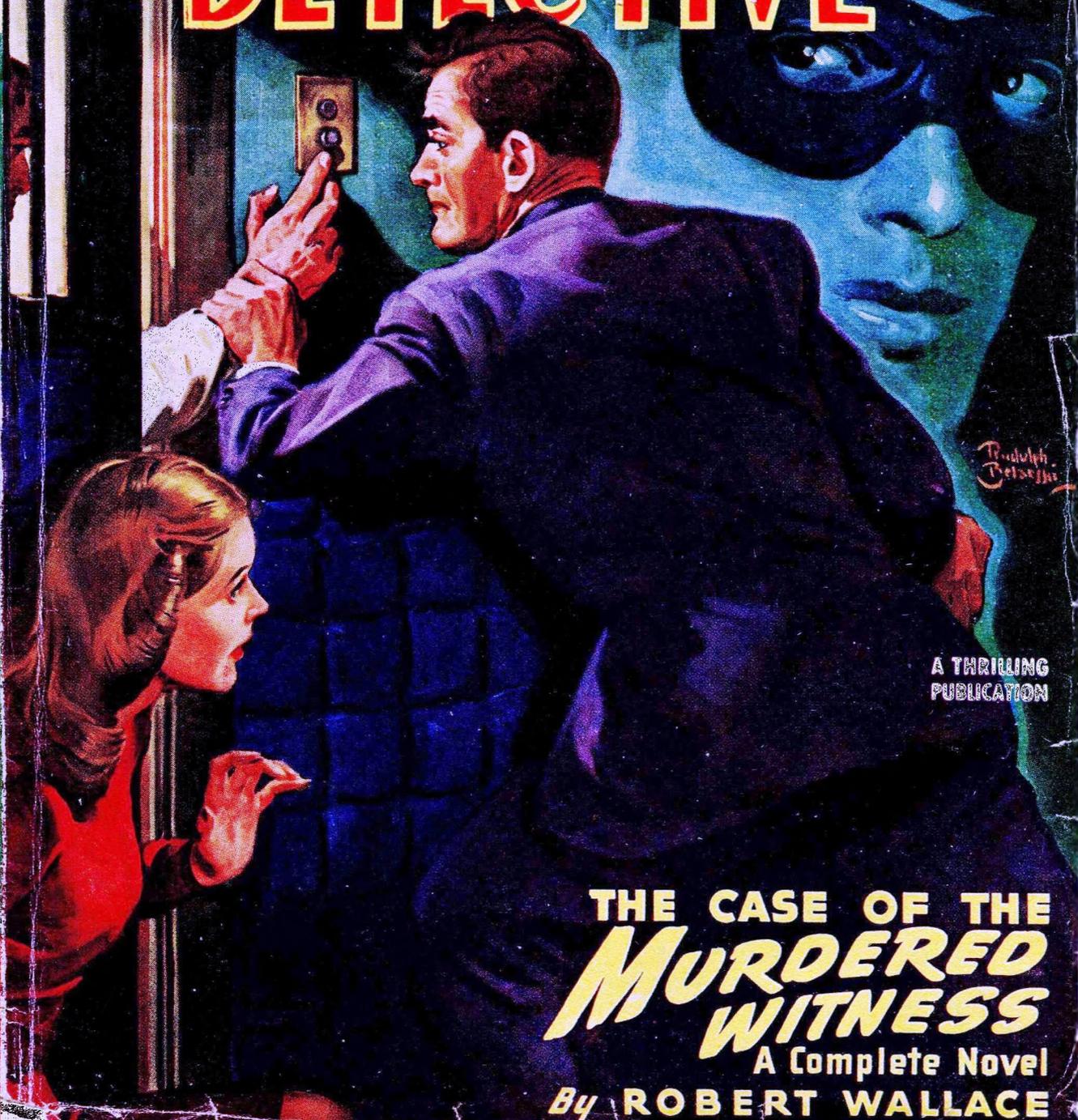


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THE PHANTOM  
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SEPT. 1941

# The PHANTOM DETECTIVE



A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION

THE CASE OF THE  
**MURDERED  
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A Complete Novel  
By ROBERT WALLACE

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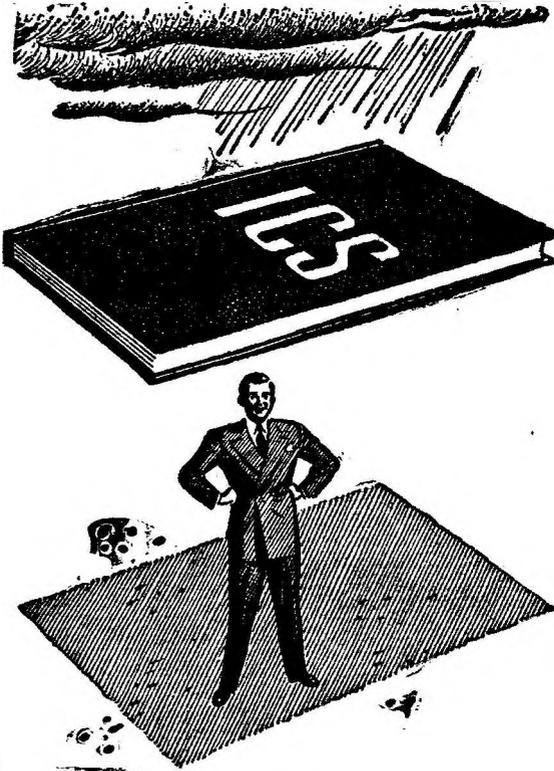
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# The PHANTOM DETECTIVE

Vol. L, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

September, 1947

A COMPLETE NOVEL

## The Case of the Murdered Witness

by Robert Wallace



A trail of oil leads from the baffling and strange riddle of Ernest Shaler's sudden disappearance right to the door of a grim, sinister conspiracy! The Phantom's clues are a hat, a broken cufflink, and a hotel room key as he pursues a dangerous quarry! 11

### SHORT STORIES

- THE MILLION DOLLAR WEAPON**.....Wayland Rice 78  
Hired by a movie star, Detective Peter Coe is in for plenty of drama
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When trained eyes seek evidence, it's time for a killer to be careful
- OPEN HOUSE FOR A KILLER**.....Johnston McCulley 93  
Confronted by a slayer, the old unarmed judge had an ace up his sleeve
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Trapping the killer seemed impossible—but Manny Martin made the try

### A DEPARTMENT

- THE PHANTOM SPEAKS**.....The Phantom 6  
Announcements of coming features, club news and letters from readers

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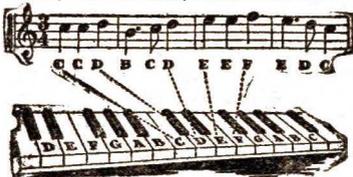
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# The PHANTOM SPEAKS



**J**IM DARREL was a young fellow who made a good living for himself with his camera. I first met him when Steve Huston was doing a series of articles for the *Clarion* and Darrel got the job of making the background photographs to illustrate the stories. Frank Havens thought so much of Darrel's work that he offered him a regular berth on the *Clarion*. Jim Darrel however, was ambitious, courageous, and eager to succeed on his own, so he preferred to freelance his work. I like that sort of a fellow.

Suddenly I was amazed to receive the shocking news that Darrel had been murdered. Inspector Gregg and his men seemed to think that Darrel was killed when he woke up during the commission of a burglary in his apartment. But I didn't think Jim Darrel had anything valuable enough to interest the average burglar, and the bachelor residence he maintained certainly was not in a part of New York City that indicated unusual affluence.

## Two Valuable Clues

The combination of a photographer and a brutal crime indicated that Jim Darrel may have taken some photographs that were valuable to a criminal combine, and I went into the investigation from that standpoint. The New York police had pretty thoroughly combed Darrel's quarters before I undertook my examination, but in spite of this, I was able to pick up two valuable clues.

One of these was a notebook which was more or less a daily record of expenses and photographic data to help Darrel in his work. In it there was a cryptic message directing me to a well-known Senator in Washington. The other clue was part of a medical kit which had been placed upon a shelf, but which did not fit in with Darrel's way of life at all.

The circumstances surrounding the murder

of the energetic young photographer led me out into the Pennsylvania mountains, where I learned that Darrel had been engaged in a mission for a large land company in Philadelphia to determine their interest in a tract of woods and mountain property.

## Burning Rocks

The remarkable part of the picture expedition, however, was the fact that Darrel had taken photographs of burning rocks. I couldn't believe the information that came to me at first, and I had to investigate the area for myself, but when I did this, new and dramatic possibilities were opened up before me.

A fortune of millions of dollars was involved, and some of the leading figures in the social, government and theatrical worlds were implicated more or less innocently. My job was to delve beneath this upper crust of confusion and fear to find the grawing viper who was boring from within in an effort to compromise some of America's top families in Washington and New York.

The quest for the big mogul behind this pattern of crime was one that threatened at times to overwhelm the forces I brought into play, but with the help of good friends and staunch workers like Steve Huston, Frank Havens and his staff, "The Case of the Burning Rocks" was successfully worked out, and the criminals were turned over to our law enforcement agencies!

## A Dramatic Novel

Robert Wallace has done a swell job of transcribing the notes on this case, and he has built them up into a dramatic and effective novel that is scheduled for your entertainment in the next issue. I enjoyed working on the job, and there was a real, if grim satisfaction in running down the culprits re-

sponsible for the series of crimes that started with the murder of Jim Darrel, the young news photographer.

I know you're going to like "The Case of the Burning Rocks," and I hope you'll find it entertaining from start to finish.

Crime has a habit of running in bunches. A murder is seldom a simple matter. Behind it there are a number of ramifications that lead into the depths of the human soul, and branch out into all the various strata of human society. This was what happened in "The Case of the Burning Rocks."

Greed was the original motivating factor, but it was soon joined by other sinister qualities. You'll be swept along by the conflict of these emotions as you read this exciting story. It's "The Case of the Burning Rocks"—next issue!

### Join the Friends of the Phantom

AS I write this, the second anniversary of VE and VJ Day is upon us, and we find that law enforcements agencies in the Federal and State Governments are continuing their battle against post-war laxness. It is a winning battle, and these police authorities assure me that the victory belongs not only to them, but to that overwhelming cross-section of our country which is made up of the clean-living, industrious and courageous people who are the real backbone of the nation.

The Phantom's fight against crime began long before World War II, as you all know, and the many friends gained through this magazine have been carrying their share of the law-enforcement burden for a good many years, too. They have expressed their interest in the upholding of the sovereign power of our country and the sanctity of its laws through our nation-wide association, FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM.

All of the people in this group have given tangible expression to their law-abiding spirit, and they are constantly working with official agencies in this direction. If you are reading the Phantom Detective Magazine for the first time, and would like to become a Friend of the Phantom, by all means let us know about it. Write us a letter of application, stating your name, address, age and sex. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope, and we will forward your membership card at once.

[Turn page]

### Sells 95 Stories and Novelettes



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From time to time our members have asked us whether it is possible to supply them with some emblem to indicate their membership in FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM. For the convenience of these people we have had a number of these emblems made up. They are attractive bronzed replicas of the Phantom badge, and they may be had for a nominal charge of fifteen cents in stamps or coins to cover the cost of mailing and handling. These badges are not essential to membership.

From time to time we are asked whether membership in FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM confers special police powers. Joining a group such as ours does not give you any special rights or privileges with respect to your local or Federal law enforcement agencies. There is no connection between our club and any of these law-enforcement bodies. Our chief purpose is to express, collectively, the spirit and feelings of the right-thinking, law-abiding folks who follow THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE.

## In the Mailbox

**R**ECENTLY we've been receiving a good many interesting letters from our readers and they are always welcome. It is nice to have these expressions from you folks, because it helps us a lot in deciding just how well we have succeeded in giving you the sort of exciting reading matter that you are looking for. Now and then some letters come in which are a real delight to us. One of them comes to us from the New York Veterans Hospital. It reads:

Dear Phantom:

The fellows here in the veterans hospital are writing to let you know how much we enjoy reading THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE Magazine. Although this is our first letter to you, we want you to know that we have been following the Phantom's adventures for more than two years. When you're confined in a hospital, it gets pretty monotonous from time to time and reading is the best thing to do. We find the Phantom to be an ideal antidote for monotony. Robert Wallace is well known and popular in this hospital. He presents the cream of the lot in the field of "sleuthing" literature. Your magazines are passed from hand to hand here in the hospital until they have been read by all those who derive pleasure from what is best in detective fiction.

"Cartel of Crime" was a fine story and we certainly enjoyed it. "The Chinese Puzzle" was another first-class narrative. In all the time we have been reading about the Phantom we have never been disappointed. Mr. Wallace always turns out a grand piece of fiction.

As for the short stories, they're all very good. And before we close this letter, we want to say a word of praise for your artists. They do fine work.

Wishing you, Mr. Editor, Robert Wallace, and all those on your staff the best of health, we are, very sincerely yours—

—The fellows in the Veterans Hospital, New York.

Thanks fellows, for the kind words. It is a real pleasure to us to know that in our work we are turning out the kind of magazines that will help a bit in providing pleasant hours of relaxation for you. Let us hear from you again!

Now and then we have some curious requests sent along to us, and one of them has just come in. It is from a young man in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Dear Phantom:  
I've read THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE Magazine for several years now, except for the issues I couldn't get while in the Army. I have written a song entitled "The Phantom Is Here Again." Please let me know, sir, if you and your company could be interested in its complete musical composition, and also its full band arrangement.

—Wendell W. Stoud.

Thanks a lot for your letter, Wendell. We appreciate your thinking enough of the Phantom to write a song on the subject. However the company which publishes the PHANTOM DETECTIVE Magazine does not publish or market songs. Therefore I'm afraid we can't help you with your idea. We do hope, however, that you will continue to enjoy the PHANTOM DETECTIVE, G-MEN DETECTIVE, BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE and our other detective story magazines. Subscription rates are being sent to you as per your request.

Among the letters received this month we also have one from Chicago. We're giving it prominent display here, because it indicates the feelings of a reader who is not as enthusiastic about the Phantom stories as most people are. He says:

Dear Sirs:

Your precious Phantom is flat and wearisome. Just how come no one can discover his identity when it is twenty years or more that he goes straight home, disguise and all? Just because he goes in the back door, he seems immune to detection. All his cars are in his own name, still no one is able to detect him.

And the police always receive him with open arms, when it is a known fact that the police resent intruders butting uninvited into their work.

Would you hail an unknown man insisting upon attending to your prized tulips or anything else in your premises? Plain horse sense says no. How come the Phantom takes over police work with shouts of joy from said police?

And then we have to read over and over that he is a socialite with lots of money left by his father and he is languid when in social life, but poison to malefactors. He always gets his man without a scratch on him nor to his precious make-ups. . . .  
—A. Thorpe, 1500 West Chicago Avenue, Chicago Ill.

Mr. Thorpe certainly has definite ideas about the Phantom and why he doesn't like him, but there are several of his questions that can be answered here without any bias. For one thing, just recently we have had

(Concluded on page 113)

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# INSPECTOR MOON WON HIS BET AND THEN...



W-WHY IT'S AN ARROW!

KEEP BACK FROM THAT WINDOW!

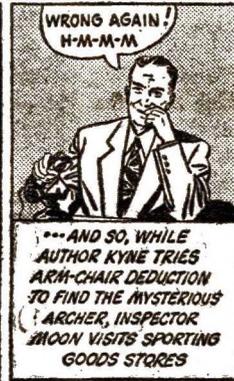
IN A LOFTY NEW YORK APARTMENT, DETECTIVE INSPECTOR JIM MOON AND A MYSTERY WRITER, M.M. KYNE, ARGUE OVER THE PLAUSIBILITY OF THE LATTER'S NEWEST "WHO DONE IT" WHEN...



NOW HERE'S A MYSTERY JUST MADE FOR ROUTINE POLICE METHODS

BET YOU A DINNER I SOLVE IT FIRST

SHORT ARROW... SMALL PERSON



WRONG AGAIN! H-M-M-M

...AND SO, WHILE AUTHOR KYNE TRIES ARM-CHAIR DEDUCTIONS TO FIND THE MYSTERIOUS ARCHER, INSPECTOR MOON VISITS SPORTING GOODS STORES



A GIRL, EH? GOT HER NAME AND ADDRESS?



HERE'S OUR ARCHER AND, ODDLY ENOUGH, HER NAME'S DIANA

I WAS TARGET SHOOTING ON MY ROOF ACROSS THE AVENUE AND...

THAT EVENING



WASN'T OUR BET "DINNER FOR THREE" MR. KYNE?

SHE'S MARVELOUS

WHY CERTAINLY! SUPPOSE WE PICK YOU UP IN AN HOUR, MISS BAILEY



I DIDN'T SHAVE TODAY AND...

YOU'RE WELCOME TO MY RAZOR



SAY, THIS IS A SWELL BLADE! SKIMS OFF MY TOUGH STUBBLE LIKE MAGIC!

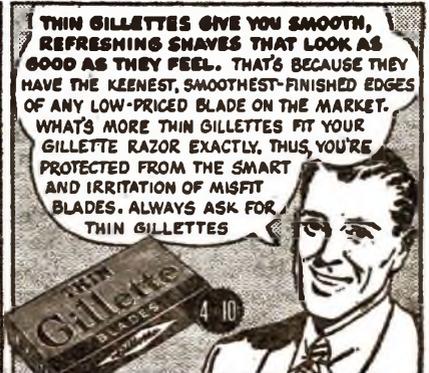
THIN GILLETTES ARE PLENTY KEEN AND EASY SHAVING



JUST IMAGINE! ME THE MAIN CHARACTER IN A REAL MYSTERY!

HE'S WONDERFUL LOOKING

YES, AND WITH A DASH OF ROMANCE, IT'LL MAKE A GOOD YARN



THIN GILLETTES GIVE YOU SMOOTH, REFRESHING SHAVES THAT LOOK AS GOOD AS THEY FEEL. THAT'S BECAUSE THEY HAVE THE KEENEST, SMOOTHEST-FINISHED EDGES OF ANY LOW-PRICED BLADE ON THE MARKET. WHAT'S MORE THIN GILLETTES FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR EXACTLY. PLUS, YOU'RE PROTECTED FROM THE SMART AND IRRITATION OF MISFIT BLADES. ALWAYS ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES



The gun coughed huskily, and the Phantom pitched face down on the floor (CHAPTER VI)

# *The Case of the* **MURDERED WITNESS**

By **ROBERT WALLACE**

*A trail of oil leads from the baffling riddle of Ernest Shaler's disappearance to the door of a grim conspiracy!*

## CHAPTER I

### DEATH IN THE RAIN

**S**TEVE HUSTON, ace reporter for the *Clarion*, didn't like borrowed cars. Steve, alert-eyed, curly-headed and freckle-faced, was driving toward New

York in the convertible coupe he had borrowed from one of his friends on the newspaper. The car was a 1934 model. In its day it had been a high-powered, expensive job, but that day, Huston knew, was long past. Now, in the shadow of the junk pile, the coupe rolled along, protesting every mile of its progress, its cracked can-

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**AN EXCITING BOOK-LENGTH MYSTERY NOVEL**

---

## Here Are the Clues: A Hat, a Broken Cufflink,

vas top letting in the early morning rain.

Steve drove on grimly. The windshield wipers didn't work. The motor was close to the boiling point and Steve had a headache.

A fine finale for a New England holiday, he decided, as he bore down harder on the gas pedal.

**F**OR the first time in over a year he had taken a few days off. Friends had invited him to their Saybrook, Connecticut, bungalow for a week-end of fishing and swimming, and the outing had lived up to his expectations. Writing front page stuff for the *Clarion* had kept him pretty well on the job, and Frank Havens, wealthy owner and publisher of the paper, had also thought it was high time Steve relaxed.

He smiled as he remembered Havens' fatherly advice. It had had something to do with the old adage about all work and no play not doing anyone any good. Steve smiled. Mr. Havens was a great person to work for. Steve knew he would never forget how the publisher had given him his first chance on the sheet as a cub reporter, how Havens had seen to it that he'd had every opportunity to climb the ladder.

Steve Huston had always felt that in addition to being a wonderful boss, the publisher deserved the gratitude of the roaring city his paper served. For Frank Havens was a crusader in the interests of justice. And the *Clarion* fought crime with fearless courage and unceasing vigilance.

Time and again the newspaper had smashed at organized vice, breaking up criminal rings, turning the white light of publicity on those shadowy, sinister denizens of the underworld who lived behind dark, scarlet-stained curtains.

But the *Clarion's* crime-cracking triumphs, Steve Huston thought, were mostly due to the brilliant deductions of the famous Phantom Detective, that mysterious super-sleuth who always stood ready for the signal of Frank Havens, his sponsor, to unravel cases too complicated and difficult for the metropolitan police to handle successfully.

Time and again the Phantom had emerged from the obscurity cloaking him to take a case, complex and baffling, and solve it by his own scientific methods. Time and again, the Phantom, when a case seemed hopeless, had turned it into an open and shut victory for the law. And Steve liked to believe that he himself had, in a small way, often helped the world-famed crime investigator in minor details.

His thoughts were abruptly shattered by what sounded like an explosion directly beneath him. At the same time the car began to bump violently. Jamming on the brakes, Steve cut the motor and climbed ruefully out. He knew what had happened even before he looked at the flat left rear tire, split completely by the force of the blowout.

Rain pattered on his hat. He stared around, trying to determine where he was. Somewhere in the upper Bronx, not far from the end of Van Courtlandt Park, he decided. And in a deserted region where woods grew on either side of the highway and little traffic passed.

Huston turned up his coat collar and tried to figure out his next move. No use trying to change the tire. The owner of the car had told him the spare was shot, and not to use it. There was only one thing to do and that was to telephone the nearest garage.

But where was he to find a telephone?

Steve's speculative gaze, wandering around, caught a glimpse of a house through the trees on the west side of the road. He headed for it, taking an overgrown path that looked like a shortcut to the other street.

The wet foliage of shrubbery stretched dripping branches to bar his progress. Steve pressed on, going deeper into the underbrush. Someone, he saw, had evidently used this same path a short time previously. There were deep footprints in the soggy ground—shoe marks that the rain had not yet obliterated.

The path cut sharply to the right. Tangled walls of underbrush glistened gemlike with raindrops. Huston suddenly stopped. He felt his breath catch quickly in his throat, a strange cold crawl to his nerves that went tense and tight. His

## and a Key from a Hotel Room in New York City!

eyes focused on the thing that had halted him.

To the left, no more than a few yards distant, he saw a tan shoe protruding from the underbrush.

The shoe in itself was not unusual. Anybody could have tossed it away there. What brought the lump to the reporter's throat and the chill to his spine was the fact a foot was in the shoe, and that a



THE PHANTOM

length of blue trouser leg was barely visible in the rain gloom!

Steve took two steps forward. The rain was cold in his face, but he hardly felt it. Cautiously he pushed the shrubbery aside, leaning forward, so he could see better.

The next instant he wished he hadn't. The dead man who lay wet and sodden in the underbrush was not a pleasant sight. How he had been killed, what had brought death in the rain, Huston didn't know. What he did see and realize was the grizzly fact that some powerful acid had been used to completely obliterate the face and features of the victim!

A little sick at his stomach, Huston

drew back with a shudder. He shook his head as if to clear it of whirling horror. Then he remembered his job, and tried to get a tight grip on himself. This, he told himself, was murder, and murder was front page material.

Gradually his nausea diminished. His gaze went back to the damp body on the wet ground. This time he looked at the dead man with a professional eye. He took in the details of a blue suit that was nearly new, obviously expensive. He saw the man's white shirt and maroon tie, both blood-stained and burned in spots from the powerful acid. He shifted his gaze and noticed the man's hat. That had rolled several feet away and reposed, crown-up, in a heap of wet leaves.

STEVE bent over. Not far from the hat something glimmered among the weed tangle. He picked up what looked like a broken cuff link. Cupping that in his hand, he looked at it curiously. It was square in shape, evidently of silver, and its design was that of an animal's head, crudely wrought.

Huston's glance went back to the murdered man's left arm. That was flung wide, the coat sleeve pulled back over his wrist so the shirt cuff was exposed. But the cuff, the reporter saw, was the type that buttoned.

Steve put the broken cuff link in his pocket, turning his attention to the water-soaked hat. Like the blue suit it, too, seemed practically new. The label in it told him it was a standard make that had cost around fifteen dollars. On its leather sweatband was the name of a haberdasher—the Holton Men's Shop, with an address on Madison Avenue.

Turning the hat over, Steve's fingers felt the bulge of something under the sweatband. It turned out to be a length of folded newspaper, inserted there to make the hat size smaller. Something prompted him to put the damp paper in his pocket. It might, or might not, be a clue.

A hot surge of interest replaced the reporter's former chill. Murder! Someone important. So important that acid had been used to prevent identification!

Steve turned and looked at the path

behind him. He remembered the deep footprints in the ground. Deep, probably, because someone had been carrying the body, carrying it into the underbrush of the deserted neighborhood to get rid of it.

Drawing a breath, Steve dropped the hat. The importance of what he had found called for haste on his part. Murder was murder, and murder couldn't wait!

Buttoning his coat, Steve whirled around and hurried toward the house he had glimpsed between the trees.

## CHAPTER II

### TRANSFORMATION



HE snipe class that was the final event on the afternoon's aquatic program at the Diamond Point Yacht Club, was almost over.

Beyond the red marker buoy that designated the last leg of the run to the finish line, half a dozen of the little sailboats heeled precariously as they rounded it. On the club's awning-covered terrace the hundred or more guests who had come to see the races showed mounting interest.

One, however, smothered a yawn behind his aristocratic hand. He was Richard Curtis Van Loan, well-known Park Avenue socialite, playboy and dilettante. Van, smiling up into the cornflower blue eyes of Wendy Malcolm, the attractive girl beside him, shook his head slightly.

"I knew we should have gone over to the Westbury polo game," he drawled. "I'll trade sails for hoofs any day. More action."

Wendy Malcolm's red lips curved in a quizzical little smile.

"Action," she scoffed. "You're probably the laziest man alive."

"Undoubtedly," Van Loan agreed. "But that doesn't mean I don't like to see other people wear themselves out."

The girl shook her head. "I don't understand you, Dick. How do you keep so fit and trim with all your inactivity? What's your secret?"

Van's good-looking face broke into a smile. He beckoned to her mysteriously. She leaned over, so close to him that he caught a whiff of the expensive perfume she was wearing.

"This is a deep, dark secret," he said. "Guard it well. You want to know how I keep from becoming a tub?"

"Yes—how?"

"I never eat!" Van whispered. "I live on capsule vitamins."

Wendy Malcolm sighed. She never expected a sane answer from the attractive young man beside her. So she wasn't disappointed when she didn't get one. With a little shake of her russet-gold head she picked up her binoculars and trained them on the boats that had rounded the buoy and were streaking back toward the tug on which the judges were stationed.

Van, instead of following her gaze with the binoculars on the arm of his chair, glanced over again to the other side of the terrace. There his eyes returned to a slim, dark-haired girl in a cherry colored dress. He had noticed her before, noticed how perturbed she seemed, how troubled. Which, he decided, wasn't right for one as attractive as she.

Her slim, mahogany-tipped fingers were nervous along the edge of her program. One open-toed white slipper tapped a restless tattoo on the flagged paving. She was alone, but undoubtedly waiting for someone. Every few minutes her dark gaze darted to the entrance to the clubhouse.

The next minute Van saw the girl stiffen. A man had come out of the building. A tall, broad-shouldered young fellow in a blue coat and white trousers. Van Loan recognized him at first glance as Clayton Sherman, a young attorney who was on the legal staff of the district attorney's office in New York.

Sherman crossed quickly to the brunette in the cherry dress. Van saw her hand clasp his. She stood quickly on tip-toe for a brief kiss. She said something, Sherman nodded and, tucking her arm under his, started to escort her back to the white, flag-decorated building from which he had come.

Van touched Wendy's sun-tanned arm. "You know everybody," he said. "Who's the girl Sherman's exiting with?"

Wendy lowered her glasses, frowned, and twisted her head around.

"Olga Tanner—if that means anything to you," she said. "It doesn't to me. Except that I met her last week-end at the Dulaney's at Hicksville. Why the curiosity?"

"No particular reason." Van shrugged. "Get you a cold drink?"

"Would you? Something innocuous, with a cherry in it."

"Be right back," Van told her. "Don't let anybody get my seat or steal you away from me."

"As if you cared—or would make an effort to get me back!" Wendy Malcolm laughed.

**I**N THE clubhouse, Van made a leisurely way toward the bar in the rear. To reach it he had to cut across the wide foyer that ran from the waterfront side of the building to the parking space in the rear.

The back door was open. Through it came the fascinatingly husky voice of a girl.

"Please take me home, Clayton!" she was saying. "Now—right away!"

From the corner of his eye Van saw Olga Tanner standing close to a new Lincoln Continental, its top down and its brown upholstery bright and shiny in the sun.

Sherman stood beside her, his expression troubled.

"Please, Olga," he said pleadingly. "We can straighten this thing out."

Van went on and into the bar. But before he could order what Wendy wanted, one of the club servants sidled up to him with a cough.

"Begging your pardon, Mr. Van Loan. I was just about to page you. There's a call for you in Booth Three."

Van fumbled a coin out of his pocket, handed it over and retraced his steps to the foyer. The door of Booth Three was open, the receiver off the hook. He sat down, kneed the door shut and put the receiver to his ear.

"Hello?"

"Dick? This is Frank Havens."

Van Loan's manner changed swiftly. His casual air of boredom disappeared in a flash. It was almost as if the few words the newspaper publisher spoke over the wire had some cryptic significance, strong enough to wipe away all of Van's previous inertia.

"Yes, Mr. Havens," he said crisply.

"I've been trying to get in touch with you for the past hour. I've called all your clubs in New York. Fortunately, someone

at the Patrooms remembered hearing you say you'd be at Diamond Point this afternoon. Can I see you within an hour?"

Van Loan's mouth tightened. Stranger than ever, Havens' statement wrought further magic. Quickly Van looked at the watch on his wrist, mentally gauging the time it would take him to get from where he was to Manhattan.

"In an hour," he said. "Right! Where?"

"Tony's," Havens said.

"I'll be there."

Van hung up the receiver. For an instant he stared frowningly at his reflected image in the booth's glass door. The gilded playboy had apparently vanished.

Those who knew him well would have been amazed at what followed. The blue-eyed Wendy, the drink she had ordered with the cherry in it, the crowd on the terrace, the white sails veering in the wind sweeping Long Island Sound—all seemed suddenly forgotten by Van, erased completely from his mind.

Almost surreptitiously he let himself out of the rear door. Olga Tanner, Clayton Sherman and the Lincoln Continental had disappeared. Van cut quickly across the parking space, picked out his own car, climbed in and a moment later was through the entrance gates of the yacht club and on the road that led directly to the four-ply highway back to the city between the two rivers.

The car, black and polished, was apparently super-charged, multi-cylindereed. With hardly a sound it sped along, low, rakish, its motor purring silkily.

It was a special job in more ways than one. No one save Van himself and Mr. Havens knew that its glimmering body was of specially constructed steel, bullet-proof. Van's friends would have been amazed had they known he rode around in such an armored vehicle. But there was a reason for that just as there was for Frank Havens' telephone call, the appointment made, and the manner in which Van had deserted his pretty companion of the terrace.

The miles dropped away under the drive of the big car's revolving wheels. Half-way to the bridge over the East River, Van Loan slowed at one of the highway's exits. He steered through a real estate development and kept on going until he saw a fringe of woods ahead.

He nodded, one eye on his watch. The woods would be both a screen and protection for his next move. He drove well into them, made sure no one was watching and, leaving the driver's seat, climbed into the rear of the car.

A TOUCH of a button snapped down shades at all the windows. On the rear seat, Van pressed another button. That dropped an electrically controlled mirrored dressing table that had been cleverly built into the back of the front seat.

Now those who were acquainted with him would have stared in wonder as he quickly assembled several small jars and reached for what looked like colored crayons.

His fingertips deftly rubbed cream from one of the jars over his face and forehead. That dried instantly. Next, with all the skill of an actor making up for a role on the stage, Van Loan went to work with the crayons.

Like an artist bringing a countenance to life on canvas, Van began to create a new face over his own handsome features. Suddenly the face took form and shape. Under the delicate tracery of the crayons, the stern, austere visage of a professional man—a doctor, professor or scientist—developed.

This was a man in the middle thirties, with gray-dark hair, a close-lipped mouth and a sallow complexion. A man who might have spent most of his time in hospital, laboratory or classroom. Van added tiny wrinkles to the corners of his eyes, looked at himself critically and from a box took two finely made plastic dentures.

These added the final touch to his transformation.

Then he raised the back seat and quickly changed the clothes he had worn to the yacht races for a somewhat baggy, light tweed suit he took from the space under the seat. Another necktie, one not quite as flamboyant as the foulard he had worn, was knotted rapidly. A hat, plain and conventional, completed the new ensemble.

Van Loan took another look at himself in the mirror above the dressing table and nodded, satisfied.

There was a reason for this startling metamorphosis. Only one other person

knew that Richard Curtis Van Loan led a dual life. The other person who knew was the same Frank Havens who had telephoned him at the club. The *Clarion* owner alone held the secret that Van Loan was also the universally famous Phantom Detective!

Havens had been responsible for the creation of the celebrated Phantom. In his crime crusades the publisher had vitally needed the talents of a scientific investigator who could go beyond routine police methods and crack cases given up as hopeless. In young Dick Van Loan, Havens had found just the one he wanted. Even in his university days Van had shown potentialities. A student of crime, he had schooled himself in new, unorthodox methods of deduction. From the first he had believed that more crimes could be solved in the laboratory than by old-fashioned, time worn police tactics.

So, under the guidance of Frank Havens, the Phantom had come to life. Now Van's lazy, gilded playboy role was a perfect cover for the Phantom's criminal investigations. No one suspected, no one dreamed that Dick Van Loan was anything other than a wealthy socialite. This, too, had contributed largely to the success of his exploits. From his first case on, the Phantom had been eminently and brilliantly successful!

Van checked to make sure the tools of his trade were with him, among them the small, jewel-encrusted domino plate mask that was his own personal identification. He put that in the secret pocket with which each suit in his disguise wardrobe was equipped. With it went a tightly rolled black felt mask, pencil flashlight, his master-key, money and a gun. For under the clothes in the space beneath the rear seat were several weapons.

He had selected a .25 caliber automatic, made sure its clip was ready for use and slid it into a recess in the lining of his coat under his left armpit. Then he pressed the button that folded the dressing table back into the rear of the front seat, snapped up the shades and took his place again at the wheel.

Within twenty minutes he was over the bridge and into the traffic of Manhattan.

Quickly the Phantom headed for Tony's place and his appointment with Frank Havens.

## CHAPTER III

## MISSING



ON THE broad Avenue of the Americas, Tony's was an ordinary rathskeller-tavern. As it was convenient to the Clarion Building, Frank Havens often selected it as a rendezvous for his meetings with the Phantom principally because he trusted the proprietor.

Havens paid well for a small dining room on the second floor, and Tony, he was confident, was both discreet and loyal to him. Tony, Havens was sure, would not disclose the fact that from time to time the publisher of Manhattan's leading newspaper came to the second floor room of the rathskeller to meet odd characters.

These characters, of course, were always the Phantom in his varied disguises. But Tony didn't know that and even if he had, the newspaper owner was certain Tony wouldn't have been curious enough to pry into what didn't concern him.

The boss, himself, stout, swarthy and genial, watched the Phantom enter his place and go directly to the stairs in the rear that led to the floor above. Tony nodded, then promptly forgot Havens' visitor.

The private dining room was at the end of the corridor. The Phantom knocked twice, then three times before opening the unlocked door. That was the agreed upon signal that told Havens the man he had summoned had arrived.

The publisher sat with a cup of coffee before him. He stared at the plainly dressed, austere-looking man who closed the door quietly behind him. Accustomed as he was to the Phantom's disguises, Havens never ceased to marvel at each new creation. And this one, he saw, was equally as clever as any of the others in the past.

"Fifty minutes exactly!" Havens pulled out a chair for Van.

"I had to leave a mighty pretty girl to do it. Leave her without saying good-by." Van shrugged. "She'll never forgive my rudeness. I hope that whatever you want to see me about is important enough to warrant my walking out on her."

"It is," the publisher assured him.



The Phantom tried to roll with the downward sweep of the blackjack (CHAPTER IX)

Van sat down. His eyes went curiously to Havens. Without comment he waited for his friend to speak. A long minute passed before Frank Havens pushed his coffee cup aside and lighted a cigar.

"You've heard of the Choctaw Oil Company?" he asked then.

"Indirectly. An Oklahoma outfit, isn't it?"

Havens nodded. "Exactly. Though the public doesn't know it—yet—this company's under investigation. It seems that through some sleight of hand, high-pressure tactics, the company acquired certain properties that were originally Government land grants to Oklahoma Indians."

The Phantom sat motionless. "Go on."

"It seems," Havens continued, "that the land bought by the Choctaw Oil Company was obtained through a clever swindle. The field man of the company is suspected of having bribed certain people who were making preliminary surveys in a search for oil. Their reports that came back showed no possibility of any successful drilling on the property. In other words, the real survey was altered and falsified to make the property appear valueless."

"So," Van put in, "when the original owners were offered a small amount for their holdings, they were glad to accept!"

Havens smiled thinly. "Precisely. Choctaw Oil took over the practically stolen land, and started drilling. Gushers came in all over the place. Because of this bare-faced grab, the original owners took the matter up with their senator. The result is that a senatorial investigating committee, under the chairmanship of Senator Lawton Larue, of that state, has been set up in Washington to probe the matter. A week ago a man named Ernest Shaler, the directing head of the oil company, was subpoenaed to appear as chief witness. The investigation was to get under way Thursday."

"Shaler didn't appear," Van said slowly.

"How did you know?" Havens gave him a swift glance.

"I didn't. I assumed that when you said the investigation was to get under way Thursday. What happened to Shaler?"

"He has disappeared. He was seen in Washington two days before the hearing was scheduled to come up. Then he faded into thin air."

"Hasn't the FBI looked into it?" Van asked.

"Yes. Shaler was traced as far as Philadelphia. There the trail ended. The Federal Bureau didn't catch up with him. They're still looking for him. However, I had a call early this morning from Senator Larue. He asked me to contact *you* and give you the task of finding Ernest Shaler."

Van frowned. "Isn't that more the type of thing Inspector Gregg handles?"

"This," Frank Havens said soberly, "is of the utmost importance. For one thing, Senator Larue believes that Shaler may have been murdered before he had a chance to testify! He thinks Shaler went to Washington in good faith but that the man was threatened by unscrupulous people using him as a stooge, so he wouldn't appear before the committee. The FBI believes Shaler is hiding out here in New York."

"I'll do what I can," Van agreed.

**B**EFORE he could ask further particulars, Havens leaned toward him.

"There's something else. Something that might be of interest to you. The body of a murdered man Steve Huston found yesterday in some woods in the Bronx!"

Van's brows went up. "You mean?"

Havens rapidly explained how Steve had discovered the body in the rain, how acid had been used to obliterate the face and features of the victim.

"Oddly," he added then, "the height and weight of the man tallies exacty with Ernest Shaler's description!"

"Then the body wasn't identified?"

"No. Every means of identification had been removed. There was no record of the fingerprints, nothing to go on. The autopsy revealed he had been shot to death with a thirty-eight-caliber gun. There were two bullets in him. One close to his heart, the other near his spine. The gun wasn't found, either."

"Clues?"

"A broken cuff link, a wad of newspaper in his hat and several footsteps in the muddy ground. Gregg has had a *mouflage* made of the footprints. When Steve found the man he had been dead at least eight hours."

"He couldn't be traced through the hat?" Van asked.

Frank Havens shook his head, said that one of Gregg's plainclothes operators had

visited the haberdasher's where the hat had been purchased, without results.

"I'd like to see the body. Also the clothes and the clues." Van got up. "The fact that the man's weight and height correspond exactly with Shaler's doesn't mean too much. That might be purely coincidental. Thousands of men weigh in the same and measure the same. What

in the taxi he had hailed near Tony's, he reviewed what Frank Havens had told him. The matter of finding the missing Ernest Shaler was vitally important. As a Government witness the man's presence in Washington was imperative. Shaler had to be found.

Yet, the Phantom was aware, locating a missing person was usually one of the most difficult of all assignments. The world was a big place. People disappeared and were never seen or heard of again. He remembered the case of Judge Crater, others. A man could step out of his house and vanish like a flash of light.

The body Steve had stumbled across didn't impress the Phantom too much, outside of the acid's use. As he had told the *Clarion* owner, the height and weight angle he considered too coincidental to be of much value. The murdered man might be Ernest Shaler, but the chances were a thousand to one that he was not. Still, Van realized, it was that thousandth chance that sometimes paid off.

Gregg was expecting the Phantom when he reached Headquarters. The Inspector had seen the Phantom in a number of his many disguises and like Havens he admired the new face with which the detective had equipped himself now. Gregg, of course, was totally unaware of the Phantom's real identity.

The Inspector shook hands and left with the Phantom for the morgue. There they viewed the body Steve had chanced across in the tangled wet underbrush in the Bronx. The Phantom looked it over carefully, trying to find some distinguishing mark or scar, but there was nothing to go on.

"How about his clothes?" he asked Gregg.

"Mr. Havens said you'd want them. I have them ready for you—in a suitcase. Also, two clues which young Huston turned in." Gregg added, "Neither of them make much sense to me."

WITH the suitcase and the manila envelope that contained the broken cuff link and the wad of newspaper which had been in the murdered man's hat, the Phantom took another taxi back to where he had parked his big car. In it, he drove east and then north, toward the Bronx.

Gregg had supplied him with a map of



FRANK HAVENS

interests me is the acid angle you mentioned."

"I'll get in touch with the Inspector at once," Frank Havens said. "I was sure you'd look into this, so I had Gregg hold everything in readiness for you. I'll tell him you're coming right down."

Van shook hands with the publisher and let himself out.

On the avenue, he walked two blocks before an empty taxi came along. The Phantom climbed into it with a brief direction:

"Police Headquarters!"

The Phantom Detective worked with the metropolitan police only infrequently. Preferring his own highly specialized methods of scientific crime detection and procedure, he collaborated with Inspector Gregg and Homicide only when the occasion made it absolutely necessary.

This, Van saw, was one of those rare occasions. Riding down to Centre Street

## THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

the location where the dead man had been found. The Phantom decided to stop there first before going on to his secret laboratory near the Westchester line.

He drove fast, his mind on the acid-rained face of the corpse in the morgue.

The Phantom stopped the car not far from where Steve's blowout had occurred. A small amount of traffic passed, but there were few pedestrians. Without any watching eyes on him, Van made his way down the path Steve had traversed yesterday.

The ground was still damp from the previous day's shower. The Phantom went along until he reached the bank of underbrush into which the dead man had been dumped. He couldn't mistake the spot. All around it were the footprints of Gregg's men, and trampled down shrubbery. The Phantom glanced at the roof of a house visible between the trees and then made a painstaking examination of the surrounding terrain.

He never depended on Homicide turning up clues for him, preferring to do that himself. Then there would be no chance of passing up leads which the Homicide men may have considered too trivial to bother with. From long experience the Phantom knew that the most inconsequential appearing things could be links which fit into the chain-diagram of a case.

### CHAPTER IV

#### CLUES



**U**SING the spot where the body was found as a pivotal point, Van Loan began to circle out, going over the ground with careful attention. The murdered man had been stripped of all obvious identification, yet it was Van's contention that, no matter how cleverly a killer worked, he always left unintentional traces of his crime.

It was one of these that the Phantom sought.

The rough ground made it difficult. He had to rake through fallen leaves, pry under masses of shrubbery, turn back knee-high weeds. But he kept at it, certain that in the end he would discover something.

It was when he was half-way back

toward the highway where his car was parked that he saw the sun sparkling on something off to the left side of the path. The Phantom pounced on it like a descending hawk. It was half-concealed in the brambles, something which might conceivably have slipped out of the dead man's pocket when, thrown over the shoulder of his killer, his body had been carried into the woods.

The Phantom was uncertain. That didn't seem logical. He was sure the murderer had not waited to reach the dumping spot under the bushes before cleaning his victim's belongings out of the pockets. The only delay that had occurred there had come when he had used the acid.

Still, what Van picked up quickly might have been clenched in the dead man's hand, unknown to the killer. It might have been a last grim stratagem on his part, a final, desperate hope that what he held so tightly would aid those who found him in tracking down the man responsible for his death.

The Phantom's eyes narrowed as he looked at the mud-stained, tagged key he had found. He slipped it in his pocket, completed the rest of his search, discovered nothing further and went back to the car and headed for his Bronx laboratory.

The laboratory was not far from the fringe of woods where he had found the key, a few miles to the east. As was his custom, when Van approached the building it was with care. The building which once had been a small warehouse stood alone, apart from the other buildings in the neighborhood. For a long time it had served his purpose well. He intended to see that it remained his own secret hide-out for his own scientific purposes.

His neighbors believed the building was the property of a Dr. Bendix, a bearded, elderly scientist who occasionally visited it for research and experiments. To make that story good, the Phantom let himself be seen in the Bendix disguise from time to time.

Now, as he parked two streets away from his lab, the Phantom cut diagonally across some vacant lots and, with Gregg's suitcase in hand, casually went up to the front door. To the onlooker he might have been a brush salesman trying to sell his wares. He set the suitcase down beside

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him, turned as if to ring the bell, and slipped an odd-shaped key he held in his hand into the door's multiple lock. Then, acting as if someone had answered his ring, he straightened quickly, picked up the suitcase and, wiping his feet on the front door mat, took off his hat and went in.

The door swung noiselessly shut behind him. Indirect lighting flooded the place with a clear glow. Lights were needed, for the windows were shielded by dark, heavy draperies behind closed shutters. The Phantom put the suitcase on a convenient table and looked around with the satisfaction he always felt when surveying this place.

No scientific laboratory boasted better or more complete equipment than Van Loan's Bronx retreat. Here were precision instruments of the latest type and model, ray machines, microscopes, shelves stocked with jars of every chemical known to science. Here was the new British-made Paxton-Hearst electric oven and the Martin Kellogg centrifugal finder, capable of reducing any known substance to its basic, component parts.

Here were test tubes of all sizes and shapes, Bunsen burners, electrical heating devices and the new type laboratory aluminum rack for graduated vials. The equipment was in neat array, so orderly that the Phantom could put his hand on anything he wanted without a second's delay.

Another section of the place was devoted to his disguise wardrobe. More than a hundred suits of clothing hung on numbered hangers. The shelf above held an equal number of hats, and a section of it was given over to shoes and other necessary accessories.

**A**CROSS from the wardrobe was the Phantom's arsenal. Behind glass doors were guns of every conceivable make and pattern, weapons that ranged from a purse-sized pistol to vicious Lugers, designed to hurl high-calibered lead. Van, a gun connoisseur, had seen to it that no gun was missing from the collection. Often his own life depended on what means of defense he carried.

The final space in the lab was devoted to his crime library, his books, maps, steel filing cabinets and all the odds and ends

that fitted into his work.

The Phantom got busy quickly. First, the clothing removed from the body in the morgue. Van spread it out on a white-topped metal table. The label sewed into the lining of the coat had been removed with a few slashes of some sharp instrument, probably a razor blade. The pockets were empty. In one were a few crumbs of tobacco. Van tossed the coat aside and went over the vest.

That also yielded nothing. He discarded it and stretched the trousers full length on the table. He worked down from the waistband, sliding parts of the cloth under his largest Greenough microscope. A gleam of interest brightened his gaze when he reached the trouser cuffs.

Several stains, along the edges of the cuffs, held his attention. He ran an eye over his chemical cabinet, helped himself to a tiny vial and sprinkled some of the grayish powder from it over the spots. The glass-stoppered touch of a liquid chemical, a scraping, another microscope and the Phantom determined the nature of the substance that had stained the cloth.

Under the glass it came up as oil.

Van's brows drew together. Choctaw oil? He touched the stuff on the glass slide and moved his shoulders. This oil was refined. It could have been picked up from the floor of a garage. Or, he thought, it might have splashed on the trousers from the oil-soggy ground of some refinery.

Van Loan put the blue suit back in the suitcase. Next, he studied the two clues Steve Huston had picked up. The folded length of paper had not come from any of the metropolitan dailies. The dead man's hat might have been purchased in Manhattan, but the newspaper was from somewhere else. The rain had made it pulpy and difficult to read. Again he used one of his microscopes, studying the blurred print as he slowly drew the paper under the lights.

He put that aside after a minute or two and looked at the broken cuff link. It was pure silver, but that didn't interest him as much as did the crude animal head decorating it. It might have been that of a dog, a wolf or a jackal.

To one not familiar with the symbols of Indian tribes, the design would have meant nothing. But to Van Loan it held an important significance.

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A student of Indian lore, he knew the meaning of such primitive emblems. To make doubly sure he stepped across to the library.

On the third shelf was a copy of James Archer's "Indian Craftsmanship." He took the book down, ran a finger along its index. In a short time he matched the head on the silver cuff link with one of the illustrations in the volume.

He put the book back and centered his attention on his own find. That was the key that had been half-buried in the mud off from the path. He washed it in alcohol, looking at its numbered tag. That bore the numerals 1128. A hotel? Key to a room on an eleventh floor? If so, it should not be too difficult to trace.

Van reached for the telephone. He dialed a number, waited, then heard the voice of Frank Havens in his ear.

"There's something you can do for me," Van told him. "I want a plane reservation for Oklahoma City. I'll need Steve Huston for a time before I leave, too. I want Steve to check on a key I have—the key to a hotel room. Have him meet me within a half hour at the Green Spot. Give him my plane reservation so I can get it when I see him."

"How long will you be gone?" Frank Havens asked. "And what do you expect to find?"

The Phantom smiled thinly.

"With any luck," he answered, "I hope to identify the body in the morgue—positively and without question. . . ."

**T**HE Phantom's plane landed in Oklahoma the next day, as scheduled. But from that central point in the oil country, he learned, he would have to continue his journey by bus. Luck was with him, however, for he was able to make one which was just about to pull out.

Heat, dry and withering, rose in glimmering waves along the water-packed highway as the lumbering bus rumbled along to Wellington. Overhead the sky was a blue, cloudless arch. Wheat fields, green and yellow, carpeted the flat, open spaces on either side of the long, straight road.

In one of the rear seats, the Phantom mused as the miles clicked off. He had a double purpose in his hasty flight from the metropolis to this distant state. Not

alone the tie-up between the missing Government witness, Ernest Shaler, and the dead man in the Bronx woods, but he also intended to learn a lot more about the Choctaw Oil Company.

An hour later the bus rolled into Wellington. Here, stark against the sky, the derricks and structures of oil wells loomed up in fantastic pattern. Van had a glimpse of huge storage tanks, of a cracking plant in the process of completion, all the litter and tangle, picturesque and bizarre, of the oil fields.

A sprawling wooden hotel, with the name "Fowler House" in six foot letters stretched across its facade, was halfway down the main street. Van hurried toward it, carried his small traveling bag into its stuffy lobby and stopped at the desk.

The clerk, a gawky young fellow with buck teeth and bright blue eyes, stared at him.

"Room and bath," Van said.

"Yes, sir, plenty of 'em. Eight dollars a day. Figure on stayin' long?"

The Phantom said he didn't expect to. He scrawled the name, "James Carney, Chicago, Ill.," in the register, laid eight dollars on the desk and waited for a bellhop to lead the way to the floor above.

"Might have a little trouble with the hot water," the bellhop said, when he opened the door of a room at the end of the hall and ushered in the guest. "It ain't always hot. And it don't always run. Sometimes it just crawls."

"I'll manage." Van tossed him a tip and glanced out of the window. "By the way, is Choctaw the only company operating in these parts?"

"Yes, sir." The bellhop seemed to like to talk. "They just about made this town. A few years ago it was mud and hills. And Indians. Summit Reservation's over there, west. Right beyond is the Black Eagle Tract. Company owns that, too."

"Black Eagle Tract?" the Phantom repeated.

"About a thousand acres. They ain't done nothin' with it—yet. I hear some of the Choctaw people say it's worth a million bucks. Must be oil there, too."

"Who's in charge of the company, in the field?"

"Buck Rooney, now that Ernie Shaler's gone East. Sometimes Colonel Tanner



The butt of the Phantom's gun flashed downward (CHAPTER X)

stops around. Him and Chet Harrington. All three of them are partners. Matter of fact, somebody said the Colonel might get in today, from New York."

Van frowned. Tanner? The name struck a chord in his memory. Suddenly he was back at the Diamond Point Yacht Club, the white sails of the racing boats before him. He remembered the attractive brunette in the cherry-colored dress, the worried, nervous, pretty girl. Wendy Malcolm had told him her name was Olga Tanner.

Still, it wasn't a too unusual name. Coincidence again? The Phantom shrugged.

"The Colonel," the bellhop said, "is one of the big stockholders. Chet Harrington, too. Real oil operators, that pair. They sure know their stuff."

Another minute or two and the door closed behind the talkative bellhop. Van Loan relaxed. He already knew considerable about the Choctaw Oil Company, for he had gone over the prospectus on his way West. The details of the company's financial operations, furnished by Frank Havens, together with a list of its stockholders were in his bag.

But that was not enough. There were still certain things he had to find out for himself. Important angles to be looked into.

He wasted no time. He washed up and, before a half hour had passed, was through the main gates of the Choctaw property.

The busy scene before him was fascinating. The steady grind of drilling op-

erations on the south side of the field. Ground that oozed the black gold of the wells. Mazes of pipe-lines, sweating men in hip boots. Shirtless men, their bodies like bronze in the burning rays of the relentless sun.

The Phantom walked on. Buck Rooney's shack was midway along the tract. The Phantom was close to it when he saw a dusty touring car pull in from the other side of the property. Two men were in its rear seat. Slowing, Van watched both climb out of the car and head for the same shack he, himself, was bound for.

The Colonel and the Harrington the bellhop had mentioned? The Phantom moved on, more slowly.

## CHAPTER V

### LAUGHING WOLF



**A** BURLY man with a mop of curly brown hair had come out of the shack. Van heard his lusty greeting.

"Hello, gents! Come on in out of the sun. When's Ernie due back? I'm getting fed up with all this work, and—"

His voice trailed off as the two men went into the shack with him. The door was slammed shut. Van continued on another hundred yards, and through an open window he had a good view of the shack's interior and the two visitors.

One, a man who wore a cream-colored tropical cloth suit and a Panama hat, had dropped into a chair. He was fat and pudgy, a moon-faced, benevolent-looking individual with the pink, glowing skin of a baby. A fluff of white hair was under the brim of his hat, a gold-banded cigar tucked in one corner of his smiling face.

From what conversation floated out, the Phantom placed the fat man as Colonel Tanner, the burly one as "Buck" Rooney, and the third man as the Chet Harrington the bellhop had mentioned.

Harrington, a perfect foil for Tanner, was thin to the point of being cadaverous. He had stiff black hair, a dark complexion, a bony, angular face and a slit for a mouth. He leaned against a table in the shack, a cigarette between his fingers, letting Tanner do the talking.

The Phantom moved leisurely past the shack. It was no time now for any con-

versation with Rooney. That would have to come later.

But he had hardly gone a dozen steps before the door of the shack was banged open. Rooney stepped out and hailed him:

"Just a minute, friend. Looking for someone?"

"For you—if you're Rooney."

"That's me. What can I do for you?"

"I'll talk to you later, when you're not busy," the Phantom told him.

"Okay. What's your name?"

"Carney."

Rooney went back in the shack.

"Who's he?" Van heard Harrington say, and heard Rooney reply, "Don't know. He's coming back later." Then the mild, placid tones of Tanner murmuring, "Probably someone looking for a job."

Van Loan retraced his steps to the gates. He had to wait to see Rooney, but that didn't make too much difference. He had another call in prospect. That was at the Summit Reservation.

Parked at the curb before the Fowler House, Van found a dilapidated flivver that was being used as a local taxi. He hired it and within a half hour was at the reservation. He told the taxi man to wait and went on to the wooden fence fronting the reservation.

Here were the descendants of the proud Pawnee and Choctaw tribes who had been the state's earliest settlers. Here the Government had erected homes for them, a school, industrial workshops, a recreation center.

**T**HE Phantom found the superintendent's office and entered. Green shades at the windows kept out the hot sun. Furniture and floor covering had been made by the Indians. Samples of their art were on the walls.

The superintendent, an Indian himself, was a pleasant middle-aged man named Miles Carter. The Phantom showed him the credentials which Inspector Gregg had supplied him with and took the broken cuff link from his wallet.

"I have reason to believe," he said, "this was made here. Am I correct?"

The liquid dark eyes of Carter turned to him. "How did you know? That is the symbol of the Laughing Wolf."

"The symbol," the Phantom added, "of the ancient Pawnee tribe. Were many of

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these cuff links made? I'm trying to learn, if possible, to whom this particular one was sold—or given."

"That," Miles Carter answered, "will take a little time."

"I'm in no hurry," the Phantom assured him.

"Then I will see our silversmiths. Will you be seated and wait?"

Twenty minutes or more elapsed before the superintendent came back with a young Indian in tow. He had flashing black eyes, a copper-colored skin. He walked with lithe grace and dignity, his beaded moccasined feet soundless on the sun-baked ground.

"This is Charles Smith—White Arrow to give him his tribal name," Carter said, making the introductions. "This is the gentleman I spoke to you about," he said to the Indian youth. Then, to Van again, "White Arrow is one of our best craftsmen."

The Phantom felt his nerves tighten. On what this Indian boy told him depended the success or failure of his hasty flight from Manhattan. But no sign of it was in his face. His expression was as blank as that of White Arrow when he held out the broken cuff link on the palm of his open hand.

"You've seen this before?" he asked.

The Indian took it, turned it over and nodded.

"I made it," he said quietly. "That little mark—I put it on all my work." He pointed to a tiny arrowhead the Phantom had noticed on the back of the silver disk.

"Can you remember who purchased the set?" the Phantom asked, and held his breath.

White Arrow frowned slightly. Apparently he was searching his mind for the correct answer. Finally he spoke.

"I remember. These silver cuff links were bought by a man in the oil fields my friends were cheated out of! It was last March. He came to the shop. He liked these cuff links. He bought them. He paid twelve dollars. I remember it as if it were yesterday."

Outside, the distant echoes of the drilling drifted in. Overhead a plane droned. But the Phantom heard only the venom in White Arrow's low, strained voice.

"Who was the man?" the Phantom asked.

The Indian handed back the cuff link. His gesture was one of finality, as if he had no wish to talk about it further, as if he were closing the matter forever.

"His name? Rooney—Buck Rooney." White Arrow's black eyes flashed. "You hear that sound, the boring for the oil that lies hidden beneath the ground? Rooney is digging for it—trying to find its wealth to add to that which has already been taken from our own warm earth!"

When the Phantom left the reservation, he had a look at the Black Eagle tract the bellhop had mentioned. He saw an expanse of untouched land, stretching as far as the eye could see. Colorless, uninteresting land, dotted with rocks and tree stumps.

The antiquated flivver took him to the sheriff's office for his next stop. That was at the end of Wellington's bedraggled main street. He went into a two story brick building that housed the local jail, the police court and the office of Seth Higby, Sheriff of Summit County.

An electric fan stirred the hot air. Flies buzzed at the screened windows. A lean, weathered man with a drooping gray mustache sat in a tilted-back chair, his boot heels on the edge of the desk before him. A silver star was pinned to his open-throated shirt. A pair of six-guns were holstered on an elaborate belt decorated with silver medallions. His levis, stuffed into the dust-powdered boots, were worn and stained.

HIGBY didn't bother to drop his feet when the Phantom walked in. Instead, he shifted a wad of tobacco from one side of his jaw to the other, snapped up the brim of the sombrero shading his eyes, and looked at his visitor curiously.

"Somethin' I can do for you, stranger?" His voice was a lazy drawl.

Without invitation the Phantom pulled out a chair and sat down. He was doubtful if Higby would realize the significance of the small, jewel-studded domino plate mask, but the Sheriff, when Van opened his hand and displayed his identification, brought his feet to the floor with a jerk that straightened him in his chair.

A wave of quick color suffused his weathered face. He looked from the tiny badge to the visitor, his expression one of sudden wonder.



"The Phantom Detective!" A note of quick respect came into his voice. "I never reckoned I'd meet up with *you*!"

The Phantom smiled faintly. Glancing around to make sure there was no one listening, he edged his chair closer to the man before the desk.

"You know Shaler?" he asked.

"Ernie? Sure do. Everyone around these parts knows him. He's top man down there." Higby nodded in the general direction of the oil fields.

"You know Shaler's been subpoenaed before a Government committee?"

The sheriff stared blankly. "Nope. Never heard about that. What's he been up to?"

The Phantom explained briefly.

"Shaler's disappeared," he said then. "I'm looking for him. There's just a chance

he might have come back to Wellington—if he's still alive. When did you see him last?"

Higby pulled at his melancholy mustache.

"Must have been most a week ago," he said thoughtfully. "Disappeared, eh? That ain't like Ernie."

The Phantom took the folded piece of newspaper Steve Huston had found under the sweatband of the hat in the Bronx woods. He pushed it over to the sheriff.

"Recognize this?"

Higby spread the paper out flat on the desk. He chewed vigorously on his tobacco cud, his keen eyes on what print was still readable. Then he reached toward a wire basket on the floor beside the desk. Out of that he took a discarded newspaper. He shook it open and handed



One shot put out the last floodlight before the Phantom and the girl sped on (CHAPTER XIX)

it to the Phantom.

"Same thing. Yours is a piece of a copy of the *Wellington Bugle*. Notice the type, the general setup. It's from the *Bugle* all right. How'd you come by it?"

"It was taken from a murdered man's hat," the Phantom said slowly.

Sheriff Higby's eyes narrowed. His fingers went back to his mustache.

"Meaning you think the murdered man might be Ernie Shaler?" he said softly. "Who'd want to kill him? He didn't have an enemy in the world. Nicest hombre you'd ever want to meet up with. Great feller, Ernie. Anybody'll tell you that."

The Phantom's mind worked fast. So the wad of paper in the hat had been part of the town's local sheet. And the cuff link that had been Steve's other clue had come from the Summit Indian Reserva-

tion. To the Phantom the double proof seemed to point a positive finger to the acid-eaten body as being that of the missing Ernie Shaler.

A car went by in the sunny street. More flies buzzed at the screens. The Phantom looked at his watch.

"What do you know about Colonel Tanner and a man named Chet Harrington?" he asked.

"Couple of nice people." Higby sounded enthusiastic. "Tanner's been around these parts for quite a while. Real oil man, the Colonel. Harrington's all right, too."

The Phantom got up.

"Thanks for your information, Sheriff." He held out his hand. "If I don't see you again, good-by."

Higby climbed to his feet. "It's been a real pleasure meetin' you. Reckon I won't

forget this day for a long time. Yes, sir. Greatest detective in the world stoppin' in and findin' me with my boots on the desk!"

## CHAPTER VI

### ONE SHOT



LEAVING Sheriff Higby, the Phantom walked back to the Fowler House. It was still early. He decided he would have lunch before going back to see Buck Rooney. He went up the hotel stairs and walked down the corridor to his room.

The minute Van unlocked his door and went in, he came to a quick stop. His glance focused on the small traveling bag he had brought for his quick jump to Oklahoma. The bag was apparently just as he had left it on a chair beside the bed, but to the Phantom's trained eye, he saw it had been tampered with in his absence.

Someone had tried to unlock it. Tiny scratches made by a knife blade, or a bit of wire, were on the brass lock. He turned his gaze and let it travel around the room. When he had gone out he had closed the closet door. Now it was unlatched, open an inch or two.

Van frowned. So someone was interested in him. Who? He moved his shoulders. Perhaps an ordinary hotel sneak, some small town crook who had seen him register and thought there might be easy pickings? Or someone with another motive? Someone who suspected that his visit to Wellington might have a secret significance?

For a minute or two the Phantom pondered the question. Then he shrugged again, tried the hot water in the bathroom and found it still didn't function. He washed in cold water and went down to the dining room.

Colonel Tanner and the cadaverous Harrington were at a choice table in the corner. Choice because it was the largest and the only one with a floral decoration. The flowers were artificial but designated that that table had been reserved for distinguished guests.

Tanner's jovial laugh boomed across the room. Harrington, sardonic and taciturn,

said little. Tanner chattered away, stopping occasionally to sample a frosty highball beside him. He sipped that while he ate a lunch large enough for two men.

From the conversation the Phantom picked up, both Tanner and Harrington were leaving Wellington sometime in the early evening. Once Tanner mentioned "New York" and the "*Queen Elizabeth*." The fat man would have elaborated on the latter subject, but Tanner dropped it abruptly.

Van, from the corner of his eye, understood why. For Tanner had hardly mentioned the name when Harrington's foot, under the table, quickly silenced him.

Finished, Van went out to find his flivver taxi waiting as he had directed. This time when he reached the scene of the Choctaw Oil Company's operations, he found Buck Rooney alone in the shack.

"Sorry I was busy this morning, Mr. Carney," Rooney apologized. "Come in and sit down. What can I do for you?"

The Phantom dropped into the same chair the stout Tanner had occupied earlier that day. He looked at Rooney casually. A fine specimen of physical perfection. Heavy without an ounce of superfluous flesh. Muscular without the bulge of a professional athlete's development. A tough customer in a close-up brawl, the Phantom thought.

"New York Police Department," he said, and let Rooney see the Detective Bureau badge Inspector Gregg had given him. "I want to ask you a few questions."

He watched Rooney closely. The man's expression didn't change. Rooney thumbed some shag into a blackened pipe and struck a match.

"Fire away," he said carelessly.

The Phantom again took the broken cuff link from his wallet and handed it to Rooney.

"You've seen this before?" he asked.

The man held his pipe suspended. His brows drew together. He looked from the head of the Laughing Wolf to the Phantom's impassive face.

"That's one of a pair of cuff links I got over at the Reservation's general store some time back," he said. "How'd you get hold of it?"

"You bought the cuff links," the Phantom said slowly. "What became of them?"

Rooney put the pipe in his mouth and

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puffed on it.

"I don't mind telling you. The cuff links were stolen, a couple of weeks after I got them."

"By whom?"

"I wish I knew. I lost a lot of other stuff at the same time—a camera, some money and a brand new watch. Higby looked into it, but never got anywhere."

The Phantom changed the subject. "Another thing. Where can I get in touch with Ernie Shaler? I understand he's the head of this outfit."

STILL watching Rooney intently, he saw there was still no change in the man's expression. Rooney frowned again before he answered.

"Mr. Shaler hasn't been around for about a week. He went to Washington, D. C. Some kind of personal business."

"Then he's still in Washington, so far as you know?"

"No, he's in New York. I had a call from him by long distance telephone not more than an hour ago."

The Phantom stared into Rooney's eyes. No trace of any surprise brought about by the man's statement flickered across Van's disguised face.

"You're sure it was Shaler?" he asked quietly.

"Sure I'm sure." Buck Rooney laughed. "No mistaking his voice. He wanted a report on some new drilling."

When he flivvered back to Wellington's only hotel, Van Loan was frankly puzzled. The pointing finger that had first indicated that the murdered man of the Bronx woods might be the missing Shaler didn't seem so positive now. But if it had not been Shaler whom Huston had found dead in the rain-splashed underbrush, who had it been?

Or was Buck Rooney lying about the long distance telephone call?

The Phantom did not believe that. No small part of his success came from his ability to judge people. He didn't need a lie detector to tell him when a person was not telling the truth. To all outward appearances, Buck Rooney had leveled with him. And yet—

"Drop me at the sheriff's office," Van said to the chauffeur.

Higby was still there when the Phantom went into the brick building. The sheriff

looked surprised to see him.

"Somethin' new turned up?" he inquired.

"I just learned that Buck Rooney had some things stolen from him a while back," the Phantom said crisply. "Did he give you a list of the stolen items?"

"He sure did," Higby murmured. "Want to see it? Got it around somewhere." When the Phantom said he'd like a look at the list, Higby said, "Guess I tucked it away in one of these letter files. Let's see—it would be under R."

He blew dust from one of the heavy cardboard boxes, ran a gnarled finger down the alphabetical index and hauled out a litter of papers.

Moistening a finger, Higby riffled through them. Finally he pulled out a typewritten sheet of paper and gave it to the waiting Phantom.

"There you are. Never did find any of the stuff, or the party who took it. That's the list."

The Phantom checked off the items, one by one. Had Rooney been lying? There was no mention of any silver cuff links anywhere among the listed articles.

"How's your memory, Sheriff?" The Phantom gave the paper back. "At the time Rooney supplied this list, do you remember if he mentioned a pair of silver cuff links?"

Seth Higby rubbed his chin reflectively. He screwed his forehead into thought furrows before he shook his head.

"No, sir. He didn't say nothin' about no cuff links. I'm sure of that."

"That's all. Thanks again."

It was twilight when Van got back to the Fowler House. In his room, with the window open, he watched the dusk settle down. A fresh breeze had sprung up to blow away the day-long heat. For a long time he lounged in the only chair in the room, eyes half-closed, musing.

Finally he heard the sounds of dinner hour activity below. He switched off the light, opened his door and stepped out into the hall.

His trained senses telegraphed a swift, vibrant warning as he pulled the door shut. But the warning seemed to come a breath too late. From across the corridor a door had opened, and he had an impression of the wan hall light falling on the muzzle of a leveled gun. Before he

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could move the gun coughed huskily.

With a strangled exclamation, the Phantom pitched forward, falling face-down on the wooden floor of the long hall!

Always an actor, versatile and perfect in even the smallest detail of whatever situation confronted him, the Phantom's fall was realistic enough to make whoever had triggered the shot absolutely sure the gunwork had fulfilled its purpose.

**A**S A matter of fact the whining lead slug had missed the Phantom's head by inches. The shot had buried itself in the plaster wall behind him. The fall to the floor had been a ruse. He wanted to bring his would-be assassin out into the open. He wanted the man who had fired through the half-open door to come out into the corridor so he could identify and cope with him.

But the ruse didn't work. As the Phantom let his knees buckle, and the strangled cry break from his lips, he heard the door of the room across from him shut.

The gun must have had a silencer on it. The husky cough of its report told that. It had attracted no attention. Nobody stepped out into the corridor to see what had happened. Nobody came up the stairs to investigate.

Or possibly, the Phantom thought, the guests of the Fowler House might be so accustomed to shots being fired here that they had become too bored to be interested.

As Van heard the door close, he reversed his tactics. Instead of giving a reasonable facsimile of a man who had just stopped a bullet, he sprang to his feet. His hand slid in under his coat. His fingers closed over his own automatic. On quick, quiet feet he crossed the hall and turned the knob of the shut door.

In his haste to make an exit, the man who had fired the shot had neglected to snap the key in the lock. The door was open, the room behind it in opaque darkness, empty.

A glance was enough to tell the Phantom what had happened. The single window was open. When Van reached it he was in time to catch a glimpse of the blurred outline of a man who had dropped from the veranda roof below the window, into a pocket of darkness in the rear of the hotel.

The Phantom followed, but not with any hope of catching up with his would-be killer. The attacker had the advantage of knowing the terrain, the turns and twists between and around the Fowler House's garages, outbuildings and laundry shed.

When the Phantom dropped from the roof's edge to the ground, the darkness around him was empty. Running footsteps had faded away in the distance.

## CHAPTER VII

### PERSONAL COLUMN



**V**AN Loan shoved the automatic back in his holster. For a full minute he stood peering through the murk, trying to find an answer to the question of who his attacker could be.

Rooney? That hardly seemed possible. It might have been Rooney, but somehow Van didn't think so. For one thing the oil man was too big and bulky to have moved with such sinuous speed. Then who in Wellington wanted to cut him down and be rid of him? The same person who had tried to open his bag?

Grimly, Van moved his shoulders. Whoever it was had failed. There wouldn't be a second time, or a second chance, either. He was leaving Oklahoma in a few more hours. Buttoning his coat, he found a narrow alley that took him through to the main street and the lobby of the hotel.

Neither Colonel Tanner, nor his thin, sardonic companion decorated the dining room with their presence that night. The meal over, Van made casual inquiries at the desk. Tanner and Harrington, it seemed, had left Wellington an hour earlier.

There was one more thing Van had to do before checking out. In his room he called Sheriff Higby to get some final information.

"Where can I get a photograph of Shaler?" he inquired, when the sheriff, in his home, responded to his call.

He could almost see Higby rubbing his chin. Finally the voice at the other end of the wire said:

"Mebbe over at the newspaper office. Seems to me Chuck Dodson—he's the

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official camera feller—took some pictures the night the first gusher came in. That was at a dinner the Colonel gave at the Fowler House. Want me to ring Chuck and ask him?"

"Yes, please."

Higby had a newspaper photograph of the mentioned dinner party with a penciled X over Ernest Shaler, when the Phantom was ready to leave Wellington. It was a fairly good photograph. Under his pocket glass Ernest Shaler's picture came up clearly, sharply, and distinctly.

The bus, the last one to leave Wellington that night, took Van back to Oklahoma City. There he caught an east-bound TWA plane, in from Los Angeles and bound for La Guardia Field.

He went aboard with no feeling of satisfaction. His quick jump out to the Choctaw Oil fields had not resulted in any spectacular revelations. He had hoped the broken silver cuff link would prove to be a direct lead to the person who had lost it in the Bronx woods, and all it had turned up was the fact that Buck Rooney had lied about it.

Van had hoped also to unearth more valuable material on the missing Ernest Shaler. And it seemed that all he had come away with was the photograph, and what Rooney had said about Shaler having called him by long distance that day.

Van pondered Rooney's statement. If the murdered man Steve had found *was* the missing Government witness, Rooney had lied again. But if the body was that of someone else, and Rooney had been on the level about the call, then Shaler was still alive and someone else involved in the Choctaw Oil matter had been slain and given the acid treatment for some other and still unknown reason.

The plane, despite bad weather over the Middle West, reached its destination on schedule. Van took the limousine from the La Guardia airport back to the Manhattan terminal and a cab from there to his Park Avenue apartment.

His rooms were atop one of the stately apartment buildings along the aristocratic avenue. Richard Curtis Van Loan lived there in solitary splendor. For his own convenience—and the role he played—he had a private entrance into the place and a small private elevator with no stops between the street and his own floor.



STEVE HUSTON

For these luxuries Dick Van Loan paid well. But he had found them well worth the cost. More than once, in emergencies, when he'd had to leave the apartment building quickly and surreptitiously in disguise, he had found his little elevator and his own entrance door of invaluable assistance. No one who lived within the tessellated four brick walls of the towering structure dreamed that one of its occupants was the celebrated Phantom Detective. And Van had always made doubly sure that no one would ever suspect as much.

The elevator stopped, its fire-proof door automatically opened for him, and he was in the tiny vestibule fronting his suite. A turn of his key and he stepped across the threshold and into his rooms.

Warm sunshine slanted in, gently touching his treasured possessions. As a collector of fine old furniture and rare *objets d'art*, Van Loan had somewhat of a reputation. Reason for it was expressed in the exquisite appointments of the suite, the rare sporting prints on the walls of his lounge, the rugs, tapestries and time-mellowed furniture.

A STATELY grandfather's clock ticked somberly, making the only sound other than the sigh of the breeze. Going

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through to the living room, Van opened the French doors that gave on the flagged terrace. From that lofty point, the entire panorama of Manhattan's south end was laid out in geometric design. From there he felt as if he could almost reach out and touch the tall skyscrapers that studded the congested skyline. From there he could see the two rivers that made the metropolis an island meet and merge at the Battery.

Usually he liked to dawdle there, finding a thousand imaginary adventures behind the sun-painted windows of the buildings that stretched toward the clouds. He liked the tranquil peace of his pinnaled retreat that gave him a feeling of isolation from the rest of the world.

But now, with hardly a glance beyond the black iron and brass terrace balustrade, he turned away.

First, he had to talk with Frank Havens. He decided the conversation was too important to be delivered in detail over the telephone wires. Accordingly, when Havens, in his private office at the Clarion Building answered his call, the Phantom said:

"Will you have lunch with me? Any place you suggest."

He spoke in the bored, blase voice of Dick Van Loan, smiling faintly at the quickening interest in Havens' reply.

"Make it the Patrooms, one-thirty."

Van hung up and went on and into his bedroom. To all outward appearances it was a room that might have come out of the pages of some smart decorator's magazine. There was one exception, one thing that set the soft, warm coloring and the furniture of the room apart from other rooms and made it different. That was the secret button behind the carved headboard of the Empire bed.

Van Loan pressed a thumb over it now. As he did, the wall panel began to slide smoothly back, revealing a hidden, windowless inner room that lay behind it.

This, in miniature, was another of the Phantom's laboratories, a place containing a disguise wardrobe, a second arsenal, scientific apparatus and a make-up table, mirrored and indirectly lighted. Smaller than the one in the Bronx, close to the Westchester line, this lab was complete down to the last necessities the Phantom used in his cases.

He dropped down in front of the triple mirrors of his dressing table. Studying his austere countenance so he could duplicate it again, he proceeded quickly to obliterate it.

Certain creams that neutralized the skin tints of his disguise wiped away the tiny wrinkles and shadows when he smeared it over his face and massaged it briskly with his fingertips. He toweled that off, removed the plastic dentures, combed the gray out of his wavy hair, and let the three mirrors reflect the familiar image of Richard Curtis Van Loan.

A shower, a change back to the faultlessly tailored clothing of one of New York's most popular socialites, and Van was ready for his appointment with Frank Havens. In the living room he carefully nipped a blue cornflower from a pot of blossoms on a table in the sun, arranged it in his lapel and, using the regular elevator, descended to the street.

He had plenty of time so decided to walk to the Patrooms' Club. It was half a dozen blocks distant, east and north. He swung leisurely along, outwardly a well-groomed, contented young man without a care in the world to disturb his serenity.

But behind his carefree surface, Van's mind grappled with the problem of the Government's missing witness. As either the Phantom or Dick Van Loan, when on a case, nothing intruded upon his thoughts except the matters facing him.

Now, he realized, he had reached an impasse. He couldn't tell Havens whether Ernest Shaler was dead or alive. If dead, he had no motive to offer for the man's killing. If alive, he could supply Havens with no assurance of where Shaler was at the moment, or any information as to why the missing man had ducked the Senate's investigating committee.

He didn't know who the murdered man in the Bronx woods was. Steve's two clues tied in perfectly with the oil field at Wellington. But beyond that the matter was a dark and mysterious blank.

**H**AVENS, in the library at the club, quickly got up from a leather chair when he saw Van stroll nonchalantly in. They shook hands and the publisher, picking out the alcove as a place where conversation would be private, led the way into it.

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Van shook his head at the mute, anticipation in his friend's gaze.

"Nothing—yet."

Havens drew a deep breath. He knew how Van Loan worked. Van never divulged information until he was ready. His reports were always terse and matter-of-fact, never revealing or explanatory until the chips were down and the Phantom about to move in and close the case.

"Tell me about Steve Huston," Van said. "Did he find a tie-up for the key I gave him?"

"He did." Havens spoke in a low, rapid voice. "Your key is for Room Eleven-twenty-eight, at the Hotel Marion on Lexington Avenue."

"Good! What else?"

"The person who registered and was assigned to that room signed himself as Stanton Wilcox. He gave his residence as Wilmington, Delaware." Havens' tone grew brittle as he went on. "Here's something significant. Steve found out that the night before he stumbled across the murdered man in the Bronx, this Stanton Wilcox left the hotel at twenty minutes after six—and has never returned!"

Van Loan nodded. After a minute he said, "Anything else?"

"Yes, one other thing. This!"

Havens reached in his pocket. From an envelope he took a narrow newspaper clipping. He handed it to Van silently.

It was not difficult to recognize the clipping as an advertisement that had appeared in the Personal Column of the *Clarion*.

Holding it to the light, Van read:

Phantom: Missed you at Wellington. Hope to do better here in New York. Would advise you calling El. 5-0620.

"That number," Havens said slowly, "is the Wescott Funeral Parlors on Fourth Avenue!"

Dick Van Loan smiled thinly. Tearing the clipping into small pieces he sifted them into a convenient ashtray. Then he laughed low, explaining to Havens what had happened at the Fowler House in Wellington.

The newspaper owner listened gravely. "Then they know that the Phantom is on the case!"

"Right." Van shrugged his well-tailored shoulders. "I want them to. I want to bring them out in the open."

Frank Havens shook his head. "And you haven't any idea who—"

"I know this much. Those behind Shaler's disappearance are not the ordinary gangster-hoodlum type of criminal. These people have brains, ingenuity. Which makes them doubly dangerous. The samples of their work so far more than verify that."

"But their motives?" Havens exclaimed. "What possible reasons could they have?"

Van Loan moved his shoulders again. "That is something I expect to uncover in the near future. I have an idea it comes under the heading of Big Business in the guise of Choctaw Oil. Shaler—if the body in the morgue is his—was exterminated for some private but important reason. On that reason hangs the attempt to get me out of the way, the advertised warning in the ashtray there, other issues which are now shadowy and mysterious. An interesting case."

Luncheon over, Van hurried back to the Park Avenue apartment and the secret chamber behind the bedroom's sliding panel. There he got back into the same disguise he had worn to Oklahoma. No use to change it yet. As he had told Havens, he wanted to keep that austere face for his own purposes. The invisible enemy knew it. They would make other attempts to destroy him.

But in those attempts they would have to come out of hiding. And that was what the Phantom wanted most of all! The opportunity to meet them face to face, brain to brain, gun to gun!

An hour later Van was at the Hotel Marion.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IDENTIFICATION?



IN THE lower Forties on Lexington Avenue, the Hotel Marion was a medium-class hostelry. Because of the unusual demand for hotel rooms, the Marion had enjoyed a popularity which, before the boom, had been lacking. It was an elderly building, painted and refurbished to keep pace with the modern trend.

The manager, a Menlo Gates, was a

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worried-looking, mousy little man. He went in for diamond rings and large cigars. He was in his office on the mezzanine, the Phantom was told, when he asked the information of the desk clerk.

When the Phantom entered the office, Gates took one look at the Detective Bureau badge and started to talk, answering the questions put to him.

"Naturally we want to cooperate with the Department in every possible way. But I can't give you much information about Wilcox. As I already told that reporter from the *Clarion*, Wilcox left the hotel at twenty minutes after six that evening and didn't come back. Nothing but trouble," he added mournfully. "Another of our guests is missing, too."

"Another?"

"A man who registered as Norman Thayer. Strange, but he hasn't been seen since the same evening Wilcox left."

"What about Wilcox's luggage?"

"That's something else I can't explain," Gates replied. "It's gone! Somebody removed it the next day."

"Would you remember what Wilcox looked like if you saw a photograph of him?"

"No," the manager said decidedly, "I wouldn't. I never did get a good look at him."

"I'd like to stop in at Room Eleven-twenty-eight," the Phantom said.

The room on the eleventh floor was on the east side of the building. Like all the other single rooms it had a small connecting bath and was furnished in regulation hotel style. A three-quarter bed, a bureau, a night table containing a lamp, telephone and metal water pitcher, two chairs and a baggage rack made up its furnishings. The curtains at the window could have been cleaner, the plain gray carpet on the floor newer.

The Phantom shut the door after him. Slowly, he let his gaze wander around the room. Was Stanton Wilcox really Ernest Shaler? If so, what bait had drawn Shaler out of this room and to his doom?

The Phantom didn't expect to unearth anything significant through an investigation of 1128. Whoever had stopped off and retrieved Wilcox's luggage had undoubtedly seen to it that no clues to link Wilcox with Shaler had been left for the police to find and follow, should the law arrive

upon the scene.

Yet the Phantom Detective never overlooked any bets.

Systematically, as he had gone over the spot in the Bronx woods, he examined the room inch by inch. As he expected, he found nothing of interest.

He was turning to the door when there was a knock on it. A tall, bony individual with a lantern jaw who looked like a cop in civilian clothes lounged in. He had false teeth, a sparse amount of reddish hair and an ear that had been damaged some time in the distant past.

"Name's Benson," he began, introducing himself. "Harry Benson. I'm the house dick here. Gates says you're from Headquarters."

"That's right."

"Must be a new man." Benson clicked his teeth. "Don't remember seeing you around before." He shrugged, his tone condescending. "You're a little late, pal—if you're trying to catch up with the guy who had this room last. He could be out on the Coast by this time. Fast things, planes."

"Death," the Phantom said shortly, "is sometimes faster."

"Meaning you think Wilcox might have been handed a deep nap?"

"Possibly. Do you member what Wilcox looked like?"

"Sure. That's part of my job. Right now I'm smelling around on the *other* fadeout. The party who called himself Norman Thayer. Tough character, if I ever saw one. Too many guys disappearing around here."

"You'd recognize Wilcox from a photograph?"

"Sure," Benson said. "Got one?"

The Phantom took the newspaper picture from the *Wellington Bugle* from his pocket. He had carefully erased the penciled X over Ernest Shaler. He spread the photograph open and handed it to Benson.

"Take a look at these gentlemen. See if you recognize any of them. Use this glass. They show up better."

**B**ENSON took both the paper and the powerful pocket lens the Phantom handed him. He sat down on the bed, propped the picture on the night table and studied it intently. He grunted once

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or twice. Then he jabbed at the paper with a broken-nailed finger and got up.

"That's him. That lug right there. That's Wilcox!"

The finger was over Ernest Shaler's likeness, in the same spot the X had been. The Phantom nodded.

"You're positive?"

"Brother, I couldn't miss that pan. Sure I'm positive. I had a drink with Wilcox the night he checked in. I talked to him at the bar downstairs. I've got a sharp memory for faces."

"Thanks," the Phantom told him. "You've been a big help. Just to make a double check, I'm going to show this picture to the clerk at the desk."

Benson followed him out to the elevator. "Five gets you eight he catches Wilcox at the first try, pal. See if I'm not right."

He was. The Phantom gave the clerk at the desk the picture and the glass, with the same result.

"That's Mr. Wilcox," the clerk said, pointing to Shaler's picture, while Benson chuckled. "I'd know him anywhere."

The double identification made it one hundred per cent.

When the Phantom left the hotel and started up Lexington Avenue he believed a thin ray of light had begun to penetrate the murky shadows of the problem confronting him. So Stanton Wilcox was really Ernest Shaler. That meant that Buck Rooney had lied about the telephone call. Or, Van told himself, it was possible someone had made the long distance communication with Wellington, pretending to be Shaler.

Rooney, Van remembered, had said he was sure it was Shaler he had spoken to

on the telephone. But maybe the caller had imitated Shaler's voice. That had been done before.

The Phantom shook his head, puzzling the facts in his mind as he walked on.

One thing was clear. Shaler had been put out of the way to prevent him from appearing before the investigating committee. But who had planned to keep him out of Washington? Who had applied the permanent muffler, and for what purpose?

Two more blocks and the Phantom's intuitive sense told him he was being tailed. He slowed his gait, unobtrusively using the plate glass windows of the shops along the way as mirrors. Another block and the Phantom singled out his shag.

Not one, but two men were following him. He made sure of that as he cut across the street. The two trailed along, moving faster when Van increased his steps, slowing when he slowed.

One, Van saw, was a medium-sized man in a brown suit and sloppy felt hat. He was in the late twenties or early thirties, with sharply cut features. He carried a folded newspaper under his arm.

His companion was a trifle taller. His face also was sharp-featured, shaded by the snapped-down brim of a dove-gray hat.

The Phantom thought fast. Probably the front entrance of the Hotel Marion had been under observation. Those responsible for Shaler's murder must have kept the hotel under surveillance on the chance that the man they had struck at in the Fowler House might eventually stop off at the Marion.

Possibly the two had been staked out in the lobby of the Marion. Van didn't

[Turn page]



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think so. He would have noticed them, he was sure, when the desk clerk had identified the newspaper photograph of Shaler.

His mouth tightened. He wanted to know who was following him. He intended to find out.

Ahead half a block was the impressive pile of the Pyramid Building. Without a backward glance Van went through the revolving door. On the left side of a marble-lined entrance, a flight of stairs went down to a barbershop and an aisle of stores. He descended the steps, his ears strained to catch the click of footfalls hurrying after him.

He passed the barbershop, rounding a bend in the corridor. From the corner of his eye he saw that the pair had split. Only one followed him now, the taller of the duo, the one in the gray hat.

At the end of the line of stores an exit led to a paved, covered alley. It was dark at its end, gloomy with the piled-up murk of the basement region. Exactly the place for his purpose.

VAN stopped, pushing himself in against one of the cement walls, waiting.

A minute passed—another—then another. He had almost decided the man in the gray hat had given up pursuit when, down the alley, he saw a shadowy figure approaching. He stayed rigidly motionless, waiting for the man to come on.

More seconds ticked away before the man was within reach. He saw the Phantom in the same heartbeat it took Van to glide out at him. With a smothered exclamation, the man in the gray hat attempted to turn and run.

The Phantom grabbed him, but the man's forward motion made Van's hands slide down the sides of his coat. The Phantom caught the flap of a jacket pocket. It ripped under his gripping fingers. His hands fell away and the man plunged forward down the alley, while something tinkled on the stone floor.

The Phantom let him go, reaching hastily to pick up what had fallen out of the ripped pocket and bounced along the floor. He found it was a key. Another key! Different from the one he had discovered in the mud beside the tangled path, this key was flat and looked like the type used to open a safe-deposit box.

The Phantom started down the alley, but the man had disappeared. Were both men waiting for him upstairs in the street?

He took no chances. There was a basement exit at the rear, around the barber-shop. He used that to reach the side street along which the Pyramid Building stretched partially, found an empty cab and got in without interference or any sign of his recent shadows. He gave the hackie an address a block away from his Park Avenue apartment, settled back on the seat and looked at his find. The key had stamping around the perforations at its top. Letters and numbers—"G.C. 39."

Van's narrowed eyes glinted as a flash of understanding ripped through him. This key was valuable. How valuable, only time would determine. He drew a short, quick breath.

Unless he was greatly mistaken, he had found something destined to be of tremendous importance to the case!

## CHAPTER IX

### CHECKMATE



MANHATTAN'S night sky, arching over the Hub of the Universe, as Forty-second Street had been colorfully described, was painted with a glow of a thousand flashing incandescent signs. The roar of traffic made an unceasing monotone. The warm night had filled the streets with throngs of people.

The Phantom moved along with the crowd going east down the wide thoroughfare. In his pocket was the key he had picked up from the floor of the alley in the Pyramid Building. A few more minutes, Van Loan told himself, and he would know if the key was as important as he had first believed.

His hunch was that it would be. The stamping, "G.C. 39," told him the key was to one of the green parcel deposit boxes in the Grand Central subway station, one of those coin-operated depositories where baggage or packages could be safely checked for a temporary period.

Van's plan was to find out what was in Box 39. Anticipation tightened his nerves as he walked on.

He reached his destination, going into

the Terminal and following the arrow markings that took him through to the subway section and the deposit boxes.

People buffeted him, hurriedly bound for the trains making underground thunder. Key in hand, the Phantom looked for Box 39. And again, as had happened earlier that day, he had the feeling of watching eyes!

He found what he wanted the next moment. The key he held went into the lock of Box 39. A turn and the steel door opened. The Phantom's fingers closed over a small, flat, paper-wrapped package. Quickly he put it in his inside coat pocket, then swung around to find the owner of the watching eyes.

The crowd eddied by. He saw no one who was displaying any interest in him. Whoever had been watching him had melted into the passing throng and disappeared.

Van Loan started back to the street, but not the busy main thoroughfare, this time. He decided on Vanderbilt Avenue where taxis were usually parked. To reach it he had to use one of the numerous west side exits.

Out of the station and into the street he moved swiftly. But there were no cabs parked, waiting for fares. Light in slanting rays came from the Terminal's doorways, lying like broken ribbons across the asphalt.

Suddenly Van quickened his gait. Ahead, where the light rays ended in gloom, he had caught a glimpse of a familiar figure—a man in a dark suit with a felt hat pulled low on his forehead. The man carried no folded newspaper now, but his build and outline were identical with those of the man in the brown suit who had followed him earlier that day.

The man he headed for saw him and crossed the street hastily. Van went after him. He was in the middle of the street when a car, coming around the corner, bore down on him with a burst of speed.

Its headlights danced in his eyes. The pant of its accelerated motor filled his ears, blotting out the night roar of the city. For one dizzy, paralyzing instant, he stood rooted to the spot, dazzled by the oncoming lights.

Then he jumped.

The car went past, so close the rush of air it created fanned the Phantom's face.

He had leapt to safety with only a fraction of a second to spare, a forward surge that carried him out of the path of the oncoming car and to the opposite curb.

He stumbled in between the bumpers of two parked sedans. His feet struck the curbing. But before he could regain his balance he had the impression of a shadowy figure sliding toward him.

It was the man in the dark suit who had been watching him in the station, the one he had started after a minute before. Abruptly the tables were reversed. The man in the dark suit was coming at him, his right arm up menacingly.

Caught off balance, the Phantom made a desperate effort to right himself and draw his gun. But the man was coming too fast.

The Phantom's left arm lifted to protect his head and face. He tried to throw himself sideward, to roll with what he knew was the downward sweep of a blackjack. He was only partially successful. He didn't stop the sap's full impact, but he got a vicious, glancing blow from it.

**H**E ROCKED back on his heels. For a dizzy instant he clawed the air, trying to find something to clutch at and cling to. Before his pain-stung vision he had a fantastic impression of his attacker's burning gaze and leering face.

Abruptly a curtain of darkness shut out the night, the street, the broken ribbons of light and the malevolent look of the one blurring before him. The asphalt whirled up to catch him as he dropped to it. . . .

Gradually the humming sound in the Phantom's head began to taper off. A numbing ache replaced it while he groped a way back from the dim vale of unconsciousness. His recuperative powers were amazing. His superb physical condition, kept always at top peak by regular exercise and clean living, stood him in good stead. The blow on the head that would have scored a total knockout on most craniums, was only a temporary set back to the Phantom.

He began to register, foggily at first, then normally as his keen mind, shaking off the stupor that had drugged him, started to function again.

His first impression was of the smell of violets, a faint almost ethereal fragrance. He breathed it in deeply, wondering

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where it came from. Next, he grew aware that his face was pressed against something soft and yielding. He moved his fingers up and over it. Touch told him it was some sort of tufted fabric.

He thought about that for several seconds, listening to the bee-like drone of what, he suddenly understood, was an engine.

It came to him all at once. He was in a car, on the rear seat, in a corner. His face was resting against upholstery and the fragrance of violets came from the material. He analyzed that while his thoughts took him back to the light-shot street, the jump that had saved his life, and the blackjack that had almost ended it.

A quiver made his pulses crawl. The small, thin package he had taken from Box 39! His hand moved to the pocket he had slipped it into. Even before he touched the pocket he knew the package was gone.

**A** SARDONIC smile curved the Phantom's lips.

The killers who had left the dead man in the Bronx woods, who had tried to get him in the hall of the Fowler House, had struck again.

This time with signal success!

The Phantom's ironic smile faded. Grimly his lips tightened. His hunch had been correct. The key had been important. So important that the killers had watched Box 39, waiting for him to open it! They had got back what had been in it and had trapped him at the same time!

He drew a deep breath. No use to speculate on the contents of the package. Whatever was in it was of such paramount importance that the enemy had been willing to risk the chance of striking him down in a public street to get it.

The Phantom didn't discount the serious side of his present predicament. His chief concern now was not so much what had happened, as what was about to happen. As he had told Frank Havens, those who concealed themselves behind the crime-stained curtain of murder were not ordinary killers.

This enemy was smart and diabolically clever!

He forced his eyes open. Through lowered lids he took in the picture of the

smooth running car and its two other occupants. One was driving. Van got an impression of a high-crowned hat, of heavy shoulders even with the top of the front seat.

He was not the man who had tailed him down into the alley of the Pyramid Building.

Neither was the man who sat beside the Phantom.

Silhouetted against the night light coming in through the half open windows, the Phantom saw and recognized the man who had wielded the blackjack, the shorter member of the two who had shadowed him. He was sitting close to Van, the sap replaced by a gun cradled on his lap.

The Phantom's narrowed gaze moved to the window. They were not on any main highway. The road they traversed wound through what looked like a suburban setting.

**T**HE white blur of large houses behind stone walls or trimmed hedges loomed up at intervals. Between them were either open meadows or woods.

The road was fairly hilly. Twice the car had to shift into second gear. And, from the glances the driver directed at the landscape, they were not far from their stopping-off place.

"Mile further," the man beside Van muttered.

"I know." The man at the wheel spoke without moving his head. "How's the passenger?"

"Still out. I had to sock him hard. He doesn't give up easy. Might have fractured his skull."

The driver laughed. "They won't like that, Wally."

Wally didn't bother to answer. The Phantom shut his eyes as the man beside him leaned closer. He felt Wally's hand move up to his head, felt fingers prod over the side of his skull that had received the glancing blow, inquisitive, probing fingers, curious to find out how much damage they had been responsible for.

"No cave-in," Wally announced. "Just a lump the size of an orange. He'll be around any time now. We'd better dock and get him berthed before that happens."

"Okay, okay," the driver said impatiently. "We're almost there."

## THE CASE OF THE MURDERED WITNESS

### CHAPTER X

#### FAST ACTION



**R**EACHING the top of a hill, the Phantom saw the perpendicular lights, ahead in the distance one over the other, of an airplane beacon. He filed its location away in memory. At some future time he might need that guide post to mark his present location. Or, he asked himself, would he?

Halfway down the hill the car turned to the right. From the position of Venus, shining mistily in the sky, Van knew they were moving west.

The road turned into a narrow lane. Dwarfed apple trees grew in a long, straight row on either side of the constricted thoroughfare. The big car turned again, and the Phantom saw the bulk of a large house in the gloom.

Somebody's estate. He had a brief picture of an expanse of lawn, terraces, gardens. The car stopped. The Phantom, in the same relaxed position he had held throughout the ride, made no move to interfere when the driver came back to help Wally carry him out.

"Take his feet, Ted," said Wally. "Wait'll I get this gun put away. And watch him. He's plenty smart."

"If he tries any tricks with me," Ted grunted, "he'll stay out for keeps!"

"All right, lift!"

At such a moment, when both Wally and Ted were busy transferring him from the car to the house, the Phantom had a golden chance for escape. But he didn't take it. With his life at stake, he decided to go through with whatever plan they had in mind. These men, Wally and Ted, were only hirelings of the sinister forces whose identity he was determined to learn. To strike now would be a mistake. He had been trapped, but the trap might yet prove to be a valuable asset to him.

There was still the package from Box 39 to recover, still the shadowy skeins of the threads in the murder design to weave together.

Limp and motionless, he allowed himself to be carried across a graveled expanse, through a rear door and into the house.

The men carrying him went down a short flight of stairs, Ted grumbling at every step. The cool, damp air of a cellar blew clammily against the Phantom's face. Evidently preparations for his arrival had been made, for beyond, through the murk, he saw the dim, wan shine of a red light.

It came from a room at the opposite end of the cellar. A small, cement-walled room with a steel-faced door that was half-open. They carried him into the room, Ted puffing from the strain of his exertion.

"Lower him—easy. And get me that line of rope. He's got to be tied up, good." Wally spoke briskly. "Come on, get the lead out of your feet!"

Thin, tough rope that might have been a bowline from a boat was wrapped around the Phantom. Wally knew his business. He was no bungling amateur in the art of trussing up a victim. Without wasting an inch of line he lashed the Phantom's ankles, legs and arms to his sides. He cinched the knots with expert speed, rolled the victim over on his side and dusted off his hands with a satisfied grunt.

"Take this gun and watch him," he directed.

He handed his weapon to Ted, opened the door and went out. The door was shut, a key was turned in the lock. The Phantom smiled. Wally wasn't taking any chances.

Under lowered lids, Van looked around. The dim red light made thick shadows on walls and ceiling. The small, windowless place had evidently been built for a camera enthusiast's dark room. There was a partitioned enamel sink, rows of shelves, cabinets for the paraphernalia used in developing pictures, and overhead wires containing metal clips for drying negatives.

The furniture consisted of a table and a couple of wooden chairs. Ted had sat down on one of them, with Wally's gun squarely in front of him on the table, and a cigarette dangling from his mouth.

The Phantom studied him. He had seen Ted's type before, many times. Ted was one of those flamboyant young criminals in a draped, padded-shouldered suit of extreme cut. Under the brim of his high-crowned hat his face was an expressionless mask. His eyes, drawn up at the

## THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

corners, had an almost Oriental cast. His nose was small and the nostrils flared. A tight-lipped mouth gave a final touch of cruel hardness to his face.

**W**HILE the Phantom watched, Ted got up. He walked past the cabinet and reached for the chromium lever of a ventilator. The room was cool and damp, but it wasn't ventilation Ted was after. The Phantom understood why he had opened the ventilator when faint voices filtered down into the cellar room.

Ted, propping himself up against the sink, was listening intently.

"So you got it back, Wally?" a thin, faraway voice said. "Good work. Hand it over."

"That's it," someone else said, after a pause. "Now we'll get on with this deal."

"What about the dick downstairs?" That was Wally's question.

"We'll take care of him, presently."

The conversation blurred as the speakers evidently moved away from the ventilator's funnel. Ted took a fresh drag on his cigarette, went back to his chair and sat down with a yawn.

The Phantom began to test his bonds. He had used his old trick of distending his wrist joints when the bowline had gone around them. When he snapped them back into place again there was an inch or two of slack in the rope, enough leeway to give him a chance to get loose.

But he had been so skillfully trussed up that at first he didn't think he could make it without attracting Ted's attention. Fortunately, Ted, starting to work on his nails with his penknife, wasn't paying much attention to him.

Swiftly and silently Van eased his right hand through the slack of the line. His left hand followed and he began to inch the rope down from his arms. It took time and patience. He blessed the dim red light, the shadows half concealing him.

Ted lit another cigarette and tilted back in his chair. Now the Phantom had the bowline loose to his waist. That was as far as he could go without arousing his watchdog's suspicions. But it wasn't far enough. He had to free his legs.

The need of haste impressed itself upon him. Any minute now Wally would come back to follow out his employer's orders. The Phantom didn't discount his danger.

The men with whom he was dealing wouldn't hesitate for a moment to empty a gun into his recumbent figure.

He rolled over on his back. A low moan escaped his lips. Ted's chair banged down on its front legs. The penknife clicked shut. Ted got up and walked over to the corner. Through narrowed lids the Phantom saw that the gun was where the man had left it—on the table.

The Phantom moaned again. Unintelligible words sounded in the back of his throat. He had to get Ted closer. He turned his head from one side to the other, moving an arm. He did that purposely, so the man who stood above him could see the loose piece of line.

That was the Phantom's lure. Ted snapped at it like a trout after a brightly colored fly.

With a sibilant exclamation Ted dropped to a knee, stretched out a hand to reach for the loose rope. His fingers never reached it.

The Phantom's iron-tight grip closed over Ted's arm. He knew this was his split-second chance. It had to be fast, but it had to be perfect. Fate wouldn't deal him another high card to gamble with.

With all of his strength, the Phantom yanked Ted from his bent knee. The fellow pitched forward. The Phantom's left arm clamped around Ted's neck like the embracing coils of a boa constrictor. The crushing pressure of it made Ted's outcry turn to a choked gurgle in his throat.

Sliding sideward, the Phantom let go of Ted's arm. With his free hand he curved a short blow into the target of the man's expressionless face. His fist traveled no further than six short inches, yet the blow had behind it all of the Phantom's steel-tension strength. His knuckles, meeting the peak of Ted's jaw, crashed into it with devastating effect.

Ted never knew what hit him. Crablike he fell sprawling on the cement floor.

The Phantom ripped off the bowline lashing his legs, was on his feet the next instant. He listened at the ventilator. No sound came down it, but from somewhere outside in the cellar he heard a door closing.

**N**EVER in all his long and brilliant career had the Phantom acted with

greater speed. He had Ted's coat off in a dozen watch ticks. Sliding out of his own jacket he made a trade—his coat for Ted's. The man out cold on the floor was about his size and build, so Ted's coat fitted him. Into his coat he pushed Ted's limp arms. Quickly he did some window dressing, wrapping the bowline around Ted to give the proper effect.

The last thing he did was to put on the other man's high-crowned hat. He pulled the floppy brim of that well down over his forehead. Ted's gun went into his pocket. The Phantom recovered his own automatic, held it in his hand, retreating back from the figure on the floor as, loud in the quiet, the rasp of the key turning in the door made a metallic sound.

The door of the dark room began to open.

Again the Phantom blessed the dim red light. Wally, entering, saw him as a shape of shadow in the gloom.

"Okay, Ted?"

The Phantom put one of his talents to work. His art of mimicry was always perfect. He had only to hear a voice once to be able to imitate it with amazing fidelity. Ted's voice had a slightly husky note in it. It was in the Phantom's voice as he replied:

"Yeah. Okay."

"Look." Wally began to come further into the room. "The boss wants us to blot this character, lug him up to the car and dump him somewhere. He's not taking any chances."

"Who does the shooting?"

Wally laughed. "I thought you'd like that. Go ahead—pump him full of lead and let's get it over with!"

The gun in the Phantom's hand went

up. It leveled out. But it didn't stop at firing height. Sweeping higher, it suddenly reversed itself in his hand. Before Wally could move or speak, its corrugated butt flashed downward.

Wally's sap had struck a glancing blow on the Phantom's head. The Phantom did better. The heavy end of the gun cracked the man in the brown suit with full impact.

Soundlessly Wally collapsed, dropping in his tracks!

## CHAPTER XI

### NEW YORK OFFICE



OW Ted, was giving signs of coming around. The Phantom slid out of the dark room. He shut the door, locked it and dropped the key in the pocket of his borrowed coat. Gun in hand he hurried across the cellar, found the door he had been carried through such a short time before and the next instant was out in the cool, starry night.

The car Wally had mentioned, the same one in which they had brought the Phantom out from town, had been obligingly turned around and pointed in the direction of the apple-tree-lined lane. Van opened the left side front door and climbed in. So far his fast action had been smooth and successful.

It was not to last.

With one hand he snapped on the lights. With the other he reached to turn the ignition key.

But there wasn't any key!

[Turn page]

# Kidneys Must Remove Excess Acids

## Help 15 Miles of Kidney Tubes Flush Out Poisonous Waste

If you have an excess of acids in your blood, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may be overworked. These tiny filters and tubes are working day and night to help Nature rid your system of excess acids and poisonous waste.

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

aches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.  
(Ado.)

## THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

As the Phantom made that discovery, he was aware of a gush of light lengthening across the gravel driveway. It came from one of the side doors of the big house. From a door that had just opened. A man came through it, his voice sharp in inquiry.

"Just a minute, Wally! I want to speak to you."

Using Ted's voice again, the Phantom answered through the opened window:

"Wally's downstairs. He wanted me to start the car, but he must have the key."

"Get down there and help him."

"Okay."

The Phantom climbed out. The idea of using the car as an escape vehicle had definitely ended. And every minute counted. The ventilator in the dark room was open. Ted, snapping out of it, would be shouting for help at any instant.

The Phantom moved slowly, hoping the man in the doorway would go back inside. Instead, his slowness made the man irritable.

"What are you waiting for?" he growled. "Get going!"

The Phantom gauged the distance from the car to the stone wall along which the apple trees grew. He had no intention of lingering longer. Luck had been good. He had extricated himself from a situation that had promised a fatal finish, but he must not press his luck.

He decided he had been in close enough contact to the Grim Reaper for one night.

The man moved out from the doorway and began to come nearer.

The Phantom spun around, making a dash for the stone wall. He seldom retreated, or gave ground, when face to face with the enemy, but this was an occasion that required finesse. Later, he would strike again. Now, the smart thing was to exit hastily, to be able to make a return!

He went over the stone wall a second before the whine of a bullet and a muffled report sounded behind him.

Twice more the man fired after him. Both shots went wild. Keeping close to the stone wall, the Phantom reached the main road without mishap.

He turned left and kept going, his ears strained for the pant of the car in which he had caught the fragrance of violets. But the car didn't pierce the night with

the shine of its headlights and within ten minutes he stopped a passing milk truck. The driver hospitably opened the door. The Phantom climbed in.

"Goin' into Ferndale," the driver told him.

"Thanks, I'll ride along with you."

While the truck rumbled on, the Phantom took stock of his possessions. Ted and Wally had picked him clean. His money, everything except the small, jeweled domino mask plate in its secret hiding place, had been removed.

His own coat, into which he had pushed Ted's limp arms, had also been cleaned out. He had made sure of that before putting it on his late watchdog. As a matter of fact, though, the trade he had made with Ted was to his advantage. In one pocket of Ted's coat he found a thin roll of bills and a few coins, enough to buy him transportation back to Manhattan.

ALMOST two hours passed, however before Van was back in New York and in his Park Avenue suite.

The first thing he did was to examine Ted's coat more completely. He waded through the contents of the pockets. A crumpled package of cigarettes, some keys, a dozen loose cartridges, a soiled handkerchief, and a letter that was a form advertisement for the opening of a new restaurant on Second Avenue.

That interested the Phantom. Not the printed inclosure, but a penciled sketch on the reverse side of the envelope. It seemed to be the outline of some country estate, though not the one he had quit so hastily near Ferndale. This place had the word "river" noted on it, and a road marked by an arrow with the notation "east."

A jumble of lines representing buildings.

Thoughtfully Van put the sketch aside and returned the other things to the pockets. Then he considered Ted's gun. It was a heavy-barrel .38 Colt revolver, fairly new and in good condition. The Phantom made a mental note to turn the gun over to Inspector Gregg, then threw himself down in a chair and reviewed the night's events.

He had lost the package—the all important package—which had been cached in Box 39 in Grand Central. But he be-

## THE CASE OF THE MURDERED WITNESS

lieved he had evened the loss by the information he had obtained. He wasn't through with Ferndale and the sprawling house beyond the apple trees. To him now the place was a beckoning beacon, shining through the dark murk of the murder mystery. . . .

Toward eleven o'clock the following morning Richard Curtis Van Loan exchanged Park Avenue for the busy pavements of Fifth Avenue in the upper Forties.

In perfectly tailored gray flannels that accented his height and slimness he strolled along leisurely. The sun was warm, the air mild. He continued as far as the Apex Building, on the east side of the avenue. Entering it, he consulted the directory in its lobby, found the office listing he wanted, and waited for an express elevator to take him to the thirty-fourth floor.

Alighting, he found the New York office suite of the Choctaw Oil Company and went in.

The anteroom was spacious and well-furnished. Colored photographs of the Oklahoma fields were on the walls. Van stepped up to the polished desk where an attractive receptionist looked at him with distinct approval.

"Colonel Tanner." Van murmured. "I haven't an appointment, but I'd like very much to see him."

He supplied his name. The receptionist, who evidently read the social columns, looked at him with new interest. Her lip-sticked mouth curved in a smile. The approval in the depths of her long-lashed eyes deepened.

"The Colonel seldom sees anyone without an appointment," she explained. "However, I'll speak to him. Maybe he'll make an exception in your case."

Her stilt heels tapped on the floor. She opened a door to the extreme left of the anteroom and disappeared through it. Van sat down in one of the black leather chairs. His gaze wandered around the walls, taking in the colored photographs. He was on his feet instantly as the receptionist returned.

"I did the very best I could," she said confidentially. "Colonel Tanner will be glad to see you."

"Thanks so much."

"This way."

She ushered Van through the left side door, down a short corridor and up to an office gold-leafed "Private." She opened that door, standing a little aside so Van could pass her.

"Mr. Van Loan, Colonel," she announced.

The stout, baby-faced Tanner whom Van had last seen at the flower bedecked table of the Fowler House in Wellington, sat in a padded swivel chair before a glass-topped mahogany desk with appointments of rich brown leather. The office was done in the same modern style as the anteroom. The same kind of colored photographs—other shots of the oil fields—decorated the walls. There was an over amount of pine paneling, too much furniture, too much of everything.

As Van shook the Colonel's warm, pudgy hand and sat down, his gaze automatically focused on a photograph in a square frame made of the same brown leather. In it was the likeness of a pretty, dark-haired girl, a familiar face to Van Loan.

IN A flash his mind again went back to the Diamond Point Yacht Club, to the brunette in the cherry-colored dress. So, he thought, the Olga Tanner who Wendy Malcolm had pointed out to him that afternoon *was* some kin of the white-haired, pink-faced man smiling across at him.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Van Loan?" Tanner's voice was pleasantly affable.

Settling back in the depths of his chair beside the desk, Van looked his blase best. While on a case Van seldom stepped out of the Phantom's character and back into his own socialite role. However, on rare occasions, he had found that the gilded Dick Van Loan could bridge gaps and open doors that it would take the Phantom valuable time to accomplish.

This, Van felt, was one of those infrequent times.

Swinging one well-creased trouser leg over the other, he said:

"I had a long talk the other night with my investment advisor. Rather a bore, but we do get together now and then. He thought I should transfer my electric power holdings—some of them—into oil. He mentioned Choctaw. Said it was a fairly new company with great possibilities

for an investor."

"It is," Colonel Tanner agreed amiably.

"So," Van went on, "I'm wondering if you can give me a prospectus as well as information about your output and plans. Not"—he smiled—"that it would mean too much to me. But Pendleton, my adviser, is a fiend for statistics."

Tanner shook his white head. "I'm sorry, but it wouldn't do you much good if I did supply you with details of the company."

The Van Loan eyebrows lifted politely. "Really?"

"Because," Tanner murmured, "Choc-taw is what you'd call a close corporation. All the stock is held equally by three people. There isn't a single share for sale. I—"

One of the two telephones on the glass-topped desk tinkled. Tanner excused himself and unpronged it.

"Yes?" His voice was bland and mild. In the receiver Van heard the crackle of a woman's voice. Tanner said, "Oh, yes, Dr. Rand. I tried to get you earlier today. Suppose I call you back later, in a half hour."

He pursed his lips as he nodded and returned the telephone to its stand. Van got up.

"Of course, if no investment is possible," he began, a trifle awkwardly, "I'm sorry to have intruded upon your time."

"That's quite all right." Tanner offered his warm fat hand again. "No harm done, Mr. Van Loan."

Van let himself out. When he reached the anteroom he found someone else was waiting to see Colonel Tanner. He felt a stab of interest as he saw the girl whose picture was on the big desk in the Colonel's private office. Olga Tanner, in dark green now, as charming as she had been the afternoon of the yacht races—and as troubled.

A haunted light was reflected in the depths of her dark eyes. Her fingers were nervous around the smart alligator bag in her lap. She stood up quickly as Van came into the anteroom.

"You can go right in, Miss Tanner," the receptionist said.

Hat in hand, Van passed the girl. As he did, something struck a chord in memory. Something that made his eyes narrow retrospectively.

The faint fragrance of violets, like an invisible cloud around Olga Tanner, came to him suddenly and subtly.

Violets!

## CHAPTER XII

### FERNDALE



OMEWHAT later, the Phantom met Frank Havens and Steve Huston at Tony's. He had telephoned them to be there.

Back in disguise, he stepped into the private room on the second floor of the rathskellertavern. Steve gave him an anticipative, welcoming smile. Havens seemed worried.

"I had a call from Washington," Havens explained. "The Senator wanted to know what progress you've made. The committee is waiting for word from you."

The Phantom shook his head. "I doubt if Ernest Shaler ever planned to appear before the committee."

Huston leaned tensely forward. Frank Havens nodded, as if confirming a suspicion he had tried not to believe.

"You've made the identification, Phantom?" he asked. "What now?"

"The killer!" Van answered. Pulling out a chair, he sat down. "I have every reason to believe this case is about to be closed. There are a couple of things I want Steve to do for me."

"Anything you say." Huston's tone was eager.

"First, this gun." Van took Ted's .38 from his pocket. "See that the Inspector gets it, Steve. Ballistics can check the bullets taken from the body you found. The gun's number has been filed off but the police lab can acid it back."

The reporter nodded and put the gun in his pocket.

"What else?" he asked.

"The *Queen Elizabeth* docked yesterday." The Phantom spoke slowly. "I want the complete passenger list, Steve, at the earliest possible minute."

"I'll get it as soon as I leave here," Huston promised.

Frank Havens frowned. "What does that mean, Phantom? What has the passenger list of that luxury liner to do with Shaler's killing?"

"Everything, I'm sure!" Van told him.

## THE CASE OF THE MURDERED WITNESS

Havens' face cleared a trifle. There was a reassuring note in the Phantom's tone, something that seemed to tell Havens the famous detective was on the right track, that results could be expected soon.

The newspaper owner knew better than to press for particulars. He forced a smile as Steve got up.

"If that's all," Huston said, "I'd better get going."

"Watch yourself," the Phantom cautioned. "Those who committed that murder in the Bronx are under the direction of a keen mind. When you leave here make sure you aren't followed. Use extreme caution every step of the way."

"I will," Steve assured him.

When the ace reporter for the *Clarion* had left, the Phantom looked at his watch. It was still early afternoon. There was still plenty of time for his next move in the murder drama.

"By the way," Frank Havens said, "I had the advertisement in our Personal Column checked for you. No success. The girl who takes those ads couldn't remember who had inserted it. It was a cash transaction at her window. The wording, of course, didn't make her suspicious. A good many of them are in code."

"It's unimportant—now." The Phantom shrugged. "They've already tried to make good on their printed threat!"

Havens' eyes widened. But the Phantom didn't explain.

"What about the passenger list?" the publisher asked. "What do you expect to find?"

Van shrugged again. "I'm not quite sure. Someone aboard the ship who might possibly be interested in oil—or something else!"

"Oil?"

"Which reminds me. I stopped at the Apex Building this morning. I wanted to buy a block of Choctaw stock. The surprising thing is that there isn't a share for sale, believe it or not."

Havens looked puzzled. "Does that mean anything important?"

"It means a great deal," Van replied cryptically. "Now, I have a call to make—up in Westchester, to a place called Ferndale. You'll hear from me later. When Steve comes in with that passenger list I'll want you to read it to me over the telephone."

He said good-bye to Havens and from Tony's walked briskly east to the garage where he kept his specially designed, supercharged cars. This was not far from his Park Avenue apartment.

FOR a long time Van had done business with the same garage. He paid well for the service he received. The owner, as discreet in his way as Tony was, never asked questions or expressed curiosity as to the real identity of the man who stored his unusual cars with him.

Secretly, Van decided, the garage man believed his customer was some sort of secret service agent. He let the man keep that idea.

He had, of course, arranged an identifying signal because of his visits to the garage in his many and varied disguises. That signal gave him instant attention. His three cars were always maintained in top mechanical condition, their tanks filled with the aviation type gasoline he used, their sleek noses pointed toward the steel street door of the garage so they could roll out at a minute's notice.

The Phantom gave the signal, climbed in under the wheel of the same car he had used the afternoon of his first move in the case. He touched the starter button, listened to the silken purr of the multi-cylinder motor and rolled out into the sunshine.

He drove north through the tangle of city streets. As he had told Havens, Ferndale was his destination. The milk truck driver had supplied him with much information. The man had said that the house the Phantom described sounded like the Julian Bender place. Bender, the driver explained, had gone to California and had rented the place furnished.

The Phantom had not pressed the matter. He hadn't wanted to make the man suspicious by his inquiries. Besides, he was sure he could find the hilly road, the lane with the apple trees again.

The express highway took him into the suburbs. The black car flashed along swiftly. At the wheel, Van's rapid, shifting thoughts kept pace with the revolving tires. As he had told Havens, he expected the next hours would bring him close to a solution of the case. But cracking it would not be easy. The killers who had shot the mysterious Wilcox and used the

## THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

acid, like cornered rats would put up a last, desperate fight to save their skins.

Van left the highway at the Ferndale exit. Five minutes later he was on a familiar, hilly road. He drove slowly, looking at the estates he passed. Suddenly, ahead of him, he saw the steel finger of the airplane beacon and, moving his gaze to the right window, caught a glimpse of the lane where the flatly trimmed apple trees stretched in a long, unbroken line.

He went on.

Less than a quarter of a mile down the other side of the hill, he found the place where he wanted to park his car. A dirt road led in between the trees on a small knoll. Evidently on week-ends this place was used for picnics. A couple of hundred yards away a small pond glimmered like a mirror. Van looked in the panoramic rear-view mirror, which he had used on his trip up to make sure he wasn't being followed, and saw that his car, in behind the trees, could not be glimpsed from the main road.

He locked it, ran the tips of his fingers over the new gun he had berthed in his shoulder holster and made his way over the knoll and to a neat stone wall that was the northern boundary line for the property of the house he intended to visit.

Warily the Phantom went over the wall. Under his feet, closely cut grass made a green carpet. The terrain was open, and there were few trees to give protection. But he had to risk observation, as he cut diagonally across the lawn. That took him to the garage. He stopped there, looking in through a side window.

There were places for four cars in the garage. But no cars were in.

Rounding the garage, Van approached the house. His mouth tightened. Finding no cars in the garage indicated that the occupants were probably not at home. But how about servants?

However, judging by the events that had been staged there last night, he believed there were no servants, no hired help to wonder about limp bodies being carried down into the cellar, shots fired from the graveled driveway.

No servants to talk, or to notify the local police.

The lowered shades at the kitchen windows gave substance to Van's supposition. He looked up at the other windows

along the south side of the building. Though it was a warm, pleasant day, the windows were closed. About the house lurked the unmistakable air of desertion, unoccupancy.

That suited his purpose perfectly.

Though Wally or Ted had relieved him of his useful master-key after they had worked him over with the blackjack, the Phantom now had a duplicate of the key in his pocket. He made sure there were no watching eyes as he moved in close to the side door through which the man who had fired at him had stepped last night. The Phantom slid the key into the lock.

A TWIST of the mechanism at the handle of the master-key, the delicate adjustment that extended the flange of the key so it fit accurately into the wards and tumblers, brought a clicking sound as the Phantom turned it.

The lock snapped back, the door opened and he went inside.

He withdrew the key, pocketed it, and shut the door noiselessly. He was in a side corridor that opened on one end into what looked like a ground floor study, and at the opposite end into a butler's pantry. His eyes moved from right to left as he bent his head, listening.

No sounds of life came to his ears. From far away he heard the thin echoes of a train whistle. Closer, the rustle of the apple trees in the sighing afternoon breeze.

On quiet feet, the Phantom went into the study. It was paneled in mellow old pine, a restful room with its four walls of books, a small pair of divans, and deep-cushioned chairs. He glanced about with interest.

Leaving the study, he crossed a wide, square foyer where a colorful Oriental rug reflected the sunlight with multiple colors. A large living room opened onto it. From its arched doorway the Phantom surveyed it, his gaze wandering over its rich furnishings, its paintings, the splendid Chu-Tsing porcelain bowl that was the only ornament on the pristine white mantle over the brass-fendered fireplace.

A glance at a raftered dining room, a look in at the streamlined electric kitchen, and Van went back to the study. He placed its location as being directly over the dark room in the cellar. He made that

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positive when he saw the grille of the ventilator in between the bookshelves. It was in this room that Wally had conferred with the head man of the murder outfit.

Standing there, Van's gaze fell on an antique cherry desk. Usually, the collector in him would have made him stop to admire its graceful turnings. But he had other things in mind. One was a leather-bound wastepaper basket, embossed with a gold decoration, that was under the desk.

He drew it out, his eyes quizzical. There were a few torn, discarded papers in it. Nothing of any value to him, he saw, until sifting through them he found a scrap of paper from a telephone memo pad.

He picked that out, palmed the wrinkles flat and read what had been scribbled on it in pencil. That said:

Riverview Nursing Home

There followed a telephone number.

### CHAPTER XIII

#### PHANTOM'S PRISONER



OLDING the creased paper into his wallet, the Phantom went on with his investigation. That took him back to the foyer and a spiral flight of stairs. He was about to start up them when, abruptly, he felt the swift, sharp contraction of his nerves.

He turned quickly.

From outside he heard the crunch of gravel under automobile tires, then the slam of a car's door. Footsteps were brisk on the flagging that led to the main entrance.

A door opened, and closed!

In the seconds that elapsed from the moment the Phantom heard the car stop until the door of the big house opened, he had just enough time to fade into the butler's pantry.

Motionless, he stood there listening to footfalls on the polished foyer floor. The shades at the windows in the pantry were drawn low as they were in the kitchen. Cautiously, Van eased one out sufficiently to give him a view of the lane.

A big car had stopped there. A car that made his gaze speculative. It was a smart, convertible Lincoln Continental. This time its top was up, its chromium sparking in

the sun.

Again, as in the New York office of the Choctaw Oil Company, the Phantom's mind swung back to the yacht club. But now he was recalling the parking space behind it where he had seen Olga Tanner and Clayton Sherman talking together.

The girl?

The Phantom was sure this visitor was not Olga Tanner. There was a masculine heaviness to the footfalls, and more force in the shutting of the front door than a woman would use. But if it were not the girl with the haunted eyes, then who?

The Phantom decided to find out.

Sounds of movement told him the person who had come in had made the study his destination. The smell of cigarette smoke wafted out of that room. Quietly the Phantom made his way back to the foyer and the living room. He slipped into it, taking up a stand to the left of its door. From there he had unobstructed vision of the room across the entry corridor.

A man was moving around in the study, removing some books from one of the lower south side shelves. He was tall, thin to the point of being cadaverous. The Phantom's brows drew together. The man's stiff black hair, dark complexion and angular face were familiar. And then he knew. This second caller at the house was Chet Harrington, Colonel Tanner's companion at Wellington!

Van watched, his mind vibrant with thoughts. Harrington? Was he the one who had rented the house from Julian Bender? If not, what was he doing here? One thing was certain. He knew his way around.

With four or five books removed, Harrington reached in behind the space where they had stood. He either pushed a button similar to the one in Dick Van Loan's Park Avenue apartment bedroom, or pulled a switch. Whatever he did slid back a panel under the bookshelves.

The Phantom saw the face of a safe suddenly appear where the panel had been. It was small, square, with a single knob and the usual numbered dial over it.

Harrington dropped to a knee and, using a small pocket note-book, began to click off the combination. The frown on Van's disguised face bit deeper. Questions multiplied as he watched Harrington's long, thin fingers set the necessary numerals.

From what he knew of Chet Harrington, the man was a partner of both the pink-cheeked Tanner and Shaler. Harrington, according to the information Van had obtained in Oklahoma, owned an equal share of the oil company with the other two. Was it possible that this white house had been rented by Tanner and that Harrington was up to some private stragem?

The idea of it being the Colonel who had rented the place loomed large in the Phantom's mind. He had smelled violets in the car that had brought him up to the place. He had smelled violets when he had passed Olga Tanner in the anteroom of the office suite in the Apex Building. And the car out on the lane tied the thing conclusively together. That was the car Olga Tanner had driven to the yacht races.

Had Colonel Tanner sent Harrington up to Ferndale? If he had, for what purpose? What was in the safe? What was Harrington after?

**T**HE Phantom didn't have to wait long for an answer. The thin man bore down hard on the knob. The clink of the lock sounded sharp in the quiet. On well-oiled hinges the stout door of the little safe swung open.

Harrington's hand darted out and into the safe. The Phantom's eyes narrowed when he saw what Harrington had come for. The man tossed it up on the cherry desk, pushed the safe's door shut, threw it off combination and reached to close the panel.

Van's narrowed eyes were drawn like steel to a magnet. His gaze riveted on what lay on the desk—the thing that had nearly cost him his life.

There was no mistaking the flat package he had taken out of Box 39 at the Grand Central subway station!

Methodically, Harrington put the books back in their places. Straightening, he dusted off his knees and reached to pick up the package. As his hand went out for it, the Phantom stepped through the study doorway.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Harrington."

With a smothered exclamation Harrington's head jerked around. Startled though he must have been, he concealed his surprise admirably. Except for the twitch of a muscle in his bony face, he

displayed no sign of any emotion.

"Carney." His voice was toneless, colorless. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm curious about certain things that have been happening around this house," the Phantom answered. "Does Colonel Tanner know that you're up here prowling around the place?"

Harrington stiffened.

"What difference does it make to you?" he countered.

It made a great deal of difference to the Phantom. If Harrington was coming here under the Colonel's orders he would have no objection to saying so, knowing that his statement could be readily checked.

"A good deal of difference," the Phantom pointed out. "One of the functions of the police is the protection of the property of citizens. It seems to me that Colonel Tanner might like to know that you are here in his house, opening his safe, and even using his car. I think I shall tell him about it—now."

He reached for the telephone instrument on the cherry desk. Harrington looked at him for a brief moment, then put a hand on the phone.

"Let's talk this over," he said. "The Colonel is holding something of mine, and I'm trying to get it back with the least amount of trouble."

"Something of yours?" There was a laugh in the Phantom's voice. "Apparently we're both after the same thing."

"What?"

The Phantom nodded toward the package on the desk.

"That! I think mine is the prior claim. It is important evidence in a case upon which I'm working. I was struck down by a blackjack and the package was taken away from me. You wouldn't know anything about that. Or would you?"

Harrington's black eyes stared at him steadily. In them Van tried to read the man's thoughts. Without success. Harrington either didn't know what he was talking about, or was adept in the art of deception.

The Phantom preferred to believe that the cadaverous Harrington was covering up cleverly.

"I don't understand." Harrington shrugged. "I was told you're a detective. That's all right with me. More power to you. But when you claim something that

## THE CASE OF THE MURDERED WITNESS

belongs to me—”

“Does it?” The Phantom’s interruption was like the snap of a whip. “I’m not so sure of that.” He took a few more steps into the room. “We’ll open it up and see what’s in it.”

Harrington’s dark face flushed. But he didn’t move as the Phantom went forward again. Instead, Harrington rammed his hands in his pockets and tried a low laugh.

“You’ve got a search warrant—I hope—Carney.”

“I doubt whether I’ll need one.” The Phantom smiled. “Did you ever hear of the law of pursuit? I saw you in Colonel Tanner’s car, I knew that it was not your own, so I followed you here to question you. In doing this I find you rifling the Colonel’s safe, and you refuse to say that the Colonel has authorized your entry here. I’m simply a law enforcement officer carrying out his oath.”

Harrington did not deny the Phantom’s statement nor its implications. The Phantom reached the desk. Harrington struck as his fingers brushed the edge of the flat package.

This time there was not any oncoming motor car, with glaring headlights, to make him leap for safety and throw him off balance, no concealed, sap-armed assassin to cut him down. Harrington’s right hand held a gun, but the Phantom’s backward, sinuous slide gave him no chance to use it.

VAN’S foot cracked into Harrington’s left leg. At the same instant his right hand grabbed the man’s pistol wrist. The gun went off, its shot burrowing into the hooked rug on the floor.

Before he could squeeze the trigger again, and make any pretense of aim, Van had him by the throat. His throttling grip and forward surge slammed the thin Harrington back against the book shelves.

The Phantom wrenched Harrington’s ugly, small caliber pistol out of his hand. He tossed that aside, and uppercut. Harrington sensed the blow coming and tried to dodge. He was a fraction of an instant too late.

The Phantom’s power blow cracked against the side of the thin man’s jaw with devastating force and effect. Chet Harrington bounced back against the book

shelves, caromed off them and toppled over backward.

With swift purpose, the Phantom followed through. He had Harrington in dreamland. The man would be out for several minutes, long enough for Van to get what he wanted.

He found it in the kitchen—a length of clothes line on a reel over the streamlined sink. He ripped it down, took it back to the study and did a fast and complete job of tying Harrington’s ankles and wrists. Then he rolled the man over on his side, picked up the gun, and helped himself to the package on the desk.

The Phantom opened it. Inside was a heavy manila envelope decorated with thick gobs of sealing wax. With a silver paper cutter, he slit the envelope and shook out its contents. That was an old, official-looking document bearing the seal of the State of Oklahoma, signatures and more seals.

The Phantom ran an eye over the document, nodded, returned the paper to the manila envelope, and placed the envelope in his inside pocket.

## CHAPTER XIV

### NEW ANGLE



HARRINGTON’S gusty breathing brought the Phantom’s attention back to the man. He saw that Harrington was coming out of it.

Harrington shook his head, got his eyes open and ran his tongue over his thin, dry lips.

He pulled at his bonds, choked deep in his throat, and lifted malevolent eyes to the man who looked down at him.

“What’s the idea?” he croaked.

“I’m taking you back to the city. You’ll be booked on suspicion of murder, Harrington.”

“You’re crazy! What proof have you got? Who did I murder?”

“That was a pretty good attempt you just made on my life.” The Phantom glanced out the window at the car on the lane.

He spied a telephone across the room, picked it up, and got Inspector Gregg on the wire. When the conversation ended, the Phantom put the last touch on Chet Harrington—a handkerchief gag, drawn

## THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

between his jaws and knotted at the nape of his neck.

That done, the Phantom left the house. He cut across the lawn, went through the knoll, got his car and drove it up the lane.

Then he went back inside the house and got Harrington. He carried the man out, laid him on the floor in the rear of the big sedan, draped him with a light robe, and slid back under the wheel.

In ten minutes the Phantom was on the express highway, headed for Manhattan with his prisoner.

Inspector Gregg was waiting for him when he reached Headquarters. His instructions to the police officer were brief and concise.

"I don't want any word of Harrington's arrest to leak," he said. "He's to be kept out of the line-up and held strictly in solitary. Don't let anyone get to him. Take his prints and check them. He might have a record, though I doubt it."

Gregg stroked his chin. "You think Harrington's mixed up in the acid murder?"

"I'm sure of it. He's valuable—to me. I intend to use him in closing the case. That's why I want him on tap when the time comes."

"I'll have him ready," the Inspector promised. "How about grilling him?"

The Phantom shook his head. "He won't talk. Don't waste time trying to make him. It doesn't matter particularly whether he does or not—now. He will at the proper minute."

Leaving Centre Street, Van Loan returned his car to the garage and went back to his apartment. A sense of satisfaction tingled through him for the first time since he had taken the case. It was beginning to open up now. Exactly what part Chet Harrington played in the murder drama was not entirely clear, but Van intended to see that the picture was clarified—and soon.

A telephone call to Havens at the *Clarion*, a wipe-away of his disguise, a quick cold shower followed, and in a surprisingly short time Richard Curtis Van Loan was ready to leave his penthouse apartment.

When Van reached the Clarion Building he found Havens in his lofty private office, alone. The publisher breathed a sigh of relief when his young friend dropped

into a chair beside him.

"Steve brought me a passenger list of the *Queen Elizabeth*," Havens said. "I have it here."

Van took the typed copy and settled back to study it. The list was arranged alphabetically. He had gone through the A's and had started on the B's when suddenly a name hit him.

"Reginald Beresford," he said. "London, England. Cabin Three, A Deck." He looked over the top of the typewritten paper. "The name familiar?"

"Beresford?" Havens frowned, then his face cleared. "Of course!" he said. "Beresford's a British industrial magnate. He's also the Number One oil man of the British Isles."

"Have Steve contact Beresford. He's a reporter, so let him interview the man. Have him find out what type of man Beresford is, and why he came over. Then I want all of his telephone calls checked, if Huston finds any tie-up between Beresford and Tanner and Harrington."

"I'll talk to Steve now." Frank Havens reached for one of the telephones on the desk.

**H**E SPOKE with Huston at some length, pronged the instrument and turned back to Dick Van Loan.

"Something's come up since I saw you earlier today," he said. "You know Clayton Sherman?"

Van registered quick interest. "Sherman? The young lawyer on the district attorney's staff. What about him?"

"He called me less than an hour ago. It seems that Sherman's worried about his fiancée, a Miss Tanner. He had a three o'clock appointment with her and she failed to keep it. A little later she called him on the telephone, but before she could say much the connection was broken. And before the wire went dead, Sherman is sure he heard her scream!"

"Where did the girl phone from?"

"Sherman doesn't know. He made an effort to check back, but without results."

"Why did he contact you?" Van asked. "Why not the police?"

Frank Havens shook his head. "For one thing Sherman didn't want any publicity. He knows that I'm in constant touch with the Phantom. He thought that I could mention this and that the Phantom

might be able to help."

"Olga Tanner?" Van spoke thoughtfully. "What else has Sherman done? Where does the girl live?"

"At the Blackfield Apartments, on East Fifty-sixth Street. Sherman went there after he failed to get any information about where her call had come from. Miss Tanner lives there with her guardian, Colonel Tanner. There was no one at the apartment and, when he spoke to me, Sherman had been unable to reach the Colonel."

For a minute Van Loan sat deep in thought. Olga Tanner, the perfume of violets. Dark eyes reflecting a haunted, troubled look. So she was Tanner's ward, not the man's daughter as he had imagined.

"Have Clayton Sherman here in an hour," Van said, as he raised his brooding gaze. "It's possible the girl's appearance may have something to do with the case I'm working on. In any event, I think the Phantom would like to talk with Sherman. . . ."

The city's lights shone through the gathering dusk when the Phantom returned to the Clarion Building. Back in disguise, and ready for whatever the night might offer, he went to Havens' office with mingled feelings of curiosity and anticipation.

Did Olga Tanner's interrupted telephone call to Sherman, the scream he thought he had heard and his inability to reach her, mean anything?

The Phantom had told Havens that Olga Tanner might have something to do with the case of the murdered Shaler. That statement, prompted partially by intuition, had also had a certain amount of basic fact. Van hadn't forgotten the first

time he had seen the dark-haired Olga.

Also, in the back of his mind an idea had taken shape and substance since, as Dick Van Loan, he had gone to the Clarion Building and listened to what the newspaper owner had told him about the young attorney's problem.

The Phantom hadn't forgotten the baby-faced Colonel's telephone call in the office of the Choctaw Oil Company, either, the incoming call during the course of which Tanner had mentioned the name "Dr. Rand."

The Phantom's analytical mind had stored that name away for future reference. His years of scientific deduction had sharpened his brain to a fine edge. It had taught him the value of seemingly inconsequential clues—a careless word, a mention of something apparently irrelevant to the main issue, things that later turned out to be highly important.

In the matter of the "Dr Rand" mentioned, the Phantom's thoughts fastened on something else that had to do with physicians and medicine. That was the scrap of memo pad he had fished out of the ornate leather waste basket under the cherry desk in the study of Julius Bender's rented house at Ferndale. Both were large question marks in his thoughts when, after a quizzical glance at him, Frank Havens' secretary passed him into the publisher's office.

This time Havens was not alone. A tall, broad-shouldered young man was slowly pacing the room. He had wavy brown hair, a healthy tanned face, gray eyes and patrician features. He was Clayton Sherman, the budding young lawyer who worked in the district attorney's office.

[Turn page]

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## THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

### CHAPTER XV

#### RIDE BY NIGHT

SHERMAN swung around as the Phantom quietly closed the door behind him. He had never seen the famous crime investigator and his look was one of intense interest—and hope. He frowned as he considered Van's austere countenance and rather nondescript appearance.

Then, as if remembering some of the Phantom's exploits and brilliant achievements, Sherman kept what might have been the shadow of disappointment out of his expression. After all, he seemed to be telling himself, no book could be judged by its cover, no man by his clothes. Van knew what was running through his mind and suppressed a smile.

Havens introduced them. Sherman sat down, facing the Phantom. Nervousness made him restless. His feet moved on the broadloom carpet, the cigarette between his fingers bobbed.

"After all," the Phantom began, in his most casual manner, "a young lady failing to keep an afternoon appointment doesn't mean too much."

"It does in this case!" Clayton Sherman strained forward in his chair. "Something's happened to Olga! I know it! I have proof of it!"

"Proof?" The Phantom's brows went up.

"Tell him what you told me," Havens suggested.

"About an hour ago," Sherman said jerkily, "I went back to the Blackfield. Still nobody home. I was about to leave when one of the hall men saw me. I've tipped him several times, so he knows me. He—he had some information. About Olga. About her leaving."

"She returned to the apartment after you had been there earlier?" the Phantom asked, succinctly.

"Yes. This was toward five. A car stopped for her. A man, so I was told, came in and used the house phone. Five minutes later Olga came down, with a bag. The hall man who told me this said she seemed much upset. She got in the car with the man and drove off."

"That wouldn't necessarily signify Miss Tanner's in some kind of danger," the Phantom said.

"She left this for me!" Sherman pulled an envelope out of his pocket. "She gave it to the hall man—smuggled it to him—on the way out!"



URIOSLY the Phantom took the envelope Sherman extended to him. It was unsealed and contained a folded sheet of creamy note-paper. On it, written shakily, as if its writer had been under some strong emotional stress, were the

words:

Clayton: I've thought it over and decided it's best not to see you again. Please don't make any effort to find me.

It was initialed, "O. T."

The Phantom slipped the note back in the envelope and returned it to Sherman.

"Her writing?"

"Of course!"

"I still don't see you have much cause for alarm. Wherever she went, it's obvious she went of her own volition."

"You don't understand." Sherman mashed out his cigarette. "I saw Olga last night. We—we were to make application for a marriage license today! She couldn't have changed overnight, without some kind of pressure!"

"Tell me a little bit about Miss Tanner." The Phantom's tone turned crisp. "You've known her for some time? You've had to use a lot of persuasion to bring her around to your point of view, to make her agree to marry you?"

"That's right!" Sherman looked at the Phantom wonderingly. "How did you know?"

The Phantom let the question pass unanswered.

"For some reason unknown to you Olga Tanner has kept putting you off," he said. "That puzzled you. You were confident she was in love with you. Yet something seemed to hold her in check, whenever you asked her to set a date, a wedding day. Did you ever try to figure out what her reasons were?"

Sherman's mouth opened. Watching them both, Havens saw how accurately the Phantom had got to the crux of the matter. The young attorney drew back in his chair.

"I tried to figure it out," he said. "But I couldn't."

"You know she's Colonel Tanner's ward?"

"His niece." Sherman nodded. "What's that got to do with it?"

Again the Phantom made no direct reply. Instead, he looked at his watch and got up from the chair in which he had been sitting.

"I have an idea where Miss Tanner is," he said. "I'd suggest you go home and wait until you hear from her, Mr. Sherman. That might not be too long. I'm confident that presently the situation will straighten itself out."

Clayton Sherman's look was one of blank amazement. Getting to his feet, he peered at the Phantom incredulously. Even Frank Havens, accustomed as he was to Van's unflinching calculations stared at him, perplexed.

"You know where Olga is!" Sherman burst out.

The Phantom dropped a hand to his shoulder. "Take it easy. This is going to work out all right. And take my advice—go back home, and wait."

His tone was reassuring, his manner easy, but all that changed when Sherman picked up his hat and left. Havens saw Van's look turn grim when the office door closed with Sherman's departure. Once more Van looked at his watch, his mouth tight and his jaw set.

"Then she didn't leave the apartment of her own free will?" Havens asked rapidly.

Van Loan looked over at him. "I've got to act and act fast. Miss Tanner's in danger. I didn't want to tell Sherman how grave a danger!"

"But—"

"She left the Blackfield Apartments of her own accord," Van said, clipping off his words. "But she was tricked. I've got to find her. I have a hunch that she can tell me something I want to know! That she can fill in the blank spaces in Ernest Shaler's murder story!"

Havens continued to stare, making no effort to hide his surprise.

"You think the Colonel's ward knows something about Shaler?"

"I'm sure of it. I believe that what she knows is the same thing that kept her from agreeing to marry Sherman when he first asked her!"

"I don't understand." The newspaper publisher shook his head.

"You will—soon! One thing before I

leave. Any word from Gregg on the gun I gave Steve to give the Inspector?"

"It's being traced," Havens answered. "The report from Ballistics wasn't in when I spoke to Gregg last."

"That gun," Van said, "is going to be revealing."

He reached for his hat and hurried out to an elevator, on his way down to the street.

A TAXI took Van from the Clarion Building to the garage where he kept his cars. He was careful to make sure no one followed. In the final scenes of the murder drama, he knew he could count on the enemy striking a last, desperate blow at him.

His escape from the Bender house at Ferndale had made them more than double their guard. They would be on the lookout for him, using all of their wily cunning to catch up with him. And this time, when they struck, the blackjack wouldn't deliver a glancing blow, the shots directed at him wouldn't go wild!

However, no one tailed him away from the Clarion Building. No car hung in his wake. He reached the garage, exchanged the taxi for the same car he had used that afternoon and at once was driving north again.

But this time the chromium nose of his super-charged car was not aimed at Ferndale. He took a different route, a northerly one, which would bring him out on the old Albany Post Road after he had passed through the congestion of the city and the towns in its northwesterly section. He rolled along swiftly, using his expert driving skill to pass laggard cars that impeded his progress.

To the Phantom, Clayton Sherman's conversation had tied together two links in the chain of the mystery-shrouded case. The scrap of memo pad with the words "Riverview Nursing Home" had been significant. From the moment he had found it, he had connected it with the "Dr. Rand" to whom Tanner had spoken on the telephone. The call number on the piece of paper had verified the thing completely when Van had made inquiries of long distance.

There was a Dr. Edith Rand connected with the Riverview Nursing Home and the place, Van had learned, was six miles

out of Peekskill, a city on the Hudson, some forty-five miles from Manhattan.

It was toward this place that the Phantom now headed. In his pocket was also the restaurant advertisement he had taken from Ted's coat, the envelope with the pencil sketch on the back of it. That sketch, Van had reason to believe, was of the nursing home. The word "river" probably referred to the Hudson, the out-buildings were the type usually found in connection with a place of its kind.

While he drove, he went back over the case. What had seemed nebulous at first, had begun to clear. He decided that Reginald Beresford, the passenger from England on the *Queen Elizabeth*, was now the pivotal figure around which the last act in the Shaler death drama would be written.

But Beresford could wait until Steve Huston had seen the man. Of paramount importance now was finding pretty Olga Tanner, removing her from all threat of immediate danger. The Phantom increased his speed when the traffic dropped away and the road, between the separated towns, was free and open.

Peekskill, after its business day, moved at a snail's pace. A movie theater had a few customers at the box-office. Some of the taverns along the main street were doing good business. A traffic officer at one intersection yawned and watched the Phantom's black sedan purr past.

Five more miles and Van began to look for road signs. The one he wanted had to say "Lake Sunopac." He found it after another half-mile, turned sharply right and went along a country road that took him deep into hilly woodlands.

A half mile more and the level beam of his headlights fell on a rustic sign:

#### RIVERVIEW NURSING HOME

He drove on until he found a spot to park his big car. He snapped off the lights, locked it and, breathing the cool night air, started through the darkness toward a cluster of buildings on the side of a hill where the woods ended. As he walked, thoughts of Steve Huston came to him again, and he fervently hoped that in some way Steve would manage to get that important interview with the British industrialist. But then Steve always did. . . .

AT THAT very moment, Huston was on his way.

The Hotel Marland, on Central Park South, had an aristocratic gloss that made Steve feel that possibly he should take off his shoes when he entered the lobby. The dove-gray carpeting looked as though it had never been stepped on.

He passed glimmering wall mirrors, shaded lights, and ran into the first of a battery of gold-braided hall attendants. One of them who looked like a rear admiral without his ship, blocked Steve's passage to the elevators.

"Do you wish to see someone?"

Steve was about to answer, "So you have to wish?" decided it was too corny and instead said, "Naturally. Mr. Reginald Beresford."

"You'll have to be announced."

The hall man looked him over critically, shaking his head slightly as if Steve's blue suit and weathered hat didn't quite belong there.

"Just say Huston of the *Clarion*—with an appointment."

An elevator took the reporter to one of the upper floors. A very British valet ushered Steve into the living room of Beresford's suite. The Englishman came out to greet him. Huston looked him over the same way the rear admiral downstairs had eyed him—thoughtfully and critically.

The Phantom wanted him to size up this Reginald Beresford, so Steve's quizzical glance was searching. He liked what he saw. Beresford, a stocky, ruddy-faced Londoner, had a pair of twinkling eyes and a hearty, jovial manner. There was nothing sinister or mysterious about him, nothing to hint that in any way he might be connected with the dark drama of murder. He offered Steve a cigar and waved him into a chair.

"Haven't been interviewed in months, really," he said. "Fire away. What would you like to know?"

"Well," Steve began, going into the routine the Phantom had suggested, "you might lead off by telling me just what you came to America for?"

"Lead off with?" Beresford laughed. "You mean, commence with." He shook his head. "If you don't mind, we'll omit that answer. Just say it's business, and rather secret at the moment."

Steve looked at him. No use trying to put the pumps to work. He could see that Beresford was not the type to be wheedled into divulging something he didn't want to make public.

Masking his disappointment, Huston went on to the next questions. The interview took less than thirty minutes, then he found himself back in the elevator, dropping down to the gilded lobby.

## CHAPTER XVI

### GUN'S POINT



WHEN Steve Huston reached the Clarion Building, Miss Marsh, Havens' secretary, told him the publisher was still in his office. Steve went in, finding Havens in the act of putting on his coat and picking up his hat.

"News, Steve?" asked Havens.

"I've just come from my interview with Beresford." Steve shook his head ruefully. "No luck. I mean, I couldn't get all the information the Phantom wanted."

"But you learned something?"

"That Beresford's a nice guy. I'm sure there's nothing shady about him. I'll stake anything that he's strictly on the level."

"Why is he here?" Havens asked.

Steve grinned. "That's the fly in the ointment. He wouldn't say, beyond admitting it's a secret matter. And that's what the Phantom wanted me to find out. But I have got this much. He's at the Hotel Marland, Suite Fourteen hundred, with a valet. While I was there the telephone rang. I heard Beresford make a date for tomorrow night with somebody he called Colonel Tanner."

"Tanner?" Havens gave him a swift glance.

"Yes, if that means anything to you. It didn't to me. But just to be on the safe side I'll have Beresford's incoming and outgoing calls listened in on."

"I'll see that the Inspector cooperates with you," Havens said. "Good work, Steve. You'd better knock off now and get your dinner."

"Yes, sir. Good night."

Havens watched Steve go out, smiling a little to himself. It wasn't hard to remember when he had been Huston's age,

fired with ambition, eager for an encounter with life, the chance to better himself.

So many years ago. Years that would never return!

Havens sighed, buttoned his light top-coat and began to snap off the lights in his office. A glance at his watch showed him that it was close to the hour he had set for a dinner engagement at the Patrons Club with Myler Bennett, managing editor of one of the string of Coast-to-Coast papers that Havens owned and published.

Bennett was in New York on a short vacation. Havens had made the dinner date that morning, subject, of course, to change if the Phantom needed him that evening.

But Van had left on a mysterious errand and Havens saw there was nothing to sidetrack or prevent his meeting Bennett. Accordingly he had told Miss Marsh to call the garage and have his car brought around to the front entrance of the building.

The office lights out, Havens said good night to Miss Marsh, who never left her post until she saw him go, and proceeded to the elevators.

Frank Havens was more like a friend to his employees than a boss. Charley, the elevator operator whose cage took him to the street floor of the Clarion Building, chatted affably on the way down. Charley's smile was wide when the newspaper owner left him with a cheery quip.

"Great guy," the elevator operator told himself. "He's the kind to work for."

Havens' Cadillac was at its customary place in front of the building. He got in and drove off. Subconsciously he was aware that a car which had been parked further up the street had started at the same time. Though he drove slowly, the other car didn't pass him.

The Patrons Club was uptown, on the East Side. It was the hour when business traffic had halted. There were not too many passenger cars in the street, either, though plenty of red lights.

As he made his way uptown, Havens saw a dark blue sedan pull up beside him when the lights went red. When they glowed green the other car oddly dropped behind him instead of flashing on ahead. But he didn't give the car and its two occupants much thought. He was still

puzzling over what Van Loan had said to Clayton Sherman.

At the proper block the Cadillac turned east. It was a quiet, eminently respectable street. Old-fashioned private houses occupied by those who had Blue Book listings lined its sides. Even the street lights seemed to dim down there and accent the air of serene dignity.

The clubhouse was on the corner beyond. As he approached it, Frank Havens felt a strange contraction of his nerves. His brows drew together. He tried to analyze the curious sensation. It was something like a stealthy chill, an uneasiness starting deep within him and creeping coldly into his blood.

Only once before had he known a similar feeling. That had been in the big woods of Maine, several years before. He had been on a hunting trip with Richard Curtis Van Loan and some business friends. They had been after moose. Havens had shot a bull. Shot it, but hadn't killed it. Wounded and infuriated, the moose had charged him. It was when the animal, head lowered and antlers menacing, had come at him that Havens had known the same crawling premonition of doom that passed through him now.

A quick shot by Dick Van Loan had ended the plunging terror for Havens. Hardly a hundred feet distant the moose had gone down. Havens remembered the damp dew of perspiration on his face, neck and hands, how rubbery his legs had felt, how fluttery his stomach. He had never wanted to feel that way again.

The parking space for club members was around the corner from the clubhouse. To enter it Havens had to drive through a narrow cut between the side of the building and the high brick wall of an apartment house. He always made the trip in with care so he wouldn't scrape his fenders.

Tonight, as he slowed for it, he glanced in the windshield mirror. No one was behind him. The car he had subconsciously noticed, with the two men in it, had apparently vanished. Havens drew a relieved breath and passed from the street into the parking space.

He extinguishing the lights, put the ignition key in his pocket, thumbed down the latch that locked the door when he closed it from the outside. Then with a

glance at the darkness around him he got out of the car.

He swung the door shut, the odd coldness in his blood turning abruptly to ice. Even before he turned his head to see, he knew he was not alone. Someone had come around from the opposite side of the car. A shape of shadow, moving on silent, muffled feet!

Havens opened his mouth to shout as momentary panic seized him. But no sound issued from his lips. He seemed to have lost his voice. Or maybe it had been jolted out of him by the hard pressure of what he knew was a gun's muzzle digging into his back.

"Quiet!" a low voice ordered. "Not a sound—or this goes off!"

Queerly, as the voice spoke, the panic evaporated. Suddenly Havens felt himself again. The presence of danger, fully realized, steadied him. Once more he was the hard-headed business man.

"What do you want?" His voice was surprisingly cool and composed.

"You!" The gun pressed harder. "Listen. We're getting out of here. There's a car at the curb, waiting for us. Walk ahead—slowly. Don't make any mistakes. Don't try anything!"

Havens nodded. The gun gave him a push. He started to walk through the cut and out to the sidewalk. The same blue sedan that had stayed with the Cadillac all the way uptown from the Clarion Building was close to the entrance to the parking space, its motor running.

Havens looked around when he reached the pavement. There was no one in sight. To the left the club's windows, discreetly curtained, showed an edge of light. In there, waiting for him was someone the publisher knew might never see him again. He crossed to the curb, to the open door of the waiting car.

"Get in!" the man behind him commanded.

Havens obeyed. The man followed him into the blue sedan. He dropped down beside Havens, the gun held level and inches away from the newspaperman.

"Okay, Ted!"

The car started off, its motor accelerating.

Frank Havens settled further back on the upholstery of the blue car's rear seat. Faintly he detected what might have been

the delicate aroma of violets. He frowned as he caught the scent of them.

Violets? The perfume of that small, woodland flower seemed strangely out of place. Beside him was a man with a gun trained on him. At the wheel sat another man and from the glimpse Havens had of his profile he understood the type and caliber of the duo.

Fear washed away, his orderly mind began to sum up the situation. Havens believed he had the answer. These two men were members of the same murdering ring that had wiped out Ernest Shaler, the missing Government witness, part of the same crew that had tried to kill the Phantom in the Wellington hotel. Members of the corporation the Phantom Detective was fighting.

**B**UT why had they picked *him* up? That, too, didn't seem difficult to answer. The person, or persons, who had mowed down Shaler, who had advertised the death warning to the Phantom in the Personal Column of the *Clarion*, realized perfectly that he, Frank Havens, had been responsible for bringing the world-famed crime investigator into the case.

It had been a simple matter for them to watch the main entrance of the Clarion Building. They had probably spotted the Cadillac days before. They knew its license plate, its single number, they knew what he looked like. It had been easy to wait for him to get in his car and then trail him.

And what better place to consummate their purpose than the darkened, deserted parking space beside the club?

Silently Havens reproached himself for his carelessness. A hundred times, at least, the Phantom had urged caution. When the great detective was on a case the criminals he matched his wits against used every trick in the book to try to frustrate and check him. They stopped at nothing to save their hides.

Now, Havens saw, he had walked directly into their trap. Because he had been lax, because he hadn't heeded the Phantom's warning, he found himself in a predicament which promised to be anything but pleasant. But they were only his own feelings. What rested on him more heavily was the fact that he might be hindering the closing of the case

on which Van had been working so diligently.

Havens turned that thought over in his mind as the blue sedan rolled on. The Phantom would have to stop all forward progress to look for him. The Cadillac would be found in the parking space. Myler Bennett would mention the appointment which had not been kept. The Phantom would have to drop the case at its climax to start a hunt for him. Havens swallowed, troubled and worried.

The car went west across town. Familiar landmarks were glimpsed through the windows. On Broadway a traffic light held them up momentarily. Hardly fifty feet away a traffic patrolman stood on duty. Havens shifted his gaze from the cop to the leveled gun in the hand of the man beside him. A single outcry on his part and, he realized, he would never speak again!

## CHAPTER XVII

### AN ORDER TO HAVENS



**P**URRING smoothly, the car in which Frank Havens was a prisoner slid across the gaudily lighted width of the Rialto and down a quiet side street. Two more avenues and two more streets passed before the car began to slow. Neither of the thugs who had snatched the publisher had spoken since they had started.

Havens sensed the one on the seat beside him stiffen slightly as, ahead, the vermilion tubing of a neon sign spelled out the words:

#### WEST SIDE GARAGE

Another minute and the car rolled through a wide open doorway. Men in hip boots, with hoses and sponges, were washing cars on one side of the place. They paid no attention to the blue sedan as it went in and continued on to an immense elevator.

On the elevator, Ted took it out of gear and clicked back the brake. He leaned out of the window and called, "Going down, Shorty!" Another pause and the lift began to descend.

A cigarette slid between Ted's thin lips. He lighted a match on the nail of his

thumb, inhaled, and twisted around on the front seat.

"How's the gent, Wally?"

"Okay, so far. He hasn't moved an inch. Smart operator."

"Either that"—Ted grinned—"or he knows sudden death when he sees it."

The elevator came to a smooth, jarless stop. Ted got back to the wheel. He reversed the car off the lift, backed it down a short ramp and let it roll across a wide expanse of cement flooring.

That brought it almost to the glass door of what Havens saw was an office. A dangling light was on inside. He had a glimpse of a shirt-sleeved blond man who wore an eyeshade, coming to the door of the room, as Ted cut the engine and hopped out.

"About time you two guys checked in," the man said in a thin, complaining voice. "Your boss has been melting the telephone wires for the last hour trying to locate you."

"Yeah?" Ted stretched, using a finger to shove the cigarette in his mouth from one corner to the other. "How long does he think it takes to drive up to Peekskill and then get back to this burg?"

"You get out here," Wally said to Havens. "Take it easy. This rod's been known to go off suddenly."

Havens made no reply. Wally pushed the door open and the publisher got out. Wally directed him to the office. The man with the eyeshade gave him a cold, curious stare as he passed.

"Sit down and make yourself comfortable," Wally said, using a knee to push a dusty chair around. When Havens obeyed, he asked, "Any word from Chet, Joe?"

The shirt-sleeved man shook his head. "No. Funny thing. Harrington was supposed to look in late this afternoon. He didn't show up."

"Probably on a bat." Ted had lounged in and as he spoke, propped himself up against a wooden wall decorated with auto advertisements. He drew on his cigarette meditatively while Wally helped himself to a telephone on a desk at the far end of the room. "Chet goes dry just so long and then—jackpot!" Ted said.

Frank Havens' glance followed Wally. He had dialed a number, holding the telephone with his left hand, the gun still in his right. A short pause, and Wally said:

"Hello. Wally speaking." There was a pause in which he listened. Then he said, "Went like clockwork. Got her up without any trouble." Another pause then, "Yes, he's here now. No, not a squawk." Finally, "Right. We'll wait for you."

He hung up and went back to where Havens was sitting. The man called Joe pushed his eyeshade up a little. Ted expelled the stub of the cigarette and ground a heel over it.

"What are we waiting for?" Ted complained. "Where's that bottle you keep bunked, Joey boy? Break it out. Long rides always make me thirsty."

"Me, too," Wally grunted.

Joe opened a cabinet in the rear. The shelves were crowded with cans of lacquer polish, other necessities for keeping automobile glass, chromium and paint in good condition. From it he took a quart bottle of Old Homestead Bourbon. On his way back he stopped at a water cooler. In a rack beside it were paper cups. He levered three of them out and set them down with the bottle on a convenient table.

Joe poured, measuring the fluid with a Scotchman's eye. He hesitated when he got to the third cup. He looked from Wally to Havens, then back to Wally again.

"How about your guest?"

"Sure, give him a lift."

"No, thanks," Havens murmured. He might have added he was not in a convivial mood, or that he was particular with whom he drank. But he didn't.

**H**E SAT, watchful and motionless, his mind on the telephone call Wally had made. Evidently the man Wally had called was coming down to the garage. When he arrived, Frank Havens understood, the question of his presence there would be explained—and settled.

Ten minutes passed. Twenty. Then a half-hour, marked by the moving hands of a clock on the wall.

When the thirty minutes elapsed, Ted, doing sentry duty at the door, straightened quickly.

"Here he comes!"

Havens listened. The lift had descended, making the same jarless, quiet stop. A car rolled off it. From where he sat Havens didn't have a good view of it, but his impression was that it was a smartly styled

convertible of some expensive make.

It backed almost to the open door. No one got out. Instead, a voice sounded from the front seat:

"Ted?"

"Yes, Boss."

"Come here."

Ted moved away from the door. At the car, an elbow on the sill of the wound-down driver's seat window, he held a low-voiced conversation with the man inside. Then he turned away and came back to the office.

"He wants to talk to you, Wally," he said. "Give me the gat. I'll watch the gent."

The transfer was made and Wally went to the car. Havens felt his throat drying queerly. Once more there was an unintelligible conversation, punctuated by Wally's nods and gestures.

"This is for you," he said, coming back and addressing the silent Havens. "Speak out so you can be heard. The boss wants to know where the Phantom is. Tell him."

So that was it!

The publisher's mind grew vibrant with thought, but he kept a tight control on himself. In that instant, while he faced Wally's lowering stare, understanding began to whip through him. They did intend to strike at the Phantom! And he, Havens, was the medium through which they planned to work! Through which, in one shattering blow, they hoped to stop the Phantom in his tracks, to bring him to his doom!

Havens moistened his dry lips.

"Come on," Wally said impatiently. "The boss wants to know where the Phantom is! Can you tell him?"

"Yes." Havens was surprised at his own steady tone.

"Ask him," a voice said, floating out of the car, "if he can get in touch with him now—immediately."

Frank Havens' mind clicked. Out of the rush of thoughts he grasped at an idea.

"I think I can," he answered.

There was a pause. Ted stood motionless, Wally's gun gripped in his hands. The shirt-sleeved Joe put a stick of gum in his mouth. He chewed it slowly while Wally, nearest the door, looked in the direction of the car.

"Ask him," the voice from the convertible went on, "if he can get a message to

the Phantom."

Again Havens nodded thoughtfully.

"I can."

"Then," the unseen speaker said, "give the gentleman some paper to write on and a pencil, Wally. Together we'll concoct a short letter!"

\* \* \* \* \*

UP IN the country, the Phantom passed the rustic sign that said, "Riverview Nursing Home," and walked on through the cool dark.

He kept to the right of a macadam driveway that led in off the country road. In the gloom he was able to make out the surrounding gardens, terraces, and open spaces set with park benches, but he paid no attention to the landscaped charm of the place.

His narrowed gaze was on the main building. That loomed up in the middle distance, a three-story structure of Old English architecture. It might have been some millionaire's home, with one exception—the bars protecting the windows along the second and third floors.

Taking it in with one comprehensive, sweeping glance, the Phantom knew what type of place it was. Here wealthy drunks were tucked away to sober up. Here, too, rich mental cases were consigned. The bars at the windows told their own story. And, in the telling, made the Phantom's face harden to stone.

Surprised that no outside guard had stopped him at the entrance gate, he went on to the broad, stone steps at the front of the building. A heavy, iron-trimmed door was shut. There were two bells beside it. One said "Day," the other "Night." The Phantom pressed the second bell and waited.

After a few minutes he heard the rasp of a bolt being drawn, the jingle of a chain, the clink of a key turning. The door began to open. A woman in a nurse's white uniform, with the light behind her, frowned out at him.

"What is it you want?" Her voice sounded annoyed.

"Dr. Rand," the Phantom requested.

That request made the woman in the doorway lean forward to scrutinize him more intently.

"You have an appointment?"

## THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

"No, but it's important."

"Come in."

The foyer was fitted out like a waiting room. There were a number of chairs, several small divans around. The walls had been painted in an enamel-like white, the floor was in black-and-white rubberized linoleum squares.

Directly in the center of the foyer, close to a wall, was a desk. No one sat before it, but during the day it was evidently used by whoever handled incoming cases and visitors. Though the Phantom's roving gaze was apparently uninterested, his eyes didn't miss a detail of his surroundings.

"What's the name?" the woman asked, her tone still acidulated.

"Carney. I want to see Dr. Rand in reference to Miss Tanner."

"Wait here," the woman said abruptly.

She turned away and went down a short corridor. As she left him, the Phantom felt a swift surge of satisfaction. At the mention of the Colonel's ward, the woman in white had betrayed what he wanted to know. She hadn't been able completely to hide the quick look that had come into her eyes, a look that spoke volumes to Van. That look told him he was on the right track.

Olga Tanner was here!

### CHAPTER XVIII

#### INTERVIEW



**B**ARELY had the woman's footsteps faded out before Van Loan was at the desk across the foyer. His seemingly idle glance had taken in a chart placed conveniently on the wall near the desk. Whoever sat in the chair behind the desk had only to turn her gaze to know instantly what rooms the patients occupied.

In a flash, Van's searching eyes scanned the names. He listened for returning footfalls while he bent to the chart. There were the names of at least thirty people on the list. He found the one he wanted at the moment he heard a door open down the corridor, heard voices. He read:

Miss O. Tanner, 203.

He was back across the room, fingering his hat brim idly, when the woman who

had admitted him came in with Dr. Rand. The head of the nursing home was a tall, raw-boned woman with a face which might have been carved from granite.

The Phantom had an impression of cold gray eyes, probing eyes, almost colorless. No expression was on Dr. Edith Rand's tight-skinned face. In her severely plain black dress she looked like the matron of a reform school—or a jail.

"You wanted to see me?" Her voice was as icy as her eyes.

"I want to see Miss Tanner. She left in such a hurry this afternoon the Colonel didn't have a chance to explain some things to her. He asked me to do this for him. May I see her?"

"What kind of things?"

"It's a personal matter."

The probing eyes wandered over the Phantom. He knew exactly what she was thinking. She was saying to herself, "This man is lying. Why? What's his purpose?"

Dr. Rand shook her head. "That's impossible. What credentials have you? How do I know the Colonel sent you?"

"Then I can't see Miss Tanner?"

"No."

The Phantom shrugged, feigning a disappointed look. Staring at him, Dr. Rand had no idea that he had already obtained the information he had come for. He hadn't expected his trumped-up, implausible story to take him to the imprisoned girl. What he had wanted was the assurance that she was there, the number of the room she was occupying.

Both facts he had learned. Now, with a word of thanks, he allowed the woman who stood waiting beside Dr. Rand to escort him to the door. He put on his hat there and stepped out into the night.

The door closed, the chain rattled, and the bolt scraped, but Van knew he was being watched. He could feel eyes peering after him through the dark.

He set off down the driveway, walking rapidly until the shadows cloaked him. He stopped then, swung around and got the main building into focus. As he looked at it, a light in one of the ground floor windows winked out. In a little while through the quiet, he heard a door open. Not the big front door. This one was evidently on the south side of the building. He caught a gleam of white through the dusk.

"See where he went, Bob," someone said. "Make sure he's off the property."

Dr. Rand's voice.

The Phantom drew in behind a thick clump of shrubbery. Whoever had come out of the house approached. It was a man in a white coat and trousers. He had a flashlight in his hand. An attendant, sent out to make sure "Carney" had vacated the place.

The man called Bob went past. The Phantom gave him thirty seconds, then cut diagonally across the lawn. He went swiftly to the south side of the home, to the door Bob had obligingly left ajar.

The Phantom looked back through the shoals of gloom. Bob's flashlight was darting around with a firefly gleam near the entrance gates. With a faint, sardonic smile, Van glided across the threshold of the open door and into the building.

He was in a small, unlighted recess with a staircase on one side and an entrance into the corridor that ran through to the main foyer on the other. That was lighted. From a room across it, he heard a woman speaking. He stopped to listen.

"We'll have to be careful, Julia," the implacable voice of Dr. Edith Rand was saying. "No one must see the girl. The Colonel stressed that point. Her mental condition—"

**T**HE Phantom started up the stairs. He didn't have much time to spare. Bob would soon be back.

What Van intended to do had to be timed perfectly. The success or failure of the night's errand hung waveringly in the balance.

The landing above, when Van reached it, was as dark as the recess below. But the second floor hall, running straight and narrow from one end of the building to the other, was lighted by two low-powered bulbs in ceiling fixtures. They gave just enough illumination to show the array of doors on either side of the hallway. Numbered doors, with drop-locks on the outside!

He went noiselessly along the rubber floor covering, looking for 203. He found it on the right side of the passage, near the end of the hall.

Van looked back over his shoulder. No one had come up the stairs. The long hall was wrapped in silence. Cautiously

he lifted the small brass bar of the drop-lock. His hand closed over the knob below it. He turned it soundlessly, inching the door open. He had it wide enough to go through when, from below, he heard a man's voice.

"Night, Doctor," it said.

Then a tread on the stairs.

The Phantom faded through the door he had opened, closed it quietly behind him.

The heavy dark of the room was broken by the faint reflection of starlight coming between the slats of a lowered Venetian blind. Ominously, darker shadows made by the bars at the window fell across the curtain of blackness.

"Who's there?"

The low voice asking the question had a sibilant, husky note of apprehension in it. He heard a movement in the murk, the creak of springs, a foot touching the floor.

"Miss Tanner!" His own voice was a whisper. "Don't be alarmed. I'm here to help you. Clayton Sherman sent me!"

What might have been a gasp—or a sob—sounded. The Phantom went forward, his eyes growing accustomed to the dark. He was able to make out the figure of the girl across from him. He picked a way to her.

"How—" she began in a tremulous voice.

The Phantom's outstretched hand found her arm.

"Quiet! I'm going to get you out of here! You're dressed?"

"Yes."

"It isn't going to be easy. You'll have to do exactly as I tell you. Slip your shoes off. Give them to me."

He stuffed the slippers she handed him in the side pockets of his jacket. Under the press of his reassuring fingers he could feel the girl trembling. Her breath was coming quickly, uneven and excited.

The Phantom was grateful for the trust she placed in him. Without hesitation she was placing herself in his hands. And he knew that she felt that anything was better than this room with its locked door and barred window.

"Ready?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"We're going out—down the hall—to the stairs. Move quietly and stay close to me. No matter what happens don't lose control of yourself."

"I won't!"

"Good. Where's your hand?"

Her fingers linked with his. Her hand was cold, tense. The fragrance of violets lingered about her.

The Phantom started toward the door. A foot away from it he stopped, dropping her hand quickly.

Outside, the same tread that had come up the stairs was moving along the hall. The footsteps stopped at the door. In the suspense of the moment, Van Loan knew that the pushed-back drop-lock had been seen.

One of two things was about to break. Either the lock would be slipped into place or the room investigated.

Which?

The next instant the door began to open!

Bob, the white-clad attendant, stood framed in the doorway. Slowly he took a few steps forward, reached out a hand, feeling for the light switch. The Phantom grabbed it.

Clamping his other hand over Bob's opening mouth, Van pulled him into the room.

"Shut the door!"

**H**IS whisper was crisp and staccato. The girl pushed the door closed. She had hardly done that before Bob's first surprise gave way to furious attack. He lashed out with his knees, squirming sideward and trying to break the Phantom's hold on his arm, to get his mouth free from the clamping hand so he could shout an alarm.

But the Phantom was prepared for desperate resistance, for undoubtedly Bob had been picked for his job because of his size and strength. Some of the patients might need strong-arm methods to quiet them. The attendant was well-qualified to handle any emergencies.

In Bob, the Phantom found a worthy adversary.

Still, the man's technique was no match for the judo hold the Phantom put into play.

Bob's arm folded over and back under crushing pressure. Helpless in the destroying grip that brought a lather of sweat to his face and sent agonizing pain shooting through him, all the fight went out of him.

The Phantom carefully eased him to the floor.

"The sheet!" He spoke in the same crisp whisper. "Tear it into strips!"

Olga Tanner hurried to the bed. The rip of linen sounded. She was back almost immediately with what he had asked for. With one knee pinning Bob to the floor, the Phantom went to work. A gag first, like the one he had supplied for Harrington, shut off any chance of an outcry.

He fastened the man's arms behind him before he turned his attention to Bob's legs. Those he lashed securely together. But he was not through. Bob could still use his heels to hammer out a tattoo on the floor for help.

The Phantom took care of that in his own novel way. A larger length of the sheet, rigged around the bars at the window lifted Bob's feet, holding them suspended.

Straightening, Van hurried to the door, opened it and listened.

**T**HE same, unbroken quiet was in the corridor.

"All right, Miss Turner!"

They went out into the hall. The stairs seemed miles distant, but they reached them without mishap. That, however, was only half the task. They had to get safely down them and out the side door. Van had an idea it wasn't only Dr. Rand he had to cope with. In a place of its kind, the Riverview Nursing Home probably had other attendants like Bob handy to block any patient's attempt at making an escape.

With Olga Tanner beside him, the Phantom reached the recess below. Warily, he paused there before turning to the door. It was locked and the key had been taken away. Still, the locked door presented no disheartening obstacle. The duplicate of the Phantom's master-key slipped into his fingers.

The lock turned and the door opened.

He pushed Olga Tanner through it and was about to follow when he saw the light from the corridor momentarily blot out. Over his shoulder the Phantom caught a glimpse of the raw-boned granite-faced Dr. Rand behind him.

Her cry was like the snap of a whip:

"Bob! Tom! Quick!"

## CHAPTER XLX

## CRIMSON SIGNAL



QUICK as a cat himself, the Phantom didn't wait to see who answered the doctor's shrill exclamation. He was through the door in the next breath. Swiftly, his hand on Olga Tanner's arm again, he started across the lawn, keep-

ing to the deeper shadows.

"My—shoes!" she panted.

The Phantom stopped, pulling them out of his pockets, and the next instant she had slipped them on.

Floodlights now seemed to be coming on all over the grounds. Cleverly concealed lights that sent their white, searching shine into the shadow clusters.

"This way!" the Phantom urged.

He pulled the girl around the shrubbery clump that had concealed him when Bob had first come out with his flash. From the home a couple of figures had emerged, hurrying figures of men, circling out and coming toward the hidden two.

The Phantom started to run again. He zigzagged across the driveway, then plunged forward in a straight line, the girl keeping pace with him. There was still one more of the floodlights to pass. That was close to the entrance gate.

The automatic in the holster under his left arm slipped into his fingers. The Phantom's reputation as a marksman had never been questioned. Adept at snap-shooting from all angles and under all conditions, his versatility and skill were now put to good use. He squeezed the trigger. There was the splintering crash of glass as the light went out!

On speeding feet they reached the Phantom's waiting car. He had its door open, Olga Tanner in it before the first of the two men who had come out of the nursing home were anywhere near that end of the property.

A touch of the starter button and the big black sedan slipped off into the dark of the country road.

Olga Tanner relaxed against the deep, yielding upholstery. The Phantom was conscious of her curious gaze on him. When he turned to her she smiled a little wanly.

"Thank you!"

"My trip up here to get you," he told her frankly, "had a double motive. To get you out of there—and to ask you some questions."

"You're a detective?" she asked.

The Phantom nodded. "Suppose you tell me what happened this afternoon, at the Blackfield Apartments. You might begin by explaining why you didn't keep your appointment with Clayton Sherman."

Olga's pretty face shadowed. She wove her fingers together, averting her head. The Phantom's eyes lifted to the panoramic mirror. In it no lights of any pursuing car were reflected.

"I—I couldn't go through with it." Olga said, and her voice faltered.

"Because of your guardian?"

She lifted her somber gaze. "Yes."

"Colonel Tanner didn't want you to marry Sherman. In fact," the Phantom added slowly, "he didn't want you to have anything to do with him."

The girl's dark eyes looked at him with wonder. She inclined her head quickly.

"He kept reminding me of all he'd done for me," she murmured. "How he had taken me when I was only eight years old, brought me up, paid for my education, given me every advantage. He held that over me, saying that I was ungrateful." Her red lips twisted. "I wanted to do the right thing. Twice I tried to discourage Clayton. I did everything possible, but he wouldn't listen. I tried so hard to end it as the Colonel wanted me to!"

"And this afternoon?"

"Clayton insisted we get a marriage license. I couldn't fight it any longer. I guess I didn't really want to. I love Clayton more than anyone else in the world. So I told him I'd meet him at three o'clock."

"What prevented—the Colonel?"

Olga Tanner nodded. "I had to play fair with him. I told him what I was going to do. At first he was furious. I've never seen him display such temper. Then he calmed down. He began to work on what he called my sense of honor, my obligation to him. He made me a proposition, said I had to accept it. That was to go to Mexico and stay a month with some close friends of his. He told me that if I still

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wanted to marry Clayton when the month was over, and I had thought about it carefully, he'd have no objection."

**I**T WAS the Phantom's turn to nod.

"You agreed. What happened then?"

"I called Clayton when I didn't keep the appointment. I was all alone in the apartment. I had to speak to him before I went away. But I'd hardly got him on the wire when the door opened and my guardian came into the room. His attitude, his expression—I don't know what it was, but it frightened me. I screamed and hung up. Then the Colonel told me I'd cheated, that I wasn't keeping my part of the bargain. He made me write a note. I was so upset I wrote exactly what he told me to."

"And the car that came for you at five o'clock?"

"That was to take me to the airport. There were two men in it, one called Wally, the other Ted. I didn't think I was in danger until I saw the direction they were taking. When I started to protest, Wally pulled a gun. After that, nothing seemed to make much difference."

The big black car rolled swiftly south.

"When we get to the city," the Phantom said, "you'll register at a small hotel I know of, under an assumed name. You'll get in touch with Sherman immediately. But don't tell him what you've told me—yet. Promise me that."

"I'll do anything you say," Olga agreed.

"Good. Now, you can tell me what you know of a man named Ernest Shaler."

From the corner of his eye the Phantom saw Olga's arched brows rise quickly. She shook her head.

"I don't know much about him. No more than that he's the head of the Choc-taw Oil Company. At least, that's what I've always believed."

"That's all you know about him?" the Phantom insisted.

"Should I know more? I don't. I've only seen him once or twice. Mr. Shaler spends most of his time in Wellington, in Oklahoma."

"You haven't seen him recently, within the past ten days—in New York?"

Again she shook her head. "No, I haven't seen him, but I know he was in town."

"Did you ever hear of a man named

Norman Thayer?" the Phantom asked suddenly.

The girl pursed her lips thoughtfully. After a pause, she said, "I'm sure I never did. I wish I could help you," she added. "I don't seem to be cooperating very well."

"Tell me what you remember about Shaler and Colonel Tanner," the Phantom suggested. "Anything that might have stuck in your mind—anything at all, no matter how inconsequential you think it might be."

She searched her memory and, after a minute, began to talk. The Phantom listened intently. But his expression remained unchanged while she spoke. . . .

Within another half-hour they were back in Manhattan. The Phantom drove directly to the quiet side street and the hotel he had mentioned. He lingered only long enough to make sure Olga Tanner registered under an assumed name and was assigned to a comfortable room on the fourth floor.

He left her calling Clayton Sherman on the telephone and hurried back to his car.

Once more he headed south, down Madison Avenue. He had almost reached the street where he would turn left for his garage when something in the sky attracted his attention. He strained forward, peering up through the slanted windshield. Atop one of the skyscrapers further downtown, he saw what looked like a ball of red fire shining against the night's drifting clouds.

An electrical tingle quickened Van's pulses. The light was on top of the Clarion Building. To the passerby in the street it might have been a bright ornament without meaning or significance. But Van Loan knew and understood why it burned there.

The ball of red fire was no decoration, no ornament. It was a signal, arranged long ago by Frank Havens, as a summons to the Phantom Detective, when the newspaper publisher was unable to reach him, and the Phantom's services were urgently needed!

**T**HE black sedan darted to the curb. Van parked, got out, crossed the pavement and, in a drug store telephone booth, called the *Clarion*. He asked for Frank Havens. But in a moment it was Steve Huston's familiar voice that came across

the wire:

"Phantom! Where are you?"

Van sensed the agitation in the reporter's tone. He mentioned the street he was on, the name of the drug store.

"Put Mr. Havens on, Steve," he said.

"That's what I've got to talk to you about, Phantom!" Huston's voice shook. "Mr. Havens has disappeared!"

"Disappeared!"

"I didn't know how to reach you, what to do. Then I remembered the light. I'm in Mr. Havens' office."

"Stay there!" snapped Van. "I'll be with you in five minutes!"

He returned to his car. The austere face he had created for his disguise was as hard and cold as that of the Dr. Rand he had outwitted so short a time before. But underneath his masklike exterior, concern greater than any he had ever felt burned in his blood and made his temples throb.

The little that Steve had told him had been sufficient to chill Van's heart. Many times the enemy had struck at him, and at Steve. That they should attack the publisher, in an effort to reach the Phantom, was incredible, unthinkable!

Van vowed that if any harm came to his old friend those responsible would pay dearly!

## CHAPTER XX

### CODE



**J**UST where Havens' Cadillac had stood earlier that evening, the Phantom left his car. He took an elevator direct to the publisher's lofty office. Miss Marsh had gone, the anteroom was in darkness, but the Phantom knew every inch of the way to the door of Havens' sanctum.

In it, white-faced and worried, Steve Huston and a man the Phantom had never seen before were waiting for him. The reporter sprang to his feet.

"Tell me what happened," the Phantom said hurriedly. "Be brief, Steve. Every minute counts!"

Huston turned to the other man.

"Phantom, this is Mr. Myler Bennett, the manager of one of Mr. Havens' papers. Mr. Bennett had an appointment to meet

the boss at the Patrons Club. It was he who called me when an hour went by and Mr. Havens didn't show up. After," Steve added, "one of the club's servants found the Cadillac in the parking space outside the clubhouse."

The Phantom acknowledged the introduction and turned back to Steve.

"You haven't heard anything from Mr. Havens?"

"We have! About an hour ago a message addressed to Mr. Bennett, but for you, from the boss, was left with the desk clerk at the club!"

"Message? Who left it? Did the clerk get a description of the man?"

"Yes, and a good one." The reporter repeated what the desk clerk had told him.

The description made the Phantom nod. "Ted!"

"Ted?" Steve frowned, but the Phantom did not explain.

"Let's see the message!" Impatience and anxiety put a snap in his voice.

Huston picked up an envelope from the desk. It was addressed to Myler Bennett. The Phantom drew out the enclosure.

That was a single sheet of folded paper. He held it to the light of the green-shaded desk lamp. But before he read the penciled words, written in Havens' scholarly chirography, his narrowed eyes focused on a smudge at the top of the paper.

He put a thumb and forefinger over it, rubbing it gently. Then he read the note:

Phantom: Granted you wish to help me, go to the s.w. corner of 55 Street and 8th Avenue at eleven forty-five tonight. Someone will meet you and bring you to me. Any plans for a trap will mean my death.  
Frank Havens

The clear shine of the desk lamp brought each word into sharp focus. Twice the Phantom read the note, his narrowed eyes beginning to mirror a strange glint.

"Of course!" His head jerked up. "Get a pencil and a sheet of paper, Steve. I want you to jot down some letters. Ready?"

"Go ahead."

"G—w—g—s—a—r—e—a." The Phantom repeated them. "Got them?"

"Right. But what do they mean?"

"Mr. Havens is trying to tell me something! Here, look at his letter. What do you see?"

"I've read it a half dozen times," Huston sighed. "I don't see anything unusual about it."

"You, Mr. Bennett?" The Phantom turned to the other man.

Bennett shook his head. "I'm afraid I don't, either."

The Phantom spread the letter out on the desk.

"Notice how some of the letters in the words are shaded a trifle more than other letters," he said. "Significant! In writing with pen and ink that's not unusual. But when it's done with a pencil, and one with hard lead, it's deliberate."

Huston's eyes widened. "I get it! The boss wants you to put the letters together to make words!"

"Word," Van corrected. "There's only one word in those eight letters. G—a—r—a—g—e. Garage, with two letters left over, s and w. Notice the smudge at the top of the paper? Oil, Steve, or grease to corroborate the word!"

"But the other two letters?" Huston exclaimed.

"Get the Classified Telephone Directory. Turn to the garage section. Start with S. S and W must be the first two letters of two separate words. See if there's a South West Garage."

**W**HILE Myler Bennett watched, pop-eyed, Steve went rapidly through the listings.

"No South West Garage," he finally said. "South Side."

"Turn the letters around," the Phantom said. "Make it w and s. What does that give you?"

Again Steve's finger traveled down the closely spaced names in the directory. Color came into his drawn face.

"This must be it, Phantom! West Side Garage—Fifty-fifth Street!"

"That's it!" the Phantom swung around. "Now get me Inspector Gregg on the phone! Hurry! It's twenty past eleven now. I've got to get to Havens before a quarter to twelve!"

Finished with his call to Gregg at Headquarters, the Phantom started across town. There was no need to flag a taxi. The black sedan was waiting and ready.

He drove fast through the empty streets, his face set with purpose. A slip, any mistake and Havens would suffer for

it! But, the Phantom told himself, he wasn't going to make any slip. This was going to be perfect!

At Eighth Avenue he slowed down. When he drove on, it was at a ten-mile-an-hour speed. Before him, another block away, he saw the vermilion neon sign that marked his destination.

The wide door of the West Side Garage stood hospitably open. The Phantom drove through it and onto a wet cement floor. He shut off the motor, opened the door and got out, to be met by a stocky little man with a pencil behind his ear.

"Storage?" the man asked.

"Wash job," said Van.

"Can't do it for a couple of hours yet. Those cars over there are ahead of you."

"That's all right." The Phantom shrugged. "By the way, Ted or Wally around tonight?"

The stocky little man gave him a swift look. The Phantom's voice was casual, his question one of idle curiosity, spoken in exactly the right tone. It caught the man unaware.

"Downstairs," he said.

"Thanks."

The Phantom's pulses tightened. No mistakes! This had to be good. It *would* be!

The stairs were around the broad elevator shaft, past a washroom. Iron stairs, spiraling to a lower level, came out beside the cement ramp that sloped down from the elevator.

The ramp was a perfect cover for the Phantom. He pressed in against it, using the top of it for an eye-level, sweeping view of the garage basement.

The first thing he saw was the open door of an office. Lazy cigarette smoke seeped out of it. From where he stood Van had a glimpse of men inside the room. At least three men. His hand moved to his shoulder holster. The gun came out of it, the steel cold to his touch.

Hardly ten minutes had elapsed since he had left the Clarion Building. Time, the Phantom told himself, to go into action!

On quick, catlike feet he stepped out from the shelter of the ramp's side, curving in toward the office door. Half-way to it he saw Wally, then Ted. The third man, whom he didn't know, was a blond-haired, shirt-sleeved individual who wore a green eyeshade.

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The three seemed to be toasting each other, drinking from paper cups which had been filled from a bottle on a dusty table.

The Phantom's raking glance focused on Frank Havens. A thrill of relief greater than he had ever known in all of his brilliant career leapt through him. His old friend was apparently all right, uninjured, awaiting his coming!

Quick, silent steps carried the Phantom to the doorway. The light from within flashed along the blue-steel barrel of his leveled automatic. His voice, when he spoke, was low and vibrant:

"Don't move—any of you!"

Havens let a choked cry escape his lips: "Phantom!"

The three other men, hands raised, stared at the man there in the doorway, their faces a study in blank amazement. That faded into understanding and unconcealed fear when the newspaper owner named the man whose gun covered them.

The Phantom walked into the room.

"Back up to the wall!" he ordered. "Mr. Havens, remove whatever artillery they carry and dump it on the table. Start with Ted."

**A**NOTHER minute and the dusty table top was decorated with a trio of snub-nosed revolvers. The Phantom nodded his satisfaction.

"The Inspector will be up here in a few minutes," he said quietly, as if trapping thugs like Wally and Ted was the most casual thing in the world. "Before he gets here, I have a job for you, Wally."

Wally stared, his hooded eyes sullen, his mouth twitching. The Phantom glanced at Havens, then back at the man.

"We might as well make this complete. There's a telephone over there. Pick it up, call the man who arranged this party tonight. I'm anxious to meet him."

Wally's face reddened. He seemed on the point of refusing. The gun in the Phantom's hand, moving in a slow arc, stopped and drew a bead on him.

Wally choked, deep in his throat. He shuffled out from the wall. When he reached the telephone, he picked it up and gazed back at the Phantom, his mouth twitching again.

"What do you want me to say?"

"Tell him that you have me, as or-

dered!" The Phantom said, watching Ted and the man with the green eyeshade. "Tell him he'd better get down here as soon as possible. Tell him that—and nothing further. You understand?"

Wally licked his lips.

"Yeah. I guess I do!"

Wally put through the call. As he hung up three of Gregg's plainclothes men, carrying out the directions the Phantom had given the Inspector before going to the garage, came in.

Van spoke authoritatively. "Take these three away." He gestured with his gun: "The Inspector knows what to do with them. Get them out of here as quickly as possible. I'm expecting another visitor, and don't want him to be suspicious."

The basement room was quickly cleared. Wally, Ted and the other man were herded out of it through a rear door to the street. It was done with such ease and dispatch that the men working on the street floor of the garage were totally unaware of what had happened below.

When the room was empty except for himself and Havens, Van Loan swung around to the newspaper publisher and gripped his hand.

"Thanks for that code tip-off. It worked perfectly."

"I hoped you would understand." Havens drew a gusty breath of deep relief. "I took a chance sending the note to Myler Bennett, one of my editors. I purposely put your name in it so he would realize something was wrong. He did, thank heaven. And now what, Phantom?" Even now, under stress, the publisher did not use Van Loan's name. He never did when Van was in disguise, as an extra precaution.

"Another prisoner for our bag, if all goes well!" Van said. "The man who tried to use you to get me! One of the main characters in our fast closing case . . . Listen! Isn't that the elevator coming down?"

The Phantom raised a hand. Havens listened. The low rumble of the descending lift broke the quiet. With a gesture that meant silence, Van drew his gun, glided out of the office and slipped into the shoals of gloom near the ramp.

Slowly the huge elevator came down, rocking gently as it automatically stopped. The smart convertible sedan on it began to

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back off, rolling down the cement slope.

The man at the wheel cut the motor and pulled on the brake. The door opened and he got out. His polished shoes had hardly touched the cement floor before the Phantom was beside him.

"Good evening!" Van's gun pressed into a fatty back. "I've been waiting for you. You wanted me, badly. So here I am. Step into the office, keeping your hands away from your sides—Colonel Tanner!"

### CHAPTER XXI

#### PHANTOM'S ORDER



**K**NOWING that Frank Havens was staring at him, the stout, baby-faced Tanner began to lose his high pink complexion. Trembling, he started to say something, when he saw the Phantom's face, but the words seemed to stick in his throat.

The Phantom understood why. The fat man's memory was good. It had gone back to Wellington, Oklahoma, and the Fowler House there. The Phantom indicated a chair and the Colonel collapsed in it like a punctured balloon.

"This is all a mistake," he began, pulling out a handkerchief and using it to mop a glisten of perspiration from his forehead.

"A mistake," the Phantom agreed, "on your part. People who try to trap me usually use a little more finesse. Crude, Colonel—like tucking your ward away in the Riverview Nursing Home."

Frank Haven's head jerked up. Tanner's eyes bulged.

"So you know about that, too!" Tanner spoke like one who had witnessed a miracle and was still shaken by it.

"The Colonel," the Phantom said to Havens, ignoring Tanner's question, "didn't like the idea of his ward, a very charming young lady, planning to marry a member of the district attorney's staff. That was bringing the law a little too close for his comfort. He decided to break it up, to get Olga—that's her name—out of the way, hidden and under cover, so Clayton Sherman couldn't persuade her to go through with their marriage."

"But you," the *Clarion's* owner said quickly, "had other ideas!"

"Miss Tanner," the Phantom answered shortly, "is no longer at the Riverview Nursing Home."

Slumping further down in the chair, the stout Tanner unsteadily used the handkerchief to mop his face again.

"You can't keep me here," he protested shakily. "You haven't anything on me. What can you prove?"

"Don't let the absence of your hired strong-arms deceive you," the Phantom snapped. "They've been arrested and are on their way downtown to keep Harrington company!"

It had been a long time since the Phantom had seen anyone go so completely to pieces as Colonel Tanner did in the next minutes. Jellylike, and numb with the shock of what the Phantom had said, Tanner gulped in air, his hands trembling like one with palsy.

"Why did he plan to trap you?" Havens asked the Phantom, turning away in disgust from Tanner's exhibition of terror. "What was his object?"

"To get a certain document from me." The Phantom's voice was crisp. "He intended to use *you* as a pawn to shake what he wanted out of me. That happens to be the deed to the Black Eagle tract in Oklahoma, some more of the acreage which the Colonel and his associates swindled from the Indians."

"Black Eagle tract?" Havens repeated.

"The reason for Reginald Beresford's trip to this country," Van explained. "Beresford had intentions of buying the Tract. Buying it for a million dollars in good American money. The chips were down, the deal ready to close, but without the deed neither the Colonel nor Harrington could turn a wheel. That's why you were snatched tonight. But Colonel Tanner and his boys almost made a bad mistake."

Tanner made a noise in his throat. Frank Havens nodded.

"What kind of a mistake?" asked the Colonel drily.

"Assuming, when you missed the document at your Ferndale place, that I was the one who had taken it. You knew that Wally and Ted had taken me there, and that I had escaped. But when I went back there to look for the document, I had no idea in the world where it might be. I certainly knew nothing about the trick safe

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behind the books in the library. It was your friend Harrington who knew that?"

"Harrington?" Colonel Tanner blustered. "What was he doing at Ferndale?"

"Trying to steal the document. And he was riding around in one of your cars, too. You ought to be more careful about things like that."

"Harrington must be mad! He knows what we're up against."

"Where did you learn all these things?" Frank Havens asked.

The Phantom shrugged. "Partly from Miss Tanner. The rest of it I pieced together from my own deductions. Not too difficult after a basic word or two from the young lady."

"So Beresford was buying this tract you speak of for the oil. Why would men like Tanner and Harrington let it go? They were in the oil producing business; weren't they?"

The Phantom laughed as he looked at Tanner.

"This is one time when smart operators like Tanner outsmarted themselves," he explained. "When they tested the Black Eagle they found a low grade of oil and a poor flow. But Beresford is part of a syndicate that has been experimenting with shale formations and cheap methods of refining that were developed during the War. He can take over the property and make a handsome profit out of it."

"But where does the Senate investigation come in?" Havens asked. "What part does it play in this matter?"

**T**HE sunken Tanner had now stopped mopping his face and was twisting the handkerchief between his spatulate fingers.

"That was the crux of the whole situation," the Phantom said. "Beresford is a reputable, conscientious business man. Tanner and Harrington knew that any hint of shady methods would immediately kill any deal with him. He was on his way across the ocean when Shaler was subpoenaed, so they couldn't postpone seeing him. They had to do something to keep the scandal from breaking until the Black Eagle tract was sold. If the Government got wind of the deal, they would certainly have blocked it."

"So that's why Shaler was put out of the way?" Frank Havens eyes grew bright.

"They murdered Shaler!"

The Phantom didn't reply immediately. Instead, he wheeled around to face the stout, cringing Colonel.

"Suppose you finish it, Tanner. You know what I've said is true."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Tanner croaked.

"So that's the way you're going to play it? All right. We'll ride you down to Headquarters and book you on suspicion of murder! Just to be ironical we'll use your five-thousand-dollar car to take us there. Come on, pull yourself together and let's get going!"

The convertible sedan headed toward Centre Street, with Havens driving, and the Phantom and his prisoner on the rear leather seat.

The night's score was gratifying to Van. In one quick stroke Wally, Ted, and now Tanner, had been added to the net in which Chet Harrington was tangled.

But there was still something else, something the Phantom knew was the most important of all, that had to be cleared up before the case was closed.

That was the Norman Thayer matter!

He set the machinery in motion for this final step when, in Inspector Gragg's office, he gave the Homicide chief some further details.

"I think we have our killer crew pretty well split up, now, Inspector," he said. "Tanner doesn't know we have Harrington in jail, and after I explained to him that it was Harrington who had designs on the deed to the Black Eagle tract, I'm sure Colonel Tanner is going to do plenty of thinking while he's enjoying our hospitality."

"No doubt about that," agreed Inspector Gregg. "What do you plan to do next?"

"We've got to convince Harrington that his partners have been going ahead without him while he has been in jail. Then we ought to see some fireworks."

"How do we do that?" asked the gray-haired police officer.

"I want Harrington set free tomorrow, Inspector."

"Free?" Surprise widened Gregg's eyes.

"You can tell him the district attorney has no evidence to hold him on," the Phantom said. "If this gang had had a clever New York lawyer, Harrington would have been out on a writ of *habeas*

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corpus in twenty-four hours anyway."

The Inspector shook his grizzled head. "I don't get it, Phantom. Do you mind telling me what you expect to gain by having Harrington turned loose?"

The Phantom smiled. "It's one of the oldest dodges in criminal investigation history, but we're going to give it a new twist. This whole plot is one that depends upon careful timing. Tanner's crowd has been carrying on negotiations with Beresford by mail and cable. They must have submitted reports and surveys, otherwise Beresford wouldn't have come to America to trade a million good American dollars for the deed to the Black Eagle tract."

"That seems plain enough," Gregg admitted.

"Tanner made the appointment with Beresford for the final negotiations," said the Phantom, "therefore he expected to have the deed. Harrington tried to steal it from the safe in the Bender house. If he had been successful he would have gone directly to Beresford, closed the deal himself and collected the money."

"That's about the size of it," Gregg agreed. "But with Tanner in jail, too, there's no one to keep the appointment with Beresford"—Gregg smiled—"unless you're planning on one of your impersonations."

"Nothing like that," the Phantom assured him. "Let's look at the progress of this deed. Tanner didn't have it originally, or he wouldn't have had to hire Wally and Ted to steal it from me after I recovered it from the parcel locker in Grand Central Terminal. He would have had the key, and could have got the deed himself. Harrington didn't put it in the locker, because I'm sure the man I had the scuffle with in the alley, and who dropped the key was not Harrington. That means that there is a third man involved, a man who ought to know what happened to two individuals in whom I'm particularly interested—Norman Thayer and Ernest Shaler!"

The Inspector's face brightened, and he snapped his fingers.

"And you think Harrington knows who this third party happens to be?" he demanded.

"I'm sure of it," the Phantom said sharply. "Not only who he is, but where he is!"

"But don't you think Harrington will be smart enough to figure out that we're like-

ly to trail him?" the Inspector asked.

"Maybe so," the Phantom said, "but that's where we've got to be one step ahead of him. Inspector, with a police car equipped with two-way radio telephone we can shadow him, keep in touch with Headquarters or any one of the precinct houses, and set up a cordon anywhere in the city in a few minutes."

"By George, maybe you have something there! I'll get things rolling right away. . . ."

VAN LOAN went home for a much needed rest, but in the clear, bright sunshine of the following morning, he was well rested and ready to go, waiting for Gregg to free Chet Harrington. The time for the appointment with Beresford had come and gone. Everything was in readiness for what Van hoped would be the final scene in the solution of this complicated murder mystery.

He had reason to be satisfied with the progress he had made the previous evening. Fast-moving events had cleared up many of the blurry details in the picture. For one thing Wally, after intensive grilling, had confessed his part in the affair. Tanner, he said, had hired him as a bodyguard. The job had sounded simple enough at the outset, but when more violent means were required to gain Tanner's ends, Wally had called upon Ted. They shadowed the Phantom, whom they had believed was a New York detective named James Carney.

Wally had frankly admitted that he had been in the deal for the money he could make out of it. Tanner, he complained, had been tight-fisted, so the grasping gunman had attempted to feather his own nest by helping Harrington. At first he had not realized that there was likely to be any conflict because he believed that Tanner and Harrington were partners.

When Harrington decided to steal the deed from Tanner, it was Wally who had supplied the information that the deed was in the safe at the Bender house, and described the location of the safe behind the books in the library. The Phantom had suspected as much, since, while Ted had held him prisoner in the basement of the Bender house, it had been Wally who had met Tanner and turned over the deed. Therefore Wally had been the only logical

person to have access to this information.

The Phantom was reviewing these facts with Detective Tim Rowley, one of the Inspector's best men, as they sat in the radio-telephone equipped car so that they had a clear view of the Tombs down Baxter Street.

"That Ted was sure willing to spill, too," Rowley remarked. "I never saw a lug so scared in my life. You suppose he was telling a straight story about the gun?"

"Maybe." The Phantom nodded. "After all, we know that gun fired the shots into the body in the Bronx, and it discharged the bullet I dug out of the door jamb down at the Fowler House in Wellington, Oklahoma. Ted wouldn't want to be mixed up in either of those shootings if he could help it."

"But if he was working for Tanner and Harrington and one of them gave him the gun, then that ought to cinch matters," Rowley insisted.

"Ordinarily it would," the Phantom agreed, "but Ted insisted that neither one of them gave him the weapon." Suddenly he straightened. "Here comes Harrington! We've got to be on the alert now."

Rowley was at the wheel of the car, while the Phantom was handling the two-way radio telephone. Harrington stepped out into the sun. Then Tanner's thin, cadaverous partner quickly walked away from the Tombs. He spotted a cab and signaled it.

"Watch him, Tim!" the Phantom said.

Rowley started the car and pulled out into the street behind the cab. The Phantom put through a call to Inspector Gregg and briefly described the first steps in the job of tracking down the killed.

## CHAPTER XXII

### HIDE-OUT



**H**ARRINGTON through traffic, Harrington's cab went up Lafayette Street and into Fourth Avenue. Rowley kept about a half block behind. Apparently the Oklahoma oil man was in no particular hurry.

Finally the cab ahead swerved into the curb and came to a stop. The cabbie left the flag up while Harrington strolled leisurely across the sidewalk and

into a corner drug store.

The police car came to a halt about twenty yards away. Van was on the sidewalk in an instant, heading for a side entrance which led to the prescription department. There was a thin partition with a peep-hole between the main part of the store and the laboratory where the prescriptions were compounded. A young pharmacist in a white jacket was working with a mortar and pestle when the Phantom stepped in. He looked up in surprise. The Phantom palmed his New York detective's badge and let the man glimpse it.

"Police business," he whispered. "I'd like to take a look at one of the customers in your store."

The druggist pointed toward the peep-hole and the Phantom peered through it. He saw Harrington talking to one of the clerks, apparently getting some small change so he could use the telephone. Van's quick glance ran along the partition and he saw that at the far end the back of the telephone booths in the store formed a continuation of the partition. The telephone cables came up from the basement and went into the booths through small openings in the rear fibre-board walls.

This was an ideal spot for eavesdropping.

The Phantom heard the booth door being closed, then the musical jangle as Harrington deposited a nickel and began to dial a number. He dialed it slowly, as though consulting a note-book or memorandum. The Phantom was writing on a pad, counting the clicks and working out the letters and numbers that gave him the combination GR 7-2291.

The conversation was bound to be one-sided, but the Phantom hoped it would be valuable, though he would have to guess what was said by the party at the other end of the wire.

"I've been in jail," he heard Harrington say, "but they let me out this morning. Said they had nothing on me. I was wondering whether Tanner closed the deal with Beresford."

There was a pause. Then Harrington swore.

"Why didn't you go up to see Beresford yourself?" he demanded.

Whatever it was the party at the other end said, Harrington was becoming an-

grier by the moment. He was shifting about in the booth and banging against the walls.

"I've got to see you about this," he said suddenly. "We can't let that crook Tanner get away with a million dollars. We're entitled to our share. Where are you holed up?"

Apparently Harrington had been given only a telephone number before. Now, irked at the thought that Tanner might have closed the deal with Beresford and skipped with the money, the two plotters were getting together to fight a single menace.

"Thanks," Harrington finally said. "I'll get in touch with you as soon as I can. In the meantime I'll call Tanner myself. Maybe he's back at his office."

The Phantom knew that Harrington's telephone call would be fruitless, so decided this was a good time for him to withdraw. He went back to the pharmacist.

"Any luck?" the young man asked.

"Some," replied the Phantom grimly. Then he inquired, "Do you know the phone number of the second booth?"

"Sure," said the druggist. "They run in order. The first one is Lackawanna Four-two-nine-one-o. the second one is two-nine-one-one, and the other two are two-nine-one-two and two-nine-one-three."

"Thanks," said the Phantom, and let himself out of the side door of the pharmacy.

Back in the police car he ordered Rowley to drive down the street. The Phantom picked up the telephone and contacted the operator.

"This is police car Two-seven-seven, Detective Carney speaking," he said. "I want to check on a telephone call from Lackawanna Four-two-nine-one-one to Gramercy Seven-two-two-nine-one. Can you give me the location of the Gramercy number?"

"One moment, please," Central said.

In a moment or so the girl told him that the telephone called was located in a rooming house on Second Avenue just off Thirty-third Street.

The Phantom made a note of the address, thanked her, then gave Rowley the necessary directions. Phoning Inspector Gregg, he reported the latest developments.

"Boy!" laughed Detective Rowley. "This sure is something. We not only know where Harrington is going but we're going to beat him there."

"That'll give you a chance to ditch the car in a side street so neither Harrington nor his friend will realize that the police have caught up with them," the Phantom said, with satisfaction. "Then you can call Inspector Gregg and the local precinct and set up the cordon."

As the police car drove toward the boarding house, Van took in the aspects of the area. The hideout was in an old-fashioned, three-story private house, one of a row of shabby, down-at-the-heel buildings that had seen better days. Opposite, gaunt and frowzy apartments lined the way.

A COUPLE of trucks rumbled past, a few children played in the street. The house number the telephone operator had given the Phantom was almost in the center of the block.

"Drift past," he directed.

His glance ran along the windows of the building. Harrington's companion might be looking out in anticipation of his arrival. Perhaps, the Phantom thought, he might recognize him as one of the chief actors in this crime drama.

But the windows were covered with torn, rumpled curtains, and if anyone was studying the street it would be almost impossible to spot him. The Phantom motioned for Rowley to stop. The detective drew up at the curb, the Phantom climbed out of the car, and Rowley drove off.

Studying the moving traffic, the Phantom strode back toward the house to which Harrington had telephoned. The front steps were worn and furrowed by time. A corroded brass bell faced him on the right side of the front door when the Phantom reached the top step.

He rang the bell. It was answered by a frowzy-looking woman in a house dress. The Phantom tipped his hat politely and smiled pleasantly.

"I'm from the telephone company, ma'am!" he said. "We are revising our directories and would like to inquire whether you wish to add any new listings before the book goes to press."

The woman shook her head slowly.

"I don't think so," she said. "My room-

## THE CASE OF THE MURDERED WITNESS

ers are always coming and going. The telephone is a coin-box in the hall, and everyone uses it."

This information was a bit disturbing, but the Phantom, smooth and suave, calmly strode over to the phone. The number was not Gramercy Seven-two-two-nine-one. Had the chief operator given him the wrong information? Was he on a wild goose chase while Harrington disappeared among New York's seven million people?

The Phantom didn't like to consider that at all.

"Isn't there another telephone in the house?" he finally asked.

The landlady hesitated, then apparently realizing that the phone company would know about its own equipment, she answered him.

"You must mean Mr. Thayer's telephone. But he doesn't want a listing. I'm sure of that. He's—well, he's eccentric."

At sound of the name "Thayer" the Phantom's pulses quickened. But he could not waste too much time here. There was no telling when Harrington would arrive. Van made a few notes in his book, closed it carefully.

"Thank you very much, ma'am," he said, and turned toward the door.

Out on the street, he weighed his next step. Should he go around the corner and notify Rowley that the roomer here was the mysterious Norman Thayer, or should he wait for Harrington's arrival?

The decision was taken out of his hands. He just had time to step into an areaway when a taxi drew up before the shabby rooming house. Harrington leaped out, paid the driver, then headed up the steps. Apparently his discovery that Tanner was not answering his telephone had given wings to his feet.

The Phantom watched as Harrington was admitted. He waited a few moments, to make sure that the oil magnate was not coming back, then climbed the stoop himself. This time he ignored the bell and pulled open the vestibule door. Inside, he tried the knob of the inner door. It was locked.

The door was wood half-way up, glass the rest of the way. Faded, soiled curtains hung disconsolately over the glass. Careful to make no shadow on the pane, the Phantom peered through the curtain.

In the hazy day-dusk of the front hall, he saw the landlady walking toward the rear of the house.

There was no sign of the cadaverous Harrington. No sound came from the other side of the door. The Phantom gave the woman time to disappear before he slipped his master-key smoothly into the lock. He turned it, and opened the door.

Warm air, reminiscent of long-defunct cooking, greeted him. He moved narrowed eyes to the flight of stairs rising steeply from the right of the entry hall. He listened again, hearing Harrington's voice on the landing above. A door opened and closed, and the Phantom, on cat-quiet feet, started up the stairs.

They ended on a narrow landing. The four doors along it were closed. Van realized that this mediocre rooming house, one of thousands housing the city's overflow, made an ideal spot for a hideout. Here anyone could hole in and remain safe for an indefinite period.

To the Phantom's strained ears conversation filtered out behind the door to the left of where he stood. Chet Harrington's familiar tone was low, but audible.

"It sure looks as though Tanner has pulled out with the dough and left us holding the bag," he was saying.

"He won't get away with it," came the brisk retort.

The second voice made the Phantom's brows draw together. This voice was soft and low. He had never heard it before.

"We've got to find out what's going on," the voice went on, "and clear things up here pretty quick."

"When did you hear from the Colonel last?" Harrington asked.

"I haven't had word since yesterday afternoon."

"What happened?"

"The Colonel said he knew how he could get the deed back. He had some plan he said couldn't miss. He was to call me last last night, or early this morning. I've buzzed the Blackfield Apartments twice since breakfast. No one answers in his suite."

"Did anyone answer at the office?" Harrington persisted, growing anger plain in his voice now.

"Only his secretary, and she hasn't heard a word from him either."

"That settles it," Harrington declared.

## THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

"He's gone through with the deal. We'll get in touch with Beresford immediately."

"What good will that do?" demanded the other man.

"If a check was issued, we may be able to catch up with Tanner when he tries to put it through the bank. Where do you keep your phone?"

**S**LOWLY the Phantom turned the knob of the door. Luck was with him, for it was unlocked. He pushed it warily open to a crack large enough to look through.

Harrington, standing sideward, was at a small desk, thumbing through a telephone directory. The Phantom's keen gaze darted to the other man in the room. He recognized him almost at once. He was younger than Harrington, almost as tall. He was well-built, slender, with dark brown hair and an alert, tanned face. The cigarette in his mouth sent a pearly mushroom of smoke toward the ceiling.

The Phantom had no trouble in recognizing him as the man he had grappled with so briefly in the shadowy alley of the Pyramid Building, the man who had originally carried the deed to the Black Eagle tract, whose ripped pocket had spilled out the key to Box 39.

But the Phantom had another way of identifying the man who was watching Harrington at the desk. A faint, cold smile played around Van's mouth as he stepped through the door, shouldered it shut behind him and drew his gun with lightning speed.

As the door slammed shut, Harrington dropped the directory with a strangled exclamation. His thin, cadaverous face went blank with surprise. Choked words ripped across his compressed lips:

"The Phantom!"

Harrington's rasped words acted like a shot in the arm to the other man in the room. Careless of the gun in Van's hand, the brown-haired man whirled and lunged at him. Chet Harrington, weaponless since he had left the Tombs, darted toward the desk. A .22 High Standard automatic, with a six and three-quarter inch barrel was lying there, half under some newspapers. He grabbed for it as the Phantom went off balance.

Once more, the Phantom's ability as an expert snap-shooter was called into in-

stant action. He knew that one or both of the men in this room were killers. His first shots must count!

## CHAPTER XXIII

### CORPUS DELICTI



**G**RIMLY reeling half across the room under the impact of Norman Thayer's forward urge, the Phantom squeezed the trigger of his automatic. Harrington yelped with pain, the .22 jumped out of his hand and he half-fell across a chair, clutching at his right arm, his nerves dulled by bullet shock.

Now the Phantom turned his attention to his attacker. The fury of Thayer's onslaught gave him no chance to fire again. He was up against a man who had strength and the will to use it. So savage was the attack that the Phantom smacked up against the wall below the end of the bed.

A hand twisted the gun out of his fingers. The weapon dropped to the floor. The Phantom kicked it under the bed while reaching, clawing hands closed about his throat. Apparently convinced that he had the Phantom helpless, Thayer snarled:

"You've been up against hirelings until now. They haven't been able to stop you, but I will!"

Always at his best in close-locked brawling, the Phantom let the first frenzy of the man's savage fury reach its peak, then begin to wane. He knew he had to work fast. The rumpus would certainly bring Rowley and the police, but before they arrived the frowzy landlady might well barge into the fight and be shot in the melee.

Then there was Harrington to be considered. The prospect of losing his share of the money involved in the oil deal might well whip him into a killing rage.

If Harrington had seen the gun go under the bed, he had only to retrieve it and the Phantom's number would be up.

With a deep breath, the Phantom renewed his efforts. He gripped the hands at his throat. Blazing eyes glared into his own. His antagonist's breath blew hotly in his face. Exerting all of his tremendous

## THE CASE OF THE MURDERED WITNESS

strength, he pried the clutching hands away from his windpipe. It was strength against strength, will against will.

Inch by inch the hands loosened. But there wasn't too much time. Over Norman Thayer's shoulder Van saw Harrington push himself up from the chair. Numbly he peered at the fighting pair, then began to look for his gun. With a final call on all the power he possessed, the Phantom twisted away the hands. His knee thudded into the pit of Thayer's stomach as he let the wrists go.

His fist smashed accurately to his adversary's jaw. Flesh yielded under his knuckles, bone cracked. The man dropped like a sack of potatoes!

The Phantom turned to Harrington then. The thin man straightened. Fear was in his eyes. He had come to grips with the Phantom once before, in Ferndale. Now that the odds had been evened, he had no desire for another battle with the Phantom. With a half-scream he went limp as Van pounced on him.

"Don't!" he shouted. "I—give up! You—I'm shot!"

Outside, voices broke the morning quiet of the house. Shouts drifted in. As the Phantom picked up the .22 from under the bed, he heard the door behind him crash open. His instructions to Rowley were being carried out with a bang!

Inspector Gregg, Frank Havens, Steve Huston, and the police detail contacted over the radio telephone came barging in.

The Phantom settled Harrington into a chair. Blood dripped from under the cuff of the man's right sleeve. The cadaverous face was black with pain and dread.

"Right on schedule, Inspector! Nice work." The Phantom made a gesture indicating Harrington. "I think our friend here is going to help us out, now that he's sure his mysterious boss can't help him any more."

"His boss?" Inspector Gregg was amazed. "But I thought . . . Tanner?"

"No," the Phantom declared. "Tanner and Harrington were both hirelings. Even though they did have their own ideas about getting rich quick. Your other prisoner is over there by the bed. Take good care of him so he won't cheat the chair!"

Gregg walked across the room. There was a tussle in the hallway as the land-

lady pushed past the police. Gregg looked down at the huddled form on the carpet, the face turned toward the ceiling, the mouth half-open like a fish gasping for air.

"What do we book him for?" he asked.

"Book him for first degree murder!" the Phantom clipped. "The murder of Norman Thayer!"

A bewildered expression crossed the landlady's face.

"But he is Norman Thayer!" she insisted.

Gregg looked from the woman to the Phantom.

"How about it?" he asked.

Conscious that all eyes in the room were riveted on him, Van laughed curtly.

"The *corpus delicti*, Inspector. The man who wants us to believe that he died in the Bronx woods. The one I went to Oklahoma to check on, the missing Ernest Shaler—in person!"

\* \* \* \* \*

**H**ALF an hour later the Phantom, with Steve Huston and Frank Havens, were in the front parlor of the rooming house. Gradually the street outside had been cleared of the curious crowd that had streamed into the block from all directions. The ambulance, with the brisk young doctor who had taken care of Harrington's wounded arm, had sired away.

Once his arm was bandaged, Harrington had answered the Phantom's deft questioning with a flow of accusations against Ernest Shaler which, added to the testimony Wally and Ted had given, built up a convincing case against the murderer.

Now Shaler, with Tanner's partner, the Inspector and Gregg's men had departed. Some measure of quiet and order had returned to the shabby house.

Steve, making notes in shorthand, listened while the Phantom explained.

"Who was Norman Thayer?" asked Huston, voicing a question that was uppermost in Havens' mind as well.

"He was a small time crook who suddenly found himself in fast company and thought he was going to cash in on it. He lived in the Hotel Marion where Shaler had hidden himself under the alias of Stanton Wilcox. Thayer had a habit of

weaseling himself into neighboring rooms when the regular occupants were out. He would check on any valuables they had, then try to rig a scheme to get them."

"A hotel sneak thief?" Havens asked.

"Not exactly," the Phantom told him. "He seldom stole anything in the hotel, for that would be too obvious. But if he found a woman who owned valuable furs or jewelry, or a man who made a habit of carrying a well-filled wallet, Thayer could easily make the snatch somewhere away from the hotel."

"I see how it worked," Huston declared. "Thayer went through Shaler's things, looking for something of value, and discovered that Shaler was leading a double life, hiding out from the F.B.I. and the Senate investigating committee."

"You're right." The Phantom nodded. "Thayer saw a chance to earn a crooked dollar by a little blackmail. Tanner was already in touch with Beresford, and Shaler saw the whole deal blowing sky-high. So he decided to eliminate Thayer and cover himself as well."

"Where did Tanner and Harrington come into it?" Havens inquired.

"Shaler talked it over with them. They pretended to agree to a payoff and Thayer was to collect handsomely to assure his silence. He didn't know the payoff was going to be in lead."

"How was it done?" Huston asked.

"Thayer was lured into one of Tanner's cars, the one Olga Tanner used a good deal of the time, the one with the aroma of violets. Shaler used the gun he later gave to Ted, and which I took from that thug. Shaler became suspicious when he heard that I was in the case, and took a chance on going back to Wellington to determine whether I had learned anything. He was the man who shot at me at the Fowler House. He had learned that I was a detective and also searched my bag to determine whether I had found anything worthwhile."

"Then when Shaler had killed Thayer, he changed clothes with the dead man, they picked a spot in the Bronx woods and dumped him there," Steve Huston concluded. "And I bumped into the stiff, acid face and all."

"Where did they make their big mistake, Phantom?" Frank Havens asked.

"They made several," Van declared.

"For one thing, they were foolish in not coming forward to identify the body as Shaler's when it was found. If they wanted the F.B.I. to believe that Shaler was dead, that couldn't be done with an unidentified body."

"But then the F.B.I. would have surely jumped on Harrington and Tanner," said Havens.

"Maybe so," agreed the Phantom, "but neither one of them was involved, and they could have had iron-clad alibis. Shaler was the president of Choctaw Oil. Anyway, they did try to leave a clue. Shaler tossed away the key to his room at the Hotel Marion. I found it. I also found something else that had not been left there intentionally. A broken silver cuff link, one of a pair that had been stolen from the field manager of the oil company."

"I've been wondering about that," Huston said. "According to your notes, the sheriff down in Wellington claimed Buck Rooney never included the cuff links in the list of stolen goods."

"I've thought of that," the Phantom admitted, "and at first I thought it pointed strongly toward Rooney. But he gave me a good lead when he told me Shaler had spoken to him on the telephone—after Steve had found the body. That might have meant that the cuff links had been on Rooney's desk in the office and that Shaler had borrowed them for a hurry-up party or something. Missing them later on Rooney might naturally have assumed that they had been with the stolen things. However, what really clinched it was what Miss Tanner said, when she mentioned she had heard the Colonel talking with Shaler over the telephone at the apartment, a day or so before."

The fact that telephone contacts appeared to be the only means of getting in touch with the missing Shaler had prompted the Phantom's use of the two-way radio telephone in the police car which had expedited the final uncovering of the clues.

Steve snapped his note-book closed, glanced at his watch and jumped up.

"What a story!" he exclaimed. "I've just got time to make the first evening edition with it. So if you'll excuse me, I'm on my way!"

## THE CASE OF THE MURDERED WITNESS

STEVE hurried out and Havens got up. "I'd better contact Senator La Rue at once and tell him what's happened," the publisher said. "I'm sure this is going to work out all right now."

"I think so," Van said. "Shaler will appear before the committee and the swindled Indians will undoubtedly get what is rightfully due them."

In the Cadillac, Havens said:

"Where can I drop you, Phantom?"

For an instant Van didn't answer. As usual he knew the tingle of relief and satisfaction that always came when a case was successfully closed and the final word spoken. Then again the Phantom Detective melted back into the shadows of obscurity out of which he came at the summons of the man beside him.

In a little while, Richard Curtis Van Loan, bored, wealthy and charming, would be back in circulation.

It was the thought of his real identity that made Van smile whimsically as he answered Frank Havens.

"You'd better drop me in the vicinity of a telephone booth. Now that this is closed, I've got to dream up an airtight apology and deliver it, via Bell System, to Miss Wendy Malcolm. And that," he added, "is going to be a much tougher assignment than the case of the murdered Government witness, who wasn't murdered at all, believe me!"

The big car stopped, and soon Van Loan was lost to Havens' view in the noonday crowds that sauntered along the sunny sidewalks.



*"This Isn't a Show—It's a Showdown! Hands Off—  
If You Want to Continue Living!"*

THERE was a shine of steel in the half-covered hand of the man who forced the Phantom to enter the dark green sedan. "We saw you go in to Seldon's apartment," said the stranger. "And we have a fair idea why you went there!"

"Really?" asked Van. "Then why bother to put on this show?"

The man explained, in no uncertain terms, that he wanted the Phantom to cease his investigations at once. He made his request clearer by pointing his gun directly at Van. And as the man talked on, Van realized there were far greater ramifications in this case than first appeared—that more than a mere routine murder investigation confronted him!

The astonishing events that follow the killing of Jim Darrel—revealing a sinister plot of greed and violence—are woven into a Phantom novel that will hold you breathless! Packed with suspense and action, danger and daring, it's one of the year's most exciting mystery thrillers!

## *The Case of the* **BURNING ROCKS** By ROBERT WALLACE

*Next Issue's Complete Book-Length Novel Featuring the Phantom!*



The blow on Coe's neck sent waves of agony down his spine

# THE MILLION DOLLAR

**P**ETER COE, private detective, was beginning to think it might not be a gag after all.

The desk clerk at the Waldorf seemed a little surprised when he asked for Jane Jones, but he made a phone call and then actually bowed to Peter Coe. It was the first time that ever happened. He gave him the number of a room. Coe went up.

The girl who let him into the very fashionable suite was of medium height, trim, blonde and wore dark glasses which she took off in answer to Coe's puzzled ex-

pression. She was Claudia Slater all right. It wasn't a gag. A bit of Hollywood at its most glamorous, was inviting Coe into the apartment.

She said, "Sit down, please. And let me see your private detective license and things."

The voice was Claudia Slater's too. No mistake about that. Coe listened to it from the screen many times. She was an important, well established movie star acting in super-doooper epics only. She looked at his license card and compared the pic-

## When Private Detective Peter Coe Is Hired



# WEAPON

By  
WAYLAND RICE

ture on it with Coe's features.

He didn't have much of a face so far as faces in Hollywood went, but she'd have to get used to New York men if she wanted him to work for her. Coe was slightly flat of nose with ears that stuck out too far. His hair was thin on top and, he'd decided that very morning, on the sides too. But he was big enough and husky enough. She seemed to be admiring that quality in him.

"I've had you checked up on," she said suddenly.

He grinned. "The private detective investigated by other private detectives, eh? What do you want me to do for you, Miss Slater?"

"I've been searching for a very tough man. Someone without too many scruples and who doesn't care about the regular police. I find you fill the bill, Mr. Coe."

"That's right," he admitted. "The cops don't care much about me. I've a happy talent for crossing them now and then. My idea is that any client of mine rates my protection whether the police like it

**by a Movie Star. He's in for Plenty of Drama!**

or not. Who is putting the buzz on you?"

"The buzz?" She frowned. "I'm sorry. I haven't acted in gangster pictures in years."

"It must be blackmail," Coe said. "You see, I've done a bit of investigating myself. I usually do. Your right name is Myrtle Goobie. You were born and raised on Tenth Avenue. Your father was killed in a drunken brawl."

Her eyes narrowed. "I'm wondering if you are going to put—what did you call it—the buzz on me yourself, Mr. Coe."

**H**E FELT a little less awed now, crossed his legs and lit a cigarette. "You've no need to worry, Miss Slater. I was raised on Tenth Avenue myself. Some pretty good people came out of that tenderloin district. Now, what's the beef?"

She bit her lip, sat down very slowly and curled one leg up under her. It was a rather nice leg, Coe decided in an abstract manner. He wished she'd get down to business.

"Very few people know my real name," she explained. "Or my background. I'm not exactly ashamed of it, but—well, my fans regard me as very sophisticated and polished. It goes with the glamour Hollywood has built up around me. I have a younger brother."

"Ah," Coe smiled, "now we come to it."

"Yes. Yes, we come to it. Marty has never forgotten that he came off Tenth Avenue and he regards this as a special prerogative to be tough. I've given him money enough to be a gentleman, but he persists in being with the wrong kind of people. Now he is in some sort of a jam. I want you to get him out of it."

"The details would help," Coe suggested.

"But I haven't any. He called me, long distance, two days ago. He said things were pretty bad and the only way I could help him was by coming to New York."

"Maybe," Coe said, "you ought to let him take the rap, whatever it is. Might do him more good than harm."

"I can't. He'd blab that he was my brother. Oh, I like Marty. Essentially he's a good kid, but I couldn't stand the publicity. I want you to find him, make him tell you what is wrong and pull him out of it. I expect the police are after him. That's why I hired you, because you

wouldn't mind if you had to fight the cops. Will you help me?"

"Certainly—at twenty-five dollars a day and expenses. My regular rate, Miss Slater. I'm not inflating my prices because you're famous. Now, where is he?"

She shuddered. "In a cheap rooming house on Carmody Street. I had a taxi drive past, but I didn't go in. He apparently is living under the name of Frank Harding, which indicates he is in hiding. Talk to him, find out what it's all about and let me know. I have two days. Then I must go back to the Coast."

Coe picked up his hat. "I'll get right on it, Miss Slater. Let you know as soon as I get any facts at all. The cops won't hear a word about it if I can arrange things."

Coe went out, climbed into his somewhat battered car and started for Carmody Street. It seemed like a simple case—unless the movie star's brother was involved in something that couldn't be squared. Coe thought back on important crimes over the past week. There were enough of them, from the important robbery of a jewelry store to half a dozen murders. He sighed and began looking for house numbers.

Miss Slater, nee Myrtle Goobie, wasn't exaggerating the quality of the place where her brother lived. It was a four-story walk-up which looked as if it ought to be abandoned to the mice that must overrun it. Coe parked his car, looked around to be sure he wasn't under observation and then walked up the stairs to the front door. He didn't ring the bell. The door was locked. He took keys out of his pocket, selected one and tried it. Without any luck. The fourth one shot the bolt back.

Inside the rather bleak foyer he looked over the wooden slots in which the landlady apparently deposited mail for her roomers. One bore the name of Frank Harding and indicated he lived in 4B. Coe climbed the stairs and wondered why a movie star's kid brother would let himself get so involved as to be forced to live in a crummy joint like this.

He tapped on the panels of 4B, but there was no answer. He tried the knob. The door was open. He stepped inside and from the illumination given by the hall light, he saw a small room fitted with cheap furniture that someone didn't seem

## THE MILLION DOLLAR WEAPON

to like very much. The contents of the rickety dresser had been dumped on the floor. A modernistic chair with steel tubular legs seemed to have been ripped apart and the bed had been ruthlessly torn up, with the mattress gashed open with a knife.

Coe whistled softly, closed the door behind him and snapped on the light. It was a single overhead, naked, hundred-watt bulb. There was a clothes closet and he approached this. He flung the door back and a pair of legs slowly unfolded from their cramped position and stretched out across the threshold.

COE gasped and quickly knelt beside the man. By the greyness of his face, he knew he was dead and the knife in his back proved it. He held one section of that modernistic chair in his right hand. A leg which he'd apparently used as a weapon of some kind.

This, Coe decided, wasn't so good. Miss Slater wouldn't be apt to pay a day's fee for having the body of her brother discovered. Especially since Coe couldn't possibly keep a thing like this from the police. The longer he held off notifying them, the tougher things would be. He searched the dead man, found nothing on him and then went out into the hallway where he'd seen a wall pay-phone.

He dropped a nickel in the slot and called the Waldorf. Miss Slater, it seemed, had gone out and left word she wouldn't be back until late. Coe hung up, frowning a little. Well, he couldn't wait for her. He used another nickel and called Police headquarters. He didn't give any name.

"Something is wrong in Room 4B at 331 Carmody Street," he explained. "I think you ought to send a man over."

He deposited the receiver on its hook, started back to the room for a final check and then moved silently and gracefully for the darker shadows of a hallway corner. Someone was coming up the stairs. It proved to be a man of about twenty-three or four, tall, good looking and well dressed. He had a furtive manner that made him jump when the floor creaked under his own weight.

He went directly to the door of 4B and scratched his nails on the panels. Then he tried the door and stepped in.

Coe moved up behind him, reached out one arm and wrapped it around the visitor's neck. He held him, suppressing the yell that tried to escape, and rapidly searched him. Then he pushed him onto what was left of the bed.

"Okay," he said, "give out. If you feel reluctant about talking, take a squint at Marty Goobie. Who killed him?"

"Marty—Goobie?" the intruder gasped. "I—he's dead, isn't he? There's a knife sticking in his back. You killed him. You did it."

"I'm a private eye," Coe explained. "I just stumbled onto this mess. The police are coming, so talk fast unless you'd rather let the cops ask the questions."

"No. No, not that. Look, he isn't Marty Goobie. I am. That's Frank Harding, a pal of mine. I've got to get out of here. I can't let the cops find me."

Coe closed his eyes in silent resignation. Now he was in it. Miss Slater would expect and pay him for getting this sap of a brother out a mess. But Coe hadn't bargained on murder. Not at twenty-five bucks a day. He seized Marty by one arm and shook him hard. "Listen, you jerk, your sister hired me. Start talking and make it snappy. I phoned three minutes ago and radio cars work fast. What's this about?"

"I'll tell you—but not here. They might come back. We've got to get away from here."

Coe thought that wasn't too bad an idea. Let the cops try to figure it out. He propelled Marty through the door, to the head of the stairs and suddenly remembered about fingerprints. He told Marty to stay where he was, hurried back to the telephone and quickly wiped off any prints he might have left on the instrument. Marty breezed past him and back into the room.

"There's something in there which will identify me," he said, over his shoulder. "I'll be right back."

He was, within a minute or two. They started down the stairs and reached the second floor when they heard the pounding at the door. Only police banged that particular way. Coe steered his charge along the hallway to a window overlooking a fire escape. He opened the window and let Marty go first. Coe climbed onto the fire escape and closed the window.

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He started down. Marty was moving fast, with apprehensive glances upward. He was going to try and get clear. Coe moved fast too. Marty was racing along an alley when the private detective caught him and put a firm grip on his wrist.

"Running out on me, are you?" he snapped. "When will smart punks like you remember that when a private eye is hired, he sticks. My car is down the street. Walk beside me, nice and easy. If you make a break for it, so help me, I'll bat you down, even if the cops pick us up for it."

"I'll be good." Marty promised. "It's just I'm so—so darned s-scared."

THE detective got him into the car and I drove five miles away from the neighborhood. Central Park seemed like a nice dark and quiet spot for a conference. He pulled up along one of the lesser used thoroughfares, shut off the motor and lit a cigarette.

"Give," he ordered brusquely.

Marty gulped. "Well, there isn't much to tell. I've been running around with Frank Harding and he belonged to Joe Thaxter's gang. They were going to take the Acme Jewel Company."

Coe groaned again. This was getting worse.

"The big job. They got several hundred thousand dollars worth of loose diamonds in that job. Were you in on it?"

"No. Honest I wasn't. I—I knew about it. Harding had cased the place. But the night it was pulled, I went to a night club where I'm known. I never left there and I can prove it. Harding came in after midnight and he asked me to alibi him. I did."

"What made you so scared you phoned your sister for help?" Coe demanded.

"Well I—it wasn't me exactly. It was Frank Harding. He split with the gang and figured they were going to try and get him. I saw some of the boys hanging around. They were watching me because they knew I was Frank's pal."

"Why should they be after Harding? If the job was over and he got his share, what were they afraid of?"

"I don't know. Frank wouldn't talk. I left Frank around eight tonight. He was okay then. Now they'll probably be look-

ing for me. You've got to hide me."

"I'll take care of that," Coe said. "They won't know where you are. Nothing to worry about, but I've got to find out who knocked off Harding or the cops will be after your hide. They'll discover you were his pal."

Marty gulped, made motions with his lips and finally blurted it out. "I think—one of Thaxter's boys saw us—leaving. I was going to tell you, but I wasn't sure."

Coe started the car. "You were born without brains," he snapped, "and you certainly never grew any. I'm taking you to your sister. Once there, you'll stay in her apartment. If you so much as put a foot out the door, I'll give the whole works to the police and let them keep you. Is that clear?"

"Y-yes, sir," Marty said meekly and Coe didn't like it. He was too meek. He'd been too cooperative all along. He brought Marty to his sister's suite and luckily found her in. Then he went back to his office to think things over.

It wasn't much of an office, but it served. There was a sparsely furnished waiting room with a desk and chair for a secretary whom Coe never seemed to acquire. His private office had a leather couch in it which he slept on more nights than not. He sat down behind the desk, turned on the desk light and proceeded to check on young Goobie's alibi for the time of the robbery. It was good. Martin Goobie really had been there. Coe leaned back to think.

The Thaxter mob had looted a jewelry firm of easy-to-dispose-of diamonds. It had been a fluke, that job. Ordinarily not more than ten or twenty grand in gems was left in the safe, but the night of the robbery a big shipment had arrived too late to be placed in bank vaults. The robbers had simply been lucky.

Coe wondered what kind of a fee the insurance company would pay for knowledge that Joe Thaxter and his boys had pulled the job. It ought to run into a lot of money. He reached for the phone and then became aware that he wasn't alone.

One man stood in the doorway. He must have entered on cat's feet for Coe hadn't heard a thing, even in the solemn quiet of this office building at such a late hour. The man himself wasn't especially formidable, but the gun he held was.

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Joe Thaxter was about five feet eight, slight of build and natty. The automatic was thick and ugly. Joe Thaxter kept the weapon trained on Coe and called out to someone apparently waiting in the corridor. Two burly men entered.

Thaxter snapped on the overhead lights, smirked at Coe and sat down. The gun was very steady. His two men walked around the desk and stood directly behind the private detective. Coe had an idea this wouldn't be so good.

**T**HAXTER said, "Where is that squirt Goobie? I want a direct answer and fast."

"He got away from me," Coe said.

"That punk got away from a tough egg like you? Come again, Coe, and this time don't fumble."

"That's the truth," Coe started to say. One of the men behind him administered a wallop that connected with the back of Coe's neck. It jarred his brains and sent waves of agony down to the tips of his toes. The blow was repeated.

He fell forward across the desk and the gun was no more than two inches from his nose. He said, "Go ahead, beat my head off and see what it gets you. I can't tell something I don't know. Goobie took a powder. In fact, this is the first time I knew his name."

"Why were you in that room then? You found Harding and you called the cops," Thaxter accused. "You're mixed up in it."

"I was hired to locate some stolen stuff," Coe raised his head cautiously. He was hit again.

"Ah, now we're getting some place," Thaxter gloated. "It wouldn't be a million bucks worth of diamonds, would it?"

"Maybe. What do you know about them?"

"I never even laid eyes on them, but I intend to. Look, Coe, we'll make a little deal. You turn over the rocks and we'll forget about Goobie. Even give you a cut. Not much, but more than the insurance company would pay."

"No!" Coe said. These men were lying, feeling him out. Trying to learn how much he knew. If he admitted the knowledge that they were the robbers, he'd probably be killed.

Thaxter shrugged, raised a hand and sat back. For the next five minutes Coe took

everything those two chunky men could hand out. They knew how to inflict punishment without sending their victim into the merciful abyss of unconsciousness.

Coe fought back, but he couldn't do much. Once, when he got clear of them, Thaxter stepped forward with the gun level and Coe had to give up his dash for the door. Finally he let his knees buckle and he slumped to the floor.

Thaxter said, "We can keep this up all night, Coe. Get wise! Where are Goobie and the rocks?"

Coe just groaned. He was fighting for time to think, for an opportunity to escape to arise. If these mugs learned where Goobie was, they'd also find out he was Claudia Slater's brother and that would put an end to Claudia's cloak of mythical respectability. It was Coe's job to protect her as much as the brother. He meant to stick it out though he couldn't take much more of this brand of punishment. He tested one tooth with his tongue. It wasn't loose, but he had expected it to drop out. There was blood in the corner of his mouth, his face was swollen, his throat felt as if he'd been dangling from a gibbet until just before his breathing stopped.

And he was sore. They were trying to take him for something he didn't know. Finding Goobie was a side issue. The missing gems were the most important and he hadn't the faintest knowledge of where they were. Goobie didn't have them. He'd searched him thoroughly in the rooming house.

Thaxter sighed deeply. "Bust him up good this time," he ordered. "Just short of killing him. We want Goobie and we want those rocks."

One of the two thugs rolled Coe over, raised his foot and brought it down into the pit of the private detective's stomach. He started to put weight on it.

Coe suddenly came to life. He grabbed the ankle with both hands and gave it a twist. The thug was surprised by this move, slightly off balance, and he fell just as Coe had hoped he'd fall. Squarely into Thaxter's lap. The second thug made a flying leap for Coe and missed. Coe dived toward the mixture of arms and legs, half of which was Thaxter. He grabbed at the waving gun. It went off, the slug grazing his wrist, but the pain didn't stop him.

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He wrested the gun free, whirled in time to face the onrushing attack of the second thug and stopped him with a bullet fired into the floor. Then he backed away from the trio.

"Okay," he snapped, "Stand up, all of you. Against the wall. Face it and put the palms of your hands flat against the paint. Just say one word, or breathe too hard, and you'll stop breathing for good."

COE went over to the desk, dialed Headquarters and got Lieutenant Bromley on the wire. He didn't especially like Bromley, but he was the only night shift detective he could think of on the spur of the moment. Bromley promised to come over fast.

"And that," Coe said, "is that. Thaxter, you're going in for stealing those rocks and for the murder of Frank Harding. If the rocks are missing and he had them, you or one of your boys know where they are now. That room was searched so well even a quarter-carat diamond couldn't have been hidden after you got through."

Thaxter started to turn, but stopped that at a sharp command from Coe. The crook said, "Of all the saps you're the biggest I ever met. We didn't pull that robbery. We didn't knock off Harding. Goobie did that. He and Harding made the haul."

"Says you," Coe grinned. "Goobie says differently and I believe him. In fact he can prove where he was the night the job was pulled. Now shut up. Do your talking to Lieutenant Bromley."

Bromley was middle-aged, efficient and rather domineering. He listened to Coe's story. Then he sat down heavily.

"So you phoned in the tip about Harding's murder. Maybe Thaxter or his boys did it but if so they'll have cute alibis. The diamond robbery, my smart friend, was not pulled by Thaxter."

"How do you know?" Coe demanded with a sinking feeling. There'd been too much conviction in Bromley's voice and if Thaxter and his mob hadn't pulled the job, Goobie and Harding were guilty. That meant Goobie had also murdered Harding. He could have killed him, removed the gems to some outside hiding place and then returned to clean up the mess. Coe saw his fee growing dimmer and dimmer.

Bromley said, "We think Thaxter meant to pull it off. Some of his boys were spotted casing the joint. When all those diamonds arrived, the owners of them told us about it. So we picked up Thaxter and every member of the mob we could find. We held them all night and while they were locked up, the robbery took place. So we know it wasn't Thaxter. Now suppose you tell us your side of it. How'd you get mixed up in this?"

Coe couldn't tell Bromley the same lie he'd told Thaxter. About being retained by an insurance company. Bromley would check that in ten minutes. Coe said, "I was checking on a missing husband. He was supposed to be living in that rooming house so I went there. I snooped around, figured one of the roomers might talk and tried to get into this room. The door was open. I looked in and there was that guy—stabbed in the back."

Bromley shook his head. "It won't work, Coe. There's more to it than that. If I ask who your client was, you'll stall by saying you can't divulge his or her name, so I won't waste time there. Thaxter, you and your boys can breeze."

"But wait," Coe cried. "Maybe they killed this Harding fellow."

"Can you prove any of them were near the place?" Bromley wanted to know.

Coe couldn't, not without dragging Goobie into it. Though he made up his mind he wouldn't hold out much longer. If it came to a choice of Claudia Slater being revealed as Tenth Avenue Myrtle Goobie, or his going into a cell, Claudia would have to face the issue.

Thaxter picked up his hat, glared at Coe and shepherded his pair of thugs out of the office. The moment they disappeared, Bromley picked up the phone and called Headquarters.

"Have the radio division notify my car that the two men in it are to tail Thaxter and his men. Get on it fast."

He hung up, cocked his head to one side and clucked his tongue. "My, my, but those boys really gave it to you, Coe. They had a reason for that. Out with it."

Coe groaned. "They must have seen me leave the rooming house. That's all I can say. Lieutenant, are you sure they couldn't have pulled that robbery?"

"I'm not sure, I'm positive," Bromley

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said. "And just as certain you've got both feet right into the muck of this case. Coe, if you don't talk, I'll have to file charges and that means your finish as a private eye. Make up your mind."

"I'll take the chance," Coe said. Bromley shrugged and left. Coe waited about ten minutes and then he departed by a back exit. Outside, he looked around very carefully. The street seemed deserted. He began walking fast toward a subway. This took him uptown close by the Waldorf. He circled the huge building once before venturing inside. With Thaxter and his mob, Bromley and his cops, all suspicious of him, he couldn't afford to take any risks.

UPSTAIRS, he found Claudia Slater pacing the floor. Goobie was lounging on a divan, sneering at her worries. He stopped sneering when he saw Coe's battered face.

"Yes," Coe said, "your pals did that. Thaxter and his boys. I held out, but they'll find you if the cops don't. We've got to get under better cover than this."

Claudia Slater stopped her pacing.

"Mr. Coe, I went out tonight. To what I thought was just a small gathering of friends. It turned out the reporters had been tipped off about me. They'll be here in droves any minute. It's impossible to hide Marty. You've got to do something."

Coe nodded. "That works in with my own ideas. Marty, get on your feet. We're leaving."

Outside, Coe hailed a cab and he and Marty were driven to where Coe had left his car. He put Marty into it and headed for the express highway. Once on it, with driving maneuvers reduced to a minimum, he glanced at Marty. The boy was biting his lip.

"Okay," Coe said, "what did your pal Harding do with those diamonds? They weren't in his room because Thaxter's men killed him and searched the place. If you'd been there, Thaxter wouldn't have let you go. But I have an idea you know about the rocks. Out with it. The whole story this time and make it true for a change."

"Harding stole them," Marty said slowly. "I was holding out. The way it

happened, Harding helped case the place. He even got the combination of the safe somehow. Through a guy who worked there. Then Thaxter and his boys were picked up because the cops were suspicious of them. Harding said it couldn't wait. In the morning the rocks would be transferred to a bank. So he got them. But like I said, I had nothing to do with it. I just alibied for Harding because he knew Thaxter would be after him as soon as he heard of the robbery."

"I checked on your being at the nightclub when the robbery took place," Coe admitted. "You're alibied, but aiding Harding is a crime. And because Thaxter hasn't got the gems, the police will assume you have. They'll also assume you knocked off Harding to get them."

"I couldn't have," Marty protested. "I knew Thaxter and his boys were with Harding. I saw them go in. I waited until they came out and then I went up. But you were there. You searched me. I didn't have the rocks. Another thing. I'm sick of this playing around. My sister says she'll give me money to get away from here. You're not going to keep me."

"Make a break," Coe invited, "and see where you land. Marty, you only think you're a tough guy. Right now we're heading for a hideout I know of. You'll stay there until this blows over." He looked up at the rear view mirror and added, "If we get there. We're being tailed and it won't be cops. Somehow Thaxter must have known you were at the Waldorf."

Marty twisted in his seat and uttered a cry of terror. Until now he'd been the silent, tough, movie version of a bad egg. That was all gone. He was nothing but a scared kid who'd gone too far and didn't know the way back.

Coe was off the highway and driving fast along a rather narrow and lonesome road. It was concrete, full of curves, and he hoped to throw his pursuers off. He used every trick he knew and they gained on him each mile. His old crate couldn't stack up against the newer faster car they used.

A gun flamed from the crooks' car. The bullet smashed into the back of Coe's sedan. Marty gave a bleat of alarm. Coe drew the gun from under his armpit. He glanced at Marty.

"If they get us, we'll both be killed.

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I've had a taste of the way Thaxter questions prisoners and I don't want any more. We're going to try and take them, Marty. It means a risk that involves our lives."

"Slow up," Marty screamed. "Let me jump. You draw them away. My sister will pay you a lot of money—"

"You rat," Coe grunted. "You're going to stick whether you like it or not. Hang on. This calls for some extra fancy driving."

He pushed the gas pedal to the floor, held it there and the old car strained at every seam. The speedometer gave him a case of the jitters. He rounded a corner on squealing tires, saw a good straight stretch of road ahead and braced himself. Halfway along the straight stretch, with Thaxter half a mile behind and coming up fast, Coe suddenly transferred his foot to the brake. At the same time he twisted the wheel sharply.

The car teetered on two tires, but by some miracle didn't turn over. It skidded directly across the road and he managed to bring it to a stop. The highway was blocked and Thaxter was coming up too fast to stop any distance away. The brakes on his car were howling now.

Coe jumped out, gun in his fist. While Thaxter's driver battled the car to stop it before they crashed into the side of Coe's sedan, all the occupants were busy getting set for the smashup. The car jolted to a stop ten yards from Coe's machine and he was right on the spot.

**B**EFORE they could get set, he had the door of their car open and his gun covered them. Thaxter was the first to throw his gun out. It was followed by three more. Thaxter and the man in the back seat emerged with their hands raised. So did the pair in front.

Coe said, "Just keep on walking, boys, straight off the road and across that field. I can see you even if it is dark. You'll be outlined against the sky. Walk fast. Get in practice for your hike home. Get going!"

He disabled their car thoroughly, threw their guns as far into the darkness as he could and then got back into his own car. Marty was there, cowering as far down in the seat as he could get. Coe gave him a contemptuous glance, turned the car

around and headed back to the city.

He led Marty into the Waldorf, holding his elbow tightly. But all the fight was gone from Marty. The reporters had come and left. Claudia Slater was alone. Coe pushed Marty into a chair.

He said, "Thaxter knew Marty was here. I tried to be careful, but he must have had me tailed. He controls a big mob with a lot of in. Somebody saw me go in here and called him. But if he has a big mob, the cops have even more men and better connections. They'll know I came here, too. So we've got to take Marty as far away as possible. Marty, get yourself cleaned up. We'll be leaving in the next ten minutes and we won't come back. Lieutenant Bromley is certain to come here."

Marty shuffled into another room. Coe lit a cigarette. "Miss Slater," he said. "I've kept my end of the bargain so far. I know you don't want your background made public but, more than that, you want Marty protected because he is your brother. Now, when Marty was here with you, what did he do?"

"Why—nothing. He cleaned up."

"Good," Coe said. "That's what he's doing now. Yet he's so scared you'd wonder why he didn't protest at the delay. You owe me for a day's work, Miss Slater. You can pay me or not. Maybe not—after what I intend doing to your precious brother."

Marty came into the room, ready to hit the road. Coe walked up to him, suddenly seized his arm and twisted him around. Then he searched him and took two corduroy sacks from his pockets. He spilled their contents on a table. Diamonds flashed and glittered in the light.

Coe said, "You fooled me only so long, Marty. When I searched you at the rooming house, you didn't have these rocks. But afterwards you went back into the room alone. Saying you left something there which might identify you. That's when you got the diamonds Thaxter and his men couldn't find. I should have known it from the evidence right there in the room, but I didn't. Harding had the stones hidden in the hollow leg of that tubular chair. A chair like that didn't go with the furnishings of that room. Harding bought it as a hiding place."

Marty scuffed the rug with his toe and

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said nothing. Coe went on. "Harding had the leg of the chair in his hand when I found him dead. I thought he'd wrenched it free to use as a weapon, but—a threatened man hasn't time to unscrew the leg of a metal chair when he is attacked. Harding was putting the leg back when Thaxter surprised him. But Thaxter, like me, figured the leg was only a weapon. You knew better. You were the big, tough, smart guy, only you turned into a sniveling bum when the pressure went on."

Coe walloped him hard, sent him reeling and followed up the attack until Marty yelled for mercy. Claudia Slater didn't interfere. She just stood there white-faced. Then Coe gave Marty some orders. Very definite commands.

**H**ALF an hour later he phoned Lieutenant Bromley. "I'm at my office," he said. "Get down to that rooming house where Harding was killed. Thaxter did it. I found a witness and I think I know where the stolen diamonds are."

Coe only lied a little bit. He was in the hallway outside Harding's room. He entered, found the leg of the metal chair lying on the floor where the morgue men had thrown it. He removed the plug from the open end, poured in the diamonds and replaced the plug. When Bromley arrived, he explained tersely.

Pointing to Marty, he said, "This lad was a friend of Harding's, though he had no idea he was a crook. He's well alibied and you can check up. He saw Thaxter and his men go in to see Harding just

before the murder. As for the diamonds, Harding held the leg of that metal chair in his fist when we found him. Just as I did, you assumed he'd used it as a weapon of defense. But what kind of a weapon is that? Would he have had time to unscrew it from the chair? No. He was holding it when Thaxter came in. They thought it was a club too."

Bromley poured the gems out of the hollow leg.

"Okay, Coe. This evens things up. We'll find Thaxter and with this boy's statement, convict him. Harding must have pulled the job solo. We thought only one man did it." Bromley hefted the now empty chair leg. "Imagine—a million dollar shillalah. That's what we thought it was."

Coe took Marty back to the Waldorf. He turned him over to Claudia Slater and then started for the door. Claudia called him back. She had a check in her hand.

"I'm paying you for one night's work," she said. "Twenty-five dollars. The way you batted my brother around—"

"Keep the twenty-five," Coe growled. "It was worth that to take him apart."

"No," she smiled. "It was worth a lot more. I've added an extra five hundred dollars to the check for that. You showed him up for just a kid who thought he was a tough guy. I'll take him back to the coast with me and if he gets out of hand again, I'll give you a rush call."

Coe grinned, studied the check and thought it wasn't too bad. Even if his jaw ached and his whole body still protested the going over Thaxter had given him.

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The old man saw the knife coming

# THE PLAINEST CLUE

By RAY CUMMINGS

*When trained eyes apply themselves to the quest for some real evidence, it's time for a killer to watch his step!*

**L**EE HAWKS sat in his bedroom with the shades drawn down, reading again the letter which he had intercepted this afternoon. It was a letter that old man Morton had written to his lawyer. Hawks was Morton's secretary, living here with Morton in the big, old

country home. It had been easy enough to intercept the letter. Hawks had found it among the mail Morton had placed on the hall table to be posted.

As he sat reading it, Hawks was grim; but his fingers were steady as they held the little sheet of notepaper. He was a

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man not easily frightened; in an emergency he was cool and calm. He was a big man; not fat, but sleek and trim with two hundred and twenty pounds of brawn and muscle. At thirty, he looked even younger than that, with his square-jawed, rugged face, his thick, crisply waving black hair. A man whom you could trust. He looked it—and he knew it.

A faint sardonic smile twitched his handsome mouth as the thought occurred to him. The police might suspect one of the others in this house, maybe. The callow, night-clubbing Jerry Fox, the old man's nephew; or Smith, the butler with his wastrel son who had a minor police record out in San Francisco, and was always writing Smith for more money. Sure, they could easily be suspected. But not the dependable Lee Hawks.

It was after midnight now—a hot summer night. Clad in his luxurious blue and grey-striped robe over his pajamas, for another moment Hawks gazed at the letter, with his mind sardonically roaming on the dire things that would have happened to him had it been posted. Then with steady fingers he lighted a match, applied it to a corner of the notepaper, held it as it burned. It was as though the thing symbolized the danger to Lee Hawks going up in smoke, vanishing. Still faintly smiling, he flipped it into his little bedroom grate, made sure that the last scrap of it was burned and the wisp of ash scattered. It was the end of his danger, because now Lee Hawks knew exactly what he had to do.

**T**HE OLD fashioned, three-story frame house of Kenneth W. Morton drowsed in the summer moonlight, shrouded by the thick grove of hemlocks, spruce and evergreens here on the hillside three miles from town. No one saw the figure of Lee Hawks in his dressing gown as he noiselessly climbed from his ground floor bedroom window and jumped to the tan-bark path beneath.

In one of the wings of the ornate and rambling old house, the bedroom window of Jerry Fox, Morton's nephew, was blank and dark. So was Smith's, down at the other end behind the kitchen. Jerry and the butler were asleep. Up on the second floor, nearly the length of the big house from Jerry Fox's room, the light in

the old man's study showed between the window portieres.

Hawks had brought the small ladder from the barn earlier in the evening. He had hidden it in a thicket. He brought it out now, laid it on the grass nearer the house. In a moment more he was back in his bedroom. And then, with his padded slippers making no sound, very quietly he went into the lower foyer, up the curving, carpeted stairs and along a carpeted length of one of the upper halls. He didn't have to pass Jerry Fox's bedroom, for Jerry was far down at the other end.

At the portieres of the study door, which was partly open, Hawks stood soundlessly for a moment, peering into the big dim room. Across it, with his back to the door, the frail, white-haired figure of Morton was seated in a chair, reading. The table light cast its circle of illumination upon him, but left most of the room shadowed. He was in his shirt sleeves, this hot night, with his slippered feet cocked up on a second chair.

Quietly Hawks stepped into the room and closed the door behind him. It had a spring lock. The lock clicked as the door closed and, at the sound, Morton turned around.

"Oh, you Lee," he said. He looked startled. "What you want?"

"Nothing important," Hawks said. "Just wanted to see you for a minute."

His quick gaze roved the room. It was an odd room. Kenneth Morton was retired now. But in his day he had been a famous naturalist and explorer. And his fame lived on. He was still well known through his many magazine articles and books. The room here was filled with his trophies. One of its walls was lined with his immense scientific library, and a shelf of the books he had written himself.

Morton's specialty, his life long study and his hobby, was oceanography. The vast undulated floor of the oceans, almost man's last mystery on earth, had always fascinated him. On one of the walls here, there was a huge, framed chart he had drawn of the oceans' varying depths. A table held a bas-relief model of the continents and oceans—the mountains rising, and the ocean deeps depressed.

There were small models of strange fishes, strange marine vegetation, on little tables, and in a big glass showcase. Huge,

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blown-up photographs of undersea life and vegetation, which Morton himself had made, were hung on the walls. In one corner, there was a glass cabinet of smaller trophies, and a smallish, rectangular glass tank, with a few treasured specimens of small fish which Morton was breeding, swimming around in it.

In years past, Morton had plumbed most of the oceans' great deeps—the one off Japan, the one just north of Porto Rico. He had written a book, fanciful but scientific, on the great Nero Deep, the monstrous, sluggish things of the sea which may be lurking far down there, in the tremendous pressures of the cold, black water.

Hawks' glance swept all this now. These trophies were of course of great value to museums, but no one could steal any of them and sell them, the important ones being too well known. He had often pondered that. But there was one little box here whose contents would bring a big sum, and safely. It lay on a shelf in the glass cabinet beside the fish tank—a box with a collection of pearls, each a huge and perfect specimen of its type. Here was something that could be sold carefully, slowly, piecemeal. The total sum might run into a hundred thousand or more. Handled right, it would give Hawks a lavish income for life.

He saw now that the box was there. Morton was saying,

"You want to talk to me, Lee? What about?"

He looked suddenly frightened, because despite himself there was a strange look on Hawks' face, a startling suggestion of the stalking panther in his gait as he came soundlessly forward on the thick pile of the carpeted floor.

"Lee! What's the matter with you?" Morton must have realized it then, and unconsciously his thin old voice rose with his terror. "Don't look at me like that, Lee!"

Abruptly Hawks heard himself growl: "Frightened because I'm onto you! Keep your voice down!"

**I**N A little wall rack beside the seated old man there was a line of knives, specimens of the pearl divers' knife with which in a single skilled slash the belly of an attacking shark could be ripped.

They were only a few steps from Hawks, and he could feel his heart abruptly racing. Do this quick now!

"You're onto *me*?" Morton echoed. He was frightened, but he twisted around in his chair and his voice held a sudden spirit. "You mean, you've found out I'm onto *you*! That's your trouble, isn't it, Lee?"

"Writing your lawyer to get you a detective to investigate me! Snooping into my affairs, you blasted prowling—" Hawks choked it back. What difference did it make, what was said now in these last few seconds?

"It just struck me today," Morton was saying. "I got curious, because I've heard rumors that you spend quite a bit of money in the city—racetracks, women, that sort of thing. Then it struck me that some of the trophies you sold for me didn't bring the price they should. You couldn't have juggled it, could you? And I'm having my banks send me my cancelled checks for this month."

"You—you rotten little—" It was only another step or two to the pearl divers' knives.

"Just a blasted embezzler, and forger!" Morton said suddenly. "I can see it on your face! What a fool I've been." He was starting up from his chair. "You get out of my house! Go on—get out! I'll see what I'm going to do to you—"

The knife handle was cool and sleek as Hawks' big fingers closed on it. But the old man saw the knife coming. His terror made a scream burst from him—a shrill, throbbing scream that split the silence of the big old house like a pistol shot.

But the scream died into a gurgle as the knife sank into his chest and he tumbled back into the chair. There was just a moment when his frail body twitched and quivered, with bloody foam at the lips and a spreading crimson stain on the white shirtfront where the knife was sunk to its hilt. Then the sagging thing in the chair lay motionless.

The panting Hawks had staggered back, with a thrust of terror at that scream stabbing through him. But instantly he steadied. This was a real emergency, wholly unexpected. Smith, the butler, back downstairs behind the kitchen, was slightly deaf. He might not have heard the scream. But if it had awakened Jerry

## THE PLAINEST CLUE

Fox, up here down the long hall on the second floor, and he came running out, Hawks would be trapped before he could get to the stairs.

Steady now! The study door here was locked on the inside. The window was only ten or twelve feet above a rise of ground at this wing of the house. With a tail of his dressing gown, Hawks swiftly wiped off the knife handle, very careful that no blood-smears got on him. Then he ran to the glass cabinet, seized the metal box of pearls. But he couldn't take it with him. Where would he hide it?

In those hurried seconds, Hawks' roving gaze landed on the fish tank, here near the cabinet. He drew his dressing gown sleeve, and the pajama sleeve under it, well up on his right arm. Carefully, so as not to get himself wet, he put the little box down into the tank.

There was about a foot of white, tropic sand covering the bottom. Carefully he dug into the sand, buried the box, and smoothed the sand over it. For a moment the water down there was clouded a little by the sand. But then it settled, cleared. He stooped, peered at it. There was no sign that the sand had been disturbed.

The whole thing had been a matter of thirty seconds or so. But now, Hawks could hear the frightened Jerry Fox shouting out in the hall. By the time Hawks reached the window, Jerry was calling to his uncle, and then pounding on the locked door.

Hanging by his hands from the low windowsill, Hawks dropped easily to the ground. No one saw him as he ran to his bedroom window, climbed in. And then in another moment he was out in the lower hall, calling up to Jerry. Then the small, wiry figure of the grey-haired Smith, with a robe over his pajamas, showed in the dining room doorway. Together they ran up to join the frightened Jerry Fox. They broke down the study door at last, and burst in upon the mute, tragic scene.

It was Hawks who rushed to the telephone and called the local police.

**W**HEN they arrived, Jerry explained. "Sergeant Riley," he said. "I was the one that got to the door here first. We knew he was in there—he wasn't in his bedroom. So we broke down the door."

They were in the study, standing over by the door—the callow, weak-chinned young Jerry, in his pajamas. He was a small, slight fellow, pimply-faced. The wiry, slender little grey-haired butler stood with them. Hawks, in his striped robe, leaned against the wall. He was smoking a cigarette. He knew he looked shocked and grave, but inside he was calm, cool, calculating.

The big room was blazing with lights now, noisy with the uniformed policemen poking around. Others were tramping about the house, and Hawks could hear a couple of others, searching the moonlit grounds outside.

This big, bluff Sergeant Riley seemed in charge. And there was another fellow who had introduced himself as Detective George Blair, of the Homicide Squad. He was an undersized, thin little man of maybe forty. He looked hard and tough, but his voice was soft, slow and quiet.

Everything was going just about as Hawks had expected. He and Jerry and the butler had been questioned. What they had said was simple enough—they had all been awakened by the scream, and had rushed up here.

"Killer evidently dropped out this window," Sergeant Riley said. "Maybe we'll get some of his fingerprints around here—that knife handle, for instance. He must've been in a hurry gettin' away, knowin' that scream would wake up the house."

But not in that much of a hurry, Hawks thought sardonically.

"Or the killer could have left by this hall door," Detective Blair said suddenly. His gaze flicked around. "He could, I should think."

It chanced that the butler and Jerry were gazing at each other blankly. Satisfaction darted through Hawks as he noticed that the detective's glance seemed to fasten on the callow Jerry Fox.

"That door has a spring lock," Blair added.

It was obvious to Hawks, what the astute little Blair was figuring. He had noted that Jerry Fox was the first one up here. If Jerry were the killer, with that scream arousing the other two men downstairs, he would have been trapped here, unable to get back to his room down the

## THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

hall, past the central stairs, because the others might have seen him as they came up. So naturally he would close the door with its spring lock and then call out, pretending he had just arrived.

Very good indeed. But Hawks said nothing. Big, graceful, handsome, he stood gravely smoking. It was Hawks to whom naturally Blair and the sergeant had turned, when they wanted an explanation of the odd trophies here in the room. And he had mentioned the box of pearls. He knew if he didn't, one of the others probably would.

The box of pearls was gone. The killer obviously had taken it and fled. Robbery and murder. The thing seemed obvious.

"Hey, Sergeant, look here." It was one of the men calling up from outside.

The ladder, of course.

"What now?" Hawks murmured. "He's found something down there?"

Hawks went with the others to the window, where the two men down there were pointing to the little ladder lying on the grass. The ladder was just about the right length to reach up to this window.

"So that's the way he got in?" Sergeant Riley exclaimed. "When the old man put up a fight, he stabbed him, grabbed the box of pearls he had come for, an' beat it down the ladder. Didn't bother to carry the ladder away, why should he? Just tossed it there on the grass."

**V**ERY good indeed. But as Hawks turned from the window, suddenly he tensed, with his heart seeming to jump and stick in his throat. The keen-eyed little Blair had only stayed at the window a moment. Hawks saw him now standing gazing at the small, glass-tank aquarium which stood on its pedestal beside the cabinet from which the pearls had vanished. And Blair was murmuring, "That's queer. I wonder—"

"Queer?" Hawks echoed. He hadn't meant to speak; it slipped out.

Blair whirled around. "Maybe somebody added water to that fish-tank? You can see where the green-slime algae marks the former level, quite a bit before where it is now."

In the silence, no one answered him. Hawks stood taut. Sergeant Riley came and joined Blair. "What you got?" he

said. "What—"

"That fish-tank," Blair said. "The water level's gone up. Water—or something else—got put in there! Then suddenly Blair had ripped off his jacket, drawn up his shirt sleeve, and was reaching down into the tank, digging in the sand.

"Well I'll be damned, here it is!" Blair murmured.

He held the small metal box, it was like a little jewel case. He opened it, displaying the missing pearls. And then he whirled around. "This killer didn't go very far!" he ripped out. "Left the pearls hidden here, so he could get them later! One of you three—"

His questing eyes were roving them as they stood with the big center lights of the room glaring down on them. "One of you three—and it's pretty easy to tell which one!" Blair added. "Green-slime algae is queer stuff—you can see a faint line of it in the tank still higher—where the water went to its highest level. Not my thin arm going into it. Not yours—" He flicked his gaze at the pallid Jerry Fox. "And not yours," he added to the butler. "This was a husky, thick hand and arm. It displaced a lot of water. The level went up nearly to the top of the tank, while he was carefully burying that little box in the sand!"

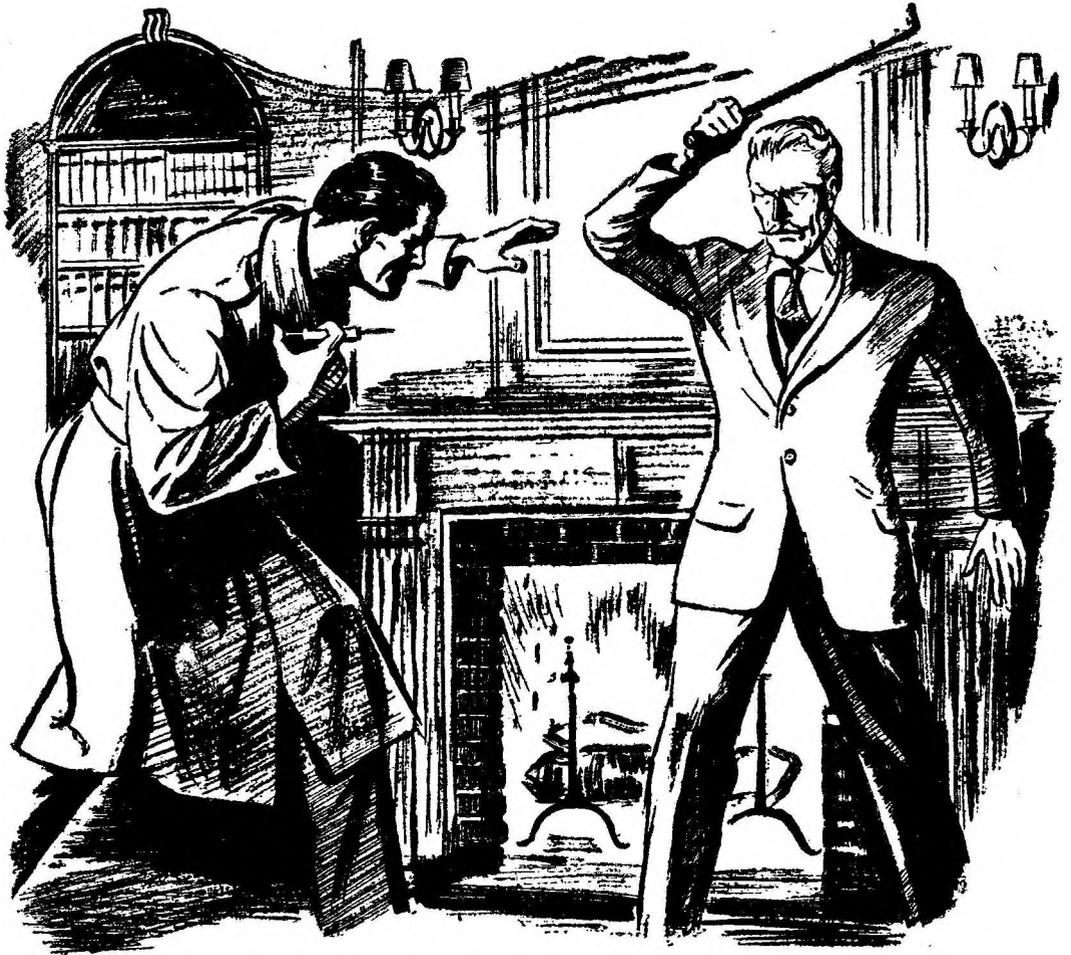
The room blurred around Hawks, as Riley like a little ferret jumped at him. And Hawks heard himself stammering, "Why, you—you're crazy."

"Am I?" A flashlight cylinder was in Blair's hand. Its light darted to the right side of Hawks' dressing gown, down by his hip. "Take a look at your robe, Hawks! There's some of the dried algae! It shows there in the light-grey stripe, an' you don't need a microscope to see it, either!"

The horrified Hawks' mind flashed back. He had so carefully wiped off the knife handle with the tail of his robe! And as he had jumped for the window, instinct had made him flick his wet hand and arm back to dry them against his hip!

"You won't be arguin' this evidence very much with the jury!" Blair was hurling at him. "Why don't you say something? Go on, let's hear about it!"

But there was nothing that Hawks could say—nothing now, or before that grim-faced jury which he knew would send him to the chair.



Larman rushed forward with the needle

# OPEN HOUSE FOR A KILLER

By JOHNSTON McCULLY

*The judge was old and unarmed—but when a vengeful slayer confronted him, he had an ace up his sleeve!*

**A**T THE age of seventy-five, Judge James Gregory had retired from the federal bench to spend the remainder of his days writing an important work on jurisprudence. At seventy-eight, he looked no more than sixty, and physicians said his physical condition was marvelous for his age.

Regarding his mental condition, there

was no doubt. And he was famous for a keen memory, which served him well at times. It served him so on this New Year's Day, when for a moment his life was at the mercy of a man half mad.

Judge Gregory lived in an old-fashioned mansion that had been in the family for generations. He lived alone with a few trusted servants. His wife had passed

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away years before, and he never had had children.

For three decades, he had made a practice of keeping open house on New Year's Day from noon until eleven at night. High and low came to greet him—the Governor of the state, senators, big business men, court attaches who had served under him, even some criminals he had sent to the Big House and who admired him for his fairness on the bench.

For these three decades he had kept a record of his New Year's callers, carefully compiled by Henry Rolfe, an aged secretary who lived in the Gregory house.

All this was known to the public through the press. And so it became known to Vance Larman, whose rage flamed hotly at mere mention of the name of Judge James Gregory.

On New Year's Eve, Vance Larman sprawled on a divan in his rather sumptuous apartment in a quiet section of the city. His face was still pallid from long incarceration. He had come from a federal prison three months before, after serving a term of five years.

One of Vance Larman's men was patrolling the hall to see that none of the wrong persons approached the door of the apartment. For Larman was in close and confidential conference with the two men nearest him in life.

One was Lew Parkin, often watched by the police but never caught. He was Vance Larman's "brains." He checked over Larman's schemes coldly and methodically, and found loopholes if any. He was tall and slender, and his manner was quiet, almost humble. In appearance, he was an experienced public accountant or chief clerk of some legal firm.

The second man was "Trigger" Rand, who had served a short term for manslaughter, and whose nickname was self-explanatory.

**L**ARMAN had called the two to this confidential meeting and had put his plan before them, asking their advice, seeking suggestions which would make the plan fool-proof.

He paced the living room of the apartment now, while Parkin and Rand sat on a couch, sipped highballs and waited for him to speak.

"I swore to kill Judge Gregory, and I'll do it," Larman told them. "All the time I was in stir, I kept telling myself that. Five years he gave me, when eighteen months would have been enough."

"A tough break," Trigger Rand commented.

"I've got everything planned. Didn't have to worry about the money end, because I had plenty planted and claimed it when I got out. Let's check over it again, now."

Lew Parkin got out notebook and pencil and propped himself up against a cushion. Trigger made himself a new highball and relaxed.

"This open house thing is made to order for me," Larman said, his eyes gleaming. "Judge Gregory is bringing it on himself. There's always a mob at his open house on New Year's day, which is tomorrow. The big stuffed shirt sits in his library and greets his guests one by one. Then they go into a big dining room and fill their insides with a buffet supper."

"Pretty setup," Trigger commented.

"The police department always sends a cop to watch what goes on. This year, as I took the trouble to find out, the man assigned is Detective Jack Burke. He's only a rookie dick, out of uniform and into plainclothes only a few months. Probably never saw me in his life. May have seen my picture in the papers during the trial. But I've changed a lot—thinner in the face and not wearing a toothbrush mustache nowadays."

"Yeh, you've changed," Trigger Rand agreed.

"I've planned to go to the Gregory house about five in the afternoon. This time of year, it's getting dark then. I'll mix in the crowd and get in the library to greet the judge. He always sits in their alone like a blasted king on a throne and receives his poor subjects one at a time. Oh, I'll greet him! Probably he won't know me. He's sent so many men to stir."

Vance Larman choked with rage and paced the floor nervously again while his two henchmen watched. Larman was a medium sized man in his late thirties. He had played the rackets from boyhood, and was known to officials as a clever mob

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manipulator. Some of his men had been caught and incarcerated, but Vance Larman had dodged conviction until nabbed by the federal government for income tax evasion.

Larman walked off his fit of rage and stopped in front of the couch again.

"I'll be alone with him in his library. I'll tell him who I am, if he doesn't recognize me. I'll blast him with words—and then with a gun!"

"I don't like that gun angle," Lew Parkin protested. "A gun makes noise, and there'll be plenty of gents there to rush into the room and nail you. Why not grab and choke the old coot before he can squawk, and give him a shot from a hypo needle filled with quick poison?"

"That's a good idea, and I've got a needle ready," Larman said. "If I am recognized by that flatfoot and searched, I don't want a gun found on me. Got no permit to carry one, and can't get one because I'm an ex-con. But a needle—I can hide that on me easily enough. Thanks for the suggestion, Lew."

**P**ARKIN bowed in acknowledgement and opened his note book again.

"After I handle him—well, we have the plans all made. I get through that French window in his library, run across the porch and drop off onto the ground. I cross the yard through the darkness. Jim will have the car waiting, and Trigger will be in it. We race to the airport, where the private plane will be warmed up and ready. We take off, supposedly for Florida. But we hit for the Mexican border and go on to the hideout in Central America. I've got plenty of money planted there."

Lew Parkin nodded. "So far, so good, But it won't take 'em long to learn who killed Judge Gregory."

"Of course, they'll learn it. I want everybody to know who killed him. They'll never bring me back to stand trial for the killing. Where I'm going, there's no extradition treaty. A man's safe as long as he greases palms, and I have plenty of grease."

"What about the rest of us?" Trigger Rand asked.

"I've given all you boys your splits. Soon as I'm settled, I'll communicate with

you through a safe channel. After the thing cools down, I'll make plans. I don't intend to stay in Central America all my life. No big pickin's there. You boys may be watched for a few months."

"Yeah," Trigger agreed. "We'll have to walk the straight line."

"They'll grab and quiz you after I make my getaway. But you don't know anything. You're smart enough to keep in the clear. When the time comes, I may send you orders to join me somewhere in Europe, probably Paris. We'll all get together again, and go to work."

"Everything will be ready, Vance," Lew Parkin said. "The car will be waiting when you get out of the Gregory house, and the plane will be warmed up and ready to take off. Trigger and I will blow now and let you get some rest. If I don't see you again before your getaway, good luck!"

Parkin and Rand shook hands with Larman, and left. After they had gone, Larman paced the big room, rehearsing mentally the blasting words he would say to Judge James Gregory before he killed him. He made sure the hypodermic needle was loaded with the quick deadly poison and ready for use. Then he stretched out on a couch and relaxed.

**J**UST at dusk on New Year's Day, an ordinary taxicab stopped at the street corner nearest the Gregory house. Vance Larman got out and paid the fare and added a generous tip.

"Happy New Year!" he told the chauffeur.

"Same to you, sir. Want me to wait for you?"

"No thanks. I'll be here for some time."

The cab drove away. Vance Larman walked calmly toward the gate of the Gregory mansion. He was dressed in quiet, inconspicuous clothing, and he restrained the quick, nervous movements which characterized him. He came to the gate, passed through it and walked slowly up to the verandah. As he went up the steps, he glanced back and saw a black sedan come slowly around the corner and stop at the curb near the end of the garden wall. That was the getaway car, there on schedule.

The house was ablaze with lights. Voices and laughter of men came from it,

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muffled by the closed door. Before he removed his glove and rang for admittance, Vance Larman made a last quick survey of the getaway route.

He could see the French window in the library, and noticed that the curtains were drawn, so anything that happened in the library could not be seen accidentally by any person outside.

In front of the window was a little balcony only four feet or so above the ground—an easy, safe jump. From the balcony to the end of the garden wall, was a distance of about one hundred feet to be covered before he could vault the low fence and reach the waiting car.

About an inch of snow covered the ground, but it had been there for several days and was frozen hard. He would have to be careful about slipping.

He stepped up and rang the bell. An old manservant opened the door and bowed slightly, and Larman entered.

At the end of a long, wide hall, he could see a big room, well lighted, and men moving around, some with food or drink in their hands. At the entrance to the room stood Detective Jack Burke. Larman had taken the trouble to have the officer pointed out to him, so he could recognize him at sight. He was the only obstacle Larman saw between himself and the accomplishment of his purpose.

"Your coat, sir?" the aged servant asked.

"Thanks, but I'll keep it on," Larman said. "I have only a moment. I only want to meet Judge Gregory and wish him a happy New Year. I'm an attorney from Chicago. Have heard a lot about the judge, and often have wished to meet him. I hope I haven't intruded coming here like this."

"Certainly not, sir! Judge Gregory will be glad to greet a member of the bar. Your Name?"

"John Harrison."

"Thank you, sir. If you will come with me, Mr. Harrison, I'll turn you over to Henry Rolfe, the judge's personal secretary. He will take you into the library to see the judge."

**L**ARMAN followed the servant to the door and so passed beneath the close scrutiny of Detective Jack Burke. He played what he thought was a clever card

there—in case the detective wondered why he did not leave his hat and overcoat in the anteroom at the front door.

"Sorry I haven't time to stay and partake of some New Year's cheer," he told the servant so Burke could hear. "But I have a train to catch. Only time enough to shake hands with the judge and wish him well."

Detective Burke looked him over and turned aside. The servant introduced Larman to Henry Rolfe, as John Harrison, an attorney from Chicago.

"You may see Judge Gregory at once, Mr. Harrison," Rolfe said. "He happens to be alone at the moment."

Following Rolfe toward the door of the library, Larman fought off a fit of nervousness. He never had killed a man before; Trigger Rand or some other gunnie always attended to things like that for him. But he wanted to kill this time with his own hand.

Rolfe opened the door, and announced him.

"Mr. John Harrison, sir, an attorney from Chicago."

Larman stepped into the library, a big room with book-lined walls and a roaring fire and a fireplace at one end. Judge James Gregory was sitting behind a huge mahogany desk. As Rolfe retreated and closed the door behind him, the judge rose, smiling, and extended his hand.

Larman flinched a bit at shaking hands, but managed to carry it out. The judge motioned for him to sit down, resumed his own chair, and pushed toward Larman a humidor filled with cigars and another with cigarettes. Larman smiled slightly and shook his head.

He fought to keep his face a blank. The moment had not come for him to disclose his real identity and blast the jurist with the speech he had prepared and rehearsed. It was Judge Gregory who brought that moment crashing down upon him.

"John Harrison, an attorney from Chicago," the judge said. "How is the legal business there?"

"We manage to keep busy," Larman replied. "Court calendars are crowded, naturally."

"That's strange. I was reading a report a few days ago which showed that

Chicago was making commendable progress in clearing its calendars. By the way, Mr. Harrison, it has been said of me that I never forget a face."

"Indeed?" The jurist's level gaze was commencing to make Larman nervous.

"A man may grow fatter or thinner in the face, grow a mustache—or remove one—and I'll still remember him. Take yourself, for instance."

"What about me?" Larman asked.

Judge Gregory smiled slightly. "You were before me once in court. Quite a long trial. Charged with income tax evasion and fraud against the United States government. Your name? Vance Larman. Am I right?"

Larman's eyes blazed suddenly and the mask fell from his face.

"Right!" he snapped.

"Why use an assumed name, then?" the judge asked. "All are welcome here on New Year's Day. I've kept open house on New Year's Day for half a lifetime, as my father did in this same house. I have records of all my visitors—"

"All right! I'm Vance Larman, the man you sent away for five years. Five years in a hell of a federal prison!" Larman kept his voice down, but his manner was tense and his eyes blazed.

"A jury found you guilty after a long trial," the judge reminded him.

"But you denied a new trial—"

"There were not competent grounds for your attorneys to ask for one."

"And you passed sentence. You didn't give me eighteen months, like you'd given others in income tax cases. You gave me five years. The police couldn't get enough on me to convict. So they called in the Feds and worked the old income tax racket. If you can't put him away on one charge, do it on another—that's the program."

**T**HE JUDGE'S mouth tightened. "In your case, Larman, I deemed five years a lenient sentence."

"You did? Do you know what it means—five years behind walls and bars? Getting up and working and going to bed when some other man orders it, eating the slop they throw you instead of ordering what you want, and all that?"

"The guilty must pay," the judge said

quietly. "Society must be protected from criminals."

"While I was in prison, every hour I was awake and conscious I cursed your name," Larman said. "I made myself one promise above all others—that when I got out I would watch for a chance and kill you!"

"So you have come here to kill me?"

"I have. You'll start you New Year in an undertaker's establishment, Judge James Gregory. And the world will learn that there's one man not afraid to blast a crooked judge!"

"Mr. Larman, I resent that word 'crooked'," Judge Gregory said, curtly. "I am a man of integrity, and I believe those who know me will say that. Many times, during my career, I have had convicted men threaten to kill me, or members of the jury, or the prosecuting attorney, some of them in open court after being sentenced. Every judge of a criminal court has had that experience."

"I came here to do something, and you can't talk me out of it," Larman snarled.

"If you kill me, do you realize the consequences to yourself? The electric chair—"

"I'll never go to the chair! I have my getaway arranged. I'll leave by your French window, run across the yard and get into a car waiting for me. I'll be driven to the airport, and there get into my private plane, registered under the name of another man. I'll fly to a hideout I have prepared, where I can't be touched even if located—"

"Sounds like Honduras," the judge interrupted.

"Maybe so. I've plenty of money to pay my way. And I'll have the satisfaction of reading in the papers all about your funeral, and possibly a few remarks about myself, and I'll sit back and gulp a highball and laugh!"

"Murder is hardly a matter for laughter," the judge observed. "Let me tell you one thing, Larman—"

"Tell it, and then I'll tell you something, and that'll be the last thing you hear on earth. My plans are perfect, and I'm not worrying about myself."

Had Vance Larman known what was happening in the other room, he might have been worrying considerably. Detec-

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tive Jack Burke had been disturbed by Larman's entrance and appearance. He knew he had seen the man somewhere before. The name John Harrison, of Chicago, meant nothing to him, and he told Henry Rolfe, the old secretary, as much.

Burke was another man who never forgot a face. He knew he had seen the caller somewhere, but could not remember where or when. But suddenly the recollection came, and he gripped Rolfe by the arm.

"I remember now!" he whispered. "That man—he's Vance Larman, the gang chief Judge Gregory sent away for five years. Here under an assumed name, and for no good purpose. I'll bust in there—"

"Wait!" Rolfe begged. "If that's true, if he came here to kill, and you rush in, he may shoot Judge Gregory before you can stop him. Call the police. Here's a phone. And there's an intercom instrument—"

**BURKE** rushed to the phone and called the nearest precinct station. He described the situation and was assured of immediate help, for the station was only a few blocks away. Then he hurried to a desk where Rolfe was waiting, where an intercommunication box was connected with his library. Rolfe had the key open, and the voices of those in the library could be heard.

"A shot might be heard in the other room and bring pursuit," Larman was telling the judge. "So I won't do any shooting. I have a hypo filled with a quick poison. I can manage to keep you quiet while I jab the needle into you. And, in a couple of minutes, you'll be dead. As easy as that!"

"As easy as that," the judge echoed. "A swift end to a long and eventful life. The record I have been keeping of my New Year's Day open house—it will be finished."

"But you won't have my name in your record," He said. "You won't have a chance to write it in, or give it to your old secretary."

"You're mistaken, Mr. Larman. Your name will be in the record. Our entire conversation here will be in it. There will even be a motion picture of this scene."

"What do you mean by all that?" Lar-

man demanded.

"It is a hobby of mine to make recordings and motion pictures of these New Year's Day events," the judge replied. "The moment a guest comes in here, the recording apparatus starts and also the picture camera. The lens is up in that corner near the ceiling, as perhaps you can see. A microphone is under the desk, and this intercommunication set carries everything said here to a recording machine."

"You're lying!" Larman said.

"Am I? Listen a moment, Mr. Larman. Do you hear that soft humming sound? The recording machine, the camera—"

"So it's all on record, is it?" Larman cried, springing to his feet, his right hand diving into a waistcoat pocket. "So everybody'll know who killed you, and on a film see how I did it? What do I care? I intended everybody to know how I killed you. My getaway is planned. They'll never catch me."

He started forward, bringing the hypodermic needle out of his pocket as he did so. Light glanced from it as it was revealed. But the old jurist had anticipated that move. The physicians had not been mistaken when they had said he was younger than his years.

The judge reached swiftly to snatch up a heavy bronze paperweight, and hurled it with considerable force. It glanced off Vance Larman's shoulder and whirled him half around. Larman gave a cry of rage and made a wild rush.

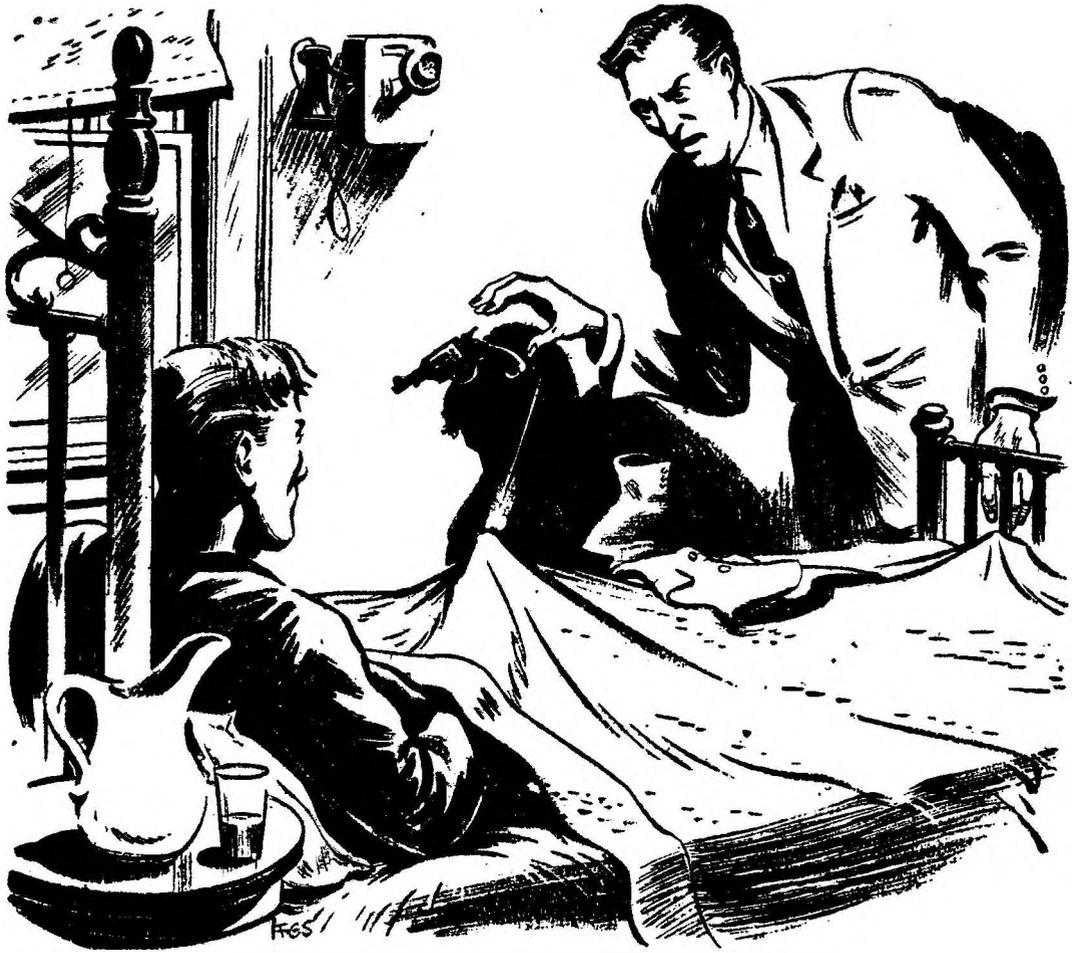
The judge darted around the desk and to the fireplace. He grabbed a long poker and stood ready to defend himself, to strike. Larman rushed toward him again.

And then the door was hurled open, and Detective Jack Burke, service revolver fisted, ran into the room. Listening over the intercom, Burke had heard that about the hypo needle. He did not have to fear that at his entrance a quick shot from a gun would end the life of the judge.

"Get 'em up, Larman!" Burke ordered.

For answer, Larman dodged behind the heavy desk. Burke could not fire because the judge was between him and the target. Larman dashed to the window and jerked it open. A bullet screeched past him as he sprang off the little balcony, hit the ground, and started to run.

(Concluded on page 112)



There was a sharp sound, and the gun slipped out of Yates' hand

# MAKE A MIRACLE

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

*He knew that it would take something extraordinary to trap the killer—so Manny Martin did the impossible!*

CAPTAIN BROWN, Chief of Homicide, cradled the phone with a bang, and swore bitterly through clenched teeth. He stamped over to his office door and yanked it open.

"Manny!" he barked. "Come in here!"

Manny Martin, Homicide Second Grade, took his feet off the table, tossed the fiction magazine where his feet had been and

ambled over. Just inside Brown's door he stopped, grimaced slightly, and took a second look at his superior's thundercloud face.

"No, Chief!" he said with an effort. "Don't tell me it happened. Because it didn't, did it?"

The chief clamped his lips shut for a second, and twisted his face into an ex-

## THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

pression of raw edged exasperation and defeat.

"It did, Manny," he said heavily. "That numb-cluck, Harris, I left to watch him just called in. It happened sometime last night. The fathead's just guessing, of course. Two slugs. One through the neck, and one through the ribs, heart high. When he didn't answer the knock this morning, Harris got the pass key. Well—there it is."

Manny Martin looked like a man in a trance. He had a feeling in the pit of his stomach akin to that when a man sees something he has carefully built up suddenly collapse before his eyes and come tumbling down. Hardly realizing what he was doing, he sank into a chair and fished for a cigarette. He found it but he just held it in his hand and stared at Captain Brown.

"And so once again Gabby Yates goes merrily on his pretzel-crooked way," he said tonelessly.

Brown nodded, bunched his two fists and jammed them hard against the edge of the desk. Then suddenly he gave a savage shake of his head.

"No!" he exploded. "I'm still going to pin that guy if it's the last pinning I ever do! This killing is one too many, so help me. Come along."

Manny Martin nodded, tossed the perfectly good unlighted cigarette into the wastepaper basket and got to his feet. Some five minutes later he was in the chief's car, along with the Medical Examiner and a couple of others, on their siren-screaming way to a second-class hotel on the other side of town. Leaning back comfortably, he closed his eyes, and let a torrent of unpleasant thoughts have full headway.

**T**HEY began with one Gabby Yates, smooth, clever, and ruthless, so-called king of the undercrust, who had been getting away with everything from murder down. And for quite a period of time, too. A month ago a competitor of Gabby's had been found plugged full of bullets in a dark alley. Everybody who knew about that kind of thing knew full well that Gabby had done the job. The law requires proof, however, and the proof was not to be had. That is, up until ten days ago. It was then that Manny's diligent digging

had struck oil. Oil in the form of a man, an ordinary citizen, who had witnessed the shooting but had been too scared to go to the police with his story.

Under smooth, persuasive pressure he had told what he knew to Manny, whereupon the entire Police Department and the District Attorney's office had breathed a big sigh of relief. At last the law-flaunting Gabby Yates would be laid by the heels once and for all time. To make sure the citizen would live to tell his story in court, he was hidden away in an obscure hotel, and a guard was stationed outside his door twenty-four hours a day.

But the picture had changed. The citizen was lying dead in his supposedly secret hotel room, and Gabby Yates, who had not yet been arraigned in court, was somewhere else and, no doubt, laughing himself sick. Manny groaned softly, then opened his eyes, as the police car wheeled into the curb and stopped. A cop popped out of the prowl car ahead and trotted back to salute Brown.

"Sergeant Krantz is up there with Harris," he reported.

Brown grunted, and went up the hotel steps in high gear. The others followed along. A white-faced hotel clerk shot out from behind the desk, but Brown waved him away and made a bee-line for the elevators. They all got off at the seventh floor and walked four doors to the right. A plainclothesman, who looked on the verge of bursting into tears, stood in front of the door with the prowl car sergeant. The plainclothesman gulped like a fish out of water and had to fight hard to get the words off his tongue.

"Geez, Chief, I'm sorry! I didn't hear a thing. Honest. I was right here where I've always been, and—"

"And you're not there any more!" the Chief of Homicide whipped at him. "Go back and leave your shield on my desk. I'll talk to you later!"

Without a second glance at the crushed man, Captain Brown pushed open the door with his foot and went into the room. The dead man was half curled on the floor over by a desk near one of twin windows. The room telephone, usually on the desk, was on the floor beside the dead man with the receiver still clutched in his right hand. One bullet had entered the right side of his neck just below the ear, and

## MAKE A MIRACLE

the other had gone into the right side about four inches down from the armpit. The bottom half of the window next to the desk was open. Thirty feet beyond the open window was the wall of a vacant rooming house. A rickety, weather-rusted fire-escape angled upward from right to left.

All these details Manny Martin took in with one sweeping glance. He groaned again, and expelled air through his pursed lips.

"I killed the poor guy!" he said bitterly. "Just as surely as though I'd pulled the trigger!"

Captain Brown straightened up from his position beside the dead man, and gaped at him.

"What the devil do you mean?" he demanded.

**M**ANNY waved toward the open window, and the fire escape beyond.

"I should have put him in a room that looked out on nothing but thin air," he said. "It's been hot, so of course he had the window open. The killer had somebody phone him, while he went up that fire-escape. When the poor devil came over here to answer the phone he made himself a target a kid couldn't miss. A silencer, or maybe something wrapped about the gun to kill the sound. The poor guy falls dead, and the killer goes off and away."

"Gabby Yates!" Captain Brown spat out.

"Who else?" Manny said in a weary voice. "He always did his own jobs."

"We'll get him! So help me, we'll get him this time!"

Manny shrugged and stared down unseeing at the dead man.

"With that slick so-and-so's luck it would take a miracle," he said more to himself.

Captain Brown stiffened and glared at Manny long and hard.

"Then, *make* a miracle!" he bit off savagely.

Manny shrugged again, and watched the Medical Examiner go to work on the dead man. Fifteen minutes later Manny and the chief were down on the sidewalk. The fingerprint and picture boys were through, and the dead man was waiting to be taken away in the usual wicker basket.

The time of death had been placed at five-thirty that morning. Fifteen minutes either way, the M.E. had hedged, saying he'd let Brown know the exact time later. And a check with the night clerk downstairs had brought to light the fact that a man had phoned the citizen around five-thirty. The clerk hadn't been sure of the exact time. He'd simply made the connection, and gone back to sleep.

"Well, we'll have Yates brought in, but a lot of good that will do!" Brown growled as he placed a foot on the running board of his car.

"I know!" Manny intoned lifelessly. "He'll have the usual alibi, and—"

Manny bit the rest off short, stiffened, and a hard gleam leaped into his eyes. Captain Brown, noticing it, quickly turned his head and did practically the same thing.

Swinging along the sidewalk toward them was a well dressed man of fifty-plus. He was hatless and carried a brief case. At a distance he wasn't too bad looking, but at close range his narrow, pinched face with its small, bright eyes made you think of something between a ferret and a skunk. He was Hawthorn J. Taylor, attorney at law, and his favorite client was one Gabby Yates! He came swinging up to them with a beaming smile, and stopped.

"Well, well, Captain, Martin!" he gushed. "Just heard that some poor devil had been shot. Who was he, and who did it? Nothing like picking up a bit of business. Could be *he* didn't do it, you know."

Taylor's silent laugh brought the blood flooding into Brown's face. Manny stared steely-eyed at the lawyer, and a bit longingly at the man's throat.

"He did!" Captain Brown snapped the silence. "Okay, let's have it, now. Save us some trouble!"

The lawyer cocked one eye and looked what he probably thought was cunningly coy.

"It?" he echoed. "I'm afraid I don't follow, Captain."

"Yates' alibi!" Brown rapped at him. "But, of course, he couldn't have done this one, could he?"

A shrewd, keen glint lighted up the lawyer's eyes.

"Couldn't have done it—when?" he countered.

"Between five and six!" Brown blurted

## THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

out. "But, sure, Yates was home in bed at the time. With ten other guys watching him sleep."

Hawthorn J. Taylor laughed softly and shook his head.

"Too bad, Captain," he said, still chuckling a little. "It couldn't have been Gabby. He left *very* early this morning to spend a few days in Weston. A little business trip—by plane. He pilots his own, you know. They could tell you at the field what time he took off. He mentioned to me something about four o'clock, but they could tell you exactly at the field."

"Very pat," Manny Martin murmured. "Very, very pat . . . you hope!"

The lawyer looked at him, and though a faint smile still tugged at his mouth, there wasn't anything like that in his eyes.

"I don't like that, but skip it, Martin," Taylor said. Then looking at Brown, he said, "If and when you want me to produce Gabby, just let me know. He'll be available. Good morning, Gentlemen."

The lawyer started away, but Manny stopped him.

"Just how did you know there'd been a shooting?" he demanded.

The lawyer looked at him in surprise—mock or otherwise. Then he smiled broadly and put a forefinger along his beaklike nose.

"I assure you, Martin," he said, "it was not Gabby who told me."

AND with that Hawthorn J. Taylor went swinging on down the street. Manny and Captain Brown stared after him bleak-eyed.

"Next to Yates he's one guy I'd love to slap for a fare-thee-well fall!" Manny muttered through clenched teeth.

"Me, too!" the Chief of Homicide agreed in a brittle voice. In a grimmer tone, he added, "Well, that's that, anyway. Now, I know Yates pulled the trigger!"

"Who doesn't?" Manny grunted. "But, there's still the little item of proof."

"Get it!" Brown ordered in a strangled voice. "You've got to!"

"Yeah, sure," Manny Martin murmured and stared absently at the morning sky. "Yeah, that miracle you were talking about."

It took Manny Martin a few minutes at the local flying field to find a lad who could help him. He took the detective into

the control tower office, and pulled out the field log. He ran a fingertip down the pages until he found the entry he was looking for.

"Yes, here it is, sir," he said. "Yates' Beechcraft, number NC four seven eight nine. Took off at four-thirty-seven. We had to throw on the lights for him. There were three."

"You were on duty?" Martin asked. "And do you know Yates when you see him?"

"The answer to both is, yes," the lad replied. "And I saw him. Yates was at the controls."

Something inside Manny Martin started to slide downward. He gave a tug at his snap brim, said, "Thanks," and started toward the door. He paused and looked back.

"How long a flight is it from here to Weston?" he asked.

"Weston?" the lad echoed. "Two hours and a half. Maybe two-fifteen if Yates pushed it. They can tell you at Weston, though, if that's where he went. It would be with his signature on the in-coming log."

Manny started to thank the lad and turn again. But he suddenly froze stiff, and his eyes narrowed.

"What was that?" he clipped out. "He would sign the in-coming log, or whatever you called it?"

"The in-coming log is right," the lad said. "Field rule all over. Plane owner, or pilot, has to sign the in-coming log when he lands at any foreign field. Matter of field record. Just the same as when you go to a hotel. A darn good rule, too, because—"

"Thanks," Manny shouted over his shoulder as he went through the door fast. "Thanks very much!"

Some hours later Manny Martin paid off the taxi and entered the administration building at the Weston airport. He could have made the trip by air except that he was in too much of a hurry to wait for the next Weston bound plane. So he had come fifty miles by a car and the rest of the way by express train.

Hope battled with fears and doubts inside of Manny as he walked across the large stone-floored lobby to the offices. He got to the right man at last—a Mr. Wills—flashed his badge and the man was

instantly impressed, and all ears. Mr. Wills escorted Manny over to the control tower office. The young man in charge produced the in-coming log without question. Manny took a deep breath, and mentally crossed all ten fingers before he looked at it.

ADY LUCK was smiling broadly at him. The log stated that Yates' Beechcraft had landed and checked in at six-fifty-eight that morning. Beside the log entry was the signature, M. H. Yates. Without asking permission, Manny picked up the log and took it over to the window where he stood with his back to the men by the desk. He pulled from his pocket a letter that also bore the signature, M. H. Yates, and compared it with the log signature. Suddenly he wanted to sing and dance. There was not the slightest similarity between the two signatures. Manny slipped the letter into his pocket, walked back to the desk, and replaced the in-coming field log.

"Notice what the man looked like who signed this?" he asked the control tower lad.

The other shrugged, and shook his head.

"No, can't say that I did, sir," he replied. "Half a dozen planes came in about the same time, and I was kind of busy."

"I see," Manny grunted as hope started to drop a little. "But maybe you can tell me this. How many in the party? Two or three?"

The control tower lad shook his head again.

"Couldn't say that, either," he said in an apologetic voice. "Could have been half a dozen. Only the plane owner, or pilot, is required to sign the in-coming. Sorry, but I just wouldn't know, sir."

Manny asked a few more questions, got answers that didn't help at all, and departed. He caught a taxi and went into Weston, where he picked up his bag at the railroad station. He told another taxi driver to take him to the Brunswick, the best hotel in town. Half way there he changed his mind, and had the cabby drive him to a cheap but fairly clean hotel on the not-so-good side of town.

The hotel clerk had to show him four rooms before he decided on the one he wanted. It was on the second floor with a fire escape outside one window. And the

windows, two of them, looked out across the quarter-mile width of the Weston River.

Manny unpacked his bag, changed his shirt, made sure that his shoulder holster and gun fitted snugly, and went downstairs. The first shadows of night were beginning to creep across Weston when Manny stepped outside.

At about eleven o'clock that night Manny paused outside a dingy, unattractive tavern and made a wry face. This was the tenth one he'd visited in the last two hours, and if he was forced to drink much more of the kind of beer they served in Weston, he'd probably float away into oblivion, or be carted off to the hospital with a swell case of ulcers.

After a moment, though, he squared his shoulders, pushed in through the door, and shuffled unobtrusively over to a badly nicked and stained table. As he slumped down into a chair, he raced keen eyes about the place. There were eighteen or twenty others, but not a single face was the one he was hoping to see. He sighed heavily, frowned in helpless annoyance, and then grunted his beer order at the big slovenly waiter who lumbered over to his elbow. When the beer arrived Manny let it stay right where the waiter placed it. He crossed his forearms on the edge of the table, rested his weight on them, and gazed miserably at nothing at all.

A hunch he had been playing ever since checking in at that second rate hotel was coming down fast, without any parachute. Manny was more certain than ever, now, that Gabby Yates had done the latest shooting. Nevertheless, the fact that the Weston airport's in-coming log signature and Gabby's real one didn't match didn't mean much when it came to smashing the underworld king's alibi. Gabby could simply claim that one of his passengers had signed for him, because he was in a hurry to keep a business appointment in town. But definitely. The difference between the signatures most certainly wouldn't *prove* that Yates had landed at some remote spot along the way and gone back by car to shoot his man, while somebody else completed the flight to Weston and fixed Gabby's alibi for him. Of course, after the shooting Gabby had driven to Weston by car, and that had been that.

No, in a case like this certain knowledge

wasn't even close to being proof. Certainly not with a man like Hawthorn J. Taylor to rip and tear it to shreds, and make a jury laugh at you. No! The proof needed was to make—

**A**T THAT instant Manny's unhappy, rambling thoughts formed themselves into a ball and rolled quickly away. The street tavern door had swung open and a small, squinting man scuttled inside. His eyes, like tiny holes in a dirty white blanket, were darting all about the place. Quickly Manny ducked his head, shielding the left side of his face with his left hand, and waited. When the small man started past his table on the way to the bar, Manny shot out his left hand and curled his fingers about a bony, almost fleshless arm.

"Pinky, as I live and breath!" he greeted in a slurring voice. "Sit down, Pinky, sit down. Have a beer with your old friend."

Startled and frightened, Pinky gaped and tried to jerk his arm free. Manny tightened his grip and simply pulled the little man down into a chair. And as he did he blinked and grinned foolishly.

"Don't you want to drink with me, Pinky, your old pal?" he asked in a thick voice. "After all the times I've stopped you from having to live behind bars? Why, Pinky! Is that gratitude?"

The little man cast anxious eyes about, but nobody was watching the scene. He turned his shifting eyes back to Martin, and screwed up his face.

"Look, Boss, I ain't got a thing I could tell you!" he whined. "I been going straight ever since you let me leave your town. You were a good guy, Boss, and I ain't never going to forget you. But I'm telling you straight, I ain't stooling for anybody these days. Me, I just make a dime here, a dime there, the honest way, see?"

"Why sure, sure, Pinky," Manny mouthed, and grinned some more. "And I don't want a thing from you, either. Just wanted to buy you a drink for old times. I'm celebrating, that's all."

The other's eyes seemed to retreat further into his head, and a tiny pin-point of bright light centered each one. He first motioned to the hovering waiter that a beer would do, and then leaned a little forward over the edge of the table.

"Celebrating, huh?" he echoed. "Never seen you potted in my life. Didn't know you touched it. What you celebrating in this town?"

Manny leaned back, hooked his thumbs in his vest pockets, and looked owlish. Then he let a very self-satisfied smirk twist his lips.

"Remember a fellow you used to work for, before you realized that stooling for me let you live longer?" he asked.

Pinky didn't blink an eyelash. The tiny lights in his eyes brightened a little. He said nothing until the waiter had placed the beer in front of him, and gone away.

"What guy would that be, Boss?" he asked cautiously.

Manny leaned forward and rested his arms on the table again. He winked, grinned broadly.

"Wouldn't be able to guess, Pinky, would you?" he said with a beery chuckle. "Not much, you wouldn't! I mean, Gabby Yates. Check. And at long last, Pinky, that heel is going to burn. Yeah! He squeezed lead once too often. So, what do you know about that?"

"Not a thing, not a thing!" Pinky got the words out so fast his teeth clicked as if he had ague. "What shooting did he do, and how do you know he did it?"

Manny started to shake his head in a cagey manner, then checked it, and chuckled. Before he said anything he took a long pull at his beer and forced himself to swallow it.

"A little shooting in his own back yard," he said. "Very neat, too, for Gabby. Came here in his plane to set up an alibi. But he slipped up on one thing. He—"

Manny Martin paused, struggled to sit up straighter in his chair, and rubbed a hand down one side of his face. Then he tapped the middle finger of that hand against his inside jacket pocket.

"Yeah, Gabby slipped on one little item," he said, and smirked. "Five will get you twenty-five he didn't even dream of it. But, me, I've got it right here. And when I'm ready, Gabby goes back home with me. Yes, sir, back where there's a nice hot seat waiting for him."

**M**ANNY emphasized the last with a very pleased chuckle, and had some more of his beer. Pinky looked like a man sitting on a load of TNT, watching the fuse

## MAKE A MIRACLE

burn slowly.

"Gabby's here in this town?" he suddenly blurted out. "Why ain't you picked him up, if it's like you say?"

Manny winked and lifted a stiff forefinger.

"Very logical question, Pinky," he mouthed. "Very logical. And I don't mind answering it, either. Nobody knows what I got on Gabby, see? And there's a couple of things I want to do before I give him the tap. Also, Gabby is a very trigger-nervous guy. If I went to the Brunswick, where he's staying, he might start shooting. That wouldn't be good. So tomorrow, after I've checked these couple of other things—well, I just take him away quiet like."

Manny stopped short, burped loudly, and drew two hands down his face. When he took them away, he was frowning, and chewing his lower lip.

"There's just one thing," he mumbled, and put both hands on the table to brace himself. "I've got to get some sleep first. This stuff would knock over a horse, and I don't want to be a horse. Pinky, how'd you like to make a saw-buck?"

Pinky started. His eyes seemed to close up at the edges, and the rest of his face settled into blank mask.

"How?" He spat out the single word.

"Easy, easy as can be," Manny said, and flopped one hand in a limp gesture. "Gabby might leave town tonight, though I don't think so. Look, Pinky, ten bucks if you keep an eye on the Brunswick. If you see Gabby and his pals coming out with their bags, pop over and tell me. I'm in two-nineteen at the Carter. Know where that is?"

Pinky nodded, but remained silent.

"Two-nineteen at the Carter," Manny mumbled, pulling ten dollars from his pocket. "I'll leave the door unlocked so's you can come right in. Wake me up, even if you have to stick me under the shower, see? And maybe there'll be another ten for you after that. A deal, Pinky?"

The small man didn't say anything. He didn't move save for his eyes. They kept switching from the ten-dollar bill on the table to Martin's face, and down again. Manny suddenly took out a five spot and added it to the ten.

"There's your bonus now, Pinky," he said. "And I'm probably tossing good

money away, because you'll probably never have to earn it. My hunch says that Gabby isn't leaving tonight. I know he came here for a couple of days. But, I'm just playing it safe, that's all. Well, fifteen bucks, Pinky."

Perhaps the little man struggled with himself, or maybe he just didn't want to be hurried. At any rate, he finally slid out a grimy, clawlike hand, scooped up the money, and made it disappear as quick as that. Manny Martin tossed some silver on the table, to pay for the beers, and slowly pushed himself up onto his feet. He swayed a little, clutched the table edge with one hand, and grinned down at Pinky.

"You're a good little guy, Pinky," he said in a heavy, dragged-out voice. "Yeah. I'm glad I never dropped down on you hard enough to get you time. Don't forget! Two-nineteen at the Carter. If you come, come fast! Be seeing you, Pinky."

With a half wave of his other hand, Manny Martin released his bracing grip on the table edge, and walked not so steadily out through the tavern front door.

It was a couple of minutes after one o'clock when Manny Martin buttoned the last button on his pajamas, and took a look about the shabby room at the Carter. Both windows were open at the bottom; his holstered service automatic was hanging on the bedpost of the headboard. He made sure the door was unlocked. Then he went over to his suitcase on the one chair, and lifted the lid. Three minutes later he turned out the light, slid under the sheet and tucked it close around his neck.

Manny lay motionless, both arms stiff at his sides. Little beads of cold sweat formed on his forehead, and trickled over his temples. He felt stifled, and the taste of poor beer still filled his mouth despite a vigorous session with his toothbrush. He swallowed, and bit down hard on his lower lip.

"If I'm wrong, then I'll find some other way!" Manny breathed to himself. Then with a stifled groan, "But heaven knows what way that could be!"

**T**IME passed with agonizing slowness. After a year—it seemed—he heard a distant clock toll two. More time passed. Street sounds ceased. It was as though

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Weston had settled into a city of the dead. Sleep dragged at Manny's eyelids, slid in soothing waves over his whole body. Time and time again he pinched his left leg to drive away the grasping sweetness of sleep. His back began to ache unbearably, and he had to fight himself to stop from turning over.

The distant clock banged three, and Manny was willing to bet a year's pay that the clock was at least four hours slow. Sleep pressed down on him so hard that it was almost physical pain to keep his eyes open. Another half hour of this, and he would go stark raving mad. He'd—

And then suddenly he heard a sound. Not exactly a sound, either. Perhaps it was just a faint draft of air caused by the opening of the door. Manny didn't know which, but he did know that zero hour had arrived. He couldn't see, but he was aware of a figure sliding into his room. He knew it for certain when he heard a faint click of the latch. Every part of him screamed to leap out of bed. To streak his hand for his holstered gun hanging but a foot from his head. With a mighty effort Manny fought down the wild urge. Instead he closed his eyes and breathed heavily.

A lifetime of soul-searing waiting, and then the light was switched on. He groaned, mumbled unintelligibly, and slowly opened his eyes. He saw correctly the first time, but he made himself blink and look fuzzily bewildered.

At the foot of the bed stood a fairly tall, good looking man: That is, good looking in a hard, chiseled sort of way. He was grinning tight lipped, and in his right hand was a gun fitted with a silencer. The gun was pointed straight at the end of Manny's nose. The man behind the gun spoke through lips that hardly moved.

"Hello, Chump!" he said. Then, with a brittle laugh, "Pinky sent me."

Manny Martin didn't reply at once. He

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moved his eyes from the gun up to Gabby Yates' face.

"That dopey little two-timing rat!" he said bitterly. "I'll get him tossed inside for life!"

"Maybe somebody else, but not you, flathead!" the other bit off. "I'm getting tired of you, Martin. You bother me too much. Yes! You've asked for it too often, see? But I'll take an answer first. What did you get on me? Pinky said you mentioned something."

Manny Martin smiled, but it was an effort.

"Everything, Yates," he said quietly. "You took off an hour before that poor guy was shot. But you didn't go all the way to Weston. You landed outside the town, and went back by car. You had somebody call him, and then shot the guy from that fire escape. Then you drove on to Weston. Check?"

Yates laughed softly, and patted his gun with his other hand.

"Check," he said. "That's the way it [Turn page]"

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was. But how'd you guess, gum-shoe?"

"Because I've got the kind of brains you haven't got," Manny told him evenly, as he sweated inside. "You forget details. I don't. Long time no burn, Gabby. But this time you're going to. You won't like it, pal!"

Yates' eyes formed slits, and the corners of his mouth twitched. Manny Martin was within an ace of playing his trump card, just as the other relaxed and laughed softly. With cat-like steps Yates came around the bed, and whipped Martin's gun out of its holster. He quickly switched with his own which he pocketed. Then catching up Martin's jacket he wrapped it about the police gun, and moved to the foot of the bed.

"Details, is right, Chump!" he said grinning. "A neat little detail, this. Fogged by your own gun. Maybe your brother dopes will figure it for suicide. Yeah, I'll arrange it that way. Dumb dick shoots himself because he's so dumb. How do you like that, Stupid?"

"It's rotten," Manny said dryly. "They'll still burn you, Yates. Strap you right into that chair for plugging Connors in that alley, and then that witness we found, and then—"

"And then you!" Yates cut in. "But they won't burn me. Not me. Another one of those details you were spilling about. You told Pinky you were the only one could bust my alibi. Remember? Well, when you aren't around— See what I mean?"

"No," Manny snapped. "Another detail, Gabby. Your alibi when I go out."

Yates chuckled and wagged his head.

"All arranged," he said. "Gabby Yates left in his plane an hour ago. They'll swear that at the airport. I made sure they saw me take off, and—well, you know how it

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works. Too bad, Martin. In some ways you aren't such a bad guy. You just aren't smart enough. And you keep getting in my way. So—"

**G**ABBY YATES never finished the rest. There was a sharp sound under the sheet that covered Manny Martin. A little black hole appeared in it, and in practically the same instant Yates' hand holding the jacket-wrapped gun leaped upward. The jacket fell off, and the gun slipped out of blood-dripping fingers.

Yates yelled with pain, and impulsively clutched at his bleeding hand. By then Manny had flung off the sheet, and was out of bed. The little .25 caliber pistol in his right hand was held steady on Yates. Moving in quickly, Martin retrieved the other gun in Yates' pocket. Then he backed up, grinning.

"Like you said, Yates, another little detail," he grunted. "Sometimes I go for weeks without using my service gun. I

[Turn page]



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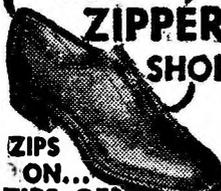
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depend on this little baby. Like I did tonight. Just a little detail that never occurred to you, did it?"

Gabby Yates didn't say anything, but his eyes spoke volumes. Stark, naked hatred glittered out at Martin. It was the look of a rage-inflamed cobra whose deadly fangs have been extracted. But it didn't impress Manny Martin at all. He grinned into the hate filled eyes.

"When I trust a rat like Pinky, I'll toss in my shield," he said. "I knew what Pinky would do. Go to you so fast his feet would smoke up the sidewalk. A chance to do something for the big shot; that's Pinky. And he did just what I figured he'd do. But you were a long time coming, Gabby. I got worried toward the last. But now you worry, dope. Start worrying how you're going to stay out of the hot seat."

Manny paused, and when Yates did nothing but throw eyes of hate at him, he jerked his free hand over his shoulder at the room telephone on the wall.

"But you might as well skip the worrying, Yates," he said tight lipped. "See that phone? A bit of match is holding that receiver prong up. And at the other end of

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This year, all airmen will observe Air Force Day not only as a memorial to the heroic dead, but as an opportunity to remind Americans that we are in an air age where events move far too fast for nineteenth century thinking.

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the line? The boys in the Weston Detective Bureau, Yates. They've taken it all down. So, see what I mean? You really are going to burn this time. This, Chump, is it!"

Gabby Yates stared blank eyed for a full second, and then the gurgling cry of a wounded animal came spilling up out of his throat. He flung himself at Manny. The detective could have pulled the trigger of his gun, but he didn't. Instead, he stepped quickly to one side, pivoted, and slashed the gun down with every ounce of his strength. The gun caught Yates just behind the ear. The man dropped flat, bounced once, and then lay still. Manny Martin swallowed, and took a deep breath.

"No, Gabby," he said softly, and shook his head. "You're still going to burn!"

With a nod for emphasis Manny walked over to the phone and lifted off the receiver.

"You get it all?" he asked into the mouthpiece.

"Every word!" came the voice at the other end. "Very nice going, Martin. Is—"

"Thanks," Manny cut in. "Hang up now, will you? I want to get another line."

Five minutes later Manny had his connection.

"Chief?" he asked. "Manny here. Well, Chief, I made one."

"Huh?" echoed Captain Brown's voice in the receiver. "You made one what?"

"I made a miracle, Chief," Manny said, and grinned at the prostrate Gabby Yates on the floor. "A very beautiful miracle. Now, here's how I made it—"

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## OPEN HOUSE FOR A KILLER

(Concluded from page 98)

Rolfe and a couple of other men rushed into the room.

"After him Burke!" Judge Gregory called. "He'll get away."

"He won't get away," Burke said, slipping his service revolver back into his shoulder holster. "He's running straight into the arms of the police. They're waiting for him beside his sedan. And at the airport, if he should manage to get away from here."

Burke rushed out to be in on the finish. Everyone except old Henry Rolfe and the judge left the library. The judge sank into the chair behind his desk and lifted a trembling hand to his face.

"Henry, that was a bad moment," he told Rolfe. "And I—I lied to the man, Henry. About the recording machine and motion picture camera. But perhaps it won't blacken my integrity too much under the circumstances."

"I'll get you a glass of sherry, sir," Rolfe said.

"Let that wait for a time. I'm all right. Don't need a bracer." He laughed a little. "That humming sound. He thought it was a recording machine and camera. He never noticed, Henry, that little ventilating fan up in the corner next to the ceiling, a part of that new air-conditioning contraption somebody coaxed me to have put into the house."



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## THE PHANTOM SPEAKS

(Concluded from page 9)

several cases of criminals, escaping from chain gangs and prisons, who were able to conceal their identity for from twenty to twenty-five years. If they can do it, why can't we assume that the Phantom could also do the same thing?

I don't know how things are in Chicago, but I do know of many apartment buildings here in New York where tenants, without any attempt at concealment, never meet or become acquainted with neighbors on the same floor in their apartment houses.

In the case of the police, it is true that they are not eager to have untrained outsiders come in and hamper their work, but here in New York, the city Police Department is constantly calling upon experts from the colleges, the scientific laboratories and other trained specialists in their own fields for help in important crime cases. The police resent incompetence, not experience.

A constant reader may feel that the Phantom's background is repeated too much in each magazine but each issue there are thousands of people who are reading their first Phantom story, and they are interested in what has gone before in his life; how he became the top-flight criminologist that he is. I'm sure you can appreciate this, Mr. Thorpe, and thanks again for your letter.

The interest in the Phantom Detective is not confined to the United States and Canada alone, although it is true that most of our readers are in these countries. Here is the reaction of a reader in Lancashire, England.

Dear Phantom:

I would like very much to become a member of your organization, "Friends of the Phantom". I read one of your magazines over here in England for the first time and believe it is one of the best detective magazines I have ever read. I hope I will be able to join your group. You see, in about two years time I am coming over to the U.S.A. to live and become an American Citizen, because ever since I was old enough to know the meaning of the letters U.S.A., that has been my heart's desire. I am also trying to find a pen-friend to write. Could you help me?—Ronald Barnes, 150 Elliott Street, Preston, Lancashire, England.

Glad to have your letter, Ronald, and to welcome you as a member of our organization. I hope you're going to be able to realize your ambition to come to the United States. Thanks to all of you for your letters and postcards. Keep them coming in. Please address all correspondence to The Editor, THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York, 16, N. Y. And let's all meet here again in the next issue!

—THE PHANTOM.

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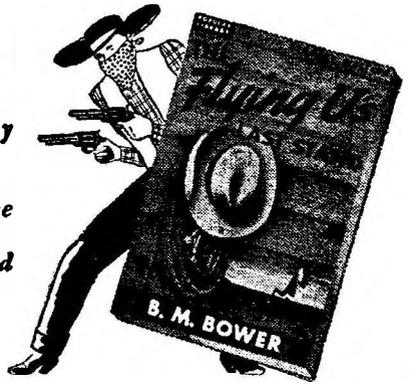


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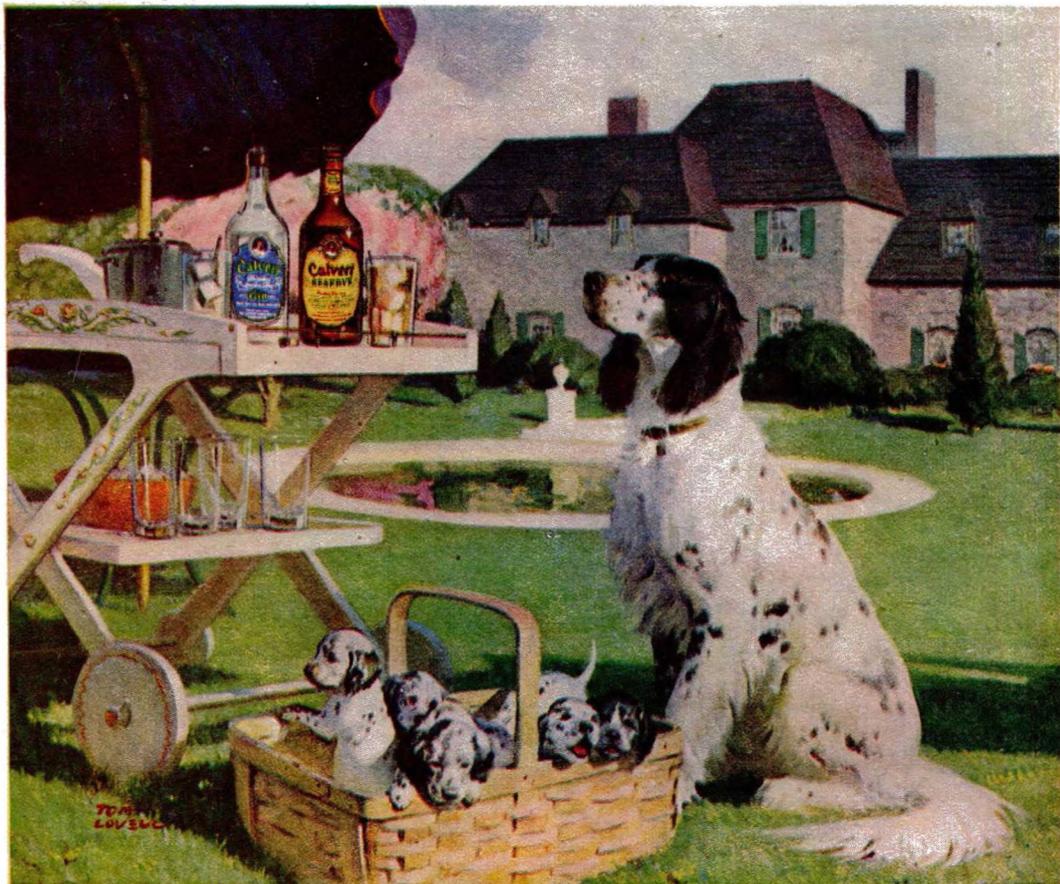
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