost into one, the sound reverberating through the domed room. Rutledge gave a cry of pain and staggered back, his shoulder bloody. He tried to bring his gun up again, but the Phantom shot the weapon out of his hand.

Van whirled, gun trained on the constable. Jim Kearny stood motionless in the doorway, his eyes wide and his mouth open.

"You—you got him all right," Kearny muttered dazedly. "Way he has been actin' there ain't no doubt he's the murderer. He had me fooled. I thought all the time he was Oberthaler."

Excited voices and the pounding of feet came from the other room. The door was flung open and Lieutenant Brady rushed in with gun drawn. Muriel, Frank Havens and Dr. Clay followed, behind four state troopers.

"It's all over," the Phantom said

quietly. "Rufus Rutledge is the killer. There he is disguised as Otto Oberthaler. I'm turning him over to you, Lieutenant Brady."

"What about Kearny?" Brady glared at the constable. "Was he working with the killer?"

"Not intentionally." The Phantom smiled and shook his head. "Kearny is just dumb."

"And this sure is one time when having somebody call me that is a relief," said Kearny. "I been more than that. I was just a dope."

Muriel looked at the Phantom, her eyes shining.

"When I waited so long at the window and didn't hear anything further from you to tell me it was all right, I went for help," she said. "But I might have known you would clear up everything without assistance."

Van smiled, and looked at Dr. Clay. The State Police officers had grabbed Rufus Rutledge and were leading him away.

"You found that the bones of the skeleton were two or three years old, of course, Doctor," said the Phantom. "That's why you took them to a lab in town, wasn't it? They were the real Oberthaler's bones, of course. I suspected that when I saw them taken out of the grave. If they hadn't been, there would have been no point in the murderer trying to destroy them with quicklime."

"You're right!" Dr. Clay looked at the Phantom in amazement. "And I've been acting like an idiot. I was sure you suspected me, so I was trying to solve the mystery myself."

"You probably haven't time to go into all details now, Phantom," said Havens. "Maybe you'll explain the whole thing to us later. But what made you certain the killer might be Rufus Rutledge?"

"I knew Rufus was alive," the Phantom said. "The clue of the golden saint gave him away. It was his luck piece and he had to get the golden image back. It accidentally fell into the hands of the watchman. You found it, Mr. Havens. You told Andrew about it, and Rufus was hiding in the house and overheard you. He waylaid you and got it back. He was afraid you'd call me in so he really intended to murder

you. Then when I arrived, he turned his attentions to me. He nearly got me, too, with that crane in the factory."

THEY left the observatory, and as Havens, Muriel and the Phantom rode back to the publisher's summer place in Havens' car after visiting the police station where Rufus Rutledge was being held on charges of murder, Van explained the whole matter to them.

"Rufus killed Moose, of course," said the Phantom. "And Andrew confessed in an effort to save his father, even though he thought he hated Rufus. Andrew knew he was in deep himself, and he committed suicide."

"Anything else?" asked Havens.

"Just one thing." The Phantom smiled. "Rufus Rutledge was a good sculptor—but not as authentic as he might have been. Did you ever see a statue of St. Anthony wearing a beard? I never did. Though there might be one."

"You're right!" exclaimed Havens. "I never did either!"

The trio lapsed into silence as the car sped on through the night. The Phantom's work was through here, and in the morning he would return to New York and once more become Richard Curtis Van Loan. But even now, somewhere, evil brains were plotting their nefarious deeds, and when they struck the Nemesis of crime would once more go into action.

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Harry was still ineffectually dousing the fire with water, still unaware he was merely spreading the flames farther about the small room

COOK'S FIGHT OUT

By RICHARD BRISTER

Wiley Johnson suddenly finds himself playing host to a pair of killers—and puts a surprise for them on the fire!

WILEY JOHNSON trudged through the snow, his hightop shoes setting up a bell-like tinkle on the crisp trail. His breath looked like steam in this frosty weather. His lean face was a fiery red.

Four months ago, back in the city, before he had thrown up his job, Wiley

had a jaundiced pallor and a complete lack of zest for living. His doctor had thrown up his hands in defeat.

"Beats me, Wiley," he had said. "You're eating and sleeping enough. Might be some allergy in the city air gets you. I don't know."

Wiley didn't know either. One thing

he did know was, that feeling as rotten as he did all the time, life in the city wasn't worth living. His job in the State Liquor Store permitted him a six months' furlough, and since he'd always had a yen for outdoor life, he had decided to spend that time trapping.

Now, as Wiley Johnson trudged back toward his cabin, his windbreaker pockets bulged with the morning's catch. There were six "rats," a weazel, three polecats; and slung over his shoulders, their hind legs tied together, a 'possum and a 'coon.

A bend in the trail brought his one-room cabin into view. A thin wisp of smoke cut skyward from the short chimney, and he quickened his steps, in his mind's eye already warming his hands over the pot-bellied stove.

He stomped his spiked feet free of the snow that clung persistently to them and pushed inside, blinking to adjust his eyes to the darkness. He leaned his rifle against the wall, flung the 'coon and the 'possum on the table, and was going to the stove when he first knew there was someone else inside the room.

"Okay," a froggy voice said. "Hold it right there, Danny."

Wiley spun on one heel and blinked toward the sound. His heart beat fast as his eyes slowly brought two crouched figures into focus, in the darkest corner of the room. One man was tall, painfully thin, and so round-shouldered he seemed actually hunch-backed. He had a long hook nose. He wore loud city clothes—what was left of them—after his trip through the woods to this cabin.

"My name's not Danny," Wiley said levelly. "I'm Wiley Johnson."

The tall man with the frog voice showed his teeth in a caricature of a smile.

"You don't say? We thought you were Daniel Boone, maybe."

The other man laughed. He was a Mr. Five-by-Five product, as short as his companion was tall, but his voice was a high hen's cackle.

"Maybe the young frontiersman can scare up some breakfast for us, Spud. I'm starving, drat it."

THE lean face of Wiley Johnson twitched with slow anger. For a pair of uninvited guests, these two did not hesitate to outline their wants. Invol-

untarily, his eyes drifted back toward the wall against which he had leaned his rifle.

Spud—the one with the lank, round shoulders and the frog voice—was watching shrewdly. His thin hand slid in and out of his frayed, coat pocket. Light from the one small window glinted off the pistol he pointed at Wiley.

"Frisk him, Harry."

Wiley Johnson started to splutter something as the fat man approached. The gun in Spud's hand jerked toward him, a silent menace. He subsided meekly as Harry's fat paws moved expertly up and down him.

"You won't find anything," he told the one called Harry. "That rifle's the only gun I own. I might as well save time all around and tell you."

Harry's fat face was close to him; his pop-eyes glinted.

"You don't know how right you are, kid. We got that Smith and Wesson out of the desk drawer already."

Wiley Johnson let his dismay crowd his face. He had hoped they had not found his pistol, but they probably would have sooner or later. They seemed pretty thorough, this Spud and Harry whoever-they-were. He wondered what they were running away from. It must be something pretty drastic, to send them on an all-night trek through the forest in zero weather. They had been dressed for the city. They were blue with cold and exposure, and hungry as two starving wolves. Also as proportionately ill-tempered.

Harry, the fat one, said in his querulous high voice:

"All right. Come on, kid. Get breakfast started."

Wiley Johnson shrugged. He pointed to the row of cans lined up on the shelves above his stove.

"What'll it be? Beans, or beans?"

Spud's face twisted with irritation. "Beans. An' while you're at it, cut off a couple chunks o' that bacon I seen over there for us." He turned to his stocky companion. "Somethin' tells me we're going to be sick o' beans, come January."

Harry's eyes drifted shrewdly toward the two carcasses Wiley had flung on the table.

"What's that gray thing, boy scout? 'Possum, ain't it?" he asked.

Wiley did not like to admit it. He had

half-hoped he could starve this pair out on a beans-and-more-beans diet, get them so disgusted they would be willing to look for another hideout. There was no doubt in his mind that they had pulled off some big job in the city. They would stick to his side like a barnacle on a ship's hull, all winter. He made a grimace of disgust at the prospect.

"It's a 'possum," Wiley admitted bleakly.

"They're good eatin'," Harry announced. "I read it somewhere."

Harry seemed to have a good head on him, Wiley thought glumly. Spud, the big thin one who had flashed a gun, was long on direct action, but short in the thinking department. Harry was going to be hard to handle.

Wiley said, playing it down, "Some people eat 'em. Colored folks, mostly. I wouldn't go so far as to say they're good eating."

Spud went over to the wall and picked up Wiley's rifle. He took out all the cartridges, extracted the magazine tube, and put that in his pocket. Then he turned to the table and looked down somewhat doubtfully at the dead carcasses with their staring eyes and bedraggled fur.

"You can have my share, Harry. I'll stick to the beans."

Harry's pop-eyes glinted and his high voice became cold and sarcastic.

"For a killer, you're getting plumb squeamish, Spud. We're going to be here one month at least. Two, maybe. It's a perfect hideout, and being bored to death is better than burning."

SLOWLY that dread word sank in. Burning? That meant the chair, didn't it? He would be spending the rest of the winter alone in this backwoods cabin with a couple of killers.

"You're not kidding when you say you'll be bored to death here, Mister," he said pointedly. "I don't mind eating beans all the time and not having any books or even a radio to keep me company. I came out here for my health. I spend all my time trapping, but it'll drive you fellows crazy in—"

Some transient glint in Harry's small eyes cut him short on the tag end of the sentence.

"Anybody'd think the kid didn't want us here, Spud," Harry said, and his lips

twitched in a hard line. "Get this, kid. We're playing for keeps. You play ball with us and you're going to be okay. But don't get smart. If you figure you can feed us punk grub and freeze us out of here, you're got another think coming."

"I'm only telling you what I have. You can see for yourself there's nothing but bacon and—"

"And beans. Also that 'possum, there. I happen to know they're pretty good eating. And the woods are full of small game, rabbits and pheasants. We'll do all right. Spud here's a pretty good shot."

"Rabbits!" Spud's lean figure straightened. "I ate rabbit once. It's a lot like chicken. Jus' give me a crack at one o' them babies."

He grabbed Wiley's gun and drew an experimental bead through the window.

"What about my trap line?" Wiley said weakly. "I'll have to look at my sets in the morning."

"Forget them."

"But . . . they'll starve to death in the traps . . . the animals I catch with my sets for tonight. It's . . . inhumane!"

"You're not stepping a foot out of this cabin for the rest of the winter," Harry announced flatly. "Get used to the idea."

Wiley was staggered. Spend two months cooped up in this single room, breathing smoky, stale air shared with two others. No exercise and a rotten diet. The fund of health he had built up since leaving the city would desert him in no time under such conditions. He was not a natural worrier and he had never brooded about his poor health until he had been forced to. Then he had taken the only sensible corrective measure he could think of.

"Listen, I was a sick man when I came out here, four months ago," he said desperately. "I'm okay now. But if I can't get out now and then, say just to chop wood or something of that sort, I'll go down again. I know it. I may not even live through the winter."

"Tsk, tsks." Harry was clucking in mock sympathy. "That's too bad, kid. That's a real shame." His eyes danced with quiet amusement. "What gave you the idea you were coming out of this thing alive in the first place?"

Wiley's mouth felt dry. "You mean—" he gulped.

"Did you think we were going to mosey out and leave you behind to help the cops track us down? Come out of it. You're a smart boy, Johnson. You can do better than that."

"If you're going to get rid of me," Wiley said slowly, "how come—"

"I was thinking the same thing," Harry mocked. "Why not do the job now, huh? Well, I figure you may be able to help us around here, for one thing. Living off the fat of the land isn't exactly our racket. And who knows, maybe Spud here won't be able to bring home the bacon, as a hunter. In that case, you an' I'll go out together. I'll keep you covered, don't worry. You won't pull anything swift with that rifle."

"Did you get that, Harry?" Spud said craftily. "Danny here says he was sick, an' come out here for his health. What if he was to just waste away, sort of, I mean, die natural?"

Harry turned an admiring glance on his tall companion. "Sometimes your mind does go into high gear, Spud. That's good. That's very good."

Spud beamed proudly.

"You—you wouldn't!" Wiley said angrily.

"On the contrary," said Harry. "We would."

HARRY elected to wash the dishes right after their large breakfast of bacon and beans. Spud then grabbed Wiley's rifle, charged out into the cold with the avowed purpose of coming back "loaded with rabbits."

"Luck," Harry told him fervently.

Wiley sat on his bunk and said nothing. He had not been invited to share the two "guests'" breakfast. When he

had grumbled about being hungry, Harry had flourished that pistol and shoved a couple of spoonfuls of his own beans toward him.

"Here. This'll do you."

"But that's not enough to keep a fly alive," Wiley Johnson protested.

Harry's eyes brushed him blandly. "You catch on fast, kiddo."

Spud's frog voice cackled. When Wiley had eaten his almost invisible portion, the tall man forced him to lie on the bunk at gunpoint, while Harry tied his hands and legs expertly.

He lay there in that cramped position fuming, his stomach gnawing with hunger. He did not know whether or not to add his well wishes to Spud on his hunting excursion. These men meant to kill him gradually, half-starve him and then let his own weak constitution complete the job for them. Even if Spud did bring back a rabbit, he would not likely eat any of it.

If Spud proved a flop as a hunter, what then? It would mean one of two things. Harry might decide they would eat beans and like them. In that case, Wiley would start starving to death in earnest, because he had put in only enough of the canned stuff for his own needs through the winter—not enough for two men. And Harry looked like a big eater.

Of course, there was a chance that Harry had meant what he had said about letting Wiley do the hunting for them, if Spud proved a flop as a hunter. Wiley thought that was his only chance to even temporarily avert the disaster that was closing in on him.

If the larder that kept them alive depended on *him*, they would have to feed

[Turn page]

Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

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

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(Adv.)

him and keep him going, wouldn't they? Sure. So Wiley Johnson took his cue from MacArthur's Bataan campaign and hoped that the hunting chores would fall on his own shoulders. Then he could at least fight a delaying action.

Harry had gone methodically about the task of washing the dishes. He glanced over at Wiley from time to time, making sure those knots still held firm. He was very cautious, this Harry, thought Wiley Johnson. You probably had to be cautious to stay alive, when you took up crime for a living.

The thin *spat spat* of a gun in the distance brought them both up sharply. Harry's round face was anxious, as his head cocked toward the sound.

Wiley could not suppress a thin smile. How strange it was, really, for so much to depend on the success or failure of those distant shots. He smiled again, because he knew at least one reason why Spud's excursion might prove fruitless. Harry shot a quick glance at him, and saw the smile vanish quickly from Wiley's face.

"What're you so pleased about, Johnson?" he said testily. "By God, if you're up to something—"

"What *could* I be up to?" Wiley countered quietly. "I'm tied hand and foot."

Harry took another tack. "How many cartridges have you got for that rifle? Oh, don't bother lying to me. I'll look for myself."

Harry went to the desk and counted the bullets in the paper container. "If Spud don't come back with somethin' to show for his trouble, you'll be doin' the hunting, boy scout. We can't waste bullets."

The gun barked again, nearer this time. Again. And a few minutes later the door opened and Spud stalked in—empty-handed.

"What's the matter?" Harry growled a greeting. "Four shots. And all of 'em misses? What were you aiming at anyhow, mosquitoes?"

"Rabbit and a squirrel," Spud admitted wryly. "I never said I was such a good shot with a rifle. Give me a tommy gun, every time. Them rabbits won't stand still for you. They keep hoppin' around and—"

"Forget it!" Harry grunted. "Hereafter the kid'll be doing the hunting." He turned. "And don't get any ideas,

either, Johnson. We'll both be going along, get it? You'll have two guns on your back, every minute."

Wiley nodded in silent agreement. His heart was pounding with exultation. He had won a reprieve. As hunter for the group, provider of the wherewithal to keep them alive through a wilderness winter, he was as safe from these men as from his own mother. He was their life insurance now. They would feed him, all right. They would do everything in their power to keep his gun arm in working condition.

He had won the opening hand in this game with Death as its stake. But the game had just started. Death still hovered over him, come Spring. He did not think it advisable to reveal to his captors the real reason why Spud had failed to hit anything with that rifle.

The sights on the rifle had been bent all out of kilter. To hit anything with it, you had to aim at least a foot high and to the right for each fifty feet from your target!

CONSIDERABLE debate followed about the preparation of the 'possum for dinner that night. Spud said boil it, Harry said broil it. From his confined position on the bunk, Wiley made a suggestion.

"Maybe you'd better skin it, before you worry about how to cook it."

Wiley had had all day to think, and a plan had grown with the passing hours, still not quite complete, but worth working on.

Harry grunted surly agreement and picked up a knife, attacking the carcass with an amateur's ineptitude. He made an awful botch of it before he said disgustedly:

"Untie Daniel Boone there, Spud. He can have the job."

A last hope was soaring in Wiley's chest as he stripped the pelt off the carcass with practiced speed. Harry watched interestedly.

"This baby's as fat as a pig," Wiley said matter-of-factly. "He was all fattened up for a winter of hibernation. Enough fat on him to panbroil him in his own grease, if you want to."

Harry was interested. "Same as french fried spuds, hey?"

"That's right."

"All right, hop to it, boy scout." He

waved the pistol, indicating that he would be watching every move that Wiley made.

Wiley cut off the legs and tail and cleaned the carcass. He sliced gobs of fat off the belly and legs and set them in a skillet atop the stove. It set up quite a smoke, but when the fat fried out, there was a solid inch of grease left in the skillet.

"Sloppy mess," Harry grunted. But when Wiley cut the meat into quarters and rolled it in flour he nodded approval. "You ain't so bad, boy scout."

"You haven't seen anything yet, big shot," Wiley thought, as he was setting the skillet to one side of the stove, tipped it sidewise, trying hard to make it appear accidental.

The grease burst into flame as it rolled down the side of the stove and along the floorboards.

Harry yelled with alarm. "Dog gone it, where's the water?" He shoved the pistol at Spud. "Here, keep an eye on the boy scout."

The fat man grabbed a bucket of water and threw it on the flames. Wiley tried to hold back a grin. The water, far from putting the flame out, just served to spread it. Smoke billowed and flamed up from the floor, suffusing the small room.

Wiley Johnson debated a moment, wondering whether now was the time to break for it. Caution held him away from the door. Spud would shoot him down in a minute. The smoke was blinding now. Tears came in his eyes; his throat burned. Harry was still ineffectually dousing the fire with water, still unaware he was merely spreading the flames farther about the small room.

Wiley got down low, his lids half closed against the smoke, and peered upward. On the other side of the room he could see the lank figure of Spud, with the gun clutched in his hand, seeking him out through the clouds of gray smoke. Spud made an impulsive bolt toward the door and swung it open. Harry's voice clipped at him and stopped him, from going further.

"Stand by the door and help with this fire. The boy scout can't get past you. If we lose this cabin we're sunk."

In one hand, Spud had a small broom, the gun in the other. He stood with his back in the doorway, beating at the

flames. Harry was swearing as he realized he had been working against his own ends.

"Blamed water just spreads it!"

Harry now ran to the bed and grabbed a double armful of Wiley's thick blankets. Wiley gulped. Harry was making sense now. He would beat the fire, at that rate, by smothering it.

WILEY looked longingly at the open door, with Spud's figure framed hazily in it. Harry was just smart enough to realize he had set this fire on purpose. They would make short work of him, once they controlled the flames that were destroying their hideout.

Wiley Johnson knew he had to get out of the cabin—now or never. But how?

When he saw he was still holding onto that skillet he cursed himself for six kinds of a fool. There was still a thick film of grease on the bottom of it. If he could only get it burning, then throw it at the others—When he got it burning he realized, he would make a perfect, highlighted target for Spud, who right now was only waiting to see him in order to send a stream of slugs at him. He had to deflect Spud's attention, somehow.

Wiley crawled cautiously across the floor to the small cabinet where he kept his first aid equipment. There was a fifth of bottled-in-bond rye whiskey in there, his only souvenir from his long hours of clerking in the State Liquor Store. He grabbed the bottle by the butt-end and knocked the neck off it against the wall. He threw it hard on the floor where the flames were biting fiercest.

The crash alone was enough to bring a startled yelp from both Spud and Harry. As the alcohol in the liquor ignited, a new spurt of hot flame drove toward the ceiling. It was then that Wiley scooped up burning grease and embers into his skillet. The grease that was still contained in it caught fire at once. He flung the blazing mass at Spud.

The long-legged man let out a bellow of pain. Flaming grease burned on his clothes, his hands, his face. He dropped the broom and the gun in one motion and beat at the flames with his arms and bare hands, screaming in terror.

Harry caught the contagion of panic now, and ran over to help Spud. He thought Spud had simply caught fire.

He didn't know it was burning grease Spud was fighting. He beat at the flames with both of his own hands too, and then he was adding his terrified screams to the confusion.

Wiley Johnson ran past them both and breathed in deep draughts of the cool, fresh air outside. Spud and Harry came storming out after him. He took off his coat and wrapped it around the flames that licked at the two intruders. When he was done, their hands were hopelessly blistered. They were moaning, cursing with pain and hot rage at the way he had tricked them.

Harry made a feeble attempt to get a gun out of his shoulder holster. The pain was too much for his blistered fingers. His hands drew back quickly.

Wiley went over and calmly took the gun from him.

"I'll be running this party from here on in," he announced. He waved the gun at them. "All right, start walking."

"Huh?" Harry gasped.

"You'd better play nice." Wiley jerked his head toward the cabin. "That thing's finished. We may be able to make Main-

ville by morning. If you two want to stay here and freeze to death, that suits me. I'm walking."

He started down the trail, moving backward, watching them. Harry stumbled after him, almost blubbering.

"We're coming," he said.

AMAZED policemen could not get over it. No matter how often Wiley explained the set-up to them. Brucker, the big beefy-faced deputy said:

"Gee whiz—Spud Muley and Harry Lander, single-handed. They're up for murder an' kidnagin' both. You'll rate more'n a grand reward money, kid. They'll burn again, if they live through that burnin' you give 'em. I still don't see—"

"You boys ought to work in a liquor store," Wiley Johnson grinned. "I used to, an' that's the only reason I'm here to tell about it."

"Huh?"

"Where else would I learn that hundred-proof liquor'll burn? And that all bottled-in-bond stuff has to be at least a hundred proof, if not higher?"

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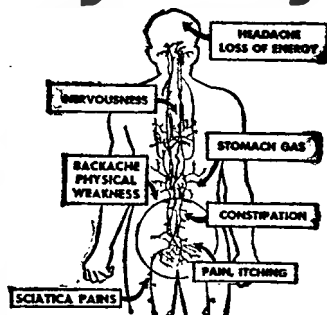
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(Adv.)

Weather for Crooks

By FRANK JOHNSON

Detective John Lake trails an elusive theater bandit!

DETECTIVE - SERGEANT JOHN LAKE was annoyed with the world in general, and with the weather in particular. It had been raining all day and, as he steered his sedan through uptown traffic, he felt like a rat drowning in a goldfish bowl. With that leak in the top, just inside the windshield, his car hardly could be called waterproof.

"Everything happens to me," he mourned disgustedly. "First I lose my ration book, then I get bawled out for not bringing in that movie theater stick-up—and now this blasted car is leaking again!"

Lake glared at the water running down on the inside of the windshield, making a damp paste of the Federal Stamp and the A and C stickers. Rain also was sloshing over the floorboards, making his feet feel like damp paste. The windshield wiper was working on the outside all right, but it didn't mop up any wet on the inside.

Dejectedly Lake pulled up to the curb and stopped. He got a dry rag out of a side pocket and wiped off the inside of the windshield so that he could at least see through it. But it would be only a little while until it was steamed up again, because of that leak.

"Maybe I'd be better off walking," he thought sourly. "But that Grand Theater I want now is a couple of miles from here. Got to get there—maybe I can get a line on that stick-up guy from the management. The lug ought to be fresh in their minds—sticking them up only yesterday afternoon." Lake smiled grimly. "Yeah, and I've got a hunch that

Lawton guy who's assistant manager there might tell me something. That guy sure gets around."

Precinct detectives all over town were working on the robberies that had occurred in their territories, but Lake, of the Headquarters Detective Bureau, had also been placed on duty. Special duty. Peremptorily ordered to investigate—and to bring in the robber.

From the descriptions given by box-office girls in the five theaters, the same man had staged all the holdups—working alone. All of them said he was tall and thin and had a scar on his cheek, but that was all they could say, except that he had worn ordinary clothing, and a soft hat. A description that would fit too many men walking the streets.

His method had been the same each time. He had waited until business was slack, and no one was in the outer lobby except the box-office girl. Then he had stepped up to the window, thrust a gun into the girl's face and demanded the cash she had on hand. When the frightened girl had obeyed and handed him the cash

he had grabbed it and disappeared.

Two girls had screamed for help, but before anyone could reach them the robber had made his escape.

IN ALL, he had managed to collect about five thousand dollars—all from theaters in the same chain. Lake had found that interesting. He had asked the girls if they had noticed anyone hanging around before the holdups, but the only person any of them remembered seeing was Ralph Lawton, assist-



"Drive uptown," Sergeant,
ordered the man with the gun

ant manager of the Grand. That meant nothing. He often dropped in at the various theaters of the chain. Everybody was used to seeing him around.

Leaky car or not, Lake finally managed to reach the Grand Theater, uptown, and parked his car at the curb. He climbed out—a big, heavy-set man with an aggressive jaw and cold blue eyes. Rain was still pouring down when he entered the lobby. He asked the box-office girl a few questions, then asked to talk to the manager.

"Mr. Brown is on vacation," the girl told him. "Mr. Lawton, his assistant, is in charge." She picked up the house phone and spoke to Lawton. "All right, Sergeant," she said. "Go right in to Mr. Lawton's office. The door inside marked 'Manager.'"

Lake thanked her and strode past the ticket taker with a nod. He had fully meant to have a talk with Lawton, but had not wanted to make it too obvious. He was pleased at the way it had been handled when he knocked on the manager's door. It opened and a tall, smooth-shaven man stood there.

"Miss Marshall said you were from Police Headquarters—wanted to see me," he said. "I'm Ralph Lawton."

Lake nodded. "Detective-sergeant John Lake, from Headquarters," he said. "I'm trying to get some kind of a line on that lone stick-up who has been playing hob with movie theaters. Thought maybe you might help me, Mr. Lawton."

"Glad to do all I can," said the tall man, as he led the way into the office and shut the door. "Of course, the police have already questioned us all here. Did it yesterday, right after we were robbed. But perhaps you can think of some questions to ask they have overlooked."

"Hope so." Lake glanced at his damp clothing and smiled ruefully. "Sure is mean weather out. . . . What did the robber look like?"

"I didn't see him," said Lawton. "But Miss Marshall said he was about as tall as I am, and had a yellowish complexion. He had a scar on his left cheek that looked purple. His eyebrows were quite bushy. I . . . Pardon me."

Lawton picked up the phone on his desk as it rang. He listened a moment, then answered.

"All right. I'll be there right away."

He hung up and glanced at Lake apologetically. "Some trouble in the projection room," he said. "Would you mind waiting here a few minutes, Sergeant?"

"Go right ahead," said Lake.

Almost as soon as the assistant manager closed the door behind him, Lake got busy. He stood up, glancing sharply around, and decided the desk offered the best possibility. Hastily he drew open a drawer at random—the top right drawer. And struck pay dirt.

A typewritten letter lay on top of a small, square tin box in the drawer. It was from the head of the theater chain, informing Lawton that beginning the first of the month his services would no longer be required.

"Umm," muttered Lake, as he pushed the letter aside and opened the tin box. "Umm," he muttered again, as he saw it was a theatrical make-up box. It's message was plain for Detective-sergeant Lake.

He was closing the box when he saw a bit of paper beneath it. He pulled it out and glanced at it. It was a curt typewritten note that read:

Lawton:

Have ten thousand in cash ready by the 10th or we'll make it tough for you. Holding your I.O.U.s—and remember, you have been playing for marbles.

J. S.

THE drawer was closed and the sergeant was casually waiting, smoking a cigar, and in a chair some distance from the desk, when the door opened. One of the ushers appeared.

"Sergeant Lake?" he asked, and when Lake nodded, "Mr. Lawton asked me to tell you he's been suddenly called away on important business. He's sorry, and says won't you come back to see him tonight?"

"All right," Lake said, disinterestedly, as he got up and followed the boy to the door. "Thanks."

He glanced back over his shoulder—and frowned as he saw that the door leading into an inner office was open just a crack. He called himself a few harsh names. He hadn't paid any attention to that door before.

When he left the theater it was still raining hard, and growing dark, for it was late afternoon. Lake climbed into the sedan, disgruntled. But one thing—the water still sliding down the windshield had washed it clean.

Lake drove away, and had just turned into a side street, for speed where there was no traffic, when abruptly a man bobbed up from the floor of the tonneau and a gun was leveled steadily at the sergeant's head.

"Some detective, uh?" growled a voice he recognized—the voice of Ralph Lawton. "So am I. That's why I was watching you from the inner office when you got so busy with my personal property. Going through my desk."

"I guess I've got that coming," Lake said quietly. "Being dumb enough not to notice that door until I was leaving. But you gave yourself away to me right from the start, Lawton. I'd talked to Miss Marshall. Her description of the

make-up, and hang around where everybody knew you and didn't pay much attention to you. Who would suspect you?"

"Keep driving, Sergeant," was Lawton's only answer.

Lake drove on silently. He was in a tight spot and realized it. A man like Lawton might not be a killer under ordinary circumstances, but now . . . Well, the guy already was in so deep he might kill if he thought it would do him any good.

The rain on both sides of the windshield made it harder and harder to see, now that it was growing dark. Lake wondered whether it would make any difference, anyway, if he never reached

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robber wasn't half as detailed as the one you gave me. Because—you were describing *yourself* made up for your rôle of stick-up man!"

"Too bad—for you—you learned so much, Sergeant," Lawton said coldly. "I'll have to put you out of the way now, to keep your mouth shut." He prodded harder with the gun. "Drive out of town!" he ordered grimly. "And don't try any tricks, or I'll give it to you—now!"

"When a man gets tangled up with gamblers who are holding his I.O.U.s, and he's fired from his job, he's pretty desperate," Lake remarked coolly, almost conversationally, as he casually drove out of the side street into Broadway. "But you got a smart idea about the holdups, Lawton. All you had to do was grab the cash, wipe off your

his unknown destination, but cracked up somewhere instead. He might at least have a chance then. Now he seemed to have none.

At an intersection a traffic officer took a good, hard look at the front of the car. Instantly he blew his whistle, motioning Lake over to the curb.

"What's this?" demanded Lawton tensely. "Did you signal him some way, Sergeant?"

"No," said Lake, and a tone of truth was in his voice. "I don't know what he wants."

"Then stall him!" ordered Lawton, between clenched teeth. "And don't forget I've got you covered—even if the gun is in my pocket!"

As the car came to a stop at the curb, the traffic policeman barged up angrily.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded hotly. "Where's your A sticker and your Federal stamp that should be on your windshield?"

For the first time Lake became aware that the A and C stickers and the Federal stamp had been washed off the glass. He glanced down quickly, saw them on the floor. And an idea came to his mind, full-blown. Hastily he planted one big foot on the stickers. That foot could have hidden a dozen such.

"They must have been washed off by the rain," he told the traffic officer nervously. He was thanking his lucky stars this man didn't know him.

"Yeah?" sneered the officer. "But them stickers are supposed to be pasted *inside* your windshield. You dope enough to stick 'em outside? Let's see your gas ration book. Come on!"

"I—I lost it," stammered Lake. "No—wait! Maybe it's in the pocket of the door. Just a second. I'll look.

Under the watchful eye of the firm-minded traffic officer, he fumbled in the side pocket for an instant. His hand came out—and in it was a gun whose black muzzle pointed directly at Ralph Lawton's heart.

"I'm Lake from Headquarters, Officer!" he yelled. "Dig in my pocket—

find my badge! This punk is the movie holdup we've been looking for. There's a gun in his pocket! He was forcing me to drive for my own 'ride'!"

The traffic officer let out a long breath, glowering at Lawton.

"Like that, huh? Maybe it was lucky them stickers did get washed off this windshield. Wouldn't have stopped you, Lake, if I hadn't seen that."

"That looked like my only out, with a rod in my back," Lake said grimly. "Waiting for some cop to get an eyeful, and stop me. I'd have been willing to drive this lug to Hades and back for that."

The cowed Lawton was quickly disarmed, and handcuffs snapped on his wrists. A patrol car drove up and stopped.

"Who says cops ain't psychic?" Lake said, grinning. "Right on the button."

One of the officers in the car climbed in the sedan to guard Lawton while they drove to the nearest police station.

"Nasty weather," commented the prowl-car officer as the sedan moved on.

"Oh, not so bad." Detective-sergeant Lake squinted at the water on the inside of the windshield and grinned broadly. "Not bad at all. Swell weather for catching crooks."

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(Adv.)



The boy's yelp of pain sounded above the blast of Benny's automatic

Journey to Doom

By H. WOLFF SALZ

Benny Brazil figured out a perfect plan for freedom!

FOR the first time in his life Benny Brazil was afraid. Not just worried or apprehensive, as he had often been when plans jammed. Now, he was shaken by a cold panic that numbed his heart and the entire length of his thin, loose-limbed body.

Benny Brazil had served time before, for petty purse-snatching, shop-lifting and once for a service station stick-up. But now he wasn't fleeing from a minor

stretch of a year or two in the pen. It was the chair waiting for him if he was caught. The hot seat!

For the first time in his life, the hot seat was a real thing to him. A thing that loomed more terrifying in his mind with every yard of ground he covered through the dense, tangled, almost impassable wooded hillsides.

He had killed a man, shot him down in cold blood. A harrowing vision of

the bank teller lying on the floor in a growing pool of blood, sent a deep shudder of fear through Benny's body. He could hear his heart pound against his ribs.

And as he crawled over a wooded, stony ridge, he cursed bitterly. Not himself, but the fool bank teller who had valued the bank's money more than his life.

The hold-up of the Bloomington bank had been "Oklahoma" Zarra's idea. All the plans had been Zarra's. He had taken Benny Brazil as a partner because Benny knew this part of the state like a native. Oklahoma Zarra was a big-time heist man and Benny had been flattered to work with him.

Now, Zarra was dead, shot by the reckless bank teller and Benny Brazil was trapped in the middle of the huge cordon that had been thrown around the county by the state troopers and the sheriff's men.

Zarra's sedan had been more of a hindrance than help, with every cop and citizen in the county on the lookout for it. So Benny had ditched the car and taken to the hills. He knew that his only hope of escape lay in getting out of the county. If he remained in the hills, the net would be drawn tighter and tighter around him.

In a couple of hours—in a day at best, they'd corner him. Then the chair, if they didn't lynch him first.

COLD beads of sweat rolled down his drawn, haggard face. The shirt under his begrimed, thorn-tattered jacket was drenched. Hunger gnawed at his stomach, too sharp to be blunted even by fear.

How long since he had eaten? A week? No, it was only two days since the stick-up, but it seemed like a lifetime of terrified running and dodging through the woods like a hunted fox.

Benny reached the crest of the hill and suddenly hurled himself forward flat on his stomach, panting. His right hand, scratched and bruised by bare October shrubs and twigs, tightened around the butt of his automatic.

His tired black eyes brightened in sudden hope as he stared at the gleaming lights of a frame building at the foot of the hill.

Even in the pitch darkness of the

moonless countryside he recognized the building. It was the Crossroads general store where he and Zarra had stopped yesterday for an early morning sandwich on their way to Bloomington.

And the thin, dark ribbon of pavement that ran past the store was the highway to the Tecumseh bridge, the bridge he had to cross to get out of the county and then to freedom.

Benny hesitated. His hands trembled. There was food in the store, and in the shadows beyond the store he could make out the shape of a car. Food and a car! Freedom!

But what if state troopers were inside, or the sheriff? No, there was only one car and that would be the storekeeper's.

He clamped his jaw in desperate determination, edged forward. Inch by inch, silently, he crept down the hillside. He reached the side of the frame building, slipped forward through the protective shadows to the bright yellow patch of a lighted window.

Again panic gripped him. He wanted to turn and plunge back into the comparative safety of the wooded hills. Grimly, he fought the wild panic down.

Tense, his breath frozen, he leaned upwards and peered into the brightly-lighted interior. His breath whistled through his teeth in sudden exultant relief.

There were only two people in the general store, a man of about forty and a pimply-faced boy of seventeen. The same pair who had been in the store yesterday morning. The storekeeper and his helper.

They were sitting on a couple of up-ended soapboxes in front of the counter, a checkerboard balanced between them on their knees.

Benny Brazil's shoulders were squared now and there was a confident gleam in his eyes as he pushed into the store. For the first time in two days he felt a glow of assurance. He knew he could handle this hick storekeeper and the kid without trouble.

The boy's eyes bulged as he looked up into the muzzle of Benny's automatic. He gasped and shrank backwards. The checkerboard dropped to the floor, red and black checkers scattering in all directions.

The storekeeper, back to Benny, ex-

claimed, "What in the world, Abner—!"

Then he saw the boy's white face and turned slowly to stare in growing recognition at Benny and his automatic.

The storekeeper's mouth hinged open. "You—you're the bank robber that got away!"

Benny didn't answer. His black eyes darted around nervously, reassured him they were alone. Without interest, his eyes passed over the general merchandise on the shelves and tables on the left—hardware, tools, tin pails, bolts of cheap cloth—and lingered hungrily on the food in the glass-fronted refrigerator box on the right.

Benny gestured to the boy with his automatic. "You, Abner! Fix me up a couple of sandwiches! Snap into it and no funny plays or I'll blast you down!"

"Yes, sir!" Abner nodded quickly, his face pale.

Benny watched narrowly as the boy went behind the counter. At the same time he kept a sharp eye on the tight-lipped storekeeper.

This was a cinch, Benny thought. At last he was getting a break. First, a quick feed. Then the storekeeper and the kid would help him escape out of the county.

The storekeeper opened his mouth. His voice was dry as he spoke, his words seemed to stick in his throat.

"What are you going to do? You can't get away. They got all the roads covered."

"I'm not asking you!" Benny snapped. The storekeeper was staring into his face in a peculiar, wide-eyed way, as if he were trying to read into Benny's mind. "You just keep your yap shut and you'll be okay."

"Put plenty of meat between the bread, Abner!" Benny called to the youth behind the counter. "And snap into it! We got a long way to go tonight!"

ABNER nodded, turned to the shelf behind him. Suddenly he whirled around. There was a long-barreled revolver in his hand.

Benny snarled a startled, enraged curse, shot before the youth had completed his pivot. The boy's yelp of pain sounded above the blast of Benny's automatic. The revolver clattered to the

(Continued on page 87)

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Let's Keep Our Eyes on the Ball

By HARRY L. "BING" CROSBY

I WAS cutting up a few touches the other day with a couple of pretty well-informed citizens. One of them coached many a championship football team out here on the coast and was at Guadalcanal when it was still considered way uptown. The other had just got back from Sicily. They agreed on one thing . . . and when you get a Marine to agree with a Soldier, the issue figures to be basic.

They agreed we've still got plenty of war to win. The headlines look good. But all military men know we've only started to get going.

We're not winning yet. We've just

stopped losing. The ball's still on the fifty-yard line . . . but we've got it.

The former football coach said that many a ball game's been lost in the last five minutes by a team that started breakin' training before the whistle blew. The Army man said that he'd heard all kinds of loose talk cloggin' our ears now to make us let down on training, on work, and in morale—vicious talk, stacked to give the enemy a slight edge here and there. That's all they need to gum the works.

But they can't get it—IF we keep our eyes on that ball and don't start to cut for the shower till the final gun.

JOURNEY TO DOOM

(Continued from page 85)

floor. Abner's frightened eyes stared at his bloody right hand.

"Next time," Benny warned through tightened lips, "I won't be aiming for your mitt!"

The storekeeper started toward the youth.

"Stand where you are!" Benny snapped.

The storekeeper's back was to Benny. He continued toward the youth as if he hadn't heard Benny's warning.

Cursing, Benny leaped forward, hooked his left fist on the storekeeper's shoulder and jerked him around.

"I said stand where you are!"

Benny was worried now. He didn't want to kill the storekeeper—not yet. He needed the storekeeper's help if he was to escape out of the county.

The storekeeper's face was pale, his lips set in a grim line. His eyes were hot with anger, but he obeyed Benny's command to step away from the injured youth.

Benny slipped behind the counter, scooped up the revolver and dropped it into his pocket. On the shelf at his side he noted several boxes of gauze and bottles of iodine.

He tossed a box of gauze to the storekeeper. "Tie up the kid's wrist!" he snapped. "I don't want him bleeding to death—yet!"

He didn't add that it suited his plan to have the youth's arm bandaged. He would have bandaged it anyway, even if he hadn't shot the dumb kid.

Hungrily, Benny wolfed down the sandwiches Abner had prepared, devouring chunks without chewing. At the same time his eyes watched warily while the storekeeper bandaged Abner's wrist.

A grim smile twisted his lips as he listened to the storekeeper rebuking the youth.

"You shouldn't have done that, Abner. He might have killed you!"

"He will anyhow, Jed! He's going to kill us anyhow!" Abner glared at Benny over the storekeeper's shoulder.

"No, no." The storekeeper shook his head. "He wouldn't do that—not if we don't try to stop him."

Suddenly Benny's head jerked up, his

[Turn page]



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body tensing. His left hand froze in mid-air with the undevoured part of a sandwich.

Close to his side the shrill ringing of the wall telephone had split the silence. Benny remained motionless, uncertain. He saw Abner's eyes gleam with sudden hope as he stared past the storekeeper's shoulder toward the phone.

The storekeeper seemed too engrossed in bandaging Abner's arm to look up. He paid no attention to the ringing phone, continued to wrap gauze around Abner's wrist.

Abner looked uncertainly at Benny, muttered, "I better answer that phone. If I don't answer, they'll get suspicious."

Benny's eyes narrowed. The kid was too eager to get to the phone.

He snapped, "You stay where you are, Abner! You're a smart punk. And too dumb to keep your trap shut. I'll handle this myself!"

He took two swift steps toward the wall phone, stuffed a hunk of sandwich into his mouth. With his mouth full of food, his voice should sound enough like the storekeeper's thick, awkward drawl to fool anybody over the phone.

"Abner?" the voice on the phone called. "This is Sheriff Cannon."

"This ain't Abner," Benny muttered through the food in his mouth. "This is Jed."

It was a good thing, Benny complimented himself, that he had heard the youth call the storekeeper by name.

"What is it, Sheriff?" he asked.

There was no answer, and for a moment Benny was gripped by fear that his voice hadn't fooled the sheriff.

Then the voice on the other end said, "Jed, you and Abner better be on the lookout for that bank robber. We got an idea he's beating his way through the hills toward the river, so he might be near your store. But don't try to stop him. He's a killer. If you see anyone that looks suspicious, just let him go, but phone me right quick. He won't get away. We got all the roads covered."

"We'll be on the lookout, Sheriff," Benny murmured, keeping his voice low. "But we won't be here at the store. Abner got hurt cleaning the revolver, so I'm driving him over to the Phillips Hospital."

"Abner hurt! Bad?" the sheriff asked anxiously.

"No, just a scratch in his wrist, but it

better be looked after," Benny muttered through the food in his mouth. He hung up, smiled exultantly.

He knew his voice had fooled the sheriff. Now, the sheriff's men would be expecting to see the storekeeper driving over the bridge on his way to the hospital. They wouldn't stop him.

IT WAS a good thing, Benny said to himself, that he knew this part of the state so well. Phillips Hospital was the only one within twenty miles of here. It would be natural to take an injured person there. And it was well beyond the county line. Once through the cordon of cops surrounding the county, escape would be easy.

Benny smiled at the storekeeper and the youth. They were staring at him in a peculiar, bright-eyed way.

"Smart, wasn't it!" Benny exclaimed. "Telling the sheriff you're taking the kid to the hospital! I'll be out of the county in an hour—with your help!"

"Everybody knows me," the storekeeper nodded. "They won't stop me if I drive over the bridge."

"Don't do it, Jed!" the youth cried suddenly. "He'll kill us after we get him out of the county! He'll have to kill us so we can't tell the sheriff he got across the river!"

[Turn page]

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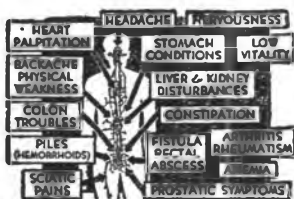
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"You'll do it," Benny nodded confidently at the storekeeper. "You don't want to get knocked off right here."

The storekeeper sat behind the driver's wheel of his battered sedan, Abner beside him in the front seat. Benny knelt on the floor behind them, his automatic jammed against the back of Jed's skull.

"Remember," Benny muttered through clenched teeth, "if they stop you at the bridge, you're taking Abner to the hospital. And you're in a hurry so you can't stop to answer questions! Get it?"

The storekeeper's eyes were glued to the road ahead. He didn't answer, but Benny knew he wouldn't try to tip the cops off, not with the .38 automatic trained on the nape of his neck.

But the kid, Abner, he was too dumb to know what was good for him. He might try something.

Benny jammed the muzzle of his automatic against Abner's neck.

"Remember, kid, one wrong word out of you and I'll blast your fool head off! I'm playing for keeps, remember that!"

Abner nodded silently.

The road wound downward in a steep grade. The looming shadows of wooded hills flashed by on either side. Benny knew it was less than a ten-minute drive to the bridge.

Benny's chest rose and fell rapidly in rhythm with the thump of the car tires over the pavement dividing lines.

The sedan rounded a sharp curve. And there, two hundred yards ahead was the bridge, a vague shadow in the darkness.

Suddenly a car pulled out of a side road a hundred yards up the highway,



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stopped. In the streak of headlights from the storekeeper's sedan, Benny could make out the figures of two men as they leaped out of their car and ran to the middle of the road, waving their arms.

Benny's breath caught in his throat. His heart thumped.

He crouched low on the floor, jabbed the automatic into the nape of the storekeeper's neck.

"Remember," he whispered hoarsely, "one wrong peep out of either of you mugs and you get it first!"

The sedan jerked to a stop. Benny crouched low, out of sight. He heard footsteps, then a voice at the storekeeper's side.

"Oh, it's you, Jed! And Abner!"

"Hello, Sheriff Cannon." It was Abner's voice.

Benny held his breath. His fingers tightened around his automatic.

"On the way to the hospital, are you, Jed?" Benny recognized the sheriff's voice. "Abner, don't you know better than to clean a loaded gun?"

"Reckon I do. Sheriff," Abner's voice said. "But I—I guess I didn't know it was loaded."

"Well, we won't keep you," the sheriff

[Turn page]

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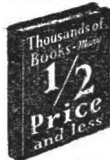
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said. "Hurry on to the hospital and get that arm taken care of."

Benny heard the car grind into gear. He had to choke off the deep sigh of exultant relief that surged up in his throat. The car was starting to move. In a minute they'd be over the bridge. In a few minutes, he would be out of the trap thrown around the whole county by the sheriff and the state troopers.

THE thing happened so suddenly that Benny was startled into a second of paralyzed inaction. Both rear doors of the sedan were jerked open in the same split second.

The burly forms lunged upon Benny, one at his head, the other at his feet. Benny gasped, cursed, and jerked his automatic upward. A fist smashed into his gun wrist, numbed his fingers. The automatic flew out of his grasp.

Fists hammered into his face and stomach. He flayed wildly at the surging figures. Arms like steel bands folded around him, pinned him down to the floor. Benny writhed, twisted. Then he relaxed, sobbing. He knew it was all over for him.

When he stood on the highway a minute later, his wrists manacled, a burly deputy on either side of him, he glared wrathfully at the storekeeper, still sitting silently behind the wheel of his sedan.

"You dirty dog!" he gasped. "You tipped the sheriff off some way that I was hiding in the back!"

Sheriff Cannon shook Benny roughly. "Never mind the cussing! Jed can't hear you anyhow! And besides, you're the one that tipped me off!"

"I tipped you off! How? When?" Benny's eyes reflected his bewilderment. The sheriff grinned.

"When you answered Jed's phone and

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acted like you were Jed. I knew it wasn't Jed talking. And when you wanted me to think Jed was driving Abner to the Phillips Hospital, which is outside the cordon we threw around the county to trap you, I could add a couple and one together and get the answer as to who I talked to on the phone!"

Benny's voice was dry. He shook his head in disbelief.

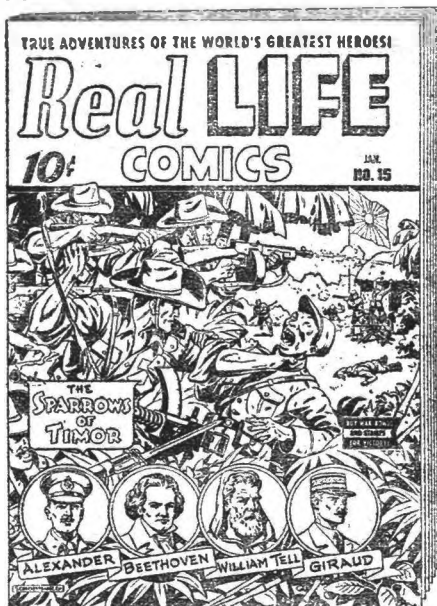
"My voice was just like Jed's on the telephone. You couldn't have known it wasn't Jed talking!"

"Sure, I could," the sheriff snapped. "Because Jed can't talk on the telephone! Jed is deaf!"

"Deaf!" Benny laughed hoarsely. "Why, he's been talking to me all evening!"

"Sure," the sheriff nodded. "Where there's plenty of light, he can talk. Jed's been deaf for over ten years, but he can talk with people by reading their lips. But to do that, they've got to be in a lighted place so he can see their lips. That's why he doesn't know what we're talking about right now, because we're in the dark. And that," added the sheriff, "is why I knew it wasn't Jed I was talking to when I called the store. Because Jed can't read lips over the telephone!"

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THE PHANTOM SPEAKS

(Continued from page 11)

them. We're sorry not all our short stories please you. Glad you like the other things about the magazine. The discussion of my special devices is something I frown upon. After all, if all my secret equipment is revealed, it would handicap later criminal investigation.

Baltimore, Maryland, is the home of our next correspondent.

Dear Phantom:

Inclosed you will find a coupon, title strip, stamped, self-addressed envelope, and 10¢ in stamps for application to become a member of FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM. Please send me a membership card and the Phantom emblem.

I have been reading the PHANTOM DETECTIVE MAGAZINE for a little over a year, and like the stories very much—both the novel and the short stories. In fact, I like it so much that is why I have decided to join FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM.

It seems when I get started on one of the Phantom's adventures, I never stop until I reach the end.

Please keep up the good stories.

Charles E. Van Dyke.

2332 Calverton Heights Ave.,
Baltimore, Maryland.

Thanks for your nice comments, Mr. Van Dyke. Here's hoping you enjoy a good many more of our stories. Now, let us go out on the West Coast and see what one of the boys in the Golden State has to say.

Dear Phantom:

I have just finished "The Black Market Murders," and it is a swell story. But every Phantom story is a good one. If every nine out of ten men were as good Americans as Van, crime couldn't exist long.

I am sending for a Phantom badge. Thanking you in advance, I am,

Othell E. Nichols.

Rt. 2, Corona, Calif.,
c/o Pepper Corner.

You're right about the "good American" characteristics of any law-abiding citizen, Mr. Nichols. Somehow we don't always think of this angle, even though we should. John Madden from down Illinois way is our next letter-writer.

Dear Phantom:

It gives me great pleasure to read your books. I am reading "The Black Market Murders" where the fellow puts the cork and a note in the meat and Fletcher got it. It was lucky they did not get you. I felt sorry for Steve Huston when they kicked him and beat him but you certainly got even with them, and how you got into Senator Regan's house—that was well done. You caught the rats there but it was too bad they got away at the police station. It was lucky for Steve that he did not get the electric chair.

I will always read THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE. We have no crimes in Evanston, but I am next to Chicago.

John J. Madden.

812 Main St., Evanston, Ill.

Here is a brief and to-the-point comment from New York:

Dear Phantom:

I am interested in criminology and follow the Phantom's adventures each month.

If you have other things of the Phantom pertaining to criminology and its like, please notify me.

Lou Bachrock.

34 Hillside Ave., New York, N. Y.

Thanks for your note, Lou. You will find many interesting things connected with crim-

inology in any one of the public libraries near your home. Have you checked there?

Moving down into the Gulf States we find a note from Gene Wilson:

Dear Phantom:

I am sending for the Phantom Detective badge. I have just finished reading "The Black Market Murders," and the Phantom sure did a good job. I have been reading THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE for almost two years and like it better than any other detective magazine I have read.

Gene Wilson.

Route F, Evergreen, Ala.

Our next jump into the mail bag takes us down along the banks of the Mississippi.

Dear Phantom:

I have just completed the novel, "The Black Market Murders," which in my opinion is one of the best novels Mr. Wallace has ever written. It should make every American realize the danger he faces by patronizing Black Markets.

I have been reading your magazine for nearly four years, and I enjoy it more than any other detective fiction magazine. Your short stories are super. Lets have more of them.

I have only one complaint. That is, that THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE isn't issued more often.

I read your companion magazines that I have listed—THRILLING DETECTIVE, POPULAR DETECTIVE, G-MEN DETECTIVE, BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, RAF ACES, AIR WAR, ARMY NAVY FLYING STORIES and SKY FIGHTERS. I also read DETECTIVE NOVELS MAGAZINE.

In my opinion, Thrilling Publications are the best. Here's luck to the Phantom and his aides and congratulations and thanks to Mr. Wallace on his stories.

Buddy Lasater.

131 Cherry St., Lebanon, Tennessee.

You are to be congratulated for your interest in the detective story field, Buddy!

The whaling city comes up with a correspondent who's interested in Phantom novels, and we're glad to have his letter.

Dear Phantom:

I wish to join FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM.

Really, Mr. Wallace, your descriptive and interesting [Turn page]

THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE



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writings hold my interest throughout every novel of the Phantom. I'm a consistent reader and have been for the past three years.

Keep them coming.

J. Charlton Sylvia.

830 County St., New Bedford, Mass.

The distaff side has another representative in the mail bag from out Pacific way.

Dear Phantom:

Have been reading THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE and companion magazines for some time and call them swell publications, if you ask me. Mystery and detective stories are my favorites in reading, but yours take the lead. I would like to have my name enrolled in membership in the FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM, as I'm so interested in your kind of stories. I am also sending for the Phantom emblem.

And truly, I want to say right here, that if you have the good luck and prosperity that I am wishing for you some day you may write checks in the Viginillions, and won't you be proud?

Mrs. Lucy B. Dean,

Bunny Acres, Route A,
Santa Maria, Calif.

Those checks in the viginillions would be all right, but think of the income tax I'd have to pay. Morgenthau could stop worrying. Our last letter for this month is one from a young fellow up near Boston.

Dear Phantom:

Enclosed you will find a self-addressed stamped envelope for my membership card. Also you will find enclosed the name-strip and 10¢ in coin for my Phantom emblem.

I first started reading your magazine with the August issue, which had "The Red Bishop Murders" as the star novel. From the first chapter on, I knew you had a No. 1 magazine. So good, in fact, that I bought the October and December issues. Of the three I've read, the best in my opinion is the latest novel, "Murder Under the Big Top." Not once could I lay down the book till I found out who the big boss was. Was I surprised at who he was!

From now on you've got another Phantom fan. How about having the magazine out every month? And see how it works.

I guess I've said enough.

Yours till the Phantom's guns are silent, and his battle against the forces of crime is won!

Bernard Miner.

650 Commonwealth Ave.,
Newton Center, Mass.

Thanks to all of you for your many interesting letters and post cards. Keep them coming in. Please address all correspondence to The Editor, THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Thank you! Be with you all next issue.

Until then, keep licking those War Stamps, and the boys overseas will keep licking the Axis!

—THE PHANTOM.

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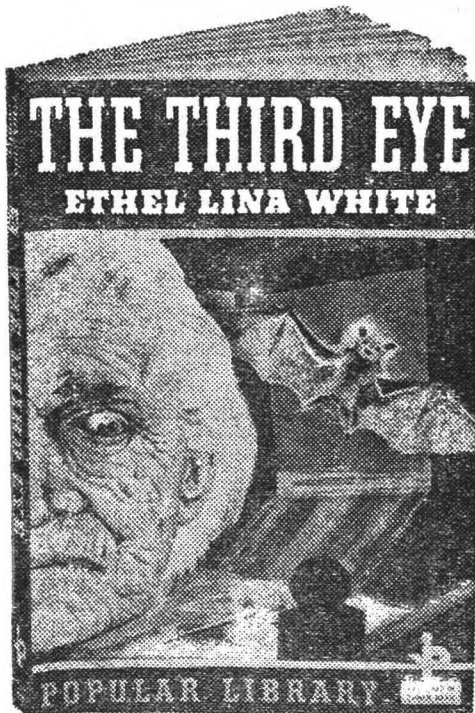
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