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PUBLICATION

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*The CITY OF  
DREADFUL NIGHT*  
*A Full-Length Mystery Novel*  
By ROBERT WALLACE

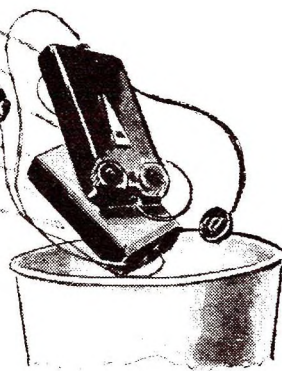


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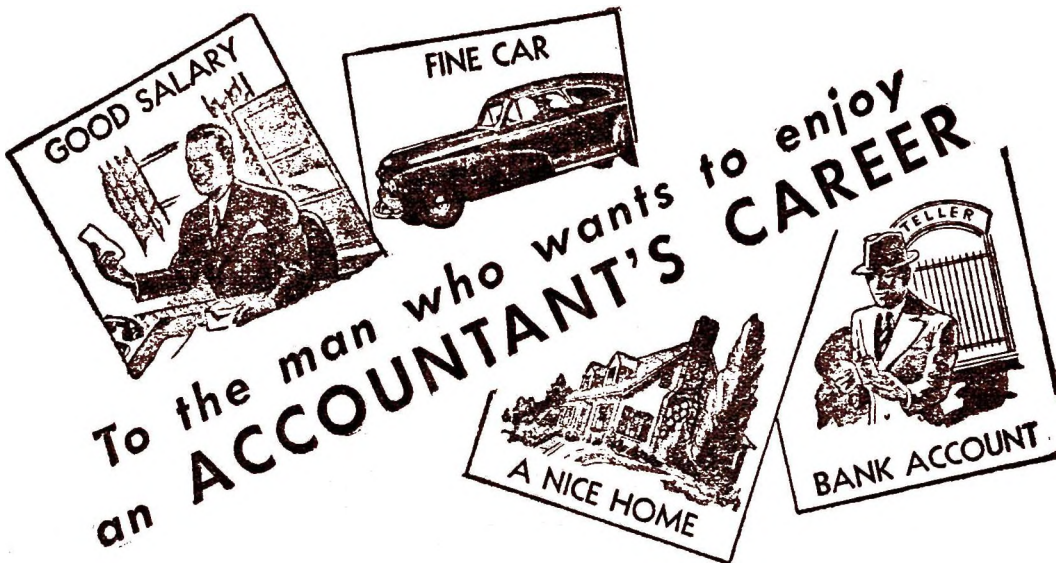
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# The PHANTOM DETECTIVE

Vol. LIII, No. 2

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Spring, 1949

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## The City of Dreadful Night

by Robert Wallace

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I'VE always been a great lover of music, whether it happens to be the classical type that is supposed to appeal particularly to the wealthy dowagers, or the lively tempos of modern music that are assumed to appeal to the younger generations. Certain types of music are particularly interesting to me, and certain musicians have long been my friends. My specialty is violin music, although I know that Heifetz, Milstein, Menuhin and Kreisler will never have to consider me as very serious competition. But this interest did account for my delight when Frank Havens mentioned that he was going to meet the great Jon Hugo, who was himself a maestro of the strings.

The meeting with Jon Hugo was much different than I had anticipated. Long before the violin virtuoso was able to keep his appointment with Mr. Havens, he met up with a blue-coated, brass-buttoned member of the New York Police Department who went by the name of Bill Ryan.

Officer Ryan discovered the body of Jon Hugo, murdered, and thrown on a wharf by several men in a big sedan. Steve Huston was the first reporter on the scene of the crime and he made the identification with the assistance of Claude Dean, music critic of the New York *Clarion*.

### The Second Slaying

This brutal slaying of an accomplished musician who had so much talent and ability to bring pleasure to the people of his generation was a shock in itself, and it stirred me deeply. But almost before the news of Jon Hugo's murder had reached the teletypes and radio receivers of the Police Stations in outlying districts of the City of New York, there came the sinister announcement that Mark Warren, a rising young figure in the musical world and a protege of Hugo, had

been killed between the two portions of a recital in the famous Lyric Hall in New York City.

I was on my way to the scene of Hugo's murder when I picked up the report of the Warren death on my short wave radio. I was on the scene of this second slaying almost as soon as the Homicide Squad. Clues were sparse, and the line of investigation was complicated, almost from the beginning.

One thing that added to the difficulty in tracking down the killers and the motive for their actions was the almost immediate discovery that Jon Hugo had not been murdered at the spot where his body was found. At this spot, however, there was one of Jon Hugo's famous Stradivarius violins. It was Steve Huston who discovered that the violin of the usually meticulous Hugo was not in the velvet bag that usually protected it from any chance damage while it was being carried from place to place.

### Baffling Questions

This circumstance led me back to Jon Hugo's home, and to the private sound-proofed studio where he had done his practising for many hours each day, as is the custom with accomplished musicians who are proud of their public attention. Was this the spot where Hugo had been murdered? How had the killer surprised him? Why didn't his house man know that there was an intruder who had designs on the life of the virtuoso? All of these questions came to my mind almost immediately, and I undertook their investigation with diligence and what skill I could muster.

Steve Huston was a great help to me, and Chip Dorlan also supplied some of the twists and turns in the trail that ultimately made it possible for me to get on the heels of the killers and to track them down.

The entire case was one that had a grim fascination for me. It was a puzzler for the New York Police Department, and Inspector Gregg helped a great deal in tying up the loose ends before the criminals responsible for the murder of the musical masters were finally uncovered.

### Behind the Scenes

I've called the case "Murder Set to Music", and Robert Wallace has done an excellent job of putting it into popular form so that you can read it and get the full benefit of all the sleuthing angles that went into the job. If you want to go into a different side of the night life of Greater New York, if you want to get behind the scenes in a world that has many determined devotees, you'll find real satisfaction when you become acquainted with the characters in "Murder Set to Music."

The case was a real challenge to The Phantom Detective, and I hope that the manner in which it was solved will serve to give you the type of entertainment that you have come to expect from stories in this magazine.

You're getting all the facts in the Jon Hugo murder case right from start to finish. It ought to prove fascinating reading, and might well give you a challenge to work toward the solution at the same time that the case is unraveling. By all means look forward to "Murder Set to Music" in the next issue of THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE.

### BE A FRIEND OF THE PHANTOM

ONE of the big thrills in my association with this magazine comes from the letters that are written to the editor in which the fine, upstanding folks of this great nation of ours show that they have a wholesome

(Continued on page 128)



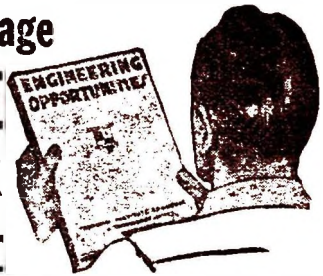
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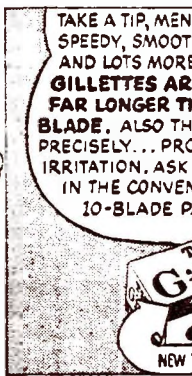
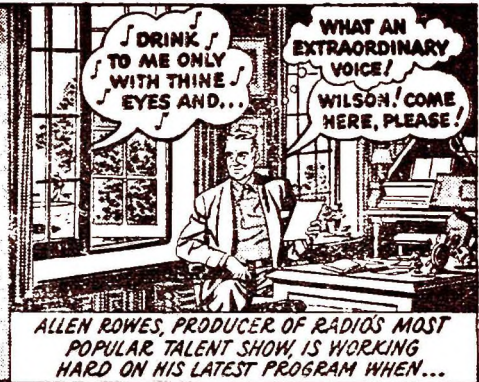
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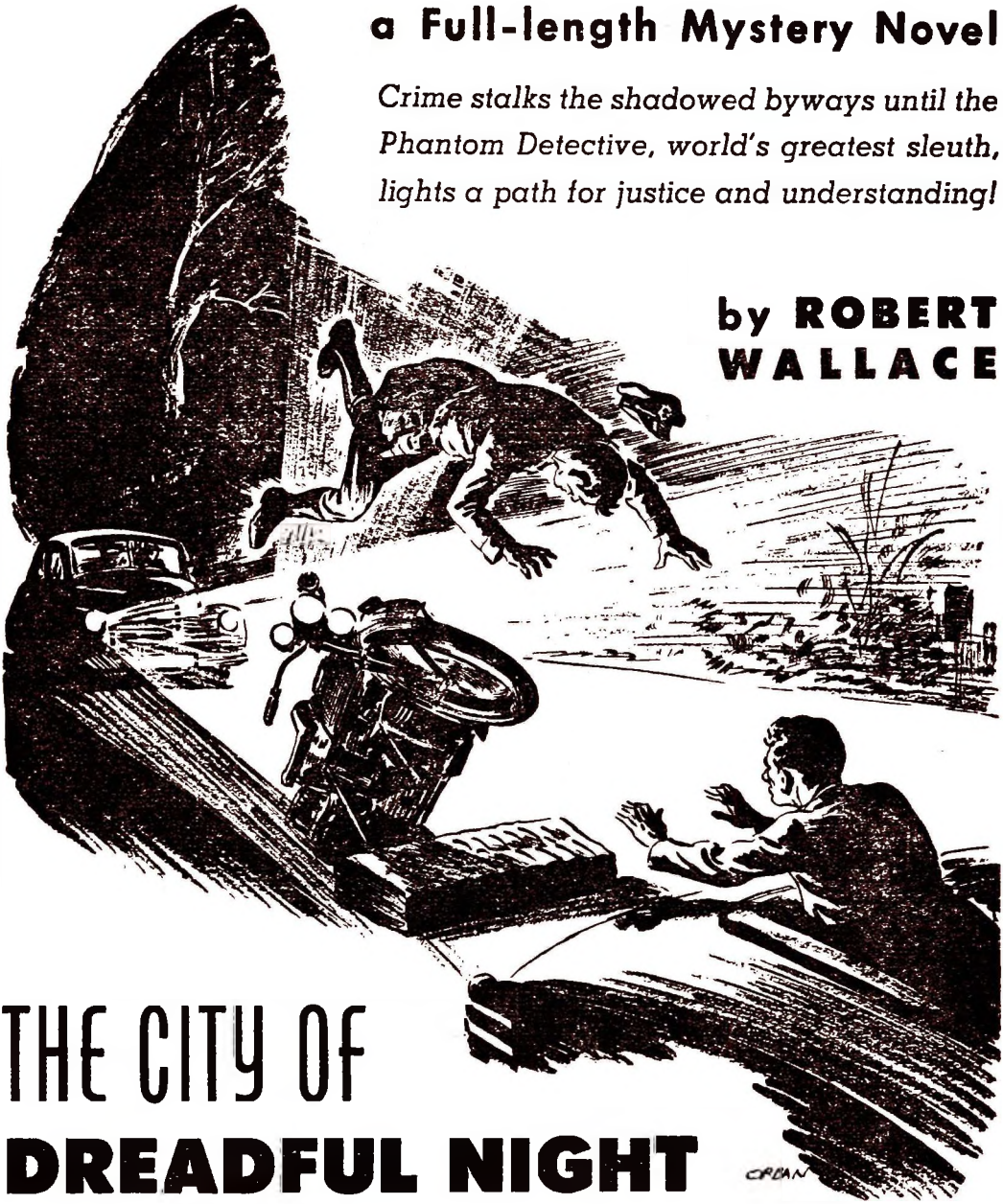
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by **ROBERT WALLACE**



# THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

## CHAPTER I

### MURDER AT HIGH SPEED

**T**HE BLUE MOON was in an ideal location for the type of business conducted there. On the outskirts of the city, it was back from Highway 45 and masked by tall poplar trees. There was a good sized parking space for cars, a hot orchestra, and soft and hard drinks.

This was no cheap roadside night club. The cover charge ran to two-fifty after nine o'clock and the dinner minimum was three dollars. As a result, many of the cars parked outside the low building were in the expensive class.

A wide-angled blue spotlight bathed the

## Fate Holds the Strings When Teen-Agers Are

front of the sprawling one-story structure, the color which gave the place the name of Blue Moon. Inside, the dance floor was crowded and so was the bar. The annual high school dance was going on, but there were other customers, too.

A tall, lanky boy draped himself over the bar and said:

"Rye!"

The bartender gave a loud laugh. "Bob," he said, "you know better than that. Beat it and don't come back until you're legally old enough to drink. What's the matter with you kids, anyhow?"

The boy, Robert Covert, had a thin, sensitive-looking face, and his long blond hair was combed straight back. There was a slight wave in it that nothing seemed to iron out. He suddenly slapped the bar hard, sneered, and called the bartender a name that would have got him a broken jaw if he had been any older. Then Robert Covert drifted away from the bar and went outside.

He stood in the doorway overlooking the parking space at the rear, glanced at the jalopy in which he had driven out. It was about fifteen years old, without a top, one door was missing and so, he mused, were two or three of the six cylinders. Robert Covert decided that the world was all wrong. His father had money, a good job and could well afford his son a fast, sleek roadster instead of this flea-bitten piece of junk.

Bob kicked at the door sill. A willowy girl, holding tight to a young man's arm, smiled up at him impishly, and Bob squirmed even more.

Not so long ago Marva had been his girl. She still would be if he had a new coupé like Paul Hanley, to whose arm she was clinging.

Bob was scowling darkly when two other boys joined him. All three strolled off, but not far from the parking space. Bob Covert eyed a powder-blue Lincoln with its top down and appearing even bluer than it was in the blue spotlight.

"Jeepers, what a wagon!" one of the other boys said.

The third whistled.

"I'll bet that bus would do better than a hundred."

BOB COVERT started to smile. That was it! The whole world was against him, but he could still do what he wanted to do. A bartender who knew his age refused him a drink. His father refused to buy him a good car. If it was any other place than this small city, he wouldn't be allowed to drive a car at all, at his age. His girl had left him for a boy who had a better car. They could all go to blazes. If the world was wrong for Bob Covert, he knew how to set it right.

"Wally," he said, "what do you say you and me and Mark just ease over and sort of slide that blue Lincoln onto the highway for a spin. We can get it back before it's missed."

"Gosh!" Slightly rotund Wally Walsh licked his lips. "Do you think we ought to risk it? I'd like a ride in that chariot. Sure, I admit it, but the way the cops have been picking up car thieves lately, it's a big chance."

"We're just going to borrow it," the third boy, Mark Tormay, argued. He was the runt of the trio but harder looking, as if he had been around far more than his youthful appearance indicated. "That car belongs to Kirk August Sloper the Third," he went on. "Yeah, and if we smash it up, so what? He's got dough enough to buy fifty cars like this. Come on—let's take it for a spin. I know Sloper anyway. If we get in a jam he won't prefer charges."

"Okay." Bob Covert breathed hard. "Okay—let's go!"

Mark Tormay seized Covert's arm. "That's no way to lift a car—just walk up and take it. People will be watching. Now here's what we do. If the key is in it—and I never knew Sloper to bother with taking the key out—we'll just quietly release the brake, push her along to that dark spot near the shed and get her lined up so when we start the motor we just pull for the road fast. All set? Come on."

They moved the car easily. The key was in the ignition. Bob Covert got behind the wheel. It had been his idea and he was granted the privilege of driving it away. All three boys were in the front seat as Bob turned onto the highway.

None of the trio noticed the man who had been idly seated on the running board

## *the Puppets in a Spectacle of Lawlessness!*

of a medium priced sedan near the outer fringe of the parking space. He watched the theft being performed, watched it with great interest. As the Lincoln rolled off, he got into his own car and stepped on the starter.

He was a rather ordinary looking man. In fact, having such an ordinary appearance was part of his stock in trade. His face was inclined to be square, with high cheek bones and thin lips. His coloring

his sedan up to eighty, which surprised him some because he didn't think it had that much life left in it. But he couldn't gain on the Lincoln now. It was streaking along a stretch of road that was as straight as an arrow for ten miles.

The twin tail-lights grew fainter and fainter. Bob Covert, at the wheel of the Lincoln, knew how to drive, though his speed would have given an older man a case of nerves. Here, with the wind blow-



THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

was medium, his hair a neutral shade. Everything about him was neutral. If he had pulled off some monstrous crime in front of a dozen witnesses, few would have described him accurately.

He drove his sedan onto the highway, spotted the twin tail-lights of the blue Lincoln and stepped on the gas pedal a little harder. Within a mile he had gained a trifle on the more expensive and much faster car. The boys were taking it easy, trying not to draw any attention to themselves.

For about three miles the distance between the cars held, then the blue Lincoln began to speed. The man following it got

ing in his face, with around two hundred horse-power under his foot, Bob felt that he rated. He was a man without fear, bold enough to take what he wanted. A superior sort of person to whom girls would look up and boys would seek out.

He had no worries. They would get the car back before it was missed. But Mark and Wally would quietly describe the episode, brag about it and bring glory to Bob Covert. He would show his father he rated a good car.

Of course if his father ever got wind of this, there probably never would be a car, big or small, fast or slow, but there was no reason why he should find out. And if he

refused to buy his only son a good car, that son could smile behind his back in the knowledge that he had handled a faster and better car than his father owned.

Marva's eyes would open wide too. Bob let out a wild yell and grinned at his two companions. Rotund Wally Walsh had already had enough. He was white-faced and gasping for air. All he wanted was to set two feet on solid ground, get back to the dance, and be satisfied with his lot. After all, at sixteen he couldn't expect too much out of life. There were many years ahead—if he ever got out of this mess.

**MARK** TORMAY, on the outside, was enjoying the ride. He displayed no nerves. Rather, he felt quite proud of

Bob shook his head, laughed, and pushed the accelerator the last tenth of an inch down to the floor. The blue car didn't seem to pick up any more speed, but the speedometer crept up another four miles an hour.

Well behind them now, the ordinary-looking man in the sedan was concentrat-

"Stand up and lift 'em!" ordered Steve. "Let go of those guns or I'll kill you!"  
(CHAP. IV)



himself. This had worked better than he had expected. But Bob was driving too fast. No sense in getting killed. Mark leaned across Wally Walsh and shouted at Bob to slow down.

ing on being as close as possible when the crash came, so he could pick up the pieces and perhaps save the lives of these crazy kids. All hope of overtaking the blue convertible had left him long ago.

Then he saw the single headlight in his rear view mirror and a motorcycle cop was roaring up, siren shrieking. The ordinary-looking man held his sedan steady, but didn't slacken his speed. When the motorcycle cop came alongside and

waved him toward the side of the road, the driver leaned out.

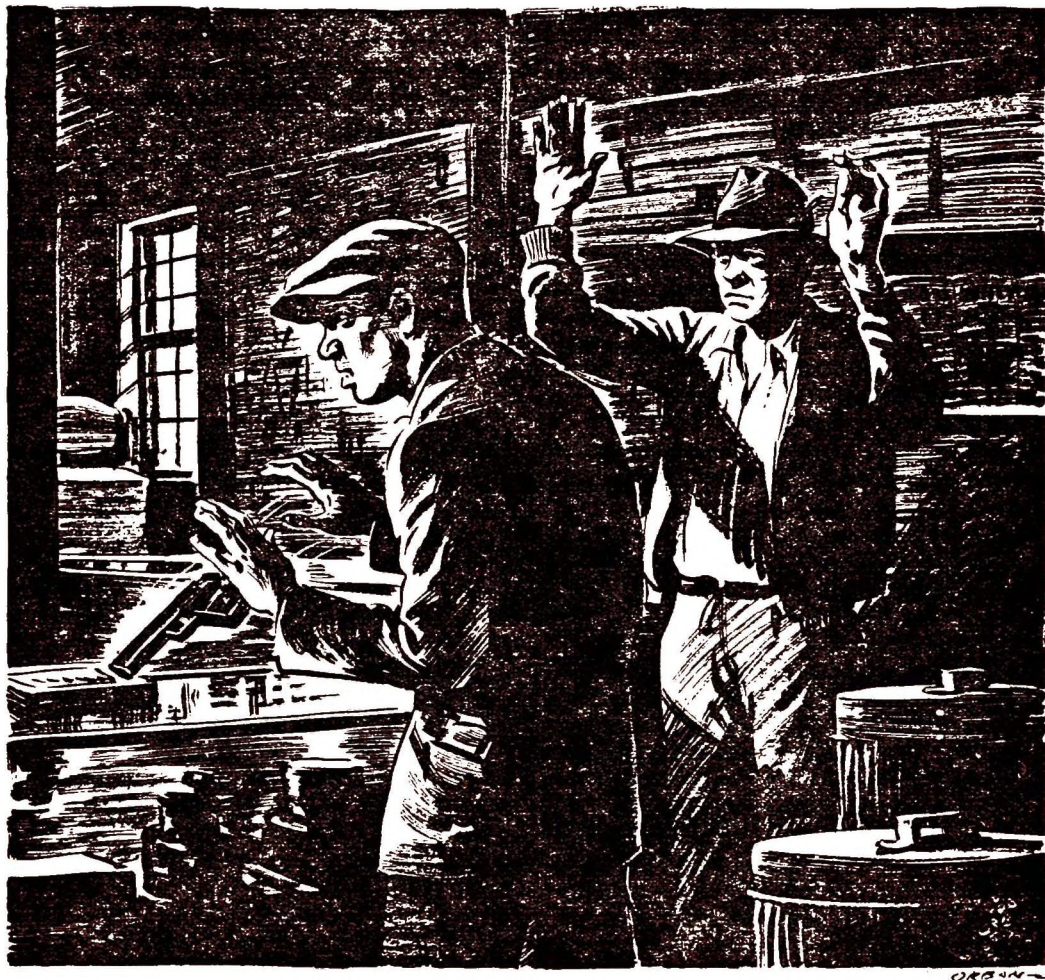
"I'm following a stolen car," he yelled. "It's a mile ahead. Three fool kids. They'll kill themselves if they aren't stopped!"

"I'm taking care of you first!" the cop shouted. "Pull over."

The driver of the sedan gave an ex-

going to be killed.

The boy driving the convertible seemed to realize that, too, for he did slow up some. The sedan gained a little, until its driver could see the motorcycle cop hurtling up behind the blue open job. Then the driver of the sedan suddenly opened his mouth and shouted. Shouted until his



asperated grunt, reached into his pocket and took out a leather case. He opened this and held up a badge. The motorcycle cop glanced at it, settled himself in his saddle, and bent over the handlebars. His machine pulled away fast.

The driver of the sedan kept up fairly well. The chase, he knew, would have to end soon. The road would become curved not much further on, and if that blue convertible didn't slow down, three boys were

lungs and throat ached.

In the convertible, Bob Covert had gone slightly green. A motorcycle cop meant an arrest. Not only for reckless driving, but for theft of the car. That wouldn't be so good. And yet, how could he hope to get away from this policeman?

"Bob, for gosh sakes, stop!" Wally Walsh moaned. "Maybe—maybe the cop'll start to shoot. Maybe he'll kill us!"

"Shut up!" Mark Tormay shouted.

"Bob, you hold this crate steady and keep her rolling as fast as she'll go. I'll take care of the cop. There won't be any pinch. Leave it to me."

Tormay crawled into the back of the convertible. He loosened the rear seat, lifted it and rested it on the back of the car. The motorcycle cop had his head down, against the terrific wind, and noticed nothing. Mark Tormay didn't hear the driver of the sedan behind shout in protest. Mark just grinned and shoved the car seat onto the road and directly in the path of the motorcycle cop.

The patrolman never had a chance. When his front wheel hit that seat the forward momentum of nearly a hundred miles an hour was suddenly checked. The bike stopped, but the cop didn't. He cleared thirty feet before he landed, and oblivion came as quickly as the crash.

The driver of the sedan swerved wildly to avoid running over the prostrate officer, but he didn't slacken his speed. A car, coming in the opposite direction, had gone completely off the road at the sight of the speeding convertible and the cop. Now it was moving toward the officer. If he still lived, he would at least have help.

The boys in the convertible needed help, too. Perhaps worse than the motorcycle cop who was probably dead. At any moment they might kill themselves or crash into another car with disastrous results.

The man in the sedan drew an automatic from a shoulder rig. Those boys ahead were just that—boys. But during the past moment they'd become something else—murderers. They had to be stopped.

The driver took a firm grip of the wheel with his right hand and aimed the automatic with his left. He had no intention of hitting any of the boys or even trying to hit a tire, but if they saw gun flashes and perhaps heard bullets whine past, they might stop.

They were slowing down. The road was becoming curved now and they couldn't keep on at such crazy speed. The man in the sedan fired twice. The blue convertible zigzagged slightly. He fired two more shots and this time the convertible's brake lights blinked.

**B**OB COVERT was slowing down. He didn't care about speed any more. He had seen that motorcycle cop sail over the

handlebars and hit the road. There was an uneasy feeling in Bob's stomach, his throat was dry, and his heart hammered with a speed he thought comparable to the pistons under that sleek hood. Now there were bullets—hot lead being thrown at him. It was all over. All except facing the consequences.

Wally Walsh had slid as far down in the seat as he could get and stayed there, moaning. In the rear Mark Tormay was swearing bitterly, but he didn't protest when he felt the convertible slacken its speed. He bent down and picked up a heavy jack iron which had been under the rear seat. He hefted this and waited.

Bob barely made the next corner and knew that all hope of escape was gone. The driver of the sedan was better at piloting a car than he, and besides there was that gun. Bob slowed up enough to pull over and finally stop. The sedan nosed in to block any chance of Bob changing his mind. The driver got out.

So did Mark Tormay, holding the tire iron behind his back. Mark suddenly brought his weapon into view. He had noted that the stranger wasn't holding a gun. Mark lunged at the man. The tire iron whistled down in an arc meant to split the man's head. But the man wasn't there when the iron parted air instead of skull.

Mark Tormay was suddenly seized by the wrist. Something happened to the whole side of his body. It was shot through with sudden, paralyzing pain. He dropped the tire iron and tried to use his right fist.

He never did know quite what happened. All he knew was that the stars were mysteriously where the earth had been and the ground hung in the heavens like a canopy of night. Then he landed, and all the breath went out of his body.

The driver of the sedan picked him up, carried him over to the blue convertible and put him in the front seat.

"All right, boys," he said. "Turn around and go back. Let's have a look at what you did. Or maybe you don't realize you killed a police officer."

"I didn't!" Bob Covert sobbed. "I wouldn't have done that. Mark threw the seat."

Wally Walsh didn't say a word. His jaws were rigid, his tongue incapable of movement. The stranger got into the back of

the convertible and perched himself uncomfortably on the seat frame.

Bob Covert turned the car around. He wished then that he'd had sense enough to obey his father, to try fairly to get his girl away from a rival, accept adversity and make the best of it. He wondered, with growing horror, if they would electrocute him.

## CHAPTER II

### THE YOUNG IN CRIME



BOB COVERT, Wally Walsh and Mark Tormay sat in a row against the further wall of Police Chief George Abel's office. Abel was a ponderous man with pure white hair and a stern face.

Standing beside his desk was Philip Covert, a man of about forty-five—tough, hard, active, and a fighter. He was fighting now and bristling with indignation.

"My son happens to be a minor," he protested. "You can't lock him up. Not for stealing a car. Not even Kirk August Sloper the Third's car. Bob is under sixteen. He belongs in Juvenile Court."

"Now just a minute, Mr. Covert," Chief Abel said. "You haven't heard the entire story. I'm going to let a man who saw it all give you the details."

The man who had captured the three boys, stepped forward to face Philip Covert.

"I watched and heard your son and those other two boys actually plan to steal that car," he said, "and then carry out their plans."

"You saw them? You knew what they were going to do? What kind of a man are you? Why didn't you stop them?"

"I'm sorry. I wish I had done so now, but I had no way of knowing how this would end. My interest was in learning why they stole the car, and what they intended to do with it. I think I know."

"You stood by and allowed my son to become a thief?" Covert shouted.

"He's more than that, Mr. Covert. One of the boys riding with your son threw the back seat of the car into the path of a motorcycle officer. He was killed."

Covert's mouth opened slowly and his

eyes became filled with horror. He whirled and stalked toward Bob, his right hand a fist and drawn back. Before he could start a swing, his wrist was seized and held firmly. He was propelled into a neat pivot until he faced the stranger.

"I wouldn't do that," Covert was told in a quiet voice. "Frankly, if you had considered your son more than you've been in the habit of doing, it's possible this might not have happened. I heard him tell his companions you refused to let him use your car to go to the dance, and his girl friend objected to the jalopy he had to use. I don't really blame the girl. An evening gown and wrap could have been ruined. You should have permitted the boy to have your car tonight. Making an exception wouldn't have hurt you. Or, if you required the use of your car for urgent reasons, you should have taken enough time to explain this to Bob. Even a boy will see reason if he is treated like an adult, and told why or why not he can't have the use of the family car."

Philip Covert wrenched his wrist free. "And who the devil are you, to be lecturing me this way? I know most of the local officers. You don't belong here. In what official capacity did you arrest my son?"

Chief Abel came around from behind his desk. "Mr. Covert," he said, "this is the Phantom Detective."

Covert just stared at the ordinary-looking man for a moment, then he reeled over to a chair beside a table, sank into it, and buried his head in his hands. All three boys were wide-eyed. The Phantom went over and sat down beside Philip Covert.

"In killing that motorcycle policeman," he said in a kindly voice, "your son and his companions automatically advanced themselves into adult crime. Murder is not a juvenile offense. The boys will have to face that charge as grown people. It's too bad, but those are the laws of this state."

Covert looked up. "Laws? Do you think I care about laws? That happens to be my son. When I learned you are the Phantom, I realized there was nothing to gain by fighting you. But I still maintain that you are as guilty as those boys, and I shall do everything in my power to get them free and to—to break you. If I can't break you I—I'll kill you!"

The Phantom walked slowly away. He

signaled that he was finished, and Chief Abel phoned for help. The three boys were led out to be searched and locked up. Philip Covert hardly seemed aware of what was going on. He arose, finally, and walked over to the Chief's desk.

"Tell me how much the bond is," he said. "I'll furnish it somehow. You know me, Chief. I'll see that the boy faces the justice that's due him. You don't have to make the bail too steep."

Chief Abel shook his head slowly. "Mr. Covert, you must be aware of the fact that murder is an unbailable offense."

"Oh—yes. Yes, of course. I suppose it is."

Covert turned and walked away, each step a shuffle, his shoulders sagging, his face that of an old, old man. As he passed through the doorway, he hesitated a moment, looked back, and took a long breath as if he was going to say something. Then he shrugged, recognizing the uselessness of it all and trudged on.

THE Phantom passed a hand across tired eyes.

"Chief," he said, "at least you ought to be told the truth. This tragedy of young Bob Covert's started out simply because he was frustrated and sore. Everything had gone wrong for him and he was—or thought he was—getting back his self-respect by turning into a tough guy not afraid to steal a car. I would have wagered a million to one that those three boys would abandon the car as soon as they had their fill of it."

"I know, Phantom," Chief Abel said. "You're not to blame for what happened. Covert is all wrought up. He's in a mood to blame anyone, and you happened to be the fall guy. He's like that kid of his—trying to forget his own troubles by taking it out on someone else. The kid had the car, Covert has you."

The Phantom nodded. "Really though, Mr. Covert is fortunate that I happened to be close by. I saw who threw that car seat in front of the motorcycle cop. It happened to be Mark Tormay. Of course the other two boys share guilt in the crime, but neither could have prevented Tormay from doing what he did."

"Why should he have killed the cop?" Chief Abel's voice was almost a chant. "Why, I ask you? Because they were

afraid to face a juvenile rap for car stealing?"

"You know, Chief," the Phantom said, "young Tormay interests me. When I finally stopped them, he came at me with a tire iron. He'd have brained me quite cheerfully. What do you know about Tormay?"

Chief Abel shrugged. "His people are okay, I suppose. Father drinks, beats up his wife now and then, and wallops the blazes out of the kids. There are five of them. Young Tormay has a record. Not much. Played hookey a lot, didn't study except to barely creep by in school. About a year ago he was suspected of being a lookout for a gang of juvenile burglars. I'd say it was the usual story except, that young Tormay didn't build up quite as far as Dillinger or Pretty Boy Floyd. I'll bet he was on his way though."

"What about the fat boy—Wally Walsh?"

Chief Abel smiled. "I wish our juvenile problem was no worse than the type he represents. Wally is okay. He got into this thing because he hates being called a coward. Silly, but that's how he's always been. He lives two blocks up the street from me."

Chief Abel's phone buzzed. He answered it and spoke briefly. Then he reached for his uniformed hat on the edge of the desk. As he arose, he said:

"That was Frank Havens. He's just arrived from New York and is at the Center Hotel. He promised to provide me with some information. Want to come along, Phantom?"

"I do indeed, Chief. It's time you were told why I came here anyway. Mr. Havens is really responsible, and it begins to look as if his curiosity was about to uncover something of substantial proportions."

They walked through the main office and Chief Abel returned the salutes of the desk captain and his aides. A car was waiting outside but the Chief decided to walk the short distance to the hotel. He nodded greetings and gravely saluted half the people he encountered. Chief Abel, it seemed, was a popular officer.

"Phantom," he said, "what about yourself? I've been curious about you for years. I can't ask who are you, but let me put it this way. What are you?"

The Phantom chuckled. "It's a fair

question, Chief. Who I am doesn't matter. I'm a detective. I enjoy tracking down criminals, fighting them, tricking them, running them down by legwork, headwork—and by science. Never discount the latter method, Chief."

"What in the world do you get out of it, Phantom?"

"Satisfaction, I suppose. Money doesn't interest me. Put it this way, Chief. If my coming to your city helps wipe out or lower a crime wave, then I have my reward."

"You'll stay then and help, Phantom?" Chief Abel asked.

"Yes. After what happened tonight, I'd have changed my mind if I had intended to leave. But Mr. Havens will explain all that to you. I'm grateful for your cooperation. Tell me, Chief, how is my red-headed colleague doing as a patrolman?"

"Steve Huston?" Chief Abel mustered a grin. "I detailed him as you and he requested, to one of the toughest beats in town. I had some difficulty putting him across but I managed, and I'm certain that no one suspects he isn't what the records proclaim him—a rookie cop."

The Phantom was smiling. "There's one thing I'll promise you, Chief. The beat he goes out on will never be the same again. It might remain as tough, or become even tougher, but the people who live there won't ever forget Patrolman Huston."

"He's quite a pal of yours, isn't he?" Abel asked.

"He likes to work with me," the Phantom explained. "And I find him most useful. He's a crack crime reporter on one of Mr. Havens' metropolitan newspapers but he's never as happy as when I send him out on something."

"Does he know who you are?" the Chief asked.

"No. He hasn't the faintest idea. No one knows my identity, Chief, except Mr. Havens. If it was known I probably wouldn't live long. At the least I'd be considered a mighty poor insurance risk. So I choose to disguise myself and operate anonymously. It gets results, and saves me worry that I can expend on my investigations and not upon myself."

"I can understand that," Abel agreed. "Well, here we are. The hotel, Phantom. I'm interested to find out why Mr. Havens sent you here to help us. We need help,



MURIEL HAVENS

we welcome it especially from you, but how did Mr. Havens know?"

"I expect he'll have the answer to that," the Phantom said. "At any rate it's more his province to do the explaining."

### CHAPTER III

#### THE FIGURES OF CRIME



RANK HAVENS opened his hotel suite door in answer to the Phantom's knock. Havens was a stocky, gray-haired man, past fifty. He had the polished assurance of a successful man and his handshake was warm and friendly.

"Hello, Phantom," he said. "Chief Abel, it's a pleasure to see you again."

The Phantom closed the door behind them.

"Things haven't worked out too well, sir," he commented.

"I know," Havens said somberly. "My local newspaper informed me of the death of that motorcycle officer. Sit down, gentlemen. Chief Abel, my chain of newspapers has always fought crime, organized and unorganized. I make it a point to watch things, to study crime statistics and keep up with developments. My newspapers, which are part of the civic life of many cities, including this one, have orders to report anything out of the ordinary to me personally."

Chief Abel sighed and removed cellophane from a cigar. He snipped off the end with his penknife.

"The unusual is happening here, Mr. Havens," he said. "I know just about what your local editor must have reported." Abel lit a match, puffed until the cigar tip glowed, then leaned back to continue. "We have a juvenile crime wave here. Despite all we can do it keeps getting worse."

Havens zipped open a brown leather brief case and took out several papers. He spread these on the table and consulted them.

"This city is in the more than three hundred thousand population group," he said. "I'll give you figures of other cities of the same size and type and compare them with your record. The average murder and non-negligent manslaughter rate for the other cities is two points and ninety-two hundredths. Your town has accumulated a figure of six points and seventy-nine hundredths. In manslaughter by negligence your city has five points and seven tenths against two points and four tenths. In robbery the other cities average thirty points and seven-tenths to every hundred thousand population. Yours is much worse—ninety points and four tenths."

"Where did you get these figures?" Chief Abel asked.

"They were compiled by my statistical department and augmented by the reports from the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Washington. Let me go on. In aggravated assault per one hundred thousand your city ran eighty points and nine tenths, and the other cities of the same size were only thirty-four points and four tenths. Take burglary—one of the outstanding increases occurred in this type of crime. Per one hundred thousand population in other cities, the rate runs two hundred and three points and two tenths. In your town it amounts to six hundred ninety-two points and four tenths. Larceny in other cities is four hundred seventy-three points and one tenth crimes for each one hundred thousand people. Here it is over a thousand."

Chief Abel was puffing hard and fast on the cigar until he was clouded in smoke. He fanned some of this away.

"Mr. Havens," he said wearily, "I'm not

denying those figures. I realize my city has suddenly and unexplainably gone haywire. My men and I are doing our best, but we can't seem to cope with it. Those kids are on the loose. There is one particular type of crime you haven't mentioned. I wonder what the difference is in our percentage compared to other cities. I mean the crime of car stealing."

"Car thefts are an extremely common juvenile form of crime," Havens said. "Generally, the rate runs to ninety-four points and five tenths cars stolen for each hundred thousand population. Here, in this town, the figure is five times as high."

The Phantom, comfortably sprawled out in an easy chair, commented on this.

"Your car theft rate is the highest in the country, Chief. True, many of the cars are recovered, but some are never seen again. True, most of the thefts are committed by boys looking for thrills, but they don't steal them all."

"We recover about two-thirds of all stolen cars," Chief Abel said. He regarded the tip of his cigar for a moment. "I wonder why the kids in this city are more prone to crime than the boys in other towns? Why are more cars stolen here than anywhere else? There must be some reason."

"That is exactly why I asked the Phantom to come here, Chief," Havens said. "Why I sent one of my crack reporters to work undercover, and why I shall devote the assets and abilities of my entire organization to answering your questions. There must be an answer."

THE Phantom arose and walked slowly to the window where he stood, looking idly down upon the busy Main Street.

"I've been trying to find it, Chief," he said. "In the two weeks I've spent here I've quietly studied various juvenile groups. They don't appear any different than those in any other city. Bob Covert wasn't the only boy I observed stealing a car. My theory has been that some of these cars hit the hot car market, and what I wanted to know was whether or not juveniles stole these particular cars—the ones which disappear completely. Cars had been stolen from the parking space of the Blue Moon Inn so I spent some time there waiting and watching. I'm certain that young Bob Covert had no idea of

selling that blue convertible."

"But why, then," Chief Abel argued, "did the boys kill a policeman to keep from getting caught? Murder is usually only the work of desperate criminals."

"Chief," the Phantom said, "I told you that I doubted Bob Covert stole that car with the intentions of selling it. I agree that Wally Walsh only went along for the ride, but Mark Tormay told the other two how to steal the car, and how to get it out of the parking space without attracting attention. He talked them into the crime—not that much talking was necessary. And it was Tormay who killed that policeman. He alone is actually guilty."

"What are you driving at, Phantom?" Chief Abel asked.

"I believe that Tormay really intended to profit by the theft of the car. Oh, he would have suggested that Bob Covert abandon it in some quiet spot, but I believe Tormay would have gone back for it or sent someone who knew how to dispose of it. That is why Tormay threw the back seat of the car. He was a desperate criminal. That ride in a stolen car was no lark to him. It was serious business."

Frank Havens put the papers back into his briefcase. "Phantom," he asked, "have you any proof of this?"

"No—none at all. But I do know that cars stolen by other boys intent only upon committing a prank, have vanished completely. Perhaps Tormay was involved in these thefts. I intend to question young Tormay."

"With those facts brought to my attention, so do I," Chief Abel said. "I've had a horrible feeling all along that this crime wave wasn't just the crazy stunts of kids. Phantom, do you think our juveniles here are being exploited?"

The Phantom dropped the curtain back into place, walked over and stood beside Havens who was still seated at the table.

"I don't know, Chief," he said soberly. "Boys have been exploited by professional criminals in the past, but hardly on such an extensive scale. Suppose this was true—that boys were detailed to commit crimes—who would likely be back of it?"

"You mean who heads our local underworld? I can answer that one. Mike Lathy grew up in crime. He was the youngest racketeering bootlegger we ever pinched during prohibition. He developed

gangs, led them, and cut in on their profits. He still does. Nothing much in the way of crime ever happens here that he doesn't know about."

The Phantom paced the floor for a moment. "Chief, does this Mike Lathy operate any places where boys would normally go? Like pool rooms, bowling alleys, juke-box joints? Even athletic clubs?"

"No. There wouldn't be enough profit in anything like that for Lathy."

"I see. Anyone else who might have taken these boys over?"

Chief Abel shook his head. "We're singularly free of organized crime, barring Mike Lathy and his men. I'm proud to say that even Lathy is more or less controlled. We've had our bad men. Right now any cop in town would give his vacation to find out where a mug named Tom Wiley is hiding out. Wiley shot one of my men—put him in a wheelchair perhaps permanently. That was six months ago, but Wiley has been seen around town. He is wanted for murder now."

"Cross him off," the Phantom said. "Any man on the lam and red-hot as Wiley must be, wouldn't organize a gang of juveniles or plan their crimes. He's too busy saving his own hide. We'll have to look further, Chief. Especially under rocks and rotted stumps where the kind of vermin we're after would be hiding. You don't mind if I keep poking around?"

"Mind?" Abel cried. "Phantom, I'll do everything in my power to help you any way I can!"

"Of course," Havens added, "all this will work much better if the matter doesn't receive much publicity. The Phantom won't be operating strictly undercover, but Steve Huston will be. Also, if news of a concentrated investigation leaks out, those people we are after may cease operations and hide until all the commotion dies away."

CHIEF ABEL strode over to Havens and offered his hand.

"I'll cooperate in every possible way. I'm not proud of the crime record set in this city and I know that if it grows or isn't chopped down, I'll be out of a job. Which is only right, because a chief of police must be judged by the amount of crime he cannot control. My record as of now isn't so good, but I'm trying to better

it. Thanks for your interest and your help."

The Phantom went to the door with Abel. "I'll be at your office shortly," he said. "We'll talk to Mark Tormay together and perhaps he may solve a lot of our problems. I've an idea that Tormay's toughness is a shell, and that underneath it he's just another boy."

After Chief Abel was gone, the Phantom sat down at the table across from Havens.

"Those statistics of yours are certainly backed up, sir," he said. "This city is alive with crime. You'll note that none of it is spectacular. Just a series of small incidents, but add them up and they reach tremendous proportions."

"I know," Havens agreed. "And the worst of it all lies in the fact that juveniles are being used. I know their crimes are not the spontaneous ones of youth. They are guided, personally conducted tours into a world of crime by inhuman beings who don't care if they twist and turn young minds into warped shapes. Phantom, we've got to lick this thing here, because if it is allowed to grow it will spread like a festering sore."

"I've been on this case about a week, Mr. Havens. In that space of time I've come to realize the importance of breaking this up. But I can't make any headway. It still looks only like the isolated crimes of juveniles. I've an idea the boys involved don't even know they are being led, or used."

Frank Havens reached for the phone. "I'm keeping frequent checks on other large cities. Just in case this type of crime has already spread. Excuse me while I contact some of my editors. By keeping a close check, and working fast, we may be able to control this and confine it here."

The Phantom sat down and closed his eyes. He was tired. Two weeks of work by day and night was nothing new to him but in this case he had found no tangible results—only a boredom that comes with too much leg work and no progress.

He had no intentions of giving up. History would be made the day the Phantom Detective dropped an investigation. But he missed his penthouse apartment in New York. Atop one of the large buildings and reached by a private elevator, it was one of the most comfortable bachelor

apartments in the city.

There the Phantom lived a life of luxury and ease as Richard Curtis Van Loan, millionaire, and popular socialite, a man much sought after as a top tennis player, and a polo expert qualifying for the international games. He was a member of exclusive clubs but didn't confine his activities to only the moneyed side of life. Boys clubs knew him as a generous donor, and an active participant in the development of children.

Richard Curtis Van Loan was tall, athletically built, with even, handsome features. But when he became the Phantom he altered his appearance to assume any sort of character he needed to fit the particular case on hand. He could do this, because he was an expert in the art of disguise, but wise enough to know that hair dyes, mechanical devices and skin colorings were not enough. He lived every part he played.

In his penthouse apartment were secret wardrobes where he kept clothing suited to any role, identification documents which would have challenged the skill of any expert on forgery to prove them false. He maintained a complete disguise layout there also and he could come and go as either Richard Curtis Van Loan or in any disguise he chose. The private elevator gave him ready entrance or exit.

Far uptown, under another identity, he maintained a large and expensively equipped crime laboratory. It was there that he developed clues through scientific methods and tracked down criminals by means of microscopes and spectroscopes. And there, to the few who ever noticed him, he was known as Dr. Bendix, an eccentric old recluse and research scientist.

Only Frank Havens knew the Phantom's real identity. Havens, one of the biggest newspaper publishers in the nation, used his power and his presses to conduct a constant campaign against crime. There was nothing he liked to do better than turn a bright light into the dark corners of the underworld, and in this work the Phantom was of inestimable aid to him.

**F**RANK HAVENS' largest newspaper was the New York *Clarion* and Steve Huston, red-headed, tough and able crime reporter was on the staff. Huston often



"Steve!" the Phantom called.  
"They got him—tell them to  
stop shooting!" (CHAP. VIII)

helped the Phantom in his work, though Steve didn't have the vaguest idea that under the Phantom's disguise was Richard Curtis Van Loan whom Huston knew by sight and thought of as an idler with too much money.

Lovely Muriel Havens, Frank Havens' only child had known Richard Curtis Van Loan almost all her life, and was one of his closest friends. She often sensed that beneath his polished, calm exterior lay something vital and dynamic which prevented him from being content with only the excitement of a polo or tennis game. She was sure he was not satisfied to merely exist for pleasure. But while Muriel often pondered this problem, it never occurred to her in her wildest dream that Van Loan could be the Phantom Detective.

Both the Phantom and Frank Havens agreed that while Muriel might often be of help to the Phantom, she must never know his true identity. If she did it could place her in constant jeopardy at the hands of criminals who might discover she knew the Phantom's secret and think she would talk under proper "persuasion." Like Steve Huston, Muriel asked no questions and was content to be of aid to the Phantom. It gave her a feeling of accomplishment and usefulness.

The ringing of the telephone brought the Phantom Detective out of his light doze. Havens had been calling cities all over the country and his voice droned on and on. But this time the phone rang and when the Phantom saw Frank Havens give a start of excitement, he became fully awake and attentive.

Havens hung up slowly and took a long breath.

"Chief Abel wants you at his office," he said. "Not to question Mark Tormay though. Tormay is dead. He was found in his cell five minutes ago—poisoned."

#### NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL

## THE PHANTOM in MURDER SET TO MUSIC

By Robert Wallace

## CHAPTER IV

### REDHEAD IN BLUE



HERE was some question as to whether his shoes or his badge wore the highest polish. He walked down the shabby street, night stick swinging as though he had been a patrolman half his life instead of only a few days. Under his cap fiery red hair contrasted with the blue uniform.

Steve Huston liked this assignment. He had taken on a number of rôles in his day as a newspaper reporter but this was one of the most exciting. He was supposed to keep on the alert for all kinds of crime, but especially for the type committed by juveniles. He also had orders to watch his fellow policemen, though no suspicion had been centered on them so far.

Steve Huston saw the sergeant waiting at the corner near the call box. He saluted with a flourish, and the sergeant returned the salute. Sergeant Callahan waited until Steve placed his duty call and closed the metal box.

"How's everything, Steve?" Callahan said. "Quiet as it should be?"

"Too quiet." Steve looked around in the gloom. "Too doggone quiet, Sergeant. The kids who are allowed to stay out nights aren't usually home as early as this."

Callahan dragged out a thick watch. "Steve, my boy," he said, "cops don't work on hunches. We leave that for the detective bureau. If the beat is quiet you're in luck."

"Just the same, Sergeant," Steve said, "I'll bet you better than even dough that we're being watched this very minute. I saw a shadow streak across the sidewalk at the mouth of the alley beside the Prentice Hardware Store. If we walk away from here, circle the block and meet in front of Johnston's Florist Shop on the other street, we'll be in a position to make sure."

Callahan took a casual look toward the alley.

"Lad," he said softly, "you got it bad. All rookies see shadows and guess they're everything from prospective burglars to ghosts. I used to see 'em myself when I was young and green."

"I saw what I saw," Steve insisted.

"I ain't saying you didn't, lad. And I'm going to help you prove that shadows aren't always made by lurking crooks. How long you been on the force now?"

"Less than a week. Does that make any difference?"

Callahan eyed him shrewdly. "You pop out of nowhere and you're out on a beat. Others have been waiting for months to get a crack at an opening, but you just come along and you're Patrolman Steve Huston. Who you got such a big drag with, lad?"

Steve grinned. "We can talk about that later. Now I want to earn my pay by stopping a crime. I'm betting there's a bunch of kids waiting for us to go away from this call box so they can break into that hardware store and get themselves a supply of guns."

"How do you know that?" Callahan asked. "Presuming the boys are hiding."

"That store has had a window full of guns for the last three days. Beautiful weapons, but they shouldn't be displayed like that. All they do is excite kids who might be planning a stickup. How about it, Sergeant? Do we meet as I suggested?"

"You're reaching for a lieutenant's bar," Callahan grumbled, "but I'm with you, Steve. We meet around the block."

Steve saluted and ambled slowly away. Callahan passed the alley without so much as a glance down it. Steve turned the corner and fought off a temptation to backtrack for a quick look. He could be wrong. Shadows are deceptive. He kept on going, turned into the street behind the hardware store and saw Callahan coming his way. They headed for a florist shop and its deep doorway.

"I saw nothing," Callahan grumbled again. "But just to prove you're like all rookies we'll check the alley and the hardware store. There's only a six-foot fence to climb. Come on!"

Callahan took the lead and Steve had to admit the sergeant knew how to work in the darkness. He made no false moves and he seemed to sense the location of such pitfalls as garbage cans, loose bricks or clothes lines. They reached the wooden fence and Steve leaped slightly to get a handhold on the edge and slowly pull himself up. He hung there, knees braced against the fence.

He could see nothing at first, but he did hear a scraping sound and then the clink of metal against metal. This was soon followed by a distinct snap as some sort of a lock broke under great pressure. Immediately afterward he saw a shadowy form spring down the alley toward the street. Someone had been dispatched to check on whether or not the noise had aroused any passersby.

STEVE let go and dropped lightly to the ground. He was grinning broadly.

"Sergeant, all those assorted shadows just jimmied a window and are climbing through. You circle the block again and cover the front door, because they'll have that ready to run through in case they need a fast retreat. I'll cover the rear and we ought to have 'em bottled up."

"I'm on my way," Callahan said. "I heard that snap, too, and I've heard locks break before. Is it kids, do you think?"

"I'm sure of it. Why?"

"Because I don't want to be shooting down some young fellow who has never tried to steal anything before. You give me a blast of your whistle just before you go in after 'em. I'll be set if they start running out the front door. Hop to it now."

Steve waited three full minutes, giving Sergeant Callahan time to get set. Then he went over the fence, hung his night stick on his badge and drew flashlight and gun. He approached the back of the hardware store softly.

He realized that while the burglars might be fifteen- or sixteen-year-old boys, it was possible each had already armed himself and loaded the guns they had stolen. Boys, in possession of brand new guns, might be tempted to use them. Steve didn't like the idea. He spun the cylinder of his Police Positive to be certain it was free and ready for action.

He soon found the broken window and saw how three stout steel bars had been sawed or cut through. Then a pane of glass had been broken, only to have the burglars find that the window lock was inaccessible. They had used a jimmy on it then.

If they were smart burglars they would have unlocked the back door for a quick getaway. Steve grasped the knob hard and turned it. The door was open. If

there was a lookout, Sergeant Callahan had either nailed him quietly or avoided him. Steve didn't care which. He put his police whistle between his lips and blew a loud blast on it.

Instantly he heard running footsteps inside the store. Then there were two quick shots, answered by the louder roar of Sergeant Callahan's .38. Steve ran across a store-room, reached a door to the store, and started to open it. He heard a board squeak behind him. Instead of turning, he dropped to the floor. It was a trick the Phantom had taught him. There was a streak of flame, the reverberating crash of a gun, and Steve almost fired back.

He loosened his pressure on the trigger, however, sprang to a crouch, and headed toward a row of shelves and cabinets in the center of the room. The gun roared again just as he reached the protecting barrier. Steve slipped his gun back into its holster, removed the night stick thong from around his badge and grasped the stick by its end. He suddenly stepped out, the night stick raised.

He saw the gunman, creeping forward on all fours. He was no more than thirty feet away and a perfect target. Steve flung the night stick. It went end over end gracefully before it hit the gunman across the top of the head. He fell flat and stayed that way.

Steve had moved fast as he hurled the club. He heard it strike and hurried toward the side of the gunman. A quick flash of his light showed him a boy of fifteen or sixteen. Huston took the gun out of his limp hand.

Then he approached the door to the store once again. He opened it wide. Two men were crouched behind a counter, covering Sergeant Callahan who was slowly making his way along the store.

"Stand up and lift 'em!" Steve said. "Let go of the guns or I'll kill you!"

The pair jumped erect. Their guns clattered to the floor. Steve didn't move. He was still eying the darkness, wondering if there could be any others lurking here.

"You two," Steve said, "this is a warning. If any others of your gang are hiding and take a shot at us, I'll gun you two out first. Sergeant—watch it. I think there are one or two more of them."

"Cuff that pair," Callahan ordered crisply, "while I go hunting rats."

Steve approached the pair. "Raise your hands higher," he said. "Now walk toward the wall. Stop four feet away from it, stick both hands out and let yourself fall against the wall. Support yourselves with the palms of your hands. Snap it up!"

They were soon helpless. Steve searched them and found another gun on each. He had no time to estimate how old they were. He inserted his night stick between the legs of one man, twisted it and sent the man crashing down. Steve clamped a handcuff on him quickly. Then he spilled the other burglar and used the other cuff on him.

"Only one more in the back room," Callahan called, "and he looks as if you gave him a treatment, Steve. I'm turning on the lights."

HUSTON shaded his eyes until they became accustomed to the glare. The shooting had attracted attention and radio cars were already pulling up. Steve turned to his prisoners. He judged them to be past the juvenile court age, but not by much.

They were not the type the Phantom had encountered in Bob Covert, Wally Walsh or Mark Tormay, though Tormay resembled them more than did his companions. These boys were hard-bitten, slum-raised tough guys, openly sneering at Steve as he studied them.

The only thing in the store which had been touched so far was the case of guns and that had been stripped of only eight weapons. Sergeant Callahan came out of the back room, herding his prisoner before him. He ordered a radio patrolman to call a wagon.

"Sometimes," Callahan grunted, "a wise kid remembers a ride in the paddy wagon more than he does the crime he committed. All right, boys, who put you up to this?"

"Santa Claus," one boy sneered. "He needed some rods to put in his bag for the kids at the orphans' home. You wouldn't be asking these questions if Rocky had kept his ears and eyes open. Letting that flatfoot slip up behind us. Rocky, when I get out of this I'm going to punch your head in."

"Come along," Callahan ordered gruffly. "After I have you tucked in a cell then it's my duty to go visit your parents and tell

them where you are. That's the life of a cop—for them that likes that sort of thing."

After the boys were taken away, Callahan phoned the owner of the hardware store to come down and guard his stock. Then he leaned against the counter and smiled at Steve.

"For a greenhorn you ain't bad," he acknowledged. "In fact, lad, I don't think you're quite as green as you look."

"If you could have seen how that one in the back room got the drop on me, Sergeant, you'd have sent me back to the Academy to study fundamentals of police work. I'm going to look around out back. I can't help but think some of them got away."

He turned on outside lights to illuminate the alley and areaway now. Below the jimmied window he found the tool with which the burglary had been committed. It looked like the weapon Mark Tormay had tried to use on the Phantom—a tire iron, but sharpened at the flat end. A more careful examination showed that it was a hand-made burglar tool, created out of the finest high-tempered steel. Steve carried it back into the store and arrived at the same time as the precinct Captain.

Callahan saluted him and told a brief story of the burglary and fight. Steve handed him the tool.

"They used it to jimmy the window," he explained. "Looks like a tailor-made burglar's implement to me, Captain."

"Show me the window they jimmied," the Captain said. "This starts to add up."

Steve and the Captain went out into the alley. The Captain studied the imprint of the jimmy in the old, soft wood of the window sill. He took a small ruler from his

pocket and made some measurements. Then he turned to Steve.

"You were well recommended for a rookie," he told Steve. "I guess the brass that detailed you to my precinct knew what they were talking about. Good work. You didn't just collar three plain burglars tonight, Huston. Not by a long shot. Those three young hoodlums robbed a jewelry store before they came here. The same jimmy was used to get in there, after the burglar alarm system had been wrecked. Of course I can't prove the same gang did both jobs, but the experts from the police labs will be able to tell. I think the same jimmy opened both windows and if so, the same men were using it."

"I didn't find any jewelry on them," Steve said. "Did they get much?"

"About eight thousand dollars' worth. Stuff that wasn't put in the main vault. One man was repairing watches in a back room. They brained him. He may die, so it's a good job you did tonight, Officer Huston. I'll be proud to report you to Headquarters."

"Thank you, sir," Steve said gratefully. "There's only one thing worries me and makes me think I'm not quite as good a patrolman as I seem to be. There were three boys in here. Each one had stolen two guns and I recovered six weapons. But there are eight empty boxes in that show case. If all the boxes were full, two guns are still missing and that means so is another one of those kids."

"Check around in back," the Captain said. "Even if one got away, three out of four is a pretty good bag, and we'll get the fourth one. These kids almost always squeal on one another."

[Turn page]

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STEVE went out the back door again. The areaway behind this building was wide, dark, and cluttered with refuse sheds, piles of old bricks and lumber and some packing cases probably saved for kindling. He moved warily, though he believed that if there had been a fourth member of the group, that burglar would have put considerable distance between himself and the scene of his crime by now.

Steve threw the beam of his flash at one exceptionally dark corner of the court. As he shut it off, he felt a gun pushed against the small of his back. Steve slowly raised his hands.

The gun was held steady. A hand came around him to open his coat and remove his service pistol. Then, in a hoarse whisper, the gunman gave orders.

"Copper, if I bump you it means absolutely nothing to me. I burn anyway. So we walk down this alley, out to the street and you got my arm like I'm pinched, see. Only I got a gun ready to blow you in half and maybe blast a couple of more bulls before they get me. You'll find us a car and you'll drive us off in it. Just you and me. Make it look good, copper, or they'll be hanging a wreath on your door."

## CHAPTER V

### CORPSE BEHIND BARS



QUIETLY the Phantom stepped into Mark Tormay's cell. Tormay lay on the bunk, huddled up in one final contortion of agony. On the floor beside the bunk was a tin cup, the bottom of which was slowly turning black.

"I can't imagine how it happened, Phantom," Chief Abel said. "Tormay was carefully searched when he was brought to the cell room. It's impossible that he had either a vial or medicinal paper of poison on him. And yet no one entered his cell between the time he was locked in and when he was found dead."

"The poison was, of course, in the cup of water he drank," the Phantom observed. "Have you looked for a container in which he might have secreted the stuff?"

"We even pulled the plumbing apart," Abel said. "There's no trace of it."

The Phantom stepped out and glanced at the neighboring cells. They were occupied, and the men in them swore that nobody had even come near Tormay.

"He was okay when they locked him up," one of the prisoners said. "There was a lot of fuss taking his picture and the pictures of those other crazy kids. Reporters were asking a lot of questions, and it wasn't doing my hangover any good. But then it died away. Tormay just fussed around the cell for a while, cussing pretty much. Then I heard him turn on the water and fill his tin cup. Maybe ten minutes went by and I heard him groaning. I started yelling for help but the cops don't pay much attention when one of their guests sings out. By the time somebody figured I wasn't fooling, Tormay was quiet. A goner, I guess."

"Where are the other boys, Chief?" the Phantom asked. "Walsh and Covert?"

"I had them locked in the women's division. The cells are cleaner, have real beds. Those two are just kids, but we found out that Tormay was nineteen. Old enough so he didn't rate a break. That's why I had him put in the regular cell room."

They walked back to Chief Abel's office. Word of the death had leaked out and the front office was full of reporters and photographers. They pressed around Abel, trying to get a statement from him. Nobody paid much attention to the Phantom, though this pack would have turned every bit of their energy on him if they had known who he was.

Abel got through them. He entered his office, locked the door and sat down wearily.

"This is bad," he admitted, "but wait until the big city papers hear about it. Phantom, if Tormay was slipped poison with which to commit suicide, or the dose was put into the only cup in his cell, the person who did it was among the reporters, cops, detectives and officials who crowded into the cell room to see Tormay. But I'll be doggoned if I could point out any likely suspect. I trust everyone who was there."

"You'd best check on them, just to be sure," the Phantom advised. "You're running this show, Chief. I'll be glad to offer what assistance I can, and there is certain help I'd like, too. The autopsy report, for one thing. A talk with the other two

boys if you can arrange it without that pack of wolves outside getting wise."

"They won't bother us, Phantom," Abel said. "They know—the newspapermen anyway—that juveniles can't be photographed or questioned. I'll have a man take you to a visitor's room and have Walsh and Covert sent in."

"That will be fine. I'll see them now, if I may."

Abel made a phone call.

"Phantom," he asked then, "what's your theory on the motive for Tormay's murder? Or do you think it was suicide?"

"It's difficult to tell, Chief. Tormay didn't strike me as the type to take his own life, even if he was in such a bad spot. Furthermore, the poison was a corrosive substance that could blacken the metal of the tin cup. If it was murder, the poison would hardly have been in the form of a powder. Tormay might have noticed it, and then, too, most poisons in the form of powders are none too readily soluble. I believe it was a colorless liquid. A minute quantity that couldn't be seen. But a liquid must be carried in either a bottle or a capsule. There was no bottle. He might have swallowed an empty capsule and an autopsy might show this. Though why he should empty the capsule into water is beyond me. It would have been easier to swallow the whole thing."

"I don't think it was suicide either," Abel agreed. "But why, Phantom? Why was he bumped off this way?"

**T**HE Phantom arose and stood before the Chief's desk.

"I had a half formed notion that Tormay wasn't just some kid bent on mischief," he said. "He seemed to boss the theft of that car though he did it so well Walsh and Covert probably don't realize it."

"What do you mean, Phantom? Tormay may have been a young toughie, but he was still a kid. Stealing that car was only another of those juvenile crimes."

"Was it?" the Phantom asked gently. "All your stolen cars aren't found. Enough stay missing to make it look as if someone was getting a profitable living out of it. I've no evidence to go on, but I would like to know why your city should suddenly develop a juvenile crime wave five times as great as that of any other city

this size and type."

"So would I," Abel sighed. "So would I, Phantom. I'll see you when you finish talking to the boys."

Wally Walsh was perched on the edge of a straight-backed wooden chair in a brick-walled office containing only three chairs. Bob Covert slumped in his. Both boys gave the Phantom worried glances. The Phantom pulled a chair over between them and sat down.

"You know who I am," he said. "I'm not a policeman. I have no desire to see either of you punished beyond what is properly due you for being so foolish. However, there are things I want to know."

"Where's my dad?" Covert asked. "I'm not saying anything unless he's here. He'll whale the daylights out of me if I tell you anything."

"I don't think he will, Bob. Before this is over he'll know he's been wrong and that he's partly to blame for what has happened. The trouble with your father is that he is too steeped in making money to pay much attention to his son. Your mother is dead, isn't she?"

"Yes, sir," young Covert replied.

"You're an only child. You deserved a better break than you've been given. What about other relatives?"

"There's Aunt Janis. She lives in Bartonville. I always liked to go see her. She's a schoolteacher there and lives in a nice house all by herself. We had a lot of fun last summer. She's a good sport. She's my mother's younger sister."

"A visit there might be good for you," the Phantom said. He glanced at dejected-looking Wally Walsh. "What about you, Wally?"

"My father will let me stay here so it'll be a lesson to me. He always says I got to clean up my own messes. He wouldn't let Mom come to see me. I know that's why she hasn't come."

The Phantom shook his head in sympathy. "You boys have been building up to this for some time, but your parents are as much to blame as you. Now perhaps if you help me and the police, things won't be so terribly bad. Of course, that policeman is dead. Nothing can bring him back. But Mark Tormay killed him. It was lucky that I happened to be right behind that blue convertible and saw it all. My

testimony will absolve you from direct blame. In fact I saw both of you try to stop him from getting into the back of the car."

"He told us what he was going to do," young Walsh said. "Mark was always so smart and so tough. I don't know how I got mixed up in this."

"Well, how did you?" the Phantom asked. "It didn't just happen around you, Wally. You were there by choice."

"Yeah, I know I was. But a couple of kids swiped another car last month and I wouldn't go along, and they said I was yellow. So this time I just went. I wish I'd let Mark and Bob call me yellow. I'd rather be yellow than be a k-killer. Then be locked up in here and maybe on my way to the reformatory."

"Did Mark Tormay mention anything about where you'd abandon the stolen car?" the Phantom asked. "Did he act as if he—well wanted that particular car stolen?"

"I don't think so," Bob said. "He just came along for the ride. I wanted that blue convertible. Mark did say I should drive it to Ankerston because we could leave it there and get the bus back."

"Did either of you ever hear about any other boys who stole a car and abandoned it in Ankerston?"

"I didn't," Bob replied.

"That car I was telling you about—when I wouldn't go along," Walsh said. "They were going to leave it in Ankerston."

"Who were the boys who stole it?" the Phantom asked.

"I don't know, sir. Only Mark Tormay. He was there, and there were two others. Just kids, I guess. Kinda scared, but they wanted to drive a big car."

"Why don't you ask Mark Tormay about this?" Bob demanded. "Why do we have to answer all the questions?"

The Phantom told it slowly and quietly. "Mark Tormay is dead. We don't know yet whether he took his own life or was murdered."

Both boys sat rigid, saying nothing, but filled with a new kind of terror.

"I'm going to try and get you boys out of here," the Phantom said. "I have no authority, but I think if your parents were told the exact circumstances and had certain facts pointed out to them, they might pull wires."

"My father wouldn't," Bob Covert said. "Anyway, I don't want him to. He'd skin me alive if he got me alone. I'm safer right here."

The Phantom arose. "And they say the crimes are those of juveniles," he said harshly. "I'll see you later, boys."

## CHAPTER VI

### WANTED FOR MURDER



STEVE HUSTON hoped they made a pretty picture. He held onto the elbow of a prisoner who really had him in custody. At the mouth of the alley radio police glanced at them with curiosity but saw nothing wrong. It was expected that a prisoner might be found lurking somewhere and be hauled off to the precinct station.

Huston led his man to a radio car parked half a block away. He got in and the man climbed in beside him. Now the crook openly held his gun pointed at Huston and for the first time Steve saw his face. It seemed vaguely familiar.

"Go ahead," the man snapped. "Take a good look. A lot of good it'll do you. Now start driving. Head for Route Nineteen out of town and keep on it. If any alarm goes out because of some trick you pulled before we got into this prowler car, I'll kill you and shoot it out with the other cops. I ain't being taken alive."

"What's your objection to that?" Steve asked. "Are you sick of living? Hand me a gun and I'll arrange that you stop—suddenly."

"Smart, huh? A comedian. I'm in no mood for laughs. Just keep quiet and drive like I tell you."

Steve didn't exactly concentrate on driving. He was trying to figure some way to get away from a man who kept a gun constantly prodding his ribs. The chance seemed remote, and the way this fugitive kept harping on shooting it out with the cops indicated that capture would mean death. Steve sneaked another quick look at the man. In profile his nose was thinner, his face sharper. Steve cried involuntarily.

"Wiley!"

The gunman gave a curt, mirthless

laugh. "So you finally tumbled. Camera-eye cop recognizes Tom Wiley, whose face is on every police department bulletin board in the country. What's the matter, copper? Don't I look like my picture on the readers?"

"Yes—yes, you do," Steve said. "You're wanted for murder and you'll get the chair when they catch up with you. But maybe you could fix that rap, make it only life. If you kill me you won't live long enough to make the chair. A cop killer never gets the slightest break."

"You think I might fix it, huh?" Wiley laughed harshly. "Listen, the minute a cop heeled with a gun spots me he'll start shooting. I can't make any deals. . . About a mile on we come to a side road. Take it."

Steve kept trying to think of a way out. He reached the side road and saw with considerable apprehension that it was a narrow dirt lane leading off into what looked like a dark wilderness. An ideal spot for the end of a ride, the kind he was being taken for. Wiley, from his more than ample police record, had shown that he lacked the element of mercy. There was little reason to think he had acquired any since his last arrest.

"You can stop the car right here, pal," Wiley said. "Then you can get out."

Steve had been in some ticklish spots before, but none quite as close to death as this. His usually facile tongue couldn't talk Wiley out of killing him. The man simply had nothing to lose. It was easier for him to murder this policeman than to let him go.

"I don't know what you're thinking, pal," Wiley said, "but don't try it. These kind of things can be done the easy way and the hard way. First we'll roll this bus down the side of that sand pit. There's a good deep pool at the bottom. Deep enough to hide the car. Deep enough to hide you, too, if you don't do as I say."

Steve carefully slid out of the car. Wiley watched him every moment and no gun was ever held steadier. Steve raised his arm slightly and stood there waiting. Wiley motioned with the gun.

"Twist the wheel and head her straight down. I know this territory like a book. Been hiding out here for weeks. There's just a bare hill smack down to the pool and if this car gets going fast enough it'll land way out in the water. Get her set,



FRANK HAVENS

then give her a shove."

Steve was puzzled. If Wiley intended to kill him it would have been simpler to use the gun in the car, leave the body of his victim behind the wheel and get rid of both the corpse and the car at the same time. Wiley didn't handle this with the usual acumen his breed showed in cases of murder.

STEVE worked the police coupé around until it was headed down the slope. He gave it a shove and the coupé gained momentum. It disappeared in the darkness, but he could hear it rolling faster and faster down the long cleared hillside. Then there was a crash and the splash of water. In a few moments the rural silence returned.

"You carry a flashlight," Wiley said. "Take it out of your pocket and drop it on the ground."

Steve obeyed, half tempted to hurl the heavy flash at the man and take his chances with the bullets that were bound to crash out of the killer's gun.

"I changed my mind," Wiley said, with a laugh. "Pick the flash up again. Go on—pick it up."

Steve thought he recognized the game then. Wiley was playing with him. When he got tired of it he would shoot. Steve bent and reached for the flashlight. The

blow hit him across the back of the neck. It was well-placed, by an expert in these things, and it paralyzed him clear down to the toes. His uniform hat fell off and he landed flat on his face. Wiley stepped closer, nudged him with his toe, then pulled back a foot and kicked him on top of the head.

Steve's senses didn't quite leave him. He knew it was night, the grass was cool, and there were stars in the sky. He knew that a murderer stood above him, and that death was inevitable, only in this case it would come too soon, by many years.

Then the stars and the ground and the cool grass and even his thoughts all became one rolling, jumbled mass of confusion. The sky passed in review before his open eyes, vanished, then came back for an encore. He didn't realize he was rolling down that smooth hill until he felt the iciness of the water as it closed around him.

But it was only inches deep this close to shore and he had stopped rolling. He was on his back. The cold water shocked his nerves and muscles into a state of near normalcy. He wanted to get up, to get out of that water, but he knew better. Dimly he could hear Wiley coming down the incline, then the ray of the flashlight stabbed the darkness, swept across the edge of the pond and centered on him. Before the spot illuminated his face, Steve closed his eyes and pretended unconsciousness.

Wiley didn't step into the water. He merely nudged Steve again, seemed satisfied that he was unconscious, and bent down. He grasped Steve by one shoulder, turned him clumsily until his face lay in the water. An unconscious man would quickly drown that way. Steve held his breath.

Wiley laughed, walked backward up the incline for several steps, then decided his deed was done. He wheeled and began moving faster. Steve raised himself slightly, filled his lungs, then let himself down again in case Wiley changed his mind or threw the beam of that flash his way.

After a moment or two, Steve saw the bobbing flashlight near the top of the incline. He crawled out of the water, shivered in the cold air and started up the hill himself. At the top he lay flat and watched the darkness for signs of Wiley.

The wanted killer appeared to be quite

certain of himself. He was using the flashlight again, and he had turned into some sort of a lane. Then Steve saw the red wall of a barn and finally the flash lit the front door of a farmhouse. Wiley let himself in. No lights were turned on, but Steve had seen enough.

He found his uniform cap in the lane and put it on, wincing as it pressed against the growing lumps on his scalp. He broke into a run, reached the highway, and when a car came rolling toward the city, he stepped into the middle of the road and held up his hand authoritatively. The car came to a quick stop.

Steve gave the driver a short explanation and ordered him to head for the nearest house with a telephone. Steve changed his mind. A house telephone didn't offer the privacy he wanted. He had himself driven to a small town only a mile further on.

**T**HERE he entered a phone booth and called the Center Hotel. He asked for Frank Havens and the publisher was soon on the wire.

"This is Huston," the reporter said. "I'm in a drug store in the center of Plainfield, ten miles north of the city. A wanted killer named Tom Wiley snatched me. He thinks I'm dead. He took part in the stick-up of that hardware store tonight. Maybe you heard about it, maybe you didn't. Anyway a sergeant and I nailed three kids robbing the place and it seems they also busted into a jewelry store."

"I know about both jobs," Havens said. "I also know you've been reported missing. Go on, Steve."

"This Wiley is holed up in a farmhouse. I know just where it is. I think he knows a lot about this juvenile crime wave. Maybe he's bossing some of the kids and teaching them how to steal. Anyway he's wanted for murder, so it doesn't make much difference."

"Stay where you are," Havens ordered. "I'll send the Phantom out. If he sizes up the situation and decides a raiding party of police are needed, we'll arrange that, too. He may want to get this Wiley without having him shot to ribbons. At any rate, you stay where you are."

"Yes, sir," Steve said. "Shall I call re-write on your local paper and give them a scoop?"

"No—forget you're a reporter. When you go back to writing stories, I want you to have a really big one."

"Yes, sir," Huston said happily.

## CHAPTER VII

### SIEGE



WHEN the Phantom reached the office of Chief Abel, he found that official in the middle of a press conference. There were three newspapers in town, but reporters and photographers from various press services were present and crowded the office.

Chief Abel gave them routine information, said he didn't know whether Tormay had taken his own life or been murdered, and that it was up to the Medical Examiner's office and the Detective Bureau to determine that. When the theft of the blue convertible was mentioned, Chief Abel waved his hand toward a young man who was seated in a corner and quietly observing the whole thing with considerable interest.

"This is Kirk Sloper, boys," Chief Abel said. "It was his car they stole."

The Phantom, near the door, simply watched. Press conferences in this fairly large city were no different than they were in New York. Reporters everywhere had a natural flair for fast talking, faster acting, and adapting themselves to anything that turned up. To a man they closed in on Kirk Sloper. One of the photographers stuck his camera close and the flash bulb blinded Sloper. He clapped both hands to his eyes, arose, and looked for the photographer. Spotting him, he pushed his way through the other reporters and seized the photographer by both shoulders and shook him violently.

Kirk Sloper was tall, rangy, and, like Richard Curtis Van Loan, had never permitted too much money to make him lazy. He was in excellent physical trim and when the smaller, more wiry photographer wrenched himself free and swung one, Sloper was prepared. He ducked the blow, drove the photographer against the wall and poised a fist. Then he lowered it, stepped back and laughed.

"All right," he said. "But next time you

shove a flash bulb in my face as you set it off, I'll break your camera and your neck."

"Yes, you will." The photographer adjusted his coat and hung his camera more securely over his shoulder. "Guys like you only read the papers to see if their picture is on the society page. This time you're making Page One, so what are you complaining about?"

"I don't like being nearly blinded," Sloper told him.

"Maybe you don't like close-ups," the reporter derided. "What's the matter, friend? Afraid the bags under your eyes will show?"

Sloper cocked a fist again, and the photographer made a hasty retreat out of range. He grinned broadly and the others laughed. Sloper lowered his fist and laughed also. He had been taken for a brief ride, knew it, and took it like a good sport.

"Okay, Mr. Sloper," the short, wiry photographer said. "I figured you for a stuffed shirt and I figured wrong. You want me to take another shot? I'm Mornay of the *Sphere*."

"It's all right," Sloper said. "Forget the whole incident."

"How about some pictures of that convertible?" Mornay asked. "Just to show what the younger element is stealing in the way of cars these days."

"It's out front," Sloper said. "Come along. You can take all the pictures you like."

Most of the reporters filed out. To the few who remained, Chief Abel gave some additional and rather meagre information. Finally the office was clear and the Phantom came over to sit down.

"I've kept your name out of this," Chief Abel said. "I know you asked me to do that, but we can't keep it out forever. Not when you'll be an essential witness in the trial of those two boys."

"I've been talking to young Walsh and Bob Covert," the Phantom said. "They're not bad boys. As in many of these cases their parents need punishing more than the boys do. Is there anything new on the death of Mark Tormay?"

"Not yet. They'll do an autopsy soon now. We've received word of two more burglaries. One, of a jewelry store, resulting in the serious injury of a clock repairer who was working late in a back

room. The other job was entering a hardware store, presumably after guns. It seems your friend Steve Huston makes a good officer. He helped nail the boys who broke into the store."

"Fine!" The Phantom chuckled. "Steve is probably enjoying himself. I said he'd be remembered on that beat. So there were two more jobs. Did they tie up?"

"Yes. A jimmy was found at the hardware store job and it is apparently the same instrument used to force entrance to the jewelry store. The marks caused by the tool match perfectly. Have you heard from Steve Huston?"

"No. Should I have heard from him, Chief?"

"I don't know." Abel frowned. "Steve apparently made a pinch and took his prisoner off in a radio car. He didn't ask permission to go off like that nor to borrow the car, but off he went. We haven't heard from him, and I wondered if this prisoner might be someone he wanted you to see first."

**T**HE Phantom shook his head.

"I haven't heard from him at all," he declared. "Steve doesn't normally act like that. He plays it straight and never takes unusual steps without some definite reason. I don't like it, Chief."

"Well, neither do I, Phantom, but we can't do anything about it. Steve, his prisoner and the radio car all seem to have vanished. I expect though, that he'll turn up. Reporters and news photographers are unpredictable beings. Take that undersized squirt, Mornay. Did you see him tantalize Sloper? Mornay likes to get society people at a disadvantage. He gets more kick out of an uncomplimentary picture of someone like Sloper than in a prize news shot. But he picked on the wrong man when he went after Kirk Sloper."

"So I noticed," the Phantom commented. "Tell me, were all those people around Mark Tormay just before he was found dead? They were taking his picture, I understand."

"Yes," Chief Abel said. "As a matter of fact I called the reporters to my office and had no intention of turning the meeting into a press conference. I wanted to ask them about Tormay. Naturally they tried to help, but there was so much confusion in the cell room that nobody really knows

what happened."

"Was Sloper there?" the Phantom asked.

"No. He came down to pick up his car. The blue convertible those boys stole. Are you asking these questions with some definite suspicion on your mind?"

"Someone dumped poison into Tormay's cup—if he didn't kill himself. The only people who were near him were your men and those reporters. That's true, isn't it?"

"Yes. I . . . Wait a moment!" Chief Abel scowled darkly. "I forgot about Joe Proctor. Never saw him anyway. The desk captain phoned me to ask if Proctor could visit the boys. Proctor is an attorney. Not too prosperous a one because instead of attending strictly to business, he makes it a practice to insert himself into the arrests of juveniles."

"That's interesting," the Phantom observed.

"Proctor is, too. He played college and professional football and got the name of 'Killer' because he was one of the roughest men who ever played the game. He made his own way through life. In fact, he was a juvenile delinquent himself and spent a year in a reform school. That's what turned him into a crusader for the rights of juveniles. He jumps on anyone who violates a single law with reference to junior-size crooks."

"And he had an interview with Tormay," the Phantom mused. "I think I'll see Attorney Proctor."

The phone rang and Chief Abel answered it. The Phantom saw him grow tense as he listened.

"Thank you, Mr. Havens," Chief Abel said. "I'll attend to it at once." He hung up and looked at the Phantom. "That was Frank Havens. He just heard from Steve. It seems Steve wasn't exactly taking a prisoner when the men saw him drive off in a radio car. It was Steve who was the prisoner and his captor happened to be a wanted killer named Tom Wiley."

"Where is Steve now?" the Phantom asked quickly.

"Wiley tried to murder him, and slipped up. Steve knows where the man is hiding. It's far out, in a farming section, thank heaven. I'll assemble a squad and get out there at once. Wiley is a dangerous man. He's boasted that he'll never be taken alive."

The Phantom stood up. "I'm going out there first, Chief. Maybe Steve and I can hold that killer. Where do you meet Steve?"

"He's in a drug store in the center of a village called Plainfield. Go on ahead if you like. It will take a few moments to get a squad together and properly armed. Steve doesn't have to show us the place. We know where it is."

The Phantom hurried out of Headquarters. He had a fast car parked close by. In front of Headquarters, Kirk Sloper was



STEVE HUSTON

still being questioned and photographed as he sat in the convertible. Nobody paid any attention to the Phantom as he slipped by the crowd.

In a few moments he was racing north to meet Steve Huston and there were a number of things on the Phantom's mind to confuse him. Primarily, the death of Tormay was the most puzzling. Why should a boy of about nineteen be killed? What sinister plot lay behind his murder?

Because the Phantom never doubted that it was murder. Tormay hadn't been filled with terror even though he stood a chance of facing the electric chair. He was the blustering type. He might have folded up when he faced the judge for sentence, but until his fate was assured, he would have brazened the whole thing out.

**H**AD he been killed because he knew too much, and someone was afraid that under the pressure of a murder rap, the young man might talk, might be agreeable to a deal in order to save his neck? That was highly possible, but what could Tormay know?

Wally Walsh and Bob Covert were out of it so far as the Phantom's suspicions were concerned. They were just a couple of frustrated boys out on what they had thought would be an exciting lark. They were cured now.

The Phantom wondered about Attorney Proctor, whom he had not met as yet, but who had visited the boys. A man who professed to devote much of his valuable time to defending boys gone wrong, was in an excellent position to reap a tremendous profit if he could arrange to pick from these boys those who would make good thieves.

For the Phantom had few doubts but that an adult brain was behind this sudden rise in juvenile crime in this city. Such a crime wave doesn't materialize of itself. It had to be planned, installed, and carried out. And now, it appeared, Steve Huston had uncovered something pertinent to the Phantom's half-formed theory about this crime wave. One member of a juvenile gang had turned out to be a wanted murderer. That fact lent strength and substance to the Phantom's idea that these boys were being led.

Steve Huston was waiting on the corner near the closed and darkened drug store. He knew this disguise the Phantom was wearing. Both he and Frank Havens had familiarized themselves with it even before they all came to this city. So Steve swung aboard the car without hesitation.

"Am I glad to see you!" he said. "I was afraid Mr. Havens wouldn't be able to reach you."

"He didn't. He called Chief Abel, and I happened to be there. The Chief is organizing a raiding party to surround the place. But I'd like to get at this Wiley fellow first, if I can. Give me the details, Steve."

"There isn't much to tell," Steve grunted. "He got the drop on me, kidnaped me and a radio car. I recognized him from wanted bulletins on the police station walls. He ran the radio car down a sand pit and into a pond, slugged me, and rolled

me down into the same pit. I landed in the water and he turned me over, face down so I'd drown. But I wasn't as unconscious as he thought I was."

The Phantom rolled his car along at a fast clip. "Let me understand this, Steve. Wiley had a gun trained on you and instead of using it he rolled you down into a sand pit?"

"He used the gun all right. But as a club."

"You were far out, where any shooting wouldn't be heard, Steve?"

"Well. . . Yes, I suppose so."

"Then why didn't he shoot you? Why did he risk clubbing you when often a blow from a gun butt is ineffective and sometimes the victim gets at his assailant before the gun can be used to fire a bullet. And he was content to turn you over in shallow water when he could have dropped a rock on your head, or put a foot on your neck and held your mouth and nose under until he knew you were dead. Wiley was in no hurry, otherwise he'd hardly have gone to this hideout."

Steve whistled sharply. "You're telling me that Wiley had no intention of killing me, that he wanted me to get away and spread an alarm? But why, Phantom? The man is wanted for murder. He knows if he isn't killed in a gun battle, he'll die in the chair."

"I don't know why, but if we can find Wiley—" The Phantom braked the car. "Where is that side road?"

Steve directed him there and soon the Phantom cut the lights and rolled to a stop on the rise overlooking the farm where Wiley had taken refuge. There were no lights down there but that was hardly surprising. Wiley would make it a point to see that no signs of life were visible.

"We haven't much time and we'll have to move fast," the Phantom said. "When the police arrive it won't be healthy to be caught between their bullets and Wiley's. But I want at least to make a try at getting him alive. We'll circle the farm, come at it from the rear, and try to get inside. Chief Abel will see our car and if we're not around and don't answer his hail, he'll know we must have made it."

They hurried across abandoned pasture land, now high with weeds. The Phantom handed Steve a gun and kept his own ready for quick action. In a few moments

they were behind the farmhouse. The Phantom dropped to his knees and crept toward a fringe of trees and brush about a hundred yards from the house. Steve was at his side. As they neared the open space they lay flat.

"I'm going ahead," the Phantom whispered. "You stay here and cover me. If Wiley starts shooting, keep him busy so I can either withdraw or make a run for the house. Ready, Steve?"

"Ready," Steve said between his teeth. "Good luck, Phantom."

THERE was no hope of approaching the rear door without exposing himself. The Phantom was crouched and moving softly and rapidly across that cleared space. Nothing happened. The house remained dark and quiet. Perhaps Wiley really believed he had killed that patrolman and was in no danger. Perhaps he figured if a squad came they would attack from the front of the place and make little attempt at stealth.

The Phantom reached a small shed. He circled it, keeping close to the shadows. As he passed the wide door he smelled the odor of gasoline. The shed was apparently used as a garage. He left the protection of the small building and had taken a dozen steps when a gun cracked.

It was shooting at almost point-blank range and in daylight might have been lethal. But in the hazy starlight, replete with hovering shadows from trees and outbuildings, the Phantom was a dim form and the bullet missed him by a yard.

The next one wouldn't. He fell flat. From behind him Steve Huston opened up, shooting at one of the first floor windows. His slugs smashed glass and smacked into the side of the house. The Phantom had no time to waste now. Steve's covering shots would keep the killer from using that window, but he would quickly go to another room and open up before Steve could know which new place to cover. The Phantom was close to the house now.

Glass crashed somewhere above. He looked up in time to see the muzzle of a rifle protrude from a second floor window. The Phantom snapped two quick shots but Steve, because of the distance and the darkness, didn't know what target the Phantom had chosen, and held his fire.

## CHAPTER VIII

## FARMHOUSE MYSTERY

The Phantom straightened and went into a spring that carried him toward the back door which had a storm porch protecting it. The rifle cracked and the Phantom actually felt the impact of a bullet hitting the ground close to his feet.

Then Steve opened up, with a target now. The flash of the rifle had sent him into action. The Phantom reached the storm porch, flung himself across it and set his back against the wall near the rear door.

For a moment there was a grim silence. Nobody had anything to shoot at. Then the Phantom heard the first of Chief Abel's vanguard of cars. Steve fired a shot into the air as a warning and the police cars stopped out of range of even a rifle. Men got out, armed to the teeth with every kind of a weapon the Police Department had in its arsenal.

Tommy-gunners moved into position to cover all sides of the house. Men with powerful and portable searchlights set up their equipment. Detectives and patrolmen with tear gas guns crept closer, for their weapons had a shorter range.

Chief Abel manned a loud-speaker.

"Wiley!" his voice rolled out over the countryside. "You can't get away. We're coming in after you in two minutes, and we'll come shooting."

The Phantom slowly reached out, located the doorknob and turned it. Wiley should be at the front of the house by now. If that door was unlocked. . . He sighed because by the way the door felt it wasn't merely locked but bolted as well.

There was a scurry of feet and the Phantom's gun automatically came up. Steve leaped up the porch steps and flattened himself beside the Phantom.

"The Chief knew from the shot I fired that we had the back of the place covered," he said. "They'll attack from the other three sides, but that doesn't make being in or near this house any safer. We've either got to nail Wiley or get away from here!"

"Let's go in," the Phantom said, with a light laugh.



TOMMY-GUN cut loose first. Then searchlights bathed the house in brilliant light. Another tommy-gun started up. The Phantom stepped back, pointed his gun at the door lock and fired twice. The lock broke, but the door still held.

"Bolt near the top," Steve grunted after an examination. "I can crash that."

From inside the house a gun cut loose. The same rifle, and it fired three fast shots which became a signal for every policeman to open up. Glass crashed. From inside the Phantom and Steve could hear the dull plops as tear gas bombs exploded. The man penned up in here hadn't fired after he had let him loose those three shots.

Steve launched an attack at the door and sent it crashing open under one assault. The Phantom went in first, gun ready. He coughed as some of the tear gas seeped out to greet him. Then he saw the prone figure in the front hallway.

"Steve!" the Phantom called. "Steve—they got him! Tell them to stop shooting."

Steve's voice rang out. The police began closing in fast. The Phantom stepped up toward the recumbent figure, his automatic slanted down and ready. He pushed a toe against the fallen man's ribs, drew no response, and kicked the rifle he still held out of his unresisting hand.

The Phantom bent quickly and turned the man over. Those searchlights illuminated the hallway fairly well, but for a moment the Phantom thought the shadows were deceptive enough to make him think that Tom Wiley resembled Philip Covert in appearance. He looked closer and knew this was no resemblance. He was looking at the actual man. He was the father of Bob Covert, who had stolen Sloper's car and who was now in a cell.

Steve reached him as the Phantom straightened up. Men were already on the porch and hammering at the door.

"Watch it, Steve," the Phantom said. "Wiley may still be here. The man on the floor is someone else. Let the police in and warn them. I'm going to fade out for a few moments."

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The Phantom went through the back door, encountered a group of policemen and exhibited his badge. It was no regulation badge, but it was known to every policeman from coast to coast. Duplication was hardly likely because of the expense, for the Phantom Detective's identifying badge was a shield of precious metal set with jewels in the shape of a domino mask.

The Phantom retreated until he reached that shed he had circled. There was no lock on the door and he opened it. A black sedan of a common make was inside. Its radiator was hot, as if it had been driven at a furious speed.

When the Phantom returned to the farmhouse, he quietly moved into the background. That ostentatious photographer was there, maneuvering about to get angle shots of the corpse. Kirk Sloper was mysteriously on the scene, too, but like the Phantom, taking no part in the excitement.

Through the open front door, bathed in the light of the searchlights, the Phantom saw Sloper's blue convertible. Both front doors were wide open. The Phantom drifted over beside the man.

"It seems that Mr. Mornay is having a field day with his camera," the Phantom remarked.

Sloper laughed. "I guess you saw the argument in Chief Abel's office. Mornay belongs in the movies. He's the exact movie version of what a screen crime photographer is like. I think he's a bit crazy. When the flash came about this raid, I was parked in front of Police Headquarters and Mornay was taking pictures of the car. He jumped in beside me and made me drive him here. I hit eighty-five once and he wasn't satisfied."

The Phantom smiled and nodded in an abstract manner. He was looking across the room toward a door that seemed to be dented in half a dozen places. It was directly opposite a window which had been shattered by the fire of tommy-gun.

The Phantom went over to this door. It led into a stairway to the cellar. He studied the dents, rapped knuckles against the door and grunted in surprise. The door was made of steel.

He swung it shut and found that it didn't even fit the doorway, although it made an effective shield.

THERE were patrolmen in the cellar, so the Phantom knew no one had made an escape by that route. He sought out Chief Abel who seemed to have aged a dozen years.

"What in the world can have happened here?" Abel asked. "Where is Wiley and how did Covert get in this house? We killed him. He was riddled with a burst from a submachine-gun."

"I know," the Phantom said. "I looked him over. Steve swears he saw Wiley come here and I believe him, of course. But Steve had to go to town and phone. Wiley could have suspected trouble, could even have returned to the sand pit into which he had thrown Steve to drown, found no corpse there, and realized Steve must have got away. It wouldn't take Wiley long to get clear once he knew a raid was bound to happen. But that doesn't explain how Covert came to be here."

"Well, don't look to me for an explanation," the Chief said. "Last time I saw Covert he was threatening to kill you."

The Phantom pursed his lips. "Chief—I wonder. Could this be some sort of a scheme to discredit me and your Department? Apparently we've gunned an innocent man to death. A man we didn't particularly like, and who had threatened us, but just the same he was no criminal."

"Discredit us for what reason?" the Chief demanded. "Look here—Covert was the only person in this house. Nobody got out of it. There are no tunnels, no secret exits. You covered the back door. My men had the rest of the place under observation. If anyone else had been here, we'd have him, too. Therefore Covert opened fire on us, didn't even try to identify himself and died resisting arrest. Maybe he'd gone crazy over that boy of his, and thought killing a few cops would even things up."

"Chief," the Phantom said, "have Covert's body watched every moment. Send it to the hospital morgue the moment the Medical Examiner finishes. I recommend that Covert's scalp be carefully examined for any signs of a bruise with some instrument that might not have raised a lump or caused a laceration but knocked him out. That, or the presence of a sleep-inducing drug."

"I'll see to it," Abel said.

"One more thing. In a shed behind this house you'll find a car. Check on it. If it was stolen try to ascertain about when it was taken. I'm going back to Headquarters for a talk with young Bob Covert. I'll break the news to him, even though I'd much rather face a gun battle with a murderer."

"Good idea." Abel mopped his face. "Maybe he knows of some reason why Covert took the place of a murderer and elected to shoot it out with us."

The Phantom signaled Steve and took him to one side.

"Keep your ears open," he said. "Stay in your rôle of a patrolman—a rookie. I'll meet you later."

The Phantom made his way back to where he had parked his car. He got behind the wheel and turned the car around to head back to the city. He was sorely puzzled now. Finding Philip Covert in that farmhouse was incredible. It had to have some meaning, but what? Unless his first theory was true, and Covert had died to discredit both the Police Department and the Phantom Detective.

Boys, members of juvenile gangs, would be getting leery and frightened at the work of the police and the Phantom. Therefore, if someone wanted to make them lose this sudden fear, turning the Police and the Phantom into fools was the best way.

They had trapped Tom Wiley, a badly wanted man. They had staged a savage all-out attack, and killed an innocent man. Somewhere along the line a grave mistake had been made, and if the police made such silly errors they couldn't be expected to track down gangs that preyed on the city.

With a good understanding of a teen-age boy's mind, the Phantom knew how such a boy would be impressed by the fiasco at the farmhouse. Such boys would laugh at the discomfiture of the police, visualize how Chief Abel must have looked when he saw his men had bagged an innocent and rather important citizen instead of a wanted murderer. The boys would drink in every line, every word reported in the newspapers. They would call the police stupid, and avidly start making plans to go ahead with their schemes because they had little to fear from the police now.

The Phantom pulled up in front of Headquarters and went in. He told the desk



CHIP DORLAN

captain briefly what had happened, asked permission to see Bob Covert, and the desk captain arranged to send the boy into that visitor's room.

**B**OB sensed that something had happened. He sat down slowly and gave the Phantom an anxious look.

"I've bad news for you, Bob," the Phantom said. "Your father is dead."

Young Covert turned pale, bit his lip, then suddenly arose. He walked over to the barren wall, faced it and stood there for a few moments. He rubbed his eyes before he turned around, but his chin was up and his shoulders were back.

"Your father was killed by police bullets," the Phantom said. "They were after a murderer who took part in a robbery to-night in which three teen-age boys were involved. He was traced to this hideout. How your father got there, or why he was there, no one can even guess. The murderer had vanished. There was no one else in the house, and apparently your father fired on the police who were closing in. I know someone shot at me a couple of times."

"He had an awful temper," Bob Covert said. "He said he'd kill you—remember?"

But just the same I don't think he'd hurt anyone. Dad was okay. Sometimes he didn't seem to understand what I wanted, but that was all right. Dad wouldn't try to kill anybody. He just talked a lot. You got to believe that."

"I do, Bob. That's why I came here before anyone else could reach you. Think carefully now. Was your father mixed up with any crooks? Did he gamble, stay out nights, go away on mysterious trips?"

"Gosh, no. He used to be in bed before I was and he didn't have too much money. That was why we didn't get along so well. I wanted more than he could afford."

"Bob," the Phantom said, "your father's death was murder. Somehow his death was important to a band of killers. You and I must determine the reasons, locate the guilty men, and see that they are punished. That means I will need your help. Your very active help."

"Just ask me anything." Bob's eyes were wet again. "I loved my dad. He loved me too. I—I want to—to—"

"You mentioned an aunt whom you used to visit," the Phantom said. "What is she like? How old, for instance?"

"Aunt Janis?" Bob rubbed his eyes again. "Oh, she's young. In her twenties all right. She's awful pretty and I always liked to go there. We used to go out to dances and everybody thought she was my girl instead of my aunt."

"I see, Bob, I'm going to visit your aunt. Then, later on, someone is coming to your house. Someone you will greet as your aunt and call your aunt. But you'll never have seen her before. You must make everyone in town accept her as Janis Scott. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir. She's some sort of a—a detective. Isn't that so, sir?"

"You might call her that. A great deal depends on you, Bob. There's another thing, of equal importance. You must indicate to everyone that you feel the police are responsible for the death of your father, and that you hate them for it."

"Yes, sir," Bob said. "They—they didn't kill him on purpose, did they?"

"I assure you they did not. As a matter of fact, I think he was dead when the police bullets hit him. Dead or unconscious. It was plain murder, Bob. Your father is the second to die that way. Tor-

may was first."

"Yes, I know." Bob nodded.

"You're positive that Tormay said or did nothing which would lead you to believe he was part of a gang, and that Sloper's car wasn't going to be simply abandoned, but really disposed of?"

"He never said anything, sir. Except. . . Well, when he was climbing from the front into the back seat to try and ditch the motorcycle cop, he talked under his breath a little. About no cop was going to stop him."

"Thank you," the Phantom said. "I'll put our plan into motion as soon as possible. Has anyone in your neighborhood ever seen your Aunt Janis?"

"She's never been in this city, sir. No one will know her. But what about Wally Walsh? Has he got to stay locked up?"

"I don't think so. With the death of Tormay, I doubt either of you will be held for murder. Wally Walsh isn't to know you're working with me. Even to him you must act as though you hate the police."

The Phantom arose and so did Bob Covert. The Phantom offered him his hand. Bob took it. He did his best to smile a little. It didn't come off very well, but he knew that he was being accepted as an adult, being trusted and given a man's work to do. His eyes may have been tear-dimmed, but they held a great deal of pride, too.

## CHAPTER IX

### DAINGEROUS PLANS



MURIEL HAVENS followed the headwaiter to a table in a booth, smiled her appreciation for this privacy, and sat down. She was small enough to be called petite and she seemed to sparkle with good health and beauty. Her dark eyes were bright and alert.

"I'm expecting a friend," she said. "We'll order when he arrives."

The headwaiter bowed, left two menu cards and went away. Muriel leaned back and watched the entrance to this smart restaurant. Through that door would come a man who was an utter stranger to her. She had no idea what he would look like. He might be stocky and give the

illusion that he wasn't very tall, or he might be lanky and rangy. He might look like a prosperous professional man, a down-in-the-mouth failure, an indolent cafe-hopping playboy, or a shifty-eyed gangster. She wouldn't know it was the Phantom until he sat down beside her and smiled, and she looked into his eyes.

Those eyes always intrigued her. She was certain she could recognize them anywhere and yet, while they seemed familiar in any rôle he undertook she could never tell where she had seen them before. In a way, this man of many disguises and identities—they called him the "Man of a Thousand Faces"—reminded her of half a dozen people and she knew that was the highest praise of his skill in switching character she could offer him.

She hardly noticed an ordinary-looking man who did enter unobtrusively. It would have been difficult for anyone to tell whether or not he belonged in this place, though he had a certain assurance about him. He stopped for a moment on the low balcony at the entrance, and his eyes quickly scanned the room and everyone in it.

Then he made his way down the steps to the main floor, between tables, and came straight to Muriel's booth. His right hand slowly moved up as if to massage his jaw. Instead he gently tugged at his left ear lobe, and that was the signal by which Muriel knew him.

"Phantom!" she said softly. "It's so nice to work with you again."

He grinned at her as he sat down. "You may not think it's so nice by the time this is finished, Muriel. We're bucking a tough proposition. Let's order first, then I'll brief you on all the details."

She listened attentively, a short time later, while the Phantom outlined the case.

"This little city of which I am speaking," he explained, "has shown an amazing rise in the juvenile crime rate. Your father decided to try and find out why. We still aren't certain, though it begins to look as if someone is exploiting these juveniles, teaching them the ways of crime, preaching about what they can do with the money they'll have. Making them envious of those who have more than they. It's a clever, ruthless campaign, Muriel. It has led to three murders so far, and the thing has hardly begun."

"And what am I to do," Muriel asked with a smile, "that is to be so dangerous?"

"Three boys stole a car. One of the boys killed a motorcycle cop rather than risk capture. That boy was himself killed—poisoned—while he was locked up. There is some question as to whether it was suicide or murder, but I believe someone killed him. The father of one of the other boys—a nice kid named Bob Covert—was caught in a police trap set for a wanted killer named Tom Wiley. In my opinion Wiley deliberately led Steve Huston to believe he was hidden in a farmhouse so that Steve would bring a raiding party to the place."

"And Steve did," Muriel reasoned. "I know how that redhead works. What happened there, Phantom?"

"Someone fired at the police. At Steve and me, too. Naturally the police threw everything they had at the farmhouse. We didn't find this wanted murderer, Tom Wiley, in there. We did find Philip Covert, the father of this boy mixed up in the cop kill."

"But why on earth did they kill him?" Muriel asked. "Or did they? Was he involved with the crooks or this killer named Wiley?"

"We don't know," the Phantom confessed. "In my opinion someone else was in that farmhouse with Covert. Someone who held Covert a prisoner and when the police began firing tommy-guns, this man put Covert in the path of the bullets,"

**M**URIEL wrinkled her smooth forehead in puzzlement.

"But how did this second party get away, Phantom?" she asked. "The house must have been surrounded."

"It was. Yet Covert was the only person we found. However, I did locate a car in a shed behind the house. It was a car which was stolen off the city streets not half an hour before we rushed the farmhouse. Whoever used it, didn't spare the horses. The radiator was plenty hot. And then we discovered another interesting fact. The door leading to the cellar of the farmhouse was made of steel. Bullet-proof stuff."

"Then it seems someone planned all this and made certain not to be hit by a bullet," Muriel said.

"Yes. Tom Wiley could have installed

that door. We think he meant to make a stand of it in that farmhouse. Now I'm leading up to your part in all this. Philip Covert, the man who was killed, has a sister-in-law named Janis Scott. I've seen and talked to her. She's about your age and, although you don't look alike, you are both of the same general coloring. Janis Scott isn't known in that town. I want you to come help Bob Covert, the boy. He will accept you as his Aunt Janis. I've covered all the details."

"That doesn't sound dangerous, Phantom," Muriel said.

"Wait—and listen," the Phantom told her. "You will be accepted as Bob's aunt because there is no reason why you shouldn't be. You'll hint that Philip Covert phoned you not long before he died and that you are dissatisfied with the way the police have handled the whole thing. You will even say that the police can't be trusted, and you intend to take care of matters in your own way."

Muriel nodded slowly and pursed her lips. "Now it comes. If this Philip Covert had an idea he was to be killed and phoned his sister-in-law just prior to his death, he might have told her something. To find out what that was, those crooks are bound to be checking. Phantom, they might decide that Philip Covert's sister-in-law is potentially dangerous enough to rate a bullet."

"I told you it wasn't a tame assignment," the Phantom said. "I'm not insisting you take it, Muriel."

"Of course I'll take it," she said quickly. "Of whom should I beware? Are there any suspects?"

"One," the Phantom said soberly, "and I haven't even seen him yet. That's how fast things are moving. The boy who was poisoned might have been killed by an attorney who visited the boys without even being asked to appear there. His name is Proctor. He spent part of his youth in a reformatory, and he professes to be devoting his energies to keeping other boys from the same fate. Other than Attorney Proctor you have—well, three hundred thousand and more people who live in this city. I'm hoping you can lure the real culprit into the open."

"I'll do my best," Muriel promised. "When does this begin?"

"At once. Go see Janis Scott. She lives

in this town where we are now. She'll loan you baggage initialed properly, arrange to send you mail, and all-in-all build you up as the genuine article. You'll board a train after wiring Bob, and the boy will meet you. He knows exactly what you look like and he'll begin calling you Aunt Janis from then on."

"Phantom, can we trust this boy?" she asked.

"I think so. It's a chance, but then our game is full of chances. I think all he needs is a break. Is everything quite clear now?"

"I think so," Muriel said, "but another pot of coffee might clarify little details, especially if you drink the coffee with me. . . . Phantom, what are you like? Really like?"

He chuckled.

"Perhaps if you knew, you'd be mighty disappointed, Muriel."

SHE tucked her chin in her cupped hand, looked at him thoughtfully.

"I doubt it," she said. "You're a strange man. You have the poise and assurance that go with good breeding and money. You're educated to the teeth and I know you're a scientist—a really trained one. You aren't afraid of a thing. People like and trust you—and yet you have no identity."

"Perhaps I should develop one, just for you," he teased her.

"No—I wouldn't like that. It's much better this way. Because if I'm ever in danger and the only way out is by having to tell who you are, I wouldn't want to know."

"Steve Huston has been talking to you," the Phantom accused. "That's the line he always uses."

"It isn't a line," Muriel said somberly. "For either Steve Huston or me. And if you laugh at me for saying this, I'll make my father tell me who you are. I can wind him around my finger. He buys me mink when my eyes gleam in front of a fur store. He arranges for me to be escorted by his good friends to the best affairs in New York. There isn't a thing I can want for. Dad would do anything in the world for me"—she heaved a sigh, smiled a little and added, in a small voice—"except tell me who the Phantom Detective really is."

## CHAPTER X

## MAN AFRAID



IN A CHAIR in a corner at the rear of Chief Abel's office, the Phantom sat watching and listening while one of the boys whom Steve Huston had captured was being questioned. Chief Abel was kindly enough about it, even in the face of determined insolence on the part of the prisoner.

"Stop trying to make a wise guy of yourself," the Chief said. "You were caught red-handed in the act of burglarizing a store. You shot at an officer. We know you have been hanging around Mike Lathy, who claims to be our most eminent gangster."

The youth smiled out of one side of his thin face. "You know so much, why ask me anything? I guess maybe my record card shows plenty, huh?"

Chief Abel shrugged and looked at the Phantom. "He's even proud of his police record. What a representative of our coming generation this young man is!" He turned back to the boy. "Well, I'm going to keep on asking questions, and you'll answer them if you ever hope to get out of here."

The youth laughed again, loudly this time, and in shrill derision.

"You can't keep me here. I didn't kill nobody. My lawyer says you can't hold me more'n twenty-four hours, and as soon as the time is up, I'll start squawking. I'll get sprung all right. No cop, even with all the gold braid you got, can keep me here. I know my rights."

"And you respect the rights of no one else," Abel sighed. "Your full name is Paul Blannick. You are eighteen. You were given a suspended sentence for attempted auto theft. You were placed on probation for rolling a drunk. Your father reported you as incorrigible. That's a fine record. Now we'll add burglary, attempted murder and—murder."

Paul Blannick began a sneer which looked as if it had been practised in front of a mirror. No eighteen-year-old could make such a caricature of his face without practise. Half-formed, it died away. Blannick's mouth opened, and his jaw stayed agape. His eyes were suddenly wide in sheer horror.

"Mur-murder!" he gasped.

"It looks as if it will be," Chief Abel said. "At least, we can hold you without bail until the hospital tells us that watch repairman won't die."

"What repairman?" Blannick shouted. "What are you trying to give me? What kind of a frame is this?"

The Phantom came forward. He held the jimmy which had been used to pry open the hardware store window. He laid this on the desk in front of Blannick.

"The Chief is right, Blannick," he said. "You were caught inside the hardware store, so you can't deny you broke in. And with this jimmy. Isn't that so?"

"Okay—we did jimmy the window. But that don't make me no murderer. I don't know what the Chief is talking about. I never saw any repairman."

"This jimmy," the Phantom said, "was used on another job just before you boys broke into the hardware store. A jeweler's establishment was burglarized and a

[Turn page]

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watch repairman who was working late was attacked. He may die. We can prove this jimmy is the one which was used to open the jewelry store window. So you see how that ties you up?"

"But I didn't break into any other place!" Blannick protested shrilly. "I swear I didn't! I didn't hurt anybody. We lost our heads when that cop came in and we shot at him because we had brand new guns in our hands and we thought we were tough guys. But I'm glad we didn't hit the cop. You got to believe me! I didn't do that jewelry store job."

"But the jimmy is the same," the Phantom reiterated. "We can tell by the mark it left. We can tell so completely that it would be accepted as evidence in court."

"We weren't near any jewelry store!" Blannick wailed. "All we wanted was guns. We saw them in the window and we wanted them."

"Why?" the Phantom asked bluntly.

**B**LANNICK hesitated, looked from the Phantom's stern face to Chief Abel's even sterner one. In his mind he heard the word "murder." Paul Blannick was in a mood to talk.

"We were going to stick up a lot of gas stations and diners," he explained. "We had to have guns. But honest, we didn't bust into any jewelry store."

"The jimmy says you did," the Phantom said. "I personally measured the mark it made and there is no question about it. The jimmy even has a broken corner which showed up both at the jewelry store and the hardware store. It's like leaving a fingerprint. Where were you an hour before you tapped the hardware store?"

"Planning on how to do it," Blannick groaned. "We met in an empty store over on Oak Street. We were there at nine o'clock and we left only fifteen minutes before we tackled the hardware place. Ask the other boys. It's the truth. I swear it's the truth."

"Where was this jimmy all that time?" Chief Abel demanded.

"I had it. In my pocket. My back pocket where it wouldn't show. It couldn't have been used on the jewelry store."

"Where did you get the jimmy?" the Phantom asked.

Paul suddenly brought his lips together in a tight line. He seemed to be thinking.

"I ain't telling," he finally said. "I'm no squealer. Anyway the guy who gave it to us had nothing to do with either job."

The Phantom gave Chief Abel a nod and the Chief sent for a detective who took Paul Blannick back to a cell. Chief Abel sat down, lit one of his cigars, and bit through it savagely.

"I think he's lying," he growled. "He and those other kids robbed that jewelry store. You measured the mark of the jimmy, Phantom. You know how it matches."

"I'd be almost willing to swear the same jimmy opened both windows," the Phantom said. "So in all likelihood, the same was used in both jobs. How much was stolen from the jewelry store, Chief?"

"It was no kid job—not in results. They took several thousand dollars' worth of easily negotiable stuff. But Phantom, this Paul Blannick is a so-called tough guy. Maybe he wouldn't crack, but those other kids—they're yelling bloody murder for their mammas. They've talked, made good statements, and everything Blannick says jibes with the stories of his kid companions."

"Do you believe they are lying? That they had these stories all rigged and are sticking to them?"

"I don't know what to think," Chief Abel threw his massacred cigar into an ash tray. "This thing is running away from us, Phantom. Someone must be training those kids. Look how they operate. Two or three juveniles—under sixteen, led by a kid who thinks because he is eighteen he's a man and a tough one at that. Look how they break into places. Kids don't use tools that way. They don't know about burglar alarm systems. I tell you a trained criminal mind is back of them."

"I agree," the Phantom said. "And it might be Tom Wiley. How is our friend Attorney Proctor taking all this?"

"He swears he'll get those kids out if he has to go to the highest court in the state. He'll do it, too. Proctor is either the most sincere man I ever encountered or the most thorough-going crook outside of a cell."

"Well it's a wide choice." The Phantom laughed. "I think I'll see Proctor. And how about your alleged chief of the local underworld. This Mike Lathy. Hasn't he been pretty quiet?"

"Too quiet," Chief Abel grumbled. "I'm having him tailed wherever he goes. He knows it. You don't fool Lathy like that, but he seems to welcome being watched. He knows what's going on all right, but if he's mixed up in it, I don't see how."

"He'd make certain you didn't," the Phantom said. "I believe you are handling Lathy and all the others in as good a manner as possible, Chief. You're doing all you can."

"What's it getting me? Just more crimes! Phantom, what is the answer? There must be one. This isn't a series of isolated crimes, being pulled by juveniles. It's big stuff, directed by an adult mind. Three people have died already. A motorcycle cop, Mark Tormay, and Philip Covert. How many more will die before we run this to earth? How many more kids will get the fever and go wrong? Not just here, in my city, but all over the country! This thing is getting publicity."

"Perhaps it is meant to, as all part of the scheme," the Phantom said musingly. "Juvenile crime planned on a nationwide basis. It could be. Criminal minds have thought of stranger things. . . Thanks for letting Bob Covert get out in time to meet his aunt. I'm sure he won't run away."

"We couldn't hold him," Chief Abel explained. "The murder charge petered out because Tormay was the only guilty one. I'm glad they're free—Bob and Wally. Those poor kids have suffered enough."

USING a car which was provided by Frank Havens' local newspaper, the Phantom first checked the address of Attorney Proctor and drove to his home. It was a small, modest, but neat little bungalow. Lawn and hedges didn't have a blade of grass or a leaf out of the way. The octagonal tiles of the walk from the gate to the porch looked as if they were scrubbed daily.

Joe Proctor, Attorney-at-law, was like those tiles. Scrubbed-looking. He was a viking of a man, ruddy of face, wide-shouldered, and rugged. The only contrasting feature about him was his eyes—small, inclined to squint, and mirroring suspicion of everyone and everything. The Phantom showed him the jeweled badge.

"Ah—yes." Proctor bowed slightly. "I'm happy to have you call on me. I've been expecting you, to be frank about it. And

if you hadn't come, I would have looked you up. Though I will admit searching out a man who calls himself the Phantom, can't be an easy process."

"What are you afraid of, Mr. Proctor?" the Phantom asked calmly.

"Eh? Did you say afraid? Why should I be afraid?"

"I asked you," the Phantom answered. "Until you saw my badge and knew who I was, you were quite normal, but the sight of that badge sent a rather prominent vein in your throat pounding too fast and too hard. You've a built-in lie detector, Mr. Proctor."

Proctor laughed. "What an idea! I'm afraid of nothing or no one—including you. Come in. Standing here on the porch is no way to welcome a man. Even one who thinks you are afraid."

"The pulse in that vein jumped even faster when I mentioned it," the Phantom said. "But it's probably none of my business anyway. You've a nice little place here. Do you live all alone?"

"Yes. I learned how to like loneliness when I spent three years in a reformatory. I had a cell to myself, which was probably best, but it changed me from a boy into a man overnight. I haven't forgotten it."

The Phantom sat down. "And that is why you insist upon helping juveniles, no matter what sort of a crime they commit? Whether they are guilty or not?"

"Yes—I admit it. You can't relate the word 'guilty' to a boy of twelve or fourteen. He isn't capable of guilt because he hasn't learned how to think. But put him behind bars and he learns quickly, and in the wrong sort of way. I know because I went through it."

"You talked to Mark Tormay yesterday. What did the boy have to say?"

"Tormay? You mean the one who was poisoned? I'm not quite certain which of the three he was. Names don't mean much. I wanted to help them all."

"He was the smallest of the trio, and the oldest. Brown hair and eyes, dressed in a tweed jacket and slacks."

"Oh, yes." Proctor nodded heavily. "He told me to go to blazes at first. Thought I was a lawyer on the D. A.'s staff. When I finally convinced him, he said he hadn't done a thing. That it was all an accident. I didn't believe him. In my opinion he was beyond the point of redemption. The

other two were nice boys, though. Just sowing oats—wild or tame, whichever you wish to call them."

"Were you in Tormay's cell, Mr. Proctor?"

The lawyer smiled. "Why don't you be honest about it, and ask me if I poisoned him?"

"Well, did you?"

"No. I remained outside his cell and the turnkey stood no more than a dozen yards away, watching us. You know how they are when they have a prisoner charged with murder. They keep pretty close tabs on him."

"Did he, while you were present, drink water from his tin cup?"

Proctor cocked his head to one side as if thinking deeply.

"No—I'm quite sure he didn't," he said finally. "I recall that he was holding onto the cell door bars so tightly his knuckles shone. By that I knew he was scared—the same way that you think a pulse in my throat shows I'm scared. I wish I could help you, Phantom."

"Is the substance known as uranyl familiar to you?"

"I never heard the word before. What in the world is it?"

The Phantom shrugged. "They make atom bombs out of its first cousin, Mr. Proctor. Good night—and don't bother to show me out. Stay seated and calm those jumping nerves of yours."

## CHAPTER XI

### TIP-OFF



ROUSED by the jangling of the telephone in his hotel room the Phantom quickly awakened. There was no hesitation in his movements, even though his eyes were barely open as he swung out of bed.

Frank Havens was on the wire and he sounded sleepier than the Phantom.

"Meet me in the breakfast room downstairs as soon as you can make it," Havens said. "Something has come up."

The Phantom shaved and showered in a few minutes. When he was partially dressed, he stood before the medicine cabinet mirror and proceeded to renew

his disguise makeup from a special field kit he carried with him. There was not much to be done. The Phantom's disguises were as permanent as a disguise can be.

Satisfied that he could never be recognized as the millionaire Richard Curtis Van Loan, the Phantom finished dressing and hurried to the elevator. Frank Havens was already at a corner table, purposely selected for the greatest amount of privacy.

Havens waved the Phantom to a chair across the table.

"Sit down and enjoy a substantial breakfast. You may not find time to eat decently again for hours."

A waiter came and took the order. While the Phantom started on his orange juice and hot cereal, Havens leaned across the table and spoke in a low voice.

"About an hour ago—right after dawn, in fact—the night editor on my paper here received an anonymous phone call. Some man said he wanted to perform a civic duty and that if the newspaper wanted a good story, a reporter and a photographer should be posted outside the Security Trust Bank at nine-thirty this morning."

"Wasn't any attempt made to trace the call, Mr. Havens?" the Phantom asked.

"The night editor did what he could, which wasn't much. The caller merely made his statement and hung up. The call came from a pay station at a bus depot. Nobody noticed anyone using that particular booth. The anonymous caller also phoned the other two newspapers here in town with a similar story, and a warning that when these men were posted they were to be well-hidden."

"Sounds like an intended stickup to me," the Phantom said thoughtfully, "with one of the gang ready to renege. Are you and the others sending men as suggested?"

"My paper is, and I believe the others will too," Havens said. "We can't afford to pass up a tip like this. I wanted you to know about it."

The Phantom sipped his coffee and looked over the top of the cup at Havens.

"I'll be there," he promised. "As a reporter from one of the press services who has just arrived in town. Naturally, I'll change my appearance, and I'll also need a camera and equipment. Can you fur-

nish these?"

"Of course. I'll get them myself, meet you wherever you say, and turn them over to you."

"Fine. Make it Lawlor and Beatty Streets. That's a quiet section, and we're not apt to be seen. I don't want this press service photographer to be associated with you in any way. Shall we make our date in about an hour? That will be around eight-thirty, and I'll have time to give the neighborhood of the bank a good going over."

"I'll be there," Havens promised. "How did things work out with Muriel?"

"She arrives today and will be greeted by Bob Covert with loud exclamations of welcome. They'll go to the Covert home where she will take over, even to supervising the funeral of Bob's father. What happens after she establishes herself as Janis Scott remains to be seen. I'm hoping she will draw a murderer in her direction, bring him out of the woodwork, so to speak. Because the man we want is as well-hidden as a termite. See you soon."

The Phantom returned to his room and locked the door. He carried his makeup kit into the bathroom where the light was good and went to work erasing the features which had so far served him. For a few brief moments, the handsome countenance of Richard Curtis Van Loan was revealed without a trace of disguise. Then he began converting this into a new face.

**E**ACH move he made was that of an expert. Sure, deft fingers rubbed a dye into his skin clear down to the shoulders. It made him seem darker. He applied a chemical to his hair which definitely blackened it. Into his nostrils went minute pads which caused the nose to look broader and the nostrils to flare slightly.

Two small suction cups applied inside the mouth make his cheeks look a bit hollow. He applied some flesh-colored putty behind his ears and they stood out more prominently. His lips became fuller, his chin less square. Finally he combed his hair in a different way, slicking it straight back. This gave him a higher forehead, or seemed to. Most of the disguise was an illusion, but so well-handled that there wasn't the slightest resemblance between this man and the other identity

the Phantom had so far maintained.

He changed into a dark brown pin-striped suit, added a somewhat battered brown hat with a gray feather in the band. He scraped some of the polish off his shoes, filled his pockets with cigars—which his other identity never touched. With a final appraising look in the mirror, he quietly unlocked and opened his door, saw no one about and went to the fire stairway where he climbed three floors before ringing for the elevator.

His rendezvous with Frank Havens was within easy walking distance, but he detoured slightly and passed by the Security Trust Bank. It was on one of the main streets, in a section which would become busy soon now. It was like most banks in cities this size—big plate glass windows behind which the bank officers showed themselves, a long corridor along which were the dozen cages of tellers and bookkeepers. The vault, big and gleaming, was at the rear of the bank. A uniformed guard, with Sam Browne belt and pistol prominently displayed, lounged inside the main door to let the employees enter.

The Phantom saw all this briefly and thoroughly. He kept on going until he spotted Frank Havens' car and promptly got into it. They wasted no time, for their plans might fall through if it became known that this strange news photographer knew Frank Havens.

The Phantom shoved a couple of flash bulbs into a side pocket, put an exposure meter in his breast pocket, added a couple of cheap mechanical pencils, then slung the Graphlex camera over one shoulder and a leather kit of equipment over the other. None of this paraphernalia interfered with the automatic strapped in a shoulder rig under his left arm.

"Don't depend upon me for good picture work," the Phantom chuckled. "I'll be too busy trying to stop whatever happens to take prize winning pictures. Did the police get any tip-offs?"

"No—and they won't. Police might spoil the story, and my men and those of the other papers will keep quiet about the whole thing. Who knows, anyway, but that it's just the work of some prankster?"

The Phantom waited until he was sure no one could see him. He got out of the car, swung down the next side street and kept going until he was within a block of

the bank. While he watched, he counted five employees passing the guard.

At twenty minutes of nine, the Phantom spotted a reporter ambling too casually by the bank, too studiously avoiding even a glance at it. Then an old car pulled up directly across the street. The Phantom saw the driver and recognized him as Hank Mornay of the *Sphere*.

During the next ten minutes two more news photographers appeared, then a corresponding number of reporters. They greeted one another and apparently laid plans for the greatest coverage if anything broke. By nine o'clock, when the bank doors opened for business, every newsmen was tense.

Once a black sedan swung into the curb as if it were in a hurry. But it was only a bank official, late for work, and the Phantom relaxed again. There were no more scares.

At ten o'clock the reporters were growing restless, and at quarter after one reporter and his photographer drove off, convinced the whole thing was a hoax. Even the men from Frank Havens' paper gave up at ten-thirty. The *Sphere* reporter went over to Hank Mornay's car and opened the door. He carried on a brief conversation, shrugged and walked away. Mornay, it seemed, was going to stick it out.

THE Phantom drifted over his way, casually passed the car and turned quickly when Mornay called out to him. The Phantom went back to the car, peering curiously at the man behind the wheel. Then he apparently saw the camera on the seat beside Mornay for the first time, and broke into a wide grin.

"Hello, sucker," the Phantom chortled. "They got you too?"

"Step in." Mornay wriggled over to the other side of the car and lifted his camera over to the back seat. "You're new. How come you're in on this?"

The Phantom pointed to his nose. "It gets long sometimes. The boss says I got the best nose for news he's ever seen. I'm Tucker—with *Allied News*. I was sent here to do a series on your juvenile problem, and I got to know a couple of the boys. This morning I saw them pass me with that look a reporter gets when he thinks the hunting is going to be good.

So I sort of tagged along and tailed them here. The only thing they seemed to be etching was the bank, so I figured they got a bum steer."

"You're pretty fast on the draw, brotched." Mornay offered him a cigarette which the Phantom rejected for one of his cheap cigars. "Fact is, we were all tipped something was going to happen at the bank at nine-thirty this A.M. Well, whatever the guy meant, it's sure delayed. I had nothing else to do, so I thought I'd stick. I get paid for my time anyway."

"Me too," the Phantom said. "Who are you with?"

"I'm Hank Mornay—the *Sphere*! What kind of a box are you using?"

The Phantom opened his camera case and removed the instrument. For the next ten minutes they talked shop, but neither man took his eyes off the bank for more than a few seconds at a time.

It was the Phantom who saw the first boy. He seemed to be about eighteen, wore dirty slacks and a leather flying jacket with some sort of a design on the back of it. The jacket was tightly buttoned, though the morning was fairly warm. Once the boy let his right hand casually brush the jacket about where his belt was—and where a gun would be.

"Mornay—pipe him," the Phantom said. "That kid's on the prowl or I never learned much during the gang days in Chicago and Cicero. Look at him case that bank."

"A young punk." Mornay reached for his camera and worked fast to get it set. "What's he think he's going to do—stick up the bank all by himself?"

"Some of them don't have much more brains than to pull a stunt like that," the Phantom answered, and worked on his camera also. "We'd better get out of this car, find good spots and go on an alert, Mornay. When this busts, it'll come fast."

Mornay studied the neighborhood. "We've got to keep the kids from spotting the cameras or they'll guess what's up. Look—right across the street from the bank entrance—that doorway. One of us could hide there. Seems to lead to an empty store."

"Flip you for it," the Phantom offered, and reached for a coin. He tossed it.

"Oh, take the spot," Mornay said. "I know one even better . . . Hey—there's

another one of those teen-age hoodlums. Boy, the way those two ignore one another! So nobody will guess they're going to stick up the bank. Look, my friend, what do you intend to do about this?"

"Get my shots first, and then holler." The Phantom shrugged. "After all, my boss pays me to get pics, not play cops."

"That's how I feel, too, even though this is my town. Okay—it's a deal. We take our pics first. See you, pal, and watch out for hot lead. Some of those juvenile Baby Face Nelsons throw their lead a little wild."

The Phantom nodded and watched Mornay await a chance to approach the corner near the bank. He was intending to wait until the boys entered, hurry around the corner and be ready to shoot his pictures as they came out. It would be tricky, dangerous stuff, but Mornay was going about it as though he was taking a studio shot of some bridal couple.

The Phantom reached the doorway. It was not a bad spot. Both boys had reached the ends of the block, were turning, and on their way back. Judging by the way they walked, it seemed obvious they intended to meet at the bank entrance and go into high gear.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE LOOT AND THE FLAME



IN THE theory that no man knows fully when he is or is not under observation, the Phantom kept acting his part. He raised the camera, sighted it, and fussed with the shutter control. The morning had turned dull and a few drops of rain were already falling.

The two boys met, but didn't go into the bank. Instead they stood there as if waiting for a bus, and a moment later the Phantom knew why. A third young man sauntered up the street. He was carrying a canvas bag with a zipper and leather trim. He gave one single nod of his head and moved up just outside the door, turned his back, zipped open the canvas bag, and worked fast.

When he half turned, the Phantom saw that he held an automatic rifle with a short muzzle, down alongside the seams of

his trousers. The Phantom whistled softly. There might be some bloodshed before these foolish boys were through. One of the boys promptly took the canvas bag, apparently as a receptacle for loot.

The Phantom loosened his gun in its holster. If that boy with the automatic weapon prepared to use it, the Phantom intended winging him. It might be only a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old youth at whom he would shoot, but he might save a number of lives. The boy deserved no particular break. By using a tommy-gun he placed himself far above the range of juvenile crimes. This was big stuff on a big scale.

The other two boys unbuttoned their leather jackets, swung briskly into the bank, and the Phantom could see their heads through the window as they moved halfway down the line of tellers' cages. Then they came to a stop.

There were two full minutes of agonizing suspense!

Suddenly both boys erupted from the bank, and as they reached the sidewalk the bank alarm system began to clamor. The Phantom saw Mornay step around the corner, camera raised. The bank guard ran out of the bank, and the boy with the tommy-gun started to raise it.

Behind the Phantom a window crashed. The door was pulled open and uniformed police came swarming out. This was so unexpected that the Phantom didn't move quite fast enough and was almost bowled over. Through the broken window a police rifle chattered briefly.

The boy with the tommy-gun just leaned against the bank wall as if he were very, very tired. He turned a white face in the direction of the shooting, then let go of the tommy-gun. He started to raise his hands, but as they went up, his knees caved in and he went down.

The Phantom was already on the street and racing after the two boys who had rushed past Mornay. The *Sphere* photographer was raising his camera for a shot at the tommy-gun guard on his way to the sidewalk. Mornay was totally oblivious to all else, including the rain that had started to pelt down.

The Phantom had already seen the two fleeing bandits dart down an alley. He reached it far ahead of the police, and began discarding camera and utility case to

give him more speed. Police pounded after him, but he had been recognized as a news photographer and definitely on their side. Also he seemed unusually fleet of foot and police never turn down that kind of help in such a situation.

The Phantom had his automatic ready for a couple of fast shots above the heads of those boys. They were nowhere in sight. He kept on to the end of the alley and saw one of the boys standing beside what looked like a large incinerator. The boy saw the Phantom at about the same time and gave a warning yell.

A metal door clanged shut. The boys were on the move again, but when the Phantom saw them both, neither one carried the blue canvas bag. He recalled the clang of metal, slowed, and looked around. That incinerator was provided with a steel door. The Phantom hesitated for a second or two. Capturing the boys was of paramount importance, but getting the loot also meant a great deal.

Then he no longer had to make up his mind because, from the vent atop that incinerator, came a gust of smoke followed by flame. He raced back, grasped the door handle and yanked it open. A sheet of flame came out to meet him. He tried to fan it away with his hat, but it was no use. He did manage to see the canvas bag blazing furiously and as the flimsy sides of it fell away, he spotted the stacks of currency being consumed by those eager flames.

**P**OLICE swarmed around him. The Phantom quickly told them what had happened and four of the fleetest cops went after the boys. The others did their best to get at the burning loot. But nothing could get by those flames, and while they hunted for some metal or wooden bar with which to rake out the currency, the fire had its full way.

"You can relax," the Phantom said. "There won't be much left. This incinerator was full of loose paper and refuse. Probably it had just been started on fire, but didn't get going until those boys opened the door and created a draft. Then the whole thing went up in seconds."

"Fool kids!" one patrolman grumbled. "Didn't they know you'd see them hide that dough here?"

"I'm not sure," the Phantom admitted.

"They were in a big rush, wanted to cache the loot and hide among the crowds on the streets. I suppose they didn't notice the smoke or feel the fire in this incinerator. Now nobody has the dough."

The Phantom went back up the alley, retrieving his equipment as he progressed. Mornay was on the sidewalk at the mouth of the alley. He raised his camera, grinned broadly, and took the Phantom's picture.

"Boy," Mornay cried, "did things happen! So the darn fool kids ditched their loot in a burning incinerator. How dumb can those kids get? Me, I've some of the best pics I've ever taken. How did you make out?"

"I didn't," the Phantom grumbled. "I started to take a shot of that kid with the tommy-gun and half the Police Force piled on me from behind. They must have been tipped, too, and were waiting in that vacant store. Oh well, you can't get what you go after all the time."

Mornay winked at him and patted his camera. "Pal, you want some advice from a guy who has taken news pics for years? Never play the hero. Leave that to the cops, and just remember you get paid for taking pics, not stopping crooks."

"Thanks," the Phantom said wryly. "I'll remember that. How is the boy they cut down?"

"They just chopped the legs from under him," Mornay said cheerfully. "He'll live and after about fifteen years in the pen wish he hadn't. I'm going back to the bank and promote the story."

"I'll come along," the Phantom said. "Might as well turn reporter if I can't get pics."

They trotted down the street and into the bank where confusion still reigned. The clamor of the burglar alarm added to the din of voices and the shouts of the gathering crowd.

"They stuck up Teller Number Six," Mornay said. "Let's see him and get the story first hand."

With press cards stuck in their hats, Mornay and the Phantom went down to the end of the bank, elbowed their way past bank officials and boldly invaded the otherwise sacred precincts of the area behind the cages. Teller Number Six was about thirty years old, still shaking from his experience, but staying in his cage.

"Friend," Mornay said, "we'd like to

get a shot of you. Okay?"

"S-sure," the teller said uncertainly. "I—I guess it'll be okay."

"Thanks."

Mornay fired a flash bulb, inserted another and took a second shot. The Phantom got two, also. Mornay removed his second flash bulb and, with a wink at the Phantom, threw it past the teller into his cage where it hit the cement floor and exploded with a noise like a bullet. The teller gave a bleat of alarm, jumped clear off the floor and the new excitement brought bank officials.

"Just an accident, folks," Mornay said. "I'm sorry. Hey—what's your name? All the details. You're Page One news, friend."

The teller retreated into his cage, crumbling the broken bits of glass underfoot. Mornay followed him, threw his utility case on the high chair below the window and hauled out a notebook.

"I'm Richard Gibson," the teller said. "I've worked here for eleven years. Ever since I left high school."

"Okay, okay," Mornay said. "What happened?"

"Why—why, these two boys stepped up to my window and one of them stuck a canvas bag and a gun at me. All he said was to fill it up with the dough from the night deposits."

The Phantom stepped a bit closer. "You handled night deposits every day, Mr. Gibson?"

"Yes. There's quite a few of them. It puts a lot of money in my cage all at the same time. But I never thought—"

"You sure didn't." Mornay rubbed it in a bit. "Come on, pal." He took the Phantom's arm. "Let's get the dirt from somebody high up. These bank officials dote on having their mugs on the front page."

**T**HE Phantom trailed behind the apparently more aggressive Mornay who broached the bank officials without the slightest hesitation. They cooperated well and soon Mornay was in a booth phoning the information to his paper.

The Phantom entered a booth, too, and called Frank Havens at the office of his newspaper. He gave a terse story of what happened—enough to put on the Press Service wires. While he spoke, he saw Mornay leave the booth, hunt around the

bank, and finally speak to Gibson, the teller who had been held up. Gibson pointed and Mornay hurried to the cage where he found his camera case. He slung this over his shoulder.

The Phantom caught up with him at the door. It was raining hard now.

"Well," the Phantom said, "I guess that ends all the excitement. Congratulations, Mornay. I'll be looking forward with a lot of interest to seeing the pics. I should have shot, too. I'll remember what you said about heroes and newspaper photographers."

Mornay grinned and offered his hand. "So long, pal. Better luck next time."

Holding his camera close, Mornay darted out into the rain and went scurrying to where his car was parked a block away. His camera case and utility case were pounding against his ribs. The Phantom watched him until Mornay was in his car and driving off. Then the Phantom went back into the bank and stood by while officials tallied the teller's cash to see how much was missing.

It totaled twenty-six thousand dollars on the first tally, but there were many deposit slips to check. Twenty-six thousand dollars burned up because of the greed and foolishness of boys! Or was it the greed of someone who had egged those boys on, made them take the risks while he took the loot and basked safely in some spot where he would never even be suspected, let alone found?

The Phantom realized he still had much work to do. Disregarding the pouring rain, he returned to that alley and the incinerator in which those thousands of dollars had been consumed. He opened the door and found that the fire had died away. The ashes were still hot, but he used a small bit of wood to move the residue about until he encountered what had once been a stack of bills, now so burned that nothing was left but flimsy layers of thoroughly blackened ash.

The Phantom took an envelope from his pocket, carefully transferred some of the ash into the envelope and put this away. There was not a trace of that canvas bag left.

Reaching his hotel, the Phantom proceeded to his room by the same devious route he had taken in leaving it. Once behind a locked door, he quickly changed

his disguise back to the one that was known in the town. He left the hotel openly this time and went to Police Headquarters.

Chief Abel saw him at once. Abel was considerably agitated over the events of the morning.

"We were tipped off, just as the newspapers were tipped," he said. "Somebody sent those three boys into what looked like certain death. I can't make up my mind if they were to be deliberately sacrificed or whether some member of the gang turned rat and squealed."

"What does the wounded boy say about it?" the Phantom asked.

"He think's he's tough, won't say anything much, and refuses point-blank to name the two boys who escaped. He won't believe the set-up was tipped, and he swears his only disappointment is the fact that he didn't have time to open up with that tommy-gun."

"Speaking of guns," the Phantom said, "I've a suggestion to make. It's beginning to become apparent that your juveniles are being organized, taught how to become criminals, and sent out on jobs that seem to grow in importance. Can you imagine three teen-age boys sticking up a bank? But it happened. Those boys were armed. Last night another gang tried to rob a store because they wanted weapons. I believe you should instruct all dealers in guns and ammunition to lock them in their safes or get rid of them temporarily. The temptation they offer is tremendous."

CHIEF ABEL nodded his agreement.

"That's an excellent idea," he said, "and I'll put it into operation at once. A boy and a gun are a dangerous combination."

"There is one more thing," the Phantom said. "Can you tell me where I can find a spectroscope? Perhaps one of the larger factories is supplied with one. I know your police lab isn't so equipped."

Chief Abel reached for his phone, made a couple of calls, and hung up.

"You'll have one available at any time in the chemical laboratories of the Parker Manufacturing Company," he said. "But what has developed to require the use of scientific instruments?"

"Ashes," the Phantom smiled. "Just

plain ashes, Chief."

He borrowed a police car and driver, went to the factory labs and spent about half an hour working with a spectroscope. He dissolved part of the ash from the incinerator in an acid, picked up a little with a platinum loop, and held it in the flame of a Bunsen burner while he studied the colors of its spectrum through the instrument. He concentrated mainly on the scale between blue and green.

Satisfied with these results, he asked permission to use the scientific library and turned to an article on uranyl, also known as uranium nitrate.

## CHAPTER XIII

### BENEFIT PERFORMANCE



LIVING up to her rôle of Janis Scott, aunt of Bob Covert, Muriel Havens attended Philip Covert's funeral next morning with Bob. It was a trying experience because she met many people and wondered if, by chance, any of them had known the real Janis Scott.

Her presence was a blessing to Bob for she helped him to stand up under the severe blow of his father's murder. Since she had arrived the day before she had been an encouragement and comfort to him. She had already heard about the bank holdup and realized how serious things were becoming in the city, and how much boys like Bob needed help.

She and Bob were on their way home after the funeral when a car pulled into the curb and Kirk Sloper got out. Muriel recalled having seen him at the funeral services both at church and at the grave.

Sloper removed his hat. "Hello, Bob," he said, with a faint smile. "I've been wanting to see you."

Bob looked sheepish. "Aunt Janis," he explained, "this is Mr. Sloper. It was his car I stole. You know, the one where—"

"Oh, I see," Muriel broke in quickly. "I'm sure, Mr. Sloper, that Bob is sorry."

"I know he is," Sloper said. "And I am withdrawing my complaint against Bob and his friend Wally Walsh. I have already informed the District Attorney's office that I do not wish to prosecute. After all, they didn't hurt my car, and I

was partly to blame in leaving it unlocked."

"Then I won't have to go to court?" Bob asked eagerly.

"I'm not promising that," Sloper told him. "More than stealing a car came out of this, but I've a feeling you won't be punished any further. I'll do all I can."

Muriel offered her hand. "We're most grateful, Mr. Sloper. Bob has been through so much."

"Let me drive you two home," Sloper said. "I insist—and now that I've met you, Miss Scott, I must admit I have a reason. I'll tell you about it on the way."

He took a rather long route to the Covert home but neither Muriel nor Bob commented on it.

"Do you intend to live here now, Miss Scott?" Sloper asked. "Or will you take Bob back to your own town?"

"I haven't made up my mind, Mr. Sloper. Are you trying to sell me the idea I should stay here?"

"I wish I could. This is why I ask. If you intend to remain, you will want to meet our more prominent people. I don't mean stuffed shirts, but neighbors and friends of Philip. There happens to be an excellent way for you to become acquainted with many of them."

"I'm listening," Muriel smiled.

Sloper became more enthusiastic. "Tonight we're giving a special performance at one of the big movie houses. Name acts are coming in to perform and we managed to corral a Hollywood preview. There'll be searchlights, cameras, microphones—all that stuff. The price of admission is somewhat unique. I don't know who got the idea, but it's good. You've heard the ads over the air and in the newspapers and magazines to sell your old diamonds. Well, to witness this show you turn in some piece of jewelry, and we're emphasizing old diamonds. Not big ones—two- and four-point stones are quite acceptable."

"What's it for?" Muriel asked.

"We're trying to create a fund to buy cocktails," Sloper said, and grinned.

"Good heavens!" Muriel cried. "Do you mean that?"

"Yes, but not the kind of cocktail you buy in cafés. These are atom cocktails for people suffering from cancer. Expensive cocktails. They cost a thousand dollars

and up."

"I see," Muriel nodded. "I doubt you could pick a worthier cause, Mr. Sloper."

"We've got everybody lined up," he said proudly. "I'm betting we'll take in enough old gems to create a small hospital ward. And to bring in as much as possible, we're holding a raffle. The winner gets a two-carat diamond. It's donated, so the proceeds will be all profit."

"Of course I'll be there," Muriel said. "Though I don't know where I'm going to find even a speck of a diamond."

"I thought of that, too," Sloper said. "So I brought one. What's the difference if I let you use it? I meant to donate the thing anyway, and to be frank, your presence will be well worth the stone. People are curious about you. They'll come in droves to see what you look like. It's plain sadistic curiosity, but it exists in every case of—ah—"

"I understand," Muriel said. "And of course I shall go. I'll bring Bob with me. Bob and I must pick up our lives now and I believe this is a good way to begin. Thank you, Mr. Sloper."

"Not at all," he said softly. "There is to be a dance afterward. Bob can go to my home where he will be well taken care of and you and I . . . How about it, Miss Scott?"

"We'll see how things go," Muriel said. "Thank you for the ride—and the diamond."

SLOPER saw them to the door of Bob Covert's pleasant home. Muriel watched him drive away and as he turned the corner he looked back and waved.

"He's a nice guy," Bob declared, with fervor. "Gosh, he's not even going to let them send me to the reformatory."

"He's a very nice guy," Muriel conceded. "I suppose he knew your father well?"

"I don't think so," Bob replied. "Dad never mentioned his name except after I—after it happened. Dad told me at the police station that he was going to beg Mr. Sloper not to make it too tough on me. I guess Dad didn't have any time—to—that."

Muriel put her arm around the boy. "You've the makings of an excellent detective, Bob," she said hastily. "And an actor. The way you put me over as your

aunt is remarkable. Everyone believed it."

Bob gave her a small smile. "I'm getting so I believe it, too. I wish you were my aunt."

"My"—Muriel winked at him—"all the good-looking young men in town are falling for me. But you come first, Bobbie. Now we're going to begin our detective work. We'll take your father's car and go visit an undercover agent late this afternoon. Meantime we must look over your father's letters and papers. There may be something in the way of a clue."

She kept the boy so busy for the remainder of the day that he almost forgot the disastrous results of his escapade. Early in the evening, Muriel and Bob drove to one of the poorer sections of the city and she circled a couple of blocks until she saw Steve Huston, walking slowly along swinging his night stick.

Muriel nudged Bob, stepped on the gas, and deliberately went through a red light. Steve's whistle shrilled a command to stop, and she braked the car over to the curb. Steve put his foot on the running board and peered through the rolled-down window.

"You may be a good-looking girl," he said with a grin, "but I'm married and have eight kids, and no amount of blarney or a smile is getting you out of a ticket... Hello, Miss Havens. And how is Bob Covert?"

"It's Janis Scott," Muriel told him. "Aunt Janis, to you and Bobbie. We're doing fine, thanks, but we don't dare risk trying to see the Phantom. You can do that for us."

"I'm expecting him around any minute," Steve said. "What's up?"

"It's only a hunch, Steve, but strong enough to be ridden. Tonight, at one of the big theatres they are holding a performance to which admittance is secured only by donating a precious gem. It's to buy atomic energy for use in a hospital. Everyone of importance will be there, and as the theatre seats eighteen hundred people, there should be quite a sack of gems."

Steve nodded. "I get it. A target like that is bound to attract crooks. And loot consisting of donated gems would be the easiest stuff in the world to dispose of. You could be right, and an attempt will be

made on the haul. I'll tell the Phantom."

Steve stepped back, administered a brief lecture about passing traffic lights, and waved them on. He resumed his beat and kept his eyes peeled for the Phantom.

At seven-thirty he heard a whisper as he passed a deep, dark doorway. Steve Huston slowed up, walked over to the doorway and leaned against the side of it. He couldn't see the Phantom, hidden somewhere in the darkened depths.

**H**USTON spoke softly.

"Muriel was here. Says there is a charity affair at one of the movie theatres and admission costs a genuine jewel. A diamond, pearl, anything like that. Proceeds are for a hospital. She says nearly two thousand people are attending and donating old jewelry. It could make a fancy and easily disposed haul for these gangs."

"Quite possible," the Phantom's voice reached him. "I'm expecting that whoever trains, guides and controls these juvenile gangs has been building up to some big crime. Something in which the profits will enable these crooks to either expand on a national basis, or quit the racket and live like millionaires. Eighteen hundred people donating gems will make a sizable amount of negotiable stuff worth a lot, because it can't be traced. I'm going to be at that affair, Steve."

"I wish I was going with you," Steve said. "This patrolling a beat gets monotonous, even with a burglary job now and then to keep me busy. Are you making any progress, Phantom?"

"Enough. Keep your eyes skinned for Tom Wiley, the man who kidnaped you. I've a feeling it is his skill which is being imparted to the gangs of boys. The manner in which the bank robbery took place this morning matched Wiley's methods too closely to be an accident."

"Phantom," Steve said softly, "if I see Wiley, I promise you he'll be hauled in whether it's on a stretcher or in a basket. He's one bird I'm not apt to forget in a hurry."

"He may remember you, too," the Phantom warned. "And Wiley is a highly dangerous man."

"You know"—Steve twirled his night stick as he began to move away—"I'll bet he thinks the same thing about us."

## CHAPTER XIV

## FAST COMPANY



KIRK SLOPER had not exaggerated about the benefit performance. By seven-thirty, people began to arrive. By eight, the block was jammed. Searchlights fingered the sky with their beams. Someone had dug up a calliope that made a circus din of the scene. Cars pulled up and fur-draped women and tuxedoed men got out. No metropolitan opening ever had more swank.

A slightly different touch had been added in that the doorman was dressed like a surgeon, replete with operating mask and gown. The ushers wore white uniforms with fake stethoscopes sticking out of their pockets. An entire hospital room had been set up in the lobby.

Kirk Sloper, Muriel, and Bob Covert arrived fairly early, and Sloper introduced Muriel to a number of people. Finally they went inside. Hank Mornay, the *Sphere* photographer, showed up early and took enough pictures for an entire Sunday supplement section.

All of this was carefully observed by the Phantom Detective from a window directly across the street which was just high enough so that with a pair of field-glasses he was able to look deep into the theatre lobby.

He noted the arrival of Muriel and Sloper and squirmed a bit at the way Sloper acted toward her. He muttered under his breath when she smiled at Sloper and held his arm tightly. That was the way she acted with Richard Curtis Van Loan, and the Phantom didn't like it.

He got back his sense of humor after a few moments though. Muriel was playing a part, and doing a marvelous job at it. Besides, there were far more important things for the Phantom to do than give way to jealousy.

Each patron was obliged to donate before entering the theatre, and the offerings were dropped into a large, shiny, chrome-finished sterilizing machine which further lent a hospital air to the festivities. Gems sparkled in the Phantom's field-glasses. Some of the jewels, even at this distance, he knew were extremely valuable.

Some were small, worth only twenty or thirty dollars. But there were eighteen hundred people turning over gems to enter the theatre. The sum total of their donations would run into a sizable amount.

At nine-forty, the theatre doors were swung shut. The white-clad ushers drifted into the lobby to smoke cigarettes and chat. Two uniformed policemen were getting ready to move the sterilizing machine and its valuable cargo. They wheeled the thing across the lobby and into the manager's office.

The Phantom held the glasses tighter to his eyes. If anything was going to happen, this was the moment. He studied a couple of the white-clad ushers. All along he had sensed that there'd been something wrong with them. In the first place, the regular ushers were on duty in regulation uniforms. Those in white were merely superfluous. Yet they had moved in and taken over.

None of the white uniforms fitted too well; some had long sleeves, some hung like sacks, and in two or three cases they were too small. Furthermore, the men who wore them were all about the same age. Seventeen or eighteen.

A movie truck, with a camera perched on top of it, had been parked just beyond the entrance. Now it pulled up directly in front of the place. The men manning the camera and mike were dismantling their equipment and passing it down into the truck. They, too, seemed too young for this sort of work.

The Phantom felt more and more that Muriel's hunch was correct, and that the generous donations from the theatre patrons were going to be stolen. He watched one of the white-uniformed ushers go over to the dummy hospital room and quickly strip a pillow slip off a pillow. He rolled this up and stuck it under his uniform.

He walked slowly in the direction of the manager's office and the Phantom counted eight white-clad ushers following him. Each seemed to have been well-trained in his duties.

They took up positions to protect both an escape to the street and to cover everyone in the manager's office.

The Phantom hurried out of the building, entered an alley by a side door, and climbed into a car which he had chosen for speed. He started the motor and sat

there, waiting. He also had a good view of the lobby from here.

UNTRAINED, amateur juvenile criminals would have stormed the manager's office, shot their way in if necessary, and then run for it. But these young men operated with all the smoothness of an experienced gang. When they were all set, two men in tuxedos jumped out of the movie truck and hurried into the lobby.

There, without preamble, they started swinging at one another and shouting. One of them stumbled against a glass-enclosed advertising sign and it crashed to the marble floor.

The door to the manager's office was unlocked from inside, flung open, and the two patrolmen came barging out to stop the fight. They ran straight into drawn guns, and when they halted in stunned confusion, the boys swarmed over them with gun butts wielded as clubs.

Four of the bandits had already entered the office. In a few moments the one who had appropriated the pillow slip emerged with the white pillow case bulging. He ran to the movie truck and threw the sack inside, climbed in himself, and someone tooted the truck horn just once. All the fake ushers streamed for the truck, piled in, and it was pulling away as the last man was hauled in and the door slammed shut.

The Phantom drove out of the alley, picked up the trail within two blocks and stayed on it. No alarm would be given for a few minutes yet. From what he had seen, everyone connected with the theatre had been knocked out.

The movie truck suddenly pulled to the curb of a fairly quiet side street. The men who came out the back door no longer wore white uniforms but were dressed in natty suits or in sport jackets. Four of them headed for the business district in pairs. Four others crossed the street and got into two cars which were waiting. Three more men got out of the truck and one of these carried a suitcase that seemed heavy. He was the Phantom's quarry.

This man talked rapidly to his companions for a moment or two, then threw the suitcase into a light sedan, got behind the wheel and drove off alone. Somewhere in the distance the Phantom heard the vanguard of wailing police sirens.

The Phantom was a past master at the art of trailing, either on foot or by car. Once he even pulled up parallel with the bandit's car at a red light. He got a faster start, but two blocks further on he was behind the bandit again.

The crook was in no hurry, and showed no signs of fear or nervousness. A bright red light suddenly flashed in the Phantom's rear view mirror and he thought for a moment that somehow the police had found the right trail. But it was an ambulance overtaking him.

As it zipped by the Phantom had a glimpse of an attendant in white. The stretcher was empty. The ambulance sired its way past the bandit's car, swerved around a corner and finally slid to a stop. Its searchlight fanned the closely built private dwellings until the driver found the number he wanted. He backed the vehicle to the curb.

The Phantom had already stopped his car around the corner, after passing the ambulance and the sedan driven by the bandit. He made his way on foot back to a stop where he could observe what went on. The young man who had taken charge of the loot approached the ambulance and stood there, as if he were just curious. The empty stretcher was taken out by the driver and the attendant. They carried it into the house.

The young man took a long look around before he returned to his car. Then he worked fast. Certain that he was not being observed, he lifted out a dark blanket in which the Phantom knew that sack of gems had been wrapped. He thrust this into the ambulance and two minutes later he was driving off.

From the house, the ambulance men carried a patient swathed to the neck in blankets, wearing a big peaked cap and dark glasses. They maneuvered him into the ambulance, the driver slammed the door, and it started off with flasher light working, and siren demanding a right of way.

Trailing it was simple, and the Phantom remained far back until he realized the destination of the ambulance. It was not being driven to any hospital, but to the airport. He speeded up his car and passed the ambulance. By the time it reached the field and rolled out toward one of the big passenger planes poised for

the takeoff, the Phantom was already inside the administration building.

That plane, he learned, was bound for New York on a non-stop flight. The Phantom quickly bought a ticket. If the plane had been full to capacity he would have identified himself to get aboard, but this was not necessary.

The patient had already been placed in one of the forward seats. If he had the stolen gems on him, they made no bulk. The Phantom had an idea they might be concealed inside a specially made blanket which swathed him from head to foot.

The stewardess was worried about the sick passenger, and stayed close by him.

"I'm quite all right, miss," the Phantom heard him say. "Everything is fine. Someone will meet me in New York. I'm going there for an operation, and I'm easily capable of traveling alone."

The Phantom sat down in one of the rear seats, fixed his belt, and picked up a magazine he had purchased. The plane taxied into position for the take-off. He looked at his watch. Exactly twenty-two minutes had elapsed since the theatre holdup. Few crimes had been as carefully planned and as efficiently worked out. The loot was on its way to New York, well-concealed, and before the news of the robbery even reached the city it would be disposed of.

The Phantom wondered who the supposedly sick man was. The dark glasses, cap and blankets effectively concealed his identity. It didn't matter much at the moment. The sick man was not getting off that plane until the Phantom did. For the moment the chase was over, and the Phantom settled down for the two-hour flight.

## CHAPTER XV

### TRAIL EAST



NEW YORK—and LaGuardia Airport. There another ambulance was waiting. Swiftly the Phantom was out of the plane and hiring a cab to tail the ambulance. This time it was far more difficult, but his driver managed to keep the white vehicle in sight. The destination was a brownstone front house in the East Eighties.

The sick man was carried inside and soon afterward the ambulance rolled off. The Phantom chartered his taxi and had the driver wait a block away while the Phantom himself took up a vigil closer to the house. He waited half an hour and had begun making plans to enter the place when he saw the door open and a man emerge.

He was a rather short, slim man. He wore dark glasses, like the glasses the patient had used. Undoubtedly this was the same man, but now he was neatly dressed, and at ease as he walked slowly down the steps of the brownstone. He kept on walking for three blocks, then entered a café. At the bar he ordered a drink.

The Phantom, at the other end of the bar, watched his man in the mirror. The crook drank his whisky straight, in one gulp, and ordered more. While he waited for it he removed the dark glasses for a moment and rubbed his eyes. The Phantom gave no sign of recognition, but now he knew the identity of the man he had followed. Steve Huston would have been highly interested. For the man was Tom Wiley, the wanted killer who had escaped so mysteriously from that farmhouse where Philip Covert had turned up just as mysteriously to take the bullets meant for Wiley.

All along, the Phantom had been certain that Wiley must be one of the kingpins in this new racket of exploiting teenage boys. His pupils had shown too much of the skill Wiley possessed. Now this crook had flown to New York, some five hundred miles away, to dispose of the stolen gems, almost before the theft could be reported to various police departments around the country. It would take twenty-four hours to inventory those gems, let alone list and broadcast their descriptions.

Wiley took a taxi after he left the café, and the Phantom stuck to his trail. The crook finally dismissed his taxi far downtown, walked a couple of blocks, then started some evasive tactics that took all the Phantom's ingenuity to counter.

Wiley was making certain he couldn't be tagged. He resorted to every trick he knew, or had ever heard of, from suddenly wheeling about and reversing his direction, to the old dodge of pretending to tie his shoe. He darted in and out of subway stations, took short rides on local trains,

buses, and finally came to a complete stop in front of an antique store on Third Avenue.

He smoked a cigarette while his eyes roved up and down the street. It was late, few people were about, and the Phantom was compelled to remain well-hidden. Wiley scaled his cigarette butt into the air, pivoted, and walked into the antique store.

Two minutes later the proprietor, a wizened, shuffling little man put out the lights and locked the door. The Phantom didn't try to get in. He knew why Wiley was there. This antique dealer was known to be a fence.

Realizing he could afford to risk a few minutes of not watching the store, the Phantom hurried to a phone booth in a tobacco store. He dialed a number and grinned when a sleepy, impatient voice answered.

"Inspector Gregg," he said, "this is the Phantom."

The sleepy voice was instantly a wide-awake one, the impatience gone from it. Inspector Gregg of the New York Police was one of the Department's most efficient officers, a close friend of the Phantom Detective, and ready to work with him at all times.

"What's up?" he demanded. "It must be darned near morning."

"It's barely after midnight," the Phantom chuckled. "You big city folks go to bed too early. Inspector, I need help. A man I'm trailing is now in the process of fencing a lot of stolen stuff. I want that fence watched and scooped up with the loot if he tries to go away with it. I'm at the corner of Third and Eleventh right now."

"I'll come myself, with a couple of good men," Gregg said. "Look for me and introduce yourself. Heavens knows what you'll look like, but I know better than to think I'll recognize you."

**T**HE Phantom returned to the antique store and resumed his watching and waiting. Within fifteen minutes he saw two quietly dressed men amble along the street. Then a detective cruiser pulled up and Inspector Gregg got out. He was a heavy-set man, quick moving and sharp-eyed. He sent the car away and stood in the middle of the sidewalk, furiously puffing on a cigar until the Phantom walked

up to him.

"Good evening, Inspector," he said. "Or does it still feel like almost morning as you stated over the phone?"

Gregg stuck out his hand. "Glad to see you again, Phantom. Who are you lining up this time? That creepy old Doc Noakes who runs the store just beyond that corner?"

"I don't know his name, but that's the place," the Phantom said. "At any moment, a man will come out. I'll trail him, and you tail me. Have your two detectives give us a ten-minute leeway, then grab Noakes. Look for a large amount of small gems, a hatful of them at least."

Gregg nodded, walked away and held a brief conference with the two men who had already taken up positions to watch the store. Wiley didn't spend too much time dickering and he seemed in more of a hurry than before when he emerged. This time he made no attempt to throw off any possible pursuit, and he didn't have far to go.

The Phantom saw him trot down cement stairs to the basement entrance of a cheap apartment building. He rang the bell beside the iron-grilled door, lit a cigarette, and was puffing nervously when admitted.

Inspector Gregg joined the Phantom. "That's a new place to me," the police officer admitted. "I can't even hazard a guess as to why your man went in there, unless the superintendent of the building lives in the basement and is in cahoots with someone who lives on an upper floor. Want me to bust in?"

"No, Inspector. Later, perhaps, but I don't want to frighten Tom Wiley in any way. I think I might give you some idea as to what this is all about too, while we're waiting."

"It might help to know," Gregg grunted.

"I'm working in a city five hundred miles from here. Almost midway between New York and Chicago. They're having a juvenile crime wave there and it's become deadly serious. People have been murdered, some fast and efficient stickups have been pulled, and crime is being more or less glorified. Something of this nature could spread fast, Inspector."

Gregg shuddered. "Don't even mention it. We have enough trouble with adult crooks."

"So has every community," the Phan-

tom said. "The way to stop that is to reach those inclined to turn crooked before they go off the right track. That means when they are young. I intend to suggest that this city where I'm now working spend money for more playgrounds and supervised sports and entertainment. That they train more men and women to teach children and teen-agers that being honest pays off a thousand times better than a life of stealing and violence."

Gregg shrugged. "The first thing you'll hear when you begin your speech, Phantom, is that such ideas cost money."

"Of course they do," the Phantom admitted readily. "But it also costs money to bury murder victims, execute their murderers, put people in prison and keep them there. Any reduction in crime will result in the savings of millions of dollars, Inspector. Insurance rates, for one thing, will drop. So many courts, prisons, police, expensive safeguards won't be needed. It would pay off."

"Am I arguing?" Gregg's cigar shifted from one corner of his mouth to the other. "But let a city like the one you describe get out of hand, let some wise guys train kids and send them out to pull off successful jobs, and you'll find the nation hiring more cops, building more prisons and insurance rates. Use your own imagination."

"That is why it's got to stop," the Phantom said tensely. "If I can break this up before a big job is pulled—and they're aiming at one—if I can turn the spotlight of publicity on the whole thing and show up the crooks behind these teen-age boys, the whole thing will collapse."

"Count on me and nineteen thousand New York City cops to help in any way we can," Gregg said. "Now, about the immediate matter of your friend who just went into that house. What happens when he comes out?"

Quickly the Phantom outlined what he had in mind.

"Your job will be to find out what his business was here," he said, "and you must try to handle this quietly. If you get no results that way, smash your way through and get at the truth. I'll keep on Wiley's trail. Something tells me that this stickup of a few hours ago was planned and carried through to provide funds for the big job. They've got to pull it soon. People are getting up in arms about the

whole thing. The local police of that city are beginning to run down clues and I'm getting closer to the truth. They'll use speed in this final crime, and that makes our part risky. We won't have time to plan and get set."

"Things are happening already, Phantom," Gregg said. "I just saw a shaft of light come from the basement entrance. Your man is on his way out, and I'm on my way in."

Wiley had a spring in his steps as he walked rapidly away. He whistled shrilly, too, as if his efforts had met with complete success. He took a cab to a quiet, moderately priced midtown hotel and checked in. He signed a registry card and paid in advance for one night, because he had no baggage.

The desk clerk picked up a bundle of mail, ran through it, and handed Wiley a sealed letter bearing no stamp and no post-office cancellation. Wiley refused the services of a bellhop, thanked the desk clerk, and turned away to rip the seal of the envelope.

From it he took a brief note which he scanned, then placed in a sand-filled urn. He lit a cigarette, dropped the lighted match onto the crumpled ball of thin paper as if by accident and watched the note burn. This done, he slid two small pictures from the envelope. Both were pictures of the Phantom in two disguises.

Wiley studied them intently for a couple of minutes, slipped off his dark glasses and casually let his eyes drift across the almost deserted lobby. The Phantom had taken a chair near the tobacco stand and he sat there, reading a newspaper.

Wiley glanced at one of the pictures again, grunted under his breath, and headed for the phone booths. He made a call which required only a moment or two, emerged, and walked quickly out of the hotel.

The Phantom was already feeling the first twinges of threatening danger. The letter Wiley received had been important. The phone call was either to receive instructions or give orders. Now Wiley was proceeding to carry out certain plans.

He made no attempt to throw off any possibility of a shadow and he studiously avoided looking about, even when he got aboard a half empty subway car.

Wiley rode downtown, made his way to

the Staten Island Ferry slip and checked the time of the next departure against his watch. Then he dropped a coin in the turnstile and went aboard the ferry.

It was one of those early morning periods when fog choked river and harbor traffic, but didn't spill over on land enough to interfere. Boats were hooting their way through the thick haze. Now and then a passing ship threw a dull halo in the mist. In between the blasts, a heavy silence seemed to have settled over the river. It was an ominous silence, and Tom Wiley's eyes were equally ominous.

He went as far forward on deck as he could get, lit a cigarette, and cupped it in his hand. The Phantom leaned against the rail, pondering the idea of taking Wiley then and there, before he had a chance to pull whatever murderous little trick was hatching in his mind.

The ferry shivered and her engines came to life. She slid smoothly out of the slip and headed into the fog. For perhaps ten minutes Wiley stood there, and during that brief period of time he smoked three cigarettes in long, nervous puffs. A few passengers were braving the raw, wet chill of the fog to walk the deck, but most of them went back to the lighted and heated saloon after a few moments of this.

The deck was practically deserted, the fog had closed in and the chill was eating deeper when Wiley deliberately turned around and looked directly at the Phantom.

"Well, wise guy," Wiley said, "why don't you make the pinch and get it over with? Or are you afraid the thirty-eight in my pocket will fill you too full of lead?"

**T**HE Phantom straightened from his lounging position against the rail and walked slowly toward Wiley.

"You may start shooting any time you wish," he said calmly. "I'm betting you can't kill me before I can reach my own gun and do some trigger work myself. If you'd like to try, this is the best opportunity you'll get, Wiley."

"They say you're fast, Phantom. They also say you're smart, but I don't think so. I been wise to you right along."

"Only since you received a letter at the hotel," the Phantom said. "And it must have contained a picture of me, because when you looked over the hotel lobby, you

practically waved in my direction. I'm interested to learn where you got those pictures, Wiley."

"What's the deal, if I tell?" Wiley asked.

"I don't deal with murderers," the Phantom said coldly. "Wiley, I'm taking you—"

Wiley carefully removed a hand from his pocket and snapped the envelope containing the pictures toward the Phantom.

"Take a look at this," he said, "and maybe you'll change your mind. Maybe you'll be glad to make a deal."

The Phantom moved forward half a dozen steps until he was close to the rail. He bent to pick up the envelope, keeping a wary eye on Wiley. He was so intent on watching the killer that he did not see the man who came out of the fog, moving on shoeless feet. The fellow sprinted across the narrow expanse of deck, raising a blackjack as he approached.

The Phantom sensed rather than heard or saw the danger. He began rising and pulling a gun at the same time. The blackjack crashed against the side of his head and the attacker's onrush sent the Phantom reeling against the rail.

He was half-stunned, fighting off a dizziness and ringing in his head that threatened to become dark oblivion. Someone seized his legs, just above the knees. He was lifted in one powerful move, his hips cleared the rail, and he began falling. It seemed miles and miles to the surface of the water. He hurtled through white fog that seemed almost like a cushion.

He hit the bay head-first, which probably saved him from passing out altogether. The water was icy cold and it shocked him back to full consciousness. He kicked water, fighting his way back upward. His lungs were aching by the time he broke the surface.

Something slid past him, not more than two or three yards away. It was the stern of the ferry boat from which he had been thrown.

The Phantom turned over on his back, doubled up his legs and kicked off his shoes. Then he floated on the fairly quiet bay until some measure of strength returned.

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## CHAPTER XVI

## MURDER GUNS



**D**ISAPPEARING in the fog and darkness, the ferry was quickly out of sight. The Phantom twisted around and began swimming. A fog whistle hooted somewhere to his left and he instantly reversed direction. If he swam into the path of some fast-moving ferry or tug, he might be killed.

He swam for ten minutes before he slowed his efforts and suddenly realized he didn't know which direction to take. He couldn't figure out how far he was from any shore. He was, in fact, lost somewhere in the middle of the bay, hemmed in by fog, and at the mercy of any passing ship.

Finally lights came mistily into being and the Phantom hardly dared breathe for fear they were a mirage. They were real enough, but might as well have been a trick of the mind. For the lights were moving, and his yells could not be heard twenty feet in this fog.

That he was somewhere between the tip of Manhattan Island and Staten Island was all he knew. He might swim out to sea and never get back. Before long the cold was going to get him. His head ached; his wet clothing pulled him down. Fog sirens were howling in a dozen different keys from a dozen directions now. He was directly in the channel then, the worst possible spot to be found.

The Phantom felt the tug of the current, struck out against it and soon the fog sirens grew fainter and the current practically disappeared. His strokes were not getting any stronger. He felt as if he had swum halfway to Europe. He slowed down, using his arms and legs just enough to keep the chill from bringing on a paralysis. This helped, for it built up his strength slightly.

At least it gave him strength to shout and swim with all his might when he saw the lights of a ferry-boat moving toward him. His throat became raw from shouting, his arms felt as if they were coming apart at the sockets—and the ferry sailed serenely past.

That was when the Phantom knew

futility, and an odd measure of fear. He hated the sirens that hooted all around him again. They could drive a man to distraction. He turned over on his back to rest, but it was too cold, so he twisted around again and started swimming.

He gave a harsh laugh. There was nobody to hear the note of desperation in it. Maybe, he thought, he would crawl up on the shores of Newfoundland. Or when the fog finally lifted, he would find himself swimming along in the Thames.

It all became funny, and he laughed at the idea. This passed, and he wanted to go to sleep. That was the way to forget that he ached all over, that he was cold clear through, and that those foghorns were only the tantalizing notes of pure illusion. They were not horns built on any boats. They just existed somewhere in the fog, and there was no chance of rescue.

There was a roaring in his ears. It came closer and grew louder. Someone was shouting, but that seemed silly. Who would be talking and shouting way out here, in the middle of the bay?

"I'd have sworn I heard somebody yellin'—right over this way!" a voice said. "Easy now. . . There he is! Easy!"

The Phantom lay on his back, looking up at the fog. The water still seemed to be swirling all around him but he was no longer any part of it. The clammy feeling existed only because he was soaking wet. Someone raised him, tilted his head back, and sharp whisky burned a path down his throat.

The heat of it spread all through his body. He felt better. Much better, and all he wanted to do was sleep. Just sleep for about ten years. And he thought of Tom Wiley, standing there at the rail of the ferry, taunting him to come closer until the hidden assassin was ready to spring.

The Phantom sat bolt upright and began wringing out the end of his coat. He soon learned that he was aboard a fishing boat usually rented to groups of people, but at the moment manned only by a crew of two—the owner and his brother-in-law. They had been trapped by the fog while returning from a fishing trip, had almost run out of gasoline and had shut off the engine to conserve fuel and ride the fog out. That was why they had heard the Phantom's cries.

They got him ashore about dawn, re-

fused to accept any sort of a reward, and still seemed to regard the Phantom as someone who had jumped overside from a ferry-boat and then changed his mind about dying. The Phantom examined his features in the mirror of a gum machine. The makeup had suffered severely.

**H**E TOOK a cab to a street a block away from Park Avenue, paid the driver and walked to the private entrance of a towering apartment building on Park. There he stepped into a private elevator that shot him to the penthouse atop this structure jutting high into the sky. He let himself into a luxurious apartment where, as Richard Curtis Van Loan, he lived alone.

The many friends of Van Loan wondered why a bachelor as wealthy as he didn't keep at least one man-servant, a valet, but Van Loan preferred to live alone. Mainly that was because in the apartment were secreted part of the Phantom Detective's disguise materials. Living alone, he could come and go as he pleased.

It was to this hidden supply of clothing and dyes and facial contour pads that he proceeded the moment he was inside the apartment. In a few moments a hot shower had taken the last of the chill from his bones, and he had a pot of coffee percolating in the kitchen.

He renewed his makeup, put on a suit that was a duplicate of the one ruined by the waters of the bay. He watched the sun come over the distant spires of the skyline while he drank his coffee and began feeling much better.

He left the building by the same convenient private elevator and went straight to Police Headquarters. Inspector Gregg, groggy from lack of sleep, greeted him with enthusiasm.

"I was certain they'd finally nailed you!" the Inspector exclaimed. "What happened?"

The Phantom laughed. "They almost did. I spent part of the night in the bay, and it's not a good season for swimming, believe me on that. Did you bag those people Wiley visited?"

"The first one was a fence, as you know. We found him adding up the value of the loot stolen from that theatre. He admitted Wiley had arranged to sell the stuff even before it was swiped, that he had paid

him thirty-five grand in cash, and that Wiley was in a big rush for the money. If he had dickered the fence would have raised the ante ten or fifteen grand."

"Wiley would only be in a rush," the Phantom said, "if the big job must be ready to be sprung. How about that basement visit Wiley made?"

"Fellow named Montague lived there. He didn't know a thing about Wiley or anyone else, but we found five thousand dollars on him which he said he was always in the habit of carrying. We proved, however, that the fence had given this dough to Wiley a short time before, and that Wiley must have turned it over to Montague. That broke him, and he talked. Montague is one of our more important, yet lesser known, purveyors of tommy-guns, automatics, revolvers, rifles, grenades and even tear gas. Wiley bought five thousand dollars' worth of assorted goods from him."

The Phantom whistled sharply. "You stopped the shipment, I hope!"

"No. Montague didn't keep the artillery at his home but in a hidden warehouse where it could be distributed fast. Wiley had the stuff shipped right out by private car, and before we reached the place, the stuff was gone. We sent out an alarm, but I don't think it will do any good."

"Wiley must have gone back, too," the Phantom said. "And the man who came out of the fog to toss me into the bay. Thanks, Inspector, I'm grateful for your help."

"Don't thank me," Gregg countered. "Stop this business of turning boys into crooks and you'll save everyone like me a lot of headaches."

The Phantom nodded and smiled. "Frankly, Inspector, I'm not thinking of the headaches you and other men in your profession get out of this. You're paid for the worry and the fun of dodging bullets. I'm thinking of mothers and fathers, of brothers and sisters, of the kids themselves—the ones who go wrong."

By courtesy of Inspector Gregg a police car whisked the Phantom to LaGuardia where he could board a plane and reach the town he had earlier left in fast time. He was the last one aboard and looked around for a seat. He saw Attorney Proctor fastening his safety belt, and sat down next to him.

Proctor gave him a startled look. "You are—who I think you are, I suppose?" he asked.

"I'm the Phantom, yes. Did you have a pleasant stay in New York, Mr. Proctor?"

"No," the attorney growled. "I came here to check on a reformatory term which a couple of those boys who robbed that hardware store had served. Frankly, I was disappointed. They were classed as incorrigibles a long time ago. Worse than that, the boys lied to me about this record."

"Maybe they can still be helped," the Phantom suggested. "You didn't run across Tom Wiley in New York?"

"Wiley? The man who is wanted for murder? Why hardly, Phantom. I doubt he'd be apt to show his face or travel as far as New York."

"Well, he did, and he had someone with him. A man who would be quite strong—about like you."

**P**ROCTOR regarded the Phantom with open amazement, then gave a short laugh.

"Talk about your direct accusations. But you're wrong. I did not see Wiley. I didn't see anyone I knew, in fact. So whatever you're driving at, it simply isn't true."

"Very well," the Phantom said. "But I haven't stopped believing that you're all wrong, Mr. Proctor."

"How do you mean, all wrong?" Proctor scowled.

"You act too much like a policeman. You . . . Better fasten your belt. We're taking off. I was saying, a policeman walks his beat or works his shift in the detective bureau. He does little or nothing until a crime is committed. Then he springs to action. Commendable, I'll admit, but a really good officer would do something to prevent crimes from being committed. You're like that. A boy gets in trouble and you're in there pitching for him. He needs help. You do a lot of good—there isn't any question about it. But why not reach the boys before they're behind bars?"

Proctor studied the square face of his companion. "You tell me how, Phantom. Tell me the first step. Show me how to creep, and I'll soon learn how to walk and run. I want to help those boys. I want to do it, not in court before a judge, but

at a time when the help will do more good."

"Then fight for those kids. Especially the ones who live in poor quarters and have nothing. Don't neglect the more prosperous families, either. Look what happened to young Bob Covert. Wherever you go, make speeches for these boys, approach important people, start funds. Set up playgrounds, camps. Do it on a rough scale if necessary, but do it. Your city, Mr. Proctor, needs a man with vitality and ambition to handle this. More than that, a man who knows what those kids go through, and suffers with them."

"I'll start on it right away," Proctor said. "But I'll fight you, too, in connection with the boys you and the police have been hauling in. That's a warning."

"Let me deliver one, too," the Phantom said quietly. "If you turn out to be working against those boys, if you happen to be the man responsible for the bank stickup and the theatre robbery, I'm sure you'll wish you'd never been born."

"Do you believe I'm your man?" Proctor asked.

"I don't know. You have the background—a juvenile delinquency record yourself and possibly a deep-seated idea that society had treated you wrong, and you are now getting back at it. The way you leap to the defense of these boys when they are arrested, and the perfect contact you have with these delinquents adds up. More than that, your trip to New York at the time when I was nearly killed by Wiley and someone else who warned Wiley I was on his trail comes close to convicting you."

Proctor looked out of the window for a moment as the plane leveled off. Then he unbuckled his safety belt.

"Phantom," he said, "I didn't try to kill you. My trip to the city was because of those boys. One of them lied, and said a visit to New York would prove he wasn't as bad as the police insist. He was worse than that."

"You could have been purposely sent there," the Phantom suggested. "The boy who lied could have been approached by someone who wanted you suspected. When did you leave?"

"Yesterday afternoon. Why?"

"Then others knew you were gone, that you'd be in New York, and that if things

went wrong, at least a certain amount of suspicion could be thrown your way. Let's drop the subject for now. Tell me whom you will line up to help in your campaign to straighten out these boys."

Proctor enthusiastically named a score of men.

"What about young Sloper?" the Phantom asked. "The man whose car was stolen by Bob Covert and his pals? He ought to see the necessity for working with those boys."

"Sloper would do it in a second," Proctor agreed. "But I happen to know he's broke. Or almost so. His father didn't leave as much of a fortune as people think, and Sloper went through it. I warned him and he laughed, said he knew what he was doing, and that he'd go to work when his money was gone. I think he'll be hunting a job within the next six months."

They talked about other people, the Phantom adroitly bringing in everyone connected with the juvenile crime problem. Proctor held nothing back. He seemed glad to talk.

**W**HEN the plane landed Proctor and the Phantom got off, Proctor offered him his hand.

"I know you haven't got rid of your suspicions of me yet," he said. "That's all right because, as an innocent man, I've nothing to fear from you. When you are convinced, drop around and give me a hand in this. I'm going to need plenty of help, and your kind is the most expert of all. Those kids—I know how they feel. Why, after what I went through when I was young, even the sight of a badge today makes me tremble. You recall how you noticed my fear when you came to see me. I was too ashamed to tell you the truth then."

The Phantom's car was still where he had parked it. He entered the airline ticket office and asked if anyone had taken off the night before in a chartered plane. No one had. He wanted to know if any nearby towns had flights leaving for New York shortly after nine o'clock. His guess on that was correct. Two cities within twenty miles of here were regular stops for passenger liners east-bound after nine.

The Phantom knew then that someone in town could have discovered he was missing, guessed he was on the trail of

Wiley, and sent that shrewd little killer pictures with which to identify the Phantom. There had been two pictures, he knew, for Wiley had studied each one intently. And the Phantom had appeared here in two disguises. He was rapidly progressing past the guessing stage now.

He drove to Police Headquarters and went straight to Chief Abel's office. There he told about the incoming shipment of weapons and advised that road blocks be set up. It was a vain gesture, he knew, but one not to be overlooked. Then he went to his hotel and slept for six hours.

## CHAPTER XVII

### PAID IN POISON



UNIFORM discarded now, Steve Huston sat across the dinner table from the Phantom. They had selected a quiet corner of the hotel dining room and were consuming hearty meals.

"I'm glad to be off that beat," Steve said. "Oh, I realize all the hoofing was worth it. I made friends with a lot of kids, and with some of their parents. Phantom, we're sitting smack on top of a volcano! Did you know that?"

"What makes you say so?" the Phantom asked.

"Something is about to explode. I can't get any definite story, but the feeling exists. Everybody in the slums knows it. They understand by the way some of those wise kids are clamming up, spending money, or doing a lot of whispering. Those people aren't fools. They actually know."

"I do, too," the Phantom said. "And whatever it is won't be much longer in coming, because those behind the scheme realize we're getting closer to the truth all the time and that public opinion is being molded to such an extent that these boys—some of them—might have a change of heart before the big job is pulled. Let one of those boys squeal, and the fat's in the fire."

Steve grinned. "One of them will, Phantom. I've got him all lined up. What do you think of that?"

"Fine—if he's really on the level."

"This kid wouldn't pull a doublecross. He's seventeen, his father is in prison, and

he's worked hard since he was able to get out of school. He knows what crime can do to a family, and he's kept resisting the efforts of other kids to get him on the wrong track. I talked to him often and long. He's pretending he's sick of the whole thing and wants to make money fast. If they accept him, and tell him their plans, we've got them."

"Keep in contact with that boy," the Phantom advised. "I have Bob Covert trying to work the same thing. Between the two of them we might get results. As of now, make certain your gun is free and easy to draw, because we're going hunting. For Tom Wiley and five thousand dollars' worth of red-hot weapons he just bought and had sent here."

"Do you know where he is?" Steve asked quickly.

"I know one of his hideouts. He is also aware that I know it, so while he may not be there, I'm hoping to find something which will show where he is. At any rate it's worth a gamble. If we meet him, he'll shoot to kill the moment he lays eyes on me."

The Phantom drove Steve to the house from which Wiley had emerged on an ambulance stretcher the night before. The place was dark and deserted-looking. They watched it for five minutes, then stole around to the back of the place.

The Phantom studied the rear door lock, found it to be old-fashioned and anything but pick-proof. He went to work on it with a slim, flat piece of metal. In less than five minutes the bolt slid back. There were no burglar chains or other bolts.

Steve used a pencil flash to light their way, and held a gun in his other hand. They crossed the kitchen, pushed open the pantry door and stood in darkness to listen. There was not a sound.

The Phantom put his lips against Steve's ear. "Do you smell fresh tobacco smoke? It seems to get stronger the deeper we progress into the house."

"I also smell freshly poured whisky," Steve whispered back. "The whole joint reminds me of a barroom."

"Keep going," the Phantom ordered. "And hold that gun ready."

They reached the front hall, went down it, and peered into a large living room. Further along they came to a music room, and the Phantom's arm suddenly checked

Steve's advance. The Phantom quietly took the flash from Steve, snapped it on and turned the small beam in the direction of the corner where a console radio was placed. A man was seated before the instrument. Beside him was a small table on which rested a bottle of whisky, an ice bucket, some ginger ale, and a heavy automatic. The man seemed to be listening intently to the radio. A perfectly natural picture, except that the radio wasn't playing and the man was dead.

"Turn on the lights," the Phantom snapped. "Then we'll search this house from top to bottom. We've found Tom Wiley all right."

"Yes." Steve looked at the dead man in the bright overhead lights which he turned on. "I recognize him now. Somebody knew Wiley was plenty hot, and couldn't hide out forever. Somebody knew you'd look him up."

THE Phantom felt for a pulse, found none, then picked up the almost empty highball glass. He smelled of it, held the glass to the light and rotated the remaining liquor in it.

"Poison," he said. "The murderer realized that Wiley was not only a member of this band now too hot to handle, but he had to be got rid of cleverly. The gun on the table is an indication that Wiley was getting suspicious of his friends, too, but he forgot that they had killed one boy by poison already. Or maybe Wiley didn't even know it. I saw a phone in the living room. Will you call Chief Abel?"

Steve came back in two minutes.

"The Chief is coming out personally. How long has Wiley been dead, Phantom?"

"I'm not a doctor, but I'd say about half an hour. Which means we're going to check certain people's whereabouts not only for last night when I was heaved off the ferry-boat in New York, but tonight about the time that Wiley died."

"You have ideas then?" Steve asked.

"Ideas? No. I'm sure who is behind this, but I can't pin the evidence down. To make an arrest now would just tip our hand, put our enemies on the defensive, and throw the whole thing off until they are ready to start work again."

"But what about that big job? The one requiring all those guns?"

"If we can't determine what it is or when it is to be pulled, I'll have the people I suspect arrested. That's something I promised myself, though once this is done we lose our best chances of convicting them."

The Phantom searched Wiley carefully without disturbing the body. He found nothing of interest. There would be no prints on the bottles or glasses, not a clue to indicate who had been here and slipped a poison into Wiley's highball. The Phantom could depend upon only one thing—the fact that no person can be in two places at the same time.

Chief Abel arrived, tired-looking and discouraged. He heard the Phantom's story, assigned men to do what was necessary, then sat down with a long-drawn-out sigh.

"Another murder," he groaned. "Phantom, how much longer will this last? Tonight's newspapers are screaming for action, and one of them calls this the 'City Of Dreadful Night.' Whoever wrote that caption wasn't far wrong. With darkness, it does become a city of fear. The crimes are getting worse and more frequent and, most serious of all, is the fact that the majority of them are done by juveniles. What's going to happen with all these kids gone wrong? 'City Of Dreadful Night' is the right phrase all right. But you're doing all you can. So is everyone."

The Phantom and Steve walked slowly out of the house. The Phantom drove to the Covert home and rang the bell. Bob Covert let him in.

The Phantom indicated Steve. "This is a friend of mine, Bobbie. We came to see your aunt."

Bob said he remembered Steve, even if he was out of uniform. Then he said, "But she isn't here, sir. Mr. Sloper came for her about an hour ago. They were going out to dinner and dance. But I've been working, and I've got some news."

The Phantom sat down on the edge of a chair. "Good, Bobbie. Let's have it."

"I went down to a juke-box joint this afternoon and acted like a sorehead. I said the cops were tough and mean and they killed my dad. I guess I put on a good act, because they told me I could get back at the cops if I wanted to."

"Fine! You're developing this case faster than we are, Bobbie. What else?"

"There are about fifteen fellows in on it. Tomorrow morning they're going to stick up gas stations, diners, any stores open all night—"

"In the morning?" the Phantom frowned. "Are you sure?"

"Yes sir, tomorrow morning. They'll have a lot of guns ready. Somebody told the boys it would be easy, because around nine o'clock in the morning people who work all night are dopy and can be taken easy. Also the banks won't be open yet, and all the money taken in during the night will be there."

"I don't get it," Steve broke in. "Shifts at gas stations and diners change before nine. And only a little dough is taken in during the night compared to what goes into the cash register by day and early evening. The whole thing sounds funny to me."

"But that's what they told me!" Bob cried. "It's the truth! I wouldn't lie."

SOOTHINGLY the Phantom eased the boy's distress.

"We know that," he said. "Steve didn't mean it that way. It seems that whoever is supplying this information and plotting these crimes is lying to his own men. I'd like to know why."

"I'll go back and maybe find out something more," Bob offered.

"No. Don't do that. They're getting cagey enough as it is. Stay away from them, Bob. Especially tomorrow, because I have an idea all those jobs which look so lush will turn out to be dangerous and unprofitable."

"Then why are they going through with them?" Bob asked.

"To create a smokescreen. A diversion. See what I mean, Steve?"

"Do I?" Steve gasped. "Put fifty or sixty kids out sticking up a couple of dozen places at the same time all over town and you'll have the cops in a lather they won't work out of for hours. And while that goes on, somebody pulls a big number. Even if something goes wrong and an alarm goes through, chances are there won't be enough cops nearby to make any difference. Phantom, I'm seeing my contact, too. Right now, if I may."

"Of course," the Phantom said. "I'll meet you at the hotel in an hour. Verify Bob's story and get all the additional facts

you can. We work fast, Steve, or we'll lose this game. Tomorrow morning is the deadline."

Steve hurried away and the Phantom turned to Bob Covert.

"You're sure that Sloper came for your 'aunt' about an hour ago? And he was alone?"

"Oh yes, sir," Bob said. "He had that blue convertible, too. They were going to the Club Samoa, I heard him say. I like Mr. Sloper. I guess he's falling for Aunt Janis and I'll bet he's glad now he told my father he'd get me out of all that trouble."

"Sloper—told your father?" the Phantom asked. "When?"

"Dad came to see me that night. He said he was sorry for the way he'd acted in Chief Abel's office and he was going to get me out. He said he'd make Mr. Sloper listen to reason and drop the charge of stealing the car. Then he'd work on other people to get me out of that—murder charge."

"Your father went to see Sloper," the Phantom said. "That's interesting, because Sloper might be the last person who talked to your father before he was taken away to be killed. Thanks for the information, Bob."

The Phantom gravely shook hands with the youth, went out to where his car was parked, and Bob stood in the doorway watching until the phone rang in the living room. He hurried back into the house to answer it.

"This," a voice said over the wire, "is Aunt Janis, Bobbie. I called to tell you that—that Mr. Sloper and I are running away to be—to be married. I'm very happy. . . The noise? Oh, that's music from the Club Samoa, but we'll be leaving here now. I want you to be happy about this, Bobbie. I want everyone to be happy about it."

"Sure—sure, Aunt Janis," Bob said. "I guess Mr. Sloper is a nice man. I'm glad you're going to marry him. I'll be all right—honest I will."

"I'm certain you will, Bobbie," Muriel said in a somewhat strained voice. "Tell Uncle Bill about it. You could go and stay with him."

"But I haven't any Uncle Bill—" Bob started to say.

There was a click and he knew she had hung up. He put the phone down. She

had sounded odd, almost scared. And why had she talked about an Uncle Bill who didn't exist? And would she run off and marry Sloper even though she had known him only a short time? How could she marry him anyway, unless she told him the truth, that she was not Aunt Janis Scott, but someone who worked for the Phantom Detective?

Suddenly Bob realized something was radically wrong. He raced to the front door, but he was too late. The Phantom had driven off. Bob went back into the house. There must be something he could do, but what? If anything ever happened to Aunt Janis, even though she wasn't really his aunt. . . Bob suddenly felt as frightened as he had that night when the motorcycle officer was killed.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MURDER RIDE



VERY headwaiter in town knew Kirk Sloper the Third. Because of the fat tips he handed out he rated one of the finest tables at the Club Somoa. Sloper helped Muriel into her chair and sat down himself.

It was the dinner hour, and the orchestra was just tuning up. Sloper ordered, they relaxed over their drinks, and Muriel approved of the lush spot.

"Even New York couldn't outdo this by much, Mr. Sloper."

"Well"—Sloper grinned—"I've been around quite a lot, and there are a few places to top it. However, I've nothing better to offer, so let's enjoy our night out. How is Bob taking things?"

"Much better than I'd hoped for," Muriel replied. "He's a good soldier. He misses his father, but won't talk about it. Philip was a fine man, but of course you know that."

"I?" Sloper asked. "I never knew him, Miss Scott."

Muriel looked surprised. "But didn't Philip go to see you about dropping the charges against Bob? That night Phil was—was killed?"

"Why no. No, he didn't come to see me. Are you certain he meant to?"

"He told Bob he was going directly from Police Headquarters to your home. Bob

was sure you two had talked, since you refused to press charges just as Philip intended to ask you to do."

Sloper drained his cocktail in one gulp. "He didn't see me, I tell you. He never reached my home."

"All right," Muriel soothed him. "If you say so, then he didn't see you. Let's not quarrel about this."

He smiled. "What's there to quarrel about? Come on, the orchestra is starting, and we'll dance away our little argument."

While they were dancing, Muriel's mind worked furiously. Philip had started for Sloper's place. Apparently he never got there, but why then was Sloper so vehemently insistent about it? Why hadn't he merely passed it off? She had worked with the Phantom long enough to have developed a good sense of judgment and psychology. Sloper's denial was too strong. In fact it reversed itself to become a positive statement. He had seen Covert, so why deny it?

Sloper put a finger under her chin and tilted her head back.

"What in the world is so weighty on your mind?" he asked.

"I was thinking about Bob," she said. "I promised to phone him before he goes to bed."

"It's only eight-thirty," Sloper objected, with a laugh. "Kids his age stay up later than this."

"I was only reminding myself to do it later," Muriel said. "If I don't call, he'll worry so much he's apt to call the police. I mean it, Mr. Sloper."

"He's a smart lad," Sloper chuckled. "If you promised to call me and didn't, I'd do something drastic, too. . . Our first course is being served."

They sat down and began eating. Muriel hardly tasted the food. She was trying to figure out how and why Kirk Sloper could be involved in this mixture of robbery and murder. She was hardly aware of it when a waiter hovered behind Sloper and gave him an envelope.

"This just came," the waiter said. "The gentleman who brought it said it was urgent."

Sloper handed him a bill. "Thanks. I've been expecting it." He smiled across the table at Muriel. "Excuse me just one moment." He slit the flap, extracted a picture with a note pinned on it. He turned the

picture face down, crumpled the note and placed it in the ash tray. He touched a match to it and watched it burn.

Muriel smiled at him. "You're acting just like a spy, Mr. Sloper. Was that a message from some Mata Hari?"

"No." Sloper picked up the photograph, and handed it to Muriel. "Just a friend of mine. Tell me—have you ever seen this girl before?"

Muriel looked at the picture and a panicky feeling touched her.

"Why no, Kirk," she said. "Should I recognize her?"

"In a way, yes. Her name is Janis Scott, and she is Bob Covert's real aunt. Who are you, and why this impersonation?"

"So you checked up," Muriel said quietly.

"Of course I did. I always check up. Who are you working with—the police?"

**M**URIEL pushed her chair back.

"I'm going! Please excuse me."

"Sit down," he said quietly. "You're not going anywhere. Because in about three minutes someone is going to visit your fake nephew. I've an idea you've come to like that brat. My friend will cut his rotten little throat if you get away from me. Perhaps I can't stop you from leaving here, but I can have Bob killed before you can reach him or do anything about me."

Muriel, half arisen, sat down again. "What do you want me to do?"

"We're going for a little ride, just the two of us. If you tell me the whole truth about yourself, neither you nor Bob will come to any harm. I couldn't hurt you, and there is no reason why I should. Because in less than twelve hours everything here will be finished."

Muriel closed her eyes for a moment. "I'll do what you say," she murmured. "I'd already guessed you were hiding something, because I felt sure Bob's father had seen you and if that was true, then it was at your home where he was probably attacked."

"One of the more unfortunate risks of my chosen business," Sloper said smoothly. "We're leaving now. I want you to go to one of the phones and call Bob, just as you promised him. Thanks for telling me he expected the call, because I agree that he's just about the type of a kid who would

raise the roof if you didn't phone."

"What can I tell him? To account for the fact that I won't be home?"

Sloper's lips spread in a wide smile. "Something I honestly contemplated as coming true. Tell him you and I are eloping. If there is anyone else he can visit, tell him to go there because you won't be home for a couple of days. That will remove any suspicion he might have."

"And if I refuse?" Muriel asked.

"We'll arrange it so Bob won't worry—about anything. You know what I mean."

"Yes. I'll do as you say. I suppose you'll be right at my elbow?"

"Of course."

He arose, went around the table and helped her up. He signaled for the check, dropped a good-sized bill on it, and took Muriel's elbow firmly. He piloted her between tables, bowing and greeting friends. He was the smooth, debonair man-about-town. Muriel didn't wonder why the Phantom had never come to suspect this man.

She entered a phone booth and Sloper crammed himself into it with her. He managed to get the door shut and supplied her with a coin. She called Bob and prayed the message she wanted to deliver wouldn't be too elusive for his boyish mind to grasp.

He should realize she couldn't marry anyone while she maintained a double identity. He would know there wasn't any Uncle Bill, and that she must mean something by this strange suggestion. Bob was playing detective for all he was worth, suspicious of everyone, and the least thing that set off his suspicions would make him go after advice. Muriel didn't possess too much hope, but it was all she could do.

She hung up and walked beside Sloper to the parking space where his blue convertible was waiting. He got in first, holding her wrist in what seemed to be a playful mood. She sat down beside him, and he was smiling and laughing as he backed out to drive away.

They passed through busy downtown streets, reached the beginning of the outskirts and suddenly Sloper jammed on the brake, forced Muriel's head back and struck her on the point of the jaw. . . .

When she awoke, the car was rolling along at a fairly fast clip. Sloper was grinning at her. She tried to move and found

that her ankles and wrists were tied, and that there was an uncomfortable gag between her lips. She gurgled through it.

Sloper bowed slightly. "I'm sorry," he apologized with mock sincerity. "I've reached a decision that you won't talk, or if you do, will only tell me a pack of lies. I realize you're a police spy, and you know far too much. I can't afford to take any risks at this stage of the game. We're set to complete our plans tomorrow morning. If you were permitted to interfere, all this work and risk would be for nothing."

MURIEL struggled with the soft cloth holding her wrists. It was no use.

"People will condemn me if they learn the truth," Sloper said. "I can't stand condemnation. Or poverty. I was on the verge of bankruptcy, you see. I had to recoup my fortune somehow, and this blasted city owed it to me. They took most of my father's money away from him and finished the job by cleaning me out. So why shouldn't they pay me back? I'm no ordinary man. I'm Kirk Sloper. I come of an important family. A smart family too. They knew how to build up a fortune, but in those days they could get away with things for which I'd be put in prison. So I have emulated them in some respects, and I won't go to prison."

They were far out now, along a winding macadam road lined with trees and shrubs. The headlights swept the lonely highway and the convertible was gaining speed.

"I'm sorry about this," Sloper said. "In a way I'll owe you a great deal, because little Bobbie will swear you told him we were off to get married. Naturally we were traveling rather fast. There was a terrible accident. Terrible! They'll find you dead. They'll pick me up half dead—or so they'll believe. I'll go to the hospital, and I'll be there in the morning. What an alibi!"

Sloper maneuvered around an especially sharp corner and, stretching ahead of him, was straight road but along a high bank. The white highway fence looked incredibly flimsy. Sloper opened the car door beside him and climbed out onto the running board.

"Good-by, Beautiful," he said. "I hope it's fast."

Muriel braced herself. He was going to pull out the hand throttle, jump, and let the car gain momentum along that straight

strip. By the time it veered off, it would be doing eighty or better. She knew how fast this car could pick up. It would crash the fence, perhaps turn over several times.

Sloper would run to the wreckage. If she wasn't dead, a blow with a stone or a stout piece of the wreckage would take care of that. Then he would untie her and remove the gag. He would bruise and bloody himself and squeeze into the wreckage to wait until the accident was discovered.

Muriel saw him reach for the throttle. He had grown pale, because jumping off the car even at this speed was highly dangerous. He began pulling the throttle out.

Suddenly Sloper gave a yell of alarm. The windshield right above the driver's wheel was suddenly shattered. He twisted around. A car was hurtling toward him and a streak of flame jetted from the driver's window. Sloper howled a curse, realized that if he jumped he would land in the path of this oncoming car, or at least be shot by the driver.

He had to get away!

He slid behind the wheel again, slammed the door and pushed his foot down on the gas pedal.

The car following him looked like an old crate. It could never outstrip this fancy convertible. He didn't stop to think that no car is faster than a bullet. One piece of steel hit him high in the left shoulder. He screamed, and took his foot off the gas pedal. He didn't want to die. Suddenly he wanted to live no matter if it was behind prison bars. He pushed on the brake and kept screaming.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THREE MEN OF MURDER



CHIEF ABEL listened, astounded, as the Phantom and Muriel Havens told him their story. They had stopped on the way back to town, made certain that Bob Covert was not harmed, and Bob was waiting out with the desk captain now. Chief Abel couldn't believe it.

"You could have brought in anyone except young Sloper," he said, "and I wouldn't have been surprised. But his family background, the money that was

left him—"

"All gone," the Phantom said. "He's broke, and was trying to get as rich once more as his forefathers had been. Only he wanted to do it faster, and without much regard to how."

"But Phantom," Muriel said, "last night someone attacked you on a ferry-boat bound for Staten Island. If Sloper is the man behind this crime, he can't be alone. Because Sloper was here in town last night."

"I know—I checked," the Phantom said. He took a newspaper from his pocket and spread it on Chief Abel's desk. "A lot of people had alibis for last night. Mornay, the photographer for the *Sphere*, certainly took enough pictures. There's one here that shows Sloper, and you, Muriel. It also shows Gibson, the bank teller who was robbed. Everyone is here except Attorney Proctor, and he admits he was in New York."

"Sure he does—when you caught him on his way home," Chief Abel grunted. "Well, does Sloper have help in this?"

"Quite a bit of help," the Phantom said. "Mornay is his right-hand man."

"The *Sphere* photographer?" Muriel cried.

"The same. Mornay killed Mark Tormay. During the excitement of questioning Tormay and taking his picture, Mornay managed to dump a small amount of a deadly drug into the boy's tin cup. When Tormay drank from it, he died almost at once. . . Chief, has an autopsy been performed on Tom Wiley yet?"

"Yes." Chief Abel drew a piece of paper toward him. "The same stuff that killed Tormay killed Wiley."

"Sure it did," the Phantom said. "And the nature of that poison points straight at Mornay. It's called uranyl, chemically known as uranium nitrate. It has few uses, and the major one is for intensifying photo negatives and prints. They put it in toning baths. Mornay needed a poison fast. It was late, drug stores were closed for the most part, and a purchase of poison at the hour would be well-remembered. So Mornay appropriated a bottle from the photo lab. It was labeled poison, so he took a chance. He wasn't wrong on the power of the stuff—all uranium salts are deadly. But he made a serious error in selecting a drug that in all likelihood came out of a

photo lab."

"I'll have Mornay rounded up," Chief Abel said grimly.

"It won't be necessary," the Phantom said. "He'll be around here in a few minutes. I asked him to come down and bring along the pictures he took at the theatre stickup. Mornay killed Tormay because that youth was no ordinary juvenile delinquent. He was an out-and-out crook who helped other boys steal cars and park them conveniently for other members of the gang to pick up and hide. That way, the car thefts were mostly pinned on juveniles. He poisoned Wiley because that crook and killer had become more dangerous than useful. Wiley, of course, taught some of the boys his tricks of burglary and holdup."

"What about Philip Covert, Phantom?" Chief Abel asked. "How did he get into that farmhouse? Where did Wiley go? And—well, I want to know how we killed an innocent man instead of a guilty one."

"Sloper told me some of it," Muriel said. "I believe that Philip Covert went to see Sloper about dropping the charges against Bob. Covert found Tom Wiley with Sloper and recognized him. That made it bad, because if Sloper was tied up to Wiley, the whole thing could fall through. So they took Covert a prisoner, brought him to the farmhouse, and then Wiley set the stage."

"You mean that Wiley deliberately kidnaped Steve Huston, pretended he wanted to kill him, but purposely let him go so he could send in an alarm?" asked Chief Abel.

"That's correct. Meanwhile, Tom Wiley got out of that farmhouse, and Hank Mornay took his place."

**T**HE CHIEF gasped and spluttered.

"Hank?" he exclaimed. "But—but Mornay was right around Headquarters up to the time the flash came in."

"Almost until the time of the flash," the Phantom corrected. "He teased Sloper, attracted attention to them both for an alibi. He went outside to Sloper's car and claimed that when the alarm came in, he and Sloper hit out for the farm. The truth is, Mornay went there first in a stolen car which he parked in the shed behind the farmhouse. He traveled fast in it, for the radiator was almost red-hot. He slipped

into the house before anyone arrived. Wiley had it fitted up for a last stand, even to a steel cellar door he picked up somewhere."

"Mornay simply waited until the police were set, fired at them and, as the machine-guns started playing, he pushed the half-conscious and drugged Covert in front of a window. The tommy-guns cut him up. Mornay promptly came out of his hiding place behind the steel door and when the police burst into the house, he merely held up his camera and started taking pictures. Sloper, in that blue convertible, told everyone how Mornay had practically commandeered the car and made him drive there."

Chief Abel made a few notes, called the desk captain, and told him to expect Mornay, and seize him on sight. Then he leaned back and did some thinking.

"Phantom," he said after a moment, "you were attacked in New York. We know that Sloper stayed in town here, and that Mornay was taking pictures. Neither of them could have gone there."

"That's true," the Phantom admitted. "I'll explain a little later who tried to kill me. Right now we have plans to make."

"About the intended stickups in the morning?" Abel asked.

"Exactly. We haven't found the guns Wiley bought. They are probably ready for distribution now. We can't stop the boys from forming or even accepting the weapons, but we can intercept them before they use them. You'll need every available officer, and perhaps as many State policemen as possible. All places likely to be stuck up must be watched, and the boys taken before they can even get set. That, Chief, is preventive police work. The best kind of police work there is."

"All right," Abel said. "I can do that. What else?"

"Let's go back to the series of crimes for a moment. From the first, I half-believed that your local underworld was not mixed up in it. Not a clue pointed toward your known gangster named Lathy. And why should he start a campaign of juvenile crime anyway? It would only cut into his own brand of crime. The cut a gang leader would get from gangs of boys would be small. Not worth the risks. So I thought there might be another reason for this

juvenile activity, something which would hide behind the stickups, robberies and burglaries of these boys."

"And do you know what it is?" Chief Abel asked.

"I'm not certain. When the burglary at that hardware store took place, I began to get suspicious. The jimmy used on the window left a telltale mark, but the twin of that mark appeared at the scene of a jewelry store stickup, which took place just before the hardware store job. The boys Steve caught denied breaking into the jewelry store. Nobody believed them, especially when the same jimmy seemed to have been used in both crimes."

"And wasn't it?" Abel wanted to know.

"I believe these boys were supplied with exact duplicates of the tools our adult crooks used, so that all suspicion would continue to center on these juveniles. You'll note that the jobs which really paid off were done by the adults."

"Not the bank stickup," Chief Abel argued. "Mornay even got pictures of the kids involved."

"But you didn't find the boys. Their adult mentors spirited them away. And wasn't it foolish for those boys to hide their loot in an incinerator? The boy your men cut down talked enough to show their orders were to cache the money there."

"Kids do fool things," Abel commented.

"But not that foolish. The idea was for someone else to come along, get the loot, and make off with it while the boys involved in the holdup would stroll away and, if arrested, deny everything. Didn't you think it odd that the incinerator should start burning just after they deposited the loot in it?"

"Incinerators smolder," Chief Abel shrugged. "Opening the door would create a draft."

**T**HE PHANTOM shrugged, and waved a hand.

"This fire didn't require a draft," he said. "It was probably wired somehow to the door so that when it was opened and closed, the combustion began. The flames wiped out all trace of the method used, but it didn't wipe out twenty odd thousand dollars in currency."

"Phantom," Chief Abel said, "the money was in there. Even you saw the boys ditch it."

"I saw them ditch a canvas bag in which the money was placed. However, the currency which went into that canvas sack happened to be a good grade of stage money. Or, maybe, some counterfeit bills that Wiley could have picked up."

"Phantom," Muriel said quickly, "if those boys thought they cached real money in the incinerator and it was worthless, then they were given this worthless money during the holdup. The real money was held out!"

The Phantom nodded. "You're right."

Someone knocked on the door. Hank Mornay, camera slung over his shoulder, came in ahead of a uniformed sergeant. Mornay wasn't pleased about the fact that the sergeant held his elbow.

"What's the idea?" he demanded. "I walk in and the sarge put the arm on me, drags me back here."

"Did you search him, Sergeant?" Chief Abel asked.

"Yes, sir. No guns. Nothing."

"Sit down, Mornay," the Phantom said. "Relax—because you probably won't again for a long, long time. I was just telling Chief Abel and Miss Havens—"

"Miss Havens?" Mornay gasped. "I thought she was Bob Covert's aunt!"

"You did until Sloper had you check and you got a picture of the real Janis Scott," the Phantom said. "Let me go on. I was telling them about the bank holdup, how the boys stole a lot of worthless money. You see, I gathered up some of the ashes and put them under spectroscopic examination. Real bills have a secret dye that comes well within a certain green spectrum range. The spurious bills didn't have this dye, and that fact alone proved they were fake."

"I don't get it," Mornay pretended innocence.

"You will," the Phantom said. "After the stickup, we entered the bank. I say 'we,' because I was that press association photographer you stuck in that doorway for the hidden police to bowl over and delay—because you knew darned well I was some sort of a detective. You notified the local papers and the local police about the intended holdup, but that was all."

"I've wondered why they tipped off the holdup," Muriel said.

"So their plan could go into operation, and Mornay needed an excellent reason

for being at the scene," the Phantom explained. "After the crime, Mornay entered the bank and shot pictures of everyone. There was a lot of excitement and he did his best to add to it. He left his camera case in a teller's cage, later on retrieving it."

"So what?" Mornay shouted. "Can't a guy leave an empty leather camera case around?"

"Of course, but it becomes a handy place to hold the money which was supposed to have been stolen, Mornay. When we left the bank, it was raining hard. You were carrying an extremely valuable camera, and yet you didn't even try to put it in its case. You know why. The case was jammed with bills. No professional photographer would have treated a camera that way unless the reasons were extreme."

"I'm not going to say one word," Mornay exclaimed. "This is all a lot of lies. You can't prove anything against me."

"I think," the Phantom said, "we can prove two murders against you. You'll find out how later on. And when those boys realize you didn't care if they were captured or killed after the stickup, I'm betting they'll talk."

"I'll keep this man away from Sloper," Chief Abel said.

"Sloper?" Mornay screamed. "Did he talk?"

"He will," the Phantom said. "And if he doesn't, then Gibson will."

"Gibson?" Muriel asked. "I don't seem to know him."

"He's the bank teller who shoved the fake money at those holdup boys. The man whose face our friend Mornay here superimposed upon the body of another person attending the theatre affair, so that

Gibson would be well alibied, and it would be thought impossible that he could fly to New York after it was found I'd followed Tom Wiley there. Gibson warned Wiley, had him lead me into a trap, and threw me off the ferry-boat."

"Gibson," Chief Abel snorted. "I'll haul him in too."

"I'll give you odds you wan't," the Phantom said. "Not tonight. Am I right about that, Mornay?"

The news photographer's reply made Muriel's eyes open wide, caused the Phantom to wince, and brought Chief Abel out of his chair with a clenched fist. Mornay didn't say anything after that.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE BIG JOB



**G**IRMLY determined men were on the job, so between eight and nine o'clock the next morning, the greatest crime wave ever hatched in this city was stopped in its tracks. Boys, slipping up on gas stations and diners, were quickly surrounded, stripped of their weapons and loaded into cars. They weren't taken to Police Headquarters but, under close guard were brought to the street in front of the bank where Gibson worked as a teller.

There, motion picture cameras had been set up, police were ready, and the boys were told to watch intently. The Phantom, Muriel, Steve Huston and Chief Abel were in one big car covering the front of the bank. The doors would open in the next five minutes.

[Turn page]

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"I hope you're right about this," Chief Abel said fervently. "Phantom, if it goes wrong, we'll be laughed at until—until Doomsday."

The Phantom was not worried. Not on the surface, though some doubts were growing within him as the morning progressed.

"I figured it this way," he said. "Gibson worked yesterday afternoon. Nobody saw him leave the bank, and he didn't go home nor to his usual haunts—a café, a pool-room. Nobody at either place saw him. There is a suitcase missing from his room."

"All that doesn't add up to bank robbery," Abel declared.

"It does when added to other factors. Like the fact that the bank vault contains more than a million dollars in cash this morning. That amount isn't often carried. The juvenile gangs were prompted to create a crime wave just prior to the time the bank opens for business. There was so much necessity for haste that Wiley was dispatched with stolen jewels to help buy the guns needed."

"All right," Chief Abel grunted. "There's a lot of money in the vault. Gibson has disappeared. The boys were set to create a diversion which would make the bank robbery simple. I admit all that, but bank employees are already in the bank and nothing has happened. Where is Gibson? Why this set-up—boys we captured, movie cameras?"

"Gibson," the Phantom said, "is in the bank vault. He's been there all night, and when the door opens in about three minutes, he'll come out shooting and carrying a suitcase full of cash. If every cop in town was chasing the score or more of stickups that were to have been pulled off, Gibson would have an easy time getting away. He could shoot a path through the bank employees without any trouble."

"So that's it," Steve Huston said. "I suspected he'd be in the vault, especially after the rather definite assignments you gave me last night in connection with Gibson."

"The boys"—the Phantom turned to look at the police cars containing the thirty-odd juvenile criminals—"will have a first-row seat at the capture of a bank robber. I want them to see how it's done, see what little chance a crook has, and

how he reacts when all his props fall down."

"If he comes out shooting," Chief Abel warned, "his only reaction will be toward the slugs that smash him to pieces."

"I don't believe it will be necessary to shoot," the Phantom said. "The movie cameras are set to photograph the whole thing. They'll be shown in every theatre, and kids all over the land will have a good sound laugh at Gibson. If most of these boys are ever tempted, they'll stop to think of Gibson and what happened to him despite his careful plans. They'll remember how stupid he looked and acted."

The Phantom's watch showed one minute of nine. He walked briskly into the bank. Two men stood before the huge vault. The electric clock controlling the time lock gave its customary click. One bank employee spun one of the combination dials, stepped back, and a second turned another dial. The Phantom motioned everyone aside. He seized the high door lever, turned it, and pulled the massive door open.

For a few seconds nothing happened. Then a burst of gunfire came from within the dark vault. It was followed by a man dressed in overalls and jumper, with a long peaked cap on his head, and an oxygen mask over his face, completely concealing his features.

He had a suitcase with a stout leather strap slung over one shoulder, and used both hands to hold the submachine-gun. He fired a couple of more warning bursts, fanned the weapon toward the employees who stood with their hands stretched high.

THE masked man backed toward the door, turned and started to race through it. Suddenly he stopped. The submachine-gun he held sagged. He faced a half-circle of police and a dozen varieties of weapons were trained on him. He saw the line of cars with the spectators gaping at him. He spotted the movie cameras grinding away as if this were a well-rehearsed piece of business, with the final take now in progress.

The masked man whirled about, seeking an exit. The Phantom stood behind him, an automatic leveled.

"Take off that oxygen mask, Gibson,"

the Phantom said. "Drop the gun and see how high you can reach. Do that—or die!"

Gibson let out a scream that sounded half-strangled beneath the mask. His gun clattered to the pavement. He ripped the mask from his face and showed features dead-white and contorted in terror. His knees shook visibly. The words he uttered didn't make sense and came in a high pitched wail.

Both arms shot as high as he could get them. Then he began to sway. His eyes rolled back until only the whites showed, his knees buckled, and he fell on his face.

Somebody laughed. It was taken up until the crowd howled. The Phantom didn't stay for that part of it. He and Muriel and Steve Huston had a car waiting.

"It worked," Steve said. "Gibson reacted the way we all hoped he would. He showed himself to be a sniveling coward. The boys aren't apt to forget him, nor the way Mornay and Sloper are shouting accusations at one another."

"Whatever is done to them, they deserve it," Muriel said. "Trying to get rich by using impressionable boys as a smoke screen for their bigger crimes. They don't rate one iota of mercy."

"They won't get it," Steve Huston opined. "Your father's newspapers are going to keep this case open until they burn those men. What do you want to bet that the crime statistics of this city take a nose dive?"

"They'll do that," the Phantom said slowly. "But this is just one city. How about the others? We've done what little was possible here, but our efforts can't extend from Coast to Coast. We need men like Attorney Proctor to take over. We need money, a great deal of it, to keep boys off the streets. It's never too late to save one of those kids, and each one saved is a million dollars in our bank."

Muriel and Steve Huston got out of the car in front of Frank Havens' local newspaper building. They watched the Phantom drive away. Neither said a word as they turned and walked into the building where Steve would write one of the biggest stories of his career, and Muriel would explain all the facts which couldn't be made public, to her father.

Both knew they would see the Phantom again and soon. Because somewhere a man would be thinking that he was greater than the law, cleverer than anyone else, and that the world owed him a living which was to be his for the taking. Such men always plot and plan, but against them would be the ingenuity, experience, courage, and the guns of the Phantom Detective.

But in the meantime, wealthy Richard Curtis Van Loan would be taking life easy in his luxurious penthouse, back to the life he had been born.

But when the call did come for the Phantom he would be ready to answer—was ever ready.



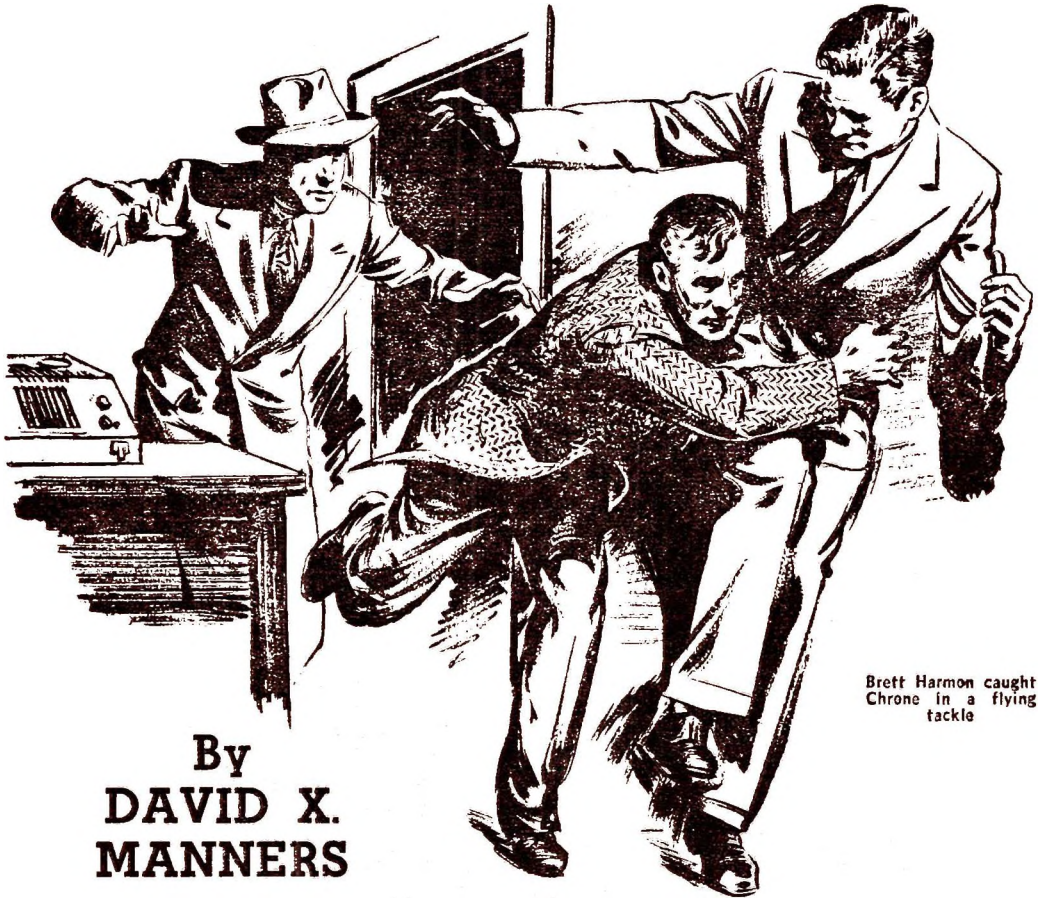
NEXT ISSUE'S PHANTOM NOVEL

## MURDER SET TO MUSIC

*The Case of the Slain Musician*

By ROBERT WALLACE

# The Stranger's Voice



Brett Harmon caught Chrono in a flying tackle

By  
**DAVID X.  
MANNERS**

**T**RAGEDY never means very much unless you know the persons involved. But when you knew the boy who was drowned, the family that was broken up, or the person who was shot to death, it took on a new light.

Brett Harmon thought that as he sat at his desk in the semi-darkness of his office. He had known Joe Decker. He remembered him as a skinny kid stealing spuds off pushcarts and helping roast them for other hungry kids in gutter fires under the shadow of New York's old "El." He had met him in later years, too, when Joe Decker had made the mistake of going

into the business of peddling pin-ball machines. He remembered how, at that meeting, they had compared notes, and how strange it seemed that they should both now have a couple kids of their own.

"And now you're the D.A.," Joe Decker had said, "and I'm still a small-timer. But I always knew you'd be something big, Brett."

And now Joe Decker was dead. To Brett Harmon, it almost seemed that a part of himself had died.

One of the phones on the desk buzzed and Harmon reached for it. "Yes," he said into its mouthpiece, and after listening to

***Harmon Had an Eyewitness—Who Wouldn't Talk!***

a few brief words, he hung up, arose from his desk and walked out of the room.

He went through his secretary's room, that was dark with the gloom of after-hours, into a corridor and then down its echoing emptiness to an elevator bank. The man who operated the elevator wore a star on his shirt and a gun at his hip. When he reached the prison floor, he unlocked the door. Harmon crossed an anteroom to a barred door. The guard there tipped his head and unlocked the brass lock.

Brett Harmon was tall, but not imposing. A handsomer face might have helped him in election campaigns, but the swatch of gray that he had acquired during the war years was a flattering distinction.

The room Harmon entered was small, square, and bare in appearance, although there were three chairs along one wall, a chair in the center of it, and a spotlight on a tripod. Jerry Ziff and Alec White, two Homicide detectives who were loitering about the room, straightened to attention on seeing Harmon. But the male stenographer at the small table didn't pay any notice. The fourth man, who was seated in the center chair, didn't look up.

Harmon took a brief that Jerry Ziff handed him, and squinted his eyes in annoyance at the spotlight.

"Turn that thing off," he said. "We don't need anything like that here."

Brett Harmon had never liked anything that smacked of third degree methods. If a man was going to talk, he could talk without being physically tortured. When the spot was switched off, Harmon sat down casually and for a moment studied the witness. In the half dozen years before he had become district attorney, when, as a lowly assistant, he used to be called day or night to ascertain the facts at the scene of a crime. He often had to interrogate witnesses and sometimes murderers. In this way he had evolved a code of routine.

First, he never questioned more than one witness at a time, nor did he ever let one witness hear the answers that any other witness had given. Second, in cross-examination he shunned the use of blunt, fear-inspiring words, such as "murder" and "shooting" and "rape".

Brett Harmon only used soft, cushioned words, to make it easier for a person to

talk about the crime. Third, he always tried to make anyone being interrogated realize that he was a friend, a counselor, and not a prosecutor. Finally—and this was the cardinal rule of all—he never revealed anything of the evidence at hand or what the police knew.

The man sitting in the center chair looked up now. Brett Harmon judged him to be in his middle forties. He was a big man with a florid face and nervous hands.

"You're John J. Mahoney?" Harmon asked, and when the man nodded, "You're the proprietor of a tavern on Fourth Street?"

"Yes sir," Mahoney said.

**B**RETT HARMON, District Attorney, felt sorry seeing the way the man was squirming. But when innocent persons were sucked into crimes which they had no part in making, personal anguish was only part of the tragedy.

"I'm here to help you," Harmon said.

"Yes sir, I don't want to get in no trouble." Mahoney gestured appealingly with one hand.

"That's what we want to keep you out of—trouble," Harmon said. "But concealing evidence in a murder case is a serious offence. It's compounding a felony. You don't want to compound a felony, do you?"

Mahoney said that he didn't, and Harmon continued. "According to the word I have here, when the police first arrived on the scene, you identified the murderer as a man named Eddie Chrone. Afterwards, you not only denied it was Chrone, but you asserted you never had mentioned his name. What are you scared of, Mahoney?"

"I'm not scared of anything. I just don't want no trouble. And Chrone is a power in this town."

"So that's what you're afraid of?" Harmon dropped his voice. "Decker bucked Chrone in his gambling-machine racket, and died. And you think if you talk, Chrone or Chrone's men will come after you."

"I didn't say that."

John J. Mahoney was scared, scared of his life.

"You as good as said it, Mahoney. Look, I want you to know we protect our wit-

nesses. Anyway, once Chrono is sentenced, his power will be broken. He'll have no men—no organization."

Mahoney was silent, his eyes down. "I never said it was Eddie Chrono who did the killing," he said finally. "You cops told me I said it. But I never did."

Harmon looked over the brief he held in his hand. "I have a statement here you made last night when you were first questioned. You said that you had just closed up your tavern and walked out with Joe Decker, who was your last customer, and that you then met Eddie Chrono."

"I didn't say it was Eddie Chrono. I said it was somebody I never seen before."

"All right. You met this fellow, and he started arguing with Decker. They passed a few words back and forth, and then suddenly this stranger pulled a gun. Is that right?"

"That's right," Mahoney said.

"Then, according to you," Harmon tapped the paper in his hand, "this is exactly what happened. You have all the conversation down here. And yet you deny Eddie Chrono was the killer."

"That's the way it happened," Mahoney said. "That's it exactly. But I don't know who did it."

It was all ground that had been gone over before. But in questioning a man, Harmon knew, getting him to repeat the same story over and over had a point. Little variations would creep into the story that might suddenly change its whole complexion.

Harmon said to Ziff and White. "Come on, boys." He tipped his head at Mahoney. "Let's take this one for a walk."

With Mahoney and the two Homicide men following, Harmon moved down a long corridor, past two tanks of prisoners, and came to an isolation cell. A man sprang up from the bunk there at his approach. Harmon watched the man's eyes to gauge his reaction toward Mahoney, but he could discover nothing significant.

Harmon turned to the tavern keeper. "You know this man, Mahoney?"

Mahoney's eyes were on the floor. He raised them, and thrust his hand forward in a gesture. "Sure. It's Eddie Chrono."

"Of course he knows me," Eddie Chrono said. "I hoist 'em at his bar quite often. So what?"

Chrono was a wire-lean man with a dark jaw that was too big for his face. Harmon pointed at him, as he pounded home the question at Mahoney.

"Wasn't it this man who came up to you and Joe Decker when you left your tavern?"

Mahoney dropped his eyes. The words struggled in his throat and it seemed for a time he'd never get them out.

"No sir," he said then. "It wasn't. I don't know who it was who killed Joe Decker."

HARMON let the breath run out of his lungs slowly. There was nothing more to be done. He had an eyewitness, but the eyewitness, in fear of his life, would never talk. He had to figure out some way of making him talk, of pinning guilt on this killer of Joe Decker.

"Take Mahoney back to his cell," he said. "Perhaps I'll return to him later." But in his heart he knew that Mahoney would never be of any use to him. Mahoney was taken away, and Harmon and Ziff were left alone with the prisoner.

"Is this a social call or business?" Chrono asked. "If it's social, you can skip it. If it's business, all I got to say is, book me or let me go."

Eddie Chrono was the sort of social misfit who is never able to think in any terms outside himself. Life, for him, was still a jungle in its most primitive state, with every man fighting tooth and claw to get everything for himself and leave nothing of value for others.

"Where were you at three-fifteen A.M. this morning?" Harmon asked him.

Chrono's jaw jutted another balky inch. "I don't have to answer questions, Flat-foot. You got nothin' on me. I'm gonna be sprung outa this can the minute my lawyers can get down here."

"Did you happen to see Joe Decker at three-fifteen this morning?" And when there was only sullen silence, "Get wise to things, Chrono. You'll only make it hard for yourself by playing stubborn."

Chrono sneered. "I've heard that song before. I take it you checked my alibi."

"Alibis are easy to buy, Chrono."

"Have you got anything on me? Then spill it. Put up, or shut up."

The man was right. Chrono could feel cocky and sure of himself. He had com-

mitted a murder and he was going to get away with it because everyone was afraid to say anything against him.

Harmon turned away. He walked with Ziff all the way out of the cell area before he spoke. "What do you think?" he said then.

"I think he's guilty as blazes," Ziff said.

"Of course," Harmon agreed morosely.

"We got our killer, but our only witness against him has been scared into a hopeless clam-up."

Never in all his career had Harmon felt such a sense of frustration. Back in his darkened office, he sat soberly at his desk thinking. It all reduced itself to childhood terms. They were all a bunch of slum kids again, he and Joe Decker and, this time, Eddie Chrone too. He knew how Eddie would have fitted in. The big kid who secretly beat up smaller ones, who could never play a game without bickering for more than his share.

Occasionally, Harmon's thoughts were interrupted by phone calls. One was about a killing in Harlem that one of his assistants could handle competently. A second was a request for him to speak at a high school assembly, which he granted. The third was a call from his wife that concerned his favorite radio program.

It made him sit up with sudden excitement. That last call was a clue, a possible solution to his dilemma. He was just reaching for the phone again, this time to make an outside call, when Jerry Ziff entered the room. "They've just served the writ on Chrone."

Eddie Chrone had made good his threat. His lawyers had won his freedom on a habeas corpus. Harmon's mouth tightened. "I want him rearrested the minute he steps outside the door."

Ziff's eyes widened. "Rearrested?"

"You heard me," Harmon said. "And we'll book him for Murder One this time."

Ziff started for the door.

"And, Ziff," Harmon called after him. "We can release John J. Mahoney. We won't need his testimony. Because we've got ourselves a new eyewitness—to Joe Decker's killing."

Ziff swung back to ask some questions about that, but Harmon waved him on his way. He could have held Mahoney now on a charge of compounding a felony, of shielding a killer, but somehow it didn't

seem worth it. It was a little too much like persecution instead of prosecution.

The door closed on Ziff and Harmon picked up the phone again.

AN HOUR later, a dapper, boldly-dressed man, carrying a pair of suitcases, appeared at Harmon's office. He had a comical blond mustache, and he looked as if he might be a Hollywood writer. Actually he was an actor who had skyrocketed to success on the basis of a new kind of radio show.

Brett Harmon clasped his hand warmly. "Tom Wood," he said. "Come with me. You've saved my life."

They walked down the corridor, and Brett Harmon ordered the elevator to the prison floor. They found Eddie Chrone, chafing and fuming in the same cell he had occupied earlier.

"What in blazes is this, Harmon?" he demanded. "I'm going to break you for this. This is your finish, Copper."

Harmon smiled slowly. "I'm afraid it's the other way around this time, Chrone. I want you to meet a gentleman who is going to play a very important role at your murder trial. Meet Mr. Tom Wood, originator and producer of the Hidden Microphone radio show."

Chrone's eyes narrowed. Harmon could see the wheels turning around in his head. The skin around the pinball-promotor's mouth grew whiter.

"What's that got to do with me?"

"Plenty," Harmon said. "Plenty. Ordinarily, I follow a policy of never revealing to a suspect the evidence we have against him. But in this case I can see no objection to letting you know our situation. You've heard the Hidden Microphone radio show, Chrone—everybody has. Well, this time, looking for real-life, unrehearsed stuff to broadcast, they got some real drama—your murder of Joe Decker."

Eddie Chrone's face blanched completely. "Who you kidding?" he said.

"We're kidding no one," Harmon answered. "Tom Wood was on the scene in a nearby parked car with his hidden microphone and made a recording of what happened when you and Joe Decker met up."

Chrone's eyes wavered, then grew hard.

"It won't wash, Copper," he snarled. "Nobody's prowling the streets at three

in the morning to get stuff for radio shows."

"But it so happens that Tom here wanted to get some amusing drunks in conversation, and what better time than three o'clock when all the bars close? Understand, Tom isn't too choosy about what he records. He uses less than two percent of what he gets—less than one recording in fifty. Do you begin to understand now, Chrono, why it's not so unusual that he happened to get you and Decker on his little wire recorder?"

Harmon took Wood by the arm and led him away before Chrono could answer. "How long do you think it will take to get it set up, so we can let him hear it?" he asked then. "An hour?"

"A while longer than that," Wood said.

"Don't hurry," Harmon said. "Perhaps the longer, the better. I want Chrono to stew for a good long while. He'll be soft enough for the pickling then."

Three hours later, Harmon lifted a phone on his desk and asked that Joe Chrono be brought to his office. He had decided a new scene might be just the place for a shift in attitude for Eddie Chrono from his former self-assurance and cockiness.

Chrono entered, skeptical, but wary. His shifting eyes quickly took in the layout of the room, its exits, the positions of the Homicide men, then settled on the portable player for wire recordings.

"Is that the gimmick?" he asked.

Harmon did not bother to answer. He turned to Tom Wood. "Turn it on," he said to the radio man.

**D**EFTLY, Tom Wood threw the toggle switch and placed his hand on a dial which he slowly turned. For half a minute there was only the hum of the speaker, as one spool revolved, and another wound the take-up. Then, suddenly, there was the background of street noises, distant auto horns and the throb of car noises. There was another brief pause, then the thumping sound of footsteps on a walk.

The voice came distinctly and clear. "I've been wanting to kill you for a long time, Decker."

The answer was lost in the roar of a passing elevated train.

"What?" came the voice again. Then,

"Let go of my arm!"

The recorded crack of the gun was lost in the sudden shout of Jerry Ziff. Eddie Chrono was lunging across the room toward a window. His purpose was clear. He was going to hurl himself through it no matter how deadly the result.

Brett Harmon was after him then. Legs thrusting, he left his feet in a flying tackle that caught Chrono about his middle. He hit the floor hard. Other men swarmed in on him, dragged him up.

"All right, I killed him," he babbled. "But I'll never fry for it. You'll never get me in that chair!"

"The charge will be Murder One, Chrono," Harmon answered, straightening his sleeves and adjusting his coat. "The sentence will be up to the judge and jury. Take him out, boys, and have the stenographer get his statement."

He felt better now. He guessed it had been a sort of loyalty. A loyalty not only toward Joe Decker, but to all the kids like him who had grown up in similar poverty and squalor. A sort of loyalty to his own kind.

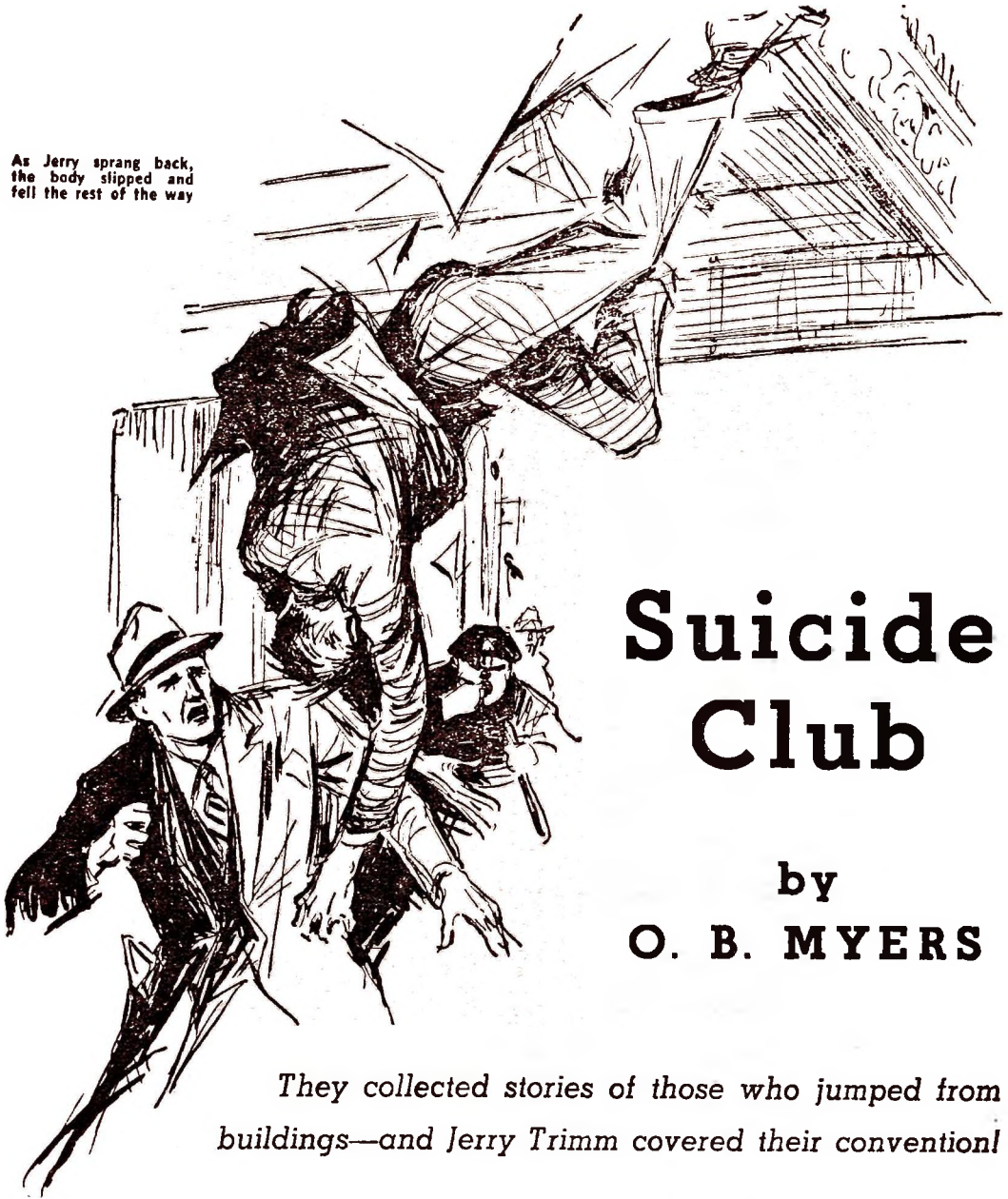
Jerry Ziff could scarcely restrain his question. Everyone except Tom Wood and Brett Harmon had cleared from the room. "How did you do it?" the homicide man gasped. "You mean you actually got a recording of the murder as it was committed?"

"Of course not," Harmon said. "No district attorney could be that lucky. But my wife, phoning to remind me to tune in on my favorite radio show made me think of the whole scheme. It stacked up this way: Tom Wood here is an actor. We knew, from Mahoney's testimony, exactly what was said and had taken place at the time of the murder. Everything but the identity of the killer. I took Tom down to let him hear Eddie Chrono talk. Then he went back to the studio and made the recording, with himself playing the role of Chrono."

"You mean that wasn't Chrono? But wouldn't he recognize it wasn't himself?"

"He didn't, did he?" Harmon said blandly. "As you yourself may know, outside of movie actors and radio people, few persons know what their own voices really sound like. An imitation was good enough to fool Chrono."

As Jerry sprang back,  
the body slipped and  
fell the rest of the way



# Suicide Club

by  
**O. B. MYERS**

*They collected stories of those who jumped from  
buildings—and Jerry Trimm covered their convention!*

**J**ERRY TRIMM turned from the avenue into the side street, walking with long, swinging strides that reflected the vigor of spring and of youth. To one who knew him, that meant that he had a slight hangover which he wished to walk off before lunch. It was probably the Scotch on top of the Planters punch, last night. He reminded himself, scow-

ling, to avoid that combination in the future, and cocked his fedora at a slightly more dapper angle just to show that he didn't give a hoot.

He could see his destination ahead of him on the corner of Sixth, where the Monument Hotel towered high above its neighbors. The main entrance was around the corner, but he remembered

that there was a side entrance on this cross street. Yes, he could see the marquee that extended out over the sidewalk. White, frosted-glass letters said:

MONUMENT GRILL — EDDIE EFTON'S TROUBADOURS.

It led you in at the rear of the lobby, where the bar was located. He remembered that, too. Jerry Trimm was a man who got around New York pretty thoroughly; he knew his way. It was part of his job.

Of course a little hair of the dog wasn't exactly part of his job, though right now it would certainly help. He was pondering that as he neared the entrance. Should he, or should he not, stop for a sour before tackling his assignment? Well, perhaps.

Just before the marquee cut off the sky, he looked up.

He couldn't say, afterward, what had made him look up. He wasn't even sure whether he had seen anything or not. If his eye did catch a momentary glimpse of something, there was certainly no time for the significance of what he saw to telegraph itself to his brain. For in that same instant his ears were assailed by a terrific, shattering crash. Instinctively he cringed, and halted so abruptly that the soles of his shoes actually slid a few inches on the cement pavement.

For a moment he had no idea of what had happened. Then he was aware that jagged shards of broken glass were clattering to the sidewalk, just in front of him. He was also aware that a sudden, shocked hush had fallen on the busy street.

Cars braked to a halt, pedestrians froze in their tracks. A single, sharp scream rang out.

He raised his eyes. The marquee was made up of sheets of thick wire-glass supported by a framework of steel channels, the structure designed to carry its own weight plus that of two feet of wet snow.

The whole framework was shivering violently. Two adjacent panels of glass were smashed to fragments. The steel beam between them was bent in the middle, nearly torn from its bolts. Over it something was draped, loosely—something that, since it wore clothes, must be human.

OF THAT fact, scarcely recognizable at first glance, further proof was now given by a bizarre illustration of the inexorable law of gravity; the law which had already exerted its fearful power for more than twenty floors. In those clothes were pockets, and, since the body now hung head down, some of the contents disgorged themselves. With a metallic tinkling, coins rolled hither and yon.

Instinct that was stronger than will power loosened Jerry Trimm's muscles. Half unaware that he was moving, he put out his foot, stopped a skittering coin, and stooped to pick it up. At that moment the body slipped, and fell the rest of the way.

Jerry sprang back. From the corner a police whistle shrilled. Throats which during those few seconds had been frozen in horror now opened up. Great shouts arose. Jerry sprang up the steps and made for the bar. . . .

Some time later he sat in the private office of Horace Coyle, manager of the Monument. Others sat or stood about the small, austere furnished room. The traffic cop from the corner, bulky and self-assured in his uniform; a police lieutenant named Fennelly, in plain clothes, making notes at the desk; a chambermaid in starched gray and white jumper, a desk clerk who fiddled with his collar and tried to look calm and self-possessed.

The doctor, the photographers, and the morgue attendants had come and gone, the latter taking with them all but certain contents of the pockets which were now strewn forlornly on the desk.

Horace Coyle, dapper, sallow-jowled, twisted one hand with the other in nervous distaste.

"A terrible thing," he murmured for the fourth time. "The name of the hotel—"

Lieutenant Fennelly shrugged callously. "You'll live it down, Coyle. Anybody with a twenty-four-story heap in New York has got to expect people to jump out of their windows, once in a while." His loose mouth grinned sardonically. "Maybe he got a bad egg for breakfast, this morning."

Coyle's hands fluttered in distress. "For heavens' sake, Lieutenant, don't say that—in front of the press!"

Fennelly turned to Jerry Trimm, his

grin fading. "You're with the *Daily Star*, you say?"

"Yes," Jerry said quickly, "but not on straight news. I write features for the Sunday edition, the *Star Weekly*. I've called the city room. They're sending a man to cover this."

"And this—what's his name?—Victor Gair. He was a friend of yours, eh?"

"I didn't say a friend, exactly. I knew him. He was a private dick operating on his own. I bumped into him in connection with that Orbach jewel case, last year. He tried to chisel himself in on the reward, I remember. He—"

Jerry checked himself. After all, the man was dead. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*.

The police lieutenant turned back to Horace Coyle. "What was he trying to chisel himself into, here in the Monument?"

The manager raised his palms in protest. "I don't know. As I told you, he has been quite—er—cooperative with us, in the past. He came in yesterday, and asked for a room on the south side of the building, on either the nineteenth or twenty-first floors. It happened that we could give him Twenty-one-thirty-six, and we did. Naturally, I did not inquire into his business."

"His business is easy enough to guess," growled Fennelly. "He wanted to watch somebody on the twentieth . . . Say, where is that man from Twenty-thirty-six? I thought you asked—"

"Here he comes now, Lieutenant."

An assistant manager held the door open for a tall, heavy-chested man in a pin-stripe blue suit. He had glossy black hair, features that were handsome if you liked the surly type, and he wore an expression of cautious annoyance.

In response to Fennelly's questions, he said that his name was Judson Bruno, that he lived in Stamford, Connecticut, where he was in the used car business, and that he was in New York to attend a convention, and, if possible, to work up a little business on the side.

"You acquainted with a man named Victor Gair?"

Bruno cocked his head to stare at one corner of the ceiling, exercising his memory.

"Gair? Not to my knowledge—no."

"You know anything about his suicide

this morning?"

Bruno's features seemed to stiffen. "Suicide?"

The police lieutenant described briefly what had happened.

"He was in Room Twenty-one-thirty-six. He must have gone right past your window, on the way down. Were you in your room, Mr. Bruno, at"—he consulted his notes—"twelve-ten?"

THE answer was measured, definite.

"I was. I came in just before twelve. At twelve-ten I must have been just about phoning room service to send up my lunch. You can check up on that, of course. Perhaps that's why I didn't see anything go past the window."

Jerry Trimm looked up. The remark about checking up on his presence in Room Twenty-thirty-six struck Jerry as odd, or at least unnecessary. The man, after all, wasn't suspected of anything. It was probably just one of those things people said to the police.

Fennelly didn't seem to notice it. "I guess you can't help us then, Mr. Bruno. By the way, what convention did you say brought you to New York?"

The tall man turned back from the door, and answered slowly.

"I came to attend the annual meeting of the Suicide Club."

Jerry straightened in his chair. That was the assignment that had brought him here—to write up the Suicide Club, whatever that was.

He saw Fennelly's jaw go slack with surprise.

"The . . . What did you say?"

Bruno frowned, and looked to Horace Coyle as if for help.

"It doesn't mean anything. It's just a hobby, a fad. There are several hundred collectors, all over the country. We correspond, and swap, and have a meeting once a year."

"But what do you collect?"

"Suicides. The news reports, that is. We clip them and paste them in scrap-books. Only those who jump from buildings, of course. And we keep them by floors. The perfect collection would contain a news item on a suicide from every floor from the first right up to the hundred and second. The older the date line, the better."

"The hundred and second? Why not higher?"

"That's the Empire State Building, you see. There aren't any higher than that, up to now. And that particular item, of course, is quite common."

Fennelly snorted. "Well, I'll be hanged! What the devil is the value of old news clippings on suicides?"

"None, of course," replied Bruno coolly. "But it's like anything else that people collect. What material value, for example, have old stamps, or copper coins, or books in a language that's no longer read? They are only valuable to the collector, because of their rarity. As soon as he has a sample of any one item, he is no longer interested in a second—except, naturally, to sell or trade to another collector."

"And you sell and trade these clippings?"

"Certainly. I had two seventeens, both date-lined from Bridgeport. I received sixty dollars for one, last evening. The buyer just didn't happen to have a seventeen, that's all."

Fennelly leaned heavily on the desk. "And next I suppose you're going to tell me that Victor Gair jumped out of his window just because somebody didn't have a twenty-one, eh?"

Bruno flushed. "I'm not telling you anything at all about Victor Gair, Lieutenant, because I don't know anything. Furthermore, I happen to have a twenty-one already, which I can show you. Would you like to look over my collection?"

The police lieutenant disposed of this offer with a sarcastic sweep of his hand. He looked slowly 'round the room with a hard, incredulous glare, as if to say, "Did y'ever hear of anything as crazy as that?" Just as his eyes came to the door, it opened, and he saw the sergeant whom he had earlier sent upstairs.

"Come in, Dave. You look through Twenty-one-thirty-six?"

The sergeant wore a derby and a perfect dead-pan.

"Cheap valise, a raincoat, a few underclothes," he reported. "Razor and toilet articles, a half pint of Bourbon nearly finished, and yesterday's *Star*. No letters or papers; no clues to his movements. The window was open. If there's any

marks on the sill, you'll need a microscope to read 'em. His room key was lying on the table."

The last item he dropped on the corner of the desk. Fennelly eyed him.

"Is the Bourbon gone now, Dave?" he asked.

"Nearly," was the sergeant's inscrutable reply.

"I beg pardon," interpolated Bruno. "I have some business. If you don't need me."

"I guess not," admitted the lieutenant. "If we have any more questions, we'll know where to reach you."

Bruno nodded quickly, and departed.

AFTER he was gone, Fennelly picked up the key the sergeant had just brought in. From where he sat, Jerry could see the number "2136" impressed into the plastic tag. Then suddenly the detective dropped it, and began poking through the articles which had come from the pockets of the corpse. He held up another key, with tag attached.

"Two keys?" he muttered, in puzzled inquiry. He turned over the second tag, and read aloud, "Four—eight—G—seven—two."

Horace Coyle made a sudden movement, checked it. "It's one of our passkeys," he explained.

"What do the numbers signify?"

"It's a code," explained the manager, "in case the key gets lost. That one unlocks all doors from the twentieth floor up."

"And can you explain how it came to be in Victor Gair's pocket?"

Coyle was obviously uncomfortable. "No, I can't. We naturally don't give out passkeys to guests. But I suppose, in his line of work, he would know how to get hold of one. There are, of course, quite a few in existence, in the hands of the management, the house detectives, inspectors, chambermaids, and so forth."

Fennelly's eyes swung to the elderly woman in the striped jumper. She met his silent accusation with tightly compressed lips, lifting the bunch of keys that hung at her waist. She selected one, held it out for Fennelly's inspection. As he read the numbers, he muttered them aloud.

"Four—eight—G—seven—two . . .

Okay. So it isn't yours he had. In that case, he probably paid somebody else to get hold of it. I can't see that it's got anything to do with his killing himself, but I'm wondering who—and why."

The ensuing discussion did not, however, bring forth any answers to those questions, nor any hint of an explanation why Gair should have carried one key in his pocket and left the other lying in his room. After a short time Jerry Trimm rose.

"I just remembered, Lieutenant, that I've eaten no lunch. Is it all right if I breeze along?"

Fennelly frowned. "Since you're one of the few persons who actually saw death occur, you may be called on to give testimony at the inquest, when it's held. We'll let you know."

Jerry nodded, and went out to the business men's grill. He ate a hot ham sandwich, a dish of rice pudding, and drank two cups of coffee. The check was an even dollar. He fished out his change to find a quarter for a tip.

Staring at the handful of silver, he noticed a coin that he had not previously been aware was in his pocket. At least it looked like a coin, although it was stamped out of aluminum and had a tiny circlet screwed into one edge so that it could be worn on a watch chain or a key-ring.

On one side was embossed a stylized skull-and-cross-bones, and underneath it the words, "Suicide Club." On the other, against a background of a towering skyscraper, was a blank rectangle big enough to accommodate a name, and in small digits a number. The number "326."

He examined it in mingled surprise and curiosity. Obviously it was an identifying bangle for a member of the Suicide Club—but whose? Well, the number might give him the answer to that. That was doubtless what it was for. He dropped it back in his pocket and went out into the lobby.

The bulletin board near the main elevators announced, among other events:

Suicide Club—Dinner—Green Room, 8:00 P. M.

When he inquired at the desk, the clerk told him, "See the club secretary, Mr. Pfeister. He's in Room Seven-twenty-seven."

Jerry picked up the phone on the ledge

and asked for Seven-twenty-seven. Yes, Mr. Pfeister was in, and would be glad to see him. Nothing in the voice prepared him for the jolt he received when the door of Number Seven-twenty-seven swung open and he faced the straight-cut black coat and stiff white collar of a clergyman. Above the collar was a firm, pink chin, a pair of keen blue eyes, and a shock of unruly white hair.

"Mr.—Mr. Pfeister?" stammered Jerry.

"Yes. Come right in." His voice was soft, smoothly modulated, as he indicated a chair, smiling at Jerry's surprise. "You are interested in the Suicide Club?"

Jerry said that he was, and told him why.

"We are not averse to a little publicity, although we do not seek it." His host nodded. "Like all with a hobby, we are glad to interest others in riding it."

IT HAD been started, he explained, by a man who had been a coroner in Detroit in Nineteen-thirty, when the onset of the depression had provoked a wave of suicides. It had spread, slowly but steadily, as a fad among men in all walks of life. To take it up, one needed only a scrapbook, a pair of shears, and access to the newspapers. The rules were simple. The members established their own values by trading, and developed their own lingo through correspondence.

"For example, a report on a suicide from a bridge, a monument, or a cliff, is known as a bridger. While the height may be great, it is not possible to determine an exact floor level. Consequently, bridgers are not in great demand. Livers, on the other hand—"

"Pardon me. Did you say, livers?"

"Those who jump with the intent of suicide, but do not succeed in killing themselves. Fairly common from the lower floors, but extremely rare in the higher levels, of course. The victim must live at least twenty-four hours in order to classify as a liver."

He spoke briefly of his own personal interests. He had no parish, but was retired on a private income. The Suicide Club was primarily a hobby to pass the time. However, the pursuit did occasionally bring to his attention cases of desperate financial need, in which he could sometimes be of assistance.

"This case here today—have you looked into it, Mr. Pfeister?"

"Not yet. I am waiting for the news reports." He smiled peculiarly. "I will confess that my collection has so far lacked a twenty-one. Although this one, being a stumbler, is not so valuable."

Jerry's expression betrayed his question.

"A stumbler," explained the elderly clergyman, "does not reach the ground, but lands on a set-back, an adjoining roof, a marquee, or something of the sort." His tone held a note of sadness. "The way modern skyscrapers are constructed, we get few examples of the full, clean-cut fall in the ranges above twenty."

He went on to say that the club had been formally organized only in the last two years, and only at this meeting had distributed to the members, at a cost of ten dollars apiece, a membership token. It was a disc, carrying certain insignia.

"Oh, yes," said Jerry. "I think I've found one. I would like to return it to its owner, if you can tell me who it is."

He dug in his pocket and brought out the aluminum coin. Mr. Pfeister noted the number, and consulted a small ledger.

"Why, yes. Let's see—Seven-twenty-seven . . . That's Bruno—Judson Bruno. His home address is in Stamford, but he's stopping here in the hotel, I believe." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "That's odd, that he should have lost it so soon. He was one of those who paid me only last night, and I delivered it to him just before noon today. At least, I delivered it to his room. He wasn't in, so I put it in an envelope and slipped it under the door. Fortunately I keep a listing of the serial numbers, just for this reason."

Jerry stood up. "It's been interesting, Mr. Pfeister. Thanks very much. You'll probably see a write-up in the *Sunday Star*, soon. And I'll take care of returning this little souvenir."

He went back to his office and wrote half a dozen pages, but was not satisfied. He returned to the Monument about six and inquired for Judson Bruno. He was told that Mr. Bruno had checked out. He got Mr. Pfeister on the phone and asked about the dinner.

"No, I'm afraid you won't find Mr.

Bruno at the dinner," he was informed. "He left a note in my mail-box—said he had to return to Stamford on an urgent business matter."

While he ate dinner alone, Jerry hesitated. But he had nothing to do that evening, and it was his instinct, developed by his work, to follow things through. You never could tell where you might pick up a story with a twist. At eight o'clock he was boarding a train for Stamford in Grand Central.

The directory in Stamford gave him the address. It was an apartment house hardly a block from the station. He pushed a button, and listened to agitated footsteps inside, for fully a minute before the door opened.

The girl who faced him had beautiful blond hair that tumbled over her shoulders in symmetrical waves of gold. It was the kind of hair you see in the shampoo ads—brilliant, incredible. She had not much else. Her features were slightly heavy, her face round, her lips rouged to a petulant pout. Her eyes narrowed at him, and there was an edge to her tone.

"Yes?"

"I beg pardon . . . Mr. Bruno? Judson Bruno?"

"He's not in." Her manner was impatient.

**J**ERRY explained that he had seen Bruno in New York during the day, that he had found something of Bruno's and wished to return it. As evidence of his intentions he drew out the aluminum coin and held it in his palm. It seemed to mean nothing to her.

"You'll have to come back some other time."

She moved the door a few inches, getting ready to close it. Jerry spoke on a sudden hunch.

"By the way, do you know about Victor Gair?"

It was almost as if he had slapped her face. She drew back with a gasp, her eyes widening. Then abruptly she stepped aside.

"Come in," she said huskily.

She closed the door behind him, then locked it and shot the bolt. They were in a small living room, overcrowded with cheap furniture. Through one open door Jerry could see a sink piled with dirty

dishes, and through another a traveling bag open on a bed, a stack of women's clothing on either side of it. It looked as though Mrs. Bruno had been getting ready to walk out.

She clutched his arm. Her fingers were tense, frightened. "For heaven's sake, tell me what happened to him!" she begged.

"He stepped out of a window on the twenty-first floor of the Monument," Jerry told her. "Suicide. I was on the sidewalk when he landed. It was pretty bad. Why? Was he a friend of yours?"

She shook her head numbly, but not in answer to his question.

"I don't understand it. I don't understand it."

She dropped into a chair, staring blankly at the rug. Jerry sat down on the sofa, facing her. After a moment she began to talk. Slowly, uncertainly at first, but then like a flood poured out the sordid story. Her expression never changed its wooden rigidity, even after the tears began to roll down her cheeks. It was grotesque, like watching a statue weep; a statue with shining golden hair.

Jud was a brute—a selfish, stubborn bully. A month after their marriage she had discovered that he was playing with other women. The discovery had been repeated, often. She had asked for a divorce; he refused. What could she do? She had no family except a cousin in California, and no money to pay lawyers. Although Jud's income was in five figures, he gave her barely enough for household expenses. The rest he spent on his own entertainment.

Then she had met Victor Gair. He had been working on a case in Stamford at that time, and had picked her up in a local grill. They had seen each other, secretly, half a dozen times. He had pointed out that his business was getting divorce evidence.

"I had no money to pay him," she explained. "But he was willing to do it—for other reasons."

Jerry understood. She went on, her tone bitter. The convention in New York had seemed like an opportunity. Obviously Jud meant to use it as an excuse for some illicit fun. Otherwise, why take a hotel room when he could easily have returned to Stamford each night? Victor

had been optimistic about catching him *in flagrante delicto*.

The next thing she knew, Jud had come home, a couple of hours ago, a day sooner than she had expected. He had offered no explanation, but had laid a late edition of a New York evening paper on the table and pointed to a short paragraph on the first page. The expression in his eyes as he watched her read—she could not define it, but it had frightened her. Leering, triumphant.

She had pretended ignorance, but her agitation must have been noticeable. His sneering silence had been terrifying. She had no idea how much he knew about Victor Gair, but he must have known something, else why call her attention to that paragraph? He had refused any explanation. She had been too frightened to demand one.

"Where is he now?" asked Jerry.

"He went out—to his office, he said. I don't think—I don't know what he's going to do."

The dribble of glassy tears began to get on Jerry's nerves.

He pulled out his handkerchief and offered it to her.

"Thank you." She mopped at her livid cheeks.

"So Victor Gair was working for you? When did you last hear from him?"

"Last evening—he phoned. He said he had a room in the same hotel with Jud, and was watching him like a hawk."

"Did he say anything to indicate that he might be thinking of committing suicide?"

"Heavens, no! Victor—I just can't imagine. . ."

Jerry pondered these revelations, while she sniffled opposite him. Then he rose, reaching for his hat.

"Well, I'll go see if I can find your husband."

She was at his side quickly. "You won't tell him? I don't know why I've told you all this, but you—you're so sympathetic. I know I can trust you. Can't I?"

HER eyes were bright with tears again, her lips twisted in distress. Jerry hesitated over what to say. He felt sorry for her, yet did not wish to be drawn any farther into the unsavory complica-

tions of her affairs. She misread his hesitation.

"Oh, no, please! Don't tell Jud anything!" She clutched his shoulders with both hands. "If he knew what I've done, he—he'd beat me! I'm afraid! I'm leaving here—I don't know where I'm going. You'll help me that much, won't you?"

From his shoulders her hands went around his neck. She pressed against him, turning on the form of appeal that, in her experience, was always most effective. Without actually taking her in his arms, Jerry had to seize her waist to keep his balance.

She murmured into his neck, "Please! I'll do anything you ask!"

They were in that position when the door opened and Judson Bruno stood there, staring at them.

"Ah-h-h-h," he purred, with a nasty intonation.

By the time the door clicked shut they had sprung apart, but the spring itself was guilty. The blonde cringed against the table, her eyes wide with terror.

"Jud! I didn't know—I only meant—" She gulped, trembling. "I never saw this man before in my life."

"No?" Bruno's tone sneered disbelief. "But I have seen him before, I think. Yes?"

Jerry tried to keep his voice level. "That's right. At the Monument Hotel this noon. That's why I'm here. Mr. Bruno. I came to see you, not your wife. She was just explaining to me that you were—that you were not at home."

"Ah, yes!" Bruno's sneer was malevolent. "She explains these things very well, doesn't she?" When he shot her a malicious look, her mouth opened to speak. "Keep quiet!" he ordered harshly.

She shrank back, shuddering. He turned again to Jerry.

"Now perhaps you'll explain a little further just what you're doing here, Mr. —er—"

"Trimm," Jerry told him curtly. "With the *Star*. I happened to be at the Monument this noon, as you know. I found something that I discovered later belongs to you, and I came to return it."

He produced the aluminum disc, extended it on his open palm. Bruno peered at it curiously without touching it.

"I've never seen it before. What is it?"

In surprise Jerry told him, "It's your membership token in the Suicide Club."

"Oh, yes! You say it's *mine*?"

"The number on it shows that. Mr. Pfeister, the secretary, looked it up in his roster. He told me that he had delivered it to you just before noon, today, by slipping it under your door in an envelope. The door of Room Twenty-three-six, at the Monument."

"Maybe he did," Bruno shrugged. "But then how did you happen to find it?"

"I picked it up on the sidewalk, under the marquee, when Gair's body struck. I thought that it fell out of his pocket."

Jerry stopped talking, but he did not stop thinking. In fact, he was thinking faster than ever. This curious collection of facts, and their interrelated meanings, was suddenly beginning to fall into a pattern. The meaning of that pattern struck him like a chill.

Mr. Pfeister had left that pseudo coin, marked by its identifying number, in 2036, Bruno's room, just before noon. At ten minutes past noon it had reappeared, bouncing on the sidewalk under Victor Gair's smashed corpse.

How had it got into Gair's pocket? Bruno might have given it to him, except that Bruno had denied even knowing Gair. And just now he had stated, with off-guard frankness, that he had never seen the token before. Then how had Gair—

But Jerry was not the only one doing some fast thinking. Something similar must have been passing through Bruno's mind, although his thoughts were not reflected on his face. He came at least to one conclusion. Reaching out unhurriedly, he picked the disc from Jerry's palm and dropped it into his pocket.

"Thanks for your trouble, Trimm," he said, in a tone that tried to be casual. Then he turned toward his wife. "Get out!"

She gripped the edge of the table. "But Jud! I haven't—"

"Get out!" he repeated with brutal finality. "You were getting ready to leave anyway, before I came home. Now you can walk out, you little devil, and stay out forever. Go on!"

Jerry started to speak, then checked himself. Any interference would only involve him further in this marital mess,

the most thankless position he could assume.

THE blonde, her eyes riveted to her husband, obeyed his blunt command. Her lips trembling, she crept round the edge of the room, keeping as far from him as possible. When she was almost at the foyer, he made a small, impatient gesture with his hand. She emitted a brief shriek of terror, jerked open the door, and slammed it behind her. Jerry heard her heels running along the corridor.

"Now," said Bruno ominously. He stood with heels apart, between Jerry and the door, his heavy features set, like concrete. "Now tell me the truth about finding that coin."

Jerry, taken by surprise, repeated his former statement. "How do you explain its getting into Gair's pocket?" he added.

The other man disregarded his question. "And did you discuss this with my wife?"

"No. She didn't seem to know anything about the coin. It's true that we had never seen each other before. She was upset, frightened, by what happened to Victor Gair, and she was appealing to me for help. That's all it amounted to."

"Did you tell Pfeister where you picked up that disc?"

"No, I just said I'd found it. I didn't realize then—"

"No, you probably did not. But you realize now, perhaps."

"I'll have to be going," said Jerry.

"No, you won't," snapped Bruno.

His hand came out of his pocket holding a revolver, small but deadly. He held it pointed steadily at the pit of Jerry's stomach. Jerry blanched.

"You realize that, if you find it difficult to explain how Gair got possession of that coin, I would find it even more difficult, not to say dangerous. Luckily you are the only one in the world who might ask questions. Now that it is in my pocket, I am quite safe. It is unfortunate for you, Mr. Trimm, but you newspapermen are always putting your noses into other peoples' affairs. Sometimes so far that you cannot get them out clean."

Jerry's throat was tight. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to shoot you," was the cold, unequivocal reply. Jerry noticed that Bruno's lip twitched nervously, as if the prospect was a pleasure. "Alive, you are too dangerous to me. Dead, you will be no problem whatsoever."

"But you'll go to the chair for murder!"

"Ah, no! The explanation will be quite simple—much simpler than explaining that coin. I come home unexpectedly, and find my wife in your arms. She runs out. I kill you in rage. The unwritten law will get me a light sentence; perhaps nothing. You know how these things are. You've written them often enough in your newspaper. Proof? That lipstick on your chin."

Involuntarily Jerry raised his hand.

"Don't move! If there's no lipstick there now, there will be before you're found."

He had sidled cautiously toward the sofa while talking. Now he had a pillow in his hand. He held it so that a corner was over the muzzle of the revolver, to muffle the explosion.

"The less noise the better," he explained, half to himself. "I may need a little time to arrange things, before the neighbors rush in."

His eyes were glazed with excitement now, but his hand was steady as a rock. He moved toward Jerry from the side, beginning to get around behind him. It was evidently his intention to shoot him in the back of the head, deadening the blast with the pillow.

Jerry's muscles tensed like iron. The slightest premature movement would, he knew, jerk that trigger finger into action. He had to wait until Bruno got close enough, but not too close. When he could step and reach that gun hand in one swing—not before.

The front door flew open with a bang. Jerry saw a broad chest in a blue uniform with brass buttons. Peering past his shoulder were frightened eyes under a mop of rumpled blonde hair.

"Go ahead! Make him give me my things! He can't throw me out like this! All my clothes, my rings—"

As Jerry swung, the gun barked. His eyes, still focused toward the door, saw the puncture appear as if by magic in the long skirt of that blue blouse. The

cop plunged to his knees. Then Jerry's attention was concentrated elsewhere.

The pillow, Bruno, the gun, all went to the floor together in a desperate scramble. For Bruno the jig was up. He must have known it, but for a moment he fought like a wild beast. Jerry got hold of the gun, but Bruno's teeth sank into his wrist, and he couldn't do anything with it. They thrashed about on the rug, the screams of the terrified blonde resounding in their ears.

**A**FTER what seemed like a century, but was probably all of ten seconds, Jerry got his elbow on the other man's solar plexus and bore down. Bruno's breath went *whuff*; his muscles began to relax. As Jerry's arm tore free, the cop arrived on hands and knees, his own police positive reversed in his massive hand. A blow of the butt put Bruno in dreamland, but the officer handcuffed him to a steam pipe before starting to unbutton his blouse.

More by accident than by intention the bullet had passed through the pillow before reaching its target. It was now embedded an inch deep in the policeman's hip, but had penetrated no vital spot.

He gritted his teeth and began to ask questions.

Jerry made no attempt to explain the whole story, there in Stamford. He merely signed a charge of felonious assault, to make certain Bruno would be held, but as soon as he got to New York he got hold of Fennelly on the telephone.

"Bruno probably guessed that Gair was tailing him," he explained. "Gair went down to Twenty-thirty-six when he knew Bruno was out, to see what he could pick up, using the passkey that he'd bribed some chambermaid to give him. While he was there, this envelope was slipped under the door. Naturally, he looked in it. Perhaps he thought that identity disc would be of some service to him. Anyway, he put it in his pocket.

Then Bruno came and caught him there."

"And killed him?" speculated the detective.

"I don't know. Maybe just knocked him cold. In order to avoid an accusation of burglary, Gair probably explained his errand. That doubtless made Bruno madder than ever. They had some words, and the words soon became blows. Then Bruno found himself with a body on his hands. Perhaps a dead body; perhaps only an unconscious one."

"In Gair's pocket he overlooked the passkey, but he found the room key to Twenty-one-thirty-six right above him. He saw a way to kill a lot of birds with one stone. He went up the service stairs to the floor above and let himself into Gair's room. He opened the window, and left the key lying on the table. Then he came down again and threw Gair, or Gair's body, out of his own window. It was directly below, and nobody could tell, afterward, which room it came from."

"But he never saw that Suicide Club coin in Gair's pocket?"

"If he did, he may have thought it was Gair's, and left it there. He had no way of knowing it was his own, because he had no idea what his own number was. So it went down and tumbled out on the sidewalk. When I picked it up, of course, I didn't realize what significance it was going to have."

"You realized just in time, didn't you?"

"It came pretty close to being just in time to be too late." Jerry laughed shortly. "I'm wondering if Mr. Pfeister is going to be bitterly disappointed."

"Disappointed? Why?"

"He told me that his collection lacked a twenty-one."

"And now it turns out to be a twenty, eh?"

"Worse than that. As I understand his explanation, murders are no good. To make the grade, it has to be suicide."

He could hear Fennelly's sarcastic grunt. "Tough break, huh?"



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# Murder Wears a Dress

He smashed the heavy candlestick against her head again and again



*A pair of  
pruning shears  
trims down  
a death design!*

by **JOHN DI SILVESTRO**

**A**LBERT MERICAN was ready to kill again. His thin, short body was protected from the rain by a black raincoat and a large black umbrella which he held at an angle against the driving downpour. From time to time an annoying run of water dripped from his long nose.

He disliked foul weather, but anything

was better than staying in the same house with Milly.

"Milly," he muttered savagely, his voice as mean a sound as the slash of the pounding rain on the umbrella.

He looked up the street. In the distance the round bright red neon sign of the bar warmly beckoned. Perhaps a warm burst of whisky would settle his raw nerves.

He slowly walked toward the bar. How he hated his current wife. How he hated her. His anger softened a bit at the tepefying thought of the money he'd have after Milly's funeral.

The bartender was a dull-faced man with battered ears and a ludicrously small nose.

The pleasant hum of conversation in the large booth room was dim and sweet against the harsh night sounds in the torrential outdoors.

"Double bourbon," Albert ordered and took the drink to an untenanted booth.

He sipped gently, thought, sipped— Yes, it was nice in here—a place where a man could plan. No wonder taverns had been the chief plotting places through the ages.

He was pleased with himself. He was a master criminal—blasted right he was. In Washington, in Florida, in New York, he had married and killed three fairly wealthy women.

A man of simple habits plus a complete and utter hatred for women or companionship of any kind and the nosier places of entertainment could live a brilliant life of ease in such a fashion.

Albert nodded. Yes, he had good reason to be proud of himself. He never used the same method twice.

In Washington he'd been Paul Funnelson, frustrated literary man—Wilma had unfortunately plunged down the cellar stairs. The "poor" reward to the "bereaved" husband had been \$11,000.

In Florida he'd been William Benzinger, sickly ex-insurance broker—Fanny had slipped on an icy pavement. The insoluble husband had been left \$9,000.

In New York he'd been Rudolph Laswin, businessman—Dorothy who couldn't swim had drowned when their row-boat overturned. All that had been left to the miserable husband who had adored his Dorothy was \$14,500.

**H**E DRAINED the glass. Oh how he would love to use the boat trick again! The simplest method, indeed. But he didn't dare; he was much too clever to repeat himself.

For Milly he'd devised a brilliant scheme. Of course, there were a few weak spots in the plan, but that made it all the more foolproof! Only an idiot tried to make a plan perfect. His plan was as

perfect as any and would give him maximum protection.

He had the bartender refill his glass and returned to the quiet comfort of the padded booth to go over his plan again.

After his two-week vacation, which started on Monday, he'd go to his office as usual. It was a mere twelve-by-twelve gash in the ten-story Furry Building where he ran a mail-order business of the most trivial nature. He placed ads in the cheap magazines, and when someone wrote for a luckystone ring he sent it to the purchaser if fifty cents had been enclosed with the request.

So he'd go to his lonely office as usual the first business day after his vacation and tend to business as usual—until ten-thirty. Then he'd don the heavily padded sport coat (which he'd purchased two years ago in Chicago), slip on the elevator shoes which added three inches to his height and the old black felt hat.

He'd sneak out the rear entrance of the building and go home. They lived on the outskirts of this little Ohio city, and their beautiful little cottage was a mile away. A good walk, but he'd always been fond of hiking.

The house nearest to theirs belonged to Rena, his sister-in-law, and was a good hundred yards away. After making certain no one was about he'd knock on the door and surprise Milly that he had come home so early. Well, her surprise wouldn't last long. He'd dispatch her quickly and set to work on his alibi.

That was where the sheer genius of his plan came in. Milly was an atrocious cook, a poor housekeeper, an incomparable bore. In fact, her only accomplishment was the front lawn, the flowers and the box hedges. She kept those stiff little plants with professional care, priding herself upon the excellence of the hedge which greenly fenced the front garden.

Every two weeks Milly trimmed the hedges, carefully lining up the poles and the string which went over the bushes to insure that she sheared an even path over the green things which Albert hated.

After disposing of her, he'd put on her old garden frock and the floppy sun hat she always wore and trim the hedges himself.

Rena would be on her sun porch—as usual. He'd wave to her, as he'd seen

Milly do when he was home on a Sunday afternoon, and she would remember it later. He had no fear that Rena would come over. She was a reticent person and rarely visited even her own sister.

After trimming the hedges he'd hurry off in his too-large overcoat and elevator shoes (from a window Rena couldn't see) and hop a bus to the business section. It wouldn't take long.

The first thing he'd do upon arrival at the office would be to phone his house twice. The operator would verify it. Of course there would be no reply. Then he'd phone his sister-in-law and ask her if Milly was over at her house. Rena would naturally say that Milly had just been out on the front lawn.

Actually the ten minutes he used to return to the city via the speedy bus would be mighty difficult to account for—if *they suspected him*.

That was his alibi—the phone call. He couldn't be home and in the office at the same time.

Albert had one final drink and left the bar. He was at the end of town so he boarded a bus and was driven to the stop a few blocks from his home.

He was quite pleased with himself. He could get twelve thousand easily for the house in these inflated times, Milly's insurance would net another ten thousand and her twenty-one thousand in the bank would come to him also.

Forty-three thousand cool, beautiful dollars! His most ambitious coup indeed!

Milly was a trim-figured fortyish little woman with rumpled dark hair and humble eyes. She greeted her husband pleasantly and returned to her book.

Albert hadn't been what she expected but he was something to take along on visits and to parties. Morose occasionally, but what intelligent person didn't have fits of depression?

Albert lit his pipe and smugly puffed on it. No, he was sure, she hadn't changed in three years. Good heavens, married to that for a *thousand days*.

"Where shall we go on our vacation?" Albert asked hopefully, between puffs on the pipe.

"Al, you know I dislike travel."

"But, Mil—another vacation spent at home! We haven't gone anywhere since we married."

"Can you afford California or Bermuda?"

He blushed. "I can afford Chicago. It's a nice place—"

"Oh rattles!" She slammed the book shut. "Let's not discuss it."

Beginning to sound like one of those crapulently conceived soap operas, he thought. Two whole weeks with Milly—but it would be a point in his favor at the inquest and trial. A man didn't spend his vacation at home with a wife he didn't love.

She was stingy as all of them had been, and he regarded that as another point in his favor.

It proved his true love for the woman he had married.

**MONDAY.** First day of the vacation. Oatmeal, coffee (it never tasted the same twice) and a revolting, soft-boiled egg.

At eleven in the morning Milly gayly donned her garden frock (a long, green-stained), put on the wide-brimmed sun hat and smiled at him.

"Must be punctual or the most beautiful garden in the world will fail," she said.

He didn't curse because he'd long since passed the swearing stage.

"It is beautiful," he admitted, following her out into the hot early sunshine.

She set up the poles and the measuring string carefully. Seeming barely to touch the growth, she worked over the beautifully even topped hedge.

Acute disgust rustled through Albert. He'd endure these two weeks somehow, but come that Monday, two weeks hence—

Milly fooled with the marvelously fresh-looking flowers for a long while, then returned to the porch.

"You give all that time to the garden?" Albert asked.

She smiled. "Every day. It took a little longer today because it's hedge-cutting day. Every two weeks, on the first and third Mondays, I trim them. That's why they're so—so perfect."

Luncheon consisted of sandwiches (bacon, he imagined, from the burnt ruins that he swallowed), tea and cake. She'd baked the cake, hence Albert was rather hungry when he left the table.

He couldn't soid her for the horrible meals. She had a shelf of cook books. She

was trying. You couldn't ask more of a woman.

Even the dullest, most frightful days will pass. Albert was a pale, hungry-eyed little man when he went back to work.

He had a large breakfast in the building restaurant and went up to his office. There were quite a few pieces of mail waiting for him. He set to work and had a goodly portion of the lucky-stone rings in the mail by ten-twenty.

Then he took out the garments and donned the sport coat with the heavily padded shoulders, put on the high-heeled shoes and the dark brown trousers. The black slouch hat completed the picture.

No one saw him leave via the alley route. He couldn't walk very quickly in the stilted shoes, but he did make good time because he paced himself brilliantly.

From the shadow of the huge elm tree a few yards from his own house he surveyed the scene. Rena wasn't on her front porch. He glanced at his watch. It was ten forty-five. He boldly went to the front door and rang the bell.

The door opened and Milly's face drooped with surprise. "Albert! That coat, that hat!"

"Something dreadful's happened," he mumbled. "Let me in."

She moved aside, and he entered. Milly slammed the door shut.

"Please, Mil, get me a glass of brandy." Wearily he flung himself in the chair near the fireplace.

Milly hurried into the kitchen.

In a flash he had one of the heavy brass candle-holders, tip-toed to the kitchen doorway, flattened his back against the wall.

Milly came bustling back to the parlor.

He smashed the heavy candlestick against the top of her head, again and again. When he finally stopped, her head was as red as beet juice.

At last his little gardener was dead. At last. He sighed with relief. She hadn't been carrying a glass of brandy. Probably she'd forgotten where she'd hidden the bottle.

Then he moved quickly, his gloved hands taking the few dollars from her little change-purse and flinging it at her side.

He donned her garden frock and the floppy hat. He was slight enough so that

from a distance Rena would think it was her sister in the garden at the usual time.

Today was hedge-trimming day. He lined up the poles on the lawn, started to snip carefully at the top of the hedge. He glanced toward Rena's house. Good—she was on the porch. Rena waved to him. He waved back. Thank goodness she never came over to gossip.

He was nearly finished when he heard a car slow down on the highway before the house. Fear made him tremble a little. It might be a salesman—maybe a friend—maybe another murder.

As the motor slowly picked up speed, Albert peeked over the hedge. He was sure the floppy hat screened most of his face.

It was a dusty Ford coupe and the driver, a youngish man, was looking directly at him.

Deliberately Albert turned his back on the man—meaning going away, Mr. Salesman—his fingers tightening around the heavy shears.

He heard the motor accelerate. When he turned, the trunk of the little car was disappearing around the bend in the highway.

It was noon when he finished with the garden, for the hedge had been hard work for him. He waved good-bye to Rena and entered the house.

Quickly he donned his disguise and made his exit via a side window which was out of Rena's view and hastened for the bus stop a few blocks ahead of the one he ordinarily used.

There were a few disinterested people in the bus. They didn't pay any attention to Albert who seemed engrossed in a newspaper.

Unobserved he entered the office building by the rear entrance. Safely in his office he closed the blind and quickly disrobed, putting on his drab brown suit. He balled up the costume he'd used and jammed it into a little leather bag.

According to his plan he phoned his home, and of course there was no answer. That was for the police record. He phoned again. Then he phoned his sister-in-law.

"This is Al, Rena, Is Milly at your place?"

"Why, no. Weren't you home a little while ago, Al?"

"No."

"Oh I thought you were."

He laughed briefly. "I've been jammed with work here. After the vacation layoff, you know—"

"Yes, of course. What did you want of Mil?"

"I can't remember whether it was tea or coffee she wanted me to bring home."

"She was in the garden a short while ago," said Rena. "She probably was bathing when you phoned."

"Could be, I'll try again." He hung up, and his right eyelid began twitching uncontrollably. He closed his eyes and after a while it stopped.

**W**HAT had Rena meant: "*I thought you were home, Al?*" She'd said something like that. Why? Why?

He brought out his pipe and tobacco pouch, then dropped them on the desk. He'd slipped—but *where?*

Then he smiled. He was being a fool. Rena had probably thought he was still on vacation. That was it.

He left the office at five sharp as usual. The little bag with the clothes he threw into a bubbling little tar pit that was on his way. He then purchased a can of coffee and a packet of tea.

He was very calm when he alighted from the bus near his home, and walked leisurely along, nodding to neighbors.

He knocked on the door, waited, knocked again. After a reasonable amount of time he opened the door and entered. Milly never locked the door, but she hated for him to pop in on her and give her a start.

He looked at the familiar sight on the floor, the top of her head now black with dried blood.

He had to simulate horror, fright, grief. He thought of his mother—brutal, obese, ignorant. He remembered what he'd endured when she'd been drinking, remembered vividly—and sweat covered his face. His hand quivered. How he'd hated that woman!

He ran outside, yelling as he stumbled toward Rena's house. A passerby stared at him.

"My wife's been killed," he shrieked and pitched forward on his face.

Police Chief Cander nodded sadly to Albert. "I'm sorry," he said. "Looks like some tramp got in here."

Albert jammed the handkerchief into his mouth, choked indistinguishable words.

Rena was in the room, along with the police officers and the medical examiners.

"Killer used the candlestick," said the M. E.

"For a few pennies she was killed," moaned Albert.

"We'll get him," said Cander. "Don't you worry."

"Milly. She was so gentle . . . probably fed him."

"No," said Cander, "the kitchen's in order."

"Who'd do this?" cried Albert.

They consoled him as best they could. Before they left the Chief asked if he wanted to stay at a hotel for a while.

"No—no." His face felt sticky and hard. "I'll be all right."

Rena patted his arm. "Just call"—her eyes brightened—"just call if you want anything."

"Th-thank you."

They were gone, at last, and he was alone again.

He slowly filled his pipe, lit it, savored the friendly pipe juices that filled his mouth. He exhaled with perfect contentment.

Forty-three thousand dollars. Forty-three excellent reasons for living.

After a decent interval he'd sell everything, get the insurance money, and head for New England.

Splendid place. A man could relax near the sea. Quiet there, too. Perhaps he'd buy a little sea-side cottage and hire a *good* cook.

The police chief hadn't even suspected him. Number four was as great a success as the others.

Albert settled deeper in the comfortable wing chair near the fire-place and dreamed while tobacco smoke spiraled upward before his relaxed face.

He didn't hear the door bell at first—he hadn't been expecting any callers—but the shrill, insistent buzzing pierced his dream-soaked mind at last.

He sprang to his feet, went to the door, opened it.

"Sorry to disturb you again," said Chief Cander, "but something's turned up." Rena stood beside the officer.

"You caught him?"

"Uh—no." Cander was visibly dis-

turbed. Anger edged into his tone as he asked, "Why did you call your wife this afternoon?"

"Why—why to see if Mil wanted coffee or tea. I'd forgotten."

Cander glanced at Rena. "You sure he doesn't know about it?"

"No," said Rena slowly, her eyes fixed on Albert's face, following every twitch.

"You worked it pretty slick," said Cander, "but you just weren't well enough informed."

"Wh-what?" He carried it off pretty well, Albert did.

"Your wife," said Cander, "or somebody in a garden dress and hat was seen by Rena from eleven till about noon. Right, Rena?"

"Yes."

"Probably Mil," said Albert. "She was a fanatic about the garden."

"Milly never touched a leaf of the garden," said Rena, "unless you were around, Al."

"Huh?" Albert felt his self-assurance weaken.

"Poor Mil," said Rena. "She could never do anything well, but when she met you, Al, she thought she'd found a good man. She wanted you to be proud of her, if only for the garden."

"You see," finished Rena, "she had a professional gardener come in every two weeks to tend the garden. I saw him stop before your house—I know his car—then I saw him pull away."

Cander cut in. "I'll make it short and sweet, Albert. Your wife gave orders to that pro gardener never to come in and do his stuff if she was puttering in the garden because it meant her husband was home, and she didn't want you to catch on to her little game."

"That's why I thought you were calling from home this afternoon," Rena said stiffly.

"Sure," added Cander. "You work alone. You phoned to get some kind of alibi."

Rena was right, Albert thought. Milly couldn't do anything—

It snapped through Albert. No wonder. Bake or keep house or— He should have guessed.

**T**WO troopers brought in a sun-burned young man who said he was Paul Lison, gardener by trade.

"Yeah," said Paul. "Sure looked kinda funny here. Didn't look much like her fooling with the hedge. Acted suspicious, too. I thought her husband was home so I kept on going. Later I got to remembering her face—"

"You're all crazy," yelled Albert, "Why would I want to kill her?"

"For her money," said Cander. "For her money."

"I didn't do it," said Albert.

"You didn't do it right," said Cander, "that's all."

The almost perfect plan. He would trim the hedges, proving she'd been alive at that time.

The gardener stared at him, his mouth opening. "Yeah, I'm sure that's the guy in that lady's outfit—sure that's him."

"Get this guy's description on the teletype," Cander was ordering. "and make it snappy. He's probably worked this game before some place. They always do."

Albert rushed for the window. A well aimed shot from the chief's .38 smashed his kneecap, tumbling him to the floor. His senses were gone, pain blotted out everything.

"Ma," moaned Albert, "I didn't mean to . . . don't—don't hit me—"

"What's he talkin' about?" asked a trooper.

"Who cares?" said Cander. He glanced down at the little man whom the M. E. was attending to. "He thought he was making an easy buck."

The trooper laughed. "Living with these dames—Ha, that's making a buck the hard way."

"Sorry, ma'am," said Cander to Rena.

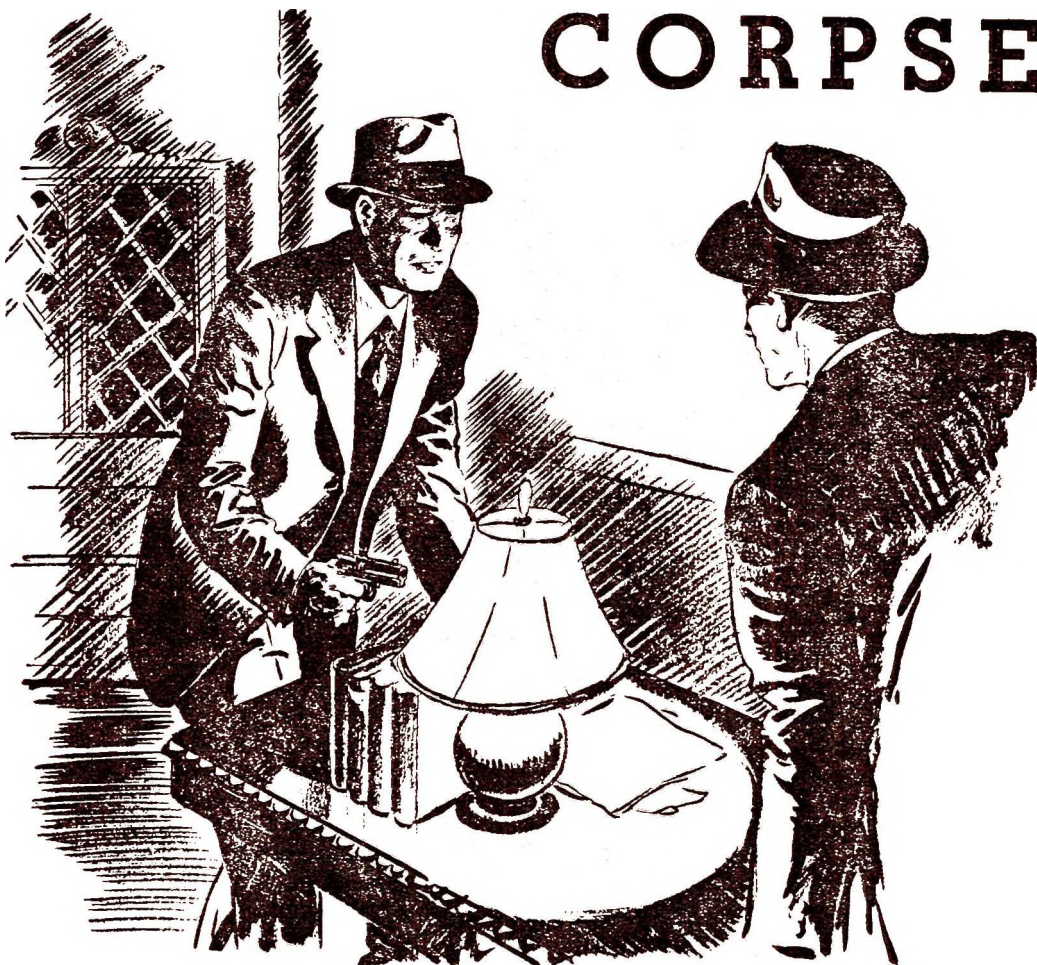
Rena nodded absently. She didn't say anything. She hadn't had much truck with men, couldn't understand their ways—

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# The Unwanted CORPSE



The muzzle of the short-barreled automatic was pointed at Fenwick's belt-buckle

By LEONARD JONES

**S**TEVE FENWICK'S first impulse was to throw the man out of the office. Curiosity stopped him. That, and the thousand-dollar treasury note the man drew from his wallet. A thousand dollars would pay a lot of overdue instalments on his hired furniture.

Little Tony Ellis, who ran the pawnshop around the corner, and whose hard

earned savings backed Fenwick's venture as a private investigator, used to remonstrate with him about his habit of treating shady clients to a quick and unexpected exit.

"Tact, Steve," he used to say. "Tact is what makes money. When you meet a heel, treat him like a gentleman. Charge him double, yes; but insult him to his face,

***Two bodies—where there should have been only one!***

no. You got to remember that in business. Trouble your methods bring us, but no cash." And with a sigh he would advance Steve enough from some mysterious sources of his own to keep the process servers from the door.

So, thinking of Ellis, Fenwick listened to what his visitor had to say. And as he listened he took stock of him.

Ayrton—Dr. Ayrton, the embossed visiting card on the desk put it—was a slow speaking, rather pompous individual, a little run to fat. His pink, smooth shaven cheeks, the carefully tended and waxed mustache, and the expanse of gleaming scalp that showed through his rapidly thinning hair all betokened the easy living, prosperous man of the world.

But under the smooth surface could be sensed a hard core of ruthlessness. The close set, rather pale eyes held a hint of cold determination, and Fenwick suspected that the man who put himself between the doctor and his goal might, metaphorically speaking, find the imprint of the doctor's spiked boots on his face.

"I have reason to believe an attempt on my life will be made in the near future," said the doctor, as calmly as if he were telling a rich dowager that she was suffering from some exclusive and expensive ailment. "If it succeeds, I want you to make sure the guilty party does not profit. You may consider this—" he touched the bill negligently with a manicured forefinger—"as a retainer. I have purposely made it a large one. Obviously, if you have to enter the case, I will not be in a position to advance any further payments. I take it the amount is sufficient?"

FENWICK looked at the bill. So far as he was concerned it was all the money in the world. But the thing was screwy from the word go. People just didn't act like that.

"You want me as a sort of bodyguard?" he suggested cautiously, sparring for time. "Is that it?"

Dr. Ayrton looked at him in cold annoyance. "I thought I had made myself clear," he said wearily. "I will explain again. No, Mr. Fenwick. I do not want a bodyguard. As long as I am alive I want nothing whatever from you. But should I die, say, in the next few weeks, you will find out why, and inform the police accordingly. That

is all."

With some difficulty Fenwick kept his growing temper in check.

"You spoke of the police," he said reasonably. "Why pay me a thousand for a job they'll do in any case, and do as well or better?"

Dr. Ayrton nodded. "A fair question," he admitted. "If I thought the police would be sure to get at the truth I should not come to you. But the police will investigate only where it is plain a murder has been committed. Suicide, for instance, would not interest them. Now, I certainly have no intention of killing myself. You follow me? If I die by accident, that accident is staged. If I am found dead in my chair and a gun in my hand, someone has closed my fingers around the butt of that gun. I am asking nothing illegal. You are to give your findings to the police."

Fenwick was beginning to wonder if he was dealing with the victim of a persecution mania. But he seemed sane enough. If he was willing to back up his beliefs with a thousand dollars, who was Steve Fenwick to call him a liar? He shrugged slightly, and taking a sheet of notepaper from his desk, unscrewed the top of his fountain pen.

"If you'll just give me a few particulars?" he said. "I assume you have a definite suspicion of someone?"

The doctor paused for a moment, and a look of hatred came into his eyes. "Yes," he said. "My wife."

Fenwick glanced up sharply. The doctor merely raised his eyebrows. "I realize it sounds quite incredible," he said quietly. "Unfortunately, it happens to be true."

Fenwick let it pass. "Motive?" he asked dispassionately.

"None!" snapped the doctor. Then he made an apologetic gesture. "Oh, money, I suppose. I am a wealthy man, and she expects to inherit a fortune. And, of course her freedom. She is more than a little interested in a business associate of mine, named North. Miles North."

"Why not a divorce?" asked Fenwick, making a note of the name. "It's tidier than being killed."

The doctor's lip curled. "I do not expect you to understand," he said, "but the name of Ayrton means something socially. I do not intend to have any hint of scandal attached to it." He rose. "And now, if you

have no further questions, good day."

When the doctor had gone, the head of Fenwick Investigations put his feet up on the desk and thought it over. A doctor who was a stuffed shirt and, if he was any judge, a cruel man; a wife who had probably been driven to seeking companionship elsewhere; and North completing the triangle. Sordid, the whole thing. The only part of it that was clean was the crisp note now reposing in his battered wallet.

On the face of it, an easy thousand dollars. As long as his client was alive he had no worries. If he died all Fenwick had to do was pin the job on the wife, and turn the evidence over to the police. Yes, money for jam. None the less he was aware of a sneaking feeling of regret that he had not thrown the doctor out on his ear.

Tony Ellis was perched on the high stool back of his caged desk when Fenwick entered. The detective dropped the thousand on the desk.

"Put this in the account and let me have a couple of hundred in cash," he said.

ELLIS looked at the note and groaned. "Steve," he said reproachfully, "all these years I have trusted you like a son. Now you have to go and knock over a bank, or maybe hold up a big crap game. Do I deserve you should try to put me behind bars? It is all right when you come to me for an advance; if I have it I give it to you. But hot money I cannot touch."

"It isn't hot," said Fenwick patiently. "Maybe the guy is wacky. I'm not sure. But he paid me a thousand to find out who kills him. Didn't even ask for a receipt."

"Mad he certainly is, if he doesn't ask for a receipt," agreed Ellis suspiciously. "And what kind of talk is this about his wanting to find out who kills him? He is maybe dead when he comes into your office? A Zombie, perhaps? Or do you see him in a seance blowing tiny trumpets and scattering thousand-dollar bills about the room? Steve, you would not try to fool an old man?"

Fenwick explained further, and Ellis looked relieved. "Is that all?" he said. "Why didn't you say so right off? Wives poison their husbands every day. It looks as if he has married the wrong girl."

"Doesn't it? And now, about my couple of hundred?"

"Wait," said Ellis. He took the money and went into a little room back of the shop. He came back with his hands full of small bills and gave them to Fenwick. "This Dr. Ayrton," he said. "Maybe I know him. He has offices on Park Avenue?"

For a man who never left his shop Ellis knew more things about more people than seemed possible, and Fenwick had frequently found his knowledge useful.

"That's the one," he said. "Smooth, fat individual. Hates everybody."

Ellis nodded, and his chubby face was serious. "I have heard things about this Dr. Ayrton," he said. "He is not a man to take lightly, Steve. I think maybe he uses you to pull some little chestnuts out of the fire for him."

Fenwick rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "It's possible," he admitted. "But what can he do? I don't even come into it until he has passed to happier spheres."

"It is somewhere else he goes when he dies," growled Ellis. "But you watch yourself, Steve. I do not want you should be burned to the elbow in this business."

While Steve did not expect to have to earn his money, he decided a little preliminary investigation might be useful.

It wasn't hard to get a line on the Ayrtons. A little judicious priming with some of the money Ellis had given him put the doorman in a talkative mood.

"She's a good looker, Mrs. Ayrton is," the doorman said appreciatively. "Maybe twenty-three or four; about half the doctor's age. Used to be a model for a Fifth Avenue firm. About nineteen when she married. The doctor was a big-time surgeon, you know. Lots of kids are idealistic about doctors. If I'm any judge, she's regretted it ever since."

"Lots of them do," agreed Fenwick. "Ever hear of a man named North? Miles North?"

The doorman sniffed. "North? He's a lawyer. Smooth article. One of these sharks who set up in business on a shoe-string, and a couple of years later are cheating the government in the upper income tax brackets. Out for what he can get."

Including other men's wives, thought Fenwick, but did not say it. "You know a lot about things," he remarked.

The doorman shrugged. "In my busi-

ness you learn a lot. People regard you as part of the furniture, and they talk. It pays to keep your ears open and your mouth shut—sometimes." He looked at the fiver in his hand and grinned.

A car drew up, and he straightened abruptly. "Ayrton's car," he said hurriedly. "You're in luck."

He went to the curb and opened the door. Fenwick looked speculatively at the girl who got out. So she was the dame who was preparing to bump off an inconvenient husband? She certainly didn't look the part. The doorman hadn't exaggerated about her looks, either. She glanced at him as she passed, and Fenwick smiled automatically. For a moment he thought she was going to freeze up, and then she smiled back. A warm, friendly smile, like a kid's. But like a kid who has been hurt, and isn't sure of herself.

WHEN she had passed, Steve left the building and drifted aimlessly along the street. Like many another man, he believed in hunches, and he was sure she was no more capable of cold-blooded murder than he was. Ellis was right. There was something fishy in Ayrton's tale.

A picture theatre caught his eye, and he went in. It wasn't exactly his idea of a wild night, but nothing better seemed to offer. Afterwards he called at a bar in East Forty-fifth, and spent a couple of hours listening to the bartender's peculiar brand of philosophy. By the time he got back to his apartment it was well past two, and the telephone in his bedroom was ringing with shrill and monotonous insistence. He strode over and picked up the instrument.

"Fenwick speaking," he said.

The voice at the other end was Dr. Ayrton's, and he sounded as if he were pressed for time.

"Fenwick? I've been trying to get you for hours. Listen. I'm speaking from my place in Westchester—" he gave the address. "I need you tonight, and badly. Things have happened today. I can't tell you over the phone. But I can count on you?"

"Why not?" said Fenwick. "You hired me."

He hung up, and reached for his hat. So Ayrton had changed his mind about a bodyguard after all! Well, for a thousand

bucks he was willing to keep even Ayrton alive. With swift fingers he checked a heavy thirty-eight automatic and slipped it into his pocket. A quarter of an hour later he was roaring north in his car.

It was close to four when he turned into Ayrton's drive and pulled up in front of the house. There were no lights showing, and to Fenwick's mind that spelled trouble. Ayrton might be hiding somewhere in that darkened house in fear of his life, but he doubted it. Heel or not, the doctor had courage and a colossal vanity that would never let him admit fear.

His ring brought no response except the faint peal of chimes somewhere in the house. With a growing sense of uneasiness Fenwick went around to the back of the house and repeated the summons. Still no result. Both locks were heavy Yales, and he was on the point of breaking a window when he remembered the garage. Attached to the house as it was, it would be sure to have a communicating door. There was a padlock on the sliding garage doors, but it was not secured. Fenwick went in, his footsteps echoing sharply from the concrete floor.

The only car in the garage was the typical doctor's coupe. The radiator was cold. Casually Fenwick turned his flashlight inside the car, and received his first shock. There was someone inside, and that someone was dead.

In fact, Fenwick had never seen anyone who looked quite as dead as that motionless, waxen faced figure, and he had seen more than one stiff in his time. Not only that, it was not the doctor, as he had half expected. It was someone he had never seen before. He opened the door and made a closer inspection. The man was dead right enough, but Fenwick could see no cause of death. No blood, no signs of a wound. And the body was stone cold. If there was anything certain, it was that when Ayrton had phoned the uncommunicative gentleman in his car was just as dead as when Fenwick found him.

That left Ayrton some explaining to do. Reminded of the doctor, the detective glanced about him. The door leading to the house was not locked, and opened soundlessly. It gave access to a sort of anteroom opening into a combined study and library. Fenwick switched on the lights.

A soft, tiny *plop*, in the direction of the fireplace, attracted his attention, and he saw the top of the doctor's head peeping over the back of an armchair. Fenwick did not say anything. There would have been little point in doing so, for the *plop* he had heard was caused by a drop of blood falling into a wide pool beside the chair. The doctor, like the stiff in the garage, was dead.

This time, however, there was no doubt as to the cause of death. There was a bullet hole in the side of the doctor's head, and in his right hand, hanging over the side of the chair, was a small but obviously effective revolver. It looked as if the time had come for Fenwick to start earning his money.

**H**IE PERCHED himself on the edge of the table and studied the layout. It looked like suicide; maybe it was. But Ayrton had said it might look like suicide. And where did the extra corpse fit in? No suicide there, or murder either. He had just died, period. There must be a tie-up, but what was it?

A woman's handbag on the sofa caught his attention. He went over and picked it up. Mrs. Ayrton's: plenty of stuff inside to prove that. And half a box of .32 revolver cartridges, the same caliber as the gun gripped so tightly in Ayrton's fist.

Very careless of the dame—too careless. Again it didn't make sense. The whole business smelled of—hold it, there was a peculiar smell in the room, at that. Fenwick found what he was looking for in a corner, half hidden by a pile of old rags. A two-gallon tin of gasoline. In the garage he wouldn't have looked at them twice. Here they meant only one thing. Incendiarism.

Someone had planned to start a neat little fire in the doctor's study. That fire would have left a body too charred to be recognizable, the metal initials from a woman's handbag, and very little else. Any other clues would have been wiped out.

A neat theory, only there hadn't been any fire. Either the killer was badly flustered, or he had been interrupted.

Meanwhile Fenwick had the choice of calling the police or letting them find it out for themselves. Ayrton's orders were to give his findings to the police. But that

order was given on the assumption that, faced with apparent suicide, the police would not be interested. This was different. Even the dumbest hick cop would find enough of the bizarre in the case to stimulate his interest. Besides, being found in close proximity to a couple of corpses was the sort of thing likely to cause hard feelings all around. It would certainly mean a day or two in the local calaboose while they checked up on him; time he could use to better advantage on his own.

He might just as well have saved himself all that arguing, because just then the door to the garage opened, and a beefy gent in plain clothes eased his way in. He was accompanied by two uniformed policemen who regarded Fenwick with a speculative interest, but said nothing.

It didn't add anything to Fenwick's peace of mind when he recognized the plainclothes man. It was a bad sign that Detective Sergeant Wills had appeared so promptly and so far off his usual beat. Wills didn't seem pleased to see Fenwick, if it came to that. He took off his already battered hat and slammed it down on the floor. Then carefully and deliberately he jumped on it with both his capable feet. That seemed to ease his mind a little, because when he spoke his voice was more plaintive than angry.

"Steve," he said, "why must you do these things? Can't I have peace in my old age without you strewing my path with corpses every so often?"

Fenwick could not help grinning. Knowing Wills, he was of the opinion he had as much use for peace as a Dyak headhunter on the lookout for a couple of skulls to decorate the ancestral mansion.

"I'm not askin' you if you killed this mug," continued Wills, "because you are such a liar you'd say no anyway. Besides, that blood has been there about an hour, and when I came in the radiator of your car was still too hot to touch. But I wanna know what you are doing so far from town at this time of night."

"You aren't very near home yourself," countered Fenwick, sparring for time.

"Been giving evidence in a case in Peekskill," Wills said shortly. "The boys were driving me home. You oughtn't to go flashing lights in a house that's supposed to be shut up for the season if you

don't want company. And now—"

"You came in through the garage," interrupted Fenwick. "The doctor's car is there. Did you look inside?"

Wills gave him a long stare. "Is this a game?" he asked suspiciously.

"I doubt it," said Fenwick dryly. "Better have a look inside that car. You'll die laughing."

"I don't laugh easy," growled Wills. Then, to one of the policemen, "See what's up, George."

George detached himself and went out towards the garage. Wills looked around the room. His eye fell on the gasoline and rags in the corner, and he pointed an accusing finger.

"Steve," he said reproachfully, "sure this ain't a crooked insurance angle you are working."

"Not guilty," said Fenwick. "That's how I found things."

**WILLS** wore a puzzled frown. Here was a nice routine suicide threatening to turn into something with angles, and suicides with angles are things that have to be handled with kid gloves. He scrutinized the corpse carefully, then turned to Fenwick.

"I'm going to ask you some questions," he said grimly, "and I want some straight answers. Otherwise—"

George came back. His eyes were still popping. "There's another one in the car, sarge," he bleated, "and deader'n Judas!"

Wills paused, looked as if he were about to say something, and closed his mouth again. Followed by George, he made a hasty exit towards the garage. After a moment's hesitation, the other patrolman drifted after them.

Fenwick had hoped for that. The handbag belonging to Mrs. Ayrton he had dropped behind a cushion as Wills came in. Now he scooped out the contents and sorted them rapidly. Those that could be traced to Mrs. Ayrton he stuffed in his pockets, the rest he put back. The bag itself, too bulky to conceal, he wedged in the fireplace chimney.

He could not have said himself why he did it. Dr. Ayrton had hired him to find his killer, and said in so many words that killer would be his wife. Ayrton was dead, and now Fenwick was doing his best to keep the incriminating evidence from

the police. Maybe he was just playing a hunch, and then again maybe there was more to it. He hadn't forgotten that remark of Ellis's about pulling chestnuts out of the fire. The whole business was screwy; had been on the fringe of lunacy from the time Ayrton had come with his absurd tale.

Sergeant Wills thought it was screwy too. His face had a hunted look when he came back into the room. "Riddles," he said. "Questions that haven't got answers. Which reminds me. You haven't said why you are here."

Fenwick gave him part of the truth.

"Ayrton had a hunch some one was gunning for him," he said. "He came to me for protection. Tonight he called me up and said the blowoff was due. When I got here I found him like that."

"I see," said Wills with heavy sarcasm. "He gets to thinking it over, and when he realizes what a rotten bodyguard he has hired he shoots himself in sheer disgust. I don't blame him. And who is our friend in the garage?"

"You've got me there," said Fenwick. "I hoped you'd know."

"I don't. Or why he is dead. Or why he is wearing no shoes or socks, and clothes that don't fit. Or why anything is the way it is." He scowled blackly at Ayrton's corpse, and at the gasoline in the corner.

"Well, Steve," he decided after a moment, "there's no need for you to lose any more sleep over this. You're out of a job. I'll give this case my personal attention. But of course you'll stay in New York where I can reach you?"

Fenwick took the hint. He got to his feet, hoping the bulge of feminine odds and ends in his pockets did not show too much, and left as casually as he could. Wills watched him go, and with a weary sigh turned back to the job in hand.

In the garage Fenwick worked fast. The luggage compartment of the doctor's car contained a large suitcase, and he grunted in satisfaction. He had expected something of the sort, but finding it was a further indication that he was on the right track. When he drove off, the suitcase was on the seat beside him.

He stopped some distance down the road and opened it. He found the contents suggestive. A new bankbook made out in the name of Richard Elwood, and con-

taining a staggering balance. A second book, being a joint account between Ayrton and Miles North, with recent withdrawals. Clothes, all new, and neatly tabbed with the name of Elwood. In fact, everything else in the case was apparently the property of this unknown Elwood, except the suitcase itself. Fenwick grinned mirthlessly. It bore Ayrton's initials. For all his cunning, the doctor had made a slip there.

Elwood—the corpse in the car? A possibility, but Fenwick was inclined to doubt it. He had certain ideas about that corpse; ideas he meant to check right away.

IT WAS nearly eight when he reached the hospital where Ayrton had been chief surgeon. The receptionist, a redhead with curves, said curtly that Dr. Ayrton was not in, and besides he saw people only by appointment. Her eyes wandered over Fenwick's unshaven chin and crumpled suit with the implied assertion that it would be a frosty day when he succeeded in making one.

Fenwick turned on the charm. "You don't understand, beautiful. I don't want to see him. I'm a friend of his, and he asked me to look in about a registered drug he lost yesterday. He thought it might be somewhere in the dissecting room."

Under that smile the redhead became suddenly human. "It's a little irregular," she smiled back, "but I believe Dr. Ayrton was in the dissecting room last evening. If you'd come this way?"

If the nurse was expecting Fenwick to try and improve their acquaintance in the quiet of the dissecting room, she was doomed to disappointment. The room was not empty. In addition to four cadavers in various stages of assembly, the morgue attendant was there, and he was on the verge of coming unstuck mentally.

"Five!" he shouted as they came in. "Five, there were yesterday, and now there's only four! No one's signed it out, and Dr. Harvey has booked the brain for his lecture. What'll I do?"

The nurse sighed resignedly and turned to Fenwick. "Sorry," she said, "I'll have to report this. That miserable old gin-hound's mislaid a stiff again. He's always doing it." And with a final pungent com-

ment about the attendant's ancestry she went out.

Fenwick was feeling pleased. One point was cleared up, at least. It was obvious the missing subject was the corpse in Ayrton's car. There was no further need to spend time at the hospital. A door opening on to a parking space showed how the corpse had been abstracted without attracting attention, and Fenwick slipped out by it.

His next point of call was a shop where, for thirty dollars of Ayrton's money, he bought a duplicate of Mrs. Ayrton's handbag. Wills would ask questions, and he might as well supply the answers.

Mrs. Ayrton was already up when he called. Time was short, and he wasted none in beating around the bush.

"Mrs. Ayrton," he said, "your husband has been murdered. I know you didn't do it, but the police will think you did. I want you to go out and let me deal with them. Have your hair done, or something; but go quickly."

The girl swayed a moment on her feet, and Fenwick was afraid she was going to faint. But she steadied herself. "I—I don't understand." Her voice was expressive of complete bewilderment.

"I hoped you wouldn't. But believe me, it's urgent. I know I'm a stranger. But your husband hired me to protect his interests—Fenwick lied diplomatically—and with him dead, I regard helping you as part of that job. Please believe that, Mrs. Ayrton."

For a moment she looked searchingly at him. Then without a word she turned towards the bedroom. A moment later she returned dressed for the street.

"I'm going to the hairdresser's on the corner," she said simply. "You can reach me there if I'm needed."

When she had gone Fenwick put the handbag on the table and sat down. He had not long to wait. The doorbell rang with that imperious touch only authority can convey. Fenwick felt a certain admiration. Wills might be the slow type, but he got results.

The sergeant had an official looking paper in one hand, and Mrs. Ayrton's handbag in the other. His mouth dropped open as Fenwick opened the door. "No!" he said protestingly. "Not again! What are you doing here?"

"I'm an old friend of Mrs. Ayrton's," said Fenwick calmly. "I came to offer my sympathy." His eyes turned questioning to the stranger beside Wills, who had been looking at him fixedly.

"Mr. North," said Wills mechanically as the two entered. "Look here, Steve, what's your game? Where's Mrs. Ayrton?"

"She's not in," said Steve. "I was waiting for her."

Wills looked his suspicion. "Uh-huh. You're sure you didn't send her out, knowing I had a warrant for her arrest?"

"What a question! How could I know that?"

Wills held out the handbag aggressively. "Mrs. Ayrton's," he snapped. "We found it at the doctor's place, and Mr. North here identified it. And don't try to tell me you—suffering cats."

His eye had fallen on the second handbag, and he stopped short. "What's the matter?" asked Fenwick innocently.

WILLS didn't answer. He was staring from one bag to the other. He went across to the table and looked inside the second one. It contained Mrs. Ayrton's odds and ends. He fingered the leather thoughtfully, and Steve frowned. Wills was no fool. Fortunately both bags were of soft leather, and Wills could tell little about their comparative ages.

"Maybe we've made a mistake, Steve," he said slowly. "But I find it very odd both bags are so much alike."

"You know what I think, Sarge?"

"No, Steve," said Wills dangerously. "What do you think?"

"Someone planted that bag you found. Someone who knew what kind of bag Mrs. Ayrton had."

Wills' eyes had narrowed. "Yes," he conceded, "if you are right he'd have to know that, wouldn't he? Well, I can see I have some work to do yet. Coming, Mr. North?"

"Eh?" North turned his eyes reluctantly from Fenwick's face. "No, not yet. I think I'll wait. As the Ayrtons' legal adviser—"

"Sure. Well, see you later, Steve. And if I find you've been interfering with evidence, in jail!"

He went out. Fenwick looked speculatively at North. It would not take Wills long to find out that he had bought that second handbag. He suspected something

already. The case had to be clinched before he got back, and he frowned thoughtfully. North's hat was on a table by his hand. Beside it was a pair of leather gloves. Fenwick shrugged. Why not? He had suppressed a lot of evidence so far. Why not manufacture a little? When the lawyer's back was turned he dropped the gloves in his pocket. Then he spoke to North, who was pacing restlessly about the room.

"I suppose Ayrton had it coming," he said conversationally.

"Hey? What are you talking about?"

"Your killing him," said Fenwick calmly. "In your place I might have done the same. But why drag Mrs. Ayrton into it?"

"You're crazy!" But North was all attention now.

"Am I? We'll consider the case of two hypothetical business partners, then; a doctor and a lawyer. Their methods were shaky; so shaky they were beginning to worry about the district attorney taking an interest. Shall I go on?"

"Please do," said North politely. Fenwick noted his right hand was resting in his coat pocket, and his pulse quickened.

"I will. One of the two, the doctor, got so panicky he decided to light out, leaving his partner to face the D.A. He raided their joint account, and arranged to disappear under the name of Richard Elwood. The lawyer found out, shot him with his own gun, and faked a suicide. What he didn't know was that the doctor was trying to fake a murder, and the two mixed together made an unholy mess! The doctor left his wife's bag there, meaning her to take the rap. When the lawyer found out his fake suicide didn't hold water, he was only too glad to identify the handbag and incriminate her."

"That's all guesswork. It's absurd."

"Is it? Unfortunately for you, Wills thinks now that it was you who planted that handbag. Ever hear of the paraffin test?"

Involuntarily North glanced at his free hand. Then he smiled contemptuously. "Of course."

"Of course," agreed Fenwick. "You're a lawyer. You know the paraffin test proves infallibly if a gun has been fired recently from a person's hand. It frightened you, though, until you remembered

you wore gloves last night. Where are those gloves now, North?"

North's glance flashed to the table, and his face went gray.

"Yes," said Fenwick, "it looks as if the sergeant has heard of the test too, doesn't it? Gloves are made of leather, and leather is skin. What can be proved for one can be proved for both."

North's hand came out of his pocket with a short barreled automatic. The next instant he was sprawling on the floor under the table Fenwick had tipped over on him. The gun went clattering into a corner. North was a heavy man and a fighter. He managed a grip on Fenwick's throat and began to squeeze. But of the two Fenwick had been brought up in the tougher school. He wasted no time in trying to break that deadly hold. Instead he brought both palms sharply and simultaneously against North's ears. The lawyer gave a howl of pain as the suddenly compressed air shattered his ear drums. He released his hold.

**THAT** was all Fenwick needed. He smashed his fists into North's face and midsection, and that was that.

"Very pretty, Steve," said Wills' voice from the door. "But do you have to mess him up so much? All blood he is, and the police will be accused of using strong-arm methods again."

He looked at North's unconscious figure, and shook his head.

"So he did it, eh? I thought so when you mentioned the handbag. Except for Ayrton himself, he was the only one who knew about it."

Fenwick shook his head. "Ayrton planted the bag," he said.

"You mean he cooperated in his own murder?"

Fenwick explained briefly. "No. You see, Ayrton had to disappear, and he figured the best way to disappear was to be buried. And for a burial you have to have a body. For him that was easy. He stole a body from his own hospital. He meant to put a bullet through its head, and start a fire to make it unrecognizable. But a fire on top of a supposed suicide would make the police suspicious, so he came to me with a trumped up tale about his wife, and how she was planning to kill him and make it look like suicide. Smart. If it hadn't been for North interfering I might have fallen for it. But North rigged it for plain suicide. He never saw the extra body at all, and it must have been one devil of a shock to him when he read about it in the papers."

Wills nodded, and looked absently around the room. "By the way," he said. "You haven't seen my gloves about anywhere, have you? When I went out I picked up North's by mistake."



### *"It's Just a Routine Waterfront Killing—"*

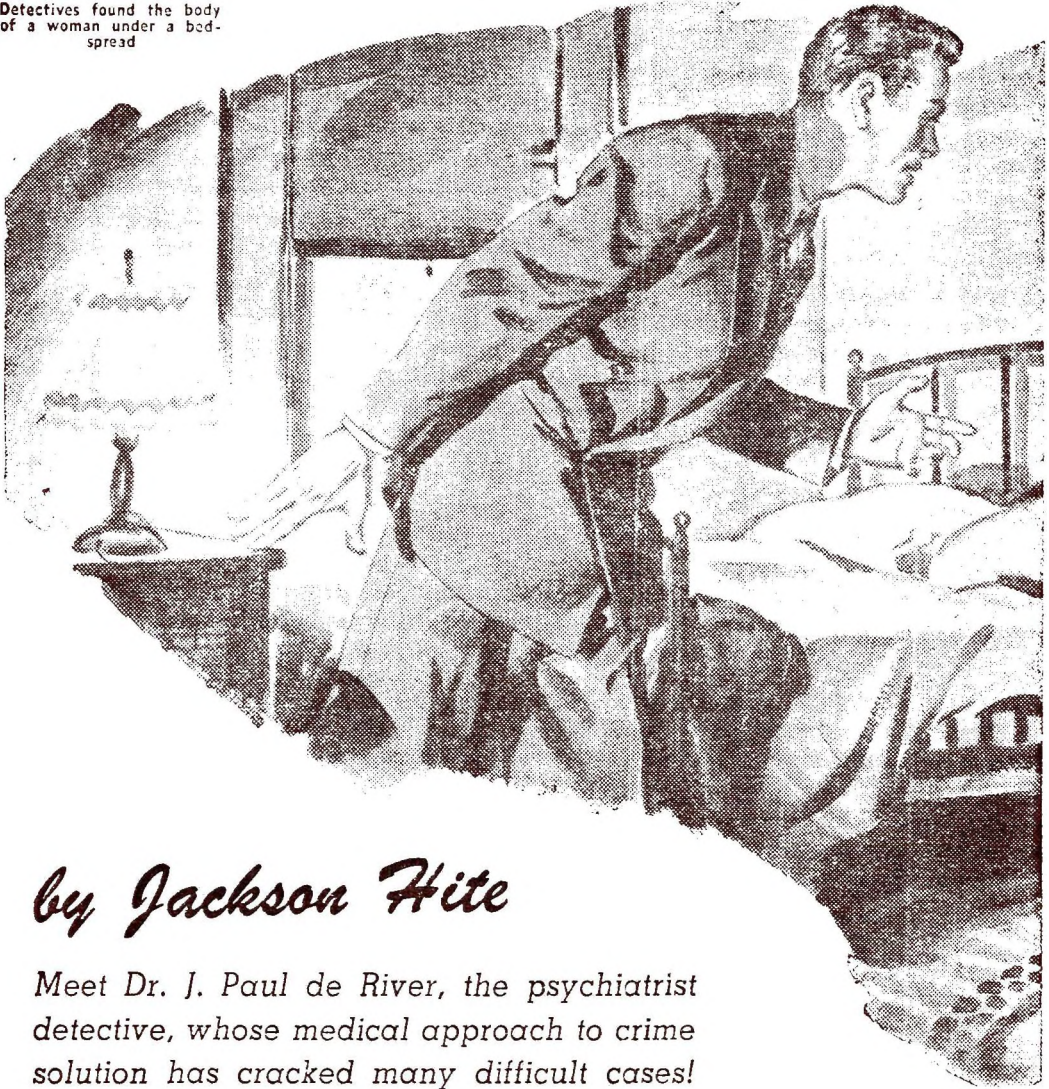
**THAT'S** what the young policeman, Bill Ryan, thought when he found the body in the alley. But strangely enough, sight of this particular body unnerved him. There was something appallingly horrible about finding this dead man in a garbage-littered waterfront alley, with the river waters lapping at the pilings nearby and, in the other direction, the bright-lit cars streaming unconcernedly on the great elevated highway. . . .

Just routine, the Homicide men told Steve Huston when he made inquiry, but he hopped along on the Homicide car. "I'll go along for the ride, if you don't mind," said Steve. Somehow he had a hunch that something important was afoot. And when a violin, with a case initialed J.H., was found at the scene of the crime, that clinched matters.

It was a case for the Phantom! The case of the slain musician—told next issue by Robert Wallace in **MURDER SET TO MUSIC**, one of the most exciting mystery novels of the year! Look forward to a top-flight thriller in which the finding of the victim's body is only the first note in a macabre symphony of death!

# THE *Doctor* CALLED

Detectives found the body  
of a woman under a bed-  
spread



*by Jackson Hite*

Meet Dr. J. Paul de River, the psychiatrist detective, whose medical approach to crime solution has cracked many difficult cases!

THE news swept through police headquarters in Los Angeles. Word passed from floor to floor and even through the cell blocks. "The Black Dahlia killer has confessed," was the message.

Few murders had created more furore in Los Angeles than the slaying of the beautiful butterfly girl nicknamed Black

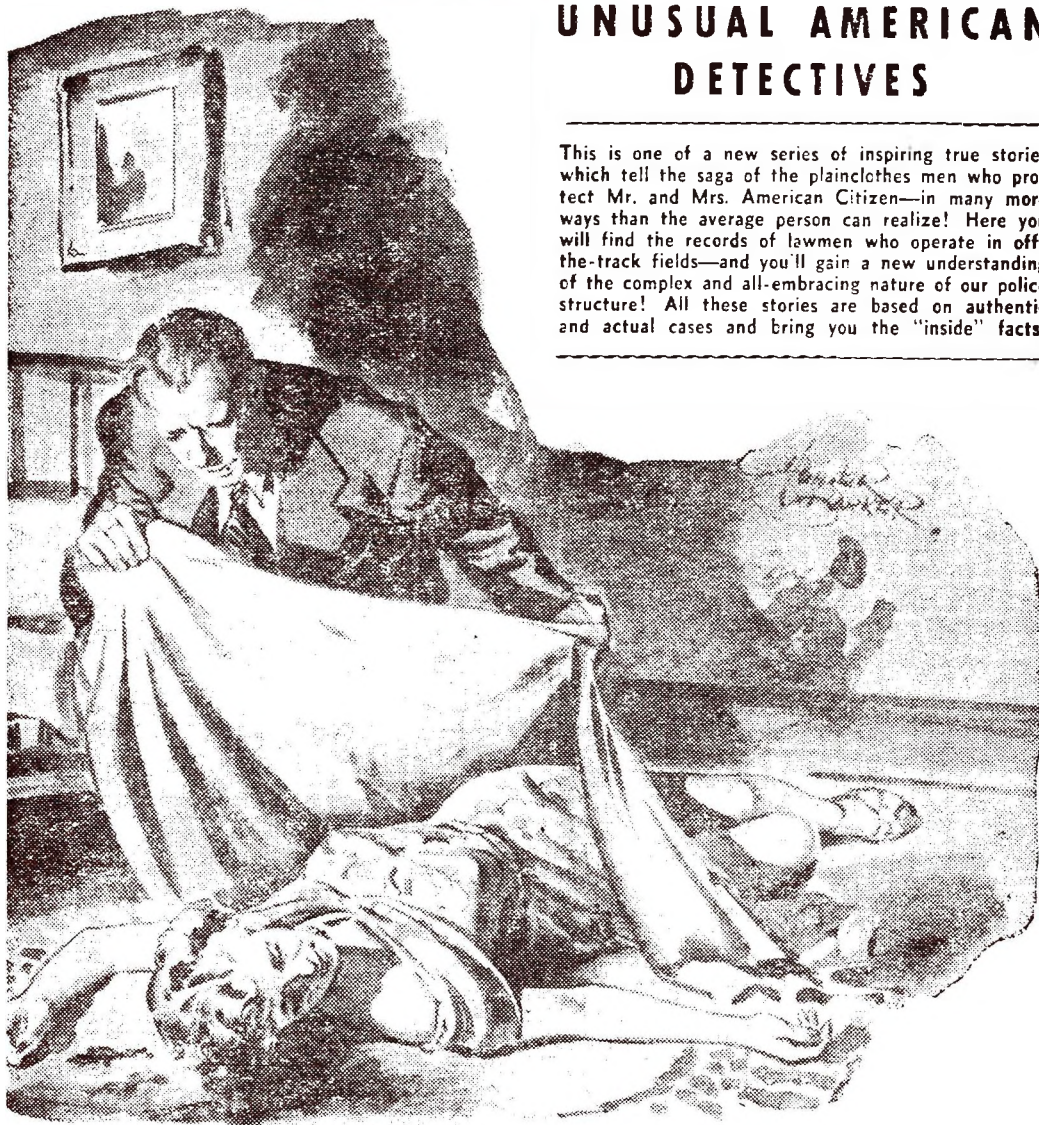
Dahlia by the press. Her body had been horribly mutilated and this act had given rise to many conflicting public theories about the killer.

Upstairs in a room in the detective division, burly sleuths were questioning a cowering suspect. "Yes, I did it," he whimpered. A homicide stenographer was

# THE *Truth*

## UNUSUAL AMERICAN DETECTIVES

This is one of a new series of inspiring true stories which tell the saga of the plainclothes men who protect Mr. and Mrs. American Citizen—in many more ways than the average person can realize! Here you will find the records of lawmen who operate in off-the-track fields—and you'll gain a new understanding of the complex and all-embracing nature of our police structure! All these stories are based on authentic and actual cases and bring you the "inside" facts!



hurriedly summoned and took down the words of the trembling man. The statement was typewritten and each of the pages was signed by the prisoner.

### *Solved at Long Last*

The elated detective heaved a sigh of re-

lief. Their first class headache had been solved.

As they were congratulating themselves, the door opened and a tall man with sharp piercing eyes and a long thin mustache stepped into the room.

"We got the right man this time, Doc," they greeted him.

"That's fine," replied Dr. J. Paul de River, psychiatrist attached to the Los Angeles police force. Dr. de River began questioning the confessed murderer. A short while later he picked up the statement signed by the prisoner and tossed it into the waste-basket.

"Sorry, boys," he told the crestfallen detectives, "but this is just another one of those phony confessions."

The deflated prisoner, his hour of glory over, was taken to a hospital for mental observation, another man in the long list of weak-minded individuals who had confessed to a murder he had not committed.

### *False Confession Common*

Police know that every time a murder breaks and newspapers devote a great deal of space to it, they can expect to receive false confessions. Sometimes the confessions are from prisoners already in jail who hope to relieve the boredom of confinement by a trip out of prison gates. More often the confessions are from psychotic individuals who become so wrapped up in the crime that they even delude themselves into thinking they had committed the murder.

Dr. de River occupies a unique niche in the art of crime detection and has trail blazed a path of psychiatric approach to the solution of murder. He probably would be startled to hear himself described as a detective since he is a medical doctor who specializes in psychiatry. But as the only full time psychiatrist who is a member of a police force and who devotes his energies to solving crime, he is as much a detective as any member of the Los Angeles Homicide Squad. In fact, he goes to the scene of every murder, responding as quickly as the Homicide Squad itself.

### *Doctor Solves Murders*

The psychiatric detective does more than separate the sheep from the goats as far as confessions are concerned. He personally has solved many of the best known murders in the West Coast city. Officially he is listed on the payroll as head of the Sex Offense Bureau, a separate division that is allied with the police department. The title is misleading. To psychiatrists,

sex motivation in the medical sense, is the underlying cause of most crimes and as a result Dr. de River legitimately takes part in the investigation of all important cases. The position of the body, certain acts of the killer following the murder, which mean nothing at all to police, often provide him with a definite clue which assist authorities in identifying the killer.

Dr. de River takes a leading role in questioning suspects and his shrewd analysis of the prisoner's answers and actions have enabled him to trap many culprits who thought they were getting away with it.

### *Letter Cleared Up Crime*

Reading of several letters enabled the psychiatric detective to solve the murder of Mrs. Rose M. Whitmore, a millionaire widow. This case broke in a strange fashion.

The time was late April, 1942, the nation was at war, and Air Raid Warden Raymond E. Stepp was a conscientious member of the civil defense corps. When a new couple moved into a bungalow on North Hobart Boulevard in Los Angeles, only two doors from his home, he knew it was his duty to call there and record their names for the records being kept by his volunteer organization.

### *Won't Answer Bell*

Stepp went there several times but received no answer to his repeated tugs at the bell. Tappings on the door brought no response. Other neighbors occasionally saw a middle-aged couple enter a new expensive machine and drive away. The couple usually kept all the window blinds drawn. Several times when Stepp rang the bell he was certain that the people were home but deliberately would not answer.

One night a neighbor informed him that she had heard screams in the bungalow the previous week and since that time had seen no signs of activity there. Stepp went to the bungalow to make a final call, determined that if he received no answer he would report the lack of cooperation to police. He found the house in darkness and the garage empty. As he was about to move away he detected an odor which he

recognized as decomposing flesh. Stepp called police and two detectives forced their way into the house and found the body of a woman lying under a bedspread in the front bedroom.

### *Murder Was Brutal*

The woman's head and face was battered and bloodstains were on the floor and walls of the room. An inspection of the house showed that there were three bedrooms, one of which was bare. The other bedroom had been occupied by a man and contained several suits, hats, shoes and ties.

Further mystery was injected by the neighbor who had heard the screams. She said she glanced over at the bungalow and caught a glimpse of a man wearing a white shirt pull down the shades. The action had been so quick that she had not seen the face of the man. A short time before that she had momentarily seen the man who lived in the bungalow on the lawn and she was certain that he had been wearing a blue shirt at that time. She did not know whether he was the man who had lowered the shades. Wondering if there might be two bodies in the house, the officers searched it thoroughly without finding anything else. In the man's bedroom they noticed a shaving set.

### *Police Are Called*

The local men notified central headquarters and Captain Vernon Rasmussen, commander of the homicide squad, raced to the bungalow. Dr. de River also responded to the call.

None of the neighbors even knew the names of the couple who had occupied the house. In a desk in the living room the officers found papers which established the identity of the murdered woman as Mrs. Whitmore. The officers found stock securities with a face value of more than a quarter-million dollars. The checkbook showed that shortly before her murder she had withdrawn \$3,400 in cash. There was no money in the house, but additional stocks and bonds plus a sterling silver diamond wrist watch were in the various rooms.

In the woman's dresser were a batch of

letters which were signed, "Dahl." The name of a New York City attorney was on many of the legal papers and officers telephoned him. They learned that Mrs. Whitmore was a widow. Her husband had died some 12 years earlier and left her more than a million dollars in cash plus a large trust fund. She had been in New York in February and told her attorney she was going to her winter home in West Palm Beach.

Several weeks later she called him and said she was selling her Florida home. The attorney did not know that she had gone to Los Angeles. So far as he knew she had not remarried and he was certain that she would have notified him promptly if she had, since they had been friends for many years. He added that she was a shrewd business woman who would have wanted legal documents drawn up to protect her fortune if she ever remarried.

### *Roomer Puzzles Detectives*

Several hours later the puzzled detectives returned to headquarters with no information about the man who had lived in the second bedroom. None of the neighbors had ever spoken to him and their descriptions of him were vague to the point of being practically valueless. Mrs. Whitmore had purchased the house and made all the arrangements herself.

Although neighbors said that the man always had driven the car, the sales agency reported that she had walked in alone and placed the order for it.

The officers turned to Dr. de River and asked if he had spotted anything in the way of a clue. The packet of letters turned out to be love notes but none of them were dated or carried any address.

The psychiatrist scanned the love notes. One of them read, "I love and respect you more than anything else in the world. I want to marry you and make a fine home for you. There exists no cure for my heart, wounded with the sword of separation from you." The rest were quite similar in that the writer stressed his respect and love.

"Find this man Dahl and you will have the killer," he told the startled officers. "These letters from him to the murdered woman aren't normal love letters at all.

When a man's in love he doesn't have to tell a woman he respects her. The only reason for the assurance is that he knew it wasn't true and he was trying to cover it up that way. The answer is that he was after her money, and as her attorney pointed out, she was too shrewd a business woman to give it to him. He probably killed her in a rage when she would not turn over her fortune to him.

"Another thing," he added. "Since these are love letters the signature Dahl is probably part of his name or a nickname. A nickname. A man named Jones wouldn't sign love letters just as Jones."

#### *Hunt for Man's Name*

The detectives went to work once again sifting through the various papers they had found in the desk. On one they found the name of Grover Cleveland Dahlbender.

"I'll bet he's the one who wrote the 'Dahl' letters," the psychiatrist exclaimed.

"And with a name like that my men better find him or turn in their badges," Rasmussen added.

The detectives quickly got on the trail of Dahlbender. They learned that he was a former Wall Street broker who came to Los Angeles and was employed by a local wholesale drug firm as a salesman. The officers knew that they were on the right track when they learned that Dahlbender had not appeared at the drug house for more than a week, which was since the murder had been committed.

While the search for the missing man spread through California, an itemized record of the murdered woman's belongings showed that jewelry and negotiable securities valued at \$50,000 were missing. Dahlbender was traced to San Diego and from there to a resort town where he was found in the company of an attractive divorcee.

#### *Dazed Killer Admits Crime*

Startled by the rapidity with which the police discovered his identity, even though he never had allowed himself to be seen by the neighbors at the bungalow, he admitted the murder and theft. Later he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to life imprisonment, trapped because the psy-

chiatric detective had been able to read another meaning in his love letters.

One of Dr. de River's most noted cases involved the brutal murder of three little schoolgirls, 7, 8 and 10 years old. The girls had left their homes in Inglewood, located in Los Angeles County, about 11 o'clock Saturday morning. They were seen early that afternoon in a nearby park but later disappeared.

When they failed to return home that night, a search was made. Monday afternoon members of the searching party stopped short when they saw three pairs of shoes neatly placed side by side on the edge of a gully.

In the ravine were the three bodies of the children.

Each one had been criminally assaulted and a piece of clothesline was tied around their necks.

#### *De River Gives Aid*

Dr. de River was summoned to the scene and asked for his opinion. Here it is on record in police files given the day the bodies were found:

"Look for one man, probably in his early twenties, a pedophile (interested in children) who might have been arrested before for annoying children. He is a sadist with a super-abundance of curiosity. He is very meticulous, and probably now remorseful; most sadists are very apt to masochistic (self-condemning) after expressing sadism. The slayer may have a religious streak and even become prayerful.

"Moreover, he is a spectacular type and has done this thing, not on sudden impulse, but as a deliberately planned affair. I am of the opinion that he had obtained the confidence of these little girls. I believe they knew the man and trusted him."

#### *Psychiatric Clues Only*

The psychiatric detective was basing his description of the killer solely on his medical knowledge, the position of the shoes and the three bodies. There were no physical clues at the scene.

Working on the leads furnished by Dr. de River, detectives concentrated on finding all the young men whom the three girls might know. One of those questioned

was Albert Dyer, a WPA worker who had guarded the school crossing as part of his job. He had been arrested once on a sex charge. Dyer offered an alibi that stood up under routine checking as did so many others being questioned.

Several days later he returned to the local station house and said he had heard police were looking for him. The officer on duty shook his head and Dyer started to walk out. Dr. de River happened to be at the station house at the time and he watched the man strut toward the door. "Bring him back here," he ordered.

### *Killer Is Grilled*

For the next half hour the psychiatrist questioned the youth and while the police officers stood by and watched they saw Dyer suddenly lose his cocksure air and then confess to the triple murders. They exchanged glances when the prisoner in describing his crime remarked, "I even knelt and prayed for their souls and my own."

The psychiatrist had completely called the turn on the killer. The "super-abundance of curiosity," which Dr. de River had predicted in his report proved Dyer's undoing. He later was executed. If he had stayed away from the station house after being cleared by police the crime possibly never would have been solved. It also might have remained unsolved if Dr. de River hadn't happened to drop in at the station house that day.

Like so many other experts in the field of crime detection, Dr. de River embarked on his career first by chance and then by deliberation. He was a noted and most successful practising psychiatrist in New York City when the late President Roosevelt appointed him to a special board to handle cases involving disabled war veterans in California. Dr. de River was appointed as consulting psychiatrist to the board.

### *He Blazes New Trail*

In making investigations in certain problem cases, he became interested in the study of sex and its relation to causing crime. With the enthusiasm of a scientist blazing a trail, Dr. de River offered his services to the Los Angeles probation de-

partment. He interviewed and studied the prisoners who had pleaded guilty or been convicted by a jury, and made recommendations to the court as to any treatment needed to rehabilitate the prisoners and make them useful members of society.

It was his work in solving the murder of the three little girls that led to the establishment of his bureau as a part of the Los Angeles police.

Several years ago the newspapers of the nation headlined the story of an attractive bride who was found murdered in her pullman berth. Because of the difficulty of obtaining train accommodations at that time, the bride's husband had been assigned to a berth in another train. The murder had occurred in Oregon while the train was on its way to Los Angeles.

### *Murder Puzzles Press*

For the next twenty-four hours the reporters had a field day picturing a crafty killer who went about the train knifing passengers and they wondered if the killer was somebody from out the bride's past.

When the train arrived in Los Angeles, detectives and Dr. de River were waiting in the station. They quickly obtained statements from the various passengers who were released and allowed to go about on their business after receiving a nod from the psychiatrist.

The last group of men to be questioned were the train personnel. The porter assigned to the car, who had been one of the chief suspects all along, found himself answering a barrage of questions. Meanwhile Dr. de River began talking to a dining car cook, a crew member who under normal conditions would have been nowhere near the pullman car where the murder had been committed.

### *Cook's Delight Betrays Him*

The psychiatrist had detected an air of suppressed excitement about the man, certain mannerisms and evident delight at hearing about the more gory aspects of the crime, and he suspected that Robert Lee Folkes, the cook, might be a sadist.

Dr. de River deliberately designed his questions to get the other man boasting and then quietly asked him if he had cut up the woman.

"Sure, I did," was the reply. "I like to see blood. It makes me feel big."

Later, when the realization of what he had said sank home, the prisoner tried to back out, but he already had demonstrated before witnesses just how he had committed the murder and displayed knowledge of the crime that only the killer could have known. Folkes was returned to Oregon where he was convicted and ordered put to death in the gas chamber.

When Dr. de River states that a sex impulse caused a crime he is not thinking in terms of lust. Folkes, the killer of the bride in the pullman, received his thrill from the sight of blood.

### *Knows Murderers' Impulses*

It is by understanding the impulses which drive men to commit certain crimes, that has enabled the psychiatrist to solve the crimes. Los Angeles police, for example, could find no motive for the brutal murder of a young teen-age girl found stabbed some twenty times. There had been no criminal assault, no jealous suitor, and robbery definitely had not been a factor. The girl had lived a blameless life and yet the repeated stabbing indicated a revenge slaying.

To Dr. de River the answer was simple.

"We must look for somebody young and athletic," he informed detectives.

"Someone who is apt to be normal in appearance with a pleasing personality but absolutely cold and ruthless. He derives his thrill from the sight of blood and cannot be completely appeased until he has destroyed his victim."

### *Advice Spurs Police*

The doctor's word spurred police to intensify their efforts since such a killer could strike again and again whenever seized by the impulse. They found that among the boys the murdered girl knew was a husky youth, big for his age, who liked to boast of his athletic prowess. The officers concentrated in checking on his movements and cracked his alibi. He confessed and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

The psychiatrist has on a number of occasions linked together what appeared to

be separate crimes with no possible connection and demonstrated that the same person was responsible.

There was for example the moonlight attacker who pounced upon women, beating them with a heavy stick and robbing them. The first victim was a beautiful Russian dancer named Anya Sosoyeva who worked as an extra in pictures and was attending a dramatic course given at the college. On the night of February 24, 1939, she was crossing the campus when a man leaped from behind a bush and crushed her skull. She sank into a coma soon after and never regained consciousness. She was unable to describe the man.

### *Investigates Girl's Death*

Dr. de River went to the scene with the homicide squad men. A pair of gray gloves was found at the scene.

Just about a month later the killer made his second attack. The screams of his victim brought several people running to the scene and the man raced off. The second victim also was a pretty young actress.

Meanwhile police were in the midst of a series of burglaries by a mysterious intruder who crept in and out of houses without being detected. They were at a complete loss as to the identity of the phantom burglar, or the man who attacked the women with a heavy stick.

Dr. de River studied police reports on the various crimes and then informed detectives that he believed both series of crimes were being committed by the same person. He pointed out that all the crimes were occurring during certain moonlit nights. Meanwhile, the burglaries continued with occasional attacks on women walking on lonely streets.

### *Crimes Have Police Guessing*

Because the crimes were so different police weren't too certain that the same man could be responsible.

"The thefts are secondary in importance to this thief," Dr. de River insisted. "He likes to inflict pain whether it is by striking women over the head or by stealing items which may not be very valuable but which he senses has some sentimental value."

Finally one night, detectives picked up

a 21-year-old suspect named DeWitt Cook, who was wearing leather gloves and sneakers. When police found a large cache of jewelry in his home which he never had even attempted to sell, he admitted that he was the phantom thief who had been responsible for some 300 burglaries. He denied any knowledge, however, of the murder of the Russian dancer or any of the other similar attacks.

#### *Attacker Re-enacts Murder*

Police notified Dr. de River that his theory about the suspect seemed to be wrong. The psychiatrist questioned Cook and slowly brought out from him his life story including his desire to be on the prowl as a lone wolf. Under the gentle but persistent questioning of the physician, he finally cracked and admitted the murder. Later, he calmly went through the motions of the murder while a news-reel camera cranked away. This dramatic confession was used against him in his trial and he was executed for the murder of the dancer.

A few officers had red faces one morning after Dr. de River attended the morning line-up at police headquarters. One of the prisoners was a young man accused of passing rubber checks. He stood in the glare of the bright lights while detectives studied his features so they could remember him in the future.

Both the regular officers and the prisoners were surprised when the psychiatrist asked that the suspect be brought to his office. There was nothing about the crime

to attract the attention of the noted medical sleuth.

#### *Prisoner Resents Inquiry*

The prisoner also seemed to resent the implication that the sex bureau should be involved in his case.

The psychiatrist asked the suspect to talk about himself.

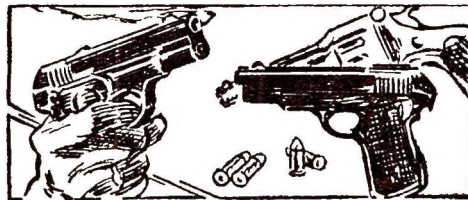
The prisoner shrugged. "What's there to tell?" he countered. "I'm married and have a job. Things got a little tough and I wrote a check. It's the only mistake I made."

"Not quite," the psychiatrist replied. "Suppose you tell us why you're posing as a man."

The detectives in the room stared open-mouthed at that. The prisoner slowly turned crimson and finally admitted that she had been passing herself as a man ever since she was a young girl, and liked to play baseball and other boys' games.

Police hurriedly assigned her to another cell block in the stationhouse. Later she was sent to a woman's prison after receiving advice from Dr. de River on how to adjust herself to living a normal life.

Dr. de River has urged that every large city employ a psychiatrist to work with homicide squads. He can prevent prisoners from making false claims to insanity and at the same time, if a prisoner is insane, see that he is given proper medical attention instead of being prosecuted for a crime the nature of which he didn't understand.



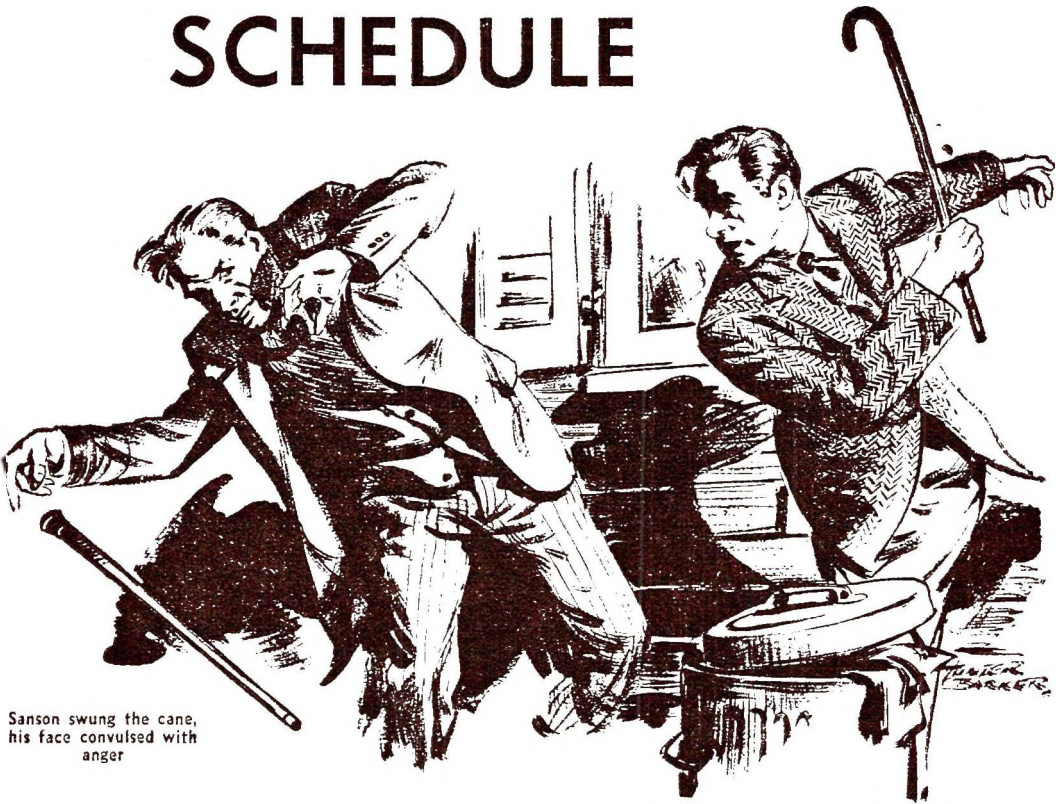
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## DETECTIVE AT LARGE

*The Story of Illinois Sleuth Sam L. Malone* by JACKSON HITE

By ROGER DEE

# MURDER on SCHEDULE



Sanson swung the cane, his face convulsed with anger

*Just act respectable and keep your eyes open for details, thought Wilder as he planned the robbery, but—*

SANSON WILDER tucked his brown sheepcrook cane under his arm and smiled approvingly at his reflection in the plate glass window of the Deauville Drygoods Emporium.

"The picture of respectability," he chuckled. "Who would think that within two hours I'll be robbing the Sump County Farmer's Bank?"

His reflection smiled back at him confidently, a well-set, middle-aged man in a quietly cut gray suit. Cheerful pink face, twinkling rimless glasses, and neatly trimmed mustache expressing to his complete satisfaction the personality he had created for himself in two short

weeks. In Deauville, pop. 2300, he was Theodore Wilder, wealthy retired businessman with a hobby of collecting and compiling Civil War legends.

He moved down the silent street, pausing at old Pop Rand's newsstand for a cigar and a copy of the weekly *Herald*. Old Rand raised his blind, pleasant face from his cash drawer at the sound of Sanson's approach, recognizing his step instantly with the practiced ease of a man sightless for years.

"Out late, aren't you?" he asked cheerfully. "Going to stay out tonight and listen to the election returns, Mr. Wilder?"

"No late hours for me, Pop," Sanson answered expansively, "I've just finished the last of the old papers at the library, and I'm turning in for the night. I'll be moving on in a few days now, I suppose."

Old Rand nodded, his pale dexterous fingers sorting change rapidly into the little wooden bowls of his cash drawer. His white blind man's cane lay on the glass counter at his elbow, its polished handle ready to his hand.

"They tell me you're writing a regular history of Deauville and Sump County," he said curiously.

"Just covering the years of the war between the states, Pop," Sanson corrected.

He walked back slowly to Deauville's dingy two-story hotel, smoking his cigar and checking over his schedule for the hundredth time. Tonight's job would go off smoothly, as other jobs had gone in the past.

He had worked old Pop Rand's routine into his schedule because Pop was the last man to walk the streets at night, excepting his nephew, George Rand. George was Deauville's night patrolman and a full one-third of the local police force.

At ten-thirty, old Karapoulos, the Greek who owned the restaurant next door to the newsstand, would stop and leave a packaged lunch on Pop's counter. At eleven sharp, old Pop would close his stand and tap his way down Main Street, bound for the all-night service station a block below the bank. His patrolman nephew would be waiting for him there, and they would eat their midnight lunch together with Hendricks, the station attendant.

From eleven to eleven forty-five they would be in the station, then Pop would shuffle off to his own house farther down Main Street, leaving George to take up his rounds again. It was a routine that never varied, and it would give Sanson forty-five minutes to enter the bank, jimmy the ancient vault, and get back to his hotel.

It was ten thirty when Sanson walked into the lobby of the Deauville Arms and took his key from Tolbert, the fat night clerk. They chatted a moment over the election returns blaring from

the lobby radio, then Sanson went upstairs unhurriedly, still puffing at his cigar.

With the click of his door behind him affability dropped from Sanson's face like the slipping off of a mask. He had twenty minutes to get ready. It was time he went to work!

HE opened the larger of his two bags and took out a briefcase of alligator-grained leather. It was very heavy, though it was not full. The top half was left empty for the loot he would soon have, the bottom half packed with a neat array of chilled steel tools, precision tempered for the job they were meant to do.

"They wouldn't faze a city vault," he muttered, looking down at their shiny competence. "But the tin can in this hick bank will split like a cracker box."

Respectability and an eye for details he thought as he fished the duplicate key to the bank's side door lock out of the briefcase.

It was a brass copy he had made a week ago from a wax impression. He had checked it against the lock last night, making sure it would open the door silently and quickly.

At ten fifty-five he went softly down the wooden fire escape at the rear of the hotel, the briefcase in one hand and his stout brown cane in the other. The stick made a handy weapon if he should be forced to use one.

Suppose someone did see him, he thought as he reached the bottom of the stairs and felt his way through the darkness behind the hotel. He was only an eccentric old codger who couldn't sleep tonight because of the election returns blaring up from the lobby radio.

He went briskly down the back street behind the hotel, turning left on the unlighted block behind the Deauville bank. At the end of the block he turned right, approaching the side entrance of the bank through the narrow alley that led back to Main Street.

His strap watch showed eleven o'clock. Old Pop Rand, his newsstand closed, would be tapping his way down Main toward the service station where his policeman nephew waited for him. For the next forty-five minutes he would

be out of Sanson's way, eating his leisurely midnight snack with George Rand and Hendricks, the station operator.

Sanson stepped into the deeper blackness of the bank's side entrance, slipping his duplicate key noiselessly into the lock. He was turning it gently when heavy footsteps sounded on the sidewalk, coming toward him down the alley from Main Street.

For a breathless second, he was shocked motionless. It was George's step—Sanson had heard it too often before on his trips to and from the library not to recognize it.

Sanson turned the key quickly, stepped inside the dark lobby of the bank, and closed the door softly behind him. There was no time to relock it—George Rand's shadowy bulk loomed up outside the barred glass panel too soon. Sanson knew from experience that George conscientiously tried every door on his beat as he passed, giving his whole attention to his job.

Sanson knelt on the floor away from the glass of the door and gripped the doorknob with both hands—just in time. George rattled the outside knob, giving it a wrench that took every ounce of Sanson's strength to resist.

The knob did not turn. George Rand went stumping off down the alley, whistling tunelessly. Sanson stood up slowly in the darkness. Never, in the twenty years of such work had he been so close to capture.

Sanson relocked the door, opening his briefcase in front of the rickety old safe, he risked a brief ray from his pocket flash, then chose his first tool. Uneasiness left him, and he worked swiftly.

Twenty minutes later, the loot packed snugly above the neat layers in his briefcase, Sanson was opening the side door again. The job was over without mishap, as he had known it would be.

He went out quickly, leaving the side door unlocked. Finding it unbolted in the morning might easily shift suspicion to the bank personnel, and served to cover his tracks even more completely.

**G**LANCING at the luminous dial of his watch, he noted with satisfaction that it was only eleven twenty-five—and

recoiled from a near collision with a vague form that shuffled up out of the darkness. It was old Pop Rand. Sanson had recognized him from the tap-tap of his stick. He hoped the old man had not recognized him in turn.

"You're out late, Mr. Wilder," the blind man said. He had known Sanson's step at once, the darkness in no way hampering his keen hearing. "Taking a late stroll, or are you—"

"What are you doing here?" Sanson shot at him. He strained his eyes to make out the pale blur of the old man's face in the darkness. Panic fluttered sickeningly within him.

"I stayed open a little late to hear the rest of the election returns before I took George's lunch to him," the old man said. "I called George and told him I'd be a little late."

A thin note of suspicion came suddenly into his voice. "What are *you* doing here at the bank, Mr. Wilder? It's eleven thirty by now and—"

Sanson stepped in and swung the cane in his hand, his face convulsed with anger and frustration. The heavy stick caught the old man across the forehead, and he went down limply, the boxed lunch and his white cane falling from lax hands.

Sanson stood for a tense moment with his thoughts whirling, trying to fight down the terror that welled up in him. He had never killed a man before, because it had never been necessary. But he could not possibly have let Rand go—the old man would have told of their meeting when the robbery was discovered, and not even the bumpkin police force of Deauville would fail to see the significance of his being at the bank so late at night.

Sanson dropped his cane and briefcase and knelt beside the old man's prone figure, feeling for his wrists. Old Rand's pulse was feeble but steady. He was unconscious, but he was still alive.

The unconscious man threshed briefly under Sanson's grip before the pulse ceased to flutter in his wrinkled throat and the laxness of death put an end to his struggles. Sanson stood up shakily, his heart pounding. He was afraid he was going to be sick.

A big figure loomed up at the alley

entrance off Main Street. Sanson wheeled to run, realizing that it was George Rand making a last round before meeting his uncle for his belated midnight lunch.

Sanson's haste was almost fatal. He tripped over the briefcase and fell headlong, grunting aloud with the force of his fall. At the alley mouth George Rand's big bulk stiffened into alertness.

"Who's there?" he barked. "What's going on in there?"

Even in the desperation of his haste Sanson kept his wits, remembering the briefcase and his cane. He scrambled frantically for them in the darkness, found them and raced down the alley.

Behind him he heard George Rand's explosive curse and the heavy thud as he tripped over his uncle's body and fell. The delay gave Sanson the precious seconds he needed, seconds which put him out of the alley mouth and on the back street that led to his hotel.

Presently he was inching up the old wooden fire escape, took a last look to make sure he was not followed, and climbed through the open window into his room.

He had just time to shove the briefcase under his bed before a heavy fist pounded at the door, rattling it on its hinges.

He opened the door after a brief moment of uncertainty, blinking against

the light from the hallway outside, and stared at George Rand and Tolbert, the fat hotel clerk. George's bulk blocked the doorway, his broad face pale and his eyes hot and hard. His night-stick swung ominously in his right hand. His left was out of sight behind the half-opened door.

"Come out, Wilder," he ordered. "I'm arresting you for the murder of my uncle and for robbing the Deauville bank." His big jaw bulged with his effort at control. "I hope you resist," he said through his teeth. "I'd like to—"

"But I haven't been out of my room!" Sanson protested.

"You were out all right," George Rand said grimly. "You were in the alley by the bank, where you murdered my uncle. You identified yourself by leaving—this!"

He brought his left hand into sight, gripping a heavy brown sheepcrook cane. "You were too hasty, Wilder," he said. "You made an error there in the dark—an error that's going to hang you."

Sanson's eyes fell to the cane he still held in his hand, the one he had brought from his scramble in the alley. With sight of it he knew with a freezing certainty that George Rand was right, because the stick he held was not his own.

It was white—a blind man's stick.



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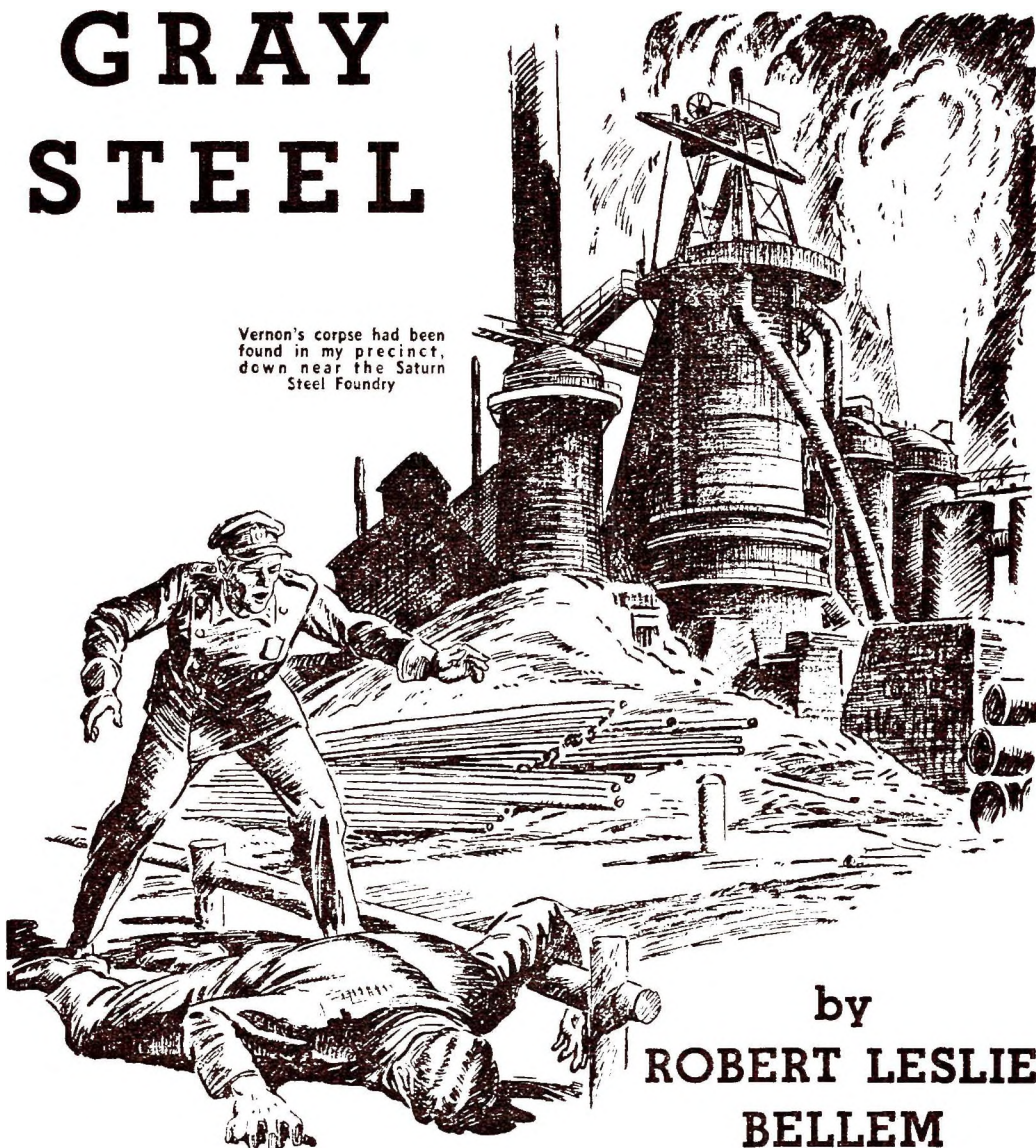
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# GRAY STEEL

Vernon's corpse had been  
found in my precinct,  
down near the Saturn  
Steel Foundry



by  
**ROBERT LESLIE  
BELLEM**

*"Tom Vernon had lived for steel—it was in his blood and his bones, and he had been shot dead because of it. . . ."*

**W**HEN YOU came right down to it, Tom Vernon's death was not my responsibility and its investigation none of my business. I'm a cop, sure, but only a desk sergeant in the uniformed division. Murder belongs to the homicide squad. All the same, Vernon had been a friend of mine and his corpse was found

in my precinct, down by the Saturn Steel Foundry where he'd worked as invoice accountant. So it was natural enough for his killing to be on my mind. I hadn't been able to think of anything else in the week since it happened.

Not that thinking about it did any good, I reflected as I went off duty at eight

o'clock and started home. The night was dark except for a pinkish red glare in the sky over the Saturn Foundry's open hearth furnaces and coking ovens south of town, and I remembered how Tom Vernon had built his life around that foundry, that constant splash of flame which told of molten steel being cooked and poured and processed for the rolling mills.

Vernon had lived for steel; it was in his blood and in his bones, and he had been shot dead because of it. And up to now, Homicide hadn't made one move toward arresting the man who'd shot him. Or who had ordered him shot, which amounted to the same thing.

Much as I disliked the idea, I had begun to wonder if pressure was being used on somebody higher up in the police department: political or maybe financial pressure to get the heat turned off, the investigation closed, the case marked "Unsolved" and filed away as dead as Tom Vernon himself. Could be. I hated to believe it, though, because my kid brother, Garry MacPherson, was a lieutenant in Homicide—and he had the Vernon assignment. He was in charge. If he allowed this killer to get away with it, he would be no brother of mine. Not any more he wouldn't.

I keyed myself into the little north-side cottage where the two of us kept bachelor hall. Garry was in the bedroom wearing my new birthday necktie, the yellow-blue-and-red one that he himself had given me a month ago when I turned forty. He was just thirty-two.

He had on his fawn gabardine slacks, his tan-hound's-tooth sports coat and a shirt that looked like a fire alarm in Technicolor.

**H**E WAS standing in front of the bureau mirror, admiring himself, and he grinned at me in the glass when he saw me come clumping into the room.

"Hi, Jock," he said. "Don't mind me. I'm just preening in borrowed finery." He gave the tie a pat. "How's it look?"

On him it looked a lot better than it would ever look on me. I don't wear civilian clothes too well because I've been too many years in uniform. Anything but blue serge and brass buttons makes me uncomfortable.

I said, "Okay, it's yours. I give it back to you."

"Nope. Strictly a loan for tonight only. Now climb out of the harness and get into something gay. You and I are going on a nice refined party."

"Party? What the devil are you talking about?"

"Don't ask questions." He grinned again. "Shave those blue Scotch jowls of yours and shift from uniform to plainclothes. We have a date, you and I."

His jauntiness irritated me and his care-free, go-to-thunder attitude got under my hide.

"Aren't you overlooking something?" I said, and sat down on the edge of the bed. "You're supposed to be on a murder case. The Tom Vernon case. Tom was a friend of ours, and he's dead."

"Just this evening, let's forget about Tom Vernon, eh, Jock?"

"A cop never forgets his duty."

"That depends on the kind of cop," Garry said lightly. "Anyhow I've got a surprise for you tonight. In fact, two surprises; big ones. Important enough to make your eyes pop out."

"As important as nailing Vernon's killer?"

"For the love of mud, Jock, let's skip the Vernon case a while. You don't have to wear the badge twenty-four hours a day, do you?" He mussed my hair. "Be human for a change."

Oh, sure. Be human. I had raised Garry from a pup, after the folks died. I'd put him through school and college and got him a rookie's rating on the force, and now he was a homicide lieutenant while I was just a crusty, stodgy old desk sergeant watching him climb to the top. So I wasn't human.

I scowled. "Look, kid. Officially it's none of my business, but how's for telling what progress you're making?"

"Progress? On what?"

"On nabbing Anton Semmler for the Vernon murder."

"Oh, lord!" Garry raised his eyes, mockingly. "Back at that again."

"Yeah."

"And still barking about Anton Semmler."

"Who else?" I said. "Semmler used to be a bootlegger, a rum-runner in prohibition. After repeal he went into the

rackets and got fat. During the war he had his fist in the black markets: gas, tires, meat. And he's still at it, only now they call it gray marketing in the steel game. He's been under Senate investigation. He controls an organization of hoods and cutthroats masquerading as legitimate businessmen. He—"

Garry waved a languid hand. "Tell me something I don't already know."

"All right. If you know all that, why haven't you put the finger on him for killing Tom Vernon?"

"No evidence," Garry said shortly, and looked annoyed.

I was annoyed too. More than that, I was getting bitter. "Evidence! You've got all you need. It's a known fact that a trainload of sheet steel was shipped out of the Saturn plant last month, presumably for a valid destination—a customer who had a foundry priority. But the invoices and bills of lading and shipping instructions were destroyed in the Saturn offices and somebody filled out substitute forms. The shipment went to another outfit and was paid for, C.O.D."

"Mistakes happen in the best of foundries."

"But this was no mistake," I retorted. "The concern that got and paid for the steel was a dummy corporation, a front for Anton Semmler. He's the guy that received the shipment and re-sold it on the gray market."

GARRY lifted a shoulder. "Perfectly legal, so far as Semmler was concerned. Shucks, Jock, you remember the howl that was raised. There was a thorough inquiry, and Semmler came out of it with a clean slate. Nobody could prove he had any connection with that dummy corporation. Sure the dummy outfit received the steel by a fluke, a shipping error. But they paid for the cargo, and there was nothing illegal in the way they transferred it to Semmler. After all, the Saturn Foundry got its dough for the steel. The only real loser was the original legitimate customer that the shipment should have been consigned to."

"Wrong," I said. "The real loser was Tom Vernon. He lost his life. And I'll tell you why. He was Saturn's invoice accountant, and he probably found out how the so-called mistake had been made on that

mis-sent steel shipment. Chances are he traced the error down and discovered Anton Semmler was at the bottom of it, probably by bribing a shipping clerk. That would be just like Semmler to corrupt an employe and pay him to make out substitute waybills. So Vernon probably accused Semmler and threatened to blow it wide open. And Semmler killed him—or had him killed."

Garry made a wry face at me. "Got it all figured out, haven't you, Jock?"

"That's the way I see it. Vernon was murdered so he couldn't testify."

"You may be right," Garry admitted. "But proving it is another thing entirely. Got any suggestions along that line?"

I made a fist. "Yeah. Pinch Semmler and beat a confession out of him."

"Now you're being a cop again. The old-fashioned unscientific kind. Relax, Jock. Leave homicide work to the experts."

"Like you, for instance?" I said. "Lazy experts that sit around while a killer laughs at the law?"

He chuckled and made another pass at rumpling my hair. "Maybe I'm tired of being that kind of homicide expert. Maybe that's one of the surprises I've got for you tonight. Are we going on a party or aren't we?"

"I don't know. Are we?"

"We are, so hurry up and take a shave and change into civvies. We wouldn't want to keep our host waiting. Or the fair lady, either. Impolite, you know."

Grumbling, I shaved and changed. My brown worsted suit seemed stiff on me or maybe I was stiff in it. I didn't feel any better when a liveried chauffeur rang our doorbell and Garry and I went out to a big black Lincoln limousine that was waiting for us at the curb.

There was a man in the tonneau. Opening the door made the dome light come on, so that I could see his face and take his handshake. He was a wiry, middle-aged little guy, frosty at the temples, warm enough with his smile.

It was the first time in my life I had ever mingled socially with Benjamin Lefcourt, vice president and general manager of Saturn Steel. But I had to admit I was impressed. I wondered how my kid brother had got to know him so well. It wasn't every flatfoot who could go on a party with a personage as important as Lefcourt.

"Glad you could come, Sergeant MacPherson," he welcomed me. "I wasn't sure you'd make it, from what Garry told me. And this is an occasion that should be celebrated."

"Is it?" I didn't try to keep the perplexity out of my voice. "Why?"

Garry said, "Jock doesn't know the secret yet. Let's keep him in ignorance a while longer, shall we? Then I'll spring both surprises at once."

"Both?" Lefcourt looked at him as the limousine headed toward East Bridge.

Garry laughed. "That's right, there's one that *you* don't know about. You will pretty soon, though."

**WE** rolled to the spacious, landscaped parking grounds outside Riverdale Country Club, which was less a country club than a high-grade night spot, open to all comers if they had the money. According to gossip, Anton Semmler owned the place. If so, it was one of his very few legitimate enterprises. And legitimate or not, I wasn't too pleased at the prospect of eating food prepared in a kitchen owned by a rat like Semmler—the guy responsible for the murder of my friend, Tom Vernon.

I suppose I showed my distaste. Garry and Lefcourt kept trying to kid me into a good humor through the various courses, but they didn't get far. And I was just as bored with the floor show. Maybe I'm getting a little old for a row of chorines in G-strings and gauze brassieres and artificial smiles.

All during this chorus-girl routine I kept letting my eyes wander around the well filled room, watching the other customers, sorting and classifying them in my mind. Then I saw Semmler.

He was sitting alone at a ringside table opposite us: a heavy, paunchy, flabby-jowled man in dinner clothes and diamonds. I wanted to get up and walk over to him and trade him his gaudy rings for a pair of handcuffs. The very sight of him there, smug, confident, cocksure of himself, made my hackles prickle. That was the cop in me: the cop looking at a killer who thought he was bigger than the law.

A girl came out and sang into a microphone. The master of ceremonies introduced her as Vivian Lane, but I didn't need him to tell me who she was. There'd

been more than enough about her in the gossip columns out of New York—her sudden rise to night club fame, the millionaires throwing themselves at her feet, the offers of marriage from Argentine cattle barons and Social Register playboys.

The thing I remembered best was the talk that her initial break in show business had been sponsored by Anton Semmler. Sure. At the start, she'd been Semmler's protegee. What else she'd been to him, I didn't know, but I noticed the way he looked at her while she chanted her torch tunes in a husky, throaty voice as intimate as whispers in a bridal boudoir. His beady little eyes told me plenty.

Vivian Lane, I thought. Stopping over for a one-week stand in a steel mill town to give the yokels a treat. And to be close to the guy who'd given her her first boost up the ladder. Strangely enough, though, she didn't strike me as the type who'd fall for an egg like Semmler. She was tall willowy, rounded in the right places but not making an issue of it.

Her hair was red and bobbed page-boy style, and her features were just irregular enough to be interesting and feminine, but not perfect like a calendar painting. It was hard to imagine her as Semmler's private property, but she must have been. Semmler wasn't a guy who'd do favors without getting full value in return.

"Nice, eh, Jock?" Garry nudged me.

I nodded. "Nice if that's what you like. Me personally, I prefer—"

My sentence never got finished because Vivian Lane came to the end of her last song, and the lights went up for dancing, and she made a graceful bee-line for our table, smiling and showing her lovely white teeth.

Garry jumped to his feet and pulled out a chair for her like a courtier performing nip-ups for a royal princess. She flashed that smile at him and he got a fatuous smirk on his face and introduced me to her. Then he introduced Benjamin Lefcourt, who looked dazzled. For a big shot foundry manager, he seemed as impressionable as a schoolboy.

Garry picked up his brandy goblet. "Now for those two surprises I promised. The first is no news to Mr. Lefcourt; but you, Jock, you'd better hang on tight. I've resigned from the Homicide Bureau. I've

quit the force."

"You—what?" I choked.

"Effective tomorrow, I'm chief of plant police at the Saturn Foundry."

I stared at him, trying to find words that wouldn't come.

HE put a hand on the Lane girl's shoulder. "And next week Vivian and I are getting married."

"Now wait," I said. My voice sounded harsh and something boiled up inside me, something I had trouble keeping under control. I fought for steadiness. "Wait just a moment. Let me get this right. Let me understand this."

"You're not angry, are you, Sergeant?" That was Lefcourt talking. "You aren't sore because I'm giving your brother a chance at bigger things? He'll make three times as much salary as head of my mill's private police force."

Garry grinned at me, a little uncertainly.

"Maybe you're jealous because I found Vivian before you did, eh, Jock?"

I could have answered that, but he wouldn't have liked the answer. I could have told him how I felt about him hooking up with a woman who'd belonged to Anton Semmler. Instead, I poured myself a stiff jolt of brandy from the cobwebbed bottle in the middle of the table, and downed it neat. That wasn't a respectful way to treat vintage liquor a hundred years older than I was, but it steadied me; gave me time to think.

Presently I said, "I'm a trifle stunned by all this news, Garry. You say you start at the Saturn plant tomorrow?"

"That's right."

"Sort of short notice to Headquarters, isn't it?"

"I imagine they'll get along okay without me."

"What happens to the assignment you were working on?" He knew what I meant. The Vernon kill.

He shrugged. "There are plenty of others to carry on where I leave off," he said indifferently. "And don't start preaching to me about duty. I've got my future to think about. Higher pay's important, now that I'll have two mouths to feed." He squeezed Vivian's hand, and she squeezed back.

"Yeah," I said. "And the second mouth

is a mighty pretty one." I looked at the girl. "Welcome to the Clan MacPherson. I hope we'll all be very, very happy together."

She caught my sarcasm and frowned through a blush. She seemed on the edge of saying something just as cutting, but then she widened her eyes and looked past me.

I turned in my chair, and there was Anton Semmler standing behind me—close enough to have listened and heard the whole conversation.

"You're marrying the shamus, Viv?" he said, and indicated Garry. When she nodded he said, "Be good to her, copper. Or else."

I waited for Garry to jump him. Garry didn't, so I started to. I was blind angry. Big as Semmler was, and for all the weight he threw around, I was going to take him apart and fling the pieces in his fat, flabby face.

But Benjamin Lefcourt grabbed my arm and tugged at me, hard.

"Please," he said. "Not here, Sergeant MacPherson. Let's not have a brawl. Consider your brother, and his fiancée."

"I'll kill the fat creep," I said through my teeth. Meanwhile Semmler had walked to the door and was getting his hat from the check girl. He didn't look back.

Garry said sharply, "Jock, you're forgetting yourself! What's the matter with you?" He glanced at my empty glass. "First time I ever saw you drunk."

I was stone sober and he knew it. But he was embarrassed, and trying to cover for both of us; covering his refusal to fight Semmler, and covering me because I had wanted to. Suddenly I felt sick, not from the brandy but because of the kind of brother I had.

That gave me an excuse to stand up and sway a little. "Yeah," I mumbled. "Drunk. Sorry, folks. Hope you'll forgive me. I'm not a drinking man, y'understand. Can't take the stuff. Go with me, Garry, before I make a spectacle of myself in front of everybody." I hiccupped.

LEFCOURT and the Lane girl were gracious about it. They excused Garry while he took my arm and steered me back into the little boy's room. Then I snapped out of my pretended stupor. I

gave the colored attendant a dollar and said:

"Leave us alone for five minutes, son, will you?"

The man departed. Garry narrowed his eyes at me. "What's the idea, Jock?"

"The idea is I want to ask you a question. Is this some clever college-cop caper you've dreamed up?"

"I don't get your drift."

"I'll make it plainer. Are you shifting over to the Saturn outfit so you can be on the inside? So you can do some undercover investigating on the Vernon murder?"

"Jock, shut up that kind of talk." His gaze wouldn't meet mine, but had wavered beyond me, downward, uneasy.

I ignored that. "And are you shining up to the Lane girl so you can get a pipeline to Anton Semmler?"

I wanted him to answer yes to everything I'd asked him. Then I would know he was being smart, sticking to his job of tracking down a killer. I would know he was honest.

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He shook his head, quickly. "It's none of your business and this is no place to discuss it. But since you want to know, I'm taking the Saturn berth for one reason only. Money. Now come on, let's get out of here."

"You mean you're not interested in nailing Tom Vernon's murderer?"

"That's city police work. I'm not a city cop any more."

"And this play you're making for Vivian Lane—it's not to give you a line on Semmler?"

"No! What makes you think I could get to Semmler through her, even if I wanted to? Which I don't."

"She's his woman," I said. "Or at least she used to be."

"Take that back, Jock."

"I don't take back the truth. That dame—"

He moved close to me, and his face was white. "Don't call her a dame. She's a lady in case you know what that word really means. Semmler may have helped her get started in show business, but she told me that's all it was. Business."

"And you believe her?"

"Yes. I happen to be in love with her."

"Then you're a fool," I said. "It's easy to see what's going on. You're being suckered. Semmler found out through his grapevine that you were taking his job at the foundry. He figured you might stumble into something that would incriminate him on that gray market steel deal. So he sicked the girl on you. She'll keep you pumped dry of information, and she'll pass it on to Semmler. Then he'll know every move you make, every step you take. He'll checkmate you, stay ahead of you all the way. Look, kid, don't tell me you're actually falling for the stall. Don't tell me you can't realize what that red-haired chippy is after—"

He hit me. He feinted me wide open with his left and followed through with a right uppercut that put me down on the tile floor. Then he walked out. And as I fell, I saw one of the booths opening at the rear of the white-walled rest room. A man stepped from the booth.

His face was the last thing I saw for a while. Then my head hit the floor and I was unconscious. But in that final second, before the blackness closed in around me, I recognized the man as one of Anton

Semmler's gray market underlings and realized he had eavesdropped on everything I'd said to Garry. And that spelled trouble. Bad trouble.

It was all of five minutes later, maybe more, when I felt the cold wet towel being slashed on me by the colored attendant. Garry's fist had left an aching bruise on my jaw, and the back of my skull throbbed from impact with the floor tiles. I stirred, blinked my eyes open; managed to lurch to my feet. As my mind got clear and my memory focused, a lot of things became plain to me—things I'd been too stupid to understand until now.

**A**BOUT Garry's actions, for instance. He must have known there was somebody in that rear booth: he'd known our talk was being overheard. Sure, I'd tipped the attendant to go away for a while but I hadn't been smart enough to check and make sure nobody else was in the rest room. But Garry had realized it.

That was why he'd denied he was taking the Saturn police-chief job as a means of getting the goods on Tom Vernon's killer. That was why he had denied any idea of using Vivian Lane as a pipeline to Semmler. I'd been a blundering idiot to ask him such questions in a place like this. What else could Garry do but deny, and pretend to be enraged, and knock me cold?

By that time, though, the damage had been done. Semmler's man would report the conversation—and Semmler himself would be smart enough to see that Garry was on his trail, jockeying for evidence.

I wondered if Garry fully understood the danger I'd exposed him to. Semmler was the kind of guy who, being forwarned, would defend himself by attacking. He had proved this, I reasoned, when he murdered Tom Vernon to keep Vernon from exposing him in connection with the misdirected trainload of Saturn steel. Compared with the hundreds of thousands of dollars Semmler was making in the gray market, a human life meant nothing. If Semmler killed Vernon he wouldn't hesitate to kill Garry for a like motive.

I stumbled out of the rest room and made for our table. Lefcourt was still there, but Garry and the Lane girl were gone. Cold premonition inched through me.

"Where are they?" I asked thickly.

The Saturn Foundry executive looked at my bruised jaw, my wet face and hair. Disapproval came into his eyes.

"Your brother and his fiancée decided to leave. He didn't explain why. Naturally I waited here for you. As your host, it was the thing to do. But if you'll pardon my saying so, Sergeant MacPherson, I think you've been acting rather boorishly this evening. Forgive me for being blunt."

I let that ride. After all, he was right about it. Sure I had been a boor. Worse, I'd been a fool.

"Did Garry say where he and the girl were going?"

"I believe he mentioned taking her to her hotel. He asked the waiter to phone for a cab from town."

"Come on!" I said savagely. "He may be walking into a trap. A bullet trap. I talked to him in the rest room about how he's closing in on the Vernon murderer, and somebody overheard it. One of Semmler's hoods. Semmler's been tipped by this time. Garry's in danger."

Lefcourt stood up. "I don't like this. If what you say is true—"

"It is. Let's go!"

Outside on the parking grounds, we found Lefcourt's limousine. And his chauffeur. Lefcourt asked the man some

[Turn page]



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questions. The answers thickened my feeling of premonition.

Garry and Vivian Lane had come outdoors to wait for their cab. But instead, a station wagon had come for them and they'd left in that. Not too willingly, it had seemed to Lefcourt's chauffeur. "I noticed the station wagon 'specially," he added. "A Cad custom job. Green trim, chrome ripple caps, chrome luggage rack on top. Mean anything, sir?"

To me it meant plenty. There was only one car like that anywhere in our area. It belonged to Anton Semmler. He used it exclusively for his trips to and from his elaborate rustic fishing lodge eleven miles up the river. Maybe its destination hadn't been that fishing lodge, this time. Maybe it had gone to Semmler's massive town house—or to any one of a dozen places.

I put my bet on the lodge. It was a bet against long odds, an ugly, desperate bet that might very well have Garry's life as the main stakes. That was the chance I took.

Lefcourt's limousine rolled. We headed north along the Riverside Freeway, gathering speed, slashing through the lateness of the night. Behind us, far to the other side of town, the sky was a sullen red reflection of the Saturn Foundry's furnaces. The red of blood, I thought grimly. My old friend Tom Vernon's blood, and now maybe my kid brother's.

At last we reached Semmler's fishing lodge.

**T**HERE were lights glowing inside the sprawling, peeled-willow-log building; and there was a Cadillac station wagon on the front drive, under the trees. Then a man came toward us: the station wagon's chauffeur. Only he didn't look like a chauffeur. He looked like what he was—a bodyguard, a gunsel.

I didn't wait for him to ask what I wanted. I let him have my fist, full in the mouth. He went down and stayed down. Then, with Lefcourt tagging along behind me, I raced to the rustic lodge and started for the front screen door.

I stopped, so abruptly that Lefcourt bumped into me.

Inside the huge log-and-stone living room stood Garry. He had an arm around Vivian Lane, and he was facing Semmler.

I could see all of them through the screen door. I could see the bleak hostility in Semmler's small, fat-pocketed eyes, and the coldness of his flabby-jowled features.

"Call it kidnaping if you want to," Semmler was rasping. "I disagree. Kidnaping usually means for ransom. That wasn't my purpose in having you brought here. What I want is a showdown. I've told you why. Okay, I've said my say, now let's hear yours."

"Sure," Garry said levelly. "In the first place, regardless of what your man heard in that rest-room and regardless of whatever he may have reported to you by phone, it happens that Vivian and I are in love. We're going to be married whether you like it or not. That's straight, and it has nothing to do with you."

"You insist you're not using her to get at me?"

Garry uttered a sardonic laugh. "Vivian isn't the kind who would stool on her own father, even if she could."

"You—you" The fat man's round face flushed. "You—you know she's—"

Vivian Lane said, "Yes, Dad. I told him at the very beginning. He knows I'm your daughter, and it makes no difference to him. He loves me in spite of that."

Semmler was silent, briefly thoughtful. He studied Garry for a moment.

"All right," he said presently. "I'm going to give you the only kind of wedding present you'd probably accept from me. My money you wouldn't touch; you're not that kind. You think anything of mine is dirty."

"Except your daughter," Garry tightened his arm around her.

"And maybe you're right. But that's going to be changed. I've made my pile and I'm getting out of the gray market racket. As to the wedding present I mentioned—I'm going to tell you the name of

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the guy I dealt with at Saturn. The man who changed the invoices on that last trainload shipment and who killed Tom Vernon because he discovered the truth. Maybe I'm a rat for squealing; but murder is something I never stooped to even in my rum-running days. I think I'd have turned State's evidence in the long run, anyhow. But now that you're marrying Vivian—"

He reached toward his hip pocket. He was sweating, and I figured he was after a handkerchief. But behind me, Benjamin Lefcourt pulled an automatic and fired twice through the screen door. The sudden thunder of the gun almost deafened me, and then I saw Semmler grab at his fat middle and fold over slowly.

The red-haired girl screamed as he sagged to the floor.

"He was going to shoot them!" Lefcourt shouted at me. "He was going for his pistol."

I grappled with him, disarmed him just as Garry came hurtling out of the house. Garry saw the smoking gun in my fist and choked: "Jock!" in strained disbelief.

"Not me, kid. Lefcourt."

The disbelief went out of Garry's eyes, then, and he sprang at the steel mill manager. There was a flash of metal, a clicking sound, and Lefcourt was wearing handcuffs.

"For murder," Garry said harshly. "You'll fry in the hot seat for that. You killed a man in front of eye-witnesses, and you'll fry."

"Don't be a fool!" Lefcourt squalled. "Take these things off me!" He rattled the manacles. "I shot Semmler because I knew he was going to kill you—"

"No. You shot him because you knew he was going to name you as Tom Vernon's murderer."

**L** EFCOURT'S mouth twisted crazily. "That's a lie! A malicious lie! You can't prove it."

"Perhaps not, though I was getting closer to you. I knew why you were giving me the job of foundry police chief. You wanted me where you could watch me; you wanted to make sure I wouldn't pin the Vernon kill on you. I had some evidence, but not enough. And by hiring me away from the Homicide Bureau, you figured I'd never get any more."

"No. You're insane!"

"Am I? When we go through Semmler's papers you may change your mind. Not that it matters, because we've got you now for murdering him. And you can only be executed once."

I said softly, "Garry, lad, I didn't know. I didn't even guess how it was. I—"

"It's all right, Jock. You meddled. You fouled things up. But you brought it to a head. You forced Lefcourt's hand."

"At the cost of another life," I said bitterly, and went into the lodge where Vivian Lane was hovering over her murdered father. I touched her, and she turned her wet eyes up to me.

Grief was in them, and numb despair; but her glance was not accusing. She wasn't blaming me for what had happened; she didn't hold me responsible. She wasn't that kind. She knew Semmler had lived outside the law; she seemed to understand that it was inevitable he would die outside the law.

"Garry will make it up to you, Vivian," I said gently. Then I said, "Welcome to the Clan MacPherson." And this time it was not sarcasm. This time I meant it.

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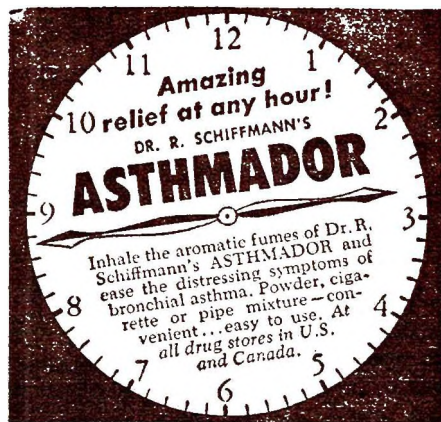


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## THE PHANTOM SPEAKS

(Continued from page 7)

attitude toward law and order and the understanding of the rights and privileges of their friends and neighbors. In my opinion, this is real Democracy in action, and it is one of the foundation stones and main pillars of our way of living.

Numerous readers are affiliating themselves with our friendly group which makes tangible expression of its support of law and order and the local law enforcement bodies who are charged with the prevention of crime and the punishment of criminals.

If you are one of those readers who is not already a member of **FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM**, and you would like to join with us, just send along a letter or a postcard indicating your interest in joining the club. Please state your name, address, age and sex. When this information is received, I will see that you are forwarded your membership card immediately. Enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope so that the card will reach you safely.

In the past a number of our **FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM** Members have asked for some more tangible expression of their membership than the card itself. For these people we have secured an attractive bronzed replica of the Phantom Badge which may be had upon request. This badge is not required for membership, but if you would like to have one, it may be secured for a nominal charge of fifteen cents in stamps or coin to cover the cost of mailing and handling.

There is one thing we would like to make clear at this time. Some people are inclined to feel that membership in our organization automatically makes them police officers. This is definitely not the case. Membership in **FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM** does not give you any special rights or privileges with respect to City, State or Federal law enforcement bodies.

Our chief purpose in sponsoring the **FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM** is to indi-

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cate the collective power of the moral support of our readers and the great majority of the American people. We feel that we are accomplishing something really up-to-date and worthwhile in this enterprise.

## FROM THE MAIL BAG

**W**E have received quite a few letters from readers this month. They are all interesting and we are more than glad to have them. One that brings up an interesting question comes from down Virginia way.

Dear Phantom:

Please send me the Phantom emblem. Find 15c in stamps. If it is possible to send my membership card along with the emblem, will you please do so? In your last issue, in "The Case of the Bible Murders," on page 24, Havens tells Van to take Muriel home from the scene of the murder in his car. Havens says, "I'll take a taxi later." Van takes the car. Later, as the Phantom, he and Havens are again in Havens' car. Now what I want to know is, how did Havens' car get back so that he could ride away in it again, when the car had already been taken home? In all the time I've read the Phantom's adventures I've never found a bad one. In fact The Phantom is the best of its kind I've ever read. Keep up the good work. Let's have more, lots more like it.

Arlie F. Armentrout,  
Keezletown, Virginia, R.F.D. 1.

Well, Mr. Armentrout, at first glance it surely looks as though Havens and Van Loan have been doing a little funny work with that limousine, but since the Phantom spent some time at his apartment and things have been going along on the case as indicated by the arrival of Inspector Gregg, etc., it is quite possible that Havens went home in the taxi and came back in the limousine, isn't it? Bob Wallace has been given this one to puzzle over. I'm sure he'll be much more careful in future stories.

One of our correspondents has suggested that it might be a good idea to have some

[Turn page]

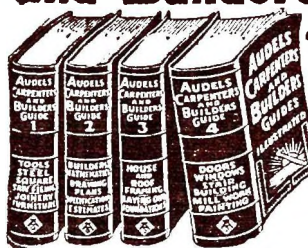
NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL

## MURDER SET TO MUSIC

by  
**ROBERT WALLACE**

Featuring the Phantom

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kind of a list of new members of the **FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM Club** with their names and addresses. Since a great proportion of the letters coming into the Mail Bag this month are from readers who are interested in joining the club, this seems like an excellent opportunity to supply the list and acknowledge these letters at the same time. So here goes:

Mrs. Ed Shreves, 1444 South Lincoln, Casper, Wyo.  
Sergeant William M. Hudson, P.O. Box 44, Fort Hancock, N. J.  
Stanley Rush, State Hospital, Augusta, Me.  
Bill Engel, 5410 South Washtenaw Avenue, Chicago 32, Ill.  
A. F. Fisher, General Delivery, Ardmore, Okla.  
William Gerard Begley, Parkview Lodge, Chemong Park, Bridgenorth, Ontario, Canada.  
Victor A. Cranston, Drew University, Madison, N. J.  
Harry E. Hunt, 3217 G McMichael Street, Philadelphia, Pa.  
Alfred F. Churchill, 300 Leigh, Detroit 17, Mich.  
Eugene L. Hager, R.R. #1, Hatton, Ky.  
Ovid A. Fox, 4904 Tchoupitoulas Street, New Orleans 15, La.  
James Easley, 1321 Askew, Kansas City, Mo.  
James H. Goytche, 1725 Main Street North, Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada.  
Lester Tandit, 1837 East 79th, Cleveland, Ohio.  
Bobby Bozeman, Route #3, Cartersville, Ga.  
Norton A. Lushbough, 324 N.E. 6th Street, Oklahoma City, Okla.  
Charles H. MacDonald, Route #1, Box 363, Pittsburg, Colo.  
William E. Allen, 221 East 60th Street, New York 22, N. Y.  
Mrs. B. M. Flemitz, West 42nd Street, Shadyside, Ohio.  
Alfred Hull, 68 Second Street, Northwest, Huron, S. D.  
Bob Schilling, 6044 North American Street, Philadelphia 20, Pa.

Sam Johnson, 14797 Dequindre, Detroit 12, Mich.  
Roy Hubley, 19 Murray Street, St. John, N. B., Canada.  
Mrs. Arthur Sendelbach, R.R.3, Box 217, Fostoria, Ohio.

Welcome to all of you new members. We're certainly glad to have you in our organization, and we feel sure that you are active in many fields in your own communities.

Thanks, too, to all you other folks who have written in to us. We are always glad to have your comments and criticisms on the stories we are publishing in **THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE**. Send along your remarks whether they are favorable or unfavorable. A postal card is as welcome as a letter. Kindly address all of your correspondence to The Editor, **THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York, 16, N. Y. Let's meet here again in the next issue!

—THE PHANTOM

P. S. Just a word to tell you about a swell motion picture I've seen recently. Called **WHISPERING SMITH**, and starring Alan Ladd, this Paramount Picture in Technicolor is a pulse-stirring yarn of the crimes committed during the railroad era of the West in the 1890s. It's a grand bet for both Western and detective fans!

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\*C. S. L., New York.



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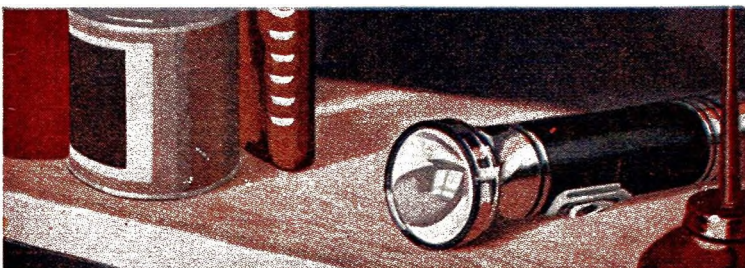
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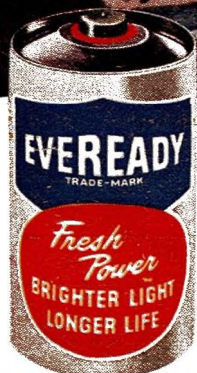
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