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The PHANTOM DETECTIVE

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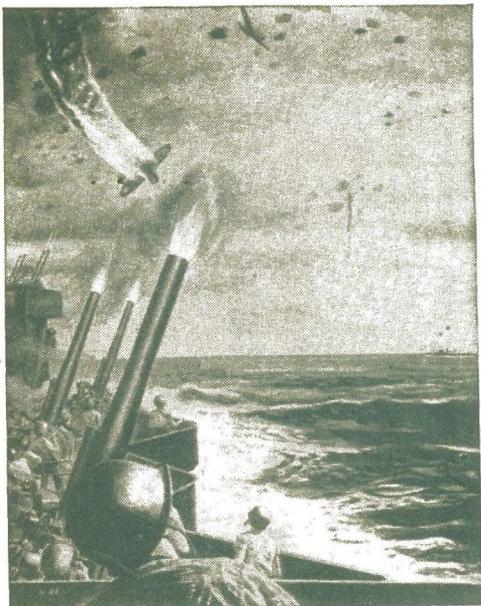


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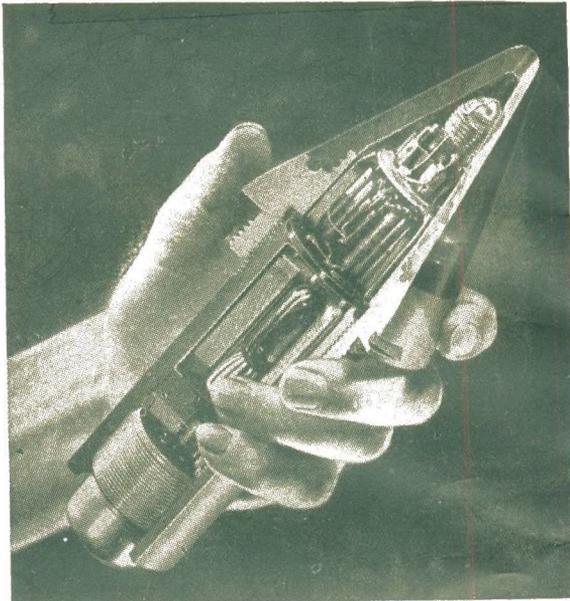
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Mystery Novel

By ROBERT WALLACE



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Vol. XLVII, No. 1

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NEXT ISSUE: The Phantom in MODEL FOR MURDER, by ROBERT WALLACE

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The PHANTOM SPEAKS

PLEASANT hours are spent by many people in the museums and art collections of our large cities. In the small towns, leading citizens frequently have valuable pieces of statuary and other art objects that are a pleasure to themselves and to their neighbors. But aside from the delight given to owner and beholder, art collections constitute a big business, and big business is frequently the target of the master criminal.

That is one of the reasons why the case of the stolen figurine, the basis for the Phantom Detective novel which Robert Wallace is preparing for the next issue of this magazine, is one of the most interesting crime hunts in my career. *Model for Murder* is the title he has given the novel based on this case, and I believe the yarn is a model of the story-telling art that will intrigue you from start to finish!

You all know the friendly relationship existing between Frank Havens and myself, and how I have the greatest respect and understanding for the energetic newspaper owner. He was indirectly responsible for thrusting me into the middle of the case that was built up around the model which inspired the title, *Model for Murder*.

Curious Circumstances

This statue was on display in the window of a small art shop close to the office of the *Clarion*, the New York member of the Havens chain of newspapers. The figurine impressed him at first glance, and the price was reasonable. As a result, he sent Steve Huston down to purchase the model, planning to give it a prominent place in his home. The first part of the transaction was completed without any difficulty, and then things started to happen quickly.

Steve Huston was visited by a rather

doubtful character, who insisted that he return the figurine at once, but since Huston had already turned it over to Mr. Havens, he was unable to comply.

When I was told of the curious circumstances surrounding the purchase, I immediately asked for a chance to examine the little model in my laboratory and that was only the beginning of the round of dramatic events that marked the investigation of the case.

I decided that it might be a good idea to visit the woman owning the art store, and immediately put this thought into operation, but when I reached the business establishment, I found that another grim figure had beaten me there—the stalking figure of Death.

Buried under a pile of rubbish in the now empty store was the body of the woman who had sold Huston the little figurine!

A Trail of Crime

That was merely the beginning of the trail of crime that led me through some of the most dramatic incidents of my long and exciting career. The other elements that contributed to the plans of the master criminal in his campaign to profit from the theft of a gigantic shipment of valuable art works, were so cleverly handled that there were times when extraordinary devices were necessary in order to bring the culprits to book.

The killers in this case were inclined to work behind innocent-appearing fronts, and frequently had people doing business for them who had no idea at all of the nefarious side of their activities.

The death of the lady manager of the art store merely meant the elimination of a helpless pawn who might point the way to the tower of crime where the guiding genius held forth.

(Continued on page 8)





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*Source: "American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times," by Douglas Gilbert (published by Whitlsey House); I. C. S. records.

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THE PHANTOM SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

It was into this labyrinth of crime in big time art treasures that I plunged after the purchase of the figurine by Steve Huston for Frank Havens, and the story of just how this case worked out to its inevitable climax is the novel fare that is in store for our readers in the next issue of THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE.

I liked working on the case described in *Model for Murder*, and I certainly feel that it is well worth reading about! I'm sure you'll enjoy the novel from start to finish, and find it packed with action, suspense and surprises!

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(Continued on page 10)

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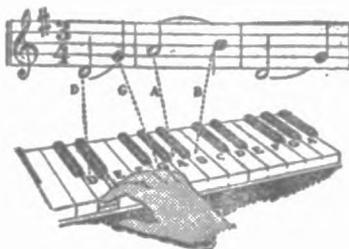
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THE PHANTOM SPEAKS

(Continued from page 8)

Membership in the FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM carries with it no privileges or rights with regard to local or Federal law-enforcement bodies. The purpose of the club is to express tangibly the feelings of right-thinking, law-abiding readers of this magazine. You're all welcome, so be sure and join up.

IN THE MAIL

WE'VE HAD some rather interesting comments in the mail this month, and one of the curious things about them is the fact that by far the larger percentage appears to be coming from the distaff side of the household. In the good old days, the men-folks were the ones who took the latest detective stories and read them while sipping the summer julep or orange juice, or drinking the black coffee on a winter's evening. Now, however, with all the latest household time-saving devices, it appears as though the feminine contingent is getting more time to follow the exploits of favorite detectives.

First comment comes from Miss Patricia Shepard of New York City. She says:

I noticed in your latest PHANTOM DETECTIVE Magazine a letter in which some comments on the last story of the Phantom. I am writing to tell you that I think that "The Case of the Poison Formula," by Robert Wallace is a very good story. I enjoyed it as much as any other Phantom story I've read. I hope the Phantom keeps on doing the great job he is doing, in order to clean up the worst enemies in the city.

As some of you regular readers know, Patricia is one of our regular fans, and we're certainly glad to hear from her, and especially to know that she is getting real pleasure from these stories. Often when we hear from our lady readers it is on the question of whether Richard Curtis Van Loan should go along with Muriel Havens from a romantic angle, as well as having her assist in the solution of the murder cases. This time, however, it is one of Uncle Sam's sailor boys who wants to have his say on this important matter. Well, sailors are supposed to know about girls, so we'll listen to Robert L. Freu,

(Concluded on page 97)

The February issue of the new pocket-size MYSTERY BOOK Magazine features the newest mystery novel by Mignon G. Eberhart, also H. H. Holmes, Will Cuppy and others. Get it today, 25c at all newsstands.

(Adv.)

WHO WAS GUILTY?

Can you solve this crime?



Here are the clues

The body of William Manson, a well known and prosperous young man, was found behind a clump of bushes just outside his home in the early morning hours by Patrolman Kiarvis. Near by was the neck of a heavy quart bottle, with other glass fragments scattered about. A blow from this weapon had crushed the victim's skull. Investigation developed that Manson had been in possession of a large roll of bills the afternoon and evening of his murder and that at least six people had seen him handle the money; a lady friend, a waiter, a florist, and three bowling companions. Examination of the broken bottle neck disclosed well defined finger prints. Finger prints obtained from all the probable suspects, when compared with those on the bottle, soon solved the mystery.

...now... here are the FINGER PRINTS



Who was guilty?

1. Lady Friend
2. The Waiter
3. The Florist
4. Bowler #1
5. Bowler #2
6. Bowler #3
7. The Slayer

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A clue leads to the finger prints and the finger prints to the slayer

When the murderer, in his greed, carelessly dropped the bottle he branded himself. The Police Department Finger Print Experts immediately secured prints from the several people who had occasion to know Manson was carrying a large sum of money. Comparison with the freshly made prints found on the smooth glass bottle neck brought the killer to justice in short order. Study the prints and see if you can put your finger on the criminal.

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There's a thrill in Scientific Crime Detection, and there's good money in it, too. The demand for I.A.S. trained finger print men has been constant for the past 28 years. This fine profession can be learned at home in spare time. Send today for FREE book and list of over 840 Identification Bureaus employing I.A.S. students and graduates. Use the coupon. If you wish to do so, indicate your identity of the slayer of William Manson by making cross in the square provided.

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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 yesterday's 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 groves, 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,

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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 Mystery 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!

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An Exciting
Book-Length
Mystery
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"Put up your hands! I'll
shoot to kill if you make a
move!" (CHAPTER VII)

Doom on Schedule

By ROBERT WALLACE

The Phantom Detective battles to halt a wave of sudden death and tragedy when railroads are the targets of sinister crime!

CHAPTER I

RAILS OF DEATH

STEVE HUSTON, ace crime reporter for the New York *Clarion*, looked at his watch. The Green Mountain Special, the express that was to take him to Leedsville, for a long-anticipated vacation, was fifteen minutes late. And the Springfield

Junction railroad station where Steve impatiently waited, was not the most cheerful place in the world. Old-fashioned, sadly in need of paint and repairs, it huddled in the night, its platform lamps like tired eyes watching him through the darkness and the lonely stillness.

Still, Steve reflected, the Maine and Vermont Railroad was not any nickel-plate line. In operation years before Huston had been

RICHARD CURTIS VAN LOAN FIGHTS

born, the road served the towns, cities and communities of the two great New England States.

And, more important, it was taking this freckle-faced, hard-boiled young Manhattan newspaperman on the first lap of what he considered a well-earned vacation, since it had been delayed, due to a shortage of men in his business as well as in others. Steve, one of the *Clarion's* star news gatherers, hadn't had a week off in the past three years.

He hadn't really wanted to get away from the excitement of his job too much, he reflected, and from the spell the metropolis held him in. Young Huston was one of those fortunate people who loved his berth. Coming up from the ranks of a raw cub reporter he had, by sheer ability and perseverance, climbed to the top at the *Clarion's* office.

Frank Havens, wealthy owner and publisher of the sheet, had taken a fatherly interest in him. More and more, Havens had seen to it that Huston got a chance to cover the big news breaks. And Steve, snapping at such chances like a hungry trout after a colored fly, had justified the trust reposed in him. The Huston *chef d'oeuvres* had become models of reportorial perfection, and his fame in the business was climbing steadily.

Thinking of hungry trout and flies made him look at the pile of luggage assembled around the bench where he sat. He had bought a lot of things for this vacation, including two brand new Hathaway rods. He had spent an hour and plenty of money in the fish and game department of a well-known Madison Avenue sporting goods store.

A dapper, oily-tongued salesman there had thrown fuel on the fires of Steve's piscatorial ambitions. The result was that when he had staggered out of the place he'd had every conceivable kind of equipment necessary to make a Friday night dinner a banquet for any fish lover.

BUT he needed the gear at Lake Togue, for which he was headed. The lake was a well-stocked two miles of water just beyond the town of Leedsville, in Maine. Up there, if the advertising literature sent him by the Lake Lodge were to be believed, you had to hide behind trees to keep the trout from snapping the bait out of your hand.

That had sounded good to Huston. He was not the type to drop a line off a dock and wait for a nibble. Steve was all for action in any sport and if Lake Togue offered it, that was the place for him.

So he had wired for accommodations, had let his fellow workers at the *Clarion* throw a party for him, and was there at Springfield Junction, waiting for the green cushions on which he would ride on to Leedsville. According to his time-table, he should get there somewhere in the dawn hours. That, too, was all right with Steve. He could sleep anywhere, at any time and under any conditions, and an all-night ride would not necessarily mean a sleepless night for him.

Steve saw lights coming down the road and looked around. An ancient bus wheezed to a stop and a few people got out. The bus driver, a weather-beaten country fellow of undetermined age, climbed down and stretched.

"Special ain't never on time," he said for the benefit of anyone who cared to listen. "Leastwise not since I've been drivin' my old ark." He pulled out a brass factory masquerading as a watch, spat, and squinted at the time-piece. "Fifteen minutes off so far," he commented.

No one answered him, and he wandered away.

Five more minutes passed before a bell clanged at the crossing below the station. Steve Huston got up and began to collect his luggage. He was ready to board the train when the Green Mountain Special pulled in, the locomotive's headlights slicing the night.

Conductors swung off as the train ground to a stop beside the platform. Huston, loaded like a Rocky Mountain pack-burro, picked out the nearest coach steps and clambered up them.

"Plenty of seats in the rear car," one of the train men announced. "Front ones pretty well filled up." He looked at Steve and grinned. "Got a load there, young feller. Ought to put you in the baggage department."

"A padded cell would be better," Steve puffed.

"Gonna corner the fish market?" asked the friendly trainman.

"If I don't I'm out sixty bucks," Steve said over his shoulder, as he headed toward the rear coach. With all his fishing paraphernalia he felt the need of plenty of space.

TO STEM GRIM SLAUGHTER AND SABOTAGE!

Even the last coach, he saw, as he got aboard, was fairly well filled. Bumping people along the aisle, and apologizing profusely, Steve Huston picked out an empty, double seat almost at the end of the car.

It took some minutes to get his baggage on the overhead rack, for he had to be careful. That stuff had cost him money. He was still stowing it there when the Special got under-way.

With a long sigh of relief Steve sank gratefully down on plush upholstery that was dusty this far along in the Special's journey. He mopped his face with his handkerchief



THE PHANTOM

and loosened his tie. He stuck his ticket in the top of the seat in front of him, stretched out his legs and found a comfortable position for his head. He had been right—this would do him as well as a sleeper and didn't cost near as much. With another sigh he closed his eyes and prepared to cork off.

But he couldn't sleep. For once in his life his mind was too active, too much concerned with the fourteen days ahead of him. This kind of vacation was new to him, and he kept picturing his two weeks in anticipation.

The train gathered speed, wheels and trucks rhythmically pounding out a sound that always reminded Steve of a voice monotonously repeating whatever words he fitted to their tune. Tonight the words were: "Going away—going away—fourteen days!" Steve crossed his legs and listened.

Stations whirled by after a while. He could hear the whirr as they were passed. And he realized that the Green Mountain Special was making up lost time. Not a bad bunch of rattle for a jerkwater road, Steve decided. The Special was its crack flyer and was living up to its reputation. It might have been fifteen minutes or more behind time at Springfield Junction but now that it was deep in Vermont it was eating up the minutes like the clock did between rounds at a prize fight in Madison Square Garden.

AFTER awhile more, Steve's anticipation dwindled. An odd feeling began to replace it. He couldn't analyze it exactly, but somehow he had a deep-rooted impression of impending danger. He sat up, frowning. That was a goofy idea—danger. He had never been one either to experience premonitions or believe in them. Besides, he asked himself, what could possibly happen to him on the plush seat in the last coach of the Special?

He sat staring at his image reflected on the window beside him. "Going away—going away—fourteen days!" The words pounded through his mind. With an effort he fought the strange restlessness that was creeping through him.

Finally he did get rid of it entirely, and relaxed. Though he still was wide-awake—he could not sleep. He wondered just where the Special was now. Through the window he caught a glimpse of water shining in the moonlight—the thread of a stream wandering along below the roadbed.

The Maine and Vermont tracks now stretched straight ahead atop an embankment. The moon had come up and Huston saw that the train was passing through a valley. It was almost as light as day outside but a light with that spectral quality that made the trees look as if they were black silhouettes against a world of silver.

He was making that comparison when the queer feeling sprayed through him once more. This time it was so sharp and real that

he instinctively uncrossed his legs and straightened up.

At the same precise second, Steve Huston's strained nerves vibrated with a breathless warning. He felt his hands grip the plush upholstery. He seemed to go rigid, and then as limp as a rag. Simultaneously there was a curious whistling sound, siren-sharp in the night—then a thunderous crash!

Steve, hurled out of his seat, saw the coach ceiling veer to the right and come down on him. Even in that fantastic split-second he seemed to know that the Green Mountain Special had gone off the track. And he knew that the warning his intuition flashed him had been real and vital—one of those unexplainable things that no one could account for.

A pounding in his ears was blotted out abruptly as the vivid moonlight suddenly was turned off!

His next impression, when he struggled back to consciousness was, that in some stunned, bewildered fashion he had somehow managed to get out of the coach. He remembered some of it vaguely—stepping on broken glass, hearing a conglomeration of sounds that blended groans and agonized screams with the shrill cries of alarmed night birds. Groggily, like one in a trance, he stumbled forward. Some faculty, less stupefied than his others, told him that he had to get to a telephone, that his first duty was to the *Clarion*, that this tangled wreck was news of calamitous importance! That was second nature asserting itself.

He stumbled on, not knowing in which direction he was going. His only idea was to get in communication with New York. The glare of fire scorched his glazed eyes. He felt sick, weakly numb, but knew that was from shock—that miraculously he was still all together, in one piece.

Another hundred yards and the silvery darkness beckoned invitingly. But as Steve reached it his feet seemed to go feather-light. He was stepping on air, walking a short distance more before he collapsed. . . .

He had no idea how long he had been out when, for a second time he came back to consciousness. Now his mind seemed clearer. It was so normal that he was able to hear and understand voices somewhere close at hand. He heard a man's voice speaking.

"I guess we knocked that one over pretty neat," the man was saying in a thick, low tone. "Frenchy's due to love this."

Steve opened his eyes. He had fallen into a clump of shrubbery. He couldn't see the speaker, but knew two men were on the other side of the thick bushes, and some instinct warned him not to move, to make no sound.

A second man laughed harshly.

"Yeah. And he'd better come up with a bonus, too, I'm telling you. When we wreck 'em they stay wrecked!"

Every nerve in Steve's body tightened. For a second he thought he was still out, was hearing the grotesque mutterings in a dream. Then, through the shrubbery, he saw legs and feet and knew his ears had not tricked him.

"What'll I do with this spike-puller?" asked the first man who had spoken.

"Chuck it away—where it won't be found. We'd better get out of here—fast!"

The feet and legs disappeared. The man listening in the bushes waited until the rustling sound they made faded away.

Painfully then, Steve Huston raised himself from the ground, his mind whirling.

CHAPTER II

LIGHT IN THE NIGHT



RICHARD CURTIS VAN LOAN, mingling with the exiting crowd that was flowing through the lobby of the St. Regent Theater, smiled at the girl who clung to his arm. Van, in faultlessly tailored evening clothes, gave a rakish slant to his opera hat as the cool night air of Broadway blew in his face.

His companion, Nancy Porter, her big brown eyes still filled with the enchantment of the make-believe world she had just left, gave a happy laugh.

"Wasn't it wonderful, Dick?" she exclaimed, enthusiastically. "That last scene! That final line. I was never so thrilled in my life!"

It was going to be hard to get a taxi, Van Loan saw, as he paused at the curb, waiting for an empty to come along. Further down the street some newsboy was calling: "Extra! Extra!" Van caught a few words of the high-pitched cry. It had something to do with a train wreck. He didn't pay much attention because the next minute a taxi slid up and stopped in front of them.

After's hiring started to drag out
a gun, but the Phantom reached
for him, tipped him over and got
his fingers around the wrecker's
throat (CHAPTER XIV)



Van helped Nancy Porter in and hesitated. "You make the selection," he said to her, a little whimsically. "What night club shall we honor with our presence. I hear the Roc-A-Co is amusing, but it's also said to be a little rough. Want to try it?"

The girl wrinkled her tip-tilted nose. "No thanks—if you don't mind," she said. "Somehow I just don't feel in a rowdy mood."

Van laughed as he pulled the door shut after him.

"Sky High Club, driver."

"That's better," Nancy approved, making room for him on the seat beside her. "You're so understanding, Dick."

"I must be, when I lead off with the wrong suggestion for a night spot to interest you," he murmured.

"But you are understanding, Dick!" she assured him, "Probably the most understanding person I know—even with all of your idiosyncrasies."

"That's a harsh word," Van demurred.

She turned a little and lifted her eyes to meet his levelly. Secretly, Van had to admit that this girl not only was lovely to look at but easy to talk with. Nancy Porter had a keen sense of humor, a quick mind and a sophisticated viewpoint. More than that, she had a way of hitting nails directly on their heads, squarely and accurately. Van enjoyed her frankness, so different from that of most of the season's debutantes he had met, as well as more seasoned Social Registerites.

"I mean it," she insisted seriously. "I think it's a shame the kind of life you lead. You have everything to make a success and simply because you don't have to work, you drift along wasting time and getting nowhere. Haven't you anything on your mind except entertaining yourself?"

"I am in the company of a reformer!" Van exclaimed, with pretended dismay. "Idleness and luxury have caught up with me! I am about to be shown the error of my ways."

"Can't you even be serious?" The brown-eyed girl's voice held a hurt note. "Dick Van Loan, I simply can't understand you. You have a dual personality—I'm sure of it. Sometimes I'm almost certain you're not at all what you pretend to be. Then, the next minute, I'm just as confident I'm wrong—that you are, to be blunt, nothing more nor less than the social butterfly you seem."

"The leopard and its spots," Van said lightly, and with an elaborate sigh.

"And I can't understand Mr. Havens—with

his interest in you—letting you dally along," Nancy went on. "I should think he'd find a place for you on the *Clarion's* staff. Personally I think you'd make an excellent journalist."

Van's laugh was genuine. He reached out and squeezed her hand. "How you rave and rant," he said. "A journalist, no less. And I can hardly keep up with my correspondence! It's a task for me to write letters."

The taxi had been driven east and now was stopping before one of the newer cloud-bumping edifices close to Park Avenue. Van paid and dismissed the hackie, and a minute later he and Nancy were in a velvet-quiet elevator that swept to the building's roof with incredible speed.

Its door opened when the top was reached. Soft lights blended into a rainbow haze and music stole out to greet them.

A DIGNITARY in the guise of a captain of waiters loomed up, bowing.

"Good evening, Mr. Van Loan," he murmured. "A pleasure to see you, sir. I have your table ready. This way, if you please."

As they followed him down a center aisle, past tables where candles made wavering lights in hurricane globes, Nancy gave Van an accusing look.

"You fraud!" she said. "You were just making fun of me, suggesting that terrible Roc-A-Co Club. You knew all the time we were coming here."

"I had sort of an idea," Van admitted, with a smile.

"Now you know what I mean when I say you're understanding," she told him with positiveness.

They sat down at a table placed far enough from the band's dais to make conversation possible without interruption. All around them were walls of glass. Glass that held the night at bay, but permitted a panoramic view of Manhattan, spread like a magic carpet, below.

Van Loan rather liked the place. Whenever he was here he always had the impression of being up in a plane, riding above the tall tops of lesser buildings, close to the clouds and the stars.

One of the best broadcasting bands supplied dance music. Here at the Sky High Club was none of the tawdry night life of Broadway. Its patrons were distinctly Social Register, drawn principally from the avenue so short a distance away and the aristocratic

purlieu of the East Side, further uptown.

Here was nothing of the garish Roc-A-Co which, ten nights past, a man named "Frenchy" Atlee and whose name Steve Huston had heard mentioned at the scene of a train wreck in far-away Vermont, had visited on his first evening in New York. But of that, of course, Richard Curtis Van Loan knew nothing—as yet.

Nancy Porter, dancing with Van, didn't bring up the subject of his idle life again. But it stuck in her mind like a burr. What she had told him, she meant sincerely. And what she had said about his dual personality she believed was true. Now that she thought more about it, while they danced, her arched brows drew together in a tiny frown.

In a way Dick Van Loan was, to her, a mysterious person. The habit he had of popping off for a week or a month—disappearing without explanation or regard for the social obligations he so casually shrugged aside. That was something that puzzled her. And when he did return he would be as languid and listless as ever, and would mention a fishing pilgrimage in the Canadian wilds, a dude ranch interlude in Wyoming, a jaunt to Havana, or shooting in Carolina.

Van Loan's friends long ago had come to take these hegiras for granted. They knew his friendships were not entirely centered in New York, that they extended from Maine to California, from Canada to Mexico, and they were indulgent to him. Particularly a man who perhaps was the oldest and best friend Van had—the Frank Havens whom Nancy Porter had mentioned in the taxi. Havens, owner and publisher of the *Clarion*, one of the great metropolitan newspapers that was part of a chain he published from coast-to-coast, had been a friend of Van Loan's father, too.

Of course everyone who knew Van, knew these facts, but they were running through the girl's mind as the dance number finished and Van started to lead her back to their table.

"Wait a minute, Dick," she said, and laid a hand on his black-clad arm. "Let's look at the view from the terrace over there—south toward the Battery. I always get a terrific kick out of it. The two rivers meeting, Miss Liberty holding her torch high for all the world to see. Mind?"

"Still carrying the torch?" Van jested. "These French gals! Here's a place and—"

He stopped abruptly, close to the vantage



FRANK HAVENS

point to which he had steered her. From the lofty perch of the Sky High Club the heavens seemed to clamp down over the city like the rim of an inverted bowl. Before the two who watched was an uninterrupted view. Famous buildings, fingers of steel and stone. Van's gaze, sweeping like metal to a magnet, fastened on the apex of the *Clarion* Building.

A red light burned there, crimson against the dark!

TO THE casual observer it might have been nothing more than a florid decoration, an ornament set there by publisher Havens to mark the location of his newspaper. But to Richard Curtis Van Loan, standing there with the perfume from Nancy's shining hair drifting to him, that red light had a secret but definite meaning.

Frank Havens kindled the scarlet tocsin for one purpose only. That was to signal and summon the Phantom Detective—to call the world's most renowned sleuth across time and space! The light meant that crime and intrigue which seemed too much for the missions of law and order to cope with were once more on the loose. It meant that the shadowy forces of evil had struck again and that the Phantom, the dread nemesis of the underworld, was needed!

Nancy Porter, entranced by the limitless view, didn't see the change that came over the face of the man who stood beside her.

Had she glanced up at Van that moment she might perhaps have noticed something that would have confirmed what she had told him about his dual personality.

Like a sleight-of-hand artist turning wine into water, Van's whole mien had changed. His indolent air had dropped away like a discarded cloak. It had been replaced by a sudden alertness that tightened his mouth and gave a new set to his handsome face.

In that split second a strange metamorphosis took place. The gilded playboy, the society celebrity faded out and in his stead was a man of grim purpose, a new character whose narrowing eyes looked at the red light, reading and understanding its blazing significance.

Frank Havens was calling the Phantom Detective and Richard Curtis Van Loan, incredible as it would seem to those who thought they knew him, *was* the Phantom! That was his other personality, the one he guarded with his life, the rôle he played, that no one but Frank Havens knew about! It was the rôle that his girl companion somehow had sensed, but never would she be able to put a finger on it.

"Dick, you're not listening." Nancy Porter was pouting when he swiftly looked down at her. "Why don't you answer my question? I asked you if that was a commercial plane and you didn't seem to hear me. Is it?"

Van moved his gaze from the red light in the *Clarion* tower to the fast disappearing object in the sky which Nancy indicated. He shrugged, dropping easily back into the Van Loan stance.

"I'm trying to decide," he said slowly. "Could be. Or a transport ship in from an ocean crossing. Either way, it's gone now, and you may get chilled out here on the terrace without a wrap. Let's go back to our table. Then, if you'll excuse me a minute, I'll make a phone call I'd completely forgotten about."

There were booths in the club's foyer. Van had three numbers committed to memory where he could always reach his friend Frank Havens. He called the first and was rewarded with instant service. The *Clarion's* owner answered immediately.

As always, when emergencies made conversation on the telephone necessary, both Havens and Van Loan were careful of what they said and how they said it. There was always the possibility of a listening ear that might catch a word or a sentence that would

expose the Phantom's well-hidden identity, and pass it on to the enemies of law and order, lurking in their dark hideouts.

"Mr. Havens?" Van said when his call was answered. "Dick Van Loan. I just remembered I was supposed to have called you earlier. So sorry."

"That's quite all right, Dick," came Havens' voice. "Where are you?"

"Sky High Club," Van explained. "I'm with Miss Porter."

There was a momentary pause, the hum of the wire, before Havens coughed and went on:

"It's still early—for you—and for me. Couldn't you have a nightcap with me at the Pilgrims Club? Say in about thirty minutes?"

Though Havens made the invitation casual, the "thirty minutes" was enough to tell Van that the matter Havens wanted to tell him about was of extreme urgency. His fingers tightened over the receiver. His blood began to whip through him at a faster tempo. The Phantom was needed and needed at once!

"I'll be there," he drawled, and rang off.

The problem of Nancy faced him squarely. She was just settling down for a pleasant evening. They had danced only once, and he had not ordered supper yet. How to break with her and keep his rendezvous with Havens wasn't going to be the easiest thing in the world.

COMING out of the phone booth, Van thought fast. Nancy was highly intelligent, and no ordinary ruse would deceive her. Whatever he told her had to be good, convincing, at the first try.

Swiftly he darted a glance up and down the foyer. It stopped at the coat check counter. There was a girl there, a tall, dark young lady with a languid expression. Van headed for her, digging a bill out of his pocket.

A few directions, to the girl who also proved to be intelligent as well as pretty, then Van was back at the table, murmuring his apologies to the brown-eyed Nancy.

"Now, if we can get our waiter—" he began. "Hungry?"

He picked up the embossed menu, but before he could look it over and summon his waiter, there was an interruption. The tall, dark coatroom girl came in and hurried over to their table. She acted disturbed.

"Mr. Van Loan, could you come outside?" she asked primly, but hastily. "There's a man out there who insists your coat is his. He wants to walk off with it."

Van gave the girl across from him a wry look. "My favorite coat, too," he murmured. "Nancy, bear with me. This seems to be one of those nights."

Out in the foyer, Van smiled approval at the hatcheck girl, put on his topcoat and snapped his opera hat open.

"A perfect piece of acting," he said to the tall girl.

Hurrying to the same booth from which he had spoken to Frank Havens, he dialed the number of the Porters' garage.

"This is Mr. Van Loan," he said, when the call was answered. "Miss Porter is at the Sky High Club. She has asked me to instruct you to have her car sent around for her immediately. Will you kindly take care of this at once?"

"Yes, right away, Mr. Van Loan."

Ten seconds later Van was in an elevator, plummeting down to the street floor. Ten minutes after that he was in another elevator—the private lift that took him to his own Park Avenue penthouse, and the secret laboratory concealed behind his bedroom wall.

CHAPTER III

THE PHANTOM'S CASE



THE girl whom Dick Van Loan had so precipitately left at the Sky High Club, Nancy Porter who prided herself on knowing him so well, could not have recognized the man who hurried through the street's shadows toward the Pilgrims Club.

In the secret lab at his apartment, the last vestiges of Richard Curtis Van Loan had disappeared. Under the deft fingers of the Phantom, a new face had been created. It was the slightly square-jawed countenance of an ordinary citizen, a man in the thirties with no outstanding characteristics that would stick in anyone's memory.

A master of the make-up art, Van had given himself a face, not only completely different in every respect from his own, but one that could be touched up and repaired without undue difficulty. That, he had learned long ago, when he had first become the

Phantom Detective, was a matter of paramount importance.

Wigs and bulky disguises that deceived no one, Van never used. Such things were for stage detectives, masquerades. His new likeness, as were all those he constructed for himself, was one that was a model of simplicity, in perfect accord with the plain dark suit and snap-brim felt hat he wore.

Hidden in a secret pocket of the suit—each suit he possessed had a like pocket constructed in it—was the tiny jeweled domino-mask plate the Phantom always carried, together with his rolled mask and automatic. The little plate was as important to him as the gun itself. Not only was it a means of identifying himself, but times without number the insigne had opened for him doors closed by the law, and provided assistance when he needed it most.

It was a badge that was known the world over, by the police and others in authority in all the great cities of the world. It commanded instant attention and respect.

A few feet beyond the entrance to the building housing the exclusive Pilgrims Club, Van caught sight of a familiar limousine. Its tail-lights were on, illumining its license number, though as a matter of fact he would have known that car anywhere.

He walked past the limousine to make certain no one was following him, turned and, opening the rear door as he returned, stepped directly into the car. As he closed the door, the machine purred off along the street, with Havens at the wheel.

"Thirty minutes exactly, Phantom!" the publisher said, through the opened window. Never did he address his young friend as "Dick," even when they were alone, when Van Loan was in disguise.

"You'll never know how I hurried." Van's voice grew vibrant, eager. "What is it, Mr. Havens?"

"A long distance call," Havens said soberly. "From Steve Huston in Bedlow Green in Vermont. Following one from a place called Skinner's Falls in the same State."

Van frowned. He fervently hoped that nothing had happened to Steve. He was fond of the *Clarion's* star reporter, almost as fond of the young redhead as Frank Havens was himself, and Huston was the publisher's protégé. As a matter of fact, the reporter had many times rendered valuable aid to the Phantom when he was on a case, and was an ardent admirer of the Phantom Detective.

Van turned an inquiring look on the man who drove the sedan.

"What about Steve, Mr. Havens?" he asked uneasily.

"He left for a vacation today," Havens explained. "A short time ago he telephoned me, long distance. Steve was in a railroad wreck on the Maine and Vermont!"

The Phantom's expression didn't change. But his eyes narrowed. He almost dreaded the question he had to ask.

"Was he—hurt?"

"Fortunately, no." Havens drew a deep breath that showed the Phantom his friend's relief. "Badly shaken up, but otherwise uninjured. It's the wreck that I have to talk to you about—a train called the Green Mountain Special that went off the track at a place called Skinner's Falls, in Vermont. The death list is appalling!"

Suddenly Van remembered the "Extra" he had heard shouted when he left the theater. He gave Frank Havens a searching glance.

"You want to talk to me about it?" he repeated.

"Steve says he has absolute proof the wreck was deliberately planned!" Havens replied, with a grim tightening of his lips.

THE Phantom's face darkened. Of all crimes aimed against society, those that struck at innocent people, without reason or warning, were the most heinous to his mind. Only a vicious arch-fiend, he was positive, would direct his evil talents at the unsuspecting. To the Phantom that was mass murder, little different from the slaughter planned by the late dictators of Europe. And as thoroughly to be condemned and the perpetrators made to pay.

The Phantom made one of his quick decisions. "Tell me where Steve is and I'll leave at once!" he said.

Relaxation showed in Frank Havens' face. He had counted on the Phantom—from the minute Huston had telephoned him, the publisher had been certain the nemesis of such evil would welcome a chance to work on the case, but this reassurance was fresh proof of the staunchness of the man who in reality was Richard Curtis Van Loan. In no way, the *Clarion's* publisher was confident, could the Phantom better serve the cause of justice than to track down those who had been responsible for what had happened at Skinner's Falls that night.

"I was sure you'd say just that, Phan-

tom," he said simply.

"Give me what facts you got from Steve." Van clipped the words off short. "And any other particulars that have come into your office. Then drop me off a block from my place."

While Havens drove, he talked. Crisply and precisely he gave the Phantom the details of Huston's phone calls. The man in the rear seat listened attentively, his mind busy with the gist of what he heard.

Havens didn't have much information, not a great deal to go on, but enough for the Phantom to understand how necessary it was for him to make Vermont, and Steve Huston who was waiting there, his immediate objective.

As was customary when Havens was driving the Phantom, he stopped the car a street away from the tall apartment building where Richard Curtis Van Loan maintained his luxurious suite. The publisher shook hands and said soberly:

"Keep me advised, Phantom."

"I may need Steve for a day or two," said the Phantom. "Right?"

"Keep him as long as you like." Havens smiled a little. "It's his say-so, anyhow. He's on vacation."

The Phantom closed the door and Havens drove off. Standing there for a moment, Van Loan also smiled. He knew how eager Steve Huston would be to aid him. That redhead would give up more than a vacation in order to help the Phantom.

Five minutes later the Phantom was in his rooms at the top of the lofty apartment building. As he opened the door indirect lighting clicked on, bathing his rugs, tapestries and fine old furniture in a golden glow. But tonight Van had no eye for his treasures. Quickly he made his way to his bedroom.

Without delay, he pressed a button cleverly concealed behind the head of the bed, and a section of wall swung back. It revealed his smaller laboratory. He had two—this, and a large one completely equipped with everything concerned with crime detection, which he maintained in the Bronx, where he was known as Dr. Bendix, an eccentric old scientist.

This lab in his home, though small, was well-equipped with many of the scientific devices necessary for his war against crime. Here were delicate microscopes, various types of infra-red and X-ray machines, chemicals, much of the apparatus required

and used in a hundred baffling cases.

Here, also, was the wardrobe containing some of the various disguises Van used in his many rôles. He had more in the Bronx laboratory. Here also, was an arsenal that would have delighted a connoisseur of fire-arms. Yet this collection of guns was in no way a hobby. Each weapon in it served a specific purpose. There were small pistols,

he shut and locked the bag.

Straightening, the Phantom checked mentally to make sure he had forgotten nothing. Then, by way of his private elevator and a side exit, he left the apartment building. A taxi he picked up a few blocks away, took him to LaGuardia Field. The jeweled domino-plate and a few words of explanation put a plane and pilot at his disposal.



The Phantom triggered, angling the shot at the arm raising the ax (CHAPTER IV)

tiny enough to fit into the palm of a hand, but capable of destruction in their own right. There were large-bore Lugers, Colt Peacemakers, derringers, shiny nickel-plated S & W's, blue-steel automatics with easy-action triggers made especially to the Phantom's order.

HE GAVE the assortment a quick appraisal and dragged a black walrus bag out from the wardrobe. In it he put three guns, as well as enough rounds of ammunition to see him through the initial stages of what might lie ahead. Adding his make-up kit, as well as other necessities and clothing,

It was a fast two-seater, low-wing cabin job. Used by the Municipal authorities, it was available, by order of the Police Department and Inspector Thomas Gregg, whenever the Phantom Detective had occasion for rapid transportation.

Van climbed in beside the pilot, a former Air Force flier. The twin engines had been warmed sufficiently for an immediate take-off. With a beelike drone the plane left the field and climbed. In a few minutes Bagdad-on-the-Hudson was lost behind them in a swirl of starry darkness.

Van Loan glanced back, and a wry grin twisted his disguised face. He certainly

would have a lot of explaining to do to set himself right with Nancy Porter—if he ever did. He hoped that her car had arrived and that she was not still waiting there in the Sky High Club. Little chance of that, however. Nancy was not exactly the waiting kind.

Then he put her out of his mind as his thoughts centered on the problem confronting him. He had little enough to go on, true; all the more reason to make the most of what information was available. . . .

The plane came down in a flying field several miles from the town of Bedlow Green, near the scene of the wreck, in rock-ribbed Vermont. The Phantom reached for his bag, climbed out and stretched. The pilot lingered long enough to light a cigarette. Then with a handshake and a word of thanks from Van, he took off for his trip back.

It was still several hours before dawn.

Overhead the sky was graying, the stars turning misty. The Phantom picked up the bag and walked along until he reached a country road. Frank Havens had promised to telephone Steve his arrival, and as the Phantom came out on a macadam strip, he saw a car some little distance away.

The next minute Steve Huston was greeting him warmly.

"I watched your plane come down. Sweet landing, Phantom. That boy sure knows his stuff."

"You're all right?" was the Phantom's first question.

"Yes—now," Steve said soberly. "But it wasn't funny—any of it. I was walking on my heels for a while, after I got out of the wrecked train. I don't know how I got away with it. Every car was wrecked, including the one I was in. I must be loaded with horseshoes, four leaf clovers, and rabbits' feet!"

Van got into the coupe Steve had hired and driven there to meet him. The reporter, outside of being a trifle pale, looked as he usually did. He grinned at the Phantom secretly thrilled at the meeting. For always, as the underworld nemesis so well knew, Steve Huston welcomed a chance to cooperate with the master detective. On the cases where he had given assistance, Huston's reward had been the one that most appealed to him—plenty of excitement and thrills.

The reporter knew nothing, and cared nothing about the Phantom Detective's real

identity. To him the great sleuth was the Man of a Thousand Faces—an appellation long since given the Phantom—and a friend of his employer. Steve was aware that Frank Havens, and only Havens, knew who the Phantom actually was. But that didn't bother young Huston. He made no effort to ferret out the man's identity for himself, and as long as he had a chance to help in any way possible he was more than repaid for his services.

As a matter of fact, trying to probe behind the Phantom's many disguises, was something that had never crossed Steve's mind.

At the Phantom's request now, Huston explained about the wreck of the Green Mountain Special, going into details. He told about what he had overheard when he had come to in the bushes and then went a step further. After he had managed to get a lift to Skinner's Falls, a small place not far from the wreck, and had telephoned the *Clarion's* publisher, he had made one or two lucky discoveries.

IN A town tavern, where he had been told he would find a man who could rent him a coupe, Huston explained how he had learned something else that tied in with the conversation he had listened in on at the scene of the wreck.

"I had to wait twenty minutes for the party who rented me this hack," the reporter said. "I sat in a booth and had a couple of beers. Right behind me was a big red-headed lug who was pretty well ginned up. He was talking to himself, mumbling something about being all washed up with people who committed murder and made train wrecks!"

"Did you find out who he is?" the Phantom asked, though he knew he could take that for granted.

Steve nodded. "Yeah, he's a red-headed oiler who works for the road. Name's Garity—Mike Garity. I slipped in beside him, in his booth, and bought him a drink. That loosened his tongue further. I slipped a few questions to him, casual-like, and got some information. One thing was kind of astonishing. He told me he tried to get a man named Archer Gallup—he's the president of the railroad—on the phone tonight to tell him a section of track, with its fishplate and spikes pried loose, was ready to send the Special over the thirty-foot embankment, a couple of miles outside of the Falls! Couldn't

get him, this Mike boy said."

"What else did this Garrity say?" asked the Phantom.

"That's all I got." Steve shrugged. "After he unloaded that he shut up like an umbrella."

The Phantom nodded. He happened to know something about the Maine and Vermont Railroad. Invariably, before going off on a case, he familiarized himself with its background, and he had done some research this time before leaving the city. In this instance, Van Loan had found that the railroad while, small and unimportant, had one decidedly valuable asset, the significance of which could not be overlooked.

Recently, the road had put into operation a device on which it owned the patent rights. That was the Webb-Lock Automatic Switch. This new invention in railroading had served to make possible a faster connecting link freight service with the big New York, Buffalo and Great Lakes System.

From what he had picked up, the Phantom had the idea the new switch did away with numerous old-fashioned signal towers, routing the express freights through with smooth efficiency.

A few more questions were asked and answered, then Steve started the car.

"I've reserved a room for you at the same place I'm staying," the reporter told the Phantom. "That's the Green Inn in Bedlow Green. I went on there after I left Skinner's Falls. I used the name of John Watson for you. Okay?"

"Surely. Watson's an easy name to remember."

A few minutes of driving and the reporter pulled up in front of an inn that faced a village green. The Phantom glanced around. He saw that Bedlow Green was one of those sleepy Vermont towns, unchanged by the years. It boasted a main street with shops and a garage, a movie theater, a post-office and a town hall. On either side of the way, white Colonial houses stood in dignified rows, houses that had been occupied by generations of Vermonters.

As the Phantom followed Steve into the quiet lobby of the Green Inn, he found it hard to believe that against this peaceful Vermont setting a drama of crime and violence, of death and destruction, had already been begun.

And he was certain in his own mind that more was being projected!

CHAPTER IV

AX MAN



IN THE warm sunshine of the following day, the Phantom's keen eyes kept steadily on the road from Bedlow Green to Skinner's Falls that wound through valleys and climbed hills as he was driven along it. On both sides of the road, woodlands made a cool, shady background. Overhead, lazy clouds drifted across a brilliant sky. Pine-scented air was like a tonic to the Phantom as he and Steve drove on toward the scene of the previous night's catastrophe.

They passed the foam-flecked waterfall from which the town of Skinner's Falls got its name. Half a mile further on Steve pulled off the road and cut the engine.

"We brogan in the rest of the way," he said.

Cars, and people who had arrived in droves—those who had come to help, and others who were merely curious, had flattened down the grass-grown road that twisted in between the trees. A quarter of a mile more and Huston and Van emerged from the woods and came out on a clearing. A couple of telephone repair trucks were stringing new wires to replace those which had been snapped where the train had gone off the rails. The Phantom walked on a little distance and looked at the high, cinder-packed embankment where the wrecked train was piled.

Like something out of a horrific nightmare, several coaches lay in a twisted, tangled mass of wreckage, half in a stream and half on its bank. Above, a crane-hoist flat car, and a wrecking crew, already at work, had hauled up the locomotive. The spread rails had been repaired and service had been partially resumed on the southbound track.

The Phantom studied the wreck. He was careful to take in all the details possible before he started up the embankment. The crew paid no attention to him. The detective knew that these men must have seen crowds of people around here in the last few hours, and that quite likely they put him down as some curious, probably morbid-minded person who wanted to get a first-hand view of the disaster. That suited him perfectly. Leaving Steve, with a slight ges-

ture to the reporter not to follow, the Phantom wandered down the track.

A new section of rail, easily discernible because of its brightness, marked the spot where the rail that formerly had been there had been tampered with. The tie marks Huston had seen were now obliterated, but that was not important. Steve had seen them and that was all that was necessary.

Casually, almost indifferently, the Phantom Detective descended the embankment some little distance beyond the new rails. Cinders dropped into his shoes as he went down. He paid no heed, his keen gaze roving over the thick underbrush that grew profusely on the far side of the little stream.

In only a few minutes he noticed that some of the bushes had broken branches, and had lost some leaves. His indifference vanished instantly, and he seemed to stiffen and grow tense. As clearly as if the action had been photographed, he realized that someone had plunged into the shrubbery there, marking the spot as plainly as if whoever had fled had left a painted post.

He turned and signaled the waiting Steve to go back to the car, then pushed the bushes aside. The ground was damp behind them. In the black loam were footprints, heel marks. They led some distance back, disappearing where lush grass grew thickly.

The woods stretched in there at an angle. Birds choired from the trees and the sun filtered through, hazy and half-screened.

There were no more footprints to follow, but the Phantom didn't need them. Long ago he had made woodcraft one of his studies. He had acquired the ability to follow a trail by signs an untrained eye could not have noticed, as easily as an Indian of primitive days. And this trail, winding in and out among the trees, was unmistakable.

A hundred yards further on, and the Phantom stopped. His keen eyes had caught sight of something in the dense underbrush that glistened where the sun lanced through and struck sparks from it. He reached in and pulled out a tool. It had been flung there recently. No grass grew over or around the spot where it had fallen. As a murderer might have tossed away the smoking gun with which he had made his kill, so had the wrecker disposed of his own death-dealing instrument.

THE Phantom looked at his find, recognizing it for what it was—a regulation steel spike-puller of the type used by rail-

road track men!

Prints? The Phantom shook his head. In all probability the man who had used this had worn gloves. Taking a deep breath, the investigator went back to following the trail he had cut.

As he walked on, the sounds being made by the repair crew at the wreck died away behind him. Silence, deep and absolute, closed in around him, broken only by the songs of birds and the twitterings of small forest animals. The woods became more dense, the trail more apparent as the person who had made it had had to press his way deeper through the tangle. Bits of wool, as if from a sweater, clung to some of the thorny vines. With some difficulty the Phantom kept on through the pressing brush until all at once the trail abruptly ended.

Now, ahead of him, he saw the outline of a small shack.

He stared at it, looking and listening for signs of habitation. It was a crude affair, that had been knocked together from second-hand lumber, with a stove-pipe stuck out of its roof and rags stuffed in a window from which half the panes had been broken. Satisfied that the place was deserted, the Phantom approached it.

The shack's door was shut and locked. Gingerly, the Phantom pulled out the rags from the window. Then he turned its catch, pushed the lower sash up creakingly, and climbed in. A musty, dank smell permeated the place, the dead odors of a variety of things. For the shack contained but one room and that had been used as a combined kitchen, living and bedroom.

The remains of a wood fire were in an old iron stove. A battered coffee pot decorated one of its lids. A lumpy cot sagged in a corner, with two moldy blankets draped over it. For the rest there was only a wooden table, a chair with a broken seat, and a row of wall pegs from which some mildewed clothing dangled limply.

Yet not all of it was mildewed, the Phantom saw at second glance. For his gaze had fallen on a worn jacket, with chamois patches sewed on each elbow, on the last peg. He took that down and looked at it. When new, the coat had probably been an expensive one. It was made of tweed, of good quality, the kind that came from England, and while it was a trifle flamboyantly cut, it had been hand-tailored.

The tailor's label, or that of the shop that had sold the garment, had been removed.

But there was something in the pockets. A couple of packages of paper matches, the stub of a pencil, the latest time-table of the Maine and Vermont Railroad.

The Phantom held the time-table to the light that came in through the broken window. Quickly he ran an eye down the list of stations with their arrivals and departures. A black pencil mark caught his attention. One train had been checked.

That was the Green Mountain Special!

The Phantom's face turned grim. This time-table could have been used by the wrecker who had caused so much violent death. Here, before the Phantom's gaze, was the black mark of Fate, the symbol that pointed out the train that was to meet its doom on schedule!

The next and last thing the searcher found in the tweed coat was a folded piece of notepaper. Gray, deckle-edged, it gave off a faint aroma of perfume when he opened it. On one side was a penciled sketch of the shack. The picture was rough, and not too well-drawn, but it showed the shack's location and how it could be reached from Bed-low Green.

Reversing the notepaper, the Phantom read what was written on the other side:

Why don't you call me up? Friday would be fine, between eleven and one. I've got something important I want to tell you. Please don't forget.

It was signed with the initial "G." Underneath that was a telephone number in one of the midtown New York exchanges.

The Phantom added the note to the time-table in his pocket and, satisfied that there was nothing more of interest in the shack, picked up the spike-puller and turned the snap-lock on the door.

As he went out, instinct that had been sharpened on the stone of the danger trail he had traversed on so many perilous occasions, telegraphed a warning. He let the door creak shut behind him, looking from left to right for whatever menace lurked close at hand. Then a harsh voice, at the corner of the shack spoke.

"Just stand where you are, mister!" it ordered. "Keep your hands away from your coat. No tricks or I'll cut you down!"

A MAN stepped out of the shadows made by the trees. Judging by where he had



Van had an intuitive flash of danger as a loomed hoodler hurtled down (CHAPTER VIII)

been standing, the Phantom realized that the man must have been watching him through the window. The fellow was well-built, unshaven and grimy in dirty cotton pants and a worn sweat shirt, but the thing that held the Phantom glued to the spot was the long-handled ax the man brandished ominously.

The Phantom went ice-cold. A hundred times he had been threatened by all conceivable types of weapons. But an ax was a new one for him. Motionless, he kept his gaze warily on the fellow who came in closer to where the Phantom stood.

Under bushy brows, the man's murky eyes were riveted on the spike-puller Van carried. He drew the back of his left hand across his mouth, curling his lips back over stained teeth in a sneer.

"What you got there, mister?" he demanded surlily. "A gent like you won't be needin' a thing like that! So you'd better drop it!"

The Phantom let the tool slide out of his hand. Obediently he kept his arms wide, saying nothing, but waiting and watching for the opportunity which, when it came, he knew must be acted on instantly. The man put a big foot over the spike-puller and thumbed the sharp edge of the ax.

"Been rootin' around my place, huh?" he growled, and shook his head. "I don't like that much. Folks who get nosy always end up in plenty of trouble. Now take you—bustin' in where you wasn't invited. That's bad. Looks like I got the right to make you be kind of sorry for that."

The ax went up—and at that instant the Phantom whipped into action. Like a flash of light he drew his gun. He had no time to aim. By sheer instinct he squeezed the trigger, angling a blind shot at the rigid arm raising the glinting ax. But the Phantom didn't need to aim, for his ability as a snaphooter was well-known to those who had been targets for it, and others who feared it. With deadly accuracy his slug ripped into the fleshy part of the arm of the man who held the gleaming ax uplifted.

With a yelp of pain the man let the weapon fall heavily to the ground. He lurched forward, snarling curses. The Phantom triggered his automatic again, but this time, as bad luck would have it, the gun jammed. In front of him the man's contorted face, teeth bared and eyes venomous, swam grotesquely.

Blood spurted from the wound in the big

fellow's arm, goading him on with bull-like fury. The Phantom hurled his automatic into the face of his oncoming attacker. It struck solidly, but failed to stop the man.

Brawny hands reached for him. He tried to duck, but stumbled over a loose stone before the shack's doorway and slipped. Before he could recover his balance, he was in a bone-crushing grip.

A hot breath blew against his face. The man who used an ax as a weapon was spitting out words, threats, but the Phantom didn't hear them. He knew he was in for the battle of his life, that this adversary was as powerful as anyone he had ever met or fought with in all his career.

He was flung back in a viselike hold, and the man's right hand came up to circle about his throat. Savage spatulate fingers dug into the vulnerable spots. A haze, crimson-flecked, floated before the Phantom's burning eyes.

He realized his attacker's strategy was to beat him down by brute force and then use the ax on him as the man had intended in the first place. The Phantom's mind whirled. Then his vision cleared a trifle and he could see that his gun had cut the sunburned face before him. That, too, was showing a scarlet ooze. Suddenly and abruptly the Phantom went limp, a broken gasp of pain choking out from his harried throat.

He heard the man's panted breath of satisfaction. The fellow's relentless fingers left his victim's throat. Holding the Phantom anchored, the man leaned down to grab up the ax. In that dizzy instant, before the outstretched hand reached the weapon, the Phantom knew his fate hung in the balance. His mind seethed with jumbled thoughts, but he knew also that now, as never before in his life, he must keep his brain clear.

HALF-DOUBLED over, he let his dead weight rest on the arm that pinned him while he worked his left shoulder lower. He had only heartbeats left in which to act. He found the place on the man's torso he wanted. With amazing power, for one supposedly on the verge of unconsciousness, the Phantom heaved!

At the same moment he seized the hand that was jammed against him. He wrenched that loose with a jerk that nearly tore the killer's arm from its socket. Throwing him sideward, the Phantom smashed his fist into the face his gun had bruised. His opponent's

head snapped back. Before he could straighten the Phantom really went to work on him.

Expert in all methods of attack, the great detective selected the brand he deemed necessary for this occasion, with cold deliberation. It was a combination of old-fashioned, toe-to-toe slugging, with a few wrestling holds thrown in for good measure. Against his bewildering attack, delivered with scientific precision, the other battler was unable to put up more than a feeble resistance.

The Phantom beat down his opponent's defense, and pressed in for the kill.

In just a moment he saw his opening and shot a hard right to the jaw. A left, with all of his superb strength behind it, arrowed to the solar plexus.

The man dropped like a fallen ox.

Retrieving his gun and the spike-puller, the Phantom started off through the trees—toward the road beyond.

CHAPTER V

NEW YORK CALL



WHEN the Phantom returned to the Green Inn, late that afternoon, he found a worried Steve Huston prowling restlessly around the lobby of the comfortable little hotel. At the Phantom's signal, Huston eagerly followed him up the stairs.

"What happened, Phantom?" the reporter asked anxiously, when they were in Van's room and the door had been closed. "I waited two hours for you, there at the wreck. Then I thought I'd better come back here and ask the clerk if there was any word from you."

"Sorry," the Phantom said. "I've been busy."

Accustomed to the famous detective's methods, the surprising twists and turns he made when working on a case, Huston took the explanation with a nod. Curiously, he looked at the object the Phantom had drawn from his pocket and was going over with the small but powerful glass he had taken from his bag.

"What have you got there, Phantom?" the reporter asked.

"Tool known as a spike-puller. The implement, that pulled the spikes and

caused the wreck." The Phantom put the glass away with a shrug. "No chance to get a clear print from it, I see. Well, it doesn't matter too much. I have a couple of other leads that look worthwhile."

He lapsed into thoughtful silence. Steve Huston saw that he was not to learn anything more at this time. But he was restless at inaction, anxious to do something on his own account. He waited a minute or two, then asked: "What have you got pegged for me to do next?"

The Phantom raised his brooding gaze and brought himself back to the red-headed reporter he seemed to have forgotten.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Last night you mentioned a Mike Garrity who appeared to know something. Since he's an oiler, I'm most likely to find him at the railroad yards, I suppose. Then I've got to get in touch with Archer Gallup, the road's president—see him, if possible. Tell me, was there anything in the local papers about the wreck not being an accident?"

Steve Huston shook his head.

"No," he said. "But I've learned there's a private investigation under way. Not the usual one put on to satisfy the authorities and the insurance companies. This one is being made by the road's own detectives and inspectors."

"You sent your story to the *Clarion*?" the Phantom asked. "Was there any hint in it of foul play?"

Huston frowned.

"Yes," he admitted. "But only indirectly."

The Phantom stopped his pacing and pulled a chair around to face the bed and Steve. He dropped into it, taking the gray, deckle-edged note from his pocket.

"I won't need you for the next day or two, Steve," he said. "Not up here. But even if you are on vacation, I'm going to need you. Right now you'd better go back to town. Take this with you." He handed the reporter the note. "Check on its author. Use the telephone number for a way in and get me all the facts you can dig up."

Steve read the note and smiled. "A boat-ride, Phantom," he said. "I'll do just that. You'll get your information."

"Be careful," the redhead was warned. "You may think it's a cinch, but this is a tough assignment. I'm convinced that the people we're dealing with don't pull their punches."

"What's the idea back of it?" Huston asked, with real curiosity. "What's the motive, I mean—the pay-off? What possible reason can anyone have for deliberately wrecking a train and killing a lot of innocent people? I don't get it."

"At the moment," the Phantom said. "I can only guess at the answer, myself. And I don't like speculation. I'm only interested in facts. Hard, cold, definite facts. I'll get those presently. Meanwhile I think you'd better telephone Mr. Havens now and let him know you'll be back tomorrow. When you finish talking, let me have a word with him. . . ."

Steve Huston left **Bedlow Green** on a late train that night, leaving the Phantom, to line up his next move.

Van Loan waited until nine-thirty the next morning before starting for the business office of the Maine and Vermont Railroad. That was located in the town of Skinner's Falls. Taking over the coupé Huston had hired, the Phantom drove himself to the town. Reaching it, he parked the car in front of the long, low building that was his destination and got out.

He found the section of the long, rambling building in which Archer Gallup's private office was located. A capable-looking woman who presided over its ante-office shook her head at the Phantom's request.

"Mr. Gallup is seeing no one without an appointment," she said, with decision.

"He'll see me," the Phantom told her.

SHE gave him a curious stare. Returning it levelly, he put his hand in his pocket and took out the Bureau of Detectives badge he usually carried for just such an emergency. Cupping it in the palm of his hand he let her see it briefly.

"Oh, you're a detective!" she said, and her manner changed. "Just a minute, please. I'll see if Mr. Gallup is busy."

Hurrying to a door behind her, she disappeared through it. The Phantom slipped the badge back in his pocket and idly glanced around the room. His attention was taken by a map of upper New England, showing the territory served by the Maine and Vermont Railroad. It was framed, and occupied a conspicuous place on one wall. On the opposite wall was another map, a much later one. That was of the extensive New York, Buffalo and Great Lakes System. The connecting

freight link between the two railroads was heavily accented in red on this map.

The woman came back in to the ante-room. "Mr. Gallup will see you," she said. "You can go right in."

The Phantom thanked her and crossed to the door. Opening it, he found himself looking into a room that apparently had not been changed since Civil War days. An ancient roll-top desk was in the exact center of the office. Antique, rush-bottom chairs and a counting house table filled in where a venerable old safe with the words *Maine and Vermont R. R.* stenciled in gold on its double doors, and wooden filing cabinets left off.

Framed prints of famous locomotives, most of them belching smoke from fantastic stacks, decorated the wainscoted walls. A funereal-looking oppressive bank of palms stretched across two windows that looked as if they hadn't been cleaned for years. A length of dusty druggist paved the broad planked floor.

The man at the roll-top desk seemed a perfect part of the picture. Archer Gallup, railroad president, silver-haired, wrinkled, and an echo from another day, let his swivel chair creak noisily as he turned in it. His thin neck was enclosed in what the Phantom was sure was a celluloid collar. A linen collar on this ancient, he thought, would in fact be an anachronism. The old man's severe black trousers and alpaca coat didn't help lighten the dreary aspect of the place.

But the Phantom instantly saw that the eyes that looked at him from behind the gold-rimmed spectacles were sharp and shrewd. Archer Gallup might have stepped directly from a gilt-framed daguerreotype, but time had not dulled his mind. He coughed and said pettishly:

"Close the door, please. There's a draught. Draughts are bad for me at my age. Miss Vinson tells me you're a detective. I'm not used to having detectives call on me. What is it you want? Be brief. My time is valuable."

"I want to talk to you about the wreck on your road," the Phantom began, but stopped as Gallup snapped his bony fingers.

"There's nothing to talk about. It's over and done with. Unfortunate, but it couldn't be helped. All railroads have accidents at one time or another. We, luckily, had escaped until this one. I have nothing to say on the subject."

"But I have," the Phantom said slowly, and there was a grim tightening of his lips. "You know, of course, this wasn't an accident. You know perfectly well that it was planned, the work of a wrecker. I understand you may even have had advance information that it was due to happen. A man who phoned you once, without getting you, may have tried again."

Archer Gallup straightened in his chair. Like a receding tide, his testy manner ebbed. The eyes behind the lenses of his spectacles focused on the Phantom intently. He coughed again, fumbling with some papers on the desk in what was obviously a bid for time.

"The wreck is being investigated," he finally said, in a tone unlike his former abrupt one. "That's all I can tell you."

"Why would anyone want to put your road into bankruptcy, Mr. Gallup?" the Phantom asked.

The lids came down over the sharp eyes. With a silk handkerchief whisked from his upper coat pocket, Gallup patted his thin-lipped mouth. Before he could answer, the door opened and Miss Vinson looked in.

"New York on the telephone, sir," she said primly. "It's Mr. Borden."

WATCHING, the Phantom saw a subtle change take place in Archer Gallup's expression. It was as if a shade had been lowered quickly, shutting out all expression in his wrinkled face. Something secretive, almost furtive, appeared in his glance.

"Ask him to wait just a minute," the railroad president said, and to the Phantom, "You'll have to excuse me. I'm very busy."

"Perhaps," the Phantom suggested, "it might be better if I stop in to see you tonight

at your home."

Gallup pounced on that.

"Yes, much better. I'll have more time then. I'll be glad to answer your questions. I . . . Miss Vinson will show you out. Don't misunderstand me. All my life I've cooperated with the law. Tonight will be fine. Make it around eight-thirty or nine. Good day, sir."

The Phantom went back to the coupe. A "Mr. Borden" was calling from New York. Someone of extreme importance to the president of the M and V, from Gallup's strange actions and the haste he applied in getting rid of his detective caller.

Who was Borden?

Van's eyes narrowed as he climbed in under the wheel of the car and started the motor.

CHAPTER VI

BROWN EYES



SWIFTLY the Phantom headed for the Maine and Vermont freight yards and roundhouse, a mile north, on the outskirts of Skinner's Falls.

While he drove, his mind was busy. From the short time he had been on the case had come to one definite conclusion. That was the fact a well-organized plot to ruin the M & V Railroad had been put into operation. This was no spite work on the part of some disgruntled employee of the line, or the machinations of a crackpot. Van had a hunch that a clever brain was behind the wreck.

His thoughts went back to the shack in the
[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.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 5 pints a day.

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

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

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (4#.)

woods. He had had a reason for leaving the ax man there. For one thing, the Phantom didn't want any arrests made so early in the proceedings. Arrests that might tip his hand—tell the enemy that he was on the scene and in action. Secrecy was of vital importance.

A few more minutes and the Phantom saw the spread of the freight yards from a trestle bridge. He rolled over that, stopped a short distance from a high board fence that bore the warning "KEEP OUT" and made his way on foot to the roundhouse.

Men were busy at work there. A locomotive was on the turntable. The fireman, squatting atop the tender, was hosing water into the big boiler. The engineer lounged in the cab while his iron horse made a slow, complete circle.

Oilers and yard men, sweaty and greasy, went about their tasks, paying no attention to the Phantom.

He looked at the locomotive. The numerals, "607," were on its headlight plate, stenciled under the cab windows and on the tender itself. Like most of the M & V's rolling stock, the engine was old type, the kind the New York, Buffalo and Great Lakes System had discarded years previously.

Van Loan watched for a minute or more, then stopped one of the men who was passing.

"Garrity around?" he asked.

The man shook his head. "Ain't here today. He didn't show up for work this morning."

The Phantom turned and made his way toward the yard office. There were a couple of guards on duty, but they didn't stop or quiz him when he went into the one-story building. Several windows, where the workers lined up on pay day, faced a larger window that said "Information." The Phantom stopped there and addressed a girl whose head was bent over a thick ledger.

"I'm looking for Michael Garrity. They told me at the roundhouse he isn't here today. I wonder if you could give me his address."

The girl glanced up.

"We don't usually—"

"Supply the addresses of employees," the Phantom finished for her. "I know. But this is important. I have to talk with Mr. Garrity about his insurance policy. Stupidly, I left my book with his address at the hotel." He smiled. "You can save me a trip back, if you will."

Either the smile or the casual way he spoke, brought results. The girl hesitated only a minute more. Then with a little nod she consulted a card index file, jotted down what the Phantom wanted and, tearing the piece of paper from her pad, handed it through the window.

"Sixty, Huron Street," she said.

The Phantom thanked her and, asking information from one of the guards outside, found Huron Street on the south side of Skinner's Falls.

Small cottages, close enough for the dwellers to reach out and touch the adjoining house, were on either side of the street. Each had a patch of lawn in front, a small garden in the rear. The Phantom parked the car and got out in front of Number 60.

There was no bell. He knocked on the front door. He knew someone was inside because he could hear sounds of movement, but a long time passed before the knob was turned and the door opened on a narrow crack.

"Yes?"

The Phantom looked into a pair of brown eyes raised inquiringly to his. They belonged to a pretty girl who couldn't have been more than nineteen or so. She was healthily suntanned, her teeth were very white, which made her lips seem redder than if they had been lipstick. There was trouble in her gaze, a degree of doubt that the caller sensed immediately.

"I'm looking for Mike Garrity," the Phantom said. "I stopped at the roundhouse and they told me he hadn't been there today. Are you—"

"I'm Mrs. Garrity. What do you want to see him about?" The long lashes began to veil the trouble in her gaze.

"It's about his insurance policy," the Phantom explained smoothly. "I wonder if I could talk to him about it?"

THE word "insurance" was the open sesame. She pushed the door wider and the Phantom stepped into a small living room. Its furniture was Grand Rapids at a low ebb, pictures and ornaments which would have made Richard Curtis Van Loan shudder, but the room had the virtue of extreme cleanliness. Garrity's wife took off the starched apron she wore and draped it over one rounded arm.

"Perhaps I can tell you what you want to know." Her tone was almost mechanical.

"You see, my husband's a little under the weather today. He's sick."

"Sick?"

"He had a drop too much last night." A hard, defensive note came into her voice. "He's in bed—asleep."

"In that case I'd better come back some other time. Maybe he'd like to take out an extra policy." A glib, professional quality colored the Phantom's words. "We have a new special liability covering accidents. In view of the railroad trouble, he might be interested."

"We couldn't possibly afford more than we're carrying now," the girl interrupted. Cryptically, she added, "Besides, my husband won't be in any danger from now on."

She said it smoothly enough, but in the simple statement the Phantom found a world of conjecture. There was nothing more to keep him there. He said good-bye and was halfway to the porch steps when the muffled ring of a telephone in the house stopped him.

On noiseless feet he tiptoed back to the screen door.

By straining his ears he was just able to catch what the girl with the brown eyes was saying:

"This is Ruth—Yes, he's home—But you can't see him, Raff—Because I don't want you to, that's why!" Her low, vibrant voice seemed to catch and break. "And please don't call again! Just leave us alone!"

For a moment more the Phantom listened.

Then, turning, he went out to the street and his car. . . .

Van Loan had been in his room at the Inn no more than ten minutes after his return from Huron Street before his phone jingled.

"A message for you," the clerk downstairs said. "A Mr. Huston called you from New York an hour ago. He asked that you get in touch with him."

"Thanks."

The Phantom frowned. He didn't intend to make any calls from the inn, for they might be listened in on by the switchboard operator. So he went across the green. He found a drug store with a booth, dropped coins into the telephone box and in a surprisingly short time had the *Clarion's* office on the wire.

Steve's familiar voice came to him.

"What's on your mind?" the Phantom asked.

"Where are you calling from?" The little

reporter spoke guardedly.

"In a phone booth. It's all right. Go ahead."

"I thought I'd better tell you, Phantom. Certain people up there know you're on the case!"

"How'd you find that out?"

"Coming down on the train. There were two men in the seat ahead of me. I pretended to doze and listened to what they were saying. They mentioned you in connection with the wreck."

The Phantom nodded to himself. What Steve imparted was not too surprising. The note he had found in the tweed coat in the shack indicated that one of the conspirators, in the plot against the railroad, had some Manhattan connection.

That fact, coupled with the red tocsin that had burned from the top of the *Clarion* Building—which the underworld had come to know was a call for the Phantom—had probably supplied the information that he was on another case. And what case was of more importance than the wreck of the Green Mountain Special?

"Thanks for telling me, Steve," he said. "By the way, have you had a chance to check on the note I gave you?"

"Not yet. I've called that number twice without an answer. The listing for it is a Miss Savage, in the Fifties. I'll drop in there this afternoon, later. When do you expect to be back?"

"I'm not quite certain. Mr. Havens there?"

"He's in conference."

A few more words and the Phantom hung up.

CHAPTER VII

VOICE SILENCED



PURCHASING a copy of the *Bedlow Green Chronicle*, along with two New York papers, the Phantom took them back to his room. The local sheet had the wreck of the Green Mountain Special plastered all over its front page. But nowhere in the story that its rural reporter had gone to town on, was there any hint that a rail had been spread and that the train had been sent deliberately to its doom.

In the metropolitan dailies, the account of the wreck was tucked away on rear pages.

After the "Extra," its importance had diminished. Like the *Chronicle*, the New York papers made no mention of wreckers having been at work.

The long afternoon faded into twilight. The Phantom grew restless and impatient for the hour of his appointment with Archer Gallup. Marking time never appealed to him. On a case he liked to keep going at top speed, to follow through without delays. The minutes seemed to drag by leadenly. An eternity elapsed before it was eight o'clock, then half past.

The Phantom drove two miles out from Bedlow Green. Gallup's place was up Steep Hill Road and that stretch of macadam more than justified its name. It twisted in sharp loop turns as it climbed precariously. He tried to picture it on a sleety winter night. He had to go all the way up in second gear.

The road leveled at the top. Below him the town he had left nestled snugly in the valley, the moon painting the white houses with a silver brush. Half a mile more and a high stone wall reared to the left of him. His headlights fell on a brass plate that read:

PINEFAIR

A. M. GALLUP

A few more yards and the coupe went in between tall bronze gates that stood hospitably ajar.

After the office he had visited that morning, the Phantom was prepared for anything except the house he approached along a rhododendron-shadowed drive. It spread out in the moonlight, L-shaped, with gardens surrounding it and a forest of pines making a back drop at its rear. Modern, substantial and undoubtedly expensive in its construction, Archer Gallup's house was a far cry from the musty, out-of-date office in which he conducted the affairs of the railroad of which he was president.

One second floor window was lighted dimly. The rest of the house was in darkness. The Phantom went up some half-circle brick steps. A stout front door, a faithful reproduction of the doors in the houses along the green, confronted him. A ponderous brass knocker had turned to silver in the glow of the moon.

He reached for it, checking his hand when—as if his presence had already been sig-

naled—the door began to open.

Misty blackness yawned beyond. In it, Van saw the smear of a face. He had time for no more than a brief glance before its owner flung himself forward in a swift, direct lunge.

There was a whistling sound, an all too familiar one to the Phantom.

He ducked, hearing the muffled impact of the most murderous of gangland's weapons—a blackjack—as it missed him and thudded against the side of the doorway. Before he could draw his gun a foot landed against his knee, making him grab for the door to keep from falling.

The foot was followed by a knee driven to the pit of his stomach. A spasm of excruciating pain held the Phantom momentarily paralyzed.

He expected, as he swayed there, to be an easy victim for the sap. A hot prospect for a cold slab. But his assailant, intent only upon an immediate getaway, slammed a fist into the Phantom's face before he slithered past and sprinted toward the driveway.

He cut left there. In another second or two the throaty rumble of a car's engine was followed by the crunch of gravel under tires.

With a clash of changing gears, the car roared away.

Gingerly, the Phantom pressed an exploring finger over his mouth. He expected to spit out loose teeth. The knuckles in his face had had lusty power behind them. But except for a small cut on his lip he still seemed to be intact.

He pulled himself together and listened.

THE echoes of the car's exhaust died away in the distance down Steep Hill Road. Slowly, the Phantom turned toward the open door and the misty darkness bulking behind it.

He recalled the dimly lit window above. For an instant more he hesitated. Then he took out his torch and switched it on. Its specially ground lens made a brilliant V of light. He swung it around as he penetrated deeper into the wide foyer hall ahead of him.

On either side were rooms with open doors. Attractively furnished rooms, from the quick glances he caught of them in the flood of his flash.

As he moved on, the Phantom felt his nerves begin to creep and crawl. Intuitively,

knowledge that he was on the brink of some ominous discovery, began to steal through him. Not only had Archer Gallup's house concealed a gloom-blurred figure armed with a skull-crushing blackjack, but something else filled the Phantom with the premonition of a dire revelation.

He found it the next minute—at the end of the foyer, in a small study.

The Phantom's light, splitting the blackness like a rising sun, focused on a body that lay halfway between the door and a writing table on the left side of the room!



STEVE HUSTON

A wall switch kindled lights in twin lamps as the Phantom pressed it on.

Tense and grim-faced he knelt beside the man who had been struck down and lay with his face to the rug. The death wound, the Phantom saw, had smashed in the left side of Archer Gallup's silver-haired head. A wound made by the same blackjack that might have ended the Phantom's career!

Van straightened up. Once more the Maine and Vermont had suffered planned disaster. This time no rail had been spread. But the guiding hand of the railroad's destiny had been rendered ineffectual.

Who had done that? Why?

Tight-lipped, Van turned from Archer Gallup's limp body, to survey the study with keen intentness.

The killer had used the room's window to enter by. That was open, its screen removed. Outside it was a length of covered terrace. Anyone could have come across the garden, quietly slipped the screen out of place, used the sap and then extinguished the lights when he had heard the coupe stop outside. Instead of leaving by the same way he had entered, he had probably figured that if he could cut down the visitor at the front door he would have more time to make his getaway and less chance of pursuit. The Phantom crossed the room to the writing desk.

From the papers scattered there, he saw that Gallup had been busy with work he had brought home. A thick sheaf of freight invoices and bills of lading were under a paperweight. A telegram was propped up against a leather calendar. The Phantom reached for it. It had been sent at one o'clock that day, from New York, and said:

WILL ARRIVE AT SIX STOP ARRANGE TO MEET
ME DEPOT STOP HOPE YOU HAVE KEPT YOUR END
OF OUR AGREEMENT STOP

The signature was that of someone named MacComber.

Van slipped the yellow message in his pocket. Another name for his collection! He gave his attention to the writing table again and was looking at some correspondence when, from the doorway, a shaky voice said:

"Put up your hands! I'll shoot to kill if you make a move!"

The Phantom turned his head slowly. Framed in the doorway a portly, gray-haired man with the face of a startled cherub covered Van with what looked like a long-barreled pistol of Revolutionary vintage. He wore trousers, carpet slippers and a wrinkled white coat. He was obviously one of the household servants, probably the butler.

"Careful," the Phantom warned. "That thing might go off and hurt you!"

The next minute the man saw Gallup's body on the floor. A strangled exclamation broke across his lips. The pistol pointed at the Phantom was lowered.

"Mr. Gallup! You've killed him!"

VAN took advantage of the servant's agitation to cross quickly, prison the portly man's arm and relieve him of the ancient firearm. He made no attempt to struggle, his wide-eyed gaze kept fastened on the dead

man. The next moment the Phantom saw tears roll down the pink cheeks.

"Pull yourself together." Van's voice lost some of its hard quality. "This is a job for your sheriff. You'd better call him at once. There's nothing either of us can do for Mr. Gallup, now!"

Another word or two brought the information that the stout man was Roberts, the butler. Still shaken, he numbly followed the instructions given him. With a trembling hand he picked up a telephone on the far side of the study.

The Phantom heard him call a number and, after a pause, say:

"Sheriff Allen? This is Roberts . . . Yes, sir, Mr. Gallup's butler. Could you come up here as soon as possible? Something terrible has happened!"

The Phantom prowled around the room, his eyes searching for possible clues. No killer ever struck down a victim without leaving behind some faint trace of his identity. But in this particular instance, the Phantom found nothing to help him.

In an apathetic huddle, Roberts watched from a chair near the telephone. The butler couldn't quite make out who the Phantom was or what he was doing there, but offered no interference. Roberts had winked away his tears and seemed to have himself under better control. Once or twice he started to say something, stopped and, with another shudder, stared blankly through the shimmering light haze at his late employer.

"While we're waiting for the sheriff," the Phantom said to him, "you might tell me a few things, Roberts. I'm with the police, so you don't have to hide anything."

In proof of his statement he let the butler see the badge that had impressed Miss Vinson that morning. Roberts however, did not register any surprise. He drew a quivering breath and looked up at the man who had spoken to him.

"Yes, sir," he murmured. "What would you like to know?"

"Mr. Gallup had an appointment with a Mr. MacComber?" he asked. "He was to meet him at the railroad station at six o'clock, or send someone for him?"

"The gentleman didn't arrive, sir. He telephoned that he would be late, that he wouldn't see Mr. Gallup until tomorrow morning."

"Who is he?" asked the Phantom.

Roberts shook his head. "I don't know,

sir. I never heard of him until Mr. Gallup mentioned his name this evening at dinner."

"You know of a Mr. Borden?"

Again Roberts shook his head.

"No, I don't, sir."

"Tell me about tonight. Is it your habit to retire so early? Did Mr. Gallup have any visitors, any telephone calls?"

"No, he didn't. He usually came in here after dinner if he had any work to finish up. I never bothered him. When my duties were over I went to my room. I was there a little while ago when I heard a car drive off in a hurry. I thought I'd better come down and look around. The front door was open and— and then I saw you."

"One minute." The Phantom's voice turned crisp. "You say you heard a car drive off. Two cars arrived. Mine and the one driven by Mr. Gallup's murder."

"I didn't hear either arrive," Roberts drew a breath and added. "I might have been dozing then, over my book. I do sometimes."

CHAPTER VIII

METAL DISK



JUST a few minutes later a car whined up to the main entrance of the Gallup's house. Roberts, the butler, hurried out, and presently heavy footsteps clumped down the hall. Sheriff Allen, with two deputies, came into the study.

The Phantom, balanced against the writing table, saw the gun the sheriff drew and covered him with. A big .44 with a long, ominous barrel.

The Phantom had prepared himself for that. In his right hand he held, not the New York detective's badge, but his own jeweled domino mask-plate. This he let Sheriff Allen see when the other man came in closer to frisk him.

The sheriff's eyes widened. A tinge of color crept into his rawboned, weather-beaten face. Under his breath he exclaimed:

"The Phantom Detective! I I heard you were up here, but I never thought I'd have the chance to meet you!"

The Phantom put him at ease with a casual remark and led the man out of earshot of the others. One of the deputies had turned Archer Gallup over and the other had gone to telephone for the coroner. Rapidly, the

Phantom sketched a brief word picture of what had happened since he had come to Pinefair. The sheriff listened attentively, nodding once or twice.

"And you think this ties in with the trouble the railroad's been having?" When the Phantom said he did, Sheriff Allen shook his head doubtfully. "I reckon you'd better stay around and sort of keep an eye on things, Phantom. Never had nothin' like this before and I've been in office twelve years!"

The Phantom said good night to the sheriff and the others, and let himself out.

The moon still paved the gardens and graveled drives. Starting for his own car, he stopped, struck by an idea. Wheeling, he made his way to the heavy shadows where the murderer's car had been parked. It was always the off chance, a remote possibility that the killer, in his hurry to get away, might have left something of significance behind.

His flash played over the gravel, covering it foot by foot.

Oil drops, dripped from a crankcase, marked the place where the car had stood. But there didn't seem to be anything there to claim his attention. It began to look as if the driveway was as barren of clues as the study had been. And then, as he was about to switch off the torch, the Phantom's eyes saw something.

It was a round metal disk. Van picked it up and, holding it between thumb and forefinger, looked it over carefully. The number, "33", stamped on one side, bore out the supposition that the disk was a check given as a receipt for a hat or a coat.

Turning it over the Phantom read the words "Roc-A-Co."

He nodded to himself. The Roc-A-Co was one of Manhattan's torrid night spots, the same place he had suggested taking Nancy Porter to see. He slipped the disk in his pocket, went back to his own car and started the motor.

Steep Hill Road, when he began its descent in second gear, seemed even more tortuous than when he had climbed it. On one side, over a white wooden fence, the land fell away in a sheer drop of several hundred feet. Down there a stream wandered—probably the same one in which the piled-up coaches of the Special had landed.

Trees grew thickly on the left, mounting to the peak of an Alpine-like mountainside.

Van was making one of the hairpin turns, headlights on full, when he had an intuitive danger flash. It came with such psychic suddenness that his foot jammed down on the brake and the coupe ground to a jolting stop.

Flung up against the wheel, he gripped it, wondering what had prompted his action. Then, in the next breath, he understood.

Down from the side of the hill a loosened boulder, gaining momentum with every revolution, hurtled out of the brush, thundered across the road at a point where the coupe would have been if he hadn't stopped it. Ripping away a section of the white fencing as if it were so much paper, it dropped over the lip of the precipice.

The Phantom switched off the headlights. As he blotted them out the whang of a rifle sounded up the hillside. Lead ricocheted off his coupe's steel roof. Ducking down, he slipped his own gun out and waited for a repeat shot and the location of its flash.

HE TOLD himself he might have known. Hurried though the flight of Archer Gallup's assassin had been, he had had time for a glance that showed him the type of car the Phantom had been driving. He had laid in wait for the trip down the hill road of Gallup's other visitor!

A second shot, and the Phantom squeezed the trigger of his automatic. He opened the door and dropped down to the roadway. The second flash had come from the right, up among the trees. He stabbed two more shots in that direction. The rolling vibration of their echoes died away. Silence lay undisturbed again.

Then, as he stood there, from high above him a mocking voice came out of the night:

"Next time it will be different, Phantom! Maybe you won't be so lucky!"

A laugh, sinister and eerie in the moonlight, followed the threat before it faded...

The Phantom left Vermont the next day for a swift visit to New York to make some personal investigations in the city. On his arrival, he went directly to his Park Avenue apartment. There, after a quick telephone call to Frank Havens, he removed the face and clothing of "Watson" and again became Richard Curtis Van Loan.

The *Clarion's* owner had told Van to meet him at a certain midtown luncheon club within an hour. Van, arriving minutes early, dawdled in the comfortable waiting room.

Perfectly turned out, his flannels fitting as if they had been molded to his tall, athletic physique, Van Loan was nonchalantly bored by the conversation that went on around him. Figures and sales talk. Topics dry and uninteresting as dust. He drew into himself, using his old trick of completely cutting his mind off from his surroundings.

Van pondered his own problems. His thoughts ranged back over the past hours. He had made a start, a beginning, but that was not enough. He had yet to penetrate deeper into the tangled plans of those who plotted against the Maine and Vermont Railroad.

In one way he had found a crack that let in some light. Before leaving the Green Inn, he had seen the name of John MacComber on the register. He had spent half an hour talking with MacComber. The results of the interview had backed up and substantiated what had been in the back of his mind. But it hadn't led him any closer to the guilty parties.

Still, Van understood, no case could be solved swiftly and with simple ease. Particularly one with the complex angles this had. The intrigues created by criminals had to be taken apart, piece by piece, and then rebuilt before a satisfactory conclusion could be reached.

His trained mind had already drawn up a diagram of possible motives—reasons for both the wreck and the blackjack that had ended Archer Gallup's career.

But they were still shadowy outlines at best. Until something concrete and definite resulted, they must remain as such. Van Loan drew a long breath, raising his brooding gaze as he saw Frank Havens in the doorway. He sauntered over to meet the publisher.

"Dick!" Havens greeted. "Sorry I'm late. Hope you haven't been waiting long."

Frank Havens held out his hand and Van shook hands with his old friend. The publisher, who had a table reserved for his special use, led the way toward it. It was in a quiet corner, far enough away from those surrounding it to give it privacy. There, in confidential tones, a conversation could be carried on without being overheard.

Havens sat down, shook out a folded napkin and looked inquiringly at the attractive young man across from him. Van smiled, interpreting the look.

"It isn't a whole lot, Mr. Havens," he said,

in answer to the unspoken question. "I wish it were. It's still more or less embryonic, a murder-splashed pattern. But what I've learned I'll tell you."

Slowly and concisely he related the happenings in Vermont. Havens listened without comment, until Van finished.

"Now," he said. "I've a word for you from Steve. The young redhead has information on the assignment you gave him."

"Good. I'd like to see him as soon as possible. Time is a factor. There are loose ends that have to be tied up without delay. Those who struck at the Special—and Archer Gallup—haven't finished. And any third or fourth attempt must be frustrated!"

FACE serious, Havens leaned a little forward.

"I understand. Dick, I know this case can't wait. Probably you've heard that two more of the injured in that wreck have died. The guilty must be found and punished!"

"They will be!" Van promised grimly.

As the meal was served they discussed the matter in more detail, touching upon various points. But, as yet, there was much that Van himself could only guess at, and there was little information he could give Havens.

The meal finished, Havens said, "What, if any, significance do you attach to what MacComber told you?"

The Phantom shrugged.

"It fits in somewhere." He smiled faintly. "That's one of the loose ends I mentioned."

A call to Steve at the newspaper office found the red-headed reporter waiting to hear from the Phantom.

"I've got some news for you, Phantom!" he said at once. "Where can I meet you?"

Van glanced at his watch. "Make it in an hour—at the Triple Crown."

After he phoned Huston, Van went to his room. In a few minutes, before his three-mirrored dressing table in the secret room, he again drew the curtain on Richard Curtis Van Loan. For the second time the face and features of "Watson" looked back at him from the glass.

Van studied himself critically. Every line must be perfect, every shading correct. A flaw anywhere would betray his disguise to those who had seen him in this character before. Satisfied, at length, he put his make-up pencils, and skin creams away, donned the same clothing he had previously worn, and went out.

CHAPTER IX

STEVE'S LEAD



NEXT stop for Van Loan was the garage, convenient to his home, where he kept his specially made, high-powered cars parked so that he could get them easily when needed. He paid well, so there was never any delay in getting a car out of crowded ranks. The prowlike noses of his three black beauties stood aimed at the garage doors, their tanks filled with the high octane, aviation type gas they used.

The owner of the place, a man named Rogers, had his own ideas about his customer. He had seen Van in many varied disguises, though never as his real self. Rogers knew his patron was some kind of secret agent of the law, though exactly how he was connected with the law forces Rogers could not be certain. Well-paid as he was, however, he held his curiosity in check. It was enough for him that this man, who always greeted him with the same signal, saw

fit to use his accommodations. In a way he felt flattered by the trust placed in him.

When Rogers looked inquiringly at the man who entered the garage, the customer pulled the lobe of his left ear with his right hand. That was a signal Frank Havens and Steve Huston knew—the identity of the Phantom. The garage man nodded.

"All ready for you, sir. Which?"

"The sedan." Van crossed to it and climbed in.

A touch of the starter-button and the motor purred silkily. Garageman Rogers hurried to swing open the steel overhead doors. He touched his cap as the big black car slid past.

The Phantom's next stop was in the Bronx, close to the Westchester line. There was where he maintained that other laboratory in which he had conducted so many successful experiments as Dr. Bendix, the venerable scientist. There, too, was a more complete arsenal than in his Park Avenue penthouse, and a larger wardrobe of disguises. There likewise were his camera room and the workshop where he did his chemical test-

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ing and analyzing. Many a criminal would have paid a fortune to have learned the location of this atelier of the Phantom Detective's. As with his personal identity, he kept his whereabouts a closely guarded secret.

A thrust of his specially designed key into the multiple lock, and he was inside. As if directed by a hand, the door clicked quietly shut behind him. Shaded lights brightened the gloom for the windows were masked to keep out both the day and curious eyes.

Van looked around slowly. That had become a habit—to make sure that, in his absence, none of the underworld enemies to whom he carried his war against crime had paid the place a surreptitious visit.

Everything was in order. The Phantom had no experiments to tackle today. No bloodstains to test, fingerprints to clear, or mysterious inks to analyze. Instead, his stop-off was for an entirely different reason. An up-to-the-minute glossary of information on every conceivable subject was filed away in leather-bound volumes. No encyclopedia could boast a more comprehensive burden of facts than these books.

A green-shaded reading lamp threw its mellow glow on the volume Van selected. That was a tome on Eastern railroads. He ran a thumb down the index and not much later had all the facts and figures on the Maine and Vermont line before him.

The Phantom read them carefully. What he felt was important he consigned to memory. Some of the information he culled he believed had a direct bearing on recently past events. He retained that, discarding useless details, before he returned to the great New York, Buffalo and Great Lakes System.

Some twenty minutes later he left the Bronx laboratory and drove down town to keep his appointment with Steve Huston.

The Triple Crown he had mentioned as a rendezvous on the telephone was a tavern on 44th Street, near Sixth Avenue. A copy of an old English pub, its London atmosphere was enhanced by colorful sporting prints in its smoking room, cockney bartenders and flagstone floors. Perennial gloom was pierced by orange light from coach lamps along the walls. Unlike the noisy bars of Longacre Square, the Triple Crown had a leisurely, unhurried air of comfort.

Steve was in the smoking room, with a copy of the *Clarion's* first afternoon edition

spread open before him. He folded it hastily when the Phantom joined him. They were alone in the room, but Van made certain no ears could catch what Huston had to tell him. Instead of occupying a table in a corner, close to a wall that might be a thin partition, on the other side of which strained ears would be able to pick up words and sentences, he picked out a spot in the center of the room.

A WAITER took his order. Beer for the reporter, iced seltzer tanged with lime juice for himself. When the waiter went out the Phantom leaned to Steve.

"What have you learned?"

"Plenty, Phantom," Huston said eagerly. "That phone number. It belongs to a dame, name of Savage, Gypsy Savage. I've seen her. I went up to her place and hung around until she went out. I got a good look at her and"—he grinned—"it didn't hurt my eyes any."

"What does she do?" the Phantom asked.

"I oiled the superintendent for a little information." Huston grinned again. "Nothing like a couple of bucks to make a fellow give. It seems this Savage gal is a night-club performer. Does some warbling and hoofing in a certain clip joint with lace curtains known to the trade as—"

"The Roc-A-Co?"

Steve stared.

"What's the use?" he said dolefully. "I get out and dig and you tell me!"

The Phantom laughed.

"I couldn't miss on that one. I found this at Bedlow Green, on Gallup's driveway.

He tossed the hat check across to the reporter. Steve looked at it and nodded.

"That makes me feel better, Phantom. This Roc-A-Co place is run by a first class rigger called Gil Swain. Maybe you've heard of him."

The Phantom's face lost its smile. "Swain?" He frowned. "High-class rigger is right. He's also known as the King of Bookmakers. An ex-con whose gone into high finance. Yes, I know all about him. He's a top-bracket operator, smart and dangerous."

"This Gypsy Savage," Steve put in, "is supposed to be engaged to Swain."

The Phantom didn't speak for a minute or two. Then he finished his lime and seltzer and got up.

"Thanks—you've been a big help, Steve,"

he said. "Stand by in case I need you again. I think that both Swain, and the girl who writes notes that are found in old tweed coats in Vermont shacks, will bear some investigating—tonight. . . ."

The evening was far spent, and the patrons of the Roc-A-Co Club were beginning to weary, and turn their thoughts homeward when the Phantom sauntered into the night spot.

He handed his felt hat to a small blond girl whose lipsticked mouth wore a fixed smile. Her blue eyes wandered over him casually. He didn't look like heavy coin, so she didn't bother to wisecrack. Instead, after giving him a check, she turned directly to the newspaper open on her counter.

The Phantom smiled to himself and turned away. A head waiter, a hard-looking man whose appearance suggested he might have been a bouncer at some time, approached.

"Reservation?" he asked.

The Phantom shook his head. "No, I just dropped in to see your show."

The head waiter looked him over, much in the same manner the blonde with the blue eyes, had.

"I've got a single," he finally said. "Not ringside but you get a view. This way."

Another moment and the Phantom found himself at a postage-stamp-sized table that was wedged in between other tables. Behind him a bibulous party of out-of-towners, celebrating somebody's birthday, were toasting each other with champagne. Their conversation and comments seemed to indicate that the country's public school system was faulty. Van winced at some of the banal remarks that drifted to him.

On his other side, a greasy-looking man, with a henna-haired young lady, drew out a cigar and spilled ashes on his button-strained waistcoat. His eyes were half-shut and his cigar had gone out. His companion seemed annoyed about something.

"If you want to sleep," she said irritably, "why don't you go home and roll on your mattress, Charlie? It's much cheaper."

The man grinned crookedly.

"Having fun, babe?"

The girl's eyes snapped. "You're impossible! Sometimes," she told him, "I wonder what I see in you."

"You mean," he grunted, "what do you see in my poke. Plenty of lettuce, honey. Two grand a day—right out of the mutual machines."

"Money ain't everything!" she informed him, and turned her gaze on the Phantom.

HE HASTILY looked away, toward the dance floor that had been cleared in preparation for the Roc-A-Co's final show. Colored lights were painting it. The band, vamping a written-to-order tune, gave out with a blare of brass. Twelve girls scampered onto the floor and the greasy man with the cold cigar seemed to lose his apathy.

The floor show's master of ceremonies, a somber individual, wandered on after the first song and dance. He introduced the specialties that followed in quick succession. Dancing acts, comedians, a magician who fooled few. And then the one the Phantom had come to see.

"Now, folks," the M.C. said over the mike that sent his voice booming out of the amplifiers, "the star of our little entertainment. I give you—and I know you'll like the present—Miss Gypsy Savage, the toast of Broadway, plain or with margarine! A chord, doctor," he directed the band leader. "from your strings!"

The spotlights gathered at a point toward the end of the waxed dance floor. Curtains parted and Gil Swain's girl friend and star stepped out and into their glare. There was a rumble of applause. Evidently most of the Roc-A-Co's clientele had seen her before. She smiled a greeting and went directly into her song, while Van studied her.

Geared for glamour, Gypsy Savage's red-gold hair was like a flame in the light's glow. Her scarlet patch of a mouth wore a provocative smile, supposed to be faintly alluring. Costume and the starry violet eyes veiled behind long lashes, enhanced the effect she sought to get across. She was attractive in a cheap, obvious way. Her song, her gestures, the way she used her hands—all were designed to create the illusion of the Lorelei she was supposed to be.

The Phantom watching, disregarded the charm she threw at the customers in shovelfuls. The girl interested him for only one reason. He wanted the identity of the man to whom she had written the note. He was confident that person had a direct bearing not only on the wreck of the Green Mountain Special, but on the other Vermont events. And to find him, he had to check through Gypsy Savage. He tightened his mouth, letting his eyes move away from her and wander the semi-gloom.

THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

When her song had ended and Gypsy Savage bowed herself out, a storm of applause followed her. The lights came up again. The Phantom saw a man to the left of the place, near the drapes of an exit. He stood motionless. Van had a good view, but it took him a minute to recognize the flat, expressionless face, the crooked, thin-lipped mouth and the chalky complexion of Gil Swain, the self-styled King of Bookmakers!

The Phantom saw that Swain was watching Gypsy Savage intently when she came back for an encore. Finally, the man turned and disappeared behind the drapery. Van caught his waiter's attention and asked for his check. After he paid it he retrieved his hat from the disinterested blonde and left the Roc-A-Co.

Steve Huston had mentioned the entrance around the corner, used by the employees of the night club. The Phantom had parked his big car across the street from it. He unlocked its door, got in, but instead of driving off, settled back to keep the entrance under direct observation.

There was just a chance that things might break right, a remote possibility luck would be with him. The Phantom Detective never passed up any bets. Time and again, the smallest, most trivial incident had led him through to issues of paramount importance. Resigning himself to patience, he sat, statue-still, watching and waiting.

CHAPTER X

GEARED FOR GLAMOUR



ONE by one the girls who had appeared in the last floor show drifted out of the club, leaving for the night. Plainly dressed now, inconspicuous, they left their enchantment behind, shedding it when they had removed their grease paint and colorful costumes.

Two taxis came down the street. One went on as far as the corner, the other stopped at some little distance beyond the entrance to the Roc-A-Co. It had hardly pulled into the curb before, framed against the light in the doorway, the Phantom saw Gypsy Savage.

She came down the steps slowly, taller than she had appeared in the spotlight. She looked up and down the street and then

back over her shoulder. It was that last glance, hurried and significant, that whipped the Phantom's nerves and made him believe his vigil had not been in vain.

A man alighted from one of the taxis. He was tall in the shadows. He took a few steps away from the cab's open door, and the girl saw him and quickened her steps. The Phantom slid in under the wheel, touched the button that started the purring motor and let off the brake. He was ready for action when the man handed Gypsy Savage into the taxi and the vehicle rolled off.

Always an expert at tailing a suspect, whether on foot or in a car, the Phantom used all of his finesse in keeping the taxi in sight. Because of the early morning hour there was not too much traffic to interfere.

Yet, by its absence, it made his job harder. He had to be careful not to let the city-wise hackie know his cab was being followed. That called for all of the Phantom's ingenuity. For a street or two he dropped back, waiting to time the traffic lights so he could come up even with the cab in which Gypsy Savage was riding.

When he did that he made no move to turn his gaze away from the avenue beyond him. By his open disinterest he allayed any suspicion on the part of those he trailed.

The way led east for two avenues and then south again. Now the Phantom began to grow acutely conscious of someone behind him—someone sticking with him persistently. In his rear-view mirror he noticed headlights, the left one dimmer than the right. When the taxi he was following turned, and he did likewise, so did the car with the mismatched headlights. Unlike the Phantom's strategy, its driver never came up abreast of them when a red light stopped the traffic.

Van smiled thinly. Who? He moved his shoulders. Someone must have been planted in the first taxi that had come down the street, the one that had stopped near the corner. It had waited until the Savage girl, and the black sedan, had passed. Now it was half a street behind, keeping both under surveillance.

Another street and the first taxi began to slow down. The Phantom saw where it was bound. Some little distance ahead a sign with the words "The Grotto" lighted the dingy neighborhood with the red flash of its neon lettering. Gypsy Savage and her companion were getting out of their taxi when the Phantom went by.

In the mirror he saw the cab start off. Quickly he cut into the curb, parked, had the lights and engine off and the door locked. The taxi that had been behind him seemed to have disappeared. For the moment he was not interested in it. His object now was to keep the girl with the red-gold hair, and her escort, from slipping away.

The Phantom went through the colored glass doors of the Grotto. He recognized the type of place it was—a beer stube with a foreign flavor, one of many similar spots drawing its customers from the crowded sections of the city. Tawdry and smoke-filled, doing capacity business, it greeted him with the squeezed out music of an accordion and the squeak of a violin playing a Viennese waltz.

As the doors swung behind him, the Phantom was in time to see Gypsy Savage, and the tall man with her, almost at the top of a narrow, enclosed stairway that had twin palms in buckets on either side of its first step.

The Phantom went up the stairs, timing his progress so as not to overtake them.

He heard a man talking to them in a foreign accent. Then Gypsy Savage's ripple of laughter. A door opened and closed as the Phantom reached the upper landing. He looked around swiftly. The rooms, along the corridor, were private dining rooms. The one the three had gone into was to the right, four doors down its length.

SOMEONE was coming up the stairs, and that coupled with the chance that the man who had shown Gypsy and her boy friend into the room would come out directly, made Van duck hastily into the next room in line.

It was dark. It took him a moment to get his eyes accustomed to its murk, to place the table and chairs so he wouldn't stumble into them. Out in the hall the voice with the foreign accent was saying:

"I will send someone up immediately."

Then footsteps going toward the stairs and Gypsy Savage's laugh again, smothered this time by the closed door.

The Phantom's brows drew together. If he hoped to eavesdrop, he was to be disappointed. The wall separating the two rooms was thick enough to blot out conversation. He stood deliberating. This room in the Grotto was a far cry from the hills of Vermont. Still, he was certain, the red bridge

of crime spanned the distance. What had happened at Skinner's Falls could be traced back to the place he was in.

He had to go on, to see for himself who the man with Gypsy Savage was and, if possible, to hear what they were talking about. To that end he moved toward the window, hoping to find a fire-escape outside.

But there was none. The window, pushed open to let the cool night air enter, gave Van Loan a glimpse only of a sheer brick wall and the areaway below. However, he wasn't entirely frustrated. A stone decoration in the form of beading, made a narrow, precarious ledge along the building's side. With a hand the Phantom felt for a groove above it, between his window and the next.

Without hesitation when he found the groove he straddled the sill, got a toe hold on the ledge and with his strong fingers gripping the groove, flattened himself against the brick facing. Then, inch by inch, he drew himself closer to the other window.

Under the edge of a shade that swayed in the night breeze, he had a view into the room. Gypsy Savage was in a chair at the table, studying a large menu card. The Phantom's gaze darted from her to her companion. Lamplight fell on the man's inky black hair, his dark expressionless eyes and olive-tinted skin.

The Phantom had never seen him before. He let his mind photograph the face before he took in other details. The man was well-dressed, his stone-gray suit draped to his wide shoulders without a wrinkle. Shirt, necktie and shoes were expensive. But what interested the Phantom principally, were the hallmarks of crime engraved indelibly in the face he memorized.

"Put the window down, Frenchy," he heard Gypsy say. "I'm in a draught."

The Phantom pulled himself back before the girl's companion was out of his chair. The window thudded shut. The Phantom, his fingers beginning to feel the strain of holding to his perch, went back to the window from which he had climbed. Disappointment that he was to hear nothing was tempered somewhat by the fact he had seen "Frenchy", that he would recognize him again, have the advantage of knowing the man while he, himself remained unknown when their paths crossed. And he was sure he was to encounter the other man before much more time elapsed.

He climbed into the darkened room, hardly

getting his feet on the floor when he realized he was not alone in the murk.

Someone who had been standing close to the wall, with head bent forward in a listening attitude, wheeled around as the Phantom came through the window.

The Phantom remembered the cab with the mismatched headlights as the man, acting with swift decision, made a lunge for him!

Brass knuckles, in lieu of a sap, struck at him. The Phantom parried the blows and surged in to attack. The need of quiet impressed itself upon him as he fought. Any sounds of a brawl that would bring the Grotto's manager, and the two in the next room in on him might completely spoil all his plans.

He realized that his opponent had the same idea. The man slugged at him with silent ferocity. He, too, had no wish to have his presence there known to the couple he had spied upon.

The first flurry of wild hooks and jabs subsiding, the Phantom worked in closer. A dark target faced him, but there was plenty of it. He knocked down the armored fist curving at him in a final thrust, set himself and drew his right arm back.

THE Phantom used no more than a few scant inches to whip his fist up in a jaw-cracking smash that flung his victim backward.

He couldn't risk the crash of the man's fall. He caught the fellow, lowered him to the floor, and heard his thin moan. Another instant and he had his flash out. The beam of it painted the face of the individual he had sent to dreamland.

Brows drawn together, the Phantom stared at the moronic countenance of a thin, chinless youth with closed, sunken eyes. A face he had never seen—that of an underworld character, some small-time rat doing somebody's dirty work!

Van slipped his fingers into the man's coat pockets. Quickly he examined what he drew out of them. A few policy tickets, a folded scratch sheet for the day's races, some cigarettes and a handful of cartridges.

Then he saw that the crook he had sent wobbling down Queer Street showed signs of returning from the ether. Swiftly, the Phantom turned off his light, waited at the door until the hall was empty and then hurried down the stairs.

He had learned as much as he could in

this city for the time being, and another spot was calling. Grimly he turned his car in the direction of the city line, and settled down for the long drive back to Vermont. . . .

Back at Bedlow Green, the whispering black sedan at the inn's garage, the Phantom went directly to Sheriff Allen's office. That was in a rickety wooden building fronting a modern, two-story jail. The deputies who had been out at Pinefair the night of the Gallup murder, snapped to attention when the Phantom entered.

In his rear office, Sheriff Allen's weathered face lighted when his visitor went in.

"I'm mighty glad to see you, sir," he began, dusting off a chair for his distinguished visitor.

The Phantom sat down.

"Then you have some news?" he asked.

The sheriff nodded.

"Not on Gallup's death. That's a tough one. Looks like nothin' will come of it, until you get around to it. What I've got, is different."

Sheriff Allen helped himself to a fresh chew of plug tobacco, clamped his teeth around it and settled further back in his chair. His eyes on him, the Phantom waited.

Allen explained how the previous night someone had called him at his home. A woman's voice on the wire had told him that if he went directly, and without delay, to the freight yards at Skinner's Falls, he might find something of interest. Then, the sheriff said, before he could ask any questions, his caller had rung off.

"I never thought to have the number traced," he admitted wryly. "All I kept thinkin' of was mebbe somebody was playin' a joke on me."

"What did you find at the freight yards?" the Phantom asked quickly.

"Plenty! A lot of gasoline-soaked rags piled up against one of the wooden buildings! All they needed was a match and the yards would have gone up in smoke. Not only the yards, but a lot of empties—freight cars—waitin' there to be loaded!"

The Phantom's eyes narrowed.

"What did you do?"

"Wiped that fire hazard out in a hurry!" Sheriff Allen chuckled. "Whoever was gettin' ready to start a holocaust," he said, rolling the word out as if he enjoyed it, "got fooled. I left Lem Tucker on guard, but nothin' happened. Nobody came back."

"A woman's voice?" the Phantom mused. He looked at his watch. There was no use telling the sheriff that if he had been smart, instead of wiping out the fire hazard, he could have set a trap and caught those who had prepared it.

"Good work," he said instead. "You've probably saved the M and V a terrific property loss. By the way, who succeeds Mr. Gallup to the presidency of the road?"

"His nephew." The sheriff hooked a foot around a brass cuspidor and drew it closer. "Young feller by the name of Reed. Malcolm Reed."

"Does he live at the Green?"

"No, he's got a place halfway between here and the Falls. Big place. Raises prize cattle and such." He asked, as the Phantom got up: "You'll be around for a while?"

"Until the case is ended." The Phantom continued, "I trust you're keeping my identity a secret. Not that my presence isn't known. But I don't want anyone to learn I'm using the name of Watson and staying at the Green Inn."

"You can trust me, Phantom. I'm proud to have you up here, but I won't do no braggin' about it."

CHAPTER XI

GARRITY



AN LOAN'S black car took him to Skinner's Falls. So the enemy would have struck again, he was thinking as he drove—this time at the freight yards! He saw what a whimsical mood Fate was in. It had sent him back to Manhattan at a time when, if he had stayed, he would have cashed in with the arrest of those who had built the unlighted pyre. But the sheriff had given him one clue. And that made him hope he'd get deeper into the labyrinth of the puzzle confronting him.

At the corner of Huron Street, the Phantom got out of the car and walked down to the cottage he had visited once before. This time there was no need to knock on the door. Mike Garrity's pretty wife was busy cleaning the windows overlooking the porch.

She stopped when the Phantom came up the steps, used the back of her hand to brush away a tendril of lustrous hair, and smiled faintly. This afternoon she seemed in a happier mood.

"My husband hasn't got home yet," she informed. "He doesn't get in until after six. I told him you called, but he said he doesn't want any more insurance."

"I'm calling on you to-day," the Phantom told her.

The brown eyes widened. She put down a polishing rag and took a step back. Her expression changed. Suspicion crossed her face in a shifting shadow. Finally it cleared a little.

"Oh, you mean you want to sell me a policy?"

"I want to talk to you about a telephone call," her caller corrected. "A call made to Sheriff Allen—concerning a fire that was to be started at the freight yards."

Ruth Garrity's exclamation choked in her throat. Her face went white in sudden fear. She pressed a hand over her heart, peering at the Phantom with wide, startled eyes into which the previous fear he had seen poured like an incoming tide. She tried to say something, to form words, while a pulse throbbed in her soft throat.

"Who are you?" she finally whispered thinly.

"Let's go inside," he said. "I'll explain and then you can tell me what prompted you to make the call."

He opened the door and stood aside to let her pass. In the living room she sat down heavily in a chair, her eyes never leaving the Phantom's face. Wonder mingled with her fear now, her fingers trembled on the upholstered arm of the chair they gripped.

"How did you know?" she whispered.

First, he showed her the same badge that had obtained service from Miss Vinson at the railroad office. Next, he said:

"I put two and two together. I heard you talking on the phone the day I was here. It wasn't hard to see that you were not in sympathy with your caller. Raff, I believe you called him. Besides, I happen to know Mike Garrity had advance information about the wreck of the Special. For your own good, you'd better tell me what you know."

The lady hid her eyes from him. For a moment the Phantom thought he was due to fail. Then, while she leaned forward, he saw sudden resolve make her mouth set and, without further questioning, pulled a chair around opposite her and sat down.

"You won't arrest Mike!" Her voice was low and strained. "He hasn't done anything—yet! It—it's Raff, promising him money

and—and knowing Mike's weakness, buying him drinks! I swear Mike didn't have anything to do with the wreck, or with the fire they planned!"

"He knew about it and told you?"

She shook her brown head.

"No. I heard him talking to Raff—before he went out last night. It was after he'd gone that I telephoned the sheriff. I . . . It was terrible—waiting and waiting. But it didn't happen!" she cried, almost exultingly. "I knew that when Mike came back—knew from the look on his face!"

She had hardly finished speaking when the Phantom heard a car turn into the narrow driveway separating the house from the one next door. The motor knocked noisily, the car needed a new muffler and a valve job. Ruth Garrity, her eyes widening, jumped to her feet.

"It's Mike! Home early."

THE Phantom was standing near the door to the dining room when Mike Garrity came into the kitchen. Van had an oblique glance at a ruggedly-built man with red hair and a freckled face. Garrity dumped his denim jumper and lunch pail on a convenient chair. He rolled up his sleeves and turned on the hot water faucet at the sink, reaching for a cake of soap.

"Hi, honey!" he called, "Where are you?"

Ruth Garrity looked inquiringly at the Phantom. He nodded reassuringly and, walking through the dining room, stopped at the kitchen door.

"Garrity?"

The red-headed man wheeled around with an exclamation.

"What the—"

"I dropped in to see your wife," the Phantom said.

"I've had a talk with her and now I want one with you!"

Almost an hour later, when the Phantom left Huron Street, he was satisfied that he had found a link in the moving chain that would, in the immediate future, carry him closer to the plot against the Maine and Vermont Railroad. He turned the nose of his big black car back to Bedlow Green.

The sun had set and the countryside lay in a paint-box haze of pastel colors. The white houses along the Green stood out in bold silhouette. Diagonally across from the inn, the railroad station showed signs of activity. After parking his sedan, the Phan-

tom walked over to see if the New York newspapers had arrived.

The station agent told him they would come up on a train that was due in a few minutes. As the Phantom turned away he heard a distant whistle, the warning clang of the bell at the crossing, just below the station. Another minute and the train panted in, air-brakes hissing.

A few people began to alight. Idly, the Phantom looked at the baggage car. Its door was open and a mail clerk had two sacks ready to toss out. Then, still idly, Van noticed one of the first passengers off the train.

What attracted his attention was the size of the man and the wide-brimmed, fawn-colored hat he wore. It had a Western touch that went well with the big man's ambling gait as he crossed the station and stopped at the ticket window to ask information.

The Phantom's gaze left him the next instant. Abruptly, Van felt the click of his pulses. All at once he realized the trip he had made to Manhattan was not entirely wasted time. For a second man had swung off the coach's steps—a tall, dark-skinned man with straight black hair and expressionless eyes. Well-groomed, he brought a metropolitan air to the old-fashioned, rural station. The Phantom didn't need a second look to place him as "Frenchy," Gypsy Savage's companion at the Grotto!

Valise in hand, Frenchy cut directly across the platform and walked toward the end of the Green. Keeping him in eye-range, the Phantom leisurely directed his own steps to the other side of the grass-covered plot for which the town had been named. Frenchy swung along without bothering to glance back. Evidently he had no reason to believe that anyone might be tailing him. Another minute and he opened the gate in the fence fronting the emerald sweep of lawn before one of the stately old Colonial houses.

Still without a backward glance, Frenchy went up to its front door. That opened, as if someone behind it had been expecting him. The door closed and the Phantom wheeled around and went back to the station. His paper had come. He folded it under his arm and paused at the ticket window where the big man in the fawn-colored hat had stopped for information so short a time before.

"Whose house is that at the end of the Green?" he asked. "The one with the two chimneys and the black iron weathervane?"

It rather interests me. Nice old-time architecture."

The agent, his sleeves held up by faded arm-garters, pushed his eye-shade higher.

"Guess you mean the Jessup place," he said. "It's been rented. Some party from New York leased it. Name of Atlee, I believe."

The Phantom thanked him and went back to the Green Inn. He entered the lobby, slowing as he caught a glimpse of the man at the desk. Now the fawn-colored hat was further back on the big fellow's head, he had finished with the register and was tearing the cellophane wrapper from a fat cigar.

BESIDE him, a bellhop held his bag while Henry Franklin, the clerk, searched the rack behind him for a key.

"Here it is," he said. "Three-o-six." He handed the key over and spoke to the bellboy, "Take the gentleman up, Zeke. Dinner will be ready in fifteen minutes, Mr. Borden."

The Phantom stopped. Borden? His mind went back to Gallup's musty office, Miss Vinson in the doorway. Borden? The interrogation mark in the Phantom's mind took him over to the desk. Henry Franklin nodded and said:

"I don't believe there's any mail for you, Mr. Watson. One minute. I'll look."

Van's eyes fastened on the name in the register. *Landon Borden, Albuquerque, New Mexico.* Franklin told him there were no letters and the Phantom went up to his room.

Garrity, then Frenchy and now Borden! Business was picking up. The Phantom dropped into a chair, near the window. Room 306 was in the south wing of the hotel, he

figured, almost directly across and down from his own room. From where he sat he could see its lighted window, Borden's bulky shadow on the shade. He watched it meditatively, thinking about Frenchy Atlee and the man's presence in Bedlow Green.

The Phantom sensed the stepped-up tempo of the case. From here on, he believed, things were going to happen. He was drawing closer to the core of the conspiracy, penetrating deeper into the labyrinth.

He had promised Frank Havens that those responsible for the wreck on the line would be found and brought to justice. And the Phantom always kept his promises. No matter how baffling or obtuse the problem might appear at first, his patient and painstaking strategy invariably uncovered the plot and its instigators.

Never had he failed in the past. Now, with every instinct telling him that the hours ahead were destined to be revealing, he saw the rainbow of success arching through the gray clouds of doubt and uncertainty.

The light in Room 306 winked out. The Phantom got up. In the hall, he paused at the head of the stairs. A door closed below him and Landon Borden came down the corridor. Van waited until the man descended the stairs.

Swiftly and quietly then the Phantom hurried down the steps. Making sure the corridor was empty, he tried the door of the room Borden had come out of.

It was locked, as he had supposed it would be. But closed doors never stopped the Phantom Detective. In his pocket he carried the invention of a Viennese locksmith—a master-key, against which no door stayed shut to block his progress. He slipped the

[Turn page]

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ingenious device into the keyhole, twirled the adjustment on its shank so that its flanges spread, fitting accurately with the wards and tumblers of the lock, and turned it.

The latch clicked and the Phantom stepped into Landon Borden's room.

The aromatic smell of cigar smoke hung listlessly on the air. The window shade was still down, but Van couldn't risk a light brighter than that made by his smallest pencil flash. Careful to disturb nothing that would indicate the room had been visited, he let the slender beam rove around until it rested on Borden's luggage.

A handsome, cowhide bag stood open. From it the big man had taken his shaving equipment and brushes. The Phantom raked the bag with his light before he delved into it with skillful fingers. Almost at the bottom he found what he wanted—a leather portfolio containing a sheaf of papers and documents.

Ten minutes later the Phantom snapped his light off and, again making sure the outside hall was empty, let himself out of Borden's room and went down to dinner.

CHAPTER XII

STACKED CARDS



FEW minutes after nine o'clock that night the Phantom moved.

The black sedan backed out of the inn's garage. Another minute or two and he was on the road that led to Skinner's Falls. The night was clear. Stars spangled the cloudless sky and over the eastern horizon the moon was just coming up. He drove fast, slowing for the sharper turns, giving the super-charged motor full pedal when the highway straightened.

At that hour, the village of Skinner's Falls, when he reached it, was practically deserted. As Steve Huston would have said, the streets had been rolled up for the night. There were a few people in the town's ice-cream parlor, one or two bound for the second show at the local movie house.

Slowing to a legal speed, Van began to search for landmarks. The talk he had had with Mike Garrity had made his return to the Falls imperative. He had struck a bargain with the red-headed railroad oiler and had arranged to pick Garrity up on the

north side of a place called Fiddler's Bridge. To reach it he had to make several turns on a road that led off from the main street.

Remembering his directions, he found the bridge, rolled over it and stopped a hundred yards beyond. Switching off the motor, he listened. The gurgle of the stream wandering under the bridge made silver music in the night. A freshening breeze stirred the trees along the roadside.

Van raised and lowered the headlights several times before, off to the left, he saw a figure approaching. The next minute Mike Garrity climbed into the big car.

That afternoon at Huron Street, the Phantom's ultimatum to Garrity had left the man willing to cooperate, but sullen. Now, as the railroad employee wedged himself back against the hand-buffed leather upholstery, the Phantom began to see that Garrity was in a better mood. Probably his wife had talked to him, after the Phantom had left. Looking him over, meeting the eyes that peered into his, the Phantom mentally went back over the bargain he had made.

The threat of arrest had opened Garrity's mouth. He admitted having taken money from "Raff" to lend a hand in the wreck plot, but only after Raff had poured liquor into him. Because of his condition, Garrity had not participated in the removal of the fish-plate and the spreading of the rail that had brought disaster to the Green Mountain Special. Sober, so Garrity explained, he had realized the enormity of what had happened and how close he had come to being a part of it.

But, he said, he had been afraid to break with Raff now that he had taken the money. Raff was a tough number and wouldn't let him out.

Besides, Garrity had made plain, he was afraid of what might happen to Ruth. Because, it seemed, Raff had delivered a short lecture, saying bluntly that if there was any indication of a doublecross on Garrity's part, not only would he be put on the spot, but something would be certain to happen to his wife. And, in conclusion, Garrity had told the Phantom he had wanted no part of it from the first.

It was on this story that the Phantom had gone to work with subtle suggestions. He was an agent of the law, he had said. As such, he was in a position either to protect or turn Garrity over to the authorities. If Garrity would string along with him, dan-

gerous though the mission appeared, he promised nothing would happen to *him* when the others were finally brought to bay.

Balanced against this was the threat of the jail at Bedlow Green, the knowledge that Garrity had spilled. Which meant that Raff and the others, would take their vengeance out on his wife.

No matter how he figured it, Garrity had come to see that the Phantom's proposition was his only salvation. All that was in the eyes that met the Phantom's in the dusk of the black sedan.

"All set?" he asked.

Garrity drew a deep breath. "Yes, but this had better be good—for both of us."

"It will be. You do your part and I'll do mine."

The car started off, Garrity supplying directions. Anticipation was keen within the Phantom. At last, the stage was set for drama. He began to fit the characters into their proper places. Landon Borden. Malcolm Reed, the railroad's new president. Others. But it was not going to be easy. It was not what Steve Huston would call a "boat ride" or a "turkey shoot."

A MILE more and the sedan jolted off the stretch of road and turned into what was little better than a cleared path.

"Park her here," Garrity said, "but slide her in well. These bozos have got eyes like needles."

The black car penetrated the underbrush far enough to be well-screened. Before he got out, the Phantom made a few minor changes in his appearance. He turned his necktie to the worn side, wrinkled a collar that might be a trifle too clean for his errand, let a couple of buttons on his vest sag and ran his fingers through his hair. He pulled the brim of the felt hat he wore lower over his forehead, turned a key in the lock of the car's door and joined Garrity out in the gloom.

The red-headed man led the way through the darkness. Somewhere, not too far distant, the double tracks of the Maine & Vermont ribboned through the woods. Far away a freight train pounded along, trucks clanking, couplings jarring. Garrity kept on for a short distance and then the Phantom saw a house nestling on the side of a hill.

At one time a farm had been worked there. But that had been some years ago. Vegetable gardens now had become a tangle of

weeds. Pastures were waist high in grass. Fences had rotted and fallen into decay. A huge barn leaned tipsily into the freshening breeze. An air of melancholy desuetude hung over the place like a pall.

The Phantom realized a critical moment was at hand. As Garrity had said, it had to be good, for both of them. On the time, divided into minutes and hours, that confronted him, depended the success or failure of the Phantom's case. He ran his fingers over the automatic slung in its shoulder scabbard, his mind alert and anxious for this meeting he had planned.

Garrity, when they reached the house, circled to its rear door and knocked twice.

"Yeah?" a voice inside called.

"Mike."

The door opened. "And who else?"

"A friend of mine."

Garrity's voice was full of a "So what?" challenge.

The door opened wider. The smell of a kerosene lamp was heavy on the air. Its light puddled the dirty floor of a short passage that led to a room out of which the voices of two men sounded. The one who had opened the door gave the Phantom a cold, inquiring stare, but said nothing further. The door was shut behind them, and Garrity then led the way toward the lamplighted room.

The Phantom felt a tingle of satisfaction when he went in. The man he had first seen under the lowered shade at the window of the room in the Grotto, and whom he had glimpsed again on the railroad station, occupied a tilted-back wooden chair.

Frenchy Atlee, with his Broadway clothes, looked as out of place in the drab farmhouse room as a ship in a desert. His smart snapbrim felt was cocked at a jaunty angle. A cigarette in an ivory holder smoldered between his fingers. His expressionless dark eyes lanced from Garrity to the man with him.

The Phantom looked at the other man in the room. He had never seen him before and marked him as the type he wouldn't care to see again. A rustic-looking, half-witted youth with a pear-shaped head and piglike eyes, he squatted on what once had been a horsehair sofa. Time and mildew had made inroads on its upholstery and rusted the springs. They twanged when he moved.

The man who had opened the door slouched in, taking up a position in the background.

He, likewise, was a hard-faced, unprepossessing lout.

The Phantom paid no attention to the two. Under Frenchy's probing appraisal, he stared back at the olive-skinned man with a faint, crooked smile. The famous detective's ability to act a rôle with flawless perfection had always been one of his chief assets. Facing Frenchy Atlee, there was just the correct amount of bravado and belligerent assurance in his attitude to back up Mike Garrity.

"Raff told me to bring in any lug I knew who was strictly legitimate," Garrity was saying. "Someone willing to get his pockets around a lot of dough—no questions asked. Dave here's okay. Out of the clink a couple of weeks, he rodded in yesterday and for old times' sake I bunked him last night."

"Dave—what?" Atlee's tone was all in one key.

"Thayer," the Phantom answered.

THE dark eyes left him and moved to Garrity.

"Looks like you've had a change of heart," Frenchy observed. "So you've made up your mind to play ball with us?"

Garrity shrugged.

"Sure. I'm not dumb."

"Not when you're sober. When you don't let your wife work on you. I guess we can fit your pal in. Raff ought to be along any minute. By the way"—he looked at the Phantom—"what poogie?"

"Manchester State Pen."

"How long and what for?"

"Two-and-a-half. Breaking and entering."

The Phantom was casually nonchalant. But he had the feeling that while Atlee's nod seemed all right, Frenchy's expressionless eyes hid what was going on in his mind.

Atlee tapped the ash from the cigarette in his ivory holder. He pulled out a wafer-thin gold watch, took a look at the time and was replacing it when the man he expected entered from the short passage leading in from the rear door.

"Raff!" Atlee let his chair drop back on its front legs. "About time you showed. What kept you?"

The Phantom, turning for a look at the new arrival, reached quickly for his gun. In that fleeting second that came when Raff's gaze locked with his, he saw how neatly the

cards had been stacked against him. For, as he recognized Raff, he saw that Raff had recognized him.

The ax-man he had fought with and knocked out, in the clearing beside the shack in the woods, stared at him, blood-lust kindling in his burning eyes!

"Grab his gun!" Raff's voice rose in a bel-low. "He's the snooper I found at the shack! A detective!"

CHAPTER XIII

WRECKERS



GRIMLY the Phantom squeezed his automatic's trigger. But the shot went wild as, acting with catlike agility, Frenchy Atlee dived at him and knocked his arm wide. Before the Phantom could aim again and fire they were on him like a hungry wolf-

pack.

He went back under their onslaught. He had a hazy glimpse of the red-headed Garrity. Even in that instant of confusion, he saw that Garrity was playing his part, pretending to attack with the others.

The moldy wall at the rear of the room leaped out to stop the Phantom's retreat. He fought furiously, using all of his strength, but he knew in his heart that the odds were overwhelming, that he had no chance.

Hands clawed at him. Fists thudded off cheek and jaw. Men came at him from both sides, murderously relentless. The Phantom's knees buckled, as realization that discretion was the better part of valor made him stop the uneven struggle. He should save his strength for a time when he had an even chance.

Pretending he was all through, he slumped to the floor. Raff dragged him to his feet and slammed him back against the wall. Pinned there, the Phantom saw the ax-man's talonlike fingers open and reach for his throat. Frenchy Atlee intervened.

"I'll take care of him!" He shoved Raff aside. "Maybe we've bagged someone important tonight! There's been a lot of talk about the Phantom being in these parts!"

"The Phantom!" The pig-eyed thug's exclamation was full of fright.

"That's right!" Cool and sardonic, Frenchy's lips curved back over the even white teeth in his dark face. "The world's

greatest detective! Get some rope and tie him up!"

While someone hurried to obey, Mike Garrity, blowing on his knuckles, laughed mirthlessly.

"That's one for the book! I had him figured for a right sport. How did I know he was just pretendin'?"

Atlee walked over to him. Gun in hand, the well-dressed gangster dug the nose of his weapon into Garrity's chest.

"Lift!" he ordered coldly.

Garrity's hands went up. "What's the idea! I told you he fooled me!"

Atlee wiped the back of his hand over Garrity's moving mouth.

"Shut up! What do you think I am—some kind of a mental case? I had you pegged the minute you brought him in tonight! That blaze that didn't come off at the yards. Who tipped the law to go around and kick it apart? You—smart lug!" He sneered at the railroad oiler. "But the only one you fooled was yourself, Garrity! I'll take care of you—later." Frenchy glared at his men and snapped: "Get them out of my sight!"

Limp and unprotesting, the Phantom allowed himself to be tied up. But as the thin line of cord was lashed around his joined wrists, he resorted to one of his oldest stratagems. Long ago he had learned a Hindu trick, the art of throwing his wrist joints out so that when the bonds were fastened, and his bones went into place again, there would be enough slack to let him work his hands free.

Trussed at arms and legs, Van was dragged through an open door by a couple of Frenchy's helpers. Dumped unceremoniously on the board floor of what had once been a kitchen, someone kicked him in the back for good measure. Another minute and Garrity was tossed in beside him. A door creaked shut, blotting out the lamplight and leaving only the glow of the stars and the rising moon to color the broken, grimy window.

He heard Garrity breathing thickly. Then Garrity's quick whisper:

"Are you out of it?"

"I'm all right."

Garrity rolled over close to him. "Tough spot. This Atlee's a killer. He'll think up some fancy way of knocking us off! I've heard right terrible things about him."

"Listen!"

The Phantom's sibilant order cut him short.

Straining his ears, the Phantom could hear Atlee, in the other room, rapping out instructions. To Van every word was of incalculable value. He let them sink into his mind, write themselves across the back of his brain.

"Now that's over," was what Frenchy Atlee was saying, "let's get tonight's job lined up. We've got forty minutes. How far is it from here to Thimble Creek?"

"Couple miles," someone told him.

"The Midnight leaves Brattleboro at eleven-two. It's on the curve twenty-six minutes later. That means we've got to get to the tower well inside the next half-hour."

"That's easy," someone else put in. "We can cut across the back woods and come out on top of it."

THEY were moving around hurriedly in the other room.

"The freight should be a mile north of the tower—if the switch doesn't work and the go-ahead signals for the Midnight stay green," Frenchy said, and there was a silky satisfaction in his voice. "Get the idea!"

"Another wreck!" The Phantom recognized the adenoidal voice of the pig-eyed hoodlum.

"The Midnight meets the freight at top speed!" Raff's heavy tones blended excitement and pleasure. "I want to be around to watch that one! What do I do, boss?"

"You take care of the switch." Frenchy's clipped instructions were crisp. "You know what to do! Use a sledge on the base mechanism and be sure the wires are broken through. You'd better get started."

"Right."

"Make it stick!" Atlee added.

"Don't worry." Raff laughed. "When the engineer finds his freight didn't get shoved over—" He laughed again. "He'll never know what hit him! See you later."

A door opened and closed.

"Johnny, you and Ed, handle the tower," Frenchy Atlee went on. "You've got guns! Shoot first and argue later. But hand-set those signals for a clear track ahead!"

"Okay," a hoodlum answered.

"You'd better get started, too," Atlee said hastily. "Plenty of time's better than not enough. Stay there until the express goes through. I don't want any slip-up."

"We'll handle it to the king's taste!" Johnny's voice promised.

"Get going!" Frenchy ordered shortly.

The door in the other room opened and closed again. Garrity's breathing grew faster. The Phantom knew why. Garrity, too, had listened in on the plans for still another diabolical strike at the railroad!

The Phantom's nerves quivered. While he had listened he had worked the rope free from his chafed wrists. Another minute and the line around his legs dropped off. He was just reaching to help Garrity when he heard the door to the kitchen open.

The Phantom lay still, holding his wrists together and his legs bent so as not to betray the fact that he had freed himself.

But the Phantom's eyes moved to follow the course of action of the man who had appeared at the door. It was Frenchy Atlee and at sight of the pig-eyed hoodlum the Phantom held his breath. This was to be the one last bid for freedom, and the least mischance could spoil everything and mean death not only for Garrity and himself, but for countless other innocent people, as well.

Frenchy Atlee came in. The lamplight behind him showed the glint of the snub-nosed gun drooping in his hand. He rested a shoulder against the frame of the door. The same sardonic sneer was in his voice when he spoke.

"How did you like the set-up? A green light for the biggest smack this part of the country has ever known! Too bad you can't do anything about it. Too bad you'll never be able to do anything about anything again—either of you!"

The Phantom tensed himself. He had a blueprint of what was about to happen. Frenchy, a cold-blooded killer, didn't intend to waste time with them. For Atlee the simplest means of disposal was the best. And it was simple enough to walk over and pump both Garrity and the Phantom full of lead slugs.

That done, and without interference of any kind, Atlee was in a position to return to Bedlow Green and his rented Colonial house to await results of his fiendish plot. In his mind's eye the Phantom could see the dark-faced man gloating over the destruction he had wrought, the death list he had compiled.

"You'll never get away with this!" Mike Garrity choked.

Atlee laughed thinly.

"No? What are you going to do about it? You and the famous Phantom? What a joke he is—the man who never fails! When they find his bones here—if they ever do—they'll

come across a card I'll leave with them. That'll say, 'The remains of the world's greatest detective! He was so good he couldn't even find his way out!'"

Frenchy began to move deeper into the room. Garrity rolled over, away from the Phantom. The gun in Frenchy's hand rose a few inches before leveling. The Phantom's mind told him how much time he had—only heartbeats in which to act. Only fleeting fragments of seconds to gauge the distance from where he huddled to the custom-made shoes of the man who intended murdering Garrity and himself!

IN HIS entire career, the Phantom had never called upon the coordination of mind and muscle in a more desperate situation. Raising himself on his elbows, so slightly that the move was unnoticed, he suddenly jerked himself to a sitting posture and, in the same forward motion, kept going.

With the element of surprise all in his favor, the Phantom lunged at Frenchy Atlee's legs. Atlee had spoiled his shot at Raff in the other room, but now the tables were reversed. Frenchy's gun went off, his backward pitch sending the slug into the sagging ceiling.

Before he could shoot again, the Phantom had him.

While Mike Garrity threshed helplessly on the floor, the Phantom went to work to get the gun out of Atlee's steely fingers. The man fought furiously to retain it. He was no below-average opponent, Van learned immediately. A graduate of a tough school where every foul trick for attack and defense was taught. Atlee lashed out with knee and fist.

But the Phantom, by sheer strength and superior power, beat him back and down. With a rasping gasp, Atlee finally gave up. He sagged and in that moment the Phantom, fumbling for the dropped gun, scooped it up and used the butt of it against Frenchy's black-haired head.

The man's knees buckled, and he dropped limply.

Sheathing the gangster's gun, the Phantom turned his attention to Garrity. Garrity's arms quickly came free, then his legs. He got up slowly, wincing at the whip of the stagnant blood released in his squeezed-off veins.

His voice was harsh but full of admiration as he cried hoarsely: "You got him!"

CHAPTER XIV

SET SIGNALS



BREATHING hard, the Phantom dragged the heavy weight of Atlee into the lamplighted room. He used the same rope with which he himself had been bound to make a package of his now unconscious opponent. The Phantom tied the knots and rolled Frenchy Atlee over on his back. He looked at his watch. It still ticked, marking the hour and showing that there was no time to lose.

"Come on," he said to Garrity. "We've got to get out of here—fast!"

"And leave him?" asked the railroad employee.

"Until later. He isn't apt to go anywhere."

"But aren't the others likely to come back?"

The Phantom shrugged.

"Possibly. But the tower is more important! You heard them! What about the switch—the set signals for the express?"

Mike Garrity's face was like a drawn mask. "The switch don't count. The freight'll keep going. But you've got to stop the Midnight!"

"You know the way!" The Phantom pulled the back door open and pushed the red-headed man through it. "They said something about a short cut!"

"I know what they meant." Garrity's tone indicated that his mind was working clearly again.

"Lead on!" ordered the Phantom.

They cut across the weed-tangled gardens, heading for the open meadow beyond. Garrity's dog trot quickened as the Phantom urged him to greater haste. The moon had gone under a cloud-bank. The ground had gone uneven, stony in places, and full of holes. Suddenly the fringe of woods at the end of the open land sprang up like a barrier.

Garrity stopped to get his bearings and some of his lost breath. Then he nodded and plunged on. Following, the Phantom urged faster speed.

"Set signals?" he asked, as he ran.

"Controlled by the Webb-Lock Switch. Best in the world." Garrity drew a panting breath. "When the freight don't go over, like it's supposed to, the switch's safety lock makes the lights red."

"Then?"

"The only way to change them," Garrity said, "is from the tower—by hand!"

The Phantom understood. Frenchy Atlee had sent his two thugs to the signal tower to turn the red danger warning to green! The express, minutes behind the freight, didn't have a chance.

His mouth tightened to a thin streak. He remembered his meeting with Frank Havens at the lunch club, the talk he had had with the *Clarion's* owner, the promise he had made his old friend. The wreck of the Special wouldn't be repeated!

Suddenly the Phantom grew aware that Garrity was slowing down. The man stopped beside him. Before them the trail ended in a dense bank of underbrush.

"Wait a minute," Garrity said. "I've lost the way."

As he stopped speaking, the Phantom heard a humming sound. It came from the left, off through the trees. The steady, rhythmic beat of a far-off train coming along tracks that were close at hand.

The windblown echoes of its whistle cut through the quiet.

"The freight!" Garrity's hand jerked around. "I know the way—now!"

Loamy ground was soft under the Phantom's feet when they left the woods. They reached a point just beyond which the tracks of the Maine and Vermont curved gracefully past.

As if by prearrangement the moon tore itself free from the clouds at the same minute. The night turned to silver again. Less than a quarter of a mile away, the Phantom saw the signal tower Frenchy Atlee had marked, standing stark against the night sky.

They headed for it while the caboose of the freight grew smaller as it passed into the distance. The rails stopped their metallic song. Brilliantly green, the emerald lights in the tower remained fixed and set.

Then the Phantom, running again, heard another distant whistle somewhere behind him and felt the lash of his blood spurting him on.

"Faster!"

BESIDE him, Garrity did his best to match his pace. They crossed to the creosoted ties along the roadbed. That made for greater speed, but had one drawback. Atlee's plants in the tower now had a full view of their approach.

The Phantom shook his head. There was no stopping now. He had to risk a fusillade of shots, to trust his luck, for in his ears again he heard the whistle, closer now, and the same queer humming of the rails!

A steel ladder led to the tower. The Phantom sprang for the moon-silvered rungs, Garrity close behind him. A slitlike door opened above. Someone poked a head out. The Phantom kept his face averted as a snarled question came down to him:

"What do you lugs want?"

Mimicry had always been one of the Phantom's many and varied talents. He had the ability to hear a voice once and then simulate it with such tonal perfection it was difficult to tell it from the original. He used the ruse now, imitating the crisp, cold voice of Atlee with perfect fidelity.

"Who are you—Frenchy!"

That got him to the lofty door. But there Atlee's hireling saw and recognized him. He started to drop out a gun, but the Phantom reached for him, grabbed him by the leg and tipped him over. Before the fellow could use his cannon, the Phantom, wedging himself in through the door, got his fingers around the wrecker's throat.

He hauled the man out and passed him down to Garrity.

There was still a second menace to overcome, though. Frenchy's other henchman crouched in the tiny cubicle of the signal room. He opened fire as the Phantom, using Atlee's snub-nosed rod, pumped two fast shots into him.

The Phantom saw him stagger to the open window. He swayed there for an instant before he went through it, dropping from sight to the tracks below.

Now the Phantom had no time for anything except the vital emergency confronting him. The open window he faced looked south. Down there the headlight of the Midnight, like a sun expanding with every piston-propelled revolution of the engine's wheels, was almost on the curve. Hazily he was conscious of Garrity beside him, reaching for the light-control levers that were banked before them.

"That one, Phantom!" Garrity ripped the directions out with frantic haste. "All the way forward!"

Like an automaton, the Phantom obeyed.

The lever clicked down, functioning with smooth, oil-bathed precision. Garrity tugged at the end control and then, before the Phan-

tom's strained gaze, the green lights were blotted out, a ruby glare replacing them.

On the curve, the express ground to a jolting stop. . . .

It was not long after that tense moment when the deaths of more innocent victims had been prevented by no more than a hair's breadth, that Frenchy Atlee opened his eyes in the kitchen of the dilapidated farm house. Darkness swirled around him. The lamp had gone out, the smell of kerosene was more pungent than before. Atlee moved on the floor, cursing thickly when he found that his arms and legs were securely fastened.

His head ached dully, with a steady throb. The inside of his mouth tasted like the room smelled. But gradually bells stopped ringing in his ears and his first nausea passed.

Lying there, Frenchy saw how decisively the tables had been turned on him by the Phantom Detective. Gil Swain had warned him about the Phantom, had told him not to underestimate the great sleuth's ability, but Atlee had sneered in Swain's flat, white face. Personally, the ex-con thought the stories he had heard concerning the famous detective's feats were a lot of bunk dreamed up for the sole purpose of throwing a scare into those he waged war against.

Now the black-haired man had had a sample of the Phantom's handiwork, and he didn't like it. A thrill of fear made him shiver involuntarily. The Phantom was coming back—for him! Atlee's crime-stained conscience troubled him. If the Phantom had linked up the wreck of the Green Mountain Special with what had been arranged for tonight, it was all up with him.

FRENCHY stopped thinking. He turned his head as, outside, he heard a car stop. It had a familiar piston-slap. The bound man raised himself to a sitting posture. Raff! He ran a tongue around his fuzzy mouth and over his dry lips. His voice was a feeble croak when he used it. He had to wet his lips again before he was able to shout:

"Raff! I'm in here—in the kitchen! Make a light and hurry it up!"

The rear door banged open. A match scratched, and Raff swore.

"Just a minute, boss," he said. "No oil in the lamp. I'll get my torch."

A pause, and then Raff came back. The light of his flash, falling on Atlee, made him exclaim:

"What happened?"

"Get these ropes off! Be quick about it!" snarled Atlee.

Unsteadily, when the ropes were cut, Atlee got to his feet. He swung his numb arms to start the circulation.

"What about the Midnight?" he asked. But the question was mechanical, for he sensed the answer before he heard it.

"No good!" Raff swore softly. "I took care of the switch, but the signals from the tower were changed. I knew something had gone wrong. I thought I'd better get back. Garrity and that other lug—"

"The Phantom!" Atlee's scalp tingled. "Come on, let's duck out of here before he comes back!"

"What do we do?"

"You drive me back to town. Then, if you're smart, you'll hide out until you hear from me. If the Phantom taps Johnny and Ed they're sure to talk. You'd better keep undercover!"

ominous.

"I'll take care of that tomorrow." Atlee climbed into the front seat of the car Raff had come in. "Get going!"

CHAPTER XV

FRENCHY'S VISITOR



FRENCHY looked back, through the moonlight, as the car bumped away, with Raff's foot jammed down on the gas pedal. A vicious smile cut into the corners of Atlee's mouth. There had been a wreck, not to the train, but to his plans. He could thank the Phantom for that, for dismal failure, just when he had stretched out a hand to take the plum he had reached for!

Still, he tried to assure himself, all wasn't entirely lost. He had one card left to play. If he could get it out of the deck and trump the Phantom's ace with it, he would still be on top. Of course he would have to take a trip to South America, or somewhere for his health, but he would have all the money he wanted. Swain would take care of that angle.

Frenchy began to feel better as his mind conjured a rosy future.

Raff's car went down the main street of Bedlow Green. The little community was as quiet as a churchyard. Raff pulled up in front of the white Colonial house and

dropped a hand over Atlee's arm.

"What time tomorrow?" he asked meaningly. "Where?"

"Around noon. Out at your shack."

Raff nodded.

"You be there! Because," he added, "if you get absent-minded you're liable to get a reminder. Here!"

Raff extended a finger and put the tip of it against his right temple. He went through the motions of pulling an imaginary trigger.

"I'll be there," Atlee said. "Go on—beat it now."

He opened the gate in the fence.

He listened to the noisy sound of the engine in Raff's car as it faded out in the distance. Then he let himself into the house he had rented, shut and bolted the wide front door. He had no illusions about the immediate future. The Phantom had broken up the contemplated disaster to the Midnight. The Phantom probably was fully aware of this house on the Green. When he didn't find him at the shack, Atlee figured this would be his next stop.

Wiping a sudden dew of sweat from his forehead, Frenchy went up the old, polished stairs. He turned on a lamp in a rear room furnished as a study. Until that morning Johnny and Ed had lived there with him. Alone in the silence now, the solemn tick of a grandfather's clock beat heavily against his jittery nerves.

He crossed to a telephone in the corner. It took some minutes to get the operator, several more before his New York number was put through. Finally, someone spoke.

"Connect me with Miss Savage's dressing room," Atlee said.

The lids came down over his dark eyes. Another pause and then a soft, feminine voice drifted across the wire:

"Yes?"

"It's me, Frenchy."

He heard her smothered exclamation. Then something that sounded like a voice asking questions in the background.

"Where are you, Frenchy?" the girl said.

"Still up in the hills. I'm lamming out on the first rattler I can catch. Who's that talking with you?"

"Nobody, silly. I'm here all alone. You're coming back to town? I thought you would be there for a while."

"Bad break." Atlee minimized it with a laugh. "One of those things. Swain around?"

"I—I haven't seen him. Why?"

"I'll tell you tomorrow. As soon as I dock I'll hit for your place. I've got a lot of plans I want to talk over—about us." His voice lowered. "Want to hear them?"

"Yes, naturally." Her laugh sounded strangely nervous, before she said, "Good-by now, Frenchy."

A snap told him she had rung off. Atlee put the telephone back on the table and his brows drew together. He didn't like the way Gypsy Savage had rung off. He sensed a strange finality in her last words. With an effort, he shrugged the feeling aside and looked at the time.

Frenchy knew he had better get going. He couldn't get a train out of Bedlow Green until the "Rooster," as the local wits called the dawn local, came along. But he could pick up a train that left Skinner's Falls in forty minutes. That would have to do, to duck Raff tomorrow and the Phantom tonight. He wondered how he was going to get over to the Falls.

Then he remembered the garage down the main street, the man who ran it, and what he had said about being willing to drive anybody, anywhere, at anytime—if he were paid enough.

Frenchy started to get up.

He was halfway to his feet when, distinctly, he heard a footstep out on the broad landing. That sound was followed by the tiny click of a gun going off safety. A shadow lengthened across the floor as Atlee's narrowed gaze darted to the doorway.

A man stepped into the room!

WHEN the Phantom had hurried back from the tower to the deserted farmhouse where he had left Frenchy Atlee bound, he had not wasted any time. Frenchy had been gone, there were tire marks on the ground outside, with the drip of fresh oil from a motor that needed a ring job. That had been explanation enough. Raff, of course. The ax-man had come back and set Atlee free.

But that didn't trouble Van too much. He had prevented Frenchy's plan from working, and that was all that mattered. Besides, the Phantom told himself, he knew where Atlee was, where he could find him. Unless the well-dressed ex-convict had already taken a powder.

Van shook his head. That wasn't likely—yet. The papers he had glanced at in Landon Borden's portfolio told him that Frenchy

was sure to stay close to Bedlow Green for the next few hours, at least. Yet Atlee was a shrewd operator. After tonight's frustration he might figure the law was too close behind him for comfort, and pull out. Either way, the Phantom decided to find out.

Leaving the musty house, he hurried to the spot where he had parked his black sedan. He backed it from its concealment, took the road Garrity had guided him over and headed for Skinner's Falls. From there to Bedlow Green he kept an even pace, watching the moon sail along beside him, certain now that his Vermont pilgrimage was in its final phases.

Tonight's stroke had broken the back of Frenchy Atlee's plot. There was still Archer Gallup's murderer to corner, but Van had his own ideas about the identity of the killer.

Then New York and the terminating clean-up!

Van left his car in the parking space behind the Green Inn. Frenchy's snub-nosed automatic was in his right hand pocket. He examined its clip to make sure it was ready for business and struck off down toward the end of the Green.

In the road in front of the white Colonial house the Phantom noticed the same sort of oil puddle he had seen at the farm. That meant that Raff had brought Frenchy home, that Atlee, unless he had bolted, was inside. Van walked to the end of the property. The moon was too bright to cut across the lawn to the front door. A gun stuck through an open window could pick him off with a single shot.

The Phantom found a vale of shadows on the south side of the house. A knoll of trees grew thickly there, screening the moon. The darkness was made to order for his purpose.

Close to a covered porch he looked around for a means of entry. He discovered it the next minute. Between the kitchen and the bay of a dining room was an open window and, as if prepared for him, a rustic bench stood directly beneath it. He eased himself across the sill, lowered his feet to linoleum and touched the button of his pencil flash.

He was in a pantry. A swinging door was to the right of him, the kitchen to the left. He chose the former, moving with catlike quiet. Another space and he was out of the dining room and into a hall. A massive front door, locked and bolted, had glass on either side that filled the hall with a spectral light. In its wan glow, he saw the curve of a

staircase, rising to the darker regions above. The Phantom stopped at its carved newel post, listening.

Except for the monotonous tick of a clock, the quiet lay undisturbed. Paintings in shadow boxes lined the wall along the stairs. Portraits for the most part of long-departed citizens of the town. Men, bearded and stock-collared. Women in their Sunday best, severe-faced and dignified. The incongruity of such a house harboring one of Frenchy Atlee's ilk, impressed itself upon the Phantom.

He slipped the gangster's gun from his pocket and started up the steps.

Had Atlee gone? The Phantom frowned. As far as he knew there was no train out of Bedlow Green until the one called the "Rooster," and that didn't leave until almost dawn. He set his feet on the thick carpeting of a broad landing, his torch darting inquisitively around in his left hand while his right held the gun ready for quick action.

Directly in front of him a door stood ajar. Silently, he eased it wider. He went over its threshold, the light jumping on ahead. Abruptly, he stopped. The light, slanting to the floor, remained fixed while the Phantom stiffened.

SOMEBODY lay there, face down. Someone whose well-tailored coat was stained with the blood that pooled out from under his crumpled body.

The Phantom found the light switch. Electricity came on in a reading lamp on a table where a telephone stood. In its shine, he went closer to the figure on the floor. There was no need to turn it over. He identified Frenchy Atlee by the black hair as well as by the clothing he wore. Neither was it necessary to touch one of the outflung wrists in search of a pulse-beat. Frenchy was obviously dead!

The Phantom's gaze focused on the gaping wound above Atlee's left ear. A slug from a .44, or even a large calibered weapon, had made it. As if for good measure, another shot had been fired into Frenchy's chest. Either would have been sufficient to put him on ice. The second shot, to the Phantom, looked like an afterthought—as if the murderer, knowing how tough Atlee was, had taken no chances.

Straightening, the Phantom put away the gun he carried. His eyes roamed the room. From the look of the blood on the floor Atlee

couldn't have been dead long. The Phantom's face shadowed. The killer had come and gone in a hurry. The open window downstairs, with the bench conveniently under it, told its own story.

Adjoining the study was a large bedroom. Atlee's sleeping quarters, judging from the high-piled ash tray and the new initialed suitcase on the floor. The suitcase drew the Phantom across the room. He opened it and investigated its contents. No need to be as careful as he had been with Borden's bag.

Frenchy, he told himself, wouldn't care who pawed through his personal belongings now.

The Phantom finally shut the bag and was putting it where he had found it when he raised his head. Outside he heard a car stopping. It's door thudded softly. From the window he caught a glimpse of a man cutting across the lawn. Avoiding the front entrance, he hurried around to the side.

The Phantom tiptoed out of the bedroom, passed the contorted body on the floor and took up a stand out on the broad landing.

CHAPTER XVI

FINAL PLANS



MINUTES ticked away before, from the floor below, the waiting Phantom heard the swinging door in the pantry open and close. Whoever came in had been there before. He knew his way around and wasn't bothering to keep his visit quiet. Coming out in the hall, where the moonlight filtered in, he started up the stairs.

The Phantom drew back, away from the light he had made in the study. Motionless, his fingers closing over Frenchy Atlee's gun, he watched the man climb the last steps and head directly for the room facing the stairway.

The Phantom inched himself toward the door. Out of the room came a strangled exclamation. The Phantom loomed up on the threshold. His voice, ice-cold, spoke sharply:

"All right, Raff! Stand where you are and keep your hands away from your pockets!"

The ax-man's eyes glared at him from under their bushy brows. His unshaven face darkened with color. He swallowed, a muscle twitching in his cheek, his stained and broken teeth bared in a vulpine leer.

THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

"You brought Frenchy back, left him, and then drove away," the Phantom said. "What did you come back for?"

"You know all the answers!" Raff's voice was husky.

"Hazarding a guess," the Phantom told him, "I'd say you were slightly worried about your payoff. What did Frenchy do—stall you with talk about 'tomorrow?' And what did you do, after thinking it over? Decide to come back and get your blood money to-night?"

Raff's venomous glare was masked by the new expression that filled his gaze.

"I didn't kill him!" he grated.

The Phantom laughed.

"What are you trying to do—alibi yourself to me? What difference does one more killing make, after what you helped do to the Special?"

Raff's leer deepened. But he said nothing, standing a foot away from Atlee's crumpled body, his hands out and away from his sides.

"I'm glad you decided to come back." The Phantom's voice crackled. "I was worried about the Garritys—what you might try to do to them. This saves a lot of time and effort. Because, my ax-swinging friend, I'm turning you over to Sheriff Allen."

For all of his size and bulk, Raff acted with surprising speed and agility. Whirling around he snatched up a heavy inkstand from the desk, less than a yard away from him. He hurled that at the Phantom, dragging out his gun as the hand that threw the missile flashed down to the opening in his worn coat.

The Phantom dodged the flying glass-and-metal projectile. Off balance, he held his fire for a tense split-second. Raff sprang toward the windows, stopped midway, and pulled the trigger of his gun. The Phantom shot at the same time and his was the better aim. Raff's gun exploded, but the bullet went wild.

For an instant more the ax-man, the leer fading from his saturnine mouth, stood as if frozen to the spot where he had stopped. Both his thick-muscled arms came up, his fingers opening. His hands reached out as if to grip an invisible support. Without a sound he pitched forward, dropping like a felled tree.

When the Phantom reached him he saw there was no need for a pair of the sheriff's handcuffs. Ruth Garrity and her red-headed husband wouldn't have to worry, either. Raff, like the man who had employed him,

was completely and definitely finished.

Atlee had failed to pay him off. That had remained for the Phantom Detective!

Van took one more glance at the dead men on the floor, then headed for the stairs and out of doors. Day was breaking by now. And there were one or two more details to be attended to here—then New York, where he meant to have the final showdown.

In the early morning his black car was rolling over the Vermont roads on the way to New York. . . .

It was late afternoon when the taxi that took Richard Curtis Van Loan down Park Avenue, drew up before the awninged entrance to the Cambridge Chambers. That towering apartment-hotel occupied half a block. It had a landscaped courtyard in its center, and its cliffs of windows, glimmering in the last of the afternoon sun, resembled a thousand mirrors.

Van Loan paid the toll on the meter and crossed the courtyard to the south section. Tall, slim, he wore his dark blue flannels with an easy, debonair grace. Today there was a flower in his buttonhole, a rakish tilt to his smart hat. He paused long enough to have himself announced, and stepped into one of the elevators.

The Keltons who lived here had asked him for cocktails. An invitation from the retired industrialist, and his socially prominent wife was more or less a command performance. No one in Van Loan's set would think of turning it down. Van himself, however, had accepted because Frank Havens would be there. And he had to see the *Clarion's* publisher without delay.

The elevator rose with velvet-quiet. Van's mind was busy, recalling the events in Bedlow Green before, after winding up his affairs he had left the Vermont town. He had spent more than a half hour with Sheriff Allen. Then, leaving the lawman shocked by the double deaths in the old Jessup house, had gone to Skinner's Falls, arriving as the business day was just beginning.

Once more, Miss Vinson had shown him into the dreary office of the Maine and Vermont's president. But this time it had not been to interview an elderly man with silver hair and shrewd, observing eyes. Instead, he had met Malcolm Reed, Gallup's nephew. Another half-hour had elapsed before he had headed his black sedan toward the city and the curtain he was to ring down on the last act of the drama in which he had played so

prominent a part.

"Fifteenth floor, suh."

Van came out of his thoughts and left the lift for a tiled corridor. Another minute and he was giving his hat to the Keltons' butler. From a sunny room to the left of him came laughter and conversation, the clink of ice in glasses, the frosty music of cocktail shakers. Van, suave and polished, walked in, fitting himself, with all of his usual charm, into the group that hailed him noisily.

He had hardly spoken with his host and hostess and nodded to Havens across the room, before a hand plucked at his elbow. A familiar voice, low and excited, said:

"How about that coat you left the Sky-High Club to retrieve, Dick? You've been gone such a long time! What did you do—follow the man who grabbed it to Texas?"

Van looked down into the smiling brown eyes of Nancy Porter. He grinned his boyish grin.

"Deep in the heart of it!" he said. "I'm terribly sorry, Nancy. One of those things. I love that coat like a brother."

"I'll bet." She wound an arm around his. "Now that I've got you again I'm not going to let you get away." She laughed. "Oh, yes. And thank you for sending for my car. That was really thoughtful, even if I did sit there like a toad on a log waiting for you to come back."

"Not a toad—a brown-eyed sprite," Van corrected gallantly.

Secretly, he was perplexed. He had to see Havens, at once, and the arm through his had no intention of letting go. He saw the publisher walking toward an alcove and knew what that meant. Gently but firmly, Van unclasped the fingers on his blue flannel sleeve.

"Look, Nancy. I have no intention of dodging away, but I must see Mr. Havens before he leaves."

"What about?" Her red lips drooped. "Everybody knows you haven't any business ties. What could be more important than—talking to me?"

"Absolutely nothing. Still, all the same, it's another one of those things that has to be done. Stay here, and I'll be back as soon as possible."

He patted her hand and ducked away before she could protest further.

Havens was waiting for him in the alcove. The newspaper owner shook his head.

"I thought you were hooked, Dick. The

curse of popularity. She asked me a dozen times, before you got here, if you were coming."

VAN glanced around to make sure they were alone. He pitched his voice in a low, confidential key.

"Any word from Steve? I had him on long distance this morning. Final plans are now complete. He's to telephone you, so you can get in touch with me, when the break comes."

Havens shook his head.

"I haven't heard from him. I left word at the office I'd be here in case I was needed. I always do that when things like this are afoot, Dick. Now tell me all that happened."

Van sketched a quick word picture of the events of the past few hours. He spoke against the background of the noisy room outside. Frank Havens listened attentively, nodding now and then as Van hurried along with the story.

"So," Van Loan concluded, "what remains now is to trap a killer and eliminate the force that was the shadowy power behind the plot against the railroad. That, I'm sure, will happen tonight!"

"The plot?" Havens raised his glance to Van.

"The Maine and Vermont road," Van Loan explained, "while small and comparatively unimportant, owns the patents to a device known as the Webb-Lock Switch. This switch, several months ago, was put into operation to supply a faster connecting line freight service to the New York, Buffalo and Great Lakes System, one of the major railroads."

Frank Havens nodded again.

"Go on."

"That company," Van continued, "decided to purchase the patent. They made tentative offers to Gallup through MacComber, but were turned down. Gallup, a very shrewd character, told them that if they wanted the switch they would have to buy the railroad, too. While these negotiations were going on, one of the Western lines, after examining the patent and sending one of its inspectors to Vermont for a first hand view of the switch in use, also began to throw out feelers for a price on the road. Both worked undercover so the price of the railroad and the switch patents wouldn't go up to any exorbitant levels. Clear?"

"Perfectly. But where does Atlee come in?"

"In some way Frenchy learned about the dicker. How he did it I don't know—yet. Anyway, he smelled money. Big money. He decided to cut in on his own, get an option on the railroad and switch, and then turn around and let the two other roads bid for it. He tried Archer Gallup out, but Gallup was only mildly interested despite all of Frenchy's big talk."

"Then?"

"Atlee, an ex-convict, as you know, wasn't to be stopped by any antiquated character in a celluloid collar." Van smiled thinly. "If he couldn't strike a bargain with Gallup by fair means, he made up his mind he'd use foul. Murder, I might say, was right up his alley. Like most criminals, Frenchy had a kink in his brain. He believed that if he started a systematized attack on the M and V, causing wrecks, fires and general destruction, he could force the road into bankruptcy and at the same time frighten off the other two potential purchasers. What he didn't do was reckon with Gallup's stubbornness."

Out in the other room Van caught a glimpse of Nancy Porter perched on a broad-caded divan, her eyes intent on the drapes screening the alcove. Frank Havens drew a breath.

"Atlee murdered Gallup, thinking—"

"It would be easier to deal with his nephew, Malcolm Reed, who succeeded the old man. Part of his plot did work, making the M and V's stock drop sharply and temporarily causing MacComber, a director of the big System, to wonder if the road and switch would be a good buy. That explains what you asked me the day we had lunch together, when you wanted to know what significance I attached to MacComber's visit to Bedlow Green."

"What about the other competitor?"

"He's a breezy Westerner, a Landon Borden." Van smiled again, remembering his visit to Borden's room. "He owns a majority stock interest in the Colorado, Santa Fe and Texas Central. I think that Borden will probably be the next owner of the M and V, although MacComber will probably have a change of heart when the details of the plot are made public."

Before Frank Havens could speak again one of the Keltons' servants coughed discreetly on the other side of the drapes and announced:

"Mr. Havens, sir? You are wanted on the telephone."



HAVENS was gone a few minutes. He left by a back door in the alcove at Van's suggestion. That was so Nancy Porter wouldn't take his exit as a signal to come fluttering in. Van Loan waited impatiently. Was the phone call from Steve?

He learned after another short pause. For then Havens returned through the rear door. "For you, Phantom," he said. "Maybe you can make sense of it. Huston told me to tell you this. 'Word from the decoy. Abbington Arms. Nine o'clock.' Probably you understand. I don't."

"I know what he means." Van glanced from the room outside back to his friend. "One thing more, Mr. Havens. I have to get out of here, and I want you to cover my retreat. When Miss Porter comes looking, tell her I had a dizzy spell and had to leave. Tell her anything, but make it convincing."

He added a few more instructions and left by the alcove's rear door. In a short time he had reached his penthouse apartment.

For what he was confident would be the last time, Van replaced his good-looking countenance with the face he had worn since he had first gone on the case. In the small, secret room back of the sliding panel in his own sky-high dwelling place, he worked with his usual smooth, effortless ease.

The face of Watson emerged from the make-up kit. The same features the unshaven Raff had discovered in the woodland shack. The face Ruth Garrity had stared at with fear-stricken eyes, that Atlee had sneered into in the dank, lamplit room at the farmhouse was reflected in the triple mirrors.

He put away his pastel pencils and jars of skin creams. Another minute or two and Van changed from the trim blue flannels to the suit in which he had knocked around in Vermont.

The Phantom looked at the snub-nosed gun that had once belonged to Frenchy. He would keep that as a souvenir, along with the other weapons he had collected in his journeys down the twisting danger trail. He laid it in a drawer and from his arsenal helped himself to a new .38—a gun made to his own design, flat and deadly, whose japped barrel would never catch or reflect

any betraying light glints.

Van tested trigger and safety before sliding in its clip. Fitting the gun to his shoulder holster, he buttoned his jacket and selected a hat from the wardrobe closet. That went over his powder-dusted hair and down low on his forehead. He checked to make sure his jeweled trademark was in its secret pocket along with his rolled mask. Then he stepped back into the bedroom, closed the panel and took his private elevator to the street.

His destination was an apartment house in the Fifties, a narrow building of tessellated brick with an ornate entry hall and a self-service elevator. It was one of the better class places, too good by far, the Phantom decided, for the person upon whom he was about to call who lived there. He took a name and apartment number from the chart on the grille of the elevator shaft and went up to the sixth floor.

The Phantom pressed the pearl circle of a bell. A long minute elapsed before the tap of heels sounded from inside. The knob turned, the front door opened, and he looked into the starry violet eyes of the girl with the red-gold hair who sang and danced at the Roc-A-Co.

"What is it?" Gypsy Savage asked curtly.

She wore a powder-blue house coat. Gold-strapped slippers were on her small feet and a cigarette smoked between her mahogany-tipped fingers. Despite her glamour, there was a certain coldness in her face, a cruel curve to her lipsticked mouth.

"Alone?" The Phantom made it sound casual.

She gave him a sharper stare.

"What business is that of yours?"

"I'd rather talk to you with no one else present." A grim note flavored his tone. He opened his hand and let her see the same badge he had used to such good advantage in Vermont. "Police business—urgent," he added.

"A cop!" The sweeping lashes lifted suddenly, her eyes revealed the fact she had gone on guard. "Sure—come on in. Make yourself to home."

THE Phantom faced her in an untidy, bandbox living room. Defiantly she sat down on the arm of a chair, swinging a gold-slipped foot, making an effort to appear bored and indifferent. But again her eyes betrayed her.

"Last night," the Phantom said, "a certain ex-con who called himself Frenchy Atlee was shot to death in a house he rented in Vermont. You knew him?"

"Yes, I knew him."

"You knew he had been murdered?"

"Not until you just told me. So what?"

"So," Van said slowly, "you'll either answer my questions, fully and truthfully, or you'll come downtown and let Inspector Gregg work you over. What's your choice?"

The slender foot stopped swinging. Gypsy Savage turned her head slightly away. He could see she had shut her hands, clenching them so tightly that her long nails were digging into her palms. The Phantom waited. One minute, two, three.

"Go ahead—ask," she said, looking back at him. "I'll talk! I might as well, now, with Frenchy knocked off. . . ."

Dark had fallen long before the Phantom left Gypsy Savage, but it was with a sense of satisfaction that he walked out of the ornate apartment and moved at a swift pace along the cross street.

The phosphorescent hands on the watch strapped to his left wrist told him the hour was eight-forty-five. Cutting down Sixth Avenue at a leisurely walk, he saw that he had plenty of time. He continued on, the roar of the metropolis in his ears.

Van marked the difference between this night and last. Then the stillness of Vermont, undisturbed and tranquil, had been all around him. Now, traffic flowed along in an unending stream. People, enjoying the clear coolness of the evening, thronged the sidewalks. A street distant, Broadway lifted its incandescent glare to the arching sky.

Three more streets and the Phantom turned west. He was on a block that mingled theaters with eating places, old-fashioned private residences turned into rooming houses, business buildings and, on its south side, the frowsy façade of the hotel known as the Abbington Arms. It was strictly a second-rate hostelry, a place patronized by theatrical folk, gamblers, and the flotsam and jetsam washed up by the turgid currents of the world's most popular thoroughfare.

Van directed his steps toward it. A dozen or more people were in its slightly tarnished rococo lobby. A clock over the clerk's desk showed it lacked five minutes of being nine o'clock. Van picked up a newspaper and went across to a leather lounge. He was sitting there, apparently deep in the news of

the day, when he saw someone come in.

A slim, blond young man with a clear, healthy complexion, an overcoat folded on his arm and briefcase in hand, stopped at the desk for information. With a word of thanks, he went to the nearest elevator.

"Eighty-three," Van heard him direct its operator.

The Phantom folded the newspaper neatly and put it back where he had found it. Time to act. Unhurriedly he wandered over to the closed door of the elevator, waited for its return and stepped in with a request:

"Ninth, bud."

Alighting on the ninth floor, the Phantom waited until the cage began its downward drop. Then he found stairs, descended to the floor below and, reminded of the Green Inn and the night he had looked for Landon Borden's room, scanned the numbers of the doors as he went along the passage. Eighty-three he located around a bend in the corridor, part of a small suite, if the unnumbered doors in line beside it were interpreted correctly.

The Phantom stopped there. On the other side of the door he heard voices. Heavy tones telling someone to sit down and make himself comfortable. Lighter tones murmuring a word of thanks. Then the hiss of a siphon, the clink of a glass touching a bottle and the gurgle of liquid being poured.

Minutes ticked away without any move on the Phantom's part. The elevator came up and two men came out of it. They looked at Van and he glanced at them as they passed. They were around the bend in the corridor when he lifted his hand and knocked quietly on the door before which he stood.

"Come in," called a voice from inside.

The Phantom opened the door, stepped into warm lamplight and let the door swing shut after him.

IN A chair beside the table where the lamp stood, the blond young man with the overcoat and briefcase was sitting. He had thrown his overcoat on a small sofa. The briefcase was open on his lap and he was fingering a sheaf of typewritten documents. The Phantom gave him no more than a fleeting glance as he let his gaze fasten on the man who had told him to enter.

The lamplight fell on a flat, chalky white face and pale hair thinning rapidly on top. Under puffy lids, eyes that were like green china marbles stared back at the Phantom.

The man was the night-club owner, Gil Swain.

"Looking for someone?" Swain asked, frowning.

"Mr. Swain?"

"I'm Swain. Who are you?"

The Phantom, from the corner of his eye, saw one door to the left of the room, leading into darkness, double windows, half-open and with the shades pulled fully down. They swayed and rattled in air currents. He moved in a step.

Malcolm Reed—for the blond young man was the new president of the Maine and Vermont Railroad—began to put the documents away. The Phantom sensed the fact that young Reed, acting on his suggestion of that morning and knowing his decoy rôle was about to end, was preparing to avoid trouble.

"I'd like to talk to you about several things." The Phantom never let Swain's hands get out of his view. "Train wrecks, for one."

The puffy lids dropped over the green eyes. The Phantom had to admire the man's coolness. Not a semblance of any change took place in the flat, white face. Gil Swain kept on staring.

"What kind of jive is this?" he demanded. "Train wrecks? You're in the wrong room, partner."

"Wrecks on the Maine and Vermont line, Mr. Reed's road," the Phantom said more explicitly. Wrecks you were responsible for in part. Also, there's a matter of murder—that of Mr. Reed's uncle."

"Wrong pew!" Swain interrupted. "You've got some of the dope right, but most of it wrong. I am interested in the Maine and Vermont Railroad. In fact I'm laying heavy coin on the line to buy an option from Mr. Reed tonight. But wrecks and murder—harsh words, partner."

The Phantom shook his head.

"No good, Swain. I know you have a cast-iron alibi. You haven't been in Vermont for the past nine years. But nevertheless you're a super-killer! Through Atlee you manipulated the wreck of the Green Mountain Special, Archer Gallup's death, and Atlee's murder last night taken care of by a trigger named Henderson."

Gil Swain's face now showed a trace of color.

"I've got you tabbed now," he said sibilantly. "You're the Phantom Detective!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

"GOOD WORK, PHANTOM!"



DELIBERATELY the Phantom took two more steps in the gambler's direction. He did not trouble either to confirm or deny what Swain had said.

"This is your showdown, Swain," he said. "The cards are on the table. Your girl friend,

Miss Savage, had a long, confidential conference with me late this afternoon. You had Atlee killed for two reasons. You wanted the whole hog on the railroad deal, no share-up with a former prison pal. And you were afraid Frenchy was about to walk off with your romance!"

Suddenly Gil Swain laughed. He shrugged his shoulders and looked in Malcolm Reed's direction. It was obvious he knew now that the blond young man had been a plant.

"Okay, Phantom. Looks like you've got this round on points. Where are you taking me—down to Headquarters? Fair enough. I'll come quietly, so don't try to foist off any of that Government hardware that clicks when you put it on. Just a minute until I get my hat."

He began to walk toward the doorway. Neither of the three men in the room had noticed the maid who had entered a moment ago with towels which she went on and placed in the bathroom. She had just walked out of it, paying no attention to the men—she may have been used to such "scenes" in this hotel—when the Phantom stopped Swain with a sharp word.

"Hold it, Swain! Mr. Reed will get your hat."

The man with the flat face chuckled. "Suspicious, ain't you? Well, partner, I'm not going for a gun, if that's what's worrying you. Matter of fact, I don't need it. I always keep a gungel in reserve for just such occasions . . . Okay, Gabby!" he called out. "Blast him!"

The shade in one window zipped to its roller as the same thin, chinless youth with the sunken eyes and moronic look the Phantom had last seen in the light of his flash, on the floor of the room in the Grotto, made his entrance from the fire-escape, shooting as he came! The maid yelled, fell back, then turned and raced for the door.

Simultaneously, while the Phantom shout-

ed a warning to Reed, Swain went into action. He dragged a gun from his belt and crossed his fire with that of his henchman. But the Phantom, kicking over table and lamp, had dropped to his knees. His own flat automatic whipped out from its shoulder holster. The light was poor, a wan, gray haze sifting through the window with the lifted shade, but it was strong enough for him to see "Gabby," who had crouched in behind the sofa and was using that as a barricade to get his lead away.

Swain first! The King of Bookmakers, flopping down beside Gabby at the other end of the sofa, left one leg out for a shooting-gallery target. It was only a moving blur, but that was all the Phantom needed. He hit it with his first shot, wrenching a choked curse from its owner—and a fusillade from Gabby.

Bullets spattered all around the Phantom, spraying the walls. Puffs of plaster followed their whine. The Phantom's left hand reached into his pocket. He carried a second gun there, a small Smith & Wesson. Simulating a hollow moan of pain, he rolled over on his side and bounced the gun across the carpet.

That perfect bit of acting—a man cut down by a slug and dropping his smoking gat—brought instant results. There was a movement at the left end of the couch.

"Got him, boss!" Gabby's voice cracked with satisfied excitement. "That did it!"

"He plugged me in the leg!" Swain's vehement cry ended in a curse. "Get me out of here! The whole town will be in on us any minute!"

Gabby Henderson ran across the room. He stopped beside the Phantom whose hands grabbed his ankles. The Phantom heaved and the chinless youth went crashing to the floor. Stopping only to scoop up Gabby's metal-hot revolver, the underworld nemesis turned his attention to Swain.

Though wounded, the gambler-killer was still armed; still in possession of sudden death he could trigger with the squeeze of a finger. He had got from the floor to his knees and was bracing himself against the sofa.

His right arm came up and the gun was leveled out. The Phantom snap-shot it out of his hand before Swain could fire. Then he was turning back to Gabby, before he could see how Reed had fared, when the door was burst open and the two men from Gregg's Bureau of Detectives who had passed

the Phantom in the hall, hurried in.

Behind them, like an invading army, the Phantom caught a sweat-blurred glimpse of Gregg, himself, of Frank Havens, Steve Huston, in *bas relief* before a pop-eyed, gathering crowd of the hotel's guests.

There was still some fight in the sunken-eyed gangster. He tried to tackle the Phantom at the knees, and got a foot in his face for his trouble.

"Come right in, gentlemen," the Phantom invited cordially. "I have a couple of charming people here for you to meet!"

FRANK HAVENS' car took the publisher, the Phantom and the *Clarion's* star reporter, together with Malcolm Reed, to the newspaper building. En route, they stopped at one of the best hotels in Manhattan. There the new president of the Maine and Vermont, still shaken by his experience but unhurt, got out and greeted the Phantom.

"I'm glad to have been of service," he said, a trifle unsteady, "but I don't think I'd care to go through it again. A little too hectic for a country boy."

The Phantom laughed.

"Thanks a lot for coming down. It simplified matters. You telling Huston where you were to meet Swain saved me a lot of time and trouble. All you need is a good night's sleep and you'll be fit as a fiddle in the morning. And right there"—he indicated the hotel's revolving doors—"is where to get it"

Back in the car, the Phantom settled back against the whipcord upholstery. Frank Havens nudged him and nodded at the little reporter. Steve was in a fever of impatience to get his story written and was counting the streets that drifted by. This was more important than thinking of his interrupted vacation that would be resumed the next day.

"One thing that puzzles me," Havens said, "is how you knew Reed had made the appointment with Swain for tonight."

"He told me about it when I saw him this morning at the railroad's office at Skinner's Falls," the Phantom explained. "Atlee had been informed that when the deal was closed, it was to be closed with Swain, in New York. And Swain, after sending Gabby up to liquidate Frenchy, phoned Reed that tonight was the night."

"Then Reed never had any intention of selling?" Steve put in.

"No, he kept the appointment because I asked him to. As a matter of fact, he's about

to close with Landon Borden. That is, if he can still manage the M and V under Borden's supervision."

"You knew Gabby Henderson killed Atlee?" Frank Havens asked.

"Not for sure—at first. I suspected the money man behind Frenchy wanted him out of the way and sent an agent up to do the job. The wound in Atlee's head was the kind made by gangster lead—large slug. It was Miss Savage, when I put the pressure on, who gave me names and particulars. In a way," he added grimly, "she's almost as bad as Swain. She knew Atlee's number was up and didn't raise a manicured finger to stop the slaughter. The only reason she talked was to try and lighten the rap for herself."

"The chair for two and a long stretch for the lady," Huston murmured. "One thing more. How did Frenchy Atlee know about the two railroads if, as you said, both were working undercover to buy the M and V?"

The Phantom smiled thinly.

"Frenchy was quite a ladies' man. Miss Savage explained. Before he came to New York Frenchy gave a lot of attention to one of Borden's confidential secretaries—in the Chicago office of the railroad. She dropped the word and that was all he needed."

Another street and Steve dropped off to head for the *Clarion's* office.

"Where can I take you?" Havens inquired.

"To a block away from my rooms. I gave Reed the right prescription. Nothing like a good sleep. I haven't had much of it lately."

Frank Havens nodded and turned his head.

"Good work, Phantom," he said softly. "It seems I'm always telling you that. I wish sometime I didn't have to say it, that it wouldn't be necessary."

"But crime," the Phantom told him, "is like the tides of the sea—always there, washing in, swift and relentless! Together we'll have to continue to fight it, Mr. Havens. To blot out evil and replace it with justice, to let the underworld know we hear its challenge and accept it. To fight on, never vanquished, always triumphant!"

With that resolution the Phantom Detective said good night to Frank Havens when the publisher's car stopped a block away from Park Avenue.

Twenty minutes later Richard Curtis Van Loan slept peacefully in the bedroom of his suite, starlight on the sills of his open windows, through which the moon intruded gently.



The two running figures moved past quickly

OUT OF THIS WORLD

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

Ace reporter Danny Taylor wages a single-handed fight to protect his home town from crime and corruption!

DANNY TAYLOR gave the tire jack a final turn, hauled it out from under the axle and dumped the thing into the rear seat of the car. Tomorrow he'd unjoint the thing and put it away in the trunk where it belonged.

But not now—because he was just too darn tired, and too lazy.

Straightening up, he rubbed the small of his back with his hand and grinned at the road sign just ahead of his parked car. It read:

INCORPORATED VILLAGE OF
WALLACE
SLOW DOWN!

"The old home town," he murmured. "I wonder what it will be like after these seven long years?"

As a matter of fact, it was exactly seven years to the day since he had left Wallace to astound the town folks, and the world at large, by becoming a famous newspaper reporter. He hadn't exactly succeeded in doing just that, but he had done all right for him-

self in a small way.'

For the last two years he had been top police reporter on a New York daily, and he would be right there now if a yen to see the town of his birth and childhood had not been greater than a very good raise in pay. So here he was at the town line after seven long years.

He let his rambling thoughts drift away as he saw the approaching car slow down. The moon was full and high, and he had been driving without lights for the last half hour. The approaching car had its lights out, too, but because of the moon he could see it as clearly as at midday. He watched it slow down and stop about a hundred yards from where his car was partly hidden by road-bordering trees. He saw the figure of a man get out and start walking along in front of the car as though he were looking for something.

Then suddenly it happened!

It happened so swiftly and so unexpectedly that Taylor could only stand frozen, his eyes wide with stunned horror. The other car's engine roared up to shatter the comparative silence of the night. The car fairly leaped forward to attain violent speed in the matter of a few yards.

The walking man out in front turned his head and started to leap wildly toward the road shoulder. But he didn't have a chance. The oncoming car struck him while his feet were off the ground. The impact threw the man forward down onto the road. The car tore over his huddled body and was traveling at least sixty miles an hour as it went by where Taylor stood.

"Hey!" he shouted.

For a fleeting instant, as the car streaked by, the moon gave him a glimpse of the face of the driver bent over the wheel. Black hair and a lot of it. A thin face with high cheekbones, and slightly sunken eyes. Those items plus a wide mouth that was twisted into a savage grimace. Then car and driver were up the road and around a sharp bend out of sight.

For perhaps three or four seconds more, Danny Taylor stood right where he was. Then he shook himself out of his trance and ran back along the road shoulder to the huddled heap of dead man.

The man was dead. The very position of his head showed Taylor that his neck was broken. Two wheels of the speeding car had passed over his chest. The reporter took one look at those facts, then looked up and down the road. There was nothing coming in either direction.

A small voice within him told him to get away from there, fast. If a car, particularly a State Police car, should come along he would be in a mess. There was a dead man

on the road. A hundred yards up was Taylor's parked car, and all kinds of evidence that he had just changed a tire.

No, it wouldn't be a happy situation at all. But the inner warning didn't stand a chance against the reporter in him. He had seen murder, and he was curious as to the identity of the murdered man. So he knelt by the corpse and searched for the wallet.

He found it and in it were all kinds of identification to prove that the owner was one Thomas J. Benton, of Wallace, president of the local life insurance agency, Wallace Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, and several other organizations.

VAGUELY Danny Taylor remembered the name, but he couldn't remember the man. He rifled through the various cards of identification, and then slipped the wallet back into the dead man's jacket pocket. For a moment he stood there by the body wondering what to do next. The cold logical side of him decided that since nothing could be done for Thomas J. Benton, now, the sensible thing for him to do was leave the dead man where he was for the next State Trooper to find and get out of there before he became involved in something that was none of his affair.

But he was wrong in figuring that it was none of his affair. It was, or at least he'd make it so. He'd had a good look at the driver of that car. True, he had been so momentarily stunned by the swiftness of the whole thing that he had failed to note the license plate number, or the make and design of the car. But he had a good look at that face. He'd know it the next time he saw it. There had been something faintly familiar about that face. But as he hurried back to his parked car he hadn't the faintest idea what it was.

An hour later he registered at the Wallace House, failed to recognize a single soul in the lobby, and went right up to his room. There were two things he wanted to do right away. One was a good slug out of the scotch bottle in his bag, and the other was to do some heavy thinking.

He had the slug of Scotch but when he sat down to light a cigarette he discovered he was out of cigarettes. He reached for the phone but decided against it. Instead he went down in the elevator to the lobby.

As he walked toward the cigar stand, he saw a man standing at the desk. The man was looking at the register. At that moment the desk clerk saw Taylor and seemed to lean forward and whisper something to the man studying the register.

The man turned his head briefly and Taylor almost tripped over his own feet. One look and he knew it was the man who had

driven that speeding death car.

Taylor could not make up his mind whether to race over and accuse the man or not. He compromised by first buying the needed pack of cigarettes at the stand. When he turned around the man was gone. He was just disappearing through the revolving doors.

Vague, faint memory of some thing pricked his brain. He stared at the desk clerk, but the man was going about his duties as though nothing unusual had happened. Taylor took a full step toward the desk, but on a hunch changed his mind and went back upstairs to his room.

He had another drink of scotch, looked at his watch to note that it wasn't yet nine o'clock in the evening. He picked up the phone and put through a call to the town's one and only newspaper. The Wallace Courier, a bi-weekly.

"Is Hank Clemens there, or at his home?" he asked when the call was put through.

He was told that Clemens was there, and a moment or two later a gruff voice grunted: "Yeah?"

"I want to make a complaint," Taylor said. "You get out a very cheap rag, Mr. Clemens. Did you know that?"

"Sure I do!" the voice at the other end came right back. "So why bother me? Now, which frank and honest citizen might you be?"

"The same old unruffled Hank," Taylor said with a chuckle. "Hi-ya, Hank? This is Danny. Danny Taylor. Remember?"

There was a brief moment of silence, and then the blast that came over the wire almost knocked the receiver from Taylor's ear.

"Danny Taylor? It's really you? Where are you, you bum? In town? When did you get in? But there hasn't been a single flash from the State Police, so it can't be you. Where are you, Danny?"

"At the Wallace," Taylor told him. "Room six-twenty-four. Look, Hank, busy? Could you get up here fast?"

"Before you get the cork out of the bottle, boy! Wait for me."

The line clicked and went dead. Taylor hung up, too, and for a moment sat smiling absently at the instrument as long ago memories started floating back.

Hank Clemens had given him the first newspaper job he'd ever had. His boss, his best friend, and a vitriolic critic of his fourth estate efforts if there ever was one. But he had learned a lot from Hank Clemens, who was ten years his senior. A newspaperman's newspaper man was Hank Clemens.

Taylor glanced toward the scotch bottle, made a move to reach for it, but let his hand drop empty to his lap. He simply sat there thinking for five or six minutes. At the end

of that time, he heard the elevator doors wheeze open, heard footsteps in the hallway, and then the knock on his door. A medium-built, slappy, brown haired man, with a complexion in his cheeks of a sixteen-year-old, came breezing inside.

"Danny! You old story thief."

"Hank! You old tyrant!"

The two grabbed hands, pummeled each other on the back, and talked at the same time. Presently Clemens broke away, poured two drinks of scotch without being asked, and took one and dropped into the nearest chair.

"Seven years!" Clemens said at length. "Tell me about yourself, Danny. I've read some of your syndicated stuff, and it was good. But tell me everything, boy. What are you doing in town?"

"In time, Hank," Taylor said dropping into another chair. "But first I want to tell you about something else. Listen carefully to this, Hank."

WITH that introduction, Taylor related in detail of his recent experience. Hank Clemens listened through to the end without so much as tasting his drink. As Taylor talked the youthful glow went out of the editor's face. His shoulders began to droop, and he suddenly looked his full fifty-five years.

"You say you got a good look at the car driver's face, Danny?" the editor asked in a dull voice a moment or so after Taylor had finished his story.

"That's right, Hank," Taylor said. "I knew I'd know him the next time I saw him. And I did. The same man was at the lobby desk shortly after I'd registered here. I went down for some smokes and saw him. But he'd taken a powder by the time I could make up my mind what to do about it. He was fairly tall with black hair, and a thin face, and—

"Like this, Danny?" Hank Clemens stopped him and pulled a folded newspaper from his pocket. "Like this?"

Taylor looked at the front page as Clemens smoothed it out, and saw the perfect likeness of the death car driver smiling out at him. Underneath the picture was printed—Kurt T. Faben. Our Next Mayor?

"That's him!" Taylor cried. "That's the man who drove the car, and the same one I saw in the lobby. I— Now I catch it! I was wondering why something about his face seemed to touch something in the old brain. I remember now seeing a picture of him in a New York paper. The Wallace dateline was what caught my eye.

"He was head of a salvage paper drive, or something. Anyway, Wallace set a high for all the towns in the country. So a killer is running for mayor? And Benton, Hank?"

THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

he name has a certain ring, but I've forgotten. What about him, Hank?"

Clemens didn't reply for a moment. He stared down at the newspaper picture with the expression on his drawn face of a man who wanted to spit. Then with a sudden gesture he scaled the paper from him.

"Tom Benton was one of the few men in this town with sand enough, and money enough, to fight Solo Faben with everything he had," the editor said finally.

"Solo Faben?" Taylor echoed. "What is he, a pilot or something?"

"No," Clemens said. "He is a dirty stinker, but a smooth one, who has Wallace and everything in it by the throat. Solo is the nickname somebody hung on him, a few months after he arrived in town. I forget now who it was, but it tabbed Faben to a T.

"This scamp has his own little organization, of course, but it is all one man rule. Faben does everything alone. He doesn't leave big things for any member of his bunch to carry out. Hence the nickname somebody tagged on him."

"Tell me more about Solo Faben, Hank," Taylor said.

The editor took his first drink, and made a little half hearted wave with his free hand.

"It's the old mossgrown story all over again, Danny," he said. "Only it was acted out in a small town instead of a big city. I guess it was a couple of years after you left. Yes, five years ago. Anyway, Kurt T. Faben came to town with a lot of money and ideas.

"At first we thought that his ideas were going to benefit the town. He re-opened the Stirling Mills and got them going on a paying basis. He cleared that land over on the west side and put up some good, low rent houses. Things like that, and suckers that we were, we took Faben to our hearts. Even I gave him a write-up that was jammed with ten-dollar adjectives."

The editor paused for breath, and once again he wore the expression of a man with a bad taste in his mouth.

"Then little by little we began to wake up and get wise to Solo Faben," Clemens continued. "Old Police Chief Reilly had died and the new chief, name of Carter, was a man Faben had brought to town with him. We woke up to find that other important appointments down at the Town Hall were all Faben's men.

"Several fast deals came to light. Shady stuff with Faben cleaning up big, but safe from the law. Lots of things like that, and some of the big men in town tried to do something about it.

"They didn't succeed in doing a thing. Parker, head of the Wallace Engineering Company was one of them. Well, Parker's factory burned down one night, and his

charred body was found in the ruins the next day. A couple of other fatal accidents happened. In short, men with courage enough to buck Faben, lost everything including their lives. And now, Tom Benton."

"But couldn't you fellows put up some kind of a fight? Danny Taylor asked.

"How could we?" Clemens shot right back at him. "Faben has everything right in his hand. No matter which way you try to buck him, you're out of luck. He's suave and gracious to meet. But smooth as silk and deadly as a rattler. In short, it's one of those things that couldn't happen here, but has."

Danny Taylor knew the picture now, and all its angles. He'd seen the same thing so often in his travels that it was like reading an exposé in yesterday's newspaper.

"I wonder how Benton came to be in his car?" he murmured more to himself. "And how he got Benton to get out and walk ahead on the road?"

"I wouldn't know," Clemens said with a shrug. "He just worked it somehow. He always does."

As though to punctuate the last, the phone bell jangled. Taylor took the call but it was from the *Courier* office for Clemens. He handed the phone to his old friend and former boss. The editor grunted into it a few times and eventually hung up.

"A State Trooper car found Benton," he announced. "Identified it, of course. It's at the hospital morgue now, awaiting instructions from Tom's wife. That rotten stinker. Some day, please God, if there is any justice. Some day!"

"Some day?" Taylor echoed and gave him a searching look. "Why not today? Tonight? You're forgetting, Hank. I saw him run down Benton and kill him. On my story he can be hung higher than a kite. Running for mayor, is he? Not any more. Who in town do I make my eyewitness statement to and get the ball rolling, Hank?"

AT FIRST the editor seemed not to hear. His face was a sort of dull gray. His shoulders sagged even more, and he had his hands so tightly clasped that the skin showed white at the knuckles.

"There isn't anybody, Danny," Clemens said in a low, hopeless voice. "The judge, the local prosecutor, all of them, are Faben's men. They'd tie you up in legal knots. It would be like talking to a brick wall."

Danny Taylor's eyes went wide, and an angry flush mounted in his face.

"What?" he almost yelled. "You mean to sit there and say I should do nothing? Man alive, here's a scoop for your sheet. An eyewitness story of the murder, plus definite identification. Why any editor would give his eye teeth for that kind of a yarn, Hank!"

"No, Danny, that wouldn't do any good, either," Clemens said bitterly. "I'd get the plant burned to the ground most likely. You don't realize the grip he's got on us, Danny. I don't play ball with him, but I don't go after his scalp, either. It would be suicide. Maybe, if I were younger, and single. But, there's Mary, and the kids. I'm all they've got. And the *Courier* is all I've got."

Clemens emphasized the last with a hopeless gesture of his hands.

"You say you saw him in the lobby?" the editor suddenly asked. "The desk clerk spoke to him, and he turned and looked at you?"

"Right," Taylor nodded. "And it was the same bird. You couldn't mistake his looks."

"Danny, I'm going to give you a good piece of advice," Clemens said after a long period of silence between them. "It's this. Check out of this hotel, now, and leave Wallace. It's obvious that Solo has identified you as the man by that parked car he passed. So that puts you in the middle of something you can't do anything about. Don't try to, Danny. I hate to say this, but it's true. You'd only get hurt, or worse."

"Leave town?" Danny Taylor snapped. "Get out of my own home town that I haven't even had half a look at yet? The town where I was born, and raised, and went to school?"

"Maybe I haven't got any folks living here any more, and maybe I've been away seven years, but Wallace is still my town. Why out in the tunnels of the old copper mine there's my name scratched into the rock. And the date. Nineteen Ten. Thirty-five years ago. And a killing rat, who has only been here five years, is going to scare me out of town? You're nuts! You're crazy!"

"No, Danny," Clemens said, and there were almost tears in his eyes as well as in his voice. "I'm not crazy. I know what I'm telling you. You don't understand. Wallace has changed. Everything's different. It isn't the town you once knew. It isn't anything like it was once. Solo Faben has changed it, but one man isn't going to change it back again."

"Some day something may happen, and a change for the better will be made. But not now, no. Faben is sitting pretty, and sitting tight. It isn't your town, or my town, or anybody's town any more. It's Faben's. It hurts more than you know for me to say that. That's why I advise you to get out. Faben has you marked, now. You're only bound to get hurt, or worse."

Danny Taylor sat staring silently at his old friend, trying desperately to understand his side of things. He was still trying to understand when the phone bell jangled for the second time.

"Yes?" he barked into the mouthpiece.

"Do you wear glasses by any chance, Mr.

Taylor?" a quiet, pleasant voice inquired at the other end of the connection.

"Huh, glasses?" Taylor echoed. "No, I don't wear glasses. Why?"

"You should, Mr. Taylor," the other voice assured him. "You really should. A lot of people are without glasses, who really need them. Often times they think they see something when it actually isn't so. As a friend, Mr. Taylor, I advise you to consult an oculist. There are several good ones in Chicago. I'd go there as soon as possible, if I were you. By five o'clock tomorrow afternoon at the latest. That'll still give you plenty of time to visit our town. Good night, Mr. Taylor."

"Listen, you—!" Taylor shouted into the mouthpiece.

But he was too late. The line had gone dead. He slammed the receiver back on the hook and glared at Clemens. In a few choice words he told what had been said to him. Hank Clemens listened through the tirade without comment or change of expression.

"He wasn't kidding, Danny," he said earnestly when the other had run out of words. "But you're too burned now to pay any attention to anything I said. Tell you what, Danny. Sleep on it, and have lunch with me tomorrow."

Taylor stared at him and through him.

"Where do I get a gun, and a permit to carry it?" he suddenly demanded. "That was a threat. I've got a right to protect myself. I'll be—"

"Don't be a dope!" Clemens stopped him. "They'd laugh at you down at the police department. Look, Danny, sleep on it for tonight, anyway. Come round to my office about noon. I'll take you over to the Rotary for lunch. Maybe I'll have thought of something by then. Good night, Danny. It was almost like old times for the first couple of minutes. At noon, Danny?"

"Okay, I'll be there," Taylor said scowling heavily at his drink.

CLEMENS hesitated a moment as he held the door open. He looked back at Taylor. An expression of deep affection, and then marked worry, passed across the editor's face. Then he went out into the hall, softly closing the door behind him.

When Danny Taylor finally was between the sheets, sleep did not come for a long time. His brain was too filled with spinning thoughts to give sleep a chance. The anger welling up in him was so great that he wasn't able to remain in one position for more than a minute or two. He shifted and tossed about for three hours or more, banging his brain for a plan of action that would lead to a suitable solution.

As time wore on he calmed down enough to admit to himself that he wasn't really

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angry at Hank Clemens, nor ashamed as he had been at first. Hank wasn't a rolling stone like himself. He never had been. Wallace was the town of his birth, and it would be the town of his death. Everything in the *Courier* editor's life spelled Wallace.

Oh, it was very fine, and brave, and glorious for an editor to buck "the machine", or "the gang." It made nice reading, win, lose, or draw. But Hank was being sensible. He knew that there would be only one outcome. He'd lose. Everything. Maybe his life. So Hank was doing the sensible thing, considering everything. He was sitting tight, waiting and hoping.

But Hank's advice that he leave town at once was something Taylor could not take, even in small portions. He'd seen murder done, and he knew the killer. Not in a thousand years would he leave Wallace until he had done something about that. That was the kind of fellow he was.

Some twenty-five to thirty citizens of Wallace showed up at the Rotary luncheon the next day. Taylor knew about half of them. It seemed like a slightly strained occasion because a pall hung over the luncheon room. The death of Tom Benton was a blow.

By accident, or maybe because Clemens arranged it that way, they sat alone at one of the smaller tables. No sooner were they alone than Taylor guessed that Hank had arranged it so. Because of the editor's first words.

"I've thought it over and over, Danny," Clemens said. "But my advice is still the same. Accept that tip, even though it burns you up, and leave town. Believe me, you can't do a thing to help. You've got your New York connections. Go back there and forget the town of Wallace for awhile. Maybe some day we'll find a way."

The words were like salt in an open wound to Taylor, but he didn't say anything. A certain look on Hank Clemens' face was reflected in many other faces in that luncheon room. He suddenly felt sick and could hardly seem to get the food down his throat. That the grown men of his home town could ever reach this state!

"Greetings, Clemens. That was a nice picture in yesterday's paper. I only wish I looked like that."

Something inside of Danny Taylor froze up as the smooth pleasant voice came to his ears. He glanced up and straight into the eyes of Kurt Faben. With Faben was a well dressed man of about the same age. Hank Clemens made introductions, and the other man's name proved to be Higgins. He also proved to be the president of the Board of Aldermen. He merely smiled and let Faben do the talking. And Faben spoke directly to Danny.

"Back for a visit to the old home town, eh, Mr. Taylor?" the man said in his smooth, suave voice. "Well, that's fine. And we're mighty glad to have you here at Rotary. How long are you staying?"

Danny Taylor accepted the challenge at once. A tiny idea had formed in his brain at breakfast. It was now fast expanding and reaching the point of definite decision.

"Oh, I don't know, Mr. Faben," Taylor said casually. "A week or two, I guess. It's seven years since I left, and there are a lot of things I want to see and do. Scenes of my childhood, and that sort of stuff. Then again, I may decide to stay in Wallace for keeps. I haven't made up my mind."

Solo Faben nodded in an interested way, and broadened his smile slightly.

"Well, that fine, Mr. Taylor," Faben said. "We've a great little town here, now. Maybe you should stay here, for keeps. So long, Clemens, and thanks again for that picture. I liked it."

The editor waited until the pair had moved on to some other table, then he gave Danny a hard stare.

"You didn't mean that, did you, Danny?" he demanded. "Just needling him, weren't you?"

"Let's eat and get out of here," Taylor said through stiff lips. "I can't stand the stink. Besides I've got some things I want to do. Look, Hank, will you be in your office this evening?"

"Every evening," the editor replied. "But look, Danny—"

"Skip it!" Taylor said almost savagely. "I reached voting age years ago. I may call you this evening, or maybe even drop in. If I do neither, give me a day or two. If you don't hear from me by then, go get my stuff at the hotel and do whatever you like with it. There'll be an envelope in my bag. A few bucks, Hank. I never was the one to save. But they may help you and Mary. and the kids."

"Danny, for God's sake—!"

"Skip it, Hank!" Taylor stopped him. "I'm playing it my way, and that's final!"

At about half past four that afternoon Danny Taylor stopped at the Wallace House desk long enough to tell the clerk that he was taking a sightseeing run in his car and would be back in two or three hours. Then he went outside and got into his car. The next fifteen minutes he spent driving about town. Just long enough to make sure that a plain, unobtrusive looking black sedan was following him at a respectful distance.

TAYLOR could see that there were two men in the sedan. As a matter of fact, the car trailed along so far behind him that twice he lost it completely. Eventually,

though, when he finally got onto the little used road that headed out by the old copper mines, he saw the black sedan a good quarter of a mile behind him.

Then he was really certain and a sense of savage satisfaction swept through him. But at the same time, an icy chill rippled up and down his spine. He wished very much that he had a gun, but he hadn't. He also wished that there had been more time to make relatively certain that his plan of action stood a fifty-fifty chance of success.

"So it's a hope and a prayer that it hasn't changed since you were a kid," he muttered, and peered at the other car in the rear view mirror.

When he was a mile or so out of town and winding through hilly, uninhabited country, he noticed that the black sedan was slowly cutting down his lead. He fed more gas to his own engine and the car leaped forward. But so did the black sedan behind. A lot of lumps of lead began to jump about in his stomach, and his mouth and throat started to go bone dry.

He put the car up to sixty-five and gained a couple of hundred yards on the black sedan. But not for long. In the matter of a minute or so, it became startlingly clear that though the sedan was one of the small and cheap type of cars, there was a souped-up engine under the hood. He gripped the wheel tight and pushed the gas pedal to the floor, while he stared ahead at the range of higher hills about four miles ahead.

Praise be, it was the middle of summer and the road was baked dry and hard. However, there were many bumps and several times he came within an ace of slithering off the road on a sharp turn. But, also, he gained on the black sedan. When he was less than a mile from the virtually age old abandoned copper mine, he was a good half mile in the lead.

The road led uphill with wide easy turns so that he had only to snap a quick glance back out the side window to catch sight of the black sedan racing up after him in hot pursuit.

Suddenly he found himself, exactly abreast of the old copper mine. Frantically he searched for something and found it. A jagged piece of rusty metal at the side of the road. He slammed on the brakes and deliberately drove the right front tire over the jagged points at twenty miles an hour. The jagged points pierced the rubber and the tire went with a bang.

As soon as he heard the sound and felt the car lurch crazily to the right, he slammed the brakes on to their full limit, and kicked open the door on his side. He was out and across the road and racing down through tangled underbrush toward the old mine

opening, when he heard the black sedan come to a tire-screaming halt. He heard a half yell but branches were slapping too much against his head for him to catch what was said.

Then he was at the entrance of the old copper mine. For a brief instant he halted and tried desperately to bring back brain pictures of his last visit to this place as a kid.

"There he goes in!"

The yell seemed to come from but a foot in back of him. He jumped as though he had been shot. But he jumped straight forward into the pitch dark opening of the mine. By then, though, he had his only weapon out and in his hand. It was a small pocket flashlight, and as he plunged into the pitch dark opening, he snapped on the beam for a fleeting second or two.

Two rusty tracks leading off into the hill met his gaze. Some kind of an animal scurried off out of the beam of light. Cobwebs became draped on his face, while an evil, musty smell assailed him.

Then there was another yell back at the mouth of the tunnel. He put out his flashlight and went forward as fast as he dared with one hand out in front of him, the fingers of the other hand trailing along the stone and dirt tunnel wall.

As though by magic, the years fell away from him. Thirty-five years in all, and he was again a ten-year-old kid playing with the gang in the old copper mine.

Taylor suddenly reached the right angle turn to the left. He slowed up and snapped on his flashlight. The left turn led away into complete darkness. He heard a low curse behind him, and then the sound of a shot that was like the entire mine blowing up. Something sang past his ears and went *plunk* into the wall. He let out a yelp as though in pain and scurried forward.

"Winged the little rat, I think! Come on! He can't be far ahead. Hold that light steady, can't you?"

There were more words but Danny Taylor didn't wait to hear them. Another fifty yards, at least, before that next turn. If they fired again down the tunnel, they couldn't help hitting him. He knew that he was making as much noise as a ten ton truck on a loose gravel road. But he had to sacrifice noise for speed.

Fifty yards, forty—thirty. If that old cave-in was still there! What if it had been filled in? Beyond the cave-in, the tunnel went straight as an arrow for a good hundred yards. It would be a shooting gallery for them, and he would be the target.

Thirty yards, twenty, ten—five!

He chanced one split second of his flashlight beam, and saw the turn. It drew a shot but the bullet missed him because he was

around the turn now and flattening himself dead still against the wall. Two feet beyond was a yawning hole. It fell sheer in a forty foot drop to a pile of jagged stone.

IT SEEMED to Taylor, that time stood still. He did not dare even to breathe. Running footsteps. Panted curses. Nearer and nearer. The glow of a flashlight beam. Then the words:

"Another turn. Blast him! Come on!"

Two shadowy figures coming around the turn. They seemed to fill up the whole tunnel. The two shadows moved past quickly. Then came a gasp followed instantly by a hideous scream of terror. Then another voice screaming wildly. The rumbling sound of loose falling stones. A third scream, and two sickening thuds in rapid succession. A few more falling stones and dirt—then dead silence!

He wanted to be sick. He fought the feeling and won. He took one cautious step forward, pressed the button of his flashlight and pointed it down into the cave-in. The horrible sight he saw made his head swim, and he put one hand against the wall to brace his violently trembling body.

The two bodies looked like well dressed dummies impaled on sharp rocks. There was blood on both faces but he could see the features clearly. One face had belonged to Solo Faben. The other to the president of the Board of Aldermen, Higgins. In one of Higgins's hands was a flashlight. In Solo Faben's outflung right hand was a small snub-nosed automatic.

Ten minutes later he was out on the road by his car. It took him another ten minutes to put on the spare wheel. As he was getting in behind the wheel, an idea struck him.

Sixty yards back along the road there was a sharp turn. The guard-rail was made of wooden posts, and it guarded a five-hundred foot drop almost straight down.

He got out of his car and went back to the black sedah.

The key was in the ignition lock. He got in, started the engine, and turned the car around. When he had it headed right, he put the gear in high, opened the door on the wheel side, pulled the throttle plunger on the dash all the way out, and jumped.

The car couldn't have gone straighter if he had been at the wheel. It hit the wooden guard-rail and went through it as though through crossed toothpicks. The black sedan plunged over the lip and disappeared down out of sight. There was some bumping and banging, and crashing. Then stone silence. Nothing but a thin coil of oily, black smoke starting to climb up to the sky.

At seven o'clock Danny Taylor walked into Hank Clemen's office. The editor took one look and came around his desk fast.

"Danny! You're still here? Danny! You're white as a ghost! What happened, boy? What?"

"Enough," Taylor said. "Got a bottle in that desk, Hank? Now, now, relax. Everything is okay. Wallace is our town again. And I'm going to stick around for awhile to make sure. Got a job for me on the *Courier*?"

"Sure, Danny, sure, I—," the editor began and stopped. "Danny!" he choked out. "You don't mean that—you?"

"No, Hank," Taylor stopped him. "I didn't lay a finger on him. Or Higgins who was with him. It's the truth, Hank. They—well, they sort of ran right out of this world, they were in such a hurry. Tell you about it, later. Right now, that drink, Hank. Trot it out."



RICHARD CURTIS VAN LOAN AT HIS SLEUTHING BEST IN

MODEL FOR MURDER

By ROBERT WALLACE

Next Issue's Exciting Complete Mystery Novel

"Please do not be foolish enough to make me shoot!"



MURDER DIRGE

By WAYLAND RICE

When Detective Tim Moore sees a burglar stealing some jewels, there's sure plenty of trouble ahead—for Tim!

TO TIM MOORE it was still all as amazing as a wish on an Aladdin's lamp. He prodded through the second floor hallway of Mrs. Clara Finch's elaborate home.

A month ago he'd been on his way back from the Pacific with an even dozen points over the number required for his discharge from the army. His plans had been made for months, and now he had an office with **TIMOTHY MOORE, PRIVATE INVESTIGATIONS** printed on the door. He would liked to have added to that sign words indicating that he was the son of the original Tim Moore who had been one of the top flight detectives turned out by the New York police force.

Tim Moore entered Mrs. Finch's ornate bedroom. He saw the picture of Mrs. Finch's mother. Behind it, he'd been told, was a wall safe which he should keep an eye on. Moore glanced at the glass covered portrait and saw his own image superimposed over the subject's somewhat forbidding face.

He left the room after another quick glance around and made certain the door stayed open. As he backed out, someone seized his arm and jerked him around. The man who regarded him with open suspicion was tall, with slate gray hair and a thin, distinguished face.

"Well?" this man demanded. "What's the idea?"

Moore grinned.

"You can let go of me, Mr. Lee Byron," he said. "I'm a private eye hired to protect the guests and Mrs. Finch. You were pointed out to me a little while ago. You're a music critic. Here, take a look at my papers."

Byron looked and was satisfied.

"Sorry, Mr. Moore," he apologized. "but you did act strangely. Good luck if anything happens. Call on me if you need help."

"Thanks," Tim Moore said. "I know most of the guests, but there is one I didn't have pointed out to me. A pompous soul with a bulging midriff who acts as though he should be wearing a diplomat's ribbon across his chest."

"Lucky you asked me and not Mrs. Finch." Byron grinned. "That's her brother-in-law, Noah Finch, and he is pompous. Keep out of his way."

BYRON adjusted his white tie, clapped Moore across the shoulder, and went downstairs. Moore continued his prowling. He examined several more rooms and then he noticed Mrs. Finch's door was almost closed. He stepped quickly up to the door, opened it, and his eyes darted in the direction of the wall safe.

The glass-covered portrait had been moved aside, and the safe opened. Moore took two steps inside the room, and then stopped cold. There was something pushed against the small of his back.

"Please do not be foolish enough to make me shoot," a man's voice warned. "Raise your hands and keep them there. Good! Now walk straight ahead, just left of the wall safe. I will tell you when to stop."

Tim Moore finally faced the wall and stayed there. He heard the burglar rummage through the safe, and out of the corner of his eye he saw the burglar's free hand remove a plush jewelry case and then close the safe door, swinging the portrait back in place.

"Now please walk backward," the burglar ordered. "I shall lock you in the closet. Don't turn your head. If you see my face, I shall be forced to shoot."

The pressure of the gun didn't relax. Moore moved backward, and somewhat to the right. He maneuvered to get directly in front of the glass-covered portrait, for he already knew its reflecting power. The trick worked.

In the glass he saw the burglar. He was not bad looking, although there was a scar across part of the left cheek. He was about forty-five, with blond hair turning gray at the temples. He was dressed in gray plaid with a blue-dotted cream colored tie. Tim Moore would know him again in a crowd of thousands.

A moment later, the closet door closed on

him. He waited about half a minute and then attacked the door. Moore was powerful and heavy enough to crack the panels with his first assault. Within two minutes he had the door smashed open.

He ran downstairs. The musicale was in progress. He saw Byron listlessly sitting in one of the rear chairs. The butler stationed at the front door claimed that no one had departed, and there were no guests not in formal dress.

Moore hurried out to the kitchen, the only other exit. Two chefs were hard at work. Moore showed his papers.

"No strangers came through here," one chef stated.

"What about the blond-haired man in gray plaid, with a scar on his cheek?" Moore took a long shot.

The chef shrugged.

"That was Stewart, an antique dealer from town," he said. He brought a package for Mrs. Finch."

Tim Moore didn't have a car so he proceeded to hike toward the village. This was a Long Island residential town with the business center compact and not very far away. He soon located the antique shop of Wilbur Stewart. Lights were still on.

Moore was puzzled. Granted that Stewart was the burglar, why hadn't he displayed some tact? He'd barged right into the house, not caring who saw him. Yet he'd been afraid that Tim Moore might identify him. Of course he might not be the man Moore had seen reflected in that picture, but he'd soon know.

Moore pushed the door open and a little bell tinkled. He walked up to the counter.

Someone was coming from the back room. A curtain parted and a man emerged. He was the identical man Moore had seen in the glass of the portrait.

Tim Moore leaned against the counter, feeling better. Much better.

"Suppose," Moore said, "you just hand me that box of jewelry you stole from Mrs. Finch's safe. Then come along with me, and don't give any trouble."

"What in the world are you talking about?" the shopkeeper demanded.

"I'm a private detective hired to keep an eye on Mrs. Finch's jewels. Ten minutes ago, you had a gun drilled against my back. I've got a gun, too, which you neglected to take away from me. Come around from behind that counter. You're under arrest."

The man sullenly obeyed Tim Moore's orders.

"This is silly," he exclaimed. "I'm Wilbur Stewart. I own this shop. Good heavens, I'm not a burglar. Yes, I'll go with you gladly."

Moore searched him thoroughly, but found neither weapon nor jewels. On the way

back to the Finch estate, Moore kept a firm grip on Stewart's arm. The antique shop dealer seemed suddenly possessed of the idea that it was all very funny.

The musicale was still in progress, but Tim Moore sent the butler for Mrs. Finch. She came, accompanied by her overbearing brother-in-law, Noah. Moore explained as briefly as possible.

"Mr. Stewart robbed my safe?" she asked in horror. "Why, it seems incredible."

"I saw him do it," Moore answered confidently. "Let's go upstairs, and you can see for yourself what's missing. He took only one box. A black plush jewel case."

MRS. Finch hurried up the steps. Noah followed, and Moore brought up the rear with Stewart. The antique dealer wasn't laughing any more. He was growing more and more angry.

"Moore," he said in a hoarse whisper, "start praying you didn't make any mistake. I can sue you for this, and I shall."

Mrs. Finch opened the safe door. She removed about a dozen jewel cases, some papers and a thick wad of cash. She looked in every box and did some counting on her fingers. Then she turned to Moore.

"I really don't know what to say. There is nothing missing. Not a thing. There must be some horrible mistake."

Tim Moore closed his eyes in silent resignation. The things he had to learn before he became proficient at this game were stupendous, and he was certainly starting his education the hard way.

"But I saw him take out a jewel case," Moore insisted. "If we search his shop perhaps—"

"Try it, and see what happens!" Stewart pulled himself free of Moore's grasp. "This is outrageous!"

"Why should we search Mr. Stewart's place of business?" Mrs. Finch demanded. "I informed you that nothing is missing. What should we search for?"

Noah Finch cleared his throat. For three minutes Tim Moore listened to his abuse while Mrs. Finch nodded in full agreement. Finally, Moore couldn't stand it any longer. "Shut up," he broke into Noah's tirade. "You overstuffed pack of liars and thieves. I know what I saw. For some reason you don't want to admit there even was a theft, but I say there was. I'm trapped. But, so help me, don't believe I'll give up. That goes for you, Mr. Stewart, and you, Mr. Finch. Good night!"

Tim Moore walked dismally out of the house. The mezzo-soprano was in full action and the music irritated him. He felt like heaving a rock through one of those big windows.

"Moore, old boy," a soft voice came out of the darkness, "they certainly handed it to you."

"Hello, Mr. Byron," Tim Moore said. "You heard it then?"

Byron grinned.

"I saw you trotting back here with Stewart, and I listened in," he said. "Did you actually see Stewart pilfer the safe?"

Moore nodded.

"Of course I did, and he took something. I just happened to think. Stewart was willing to come over here and be confronted with Mrs. Finch. Don't you think that's odd?"

Byron shrugged.

"Not if Stewart is as innocent as he claims to be, and the evidence backs him up."

"I tell you I saw him steal something," Tim Moore insisted. "An article which Mrs. Finch can't afford to acknowledge possession of. She had to let Stewart get away with it, as he very well knew she would."

Byron flipped his cigarette away into the darkness.

"Tim," he said. "Take my advice and drop the whole thing. If, as you say, Mrs. Finch can't claim anything is missing, that's exclusively her affair."

"Not any more," Tim Moore grunted. "I'm in a mess, and the only way out is to dig myself clear. I know I'm right."

Byron whistled softly.

"You've certainly more than your share of determination," he admitted. "I'd like to help. Suppose I see Stewart in your behalf and get him to drop this. I can talk to Mrs. Finch, too, so she won't make any report."

"I doubt even you could make Mrs. Finch drop the thing," Moore said.

Byron grinned.

"If I write nice things about that singer, who is Mrs. Finch's protege, Mrs. Finch will do anything I ask of her. Leave it to me, Tim."

"Okay." Tim Moore showed no spark of delight. "The worst you can do is stall the proceedings. I'm going ahead with my own investigation however. Don't think I'm not grateful, Mr. Byron. I am—very much so."

Tim Moore walked disconsolately away, in the general direction of the bus stop. He tried to reason it out. Why had Mrs. Finch denied anything was missing? Why had Stewart been so cockeyed sure of himself? There was an answer somewhere, but not in the textbooks Tim Moore knew about.

HE TAPPED his coat pocket where the weight of a silver cigarette case lay heavy. It was Stewart's case. Tim Moore had neatly picked his pocket. If Stewart was a thief, maybe there'd be fingerprints

on file. It was Moore's one forlorn hope and he proceeded straight to Police Headquarters where he was well known. He visited the identification room and had the prints on that cigarette case developed and checked.

"Sorry," one of the experts told him. "We've got nothing on file that matches these prints, but I'll photograph them and shoot 'em to the FBI. They've really got a complete file there."

"Do that," Moore said. "Let me know as soon as you get a report."

He rode a bus back to Long Island and his mind was made up. He meant to get into Stewart's store somehow and search it thoroughly. If he could find the stolen article, he might have something. The very nature of the loot might give the whole thing away.

Tim Moore stepped up to the door and peered inside the darkened store. There were no signs of life. He automatically tried the door and to his amazement it gave way under pressure.

He stepped inside and closed the door behind him. He could hear a faint tinkling sound. It seemed to be making music. There really was a melody, heavy, mournful music, but what on earth created it, he didn't know. He moved softly toward the curtained entrance to the back of the store. The music grew louder. Then Moore's nostrils twitched.

He was smelling an odor that had grown very familiar to him. One he hoped he'd never smell again. Blood! He parted the curtains. The music was loud now. He lit a match and held it aloft. He saw the light switch and snapped it on.

There was a very large combination desk and workbench in one corner of the room. From behind it issued a thin stream of blood, coursing its way along the floor boards. Moore gasped and sped to the edge of the desk. There was nothing he could do.

Wilbur Stewart would never sue him. Stewart lay huddled in a heap on the floor. His throat had been slashed. Moore felt of the dead man's hand. It was very warm. He'd been dead only a short time.

The tinkling sound crept under Moore's skin. It annoyed him, and he saw what made it. There were several old music boxes on a shelf above the desk. One had been taken down, as if for repair. That one made all the noise. It played the same tune over and over again. Music in perfect tune with murder.

Tim Moore closed the lid of the box, stopping the music automatically. He noticed that there was a smear of blood on the edge of the desk. Where Stewart had fallen, probably. Moore massaged his jaw and tried to figure out what he should do next.

This was murder, and a job for the local cops. He was reaching for the telephone

when the bell on the inside of the door jangled. Moore parted the curtains.

Noah Finch stood there, in the center of the store, staring at Tim Moore. His massive bulk blocked any direct route of escape if Moore wanted to get away.

"What are you doing here?" Noah demanded. "Where is Stewart?"

"Maybe I could ask you the same question," Moore countered.

"I came here to intercede for you. My sister believes you are young, inexperienced and not deserving of the trouble Stewart intends to make for you. I think she's wrong. I think anyone as stupid as you should be punished. Now, where is Stewart?"

"He's dead," Moore said softly. "Somebody slit his throat."

Noah's eyes grew wider and wider.

"You! You killed him! he cried. "So he wouldn't sue and make trouble. You're a murderer. I was right about you."

Noah Finch turned and for a man his bulk, moved very fast. He hit the sidewalk, screaming at the top of his lungs for the police.

Tim Moore raced through the back room, unlocked the rear door and scampered off into an alleyway. He knew this was the wrong thing to do. It would only add fuel to the fires of guilt already heaped upon him. But he simply couldn't submit meekly to arrest. First of all, the evidence was against him. He had a motive, the opportunity, and he'd been seen in the store only minutes after Stewart had died.

MOORE knew where he was going. To Mrs. Finch's home, before Noah reached it with the news. Perhaps she'd relent and tell him something of what went on, now that murder had been done. But he had to be away from there before the police arrived.

He walked boldly up to the door. The party was over, but the house was well illuminated. The front door was wide open so Tim Moore stepped in. Mrs. Finch and Lee Byron were coming out of the living room, arm-in-arm. They both came to a dead stop upon seeing him.

"I hope," Mrs. Finch said very firmly, "that you haven't returned to create any further disturbance. Tonight, because of you, I missed a fine performance."

"Superb," Byron added. "Mrs. Finch and I were discussing the depth and tone of her protegee's voice."

"Where is Noah?" Tim Moore asked.

"I sent him to ask Mr. Stewart to drop proceedings against you." Mrs. Finch looked extremely haughty. "You probably had my welfare at heart. I shall even pay you the agreed upon fee."

"When did Noah leave here?"

"About three-quarters of an hour ago," Byron said. "Mrs. Finch, I'm afraid I must take my leave now. It's been a grand evening, even a bit exciting, thanks to Mr. Moore. By the way, Tim, can I give you a lift to town?"

"I'd appreciate it," Tim Moore said. If he didn't get away from here soon, the police would be on his neck.

Byron was driving toward the highway when a car came toward them, traveling fast.

"Odd," Byron grunted. "That looked like a police car."

"It was," Moore said gloomily. "Byron, I'm going to tell you the truth. Wilbur Stewart is dead. Murdered!"

Byron's foot came off the gas pedal.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "You?"

"Uh-uh," Moore shook his head. "I merely found the body. In the back of his store. And I've got a pretty good hunch what this is all about now."

Byron got the car under control again.

"Tell me, Tim," he said. "I'm worried about you. Suppose they say you killed him?"

"They're going to broadcast it," Tim Moore said. "Noah showed up—walked right into the store and met me there. Last I saw of him, he was yelling for the cops."

"Bad," Byron mused. "I'll do all I can to help. You didn't kill him, Tim?"

"Of course I didn't," Tim Moore said. "Maybe Noah did. That family is involved. You told me Noah had left the house three-quarters of an hour before I arrived. The distance to the store isn't great. He should have reached it long before he did. Perhaps he was there first, killed Stewart, departed and then saw me enter. He recognized the chance of a lifetime and came back."

"But why on earth should Noah murder Stewart?" Byron asked. "He hardly knew the man."

"That's what I'm getting to," Moore said. "Stewart really stole something from Mrs. Finch's safe. Something she couldn't afford to admit the loss of and which she had to have back. Noah went after the object—and got it. Tell me, are Mrs. Finch's jewels still at the house?"

"Why, naturally," Byron said. "She usually keeps them there overnight. In the morning, a bank messenger comes for them and puts them back into a vault until she wants to show off again."

"That's not much help," Moore sighed. "Drop me near my office, like a good fellow. It's on Oak Street."

BUT Tim Moore entered his office only to use the telephone. He called the identification expert at Police Headquarters.

"Tim," this man gasped. "Good heavens,

what's happened? There's an alarm out to pick you up."

"I know, I know," Moore said. "I need a break. You must be sure I didn't murder anyone. I need help. See if there is anything in your files of jewel thieves under the name of Wilbur Stewart."

"Well," the identification man said doubtfully, "if I hadn't known your father so well... Okay, Tim, I'll take a chance and keep quiet about your call. Wait a minute." He came back on the line shortly. "Nothing concerning anybody named Wilbur Stewart. But remember those prints on the cigarette case? It so happened I had to have some other prints checked fast and I sent a man by plane, to Washington. Had yours attended to at the same time."

"And they—were identified?" Moore asked anxiously.

"Yep. They were in the files of aliens allowed to stay indefinitely in this country. The owner of those prints is named Willi Stuben, from Vienna. Came here with his father before the war. I understand they were gem merchants. Handling big stuff."

"Thanks, Mike," Moore said. "Thanks very much for getting me this information and giving me a break. I'll never forget it."

Tim Moore rushed out of his office and headed for a newspaper building. He got permission to use their files. Studying the index systems he found a reference to Willi Stuben and looked up the items. They concerned this rather famous family of gem cutters and experts and there was a reference to the fact that they had been robbed, not long after they arrived in this country, of a fortune represented by an historic necklace of rubies and diamonds.

Moore closed the huge volume of old newspapers. Then he opened it again. He noticed Lee Byron's music column and read it, with interest. It was well spotted, carried a by-line with a unique decoration—a bar of music.

Moore read a few more of his critical reviews. They were crammed with sarcasm, and with witty but biting words calculated more to build up the writer than the artist they concerned.

Tim Moore put the volume away and left. He had to be cautious. The police would be looking for him, and even most of the patrolmen knew him by sight. He was acting purely on what seemed to be a hunch, although much later he realized it was more than that. He actually worked on facts, subconsciously tucked away in his mind.

He reached Mrs. Finch's estate shortly after midnight. The house was well lighted, and he took up a position close by where he could be hidden and at the same time watch the front and rear doors. It was about

an hour later when he saw Mrs. Finch slip out the back, enter the garage and drive away in a sedan.

For a second or two, Moore felt the full pangs of defeat. Then he raced for the garage, saw a coupe ready to roll, and started the motor. He was entirely unabashed at this first attempt as a car thief. It couldn't harm him very much—not with a murder charge hanging over his head.

He caught up with Mrs. Finch just before she crossed the bridge into the city. She seemed to know exactly where she was going, but the destination surprised Moore. She parked the car at a fairly busy spot, walked two blocks, and waddled down the stairway to a subway station.

Moore yanked his hatbrim far down, prayed he wouldn't run head on into a cop, and followed her. She went through the turnstile, but apparently had no intention of taking a train. She swept along the thinly crowded platform and went directly to a series of public lockers.

She took a key from her purse, studied the lockers, and selected the proper one. She opened it, reached inside and removed a plain brown paper bag. Not a very large one. She clung tightly to this, but didn't close the locker door. Instead, she reached into her purse again, removed a long fat envelope and put this into the locker.

As she did so, Tim Moore hurried over to a newspaper stand and bought five flat bars of candy, asked for a bag to put them in, and was provided with one like the one which Mrs. Finch had taken from the storage locker. She was already waddling toward the turnstiles.

Moore started running. There was a dangerously big man close by Mrs. Finch, but Moore wasn't going to be stopped by anything now. He crashed head on into that man, stepped back and took a wild swing at him. He missed purposely, and at the same time crashed into Mrs. Finch hard enough to knock her off her feet.

WITH a shriek, she landed on the cement platform. The bag she held was jarred out of her hand. At that instant Tim Moore felt a General Sherman tank run smack into his face. It was the big man's fist, and Moore went reeling back. He fell heavily, not too far from Mrs. Finch, but his hat was still jammed down. In the excitement she'd never recognize him.

Tim Moore scooped up the paper bag she had dropped and left the one filled with candy in its place. The big man was advancing aggressively while a couple of well meaning citizens hung onto his coattails to stop him. Mrs. Finch got to her feet, still screaming. She pressed the brown paper bag against

her ample bosom and fled.

Moore arose. The big man tried to shake off the two well wishers hanging onto him. When it didn't work, he turned on them with swinging fists. Moore grinned slightly, catapulted through the turnstile and raced up the steps. A cop was on his way down. Moore's heart stopped beating.

"Right down there," he mumbled. "Big fight. Guys killing one another."

The cop speeded his descent. Tim Moore never climbed stairs so fast in his life. He didn't bother with Mrs. Finch's coupe. That could stay there. Let her figure out how it came to be parked in town when it should have been in the garage.

Moore fled east, making tracks in the direction of his office. But the contents of that brown paper bag were burning a hole in his pocket. He veered into a dark doorway, made sure he was unobserved, and took a black plush jewel case from the bag. A jewel case exactly like the one he'd seen Wilbur Stewart, alias Willi Stuben, remove from Mrs. Finch's wall safe.

He opened it and gasped. The necklace that lay exposed to his gaze threw a million brilliant beams of light from the street lamp across the way. Red and white beams from rubies and diamonds. Moore snapped the lid shut, as if he were afraid the gems would act like searchlights and draw a crowd.

With a grin as magnificent as the necklace, Tim Moore tucked the box into his pocket. Then the grin faded. He'd come far since the moment when he saw Willi Stuben rob the safe—but not far enough. He still didn't know who had killed Willi in the antique shop, at least not with a degree of accuracy to enable a conviction.

It could have been Noah Finch, of course, in a wild endeavor to protect his sister-in-law from the complications of being exposed as a receiver of stolen goods. The necklace was the historic one stolen from the Stubens—an item hardly negotiable except to someone like Mrs. Finch who would gloat in her possession of it. Something to be shown to very intimate friends, those she could trust. Something that added a thrill to her life. An object her money could buy and no else's could.

But if Noah had killed Willi Stuben and taken the necklace back, why had it been placed in that public locker? And why had Mrs. Finch exchanged an envelope undoubtedly full of money for it? She had the cash. Enough to handle any reasonable deal. Moore had seen the money himself, inside her wall safe. So she had been in a position to negotiate quickly.

There, in the darkened doorway, Tim Moore made plans. He'd have to wait until

(Continued on page 93)



"Up with 'em, everybody!" Murphy barked

NEW YEAR'S EVE TEST

By JOHNSTON McCULLLEY

Patrolman Larry Murphy wants to be a plainclothes man—and makes a good start when he tackles a tough gang!

AN hour before midnight on New Year's Eve, Patrolman Larry Murphy, dressed in civilian garb, was one of a mob.

The walks along the broad avenue had been crowded with merrymakers since night-fall. The crowd had overflowed the walks and thronged the street itself, leaving only a narrow lane for the passage of vehicles. As midnight approached and the birth of a

new year occurred, even that narrow lane would be congested with hilarious humanity, and vehicles would take to the side streets.

Murphy was elbowed and jostled and had his feet trod upon. Without his uniform on, he was just one of the crowd—a huge man of forty, the picture of health and strength, having something of the appearance of a truck driver on a holiday.

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ABOUT
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Yet he was on duty. He and a few other patrolmen from the precinct had been ordered into plain clothes for the evening by Jim Dayle, the precinct captain. It was a night when any number of policemen probably would not be enough.

"Keep your eyes open for dips and purse snatchers," Captain Dayle had told them. "This is the night they get busy. In the street jam, with horns blowing and everybody yelling and confetti filling the air, folks get careless, and dips and purse snatchers reap a harvest."

As the men had started out, Dayle had called Murphy back into his office.

"Larry," he had said. "You've been in uniform about fifteen years. Your record is about as clean as a man's can be. You know police business and never lose your head. You're steady and dependable. You're married and have a couple of kids. And you've put in for elevation to the rank of plainclothes man. Because of the extra salary?"

Murphy had grinned. "I sure can use that, Cap'n, with a couple of kids growin'," he had replied. "But that's not all. I feel that I'm in a rut, not gettin' anywhere. Gettin' into the plainclothes detail would make me feel like I was gettin' somewhere."

"I can understand that," the captain had told him. "You have a chance tonight to test yourself and see what you can do. Your examination papers and your oral examination have put you at the top of the list. There are two plainclothes men to be named from this precinct, and I have to pick a couple of men out of five eligibles to recommend for the job. I hope you're one of them. But you know me, Murphy—I never play favorites. The best men in my opinion will be recommended."

"I understand that, Cap'n."

"There's a great difference between uniform work and plainclothes work, Murphy. You haven't the weight of the uniform."

"What do you mean by that, Cap'n?"

"The sight of a policeman's uniform does something to most people. It carries weight. It's a picture of the Law. Everybody knows you're a copper. A plainclothes man doesn't carry the weight of the uniform. Nobody knows he's a copper until he flashes his badge. I can't explain it exactly, but . . . Well, Murphy, go out and do the best you can."

"Yes, sir," Murphy had said.

(Turn to page 82)

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NEW YEAR'S EVE TEST

(Continued from page 80)

SO, on a roving commission, he had gone forth into the streets filled with merry-makers. He had orders to prowls around where he wished, do his duty in any emergency, and return to the station house at two in the morning to report and check out.

It was eleven now. Murphy had been going through the crowd, drifting along with it, keeping his eyes and ears open. He had encountered no dips or purse snatchers. The only semblance of crime he had seen had been a few men who had taken too much liquor and were rather noisy—but everybody was noisy tonight. Once he had seen a fight start, but a couple of officers in uniform who happened to be near had stopped it before Murphy could get through the crowd.

Murphy came to a crowded corner and managed to get up on the steps in front of a hotel. That put him a couple of feet above the heads of the jostling crowd. He could look down upon the passersby in the jammed street. And he saw Eddie Dix.

Eddie was a product of Murphy's precinct. He had lived there with his widow mother. Murphy had chased him home from street corners, pool halls and crap games many times during Eddie's early teens.

Eddie had fallen in with bad companions and had gone wrong. At seventeen, he had been sent to the juvenile house of correction. Released at twenty-one, within a month he had been caught in an act of burglary and had been sentenced to the Big House.

That had killed his mother. Eddie had been released with time off for good behavior, and got a job. But he hadn't been able to settle down and go straight. He had been caught again, and had been released only recently after serving five years. Eddie Dix was a two-time loser. Another conviction would stamp him as an habitual criminal, and he would be put away for life.

Murphy watched Eddie closely. He was standing on the walk in the crowd, talking to a man Murphy didn't know. The jostling crowd gradually forced the pair over to the steps. They did not notice Murphy as he stepped down behind them. They were talking in low tones, but Murphy could hear what they said despite the din in the street.

"Do you catch or carry, Eddie?" the other man was asking.

"Catch."

"Me, too. I lost my carry man somewhere

in the crowd, but we'll get together again soon. I'll meet him around the corner, and we'll get busy. How are you makin' out?"

"Nothin' yet," Eddie replied. "I'm not wastin' my time and takin' a chance fussin' with small stuff. My carry man went into the hotel bar to get a drink. I'm waitin' for him."

"Pretty slick idea of Jeff's, huh? He gets a cut, but he manages things. Pairs us off, and we all head back to his hide-out. Share and share alike. Nobody knows how much is in the bag until the cut. He's got twelve couples of us out tonight. After Jeff takes his percentage, we all split the pot. Fair enough! And if we're snagged, Jeff's mouth-piece bails us out and we hightail."

"Easy with the talk," Eddie warned.

The other man drifted away through the crowd, and Eddie Dix struck a match and lit a cigarette. He was small, rat-faced, furtive, dangerous. He stood there smoking, waiting for his teammate to return, and watching the passersby for a potential victim.

Murphy realized what that conversation had meant, and he knew the identity of "Jeff." That would mean Jeff Renland, a gangster and head of a mob, watched by the police for some time but never caught with sufficient evidence to convict.

Now Renland, it appeared, had collected as a side line a gang of pickpockets and purse snatchers and paired them off and sent them out. All loot went into a common pot, and everybody shared alike after Renland took his percentage. He gave them protection in case of disaster, furnishing lawyer and bail.

Eddie jumped and almost swallowed his cigarette when Murphy touched him on the shoulder.

"Hello, Eddie," Murphy said. "Going to watch the New Year come in, huh? Hope you're makin' plenty of good resolutions."

Eddie fought himself to regain his composure. "Why—howdy, Murph!" he greeted. "Didn't know you at first in your civvies. Copper Murphy, out of uniform and dressed in his Sunday best and off his beat! Turned human for an evenin', Murph? Havin' a little fun on your own?"

"I don't have to wear a uniform all the time, Eddie," Murphy said. "I get an hour off now and then."

"I'll bet you're glad to shed it at times. Well—Happy New Year, copper, and keep

[Turn page]

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your nose clean."
"Wait a minute, Eddie!" Murphy ordered, as the rat-eyed man began to move into the passing crowd to get away. "I happened to overhear a part of your talk with that lug who just left you. So you catch tonight, do you? You pick a pocket or snatch a purse, and pass it quickly to your carry man, so if you're grabbed and searched nothin' will be found on you."

"Aw, we were just gassin'," Eddie said.
"Don't give me any of that stuff, Eddie. Listen, boy! You're a two-time loser already. You know what it'll mean if you're convicted again. It'll mean that you'll be sent to the Big House for life, as an habitual criminal. Is it worth that much, Eddie? It'd be a pretty big price to pay, wouldn't it? Get smart!"

EDDIE'S lips twisted and his eyes glittered. "Do I have to listen to a sermon by a copper on New Year's Eve?" he asked.

"I'm just tellin' you, Eddie. I was interested in what I overheard about Jeff, too. That'd be Jeff Renland, of course. If you got in a jam, Eddie, he'd throw you to the wolves. You're a sucker to play his game. Bein' a crook is bad enough, Eddie, but bein' a sucker is worse."

"You on duty now?" Eddie asked.
"I am," Murphy replied. "Special duty tonight. If I see you make a wrong move, I'll take you in as quick as I would the next man, even if I did know your mother and admire her for the losin' fight she made to keep you straight."

"Listen to me, Murph! You're a good patrolman. Walkin' a beat and tryin' doors at night and stoppin' fights—that's your line. Don't every try to crash into the big time, Murph. You'll maybe get yourself hurt."
"I'll chance that, Eddie."

"With men like Jeff Renland, you wouldn't last as long as a snowball in a furnace. Let the Headquarters dicks play around with men like him. They've been after him for years, and haven't nailed him yet. And if they ever do nail him, he'll beat the rap. He's got plenty of foldin' money and a swell mouthpiece."

"It catches up with all of 'em some day," Murphy observed. "Crime isn't a payin' business in the end. You're walkin' the wrong path, boy. Why don't you break away from it? Go to some other part of the country and get a job."

"You're sourin' my New Year's spirit," Eddie interrupted. "So long, copper! It's nice to have met you again."

He twisted his lips and slid into the passing crowd.

Murphy lost sight of him almost immediately, and made his own slow progress through the crowd in the general direction Eddie Dix had gone. He was watching, listening as he elbowed and shoved and tried to keep his footing. The light snow of a couple of days before had melted, but there remained small patches of ice on the walks and pavement. There was no cold wind tonight to deter the merrymakers.

It was half after eleven now, and the crowd was getting thicker and noisier. Murphy had confetti thrown upon him and horns blown in his ears. Strident voices were screeching on every side of him. People were struggling to get into cafés and restaurants.

Murphy slid a hand beneath overcoat and coat to make sure his shoulder holster was in position and the automatic it contained easy to draw if necessity arose. He passed other police officers and nodded to some he knew. He was thinking that perhaps nothing would happen, that he would return to the precinct station house and report to Captain Dayle that the night had been uneventful.

He had been hoping that he would have a chance to show his ability. He had revealed that on many occasions during the years, but always in uniform. What Captain Dayle wanted, he judged, was to learn what Murphy would do in a moment of emergency.

He wanted the plainclothes job badly. The extra salary would help with his wife and the children. The latter were at an age where they kicked out shoes swiftly and always seemed to be wanting clothes and spending money. The boy was fourteen and the girl twelve now.

And he wanted the job for another reason—as an indication of advancement. He had been in uniform for a long time—standing still, he told himself. His wife and kids would be proud of him if he got the promotion he sought.

He came to where the broad avenue branched into two streets, and turned down the right hand street. And, a short distance ahead of him, he saw Eddie Dix again. Eddie was with another man, no doubt his "carry" man. They were walking slowly side

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by side, and it was evident that Eddie was searching for a prospective victim.

He found him as Murphy watched from the near distance. The victim was a middle-aged, prosperous-looking man with a young woman on either side of him. They were claiming all his attention.

Murphy saw Eddie and his teammate get behind the three and follow them. Eddie surged forward and brushed against the man once, and when the fellow turned Eddie was looking in another direction. Murphy understood Eddie's move. He had been trying to ascertain whether the prosperous-looking man had a wallet in a hip pocket.

Men supposed to be sensible about such things still carried wallets in their hip pockets, Murphy knew. That was an invitation to a dip. A good dip could slip a tiny knife attached to a ring on the end of his forefinger, slit the side of the pocket and let the wallet tumble into his hand, and in such a crowd the victim probably would never feel it, would not know he had been robbed until later.

Murphy struggled to get nearer, watching Eddie and his carry man closely as he did so. The crowd had thinned for an instant, and it would not have been wise for Eddie to make a move then.

BUT there came a surge in the crowd, a tight jam of human beings around the man with the two women. Murphy managed to get through and within a few feet of Eddie.

Another surge in the crowd came, and Murphy, edging closer, saw Eddie make his move. His right hand went under the bottom of the victim's coat. He got a wallet and handed it back quickly to his carry man, who started to move aside.

Murphy shot out his two hands and colored them both.

"Caught you!" he roared. "You!" he barked at the man with the two women. "This man just picked your hip pocket and got a wallet. Come along as a witness."

"You—" the startled victim said, as he felt quickly and found the wallet gone.

"I'm a police officer," Murphy said.

The crowd surged away and back and away again, trying to avoid the center of disturbance. Murphy was gripping both men by their coat collars. The carry man tried to twist away, and Murphy jerked him back. But the move gave Eddie Dix his chance.

Eddie had more sense than to carry a gun,

being a two-time loser and not entitled to a permit. He knew what it would mean if caught with a gun on him. But he carried a knife, razor sharp, a knife with a blade of legal size. And he got it out quickly, since Murphy did not have him by the wrists, and made a quick slash.

Murphy felt searing flame along his right forearm, another streak of flame as the knife cut through his clothing and reached the skin on his chest.

His prisoners twisted free and slammed into the dense crowd. Women began screaming and men yelling. Murphy plunged after the pair, fighting to make a path for himself.

"One side!" he howled. "Police officer!"

Eddie Dix led the way to the crowded walk, made it with his pal a few steps behind him. Murphy had his automatic out now, but dared not fire at the fleeing crooks. In that thick crowd he was sure to wound or kill one or more innocent bystanders.

But they saw the expression on Murphy's face, saw the weapon he held, and began screeching and fighting to get out of his path. He gained on the pair ahead slightly. They made it to a corner and turned into the side street. An officer in uniform, standing on the corner, let them pass and seemed to be bewildered.

He held up a hand when he saw Murphy coming, holding the automatic. Murphy took his shield from his pocket and showed it.

"Murphy . . . Twelfth Precinct . . . pick-pockets . . . come on!" he shouted.

He pounded on after the two, and the officer pounded on behind him, catching up rapidly.

"There they go!" Murphy told him. His breath was commencing to come in painful gasps.

The crowd in the side streets was much thinner, and people got out of their way quickly. Eddie Dix and his pal were almost half a block ahead. Murphy tried a quick shot at a time when there was little danger of hitting an innocent person, and missed. The policeman beside him had his service pistol out of its holster, but did not fire.

Ahead of them, Eddie and his pal darted into a dark alley.

The police officers came to the mouth of the dark alley and pulled up. They could hear feet pounding the pavement in the alley. No lights were burning behind any of the buildings except one at the far end.

[Turn page]

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"After 'em!" Murphy said, gulping to get air into his lungs.

"They may be armed," the policeman said. "Watch out!"

"One's a two-timer loser. He wouldn't risk havin' a gun on him. The other—I don't know."

Another uniformed man, who had seen the chase, came pounding to the end of the alley, service pistol out and ready for business. The first one explained to him as Murphy started into the alley. The policemen followed him.

Half-way to the next street, a thin streak of light showed for an instant as a door was opened. In that streak of light, Murphy and the two with him saw Eddie Dix and his pal dodge in. A door was closed and the streak of light cut off.

"I know where that is—this is my regular beat," the first policeman Murphy had called on for help said. "There's one front exit."

"One of you cover it, and the other come with me," Murphy said. He began running through the alley.

The first uniformed man he had met charged after him, and the other hurried to the street with the intention of getting around to the front. The man with Murphy came to the door and stopped. Murphy stopped beside him.

"This is an old four-story building," the policeman informed Murphy. "Some cheap loft firms in it. A few cheap apartments in front."

TALKING swiftly and in disjointed sentences, Murphy related the conversation he had overheard between Eddie Dix and the other crook.

"Jeff Renland, huh?" the policeman said. "Be feathers in our caps if we could catch him wrong. Maybe I'd better phone for help."

"And maybe we'd better break in here quick and catch 'em hot," Murphy suggested. "If this is one of Jeff Renland's hangouts, you can be sure he's got a getaway."

The door was locked. The policeman used his service pistol and broke the lock. Then they found the door was bolted, too. The policeman backed away and hurled himself against it. At the third charge, the bolt was torn off the old door, and they sprawled inside.

A couple of shots came from the top of a short flight of stairs as they entered. The

policeman blazed away at the flashes. Murphy was commencing to feel weak, and realized he had lost some blood. That, and the exertion of smashing through the crowd and running was commencing to rob him of strength he needed badly now.

Murphy and the uniformed man went up the flight of steps almost silently and came to a hallway. The hallway was in total darkness. They slipped along one wall. They heard somebody move a short distance down the hall, heard heavy breathing.

The uniformed man used his flashlight. It revealed a man crouching against the wall with a weapon held ready.

"Drop it!" Murphy ordered.

The man against the wall knew from the direction in which the voice had come that the officer with the flashlight was not alone. But he hesitated.

"Drop it!" Murphy ordered again. "Quick!"

The man against the wall, half-blinded by the flashlight, bent forward and let his weapon slip from his hand and clatter on the floor. Murphy and the policeman advanced, the uniformed man holding the light on the man in front.

"I know this bird—sneak thief and hop-head!" he told Murphy.

Murphy grabbed the crook by the arm. "Where'd they go?" he demanded. "The two who came in here—Eddie Dix and his pal."

"I—I don't know."

"We haven't any time to play tag with you," Murphy warned. "What I want is a quick answer."

The crook seemed to sag back against the wall. And suddenly he made a dive for the gun he had dropped to the floor. The uniformed man pistol-whipped him and sent him crashing to the floor in the path of the flashlight's gleam.

"Hit him too hard," the uniformed officer said. "He can't take a rap like that. He'll be out for some time. Let's go on. I know this bird—can have him picked up any time."

They went cautiously along the hall, making as little noise as possible. Finally they came to a cross hall, and entered that carefully, weapons held ready. They went toward the front of the building. No lights were showing through the transoms there, no streaks of light coming from beneath doors, and they heard no voices.

"Next floor up," the policeman suggested.

They found the stairs and went up slowly

[Turn page]

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and cautiously. Above them, they heard the floor boards of the old building creaking. At the top of the stairs there was darkness except where a thin film of light came from beneath one of the doors. Nobody was in the hall, as far as they could see. Expecting a gun explosion and a hail of lead, they stood tense while the policeman used his flashlight. The hall was empty.

Voices came to them from inside the door, and they crept close to listen.

"Cursed fools to come rushing here!" some man was saying. "They'll call for help and go through the place. Eddie, you haven't any sense."

"Only thing I could do," they heard Eddie Dix whimper. "One of the coppers is from my home precinct and knows me, Jeff."

"Then you've got to get out of town. Here's some dough. And keep out until you hear from me. I'm not goin' to be landed because of a couple of punks who don't know any better than to run back to headquarters when they get in a jam. Now, we've got to leave everything here and get over the roofs. And some of the other boys may come wanderin' in and get nabbed."

The policeman bent close and whispered into Murphy's ear. "Jeff Renland, sure enough," he said.

"We're goin' in there," Murphy told him.

"We don't know how many—"

"Makes no difference. We're goin' in there. Get ready."

But they heard more voices inside, and waited and listened.

"Them coppers didn't come on in," Jeff Renland was saying. "Jim's down in the hall, and we'd have heard shootin'."

He did not know that Jim had been pistol-whipped into silence.

"Eddie," Jeff Renland continued, "you and your pal get out of here and make your getaway. I'll be right behind you with George. It's a good thing none of the others are here."

"They're comin' out," the policeman whispered to Murphy. "We'll nab them as they do. Only four in there, from the talk. I told that other copper to phone Headquarters for help. We'll be havin' it soon."

"Take that side of the door, and I'll take this," Murphy whispered in reply. "When they pull the door open, we'll walk in on 'em."

A MUTTER of voices inside the room came to them, then feet pounding the floor,

and the door was pulled open by Eddie Dix. "Up with 'em — everybody!" Murphy barked, shoving Eddie backward and bursting into the room with the uniformed man a step behind him.

The blast of a gun answered him, and a slug whistled past Murphy's head. Through a swirl of smoke, he saw Jeff Renland, whom he knew by sight, the man who had been with Eddie in the street, and another, evidently the George mentioned by Renland.

George jerked out a gun, and a bullet from the policeman's service pistol sent him reeling backward with a shattered shoulder. Jeff Renland had his weapon out as Murphy charged straight into the room.

Blasts of gunfire sounded in the little apartment, smoke swirled. Murphy felt a blow in his left shoulder and knew he had been hit. A mist seemed to be before his eyes. He was already weak enough from loss of blood because of the slashes Eddie Dix had given him with the knife, without carrying the fresh wound also.

The policeman was shouting something. Murphy saw Eddie's pal go crashing to the floor and sprawl there with a trickle of blood coming from his chest. Jeff Renland, his face that of a wild man, was charging forward with gun up, straight for the door, plainly enough intending to fight his way through.

The policeman gave a grunt and slid down against the wall, to sit on the floor and continue shooting. Murphy felt another blow, this time in his left leg, and almost collapsed. He braced himself against a table by the wall and fought to lift his gun.

His arms suddenly seemed to be as heavy as lead. He bit his lips and tried again to lift the gun. Jeff Renland came charging on. The man whom Renland had called George was on his feet and coming forward also. He gripped his gun.

Again, weapons blasted. A slug smashed into the wall inches from Murphy's head. Through the swirls of smoke, he saw Jeff Renland reel and fall, his gun dropping from a nerveless hand.

The policeman was trying to shout something. George sent another shot at him, and

[Turn page]

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missed. But the policeman did not miss. Murphy, seemingly on the brink of a black abyss, saw George reel aside and drop.

Then the abyss swallowed him. He seemed to be dropping down, down. Faces flashed before him—his wife, those of the children, Captain Dayle, Eddie Dix. . . .

Through the darkness, after a time, came flashes of red flame, and he seemed to hear voices, but could not make out what was being said. He felt pain, felt as if he were being lifted. Then he was in the dark abyss again.

He did not know until some time afterward how long he was in that dark abyss. Light came to him slowly, finally. He heard voices, and the sound of soft weeping, and he opened his eyes.

He saw a ceiling, saw somebody in white moving near him. A man in a white coat bent over him.

"He's conscious—he's all right," Murphy heard the man say.

Then his wife was bending over him, her tears dropping softly on his face.

"Oh, Larry!" she murmured. "We were so afraid."

"He'll be all right," the surgeon said. "Passed out from loss of blood more than anything else. Those two slashes, and all his exertion without having them attended to—and the gunshot wounds later. Nothing serious about the gunshot wounds. We've patched him up. A few days' vacation, and he'll be as good as new."

The doctor stepped away and somebody took his place. Murphy tried to grin when he saw Captain Dayle.

"Well, Murph, you sure scored last night," Dayle told him. "We've got the goods on Jeff Renland at last. The whole four of the crooks will live to do time. The policeman who helped you will get along, too. Men from Headquarters get there just as you passed out."

"I'm—glad," Murphy muttered.

"Oh, yeah!" Captain Dayle said. "Almost forgot. Happy New Year to you—plain-clothes man!"

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MURDER DIRGE

(Continued from page 78)

morning, however, to put them into full effect. Mrs. Finch was going to talk. She was going to tell all, including the name of the man from whom she had purchased that stolen necklace. That man may have killed Willi. Perhaps it was someone whom Mrs. Finch hired. No matter, it would all come out in the wash when Mrs. Finch went through the wringer.

Moore wondered if his office had been searched yet by the police. They'd be looking for him by now, but maybe they'd content themselves with watching his tiny bachelor apartment. At any rate, he had to go somewhere, and the office was the most attractive place. Besides, if the police came there and Moore had the slightest warning, he could escape via the several exits.

The walk to the office was long, and varied off a normal course many times as Tim Moore ducked for cover when patrolman ambled past or a radio car hove into view. It was almost three in the morning when he slipped into the lobby, took the self-service night elevator to his floor and opened the office door.

There was a rather small waiting room, but the office itself was very large and imposing. Moore had deliberately chosen it for its spaciousness. Space and the proper furnishings lent a certain dignity which Moore hoped might help business.

HE OPENED the main office door, fumbled for the still unfamiliar light switch and snapped it. Nothing happened. The lights remained dark. Then a voice came out of the gloom. Tim Moore noticed that the window shades had been pulled down.

"Tim—don't move if you value your life. Close the door. Close it!"

Moore kicked the door shut. The voice gave another command.

"Lock it. The key is on the inside."

Tim Moore locked the door, withdrew the key and made the fanciest side lunge of his career. It carried him into the left hand corner, but as he hurtled toward it, he gave a light-weight, straight-backed chair a hard shove to the right. It clattered against the opposite wall. Moore put his back against the corner where he landed, straightened to his full height and ceased to breathe. He knew that the intruder was puzzled. The chair had caused enough commotion so that he didn't know exactly where Tim Moore was.

"You idiot, Tim," he said half pleasantly. "Listen to me. I've got a gun and I'm prepared to shoot. But I don't want to. All I ask is that you walk over, and place the

[Turn page]

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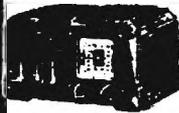
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plush box with its necklace on your desk. Then stand there with your hands raised. Do that and I'll talk business."

Moore didn't reply. He was breathing again, but slowly, and without making a sound. If only his heart would stop beating so madly. This trick wasn't new to him. He'd gone through this exact procedure half a dozen times. Lying prone in a foxhole while grenade-armed Japanese prowled around looking for something to heave their grenades at. The barest sound would give him away. His life hung in the balance now, as it had on those steaming islands.

"Tim," the man in the darkness was getting exasperated. "Where the devil are you? Speak up, man. I only want those jewels. Very clever of you to follow Mrs. Finch. I thought you might, so I was close by that subway station."

Tim Moore was just as rigid, just as silent. He knew the intruder's nerves would break soon. The intruder couldn't be certain Moore wasn't armed and silently stalking him. A million doubts would fill his mind until it cracked. It always happened that way, Moore knew. This was all a part of his past experience, useful now in a deadly spot like this.

"Tim, darn you," the man yelled. "You can't get out of here. If you start unlocking the door, I'll shoot you down. What do I care if you die—if you want to be a fool and pass up the proposition I have in mind for you?"

Tim Moore knew where the man was now. He seemed to be crouched down behind the big desk. Perhaps his head protruded above the edge and he'd be ready to shoot. Moore stayed where he was, just as silently.

"All right," the intruder shouted. "You asked for it. I'm going to start shooting right now."

But he didn't, for he had no target. He didn't know where Tim Moore was and every time he spoke, Moore was able to gauge the man's location better. There were about three minutes of the grimmest silence imaginable. Then the intruder's nerve broke.

Moore heard him stand up, heard the bones creak as he did so, and clothing rustle. Just the sounds he'd always listened for when the Japanese were close by. Moore's body moved too, all his muscles in play as he tensed for the leap that would either save his life or kill him.

"Tim," the intruder screamed. "You stupid fool. I tell you I'll kill you if you don't answer. I'll put half a dozen bullets into your body and take the jewels anyway. Answer me! Answer me! Answer—me!"

Tim Moore remained silent as a tomb. The intruder was moving a bit now. Suddenly, there were two flashes of light. The killer

had selected the corner into which the chair had crashed. It always had been a fifty-fifty proposition as far as Moore was concerned. The killer had to select either corner. Like some Japanese Tim had briefly known, the killer had chosen the wrong corner.

Before the din of the shots had started to die away, Moore was crossing the floor, touching it only twice in his huge strides. He dived over the desk top. He knew just where the killer was now. The gun went off once more, a purely ineffective shot, and then Moore's fist crashed against the point of a jaw.

Moore got up a moment later and screwed the loosened light bulb into his desk lamp. He turned it on. Lee Byron, the music critic, was on the floor, groaning and half conscious. Moore picked up Byron's gun and stuffed it into his own pocket. Then he found a roll of adhesive tape in his desk drawer and applied it as no surgeon had ever seen the stuff applied. Finally, he picked Byron up and dumped him into one of the big chairs. Then he telephoned Headquarters to send men.

BYRON opened his eyes. They were smoky with hatred. Tim Moore grinned. "You'd make a rotten soldier, Byron. You can't take it. But then, what murderer ever could? You stole that necklace from the Stubens and sold it to Mrs. Finch. But the younger Stuben, by some means, discovered she had it. He opened an antique store close by her house. I imagine during a time when she was away and the house empty, he studied the wall safe and learned its combination. He stole it last night. He realized that was the simplest way of getting it back. Mrs. Finch couldn't risk saying it was gone, because she had committed a crime in owning it. Stuben knew that so he went to the house readily enough.

"Mrs. Finch wanted the necklace back. You were right there, so she told you she'd pay you if you'd get it. Or, perhaps, scream her head off that you were a crook if you refused. You went to see Stuben, pretending you wanted to intercede for me. Then you killed him when he was off guard. There were no signs of a struggle, so Stuben must have been killed by someone he trusted.

"You returned to Mrs. Finch's house, but I showed up before the transaction could be completed. You didn't dare make direct contact with her so soon. Therefore you sent her the locker key with instructions on how to get the necklace."

"You killed Stuben," Byron accused. "I'll swear you told me you did. Noah will back me up."

"I'm afraid it won't work," Tim Moore [Turn page]

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said gently. "You see—Stuben told me who had killed him."

Byron gave vent to a raucous sound. "Stuben's throat was slashed. His vocal cords cut. Don't tell me he talked."

"Oh, but he did," Moore went on. "I've known it was you for a little while now. Ever since I read your column. Neat, I must admit. Through your influence as a music critic, you are invited everywhere. A splendid opportunity to see where good jewels are and how to get them. But, Byron, you know little about music. Your columns are based upon sarcasm, which hides your ignorance of real music. You've been smart enough to get away with it, popularize your column to such an extent that your lack of musical education is overlooked.

"And that by-line with its bar of music is excellent too. A fine trademark. It's a bar from Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C Sharp Minor, isn't it? A slow thing, resembling a funeral song. I studied piano when I was a kid. I can read notes. The moment I hummed the tune to your trademark, I knew you were the killer."

"You're getting soft-brained," Byron snapped.

"No. A few more cases like this and I might, but right now I know what I'm talking about. Stuben didn't die instantly. He was able to rise up—blood on his workbench proved it—and reach for one of several music boxes on a shelf above it. He only had to open the lid. It was all wound up. That music box, Byron, played the same tune you used in your trademark. That was why Stuben selected it. It was his way of letting someone know who killed him. Luck? Yes, perhaps you could call it that. The music box was there, the tune was the same. I don't call it luck. My name for it is retribution. You killed the one man who could identify you after he was dead.

"Besides, Mrs. Finch will bellow her head off when she is confronted with the truth. You're all done, Byron. It's very gratifying to me. There hasn't been any material profit in this first job of mine, but a devil of a lot of satisfaction."

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THE PHANTOM SPEAKS

(Concluded from page 10)

U.S.N. from Beloit, Kansas. Speak up, Bob:

I have just started reading THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, and it is about the only detective story that will hold my attention.

I do not agree that the Phantom Detective shouldn't associate with girls. In fact every story is twice as interesting if there is an attractive, mysterious girl in it. Anyway, that is my opinion.

And it's a welcome opinion, Seaman Freu. Thanks for writing to us. Our next letter is from California, and it's from another of our feminine cohorts. It's from Miss Ricarda Up de Graff of Beverly Hills, and she certainly has some rather interesting ideas to present.

I wanted to write you long ago to tell you how much I enjoy your magazine. I am living with an elderly aunt and uncle of mine, and don't get much chance to go out anywhere, therefore you can understand how much I appreciate your magazine. It really gives me many pleasant hours of reading and trying to figure out who the villain is.

I have quite a collection of mystery thrillers here and when I haven't new book, I look at an old issue and see if I can remember the story. This has proven a fascinating game. I also find that the Phantom is more interesting than other mystery magazines. It holds a person's interest all the way through and doesn't sag in the middle like an old mattress.

We're certainly glad to have your letter, Rickey, and we're calling you that because you've asked us to. We hope that you're going to be able to get a good deal more enjoyment out of the Phantom Detective stories in the future.

One of our old Friends of the Phantom, who prefers to hide his identity under his membership number, writes us from Los Angeles, California to tell us that he is now out of the service. Welcome back, fellow. He says:

Have just returned to civilian life, and am able to circulate freely, and from your August issue, I see you are still going strong, of which I'm very proud. May your life be as long and as happy as mine!

Thanks for the kind words, pal, and here's hoping the stories following the August issue have proven as interesting to you. And so, folks, that gives you a pretty fair cross section of the feelings of our readers, as the above comments are typical of hundreds of others received. We're always glad to have these personal reactions, and hope that you'll all send us a letter or a postcard telling us your feelings about THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE and the stories appearing in it. Address your letters, postcards and notes to The Editor, THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York, 16. N. Y. Thanks for your fine comments.

—THE PHANTOM.

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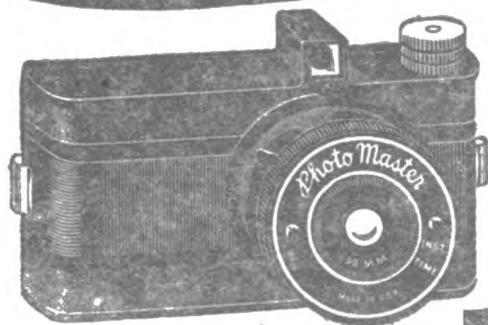
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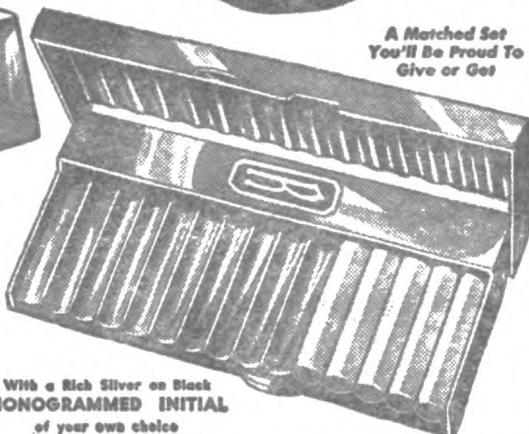
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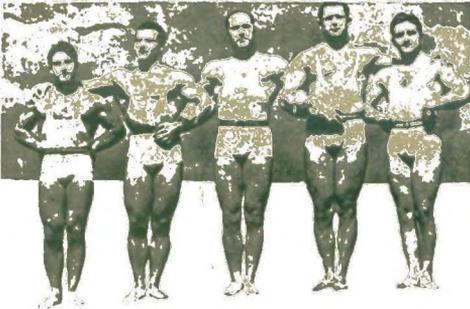
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