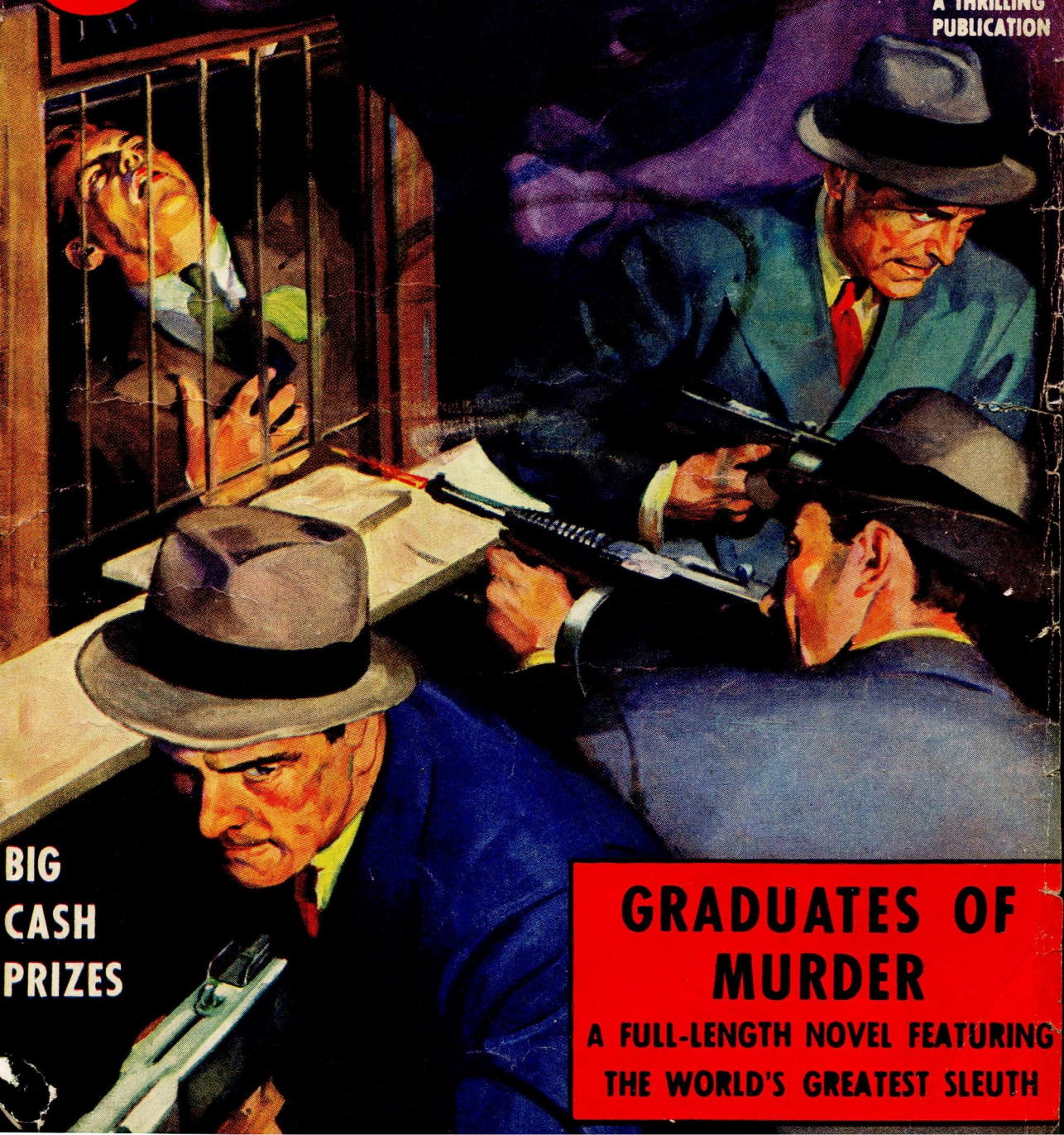


# *The* PHANTOM DETECTIVE

OCT.

A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION

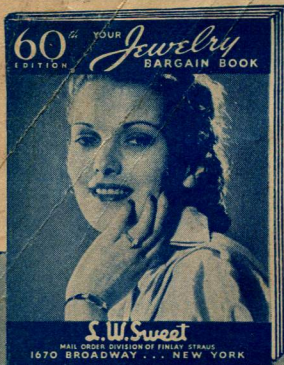


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**GRADUATES OF  
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A FULL-LENGTH NOVEL FEATURING  
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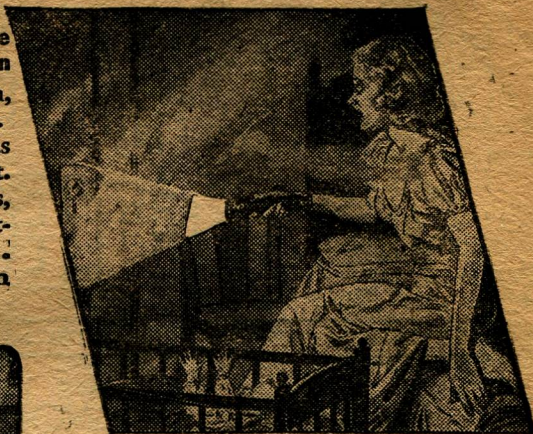
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**Their Home in Flames the Sweetman Family Slept on**

1. Arthur E. Sweetman, of 336 Durham Ave. Metuchen, N. J., still has his "Eveready" flashlight. It's still working, he says, with the original bat-

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2. "My wife waked out of a sound sleep when the baby coughed," writes Mr. Sweetman, "and picked up our flashlight from a chair by the bed as she got up. In its bright beam smoke was curling under the bedroom door!



3. "Quickly, we wrapped the baby in blankets and climbed out the window just as the room burst into flame.

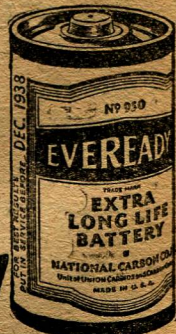


4. "Safe! But there we stood shivering in our night clothes watching everything else we owned burn up.

5. "Not quite everything, however. Firemen found the flashlight still burning where my wife had dropped it in that flaming bedroom... and because it, and those *fresh* DATED 'Eveready' batteries saved us from a living cremation, I shall treasure it all my life.

(Signed)

*Arthur E. Sweetman*



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# The PHANTOM DETECTIVE

Vol. XXIV, No. 3

OCTOBER, 1938

Price, 10c

FEATURING THE WORLD'S GREATEST SLEUTH  
IN

## A FULL BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL GRADUATES OF MURDER

By ROBERT WALLACE

Taken from the Case-book of Richard Curtis Van Loan

(Profusely Illustrated)

*Brutal Mass Murder is a Tocsin Call to the Phantom in this Grim Manhunt! A Sinister Genius of Crime Hurls Defiance at Public and Police as He Carries on a Campaign of Banditry which Shocks a Nation..... 14*

## GRIPPING SHORT STORIES

PRIZE TITLE CONTEST STORY..... Charles S. Strong 94

*Name this Story—and Win a Cash Prize! Details on Page 99*

DEATH WATCH..... Owen Fox Jerome 100

*The Grim Reaper Holds the Timepiece While a Witness Talks*

AND

THE PHANTOM SPEAKS..... A Department 12

*Join FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM! Coupon on Page 13*

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**WRITE YOUR FULL NAME AND ADDRESS HERE:**

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(State whether Mr., Mrs., or Miss)

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City and State \_\_\_\_\_

**②**

**HOW MUCH TIME CAN YOU DEVOTE TO COFFEE AGENCY?**

Mark with an "X" ☐ FULL TIME ☐ PART TIME

Full time pays up to \$35 to \$60 in a week. Part time, either during the day or evenings, pays up to \$22.50 in a week.

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In addition to their cash earnings, we offer our producers a cash bonus of \$500.00 or a brand-new, latest model Ford Tudor Sedan. State which you would prefer if you decide to accept our offer. Mark "X" before your choice.

☐ \$500.00 CASH BONUS ☐ LATEST MODEL FORD TUDOR SEDAN

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**CAN YOU START AT ONCE?** Mark with an "X" ☐ YES ☐ NO

If you cannot start at once, state about when you will be able to start.

**ALL  
APPLICATIONS  
WILL BE  
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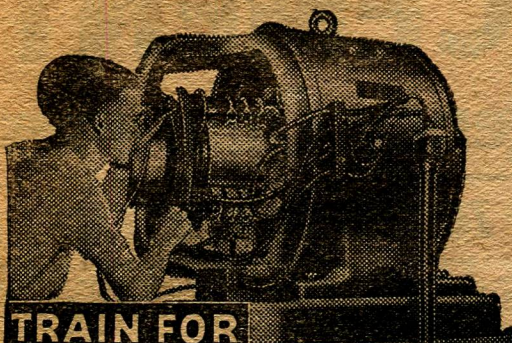
### **SEND NO MONEY**

There is no money fee of any kind required with this Application. It merely tells us that you would consider running a Coffee Agency in your locality if we have an opening for you. You will be notified by return mail whether your home locality is available. Then you can decide if the money-making possibilities look good to you. No obligation on your part. Those who apply first will be given preference, so be sure to mail your Application without delay—NOW! No letter is required, just the Application. Mail at once to

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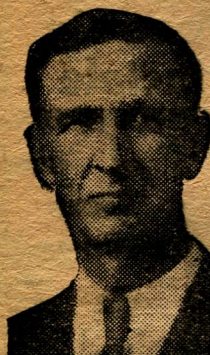
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*It Shows How I Train You  
at Home in Your Spare Time for a*

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Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays as much as \$200 to \$500 a year—full time repair jobs with Radio jobbers, manufacturers, dealers, as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts open their own full time or part time Radio sales and repair businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to \$6,000 a year. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loud speaker systems are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read their letters. Mail the coupon.

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Radio today is young—yet it's one of our large industries. More than 28,000,000 homes have one or more Radios. There are more Radios than telephones. Each year millions of Radios get out of date, need replacing or new tubes, repairs. Millions are spent each year for Radio repairs. More than 5,000,000 auto Radios are in use; more are being sold every day, offering more profit-making opportunities for Radio experts. And Radio IS STILL YOUNG—GROWING. Radio is expanding into other fields. The few hundred \$30, \$50, \$75 a week jobs of 20 years ago have grown to thousands. Yes, Radio offers opportunities—now and in the future!

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The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets showing how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and ideas that made good spare time money—\$200 to \$500 a year—for hundreds. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT TO HELP FIX SETS QUICKER—SAVE TIME, MAKE MORE MONEY.

### I Give You Practical Experience

I send you special Radio equipment, show you how to conduct experiments, build circuits illustrating important principles used in modern Radio receivers, broadcast stations, loud-speaker installations. Read



about this 50-50 method of training—how it makes learning at home interesting, quick, fascinating, practical. Mail coupon.

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I am sure I can train you successfully. I agree in writing to refund every penny you pay me if you are not satisfied with my Lessons and Instruction Service when you finish. I'll send you a copy of this agreement with my Free Book.

### Find Out What Radio Offers You

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J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 8K09

National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

**MAIL COUPON NOW!**



## GOOD FOR BOTH 64 PAGE BOOK SAMPLE LESSON FREE

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National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send the sample lesson and your book which tells about the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please write plainly.)

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**The Tested WAY to BETTER PAY**



# Amazing Invention

**Stimulates Deep-Lying Blood Vessels  
Through Intermittent Vacuum Principle**

# GROWS HAIR

**in Many Thousands of Cases**

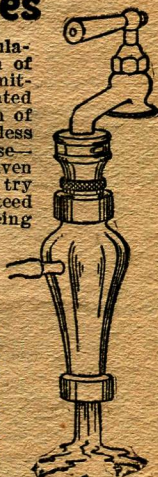
Hair and scalp specialists know increasing blood circulation in deep-lying scalp blood vessels stimulates growth of hair. Here is an amazing machine which through "intermittent Vacuum" actually pumps blood to starved and stunted hair roots, stops falling hair, and results in new growth of hair. Results are obtained even in many so-called hopeless cases of baldness. You men who have tried everything else—you men who are losing your hair—you men who have given up hope of ever regaining your hair—YOU are invited to try the Rand Hair Growing Machine on our amazing Guaranteed Offer. Stop being laughed at behind your back! Stop being called "Baldy"! Stop looking old before your time.

**Will This Sound  
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Amazing reports from users. The Rand is simple to use. Hook up to any faucet—place helmet over head—turn on water—that's all! Power of water pumps life-giving, invigorating blood through scalp blood vessels, feeds starved hair roots, gives inner stimulation—and often results in QUICK growth of new hair. No water touches your head or hair. Order today.

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**Results!**

**LOOK! In As  
Little as 90 Days  
Results Like This**



The illustrations above explain the Rand principle of growing hair. At left is a starved hair root—too weak to push hair through the scalp. At right is a strong, active hair root—GROWING HAIR—because it is properly nourished by rich blood supply.



**Rush This Coupon—SEND NO MONEY!**

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Please ship the Rand in plain package complete to me C. O. D. for \$5.00 plus postage. I agree to pay balance of \$4.95 if after 30 days I am satisfied with results. Otherwise I may return the Rand to you and you will refund my money.

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....

Send no money now. Pay \$5.00 (plus postage) when the Rand is delivered to you. Use 30 days according to directions. If at that time you are not delighted with results, return the Rand to us and we'll refund the entire amount of your deposit. You take no risk!



# IT'S DIESELS Everywhere YOU LOOK!

## .. and Where There Are Diesels You Find H. D. S. Graduates

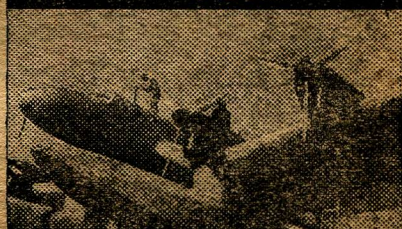
Almost every day . . . right in your own daily life . . . you see Diesels at work . . . read about, or hear about, this great new form of power . . . about how it is spreading like wildfire. Hemphill Schools graduates are in the thick of this great swing to Diesel. Back of thousands of Diesel horsepower turning the wheels, driving the propellers . . . meeting the world's numerous power needs . . . are Hemphill men, in the many interesting, "big future" jobs offered by Diesel.

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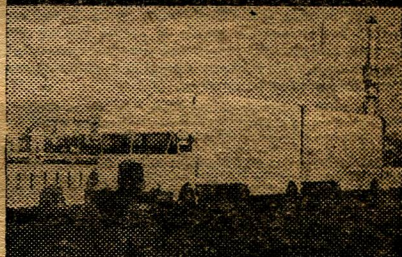
*On the Rails*



*On the Sea*



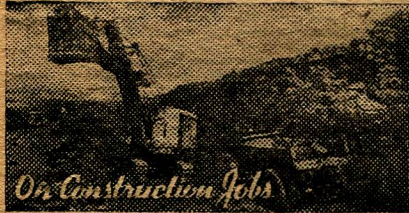
*In the Air*



*On the Highways*



*On Construction Jobs*

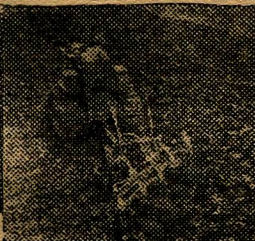


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SEATTLE, 806 Westlake North  
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*In Power Plants*

Please send me new issue of "March of Diesel" booklet and details on Hemphill Diesel training. (This special information is intended only for men between the ages of 18 and 45).

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EXCLUSIVE FRANCHISE FOR

## AN INVENTION EXPECTED TO REPLACE A MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR INDUSTRY

**Costly Work Formerly  
"Sent Out" by Business Men  
Now Done by Themselves  
at a Fraction of the Expense**

**This is a call for men everywhere to handle  
exclusive agency for one of the most  
unique business inventions of the day.**

Forty years ago the horse and buggy business was supreme—today almost extinct. Twenty years ago the phonograph industry ran into many millions—today practically a relic. Only a comparatively few foresighted men saw the fortunes ahead in the automobile and the radio. Yet irresistible waves of public buying swept these men to fortune, and sent the buggy and the phonograph into the discard. So are great successes made by men able to detect the shift in public favor from one industry to another.

Now another change is taking place. An old established industry—an integral and important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—is in thousands of cases being replaced by a truly astonishing, simple invention which does the work better—more reliably—AND AT A COST OFTEN AS LOW AS 2% OF WHAT IS ORDINARILY PAID! It has not required very long for men who have taken over the rights to this valuable invention to do a remarkable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

### Not a "Gadget"— Not a "Knick-Knack"—

but a valuable, proved device which has been sold successfully by business men as well as seasoned veterans.

Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never dreamed of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by dealers of great corporations—by their branches—by doctors, newspapers, publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to convince a man that he should use an electric bulb to light his office instead of a gas lamp. Nor do you have to sell the same business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at that very moment—and the desirability of saving the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

### Some of the Savings You Can Show

You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for \$11 which formerly could have cost them over \$80. A building supply corporation pays our man \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,600! An automobile dealer pays our representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense of \$88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these field reports which hammer across dazzling, convincing money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

### Profits Typical of the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, \$5.83 can be your share. On \$1,500 worth of business, your share can be \$1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth \$6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth \$67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

### This Business Has Nothing to Do With House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—wherever size the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let men speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

## EARNINGS

One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A Connecticut man writes he has made \$55.00 in a single day's time. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$5 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

### No Money Need Be Risked

in trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. If you are looking for a business that is not overworked—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can set foot—regardless of size—that is a necessity but does not have any price cutting to contend with as other necessities do—that because you control the sales in exclusive territory is your own business—that pays more on some individual sales than many men make in a week and sometimes in a month's time—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, get in touch with us at once for the rights in your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and if it turns out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, use the coupon below—but send it right away—or wire if you wish. But do it now. Address

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# THOUSANDS NOW PLAY

## who never thought they could!



### Learned Quickly at Home

I didn't dream I could actually learn to play without a teacher. Now when I play for people they hardly believe that I learned to play so well in so short a time.  
\* H. C. S. Calif.



### Plays on Radio

I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio station. So thanks to your institution for such a wonderful course.  
\* W. H. S., Alabama.



### Wouldn't Take \$1,000 for Course

The lessons are so simple that anyone can understand them. I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course.  
\* S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.



### Surprised Friends

I want to say that my friends are greatly surprised at the different pieces I can already play. I am very happy to have chosen your method of learning.  
\* B. F., Bronx, N. Y.



### Best Method by Far

Enclosed is my last examination sheet for my course in Tenor Banjo. This completes my course. I have taken lessons before under teachers, but my instructions with you were by far the best.  
\* A. O., Minn.

\*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.

## You, too, can play any instrument

### By this EASY A-B-C Method

#### YOU think it's difficult to learn music?

That's what thousands of others have thought! Just like you, they longed to play some instrument—the piano, violin, guitar, saxophone or other favorites. But they denied themselves the pleasure—because they thought it took months and years of tedious study and practice to learn.

And then they made an amazing discovery! They learned about a wonderful way to learn music at home—without a private teacher—without tedious study—and in a surprisingly short time. They wrote to the U. S. School of Music for the facts about this remarkable short-cut method. And the facts opened their eyes! To cap the climax a free Demonstration lesson actually showed them how easy it was to learn.

The result? Over 700,000 men and women have studied music at home this simple, A-B-C way. Now, all over the world, en-

thusiastic music-lovers are enjoying the thrilling satisfaction of creating their own music. They have found the key to good times, popularity and profit.

And that's what you can do, right now. Simply mail the coupon below. Get the proof that you, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument—quickly, easily, in spare time at home. Never mind if you have no musical knowledge, training or talent. Just read the fascinating illustrated booklet that answers all your questions—examine the demonstration lesson. Both will be mailed to you without the slightest cost or obligation. Tear out the coupon now, before you turn the page. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.) U. S. School of Music, 29410 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

Fortieth year. (Established 1898.)

### FREE DEMONSTRATION LESSON AND BOOKLET

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Without cost or obligation to me, please send me your free illustrated booklet and demonstration lesson. I am interested in the instrument checked below:

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CORNET  
TRUMPET  
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FLUTE  
PICCOLO  
ORGAN  
DRUMS AND TRAPS  
HARMONY AND COMPOSITION  
VOICE CULTURE

Name..... Have you This Instr.?

Address .....

City..... State.....



## Have You Had These Strange Experiences?



WHO has not experienced that inexplicable phenomenon of sensing an unseen presence? Who has not suddenly realized that he has been listening to a conversation within himself—an eloquent appeal to self from some intangible intelligence? Too long have the restrictions of orthodoxy and ridicule of unenlightened persons kept these commonplace occurrences shrouded in secrecy. Learn what the world's greatest thinkers, artists, poets and geniuses found by accident—that the intelligence just beyond the border of thinking consciousness is man's fountain-head of imagination and the source of the greatest creative power he can command.

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You cannot better your place in life by thinking only in terms of what you have read or heard. Only by the intelligent direction of your inner faculties will you receive that needed vision and impetus to carry you beyond the plodding, routine-enslaved masses. Let the Rosicrucians send you a FREE Sealed Book that tells you how you may learn to employ and enjoy your natural heritage—the forces of mind. Address: Scribe L.M.N.

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## THE PHANTOM SPEAKS

FIVE men sat at a table in the darkness of the room. They did not speak. There was no sound save that of a faint breathing.

Then there appeared a ray of light. It was not an illuminating light. It was not the clean fresh light of day, nor yet the artificial blaze of night. The light had an eerie bluish quality; a blue so dark, so reluctant that it was almost black.

Suddenly, from the head of the table, a voice metallic and hard reached out through the darkness.

"So you men are worried about that sleuth they call the Phantom?" it said. "I will grant you that the Phantom is far more intelligent than the police. However, I shall not grant you that he is more intelligent than I. What have former adversaries of the Phantom done? They have waited until he took the trail, until he came after them, armed at least with some knowledge of their motives, of their identity. In that they were fools."

"Well," said one of the men at the table. "What should they do? Blow out their brains?"

### THE FIRST BLOW

"Fool," said the other. "No. We must strike the first blow! Kill the Phantom before he takes the case. Men, I promise you something that has never been experienced by man before. You shall watch, with your own eyes, the Phantom cringe, turn yellow, cry for mercy before he dies!"

In next month's thrilling complete novel, DEATH GLOW, a band of diabolical murder masters vow to capture me alive!

In the spectral aurora of a ghostly blue light, an indigo beam that signifies mysterious death—a series of unbelievable crimes take place with spectacular efficiency! The secret of the strange DEATH GLOW is an astounding one! The red light from the Clarion Building projects me into an intricate crime maze—but the blue light means murder!

The whole story's told next month—be on hand for thrills!



## WIN A CASH PRIZE

Turn to Page 94 of this issue for the fourth untitled story in our sensational Title Contest series. The first three contests in this series brought in thousands and thousands of clever replies—why not try your skill on this one? The prizes are:

FIRST PRIZE ..... \$15  
SECOND PRIZE..... \$10  
THIRD PRIZE ..... \$5

This is one of the most unusual contests ever held by any magazine. Be sure to read the details on Page 99 and see whether you can win a cash award!

## Join FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM

Here's a call for new members for FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM. It's a great nation-wide organization devoted to the war on crime—and there are no dues or fees! Clip, sign and mail the coupon today!

The coupon will also tell you how to obtain your Phantom emblem, which is optional and not a requirement for membership.

Everybody—keep your swell letters rolling in!

Your comments, suggestions and criticisms are of great help in planning future issues. A post-card's as welcome as a letter—and I'd like to hear from every one of you. Among the best letters I've received recently are those from the following readers:

Tweedy Wright, San Diego, Cal.; W. B. Taylor, Victoria, Australia; Martin Altins, Mt. Pleasant, Texas; Willis Johnson, Annapolis, Md.; James X. Kirk, Albany, N. Y.; William Worth Browne, Chicago; M. M. Larrimore, New York City; Johnson Coleby, Seattle, Wash., and Ferguson Standler, Birmingham, England.

Thanks to you all! And let's hear from you regularly. The more letters, the better the magazine!

—THE PHANTOM.

## THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE



22 West 48th Street  
New York City

I wish to join FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM. I promise to uphold the laws of the nation and do all in my power to aid in their enforcement.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....

State..... Age..... Sex.....

Enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope if a membership card is desired.

**TO OBTAIN THE PHANTOM EMBLEM**, our official insignia, enclose the name-strip THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE from the cover of this magazine plus ten cents in stamps or coin.

**NOTE:** If you do not enclose the name-strip, send 15c in stamps or coin. This nominal charge is made merely to cover our expense in mailing this valuable bronze badge.

☐ If already a member, check here

10-38

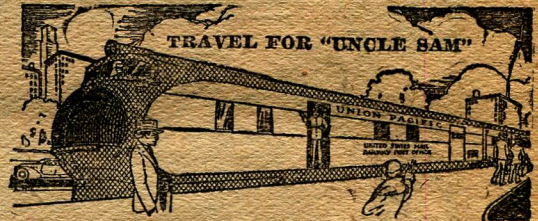


## GOVERNMENT JOBS START

**\$1260 to \$2100 Year**  
**Get Ready IMMEDIATELY**

### Railway Postal Clerks

Railway Postal Clerks get \$1,900 the first year regular, being paid on the first and fifteenth of each month. (\$79.17 each pay day.) Their pay is automatically increased yearly to \$2,450. Advance may be had to Chief Clerk at \$2,700 a year. (\$112.50 each pay day.)



### 3 Days On—3 Days Off—Full Pay

Railway Postal Clerks on long runs usually work 3 days and have 3 days off duty or in the same proportion. During this off duty their pay continues just as though they were working. They travel on a pass when on business. When they grow old, they are retired with a pension.

### City Mail Carriers, Post Office Clerks

Clerks and Carriers now get \$1,700 the first year on regular and automatically increase \$100 a year to \$2,100 and \$2,300.



### Customs Inspector

Salary \$2,100 to start. Men 23 to 45. Work connected with examining baggage and merchandise entering the country from foreign parts covering boats, trains, roads, automobiles, etc.

### Many Other Positions

Many other positions are obtainable. Those wishing these positions should qualify at once.

### Get Free List of Positions

Fill out the following coupon. Tear it off and mail it today—now, at once.

This investment may result in your getting a big-paid government job.

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. A-266, Rochester, N. Y.

Rush to me, entirely free of charge (1) a full description of U. S. Government Jobs; (2) Free copy of illustrated 32-page book, "How to Get a Government Job"; (3) List of U. S. Government Jobs; (4) Tell me how to qualify for a U. S. Government Job.

Name .....

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Use This Coupon Before You Mislay It. Write or Print Plainly.



# GRADUATES



*A moment after  
the police car  
crashed into the  
truck, guns were  
roaring  
(Chapter XVI)*

## CHAPTER I A BANK IS ROBBED

**I**T was nine o'clock in the morning, and business in the financial district of Makon, the rubber metropolis, was getting in full swing.

Near the corner, a hundred yards away from the Makon Second National Bank, the *rat-tat-tat* of an air-hammer shattered the morning stillness. It was not heard so loudly in the bank; the heavy windows and thick revolving doors muted the sound to some extent. But it was

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## Brutal Mass Slaughter Is a Tocsin Call

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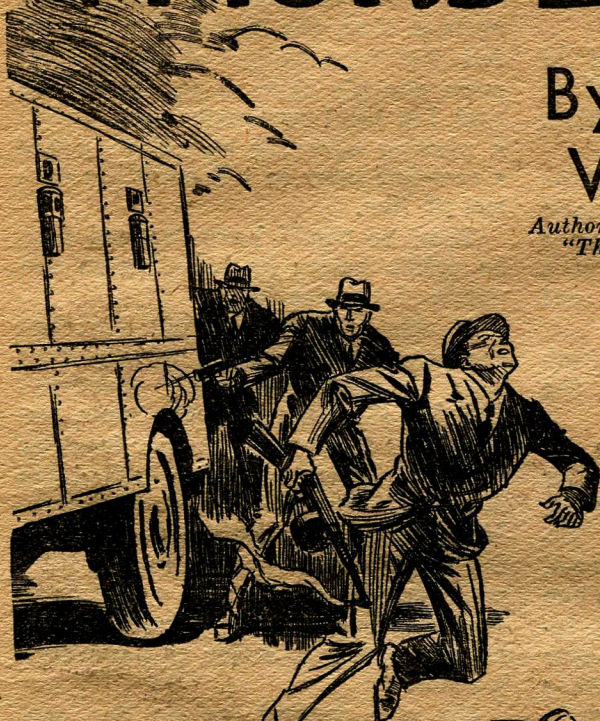
# of MURDER

A FULL  
BOOK-LENGTH  
NOVEL

By ROBERT  
WALLACE

Author of "The Counterfeit Killer,"  
"The Broadway Murders," etc.

TAKEN FROM  
THE CASE-BOOK  
OF RICHARD  
CURTIS VAN  
LOAN



Featuring

THE WORLD'S  
GREATEST  
SLEUTH



annoying, nevertheless; disturbing.

"Wish they'd hurry up and get the sewers fixed," complained the teller in Cage Two, shoveling fives into his cash drawer and then breaking a roll of quarters.

Payroll time today for the electric plant two blocks away. The

company paid by check. The men and girls would be in to cash them at noon.

"They're not fixing sewers," said the teller in Cage Three, talking through the bars to his fellow worker in the adjoining cage. "They're fixing gas mains."

---

to the Phantom In This Grim Manhunt!

---



"What's the difference? Those air-hammers are just as noisy, no matter what they're chiseling up the pavement for."

Cage Three checked a sheaf of ten dollar bills, found the count of a hundred bills in the bale correct, as it was marked.

"Swell chance for a holdup," he said lugubriously. "That pneumatic drill thing would cover gun sounds all right. You could even fire a machine gun in this place, and not be heard."

Teller Two grinned. "You think that hasn't occurred to Brassey, the cashier before now? Look!"

The other man looked in the direction of his pointed finger. He saw "Pop" Terry, the elderly bank guard, standing near the side entrance opening on Miller Street, with his hand on his gun butt. Then the teller in Cage Two nodded toward the rear, where the iron gate to the vaults swung open. Another guard was there; a special man, hired temporarily. A young fellow with alert eyes he, too, stood with his hand on the butt of his holstered gun.

"Just a hunch, Brassey was telling me," Teller Two remarked. "But he's playing it. Taking no chances of trouble till after the noise of street-fixing is done."

The other teller grinned back. "Guess we're safe enough," he said, nodding. "Far as that goes, we've never had trouble here at the Second National. Don't know why we would now."

There was no more talk. The electric company, and a big rubber company farther along Miller Street would spew their employees out before long, all with checks to cash, if possible, in the crowded noon hour—

UP Miller Street, past the clattering pneumatic drills, a man walked quickly. He was of average

height, a little thinner than ordinary. He walked with a swift, jerky step. It would scarcely have been noticed that the brim of his gray felt hat was turned down a little more sharply than most, or that he held his head unusually low, unless a passing observer should be asked a moment later to tell what his face looked like.

Then he would have realized that he didn't know; he hadn't seen the man's face clearly.

It was a warm August day, but the man had the coat of his dark blue, pin-striped suit buttoned tightly. He went past the main entrance of the bank, the one fronting on High Street, and approached the Miller Street entrance on the side. He paused there before the revolving door. His back was to the sidewalk so that a passerby would have had to stop and watch directly what he was doing in order to have seen his act.

No one stopped, so no one saw what he did. Opening the blue coat, he whipped from under it a hand-lettered sign, and pinned it to the revolving door, thrusting the pin through the rubber strip that extended down the edge of the revolving panel as a sound-and-weather-deadener.

Then the man went into the bank through the regular swinging door beside the revolving one.

The sign he had inconspicuously hung on the door said:

PLEASE USE HIGH STREET ENTRANCE

While he had been doing this, another man had approached the main entrance with equal swiftness. This second man, with face half hidden under the sharply-turned-down brim of a gray felt hat, looked like a twin of the first. He was of about the same build; he wore a dark blue suit with a thin pin stripe; his coat was tightly buttoned.



Swiftly, and unobserved, he hung a sign on the main door. It read:

PLEASE USE MILLER STREET  
ENTRANCE

Inside the bank, the two men in identical clothes went to glass-topped stands nearest their respective points of entrance and began to fill out deposit slips, but with eyes fixed on the two doors.

Through the Miller Street entrance came three men, at twenty-second intervals, all dressed in dark blue with pin-stripes, and wearing gray felt hats. Through the High Street door came two more. The High Street pair carried large black cases of the type used to protect and transport French horns.

"Must have been a fire sale some place in town," the teller in Cage Two said to his friend.

"What you mean?" said Three.

"Look! There's two guys dressed in exactly the same suits and wearing the same hats. And what do you know—there's another!"

Pop Terry, at the Miller Street entrance, saw two customers approach the door, saw them stop with puzzled expressions, and head around the corner toward the other entrance. Then Pop saw a sort of placard, fastened to the revolving panel on the street side, swinging a little in the breeze. Frowning, he reached out a hand to open the door and go out and see what the leuce that placard was doing there.

At the nearest counter, one of the last men in whipped open his French-horn case. Eight staccato bursts, not unlike the *rat-tat-tat* of the pneumatic drill outside, ripped out in the bank's stillness.

Following that deadly burst of sound there was a half-second of silence, then a girl's shrill shriek. Pop, never knowing what had struck him, sank to the floor with his hand still outstretched to open the door.

Blood spurted from half a dozen holes in his body.

The girl's shriek was drowned by the crisp yell of one of the men in the dark blue, pin-striped suits.

"Stick 'em up, everybody! Don't try for an alarm button! The first one who does—"

A single shot formed a grim period for the uncompleted sentence. In Cage Three, the teller, who had betrayed himself when his body slanted off balance as he felt with his toe for a buzzer, fell with a blue hole over his right eye.

THERE was horrified silence, then. And method that might have been devised by Satan himself.

One of the two men with machine guns covered the west wall, along which were the cages. The other covered the east wall, where were the open desks of the bank executives and the girl clerks. A third stood by the Miller Street door; a fourth covered the High Street door. That left three of the fellows in the pin-striped blue suits to walk back toward the vault.

At the vault entrance the younger temporary guard stood with his hands up but with baffled fury in his eyes. Suddenly, and defiantly, his hand darted for his gun. The three walked on toward him without reaching for guns themselves at all. There was perspiration on their foreheads, but no expression in their set faces.

They looked much as men used to look at the zero hour when they climbed out of their trenches and began advancing on enemy lines in a slow, measured walk, unable to do anything about enemy shells bursting in their midst, unable to speed up for fear of getting caught in the barrage laid down ahead of them by their own threatening guns in the rear.

The guard actually got his gun





*Richard Curtis Van Loan*

out, was aiming it, when one of the tommy guns belched lead. The guard fell, slowly, like a sagging tree. The three men went on to the vaults.

Breathlessly those in the bank watched. Along the west wall, customers and employees stood with hands up. Along the east wall, employees sat where they were with hands on desk tops. No one moved. No one dared move! The keen, ruthless method of the thing had them all licked.

The vault had a time-lock. But at this hour of the morning it was open. The men walked in, came out in an incredibly short time with the French-horn cases nearly full. Then they went to the cages along the west wall, one after another. As they moved, the blank-faced killer covering that side shifted too, so that never was one of the bandits in line with an employee.

The three had the black cases crammed to capacity with cash. One of them took off his coat and began stuffing money into it as into a sack. Cage Three was left untouched; the man in there was dead and couldn't hand out the contents of the cash drawers, and it was too risky for

the bandits to try to enter from the rear.

The thing was done. Not six minutes had elapsed. During that time several dozen people had approached the doors outside, had gone from one to the other as the signs directed. Most had finally given it up in perplexity to come back to the bank later. A few had come in in spite of the signs—and had been promptly lined up by the door guards.

The three men with the money retreated toward the Miller Street entrance. The two with the tommy guns backed after them.

"Don't anybody move for five minutes," one of them grated.

The seven bank robbers had not come in cars. They had inconspicuously approached the bank on foot. But precisely two minutes before their exit a big sedan had idled up in front of the Miller Street door. There was a solid line of parked cars, but the big sedan had simply parked double for a moment.

The three men with the money walked out the door and stepped into the car. Crowds on the sidewalk didn't even bother to stare at them. The two killers with the machine guns started to back through.

Half the men in the bank were taut, ready to act the instant guns were no longer covering them. A dangerous point, the getaway! One of the men with a chopper backed through the door. The other started to follow.

There was a shot. The second machine gunner screamed and fell, clutching at his side. The guard at the vault door, dying, had desperately managed enough strength to press the trigger once before death took him.

The man at the High Street door cursed furiously, and dipped into sagging coat pockets. He threw two small metallic things that tinkled



when they hit the bank's marble floor, then sprinted for the Miller Street entrance. He got to it and paused.

Men raced to phones—and staggered, clawing at their throats as gas, released by the breaking bombs, chained them; coughing, strangling prisoners.

The last member of the bandit gang bent and coldly, methodically, put two slugs through the head of the man who had been wounded by the dying guard. Then he snatched up the submachine gun and sped out to join his comrades, without a backward glance at the shambles.

The big sedan, crammed with the men and money, whirled off and down Miller Street.

But someone on the sidewalk had caught a glint of the one tommy gun left, held down by the gunner's side, but of course too big to be hidden. Someone else had wondered at the sight of two men carrying horn cases out of a bank, and a third carrying a coat that was rolled as over a bundle of laundry or some such thing. Still someone else had caught the sound of single explosive noises in the midst of the pneumatic drill's drum-beats, and now suddenly realized that the two were not at all connected; that the single noises had been shots!

Belatedly, there were yells. The traffic cop at the corner, not knowing what had happened, but a veteran at reading mob sounds, shrilled urgently at his whistle for reinforcements. Too late! The big sedan was already two blocks away and still accelerating at seventy miles per hour.

Ten blocks from the scene of the bloody crime, with a squealing of tortured brakes and a shrieking of sliding tires that left hot, smoking marks on the pavement, the hurtling machine slowed and swerved left around a corner. Two blocks over



*Frank Havens*

it cut left again, and then at a more sedate pace headed back in the direction from which it had come.

Even the driver wore a blue suit with a pin stripe and a gray felt hat. As they rode back toward the bank, three of the bandits crouched down with the instrument cases on the floor of the crowded tonneau. The others promptly removed their hats. The driver clapped on a black cap with a snappy leather visor. With bland insouciance, smiling and chatting, the men who had just robbed the Makon Second National Bank—and killed—rode past the uproar at the ravaged bank just a block away.

Gradually the car picked up speed. Eight blocks down it turned toward the river, bringing up in a warehouse district. Abruptly it cut sharply into a side street, then into an alley. Purring along for fifty yards, it turned in at the truck entrance of a desolate-looking building.

Instantly the steel shutter door rolled down behind it. In the gloom three smaller sedans of popular make loomed dimly, and a light delivery truck was in the big shed. On the white paneled sides of the

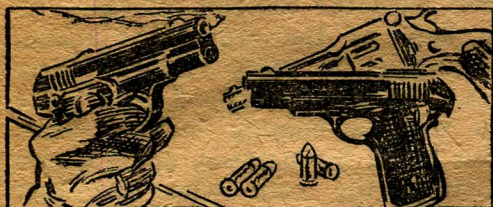


truck, painted with a flourish in black and gold was the sign:

#### WEBBER'S PERFECT BREAD

Coolly the bandits got out of the big sedan. Two of them began going over the huge car with special cloths, wiping away all possible fingerprints. The others started carrying weapons and loot to the bread truck and stowing them inside. Then, with two moving to each sedan, six of them quickly removed their suits and put on clothes of various colors and designs which were awaiting them. The leader removed his own coat and pulled on a long service coat of white and a workman's cap. Both had "Webber's Perfect Bread" stitched upon them in black thread.

The doffed suits and telltale gray felts were quickly bundled into the bread truck, and the leader padded the back doors. Then, two men to a car, they loaded up. The leader got behind the wheel of the



bread truck. The man who had closed the steel shutter on their entrance, and who had remained stolidly at his post, was clad in service coat and cap like the leader. Stolidly he opened the shutter, and the cars rolled out to scatter in different directions like ants from a disturbed hill.

The bread truck came out last, and paused. Giving the steel shutter a heave to bring it down, the doorman scrambled into the seat of the truck. The car was in motion by the time the shutter clanged down with a dismal sound. And silence settled upon the vacant building with its abandoned sedan.

## CHAPTER II

### MYSTERIOUS DEATHS



THE softly glowing lights on the new building of the Newark airport gleamed through the night like floating globes of luminous red. On the highway outside cars whizzed past with lancing headlights in a never-ceasing flow of traffic. There was orderly confusion about the hustle and bustle. Overhead droned the motors of a huge transport from the west.

Inside his office the radio operator was in communication with the pilot of the airship, directing his landing. Mechanics and attendants ran out into the glare of the landing lights. And like a glittering dragon of the air, the great ship materialized out of the upper darkness, swooped down gracefully, and touched the runway. Smoothly, without a bounce, the wheels took the ground, skimmed a bit, then settled gently. The pilot taxied his ship neatly toward the landing shed. The landing steps were rolled to the side of the transport, the door was opened, and passengers began to unload.

Suddenly there was a scream from within the huge ship. It was the stewardess. Field attendants leaped for the ship, jammed their way inside, motioning the straggling passengers on out of the way. Newspapermen, on hand to interview notables, pushed their way forward, forcing themselves into the transport, their press cards stuck jauntily into their hat-bands.

Inside, the co-pilot and a guard were trying to calm a hysterical young woman in the uniform of a stewardess of the line. The eyes of



the reporters flashed past her toward the last compartment. There, slumped lifelessly in the seat, was a man somewhat past middle age. He had been shot through the heart! Blood was still flowing sluggishly from the wound, and there was the faint reek of gunpowder in the air.

Obviously he had just been killed, probably by a silenced pistol under cover of the noise of disembarking.

"Chase to the office, Macey," the co-pilot snapped to the attendant. "Tell them to lock the gates! To hold everybody!"

THE attendant whirled and left. A reporter, with the card of the *Clarion* prominently displayed in his hat, pushed forward, goggling at the corpse. A low whistle escaped his lips.

"Good cripes!" he ejaculated. "That's George Creighton!"

The flyer spun about and stared with widening eyes at the dead man.

"Who?" he snapped. "What do you know about him?"

"Nothing much," the *Clarion* man said laconically. "Except that he's one of the biggest bankers in Wall Street. Know how he came to be aboard?"

The stewardess answered the rapid-fire questions that followed.

"He boarded the ship at Makon, Ohio," she said tremulously. "He was alone. That's all I know. I thought he was dozing just now and came back to wake him. I—I found him like this, and I screamed."

"He's just been killed," said the *Clarion* reporter, as other newspapermen crowded around. "Didn't you hear the shot?"

"N-no," she hesitated. "I was so busy, I didn't notice. There was an air-sick woman in Four, and I was helping her. I didn't—"

"Makon!" exclaimed a watching newspaperman. "Hell, that town's been in the news a lot recently—

now it'll get a new whirl about what this guy was doing there. Remember? Makon's where they had such a whopping bank robbery the other day, with so many killed. Hey, I'm on my way! Let me outa here!"

"You can't leave the port now!" yelled the pilot. "None of you guys. You'll have to wait for the police, story or no story."

"Okay, we'll be around," called the *Clarion* man over his shoulder. And he, with his confreres, clambered out of the ship to leg it for the main building and a telephone.

There was confusion at the gates as they passed them. The panting newspapermen accosted a guard.

"What's going on?" the guard snapped crossly to their hurried questions.

"How the hell should I know? Here we get orders to close up this field like a drum, and three cars have already left. The manager's raising a merry rumpus about that, but how were we to know to bar the exits before we were told to do it?"

The *Clarion* man stopped long enough to agree to the impossibility of this, then rushed on to the office. There was a queue of people at the telephone booths. Everybody was talking at once, demanding to know what the trouble was, why they were being held. The *Clarion* man was among the first to force his way to a phone. A police siren was wailing outside by the time he got his number.

"Gimme the desk—quick!" he barked into the transmitter, twisting his head and rolling his eyes to watch everything possible around him. "Hello! Boss! Mitchell, at the airport. Listen—George Creighton, Wall Street capitalist, was on board the Western transport. He was shot to death—murdered—killer as yet unknown—just as the ship was landing. All of us are locked up



here and can't get out, but three cars of people got away before the exits were closed. Creighton got aboard at Makon, Ohio. That's all I've found out so far, except he was alone."

"Good!" exclaimed the voice at the other end of the line, and again: "Good! Big story, fella. Keep on the job. Pick up all you can. I'll send a photographer and a legman out to help you right away. Report to me the moment you can get away. I'm on my way to see Mr. Havens



himself about this—now! This is too big to be handled by anybody but the *Clarion's* publisher."

The *Clarion* man at the airport hung up and went back out to the transport. A cordon of guards was stationed there now, and a lieutenant of Newark police was questioning the co-pilot and Mary Haines, the stewardess. The *Clarion* reporter, as the man who had identified the murder victim was admitted and briefly questioned. He told what little he knew, then stood by taking mental notes as the investigation widened through the night until it included the entire airport.

Dawn was breaking when he

left the field. And the mysterious affair was no nearer solution. As far as the police could ascertain, three passengers from the murder transport had managed to get away before the gates had been closed. Two of them were New York men, judging from the passenger list, and the other was the air-sick woman. Police outside were already tracing them. The remaining fourteen passengers, all men but two, had been thoroughly questioned and searched for firearms. The result was nil.

It seemed preposterous on the face of it that anybody could have committed murder with a gun in such a small space as a transport's cabin, with nineteen people in it, and get away undetected, but that was precisely what had happened. The sheer effrontery, the unexpectedness of it had made it possible. But murder was generally like that. It leaped out suddenly. The trick was to get away successfully, and in this case the murderer or murderess had done that without any trouble.

The air-sick woman was found in Jersey City, and satisfactorily cleared of all implication. But the two New York men had given fictitious names and addresses, and they had simply disappeared. All that had been gleaned about them was the meager description given by the stewardess.

They had not sat together and had been wholly inconspicuous during the entire trip. Both of them had boarded the plane in Chicago. Oddly, though they were strangers to each other, they had been dressed exactly alike, down to light gray topcoats and dark felt hats. They had seemed fairly young and of the same approximate size and coloring—like thousands of other men.

At last the *Clarion* reporter slouched into his office, wearily



tapped out what details he had not already given over the phone. Then he went home to bed.

**P**ASSENGERS crowded the decks of the *Atlantic Queen* as the steamer from Bermuda nosed her way up the Hudson. Laughter and excited voices filled the air as the throng gathered on the starboard side of the deck and gazed at the New York shore-line.

In the bright sunlight of midday the towering buildings were like a mystical city in some fairy legend. An ever changing vista before the eyes of the ship's passengers as the *Atlantic Queen* moved slowly up the river toward her pier. The sight brought joy to those on board, for though they had found the trip delightful, it was always good to be home again.

Some of them casually observed the red glow of a light in the tower of a giant skyscraper, a light that was barely visible because of the bright sunlight. To them it was merely a waste of electricity. But to one man who stood a little apart from the rest on B Deck that crimson beacon was the tocsin of danger. To him that burning light was as much of a call for aid as would have been the eerie scream of a woman coming out of the black darkness of night. For that light was in the tower of the *Clarion* Building, and it was the secret signal that Frank Havens used to inform the Phantom, that indefatigable Nemesis of crime, that something of such magnitude had occurred that his services were urgently needed.

Bland, suave, and self-effacing, how could his fellow voyagers guess that the stalwart, youngish man with the tan of a summer vacation on his pleasantly rugged features,

who stood a little apart from them, was the super-sleuth whose exploits had brought him fame from the Golden Gate to Scotland Yard? Even on into the obscure fastnesses of the Far East—wherever crime was a menace to civilization? The man who was respected by police officials all over the world, whose very name brought fear into the craven hearts of the greater and lesser lights of gangdom!

But he was. For he was the Phantom!

On the passenger list his name was Richard Curtis Van Loan. That was the name by which his world knew him, never guessing he was known by any other. He was Richard Van Loan to the society column scribblers, for Van was a notorious idler and playboy, so rich and well liked by all who knew him that he and his affairs were always grist to gossip writers' mills.

Of all the men in the world he knew, and his acquaintance was wide, only Frank Havens, publisher of the *Clarion*, knew that Van Loan was in reality the Phantom. For it had been the publisher who had started Van on the career to which he now devoted his entire existence. Havens alone knew of that constant, ceaseless battle against crime in all its insidious ramifications.

It had been Havens who had launched Van Loan on his first case, once when the younger man had confessed to boredom and dissatisfaction with his idle mode of life. Havens had told him of a case that had baffled the best efforts of the police and newspapermen in its solving. That had been a challenge, and Van *had* solved the case.

Since then, so successful had been the coordination of Van's keen brain and dauntless courage that his efforts always had been successful,



and the Phantom had been born—to become a name both admired and feared. Feared by criminals and admired by all the powers of law and order. A dual personality.

But Van had not been content with ordinary success. Always he had striven for greater perfection in his chosen line, had reached out for greater heights of achievement in his sworn war against crime. To others he might be the figure of mystery and uncanny force he had become. But to himself—to Richard Curtis Van Loan—he was a man who believed no credit due him except in as far as he had developed his brain and strength to the highest degree it was possible for him to reach.

ALWAYS Van had studied. Now he not only had a thorough knowledge of the last word in criminology, but he had become such a master of disguise as to defy identification. He had perfected the arts of mimicry and ventriloquism, and the knowledge of all scientific aids was at his finger tips. He was master of a dozen languages and as many dialects, as well as the customs in use in even the furthestmost corners of the world. And in his own laboratory, where every modern aid was at his disposal, regardless of cost, it was possible for him to perform seeming miracles in running down crime.

Such was the Phantom, a man cold-nerved, fearless, a fighter who hated crime and injustice, a man ever ready to gamble his life for the protection of others.

For a time, he had been away, resting after a particularly trying case, and now, even before he landed, the silent call for help was winging to him again.

As the steamer finally edged into her pier, Van Loan was among the first to hurry down the gangplank.

Smartly attired in sports clothes, and with an expression on his face that was almost vapid and bored, he walked to the customs section and found his luggage piled under the section marked with a big letter V.

His keen eyes lighted with pleasure as he saw the distinguished-looking gray-haired man who was hurrying toward him.

"Frank!" he said, in his strong, resonant voice. "Good of you to meet me. How have you been?" And then in a tone so low that only Havens heard him: "I saw the light on the *Clarion* Building. What's up?"

"I'm feeling quite fit," said the publisher, smiling. "If you're free, I have my car waiting. You look as if your cruise has done you good."

As soon as Van's luggage had been passed by the customs inspectors he ordered it sent to his Park Avenue penthouse. Then the two men hurried to Havens' car.

Their conversation was casual as they rode to the *Clarion* Building, and it was not until they were comfortably seated in the publisher's private office that Van Loan brought up the subject that was uppermost in the minds of both of them.

"Well, Frank?" said the Phantom, and he repeated: "What's up?"

"Last night George Creighton was murdered at the Newark airport," said Havens, and apparently irrelevantly he added: "And the Second National Bank of Makon, Ohio, was robbed four days ago. Men were killed. A brutal and ruthless crime."

"You mean you think there's a connection between the bank robbery and Creighton's murder?" asked Van, his keen brain alert for what possibilities that might offer.

"Yes!" said Havens, "Creighton's bank was a correspondent of the Second National at Makon. In fact Creighton was a personal stock-



holder in the Ohio bank himself."

"I knew that," Van Loan nodded. "That's probably why he was out there after the robbery. Nothing strange about that, is there?" he asked.

"In itself, no. But listen. That holdup was the third one to take place within thirty days. Just before you left on your trip the Acme Food Company in Chicago was held up and robbed of a fifty-thousand-dollar payroll. Five people were killed. The bandits were all dressed alike in brown suits and green hats. They even looked alike. And did the job like drilled soldiers."

"A new twist," commented the Phantom. "Made them hard to identify."

"Quite true," said Havens quietly. "The odd thing about it was that Amos Overby, president of the firm, was found in his home twenty-four hours later, with his brains blown out."

"Suicide?"

"Murder!" said Havens grimly. "Like Creighton last night. And here's more for you to mull over. Two weeks ago the Best Welt Shoe Factory in St. Louis was held up at payroll time. More than sixty thousand dollars in that haul. And two days later, Robert Martin, treasurer and heavy stockholder in the concern, was found in a downtown hotel room, shot twice through the head. Murder! Here, I have all the dope on all three cases. Some gang, apparently, in all three cases—a gang that went to work with deadly efficiency and foreknowledge. And, in the Best Welt Shoe Factory case, just as in the robberies of the Acme Food Company and, latest, the Makon Second National Bank, the bandits were dressed alike—only when they went after the Best Welt, they wore overalls and caps like workmen. Here's the file. Read the accounts."

VAN LOAN took the pile of clippings and dispatches and read them, swiftly but carefully. Havens busied himself until his friend had finished.

"So what's the answer, Van?" he asked then. "There's no doubt that the same gang did all three jobs. They're operating on a vast scale. And each job has the earmarks of an inside piece of work to aid them. But the crazy part of it is the murder, *after the crime*, of some executive of the looted concern. It doesn't make sense."

"No," admitted the Phantom, "it doesn't. At first glance it looks like Overby of the Acme Food Company, Martin of the Best Welt, and now Creighton, so closely connected with the Makon bank, sold out to the bandits for a cut, or to cover their own crookedness, and then got doublecrossed."

"It does, at first, yes. But Creighton wasn't in Makon when the Second National was knocked over. He hadn't been there in months. He had little or nothing to do with the operation of that bank. And he was killed after he came back from a flying visit of investigation into the holdup."

"It doesn't match up very well," admitted Van Loan thoughtfully. "If a company official were selling out to the bandits each time and then getting knocked off, the criminals would soon run out of willing material. To throw in with them would seem to be like signing a man's death warrant."

"Right! And, Van, look at the men who have been killed—nationally known business wizards. No blackmail, no kidnaping, no threats; simply a cold-blooded killing *after* the robbery. There seems to be no connection between the three men who have been killed. Yet there must be! My guess is that each killing has been a cover-up of some



sort, but you and I know better than to suspect such a man as George Creighton of collusion with a gang of bank robbers and murderers."

Van Loan motioned to the desk phone.

"I agree with you, Frank, but just for curiosity's sake, call up some of your contacts and get a report on Creighton's financial condition and recent operations. A thorough report!"

WITH a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes, Havens followed the suggestion. Then they went out to lunch together, an elderly, benign publisher and his younger playboy friend. When they returned to the office, Havens' confidential secretary had placed a small file of reports on the publisher's desk. Together Havens and the Phantom went over a very private report on the affairs of the late George Creighton.

"Well," said Van Loan a bit grimly, "Creighton was not insolvent, but what did he do with that two hundred thousand dollars in cash five months ago? It certainly crimped his bank account when he drew it out."

"That makes things crazier than ever," said the publisher.

"It makes," said Van Loan, "an interesting problem, with the answer plain, unvarnished, unembellished death. It's a more lucrative racket than the robbery angle—if the money went into the same pot."

"The whole thing's ghastly," said Havens. "It's as bad as war atrocities in other parts of the world—worse than mass murder in China. The way that gang works—like devils trained in a special crime school! Did you note how the leader executed his own wounded confederate at the bank job, so there could be no tracing of the other members of the gang? That got me, Van. So much so that I am appealing to you

of my own accord this time to see this thing through to a finish. No one else has asked your aid, but I've got to see that murderous gang wiped out!"

"A crime school," the Phantom repeated musingly. "Graduates in murder. All right, you win, Frank. This Makon job is the hottest. I'll fly to Makon tonight. Get this same kind of report on Overby and Martin and wire me in code, care of the Police Department there."

"God bless you, boy," said the publisher fervently. "And be careful!" He grinned a little wryly. "And Van—this is one time that you're not going to go it on your own. From the very set-up of the case, it's going to be expedient for you to work with the police—from start to finish."

Van Loan grinned as he rose. "I think I'm going to like that," he said. "It will be a novelty. Good-by, Frank. I'm on my way."

Twenty minutes later, Richard Curtis Van Loan entered his penthouse apartment and walked swiftly through to his bedroom. Inside a specially built-in closet were a number of disguises on which he could quickly lay his hands, without making a special trip to his much better equipped laboratory in the Bronx. There he was known in still another rôle, that of Dr. Bendix, a somewhat vague-mannered old scientist, interested only in his retorts and Bunsen burners.

Now, all that the Phantom needed was a cheap, worn, dark suit of the obviously fire-sale type, for the rôle he had chosen to portray in his sortie on Makon. Equally simple was his disguise for altering his features. That is, simple for the master of disguise that Van was.

Seated at his dressing table where reflecting mirrors showed him every angle of his physiognomy, he began work with a shading pencil. A few





*On the floor lay  
Waltham, face  
livid, eyes staring  
vacantly  
(Chapter XVIII)*

strokes made his lower jaw appear heavier, and mechanical gadgets along the bone below the lower lip furthered that impression. The contents of a little jar gave a roughened, brick-red, bucolic appearance to his smooth, bronzed skin. Two tiny pellets, inserted in his nostrils, broadened his nose.

Strapping on a shoulder holster, he carefully examined his .45 automatic before slipping it into the holster. Two extra clips of cartridges went into a coat pocket. In a specially constructed waistband pocket, he slipped a tiny mask, made of platinum and precious stones. And into another pocket he slid a

compact little make-up kit. With characteristic thoroughness he chose the articles to go into his cheap suitcase, seeing to it that there would be no discrepancies with his assumed character.

Picking up a list of assumed names that he always had ready for quick use, his finger slid down the list and stopped at a name. The Phantom nodded—and in that moment a man named Simon Stigler came into the land of the living.

Picking up the Phantom's suitcase, "Simon Stigler" took the Van Loan private elevator down to the ground floor where there were no inquisitive lackeys around. Hailing



a cab, he drove to Grand Central Station, where he bought a ticket for Makon, Ohio.

### CHAPTER III

#### BENEATH THE SURFACE



IN the Apache Club, a notorious night spot in Makon, the couple at the table near the blaring orchestra were sleek and smooth and hard. In that respect, they were at home there. It was not only favored customers who had to be smooth and hard to frequent the Apache.

The place, reputed to be silently owned by "Frenchie" Dubois himself, accredited gang lord of the city, though that had never been proven, had seen more big-shot crooks from all over the United States within its doors than any other two gambling and night clubs in a dozen states. No place in New York itself was any hotter than this Makon hot spot.

The man who sat at that table near the orchestra with a girl, was tall and well built. He had a good jaw which was wrecked by the thin, snarling mouth; a good nose that had a thin, disfiguring scar down its right side; a good forehead, which went unnoticed by reason of his eyes, slightly Mongoloid in slant, cruel and cold as ice in Arctic mid-winter.

The girl was the partner for him, beyond question. She was beautiful—but no man in his right mind would have tried to make anything of that. She looked like a blond tigress who could smile as she drew a thin blade from her garter and sank it into a man's throat. The two wore a thousand dollars worth

of clothes between them, and yet looked subtly down at the heels. The man's words bore out the "broke" hint.

"We've got to get some jack together, some way, Mimi. I've never been put out of a hotel for lack of rent payment, and damned if I'm going to start now."

"We'll get dough," murmured the girl. "We always have, haven't we?"

"Yes, but it don't look so good now. That hotel bill! That's what burns me up. We can't just fade out of the joint, either, because all our duds are in a trunk in the storeroom. Cripes! Me, Dannie Regan, wondering where his next week's rent is to come from! Is that a laugh?"

The girl cautioned him with her eyes to beware of the next table. Two men sat there, and one of them was trying to listen to their conversation. Apparently the men were talking to each other and seemed only to be watching the dancers. But a keen watcher would have been intangibly aware that the one nearest the couple's table had an ear bent their way.

And at a corner table, almost hidden by palm fronds sat a middle-aged man watching all of them. Flushed and drunken he didn't seem to be actually watching anybody, though. He was apparently a small-town tire agent or something of the sort, in Makon on business and taking the opportunity to go on a binge.

"Don't lose your grip, Danny," the girl said, in a lower tone. "It's not your fault. You had to—do that—to that cop in Cleveland. So now you're too hot to work your regular racket. That's all. You'll cool in a little while and we can work around again."

"Sure, and be shoved out of a hotel in the meantime! That is, un-



less we can get some kind of a line through this Seymour lad. Cripes, the only good thing I've done in this town was to follow the tip I got to tag onto him soon as we got here. Hell, it was easy. Him and me right now—we're just like that!" He snapped his fingers with a sharp click.

There was silence for a moment. Then the man said:

"That Second National Bank job that was pulled in this man's town. Gawd, what a beaut! I never saw such method! What I'd really like to do, Mimi, is get hooked up with the guy behind the bank haul!"

"That shouldn't be so tough," the girl said. "Just go to Frenchie Dubois and—"

"Frenchie Dubois!" Danny Regan spat out. "That stuffed shirt! He's a mob leader, not a brainstorm. You and me ought to be a good bet for a real brain, Mimi. We got the looks and the know-how. Surely there ought to be a place in an organization-like that for a couple like us."

"Ssh," said the girl suddenly. "Seymour's coming back. Looks like he'd had dancing enough."

The orchestra was still playing. On the crowded floor, men and girls were still swaying in something that might have been called dancing had there been about ten less people for every square yard of clogged floor space.

FROM the floor, another couple were coming to the table where Danny Regan and the girl Mimi sat. Two half-empty highball glasses at two empty chairs indicated that they belonged there; that they made up a party of four with Regan and Mimi.

The man staggered a little as he seated the girl, then walked to his own chair. He looked like a budding politician, which, indeed, he was. About twenty-six, with a big jaw

and a bigger mouth, with a fine, baby-kissing expression and already with a trace of an abdomen that should sport morning suits with ease, Harry Seymour was hot stuff with the gang that ran the city.

He was a bright boy at the City Hall. He was the engineer in charge of the Department of Streets and Parks; a bit young for the job, but his uncle was commissioner. Somehow his fifty a week salary let him live on a two hundred a week scale.

Seymour clutched at his highball glass. The girl with him, a brunette with a calculating eye, reached out her hand to stop his hoisting motion.

"Cut it, Harry, will you? You're fried to the eyeballs right now."

Seymour batted her hand aside and glared. He was obviously a truculent drinker, a bully when sober and an outright sadist when drunk.

"Lay off me, will you?" he snarled. "I guess I know how much I can take. And I ain't had half that much yet."

Mimi winked meaningly at the brunette.

"Sure, lay off him, Dorrie."

"It's for his own good," began Dorrie, not very intelligently.

"For my own good! For my own good!" squalled Seymour. "What the hell do you think you are? My Mother? I left my old woman's apron-strings years ago, Babe."

"Sure, that's right Harry," Regan said soothingly. He glanced at Mimi then leaned toward the young politician. "Say, I've been thinking—going back to that bank job we were discussing before you went to hoof it with Dorrie."

"Yeah, that was queer!" smirked Seymour, drunken cunning in his shallow eyes. "I remember what you were trying to guess. How did the bandits know there'd be an air-hammer banging on the street in



front of the bank at just that time?"

"Harry, you fool. *Shut up!*" wailed Dorrie, under her breath. She looked as if somebody had kicked her in the stomach.

"Yeah, Harry, pipe down," sneered Danny Regan, staring around him. Mimi was powdering her little nose with a hand that shook a bit. "What the hell could you know about it? That's in your department, ain't it? It would look bad for you if the police decided to tie both things together. I want to stay healthy, myself, see? All I'm asking is that you kind of introduce me around in Makon, maybe take me over to see Frenchie Dubois. Maybe him and me could make a deal. I need dough Harry, like I was telling you."

"Boy, you got something there—heading for Frenchie," Seymour said, with ponderous admiration. "There, you got something. One thing I like about you, Danny Regan, you don't want to know anything. If a guy starts to talk, you shut him up. Silent Danny, 'at'sa kid! But I'm givin' you three guesses—how *did* the boys know the pneumatic drillers would be there this morning?"

"Let's go throw a buck on the wheel," Regan said swiftly. He glanced at Seymour's brunette companion with one well clad shoulder raised a bit, and she stared helplessly back at him.

"'At'sa kid, Danny," said Seymour, successfully diverted for the moment. "Let's."

He scribbled his name on the check the expressionless waiter brought, and the four went to rear stairs.

A man standing there and apparently doing nothing but peacefully watching the crowd in the cafe room, glanced just once at them. But the one glance was as sharp as a sword cut. Then he stepped aside without another look and kept on

observing the occupants of the cafe while Seymour and Dorrie, Danny Regan and Mimi, went up to the second-floor gambling room.

Behind them, after a moment, the two men who had sat at the adjoining table, got up and came to the stairs too. The man at the foot of them didn't even look at these two. But as they passed, he said out of the corner of his mouth:

"What's up?"

"Seymour's popping off," said one, not glancing at the guard at all.

"Guy with him?"

"Seems jake. But you can't tell."

The two went on up and after the two couples.

In the gambling room, Seymour moved at once to the high-stake roulette table, with a fat wallet in his hand. The faithful Dorrie trailed with him, clutching his arm.

"Harry, you chump! Don't go flashing all the dough in Makon around here. With your City Hall connection, it looks bad. And when a thing begins to attract too much attention—you know what happens to it."

"Don't worry, Babe," Seymour hiccupped. "I know my way around. Now stop nagging! Fifty on the red to start with, huh?"

**B**EHIND them, Regan and Mimi smiled. Regan said, in a tone so low that no one a yard away could have known he was talking: "Go home, kid."

"Nothing doing," said the girl. "We've played around Makon after getting in with Seymour, for a boring week. Tonight's the first time Seymour's opened up, and you want me to miss it."

Regan's lips were not moving at all. But he kept on talking in the queer, breathless whisper he had used before.

"I tell you—go home! This is getting hot. Seymour will take me





*An arm wrapped  
itself around the  
Phantom's neck  
(Chapter XI)*

to Frenchie Dubois before the night's out. And from there—Well, the trail has only one direction. I'll get in touch with you later."

The girl looked thoughtful. "I hate to leave you even for a few minutes," she whispered. "We may be wasting our time with Seymour, anyhow. He's a sap—more



likely to get us in jail than in with Makon big shots. This town's hot, Danny."

"And us broke and stranded here," he said. "You beat it back to the hotel, but first get Dorrie off of Seymour's neck. She's hindering him. I'll drop him like a shot if he can't put me in the know."

"Okay," she murmured, and smiled at him as though he had just passed her a personal compliment.

He grinned back at her. A sleek, smooth, hard couple—perfectly fitted to their swanky but quietly dangerous environment. Then she deftly corralled the brunette and coaxed her off to the ladies' lounge. Regan casually joined the drunken Seymour at the gambling table.

After watching the idiot drop about a thousand dollars, he sneered openly.

"You're a sap, Seymour," he muttered, in a tone that reached only the other's ear. "You risk your neck to sell Frenchie Dubois some information, and then you come to one of his gambling clubs and slough it all back to him."

**H**ARRY SEYMOUR shivered. He twisted his head and opened his mouth in drunken protest. Swiftly Regan shut him up and piloted him away.

"Bawl me out in private, Harry," he advised. "It's safer."

"You're nuts!" growled Seymour, his face pale. "I know I talk too much when I'm drunk, but I didn't sell Frenchie Dubois anything. You got me wrong, Danny. Frenchie didn't have anything to do with that bank job. Didn't the police pick him up and grill him for twenty-four hours? Every one of his employees had a perfect alibi. I wouldn't even be in one of his places if that wasn't so."

"Then," taunted Regan, his eyes

glittering wolfishly, "where did you get the jack to throw away on that crooked roulette table?"

This sobered the young engineer a little. He waited until a drifting couple passed by out of earshot, and then answered.

"The Seymours have money. I'm worth more than my dinky job with the city. What's it to you, anyhow?"

"Nothing," admitted Regan. "I just hate to see you played for a sucker, that's all. And you're not kidding me, Harry. This is easy money you're sloughing. I keep on telling you I need some dough—bad. You know I'm hot from a little job over in Cleevland, but I'm not as hot as this bank gang here in Makon. How about introducing me around among the big boys? Mimi and I could do with a job."

Seymour's face wrinkled in thought. A certain cunning gleamed in his eyes.

"Maybe you got something there, Danny," he said. "I like you. I been thinking about putting you on to something. Come on. I'll take you over to meet a guy."

"Let's go," said Regan promptly.

Seymour led the way to the check-room.

"Where are you going?" demanded Regan. "I thought you'd take me to see Frenchie Dubois."

"Maybe that's where I am taking you," leered Seymour. "You don't think a big shot like Frenchie hangs around the Apache Club all the time, do you? He's got offices in a hotel suite, that's a darb."

They reclaimed their hats and started down the stairs just as Mimi and Dorrie came out of the ladies' lounge. Regan hurried his companion out of sight before the anxious-eyed Dorrie could spot them.

"Dubois is your boss?" he asked casually.

"Of course not," snorted Seymour.



"The people of the city of Makon are my employers. The dear peepul, in whose interests I work so assid—assiduously. That's a good word, ain't it, Danny?"

"Part of it is," agreed Regan subtly.

Seymour missed the irony as he fumbled with his keys. They got into his big, flashy car. He rasped the gears with drunken inefficiency, and they jerked to a staggering start.

The dowdy small-towner on the binge, imposed upon by unscrupulous waiters, seemed content in his corner in the restaurant on the lower floor. He saw the two men leave without their girl companions, and he looked undecided. The two smooth-faced and snappily attired young men who had followed the quartet upstairs had not reappeared. The man from the sticks lurched erect and called loudly for his check. A waiter hurried over.

It was at this moment that Dorrie and Mimi came down into the restaurant. They walked slowly toward their former table, which was still unoccupied. The small-town celebrant waved the waiter away. Tipsily he marched over toward the deserted girls.

"How do," he said in a slightly thick voice. "Can I be of any asssssiss—hic—help?"

The brunette Dorrie flashed him a swift look of appraisal. It was the blonde who answered.

"Scram, hick!" she almost spat at him, like an angry cat.

The man blinked in ludicrous surprise and hurt.

"But I jus' wanna be of s-s-service. That's me— S-simon S-s-stigler, S-stigler's S-s-service S-s-station. I s-saw your escorts leave. I'd be glad to—hic—s-see you ladies home."

"Your air hose is leaking, brother," said the brunette. "Go

peddle your stuff somewhere else."

"Your check, sir," said a waiter behind Simon Stigler, with peculiar emphasis.

"Huh? Oh, yeah," said Stigler, fumbling for his wallet.

"Let's go over to your place, Dorrie," suggested the blonde.

They quickly moved away, leaving the lonesome Stigler stranded with the waiter. This factotum swiftly made change, reclaimed the guest's hat, and bundled him out of the place and into a taxicab with a dexterity that bespoke long practice at getting rid of undesirables.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE INFLEXIBLE RULE



RENCHIE DUBOIS, having risen to a position of power in the comparatively small city of Makon, continued to reside there. Why not? It was more centrally located than say New York, and

there were trains running and planes flying and ships steaming to any part of the world he cared to visit. It was better to remain a big frog in a little pond than become one of the chorus in a lake.

As it was, *Monsieur* Dubois was a nationally known figure. He was not a political boss in the strict sense of the word. He had turned his peculiar talents to more simple amusements. He catered to the gambling instincts. Being smarter than his contemporaries, he had set about cornering the night clubs, the slot machines, and the gambling dens of Makon, leaving the tougher rackets to the hoodlums and mobsters. If Dubois had ever been connected with anything more questionable than gambling, neither the authorities nor



anybody else had ever been able to put a finger on it.

Gradually, due to his foresight and knack of making quick decisions, he absorbed lesser criminals. It was just a step to become the admitted underworld leader of Makon, though that was a deep, dark secret—or supposed to be. From this, his power spread like a cancer, sending fibers into various branches of the nefarious industry, reaching out like a growing octopus. Now he was at the top. And the police had nothing on him.

**F**RENCHY DUBOIS had certainly grown. Just a shade more ruthless than the hoods who looked to him for leadership, jobs, and protection, he had built up a tight organization. Free with his money in the right places, in the years since his real beginning he had come to control all the buyable elements in city politics. He had an elaborate lobby at the state capitol.

He now dominated night life in Makon, with ramifications that reached from San Francisco to New York. But one would never know it from a casual meeting with the man.

Frenchie sat now in an easy chair in his luxurious three-room suite at the Hiltonia Hotel. One room had been fitted up like an office, having a private switchboard—everything. But the occupant of the suite was relaxing in the living room tonight.

Frenchie Dubois was tall and heavy-set. He had piercing black eyes and a wide, bulging brow. His features were heavy. Deep lines etched his face. His hands were massive and stubby. His movements were deliberate. His voice was the only light thing about him. It was ridiculously high for such a ponderous man, and he had therefore trained himself to speak in a tone just above a whisper. In rare moments of excitement, when he for-

got, he squeaked like a fat rat.

The phone on the handsome stand at his elbow buzzed lightly. It was a private wire which did not go through the hotel switchboard. Laying down his slender Havana cigar, he let his newspaper fall to his lap and answered the call.

"Yes?" he said in his deliberate, soft voice. And he listened, his heavy features impassive. Then: "Okay. Stand by," he said calmly.

He broke the connection, waited an instant, and dialed a number. He let the phone ring five times. Then he broke the contact and redialed the number. This time an answer came immediately.

"All right?" said a metallic voice.

"This is D," said the gambling house king. "Your set-up's not so hot. H. S. talks too freely while drunk. I was afraid of him, but you said use him."

"Are you questioning my judgment?" demanded the metallic voice.

"Yes," replied Dubois bluntly. "We made a deal. You furnish the blueprints and I supply the labor. So far you've been jake, but H. S. was a mistake. I know everybody in Makon. Now, because of that one job, he thinks he is privileged. He's bringing a guy by the name of Regan to see me."

"So?" queried the voice.

"Regan's a red-hot from Cleveland. He seems okay, but I think we ought to throw him to the police before he tears down our playhouse. You're in the clear, but I've been grilled by the bulls already, and I can't stand any more leads to me."

"To whom has H. S. been spouting?" asked the glacial voice.

"To this Regan guy tonight at the Apache. I don't like it."

There was silence for a moment. Then:

"You're right. But don't turn Regan over to the law."



"I'm more concerned over H. S. What's he to you, anyway?"

"Nothing," said the cold voice, and even Dubois felt a slight chill at the grim finality of that word. "What is the inflexible rule of our organization?"

"Never take a chance!" said Dubois curtly. "I was wondering if you had forgotten it."

"I never forget," said the implacable voice. "Between us, we worked out a complete set of regulations and procedures. Put the first rule into effect."

"Right," said Dubois.

"And D! I don't like your tone. Don't forget who is the head of this organization."

"Okay," said Dubois grudgingly. "Just don't cross me up. The heat is on—and you can't fry any harder now, no matter what you do."

"Is that a threat?" the metallic voice snapped.

"No, a statement of facts."

"Very well, but remember one significant fact, my friend. I know who you are. So do the police. But you just think you know who I am! Moreover, don't forget—ever—that there is a certain little matter of which I, alone, know—and hold the proofs—that would be of vast interest to the police. The matter of

two deaths that were thought to be murder and suicide. And were not. The police would be interested; so would a man who pulls the electric switch in the death house in Sing Sing, for he would be a couple of hundred dollars richer."

The line went dead, and Dubois went cold. He sat there for a moment, staring at the handsome steel engraving on the wall before him. Once again he had heard a threat that he had thought over and done with; finished—ever since he had undertaken to do this mysterious man's bidding. The man's plans and schemes hadn't worked out so badly, at that, but who in hell was he, anyhow?

Many a time before Frenchie Dubois had tried to find that out, to make his suspicion a certainty; with no success. Was he, after all, the man Dubois was inclined to think he was, or somebody else? If he, Frenchie Dubois, could just get his hands on that taunting, mysterious guy—just once! As it was—

He shivered and called the private number at the Apache night club.

"Yes, sir?" answered the voice of the man who had first called him.

"About H. S. and Regan?" asked Dubois calmly.

[Turn Page]

## DOES TAKING A LAXATIVE LEAVE

# YOU WITH A "Hang-Over"?

Over-action in a laxative is even worse than under-action. It leaves you feeling weak and dragged down—thoroughly miserable!

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When Nature forgets—remember

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THE ORIGINAL CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE



"Yeah," was the answer. "They're just leaving. Shall I put a tail on them?"

"More," said Dubois. "Put a lily on them."

"W-what?" faltered the astonished man.

"You heard me. I don't want to see them. I don't think anybody else will ever want to see them again. Understand?"

"Gotcha," said the man.

The wire clicked dead. Wiping his suddenly damp forehead, the young man who had spoken to Dubois left the private room he was in and quickly sought his companion. The pair of them left the Apache by an alley door without going back into the club proper. And that was the reason the apparently inebriated Simon Stigler did not see them again.

OUTSIDE, the two got into Seymour's car and started away, with Seymour at the wheel. The politician was in a loquacious frame of mind. He weaved from side to side of the street, careless in controlling his flashy roadster.

"You'll be in the bucks if Frenchie takes to you," he said loquaciously to Regan, slumped in the seat beside him. "'Course, like I said, you'll have to be right. But I'll give Frenchie the guarantee for you, kid. I know you by now—and you came to me with an A-1 recommend. You're aces."

He turned the car down a dark side street.

"What's this?" asked Regan, instantly alert. But his tensivity was soon dissipated.

"We don't go right to Frenchie's place," hiccupped Seymour. "We'll sit in at a joint I know of down this street, and let the big boy come to us. Safer for him that way."

"Oh!" said Regan. "Oh. Sure, that's best."

"It's that apartment house two blocks down," Seymour said.

But the roadster never reached the apartment house. At that moment a long low coupé flashed out of a side street in front of them, and blocked their way. Seymour slammed on the brakes barely in time to avoid hitting them.

"Say, you guys! What's the big idea? I'll have you pinched for life for a dumb play like this! You don't know who I am—"

Seymour was abruptly silent as a gun touched his neck. Regan stopped diving for his own gun with his fingers only an aching three inches from the butt. But the three inches were as bad as three miles, with an automatic against his side.

"Outa there, you two," one of the men droned.

Seymour stared with an icy, dawning terror sobering his muddy eyes.

"Rake! Bat! What's the idea—"

"I said outa there! And into this house, here."

The place indicated was a vacant brick house, half tumbled down, unoccupied and windowless, desolate looking.

Seymour's eyes were wide with fear. All his drunkenness left him instantaneously.

"Bat! Rake!" he repeated to the men he had long known during the time he had been an habitué of the Apache Club. "Look, what you aiming to do? I'm on the level. Honest to God! Have I talked too much or something? I won't again, ever! So help me!"

The man covering him swore indifferently and raised his gun. He cracked down with it. Almost like an echo, the smack of the other man's gun on Regan's head sounded. The two thugs from the Apache Club dragged Seymour and Danny Regan out of the roadster like so many sacks of meal.



They carried them into the deserted house.

"Open 'em up?" carelessly asked the one called "Bat."

"Rake" shook his head. "Not smart enough. Seymour's got a little drag, remember. I got a better way."

They were in the deserted house for quite a little while. During the interval, Rake came out once with a rusty old bucket and siphoned gasoline from the roadster's tank into it. Then they came out for good, and one drove the roadster away while the other took the coupé.

In the basement, two unconscious men were left behind them. They were bound, with gasoline soaking their bonds. Gasoline also soaked old papers left in strategic corners; and one of those piles, connected by inflammable little trails with the rest, blazed merrily from the touch of a match that had been held in the hand of the man called Rake.

In another part of town the intoxicated Stigler, on his bender, trailed two girls to a swanky apartment house and found, to his chagrin, that he had drawn a blank.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CHIEF GETS AID



CHIEF OF POLICE AMOS NEGLEY sat in his office in the Makon Police Headquarters and scowled at the telegram in his hand. It had just come from New York. Looked to him more like the work of

some crank or practical joker than anything else. It read:

THE PHANTOM

CARE MAKON POLICE

MAKON OHIO

TRIPLETS SAME WEIGHT AND NO

BIRTH CERTIFICATE STOP CIRCUMSTANCES IDENTICAL FRANK

That was all. No signature; nothing. Of course, if he wanted to trace that wire, Captain Negley could do so, but why waste the time and trouble when he had so much else on his mind? The newspapers were screaming for his scalp, along with that of the district attorney. And to cap the climax of the Second National Bank disaster, so recently pulled, and with not a clue to its perpetrators, there was that unexplained fire last night on Maple Street where two persons were incinerated.

It was enough to make a preacher cuss. Savagely Negley punched a button. A uniformed officer stuck his head in the door.

"Blanchard and Ripman back yet?" demanded the chief. At the other's nod he added: "Tell 'em to come in here."

Two plainclothes men filed into the office.

"Did you bring in that teller?" demanded Negley.

"Yes, sir," one of the detectives said promptly. "He's a little hot, too, about being picked up a second time."

"That's just too bad," the chief grunted sourly. "I'm hot myself. The whole damn town's on my neck. Bring him in."

He snapped off his words, just as the door opened again, and the uniformed officer appeared.

"Excuse me, Chief," he said, "but there's a bird out here by the name of Simon Stigler who insists on seeing you. When I told him you were busy, he said he could go see the district attorney, but that he knew that you'd rather he'd talk to you first."

Captain Negley started to shout an emphatic "No!" But he checked himself.



"Did he say what his business was?"

"He said he was interested in a fire that happened last night."

"Ah!" Negley exhaled grimly. "Bring him in."

In a moment the middle-aged man who had been at the night club the previous evening was admitted. He showed no signs of alcoholic indulgence today, but his rustic appearance had not improved. He came forward to the desk, and his eyes flicked over the yellow telegram on the chief's desk. He glanced swiftly at the two detectives, then fastened his gaze on the red face of the fuming chief.

"Mr. Stigler, is it?" Negley asked, in suspicious politeness.

"Yes, sir." The newcomer nodded, speaking in a voice slightly hoarse. Then, as the door closed behind the uniformed officer, a change came over the rustic. Indefinably, but instantly, he was different, inwardly changing so that he did not appear to be the same man who had entered. Even his voice was different.

"Do you trust these two men, Captain Negley?" he asked matter-of-factly.

"Certainly," growled the amazed chief. "They are two of my best men. What's your business? You a Makon man?"

"No. What I've come for, in fact, is my telegram. Isn't that it on your desk?"

Negley uttered an explosive exclamation. The two detectives whirled upon the visitor as if to grab him. And suddenly he opened his right hand under their noses. There on the palm, glittering like white fire, was a small platinum badge shaped like a domino and set with diamonds.

"I don't like to be spectacular, gentlemen," he murmured, "but the nature of my work compels it."

The three police officers stared at

the insignia, their eyes widening with surprise.

"You!" blurted Negley. "You—the Phantom?"

Simon Stigler smiled. "Do you need more identification?"

"No," said Negley. "And, thank God, you're here in Makon. Maybe you can make some sense out of all this. I don't know anybody else that can. What do you know about that fire last night?"

"Only that I was sidetracked before I knew what was going to happen. I was at the Apache Club last night, and I followed a cold trail. I think I can name the two fire victims, and I believe I can describe their murderers. But let me see my message."

THE chief of police quickly handed over the opened telegram with a murmured apology for having read it. Stigler, alias Van Loan, smiled the apology aside. One of the plainclothes men brought him a chair. He digested the contents of the wire from Frank Havens instantly.

"This means, gentlemen," he explained, "that three men paid out two hundred thousand dollars each in an untraceable fashion—and died. That is a point I have already been investigating. Further than that, however, I am not prepared to state at present. Tell me what you have."

"Well, for one thing, we have a bank teller from the Second National in for another questioning. Do you want to quiz him?"

"Yes. But remember, please, I'm just another plainclothes man to him."

Officer Blanchard went out at once and returned with the teller. The man was slim and dapper, fairly young, and still shaken from the harrowing experience he had had a few days before. The Phantom began his questioning immediately.

"Your name?" he asked evenly.



"Henry Barber," said the teller. "You police ought to know. I've been around here enough." He moistened his lips nervously.

"Barber," the Phantom said firmly, "I want you to tell us again, carefully, every detail of the bank holdup you can remember. Don't overlook a thing."

"Okay." The teller nodded. "I've already told Chief Negley, but it doesn't seem to be much help. Here goes. I was filling my cash drawer, getting ready to pay cash pay checks at noon—"

"What time was this?" interrupted the Phantom.

"Around nine o'clock, I think."

"All right, go on."

"I was talking with Bill Rand in the cage next to mine," said Barber, with the horror of memory plain in his eyes. "I remember he'd just made a sappy remark to the effect that the sound of the pneumatic drills in the street outside would make a holdup kind of easy, that they could drown out any shooting."

"I said something about the bank never having a robbery in its history, and I pointed out a special extra guard the cashier had hired recently. I worked on for a while, and then I said to Bill, in the next cage, that there must have been a fire sale somewhere because there were two men in the bank dressed exactly alike."

"Dressed how?" the Phantom shot out.

"Dark blue suits, with pin stripes in them, and light gray felt hats. In a minute I saw a third man exactly the same. I was just beginning to feel that there must be something more than coincidence in that when I heard a shot and saw the guard at the Miller Street door go down."

"A shot?" said Van. Here was a discrepancy.

"Several shots," Barber corrected himself. "From a machine gun. And just like Bill Rand had surmised, the sound outside drowned it out completely. Then I saw six or seven men—all in dark blue with gray felt hats. They stripped the vaults and took the cages one by one—"

"Then for a moment or two you were within a yard of at least one of the bandits," Van remarked. "Can't you describe him?"

BARBER shook his head.

"I was confused by the fact that there was nothing about the way he was dressed to make him different from the others. They all looked alike in those clothes."

"His face?"

"I never did see it plainly. He kept his head down a little, and I was pretty scared. I just shoveled out the money and did as I was told. It may not have been very courageous"—he added that defiantly—"but Bill Rand was lying dead in the next cage because he'd tried to toe an alarm button, and I didn't want to join Bill."

"You did the right thing," Van said quietly. "Money isn't worth life. You hadn't a chance. Anything else you can remember?"

"No— Yes! Just one thing. That was, that the gang seemed to be split up into two groups. Kind of specialized. There were workers, and there were killers! The two with the machine guns, and the two with automatics at the doors, were the killers. The other three just collected."

"I remember that the extra guard pulled a gun, in desperation, as the three walked toward him and then toward the vault. They didn't even try to get guns out in answer. They just kept on walking, knowing that one of their pals would cover them. And one did. The guard went down just a second before he could shoot."



"All right, Barber. And thanks," Van told him.

They all looked after the teller as he went out. Then Negley glanced at the Phantom.

"Think he's on the level?" the chief asked suspiciously.

"I think so," said Van slowly. "Everything he says ties right in with the other jobs. Method! Method! All dressed alike to confuse witnesses who tried to describe any one of them later. Each with his specialized job to perform. Everything timed to the second. It's a crime army we have to face here, with the general as able as any crook we've ever bumped up against."

Captain Negley received a laboratory report. His face was grave as he looked up from it.

"The dental report shows that one of the two dead men was Harry Seymour. The other was—Daniel Regan—a Federal man!"

"Ah!" said the Phantom, and his jaw tightened. "I suspected as much. Go on, Chief."

But Negley shook his head in frustration.

"Sorry. There's nothing in the fire case that we've been able to turn up to indicate murder. It all points to accident. Seymour and Regan—this report says his right name was Clarke, but he was posing as Danny Regan, left the Apache Club at one last night. Seymour was pretty drunk. They went to this vacant house, for some reason of their own, and it burned down. It looks like an accident, looks as though Seymour, drunk and careless, set off the fire somehow, and the two were burned to death. And the flames destroyed all trace of proof to the contrary. The house was pretty well gutted."

"Yes?" Van said softly. "You'd be surprised, Chief, at the things fire can leave behind it! I think

this is our first break. Our first 'smart' break. Something complicated enough to give us a few clues."

## CHAPTER VI

### "SMART" SCHEME



UNCHED over a desk in his suite at the Hiltonia Hotel, Frenchie Dubois was sweating. And it was because again he was listening to the cold, inhuman voice over the telephone.

"I have just read of the fire on Maple Street," the voice said. "The two in it, of course, were the two you spoke of last night?"

"Yeah," said Frenchie. "Good clean job."

"What do you mean, a good clean job?"

It was then that Dubois had begun to perspire a little. He'd been pretty proud of his men for their work last night. It had seemed beautifully foolproof. But something in the voice was far from approving, and Dubois' poise and dignity were rapidly fading away under the menacing thrust in that metallic, mysterious voice.

"Well," he said, "everything went up in smoke, didn't it? Not one thing to trace. H.S. was boiled. Everybody'll set it down to a drunk's fool accident. I think the boys were pretty smart."

"Oh, you do?" said the voice.

Frenchie repressed an uncomfortable shiver.

"You know the usual method," the voice continued inexorably. "Why didn't your men follow it?"

Dubois wiped his pockmarked forehead. He did know the usual method. The simple method. A bullet through the brain, then com-



plete destruction or hiding of the murder gun.

"I didn't supervise it," he quickly disclaimed. "I just told them what to do. I thought they'd go ahead as usual. But I guess they figured this was a smarter way—"

"Their smart figuring gives the enemy their biggest chance against us to date!" snapped the voice. "Haven't I warned you never to deviate from our methods? Didn't you school your men? Haven't I assured you that I know as much of enforcement methods as the law itself? If my orders are obeyed, no direct evidence can ever be discovered for use against us. But how can I cope with stupidity and disobedience?"

"You mean—you don't think the job was foolproof?" Frenchie quavered.

"Foolproof!" The voice was bitter. "As sure as daylight comes tomorrow, the men who did that job will be traced. I know, because I know of the marvelously efficient methods that can be used in checking such 'good clean jobs.' Those men will be caught and put behind bars within forty-eight hours, probably. So you know what must be done? You know what they are to get for their clever disobedience?" the cold voice demanded.

"Aw, Chief," whined Frenchie, "they're good boys. Two of the best. I can't—"

In the face of the sinister silence from the telephone, Frenchie's voice trailed into nothingness. He gulped.

"Okay, Chief, okay," he said hastily. "You're calling the turn on this one."

He hung up, with a trembling hand.

For a moment rebellion filled him. After all, he was Frenchie Dubois, lord of the underworld in this section of the country. Why the hell should he take such orders as these?

Even if that mysterious man did claim he had proof of a crime for which Frenchie Dubois could burn? How did he, Frenchie, know that was the truth? He'd never seen that proof that was eternally being shaken over his head.

Bat and Rake! Why, they'd been with him for six years. As he'd said, they were of the best. And they'd done the best they knew how, last night. They'd only tried to be a little smarter than they were ordered to be; that was all. Damned if he'd follow commands!

But even as he thought this, he knew he would. Frenchie had never cringed from any man. But a voice from a telephone, a voice belonging to a person he wasn't at all sure he'd ever seen, had his number. Because when that voice pronounced measured sentence, men died. And Frenchie did not want to die. Not like Overby, Martin, and Creighton. Big as those men were, they had died when that inexorable man with the voice of steel and ice had given the word.

IN the office of Chief Negley the Phantom faced the perplexed police officials. "You are working with the F.B.I. in this case?"

"Not exactly," explained Negley. "We are more than willing to cooperate, but the G-men haven't called on the Makon Police Department for anything except to give Daniel Clarke, known as Danny Regan, a free hand. So we were pursuing our angles while he was working his own. We thought he was wasting his time at the Apache, because we've already grilled Frenchie Dubois about last night's fire, just as we did after the bank robbery, and checked the movements of all his known employees. He's in the clear. He was in his hotel all evening and all night, too. We know definitely that he never even saw



Seymour and this so-called Danny Regan."

"The woman—Mimi? Was she Regan—Clarke's—partner?"

"Yes."

"I want to see her right away. And then you must get her out of town at once. She is of no value to the law any longer, and her life isn't worth a snap of your fingers. It's obvious that the brains behind this crime wave know that Regan, or Clarke, and the girl were both detectives. At least, the master criminal is taking no chances. I take it you are giving me full cooperation?"

"You're damn' whistling!" said the chief fervently.

"Then, for working purposes, I am Simon Stigler from here out, on special assignment to the Second National Bank case from your department. You can say I've recently been transferred from another city. Better pass along the word. If I see fit to change my identity and disguise, I'll notify you."

"What's that?" cried Officer Blanchard sharply. "You mean you're in disguise now?"

THE Phantom smiled. "I am always in disguise when working on a case. My life wouldn't be worth another finger snap, otherwise."

Blanchard came close and peered at the Phantom's make-up. He shook his head in amazement at its perfection. The special moulages, greaseless paints, and other tricks—some of them Van's own development—were beyond him.

"How do you do it?"

Again the Phantom smiled and shrugged.

Chief Negley chuckled. "Okay, Phantom," he said. "You're in charge on this case. Any orders?"

"Yes," Van said rapidly. "Send to those two addresses and pick up this Mimi for questioning. If she's

not to be found, send out a general alarm for her, and let me know at once. We may be too late already. There's a brunette girl named Dorrie, too—Dorrie Wellman, as I discovered. She was a pal of this Seymour chap. Grab her, also. And now, I'd like to go to the scene of the fire last night and then have the use of your laboratory for a while."

"Ripman," Negley snapped to the officer awaiting orders, "go pick up the dames. Take help if you want it. Blanchard, you consider yourself at the disposal of the Phantom from here out. You're relieved from all other duty. And, Phant—er—Stigler, call on me at any hour for anything. I'll go on with the routine investigations. I'm going over to see the district attorney right now. Boy, will he be relieved when he knows *you're* on the job!"

In company with Blanchard, Van went to the fire-gutted building on Maple Street. Luckily the fire department had reached the place the night before in time to prevent the collapse of the walls, so the two investigators were able to get into the basement. Then they made a trip to the morgue. At both places the Phantom took samples of ashes and charred fragments, putting each in a separate envelope and marking it carefully.

By the time they returned to the City Hall they found Officer Ripman had returned. He had the blonde. Dorrie Wellman, he informed them, had disappeared. The blond Mimi had been at her hotel address. She had just finished reading the newspaper account of the fire, and her apprehensive eyes showed that she already suspected the truth.

The Phantom didn't waste any time.

"You know me as Simon Stigler," he said. "But I'm known by another name. The Phantom!"



"The Phantom!" she cried.

"Right." He nodded. "Danny Regan, alias Clarke, was one of the victims of that fire last night. The police know about him and what brought him here. But what was your connection with the F.B.I?"

"None," she answered promptly. "I am employed by the National Manufacturers' Detective Association. I met Clarke, or Danny Regan, in St. Louis where I was working on the Best Welt Shoe Factory robbery."

"Ah!" said Van. "The association suspected inside work on that job and put you to work on it?"

"No. We suspected inside stuff on the Acme Food job in Chicago prior to that. It was the peculiar telegram President Martin of the Acme Food Company sent to the Overby family that took my interest. He seemed to have been a close friend of Overby who was, as you know, the head of the Best Welt Shoe Factory. He asked if there were any peculiar circumstances surrounding Overby's death not reported to the police. I had found none, by the way, save for that wire. Then came the Best Welt job, and I was sent to St. Louis.

"Before I could get a good line on Martin, he was killed. Then I met this man Clarke who was already going by the name of Danny Regan, and found he was working on the case because it was believed to be the same gang operating in different states. In St. Louis they used automobiles stolen in Chicago, abandoning them later without leaving a fingerprint or any other trace. While we were still separately investigating things, a man who said he was Patrick Moller, a Makon attorney, called the Best Welt on long distance and tried to get details of Martin's death. So Danny and I played a hunch, made up an act, and came here."



*Rake held a match to the trail of papers (Chapter IV)*



The woman paused and shrugged. "Our hunch was right. The Second National Bank was knocked over right after we got here, posing as a couple of Cleveland red-hots. We couldn't find any Patrick Moller, so we went to work on the robbery angle."

"The chain dropped a stitch," observed the Phantom keenly. "Or, rather it jumped a couple. George Creighton, New York banker, was shot to death while he was returning home from a visit to the Second National Bank here. By the way, your real name is—"

"Adelia Carson."

"Thank you. Will you tell me just what you and Clarke did unearth here?"

"Not a great deal. We got in with Harry Seymour because we learned he was spending too much money for a man in his position. Danny Clarke gave the man some swell forged credentials, presumably from another shady political character in Cleveland. They worked. Clarke quickly learned that Seymour was well connected politically but was in with the shady element, too. That's why we were playing the Apache night club together. We suspected Frenchie Dubois of being in the whole mess, somehow, and I still do."

"One thing we did learn, though. It was Seymour who gave the order to start tearing up the street that morning of the holdup at the bank. I am positive that he sold out to Frenchie, who may or may not have been working for somebody else, for Clarke was convinced that Dubois is not the man we want. He thought there was another man higher up—perhaps this mythical person who over the phone called himself Patrick Moller."

"Thank you very much, Miss Carson," the Phantom said admiringly. "You are a brave girl. Chief Negley

will see that you are safely spirited out of town at—"

"But I'm not leaving Makon," Adelia Carson protested. "Why, I—"

"On the contrary, young lady, you are leaving immediately. Don't argue, please. You are in terrible danger. Go back to St. Louis, go to Chicago. Report to your employers what you wish—but get out of Makon!"

"But I don't—"

He whirled on her almost savagely. "Where is Dorrie Wellman?"

She looked startled. "Why, I—I don't know. I left her at her apartment last night."

"You have been phenomenally lucky, Miss Carson. Don't tempt Fate further."

"You mean that Dorrie—that she—"

"We don't know—yet. But nothing's going to happen to you in Makon. Go back to your own job. And thank you again."

After a couple of plainclothes men escorted her away, the Phantom turned to the waiting Officer Blanchard. Van's disguised face was grim.

"Well, let's go see if we can read any secrets in these bits of ashes," he said. "And you'd better put the dragnet out for those two men I described, Chief Negley."

"I have," said Negley. "Bat Lunden and Rake Malone, by your description. Been working for Frenchie Dubois at the Apache Club for a long time."

AT the police laboratory that afternoon Van showed the chemist in charge and the astonished Blanchard some amazing research work. Handicapped by the lack of the elaborate equipment of his own private laboratory in New York which he maintained in the character of Dr. Bendix, he nevertheless made some startlingly accurate deductions.



"Laboratory research work has certainly got fire-bugs on the run," he explained. "There was a time when an arsonist could set a fire and walk away, serene in the knowledge that there wasn't a chance in ten of his being caught. Not any more. Science has probed into the nature of ashes with microscope and spectroscope, and with micrographic cameras, until unbelievably complete stories can be rewritten about the minutest fragment of ash.

"Here, for instance, is fine ash taken from a place near the bodies of Seymour and the Federal man, Clarke. It looks like—plain ash. But the spectroscope tells us that it is ash from burned rope. The rope was undoubtedly binding the two men so they couldn't escape their fate in the fire. However, it was an extra good grade of hemp rope that doesn't come in sizes of less than half-inch. Probably three-quarters. Which is heavy rope to use for such a purpose. My guess is that it was a tow-rope out of an automobile."

He tapped another exhibit with a forefinger.

"Here, fortunately, is a bit of burned wood which the microscope revealed as maple wood. Perhaps part of an old, broken table down there in the basement where the fire started. If you burn a piece of maple wood normally, the cross-checks—they call them 'alligatorings'—have a certain recognized size. But if a more than normal heat consumed the wood, the alligatorings will be closer together, smaller, because of the extreme temperature.

"Now the crosschecks in this bit tell us that no ordinary fire consumed it. Kerosene, or some such volatile liquid, was responsible. However, it looks as if the job were done on the spur of the moment. Now you don't go around with a

can of kerosene in your hand ready for murderous emergencies. Also gasoline, burning at a temperature of fifteen hundred degrees, would produce precisely those alligatorings in maple wood.

"So I bet on gasoline, and the lab confirmed it. The spectroscope revealed the precise chemical analysis of the gasoline used. No two are quite alike. And now the police are tracing it to see what station sold it, and to whom, if that's possible."

"Well!" said Blanchard. "If the birds who pulled this one thought they were covering their tracks, they were certainly mistaken!"

"They were," Van said grimly. "Much better to have killed more simply, as these gang killers seem to have done until now. I have an idea last night's job was the result of overzealousness. And it may be our first opening."

NEGLEY came in. There was triumph on his face.

"You called it, Stigler," he rumbled. "We located the place where the gas came from. It came from the city garage itself. A special formula gas insisted on by the municipal engineers."

"Seymour's car!" said the Phantom.

"Right. Seymour's car. Evidently he filled his tank at the city garage, like a lot of these half-baked politicians do. A little more graft, getting their gas and oil for nothing. Also, he had a tow-rope in his roadster. A mechanic at the city garage can testify to that. Hemp rope, three-quarters, also from the city store-room. But the rope isn't in Seymour's car now."

The Phantom's eyes were glittering gray ice.

"Seymour's roadster was found around the corner from the Apache Club entrance," he said tightly. "You assumed, Chief, that he and



Clarke had gone to the Maple Street house in a cab because Seymour was afraid his flashy car would be spotted. You were after the taxi-driver who had taken them, weren't you, Chief? But now we get the whole picture, the true one. They drove in Seymour's own roadster. At that house where they were killed, their murderers used gas siphoned from Seymour's tank, and bound him with his own tow-rope.



Then they quietly drove the roadster back to the club and left it where it had been before."

"That seems to be the dope," Negley nodded, with a good deal of respect in his eyes. "So now?"

"Now we get the men who drove that car back to the Apache. Get them, and we have our killers."

**N**EGLEY looked doubtful. "There won't be any fingerprints. These birds are too wise."

"But there will be other prints," Van smiled. "The print of the driver's shoe on the rubber-covered brake and clutch pedals. The print of his gloves on the steering wheel. Pick up Bat Luden and Rake Malone, of the Dubois gang. We're ready to bring them in, now. And if their shoe-soles match the prints in the car, or if they have gloves matching the fabric-prints bound to be microscopically in evidence on Seymour's steering wheel, you'll have your men— Say, has anybody found that dark-haired girl, Dorrie, who was with Seymour last night?"

"Not yet," said Negley. "She seems to have disappeared into thin air. She isn't at any of the places where she might regularly be found. She's just vanished."

"Bad," said the Phantom.

"Very bad," agreed Negley, face hard. "I have an idea that young lady will never be questioned—by anybody. But we'll sweat something out of Bat and Rake."

It developed, however, that no one would ever question Bat and Rake, either.

Never take a chance. Never leave a loose end. That was the motto of the organization the Phantom fought. And it had been scrupulously followed in the case of the two men who thought they had been smarter than their chief.

Negley's men found Bat and Rake all right. And Bat's shoe soles, with a slight cut in the right one and a worn ridge in the left, matched the faint prints carefully taken from clutch and brake pedals of Seymour's roadster. Also a pair of gloves in his pocket had the same number of threads to the inch as the equally faint fabric print on the steering wheel.

But Bat Luden and Rake Malone were dead.

They lay in the living room of Malone's apartment. And each had died with a bullet through his brain.

The Phantom got the slugs from the near wall, but he knew they wouldn't be any good to him. He felt rather certain that the guns that had fired those bullets would never be found.

One small loophole in the armor of the man behind the Dubois gang had been made by the Maple Street fire. But that hole, with an efficiency and utter disregard for human life, had promptly been plugged up by the shadowy leader of the crime army the Phantom was seeking.



## CHAPTER VII

## THE MASSEY POOL



**N**EGLEY spread his hands helplessly, then ran his fingers through his thinning thatch.

"So we're back where we started," he sighed, staring dully at the Phantom. "You tabbed the men who did

the Seymour and Regan job—and we find them dead. The black sedan used in the bank robbery we found in a vacant warehouse with no fingerprints or clues of any kind beyond the fact that it was stolen in St. Louis. What's going to happen next?"

"Logically," admitted Van, "there'll be cars stolen here in Makon for use on the next job in some other city. Until such a thing breaks, carry on. I have another lead to follow before the case folds up in our faces. I'll call you if I develop anything for routine follow-up."

The Phantom did have a clue, a slender one, indeed, but at least a lead. From the telephone company he verified, working as Simon Stigler on the Makon Homicide Squad, what Adelia Carson had told him. By a careful checking of records and dates, he unearthed the fact that a man who had given his name as Patrick Moller had called St. Louis to inquire into the death of Robert Martin of the Best Welt Shoe Company. The call had been made from a public phone booth in a suburban drug store in Makon.

That fact was what had stumped the Carson girl and Danny Regan. But the Phantom, realizing that Makon was no such vast and confusing city as New York or Chicago, decided to investigate the drug store. In the rôle of a young loafer,

he spent several hours hanging around the fountain, spending money and chatting with the soda clerk. He was an expert at winning the confidence of people. By the time he got around to calling the clerk by his first name he struck gold.

"Say, whatever became of Pat Moller, Joe?" he asked casually. "Or doesn't he hang around here any more?"

The clerk frowned and looked at Van peculiarly.

"You kiddin', Jack?" he said. "He never did hang around here—not since I been working here. Unless you mean stopping to buy a package of gum, or coming in occasionally at night to use the telephone is what you call hanging around."

"So he's as tight as ever, huh?" Van smiled, without batting an eye. "He still lives in the neighborhood?"

"Yeah." The clerk nodded. "Still living with his boss. Say, that boss of his, that Claridge big shot, is a better customer than Moller ever was any day in his life. He stops in on his way downtown nearly every day to buy a handful of cigars. And he orders ginger ale and soda from us by the case. There's what I call a customer!"

"I guess so," Van agreed, industriously assaulting the sandwich Joe deftly slid before him.

When the clerk went to wait on somebody else, Van strolled over to the phone booth. Still munching part of his sandwich, he casually flipped the pages of the directory. He found what he sought, a Claridge listed in this neighborhood. John Claridge, attorney, 154 Woodlawn Drive. A little later he left the store without asking further questions.

That evening, reverting to the character of Simon Stigler, detective, he returned to the neighborhood. So there was a Patrick Moller, and he worked for and lived with his boss, John Claridge. It was



Claridge who was the attorney, not Moller. In making his call to St. Louis, Moller had deliberately misled the operator, or the St. Louis office of the Best Welt Company had misunderstood him. Anyway, Van was interested in interviewing both clerk and employer without calling on police aid.

THE Woodlawn Drive address proved to be a nice-looking home set back in considerable yard space. It exuded an air of affluence without seeming luxurious. At Van's ring, a young man with rumpled, sandy hair opened the door.

"There's no one at home this evening," he quickly explained. "Mr. and Mrs. Claridge went to the theater."

"I just wanted to see Mr. Claridge on a little business," said the Phantom, with his best small-town mannerisms.

"Well, you'll have to see him at the office tomorrow. He never receives clients at home any more. If you'll give me your name and address I'll arrange for an appointment for you the first thing—"

"Perhaps you'll do," said the Phantom uncertainly. "I just need some information about a— Say, who are you?"

"Pat Moller. I'm Mr. Claridge's secretary."

"You'll do," said Van, changing his demeanor and pushing forward to enter.

Moller made a feeble attempt to bar the way, whereupon Van flashed the police shield that Captain Negley had loaned him. To his faint surprise this quieted Moller like magic. The young fellow was relieved. In the living room, Van opened up promptly.

"Why did you call St. Louis last month, Moller, and inquire into the death of Robert Martin?"

Moller blinked. "Because—er—

because Mr. Claridge asked me to."  
"Why?"

"I don't know, but Mr. Claridge was quite upset about a Mr. Martin's death. Martin was president of the Best Welt Shoe Company. You may have read about him being killed. Mr. Claridge and Mr. Martin were business acquaintances."

"Did they transact any business together? Did Claridge handle any matters for Martin?"

"No, sir. At least, not through the office."

After a few more questions which elicited nothing further from the clerk, Van said shortly: "Tell Mr. Claridge to drop in at Headquarters tomorrow for a few minutes, Moller. Chief Negley is also interested in the death of Robert Martin. We just want to ask Claridge a few questions."

"Yes, sir," promised Moller, and Van departed.

But he didn't leave the block. Cutting back to the alley, he returned to the lawyer's residence and calmly picked the lock on the back door. Prowling carefully so as not to arouse Moller who had returned to his law reading upstairs, the Phantom found the library and a small room adjoining, which proved to be Claridge's study.

Closing the door and drawing the shade, the Phantom snapped on the lights and surveyed the study. He located the wall safe at once, a circular affair of sturdy construction with a five-tumbler combination. First he methodically went through the desk, finding nothing of importance, but learning a great deal about Claridge's business. At length, he attacked the safe.

Drawing a stethoscope from his pocket, he eared it and began manipulating the dial. In ten minutes, so expert was his technique, he had the safe opened. He was deep in a careful scrutiny of the papers he found



there, when he heard a faint click behind him.

He whirled, stethoscope still hooked around his neck, and found himself facing a tall man with a hooked nose and piercing black eyes. The man was wearing a silk hat and light tan topcoat over immaculate evening clothes. In his right hand a wicked-looking automatic covered the Phantom. And Van saw at once why he had been unaware of the approach. The top-hatted man had come through a narrow door hidden by a bookcase mounted thereon.

The man was middle-aged, and with a look in his eyes that was half-frightened, half-fanatical. The fact that he didn't recognize his burglar seemed to alarm him more than did the fact that a burglar *was* there.

"Stand just as you are," he ordered, menacingly, stepping forward and closing the bookcase-lined door behind him. He didn't raise his voice, and he made no attempt to signal for aid. Alarmed though he undoubtedly was, he deliberately shut himself in with this stranger who looked more like a product of the rural districts than a burglar.

The Phantom thought rapidly. He was satisfied to remain as he was for the moment, because he had a paper under his eyes that he wanted to memorize. But he had to get the man with the gun calmed down before sheer nervous tension caused him to start shooting. Not having decided just how Claridge fitted into the picture, Van was hesitant about using violence himself.

He was sorry that he was not wearing a mask, for if by any chance Pat Moller should come in now, he would at once recognize him as Simon Stigler, of the Makon police force. There being no other sensible way out of it, he chose the blindest course.

"W—who are you?" demanded

Claridge. "What are you doing here in my private study? I have no money here."

"You can put up your gun, Mr. Claridge," Van answered pleasantly. "I am not burglarizing your—"

"Put those papers down on the desk!" Claridge ordered harshly, his cheeks blanching. "Quick!"

Van lowered his eyes and once more swept the opened sheet he had been examining. It was almost a cryptogram, but it was clear in his memory now, would remain there. It read:

#### THE MASSEY POOL

—Creighton	\$200,000
—Overby	\$200,000
—Martin	\$200,000
Corsener	\$200,000
Waltham	\$200,000
Elmo	\$200,000
Claridge (Cash)	\$50,000
" for (Service)	\$150,000

WITH these names and figures memorized by his quick eye, the Phantom carefully advanced a step and deposited the mass of papers he held in his hands. At sight of the uppermost sheet, a quiver shot through Claridge's body.

"Control yourself, Claridge!" Van snapped curtly.

But the sight of that sheet of paper and what was revealed on it, was too much for the lawyer. His knuckles whitened around the trigger of his weapon, his face twisted grotesquely, and his eyes had the look of hell in them. Van dived to the floor behind the desk just as the man's gun roared. The slug tore viciously past Van's ear, thudding into the wall just below the safe.

Before the lawyer could step around the desk, Van snatched the leather cushion from the chair and hurled it at the spot where the man in the top hat had been standing. Instantly he had his own gun out and was sprawled flat on the floor



at the other end of the desk. From his supine position he had the staggering lawyer covered.

"Hold it, Claridge!" he ordered sharply.

Claridge's answer to that order was recklessly to blaze away, doing his best to make his aim good. There was nothing else for it then. Levering himself to one elbow, Van hurled his gun with unerring aim. It was a dangerous thing to do, but he didn't want to injure the lawyer with bullets before he had time to question him. The heavy gun caught the lawyer on the side of the head before he could duck, and he went down like a falling tree.

VAN was on his feet, unscathed, before Claridge hit the floor. He could hear confusion upstairs as the gun thunder died away. A woman was screaming, and Moller was shouting. Footsteps were racing along the floor above.

One look at Claridge was enough. He was out—good for an hour. There would be no questioning him tonight. Van stuffed the papers back into the safe and twirled the combination. Wiping the front of the safe, he snatched up his own gun and went back through the library. A moment more and he was fleeing down the alley like a frightened crook. But he wasn't frightened, and he wasn't a crook. At last he had a definite lead!

The first three names on that cryptic list, he recalled, had had a sort of dash mark beside them—and they were the names of the three men who had been murdered! There were four names remaining, one of them Claridge's. Just what this portended, or how it fitted in with the brutally efficient holdups, or if it did, in any remotest way, the Phantom intended finding out.

He heard the wailing siren of a police car before he had traversed

two blocks. Struck with a sudden thought, he hastened to the police car he had parked, got in and drove swiftly to Headquarters. He found the officer in charge for the night a bit excited over the call from the Claridge residence.

"Just who is this John Claridge, O'Rourke?" he asked.

"Faith, and he's the biggest corporation lawyer in Makon," said the bluecoat promptly. "He's a prominent citizen and a power in state politics. A big churchman, too. Sure, and I wonder what prowlers could be doing at his house. He ain't so rich he's likely to have much cash layin' around the house."

"We shall know pretty soon, I think," Van said with an enigmatic smile. "But say, O'Rourke, tell me. Is there another prominent man in this town named Waltham?"

"Thomas Waltham? Sure. He's vice-president of the Geyser Oil Company—one of the richest men in town."

"How about a fellow named Corsener?"

"Yeah. Eli Corsener. President of the Wheat Exchange Bank. He lives out in the Sylvan Hills addition."

"Makonites," observed Van, raising his eyebrows slightly. "I don't suppose you have an Elmo here, do you?"

"Leroy Elmo? Faith, and we have. He's general manager of the Hermes Motor Company—the biggest motor car makers in their price class. That's Makon's biggest industry."

"One final inquiry. Who or what is Massey?"

Captain O'Rourke wrinkled his brow. This one stumped him.

"Never heard the name before. You been going through Bradstreet's reports, Stigler?"

"I wonder," said Van.

And he was wondering—greatly.



What was the Massey Pool? Why were seven men so widely scattered from a business point of view, connected with it? What bearing did it have on the bank and payroll holdups? And why were they dying? All of the men obviously had put up or pledged two hundred thousand dollars except John Claridge, who had put up fifty thousand dollars, plus his services, whatever they might be.

It couldn't logically be an oil pool, and what could that have to do with robberies anyhow, with the president of the company killed *after* the robbery? Only two men on the list fitted into the oil category, at that—Waltham and Elmo. But one startling fact struck the Phantom squarely between the eyes. All of the men remaining alive lived in Makon! The outside participants had been mysteriously eliminated.

The prowler car that had gone out to the Claridge residence reported back.

"Nuts!" said the disgruntled sergeant succinctly. "Old lady Claridge yelled her head off for the police, and when we got there we found the lawyer in his study, unconscious. Looked like he'd tried to use a gun and couldn't aim straight, so the guy conked himself on the side of the head. When we brought him out of it, he said he must have been dreaming. He swore nothing was wrong and nobody was in the house. He even opened his wall safe to prove it. Said everything was all okay."

"He may show up in the morning," commented Van.

But he doubted it now. When Claridge covered for the prowler there was little chance that the lawyer wanted police protection or investigation. But Mr. John Claridge was due for a rigorous questioning by the Phantom. The lawyer was too good a lead not to exploit.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SCHOOL FOR CRIME



AT FIRST glance, the place looked a little like a clothing store, or one of those barn theaters up in New England.

It was over a small tobacco store in Lincoln, a town near Makon. The building was small, two-storied. A store took up the ground floor; a hall-like room, twenty by thirty, took up all the second floor. Frenchie Dubois owned the building, though none knew that, and few had ever seen him or any of his men enter the place. They always came late at night, and entered from the rear.

Frenchie was there now, with a dozen men. And an onlooker would have been struck at once by a most peculiar fact. All of these men were surprisingly alike in general build and coloring. Every shade of brown hair was represented, and every shade of brown eyes. But each pair of eyes and each head of hair was dark.

Their height didn't vary more than two inches and their weight more than twenty pounds. No two of them were at all similar when examined side by side. But in a group they might facetiously have been dubbed Mr. Average. And anyone describing any of them would have been, perforce, vaguely describing all the rest.

Over some chairs, the only furniture in the room, clothing was laid out. Eight dark brown suits. Eight inexpensive panama-type hats with plain brown bands. Eight neckties of the same brown stripe.

"I've said which of you guys were on the inside in the Tuesday job," Frenchie rumbled in his heavy,



harsh voice. "Eight inside, four drivin' the cars. Four getaway cars, as usual. Now we'll have a dress rehearsal."

He chuckled raspily at his own humor; and eight of the men began taking off their clothes and putting on the identical suits which would make descriptions after a crime so vague and difficult.

Frenchie took chalk and began marking lines on the bare floor of the big room, glancing often at a chart, something like a blueprint, which he had carried here in his pocket. When he was done, the men had finished changing clothes and stood around, looking more than ever similar.

"Watch close, you guys," Frenchie said. "Any guy that don't get this straight is apt to get a slug from a guard's rod. And you know the rest of it if that happens."

The men nodded, stolid but tight-lipped. They did know the rest of it. Inexorable orders were to finish off any of their number who got shot. Don't take a chance that he isn't mortally wounded. Don't try to help him out to safety, because it might ruin the getaway. Just pause beside him long enough to send a bullet or two through his head yourself. In that way there was never a gang survivor picked up for questioning.

Frenchie pointed out a long, straight chalk-line near the center of the room, and his instructions to his apt pupils in the crime that was next to be committed, were begun.

"This here's a low railing that marks off two-thirds of the joint," he said. "Behind it's the general office. Lotta desks with clerks and whatnot at 'em. Couple hundred, I'd say. You, Ike, step here. You'll keep 'em covered."

One of the men walked forward and stood on a chalked square that Frenchie drew just outside the "railing."

"Here"—Frenchie pointed like a

military instructor to spaces at the end of the railing—"are private offices of the big shots of the company. Kelly, you'll stand here." He indicated a second square, commanding the private office markings. "If any mug sticks his nose out of a door, burn it for 'im."

He blocked in half the space opposite the general office diagram.

"Filing cabinets and more clerks here. Next to it is the spot we're interested in. The cash cage. Big. Four guys in it. And four guards outside. Here's where the guards stand."

HE marked four short lines, two on either side of the supposed window of the supposed cage.

"And here's the outer door, leading to the stairs." He drew a slanting line next to the cage. "The office is three floors up, which makes 'em feel safe as hell."

He looked at his listening crime pupils, his pockmarked face beetling in a frown.

"Here's the dope. And get it right. You eight guys come in the florist truck just after the cash has got to the joint from the bank, before the guys in the cash cage have taken it outa the leather sacks. Walk up the stairs. Take anybody that happens to be on 'em, but take 'em quiet. A gun barrel alongside the head. Go in the door, and go in shooting. Get them four guards before they know what's happening, and get 'em right."

"Then two of you cover the private offices and the big general joint like I told you. Another takes the four guys in the cage and keeps 'em standing with their faces to one wall. The other four take the big nippers, cut the locks on the cage, because it'll be locked, of course, and go in and lift the sacks. There'll be four of 'em. Each take one. Pop anybody that bats an eye."



"Beat it back to the truck. There you'll go six blocks, and scatter four ways in four cars waitin'. Now—do it. Here, you four that ain't dressed, you'll be outside in the get-away cars, so you ain't in this anyway. Stand where the guards'll be, and take it like the guards'll take it."

The four men in regular clothes stood two on each side of the imaginary window of the cash cage. The eight in the identical brown suits went beyond the slanting line indicating the stair door.

"Okay. Begin."

The eight filed in, with the first two holding imaginary machine guns. Their hands took the position with such trained naturalness that in imagination the deadly weapons could almost be seen. They raised the guns the instant they'd stepped through the door.

"*Bang, bang, bang, bang,*" one said.

The four representing the guards fell, rather carefully, to the floor. It was almost laughable. Childish. Like a game played by little boys. Until reflection was made that this was a careful rehearsal of actual murder soon to take place.

Then the two with machine guns went to points covering private offices and general offices, and stood with their guns ready. A third stayed at the outer door. The fourth went to the marked-off cage and trained guns on the four cashiers supposed to be within. The other four went through the movements of cutting bars with a giant, case-hardened steel nipper, and after that of scooping up four leather sacks of cash.

"Okay," said Frenchie, who had been watching them critically. "See you don't forget any of that on Tuesday. There are five thousand chumps working at the joint. They get an average of about nineteen bucks each for the week's pay envelope. That

makes close to a hundred grand. I know you guys wouldn't want to miss out on that."

His lips tightened a little grimly.

"Hell, what a snap for guys like you—to get a cut on dough like that, plus protection and a chance to keep out of the hot seat, just for doing a few little things for the big boss, like he tells you to do 'em. The big boss is doing all that for you; see you do a few things for him—his way! That's all you've got to do, and are you damned lucky, all you wanted guys!

"You know as well as I do that I got sent to hell and gone to pick up just the kind of fellers the boss wanted. Now you gotta make good. You know the kind of evidence he's got against every one of you, how quick you could be turned in, without hurting the rest of the organization. So snap into it—and make some real dough while you're doing it."

IT WAS a long speech for Frenchie, but it was a good sales talk. The men so similar in appearance were impressed. As impressed with the "boss'" power as was Frenchie himself. There was a short silence, then one of them spoke.

"Look, Frenchie, how about the street door of the joint we're studying? Won't there be some mug on that till the cash is paid off?"

"Sure," Frenchie said. "Four stand around the office upstairs. One stays at the street door. But you don't hafta worry about him. I take him myself, from half a block away, with the high-power rifle. I take him just as you guys roll up and he begins to wonder what the hell a florist's truck is doin' around there at just that time. And you drag him inside the entrance and leave him lay there outa sight."

With no clairvoyant prescience of any of these plans, the Phantom



took a night plane to St. Louis and spent an interesting morning the next day. Then he hopped to Chicago, still in the character of Simon Stigler, and interviewed a number of people connected with the Acme Food Company. He had not finished with his inquiries in the Windy City when extras hit the streets telling about the holdup of the Hermes Motor Company in Makon, the killing of seven employes, and the robbery of a hundred-thousand-dollar payroll.

Dropping everything, and for one of the few times in his life chagrined because he hadn't foreseen such a possibility, Van wired Chief Negley to put a heavy police guard around Leroy Elmo, and chartered a fast airplane to fly back to Makon. It was night when he arrived. Negley met him at the airport, his face as long as the old gray mare's.

"Well?" demanded Van quickly. "Tell me about it."

"We were too late about Elmo," Negley said mournfully. "By the time we got to him, where he was prostrated at home over the holdup this morning, he was dead. Shot through the head."

"Damn!" said Van bitterly. "But I didn't think there'd be another robbery so soon in Makon—not after the Second National Bank affair. Quick! Take me to see Eli Corsener and Thomas Waltham."

**A**SKING no further questions, Negley drove the Phantom to both homes.

"Better go in with me," said Van, as they reached Eli Corsener's suburban home.

Corsener proved to be a thin-faced man with a dignified manner and the cold eye of the careful banker. Chief Negley introduced Van as Stigler, and Van came to the point at once.

"Mr. Corsener, we have reason to

believe you are in the Massey Pool with six other men. Is that true?"

The banker looked as startled as it was possible for such a man to look.

"I fail to see—" he began.

"Wrong," said Van crisply. "You see a lot more than appears on the surface. This is a matter of life and death. Are you, or aren't you, the Corsener in the pool?"

"Why—er—yes, I am. But that is a private and secret business deal. I don't understand how you gentlemen knew anything—"

"Pass that for the present. You are surely aware that only three of your syndicate remain alive tonight."

"Yes," Corsener admitted faintly. "I—I know that. But I still don't see—"

"Neither do we," said Van. "But I'm warning you to take every precaution to safeguard your life for the next few days. If you want police protection, Chief Negley will be glad to see that you get it."

"But why?" ejaculated the banker, paling. "What possible danger can I be in? My life hasn't been threatened. I have no particular enemies. And there can't be any connection between these holdups and—and us. The pool, I mean."

"The fact that you've already coupled them together in your mind is connection enough," Van said bitingly. "Better redouble your vigilance at the bank, too. As long as nothing happens there you will likely be safe."

The banker was so shaken that he had to sit down.

"Perhaps I'd better take a trip," he said uncertainly.

"If you like," Van said, and nodded. "But George Creighton was in New Jersey several days after the robbery of the Second National Bank—and he died. The principal thing to do is safeguard your bank and surround yourself with all possible pro-





*A wicked-looking automatic  
covered the Phantom  
(Chapter VII)*

tection until we smoke out the gang responsible for these crimes!"

From the Corsener home Van and Negley went to the residence of Thomas Waltham. The official of the Geyser Oil Company was a florid-faced man with crisp iron-gray hair. He wore a flower in his buttonhole.

He had been a surveyor and an engineer in his youth, covering foreign oil deposits for a world-famous oil corporation, before becoming one of the founders of his own. He had a competent look about him.

He took the Phantom's news more calmly than had Eli Corsener, but it was obvious that it made him thoughtful. He thanked them both, saw them to the front door himself, a speculative look in his eyes.

"Where next?" the puzzled Negley demanded of his companion. "Who's the third member of this crazy combine?"

"John Claridge," informed Van. "But we won't have to warn him."

"Why not?" Negley wanted to know immediately.

"Because," said the Phantom with a hard little smile, "he knows about it already." And that was all he would say on the subject. "Tell me all about the motor company hold-up."

NEGLEY obliged with what amounted to a duplicate description of the Second National Bank job.

"Only they wore brown suits this time," he said. "Two of the crooks were wounded in the mêlée. Of course they were shot through the head by their companions, so they can't talk, but we know who they are. Pinkie Benz and Cap Stryker. They are in the police files of half a dozen cities, but they were young. Didn't have much record. Leaped



into killer glory all at once. The whole setup's crazy as hell, Stigler! They weren't members of the Dubois gang, either, but they knew their way around Makon."

"I think," said Van softly, "that it's time to talk to this Frenchie Dubois once more. Let's go there next. His name, and talk about his 'gang' seems always to be cropping up."

"Okay." Negley shrugged. "But it won't get us anywhere. It's been tried before. I wish you'd explain all this hocus-pocus about this Massey Pool stuff to me."

"I will, just as soon as we steam things up to a blow-off."

## CHAPTER IX

### A CALL ON FRENCHIE



**S**PEEDILY, Chief Negley rolled the police car to the Hiltonia Hotel where Frenchie Dubois had his suite.

In every city of any size there seems to be at least one off-color hotel, and such was the Hiltonia of Makon. Sleek, expensive, it was beyond the ordinary reach of the law. Its occupants were generally known to be crooks or racketeers, from confidence men to mob leaders. But they were big crooks, either with no definite records to their credit, or with such political pull that a jail sentence or two in the past made little difference.

The Hiltonia was a perfect example of its type. And from bell captain to manager, its shifty-eyed employes matched in temperament the patrons they served. Van knew the setup thoroughly, although he had not yet been in this particular house.

It was just a bit past the usual

conventional hour for dinner, and therefore still too early for dinner in this place. The lobby was fairly empty when the two men from Police Headquarters entered. At one in the morning it would be crowded, but early evening was not the hour for underworld society to be active.

At the desk a clerk was sorting the last mail. He turned at the sound of their steps, sized up the two with one sullen, hostile glance, and his hand darted toward something hidden under the key-counter.

Van's big right hand darted more swiftly, clamped over the clerk's wrist until the man's lips compressed with the pain of it. But Van's hold prevented the clerk's finger from touching the concealed alarm button.

"We have a yearning for anonymity, my friend," he said smoothly. "So there will be no announcements, please. What is Frenchie Dubois' suite number?"

The clerk's lips clamped more tightly closed, and Van shrugged. There was a room list hanging to the side of the switchboard, to his right. He examined it.

"Suite Four A," he read. "Thank you very much. Chief, suppose you stay behind and engage our friend in fascinating conversation for a few minutes. Just till I get up at Four A. In that way, I can reach there unannounced."

"With pleasure," said Negley grimly.

He backed the clerk away from the counter. The clerk looked longingly toward the alarm buzzer, but made no effort to get at it again. The Phantom went to the stairs and walked to the fourth floor. He tapped softly at the door of Four A.

"Come in," a heavy voice instantly rumbled.

Frenchie was not too dumb. If it was a gang enemy knocking, Frenchie was no doubt amply pre-



pared to receive him. If it was the law, Frenchie was too astute to try to bar his door. Besides, to Frenchie the fact that the clerk hadn't announced anyone must indicate that the knocker was some friend in the hotel.

Van opened the door, and stood instantly on the threshold with his hands hanging openly at his sides.

**F**RENCHIE was at one side of the door, both hands in the bulging pockets of his worn bathrobe. When a man holds a gun concealed in each hand, it is discreet to give him a second in which to compose himself so that sheer reflex will not twitch a trigger finger.

The big gambler slowly took his hands from his pockets. Van had never had the misfortune to meet him personally before; and yet he could swear he saw a light of recognition in the man's cunning, cruel eyes. Doubtless, Simon Stigler was becoming known to Makon's underworld.

"You're law," Frenchie said, quite calmly. A half-smoked cigar smoldered on the edge of a stand-ashtray next to the padded chair a dozen feet away. The big mobster walked to the chair, sat down, and put the cigar between his teeth.

"I'm law," the Phantom acknowledged, slowly coming into the room and shutting the door behind him.

Frenchie shrugged thick shoulders. "I can smell 'em almost as fast as I can see 'em," he said sourly. "And I don't like the smell. What're you barging in here for? Think you'll do your good deed of the day in my joint?"

Van stood before the gambler, a man so wily that the police had never pinned anything of importance on him, with a small cold smile on his lips, saying nothing, eyes flicking over the room. Nothing here. Van had been certain

there would not be. This was just a luxurious apartment hotel living room.

"Well, say something," snapped Frenchie belligerently. "What the hell are you doing here? Got a warrant to come in like this?"

"Warrant?" repeated Van Loan smoothly. "Why, no. What for? I just came for a sociable little visit, Frenchie. You don't need a warrant for that, do you?"

His voice was soft. Frenchie's for all its belligerence, was calm enough. And yet the aura around the two men was as taut as quivering wire, as gray eyes stared into black. Van could sense Frenchie deliberating coldly about how he would like to kill this man, if there was a chance on getting away with it. Just a mental crime, however. Plainly Frenchie believed he had better ways of handling this intruder.

"So you want to be sociable," he purred, his face as inscrutable as something carved out of rock. "What about?"

"You wouldn't know a couple of rats called Pinkie Benz and Cap Stryker, would you?" Van shot out suddenly.

Frenchie blinked in apparent surprise. He struck a match to refire his cigar, and his hands were as steady as granite.

"Oh," he said between puffs, studying his caller over his fingers, "so that's it. Sure, I know them. I suppose it's no news to you that I make it a point to know who comes into this town. A couple of rods from Detroit, I understand. Makon seems to be attracting some bad actors from out of town of late, and I don't like it."

"You wouldn't know that they were killed in the Hermes Motor stickup this morning?" said Van acidly.

"I would," Frenchie Dubois said flatly. "I read the papers. I would



also know that you're a new cop in Makon. So far you haven't made a nuisance of yourself. Don't. Find out who Frenchie Dubois is, all you want to know about his business and get it out of your system. Then go on about your sleuthing. I'll tell you now that you're wasting time trying to couple any of those hold-up red-hots to me, or any of the boys that work for me. The Dubois interests don't go in for wholesale murder and hijacking. Get wise, copper. If you want gambling information, come to me. Otherwise, lay off. Get me?"

"I think perhaps I do." The Phantom nodded.

At that moment Chief Negley came in. The racketeer looked at the police chief without surprise.

"I thought this was another of your hick stunts, Negley," he said. "Take your trained seal away and keep him away. I don't like the smell of fish, anyhow. And, for your information, for maybe you don't keep tabs so well on your new men, I know this guy was thrown out of the Apache Club for being drunk. That's why he wasn't beat up for being too fresh."

"You seem to know a lot, Mr. Dubois," remarked the Phantom, "not to know the right answers."

"I know I'm clean," snapped Frenchie. "Negley, you ought to know that by now. And what's more, I'm saying right now that if you can pin a thing on any of my employes, I'll help you run them down myself. Anything else, gents?"

"If you can't give us a line on Benz and Stryker, no," said Van. "Let's go, Chief."

As they left the hotel, Negley spoke, his brow wrinkling.

"What good did that do, Stigler?"

"Well," Van said, "for one thing, it gave me a chance to give Frenchie Dubois the once-over. I wanted to talk to him so I could study him.

There's no doubt in my mind now that he knows plenty about this business, if he isn't in it himself up to his neck. But he's smooth, Negley."

"My own idea is," said the chief, "that there's more chance of picking up something through what you suggested about tracing the clothes worn by the gangsters. We sent samples of the brown suits of Benz and Stryker to follow those from the bandit killed in the Second National Bank job. I'm counting on hearing something from that."

"So am I," said the Phantom. "Keep working on all angles. Even those death guns—though I'm sure they will never be found. The opposition is good on details."

"And you are right. I guess we've calibrated bullets from two-thirds of the firearms in town—and haven't matched a single one yet."

"Keep after it, though, Chief. Don't overlook the slightest thing. You never know when the smallest clue will lead to something."

AS HE turned away, the Phantom couldn't help thinking ruefully that the investigation thus far hadn't led to very much. He was chafing impatiently at the continued inaction which had been forced upon him in this case. The Phantom was used to action—getting to close grips with whatever menace threatened. And here all he could do, on account of the diabolic scarcity of clues, was patiently try to burrow out the slightest, most infinitesimal lead.

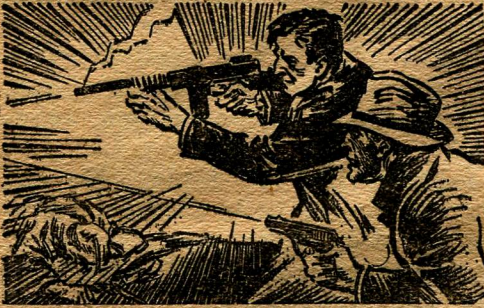
The Phantom squared his shoulders and drew a deep breath. At least, the routine ground work had been laid. Now, with that intuitive feeling that he had so often experienced, he felt that the time for action was at hand. Something was bound to break.

In Chief Negley's office the next



morning the Phantom found a quite pleased police chief.

"Stigler"—he was almost beaming—"we've checked everything checkable since the Hermes job. You spent most of the night going over things yourself. We found the get-away truck this morning in a ditch out of town. Of course, there were no prints of any kind on it, but you



may want to go over it yourself. No trace of the heavy nippers that clipped the bars of the cash cage, either. The few dealers in Makon carrying cutters that heavy haven't sold a pair in months."

"Then what are you so pleased about?" asked Van.

"The suits!" said Negley, chuckling. "Your idea was swell! We've traced the brown suits worn by those two dead thugs, Stryker and Benz."

"Excellent," said the Phantom.

HE WAS still working on and puzzling over the death angle of the Massey Pool members, but this lead of the suits was of vital importance. Maybe this was the break he was expecting.

"Let's have it," he said.

"We clicked, with the help of the blue suit from the Second National job," explained the chief. "One cloth supplemented the other. It served to identify them, maybe eliminating weeks of combing through textile mills. Here's a wire from Humbolt Textile positively identifying both patterns as having come from their

mills. They sent us a list of every clothing manufacturer who bought both suitings."

Van perused the lengthy day letter.

"This is splendid, Negley," he complimented warmly. "Wire every one of these manufacturers at once and get the names of every dealer in the United States who stocked either of these numbers."

Before noon, Chief Negley had replies from each of the suit manufacturers. He checked them carefully and showed them to the Phantom.

"There are dozens of dealers who bought one or both of these patterns all over the country," he said. "But in all of Ohio there were only ten dealers who bought both. Before you try to check Illinois and Missouri, I think we've got the man spotted you want to see, Stigler."

Van's eyebrows lifted in question. The look of the man-hunter was coming into his eyes.

"There's one bird of that ten who fits this lay-out. He's a shady customer by the name of Sam Johnson, over in Dayton. He's been a wily merchant for all the years he's been in business. I have a report on him for you. A couple of smelly bankruptcies. Dayton police have suspected him of receiving and selling stolen goods, although they never pinned anything on him. What do you think?"

"Sam Johnson, of Dayton," reflected Van thoughtfully. "Okay, Negley. Suppose you and I run down there and pay him a call. You may have to enlist the support of the Dayton police to make our visit authoritative, but I imagine you can arrange that."

But other affairs served to detain them before they could make a start and it was nearly night before the Phantom and Chief Negley arrived in Dayton.



## CHAPTER X

## THE MATCHING SUITS



JOHNSON'S clothing emporium was on a side street in Dayton, not far from a big automobile ignition plant. It was a small place; but obviously it had a good deal of business, catering to cheap trade. Small as his place was, Johnson seemed to sell everything, and sold it very, very cheaply.

Work pants and overalls were stacked on counters for sale at extremely low prices. The price tags on the suits, which took up one whole wall, would have made any detective's eyes glitter with suspicion. Prices of hats and shirts, too, indicated one of two things: a plan afoot deliberately to drive the place into a profitable bankruptcy—or stolen goods.

It was nearly closing time when Van and Chief Negley and Grogan, a Dayton detective who had been assigned to aid the Makon men, walked into the store. There was only one customer in the place, and he walked out into the hot summer dusk shortly after the others had come in. A clerk came up, and Van asked for Johnson. The clerk indicated a door at the rear of the place. The three men went to it and walked purposefully into a small, littered office.

Seated at the desk was a round-shouldered man. His business was clothing, but it seemed he didn't extend the amenities of that business to his own person. He was dressed in baggy old clothes, with coat off and frayed suspenders showing outside an equally frayed shirt. He was bald and wrinkled, perhaps sixty, but looking older. He had

shrewd, pale eyes under heavy eyebrows.

Johnson looked at the Dayton detective, and Van saw recognition in his eyes. Evidently it was no new thing for him to contact the local police. His opening remark verified that.

"Well," he said, in a dry, rasping voice, "what you want now, Grogan? And who are these fellows with you? More detectives?"

"In a sense," Van replied before the Dayton detective could speak. "We're special insurance men, Johnson."

Johnson had no reply. He sat very still, with little shutters seeming to slide down over his eyes, leaving them opaque and expressionless, but watchful.

"Well," he asked, after a moment, "what have you come here about?"

Apparently he had been reading a partly folded newspaper that lay on his desk. Van calmly reached out and took it up. The paper was opened to an account of the robbery of Hermes Motors the previous day in Makon.

"We came about this," Van said, tapping the newspaper.

Johnson shrugged his heavy shoulders. "What's that got to do with me? I don't get you."

The Dayton detective snorted. Negley grinned. But Van remained grim and solemn.

"You will. I'd like to look through your store, Johnson."

"Oh, no!" In one movement that was incredibly swift for one of his years and stoop-shouldered build, the storekeeper was on his feet and between the three men and the door, as though he would physically forbid their search of his store. "I mean," he said, obviously struggling for calm, "nobody looks through my place without a warrant. My business is my own. I won't have snoopers, even the law—"





*The stewardess screamed  
as she discovered the body  
(Chapter II)*

"Here is a warrant, all regular and legal," Van said calmly, producing the document. "Any other objections, Johnson?"

"Why—" said Johnson. "I— No."

"Thank you," said Van sardonically. "We'll try the suit department first," he said to Chief Negley and the Dayton detective.

THEY went to a wall along which the suits were hung. Johnson trotted after them, chewing his underlip, furious but impotent.

The Phantom began leisurely examining suits. All the blue ones with stripes in them; all the plain brown. Among the latter he struck oil. He

looked a second time at a brown suit in the Size 42 rack, then drew from his pocket a small piece of brown cloth, and a lens. He looked through the lens at the sample, taken from the dead body of "Pinkie" Benz, and at the Size 42 suit.

"They match," he said succinctly. "We'll check the thread count and the weave at Headquarters later under a low-power comparison microscope. But I can swear right now that the fabric in this suit before me and a certain other suit we have in mind, Negley, came from the same shipment of brown cloth."

"So what?" barked Johnson.



"You come in with a cloth sample, and compare it to one of my suits, and the two match. What about it? Does that make me a crook or something?"

Chief Negley's slow stare silenced the man.

"You follow the newspapers, it seems," the Phantom said to the storekeeper. "You must have read about all the holdups that have been raising the devil with Ohio. You must have read about the way the bandits invariably dress alike, to make future identification difficult. If you have read about the Hermes job—which I think you were doing as we came in—you must have read that the robbers all wore brown. This shade of brown. In fact, brown suits from your store, Johnson!"

Johnson licked dry lips, but only peered with pale eyes at Van, from under his heavy brows, and was silent.

"You outfitted that gang from this store for the motor company job," Van shot out. "I don't see pin-striped blue here, but it's dollars to doughnuts you outfitted them for the Makon bank job—and others. And you must have known what you were doing—must have read it in the papers. That means that you can't possibly be innocent."

"What are you planning to do about it?" It was hardly more than a whisper from the man's lips.

"We're going to arrest you, of course, as an accessory."

The pale eyes glinted shrewdly.

"You can't do that! I got a suit in stock like those worn by some hoods in a stickup. But a hundred other guys must have suits like that. It ain't any proof."

"It's enough to put you on ice for awhile," Van rapped out. "Take him, Grogan."

The Dayton detective eyed Johnson with something like pleasure. "Okay. Come on, fella."

"You can't do this!" squalled the storekeeper. "Give me that phone! I'm going to call my lawyer. You haven't any proof. It's a frameup! I'll be out in an hour. You can't do it. I tell you—"

Grogan led him, protesting, away. Chief Negley turned to the Phantom.

"He's calling the turn," he said. "He'll be out in an hour, all right, unless we can dig up more evidence. A smart lawyer can make a joke out of that brown suit business."

Van grinned. "I don't care if he's out in ten minutes. All I wanted was to throw a scare into this clerk outside, and also to get Johnson away so he couldn't signal threats to him or anything."

HE strolled over to the clerk, who was behind the hat counter now, watching the two with fear in his eyes. He was just a youngster, tow-headed, thin, not too strong-looking, possibly from his long indoor hours.

"Your name?" the Phantom said crisply.

"K-Kubin," faltered the lad. "John Kubin."

"Kubin, your boss is in trouble. Serious trouble. And you may be, too, if you don't answer what we're going to ask you straight and to the point. We're officers, as you probably overheard."

Kubin nodded quickly. "I'll answer anything I can."

"Good. Not too long ago a flock of brown suits, all of about the same size, were sold in a lump. Seven cheap panama hats, too. Do you remember any purchase like that?"

The boy shook his head. Van stared hard. The kid seemed all right.

"You're sure?" he rapped out.

"I'm sure. But just because I don't know about it doesn't mean they weren't bought here. Mr. John-



son, he wraps up lots of orders himself. And I wouldn't know what they were just by lookin' at a box."

Van tried another angle.

"This order, nine chances out of ten, came in by phone, and was delivered somewhere. Who delivers stuff for this store?"

"Me," said Kubin.

"All right. Now any order like that is pretty bulky. You may not be able to look at a box and tell what's in it, but you must remember any delivery as big as that within the last month."

"Yes, sir. I can remember three deliveries big enough to have been

north side, near the city line. Mr. Johnson didn't give me a bill with an address on it. He just had me remember the address. And he said I was just to turn the stuff over to whoever answered the door, not try to collect or anything. The address is Thirty-two-forty-five Forrest."

"And who received the packages? Can you remember anything about that?"

"Some," nodded Kubin. "The first time, a jane took the stuff, though the boxes were more than she could handle. She had me just set 'em in the hall. She was pretty, and young. Not more'n twenty-five, I'd say, with

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FOLLOW RICHARD CURTIS VAN LOAN AS HE SEEKS  
TO DISCOVER THE WEAKEST LINK IN A  
CHAIN OF MURDER

in

## DEATH GLOW

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that many suits and hats, within the last four weeks."

Both Van and Negley leaned nearer. "Go on."

"One was to the Dayton Light and Ignition Company, and I think I know what was in that—a flock of work clothes for some guys in the shop who get a cheaper price by ordering in a bunch. But the other two big orders, I don't know what was in 'em. One was three weeks ago, one was ten days ago."

"That could be the pin-striped blue, and the brown," Chief Negley murmured. The Phantom nodded, with eyes glinting ice-gray.

"Where did you deliver them, Kubin?"

"Both to the same place," said Johnson's clerk. "A joint on the

dark hair and big dark eyes. Second time I went there, a guy took the stuff. He was a big, heavy guy, with a deadpan face. Looked like he'd shoot you for a nickel. Black hair."

Van's heavy-featured face had the keen look on it that only came when the end of a long, hard trail seemed not too far away.

"Thanks," he said. "I think you have been telling us the truth. Go home, now. And if you can get a job anywhere else in town besides this place, I'd certainly advise you to do it."

Van's borrowed car sang toward the Dayton line, along Forrest Avenue.

"The 'big, heavy guy' with black hair sounds a lot like Frenchie Du-



bois!" said Negley. "The dark haired girl, 'pretty and young'—the missing Dorrie who was last seen with Seymour and whom we haven't been able to locate as yet. She must have been deeper in the game than we thought. Probably detailed by the gang to Harry Seymour to make him a City Hall stooge for them in the first place, and to keep him in line in the second."

Van nodded abstractedly, eyes like live things in his strong countenance. But he made no comment. What the police chief was deducing about the girl, Dorrie, was a chance, of course. But Van was not so sure. Somehow it didn't just exactly seem to fit in. From his own short, but keen observation of Dorrie Wellman, the pretty dark girl had seemed genuinely attached to the Makon politician, Harry Seymour.

"Frenchie Dubois—and Dorrie!" Negley repeated. "At last the trail begins to look hot."

"Yes," said the Phantom, "it looks hot. And yet—"

CHIEF NEGLEY stared at him questioningly.

"All along, Negley, our criminal has calculated a bit ahead of us. All loose ends provided for in advance. Now it must have occurred to him that those identical suits were a loose end. Wouldn't you think he'd anticipate their possible tracing here to Dayton?"

Negley shrugged.

"It isn't in line with the rest of his conduct that he'd be careless about this. But every man is careless at some time. Maybe this was his time."

"Maybe it was," Van said thoughtfully.

They drove past a block in which two cheap bungalows were the only buildings.

"That's the address," said Negley

in a low tone, pointing to the further one.

The Phantom drove on around the block and stopped, with a lone three-flat building hiding the car from the bungalow. They came back 'cross-lots, walking slowly until the gathering dusk could no longer hide them, then rapidly to the rickety small house. Chief Negley went to the front door, Van to the back.

The Phantom heard Negley knock heavily on the front door. Then, while the attention of anyone who might be within must be centered on the front, Van soundlessly raised a rear window next to the door and stepped in. But he abandoned his soundlessness in a few moments.

The house was empty. Not only was there no living person in it, but there wasn't even furniture. As bare as a storeroom, it extended in front of him. He opened the front door and Negley came in, eyes questioning. The police chief answered his own question as he gazed around.

"Hell!" he said.

"Exactly." Van nodded. "Either this place was abandoned, with our calculator's usual forethought, weeks ago, or else it's just a blind address, used solely for receiving those clothes, a place that might not be visited again for months."

"And I was hoping it might be a hot lead," Negley began with a sigh. But then he stopped.

The two men stared at each other in the growing gloom. From the floor to their right had come a most peculiar sound to be heard in an untenanted house. The ring of a telephone. Van stepped toward the instrument, which was sitting on the floor in the corner. Negley almost walked on his heels, he followed so close. The police chief was breathing a little faster than usual.

"A wrong number?" he whispered. "Or a lead—at last?"

Van shrugged and picked up the



phone. His lips twisted a little and his voice roughened. "Yeah?" he said, in a guarded tone.

"You know who this is."

Van felt as though the hair was literally rising a bit on the back of his neck at the sound of that voice. Cold and measured and arrogant, like no voice he had ever heard before, and yet somehow vaguely familiar.

He made his own voice instantly deferential.

"Yeah, sure. I know."

"Are you alone there?"

"Yeah," half whispered Van, wondering who he was supposed to be. "I'm alone."

"Well, leave at once," said the measured, domineering voice. "Johnson has been taken in. There may be trouble. Go through the place and be sure no trace is left in the house. Then come to me at the old Scott Farm."

The phone went dead. Van hung up with fingers that felt almost numb.

"Negley," he said tightly, "that was our head crook himself! But it wasn't Frenchie Dubois! And he told where he could be found!"

"I know. I heard it. Now we'll find out where the place called the Scott Farm is—"

"We'll do no such thing!" snapped the Phantom. "You stay here. The man the criminal thought I was may

show up here at any minute. It's your job to stay and nail him. Otherwise he might tip the play by phoning his boss for instructions—when the boss thought he had already spoken to him."

"You can't go alone to this place—"

"I can go alone—but I won't stay alone long."

Van had Police Headquarters on the wire as he spoke and the next minute was talking to Detective Grogan.

"Where is the old Scott Farm? Ever hear of it? Oh, you have. Big place with a deserted house ten miles northeast, on Route Eighteen. Fine! I'm going out there, Grogan. A hot tip.

"I want you to follow me with all the men you can round up. No—follow me! If a crowd tried to enter the place, whoever is in it would be warned and have a chance to escape. But one man can steal in and tie up their attention for ten—fifteen—minutes while a crowd surrounds the building. That will be my job.

"I'm leaving now. I'll get there in about twelve minutes, I'd say. You plan to get there twenty-five minutes from now. Completely encircle the place and close in if you hear shots. Close in anyhow, shots or no, if there's been no sign of

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life within ten minutes after you arrive."

He hung up and started for the back door, to cut across lots and back to his car. Chief Negley laid a hand on his arm for a second.

"Easy does it, Stigler. This rat is the most dangerous I have ever struck. There may be the whole gang where you're going, and they could have an arsenal out there."

"Watch your own end here," Van replied.

And then he was gone—chasing down the owner of that arrogant, deadly voice.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SCOTT FARM



WHEN an ordinary traveler asks a local resident how far it is to a given spot and is told that it is ten miles, the traveler will do well to take the information with a grain of salt. It may be six miles, or it may be fifteen. But when a detective says it is ten miles, then it is ten miles, to within a few tenths.

The Phantom, on Route 18, skimmed the highway at an even eighty an hour for nine miles, confident in Detective Grogan's accuracy. Then, with the tenth mile coming up on his speedometer, he slowed.

It was a perfect August evening, clear, warm, with the stars like headlights in the sky. There was a little breeze, but not enough to keep the countryside from seeming breathlessly quiet. However, the Phantom wasn't occupied with the beauties of the night. Serious things were absorbing his attention.

It looked as though the chief crim-

inal, the brain behind Frenchie Dubois—for it was more obvious to him than ever now that the gambler was head over heels in the robbery crimes—and the stupidly deadly men Dubois headed, had left an open chink in his armor at last.

Anyhow, the next half hour would tell. Would the Phantom be able to hold the attention of whoever was at the Scott Farm until Grogan and the Dayton police could quietly encircle the place?

He vowed that he could, and would. Men like this deadly murderer had to be stopped. They were far too dangerous to be allowed to remain at large.

The Phantom parked the car at the side of the road. There was a chance that whoever was at the farm might recognize him as Simon Stigler and know him to be working on the Makon police force. Van wanted to take advantage of the element of surprise that always proved in his favor.

From his inside pocket he drew out his compact, flat makeup kit. Aided by the dash-light of the car and the mirror built in the top of the kit the Phantom's deft fingers made a rapid change in his appearance. As he worked swiftly the countenance of Simon Stigler disappeared and the face of another man appeared; a man who looked somewhat like Stigler at first glance and yet upon closer observation, was entirely different.

While Stigler had been a dowdy, middle-aged man, the face now visible in the mirror was younger, and far more clean-cut and alert. Yet the features of Richard Curtis Van Loan did not look out of the mirror.

Satisfied with the masterful job of expert makeup he had accomplished the Phantom replaced the kit in his pocket and slowly drove on.

At that he almost passed something which told him he had reached



his destination. One reason for that was because he wasn't looking for any such indication, and the other was because it still lacked six-tenths of being ten miles on the road. But his quick eye caught it just in time. He slammed on the brakes, stopped and backed along the highway.

An old, old signboard hung there, swaying crookedly on a rotting post, with its pointing end slanted drunkenly toward the ground. But he could still make out the lettering:

SCOTT FARMS  
Elias T. Scott

The Phantom stared down the road indicated by the sign as leading from the main highway to his destination. It was hardly more than a lane, grass-grown in the middle, with deep ruts. A few hundred yards from the highway it wound into young but thick woods and disappeared. Probably the farmhouse was behind the woods.

VAN turned his car into the lane and rolled it softly, headlights out, into the woods. A clear, small open space in the foliage invited him to the left. He ran the car into it, far enough so that bushes and young trees whipped back into place behind it and hid it completely, at least in the darkness of the night. He got out and went back to the lane on foot.

Softly, gun in hand, he went down the lane away from the highway, walking on the balls of his feet like a trained boxer ready for an unexpected attack. The woods were as quiet as the tomb. Breathlessly, abnormally quiet, he thought.

A feeling of danger stole over him, made him search the shadows as he advanced. But then he reached the place where the lane burst out of the woods, and stopped. Another sign hung there, as dilapidated as the first he had seen, but there was

no house in sight. The second sign read:

SCOTT FARM—2 mi

The ruts went on across open fields, endlessly, it seemed, then dipped over the brow of a low hill. There might be house and barn and the usual farm outbuildings hidden in a gully over that hill, but it seemed most unusual.

The Phantom turned back. If the farmhouse was that far away it might be better if he tried to reach it in his car. In a few moments he was close to the place where the lane jutted off from the highway. He halted abruptly as he saw there was another car parked at the side of the lane.

Then a dark shape whipped around from behind the trunk of a tree with the speed of light. Van tried to snatch the gun out of his pocket into which he had dropped it, as an arm wrapped itself about his neck. He was pulled back off balance before his fingers could touch his gun butt. At the same instant another figure leaped toward him, holding an automatic by the barrel. Instantly the weapon was crashed down on his head.

The Phantom sank to his knees, too dazed by the pain of the blow to stand. But then he kept on sagging until he sprawled limply on the ground. His fall had been genuine, but that second action was a fake. For he was not unconscious.

As he dropped he had felt one of the men snatch the gun out of his pocket. So, empty handed, with two armed men confronting him, and perhaps more nearby, he thought it best to pretend helplessness. He lay with eyes nearly closed, so that no hint of dim light could glisten on his eyeballs and give away his consciousness.

"That'll fix the punk!" he heard a man snarl. From the location he



guessed it was the man who had lurked behind the tree. "Fell right into it, the sap! I'll open him up—"

"Hold it!" That was the man who had hit the Phantom with the gun. "Wait till you get the word. *He's* watching over there in the car, but he ain't said nothin' yet."

So this whole thing had been an elaborate trap! And Van had fallen right into it. Somebody had been watching, had known about his and Chief Negley's visit to the deserted house, and that telephone call had been a come-on. It was all clear to him now. They had moved the sign post and placed it at the entrance of this lane so that he would enter here in seeking the Scott Farm. That was why there had been no house or farm buildings visible from this side of the hill.

There was a click as a car door opened.

"Got him?" A man spoke.

The Phantom's jaw shut hard at the sound of that voice. It was the voice of the telephone, measured, hard as steel, arrogant.

"Yeah, we got him!" said one of the two men standing over the Phantom.

His tone was deeply respectful. Van made a note of that. No man had ever talked to Frenchie Dubois quite in that manner. His rodmen respected Dubois, in a way, but talked to him as one thug to another—not like this.

Headlights flared on, with blinding radiance. The move was so sudden that it almost caught the Phantom with his eyes open and off guard. But not quite. The light rested on a pallid, disguised face, with blood from a scalp wound trickling on the slack mouth and closed eyes.

"You fools!" snapped the hard, cold voice of the man at the car. "This is not Stigler—but a man who looks something like him!"

"But he drove into the lane," protested one of the thugs. "He hid his car in the brush. We seen him. If he ain't Stigler, then who is he?"

"Someone who knows too much to live now." There was no expression in the hard voice. The man might have been discussing the weather. "You will take care of him."

THE lights clicked off, casting the lane into darkness.

"The usual way?" asked one of the men standing close to the motionless figure of the Phantom.

"You may decide about that," said the man with the chill voice. "If my suspicions regarding his identity are correct, a more elaborate death might be advisable. One in which no trace of the body can be found for a long, long time."

"What do you mean?" demanded one of the thugs. "I don't get it, boss."

"Back beyond the hill at the end of this lane there is the foundation of what was once a farm house. Not far from it is an old well. It might be quite a while before anyone thought of looking into that well—in search of a body!"

"I get you," said the gangster who had done all of the talking. "We'll take care of it like you say."

"All right. Give me three minutes to get away and then do as I've told you. Undoubtedly the police have arrived at the Scott Farm by this time, but that is still some distance down the highway. Unfortunately they will find no one there!"

The car door clicked again, and the whir of a starter sounded. The motor caught instantly. The car made a half turn, backed with a little bump against a tree too sturdy to give with the impact. The car's lights snapped on for another instant so the driver could orient himself and the lane, and went out once more. Like a blind but clever monster the



car felt its way along the lane to the highway.

"Minute and a half," said one of the men. "What did the brain mean when he said this guy was so important he deserved a special death?"

"You got me," answered the other man. "But we're carrying out orders all the same. Though I kinda wish he had let us use the regular way."

"What's that?" asked the first gunman.

"You ain't been workin' with this mob long, have you?" said the other. "The regular way means just two slugs through the knob, with no gat ever found afterwards. Frenchie says the simpler a job is, the less it's liable to explode in your face afterwards."

"Sounds right," said the other. "But don't try to kid me, Bill. That guy wasn't Frenchie."

"Who'n hell said he was?" demanded the thug called Bill. "He's the guy that pulls the strings that makes Frenchie wiggle. First time I've ever got this close to him. He—hey!"

The shout started with Bill halfway to the ground and ended as he crashed full length on his back. Van released his iron grip on the man's ankles, rolling away from his fallen foe. A bullet ploughed into the leaf mold within an inch of his head, but before the second gangster could fire again, the Phantom's flailing arms swept that man's legs from under him too.

The Phantom was the first of the three to get to his feet. He saw starlight flash on metal, and lashed out with his foot. An automatic spun from the grip of one of the prone gangsters. Then the other was up, straightening from the fumbling search for his own gun, the automatic again in his possession.

Van leaped forward, got the wrist behind the gun with his left hand

and smashed for the man's face with his right. And then he felt a weight on his back as the second man lit on him like a furious ape.

The Phantom's strength hadn't entirely returned as yet, for the force of the blow on his head had weakened him considerably. For that reason he had put off his ankle grabbing maneuver until the last possible second, to husband his shattered power. He sagged a little under that weight.

Then a rabbit punch from the man behind him caught him at the base of the neck and everything grew black as he dropped to the ground unconscious.

WHEN Van finally opened his eyes it was to find that he was sprawled in at least two feet of water. They had dropped him down into the old well!

Evidently—and fortunately—the water, shallow as it was, had broken his fall to an extent. For while he was bruised and shaken, he had no broken bones. Glancing up, he saw that the top of the well was at least twenty feet above him.

As he managed to get to his feet he realized that he had been lucky enough to land in a half sitting position, so that his head had not gone below the surface and drowned him while he was still unconscious.

As he moved about in the black darkness at the bottom of the well his leg struck against something hard. He reached down and discovered it to be a well cover that had been made of thick oak and reinforced on top by iron sheeting.

From above there came the sudden bright glare of an electric torch. The light gleamed on him as he stood there in water above his knees.

"He ain't dead!" he heard one of the gangsters shout. "I thought the fall would kill him when he hit bot-



tom. Now we gotta finish him off quick!"

The Phantom grabbed up the thick well cover and crouched down behind it, his back against the wall of the well. From above came the steady cracking of the automatics in the hands of the two thugs. Bullets rattled against the iron sheeting of the well cover like giant hailstones on a tin roof. But the oak and iron was too thick for the slugs to penetrate.

Deliberately the Phantom uttered a shrill cry that sounded like a man in mortal agony. Then he sank into the water so that only the shield that protected him was visible above the surface.

"Got him!" shouted one of the men above. "He's finished, Bill!"

THE ray of the flashlight disappeared. In a moment the Phantom had tossed aside the well cover, was searching about in the darkness with groping hands. The sides of the well, he found, were built of rough stones that projected from the plane of the wall. Instantly he was clutching at them, and with the agility of the trained athlete that he was he succeeded in climbing slowly upward.

He fully realized that at any moment the men might come back for one last look, to assure themselves that he was actually dead. If they did, and found him clinging to the side of the well he would die from those blazing guns as would a fly crushed against the wall by a fly-swatter. But he kept doggedly on with his ascent.

But there was no sound as he reached the top of the well and swung over the side. He was breathing heavily as he felt his feet on firm ground once more. Then he saw the two men. They had not gone yet. Their backs were toward him as they moved in the direction

of their car. Swiftly and silently he ran toward them.

The man nearest him heard the sound of running feet and whirled as the Phantom drew close. But there was no time for the gangster to draw his gun. Van caught him just at the same time that the other man's hands clutched the Phantom by the throat. Again the second thug had leaped for his back.

He saw a leering face dimly before him and, struggling desperately against the hands at his throat, swung on it with all his strength.

There was a snap like the breaking of a small branch as a jaw bone cracked, a sort of squawk, and the face faded from view. Then the Phantom was free to concentrate on that clawing weight on his back. Which wasn't so hard. He simply fell straight backward.

There was an agonized grunt as the man smashed between the hard ground and Van's hundred and ninety-odd pounds. The grip on the Phantom's throat was jarred loose. Swiftly snatching the gangster's gun from its holster, Van gave that man what he had himself received before they had thrown him into the well—a gun butt crashing down on his head. Only the Phantom made his blow harder.

In the ensuing silence, Van leaned against a tree, gasping in the night air. He was all but exhausted.

When he had recovered sufficiently he found that his makeup kit was still in his pocket. Working swiftly, with the aid of one of the gangsters' flashlights, he again brought those deft fingers and uncanny skill into play as again he assumed the character of Simon Stigler.

Then, breathing more easily, he raised the gun in the air and fired three times, sure that if the police were still somewhere close by they would hear the distress signal, even



though they had evidently not arrived in time to hear the one shot that the gangsters had fired when they had first attacked him in the lane. Nor had they apparently been close enough to have the shooting at the old well brought to their ears. But now they should be coming back along the road, searching for him after finding the Scott Farm deserted.

He waited about five minutes, narrowly watching his two prisoners, and then fired three times more. And at the sound of that second salvo, a string of police cars hurtling along Route 18 slowed near the lane, paused a moment irresolutely, then came around and into the woods.

## CHAPTER XII

### A LITTLE BLUE FLOWER



GROGAN'S men picked up the two gangsters that Van had taken prisoners. Grogan got into the Phantom's car and drove back to Dayton, while Van sat beside him and recovered the rest of his strength

and wits. It had been a near thing. But the chief criminal—or rather his tools—had slipped; and Van had emerged not only with his life but also with a small fact or two that he thought might be extremely valuable.

In Detective Grogan's office, he got the news when he came in from washing up. Grogan and Chief Negley were waiting for him.

"Johnson was sprung within a quarter of an hour," the Dayton detective told him. "One of the best lawyers in town. It takes money to buy that mouthpiece. More money than Johnson's got."

"Nobody ever showed up at the bungalow, of course," Negley said gloomily. "It was a trap from start to finish. I traced the call, and found it came from down Forrest Avenue a few blocks. Near enough for a man with field glasses to see one or the other of us enter the bungalow. So our man simply waited till he knew we'd come in on the trail of those identical suits, then made his phony call to 'one of his men'."

"I didn't go with the police on the Scott Farm raid—which never got as far as Scott Farm. I beat it down to the Forrest Avenue place where that phone call had come from. Another vacant house. But in it, on the rather dirty wallpaper beside the phone where the man had leaned while he talked, is the print of a man's shoulder. I took a photograph. We may find the coat that matches the print—some day."

Another plainclothes man came in. Van turned to him.

"The sign that sent me down the wrong lane?" he snapped. "Did you get it?"

The detective shook his head.

"There's an old rotten post there, with fresh splits in it showing where a sign had been nailed up and then torn down again. The guy that did that stopped long enough to take it with him. Took the other one you saw farther down the lane, too."

Van frowned. "There might have been a story on those signs. The wood, the paint used for the lettering."

His frown cleared as he thought of one small fact with which he had emerged from his brush with death. A thing revealed the second time the man with the arrogant voice had blinked on his headlights, so he could see to turn around in the woods.

A license plate. Number 814-324, Ohio. They looked it up.



"Chevrolet sedan, motor number six—one—o—seven, one—eight—seven," said Grogan. "Belongs to the Drive-Yourself Company."

A big man in his shirtsleeves came in with a still-wet print from the developing room in his hand and a curious expression on his face.

"Got the picture of your wall, where a guy leaned on it, Negley," he said. "Here it is."

The Makon police chief stared at a beautifully sharp picture of something that looked almost like fine netting.

"You've blown it up, eh?" he asked.

"Nope. No enlargement. That's the size of the weave, actual. No suit of clothes ever made that print."

VAN stared over Negley's shoulder at the coarse mesh imprint.

"That's burlap sacking, or something like it," he said.

Chief Negley and Grogan stared at each other, perplexity in their eyes.

"The man who made that print saw the print where his shoulder had touched the wall, himself," explained the Phantom. "Instead of simply smudging it, he pressed an old piece of burlap over it to let us photograph *that* and see if we can find a coat to match!"

"Hey!" said Detective Grogan. "I never heard of a crook that smart before. Who you guys after, anyhow?"

"A gentleman who thinks he's smarter than all the law," the Phantom retorted bleakly. "And it's up to us to prove he's wrong. Wish I could tell you more—now—Grogan, but—Let's pay a call on that Drive-Yourself outfit, and see if we can find anything helpful."

It was easy to locate the Chevrolet sedan at the hire company's garage. The radiator was still warm. It had been the last car

turned in before Van and Negley and the men from the Dayton Police Headquarters got there. Van turned the men loose to go over it from front to back, then questioned the clerk.

The resulting information was scanty.

"I didn't pay much attention to the guy," the clerk said. "He didn't have a regular Drive-Yourself credit card, but he left a cash deposit that was plenty. Said his name was John Carter, from Columbus. He was pretty big, though not as big as you, and had on a dark gray suit and a hat with a brim dipping down. Glasses. They were thick, and I guess there must have been a tint to 'em, because I can't remember the color of his eyes."

Grogan, who had been beside Van, went to a phone to put a call through to pick up on sight any man answering such a description, with emphasis at the union depot and the airport. But all knew there was no real chance of such a pickup.

"You couldn't recognize him in court, then?" Van asked.

"Mister," said the clerk, "I couldn't recognize him if I bumped right into him this minute—unless he had on the same clothes and wore the same glasses. Which I don't s'pose he'd be doin' if he was a crook."

The sedan had yielded nothing, it seemed, when Van walked over to it for a report. A thousand and one fingerprints, but none on steering wheel, front door handles, cigarette lighter, or any other place where the most recent should have been. These had been wiped. No impressions of any kind on the seat cushions.

"I even took 'em out and tried the under edges," said one of the Headquarters men. "Like this." He slid the front seat forward and tipped it up a bit— "Hello, what's this?"



How'd I miss that? Must have stuck to the seat frame when I pulled the cushion out before."

The Phantom had already pounced on the thing and was holding it gingerly between thumb and forefinger. It was a flower. A crushed blue flower. It had been mashed in there between the seat and the frame, but it was obviously fresh.

"Now that," said the Phantom softly, "is very interesting."

"Say!" exclaimed the clerk suddenly. "Am I dumb! The guy wore that, or one like it, in his button-hole when he came in, and I forgot about it when I was tryin' to describe him. Probably got it from old Emma, down at the corner. She's sold flowers there for longer'n anybody can remember. Maybe she saw him better'n I did. She's got a sharp pair of eyes."

OLD Emma, looking a hundred years old but spry as a young girl of seventy, *had* seen the man more closely than the clerk. Or else she was just naturally more observant.

"He was about five-foot-ten," she mumbled toothlessly, "and kinda puny. Shorter an' lighter than my last husband. That's the way I tell the size of men. I compare 'em to my husbands. He gave me a dollar bill for a cornflower. Then, like he'd got to thinkin' about it, he took it back and gave me a half-dollar. He kinda felt it first."

"Damn him, he's smart," whispered Chief Negley. "He must have suddenly thought of possible fingerprints on the bill, took it back, and gave a coin which he smudged in his fingers as he passed it over."

Van nodded, still staring at the old woman.

"So he was five-feet-ten, about, and—er—puny," he reminded her. "Notice anything else?"

"He looked like the kind of man that flowers die on, but who'd wear

'em just the same. A kind of set, calculating sort of look, sir, if you understand."

That was the best the old woman could do. Thanking her, Van led the way back to the garage. Picking up the rest of the men, they drove to Police Headquarters. Here, manacled together, were the two bunged-up gunmen that Van had captured near the Scott Farm.

Van drew the Makon police chief to one side for a conference. Grogan fixed them up with a private office. When they were alone, the Phantom began to talk earnestly.

"You've given me a free hand and all the cooperation in the world, Negley," he said. "You've followed blindly at times, risking your job with the city of Makon, and your standing with the district attorney."

The chief grimaced wryly. "That wasn't hard to do. My neck is already in a vise, and the D.A. said to play ball with you. And I've carried on the regular police routine, anyhow."

"Well, I can't tell you everything yet, because I'm not sure of things myself, but I can tell you that Frenchie Dubois is undoubtedly the head of the holdup gang which is a separate outfit from his regular Makon gambling setup."

And Van proceeded to tell Negley what the two crooks had said in his hearing when they had been certain they were going to kill him.

"If it hadn't been for the fact that they unquestionably meant to kill me, I'd say this was another plant," Van concluded. "Now, this is what I want you to do. It may sound crazy to you, but I have my reasons. I want you to go in there with the Dayton police in charge, and grill those two crooks within an inch of their lives. You won't get much out of them, because they don't know much. But let it slip in their presence that I am the Phantom. I



think their leader already suspects that.

"Then, when you are through with them, let them call their lawyer, or anybody they please. They may not even be sprung, but I'm gambling that they will be, and dollars to doughnuts, by the same lawyer that sprung Sam Johnson. Have Grogan put a tail on each of them, and you go on back to Makon. I'm going back right away myself. I've a little



investigation to make before morning. I'll meet you at your office bright and early."

"What you got in mind?" said Negley. "You are deliberately putting your life in danger."

"Right," nodded Van grimly. "I am trying to draw the fire of the man beyond Frenchie Dubois."

"You know who he is?"

"No, but I hope to know by tomorrow. And I'll try to have the proof to hand over to you that will be sufficient to send him to the chair. You can gather in Frenchie and his special crime school gang at the same time, I think. No use to start anything with Dubois before then. We don't want to put him wise."

"I don't like it," the police chief said, "but I'll play it your way."

"Thanks. I'll take the car back to Makon with me."

"Okay," agreed Negley.

"And put on a good show in there," the Phantom urged, nodding toward the other office.

"Won't I, though!" said the police chief grimly.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND



ATE in the morning, the private telephone in Frenchie Dubois' suite rang imperiously. The gambler awoke quickly. He hadn't been sleeping well of late.

Getting to the instrument, he answered with a curt, "Yes?"

"Those two rods Bill Bates and Patelli, that you sent me at Dayton last night," came the familiar metallic voice of the man he thought he knew.

It was Frenchie Dubois' private belief that that voice belonged to Pat Moller, clerk to John Claridge. If only he could prove it! Then he could— But he couldn't prove it—not yet—and to go ahead, either with or without proof, was too dangerous until he could in some way locate that "proof" against Frenchie Dubois; that deadly proof that was eternally hanging over his head.

"Yes?" repeated Dubois.

"They muffed the job," said the voice coldly. "That new detective, Simon Stigler, is getting in my hair. That fellow was more important than those rods could ever imagine, and they had him cold—under my directions. They let him get away, and take *them* prisoners. Sam Johnson was pulled in, too. Theodore Fowne, that Dayton lawyer who— Well, you know. He had to bail all three. Those two rods are red-hot now. They just called my special number. Nobody is supposed to do that but you, Dubois.

"Fortunately, it's a public phone arrangement I have. But it's finished right now. You can forget that number yourself. I'll give you an-



other later. Meanwhile, Bates and Patelli are on their way to your special hideout. Don't let them walk out after they get in."

"You mean—"

"Exactly. But with bullets this time, and dispose of the weapons the usual way. You value your skin, don't you?"

"Sure, but—"

"No buts. And one other thing, Dubois. Get Stigler! Rub him out! He's dangerous."

"Okay, Boss," said Dubois. "But he didn't strike me as being particularly dangerous. He's just a fat-head dick."

"That's what you think! He's—the Phantom!"

THIS one was a blow over the heart to Frenchie Dubois. He felt as if somebody had dumped a glass of ice water down his back. He actually shivered, his blood running cold.

After a long pause he asked: "How—how do you know that? Are you sure?"

"Negley let it slip while he was grilling your two thugs, but I already had my suspicions. For reasons of my own that are no affair of yours. All three of them will have to be wiped out. And, Dubois, don't let any grass grow under your feet. The biggest and final job in Makon is just ahead. You know that."

Frenchie Dubois knew that, and a number of other things.

"No," he vetoed, his voice thinning uncontrollably. "If what you told me is true, that's out."

"Don't be a sap! You couldn't be in any deeper. Now, get busy. I'll give you the dope on the big job some time tonight."

The line went dead before Dubois could say anything further. Slowly he pronged the hand set and stared at nothing for a long moment. That

man had said it. Frenchie Dubois *was* a sap. After that former conversation at the time the "liquidation" of Bat Luden and Rake Malone had been arranged, when the voice over the phone had taunted him, telling him that though Frenchie *thought* he knew to whom that voice belonged, but was off the track, Frenchie had done some private sleuthing.

He knew everybody of consequence in Makon. And until his investigation he had been reasonably sure he was dealing with Patrick Moller; had just been biding his time while he had forcibly obeyed telephoned instructions. Moving carefully, very carefully so that he would alarm no one, he had personally shadowed the private clerk of John Claridge, the attorney.

And Pat Moller had proved to be—simply Pat Moller. The man who early in the game had led Dubois to believe he was Moller, hadn't been the law clerk at all. The fact now was that Frenchie Dubois didn't know who the hell his companion in crime was! He had been sold a bill of goods like the veriest nitwit.

But except for that threat hanging over his head, it had been a good bill of goods—so far. But Frenchie knew he held the sack if things went wrong. And another thing had been troubling the underworld leader. Why was it, that after each robbery, some official connected with the firm or bank that was robbed had to be knocked off?

At first, he had thought each man so killed must have been the source of his unknown chief's information—bumped off by his confederate to cover up or to avoid a split. And he hadn't bothered to worry about it. But Frenchie hadn't had anything to do with these subsequent killings. He could take it when he'd had anything to do with any killings himself, but these that he knew noth-



ing about, but *still* knew must in some way be tied up with the robberies, were beginning to worry him like hell.

What was this crazy mess anyhow? And why was it his unknown chief always demanded that some one of Frenchie's own crime gang be assigned to kill some man, *after* the robbery, as part of the crime gang member's assurance of further protection? It all looked screwy to Frenchie.

Taking up his phone, he called a number, and asked for a member of his gang.

"I want Dugan," he said curtly to the voice that answered him. "I don't care if he is in bed. Get him up."

In a few moments a sleepy voice answered him.

"Bates and Patelli are on their way over here to see me," he said swiftly. "They made a bad mistake. Ask them no questions, but if you don't want to fry—"

"Aw, Frenchie, you don't mean that. They're new with us. They haven't had the experience that—"

"Don't argue. This is damned important. It's too bad, but *I* can't help it. Burn 'em down, and close that joint for good. Don't leave a thing there with them that anybody can get his mitts on. They're red-hot, them two guys are."

"Okay," said Dugan. "I hope you know what you're doing."

Frenchie flinched, but his voice was level as he said: "You'd better do like I tell you. I'll see you at rehearsal at midnight. Have your men there."

He put down the phone distastefully. Then he proceeded to shave and bathe. Dressing himself with care, he opened a drawer and took out a neat spring-clip shoulder holster and put it on before donning his coat. Selecting a new and shiny .45 automatic, he examined its ac-

tion thoroughly. Then, loading it with a full clip, he levered the first shell into the chamber and holstered the gun.

By noon he was on the way to the Apache Club, an unusual hour for him to be out. But Frenchie Dubois had personal business to arrange and attend to. He was figuring on attending the last illness of the man he knew as Simon Stigler. After that, there would be time for a show-down with whoever it was who had been making Frenchie Dubois think he was Pat Moller.

But other business claimed the Phantom's attention, and Frenchie was unable to contact him. He couldn't even locate him.

IT WAS while Dubois was conducting his futile search that a gnome-like little man with a withered left hand entered the end phone booth of a big Makon drug store. It was early evening.

He got a number, waited and, after a girl had said that he would be called back in ten or fifteen minutes, hung up to wait. No one knew him in that drug store, but there were other places where he would at once have been recognized as Henry Boyle, a confidential clerk of the Federal Reserve Bank in Cleveland, Ohio.

As he paced up and down within earshot of the booth, he clenched and unclenched his good right hand. His face would have been a complete course in psychology, had anyone there been interested enough to study it. Fear was in his countenance, and desperation, and a furtive madness.

Sometimes, if the provocation be great enough, even a rabbit will fight; and if a rabbit can be said to have expression, a trapped and frantic one might have had the look of this man.

It was no wonder his face looked



like that, for he had decided to defy the man who controlled him. Not utterly defy that man. For he was going to give the required information about the Wheat Exchange Bank's affairs in connection with the Federal Reserve Bank. But he was also going to issue an ultimatum. And such an issuance, to the owner of that cold, telephonic voice, was going to take all the strength that despair could lend him.

THE phone in the end booth rang. It took all his will power to go to it and pick up the receiver.

"Yes?" came the cold, deliberate voice that for months had haunted him in nightmares.

"I am calling about the Wheat proposition," quavered the little man with the withered hand. "You know who this is?"

"Yes. Go on."

"The maximum amount of cash to be on hand during the week will be there tomorrow—Saturday. It will arrive at about nine-twenty in the morning."

"You are sure?"

"I'm sure. At seven an armored truck will leave the Federal Reserve Bank with a load for the Wheat. It will get there in a little under two and a half hours."

"Excellent. The report is valuable and, let us hope for your sake, accurate. That is all."

The little man clutched his rabbit courage in both hands.

"No, that is not all," he fairly cried into the phone.

Silence. The silence of a sputtering dynamite fuse, which lasted for perhaps a quarter of a minute. Then:

"What more do you want to say?"

"Plenty more," said the little man, trying to bluster and succeeding only in quavering some more.

"Well?"

"Look here! There have been more

and more people killed in these affairs. I can't stand any more of it. I can't sleep nights for thinking of men lying dead with holes in their skulls. The robberies, yes. But all this cold-blooded, wholesale murder has got to stop!"

"Has it?" said the voice, and its tone was almost soft.

The little man was emboldened. "Yes, it has. I tell you I can't stand it any more!"

"You can't stand it any more?"

"That's right." The little man showed rabbit fangs. "I'm not just talking. I have a few things on you. If there are any more guards slaughtered in bunches, as they were at Second National, I'll talk to the police!"

"Don't you think it's a bit dangerous to talk so—frankly?"

"No one's around. And I'm going to say what I've got to say, regardless. I don't care what you've got on me—what you say you can prove! I'm through, right now! I've given you what you want about the Wheat Exchange Bank. That's the last. I've bought my way clear of you. We're quits!"

"No," said the voice, "it's not the last."

But still the tone was mild, almost undecided. The little man had never heard it quite like that before. He got a strong impression that he'd forced an issue, that he had made the owner of the voice a little less sure of his slave with the withered hand. He cursed himself for not assuming this attitude before.

"There's one more little job I want you to do for me," came to him in that new, undecided voice. "Just one more. And then you'll be released."

The little man considered. He could keep on forcing the issue, and risk getting into deadly trouble; or he could compromise a little and do the one last thing required, thus



ducking the chance of getting killed some time in the future; which would have been an alternative preferable to the one with which he had been constantly threatened, at that.

He chose the course which for a time, at least, would let him go on living.

"All right. One more thing for you. Just one! Then I'm considering myself released forever from that damnable threat you've held over me—and holding you to your promise to turn over to me that proof."

"Correct."

"And you'll stop this wholesale murder, even if it means taking more risks?"

"Of course," purred the voice.

"All right, then. Tell me what's this last thing you want me to do?"

"It is a little too important to tell, over any phone. Please meet me, in half an hour, at the west end of the Park Real Estate subdivision. The extreme west end. Look for a black sedan. I'll explain everything."

"I'll be there," said the little man.

THE line went dead. The bank clerk hung up. From his eyes faded the glints of rabbit bravery. Now that it was over, he was appalled at what he had done. Threatening this man! But it had seemed to work! Either that mention of evidence against the boss—which he didn't have—had moved him, or he had some slight trace of a heart, after all, and had decided that the crippled little bank employe had done enough to win his freedom. Anyhow, he was going to be released from his hateful criminal life—forever. After just one last job.

He got into his modest coupé and pointed the nose west to see what the one last job could be.

The Park Real Estate subdivision

was a closed in suburban section of Makon that a wealthy real estate ring had paved and subdivided and street-lighted. They had been left holding the bag, by the recession.

It covered almost a square mile of farm land on the west fringe of Makon, where the development stood now, with no light pouring from its lamps, with the first blades of grass beginning to thrust up between its paving blocks, utterly deserted.

Fatuously the little confidential clerk from the Federal Reserve Bank drove toward it.

The night was overcast; so dark that when he reached the place the little man didn't see the big black sedan, standing without lights, until he was within thirty yards of it. He stopped his car and got out, after a look around showed him that the spot was apparently deserted. He walked over to the sedan.

He saw a figure in it, at the wheel; his knees began to tremble. The owner of the voice that had so horribly dominated his life lately! The man who was behind all this large-scale crime!

He forced himself forward. The last of his rabbit courage had left him, but the stake, release from his servitude, kept him going. He stopped beside the sedan. The left front window rolled down. He got a glimpse of a pale blotch of a face as he stood alongside the car.

"You wanted to see me?"

The question didn't make sense to the little man at first, until he realized that the man inside was making sure this wasn't some chance stroller approaching the sedan, or possibly some patrolling plainclothes man.

"Yes. I phoned—"

"Salute me, with your left hand."

This wasn't inexplicable, even for a minute. When the clerk raised his withered left hand, he would be instantly and positively identified.



He saluted with his left hand. "Now, are you sure—"

"Quite," came the metallic voice softly.

And then there was a single cracking gunshot. A small caliber bullet entered the little man's singularly ugly face, almost in the exact center.

Before the body had quit moving after it hit the street, the sedan's door was opening. The man behind the wheel sprang out and bent down. He made one swift, darting movement with his hand toward the dead man's coat lapel, then leaped into the big sedan and roared away.

There was an excited hail from some man and girl not far away, alarmed by the sound of the shot. The black sedan whirled in the opposite direction.

And behind it lay the gnomelike little fellow with the withered hand. He lay on his back, with his legs awkwardly sprawled, and with a single blue cornflower in the lapel of his coat.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE WOMAN IN THE COUPÉ



RIGHT the minute I saw that cornflower I phoned you," Chief Negley rumbled to the Phantom.

It was two in the morning. A half dozen blue-coated police and plainclothes men were gathered about the dead body in the subdivision.

"When some necking couple out here phoned a guy had been bumped off," the chief explained, "I thought at first it was just another gang job. But then I got here and saw the guy wasn't a hood, and saw that flower like the one you got so hot

about down in Dayton, and gave you a quick ring."

"I'm certainly glad you did," Van said softly. "You know who this man was?"

"Yes," said Negley. "He was an employe of the Federal Reserve Bank. Some sort of a clerk. Do you think he was the man you've been looking for? He was right in banking circles, familiar with it, as you said the head criminal must be. And he wore a cornflower in his buttonhole—"

Van shook his head. "I don't know. We'll check the rest a little later. You say the coupé over there belongs to the dead man. Any tracks left by the one the killer came in, Negley? He didn't come all the way out here on foot. And I doubt if he came in the car with his victim. This looks more like a rendezvous to me. This fellow had got out of his car—"

The police chief shook his head glumly.

"Dry weather. Dry pavement out here. Nothing leaves tracks. If only it had rained awhile ago. But it didn't."

The Phantom looked this way and that in the darkness.

"This street go out of here?"

"No," replied Negley. "It ends a few hundred yards up."

"Then the killer's car must have gone back the other way. Walk back slowly, everybody. Fan out, and look for tire tracks. Even on a dry pavement, occasional accidents can produce tracks."

They found such an accident at a point less than four yards from the nearest intersection, where a get-away could have been made by any one of three streets. Just that close to preserving his anonymity had the killer come. But there luck had failed him.

There was a patch of loose earth at this point, probably blown there



by the wind during the recent dry spell. And over this patch the killer's car had rolled. There was a clear, distinct treadmark for perhaps nine inches.

"Take pictures first, then moulage cast," snapped the Phantom. "We've got to find the car that made that mark."

It was nearly five in the morning before they got to bed for a needed snatch of rest. By then, Van was sure the dead man was only some comparatively unimportant figure in the master criminal's plans. But in them, nevertheless.

"In with the gang, of course," he summed up. "Or he would never have met one of them at that deserted spot so late at night. But *not* the leader. You remember we decided that the leader not only was thoroughly familiar with the finance setup in and around Makon, but also that he had some sort of background that would make him familiar with law enforcement methods.

"This man only fulfills half of that. He's in a bank—but he's been nothing but a teller, and later assistant cashier, all his life. He'd have had no chance, apparently, to learn enough about crime to circumvent the law the way the arch criminal does. My guess is that the chief of the gang himself did this job. And after he had murdered the man, he put that cornflower in his lapel in the hope that the dead man would be taken for the organizing brain who left a flower in that Dayton sedan.

"If that guess is right, then the criminal knew almost as soon as we did that he had dropped his lapel flower in the Drive-Yourself car, and we will never see our quarry unsuspectingly wearing one to give himself away."

"One by one the slightest clues we gather against him, melt away," Chief Negley said bitterly.

"A few haven't melted," the Phantom answered him, grimly. "We'll get him, and not too long from now."

"But how many more people will be murdered, and how many more hundreds of thousands of dollars stolen, first?" lamented Negley.

THE answer to that might have been gleaned five hours earlier, shortly after Boyle of the Federal Reserve Bank was killed. At that time a man of Dubois' came into the gambler's suite to mutter that Frenchie was to call a certain number from a public phone as soon as he could. Frenchie couldn't say anything over his own phone any more, of course; too certain that it was tapped.

When Frenchie called the number, from a mile away, after making sure he hadn't been tailed, he heard the boss' voice.

"Dubois, on the Wheat Exchange job—"

Frenchie dared to interrupt.

"Hell, man! Are you going ahead with that job? I'm telling you, the bulls will be ready for a try! That Phantom guy is poison. And I couldn't locate him all day."

"So I gather," said the thin, dry voice. "Did you take care of the other angle?"

"You ought to know that, too," said Frenchie with a slight snarl. "Two more good men gone to hell, and the police have the bodies. That makes seven men we've lost to date. If this keeps up, we'll have to train another class."

"How about switching over some of your night club employees?"

"Not a chance!" said Frenchie emphatically. "The only two I transferred were Bat and Rake—and look what happened to them. That's out. None of my regular gang even know anything about this business."

"Well, take down these instruc-



tions carefully. I'll arrange the Phantom's demise for you. All you have to do is carry out instructions. Here are the details."

Frenchie's fingers moved rapidly as he jotted down the words coming into his ear. As he wrote, he marveled at the sharp cleverness of the other's planning. He had to give grudging admiration to the unknown devil.

"It's the smartest thing I ever heard of," he admitted.

"I am delighted that you approve," the metallic voice said dryly.

"There is one more item. An employe of the Federal Reserve Bank met with an unavoidable accident an hour ago. Now, listen carefully. On the corner of Miller and Hastings Avenues, northeast corner, in the city trash can, there is a gun. Send it to the sashweight factory at once. And, Dubois, don't trouble to save it for evidence or a hold over me. It has no prints on it, and the gloves have already been burned. It's safer for you to destroy the weapon."

"Okay," Dubois grunted sourly.

HE hung up, went out of the booth, and started himself for the trash can in question. It was diabolical how the other man thought two or three steps ahead of him. The idea of holding on to the murder gun which had killed a Federal Reserve Bank employe had not even occurred to him until his devilish partner in crime mentioned it. He would have thought of it, given time enough, because never before had he been directed to dispose of any weapons personally used by the man who had that hellish hold on him. But the man of mystery had foreseen that, and warned him of the danger to himself.

From the beginning it had been the idea of the mysterious man with the criminally planning brain to have plenty of guns and ammunition

on hand in a private arsenal before starting this bloody series of robberies. That had been to avoid making purchases that might possibly be traced. It had also been by his arrangement that use was made of the Makon Sashweight Company, a small factory where scrap iron was melted down and poured into molds to make sashweights; an ideal way to dispose of the instruments of murder.

A night man there was on Frenchie's private payroll, and many and sundry were the metallic objects which found their way through his hands into the fiery maw of the furnace, to become innocuous window sash supplies. If Jack Collins, Frenchie's man in the sashweight factory, had had a ten-dollar bill for every gun he had furtively dumped into the melting pots, he would have been modestly wealthy. Every gun fired on a job, whether a person was hit or not, went into the sashweight business.

Into that obliterating melting pot would go the weapon that had killed the gnome-like little man with the withered hand. And Frenchie Dubois, even while he cursed to himself, knew that he would not hesitate to consign the pistol to this unsuspecting Moloch of crime.

He picked up the .25 caliber weapon without difficulty. Making certain he was not being trailed, he drove to the sashweight factory and contacted Collins. Delivering the gun with the usual instructions, he drove out to the Black Swan, a popular roadhouse he controlled. It was situated just off the highway leading to Indianapolis.

Parking his handsome coupé, he went inside. People spoke to him respectfully, and he nodded and smiled in return. He was beginning to feel in a better humor, as the scheme of his telephoning boss took shape in his mind. There was a



## CHAPTER XV

## PREPARED FOR TROUBLE

subtle irony, a sort of grim boomerang quality about it that appealed to Frenchie.

Making his way to the private office of the manager of the roadhouse, he entered and sat down, facing the man at the desk, who looked up, smiling.

"Good evening, Mr. Dubois," said the sleek, dapper manager.

"Hello, Milton," Frenchie grunted. "Everything okay?"

"Aces, out here. Things a bit hot in town, eh? Got a line yet on the gang that was trying to muscle in?"

"Not quite, but it won't be long. Listen, Milton. The heat's off the girl now. Send a couple of the boys to get her. I'll wait."

"Fine!" The manager smiled. "Glad you can spend a little time with us. It'll take an hour to go over to the farm and back," he told Dubois.

"Make it snappy. Tell them to park her in my car outside. I don't want her seen here. Then let me know."

"Yes, sir." The manager nodded, hurrying out.

Frenchie settled down comfortably and lighted a cigar. He enjoyed the faint strains of dance music from the pavilion as he studied the notes he had taken down over the phone and proceeded to make elaborate notes and lists of his own. When Milton, his roadhouse manager, returned, he had just finished his figuring. Putting all of the papers into his inside coat pocket, he looked up. At Milton's okaying nod, he left the resort by a side door and hurried over to his car.

In his coupé, muffled up well, was a woman.

"Hello, kid," he greeted. "It's been tough for you, but everything will clear up now. I have a swell plan that will put you right with everybody, no matter what happens. I'll talk, and you listen."



DAYLIGHT was not far off, but the office of the Makon Chief of Police was brightly lighted, the shades drawn. The room was crowded with uniformed police and plainclothes men. Cowering on a leather couch, her hair in wild disorder, her clothes showing signs of having been slept in for days, her face and arms bruised and scratched, was the missing Dorrie Wellman.

Chief Negley sat at his desk and listened attentively as a couple of detectives administered restoratives to the girl, and Simon Stigler, alias the Phantom, interrogated her. The story she told was wild, at times incoherent, but it hung together fairly well.

It began with the night of the Seymour-Regan killing. That night, she said, she had taken the blonde called Mimi to her apartment. Later, Mimi had left, and Dorrie had gone to bed. In the middle of the night she had been snatched by three masked men and carried away. For several days and nights she had been confined in a cellar in an unknown place.

She had not been badly treated, just imprisoned and told nothing, not even why she had been kidnapped. All of her captors, and the various men who came and went during the time she was held, had been strangers to her. She had gathered that they were members of a new mob that had moved into Makon. One peculiarity struck her, however. All of the men had seemed about the same age, and of the same general appearance and build.

From their conversation in her



presence she had picked up the impression that they had come from various parts of the United States to work for an unknown chief they called the "brain." There had been a hint or two that they might have come under duress, but they had liked it, and had seemed to consider themselves lucky in escaping some other fate that might not have been so pleasant. No, she said, Frenchie Dubois' name had not been mentioned save once or twice in a disparaging way.

Then, last night, two mobsters she had heard called Bates and Patelli had come in. They had been burned down right before her eyes in the cellar. There had been a lot of confusion, Dorrie had been roughly handled, and they had all lammed out of the joint, taking Dorrie along.

At this point in her story Dorrie became hysterical and had to rest for a few minutes. Then, after a pause, Chief Negley asked for descriptions of the place as near as Dorrie could tell him. She accurately described the Elm Street hideout where the bodies of Bates and Patelli had been discovered in the small hours when the detectives on the two gangsters' trail had called Headquarters about the sound of a gunfight. The police had got there too late to prevent a getaway.

THE chief nodded as all this dovetailed, and turned inquiringly to the Phantom.

"Go on with your story, Miss Wellman," said the Phantom gently.

The girl began crying softly. She resumed. There had followed a wild ride in a car for her—there had been three carloads of thugs altogether, but they had separated. Finally, when the girl had been utterly lost and terrified, they had stopped at a small farmhouse.

Here she had been locked in a

sort of shed next to the kitchen. Yes, she thought she could recognize the house if she saw it again. Then had come the most surprising thing of all. She had overheard scraps of plans to knock over the Wheat Exchange Bank in the morning—this morning, now. Those bandits meant to go about it like a well-trained company of soldiers. What they had said had been like a description of the Second National Bank robbery.

Desperate, horrified, frightened to death, Dorrie had managed to escape from her bonds and from the shed. Stumbling blindly through the night, she had wandered for hours, finally being picked up by a milk truck some five miles north of Makon. Making the driver understand that it was a matter of life and death, she had prevailed on him to drive her straight to Police Headquarters. And here she was.

The milkman was promptly interrogated in another room, and he corroborated her story in every detail, so far as he knew it. As he was a known and reputable dairyman he was released. The investigators concentrated on Dorrie. But they couldn't break down her story. If she was acting, she was putting up a swell job.

"And, aside from public spirited motives, Miss Wellman," asked the Phantom at length, "just why do you come to the police?"

"Why shouldn't I?" she cried wildly. "I'm not safe anywhere else! And those rats murdered my boy friend. They talked about it before me. And now they're planning another wholesale slaughter! I had to get here to warn you. And I want to be put in jail until you catch them. They'll kill me if they find me now!"

"I wouldn't be surprised," agreed the Phantom grimly.

"What shall we do?" asked the



police chief. "We haven't much time."

"If the girl's escape doesn't change their plans," said Van, "it seems that the sensible thing is to get hold of the president of the Wheat Exchange Bank—Eli Corsener—at once and proceed to fill his bank with plenty of guards. Keep Dorrie Wellman under cover until this crisis is past."

The chief of police was already on the phone.

In less than thirty minutes a shaken and badly frightened bank president was admitted to the office. Apprised of what was in the wind, Corsener pleaded for protection. He was trembling with his willingness to co-operate in every particular.

"It's all we can do, at this moment," the Phantom said grimly. "We simply have to guard the bank."

Police Headquarters became a beehive of activity for the rest of the morning. This was the first real break of the entire case, if it was a break, and they couldn't afford to overlook or ignore this stray chance to trap the gang of highly specialized bank robbers. Before banking hours that day, the Wheat Exchange Bank had been turned into an arsenal, but without this fact being apparent on the surface. The criminals could get in, but they were going to have deadly trouble getting out.

At ten minutes of nine on this day which was to be long remembered in Makon, Simon Stigler stepped into the big private office of the presiding executive at the rear of the bank. Eli Corsener was sitting quietly enough behind his desk, but he wasn't even pretending to work. His bony right hand trembled a little as he essayed a smile and took off his glasses to polish them.

Everyone in the bank, for that

matter, was as taut as coiled springs. Violence was in the very air. Corsener's eyes were pleading when he addressed the Phantom.

"You are sure the attempt will be made this morning?"

THE Phantom was wearing his mask, anxious for the mob to be sure of his identity, on the chance that it might draw them out. His hope was to force them to reveal themselves in an attempt to get him. He calmly regarded the bank president through the mask holes.

"You can't be sure of anything in this business," he said, with a non-committal shrug. "But everything points to this being the day they will make an attempt on the bank—if they intend making it at all. Yesterday, the Department of Streets and Parks started tearing out the car tracks in front of the bank. They'll be in this block for the next few days.

"That's Point One. For the crooks always stage their jobs where the streets are full of unusual noise. In the next place, your bank will have its greatest amount of cash today, when the employes of the two big department stores in the block come in to cash their pay checks. Isn't that right?"

"Yes," Corsener sighed, "that's right."

"Well," said Van, shrugging again, "the large amount of cash you'll soon have here, and the covering noise in the street outside, fulfill just the conditions under which the Second National Bank holdup was staged. Besides, at a little after eight, we got that call from the young house painter that I told you about."

"You mean the call about Boyle, the bank clerk who was—murdered last night out at that subdivision?"

"Yes. As I told you, this house painter saw pictures of the mur-



dered man in the papers this morning, and phoned Police Headquarters. The painter had been in a booth next to the one in which Boyle had been talking to somebody, and heard him say something about the Wheat Exchange Bank. I guess the little chap had been talking in a rashly loud tone. Anyhow, the painter saw the man come out of the booth, remembered his withered hand and his ugliness, and spotted him as the victim from the newspaper cut, especially when the newspaper description of the victim mentioned that withered hand. And all of it ties in with Dorrie Wellman's story."

"I'm still hoping," Corsener said, with another deep sigh, "that it won't be attempted, now that the girl escaped. Maybe— Stigler, I'd like to ask you something. Could it possibly be that Boyle was the leader of this murderous robber band? And was killed by one of his subordinates? That phone talk, as well as the flower he wore in his lapel, indicates to me that he might have been the organizing mind. Probably he was giving orders to his men."

"To me," countered Van, "the reported phone conversation confirms the theory that he was *not* the real leader. I'm gambling that he wasn't giving orders to a subordinate—but giving a report to his superior. About this bank. In any event, you are thoroughly protected against a successful holdup this morning," the Phantom assured him.

"I hope you're right," Corsener said, nodding glumly. "At any rate, you couldn't have done otherwise than as you did—be ready in case there is trouble here."

Van left the tall, bony man fidgeting behind his desk, with the deep lines that bracketed his mouth even deeper than usual from worry and—frankly—fear. The Phantom went out into the bank proper for a final

word with Chief of Police Negley.

It was nearly nine, now. Everyone was at his or her station in the bank, ready for the routine opening of the place at nine o'clock. Van hadn't liked the risk of having all the employees there, but he hadn't seen any way out of it. He wanted the bank to be a trap, completely unsuspected by the gang that intended to raid it. He wanted the bandits to get inside, and then be either killed or captured—every mother's son of them. After that would come the spotting and arrest of the chief criminal.

However, all possible safeguards and precautions had been taken. Every employe had been thoroughly instructed as he or she came in that morning.

With the first burst of shots, all were to drop to the floor behind desks or what not, and stay there. With just a little luck no one would be hurt.

CHIEF NEGLEY walked over to the Phantom from a station he had chosen behind the "statements" window. The counter there was a marble slab that supported a metal grille work that was expensively carved and fretted. Behind a machine gun whose snout would be poked unobtrusively through one of the holes, Chief Negley would wait.

"Zero hour coming up, eh?" he said.

"Yes." Van looked at his watch. "At about nine-twenty the armored car from the Federal Reserve Bank will dump its half million in cold cash. And any time after that, we can expect trouble."

"You know I'm kind of wondering if we'll get it after all," mused Negley. "That criminal devil has been so fiendishly smart. Don't you suppose he has figured that we've got wise to his timing of attack, and that we'll plant men in every



place from now on where street noise could give him his chance?"

"That's what makes this setup look funny to me," Van admitted, frowning. "I'm afraid it's quite possible the 'brain,' as they call him, according to Miss Wellman, has guessed we're on to his methods. But that's not what's worrying me."

"Then what is?"

"This! I'm afraid he has figured out some way, in that hellishly ruthless manner of his, to counter against all the preparations we've been making to receive him. I'm afraid he may actually have a plan in mind successfully to hold up the Wheat Exchange in spite of everything we've done to guard against it."

"Impossible!" Negley exclaimed.

The Phantom looked around.

At each key point, which meant in every barred cage of whatever nature in the bank, city detectives and police in civilian clothes were stationed, hidden below counters at the feet of the regular tellers and clerks. At the first hint of trouble bank employes were to duck below their counters as detectives and officers shot up to replace them, with smoking guns in their hands.

Besides two regular uniformed bank guards, there were three other guards in the bank uniforms—but the latter three were members of Makon's crack police. At counters in the big room were half a dozen men who would be industriously filling out deposit slips when the big moment arrived, ostensibly patrons of the bank, but actually plainclothes men.

Across the alley in the rear, ready to come through a door normally locked, but now open, were regulation police officers. And across the street, in windows affording an excellent vantage of the bank's big entrance, were still more, stationed with rifles and riot guns.

"It simply isn't possible for them to pull this job off," said Negley.

"I guess it isn't," Van slowly admitted.

He looked at his watch. A minute to nine. One of the bank guards went to the door and unlocked it. He did a pretty good job of acting, yawning a bit, and looking as if the last thing in the world he expected was trouble here.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE ARMORED TRUCK



ONLY three minutes after nine," announced Chief Negley. "I don't suppose there'll be any trouble till after the cash arrives from the Federal Reserve at nine-twenty, but we'd better take our places."

Van nodded, still vaguely troubled, though he could not understand why. Every loophole seemed to be covered. It simply wasn't *possible* for the "brain" to win. Even if the head criminal should have some fantastic idea of using gas to cripple every living soul in the bank, there were still the men outside to be reckoned with. If he and his bandit band tried to take advantage of the unlocked rear door through which the police across the alley were to come, those men would see the gang and their shots would give warning.

No, it looked utterly impossible for anything to happen here. And yet Van dreaded the moment, at about twenty after, when the truck full of cash was to draw up at the curb.

He suddenly straightened as if shot.

The armored car from the Federal Reserve Bank! The painter who had overheard the telephoned con-



versation of Henry Boyle's! Boyle had reported the movements of the armored car.

In that instant the Phantom had it all! Dorrie Wellman *had* lied! She *had* been in with the crook gang, as Chief Negley had suggested and that whole story she had told at Police Headquarters had been told with a *reason*! She had been talking following instructions.

It was all clear now. This whole set-up was a plant. There wasn't to be a holdup of the Wheat Exchange Bank. The crooks hadn't the slightest intention of robbing the heavily guarded bank.

**A TACTICIAN!** A crime genius! Let the bank be heavily guarded—the more heavily, the fewer men to bother with around the Federal Reserve truck itself! While the police held an empty sack, the cash truck would be stopped and looted.

Van whirled and ran to Corsener's office at the rear of the bank.

"The armored truck from Federal Reserve!" he shot out at the alarmed banker. "What route does it take to get here? Quick!"

"Why, I—" faltered Corsener, "I—guess it would come down Portage Avenue. Yes, that would be it. It would come down Portage."

Van leaped from the office, waiting to hear no more. And there, in the big banking room, with those nearest staring at him in astonishment, he had one of the most torturing moments of his career.

He was as sure his hunch was right as that he was standing here with jaws and hands set rigidly. And yet, on little more than sheer intuition, did he dare leave this admitted danger spot unprotected? Did he dare send the men there to meet the money truck, and face the risk that he was wrong? There was plenty of money in the bank even now. Suppose it were held up after

all, while he was chasing a will-o'-the-wisp!

The agony only lasted a few seconds. Things clicked into place for him.

"Negley! Everybody!" he shouted. "It's the money truck from the Federal Reserve the gang is after! Come on! All the men here—get in your own cars or commandeer others and cover the city route from the outskirts of town to the Wheat Exchange. If there's trouble, all race to where you hear shots! That'll probably be on Portage Avenue."

He leaped for the revolving door and out. His big car was a hundred yards away, around the corner. He tore into it, the uniformed Negley panting behind him. The police chief flung himself into the car, too, jerking back as the Phantom roared off with screaming motor.

"So you decided it was the truck, eh?" Negley bellowed. "Sounds like a right hunch to me! Know the route?"

Van, driving as few men have ever driven in a crowded city before, still had time to frown a bit over that one.

"I'm wondering myself," he said. "Corsener thought it was down Portage."

The map of the city danced before his mind.

"The Cleveland road cuts in at Portage. I should think the shortest way would be down Miller to Rubber Avenue, where the Wheat Exchange is situated."

"Sounds like the best route to me, too," Negley said shortly.

Van put the wheel over hard. It was the second difficult decision to have been forced to make within two minutes. For in this one he disregarded what Corsener had said about the probable route, in favor of topographical logic.

They shot up Miller like a comet.



And they had gone about eight blocks when they saw logic reap its usual harvest. This was it, all right! A wildly scattering crowd ahead, and the sound of shots and yells, told them that. Van crammed on even more speed.

"There she is!" cried the police chief, pointing with a gun toward a dully glinting truck that was wobbling toward them like a half-drunken monster.

With his left hand, Van reached for a machine gun cradled beside him.

"My God, they've got the truck already!" Negley shouted.

But Van had seen what Negley had. Three uniformed figures sprawled forever motionless near the right-hand curb. Two more in the center of the street. Another lying athwart the hood of the truck where it had fallen, slowly sliding off it as the vehicle bumped with gathering speed toward a side street.

**T**HROUGH a bullet-seamed, shattered proof windshield, Van and Negley also saw two men and a driver in the cab. But they were not uniformed. Felt hats were pulled low over their faces and they fired at random into the crowd while the truck rolled on.

"Lord knows how many more of that damnable crew are back inside that truck!" Negley groaned. "Getting them out of there will be like trying to get a gang out of a fort on wheels with a pair of peashooters. We can never do it, Stigler! And we can't stop them before the rest get here!"

"Oh, yes, we can," said Van. "Get set to jump."

The truck was turning for the side street. Once on that, it could move at top speed away from town, while the men inside it cracked down with machine guns on all pur-

suit while the killers grinned behind steel walls.

But the truck wasn't going to reach that side street! At forty an hour, the Phantom bore down on it, racing for the side street himself.

The gangster driver of the captured truck saw what was coming. He howled an obscenity and wrenched at the wheel. But he couldn't turn in time.

Van had his door open and was half out, but with his foot still on the accelerator. Chief Negley had his door open, too, ready to leap for safety.

The thing was as perfectly coordinated and timed as the movement of a Swiss watch. At the last possible instant, Van and Negley, disregarding wild bursts of lead being sent at them from the cab of the truck, dropped from the heavy police car, which ploughed into the truck's front end less than two seconds later.

The crash could have been heard for blocks. The police car, heavy, armored, was almost as solid as the armored truck. The two jarred to a stop in a mass of wreckage from which neither would ever move under its own power.

And then the doors of the truck opened, and ten men with tommy guns and automatics searched with screaming lead fingers behind the wreckage of the police car, for the two men who had stopped their escape.

Miller Street, one of the main thoroughfares of the city, was fairly uncrowded at this spot. Here, for a few blocks, it smoothed out into a wholesale section and was not dotted with the throngs that showed on either side of the region where the big stores were located.

But there were plenty of people around, at that. Van and Negley, fighting for their lives, with the wrecked police car as a barricade,



got small, frantic pictures in a kaleidoscopic effect.

Here was a group of men plunging for safety down the block, with the vacant terror in their faces characteristic of those who, totally unused to violence, are suddenly confronted with it in its bloodiest form. There several men and a woman crowded back into an all-too-small doorway which offered little other than psychological protection. Just beyond, a mother crouched over a little boy, holding his head tight against her thigh as though to stop with her own body any bullets that might come their way.

On the pavement, in addition to the coldly murdered guards, several innocent bystanders were lying in their own blood. It looked like a battlefield; and this resemblance was heightened by the appearance of the lawless rats who had produced all this carnage.

They were, as usual, dressed in identical suits, which gave them more than ever the appearance of an army. A crime army. This time they had on jumpers; but whether they were utilizing the St. Louis garments a second time, or whether they were clad in still another lot of clothes from some shady dealer who would sell and keep his mouth shut, Van couldn't as yet tell.

VAN had the machine gun he had taken from the police car, and Chief Negley had his two service .45s. Both of them worked with the cold, calm precision which is the hallmark of courageous men.

Ten killers from the wrecked truck—two men of the law. Ten against two. If the ten had fanned out scientifically to get the two, Van and Negley wouldn't have lasted for a minute. But the bandits evidently didn't feel that it was necessary to concentrate on so small a force, and besides there was all that

money in the truck, in tempting, liquid cash.

About half of the deadly figures in denim delved into the smashed truck after the money sacks, leaving the other half to take care of the Phantom. And over a minute passed before it began to be apparent that the fighting half of the bandit force wasn't able to do the job!

A man with a spouting machine gun, crouching low, circled to get to the side of the wreckage to a point where he could rake along the back of the police car. Negley dropped him with a single shot that nicked his down-drooping hat brim and entered his skull at the base of the nose.

The Phantom, with his gun propped on a rear fender and with just his left eye looking out through the mask he still wore, from beyond the armored bulk of the car, sent a burst of six slugs into the body of a man leaning over the hood of the truck. Then he sent another burst after the second killer who had dropped and was firing from beneath the truck's chassis.

They heard a dreadful screaming. The man underneath the truck must have had his legs shattered in a dozen places by slugs ricocheting from the pavement. The screaming was punctuated by the solid roar of one of Chief Negley's .45s as he picked off a denim-clad figure that was running, bent far over, for a doorway which commanded the rear of the Phantom's barricade.

"Nice work," Van called over the unholy din.

"Same to y—" began Negley, but his words were drowned suddenly as he fired at a man emerging from the back of the truck with a sack. The gray-haired police officer was wearing a tight grin. At last here was something he could sink his teeth in. This was the one time that these killers were out of luck.



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE STREET BATTLE



**M**ORE men came from the rear of the truck—two of them—each bearing a canvas sack. They leaped to a parked car, careful to keep the bulk of the truck between them and the police car. And either the keys had been left in the parked car, or one of the two was a genius at car-stealing; for in an incredibly short time the car was in motion.

Van's jaw set below his mask. Deliberately exposing himself for several seconds, he raised up a bit and concentrated on that car, which was riding up over the curb for a quick turn and a getaway. Flames spat from his gun again and again in solid red lances.

The car was not a bullet-proofed one. It stopped, with the driver slumped forward over the wheel, with both rear tires riddled, and with gasoline flowing like colorless life-fluid from a pierced gas tank. The man beside the driver leaped out, not bothering with money sacks now, and leaped behind a fire-hydrant before Van could nail him.

The rest of the gang had learned their lesson. It would take all of them, and to hell with the cash they'd captured, to silence these two and make a belated escape. All turned on the wrecked car with howling ferocity.

For a moment the Phantom and his police chief companion were helpless. The whole battle had happened with such rapidity that it had not been possible for police aid to reach them yet, spread out through the town as they were at Van's instructions.

Bullets were whining around the

barricaded two like angry hornets. For now the survivors of the mob were doing what they should have had sense enough to do in the first place—spreading to left and right, fanning out so as to get to points from which they could reach their enemies from the rear.

The wrecked police machine shielding the pair quivered like a live thing from the constant impact of bullets. There was a clangor like that in a small boiler factory as slugs glanced from the car's armored, rounded sides. The top of the spare tire, about six inches from Van's head, began to get a fretwork look from the missiles tearing through it.

And then, almost lost in the other thudding impacts, there was a slightly different one. Almost lost—but not quite.

Van stared at a clean, crisp hole in the back of the car, totally unlike the ragged marks made by the other bullets. As he stared, another just like it leaped into existence, within four inches of his shoulder. And he knew the answer even then, with a part of his brain that wasn't tautly concentrated on their grim position.

Boat-tailed, high-powered rifle bullets had made those holes. Somewhere up the line, toward Portage Street, somebody was deliberately sniping with a menacingly accurate marksman's weapon.

He had to ignore that danger for the moment, but he called over his shoulder to Negley:

"Keep moving back and forth!"

The police chief hadn't seen the different-looking bullet holes; didn't know the reason for the command. But he knew the Phantom didn't give orders just to hear the sound of his own voice, so he began swaying his body back and forth. The weaving, shifting targets the two fighting men presented didn't make



for accuracy on the part of the distant gunman with the rifle.

"Where are those police cars?" the chief jerked out, as a slug tore his hat half around on his head, then sailed it ten feet away.

The Phantom only grunted. Heaven knew they were making enough noise around here. The men who were to follow them from the Wheat Exchange Bank should have heard it and showed up by now, even though they'd been diverted to Portage, six blocks off.

There was a triple crack from the man behind the fire hydrant. Chief Negley put the barrel of the automatic in his right hand across his left forearm, drew a bead as carefully—though a lot more quickly—as he would if he'd been in the police pistol gallery. After he squeezed the trigger, there was no more movement from behind the hydrant. A bullet, and a splinter of metal from the hydrant, had gone into the brain of the man there.

"Where are the rest?"

Van thought he had yelled that. Actually he had only thought it. The sentiment had been jerked from him by a gasp from Negley, and a thin red trickle slowly beginning to seep down from the top of the police chief's left shoulder. One of the deadly rifle slugs had caught him, in spite of the weaving motion.

"Just grazed," Negley yelled gamely, moving the arm under the shoulder to prove it. But both knew they'd be done in another sixty seconds if help didn't arrive.

It came, then. From down the street sounded the clear, wild shriek of police sirens. The shooting at Van and Negley ended abruptly. Men in blue denim began scurrying in the opposite direction, some of them dragging wounded legs or holding drilled arms. But then the same siren call, like an echo, was repeated *up* the street.

And that was the finish. Van shot the hand half off one of the men who was viciously spurting lead from his machine gun at the cars racing toward him, and the rest dropped their weapons and raised their hands.

"My God, what a battlefield!" gasped the driver of the first squad car to skid to a stop beside the wrecked machines.

The bluecoat's face was a little white. Here was crime, and a battle against crime on a larger scale than he'd ever seen before.

THE Phantom said nothing. That is, not about their close brush with death. That was water over the dam, now. He wanted *all* this gang—every one of them. And the cleanup now in progress didn't quite extend that far.

"Want this car!" he rapped out, half dragging the police driver from behind the wheel.

One of the plainclothes men in the rear seat, and the man beside the driver, were out now, rounding up the crooks.

"Stay with us!" the Phantom snapped to the other two, still in the rear. "In front with me, Negley!"

With the eyes of the men in the rear seat widening a little in sheer astonishment, Van sent the car forward up the street. In front, Negley was as amazed as his two men sitting behind him.

"What's the dope, Phantom?" the chief panted.

"Someone up the line—popping at us with a rifle!" Van snapped. "*And there he goes!*"

Almost a block from the scene of carnage, a man suddenly dashed from a building entrance, across the sidewalk to a big, parked car. He had a rifle in his hands. The gun hampered him for a fraction of a second as he tried to scramble into



the car, so he dropped it, subordinating all else to the one hysterical job of getting away from there now that the business had gone so disastrously against the mobsters.

Van slowed for just a breath, and yelled back over his shoulder:

"Get that gun, one of you. It'll hang him."

The plainclothes man on the curb side slid the door open, dropped from the car, skinned his knees, got up and ran for the rifle. Van drove on after the fleeing sniper.

The parked car undoubtedly had been left with motor idling in anticipation of just this possible emergency. It had shot off from the curb as if hurled from a rocket gun. And after it wheeled the squad car.

"You saw him?" Van grated. "Saw who he was?"

CHIEF NEGLEY, hanging on against the car's wild plunge under the Phantom's steely fingers, nodded. He had clearly seen the fleeing man, had noted his bulk, his heavy face, his big, powerful shoulders.

"Frenchie Dubois!" he exulted. "So he's the mug who shot me with a high-power rifle! At last, he's flushed out into the open. And will I take pleasure in opening him up with a nice grilling."

"First, we catch him," said the Phantom. "Better take a shot at his tires."

The Phantom settled down to the straightest, smoothest driving of which he was capable, rocketing along the open street after the gambling king's car. Chief Negley leaned out of the window and began a steady, careful shooting at the rear of Frenchie's car. Spots began to appear on the rear-view mirror and against the enamel, but the crook did not swerve, merely putting on more speed. It was obvious his car was armored and contained bullet-proof glass.

But it couldn't get away. The lighter squad car, built for speed rather than for safety, began crawling up on the one ahead. The fleeing man could not drive and take shots at his pursuers. So he drove desperately, attempting the impossible.

The two detectives in the rear seat of the police car were leaning out and firing now. It was only a matter of minutes. Frenchie had scarcely reached the outskirts of town when a well placed shot caught one of his front tires as he was curving onto the highway at seventy miles per hour. The wheel locked under his hand as the front axle came sharply back on the side of the blow-out.

Out of control, the heavy car slewed to the side and went over the low embankment, to plunge into a telephone pole. There was a terrific, rending crash. Silence for a heartbeat, and then the sudden bellow of exploding flame. By the time the Phantom stopped the racing police car, and the three of them ran back to the wreck, they could hear Frenchie screaming.

The big sedan was a flaming pyre. It was impossible to get close. But, as they stared in sick horror, the nearer door opened like a swinging torch, and a blackened but blazing figure toppled out and rolled weakly on the slope of the embankment. Braving the awful heat of the fire, the two detectives wrapped their coats about their heads and made a concerted sweep to rescue the burning man.

Getting him up to the concrete, they hastily wrapped their coats around him to smother out the flames. But Frenchie was through. At a glance the Phantom could see the man was dying. He knelt quickly beside the gambler.

"You're going, Frenchie Dubois," he said. "Can you understand me?"



Bleeding, blackened, and seared, the king of Makon's underworld opened his eyes. All the hair had been scorched from his face and head, but he fixed his pain-glazed stare on the masked countenance of the Phantom.

"Damn you, yes," he whispered. "You were to be at the Wheat Exchange so the bomb—would blow you—to hell."

THE Phantom felt a thrill of horror tingle his spine. He had used himself as bait to lure the leader of this ruthless gang, but he had not realized that he had been risking the lives of others also.

"What bomb?" he asked swiftly. "What do you mean, Frenchie? Square as much as you can before you go."

"I was going to wipe you out," muttered the dying gambler. "Had two men in armored car all set to pass bank—heave dynamite at you. Don't worry—they didn't do it. I watched from empty office in Tower Building. When you left—ruined my plans—knew you were after me ever since—you came to hotel." He choked and coughed and then went on. "Tried to catch you—get you with rifle from office building on Miller Street."

"My God!" exclaimed Chief Negley, white-faced, already weak from loss of blood from the wound in his shoulder. "He was going to blow up the whole bank just to get you!"

"That wasn't your idea, Frenchie," said the Phantom, bending closer to the blackened cinder of what had once been a man. "Who planned all of this? Tell me his name. Just whisper—"

"That's right." DuBois' voice was growing weak, husky. "He planned it—crime school—everything. Got his share of all the jobs—he was brain—"

"His name, Frenchie!" urged the Phantom frantically. "Tell me!"

"I—never knew," sighed Frenchie DuBois. And he died as horribly as any of the men he had condemned to death.

"Hell!" Chief Negley groaned bitterly.

"Take over, Negley," said the Phantom crisply. "I've got to go to see a man on Woodlawn Avenue. And don't be so disappointed. You'll arrest your arch crook before night."

Leaping erect, the Phantom ran back down the road toward the police car.

"Hey!" yelled the police chief.  
(Continued on page 102)

*Next Month: THE PHANTOM in DEATH GLOW*



## MOUNTAIN FEUD!

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# NAME THIS STORY and

## Title



*Colonel Talbot charged from the telephone booth*

OF COURSE, the drug store was nice enough, but it was a rather odd place for the three men to be eating lunch, perched at the soda fountain like three high school boys. One would have expected to find such well-known personages lunching at a swanky restaurant, or at the Adventurers' Club.

Colonel Talbot, renowned explorer of the Near East, Borneo, and Africa, and Lionel Galvin, famous polar explorer, had been in conference with Barry Cavanaugh, director of the Explorers' Club nearby, regarding the conditions and details of a proposed exploration of the Amazon headwaters.

"What are you ordering, gentlemen?" asked Colonel Talbot. "We must get back to our discussion—by the way, I have to make a phone call. Excuse me a moment."

The colonel, tall, distinguished, still short of middle age, got change from the cashier and crossed the narrow little pharmacy to the phone booth on the opposite side. His companions remained at the soda fountain, giving their orders to the dispenser.

The store was not crowded, but there were numerous people moving about. The clatter of dishes, the buzz of fans, the murmur of voices all combined to cover the dialing of the colonel in his booth. Dr. Westphal, the pharmacist, was walking toward the front of the store when tragedy struck.

## See Announcement on Page 99 for Full



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# WIN A CASH PRIZE!

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## Contest Story

Lionel Galvin uttered an exclamation, clapped his hand to the back of his neck, and started to his feet in pain. Cavanaugh jerked his head around in surprise. Before he could voice a question, before Dr. Westphal could quicken his pace, the polar explorer gurgled something unintelligible, and crumpled to the floor, over-

By  
**CHARLES S.  
STRONG**

*Author of  
"Lightning Never Strikes Twice,"  
"By a Nose," etc.*

turning one of the fountain stools in his fall.

Dr. Westphal uttered a cry and ran forward. Colonel Talbot came charging from the telephone booth. Cavanaugh got off his own stool to kneel beside the queerly stricken explorer. By the time the first man reached Lionel Galvin's side, the man was dead.

A woman screamed. All was confusion.

"Call an ambulance!" directed Dr. Westphal to the cashier. "It must be the heat."

"Maybe he's swallowed something," said Talbot crisply. "Get some am-

monia, some strychnine tablets. Quick!"

"Call the police!" said Director Cavanaugh, white-lipped. "Mr. Galvin is dead. I think he has been killed. Look at the spot of blood on his neck."

It seemed just a moment that the shrieking of a prowling car was heard swelling along the street, and Radio Patrol Car Number 241 slid to a stop at the curb outside. Sergeant Arthur Brooks of the Homicide Squad hit the pavement at a run even as a limousine drew to a halt behind the radio car and disgorged more plainclothes men.

"Hell of a place to pick for a murder," Brooks grumbled, as he shot a glance at the crowd that uniformed officers were trying to hold back. Once inside the drug store, Brooks did not at once glance at the dead man stretched out on the floor, though the medical examiner, the fingerprint man, and the police photographer who had come in the second car went immediately to work.

Brooks was more interested in the living, and his practised eye studied the four men who stood at the rear counter, the witnesses to the sudden death that had visited the place.

Brooks finally jerked a thumb toward the dead man.

"How did it happen?" he asked the worried druggist.

"I don't exactly know," Dr. Westphal stammered. "Mr. Galvin, Mr. Cavanaugh and Colonel Talbot came in together for a bit of lunch as they

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## Details of Our GREAT NEW CONTEST!

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often do. They sat down at the counter with Galvin in the center, and—”

“So Colonel Talbot was seated on one side of Galvin, and Cavanaugh on the other when he—er—well, when he died,” snapped the sergeant.

“No,” said Westphal. “Colonel Talbot had left the counter. He went to the cashier for some change and was making a telephone call when—well, all I know is that Mr. Galvin suddenly straightened up and the next thing he was on the floor between the stools as you see him now.”

“You can’t tell me just how it happened, can you?” Brooks asked, but the pharmacist shook his head.

“I believe I can,” Buster Leonard, the clerk, said nervously. “I just happened to be looking his way when I saw Mr. Galvin suddenly scratch his neck, then he put his hand to his head as though he was getting dizzy, and then he fell. I thought maybe he was choking on something but before I could get around the counter to help him he was dead.”

“DIDN’T Barry Cavanaugh do anything while this was going on?”

“No,” Cavanaugh stammered. “It was all so sudden I didn’t know what was happening.”

“How about you, Colonel Talbot?” demanded the officer.

“I rushed right over from the phone booth,” replied the explorer, “and my first idea was he’d taken some sort of a poison.”

The tall, lean medical examiner touched Brooks on the arm, and the sergeant followed him back of the prescription counter.

“Killed by hydrocyanic acid,” the M.E. said very grimly. “Introduced through a small opening in the back of the neck. Could have been done with a hypodermic needle, or some other small instrument.”

“A hypodermic needle!” Brooks said disgustedly. “Hell, a place like

this is lousy with ’em! They’ll be as hard to check as a drop of rain in the Hudson River.”

“If anybody did use one he didn’t have time to dispose of it with everyone watching him,” the M.E. said.

Brooks nodded. If the poison had been administered with a needle, that seemed to elect Barry Cavanaugh. The club attendant had been seated alongside Galvin all of the time.

But each of the four men who had been present were suspects, and as such subject to examination. Brooks went over the clothing of Cavanaugh and of the other three men, but it was a fruitless search.

As soon as Galvin’s body had been removed, Brooks undertook an examination of the floor alongside the soda fountain. But he found nothing that even faintly resembled the remains of a hypodermic. All he got for his pains was a collection of crumpled paper napkins, cigarette butts, some paper and wooden matches, a few matchbooks, crumbs and fruit seeds. He ordered the patrolman to collect the debris and send it to the police laboratory for examination, then resumed his questioning of the murder witnesses.

“You said, Colonel Talbot, that Lionel Galvin was a friend of yours. Just how good a friend?”

“Well, I’ve known him ever since he was a kid. We grew up together in Boston. We’ve always been pretty close—whenever we managed to meet after our exploration trips. Recently we’d been planning a trip up to the Amazon together. Now I’ll have to get someone else to go in with me.”

“Is that so?” Brooks’ eyes narrowed.

“Colonel Talbot,” he asked quite abruptly, “in your exploration have you ever been among the Jivaro Indians?”

“Oh, yes,” replied the colonel, “many times. They like to hunt heads and shrink them down to about the



size of an orange. Queer fellows, but I never had any trouble with them."

"Know how to work a blow-gun?" Brooks demanded.

But if he expected to surprise anything out of the colonel he was disappointed. A trace of a smile crossed the explorer's face.

"Of course I do," he said promptly. "That's one reason I got along so well with the Jivaros. They made me sort of a sub-chief."

"No offense meant. I just wanted to point out that even though you happened to be at the cashier's cage or in the telephone booth, you could have killed Galvin."

Again the laughter came into Talbot's eyes. "Assuming that I had a blow-gun, dart, and a bottle of poison," he said.

Brooks' abrupt questions had been prompted merely by a desire to catch the suave Talbot off guard, but on second thoughts the idea seemed to have possibilities at that.

While the photographer's flash boomed, taking pictures of the interior of the store, Brooks was thinking deeply. Had the poison been anything but hydrocyanic acid, there might have been a possibility of its having been administered elsewhere, and not taking effect until Galvin reached the drug store; but in the face of the facts it was certain that one of the four men who had seen Galvin die was the explorer's killer!

In his final complete survey of the drug store Detective-sergeant Brooks made an inspection of the telephone booth. It was the usual dial telephone booth. Wads of chewing gum were scattered on the floor. Brooks stepped out and faced the four men he had been questioning.

"Whom were you phoning when the murder was committed?" he asked Talbot.

"Why, I was calling up my manager," Talbot said. "I was in the midst of dialing when Galvin screamed."

"What's the name of your manager—and his phone number?"

Talbot gave him the information. Brooks put in a call to the number, spoke for several moments with the door closed, then came out.

"Well," he declared, "we seem to be getting nowhere in a hurry around here. I guess we'd all better run downtown."

Talbot and Cavanaugh already had on their hats and coats. Westphal donned his after taking the garments from a metal locker. Buster Leonard shed his apron and took a gray fedora from a hook beside a "No Smoking" sign.

As the others started for the door Brooks bent over before the phone booth and picked up a drying bit of chewing gum, dropped it into an envelope he picked from a greeting card

[Turn Page]

# College Humor

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CENTS

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box on the counter. Then he followed the four men to the street.

In the office of the Homicide Squad in Centre Street, the detective-sergeant and his four suspects were more comfortable in chairs than they had been teetering on one foot and then another in the drug store. Brooks asked Buster Leonard a few questions, then called attention to the fact that Galvin's wound had been in the back of his neck.

"Guess that lets you out, Leonard," he said. "Don't see how you could possibly have done it from your side of the counter. He nodded toward the door. "You may go, but you hang around this town until you hear from me."

Brooks took an envelope out of his pocket, placed the wad of chewing gum on his desk top. Long fingers picked up a letter opener, and with the point of it he began prying into the sticky mass. Suddenly he uncovered a bit of red gelatinous material. With the tips of his fingers he pulled the nugget from the gum, handed it to Dr. Westphal.

"Can you tell me what that is?" he demanded.

The druggist sniffed at it. "Hell, yes!" he cried in amazement. "It's hydrocyanic acid!"

Cavanaugh's eyes were wide and startled.

"You—you mean somebody gave Mr. Galvin poison in a piece of chewing gum!" he stammered excitedly.

The sergeant shrugged. "A piece of chewing gum could hardly be pushed through a pin-prick in the neck," he said acidly.

Westphal's face was flushed with excitement, Cavanaugh looked as though his teeth would begin chattering at any moment, but Colonel Talbot appeared only mildly amused.

Brooks fished around in his desk, and drew out an old pipe. He stuffed it with tobacco, and began fumbling for a match.

"Guess I'm all out," he remarked.

Cavanaugh and Talbot produced matches and offered them to the officer. He took a light from the colonel, and settled back in his chair. Suddenly he turned to Westphal, and between puffs he asked:

"Have any trouble enforcing the 'No Smoking' regulation in your store?"

"None to speak of," the druggist said. "Sometimes a fellow will come in with a half-smoked cigarette, and will finish it before he orders. Others may light up when they're ready to leave. But we don't mind that."

Detective-sergeant Brooks nodded, and picked up the telephone. He put through a call to the police laboratory and talked for some time. Then he hung up the phone, and settled back in his chair.

"Westphal, you can go," he said. "Take Cavanaugh with you. And tell Leonard he can go to California, for all I care!"

"You mean—" stammered Cavanaugh.

"I mean that Colonel Talbot murdered Lionel Galvin!"

The colonel leaped to his feet.

"Ridiculous," he snapped. "You've nothing to back up any such crazy accusation!"

"Haven't I?" Brooks shrugged. "I have enough to put you in the chair."

"You can't bluff me!" Talbot yelled. "Where's your proof?"

**B**ROOKS waved the other two men out of the room, though now they went reluctantly.

"All right, Talbot," the Homicide man said calmly. "You asked for it. Here it is. First, this capsule that I found in the chewing gum on the floor outside the phone booth. It's similar to capsules used to carry coloring for oleomargarines, but is made to stand acid. You used it to carry your poison, thinking that it would be easy to dispose of in a wad of discarded



chewing gum. Then you sharpened a wooden match—most explorers carry them in preference to paper matchbooks, because they transport better in wet and muggy tropical countries—and with this match you pierced the capsule, placed the make-shift match dart into a soda straw, and were all set for your little murder job."

"You'll have to have more than a nice story like that for a court of law," snarled Talbot.

Sergeant Brooks eyed the killer coldly and went on:

"The police lab tells me that there was a match impregnated with this acid in the floor sweepings sent for analysis. I'm betting it's the mate of the one you gave me to light my pipe. You didn't use it to light anything, or Westphal would have mentioned it when I asked him about his 'No Smoking' rule. And a soda straw would make a fairly good blow-gun for a fellow as expert at using one

as you claim to be. The half-closed phone booth door hid your action—but you can't cover your tracks as easily as that."

The colonel saw the handwriting all right. But he was still fighting as he rapped out:

"Why should I kill Galvin?"

"That's easy. The lecture bureau—I talked to them, remember—wasn't going to back *two* trips to the Amazon. They had to decide between you and Galvin. You figured that with Galvin out of the way you'd have no competition, especially with them preferring Galvin."

The colonel's ruddy, bronzed face went pale; his fingers were nerveless.

"You're right," he croaked, broken at last. "With Galvin gone I thought I'd have a chance."

But Detective-sergeant Brooks had no sympathy for murderers.

"The trip you're taking," he retorted tightly, "won't need any backing."

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All are eligible except the members of the staff of THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE and their families. In the event of a tie, duplicate prizes will be awarded. All letters must be mailed on or before November 1, 1938. Address: TITLE CONTEST EDITOR, THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y., and mark "Contest No. 4" on the envelope.



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# Death Watch

*The Grim Reaper Held the Timepiece While Officer Clancy Sat on the Witness Chair!*

By OWEN  
FOX JEROME

*Author of "Doubling for Death,"  
"The Golf Club Murders," etc*

**A** MAN'S life hung on Patrolman Clancy's testimony. The officer sat in the witness chair and stared pensively out of the courtroom window.

From his present position he could see the very spot where Amos Klein had met his death. The corner jewelry store down there at the street intersection at the end of the square.

Clancy was watching the ebb and flow of traffic. McGonigle would be having his hands full handling things there this afternoon, what with the labor parade crowding cars off of Main Street.

The sounds of the courtroom faded away from Clancy's conscious mind.

The shuffling of feet, the murmur of spectators, the rustling of papers, the drone of a couple of zooming flies all furnished a sort of monotonous obligato to the officer's thoughts.

He was weary of that badgering, heckling, antagonistic defense attorney for Tony Narvelli, anyhow.

Knowing that his client was guilty



*"He drew a gun, and I struggled with him"*



as hell, Lawyer Barton was fighting and contesting every step of the legal process of herding his client into the chair.

It had finally simmered down to the accuracy of Officer Clancy's statement. He had stated that Amos Klein fired two minutes after he was mortally wounded, and now they were checking his time sense in the witness chair. For Barton, the defense attorney, insisted that no man could accurately estimate time.

The grizzled old patrolman recalled the circumstances of the crime as keenly as if it had just happened.

**A**BOUT ten-thirty it had been. Clancy had just stopped for a cup of coffee and a cheery word at Mike's All-Night Lunch Room. He had come up Cliff Avenue to the intersection at the corner of the square, walking quietly along the wet pavement, frowning ahead through the misting rain. Business was usually dead around Courthouse Square after seven o'clock at night. All the stores and shops were closed. There wasn't even much traffic—

The traffic light on the corner blinked green, reflecting across the black and glistening pavement in a long, ghostly glimmer to Clancy's feet at the very instant he heard the muffled sound of the shot. With an exclamation, he quickened his step.

Just as he reached the corner, out of the darkened doorway of the jewelry shop that Amos Klein operated a man's figure came lurching. Clancy halted, froze against the brick corner and stared.

The lurching man straightened up in the gloom, threw back his shoulders, looked in every direction without seeing the patrolman at the corner, and walked steadily back to the deep shadow of the doorway from whence he had come.

Clancy was just about to charge around the corner and investigate

the matter when the man stepped out of the doorway for the second time, laughed shortly, and started walking briskly toward the patrolman and the street intersection.

As the light from the street lamp on the far corner pole cast its sickly glow over the man's features, Clancy recognized the swarthy face of Tony Narvelli, gambling racketeer and wearer of flashy diamonds.

Before the patrolman had time to demand an explanation from the gambler, there was a streak of orange flame and a report from the jeweler's doorway, low down, about a foot from the sidewalk.

A slug whined by between Clancy and Narvelli, winging its diagonal way up into the night.

With a startled curse, Narvelli broke into a run. And Clancy did the same. He leaped out of the side street and collided with the fleeing racketeer, collaring him.

"Shure an' jes' what th' hell's goin' on here, Narvelli?" he growled.

The racketeer yelped in dismay, twisted free, and sprinted away.

Clancy lit out after him, overtook him halfway in the next block. Narvelli surrendered without further protest. When they got back to the jewelry store they found the proprietor—dead.

"Klein and me had an argument," was Narvelli's defense, "and he drew a gun, I struggled with him, but couldn't get the advantage—and he shot at me first. I shot once at him. I must have killed him."

That was all he would say before he saw his lawyer. And, in three months, Attorney Barton had worked up a swell defense case.

There was a whale of a difference between manslaughter and murder. And that was the point in question—

Yes, Clancy remembered it vividly. He sighed and brought his attention back to the courtroom as the halted traffic on Cliff Avenue began



to flow across the intersection and around McGonigle's bluecoated figure.

"Two minutes!" said Officer Clancy wearily, announcing the question that had last been asked him. And there was a great murmur of astonishment through the room as people looked up from their watches in amazement.

"It was two minutes after he received his mortal wound," repeated Clancy firmly, "that poor auld Amos Klein raised up an' fired wan last an' only shot at his assassin."

The judge's gavel rapped heavily for order. The prosecutor was jumping up and down in his excited triumph. Barton was staring from his watch to the witness in stark disbelief.

His case was lost; there was no hope now for Tony Narvelli. Clancy

had proved that his statement was unshakable. He knew exactly what two minutes of time amounted to.

Narvelli would burn for murder, not take a light sentence for manslaughter in self-defense.

"But how the devil can you tell a passage of two minutes without a watch?" demanded the flabbergasted defense attorney.

"Ask McGonigle," said Clancy wearily. "Ask anybody who iver toimed th' traffic lights down there on th' end o' th' square. Th' light had just turned green when I heard th' first shot. It turned red jes' as poor auld Klein fired wid his last effort from his doorway. It was two minutes exactly. I jes' toimed it agin as a court test for ye by watchin' th' same light down there where Pat McGonigle is directin' traffic."

## GRADUATES OF MURDER

(Continued from page 93)

"What in hell? Are you leaving us stranded here?"

"Hitch hike," Van called over his shoulder, but he pointed toward the two police cars now sirening their way to the scene.

Behind the wheel of his borrowed machine, the Phantom sped away.

### CHAPTER XVIII

#### IN THE VAULT



**B**ACK at the Wheat Exchange Bank that afternoon Chief Negley found his hands full. Eli Corsener, president of the bank, was crazy mad. In his private chamber he was raving aloud. The police chief

could not calm him.

Seated in a chair to one side was Thomas Waltham, executive of the Geyser Oil Company. Waltham, conservatively dressed, was shaken, but nevertheless more in control of his nerves than the bank president. He listened without comment to what Corsener had to say, occasionally glancing at a beautiful wrist watch he wore.

"I tell you that it doesn't matter if this bank *wasn't* robbed!" Corsener was shouting. "The attempt was made—that was our money on the truck—men were killed. Waltham and Claridge and I are the principal stockholders in this bank. I tell you one of us is fated to die—maybe all of us. Stigler was right, although I wouldn't admit it. Where is he, Negley? My God, I don't want to die!"

"But you aren't in any danger now, Mr. Corsener," soothed the



police chief. "We've got the entire Dubois gang of murderers, and—"

"You don't know, you don't know!" wailed the banker. "As soon as John Claridge gets here, we'll all three go into the safety deposit vault. That's what we've decided to do—and we're going to stay there until you have a report from Stigler! He's the smartest man on your force, Negley. He knows what he's doing. When he says the danger is over, we'll come out."

Chief Negley shrugged his shoulders helplessly. "What do you think of this scheme, Mr. Waltham?" he asked.

Waltham glanced sharply at Corsener and he, too, shrugged. "I think Eli is a little overwrought, but I'm willing to go into hiding for twenty-four hours if he's so set on it. Certain things have been queer. But I think you're talking too much, Eli."

"No, I'm not!" contradicted the banker angrily. "I'm not going to be silent any longer. I'm going to talk. I'm going to tell—"

"Wait, you fool!" said Waltham tersely. "If you want to go through with this bank vault scheme of yours, I'm willing, but keep your mouth shut."

CHIEF NEGLEY glanced sharply from one to the other of them.

"Perhaps," he said softly, "it would be a good idea to talk."

"This isn't police business I want him to keep quiet about," Waltham said coolly. "Nothing nefarious. Mr. Corsener will feel differently after he gets over this robbery shock."

At that moment there was a knock at the door. Anxiously the banker motioned to it. It was opened to admit tall, thin-faced John Claridge.

"It's about time you got here," Corsener said testily. "You fool, we'll be killed off like sheep! Why

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(Continued from page 103)

didn't you hurry when I called you?"

"I couldn't simply walk off and leave things up in the air for twenty-four hours," Claridge said in that nervous manner of his. "What is this scheme of yours, anyhow?"

CHIEF NEGLEY replied for the banker.

"Mr. Corsener thinks it safer for you three gentlemen to retire to the safety deposit vault downstairs until tomorrow, or until such time as we get word from Simon Stigler who is after the main criminal who is behind all these bloody crimes. The vault has been fitted up with a table and comfortable chairs, food and drink, and three cots for you to sleep on. The ventilating system is working, and there is a communicating telephone for your use. We have promised to put a cordon of police around the vault, leaving you men safely locked up until Stigler brings in the arch criminal, or until you three signify your wish to be released."

"That is an absurd idea," Claridge said promptly.

"Absurd or not, we're going to do it," Corsener declared sourly. "I don't know what's behind all this, but I don't want to die—and I want you and Waltham with me until we *know* we're safe."

"Come on and be a sport, Claridge," said Waltham. "There might be something to Eli Corsener's idea at that."

The lawyer capitulated. The entire group filed down to the vaults in the basement.

At the entrance to the safe deposit vault, Claridge halted and made a suggestion.

"Since we're going to all this precaution," he said acidly, "how about searching us before we get locked up together? Who knows—locked

up like that, we might get to accusing each other. God knows the whole business is mysterious enough for *anybody* to be accused."

Corsener scowled at him, but promptly agreed. Waltham demurred, but finally shrugged and submitted to a casual frisking at the hands of the police chief. Then all three of them entered the vault. After another check on the ventilating system and the telephone, the foot treads were removed, and the huge circular vault door swung to. The bolts were shot, and the heavy wheel controlling the combination was spun.

"Whew!" breathed Negley, wiping his forehead. "I'm glad that's over with. Hope they *don't* get to biting at each other."

Placing a police operative on the switchboard, and another down in the basement with a phone headset, Negley posted a guard of six officers around the front of the deposit vault.

That, with a minor official of the bank on hand to unlock the vault if need be, or if the three prisoners demanded exit, was all he could do.

Leaving the bank, Chief Negley went back to the job of mopping up the final details of the street battle that morning. And he drew a relieved breath for the first time in weeks.

The larger newspapers of the nation were carrying extras of the affair.

The Phantom received another wire from the New Yorker who signed his name, "Frank," but it remained undelivered. For the Phantom had disappeared.

At the bank, the police operative called the three imprisoned men in the vault every fifteen minutes and got an okay from them. Things remained like this until one minute after three in the early morning.



Just sixty seconds after the operative got an okay from the vault, the switchboard light from there flashed, and the vibrator whirled like a rattlesnake. The operator clamped on the headset.

A scream sounded in his ears, a sound that the surrounding officers could hear. Then came another man's voice—Claridge's, speaking in swift accents.

"Let us out of here!" he called. "Quick!"

"Get Chief Negley over here," yelled the man with the telephone to some of the guards. "Open that vault!" he directed the suddenly white-faced bank official. "Yes, yes, we are unlocking the vault," he called into the mouthpiece. "What's happened?"

But he got no answer. The line was dead.

The vault having earlier been disconnected from the time lock device, was unlocked and the door was being tugged wide open as Chief Negley came tumbling down the stairs.

A weird scene met their gaze. Leaning against the bank of deposit boxes on one side was Eli Corsener, president of the bank. His face was white, his eyes staring in horror. On the floor lay Thomas Waltham, face livid, eyes staring vacantly. His left hand was clawing at his collar. On one knee beside the stricken man was John Claridge, obviously attempting to render first aid.

But it seemed apparent at a glance to the advancing police that there was no earthly aid for Thomas Waltham.

John Claridge began explaining. "Nothing was wrong. Nothing happened. About five minutes to three Waltham complained that he'd scratched himself somehow, but he seemed all right until right after that last call from outside. Then he

(Continued on page 106)

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*(Continued from page 105)*

began to choke and gasp for breath. I called for help, but—but he seems to be dead."

"Yeah," snorted Negley, entering. "And that makes a monkey outa whom?"

Examination showed there was nothing wrong with the air in the vault. All three men had eaten and drunk the same foods and bottled drinks. It was eerie and perplexing.

THEN Eli Corsener came to life.

"You did it!" he screamed, shaking his fist at John Claridge. "You are the man back of all these crimes! You have arranged all these deaths. You came to me with your damn scheme to form the Massey Pool. You got us all to put in two hundred thousand dollars while you only put in fifty thousand, and claimed that the other one hundred and fifty thousand was part of your share for the services you rendered us all in forming the pool. You are the man who dug up that Massey fellow with his invention of a carburetor for a motor car that would run on hydrogen. You—"

"Hey, hold everything!" said Chief Negley, motioning to one of his men to get busy with his shorthand notebook and pencil.

John Claridge was still kneeling, his body blocking off the body of Waltham that lay at his feet. He was staring at the accusing bank president with straining eyes, cringing.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Corsener," he said nervously. "You've gone mad. I never heard of a Massey Pool. You tricked Waltham and me into getting into this vault with you. You—"

"Don't lie like that!" interrupted Corsener excitedly. "You know well enough who Massey is! You found him—the man who had plans for a

motor that would run on hydrogen gas." He swung his eyes around to include the police in his remarks. "We bought it from him cheaply. He perfected a carburetor that would separate water by electrolysis into oxygen and hydrogen, using hydrogen for power. You, Claridge—you demonstrated the machine that night months ago in your home. We all realized what it would mean if we revealed the secret. It would ruin the sale of gasoline all over the world. You were looking for men with money. You got them—Overby, president of the Acme Food Company; Martin, of Best Welt Shoes; Creighton who held so much stock in the Makon Second National Bank and other banks; Waltham, too—You got Overby, Martin, Waltham and all the rest of us in for two hundred thousand dollars in a secret pool."

"Why a secret pool?" demanded Negley, who had been listening intently.

"Because we couldn't let the car manufacturers and oil companies know about it too soon," Corsener said quickly. "And listen to this, Chief Negley! We all were to share alike. If one of us died, his two hundred thousand was to go to the others!" He glared at John Claridge. "And you, Claridge, you've murdered us one by one so you could keep the plans and our money for yourself!" His voice rose. "You damn killer!"

"Wait a minute!" Claridge's voice suddenly grew strong and commanding, as he waved back the police who had started for him. "You are very clever, Corsener! In fact, you possess surprisingly complete information regarding what has been going on. Tell me just how I killed Waltham?"

"That scratch he got!" cried the bank president excitedly. "Take off his coat, Negley! It's my guess



you'll find that a needle—a hypodermic needle—has been stuck into him. A needle filled with something so deadly it acted almost instantaneously. The autopsy will show!"

"All right, Negley," said Claridge carelessly. "Have your men put the cuffs on Corsener. There is only one man could have known about that needle. The killer!"

At a nod from Chief Negley, the hesitating policemen snapped handcuffs on Eli Corsener's wrists. The bank president was fuming and storming as he saw the looks that passed between the chief of police and John Claridge. And a great light burst upon him.

"You're not Claridge!" he shouted.

"No. But you know me just the same."

"The Phantom!" yelled Corsener. "This is another of your clever makeup tricks!"

"The second time you're a good guesser, Corsener," said the Phantom. "This time you're right, too. John Claridge is safe at home. I merely took his place here. I was a little afraid to trust him here. He isn't as good an actor as Waltham."

He touched the body on the floor with his foot, and grinned down.

"You can get up now, Waltham. Show's over. You won't have to attend your own autopsy tonight."

A scream came from Eli Corsener and even the hard-boiled police fell back, staring with bulging eyes as the supposed dead man scrambled to his feet and looked about sheepishly. He, too, grinned, but his grin was wiped off as he glanced at Eli Corsener. He took one step toward the man who had wanted to kill him, but the Phantom's strong hand held him back.

"The law will attend to him, Waltham," Van said firmly. "There's been enough illegal bloodshed."

"Whew!" said Chief Negley. "So  
(Continued on page 108)

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(Continued from page 107)

that's what you've been doing since you disappeared. Staging all this. You didn't let me know all you were planning to do. But tell me—"

"Knowing what I did about the Massey pool, Negley," Van explained, "something you had no opportunity of knowing, but the details of which you have just heard Corsener explain, my investigation of all those who have been killed, aside from those who were shot down in the robberies, finally narrowed itself down to the three men in the pool who are still alive. I was at a loss, at first, because the clue of the blue buttonhole flower was so cleverly planted on poor, crippled Henry Boyle that it seemed to throw suspicion away from any of the three.

"But as I went further into the case, always it came back to those three. I went after them, one at a time, without their vaguely guessing it. Certain things I learned about Waltham convinced me that he could not possibly be the planner of the crimes, or have anything to do with them. As for Claridge—he was too nervous and excitable to be a cold-blooded killer. The night I surreptitiously entered his house and learned about the Massey pool, I was given unquestionable evidence of that."

The Phantom smiled a little reminiscently and went on.

"So after the gang clean-up, I laid my plans to get the man whose brains had planned for those dead gangsters. I had more to go on than Corsener could imagine, at that. It was not merely a wild guess on my part that made me think an attempt on Waltham's life would be made tonight, in the particular way it was done. Corsener would have been astonished if he had known he had a midnight visitor to his private office in the bank a night or two ago—myself.

"You can realize the difficulty of such a visit, under ordinary circumstances. But don't forget that I was a rather privileged character around that bank, quite *persona grata* with its president. Little attention, if any, was paid to my comings and goings. When the time came, therefore, I was able to hide myself in the coat closet in Corsener's private office—"

The Phantom laughed.

"Another few inches' reach of his fingers when he took out his hat would have touched me," he said. "It was a break for me that it is warm weather, and that Corsener keeps his office closet full of a variety of coats for all occasions—none of which he needed in such weather. But I will admit it was a little difficult for me to hide my big feet behind a golf bag."

He glanced down ruefully at the heavy brogans he wore in his rôle of Simon Stigler; shoes that would never be found in the correct row of footgear in the closet of Richard Curtis Van Loan.

**B**UT immediately Van was deadly serious again. His lips tightened grimly a moment before he opened them to speak accusingly.

"What I found in Corsener's office told me that he was planning murder again—and how it was to be done! As plainly as if he had left written explanations beside his murder weapon. For it *was* a murder weapon; a deadly one. In a moment you will see it.

"After that discovery, I took both Waltham and Claridge into my confidence—and how they cooperated you have just seen."

Again he smiled but it was wryly.

"If Corsener will think back, he will remember it was I who first casually put this vault idea into his head. But it was a good scheme, and he grabbed at it. He must have



been wondering just how he could best put his murder scheme into effect, and here it was right at his hand! A chance to get rid of both Waltham and Claridge in one fell swoop. I wanted him to make his murder try in that vault, so that I would be sure to be on hand. Otherwise, should it be tried at some other time and place of which I had no knowledge, there would be no way in which I could have saved Claridge and Waltham."

Corsener was glaring at the Phantom, and murder was again in the cold eyes of the bank president; this time undisguised.

Van reached into a side pocket of his coat and drew forth an object that glittered in the electric light. It was a hypodermic needle, the glass container empty, save for a few drops of some clear liquid.

"Just what I thought," said the Phantom. "Corsener dropped this into my pocket after he thought he had murdered Waltham with it. That's why he accused me, thinking I was the real Claridge, of being the chief criminal. With Waltham and all the other members of the Massey pool dead, and Claridge framed and perhaps eventually executed for their murders, then Corsener would have all the money for himself.

"You see, Negley"—Van held up the little syringe—"this is what I found in Corsener's desk that night. This, and a small vial of a deadly poison that looked like water. Because of my laboratory studies and research into various poisons, I was able to identify the contents of that vial, by its smell, and by certain reactions when I tested a drop of it.

"I emptied the vial and refilled it, carefully replacing vial and hypodermic syringe *exactly* as I had found them. But I am sure Waltham benefited more by his water hypo than he would have had the

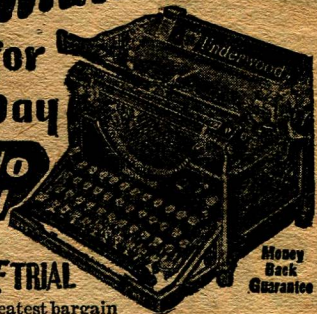
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(Continued from page 109)

syringe been filled with what Corsener thought he put in it.

"That Corsener loves the dramatic and prides himself on his efficiency is plain. That was his undoing. For when I found nothing incriminating in his desk or anywhere else in the room, I was not surprised. I was certain that he would lean toward secret compartments or receptacles—and I was not mistaken. I found one cunningly hidden in a desk leg.

"And the whole scheme was plain to me. I made my arrangements with Waltham and Claridge as soon as I left the bank in the morning. Which was easily accomplished. Merely a matter of casually strolling out before Corsener arrived."

"But if all Corsener was interested in was killing off the others in this Massey pool," Chief Negley asked, puzzled, "why the tieup with Frenchie Dubois? The crime school and all that?"

"That was the cleverest part of the whole setup," said the Phantom. "Here is the way I visualize the thing. Corsener evidently contacted Dubois, and because he must have had some deadly knowledge to hold over the gambler's head, not only forced the man to do his bidding, but convinced him that the idea of the crime school was perfect.

"Especially when the members of that crime school were killers who had been in hiding in various parts of the country, knowing they were due for hanging or the electric chair as soon as their money was gone. Corsener had Frenchie collect them, as Dubois could, with his knowledge of the underworld. They were only too glad to do Corsener's bidding—through Frenchie—in exchange for protection and part of the spoils of the robberies in which they participated.

"One of the particularly smart



tricks which Corsener must have pulled, and obviously he did, was to have slight operations performed on all their faces, so that in a general way they looked alike. Faces may be changed; yes. But fingerprints don't lie. And the fingerprints of all those bandits now in the city morgue correspond with those of wanted killers—though they would never be recognized by their photographs.

"They never knew who Corsener, their 'benefactor', was. I doubt that even Frenchie himself ever knew the actual identity of Corsener. I believe Dubois told us the truth about that, just before he died."

"What did Corsener get through this angle?" asked Chief Negley.

"Two things. First, he must have received a good share of every bank robbery and holdup that Dubois' gang staged. Second, the apparent tieup with these crimes and the men who were murdered afterward—men who could be thought to be the planners of the robberies of their own banks or firms, and who had been killed by doublecrossing accomplices—was a good cover-up for Corsener. It was not until I found the list of the men who were members of the Massey Pool and discovered that three of them had already been murdered that I understood this angle."

"How about the intended blowing up of the bank Dubois told us about?" Negley asked. "Corsener was there himself, wasn't he?"

Van smiled. "Don't worry, Negley. He wasn't really taking any chances. He was in the back of the building in his private office, if you remember. The bomb would have demolished only the lobby in the front!"

The Phantom paused and stood gazing sternly at the man who had

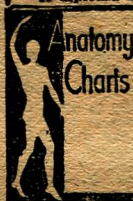
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(Continued from page 111)

been a master of crime; the man who had trained criminals to work in such a ruthless fashion that they even killed each other in order to protect themselves.

"You were smart, Corsener," he said. "But not quite smart enough. You gave yourself away on the robbery that was supposed to take place here at your bank. True, they did go after the armored truck that was delivering the paycheck money—but you had no intention of letting them rob your bank. You didn't dare risk that, for it would have meant your losing all you had hoped to gain. The money for the Massey Pool is here in this bank, isn't that true?"

"Yes," said the bank president sullenly.

"And that's why you couldn't take the risk of letting the gangsters rob this bank!" said the Phantom.

"You can't prove it!" shouted Corsener suddenly. "You haven't any actual evidence against me. All that you have said has just been guess work, Phantom."

"Yes," said the Phantom. "But all the same it has been the truth—and clever as you are, you have overlooked some things, Corsener. Just tiny details but one of them is going to send you to the chair!"

"What's that?" shouted the bank president.

"For one thing, your fingerprints are on this hypodermic needle that you dropped into my pocket. And that needle was meant to murder Waltham! You weren't wearing gloves here in the vault and you could not have wiped off your prints without me—and Waltham, too—seeing you do it. And, Corsener, those same fingerprints are on the little flower you so carefully put in Henry Boyle's buttonhole. Probably you didn't think prints would show upon anything so fragile, on a flower that would probably be wilted before the body was found. But they did! We've got you, Corsener!"

"There are several other little points which might interest your analytic mind, too. We'll see what Dorrie Wellman and Pat Moller can reveal about your private life. I already know that you used Moller, without his suspecting it, as your go-between pretty often. That night we met near Dayton you were the only one of the three suspects whose movements were impossible to check. This morning, here in the bank, you misdirected me about the route of the truck.

"But the worst slip you made was when you said that Henry Boyle must be the chief criminal because

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he wore a flower in his buttonhole." The Phantom lashed out the words swiftly. "That was another fatal error, Corsener, because you could not legitimately have known that the chief crook wore a flower that night in Dayton. I never told you that!"

Eli Corsener uttered a choking cry and raised his hand to his mouth. Instantly Van lunged at him, and caught his wrist, but he was too late. The bank president had quickly swallowed something.

"Damn you, Phantom!" snarled Corsener. "I've cheated you after all!"

He grimaced, clutching at his throat and fell writhing on the floor.

"Get a stomach pump!" directed the Phantom swiftly. "You may save him, but I doubt it. Anyway, there's your man, Negley. And let me get out of here before the newspaper reporters barge in."

"By the way," said Chief Negley, "there's another wire for you at Headquarters, Phantom."

"From 'Frank'?" demanded Van, and then as the chief nodded, "I'll answer that one in person. My work is through here."

"Hey, wait!" the police chief called as Van started out of the bank. "You haven't given us a chance to even thank you—"

But the Phantom was gone. He knew that somewhere even now some other sinister forces were weaving their web of crime, that perhaps that wire from Frank Havens might be calling him again into battle against some other diabolical brain who moved the grisly pawn called murder across the vast chessboard of life.

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28x6.00-18	3.40	1.50	30x3.50-18	3.45	1.50	32x3.50-18	3.95	1.70	34x3.50-18	3.95	1.70
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28x6.00-20	3.40	1.50	30x3.50-20	3.45	1.50	32x3.50-20	3.95	1.70	34x3.50-20	3.95	1.70
28x6.00-21	3.40	1.50	30x3.50-21	3.45	1.50	32x3.50-21	3.95	1.70	34x3.50-21	3.95	1.70
28x6.50-17	3.75	1.75	30x3.50-17	3.80	1.75	32x3.50-17	4.30	1.85	34x3.50-17	4.30	1.85
28x6.50-18	3.75	1.75	30x3.50-18	3.80	1.75	32x3.50-18	4.30	1.85	34x3.50-18	4.30	1.85
28x6.50-19	3.75	1.75	30x3.50-19	3.80	1.75	32x3.50-19	4.30	1.85	34x3.50-19	4.30	1.85
28x6.50-20	3.75	1.75	30x3.50-20	3.80	1.75	32x3.50-20	4.30	1.85	34x3.50-20	4.30	1.85
28x6.50-21	3.75	1.75	30x3.50-21	3.80	1.75	32x3.50-21	4.30	1.85	34x3.50-21	4.30	1.85

#### HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES

(High Pressure)

Size Wm. Tires Size Wm. Tires

30x8.00-20 4.25 1.75 32x8.00-20 4.25 1.75

30x8.00-21 4.25 1.75 32x8.00-21 4.25 1.75

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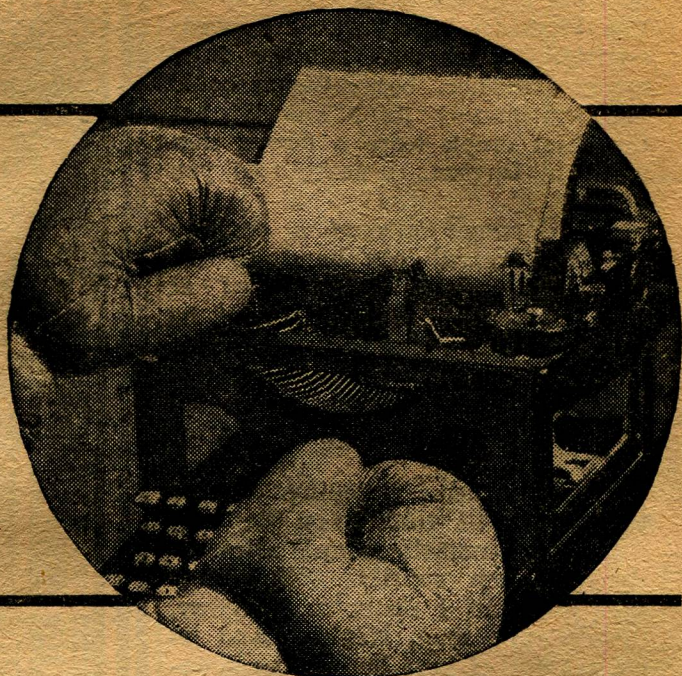
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30x8.00-112 4.25 1.75 32x8.00-112 4.25 1.75



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| <input type="checkbox"/> Building Estimating       | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph Engineer                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Heating <input type="checkbox"/> Ventilation        | <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge and Building Foreman                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contractor and Builder    | <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone Work <input type="checkbox"/> Radio | <input type="checkbox"/> Air Conditioning and Cooling                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy      |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineer       | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Draftsman                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Electric Engineer                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Mine Foreman <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Bombs |
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- |  |   |  |  |
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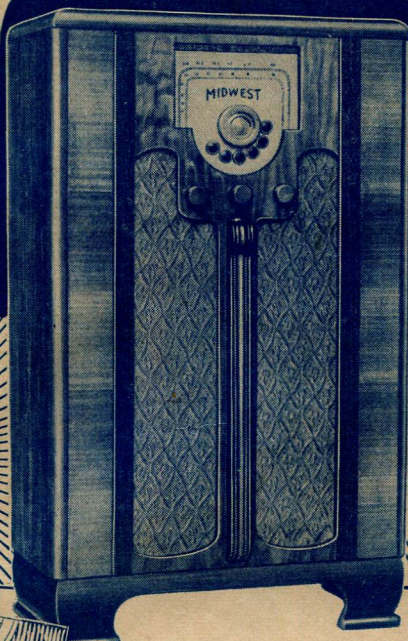
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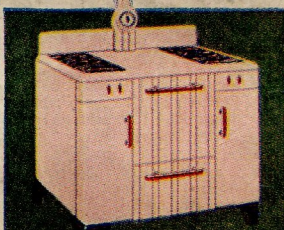
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