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# The PHANTOM DETECTIVE

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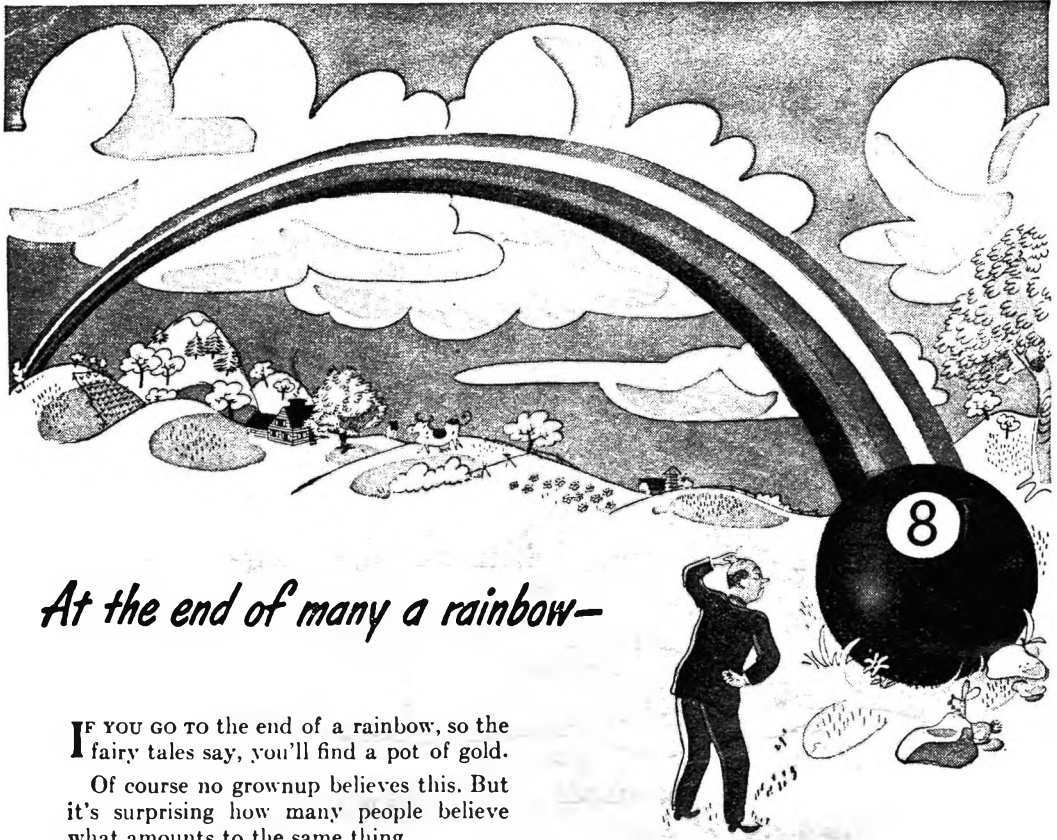


*The*  
**ANGEL**  
OF  
**DEATH**  
*A Full-Length  
Mystery Novel*  
By **ROBERT  
WALLACE**

Francis  
Bolton

THRILLING  
PUBLICATION





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# The PHANTOM DETECTIVE

Vol. XLIX, No. 2

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

May, 1947

A COMPLETE NOVEL

## THE ANGEL OF DEATH

by Robert Wallace



A gold wine-taster and an ancient silver snuff-box marked with an eagle's claw put the Phantom Detective on the trail of the crime combine dedicated to the looting of a fabulous fortune! Van Loan probes the career of a strange and mysterious woman! 11

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*A stranger to her heart!  
... but she knew she loved him more  
than anything else in the world!*



The dramatic story of a girl in a man's world who taught a killer the real meaning of love!

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# Angel and the BADMAN



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OCEAN transportation became one of the world's most important industries during the years of World War II. Naturally, it prompted a feeling in the hearts of many civilian stay-at-homes that once the war clouds had rolled by they, too, would like to see the lands beyond the horizons.

That was one reason why John and Martin Mattling had every reason to believe that their Coastwise Steamship Line was in for a period of prosperity as a result of both passenger and freight revenues. The Coastwise Line was an important link between the United States and the good neighbor countries of South and Central America. The Mattlings had been owners of the line since the days, several generations back, when the old windjammer *Mary Mattling* had sailed the Seven Seas.

### Sinister Menace

Now, however, some sinister menace was haunting Martin Mattling and his son John, the last two surviving members of the Mattling steamship family. This menace expressed itself in many disastrous happenings. First of all there was the loss of the *Santa Cruz*, a crack new ship which went down in a Florida storm. The craft had been far off her course when she struck the reef that sent her to the bottom.

Then there had been the ship that was involved with the United States Customs because of the belated discovery of undeclared cargo. More recently a Mattling ship had come up with a mutiny aboard.

Young John Mattling felt that the responsibility for clearing up these activities rested upon his capable shoulders. When the Mattling Line's crack liner, *Star of Brazil* arrived, John Mattling expected Captain Olaf Swenson to bring him information that would complete his report on the evil plot designed to smash the steamship company and permit its purchase by a grim hard-boiled ring of speculators.

But John Mattling and Olaf Swenson were destined never to have their final meeting! Several days before the arrival of the *Star of Brazil*, John Mattling met death in the music room of his own home. At almost the same moment his father was in conference with Frank Havens on matters connected with the steamship line.

### Tentacles of an Octopus

As soon as the two men learned of the death of the youth, I was notified, and immediately took a hand. There were any number of criminal ramifications involved in the effort to wreck the company, and they ran their slimy fingers into all parts of the waterfront and the underworld like the tentacles of a giant octopus.

The killer of John Mattling showed a certain amount of originality in his murder method, and this was the first thing that impressed me with the fact that I was up against a crime overlord. He was one who was gifted with a clever, but warped brain that might cause plenty of trouble for any on those people who bucked him.

Since Mattling Junior had been working on the report in his steamship office, it seemed only logical to follow the trail from the old Mattling mansion in Greenwich Village to the office on New York's waterfront. The discovery I made there was one that corroborated the feeling that the intricacies of this plot set up against the Mattling interests were far-reaching.

### Crime Which Spans A Nation

Before the final clues were assembled, pointing to the killer-chieftain who thought nothing of taking the lives of innocent people as well as the lives of his own underlings, in order to further his empire of greed, the investigation had spanned the country. It had gone into some of the biggest cities in the United States.

It was a fascinating chase, and for a time looked as though it would be a definitely



baffling problem. But criminals have a way of leaving loose ends that are inevitably picked up by clever criminologists and efficient police officers and used as a lead to unravel their crime pattern.

Bob Wallace has taken the story of the menace to the Matting shipping interests and its relationship to the American overseas export trade and has woven it into an intriguing and challenging detective story in "Masterpiece of Murder", the Phantom Detective novel appearing in the next issue of THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE Magazine.

I, personally, got a great kick out of working on the case, and I know that when "Masterpiece of Murder" comes your way that you'll get just as much satisfaction in reading about the incidents that led up to the uncovering of the whole nest of criminal vipers involved in the plot.

Steve Huston played an important part in uncovering some of the leads that pointed to the criminal over-lord, and you folks who have been writing in to comment on the lively activities of this crime reporter from the Clarion will be delighted at the role he has had in "Masterpiece of Murder." In fact, I'm sure you'll enjoy the entire yarn from start to finish—as it's packed with action, thrills, suspense and surprises all the way through!

### Join the FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM

**M**OST of us follow our daily newspapers or listen to the radio as a matter of habit, but too many are inclined to be casual about the reports that come to our attention regarding crime waves in various parts of the country. These incidents in the ordinary movement of human life seem to be so remote from us that they require nothing more than simple comment among friends.

The majority of our police and public officials, from J. Edgar Hoover down to the cop on the beat, however, agree that the job of law enforcement will only be one hundred percent effective when every citizen cooperates in eradicating crime and in bringing criminals to their just punishment.

We arrived at this same conclusion years ago, and the result was our nation-wide association known as FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM. Our members have allied themselves as a spontaneous expression of the law-abiding spirit, and their numbers are to be found from Coast to Coast.

If you are a new reader and would like to

[Turn page]

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become a Friend of the Phantom, by all means let us know about it. Send along a letter of application, stating your name, address, age and sex. Enclose with this a self-addressed, stamped envelope for the forwarding of your membership card. I'll see that you receive the card immediately.

Some of our readers also like to have the Phantom emblem to wear on coat or dress. These badges are not necessary to membership. They have been made up merely as a convenience to members who wish to have them. If you want one of these they are to be had for a nominal charge of fifteen cents in stamps or coins to cover cost of mailing and handling this attractive bronzed emblem.

A question that comes up frequently in connection with Friends of the Phantom is whether or not membership confers special police powers. Naturally joining our group does not give you any special rights or privileges with regard to your local or Federal law enforcement agencies. There is no connection between our organization and any of these law-enforcement bodies. Our chief purpose is to express, tangibly and collectively, the feelings of the right-thinking, law-abiding readers who follow THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE.

## OUR MAIL BOX

ONE thing that gives an editor an interesting index of the readers who are following the exploits of the characters in his magazine is the steady stream of letters that come in from all parts of the country. I'm glad to be able to say that we receive our share, and we are much gratified at the comments that you people bring to our attention.

Some of you readers are disappointed with certain things that appear in the magazine. We're glad to hear about this. Others have suggestions that may be worked into the development of special features in future issues. These are also appreciated.

Occasionally letters that come in are a bit difficult to interpret, but they do provide food for thought. Each issue we like to publish excerpts from a few letters as a guide to you in penning your own thoughts and ideas about THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE. Here's one that was addressed to Bob Wallace:

Dear Bob: Your stories are all good except that I don't like your main character. Your plots are in-



interesting, but not the Phantom.—James Louis Monroe, Kinston, North Carolina.

Both Bob and I got quite a chuckle out of this note from Mr. Monroe, and we're glad to pass it along to you readers. An author would have to be exceptionally skillful to write a good story without a good main character! But we're glad to know what you think, Mr. Monroe, even though we know the vast majority of your readers differ with you.

Jumping over the mountains into Tennessee, we find a letter from Rubye Glenn. She not only likes the magazine, but would like to know our readers better.

Dear Phantom: I love to read your magazine. It has some interesting stories in it. I do a lot of reading because I live in a small town and there isn't much to do here in the way of entertainment. I'm eighteen years of age and a junior in high school. I'd like to hear from your readers between the ages of 16 and 25. My hobbies are collecting movie star books and pictures to put in my movie star album. I love to collect pictures of my friends, too.—Rubye Glenn, Covington, Tenn. General Delivery.

Well, we're certainly glad to have this information about you, Rubye, and I hope some of our readers will be interested in writing you.

Here's another letter that takes us a bit further west:

Dear Phantom: I sure got a big kick out of reading your story, "The Chinese Puzzle," in the January 1947 issue of THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE. I happened to be serving in the Army in the South Pacific, and before coming back to the States this year I got into China. I found out a good deal about some of the intrigue that was going on there, and your story sure stirred up some colorful memories. More power to you. Joseph Dillon, Fort Smith, Ark.

Glad you liked the story. Joe. I'll bet you had plenty of exciting experiences while you were out there in the South Pacific. Many of the boys will sure have plenty of stories to tell!

Now a fine note, from the big city:

I think the Phantom is tops among detective characters, and I have many friends who share my opinion. More power to the world's greatest sleuth!—John Egerton, New York City.

Thanks a lot for your letters and postcards! Keep them rolling in. Please address all correspondence to The Editor, THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. And let's all get together here in the next issue!

—THE PHANTOM

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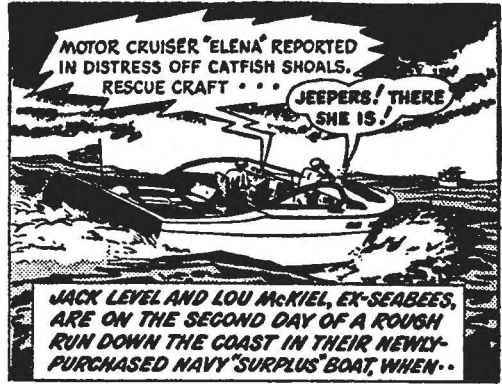
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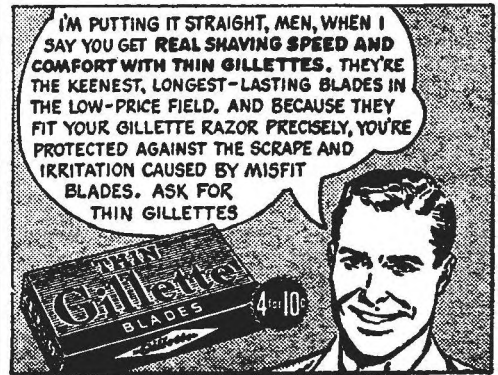
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# JACK PLAYED IN LUCK WHEN...



20 MINUTES LATER





The weight of the statuette  
told Van what a perfect murder  
weapon it had been  
(CHAPTER IV)



# THE ANGEL OF DEATH

By ROBERT WALLACE

*An ancient silver snuff-box and a gold wine-taster put the Phantom Detective on the trail of a murder combine dedicated to the looting of a vast and fabulous fortune!*

## CHAPTER I

### EAGLE'S CLAW

**T**HOUGH it was still afternoon, gray shadows seemed to fill the shop beyond the grimy plate-glass window where the name, "J. MADIGAN, CURIOS," in peeling gold-leaf, attracted the at-

tention of the tall, well-groomed young man who had just turned the corner.

He stopped and looked in at the window display. Chipped pieces of china, corroded pewter, dusty books in piles, musical instruments of all varieties. Richard Curtis Van Loan ran a discerning eye over the junk litter.

His gaze shifted to a glass shelf. Wedged.

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in between an iron inkstand and a colorful paperweight, Van Loan noticed a small snuff-box. He stared at it for a minute or two. Finally he opened the door and went into the place.

As he shut the door a bell jangled. Out of the shadows a little man, gray as the half-light around him, appeared. He reminded Van Loan of a mole. There was something grubby about his worn clothes, his thinning hair and blinking eyes. Except that moles, Van reminded himself, couldn't blink.

"Yes, sir. Something you wish to look at?"

"Mind if I browse around?" Van Loan nodded toward counters stacked high with the same sort of stuff that was in the window.

"Not at all. I'll turn on a light." The little man sounded apologetic. "It's always dark in here. I never could understand why."

Van could have told him that washing the window might help. But he didn't, and the molelike little man pattered away. A minute later a couple of dangling electric lights were turned on. Van Loan considered the miscellany on the counter nearest him.

But his thoughts still centered on the snuff-box. There was something about it that had intrigued him. He raised his glance. The little man hovered discreetly in the background.

"You're Mr. Madigan?"

"No, sir. My name's Blake. I work for Mr. Madigan."

"There's a snuff-box in the window. On the shelf beside an inkstand. I'd like to look at it."

"Yes, sir. I'll get it for you."

**B**LAKE returned with what Van had asked for. He rubbed it on his shiny sleeve as if to remove tarnish that only a strong cleaning compound could effectually efface. He breathed on it, shaking his head.

"Pretty badly tarnished. But no harm's done to it, sir. A dash of polishing cream will make it shine like new."

He handed his customer the snuff-box.

Van Loan weighed it speculatively in his hand. It was heavier than he had imagined. Heavy, his collector's instinct told him, with pure silver rather than an alloy. Van held it to the light.

The black tarnish was like a veneer. He noticed how exquisitely it was made, its edges beveled, its face delicately etched with some medieval design. Then, as he turned it over in his fingers, his eyes suddenly narrowed.

An eagle's claw, small and almost imperceptible under the dark silver stain, held his gaze steadily. He studied it intently.

Collecting rare bibelots of the kind had come to be almost a fetish with the wealthy Dick Van Loan, whom metropolitan society had marked as the town's most eligible bachelor. His friends also knew that, because of his wealth and the languid life of gilded ease he led, his hobbies were many and varied. They ranged from the good game of squash he played on the courts at the City Club to this prowling around musty second-hand shops in the hope of unearthing some rare or unusual treasure.

Was the snuff-box one? Van Loan peered at the eagle's claw. That told him many things.

The eagle's claw mark identified the box as coming from the silver and gold collection of a prominent New York family—the Delmar Palmers. There couldn't possibly be any mistake about it. Once, two years ago, Van had been privileged to see the Palmer collection.

His brows drew together. What was the snuff-box doing in the Second Avenue shop? He grew thoughtful. A month before Delmar Palmer, one of New York's most important bankers and financiers, had been lost at sea. Details of the banker's death ran through Van's mind. Palmer, at the time, had been on his honeymoon. He had married a Marcia Rickand, a former concert pianist of considerable fame, and had taken her for a long cruise on the *Triton*, his yacht.

Off Bermuda, Van Loan remembered hearing, the *Triton* had run into a terrific storm. Delmar Palmer, at the storm's



## Career of a Strange Woman of Mystery!

height, had been washed overboard and lost.

But his death, Van knew, had nothing to do with the presence of the snuff-box in the grimy shop. For one thing, Delmar Palmer's estate had not been settled. Nothing had been sold. For another thing, Dick Van Loan knew that Amanda Palmer, Delmar's aunt, an elderly spinster who lived alone in the old Palmer mansion on Gramercy Park, had the entire collection in her possession. Also, Van under-



THE PHANTOM

stood, its many pieces of gold and silver were supposed to be intact.

It was not reasonable to assume that the woman would dispose of any part of the famous collection.

He put the snuff-box down and went on with his browsing. It was easy enough for a silversmith to use the eagle's claw mark. But it was unlikely. There was no point in counterfeiting it. Unless the thing marked with it actually had come from the noted collection, it remained an imitation.

Still, Van Loan was confident the snuff-

box was no copy. The way it was made, the weight of it, the delicate etching told him that.

A few minutes later, under a heap of green-beaded ornaments, he found a second piece marked with the eagle's claw.

This was a small antique gold wine-taster. Lip, handle and godroon edging gave it a charm that struck Van sharply. He turned to Blake who came shuffling forward.

"You've found something, sir?"

"What's the price of these two items?"

"I'll have to ask Mr. Madigan. Just a minute, please."

Blake took snuff-box and wine-taster and made his way to the rear of the shop. Van Loan noticed a door there, set in a wall hung with pictures and prints in chipped gilt frames.

The door closed. From its other side Van heard conversation.

"There's a gentleman outside who wants to know the prices on these articles, Mr. Madigan," Blake was saying.

**A**FTER a pause came a deeper, rasping voice. The owner of the shop, Dick Van Loan suspected.

"What have you got there?" Then, with a snap in his tone, the speaker continued. "Where'd you get those two things?"

Blake coughed. "From the big box in the storeroom, Mr. Madigan. You didn't say anything, but I thought—"

"Put them back!" the rasping voice snarled. "That's part of some stuff that's been sold to a millionaire in South America. You leave that big box alone! I'll tell you what to put in the shop."

"Yes, sir." Blake sounded meek and mortified at his mistake. "But the gentleman. He's waiting."

"I'll talk to him."

Van Loan had his back to the door and was sifting idly through the green-beaded ornaments when footsteps sounded on the dusty floor behind him. He turned casually, his look one of anticipation, to meet the sharp regard of hooded eyes.

They were set in a thin, angular face. Muddy-colored, with yellow glints in them. More like a cat's eyes than a

human's. With them went a beaky nose, a tight, thin-lipped mouth and mouse-colored hair that grew thick over the man's lobeless ears.

Madigan's dark blue suit hung on his spare and wiry frame like a sack on a pole. Van Loan saw suspicion in the muddy-colored gaze, suspicion that began to fade when the eyes flickered over him briefly.

"I'm sorry," Madigan said. "The snuff-box and the wine-taster have been sold. My clerk made a mistake. They shouldn't have been on display."

Van moved his broad shoulders. "Too bad. I rather fancied them. The purchaser wouldn't be interested in making a profit? I'd like to buy them."

"No, the purchaser wouldn't be interested."

"In which case," Van murmured, adding a smile to his words, "I can only say good afternoon."

Outside, the smile faded. Van Loan's brows drew together. Thoughtfully he walked a block or two down the avenue before he signaled a passing cab, murmured an address, and climbed in.

Back in the shop he had just left, the muddy-eyed Madigan turned to go back to his office. His angular face was dark with suppressed anger. The lids lowered over his eyes. His mouth twisted into a sardonic line.

"That fool, Blake!" Madigan said to himself. "I'll fix him! Putting these pieces out for the public to look at! Lucky that young fellar wasn't a cop—or somebody who knew something!"

## CHAPTER II

### BACK COPIES



HE taxi Dick Van Loan had hailed cut west with him across town. In a few minutes it reached Gramercy Park.

This was a familiar neighborhood to Van. South, the Pilgrims Club rose in all its limestone dignity in a row of stately private dwellings. He was a member of the club. Often he met his best friend, Frank Havens, for dinner there. Van thought about Havens as the cab began to slow.

Frank Havens, publisher of the *Clarion*,

and a string of Coast-to-Coast newspapers, besides being Van's oldest friend, was a crusader in the best interests of justice. No paper fought organized crime with more vigor than the *Clarion*. Fearless, forceful and altruistic, Havens wielded the power of the press as a shining weapon to uncover corruption and the evil machinations spawned in the underworld by the enemies of society.

With undaunted courage the *Clarion's* owner directed its force against those in all walks of life who crossed the deadline of the law for selfish gain. Large or small, criminal or otherwise, Havens turned the white light of investigation on the activities of those who sought to defeat the ends of justice.

These thoughts ran through Dick Van Loan's mind as the taxi driver pulled on the brake and spoke over his shoulder: "This is it, boss. Sure you have the right number?"

Van looked out the window. The vehicle had stopped at the curb in front of a four-story, weatherbeaten house. Years ago the Palmer Mansion, a trifle more pretentious in architecture than the others in the park, had been one of the show places of the town. Now, with its shuttered windows and air of desuetude, it reminded Van of an old patrician who had outlived the desire to keep up appearances and had gone to seed.

The elements, and the park's pigeons, had combined to mar its facade. Its windows were as dirty as those in the shop of Mr. Madigan. At least, the unshuttered ones were. The deep square areaway was filled with a drift of metropolitan dirt and dust. The front steps were cracked and crumbling.

Yet, Van knew, Miss Amanda Palmer lived within its four walls. She had inherited the property from Pelham Palmer, her brother, and the father of Delmar Palmer who had been drowned. The elderly spinster, Van Loan knew, lived there as a recluse.

He glanced at the meter, buttoned his smartly tailored jacket and transferred himself from the cab to the sidewalk. The purpose of Van's call was simple. If Amanda Palmer were beginning to dispose of the fabulous Palmer Collection, he, as a collector, wanted to be in on the ground floor. At least, Van assured himself, no

harm would come from merely inquiring about the gold and silver art treasures.

"Wait," he said to the hackie.

The man, a typical New York Jehu, with a pair of shrewd eyes and a ready grin, looked his fare over and nodded.

"Right, boss. It's been a long time since I dropped a passenger at the Haunted Mansion."

"The *what*?" Van Loan turned.

"That's right. That's what they call this dump. The Haunted Mansion. Imagine anybody living inside. You'd have nightmares all day."

Van smiled and went up the cracked steps. Double doors shielded the vestibule. They were of the swinging variety. Their plate-glass, filmed with grime, opened into a mosaic-tiled square where a second door, carved, heavy and inlaid with colored glass, stoutly barred all entrance.

Van Loan pressed a corroded brass bell. Far away inside he heard its ring. In the vestibule, the glass door swinging shut, he waited.

In fancy he half-expected to hear faltering footsteps, the rasp of bolts and locks. He half expected to see the wrinkled face of Amanda Palmer in the opening door. But no one came to answer the bell.

Van went out and rang it again. Five minutes passed. Still there was no response.

He frowned. It was possible that Miss Palmer never answered the door. Yet he saw that the inner door had been opened. And not at a time too long past. Its brass knob, large and round, was free of the dust that hung over the rest of the vestibule.

**A**NOTHER THING that verified the fact, was a cigarette stub that lay crushed on the tiles. Van touched it with the tip of his custom-made shoe. A fresh stub, still moist, with lipstick on it. It hadn't been there long. He made one final attempt to get in, holding his thumb over the bell's button for a long minute or two. The taxi driver watched him interestedly.

"No five-and-two on your dice, boss," he called up. "Looks like the spooks don't want to see nobody today."

With a shrug, Van gave it up. He went down the steps and crossed the pavement to the cab.

"Drop me at the Clarion Building," he directed.

Some twenty minutes later in Frank Havens' lofty office, the publisher's secretary spoke to her employer over the inter-office communication system.

"Mr. Van Loan to see you, Mr. Havens."

Back came the robust, familiar voice of Van's old friend.

"Send him right in, Miss Sawyer. I'll see him immediately."

Van opened a door on the left side of the anteroom and crossed the threshold. With all of his usual languid nonchalance, he shook hands with the dignified, gray-headed man who rose from his chair in front of his massive desk to greet him.

The publisher's office was more like a study or a library in a private home than a place of business where the intricacies of newspaper publishing were conducted. The draperies at the windows, the plain taupe rug underfoot and the dull-rubbed furniture were set off by the pickled pine bookcases, the wood-burning fireplace with its polished andirons, the framed sporting prints on the walls.

Van, who had been there many a time, dropped down in the leather depths of the chair Havens pulled around for him.

"This is a real pleasure, Dick," Havens said. "Having you drop in unexpectedly."

"Hope I'm not disturbing you too much," Van said, his voice an indolent drawl.

"Not at all. You want to see me about something special?"

"Several months ago," Van said, "you published an account of the Palmer Collection in the magazine section of the Sunday *Clarion*. I wonder if I could get a copy of it."

Havens stared. "Palmer Collection?"

"I'd like to refresh my memory. If it isn't too much trouble."

"I'll have it for you in a few minutes." The publisher picked up a telephone and spoke into it.

About five minutes later a clerk came in, carrying a thick sheaf of papers. He laid them on Havens' desk and withdrew. Van frowned slightly.

"All those? I only wanted the magazine section."

"I've taken the liberty," the publisher explained, "of including back copies with the accounts in them, of Delmar Palmer's death. They might make interesting read-



ing. Take them along with you."

"Thanks a lot." Van put the papers under his arm and got up. "I have to dash now. I'm booked for the Hamilton Crosby dinner at the Belgrave. Going?"

Havens said he was not. Van thanked him again and left.

Down in the street, he walked slowly east. The afternoon was fading. Sharp in his mind, Van still saw a tiny silver snuff-box and an ancient gold wine-taster.

Then, as he looked around for a taxi to take him to his Park Avenue apartment, he seemed again to hear the bell ringing in the Haunted Mansion. A bell that rang and rang, but brought no one to the carved front door!

### CHAPTER III

#### THE PHANTOM

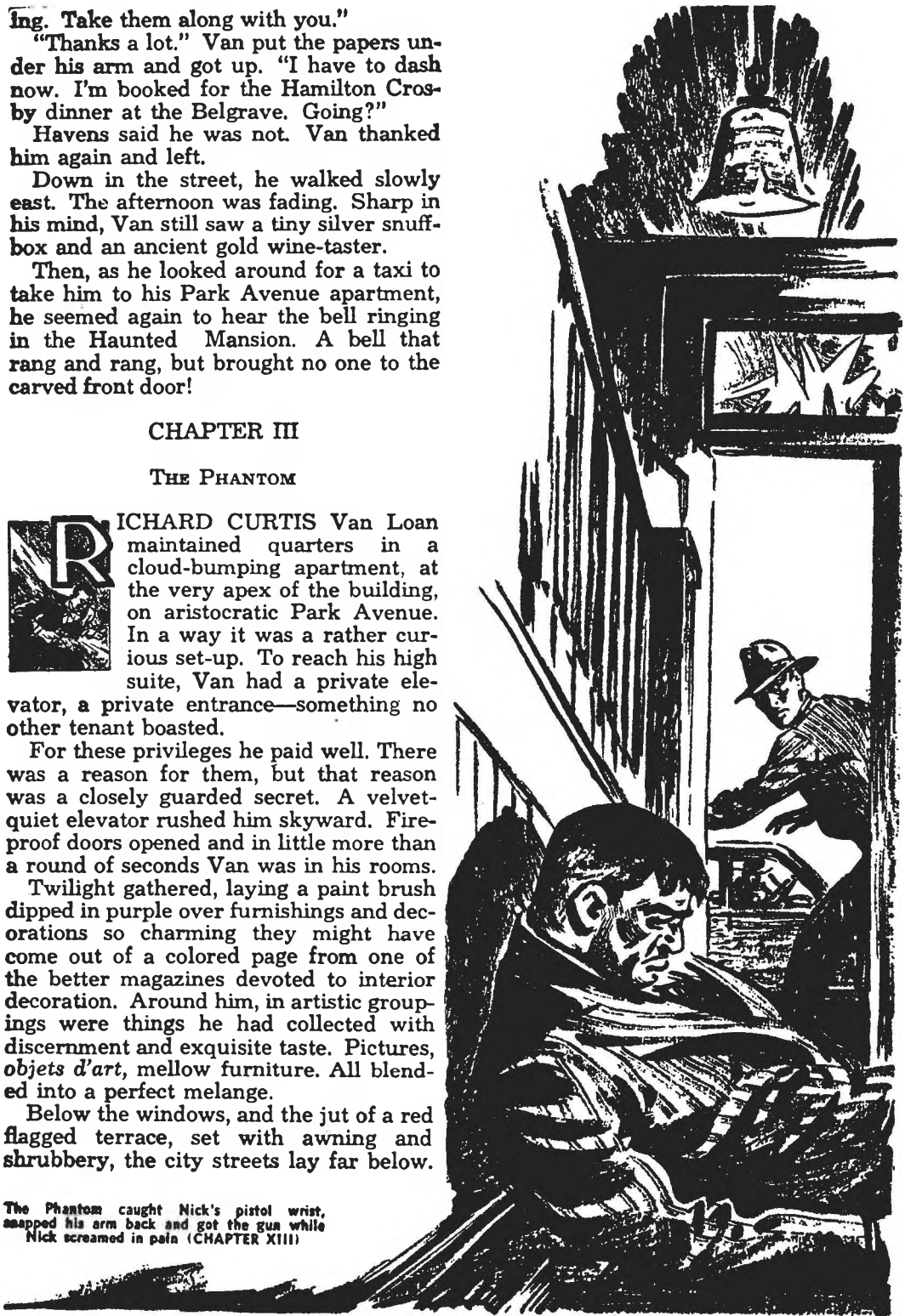
**R**ICHARD CURTIS Van Loan maintained quarters in a cloud-bumping apartment, at the very apex of the building, on aristocratic Park Avenue. In a way it was a rather curious set-up. To reach his high suite, Van had a private elevator, a private entrance—something no other tenant boasted.

For these privileges he paid well. There was a reason for them, but that reason was a closely guarded secret. A velvet-quiet elevator rushed him skyward. Fire-proof doors opened and in little more than a round of seconds Van was in his rooms.

Twilight gathered, laying a paint brush dipped in purple over furnishings and decorations so charming they might have come out of a colored page from one of the better magazines devoted to interior decoration. Around him, in artistic groupings were things he had collected with discernment and exquisite taste. Pictures, *objets d'art*, mellow furniture. All blended into a perfect melange.

Below the windows, and the jut of a red flagged terrace, set with awning and shrubbery, the city streets lay far below.

The Phantom caught Nick's pistol wrist, snapped his arm back and got the gun while Nick screamed in pain (CHAPTER XIII)



Their sounds were faint, murmuring echoes. Here, quiet and tranquility prevailed.

Van, who lived alone and liked it, noted the time as he switched on lights in parchment shaded lamps. He dropped the copies of the *Clarion* on the pumpkin-brown top of an ancient tavern table, lighted a cigarette, and made himself comfortable in one of the upholstered chairs.

Unhurriedly, he spread one of the news-

papers open before him. He selected the magazine section he had asked Havens to get for him, pushed the other papers away, and settled comfortably back to read about the Palmer Collection.

The person who had written the account had gone over the *objets d'art* carefully. Each treasure, with a short history included, made up a colorful narrative. Van read on, deeply interested. The silver snuff-box, he learned had once been in the possession of the Duke of Wellington. The origin of the gold wine-taster was lost in the mists of antiquity. The family which had last owned it was a branch of the Hapsburg line.

And not too many hours past Van had had the wine-taster in his hand!



Finished, he put the magazine aside and idly reached for the other back copies of the *Clarion* that Frank Havens had included. Another few minutes and Van found himself engrossed in the account of the Delmar Palmer tragedy.

It seemed that Bermuda had been the Palmer yacht's last stop-over before returning to Manhattan after a six-weeks honeymoon cruise around the West Indies. At the height of the violent storm the *Triton* had run into, Palmer, attempting to reach the bridge, had been struck by a terrific wave and hurled overboard. The captain of the yacht, Amos Hayden, and another member of the crew had seen the disaster, but had been helpless to save the financier. Van Loan read on.

The newspaper account switched to details concerning the woman Delmar Palmer had married. Marcia Rickard, as she was known professionally, had had quite a career both musically and matrimonially. Steve Huston, ace reporter from the *Clarion* had gone to town in his raking over of the pianist's life story. Interested, Van delved into it deeper.

Steve referred to Marcia Rickard as the "Angel of Death". Not once, but several times. Van understood why when he read that the woman's first husband, Arthur Rickard, an opera singer, had been killed by a fall on a mountain in Switzerland.

Strangely, this fatality had also occurred on her honeymoon, six weeks after the wedding ceremony.

Six weeks? Van frowned thoughtfully. That was exactly the length of time she had been married to Delmar Palmer. He pushed the newspaper aside and mashed out his cigarette.

Another glance at the time showed him he had to think about the matter of dressing for his night's engagement. But, as he stood up and stretched, he found he was not destined to attend the elaborate dinner party at the Belgrave Hotel that night.

**S**HARP and shrill in the quiet, the telephone suddenly rang.

"Dick?" The voice of Frank Havens came over the wire. In it Van caught an urgent note.

"Speaking."

"You'll have to cancel your date with the Crosbys. Meet me in a half hour—the

usual place."

"Right."

Van pronged the telephone. The customary indolence and bored languor he wore as he did his expensive clothing disappeared in a flash. Those who knew Van well—or thought they did—would have been astonished both by the expression that came into his face and the alert, vibrant air that took possession of him as he finished speaking on the telephone.

A dozen long strides took him to the bedroom. The click of a switch turned on its indirect illumination. Moving quickly to the bed, Van reached around behind it and felt for a hidden button. He pressed it and, like the wave of a magician's wand, things began to happen.

A section of the wall folded noiselessly back. Revealed before him was an inner room, a windowless, secret room Van Loan had blueprinted and devised. That room fitted in with the private elevator and the private entrance for his use in the building. All three things were part of a pattern, known only to one other person besides himself.

This pattern concerned itself with Richard Curtis Van Loan's dual personality, his other self. Incredible as it seemed, the rich playboy, the bored social favorite, and the town's most eligible bachelor, had another personality far different from the one he presented to the public.

It was with this personality that Frank Haven had made the appointment over the telephone. This characterization, unbelievable as it appeared, was that of a man feared and hated by all enemies of the law. And that man was the famed Phantom Detective!

Richard Curtis Van Loan *was* the Phantom!

That was the closely guarded secret shared only with the publisher of the *Clarion*. For Frank Havens, in his desperate, unceasing war against crime and injustice, relied completely on the brilliant talents of the young man he sponsored. In Van Loan, whose father Havens had known well, the newspaper owner had recognized certain outstanding qualities of deduction, an analytical brain, and a courage unquestioned, all vital assets to the crime campaigns he waged.

So under Havens' direction the Phantom Detective had come to life. Through



Van's inimitable cleverness the most difficult cases had been successfully solved. Time and again, when the police had been at the end of their rope, the Phantom had stepped in to climax their efforts with his own unfailing methods. Small wonder that the denizens of the underworld spoke of the Phantom as their nemesis.

Wasting no time, Van took off the clothes he wore and selected a suit from his disguise wardrobe. This, while smaller than the one in his Bronx workshop-laboratory, held a wide range of garments for any emergency. He put the suit on and sat down in front of a triple-mirrored dressing-make-up table.

Swiftly, with an experience born of long practise, he went to work to obliterate the handsome countenance of Dick Van Loan.

At his disposal were the tools of the make-up art. No theater dressing-room, no Hollywood studio or beauty salon boasted a more complete array of skin creams, color crayons, shadow pencils—all the necessities he used to create his disguises.

Van brought a face into mental focus. The face of a man in the early thirties. A rather ruddy-complexioned, Roman-nosed individual with prominent cheek-bones and a wide, loose-lipped mouth. Such a man would wear the blue tweed suit he had chosen. Such a man would be any one of the millions in the city, a man without outstanding characteristics, one who would be passed on the street without a second glance.

A man the enemies who sought to destroy him would find hard to remember.

A film of foundation tone cream blotted out the healthy Van Loan complexion. That dried quickly. Into it, with all the delicacy of an artist working on a canvas, he massaged another flesh emollient. Then with crayons and shadow pencils he created wrinkles and subtle shadings that gave the countenance a definite expression.

**F**EATHERWEIGHT plastic dentures made his mouth wide, his lips loose. Others changed the shape of his nose. Carefully, with a tiny brush, he rearranged the shape of his brows. A color comb drawn lightly through his crisp hair, flattened it on his well-shaped head. At



FRANK HAVENS

the same time it introduced a faint, red glint. Van combed it in a new way and leaned to study himself critically.

Disguise was something more than the use of cosmetics. Stacked against criminal brains, a flaw in a disguise could often be disastrous. But he had so well mastered the art of illusion that he had won the title of the "Man of a Thousand Faces!" This face, reflected in the three mirrors, was perfect in all details. As if a curtain had been drawn across the bored visage of the Park Avenue socialite, Van's new face looked out at the world with anticipation and expectancy.

He got up, turning to a full length mirror set in the back of the wardrobe door. Clever padding in the shoulders of the blue tweed jacket, as well as the cut of the coat, served to give him the appearance of being shorter than he really was. He found a hat that went with the outfit and busied himself with final details.

In every suit of clothing was a secret, hidden pocket. That was designed to accommodate the tiny jeweled domino-plate mask which he took from a drawer in a steel cabinet. The little mask plate was the Phantom Detective's means of identification, his personal insigne. It had the power of enlisting the services of the law if and when he found it necessary to call upon others. More than once the jewel-

studded bauble had come in handy at crucial moments.

Van placed the mask-plate in the secret pocket. His tightly rolled black felt mask went into another pocket. More of his equipment came out of the steel cabinet to be distributed about his person. His master-key, his flashlight with its special lens, a folding, double magnifying glass, his wallet, and a pair of thin silk gloves.

The last thing he did was to cross to the arsenal on the right side of the windowless room. That, too, while not as fully stocked with guns of all sizes, shapes and calibers as his other lab, still gave him a wide range of choice in lethal weapons.

Deciding rapidly, Van picked out a blue-steel automatic. The clip was full and ready for action. He tucked it into the ingenious recess made for it in the lining of his coat and paused for an instant to make sure he had not forgotten anything.

A minute later the bedroom wall panel slid quietly back into place. Richard Curtis Van Loan had entered the secret room, but it was the Phantom Detective who left it!

Now the private elevator and the private exit out of the Park Avenue apartment building had an explanation for their presence. Should he enter and leave a dozen times a day there was no one to observe his comings and goings. The press of a button took the waiting cage down to the street level.

Another minute and the Phantom was out on the avenue heading for his rendezvous with Frank Havens.

## CHAPTER IV

### MURDER IN THE MANSION



NEW moon was just above the Manhattan skyline. The night was mild. A sprinkle of stars, lost in the glare of Broadway to the west, was brighter at the north end of the thirteen-mile island and over the frowning Palisades on the other side of the broad Hudson.

Traffic moved in both directions along the avenue. Changing lights stopped it or sent it on its way. The sidewalks echoed to the tread of the city dwellers who had come out for a breath of the night air or a short after dinner stroll. The

Phantom unobtrusively joined those going south along the pavement.

Four streets south, Van turned a corner and went east for half a block. Ahead, beyond the shine of a tall arc light he glimpsed a familiar Cadillac. A big, shiny, expensive car. The Phantom passed it, walked on for some distance, crossed the street and went back. He always did that to make sure there were no watchers in the dark, none of the black brotherhood who might have trailed the owner of the *Clarion*, anxious to see whom he was meeting, whom he was picking up.

Satisfied the coast was clear, Van approached the car a second time. He opened the front right hand door and got in. Frank Havens, at the wheel, peered at him in the glow made by the lights on the instrument panel.

In his old friend's expression, Van saw admiration. Havens never ceased to marvel at the Van Loan disguises. Each was so much a masterpiece, so perfectly executed, that the publisher often needed their arranged identification signal before he actually believed he was in the presence of the Phantom.

Van gave him the signal as he sat down on the yielding upholstery. Thumb and forefinger briefly touched the lobe of his left ear. Havens suppressed an exclamation.

"What's happened?" There was nothing of Dick Van Loan's laconic drawl in the Phantom's tone. "It must be something highly important to have me cancel my dinner date."

"It is!" Havens answered grimly.

Van waited for him to start the car before he said: "Let's have it."

"This afternoon—" The publisher searched for words. "You, stopping in, asking about the Palmer collection. Requesting the back copies of the paper. It—it's fantastic!"

"What?"

The Phantom stiffened. Coincidence, he had found, frequently played an important role in the cases he was called upon to unravel. Was coincidence tied up with his afternoon visit to the shop of the muddy-eyed Madigan, his subsequent call at the Haunted Mansion?

Havens turned his head slightly. "We're going directly to the place you were asking about," he went on, in the

same grim voice. "The old Palmer Mansion. Amanda Palmer was found there, less than an hour ago—murdered!"

The Phantom's mouth tightened. In memory again he heard the peal of the bell he had pressed. No wonder no faltering steps had come to the door. Unaware, he had been trying to rouse the dead!

"Give me the particulars, as many as you have."

Havens explained briefly. Gas company employees, attempting to trace a leak from the street main, had tried to gain admittance to the house. When no one answered the bell one man had gone around to the back yard. Finding the rear door unlocked, and his errand being an emergency, he went in.

Tracing the leak to the first floor, the man had continued on as far as the music room. There he had seen something that had made him hurry back to the street and the nearest telephone.

"That was about an hour ago," Havens said. "Inspector Gregg has been at the Mansion since he was notified. It was he who got in touch with me just before I telephoned you. He urgently requested me to bring you down there."

Van nodded. So it was coincidence after all? Coincidence that linked a tarnished silver snuff-box and a gold wine-taster with a dead woman in an old, forgotten mansion!

The big Cadillac continued on its way. The Phantom brooded silently. He shook off his thoughtful apathy when they turned into Gramercy Park. Havens stopped a few feet behind Gregg's official sedan which, in turn, was parked in the rear of two radio cruisers.

**T**HE USUAL knot of the morbidly curious was in front of the house. The cop on the beat glowered at them from the top of the crumbling steps. He touched his cap when Havens, with Van beside him, reached the vestibule. He looked at Van curiously, wondering who he was and what he was doing there.

The door, carved and glass-decorated, that hadn't opened for Van that afternoon, now stood partially ajar. Lights glowed on the other side of it, in a foyer where a couple of plainclothes men were talking together. Van Loan followed Havens inside.

His first impression was of mustiness. Air heavy with dust. A stuffy smell, dank and damp, hung over the place.

The Phantom's hasty glance shifted from the rare oil paintings cluttering the foyer walls to the heavy Victorian draperies closing off the front parlor to the left. Carpeting on floor and stairs, once green, was gray with dirt.

Inspector Gregg, with members of his squad, were crowded in a reception room opposite the parlor. The Phantom didn't waste any time in preliminaries. A word from Havens, a quick hand clasp, a look of relief on Gregg's face and then the Phantom, alone, was at the end of the foyer corridor.

A somber walnut door, closed by the Inspector's order, creaked open at Van's touch. Gregg had left a light burning in an old red-glass shaded lamp. Its crimson glow gave the music room an eerie aspect. Because Gregg had hoped that the Phantom would arrive with Havens, and because the Inspector understood that the Phantom Detective always required a free hand, nothing in the room had been touched.

Van, a few feet in from the door, let his narrowed eyes move from the once elegant furnishings to the body of Amanda Palmer.

The woman lay between a black ebony square piano and a high-backed needle-point chair. She was half on her side, half on her back. Her arms were flung wide across the dusty carpet, her position, queerly, was one of relaxation. She might have been sleeping, Van saw.

His mouth twisted cynically. Amanda Palmer was sleeping, but it was the long, deep, untroubled slumber from which there is no awaking.

He stepped closer to the body. The handiwork of the Grim Reaper was no novelty to him. The Phantom studied Death with the cold, impersonal regard of one who had to know its causes, its reasons and its results. A glance was enough to tell him the wealthy spinster had been dead for at least a week.

His flashlight played over the old-fashioned gray dress she wore, with its embroidered bodice and lace cuffs. An oval cameo brooch circled with pearls was at her throat where the high collar of the dress met. But the Phantom took in those



details after his gaze slid from the dark, telltale stains on the carpet to the woman's gray head.

The death wound was above her left ear. She had been struck there with some blunt-pointed instrument. Death, Van saw, must have been instantaneous. Such a blow had brought the crash of doom to Amanda Palmer like a bolt of striking lightning.

The Phantom straightened, still regarding the corpse with studious interest. A week ago? Time enough to put the murderer thousands of miles away. Enough time to have erased any definite trail.

Van shook his head slightly. The hand of the law had no boundaries. Today a killer could be reached in Bombay almost as easily as in Times Square.

pointed.

The Phantom always carried a folding measure. He had found it almost as much of a necessity as his flash or his gun. He whipped it out and held it lengthwise and across the shoe print. He filed the measurements in his mind as he moved the torch and let it center on some faint traces of black-gray substance sifted over the wooden floor.

That both puzzled and interested him. So much so that he took a specimen of it, put it in an envelope and went on with his investigation.

But the shoe print and the flaky substance seemed all he was destined to discover until, back in the music room again, he started a systematic examination of the floor. Over near the gilt music cabinet the Phantom picked up a small em-

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The head wound held his attention. A blackjack? He didn't think so. A sap had a rounded end and this skull fracture had been caused by what he was certain was a pointed implement. He let the yellow eye of the flash rest on the jagged, broken wound, mentally measuring it.

Snapping off his flash, the Phantom took in the details of the room again. Tall, double windows, half hidden by draperies that billowed to the floor, looked out over a backyard. In the moonlight that was a tangle of weeds and wisteria that had run wild. The windows were not only locked but nailed. No one had entered through them.

Beyond a flamboyantly decorated gilt music cabinet a second door to the room led out to a small square recess. On the right side a swinging door opened on a butler's pantry. Opposite that another door gave on cellar steps. Dark, musty dampness swirled up when the Phantom, checking, opened that door.

**H**E PUSHED it shut and, the next minute, found something he had almost obliterated in crossing the passage. Distinct in the gray dust Van saw the imprint of a man's shoe. His flash roamed over it. A large shoe with a worn spot almost in the center of the sole. He stared at it, noticing the direction in which the toe was

bossed black button. He held it speculatively in the palm of his hand. The dress the dead woman wore had gray buttons. Buttons as old as the fabric it was made of. The button the Phantom held was new and shiny. He added it to the envelope in his pocket.

Luck was with him. At the north end of the room, behind a sofa, spindle-legged and velvet covered, the Phantom saw a gouge in the red-leather wall covering. It looked as if it had been made recently. As if someone had tossed something away. Something that had struck the wall and made the mark.

Quickly, he dropped to his knees. With a breath of satisfaction he pulled on one of the thin gloves he had brought, reached in under the sofa and pulled out a small bronze statuette.

Van's eyes glinted. The murder weapon? The implement that had killed Amanda Palmer before it had been tossed carelessly aside!

Instantly he saw that it was. The statuette, that of a fisher boy, was on a square, solid base. One of its corners held a significant blackish smear. Blood that had dried over the days.

Van wrapped the statuette in a handkerchief. The weight of it in his hand told him what a perfect weapon it had been. He looked at the body on the floor

again, and the red glow of the lamp seemed to deepen around it ominously.

Then, going to the door he had come in through, he let himself out and went back to the front part of the Haunted Mansion.

The Inspector had not wasted any time. For all his lack of imagination and his brusque manner, Gregg was gifted with an ability for routine. To the Phantom, Gregg's police methods were somewhat stereotyped and old-fashioned, but at least they were complete and thorough.

Already, Gregg's plainclothes men had brought in a couple of servants from the adjoining house. A man and a woman, dull-witted, but frank in their answers to the questions Gregg put to them. Van took up an unobtrusive position near the door of the reception room and listened.

"Miss Palmer," the man was saying, "never had callers and never saw no one. Tom Hubbard was the only one who came here. He's been taking care of her furnace and front walk for the past three years. Came in the morning, went away after an hour or so, and came back at night."

The Inspector went on with his questioning. The Phantom eased himself out of the picture. He had work to do.

A glance in at the parlor behind the foyer draperies, a look at the paneled dining room, and the Phantom turned to the staircase that rose to the floor above.

At every step dust stirred by his feet stung his nostrils. He reached the landing above. Now the desertion of sumptuously furnished rooms on every side of the hall that went away from the landing impressed him with a sense of decadent splendor. No wonder they called this place the Haunted Mansion. No Hollywood movie set, designed to create a scene of desertion and awesome solitude, could boast more cobwebs, more moldy furnishings.

The Phantom went on to the third floor. Once the rooms there had been the servants' quarters. He examined the skylight, climbing an iron ladder that took him to its scuttle on the roof.

He had an idea the spinster's murderer might have come in that way. But a glance told him that the scuttle had not been opened for years. Its locks were rusted, and streamers of dirt festooned its glass top.

## CHAPTER V

## BRONX LABORATORY



DOWNSTAIRS, Inspector Gregg was still hammering away at the two servants from the house next door. Van glanced in the direction of the cop on the stoop, turned and headed for the door he had found that opened on the cellar steps.

His flashlight, spreading a ray wide and luminous, darted down the stairs before him. He pulled the door shut after him, the chill of the cellar creeping into him.

Down there, where the rubbish of years was piled high in corners, the Phantom's pulses began to tick anticipatively, but it took some time and much investigating before he turned up a shoe in the pile of debris.

Not a right shoe, with a hole in the center of its sole. This was a worn, brown leather left shoe but, Van saw, undoubtedly the mate to the one that had made the print in the dust upstairs.

It was the same size, the same shape. The significant part of it was that wet mold on the tongue and broken laces showed him it had not been worn for a long time. That fact registered with Van. Why would a man wear different shoes? He thought he understood the reason, put the shoe aside to take with him later and continued his search of the cellar.

Low beams made him proceed cautiously. He passed a wine room. Vintage prizes stocked its shelves, ancient bottles so dirt-covered their labels were unreadable.

Passing the shelves, he stopped abruptly, face to face with a steel-sheathed door set in a cement bulge. A formidable-looking padlock made the Phantom's brows draw together. It was new, of the latest design and make.

To all outward appearances it seemed strong enough to keep any intruder from opening the door it guarded. But when Van inspected it, he was quick to discover that it had been filed. One part of it had been cut and then the part pushed back into place so that it looked intact.

Removing the padlock, the Phantom turned the knob of the steel-faced door. It swung in, making space enough for him

to enter. His flash played over the accumulation of trunks piled neatly in a row across the cement-lined room.

The Palmer Collection? The trunks were of the storage variety, all fairly new, all stout and in good condition. Two years ago, when the collection had been on display at the Alstyne Galleries, on 57th Street, and Richard Curtis Van Loan had admired it, he had noticed these same trunks—or receptacles exactly like them—out in a corridor near the galleries' service entrance.

Unless he was mistaken he had stumbled in on the famous gold and silver treasures of the late Delmar Palmer.

The filed padlock had its own meaning. The Phantom found what that was when he saw marks on the damp stone floor. One of the trunks, at least, had been removed from the row and dragged across the floor to the door. It had been dragged to the door, the Phantom saw, and then out of the cellar by the same unlocked entrance the gas company man had used to enter the house and discover the horror in the music room.

That door drew the Phantom like steel to a magnet. It was on the opposite side of the cellar, opening into the overgrown back yard. It needed only a light on the weed-covered grass plot to show him that the trunk had been set down there before being lifted and carried down a narrow passage to the street. The same type of marks that had been on the damp floor of the cellar were out there in the yard.

The Phantom's mouth tightened. That, in part, explained the presence of the snuff-box and the wine-taster in the Second Avenue shop. But that was not enough. Did it also supply a motive for murder? Did the trunk's removal tie in with the bronze statuette, handkerchief-wrapped in his pocket, and the still, relaxed figure in the old fashioned gray dress on the music room floor?

When the Phantom went back to the reception room, Gregg was talking with the medical examiner. The Inspector stared silently at the shoe under the Phantom's arm, the bulge the statuette made in his pocket. His worried look cleared a trifle as the Phantom crossed to him.

"You've found something?"

"A shoe and the murder weapon." The Phantom handed over the statuette. "You

might check it for prints, though I hardly think you'll find any on it. Our killer has imagination. He's clever, diabolically clever."

THE INSPECTOR drew the folds of the handkerchief away from the fisher boy. Several plainclothes men gathered around him to look.

There was nothing further to detain the the Phantom. He said good night to the Inspector and, with Frank Havens, went down the front steps and back to the publisher's Cadillac.

"What do you think?" Havens gave him a dubious look.

Van shrugged. "An interesting case." He was noncommittal as usual, but that didn't deceive Havens.

"You told the Inspector the killer was diabolically clever. What makes you think so?"

"Several things."

Van got in the car, adding a request to be dropped across town.

He pondered the murder in the Haunted Mansion while the car continued uptown. Three blocks from his Park Avenue address, Havens pulled in at the curb and stopped.

"You'll hear from me," Van told him.

They shook hands and Van cut through the side street that led to the all-night garage where he kept his special, super-powered cars. Men were busy washing cars when Van reached it. For months he had kept his means of transportation there. He found it both convenient and satisfactory.

The garage owner was a discreet person who asked no questions, but he had his own opinion about the man who came and went at any hour of the day or night. A man who was always in disguise, who always wore a new face.

The garage-keeper believed the Phantom was a Government agent. So he expressed no curiosity, and made sure those who worked for him kept silent about the owner of the three high-powered black cars that were ready for the road at all times.

A few more minutes and the Phantom, at the wheel of a sleek black sedan, was rolling down the ramp and out to the street. He went east, then north up one of the wide East Side avenues. His



glance moved to the tilted mirrors over the windshield. They were his own design, made of glare-proof, panoramic glass that gave him a complete picture of what was going on behind him.

No one could tail the black sedan for any length of time without being observed. The Phantom, as was his cautious custom, made certain no following car hung in his wake as he went on and up to the Bronx.

His larger workshop and laboratory, a former warehouse which was situated close to the Westchester line, was set apart from other buildings. Early in his career the Phantom had realized the necessity of having a headquarters remote from the throbbing heart of the city and had arranged for this place. Here he could work without interruption, in secret.

At his disposal were the most modern scientific precision instruments available. Ray machines, microscopes, a complete chemical-stocked lab for his research work. Arsenal and wardrobe, photographic dark room and filing cabinets containing every scrap of information necessary to him in his war against crime.

Van was known to the neighborhood as Dr. Bendix, an elderly, bearded scientist. No one expressed any particular interest in the eccentric old gentleman who stayed away from the little building for long periods of time, then suddenly bobbed up to open the place for short intervals. The Phantom furthered the legend of the ancient savant by appearing in the Bendix disguise on strategic occasions.

Parking the car a street away, he went through the dark. A turn of a queer-shaped, triangular key in a multiple lock and he was inside his sanctuary. Indirect lights came on as the door closed behind him. He ran a quick eye over the laboratory. It was just as he had left it after his last visit.

Noting the time, Van sat down at a porcelain-topped table and put the shoe he had picked up in the Gramercy Park house under the refulgent beam of a high-powered ray lamp. He wondered about its mate. The right shoe hadn't been in the cellar. He was sure of that.



As a blackjack came whistling down, the misty stars and consciousness were blotted out for the Phantom (CHAPTER XI)

He wiped away some of the mold. It was a cheap shoe of inferior leather. It had been resoled and rubber-heeled. There was nothing he could learn from it, nothing he expected to learn, so he pushed it aside and produced the small black button he had found on the floor.

He studied that for a minute or two. It had not come from Amanda Palmer's gray dress. The gas company man might have dropped it, but the Phantom didn't think so. It was not the type of button found on a business suit or a uniform. He put that back in his pocket and went to work to analyze the flaky, black-gray substance of which he had taken a specimen from the dusty floor.

**H**HE TESTED that three ways, using a chemical reagent and his Greenough microscope. He had his answer after the third try. The flaky substance came up as coal ashes. Thoughtfully, Van considered his findings.

The gas man had said the back yard door was open when he had gone around to try to get in to trace the leak. Amanda Palmer's killer could have entered and left by that door. The ash powder indicated that whoever had made the footprints in the dust must have come up out of the cellar.

That could have been the gas man himself. But such a thing didn't explain the shoe or its missing mate. Van's mind went back to the vestibule of the old house—to the dust-free knob of the front door, the cigarette stub with its lipsticked tip, on the grimy tiles.

He turned off the light in the lamp before him and walked over to his filing compartment. There, steel cabinets were indexed in such a way that any data he wanted was instantly available. A clipping bureau kept him supplied with needed information, and after a minute or two the Phantom had all the printed material he wanted concerning the Palmer family.

Methodically he plodded through that before he turned his attention to the former Marcia Rickand and the printed information he had on Delmar Palmer's talented widow.

Almost an hour later the Phantom left his workshop, hurrying through the starry dusk toward the big black sedan a street away.

In his mind three words seemed to repeat themselves. Three words that might or might not have a direct bearing on the still, dead figure sleeping the long sleep in the mansion's music room.

The three words formed themselves on the Phantom's lips as he went on through the gloom.

"Angel of Death!" he said, half-aloud.

## CHAPTER VI

### FRIENDS MEET



**S**TEVE HUSTON, ace reporter for the *Clarion*, finished a second cup of coffee in the cafeteria around the corner from the newspaper office and reached for a cigarette. The clock over the door told him it was a few minutes after

nine. Time, Steve saw, to be up and doing.

He felt pretty good. The morning was cool and sunny. Steve liked murder assignments on bright, cheerful days. Somehow the weather tempered the grimness of the business at hand. And the murder of the wealthy Miss Amanda Palmer, he was sure, would be anything but pleasant to write about.

Yet, in a way, the spinster's demise offered a wealth of colorful material. The Haunted Mansion, in itself, was an inspiration to any newspaper reporter interested in unusual backgrounds. It was, Steve told himself, a perfect setting for a murder mystery.

It was the kind of case that would grip the imaginations of readers. The type of gory sensation that made working girls as well as society matrons who had known the rich Palmer family read every printed word breathlessly. The kind of story Huston liked best to do, the kind on which he could go to town.

He smoked meditatively for a minute or two longer. Odd that two such dramatic deaths should occur to the Palmers within such a short space of time.

His mind dwelt on the concert pianist who had married the man washed overboard from the *Triton*. He had labeled the woman the "Angel of Death." He had never seen Marcia Rickand, though he knew quite a lot about her, and wondered if Gregg would have her on tap for ques-

tioning and discussion.

Steve had poked into the tragedy in Switzerland at the time of the pianist's first marriage. He had even gone to the Swiss Consul's office to get his facts straight. He had invaded musical circles, talking with professional people who had known Marcia Rickand at the height of her concert fame. The information garnered was similar to that the Phantom had checked on in his Bronx workshop the previous night.

What Steve had learned was that Marcia Rickand had been born Marcia Kent. Like so many stage and musical celebrities she had come to Manhattan from a small, Midwestern town. Her father had been the postmaster there and her only other living relative was a brother, a Malcolm Kent.

Steve didn't know much about the brother, and didn't care. The career of the former Marcia Kent, with all its highlights and successes, was more than enough to hold his attention. Beside her, her postmaster father and brother were of small importance.

Steve dropped his cigarette, put his heel over it, and went out to take a bus down Fifth Avenue.

Judged by the looks of things, the murder in the Haunted Mansion was enough to give Inspector Gregg plenty of headaches. From what Huston had already picked up, he had an idea that Gregg was stalled. What a spot, the little reporter thought, for the Phantom Detective to step in and, with his usual scientific and brilliant methods, clear up the case without delay.

Steve thought about the Phantom as the bus lumbered on. Numbers of times in the past he had assisted the world-famed detective in a small way. He had no idea of the Phantom's real identity, and personally, he didn't care who or what the man was. It was enough, Steve told himself, to be allowed to participate in the tangled puzzle-dramas the Phantom worked on, if only in a minor capacity.

He shook his head. The Haunted Mansion murder didn't seem one that would engage the Phantom's attention. Huston knew that the internationally famous master detective was called in only on tremendously important matters and then after all ordinary police work had failed. On the

surface, the death of Miss Amanda Palmer appeared as a routine case for Gregg to solve—the killing of a rich woman, probably with robbery as a motive, without angles or a web of intrigue behind it.

The Inspector might be stalled, but he would eventually break the case. The thing holding him up, Steve saw, was the fact that the spinster had been dead for a week. Gregg usually liked his corpses still warm when he took over.

Alighting at the proper street, Steve walked through to Gramercy Park. Across the way was one of his boss' clubs. He hadn't seen Mr. Havens that morning. His assignment had come from the city desk. Huston walked faster.

THE INSPECTOR'S car was not at the Palmer mansion. A cop stood on duty in the vestibule and one of Headquarters' detectives was finishing a bottle of beer in the reception room when Huston got by the patrolman at the portals and went on in.

The plainie's name was Cassidy and he had known Steve since Huston's cub reporting days. He was a pretty fair gumshoe, with a red face and a pair of cold blue eyes. He finished the beer and grinned at Huston's look of disgust.

"Can't take it so early? This is practically the middle of the night for me." Cassidy yawned. "I've been staked out in this rat-trap since eight last night."

Steve's reportorial instincts rose. "How about some inside dope?"

Cassidy yawned again. He used a sleeve as a napkin and fished a cigar out of his vest pocket. He broke the cellophane wrapper, smelled the tobacco, and bit the end from it.

"Look, Stevie," he said. "You don't want to quiz me. You want to see the party you work for."

"What do you mean?"

The plainclothes man struck a match and expelled a cloud of cigar smoke that was not exactly aromatic. The blue eyes turned quizzical.

"Havens dropped in last night. He had somebody with him. Somebody important enough to make the Inspector stop everything until the fellow had a look around—a first look."

"The Phantom!" Steve exclaimed.

Cassidy moved a set of bulky shoulders.

"Could be. No names were mentioned, but you can use your imagination. Why would a big shot like Mr. Havens hotfoot it up here with a stranger in tow, and have the Inspector holding the show until he could smell around?"

The little reporter felt something tingle inside him. This was better than he had hoped for. So the murder of Amanda Palmer wasn't just another one of those things!

"Swell!" he said.

"Sure, for the department. Now," Cassidy went on smugly, "we'll get all the answers. Personally, it looks a little too tough for me. A week ago somebody ambles in, conks the old dame with a bronze statuette and fades. The only thing left behind is a shoe. At least, that's all Havens' friend turned up—or said he did. A shoe can put a kick in it, but I wouldn't want to be the one who had to start from there and work it out."

"Then there's nothing you can tell me?"

"Not a thing, Stevie. The wagon picked up the body around midnight. We went over this mausoleum inch by inch. There's a collection of moths here I'll match against any wool destroyers in the country. That's about all we found outside of some real fancy beverages down in the cellar. And I don't mean beer. Take a look around, treat yourself to a view of the way the other half lives."

"And died!" Huston said under his breath.

He accepted the invitation. But all the time he was looking at the faded glory of the mansion's sumptuous rooms, his mind was full of what Cassidy had said about the man who had come here last night with the *Clarion* publisher.

Now, Steve saw, he would have to get in touch with the Phantom if he were to write any kind of story for the paper. He would have to have Mr. Havens make the contact. He nodded, said good-by to Cassidy and went out to Gramercy Park.

Still tingling, Steve started back toward Fifth Avenue. He was only vaguely aware that a man, coming along, was slowing down and walking toward him. He had an impression of an unfamiliar ruddy face, a loose-lipped mouth, and a slouching kind of gait.

Steve stopped when the man addressed him.

"I beg your pardon," said a voice Steve was certain he had never heard before. "Could you direct me to the Palmer mansion? Better still, could you kindly tell me who murdered Miss Palmer and why?"

HUSTON'S brows drew together. He was about to make some pertinent crack, when he saw the man casually lift thumb and forefinger and briefly touch the lobe of his left ear. The tingling in Steve turned to a sudden sweep of understanding.

"Phantom!"

Van smiled. "Not so loud. Even the sidewalks have ears. How are you, Steve? Mr. Havens said that I'd probably find you down here. Feel in the mood to lend a hand?"

"Naturally!" Suppressed excitement made the reporter's tone eager.

"Then let's find a taxi and go some place where we can talk."

"Right. We ought to get—" Huston broke off with a smothered exclamation. "Phantom! That car—somebody in it had a camera and was snapping us!"

The Phantom wheeled around. A gray 1940 model Lincoln sedan, picking up speed, had gone past them. The Phantom's keen gaze caught the outline of a man's head and shoulders through the rear window, then a cautious face turning to look back.

"Quick, Steve! Here comes a cab. Flag it!"

A taxi, after discharging two passengers at a house across the way, approached. Huston ran out and stopped it. The Phantom pushed him in and followed with a curt order:

"That gray Lincoln just turning the corner, driver. Follow it!"

The hackie, apparently a quick-witted young man, nodded and slapped his foot down on the gas treadle. The cab whined off, but when it turned the corner there was no sign of the gray sedan. The taximan throttled down while the Phantom's brows drew together.

"Gone." He shrugged.

"But where?" Steve looked bewildered.

"Apparently the wrong way on a one-way street." Van nodded east. "In quite a hurry. No matter. If somebody wanted my picture they're welcome to it."



Huston stared. The Phantom's tone was amused. But to Steve there was something far from funny behind the incident. People didn't snap cameras from car windows and then dash away without a good reason. Or a definite purpose.

The reporter, as it happened, was correct in his reasoning. The taxi in which he and the Phantom were riding continued on uptown. At the same moment, a man who had got out of the gray Lincoln in front of a drug store on Third Avenue, dropped a nickel in a telephone there, pulled the booth door shut and dialed a number.

"Okay," he said, when the call went through. "I tagged the newshawk down from the cafeteria where he had breakfast. He met somebody who came out of the Palmer place. I got a couple of fast snaps of the pair of them. I'll be right up. . . ."

The Green Spot, a Longacre oasis for the thirsty, was one of the Phantom's favorite places whenever he had business to talk over with Steve Huston.

An ordinary tavern, situated between a movie house on one side and an office building on the other, the beer pavilion had a back room where conversation was possible without listening ears overhearing it. The tavern's play was all in the front part, at its long bar.

Few customers bothered to invade its back section. Those who did were usually bookmakers, jotting down bets on their tabulating sheet.

When Steve and the Phantom went into the rear room it was empty. A waiter eyed them dubiously. Steve ordered foam for himself, and lime and seltzer for the man with him. Then he sat down and looked across at the ruddy face on the other side of the table.

"You're on the case." Steve drew a deep breath. "That means there's something behind it that I've yet to dig into. Any hints?"

"An old snuff-box, a wine-taster, a storm at sea, and death on a Swiss mountainside." Van relaxed comfortably in his chair as he spoke.

**S**TEVE HUSTON frowned, puzzled. "You mean those all link together?"

"They might. Suppose you tell me how you happened to coin that phrase, 'Angel of Death'."

"I don't know. It just came to me." Steve made a gesture. "Marcia Rickand's first husband passed out on his honeymoon. So did her second. I thought it was appropriate."

"You didn't think," the Phantom murmured casually, "that there might be any connection between Arthur Rickand's unfortunate death and that of Delmar Palmer?"

The waiter brought their beverages and shuffled away. Steve sampled his and said:

"As a matter of fact, I did. It was in the back of my mind. I couldn't help thinking that."

"You're suspicious enough," the Phantom told him, "to be working for Inspector Gregg. What motive could the woman have had to get rid of two husbands practically as soon as she had gotten them?"

"Insurance?" Huston put his glass down. "In Palmer's case, his estate!"

The Phantom shook his head. "Possibly, but a trifle too dangerous. Getting rid of husband Number Two after almost exactly the same length of time spent with Number One would be cutting it rather thin. Yet, apart from the insurance idea, you might have something there. What do you know, from your investigation of Marcia Rickand, about the woman? Where does she live?"

"Up in Connecticut. At a place called Three Deer Farm. It's a small town, Wayville, about sixty miles from Grand Central. At least, that's the address I have. I've never seen her."

## CHAPTER VII

### HEADQUARTERS



**W**AITING until Steve had finished, the Phantom produced the black button he had found at the Haunted Mansion. He rolled it across the table.

"Check on this for me, Steve," he said. "See if you can find the manufacturer. What I want to learn is what sort of a garment it came off."

Huston looked at the black button with interest. He put it carefully in his wallet.

"I'll get after it right away," he said. "Anything else?"

"Yes. I want some information on Amos

Hayden. That name ought to be familiar to you."

"It is," Steve said. "Hayden was the skipper of Palmer's yacht."

"After the *Triton* put in at Bermuda for repairs following the hurricane," the Phantom commented, "it came up here and was dry-docked. From what I understand it's still out of commission. I want to talk to Captain Hayden. Finding him might not be an easy task. Captain and crew were discharged. Hayden might have got another berth, or gone into the Merchant Marine."

"Any suggestions where I can look for him?"

"Try the Sheepshead Bay waterfront," the Phantom said. "If you draw a blank there, circulate around the sailors' boarding houses at the Erie Basin. You might even try the Seamens Bank. Gregg can give you the proper authority."

That was the sort of thing Huston liked to do. Following the Phantom's leads, always was sure to furnish interesting experiences and plenty of excitement. Danger, too. In the past, what had seemed a harmless investigation had often turned out to be packed with thrills and colored with peril.

"I'll see what I can do on Hayden right away," he promised. "How about Amanda Palmer? I'm handling the story. If you could slip me a few tips—"

The Phantom shook his head. "Not yet. Too early. You'll get the whole story exclusively when it breaks."

"But the snuff-box you spoke about?" Steve prodded, hopefully.

"You'll hear about that—later."

Another beer and Huston said good-by and left. The Phantom glanced at his watch and followed suit a few minutes later. The subway took him downtown. When he got out at the Spring Street station he directed his steps toward Headquarters and Gregg's office.

The big building on Centre Street hummed with activity. The nerve center of the forces that battled day and night with metropolitan crime, the old-fashioned building vibrated with action. Patrolmen were going out on detail, plainclothes detectives were checking in or checking out. Citizens with complaints or personal problems, bound for the various departments, came or left.

Nobody paid any attention to the Phantom Detective when he went up the steps and entered. Usually, Van kept away from Headquarters. He preferred to operate alone, to work along his own lines, unhindered by routine or the complexities of red tape. Scientific deduction such as he employed was entirely foreign to the Department.

Yet, on occasion, he found it necessary to cooperate and collaborate with the police. And this, he reflected as he went down the wide corridor, was one of those times. The Inspector expected him. There was a chance, Van felt, that he might learn something valuable.

Gregg sat behind a littered desk studded with telephones. He was talking on one when the Phantom shut the door. The Inspector finished a brief conversation, expelled a deep breath, and greeted his visitor with a look of relief.

"Glad you stopped in. I've got Hubbard in the anteroom. I thought you might like to question him."

"Hubbard? The furnace man who worked for Miss Palmer?" The Phantom sat down, a package he had carried all morning, beside him. "I don't expect much information, but let's see what Hubbard has to say."

Gregg used one of the telephones and Tom Hubbard was ushered in.

As the Phantom had expected, the furnace-tender and handyman looked the part. Stoop-shouldered, shabby and elderly, his gaunt appearance seemed to indicate ill health.

**H**UBBARD fingered his battered felt hat nervously, glancing from the Inspector to the man in the chair beside the desk. When Gregg told him to sit down he lowered himself slowly and almost painfully into an opposite chair.

"This gentleman wants to ask you a few questions." Gregg nodded to the Phantom.

"You were employed by Miss Palmer?" the Phantom began.

"That's right, sir. For the past year or more."

"You had a key to the cellar door?"

"Yes, sir."

"You didn't have a habit of leaving the door open, forgetting to lock it?"

"No, sir. I was always careful to lock up when I left."

"You haven't seen Miss Palmer for a week?" the Phantom said. "When was the last time you were at her house?"

"Ten days ago," Hubbard coughed. "I've been at the hospital since. I've been sick. I only got out the day before yesterday."

"That's correct," Inspector Gregg put in. "I checked with Garvey at the General Hospital. It's as he says."

"In which case," the Phantom went on, opening the package he had brought, "you couldn't very well have worn the mate to this shoe. It is your shoe?"

He handed it over. Hubbard looked at it and nodded, surprised.

"It's mine, one of a pair I threw away a long time ago. Where's the other?"

"You haven't any idea?" When Hubbard shook his head, the Phantom said, "Neither have I. The other shoe left an imprint in the dust on the floor of the passage outside the music room. It was made recently—no more than a week ago."

Hubbard blinked. Gregg's brows drew together. He looked at the Phantom curiously.

"I don't know anything about that," the furnace-tender said quickly. "It's as I told you. I threw the shoes away, in the junk in the cellar."

"I believe you." The Phantom's tone was quiet and friendly. "I was hoping you might know who had borrowed your discarded footgear. Because," he explained, "I have reason to suspect the missing shoe was used deliberately in order to implicate you."

Hubbard's mouth opened. Gregg scowled.

"A planted footprint?"

"Exactly. But by someone who didn't realize Hubbard was in the hospital. Someone who wanted to point the finger of suspicion at him." The Phantom nodded at the man. "That's all," he said. "You wouldn't know anything about several trunks that were in a cellar store-room, or a padlock that was filed?"

Hubbard shook his head and a few minutes later, when they were alone again, the Inspector said:

"So you found the filed padlock, too. I suppose you even know what is in the trunks."

"Certainly. They contain the Palmer Collection of art treasures."



STEVE HUSTON

"But did you know what Miss Palmer intended to do with the stuff?" Gregg asked.

"What?"

"She was going to give it to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Outright and permanently. I found some correspondence on the subject in a desk at the house. Letters dated ten days ago."

The Phantom's eyes narrowed. He sat silent for a minute, considering what Gregg had said. It was important. To Van it hinted that someone had made an effort to get some of the collection before it was removed to the museum. Removed and placed forever beyond the reach of predatory hands.

He changed the subject. "What about Mrs. Palmer?"

"I've sent for her. She's coming down from her place in Connecticut." The Inspector glanced at a memorandum on his desk pad. "She should be here any time now. Do you want to talk with her?"

"No. But I would like to learn if she was at her farm the day—or night—Amanda Palmer was killed. If she was, and can prove it, it will make things more difficult. I have a feeling," the Phantom added slowly, "that Delmar Palmer's widow is a key figure in our mystery murder."

**I**NSPECTOR GREGG'S head jerked up. "You think she's in on it? Maybe she was after the collection?"

The Phantom smiled thinly. "That's the furthest thing from my thoughts. Be subtle when you question her, and under no circumstances give her the idea you have any suspicion at all, where she's concerned. Simply find out where she was at the time of the murder and let it go at that."

"I'll give you a transcript of what she says."

"You might," the Phantom went on, "take a look at the activities of a man named Madigan who has a second-hand shop on Second Avenue. But that will have to be done cleverly, too. I'd like to find out something about Madigan's business and his background."

"I'll take care of it immediately," Gregg assured him, making a notation on a pad beside him.

"I think that's about all."

The Phantom started to get up, waiting while the Inspector unhooked the receiver to answer one of the many telephones. Gregg put his hand over the mouthpiece of the instrument.

"Wait! One of our prize pigeons has just come in, with some information," Gregg said tersely. "He's downstairs, and he claims to know something about the Phantom Detective!"

Barney Raff, police stoolie, turned out to be a type the Phantom had encountered numerous times in his underworld exploits. He stood a few feet from Gregg's big desk, trying to duck the shaft of sunshine that slanted in, his red-rimmed eyes watering slightly as if they were not accustomed to the bright light of day.

He looked unclean, unkempt, though the brown suit he wore was new enough and his foulard tie was obviously expensive. Black hair was combed flat on a slightly bullet-shaped head, and at some point in his career his nose had been broken and was out of alinement.

His mouth was small and he did most of his breathing through it. Gold fillings decorated his front teeth. He was built like a lightweight boxer, small and well put together, with no superfluous weight anywhere. And, the Phantom noticed, his eyes were sharp and shrewd behind their red rims. Bargaining eyes, the kind that

made deals.

Stool pigeons of Raff's type were important to the machinery of the law. Go-betweens who could be trusted were often of incalculable value to the cause of justice. Through their contacts with subterranean characters they were in a position to obtain information an ordinary detective could never hope to get close to.

It was a precarious business. Something like that of an enemy agent, or common spy, during wartime. For if a stoolie's secret got out and his affiliation with the police became known, his number was up immediately. The Phantom understood that this Barney Raff must be good at his trade. Otherwise Gregg would have had him behind bars instead of leaving him on the loose.

"Hello, Barney," Gregg said. "Meet Mr.—"

"Black," the Phantom filled in for him.

"Mr. Black," said Gregg. "So you've got some information. Let's have it."

Raff looked quizzically at the Phantom. He seemed to be trying to figure out who "Mr. Black" was, if it were wise to spill anything before him. The Inspector settled that doubt with a word.

"You can talk, Barney. Mr. Black is a special agent."

Raff switched his gaze back to Gregg. "About that Gramercy Park rub. Around two this morning I was over at Gillian's. That's a pool hall near Eleventh on Fifty-third. A tough bunch of garoons headquarters there. Abe Shandelle and his musclers. I was having a drink with Beefy Doyle when I picked up an earful."

He stopped. Gregg let him take his dramatic pause without interruption. The Phantom sat motionless, waiting.

"A couple of strangers were getting a glow," Raff continued. "They'd taken plenty on board. They were talking louder than they probably figured they were. They were talking about the Palmer dame's blackout and the Phantom Detective!"

"What did they say?" the Inspector prompted.

"Not a whole lot. But enough to in me on the fact they knew something. They mentioned the name Malligan, or Madigan, and they said if the Phantom shows up on this tangle he can see his favorite undertaker."

"That's all?" Gregg questioned.

Barney Raff nodded. "Yeah. They went on spilling but Beefy started to sing—he always does when he's bourboned—and I couldn't hear anything else."

"You say you never saw the men before?" the Phantom murmured.

"That's right." The shrewd eyes swung around to the man in the chair beside the desk. "But I'd know 'em if I saw 'em again, both parties."

The Phantom slipped a bill out of his wallet. Folding it lengthwise he handed it to Raff.

"Try and find them. Learn who they are. What their interest is. And while you're at it you might circulate the story around that the Phantom Detective is on the case!"

"Why do you want it known?" Inspector Gregg asked, when Raff had left the office.

"It might make things easier," said the Phantom. "Simplify matters. Bring them out in the open. I'd rather have them come after me than go after them. A big time-saver."

## CHAPTER VIII

### MAD MUSIC



INSPECTOR GREGG stared. He never questioned the Phantom's moves, but often they puzzled him. They were so adroit and carefully thought out that Gregg frequently was completely baffled by the man's swift strategy.

The Phantom did not discount the stool-pigeon's warning. The gray Lincoln that morning showed him clearly that those who operated behind a curtain of secrecy were out to make sure whether or not the Phantom was active in the Amanda Palmer case.

The camera business, he believed, could be easily explained. Smart underworld brains, realizing that Frank Havens was the Phantom's contact, and that Huston might be the publisher's messenger, could put a tail on both the newspaperman and the reporter. The enemy knew that the Man of a Thousand Faces was difficult to single out and identify.

What they had done was to shag Steve,

with orders to get pictures if possible of all those Huston met at the scene of the crime, or under circumstances that might hint of a connection with the case.

The warning didn't bother Van. A hundred times in the past criminals who knew they would have to pay the full penalties for their crimes unless the Phantom were stopped, had made desperate efforts to get him. They had failed. They would fail again—and again!

"One other thing," the Phantom said. "There were no prints on the statuette?"

Gregg shook his head. "Either wiped clean or the killer wore gloves."

"And no other clues?"

"Not a thing, Phantom."

"Get in touch with me through Mr. Havens," the Phantom said, and a few minutes later was on his way uptown. He had a two o'clock luncheon appointment with the *Clarion's* owner at Durand's on Park Avenue.

Back in his other personality of the attractive Richard Curtis Van Loan, the Phantom dined on the mezzanine with the publisher. A bright blue cornflower decorated his lapel. He looked as if he didn't have a care in the world, the same handsome loungeer whom society knew and entertained.

But while he made small talk, Van's mental faculties functioned like a high-powered machine. The death of the elderly spinster in the Gramercy Park mansion stood as a challenge before him. The offshoots of the case, like the dark tendrils of a black flower, were deeply hidden. Yet, he was certain that when the earth was spaded away from them they would lead accurately to the motive for the murder and those responsible for it.

Van waited until the adjoining table was vacated by the party of three who had dined there. He leaned slightly forward then.

"What about Mrs. Palmer?" he asked his publisher friend. "Did the Inspector meet her as he expected?"

Havens glanced around cautiously to make sure no one could overhear their conversation.

"Yes. She told him she hasn't been away from her place in Connecticut for a month."

"What about Delmar Palmer's will?" Van continued.



"That was slightly difficult." Havens smiled at the thought. "I had to use a lot of pressure and influence on Masterson. He's the senior partner of the firm of Masterson, Riker and White. Delmar Palmer's attorneys. Palmer's widow gets everything, with the exception of the Palmer Collection and a trust fund to maintain his aunt, Amanda Palmer. In the event of her death the fund reverts to the widow."

"All tied up in a neat package," Van said slowly.

Havens looked across at him with undisguised curiosity. "You think the woman had something to do with it?"

"I think Mrs. Palmer fits somewhere in the case. It's purely a hunch. So far there is nothing concrete to connect her with it."

"And the murder itself?"

"I have an idea there were two people at the Haunted Mansion the night of the killing." Van Loan's tone remained in its slow, even key. "One who went in through the front door; the other who entered via the cellar. The one who used the front entrance was known to Amanda Palmer. He—or she—was a cover for the second caller that night. Somewhere along the line something went wrong. Amanda Palmer had to be killed, and was. But by which visitor? Number One or Number Two?"

"Why?" Havens stressed the word.

"To obtain part of the Palmer Collection. One trunk was removed from the strong room in the cellar. Probably all of them would have been taken had it not been for the fact the callers that night were frightened off by the murder."

"But a week elapsed before the body was found," Frank Havens pointed out. "They had plenty of time to return."

Van shrugged his well-tailored shoulders. "Ample time," he agreed. "But something stalled them."

**H**AVENS waited, but Van lapsed into thoughtful silence. Then the publisher remembered the talk he had had with the Inspector before leaving his office at the Clarion Building.

"I almost forgot," he said. "I have a message for you. Gregg sent a man to the Second Avenue curio shop. The place is closed. From inquiries around, the Inspector believes the man you're interested

in has disappeared. He's sent out a general alarm for Madigan."

"Good. Any word from Steve? I gave him a couple of tough assignments."

"I haven't heard from him," Havens answered.

"When you do," Van said, "impress upon him the necessity of being careful. I've already been warned that I should get in touch with my favorite undertaker. Snapshots were taken of Steve and me in Gramercy Park. They know him, and they might strike at me through Huston."

Havens frowned. To the publisher, Steve was more like a son than an employee. Long ago, when Huston had first started to work for the *Clarion* as a cub reporter, his youthful energy, enthusiasm and ambition had made Havens remember his own early struggle for a foothold on the ladder of success. He had gone out of his way to see that Steve learned the newspaper business from the bottom up, and it was his coaching that had developed Huston's ability to turn in a perfectly written news account.

The thought of harm coming to Steve was intolerable. Frank Havens glanced apprehensively across the table.

"I'll tell him what you said. But don't let anything happen to him. He—he's valuable to the sheet."

Van Loan smiled. He knew how Havens felt about his ace reporter. There was something more to it than Steve Huston being a good man for feature articles.

"Don't worry. Huston's no fool. He might blunder into trouble, but he can always give a good account of himself. I'll keep an eye on him. Now," Van added, "I'll have to cut and get busy. I'm going up to Connecticut this afternoon, to a place called Wayville. The Three Deer Farm."

"That's where Mrs. Palmer lives!" Havens exclaimed.

"So I understand." A faint smile, both amused and sardonic, turned down the corners of Van's mouth. "I have an idea that I'm going to learn something up there. Something important, bearing directly upon the woman they found dead in the music room of the old mansion. . . ."

Not an hour later, the Phantom's big black sedan flashed swiftly along the cement ribbons of the parkway that led from New York into the neighboring state of Connecticut. At its wheel Van, back

in the disguise of the ruddy-faced, loose-mouthed "Mr. Black," watched the miles tick off on the dial instrument before him.

He drove with expert skill, keeping the speed needle at an exact figure while the highway swiftly unwound under the purring tires.

The afternoon had turned hazy and humid. In the west, dark clouds had gathered, with the promise of a storm sometime before evening. Van glanced at them before he shifted his gaze back to the concise penciled directions he had propped up on the instrument panel before him. They told him exactly where to leave the parkway, where to turn for the road into Wayville and where the Three Deer Farm was located.

He reached his first turn some thirty minutes later. Five miles more, and he was in the town of Wayville.

It nestled in a valley between two ridges, a small, unspoiled town with all the charm of its Colonial background. White houses faced the village green. There was a combined general store and post office beside a garage. An old inn with a weatherbeaten sign stood further along the street. Van noticed the name of the inn. It was called "The Eagle's Claw."

He turned that over in his mind speculatively, letting the car cross a bridge spanning a shallow stream. Up a hill through woods and then out into the open country again. One more mile and he had reached his destination.

The late Delmar Palmer's farm spread for many acres over rolling pasture land and wooded terrain. It was a model, beautifully kept tract, half hidden behind a high, whitewashed brick wall. That wall in itself must have cost a fortune to build.

There seemed to be miles of it. The Phantom continued along it until he found the main entrance to the property.

**T**HIS was at its west end between tall iron-grille gates that stood ajar. At their top three bronze deer heads looked at the visitor with lambent sloe eyes. Inside trees and shrubbery made a natural screen to protect the rambling white house that stood beyond.

The house itself was almost a quarter of a mile in from the entrance gates. The Phantom parked his car some distance away from the house, edging it in behind a tall hemlock hedge. He locked the car and went along a stepping-stone path on foot.

As he neared the house he heard music. Someone was playing a piano. Not just an ordinary, musically inclined person finding entertainment in popular pieces on a warm afternoon. This music that came to him was classical, played by one whose touch was professionally sure. By one gifted with a talent so great that the composition being played rose in swelling, majestic grandeur.

The Phantom recognized it as one of the concerti of the Russian, Petrov Zehalka, written during the defense of Stalingrad. It had come to America out of the welter of war. A dirgelike, martial quality marked its measures with frenzied madness and rapture. Hardly the sort of lazy, melodious thing suitable for a humid afternoon.

This music was for a concert hall, for a rapt audience who understood, or thought they did, its cryptic theme.

Only one person of whom Van knew  
[Turn page]



TOPS FOR QUALITY

BIGGER AND BETTER



could render Petrov Zehalka's work in the same brilliant style. The former Marcia Rickand, Delmar Palmer's widow! The Phantom's satisfaction increased. He had telephoned before leaving Manhattan to make sure the woman had returned to the Three Deer Farm after her morning call at Gregg's office. A servant had told him what time she was expected. There would be no waiting, Van assured himself.

He reached the house. The mad music came from a studio in a wing to the south, through open windows where draperies hung motionless. The Phantom pressed a bell that struck a chime and the torrent pouring from the piano ended in diminishing echoes.

After a minute a man came to the door. He was fat and short and wore a houseman's white coat. The Phantom stated his business and was ushered onto a terrace. Scarlet flowers flamed along its edge in a line of red fire. A humming bird quivered above them. Voices sounded from the studio wing of the building.

Several minutes passed, then a screen door opened. The Phantom turned as Mrs. Delmar Palmer came toward him.

His first impression was of her beauty. Dark, tragic beauty expressed in long-lashed, burning eyes beneath the arched crescents of her brows. Shining black hair was drawn back from her high white forehead. Her nose was classically straight, her mouth full-lipped, and as crimson as the flowers at the edge of the terrace. Her skin was clear, almost transparent, and Van could see the tiny pulse that throbbed in her throat.

She wore a simple white dress that accented her vivid charms. She was younger than he had expected. Her figure was slender, curved and streamlined. He caught the flash of the braided Yucatan sandals she wore as she came still closer, the dark eyes intent upon him.

"You are the gentleman who telephoned?"

"From Headquarters." The Phantom showed her the Detective Bureau badge with which Inspector Gregg had supplied him for just such occasions.

"But I spent over an hour this morning at Headquarters." Her voice was a rich contralto. "I answered all the questions asked. I have no further information."

"Probably not on the death of Amanda Palmer," the Phantom said. "I've come up to inquire about something else."

Her gaze continued to hold his. Gradually the Phantom was aware of an unhealthy, almost morbid air cloaking her like an invisible garment. Though her expression remained unchanged, he had an idea that behind the beautiful mask of her face, her mind was working quickly.

"Something else?" she repeated, after she asked him to sit down.

"A storm."

The dark eyes widened. She had seated herself on a rattan settee a few feet away from the Phantom. She was half in shadow, but he was able to see what had come into her eyes and face.

"I don't think I understand."

"The storm that struck the *Triton* off Bermuda, Mrs. Palmer. You were on board that night."

She seemed to shudder involuntarily. One slender hand tightened over the arm of the settee.

"What do you want to know? What can I tell you that wasn't printed in the newspapers?"

She started to say something else and stopped, choking. From a room adjoining came the sound of a telephone's ring. Then the fat man in the white coat was answering it.

"For you, Mrs. Palmer." The houseman opened the connecting door. "Long distance."

## CHAPTER IX

### DEVELOPMENT



RS. PALMER excused herself and went out. The door closed after her. The Phantom caught the drift of heavy perfume on the still air. He sat perfectly still, waiting for her to come back.

Though she had shut the door, Van could hear her low, vibrant voice. It was purposely pitched in a confidential key. Only once or twice she spoke, apparently answering questions.

Then, abruptly, the Phantom heard her say:

"No, don't do that! There are some things I can't stand! And don't call me

again—ever!”

The Phantom looked at his watch. The exact time of Mrs. Palmer's call would be necessary—later. He was standing with his back to the door, looking out over the garden when the woman returned to the room.

“I—I'm sorry,” she apologized. “I had some bad news on the telephone. If you—could possibly come back again. I—I'm not myself.”

There was no disguising her agitation. The tragic face was filled with emotion. The dark eyes held a brooding, frightened look. Van noticed her hands were trembling.

“Certainly, Mrs. Palmer. Some other time.”

The man in the white coat showed him to the door. Another minute and the Phantom was out on the flagged walk.

As he started down it the mad, impassioned music broke out again in the studio. But this time it was not Russian. A swirl of melody in the Sibelius style followed Van back to the parked black car.

He reached for his keys, wheeling around as some swift sense telegraphed a quick warning. His sudden move saved his life! Something like the crack of a whip sounded and a bullet whined above the Phantom's head. It struck the chromium band on the window of the door he stood beside, ricocheting off.

The Phantom's automatic slid into his hand. He whirled around. Faintly traced over a clump of rhododendrons thin gray gunsmoke was dissolving in the humid air.

Risking a second shot, the Phantom circled the dark-leaved shrubbery. But there was no one behind it now—only distinct footprints where someone had waited for him to leave the house and go back to the car.

Van saw the opening in the rhododendrons. Gun in hand he went through it, in time to see the figure of a man running across a stretch of lawn that paralleled the drive to the entrance gates.

He was too far away for Van to throw a shot at him or to recognize him. He wore a gray suit and a pulled-down felt hat. Even as Van watched the man cut through to the drive and vanished through the open bronze gates.

The accelerated hum of a car's engine followed. Then the clash of gears and the scrape of tires.

The Phantom, grim-faced and thoughtful, went back to his black sedan. He ran his thumb over the indentation the bullet had made in the chromium band. A split fraction of a second's delay and his skull, instead of the metal, would have stopped the lead. He unlocked the door and got in, the echoes of the piano music drifting to him through the warm afternoon. Like the music in a nightmare, he thought.

Inspector Gregg's stool-pigeon had had the right dope. The forces responsible for the murder of Amanda Palmer were trying to keep their promise, their threat to “get the Phantom Detective”!

In the few minutes it took Van to drive back to the town of Wayville, he did some deep thinking. Who knew about his visit to the Three Deer Farm? He sifted through possible leaks, centering his attention on two people.

One was Delmar Palmer's widow. She had been told about his phone call. She had had plenty of time to prepare for his arrival, plant a sharpshooter out in the rhododendrons to wait and drop him with a single shot.

Was it the woman? The Phantom's shoulders moved.

The only other person who had advance information on his arrival was the man he had talked to over the wire. The fat houseman. They were the only two, employer and servant, who definitely knew.

He was sure he had not been followed. Of course, there was the possibility the Palmer farm had been watched. But that didn't seem likely on the off chance that the Phantom might, at some unknown time, visit the place.

**R**EACHING the green, Van got out of the car. The local telephone company's building was on its south side, across from the general store and post office. He went in, watching the road from the corner of his eye. A rather stout, pleasant-faced woman at a desk pushed aside some bills she was putting in envelopes and glanced up.

“Something I can do for you?”

The badge he had let Mrs. Palmer glimpse glinted briefly in his hand. Long enough for the pleasant-faced woman to

see. She caught its significance and looked startled.

"The police!"

"A few minutes ago," the Phantom said, "at four twenty-seven exactly a long distance call was put through to the Three Deer Farm. For Mrs. Delmar Palmer. I want to know where it came from."

"I'll have it checked immediately."

The woman reached for a phone. The Phantom took up a position so he could see the green, and the traffic passing. The woman at the desk told him it would take a few minutes.

He thanked her and indicated the inn across the way.

"The Eagle's Claw? I wonder if you know why it was called that."

"Mr. Palmer owned the inn at one time. He gave it that name."

She studied the Phantom curiously. Evidently, he saw, she wasn't in the habit of entertaining New York detectives. Her hands went back to bills and envelopes, but her mind didn't seem to be on them.

"I don't know whether I should tell you this," she said, after a minute, "but it may be important. It's about Mrs. Palmer."

The Phantom turned his head.

"I've read about the murder in Gramercy Park," the woman went on. "Amanda Palmer. She used to come up here summers and stay at the inn. I remember her perfectly for she was quite a character. A sweet old lady, even though she was eccentric. Who would want to kill her?"

The Phantom didn't answer that question. Instead, he asked one of his own.

"You were about to say something about Mrs. Palmer?"

"Yes. The paper said Miss Palmer was killed a week ago Thursday. That Thursday night, around seven o'clock, Mrs. Palmer called from the farm for a taxi to take her to the station. I'm sure about it because I took over the switchboard while Jessie went out to dinner."

The Phantom's eyes narrowed slightly. "Why a taxi? Hasn't she cars at the farm, people to drive them?"

"That's why I thought it was odd."

"There's a New York train around that time?"

"At seven-eighteen."

She was about to add something else when the telephone beside her rang. She

picked it up, reaching for a pencil and pulling a pad around to write on.

"Yes, speaking. Go ahead."

Another minute or two and the Phantom had his information. The call that had come through while he was at the Three Deer Farm had been made from New York. From a number in the Rhineland Exchange. The number he was informed, of a hotel called the Marleigh Court.

There was nothing further to keep him in Wayville. Within a few minutes he was on the smooth four-ply highway that took him back to the congestion of the island metropolis.

Half an hour after he had put the black car in the garage, the Phantom was waiting for Steve Huston at a small restaurant on Lexington Avenue, not far from where the reporter boarded.

It was a quiet tea room sort of place. Van got a table toward the rear and opened the late edition of the *Clarion* he had brought in with him. The Amanda Palmer case was on the first page. Steve had turned in a good story. But it contained nothing that indicated Inspector Gregg expected any immediate arrests.

He finished the account when he saw Huston entering. A glance was enough to tell him that Steve was loaded with information. The reporter's eyes glinted. He slid into his chair at the candlelight table, suppressed his eagerness to talk until the waitress had taken their order, and the Phantom had given him a go-ahead signal.

"The button first, Steve."

"That was a cinch." Huston helped himself to a glass of water and explained. "The Acme Button Works on Canal Street. I saw a Mr. Defoe. The button came from a tuxedo waistcoat." He unwrapped it and handed it over. "It's impossible to check and find the tailoring company that used it."

"Like looking for a haystack in a flock of needles. Right. What about the skipper of the *Triton*?"

STEVE'S freckled face went sober.

"That was a toughie. Twice as hard as any job you ever gave me. Because, the minute Palmer's yacht put in at the Erie Basin, Captain Hayden disappeared."

The Phantom had expected to hear as



much. "But you located him?"

Huston nodded. "Finally. By sheer luck. I did what you suggested—gave the boarding houses a play, but with no results. Then I tried Sheepshead Bay. No one I quizzed had any information about Hayden. They knew him.

"At one time the *Triton* had anchored off Seagate. That's at the end of Coney Island, not far from the Bay, and Hayden had stayed with some people there. But they didn't know where he'd gone or what had become of him. I got a pretty accurate description of him."

"Good. Let's have it."

Huston gave him the particulars of what Captain Amos Hayden looked like.

"I was just about to write it off as hopeless when luck hit me," he went on. "I stopped in a lunchroom for a cup of coffee. I got talking to the short order cook, an ex-sailor whose brother was one of the *Triton's* crew, believe it or not. Swede by the name of Sandborg. He told me he'd seen Hayden a couple of days ago. He said that Hayden was staying in a room at a wharf building operated by the Siwanoy Canoe Club. That was half a mile further on."

The Phantom said nothing, letting Steve pause for breath and supply the rest of it.

"I went there. It's a flimsy, wooden building, two stories. The lower floor is filled with racks holding canoes. There must be a hundred or more. Club members keep 'em there and use them on weekends. I dug up a watchman and asked questions. He didn't know any Amos Hayden. But he did know a party named Stokes who had rented a room upstairs."

"You gave the watchman the same description you gave me," the Phantom said. "Stokes is Hayden or vice versa."

"Right!" Huston frowned. "There's something phony about all this. Why is Hayden covering up? Why the changed name and the hideout?"

"Because he's afraid."

"Of what?"

"What do you think? If you had been the master of a yacht from the deck of which your wealthy employer had been washed, to drown, during a storm, and you'd come back to dry-dock the ship, what would make you take another name and disappear?"

Steve pondered the question. Finally he shook his head.

"I don't know. Unless, of course, there was foul play involved." The Phantom said nothing and Steve's face cleared quickly. "That's it!" he exclaimed softly. "That must be it! Palmer wasn't washed overboard! He was thrown into the sea!"

The Phantom shrugged. "Possibly. But don't jump to conclusions. Crime is a complex thing. In its pattern black often appears to be white. Perhaps you've hit the nail on the head. Perhaps you've missed it by a wide margin. But you've come up with some valuable information and that's what counts. Stand by, because I'll probably need you again."

When he left the tea room, Van took a taxi to the Marleigh Court. He knew the place. It was a small residential hostelry, unpretentious but comfortable. Tucked away on a quiet side street in the East Fifties, the Marleigh Court had none of the flash and glitter of Manhattan's larger hotels.

The Phantom asked for the manager. For the third time the Inspector's badge proved its worth. The manager, a bluff little man with false teeth and hair carefully parted to cover a bald spot, listened to what the Phantom said.

"Take a look at your switchboard records. I want to find out who called Wayville, Connecticut, at four twenty-seven this afternoon. That shouldn't be difficult."

"No, indeed. Sit down and I'll have the information for you in a minute or two."

THE manager hurried away. He was gone five minutes. When he came back he held a regulation telephone-charge slip. His mouth was pursed. The Phantom saw that he looked puzzled.

"This is the memo of the call," he said. "It was made by a guest in Room Nine-0-six. He checked in here a week ago last Thursday. His name was Robert Anderton."

"Was?"

The manager coughed. "I use that tense because Anderton checked out of here at six o'clock this evening. I've asked at the desk and found he left no forwarding address."

"Robert Anderton," the Phantom repeated. "That name's familiar. What did

he look like?"

"A man in the early thirties, sandy-haired, about six feet. Good dresser. He had blue eyes and apparently plenty of money. He tipped well."

The Phantom saw it was on the tip of the manager's tongue to ask why the police were interested in the Marleigh Court's guest. But he didn't and, after thanking him, the Phantom left and took a taxi back to his Park Avenue apartment.

Robert Anderton? The name struck a responsive chord in his memory. Somewhere, recently, he had either read or heard the name. Where and in connection with what?

## CHAPTER X

### STARS BLOT OUT



**B**ACK in his lofty suite Van, on the jut of his terrace, stared out over the checkerboard of the city below. The night lights made geometrical patterns. The evening traffic on the avenue, resembled crawling fireflies. The tall tops of skyscrapers were shafts of steel and stone reaching toward the sky. A million lighted windows were yellow oblongs in the dusk.

"Robert Anderton?" Van said under his breath.

Then, after another thoughtful pause, he went back to the charming lounge room beyond the double French doors of the terrace. The back copies of the *Clarion* that Frank Havens had given Richard Curtis Van Loan were still on the pumpkin-brown top of the tavern table. Van picked them up and pulled a lamp around to the chair he dropped into.

Robert Anderton?

He turned to the accounts he had skimmed through when he had first got the background on the former Marcia Rickand. Half a dozen paragraphs along and he had it. He folded the paper and pushed it aside. But what he had learned, the Phantom saw, was not of much help.

This Robert Anderton who had telephoned the Three Deer Farm and shortly thereafter checked out of the hotel where he had registered the same night Amanda

Palmer had been murdered, had been Marcia Rickand's business manager at the time when she had been at the height of her fame!

Still mulling that fact over, Van Loan was again at the wheel of his car when the storm that had threatened all afternoon broke with a pyrotechnic display. Lightning laced an angry night sky with brilliant designs. The Phantom was halfway over one of the East River bridges when the full fury of the storm struck.

Other cars pulled over to stop and wait for the lashing downpour to abate. But the Phantom kept going, his special rain-lights penetrating the sheet of descending water, his windshield wipers turned to their fullest speed, giving him clear vision.

He left the bridge and, solving a tangle of streets and avenues, came out finally on a broad boulevard that ran straight to the outlying sections of Brooklyn.

The murder pattern he had built up in his mind held his attention closely. He went back over it, beginning with his visit to the Madigan shop. Step by step, detail by detail, he examined the many facets of the crime.

So far the riddle, when analytical deduction was put on it, seemed fairly obvious. As he had told Frank Havens, he was sure that two people had had a hand in the killing of the elderly spinster; one who had entered by the cellar, the one who had come in through the front door.

The person who had gone in via the vestibule had been in dinner clothes. The black button Steve had checked for him told Van as much. It also indicated that Amanda Palmer must have known this person. Otherwise she would not have admitted him and taken him into the music room.

The Phantom's brows knit. Who would the woman know well enough to entertain? Not the Robert Anderton who had been Marcia Palmer's manager. Or would Amanda Palmer know him? Van shook his head. It was possible, but not probable.

He had a hunch that while the man in the tuxedo was at the Haunted Mansion, those he operated with were busy in the strong room in the cellar. He had a deep-rooted feeling that the trunk had been removed that night.

Another question presented itself, puzzling him again. In the seven days that

had elapsed, why hadn't the rest of the Palmer Collection been removed?

There was no immediate answer for that. The Phantom filed it mentally and let his thoughts swing around to the Three Deer Farm, the lead slug that had so narrowly missed him, the information he had picked up at the office of the local telephone company.

Palmer's widow had lied to Gregg. The woman had left Wayville the night of the murder. She had been in New York. Or, if she had got off the seven-eighteen before it reached the city, she had made no mention of it. She had told Gregg she hadn't left the Farm.

VAN pondered that one, holding the car steady while the wind roared around its wheels. The gunman hidden behind the rhododendrons was too much of a coincidence to swallow. Van was sure he hadn't been followed to Wayville. Therefore it argued that the sharpshooter had been tipped and planted. The timing must have been close, as close as the bullet that had missed its mark.

That brought him around to the question of Anderton. Whatever the pianist's former manager had said over the telephone had shaken the woman deeply. What? And, Van asked himself, what kind of a tie-up did Anderton have with the woman now?

Something out of Marcia Rickand's past? Blackmail? Something that Anderton knew about the tragedy in Switzerland? Or the death of Delmar Palmer in the hurricane? The possibilities were many and varied. But conjecture was futile.

The Phantom never based his deductions on surface possibilities, no matter how plausible they appeared. He laid the foundation stones for his cases with meticulous care, so that on them, in time, the structure of fact would rest solidly.

He was near the end of the broad avenue. The thunder still cannonaded, but the swish of the rain was diminishing. Cool, wet air slid past the window the touch of a button lowered.

Ahead, Van caught the black shine of water. He had reached that same neighborhood where Steve Huston, that day, had hunted for a clue to the whereabouts of Captain Amos Hayden.

Following the reporter's directions, the Phantom went east for a half-mile. The huddle of buildings along the waterfront thinned there. He found a place between a clam-digger's shack and a boathouse to park the car. He left it and went on, looking for the building that housed the Siwanoy Canoe Club.

Rain spattered in his face. The brim of his hat dripped. Two men passed him, shapes of shadow in the black. He heard their footsteps on the road, the low rumble of their voices. Another minute or two and Van's flashlight played over the sign on a wooden structure where a second floor window held dim illumination.

The sign said "SIWANoy CANOE CLUB." The Phantom crossed some wooden planking and went down a covered porch built partially on piles sunk in the mud of the Bay's edge. The smell of salt water, accented by the rain, came to him. He passed the entrance to the place where the canoes were racked. Fronting it was a wide, railed runway that led to the wharf below.

A boat with a light in its bow trudged along. The Phantom waited until it lost itself in the gloom. Then he approached the other side of the building, searching for a means to get to the second floor. He found it in the form of a steep flight of stairs. Before he went up them he listened, head averted.

Unless all calculations were wrong, Van expected his meeting with the former captain of Delmar Palmer's yacht to be vitally important to the case. The very fact that Hayden had gone into hiding was in itself significant. If he could get the man to talk—and he had no reason to believe he couldn't—he anticipated interesting disclosures.

The steps were soggy under his feet. A door stood at their head. Water trickled down from the eaves. Van knocked on damp panels. There was no answer. He tried it again, knocking louder. Still no answer.

About to use his master-key, that ingenious invention of a Viennese locksmith against which no door remained closed for long, he tried the white china knob first as a matter of habit. There was no need for the key. As the knob turned under his hand, the lock clicked back and the door creaked open.

The Phantom looked into a small recess used principally as a closet. Hooks in a strip of wood along a plastered wall held an accumulation of garments. There was a second half-opened door to the left. Through that came some of the light he had glimpsed in the window when he had been down the road. It was enough light to guide him across the recess and to the bedroom beyond.

With every step that carried him to the door the Phantom felt his nerves tighten. The wind buffeting the building in gusty puffs. The drip of slackening rain from the roof. The smell of salt water.

Intuition, stirring within him, stopped him at the threshold. There, between wind gusts, he heard a labored, rasping sound. Someone was breathing slowly, painfully! In the next breath of time the Phantom saw and understood.

A LAMP on a pine chest of drawers diffused the glow made by a low-powered bulb. There wasn't much light, but enough for Van to see the man who lay sprawled across a disordered cot. A man in blue striped pajamas, with his hands twisted together, and his eyes peering at the rain spots on the ceiling above!

A man, the Phantom saw immediately, who was an accurate fit to Huston's description. Thick, short-cropped hair, a face bronzed by exposure to sea winds and sun, a strong, muscular body. There was no doubt that he was the Amos Hayden who had disappeared shortly after the *Triton* had returned to the Erie Basin.

The Phantom had found him, but had he found him too late?

The disorder of the room, the overturned chairs and the ominous red stain growing larger on the wrinkled sheets as the Phantom looked, told their own story. He had a fleeting recollection of the two men who had passed him outside. He hurried to the bed, the rasping, convulsive breathing of the man on it giving him a flicker of hope.

There was a chance he was not too late. He grasped at it, bending over Hayden, the torch supplementing the lamp on the pine chest.

A glance was enough to tell him what had happened. Hayden had been shot and left for dead. Blood oozing through the pajama coat at a point close to the heart's

location marked where the bullet had struck. In some miraculous way it must have missed the ventricles of the heart itself, plowing deep into Hayden's body.

While death had not been instantaneous, from the position of the wound and what the Phantom knew about ballistics, as well as the agonized breathing, he understood that the man's life was slipping rapidly away.

"Hayden!" The Phantom's hand dropped to the man's shoulder. "Hayden!"

The fingers stopped their twisting. The staring eyes seemed to come back in focus. The lids went down over them. Weakly, Hayden tried to moisten his dry, feverish lips.

"What—"

The one word seemed pulled up by bodily force from the very depths of his being. It came as a croak, a sibilant, desperate attempt to form other words.

"Who did this?" The Phantom's voice was like a bell. "Why, Hayden? Try and speak! You've got to tell me!"

The man's head lolled from one side to the other. Opening and closing fingers pawed at the sheet beneath him. The lids stayed down over his eyes. For an instant the Phantom thought he had gone, dropping into the deep void that carried him to the dark river of death.

Then, as the Phantom hung over the dying man, Hayden made a final, courageous effort. The eyes opened and looked straight up at Van. The contorted mouth ironed out its tight, sucked-in lines, the fingers stopped their futile groping.

Hayden had just enough breath left to gasp a few cryptic words. Words that engraved themselves on the Phantom's mind as he strained his ears to catch each one.

"They—don't—know!" Hayden's eyes began to glaze over. "Joke—on—them! Sand Island—the name is Godfrey—Ralph Godfrey! He—"

Hayden broke off. Once more the eyes closed and his body relaxed. But he still had enough strength to whisper:

"The music—terrible! They don't know! —Godfrey—"

It was over in another minute.

The Phantom straightened and stepped away from the bed. Whoever had gunned Hayden had come up the stairs. There was no other possible way of entering the second floor room. They must have come

in to talk to him. Hayden had put up a fight—the condition of the room showed that—but he hadn't had a chance.

Van's torch looked at the wet footprints on the mangy rug. Hayden's attackers had come there for one purpose—to kill him. Nothing about the room indicated that they had been looking for anything.

The drawers in the pine chest were closed. Two worn valises in a corner had not been disturbed. A gold watch, some coins, keys on a ring, and a few crumpled bills on a magazine stand beside the bed, which had escaped the scuffle, were in plain view. Robbery had not been the motive.

Rapidly, Van went through the drawers of the chest. The top two contained some clean haberdashery. Nothing else. The other drawers were empty.

He unstrapped and examined the valises, once he used the keys that had been on the stand to unlock them. He sifted through them swiftly, hoping to come across a diary, or some letters. Anything that might have a bearing on what Hayden had told him as life had ebbed like the tides of the sea that had been his highway.

**T**HERE were no letters, nothing of importance in the valises. They held what any seafaring man might pick up in his travels. Souvenirs from ports in the West and East Indies. Packets of colored scenic photographs. A menu from a night club in Havana with a year-old date penciled on it. A scarf and a few woven neckties. A white duck uniform and a blue flannel one. A tin of foreign cigarettes.

At the bottom of the second valise the Phantom found something that brought a sardonic grimace to his face. There, under

some laundered shirts, a .44 caliber Smith and Wesson revolver, its chambers loaded, glinted in the torchlight. A gun that should have been under the captain's pillow, a gun that might have saved his life had Hayden not been so sure that as "Stokes" he was safely hidden from all enemies!

Van Loan let himself out. A telephone call now to Inspector Gregg. Another murder for Gregg to untangle. Another headache for Homicide.

The rain had stopped. Thunder made a faint, faraway echo. A few misty stars were over Sheepshead Bay and the clouds had unscreened the night sky, leaving it patched with blue.

The Phantom headed back toward his parked car. The words engraved in his mind sifted down to two names—Sand Island, Ralph Godfrey. So another character, mysterious and unknown, had been projected onto the screen of the Haunted Mansion murder!

He hadn't been able to talk to Captain Hayden. Yet, Van understood that the dying skipper's statement contained, in capsule form, all the information that might be necessary to crack the case and close it. Expectancy made him move faster along the unlighted road.

He reached his car. Key in hand he moved in close to the driver's seat door. But the key never reached its lock.

Behind him, a foot scraped against stones. Instinctively he wheeled around, reaching for his holstered gun. The Phantom had a reputation of being able to draw and shoot in a single move. Like the thrust of the key that never reached the car's lock, the hand that went after his

[Turn page.]

## Backache, Leg Pains May Be Danger Sign Of Tired Kidneys

**If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.**

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

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, 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 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)



gun failed to touch it.

A figure, shapeless and black, jumped him. The Phantom threw up a left arm to ward off the man and tried to strike with his right. That arm was caught from behind, by someone waiting near the hood of the sedan. A grip of steel held his arm in a vise.

"Let him have it!" a throaty voice snarled.

Abruptly, as a blackjack snapped into action and came whistling down, the misty stars, the blue-patched sky and consciousness were blotted out.

With a roaring in his ears like the machinery of doom clicking off the final minutes of his colorful career, the Phantom Detective collapsed in the road beside the car!

## CHAPTER XI

### SAILOR'S KNOT



**G**RADUALLY, struggling back to normalcy like a swimmer coming to the surface after a deep dive, the Phantom's dulled mind began to register. Sounds and impressions, mixed grotesquely with a throbbing in his head, started to have reality.

He kept his eyes shut. When he tried to open them they seemed weighted down. He was aware, too, of a deadly inertia that robbed him of his strength. He felt weak, helplessly weak. In the past, when he had gone down before overwhelming odds, he had always snapped back quickly. His superb physical condition was responsible for that. No knockout ever lasted long with the Phantom.

Now, however, the inertia and the weakness told him that more than a blackjack's blow had been administered. He knew he had been drugged. The will to shake off the lethargy holding him down was gone. His mind seemed blanketed with a haze he couldn't think through. A weariness greater than he had ever experienced made his eyes leaden and his body useless.

A taste in his mouth like wet rust choked him. Slowly, valiantly he fought off the lingering effects of the drug. Even in those sluggish moments he had enough

interest to try and determine what had been used on him. The study of toxicology was one in which he was well-versed. The science of poisonous drugs told him that one of the barbiturates had probably been hypoed into him. Possibly phenobarbital, in sufficient quantity to keep him limp and inactive.

The reaction he felt was different from morphine. A one-quarter grain tablet of that drug would have clouded his mind completely. He moved one arm, then the other. He tried to wriggle his fingers. He told himself he would be all right in a short time if he wasn't doped again.

Slowly, his numb mind reached out to find the answers to the questions crowding in on him. He was in a car, propped up in a corner of its rear seat. A smooth-running job with good springs and comfortable upholstery. Foggily, at last, he cracked his eyes open, let the blur before them pass and adjusted his vision to his immediate surroundings.

There was a man beside him. The Phantom could see only his profile and that was half-shaded by the down-snapped brim of his hat. There was another man next to him, and a third was at the wheel.

He let these impressions register before he looked out of the window beside him. They were on a four-lane highway. It was too dark to see anything except the black of the countryside. But there was something familiar about the cement strips, the bridges they went under, the hills and valleys. He had a feeling that he had traversed that road no more than a few hours past.

The parkway to Connecticut!

That supposition was verified when the car stopped briefly at a toll booth. It thrummed away, stepping its speed to the legal rate. Now the highway glistened with recent rain. The man on the far side of the seat struck a match for a cigarette. The Phantom closed his eyes. A grunt sounded, the whip of aromatic smoke blew to him.

"How much farther?" the smoker asked.

The driver turned his head slightly. "Not much. What's the matter—gettin' an itch in your heels, Nick?"

"I need a drink," Nick told him. "I'm no camel. I gotta refuel every so often."

The man beside the Phantom said noth-

ing. Van could feel his shoulder touching the fellow. Slowly the effect of the drug began to wear off. The leaden weights left his eyes. Inertia passed, the mists in his mind evaporated.

Suddenly he felt better, except for the ache in his head where the blackjack had glanced off.

Motionless, chin on chest, the Phantom studied the situation. The touch of his left arm against his side told him his gun was gone. They must have searched him while he was out cold. But they hadn't found the jeweled domino mask in the secret pocket. That was too well-hidden.

While the car hummed along, Van smiled cynically. He had told Inspector Gregg he wanted the enemy to come out in the open. He had asked Raff, the stool pigeon, to circulate the news around that he was on the case. For all of his predicament the Phantom felt a certain amount of satisfaction.

He had made progress, despite being cut down and drugged! These men in the car were pieces of the murder puzzle!

**HIS** mind went back to the building where he found Hayden. Hayden's killers must have spotted the black sedan in the dark. They had waited for him to come back from the Canoe Club. As simple as that.

The Phantom's mind quickened. Hayden must have been killed so he wouldn't talk. Talk about what? The Phantom believed he had the answer to that. The *Triton's* skipper knew too much about Delmar Palmer's death at sea. That must be it. It accounted for Hayden going into hiding. For Hayden taking the name of Stokes and holing away in the room on the waterfront.

Yet, there was one flaw in the reasoning. It was a flaw which bothered the Phantom. If Hayden had been on the level, and the hideout would indicate he had been, why hadn't he gone directly to the police with his information? The captain had had ample time, but had done nothing about it. If foul play had stalked the yacht's deck that night, Hayden had kept it a closely guarded secret. The Phantom puzzled over that while the car, leaving the parkway, started over the same road he had used to go to Wayville.

The Three Deer Farm? The Phantom's

nerves tightened. So the shadowy wings of the Angel of Death were fluttering again! The farm must be their destination, the woman the one who had manipulated the scheme to get him there!

Wayville slept peacefully in the rain-gloom. Its white houses were chalky blurs in the murk. The car's tires drummed on the bridge.

"What are the miles made of—elastic?" Nick said.

"We're almost there," the driver informed him.

They were. Suddenly the Phantom made out the high brick wall. But they didn't go through the bronze entrance gates. Instead, the car continued for another half-mile, turned where the wall ended, and bumped along a rutted piece of road.

Finally it made a sharp swing to the right, slowed and stopped, gravel grating under the wheels.

"Okay." The driver shut off the motor, climbed out and fumbled for a cigarette.

He went toward a building a hundred yards beyond where the car had stopped. Nick opened the door beside him. He stepped out with all the satisfaction of one who was glad the ride was over.

"Wait a minute." The cold, precise voice of the man whose shoulder had rested against the Phantom's, speaking for the first time, slashed the silence like a knife.

The Phantom's lips tightened. That voice was familiar. He had heard it only once before, but he never forgot a voice. Quickly, on his inner vision, he had a picture of a second-hand curio shop, of a thin, angular face, of muddy-colored eyes with yellow glints. More like a cat's eyes than a man's. In memory he saw a beaky nose, a thin-lipped mouth, and mouse-colored hair growing thickly over lobeless ears.

Madigan, the curio dealer who had closed up and cleared out before the police could investigate him!

The voice verified another of the Phantom's suspicions. From the first moment he had seen the tarnished snuff-box with its eagle's claw mark, he had placed Madigan as either a fence or a common thief. Then, after the body of Amanda Palmer had been found in the music room, his suspicions had doubled. There was more to Madigan's connection with the spin-

ster's murder than a trunk containing some of the famous Palmer Collection of art treasures.

"Pardon me while I stretch," Nick said.

"Find Bodie. Bring him back." Madigan's tone was like ice. "What am I supposed to do—carry this gumshoe in by myself?"

Nick laughed and whistled. The driver came back.

"Jerry wants us to lend a hand." Nick went around to the left side of the car.

"Haul him out," Madigan ordered.

The Phantom went limp. Nick grunted when he got an arm under Van's knees and pulled him off the seat.

"This guy's a load of lead. Take his shoulders, Bodie."

"How long does the dream stuff last?" Bodie asked, as he followed directions and both his hands got a grip on the Phantom's shoulders.

"Long enough," Madigan replied briefly. "Come on—lift!"

Bodie was much stronger than Nick. Together, they got the Phantom through the car door and out into the damp dark. Madigan went on ahead, across a graveled expanse and up a dirt path leading to what the Phantom saw was a small cottage.

**P**ROBABLY it was a gardener's house. Or a stableman's residence on the estate. Behind it loomed barns, railed enclosures.

Madigan opened a door of the house and turned on some light. Nick puffed as he and Bodie mounted four wooden steps, crossed a narrow veranda and went in through the front door.

"Dump him back here." Madigan's voice sounded from the end of a hall.

Another minute and the Phantom was dropped on a mattress spread along an uneven floor in a rear room. Bodie lowered him with some care, but Nick let his legs go with a grunt of relief.

"Two hundred pounds if he weighs an ounce!" He got his breath back after a cough.

"One eighty-five," Bodie rejoined, hitting the weight nail accurately on the head. "What do we do now, Jerry?"

"You two hang around and watch him. I might not get word until tomorrow afternoon—what *he* wants done with him. I've got to get back to town. I'm leaving the

needle. Keep him doped. Any time he wakes up and shows signs of coming around, give him a jab. And don't forget—this party's a top operator. He knows all the answers, and he's double dangerous. He'll trick you in a minute if he gets the chance. Just keep that in mind, unless you want a ticket through to the heat seat!"

"Don't worry," Nick said. "I've handled big shots before."

"Tie him up," Madigan said, after a pause. "There's some rope out in the tool-house. Use some of those sailor knots of yours, Bodie."

"Right."

The Phantom opened one eye. He had a view of a fairly large, square room. Its furniture—wooden kitchen table and several chairs—was augmented by a built-in cupboard. The wallpaper was in good condition, the light came from a wall sconce, gaudily silvered.

Madigan had walked to the hall door, with Bodie beside him. The Phantom's first glimpse of Bodie showed him that the man who had driven the car had the appearance of a seaman. The way he walked and the tattooing on both hairy arms, below rolled-up shirt sleeves, furthered the impression. He had carrotty hair, and looked like a Scandinavian.

Both he and Madigan went out.

The Phantom focused his half-opened eye on Nick. Nick had pulled one of the chairs around, tilted it back against the wall and was trying it for balance. He pushed a fresh cigarette between his shapeless lips and tore a paper match from a book.

Nick was typical of the type the Phantom Detective found in his crime war. He was dark-faced, furtive-eyed, slender, and dapper in cheap, flamboyant clothing. The kind who did trigger jobs for higher-ups and specialized in all forms of major crimes.

The Phantom understood that both Nick and Bodie were paid tools for the person Madigan had mentioned. Madigan had said "*he*" and to the Phantom that meant plenty. It meant that behind the double murders, and his own snatch this night, the brains of the man who hired the three operated behind a veil of secrecy.

It was that person the Phantom wanted to meet. For, he understood, when he met

that one face to face he would have the shadowy force that had planned the deaths of Amanda Palmer and Amos Hayden. He would know then how accurate his suspicions were, how correct his assumption that Delmar Palmer had been murdered as surely as his elderly aunt had been.

Bodie came back about the same time the engine of the car out in the dark kicked into life. Bodie had a length of thin rope coiled over an arm. In his other hand he carried a pasteboard box, long and narrow.

"Here's the needle," he said to Nick. "Keep it handy. And help me roll this lug over while I gift-wrap him."

Nick lent a hand and the Phantom felt Bodie's coil of rope wind around him. It was pulled tight at wrists and ankles, lashed effectively and secured with a couple of nautical knots.

"I guess that does it." Bodie straightened. "Where's that bottle? I need a tingle!"

## CHAPTER XII

### GRAY CAR



EASILY Steve Huston, in Gregg's office at Headquarters, looked at his watch. It was ten A. M. to the minute. Four hours, the reporter reflected, since the Phantom's sleek, super-powered sedan had been found parked between the clam-digger's shack and boat-house at Sheepshead Bay.

Four long hours since the watchman at the Siwanoy Canoe Club explained how he had gone up the steep stairs, when he had heard a door banging in the morning breeze, to find the body of Amos Hayden—"Stokes," as he knew him—lifeless on the red-stained bed.

Steve looked haggardly across at the Inspector's grizzled head. Gregg had alerted the entire Force. The Department's best men were out looking for the Phantom, using every means at their disposal to get a clue to his whereabouts.

To Steve the scuffle marks in the road beside the black sedan told their own story. Those, coupled with the fact the Phantom had not kept a nine o'clock appointment with Gregg, were enough to tell

the reporter what had happened.

Huston didn't want to believe that the master-detective had met the same fate as the *Triton's* captain. Too many times the Phantom had successfully skirted the precarious precipice of death. Too many times he had been struck down by the sheer weight of overpowering numbers, only to stage a brilliant comeback.

Yet, Steve reminded himself, there was always a first time for everything!

Gregg finished talking on one of the telephones and looked over at him.

"You'd better get back to your office." The Inspector's voice was gruff, as if to cover his feelings. "I'll let you hear as soon as I have any word."

"Yeah, I guess I'd better blow." Steve pulled himself together. "Look, Inspector. Make this try one of your best. Because, if we flop, we won't get another chance."

"Go on—move!" Gregg stuck out his hand. "And stop worrying. For all we know the Phantom may have let himself be picked up last night."

Steve faded, on that bit of hope. The minute he was gone Gregg thumbed through a small book in which he kept a few secret telephone numbers. He found the one he wanted, put a call through, and spoke carefully and concisely when the number finally answered.

Steve Huston, splurging on a taxi, got out in front of the Clarion Building. A couple of his fellow scribes noted this show of extravagance. They crowded into the same elevator with Steve, kidding him.

"So the sheet's star shows up for work after ten and arrives in a taxi no less," one of them gaged.

"I'll bet he has his stuff ghost-written," the other gibed.

"Naw. He couldn't get a self-respecting spook to dream up his brand of hoke. Haven't you been reading the Haunted Mansion Murder—to be continued?"

Huston paid no attention. He was too worried. At his desk he tried to get his mind on his work. He had a follow-up on his last edition story of yesterday, but he couldn't keep his thoughts on Gramercy Park or what he had to write.

An hour later he called Miss Sawyer in the anteroom of the office of the owner of the paper. The secretary told him that Mr. Havens hadn't come in yet. Steve hung up, brooded for a few more mo-

ments, then shot a call through to Headquarters.

He had no luck there, either. Inspector Gregg, a cop with a brogue told him, had gone out.

The walls seemed to close in around him. Sitting there, waiting for developments while time ran away, was intolerable. Steve got up and jammed on his hat. He headed for the swinging glass doors that opened on the corridor where the elevators stopped. Five minutes later he was down in the street, walking west, hardly conscious of the sun in his face or the people jostling him.

He picked up a cup of coffee in a lunchroom near Seventh Avenue, chain-smoked a half-dozen cigarettes, and went back to the street. The idea of the Green Spot hit him. The rendezvous where he so often met the Phantom was only a few streets away. Maybe if he went there and waited, the Phantom would show.

He shook his head at the idea. If the Phantom wanted him he would have contacted him long before this. That was out. But what could he do? Wandering aimlessly wouldn't solve any problems. Yet inactivity was maddening.

**A**NOTHER street, and Steve stopped on the corner before crossing. A patrolman's whistle shrilled and the traffic lights turned red for pedestrians. A long line of cars began to move forward. Suddenly Steve's strained nerves jangled. Not three feet away from him he saw something that sent an electrical thrill rushing through him.

A gray Lincoln sedan, its windshield rain-spotted except where the twin wipers made half circles, had started away.

Like a flash of lightning Steve's mind darted back to Gramercy Park and a gray Lincoln that had slowed there while somebody snapped a camera at the Phantom and him. At the time Steve's trained, reportorial eye had noticed that the license plate on its rear bracket had been slightly tilted and pushed back a trifle.

This gray car's black plate was at the same angle!

The identical car? He had to find out!

Huston pushed past people waiting at the curb and jumped on the running board of an empty taxi. The driver twisted around as Steve got the door open and half

fell in.

"I wouldn't do that again, buddy," the cabbie drawled. "Not unless you carry a couple of legs for spares."

"Tail that gray Lincoln!" Steve's voice was tight with excitement. "Five bucks if you stick with it!"

The hackie turned all the way around. "What goes, big stuff? Copper?"

"Ten bucks!" Steve's voice cracked. "He's getting away! I'm working for Center Street—Homicide!"

For an instant the reporter chilled at the thought of the taximan's refusal to turn a wheel until he saw a badge. But the driver didn't ask. Instead, he slipped the taxi through a hole in the traffic and got the gray sedan in view again.

"Okay, bud. Why didn't you say so in the first place? Watch me shag that baby ahead. It's done with mirrors!"

"Watch out he doesn't look in his and get wise!"

The hackie laughed. "Relax. I'm an expert at this hide-and-seek racket. You're not the only square-toe I've had on board."

At Columbus Circle, with its four directional traffic lights and carousel of cars, Steve had a bad minute or two. The gray Lincoln had turned west. For a dozen hollow pulsebeats he thought sure the car had slipped him.

But once the lights were green again, his chauffeur got under way, narrowly missed a collision with a truck, slid in front of it and Steve, tense on the edge of the seat, saw the gray car a block ahead.

"A boat ride from here on," the hackie assured him.

South on Eleventh Avenue, hemmed in by vans and trucks, they went along for five blocks. The gray sedan worked its way over to the curb. The taxi kept well back of it, Steve marveling how anyone could drive with a definite pattern in the surrounding congestion of vehicles.

"He's stopping. What do I do now—pass, or pull over?"

"Pull over," Huston directed.

The taxi stopped. Steve pushed a ten-dollar bill into a receptive hand. He told the man to wait and hurried down the pavement, his gaze riveted on the man who had got out of the Lincoln.

The man, thin and spare, turned the corner. Without a backward glance he went through the front doors of what Steve saw



was a combined pool hall and tavern. The name "GILLIAN'S" decorated a sign under crossed cues and pyramid of pool balls.

Both front windows displayed brewers' placards and an advertisement of the coming Friday night bouts at the Stadium A.C. Huston swallowed the breath caught in his throat and, slowing down, pushed the double doors open and went on in.

A sloppy, conventional bar was in the front section. Morning habitues of the neighborhood rested elbows on it, talking together. Two bartenders filled glasses, and a few of the unemployed lounged around in wooden chairs, yawning apathetically over tabloids the house supplied.

Steve edged his way up to the mahogany and, jingling a quarter on it, ordered beer. He looked for the man he had followed in. He pegged him after a minute, finding him in conversation with a gray-haired, red-faced man in shirt sleeves. Both were a little distance away in a barnlike room where several pool tables were in play.

**F**ROM where Huston stood he was able to get a good look at the man. A hard character with his mousy hair, angular face, jutting nose and hooded eyes. Huston took him in slowly, with mingled feelings. Was he on the right track?

It wasn't likely there would be two gray Lincolns with license plates in the same pushed-out-of-place position. This must be the car that had slipped their pursuing taxi at Gramercy Park. Therefore, Steve argued, the man with the mousy hair must be tied into the murder plot somewhere. He drank his beer, coaxing it along, while he kept the man in view.

The other man seemed in no hurry. After a few more words with the red-faced man he talked to, he walked into the back room and, dropping into a chair, watched a couple of pool sharks at work.

Steve felt let down. He didn't know what he had expected. Not an impasse, a slow-up like this. What was the next thing to do? Outside, he had a taxi ticking off nickels and dimes. Inside, a person he considered a valuable lead was in the act of lighting a cigarette and giving every indication of dawdling there indefinitely.

Huston knew that detective work required patience. But he couldn't go on drinking beer while he killed time. After a second glass he had an idea. He crossed to

the back room and pretended deep interest in the pool balls clicking on a table several yards away from where the man with the mouse-colored hair sat.

Once or twice Steve saw the hooded eyes move in his direction. He looked away, yawned, and glanced at his watch. Five minutes more passed. Then ten.

Finally, when Huston's inner nervousness began to get the better of him he had action.

A young man coming in from the street loomed up in the doorway. Steve noticed his red-rimmed eyes, the brown suit he wore, the black hair combed flat on his slightly bullet-shaped head. His nose was crooked, and he walked on his toes, lightly and like a dancer or a boxer.

The mouse-haired man registered some interest as the fellow edged around a table and advanced to him.

"Hello," Steve heard him say. "About time you showed up."

"Sorry. I got stalled."

"Let's go upstairs."

The man with the hooded eyes stood up. Without further comment he turned and led the way to a door on the left side of the room. The wearer of the brown suit followed and both went out.

Watching, Steve knew he had to move and move fast. Trying not to attract attention he headed for the door. Nobody appeared interested in him. He opened the door and found a short hall and a flight of stairs behind it. Above, he heard a voice saying:

"This is feed-box stuff. I got it from Cassidy. He's one of the Inspector's prize dicks. You probably know him. Big guy with shoulders like a piano mover's."

Steve started up the stairs, a breath catching in his throat. Cassidy? Reference to the plainclothes man seemed to cinch it. He was on the right track! Now if he were lucky—

He stopped several steps from the top of the stairway. Footsteps on a wooden floor ended in the opening and closing of a door. Huston finished his climb, and paused to get his bearings. There were three doors ahead of him, around a bend in the corridor. Excitement began to buzz within him again.

He told himself that all he had to do was find the right door and listen. But which door?

Cautiously he started toward the bend in the hall, trying to keep his feet from making a noise on the flooring. Caution, he discovered sixty seconds later, was not at all necessary. The opening and closing of the door he had heard was a ruse. The two men hadn't gone through it. Instead, both were waiting, standing flat against the wall behind the bulge in the hall, waiting for him!

The man with the mouse-colored hair held a gun waist-high in his right hand. Steve almost ran into it as he swung around the bend. He stopped dead in his tracks while he stared into a pair of muddy-colored eyes.

"All right. Freeze!" The man snarled it sibilantly. Without moving head or eyes, he said to his companion, "Give him a feel. See if he's loaded."

Hands padded over the reporter.

"Clean," the other man said. "No wep." The man with the gun smiled thinly.

"Let's step inside and split a little conversation. Unless I'm mistaken I've seen your face somewhere before. In a candid camera shot, maybe. You and some other guy. Go on—move!"

The door stayed open this time.

Huston went through it, the blunt nose of the automatic prodding him.

### CHAPTER XIII

#### ARRIVALS



JUST at the time the *Clarion* reporter had been parked at Gillian's bar, the Phantom, on the mattress in the back room of the cottage at the Three Deer Farm, watched the sun yellow the wallpaper across from where he lay.

The night hours had seemed interminable. Bodie and Nick had taken turns watching. While one smoked and hit the bottle for an occasional lift, the other, chin on chest, had snored.

In that fashion the long hours had turned the night to dawn, and the dawn into the bright, sunny morning outside.

Van hadn't moved on the mattress. Madigan's suggestion that they needle him if he showed activity had been enough to keep him quiet. He didn't want another shot of dope to dull his senses. He had a

feeling, sharp and sure, that Madigan would be back—with orders as to what the top man of the murder ring wanted done to and with him.

But he hadn't entirely wasted the passing time. Warily, at every possible moment, he had worked on his bonds. An old hand at solving the intricacies of a rope truss-up, the Phantom's efforts to loosen his bonds had finally been rewarded.

Bodie's sailor knot was not as tight now as when it had been made, hours earlier. There was a slack of rope where it went around the Phantom's ankles. His wrists, behind him, were almost entirely free. When he had been lashed he had made sure that his joints were distended enough to permit a slight space when he relaxed them. That, too, was a trick he had learned and used in many dangerous spots.

The smell of coffee being made in the kitchen of the cottage came to him. Hunger gnawed at him. Bodie was in there, whistling under his breath while he whipped up something to eat. Nick, adding another cigarette stub to the volcano of ashes on the floor, walked to the window, glanced out and shook himself.

"How about the brew?" he called to Bodie.

"Coming right up."

Bodie came in a minute later with a steaming cup.

"A big farm, and not a cow around to give enough milk to color this stuff. Funny, eh?"

"A scream. I take mine black anyway." Nick reached for the cup. "Where's my hat? I want to fan it."

"How's the guest gettin' along?" Bodie turned around and looked over at the mattress.

"Hasn't moved an inch since we dumped him." Nick blew on the coffee. "That shot must have been strong enough to drop an elephant."

"Sure he hasn't conked out on us?"

"He's breathin'." Nick shrugged. "Suppose he does help himself to clouds? Mebbe we'd all be better off."

"Don't get smart." Bodie's tone dropped. "This party's important. The cops would make plenty concessions to get him untangled."

"One of them things?" Nick nodded. "What time does Jerry come back?"

"You heard what he said."

"Yeah. But I don't like the country. Too many trees. How do I know I won't get fresh air poisoning or colic? I'm strictly city."

Nick finished the coffee and slumped back in his chair, yawning. Bodie ducked into the kitchen, and Van heard the rusty creak of a pump, water splashing.

Ten minutes later Bodie was back in the doorway again.

"I'm going to get a breath of air. I'm all cramped up from sittin'."

"Go ahead." Nick sounded disinterested.

Bodie went through the room and out to the hall. He walked heavily, with the nautical roll, as if he were on the deck of a ship. In the front of the house a door opened. The Phantom looked at Nick speculatively. At any time now Madigan would be coming back—with orders. Orders, Van knew, concerning his own fate.

He decided to make his break without further delay.

One adversary was always easier to beat than two. Nick didn't impress him as being as tough as Bodie anyhow. In his present condition, the Phantom didn't want extra competition. He felt all right, but he wouldn't know about his own strength until he tested it. Through a half-open eye he appraised the lounging Nick.

THE Phantom moved his feet on the mattress. He breathed hard and heavily, turning his head from side to side like a sleeper just regaining consciousness. The tilted legs of Nick's chair banged on the floor. He got up and walked over.

"Where am I?" The Phantom's voice was thick and bewildered.

His acting ability was perfect in whatever role he chose to play. This one—that of a drugged sleeper throwing off the shackles of doped slumber—had Nick completely fooled. The man stood close to the mattress. The Phantom could practically read his mind. Nick was trying to decide whether to use the needle in the box on the table or call Bodie.

In that moment of Nick's indecision, the Phantom saw his opportunity and grasped it.

He turned over on his side. The hands he had freed from their bonds slipped away from the rope loops. At the same instant he kicked his ankle lashings off. Split-second timing gave Nick little chance to stave off the attack.

The Phantom reached out and got the man at the knees. Like the crushing tentacles of an octopus he put iron pressure into the encircling grip. His head pressed into the pit of Nick's stomach, while, with a forward jerk of his arms, he threw the fellow off balance.

Nick yelped as the Phantom opened his arms and let him fall. The Phantom's fist helped flatten the man. Nick struck the uncarpeted floor with a thud that jarred the cottage.

The Phantom had Nick's gun the next instant. He ripped it out of Nick's side pocket, tapped him on the head with its butt and hurried to the door. Nick's yelp had been loud enough to have been heard at some distance. Loud enough to bring Bodie running. Van caught a glimpse of the tattooed toughie cutting across a cleared space to the left of the house.

The Phantom was down the short hall and in the shelter of the front door Bodie

[Turn page]

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had left open when the man's feet clattered on the porch. The Phantom's arm went up, Nick's gun reversed again. He brought it down in a sweep as Bodie bulled his way through the door.

The Phantom could feel the crack of bone through the steel of the weapon he held. But Bodie was like an ox. He reeled away from the blow, eyes bulging, his mouth twisted with pain. Instead of going down he bounced off the opposite wall like a squash ball Richard Curtis Van Loan might have struck with his racket. And like the ball, he hurtled back.

The Phantom left-hooked him on the rebound, but Bodie kept on coming. Van had no chance to trigger the gun, still held the wrong way in his hand. Bodie's impact jammed him against the door. He felt a pawing hand wrench Nick's pistol out of his fingers. The next moment he had shifted from the offensive to a desperate effort to hold Bodie off.

A hot breath fanned his face. Blazing eyes burned into his. The man's mouth, pain-twisted and leering, snarled oaths.

Well-schooled though he was in the art of close-in brawling, the Phantom realized Bodie would probably rate as one of the most formidable adversaries with whom he had ever tangled. The former sailor, groggy from the skull blow, still had enough to give a good account of himself. His super-strength, in connection with what the Phantom knew was pugilistic skill, gave Van a busy few minutes.

He ducked most of Bodie's blows, rolling with the others. He blocked uppercuts and left jabs powerful enough to have kayoed him had they reached vulnerable spots. He let Bodie's fury wear itself down, content to weather the storm before taking the offensive again.

The Phantom knew he didn't have too much time. Nick would be coming out of it soon. And a jab of the needle would put Van back on the mattress for another space. He had to do something and do it fast.

Bodie was so close that the buttons on his coat rubbed against the Phantom's chest. The man's face was a red mask. The oaths still ripped from his contorted mouth. But the Phantom felt that Bodie was slowing. Now the precisionlike delivery of the blows were lacking their first speed and accuracy. Bodie began to miss

and miss badly.

The Phantom sidestepped and got around to the more open ground in the center of the hall. Again Bodie charged. The Phantom drew back and shot out a leg. Bodie tripped over it and, arms swinging, stumbled in the direction of a narrow flight of stairs. The Phantom had him before he could right himself.

**H**E GOT a throathold and forced Bodie against the bannisters. His thumbs dug in on either side of the man's windpipe. As he applied more pressure, the Phantom grew conscious of two things—one, that Nick was on his feet and coming out of the back room, and the other, that a car had rolled into the sunlit space in front of the cottage!

Over Bodie's shoulder, the Phantom's narrowed eyes took in the picture of a gray sedan that had come to a stop. He saw Madigan opening the rear door. Another man, at the wheel, was half-turned looking toward the cottage.

Reinforcements!

Bodie went limp in the Phantom's relentless grip. The ex-sailor's legs buckled under him. The Phantom let him go and turned his attention to Nick—without a minute to spare.

Nick had caught up the gun wrenched from Van's hand and was thumbing it off safety. As the Phantom charged at him, the gangster tried to angle the rod for a snap-shot. He squeezed the trigger, but the bullet missed by a wide margin. It splintered the glass transom over the front door just as Madigan reached the porch.

The man with the mousy hair ducked and scuttled out of range.

The Phantom had Nick before he could fire again.

He caught Nick's pistol wrist, jerked him forward, snapped his arm back, got the gun while Nick screamed with pain. But the hoodlum was not finished. He seemed to fumble with his left hand as if reaching for a hidden weapon.

The Phantom threw a shot at him that hit Nick in the shoulder.

Smoking gun ready for use, the Phantom ran toward the door. He reached the porch at the same time Madigan's fast sprint had taken him back to the gray Lincoln.

The man with the muddy eyes tore the rear door open and threw himself in. Against the sun-glare, the Phantom had a momentary view of the man at the wheel. But it was no clear picture, an impression only of a narrow-brimmed felt hat, a shaded face.

The Phantom started toward the car. From somewhere in the cottage he heard the bang of a door. Then from around the edge of a woodshed Bodie appeared, shouting something unintelligible. The car's accelerated motor roared. As at a signal, Bodie lurched toward it, gaining speed as he ran.

The Phantom brought his gun up. He fired twice, but didn't stop the fleeing Bodie. He was sure, however, that both his shots had struck the car. Bodie reached it as Madigan, teetering in the tonneau door, grabbed him by the shoulders and pulled him into the sedan.

With a clash of shifting gears the Lincoln sprang away.

The Phantom breathed its dust. Then, as if for good measure, Madigan's arm curved out of the wound-down window. The sun sparked on the long barrel of the gun he thrust out. He fired four times—wildly, aimlessly.

The Phantom took a final shot at the tires before the car and its passengers disappeared!

His face grim, Van went back to the cottage. There was no sign of Nick in the hall. The sprinkling of blood on the floor led through to the back room and then to the kitchen and out to wooden steps. Nick crouched there near a hand pump, sopping a stained handkerchief in water and trying to staunch the wound in his shoulder.

"I'm through!" he chattered. "Do something for me! I'm bleeding to death!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### TAXI



ASHIONING a tourniquet when he got Nick back in the kitchen, the Phantom examined the man's wound. Lead hadn't gone into Nick's flesh. The bullet had ridged the top of his arm and continued on.

There wouldn't be any probing for a bullet.

The tourniquet applied, the Phantom gave the pallid-faced, frightened toughie a drink from the bottle in the back room. Nick stopped moaning and lapsed into sullen silence. The Phantom let him stretch out on the mattress and studied him meditatively.

"How do you feel?" he asked, after a long pause.

Nick shook his head and opened his eyes. "Terrible. I'm practically dead."

"You'll live." The Phantom leaned over him. "You'll live and you'll sit on high voltage! You look all right. Pull yourself together. This is your cue to talk!"

"I don't know from nothin'!" Nick whined. "If I did I'd give you an in. Look what they did to me. My pals—they powdered! Leavin' me behind to take the rap!"

The Phantom stared into his sullen face. "You were mixed up in a murder in Gramercy Park."

"Me—no!"

"Don't lie. You killed Miss Palmer!"

The Phantom's voice was like polished steel. Nick licked his lips. He put up his good arm as if to ward the Phantom off.

"I didn't have nothin' to do with it! So help me!"

"You were there that night!"

Nick began to crack. Slowly, but surely, Van saw him start to crumble. The fact that his pals had run out on him and the Phantom's insistence had beaten down his resistance.

"I was there that night. But I didn't have nothin' to do with it. My job was to break a padlock and get a trunk out of the cellar. What went on upstairs I wouldn't know."

"A trunk?"

"Yeah. Jerry Madigan was promised a trunk with a lot of stuff in it for doin' a job for the boss. He got it after the job was done."

The lids went further down over the Phantom's glinting eyes. What Nick said cleared a point for him. It explained why the other trunks in the cellar of the Haunted Mansion hadn't been removed. He had puzzled over that. Now he understood. So Anderton—or somebody—had dealt out a share of the Palmer Collection in payment for a job Madigan had handled.

Swiftly, the Phantom changed the sub-



ject. "What about Bodie?"

"I used to pal around with him in the old days." Nick's voice turned to a sneer. "I met him last month, after I hadn't seen him for quite a while. He says, do I want to make myself a grand? He knows a party who needs a couple of strong-arms. I'm broke, so what can I do?"

"Bodie used to be a sailor?" When Nick nodded, the Phantom added, "On a yacht called the *Triton*?"

"That's right!" Nick looked surprised. "He'd just come back from a cruise when I ran into him."

To the Phantom the murder picture began to clarify. Quickly he placed the facts in order. They added up to make a magnificent score.

If Anderton, Marcia Rickand's former manager, was the head man in the plot, he had employed Jerry Madigan to run it off. Madigan must have planned the murder of Delmar Palmer, at sea. Bodie, the strong-arm, had been a member of the crew. That, in itself, was revealing.

As payment to Madigan for the financier's drowning, Madigan had been promised some of the Palmer Collection. This payment had been made, the treasures sold to some South American millionaire where they would be outside the reaching hand of the law. But inadvertently two pieces from it which Richard Curtis Van Loan had seen in the second-hand shop had been responsible for the Phantom's connection with the case.

Van turned from the white-faced gunman on the mattress. As he straightened, he heard the sound of wheels outside. A car that needed a new muffler had turned into the cleared space fronting the cottage. Into Nick's dull eyes came a sudden gleam of hope. From the window the Phantom peered out at a taxicab with a New York license plate. He watched while the hackie climbed down and went around to open the door of his cab.

Then Van's tightened nerves whipped to attention.

**T**HE hackie helped his fare out. In the blaze of the sun, the Phantom Detective had to look twice to make sure he wasn't seeing things. Unless his eyes were tricking him, the passenger being assisted to the ground was Steve Huston!

The Phantom called from the window,

the cabbie and Steve came piling into the cottage.

"Steve! How in the world!"

"I didn't start up here in that chariot," the reporter said shakily. "But I'm certainly glad to arrive in it, Phantom! Particularly after the way you blazed away at the gray sedan!"

"You mean you were in the Lincoln?" the Phantom asked incredulously.

Steve nodded. "On the back seat. All the time you were standing out there firing at it."

The taxi man's name was Cliff Rowley. Huston let him do the explaining:

"Like this," he said. "The guy here tells me to wait and ducks into Gillian's. I let the meter click and a half-hour goes by. Then I see him come out, with another guy. From where I sit it looks like he has a rod on him. To me it looks like a snatch."

He stopped.

"Tell him the rest of it," Steve said.

"Okay. The two of them—this party and the other—climb into the gray heap I'd been ten-bucked to follow. It looks phony as heck. This gent here has told me he's a copper. Besides, there's thirty minutes' fare on my clock."

"So you tailed the gray car again?" the Phantom said.

"All the way up the Parkway. I lose it when we make the turn-off. Then I pick it up again down near the bridge. It's got a flat rear tire and there's nobody in it except him." He indicated Steve.

"They stuck me with a needle," Huston said, taking it from where Rowley left off. "I began to snap out of it about a half-hour ago, just before we pulled in here. But I kept quiet. When they left in a hurry I thought I was finished. One of your shots must have got a rear shoe and started a leak. It blew when we were nearly to the bridge."

He stopped and looked at Van and his prisoner. Nick's ears were quivering.

"All three of them left the car," Steve went on. "The tall one, who took Madigan's place at the wheel in town, seemed afraid you were coming after them. He said he wasn't taking any chances. A few minutes after they started down the road they stopped a passing car and piled in. Then Rowley came along, picked me up and I showed him how to get here."

A wave of relief spread through the Phantom. Luck, he saw, had dealt him the top cards that day. He smiled over at the reporter before he spoke again.

"Good work, Rowley," he said. "You'll be taken care of for this. Now, I'm going to use your cab to take this bloodstained gunman to the local lockup. All right, Nick. On your feet!"

They got in the taxi. Out on the main road, the Phantom told Rowley to drive in through the bronze gates. He had him stop the cab at almost the same place he had parked the black sedan the humid afternoon he had listened to the mad piano music.

"Wait."

He went on up the stepping-stone walk. Birds chirped in the trees. The perfume of the gardens came to him on a soft breeze, bland and fragrant. He walked on to the house.

Now there was no music to greet him. Only that of the tree choirs. He saw that the garage doors were shut, an air of vacancy about the place. He pressed the bell, intuitively realizing that no one would come to answer it.

Three Deer Farm was as deserted as the Haunted Mansion!

The Phantom walked around the house. The shades were drawn at the windows. He tried the back door. That, too, was locked. The Angel of Death had spread her dark wings and flown!

The Phantom went back to the taxi, with a word to Rowley:

"Let's go."

They passed the abandoned Lincoln on the other side of the little bridge. The Phantom gave it a sharp look. Unless he was mistaken, the gray car was to yield some valuable clues for him to work on. Fortunately, he observed, no one seemed to have investigated its presence there, so far.

**S**HORTLY the cab pulled up in front of the Wayville Police Station. Alone, the Phantom went in. A coatless man at the Traffic Window gave him a curious stare.

"Something I can do for you?"

"I want to see your chief. Personal and important."

The man stared harder. There was something in the Phantom's tone that told

him the matter was urgent.

"Yes, sir. He's busy, but you can go right in. This way."

A door opened and the Phantom walked into a rear office. Police Chief Harmon pushed some papers aside and glanced from him to the officer who had brought him in.

"This gentleman wants to see you, Skipper. Says it's personal and important."

He withdrew and shut the door.

Van sized up Harmon with one direct, appraising look. The police chief was middle-aged, gray-haired, heavily-built and dignified. Van liked the crisp way he shook hands and asked him to sit down.

"I don't believe I have had the pleasure of meeting you before," Harmon said.

In reply, the Phantom's hand came away from the secret pocket in the waistband of his trousers. The jewel-encrusted domino mask plate that both Madigan and Bodie had failed to find glinted in his palm. Harmon took one look at it and widened his eyes.

"The Phantom Detective!"

## CHAPTER XV

### ROOM 300



AN put his identification away and explained rapidly. He gave Harmon enough particulars to make a clear synopsis of why he was in Wayville and what had happened.

"The gray sedan's down near the bridge," he said then. "I want prints taken from the wheel. This is vitally important. Get all you can, also from any other part of the car."

"I'll take care of it immediately," Harmon promised.

"I stopped at the main house of Three Deer Farm," the Phantom continued. "Mrs. Palmer has left. On my previous visit I was admitted by her houseman. Any information on him?"

"I can get it for you in a few minutes," the chief said.

"Do that. Meanwhile, I've got a prisoner outside. I want him locked up and kept here until you hear from me again. He'll probably demand a lawyer. Make the charge suspicion of murder and don't let any shyster get to him. There's no bail in

his case."

"I understand." Chief Harmon got up. "I'll have a couple of the boys bring him in."

"This character," the Phantom went on, "has a gunshot wound in his arm. It doesn't look serious, but you'd better have a doctor clean it up."

While the transfer of Nick to one of the four cells in the rear of the building was being arranged, the Phantom walked down the green to the inn. He went up the wide porch stairs and into a cool, old-fashioned lobby.

Chintz-covered furniture, an ancient grandfather's clock with melodic chimes, bowls of fresh-cut flowers, gave the lobby the restful, comfortable air of a private home. Such a setting was out of keeping with murder or those who dealt in it.

The Phantom walked over to a polished cherry desk and helped himself to the register. No Anderton had signed it within a week. Van looked at a signature under the previous day's date line. It was scribbled, in an obviously disguised hand. The name read:

Charles Warner, Oswego, N. Y.

The desk clerk came out of a rear room. The Phantom closed the register and pushed it aside.

"Mr. Warner," he said. "Do you know if he's in his room?"

The clerk turned to consult the key rack.

"No, sir. He's out."

An elderly man, seated across the lobby, lowered his newspaper.

"Mr. Warner," he said, "left in a car some time ago."

The Phantom leaned a little way over the desk. Madigan, when the muddy-eyed man had searched him, had taken the Phantom's Detective Bureau badge, that handy gadget he relied upon for occasions such as this. He had to try something else.

"I'm a New York detective," he said confidentially to the clerk. "My name's Black. I've just been in consultation with Chief Harmon. You can phone him and check on that."

The clerk's jaw dropped. Mention of the police stiffened him to immediate attention.

"You mean?"

"I want to look at Room Three hundred, Mr. Warner's room."

The clerk, to play it safe, made the call and a few minutes later personally escorted Van to the third floor of the inn. The door of Room 300 was locked. But the clerk had a passkey and used it.

He opened the door, his attitude one of such compelling curiosity that he would have lingered to watch, if the Phantom hadn't said:

"Thanks. You've been a big help. I won't be long. And I'm sure you won't mind if I close the door."

He did, shutting out the clerk and the hall. With his back to the door the Phantom surveyed the room.

Like the lobby, it had all the charm of an old New England hostelry. A four-poster maple bed with a colorful patchwork quilt folded in a triangle at its foot. A maple dresser, two upholstered wing chairs, a fireplace with brass andirons, and a desk containing a telephone and a tray with a conventional carafe and glass.

Van opened the door of the closet. A pair of green silk pajamas hung limply from a brass hook on the back of the door. His gaze darted from them to a small pigskin bag that stood open on the closet floor. He took that out and sat down in one of the wing chairs to see what it contained.

The bag was unlocked, half-open.

VAN took out a pair of traveling slippers in a leather case. Under them were a clean shirt, some underwear, a map of the New England States, a small address book, three letters sent to Robert Anderton at the Marleigh Court Hotel and, at the bottom of the bag, a long-barreled Colt Guardian revolver, together with an unopened box of cartridges.

Van felt a stab of satisfaction. "Charles Warner" was Robert Anderton, just as he had thought. He turned his attention to the letters first. The one he opened was a statement of Robert Anderton's account furnished by a Pine Street brokerage firm. Van ran his eye over the buy-and-sell transactions. They were all in a minor key, totaling around two thousand dollars, either way.

He looked at the second letter. That gripped and held his attention. Its postmark was Wayville, the date a week previous. The stationery was a deep cream col-

or. Embossed on it in brilliant red were the words "Three Deer Farm" and under that a replica of the bronze heads over the entrance gates to the Palmer estate. The delicate scent of a fragrance like the perfume of the gardens on the soft, slow wind drifted to Van.

Quickly he read what had been written hastily:

Bob: I have given orders that I am not home when you telephone. Surely, you must realize I do not wish to see or hear from you. There are some things in this life that can never be condoned. You know exactly what I mean. Please—leave me alone!

The writer signed herself "Marcia Palmer."

Frowning, the Phantom put the letter in his pocket. He had hoped it might explain more than it did. The jumble of words was cryptic, as much so as if it were a code message.

For a minute or two he let what she had written flicker through his mind, trying to analyze it. Finally, he shook his head and picked up the third note. That was a bill from a Madison Avenue tailor addressed to Robert Anderton. The Phantom dropped that one back in the bag and thumbed through the address book.

It contained mostly telephone numbers, filed alphabetically, but with only initials attached. Later, the little book might come in handy for the Phantom. Now, with time pressing, he put it in his pocket with the letter. Then he closed and snapped the bag shut and walked down the stairs to the lobby.

The clerk was waiting for him at the desk.

"I'm removing Mr. Warner's bag," the Phantom said, and held it up. "I hardly imagine he'll return for it. By the way, did he pay you for his stay here?"

"No, he didn't." The clerk reached for a metal file. "He owes us eleven dollars." "I'll take care of that."

The Phantom paid the bill. Then, bag in hand, he left the inn and went back to the police station.

He found Steve Huston there in conversation with Rowley, the hackie. The taxi man turned to the Phantom.

"Look, boss," he said. "If it's all the same to you, can I shove off? By this time the company's probably got a drag-

net out for me, figuring I've lammed with the cab—permanently. I'd like to get back to the noisy burg and take a load off their minds."

The Phantom said he would see Rowley in New York and told him that if anything unpleasant developed he was to communicate with Frank Havens at the *Clarion*. He and Steve shook hands with Rowley, thanking him again for the part he had played, then watched the taxi pull away.

When it was gone the Phantom went into Chief Harmon's office. Harmon was not back yet from the errand that had taken him to the abandoned sedan near the bridge. The Phantom put the satchel belonging to "Charles Warner," whom he knew now was Robert Anderton, on the floor beside him and sat down to wait.

The sun, streaming through open windows, was warm and pleasant. Flies buzzed lazily at the screens. The sounds of Wayville drifted in, but the Phantom hardly heard them.

His keen mind centered on the fast moving events of the past twelve hours—what had happened and what he had learned.

Now the salient key pieces in the Gramercy Park murder case began to crystalize and drop into place. The blood-stained threads of the twin murders, previously separated and snarled, were coming together to make a woven whole. There were still several tangles to straighten out, but he was confident that could be done and done soon. He brooded, his mind working like a perfectly functioning machine.

THE Phantom believed the cryptic words Captain Amos Hayden had so painfully gasped when the shadow of the Grim Reaper had hovered over him were the keys to unlock the puzzle of the double killings. Already Van had the main facts. Delmar Palmer, as Van had suspected from the first, had been murdered at sea. Bodie, placed in the crew by the sinister Madigan, had engineered the death part of the conspiracy.

But that was not all. That was only part of it. Van had yet to learn the role Robert Anderton played in the dark drama. Where Anderton's profit came from, what his motive was. And there was still the woman with the dark eyes and the shining

hair to reckon with—the Angel of Death—who, for a second time in her brilliant but tragic career, had folded somber wings over another victim.

Until Van Loan had a clear picture of all that, the case could not be marked closed.

He reached for Harmon's telephone and called New York. A few minutes and he had Frank Havens on the wire. The publisher of the *Clarion* couldn't disguise the relief that made his voice vibrantly pleased.

"Thank heaven you're safe! I'll contact the Inspector at once and tell him to call off his manhunt—for you!"

"I'll be in town shortly," Van said. "There are one or two details I have to attend to, then Steve and I will leave here."

"Steve?" Havens sounded amazed. "Is he with you?"

"Intact." Van smiled. "He has quite a story to tell you. Front page stuff—about himself."

"One other thing. Tonight," Havens added significantly, "is the Perry Martins' dinner dance at Surrey's."

"Good. I'll see you there."

Van hung up and in a few minutes Chief Harmon's car stopped outside. He came in, shaking his head.

"No good," he said. "There wasn't a fingerprint on the driver's wheel."

The Phantom walked to the door. "Steve," he said. "The man Madigan picked up at the inn down the street. Was he wearing gloves?"

Huston nodded. "Yes," he said. "Silk ones, light colored."

The Phantom turned back to Harmon. "What about the rear of the car? Any prints on the window moldings, door handles?"

The police officer shook his head again. "Plenty, but no clear ones. Just a lot of overlaps. I couldn't get a whorl out of the bunch."

The Phantom shrugged. After all, it didn't matter particularly. The gun in the pigskin bag would have Anderton's fingerprints on it. Luckily, the Phantom hadn't taken the Colt Guardian from its resting place in the bottom of the satchel.

"What about the houseman at the farm?" he asked.

Harmon brightened. "I've got that for you." He went to his desk and picked up a memo. "His name is Otto Framm. He's

worked for Mrs. Palmer for the past three weeks. Local. Right now Framm's over at his brother's place on Willow Lane. Want me to bring him in?"

"I'll go over there and talk to him," the Phantom decided.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE HUNT WIDENS



EXCHANGING a few more words with Wayville's upholder of the law, the Phantom, with Steve Huston in tow, used one of the Chief's cars and headed for Willow Lane.

It was near the southern town line, a neighborhood where workers of Wayville lived in modest cottages. Each had a square of lawn in front, a garden in the rear, a neat one-car garage. Harmon had supplied a guide in the person of one of his deputies. He showed the Phantom the house that was their destination.

"Hugo Framm's a carpenter," the deputy explained. "Pretty good one, too. I don't know much about Otto. He's a floater. In and out of town all the time."

Leaving Steve Huston in the police car, the Phantom went up the front walk with the constable. The lawn was closely cut, the flower beds carefully weeded. The cottage, itself, was immaculate in a fresh coat of white paint and glimmering windows.

The guide opened an unlocked screen door and stuck his head in.

"Anybody home?"

From the kitchen, footsteps sounded on the linoleum. A woman came out of it, drying her hands on the blue-and-white apron tied around her ample waist. Like the house, she looked clean and neat.

"Good morning, Mrs. Framm. Is your brother-in-law around?"

"Otto? Yes. He's out in the garage. Do you want to see him?"

The constable looked at the Phantom.

"We'll walk around and talk to him out there," Van said.

Mrs. Framm looked at him quickly. "He isn't in any—trouble?"

"This gentleman just wants to ask him a few questions," the constable explained.

The double doors of the one-car garage



were open. There was no car in it. The Phantom saw Otto Framm at a work table in the rear, the parts of a carburetor spread out before him. The fat little houseman jerked his head up as he heard their footsteps, and stared at the Phantom with a puzzled expression.

"Hello, Otto," the constable greeted him. "Busy? Knock off for a few minutes. This gentleman wants to talk to you. I guess you remember him."

"Yes, I remember him." Framm spoke slowly. "He's a New York detective."

The Phantom walked over to Framm. He looked him up and down, slowly and thoroughly.

"What happened at the farm?" he finally asked. "Why did Mrs. Palmer leave? When did she go?"

Framm coughed nervously. But he didn't shift his gaze from the keen regard of the man whose stare was boring into him.

"She left yesterday—around noon."

"Wasn't that unexpected?"

Framm shrugged his fat shoulders. "Everything she did was unexpected. Temperamental, I guess you'd call it. She had a telephone call. Short. When she hung up she called me in. She said she was closing the house, that she wouldn't need me any more. She paid me, told me to pack and go."

The houseman spoke frankly enough.

"Break the phone call down," the Phantom said. "You probably heard what Mrs. Palmer said."

"Why should—"

"What did she say?" The steely note, which never brooked procrastination, crept into the Phantom's voice. "You listened to her conversation—as you al-

ways did. What did she say?"

Framm's plump cheeks reddened. He shuffled his feet uneasily. He looked angry, rather than frightened.

"She said, 'I'll go to the Regal Arms—I don't know what to do.'" Framm made a deprecating gesture. "That's all I heard her say, every word."

"Regal Arms?" The Phantom repeated, half-aloud. "She left in a car?"

"No, sir. She called a taxi to take her to the train."

"Jed's rig," the constable put in.

"I carried her baggage out," Framm added.

"How much baggage?" the Phantom queried.

"One suitcase."

"Then she was in a hurry." The Phantom stepped back. "I think that's all."

They went back to the car. Steve had procured a time-table and was checking trains.

"We can get an express in fifteen minutes," Huston said. "That is, if you're all finished up here."

"I am," the Phantom assured him.

He had the constable drop them at the Wayville railroad station. There was the matter of money for tickets, but Harmon had taken care of that. Some eighteen minutes later the train pulled in and soon the sleepy little Connecticut town faded behind them as engine and coaches sped off down the shining ribbons of the rails.

**H**HEAD tipped back against the green plush upholstery of a seat beside the window, the Phantom apparently dozed.

But his appearance was deceptive. Behind closed eyes his trained, agile mind

[Turn page]

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was hard at work, laying out plans, devising future moves.

"How would you like to take a trip, Steve?" he asked, without opening his eyes.

"Trip?" Huston sounded surprised. "Where?"

"To Ohio—a town called Wellington." The Phantom's lids lifted. Bright and alert, his gaze locked with the reporter's. "Does that name bring anything to mind?"

"Wellington?" Steve frowned thoughtfully. He had it the next instant. "Sure! Wellington's the home town of Mrs. Palmer, the place where she was born and raised!"

The Phantom nodded, smiling thinly before he closed his eyes again and let his head tip back against the cushions. . . .

Back in Manhattan, the Phantom had a busy hour at Headquarters. Closeted with Inspector Gregg, he handed over the gun in Anderton's bag for a print check. After that he spent some time in the Rogues Gallery, glancing through the criminal photos on file. He looked for a certain picture, failed to find it, and went back to the Inspector's office.

Gregg, who made no secret of his relief now that the Phantom was safely on the scene again, eyed him anticipatively.

"This murder at the Canoe Club, Phantom. You know anything?"

"I know who did it, and why. You'll have to be patient a little longer, Inspector. Another thing. I want you to call off and cancel the alarm you have out for Madigan."

"Cancel it?"

"I don't want Madigan picked up—yet. The climax of the case is still ahead. A wrong move now might ruin everything."

"Just as you say." Gregg shook a puzzled head.

"I saw Barney Raff outside," the Phantom went on. "I want extra special protection for him. Hole him in somewhere. His life isn't worth a dime if you don't keep a watch over him."

"I'll let Cassidy look out for him," Gregg promised.

"I have a feeling," the Phantom said, "that your pigeon is going to prove valuable before this case is finally cracked and closed. See that no harm comes to him."

"Anything else?"

On his feet, the Phantom added, "Tell

the press that you're completely bogged down as far as Hayden's killing is concerned. I want the papers to let their readers think you're stymied. No clues to work on, no suspects. Blank wall stuff."

"But Madigan and this Anderton know that you know," Gregg pointed out. "They certainly must realize that you pumped Nick dry."

"Naturally," the Phantom laughed, under his breath. "But I expect to be away for a short time. So does Steve. We're both taking trips and our combined absences, with your apparent lack of knowledge, might help to accelerate matters. Anderton still has details to wind up. It's risky business for him but he has to take the chance. He'll take it that much quicker if the coast looks clear."

Gregg made pencil notes on the pad beside him.

"What about Mrs. Delmar Palmer, Phantom?" he asked, curiously.

"I intend to see her before I leave." The Phantom looked at his watch. "I believe that's all for now. You'll hear from me again before long."

When he left Headquarters, Van made doubly sure he wasn't being followed. A taxi took him to Park Avenue. He left the cab a street away from his lofty suite, went into the building by its private entrance, and to his rooms.

As always, when the Phantom Detective returned to them after an excursion down the danger trail, he found in their quiet, remote luxury a sanctuary. He looked around at his treasures. At the doors opening on his terrace he paused to enjoy the panoramic view of the great city, spread like a busy carpet below him. He never tired of the wide expanse—the bend of the sky overhead, the skyscrapers to the south, the rivers, like silver channels, merging at the Battery.

For the first time since he had been in the Victorian music room at the Haunted Mansion, looking at the dead figure in the old-fashioned gray dress, the Phantom had a moment or two of relaxation. But for him, while intent upon a case, there could never be any letdown until it was marked finished.

He took Anderton's pigskin satchel into the bedroom. A touch of the hidden button, the slide of the wall panel and he was in the secret, hidden laboratory.

**T**HERE, the Phantom carefully checked over the contents of the bag. Nothing escaped his attention. The labels on the shirts and haberdashery, the initials on the handkerchiefs—he went over every inch of them.

Anderton's address book held his attention. Van studied the penciled notations, the telephone numbers listed, the initials before or after them. He felt the texture of the pages. Finally he took the book over and put it under one of his ray machines.

Ultra-violet rays, in his Dexichrome machine, gave it a negative. The Phantom slid the book out and tried his infra-red director. He made careful adjustments, narrowing the ray down to the size of the pages in the book.

Then he switched on the current and watched writing come up in what had been blank spaces.

The light held steadily. He read a jumble of meaningless notations:

José Sandera, Buenos Aires  
The Club Carousel, 56th Street

Other memos were made in the special secret ink.

Van Loan frowned. Those two items must be important. Anderton didn't want them revealed to the public if he lost the address book. Van filed both names away in the back of his mind and shut off the ray machine.

Who and what Anderton really was posed a question. An interrogation for the Phantom to ponder. Where did he fit into the double murders? What was his connection with them and, more important, what hold did he have on Marcia Palmer?

Blackmail?

Did Anderton know something about the woman's early life? Had he discovered something that had led him to pay-dirt in the form of a big pay-off? The lives of those in the public eye were like books, open for the public to read.

Scandal could easily ruin a promising career. Was that it? Had the Angel of Death made a deal with her former manager? It would evidently be a deal to have Delmar Palmer drowned so she could collect the entire estate and make a final settlement with the man of whom she was now obviously afraid.

The supposition had promising angles. Havens had told the Phantom that the Palmer wealth, with the exception of the collection, and a trust fund set up to take care of Amanda Palmer while she lived, had all been willed to Delmar Palmer's widow. Millions were involved, stakes large enough to excite the greed of any corruptly ambitious person.

The Phantom shook his head. On the surface, the thoughts passing through his mind made a definite crime pattern. But he couldn't bring himself to believe the dark-eyed woman was cold-blooded enough to have had any part in the drowning of her husband. To Van the murder at sea was a diabolically plotted inspiration. That a criminal brain had hatched it, he was certain.

He reached for a telephone directory. Framm had said the woman had mentioned the Regal Arms in the last telephone conversation she had had at the farm. It took only a minute to find the name in the phone book. It was that of an apartment house near Morningside Heights in the upper section of Manhattan.

Dick Van Loan closed the directory. As an afterthought he reached for it again, hunting up the name of Jose Sandera. He found that without any trouble. Though Buenos Aires had been written after Sandera's name, the man had a New York address, too. It was on lower Broadway, in the financial district.

## CHAPTER XVII

### OFF KEY



**N**OW the Phantom, before the triple mirrors of his make-up table, dropped the rôle of "Mr. Black." Cold cream and a towel wiped away the ruddy face and features of the disguise. The plastic dentures were removed, the loose-lipped mouth went back into place. A few more minutes and the handsome countenance of Richard Curtis Van Loan was reflected in the three mirrors.

A quick hot, and an ice-cold shower. A change of linen, and dinner clothes followed. The man who walked out of the secret room behind the bedroom wall was

the blase social favorite who had been absent from the metropolitan scene for the past few days.

Park Avenue was blue with the thickening twilight when Van started down it for Surrey's. The fashionable rendezvous, where society met for social functions, stood on a corner a half-dozen streets south. Under a canopy spread from curb to door an impressively liveried carriage man was opening and closing car doors.

Van joined the small throng flowing to the main entrance. He went in, to be promptly pounced upon by a pretty redhead whose long-lashed, gray-green eyes looked at him accusingly.

"Dick! Where have you been? You're the most mysterious person!"

"Really?" He laughed.

She was Patty Driscoll, the glamorous Patricia, daughter of Berkeley Driscoll, bank president. A last year's deb, the girl had found Van attractive and amusing. She liked his gilded indolence, his sophisticated sense of humor. But he puzzled her. For all of his boredom she seemed to detect a smart, alert mind behind his lazy, nonchalant exterior.

"I mean," she said, "the way you disappear. Then you pop up again as if you'd never been away."

"Fishing." Van Loan grinned. "Try it sometime. It's stirring. For the fish," he added.

She gave him a little sidelong look and twined her arm with his. Tonight she wore a green dinner dress, a shade darker than her eyes. It accented her youthful radiance, but Van was in no mood to appreciate beauty. Secretly, he was annoyed that Patty Driscoll had found him.

This dinner dance of the Perry Martins was more than a social affair for Van Loan. He had to see Frank Havens. The event at Surrey's served only as a meeting place for Van Loan and his old friend. He had to talk with Havens and, he saw, with Patty in a possessive frame of mind, it promised to be difficult.

In the famous Castilian Room a well simulated tropic sun beat hotly down upon a reasonable facsimile of the old Spanish city. A brightly costumed band played Latin melodies. Van and the girl with him paid their respects to their host and hostess and moved on, Van keeping a sharp eye out for Havens.

He spotted the publisher presently, standing near some palms that flanked the entrance to one of the smoking rooms. Van looked down into the green eyes.

"Let me get you something to drink." He nodded toward the crowd at the refreshment table. "Looks like a nylon rush. You'd better wait here."

"Don't be long."

Van helped himself to one of the silver-rimmed cups and edged up toward the huge glass bowl on the table, and the harried attendant who was ladling out its aromatic contents.

A hand touched his arm. Van turned and looked into the vapid face of one of the men who played squash with him at the City Club. A wealthy, bibulous youth who intelligence was sufficient to get him from bar to bar, and not much further.

"Some people have all the luck," the young man complained. "I never get a break with the Driscoll dream. How do you do it?"

"This way." Van handed him the glass cup. "Have it filled, take it back to her, and tell her that I was called to the phone."

"You mean it?"

With a laugh, Van pressed the cup into the other man's willing hand, turned, and slid off through the throng.

Havens, watching and waiting, led the way into the smoking room. Van hesitated a moment longer, to make sure the girl in the green dress hadn't located him and followed.

There was no one in the small, pickled pine room. Only the aroma of expensive cigar smoke. Havens lowered his voice.

"Gregg wanted me to tell you that there were no prints on the gun you gave him this morning."

VAN'S eyes narrowed. Wiped clean! Anderton was a clever operator. Gloves for the wheel of the gray sedan. An unmarked revolver in the bottom of his bag, placed there with a handkerchief-wrapped hand.

He shrugged. After all, the matter of fingerprints was not as important as it might otherwise have been. As the Phantom, he had a plan. A plan to learn who the tall, smooth crime master was, and what part he played in the puzzle drama.

Quickly and concisely Van brought

Frank Havens up to date on the developments of the case. Steve had told the publisher some of what had occurred at the Three Deer Farm. Van completed it, while Havens listened attentively.

The publisher was highly interested in Captain Hayden's last words. He looked at Van speculatively.

"You think what he managed to say will turn out to be important?"

"So much so," Van Loan said succinctly, "that I'm leaving for Sand Island at the earliest moment. It's a small island off the Georgia coast, quite popular in winter. Deserted, except for the natives, at this time of year."

"Any ideas as to who Godfrey is?"

"It's possible he might have been a member of the *Triton's* crew. Whoever he is he knows something about what happened on the yacht the night Delmar Palmer was 'washed' overboard. I have a hunch that it's this mysterious Godfrey who kept Hayden from going to the police with his story, who made the Captain take the name of Stokes and hide out."

Havens nodded. "So Sand Island's your next move?"

Van shook his head. "No, the Regal Arms is—tomorrow."

"Regal Arms?"

"Mrs. Palmer, I have reason to believe, is in hiding there. This time, when we meet"—Van spoke shortly—"she has much to explain, much that will shed light on the death of her late husband's aunt and Hayden. She'll talk. . . ."

Toward eleven o'clock the next morning, and wearing the face the Phantom had created the first time he had gone to the Haunted Mansion, Van got out of a taxi in front of the Regal Arms Apartments.

He found himself in a quiet, respectable neighborhood. A few streets away the graystone buildings of Columbia University spread out in dignified pattern. There was little traffic in the street, few pedestrians.

Van paid off and dismissed the cab. A glance told him the Regal Arms was a rather elderly building which had been converted into small suites shortly before the housing shortage had become acute in the city.

He walked into an empty lobby. There were no hallmen, no elevator operators.

Instead, a self-service lift with a mirrored door stood toward the rear, with stairs on either side. Wired to the iron grille of the elevator was a typewritten list of the tenants. Van scanned it.

As he had expected, there was no Palmer listed.

He found a side lobby door that led down to the basement and the superintendent's rooms below. Down there, he knocked on a door. After a minute a woman appeared. Van asked for the superintendent and was told he had gone somewhere to pick up some plumbing parts.

"But maybe I can help you. I'm his wife." She seemed intelligent and quick-witted. "If it's a vacancy, we haven't any." She smiled. "There's a waiting list a mile long."

"It's something else."

The Phantom, the previous day, had supplied himself with another of the Detective Bureau badges to replace the one of which Bodie or Nick had relieved him. He displayed it with a professional flourish.

"I want some information."

As usual, a glimpse of the law's insignia had its startling effect. The woman's mouth opened.

"Yes, sir."

Van described Mrs. Delmar Palmer, explaining:

"She came down here yesterday. Have you seen anyone fitting that description?"

"No, sir." The superintendent's wife shook her head. "And I'm sure John—my husband—hasn't, either. He would have told me. Of course, she could have come in and gone to any of the apartments and we wouldn't have known about it. Maybe she's staying with friends in the building."

THE Phantom's mouth tightened. When he had looked at the names of the tenants they had left no impression. As the woman said, Mrs. Palmer could be anywhere in the six-storied structure, as completely hidden as if she were in another city.

He thought fast. Time was pressing. The arrangements he had made to leave for Sand Island couldn't wait. And he had to find the Angel of Death before he left.

He had no way of knowing what con-



fronted him on the little island off the Georgia coast. Or how long he would be there. When he came back to Manhattan it might be too late. The Angel of Death might have spread her wings and flown again. For all he knew the Regal Arms could be a temporary stopover in a secret flight.

Going from apartment to apartment was out of the question. Smoking Mrs. Palmer out had to be done cleverly. And it had to be accomplished before he left. An idea struck him. He toyed with it. It was fantastic but, the Phantom believed, it might nevertheless be the solution to his problem.

"You haven't heard anyone playing the piano?" he asked. "Playing with a professional touch?" When the woman shook her head again, he said, "There are pianos in the house?"

"Yes, sir. Plenty of them."

"Who has one on the second floor?" the Phantom asked.

"The Trimbles. Apartment Two B."

"I think I'll try the Trimbles," he decided.

He gave the woman a bill for her trouble, went back to the lobby and climbed to the second floor. Apartment 2B was midway down a wide corridor. The Phantom rang the bell.

After a minute or two, a girl of about eighteen looked out at him.

"We don't need vacuum cleaners and we have all the magazines we can read," she said quickly.

"And a piano."

The Phantom's white teeth flashed in a friendly smile.

"Which doesn't need tuning," the girl retorted.

Again Van used the badge. It had the same effect on the girl looking out through the crack in the door as it had had on the janitor's spouse. Brown eyes widened quickly.

"Oh, the cops!" She choked on the last word.

"If I can come in," he told her, "I'll explain what I want. It isn't difficult, and I don't think it'll take too long or trouble you too much. You've read about the Gramercy Park murder?"

The girl nodded, momentarily speechless.

"Y-yes."

The Phantom pushed the door open and walked into a pleasant, sun-filled living room. His gaze darted to a small baby grand piano between open double windows that looked out on the court.

The rack was piled with popular sheet music.

"This is the general idea," he said, and explained rapidly.

WHEN he finished he gave the girl another of his friendly smiles.

"So that makes it all right?" he asked.

She inclined her head, her cheeks pink with excitement.

"Sure thing! And I—you want me to stay by the telephone. I wish Mother were here. She loves anything like this. It's better than the movies."

The Phantom sat down before the piano. He was counting heavily on Marcia Palmer's emotional and nervous condition to climax his idea successfully. An accomplished pianist in his own right, the Phantom ran his fingers up and down the keyboard.

The Trimble girl watched him, open-mouthed.

The Phantom struck a few preliminary chords. Then he swung into the prelude of the same Zehalka Concerto that had made the mad music in the studio wing at the Three Deer Farm. One foot held the loud pedal down firmly, he played with enthusiasm, purposely making all the mistakes he could.

The court was filled with the clamorous echoes of the Russian dirge. For ten minutes he beat out its martial measures, in a frenzied swirl of incorrect phrasing.

The Phantom stopped and waited. His gaze focused on the girl across the room. Nothing happened. Out in the court a few windows that had banged shut were being opened again.

With a deep breath, the Phantom went back to begin all over.

Once more his strong fingers struck the keys.

Across the room, the girl winced as the piano music welled out in an even louder volume.

As the Phantom played, he told himself the plan had to work. Through this discordant music he sought an explanation to what he only partially understood. He was reaching toward a woman who had

taken refuge in the building, a woman he had to find! He kept at it doggedly.

**S**UDDENLY the telephone rang. Shrilly its bell demanded attention. Breathlessly, the girl who sat beside it unpronged it, spoke and listened.

She capped the mouthpiece with a hand. Eyes dancing, she said in a husky whisper:

"There have been complaints. Some woman has telephoned the superintendent's wife. She says you've got to stop playing or she'll go mad!"

"Fine!" The Phantom was on his feet instantly. "Find out what apartment the call came from!"

Ten minutes later he got out of the self-service elevator on the sixth floor. He walked down a counterpart of the second-story hall, pausing at an imitation fire-proof door lettered 6F. His thumb went over the pearl circle of the bell. He pressed it gently, ready with a foot when the latch clicked over and the door began to open.

"Yes?"

The Phantom's foot held the door from being shut in his face. The single word, spoken in an impatient but familiar voice, was all he needed. He pushed the door wide, stepped through it, heeled it closed behind him and stared deep into the dark eyes of the woman he had come here to find!

"Good morning, Mrs. Palmer. I'm sorry my playing annoyed you. It was the only way I had of finding you."

"You—again!" She pressed back against the painted foyer wall.

She wore a flowing robe. In the intruding sunlight her hair was like polished ebony, her skin flawless and chalk-white. Against it the red of her mouth glowed like a crimson splash.

The eyes that looked at the Phantom were filled with dread. She had pressed a hand over her heart as if to stop its frantic pounding. She stood there facing him, fighting for control, for some kind of composure.

"Now," the Phantom said quietly, "you can tell me why you lied to Inspector Gregg, Mrs. Palmer. Why you told him you were at Wayville the night of the Gramercy Park murder, when you were really in Manhattan—at the Haunted Mansion!"

## ON THE TERRACE



**I**KE one of the gulls circling over the green island off the Georgia coast, the Phantom's chartered plane swooped gracefully down from the clouds and leveled for a landing on the flying field at the tip of Sand Island.

Van alighted, stretched and shook hands with his pilot. A few more minutes and he was in one of the busses that ran from the flying field to the town and the Sand Island House.

The hotel, a wooden edifice, was weatherbeaten and time-scarred. Yet, inside, the Phantom found good furnishings, a restful air not unlike that of the Eagle's Claw Inn at Wayville. A bellhop took his bag. At the desk, the Phantom said:

"A reservation for Mr. Black."

"We received your telegram. Your room is ready, sir."

The clerk found the key and handed it to the bellhop. The Phantom signed the register.

"On the second floor, facing the harbor," the clerk went on. "We hope you'll be comfortable, sir."

An old fashioned rope-controlled elevator creaked to the floor above. The bellhop went on ahead and unlocked a door. He put the grip on a baggage-rack, picked up a water pitcher, and went out.

The Phantom waited until the boy came back. The young fellow looked smart, as if he knew his way around. The Phantom took a bill from his wallet and folded it lengthwise. He drew it back and forth between his fingers. The bellhop eyed it as he put the filled pitcher back on the tray on the table.

"Not many guests at this time of the year," the Phantom led off with.

"Hardly any. About six, right now."

Another plane was circling the island before making a landing. A small job, Van saw through the window. He glanced at it before he looked back at the bellhop.

"You wouldn't know anybody named Godfrey, Ralph Godfrey?"

The boy's brows drew together. He looked at the money and thought hard. Then he shook his head.

"No, sir. I don't believe I do. Live down here?"

"Yes. But I don't know where."

"I'll ask around. Let you know if I hear anything."

"Do that." The bill changed hands and went into the bellhop's braided pocket.

The Phantom lost little time circulating around the island. There was a chance that the man he looked for had left. But that was a chance he had to take. As he had told Frank Havens, he was confident that when he found Ralph Godfrey he would be ready to close the case.

Now, since he had walked in on the agitated Mrs. Palmer at the Regal Arms, and had made her talk, the Phantom had the complete set-up of the crime diagram. He knew at last, who Robert Anderton was, the part he had played in the duo of killings, the motivation for them.

He knew why Marcia Palmer was frightened. All the details that had been conjectures and suspicions were now actualities. There remained only the last few scenes in the dark drama to enact.

Inspector Gregg had warrants for the arrests of Anderton, Bodie and Madigan. Homicide, when the Phantom had left Manhattan, had already started an intensive manhunt for the three. The Phantom had assured the Inspector the arrests would stick. He thought about it as he wandered down to the docks along the harbor at Sand Island.

All types of boats were at the wharves or moored out on the smooth, glassy surface of the bay. It was a colorful scene. Dark-skinned men at work with their nets and gear. Fishing smacks coming in with lashed sails, their auxiliary engines throbbing.

Van went from dock to dock, asking questions. In each case he got a negative answer. No one knew anything about Ralph Godfrey or had any information to offer.

Back in town, the Phantom went directly to the post office. He drew another blank. The postmaster shook his head.

"Nobody on the island by that name," he said.

"No mail has come here for Godfrey?"

"Not as long as I've been on the job. That's more than five years."

The Phantom tried a barbershop and a tavern, with no results. The sun had

climbed higher and the heat increased. A sea wind sprang up, but it was warm and damp. Van finally stopped at an outdoor bar, ordered his usual lime juice and seltzer, with plenty of ice, and sat down at a table to think things out.

IMPATIENCE made him restless. Running into a blank wall at a time when the machinery of the murder case was in motion and ready to grind out results, called for all of his cleverness. But cleverness and ingenuity, he saw, wouldn't get far in an impasse as seemingly futile as this.

Again, he went over the gasped words of Amos Hayden. He had made sure there were not two Sand Islands. This place was the logical spot, within a reasonable distance of Bermuda. He studied his next move, the ice melting in his glass.

A half-hour passed before he got action. Then, as the Phantom was about to get up and leave, he saw a man coming out of a drug store across the street. What attracted Van's attention was the cut of the man's clothes, the silvery ripple of his thick hair, his bronzed face. The Phantom leaned forward, narrowing his eyes as he watched the man cross the street and come closer.

The man paused at the curb and glanced up and down the street. At closer range, the Phantom had a good view of his face and features. The Phantom's heart beat faster. For one flashing second he let his mind photograph the man at the curb while swiftly a closed door in the back of his brain seemed to open and let in a flood of blinding light.

A maroon-colored station-wagon had come around the corner and was drawing to a stop. The Phantom saw a white-coated driver lean to open the door for the man with the silvery hair. He got in and the vehicle started off. The Phantom was on his feet in a flash.

"That station wagon," he said to the waiter who had come out to bring him his change. "Who does it belong to?"

The waiter shielded his eyes with a hand.

"That's Doctor Scribner's wagon," he answered.

"Doctor Scribner? Who's he?"

The waiter looked at his customer curiously. "He's the party who runs the nurs-

ing home at the other end of the island."

"And the man who just got in?"

"I didn't see him."

The Phantom turned away. The station-wagon had disappeared, leaving Van to stare after it thoughtfully. Dr. Scribner? A nursing home at the other end of the island? All at once the clear, revealing shaft of light in his mind seemed to widen and include other details.

A taxi, picked up further down the street, took him out to the place. The Phantom wanted to look at it before he put his next plans into operation. Almost at the end of a straight, fairly well-paved road that ran between the hummocks of sand dunes, he saw the roofs of white buildings, sprawled behind a high wall. He caught the glimmer of green lawns, the sun on the oblong of a swimming pool.

"Stop here," he told the driver.

He got out and walked up on one of the dunes. From this perch he had a better idea of the topography of the place. He sent his gaze in all directions, fixing the general layout of the nursing home well in his mind before he went back and got into the taxi.

"I'll need you tonight," he said to the cab driver. "Make it nine o'clock and pick me up at the inn."

"Right. I'll be there. . . ."

The cab was waiting outside the Sand Island House at the designated hour that night. The Phantom sank back on its worn upholstery. Darkness clamped down over the island like an overturned bowl. Stars were faint and misty in the sky, the moon hadn't come up, and the warm wind of the day, with the changing tides, had stopped its damp blowing.

The taxi chugged along the straight road. A quarter of a mile from the nursing home, the Phantom stopped it. He paid the driver, added a tip and told the man he wouldn't need him further.

On foot, Van continued along the road.

There was a large parking space to the left of the high wall he had glimpsed from the dune that afternoon. No cars stood there, but one had stopped recently. Van caught the smell of gasoline and saw fresh tire marks in the sandy soil when he switched on his flash for an instant.

He let the eye of the torch zigzag over the shut doors in the wall. They were locked. He tried the handles in turn,

then stepped back and started to circle the wall. It was unbroken, a blank expanse of whitewashed brick until he reached the rear. There Van discovered a small iron gate that was probably used by delivery men or for the disposal of trash.

He expected some trouble in getting the gate open. But when he tried its iron knob he found it unlocked. The gate jarred open at his push. He stepped through it, onto the closely cut grass of the lawn he had seen from a distance that day.

**D**IRECTLY ahead, the main building of the home was built like an H. It was in two stories, dark except for a window on its south side. Around and beyond the main building were a number of small bungalows, each with a screened-in terrace and a picket fence. One or two of these were lighted, shaded lamps making a smear of illumination against the dark curtain of the gloom.

The Phantom's problem seemed to grow more complex as he stood there, a shape of shadow in the murk. Thoughtfully he moved on, heading toward one of the bungalows that showed a light. From here on he knew he would have to be careful. Any mistake would spoil what he had in mind.

Quietly, the grass muffling his steps, he reached the picket fence, unlatched its gate and, still keeping to the lawn, headed for the terrace.

Closer, the Phantom could see that a man was comfortably stretched out in a deck-type chair, his feet on a foot-rest, the lamp that made the light focused on a book opened on his lap.

A man, the Phantom saw the next instant, with thick, silvery hair and a bronzed face!

Luck, Van felt, was running high for him. His secret call at Dr. Scribner's nursing home had promised difficulties. He had realized the futility of going there openly and asking to see Ralph Godfrey. If Godfrey were in hiding, those in charge of the place would have orders to keep out all inquirers. For this reason the Phantom had made his move under the cover of darkness.

But to find the man he wanted at the first try was almost too good to be true.

A screen door at the side of the terrace

opened noiselessly. The Phantom transferred his feet from the outside stone step to the thick hemp rug that paved the terrace flagging. He closed the screen door and spoke softly.

"Mr. Godfrey?"

The book slammed shut. Feet kicked the foot-rest away. The man, pajama-clad under his light cotton robe, sat bolt upright with a smothered exclamation. With the lamp fully on him the Phantom saw that the man he had come to find at Sand Island had undoubtedly been convalescing from some recent illness.

There were shadows under his eyes, a pinched-in appearance about his face that the suntan failed to hide completely. His gaze swept to the visitor, who moved a few steps closer.

"Who are you?" the silvery-haired man demanded. "What do you want? How did you know where to look?"

He broke off abruptly. The Phantom's eyes never left his face.

"I came down to take you back to New York. You're needed—to close the murder of Amanda Palmer and Captain Amos Hayden!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### OUT OF THE PAST



PERHAPS a minute passed before the man in the chair made any reply. The lids came down over his eyes. The Phantom saw his hands tremble, prominent veins on them whip into sight as if he were held in the grip of some deep, secret emo-

tion.

"Maybe you're right." He spoke slowly. "I'm well enough now to go through with it."

"Then you'll leave in the morning with me?"

"Yes. First, tell me—"

A rustle in the shrubbery and the quick opening of the screen door ended what he would have said.

Wheeling, the Phantom looked into a gun with a silencer that beaded him.

"Don't move, either of you!" the voice of the muddy-eyed Madigan warned sibilantly. "I'll take care of your leaving. Not tomorrow—now!"

In the tense instant of surprise that followed, the Phantom tried desperately to determine in what way he had shown his hand to the mousy-haired killer whose menacing gun covered him.

Madigan saved him the trouble.

"Thought you were the only one with an in on Ralph Godfrey!" he sneered. "You haven't got all the luck, Phantom! Sometimes the wheel stops at the right number for us, too!"

"Phantom!" The man in the chair widened his eyes.

"So you were in the plane that landed shortly after I arrived?" the Phantom said to Madigan casually.

"That's right. I watched you take off from LaGuardia before I hit the air ten minutes later."

"Hayden told you what he told me?" The Phantom's tone quickened.

Madigan shook his head. Satisfaction at the unexpected turn of events gave his muddy-colored eyes a bright gleam. A smug expression spread across his thin, angular face.

"Try again. We got it out of a letter—from this party to the skipper—on the table with his keys and watch in his room at the Canoe Club. It took a little time to figure it out, but we managed." The glance he directed at the man in the chair was almost admiring. "Smart stuff. But not quite smart enough, Godfrey!"

Tense and rigid, the Phantom felt his pulses beat like drums. Was Madigan, in this final moment, destined to wreck the entire case? The thought was intolerable. Failure now meant the triumph of crime over justice. Without this pajama-clad man, without the Phantom, the double murder case fell to pieces!

All that and more swam dizzily through the Phantom's mind. He didn't need a blueprint to understand the deadly intent of Jerry Madigan. He had been sent to Sand Island with orders to destroy. The killings that had gone before were of minor importanec compared with those about to come off!

The Phantom's foot inched along the hemp rug. Under the sole of his shoe he felt the rubber insulated light cord running from the reading lamp to a wall socket. The cord was taut, pulled tight. The touch of it brought a surge of hope. He dug the toe of his shoe into the pile of

the rope rug, sliding it in under the stretched-out cord. He saw Madigan leer expectantly, eagerly.

"Two lead slugs, Phantom!" Madigan said. "One with your initials, the other with his! Thanks for leading me to him. I was waiting out there by the parking space, figuring you'd be along to do the hard part of it for me. Much obliged."

The Phantom's foot kicked up. He swept the light cord out of the socket in one swift thrust. The lamp teetered on its metal legs as it blacked out and fell over. The silenced gun spat flame at the spot where the Phantom had been, its slug ricocheting off the stone floor at the rug's edge.

The Phantom had him in the next breath-take.

Like a steel spring uncoiling, he sprang at Madigan. The gun went up for a second shot, but the trigger remained un-squeezed. The Phantom's fist found the target of Madigan's thin face. The power behind the blow nearly jarred the killer's head from his body. Madigan went back as if kicked by a mule, tearing into the screen netting and falling half out of the terrace.

It was dark, but not too dark for the Phantom to see him. He dragged Madigan back, wrenching the gun out of his clenched fingers. Holding the killer by the throat with his left hand, the Phantom used the gun butt as a sap. One downward lunge of the weapon was enough.

With a choked-off gasp, the man with the mouse-colored hair collapsed face down on the hemp rug!

**A**N HOUR following the Phantom's return to Manhattan, and after Madigan was safely behind bars, the famous detective was in Gregg's office at Headquarters. As he talked, he carefully omitted all mention of the silvery-haired Godfrey and plunged directly into his plans to close the case.

"I'll need Raff tonight," he told the Inspector. "You haven't been able to turn up Anderton or Bodie. I'm counting on Raff to do just that."

Frank Havens, seated to the left of Gregg's big desk, looked at the Phantom curiously. The Inspector nodded.

"I'll see that he's available."

The Phantom next unfolded his strategy for that night. Carefully, while both men listened, he outlined his plan. Then, when Gregg promised close cooperation, the Phantom dropped into a chair, smiling thinly.

"I suppose you want the details of the man who calls himself Robert Anderton and his connection with Mrs. Delmar Palmer and this case," he said. "It's a long story. I'll try to break it down and give you the salient facts briefly."

Both the Inspector and Havens waited with consuming curiosity and interest. What the Phantom was about to reveal, they knew, was the pivot on which the wheels of the double murders had turned.

"It goes back a few years," the Phantom told them. "To the time when Marcia Rickand was on the threshold of her brilliant concert career. It goes all the way back to the time when she married Arthur Rickand, an opera singer of some fame. Rickand was temperamental, egotistical.

"Matching his artistic nature with that of the woman he married, was like introducing a spark to tinder. Even on their honeymoon in Switzerland there was a constant difference of opinion, continual bickering and arguments over trivial matters."

"She killed Rickand!" Inspector Gregg said tersely.

"On the sixth week of her honeymoon." The Phantom paused for a minute, listening to the echoes in the corridors outside. "But not with intent, not with premeditation. It was an accident, but one which she was responsible for and which," he said significantly, "is responsible for everything that has happened since!"

"How do you mean that?" Havens asked.

"She and Rickand were staying at an inn at the foot of Mt. Wyssmar. She wanted to climb the mountain. He forbade it. That morning she started out, alone. Rickand followed. Somewhere up the mountainside he overtook her. There was a violent argument. Rickand tried to prevent her from going further, tried to haul her from a narrow ledge where she stood. In the scuffle that followed she broke away and in doing so pushed her husband back—off the ledge and into oblivion!"

Gregg fingered his leathery face. Hav-



ens said nothing.

"The Swiss authorities wrote it off as an accident," the Phantom continued. "The woman, when she fully realized what she had done, was overcome with terror and remorse. Several days later she put the complete details of Arthur Rickand's death in a letter to her father back here in the States. She wanted advice, she was close to a breakdown and had no one to turn to."

Havens coughed. "She came back to America?"

"On her father's instructions. Now the plot changes. Marcia had been Marcia Kent, which of course was her father's name. The other member of the Kent family in Wellington, a small Ohio town, was her adopted brother, Malcolm. I sent

resumed, when Gregg put the receiver back on its hook. "Malcolm Kent—or Anderton as we know him—at first was pleased with the nuptials. He saw a life of ease and comfort in them—for himself. But the sister, who was no blood relation to him, for the first time rebelled against his demands. Palmer, a man of force and power, had no intention of having Anderton around. Also, Anderton began to be afraid of his position in this new regime. With her new husband to turn to, Marcia would be harder to handle.

"Anderton, meanwhile, had made arrangements with a Jose Sandera, a broker in South American ranches, to buy some property in Argentina and settled down to play cattle baron. That would put him out of range of the police, give him safety and

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Steve out there to do a little delving into the past and he's come up with some interesting facts that bear directly on what follows."

"Such as?" Gregg prompted.

"Such as learning that Malcolm Kent, even in those early days, had criminal tendencies. He was the leader of a local gang. Twice he had been in trouble with the police. He was ripe to steal the letter Marcia Rickand sent her father, that letter of confession, written at a time when she was at the breaking point!"

The owner of the *Clarion* straightened, a look of understanding spreading over his dignified face.

"Blackmail!"

The Phantom nodded. "Blackmail that threatened Marcia Rickand's entire career! By her own words she had killed her husband! Malcolm Kent used that theme for his nefarious ends. He latched onto her artistic success to become her manager under the name of Robert Anderton. Half of everything she made went into his pockets. But it was not enough. It was never enough to satisfy his greed."

**T**HE Phantom stopped while Gregg answered an incoming call. Havens, under the spell of what had been related, sat deep in thought.

"The story switches to Marcia's marriage to Delmar Palmer," the Phantom

security. All he needed to do it was a half-million dollars in American money."

"In Palmer's American money!" Frank Havens put in.

The Inspector leaned forward. "So he plotted Delmar Palmer's murder?"

"With Jerry Madigan's help. Madigan, a Chicago trigger man and racketeer, was an old friend of Anderton's. Anderton laid his plan on the table. Madigan agreed to handle it and this Bodie another killer, was eased into the crew aboard the *Triton* when the yacht was being made ready for the honeymoon cruise. The murder plans worked out smoothly, as you know."

The Phantom stopped. When he spoke again, it was slowly.

"Now we come to Gramercy Park, the Haunted Mansion. With Delmar Palmer out of the way, and with Marcia totally unaware his death had been murder, Anderton stepped back into his former rôle of leech. Now his hold was stronger than ever. Huston had coined the name, 'Angel of Death', and the woman knew that if Anderton told his story and produced his evidence of her first honeymoon, she was doomed. In despair, she was willing to follow any suggestion he made."

"What about the Haunted Mansion—Amanda Palmer's murder?" Inspector Greggs asked, brusquely.

"As a second down payment to Mad-

## CHAPTER XX

## ZERO HOUR

igan," the Phantom went on, "Anderton promised him part of the Palmer Collection. He had to find out where it was, and used Marcia to do it. He went with her to the old house to visit Miss Palmer. I found a button from the waistcoat of Anderton's dinner jacket in the music room.

"I suspected that whoever Amanda Palmer admitted, was known to her. Otherwise she would never have let them in. She mentioned to Anderton and Marcia the fact she was turning the collection over to the Museum. And Anderton, hearing that, and learning where the trunks were located, passed the word along to Madigan."

For the first time the Phantom smiled, but it was thinly.

"Later that night," he went on, "Madigan, Bodie and Nick broke into the Haunted Mansion. They found the cellar strong-room and Nick got away with the trunk. But there was an interruption. Amanda Palmer suffered from insomnia. She was prowling around and had heard them in the cellar. She reached the music room and must have made an outcry.

"Madigan came up from the basement and killed her with the statuette. Then he cooked up the clumsy attempt to divert suspicion by using one of the shoes he had seen in the cellar, rubbing it in some ashes to make it look as if Hubbard were the guilty party. The only trouble was he didn't know that Hubbard was in the hospital—with a perfect alibi—and that the other shoe, the one I picked up, was moldy enough to tell me no one had worn it for months."

"So we have Miss Palmer's killer just where we want him!" Gregg spoke with satisfaction. "And tonight you're going to bag Anderton and Bodie?"

"I'm counting on it," the Phantom said quietly.

"And this Godfrey you brought back?" Havens asked.

"His story comes later."

The Phantom was about to add something when the door opened and one of the Inspector's men came in.

"Raff's outside, to see you, Inspector."

Gregg looked over at the Phantom, who turned quickly in his chair.

"Bring him in, Sargeant!"



CALLMPLY the Manhattan night shrouded the windows of Richard Curtis Van Loan's lofty Park Avenue apartment. Seated before the make-up table in the hidden room behind the sliding panel, he busied himself with removing the disguise he had used from the time Frank Havens had taken him to Gramercy Park and the dead woman in the Haunted Mansion.

Van needed a new face for the finale. The countenance he had created for "Mr. Black" had outlived its usefulness. Tonight he would take the danger trail as someone entirely different, someone never seen before.

His face wiped clean, Richard Curtis Van Loan appeared briefly in the triple mirrors. Then, like a shadow crossing the sun, a layer of skin cream blotted out his familiar features. The Phantom, crayons and shadow pencils beside him, went to work rapidly.

He was finished in a few minutes.

Critically, he studied the face of the swarthy, foreign-looking man in the mirrors. A faint scar was above his left jaw line. His brows were thick, his nose spread. He had high cheekbones, a Slavic cast of features. He pulled a battered hat over his darkened hair and got up to view the ensemble in a full-length mirror.

The suit he had selected was worn and wrinkled. With it went cracked, tan shoes, a flannel shirt, a stringy tie. He made sure all his necessities were with him—jeweled badge, rolled mask, keys, money, his pocket flash—before he turned to the arsenal.

His choice there was a short-barreled automatic that fitted snugly into a holster he wore just above his waist and underneath his coat. He checked the clip, sheathed the weapon and looked at his watch.

Eight-twenty!

At half-past eight he stopped a cruising cab two blocks away from Park Avenue. The driver gave him a long glance as he opened the door. Van knew what he was thinking. In his new disguise he didn't

look like a man who could afford taxi transportation.

"Gillian's," the Phantom said. "That's over on Eleventh Avenue."

The cab went across town. Van sat deep in thought, watching the streets drift by. Gregg had failed to find Anderton and Bodie, but the Phantom was certain both were still in the city. Anderton wouldn't leave without a final gouge. Until he found Marcia Palmer and clamped down on her again for whatever he could get.

The half-million Anderton had hoped to force Marcia to pay him out of the financier's estate was lost to him now. There would be no ranch in South America, no life of security and ease, but there was still money to be had from the fount Anderton had tapped so many times. The Phantom was staking on that, and on Barney Raff to bring the last scene in the murder plot to a successful conclusion.

He looked at his watch again. The phosphorescent hands on it showed him he was close to the arranged zero hour.

"Faster!" he ordered.

A few more minutes and the taxi was stopping almost in the same spot where another taximan, Rowley, had waited for Steve Huston. The Phantom settled for his fare and headed for Gillian's. He slouched into the place, a perfect type to mingle with the crowd at the bar.

From the rear came the click of pool balls, and wrangling voices raised in argument. A juke box was blaring a Woody Herman platter. The smell of beer and cigarettes blended into a breath-catching reek.

The Phantom pushed closer to the bar. No one paid any attention to him as he took his beer glass and moved back from the packed-in customers.

Once more he gave his watch a quick glance. Three more minutes! He waited, keen eyes on the entrance, under the pulled-down brim of his battered hat.

Two minutes—one minute!

Suddenly a man entered Gillian's. Walking with his usual catlike quickness, his flamboyant suit freshly pressed and some of his untidiness gone, Barney Raff came in from the street.

Passing the Phantom, Raff joined the drinkers at the bar, greeting one or two of them with a nod and a word. Further down, near the doors to the space where

the pool tables stood, the Phantom saw a red-faced man, in shirtsleeves, dart a swift look at Raff before he wheeled on his heel and disappeared.

**R**AFF, in conversation with a couple of men, didn't bother to turn his head. The Phantom watched and waited. He knew what had happened. The red-faced man, spotting Raff, had bee-lined for a telephone. The Phantom's plan was beginning to work!

Raff was his decoy and on the little stoolie depended the success of the night's strategem. Marked for death though he was, Raff had courageously agreed to help the Phantom and follow out his directions. Barney was making a brave effort, Van thought, to set himself right in the eyes of the police. But for Barney's sake, there had to be perfect timing. A faulty move anywhere from now on and Raff was a dead pigeon!

Ten minutes passed slowly, leadenly.

As they ticked away, the doors at Gillian's opened again. This time two men entered. Anderton and Bodie!

They passed the Phantom, moving leisurely in the direction of the bar. The Phantom faded through the doors and out to the avenue. A taxi stood almost in front of the pool hall, engine running, meter flag down. The Phantom whistled twice, softly, before he walked directly to the waiting taxi.

"You just dropped two men here."

"Yeah. So what?" The driver, in the act of lighting a cigarette, looked at his questioner belligerently.

"Step down!" the Phantom ordered.

"What the devil!"

Two of Gregg's men, summoned by the Phantom's whistle, loomed up at either door of the taxi. The one nearest the hackie flashed a badge.

"All right, bud," he said curtly. "Get out."

"I'll borrow his cap." The Phantom reached for it. "Take him away, convince him his cab is safe, and that he won't lose anything. And fade—fast!"

The Phantom tossed his battered hat aside and replaced it with the driver's cap. He was under the wheel, a cigarette dangling from one corner of his mouth when Bodie and Anderton came out of Gillian's with Raff between them.

Bodie opened the door and pushed Raff in. He followed.

"Okay, driver," Anderton said. "Take us over to the Club Carousel. You know where that is—Fifty-sixth near Seventh. Get going."

The Phantom threw his cigarette away and let off the brake. He started the taxi, straining his ears to catch the blur of conversation that came through the opened glass partition behind him.

"Nice running into you this way, Barney, old-timer," Bodie was saying. "Funny how we happened to walk into Gillian's and find you."

"What's the angle?" Raff's question was muffled.

"Can't you figure it out?" Anderton's tone was velvet-smooth. "How long did you think you could get away with it? Propositioning Madigan, dosing him with some story that you had inside information on the Phantom that you'd picked up from Cassidy? The minute I heard it I knew it was phony. So we're paying off what we owe you—and the other gentlemen who's initials are the same as the Police Department's. We're settling both debts tonight, with your help, stoolie!"

Across town, through the night's traffic stream and over to Seventh Avenue, the Phantom drove with expert skill. In the rear view mirror he caught a glimpse of another cab, hanging in his wake, but not crowding him.

A tight, grim smile made the Phantom's mouth a thin streak. First success he told himself, must be followed up relentlessly with what was to come. Both Bodie and Anderton were the type who would use a gun at any unexpected minute.

In front of the designated night spot the Phantom stopped. Another glance told him the pursuing cab was also slowing, further down the street.

Then, as if by a given signal, two police prowling cars turned into Fifty-sixth Street, one from its west corner, one from its east.

ANDERTON opened the door, some coins jingling in his hand.

"That's all, pal," he said to the Phantom. "Buy yourself a raccoon coat for next winter."

The coins slid from Anderton's palm into the Phantom's hand.

"Thanks," he said, while Bodie and Raff alighted.

All three entered the Club Carousel, but not by its main door. Instead of going up the brownstone steps, Anderton led the way to a basement entrance. They had hardly gone through it before the Phantom was out of the taxi and in the dark of the areaway.

The door that slammed shut snapped its lock. The Phantom felt for his master-key. Noiselessly he slid it into the lock, adjusting the mechanism on its shank so its flanges fit accurately into the wards and tumblers of the latch. It was the work of less than a minute to make the fit, turn the key, and open the door.

He stepped into a wainscoted hall where the smell of cooking was strong on the warm, unstirring air. Above him the thump of a jump band and the shuffle of dancing feet made an unceasing, rhythmic clatter.

The Phantom knew something about the Club Carousel. A second-rate joint, its clientele was drawn principally from Broadway mobsters, gamblers and sharpshooters. They flocked to it because the liquor was reasonable, the entertainment good, and the music hot.

It was just the type of place where garoons of Bodie's stripe could find relaxation.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE PHANTOM WRITES FINIS



HOLDING his gun in hand, the Phantom started along the wainscoted passage. He saw two doors beyond, one facing him, one in the side of the wall. He reached the side door, bending his head and listening intently. From the other side of it he could hear Anderton's smooth, low-pitched voice.

"There's a telephone," Anderton was saying. "Get busy. You know where the Phantom is! Call him up, tell him you're in a jam and he'd better help you out."

"I don't know anything about him!" Raff's protest was perfectly toned.

"Look, Barney!" Bodie chimed in menacingly. "Two seconds to do what the boss says, or else."

As he broke off, the other door opened. A flood of light dazzled the Phantom's narrowed eyes. He had an instant's impression of a kitchen beyond—copper cooking utensils hanging on a wall, chefs in white hats, and a thin, wiry, partially bald little man in a tuxedo who was standing there peering at him.

"What th' devil!" The little man's first surprise ended in a shout. He pulled the door shut as he yelled, "Bob! Out here, quick!"

As he raised his voice, he went after a gun. The Phantom didn't hesitate. The automatic in his hand fired without seeming to take aim. The snap-shot, one of the Phantom's specialties, struck the little man's right arm before he could draw. He screamed and jarred back against the wainscoting.

Another instant and the door at which the Phantom had listened was yanked open. Another gush of light beat against the Phantom's eyes. He turned to confront Bodie—Bodie with a gun that spat flame!

The Phantom ducked, firing from a bent-over position. He angled two shots accurately. Tattooed arms flung wide, Bodie staggered up against the frame of the door, hung there briefly, his expression one of complete bewilderment, before he pitched forward, falling like a tree under the ax of a woodsman.

Raff had jumped on Anderton's back. The Phantom surged into the room.

"That's all, Anderton!" His voice was like the snap of a whip. "Stand where you are and get your hands up!"

The killer chief snarled an oath in reply and pulled Raff around to shield him. Through the reverberating echoes of the Phantom's shots, Anderton's laugh was like a madman's.

"Not a chance! I'll get you yet!"

The Phantom saw his left arm hug Barney Raff to him while blue steel glinted in his right hand. The hand was close to Raff's side. The Phantom had only heartbeats of time in which to decide. A chance that his bullet would strike Raff was the risk, he knew, he had to take. It called for all of his skill, his steady nerves, his courage.

He squeezed the automatic's trigger!

The blue steel revolver flew out of Anderton's hand. He let Raff go, a gush of red dripping from his fingertips. He made

one last effort, hurtling forward, but the Phantom met him in the middle of the room. The Phantom's gun dug into the man's chest.

"All right, Anderton! You're through!"

Raff scrambled to his feet as men began to come in through the open door—Gregg's Homicide Squad—closing the net the Phantom had arranged!

Then, as the Phantom Detective straightened Anderton up, Gregg, with Steve Huston, Havens, and the tall, silvery-haired man who had returned to New York from Sand Island with the Phantom and Madigan, entered. The Phantom watched Anderton's face as the fellow's pin-pointed eyes fastened on "Godfrey" in utter amazement.

Chalk-white, lips working convulsively, Anderton stared at Godfrey as if at an apparition. Finally, two words, gasped out almost against his will, came from his trembling lips.

"Delmar Palmer!" he choked, thickly.

**I**T WAS almost dawn.

Over Manhattan the night stars had faded. A faint streak of haggard light widened in the east, heralding the beginning of a new day. The crowd had been finally cleared from the sidewalks in front of the Club Carousel. An ambulance with two police officers riding away in it had taken Bodie and the little man in the tuxedo to the hospital.

Inspector Gregg, with Anderton and most of the squad, had left for Centre Street. Steve Huston, Havens and the Phantom were in the publisher's big Cadillac.

The Phantom was adding the final details, explaining about the man who had left to go to the Regal Arms, to the woman who had thought him dead.

"I had no idea Godfrey was really Palmer until I got a close-up view of him down at Sand Island," the Phantom explained. "Then I recognized him immediately. The whole thing came to me the instant I saw him."

Huston, anxious to be off with his front page story for the *Clarion*, bent forward. "How—why—"

"Madigan bribed Captain Hayden to take part in the murder plot. What he didn't know was that Hayden immediately took the money and his information to his

employer. Delmar Palmer told the captain to go through with it. Palmer admitted to me that for a moment—but a moment only—he thought Marcia might be behind it.”

“What happened?” Frank Havens asked.

“Palmer made arrangements to have the *Triton* covered by a high-powered motor cruiser with men aboard he could trust. That craft was standing by, the fateful night of the storm when Palmer went on deck and, Bodie following, threw him into the sea. Only Captain Amos Hayden knew that Palmer had a special life preserver on under his clothes, that the motor cruiser was circling to pick him up!”

“Which is why,” Steve added, “Hayden didn’t go to the police.”

“Exactly. Palmer was in communication with the captain who, as we know, kept under cover according to instructions. Delmar Palmer wanted him for evidence when he returned. Meanwhile, however, by hiding out Hayden aroused Anderton’s and Madigan’s suspicion, which increased when they couldn’t find him. That culminated the night Hayden was killed at the Canoe Club and a letter from Palmer found beside him.”

“Palmer,” the publisher murmured, “was recuperating at the nursing home?”

The Phantom nodded. “It was some time before the cruiser picked him up. He was suffering from exposure and shock. He had had a bad time of it and it was neces-

sary for him to come back slowly. But he’s all right now, ready to be the principal witness against Bob Anderton.”

“Which means,” Huston said, “the story of Rickand and the Swiss mountain will break.”

“But with no harm to Marcia Palmer,” the Phantom pointed out. “Her brilliant career is over, the husband she thought dead has come back. She’ll probably settle down to a peaceful, happy life, out of the public eye. The Angel of Death,” he said, “has folded her somber wings at last!”

Havens started the car. After a few blocks, Steve Huston dropped off to put his story on paper. Through the deserted Manhattan streets, quiet for a little while before the new day started, the Cadillac rolled on uptown.

In a few hours, Van reflected, the Phantom Detective would dissolve into the shadows out of which he came when needed. In a few hours the world-renowned sleuth would be only a legendary figure, replaced again by the handsome Richard Curtis Van Loan, playboy and social favorite.

Van smiled to himself as he smothered a yawn and looked up at his old friend beside him.

“Drop me a block away from the apartment,” he said to Frank Havens. “I think I’ll turn in and sleep—for a couple of days at least!”

***“If You’re on the Mattling Case, Phantom, Don’t Probe Too Deeply! What Happened to John Mattling Can Happen to You!”***

**T**HE thin, disguised voice drifted across the wire. Though it was flat and toneless, Van had the impression he had heard it somewhere before. And as the Phantom listened, his pulses pounded madly. The man making this mysterious call was undoubtedly the killer of John Mattling!

Van hung up and turned to Havens. “We’ll have that call traced right away. And now let’s get out of here. We’re going to the office of the Coastwise Line!”

“Who called you?” Havens demanded. “Who knew you were here—at the Mattling home?”

“If I knew that,” the Phantom said slowly, “I would have this case solved!”

Follow the Phantom on one of the most exciting crime trails of his career in **MASTERPIECE OF MURDER**, by Robert Wallace, next issue—a crime trail beset by deadly danger and packed with surprises and suspense every step of the way! It’s a mystery of sudden death and conflicting clues that will hold you enthralled and breathless!





# THE PROMISE OF MURDER

By ANTHONY TOMPKINS

*When Rodney Gray finds a corpse, he is automatically dealt a hand in a weird and terrible game of death!*

## CHAPTER I

### HIDDEN CORPSE

THEY SAT on the cross-bars of a wooden fence far to the rear of the estate. Northern Massachusetts country rolled endlessly into the distance. They were young and very much in love and oblivious to all things save themselves. Even the crisp mid-autumnal breeze made no impression.

Rodney Gray gave a long sigh, slipped off his perch on the fence, and helped Sally Fenton to the ground. Rodney Gray was twenty-four. There was nothing outstanding about him. He was quite an or-

dinary boy, good looking enough, and of medium height. Sally was a blonde, lovely in every way, but frowning slightly now, and the frown quite obviously did not go with her youth and buoyancy.

"I don't like him either, Rod. He isn't at all like your Uncle John."

"Uncle John is my mother's brother," Rodney said. "Uncle Walter is my uncle only by marriage. John manages the estate and works hard. Walt never turns a finger. The hardest work he does is to go fishing. Lately he's become bossy, too. Ever since Uncle John went off on his trip to Chicago. I don't like it. Walt acts as if—well, as if Uncle John was never coming back."



Rod sat on the edge of his chair, straining against the impulse to jump that gun.

**A Complete  
Novelet**



"But haven't you heard from him at all?" Sally asked. "He's been gone three weeks."

"Walt received two or three letters. I don't know what was in them, but they came from Chicago all right, and the handwriting seemed to be Uncle John's. Oh, well, I'm probably imagining a lot of things."

Sally's frown didn't go away. "It's awfully strange, Rod, how so few people like Walt. Take my father, for instance. He went fishing with him once. I know he'd never go again. Some of Walt's fishing equipment is still in our cellar, but Dad won't even bring it over here."

**R**OD TUCKED a hand under Sally's elbow and piloted her around a bramble bush.

"Oh well," he said, "Uncle Walt can't hurt us. I guess we feel this way about him because he won't work. Just lives off us. But I think I'll have a talk with Uncle John when he comes back. About Walt going to work and—say, isn't that a State Trooper down there?"

They saw the man in uniform. He was alone, walking slowly and bending to look around the base of every bush. Rod and Sally hurried down. He saw them, straightened, and saluted Sally gravely.

"There's a three year old boy missing from a house about three miles up the road," he explained. "We're checking the whole area. Haven't seen anything of him, have you? He's wearing a blue and white striped jersey, corduroy pants, and white socks."

"I'm sorry," Rod said. "Look, I'll change my clothes and give you a hand."

The trooper shook his head. "Thanks, but it won't be necessary. They're bringing bloodhounds from Bangor in a little while. We'll find him okay."

They watched the trooper slowly disappear into the forest area behind the estate. Then, hand in hand, they walked toward the big house. Sally's roadster was parked outside the garage. Rod helped her into it, waved when she pulled away, and then he entered the house.

He often wondered why his dead father had wanted such an immense place. Perhaps it was because, in his youth, Rod's father had been one of several children brought up in a small, cramped home and

when he became wealthy, he had wanted all the space he could get.

Rod hurried upstairs to his mother's room. She hadn't left it in two years. The nurse went quietly out. Rod sat down beside the bed. It was difficult to realize that his mother was a hopeless cripple. She looked more as though she were resting before a dinner-and-dance date. Rod grinned and winked at her.

"Sally and I just ran across a State Policeman. He's searching for a missing child." Then, abruptly, he switched the conversation to the thing that was bothering him.

"Mother, when is Uncle John coming back?"

"You will have to ask Walter, son. He seems to get all of John's letters. Apparently he won't be back for some time, though. He sent Walter a power of attorney so that some arrangements about investments could be handled."

"Mother, do you trust Walt to handle things like that?" Rod asked in a worried tone of voice. "Don't you think it's rather peculiar that Uncle John would delegate such powers to him? Walt is nothing but a parasite. He always has been. And lately, ever since John went away, he's become bossy. I don't like it."

His mother smiled. "I don't believe Walter will murder us in our sleep. It's true that he never earns anything and spends too much, but then, he did marry into the family and has some rights. Anyway, Uncle John told me before he left that Walt was improving. Settling down and trying to be of some help. Run along now and stop worrying."

He was sorry he'd even brought it up because, despite his mother's lightness of tone, he recognized the fact that she had been thinking along the same lines and was worried, too. Rod went to his own suite of rooms, changed clothes and got ready for dinner. It would be a rather solitary affair, with only Uncle Walter for company, and more like something to be endured than enjoyed.

It was almost dark when he walked past Uncle John's room. It was illuminated and, for a moment, Rod thought he saw John seated before the ample desk. But it was Walt. They looked something alike from the back. Each of them were about five feet eight and weighed approximately

one hundred and sixty.

But there the resemblance ceased, for Uncle John was gay-faced, smiling, and had eyes that sparkled with merriment. Walt was dour, almost sullen. He had a long thin nose and a chin that, Rod often held, could be folded up to engulf at least part of the nose. And Walt's eyes were colorless, chill things that saw too much.

Walt swiveled the chair around and squinted through the bad light at Rod.

"Where have you been?" he asked tersely.

"Out back—with Sally," Rod replied. "It's time for dinner."

**H**E WALKED away, went downstairs, and a few minutes later Walt joined him at the table. They ate in silence, served by a woman who had been with the family for years. They were on their coffee, Walt's accompanied by a jigger of aged brandy from John's cellar, when Rod felt that he had to say something.

"Did you hear from Uncle John today?"

Walt looked up, over the rim of the brandy glass. "I told you I got a letter yesterday," he said, annoyed. "Think he has time to write every blasted day in the week? He's on a business trip, keeps moving about. He's busy."

They lapsed into silence again. Rod wondered when he'd addressed Walt last without getting a surly or angry answer. He finished his coffee, pushed back the chair, and for no reason he could account for, spoke again.

"There was a State Trooper prowling around the back of the estate today. They're thinking about bringing down bloodhounds—"

Rod stopped short because Walt's face suddenly looked as if it belonged against a casket pillow. It was perfectly gray. He tilted the brandy glass and swallowed the remaining contents in one gulp. Then he arose swiftly.

"Nobody should be allowed to prowl around this estate," he growled. "No telling what those fools will do. Stay here. I'm going to see if anything is missing."

He left the house as if he had five minutes to catch a train five miles away. Rod stared at the door which had slammed so hard. Something was gnawing at Uncle Walt. He'd never seen the man so nervous. Or was it fright which had made him turn

the oysterish color? Rod thought he ought to know.

He waited a couple of minutes and then left the house, too. Quietly, so as not to disturb his mother. He went around to the back of the house, passed the garage, and then saw the gleam of a light. Walt had stopped in the garage to obtain the flashlight. He seemed now to be headed for the thick woods well back of the estate.

And Walt wasn't merely checking around to see if anything was missing. A silly excuse anyway, Rod thought. Walt seemed to have a very definite destination in mind. Rod went after him, staying far enough back but keeping close track of the man by following the flashlight beam.

Walt continued for half a mile before he came to a stop. Rod moved very cautiously now. From tree trunk to tree trunk, gradually getting nearer and nearer until he was able to distinguish Walt's shadowy form, working just behind the spot which was sprayed by the flash. The torch had been wedged into a branch elbow because Walt had needed both hands.

He was working fast, scraping dead leaves over a portion of what seemed to be newly dug ground. It was a rather long plot and about three feet wide. About the size of a grave, though not rounded on top. Just perfectly level, and now being well camouflaged with dead leaves.

Sudden horror struck Rod. He winced at the thought that came into his head. A missing three year old boy. Maybe Walt had—hit him with his car. Or had found him toddling around the estate and administered a slap which had proven fatal. Almost any number of things could have happened. The boy was the only human being who was missing. It had to be the little boy.

Rod was riveted to the spot. He never took his eyes off Walt. The man finished his work, carefully inspected it, and then picked up his flash. Rod crept away. He had to see who was buried in that grave. Before he called the police, he had to know. If it turned out to be a dog which Walt had run down, or something like that, Walt's derision would be hard to take.

Rod knew this forest from one end to the other. He reached the tool house long before Walt was due to get there. Rod

entered, saw a shovel propped in a corner, and seized it. He also discovered a flashlight with weak batteries that threw a dim yellow light, but it was better than nothing.

He raced back toward the forest, saw Walt's flash gleaming as he approached, and promptly dropped flat in the tall grass. Walt passed within twenty yards of him and finally vanished around the corner of the tool house.

**G**ETTING TO his feet, Rod made his way into the forest. Finding the spot where that grave was located was easy for him. He didn't stop to think about the ugly job he was about to tackle. He only knew it had to be done. Strangely enough, Rod wasn't surprised at being able to think of Walter as a probable murderer. There was something about Walt which made him seem capable of anything that would safeguard his selfish way of life.

His shovel bit into the soft earth, after he had moved some of the covering of dead leaves away. He slowly excavated for a depth of about two and a half feet. Then the edge of the shovel struck something sodden and limp. Rod gulped, but he kept digging.

It wasn't a dog, nor a three year old boy he was uncovering. This was an adult human body. Gradually he cleared the dirt away, but the flash was now so weak that he could distinguish very little. Rod finally began shoveling the earth with his hands.

Fingers encountered human flesh. A face cold in death. He knew that sweat seeped out of every pore in his body. Walt was a murderer, though Rod couldn't imagine whose body could be in the grave. With more resolution than he knew he possessed, he cleared the face and lit a match, for by now the flash was no good at all.

The flare of the tiny torch went out as Rod leaped from the grave with a startled cry of horror. He told himself this simply could not be. He took a long breath and lit another match. He hadn't been wrong. This was no part of some ghastly nightmare.

Uncle John. Good, kindly Uncle John. He wouldn't be coming home to handle the estate again. This was his body in the

grave, and he'd been shot. Shot through the back of the head!

## CHAPTER II

### THE DEVIL'S OWN



**R**OD WANTED to raise his voice in a scream for help, but he realized that the only person who'd be apt to hear him was Walt, the murderer. And a man who had committed one killing was quite capable of another. It was better to go back to the house, make certain Walt was not within hearing distance, and quietly phone the police. Then let Walt know his murder had been uncovered when the police arrived. That was time enough—for him!

Rod worked rapidly, covering the grave again. Forcing himself not to lose his head. He even put back the camouflage of dead leaves. Then he hurried back to the tool house and replaced the shovel and the worn-out flash. This done, he proceeded straight to the big house.

He was on the porch, reaching for the doorknob, when he heard someone come up the porch steps behind him. He whirled about. It was Walt, his face impassive, his manner quite casual.

"It's a beautiful evening for a walk," Walt said. "Incidentally, Rodney, I had a talk with your mother's physician this morning. I think you should know what he said. Come along—to the study."

Walt linked a hand under Rod's arm and took a firmer grip. For a moment Rodney wildly considered slamming a fist into Walt's face, knocking him out, and taking him prisoner. But he thought of his mother upstairs in her room. Frail in health, the shock of all this would have to be broken gently to her.

It was better to obey Walt. After all, he had no idea that Rod had uncovered the corpse. They went into Uncle John's study. To Rod it seemed actually sacrilegious that Walt should be here.

Walt closed the door, walked over behind the desk, and sat down. Only the desk light was on. It threw shadows around the room and made Walt look like some disciple of Satan with his head sticking up above the white glow of Hades.

"Were you surprised?" Walt asked softly.

Rod gulped. "Why—what's happened that I should be surprised about?"

Walt laughed. There was no humor in it. The laugh sounded more like the grating of some rusty pieces of metal.

"Don't be a fool, Rod. I thought I heard someone in the forest. When I returned, I looked into the tool house. The shovel was gone. I waited in the darkness and saw you return it. Your shoes are covered with fresh earth. Your nails are crammed with it. You never thought I'd kill John, did you?"

Rod didn't reply. He couldn't even think of a suitable response. This seemed much more like a dream than when he'd been scraping the dirt off the dead man's features.

"What do you intend to do about it?"

Walt went on, speaking crisply now.

Rod found his voice. It came out in a hoarse croak.

"Tell the police, of course," he said.

Walt sighed. "Rodney, you shouldn't be so darned impulsive. That's youth for you. The most direct route to a certain place, eh? You find a murdered man and the murderer, so without another thought you decide to go for the police. No! No, I say. You'll hear me out first."

"Hear you out?" Rod said, half rising from his chair before the desk. "What can you say to excuse a thing like this? Tell your story to the police. I don't want to listen."

He was out of the chair now, standing erect, muscles tensed to move quickly to the door. But it was too late. Walt stood up also and there was a gun in his hand.

"Sit down, Rodney. Don't make me kill you, too. Not right away. You'll listen—and with respect. Sit down!"

Rod resumed his chair, sitting on the very edge of it and straining against the impulse to jump that gun. He knew it couldn't be done. Every bit of common sense he possessed told him it was impossible. The wide expanse of the desk was in the way, for one thing, and Walt held that gun as if he knew very well how to use it efficiently.

Walt relaxed his body, but not the gun. It remained steady, a constant threat if Rod moved an inch.

"Dear Uncle John was going to have me

arrested," Walt began. "Can you imagine that? Arrested! His own brother-in-law. You can't talk to people like him. His mind was made up. Oh, I'd chiseled a bit from the estate. He found it out. And—do you follow me, Rodney? Do you see why I had to kill him?"

**I**NCLINING HIS head, Rod kept eyes on the unwavering gun muzzle. Walt went on talking.

"So I killed him. It was John or myself. I said he went away on business. I arranged to have letters mailed back, presumably from him. I wrote them. Someone else mailed them from distant points. I forged his handwriting and did a good job of it, if I do say so. The estate lawyers believe the power of attorney to be signed by John. Know what I'm going to do, Rodney?"

"It wouldn't take a mental wizard to guess," Rod said stiffly.

"Yes. Well, I intend to convert as much as possible of the estate into cash. I'm going away then. Ship lines are open now. I can go to far places. Rodney, if you give me away, I'll kill you and I'll strip this estate so your mother won't have a dime. Do you want to play ball?"

"I can listen," Rodney said.

"Good. You're showing a slight amount of sense. I'll take only three-fourths of the estate if you keep quiet. Enough will be left so you and your mother—and your sister also—will be well provided for. All I ask is a one week start on my little journey."

"Suppose I don't agree?" Rod said. "If you kill me, it will be found out long before you can convert the estate. For instance, I have a date with Sally tonight. If I don't show up, she's going to try and find out why. Tomorrow I'm to be at Aunt Aggie's house. Tomorrow afternoon at my sister's house. Now her husband will surely make an investigation if I don't show up. How will you get around that, Walt?"

Walt gave a snort. "Do you think I'm a complete fool, you young whipper-snapper? I knew the crime might be discovered. I've taken precautions. As a matter of fact, there is no need for killing you until just before I leave. What do you think of that now?"

"I think you have lost your mind," Rod



said curtly.

"Oh, do you? Then I shall tell you exactly why I have no fear. See if you think these are the ravings of an insane mind. Rodney, you will do absolutely nothing. You will not use the telephone, leave the house, see anyone. Oh, of course, you will call Sally, Aunt Aggie, and your sister Nan. To say you won't be there. And I'll be at your side with this gun, when you phone."

Rodney snorted. "So far there's nothing intelligent in what you've told me. To convert the estate you'll have to see the lawyers. Leave the house or have them come here. You can't watch me every second for the next three or four days. You'll have to do better than that, Walt."

"I haven't finished yet," Walt said, and smiled grimly. "Not by half. You see, I made preparations for just such an event as your discovering my crime. Very well. Outside, and not too far away, I have some friends. Not influential people, but very aggressive types. They'll do anything I say—for a price.

"Now, if you contact anyone, all I have to do is raise the phone and request one of my friends to do something already planned. If you make one move to tell the police, someone you love will die. It may be Sally, your sister Nan. It may be Aunt Aggie, or even your mother. I won't say who, but I will promise that one of those people will be murdered. Yes, that's it. A definite promise of murder if you move against me. I might even have your bosom friend Joey Marshall killed."

"You can't do it," Rod said. "Those are all lies. You're bluffing and I know it."

Walt pulled open the middle drawer of the desk and removed some papers. "Come over here beside me," he ordered. "Not too close. Take a look at these and be convinced."

Rod arose warily, moved around the desk, and looked down. From that distance he couldn't make out what was typed on the papers. Automatically, he bent a trifle to peer more closely, and that was when Walt hit him. With the butt of the heavy gun. A well-placed blow.

Rodney's knees buckled. He started going down. His hands hit the arms of

Walt's chair, slid off them, and encountered Walt's legs. He tried to close his fingers around the legs, to pull him down. The trousers seemed to be as slick as ice. He couldn't get a grip. He was going down, down, and he landed in a feather-bed of blackness.

**H**E WAS spread out on the massive divan when he opened his eyes again. Walt was standing over him, gun in hand, and smiling contemptuously. All the grisly happenings of the last hour didn't have to come back to Rod's mind. They never seemed to have left it, even though he was unconscious. He sat up and held his head in his hands.

"I doubted you'd ever come over to my side," Walt said. "So I was prepared for this. Rodney, do you recall my warning? That, unless you obeyed me in every respect, I would have someone you know and love killed? Well, perhaps you need a lesson."

"You didn't have to clout me and darn near fracture my skull." Rod didn't look up. The full import of Walt's threat hadn't registered quite yet.

"I'm sorry, but it was necessary," Walt said. "You see, unless I phone these friends of mine every thirty minutes from now on, so they'll know I'm quite all right, they have orders to kill. Each thirty minutes someone you love will die. Oh, it will look like an accident. Those friends of mine are very clever."

Rodney was looking up now, with horror shining in his eyes. "You didn't order anybody killed?" he demanded hoarsely.

Walt inclined his head and smiled. "Yes, I did. I hated to, but it was necessary that you see my plan in actual operation. You were unconscious for five minutes. Check your watch if you like. I never left this room. I merely made one phone call—to my friends. About now Joey Marshall should be dead."

"Joey!" Rod almost shouted, jumping to his feet and reeling toward the desk. Not even the menace of Walt's gun made any difference now. Joey had been his roommate at college. They'd palled around since they were kids. Joey was the nicest guy Rodney knew.

"Go ahead," Walt said. "Phone Joey's home and see for yourself. Be certain to ask when the—ah—accident happened.

That way you'll know I did not do it, and you'll be assured I have friends outside, such as I described, helping me."

Rod was dialing. There was a long wait after Joey's phone began to ring and the man who finally answered was hollow-voiced.

"Joey," Rod said. "I—I want to talk to Joey. This is Rodney Gray."

"Yes. I recognized your voice. Rod, this is Joey's father. Something just happened. You know the cliff right behind our home, of course. Somehow Joey toppled off it. He's—dead. They're bringing him up now. I can't talk any more, Rod. This is so horrible. He was here, in this room, talking to me only ten minutes ago."

"It happened—just now?" Rod gasped.

"Less than five minutes ago, Rod. Not five minutes ago."

### CHAPTER III

#### TELEPHONE TROUBLE



THE PHONE clicked. Rod hung up slowly, sat down in the chair behind the desk, and wilted. Walt walked over and parked himself on a corner of the desk.

"Are you convinced?" he asked. "Or must someone else die before you realize I cannot be touched? By you."

"You devil," Rod said softly. "You miserable, fiendish devil. Hanging is too good for you by far."

Walt flushed. "Don't talk to me about hanging. Keep your mouth shut, do you hear? I won't accept anything but civility from you. If you say anything more I don't like, I won't make a certain phone call in fifteen minutes and someone else will die. Your charming Sally. Aunt Aggie. Your sister Nan. Or your mother."

Rod forced himself to think clearly. There was no evident way to battle this man—yet. Walt was still talking.

"I dismissed every servant. Even the nurse, so that you and I and your mother are alone. You'll attend to her wants. She thinks the nurse was called away suddenly because of a family illness. She believes we can't get another nurse. You

can spend your time talking to her. But one word about what has happened, Rodney, and I'll kil you both. Do you understand?"

"I understand one thing, Walt. That both of us will never leave this house alive. One of us is going to die, and I'm planning that it will be you. Because there is a way out. Somehow."

"Try and think of it, Rodney," Walt said, laughing confidently. "I did. There is no way. I shall require about three days. I may not be here all the time, but you can't act against me, because wherever I am, I must make those phone calls. If you have me arrested, no human power could make me talk before one of those calls was due, and then—well, someone else will be dead. That's all for now. You can go."

Rod walked out of the room. He closed the door behind him. Directly ahead was the front door. He was free as the air to walk out if he liked. But what could he do when he was free? As a matter of fact, no man was freer. Unless he talked. Unless he called in the police.

Even killing Walt wouldn't do any good. He'd proven that these friends of his could act and did act. Rod stifled a sob as he recalled Joey. He was dead. Merely as an object lesson. How could he, Rod, permit others to be killed too? Those he loved?

Fair-haired, lovable Sally who meant the world to him. Or Nan, his older married sister who had been his pal for so long? Ar Aunt Aggie with her bustling, kindly ways. Or his mother, lying helpless and sick upstairs?

Rod beat at the back of a chair with his fist. He was as impotent to take action as if he were tied with ten miles of fine wire. Walt had the drop on him every second of the day. It wasn't even necessary for Walt to keep track of him. Those half hourly phone calls had to be made or someone would die.

Rod paced the floor. He smoked innumerable cigarettes. Then he stopped short. He could hear Walt's muffled voice. He was making one of those phone calls. Rod slipped up to the door. It was too thick. He couldn't hear words, just mumbling. He took a chance and flung the door open. Walt was just putting the phone down.

"Ah—snooping a bit, eh? It wouldn't do you any good, Rodney. I mention no names and I'll be certain you can't see me dial. I called to compliment my friends on their work. Everyone at Joey's is firmly convinced he died by accident. Only you and I know the truth, eh, Rodney?"

Rod closed the door hard and walked away. He went into the darkest corner of the huge living room, sat down, and stared into space. He was a normal young man, alert, bright. He ought to be able to think of some way out of this.

There was no doubting but what Walt told the complete truth. He did have friends on the outside. Otherwise how had Joey died so abruptly? Walt couldn't possibly have killed him. Joey lived almost eight miles away and not more than six minutes had elapsed from the time when Walt knocked him out until his recovery. During those few minutes Joey had died. Walt had given a promise of murder—and then had fulfilled it.

Rodney's rage was almost all centered upon himself and his inability to do anything against this diabolical killer. He could imagine how Walt must be laughing at him.

**N**OW and then Walt emerged from the study, but he always went back on the hour and the half hour. Rodney watched him. His mind was still trying to think of some way out. There was a way, but it seemed just about as impossible to work as exposing Walt.

If he could find out what number Walt phoned, call the police and convince them he wasn't mad, and get them to track down this number and nab the men at the end of it, Walt would be finished. His hold would be gone.

Walt came out of the study from making his latest call. He looked into the living room at Rod.

"Your mother is sleeping, Rodney. Quite comfortably. Oh, yes, I've been listening carefully to see if you tried to listen in on some other phone while I dialed. So far you have not. Don't try it. Please don't force me to have my friends kill someone else."

Rod didn't say anything, but listening-in had been his sole idea. He knew that so long as Walt was on the alert, he'd know if the wire were cut in on. Walt came

back twenty-five minutes later.

"Rodney," he said, "please stay there until after I make my call. I want to tell you something."

He returned in a few minutes, sat down, and lit a cigar. It came from Uncle John's humidor, Rod noticed. Walt puffed slowly on it. The crimson glow illuminated his sharp features in the semi-gloom.

"About listening in again. I have just completed disabling every phone in the house except the one in the study. I wasn't sure whether or not you might be able to hear the dial clicks and count them. I read somewhere, in a detective story, that it can be done, so I just made sure."

Rod kept his lips tightly compressed. If he started to talk, it would only be to tell Walt what he thought of him and the man could be riled easily. He might skip one of those phone calls just to exhibit his power again.

"You're not very congenial company," Walt said, getting to his feet. "Oh, yes. Tomorrow night we'll exhume Uncle John's body and take it somewhere so it can't be found again. You really gave me a scare at dinner tonight. When you mentioned a State Trooper prowling around, and bloodhounds, I instantly thought they were looking for Uncle John's corpse. My heart stopped beating for a moment. Good night, Rod. Sleep well. I'll continue to make those phone calls."

He walked out and Rod slumped deeper into the chair. He finally roused himself and went upstairs to look in on his mother. She was fast asleep. Rod had an idea she'd been drugged. Looking at her, lying there so helpless, he knew how easy it would be for Walt to carry out his threat.

Downstairs the phone rang. Rod scamp-ered away. Walt beat him to the study and when he came in, he had the phone extended toward Rod.

"It's Sally. For you, Rodney. She's a bit upset about Joey's accidental death. Tell her you are upset, too, and that's why you didn't keep your appointment."

Rod took the phone. For an instant he was tempted to blurt out the truth. Tell Sally to go for the police and before Walt could do anything, turn on the man, and batter him to a plup. But only for an instant did those thoughts flash through his mind before he put them out of it.

The whole thing was impossible.

He talked to Sally, made the excuse Walt had suggested, and finally hung up. It was like cutting off the last connection with an outer world before an atomic barrage was due to be unleashed on him.

For quite suddenly Rod realized that Walt could never go away and leave him behind—alive. Walt intended to kill him. In Walt's twisted mind Rodney's fate was perfectly clear. He had to die.

"Thank you for not becoming impulsive," Walt said. "Now phone Aunt Aggie and your sister Nan. Tell them because of what happened to Joey, you won't see them tomorrow. It won't be a lie. Go on, phone them. And make it fast. I have a call to put through soon. You haven't forgotten how important those phone calls are, have you?"

Rod dialed his sister's number, talked to her a few moments, and then called his aunt. He was finished five minutes before the half hour. Walt took the phone from him.

"Run along now," Walt said. "I don't trust you, Rodney. Not even when I hold all fifty-two cards in our little deck. I don't think so, but you might have a joker to play. Get out of here!"

**R**OD walked out slowly. If he could only listen in. Get some idea as to whom Walt called. But all the other phones were disabled. Walt took no chances. Rod began thinking. He recalled that telephone linemen carried what looked like a regulation phone and merely tapped in on lines. Maybe if he got one of the disabled phones, slipped down cellar, and cut into the phone wire, he might pick up the dial signals.

It didn't sound too promising, but at least it was something to do. If he just sat here stewing, he'd crack before three days were up. He waited until he heard Walt's muffled voice. Then he scampered up the stairs and headed for the phone in Uncle John's bedroom.

He didn't even have to yank it from the wall. Walt had cut the wire. Rod carried it downstairs, paused long enough to ascertain that Walt was still talking, and then quickly descended the cellar stairs and hid the instrument under an empty box.

He was back in the hallway when Walt

came out of the study, and Rod prayed that the killer wouldn't notice how he gasped for air after his exertions. Walt stepped onto the front porch and looked up at the sky.

"Beautiful," he said softly. "A wonderful evening. I think I'll take a little stroll. I'll be back within half an hour, Rodney. Wouldn't it be terrible if I happened to break my leg and couldn't get back? But we shouldn't think of things like that. Why don't you say something, Rodney?"

"I think I'll kill you, Walt, before this is done with," Rod said. "You've got me now, that's true. But three days are a long time. I'll be watching. You'll make a slip. And when you do, I'll be there to pounce. Yes, I think I'll kill you, Walt."

Walt chuckled. "Well, that's something to look forward to. Only remember, Rodney, that when I die, so will Sally, Nan, and Aunt Aggie. Maybe a few other people you like very much. Maybe your mother. Those friends of mine could get into the house quite easily, you know."

Rod bit his lip. How could Walt slip? He had everything covered. Every provision made to insure the operation of his scheme. It was as easy as it was clever. When he'd used that forged Power of Attorney, he'd take the fortune and quietly go away. Leaving behind him two dead men. Uncle John and—Rod shuddered—himself. How could the man miss?

## CHAPTER IV

### THE LIE



**E**NTERING the living room, Rod restrained himself from thinking now. The game was past the stage of thinking. When Walt phoned again, he'd try to tap the wire in the cellar and intercept those signals. It was after ten o'clock. In a few minutes Walt would phone again.

Rod stepped out onto the porch. He could hear Walt whistling. It came from a distance. Rod turned and raced for the cellar. He located the phone wire, looked for a knife, and found one. He cut through the insulation and then through the wire itself. He quickly twisted the wires from the telephone instrument so that the line was hooked up again.

Somehow he had an idea this wouldn't work. He gave a convulsive sob because if it didn't, if Walt could not get his call through, someone was going to die. Rod hurried back upstairs and he was in the living room when Walt returned.

The moment Walt had closed the study door, Rod was heading for the cellar. He picked up the phone, praying that if it worked, he had been able to cut into the connection before Walt was listening. He put the earpiece hard against his head, listening very intently. He wanted to count the dial clicks if he could.

Nothing happened. Not a sound came over the wire. Not even the familiar buzz. His heart sank. He'd wrecked the whole phone system somehow. Walt would start checking. He'd find out what had happened and very probably allow those hire-lings of his to commit at least one murder.

Rod hurried back upstairs. He slowed down to a casual saunter as Walt came out of the study. For an instant Rod's heart stopped beating. But Walt looked quite as composed as before.

"Safe for thirty minutes more," he said, smiling crookedly at Rod. "The suspense is terrific, isn't it?"

Rod made no reply. He felt like wilting on the spot. Walt's call had gotten through. The sense of relief that Rod experienced made his senses reel. He almost staggered for the support of a chair. Walt went upstairs, whistling gayly again.

Twenty minutes later he was down. "Well, Rod, so far you've been using your head. See that you keep on."

Walt disappeared into the study. At almost the same moment, Rod saw the flash of headlights coming up the drive and he heard the purr of a car. He hurried out onto the porch. Before the car came to a stop, he was waiting for it. But he knew he couldn't say a word about what had happened. Not a word. Walt still held the cards. Every last one of them.

The driver was the family attorney from in town.

"Good evening, Rodney," he said. "I have some papers here for Walter. Will you see that he gets them at once? He was coming in for them in the morning, but I've been called to Augusta on an important case and I won't be around."

"Yes, of course." Rod took the bulky envelope of papers.

"You look a mite peaked, Rodney." The lawyer appraised him for a moment. "And say—better have the phone fixed. I tried to get you a little while ago, but the line is out of order."

"I'll see to it," Rod said dully. "Good night, sir."

He turned and walked up the porch steps as the car pulled away. There was something in what the attorney had said. Something that didn't sound important, but was. Something about—the phone. Out of order. No calls were coming in. No calls—because Rod had ruined the whole phone system. No calls coming in. How could any go out then? No calls could go out!

Rod's eyes opened very wide and a hoarse cry came from his throat. He was in the hallway, facing the study door, somehow. He wasn't sure just how he got there.

No phone calls could go out if none could come in. But Walt had been phoning those murderous friends. Or had he? Was he faking the whole thing? What about Joey? He'd been killed all right. Walt had known he was going to die and Walt couldn't have killed him. But no phone calls—

The study door opened. Walt's smile died away.

"What are you up to?" he demanded. "What are those papers in your hand? I thought I heard a car going away. For the sake of several people, I hope you did nothing rash."

"No," Rod said slowly. "No, I said nothing. It was Hotchkiss, the lawyer, with these papers. He said he wouldn't be at the office in the morning."

"Well, give them to me." Walt held out his hand.

Rod didn't move. "He also said he had been trying to phone you for the last half hour or so, but—oh, take your papers."

**W**ALKING up to the man, Rod thrust them at him. Walt reached for them and Rod hit him. He put a lot of steam behind the blow, but not all he had. He didn't want to kill Walt—yet.

Walt hurtled back. He let go of the envelope and reached for his hip pocket. Rod plastered him squarely on the tip of the nose, flattening it. Nothing ever felt so good as the impact of his fist against

Walt's nose. Rod began to laugh. Loudly and wildly. He was glad his mother was drugged.

Walt was on the floor, trying to stem the flow of blood from his face, but he made no move to reach for the gun. Rod's right foot was back a trifle, cocked for a kick that was bound to break Walt's jaw.

"You were not making any phone calls," Rod said. "Not the last two times. And nobody else has died. You haven't any friends outside who act on your orders and who will kill if you don't phone. You killed Joey, somehow. I don't know how. But you won't kill anyone else, because I'm going to finish you off, Walt. Go ahead, reach for your gun. Give me a reason for killing you. Go ahead—reach for the gun!"

"You're crazy." Walt was muttering. "Of course I made those calls. And I have to make more of them or somebody else will be killed."

"You're lying!" Rod shouted. "I tried to tap the phone wire down cellar. I botched it. I don't know a darn thing about phones. I cut the wire in half. You couldn't have made those calls, so you're bluffing. Bluffing, but I'm not."

Walt, squatted on the floor, began to sway a little. Suddenly he pitched forward on his face. Rod fell for it. He moved closer and Walt's hand snaked out. Rod went toppling into a heap. He started to scramble to his feet, but Walt was already up and racing away. Not outside, but around to the cellar door. He was through it and the lock was turned on the outside before Rod tugged at the knob. Walt's voice came from behind the door.

"You're very clever, Rod. I should have killed you, but I was afraid to. I couldn't leave here soon enough. Yes, I killed Joey. I phoned him while you were unconscious and I asked him to do me a favor. To go into the barn behind his house and fetch my fishing creel which I'd left there.

"I told him it was on a hook at the far end. The part that hung over the edge of the cliff. Last week I made a neat trap door there. On a spring, so it would close after Joey stepped on it and went hurtling down. When he reached for my creel, he had to step on the trap."

"You inhuman fiend!" Rod yelled.

"Now I'm going to phone someone else.

I'm going to pull the same trick. You've got me, Rod. You've won, in some respects. I'm done for. I don't care anymore. But before I go, someone else is going, too. You can't know who I'll phone. You can't contact that person in time. And I know how to repair a phone wire.

"It was my fault that you trapped me. My stupidity, and I'm paying now. If I'd actually put the phone to my ear while faking those last two calls, I would have guessed what you'd done. Good-by, Rod. You'll have two funerals to attend. Three—if you will deign to come to mine. Which I doubt."

Rod kicked at the stout door. He began hunting an axe. There was nothing. A butcher knife didn't even make an impression on the door. He hurled himself at it until his shoulder felt as if it had been broken. He couldn't reach the cellar by any other way. The windows were barred. The only other door leading outside was as strong as this one he now attacked.

Then he heard Walt laugh. It wasn't a laugh exactly. It sounded more like the wail of a doomed soul. This was followed by a single shot.

Rod stepped back. There was no horror in his mind. Just a cool brain, thinking hard. Walt had killed himself. That was to be expected. That was good. Rod had almost turned murderer himself. But Walt had phoned one of three people. Aunt Aggie, who lived twenty miles away; Sister Nan who lived ten miles North or—Sally, whose home was only two miles distant.

Walt had set his trap with that call. But whom had he called?

Rod raced out of the house, around to the garage, and drove the roadster out. He couldn't possibly cover all three people. Perhaps not even one of them before Walt's plan struck. Before a dead man committed another murder.

Walt hated Aunt Aggie because she'd have no part of him. He would have liked to kill her. But he hated Nan, too, just as intensely. Sally? He had no reason to hate her unless it was to get even with the boy who loved her.

ONE of the three was doomed. Which one? That was the all-important issue now. Rod didn't even have a telephone so



he might call all three, but he was heading for one as fast as he could drive. There was something in his mind that he should think of. Something which was as important as those words Attorney Hotchkiss had so innocently uttered. Something about—whom? Not Aunt Aggie. Rod hadn't seen her in days. He snapped the roadster out of the drive and onto the paved highway.

Nan? Perhaps. Rod had visited her on Sunday, three days ago. But no, what he tried to think of was fresher than that. Sally!

"My father went fishing with Walt once. He didn't like him. Walt's equipment is still in our cellar."

That was what Sally had said. When was it? This afternoon? Late, just before they spotted the trooper? It seemed as if that had happened a century and a half ago.

Rod didn't think about phoning. He opened the car to its limit and streaked across the two miles to Sally's house. It was Sally. Walt had lured Joey to his death with fishing equipment he had purposely planted to insure the success of his trap. Sally was next.

The car kept on rolling across Sally's lawn after Rod leaped out of it. He'd slowed down and jumped, but he didn't take time to set the brake. He stormed into the house. Sally's father jumped to his feet, startled at the wild-eyed apparition that faced him.

tion that faced him.

"Sally!" Rod yelled. "Sally!"

"She's gone down cellar," her father said. "The back steps. The ones we never use. Walt phoned and asked her—"

But Rod did not wait to hear any more. He knew those steps. They weren't used because they were too dangerous. They were practically nothing more than a ladder. A very long ladder, and if anyone fell off the top step, that person would probably be killed.

He went through the dining room as fast as he could travel, yelling Sally's name frantically. He saw the open cellar door. Then he caught the flash of a yellow dress. He reached the doorway and his hand darted out. It grabbed Sally's arm. She screamed and for one single awful moment she hung there. The top step had caved it.

Rod held her close. He was shaking badly. He whispered in her ear. He told her all sorts of silly things. It had been so close. So terribly close.

Then Sally's father broke the spell. Rodney shook his head, and his outraged brain suddenly grew calm. It was over. He had been in time to save her. And no one else would die now, because Walt was gone. He walked into the living room. He pulled Sally down beside him on the divan.

"I've got a story to tell," he said. "Then I've got to phone the police."



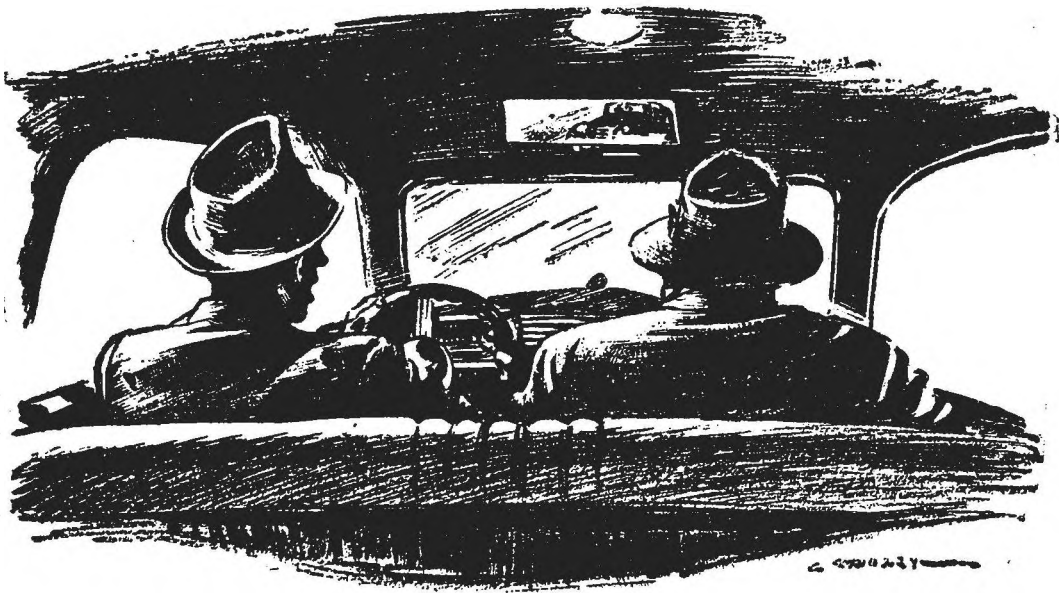
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## FIGHT FOR A MEMORY

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There was no longer any doubt—the prowler was on his tail

# DEATH HOUSE TICKET

By HAL K. WELLS

*Lonnie Resco decided to play it safe and obey every traffic rule, because a corpse was keeping him company!*

**T**HE boulevard stop sign was so nearly hidden by the luxuriant foliage of a pepper tree that Lonnie Resco did not see it until he was nearly past it. He tramped hard on the brake and brought the coupe to a stop with a suddenness that made his companion's head bob drunkenly up and down upon his chest.

Lonnie's solicitude in the matter was rather odd. The boulevard stop was an obscure marker on a minor intersection so little traveled that there wasn't a car in sight for a block either way. It was the sort of a thing that only a Caspar Milquetoast driver would ever observe to the letter, and Lonnie was hardly the timid soul type. Such innocuous citizens do not have small beady eyes that glitter with a hard, reptilian sheen and thin, pale lips of the type that look much better on a shark.

Lonnie's strict observance of the stop sign was not inspired by any great respect for the traffic laws of the City of Los Angeles.

There was another and far more important reason. The thought of that reason sent sweat trickling coldly down between Lonnie's narrow shoulder-blades.

"Have to watch our step better than that, Porky," he muttered. "If we get a prowler car on our tail now, it'll be just too bad!"

Porky did not answer. A man seldom does very much talking when he has a .38 caliber slug in his brain. Porky merely remained with his big figure huddled motionless in the corner of the seat where he had been carefully propped, dark glasses hiding his dead, staring eyes, and his felt hat pulled down low to cover the somewhat messy result of the bullet's entry into his skull.

Lonnie had expected no answer. He had spoken to the grisly thing beside him only in an effort to ease the intolerable nerve strain of driving a dead man through ten miles of city streets in the broad daylight of four o'clock in the afternoon.

There was little chance of his macabre

passenger being detected from outside the car. Porky's grossly bloated body was big enough to remain solidly fixed in its position through almost any jar or bump of ordinary driving. His topcoat collar was turned up high, which, with the dark glasses and snapped-down hat brim, left the bulbous nose the only fully visible feature in his grayish white face.

No, from anywhere outside the car, Porky merely looked like a well bundled-up fat man huddled in stolid and somnolent comfort beside the sharp-faced little driver of the coupe. From the vantage point of any cop who happened to park his elbows on the window ledge of the driver's door, however, it would be a very different matter. Porky's dead face would never get by that close a scrutiny.

Cops had a habit of parking their elbows on window ledges and thrusting their beefy faces inside cars while they wrote out tickets. That meant that Lonnie had to drive with such meticulous observance of every known traffic regulation that no prowling police car could have any possible reason for curbing him and giving him a ticket.

Under ordinary circumstances the task would not have been too difficult for a driver of Lonnie's skill, but present circumstances did not happen to be ordinary. Los Angeles was squarely in the midst of one of its occasional Traffic Safety campaigns. Newspapers screamed in righteous editorial eloquence, police courts were playing to standing room only, and traffic officers sprouted tickets with the same easy abandon that vacant lots sprouted California poppies in the Spring sunshine.

So far, in the three miles since he had driven away from Porky's place, Lonnie had solved the problem by sticking strictly to little traveled side streets. His gaze drifted longingly to the hazy purple of the foothills seven miles away. If he could stick to the back ways until he made their shelter, he'd be all set. Once deep in one of those canyons, there would be no trouble finding a place where Porky's body could safely be deposited.

**I**T WAS impossible to dodge all traffic lights, even on the back streets. One of them turned red just ahead of Lonnie now. He braked the car almost to a stop, carefully gave the correct hand signal, and turned right.

A droop-eared cocker-spaniel pup sham-bled out of a driveway squarely in front of the coupe. Lonnie choked back his natural impulse to see how far he could knock the pup, and twisted the wheel hard to the left to dodge the small black figure. The abrupt movement brought Porky's heavy body lurching against Lonnie's shoulder. He shoved it irritably back into place.

"Get back over there, you big slob!" he snarled. "What do you want, the whole seat?"

Lonnie had never cared particularly for Porky alive. He was beginning to realize he cared still less for him dead. He glanced at his companion to make sure that the glasses and hat were still safely in place, then took a look upward into the rear vision mirror. His heart skipped a full beat, then began hammering like a tommy-gun in a barrel.

Barely a block behind him there was the unmistakable black-and-white of a police prowler car cruising slowly along in his wake!

Where it had come from, Lonnie had not the slightest idea. Maybe it had been laying out somewhere at that last intersection. Lonnie frantically racked his memory for any possible traffic law violation that he might have committed.

He had come practically to a full stop before making the turn, his hand signal had been perfect, and there hadn't been a pedestrian or another car anywhere within sight. Under those circumstances, it was certainly O.K. to make a right turn against the light. But wait a minute! Lonnie cursed viciously under his breath as memory of a recent newspaper item belatedly came to his mind.

Under a freak temporary situation, where one set of traffic regulations had been repealed and a new set not yet enacted, it was no longer legal to make a right turn against the signal anywhere in the city. The violation was the flimsiest of technicalities, true, but during the present drive, rap-happy cops were handing out tickets on even less excuse.

Lonnie reached under his coat and brought his .38 out of its shoulder holster and laid it ready on the seat beside him. No use trying to run for it. The old crate he was driving wouldn't top sixty if it were going downhill with a strong tail wind.

He glanced up into the mirror again. The so-and-so's were certainly taking their time about curbing him. The police car was still cruising leisurely along nearly a block be-

## DEATH HOUSE TICKET

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hind him and showed no apparent intention of closing the gap.

They went along that way for two blocks. Hope started to flicker feebly, deep in Lonnie's brain. Maybe the prowler car hadn't spotted that right turn violation. Maybe the cops weren't after him at all, but just happened to be going in his direction.

Lonnie tried it out at the next intersection by turning left. He glued his gaze to the rear vision mirror for a long, tense moment, then snarled in savage disappointment as the police car leisurely turned left and came rolling along after him. He waited a couple of blocks, then turned again. The result was the same. There was no longer any possible doubt—the prowler car was very definitely on his tail!

Cold sweat laid a glistening film over Lonnie's ferretlike face. Why didn't the big apes close in on him and get it over with, instead of torturing him with this cat-and-mouse stuff? Lonnie fought back an insane impulse to tramp hard on the accelerator and at least try to make a run for it.

"Take it easy, sap!" he told himself. "Don't make any sucker play till you're sure. Mebbe they didn't spot you on that right turn gag back there. Mebbe they're just tailin' you, waitin' for you to make another slip before they give you a ticket."

Lonnie's lips clamped into a thin, hard line, and his hands tightened grimly on the wheel. If the cops were waiting for another slip on his part, they'd have a long, tough wait. He began driving with the taut concentration of a man who knows that his life literally depends upon making that driving good.

It was more than good. It was perfect. He came to a definite halt at boulevard stops. In 25-mile zones he drove at an exact 25-mile clip, and in 15-mile zones he drove 15. He gave arm signals that did everything but draw maps.

For fifteen solid minutes Lonnie toiled the coupe along in a manner that could not have been improved upon by the man who originally wrote the book.

But even perfection apparently wasn't enough. The black-and-white car still remained inexorably on his tail. And it was beginning to close in very slowly in the last few blocks. It was close enough now for him to see the three men in it—two uniformed cops in the front seat and a plain-clothes guy alone in the back.

Lonnie's nerve finally started to break. He cursed the dead body beside him in a bitter monotone, then changed over and cursed his own stupidity for trying the stunt in the first place. It had seemed like a good idea at the time, and he hadn't had much choice. He couldn't leave Porky there at the joint after he'd drilled him. Some of the mob were due any minute. His only chance had been to park the body in the coupe and try to make it to the hills.

He couldn't put Porky in the big rear compartment of the coupe because that space was packed with about fifteen grand in furs that had been lifted from a Wilshire shop the night before. It had been over the split on those furs that Lonnie had sent a .38 slug into Porky's greedy brain. So he had done the only thing he could. He had propped Porky's body up in the seat and started out.

Yeah, it had looked like a good idea then, but it sure looked plenty sour now! He was not only stuck with the corpse. He was even stuck with the gun that had done the killing. With that set-up, he had about as much chance of beating a murder rap as a turtle has of flying.

It finally happened then, the thing that he had been dreading for the past fifteen minutes. The police car speeded up and closed the gap in a smoothly rushing spurt. As it came alongside him, its siren whined in brief but peremptory command.

Lonnie's frantically roving eyes told him he was trapped. The cops had certainly picked their spot for it when they finally closed in. It was a narrow, thinly settled side street. There was a large truck parked at the curb just ahead, with no room to swing around it before the police car would have him pinned against the curb. The curb was too high to drive over.

Lonnie forgot his grisly passenger and tramped upon the brake with a vicious force that jerked the coupe to a head-snapping stop. A second later, Porky came flopping over on him like a huge, collapsing sack of wet dough.

He fought to push the body away with his left hand while he groped wildly with his right hand for the .38. It was still on the seat, but so firmly wedged under Porky that his groping fingers could barely move it. He heard the thud of heavy shoes on the street as someone ran toward him from the police car.

"Hey, what goes on in there!"

There was both surprise and menace in the booming voice.

Lonnie didn't answer. The gun was beginning to come free now. His finger sought the trigger, ready to start blasting the moment he had the muzzle clear. Then at the last second the gunsight caught with an unexpected jerk in the cloth of Porky's top-coat. Lonnie's finger pressed the trigger before he could stop it. The gun crashed and a slug tore harmlessly into the floor.

After that, things happened a little too fast and violently for Lonnie to follow them. A large cop jerked the door open and landed on him like the descent of about seven tons of brick. Beyond him, Lonnie caught a momentary glimpse of the plainclothes guy reaching a hand inside his coat, while back in the police car the second cop scrambled from behind the wheel.

**T**HEN something thudded into Lonnie's skull and he lost interest in his surroundings. Several minutes later, when he got his aching brains unscrambled again, he found himself disarmed and snugly handcuffed. The plainclothes guy was looking at him with a strange expression on his lean, sallow face, then glancing down at a folded paper he held in his hand.

The first cop came over from prowling the coupe.

"What a haul!" he said, shaking his head wonderingly. "A back-end full of furs that are a cinch to be hot. One very dead corpse who I think is a lug by the name of Porky Arsten. And an undersized little rat here who in all probability is the mug who corpsed Porky."

"Yeah," the plainclothes guy agreed, "we

sure hit the jackpot when we picked this sweet little character. Shall I give him his award?"

The cop grinned.

"Why not? He certainly earned it. I've never seen prettier driving in my life."

The plainclothes guy handed Lonnie the paper he had been holding. Lonnie unfolded it. It was a stiff piece of parchment-like material, with a fancy gold seal on it. Lonnie's eyes weren't in very good focus yet. He read "Award of Merit" in big fancy letters across the top of the paper, but he couldn't make out the finer lettering under it.

"What is this, a gag?" he whimpered.

"No gag," the plainclothes guy said. "I'm with the *Morning Tribune*. That certificate is our daily Award of Merit. It's part of our crusade for traffic safety. We give it to the best and safest driver we find each day. You just happened to be today's lucky man. We picked you up and followed you to see if you'd qualify, and brother, you sure did. After trailing you for fifteen minutes, we knew we'd never find a safer and saner driver today. So we finally stopped you to give you your pretty little award."

Lonnie groaned.

"Oh!" he moaned. "And I thought you was tailin' me to give me a ticket!"

"A ticket, huh?" the cop said.

His eyes were thoughtful as he studied Lonnie for a moment.

"Don't worry, rat," he said grimly. "You'll get your ticket all right. It'll be a nice little one-way ticket, with a special reserved seat and everything, but I don't think you'll like the air-conditioning. Cyanide and acid, they tell me, is very unhealthy for breathing purposes."



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One of the men held a heavy automatic leveled at the old man's chest

# ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN

By F. R. READ

*It's not what they take, but what they don't take, that points the way to the hot-seat for two thieving killers!*

PETER MARSTON reached to the bookshelf behind him for the loose-leaf albums which held his collection of postage stamps, and fanned the books before him on the back of his wide mahogany flat-top desk. From the top right-hand drawer, he drew a small tin deed box and emptied its contents. Stamp hinges, tweezers, gauges and other collectors' paraphernalia clattered on the desk.

The tall, thin old man looked uneasily about, sighed, and reached in the drawer for a smaller, stronger, fireproof box labeled

"Duplicates." He opened the hinged top and upended the box. Hundreds of stamps fluttered to the desk blotter. Each was protected by a crystal clear cellulose acetate envelope only slightly larger than the stamp itself.

Peter Marston ran a long thin hand over his shining bald head. If he noticed the two pairs of eyes peering at him through the slats of the lowered Venetian blinds, he gave no sign.

Again he reached into the desk, and on the slide to his right, placed a tray holding glasses, a full bottle of Scotch and a siphon of soda.



He splashed some of the Scotch into the glass and diluted it with a little soda. He held it between him and the desk lamp, admiring the amber color before sipping it appreciatively.

The eyes peering through the window slats melted into the darkness as the old man set his glass down on the desk blotter at his right hand. He leaned across the desk, pulled the telephone toward him, and lifted the receiver.

"Why, Susie," he exclaimed when the operator answered, "I didn't think you'd be on duty this evening. What happened to your date with the handsome Marine?" He listened attentively to the girl's reply. "Too bad, Susie," he said then, "but official orders supersede those of love. Be sure to let me know when the wedding comes off. I want to send you a little token. . . Now, would you mind humoring an old man by telling him the exact time? I'm going to spend a couple of hours studying the stamps my son left me. If I don't know the time, I'll never go to bed. . . Thank you, Susie."

Peter Marston cradled the instrument, and placed it in the center of the albums. He set the cheap little desk clock at ten minutes after nine. Then he opened an album and a thick catalogue. Painstakingly he compared a stamp with its listing in the catalogue, and jotted its value on a sheet of paper. The price he set down made an addition of three cents to the previous total of one hundred and eighty dollars and five cents.

The buzzer above the door of the little one-room, kitchen and bath cottage sounded.

"Come in—come in!" the old man called, pushing the albums aside. "The door's never locked."

Two men entered, closing the door behind them. The smaller of the two snapped the bolt in place and, crossing to the windows, straightened the slats of the blinds against further prying eyes. The taller held a heavy blued automatic pointed at the old man's chest. Both men wore new dark business suits, gray hats, and gray suede gloves. Both faces showed unmistakable prison pallor.

**T**HE old man blinked his eyes and shook his head, then looked in disbelief at the intruders.

"Who are you and what do you want?" the old man demanded. "Wait a minute—I know now. Crump Cramer and Whitey the Weasel Weitzell! Just out of prison, huh?"

The big man holding the gun shifted uneasily.

"Never mind that. We just come for the dough."

"Dough? I don't have any dough. My only income is the small police pension check I get regularly."

"Cut short the gaff, Peter Marston. We gave your son, Jimmie, some money to keep for us. Now, we've come to get it."

The old man's eyes saddened at the mention of his son. He gazed vacantly beyond "Crump" Cramer to the closed door. His hand on the desk top opened and closed automatically. He spoke slowly.

"M-m-my son left no money. I was his sole heir. After I'd sold off his cars and closed his law office, there was hardly enough left to bury him. He lived high, right up to his income. All I have left of his things is this desk, and an inexpensive collection of stamps. You know how he died?"

Neither man gave any indication of having heard him. The smaller one glanced quickly about the large main room, and then made a hurried but thorough search of the adjoining kitchen and bathroom.

"The only thing wrong with Jimmie was that he was impatient," Peter Marston's old voice continued softly in the quiet room. "He couldn't bear to wait to build a sound success. Regardless of the rights or wrongs of a case, he won it—often unscrupulously. Because of perjured testimony he won his last cast, a divorce action. The defendant, too, took the law into his own hands. He shot and killed Jimmie just outside the courtroom door."

"Whitey the Weasel" was continuing his search in the large main room—a combination living-bed-dining room. He thoroughly examined all the furnishings except the big desk at which Peter Marston sat with the stamps spread before him.

"I remember you two," Peter Marston continued. "It's been nearly twenty years. You were two of Jimmie's first clients. I remember it well. You held up an armored truck and killed a guard. You got away with two hundred thousand dollars, though you were captured not far from the scene of the crime."

Crump Cramer nodded. But his nod was intended for Whitey the Weasel. Whitey jerked the swivel chair holding the old man back from the desk. Hurriedly, but completely, he searched the drawers, even sounding

the massive mahogany desk for a hidden compartment.

"I've told you my son left no money," Peter Marston said, in the face of the continued silence. He pulled himself back before his desk. "Don't you believe me?"

Whitey the Weasel's hand shot forward. He caught the old man by the coat collar and jerked him to his feet. Swiftly he frisked Peter Marston, emptying his pockets of money. Whitey paid special attention to the lining of the old man's clothing, but found nothing. He minutely examined the swivel chair and pushed the old man back into it—hard. Peter grunted in pain and surprise.

Crump Cramer scooped the small pile of notes and coins from the corner of the desk where Whitey had placed them, and put them in his coat pocket. The muzzle of his gun, aimed at the old man's chest, never wavered.

Whitey slithered about the room, sounding the walls, baseboards, and flooring. He moved to one of the electric wall brackets, and removed the set screw. The ornamental candle with its flame-shaped bulb dangled at the end of the wires. A low whistle escaped Whitey's lips at the sight of a small wad of notes held together by a rubber band. He withdrew it from behind the fixture, and dropped it on the corner of the desk before Crump.

"There's a hundred and fifty dollars in that roll, Crump," Peter said. "It's my emergency fund, saved out of my pension check, a dollar or two at a time. It's hard to accumulate any money when I have to spend so much for heart medicine. Even the Scotch my doctor prescribes as a stimulant is expensive. That money and the twenty or so Whitey took from my pocket is every cent I have in the world. I give you my word."

Crump pocketed the bills. Whitey carefully replaced the wall bracket and examined all the others in the cottage. He found no more money. He dusted his gloved hands and moved beside Crump Cramer.

The long silence was broken by Crump Cramer.

"Old man," he said, "we want that dough. Regardless of what you cops think of your son, he was a right guy—a square mouthie. Where do you think the two hundred grand we got went to?"

Peter wet his lips. "I don't know," he answered, despite a gnawing suspicion.

"We consulted Jimmie before we knocked off the truck. He said the job was too dangerous, and the chances were we'd be caught.

He tried to talk us out of it."

A flicker of pride appeared in the old man's eyes. Crump's next words quickly extinguished the flame.

"When he couldn't convince us it was better to lay off, he said he'd park around the corner and if we dumped the money bags in his car as we left the scene he'd keep the dough for us—even if we did a stretch. Now, where's the dough?"

The old man's face was haggard. He swallowed hard. "That made Jimmie an accessory."

"Phooey! He was a right guy."

"I—we—the police never suspected Jimmie of that."

"He kept dough for lots of guys, and all of them so far collected it when they came out of stir. Where's our dough?"

**W**HITEY flexed his hands, licked his lips, and looked inquiringly at Crump, raising one eyebrow. Crump nodded.

Whitey walked around the desk, and picked up the bottle of Scotch. Ignoring the glasses, he put the bottle to his mouth and took a long pull. He wiped the top with the back of his gloved hand, and handed the bottle to Crump. Crump's thick lips curved around the neck, and the liquid gurgled down his throat. He handed the bottle back. Whitey again wiped the top and replaced it on the tray.

"You have to believe me," the old man spoke slowly. "Jimmy didn't leave anything of value—except, maybe, these stamps. You're welcome to them. They're worth, maybe, two hundred dollars. I haven't quite finished classifying what's in the albums. It isn't much, but it will tide you over until you get going again."

A sneer formed on Crump Cramer's coarse face. Whitey chuckled softly. Crump looked at Whitey, and nodded to the books on the desk. Whitey stepped forward. Crump shifted the automatic to his left hand.

"Just a minute," Peter Marston picked up the top album and opened it at random before him on the desk. "Let me explain their value, so no one will cheat you when you sell them. I don't know much about them. I've only been playing with them a couple of weeks."

Whitey looked down at the open page with the words "ARGENTINE REPUBLIC" lettered across the top of it.

Peter Marston picked up a pair of tweezers and pointed to a used one-peso brown, black and light blue stamp with the map of South

America engraved on it.

"That's an interesting stamp," he said. "It caused diplomatic ructions. You'll notice that Argentine proper is shaded brown on the map. If you look closely, you will see that the engraver also shaded the Falkland Islands. They belong to the British. Naturally, His Majesty's Government protested, and the stamp was withdrawn." The old man lifted the stamp, and exposed the number penciled on the page under it—434. "That's the number of the stamp in the catalogue. It's worth maybe, ten or fifteen cents. The catalogue will tell you the value."

Whitey the Weasel frowned and looked to Crump Cramer. Crump's brow was furrowed in thought. Peter Marston picked up another album and opened it to New Zealand.

"Here's another interesting one," he said, as he indicated a used one-penny rose, and turned it over. "Look, Whitey, it has an advertisement on the back of it. The Government collected a little additional revenue from selling the space."

Whitey read the ad. "Bonnington's Irish Moss—Increases the Flexibility of the Throat."

Peter reached for the big catalogues.

"That's Number Sixty-one," he said. "Here's the listing. New—eight cents; used—three cents. . . Stamps are fascinating. I can understand Jimmie's collecting them. Take our own Columbia Exposition stamps that depict Columbus' life. The one-cent blue shows Columbus sighting land, and he's smooth-shaven. The two-cent violet shows him landing the next day, and believe it or not, he is pictured with a full beard. Must have grown it overnight. Wait, I'll show them to you. Of course, the pair of them are only worth a couple of cents, each, but they—"

Whitey moved to one side. A sly grin crossed his face. His elbow tipped the pinch bottle, and the bottle in turn upset the glass containing Peter's drink. Amber fluid flowed in an ever-widening pool across the top of the desk.

Peter Marston cursed. Using both hands, he brushed the pile of stamps from the "Duplicate" box right and left to the floor, out of the way of the liquor. He grabbed for the albums, and knifed them together to lift them from the top of the desk. The cradled telephone rocked.

Whitey's arm shot out, and dragged him back into his chair. Again he looked hopefully toward Crump Cramer.

The big man wet his lips before he spoke. His words were harsh and rasping. His heavy voice boomed around the room.

"Give him the works, Whitey!"

"Okay, old man, whatcha do with our two hundred grand?"

"I told you the truth. There was no two hundred grand."

Whitey's gloved hand lashed the thin old face. "Where'd ya stash the dough? You ain't been spending no dough to speak of. We're smart. We've been keeping an eye on you since we got out. Whatcha do with it?"

Again the gloved hand lashed at the old man's face.

Crump Cramer grinned. "Make up your mind you can't talk your way out of this, old man. We picked your son to keep the dough for us because we knew how smooth he was. He never let a con down. Now, we come to collect it, and you offer us a collection of used postage stamps. . . Make him talk, Whitey. If you can't, we'll take him for a ride."

"You can't do that, Crump," protested old Peter. "If you bump me, you'll burn! A lot of people felt you two should have burned for killing the armored car guard. They won't let you get away with another killing."

"You kiddin'?" Whitey laughed unpleasantly. "We ain't left any proof of our ever being in this joint, see? Whatcha think I'm wearing these gloves for? If the coppers never suspected your son of keeping our dough during the last twenty years, why should you think they'll connect us with you when your carcass is found? Heck, we been careful. Even to staying on the cement walk that goes around the house, so we wouldn't leave footprints."

"Don't talk so much," Crump barked. "Get to work on him. Take it kind of easy at first though. The old guy has a weak pump."

PETER MARSTON'S fragile old wrist was caught by Whitey's gloved hand. He gave it a sharp twist and brought it up behind the old man's back. Peter straightened with pain.

"Gonna talk, old man? We ain't got all night. It's half-past nine now. Whatcha do with the armored car dough your son was keeping for us?"

"There was no money," the old man gasped painfully. "Don't twist my wrist any more, Whitey. I—"

Whitey's teeth snapped together, and he twisted the wrist again. A cry of pain spilled

out of the old man's mouth.

"No dough, he says. . . Whatcha do with the dough?" Whitey jerked the arm. "Whatcha do with it?"

Again a long agonized moan of pain escaped Peter Marston's lips. The thin old frame stiffened, and went limp. Whitey released his hold, and the frail body slumped in the swivel chair. Only the sound of Whitey's heavy breathing broke the silence of the room.

Crump's lower jaw fell open. He stared stupidly at the still figure of the old man. Slowly he lowered and pocketed the heavy automatic.

"Glory!" Whitey uttered the word as if it were a prayer. "He looks like he's dead."

Crump walked around the desk. For a moment he studied the quiet figure. He rested his gloved hand on Peter Marston's forehead, and with his thumb, raised an eyelid. Gently, he touched the eye itself—there was no reaction.

"The old man's dead, all right. I'll be hanged! He must've had a real bad ticker."

"Let's scam out of here," Whitey said, and headed for the door.

"Wait a minute, Whitey! Take it easy—look around! Be sure there's nothing here to give us away."

"Ain't nothing here but the spilled liquor."

"I'll take care of that," Crump said, and moved the old man closer to the desk. He lifted one of the thin arms and adjusted it to look as if Peter Marston himself had upset the bottle and glasses. "That takes care of it. . . You haven't taken off your gloves since you came in, have you, Whitey?"

"No, I been careful."

"The back door and the windows locked?"

"Yeah. They're all locked from the inside."

"Let's go. . . Leave the lights on."

Whitey backed out of the room. On the small front porch, he drew deep breaths of air, and turned to Crump standing in the doorway. "Am I glad to be outta there! Let's scam, Crump."

"Take it easy, Whitey. There isn't a reason in the world for the cops to connect us with this. Just to make sure, I'm going to lock the inside bolt as we close the door. It'll make it look like he was alone when he died."

"How'll you do that?" Whitey demanded.

"Easy," Crump said. "Just watch me."

Crump drew the thin rubber band from around the roll of bills, and slipped it over the knob of the bolt. He stretched the band

around the edge of the door and over the outside door knob. The elastic held the bolt in locked position. Crump then pulled a post card from his pocket, and pressed back the end of the bolt. With the card between the door and the jamb, holding back the bolt, he pulled the door shut. Easing the card free, the inside bolt clicked into position.

"Nice going, Crump." Whitey slapped his pal's back.

Crump broke the rubber band, freed one end, and pulled the other toward him. He pocketed it and joined Whitey. Together, they walked nonchalantly down the porch steps, and along the walk to the street.

Whitey paused to take off his gloves and light a cigarette. Crump studied the quiet neighborhood.

"You think maybe Jimmie's father was telling us the truth, Crump?" Whitey asked.

The big man shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe. Certainly he hasn't been spending any heavy dough. Sure you didn't miss anything in your search, Whitey?"

"Sa-a-ay!" Whitey protested. "Don't you know nothing ever gets past me? We'll come back and look around the outside grounds again when things quiet down. He might've found the dough and buried it, but I'm inclined to believe the old guy. What a tough break! Twenty years—and the dough gone. He—"

The sentence was never finished. From both ends of the narrow street, police cars, sirens screaming, converged on Whitey and Crump. Instinctively Crump tossed his automatic over a low hedge and grabbed Whitey's trembling arm.

"Easy does it, Whitey. They can't possibly tie this to us. Steady—keep walking."

"We ain't made no slip-ups, Crump? You sure of that?"

"We haven't made any slips, Whitey. We were only caught once in all the years we worked together. They wouldn't have caught us that time if the car we used hadn't failed us. Accidents will happen. It was just a tough break for us. We've always outsmarted the flatfoots."

"Yeah, we always have," Whitey agreed.

"We always will, too. Cops aren't any different than when we went away. They're only human. . . Pull in your stomach, Whitey. Here they come."

A HEADQUARTER'S radio cruiser skidded to a stop beside them. A face eyed them

sternly through the open window.

"Well, if it isn't Carter Patterson—a lieutenant now!" Crump said in feigned surprise. "What's all the uproar? Surely, there hasn't been an armored car robbery at this time of night?"

Lieutenant Patterson untangled his long, gaunt frame and stepped to the sidewalk. Expertly he frisked the pair before answering.

"Climb in, boys. You're due for a conference at Headquarters."

"Listen!" Whitey found his voice. "You can't do this to us. We ain't done nothing. I wanta see a lawyer, see?"

"Now, Whitey"—Carter Patterson smiled grimly—"if you haven't done anything, why do you want to see a lawyer?"

"I don't trust coppers," Whitey said sullenly, as he followed Crump into the car.

"Tsk! Tsk! You have a suspicious mind, Whitey."

Lieutenant Patterson slammed the door behind them.

At Headquarters, Whitey and Crump were ushered into one of the conference rooms. Two police stenographers, seated at the big table, took down the proceedings in turn.

"Okay," the lieutenant snapped, "strip out of your clothes."

Obediently, Crump and Whitey did as they were told. They wrapped themselves in the coarse bathrobes that were furnished them.

Piece by piece the technicians studied and marked for identification each article belonging to Whitey and Crump. They were examining Whitey's trousers.

"Whatcha holding us for, Lute?" Whitey demanded.

"Booked for investigation, Whitey," Lieutenant Patterson's voice held a hint of mockery.

"You can't do that to us," Whitey protested. "You gotta charge us."

"Uhm-m-m. Things have changed since you've been away. We can hold anyone for six hours without placing a formal charge. . . What's this? Something in the trouser cuff?"

All color drained from Whitey face. Perspiration beaded his brow. Fortunately for Whitey, the police were so absorbed with their discovery that they didn't notice his shock. He pulled himself together, and looked appealingly to Crump. Crump Cramer smiled reassuringly and jerked up his thumbs.

"Look at that, Whitey." Crump's face registered awe. "Two postage stamps! They

must have fallen out of the album."

Whitey caught Crump's signal. "Yeah—yeah. They must've fallen out of the album."

Carter Patterson raised his eyes from the two stamps gleaming in their cellulose—acetate covering. "What album?" he asked.

Again Crump jumped into the breach.

"We met a guy, Lieutenant, down at the bus terminal. He had an album of cheap stamps. He gave us a hard-luck story and offered us the album for ten bucks."

Whitey smiled. He caught Crump's implication.

"He said his wife had consumption," he added.

Crump nodded, sure of his ground.

"He was taking her out West. We know what it is to have tough breaks, Lieutenant, so we gave him ten bucks and told him to keep his album."

"And did he?" Carter Patterson asked.

Crump shook his head. "He insisted we take it. The stamps weren't worth much. I used to collect them myself when I was a kid, so I know. Mostly, they were cheap stuff, like those two you found. They must have fallen from the album into Whitey's cuff when we were looking at them."

"You say they were stamps like these?" The lieutenant indicated the two lying on the table.

Crump stepped forward and examined them.

"Yes. Like them. I remember that red and blue twenty-four cent one—the one with the airplane upside down, because that was one of the few stamps in the album that was unused. I remember that five-cent bluish one, too. Because it just said 'POST OFFICE PAID 5 cts.' around the picture of Washington, instead of 'United States Postage.'"

"What did you do with the album, Crump?" the lieutenant asked.

"We gave it to a kid who was waiting to ride on the same bus as the guy that sold it to us. I don't know where the bus was going. I didn't notice."

"Neither did I," Whitey added. "But the kid was crying 'cause his mother had just died—that was it. He was on his way to his mother's funeral and was crying. That's why we give him the stamps."

Crump frowned, but made no further comment.

"Oh, well"—the lieutenant shrugged—"it would be practically impossible to find them and bring them here. The bus would have

crossed the state line by this time."

Crump's frown changed to a smile. "Yes, you have to take our word for it, Lieutenant."

Carter Patterson nodded. "I'm sending your clothes to the lab for the technicians to go over. You boys comfortable? There're magazines in the rack and plenty of cigarettes in the boxes. I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Aintcha going to question us? Ask us where we been, what we been doing?" Whitey demanded.

Carter Patterson eyed them gravely. "I don't think that's necessary, now. See you later, boys."

WHITEY and Crump sat at the far end of the big table. The other occupant of the room, a uniformed patrolman, sat in a straight chair, tilted against the door at the far end and eyed them with distaste and loathing.

"Think they got this room wired?" Whitey asked. "I know that copper can't hear us. He's too far away."

"I don't think it is," Crump reassured him. "Unless the microphones are in the walls—too far away to pick up our voices, talking low like this. But it's better not to take chances."

"Yeah," Whitey agreed. "Thanks, pal, for remembering the stamp album so quick. The stamps must've fell into my cuff—you know when."

"Yeah. They probably did. Accidents will happen. But all we have to do, Whitey, is stick to the truth. Tell the police when we arrived by bus. Tell them the street car we took. Tell them how we got off at the wrong station. We mistook Thirty-third street for Sixty-sixth. How it took us the rest of the time to walk to where Lieutenant Patterson picked us up."

Whitey grinned knowingly and winked in admiration.

"Yeah. Gee, Crump, it's a shame we didn't catch the number of the bus the boy took we bought the stamps from. He could take care of—of—of—"

Again Crump came to his aid.

"—of establishing the time we left the bus station. I don't think that will be necessary, Whitey. The driver of our bus will remember when we arrived. But as you say, it would help if we should need it. Even if we couldn't find the man and the kid we gave the album to, it would be up to the police to prove beyond reasonable doubt that we're lying. And they can't do that. Because"—Crump winked

—"it is the truth."

"It sure is," Whitey agreed. "Beyond reasonable doubt. I like that."

"That's a great phrase, Whitey. Last time, we couldn't take advantage of it, because we were caught with our pants down—the gun, our fingerprints, close to the scene of the crime, the eyewitnesses. . . ."

Lieutenant Carter Patterson looked at his watch as he and his staff reentered the conference room. He glanced briefly at Whitey and Crump.

"Sorry to have left you two alone so long, but I'm still within my rights. You've only been held five and a half hours so far."

"Oh, that's all right, Lieutenant." Crump waved his hand. "Things couldn't have been more comfortable, unless you'd supplied us with beautiful female companions and served drinks."

"Than's for the suggestion, Cramer . . . are the stenographers ready?"

"Ready," replied the two men, opening their note-books.

Carter Patterson leaned back in his chair and dictated slowly.

"This statement is a rough draft of the findings up to now. These are facts that are established beyond reasonable doubt. Crump Cramer and Whitey Weitzel arrived at the bus terminal at eight-sixteen. Later, they boarded an as yet unidentified street car at First and Main.

Crump's eyes widened. "We can tell you what street car it was, Lieutenant."

"Let it ride, Crump. Later, if you like, you can fill in the gaps. I'm only dictating facts we have proved ourselves."

"How'd you know we got the car at First and Main Streets?" Whitey asked suspiciously.

"Remember the Water Department was working there, Whitey?"

"Yeah, I remember. They was pumping out a trench. Yellow mud an inch deep was all over the street. We hadda walk through it to get to the street car."

"That's how we know. That corner is the only spot in town you could have picked up yellow mud on your shoes. Besides, the bus driver remembers you two arriving on the eight-sixteen. Now, don't keep interrupting us, or I'll never finish this statement."

"Okay," Crump promised smugly.

The lieutenant resumed his dictation. "We have established that the suspects arrived at Peter Marston's home. They walked up the



path, around the house, and peered in the window. At some time after nine-ten, they entered the house. Crump took up a position before the retired patrolman's desk, while Whitey made a search of the premises. This is established by the trail of minute particles of yellow mud that dropped from their shoes. The mud particles in the shape of their foot-prints glowed brightly under black-light lamps."

Whitey had been holding his breath. "Phooey!" he managed to ejaculate feebly.

Carter Patterson ignored him and continued:

"The murder took place at exactly nine-thirty-two P.M. while Whitey Weitzel was twisting Peter Marston's wrist. The pair left the premises, using a rubber band and card to lock the night bolt behind them. They—"

Crump Cramer leaped to his feet.

"Lieutenant! Listen! I'm not saying it's so, because it isn't, but if it was so, how do you know?"

Lieutenant Patterson smiled grimly.

"Relax, Crump. Relax. At nine twenty-five, someone in that room pushed the stamp albums together. The edge of the albums raised the telephone, which was sitting between them, off its cradle. The operator cut in on the line immediately, because Peter Marston had been especially kind to her. She listened a few moments, and contacted us, cutting us in on the line. Our men managed to hear a good deal of what happened there. As to locking the door behind you—that rubber band you used left a trail on the door edge as clean as a fingerprint. Besides, we heard you say you were going to do it before you closed the door."

CRUMP slumped into a chair and Whitey jumped to his feet.

"We wasn't there, Lieutenant! It must've been a couple of other guys. We never even heard of this guy Peter Marston until this minute. S'help me, that's the truth. Never even heard of him. Let alone seen him."

"Sit down, Whitey. If you keep interrupting, I'll never finish this rough draft of facts we have proved *beyond a reasonable doubt* . . . Ready, stenographers? In Crump's side coat pockets were found one hundred and seventy-one dollars and eighty-five cents. Both the coins and the bills were literally covered with the murdered man's prints. So, also, were the cellulose acetate envelopes covering the two stamps found in

the cuff of Whitey's trousers."

Whitey again jumped to his feet.

"Can't we cop a plea, Lute? Like, for instance, if the charge was manslaughter? You ain't established a motive."

Carter Patterson ignored him. "We expect to prove at least a hundred corroborating facts—such as the leather fibers found on the lighting fixtures matching Whitey's gloves, dark blue wool fibers on the back of Peter Marston's coat as matching those in Whitey's suit, and so on. That's about all for now."

The stenographers snapped their notebooks. The lieutenant held up his hand.

"Just one more thing, and then I'll be through. Take this down. It is ironic that Peter Marston's son, Jimmie, invested the money entrusted to his care by Whitey, Crump and other convicts in postage stamps. Those so-called duplicate stamps which Peter Marston hadn't got around to examining were worth half a million dollars. Unfortunately, Peter Marston didn't know enough about stamps."

Whitey's gasp was audible throughout the room.

"All the valuable stamps had been kept in the box marked 'Duplicates,'" the lieutenant continued. "Those stamps were scattered about the floor near Peter Marston's desk. In fact, the two stamps we found in Whitey's cuff are well worth noting. The air mail stamp with the inverted center is listed at four thousand dollars and the five-cent Washington is a Middlebury Massachusetts Provisional Issue and is listed at ten thousand . . . Did you two say something?"

Neither Whitey nor Crump answered.

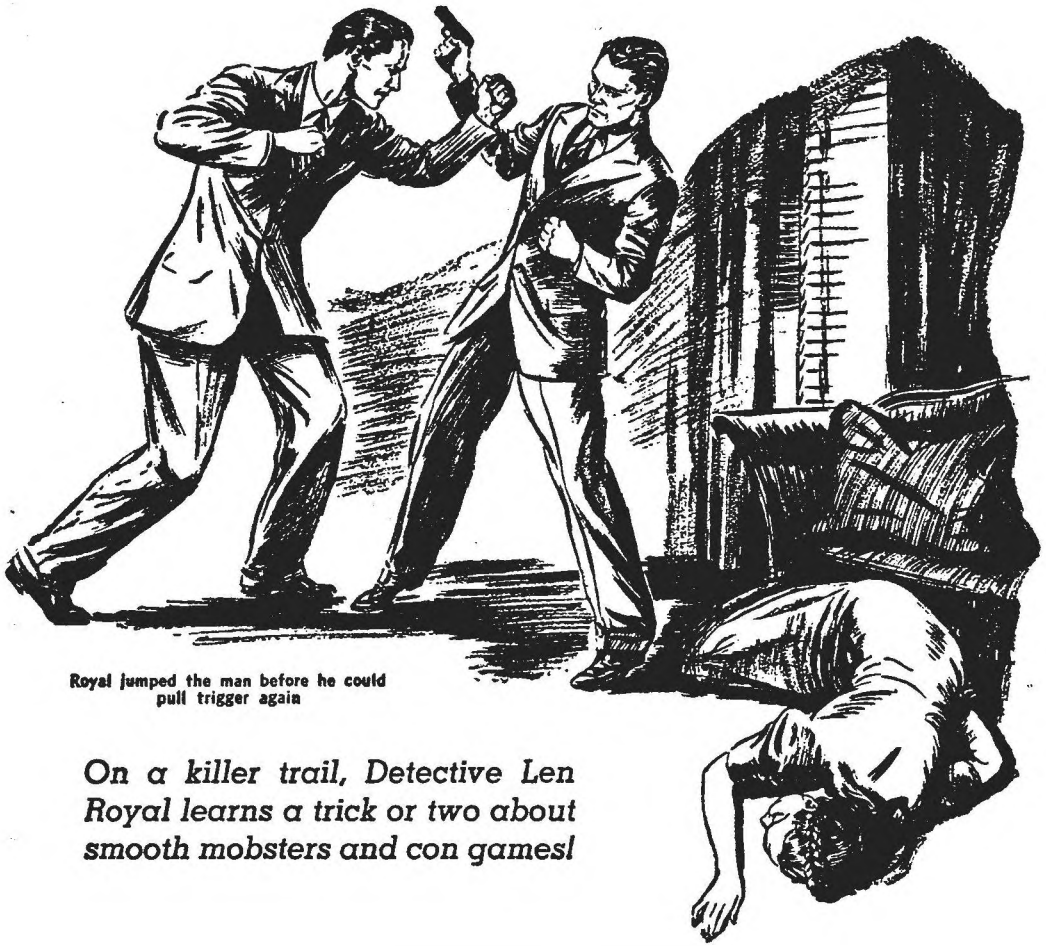
"Photographers ready? We'll take Whitey and Crump out to the desk and charge them with murder. Get good pictures of them, boys—smiling, if possible."

"Whatcha want them for? Whitey asked suspiciously.

"Oh," Carter Patterson said with disarming frankness, "we're just taking precautions against your lawyer claiming we beat you two up to get the information. We want them to show the judge and jury that you were perfectly okay at the time we lodged our charge."

"Why shouldn't I be okay?" Whitey asked.

"Accidents will happen"—the lieutenant shrugged his shoulders and smiled without humor—"especially to killers of cops—even retired cops."



Royal jumped the man before he could pull trigger again

*On a killer trail, Detective Len Royal learns a trick or two about smooth mobsters and con games!*

## THREE FROM THE STICKS

By C. S. MONTANYE

**L**EN ROYAL, the Raleigh-Plaza's house detective, lounged in the auditor's office, yawned, and wondered why he didn't knock off and go home. The overstuffed Park Avenue hotel held no particular charm for him. But then, neither did his furnished room, three blocks west, one north.

The office door was open. Royal could see past George Wiley, the night clerk, and into the hostelry's sumptuous lobby. A topaz-faced electric clock, centered above the three revolving doors, told him it was ten minutes to one.

Royal yawned some more, straightening up a trifle in the leather chair as the middle lobby door went around and spewed out

three people. A tall, gray-haired, rather loosely made man, with a florid complexion and mink eyebrows, led the way to the desk. He was followed by another man, younger and rather nondescript. A girl was with him.

A taxi driver and the hotel doorman followed, burdened with luggage.

From where he sat Royal could hear what the gray-haired man was saying to George Wiley.

"My name is Arthur Suydam. I wired from Chicago, last Tuesday, for a reservation. For myself and for Mr. and Mrs. Clark Channing."

Wiley turned on his welcoming smile and

consulted the reservation book beside him.  
"Yes, Mr. Suydam. It's right here on file."

The tall man looked pleased. "Good. This is my daughter Mrs. Channing." He nodded toward the girl and indicated the man with her. "And this is Mr. Channing."

Wiley murmured his pleasure at meeting the family. He laid engraved cards for signatures on the desk blotter and dipped a black onyx pen in the well to which it was chained. He gave the pen to Arthur Suydam with a flourish, holding his hand close to the desk's lamp so that his diamond ring glittered.

Len Royal shifted his suddenly narrowing gaze from the tall, gray-haired man to the girl. His cold blue eyes fastened on her speculatively. He indexed Suydam and Clark Channing as strictly West or mid-West. But the dame was a different proposition.

Mrs. Channing was svelte and suave, groomed to the last inch of her five-feet-five and smoothly attractive. Royal saw hair the brown of autumn leaves, flashed with golden highlights.

Her eyes, set wide apart, were heavily lashed and had plenty of thinking room between them. They, too, were a deep shade of soft brown. Her nose had a fascinating tilt, her mouth was warmly curved, with lips that might have been just a trifle too full. Or perhaps that was the lipstick and the light.

**R**oyal, who had a weakness for good-looking babes, kept his gaze on her thoughtfully. Under a loose, evidently expensive coat, he had a glimpse of a dress that might have been Fifth Avenue. He couldn't see her legs, but he had an idea they were all right.

Suydam handed the pen to his son-in-law. Clark Channing leaned to scribble his own signature and Royal caught a view of him in the glow of the desk lamp. Just an ordinary guy in the early thirties. Rough, sandy hair brushed straight back from a medium high, slanting forehead, regular features, nothing to make an impression on anyone.

The two men and the girl headed for one of the elevators, two bellhops in their wake. The arrow-marker went around and stopped at Number 15.

George Wiley filed the cards away and reached for a candy mint.

"From Oregon, Len," he called in. "Notice them?"

Royal got up and went out of the auditor's office.

"Yeah. I'm going downstairs to get a drink. It's past one and I haven't had a change of breath since eleven."

He headed for a broad flight of stairs to the left and rear of the rococo lobby.

The Neptune Bar was full of smoke and people trying on nightcaps for size. Royal had a speaking acquaintance with Neal, head barman. Neal saw Royal coming, grinned and slopped some Grade Two Bourbon in a glass. He went down to the end of the mahogany with it.

"For you, gumheel," he said.

"Thanks, Sloppy."

Royal took the drink over to a buffed-leather compartment for two and lighted a cigarette. He sat moodily inhaling the aroma of the whisky, wishing he was back in the agency business. His creditors had forced him out of a Times Square cubicle a year previous when he had run out of cases and case dough. The Raleigh-Plaza had been a port in a storm.

The only trouble, Royal told himself, was that he was anchored there. What he had hoped would be temporary looked like a long stretch.

He sampled the Bourbon, shuddered and looked up. Arthur Suydam's daughter was coming through the arched entrance to the bar. She wore neither hat nor coat and, as he had expected, the stems were lovely—all the way from the hem of her slinky skirt down to the green lizard shoes she wore.

She walked slowly, looking over the customers at the bar, shifting her gaze to the booths, and letting her brown eyes focus on Royal.

She walked over to him. Gracefully, he thought, as if to music only she could hear. He remembered his manners and got up.

"Mr. Royal?"

"That's right, Mrs. Channing."

"The clerk at the desk said I'd find you down here. That you had red hair and were wearing a gray suit. Could I speak to you a minute?"

Royal pulled out the table so she could squeeze in and sit down on the bench opposite. He didn't feel quite so bored when she smiled at him and he caught the delicate scent of her perfume. Nice, expensive.

"Scotch and soda, Mrs. Channing?"

"If you please."

Royal gave Neal the house-guest-top-

bracket-stuff signal and studied the girl thoughtfully. Plenty of personality, loaded with charm. But there was something else about her that puzzled him considerably. He wondered just what it was.

"All the way from Oregon." He said it, musingly. "Oregon, where moist Pacific breezes blow over Puget and do all right by complexions. What's on your mind, Mrs. Channing?"

"Would you be interested in earning a hundred dollars?" She made her eyes level with his.

"I'm always interested in making dough."

"I'll pay that—for protection while we're here at this hotel. That will be for a few days, possibly longer. My father has some important business to attend to and we won't leave until it's finished."

"Who do you want to be protected from?" Royal asked.

"I'm concerned about my father." She lifted her glass, her pretty face suddenly shadowed. "He doesn't know this town, the kind of people in it. Dad carries quite a lot of money around with him. Clark, my husband, has never been to New York before, either. But I have. I lived here once for a year."

LEN ROYAL nodded. He had figured that. Three from the sticks, but one that wasn't as rural as the other two.

"What kind of business is your father in?" he asked casually.

"It's rather secret. What I mean, certain wrong people might hear about it—and know about it. I wouldn't want anything to happen to him. So I thought if you could sort of keep an eye on him, on the people who come in here, if any do, looking for him—" She stopped.

"Sure," Royal said. "That's all right with me. I'll bodyguard him while he's on the premises. But I can't do any outside trailing, stuff like that."

"I don't expect you to. And another thing. This is personal between us. Dad would be upset if he thought I was worried about him."

"Strictly confidential," Royal assured her, pocketing the two fifty-dollar bills she took from the green bag that matched her shoes.

Royal was asking her if she could use another drink when he saw two men who had come into the bar. Slim, fancy-dressed characters, with hard, tight faces and predatory eyes. A couple of Broadway grifters

[Turn page]

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THE ROSICRUCIANS  
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with pen records. With shooters worn flat under their draped jackets.

By name, Royal recalled, one Sam Painter and one Ranny Barr. Two hustlers who invariably had "big deals" on the front burner. A couple of dangerous lads always on the move when any loose money was on tap. A tough pair.

"See who's here!" Barr paused beside the leather-tufted compartment. "I heard you'd been turned out to pasture. Getting fat, sport. The full life, huh?"

He gave Mrs. Channing a sharp stare while Painter, interested only in thirst-slaking, added his weight to the edge of the bar.

"The face is familiar," Royal murmured, "but I don't remember the iodine bottle I saw it on."

Barr sneered at him and went over to join his partner at the bar. He said something and Painter glanced over his shoulder. Royal paid no attention to either. He smiled into the long-lashed brown eyes.

"Thanks for the payoff," he said to the girl. "I'll do my best. But there's something you forgot to tell me. Your first name."

"Christine." She began to get up. "I guess I'd better go. I gave Clark a flimsy excuse to get out. I said I wanted to buy a magazine."

Royal laughed. "The Raleigh-Plaza doesn't sell magazines."

He took her out to the elevators and again watched the needle hit Fifteen and stop.

He rubbed his chin on the back of one hand, doubtful about Painter and Barr. He didn't know if he should tell them to get out and stay out. Or to leave them alone, let them drift away naturally.

He decided that if he tried any strong-arm stuff they might scatter lead. He didn't object to that particularly, but the management might not like it.

He started up the stairs, leaving well enough alone. Coming down the steps were two girls who looked like models, with their long, unbound, glimmering hair. They were with a slender old-young man who wore faultlessly tailored dinner clothes with rakish distinction. Royal knew he was Freddy Spartan, playboy heir to the Spartan Cotton Mills in South Carolina.

Freddy, an aristocratic lush with the finely drawn features of a highly bred horse, leased a suite by the year on the twenty-ninth floor and had the habit of buying drinks for any young lady who told him she was thirsty.

The house detective traded nods with

Spartan and went back to the auditor's office. He kept his hat and topcoat in the closet there. . . .

In the next two days Royal had brief and infrequent glimpses of the gray-haired Arthur Suydam, Clark Channing and the glamorous Christine. Oddly, he hadn't spent any of the C she had slipped him that first night. In the back of his mind Royal was sardonically trying to angle the situation and not doing so well. Somehow, it didn't add.

The third night, when he was doing some foot-dangling in the office back of the desk he saw Christine Channing crossing the lobby. He reached her before she got to the revolving doors.

"Hello, Mrs. Channing. Spare a second?"

SHE stopped, looking up at him, a troubled expression in the depths of her long-lashed eyes.

"Yes, but—"

"I want to return your money."

She drew a quick little breath. "Please don't give it back. I'm sure my father needs you." She lowered her voice. "Did you ever hear of anyone named Sam Painter?"

"Why?" Royal's brows drew together.

"Clark, my husband, told me someone by that name has been telephoning Dad. Clark says he thinks this Painter has been threatening him. Dad didn't say anything to Clark, but from the way Father talked on the telephone, what he said—" She broke off. "You will keep an eye on him?"

"Sure."

She gave him a little smile and went on out. Through the glass doorway Royal saw a car at the curb, its door held half-open by the hotel's carriage man. He caught a glimpse of the person who got out of the car to help Christine Channing in.

Royal shrugged, turned, and was half-way across the lobby when he saw George Wiley giving him an agitated signal. The night clerk's complexion had turned the color of skimmed milk. Royal made the desk in a half dozen long strides.

"What's the trouble, Georgie?"

"Fifteen-o-three!" Wiley's voice was thin and tremulous. "Bella, the floor maid—she went into Suydam's room. She just telephoned down. She says he's on the floor, that he looks dead!"

The maid was cowering half-way along the fifteenth floor corridor when Royal barged out of the elevator. A dark-haired, Polish-

born girl, trimly neat in a gray-and-white uniform. Royal straightened her up with a hand on her hunched shoulders. She looked as if she had seen a ghost.

"What's happened?" he asked.

"Fifteen-o-three. I always brought him a pitcher of water at nine-thirty. When he was home, when he wasn't. There was a light on and the door was unlocked. He's lying—"

Her choked voice faded. Royal pulled his hand away and went on down the corridor. 1503 was on its south side, the last door before the bend that went around to 1505 which was Channing's room and bath.

Bella had left the door half-open. Shaded electric light gushed out warmly. Royal pushed the door wide with an elbow, stepped inside and let it swing shut behind him.

Arthur Suydam was on the floor, and Suydam was definitely and completely dead.

Fully dressed, he lay on his back, glazed eyes staring at the ceiling, filled with the vague emptiness of death. Suydam's facial muscles were relaxed into a contorted unnatural expression. An ooze of blood, fresh and new, trickled from a wound in his head.

Royal, bending beside the body, saw that the man had been gunned about an inch above the right temple and over the ear. There was a big hole there, probably made with a .45 slug. From the looks of it, Arthur Suydam had been shot not too many minutes past.

There was no sign of the gun. Royal made sure of that before he checked the windows. They were closed, their shades drawn. The connecting door that led into the Channing room was locked on Suydam's side, the key in the latch.

Royal shook his head and walked around Suydam's limp body.

[Turn page]

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A carpet, plain taupe broadloom, thick-piled and soft as moss, paved the room from surbase to surbase. Royal studied the rug, his blue eyes beginning to narrow.

He dropped to a knee and prodded around on it with careful fingers. His gaze wandered along the rug, following his hand. He stared hard at the locked connecting door, shrugged and reached for the telephone on the bottom shelf of a table beside the bed.

"Police Headquarters, Joaney," he said crisply, when one of the switchboard girls answered his flash. "Hurry it up, honey."

SOME twenty minutes later Captain Fred Mullin of Homicide, together with his usual entourage, arrived and took over.

Royal hung around after he had spoken his piece and watched the department men give Arthur Suydam's room a routine go-over. They were busy measuring and checking when Doc Nesbitt, the medical examiner, who had broke out of a card game, bustled in, bag in hand.

The thing Royal had seen on the taupe colored carpet was gone now. And, he knew, would never come back.

Still in the background, he listened to what the badly shaken Clark Channing had to say. The dead man's son-in-law wore mulberry pajamas, slippers, a yellow bathrobe. He didn't have much to offer Mullin in the way of information.

At the time of the shooting, Channing said, he had been taking a shower. He hadn't heard any shots. He hadn't heard anything. He had finished his bath and gone to bed.

He didn't know why anyone would want to kill his father-in-law. To the best of his knowledge and belief Suydam had no enemies. Robbery, he imagined, might have been the motive.

Arthur Suydam, Channing said, always had a thousand dollars or more in his pockets. But it wasn't robbery, Royal knew. The dead man's leather was in the heap of belongings on a table.

Mullin had fingered through the wallet and found eleven hundred dollars in big bills, untouched.

Mullin switched his line of questions and Channing explained that his father-in-law, a wealthy lumber broker from Puget City, had come to Manhattan partly on business, partly for pleasure. Suydam had hoped to clinch a contract with a New London, Connecticut, shipbuilding yard. The matter was hanging



fire, but Suydam had expected to clear it away within a day or two.

Mullin nodded. "Where's your wife?" he asked.

"She went out around nine o'clock," Channing told him. "To see some friends uptown. I had a headache and—well, they were women friends she hadn't seen in some time. So I decided to take a shower and turn in. I was asleep when your man knocked on my door."

Mullin let him go and conferred with the medical examiner. Then he had the still shaken corridor maid brought in. Bella looked appealingly across at Royal when the questions began. No, she hadn't seen anyone in the public hall. She hadn't noticed Mrs. Channing leaving, and the door to Suydam's room had not been locked.

"Closed," the maid said, "but not locked."

Bella left and one of Mullin's men wandered in to say he had flashlighted the alley on that side of the hotel and found nothing in the way of a gun. Royal, wanting a drink, continued to hang around while the elevator operators were brought in one at a time.

None of them had made any stops on the fifteenth floor for descending passengers after

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Mrs. Channing had been taken down, Mullin looked baffled and made a sarcastic crack about the three stairways the Raleigh-Plaza had.

To Royal, whose thirst was increasing, it began to look like an all-night session. He edged over to Mullin.

"Need me any further, Captain?" he asked.

Mullin gave him a cold stare. "You know Mrs. Channing?"

"Sure."

"Take Dave downstairs with you and wait until the dame shows. Point her out to Dave. I want him to bring her up. I want to talk to her. She could have walked out with that gun. She could have shot the old man and powdered."

"But why?" Royal asked.

Mullin hadn't any opinion and a few minutes later Royal got into an elevator with Dave Wilcox, one of the Homicide's plainies. Wilcox looked something like a Broadway song and dance man, but the red-headed house detective knew he was a pretty fair operator.

"How does it look from where you sit, Len?" Wilcox said.

Royal moved his shoulders. "One of those things. Why don't you tell Mullin to take Arthur Suydam's prints—if he forgets. Might turn up something."

THE elevator slid to a lobby stop. They got out.

Wilcox looked slightly surprised.

"You think maybe the dead guy's on file?"

"He was a con." Royal said it carelessly. "I placed him the minute he walked in here. I remembered him from Chicago, ten years ago. He was working a gold brick caper then in a gilt-edged, diamond-studded office. He wasn't Suydam in those days. His name was Powell Gurney."

"Why didn't you tell the chief all that?"

"Why should I?" Royal opened the door to the auditor's office. "He never told me anything when I had my agency and needed a wise word. Let him find his own trigger squeezers."

It was nearly midnight when Christine Channing came through the middle revolving door. Royal nudged the lethargic Wilcox beside him. Mullin's man sat up with a jerk.

"That her? Thanks, Len."

Ten minutes later Royal got his hat and coat and went out.

He caught a cab on the avenue and used it:

for a short hop over to Times Square. He dropped into a series of taverns before he found the person he was looking for.

In the last resort Royal saw Sam Painter lighting lights and ringing bells on a pinball-machine. There was no sign of Manny Barr. Royal went over and moved in.

"Remember me, Sammy?"

"Yeah." Creepy lids lowered over Painter's sharp eyes. "What do you want?"

"Just a little patter—yours. Outside. Or maybe you'd rather roll downtown and try your voice on some of Mullin's brand of questions. I'm not particular."

Painter smiled crookedly. "The old scare?" "Outside."

"Sure. Why not?"

He seemed listlessly bored, amenable enough, but the minute they stepped into the dark cut between the tavern and the building back of it, Painter went after his gun.

Royal saw him start to draw and hit hard and fast. The house detective's knuckles slammed against Painter's jaw. The man bounced back and struck a whitewashed wall. Royal hit him again, not quite so hard

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the second time. He didn't want to knock him speechless.

Holding him with his left hand, Royal delved and came up with Sam Painter's gun. It was a .38 caliber Smith and Wesson.

He broke it, held it to what little light there was and saw that its chambers were full. He smelled its barrel before he tucked it in his pocket and tipped Painter's bruised chin higher with his thumb.

"Want to talk, punk?"

"Yeah." Sam Painter spit blood from a split lip. "What do you want to know?" . . .

Toward eight the following morning Len Royal, fresh from the Raleigh-Plaza barber shop, wandered up to the desk. George Wiley was just going off night duty.

"Georgie," Royal said, "I'd like to have a look at that big beautiful safe you preside over so efficiently. Just a peek, Georgie. All in the interests of law, order and justice."

Five minutes after that one of the switch-board operators rang the auditor's office phone.

"Fifteen-o-five calling you, Mr. Royal."

"Put them on."

"Could you come up for a minute or two?" Christine Channing asked. Her voice was low and vibrant, but colorless.

"Sure. happy to. Right away."

She was at the door, opening it before he could knock. She wore a dark green curve-fitting housecoat and gold-strapped sandals on high-arched, bare feet. Her hair caught and held the morning sun slanting obliquely through the Venetian blinds at the window.

The same delicate scent of expensive perfume Royal had noticed the first time he had met her made volatile fragrance for him to breathe. She smiled faintly.

"Clark's gone down to breakfast," she said. "I wanted to see you before he comes back."

"Here's your money." Royal pressed the two fifty-dollar bills she had given him into her slender hand. She dropped them on the table and he heard the choked sound she made.

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HER slim fingers played nervously with the buttons on the housecoat's front. "I'm asking you," she said. "You found him—you were there all the time the police were making the investigation. You must have some idea. You must have heard something."

"I heard plenty. It didn't mean much." Royal moved his shoulders. "While I listened I was wondering what you were doing on your date with Freddy Spartan. I saw you climb into his heap last night."

Her hand dropped away from her housecoat. The warm, curved lips parted.

"I used to know him. Before I was married. The year I lived in New York. I didn't want Clark to make a scene so I told him I was going to see some girl friends. Clark's always suspicious where other men are concerned. And Freddy was very nice to me—always."

"You didn't come clean, all the way," Royal went on. "You didn't tell me why Suydam needed protection. You forgot to mention the fact that he was carrying a leather case full of black pearls around with him—hot pearls—part of a four-month-old San Francisco swipe. Property of a rich realtor's wife out there. Black pearls—worth a lot of dough. Your father—if he was your father—came East to unload for a top bid. But there weren't any pearls on him last night. Plenty of currency, no pearls."

Something like wonder was in the girl's soft brown eyes.

"How did you know?"

Royal lighted a cigarette. He let smoke trickle lazily from one corner of his mouth.

[Turn page]

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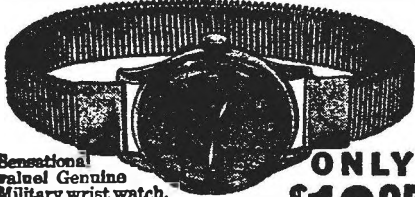
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A nice doll, he thought. Too bad she had to face what was coming up.

He went over and sat on a divan upholstered in yellow satin. He planted his feet wide on the carpet. It was the same taupe-colored, mossy-surfaced type of rug Arthur Suydam had been stretched out on last night, his empty eyes staring at nothing.

The door opened and Clark Channing came in. Channing looked worn and drawn. He evidently had had a bad night. He glanced over at Royal, nodded to him and turned to his wife.

"You'd better get dressed, Chris. They want us at ten-thirty at Headquarters. More questions. You haven't had breakfast yet. Ask Mr. Royal to excuse you."

Royal got up slowly. "That won't be necessary—I mean you folks going downtown to see Mullin. I know who washed Suydam out. I know why and all the rest of it. So I'll save you a trip and let the Captain come up here for his seance."

Neither of the Channings answered. Royal gave them a quizzical look, crossed over to the telephone and used it to put his call through.

Christine Channing watched and listened in fascinated silence until he cradled the phone and set it back where he had found it. Then, with a quick, graceful gliding motion, she confronted him, her hands catching at his.

"Who killed my father?" she cried, her voice muffled and smothered.

"Your husband," Royal said.

Clark Channing laughed. "You're crazy!"

"He waited until you went out," Royal explained to the girl. "He took a shower all right. But he stepped out of it, put on his bathrobe, got a gun and went through the connecting door to Suydam's room. It was unlocked then. He must have known the rooms up here are pretty well sound-proofed. He shot your old man, turned the key in the lock—with a towel probably, to keep his prints off—went out through the hall door, around the bend and back in here, to finish his bath."

"You're crazy!" Channing repeated.

"Occasionally. Not now." Royal half turned. "Your mistake was in not wearing slippers. You left damp footprints on the carpet in Suydam's room. I got there in time to see them, making a trail from the connecting door to the corridor door. I got a gander before they dried. When you said 'shower' to



Mullin, it was a perfect fit."

Christine Channing dropped down on the same cushion Royal had gotten up from. Against the sun, her face was ivory pale, quenched of all expression.

"Let's hear some more," Channing suggested.

**R**oyal turned all the way around to speak to him.

"After you gunned Suydam you lifted the pearls he was carrying. And this morning, just before you went in to breakfast, you had the desk clerk put a package in the safe.

You tried to build advance suspicion by telling Christine a certain character named Painter was after the oyster seeds. You didn't mention the fact that Sammy's a contact man for the biggest fence in town, the dealer who was going to buy the pearls from Suydam today."

Royal stopped as Channing reached for his gun. He had it out before Royal jumped him. The slug went wild, puffing plaster from the ceiling.

Royal had him before he could squeeze the trigger again. And Royal was rough. He didn't like people to make a target of him. He didn't like shooting-gallery stuff. And he hadn't cared particularly for Clark Channing from the time he had found out the man was Christine's husband.

He put more pressure into his hands. Channing fought furiously, trying to get in close and use his knees. But Royal was an old hand at rough-and-tumble brawling. He broke Channing's nose with his next blow and dropped him with a vicious left uppercut that landed on the exact point of the killer's jaw.

The girl had fainted. She lay crumpled on the taupe-colored rug, like a discarded flower. She smelled like one, too, Royal thought when he blew on his knuckles, stepped over her and went on and into the bathroom.

The shower curtain hung limp and damp. He ran a glass of water from the ice-cold tap. Just before he took it back to the other room, he turned his head and looked at the chromium bath equipment.

"If he had worn slippers," Royal said to himself, "he could have walked right out of this case—no footsteps on the sands of crime!"

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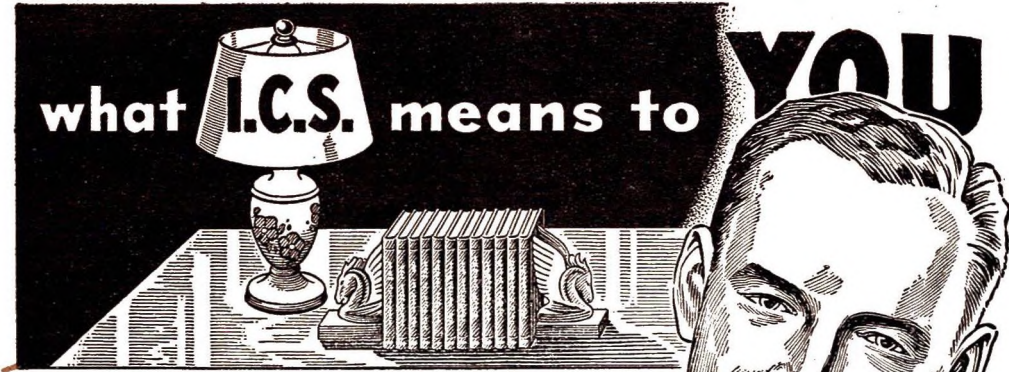
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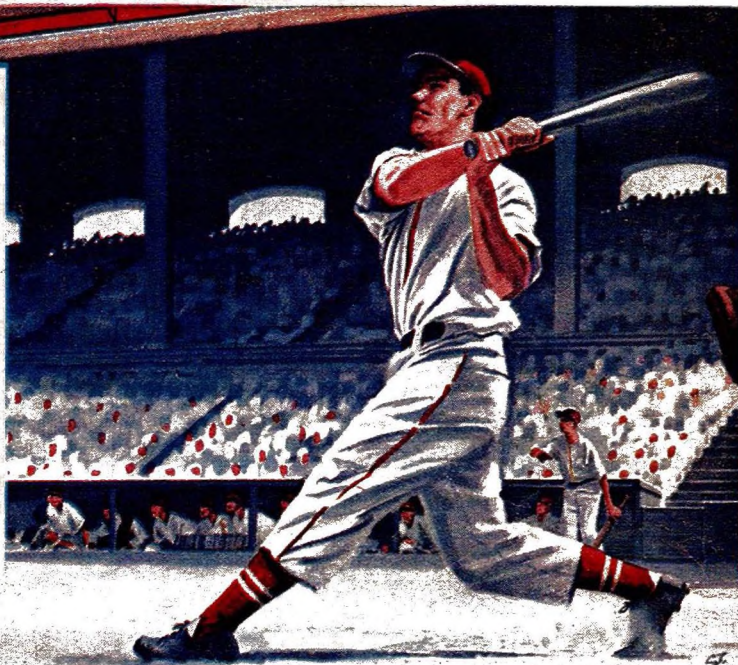


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