

# *The* PHANTOM DETECTIVE

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A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION

## MURDER ACRES

A Full-Length Mystery Novel by ROBERT WALLACE



**Reducing Specialist Says:**



"Thanks to the Spot Reducer, I lost four inches around the hips and three inches around the waistline. It's amazing." Mary Martin, Long Island City, N. Y.

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# SPOT REDUCER



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THIRTY-TWO ADDITIONAL PAGES IN THIS ISSUE

# *The* PHANTOM DETECTIVE

Vol. LII, No. 2

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

November, 1948

A COMPLETE NOVEL

## *Murder Acres*



by Robert Wallace

A killer's fabulous legacy stirs up a grim tempest of crime and blackmail, woven into a death pattern—and the Phantom, world's greatest sleuth, whirls into rapid action! 11

A COMPLETE NOVELET

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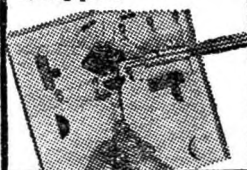
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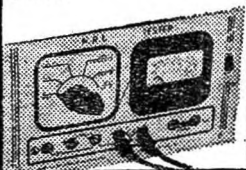
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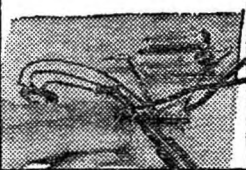
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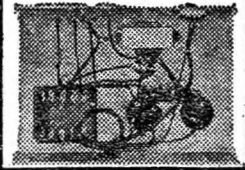
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**W**ILLOWBROOK Sanitarium was located on an extensive acreage in upper Westchester County. To the society folk who lived on adjoining estates it was an interesting medical experiment and one which might be expected to contribute a great deal to the advancement of mental research. But to Steve Huston of the New York *Clarion* and to the members of the Sheriff's office in White Plains it suddenly became a sinister headquarters of crime.

A wealthy, respected business man of Brazil who had contributed a great deal to the war effort in the United States during World War II through his knowledge of rubber and rubber products had suddenly disappeared, and Huston, who was called upon by Frank Havens to investigate the matter, traced the missing Leonard De Castro to Willowbrook Sanitarium.

The investigation which the live-wire reporter launched developed some interesting sidelights on the activities of Dr. Haley Niblo, director of Willowbrook. By the time the official checks had worked through to a dramatic conclusion Niblo and several of his henchmen had fled and the sanitarium was an empty, tenantless building on top of a high hill.

### The Sleep of Death

Had matters stopped at this point with the release of Leonard De Castro from his unwilling confinement, there would have been no need for the talents of the Phantom Detective, but Frank Havens called me in that evening while I was visiting his daughter and asked me if I would like to visit Leonard De Castro at the home of Mrs. Walker, a nurse who was assuming responsibility for him. She was a good, kind woman whose suspicions of the set-up at Willowbrook had led to the interest of Steve Huston in the case.

I was never destined to meet Leonard De

Castro in life. When we arrived at Mrs. Walker's place she told us that the wealthy Brazilian was asleep. We did not want to disturb him, but the nurse informed us that when she had been up to his room she had heard a queer tapping noise. Mr. Havens and I investigated this sinister sound and discovered that it was the heels of Leonard De Castro striking against a trunk. Apparently he had committed suicide.

The locked room and the disturbed mental condition of Leonard De Castro as a result of his confinement in the Sanitarium might have seemed like a logical reason for his act, but Mr. Havens knew that De Castro was very much in love with his wife in Brazil and considered his daughter the light of his life. Such a man would hardly take his own life now that he would be able to return home, bringing with him a million dollars turned over to him for a sale of his rubber interests in a large Amazon field.

I investigated the room in which De Castro had met his death and soon discovered a number of suspicious circumstances which indicated how a murderer might have gained access to the room and committed the crime. When this fact of possible murder was established things began to develop thick and fast. I swept into the case with all the talents at my disposal and called upon both Chip Dorian and Steve Huston to help me. Frank Havens put all of the facilities of his great newspaper organization at my beck and call and they were an important factor in tracking down the sinister forces behind the untimely death of the Brazilian.

### Fingers of Suspicion

The kernel of the problem was centered here in New York, but there were a number of elements that sent forth fingers of suspicion to other parts of the world. It was the dead man himself who supplied an im-

(Continued on page 8)



# To those who think LEARNING MUSIC is hard...

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## THE PHANTOM SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

portant clue with the mention of an Old Spanish Bible. But the details concerning the Bible were not complete enough in themselves to give me the answer to this threat against the great rubber growing industry immediately. At least, however, the notes did point the way to a line of investigation that promised startling results.

This whole crime chase was one that resulted in one of the most exciting cases in which the Phantom Detective was ever involved, and I found a number of ramifications that were a definite challenge to my utmost skills. You'll enjoy reading about them as they are presented by Robert Wallace in "The Case of the Bible Murders." It's the story that has been lined up for the next issue, and I'm sure it'll be well worth reading.

There were some factors in "The Case of the Bible Murders" that were entirely different from anything I had ever encountered before. Speedy transportation by air was an aid to the forces of law and order in an unusual way, but it also appeared to offer a means of escape for the criminal crew holding the strings that led into the labyrinth of murder and extortion that were involved in this exciting mystery.

"The Case of the Bible Murders" will pose many interesting problems for you, and you'll be amazed at the way these problems are solved. I hope you like it!

## Join the FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM

**M**EMBERSHIP cards are going out of this office to new members of the FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM Club like the proverbial hot-cakes and that is something that is rather encouraging to me and to all those folks who are interested in seeing that this great republic of ours is the law-abiding and upright country that we all want to live in. I'm sure that all of you who are readers of THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE will want to participate in this concerted movement to endorse the full principles of law and order.

If you would like to become a member of FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM, send along a letter of application. Give us your name,

(Continued on page 143)





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DON'T GET NOSY, PAL, JUST HAUL US OUTTA HERE FAST



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WHEN HE'S FINISHED, I'LL BUMP HIM



YES, I'M JESSIE ELLIS. OH, THOSE TERRIBLE MEN!

TURN AROUND, YOU MUGGS, WHILE I SLIP ON THE BRACELETS



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LIKE TO SHAVE? HERE'S A RAZOR

FINE... THANKS!



MAN WHAT A SHAVE! SAY, THIS BLADE IS REALLY SOMETHIN'

YES, THIN GILLETTES SURE MAKE SHAVING EASY



YOU'RE OKAY IN MY BOOK, SON. I'M COUNTING ON SEEING YOU TOMORROW

THAT MEANS A SWELL JOB FOR MILLS, OR I DON'T KNOW THE OLD MAN

HOURLY LATER



BELIEVE ME, MEN, YOU GET CLEANER, BETTER-LOOKING SHAVES AND SAVE MONEY, TOO, WITH THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE MUCH KEENER AND LONGER-LASTING THAN OTHER LOW-PRICE BLADES AND FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTE BLADES IN THE CONVENIENT NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE



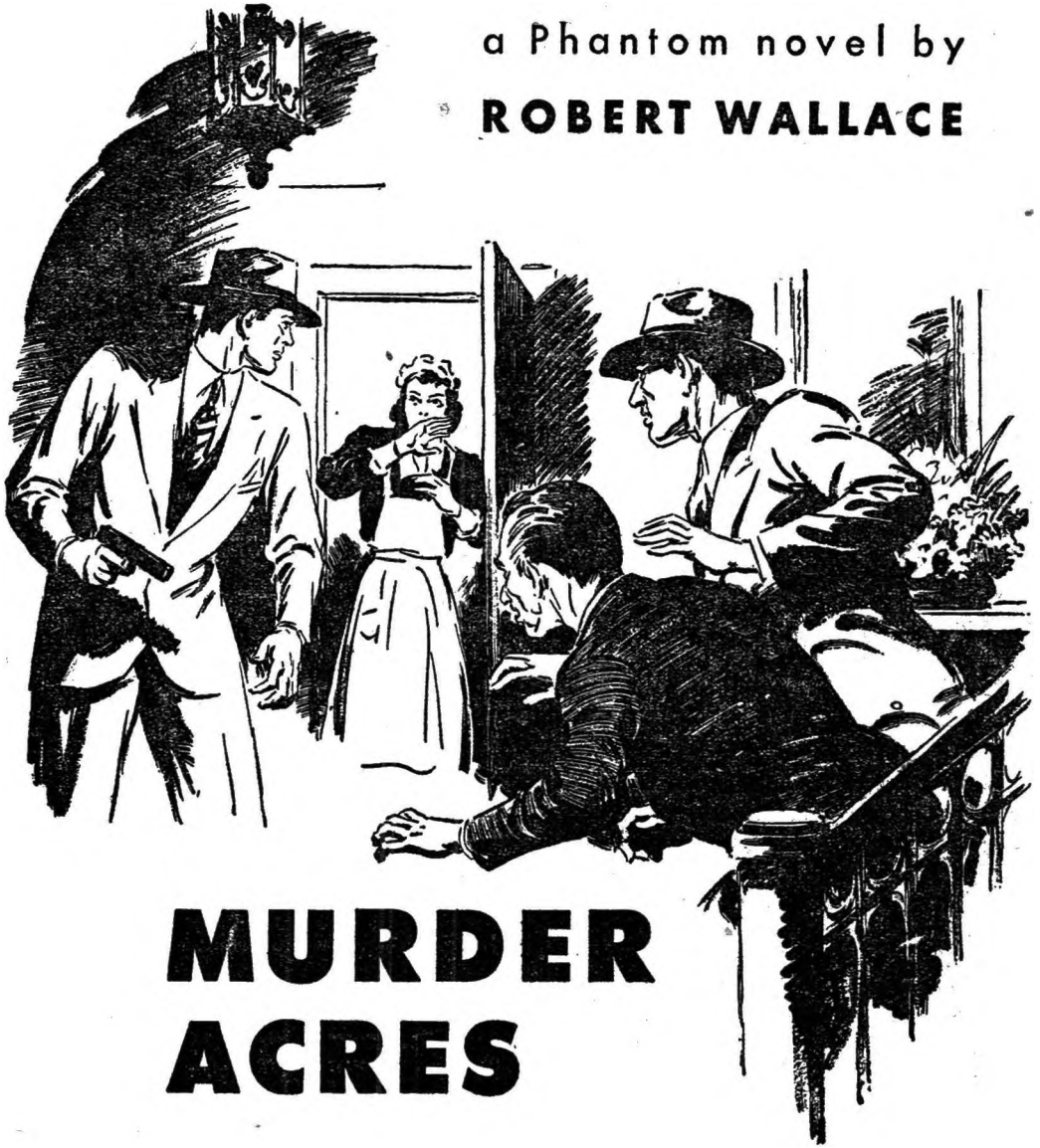
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New ten-blade package has compartment for used blades.



*The fabulous legacy of a killer stirs up a sinister tempest  
of crime, blackmail and mystery, woven into a death pattern!*

a Phantom novel by  
**ROBERT WALLACE**



# **MURDER ACRES**

## **CHAPTER I: DEATH IN A TOWEL**

**T**HE sign on the glass-pebbled door said, "Neal Brady, Investigations." Inside, in the one small office which had been divided into two by the simple expedient of using a partition, Nora Dolan, secretary, general factotum, and sole employe, raised her blue eyes to the clock on one wall. Its hands pointed to the hour of five. Nora sighed,

and rose from her desk.

Putting the cover on the typewriter on the desk, she slipped on her shorty coat, and settled her hat in place in front of the mirror over the washbowl behind a screen. Picking up her handbag then, she tapped on the door connecting the front half of the office with the rear.

"Mr. Brady," she called in a low voice,



## Wheels Within Wheels, in a Plunder Plot, Whirl

one calculated not to interrupt deep and intensive thought.

On the other side of the partition a chair squeaked. Feet struck the floor.

"Yes, Nora?" a voice said.

"It's five o'clock," the secretary announced. "I'm leaving. Do you want anything before I go?"

The door opened, framing the tall, loosely built figure of Neal Brady. He looked sleepy, or as if the heavy thought had been too much for him. His gray eyes seemed only half-open, his rusty hair was rumpled as if he had been running his hands through it repeatedly. The chalk-striped blue suit he wore was liberally sprinkled with cigarette ashes.

"No, thank you, Nora," he said. "Run along." He patted back a yawn. "See you in the morning."

When the girl had left, though, a sudden and surprising change came over Neal Brady. The sleepy look disappeared in a flash. His shrewd gray eyes brightened alertly as he reached for the telephone directory.

Flipping the pages back quickly, Brady ran a finger down a column of names under the R's. His lips moving as he silently repeated a number he dialed it, waited a moment, heard a man's soft voice in which was an obsequious accent drift across the wire.

"The Ryder residence," the voice said.

"I want to talk to the Senator." Brady spoke tersely.

"I'm sorry, sir," came over the wire. "Senator Ryder isn't at home."

"What time will he be back?" asked Brady.

"That's hard to say. If you'll give me your name—"

**B**UT Brady had cut the connection. He was frowning as he cradled the phone. The long ash on his cigarette dropped to a lapel. Absentmindedly he brushed it off, his eyes narrowing in thought.

He walked across the office and for a minute stood at the window, looking out

at the brick-walled airshaft. Then his gaze shifted to his desk and to a copy of the noon edition of the *Clarion* which lay there. He stared at it thoughtfully, something kindling in his gaze. It was as if a new thought had struck him, a sudden idea.

Abruptly Brady reached for his fawn felt hat on a hat tree. He pulled on the hat, then opened a drawer in his desk. From that he took a Smith & Wesson .38 Terrier revolver. The weapon had a two-inch barrel, a round butt. It fitted into Brady's pocket without making a bulge.

He strode out of the office, locking the door behind him, and five minutes later he was down in the lobby of the building.

There he paused inconspicuously, his eyes darting over all those leaving the elevators, those entering, and those lounging about. As if he had been looking for a certain face and had not found it, Neal Brady nodded to himself and strode out onto Forty-second Street, heading for the Times Square subway station.

He hadn't seen the face. Relief ran swiftly through him as he went quickly down the ramp to the train platform.

On a crowded southbound train, Brady hung on a strap. A recollection of the paper he had left on his desk came back to him. He turned over in his mind the idea that had struck him when he had last glanced at it while the train rumbled along and he swayed with it.

He was remembering how Frank Havens, the wealthy owner and publisher of the *Clarion*, had long been one of Wilden Ryder's firmest supporters and friends. For the past month the *Clarion* had been featuring a series of articles written for the paper by the former Senator who for a long time had been a national figure, a former Ambassador to Turkey as well as a United States Senator, and the adviser of those who dwelt in the White House and handled the destiny of the nation.

Brady left the subway at a downtown station. He walked a block east. That brought him to the time-worn façade of



## *the World's Greatest Sleuth Into Fast Action!*

the Marlboro Hotel, one of those places still left in that downtown district off the beaten path. The hotel was little better than a third-rate lodging house which, in the rising tide of inflation, still had rooms to offer at a price which an ordinary private detective could afford.

For the past two years Brady had lived there. The place satisfied him, after a fashion.

He went into the dreary, oak-furnished



RICHARD CURTIS VAN LOAN

lobby. The perennial smell of cheap cigars hung around it. Guests at the Marlboro were not exactly of the elite, and not given to smoking the better brands. Salesmen, Manhattan visitors without too much money, as well as a shabby collection of regular guests, made the Marlboro their temporary, and in many cases their permanent, home.

The clerk on duty looked up when Brady stopped at the desk. He was an elderly man who wore a toupee which didn't fit, and false teeth that had a habit of slipping.

"No mail," the clerk said. "No calls."

"I'll take my key," Brady requested. "Change a quarter for me. I want to phone before I go upstairs."

Jingling the keys and coins in one hand, Brady stopped at a public telephone booth back of the elevator shaft. Again he made use of the Manhattan telephone directory, before he slid a nickel into the coin slot and dialed the number of the *Clarion*.

His conversation was brief, and after a few minutes Brady stepped into one of the two elevators.

The operator, an anaemic youth with a bad complexion, grinned at him.

"How are they breaking, Mr. Brady?" he asked.

Brady slipped the two dimes left of the quarter into the operator's hand.

"Not bad, not good," he said, answering the grin. "Buy yourself a polo pony."

The elevator stopped at the eleventh floor. Whistling under his breath, Brady left it and went down the hall. His room, 1107, was midway along the passage. He pushed the key the clerk had given him into the lock. But even before he turned it, he knew the door wasn't latched.

THE knob moved under his fingers but Brady thought little of it until, stepping across the threshold, he stopped short when he saw a man lounging comfortably in an upholstered chair by the window. He saw something else—the dull blue-steel of the automatic the man held pressed against the top of his crossed leg.

It was aimed directly at the private detective. The hand Brady half-dropped to the pocket where his own gun was snugged went rigid as he froze to the spot.

"Come in." The smooth, suave voice of the unexpected visitor made the invitation sound gracious. But there was nothing gracious about the look in the man's face as he snapped, "Now shut the door behind you! And don't try to get your hardware out!"

Brady pushed the door shut. A sudden dryness in the back of his throat paralyzed his tongue so that he could not speak. The ease with which he had been



surprised and trapped sent a cold, sickening chill through him, remembering his own carelessness.

"What do you want?" He got his tongue loose then and spoke thickly.

"So you wouldn't know?" The man in the chair smiled thinly. "You can't figure why I took the trouble to come down to this rat hole? Think hard."

He eased himself out of the chair. For the first time then Brady noticed that the man had helped himself to one of the towels from the rack in the adjoining bathroom.

It was thick and absorbent—equally as much for sound as for water.

Watching, his heart pounding fast, Neal Brady saw the dull blue of the automatic disappear in the folds of the towel. He knew what that meant and, for one tense watch-tick, tried desperately to think.

He had to do something—and it must be fast!

"Wait a minute!" he said huskily. "Let's talk this over! You're making a mistake!"

**T**HE man across the room shook his head. "I never make mistakes, he said in a voice as cold as doom. "I know you're all ready to stop in and have a chat with the former Senator. I know what about. And you know that I know! So that must be stopped."

Sheer terror made Brady's sideward lunge swift and sudden. For one crazy instant he thought he had a chance, that the small chair he snatched up and hurled at the man might give him the one opportunity he needed. The chance to get his fingers around the gun in his pocket.

That hope faded like a puff of smoke in a breeze.

The man ducked the chair, the gun still held steadily on its target. Neal Brady clawed at the pocket of his chalk-striped jacket, his eyes filled with the white of the bath towel as it moved higher.

Then they saw nothing as the automatic concealed within it coughed and discharged its lethal dose.

Crumpling, Brady pitched forward—into the blackness of the doom he had foreseen, and had heard in that deadly voice.

## CHAPTER II: OUT THE WINDOW



**R**ICHARD CURTIS VAN LOAN, dilettante, clubman—about-town, and one of the wealthiest young men in a city of wealth, finished his swim and reached for the chromium guard rail at the end of the green-tiled pool in the gymnasium of the ultra-exclusive Patroons Club.

Climbing out, with the water dripping from his magnificently proportioned body, which was an ideal example of physical perfection, he reached for his terry cloth robe. Pushing his feet into cork clogs then, Van, as he was affectionately known to his host of Social Register friends, hurried off to the locker room to dress for his dinner appointment.

Van was well-known wherever he went, throughout the length and breadth of the land, as well as on his numerous trips to foreign climes, as one of the most eligible bachelors in the city of his birth, and smiled at indulgently for what was believed to be his disinterest in anything except amusing himself. Therefore those who had never had an opportunity of seeing him in a swimming pool like that he had just left would have been surprised at that superb physical condition of his.

Not an ounce of superfluous weight was carried over the expanse of his six feet of coordinated brawn. Muscles flowed and rippled as he toweled himself briskly in the dressing room.

Tingling from the exercise, Van dressed quickly, and went up to the foyer of the Patroons Club. Outside, the early New York night was beginning to quicken its tempo. Dick Van Loan heard the muted roar of the great metropolis as he made his way through the foyer and on to the library on the second floor. There Frank Havens, the owner of the *Clarion* and young Van Loan's oldest friend—as he had been the closest friend of Van's father before him—was waiting for him.

The staid and dignified publisher was smoking a cigar and turning the pages of the sports edition of his own paper when Van entered the library.





Sudden disappointment came to the Phantom as he saw the secretary flat on his back on the rug, dying (CHAPTER VIII)



"Twenty minutes late, Dick," he chided mildly.

"I'm sorry," Van murmured contritely. "Let's go down and have dinner. A swim gives a man an appetite."

In the discreetly lighted club dining room, Jules, the waiter who always served Havens, had ready the publisher's favorite table in a corner beside a window, where conversation could not be overheard. A silver vase of cut flowers was a special tribute from Jules himself.

Jules bowed Havens and his young guest into their chairs, took their order, and hurried off.

From the moment Van had joined Havens he had been able to see, from the expression on his old friend's face, that the newspaperman had something on his mind. Now he didn't have long to wait to learn what it was.

"Ever hear of a man named Neal Brady?" Havens asked abruptly, as he unfolded his napkin.

"Not that I know of," Van told him. "Why?"

"I thought you might have run across him somewhere," Havens said. "He's a private detective . . . Dick, this Brady telephoned me this afternoon at the office, and it has me guessing. He was rather mysterious. He claimed to have some information he says will be sure to interest me. He spoke rapidly, and refused to go into details, except to say that it concerns Wilden Ryder."

Dick Van Loan did not answer for a minute. But his gaze was sharp and interested. He knew that Ryder was a friend of Frank Havens, that the former Senator, now residing in New York, was a national figure of paramount importance in the muddled world of international politics. Anything concerning him could have vast potentialities.

"What else did Brady say?" Van asked.

"He spoke for only a minute or two," Havens said. "But he packed a lot of talk into that time. He wants me to meet him tonight. He says he has a tip that'll make front page news for the *Clarion*."

Jules appeared and served the first course. When he was gone, Van Loan was frowning.

"What did you tell your private detec-

tive friend?" he asked Havens.

"I said I'd like to hear what he had to say. But I wasn't too interested. You know well enough, Dick, that calls like that are no novelty. All newspapers are open targets for cranks and crackpots with grievances and fancied news beats."

"Also," Van put in, "for practical jokers."

"Yes, of course," Havens nodded. "But I will say this man sounded sincere. He asked me to come to his hotel between eight-thirty and nine tonight. I told him I would."

"And so—" Van smiled, knowing what was coming.

"I thought," Havens said, "you might come along with me for the ride."

"I'll be glad to. But listen—have you asked Ryder if he knows anything about this Brady?"

"I telephoned," Havens explained. "Didn't get Ryder. He isn't expected home until later this evening. He's been up at his farm for the last few days. I believe I recall he told me he's making plans to sell the farm property."

INTERESTED, Van asked a question or two and Havens told him that the ex-Senator, one of the wealthiest men in the country, had recently gone in for farming on a scientific basis. He had purchased a farm somewhere in upper New York State, near the city of Poughkeepsie, Havens thought, which he called Hundred Acres. But apparently the legislator had become tired of his experiment.

"Ryder didn't like a farmer's life?" Van asked, and smiled.

"Evidently not—in these days of labor difficulties and high wages," Havens shrugged. "I can't blame him, he told me the whole thing had become a headache."

When Havens and Van Loan finished dinner and left the club, the publisher's Cadillac had been brought around from a nearby garage and stood waiting at the curb. It was twenty-five minutes to nine by the electric clock on the car's illuminated instrument panel.

Havens took the wheel and turned the car south into the traffic stream on the broad avenue.



Reaching a downtown street that appeared quiet and deserted compared to the bustle of midtown Manhattan, Havens drove east and finally drew up before the entrance of a hotel called the Marlboro.

Van knew its type. Cheap, tawdry, and not too particular about what guests were accommodated. Havens locked the car and with Van went into an oak-furnished lobby where the aroma of defunct cigars permeated the stuffy air.

The owner of the *Clarion* stopped at the desk to speak to the elderly clerk, a man who rather intrigued Van Loan. The old fellow's toupee was as bad a fit as his false teeth.

"Mr. Brady?" the clerk repeated in answer to Havens' inquiry, and with rather surprised eyes, looked from the immaculate Havens to the perfectly groomed Van Loan. "Room eleven-o-seven. . . . Yes, he's in now. Saw him go up not so long ago."

One of two elevators took Havens and Van to the eleventh floor. They alighted on a passage with the floor covered by a worn blue strip of carpeting, and followed the numbers on the doors. The hotel was quiet for such a place. From one room came the sound of someone talking on the telephone. From a remote distance came the sound of a radio. The place seemed deserted, for Van saw that the transoms over most of the doors along the corridor were dark.

No light showed through the transom of Room 1107 when they reached it. Havens knocked on the door. Beside him, Van Loan let his gaze move from the darkened transom to the knob of the door. The publisher knocked again, louder.

"Odd," he murmured. "It isn't quite nine o'clock yet. He should be here."

"Try the knob." Van spoke idly.

Havens turned it and looked surprised when the door swung inward. Complete darkness confronted them. A draught made by an open window opposite when the door was opened streamed past them in a cool current of fresh air.

Dick Van Loan reached around Havens and felt for the wall switch. He found it and snapped it on. A lamp on a table beside a white iron bed gave off a glow.

"Nobody here," Havens said.

Van walked into the room. He motioned for the publisher to follow and shut the door after him, and stared interestedly around. In addition to the bed and night table the furnishings included an upholstered chair, a small, wooden chair without arms, a bureau and a built-in wardrobe.

A door to the left of the wardrobe was ajar. Van saw that it opened into a bathroom. He noticed other things. A fawn colored felt hat was on the end of the bed, a tagged hotel key on top of the bureau.

"The clerk said he was in," Havens murmured, frowning. "Possibly he stepped out for a minute."

Van didn't answer. His gaze, shifting from the hat to the key, had dropped, and fastened on the well-worn Axminster carpet. He bent over to study something on the carpet, to Havens' surprise.

Van straightened, and walked to the bathroom. He switched on the light and, after a minute's survey of the interior, entered and returned with a thick, folded white bath towel.

Puzzled, the publisher watched while Van Loan unfolded the towel. There seemed to be a blackish smear and a scattering of small dark stains on it.

**T**OSSING the towel aside, without comment, Van Loan bent over to eye the carpet again. This time instead of remaining in one spot he began to move step by step toward the open window. When he reached the sill, he pushed the cretonne curtains aside and leaned out.

When Van turned away from the window and walked back, Havens saw that his face was set and hard. It was a strange change, though one Havens had seen before—and understood. In one fleeting round of seconds Van Loan's carefree look had vanished. In its place was an expression of grimness that would have surprised anyone who knew him, with the single exception of the man who was silently watching him.

"Brady," Van said, his voice tight, "won't be back tonight!"

Frank Havens opened his mouth to speak, but did not. Instead, his brows



went up to form interrogation points. Quickly Van reached for the white bath towel. He pointed to the black smear on it.

"What's that?" Havens asked, frowning.

"A powder burn!" Van's tone was like ice. "This towel was used to muffle the report of a gun. There are drops of blood on the carpet—leading to the window."

Havens took a step backward, eyes widening as Van pointed to the hat, and to the key on the dresser. Abruptly the publisher understood the significance of what Van had said.

He moistened suddenly dry lips. "Brady's been killed?"

Van folded the towel and placed it beside the tagged key. All traces of the



RICHARD CURTIS VAN LOAN  
as THE PHANTOM

bored society man had disappeared from his attitude now. It was as if a new personality had replaced the Dick Van Loan who had entered this room with the publisher; as if someone had stepped into the shoes of Richard Curtis Van Loan, and as swiftly as a flash of light, had taken over.

"Brady," he said slowly, "was shot in this room—not long ago—and thrown out of the window! He's down in the area-way below!"

Down in that Marlboro Hotel areaway only swift moments later, it was still a new Richard Curtis Van Loan who, with a horrified Frank Havens and the agitated desk clerk beside him, dropped to a knee beside the crumpled figure that lay sprawled on the broken cement.

A lighted match, cupped in Van's hands, flickered over the waxy white face of the dead man. Glazed, staring eyes peered up at him unseeingly. Rust-colored hair was matted against the man's battered head. One arm was flung wide, the other folded in under his broken body.

"That's Neal Brady!" The clerk's gasped exclamation came sibilantly. "He must have fallen out of the window!"

"Call the police!" Van said tersely, as he looked up.

"I'll go," Havens offered, pulling himself together with effort.

The owner of the *Clarion* and the clerk faded through the basement door, leaving Van Loan with all that remained of Neal Brady, private detective.

Kneeling there beside the dead man, his fingers slipping from pocket to pocket in the chalk stripe suit, the odd change that had come over Dick Van Loan in Room 1107 now became even more pronounced. The wealthy dilettante Van's world knew seemed to have completely evaporated into the thin night air. A new character, an entirely different personality—and one who was the explanation for the most closely guarded secret of Van's life—had replaced him.

This new person was none other than the famous Phantom Detective!

Fantastic though it appeared on the surface, and unbelievable as it would have been to those who thought they knew him well, Van's dual identity had been carefully hidden from everyone but Frank Havens. Havens shared his secret because it was the publisher who, years before, had been responsible for the creation of the fabulous Phantom.

It was Havens who, in his unceasing crusade against crime, had recognized in young Van Loan, son of his closest and best friend, those unmistakable qualifications so necessary for crime detection.



Begun as an experiment in order to give the young man some outlet to relieve his obvious boredom with a society existence, the newspaperman found in Van what he had long sought—a man who could be molded into a master detective, and who would make of his hidden profession a life work. He had to be a man skilled in the use of the laboratory equipment which was so vitally necessary in crime solution, for instance, and one who would have an entirely different approach to criminal investigation from the ordinary routine police methods.

Havens believed he had found all these potentialities in Dick Van Loan, as well as an earnest desire to perfect himself in any line which would advance him toward the wanted goal.

Time had proved how correct Frank Havens had been. From Van's first case on, the Phantom Detective—as he had quickly come to be called by those intrigued by his mystery—had written a new and brilliant chapter in the annals of criminology. Few other detectives, living or dead, had ever been able even to approximate his amazing list of triumphs, and certainly none had ever topped them.

### CHAPTER III: RYDER'S HOUSE



**Q**UICKLY the Phantom examined what he slipped out of Neal Brady's pockets. He found Brady's gun and nodded as he examined it. The man had never had a chance to get his weapon out.

That indicated to Van that the killer must have been waiting for Brady in the room on the eleventh floor. Brady had walked in, completely unaware of what was in store for him—and the jaws of a trap had closed.

The private detective had been shot through the heart. Upstairs in the hotel room, the coagulation of the blood spots on the floor had told Van approximately the time the shooting had occurred—an hour or so previously. Now, as he examined the death wound, Van was certain he had set the time correctly.

He had finished with the body and was

getting to his feet when Havens came out of the basement door.

"Inspector Gregg will be here in a few minutes," Havens told him. "Did you find out anything about this man? Who is he?"

"There's no doubt about his having been the Neal Brady you came down here to see," the Phantom said positively. "As he told you, he was a private detective. Had an office in the Times Square section. I'd never run across him, however. Don't know yet just what his particular line was."

Van noted the time. As the Phantom, he seldom worked with the police except in specialized cases where his peculiar talents were recognized when Homicide appeared to be stumped, and the murder being investigated was important enough to warrant his attention. And this did not appear to be such a case, but one which could well be left to the police.

On the surface, Neal Brady's blackout looked routine. However, there was one exception. And that was the fact that Brady had said he had information for Frank Havens, and that information would never be delivered now—by Brady. Moreover, the information had tied in with Wilden Ryder in some way.

"I'll bow out before Gregg gets here," Van said to Havens briefly. "It is not in character for Van Loan to appear interested in any such gruesome matters as this."

Frank Havens looked disappointed. "I had hoped—" he had started to say, when Van interrupted:

"Meet me in an hour." He mentioned the place. "I'll look into this—to satisfy you, Mr. Havens."

Havens grasped his hand. "I was hoping you'd say that. Somehow I feel sure that what Brady wanted to tell me tonight must have been of tremendous importance. So vital that he was killed before he could talk!"

"We'll find out what that was," Van Loan promised, and disappeared through the basement door on his way to the street.

There he quickly found a taxi which took him uptown to his penthouse apartment on Park Avenue. . . .



An hour later, the man who moved out of the shadows of the street corner in the upper East Side Sixties was as different in appearance, bearing and manner from Dick Van Loan as morning from twilight. This man was dark-skinned, straight-haired, with angular features, a shapeless mouth, and heavy, level brows. His clothing was plain, his shoes square-toed, his hat a dark gray.

A master of disguise, Van had made this portrait he had devised one of his best efforts. The person he had created was purposely nondescript and unobtrusive. No one was likely to center much attention upon him. There was nothing about the characterization to stick in a criminal mind.

How well he had handled his creation was evident when he moved across the pavement to meet the Cadillac as Havens slowed and stopped.

With a quick glance over his shoulder to make sure no one was watching, the Phantom opened the door and slid in. As he moved he identified himself by pulling the lobe of an ear, the long ago agreed upon signal, meeting the publisher's startled glance with a thin, faint smile.

"Incredible!" Havens murmured approvingly. "Your characterizations never cease to astonish me, Phantom!" He always used that name when Van was in his detective rôle, whether there was anyone to hear or not. It was as well to take no chances whatsoever.

"We'll stop first at Ryder's home," the Phantom directed. "What happened at the Marlboro after I left? What did the Inspector learn?"

"Not much," Havens said, as he put the car in motion. "He fine-combed Brady's room without turning up any clues except the bath towel. That went to the police laboratory. When I left the medical examiner was signing a release for the body."

The Phantom lapsed into silence while the car rolled on.

**I**N A short time they had reached that section of the city where a former slum district had miraculously become one of the most aristocratic sections of the

crowded metropolis. Close to the narrow twist of the East River, tall apartment houses and brownstone-front modern dwellings huddled together in an aura of wealth, gentility, and social prominence.

A street sign under an arc light said, "River Place." Frank Havens, letting up on the gas pedal, stopped the Cadillac in front of one of the brownstone houses on that street. It was a four-story building with glimmering windows, well-swept stoop steps and double vestibule doors. This, the Phantom already knew, was the city home of ex-Senator Wilden Ryder.

Havens' finger on the bell brought someone to open the inner door. A man with thinning gray hair, in butler's garb, recognized the publisher and pulled the door wider.

"Good evening, Mr. Havens, sir."

"Good evening, Fay," Havens greeted. "Rather late for a call. Is the Senator still up and about?"

"Yes, sir." Fay glanced inquiringly at Van from the corner of his eye, and turned on the lights in a small, beautifully furnished reception room across the entrance foyer. "He has a visitor in the study. I imagine he'll be finished with him soon. Won't you wait in here?"

In the little reception room, the Phantom examined the paintings and *objets d'art* with a connoisseur's eye. Richard Curtis Van Loan could appreciate the value of the things Ryder had picked up in all parts of the world, and could acknowledge the good taste shown in their selection.

But as he examined them his mind was busy with the question of why Neal Brady had mentioned the name of Wilden Ryder to Havens. What could it possibly have been that Brady wanted to tell the publisher? Where did Ryder fit in? And why, to keep him quiet, had Brady been shot and tossed out of the window of his hotel room? Apparently Brady's world and that of the former Senator had been as far apart as the poles.

A car stopped in the street. After a minute or so a key turned in the front door lock. Someone came quietly into the house. The Phantom turned as a young man, stopping at the open door of



the reception room entrance, took a few steps forward.

"Good evening, Mr. Havens," he said, his tone one of pleasant surprise.

"Hello, Davit." Havens shook hands with Henry Davit, Wilden Ryder's secretary, and introduced the Phantom, using the name "Gray," the name Van used as identification, when he was in disguise and on a case.

Of medium height, slenderly built, Henry Davit had dark brown hair, hazel eyes and a rather attractive face. As the Phantom shook hands, he took in the details of the secretary's countenance, impressing it on his memory for future reference, should it be needed.

After a few minutes' conversation that touched on nothing more important than the weather in the city, Davit excused himself and went upstairs.

The Phantom's thoughts swung away from the secretary and back to the man they had come to see. He brought what he knew about Ryder's personal life into sharp mental focus. The former Senator and Ambassador was a widower. His wife had died several years before. He had one daughter, a girl of twenty who was prominent in social circles. Dick Van Loan, the social favorite, had met Della Ryder on various occasions. Della was a friend of Muriel Havens, the publisher's pretty daughter, who stood high in the Van Loan esteem.

These thoughts were skimming through the Phantom's mind when voices sounded from the rear of the foyer. Two men came down the hall, stopping almost directly in front of the reception room. The tall, spare figure of the white-haired, ruddy-faced Ryder was easily recognized. He wore the nose glasses that had come to be associated with him from all of his photographs, the familiar low, wing collar and carelessly knotted black tie. He radiated personality—the charm of good breeding and dynamic mental force.

The Phantom's gaze shifted to the man with the ex-Senator. Well-groomed in a flawlessly fitting blue suit, he had an air of culture and urbanity which were expressed in his ease of manner. Thick blond hair waved back from a high forehead, his skin was tanned, as if from a

Southern sun, or a ray lamp. He had a rather prominent nose, a small mouth, ears set close to his head.

A smart topcoat was over his arm, an equally smart hat in one hand.

"Then let's have lunch tomorrow and discuss the thing further, Senator," he was saying. "Naturally I'm anxious to close the deal as soon as possible."

**R**YDER nodded, and the next minute saw his guests in the reception room. A quick smile spread across his face.

"Just a moment, Lasher," he said rapidly. "Here's someone I'd like you to meet. Frank Havens, the publisher of the *Clarion*, one of my oldest friends."

"The man responsible for those splendid articles you're doing?" Lasher put in. "I should like very much to meet him."

Havens and the Phantom shook hands with the man whom Ryder introduced as Conrad Lasher, and added, in explanation:

"Mr. Lasher is interested in my farm. I believe I told you, Havens, that I've been considering the idea of selling it. It seems that Lasher believes he will be able to overcome the difficulties I've experienced in running it. Well, perhaps. At least he has a younger man's viewpoint and a great deal more enthusiasm in his favor."

"I challenge that statement," Lasher said, with a laugh. "No one could be younger or more progressive than you, Senator."

"Nobody," Havens agreed.

Fay, the quiet-footed butler, appeared in the foyer to let Lasher out. Closing the door noiselessly after the visitor, Fay went down the hall.

"This is a real pleasure, Frank," Ryder said. "Come on in the study. It's more comfortable there. I can't imagine why you dropped in at this late hour, but I'm glad you did."

Apparently the man was slightly puzzled concerning the Phantom's identity. But Ryder made no comment until they were in the study. When they reached it the Phantom said casually:

"Pardon me. I think I left my lighter in the front room." And he was back in



the hall before the former Senator could say anything.

When Fay had gone down the passage, after letting Lasher out, Van's quick eye had caught the blurred outline of a figure half concealed in the shadows of the doorway of the last room at the end of the hall.

He had seen Fay slow down there. Now, on soundless feet, he moved away from the study—to stop under the curve of the broad-railed staircase that spiraled to the floor above.

#### CHAPTER IV: THE SENATOR'S DAUGHTER



MELTING into the gloom beneath the stairway, the Phantom darted a swift glance down the hall. After a minute he heard a cautious voice speak.

"Got it, John?" the voice asked.

"Yes. Right here." Fay's tone was low. "See that I get it back. You know how the boss is, Tano."

Around and across from where he stood, the Phantom's gaze took in the two men in the doorway. Fay's hand came out of his pocket. There was something white in it that looked like an envelope. He handed it to the man to whom he had spoken. For a fleeting instant Van had the impression of an olive-skinned face, a shock of black hair and a flash of white teeth.

"Fine," the man who had been called Tano said. "You'll get it!"

Then, like figures dissolving in a fade-out camera shot, both men vanished. Thoughtfully the Phantom went back to Wilden Ryder's study.

As soon as he entered the room, Havens, making sure the door was closed, dropped his voice and turned to Ryder.

"Now I can introduce you two properly," he said. "Wilden, you're entertaining a distinguished visitor tonight. Mr. Gray here is the Phantom Detective!"

"The Phantom?" The ex-Senator's ruddy face brightened. "I'm honored, but puzzled." He smiled ruefully.

"We want to learn," Havens went on

quickly, "what you know about a private detective named Neal Brady."

He added particulars. Watching closely, the Phantom saw the look of perplexity deepen in Ryder's expression.

"I never heard of the man," the former Senator said flatly. "I haven't the slightest idea why he wanted to see you regarding something concerning me, and not the vaguest idea of what it could be."

"Perhaps I'd better describe him," the Phantom said. "Possibly you knew him under another name." Briefly, he word-pictured Brady, but as he spoke Ryder continued to shake his white head.

"No, I can't place him," he said positively.

Havens' look was one of disappointment.

"Would you mind telling me something about your servants, Senator?" the Phantom said, after a pause. "How many do you employ?"

"There's Fay, my butler," said Ryder. "He's been with me for years. A Mrs. Carter does the cooking, and a man named Garry is my chauffeur. There's an upstairs' maid, and my Filipino house boy."

"What's his name?"

"Tano."

The Phantom's eyes narrowed slightly. But he didn't dwell on Tano longer. Instead, he switched to another line of inquiry.

"Your secretary, Senator," he said. "Henry Davit. How long has he been with you?"

"More than a year." Ryder's tone showed his surprise. "I have a small office in the Pyramid Building on Fifth Avenue as well as one in the house here. Henry works in both places, depending on whether I'm at home or away. A most estimable and efficient young man, incidentally."

"So he seemed to be," the Phantom murmured, and his tone was casual again.

Havens was about to speak when the slam of the heavy front door snapped Ryder's head up. He opened the study door quickly.

"I believe that's my daughter, Della," he said over his shoulder. "Please ex-



cuse me just a minute." He went into the hall. "Is that you, Della?" he called. "Come in here. I want you to say hello to Mr. Havens."

The girl who appeared in the doorway in answer to the summons was tawny-haired, green-eyed, exotically beautiful as to face and figure. From one hand she swung the short fur jacket she had been wearing over her white evening gown. Gold strapped slippers were on her small, high-arched feet. About her hung the vibrant appeal of her exuberant youth and femininity.

But the Phantom found something besides beauty in the girl's oval face.

Expert in reading the unexpressed thoughts of people, he saw in the girl's green eyes the haunting light of fear!

For all of the smile she forced to her curved red lips, and the lilt she put in her voice, Della Ryder was secretly in the grip of some devastating emotion. An inner tempest, the Phantom realized, that was gnawing relentlessly at her mind and heart.

AS KEEN-MINDED as Ryder was, he also was aware of it. After Della had spoken to them for a few minutes, than had excused herself, saying she had a bad headache and was retiring immediately, the ex-Senator's face clouded.

"Della's changed lately," he remarked a little uneasily. "I noticed it first about two weeks ago. I can't understand it. Something's bothering the child. I've tried to draw her out, to learn what it is, but she puts me off every time. She says it's all imagination on my part, and that nothing's the matter with her."

"Perhaps a psychiatrist might help," Havens said.

Ryder shook his head. "I suggested it, but with no success. I've wanted her to go up to the farm for a rest. She won't consider that idea, either."

The conversation swung from Della to other matters, and some twenty minutes later the obsequious Fay let Havens and the Phantom out and locked and bolted



The Phantom eyed the automatic silently. "What did you expect for ten dollars?" the paunchy man said (CHAPTER XIV)



the front door behind them.

In the publisher's car, Van shoved out his long legs and half closed his eyes. Havens, unlocking the ignition and starting the motor, recognized familiar symptoms in the attitude of the man in the seat beside him.

The publisher was certain that Van had learned something in Ryder's house, which had entirely escaped Havens himself. He had come across something that had sent him into one of his deep, thoughtful silences.

"Drop you at your corner, Phantom?" Havens asked, when he finally was not far away from Van's Park Avenue apartment.

"Please."

"Too bad Ryder didn't have any information, that we wasted time," Havens hinted.

"It wasn't entirely wasted," Van said, as his head came up. "His secretary—Davit—interests me considerably, Mr. Havens."

"In what way?"

"His face. At some time not too far back Davit had a plastic job done on it. Several tiny scars were a giveaway to anyone who knows anything about that type of surgery."

"What would that signify? That he was in an accident? Or possibly had a rebuilt face job done because of a war wound?"

"Either could be possible," the Phantom admitted. "If it hadn't been for something else. Davit's hair is dyed. Done cleverly. That, too, wouldn't be noticeable to most people, not even to one as clever in most things as Ryder."

"But you, adept in disguises, saw both things." Havens nodded. "What do they mean?"

"I don't know—yet. But," Van added, "I intend to find out. Also, something else has just cropped up. We're being followed by someone in a maroon sedan."

Frank Havens' eyes darted to the rear view mirror. The Cadillac was on an avenue, going south, and the traffic behind them consisted of two or three taxis and several passenger cars. It took the newspaperman a few minutes before he was able to distinguish the car of which

the Phantom had spoken.

"You're sure?" he asked, as he thought he singled it out.

"That car," Van said positively, "was parked on River Place, three houses beyond Senator Ryder's. The driver gave you plenty of time to get started. Whoever's tailing us knows his business. Instead of stopping where I told you to, Mr. Havens, keep on going. I want to know more about this shag."

A half dozen more streets were negotiated, then the Phantom told Havens to turn west and slow down as he rounded the corner. Van had picked out a dark side street. With a glance back he opened the door beside him, waited until the Cadillac made the turn in from the avenue and slipped out, pushing the door shut as he moved.

A dozen steps carried him under the awning of a darkened grocery store. As he reached it the maroon sedan that had been following them came around the corner. The Phantom memorized the license number and shot a swift look around for some means of pursuit.

No taxis were in sight. No other cars rounded the corner. As far as he could see the dark street was entirely deserted. Then Havens' sedan, with the maroon job in its wake, had passed out of sight.

The Phantom walked back to the lighted avenue. He had been able to make out that there had been only one man in the tail car—the driver. But he had been a mere shape of shadow, unrecognizable. In Van's mind, as he walked north, was a swarm of questions.

NEAL BRADY had been murdered only a few hours ago, but already there were forces at work to stop those who apparently were trying to solve the mystery of his death. Someone had kept the Ryder house covered. Thinking back to the time he had arrived there with Havens, the Phantom couldn't recall any car parked in the place he had told the publisher he had seen it. Had Della Ryder been followed home?

Or had word leaked out of the Senator's residence that Havens was making a late call there with someone who might be classified as suspicious? In mystery



## CHAPTER V: MAN WITH BLACK HAIR

cases which were worked on by the members of the *Clarion* staff, and which often required the services of the Phantom, the newspaper owner had frequently been used by those who were on the other side of the law, hoping he would lead them to the Phantom, since Havens was the great detective's only contact.

Fast thinking criminal brains didn't need much of a peg on which to hang their conclusions. They never overlooked a bet, a chance that Frank Havens might have the Phantom with him. This was more than a mere surmise. It had happened to the Phantom before.

He walked two blocks farther on now, and finally hailed a cab and went home, to finish most of the rest of the night in intensive thought. . . .

**IT WAS** five minutes to nine the next morning when he got out of the elevator on the fourth floor of the shabby old building near Times Square where Brady had had his office. He noted the wording on the door—"Investigations." When he had gone through Brady's pockets he had found the man's credentials and identification, and he had noted then, as he did now, that there was a difference between a private investigator and a private detective.

A private investigator needed no State license to operate. And an investigator couldn't carry a gun in the line of business. There were other limitations, too. But Neal Brady, in spite of the "Investigations," had had a license, was a private eye.

The Phantom opened the door and went in.

A girl sat hunched in a chair before a typewriter. Her auburn head was tipped forward, and her eyes, fixed blankly on the opposite wall, glanced up at the Phantom without much interest, when he approached her. The eyes were red from weeping.

The girl dabbed at them with the crumpled ball of a damp handkerchief she clutched in one hand.

"You were Mr. Brady's secretary?" The Phantom's tone was solicitous as he spoke to her.

She nodded.



AN pulled a chair around and sat down beside Neal Brady's doleful secretary. He waited a minute or two while she pulled herself together.

"Mr. Brady," she said tremulously, taking it for granted that this sympathetic visitor knew all about her trouble. "He was the best boss I ever worked for. He never hung me up and he was always giving me the breaks. If I wanted a day off, it was all right with him. He was a good guy. Too good to get himself killed!"

"The police have questioned you?"

She nodded again. "Homicide men. They were up here last night, but I had gone home. They got my name and address from the building super and came to my house. A couple of plainclothes men questioned me for almost an hour."

Tears began to brim again.

"I'm from Headquarters," the Phantom said, and showed his Detective Bureau identification.

Inspector Gregg had had it made out for the Phantom's exclusive use, in gratitude for the aid the mystery detective had so often—and so freely—given him. It placed him as a first grade plainclothes detective named Charles W. Gray.

"Brady's murder is a special assignment," he explained. "I haven't seen the clip-board report on what you said to the Homicide men last night."

"I couldn't give them any clues," Nora Dolan said. "I haven't any idea who might have shot Mr. Brady."

"What to you might not seem like a clue," he told her, "could be important to me. Suppose we go back over the past few days. Have you any record of Brady's clients?"

"We haven't had many. He—he wasn't doing exactly what you might call a flourishing business." The girl got up. "I've kept a list of what appointments there were. The date and the time."

She went across to a shelf and pulled out a book bound in imitation leather. Resting that on the slide of the desk, Nora Dolan opened it and turned it around so the Phantom could see the listings.



He started a week back and questioned her about the callers who had stopped in at the office. As she had said, they were few. No more than four people had had appointments with Brady during the week. And those, the investigator soon learned, didn't fit into the murder picture he had drawn in his mind.

He shook his head and shut the book.

"You wouldn't know what Brady did on the outside?" he asked. "Isn't it just possible he could have had business not arranged for in the office?"

"He could, of course," Nora said, "but I don't think he did."

"How about his telephone calls? Did he have any yesterday that you didn't handle for him?"

She thought for a moment and shook her auburn head. "No. But Mr. Brady acted kind of funny last night when I left. I mean, he was in his private office—as we called it." She pointed to the door in the partition. "For more than an hour he didn't do anything, didn't say anything. Just kept the door closed and sat there and smoked. That wasn't like him at all."

"I'll take a look at his office," the Phantom said. "Maybe I'll find something there. You wait here."

There was nothing in Brady's desk that interested him. He was shutting the last drawer in the private detective's desk when he heard Nora Dolan's exclamation, and saw her in the doorway.

"I almost forgot!" she exclaimed. "Two mornings ago. He had a caller—a foreign looking guy with black hair. He and Mr. Brady went out together. I didn't write his name down, but I remember now that Mr. Brady mentioned it just before they left. Let me think—"

She wrinkled her forehead, thinking hard. The Phantom said nothing, giving her time to remember. For a minute he had an idea that the name she was trying to recall had escaped her. Then, suddenly, the wrinkles smoothed out and her teary eyes brightened.

"Mr. Brady called the man Tano!"

The Phantom felt the tingle of his nerves. His disguised face remained expressionless, but somewhere in the back

of his mind his brain began to click faster.

"Tano?" he repeated. "That's an odd name."

"But I'm sure that's what he called him," Nora insisted. "And besides having such black hair, he had a sort of brown face and very white teeth. He wasn't old. I'd say about twenty-three or so and he wasn't too well-dressed. Now that I think of it I remember hearing him say something about working for a rich man over on the East Side, on River Place, I think it was."

"Thanks, Nora," the Phantom said. "Maybe what you've told me will help. We'll hope so."

LEAVING Brady's office, the Phantom went on to the Green Spot, a rendezvous of which he often made use in order to contact those he sometimes called on to help him. It was a tavern on the east side of Times Square, a corner oasis for the thirsty that Van found most convenient, for there he could meet Steve Huston, red-headed reporter for the *Clarion*, and "Chip" Dorlan, his other assistant.

In the Green Spot there was a rear room where there were a lot of tables, but few customers until evening. Two telephone booths were readily accessible. The Phantom entered one to make two calls. That done he sat down at a table to wait for Steve and Chip while he refreshed himself with his favorite drink of lime and soda.

He gave himself up to thought. So Tano, Wilden Ryder's house boy, had been in contact with Neal Brady. Why? What was the nature of the business the black-haired Tano had had with Brady?

More certain now than ever that the ex-Senator was the pivotal point on which the shooting of Brady revolved, the Phantom again went back over the visit he had made to River Place. His keen, analytical mind turned a spotlight on the characters who had been there last night. He checked over them, taking each in turn, trying to find some link, no matter how tenuous, that might make a direct connection with Room 1107 of the Marlboro and the crumbled body on the cement of the areaway below the window



of that room.

He was still pondering the problem when Steve Huston came in. The ace crime reporter for the *Clarion* had often worked with the Phantom in a small way on his most important cases. Van had found Huston perfectly suited to his purpose. Steve had imagination and courage, two assets invaluable for the work. Steve could keep his mouth shut, and besides he had never shown any curiosity about the identity of the man who came into being only when some case, so difficult the police were ready to give up on it, presented itself.

The reporter, when the Phantom had made that familiar signal of pulling an ear lobe to identify himself in a new disguise, sat down, plainly puzzled. So far as Huston knew there was nothing on any precinct blotter promising developments of a magnitude sufficient to claim the attention of the famous Phantom. Huston ordered a beer and waited for the mysterious detective to speak.

"Last night, Steve," the Phantom began, "a private eye by the name of Neal Brady was murdered at the Marlboro Hotel on Eighteenth Street."

Steve's red head jerked up. "Brady? I did a routine write of his black-out. You don't mean—"

The Phantom briefed Steve while the news man, all interest and attention, listened with mounting excitement. Swiftly, in his clear and concise way, the Phantom covered the major details of the murder without the waste of a word.

"I'm particularly interested in Della Ryder," he said when he had completed his recital. "You've seen her?"

"Sure I have. About a month ago." Huston leaned forward. "At that charity bazaar at the Mayfair. The regular leg man was sick, so I covered it. I remember her perfectly. Good-looking gal, not exactly a redhead or a blonde. A little of both. And she had green eyes, expressive eyes."

"You know her," the Phantom said drily.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Huston.

"Keep her covered. I want Della Ryder under your constant surveillance. Stick

with her for the next day or two. I want a complete report on all of her activities. What she does when she goes out, where she goes, whom she meets. This is important, Steve. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, the Senator's daughter plays a leading rôle in this case of an insignificant private eye's murder."

"I'll stick to her like a brother," Steve Huston promised.

"Get in touch with me through Mr. Havens when you have something to report," the Phantom directed. "Now get busy."

Steve Huston had hardly left the Green Spot before Van's other operative entered. Chip Dorlan, a West Coast product, had more than once proved himself worthy of the Phantom's interest in him. Born in a San Francisco slum district, Dorlan, at an early age, had learned to take care of himself. This training had equipped him with sharp wits, an ability to make split-second decisions, and to use his natural, ferretlike talents to good advantage.

In Army Intelligence, during the war, he had taken a post-graduate course, which had added a finishing polish to Chip's natural ability. He emerged more poised, sure of himself, capable and shrewd.

SUCH qualifications were what the Phantom required. In Chip and Steve Huston, the Phantom knew he had a couple of skillful assistants on whom he could depend in any emergency.

He gave the identification signal to Chip whose thin face lighted with quick anticipation. And again the Phantom gave a résumé of the case in which he was interested. And for Chip he had a different kind of assignment from the one he had given the reporter.

"You're to go up to Poughkeepsie," he told Chip. "I want all the information you can collect on Ryder's farm. It's called Hundred Acres. It's a model layout and he hasn't owned it too long. I'm under the impression the Senator's farm wasn't always called by that name."

"No? What name do you think it had?" Dorlan asked.

"Murder Acres!" The Phantom leaned



forward. "I may be wrong, but I don't think so. I believe Ryder's property and the erstwhile Murder Acres of which I have heard no good are one and the same. Find out. Get all the details you can about the previous owner of the property. I'm sure that you'll learn some interesting facts."

"I'll get after it right away," said Chip.

"Find out who the Senator keeps on the farm," the Phantom elaborated. "How many employees are there now. And let me hear from you as soon as possible."

"Right."

Dorlan left and the Phantom paid his check and went out on Broadway. He was careful to make sure there was no repetition of what had happened the previous night—that no one, in a maroon sedan or on foot, followed him away from the tavern.

Van headed for his penthouse atop a lofty Park Avenue apartment building. For his exclusive use he had a private entrance and an elevator with no stops between the ground floor and his sky-high suite. He took the elevator to his rooms where, carefully concealed behind a false wall in his bedroom, was a small but complete laboratory-workshop, an arsenal and wardrobe. Also, the equipment necessary for scientific experiments.

His stop-off now at the ornately furnished suite where he lived without servants was to return temporarily to his real identity of the gilded Richard Curtis Van Loan. That transformation took only a few minutes.

The man who had come in quickly vanished. It was Dick Van Loan, in perfectly tailored tweeds, who sauntered out to meet Frank Havens at the Press Club, a breakfast and luncheon rendezvous in a Madison Avenue building.

Van was anxious to learn if Inspector Gregg had come up with anything new on Brady's murder. But Havens had nothing to report.

"I called Headquarters before leaving the office," Havens told Van. "The Inspector apparently is stymied. He had Brady's secretary questioned last night, and now doesn't know which way to turn. Looks as if he's up against a blank wall."

"I'll give him the Ryder angle pres-

ently," Van said. "For the moment I want to keep it covered. I'm afraid if the police move in too abruptly, I'll lose my lead."

Havens' brows went up. "Davit?"

"And Ryder's Filipino house boy."

"Tano?" Havens widened his eyes in surprise, at that.

"Exactly." Van nodded grimly. "Also Fay, the butler, and Miss Ryder. I've got to untangle the skeins and find what parts they play in this shadow drama."

## CHAPTER VI: GUN IN HAND



FRANK HAVENS showed his surprise and interest with a quick series of questions. But Van, as was customary with him—and Havens had expected nothing else—supplied no further information.

He had made it a rule that the Phantom should make no promises that it might not be possible to fulfill. And until a case was on the line and ready to be cracked and closed, he invariably moved with extreme caution when it came to furnishing the details of what was going on, or along what lines he was working.

But he did let the publisher know that he expected developments before much more time had elapsed. And these, he declared, would shed light on why Neal Brady had been shot to death to keep his mouth shut.

"And I believe, Mr. Havens," Van added, "that this case, in scope and importance, will equal any I've ever tackled. There's more to it than the killing of Brady. Under the surface are cross currents, darkly hidden shoals. I'm sure that, when it's finally cleared up, you will be amazed at what is revealed."

When luncheon was over, and they were finishing their coffee, Van tore a fragment from the menu. With his gold pencil he wrote a series of numbers on the scrap of paper and handed it across the table.

"What's this?" Frank Havens asked, and frowned in puzzlement.

"The license number of the car that followed us last night," Van told him. "Have the Inspector trace it, find out who



owns the car. And you might tell me what happened after I so unceremoniously left you at that corner."

"Nothing," the publisher said. "That is, the car did come up even with me at a stop light. I didn't get much of a look at the driver. When he saw I was alone he let me continue on my way untrailed."

**W**HEN Van left Frank Havens he returned to his penthouse and quickly got back in disguise. It was the Phantom who went up to River Place and the Ryder house. It was still early afternoon when he arrived. From the well-swept stoop steps he stood in full view of the few pedestrians along the street, and the infrequent traffic that passed. His sharp eyes moved restlessly in search of anyone who might be watching him.

But he saw no one who appeared to have any interest in him. He rang the bell and opened the outer vestibule doors. Fay admitted him to the cool entrance foyer. If the butler was surprised at his call he was careful to conceal it.

"The Senator isn't at home, sir," he said in his well-modulated tones. "He was called to Washington this morning. He won't be back for several days."

"In that event," the Phantom said, "I'll talk to you."

"Me, sir?" Fay coughed, and shot him a curiosity-filled glance.

"Right." The Phantom pushed past him and walked into the hall. Fay, making no attempt now to hide his feelings, stared at him blankly. "I'm from Headquarters. This is police business, Fay. I want to talk to you, and I want truthful answers."

A slow wave of color began to creep across the man's impassive face. Always the perfect servant, Fay inclined his head.

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

"First, is Davit in?"

"No, sir. He's at the Senator's office in the Pyramid Building."

"Miss Ryder?"

"She's also out."

The Phantom, who had been speaking quietly, suddenly changed his tone. A snap came into his voice and words.

"What did you give Tano last night?"



FRANK HAVENS

he demanded. "Shortly after the Senator took us into the study."

The red in Fay's face quickly drained out. He took a step back, his stare turning to one of wonder.

"You know that—that—"

"What was in the envelope, Fay?"

"Money, sir. A hundred dollars."

"Why did you give it to the Filipino?"

The butler moistened his lips. He kept his gaze steady with Van's as he said:

"It was a loan, sir."

"Loan?" barked the Phantom. "What did Tano want a hundred dollars for?"

"I'm not sure, exactly, sir," Fay said hesitantly. "He has a sister in Manila. He's been gambling lately, losing most of his wages. He promised to pay me back in installments if I'd give it to him. He wanted to send it on to his sister."

"Why the secrecy?" The Phantom's tone turned slightly caustic. "Is that the way you usually lend money—meeting people in dim doorways and passing it in envelopes?"

Fay flushed. "I don't usually lend money, sir. Not in this house. I didn't want to get Tano in trouble. The Senator wouldn't approve. I knew that. He's very particular about borrowing among the servants. And I didn't want the others—Mrs. Carter, the maid or Davit—



to know anything about it."

THAT sounded reasonable enough.

"Now tell me," the Phantom went on, tossing his bombshell, "what you know about a man named Neal Brady."

Fay's mouth sagged open. "Neal Brady?" he repeated. "Why, I don't know anything about him, sir. I've never heard of a man of that name."

"Tano in?" the Phantom asked, and when the butler said the Filipino house boy was in his room, Van added, "Go and get him. Don't tell him who wants to see him. Bring him down and I'll talk to him."

"Yes, sir."

The butler promptly started up the spiral staircase. His footsteps, muffled by heavy carpeting, died away in the upper hall. The house grew quiet. The street sounds were remote, the deep-throated growl of the city far away.

The Phantom walked into the little reception room. As he crossed its threshold he heard the slide of a key in the front door. Then he heard the door being opened and closed.

Davit? The secretary returning from the Fifth Avenue office? Or the frightened Della Ryder? Van turned around to see who passed the reception room's entrance.

He was a fraction of a second too late. Before he could retrace his steps to the doorway for a look down the hall, whoever had come in had gone swiftly by, disappearing into the day-gloom under the staircase.

The next moment, Fay was coming down the stairs. The butler moved fast, with more speed than he had probably ever used before in descending the curved steps.

The Phantom met him in the middle of the wide hall. Fay's expression was enough to give the Phantom a hint of what had occurred.

"You didn't find Tano?" he said quickly. "He's gone!"

Fay drew a deep, uneven breath. He gulped as he nodded.

"Cleared out!" he said huskily. "Bag and baggage. His room's empty! He's—"

Whatever else he was about to say was

clipped short by the drawl of a low-pitched voice that came from a point somewhere behind the spot where Fay stood.

Whirling around, the Phantom saw the man who stood half enveloped in the gloom produced by the overhang of the stairs. He got the impression of a slim figure, of a hat drawn low over a narrow face. But what registered with definite impact was the automatic trained on both Fay and himself.

"Stand still and don't move!" the low-pitched drawl said. "Not a sound out of either of you! I want a word with this gentleman!"

With his gun drawing a bead on the Phantom, the man whose hand gripped the weapon stepped out from the murk that concealed him.

Even under the menace of that steadily held gun the Phantom's interested gaze quickly took in the man's appearance. He wanted a clear picture of him for future use, for that there would be a future in spite of this threat of death the Phantom never doubted. He got his picture in sixty seconds.

The narrow face was a young one. Chestnut-colored eyes under darker brows were slightly drawn down at the corners. The man's features were well-defined. He had an intelligent look. In no way, the Phantom saw, was there any resemblance to the gangster or the underworld type of criminal.

The gray flannel suit the young man wore fitted him well. His tie was a regimental stripe under the collar of a white shirt. His shoes were a well-polished tan. His slimness and narrow face gave him an alert, hairspring air.

The Phantom did not discount his danger. For all of this fellow's genteel appearance he was as deadly as a coiled rattler. All that was needed to verify this conviction was a recollection of Neal Brady's broken body on the cement of the Hotel Marlboro areaway.

The man or men who had taken care of Brady were tangled in the same web out of which this armed spider had crawled!

Fay, whose color had turned apoplectic, broke the quiet with his thick, fast



breathing. Like the Phantom, Fay had enough sense to stand immovable, hands away from his sides, fingers pointing up.

**W**HILE the Phantom puzzled the problem of how this gunman had obtained a key to Wilden Ryder's front door, the slim killer sidled around him and took up a position near the head of the stairs. The chestnut eyes roved over the Phantom. A faint, sardonic smile shadowed his thin face.

"Clever—the way you slipped me last night," he drawled. "But not clever enough. I've covered you for the last two hours."

"I'm flattered." The Phantom's tone was drily quiet. "What for?"

"I'm allergic to the law," mocked the man with the gun. "Unfortunately—for you." Then a grim note colored his tone. "I don't like interference—official or otherwise. I've got to break it up."

Outwardly unperturbed, the Phantom instinctively tightened up inside. He kept his eyes on the automatic. Beside him, he heard Fay choke on the deep breath he drew. Silently, the Phantom waited for the next move.

It was not long in coming.

The nose of the automatic inched up, covering him more completely. An odd thought ran through the Phantom's mind. The way he was feeling now must have been how Neal Brady felt when the gun in the towel had beaded him in the hotel room. This was the single breath of time that came before the crack of doom!

But the Phantom was not paralyzed with terror, as Brady undoubtedly had been. His agile mind was busy weighing possibilities.

The gun leveled, a finger began to curl around the trigger. Then, out of nowhere, came an unexpected interruption. It was one of those unforeseen, unplanned, but always hoped for breaks that only luck could produce.

A woman's strangled scream made echoes in the hall as, simultaneously, a door directly behind the man with the gun was abruptly opened.

The Phantom saw a girl in a maid's uniform transfixed in the doorway. Her eyes were wide. One hand was pressed

over her heart, the other tight against the mouth from which the scream had come.

## CHAPTER VII: FAST EXIT



**T**HE Phantom didn't need another ticked-off second to swing into action. The maid's outcry, coming as it had when a killer's gun was about to be fired at him, must have struck against the taut nerves of the slim man with disconcerting effect. And for just the instant of time necessary to give the Phantom the sliver of advantage that might turn the tables.

Involuntarily, it seemed, the gunman's thin face jerked around to see who was behind him. The Phantom, blessing the lucky break, made a forward lunge. But his luck didn't hold. The same idea, at the same precise instant, had come to Fay who was standing with hands in the air beside the Phantom.

With a snarl, the butler made a grab for the killer!

The Phantom's forward surge bounced him off Fay as the two collided. Whirling around, the man for whom both of them were diving made a dash for the front door. Halfway to it, and without pausing in his rush, he pumped a couple of wild shots at the men behind him. The maid screamed again as the flat echoes of the two shots made one pounding explosion.

Then the slim gunman had the front door open, and he ducked through it. Pushing Fay out of the way, and yanking out his own gun, the Phantom leaped for the door. The would-be killer had slammed it after him. By the time the Phantom got it open and was out on the front steps, the man he was pursuing had reached the sidewalk.

A car which had been parked a few doors down from the Ryder house, with the engine running, roared out from the curb. The Phantom was halfway down the steps of the stoop when the slim man with the gun tore open the car door, jumped in and banged the door shut after him. On the pavement now, the Phantom was only in time to see the



maroon sedan speed off up River Place and vanish around the corner.

No use sending a shot after it as it disappeared. The Phantom shoved his gun back in holster and expelled the pent-up breath in his lungs. The fellow had slipped him neatly. Fate had been in a jocular mood. Threatening one minute, kindly the next, then fickle. He went back up the steps, aware that a taxi was coming along the street of aristocratic homes, the driver scanning the numbers of the private houses.

Inside the house, Fay was trying to calm the agitated maid when the Phantom reentered the wide hall. Now that the danger to his life was over, the butler was white and drawn. He left off chafing the girl's wrists when he saw the Phantom, and mustered a sickly smile.

"A close one, sir," he said wryly. "Too close for comfort. Sorry I got in your way, but I thought I saw a chance, and had to take it."

"It's all right. We're still alive." The Phantom's face and voice were grim. "Ever see that man before, Fay?"

"Never!"

"How about you?" The Phantom turned to query the quaking girl.

"No, sir. I never saw him before and I never want to again!" She shuddered. "That gun—and Fay's face, when I opened the door! I'll never forget any of it!"

"Where would he get a key?" the Phantom said to the butler. "He let himself in with one while you were upstairs. I didn't see him then, but I heard him—thought it was some member of the household."

Fay shook his head. "I haven't the slightest idea, sir. The whole thing's a mystery to me. He said he had followed you here, but the way he came in, just as if he had the run of the house—"

The butler stopped short. The eyes of all three people in the hall were directed at the front door. Against the glass was a shadow. The sound of a key sliding into a lock made the maid choke on a suppressed exclamation.

But it wasn't the man in the drawn-down felt hat, with the automatic, who opened the door and came in. It was

Della Ryder. Looking past her, and through the open outer vestibule doors, the Phantom saw a taxi drawing away.

The ex-Senator's daughter caught sight of the three when she was halfway to the stairs, and stopped.

"Fay," she asked, "is anything the matter? Who is this man?"

The Phantom took a step forward. "I met you last night, Miss Ryder." He nodded toward the study. "I was with Mr. Havens."

**D**ELLA RYDER'S green eyes rested on him. Today she was wearing a currant-colored light woolen dress, a smart little fur-lined jacket. No hat was on her long, tawny hair. That gleamed with coppery glints as the sun struck sparks from it. But again the Phantom saw the haunting, underlying and unmistakable shadow of fear in the fascinating green eyes.

A tiny frown drew her arched brows together. It was plain that she was puzzled and disturbed, more by the appearance of the man to whom she had been introduced in the study the night before than by Fay's chalky white face and the maid's dismayed expression.

"Yes, I remember," she said. "But I don't understand. Why are you here now?"

"When I was introduced to you," the Phantom told her quietly, "my name was given but not my profession. Perhaps I'd better explain why I'm here. I came to talk to Tano, your house boy. But your butler tells me he's gone, that he left suddenly, secretly, and without explanation."

"Tano—gone?" Della Ryder turned inquiringly to Fay.

He nodded. "Yes, Miss Della. Cleared out. His room's empty."

"I don't understand any of this!" she said a little wildly, and paused.

"All this has to do with murder, Miss Ryder," the Phantom said steadily. "Which explains my visit here. I'm connected with the police. I'm a plain-clothes detective. From Police Headquarters."

Even as he spoke, he saw a change come over Della Ryder. All the color



in her piquant face drained away. Her green eyes widened, the lashes sweeping up while she stared at the Phantom with a look of sudden fear.

Then the expensive handbag she held under her arm dropped to the floor. Before the Phantom could step forward to catch her, Della Ryder's knees buckled. And without a sound the girl collapsed in a heap on the deeply piled rug.

"Quick, Fay!" The Phantom's voice snapped like a whip. "Get some water. She's fainted!"



CHIP DORLAN

It was the maid who ran for the water, though, while the Phantom and Fay carried the Senator's daughter upstairs. When they had revived her, they left her in her room with the maid. Della Ryder was in no condition to be questioned now. That would have to wait. The Phantom asked Fay to take him to the top floor, where the servants' quarters were located. He wanted a look at the room the Filipino house boy had occupied.

It was a small, compact room, with a washstand in one corner and a shallow closet in another. It was furnished with a bed, a bureau, two chairs, a table, and a matting rug. As the butler had said,

the room had definitely been vacated. The closet and the drawers of the bureau were empty. Tano, in his hurried exit, had left nothing of any interest to the Phantom.

He finished a quick look-around with a question:

"Tano didn't give you any hint he was about to pull out?"

"Not a word," Fay said positively. "I suppose I've seen the last of my hundred dollars, sir."

They started down the stairs. When they reached the main hall downstairs, the Phantom glanced at his watch.

"I don't want anything mentioned about what happened here this afternoon," he cautioned the butler. "No leaks. The newspapers would like to play up a thing of this kind. Keep it quiet. That's important, for the Senator's sake. See that the maid doesn't talk."

"I will, sir," Fay promised.

"You don't know when the Senator's due back?" the Phantom asked, as he paused at the front door, which Fay started to open for him.

"I don't, sir," said the butler, "but Mr. Davit might. As I told you, you'll find him in the office at the Pyramid Building."

The Phantom nodded and made his exit, descending the front steps of the house to the street. He crossed River Place, heading for the nearest side street.

As he turned the corner, someone stepped out from the wide front entrance to one of the neighborhood garages. Steve Huston, his freckled face questioning, joined him.

"I didn't expect to run into you, Phantom," the reporter said, and explained quickly, "I've been following Miss Ryder around for hours. She just got out of a taxi and went into her house. I staked out here to wait for her to come out again. Shall I stick on the job?"

"You can knock off," the Phantom said, and asked, "You've learned something?"

"I've got every minute of her time tagged," Steve assured him.

"Good. Let's find a cab. I'm going to the Pyramid Building. I want you to come along. But first I'll hear what you've got to say."



WHEN they hailed a taxi, the Phantom told the driver to take them around the Park. He settled back on the leather cushions to listen to Huston's report.

Steve said he had tailed Della Ryder on a shopping expedition. She had gone directly to several Fifth Avenue stores. She had made one or two purchases and at twelve-thirty had stopped at the Colonnade Club, east of Park Avenue.

The Phantom, or Dick Van Loan rather, knew the place. It had an exclusive membership and was popular as a luncheon spot.

"I didn't need a chart to understand Miss Ryder had a date," Huston resumed. "With a guy who had been waiting for her. A nice-looking party, well-dressed, prosperous-looking. Strictly coupon-cutting type."

"You learned his name?"

"I sure did. Got his address, too. When Miss Ryder and the guy went into the dining room I asked the girl at a desk in the lobby who they were. Showed her my press card and told her it was for the society page. I guess those places all like free advertising. Anyway, the dame gave."

"Who was Miss Ryder's companion?"

Steve pulled a notebook out of his pocket. Its pages were covered with shorthand notations. He read from them:

Douglas Post. Lives at the Sulgrave Court, a high-class bachelor apartment on Sixty-eighth Street, between Fifth and Madison. His old man's in the steel business, Pennsylvania mailing address. Young Post doesn't seem to do anything for a living.

The Phantom nodded. Richard Curtis Van Loan was familiar with the identity and background of Douglas Post. The young man was something like Van Loan. That meant he was a wealthy socialite, leading a gilded existence on the substantial income of well-guarded trust funds.

"Nice work," the Phantom told the red-head approvingly. "What happened after they had lunch?"

"Not too much." Steve shrugged. "I waited across the street. They came out together. Post put her in a cab and kissed her good-by. Not one of these quick, on-the-cheek dabs, either. This bit of osculation took time. Movie stuff. If you know what I mean."

The Phantom nodded. Rapping on the glass that separated them from the hackie, he gave the Pyramid Building as his destination and settled farther back on the worn upholstery.

## CHAPTER VIII: THE YELLOW DOOR



STEVE HUSTON saw the Phantom's eyes narrow slightly. He had an idea the great detective was mulling over what he had told him.

But, as a matter of fact, Van's mind had veered away from the green-eyed Della who had fainted when she had learned that he was a plainclothes detective. His thoughts now were centered on the brief drama of near-death that had been staged in the Ryder foyer. The ease with which the slim man with the gun had managed to get into the house loomed large in his mind. Where had he got that key?

Van sifted through the possibilities. Tano might have supplied it. Or Henry Davit. The secretary with the dyed hair and the plastic face job was, the Phantom believed, destined to play an important part in the mysterious murder of Neal Brady.

Quickly he went back over the case. Ryder's daughter was mixed in it somewhere. Of that he was sure. The shadow of dread in her eyes had been more than revealing. Della Ryder knew something. More than that, the girl had something on her conscience. Something she had kept secret even from her father.

And that something, the Phantom knew, could very well be a direct link to the puzzle of why Brady had been killed. The fact that someone in her own home—Tano—had been in close communication with Brady, and had now disappeared, could be another link. The one that chained Della Ryder to the whole affair in some manner. And she had been agitated when she had heard that Tano was mysteriously gone.

The private dick had been snuffed out to keep his mouth shut. He had had some kind of information for Ryder. Could it have been information concerning the girl with the tawny hair? In-



formation so vitally important that now those who had murdered Brady were exerting every effort to keep the Phantom from learning what it was?

Davit, Van figured, was a lead that couldn't be disregarded. Of course, plastic surgery could have been resorted to after an accident. But the dyed hair was something else. A man as young as Henry Davit didn't change the color of his hair because he didn't like the shade with which nature had supplied him.

After a time the taxi left the Park and inched along in the traffic congestion at the Plaza. The Phantom had a folded bill in his hand when they were near the Pyramid Building. He passed it to the driver and he and Huston dropped off in the middle of the street.

The towering edifice they entered was one of the last skyscrapers built before the war. The entrance, done in marble and bronze, was complete even to a tenants' illuminated directory, opposite the battery of express and local elevators.

Ryder's office was on the thirty-ninth floor. An express whirled the Phantom and the reporter up there. Steve Huston fell into step beside the Phantom as they went down a short corridor.

"Swell place for an office," Huston observed. "Plenty of fresh air, and quiet as a churchyard."

It was quiet. The tumult of Manhattan, far below, was thinned to a faint drone. The clicking of a typewriter in one of the offices they passed sounded almost like a machine-gun. The Phantom halted in front of a ground glass door. There was no name on it, nothing except the number gold-leafed in the center of the glass.

His hand dropped to the knob. Was he right in expecting developments here? Would Ryder's secretary supply them? Or was there a plausible and legitimate explanation for the hair dye job and Davit's remodeled face?

The office was larger than the one which Neal Brady had occupied, and far more elaborate in its fittings. Green Venetian blinds shut out the sun. The rug was dove-gray, the furniture modernistic. There were a pair of identical, flat-topped desks, a sofa smartly done in cow-

hide, several chairs and a series of cabinets and bookshelves all arranged in a symmetrical pattern.

But the Phantom was hardly conscious of those things. He had instantly sensed something of much more importance.

For a fleeting instant he had an impression that the office was empty. He heard Steve moving beside him. The reporter bent forward, as if listening. And at that moment something like a stifled moan broke the quiet which Huston had noted.

Half a dozen quick steps took the Phantom around one of the desks. He felt the rapid drum of his pulses. Mingled with the expectancy that had brought him here to Ryder's office came sudden disappointment.

Someone else had got to Davit first! But that someone had reached him, the Phantom saw with narrowing eyes, via a gun!

DAVIT, flat on his back, lay on the gray rug with his legs half under the desk. His arms were flung wide. Under the white band of his collar ugly crimson, welling from a point in his neck, made a deep, dark stain. His eyes were open, his mouth twisted to one side. The tips of his fingers moved spasmodically as if trying to reach something.

Steve Huston's sharp exclamation blotted out Davit's thin, faint moaning. The Phantom bent over the man. A quick test of Davit's pulse told him Davit was going fast. The wonder was that he was still alive at all, with that wound.

The Phantom stared into the open eyes. They peered back at him vacantly. Leaning closer, he gripped the dying man's arm.

"Davit!" he said in an urgent voice. "Who did this?"

There was a lash to that voice, too. Low, vibrant, it was packed with insistence, as if by its sheer command it would keep the man alive long enough to answer. Davit's head lolled from one side to the other. His lips moved as if trying to form words.

Huston, waiting tensely, saw the Phantom's grip tighten over the dying man's arm. Mouth inches from Davit's ear, the



Phantom spoke again:

"Who, Davit? Speak! Who shot you?"

For an instant something that might have been a gleam of recognition filled the vacant eyes. Quivering lips opened. Through them Davit huskily forced out jumbled words:

"The door—yellow. . . . Look—for—yellow—"

The last word faded to nothing. Suddenly Davit stiffened convulsively. The Phantom dropped the arm he held and slipped his sensitive fingers over the large artery of Davit's neck. There was no beat to it now. Under his touch the flesh was still.

The man was dead!

Silently Steve Huston watched while the Phantom stood erect. With a face like stone, Van stepped away from the body on the floor. He nodded to a white plastic telephone standing on the glass top of the other desk.

"Handkerchief it," he told the *Clarion* reporter. "Call Homicide, Steve. Tell Gregg I'm here. Have him come up at once."

Huston, dialing the familiar number, put the call through while the Phantom, his keen gaze missing nothing, moved around former Senator Wilden Ryder's office.

Davit had been shot only minutes before he and Steve had arrived. They might even have passed the killer as their elevator came up and his went down. Minutes, Van knew! Precious minutes that had sealed the lips of another who could have shed light on the death of Neal Brady and some mystery that shrouded the house on River Place—a mystery that brought men with guns, to kill.

Steve, talking to Inspector Gregg, had his back to Van. He did not see the Phantom reach down and pick up the stub of a pencil that lay between the edge of the gray rug and the sill of the outer door. He put it in his pocket and continued to search for possible clues.

Close to the desk that hid Henry Davit's feet and legs, he found a rolled-up tan silk glove. That, too, went into the Phantom's pocket. Carefully he examined the rest of the room, turning only

when Huston pronged the telephone.

"Gregg's starting immediately," the reporter told him.

The Phantom nodded. Beside Davit again, his investigation next directed itself to the body of the secretary. Confirming a suspicion that actually needed no verification, the Phantom turned his attention to Davit's hair. As he had told Havens, it had been dyed.

His interested gaze ranged over the face raised toward the ceiling. The tiny scars on either side of Davit's nose told their own story. Two other small marks, now covered with skin tissue, were indisputable proof of the use of the surgeon's knife. The Phantom glanced at Davit's open fingers and the palms of the hands.

He had finished his inspection when Inspector Gregg, rugged, stolid, and with all the authority of his long years in the service of the law, came in fifteen minutes later with his retinue.

**O**CCASIONALLY, the Phantom found it necessary as well as expedient to work in cooperation with the New York Police Department and the Inspector. But Gregg had no more knowledge of his true identity than the rest of the world. However, the grizzled Inspector invariably welcomed the Phantom's presence on a knotty case. To him that meant a quick and successful wind-up.

While the Homicide detail went to work, with flashlights of the cameramen popping, the Phantom drew the Inspector aside.

He told the Homicide man that Davit had been secretary to former Senator Ryder, and explained the circumstances briefly. Gregg, listening, nodded from time to time. The Phantom, without voicing any of his own conclusions, supplied enough for Homicide to work on.

"After you've checked on Davit's fingerprints," the man whom Gregg knew as Mr. Gray said, "I'd like to have a report on them at the earliest possible minute. Another thing. I want a police pickup call sent out for a Filipino known as Tano. Until a few hours ago he was Senator Ryder's house boy. He's disappeared, but I have an idea he's in the



city—hidden out. I want to have a heart-to-heart talk with that boy."

A stenographer came over and the Phantom gave him a description of the missing Tano. Then Gregg, fumbling in his pocket, produced a folded memorandum.

"Mr. Havens asked me to trace a car license for you," he said. "The Motor Vehicle Bureau gave it to me just before I left Headquarters."

The Phantom thanked him, tucked the folded paper away without opening it and glanced in Steve's direction. Huston was busy with his pencil and notebook. He nodded when the Phantom said he would get in touch with him shortly. The next minute the Phantom had opened the office door and quietly slipped out.

He passed the medical examiner who, bag in hand, came briskly out of an elevator. People from offices along the corridor were standing in doorways, as if sensing something wrong.

Van took an express elevator, reached the street, and hailed a cab. - He rode to within a block of his Park Avenue home, walked the rest of the way to the rear of the building and went up to his penthouse in his private elevator.

In the workshop which was secreted behind the wall of his bedroom, he relaxed in a chair. Sharp in mind, the jumble of words Davit had whispered so huskily repeated themselves:

"The door—yellow . . . Look—for—yellow—"

His brows drew together. What did they mean? Davit had been trying to tell him something. And it must have had something to do with whoever had

shot him.

Van pondered. A yellow door. He was to look for a yellow door. From his pocket he took the silk glove and the stub of pencil he had picked up on the office floor.

The pencil, its point broken, was blue with yellow lettering on it. The kind of pencil handed out as an advertisement. On it he read:

Breslow, Tobacco  
Commerce Trade Building, N. Y. City

Had the murderer dropped it? It hadn't rolled from either of the desks. It had been found close to the door, and there was a possibility it might have slipped from the killer's pocket.

#### CHAPTER IX: IDENTIFICATION



EVER did the Phantom disregard any clue, no matter how trivial its surface appearance might be. More times in the past than he could recall, off-hand, things or incidents apparently unimportant to the police had developed into factors of major importance for the Phantom in the solution of a case. He was always painstaking, in small as well as large matters. The expert criminologist, time had taught him, learned to accept every opportunity that presented itself.

The tan silk glove held his attention for a time. It was average size, about eight and a half. Van considered the idea it might have been Davit's glove, but discarded that. When he had looked at the dead man's fingers he had noted the

[Turn page]

# HEADACHE

UPSET  
STOMACH

JUMPY  
NERVES

# RELIEF!

THANKS TO FAMOUS  
BROMO-SELTZER

Millions turn to Bromo-Seltzer to relieve ordinary headache three ways. It's famous for giving fast, pleasant help. Caution! Use only as directed. Get Bromo-Seltzer at your drugstore fountain or counter today. A product of Emerson Drug Co. since 1887.



size and shape of the secretary's hands. They had been small, almost feminine. Too small for the silk glove. That, too, presented another possibility. It might be that the killer, stripping it off, had dropped it while pushing it in a pocket.

Last of all, the Phantom unfolded the memorandum which Inspector Gregg had given him. He studied the typed numbers of the license plate for the maroon sedan. Under them was the name and address of the person who had registered the car. They read:

Joseph Garry  
c/o W. Ryder  
River Place, N. Y., N. Y.

Van's mouth hardened. Joseph Garry? He had heard that name only the night before when Wilden Ryder had given him the names of his servants. Garry was the ex-Senator's chauffeur!

For a long minute Van stared at the slip of paper. Then he folded it back into its original creases, returned it to his pocket, and reached for the telephone as it rang beside him. He recognized the voice of the publisher of the *Clarion*.

"That you, Dick?" Havens spoke casually. He always was careful when he called the apartment. For Van had impressed him with the possibility of a crossed wire, of listening ears, though Van's was a privately listed phone.

"Yes," Van said. "How are you, Mr. Havens?"

"I just heard from Dorlan," said Havens. "He's to be here in an hour. He asked me to tell you that."

"Good. Keep him in your office and I'll be there." Van spoke inconsequentially for a moment more, then cradled the phone.

Leaving the apartment shortly, he headed for the *Clarion*.

Havens' luxurious office, high up in the *Clarion* Building, was furnished like a study or library in a private home. From his desk there the publisher directed the destiny of his metropolitan daily, and kept a hand on the helm to guide the others of his string of papers from Coast to Coast. In the outer office, a prim, middle-aged secretary, Miss Marsh, guarded the door to his sanctum with eagle-eyed vigilance.

Miss Marsh knew Richard Curtis Van Loan well, for he was a regular visitor to his old friend, Frank Havens. She never ceased to admire Van's youth, his high spirits and vitality. She always had a smile for him.

The man who came in now, however, and asked for her employer had no slightest resemblance to the lively Dick Van Loan. This man was a total stranger to her. Over her horn-rimmed glasses Miss Marsh gave him a frowning glance as she said Mr. Havens was busy.

"I'll wait," Van said, and suppressed a smile as he sat down on one of the leather lounges and made himself comfortable.

Ten minutes passed before the newspaper publisher's visitor came out of the private office. To Van's surprise the man was the blond Lasher whom Ryder had introduced Havens and "Mr. Gray" to last night. Today, Lasher was turned out as snappily as he had been then, but now he was wearing a gray double-breasted suit that fitted him without a wrinkle. His affable manner was accented by the smile he directed at Miss Marsh as he crossed to the doorway.

Van waited until Lasher had gone out, then coughed significantly.

"Is Mr. Havens free now?" he asked hesitantly. He gave her the name of Gray and fingered his hat while the woman spoke into the inter-office communication box.

"Gray?" Frank Havens' voice boomed out of the speaker. "Send him in immediately."

**MISS MARSH**, masking her surprise, told Van he could go in and stared after him blankly. She shook her head, as if trying to understand the whims of an employer who made appointments with the sort of men like that one who was closing the inner office door after him.

"Chip ought to be along any minute," Havens said as Van entered, and looked at his young friend searchingly. "Steve called. About the murder of Ryder's secretary."

Van gave him more details than Huston had been able to furnish on such short notice. Havens shook his head, his



face troubled.

"What does it mean?" he asked anxiously. "It's too deep for me, Phantom—all this killing. First, the man at the Marlboro. Now, Ryder's secretary. It's getting closer to Ryder all the time."

"We're dealing with a clever, well organized outfit," Van told him soberly. "These are no underworld characters. They have brains, finesse. Theirs is push-button technique."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the publisher.

"I mean that murder mandates are being issued by a top conspirator who has well-trained hirelings to carry them out." Van moved his shoulders. "The case has a lot of angles, Mr. Havens. Somewhere in the center of the plot against Ryder, he is being ringed in with menace. He's the target, the key figure about which that plot revolves. He and his daughter. She's a suspect. At least I suspect her of knowing much more than she will tell."

Frank Havens lifted his brooding gaze. "Della? Under suspicion? You must be wrong!"

"Nobody faints when they meet the law face to face," the Phantom interrupted abruptly, "unless they have reason to fear it and the consequences it might bring."

"But, why—"

"I don't know, yet. But I mean to find out."

"And this Davit? Why were you suspicious of him the minute you saw him? Who was Davit?"

"I hope the Inspector will have that answer before too long," Van said confidently.

"And the Filipino house boy. What made him disappear?"

"Probably," the Phantom said, with a ghost of a smile, "a natural desire to continue breathing!"

Before Havens could ask another question, the phone buzzed and Chip Dorlan was announced.

"Send him right in," said Havens, and flipped the switch.

The door opened, and Chip Dorlan came in. A glance was enough for Van to know Chip was loaded with information, and that it was hot. The Phantom's

young aide dropped into a chair and began pulling out of his pocket a wad of pad paper on which he had made scribbled notes.

Van let Havens in on where Dorlan had been, and what he had been doing, before he gave Chip his cue to begin talking.

"What did you find up around Poughkeepsie, Chip?" he asked then.

"Plenty, Phantom!" Dorlan drew a breath and began to unload. "First," he said, "I went into the matter of Ryder property as you told me to. It formerly belonged to a man named Marvin Wanz."

Havens lifted his gray head and glanced at the Phantom. "That name's familiar," he murmured.

The Phantom made no comment.

"What else?" he asked Chip.

"Wanz," Dorlan continued, "was quite a well-known character—here in Manhattan and around the race tracks. He had a string of horses he raced under the name of Birchwood Stable."

With his eyes on the Phantom, Chip saw that in the great detective's eyes was a musing, thoughtful light.

"Go on," was all Van said.

"About a year after Wanz bought the farm," Chip said, "he sold his horses and retired to the rural life. He seldom left the place. Rather strange. I mean, a person used to crowds and excitement, settling down in the country. But that's the way it was, according to the folks up there I talked to."

"Wanz," the Phantom said slowly, "was murdered on the farm."

FRANK HAVENS stared at him, and then at Chip.

"That's right," Dorlan said. "And what you said about the name of the place, Phantom, is also correct. After the death of Wanz, the natives called the farm Murder Acres."

"You mean," Havens exclaimed, "that Hundred Acres was formerly called Murder Acres, and that it was the scene of a killing?"

"Exactly." Van nodded. "What's more, Senator Ryder must have known about it when he bought the property. It was no secret. After all, it didn't matter too



much. There was nothing left that was in any way reminiscent of murder. From what I understand, the Senator completely remodeled the buildings, gave the place a new look."

"He did," Chip Dorlan said. "However, the Murder Acres tag stuck. At least it did around there."

"Did you check on the staff Ryder has there now, Chip?" the Phantom asked.

"I was on the farm," Dorlan told him. "The Senator has dismissed all of the help he once had, except the caretaker and his wife. The caretaker's a Swede, about fifty. Olson, his name is. He'll stay on there until the property's sold again. Has a cottage on the grounds."

"As you know," Havens broke in then to say to Van, "that man Conrad Lasher we met in Ryder's home wants to buy the place. He was here a few minutes ago, asking me if I had any idea when the Senator would be returning from Washington. Lasher's anxious to close the deal."

"What did you tell him?"

"That I have no idea when Ryder will get back." Havens moved his shoulders. "The Senator is unpredictable. He might stay in Washington a day, a week or a month."

"I would like to get permission to look up a few things in the *Clarion's* morgue, Mr. Havens," Chip said. "I want to dig up the particulars on Marvin Wanz's blackout. It's got me interested. I want to find out about who did it and—"

"I can tell you that." The Phantom smiled faintly. "Wanz was shot to death by a pal, a man named Clement Morton."

Chip stared. "Yeah, that was the name of the killer, I was told. What happened to Morton? Did he get the chair? The people I quizzed shied off the subject. Nobody in that neck of the woods seemed to want to talk about it at all."

"They wouldn't," the Phantom told him. "It reflected on their local law officers. Because although Morton was captured after the shooting, he broke jail and escaped. He's never been picked up again."

It was Havens' turn to stare blankly. The newspaperman never ceased to marvel at his young friend's amazing fund of

information. Van's fertile mind was a veritable storehouse of crime statistics. But no one knew better than he how valuable the data carefully filed in the pigeon-holes of his brain could be.

From the moment the Phantom had heard Hundred Acres mentioned, he had dipped into these mental files, and had augmented the information gleaned by consulting the private morgue of clippings he kept in his Bronx laboratory. There he functioned as Dr. Bendix, an eccentric recluse and research scientist. But there, actually, much of his scientific work on criminal cases was done.

For that laboratory in an old warehouse not far from the Westchester line had equipment more complete than any to be found outside the huge laboratory of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Washington. It also contained a library on crime for an exhaustive study of the subject in all its ramifications, and rows of files also were crammed with data.

Wanz's violent death on the farm, therefore, was entirely familiar to the Phantom. When he had briefed Chip about his assistant's trip upstate, he had mentioned the fact that Ryder's model farm had formerly been called Murder Acres. Which was proof of how much he knew about the place even then.

Dorlan started to say something, but was interrupted by the buzz of a telephone on the publisher's desk. Havens reached for it, spoke for a moment, listened, and handed the instrument to the Phantom.

"For you," Havens said. "The Inspector. He had a hunch you might be here."

"Probably he's got the fingerprint information I requested." The Phantom nodded, and spoke into the telephone. "Yes, Inspector?"

"About those prints," came Gregg's voice over the wire. "The ones you wanted. It turns out that this Davit was someone else!"

"Someone," the Phantom said, "named Clement Morton—an escaped killer?"

Over the wire he heard Gregg's gasp of astonishment.

"Yes! But how did you know?"

"It was just a shot in the dark," the Phantom said. "Sort of putting two and



two together. Thanks. And keep me informed on how your net works out. I want to talk to the Filipino Tano, remember, when you pick him up."

#### CHAPTER X: THREATENING NOTE



WHEN the Phantom left the Clarion Building, he stopped at one of the pay telephone booths in the lobby to put a call through to Fay, the butler at the Ryder home on River Place.

From the man he got the information he wanted. That concerned the public garage where the former Senator kept his three cars. According to Fay, Joe Garry, the Ryder chauffeur, could usually be found at the Sutton Garage at this time of the day.

The Phantom found the place to be half a dozen streets north and west of the Ryder home. Once it had been a livery stable, but two additional stories recently had been added to it for storage purposes. It was crowded with the more expensive type of motor vehicles, limousines and chauffeur-driven sedans.

The manager of the garage, in a street floor office, pushed his hat back and looked up inquiringly as the Phantom came in.

"Joe Garry around?" Van asked.

"I think he's across the street in the lunchroom," the man said. "Know him?"

"Not by sight. What does he look like?"

The description given fit the stockily built, sandy-haired man with a partially flattened nose and bright blue eyes who, sitting on an end stool at the lunchroom counter, was working on a wedge of apple pie. He had a tabloid open before him.

Van saw that he was reading an account of the Brady murder.

The Phantom took the next stool to Garry's. "Tough one for the police," he said, in a friendly voice.

Garry's blue eyes moved in his direction. "They're all tough, brother," he growled.

"It seems to me," the Phantom continued mildly, "that one of the newspapers said Brady's killer drove away in a maroon sedan."



STEVE HUSTON

"It didn't say anything like that in this paper," said the chauffeur. "It says here that the cops haven't any clues as to who killed the private dick or why."

"In a maroon sedan," the Phantom repeated. "A car owned and licensed by a Joseph Garry, whose address is on River Place, in care of Wilden Ryder!"

The bright blue eyes didn't waver, but Garry's jaw dropped. Then his teeth clicked together.

"What's this—a gag?" he demanded. "I'm Joe Garry! I work for Ryder."

"Yes, I know."

Casually, the Phantom reached for his Detective Bureau identification. He let the chauffeur see it and slipped it back in his pocket. Garry's stare turned questioning.

"A cop, huh?"

"Tell me about that maroon sedan," said the Phantom.

"I don't get it." Garry pushed the pie plate away as if he had suddenly lost interest in it. He began to breathe harder. "I don't own any car, maroon or otherwise!"

In reply, the Phantom took out the slip of paper with the information supplied by the Motor Vehicle Bureau. He watched intently while Garry read what was on it.

A deep wave of color poured into the man's face.

"I must be twins!" he said thickly. "I



don't know what this means, but you can bet your life I'm going to find out! Somebody's been using my name and address!"

The Phantom's eyes held a speculative look. If this was a bluff on Garry's part, the chauffeur was carrying it off well. He let the man cool off a minute.

"You don't know anything about Neal Brady?" he asked then.

"Only what I read!"

"How about a well-dressed, thin young man with chestnut colored eyes and an automatic? Someone with a key to the Ryder house?"

"I don't know him, either." Joe Garry swallowed his indignation, because worry was beginning to needle him. "Look here! My boss is out of town. When he comes back he'll vouch for me. I've worked for him a long time."

"Let's go across to the garage," the Phantom suggested.

Further questioning there, however, failed to disclose anything revealing. The Phantom was a keen judge of character. Long association with criminals and law dodgers had taught him exactly how their brains functioned. Intuitively he spotted a falsehood when he heard one, and now he had an idea that Garry was leveling, that the man was truthful. Someone had used him for a front in the matter of the maroon sedan.

Registering a car in the name of another person was no novelty. Crooks who went after the so-called "hot rods" did it all the time. The fake registration of stolen motorcars had grown to be an evil the Motor Vehicle Commissioner had brought to the attention of the police and was trying to combat.

**W**ITH a word of caution to Garry to keep away from the License Bureau, and not to make a complaint, the Phantom left him, picked up a taxi and went downtown.

A telephone call from a drug store booth to Conrad Lasher brought the information that Lasher would see him late that afternoon at the man's home. The Phantom said he would be there, and went on to the Green Spot to keep a date with Steve.

Fresh from Headquarters where he had

collected the latest news on police activities, Huston told him that the Inspector was as much stalled on the murder of Davit—or Clement Morton—as he was on the killing of Neal Brady. Ryder's office in the Pyramid Building had yielded nothing for the police to work on.

"I'll meet you at nine sharp tonight, Steve," the Phantom said, after listening intently. He told Steve where, without adding further particulars, but did answer the reporter's questions about Clement Morton.

Steve had dipped into the clipping files at the *Clarion* and had obtained everything he could on Morton. But it wasn't enough to round out the story he was hoping to have for a first evening edition. The Phantom's information remedied that.

"Gregg," Steve said, "told me you beat him to the draw on Davit's real identity. How in the world was an escaped killer ever able to hole in with a man as prominent as Wilden Ryder, and get away with it?"

"The Senator will have to answer that," the Phantom said, and rubbed his chin. "After all, there are such things as phony references."

"Sure." Steve tipped his red head forward. "But Morton didn't use the job with Ryder simply as a hideout. He was busy, all the time, in the Senator's confidence. I figure he must have planned to get the job as secretary for a specific reason. A reason that was responsible for his death today. Am I right?"

"Yes," the Phantom said simply.

Huston brightened. "Another thing. I wouldn't be surprised if the Senator, himself, was mixed up plenty in this whole thing."

The Phantom gave him a shrewd look. "On what do you base your deductions, Steve?"

"The fact that Brady had something to tell the Senator, and that I've been tailing Ryder's daughter, and that, as impossible as it seems, he's had a man wanted for murder working for him. And one of his servants has disappeared. Ryder must know something about some of this. He can't have all these things happen around him and not have any idea of what it's all about."



"That's your theory?" asked the Phantom.

"Yes. How far wrong am I?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to wait to find out, Steve," the Phantom commented.

IT WAS five minutes to six when he walked into a Gramercy Park apartment building. Conrad Lasher's suite was on the second floor. A uniformed maid answered the Phantom's ring and showed him into a sitting room where logs burned in a fireplace.

The setting was one of taste and charm. The room might have been taken intact from a decorator's magazine. Deep, dull green walls made a perfect background for the glint of gold-framed paintings, bright yellow draperies and moss-green rug.

Lasher appeared in the doorway, wearing a blue silk smoking jacket, slacks, and red morocco slippers. His smile and handshake were cordial.

"Sorry I couldn't see you at the office," he apologized. "I was tied up this afternoon."

"That's all right," the Phantom said. "You remember me?"

"Weren't you at the Senator's house, with Mr. Havens?"

"Yes. My name is Gray. When I was introduced to you, though, my business wasn't mentioned. I'm a plainclothes detective."

Lasher looked surprised—and puzzled, too. "Really?"

He waved his visitor into a chair and pulled one around for himself to face it. There was a questioning expression in his eyes. The firelight flickered on his blond hair. Against it Lasher looked younger than he had when Van had first seen him.

"Just a few routine questions," the Phantom said. "I understand you're dickering with the Senator for his farm."

"We've arrived at a satisfactory figure," Lasher said. "I'm waiting for him to come back from Washington so I can close the deal."

"He'll probably return within a matter of hours," the Phantom said matter-of-factly. "His secretary was found murdered in his Fifth Avenue office today."

Lasher looked shocked. He gave a

low expression and leaned forward, his brows drawn together.

"His secretary?" he repeated. "That good-looking young chap—Davit is the name, isn't it?"

"Somebody walked in, shot him and walked out," the Phantom said. "But that isn't what I came to see you about. I want to know if you're acquainted with any of the past history of the Ryder farm."

LASHER looked puzzled again.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you know anything about its former owner?"

"No. I'm not particularly interested in who might have owned the place in the past. The main thing is whether or not I'm going to be its next owner." His tone changed, and his face shadowed.

"Is there any doubt that you may not own it?" the Phantom asked.

Lasher got up and went across the room to a Winthrop desk. He opened it, unlocked the inner drawer and took something out of it, walked back to the Phantom's chair.

"I received this yesterday, through the mail," he said. "You're a detective. Possibly you might see some connection between this letter and what you've just been telling me."

The Phantom unfolded a single sheet of notepaper. Typed on it were a few sentences which read:

Understand you're interested in Ryder's farm. Advise you to drop the matter. Stay away from it and don't try to buy it if you want to keep your health.

There was no signature. The Phantom looked up.

"You received this at your office?"

"Yes."

"Where's the envelope?"

"It was thrown away. What do you make of it? Looks as if someone were trying to frighten me out of buying the Senator's property."

"Have you received any threats before this?" the Phantom asked.

"No." A muscle twitched in Lasher's face. "It won't work. When I make up my mind to do a thing, I go through with it."

The Phantom got up, said goodnight and Lasher led the way to the front door.



## CHAPTER XI: SLIP



DOWNSTAIRS, Van stopped for an instant when he reached the street across from Gramercy Park. Instinct, blending with the caution that was always part of him, prompted the swift gaze he sent darting along the street. A man was lounging in the thick shadows of a building diagonally across from the apartment house Van had just left. He could see the red tip of the fellow's cigarette glowing in the dark.

Starting toward Fifth Avenue, Van walked along without turning his head. But he had gone no more than half a block before he had that instinctive feeling that someone was tagging along after him. An intuitive idea of who it might be tightened his nerves, and his eyes narrowed thoughtfully as he reached the avenue. He had to make sure there was a tail on him. The importance of it arrowed through his mind like a flash of light.

In only a few minutes more he was certain that his first feeling was right. The lounge in the shadows had moved out of the dark and was trailing leisurely along behind him.

The significance of that fact keyed the Phantom to quick purpose. Instead of being the man who was followed, he decided to do the following himself.

Keeping along at the same gait, he headed up the avenue. His thoughts crystallized in a clear pattern as he walked. The plant in Gramercy Park interested him. How had the man happened to be there, waiting for him? Van was sure that no one had followed him downtown. Yet the man *had* been there—waiting to pick up his trail when he left Lasher's home. To Van that could have only one meaning, one explanation. And that explanation brought into sharp focus what a short time before had been merely a vague and nebulous suspicion.

His mind dealt with the angles of his new idea while he continued on, his shadow patiently dogging his steps. Three more blocks, then ahead the Phantom saw a cab stand on a busy corner. He

quicken his pace. With long strides he hurried up to the first taxi in line, opened the door, got in and slammed it after him. He called to the driver:

"Uptown! And take it easy."

The hackie nodded, turning down the meter flag and starting the engine with one motion. The cab pulled away from the curb. Van caught a brief glimpse of his shag. He seemed to be a big man, rather paunchy and heavy-set. He was wearing brown and white shoes, a tan coat and darker trousers. For an instant the street light fell fully on him, and the Phantom knew positively then that he was not the dapper, slim gun man who had tried to play a killer rôle in the Ryder hall.

Van's gaze shifted to the rear window. The big man who had been following him reacted to the situation as he had expected. The cab that had been directly behind the one Van had engaged chugged out from the curb and started after his.

"Drive fast for a couple of minutes, then slow down," Van instructed, as his hand slipped through the open partition and he dropped a bill on the seat beside the driver. "When I tell you to slow, pull over to the curb. I'm getting out."

The man at the wheel, evidently accustomed to whimsical fares, didn't look too surprised.

"Okay, boss," he said. "Give me the pitch and I'll follow through."

The Phantom's gaze went back to the taxi behind him. It stayed a respectable distance in the rear, but there was no mistaking the way it kept to its pursuing course. For a half-dozen blocks Van let it roll along in their wake. Then he spoke to the driver again.

"Begin to work over. I'm leaving you at the corner."

He had the door open when the taxi made the move he ordered. Slipping out of the cab, he pushed the door shut and, melting in behind a row of parked cars, cut between them. He was in time to see the paunchy man's cab drift past.

Luck was with Van. The cab his shadow occupied had hardly gone by before an empty taxi, cruising near the curb, stopped at his signal. He was in



## MURDER ACRES

it before the brakes were fully on.

"That green job." He spoke fast. "Follow it!"

A quick glance at the man at the wheel showed him he hadn't been so lucky, after all, for he hadn't made a fortunate choice of chauffeurs. This cab driver, fat and sleepy, appeared none too quick-witted. He stared stupidly at the Phantom, his mouth partially open.

"Huh?"

There was no other available vehicle in view. The Phantom rapped it out again:

"Follow that green taxi, I said. There's a ten-dollar bill in it if you don't let him slip you! Go on—get moving!"

**B**UT even as the driver shifted gears, Van saw that the cab he wanted tailed was rapidly fading out of the picture. His own sleepy hackman, inspired by the promise of the money mentioned, finally got going. But it was too late. At Thirty-fourth Street, in a swirl of traffic, the green taxi disappeared entirely.

"I don't see it no more." The driver twisted around while Van slid back on the car's worn upholstery. "Looks like we're outta luck."

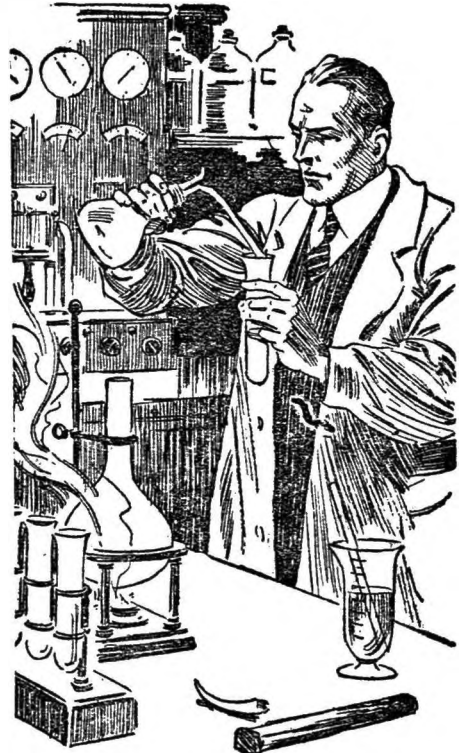
There was nothing to be done about it. Van checked the sardonic remark he was about to make and shrugged. He wasn't entirely out of luck. He had learned something and it was already forging a link in the dark chain of the murder mystery.

"Columbus Circle," he directed, and sat back to take it easy.

In a restaurant west of the Circle, the Phantom sat down to wait for nine o'clock and Steve Huston whom he had instructed to meet him here. He had plenty of time to kill, but didn't mind the delay. It gave him a chance for a leisurely meal, an opportunity to review, undisturbed, the events of the day and early evening.

Setbacks never discouraged the Phantom, for he always accepted them as only momentary. The paunchy man had slipped him, but he would bob up again. So would the dapper gunman who had the key to the Ryder house. With the score unsettled, failure on both sides was a sure stimulant to future encounters.

Picking up the case from the moment



RICHARD CURTIS VAN LOAN  
as DR. BENDIX

he had switched on the light in Room 1107 at the Marlboro, he mentally mapped its devious course to Gramercy Park. Out of the tangle the words which Clem Morton, alias Henry Davit, had whispered with his last breath came back to Van.

A yellow door? What had Ryder's secretary been trying to tell him? What was its meaning? The Phantom could make nothing of it at all. It simply didn't make sense. Still, he realized, Clem Morton had been trying to convey a message to him—a message of such grave importance that he had preferred to breathe out mysterious words concerning that as his last effort on earth, rather than name his killer.

The Phantom's mind swung away from Morton and centered on a girl with green eyes and tawny hair. Frank Havens had been shocked when he had named Della Ryder as one of his suspects. But Van had been positive from the first the girl played an important part in the complex tragedy that had woven itself around her



father's house and those within it, in all of which Neal Brady had had a part in some measure.

And the Phantom was determined to learn what was the part which Della Ryder played.

He had his check paid, his last cigarette smoked when Steve Huston joined him. The red-headed reporter was ready for whatever faced him, as usual without asking questions. But the Phantom didn't mention where they were going until they had left the restaurant and were out in the street.

"Any news, Steve?" he asked then.

"Morton was shot with a medium caliber gun and a soft-nosed bullet," Huston informed. "Beyond that—nothing."

The Phantom, walking briskly, reached the end of the Park and started up Fifth Avenue. Suddenly, Steve Huston understood.

"The Suydam Apartments," he exclaimed. "Douglas Post!"

The Suydam Apartments were in the center of the block on the street they turned into after a few more minutes of walking. As the reporter had said, it housed wealth and boasted Social Register tenants. It was more like an exclusive club than an apartment house, with its basement grill, private bar and roof gymnasium.

"Post expect us?" Huston asked, when they entered the building.

"No." The Phantom did not elaborate.

The gold-braided hallman on duty told them that the man they wanted to see was in his apartment.

"We'll go up without being announced," the Phantom said. "What's his suite number?"

The flash of his police identification checked the hallman's protests at this unseemly violation of the privacy of the wealthy. But he gave the number asked for, his eyebrows lifted in surprise. It was plain enough that the police seldom, if ever, stopped in to make calls on the tenants in this building.

A self-service elevator, upholstered in tufted leather and set with mirrors, stopped at the third floor with the Phantom and Steve. Post's apartment was

down a broad, black-and-white tiled hall. The Phantom pressed the bell button and waited.

## CHAPTER XII: HIT-AND-RUN



AS THE door of Post's apartment was opened, a tall, well-built young man looked out inquiringly from the Phantom to Steve Huston, and back. Douglas Post was a handsome young man, with a confidently aristocratic bearing, but without arrogance. Wavy brown hair was brushed back on his well-shaped head, and his features were clean-cut, his eyes blue and steady.

Van, who sometimes played squash with him at the Patrons Club, suppressed a smile as young Post confronted them, plainly with no faintest idea that ever before had he seen the man who now stood at his door.

"Mr. Post?" asked the Phantom.

"I'm Post," said the young man with dignity. "Who are you, and how did you get up here without being announced?"

"Sleight-of-hand." The Phantom smiled faintly. "I'm from Police Headquarters, and this is Huston of the *Clarion*. I want to talk to you."

"You've got a badge or—something?"

Post examined what the Phantom displayed. His face darkened, but he opened the door wider.

"Come in," he invited a little grudgingly. "But I can't imagine what you want to see me about. If it's a traffic violation—"

The room to which he led them was a typically masculine abode. The odor of pipe tobacco hung on the air. Along the paneled walls were shelves on which trophies were displayed. Cups won at tennis and golf. A bowl for a speedboat contest. The furniture was upholstered in leather, and designed for comfortable lounging. The book Post had been reading was open and turned face-down on the broad arm of a chair in which he had been sitting.

The Phantom didn't waste time with preliminaries. Putting his hat down he settled himself in the chair toward which



Post waved a hand, and got to the point without delay.

"You're a friend of Miss Della Ryder," he said.

It was both a question and an assertion. Steve Huston saw the immediate effect it made on Post. He seemed to draw in to himself, to freeze. His eyes narrowed quickly.

"Did you come here to ask me questions about Miss Ryder?" he demanded resentfully.

"That's the general idea." The Phantom's shoulders moved.

Post shook his head. "Sorry. I can't oblige."

"Why?" The Phantom's voice was quiet.

"I am not likely to discuss Miss Ryder with strangers—or with the police," Post said coldly.

"We won't split hairs," the Phantom interrupted. "You're in love with Della Ryder. I believe that you know what I have to find out where she is concerned. Don't let's make this difficult. Either you talk to me here and now or I'll have to take you down to Headquarters and let Inspector Gregg question you."

Post began to thaw. The choice was a narrow one. He took what apparently he considered the lesser of two evils.

"What can I possibly tell you?" he asked slowly.

"Della Ryder," the Phantom said, "is in the grip of some emotion that is making a different girl of her. Something new and unexplainable even to her father. By this time you are probably aware that the Senator's secretary was murdered in Ryder's office today. A series of peculiar incidents revolve around his death. They have a direct bearing on both the Senator and his daughter. You, too, must have noticed this change in her. And I believe that you know what brought it about."

Douglas Post reached over to a low table, picked up his pipe, and filled it from a tobacco jar. His fingers weren't entirely steady. The Phantom realized that he was stalling for time, trying to get his thoughts organized.

"You can't make me tell you—what I don't know," he finally muttered, striking

a match.

"Possibly not," the Phantom agreed smoothly. "But I *can* take you down to Headquarters—with Miss Ryder."

The veiled threat jerked Post's head up. His harassed glance moved in Steve Huston's direction.

"You can hardly expect me to talk with a newspaper reporter ready to take down every word!" he said huskily.

"Huston isn't here as a reporter. Whatever you tell me will be in strict confidence, which both of us will respect."

Post had to accept that—and he knew it. But his story came grudgingly, slowly.

"Della's in trouble." Post's husky tone spaced out his words. "Serious trouble. It happened two weeks ago. She—she ran over a man. Killed him!"

THE Phantom was startled. He had hardly expected that kind of disclosure. But his disguised face retained its non-committal expression. He said nothing, waiting for Post to continue.

"It happened down in Greenwich Village," Post explained. "I was to meet Della at the Carousel. That's a night spot, as you probably know. I was to be there at eleven o'clock. I couldn't make it, so around eleven-thirty I telephoned her and told her I would be unable to meet her."

"What prevented you?" the Phantom asked.

"My dad was in from Pittsburgh. I couldn't get away."

"Go on with your story."

"Della," Post explained, his tone sober, serious, "had the doorman get her car. She said she had noticed two men in the night club who seemed to be watching her. She remembered that one of them was close to the telephone booth when she was talking to me. But she thought nothing of it—at the time. So when her car was brought around—it's a Buick convertible coupe—she got in and started it. But she had hardly pulled out from the curb when someone, coming around the corner, walked directly in front of her. She struck him before she could stop!"

The Phantom's eyes had narrowed, but he made no comment. Huston saw that, listening with intent interest him-



self. Post, striking another match, looked up at the Phantom.

"Now you can understand why she's been upset—almost out of her mind—with this thing hanging over her!" There was a shade of relief in young Post's own tone that hinted he was glad to let out something that had been bottled up within him.

"Let's have the rest of it." The Phantom's voice was faintly interested. "She hit the man and stopped, you say. What happened then?"

"The two men she had seen in the Carousel came along, almost at that precise minute. They witnessed the whole thing. One of them made a quick investigation. The man Della had hit was dead!"

"What happened to the body?"

"I'm coming to that." Post drew a hard breath. "Della was so overcome and rattled that she lost her head completely. The two strangers volunteered to help her out of the mess. They told her they would take care of everything, including getting rid of the body. She put herself in their hands—and was lost!"

The Phantom's narrowed eyes opened wider. He got up, walked across the room, and looked at the trophies on the shelves. Over his shoulder, he said:

"Continue. I'm all attention. The two men got Miss Ryder away before anyone happened along. Did she see them remove the body?"

"One of the men dragged it across the sidewalk and into the areaway of a building around the corner. They were doing that when she left."

"How long after that," the Phantom asked, still admiring the trophies, "did the blackmail begin?"

Douglas Post's mouth opened. Startled, he turned in his chair. Only Steve Huston saw the look of incredulity he directed at the Phantom's back.

"How did you know?" he blurted.

"What would be the point of two total strangers helping a girl out of a jam like that, and taking the chance of running up against the law, unless they expected to profit by it?" The Phantom shrugged and walked back to face Post. "It was blackmail?"

"Yes." Post sighed heavily.

"Give me all the information you have concerning it," the Phantom told him. "You probably know all about it, for Miss Ryder must have confided in you. She must have told you what the men look like, how she's been making her payments to them—where. Let's have it."

Post didn't have too many facts to offer. He said that the Senator's daughter had been meeting one of the men at the Malta, a tavern on Fifty-fifth Street, off Seventh Avenue. All she knew about the man was that his name was Harry, that he telephoned her when she was to meet him and told her how much money she was to bring.

Post remembered the description Della had given him of the "Harry" in question. He repeated it carefully and even as the Phantom heard the first words, he felt his nerves suddenly tighten.

All he needed was to hear that Harry was a slim man who dressed well, who had chestnut-brown eyes and a narrow face to realize that at last he had one of the key pieces in the puzzle drama ready to fit into place.

For the blackmailer was the dapper gunman who had had the key to Wilden Ryder's house!

**S**TILL without any change of expression, the Phantom listened while Douglas Post completed his description of the man who was making life unbearable for Della Ryder. Steve Huston, hanging on every word, began to realize something of what the tawny-haired girl with the green eyes had suffered since the hour she had left the Village resort.

The reporter could picture the dread that must have clutched at Della Ryder's heart. A newspaperman, he well knew the sort of publicity she would have been given, what would have been written about her had the story broken that she had killed a man. He knew what a holiday the sensation sheets would have had.

She would have been described as a gay, hot-spot habitué, more interested in cocktails than in the snuffing out of a man's life under the wheels of her expensive car. Steve believed he could understand how she had been so easily



persuaded to trust the men who had offered aid. In a panic, and only too glad of a chance to keep disgrace from her father's name, she had taken the easiest way without stopping to consider the consequences. A perfect setup for blackmail!

"Was there any check made by you—or Miss Ryder—to determine what happened to the man she killed?" the Phantom asked the depressed young man who loved Della Ryder.

Post produced his wallet. He opened it and took out a newspaper clipping. Craning his neck, Huston saw that it had been cut from the *Clarion*.

The Phantom held it to the light. It was a brief item, of no more than a stick of type, informing the newspaper readers that the body of an unidentified man, evidently the victim of a hit-and-run driver, had been found in a Greenwich Village alley. The body had been taken to the morgue, and the police were investigating.

"That appeared in the *Clarion*, the afternoon following Della's accident," Douglas Post said.

The Phantom nodded and handed the clipping back. "You've done nothing at all about it?" he asked.

Post flushed. "What could I do? I've tried to think of something—anything—to help Della. My mind's been going around in circles, getting nowhere."

"You're in love with her?" the Phantom repeated, this time making it a question.

Post nodded. "I expect to marry Della—if I can ever get the Senator's consent. He doesn't approve of me, which makes any attempt on my part to help Della difficult. Not only that, but she made me promise to keep out of it. She says it's her problem, that she'll have to solve it herself."

"While she is being mulcted systematically," the Phantom said drily. "How much has she paid so far?"

Douglas Post shook his head. "I don't know—exactly. Thousands, probably. She's been meeting that Harry person nearly every other day for the past two weeks!"

"It would come high," the Phantom

murmured. "The Senator's daughter, independently wealthy because of what her mother left her—she's the dream of every blackmailer." He changed the subject abruptly. "Post, what possible objection can Senator Ryder have to you as a son-in-law? The fact that you are a rich man's son and have never held a regular job?"

Post laughed sardonically. "He thinks I'm an idler, a loafer!"

"I think that's all—for the moment," the Phantom said. "Let's go, Steve."

"Wait a minute!" Post protested. "I've answered all of your questions—I've given you the whole story! I've broken my promise to Della not to tell anyone! Now you can tell me something. What are you going to do about this?"

The Phantom's tone was mild and pleasant. "The only thing possible—break up this golden egg racket and get Della Ryder back to normalcy."

"But how?"

"Like a stage magician," the Phantom answered. "I never expose the machinery of my equipment until the trick is over and the applause has died away."

### CHAPTER XIII: MALTA



LEAVING Post with his last cryptic remark to mull over, the Phantom went out to the self-service elevator, with Steve Huston following him.

"Where do we go from here?" Huston asked, as they were walking through to Fifth Avenue.

"I have a job for you," the Phantom told the reporter. "You saw that clipping Post had in his wallet. Go down to Headquarters and have a talk with Bagby. He's probably the medical examiner who performed the autopsy on the body that was picked up in the Village. Find out exactly how long the man had been dead when his body was discovered. Get all the particulars you can. The time element involved is highly important to me."

"Time?" Huston raised his brows.

"What time the dead man was found," explained the Phantom. "Also, contact Gregg and see if the man was identified."



Huston said he would get after it at once, and had walked half a block farther before a sudden idea hit him. He looked swiftly at the tall man who was striding along beside him.

"You don't think it was a phony, do you?" he burst out. "You don't believe that Miss Ryder was framed?"

For the first time since they had started out on the day's quest, the Phantom laughed. There was a note of real amusement in it. Somehow the sound of it made the reporter feel that he must be pretty dumb and naive, in spite of the fact that he prided himself on his sophistication.

"I don't 'think' or 'believe'—I know!" the Phantom said, and mirth faded out of his voice. "The convenient 'killing' of a person in that way is one of the oldest gags in the blackmailing 'profession.' So old, in fact, it hasn't been used in this guise for a long time. I'm sure that Della Ryder didn't run over and kill anyone. Her 'victim' deliberately walked in front of her car and then played dead."

"But the story in the *Clarion*?" Steve insisted.

"You're investigating that, remember? I think what you turn up will be highly interesting—to us both. Go to it, Steve."

The pressure of his hand over Steve's was good-by, then the Phantom, seeing a southbound bus lumbering toward them, cut away to signal and stop it.

Ten blocks down the avenue, Van left the bus and walked west. What he had learned from Douglas Post brought a thrill of satisfaction. Now he had something concrete on which to work. From here on it should be possible to untangle the murder and blackmail skeins fast.

He was convinced, however, that what had happened to the Senator's daughter was not a separate issue, but rather that the plot against the girl was woven into the central pattern of the entire crime picture. He walked faster, his thoughts keeping pace with his quick steps.

A few minutes more of striding along, then ahead of him he saw a blue neon sign forming a triangle. In the center of it were the letters "M-A-L-T-A." The sign was over the Gothic arched doorway of a regulation grill and bar, the kind so

popular on and adjacent to the city's roaring boulevard of pleasure. This was the place, Douglas Post had said, where Della Ryder kept rendezvous with her blackmailer.

The Phantom went in.

It was evidently the shank of the evening in the place. It was crowded, from the front circular bar back to the long, narrow main dining room. The Old English décor was carried out in the interior of the Malta. Huge oaken beams crisscrossed the low ceiling. The lights were concealed in heavy iron lanterns. The floor was flagged with slabs of stone and from somewhere came organ music. Music, Van realized, that was being played by someone with an expert touch.

Waiters passed in a constant stream along the passage separating the front bar from the rear room. A hat-check girl was busy in her nook, arranging coats on hangers and hats on shelves.

Leisurely, the Phantom ran an eye over the double row of customers at the bar. There was no sign of the man Della Ryder had told Post about, the mysterious slim Harry with the chestnut-brown eyes from which death looked out, and to whom she had been paying hush money.

Van went on to the widely spaced entrance to the main dining room. The organ, on a raised dais, was in the center of the place. A pale amber spotlight bathed the girl at the console in a golden glow.

FROM what Van could see, the majority of the tables were occupied. He stepped to one side and, giving a perfect imitation of a man looking to see if friends had arrived, let his gaze move swiftly from table to table.

But still there was no sign of the slim man with the narrow face and the chestnut-colored eyes.

Van, however, was not too discouraged. The odds against him for finding Harry at the first try made the proposition a long shot. He had other plans. Plans which he put into immediate practice. With a careless shrug as if giving up hope of finding his friends, he went back to the passage and over to the hat-check girl.

She was a little blonde, with hair as



carefully dyed as the hair of the killer, Clement Morton, had been. Elongated brown eyes behind mascaraed lashes looked out from an old-young face. Her mouth was a lipsticked exaggeration of a bow, her pancake makeup so perfect that it gave her skin a polished look.

**S**HE wore a black dress, short-sleeved and low-necked. A quantity of costume jewelry glittered against it. Ruby-red nails, long and pointed, tipped her slender fingers. She was typical of her class—a girl who didn't overlook any bets where a loose dollar was concerned. The type, the Phantom knew, who would be willing and anxious to do business with him.

He folded a ten-dollar bill lengthwise, shoved it into the band of his hat, and placed the hat on her counter. Her eyes shifted from his face to the bill. Automatically she reached for two of the brass checks on a rack beside her.

"How's your memory?" The Phantom kept his hand on the brim of the hat.

"Pretty good." She shrugged.

"Good enough to tell me where I can find somebody?" he asked.

"That depends on who the somebody is."

"A guy named Harry who comes here pretty often." The Phantom slipped easily into the vernacular she understood. "Tall, slim, swell dresser. Place him?"

"I think so." Again the girl's eyes darted down to the money in the hat-band.

"What's the last part of his name?" the Phantom asked. "Harry—what?"

"Dancer." She said it casually, but there was nothing casual about the hand

that began to pull the hat with the money-decorated band toward her.

"One thing more," the Phantom said, before his fingers released the hat brim. "Where can I find him? This is important. It can't cool."

"You might try the third floor," she suggested. "South end of the hall."

The Phantom let the hat go. She palmed the money, stuck one of the brass checks in its place and dropped the other in front of him.

"Thanks." The Phantom pocketed the hat check. "How do I get upstairs?"

She supplied directions, the brown eyes watching him as he turned and walked away. The organist was playing an old-time melody. People in the dining room were singing its nostalgic words. The hat-check girl reached under the counter and put the ten dollars in her handbag.

Then, smiling enigmatically, she moved quickly back into her cubicle and picked up a telephone.

She pressed a button beside it, waited a second or two, and spoke rapidly into the mouthpiece. . . .

No one paid any attention to the Phantom as he followed the girl's directions in his search for Harry Dancer.

He moved down the passage where the waiters passed and repassed and to a door at the end of the passage. He opened that and found a flight of wooden-railed stairs facing him. He shut the door behind him, partially blotting out the music of the organ and the singing, the rumble of conversation and all the other sounds in the busy part of the Malta.

On the landing above he found the

[Turn page]

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usual private dining rooms to be found in such a place. Most of them, he noted, from the penciling of light along their sills, were occupied. The business office of the Malta was almost opposite the stairs. Figures inside it made shadows on the lighted square of the ground glass door.

He went on up. As he mounted the steps the noise below dwindled to a thin monotone, beelike in its humming monotony. Close to the third and top floor, the Phantom slowed. From this point on he had to proceed cautiously.

The top story of the building had evidently been given over to small apartments. It was likely the owner of the building lived in one of them, that the others were leased at high rents. The girl had said the south end of the hall. The door there was closed, and no light showed through the transom, or seeped across the sill.

**R**EACHING it, Van strained his ears for sounds from within. None came to them. His hand dropped to the brass knob. It was cold to his touch. He turned it slowly and pushed, but nothing happened. The door was locked.

From one of the inner pockets with which all his clothing was equipped, to conceal the necessary tools of his trade, the Phantom took a key. It was no ordinary skeleton key. The key he produced was the clever invention of a Viennese locksmith, and had been made to the Phantom's specifications. It was a master key made with such delicate precision that no latch was proof against it.

This key slid smoothly into the lock of the door. The Phantom's fingers made necessary adjustments, turning the movable mechanism on its shank until his sensitive touch told him he had expanded its flanges to fit into the wards and tumblers of the door latch accurately.

The lock clicked over. Turning the brass knob then let the door creak open.

Withdrawing the master key, the Phantom dropped it back in his pocket. With a glance that showed him the hall was still empty behind him, he gave his attention to the blank wall of darkness bulking on the other side of the threshold.

Warm air drifted out, touching his face. In it were a variety of aromas to prove recent occupancy—stale cigarette smoke, the tang of liquor, and the unmistakable scent of human beings.

#### CHAPTER XIV: KNOCKOUT



**L**OSING the door noiselessly, the Phantom's hand went into his pocket, and a pencil flash slipped into his fingers. The flashlight was capped with a special lens, so that it was possible to control the size and shape of the beam. He switched it on, standing motionless, letting the light roam inquisitively about.

The yellow eye glided over coral-colored walls, heavy draperies that separated the foyer he had entered from a room beyond. Under his feet the thick pile of a broadloom carpet muffled the steps that took him to the draperies.

He pushed them aside, making a slit for the torch to get through. Its lengthening beam cut across the blackness of the room. Quickly it passed from the portable bar in one corner on which it first centered to upholstered furniture, an imitation fireplace with glass coal in a grate, then onto a grouping of three windows. All of them were shut and covered by drapes of the same material as those beside which he stood.

Cautiously, in the deep silence that surrounded him, the Phantom entered the room.

Somewhere a clock ticked its monotonous rhythm. No other sound came to his strained ears. No warning creak or rustle that indicated that anyone else was anywhere in the apartment.

Yet, as he stood motionless, he had a queer subconscious feeling that he wasn't alone. Long ago he had become accustomed to that warning, for when danger threatened, the crawl of his nerves notified him of its approach. He was beginning to experience this same impression now, definitely.

A minute ticked away on the quiet clock. Then another. Gradually, then, the uneasy creep of his nerves began to subside. What he needed now was some



light on the subject.

The flash showed him a lamp on an end table that was placed beside a three-cushioned sofa. He found a dangling chain and turned it on.

Shaded light, dawning like a miniature sun, dazzled him for an instant. The lamp lighted the room sufficiently to show its size, and the two doors on either side that led to other rooms.

Both of these doors were open. And one of them framed the paunchy figure of the man the Phantom had last seen getting into a green taxi on lower Fifth Avenue!

The fellow was gripping a blue-steel automatic in his hand. At close range, the Phantom saw his unwavering prominent pale blue eyes, the leer on his shapeless mouth. An open-necked sports shirt, under the tan jacket, showed ginger-colored hair at the top of his barrel chest. It was hair of about the same shade as that on his bullet-shaped head.

The Phantom eyed the automatic silently.

"What did you expect for ten dollars?" the paunchy man said. "Somebody gift-wrapped and delivered?"

So the blonde at the hat-check stand had sold him out. The Phantom shrugged, carefully keeping his hands away from his sides, his palms out and up, while the big man moved in from the door.

"You took longer to come up than I expected," he said. "Quiet break-in you made, too. Mice could learn something from you. . . . Turn around and let me see what you're wearing in the way of sudden death."

A hairy-backed hand moved to the gun in the Phantom's shoulder holster like steel to a magnet. The big man jerked the weapon out and dropped it in his pocket. Then he backed away and his prominent blue eyes narrowed speculatively.

"He's clean, Boss," the man said, without moving his gaze from the man under his gun.

The Phantom's eyes flickered to the left. Another man had loomed up in the doorway through which the paunchy one had emerged. This other man wore a lightweight dark brown polo coat, and a

wide-brimmed hat was dragged so low over his forehead that only his eyes were visible above the white of the silk muffler masking his face.

With his hands thrust in his deep pockets he walked across the room and wheeled around at a point near the three windows.

THE Phantom's kindling gaze focused on the man in the polo coat. Boss! That word held a world of meaning for the mystery detective, himself masquerading as "Mr. Gray." For this masked man, he was positive, was the chief conspirator he wanted. His was the brain that had plotted the double murders! He was the push-button technician of whom the Phantom himself had spoken to Frank Havens.

"So we've got you." A soft, doughy voice, obviously disguised, came from behind the silk muffler. It went on blandly, "You missed us by minutes at the Pyramid Building. Now I'm curious. How did you find this place?"

"It wasn't particularly difficult," the Phantom said, and lifted his shoulders.

"How about me making him talk, Boss?" the paunchy man asked. "I owe this party something for sending me after an empty taxi."

"Restrain yourself, Mal," advised the muffled voice of the man in the polo coat. "He'll do plenty of talking—when I want him to."

Casually he leaned against the wall. Watching him narrowly, the Phantom's brows drew together. Somewhere, sometime, he knew he had heard that voice. Though cleverly pitched in a false key that gave it a slurring, doughy intonation, the Phantom was sure he had heard it in its proper pitch. The way in which syllables were formed, despite the faked tone, had a familiar ring.

"What you want me to do with him?" Mal queried.

"Turn out his pockets and see what he has on him."

With his left hand Mal went through the Phantom's pockets, and made a pile of the belongings he withdrew. He put them on the table that held the lamp. But he had completely missed the in-



genious secret pockets that held the Phantom's jeweled mask-plate which identified him to police and other law-upholders the world over, and the master key.

The man in the polo coat walked over and looked at what the paunchy Mal had dropped on the table. Without taking his hands from his pockets he eyed the bunch of keys, the Detective Bureau identification shield, his wallet and money, his handkerchief, and the pencil flashlight.

"Nothing important there," the man said, turned, and went back to the sofa. "We'll tie him up, Mal. I want him bound securely and gagged. Later, I'll decide exactly what we'll do with him."

As he spoke his hands came out of his pockets. They went in under the polo coat and came out with a jack-knife. He opened a blade and turned his attention to the Venetian blinds behind the draperies at the windows.

A few fast slashes and he tossed Mal several lengths of the cord he had cut away from the blinds.

"Use those."

"Right." Mal's prominent eyes met the Phantom's threateningly. "Stand still," he ordered gruffly. "This won't take long."

The man across the room took a gun out of one of the pockets of his polo coat. He covered the Phantom with it while Mal, stowing away his own automatic, began to sort the cords. He selected two, dropped to a knee and bent to lash his captive's ankles.

The Phantom, standing motionless as ordered, eyed the gun covering him. He gauged the distance that separated him from the man in the brown polo coat. Although he was outwardly submissive, his mind was a kaleidoscope of flashing thoughts. But he didn't move. And his face was expressionless while Mal, finished with binding his ankles, began to straighten up.

"Put your hands behind your back," Mal growled.

The Phantom saw his chance then, and seized it. His arms moved, his hands swiftly changed their position. But they didn't go behind his back. Striking like

a coiled spring, the Phantom encircled Mal with arms that were like twin bands of steel. With the same sudden, fluid movement he pulled the paunchy man to him, enveloping him in a crushing embrace that made of Mal a shield that covered the Phantom himself from the gun in the hand of the masked man.

Mal began to squirm while the Phantom, easing the pressure of his left arm, made a quick grab for the pocket where Mal had dropped his blue-steel automatic. He had to have that if his quickly formed plan were to succeed.

Mal fought furiously to break the tenacious hold on him. "Don't shoot, Boss!" he choked out as he struggled. "Don't shoot!"

**H**ANGING onto him grimly, the Phantom let his fingers reach for and brush Mal's right-hand pocket. They began to inch into it. Cold steel touched their tips and for one dizzy instant the Phantom was almost sure he had the gun, which would equalize matters here, possibly give him the advantage.

Then, as his fingers closed more completely around Mal's automatic, he heard the light, swift pad of feet on the carpet—behind him. Simultaneously, Mal stopped struggling.

Then from behind the Phantom came a swishing sound, thin and quick as a rustle of wind.

Something struck against the side of his head. Of that much he was vaguely aware—but of no more. Because he was dropping into a dark pit of unconsciousness. . . .

How much time had elapsed before the Phantom opened his eyes to complete blackness he could not guess. For a minute he had an idea his ribs had been caved in. It was hard for him to breathe. He knew he was flat on his back, and he lay motionless, trying to figure out why hot air seemed to be billowing around him. Then, with gradually returning consciousness, he moved his head and discovered that someone had thrown a blanket or a coat over him.

Painfully, he tried to draw his hands up. The first tug told him they were bound behind him. He attempted to



move his feet and remembered then that they had been lashed at the ankles before he had grabbed Mal, and been knocked out by some unknown for his pains.

That brought him back to full consciousness with an abrupt jolt. He remembered all that had happened then, with clarity. He had had the big, paunchy man in his grip. He had had him as a shield against the gun in the hand of the man in the polo coat. Then someone slipping in from the room behind him had sapped him.

With a move of his head and shoulders he managed to get rid of the coat that had been tossed over him. And he also managed to sit up, his head swimming. A dull ache, the result of the downsweep of whatever had hit him, made his temples throb. He gritted his teeth, waiting until his light-headedness passed.

When it did he made another discovery. A cloth had been knotted around his jaws and tied at the nape of his neck. Then he remembered the soft, doughy voice telling Mal to gag him.

Sitting erect, the Phantom finally figured out that he had been dumped into a closet. Hanging garments above him brushed his head. It was too dark for him to see anything clearly, but the investigating movement of his feet, brought up short by the walls boxing him in, was enough to identify the cubicle as a closet. Just where, it was not hard to guess.

#### CHAPTER XV: IN THE NET



HOW much time had passed since the Phantom had been knocked out he didn't know, and had no way of estimating. But it had not been too long, he believed. The blow that had cut him down must have been a glancing one. If it had not been, the Phantom felt sure that his skull would have been fractured.

The elapsed time didn't matter—too much. The quarter, half and full hours ahead of him were what actually counted. Sharp in his memory now was what the masked man had told Mal about deciding what to do with the Phantom later.

The word "later" had a more ominous sound now than it had held when it had been spoken. For Van was sure that when those men returned from doing what they had left him here for while they accomplished it, he would not have much to say about their disposition of him. His only chance for life was to act now and—fast!

The ache went out of his head as thoughts pounded through his mind, evaluating every possibility. Again and again he tried his bonds. But the cord which had been slashed from the Venetian blinds was thin and strong. Mal had made the knots tight. Van shook his head grimly as he tested them repeatedly. Even his great strength would not be sufficient to break them.

The air in the closet grew thick and heavy until Van felt almost as smothered as he had when he had first regained consciousness. He listened. No sound came to him. Even the beelike hum from the Malta downstairs seemed to have faded completely out. Though he was sure he must still be in the building which housed the bar and grill.

His feet on the door told him it was thick enough to withstand any pounding with any hope of breaking it down. He twisted around and explored the walls again with the soles of his shoes. They stopped when they came in contact with metal. The Phantom tipped his head forward. He realized what he had touched—a pipe, in a corner, probably a steam or a water pipe. He inched himself along the closet floor toward it, the dangling garments brushing his dodging head.

When he reached the pipe he squirmed his body around and turned his back to it. That gave him a chance to use his fingers. He ran them over the surface of the pipe. It was cold, a six-inch section of iron, probably covered with silver paint. What held his mounting interest were the rough corrugations over which the tips of his fingers roved.

Bracing himself, the Phantom tilted his torso forward so that his tied-together wrists were lifted to where he could get the circle of cord against the ridges on the pipe.

That took time, and even seemed a



hopeless task. Sweat broke out on his forehead and trickled into his eyes. But finally he made it, and went to work. He swayed backward and forward, holding his lashings hard against the pipe so that the corrugations on it tore into the shade cord.

Using the water pipe as a file, Van kept grimly at it. A long time passed. He stopped now and then to test the bonds. They still held, but he was sure he was making progress. It might have been imagination but, after another interval, he thought he detected a slight loosening of the cords around his wrists.

He worked harder, faster. The friction burned his wrists, but he paid no attention to it, winking away the beads of perspiration that were constantly dropping from his forehead. Suddenly the lashings parted as if sliced by a sharp knife!

Restored circulation of the blood in his veins made the Phantom wince. He flexed his arms and slapped them until that pain subsided. Then he whipped off the gag and turned his attention to the cords around his ankles and legs.

In only another minute or two then he was on his feet, none too steady, but pressing against the door with all his strength. It was locked, but that didn't stop him. His master key was still in its secret pocket. It had never failed him, and it did not now.

A quick turn when he had adjusted it by feeling, and the closet door opened.

The Phantom stumbled out into a bedroom. Faint moonlight came in through the drapes at the windows. He moved across to the door on catlike feet. Still no sound came to him, no movement to indicate that anyone was in this third floor suite, as he now recognized the place to be.

**H**E VERIFIED the fact that he was alone with a swift glance into the living room where he had been struck down, and the other room where his attacker had concealed himself.

That was still another bedroom, smaller than the one with the closet from which he had freed himself. There was no kitchen or kitchenette. The bathroom was

off the second bedroom, oblong in shape and white-tiled.

In the bathroom, Van turned on a light over the medicine cabinet. He stared into the mirror. His disguised face peered back at him, streaked with the caked blood that had oozed down from a point above his left ear.

He made hasty repairs, using a towel and warm water. Then, switching off the light, he went back to the bedroom closet and hunted around until he found hats on a shelf. He tried on two before he came across one that fitted him fairly well. Then swiftly he went back to the foyer and the door which opened into the third-floor corridor.

He opened that to a crack and sent his gaze arrowing down the outside landing. There was no one in view. Quickly Van let himself out of the apartment where he had been left to wait for death and started down the stairs.

He didn't want to risk making his exit through the main entrance of the Malta. There was a chance of encountering Mal or perhaps the unknown who had sapped him, at the bar. Besides, he would have to pass the shrewd, doublecrossing hatcheck girl, and she had keen eyes. He would make her a present of his hat she held.

On the ground floor, where the door opened on the short passage paralleling the narrow dining room, the Phantom found steps that went down to the level below the bar and grill.

There was a steel-faced door there. He opened it. It gave onto an alley. He went down three stone steps and out to the end of the alley.

Within minutes the Phantom was on Seventh Avenue and heading for the Green Spot. He was known there, so he could at least borrow the price of a telephone call. He walked fast, noting the time. It was a few minutes after eleven. Theater audiences who had seen shows with late curtains were being dismissed. The roar of traffic was as strident as at noon.

One of the bartenders at the Green Spot tossed a nickel over and Van, in a booth in the rear room, called the *Clarion*. Steve Huston was at his desk,



patiently staked out there waiting to hear from the Phantom.

"Are you okay?" Steve asked, and his voice was vibrant with relief. "I've been sitting here for the past hour imagining all kinds of things. Where are you now?"

"Green Spot," the Phantom said. "Come up as soon as you can. Bring some money with you."

"Be there in ten minutes—or less," Huston promised eagerly.

When he reached the taproom, Steve Huston gave the hat the Phantom was wearing a quizzical look. But he said nothing about it as he sat down at one of the round tables in the back room. Instead, his freckled face reflected his inner excitement. The Phantom caught that at once.

"I've got news, Phantom!" Huston made sure no one was close enough to hear, and dropped his voice confidentially. "You were right on all counts!"

"Concerning the body mentioned in the *Clarion* clipping?" the Phantom asked.

"That's it! You said the time element was important. It was! That stiff that was mowed down by a hit-and-run driver in the Village was found at nine o'clock that night!"

"And Miss Ryder," the Phantom said softly, "left the Carousel after eleven-thirty. Sure you're right?"

"Sure, I'm sure! I had a look at the morgue receiving record as well as the precinct blotter. No mistake. She was framed all right!" Huston stopped and frowned. "But how—"

"You mean how did the blackmailers manipulate it?" asked the Phantom. "Simple enough. First, they must have been watching Della Ryder for some time. They knew the places she frequented, where she and Post liked to go for entertainment. That night at the Carousel gave them the chance they'd been waiting for—after one of them got an earful of what she said to Post on the telephone."

"Meaning?" Huston urged, wrinkling the forehead under his red hair.

"These men are fast thinkers, fast workers, Steve," the Phantom explained. "They were ready to go into action at any minute. All they wanted was the chance. They got it when Della Ryder left the

night club alone."

STEVE'S face wore a puzzled look.

"They dreamed the hit-and-run stuff up on the spur of the minute, you think?" he asked. "You're not saying they're mind readers, are you?"

"They must have known about the real victim," the Phantom said. "They were quick to see how that poor victim's misfortune could be made to pay off—for them. All they had to do was brief a third man on the scheme and pull the switch. It was a gamble, but it clicked."

The reporter nodded. "I get it," he said, with a grim note in his voice. "In the *Clarion* clipping there was no mention of the time the dead man had been picked up. Naturally, Miss Ryder figured he was the man she had run over."

Huston was thoughtfully finishing the beer he ordered when he was struck by a sudden recollection.

"Good grief, Phantom!" he exclaimed. "I almost forgot! Just before I left the office I had a Headquarters' flash. From the Inspector—for you."

"Concerning what?" the Phantom said rapidly.

"Tano, the Filipino," Huston answered. "He was picked up tonight, in the Bronx. Gregg has him at Center Street!"

The Phantom reached for his purloined hat.

"Let's go, Steve," he said.

New York's Police Headquarters never slept. When the Phantom and Steve Huston reached there a half-hour later, it presented its usual scene of nightly activity. Squad car officers were going on or off duty. The radio room hummed with activity. In the lower hall, night-hawk members of the press loitered, waiting to pick up news.

The Phantom and Huston went directly to Inspector Gregg's office on the second floor. Homicide occupied two rooms. The lights were on in both, and the grizzled Inspector was at his desk.

"Steve says you've got Tano," the Phantom announced as he entered.

"He was nailed up on Webster Avenue, in the Bronx," Gregg said. "One of the precinct patrolmen there recognized him from the description we broadcast. The



Filipino had a room in a flat, under another name. I sent a man to dig him out. Brought him down without any trouble. I've been saving him for you."

"Thanks."

The Phantom pulled a chair around beside Gregg's desk and sat down. Steve Huston, seeing an important chunk of the murder story he was on about to break, propped himself up against the railing that stretched across the office.

"Have him brought in," said the Phantom.

#### CHAPTER XVI: TANO TALKS



ONE of Homicide's first grade detectives, Scanlon, who had picked up Tano, led the Filipino house boy into Gregg's office. The Phantom studied Tano as Scanlon escorted him up to the Inspector's big desk. The Filipino looked calm enough. The light fell on his straight black hair, making it gleam, and his liquid dark eyes were alert and expressive.

"This gentleman wants to talk to you," Gregg said, indicating the Phantom. "Answer his questions."

The dark eyes turned to the Phantom. There was nothing sullen in their stare. Nothing that might have indicated that Tano questioned or resented the authority of the man the Inspector had said would interrogate him.

"Why did you leave Senator Ryder's house?" the Phantom asked.

"If I had stayed," Tano said frankly, "I would have been killed."

"By Davit?"

"Yes, sir."

Inspector Gregg put his elbows on the desk and listened intently. More than once he had been a witness when the Phantom had broken a case with a few quiet questions. He waited, watchfully, while the questioning went on.

"You were afraid of Davit," said the Phantom. "Why?"

"He knew I was on to him," Tano said. "He knew I suspected him."

"Of—what?"

"Of being somebody that shouldn't be working for the Senator! It started about

a month ago. I was passing his room one morning, early. The door was open a little. I looked in and saw him. Davit was putting something on his hair—color! No honest man would be trying to make himself look different from what he was."

"What else?" the Phantom queried.

"I laughed about it when he came downstairs," Tano said. "He didn't think it was funny. He got very mad. He said he would break my neck if I told anyone. I saw that he meant what he said. I began to watch him. Soon, I found he was making secret telephone calls. To someone he called 'Harry.' The calls to Davit came at all hours. Sometimes this Harry called Davit when he was at the office."

"What else?"

"Once I was in the dining room when I heard the front door open. I thought it was the Senator, or Miss Ryder. But it wasn't. It was this Harry. I knew it was, though it was the first time I'd seen him, then I heard Davit call him Harry. He had a key. Davit must have given it to him. And he carried a gun. I caught a glimpse of him taking it out of his pocket and putting it in another."

The Phantom nodded. "Anything more?"

"Yes," Tano told him. "Davit and this Harry went up to Davit's room. I heard them talking. I listened. Harry said something about Davit being wanted by the police—for killing a man! He told him to be extra careful."

Tano's voice was brittle. He drew a deep breath, and his dark eyes were full of emotion.

"You didn't take your information to the Senator?" the Phantom asked. "Why?"

"I didn't know what to do," Tano said, and it was plain he was being frank in all his answers. "I was afraid the Senator wouldn't believe me. He liked Davit. He was always laughing and joking with him. And I was afraid. If Davit had killed a man, he would kill me if he thought I knew about that."

"So you went to Neal Brady, the private detective, for advice?" the Phantom asked.

"I had known Brady for some time.



He did some work for the people who employed me before I got the job with the Senator. I figured Brady would tell me the right thing to do. He was very much interested in what I said. He told me to say nothing and do nothing, to leave it all to him. Brady came up and watched the house. Once, when there was no one at home, I let him in and he looked over Davit's room. Brady said that Davit was dangerous, and that he was going to see Senator Ryder and tell him about him."

Neal Brady's murder began to clarify itself in the Phantom's mind. All at once he had a clear picture of what must have happened. Brady, in his investigation of Morton, alias Davit, in some way had shown his hand. The secretary, realizing he was ready to be exposed, had turned the matter over to Harry Dancer and Dancer's employer. With the result that Neal Brady's dead body had been dropped from his hotel room window to the areaway eleven floors below.

AND Brady, the Phantom figured, must have felt that he was being watched. That would explain the telephone call he had made to Frank Havens late in the afternoon of the day he was murdered. The private detective had wanted to turn his information over to the publisher of the *Clarion*, so that Havens could pass it on to Ryder, if anything happened to him, Brady. He must, of course, have known of the close friendship between the two men.

"For the next day or two," the Phantom said to Tano, "you'll be safer here—under lock and key. All danger to one with your knowledge is not over just because Davit is dead."

"Yes, sir." Tano's smile showed his white, flashing teeth. "Very happy to be in jail!"

"Now just how will I book him, I wonder?" said the Inspector. "What would you say, Phantom?"

"Don't book him on any charge," the Phantom said. "Just lock him up for safe-keeping until you hear from me."

With Huston, he went back uptown. He had nothing more for Steve to do so he said goodnight to the reporter when they

left the subway, and took a taxi to Park Avenue. No one followed him, and he saw nothing of the hidden enemy.

Had the Phantom been one of Gregg's operatives, he would have arranged a police trap and set it in that third-floor apartment above the Malta. But the Phantom had his own way of doing things. The apartment belonged to Harry Dancer. It was probably Dancer who had struck him down. And Van felt sure that the man in the brown polo coat now would keep his distance from Dancer's rooms. . . .

Early the next morning, Van called Havens at his home on the publisher's private wire. An early riser all his life, Havens had already been in contact with Headquarters. He had learned that the Filipino house boy had been picked up and had talked fully and freely to the Phantom.

He mentioned that before he switched to another subject.

"Something has come up that puzzles me," Havens said abruptly. "When Ryder goes to Washington on Government business, he slips down there quietly and without any fanfare, but he never keeps himself incommunicado. I promised Mr. Lasher I'd get in touch with him about the farm transaction. I haven't been able to."

"Why not?" Van asked.

"Ryder," Havens continued, "isn't in Washington! Last night I telephoned two close friends of his in the State Department. Both told me the same thing—that he isn't in Washington, that they haven't seen him, and would certainly know it if he was there."

"You've tried his house?"

"Yes, he isn't there, either. Fay hasn't heard from him."

"I'll look into it later," Van promised. "I'm calling on his daughter at ten o'clock. Suppose you have luncheon with me at one and we'll talk it over. At Duval's."

He said good-by, cradled the phone, and went back to the secret room behind the bedroom wall. For what he had to do now, he needed another suit for the Phantom. He changed his clothes, touched up his disguise and selected a gun from his



arsenal, to replace the one that had been taken from him.

Another hat replaced the one he had found on the closet shelf in Dancer's apartment.

He made sure he had forgotten nothing, let himself out, and rode his private elevator down to the street.

At ten o'clock to the minute the Phantom went up the brownstone steps of the Ryder house on River Place.

Fay, the butler, answered his ring.

"Miss Ryder's at home?" asked the Phantom.

"Yes, Mr. Gray," the butler told him. "In her room, sir."

"Tell her I want to see her," the Phantom said. "You don't have to mention who or what I am. I don't want any repetition of what happened here before."

"I understand, sir," Fay said. "Leave it to me. Will you wait in the reception room or the study?"

"The study," the Phantom decided.

Fay opened the door of the room where Van had talked with Wilden Ryder the night of his first visit to the house. Now the sun slanted in warmly, glinting on the rich bindings of the volumes in the bookcases. A pleasant room, Van decided. A masculine room, like Douglas Post's pine-paneled living room. He sat down on the end of a small sofa, his gaze thoughtfully meditative.

SEVERAL minutes passed before his eyes centered on something a lance of sunlight touched. It lay half under the hem of one of the mustard-colored curtains that fell in folds to the floor. He got up and went over to it, picked it up, and then looked at it with narrowing eyes.

It was a tan silk glove, a glove for a left hand.

And, the Phantom saw instantly, it was a perfect match for the glove he had found close to Clement Morton's body in the office in the Pyramid Building.

He slipped the glove in his pocket as the sound of light footsteps approached toward the study.

Della Ryder stopped abruptly on the threshold. Her fascinating green eyes went wide when she saw and recognized

the man who turned quickly to her.

Her red lips compressed and her eyes seemed to darken. But this time she didn't faint. Returning the Phantom's gaze, she came farther into the room, but said nothing. The Phantom was the first to speak.

"Please close the door, Miss Ryder," he murmured.

She pulled it shut after her. She was wearing a smartly tailored glen plaid suit, a crisp white blouse, russet walking shoes. Her tawny hair glittered like a flame in the sun. Her beauty seemed accented by the morning light. Only the haunting look of fear, deep in her shadowed eyes, spoiled the illusion of youth and radiance.

"You're that detective!" she said in a low voice. "And Fay told me—"

"I had to see you," he said. "Please sit down, Miss Ryder."

She dropped down on the sofa. Her graceful fingers wove themselves together, betraying the nervousness she fought to suppress. Van saw the pulse that beat with uncontrollable rapidity in her smooth white throat.

"You've come to arrest me!" Her husky voice dropped unsteadily.

The Phantom shook his head. "On the contrary. I'm here to bring you good news."

"I don't understand." She peered at him doubtfully. "You're a detective, aren't you? What else could you want to see me about?"

He nodded, and gave her a confident smile. "I am," he said, "and as such I've been investigating a certain automobile accident that took place in Greenwich Village a couple of weeks ago. An off the record investigation, Miss Ryder. You've been victimized by blackmailers. You didn't kill anyone!"

Della Ryder's gasped cry caught in her throat. She jumped up from the sofa, staring at him incredulously. He knew what she was thinking, that this was some gruesome joke, or a carefully planned trap to get her to talk.

"I mean it," he said. "You did knock a man down. But he was a plant. You didn't hurt him. It was all planned so you'd think you had killed him!"



## CHAPTER XVII: PHANTOM'S PROMISE



IN HIS clear, concise way, the Phantom sketched a quick word picture for Della Ryder of what had happened on the street outside the Carousel on the night she believed she had killed a man. Slowly, while he talked, the light of fear began to leave her green eyes. The graceful fingers stopped their trembling, and wonder dawned in the lovely face of the Senator's daughter.

"I can't believe it!" she cried. "They—they—"

She broke off, dropping down on the sofa again, with a look of despair that said she really could not believe it.

"When are you to meet Harry Dancer again?" the Phantom asked her.

"Today," she said. "At two o'clock this afternoon."

"Where?"

"I don't know. He's to phone me at one and tell me the place."

"It won't be the Malta," the Phantom said, thoughtfully. "You don't know how much money you're to take him today?"

She shuddered slightly and shook her tawny head. "No."

"It will probably be a large sum," the Phantom told her, with a shake of his head. "Dancer knows he's getting close to the finish line. He'll want every cent he can get, before he makes a getaway."

"Am I to give it to him?" Della asked. "Shall I keep the appointment?"

"Yes. Do nothing to make him suspicious. The entire success of the case against him—and some others—depends upon you now. Give him whatever he wants and play the game as you have been."

"I will!" she promised, drawing a quick breath. "I'll do anything you suggest! Anything, to prove how grateful I am for what you've done for me!"

"One thing more." The Phantom spoke slowly. "Before you leave Dancer, I want you to tell him that you're frightened—about me. Tell him that I came to see you this morning and asked you questions. You don't have to tell him exactly what questions I asked. The point is

that you must drop some information that is valuable to him. This!"

He told her what she was to say and made her repeat it, to be sure she thoroughly understood. Then his hand closed over her slim fingers.

"Don't worry, Miss Ryder," he encouraged her. "Everything's going to be all right. Particularly," he added, with a smile lighting his eyes, "between you and Douglas Post!"

He left her staring after him, speechless.

Outside on the street, he made sure there was no maroon sedan lurking along River Place, or any loitering figure to shag him, and went back to Park Avenue, though in a roundabout way.

As soon as he was in his penthouse apartment, his first move was to make sure that the glove he had found in Ryder's study matched the one he had picked up in the office on the thirty-ninth floor of the Pyramid Building. It did—perfectly. It was the same size, texture and color.

He ran both gloves under his Greenough microscope to make certain, dropped them thoughtfully in a drawer of a cabinet where he kept jars of chemicals. Then he set about removing his disguise, slipping out of his Phantom rôle, and back into that of Richard Curtis Van Loan.

Duval's, where Van had arranged to meet Havens at one o'clock, was near Lexington Avenue in the upper Fifties. The publisher liked the French cuisine there. And there also were private dining compartments where people could converse without being overheard or intruded upon.

Van reached Duval's first. He had hardly removed hat and topcoat when he saw Havens' Cadillac stop outside.

The publisher was not alone. As he crossed the pavement, Van caught a quick glimpse of Muriel, Havens' daughter, hanging on his arm.

Van's heart skipped a beat. He hadn't seen much of Muriel lately, not half as much as he would have liked. They were the best of friends, and there were times when Van thought Muriel might have confessed she wouldn't mind being some-



thing more. And he knew she appealed to him more than any girl he had ever known. But the invisible wall of his other personality made a barrier between them. Never could he allow the seed of romance to flourish and blossom. No matter what regret or heartbreak it might bring, that was part of the payment he made for being the Phantom Detective.

**M**URIEL was a small girl, gypsy-dark and gaily vivacious. Her eyes laughed up at Van when her hand snuggled into his.

"Surprised?" she asked.

"Overcome." He meant it, and the sincerity in his tone brought a deeper flush to her smooth cheeks.

"She insisted on coming along," Havens said, frowning. "And she wasn't at all interested in my lunch date until she heard it was with you."

"Why not?" Muriel pivoted on her high heels. "I don't see Dick every day. He's really getting to be a stranger."

As they went to one of the compartments, Havens was still frowning. He was anxious to talk with Van. Muriel's presence made that impossible, and the newspaperman was impatient. When the waiter arrived Muriel didn't allow her father or Van to order for her as they usually did. She ordered for herself everything she liked best, careless of whether it might take hours to prepare and consume. Her father looked at her aghast. Van chuckled.

"Muriel!" Havens protested. "I have some business to talk over with Dick. That lunch you ordered will take at least two hours!"

"Go right ahead and talk," she said airily. "I don't mind. Even if I do know what your topic is—those dry-as-dust investment matters you're always discussing. Don't mind me, I can stand it."

Van did some fast thinking. He came up with an idea.

"I'll make a bargain with you, Muriel," he said. "Your father's date with me is important. He wanted to make it for Friday night. But I selected today, because Friday is the night of the Half Moon Dance at the Belgrave."

The dark eyes showed sudden inter-

est. "And?" said Muriel demurely.

"You let us discuss this business, minus your charming company, and Friday night I'll let you take me to the brawl at the Belgrave."

Muriel jumped up. "That's a deal! Shake on it!"

They shook hands, and with a laughing "Please excuse my haste!" she wheeled around and left the compartment hurriedly. Van was on his feet.

"Wait a minute!" he called. "You don't have to run away without eating anything! We're not in that big a rush."

But she only smiled back at him and kept going, out to the street and into a taxi that stopped to pick her up.

Van slid back in his chair at the table, facing the publisher. Havens expelled a pent-up breath and met his gaze.

"Well," he said, "that's that. You're a genius, Dick . . . Now tell me about the Filipino. Did you get what you expected in the way of information from him?"

"I got the explanation of Neal Brady's murder," Van answered.

He acquainted Havens with the facts he had learned from Tano. The publisher's face shadowed.

"Which still doesn't explain the second murder," he said. "To me, it only complicates it. Why was Morton, or Davit as he called himself, done away with?"

"I believe I have the answer to that, too," Van said soberly. "But until I have concrete proof, I prefer not to talk about it."

Havens understood. Van was speaking the Phantom's language now. And it was not the Phantom's habit to divulge his theories even to his closest and oldest friend until he had them substantiated in every detail.

"This case," Van said after a moment's thoughtful silence, "hinges on treasure."

"Treasure?" The word almost exploded from Havens.

"Money—jewels—the things that arouse greed and avarice," Van said. "That motivate murder! The case is nearing its end, Mr. Havens. I think I can promise you that before this time tomorrow the jaws of my trap will snap shut!"

The newspaperman's gray head jerked



up. "Then you know the solution?"

"There are still one or two pieces of the puzzle to be put in place. A door to find, and open."

"Door?"

"A yellow door!" Van said cryptically.

He lapsed into another silence then, one that lasted until Havens said:

"Dick, I'm worried about Wilden Ryder. I'm afraid something has happened to him. He seems to have completely disappeared!"

Van gave him a meditative glance. "If you don't hear from him by tomorrow," he said slowly, "I'll investigate."

After Van Loan said good-by to Havens and left Duval's, he moved fast. He had made Havens a promise. In keeping it there were many things to be done before the afternoon waned.

Back in disguise, he telephoned Steve Huston. Then he packed a small bag and went down to Park Avenue.

**A**FTER a twenty-minute hike he reached one of the tall office buildings that mushroomed high above the domed roof of the Grand Central Terminal.

An express elevator took him up to the last stop, at its towering tip. The Phantom stepped out into a small foyer. A fireproof door confronted him. On it was no number, name or lettering. He reached for the bell. Faraway he could hear its melodious ring.

Slowly, the door opened.

The Phantom went in. . . .

Late that afternoon, the Phantom's super-charged black sedan flashed along one of the highways leading to upper New York State. In appearance the car was deceptive. It was an expensive car, true, but there was more to it than that.

Under its rakish hood was one of the finest and most powerful motors built. The body was constructed of bullet-proof steel and in the rear were gadgets Van had designed for the Phantom's use—a folding makeup table built into the back of the front seat, a compartment for guns, and a space for two or three suits of clothing and other necessities.

With him in the car were red-headed Huston, and Dorlan.

Those two knew their destination was Ryder's farm, but they had no inkling of the purpose of the trip. But neither asked questions, too well versed in the Phantom's methods not to understand that whatever impended was of paramount importance to the case on which he was working.

Huston thought of that as the tires whined on the cement strip of the highway. The reporter, accustomed to police routine, always marveled at the Phantom's unorthodox means of crime solution, but realized that the great detective's success lay not only in his approach to a problem, but in the subtle manner in which he dealt with it, once he applied the full force of his talents to it. Steve had never ceased to wonder at the way in which the Phantom unraveled the dark skeins of mystery.

## CHAPTER XVIII: MURDER ACRES



**Y**OUNG Chip Dorlan was busy with his own thoughts. Like Steve, he was entirely aware that whatever they were due to face at Hundred Acres would tend to close the case and hand over the killers of Neal Brady and Clement Morton to the law.

Chip had tried to figure motives and angles for himself but without getting anywhere. There were too many mysterious ramifications. His service with Army Intelligence during the late war had schooled him thoroughly in the art of deduction and he had a naturally keen and introspective mind. Still, there were too many offshoots to the double murders engaging the Phantom's attention that Dorlan knew nothing about for him to reach any conclusion on his own.

But he was confident of one thing. He had an instinctive feeling that this trip to the farm near Poughkeepsie would see the final stages in the Phantom's puzzle drama.

After a while the black sedan left the highway and turned west on a broad State road. It was pleasant country. Flat, for the most part, but with a fringe of hills in the distance. Farming and dairy



country, peaceful and quiet, Steve Huston observed, as Chip Dorlan already had noted on his previous visit.

Some ten miles more and the black car made a right turn at a junction. It went on, moving down a twisting road, between meadowlands and wooded areas. Near the top of a hill, the Phantom reduced speed.

"Murder Acres," he announced, waving a hand at the place ahead of them.

Chip, who had been there before, nodded. Steve, who hadn't seen the model farm, stared at the scene spread out before them with keen interest.

His impression was of lush pastures, of what looked like an unending row of maple trees along a driveway that curved into the property. There were orchards and tilled fields, rows of white barns and numerous other white outbuildings all in story-book perfection.

It was, in every respect, a model farm. About it was an air of modern efficiency which augmented the generous assets which nature had supplied.

"Off to the right," Dorlan murmured. "The white cottage with the green roof. See it? That's where Olson, the caretaker, lives."

"Where Olson lived," the Phantom corrected. "He isn't there any more. He left yesterday."

Dorlan gave him a quick look. "Then there's no one on the property?"

"No one." The Phantom smiled. "It's ours entirely. We have the run of the place, Chip."

Chip exchanged a glance with Steve while the Phantom drove through the wide entrance and down the maple-shaded driveway that took them to the sprawling, Colonial-type farmhouse that stood apart from the barns, surrounded by gardens and banked with terraces.

Getting out of the car, they went up to a front door set with a huge brass eagle knocker. The Phantom didn't lift it. Instead, he dropped a hand in his pocket and produced a bronze key. It was larger than his master key. Both Chip and Steve stared at it as he used it to unlock the door. He pushed it wide and made a gesture.

"Step in, boys," he invited. "Make

yourselves at home. I understand there are plenty of bedrooms upstairs. Not," he added, as if it was an afterthought, "that we'll need to occupy them, or be likely to."

The charm of antiquity hung over the farmhouse. Time-mellowed furniture, fitting into the rooms, gave the place a perfect touch. A cherry Grandfather's clock ticked in the spacious entrance hall. It almost gave the impression with its dignified rhythm in marking off time that the house was occupied. Besides, from the spick and span appearance of the lovely old house, those who lived there might have only stepped out a minute or so before.

"I've two or three things to take care of," the Phantom told his assistants. "Hold the fort. I'll be back presently."

He got back in the car, drove to the main road and some three miles west. That brought him to a small village. On the outskirts was a modern red brick building with white trim. Over its main entrance were the words "State Police." Pulling up before it, the Phantom cut the purring motor, put on the brake, got out and went into the building.

He spoke to the trooper at the desk and was conducted to an office in the rear. There a tall, well-built man in uniform gave him a quizzical, inquiring glance.

The Phantom waited until they were alone before explaining his visit. Then his hand came away from one of his secret pockets. He turned it palm up and opened his fingers, letting the glow of the sunset color the small jewel-studded domino mask-plate he held. The Phantom's identification that was known wherever law-enforcement officers battled against crime.

CAPTAIN FRED DAYTON, the tall man, gave a low exclamation.

"The Phantom Detective!" he said. "This is an unexpected pleasure—and honor. Please sit down. I'm at your disposal."

The Phantom thanked him and took the chair the State Police officer pushed around to him. For a minute Van studied Dayton's tan, weathered face. Finally,



he spoke.

"I'm up here on business, Captain," he said. "It concerns ex-Senator Wilden Ryder's farm, Hundred Acres. I need your cooperation. Let me explain."

He began to talk, and continued steadily for a time, outlining his story slowly and concisely, while Dayton listened with intent attention. For ten more minutes after the Phantom had described the entire plot, the two conversed, with the Phantom laying out his plans in his usual careful way.

Then he got up, satisfied he could depend on the man in whom he had confided.

"You know what Marvin Wanz was, Captain?" he asked casually, as he reached for his hat.

"Yes," Dayton said, and waited, but the Phantom didn't go further into the subject of the previous owner of the farm.

"You also know that Clement Morton, Wanz's killer, was shot to death?" was what the Phantom did say.

"I should." Dayton nodded grimly. "I've followed that case ever since Morton broke jail, after he was picked up for killing Wanz, and escaped, hoping against hope that I could somehow get a line on Morton and capture him."

Dayton went out to the car with the Phantom, shook hands with him and stood there watching the black sedan turn and head back down the road. Then, his jaw set, he returned to the barracks and sat down at his desk. Following the directions he had received from his recent visitor, he pressed a button and picked up a telephone. . . .

It was twilight when Van berthed the black sedan in one of the barns on the Ryder property. He padlocked the door and glanced toward the farmhouse. There were lights in the living room, but instead of returning directly to the house, he took the powerful torch he had brought with him for the purpose and moved through the purple shoals of the settling gloom.

Fresh, cool air, filled with the perfume of the warm earth, blew against his face as he started off on a tour of the buildings scattered about the acreage. What he had to do would take time. It had to be done methodically. There was a

chance that it might end in failure, but he didn't think so.

He started with the barn nearest at hand, standing stark and silent in the gloom. Within the past month Ryder had disposed of his dairy herd of prize Guernseys and Holsteins, so now the stalls in all the barns were empty, clean and ready for whoever purchased the farm. The powerful light of the Phantom's torch played over electric milking equipment, spotless tiled walls, all the latest apparatus necessary for the maintenance of a model farm, as he investigated one barn after another.

**T**WILIGHT merged with evening. Stars came out in the blue bend of the sky. The edge of the moon crept over the eastern horizon. Patiently the Phantom continued his tour. Reaching the last of the barns, he stepped inside and let his torch move over its interior.

Horses had been kept in this building which was in reality a big stable, not a barn. And unlike the cow barns it had not been modernized. The smell of hay from the loft above was sweet in the air. There was also a pleasant reminder to horse lovers that such animals once had made this place their home.

Suddenly the Phantom felt an inner stirring. It grew as he passed the tack room and walked on to the south end of the stable. An open trap-door, with the top of a ladder protruding from it, led down into the blackness below. But for what purpose such a pit had been used, Van did not know.

He passed the trap-door, turned, and walked slowly back to the square, dark opening. From somewhere down there he heard the scurry of rats, aroused by his footsteps on the planked floor. His brows drew together, and the queer feeling within him became augmented. He set his feet on the ladder and started down, into a swirl of damp, Stygian darkness.

A moist dirt floor made a carpet for his shoes when at the foot of the ladder he stood motionless, the torch steady in his hand. He let its bright beam wander. The cellar of the stable, behind its stoutly barred outer door, held an accumulation of old-fashioned, rusted farm machinery.



A BROKEN plow, a horse-drawn harrower and a harvesting machine with a wheel missing cluttered one end of the cellar. This was machinery, the Phantom told himself, that had undoubtedly been used in the Wanz regime, before the time when the farm had become known as Murder Acres.

He started across the dirt floor. On the east side a hay truck was piled with a litter of tools, chicken crates and disintegrating bushel baskets. The Phantom went in closer. Beyond the truck, his quick eyes caught the shoring of propped-up oak beams. He pulled some of the tools aside and saw that the cellar floor slanted sharply down from behind the hay truck.

An aperture which had been concealed behind the wagon was off to the left. A man, he found, could enter it by stooping. Van's pulses began to quicken their beat. Was this what he had been searching for? Was he about to find the meaning to Clement Morton's gasped-out, dying words?

The Phantom drew a deep breath of the damp air as he went all the way into the aperture. He was brought up short by a moldy, square door with a china knob that was cracked and discolored. In the glare of the torch he saw double locks behind encrustations of rust.

With a flat-edged stone, Van scraped away some of the mold. He leaned close, his gaze intent on the color of the paint revealed, then he drew a swift breath of satisfaction.

The door before which he stood was yellow!

Now, at last, he was ready for whatever might come. But some time had passed before he left the cellar stable, went out of the building into the night, locked the big doors after him, and headed for the farmhouse. . . .

Crickets chirped in the night. Far away a train whistle, passing a crossing, faded into thin echoes. Alone in the living room of the farmhouse, the Phantom sat before the logs he had kindled in the blackened old fireplace.

The Grandfather's clock ticked, whirled and chimed the half-hour. Van settled farther back in his chair. Ten-thirty. With his eyes thoughtfully on the flame-licked logs, his brows drew together.

He told himself that no part of his plan had gone wrong. He was certain the groundwork had been well laid, that Della Ryder had followed his instructions to the letter.

Ten-thirty came. He had looked for action before this. The jaws of the trap were open wide. Would they spring shut, or had some unforeseen circumstance arisen to change the entire diagram of his planning?

The clock's tick seemed to pound against Van's strained, listening ears. The noise of the crickets increased. Somewhere outside a night bird called through the shadows. Once more the clock chimed, this time striking the hour. It marked it off in slow, deep reverberations.

Then, down the maple-lined driveway, where the moon lay in silver puddles, the headlights of a car winked out. But not before the Phantom, from his chair, had seen them briefly. He stiffened, head lowered, his fingers restless on the arms of the chair.

There was no sound other than the crickets and the clock's tick. If a car had approached the house, it had drifted in silently, without the pant of its engine.

Head bent forward, the Phantom waited.

So quiet as to be almost unheard, he caught a footstep on the gravel outside. That sound was blotted out. Five more minutes passed. The Phantom, stretching and yawning, got up from the chair before the fireplace.

Leisurely he turned—to look into the blue-steel of the automatic gripped in the hand of the narrow-faced, dapper man he had confronted once before. In the foyer of the Ryder home!

NEXT ISSUE

## MURDER AT MAGIC LAKE

A Novelet by EDWARD RONNS

AND OTHER STORIES



## CHAPTER XIX: ONE MORE BODY



**G**RIMLY Harry Dancer moved in from the hall door. A foot behind him followed the pot-bellied Mal, his prominent eyes alert and bright. Mal held close against his side a revolver with a silencer attached. His brown and white shoes squeaked as he sidled past the Phantom and took up a position to the rear of him, near the fireplace.

Then, while the slim Harry Dancer stopped and motioned for the Phantom to get his hands up, a third man entered the room.

Once more the Phantom's speculative gaze focused on a brown polo coat, a pulled-down felt hat with a wide brim and a white silk muffler drawn up over the bridge of a nose so that only sharp, watchful eyes were visible. But there was no need for all that muffling now—not as far as Van was concerned.

The Phantom's gaze moved back to Dancer.

"You're late," he said mildly. "Miss the turn-in off the main road? I expected you an hour ago."

Dancer's chestnut-colored eyes retreated behind the white lids that dropped over them. A sneer played along the line of his mouth.

"You expected us?" he drawled.

The Phantom nodded. "Miss Ryder must have sounded convincing," he said, his tone casual, "when she let you know I was coming here. I purposely rehearsed her this morning. I wanted you to know where I'd be tonight. You took the bait nicely, as I'd planned."

Mal, tightly gripping the silenced gun, looked from Harry Dancer to the masked man.

"I don't like this," the paunchy man said, and his voice had a sudden harsh, sandpaper quality. "I don't like it at all. If he figured we were coming up here after him, he must have done something about it!"

The Phantom nodded approvingly. Mal had jumped to a reasonable conclusion. But Dancer laughed it off.

"Relax, Mal," he said, grinning. "Can't

you see he's bluffing. He has a reputation for fast thinking—and he needs to now. He didn't rehearse Della Ryder in anything!"

"Don't you think it might be a good idea to get his gun?" asked the masked man, from behind him.

The soft, doughy voice that the Phantom so well remembered prodded Mal into action. Again he searched the Phantom for weapons. He made it complete when his hands pressed against the trouser legs. Evidently Mal was experienced at frisking a man. For the Phantom realized that Mal knew that a small leg-gun could be brought into swift and unexpected action.

"No gun," Mal said at last, and shook his head, as if the absence of lethal weapons on the Phantom verified the opinion he had just expressed. He seemed positive now that this cool, contemptuous man *had* expected them and had prepared accordingly.

"Sit down!" Dancer ordered, and gestured with his automatic.

The Phantom dropped into the chair from which he had arisen.

A log crackled, sending up a shower of sparks. The Phantom pushed out his long legs toward the blaze. He looked up at the slim young man confronting him, a faint, cynical smile on his lips.

"You've hung up some kind of a record for mistakes," he taunted, including Mal and the man in the polo coat with a flicker of his eyes in their direction. "You should be flattered that I've let you stay on the loose as long as I have."

"This time," Dancer said sibilantly, "there won't be any mistake!"

"Too late now." The Phantom moved his shoulders. "Your gun career and that of the still more bloodthirsty killer who employs you, as well as the well-fed Mal, is close to the finish!"

The gun in Dancer's hand moved menacingly.

"Wait, Harry!" The doughy voice spoke quickly. "Let him talk. I want to hear what he has to say, if anything. We might possibly find it useful—later . . . All right, Phantom. What about those mistakes you're talking about?"

"The first and biggest mistake," the



Phantom said, "was the killing of Neal Brady. That brought the case to my attention. Another foolish move was registering the maroon sedan in Joseph Garry's name to shift suspicion on him and give me a wrong angle on which to work. The silk glove tossed under the curtain in the Ryder study was another red herring that wouldn't have fooled a correspondence course detective."

**D**ANCER'S lips twitched, and his eyes flashed killer fire.

The Phantom ignored him. "Your blackmailing scheme," he continued, "is out in the open now. Della Ryder knows that she didn't kill anyone. Her last payment was made on my advice. As for your real objective—the motive behind the murders and your chicanery—that's still as far away from you as the moon!"

The slim man's fingers tightened over the automatic's trigger. He seemed unable to control himself any longer. He had got as far as saying, "We'll see about that!" when the man in the brown polo coat stopped the automatic's forward move with another fast order.

"Take it easy, Harry! Let's find out how much he does know. He'll be dead a long time. I want the rest of this. It's interesting. And it may be years—if ever—before anyone else will know the workings of a Phantom brain."

The Phantom looked into the eyes peering over the top of the white muffler. Shaded by the brim of the hat they glowed like pools of fire.

"All that has happened," the Phantom said, settling back deeper into the chair, "goes back to Marvin Wanz. To the time Wanz was murdered by Clement Morton—shot here, on this farm. Morton was playing for high stakes when he did the killing—for something he knew that Wanz had hidden on the property. He killed Wanz to get it, but the police got him instead. However, they didn't hold him. Morton broke jail, slipped away and went into hiding. He stayed hidden for a long time, and while under cover he had a plastic surgery job done on his face. The hair-dyeing job he attended to himself. When he was ready to return

to circulation, he was another person. Not Clem Morton any more, but Henry Davit."

The Phantom stopped as if he had reached his climax, and that someone else could take it up from there. The masked man let his gaze flicker in Dancer's direction.

"Letter perfect," the doughy voice said. "So, Phantom?"

The Phantom shrugged, and began again.

"So Davit," he said, "found that former Senator Wilden Ryder had purchased Murder Acres while he, Davit, or Morton, had been underground. Which put the secret of the farm as far away from him as when he had been Wanz's buddy. What to do about it? Being a resourceful, well educated and clever young man, Morton mapped out a campaign. It took some string-pulling, I imagine, but as Davit he got the job as secretary with Ryder, for the specific purpose of coming up here and hunting for what he had killed Wanz to get. But in all the time he worked for the Senator, he never had a real chance. Morton never was able to make the kind of search necessary without arousing suspicion, and he was too smart to risk that."

There were no comments when the Phantom paused again.

"More?" He crossed his legs and smiled faintly as he glanced from one to the other of the silent men. "Well, Morton watched and waited. Sooner or later, he figured, opportunity would knock. Finally, his big chance broke. One day Ryder told him he was giving up the farm, selling it. The minute Morton heard that he knew this was what he had been waiting for. Unfortunately, he didn't have enough money to buy the place. But he did have something he thought almost as good. That was a scheme to raise the money quickly. So he contacted a pal he had known in his early law-breaking days. A smooth, ultra-sharp operator, exactly the type he required. He made a deal with this man and they went to work."

As the Phantom made his point and stopped speaking this time, the glance he directed toward the man in the door-



way showed him how solidly his words had registered.

"You didn't find this out for yourself!" the man in the polo coat burst out, his urbanity momentarily gone. "Clem told you!"

The Phantom did not argue the point. What the masked man said was a compliment to his deductive skill, for the fellow's words proved that he had made no mistake.

"Morton's plan to raise the purchase price of the farm," he went on, "was by the simple expedient of blackmail. It was an ironic plan, too—extorting enough money from the private fortune of Della Ryder to buy her father's property. A neat arrangement, if I ever saw one—keeping the money in the family, so to speak. The blackmail scheme worked, after Dancer and the large gentleman behind me were brought in to handle the strongarm details and the blackmail payments. In fact, everything was rolling along in high until the Senator's Filipino house boy got suspicious of Davit and went to see Neal Brady about it. Then the guns began to roar!"

**T**HE PHANTOM'S eyes moved back to the weapon in Harry Dancer's hand. But his expression did not change, and his lounging pose was still casual.

"Morton," he resumed, in the same placid tone, "wanted to close the deal in a hurry. Other prospective purchasers for Murder Acres were looming up. Nearly all of the cash required had been gouged out of the Senator's daughter and was in the till. Morton knew that, but what he didn't know was that his suave partner had not the slightest intention of making any split or division of what they hoped to find on the farm when they bought it. The partner wanted it all for himself. So Dancer was commissioned to take care of Morton. Which he did at the office on the thirty-ninth floor of the Pyramid Building."

"And which," Dancer ripped out, "adds one more body to the murder list—yours!"

"Harry!" snapped the masked man. "Stop that! Don't!"

But this time the slim man with the

narrow face paid no attention to the command. As his gun hand was thrust fully forward, the Phantom saw what was coming. Entirely prepared for it, his own fingers had closed around the small gun he had earlier secreted between the cushion and the side of the chair in which he was sitting.

The Phantom was famous for his ability to snap shoot with the speed of lightning, and with devastating accuracy. The report of his gun sounded first, blotting out the bark of Dancer's automatic.

Like an arrow unleashed from a bow, the Phantom was out of the chair as the blue-steel gun spun from the slim man's bullet-creased hand. The Phantom had him in the next watch tick. Hurling Dancer up against the wall, the Phantom stepped back, his own gun covering both the man in the doorway and Mal as it moved in a deadly arc.

"All right!" the Phantom called out. "You can come in now!"

Doors opened.

Through them hurried Captain Dayton's uniformed men, Steve Huston, Dorian, Frank Havens and, beside the owner of the *Clarion*, the tall, familiar figure of Wilden Ryder!

## CHAPTER XX: BEHIND THE DOOR



**J**UST as soon as the menace was removed from Harry Dancer by the lead that made his right hand drip blood, the narrow-faced, dapper gunman surrendered without fight. Mal, whose name later turned out to be the euphonious one of Cyril Malcolm, was a different proposition. He made use of the gun with the silencer to blaze away point-blank at the Phantom.

But his aim was bad because of his jitteriness which for some time had been building up, and the shot went wild. A State trooper had him in a bone-crushing grip before the flat-faced strongarm could try again. Mal was slapped up against a wall and handcuffed with neatness and dispatch.

The man in the turned-down hat and white silk muffler had swung around and made a dash for the outside foyer when



the Phantom had called out for the law to enter. He had reached the front door and was tearing it open when the Phantom, plunging after him, grabbed him.

Hauling him away from the door, Van shoved the nose of his gun into the fellow's back.

"We won't wait until midnight for the unmasking!" he declared. "We'll take care of that in a minute or two!"

Herding his captive back into the room where the logs burned, the Phantom pushed him forward.

"The murder chief!" Steve Huston exclaimed.

"Morton's partner," explained the Phantom. "The man who issued the order for Brady's death and followed it up with a second command to kill—Davit!" The Phantom turned to his prisoner. "Smooth and sharp," he commented, "but not quite enough of either! Let's have a look at the face behind the mask!"

Reaching up, he deftly pulled away the white silk muffler with one hand, while he removed the wide-brimmed felt hat with the other. Revealed was a face tanned as if from a Southern sun or a ray lamp. The face of a man with a prominent nose, a small mouth and thick blond hair that grew back in waves from his high, intellectual forehead.

"Conrad Lasher!" Frank Havens exclaimed incredulously.

The Phantom met Lasher's eyes. The fire in them had gone out. They were like the ashes of embers that had lost their warmth. Lasher's tongue moved over his dry lips.

"Too many mistakes," he mumbled thickly. "You were too clever for me—much too clever."

The Phantom turned him over to Dayton and the room was cleared. The tall, spare figure of the white-haired, ruddy-faced Ryder was in silhouette against the fire as he adjusted his nose glasses and smiled at Dorlan, Huston and Havens.

"I understand," the ex-Senator said, "that there was some concern caused by my absence. And especially by the fact that I didn't come back to the city when Davit was found murdered in my office." He waved a hand in the Phantom's direction. "Blame it on this gentleman. He

insisted I keep out of the picture. He was afraid something might happen to me and told me enough to make me glad to agree to his suggestions. He had me confined in an apartment on top of an office building I own on Park Avenue. I've been there looking at the clouds for all the time I was supposed to be in Washington. Late this afternoon," he added, "I was allowed to call Havens, and come up here with him."

"So you got that bronze key for the front door here direct from the Senator," Steve Huston said. "I couldn't help but wonder about that."

The Phantom nodded and went on, "I knew the type of characters we were dealing with, Senator. I couldn't take chances with you. These men were not the ordinary underworld mobsters—as you've seen. They're of the new order, the intelligentsia of crime, and far more deadly because they have brains—and breeding, of a sort."

"When did you begin to suspect Lasher?" Chip Dorlan asked, after the Grandfather's clock outside had marked the passing of another half hour.

"The night I called at the Ryder home on River Place," the Phantom said. "I was followed away from it by a man in a maroon sedan. Later, that turned out to be Dancer. Obviously, someone had sent a fast telephone call to someone to tail me. Who knew I was there? Davit, Fay, the butler, Miss Ryder and—Conrad Lasher. He had come out of the study with the Senator and had paused long enough to be introduced to Mr. Havens and me. It was not mentioned then that I was connected with the police. But Lasher has a keen brain. He had a chance to put two and two together. I wasn't positive about Lasher, though, until a couple of things turned up. One, the stub of a pencil I found in the office where Senator Ryder's secretary was killed."

HAVENS looked up in surprise.

"Pencil?" he repeated. "What has a pencil got to do with it?"

"On this one was an advertisement for a tobacco stand in the lobby of the Commerce Trade Building," the Phantom ex-



plained. "Lasher, for a front, has an office in that building. But that wasn't conclusive enough. What was more convincing turned up as a fake warning letter Lasher said he had received. Another suspicion developed. There was no envelope for the letter and I felt certain he had prepared it after I had telephoned and made an appointment to see him." The detective smiled thinly, "I should have mentioned that to him while I was giving him my résumé."

"Anything else?" queried Huston, his reportorial instincts whetted.

"The most important thing of all," the Phantom replied. "What really sold me on Lasher was this. I am positive I wasn't followed to his Gramercy Park address. Yet when I left him, Mal was waiting for me. How could he possibly know that I would be at that particular place that night—unless Lasher had told him?"

The Phantom shrugged and listened to the throaty pant of Dayton's police cars out on the maple-lined driveway. Headlights slanted across the curtains of darkness. One by one, cars, officers and their prisoners started away.

"What I want to learn," Senator Ryder said, "is the meaning of all this. I heard every word you said to those men, Phantom. You spoke of a 'secret' hidden on this farm. I'm intrigued. What is it?"

"If you don't mind a walk across the property, I'll be glad to show you," the Phantom said.

With his powerful torch cutting a golden swath through the murk, he led the way past the dairy barns and to the big stable, into the dark, damp cellar which he had earlier descended. He was silent during the walk. When they reached the stable, he led them to the trap-door, went down the ladder first, holding the light so the others could follow.

Then, heading for the south wall and the junk-cluttered haywagon, he stopped, to face them.

"Just a word before I proceed further," he said. "The secret lies behind that yellow door. Perhaps Steve can shed some light on its presence there."

"Me?" The reporter's eyes widened.

"I don't get it."

"How about you, Chip?"

It was Dorlan's turn to register surprise. He shook his head.

"What do you mean, Phantom?" he asked.

"You investigated Murder Acres for me. You dug up the facts on the late Marvin Wanz from the *Clarion* morgue. Wanz owned a stable of race horses, was a big-time gambler, a high roller. But what else was he?"

Chip got it immediately. "An old-time racket man! The head of a gang of crooks who went in for jewel robberies and top bracket takes! He served a couple of prison terms."

"With his pal, Clem Morton," agreed the Phantom. "Morton's record, once his fingerprints were checked, was a big help to me. Now I'll open the yellow door and you'll understand better."

He had used a tool on the twin locks. The moldy door swung inward at his touch. The gleam of his torch lighted the small, stone-walled, cavelike enclosure. Those behind him, peering across his shoulders, saw the piled-up boxes and receptacles, the paintings and silverware which made the place a veritable treasure trove.

Jewels flashed and scintillated as the light darted into one of the boxes which the Phantom had opened. His voice came to them in hollow, almost eerie echoes made by the underground compartment.

"The Wanz legacy!" he said. "The profits of years of crime! Morton knew they were behind a yellow door, but he didn't know where the yellow door was and he never had the chance to find it! With his dying breath he tried to tell me, so that his killers would never reach it . . ."

**M**IDNIGHT was long past when the Phantom's big black sedan rolled swiftly and smoothly in the direction of Manhattan. In addition to Steve and Chip, the Phantom had two other passengers—Havens and Wilden Ryder.

There was not much conversation, as the miles disappeared under the car's humming tires. Each seemed engrossed with his own thoughts. It was close to



dawn, the stars were misty in the blue canopy of the sky, and haggard gray smeared the horizon far to the east.

While he drove, the Phantom mentally closed the last chapter in the book of the case he had completed. After leaving the farm, he had spent some time at the State Police barracks with Captain Fred Dayton and the County Attorney who had been hastily aroused and brought over to the building. When the final details concerning the three prisoners had been disposed of, the Phantom had returned to the Ryder property to pick up his passengers for the homeward trek.

The case file was closed, but there was still one matter that needed the Phantom's attention, Van knew. He voiced it, letting his gaze move in the direction of the distinguished, white-haired man on the seat beside him.

"Without Douglas Post's cooperation and help," he said, breaking the silence which had held for miles, "tonight's wind-up would have been delayed considerably. And your daughter's unhappiness would have been unnecessarily prolonged, Senator. I don't usually meddle in romance, but this is an exception. I want to put in a good word for Post."

"You have," Ryder answered drily.

"Dealing as I do in crime," the Phantom went on to press his point, "I've developed a fairly accurate insight as to a person's character. Post impressed me as being worthy of your consideration—

worthy of joining the family and having a seat at your table. I hope you'll—"

"Tell him, Frank," the ex-Senator interrupted, to say to Havens.

The *Clarion* owner cleared his throat. "Douglas Post," he announced, "is coming to work for my paper. Not as a reporter. I'm using his inherited business ability in an executive capacity. And the Senator," Havens added, "is in full accord with everything you've just said, Phantom."

"Nothing like watching the clouds roll by from the top of a skyscraper, to let a man catch up with his thoughts," Wilden Ryder said. "Della has my blessing!"

New York lay quiet and tranquil when the Phantom's black sedan turned into River Place. His next stop was at the Havens' house. Then Steve and Chip said good-night and dropped off, bound for their respective lodgings.

Alone, the Phantom headed for the garage where he kept his cars. As he drove through the quiet streets, his disguised face was serene. But he knew the case he had finished was not destined to be the last of his brilliant succession of triumphs. Crime would strike again—and still again.

But he was not thinking entirely of that when he reached the garage. Something he had promised a girl with dark eyes and vivid lips came back to him.

"Friday," Richard Curtis Van Loan said to himself. "Friday and—Muriel!"



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*You never can tell  
what a blind  
man can see!*



Small whisked the gun out of his pocket and fired the fatal shots

# An EYE for BLOOD

By HAROLD HELFER

**B**EFORE Chet Small did the job, the thing that had worried him most was the thought of being a murderer. How well would he bear the gray, morbid pangs of regret and the dark, dreadful anguish of guilt? But, now that it was all over with, the principal emotion that Small felt was one of pleasant surprise.

He found he had been romanticizing the plight of a murderer. Actually, Chet Small discovered, murder wasn't anything more than any kind of business enterprise. There were certain risks, but

if you played it smart and close to the chest you'd come out on top.

Behind the shiny mahogany desk of his office, Chet felt so good—there was almost even a sense of exaltation—that he didn't even mind when a long, sharp-faced man from Police Headquarters walked into the office.

"Well, what can I do for you this fine afternoon, Detective Hogan?" Chet had said jocularly. "Wrap you up one of the Owl Loan Company's super three hundred-dollar loan specials?"

At first, the constant visits of the man



from Police Headquarters had bothered Chet somewhat. It made him feel that maybe he had slipped somewhere, that somehow a halo of suspicion hovered over him. But the lanky, dour detective's questions had all been routine. What was the Owl Loan Company worth? Had he ever heard any quarreling between the other two partners of the concern, Andrew Thompson and Charles Yannick? Did he know of any enemies—say, an indebted client of the loan agency—who might have had it in for Thompson? And so on.

Today the detective seemed even more glum and humorless than ever as he coiled his sparse dried-up frame into a chair by Small's desk. Chet suppressed a chuckle. Andrew Thompson was buried six feet under and Charles Yannick was deep in the recesses of the jail house. The warm summer sun was shining brightly outside, Chet Small was at least \$100,000 better off and everything was decidedly on the wonderful side.

In his flat, raspy voice, Detective Hogan said, "I wonder if you could get away for a little while?"

For a moment—but only for a moment—Chet felt a sharp jab of panic. No, this was just some more routine, he told himself quickly. The police were convinced that Charles Yannick was their man. Hadn't they kept him in jail ever since Andrew Thompson was shot down early that night two weeks ago in front of the Owl Loan Company?

Why should they doubt that Yannick was their killer? Didn't they have a "witness"—the shaggy man who sat in the backless, canvas chair in front of the loan company, Tony Fanneli, the blind man?

**S**URE, it was a bit odd, having a blind man as a "witness." But that didn't make Tony Fanneli's testimony any less damaging to Yannick. And it's what had made Small's plan so slick.

Yes, there were two things about which Small had made certain that evening. One was that Tony, with his tin cup and his capful of pencils, was sitting in his customary spot, and the other was making sure that there wasn't anybody else

in sight.

Small had acted quickly. As soon as he and Thompson had stepped out of the doorway, he had whisked the gun out of his pocket and fired his shots so rapidly that his startled partner hadn't had the breath to groan, much less make any divulging outcry. Then, changing his deep baritone to the peculiarly tenorish voice of Charles Yannick, Chet had cried out, "Well, you had it coming to you," and, a second later, was in his car and away.

And since Yannick had driven away from the scene only a minute or so before there was no reason whatsoever for the police to doubt Tony Fanneli's story a little later.

"Yes, I knew all of them, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Small and Mr. Yannick," Fanneli had said. "They were very nice to poor old Tony. Let me stay in front of their place all the time. When it rained, they let me come inside. Know them for years and years, much long time. Couldn't make mistake about them. It was Mr. Yannick all right I hear say, 'Well, you had it coming to you!'"

Chet Small came back to the present with a start. Detective Hogan had stirred.

"I was saying, Mr. Small, I'd be much obliged if you could come along with me."

"I'll be glad to do so, of course." Chet snapped out of his reverie. "Where are we going?"

Even after the detective said, "Police Headquarters," Chet didn't feel particularly alarmed. Maybe a little puzzled, that's all.

Of course, it was perfectly obvious, and had been all along, that he stood to benefit from any action that got his partners out of the way. The clause in the partnership agreement was there in black-and-white. In the event of the death of a partner his share in the business automatically belonged to the survivors.

But it also was an obvious fact that Yannick, too, stood to benefit by a bigger slice of profit at Thompson's death. Moreover, it was well-known that Yannick and Thompson had clashed temperamen-



tally and, on occasions, had quarreled. Any number of the loan company's employees could testify to that.

No, Chet Small mused as the dark nondescript detective car nosed its way through traffic, he needn't concern himself about this trip. More routine, more police dotting of i's and crossing of t's. He did wish that the detective would say something to him instead of just looking straight ahead from behind the wheel with dour somberness. But even this didn't perturb Chet too much.

If they didn't have anything on a guy, they just couldn't do anything to him, no matter how many journeys he took to Police Headquarters. Besides, why should the police bother to go off on tangents on this case anyway? They had an A-Number-One suspect who couldn't appear to be any more earmarked for the electric chair if he had had a label pinned on him.

Even if the police had stumbled across the fact that there'd been some high-and-fancy embezzling going on, they couldn't prove it had been Chet. He'd patched the books so that the haze of suspicion would make the No. 1 suspect even more suspect. It would be just another link in the chain around Yannick. It wasn't unreasonable to deduce that maybe Thompson had got suspicious of Yannick and so Yannick, desperate, had let him have it.

Chet ascended the police station steps sprightly. That strange feeling of triumph was coursing through him again. It was a wonderful thing to tackle something big and dangerous and to plan everything so cleverly that you not only got out from under it cleanly but set yourself up on the top of the world.

He'd have enough money not only to cover up the financial shortcomings but to cut a real swath. Maybe he'd go to Rio this summer, take in the gay fiestas, the good-natured marimba minstrels, the sultry señoritas. . . .

Even the shadowy, dank detective room, with its gloomy, dilapidated lockers and foul-looking cuspidors, didn't dampen Small's high spirits too much.

**D**ETECTIVE HOGAN sat down at a long scarred-up table and motioned

for Chet to take a nearby seat. Chet complied. The lean, bony detective's face was flat and impassive.

It was Chet who broke the brooding silence.

He asked affably, "What's this all about?"

The detective didn't respond right away, as if he hadn't heard. Then, about a minute later, as if in after-thought, he spoke up, "We're waiting for somebody. Should be here any minute."

Detective Hogan scarcely had finished talking when there was a knocking on the door.

"Come in!" the detective's voice rasped out.

The door opened slowly and a man stepped into the room. He nodded at Hogan and then at Chet and then strolled over to the table and took a seat across from them.

It was Tony Fannelli—Tony, the blind man.

"Sorry if I'm late," Tony said.

"That's okay," the detective spoke.

"Hurried as fast as I could," Tony said. "Very thirsty now."

"Why don't you get some water from the fountain, Tony? It's usually pretty cool."

Tony's strange, glassy eyes wandered around the room. Then they rested on the fountain in a corner. He got out of his chair, walked over to the fountain and turned the water on. Then he was back in his seat, smacking his lips.

"Water very good," he said.

Chet, his face suddenly as lusterless and dingy as limestone, was trying his best to keep a wave of nausea inside him bottled up.

The sharp-featured face of the detective was regarding him with the trace of a smile now.

"Surprised?" he asked casually.

"Make nice living many years being blind man," the shaggy man across the table was saying. "Got eyes splashed with furniture polish when boy, make eyes look funny, people always look at me like they're sorry, give me idea to act like blind man. But no can have on conscience innocent man going to chair, even if have to let everybody know Tony is



big fake. Have to tell what I really saw, not what I'm supposed to hear.

"I don't know why I didn't say it was Mr. Small I hear, not Mr. Yannick, like I knew I was supposed to hear. Then Tony not have to make confession. Guess Tony was plenty scared, plenty rattled. Me sorry about all this. Mr. Small nice gentleman, even if I did see him shoot Mr. Thompson. Must have real good reason . . ."

**C**HET SMALL was out of his chair. "I had a good reason for shooting him," he shouted, his face now as livid as a scar. "Thompson was hard to get along with. Ask Charles Yannick. Ask anybody. Thompson and I had a tussle inside the building just before we stepped out. You got to believe me. It was self defense!"

"Your confession, of course, has been recorded in the next room via a hidden microphone," Detective Hogan said languidly. "If it's any consolation, I figured

all along it was you, even without Tony. Although, in another way, he was part of my figuring. You see, what I figured was why should Mr. Thompson's killer do the deed near a blind man, unless it was for a purpose, and the purpose would hardly be to stick his own neck in a noose. And I knew it isn't hard to imitate a man's voice you'd been associated with a long time. I'm always imitating the chief's as a joke . . ."

"Well, anyway," the detective said, "you'll pardon me if I don't accompany you personally to jail. You see, I sort of feel obligated to help Tony back to his place."

"Help — Tony — back? But I — thought—"

"Oh, sure, he's really blind. Blinder than a couple of bats. I just had him come up here for a few days and learn the layout of this room and I also taught him a few things to say. Now how would you loan fellows speak of it? It was a good investment."



## *From the Annals of Justice*

**T**HE fingerprinting system that today bears his name was not invented by Alphonse Bertillion, but by George Dilnot in 1879. Bertillion first scoffed at the system, but later recognized its worth and applied its basic principles to a number of other identification methods. In this way Bertillion perfected the fingerprinting and body scar and dimensional systems of identification.

**R**ECENTLY, customs inspectors at Kantara on the Suez Canal suspected the real cargo of a caravan—and ordered that the five camels involved be killed and their stomachs opened. Their suspicions were justified. Within the five camel stomachs had been hidden 135 vials of opium worth at least \$40,000. Officials suspect that several hundred ounces of the drug have already been transported into Egypt out of Asia via this method.

**U**NWILLING to take chances, the Egyptians of 3000 years ago had a unique method of trying court cases. The courts were conducted in blacked-out chambers so that the judge might not see any offers made by interested parties—or be swayed by the appearance of the persons involved.

**E**VERYONE knows the traditional statue of Justice, which for more than two thousand years has been represented as a female and blindfolded. This interpretation dates back to the ancient Egyptians, who chose a female figure to indicate that justice can sometimes be whimsical and the blindfold to indicate an effort at impartiality.

—Simpson M. Ritter.



# GHOST OF A CHANCE

By WAYLAND RICE

*A waving acquaintance with a girl across a courtyard gives a city dweller a break when he faces suspicion!*

**T**HE window from my apartment living room overlooked a court. There wasn't much of a view most of the day or night because opposite me was just another wall and twenty-one stories below was the so-called park which was one of the attractions of this huge building.

But now and then the view became excellent because directly across from my window, on the same floor, was the apartment of a girl I'd been waving to a couple of times a day. I'd never met her face to face, only across this man-made chasm of cement and steel, but I knew she was exceptionally pretty with brown hair and an oval face that lit up like the sun when she smiled at me.

It was just one of those things that help to break the monotony of big city life. Just a casual wave, a smile and I felt better and hoped she did. This par-

ticular afternoon, just before dark, I had need of her smiles and, miraculously, she was at home. It was unusual for her to be there at this hour. I leaned out of the window and waved frantically, making up my mind then and there to meet her very soon. If my uncle didn't have me clapped in jail, which was quite likely.

My right foot slid a little on the waxed floor and I grabbed at the window casement. The girl's smile vanished and was replaced by a look of frantic worry, but I laughed at her and waved again. The smile came back.

Then my bell rang and I turned away reluctantly. I opened the door and

I held out my left hand to be cuffed, and as Gunther moved in I swung with my right





let Uncle Ed Blythe in. With him was my cousin Arthur Haywood and his wife Martha.

Uncle Ed was old, bent, dependent upon a cane. He had a thin nose, bright little eyes and a perpetually mean expression. I suspected the suit he wore had been purchased twenty odd years ago. His collar was an old-fashioned stiff type around which he wore a shoe-string bow tie. He looked like something out of a Victorian novel.

Art Haywood was dapper, modern and I'd always thought him a fairly good sort. Martha was one of those flamboyant blondes, relying on a peroxide bottle and long sessions at a hair dresser's. I wondered what the real color of her hair was. Tall, willowy and a trifle domineering, she'd always been a nonentity in my life. I didn't care particularly for her kind. Compared to the girl across the court, she fell far down in my estimation of what a woman should be.

"Hello, Eric." Arthur held out his hand. "It's nice to see you again."

"Arthur," I acknowledged his greeting. "And you, Martha. I'm glad you came."

Uncle Ed plopped himself down in a chair facing the windows. He scowled at me. It was an expression very familiar to me. Uncle Ed had never smiled to my knowledge, though I suspected that when he studied his bankbooks something comparable to a pleasant expression must have crossed his face.

Uncle Ed said, "Well, have you no greeting for me? Or do you think I'll have you locked up, which you richly deserve?"

I waited until Art and Martha were seated. Then I draped myself on the arm of a davenport. I said, "Uncle Ed, you're all wrong and you know it. My father was your younger brother. Both of you started and built to success—an insurance business. When Dad died, I was supposed to come into his share of the business, but you have refused to acknowledge my partnership. With legal reason, I'll admit, because there never were any papers drawn up between you and my father."

"What's that got to do with it?" Ed demanded irately. "You worked and were paid."

"True, but you handled the money and I might as well have been on salary. Now you have accused me of stealing a

lot of money from the firm's account. I didn't steal that money. I borrowed it and loaned it to one of our biggest life risks. Because he was temporarily strapped and couldn't meet the large premiums on his insurance. That's good business, not the act of a criminal."

"Clients can't pay their policies, let 'em lapse, I say," Uncle Ed grumbled. "How do I know we'll ever get the money back?"

I tapped my pocket. "Because that client came to see me this afternoon and gave me every penny—in cash. Now will you admit you made a mistake?"

"No," Uncle Ed snarled. "I never make mistakes. Taking that money without my permission was theft. I own that business. You simply work there. I took it over when your father died and I mean to keep it. The money was mine. You should have come to me. However—if you really have the cash, I might be willing to let it go this time."

MARTHA winked at me as she spoke. "Uncle Ed, you're making all this sound too important. Eric isn't a crook and you must admit that he hasn't been given very much of a break in the business. Forget the whole thing."

"I'll forget nothing," Uncle Ed snapped. "You can come back to work, Eric, but you cannot touch a penny of the firm's money from now on. Now give me that cash . . . what's the matter with her?"

"Who?" I looked at Martha, but she was demurely seated and doing nothing to attract any attention.

Uncle Ed arose and started for the window, leaning heavily on his cane as he always did. "Some chippy across the way. Waving like an idiot. What sort of a place is this?"

I laughed when I saw that girl across the court. She was apparently trying to attract my attention. Uncle Ed reached the window and leaned out. He raised one hand to adjust his glasses and then it happened. He was leaning on the cane and its tip rested against a heavily waxed floor.

Suddenly the cane slid from under him. He was off balance, half out of the window, and he gave a wild shriek as he tumbled clear.

I reached the window about one second too late. Uncle Ed was spiralling downward. The girl across the way was per-



fectly white. I didn't pay much attention to her.

Behind me, Martha began screaming and Arthur shoved me to one side as he looked out. I pulled myself back inside, closed my eyes tightly to shut out that horror I'd just witnessed and sat down heavily.

I said, "He was a mean old coot, but I wouldn't have wanted that to happen to him. It was my fault. I knew the waxed floor was slippery. I nearly fell out myself a couple of minutes before you people arrived."

Arthur headed for the telephone and I suddenly realized I had a duty to perform. I was going out the door when Arthur contacted the Police Department. I heard him say, "There has been a violent death."

I went to the elevator, rode down and reached the courtyard. Some building employees were gathered around the shapeless form which had been my uncle. Someone had thrown an old coat over him. I was grateful for that. I stayed there until the police came in the person of a burly man who said he was Sergeant Gunther of Homicide.

I told him my story and he nodded. "Ought to build casement windows higher. Too many of these things happen. Take me up and show me the window he fell out of."

We reached my apartment. Arthur and Martha were seated side-by-side on the davenport and looking guilty about something. Sergeant Gunther went over to the window. He picked up the cane, examined the waxed floor and then turned around.

"Looks okay," he announced. "Let's have all the details. He was your uncle, I understand?"

Arthur broke in. "Sergeant, I'm Eric Blythe's cousin and I have always liked him very much. I sympathized with him and tried to make Uncle Ed be reasonable about the trouble they were having."

"Trouble?" Sergeant Gunther exclaimed. "What sort of trouble?"

"Oh—about some money Uncle Ed accused Eric of stealing. It really wasn't a theft."

Gunther gave me an odd look and then glanced back at Arthur and Martha. "Just why do you bring that up?"

Martha took the floor then. "Why because . . . because . . . oh, I can't say it.

Tell him, Arthur. Tell him the truth. We must, no matter how much it hurts."

Arthur swallowed hard. "Well, you see, Eric told you Uncle Ed's cane slipped and threw him off balance. It—wasn't that way—at all. I'd back up Eric in almost anything, but not murder. He—pushed Uncle Ed out of the window."

I jumped up. "Why you—" I started to say.

Martha shrank back. "Sergeant—watch him. He frightens me. I'm afraid—"

Gunther motioned me to sit down. "Well," he grunted, "this is something new. So Blythe pushed his uncle out of the window. He'd been having trouble with him too, eh? Blythe, let me warn you that I'll use as evidence anything you might say."

"What's the matter with you two?" I paid no attention to Gunther. "Why this lying? You came here as friends. You both tried to help me out when Uncle Ed was browbeating me and now you've—you've turned on me. Why? Why?"

Then I lowered my voice and regarded the pair of them coldly. "I think I understand. I'm Uncle Ed's heir. If I get electrocuted or sent to prison for killing him, you are the next of kin. That's why you say I murdered Uncle Ed but, so help me, I'll shove those words down your miserable throats. You'll eat every one and be arrested in the bargain."

Gunther said, "Seems like you got an out, Mr. Blythe. I suggest you tell it to me."

"Darn right I will." I arose and led him to the window. "Take a look across the courtyard. See that window—the one with the light blue curtain? When Uncle Ed went through the window, there was a girl over there who saw the whole thing."

Gunther whistled. "Well, that's interesting. What's her name?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," I told him, "but we're friendly. We wave to one another. She was trying to attract my attention for some reason, and Uncle Ed got up to see what she wanted. She saw him fall and she could see me far back in the room. Go find her—and learn the truth."

**G**UNTHER picked up the phone. Apparently there were police



downstairs for he reached one and ordered him to proceed to the girl's apartment, describing it by counting windows from the left of the court.

I grinned at Arthur and Martha. "Now is your last chance to change your story, folks. Uncle Ed fell out of the window. It was an accident. I had nothing to do with it."

"You—pushed him," Martha said in a faint voice. "Keep away from me, you—you murderer. Art, make him keep away from me."

Art gulped, looked as if he'd like to try, but decided against it. I moved away. They'd get what was coming to them as soon as the girl was brought over. I smiled. The whole idea was good. Now I'd meet that girl at last.

The phone rang. Gunther took it, hung up a couple of minutes later and reached for his handcuffs. "Sorry," he told me, "but that girl checked out two hours before the killing. That's definite, but where she's gone no one seems to know. She left no address and was in a big hurry. Her name is Janis Marshall, but I don't think she'll make a very good witness, Blythe. Put out your hands."

I didn't move. "If we don't find that girl, my chances look pretty slim," I said thoughtfully. "What with these two buzzards waiting for me to die. Sergeant, what do you think my chances are?"

"I'm just a cop," he shrugged, "but confidentially, I'd hate to be in your shoes. Let's go, Blythe."

I started to get up slowly and stuck out my left hand. Gunther moved in and I swung with my right. Foolish? Certainly it was foolish, but I was desperate. Being locked up would check me completely and if I intended to prove my innocence, I couldn't stop for a second. I had to find that girl, Janis Marshall. My life depended upon her. She hadn't checked out two hours before. I'd seen her in there. I knew she'd witnessed Uncle Ed's fall.

Gunther was unprepared, and I could uncork a healthy punch. He flew back, landed in Art's lap and slid off to the floor. Martha began screaming. Art was white and shaking. I gave them a baleful glance and got out of there.

I didn't use the regular elevator, but rang for the freight lift and went down in that all the way to the cellar. There'd be an alarm any second now. I had to

work fast. The super's office was off the basement and it was unoccupied. I used his phone, called the main office and asked about Janis Marshall. They simply confirmed what Sergeant Gunther had told me. Janis was gone and nobody knew where.

The girl on the office phone said, "Miss Marshall must be awfully popular all of a sudden. You're the third person who phoned about her in the last few minutes."

"One of those calls was from the police," I said tightly. "How about the other?"

"I really don't know, sir. It was a woman. She seemed rather excited."

"Where did Miss Marshall work? Did she have any friends?" I wanted to know anxiously.

There was a pause. The girl said, "I can't help you much, sir. But I did look up her references for the woman who phoned just before you. Miss Marshall gave her employer's name. It's the Collins - Lockwood Company on Wall Street."

I thanked her, hung up and heard sirens. For a moment I'd forgotten my own predicament and then I realized those sirens were on cars hunting me. I raced out the back of the building and was lucky enough to find a cruising cab. I rode that for fifteen blocks, paid off the driver and ducked into a small movie house.

There I had time to catch my breath and do a little thinking. I was in a bad spot. With the lying testimony of Art and Martha, they'd send me to the chair because I was made out a cold-blooded murderer with a strong motive. Only Janis Marshall could offset such evidence and now she was probably in danger.

**A**RT and Martha had shot their bolt with that lie. Now they had to back it up and I began to realize they'd do that even if it meant killing someone. That someone would be Janis because she knew the truth. The second call to the main office had been made by Martha. As I figured it, she checked on Janis before she sent out the alarm that I'd escaped.

Gunther must have been unconscious and unable to hear her. Now Art and Martha knew as much about Janis as I did and they were in a better position



to work on it. I was a hunted man. A killer who'd be sought by every cop, whose picture would soon appear in every newspaper and make each man, woman and child I met a potential hazard.

I stayed in the theatre until I was certain it had become dark. Darkness was my friend now. The only one I had. I enjoyed a certain amount of luck though in that I carried a great deal of money. Well over a thousand dollars.

I walked out beneath the blazing theatre marquee lights and felt as conspicuous as an Emperor Penguin in the middle of Times Square. I thought every eye was upon me. I needed a hat and I bought one a few blocks away. Then I did some checking at a phone book and determined that the Collins-Lockwood firm on Wall Street was a brokerage house. I started calling every Lockwood in the book until I found the right one.

A voice admitted being a partner in that firm, and I was told that Janis Marshall had worked there, but had resigned this same morning to take a new job with some relative in the same business. Lockwood wasn't certain but he thought she had gone to a city called Elmhurst some two hundred miles away. He hesitated and then said he'd check.

I held on for a long time until I suddenly became suspicious. Art and Martha would contact Lockwood too. If they were there now, Lockwood would be calling the police to intercept me. I hung up, slid out of the booth and headed for the exit. I saw a green and white radio car pull up and two cops got out. They started moving fast toward the door. I reversed my steps, went behind the counter of the drug store, continued on to the prescription department and with a wave at a startled pharmacist, I reached the back exit and passed through it.

On the street I moved as fast as I could without attracting a lot of attention. Again I resorted to a taxi for getting me places fast. I switched cabs three times and realized that pretty soon I wouldn't be able to do this. Every cab driver would have his eyes open for me.

I wound up far uptown and wandered about the streets for a time, until I spotted an old brownstone building that had the appearance of being abandoned. I went around back, smashed a window and crawled through. In this

dusty, dark place without a stick of furniture, I felt better. I sat down in a corner to do some more thinking.

I felt like a criminal now and realized I was hot. Very, very hot. But I had to do something. Art and Martha wouldn't wait. They'd try to reach Janis before she could read about what happened after she left. If they did, Janis was in as deadly danger as I.

The longer I stalled, the better Art's chances. I left the warm security of the abandoned house, walked west and reached a traffic link with the uptown tunnel. Twice I ducked when I saw a cop. I thumbed a ride on a truck, reached Jersey and proceeded to the nearest railroad station. There I inquired about this town of Elmhurst. There were several, of course, but only one was about two hundred miles away. I bought a ticket and a single bedroom on a train due in soon.

**T**HE sleeper idea was excellent. I needed rest and I got it. But I was afraid that Art and Martha would somehow tip Sergeant Gunther that I might go to Elmhurst and he'd have a reception committee installed on the platform. So I got out two stations and some forty miles away.

My next step was to rent a car and again I was thankful for that cash. I bought a newspaper, a local one, and was relieved to find it didn't carry my picture although the story was there in all its gory details. The New York papers would have all sorts of pictures of me. There had been plenty of them in my apartment. Martha was good pictorial copy too, the feminine angle, and she'd be played up big.

I reached Elmhurst soon after noon-time, parked my rented car and relied on the phone book once more. Lockwood had said Janis was taking a similar job with some relative. There were no Marshalls engaged in the security business so I proceeded to phone every stock broker in the book. There were eleven of them and the ninth was the party I wanted.

Some woman told me that Janis was already at the office of her uncle and I was obligingly given the address. But Gunther, if he knew about this, would be on guard there too. Yet, I had to take the chance. I wasn't worrying half as much about my own welfare as that of



Janis. If I was caught, I'd still have a ghost of a chance, but Janis was doomed. Art and Martha would have to kill her eventually. Even if I was convicted and executed, she still presented a hazard to that pair.

I felt reasonably safe around the streets of this busy city and I made my way straight to the building where the offices were located. There was a small lobby and two elevators. I saw a short, chunky man leaning against the wall and reading a newspaper too intently, but I couldn't figure him for a cop. After all, policemen are required to be a certain height. I'd never seen one no more than five feet five.

He paid no attention to me beyond a casual glance. I dismissed him from my mind, went on up to the seventh floor and entered the offices. I was beginning to develop a warm glow for receptionists. They were willing and even eager to help me.

This one said that Janis had been expected and her uncle was looking forward to her working there, but she'd not turned up yet. Though she had phoned and was in town at the Alhambra Hotel. I asked for the use of the phone, got it and called the hotel. Janis was checked in all right, but she didn't answer the phone. Apprehension gripped me. Art and Martha could have beaten me here easily.

I hung up, wondering what to do next. The receptionist had gone to a window while I was on the phone. She came back now and sat down. She said, "There's some sort of trouble. A lot of police cars."

That was all I heard. I bolted out of the office and ran up, not down. They'd have every exit covered. As I reached the fire stairway door, I heard the elevator stop. The first man out was that chunky little guy who'd been down in the lobby. Behind him were two large men, unmistakably local detectives, and four uniformed men. That was enough for me. I ran up the stairs until I reached the top and there I was stuck. I could find but one exit to the roof and that was securely locked.

I started walking rapidly down the hall. The police would be up here any minute. If they intended making a search of the building, they'd start with the top floor.

By now they knew I was inside.

**T**HEN I saw an office door open and a man about my age came out carrying a brief case. I ducked for cover, but I could still observe him. He closed the door and I heard the latch sink into place. He hesitated, took keys from his pocket and went inside again. This time he didn't shut the door.

I made a bee line for the door and pushed the little button that would prevent the door from locking. I had a chance to see that the occupant of the office was a patent attorney and I prayed he'd have no stenographer or any sort of help. Added to those prayers was the hope that this man wouldn't make certain the door was locked.

He came out, slammed the door and hurried toward the elevators. I waited until he boarded one. He'd be stopped by the police, deny he knew anything about me and probably be passed once he identified himself. His name, according to the legend on the door, was Peter McCollough. I was going to be the new Peter McCollough.

I stepped into the waiting room, held my breath and coughed politely. Nobody came out or called out. I opened the door to the small main office. It was empty. For once the breaks were my way.

I left the outer door unlocked, removed my coat, mussed my hair and sat down behind the desk. I examined the contents of the drawers and found a pair of shell-rimmed glasses. I put these on, hoping they'd serve as something of a disguise.

Five minutes went by and then someone opened the door. I had papers strewn over the desk, a pencil in my hand and I lifted the phone. I began speaking to a mythical client. A uniformed patrolman walked in. I looked up, questioning him with my eyes.

I said into the phone, "Just a moment, Mr. Alcott. Hang on, will you?" Then I looked at the cop again. "Something I can do, officer?"

He scratched his ear. "Yeah. We're hunting a guy. He's in the building some place. A killer, no less. Stands about five nine or ten, weighs a hundred and fifty or so, wearing a dark suit. Mind if I check on your closets?"

"No," I said sweetly. "Go right ahead. A killer, you said? Did he kill someone in the building?"

"No—he's on the lam from New York.



Some private dick spotted him and passed the word. Personally I don't go much for private cops and this one impresses me as a guy who could be plenty wrong. Maybe it's all a fluke."

"Well," I said, "I'm very glad that no one in the building was killed. I've some very good friends here."

The cop checked around half-heartedly, thanked me and went out as I resumed talking into a dead phone. Then I leaned back and fought off the ten years which had been added to my age. I had to get out of there, somehow. So the chunky man had been a private eye. Hired by Art and Martha, of course. He wouldn't give up the hunt. I had to get out of here and as fast as possible.

I had an idea. I telephoned Police Headquarters, identified myself as McCollough and gave my office number. I said, "I've a great deal of cash to bring to the bank and I'm a little afraid. Do you provide a guard for such purposes? I'll need one right away."

They did provide guards and I was promised a cop as fast as he could get there. I'd never talked to such an obliging desk sergeant and I told him I'd send along some cigars.

I waited for twenty minutes and they seemed like years. Any moment that private eye would show up. He'd never be satisfied until he'd seen everyone in the building. Then a patrolman entered. I had prepared a thick sheaf of plain paper, covered both sides with bank notes from my roll and it looked like a large sum of cash. I put on my hat and coat, holding my breath every moment. Standing up and fully dressed I answered the description of the wanted man.

**B**UT the cop, a rather old man who probably should have been pensioned, was totally unsuspicious. There were six stripes on his sleeve indicating thirty years of service. This was a dirty trick to pull on him, but I had no choice. We walked from the office, passed a couple of cops in the corridor and entered an elevator. I still wore the glasses and walked with my knees slightly bent.

Maybe that helped, I don't know, but we passed through the lobby which swarmed with cops. My escort's presence was the magic password. I didn't even know where a bank was located so we just walked and he automatically led

me toward the center where the banks were situated. At the first one I stopped, gave the cop a ten dollar bill and told him to buy a box of cigars. Half for himself, half for the desk sergeant.

"I'll probably need an escort again next week," I told him.

"Sure—any time," he nodded. "Just ask for Officer Peterson."

I entered the bank, walked up to a window and changed two twenties into singles. The cop was gone when I came out, but my car wasn't far away, and hadn't been molested. As I drove off the pounding of my heart matched the rotation of the wheels.

I didn't think I'd been smart—just plain lucky and I couldn't play that luck too long; but there was something that must be done. I stopped at a florist shop, bought a large bouquet and ordered it boxed and sent to Janis Marshall at the Hotel Alhambra right away. They'd be there in twenty minutes, I was told.

Next I phoned the hotel and told the operator that Miss Marshall had asked me to inform the desk clerk that when a package was delivered, it was to be put in her room. That was that. I high-tailed it for the hotel and waited in my parked car until I saw the florist's messenger boy walk in. The name of the flower shop was on the box, making my job easier.

I followed him, stalled a little and watched him turn the box over to a bellhop who headed for the elevators. I was right behind him. I got off on the same floor he did, walked slowly in the same direction and when he stopped in front of a door, so did I.

I smiled. "Looks like we're both headed for the same place. Miss Marshall, isn't it?"

"That's right," he told me. "Only she ain't in." He thrust a pass key into the door, opened it and entered, leaving the door open. I saw all I needed. The room was upset. So much that I knew there'd been some sort of a battle there.

Janis was gone. She'd been taken. She was in the hands of Art and Martha. Undoubtedly that chunky private eye had taken care of this phase, but I couldn't get at him. I hurried down to where my car was parked, drove it toward New York and hours later took my life in my hands passing through the tunnel. There were plenty of cops, but the glasses I still wore must have been



a fair disguise.

I left the car at a public garage. It had been a five hours' haul from Elmhurst but during the grueling trip I had plenty of time to think and I knew just what must be done. The biggest risk I'd ever taken, I supposed, but there was no other way out. With Janis a prisoner and hidden away somewhere, I didn't have a chance. Neither did she. I felt that I'd be lucky if she wasn't dead.

By devious routes and under the protection of darkness again, I made my way to my own apartment building. There I knew all the ropes and used the service elevator again. I held my breath as I slid the door back. If Sergeant Gunther had left a man on guard, I was sunk. The corridor was empty. I reached my own door, unlocked it with my key and stepped inside. Suddenly I felt safe, among familiar things, and yet I knew this was the most dangerous spot of all. There wasn't a moment to lose.

I went to the phone and dialed the number of Art and Martha's home. Martha answered. I clicked the connection a couple of times, said 'Hello' loudly twice and let Martha help make what I hoped she'd consider a difficult contact.

"Martha," I said finally, "this is Eric."

I heard her gasp. "Eric—where are you?"

"Across the river in Jersey. Now look here, Martha, I know you hold all the cards. I know you have Janis. I'm willing to bargain if you guarantee her safety."

"You are in no position to bargain, Eric," she snapped.

"I'll proceed to my apartment," I said. "Have Art meet me there in about an hour. He is to be alone. I'll talk to him and let him surrender me if he has a note from Janis telling me she is in no danger and quite safe. Is it a deal?"

"You'll have to talk to Arthur," she told me flatly and smugly. I could visualize her smirking all over the place. Martha was quite a woman.

"In an hour. Maybe a little longer than that. I'm still a long way from New York and I have to move carefully. Tell him to wait if I'm not there."

**I** HUNG up, hurried to the hall and unscrewed the hall light above the door. Now, when the door was open, it was almost impossible to see who was inside or outside of the apartment. Half

an hour went by, and then I heard someone approaching. I was all set. I darted into the clothes closet of my bedroom and snuggled behind a row of suits. I'd rigged a long dressing gown to reach the floor and it concealed me very well indeed.

I heard Arthur's voice and that of a stranger whom I took to be the private eye. Arthur said, "Now get this straight. And don't forget you're part and parcel to a kidnapping so you'd better not miss."

"Save it," the other man growled. "I know what to do. He goes out the window. Just another suicide of a murderer who couldn't take it. Listen, you got a pair of gloves?"

"No—why?" Art wanted to know.

"Fingerprints, you sap. I don't want to touch anything. We'll breeze out, and I'll buy a pair. Then I'll come back here and wait for him. There's plenty of time. Wanted killers have to travel slowly. You hang around someplace and when the morgue wagon and the cops roll up, you just happen along and make sure everything is okay. Let's get going."

The private eye wouldn't be gone very long. I waited three minutes and then phoned Headquarters. I asked for Sergeant Gunther. I said, "Sergeant, this is Eric Blythe. Now wait a minute, will you? I'm at my apartment, and I'll stay here until you come. Just you, Sergeant, because if you don't come alone, there'll be no deal. How about it?"

"I'll be there in ten minutes," Gunther snorted. "If this is a trick, you're going to be mighty sorry."

Now I was really set. The private eye came back in five minutes and I heard him unlatch the door and leave it that way. I heard the window being raised to the top. Then there was silence and darkness. Finally there was a tap on the door. The private eye called out and the door opened. I knew Gunther couldn't see the private eye nor be plainly seen himself.

The private eye said, "I'm right over here. What are you afraid of?"

He was trying to make his voice sound like Arthur's and it would have been funny under any other conditions. Gunther must have been badly puzzled for he started moving across the room. Then the private eye went into action. He lunged for the man he thought was me, wound arms around him and started



shoving him toward the open window. Gunther was too surprised to do much in the fractions of a second allotted him, but I went into action then.

I reached the window first, grabbed the private eye and pushed a fist against his face. Gunther got free, let out a roar and I turned on the lights. Gunther reached for his gun.

I said, "Hold it, Sergeant. It was this man who attacked you. He thought you were I, and he meant to toss me out of the window. He works for my dear cousins who say I killed Uncle Ed. I'm sorry you had to go through this, but it was the only way I could prove there were forces working against me, and therefore I was entitled to some doubt."

Gunther yanked the private eye to his feet and shoved him into a chair.

**G**UNTHER said, "I know this punk. How he ever got a private detective's license is something I'll never figure out. And I know it was he who tried to toss me out of the window. Come on, Sloan, open up."

So his name was Sloan. A nice name for a rat like that, but Sloan wouldn't talk. Gunther turned to me and I told him the rest of my plans, told him about Janis and my trip to find her and what happened. I told him how I'd set a trap for Art and he'd fallen for it.

Gunther said, "It sounds good and I'll see it through." He went to the phone, called Headquarters and arranged for the morgue wagon and all the fixings to show up, just as though another dead man had fallen out of the window. Then we both tied up Sloan and gagged him.

Soon the sirens came again. Flashlights prodded the darkness down below in the courtyard. Men in white took something away on a stretcher. They were really doing the thing up brown. Gunther and I waited. He was smiling tightly now. My whole future depended upon the next few minutes. Sloan was in the other room and when someone knocked on the door, Gunther hid out there too.

I opened the door, slipped behind it and Art walked in. He was pretty sure of himself. I closed the door, put my back against it and he turned around. He let out an unearthly yell. I suppose he thought I was a ghost.

I said, "That was your private eye who went out of the window, Art. You

put me in a beautiful spot, but you forgot one little thing."

Art gulped. "Look, this was Martha's idea. I've nothing against you, Eric. Not a thing. We can iron it all out—"

I grabbed him. He was easy to handle. I pushed him toward the window. I said, "The thing you forgot, Art, is that I'm practically convicted of murder so I haven't a thing to lose. Not a solitary thing. Can they execute me twice if I kill you? Hardly—so what do I care? You've got Janis. You'll tell me where she is or—you'll follow the route of Uncle Ed and your little helper. I'm not fooling, Art."

To prove it I gave him a hard push that almost sent him out of the window backwards. He set his lips and started fighting. That lasted one minute and he went down. I picked him up, thrust him through the window and let him look down.

He began to shriek. I pulled him back a little, and he talked.

"The girl is at Martha's lake house. Don't kill me, Eric. I'll tell the police what really happened."

Gunther came in then. It was over so fast it made me dizzy and soon Gunther and I were sirening our way to the lake where Martha had a lodge.

Gunther said, "The sock you gave me was okay. I deserved it for falling for their stories. The woman fought like a cat, but she's locked up. The man is talking his head off and Sloan decided he might whittle down the kidnapping charge by singing a little too. It's all cleared up and you're free."

"If only Janis is okay," I breathed. "She was mixed up in this through no fault of her own."

We found her, tied up, gagged and uncomfortable, but otherwise unharmed. Gunther cut her loose and I helped her up. Kissing her was the most natural thing to do. She was even lovelier than she'd looked from across the court. With a few words she confirmed my story.

"I saw him fall. It was a pure accident. I did check out of my apartment earlier but I forgot something and came back. Nobody saw me. I—I wanted to tell you that I—was going away. I meant to shout my new address across the court, but that old man came to the window instead."

I kissed her again. She didn't mind. I think she rather expected it.



# *I'll Remember, Dearest*

a novelet by  
DEAN EVANS



*I let him have it with the butt of my gun*

## CHAPTER I

### THE GIRL WITH EYES—AND A GUN

**Y**OU could say her eyes were attractive, I suppose. There was a feeling and warmth and humanity in them. And she was the kind of a kid your heart would stumble over. And miss a step or two over if you kept looking at her.

But she wasn't in my corral, which was a pity.

She said these words: "Please help me."

They came out hot and urgent and needing a big strong guy to throw back his shoulders and look tough. Maybe she even needed me.

I sighed a little. It was my fault, all my fault. If I'm going to leave the office door open for customers to breeze in I've





*Ever wonder what a private eye does in Reno? Let Al Gates tell you as he tackles a gambling house stickup—with murder stakes!*

got to expect something like her to happen now and then.

"Okay," I told her. I looked up at the calendar on the wall above her head. That way I wouldn't have to watch her eyes. They were doing something to me. "Shoot," I said.

I couldn't see her hands, but I knew she was twisting the fingers around one another. Her voice sounded as though it were twisting, too.

"A boy," she said, "made a mistake. He took some money where he works. And he used it to gamble with and lost it. And I want you to get it back."

I began to grin at the wall. "Look, lady," I said.

"They cheated him!" she said.

I looked down at her again. Her cheeks were burning now. Her eyes were still pleading, still grabbing my heart by the strings, but her cheeks were burning.

I cleared my throat. "Oh sure," I said. "He was took. If he'd won, that would have been okay, but he didn't, so he was took."

"Not all at once. In dribblets. Twenty, thirty, fifty at a time. For three weeks. In all that time he never so much as won a nickel. Do you understand?"

"How much altogether?" I asked, being bored in front of her.

"Nearly two thousand. Nineteen hundred and fifty-seven even."

"Okay. Who'd he steal it from?"

"He didn't steal it! He only wanted to use the money. But they cheated him."

I FIGURED maybe this was the all time high. Sure, kids cry and swoon over Sinatra—or used to anyway—but this was something for the book.

"Who did he 'borrow' it from?" I asked.

"The Olympic Bank, where he works."



She said it with a defensive little pout.

That did it. Wouldn't you know? He couldn't be working for anybody else. Nope. A bank. A place where they check up on those things occasionally.

"Who in blazes is this punk?" I asked her.

"Tommy Flynn." She didn't bat an eye saying it.

"Your husband?"

"Boy friend." Her cheeks were reddening again.

"No," I said.

"What?"

"No. I won't take it. You can have your mess back again. Go somewhere else, or better yet forget the whole deal and let your boy friend sweat it out himself. He took the money—you didn't."

"I don't expect it for nothing," she said quietly.

Her hand dropped down again into her lap and fished around in a near-white straw handbag. She pulled up a fist full of money and threw it on the desk.

"Two hundred and seventeen dollars," she said. "All I have in the world. If it isn't enough I'll pay you off by the week. But *please!*"

I looked at the money. I looked at her eyes. I couldn't stand that, so I looked at the money again.

"No," I said.

For a long screaming second she stared at me. Then her little hand went to the handbag again. This time she brought up a .32 automatic and let me see it. Her tone said she was sorry about it. But it couldn't be helped.

"I've even told you the boy's name," she whispered. "I couldn't take no from you now. I couldn't. You understand?"

The gun made me shake as much as Hoover Dam. The safety wasn't even unfixed, and she wasn't desperate enough in the first place.

"How does it happen you know all about it yourself?" I asked her.

"Because Tommy wanted to borrow from me to pay it back. And I haven't that much money."

She waited. I wondered what she intended doing with the gun. Funny kid. The guy must have plenty on the ball, I figured. He sure must.

"Put the gun away," I told her. "I'll try. If your boy friend was cheated I'll find out. If he wasn't, that's that. And that's *all* I'm going to do one way or another."

The brown eyes blinked now. And the pretty little lips pressed tight. Right here in front of me was something. Really something.

You ever wonder what a private eye does in Reno? Well, you're finding out. Sometimes we run up against this sort of thing. And that's why we curse the job and tell ourselves it isn't worth it. A doctor doesn't have any more secrets than us, and look at what he makes every year.

"Stop crying," I said.

She shook her head. "I'm not crying. I'm not crying!"

I shrugged.

"Okay. You look like the devil. Come back, see me tomorrow. Where'd you say he lost the dough?"

"The Marlo Club," she said. "Every penny, in the Marlo Club."

I watched her close her handbag and leave the office. And I could have kicked Tommy Flynn a nice one in the pants. His girl had a build that would have made the angels gasp. . . .

**T**HE Marlo Club tried hard to outdo everything in the block. The façade of the building was inlaid with thousands of inch-square mirrors all placed at slightly different angles to catch the sunlight.

It did nothing but constitute a traffic hazard, except on rainy days.

The interior of the club was the same. Each wall and the entire ceiling was one tremendous cacaphony of tiny mirrors. Imbedded in the floor in the center of the club, and all alone and by itself, was a powerful spotlight aimed at the ceiling. Rays from this were broken up and thrown all over the place by the tiny mirrors.

That's all the illumination they had in there. And it was enough.

The boy at the blackjack table was whistling softly to himself as I came up. His hair was soaked with some kind of shiny stuff that made a prism out of the lights from the mirrors. He looked like a walking rainbow. He gave me a grin which was free.

I tossed two silver dollars on the felt.

"They used to belong to me," I said.

"See can you earn them for the house."

The grin didn't fade. He tossed a card face down and another face up. The latter was a ten of hearts. I looked at the buried card. A five.



"Hit me," I said.

Another five. "Whoah."

His long tapering fingers did some graceful embroidery in the air, snapped a card to the table. This was repeated. And again.

He stopped the grin long enough to tell me what he had.

"Nineteen," he lisped indifferently.

I showed him my twenty and he nodded, then shoved over two dollars to join my own.

I left the four, and he patterned some more with the fingers. The deck of cards made twenty-six little crackling noises in the air as he shuffled above the felt. He telescoped the deck, dropped it in front of me.

"Cut," he said generously. I cut.

An eight. A ten. Ordinarily that would have been enough, especially with the hole card, but I let him hit me again for the devil of it. A two. That made twenty. I turned up the hole card. An ace.

I smiled at him a little.

He cleared his throat, snapped the deck, flipped out two cards, one up, one down. The one showing was a queen. He looked at the hole card, frowned, gave himself another.

"Twenty-four," he said with exaggerated patience.

He reached for the stack of silver dollars beside him, let four drop next to my four.

"What'd you eat for breakfast?" I asked.

"Must of been sour beef stew," he answered.

I wandered over to the roulette wheel but the croupier wasn't working yet. It was early in the day.

As a matter of fact, outside of a few tired people grabbing onto the machines against the wall there wasn't anybody in the place.

"He's probably at the bar," the dealer said.

I nodded and went over to the wall and dropped a dollar into one of the machines. I pulled the handle and made two lemons and a cherry get seasick before they stopped spinning. I tried another. One bell, one cherry, one orange. Another. This time three cherries. I wondered if the manna had sounded like that dropping from heaven.

That gave me thirteen dollars more than I had when I came in.

## CHAPTER II

### LADY ROLLS THE BONES



THEY had a girl at the crap table. She was dressed like a car-hop at a drive-in. Otherwise she wore a smile. I ambled over her way and let five dollars slide to the felt. "Faded," she whispered in a hoarse voice.

She sounded like a barker wedged in between a merry-go-round and a roller skating rink. She handed me the dice and I threw. The cubes bounced, stopped. A five and a two. She gave me five dollars which I let lay.

"I don't like the dice," I told her. "I'll buy."

She gave me a long look, shrugged, reached under the table, brought up a cardboard box.

"Five bucks," she said, scooping up the cartwheels she had given me.

I looked at the box. In nice red printing it said on it how the cubes within were exactly alike down to the half-thousandth of an inch. That was nice, I thought.

I broke the seal on the box. The cubes smelled fresh. They were cool when I dropped them into my hand. I let them lay there till they soaked up a little warmth. I tossed. Little Joe. I grunted in agony.

"Tough," she agreed, grinning.

I tossed again. Four and five. Again. Six and two. Again. Three and one. This time it was my turn to grin.

"Your lucky day," she said. She stacked five dollars, slid the stack over. The smile remained unmoved. That gave me ten dollars on the table.

"Low man," I said.

She shrugged, nodded slightly. I let her throw first. She whipped the dice in a short arc, snapped her thumb and middle finger. The dice spun wildly, rolled in a tight circle and stopped before her.

"That's a nice trick," I said.

She frowned, looking at the dice. She had landed a seven—three and four.

I tossed carelessly. The cubes rolled straight for about a foot and a half, landed slowly, as if deliberately. Snake-eyes. She paid, still frowning.

"Let's have a drink," I said.

The frown dropped away and left her



face hanging out in the open, naked. That way she looked fifteen years younger.

"I'm dry," she admitted. "But Pepsi only."

We went to the bar. "Tell me," I asked her, "am I blest? Or does this go on all the time?"

She looked into the coke glass. "We'll survive somehow," she told me.

"Yeah, but I mean is everybody as lucky as me?"

"That depends on what you mean by lucky."

"Well, hasn't anybody ever come in here and just played and played and never won a darned thing? You know, just bum luck?"

Her eyes were cool and measuring me for a quick trip to the canvas.

"Like for instance, who?" she asked.

"Tommy Flynn," I whispered.

"Don't know the boy," she said cautiously. "Send him around some day, we'll see."

She slipped away from me like a boat leaving the pier. That quietly.

I looked at the bartender. He had a face that told me he gave quick ones to stumble bums along with a bowl of soup, on cold days. I got his eye.

"What gives with her?" I asked.

He leaned over the bar, wiped at it thoughtfully with a damp rag. There was gin on his breath—that early in the day—but his voice came from the seat of judgment.

"Sometimes," he husked, "you could kid her along till the cows come home. And then again sometimes you can't."

"Temperamental, huh?"

His eyes strayed up to the neon-circled clock that hung on the backbar. He cleared his throat.

"Six hours ago," he said, "this joint got knocked off. That might make some folks temperamental, yeah." He slid along the bar till he came to a dry one that needed filling.

He didn't know me again when I walked out.

I HAD twenty-nine silver dollars in my pockets and if you want to get that burdened-down feeling try it sometime. The Olympic National was on Second and Virginia which was just a block down, so I headed for there. Only I didn't quite make it.

"Find anything out?" a voice asked anxiously, sidling up to me. She must

have been waiting all that time.

"What's the idea?" I asked.

She stopped. That made me stop, too.

"You can have the money back," I told her. "The Marlo's on the level."

"You didn't lose anything all the time you were in there?"

"Not one red cent. I won twenty-seven dollars which I keep for my wasted time. The rest you get back."

"I don't believe you."

"Lady," I said, "I'm not kidding." I heaved up a handful of cartwheels and let her look at them. "Twenty-seven of them. I couldn't lose no matter what. I played blackjack. I played the machines. I shot craps. I didn't try roulette because it's too early. But believe me, lady, I couldn't lose. Not once. The Marlo is definitely not a skin joint."

"They're friends of yours!"

That made me laugh. "We don't even nod on the street," I said. "Do you want the cash here? Or a check instead?"

She came at me in an anxious wave. "Look, Mr. Gates. Maybe you were lucky today. Or maybe they don't get serious in there until evening. That's probably it. Try it again, just once, tonight?"

Her face wrinkled up in supplication. The breeze blew wisps of her hair down across her mouth. She didn't seem to notice. Just one thing—just one thing bothered her. I felt sorry for her, sorry as all Hades.

"It's no use," I said. "You've got to face it. He took two thousand that didn't belong to him. He lost it. It doesn't matter where he lost it. It could have been in one club or all of them. They don't need to cheat to win. The percentage is all on the side of the house."

She grabbed at my lapel. This was going to be good. Husband and wife having a nice fight out on Virginia Street where all the world could watch. I caught a few stares, a snicker.

"You have to do it!" she breathed. "All I want is for you to go back there tonight and see isn't it true then. You have to!"

More snickers. One skinny lad even stopped and got settled to watch what he figured was a hot domestic battle. I took a step in his direction. He faded fast.

"Look," I told her. "I'm telling you this like a boy scout. It wouldn't do me any good kidding you. The Marlo Club is not a gyp joint. How many times you want me to say it? It wouldn't last five



minutes if it were. Forget it."

"I don't care! Tommy wouldn't lie to me, and he says they cheated. Don't you see?"

This loyalty here in Reno where a wayward eye is grounds for divorce!

"I'm not going back," I told her. "But you've got me curious about one thing. Which branch does your Tommy work at?"

The hand dropped off my lapel. "Not a branch. The main one right down at the corner here."

"Okay," I sighed.

It was cool inside the Olympic National. Cool and quiet. Like all good banks. Two rows of cages came together at the back of the place almost to a point. I felt like I was walking into an ice cream cone, and just as conspicuous as if I had been. The new account window was at the back, at the small end of the cone. I went to it.

"I'd like to open an account," I told the guy in morning clothes who stood inside the cage.

He handed me a form to fill out, copied from it into a pass book which he finally gave to me.

"You can make your deposits at any of the windows," he told me with a reserved little welcome smile. "You're part of our family now."

I found it. A window with a little bronze plaque over the brass bars of the cage. It said: "Thomas J. Flynn." I slid the pass book under the bars. Then I shoved in two hundred and fifteen dollars in bills. Next I stacked up twenty-nine silver dollars in little rows and eased them through next to the currency.

**FLYNN** was a good-looking guy. Just what a bank needs. He was dressed neatly in dark blue. A lodge pin peeped modestly out beneath an orange poppy he had stuck in his lapel. His hair lay obediently flat over his head. The color of an adobe brick. His face was clean and smooth and smelled as if expensive shaving lotion had been applied five seconds ago.

He was born to break a few hearts—and he knew it, and it didn't particularly annoy him.

"Good morning," he said, standing me a treat to a couple hundred dollars worth of white teeth. I felt sorry for the girl. She was batting in a-league where they bury you for striking out.

"New account," I said. "Two fifteen in

bills."

He riffled through the bills, nodded. "And twenty-nine silver dollars," I finished. "I just won them at the Marlo Club."

He scooped the cartwheels by fives, stacked them expertly in a long, feminine-looking hand and dropped them into the change maker.

"At the Marlo Club," I repeated softly.

He flicked up his eyes at mine, bored into me for a while. I let him do it.

"Two forty-four even," he said quietly. "Glad to have you with us, Mr. Gates. Come in lots."

He lifted his eyes up over my shoulder, showed the teeth again in a brief smile. That meant somebody was behind me, waiting.

"Yeah," I said, moving away.

She was standing propped against the bank, watching the entrance like a little kid waiting for its mother. She had on a white wool shortie coat now. It looked like it was invented purposely for her.

"Where'd you get the coat?" I asked.

"My car. It was chilly."

"Now that's something. You could sell the car and have that much more toward pulling your boy friend out of the jam."

She shook her head quickly. "Not my car, you don't mean. It wouldn't bring over three hundred. Did you see Tommy?"

"Yeah. Let's eat lunch. We'll go in your car."

"Where?" she asked suspiciously.

"A restaurant. Where we can have a booth and talk. There's something you ought to know."

She was right about the car. Even Madman Muntz down in L. A. wouldn't have given it more than a passing sigh, but it ran.

She spied a little booth back at one end of the horseshoe in the café and we made for it.

"What was it I should know?" she asked me.

There are times when you can dress like a prospector, and then others when you've got to slick your hair back and get a shave and look intelligent. This was one of those times when I was afraid nothing would help in my case, but I had to try.

"I don't even know your name," I said, studying the menu.

"Bonnie Daugherty. Irish." She said it with a half smile as though that might



help me understand.

"All right, Bonnie. Look. I'm your old man. I'm your mother. I'm your old aunt that used to rock you on her knee and hug you when you were a kid. I wouldn't hurt you. Understand?"

She nodded.

"Well, then. Now picture this Thomas J. Flynn in a full dress suit. Got it?"

She nodded again. The brown eyes sang a hymn.

"Now picture him behind bars—and I don't mean in a cashier's cage."

The waitress broke it up.

I ordered the Number Four which meant Salisbury steak and apple pie with sauce, and coffee. Sixty-five cents. Bonnie dittoed the order. The waitress tottered off.

"He's, not a thief!" she whispered fiercely.

"All right. In your mind he's not a thief. Ask any cop what he thinks. That guy's bad medicine. Firewater. Win, lose or draw, you slobber on your bib in the end."

### CHAPTER III

#### My LUCKY DAY



WE GOT through the hamburger without another word. It wasn't until I was on the pie that Bonnie mentioned it again. She must have been planning on just how she would say it.

"Mr. Gates?"

"H'mm?"

"That money I gave you this morning is yours. Every penny. Now, is it too much to ask you to go back to the Marlo Club again tonight and find out for sure?"

"You're silly," I said.

"Is it? Were you doing anything to-night that you couldn't put off?"

"You still think he was cheated?"

"Of course. And don't you see, he hasn't anybody else to help him!"

I didn't ask her if she loved the guy. That would have made me a hot-rod in a blind alley.

"What are you worrying about her for?" I asked myself. "For two hundred and seventeen bucks," I said. "Yeah, but I mean really. Because you're a decent guy and she's a decent kid and because you're sorry for her. Simply because the guy took her out a few times and she got it mixed up with love and now she wants

to lay down her life and her bare little soul for him. And that makes sense."

THE office door opened with a click and a small *unnh* and he came in. He didn't look quite the same, perhaps because he had no little bars before his face now. I thought he was better looking showing his teeth in the bank. He sneered a little, looking at me. "I was hoping I'd find you here, Gates," he said.

"The customer's always right," I said.

"Yeah. Now I'm the customer, and you'd better sell it good, Gates."

"For a guy who's up to his eyebrows in trouble you talk big," I said.

He reached slowly into his pocket. I knew what he was reaching for, and yet it didn't seem to register. I just didn't believe it somehow, but it was so just the same. And that made me prize chump for the day. His hand came out again with a .32 in it and he pointed it at me.

"You didn't sell it at all, Gates," he said, and grinned. "You gave it away."

I didn't care much for the gun. It was the kind they use to seal up your casket with. Fast I was believing it now.

"A box of snickers to you," I told him.

"A guy who kills for two thousand bucks—in Reno yet, where money grows on the poplar trees and they line the curbs with silver dollars."

The grin stayed clamped on his face. "Too bad you never learned to add, Gates."

I couldn't keep my eyes off the gun. It seemed to be waiting. He wasn't ready to shoot yet. There was something he wanted to say or maybe something he wanted me to say.

"She's a fool about you," I said.

His eyes spread. "She's a fool, period. She told you, didn't she?"

I nodded. "She hired me to help you. That makes her in love and when a kid like her gets in love it stays that way down through the centuries."

The grin changed to a laugh. Almost a friendly laugh that I could take to and be chummy with. Maybe I hated him a little just then.

"Too bad she ain't crazy about you, Gates. You'd make a wonderful couple."

I had said something he liked. I could see that by the way he was laughing. It wasn't forced or glued there or anything; just easy and natural and relieved. Now he was going to kiss me off. Maybe he would wait until the traffic noises got loud



outside, but he was going to do it quick now.

I kept thinking about that. It didn't make sense to me but to him it looked like a clear day at Lake Tahoe with quail all around and the water deep and blue and the sun streaming down, feeling good on your skin.

He was waiting for the traffic, all right. He tilted his head just a trifle toward the window. In the distance I could hear the Chief on the S.P. tracks coming into the city fast, its klaxon bellowing at the Sierras. Maybe he would wait until it got closer, and then in the middle of a blast let me have it.

THE office door made a little clicking sound. Sometimes it does that when the hydraulic closer forces against the latch. He tightened up at the sound.

"Okay," I said calmly, "you can put it down now. It suddenly got too late."

I began to get up from the desk. The gun jerked at me. He was dying by degrees because he couldn't turn around and look.

"Don't fall," I needled him. "It's an old gag. There's nobody there."

"Nobody there," he repeated, licking at his lips. "No. That was just the door closing, wasn't it? I should have known."

"Sure," I said. "The door closed and I got brave and now I'm going to take the gun away from you and kick your teeth all over the office."

His hand pulled the gun up into his stomach, held it there. This was his minute again. His big minute.

"If I have to," he breathed at me, "I can shoot where I look. I don't even need a cannon this big to do it right."

I was still behind the desk. I wasn't brave any more. Just wondering what I could have done back there a stretch to put the hay in my barn instead. Post mortem stuff. I looked up at his eyes. Nothing he was saying with them got over to me. Or maybe he wasn't saying anything, just making up his mind about something. The klaxon on the Chief bellowed again, louder this time. I held on.

His gun relaxed. "You take your chalk, Gates," he muttered tightly, "and put a mark on the wall. A nice big white one. This is your lucky day."

I didn't breathe. To me it added up like a column of zeroes, but he seemed to get a good feeling out of it. He still kept the gun handy, but it wasn't prowling

now. Just there in case of emergencies. He backed to the door, got the knob under his left hand.

"A parting thought, Gates," he said. "There's nothing in it for the girl. There's also nothing in it for you but a nice long rest in Kopf's Gardens where they keep planting stuff all the time and nothing ever comes up."

He waited for me to say, "Yeah, yeah, I got my lesson learned like a good little kid, Teacher. I'll watch it, Teacher."

"I've seen better killers over the counter in the five and dime store," I told him.

"Just forget it," he said. "Tell the Daugherty kid when you see her it was a nice ride but I got where I was headed. The thing can go back to the barn now. We don't need it any more."

He jerked the door open and left as quietly as he had come. And left me with a dirty taste in my mouth and a lump of fudge where my brain ought to be over a brown-headed, brown-eyed girl who thought heaven's work was complete when he made a bank cashier with adobe-colored hair and a lodge pin and a poppy in his lapel.

I spent some time thinking it over before I was disturbed again. This time it was the phone.

"Mr. Al Gates?"

Brown eyes. "Yeah," I said.

"Have you made up your mind to try again for me, Mr. Gates? Please?"

The voice had practiced that. I could tell by the inflections. She had said it over and over to herself, trying to get it just right so I wouldn't fly off the handle.

"I'll call you back," I said.

"What?"

"I said I'll call you back. I'm busy."

"Oh. But you don't know my number. It's three-four-one R, Mr. Gates. Got it?"

"Yeah," I said. "341 R. I'll call you back."

I slammed the phone at the cradle. Then I wrote out a check for two hundred and seventeen dollars to Miss Bonnie Daugherty, stuck it in an envelope and laid it on my desk and looked at it. I tore it up again and let the pieces fall rustling into the wastebasket.

The lad with the adobe hair and the teeth wasn't a killer. He lacked something inside of him for that. But he had come here to try it for size anyway. And something had changed his mind. Something I had said, or maybe something he



had thought of.

All the time the clock on my desk banged away busily. Each tick-tock spread the remainder of the day just that much thinner. And each tick-tock made the room that much quieter and lonelier. I looked at the clock, turned my head and looked out the window. Then I looked back at the clock to see what time it was.

Four-fifteen. Time to eat and go home and scrub my nails and catch up with my reading. I went over to the file, turned the key in it and pushed my hat at the old head. The phone rang.

"Mr. Gates?"

"Yeah. No. I'm not going back there. It's no use."

"Mr. Gates!" It was like a sob from a disappointed child.

"It's no use. Your boy friend was here today. He tried to shoot me. Get it? Tried to kill me dead. Real dead."

"Wha-at?"

"Sure. He quit trying after a while and told me to tell you he doesn't need a taxi any more because he's got a limo-sine of his own now."

There was a pause. "Does that mean that he got the money somehow?" she asked then. "That it's all right again?"

"All right," I said. "All fine and dandy."

"Oh, that's wonderful! How did he get it? Did he say?"

"No. Give me your address, I'll mail you a check for the two seventeen."

I could hear her hunch up to the instrument. "Oh, no, Mr. Gates. That was our agreement. And now that it's turned out so fine—"

"Give me your address!"

"All right. It's eighteen forty-five Moran. But—"

"I'll mail the check," I said and slammed out on her.

The twenty-seven I'd won on her money was all right for a day's work. I've done worse.

## CHAPTER IV

### FORMER SKILL



SAW two loungers in the lobby of my apartment house when I pulled in. One looked up from a newspaper, decided I wasn't as good as the funnies after all and went back to the paper again. He was wearing a black snap-brim hat.

The other was a statue in one of the straight back chairs the management

keeps around to discourage visitors. His head was lowered. His eyes were down in the cellar somewhere and he was waiting for them to get back. He wasn't wearing a hat, but he had a cane between his knees. I figured he must be lame.

I went up in the elevator and pulled out my keys. I could hear my phone screaming even before I got to the door. It sounded as if it wasn't going to give up easy, either.

"Yeah," I said into it.

One guess. "Mr. Gates?"

"What now?"

"I tried to get you again at your office but nobody answered. When you saw Tommy this afternoon did he say anything about going somewhere?"

"He might have told me what all his little plans were, but unfortunately I was busy trying to keep him from knocking me off at the time. I must have missed it."

"Please, Mr. Gates. I mean, did he say to tell me he was—leaving?"

"He neglected to mention that," I said.

"Oh." There was a little silence on the other end. It couldn't be she had hung up. She was probably thinking over what next. Then she said: "Mr. Gates?"

"Same one," I said.

"I called Tommy but I couldn't get him on the phone. Then I started over there in the car but I had a flat so while it was being fixed I called again."

"And he didn't answer," I said.

"No. That's what made me wonder. And when I finally got there it looked like he'd cleared out. Everything was gone. All his clothes and everything."

I felt impatient at her. And bored. "How would you be knowing that?" I asked nastily.

"I've got a key, you fool!"

"Oh. Okay, so you've got a key. No, he didn't tell me where he was going. Satisfied?"

"You've still got that money, haven't you? Keep it—and find Tommy for me."

This was the best yet.

"What?" I yelled. "What for?"

"What do you want, Mr. Gates—my diary?" It sounded icy the way she said it.

"Huh?"

"He lives over in the Pueblo Apartments. Three D. Tonopah Avenue."

"Never heard of it," I said.

"The Sierra Vista tract. Will you do it?"



"Oh, all right."

"Promise?" She said something else but I couldn't hear it above the jittering of my apartment buzzer. For the third time I cut her off and went over to the door. And opened it.

The one with the cane was in the rear. He seemed to be waiting patiently, no hurry about anything at all. The other with the black felt hat was the mechanic. He had lost his newspaper somewhere and had a gun in his hand instead. He was only holding. Not ready to go to work, waiting for the nod from the cane.

"Nice dump for a dick," he said, and started to come in.

I placed a palm out and shoved it against his chest.

"Too nice for you, Sam. Take off."

He tut-tutted. "Ain't it a shame, Mr. Marlo," he said pityingly. "The guy ain't got no manners." He brought up the gun and jabbed me with it where I eat.

"In, snoop!"

He backed me up with the heater. The man with the cane looked casually up and down the hall before he followed and closed the door behind him. I gave black felt hat a look and he grinned.

"Look, Mr. Marlo," he chuckled. "This guy's tough. He's bitin' the sight off my gun."

I LOOKED over at the guy with the cane. He was watching without interest, his eyes now and then moving around, giving the place a quick case.

"Take the cannon away from him," I said, "and I'll show you just how funny your circus really is."

He smiled faintly. "Good boy," he purred softly. "Too many mystery thrillers is all. Oh right, Leo. We're only going to talk."

I liked his voice. He was the kind of a mutt you could talk to in a pinch. From there on I forgot the black felt hat. I walked away from him, poured a few c.c.'s of Scotch into a glass and smelled it.

"Have some?" I said to nobody.

Black felt hat balled me with his eyes but he didn't move.

I downed the whisky.

The man with the cane sat down, laid the cane across his knees.

"My name is Angelo Marlo," he said softly.

I nodded. "Heard you got knocked off down at the club early this morning," I offered.

"I heard you heard," he said.

I studied that. "Keeping it a secret?"

"Hardly. Publicity helps. Lots of people heard about it. Asked all sorts of questions. Including one private eye. Coincidence?"

"Sure," I said. "I didn't even know it until your bartender told me."

"There was a name mentioned," he said vaguely. "A Tommy Flynn."

"Oh, that! A girl hired me to look into your place to see was it running a little on the squeeze end. The kid had a boy who lost quite a roll in your place, she said."

"Yeah? What'd you find out?"

"I won twenty-seven dollars," I said.

He nodded. "The girl—was she dark haired, named Starr Robinson? Lives over in the Holly Courts?"

I kept my eyes looking into his but they didn't show him anything as far as I could tell.

"She didn't mention the name," I said. "Blonde, tall. Rugged soul."

Something bothered him. "The Robinson girl is a former shill of mine. She and Flynn spent a lot of time in my place lately."

I took some more Scotch. "I haven't had supper," I said. "There's probably a swell reason why you chaps are keeping me from it."

Marlo nodded. "The knock-off down at the club this morning," he said.

"What about it? There's the police you can go to, you know?"

"Sure," he agreed, smiling a little. "Always the police. Except for one thing. One of my boys got chilled in the heist. The police don't know that, though. We dumped the body up Carson way."

I studied the whisky glass a little. "Tough on the widow."

He shrugged it off. "No matter how you looked at it the guy was dead. The publicity would be bad for the club, however. We had to plant him somewhere else."

"Who did it?"

"We thought maybe you'd know."

"Unh-uh. If I did I'd have gone to the police long ago. I've got a license to keep clean."

"But you didn't?"

"No."

"All right, Gates." He got up, motioned to the black felt hat. "There's probably no connection. We just wanted to make sure." He went over to the door, opened it.



I jacked up a smile for the black felt hat. "The Scotch was swell," I said. "Too bad you couldn't have had some."

He sliced me off a nibble from a sneer as he walked out and pulled the door to behind him.

I waited until I heard the elevator hum. Then I went over to the window and looked below. Soon they came out, went down the street to a big Cadillac sedan which was parked roughly parallel to the curb. I noticed that Marlo didn't limp. Nor did he swing the cane as he walked. He seemed to like it under his arm as an ornament.

Sure, it wasn't any of my business, and I had no sense at all, but something about the girl with the brown eyes made it important. I headed out toward the neon fringes of town, out toward the big fancy motels south of the city. I'd seen the Holly Courts before. They weren't any different nor any better nor any worse than the rest. Except to me right now, that is.

The little office where guests put down their ten or fifteen bucks for a night's lodging was marked by a big red neon arrow. It was empty at the moment except for a printed sign hanging from one wall. This sign was for the benefit of guys like me, I guessed. It said:

For the convenience of our visitors, the register for tonight is:

Then followed a typewritten list of names and cabin numbers. I recognized one of them. Starr Robinson, Cabin Eighteen.

Underneath was the admonition:

Drive carefully, when entering the Courts. Remember the kiddies!

Cabin Eighteen was tucked away at the back of the court, half-hidden by small pine trees that had been planted after the cabin was built. The set-up had that Joe - Blow - Architect - Suite - Four look about it, but it was nice, and secluded and sweet-smelling, and just a little more than you'd expect of a shill in a gaming club.

The door looked unlocked, perhaps because of the thumb latch which was half-depressed. I eased it all the way and pushed the door open.

A red glow spread from one of the wall heaters and sneaked across the carpet and up the opposite wall, there to disappear in the kemtoned darkness. Otherwise there was no light. I prowled around on the wall, felt the switch, snicked it up and the lights came on.

I tried to remember what Marlo had said back there in my apartment, about a dark-haired girl named Starr Robinson. I thought about it for a while and I was sure he hadn't said anything else except that she was a former shill of his. Right now she was a former most anything. She lay on the floor beside the bed.

I knelt down and pulled her arm out of the way so I could see her face, and then wished I hadn't. There was a mark on her right cheek near her nose. Not much of a mark; rather a small hole.

I got around behind her head. A little blood had matted her hair right in the center of her skull. That meant the bullet had gone up through her sinus and into her brain. Quick.

She had been good-looking in a hard sort of way. Like those gals you see in certain spots downtown. They can't be beat until you look at their eyes. Then you begin to notice the shiny steel about them. And the more you look the more you don't like it until finally you feel sick and stop looking. Like that.

She was cool, but not yet cold. It hadn't been too long. I replaced her arm where it had been and looked for the hand of her other arm. It was under the bed and she held a small gun in it. It looked like a .25 automatic. I put my head down and smelled close to the thing. It had been fired—recently.

I got up again and went to the small dresser over in a corner. On the plate glass top of this was a black leather handbag with the initials "S R" on it in small metal script.

## CHAPTER V

### LITTLE DROPS OF BLOOD



ONLY a little money, some keys, tissues, cigarettes and two long thin strips of validated paper they give you in the railroad station were inside the bag. Final destination New York, the ticket said. I figured somebody had planned on taking a nice trip.

I went over to the small door that led to the stall shower. There wasn't anything much in here but the usual blinding flash of shiny white tile and built-in merciless make-up lights on either side of the huge mirror. I grabbed up a towel



and gave everything in the cabin a good rub off.

Starr Robinson hadn't moved any.

Then I went through the dresser drawers. Nothing. I let the towel rub around again, threw it back on the bed and went to the door.

It was queer I hadn't noticed them at first when I put the overhead light on, but I hadn't. Not until now. And they were big enough and dark enough and sticky-looking enough to catch the eye of a blind man two miles away. They spotted the beige rug from one end of the bed all the way over to the door and they were unmistakable.

They were blood spots. That would account for the funny smell of the automatic in the dead girl's hand.

She had hit something but it had got away.

I left the cabin and got in my car. I went slowly out of the court. The sign had said to drive carefully, remember the kiddies.

I didn't think there was much sense trying the Pueblo Apartments where Flynn hung out, but the Sierra Vista tract was almost an obstacle in my way downtown, so I hunted around for Tonopah Avenue. Finally I rooted it out. The Pueblo Apartments were a series of rambling low buildings done in the stucco manner and housing one-dollar-fifty-per-hour workers and their families. It was a logical economical spot for a bank cashier.

The door to Apartment Three D not only was unlocked but it was open as well, hanging forlorn, as always an open door looks. I went in, closed the door behind me. The lights were all on.

The apartment had a feeling about it like a stadium after the game. Seats and everything still in their places, but that something, that silence to show that the game is over.

In the bathroom stuck to the mirror with transparent tape was a small picture of T. J. Flynn and Bonnie Daugherty. It looked like T. J. had forgotten to take it down—or didn't give a hoot. I carefully pulled the tape away, put the picture in my pocket.

I left, closed the door behind me. The urge in the cause of the brown eyes which had started me on this rat race was petering out fast. There were a few questions running around loose in my head, without answers, but each one had

a hands-off look about it that made me push the car on for home.

A black felt hat held up by a body under it was leaning back against the apartment building wall near the outer door as I walked up.

"Nobody home upstairs," said a voice under the hat.

"All right," I said. "Get tough right out in the street where millions of people can hear you."

The hat angled toward the sky and I could see a mouth under it. The mouth was doing something that looked like a smile.

"Naw, naw," the mouth said. "Nothing like that. Me, I'm the bearer of good news, friend. Got a job for you."

"Come see me at the office tomorrow," I said. "I'm through for the day."

The mouth smiled big and friendly now. "What?" it said. "And disappoint Mr. Marlo? He's the one got the job—not me."

I let the mouth alone for a while and looked down. His hands were empty, hanging lazily by his sides.

"I could draw and make a fancy sieve out of you before you could move," I said.

That made the black hat look pained. "We're gentlemen," he protested. "We're going downtown to see Mr. Marlo and we'll get back in a jiffy, won't we?"

"Like sin," I said.

SOMEBODY coughed behind me. I turned. He was a big guy, bigger than me. He must have been there, inside the door of the apartment all the time. He had a .45 in his right hand, and it was making lazy little circles in the air at about the level of my eyes. He wore a chauffeur's cap.

"C'mon, happy hips," he grunted. "Let's go."

The black hat looked hurt. "I could of took him," he complained. "You didn't need to of got so wise."

The big guy spat from the side of his mouth. He made the distance between the door and the curb with it.

"Yeah," he said. "You could have took him in a pig's eye. Another second and you'd be laying on the concrete reading mystery stories in your sleep."

His big .45 poked at me like ducking for apples in a tub of water. I gathered that he meant a big Cadillac halfway down the block. It was a pleasant little



walk, marred only by the sudden disappearance of every cop and every citizen in the whole city of Reno. The street was as deserted as a magazine stand in the tunnel of love.

The big guy slid behind the wheel. Black hat shared the back seat with me.

"See he don't go for no walks when we stop for signals," the big guy said.

The black hat scowled. "Two-time loser up at Carson," he whispered to me. "And he still thinks he chews bricks for breakfast."

Black felt hat led me through the big swinging doors of the Marlo Club. Past the big cool bar. The same bartender was on duty. Maybe they never heard of unions where he came from. He gave me a surprised look, winked, and swished a bar rag across the mahogany surface. He was figuring that was the last look he would get at me alive, and it worried him sick. Out of the corner of my eye I saw him turn to the bar mirror and look for gray hairs in it.

We didn't go through the gaming rooms. I could hear the monotonous voice of the croupier at the roulette wheel, the clatter of the dice, the whirr of the machines against the walls. And over all the deep, sweaty buzz of the folks who think they make it faster than they spend it.

Black felt hat stopped in one corner near a door marked private. He signaled to somebody, spoke a few words. I stood, facing the gleaming door, watching the pretty lights reflected from the tiny mirrors in its polished surface. It reminded me of a kaleidoscope.

Black hat nudged me. "Okay, the boss's in. Right through there."

I breathed in his face. "I got a gun," I said. "I ain't been unheated yet."

He gave me a pitying look. "You private guys kills me," he grunted. "Go on in."

I opened the gleaming door and stepped through. It was quite a deluxe office, even for a club like the Marlo. A couple of cozy flames whispered to themselves in a fireplace over in one wall. Against the opposite wall was a huge tan leather davenport and clustered around it blue leather easy chairs. One end held a safe, filing cabinet, and a big television radio. The other end held a walnut desk and Mr. Angelo Marlo.

He was shaking a drink in an outsized golden shaker engraved with flying horses all around its circumference. He

poured two drinks from the shaker and handed one to me.

"What's the job?" I asked.

He looked at his glass, lifted it carefully to his lips in a hand that shook about as much as the Grand Canyon. He drained it, put it down again.

"Find anything at the Holly Courts, Gates?" It was a statement the way he said it. Cool, possessive. He had me in a satchel, could zip it up anytime.

"Yeah," I said. "A little. Somebody killed somebody."

"Report it to the police?"

"No."

He filled the glass again from the big gold shaker. He let it stand, watching the sweat form on the outside of it.

"I thought you had a license to keep clean," he mentioned.

"Yeah. But in this case it keeps cleaner if I don't go to the police at all. They'd wonder how I happened to know about it."

A HALF-SMILE flitted across his lips, died quickly.

"Your friend's a killer, Gates."

"Somebody is," I agreed. "Could be the boy who reads the mystery stories."

He just looked, at that.

"Or," I continued, "it could be somebody that carries a cane. Canes aren't the rage this week in Reno."

That one made him blink. "Close," he admitted. "The cane is a gun. But a forty-five. And Leo carries a thirty-eight. What gun would you say had cooled Starr Robinson?"

I thought about it some. "Small," I said. "Probably no bigger than a thirty-two."

"My money," he whispered. "I didn't locate it yet. I wouldn't kill the Robinson girl. She was my contact. Somebody beat me to it."

I let that settle down in my head. Then I said: "Fair. I could believe that, I think."

"Forty-seven thousand was in that take, Gates. Don't look surprised. I have a fair night now and then. I can't afford to lose it."

"They say Reno's got a police force now," I told him.

"Yes, you mentioned it before. If this fails I'll have to try the police."

I sat up hard. "If what fails?"

"You. There was another girl Flynn was playing around with. The one you



know. I'm going to try that first. Then the police—if I have to."

My fingers were around the stem of my glass. I could have thrown it in his face and maybe made it to the door. Maybe even to the bar outside. But not much farther than that. I put the glass down.

He didn't seem to think I'd be bothered. "There was a picture of a girl and a boy in an apartment out Sierra Vista way. See it?"

"I don't like the idea," I said.

"For one thousand cash, Gates," he offered, studying the flames in the fireplace.

"I like it just a little bit more, but not too much."

"You can go in my car. Leo will go with you. If you want, he can stay in the car, waiting."

"There were railroad tickets in the handbag," I said quietly. "To New York. But something had scared him. Maybe me, I don't know. He probably told her off. Maybe he wanted to go it alone. It looked like she pulled a gun on him, nicked him. Then he really got scared and shot her in the face."

Marlo was still looking at the flames. He didn't seem to be listening, or it could be I just thought that.

"He'd have to get the wound fixed up," I said, thinking.

Marlo's head came up, turned toward me. He nodded, his gray eyes seeing it, looking it over. Liking it.

"He'd go where he could get help, Gates," he said. "And maybe after he got it he'd get scared again and kill someone else. Someone who doesn't deserve killing. Somebody who'd be willing to die, though, just because it was him." He stared at me, holding my eyes in focus with his.

"That's clever," I told him at last.

"Yes," he judged. "Forty-seven thousand would make any of us clever for a little."



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## CHAPTER VI

### HEEL'S FINISH



P IN my office, I had the girl's address. I remembered writing it down as she told it to me over the phone. Black felt hat and the big guy with the chauffeur's cap waited out in the car for me while I got it.

Black hat gave me a grin

when I returned to the car.

"Set?" he asked. "Where to?"

"Eighteen-forty-five Moran," I said. "Know where it is?"

"Yeah. East, ain't it? Across the V and T tracks?" He rapped on the glass between us and the big guy. "Moran," he said. "One-eight-four-five. Leave the asphalt on the streets. We got time."

The big guy dropped it into gear. We moved, the Caddy chuckling along effortlessly, nosing down in little dips now and then at the stop signs. I could have used a car like that myself.

"Eighteen-forty-five about half a dozen houses down," said the big guy, slowing the car. "Stop here?"

Black hat turned to me. I nodded. "After I get inside you can move it up if you want to," I said. "I don't think there'll be trouble, but you never can tell."

It was a little cottage with a shiny-looking silver-painted oil tank perched on one side. Later in the season it would have ivy growing up a trellis in the front; and the two poplars on each side would have leaves on them, making nice green sentinels to give it a wind-swept appearance.

It was white, and it was warm and nice-looking, like hotcakes and sausage and coffee on a cold night.

I lifted the knocker, let it drop.

She seemed to be expecting someone perhaps, but not exactly me. I could tell that by the gasp when she saw who it was. I couldn't get a good slant at her eyes because of the darkness.

"Let's go in," I said, and pushed. Then I closed the door behind me.

We were in a tiny living room. On the floor beside the door were three traveling bags, and one that looked like an old-fashioned briefcase that had carried too much in its time.

"Expecting the doctor?" I asked her. Her head shook and she started to bite on the lips.



"I'll see you tomorrow," she said. "Not now. In your office. I'll come down."

"Where is he?" I grabbed her arm hard.

I expected that to make her mad, but she was too scared or worried, or whatever it was that was chewing her inside. I dropped the arm. She took a trembling breath and fluttered at me.

"I-I don't know, Mr. Gates. Really. You've got to go now. I'm busy. You—you've got to go!"

"Where is he?"

There was a little scraping sound from one of the adjoining rooms. It could have been heard outside and down the block, but she pretended it never happened.

"I tell you I'll come down tomorrow!" she screamed. "You've got to go now. Can't you leave me alone?"

I grinned at her and looked up just in time to see a figure with adobe-colored hair poking his head through the doorway in the back of the room.

"Who is it, kid?" the figure asked, then came all the way into the room.

There wasn't any lodge pin or poppy in his lapel now. In fact there wasn't any lapel. He stood there naked from the hips up except for what looked like a torn shirt that was wadded and wound up around his right shoulder and arm. It looked red in places. In his left hand he held a .32 automatic.

At first he didn't know whether to go for me or go for the girl. The way he was clocking it she'd tipped me off and I'd come to get him. And there was but one answer to that.

First the girl and then me. That was the way he would decide it. There were agony lines around his eyes and mouth but he managed a curling sneer despite it and his voice came from the depths of a white hot hate.

"You — dirty — cheap — punk!" he breathed, and took a step toward her.

The girl spun around. "Oh no, Tommy! Get back there! I can get rid of him. Back!"

**T**HE adobe hair dropped over the right side of his forehead into his eye. He never noticed it.

"You were the girl who wanted to help me!" he muttered. "Oh, yes!"

His left hand came up with the .32 and pointed it straight at her. He took one more step. Now he was going to give her the kiss-off, the big one.

I gave her a shove that would have knocked over the Caddy outside. She flew in a little arc and banged into the davenport and lay still.

Flynn wasn't reacting the way he should. His eyes went in both directions at once. I thought I had time to bring up my gun out of the holster under my coat. I only thought, that is. He got the eyes working together quick, and dragged himself toward me. The gun raised simultaneously and that made it too late for me to reach for anything but a fast prayer.

"She didn't rat on you," I told him. "I picked up your trail at the Holly Courts. You left enough blood there to paint the place red."

His shoulder ached and that made him itch to let me have it. But something else was too important.

"Talk," he whispered. "Who'd you tell? The cops?"

His gun came closer. I could have reached out and taken it away from him and thrown it away, it came so close. I could have, that is, if I'd been loopy, and anxious to get the golden crown with my name on it.

"Nobody," I said, trying to keep the voice down where it wasn't scared. "Nobody. I went to your place, and then I came here. The girl's in the clear. She didn't know."

That seemed to satisfy him. I wondered what I could keep telling him to make him listen until he got too weak to stand up any longer.

"The girl left a note before she passed out," I lied.

"Okay, Gates!" he snarled. "That did it. That's the one. Take it, you—"

The gun raised up and out straight at my Adam's apple. He was shooting with his left and couldn't afford to make any mistakes. I shut my eyes for it, but it never came.

The girl with the brown eyes made a leap from the davenport that carried her right between us. She clawed at the gun.

"No, Tommy!" she sobbed. "Oh, Tommy, no!"

It went off—after all that time. She jumped back a little, just a very little, and collapsed in a heap, and I let Thomas J. Flynn have it with the butt of my .38 right across his thin lips. He sank down and landed on his hurt shoulder. I wondered if he felt anything when he hit.

I picked up the worn old briefcase. The weight was just about right. I didn't have



to cut it open or anything. This would be it.

The big guy and the black felt hat were trying to make it through the doorway together.

"You okay?" asked the black hat.

The big guy looked at the floor. "Brother!" he said. "I take my hat off to you, Gates."

"I didn't shoot," I said. "She took it for me. I knocked him out afterward." I handed him the briefcase. "Take this to Marlo."

He looked at me.

"Yeah."

"And take this guy with you—and his bags. Put him in a car somewhere downtown. Then report it to Avila down at Stolen Car Division. They'll handle it from there on."

"What about the dame?" asked the black hat.

"She's got to have a doctor," I told him. "You know any? One who's a little blind?"

The big guy went over in the corner to the phone, called a number, spoke a couple of words.

"Okay," he told me. "Five minutes. You going to stay here, huh?"

I told him I was going to stay.

I watched the Caddy pull away and make the turn at the corner. The tires didn't even squeal when it went around. I sure could use a car like that, I decided.

I WENT back to the girl. She'd got a nice one right through the muscle in her arm. In and out like that. She wasn't bleeding much but I got a towel, twisted it tight above the wound. She opened her eyes and looked up at me.

"Tommy?"

"A nightmare," I said. "Bad dream. Something you ate. He wasn't worth it. Even you know that now, don't you?"

I looked away so I wouldn't see the tears.

"Gates," she sobbed, "he came back to me. He came back, didn't he?"

"You'll always have that," I agreed. "Fifty years from now it'll be a little thin but you'll always have it. . . ."

The radiant hands on the little clock on my desk said five to three when I let myself into my apartment. I was thinking that I had missed my supper and that I'd better fix myself something out in the kitchen before I went to bed.

Instead, I sat down in a chair next to the desk, with the lights out.

Angelo Marlo had been very, very lucky. And so had Bonnie Daugherty in a way. And so had I. But the girl—she would get over it in time. Some day she would pick on somebody else to mother and maybe he would need mothering. That was what she wanted.

My phone rang. It sounded hollow and loud and mournful, like the coyotes out in the sage down Carson way. Like all phones do in the middle of the night.

"Yeah," I said into it.

"No names," whispered a voice. It was a nice smooth voice. One you could talk to in a pinch. "Okay?"

"Yeah," I said. "Okay."

"Good. Just wanted to say thanks. The briefcase was fine. I'll put a check for a thousand in the mail tomorrow."

"Okay," I said.

"Another thing. Leo watched. The police got Flynn all right. Took him to the Washoe Hospital. That was clever, Gates, mighty clever."

"Yeah," I said. "Forty-seven thousand would make any of us clever for a little."

I heard a dry laugh. And then a click that told me he had signed off.

I pulled the little chain on the desk lamp and took out the picture I had found in Flynn's apartment, and sat there looking at it for a while. Then I held a match to it and dropped it in an ash tray. It smoked a little and had a funny smell that I thought maybe would be like old love letters burning.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

# MURDER AT MAGIC LAKE

*A Baffling Mystery Novelet*

By **EDWARD RONNS**

PLUS MANY OTHER STORIES AND FEATURES!



# WOOD SLEUTH



*Meet Arthur Koehler, the detective who can make lumber talk, and whose specialized knowledge has been the means of solving many famous cases!*

ON ONE of the main roads that bisects Madison, Wisconsin, is a building of striking modern design that catches the eye of every passing motorist. A neat sign near the road extends a welcome to visitors and identifies the structure as the home of the Forest Products Laboratory of the United States Forest Service. The place serves as an experimental workshop for the discovery of new uses for what once was just waste product of wood, and it was here that certain forms of plastic wood and plywood were developed and made commercially feasible.

The structure also serves as a museum explaining the work of the service with various exhibits on permanent display, and since Madison is both the seat of the University of Wisconsin and the state capital, the laboratory receives more than a fair share of visitors.

## *A Unique Detective*

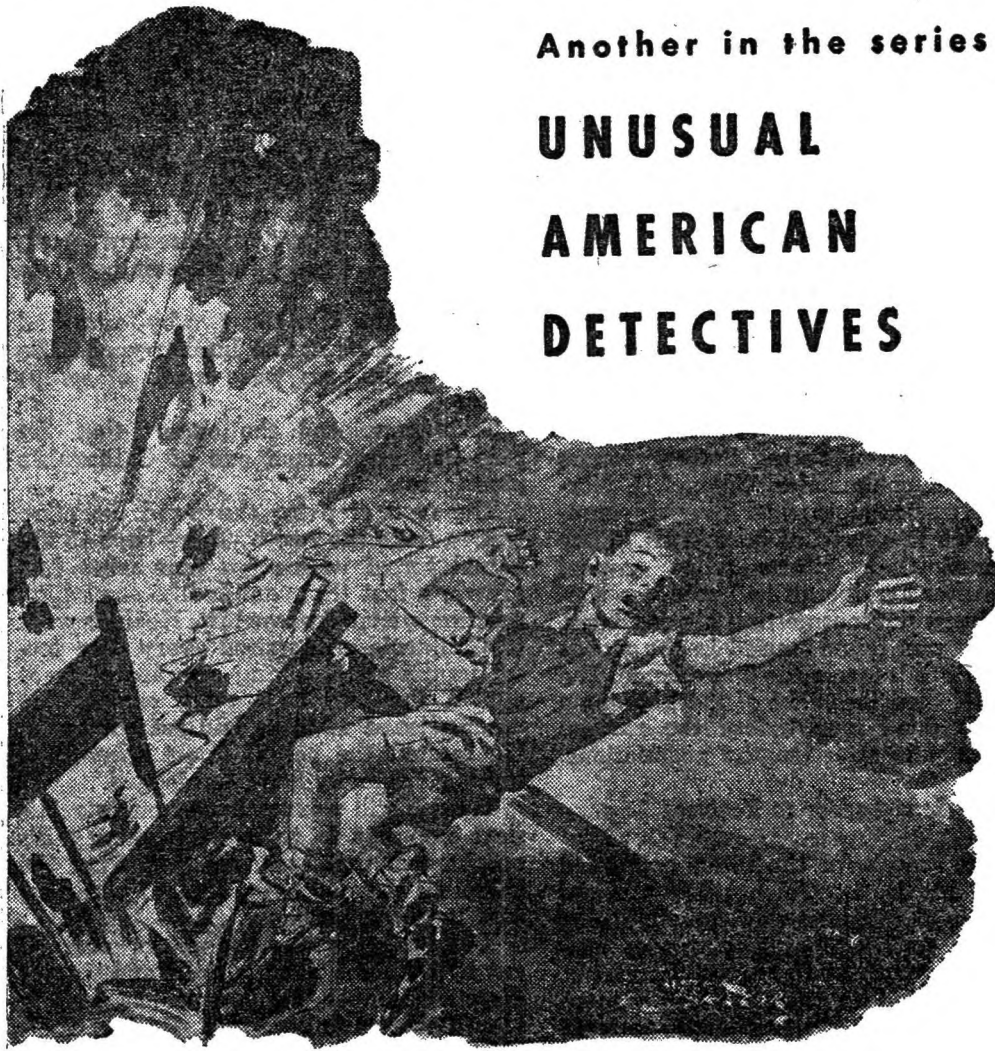
Few of the callers who wander about the main floor looking at the displays know that the building also houses an odd collection of crime mementoes. These are kept in the office of Arthur Koehler, listed



## A True Crime Story by **JACKSON HITE**

Another in the series of

# **UNUSUAL AMERICAN DETECTIVES**



in the directory as "Chief of the Division of Silvicultural Relations," but known to the law enforcement officials all over the country as the "Wood Detective."

The souvenirs are from cases on which Koehler worked, often behind the scenes. A modest man, he isn't interested in public credit for his exploits in solving crimes, and considers it as part of his job as a wood expert employed by the government.

Koehler first came to the public attention for his work in the Lindbergh baby kidnaping case when he performed a feat of wood wizardry that is without parallel

in crime detection.

The Lindbergh baby was taken from its crib on the second floor nursery of the famed flyer's home on the night of March 1, 1932. Within a short time the estate was swarming with New Jersey State Troopers and officials. A search of the area soon turned up a ladder in three sections hidden behind some bushes not too far from the Lindbergh house. On some of the rungs were clumps of fresh, reddish soil which corresponded to the red clay earth on the flier's grounds. It was apparent to the investigators that this was the ladder used by the kidnaper.



Skilled investigators studied the ladder. When the three sections were put together it extended over 30 feet, more than enough to reach the nursery window. Later police decided that only two of the sections had been used by the kidnaper which brought the ladder just short of the nursery window.

The ladder was not the usual type purchased in a store. Evidently reasoning that a regular ladder might be traced, the wily kidnaper constructed his own. Although it was obvious that the ladder was a home-made affair, police observed that the man who fashioned it was skillful enough with tools to be a carpenter. Each of the three sections had been constructed with two by fours held together by strips of boards which acted as steps. These steps were 18 inches apart.

For weeks New Jersey State Troopers under their commander, Colonel H. Norman Schwarzkopf, worked feverishly running down hundreds of false leads. They intensified their efforts when several weeks after Lindbergh had paid the ransom money without getting his son back, the baby was found buried in the woods some four miles from the flier's home. The baby had died the night of the kidnaping and was dead long before the ransom had been paid after lengthy negotiations.

#### *Send Ladder to Koehler*

As the search for the killer continued without any break, Colonel Schwarzkopf turned to the ladder as a possible clue and went to Washington where he consulted experts of the Bureau of Standards. He had the ladder with him and wanted to know whether it was possible to trace the wood in the ladder from the markings in the grain.

Although theoretically it was possible, the experts were doubtful. But at the same time they told Schwarzkopf that if anybody could do it, Arthur Koehler at the Forest Products Laboratory in Wisconsin was the man.

The ladder made the trip to Madison for inspection by the wood detective. There, almost one thousand miles away from the scene, in his pleasant office overlooking the beautiful college campus, Koehler began a series of tests that made several pieces of wood talk and the tale they told him finally placed Hauptmann in the electric chair.

Koehler examined the ladder under

powerful magnifying glasses and placed slivers of wood from it under microscopes. For days he continued his tests while Colonel Schwarzkopf waited, hardly daring to hope that a break might be forthcoming.

#### *Koehler Traces Lumber*

The hand made ladder told Koehler plenty. It was fairly simple for him to determine that the wood was a certain kind of pine, logged the previous year, with all the two-by-fours coming from the same area.

This meant that the two-by-fours had been purchased at one lumber yard. The smaller cross-bars were made of scraps of wood.

Tests convinced the expert that the pine had come from one of California's pine forests.

The next step for the wood detective was to trace the two-by-fours back to the actual forest where the pine trees had grown, a feat that sounds like something a fiction writer dreamed up. Koehler went to California and visited every pine forest in the state, taking samples of trees cut in the various logging camps. He accomplished what he had set out to do. He located the actual forest where the lumber originally had been logged.

The job still was far from complete. His next step was to go to the planing mills operated in that area and then trace the shipment of wood to the lumber yard that sold it to the kidnaper.

Koehler knew that the marks on wood cut by both the planing mills and the individual lumber yards were as readily identifiable as fingerprints. He had studied those marks on the two-by-fours. By following the trail of lumber shipments from that forest in California, he finally wound up at the National Millwork and Lumber Company on White Plains Avenue in the Bronx of New York City. An examination of the rotary saws there enabled him to tell police that the lumber used in the kidnap ladder had been purchased at that particular lumber yard!

#### *Trail Leads to Bronx*

Detectives investigated every employee and all firms doing business with the lumber yard without finding any clue. Many sales had been made on a cash and carry basis with no way to identify the particu-



lar customer. One of these was the kidnaper but his identity still was shrouded in mystery. However, Koehler's efforts meant to police that the kidnaper probably lived in the Bronx and somewhere in that region. They concentrated their efforts there.

Finally in September, 1934, Bruno Richard Hauptmann was arrested when he was traced passing one of the ransom notes. Notice how the pieces began to fall in line. Hauptmann was a carpenter, which held up with the original theory by police. He lived in the Bronx and had made purchases of wood at that particular lumber yard in the past. All this tied up with Koehler's findings.

Throughout the investigation that followed Hauptmann clung to his story that the ransom money had been left at his house in a shoebox by a man named Fish who had gone back to Germany where he later died. Hauptmann claimed he had not known there was money in the shoebox until one day there was a water leak and it flooded the closet where he had placed it, breaking the box open. It was a clever story since police could not question the dead man to refute it.

#### *Hauptmann's Board Matches Up*

There was one drawback for Hauptmann, however. He had not counted on the genius of Koehler. Where to even a carpenter one piece of wood may look like another, they differ from day and night to the wood detective. He went to Hauptmann's house and carefully examined every board in the place.

In the attic he found one of the floor planks had a small piece sawed off an end. Koehler took up this plank and compared it with the lumber in the kidnap ladder. What later became known during the trial as Rail No. 16 matched exactly with the plank from the attic, direct proof linking the Bronx carpenter with the crime. Koehler also examined the tools and was able to show that one of Hauptmann's planes was used on different parts of the ladder.

Koehler was one of many varied experts who testified during the trial. Experts for each side disagreed but there was none to disagree with Koehler. It was during this trial that the late Dr. Erasmus Hudson introduced his now famous silver nitrate fingerprinting test.

After police experts testified that they

had found only smudges on the ladder, he was called by the defense and testified that his method had brought to light dozens of fingerprints, none of which was Hauptmann's.

#### *Many Believed Hauptmann Innocent*

Such conflicting testimony resulted in some people contending that Hauptmann was not guilty and Governor Hoffman of New Jersey did issue one reprieve to the man described as the "killer of the century." But no matter what the defense said they found themselves against a stumbling block with Koehler's testimony.

They knew that no other expert could refute his findings and so they tried to get by it by claiming that police had sawed off the plank and nailed it on the ladder for Koehler to find, implying thereby that police were framing Hauptmann. What the defense did not know but soon learned was that Koehler had examined the ladder well over a year before Hauptmann was ever suspected and had made photographs of Rail No. 16 as well as the other parts of the ladder. The wood definitely came from Hauptmann's home.

The killer had met his Waterloo in the wood sleuth and he went to the electric chair for the heartless murder of a baby.

Koehler's work in this case naturally was of great interest to law enforcement officials all over the country and they formed the habit of turning to him whenever they were in need of a wood detective. Some of the cases where his advice was sought border on the whimsical.

Every school child knows that Columbus discovered America in 1492. The actual point of landing is supposed to be off the mainland, possibly Cuba, which is on a direct line across the Gulf of Mexico from where New Orleans is situated today.

#### *Swimmer Finds Wooden Shoe*

Several years ago historians became excited when a swimmer, while wading in Lake Pontchartrain on the outskirts of New Orleans, stubbed his toe and pulled up from the muddy bottom a wooden shoe.

The man examined it carefully and discovered that carved into the shoe was the date, 1492. Newspapers soon were filled with speculation as to whether this



proved that Columbus had actually landed on the mainland. The shoe was examined by university professors who were certain that it had been hand carved and such shoes were worn in the Fifteenth Century. The wooden shoe finally was sent to Koehler for his opinion.

The expert found that the foot piece had been carved from a certain variety of white pine. The only place in the world where this variety of tree is found is in the Northern states and Canada. It does not grow in Europe. Since it was hardly likely that Columbus penetrated to the center of this continent from the coast, a claim which his own log does not make, Koehler had to inform the crestfallen historians that the shoe was a much more recent product of somebody with a vivid imagination.

#### *Koehler Has Settled Disputes*

The wood detective's expert knowledge had helped solve many disputes as to ownership of acreage. Two neighbors were in constant debate over the actual line of their adjoining property. One of the men insisted that a blaze mark on a tree was the original line placed there by the surveyor many years before. This was disputed by the other man who insisted that this mark was of much more recent origin and had nothing to do with the boundary line.

To settle the matter the men agreed to send the part of the tree containing the blaze mark to Koehler. The wood Sherlock counted the annual growth rings of the tree from the depth of the old blaze mark to the surface and was able to tell how many years back the mark had been made. This was verified when he succeeded in bringing up clearly the letters and numbers cut into the mark. The dates tallied perfectly and showed that the blaze was the original mark left by the surveyor when he laid out the boundary line.

#### *Cigar Box Has History*

One of the exhibits in Koehler's office is a cigar box. From the exterior there is nothing to distinguish it from any other box, but it was one of six similar boxes that spread terror through a city, cost three lives, and badly injured two others. The wood detective played an important part in identifying the triple killer who later was executed for the murders.

The story opens on Good Friday morning, April 10, 1936, in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. A mailman delivered a package to the home of Thomas Maloney. Present at the time were Maloney's teen-aged daughter, Margaret, and his four-year-old son, Tom. Wondering whether the package might contain an Easter present for them, the children crowded around Maloney as he opened the parcel in the kitchen. When Margaret saw that it contained a cigar box she turned away. Young Tom remained at his father's side as Maloney slid a knife blade under the lid to pry it open.

As he did there was a terrific explosion that wrecked the kitchen. Even Margaret, who was outside of the room, was injured by the flying debris. Maloney and Young Tom, horribly mangled, but still alive, were rushed to the hospital with Margaret.

#### *Police Rush To Scene*

Police sped to the house. None of the injured could be questioned. The premises were roped off and the officers began a search for the cause of the explosion. They found splintered pieces of the cigar box and a scrap of the brown wrapping paper in which it had come. Printed on the paper in pencil was, "Sample H 14 WB."

A short time later in another part of the city, while police still were at the Maloney house, Michael Gallagher, a 70-year-old man, stared with curious delight at a package left for him by his mailman. Gallagher lived with his son-in-law, Clinton Lehman, a school teacher, who was home because of the Easter school recess.

Gallagher entered the house to obtain a knife with which to cut the cord. Lehman watched as the elderly man opened the parcel and removed a cigar box. Gallagher inserted the knife blade into the top and Lehman noticed a spark shoot out. Seconds later a second blast occurred in Wilkes-Barre. The force of the explosion hurtled the slight 70-year-old man against a wall of the room, crushing his skull. Death occurred almost instantly. Lehman was unconscious on the floor when neighbors arrived.

#### *Six Death Boxes*

Police also rushed to the Gallagher home and when they found the splintered remains of a cigar box they realized that



the bombs had been mailed in the boxes. Postal employees were questioned and a clerk recalled that he had handled six packages, all of them the same size. He recognized the handwriting on the scrap of wrapping paper as being similar on all six packages. This meant that four more packages of death were somewhere in the mails.

All radio stations in the area halted programs to broadcast warnings. Newspapers put out extras while police officers raced about the city rounding up all mailmen in a frantic hunt for the other four lethal packages.

Two of the other parcels already had been delivered. One was received by Luther Kniffen, a former sheriff. Kniffen was pleased when he noted that somebody had sent him a box of cigars. By a strange quirk of fate he inserted the knife blade in the back of the box rather than the front and pried open the lid the wrong way. This mistake saved his life.

Instead of cigars the box contained two sticks of dynamite. The interior of the body had been converted into two compartments by the insertion of a small piece of wood. The dynamite was in the larger compartment while in the smaller was a flashlight battery, with wires attached to it and to the top of the lid.

#### *Package Contains Dynamite*

The wires on the lid were touching the nail that held the lid down in front. The moment the front of the lid was pried open, these wires would make contact with the battery and set up a spark that would detonate the dynamite.

Kniffen hastily placed the bomb in a pail of water and summoned authorities.

A fourth package had arrived at the home of Harry Goulstone, superintendent of a coal mine, who lived in a suburb. Goulstone was at work when he heard of the two bomb explosions. Simply as a matter of precaution he telephoned home to warn his wife against opening any parcels in case any were delivered. He became alarmed when he received no answer to the call and drove to his home only to learn that his wife was out shopping. Goulstone turned pale when he saw a package addressed to him in the hall.

The mine manager notified police who opened the parcel and discovered it was another cigar box bomb.

#### *Police Intercept Package*

The other two packages were intercepted by police before they had been delivered by letter carriers. One was addressed to Judge B. R. Jones with the sixth one to James P. Gorman who lived in a small town near Wilkes-Barre.

All four packages were addressed in the same handwriting, a disguised form of printing. Instead of a return address each one was marked on the outside with "Sample H 14 WB."

Gallagher had died outright. Young Tom Maloney also succumbed, several hours later, in the hospital. His father lingered unconscious for six days and then passed away, for the third death by the bomb terrorist. Margaret Maloney and Gallagher's son-in-law, Clinton Lehman, recovered although they were scarred for life.

Meanwhile local police called upon outside experts for assistance. Crack sleuths of the United States Postal Service joined in the hunt for the triple killer while the New York City force sent two crack men from their Bomb Squad.

#### *Take Bombs Apart*

The experts took the unexploded bombs apart, leaving alone the thin pieces of wood inserted into the boxes by the killer. The wires on the inner lid of the cigar box had been glued on and samples of the glue were scraped into envelopes.

Since six persons had been marked for death by the same person, authorities realized that there must be some connection between all six men even though they came from different strata of society. They soon discovered that all six had played some part in a bitter coal strike the previous year.

Maloney had been a leader of an independent union which called the strike after breaking away from the United Mine Workers. He later quit the union and advised his followers to return to the other. During the strike many miners had been arrested for damaging property.

One of the witnesses against the miners had been Michael Gallagher who was employed as a caretaker of a cemetery and saw the acts of vandalism. Judge Jones had tried some of these cases and sentenced the miners found guilty. Kniffen was sheriff then and had arrested the men. Gorman was chairman of the An-



thracite Conciliation Board whose decision had been opposed by some miners, while Goulstone was superintendent of one of the struck mines.

### *Settle on Bomb Suspect*

Believing that the bomb killer was one of the miners who had been arrested by Kniffen and sentenced by Judge Jones, following testimony by Gallagher, detectives centered their search for the killer among the former strikers. They reasoned that Maloney had been a target because he had called a halt to the strike. The investigators learned that Maloney had been friendly with a miner named Michael Fugmann but that after the strike the two men no longer spoke to each other.

The sleuths suspected that Fugmann was the sender of the bombs but had no way of proving it. They shadowed him for weeks without finding any evidence. Attempts to connect him with the mailing of the bombs also failed.

It was at this point that Wilkes-Barre police called upon Koehler, the wood detective, for assistance. Koehler examined the thin pieces of wood used by the slayer in making the cigar box partitions. They had been cut from thick southern pine veneer, the type used in making vegetable crates.

Fugmann's house was searched and several broken crates were found in the basement. Koehler found that the partitions in the cigar boxes were made from this wood.

The wood sleuth and his men did not stop there. Paper, after all, is made from wood. The heavy wrapping paper that had been used in wrapping the bombs for mailing was inspected and compared with wrapping paper found in Fugmann's home. This paper was tested in the Madison laboratory and the experts discovered that it was identical in texture and weight with the bomb paper.

The glue used to hold the wires and partitions in place also were tested with

samples of glue found in Fugmann's home. One bottle matched the glue used by the killer.

Koehler still had one more bit of evidence for authorities. The thin pieces of veneer had been cut from the vegetable crates by saw and then carved by knife to fit into the cigar boxes. The veneer crates found in Fugmann's cellar also had saw marks and knife scratches in them. A comparison microscope showed that these saw marks and knife scratches had been made by the same instruments.

With the evidence produced by the wood detective, Fugmann was tried for the triple murders and, after he was convicted, he was electrocuted.

One of Koehler's most unusual cases involved a disappearing forest. The owner of a valuable piece of timberland went away on a short trip and when he returned he found his land stripped of his best trees. Inquiry at the local sawmill brought forth the information that a neighbor had some logs cut there while the other man was away.

### *Koehler Solves Timber Mystery*

The owner of the missing trees thought there was no way to prove his suspicions since the trees growing on his land were no different from trees growing on the adjacent land. Finally, he consulted Koehler.

The wood detective obtained samples of the butt ends of the logs which were still in the waste pile at the sawmill. He also secured the tops of the stumps from many of the missing trees. For several weeks the various samples were studied under the microscope and then one day Koehler found what he was looking for. The end of one of the log slabs matched one of the stumps perfectly. They had the same annual rings and the saw marks were identical. Enlarged photographs of these two pieces were made and shown to the neighbor.

He promptly admitted his guilt and paid for the lumber he had stolen.

*Meet W. H. Gasque, special Investigator for the Governor of Florida, in*

## **THE GOVERNOR'S SLEUTH**

**By JACKSON HITE**

*Another Story of an UNUSUAL AMERICAN DETECTIVE Coming Next Issue!*



# Death Draws a Picture



The young copper started blasting at the killers

*"So long, copper—much obliged but I can't stay put, not after being on the road so long. . . ."*

**W**ELL, copper, by the time you read this I'll be long gone and far away. I'll be riding the rods, or maybe hugging the top of a reefer like the one that took me into Galenburg that night you arrested me.

I was feeling pretty battered when I limped out of the railroad yards and headed for the town's main stem. My pants were torn at the knees where I'd landed on the sharp cinders along the

right-of-way, my palms were raw and bleeding from contact with grit and gravel, and my head was hurting plenty where those two brakemen had swatted me with their hickory clubs before kicking me off the moving freight drag. I guess I must have looked as bad as I felt, judging from what you said to me. But of course that was later. At the time, you didn't even know I existed.

Stumbling along through the darkness,

**By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM**



I decided I was getting old. A guy in his fifties had no business tramping the country, hopping freights, holing up in railroad jungles. It was all right for the younger ones who had the stamina to take it.

I'd make the grade okay myself, for longer than I liked to remember, but now I was tired. I didn't have the bounce. I thought how nice it would be to settle down somewhere, to find a spot where I could rest and take root and make friends, and forget the wanderlust that had been driving me these past twenty-odd years like a tumbleweed in the capricious wind.

Then I laughed at myself derisively. Take root, my eye! Small chance, after the mess I'd made of my life. Who would want a brokendown old drunkard, a crummy bum like me hanging around? I'd be a disgrace to anybody screwy enough to take me in and give me a home. I couldn't stay away from the bottle; I didn't have what it takes.

Crossing the little town's main street against a traffic signal, I made for a glowing neon sign in the middle of the block. As sore as my hands were, I wondered if I could even hold the glass for the drink I needed. Then you came up behind me and tapped me on the shoulder.

"Just a minute, old-timer," you said pleasantly.

I turned and blinked at you. You looked very young and tall and spruce in your blue serge with the brass buttons and shiny gold shield. Some small town cops are inclined to be sloppy, but not you. You looked proud of the badge you wore. Proud, but not arrogant.

"Stranger in Galenburg?" you asked me.

I told you yes, I was. "That is, it's been years since I was here last." When a man has been a 'bo as long as I have, he learns to be polite to policemen; to answer their questions promptly—and meekly. "It's been years," I repeated.

You chuckled. It was a warm, friendly chuckle. "Then I guess our traffic lights are new to you," you said. "You crossed against the red, you know. Jay walking." You looked me over, and your eyes didn't miss much. "You look as if you'd been in a fight," you remarked.

"No. I took a little tumble. is all."

"Off a freight?"

I ached all over, and I was too tired to argue with anybody with eyes as sharp as yours. "What's the use denying it?" I

said. "Yes, I got kicked off a freight. I'm a tramp. Now you've got me for vagrancy as well as for jay walking. Okay. Which way is the jail, or do I wait while you ring for the wagon?"

"Hey, now, not so fast, old-timer," you said. "All we do is warn a first offender on a pedestrian traffic violation, not arrest him. As for vagrancy—you got any money?"

"Not a dime," I admitted because it was true. I was broke as flat as anybody ever could be.

"Means of support?" you asked me.

I COULD have told you about the way I cadged free drinks and sandwiches in saloons, the remnants of what talent I had and how I used it. But my hands were too raw and sore to demonstrate it to you. Besides, it wasn't really a means of support. Not on the strict meaning of the term. It hadn't been. Not for years. So I just said: "I panhandle," and let it go at that. It was simpler, and it required no explanation.

"I see," you said. Then, gently: "Hungry?"

"Sure. And thirsty." I made a grimace. "You weren't going to buy me a drink, were you?"

"No," you said. "I might stake you to meal, though, if you want it. And then I'd advise you to drift out of town. Our night chief of police here isn't too friendly to vags. Jordy, his name is. Maybe you've heard of him."

I said yes, I had. "They say he's plenty tough. But you don't seem to be," I added. "What kind of cop are you?"

"Just a human kind—I hope." You shrugged it off, looking embarrassed. "There's a fairly decent lunchroom near here. You want that meal?"

Maybe food would help blunt my thirst, my inordinate craving for a shot of rye, I thought. I nodded and shuffled into step with you. As we rounded the next corner, somebody called from a parked prowler car.

"Patterson!"

Do you remember how I stopped dead in my tracks and stared at that prowler car? Another uniformed copper popped out of the car; a chunky, muscular man with heavy jowls, thinning gray hair and eyes as cold as agate marbles. He glowered at you.

"A pinch, Patterson?" he asked.

You looked uncomfortable. "Well,



Chief, not exactly. That is, I mean—"

"I know darned well what you mean," the chunky one said. He was surly and sour, and I noticed the gold stripes on his blue serge sleeve, the letters "Night Chief" on his cap device. This must be Jordy, I decided, the guy that wasn't friendly with vags. "Up to your old tricks again, eh, Patterson? Buying meals for bums."

I could see he was sore at you, and I tried to do something about it. "Look, mister," I started to say.

"Speak when you're spoken to," he snapped at me, "unless you want a slap in the teeth."

Your broad shoulders shifted uneasily in your tailored tunic. "Wait a minute, Chief," you said to Jordy. "All this man did was cross the street against a red light. I was just explaining our traffic rules to him."

"He carry any dough?"

"No, but—"

"Then vag him. Lock him up." Jordy got back in his prowler car. "That's an official order, Patterson." He drove off.

You looked at me, then, and the corners of your mouth drooped apologetically. "I'm sorry, old-timer," you said. "You see how it is, though. If I turned you loose now I'd be accused of letting a prisoner escape, disobeying my superior and heaven knows what all."

"Sure, sure, I understand."

We walked along a side street and presently came to the jail building. It was a shabby one-story affair with iron barred windows and a green bulb burning over the entrance. I had seen dozens like it in small towns across the country. I had seen them and been in them. Long ago I'd learned to take them in my stride.

You pulled out your chain of keys and used one to unlock the door. "We don't have a night-jailer," you told me. "Just four cops on patrol, this night shift, including Jordy. Any time we make an arrest we bring the prisoner in ourselves and put him in a cell. Galenburg isn't very metropolitan, even though we do have traffic signals." You still sounded apologetic.

I wasn't too interested in how Galenburg ran its lockup. "What I don't understand is why you should be so darned decent to guys like me," I said. "From that remark of Jordy's, you're always buying meals for bums and floaters. How come?"

"It's a long story," you answered me. You were having a little trouble with the lock. "Maybe you'd call it crazy. You been on the road very long, old-timer?"

"Long enough. Too long, probably."

"Ever run across a 'bo named Patterson?" you dropped the question casually. "He'd be about your age."

"Hoboes don't generally tell their last names," I told him. "Take me for, instance. I'm Whisky Bill—just Whisky Bill. What about this Patterson?"

"My old man," you said, still working with the lock. "Willard Patterson. He used to be a newspaper cartoonist. One of the best. But a lush. Always getting drunk and losing his job and drifting on to the next town. I was only three, last time I saw him, so I don't remember too much about him. He just sort of dropped out of sight one day and that was that."

"A fine heel," I felt like saying. But I didn't.

"Before my mother died," you said, "she made me promise that I'd never quit looking for him. You know how it is."

I shook my head. "I'm not sure I do."

"Well, if he's still alive, maybe I could do something for him. Give him a home, or help him some way. Anyhow it doesn't hurt to be friendly with the tramps who come through. They have it tough enough without making it worse. And maybe some day I'll run into somebody who might give me a line on my dad." You smiled a little wistfully. "Sure you've never bumped into him?"

I made my words deliberate. "Not that I remember."

YOU got the jail door open, finally. "Well, so it goes." You kept your face turned away so I wouldn't notice the disappointment there. It was in your voice, though. I couldn't miss it.

You took me to a block of cells, two on either side of a wide corridor, and all of a sudden in one of the cells on the left, some guy started yelling. He was a sawed-off runty little man, bald and slack-mouthed, pale as dirty laundry.

"I don't want to die!" he squeaked. "Don't kill me! I won't stool if you let me alone!"

"Hey, quiet!" You didn't say it harshly the way Jordy would have said it. "Cut it out, fella. Nobody's going to get to you in here. You're safe."

The runt's eyes were crawling with terror as he put his face against the bars.



"Gosh, copper! I thought I was a goner. I thought them guys was coming after me to knock me off so I couldn't talk!"

"Take it easy, Shorty," you told him reassuringly. "Get some sleep." Then you opened an opposite cell and put me in it. "Too bad your only company has to be a creep with the screaming meemies," you said to me in an undertone. "I hope he doesn't bother you too much."

Later, after you had left, I looked across at this sawed-off Shorty guy. "What the heck's eating you, pal?" I asked him.

"They're after me. They'll get me, too. I don't want to die! Gosh, I got as much right to live as anybody. I'm human. I wasn't always like I am now. I was married and had a home and a kid. My boy's growed up to be a man, now, I guess. About like that copper you just came in with. But just because I went wrong, that ain't no reason I should sit still for a couple of gunsels to make me a clay pigeon."

"What gunsels?" I asked.

"Heist guys. I got suckered into throwing in with them on one of their bank stickups day before yesterday. There was a shooting. They knocked off a watchman and made a getaway, but I got caught." He sniffled, wiped his nose on his sleeve.

"And so what?"

He started pacing his cell. "I was a dope. I said I'd finger them to save my own skin. The dicks told the reporters, and they put it in the newspapers I was gonna squeal. So now I'm spotted. Them heist guys will be after me, I know they will. I should of dummied up, I should of. Now it's too late. They'll rub me out. I ain't got a chance."

"You're nuts," I told him. "How can they break into jail? Lie down and cop a snooze." Then I went to my own cot, and pretty soon I was asleep myself.

I don't know how long I slept. All I remember was the hysterical scream that woke me up, a scream cut off by gunfire. Fear came into me, then. I knew what was happening, even though I couldn't see it. A man was being murdered across the hall from me, and if I let the killers know I was in this opposite cell I would get a dose of the same medicine. They wouldn't take a chance on leaving a witness alive behind them.

I pressed myself face down on my cot, not moving, not daring to raise my head or look through the bars of my cell door. I hardly dared to breathe. I suppose

you'll say I was yellow. Well, maybe so. But I didn't want to die the way Shorty was dying.

Somebody said: "That'll learn the rat a lesson," and another voice answered: "He won't do no stooling now," and then footfalls sounded, and the front door opened and slammed shut. Outside, the whine of an automobile motor faded away fast.

I waited a long time before I stood up and looked across into Shorty's cell. He had fallen on his side, one arm stretched up to pillow his bald head. His eyes were wide open and staring at me as if accusing me of not doing anything to help him. It was almost as though he said: "At least you might have watched those guys shooting me, so you could identify them later."

"Boloney!" I shouted at him, knowing he was past hearing me. "It was no affair of mine! You were nothing to me! Why should I stick out my neck for a stranger?" I sat on the edge of my cot and buried my face in my hands.

You remember I was still sitting there when you and the rest of the cops rushed in. I was sitting there thinking about little Shorty, and how scared he'd been, and how much he'd wanted to stay alive. I was thinking how he'd told me about his family; the son he said he had, a son about your age. And now he was dead, and I hadn't even moved a finger to save him. Or avenge him.

Jordy gave me a bad time with his questioning. Had I seen the killers? No. Why not? Because I had my head pressed into my pillow, playing ostrich. Why? Because I knew what would happen to me if those gunsels noticed me. Oh, a coward, eh? Okay, I was a coward; I was ashamed of it, but it was the truth. I avoided looking at you, copper, when I admitted it, but I had the feeling that you were studying me, and I felt my cheeks going hot. Somehow it seemed I had let you down by not making any move to save Shorty. Shorty, who'd had a son your age.

**T**HEN your night chief made a crack I didn't like. He asked me how much the two torpedoes had paid me to clam up. That got me.

"Look," I said. "You had me vagged because I didn't have any dough. All right, I still haven't got any dough. Why don't you frisk me and see for yourself? No-



body paid me anything. I'm as broke as when I came in here."

So he searched me and searched my cell, and he didn't find a thin dime. Then I said, "If you're so bright, why don't you find out how those hoods got in here in the first place? Make like a detective—investigate how they broke into the building. Maybe you got a crooked cop on your force."

The minute I said it I regretted it. I could see the growth of the idea reflected on Jordy's heavy face. He turned and pointed a finger at you.

"Patterson!" he said. "You were here last, weren't you? You brought in this bum and locked him up."

Your eyes got worried. "Why yes, Chief. I—I remember I had some trouble with the door, getting it open. Something's wrong with the lock. I've reported it before. But I'm almost positive it latched when I went out."

"Almost!" Jordy sneered. "Rigging an alibi, eh? Trying to make it look accidental. Carelessness would be bad enough, but a grafting cop I can't and won't stand for. How much did they pay you to leave that door unlocked so they could get in and kill the guy?"

You straightened. "Is that an official accusation, Jordy?"

"I'm bringing charges in the morning!"

You reached for your badge. "You can have my resignation this minute. You won't have to bring charges to get me off the force." Your voice was cold, steady.

"That's what you think," Jordy said, and grabbed your shield. He ripped it off your tunic and tore the cloth, remember? "You're not resigning!" he snarled. "You're relieved of duty—and you're under arrest." He took your gun, pushed you in the cell next to mine and slammed the door.

It was nearly dawn before everybody left and the jail quieted down. Just the two of us were there, you and me.

"That Jordy's a blasted fool," I said then. "He'll never make it stick."

"Of course he won't. Not the bribery charges, anyhow. But leaving that door unlocked is something else again," you said. "It's been needing repairs for a month, but that's no excuse. Jordy'll see that I'm fired for that."

"So what?" I said. "You don't have to be a cop. You're not a cop at heart, anyway. There are other jobs."

You laughed. "Galenburg's a small

town. Once a man is suspected of crookedness he might as well give up. Even if it isn't proved against him, he's behind the eight ball from then on. Heck, it looks like I'll wind up hitting the road like you, old-timer."

"Now cut that out!" I said. "That's no way to talk, and it isn't any kind of life for a decent kid like you to think about." I meant it. I knew. I'd been through it. "The thing that worries me, all this is mostly my fault."

"Why? Just because I brought you here to jail and then forgot to make sure the front door was locked?"

"That's only part of it. I had to shoot off my mouth to Jordy. I had to suggest maybe there was a heel on his force. That turned the heat your way."

"Skip it," you said. "After all, you had to give yourself an out, the way Jordy was browbeating you because you claimed you didn't see the murderers."

"Oh, sure, skip it," I growled. "Forget I was yellow." Then I said, "You know, kid, I've been thinking."

"About what?"

"Those killers. They came back here and bumped Shorty because he was going to put the finger on them for croaking a bank watchman. They must be pretty desperate if they're ready to murder anybody who might testify against them or identify them."

"That's obvious," you said.

"Well, if they came back to kill Shorty, they might come back again to kill another witness."

"What other witness?"

"Me," I whispered.

"But you said you didn't see them!"

"I could change my mind, couldn't I? It would be like setting a trap. I'd be the bait."

"I don't get it, old-timer. I don't follow you."

"You will when I explain it. Look, it goes back to something you told me about your dad being a cartoonist, a newspaper artist. That's what gave me the idea." I didn't mention that Shorty told me, before he died, how he had a son about your age. There wasn't any point in bringing that up.

"What idea?" you asked me.

I made my voice persuasive "Supposing I was like your father, a sketch artist turned tramp. Supposing I claim I could draw pictures of the two gunsels who killed Shorty."



"Can you?"

"Heck no," I said. "In the first place I can't sketch a lick. I couldn't make a straight line with a T-square and rule. Besides, my hands are all raw where I hit the gravel when I got kicked off that freight train tonight. I couldn't grip a pencil properly if I had to. My bad hands are part of the scheme," I added.

You still didn't get it.

"Sure you do," I said. "Supopse it goes on the radio and in the newspapers that I'm going to sketch pictures of those two gunsels, soon as my hands heal. Maybe it will scare them into coming back to kill me. If so, you'll be set for them."

"No, that wouldn't work. Even if it did, why should you risk your life? Something might slip. You might get what Shorty got. And it's no concern of yours. No, old-timer, I can't let you do it."

"I don't see how you can stop me," I said.

**B**EFORE noon I had told my carefully prepared lie to the authorities. And the reporters. I made headlines. I got top billing on the radio newscasts. I was moved over to a newer, safer jail at the county seat, twenty miles away, and I got more attention than I'd had in years. A doctor bandaged my hands. I was bathed, fed—and watched. They put a guard outside my cell and kept him there, even when I was giving interviews to the newspapermen and network broadcasters.

There were plenty of those interviews. Always with the unvarying questions: What was my name? Whisky Bill, just Whisky Bill. No last name? No; I'd forgotten my last name. When would I be able to hold a drawing pencil and sketch those murderers? Soon, I hoped. Was I sure I could draw accurate likenesses? Positive. Accurate enough for the cops to identify the gunsels and pick them up? Absolutely. Just give me time.

Late that evening you came to see me. You were wearing civilian clothes instead of your police uniform, and you told me you'd been officially suspended from duty but released from jail on bond pending investigation of Jordy's bribery charges. You were worried about me, you said. You wanted me to admit I'd been lying, remember? You said that was the only way I could get out of danger, before it was too late.

It made me feel good, down deep inside, to know you felt that way. It was the first

time in a long while that anybody had given a hang whether I lived or died. But then I thought about the murdered man, Shorty, and the things he'd said to me, and the way he had looked at me with his dead, staring eyes.

"I'm going through with it, kid," I told you.

"But suppose the killers don't come back?" you said. "Suppose the stunt doesn't work, and then when your hands get well you'll be asked to draw those sketches, and you can't do it because you aren't an artist. The police will know you were bluffing, then—and they'll throw the book at you."

I laughed. Maybe it would be okay to spend a few years behind bars, I said. At least I'd have regular meals and be sure of some place to sleep nights. And then some more newspaper reporters came to see me.

There were two of them, showing their credentials to the turnkey up front. He seemed satisfied, and brought the two guys back toward my cell. They wore gabardine trench coats and frowsy hats, with cards lettered "Press" stuck in the hat bands. The jailer indicated me by aiming his thumb.

"That's the artist," he said.

Then the two guys aimed at me, too, but not with their thumbs. They pulled automatics.

That jailer was brave. You have to give him that. He was dumb, maybe, but he was brave. He threw himself at the murderers and he got a bullet through his stomach for his bravery. Then you came out with a .38 Police Positive, and started blasting at the killers.

Me, I went down on the floor of my cell and stayed down. That was twice I'd been a coward. But you stood there and kept pulling your trigger, fast and straight. You had six shots against those two automatics with full clips—but you made yours count. Whatever it takes to be a good cop, you had.

You mowed those scum down. You mowed them down, and I didn't even get a scratch. I owed my life to you, for what little it was worth. You took a slug in the arm, and another nicked your ribs, but you nailed the guys who wanted to rub me out. You were even smart enough not to kill them. You wanted them to live long enough to make a confession.

And they did. They confessed that bank heist and the watchman's murder and the



killing of Shorty, and they cleared you by stating they had found the Galenburg jail door locked and had opened it with a burglar's gimmick.

That certainly put Jordy in his place, didn't it, copper? He ate plenty of crow, the fat-head.

Next day I came to see you in the hospital, remember? Just before I headed for the freight yards. You thanked me for using myself as bait for a killer-trap, and you asked me if I didn't want to stay around Galenburg. You said you'd get me a job, and if I wanted a place to live I could have the spare room in your little house.

"There must be some kind of work you can do, even though you're not a sketch artist." You winked at me and grinned like a schoolboy. "How about it, old-timer?"

"No," I said. My voice sounded funny, sort of choked up. But I cleared my throat. "No, kid. Much obliged, but I've got itchy feet. I have to ramble. Whisky Bill isn't a guy that can stay put." I didn't tell you I wanted to take you up on your offer. I wouldn't even admit it to myself. I couldn't see you being saddled with an old soak like me, a bum, a no-good drunkard.

You asked me a straight question, then. "Why did you do what you did? Why did you risk your life to help nab those murderers?" you wanted to know.

"I did it for Shorty," I said, which was half true, anyhow. "He was like me, a misfit, a guy that had tough breaks. He told me something about himself that night, a little while before he got killed. How he'd had a wife and kid, a son, a son just about your age, was the way he put it. And he died alone, with nobody to help him. I had to make it up to him."

"I—see," you said softly. We shook hands, and I walked out.

But lately I've been thinking about the look that came into your eyes, and it bothers me. It bothers me, copper, because I'm afraid maybe I handed you a wrong steer. The way I talked about Shorty, and him having a son your age, and that look in your eyes—as if it suddenly dawned on you that Shorty could have been your old man and got knocked off before you could even call him Dad.

I don't want you thinking that. I don't want you thinking maybe your pop was a mobster and a squealer.

I'm out on the West Coast, writing this. I cadged some paper from a barkeep, along with a couple of shots of rye. I pan-handled it the way I always do, by drawing a picture of the barkeep—a quick cartoon sketch, the kind I've been doing for years. Except this time I signed the sketch. I put my name on the bottom of it: Willard Patterson.

Take good care of yourself, son.

***"That Strange Tapping Sound! I Don't Understand It—  
and the Door's Locked. . ."***

MRS. WALKER was in the grip of fear as she ushered the Phantom and Frank Havens to Leonard De Castro's room. Van had to force the door, putting all his powerful muscles into play. As they entered the room, they heard the tapping sound. . . .

It came from behind the door of an adjoining storage room. Swiftly Van opened the door—and there, hanging from a short length of rope, the frail body of the Brazilian millionaire hung limply. As Havens and Van stared at it, a fresh gust of wind made the corpse swing back and forth.

The tapping sound that had frightened Mrs. Walker came when the heels of the dead man's shoes struck against a trunk standing up-ended on top of a barrel!

This breath-taking scene is only one of the many exciting incidents in the mystery novel of the year—THE CASE OF THE BIBLE MURDERS, by Robert Wallace, coming next issue! It's a thrill-a-minute yarn featuring the Phantom at his sleuthing best—look forward to it!





# COLD TURKEY

By O. B. MYERS

When an errant husband and a beautiful redhead supposedly run off to Atlantic City together, Private Eye Nick Morely goes a-hunting for them and winds up with a ton of trouble!



**J**OHN RODGERS, the boss man, came into my office with a slip of paper in his hand and a certain look in his eye.

"I promised my sister I'd take her up to New Haven to a football game, this week-end," I

said hastily.

It did no good. "This is Friday morning, my dear Nick Morely, 9:33 A.M. You've still got all day today to dig up a missing husband."

I sighed and threw the morning paper in the basket. "The things these women can mislay. What is he, a drunk?"

"She'll tell you herself. Something about a traffic accident."

Rodgers tossed the slip of paper on my desk. On it was written, Mrs. Molly Crimm, and an address in the upper reaches of the Bronx.

"Maybe you can get a start on the leg-work today, and then pick it up again on Monday." But he turned in the doorway to take all the joy out of that statement. "Bartley sent her to us."

I groaned as the door closed. Bartley is assistant manager of one of the biggest hotels in New York, a man for whose good will the old man would shave off what little hair he has left. That meant that I'd stay on this case until it was cleaned up, week-end or no week-end. To a private eye with a client, a day is twenty-four hours long, and every week has seven days—some weeks eight.

And just to halve my zest, it was raining, with a cold, gloomy persistence that promised that it meant to keep on raining for at least the rest of November.

I found the address in the Bronx, on a side street just off Gun Hill Road. It

was a two-family house, clapboard and shingle, decidedly in need of paint and repair, in the middle of a blockful of similar two-family houses. I pushed the button that said Crimm, and a minute later a woman peeked past the dingy lace curtain at me and then opened the door.

She was probably only in her thirties, but woman was the only word that fitted her. Lacklustre brown hair dangled lankly over the shoulders of a house dress that in the course of many washings had shrunk, but not in the right places. Her nose was pinched and pink; her eyes, which might once have been liquid hazel pools, now were clouded with worry and frustration. Her mouth was suspicious.

I told her who I was. She said, "Oh, yes, Mr. Morely! Will you come in?" and opened the door just far enough for me to squeeze through. The furniture in the front room looked like an illustration out of a tabloid ad: 10% down, and easy payments until you're sick of it. I took off my hat, but kept on my waterproof. She must have noticed the way I looked around the room.

"Now don't worry about your fee, young man. I've got plenty of money to pay your expenses. As long as they're reasonable, of course. I own this house, and everything in it. The car, too, even though it's registered in Jack's name, it was my money paid for it."

"My boss worries about the money part," I told her, "so why should I? Tell me about—er, Jack, is it?"

"His first name is really Jackson. Jackson W. Crimm. Seven years we've been married, and he does *this* to me. The wretch!"

She didn't cry, but her face twisted uncontrollably. It dawned on me that what she felt was anger, not grief.





Mike was still trying to get his fingers on that gun, but my grip on his wrist prevented him from doing so



"When did you see him last?"

"Tuesday morning, when he left. He works downtown. Usually he goes by subway, but that morning he took the car. I don't know why. He didn't tell me. But I can guess." She spoke in short, jerky sentences, as if anxious to get rid of words that hurt her.

"How can you guess, Mrs. Crimm?"

But she was telling it in her own way. "I heard nothing from him, not a word. Until Wednesday noon, I got this."

She dug into the front of the house dress, and came up with a well crumpled telegram. It had been sent from Bordentown, New Jersey at 10:17 on Wednesday, and read, "SUDDEN BUSINESS TRIP FEW DAYS—SEE YOU NEXT WEEK LOVE—JACK."

I nodded. "That's probably it. He knew he had a trip coming up, so he took the car when he—"

"No, no, you don't understand. He never travels on business, except once or twice a year to the factory, and that's in Waterbury, Connecticut. Besides, he couldn't be down in New Jersey with the car. The car was all smashed up in an accident, Tuesday night. He's down there with *her*. Don't you see? Bordentown is down toward Atlantic City. He must have gone over there to send the telegram, just to fool me. He's in Atlantic City, with that red-head—the snake!"

I wasn't quite sure who she meant was a snake. I raised my eyebrows and murmured, "Red-head?"

"His secretary. Miss Bender, her name is; Miss Carol Bender." She spat out the name as if she were getting rid of a mouthful of castor oil. "Very efficient, he keeps telling me. Oh, so efficient! Now look what she's got him into. It's perfectly obvious. That's what he was doing in Yonkers at seven o'clock in the evening. Driving her home. She lives in Yonkers. I *know* that."

I began to have the feeling that I was listening to a record that had been played often before. The melody was clear, but the accompaniment was still a little foggy. "Yonkers?" I said. "How do you know he was in Yonkers, and when?"

"That's where the accident happened. Gorling Street, I think they said. He ran into a truck, or a truck ran into him. I don't know. Insurance investigators have been here about it, they know more

than I do. The car's in the garage, just around the corner on Gun Hill Road. He called them up—but he couldn't call me."

I scribbled some names and addresses on the back of an envelope. There are always half a dozen blank envelopes in my pocket for that purpose. I never use a notebook; a notebook makes some people shut up like a clam. There is something methodic and permanent about entering facts in a book, no matter how small, that frightens them, but they don't seem to mind the informality of a crumpled envelope.

I asked a few more questions and then stood up.

"I'll see what I can do, Mrs. Crimm."

"Tell him to come home," she said. Her mouth made itself grim and straight. "Tell him I'll give him just twenty-four hours. If he isn't here then, he need never enter my door again."

I lifted my arm to look pointedly at my wrist watch, and repeated, "Twenty-four hours?"

She hesitated, and turned a little paler. "Well—forty-eight hours."

I nodded, and put on my hat. I could see that no matter what he had done, she would be only too happy to get her husband back, any time.

**T**HE garage on Gun Hill Road was a big place, but half empty in the middle of the day. It was devoted chiefly to storage, but there was a small shop in the back. A greasy man in dungarees stuck his head out from under a running-board to answer my questions.

"Yeah, it's over there in the corner. Mr. Crimm phoned in Wednesday morning for us to send a wrecker up to Yonkers after it. There's been a couple insurance guys here to look at it, already. But I don't think Crimm figures on collectin'. He said over the phone that the accident was his fault."

"Did he say anything about a trip he was taking?"

"I dunno. It was Al he talked to."

"Is Al around?"

"Not today. Fridays he's off."

I strolled casually over to the corner at which he had jerked his head. The car was a Nash coupe about six or eight years old, but outwardly in good condition, as if it hadn't been driven much. The left rear fender and the right front one were both crumpled, as if it had been squeezed diagonally between a heavy



vehicle and some pretty solid obstruction, and the right front wheel had a drunken twist to it. The force of the squeeze had warped the chassis, so that the right-hand door would not latch, but hung open several inches. The repair job was going to be expensive.

I pulled the door open the rest of the way and poked around inside. The glove compartment held the usual miscellaneous collection of road maps, empty envelopes, a dirty spark plug, a couple of small tools, and a box of throat lozenges. No gloves. On the dash was a gummed sticker with the printed name and address of the Gun Hill Road garage, and the mileage at the last oil change pencilled in a blank space. The figure was 37,600. Right now the speedometer showed 38,262.

For no particular reason I ran my hand around between the cushion and the upholstery. My fingertips came up with a small metal object. When I got it in the light, I saw that it was an earring. Inside a pear-shaped loop of gold was set a single initial: the letter C. Crimm, I thought? I shook my head. It wasn't heavy enough to be solid; probably gold-plated. I dropped it in my pocket.

I walked part way back toward the shop and asked about a telephone. The voice from under the running-board said, "There's a coin-box in a booth up by the front door."

I called the Yonkers Police, mumbled something indistinct about an insurance company, and inquired about the accident on Tuesday. When I got the right man, he read me the routine report. At 6:52 P.M. a truck and a car had tangled on Gorling Street, two blocks west of Warburton Avenue. Car seriously damaged; truck not. Police on scene ten minutes later. Names of drivers . . . I wrote on a fresh envelope, "Tony Flaggin . . . Downtown Trucking Corp." and an address on Crosby Street.

"Was anybody hurt?" I asked.

"The driver of the coupe was taken to St. John's Hospital, on Ashburton Avenue, in the truck. He was examined, treated for minor injuries, and discharged immediately. No one else hurt."

"He wasn't seriously injured?"

"Apparently not, from what the doctor reported."

I said, "Thanks," and hung up. I had nothing to give me a clue as to where

Jackson Crimm might have gone after that but I knew well enough where I meant to inquire next. I went over to Broadway, drove downtown, and parked on West 63rd.

The offices of the Terragon Manufacturing Company, kitchen ware and utensils, occupied half a floor. Behind a walnut railing a blonde sat at a PBX board manicuring her nails. She looked at me curiously when I asked for Mr. Crimm.

"I don't think he's in. Would you like to speak to his secretary?"

I said that would be fine.

**H**IS secretary, when she answered the summons from an inner office, was certainly fine to look at. Her warm bronze curls were feather-cut, and set like a little cap at a sort of devil-may-care angle on her small head. Her eyes were wide and blue, her nose tip-tilted just a trifle over a small, warm mouth with a bee-stung lower lip. Her figure was the cuddly type, and she walked as if she weren't ashamed to let you know it.

"Mr. Crimm is not in today. Can I help you Mr.—er—"

I looked her straight in the eye and said, "Nick Morely. You could tell me where he is."

Her forehead crinkled in surprise. "I'm afraid I can't tell you that. Are you—are you from the factory?"

For the benefit of the blonde I said, "Yes." At the same time I held out my hand, cupped so that she could see what lay in it, but the blonde couldn't. "Shall we go into his office?"

The red-head started to gasp, caught herself, and turned on a heel. I followed her across a large room filled with desks and filing cabinets and carefully shielded glances of curiosity. She held the door of a private office for me; after we were both inside, she set her back firmly against it, as if to hold me prisoner.

"Where is he?" she demanded in a tense half whisper.

I sat down in a straight-backed chair and fumbled leisurely for a cigarette. "That's what I came to ask you, Miss Bender."

"But he—didn't he give you *that*?"

"The ear-ring? No. I found it in the car, down behind the seat. C might stand for Crimm, except that on such things people generally use the initial of



the first name. A name like Carol, for example."

Her eyes darted quickly from one side to the other. Then she drew herself up stiffly, and tried to freeze her lovely features into a stubborn mask. "I know nothing at all about it."

"What sort of ear-rings were you wearing on Tuesday?"

"On Tuesday? Why, I—I don't remember."

I made a motion as if to rise. "Perhaps some of the other girls out in the office will remember."

"No, no!" she cried. I could see her body wilt. Her voice quivered. "Give it to me. Please—it's mine."

I put my hand in my pocket, and said quietly, "When you tell me exactly what happened Tuesday evening."

Her eyes fastened themselves on the toe of my right shoe. "He was driving me home. He happened to have the car, for a change. We where in Yonkers, on Gorling Street, when the truck hit us. We were going—"

"Just a minute. This office closes at five?" She nodded. "And 63rd Street, to Yonkers—three quarters of an hour. Say a little more, loafing. The truck hit you at 6:52. Hm—that leaves just about an hour."

There were red spots in her cheeks. "He parked at the foot of Gorling Street, facing the river."

"I see. And what did you do there?" The red spots grew so big and bright that I went right on, "All right don't answer that. We'll leave that to my imagination."

Her eyes flared up at me. "I'd rather tell you. He put his arms around me, and made love to me. Finally I kissed him. Once—or maybe twice. That's all. I didn't want to."

"You didn't want to? Why, don't you like it?"

The corner of her rosebud mouth twitched ever so faintly. "I like it well enough. But not with him. He's a married man."

"You knew that? Then why did you go out with him?"

She spread her hands, palms up. "He's my boss. Men expect that from a secretary, these days. If I kept saying no every time, pretty soon I wouldn't have any job. What can a girl do?"

"Are all men like that?" I asked out of sheer curiosity.

"All I've ever worked for," she said bitterly.

"All right. That's your problem. Now it's 6:52."

"Gorling is a dead end street," she said "and rather narrow. Instead of turning, he was backing up, to the first corner. Not very fast, but we were out in the middle of the street when the truck came down the hill. He must have twisted the wheel the wrong way. The truck hit us, and slammed the car up against a lamp post."

**S**HE stopped, and bit her lip. "The door on my side flew open. I was thrown that way. Before I knew it, I was on my feet on the sidewalk. I ran around the corner, and kept on going."

I raised my eyebrows. "No one saw you?"

"I don't think so. I thought right away of the consequences. Questions, witnesses, names, and so forth. Jack's wife would hear; it would be terrible. For him, as well as for me. So I ran."

"Without even waiting to see if he was hurt?"

"Oh, I knew he wasn't hurt. He jumped right out on the other side, and started to yell at the truck driver."

I studied her for a moment. Part of the stuff the Yonkers Police had given me over the phone was the statement of a witness; a man who had come to his window at the sound of the crash. He had seen several figures, arguing; then he had seen them pick one man up off the cobblestones and put him in the back of the truck, which had then driven off in the direction of the hospital. A man who is flat on his back, unconscious, I thought, does not yell at a truck driver. Still, a man might be shaken up by a crash without knowing it, so that his knees folded on him a minute later. It was quite possible.

"Why did you ask if he had given me this ear-ring?" I asked.

"I thought he'd sent you. You see, he had one of them. It caught on his necktie, while we were—were in the car."

I visualized the scene, and smiled faintly as I suggested, "While you were not letting him kiss you more than twice?"

Her cheeks were pink again. "That's right. He put it in his pocket; said he wanted to keep it. I tried to get it back, but he wouldn't give it to me. Only then



when I got home, I found that I had lost both of my ear-rings. You must have found the other one."

I nodded, and asked casually, "And when did you see him next?"

"I haven't seen him since." Her eyes widened. "I haven't even heard a word from him. I'm—I'm frightened."

"His wife hasn't seen him, either," I told her about the telegram. "Any idea what he would be doing in Borden-town?"

"No, not the slightest." Her chin went up. "I'm not going down there to meet him, if that's what you're thinking."

"I wasn't thinking," I assured her, and got to my feet. "It's funny, but I'm inclined to believe what you tell me. Even that stuff about only two kisses I believe. Though I can understand why a man wouldn't stop trying—even a married man."

She smiled just enough to give a hint of what her smile would really be like if she turned it on full power. "I didn't say he stopped trying. But you're not going to tell Mrs. Crimm?"

"Not about you—if you promise to let me know the first minute you hear anything about her husband."

She promised, and I walked out. On the way down in the elevator I wondered if I was being a damned fool.

I left the car where it was, ate lunch in a joint on Columbus Circle, and rode the subway downtown. The address the Yonkers Police had given me of the Downtown Trucking Corp., on Crosby Street proved to be the mouth of an alley between two grimy loft buildings. The rain made the concrete slippery and cold, and the edge of my hat-brim dribbled drops onto my nose.

The alley ended in a paved yard hemmed in by towering brick walls, a wooden fence topped by strands of barbed wire, and a wide, half open shed. One five-ton truck stood in the yard, and two others under the meager cover; on all of them was painted crudely, as if by an amateur hand, DOWNTOWN TRUCKING. At one end of the lean-to a small office was partitioned off; it was just as cold and damp in the office as it was outside.

A swivel chair squealed raucously as its occupant wheeled to peer at me inquiringly. He was a big, raw-boned man, and wore two army field jackets one on top of the other, making him bigger. He

had iron-gray hair, the lumpy nose of an ex-pug, and his small dark eyes were scornful when I broached my business.

"That case is closed," he told me flatly. "My truck ain't hurt none; I ain't claimin' a nickel. The other guy's insurance snoop was here yestiddy; I signed a release for him. Now I forget it. See, there's a copy of the blasted thing."

I looked. It was a standard form waiving all claims.

"But what about the other guy? He might sue."

"Leave him sue! He can't get nothin'."

"Is that truck around here now?"

"No, it's out. But I tell yuh, it ain't hardly scratched."

"How about the driver, Tony Flaggin'?"

"Naw, he ain't here neither. I give all the information to the cops, and to the insurance guys, already. Go ask them."

"So you think the driver of the car was crazy, eh? Why, was his behavior peculiar after the accident?"

His little black eyes quinted at me suspiciously. "How do I know if he's crazy? He don't know nothin' about drivin' a car, that's all I know. Go ask him if he's crazy. I'm busy!"

**I** THANKED him for nothing, and closed the door behind me. I paused to turn up my collar under the shed, and took a quick glance at the trucks parked there. The one nearest me had a buckled right front fender, and there were deep scratches in what was left of the greenish paint. But then two of its other fenders were buckled and there were scratches anywhere you looked.

As I moved out into the rain, a short, stocky man entered the yard from the alley. A shout followed him, echoing plainly between the blank walls on either side.

"What time d'you say, Tony?"

"Five o'clock!" the short man shouted back over his shoulder, and swerved his path toward the office. As he came closer I saw that he was not actually much shorter than I was. He looked so because his chest was both wide and thick. He walked with his head down and his hands shoved in his pockets, his feet flat and solid on the concrete.

He wore no hat, and the rain made his black hair sleek and glossy. He had the complexion of a man who needs a shave twice a day; his jowls were darkly shad-



owed, but one seemed considerably darker than the other. High on his left temple was a two-inch strip of court plaster, soiled from being fingered.

I tried a long shot. "Tony Flaggin?"

He stopped, nodded almost imperceptibly, and stared at me without speaking.

"You were driving the truck that was in that crack-up in Yonkers three days ago, weren't you?"

He spoke slowly, with heavy emphasis. "So what?"

I shrugged. "I thought nobody got hurt. But it looks as if you got bunged up a little."

"What, this?" His fingers touched the adhesive. "That didn't come from the accident. I got that in a little brawl with a guy, down here at the corner, Tuesday night."

I looked at his powerful shoulders, and thought, If the brawl marked you up that much, I wonder what your antagonist looks like.

"So you're not claiming any injuries, under your insurance?"

His glance went briefly over my shoulder, toward the office window, then came back to my face. "Ask Mike Gallo—the boss. He handles all that insurance stuff."

I could see that I was right back where I had started, so I lifted my hand, said, "Well, I guess I can forget it," and walked out to the street. Then I wasted an hour at the Aetna Casualty. Those insurance people don't pass out information freely, either. They showed me the original of the signed release that closed the matter as far as they were concerned. No, they had not heard from Mr. Crimm but if any claims were presented, they were prepared to handle them.

On the way uptown in the subway, I tried to add up what I'd got. The total was not impressive. Jackson Crimm, philandering—or trying to philander—with his secretary, had been involved in a minor traffic accident, after which, for some reason, he had been loath to return home. He had phoned his garage the next morning, and he had wired his wife from Bordentown, New Jersey. Since then, nothing.

There was something phoney somewhere, but I couldn't put my finger on it. Crimm had admitted fault, yet the owner of the truck was claiming no damages. Mike Gallo had at least one truck with a dented fender, and his driver had

some contusions. Even if neither were the result of the accident in Yonkers, he could easily have run through a claim for fifty bucks. It was done every day, and Mike did not have the look of a man with a scrupulous regard for the truth.

Back in my car, I sat for several minutes thinking. I wanted to dodge the trip to Bordentown. Crimm's telegraph was a lead but I had tried to check senders of wires before and nine times out of ten I've drawn a blank. A man doesn't have to identify himself to send a telegram, and it's sheer luck if the clerk remembers one out of hundreds. It would take me the rest of the afternoon and half the night to drive to Bordentown and back, and if I came back with nothing, I hadn't a chance of closing the case before the week-end. I decided to try Yonkers first.

**S**AIN'T JOHN'S HOSPITAL was a big place, but the receptionist was very helpful. "Tuesday evening? Let me see; they're on duty every three days, in Emergency. Yes, you're in luck. Dr. Hilary will be on again this evening. I'll try to locate him for you."

I sat down while a musical gong bonged out call numbers. Dr. Hilary, when he came in, proved to be a middle-aged man with thinning blond hair and eyes that crinkled at the corners. At first he couldn't remember what I was talking about. He said something about checking his files and started for the door, but just before reaching it turned back, snapping his fingers.

"Ah, yes! Now I recall him perfectly! Crimm! The man who left without wearing his coat. Of course."

I looked blank. It often encourages disclosures.

"He wasn't badly hurt. I took three stitches in his scalp—no, four, and bathed a contusion on his jaw. I suppose he'd been thrown against the steering wheel. In twenty minutes he was good as new. He wore a blue suit, and when he came in he was carrying the coat and vest over his arm. When he left, he insisted on carrying his suit coat that way. It was cold outside, that night, remember? I tried to make him put it on, but he wouldn't do it. Struck me as odd."

"Was he upset by his shaking up, do you suppose?"

"He didn't appear so. No broken bones or internal injuries. And he acted quite normal, while he was here. Unless you'd



call it abnormal to admit fault. He confessed to me that the accident had been entirely due to his own carelessness."

"Oh, he told you that, too, did he?"

I asked a few more questions, thanked the doctor for his trouble, and left. I stood on the top step for several minutes, mulling over what he had told me. It was beginning to grow dark and the tower clock in the next block said five minutes to five.

I turned around and re-entered the foyer. There was a telephone booth there. I slid into it, called the Terragon Manufacturing Company, and asked for Miss Bender.

"She just went out toward the elevator; maybe I can catch her," a voice said sweetly.

After a minute I recognized the red-head's throaty purr on the wire.

"Nick Morely," I said, then asked, "How much did Jackson Crimm weigh? I mean, how big a man was he?"

"Why, I don't know. A hundred and fifty, perhaps, not more. He was taller than I am, but rather slight."

"Okay. What kind of a suit was he wearing on Tuesday?"

The silence lasted so long that I said, "Hello?"

"I was thinking," she said. "It's awfully hard to remember. I know all of his suits, but that particular day—I think it was the gray one. A dark gray herring-bone—but I'm not absolutely sure. Why, have you found out anything? Where are you, in Bordentown?"

I told her no, I was in Yonkers, that I had found out very little, and hung up. Then I went out and sat in my car for a while, trying to fit together the pieces I had. When they wouldn't fit, I eased down the hill to Warburton Avenue, turned right, and followed it until I came to Gorling Street. I turned downhill again—all the side streets in that part of Yonkers slope steeply toward the Hudson River.

For a couple of short blocks I was between seedy tenements, frowning at me through the drizzle. Beyond the second corner on the left stretched a wide expanse of vacant ground. On the right was the cellar of a burned-out building, long since tumbled full of bricks and rubbish. Beyond it stood what appeared to be an unused warehouse, dilapidated, paintless, its sightless windows staring gloomily into the rainy twilight. Its rear wing had

been burned out, and long ago planked up temporarily to support the sagging roof. Beyond that one building, after another open lot, rolled the gray river.

I drove slowly to the end of the street, where a mouldy bulkhead kept me from sliding into the sullen water. There, having no red-head to make love to, and nothing to look at but dismal, oily ripples, I turned around, crept back almost to the corner, and parked.

This was the scene of the accident. I got out and looked it over. After ten minutes I knew as much as when I started. The cobblestones offered no clues, and a few vague scratches on the lamp post might have been made the previous Tuesday, or the previous decade. But standing there peering toward the river, a question slowly rose in my mind.

**W**HY had that truck been here at all? I knew why Crimm had entered this block, but it dawned on me that there was no conceivable reason for the truck to do the same. It was dead end. On one side was a vacant lot, on the other only a single abandoned warehouse. Abandoned? I'd soon find out.

The front end of the building had two doors and the smaller one was nailed shut. The other was a vertical lift of corrugated steel, big enough to admit the largest trucks. It was fastened to the sill at the bottom by a padlock as large as my two fists; the keyhole of the padlock was solid with rust.

I made a complete circuit of the walls, stepping over stones, cinders, tin cans, and rubbish. The few windows were boarded up, and for some reason which I did not then grasp I could see nothing between the cracks of the loose planking at the rear, even by using my flash. I was nearing the front again when I noticed the bologna.

Two or three slices, one of them half eaten, lay on the ground next to a crumpled sheet of wrapping paper. There seemed nothing startling about that, but when I hunkered on my heels and felt them, I could tell that they were comparatively fresh. Not right out of the delicatessen, but cut within a day or two at most.

No one in his right mind, I reasoned, would come out onto that wind and rain swept tundra to eat his lunch in mid-November. Yet they had been thrown



there recently. And they lay within six feet of the window nearest the front of the building.

It took me ten minutes to get the combination to that window. It was boarded up like the rest, but some of the nails were false, and I finally found a board that unlatched something when pushed to the left, and the whole frame swung inward on hinges.

I used my flash first. It showed me a long, empty interior, musty and cold under a leaky roof, the wooden floor covered with a layer of dust or of mud, depending on where you looked. I lifted my heels over the sill and dropped inside. Now I saw why I had been unable to peer through those cracks in the rear; tarpaulins had been nailed up on the inside of that patched-up rear wall to keep out some of the weather—and perhaps to keep out prying eyes as well.

A small cubicle that had once been an office was partitioned off in front. It contained nothing but dust, one broken chair, and three kerosene lanterns that looked quite new. Backing out, I noticed the cases that were stacked against the partition. There were ten or twelve of them, and they were quite new, too. They were marked with the trade mark of a familiar brand of aspirin, and any one of them was too big to have come in through the window.

That made me take another look at the big steel door. From the inside I could see that the sill was rotted loose; by using the chain hoist, which was in position, that door could be raised, sill and all. It wasn't hard to see, from the absence of dust on the chain, that it had been raised recently.

I moved slowly toward the rear, the circle of my flash playing along the floor. Many of the nail-heads stuck up above the worn flooring, and were polished shiny. Suddenly I stopped. Under my light there were nail-heads that did not protrude above the planking—but they were shiny, too.

I had seen a broken section of old spring-leaf in the rubbish outside. I found it again, came back, and began to pry. After the first board the rest were easy, especially as the nails had recently been pulled out and then driven back in the same holes. When I had lifted four or five planks I stopped.

Under them was a layer of concrete. A plank floor on top of a concrete one did

not make sense. But I could see that the concrete did not extend much beyond the last plank I had lifted. The concrete covered an area about three by five feet, and although it was hard to the fingers, it still had a fresh look.

Squatting on my heels, I heard the faintly distant clatter of a trolley on Warburton Avenue, and the rumble of an automobile engine. I should have paid quicker attention to that last, but I was absorbed in my speculations. A harsh voice broke my train of thought moments later.

"Stay right where you are. Don't move!"

My flash lay on the floor, casting a long ellipse across the dusty planking, but not much light into the air. I could see only dimly that a figure was climbing in the window I had left open, and that something glinted in his hand. I seldom carry a gun and he had me dead to rights, anyway.

Footsteps came around behind me, and an arm leaned past my shoulder to pick up the flash. "Stand up!" I stood up. By now I recognized Mike Gallo's voice. "Frisk him, Tony!"

Tony Flaggin vaulted in the window. His hands patted my body expertly, and he shook his head, stepping back.

From behind me Mike's rasping voice demanded, "What in hell are you doin' here, snoop?"

I could think of no deception that would do me the least good. "I'm looking for a turkey for my Thanksgiving dinner," I retorted.

That seemed to give Tony a sardonic amusement. He glanced significantly at the exposed slab of concrete, then back to me, and his face twisted. "You'll be cold turkey, quick enough!"

"Stand him against that back wall there," ordered Mike, "and if he tries to get funny, let him have it!"

**F**LAGGIN slammed me against the back wall with unnecessary roughness, and planted himself in front of me, arms akimbo. I could see from his expression that he hoped I would move. I didn't.

Mike lighted lanterns, and then raised the big door. A third man backed a truck into the opening; a truck on which was lettered, DOWNTOWN TRUCKING. Mike and the driver began loading the cases. They were heavy, and what



would have been quick work for three men was slow for two. It must have taken them nearly fifteen minutes. I was wishing it would take them years.

The last case was slammed into place. The driver lifted the tail gate and hooked his chains. I heard Mike speak to him.

"Move it out in the street, Jake, and then close the door. Tony and I will take care of this slob."

The driver climbed to his seat. Mike came back through the length of the warehouse, dusting his hands. I clenched my teeth.

The scream was so sharp and sudden that it seemed to fill the air with electricity. Our eyes jerked to the window. There stood the red-head, framed from the waist up in the opening by the mellow light of the kerosene lanterns. Her eyes were wide, and her mouth wider. She did not move, but just stood there and let out one piercing scream after another at the top of her lungs.

Things happened fast. Mike had pocketed his gun to swing cases, but now his hand was going for the holster under his armpit. I went by Tony like a rabbit and swung on Mike from the port quarter. I tried for a rabbit punch, but my aim was hurried, and he had a head like a hydrant. He went down, but immediately scrambled to get up.

I jumped on him with both feet, but he caught one ankle and jerked it. I floundered down on top of him. The screaming went right on. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Tony racing full speed for the open door. The truck had moved out, its engine roaring, into the street.

Mike was still trying to get his fingers on that gun. My weight on top of him prevented that, and I was slugging away earnestly at his face. He cursed, and tried to roll on his side. My sprawled legs stopped that, but his knee came up and took me where it hurt. I howled at the stab of pain, and my muscles relaxed involuntarily. We rolled together.

His hand was on the pistol, but I grabbed his wrist. I tried to bite it, but he used his skull to butt my face aside. That did my face no good. From out in the street—it seemed a long way off—I heard the sound of a shot, followed by a rending crash. Mike's hand jerked free.

The broken spring leaf came down hard. The red-head really put her back

into the swing, aimed for Mike's head. The only trouble was that she sliced, and got my skull at the same time. I saw an explosion of blackness, and then saw nothing for quite a long time.

**I**T WAS the raucous pound of an air hammer that brought me to. Each blow seemed to be pounding through my brain. I was flat on my back, looking up into the familiar face of Dr. Hilary. But when I sat up, another face leaned close to mine.

"Are you hurt, Nick? Are you all right? Oh, I was afraid I'd killed you! I didn't mean to hit you, Nick."

I grinned crookedly. "It's all right, Red." I looked at the two men in blue shirts who were attacking the concrete with the air hammer. "Can't we get away from this racket?"

She helped me to my feet, and we moved up toward the front of the warehouse. There was a cop posted in the doorway to the office, and a couple of others on the sidewalk, by an ambulance.

"Nick, it was a blue suit," she told me. "Blue, not gray. I remembered after you hung up. I thought it might be important, so I came right up to tell you. When you said Yonkers, I *thought* you meant where the accident happened. When I got to the corner, I saw your car, but I couldn't find you. Then that truck drove up to this building, and I saw the name on the side. I went and called the police, and a radio car came, but the officers laughed at me, and went away. So I came down to the window by myself."

"We didn't go very far away," grinned one of the cops. "Her story sounded so screwy that we were suspicious, so we stopped around the corner to watch what she did. When she began to scream—"

"All I could do was scream," she said apologetically, "hoping to attract somebody's attention."

"You could have heard her across the river." The cop eyed me. "You'd better stick around, until we see what's under that concrete."

I nodded. "I can tell you right now. You'll find the body of Jackson Crimm, his face probably battered beyond all recognition. If they didn't use acid, you may be able to identify him by fingerprints."

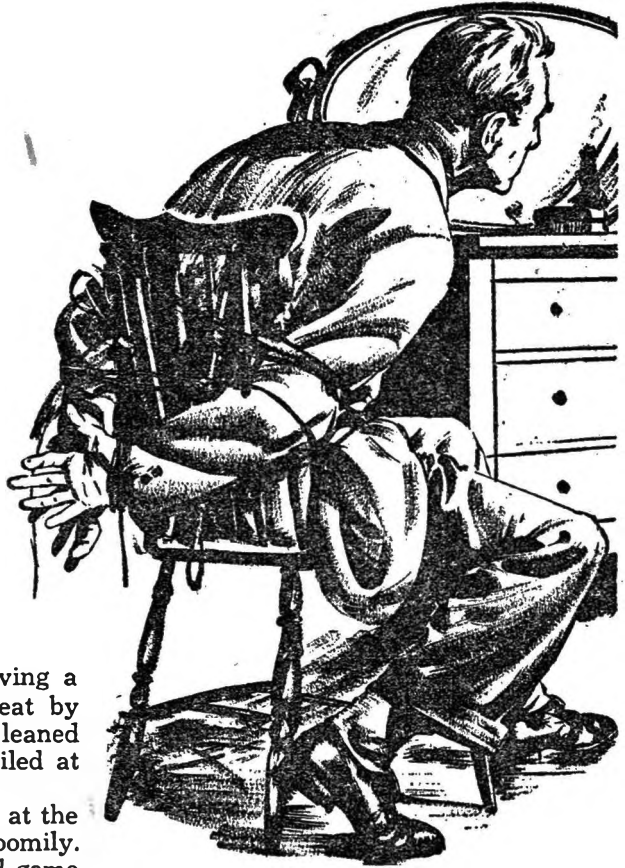
(Continued on page 141)



# The Tree That Died

*By Leonard F. Jones*

*Detective May faces the  
problem of a modern  
Bluebeard's murderous  
crimes—and finds  
the answer in a garden!*



**C**HECK," said the doctor, moving a knight and disclosing a threat by the queen. "And mate." He leaned back in placid satisfaction, and smiled at his opponent.

Detective-Sergeant May frowned at the pieces on the board, and nodded gloomily. "That does it," he admitted. "Third game you've won tonight. You're just too good for me, that's all." He pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, lit one, and puffed the smoke toward the ceiling.

Dr. Bryant, putting the pieces back in the box, glanced at him out of eyes that thirty-five years of practice had not succeeded in dimming.

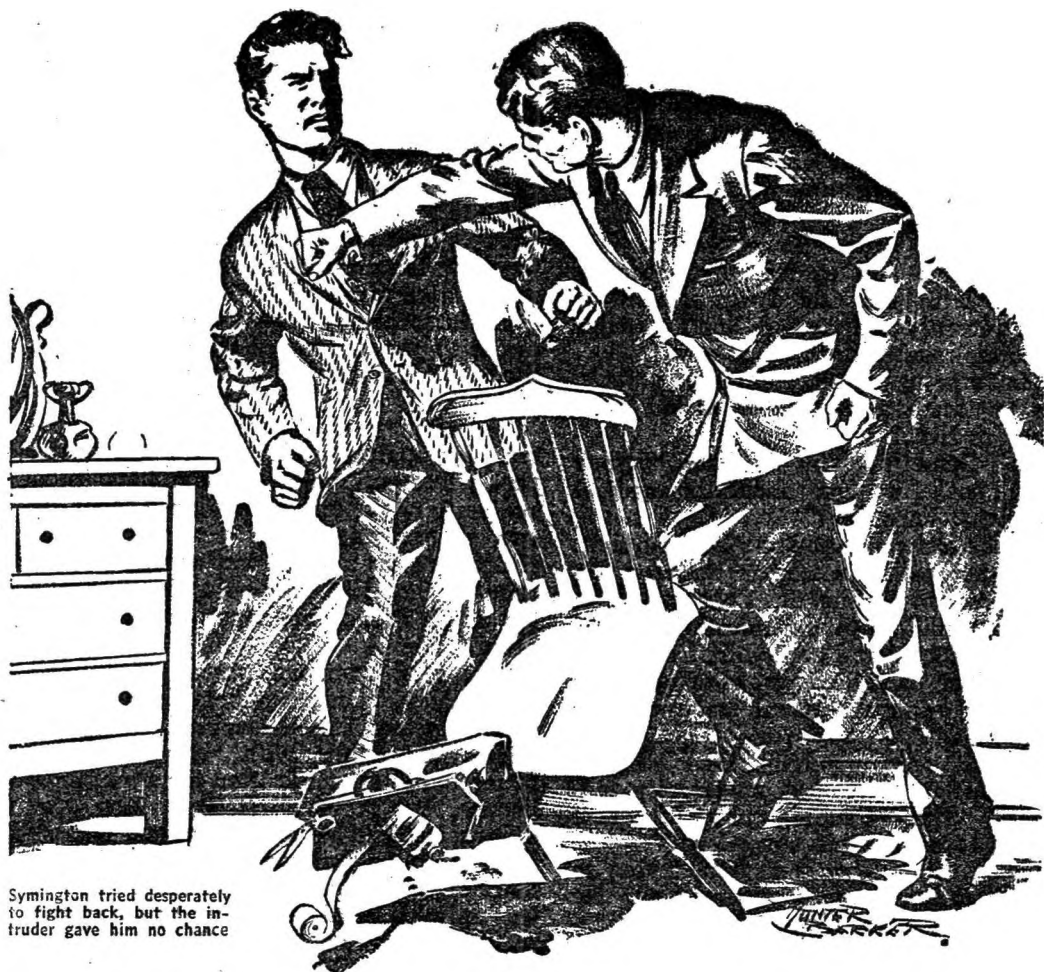
"You weren't putting your mind to it," he said soothingly. "You usually play a better game than that. Let's have it. What's worrying you?"

The younger man looked at him with a rueful smile. "Am I that transparent?" he asked. "You're right, as usual. I have got something on my mind. I'll tell you. Maybe you can give me an idea how to go about settling it."

He glanced speculatively at his cigarette, which was not burning evenly. As he applied a second match Dr. Bryant began charging an ancient briar and leaned back to listen. Retired from his practice the previous year, the doctor often found the unaccustomed leisure heavy on his hands, and his friendship with the younger detective had done much to allay the resultant boredom. In his turn, May had come to appreciate the value of the doctor's keen mind and wide experience as applied to some of his cases.

"It's not a long story," began May, "but I'll have to start at the end, because I'm not sure just where the beginning is. It





Symington tried desperately to fight back, but the intruder gave him no chance

may go back a long time. Maybe too far back for us to find it."

"Sounds promising."

"The commissioner doesn't think so, unfortunately. When I put my theory to him he just laughed and accused me of suffering from an over-active imagination. I only hope he's right. It's not a pleasant suspicion. But pleasant or not, here it is. You know the old Collins place at the north end of town?"

"Quite well," said the doctor. "Been empty for years."

"That's the place. But it's not empty just now. It was rented by a man named Symington about two months ago. He fixed it up a bit, and brought his wife there to live. They'd been married only a few days before that. He's about forty. She gave her age as forty-nine, but it's my guess she was five or six years older, at

the least. A widow, and well off, from what I've been able to make out."

"You used the word 'was,'" commented the doctor pointedly. "Am I to take it she is dead?"

THE detective nodded, and his lips twisted.

"Yes. And what bothers me. It's too pat, and too profitable. She died within a week of coming here. Symington inherited something like forty thousand. In addition, he'd had her insured for twenty thousand more. At a staggering premium, of course, considering her age, but as she died so soon after the policy was taken out only the initial premium had to be paid."

The doctor shrugged. "That sort of thing always makes gossip," he said mildly. "It's quite likely, as you suggest, that he married her for her money. It happens



every day. But fortune-hunting is no crime. What did she die of? An accident?"

"No." May frowned blackly. "If it had been an accident I'd be more sure of my ground. An accident can always be arranged, particularly when two people are living alone. But in this case there's no suggestion of accidental death. She died of pneumonia."

Dr. Bryant raised his eyebrows. "In this weather, and at her age, and especially with the added excitement of being recently married—I don't wonder the commissioner laughed at you."

"That's not quite all," said May quietly. "I'm not such a fool as to go off half-cocked as that."

"Oh? Something's at the back of your mind, I see. But what about the medical certificate? In order?"

"To the last comma. I've gone into that. Symington called a doctor directly she complained of feeling ill. That would be about the middle of the morning. Acted the devoted husband to the hilt, from what I can gather. She died just after noon the same day, after the usual treatment for pneumonia."

"Quick," commented Dr. Bryant thoughtfully. "But not necessarily significant. The attending physician saw nothing to arouse his suspicions?"

"Not a thing. I've seen him, trying to get him to apply for a post-mortem. He won't consider it. Consigned me—metaphorically, of course—to the devil."

"I don't blame him," said the doctor drily. "In his place I'd probably have acted much the same way. Looks to me as if you're barking up an empty tree."

"Think so? All right. We'll forget Symington, then. Instead, let's take the case of a man named Stone, about a year ago, in a little town near Toledo. This Stone married a widow and settled down in a house he had rented previously. No servants. They lived alone, just like Symington and his wife. Honeymooners, if you like.

"But the honeymoon didn't last long. A few days after settling down, Stone's new wife died suddenly. Taken ill about the middle of the morning, dead in a few hours. She left only five thousand in cash, but she had a life policy for twenty-five thousand. The attending physician, summoned by Stone, signed the certificate without hesitation. Strangely enough, the cause of death was pneumonia. Never any question of anything else."

"I'm beginning to see what you're driving at," admitted the doctor grimly. "Go on."

"Yes, it was an interesting parallel, wasn't it? I ran across the account of the Ohio tragedy by accident, and it set me thinking. Stone was about Symington's age. Stone had a car registered in Ohio, and the car was the same make as Symington's here in New York. I got in touch with the Motor Bureau, and I've had the registration checked in each state. The engine number of Stone's car is the same as the engine number of Symington's. But the commissioner still says it's coincidence."

"In other words," summed up the doctor, "Symington has had two wives in the past year, and both of them have died suddenly of pneumonia within a week or two of marriage. No post-mortem in either case, as a physician was in attendance at the time of death. I agree; it's too much of a coincidence to be passed over."

"I'm glad someone agrees with me," sighed May. "Only, what can I do? Using a false name isn't a criminal offense. I might charge him with giving false information in an application for a marriage license, but it wouldn't make any real difference. He'd get off with a fine. There's nothing to do but wait until Symington marries again, and send his third wife—if it is only his third—a mustard plaster and warn her to stay out of drafts."

"Pneumonia," said Dr. Bryant, "is a curious disease in many ways. Medically speaking, the last word hasn't been said about it yet, by a long way. I must confess my curiosity is aroused. Is Symington still in town?"

"Yes. I'm keeping him under observation, in an unofficial sort of way." The detective rose, and stretched. "Well, I'll be getting along now, I think. I'm on the early shift tomorrow."

After the detective had left, Dr. Bryant remained smoking thoughtfully for several minutes. Then he rose and went over to the bookcase which extended the length of one wall. Selecting a volume on toxicology, he carried it back to the chair by the fireplace, and began slowly to turn over the leaves. . . .

**E**ARLY afternoon of the next day found Dr. Bryant walking out to the rambling old mansion known locally as the Collins house, after the man who had



built it about the middle of the last century. It was set back from the road and surrounded by a garden still beautiful in spite of the neglect of years. The doctor paused a moment at the gate, then went up the path and knocked at the great paneled door. The present tenant answered the knock in person.

Luke Symington was a tall, imposing figure, beginning to run a little to fat. He towered over the elderly little doctor like Goliath over David—not an entirely inept comparison, because in spite of his years there was more than a suggestion of youth in the small, trim figure and keen eyes of the older man. But Luke Symington was not given to far-fetched comparisons, and he saw nothing more than the inopportune arrival of an inquisitive stranger.

Inopportune, certainly, for Symington had been interrupted in the process of packing when Dr. Bryant called.

"I trust," said the doctor, after he had explained who he was, "you will not consider my calling to express my sympathy as an impertinence. We are a small community here in Plainstown, and we naturally take an interest in each other's troubles."

Under the circumstances, Symington really had no option but to invite his unwanted guest inside the house. The doctor noted the state of disorder of the interior.

"Moving?" he asked softly.

"Yes," said Symington, with a sigh. "I was getting ready to leave. After what has happened—well, you will readily realize the associations of this house would be too painful for me to remain. So tragic an ending to what I had hoped would be the happiest period of my life. It has left me an embittered man." He sighed again.

"Just so," agreed the doctor noncommittally. "It must have been a great shock to you. So sudden, too. I understand your wife was ill for a matter of a few hours only."

Symington looked at him with a quick, sidelong glance. "Yes, that is quite true," he said, after a moment. "Six hours after she began to feel ill she was dead. Even now it is difficult to realize that I shall never see her again."

sort."

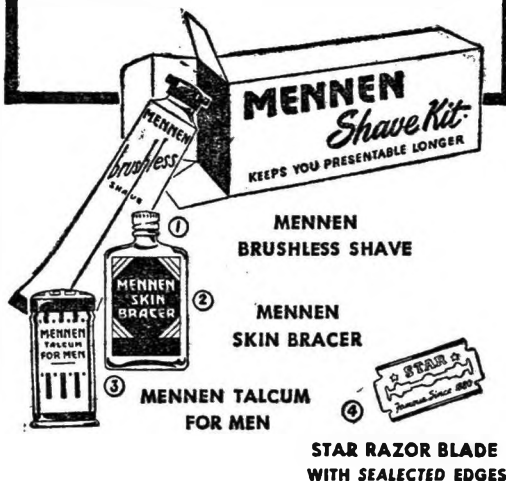
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"My reason for asking is more than vulgar curiosity," explained the doctor. "I am a medical man. Retired, it is true, but still interested in anything of that good."

"I understand. But the doctor who attended her can tell you more about it than I can. He was present most of the day. I can give you his name, if you wish."

"It doesn't really matter," said Dr. Bryant.

Was he wrong, or was Symington anxious to impress on him the fact that medical aid had been promptly summoned?

He glanced about at the discolored walls and cracked ceiling. There did not seem to have been much preparation on Symington's part before moving in. It was almost as if he knew he would not be staying long.

"I can remember when this house was one of the brightest spots in the countryside," he said musingly. "Dances, music, young people. Many's the time I've danced here myself till well on in the morning. But time passes, and everything changes."

Symington agreed, and yawned politely.

Before he left, Dr. Bryant got his host to show him over the place, using a deft persuasiveness that left Symington baffled in his efforts to rid himself of his caller. He acquiesced, though with a bad grace.

It was the garden back of the house that seemed to interest the doctor most. He walked rapidly from place to place, pouring out a voluble flow of reminiscence on times past, interspersed with multisyllabic dissertations on the various plants and trees there. He paused finally in front of a small pear tree, whose leaves were withered and drooping, in contrast to the fresh green of the surrounding foliage.

"Now, that's a pity," said the doctor. "Looks almost as if the roots had been cut, doesn't it? Recent transplanting?"

"No," said Symington briefly. "It was dying when we moved in."

"I see." The doctor paused, frowning at the tree. Then he glanced about. "Fortunately, you have another. I hate to see a fruit garden without a flourishing pear tree."

"I wasn't aware that there were two," said Symington indifferently. "I thought there was only the one."

"That one over there," said the doctor. "There, just behind the summer house."

SYMINGTON took a pace or two to one side to look where the doctor was pointing. When he turned back the doctor was standing where he had left him, "I'm afraid you were mistaken, Doctor. It's an apple seedling. Though I'll admit the leaves are similar."

Dr. Bryant sighed. "Eyes not what they used to be," he muttered defensively. "Oh well, it doesn't matter, I suppose. Shall we go back into the house?"

"If you like," said Symington.

In the refuse bin near the entrance to the house were the fragments of a large jug, which showed signs of having been recently thrown there. The doctor arched his eyebrows when he saw it, and turned to his host.

"An acid jar, if I'm not mistaken," he remarked. "Dangerous thing to have about." He sniffed at it cautiously. "Nitric acid, from the odor."

Symington hesitated a moment. "A hobby of mine," he said at last, with a self-conscious smile. "I do a bit of etching, you see. Not good, unfortunately, but I enjoy it. It adds an interest to life."

"Indeed?" said the doctor politely. "I should like to see some of your work."

Again that momentary hesitation. Then, "My prints are all packed at the moment."

"Of course! Stupid of me. For the moment I had forgotten you were leaving. But speaking of etchings, if I could offer a bit of advice? Try sulphuric acid instead of nitric. It gives far better results. Most artists use it. In fact, I've never heard of one using nitric acid."

Symington laughed, but the laugh sounded forced. "That's the result of self-study," he said deprecatingly. "One makes mistakes without realizing it. Sulphuric, you say? Thanks for the tip. I'll try it."

Once back in the house, the doctor soon took his leave.

As he was shaking hands with Symington he again expressed his sympathy over his loss.

"I know myself what it is to be lonely," he said, "but there are other consolations. With your interest in art and your pipe you can be reasonably content."

"Pipe?" echoed Symington in some wonder. "I don't—"

"Don't smoke a pipe? Cigarettes, then." The doctor pointed to Symington's yellow-stained fingers. "I see you smoke a great deal. Try a pipe. It will double the en-



joyment and cut down the expense. I know."

Symington glanced briefly at his fingers as he withdrew his hand.

"Thank you," he said. "I'll remember your advice. I appreciate your calling."

But as he watched the doctor go down the path to the gate his eyes were hard and unfriendly. He glanced again at the yellow stains on his fingertips, and scowled. Meddling old fool! A good two hours wasted. He was about to close the door when he was struck by a sudden suspicion. Hastily he went round the house to the garden where he and the doctor had just been.

At the withered pear tree he paused. Going down on his knees he examined the soil at its base. When he rose his face was a mask of fury and fear. There was no doubt of it. The doctor's mistake about the second pear tree had been no more than a ruse to divert his attention for a moment. And in that unguarded moment the doctor had taken a sample of the earth from the foot of that oddly stricken tree. The place where the soil had been removed was barely perceptible, but it was there. A spot of dampness, where the sun had not yet had time to dry it to the consistency of the surrounding area.

Slowly Symington went back into the house. As he closed the door after him, he caught sight of the doctor just turning into the house across the way.

Symington went upstairs and began to unpack deliberately. He would not be leaving Plainstown for a while yet. There was something that had to be settled first.

**M**EANWHILE Dr. Bryant was paying another visit, this time to an old patient of his whose house commanded a view of Symington's garden. Mrs. Owers, a spry old lady of about the doctor's own age, welcomed him with every show of pleasure.

"Well," she said, as she poured him a cup of tea, "and it's about time you came round to see me again! I was beginning to think you'd forgotten your friends."

"Hardly that." The doctor smiled. "I've been fairly busy. How are you these days? Insomnia any better?"

"Much improved, thank heavens," said the old lady.

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"That's a pity," said the doctor musingly.

"What!" Mrs. Owers sat bolt upright and glared at him.

"I mean—well, that is, I'm glad to hear you're better," corrected the doctor hastily. "I'm afraid I was thinking of something else at the moment."

Mrs. Owers set her cup down. There was a twinkle in her eye as she faced the confused doctor.

"I might have known it," she said. "You didn't call on me just to pass the time of day. All right, now. Out with it, you old fraud! Just why were you disappointed to hear my insomnia is improving?"

"You're just as sharp as ever," said the doctor. "I suppose I did have a reason." He paused for a moment, as if debating just how to begin. "What do you think of your new neighbor, Mr. Symington?" he asked.

The old lady sniffed in contempt. "I can't abide that man," she said flatly. "He reminds me of some fat slug crawling on a cabbage leaf—slow and nasty, and never a thought for anything but its own hunger."

"Hm—I take it you've clashed with him somehow. But if it's any consolation to you, I'm inclined to share your opinion. Your bedroom window overlooks his garden, by the way."

"Yes, I know. And much pleasure I have in looking at it, with him there! Odd, though, that you should have mentioned insomnia in that connection. I think he suffers from it himself."

"Yes?" said the doctor softly. "Why do you think that?"

"Well, about three weeks ago I wasn't sleeping very well myself, and one night I got up and sat by the window for a few hours. About one o'clock I saw Mr. Symington come out of the house—it was a fairly bright night—and began to walk up and down in the garden. I thought at first he was just getting a breath of air before turning in, but he kept walking for hours. Seemed restless. That's why I suspected insomnia. I always feel the same way myself. Can't keep still."

"I see. Did you see him go back into the house?"

"He went in just before dawn, but he came out again in a few minutes, carry-



ing something. I couldn't see it clearly, but it looked like a pan of water. As if he'd found the pan under the ice-box full and emptied it. There's nothing but an old-fashioned ice box in that house."

"You saw him empty it?"

"Yes, under a bush or something. He poured it out carefully. He's a fussy old woman, and he was probably afraid of getting his trousers splashed. Then he went back in. I didn't see him again. I went back to bed and managed to get some sleep myself, thank goodness."

"I don't suppose you could say just what day that would be?"

"I can, as it happens. It was the same day Mrs. Symington was taken ill and died. Poor thing! What she saw in him I can't imagine. She was older than he was, of course, and that makes a difference."

The doctor was looking away into space, his eyes thoughtful. Mrs. Owers cocked her head alertly on one side, much as her own parrot did, and looked at him with some amusement.

"Well Doctor?" she demanded. "Remember, you've been asking questions of a curious old woman, and I'm literally on edge. What is at the back of that woolly mind of yours? Why all the interest in Mr. Symington?"

Dr. Bryant came to himself with a start. His thoughts had not been pleasant. It is not the most enviable position in the world to know that a man is a murderer, and know that it is one's duty to expose him, however criminal a specimen he may be. And Dr. Bryant not only knew Symington had murdered his wife, or wives, but he had a good idea just how he had done it.

But until he had the proof he could not satisfy Mrs. Owers' curiosity. So he only smiled, and at that the old lady sniffed.

"That superior masculine smile," she said disdainfully. "All right, if you won't tell me, I suppose you won't. If I die of curiosity meanwhile you'll be to blame. Drink up your tea and tell me what you've been doing all these months."

THE talk drifted to various trivial things, and it was with a start that the doctor suddenly realized the afternoon was all but gone. With a feeling of genuine regret he took his leave.

[Turn page]

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Back at his own house, Dr. Bryant found Detective-sergeant May waiting for him, his long legs thrown carelessly over the arm of his favorite chair. He rose as the doctor entered.

"I've been at the commissioner again," he said. "Still no dice. He hasn't forgotten the scandal when we made an exhumation in the Ware case, and he doesn't want to risk another."

"Maybe you'll have better luck next time you see him," said the doctor grimly. "If I'm right in what I worked out this afternoon, you'll have evidence so strong he won't have any choice but to issue the order."

"What have you found out?" asked May eagerly.

"A good bit," said the doctor. "But first, come with me into the laboratory. I want to make sure of one thing."

In the laboratory, a room Dr. Bryant had fitted up at the back of the house for his experiments, he took an envelope from his pocket, and emptied it into a clean porcelain dish. May looked at the contents curiously.

"Looks like common earth to me," he said.

"It is," said the doctor. "Earth from the foot of a pear tree in Symington's garden. I took it this afternoon while I was there."

"What do you expect to find in it? Or are you just collecting earth?"

"You'll see in a moment," said the doctor. "It's a fairly simple test."

Under the interested eye of the detective, Dr. Bryant placed a little of the damp earth in a test tube, and touched a match to his Bunsen burner.

"We can't use the ferrous sulphate test," he muttered, "because the earth will be full of organic matter. And the solution will be too diluted to make a cloth stain reliable. However, there are other ways of skinning this particular cat. First, we'll just add a bit of caustic soda to neutralize, and then dry it thoroughly in the flame."

He added the soda as he spoke, and placed the test tube in a clamp, so that the flame of the burner played on it. When he judged it dry enough, he took a box from a drawer and opened it. It contained a crystalline substance which glistened dully in the lamplight.



May looked at him questioningly.

"Brucine," said the doctor, in answer to the look. "A few crystals are all we need." He dropped them into the tube, then drew the stopper from a thick bottle. "And now some sulphuric acid. A few drops, and we'll see what's what."

He tipped the bottle expertly, so that a few drops fell into the open mouth of the test tube. As May watched, fascinated, the earth in the tube slowly took on a reddish hue which grew steadily brighter, until the entire mass was a brick-red color.

"That does it," said the doctor with satisfaction. He turned out the flame, and put the rest of the earth from the porcelain dish back into the envelope, which he handed to May. "Better hang on to this," he said. "Your own police laboratory will want to make a second test. Though there's lots more where I got this."

"What exactly have you proved?" asked May. "I can see you got some sort of a reaction when you added the brucine and sulphuric acid, but what was it?"

"It's a common test for nitric acid," explained the doctor. "That sample of earth was full of it. I expected something of the sort when I saw that the little pear tree where I found it showed every sign of having been recently killed. And Mrs. Owers—you know her—actually saw Symington empty a pan of something in the garden the night before his wife died; something he took good care not to splash himself with. She thought it was water, but we know it was a container of nitric acid."

"Supposing it was, where does that get us? Mrs. Symington died of pneumonia. She wasn't burned to death with acid."

"That was the subtlety of it," said the doctor. "It's obvious Symington knows something of chemistry. And nitric acid is—"

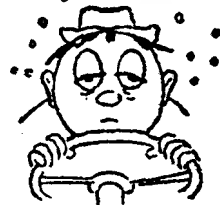
He was interrupted by the insistent ringing of the telephone. With a muttered exclamation he strode over to the instrument.

"Yes?" he said brusquely.

MAY could not hear the voice at the other end, but he saw the doctor's face grow taut and worried as he listened.

[Turn page]

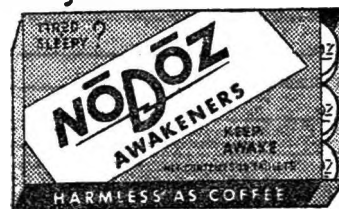
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"Is it bad?" asked the doctor. "Yes, I understand. Right. I'll be there as soon as I can make it."

He replaced the receiver and began struggling into his coat.

"It's Mrs. Owers," he explained. "She's had a heart attack. One of our patrolmen on the phone. Couldn't get in touch with the other doctor, so he called me."

"I hope it's nothing serious," said May sympathetically. He knew of the strong friendship existing between the two. "Shall I run you out?"

"No need, thanks," said the doctor, cramming some bottles and a hypo into his battered black bag. "I'll take my own car. No telling how long I'll be needed. Never suspected she had a bad heart," he added, half to himself. "Still it's a year since I last checked her, and a lot can happen in that time."

As he was leaving the room he pointed to a book on the table.

"You'll find all you want in that," he aid. "Under corrosive poisons, page two-thirty-seven. I think when you give that to the commissioner he'll sign the order for you."

"Thanks," said May.

The doctor went out hastily, and May opened the book to the page indicated. . .

WHEN Dr. Bryant parked his car in the drive of the Owers house he observed with surprise that the house was unlighted, except for one window on the second floor. He had half expected to be met by the patrolman who had called him, but there was no sign of the officer. Mystified, he went up to the front door and rang the bell.

Lights or no lights, he was certainly expected, because the door swung open at once. On the darkened threshold stood Symington, and in his hand was the menace of a stubby revolver.

"Come in, Doctor," he invited grimly. "Your patient is upstairs."

Had it not been for the gun, the doctor might have assumed that Symington was acting merely as might be expected of one neighbor to another in a case of sudden illness. But the unwavering revolver left no room for any such mistake.

"Come in," repeated Symington, a touch of sudden anger in his voice. "You know



so much already, you must know I'm not fooling."

The doctor looked at the deep-set, smoldering eyes behind the gun, and obeyed. Half dreading what he might find, he preceded his captor up the stairs to Mrs. Owens' room. As they entered the room, the old lady looked up from the chair in which she was tied.

"Dr. Bryant!" she exclaimed in astonishment. "Do you know what this all means? Has the man gone mad?"

"I'm afraid you've been used as bait to lure me into a trap," said the doctor gently. "I was told you were ill, and came without thinking."

"My imitation of a policeman was quite effective, don't you agree?" said Symington mockingly.

His eyes were glinting with a febrile light, and with a chilling shock the doctor realized that perhaps Mrs. Owers was right in her diagnosis. Perhaps the man was mad. He felt suddenly afraid, though has fear was more for what might happen to the helpless woman in the chair than for himself.

But mad or sane, Symington was not without method. Under threat of that gun the doctor took his place in a chair on the other side of the room. With deft swiftness Symington bound him to it with lengths of light cord he evidently had provided himself with for the purpose.

"I suppose you are curious as to what will happen to you," he said as he tested the knots.

"Knowing what you are, I can make a guess," said the doctor briefly.

"Because you know what I am is the precise reason I have to make sure you don't communicate that knowledge," said Symington. "It's the price you will have to pay for meddling in things that are no concern of yours."

"Is it necessary to include Mrs. Owers?" asked Dr. Bryant. "I assure you she knows nothing that could harm you."

"Your assurance isn't enough. You saw her this afternoon. I don't know what you told her. Perhaps you told her nothing, but it makes no difference at this stage. I'm leaving no loose ends."

"How do you know I haven't already told the police?"

[Turn page]

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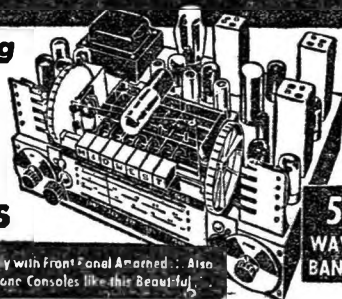
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SYMINGTON laughed shortly, with no humor.

"I don't. But I do know that without your testimony the police will have to depend on the results of their own investigations to substantiate any charges against me. And if they do investigate they won't find what you did. I've see to that."

"I see." The doctor glanced despairingly at Mrs. Owers. It looked like a bad spot for them both. "Nitric acid again?"

"Unfortunately, there are reasons why I can't use that method in this case," said Symington regretfully. "It takes time, and I haven't much to spare. No, in a few minutes this house will be a mass of flames. It's surprising how furiously an old frame house can burn, with a little judicious help. There won't be any traces of cord on your wrist when you are found. An unfortunate accident, and no one will regret it more than I. In fact, I will probably be the one to summon the Fire Department—when I am sure it will be too late for them to be of any use."

Mrs. Owers did not understand all of what was passing, but she understood that.

"Burn my house!" she exclaimed indignantly. "Why, the idea! You're a—a criminal, that's what you are!" And to the doctor's surprise the old lady added an epithet that he never imagined she had even heard. He hoped she didn't know the full meaning of it.

Having satisfied himself that there was no possibility of his captives freeing themselves, Symington dropped the gun into his pocket.

"I'll leave you to your thoughts," he said cynically. "You can call for help if you like. No one will hear you. I imagine it will take about four or five minutes for the flames to eat their way from the first floor up to here. After that the place will flare up like an explosion."

He turned to go, and stopped short, a strangled gasp of fear on his lips. An intruder was facing him across the threshold, and on his face was a look of grim purpose.

"I want you, Symington," he said.

Symington clawed frantically at the pocket where he had dropped his gun. The next instant it had been struck from his hand, and he himself knocked sprawling



into a corner. He tried to fight back, but Detective-Sergeant May was neither an elderly doctor nor a frail old lady. He worked with merciless precision, his fists backed by two hundred pounds of trained bone and muscle. When he had finished, Symington was an inert heap on the floor.

"I could have killed him when he went for his gun," said May, as he cut the ropes, "but it would have been too quick and clean for him. He doesn't deserve that much consideration."

"I don't understand how you got here so quickly," said the doctor, rubbing his wrists.

"And I don't understand a thing of what's happened," said Mrs. Owers. "Suppose you tell me, over a cup of tea, just what you and this nice young man are up to. . . ."

A few minutes later, they were in the parlor on the floor below. Symington, still semi-conscious, had been taken away in a patrol car, and Mrs. Owers was pouring out cups of steaming tea.

"Well?" she prompted.

"Well," said May, balancing his cup awkwardly, "after the doctor left me I began to think there might be something odd about that call. We have a routine for emergency cases like that, and it didn't fit in. So I called Headquarters, and they contacted the policeman on the beat. He swore he had never made any call at all. I called a squad car then and came out at high speed, and I mean high. With two murders to his credit I knew Symington wasn't going to hesitate at another."

"Hm—you tell a blunt story, young man. However, if you continue to associate with the doctor he'll teach you to put the frills in. But all this about murder?"

**D**R. BRYANT told her.

"And pneumonia, strictly speaking, isn't a disease as we commonly regard diseases," he explained then. "It can be called that, yes. But all it amounts to is a condition where the lungs become flooded with mucous to such an extent that breathing becomes impossible, and the patient dies of asphyxia. As it happens, the fumes from nitric acid are among the things that can irritate the lungs and set up this condition. After breathing the

[Turn page]

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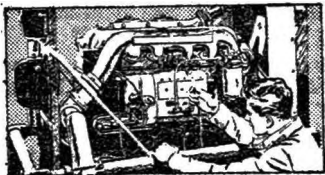
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fumes, the victim feels no immediate ill effects, but after a lapse of a few hours this pseudo pneumonia sets in, and death occurs in a remarkably short time.

"It was the speed with which his wives died that first made me think of nitric. And as soon as I met Symington I saw the characteristic yellow stains on his fingers. He must have splashed himself with the acid at one time. You remember seeing him walking in the garden the night before the death of his wife? No doubt Mrs. Symington was sleeping—probably mildly drugged—and there was an open container of the acid in the room.

"He left it there for several hours, making sure that he himself kept clear of the tainted atmosphere. Then, toward morning, he went in and removed it. His wife never suspected what had happened, even when she was taken ill. No more did the doctor. There was no reason why he should; all the symptoms of pneumonia were there.

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"Horrible!" said the old lady, with a shudder.

"Yes," agreed the doctor. "The man was mad, but not in the sense that he cannot be found guilty of murder. His madness was only the madness of the complete egotist."

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## COLD TURKEY

(Continued from page 125)

Dr. Hilary had stepped into the office, where three more patients awaited him, lined up on the floor with their backs against the wall. Mike had a big gash in his scalp; Jake, the driver, nursed a crushed hand, and Tony Flaggin had a bullet through his upper leg. The doctor paused in front of Tony, stared at him, trying to place the familiar face he saw glaring at him.

"Why, it's Crimm!" he exclaimed. "Another accident?"

A cop gaped. "What the devil is this all about?"

"Downtown Trucking," I told him, "was a cover for Mike and his pals. They're hi-jackers. Their game was to hold up a truck on the road, take the driver for a ride and turn him loose miles away, several hours later. Meantime they drove the truck to the drop—here—unloaded it, and later abandoned it. Within a few days they came back with their own trucks, picked up the merchandise, and sold it to fences."

"But where does Crimm come in?" the officer asked.

"Late Tuesday afternoon they knocked off a truckload of aspirin, and were on the way here when they smacked Crimm's coupe. That was bad for them. It meant reports, investigators, police; and the worst angle was that Crimm could identify all their faces. Mike Gallo acted fast. He clipped Crimm on the jaw, and they tossed him in the truck and drove off toward the hospital. They left one man—probably Jake—to give a phoney story to the police about whose truck it was.

Meanwhile, inside the truck, they murdered Crimm. Tony switched outer garments with the late Jackson Crimm. He put on the blue pants, but couldn't get his big shoulders into the coat and vest. That's why he had to carry them over his arm. He gave his name to the doctor as Jackson Crimm, and showed Crimm's driver's license to prove it. Later in the evening Gallo, Flaggin and company brought the truck back here and unloaded it.

[Turn page]

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The air hammer had stopped and a voice called me. I made the red-head stay where she was while the sergeant and I went back. It was about as bad as I had predicted, though there was something left of the fingertips. A blue suit was wadded in the hole next to the body. We went through the pockets. When I came to a circlet of gold with an initial inside it, I palmed it under the sergeant's nose.

It was nearly half an hour before we had hashed out all the details, and a black maria had carted off three dejected crooks.

I turned to the girl. "My car's out there. Shall I drive you home?"

She gave me such an odd look that I added hastily, "I'm a single man. And besides, I promise not to park on the way."

Her eyes were big, and quite serious, as she tucked her hand under my arm. "No—not the first time," she murmured.

Right away I was thinking ahead to the second time.

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## THE PHANTOM SPEAKS

(Continued from page 8)

address, age and sex. This information should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope, so we can send along your membership card.

For those of you who are interested in having some mark or insignia of membership there is an attractive Phantom Detective pin. This may be secured on request at the time of application. There is a charge of fifteen cents to cover the cost of mailing and handling this attractive bronzed emblem. This insignia is not required for membership. Your free membership card is sufficient for identification.

By joining the FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM, you give active indication of your interest in aiding the local, State and Federal law enforcement officers in carrying out their duties. At this time, however, we would like to point out that FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM does not have any connection with any official law enforcement body, and membership in our group does not confer upon you any special rights or privileges. You do not have any police powers. Our purpose is to supply the sort of moral support and backing that is always a welcome factor in the work of the men who are responsible for our law enforcement.

Join with our other readers as a member of FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM!

## FROM THE MAIL BAG

**O**N TOP of our mail bag, as you can well understand, are a number of letters from folks who are interested in joining our club. We will quote from several of these below. First we hear from out in Western Canada:

Dear Phantom: I have read many of your stories and can safely say they are tops. They do not seem to be fiction at all, but are more like real accounts of true crimes, believe me. As I live in Canada, I hope I am still eligible for a membership card and insignia.—Thomas G. Marsden, 10349 145th St. Edmonton, Alberta.

We're glad to have you as a member, Tom. We have a good many readers and members in Canada and we're proud of all of them.

[Turn page]



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Our next application comes from the Odd Fellows Home in Liberty, Missouri.

Dear Phantom: Volume 51, No. 2, the May issue of your gripping magazine has just been read. I'm enclosing application for card and badge. I am a retired railway expressman. —George R. Bryant, c/o I.O.O.F. Home, R. 3, Liberty, Mo.

Glad to have you with us, George, and it's nice to know that you get so much pleasure out of THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE MAGAZINE. Your membership card and badge have gone forward to you. Our next letter is from New York State.

Dear Phantom: Enclosed find 15 cents in coin for which please send me the bronzed emblem of the Phantom. I have read your magazine for over 6 years on and off and like it very much. I was a member some years back, but would like to join up again. I would also like to know whether I could get a first issue, Volume 1, No. 1 of THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE. I know this is asking a good deal, but I would like it for my files. Keep up the good work, and I may be reading the magazine for the next 60 years. —Robert J. Peterson, Hillsdale, New York.

Thanks for your letter, Bob. The membership card and badge is probably in your hands by this time. We'd like to be able to help you in the matter of securing a copy of Volume 1, No. 1, but there just aren't any copies available that I know of. That's fifteen years ago, son, and the only copies we have here in the office are bound file copies. Next, we hear from a young lady out in Ohio.

Dear Phantom: Being an interested reader of the PHANTOM DETECTIVE Magazine, and a person who has a great respect and liking for you and your ways of solving crime, I'd like very much to become a Friend of the Phantom. I enclose my application herewith. I respect law and order, and like all of the stories in THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE. Keep the good work going. —Mary S. Hayes, 17 Council Street, Dayton, Ohio.

It's nice to hear from people who feel as you do, Miss Hayes. We're more than glad to welcome you to our group. Good luck to you. For our next letter we hop back to New England.

Dear Phantom: I have just bought the latest

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PHANTOM DETECTIVE Magazine. "The Diamond Killers" was a good story. Give us more like it. I would like you to send me a membership card and badge.—John Southard, 35 Stilson Avenue, Florence, Massachusetts.

Okay John. The card and badge have gone out to you. We hope you find pleasure in the future Phantom stories. Our next reader is down in the Netherlands West Indies. He says:

Dear Phantom: After having read one of your magazines which I had borrowed from a friend, I am so fully satisfied with its contents that I am sending you a subscription and offering you my whole hearted support as a member of the Friends of the Phantom.—Walmer S. Greaves, Lago Oil & Transport Company, Ltd. Aruba, N.W.I.

Thanks for your interest, Walmer. We welcome you as a reader of the Phantom and as a member of our club. So, folks, you can see just how much the interest in our magazine is widespread around this part of the world. Other letters in this month's mail bag come from Malta, Great Britain, France, South America and all parts of the United States and Canada.

We're always glad to hear from you, and appreciate both criticisms and suggestions. If you'd like to drop us a line, whether it be a post card or a full-sized letter, by all means do so. Please address all communications to The Editor, THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE Magazine, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y. We'll talk things over here again next issue. Thanks for your cooperation.

—THE PHANTOM

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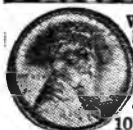
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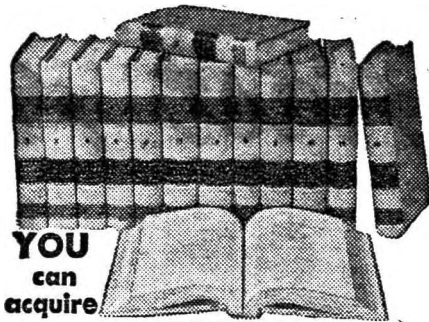
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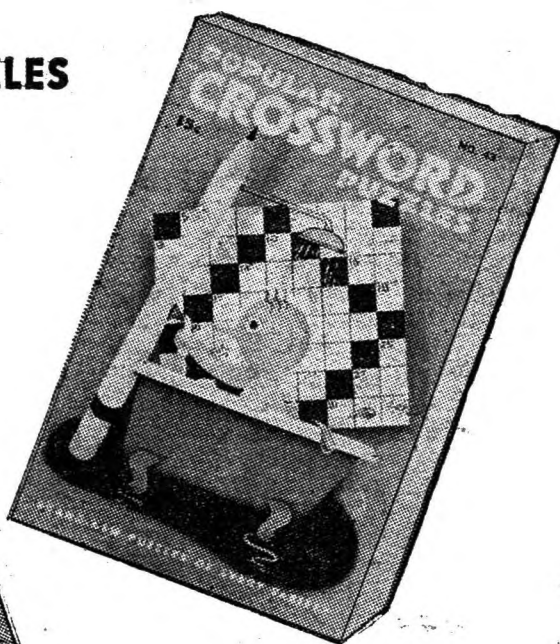
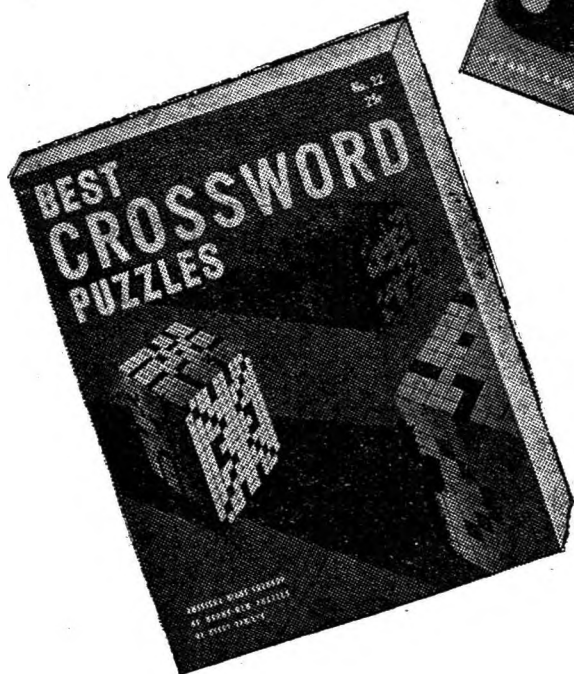
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