The Phantom Detective

The Deadly Diamonds
A Full-Length Mystery Novel
By ROBERT WALLACE

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A COMPLETE NOVEL

The Deadly Diamonds
by Robert Wallace

While pursuing a gem thief czar whose schemes are cloaked by respectability, the Phantom takes a death-strewn trail to the core of a sinister murder maze!

A MYSTERY NOVELET

OBITUARY COLUMN
Norman A. Daniels
Perhaps the great industrialist wasn't really dead at all, but then if that should be the case—who was being buried, anyway?

SHORT STORIES

NO BARKING DOG
Roger Dee
There were two brief cases, and one of them held a big fortune

THE MAN WHO VANISHED
Amelia Reynolds Long
Can an ancient Egyptian curse really make a person disappear?

MAN BAIT
Robert Sidney Bowen
As if by magic, a dead killer comes back to haunt a detective

HANGMAN'S KNOT
O. B. Myers
It was obviously a case of suicide—yet anything but obvious!

A DEPARTMENT

THE PHANTOM SPEAKS
The Phantom
Including announcements, club news and letters from readers
YOU CAN'T LOSE!

HAVE A PROFIT MAKING BUSINESS
OF YOUR OWN

A LIFETIME FUTURE
Man or woman—young or old, YOU can earn a steady income in full or part time as an independent Kendex dealer. And almost "impossible" earnings can become a reality for you. Herbert Armstrong of Tenn. earned $202 in 9 days. C. O. Watkins of Oregon sent 92 orders in one day. You have the same opportunity to duplicate these exceptional earnings. Over one million dollars will be earned in 1950 by Kendex dealers—why not let us establish you in your own business and get a share of these wonderful earnings?

KENDEX NYLONS REPLACED FREE...

If they run or snag within guarantee period up to three months! Impossible! It's true! No matter what the cause—hard use or deliberate abuse—whether it is fault of the hose or the wearer—Kendex nylons are replaced FREE if they run, snag or become unfit for wear within the guarantee period. How could any woman resist a positive guarantee of satisfaction when she can obtain it without paying anything more than other standard advertised brands? Kendex nylons are NOT sold in stores, so you have no competition. Complete line includes everything from heavy 70 denier service weight to gossamer luxurious ultra sheer 15 denier 60 gauge. Proportioned sizes and lengths. Latest colors plus white.

LINGERIE - ROBES - HOUSECOATS - MEN'S HOSE

In addition to the sensational Kendex nylons, you will have a complete line of glamorous lingerie, beautiful robes and housecoats plus a complete line of Kentcraft men's hosiery guaranteed for one full year. Any pair or pairs of men's hose that does not give satisfactory wear within one year of purchase will be replaced FREE!

NATIONALLY ADVERTISED

Kendex will spend over $50,000.00 in 1950 to tell millions of readers of the advantages in buying from you. Almost every issue of Good Housekeeping, Saturday Evening Post, McCall's, Women's Home Companion and Ladies' Home Journal carry our advertising in addition to many others. Kendex has advertised in Life, Look, Collier's, etc. Awarded Good Housekeeping Seal. Thousands of orders are shipped daily from coast to coast.

EVERYTHING GIVEN FREE

Risk nothing! Mail coupon and we will send you free and prepaid, complete money-making outfits including sample nylon stocking, samples of lingerie, robes, housecoats and men's hose fabrics and everything you need to immediately start making money. Complete outfits become your property even if you don't send any business. Simply write orders, we deliver and collect. Advance cash plus huge bonus. No money or experience needed. Mail the coupon is all you need to start on the road to a 52-weeks-of-the-year high paying business of your own. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose.

KENDEX COMPANY
BABYLON, N.Y.

Date: 1950

Send me, free and prepaid, everything I need to make money as a Kendex dealer, including sample stocking etc. There is nothing for me to pay now or later and I am under no obligation in accepting your money-making outfits.

Name: ____________________________

Address: __________________________

City: __________________ State: ______
STEVE HUSTON was under the impression that he was going to spend an uneventful vacation in his old home town of Wainboro, New York, when he took a few weeks off from his job with The New York Clarion to revisit the sights and scenes of his early newspaper career. As soon as he renewed acquaintance with Jeff Markham, editor of The Wainboro Gazette, where Huston had spent his cub reporter days, however, he realized that he was in for quite a different vacation than he had expected.

Huston, with his big city background, hoped to be able to assist Markham with a problem of political graft and corruption that was threatening to throttle the town, but before either Huston or Markham could secure any evidence or other tangible results, Markham was found dead in his automobile in the parking lot of the famous Flagship roadhouse.

That is the dramatic opening of The Phantom Detective case that has been written up by Robert Wallace for the next issue as "Homicide Town." It is the information that came to me in New York from Frank Havens, and which prompted me to head for Wainboro without delay to assist Steve Huston in discovering the killer of his friend Markham.

Roiling Undercurrents

As you may well imagine, there were many undercurrents in the small town that may be more roily and disturbing than the trends in a big city. The jealousies and hates of certain individuals appeared to be much sharper and more cruel, and the challenge flung at law and order by certain forces was just as sinister and just as menacing as anything that big city crime could conjure up.

Some of the difficulty in handling the Government of Wainboro was due to the war years. A number of the factories in the town had been given tremendous war orders and there was an influx of workers that swelled the normal population of the town to several times its usual size.

Some form of amusement had to be supplied for these people, and this was the background which supplied the sudden upheaval of the political machine, and the honeycomb of graft that was now top-heavy with the closing down of war plants, the migration of itinerant workers and the lower buying power of the people of the town. It is not a situation that was peculiar to Wainboro; it was duplicated in scores of other towns and cities throughout the United States.

Big city racketeers faced with such a setup would probably have turned their talents to other enterprises with a more modern touch. But the sinister crime overlord who had his talons enmeshed in the people and government of Wainboro was under the impression that there was still a good deal of money to be squeezed out of the town. He tried to do it with a chain of bars, dance halls, liquor stores and lush gambling places like The Flagship, but the money just wasn’t there.

A Tycoon of Terror

Markham’s interest, through his newspaper, had been in the new elections coming up, for he hailed the opportunity to put in a new city administration that would refuse to deal with the grafters, and until his untimely murder it looked as though he might accomplish really satisfactory results for the good people of Wainboro. But so many crusades have been known to fall to pieces because a militant leader has been struck down. When I realized this, it became my task to support Steve Huston as the new leader in the fight; and my duty to uncover the crime overlord, who was not opposed to knives and guns as weapons to gain his ends.

One of the first things I discovered was
that the mysterious tycoon of terror was a mystery man known as Adam Smith. There were dozens of people who had done business with Adam Smith over a period of almost ten years, but without exception, none of them would admit knowing just who he was.

The suspicions of Steve Huston and myself narrowed down to three people after preliminary investigation, but picking the coiled rattler out of the triumvirate was a task that demanded all of my detective skill, and assembling the evidence that was going to force this tricky tyrant into his just punishment was a task that was a real challenge to all the skill of The Phantom Detective.

The mysterious Adam Smith was one of the most ruthless individuals I have ever encountered, not only ruthless with the men he marked as his victims on the political stage, but also in his dealings with his own henchmen who were forced by various circumstances to carry out his cruel orders.

Restoration of a Town

I discovered this on the very first day of my arrival in Wainboro, aptly named "Homicide Town."

The mystery man had already heard of my interest in the case in some devious way, and when I went to meet Steve Huston at his hotel, a group of Adam Smith's cronies were there to give me a warm reception. But they did not count upon the native cleverness of Steve Huston, who was able to give me a veiled warning when I called up from the hotel desk to announce my arrival. From this moment forward, however, the action moved fast and furious in "Homicide Town," and I can readily admit now that the case is closed, that there were times when I considered that "Homicide Town" might well be the last stop on my journey of life, and that the mysterious Adam Smith might well be the final adversary I would face.

Robert Wallace has done an excellent job of presenting the story of graft and corruption in Wainboro in "Homicide Town," and I think you'll find that the way in which this community was restored to the hands of the respectable and law-abiding people was one that might well serve as an example to other plagued communities.

It is a pleasure for me to know that I am helping out the people who are the great backbone of this country of ours, and in

[Turn page]
"Homicide Town" I was privileged to work with a good many of those folks who are memorialized in that popular tune, "Dear Hearts and Gentle People." I'm sure you'll find that "Homicide Town" is a dramatic crime chase with a satisfying climax, but it is also a fascinating chronicle of the struggle of real folks to live a clean and pleasing life. It is all in "Homicide Town" in the next issue of THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE!

Become a

FRIEND OF THE PHANTOM

THE membership lists of our reader group are growing with each issue, and we sincerely believe that this is a tangible evidence of the moral fibre of the great cross-section of the American people. It is a heartening demonstration, and we are more than glad to be able to foster it.

FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM is an organization of our readers which has constantly stressed the importance of cooperation with our duly-elected and appointed law-enforcement authorities, and the fact that people in all parts of the country and in all walks of life are associating themselves with our group indicates that they are wholeheartedly in favor of the principles we advocate.

If you are not already a member of FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM, we will be glad to welcome you into our ever-widening circle. Simply send along a letter or a post card indicating interest in becoming a member. State your name, address, age, and sex. The application note should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope to be used to forward your membership card. When your application is here we will act upon it immediately and see that your credentials are sent to you without delay.

Some of our members have expressed a desire to have some more tangible sign of their association than the membership card, and for these good people we have provided an attractive bronzed replica of the Phantom Badge which may be had upon request. The badge is not required for membership, but if you wish to have one, it may be secured for a nominal charge of fifteen cents in stamps or coins to cover the cost of mailing and handling.

In order that there may be no misappe-
hension among new members, we would like to point out at this time that membership in FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM does not give you any police powers, nor does it extend to you any special privileges with regard to official police groups. Our intent in FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM is to sponsor an organization that creates and maintains a moral force to aid in the work of official police groups of your City, State and the Federal Government.

OUT OF THE MAIL BAG

WITH this issue we have a variety of correspondence from our many readers throughout the world, and we are selecting examples of those that have a wide appeal. Our first letter in this category comes from the French Legion in Indo-China.

Dear Phantom: I have a copy of The PHANTOM DETECTIVE which I've read about six times already, and I sure enjoyed following you in your case of "The Diamond Killers." I am at present serving in the French Foreign Legion, stationed in French Indo-China. I am an Australian, twenty-two years old. I wish to become a member of the Friends of the Phantom, so will you kindly send me the badge and membership card?—Talies Basil, 9th Company, SP 53,343, B.C.M.C., T.O.E. (via Paris).

Glad to hear from you, Legionnaire Basil, and you should have your membership card

(Continued on page 127)
Jerry Recaptured the Lion and Then...

On an overnight hop to the next town, Young Jerry Hunter's small traveling circus suddenly loses one of its major attractions...

Hey, look! Rajah's loose!

Mary Peters had heard that anything can happen on opening day of bass season, but this is too much!

Rajah, you toothless old fraud? What's the idea scaring folks?

He's harmless, Miss. Got away from our circus.

I'm still allergic to lions!

Our garage will hold him until you can get his cage.

I'll send for it now if I may use your phone?

Certainly.

You must be starved after tramping around all night, may I get you a snack?

Sounds great! Would you mind if we clean up too?

Here is my brother's razor and some blades.

What a smooth shaving blade! My face never felt better.

A thin Gillette shave always gives me a lift.

Then you'll come to our show tonight?

I'd love to!

He's better looking than I thought.

You get easy, refreshing shaves in jiffytime with Thin Gillettes. Far keener than ordinary low-priced blades, Thin Gillettes last longer, so you save money. What's more, they fit your Gillette razor to a T...

Protect you from nicks and irritation. Ask for Thin Gillettes in the 10-blade pack with used blade compartment.

Gillette 10-25¢ 4-10¢

New ten-blade package has compartment for used blades.
A Novel by ROBERT WALLACE

The Phantom pursues a gem thief czar whose evil schemes are cloaked by smug respectability!

The DEADLY DIAMONDS

CHAPTER I
ATTACK IN THE NIGHT

THE ELEGANCE of the Club Peacock was hardly noticed by the crowd filling its plush interior. Scarlet coated waiters hovered around their tables, captains presented menus and wine lists with a flourish and the stately headwaiters politely pocketed the gratuities slipped into their eager palms by those who wanted, and were willing to pay for, select tables.
Richard Curtis Van Loan Follows a Death-Strewn

The backdrop to the orchestra and floor show was an enormous Peacock set, with the spreading tail of the bird set in fake gems that were both eye catching and dazzling.

Corks popped every few moments for this was a champagne drinking crowd. Acrid tobacco smoke hovered like a cloud throughout the place. Evening gowns and black ties far outnumbered business suits and ordinary dresses. At each table, patrons laughed and talked in various degrees of loudness depending upon the number of bottles which had been consumed.

This wasn’t a place that Richard Curtis Van Loan frequented very often, even though he could well afford it. But tonight was an exception, both in being here and in dancing every other dance with the woman who was his guest.

For her, Van Loan would have gone to almost any sacrifice. The kick she was getting out of the place well repaid him for coming.

She wasn’t much like the elegantly gowned, carefully made-up women. Her gown was probably more expensive than any there, her jewels carried the sparkle of authenticity, but no amount of makeup could have covered the wrinkles that came with sixty-odd years of life.

Van Loan pulled a chair from the table and helped her into it. He was puffing slightly. He walked around the table, sat down and leaned over to put a hand on one of the withered ones resting on the white cloth.

“Well, Martha,” he asked, “what do you think of it?”

When she smiled, all of her joined in. “Van, it’s wonderful. I know it’s trite to say I like visiting New York, and I do, but you couldn’t give me the place as a steady diet.”

He grinned broadly. “There’s more to New York than swank night clubs, Martha.”

“I daresay, but nothing quite as much fun, eh, Van? You know,” she grew serious, “I owe you a great deal for sacrificing yourself to an old has-been like me.”

HE GAVE a derisive snort. “I don’t see you puffing, Martha, and I’ve been winded for the last half an hour. Incidentally, I doubt there are a pair of eyes which haven’t scrutinized you.”

“And wondered about the old lady snatching a handsome young man like you from some cradle, perhaps?”

“No, I won’t believe that, Martha. But those jewels you’re wearing. Especially that necklace. Is it all diamonds?”

“I’m afraid so, Van,” she smiled. “You see, vanity is not dissipated by age. I’m no longer attractive—like an eighteen-year-old—but I can get my attention by wearing jewels.”

“You could summon attention in a house dress,” Van Loan told her with a chuckle. “I’m mighty proud to be your escort.”

“Baloney—to be inelegant,” she said. “But you do look tired and I’m to be in town another week. Think you can take it, Van?”

“With you—yes. Martha, my father must have had a devil of a job deciding between you and my mother.”

For one fleeting moment the old lady’s eyes misted. “I don’t think so, Van. We could have made a go of it—yes. But not the same go he and your mother made. I’m not resentful. I’ve had a good life. Now let’s stop being serious, have another dance and then go home.”

Van Loan laughed. “Oh, but I’m afraid you don’t understand our hours in New York, Martha. It’s almost two and the orchestra is through playing.”

She looked around, bird-like. “Oh, pshaw! I had an idea they never stopped. Well, if it’s almost two, I think perhaps we had better go. Though I don’t want to.”

“Rugged,” Van Loan whispered in her
Trail to the Heart of a Sinister Murder Maze!

ear as he helped her on with her cape, "is the word for Martha."

They walked out between bowing waiter captains, told the head waiter they’d had a wonderful time and they were passing through the ornate bar when Van Loan heard his name called. He looked around.

A slim man with a thin blond mustache, sat in a glassed-in booth. The door was open now and he was beckoning Van. It was a radio broadcasting unit set up in the bar for recorded programs that lasted far into the night.

Van Loan said, "Martha, I have a great idea. How’d you like to say hello to the folks back home?"

"What are you talking about, Van?" she asked.

"Over there—that fellow calling us. He’s Dell Folen who conducts a nightly broadcast. He plays records, answers questions over the ’phone and interviews celebrities."

"Why Van, of course I’d like to say something. Though there’s hardly a chance of anyone back home being up at this hour. Come on—I’m not going to miss a single thing."

Dell Folen had a record playing. He let them in and closed the door. "You can talk in a normal voice," he said. "I’ve got the mike shut off, except the pickup for the disc player. Saw you two having a high old time in there. Who’s your new girl, Mr. Van Loan?"

Van chuckled. "Her name is Martha Omley, an old and dear friend. Don’t kid yourself, son, she could rumba the legs off you and me and ten more like us."

Dell Folen pushed a desk microphone toward Martha. "Soon as this record is finished, we’ll have a little interview, eh?"

"If you like, young man." Martha beamed. It was clear how much she enjoyed this.

Dell Folen said, "I attended the tennis tournament this afternoon, Mr. Van Loan. You were—to put it mildly—great."

"Thanks," Van Loan nodded. "It was a good game."

"So—you played tennis all afternoon, took me to dinner, the theatre and night clubbing," Martha snorted. "No wonder you practically gave out on me."

THEY laughed. Folen switched on the mike, eyed the turntable and when it stopped, he said, "Lady and Gentlemen Night Owls, I’ve something a little different for you. Here, in the booth at the Club Peacock, is Richard Van Loan, prominent society sportsman. What, you say? Society sportsmen are a dime a dozen. Not exactly, my friends. Not many can equal Mr. Van Loan, but then—the lady with him is even more interesting. She is . . . well, no lady likes to tell her age."

Martha spoke into the mike as if she’d done it every day of her life. "Nonsense."
Before a woman is sixty she keeps quiet about her age. After that, she brags. I'm sixty-eight and I don't feel it."

"Nor look it," Dell Folen agreed. "How do you like New York, Mrs. Omley? Mrs. Martha Omley of—Where was that place again?"

"Smith Falls, Maryland," Martha said promptly. "And I hope someone there is listening so I will have proof I stayed up until two in the morning."

There was more of it—perhaps ten minutes. Then Van Loan thanked the disc jockey and took Martha's arm. Folen was already announcing the next recorded number.

"In honor of a mighty gallant lady, we'll hear The Barclay Stomp. It's a little hot, very young and full of bounce. That's how Mrs. Martha Omley happens to be."

Outside the club, she clung to Van's arm while the doorman went for Van Loan's convertible. When it pulled up before the place, Van helped her in. He got behind the wheel and pulled onto the cross street, over which little traffic was moving.

"Van," she said quietly, "I'm having the time of my life. Thanks to you. Everyone knows you, don't they?"

"Oh, I doubt that, Martha. But I'm glad you're having a good time. Now it's home and to bed for you." He sighed deeply. "And me!"

She talked about his father during the twenty minute ride. Finally they pulled up before the quietly dignified hotel, near the East River, where Martha was registered.

Van Loan helped her out and they stood at the curb for a moment. She was breathing deeply.

"Why do they say New York air isn't wholesome?" she demanded. "I can almost smell the ripening hay from—from somewhere."

"At this time of the night it isn't too bad," Van Loan admitted. "I think it's quite possible—"

He stopped short, looking suddenly cold-eyed over Martha's left shoulder.

"What is it, Van?" she asked, recognizing his change of attitude.

"Probably nothing," he told her. "Two men."

Van suddenly took Martha's arm and started moving her fast toward the hotel, but he had waited an instant too long. The men, rough looking, not well dressed, had already blocked the way.

"Take it easy," one of them said and lifted a hand out of his pocket. It held a gun. "This is a stickup, but nobody gets hurt."

"You'll get hurt," Martha cried. "You're not taking my jewels away from me. I've learned to fight."

A hairy paw reached for her throat. Martha swung the small handbag she carried, skirted the man before her and headed for the doorway, yelling for help as she did so.

But Martha was sixty-eight, the gunman not half that. He overtook her in two leaps, seized her shoulder and spun her around. Again she tried to hit him with the handbag. The gunman growled something, brought up a fist in a short, powerful punch and slapped her on the point of the jaw. She hurtled backwards and fell heavily. He was bending over her in half a second, fingers ripping at the necklace, the bracelet and tearing the rings off her fingers.

Van Loan leaped as the gunman seized Martha's shoulder. He was facing a gun too, but all thought of personal safety left him. He whirled on the man beside him. One hand gripped the gunman's wrist and gave it an expert twist that brought out the sharp crack of bone and a howl of anguish.

Van Loan hit the man in the stomach. One of the hardest blows he'd ever struck. He was working on the ugly face when the first thug pocketed the gems and leaped into the fight.

This man realized there was no time to lose. He smashed the gun butt down hard. It clipped Van Loan across the back of the head, a viciously hard blow. The sidewalk began spinning in mad circles. There was one crack in the cement which seemed to grow larger and larger until it resembled the Grand Canyon. Then this too began to quiver as if alive.
With Bartram sagging in his grip, the Phantom fired three shots (CHAP. III)
The sidewalk felt rough to his cheek. Van Loan groaned and tried to get the palms of his hands flat against the pavement to push himself up. The gunman whose wrist he'd broken stepped up and delivered a kick to the side of Van Loan's head. The oblivion that followed was deep black and complete.

The last thing Van Loan remembered was the sight of Martha sprawled out on the sidewalk near the hotel entrance.

CHAPTER II

A CASE FOR THE PHANTOM

COUPLE of stitches had been taken in his scalp by the time he woke up and the hotel house physician was applying a light bandage. Van Loan groaned, pressed his temples and tried to remember what had happened. He was in the hotel lobby, lying on a divan. There were people around him and his outraged brain heard the dying wail of a siren. Then he remembered and sat bolt upright.

The spinning stopped after a few seconds. "Martha?" he asked in a dry, cracked voice. "Martha! The lady with me?"

"Just relax," the doctor said. "She's going to be all right."

A bulky man sat down beside Van Loan. "They took her to the hospital. I'm afraid she has a broken jaw, but nothing else of a serious nature."

"Who—are you?" Van Loan demanded.

He was shown a badge. "Lieutenant Johnson, Fifty-First Street Precinct. We got a flash about the stickup and I got it over my car radio."

"Oh," Van Loan said, "I see. Well, there were two of them. One was of average height and build, blue eyes, dark brown hair. Needed a shave. He wore a gray striped coat and brown trousers. Brown shoes, scuffed badly. He was about thirty-six."

Lieutenant Johnson was making rapid notes. "Go on, please," he said.

"He's the man who slug my com-panion and, I suppose, stole her jewels."

Johnson nodded. "He got them all. They always do. Now what about the second man?"


"Good. It should have been his neck," Johnson said. "Those are mighty good descriptions, Mr. Van Loan."

"You know who I am then?" Van asked.

"Yes, the desk clerk recognized you. Any idea how much those gems were worth?"

"None, but it must have been plenty," Van Loan said.

Johnson wagged his head from side to side. "That's the third jewel stickup tonight. There were eleven of them last week, a dozen the week before. For six month's we've had a wave of these jobs. House robberies too."

Van Loan frowned a little. "Yes, I have read about it. What are you fighting, Lieutenant? Some organized gang?"

Johnson shrugged. "Who knows? They are tipped off and know exactly what to go after. Time it perfectly, too. The house robberies are always done when nobody is at home. It's wearing us down, Mr. Van Loan. There are three hundred and fifty detectives prowling the streets, but so far we've had no luck."

"Well, call on me for any kind of help," Van said. "I'll be at the hospital."

"Uh-uh," Lieutenant Johnson said.

"Mrs. Omley was taken to Parkside Hospital, but the intern said nobody could see her until morning. She was unconscious."

"Those inhuman brutes!" Van began.

"Look, Mr. Van Loan; you seem to have a very observant eye. Suppose we take a trip to Headquarters so you can look at some pictures."

"A good idea," Van Loan said. "My car is out front, if they haven't stolen that too."

"No, they don't mess with cars," Johnson said. "Suppose you drive your car
and follow mine downtown."

Van Loan felt dizzy when he stood up, but he brushed aside offers of help and by the time he was settled behind the wheel, his wits were back to normal. There was a white hot rage in his heart that helped to steady him.

For as Richard Curtis Van Loan he hadn’t been able to use all the tricks he knew in fighting men like these two hoodlums. Van Loan was secretly the Phantom Detective who might have stopped this holdup by fast shooting or faster fighting. Because he had to keep his dual identity a secret, he’d been compelled to let these crooks get away with their crime. He did make up his mind, however, that he’d find these men again—and work as the mysterious, hard-hitting Phantom Detective to do it.

At Police Headquarters he was taken to the Identification Division and about two hundred rogue’s gallery pictures were placed before him.

Lieutenant Johnson said, “These are men we suspect. They all have records as jewel thieves and footpads. If you spot either man—and be very certain about it—just sing out. I’ll be over here typing my report.”

Van Loan nodded, sat down and began running through the pictures. There were so many that he wondered if he might be confused. Then he slipped one off the pile and looked at the front and profile views of the shorter man who had slugged Martha.

He dropped this card, as if by accident, and it turned over. On the reverse he read that it was the face of one Kip Bartram, two-time loser. He had been out of prison less than a year, was still on parole and there was an assorted record of minor crimes that began when he was sixteen. There was an address too, which Van Loan memorized.

He didn’t find the other man and he told the lieutenant, in a disappointed voice, that they would have to look elsewhere.

Johnson sighed. “Well, it was a chance in a million. That’ll be all, Mr. Van Loan. I know you must feel rotten after what you’ve been through.”

“I feelrottener when I think of Mrs. Omley,” Van Loan said. “Call on me for anything, Lieutenant. And thanks for what you’ve done.”

Johnson opened the door for him. “Wait until I clap cuffs around those birds before you start thanking me.”

Van Loan returned to his car and drove it to the garage near his apartment. He walked down the street and entered the skyscraper building through a door marked private and which required a key to open. Inside, he stepped into a small, self-operated elevator. It whisked him high above the city to the penthouse.

He let himself in, went straight to the telephone and called the Parkside Hospital. He asked about Martha.

Someone said, “She has recovered consciousness and is in no danger, sir. You may probably see her tomorrow afternoon. But phone first, please.”

Van Loan said, “Thanks very much.” He hung up the phone, arose and walked into a large bedroom. He didn’t even glance out of the picture windows which framed the sleeping city far below.

Instead, he began removing his tuxedo fast. He opened a closet door, stepped inside and tripped a hidden spring that opened a secret door to reveal a spacious dressing room.

Here hung suits of every type, quality and state of wear. There were dozens of hats, all kinds of shoes from gleaming leather riding boots to down-at-the-heel oxfords that were scuffed and dirty.

Van Loan selected a quiet business suit white shirt and sedate tie. He laid the coat across a chair and went over to a triple mirrored dressing table.

On it were rows of creams and bottles of dye. He worked fast, with deft, sure hands. First he changed the color of his hair to a jet black. Next he massaged a cream into his face, neck, hands and arms. It darkened his skin somewhat. He applied a special preparation to his eyebrows, causing them to look fuller and bushier. A pair of very small, finely created bits of metal were inserted in his
nostrils where they lodged comfortably and didn’t interfere with his breathing. These changed the shape of his nose.

There wasn’t much else to be done, but Richard Curtis Van Loan had vanished and in his place was a man of very different appearance. Richard Curtis Van Loan had vanished in a more definite sense than in appearance too. He was now the Phantom Detective.

He was a master at disguise and impersonation. He had to be for his life depended upon keeping his dual identity a secret. As the wealthy, well known society man, Richard Curtis Van Loan, he would have been an open target to those he constantly battled.

Much of the Phantom Detective’s work came through Frank Havens, newspaper publisher, who was constantly in touch with his reporters all over the nation. Sometimes the Phantom Detective learned of crime through other sources. Often he was asked to join in the hunt for some killer. It was rare that crime actually sought him out as it had tonight.

SATISFIED with his disguise, the Phantom strapped on a shoulder harness, slipped a .38 automatic into it. He tucked a compact kit of fine burglar tools into a hip pocket, made sure he had his leather encased badge in his possession.

Then he left the penthouse, rode that same elevator to the ground floor and used the private door as an exit. By this means he could come and go as he liked without incurring any suspicion on the part of the house employees.

He hailed a taxi at the corner and gave an address close to that of Kip Bartram, which he’d seen on the thug’s police record card. Kip Bartram was going to get some extremely fast action.

The Phantom never doubted but that Bartram would be at the address. He was on parole and changing his place of residence could send him back to prison if he failed to report it at once.

The neighborhood where the cab dropped the Phantom was not very prepossessing. Most of the buildings were four-story walkups, rooming houses or cheap hotels. Bartram, it turned out, lived in one of the hotels.

A sleepy night clerk woke up when the Phantom slid a bill across the counter and he promptly provided the number of Kip Bartram’s room. “Thanks,” the Phantom growled. “I knew Kip when.”

The desk clerk wasn’t interested in anything but the bill. The Phantom walked to the elevator and rode the wheezy car with an equally wheezy and rye-aromatic operator.

The rage still burned in the Phantom’s heart. Martha could have been subdued without half killing her. He rather hoped that Kip Bartram would object violently to talking about the stickup.

CHAPTER III

ROOFTOPS

He listened outside Kip Bartram’s door for a moment, but heard only the normal movements of a man unaware that he was about to find himself in a lot of trouble.

The Phantom tried the door gently, found it locked and tapped smartly on the panels. Without the slightest hesitation Kip came to the door, slid back a bolt, turned a key and threw the door wide, as if he expected someone.

For one or two seconds he stared at the man who faced him and then, somewhat uncertainly, tried to close the door. The Phantom pushed Kip back, walked in and closed the door behind him.

“Who were you expecting?” he asked, and there was no hiding the anger that burned through him. This was the man who had attacked and knocked unconscious an old lady who would never have been able to protect the jewels she wore, from a man like this.

“Now wait a minute,” Kip blustered. “I never saw you before in my life. What are you, copper or parole officer?”

“Neither, Bartram,” the Phantom said. “I’ve come for the jewelry you stole earlier tonight.”
Bartram gave a visible start, turned on his heel and walked toward the bed. "Are you crazy?" he exclaimed. "What jewels? I been here all evening. If you don't believe me—"

Bartram suddenly made a dive for the bed, ripped the pillow aside and grabbed the gun hidden beneath it. He whirled with a triumphant cry and then slowly lowered the half raised gun. He stared along the sights of an ugly blue-black automatic.

"Drop it," the Phantom snapped. "Fast!"

"Yeah, okay." Bartram let the gun fall. "Only you're making some kind of a mistake, mister. You scared me. I gotta right to protect myself."

"You haven't any rights at all when it comes to keeping a gun." The Phantom nudged the weapon with his foot until he could bend swiftly and pick it up. "You're on parole, with two years to do for any violation. This gun will get you those two years, plus a couple more for violation of the Sullivan Law pertaining to guns. And on top of that you'll find yourself plastered with about ten years for robbery and assault."

"Who are you?" Bartram demanded. He was showing much less terror than the Phantom expected.

"I'm the Phantom Detective, if that means anything to you."

Now Bartram did show fear, but only for a moment and only in his eyes. "So you're the Phantom," he said coolly. "Well, go ahead and take me in."

"Walk over to that corner, face it, clasp your hands behind your neck and remember that you'll die if you unclasp them."

Bartram shrugged, obeyed and the Phantom started a search of Bartram's person first and then of the room and its contents. A search he knew would be unproductive. If Bartram had those gems of Martha Omley's, he'd have shown an avid fear.

Ten minutes later the Phantom said,
"All right! Get your hat and coat!"

"Hey listen," Bartram pleaded. He looked funny standing there with his hands behind his head. "You got me all wrong. What am I supposed to have done?"

"Get your hat and coat," the Phantom repeated evenly.

Bartram wetted his lips and gulped. He unconsciously sensed the fact that this man hated him. He opened the closet door. Instantly the automatic was pressed against the small of his back. Bartram seized his coat on a wooden hanger, gave it a yank and the hanger fell off the cross bar with a noisy clatter.

Bartram put on his coat, pulled on his hat and walked out into the room. Suddenly he deliberately sat down in the middle of the floor.

"I got my rights," he said obstinately. "I ain’t moving. You’re no regular cop with authority to make a pinch and you ain’t taking me in."

THE PHANTOM smiled for the first time since he’d entered the room.

"I’m very glad you said that, Bartram. You make me very happy—because I’m going to drag you in."

Bartram scrambled to his feet at once. "Okay," he grumbled. "But I still know my rights."

He was stalling and the Phantom knew it. It also occurred to him that Bartram had deliberately knocked the coat hanger to the floor. It could have been some sort of a signal, agreed upon beforehand. If a friend occupied the adjoining room, he’d have heard the clatter of the hanger easily. Like most of these cheap hotels, the walls were thin.

The Phantom pushed Bartram toward the door, opened it gently, put the flat of his hand against the small of Bartram’s back and gave him a tremendous shove.

Bartram went flying across the narrow hallway, hit the wall opposite the door and bounced back. The Phantom leaped out right behind him. He had his eyes turned toward the door to the left. The tall man with his wrist in splints, stood there, a gun in his good hand. He was confused by Bartram’s weird exit and all he needed was a single look at the weapon in the Phantom’s hand. He dodged back into his room and slammed the door.

The Phantom promptly collared the half dazed Bartram, twisted his coat in a firm grip and propelled him toward the door. He stood directly behind Bartram.

"If you shoot," he called, "you’ll hit your pal. Now come out of there before I have to come in after you. Because if I do, I’ll come shooting."

There was no answer. The Phantom pointed his gun at the cheap lock, but he didn’t pull the trigger. From down the hall he heard the elevator stop around the corner and several men got out of it in a hurry. The Phantom guessed that the tall stickup man had made a phone call for help when he heard Bartram’s signal, and this was it.

Without a word, he shoved Bartram toward the fire stairway one door to the left. He pushed the door open, stuck his gun against Bartram’s spine.

"Start climbing those steps and you’d better do it fast. If I have to do any shooting, you get it first."

"Look," Bartram cried, too eagerly, "we can go down faster."

"And run into a plant in the lobby? I said start climbing!"

Bartram went up the steps two at a time. They managed to cover two flights of stairs before the chase was on. At the top, four stories higher, the Phantom saw the stairway to the roof. The door was locked with a bolt which he made Bartram slip. But once outside, there was no way to lock the door from the roof.

"We’re going across roof tops," the Phantom said. "It’s dark, but if you make a break for it, I’ll open fire at you on sight."

"I— I ain’t running," Bartram declared fervently. "I ain’t got nothing to run for. You just picked the wrong man, that’s all."

"But a man who summoned help—and plenty of it," the Phantom said. "Head to the left. The roofs of these buildings are on a level for half the block. If I say drop, fall down—and don’t even breathe or you’ll find yourself unable to.”
Bartram was by this time acutely aware of his predicament and the fact that his friends might do him more harm than good. He was almost pathetically eager to obey.

They crossed two rooftops before the pursuers located them. Against the sky, the Phantom saw that there were four of them, all carrying guns. There wasn’t much time to think of anything except escape, but it came to him that this two-bit thug moving ahead of him, was more important than he seemed.

Someone called out. “There they go. Be careful you don’t hit Kip, but get that flatfoot!”

The Phantom realized they were assuming that he was a city detective. He grabbed Bartram by the collar again and spun him behind a chimney. The four gunmen were moving up fast now. The Phantom took deliberate aim and pulled the trigger. One of the men pitched forward with a yelp of agony as a slug ripped through his leg.

The other three promptly sped for the shelter of chimneys, skylight hatches and the parapet between rooftops. The Phantom pushed Bartram again and they crossed to still another roof.

But there were still three men behind him and the Phantom didn’t discount his danger. One of the men fired a shot. It went wide, but the Phantom knew he was a fair target outlined against the city sky. He whirled and fired back.

He heard the scampering of feet. Bartram had taken advantage of the slim opportunity and was running toward his three friends. The Phantom went after him—straight toward the trio of gunmen. He overtook Bartram easily, wrapped an arm around his neck and pulled him to a stop. Bartram shouted for help. The Phantom silenced him with a punch he’d been holding back for some time. The contact of his knuckles against this thug’s chin eased some of the anger in him.

It also knocked Bartram cold and he was sagging in the Phantom’s grip. The Phantom fired three quick shots. He had no target because the trio seemed to have anticipated this shooting, but the whine of the bullets kept them down.

Half carrying, half dragging Bartram, he made his way across two rooftops and then came to the end of any escape by this route. The rooftop next door was two stories lower and there was a wide alley between buildings.

Still the pursuit stayed hot and grew closer. The Phantom heard sirens wail somewhere. The shots had been heard and an alarm ‘phoned in, but the radio police were still trying to locate the source of the excitement.

The Phantom found a skylight window and yellow light filtered through the dirty glass. He bent and peered through. There was a typical boarding house room and a man in trousers and undershirt was propped up in a brass bed reading a magazine.

The skylight was open an inch or two for ventilation and the Phantom pulled it all the way up.

The man on the bed gave a startled exclamation and jumped to his feet. The Phantom leaned down. “I’m dropping a prisoner, a stickup man, into your room. If you’re a friend of the law, grab him.”

“Let him come,” the man called back.

The Phantom eased Bartram over the edge and let him drop. He was shaming his unconsciousness, looking for another chance to run out and at the same time force the Phantom to drag him along and delay the escape.

As he landed, Bartram did a half roll, scrambled to his feet and headed for the door. The man in the room had already blocked the door. Bartram crouched and charged. He ran into a haymaker that rattled his teeth and jarred him to his heels. He sat down, stayed that way for a second and then quietly fell over.

The Phantom waved his thanks, knelt and waited for the others. If they wanted a battle, they were going to get it. Bartram was safe now and that was most important.

He saw slinking shadows, heard whispers and then they were gone. He heard them stop to pick up their wounded comrade and make their way back over the
rooftops. On the street below, radio cars were using their red flasher lights. The fight was over.

The Phantom slipped through the skylight and dropped to the floor. He held out his hand to the bruise who stood guard over Bartram somewhat hopefully, as if he wanted the man to wake up and try to escape again.

"I'm very grateful," the Phantom said. "Don't feel bad because you sluggered him. Not many hours ago he slugged a sixty-eight-year old woman so that he could steal the jewels she wore."

"He looks like a rat," The man gripped and almost wrung the Phantom's hand off. "Besides, my girl told me off tonight and I was in a mood to smash something. This guy's chin sure came in handy."

The Phantom laughed with him. "Now if you'll do me one more favor—run down to the street and tell the radio police I'm up here with a prisoner they'll like."

"Okay," the big man agreed. He pulled on his shoes and, standing on one leg, looked at the Phantom curiously. "I'm hoping you're a cop, mister."

"I'm the Phantom Detective. There's nothing to worry about."

The big man's face broke into a confident smile. "I guess there ain't. Doggone if this ain't the most fun I've had since I tangled with Mahoney. We work on one of the big skyscrapers going up. I'm a riveter."

"I imagine our friend on the floor won't argue the point," the Phantom said.

While the big man was gone, the Phantom propped a twenty-dollar bill against the framed picture of a girl who signed herself "Everlasting—Gloria" and to whom the word apparently didn't mean too much. He wrote a note:

"Send this on something for her and make up.

Then the big man was back, leading four uniformed patrolmen.

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CHAPTER IV

LINE-UP

ONE HOUR later Inspector Gregg, who often worked with the Phantom, arrived at his office. He needed a shave, still looked sleepy but the efficiency which had helped build him from the ranks, became evident while the Phantom told his story.

"This man," the Phantom pointed to Kip Bartram who was handcuffed to a stout oak chair, "in company with another, held up and robbed an elderly woman about three hours ago. They snatched considerable jewelry."

"Okay," Gregg studied Bartram a moment. "He's a punk—an ex-con. I recognize him now. Well, Kip, are you talking?"

Bartram gave him a lazy smile that changed to a wince as his swollen jaw throbbed. "I don't know a thing," he said. "Not one thing. I was home all night. This guy busts into my room with a gat in his hand so I fought back. Then he snatched me and dragged me over a lot of roofs."

"That's enough," Gregg snapped. "All right, Phantom, what else?"

"There isn't much more. I've been checking on all these jewel robberies lately. I saw this man and his pal, followed them, but they pulled the stickup too fast for me to act."

"That," Bartram shouted, "is a lie. Nobody followed us."

"A stupid remark from a stupid man," Gregg scoffed. "You just admitted the job, Bartram. Why not finish your story?"

"I'm saying nothing. I got a right to call my lawyer and furnish bail. You don't get one word out of me. But whatever the Phantom says, it's a lie."

Gregg sighed, twisted around in his chair and eyed the Phantom who resumed his story.

"After the holdup, they hurried away from the neighborhood of course, and I tailed this one to where he lives. I searched him and his room. There are no
signs of the jewelry. He signaled his pal who had the next room and he, in turn, managed to summon three gunmen. I was chased across the rooftops."

"What about the pal?" Gregg asked, his voice grim.

"After turning Bartram over to radio police, I returned to Bartram's room and searched it again. I also went through the room of his pal, who was conveniently absent. The stolen gems weren't there either."

Gregg pushed a button on his desk. Then he gave Bartram a contemptuous glance. "This is your last chance," he said. "Where are those jewels and where would that pal of yours be hiding out?"

"I don't know a thing!" Bartram declared vehemently.

A detective knocked and walked in. Gregg told him the story and turned Bartram over for questioning. When the prisoner had been removed and Gregg was alone, he sent for the report on the robbery the Phantom had outlined. Gregg studied it a moment.

"I know this Dick Van Loan," he said, totally unaware that the man seated across the desk from him was Van Loan. "He's a nice chap. A trifle fussy."

"He's a close friend of Frank Havens," the Phantom observed casually. "I know him too."

"Intelligent man, though," Gregg conceded. "He'll make an excellent witness. I'll get in touch with him in the morning and have him attend the lineup. If he identifies Bartram—and the old lady does too—we'll put that pigeon where he belongs for more years than he’ll like to contemplate."

"Good," the Phantom approved. "Now tell me about these robberies and stickups. I've been working half blind."

"We've kept many of them quiet," Gregg said. "Whenever a wave of gem robberies has a field day in newspapers, a lot of other crooks get itchy fingers. Frankly, Phantom, we've been trying to stop the biggest series of robberies we've ever known. And getting nowhere."

"Are the crimes organized?" the Phantom asked.
places of business stuck up too. Maybe they can pick out Bartram.”

“Don’t expect him to talk,” the Phantom warned. “All that money will offer protection for the thugs who do the strong-arm work.”

“I know. I don’t expect much out of him. There’s nothing else you know, Phantom?”

“I’m afraid not.” The Phantom shook his head. “I’ve been on the case too short a time and there is very little to go on. Bartram was my first break and he’s fizzling out.”

“You need anything,” Gregg said, “call on me.”

“Tell me,” the Phantom asked, “do these jewel thieves specialize in street holdups like the one Bartram pulled—or was that an isolated case?”

“No, but there’s no specialization. We’ve had about thirty stickups in six months, mostly of people returning from night clubs, fancy affairs and even house parties. Besides, we’ve had more than fifty house and apartment jobs. They know when nobody is at home. And, I think, some five or six jewelry stores and establishments were held up.”

The Phantom whistled. “No wonder you’re worried. Thanks, Inspector. If I wind up with anything to help, I’ll let you know.”

“You made a pretty good start, Phantom. Bringing in Bartram for us helps. I’m thanking you for that.”

The Phantom left Headquarters and walked back to his penthouse apartment. It would soon be dawn. The quiet streets were conducive to clear thinking and he studied the case from all angles. Inspector Gregg had outlined too many jobs to be the work of random thieves. It was a well-oiled machine and it was going to take care of Kip Bartram. There, the Phantom hoped, some clue might develop.

Right now he felt that he needed sleep. Entering the building, he used the private elevator and in his penthouse he called the hospital to see if there was any change in Martha Omley’s condition. She was reported as resting comfortably. With this assurance, the Phantom removed his makeup, became Richard Curtis Van Loan again and retired for what was hardly more than a nap before the clamor of the ‘phone awoke him.

It was Gregg on the wire. He identified himself, explained the circumstances and asked Van Loan to come to Headquarters at once. Van agreed, breakfasted and was shaking hands with Gregg before the procession across the line-up stage started.

Kip Bartram, somewhat haggard looking, was led onto the platform with six other men. Gregg asked Van Loan to step to the foot of the stage.

“We want you to make an identification if you can,” he said. “Is the man who held up Mrs. Omley on that stage?”

“He is,” Van Loan said carefully. “That short, bulky man. The second from the left.”

“All right,” Gregg said. “That makes it good. Bartram, are you talking now?”


“We’ll take him to the hospital in a few minutes,” Gregg said. “If you’d like to come along, Mr. Van Loan, it’s a good chance to see Mrs. Omley without waiting for visiting hours.”

VAN LOAN grinned. “You police know—all the tricks. I’ll be delighted to go along. And also delighted to go into court and swear this man is the one who put Mrs. Omley in the hospital. I hope you recovered the gems.”

“No,” Gregg sighed, “we didn’t. But maybe Bartram will change his mind about talking when he knows what he faces. As an ex-con still on parole, he’s due to get the book thrown at him.”

A police sedan whisked them to the hospital. They filed into Martha’s room. She was propped up in bed, not quite as gay as she had been the night before, but mad enough to rise up and attack Bartram. She couldn’t talk. Her jaw was strapped, but when Gregg asked her to make the identification, she nodded vehemently and pointed her finger at the scowling crook.

Gregg nodded to the detective to whom
Bartram was cuffed. "Take this man downstairs. Wait in the car." He turned to face Martha again. "Thank you very much. As soon as you're in shape to testify, we'll bring Bartram to trial. Breaking your jaw that way is going to cost him about five years of his life, in addition to what he'll get for the stickup. You coming back with us, Mr. Van Loan?"

"Not unless it's necessary," Van said. "I'll stay here and console Martha with a description of the places I'm going to tonight."

Gregg grinned, shook hands, saluted Martha and went out. Martha signaled Van to hand her the pad and pencil on the table. She scrawled on the pad and handed it to him. She wrote:

What a night! When shall we do it again?

He said, "Martha, you're a champion sport. And when you are able to get out again, we'll start all over. Do every place we missed."

She nodded happily. Van said, "I'm going to let you rest now. I'll try to drop in tonight. Take it easy and don't talk the nurses to death."

She made a playful pass at his chin as he bent and kissed her cheek. She was already dozing when Van left the room. He walked out of the hospital moments later, reached the sidewalk and looked around for a taxi.

A lean, hard-faced man stepped up to him. "Mr. Van Loan," he said, "if you don't want to mess up this nice ocean sidewalk, I'd advise you to walk along with me."

Van's expression became puzzled. "I beg your pardon. What do you mean?"

"I mean," the hard-faced man snarled, "that I've got a gun in my pocket and my finger is on the trigger. Just start walking."

Van said coldly, "I—see."

"Yeah, a guy with brains. I always like to do business with a guy who's got brains. Walk, chum."

Van began walking and the man fell into step with him. They paced the distance to the end of the hospital building where there was a rather narrow and dismal alley. The gun nudged Van's ribs.

"Down that alley, chum," the man with the gun ordered.

Van bit his lower lip but obeyed. It would have been foolhardy to do otherwise. The coldness in this man's eyes indicated that he was no stranger to violence.

After a dozen steps down the alley, a giant of a man detached himself from a delivery doorway. He was about six feet two or three, weighed two hundred and fifty and he had the fists of a killer and the unpleasant expression of a hungry ape.

The slender man walking beside Van suddenly came to an unexpected stop. Van continued on for a pace or two. He came to a halt. The giant began advancing on him.

The slender man said, "Frisk him, Buster."

The giant said, "Yeah," in a low growl. His big paws patted Van's pockets and ran up and down his trouser legs. The big man spoke again. "He's clean. Lemme take him apart a little, huh, Dutch?"

"Cut it out," the slim man said Dutch ordered brusquely. "That'll come later if he won't do as we say. But you can talk to him while I get the car from around the corner. He might put up a squawk when we leave and I'd like things ready for a quick getaway."

Dutch turned on his heel and walked rapidly toward the street. Buster suddenly seized the Phantom's both shoulders and pinned him hard against the brick wall.

Buster said, "It's this way. You and the old lady put the finger on Kip Bartram. Ain't I right?"

Van said, "If you mean by that—we identified him: yes."

"Sure. But you forgot it was night, there wasn't much light and maybe you was mistaken." Butch's voice purred now.

"We were not mistaken," Van said stoutly.

"You think so?" Buster inquired. "Look, if you did make a mistake—and the old lady agrees with you, well, that's
the end of it. But if you two was to keep saying Kip did it—pal, that'll be bad!"

"What happens then?" Van asked. "Will I be taken for a ride?"

The big man laughed. "Chum, you see too many movies. Why would we want to hurt you?"

"Then what's the idea?" Van demanded.

"That old lady is kinda brittle. Look at the way her jaw busted from one little tap. Now her neck could crack just as easy. Get it, pal?"

Van nodded slowly. "If we swear your friend—"

"Friend?" Buster smirked. "Listen, we never heard of the guy."

"If this Kip Bartram then, is tried and we swear he was the man, something is going to happen to Mrs. Omley. Is that what you're trying to tell me?"

"You're assuming things," Buster said. "But you get the general idea. This time we let you go. In one week you change your mind about Kip. So does the old lady. Otherwise we'll come to see you again and—we'll find out how brittle the old lady is."

Van was thinking fast. If he had been working under disguise as the Phantom, he wouldn't have hesitated about trying to disable and capture this big man. Normally, as Richard Curtis Van Loan, he wasn't supposed to possess the prowess of the Phantom Detective, but in this particular case he realized that there would be no suspicion that Van Loan might be more than he seemed. He had been threatened and he had a perfect right to defend himself and try to take this gorilla. Any man would have done the same.

Van suddenly raised his arms and pushed the big man away, tearing himself free of the grasp that pinned him to the wall. He pushed hard enough to send the gorilla across the narrow alley and against the other wall.

Buster seemed to like that. His great fist doubled, his eyes grew smaller and more concentrated with hate. "It looks," he said softly, "like you need something to remind you of what'll happen if you don't do like we say. And here it comes."

Before Buster could begin his short charge, Van sprang at him. Buster wasn't quite set and totally unprepared to go on the defensive. Van stepped in close with his fists swinging. There was a savage rage in his heart and it showed up in the punches he delivered.

The big man pulled away, took a punch full in the face that drew blood, but he managed to close in fast and get one arm around Van Loan's chest. He began squeezing. Without the slightest hesitation, Van buried an elbow into the man's stomach, drew a grunt and repeated it harder. Buster let go.

He waltzed back, bent slightly and half raised his long arms. He began a charge—and Van Loan stood there. As the thug came within range, Van struck him on the jaw, lifted his head back and hit him a dozen times, as fast as he could pump the blows. There was blood spurting from a nose badly twisted now.

Van hammered more punches at the big man's heart region, lowered his aim and concentrated on the tender stomach. It was nearly over. In another moment or two he'd have this gorilla spread out on the pavement of the alley. Perhaps, if he were lucky, he might manage to reach a 'phone, summon the police and have Buster locked up.

Dutch, the slim gunman, hadn't gone far from what he'd said. Van knew he had to work very fast. He danced up to the big man who was groggily trying to throw punches that missed by a foot each time. Van drew back his right fist, poised it and slammed it with all the force he could summon, squarely into the pit of Buster's stomach.

THE huge man let out a wheezing grunt of agony and promptly doubled up. His chin was a close and attractive target. One good punch landed there would put him out for some minutes. Van eyed the target, wound up the blow and then checked it.

Dutch was coming down the alley fast, drawn gun in his fist. He called, softly,
“Slug him and I’ll send one through your head, Van Loan.”

Van groaned, moved back against the wall and prepared himself to be beaten up. Dutch straightened Buster up, said something under his breath and advanced cautiously toward Van.

He said, “I never saw Buster taken like that before. I’m glad you licked him.”

“Put that gun down and I’ll do the same thing to you,” Van invited cordially.

Dutch laughed. “Do I look like a moron? I’d last half a second with you. Come to think of it, I heard you were a polo player and went in for sports. That’s okay. But listen to this. I’m glad you whipped Buster because when he gets over being beat up, he’s going to be half crazy. Ever see an ape trying to bust out of his cage? That’s the way Buster is going to be. If I turn him loose, he’ll kill you before you get a chance to work on him.”

“I understand that,” Van said quietly.

“And the same goes for the old lady. He’ll crack her neck like a match stick. I know Buster told you what he’d do in a week if you and the old lady still try to testify. I’m changing that. You got twenty-four hours to tell Inspector Gregg that you ain’t so sure about Kip. And the old lady does the same thing.”

“And if we don’t?” Van asked.

The gunman jerked a thumb at the still half crouched Buster. “I’ll turn him loose. Now get this. We’re leaving. If you pop outa this alley before our car is around the corner, I won’t wait twenty-four hours. I’ll blow your head off. Stand like you are. Don’t even take a step.”

He backed away from Van and got an arm around Buster somehow. Supporting the groaning big man, they stumbled out of the alley. Dutch looked back every step. To charge him would have been fatal.

Van didn’t move.

Soon he heard car gears crash. Van walked slowly toward the street. He had plenty to think about now. He could take care of himself, but Martha was in deadly danger. In twenty-four hours they’d kill her. Buster would do the job with as little remorse as he had brains—and he had none.

Van walked to the hospital door, brushed off his clothes and smoothed down his hair. He entered the building.

CHAPTER V

ATTORNEY-AT-LAW

Very glibly he talked his way in to see Martha again and found her quite excited and flushed. For a moment he thought other emissaries of this mob had been here to threaten her. She signaled for the pad and pencil.

Rapidly she wrote the following message:

Five minutes after you left, Van, a law-
yer came to see me. He said he might re-
cover my jewels. For a fee. Forty percent
of their worth.

"Did you get his name?" Van asked.
She nodded and motioned toward a
business card lying face down on the table.
Van picked it up. The card read:

JOSEPH ISELIN
BOULEVARD BUILDING
ATTORNEY-AT-LAW

"Good," Van said. "Now I'm checking
you out of here and to another hospital.
Are you strong enough to walk or shall
I arrange for an ambulance?"

There was sudden fear in her eyes. Van
decided it was best she know. If she was
scared, she'd be more apt to co-operate.

"Martha," he said slowly, "when I left
here a couple of thugs picked me up. If
we don't change our story and identifica-
tion of Kip Bartram, they said they'd . . .
kill us."

She signaled for the pad again and
wrote:

*I declare, this gets better and better. I'll
probably never leave New York again. All
this excitement is making me young again.*

Van said, "You were never old, Mar-
tha. But you must do as I say. We'd be
fools not to try and hide from them."

She agreed to that with a nod. Van
hurried to make the arrangements and
made certain the ambulance which
whisked her away, wasn't followed. He
checked her in at one of the big hospitals
on the theory that so many people about
would discourage the ape-like killer. Or
at least get him spotted. He explained at
length to the hospital superintendent, reg-
istered Martha under a false name and
then telephoned Inspector Gregg to make
a full report of what had happened.

"I'll worry about Mrs. Omley," Gregg
said, "and I'm assigning three men to
guard her around the clock. Maybe I
ought to put someone on your tail too."

"I can take care of myself," Van said
stoutly. "I insist on not being followed or
guarded. I want those men to try and get
me because I may be able to land one of
them this time."

"Yeah, and don't let anybody tell me a
polo player isn't tough." Gregg chuckled.
"Good luck and keep in touch."

Van's next move was very clear. He
would rather have operated now as the
Phantom Detective, but it would involve
Martha because only she knew the iden-
tity of the lawyer who had visited her.
Van taxied to the Boulevard Building,
located Iselin's name on the bulletin board
and went to his office on the fourth floor.

It wasn't much of an office. A poorly
furnished waiting room, with no recep-
tionist, not even a stenographer. The door
to the private office was wide open and
Van could see a pair of unshined shoes
propped up on a dented, cigarette burned
desk edge.

"Come in," a voice called. "What are
you standing there for?"

Van walked into the office. Iselin was
about fifty, bald headed with a friar's
fringe of gray. He had bushy red eye-
brows, yellow teeth and yellow fingers
where he held cigarettes. One of them
dangled from his lips now, curling smoke
up in front of his eyes.

"What can I do for you?" Iselin asked
without bothering to put his feet down.

Van said, "My name is Van Loan. You
visited Martha Omley at the hospital a
short time ago and made her an offer."

The feet plunked down and Iselin
turned in the swivel chair so he might
study his visitor better. "Yes, I did visit
Mrs. Omley. What's it to you?"

"I was with her when she was robbed.
She is my guest in town."

ISELIN nodded. "You're the socialite,
Van Loan. Saw your picture in the
papers often enough. Always holding
some kind of a trophy. What do you do
with all of them, Van Loan?"

"Cut out the kidding," Van said seri-
ously. "I want to know if you really can
recover those jewels."

"Maybe I can—maybe I can't," Iselin
said slowly. "I make no guarantees, but if I don't deliver, I don't collect. It's an honest way of making a living."

"Perhaps," Van conceded. "How do you go about this? If you're not part and parcel of the mob that did it."

"I assure you I'm not," Iselin declared. "I work this way. By defending a lot of impure, low punks, I make friends. They're always in a jam and always broke so no other lawyer will have them. I take their cases free—but I expect them to help me."

"I see. In other words you operate through a relay of stool pigeons."

"If you want to be inelegant about it—yes. I get results quite often."

"How did you get on Mrs. Omley's track?"

"I read the newspapers, my friend. It was a nasty stickup. Kip Bartram more than likely did it and I hope he gets ninety-nine years. But that won't get you the stuff he swiped. Perhaps I can."

"For how much?" Van asked.

"I told the old lady. Forty percent of their assessed worth. No retainer, nothing until I produce."

"All right," Van said. "I'm authorized to make a deal for Mrs. Omley. You return the gems and she'll pay you forty percent of their worth. It's a sizeable sum, but we'll hold to the bargain."

"Fine," Iselin nodded. "You show rare judgment. I'll get to work on it right away. Remember—no promises."

"Do the best you can," Van urged.

"I always do. That's how I earn my money. One more thing; the police are not to know of this until after I have delivered. If the gorillas behind Kip find out I'm after the stuff, they'll pull in their horns—and the rocks."

"I can see the point to that," Van admitted. "Phone me if you get anything."

Iselin nodded, put his feet back on the desk and closed his eyes. It was his way of terminating an interview. Van walked out, puzzled by this man who looked and acted so harmless and yet might be working his game this way. Being satisfied with forty percent of the take rather than fence the gems.

Against that theory was Inspector Gregg's statement that not one of the stolen gems had ever turned up. Unless Iselin was holding out and using Martha to scout out what might happen when he began turning the stuff back. Iselin was cagey, clever, and Van decided, as ruthless as the ape-like Buster, although in a gentler sort of way.

At any rate, Richard Curtis Van Loan's work was ended for the day. It was time for the Phantom Detective to take over and try to remove this danger to Martha Omley before it grew to more alarming proportions. If anything happened to her, Van knew he might forget all rules and go after those men with a fury he wouldn't like to remember after it was all over.

Van paid a brief visit to his penthouse where he changed back to the disguise by which he was known as the Phantom Detective. Soon afterwards he walked into Police Headquarters and sought out Inspector Gregg.

Gregg was glad to see him. "Sit down, Phantom," he said. "A couple of interesting things have happened. We've kept a close check on Kip Bartram's visitors. A little while ago Edmund Ward had a talk with him. Do you remember Ward?"

"Yes," the Phantom said. "Four or five years ago he was sent to prison for theft of jewels. As I recall it, he was a jewelry designer, specializing in resetting old gems into new pieces."

"That's right." Gregg nodded. "But he developed the habit of substituting inferior stones for good ones. I did a little checking and found that he and Kip were fairly good friends while they were in prison."

Gregg's information brought a thoughtful light into the Phantom's eyes.

"Interesting," the Phantom said. "A jewelry designer fits into this picture very well indeed."

"Then you'll have to fit two pieces to
piece of work. At any rate, I was carrying them from my apartment to my workshop."
"Who knew you had them?" the Phantom asked.
"A few people. Only those connected with my business. My partner, Hank Sylvester, one or two of my workmen."
"I see. Go on, Mr. Hagen."
"I stepped into a taxi which was parked in front of my apartment building. It rolled off, made a stop for a traffic light and two men opened the doors on either side, got in and stuck a gun against my ribs."
"One of these was Kip Bartram?" the Phantom asked.
"Yes. They didn’t rough me up. In fact, I think I commented on the fact that they were so polite and gentle it was almost a pleasure to be robbed by them. If I was going to be robbed at all, I mean."
"Kip Bartram wasn’t always that gentle," the Phantom commented. "Were the rubies insured?"
"Yes. I collected about two-thirds of their actual value."
"You never found a trace of those rubies again?"
"None. I’d have notified my insurance company—and the police—if they’d turned up."

Gregg smiled and said, "Well, thanks, Mr. Hagen. When you’re needed, we’ll get in touch with you."
"Any time," Hagen said. "I may go now?"
"Yes, of course," Gregg said.

After Hagen left, the Phantom edged his chair closer to Gregg’s desk. "If Hagen is telling the truth, somebody connected with his outfit must have tipped Kip about Hagen carrying those rubies."

Gregg nodded. "Phantom, when the crime happened, we checked everybody who could have known. There it ended. The people who knew, were as trustworthy as Hagen."

The Phantom arose. "Well, with so little to go on, it looks as if I’ll have to check back on Kip Bartram and try to
find those friends of his. I'll keep in touch, Inspector."

The intercom buzzed. Gregg reached for the switch. "Good," he said. "I'll feel better with you working on the case." He lowered his head and said "Yes" at the intercom.

The voice said, "Kip Bartram's lawyer just showed up. Says he's going to arrange bail. How about it, Inspector?"

"Who is the lawyer?" Gregg demanded. "Man named Iselin, sir. He looks like a shyster."

"Well, we can't keep him out," Gregg said. "I'll talk to the D.A. and try to ar-

Gregg shrugged. "Not unless you'd call using every trick in the law books as crooked. Iselin makes a specialty of befriending crooks and using them afterwards as stool pigeons. Do you know him, Phantom?"

"Only of him." The Phantom shook his head. "Thanks again, Inspector."

CHAPTER VI

ALLURING BAiT

ANY floors above the roaring presses of his local newspaper, Frank Havens maintained his executive offices. Only Havens knew the Phantom's real identity. His beautiful and courageous daughter, Muriel, worked with the Phantom often, but had no idea who he was. Neither did a dynamic red-headed reporter named Steve Huston, who helped often.

The Phantom stopped at the receptionist's desk and identified himself as a Mr. Grey, a name which Havens would recognize.

The receptionist called Havens and then said, "You may go right in, Mr. Grey."

The Phantom entered Frank Havens' private office. Havens gave no sign of recognition until the Phantom greeted him. Then Havens gave him his hand and a broad grin.

"I heard about what happened last night, of course," he said. "And I know very well that you've been busy trying to find the gang behind all these jewelry stick-ups and robberies."

"So you know there's an organized group doing it," the Phantom marvelled.

"I guessed it," Havens said. "It's happening all over the country. Miami and Palm Beach, Hollywood, Chicago and—mostly, here in New York. No isolated combination of crooks could be so efficient. There's a master hand directing this."

"The police think so too," the Phantom said. "And that's why I'm here. I know that Martha Omley's jewels at-
tracted those men. Someone at the Club Peacock saw the gems and tipped off the two men who did the actual job. How this was done I don’t know, but it was.”

Havens said, “Look here; before you came in I was toying with the idea of taking Muriel to one of the night spots and loading her down with a lot of diamonds that just occupy space in a safe deposit vault. I thought perhaps Steve Huston and maybe Chip Dorlan could trail us—see if anything happened and be ready for it, if it did.”

The Phantom shook his head doubtfully. “These crooks play it rough. Mrs. Omley could easily have been killed last night.”

“But Muriel is young, and you know how unafraid she is. Phantom—I do realize the danger, but perhaps you could take her out.”

“It’s a good idea, if you don’t mind risking your diamonds and Muriel isn’t averse to risking her pretty neck. I’ll do all I can to protect both. That I promise.”

“Good. I’ll feel much better about the whole thing. Suppose I phone Muriel and tell her it will be tonight.”

“At nine-thirty,” the Phantom said. “I’ll dress, of course, and she might introduce me as her cousin from the Coast.”

“Whatever you wish,” Havens said. “You don’t dare risk going as Van Loan?”

“No, because as Van Loan I’ve already been threatened and they might simply take advantage of the opportunity and shoot me in the back. I’m willing to take my own chances, but Muriel will be with me.”

“She’ll be tickled pink,” Havens said. “It’s been some time since she worked with you. And Phantom, if the diamonds are lost—well, I don’t mind taking chances either—don’t worry about them.”

When the Phantom left, he paid a short visit to the Jewelry Squad offices at Police Headquarters and merely confirmed the fact that none of the stolen gems had ever been seen again. Next he talked to the executives of several insurance companies who were delighted to have the Phantom working against these thieves.

He learned little from them, except that they’d paid off some terrific claims and the floater insurance rates would go up with the next fiscal year. As one of the executives pointed out, everyone was going to lose from those thefts.

At nine o’clock, the Phantom was dressed in tuxedo. He looked nothing like Richard Curtis Van Loan, didn’t seem quite as at home in formal clothes.

He chatted with the doorman at the apartment house where Frank Havens lived, pointed out the fact that he was a stranger in town and that Muriel was his cousin. If any sort of a fast check was to be made on him or Muriel, by the gang of crooks, they’d learn all they needed from that common and reliable source of information, the doorman.

At nine-twenty he rang the bell of the Havens apartment and Muriel let him in. She was a lovely brunette, trimly built and she had the laughinglyest blue eyes that the Phantom had ever seen. She wore a pale blue evening gown, blue slippers and all that blueness seemed reflected in the shimmering lights of a diamond necklace around her throat. She wore a huge diamond ring and a bracelet that shimmered like icy fire.

“You don’t need them,” the Phantom indicated the gems, “to make you look wonderful, Muriel.”

“Why thank you!” She smiled. “Come in and talk to Dad while I finish getting ready.”

The Phantom grinned at her. She was ready now, but cagey Muriel was going to have her father double check on the Phantom just to make certain. Havens recognized him, for the Phantom hadn’t changed his disguise.

“I’ll be here when you come back,” Havens said. “This is my night to relax.”

“I hope it won’t be ours, too,” the Phantom said. “We’re getting nowhere with the one thief we’ve caught but if we could nail another, he might not be quite as tough.”

Muriel linked her hand beneath the
Phantom's arm. "I'll be disappointed if this turns into a dull evening, Phantom."

They visited the Club Peacock first, because, as the Phantom pointed out, one of the most recent robbery victims had attended that club just before being held up.

"It was Dick Van Loan," Muriel told the Phantom confidentially. "A great friend of Dad’s. I like him too. He’s a nice boy even if he is inclined to be a trifle stuffy."

Under the disguise, the Phantom’s mouth twitched. Muriel would have been considerably amazed if she knew that the man she talked to was Dick Van Loan. They danced every dance, stayed near ringside and Muriel’s gems threw their tiny beams of light all about the plush room. After an hour of this, they left the club and deliberately idled in the lobby, near the empty broadcasting booth. There was a little sign fastened to the glass with scotch tape stating that there was no broadcast on Thursday evenings.

They walked out of the place, purposely ambled down deserted side streets and even stood to chat in dark spots. Nothing happened. No one trailed them—no one gave them more than a second glance, which was inspired wholly by Muriel’s beauty.

"It’s going to be a dull evening," she complained.

The Phantom laughed. "At least the food and dancing were good. Suppose we try another place? Which would you suggest as being very expensive, very plush?"

"The Club Antoine," Muriel replied promptly. "Coffee is two dollars a cup, I hear. Everything else is in proportion."

"We can always hock the diamonds," the Phantom chuckled. "Come on. The suckers this gang likes frequent places like Antoine’s. It would be a big help if we spotted their fingerprint."

SOON afterwards a bowing headwaiter glanced without interest at the Phantom, but his eyes flickered perceptibly at the sight of Muriel’s diamonds. They were a passport to a ringside table—helped along, of course, by a folded bill passed from the Phantom to the headwaiter.

The crowd was quiet, refined. The orchestra was a small, smooth band whose playing didn’t interfere with conversation. Between dance periods, a radio played softly, broadcasting records and chatter from another of those all night disc jockey programs.

Here, in the subdued splendor of this night club, Muriel and the Phantom set their trap for jewel thieves. The Phantom, without giving any indication of it, studied all the people in the place.

Because the club was small and intimate, either he or Muriel knew and identified almost everyone present. The waiters, hat check girl, cigarette girls and bus boys, were strangers of course, and any of them, hovering around the guests, could have estimated the worth of any gems.

Roger Courtney, wavy haired blond disc jockey, came through now and then, taking requests for recordings and chatting with those he knew. He stopped at the Phantom’s table and talked to Muriel for a few moments.

"He’s a nice boy," she told the Phantom later. "His father was the Courtney who—lost everything he owned twenty years ago and took his own life. Roger and his mother have made a go of it since."

"Good for them," the Phantom nodded. "But about us—and that fortune in diamonds around your neck; I’m afraid they aren’t getting much of a play."

"And it’s very late," Muriel said. "Shall we call it a night, Phantom? After all, you can hardly expect these crooks to strike at everyone who happens to be wearing jewelry."

The Phantom called for the check. In a few moments he and Muriel had left the club and again deliberately tempted danger by strolling along deserted streets. Finally even the Phantom gave up and whistled for a passing cab.

He paid off the driver in front of the
apartment building where Muriel lived, nodded affably to the night doorman and escorted Muriel to the elevator. They rode to the floor where Havens maintained his large duplex apartment.

Muriel smiled and extended a slim hand toward him.

"It may not have been a very exciting evening, Phantom, but it was a pleasant one. I'm ready to act as bait for those thieves any time you like."

"Good," he told her. "I'll stick around until you're safe inside."

She unlocked the door, opened it and they saw the dim light coming from the library at the end of the hall. The smell of an aromatic Havana drifted out to greet them.

Frank Havens often worked late in the library and inevitably smoked one of his expensive cigars.

"Good night," the Phantom told her. "Tell your father I'll let him know if I find anything."

He stepped out of the apartment, heard the door close and the latch turn before he reached the elevator. He walked through the lobby and on the sidewalk, he stopped beside the doorman and lighted a cigarette.

"Nice night," the doorman said conversationally. "I suppose something big happened. Black headlines in the morning papers."

"Why, I hadn't heard," the Phantom said.

"Neither did I—yet," the doorman grunted. "But when Mr. Havens comes flying out the way he did just before you and Miss Havens got home—well, it always means big news has broken. One thing about Mr. Havens—his newspapers come first. I... What happened to the guy?"

Before the doorman had finished, the Phantom turned and ran noiselessly through the lobby and toward the four self-service elevators. All were on the lobby floor. He stepped into three of them and pulled the switches so that only one could operate. This he sent up to Havens' floor.
moved directly out in front of the door. It opened wide now and a chunky man stepped out. The Phantom had never seen him before. He moved close, jabbed a gun into the Phantom’s stomach and proceeded to search him. He found the automatic and took it away.

“Turn around,” the jewel thief snapped. “Drop your hands and I’ll drop you. We’re taking the girl along. Just a little ride until we’re clear, and in case we meet any more gumshoes like you. Nobody gets hurt if you use your head.”

“Who am I to argue with a gun?” the Phantom asked gently. He saw Muriel emerge. She was pale. The necklace, rings and bracelet were gone. Behind her, holding her right arm tight against her back, came a lanky thug. He too was a stranger to the Phantom.

They stepped into the elevator which the short crook brought to the floor. As it descended, the Phantom was told to lower his hands and Muriel’s arm was released.

“Now look, shamus,” the short gunman warned, “if we meet anybody, you and the girl just pass it off. Don’t stop to talk and don’t try to give any warning. If either of you do, both of you will get killed.”

“I’m afraid he means it, Miss Havens,” the Phantom told Muriel. “After all, what are diamonds compared to your life?”

“I’ll behave,” Muriel promised.

Somehow they succeeded in getting the doorman out of the way and now there was a light sedan parked in front of the place. Just beyond the doorway, the Phantom and Muriel were ordered to stop. The short gunman moved up beside the Phantom and looked around the quiet neighborhood. The Phantom heard the other thief hurrying up from somewhere in the lobby.

Now they walked to the car. They were ordered into the rear seat. The tall man got behind the wheel and the short crook sat beside him, twisted around so that he could cover them with the gun he now held openly.

The car pulled away from the curb. It took the next corner and then started a series of fast runs, quick stops and sudden turns. Satisfied they were not under observation, the driver headed across town to the West Side Speedway and turned uptown.

They whizzed along, within the speed limits at all times, but traveling fast enough. They slowed up for the Toll Bridge and the short gunman gave them another warning to behave. He did lower the gun beside him, however.

AFTER they crossed the bridge and headed out over the very wide highway, the driver snapped on the car radio. A record was being softly played. The radio was left on.

“How far are you going to take us?” Muriel asked. “I’ve got high heeled dancing slippers on. Don’t make me walk too far.”

The shorter crook laughed. “When we ditch you, we don’t care what happens to either of you. Just shut up and keep acting smart.”

The Phantom said nothing. He had his arms folded across his chest and he seemed reconciled to being a prisoner. But his mind was working fast. He knew that in a matter of a few minutes they’d reach another toll gate before entering Saw Mill Road. He’d already noted that these crooks were afraid to display guns while the toll was being taken. Unless they turned off before reaching the toll gate, the Phantom knew he’d probably have his last chance to take action.

The red and green lights winked into sight as they rounded a corner and the driver slowed down. The short thug with the gun, put it down on the seat beside him and turned around. The car entered the narrow lane and stopped beside the toll house. The driver handed out the dime, shifted and pulled away.

Before the car cleared the exit lane, the Phantom suddenly leaned forward. His right arm curved around the short thug’s neck, yanked his head back hard.

The thug started bringing up the gun,
which was what the Phantom wanted. He instantly seized the thug’s wrist, gave it an expert twist and Muriel came into the game. Leaning over the seat, she reached down to wrest the gun loose from half paralyzed fingers.

The driver was trying to pull over and go for his gun at the same time. As his hand closed around the butt, Muriel pressed her newly acquired gun against the back of his neck.

“Just keep driving,” she said quietly. “With both hands on the wheel.”

The short crook was putting up a fight now. It didn’t amount to much for the Phantom increased the pressure around the man’s throat until his struggles stopped. Then he pushed the man aside, reached over the driver’s shoulder and extracted his gun. Both he and Muriel settled back in the rear seat now.

“Nice work,” he told Muriel with a grin. “Now you two crooks are headed for jail. Turn this car around, pull over and stop.”

The driver obeyed without a word. The short man slumped over beside him seemed to be still unconscious. When the car was stopped, the Phantom got out and ordered the driver out. He forced the man to turn, keep his hands raised, and the Phantom carefully searched him.

He found nothing but some matches, a few dollars and a pack of cigarettes. Apparently these crooks were traveling without any sort of identification on them. The Phantom made certain that Muriel’s diamonds weren’t on the man.

Then he dragged out the short crook and repeated the operation with exactly the same results. He kept both crooks covered and spoke to Muriel without turning his head.

“Miss Havens, look for your jewels. They must have hidden them in the car somewhere.”

She spent five minutes looking. “They aren’t here. The tall man had them the last I knew.”

“All right,” the Phantom said grimly to the prisoners. “Where are the diamonds?”

Both men gave him crooked grins. “Look pal,” the tall one said, “we don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Muriel said, “They couldn’t have passed them to anyone. We didn’t even see anyone.”

“Well,” the Phantom said, “you can swear they took them and we’ll let the cops worry about it. Get in the car, you pair of prize chumps. This time I’m sitting up front and when we get to the toll gates, I don’t care if the cops on duty there see the gun.”

MURIEL drove back and at the Phantom’s orders, cut across town to one of the busier avenues. It wasn’t too far from dawn now, but there was little traffic along here. She felt the Phantom’s foot nudge hers off the gas pedal until the car was slowing down. She held it at that speed, wondering why he didn’t want to travel faster and make it more difficult for the prisoners to escape, if they were contemplating such a move.

Then she realized that he was deliberately giving them an opportunity to get away. His foot remained beside hers on the gas pedal. Both crooks were apparently cowed by the menace of the gun the Phantom held, but their eyes kept watching him.

The Phantom said, suddenly, “The next corner, Miss Havens. That one.”

She gave the wheel a twist. At the same time the Phantom’s foot pressed on the gas pedal and the car gave a wild lurch. It seemed to throw him off. He was hurled hard against the door. The gun fell out of his hand.

At the same time, the two crooks went into action. They grabbed the door handles, threw the doors wide and leaped out of either side. Muriel, with the car not yet under control, seemed to have difficulty in stopping it. When she did, she discovered that she was alone.

She turned in time to see the two crooks pass beneath a street light and then dive down an alley. A shadowy form, moving even faster, followed them. The Phantom had deliberately arranged things so these
men would think they’d gotten clear quite by accident and their own fast thinking. As police prisoners they’d be quite useless in running down the men behind these crimes, but free, they’d probably go straight to some superior for advice.

When they climbed a fence at the end of the alley, the Phantom scaled it too, a few seconds later. His crepe soled shoes made no sound as he crept behind the fleeing pair.

They turned west when they reached the crosstown street and the Phantom was afraid they might hail a cab. There were few of them cruising about at this hour.

Instead of that, they seemed to be headed for an all night restaurant. The tall man entered at once and the short thug began pacing the sidewalk in front of the place. The Phantom stayed out of sight. He guessed that the tall man was ‘phoning someone for advice.

When he emerged, both men hurried down the street. There was a single cab parked at the corner and they got in. It pulled away and the Phantom murmured softly at his luck. There wasn’t another taxi in sight.

Then he saw the sedan roll down the street with Muriel at the wheel. He stepped out, signaled her and swung aboard. The cab was still in sight, though several blocks away now.

“Nice going,” the Phantom said. “They’re in that taxi now turning the corner.”

“I just kept circling the block,” Muriel said. “Then I saw you. Phantom, what could have happened to the diamonds?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “They weren’t on them. We’ll search this car again after we find out where they are headed. What happened in the apartment, Muriel?”

“Well, I locked the door, walked into the library to talk to Dad and these two men seized me. The tall one held my wrists while the other man stripped off the jewels. They told me Dad had left the apartment and if I screamed, they’d have to knock me out.”

“And then the ’phone rang,” the Phantom said. “Were they reluctant about answering it?”

“Why—why no, Phantom,” Muriel said in a surprised voice. “They must have been expecting a call.”

“It was about me.” The Phantom nodded. “We were followed from the club, or some spot en-route home. The trailer stayed outside and when I came out and the doorman told me your father had left, I turned back. The man saw me, knew what was up and ’phoned those two men.”

Muriel said, “Look, they’re slowing up. The brake lights are on.”

“Stay far back of them,” the Phantom warned. “If they pull over, you stop too—and right here.”

The taxi stopped at the corner and both thugs got out. The Phantom was out of the sedan and running lightly down the street before the two crooks had taken the corner.

He was in time to see them walk down a block of fashionable apartment buildings, now as deserted as a small town street at this hour. They checked building numbers, as if they were unfamiliar with the section and then they started to cross the street toward one of the loftier structures.

They were in the middle of the road when shots rang out. But the flashes from the rifle were masked, for the Phantom heard the shots clearly enough, but he was unable to spot any flare from a gun muzzle.

At the first shot, the tall thug came to an abrupt stop, as if suddenly frozen. Then he began to come apart. His head lolled forward first, then his arms went slack, his shoulders drooped and he sagged forward. His knees were next and when they went, he crumpled into a pathetic heap.

The shorter man didn’t stop to figure anything out. He pivoted neatly, broke into a run at an amazing speed, impelled by his terror. The rifle cracked again. A flat explosion picked up by the canyon of bricks and magnified.
The short thug didn’t stop. Not until he reached the curb. There he seemed unable to lift his feet enough to clear the four-inch barrier. He stumbled against the curb and fell forward. He didn’t move after he flattened himself against the sidewalk.

Gun in hand the Phantom raced toward the man. He stopped only long enough to see the widening stain near the left shoulder blade and know that the bullet had probably penetrated the heart.

The tall man’s condition was even easier to determine. The bullet had hit him in the front of the head. And because both men had suffered death by shots fired straight at them, the rifleman must have been hidden in the building across the street to which they had been headed.

The Phantom ran toward the building, pushed open the door and paused at the rows of mail slots. He studied names and found one that was familiar. The only name so far connected with the case.

Edmund Ward occupied a front apartment on the fourth floor! Edmund Ward who had once been a jewelry designer, appropriated the gems of his clients and had been sent to prison where he’d met the first man to be arrested in this series of thefts. Ward and Kip Bartram had been prison pals.

CHAPTER VIII

MURDER SUSPECT

PROMPTLY the first radio car police to arrive, sent for Inspector Gregg at the Phantom’s request and soon a sleepy-eyed, tousle-haired Detective Inspector greeted the Phantom.

“Your radio cops,” the Phantom said, “sealed off this apartment house when I told them the murder shots came from here. But of course they may have been too late. At any rate, the two dead men had committed a jewelry robbery typical of the gang we’re trying to track down. I caught them, let them think they had escaped and trailed them here.”

Gregg whistled his amazement. “But Phantom, how did the killer know they were coming? He had to be on the alert and set.”

“One of the pair stopped to make a phone call,” the Phantom explained. “The way I see it, they were ordered to come to this address, a section unfamiliar to them because they had to find house numbers. When they started across the street, the killer was waiting.”

“Let’s go see what Edmund Ward knows about it,” Gregg suggested. “My idea of him is that he’s always been a tricky guy. A greedy one too, who might not stop at murder to get what he wanted.”

They took an elevator to the fourth floor and rang the bell. The door opened almost at once and Ward stood there, staring at them in a mixture of awe and sudden fear.

“Gregg!” he said hoarsely.

Gregg walked in, followed by the Phantom. Ward eyed both men narrowly. Gregg searched him, paying no attention to his protests.

Then Gregg proceeded to search the three-room apartment.

“Well,” he said finally, “there’s no gun here anyway.”

“Gun!” Ward exploded. “Do you think I killed those two men?”

“We thought there might be a chance of it,” the Phantom said. “Seeing they were headed for this building.”

“But I didn’t wake up until the sirens started screaming. I didn’t even hear the shots.”

Gregg snapped off the flashlight with which he had been studying the window sills for any marks from a rifle. He sat down slowly and the Phantom gave him a nod.

Gregg said, “Put on your clothes, Ward.”

The ex-convict paled and wetted his lips. “Look, I don’t know a thing about this, I tell you. I swear it. If you take me in, they’ll maybe send me back to prison. I’m on parole for two more years. You can’t do this to me!”
The Phantom said, "You can relax, Ward. All we want you to do is have a look at the dead men. If you know them and admit it, we'll let you go. If you tell us they are strangers and we discover later that you did know them, you'll go back to prison."

"I've got nothing to hide," Ward declared. He peeled off his robe and started putting on a shirt over his pajamas. "Sure, I'm an ex-con, but a man is supposed to be given a break when he's paid for his crimes."

In a few moments they took him downstairs and out to where the tall man lay spread out now, after the medical examiner had finished his examination. Ward looked down at the blood splotted, grayish face.

He bit his lip nervously and then turned away fast.

"Well?" Gregg demanded.

"I—know him," Ward whispered. "He was in prison at the same time I was. His name was Tierney. Bill Tierney. He was a two time loser, as they—called it up there. Doing his second stretch for—for armed robbery."

"All right," Gregg said. "Now let's look at the other one."

They walked over to where the shorter crook had fallen. He lay on his back, open eyes staring up at a street light he couldn't see.

Ward gulped and looked ill.

"Yes," he muttered. "Yes, I know him too. Otto Arden. Another convict. Like Tierney, he was also a burglar. I—I just knew them, that's all. I had nothing to do with them after I was out and I—I didn't kill them."

"You may go home," Gregg said. "No sense warning you to stick around because you can't go off without busting parole rules anyway."

As Ward turned, the Phantom stepped before him. "Thanks," he said, "for performing a disagreeable job. We're grateful."

"It's—all right, officer," Ward grunted, mistaking the Phantom for a regular detective. "I—I just don't like being suspected, that's all."

They watched him walk slowly back to the building. Gregg said, "Well, my boys went through the place, floor by floor. Nobody suspicious was seen. Some of the apartments are vacant, some idle because the tenants are away. A killer could have slipped into one of these."

"And escaped within a few seconds after he'd killed these two men." The Phantom sighed. "Inspector, we've got proof now that these jewel thieves can easily turn into murderers. So far, the victims have been lucky, but from this time on, I wonder."

Gregg shook his head solemnly. "Phantom, these two guys were bumped because they called the big shot who probably guessed you had let them escape on purpose."

"I suppose so," the Phantom admitted. "All the hired members of the mob won't be as tight-lipped as Kip Bartram and our killer was afraid to take chances so—he killed these men."

"And they got away with more loot," Gregg groaned. "I might as well file a report on it, Phantom."

"If you don't mind, Inspector, we'll say nothing about miss Havens' loss quite yet."

Muriel Havens
Just to see what happens."

Gregg shrugged. "Anything you say, Phantom. Well, I've got to clean up this mess and make my reports. Be at the office in three hours too. Don't let anybody tell you a cop's life is an easy one."

The Phantom walked away, until he reached the sedan in which Muriel waited. Its radio was playing softly, popular recorded tunes from one of the night club bars still open. The Phantom lit a cigarette, sat beside Muriel and told her the story.

Then they searched the car again, practically stripping it. They did find a registration certificate and they suspected that the car was stolen. The jewels, however, were certainly not in the car.

"They got in touch with someone, Muriel was thinking back. "The short man stayed with us every second, but the taller thief, Phantom, I think he veered off in the lobby."

"He did," the Phantom nodded. "I remember hearing him hurry to catch up with us."

"Then he must have passed the jewels to someone," Muriel said. "There is no other answer."

"You're probably right," the Phantom said. "All of which doesn't help us much."

They turned the stolen car over to a policeman and took a cab back to Muriel's apartment house.

There they found a badly worried Frank Havens who relaxed with a long sigh when he saw Muriel.

"I knew something was wrong," he said, "when I reached my office and found that someone hadn't blown up part of the Suez Canal. I phoned here right away, but there was no answer."

"Mr. Havens," the Phantom said, "when you did return, was anyone in the lobby or just coming out of the building?"

"No," Havens replied. "I looked too, in case you and Muriel were waiting for me in the lobby. It was empty."

"Then we've hit another dead end," the Phantom said slowly. "Thanks to a man who doesn't mind murder if his killings protect him. And you, Mr. Havens, have lost a small fortune in gems."

"I can afford it," Havens answered. "I knew the risk we were taking and I'm only grateful that you and Muriel weren't hurt."

"I am too," the Phantom said. "Up until now, they were reasonably careful not to harm anyone seriously, and murder never entered the affair. But now it has, and I assure you they won't be so soft-hearted again."

Havens nodded and reached for one of his cigars. "Phantom, you believe that this is an organized gang headed by someone smart enough to plan well."

"And strong enough to hold his thieves and robbers together—yes," the Phantom said. "A man who knows gems, and the people who wear them. A man who has set up a system whereby a fingerman passes the word to the actual thieves who get into position to waylay the victims at the best possible spot for the job."

"And who has sufficient working capital that he doesn't have to sell the stolen gems," Havens grunted. "I know that none of them have ever turned up again. Whom do you suspect, Phantom?"

The Phantom smiled a bit. "Well, there is Edmund Ward from whose apartment those two crooks could have been shot. There's an attorney named Iselin who specialized in getting back stolen jewelry and who very unexpectedly turns up as the defending lawyer for Kip Bartram. So far that's all, and neither one is a strong candidate, Mr. Havens."

"Do what you can to recover Muriel's gems," Havens urged. "If you don't get them, that's all very well too."

"I'm sorry," the Phantom said, "about Muriel having had to go through all this nasty business."

"Muriel," Havens scoffed, "wouldn't have missed it for five times what those gems were worth, and you know it."

The Phantom crushed out his cigarette. "Perhaps we'll be working together again before this is finished, Mr. Havens. Right now all of us need sleep. Call me if anything happens."
CHAPTER IX
UNREPORTED CRIME

In the morning, Richard Curtis Van Loan paid a visit to Martha Omley. She was well guarded, feeling better, though spitting mad at not being able to utter a sound. She resorted to her message writing again.

Well, did the town open up last night, seeing I couldn’t be out on it?

"Frankly," Van Loan said, "I spent the night home, recovering from the life you’ve led me since you came to town."

Her eyes did the laughing. She scrawled:

Resting up for when they let me out of here?

"That won’t be too long," Van Loan said. "Right now you’re safer here anyway. That thug comes up for a hearing this morning and I’ve got to be in court."

Her eyes said she wanted to be there too and Van Loan chuckled. "It’s only a preliminary hearing. They won’t need you until the trial."

He stayed there a little longer and then took a taxi to a Magistrate’s Court near Police Headquarters. He sat down in front. Attorney Iselin was apparently napping over in a corner, with his chair tilted back against the wall. In the prisoner’s cage sat a badly worried Kip Bartram, nervously pulling at his fingers.

There was some routine business and then a clerk called Kip Bartram’s name. Iselin came to life immediately. He waited before the bench until Bartram was at his side. The charge was read. Iselin moved a step forward.

"Your Honor," he said, "the defendant wishes to change his plea to guilty and waives arraignment in this court."

The magistrate nodded. "So ordered," he said. "Next case."

A court officer clapped handcuffs around Bartram’s wrists and started leading him away. He passed close to where Richard Curtis Van Loan sat and Bar-

tram vented his anger as he passed him. "See what it’ll get you, wise guy. Wait —and see!"

Attorney Iselin came over and sat down beside Van. "Don’t mind Kip, Mr. Van Loan. I imagine you’re wondering why I’m defending him."

"Well it does seem a trifle suspicious," Van admitted.

"Sure it does. I figured it this way. Kip needed a friend and—Kip knew where Mrs. Omley’s jewels went. I thought, if I helped him, I might learn something and subsequently earn my forty percent cut for the return of the gems."

"Not a bad idea," Van Loan commented. "But will Kip talk to you?"

"As soon as he believes I’m doing all I can for him."

"By pleading guilty?" Van asked.

Iselin chuckled. "I can have the plea changed if I wish. But the evidence you and Mrs. Omley will give can send Kip away for most of his life. All of which brings up another interesting point."

"Yes?" Van asked.

"You seem to get deeper into this series of jewel robberies," Iselin said slowly. "Now your old friend’s daughter is robbed of a fortune in diamonds."

"Do you mean Muriel Havens?" Van queried.

"Yes, who else? I was wondering if I might also get a commission to try and recover the diamonds she lost last night, Mr. Van Loan."

"You’ll have to see Frank Havens for that," Van Loan said.

"But you could put in a word for me," Iselin urged.

"I don’t know about that," Van told him. "You see, Mr. Havens ’phoned me this morning and told me that his daughter had been robbed last night. He also told me that not half a dozen people knew it and none of the morning papers carried the story. How then, did you learn about it, Mr. Iselin?"

Iselin turned white at first and then a slow pink hue crept up his cheeks. He bit his lips, passed a hand through his hair and suddenly jumped to his feet.
Without a word he stalked out of the courtroom.

VAN LOAN didn’t try to stop him. It was clear that Iselin knew he’d made a dangerous slip but whether his fear was caused by the knowledge he might be suspected, or the fact that he had been tricked, wasn’t clear to Van. All he knew was that Attorney Iselin was closer to this game of robbery and murder than he admitted.

The unexpected plea of guilty for Kip Bartram was another amazing turn of events. Why, if the gang went so far as to threaten the witnesses, did Bartram’s lawyer throw the whole case away on a guilty plea? Bartram would be handed a stiff sentence on the strength of his record. More and more, Van Loan saw the firm hand of some very shrewd leader who pulled the strings and his puppets jumped to the tune of crime all the way up to, and including, murder.

Van Loan returned to his penthouse apartment where he sat down in front of the picture window overlooking the city. He stayed there an hour, assembling the case in his mind and going over every phase he knew of it.

Gems, stolen from people who didn’t wear them often, by hard-boiled thieves ordered into good positions for the crime. Then the loot disposed of in a matter of a few minutes—or even seconds—by the actual crooks. Transferred somehow—to a person or persons not only unknown, but unseen. Gems which were red hot from the moment of their theft and yet which vanished and never came into view again.

The robberies were taking place all over the country with the same technique used in almost every case. It was all part of an overall plan. Controlled by one man who more than likely operated the whole thing from New York.

The only link connected to the gang was Kip Bartram who had already proven his determination not to talk. Some powerful force must have been brought to bear upon him.

Perhaps, Van thought, the weak link might lie among the men—or women—who spotted the gang’s victims and sent out the word as to who could be profitably and safely robbed. Fingermen were notoriously weak people.

Van went to his secret dressing-room and applied the disguise by which he was known as the Phantom Detective. He changed clothes, armed himself and went out into the late afternoon. By now Inspector Gregg should have learned all that was possible about the activities of the two robbers who had been shot to death early that morning. The Phantom went around to see Gregg.

The harried inspector had little to offer. “We checked on those two dead men—Bill Tierney and Otto Arden. They were crooks, out on parole. Or Arden was anyway. Tierney had been discharged from parole a few months ago. They had no friends, lived in rooming-houses and stayed in most of the time. They never had much money. Arden held down a watchman’s job for a contracting firm. Tierney gave up work when he was dropped from parole.”

“And nothing was found in the apartment building from which the shots were fired?” the Phantom asked.

“Not one blasted thing, Phantom. No prints, no strangers around that night, but plenty of empty front apartments which could have been entered with any average master key. The bullets were thirty-thirties which accounts for the speed with which those two men died.”

The Phantom said, “Arden and Tierney were murdered for one reason. They knew too much and must have been suspected as being weak. I’m going to concentrate on them until something else breaks, Inspector.”

Gregg handed the Phantom several typed sheets stapled together. “This is a condensed version of their dossiers as our records show them. I had a copy made for you. And we haven’t released the story of their murders yet.”

“Thanks,” the Phantom said. “I’ll get busy on it at once.”
THE DEADLY DIAMONDS

He taxied first to the rooming-house where Bill Tierney had lived. There he displayed a detective sergeant’s badge to the landlady. He was entitled to use this badge whenever he felt that there was no need for showing the jeweled one of the Phantom Detective.

The landlady could give little information beyond that which Tierney’s dossier already showed. The Phantom inspected the dead man’s room. In it he found little of value, though on going over a small desk in a corner of the room, the Phantom checked a favorite hiding spot. Beneath one of the desk drawers he found a flat key, affixed to the drawer with a piece of chewing gum which was fairly fresh.

The Phantom appropriated this key and proceeded next to the room where Otto Arden had lived. This was about fifteen blocks away, not as comfortable a place and Arden seemed to have lived frugally.

His landlady also didn’t have much to offer but she unlocked the room on sight of the detective sergeant's badge. The Phantom closed the door and went through the place thoroughly. Here was no desk to be a hiding place but—like Bill Tierney—Otto Arden used the underside of a drawer to conceal something. This was obviously a telephone number. Kimberly 8-3090. There was nothing else.

The Phantom went downstairs and interviewed the landlady again. “Did Arden get many ‘phone calls?” he asked.

“Not a one since he lived here all these eight months.”

“I see,” the Phantom mused. “Did he make many calls?”

“Well now,” she smirked, “that’s a different question. Every night at ten o’clock, right on time, he always made a call. Whenever he was home, that is. He talked so low I couldn’t hear anything he said. Of course I don’t make it a practise to listen.”

“Did he have any visitors at any time?”

“Not that I know of,” she replied promptly. “Say, when’s he coming back? Or ain’t he? I got to know so I can rent the room.”

“Keep it vacant for the present,” the Phantom said. “And locked up.”

The telephone call which Arden made at ten o’clock intrigued the Phantom and he wondered if the number written on the underside of the bureau drawer was the one Arden called. There was a good way to find out. The Phantom entered a ‘phone booth and dialed the number.

Promptly a woman’s voice answered. Not with the usual “Hello.” This one said, “Otto, I’ve been so worried.”

The Phantom carefully hung up for a full minute and then called the telephone supervisor. He identified himself and asked for the address of the number, got it promptly and was in a cab not five minutes after he’d made the call.

It was somewhat surprising to find that he was being taken to one of the most fashionable sections of the city, facing Central Park. It turned out to be a very fancy residential hotel and the owner of that phone, listed as Cleo Ahern, occupied one of the expensive suites.

CHAPTER X

LADY IN LUXURY

QUICKLY the Phantom rode to the sixteenth floor without bothering to be announced. There he stopped in front of the door, thought back to the sound of Otto Arden’s voice and then rang the bell.

The same woman asked, “Who is it?” That ‘phone call had made her suspicious.

The Phantom spoke and his voice was exactly like that of the dead Otto Arden. This ability to imitate voices was one of those things which the Phantom specialized in and trained for. Every inflection was precisely right.

He said, “Now who do you think this would be?”

“Otto!” she cried and hurriedly unlocked the door. She threw it wide,
opened up her arms and then stared at this stranger who quickly stepped in, pushed her back and closed the door.

"Who—are you?" she asked.

The Phantom took time to study this girl. She was no more than twenty, red-headed, gray-eyed and strikingly pretty. There was a large diamond solitaire above a diamond encrusted wedding band on her left hand. She was neatly dressed in a sports outfit and she moved with an easy grace as she backed away from the Phantom.

"I'm sorry to alarm you," the Phantom said. "Is Otto home?"

"Otto? Who is Otto?" she asked beligerently.

"The man whose voice I imitated. The man whom you thought I was. You're married to him, aren't you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said. "I'm Mrs. Ahern. I'm a-a widow."

"Can you prove it?" the Phantom asked. "And believe me it's important that you do."

She ran her tongue around carmined lips and then seemed to make up her mind about something. "Of course," she said. "Wait here and I'll show you the papers to prove it."

She walked quickly toward a large breakfront cabinet and pulled open a drawer. She reached into it, closed her fingers around a gun and suddenly whirled around. She gave a sharp cry of surprise for her visitor had moved too. He was standing beside her and before she could recover from the shock, his hand was around her wrist, holding it firmly while he twisted the gun free.

"Well," he said quietly, "you were certainly about to prove something. Sit down."

"Copper!" she said bitterly.

"No, I'm not the police. I'm the Phantom Detective. Otto probably told you about me."

"The Phantom Detective." She said it softly. "Then Otto won't be coming back here for a-a long time."

The Phantom knew that she had no idea Otto Arden was dead. He sat opposite her. "There's no use trying to keep the secret any longer," he told her. "Otto got out of prison a year ago, but on parole. He couldn't live here—like this—without revealing that he earned crooked money and was violating his parole."

She leaned forward slightly. Living with Otto Arden had made her hard and bitter.

"You can talk all day and I won't comment. You can question me for a week and I won't answer. I'll say nothing more."

"I'm afraid you'll have to," the Phantom told her gravely. "Let me go on. Otto couldn't live this way but he wanted you to. A nice gesture on his part, if his money only came honestly."

She glared at him, her lips firmly compressed. The Phantom's eyes dropped down to her diamond ring which she was nervously turning around.

He said, "I'm afraid you'll have to tell me one thing. Where did your engagement and wedding rings come from, and can you prove it?"

He smiled at her set lips and shook his head sadley. "I hate to do this, Mrs. Arden, but you see Otto is known to have helped in many jewel robberies. Perhaps the rings you wear are someone else's property and I assure you the police will take them away from you."

HER reserve broke then. "He's dead, isn't he? I had a feeling all day. He didn't call last night and he never failed before. He's dead. I know he is dead."

"Yes," the Phantom said, "he is dead."

She raised her head and those blue eyes were colder than ever. "Did you kill him?" she asked quietly.

"No. I tried to save his life. He worked for someone. You must know that. This man decided he could no longer trust Otto and a fellow called Bill Tierney."

She nodded. "Go ahead. I know Otto was meeting Bill last night. I know there was something up."

"They stole a small fortune in gems last night, Mrs. Arden. But they didn't get
away with it. I trailed them. Your hus-
band made a 'phone call. About two-
thirty this morning. Was it you he called?"

"No," she said grimly. "I was awake
too—and worried."

"Then he 'phoned this man he worked
for, asking instructions. This man
guessed I was on your husband's trail and
ordered him to a certain address. He and
Bill Tierney went there. I wasn't far
back of them. As they crossed the street,
someone fired at them with a rifle from
the building toward which they were
headed."

She covered her eyes for a moment,
but when she removed the hand, she
wasn't crying. "He—went quickly?"

The Phantom nodded. "Yes. Now will
you talk? Will you co-operate to get
this man who murdered your husband
because he was no longer of any use
to him?"

"No," she said quietly. "I shall be taken
care of. Otto arranged all that. I shall
not have to worry again. Otto was my
husband. These rings he bought me. I
can prove both were honestly bought.
He died to give me these things and I
shall take them. I'm not afraid of any-
one, not even you, Phantom. Now get
out of here."

The Phantom frowned darkly. "Do you
know what you're doing? Didn't Otto
tell you how dangerous it is to buck
this combination? They play for keeps."

"Get out," she said imperiously.

THE Phantom shrugged and arose.
"They'll kill you, Mrs. Arden. They'll
pay you off in bullets."

"They'll pay me in the money they
should have paid Otto," she said grim-
ly. "Or—else."

"All right," the Phantom said. "You
can have your own way. If you don't
want Otto's death avenged, that's up to
you."

"Otto knew what he was into. He knew
the dangers and gambled with them. He

[Turn page]
did it so that we could live as we wanted to live, like this." She swept a hand around the lavish apartment. "Now he is dead, but he would want me to have this even if he could not share it. And I shall have it—no one can stop me."

The Phantom went out slowly. He knew there'd be no stolen gems here. All this, which the dead man's widow wanted so much, had been obtained from Arden's profits as a jewel thief, but the jewelry wouldn't be here. The trail led to his widow and stopped there. No amount of questioning would make her talk.

The Phantom went to a 'phone booth in the hotel lobby and called Frank Havens' newspaper office. He asked for Steve Huston, a red-headed dynamic bundle of explosive crime reporter who liked nothing better than to work with the Phantom Detective.

The Phantom identified himself. "It's a job exactly suited to you." He went on to explain about Mrs. Arden, being careful to describe her. Steve Huston was enthusiastically in agreement that keeping tabs on Cleo Arden was for him.

"She's smart, careful and cagey," the Phantom warned. "You'll probably learn little or nothing until I can put an idea to work. But keep at it anyway."

Huston stated that he'd be on the job twenty minutes after he told Frank Havens about it and secured permission to take the time off. The Phantom hung up, satisfied that Cleo Arden wouldn't make any contacts without Steve Huston knowing it.

The Phantom felt fairly satisfied with his work so far tonight. At least he had accomplished something in proving that a rich, well handled organization existed and maintained a strict control over its members. The Phantom never doubted but that Cleo Arden's finances would be taken care of in an ample manner, just as if her husband were alive.

Having this much to go by, the Phantom next did some routine checking up on the only other member of the outfit he knew. Like Otto Arden, Kip Bartram was also on parole and lived frugally on the sparse income of his job.

His record likewise showed that he was a married man, though not living with his wife. The Phantom got her address and went there to find it was a cheap tenement house from which she'd moved almost a year before. By some judicious questions and the use of a five-dollar bill, the Phantom got her new address and this one satisfied him more, for it was strictly Fifth Avenue.

He didn't pay Mrs. Bartram a visit. He simply learned that she had lived here ever since she'd moved from the downtown address. She had a light blue Cadillac convertible, several fur coats, a swanky apartment and no boy friends. She was happy and content, and while not as attractive as Otto Arden's wife, nor as young, she could still demand plenty of attention—and get it.

The Phantom now felt that he had two big clubs in his hands. He could turn them upon the organization which was forcing Kip Bartram to take a prison rap and which had cold bloodedly murdered Otto Arden and Bill Tierney.

Cleo Arden and Mrs. Kip Bartram had married crooks in the full knowledge of what life with such men meant. They had been willing to risk it and now they were about to absorb some of the results of a life of abetting crime.

The Phantom needed Inspector Gregg's help now. He taxied to Police Headquarters but Gregg had gone out on some emergency call. The Phantom sat in his office to wait for his return.

CHAPTER XI

EMERALD DEATH

REGG barged in, an hour later, excited and distraught. He stared at the Phantom. "Now look here, some three minutes ago I ordered the radio room to try and reach you. Don't tell me you got here this fast?"

"I've been waiting for you," the Phan-
THE DEADLY DIAMONDS

Gregg went around behind his desk and sat down. "I wanted to know how far you'd progressed before I started work on this new angle. This is what happened. About two hours ago a jeweler on Third Avenue phoned in to ask about a five-carat emerald which he described in detail. It sounded like one stolen by this gang of jewel thieves from Mrs. Severy of Park Avenue."

"And was it?" the Phantom asked.

"We think so. An old man, a very old man, came into this jeweler's and asked him to look at the stone and appraise it. Naturally it was worth a fortune and the jeweler believed he recognized it from circulars we'd sent out. He stalled the man, phoned us and came back to his customer."

"Then what happened—so that the man got away?" the Phantom asked. "He did, or you'd have him here."

"Yes, the customer decided the stall meant a police call. He got the emerald in his hands on a pretext and did a sprint out of the place. Got clean away too."

"Without being known?" the Phantom groaned.

"I didn't say that," Gregg chortled. "Seems this jeweler does business with Bert Hagen's wholesale jewelry firm and had been to Hagen's office a lot. It also seems he recognized his customer as one of Hagen's old employees."

The Phantom whistled softly. "And does Hagen know about this?"

"Not a word. I'm a little uncertain just how to handle it. We can grab the guy easily enough. I've got him covered right now. Or we can give him his head and see whom he contacts."

"The latter is the best idea, even if more dangerous for the man. But we'd better act on this right away. First of all, what about Bert Hagen?"

"We checked him six different ways. He runs a big wholesale business, is one of the best designers in the trade. His finances are excellent. His business gets better each year. He employs about fifty designers, maybe fifty or sixty office people and a force of at least thirty crack salesmen who sell all over the world."

"Suppose," the Phantom said, "we see what sort of a place Hagen runs. And find out what he knows about this man who wanted a stolen emerald appraised."

"Let's go!" Gregg said. "This is the first bit of progress we've made in this case. And the first piece of stolen jewelry that's come back into the daylight."

A police car took them to the new mid-town section devoted to wholesale jewelry. It was a branch of Maiden Lane on West 47th Street. Bert Hagen's place occupied five lower floors in one of the newer buildings.

It looked like any other business office. There was a receptionist, office help busily at work. The only different item was the fact that all doors seemed to be made of steel, painted to look like wood.

There was no stairway to the floors above, only an elevator manned by a uniformed guard with a gun at his hip. Gregg had to show his credentials before he was allowed to ride that elevator to the fifth floor where Hagen's salesrooms and private office were located.

They were dazzled by the display of gems in the show cases. Many of the cases were empty and clerks were stowing the pieces in a large vault. A very thin, white-haired man supervised the whole affair. He wore a black alpaca coat, a shoestring tie and a stiff collar. Fifty years ago he wouldn't have attracted any attention.

Gregg said, "Phantom, that's him. The guy who had the stolen emerald."

THE Phantom studied the man for a moment. "Only a detective knows how deceiving appearances can be," he commented. "But I'd be surprised if this man is a crook."

"He had the emerald," Gregg insisted flatly.

A dapper young man came to inform them that Hagen was waiting. They entered a large, plainly furnished office. Hagen sat behind a plain desk. He arose now, hand extended toward Gregg. Next
he shook hands with the Phantom.

“What in the world brings you two here, Inspector, at this hour of the day? We’re getting ready to close up.”

“We saw that,” Gregg said.

“Then there is something of importance I can help you with,” Hagen said. “Sit down and tell me.”

“You knew that the Severy emerald was stolen,” Gregg began.

“Well, no, I didn’t,” Hagen broke in. “But there have been so many of those robberies I don’t try to keep track of them any more.”

“The Severy emerald was stolen,” Gregg said. “It turned up today. A man you employ took it to a jeweler for appraisal.”

Hagen came to his feet slowly, face suddenly haggard. “One of my men?” he asked dully.

“That old fellow in the next room who seems to be supervising things,” Gregg said.

Hagen looked incredulous, then alarmed, and finally he gave a shout of laughter. “Do you mean Sylvester, by any chance? Hank Sylvester, to give him his full name.”

Gregg got up, went to the door and opened it a crack. He pointed at the back of the thin man who stood beside the big vault. “That’s him,” he said.

Hagen said, “Close the door. We’ll have Sylvester in here, of course, but first you’ve got to know about him. He worked in Maiden Lane for fifty years before he came to work for me—twenty years ago.”

“That should make him more than eighty,” the Phantom commented quietly.

“He won’t tell his real age. It’s closer to ninety, I think. In all those years millions upon millions of dollars worth of gems have passed through his hands, gentlemen. Not one grain of diamond dust stuck to his fingers and right now I’d trust him with every gem in this place. Now go ahead and tell me how in the world he got mixed up with this business.”

“Why not ask him?” Gregg demanded. “All I know is that he took a gem known to be stolen, to a jeweler’s for an appraisal.”

“On the face of it, that seems silly,” Hagen protested. “Sylvester knows gems better than any average jeweler.”

The Phantom asked, “He is quite old, Mr. Hagen. How is his eyesight?”

“Why, he never wore glasses... Oh, I see what you mean, Phantom. He might have needed glasses but wouldn’t wear them and he wasn’t certain about this particular stone.”

“That’s about it,” the Phantom said. “But, as Inspector Gregg suggested, why not let Sylvester talk for himself.”

There was a light tap on the door. Hagen gave them each a quick nod. “That’s him, now,” he said, “reporting before he goes home.”

Hagen went to the door, opened it and let Sylvester in. He was scrawny at closer range, his clothes hung off him like a scarecrow. His watery eyes studied Gregg and the Phantom suspiciously.

“It’s all right,” Hagen told him. “These are friends of mine. They can be trusted.”

“Hmm, I’m glad you think so,” Sylvester grumbled. “The vault is locked, the alarm switch is ready to be turned on. Guess that’s all, Mr. Hagen.”

“Ah, just a couple of more things,” Hagen said. He turned toward the Phantom. Sylvester’s watery eyes went bleak and possessed of a cold fear. He clasped both hands but the long fingers were restlessly moving.

GREGG cleared his throat and stepped forward. He didn’t have time to say a word. The office door suddenly flew open and a man with a bandaged right wrist and a gun in his left hand, stood framed in the doorway. The gun was steady and he held it as if he could shoot with either hand.

“Okay, boys,” he said. “You can reach.”

Hagen’s hands went up promptly. Gregg hesitated until he saw four other armed men in the outer office and recognized the futility of resistance. The Phantom saw those men too and was unwilling to
risk a gun battle in which too many might be killed.

The man with the bandaged wrist the Phantom had instantly recognized as Kip Bartram’s fellow footpad and that wrist was a souvenir of Richard Curtis Van Loan’s resistance. But this crook didn’t have the faintest idea that he had Van Loan on the other end of a gun.

One of the men in the outer office called a report. “Okay, Stelling. All the help left on schedule.”

Stelling turned his head slightly to call a reply and that was the moment Hank Sylvester selected to reach for the brass paper weight on Hagen’s desk. He had it half raised when Stelling turned back. Without a second’s delay the gunman fired. Just one shot—but well aimed. It hit Hank Sylvester in the left temple. He must have died instantly, though it took him a long time to hit the floor. He finally slid off the edge of the desk, leaving a trail of blood on the glass surface.

Stelling said, “The rest of you get the same thing if you so much as bat a whisker. Turn around, walk to the wall. Right up against it. Put your hands flat against the wall and keep them there.”

Other crooks entered the office. At Stelling’s orders they quickly searched Hagen and appropriated his wallet that was well enough filled to make them give a delighted series of exclamations.

Gregg was next. The man who searched him found Gregg’s badge and whistled. He threw it on the desk along with the police officer’s gun and cuffs.

“Pipe that,” he marvelled. “We caught us a real Inspector of Police.”

“Cops,” Stelling sneered. “Who is the other one? A dick too?”

The probing fingers of the thug found the Phantom’s detective sergeant badge and his gun. He wasn’t searched further, though it would have taken a man akin to a magician to find the jeweled Phantom’s badge.

“This guy is only a sergeant, Stelling,” the thug laughed and handed over the badge and gun. “Look, do you think that shot could be heard?”

“The doors of this joint are made of steel,” Stelling laughed harshly. “The place is just about soundproof. Keep those three guys covered and remember that two of them are cops.”

“Yeah,” the other man grunted. “I ain’t liable to forget.”

“I’ll take care of the safe,” Stelling said. “This is going to be one cinch of a job.”

He left the room and they could hear him ordering another man to bring up two small handbags. A moment later they heard the safe door open, the thinner door inside clanged as it was thrown back and Stelling gave happy reports of the gems he was hauling out.

Hagen said, “The safe wasn’t locked.”

“Shut up,” the gunman snapped. “And stay that way.”

The Phantom was scheming, seeking some way to get out of this. They’d shot down Sylvester and made murderers of themselves. Which meant that they had nothing to lose by adding a couple of more killings. If they learned that it was the Phantom Detective and not just a detective sergeant whom they had subdued, the guns were bound to bark. That secret had to be kept and the Phantom hoped that both Hagen and Gregg realized it.

Stelling came into the office then. He ordered the three prisoners to turn around. All the others were lined up beside him, four men holding guns.

Stelling said, “Now listen you three. We won’t knock you off if you do as we say. Inspector, how many cops are on the prowl outside this building?”

“None,” Gregg responded. “You should have sent me word that you’d be here. I’d have come prepared.”

“Sometimes you just can’t get the breaks,” Stelling said with a grin. “We’re leaving here. Hagen, if a burglar alarm goes off, you’ll get riddled first. Outside, there will be cars ready. We get into them without any fuss. Soon as we’re far enough away from here, you guys can start walking back.”

“Now look here—” Hagen protested.

When we hit the elevators and the street, act like nothing is wrong."

They filed out, past the yawning safe and the Phantom saw how well it had been looted. He was beginning to think that they'd made a mistake in not jumping Stelling's gun, before he could bring the other armed men into the office.

The Phantom gave no credence to Stelling's promise that all they'd have to do was walk back. Stelling, in killing Sylvester, had made more murder essential.

Hagen bit his lip. "Give him a break," he said. "We're doing as you tell us. After all, you can't expect a man who's been on the force as long as Gregg to—"

"You shut up too," Stelling growled. "The next one of you who opens his mouth dies quick. I'm sick of listening to your yapping."

They remained silent. The Phantom watched and hoped for a break but the thug who sat facing him must have had some sort of intuition for he never took his eyes off the Phantom and never lowered the gun a fraction of an inch.

They reached the speedway and headed uptown. They crossed the bridge, speeded up along the Saw Mill Road and finally took one of the cut-offs. In a few moments they were in a semi-rural section, part of some park preserve.

Stelling got out first. "This is where we leave you, boys," he said. "Pile out and line up."

They obeyed while the second car pulled up and three more men got out. Stelling led the way deeper into the preserve where the trees and shrubs were thickest. Finally he came to a stop.

"All right," he said. "We're letting you go—all three of you. But one by one, and you'll head into the forest. Five minutes apart so you can't get together and try to take us. Gregg, as the ranking cop you go first. Then this sergeant of yours. Hagen goes last. Start walking."

The Phantom's hands clenched into fists. He sensed what Stelling was up to. It was cold blooded murder. This was no escape for Stelling's three prisoners, just a way to satisfy his ego and sate his lust for killing. Perhaps he hoped to build himself up in the eyes of the men who served under him.

Gregg seemed to know it too. His eyes flashed a warning to the Phantom but there was hopelessness in them too. Hagen just stood there, frozen in fear. Stelling moved close to Hagen and stood beside him. Gregg moved away, slowly, as if he was counting his steps—conserving them, for they were his last steps. He didn't turn around but the Phantom saw that
as he moved down a path through the preserve, he stayed close to the edge of it. Gregg was going to dive for the brush if he got the slightest chance.

Stelling's face had been immobile. The Phantom studied it now. The other thugs stood watching, well aware of what was to happen and waiting for it. Stelling's lips turned down at the corners. His uninjured hand slid beneath his coat and came into view holding the nickel-plated revolver. He began laughing softly. The gun leveled at Inspector Gregg's back.

**That** was the moment when the Phantom gave Hagen a hard shove, sending him against the killer. But the gun had been level, Stelling's finger already squeezing trigger. The gun exploded by reflex action. Gregg gave a sharp cry, stumbled a few steps and then dropped to his knees. Finally he fell over and lay still.

The Phantom saw none of this. As he shoved Hagen, he wheeled and scurried into the brush. Stelling yelled orders. His men fanned out, guns ready. The Phantom kept on going as fast as he could travel but he was making a half circle of the scene, preparing to come back by another route if possible. He didn't intend leaving Hagen there, nor Inspector Gregg who might only be wounded.

Hagen yelled, "Phantom, never mind me!"

The Phantom heard Stelling and his men curse when they realized that the detective sergeant who'd obeyed their orders, had been the Phantom Detective. They began beating the brush faster and more intently than ever now.

The Phantom found a wide tree trunk, got behind it and stood there to regain his breath. Someone was moaning back in the clearing and he prayed that would be Inspector Gregg and that he'd be able to get away before these killers returned to finish the job on him.

None of the thugs were talking now, just moving slowly forward. There were enough of them to surround the area fairly well and it was still dusk so that there was no escape into darkness.

The Phantom heard brush crackle very close by. He took a sharp breath, held it and slowly moved around the tree. One of those thugs was creeping through the brush, an automatic in his fist. Somewhere ahead of the man were more cracking sounds which must have been made by another killer. The one the Phantom watched was taking no chances. He kept on going, crouched over, completely intent upon the sounds ahead of him.

The Phantom bent over too, listened a full minute and heard no one else close by. Then he charged the crook. It was useless to conceal himself, he had to depend upon speed.

The thug swung around, a trifle too late. As he tried to bring his gun to bear, the Phantom was already in a leap that carried him close enough to the thug's legs to seize them and pull the man down.

In a flash, the Phantom swarmed over him. There was no time to twist the gun out of the man's hand, talk him into behaving. The Phantom swung a short punch, connected with the thug's chin and stopped short the cry for help surging out of the man's throat.

The blow was too short to be fully effective and the thug began struggling. The Phantom scrambled to his feet, bent and swung a harder blow. This one connected better. The thug suddenly went limp.

The Phantom wrenched the automatic free of the thug's unresisting hand. He was barely in time for, in threshing around, they'd made enough noise to attract the others and one man was hurrying up.

The Phantom fired once. He meant to hit the man and he did. The thug screamed, dropped his gun and clawed at his thigh. His leg doubled under him and he fell.

The Phantom ran forward, picked up the fallen gun and kept on going.

He was headed back to the spot where Inspector Gregg had fallen. There were no more moans from the area. The Phantom heard car motors whine into life. Stelling was shouting orders. The big car
pulled away fast and Stelling was at the wheel.

The second car got into motion a second later but proceeded slower in order to pick up the thugs who came out of the preserve in answer to Stelling's shouts. The one who'd gone down with a bullet through his thigh, burst out of the brush in time to see the second car pick up speed and vanish. He began yelling and shaking his fist at it. Then he sat down weakly and started tearing his trouser leg to get at the wound.

The Phantom saw Hagen lying on his face. Gregg was also ominously still. The Phantom hurried up to him, dropped to one knee and turned the Inspector over. There was a deep furrow alongside Gregg's temple. He'd only been gougied by the slug but even that could be dangerous if the skull had been fractured. The Phantom felt the police officer's pulse and found it fairly good. At least he wasn't dying of shock. Possibly just knocked out.

**HURRIEDLY** the Phantom, gun in hand, ran to where Hagen lay. There was blood on the jeweler's face, his hair was matted with it and he'd been struck cruelly over the head probably with a gun butt. He was moaning softly and the Phantom realized it was his moans he'd heard.

Hagen was trying to sit up when the Phantom went over to help the crook with the thigh wound. Under the Phantom's orders, the thug applied a tourniquet fashioned of his neck tie and a stout piece of branch. Hagen was nursing his head in his hands and moaning again. The Phantom helped him to his feet and put a gun in his hand.

"Watch that mug," he pointed at the wounded crook. "We want him—alive, but if he tries to get away, shoot out his other leg."

"I'd like to—shoot his . . . head off," Hagen grumbled. "Gregg . . . how is he?"

"All right, I think," the Phantom said. "I've got another gorilla back in the woods. He might come in handy and he was only knocked out so I'd better go get him."

"Don't worry about this character." Hagen aimed the gun at the wounded man. "I'm aching to shoot somebody."

In five minutes the Phantom was back, herding the still groggy crook before him. They tied him to a tree and then went to help Gregg. The Phantom propped Gregg up against a tree trunk.

"Hagen," he said, "you can do the most good by trying to find help. If there's a highway nearby, flag down a car. If you can find a telephone, so much the better."

Hagen handed the gun to the Phantom. "I'll be as fast as I can. You might need this. I'll try to get a doctor too."

He hurried off and the Phantom began ministering to Gregg as best he could. The Inspector's eyelids flickered, finally opened. He groaned and closed them as if the light hurt more than the bullet wound. He tried again, this time slitting his eyes against what was left of the daylight that filtered through the trees.

"How bad am I?" he asked bluntly.

"Just lie still," the Phantom warned. "He got you alongside the head."

"Yeah," Gregg mumbled. "My head feels like a pumpkin. How come I wasn't plugged proper?"

"I shoved Hagen into Stelling as he was aiming. Too late to save you from this headache but at least you're alive and not badly hurt."

Gregg said, "I noticed you got yourself a bag of two. Nice going, but I'm sorry one of 'em isn't Stelling so I could take him apart. I've met rats but he tops them all."

"Hagen has gone for help," the Phantom explained. "You relax. I'm going to talk to those crooks, before they decide to keep their mouths shut. Both of them are plenty scared right now."

"Remind 'em," Gregg said, "that Hank Sylvester got more than just a crease alongside the head."

The Phantom walked over and squatted down in front of the man he'd knocked out. He said, "Well, they sort of left you holding a nice big empty sack full of po-
potential death."

The thug sneered, "What do you mean, potential death?"

"It works this way," the Phantom explained. "Stelling shot a man to death in Hagen's office. You were part of his mob engaged in stickup and looting the place. That makes you an accessory to armed robbery and as guilty of murder as though you fired the shot."

"They'll get me out of it," the crook derided. "You can't scare me. I'll be sprung in no time flat."

"Do you really think so?" the Phantom queried. "The charge is going to be first degree murder, which means no bail. When Inspector Gregg tells you how you stood by while Stelling shot at him, the District Attorney isn't going to like you very much. He'll move for a fast trial. I'd be willing to bet that in as little as eight months they'll roast you."

The thug lost some of his bravado. He had enough brains to realize that the Phantom was right. He licked his lips and kicked at the grass with his heels.

"Suppose I make a deal?" he asked.

"What have you got to offer?" the Phantom asked. "Anything less than the identity of the man who pays you off won't work."

"Stelling pays us. Look, I'm Joe Faris. The guy you plugged over there is Cliff Sprague. We worked for Stelling on this one deal, to case the Hagen joint and take it."

The Phantom shrugged. "That will get you no break. Stelling is a hired hand. Who gives him the money to pay you off?"

"Honest, we don't know," Faris insisted plaintively. "Stelling said when we went to work for him we were not to ask any questions. Well, we didn't. Sure, somebody pays off Stelling but we don't know who—or even when or how much."

It was logical to believe that the man was telling the truth and the Phantom didn't press him now. He could hear a car coming, which meant that Hagen had found help. It was more important to get Gregg and the wounded thug to a hospital. The questioning could wait.
and a pencil. "These two names are those of the newly made widows I talked to a few hours ago. The wives whom Bill Tierney and Otto Arden set up in luxury. There must have been some sort of an agreement whereby they'd been taken care of if anything happened to their husbands, because the Arden woman didn't seem in the least worried. In fact she slipped a bit and said if they killed her husband, they'd pay for it. She meant through the nose."

"They can shut them up by paying them," Gregg said. "How can we do anything about that?"

"Those two women crave the luxuries they're enjoying now, otherwise they'd have gone with their husbands who were compelled to live in poorer conditions because of their parole rules. Now if you take away those luxuries, those women aren't going to like it."

Gregg pursed his lips and nodded slowly. "We'll question all merchants who do business with them, talk to the landlord, the banks where they have accounts. Sure, we can sew the whole thing up nicely. Legal too—as everything they have must be considered the estates of their late husbands."

"Get on that right away," the Phantom suggested, "so that they'll begin wondering what's happened by tomorrow noon. You might also get the co-operation of the Post Office Department about holding up their mail. And be sure to cut off their 'phones."

"They'll have to run to whoever they depend on for money," Gregg chortled. "I'll have men watching. They'll be followed every step of the way."

"Good." The Phantom arose. "I'm going to prowl a bit, on the off chance of preventing a stickup tonight. You may communicate with me over your radio."

The intercom buzzed and a clerk announced that Bert Hagen was on his way in. Hagen was glad to see Gregg.

"When you went down I thought you were finished," he said. "Thanks to the Phantom's fast thinking that killer's aim was spoiled. Do you know that he intended picking us off, one by one?"

"That was easy to guess," Gregg grunted. "Seeing we'd witnessed his committing a murder. How much did you lose, Hagen?"

The jeweler sat down heavily, as if being reminded of his loss brought the whole thing back too vividly.

He said, "Everything. They cleaned out the safe. And when I checked to see what insurance companies to notify, I found that Sylvester had neglected to renew any of the policies and even gone to the extreme of hiding the letters from the agents and the companies that always handled my insurance."

Gregg whistled sharply. "Do you mean you weren't covered at all?"

"I mean exactly that, Inspector. All I know is what was wrong with Sylvester. He found out I intended to retire him on a small pension."

"And he sold out to those crooks because of that?" the Phantom asked.

"Sold out? Not exactly, Phantom. The way I see it, he was part and parcel of the mob. One of their spies. Sylvester advised them when one of my clients purchased some very valuable piece of jewelry. It had to be that way, otherwise how could Sylvester have been in possession of a stolen gem?"

Gregg said, "That's right. He did try to get an appraisal on a stone we know was part of the gang's loot."

"Sylvester," Hagen went on, "was getting soft. Forgetting things, losing papers and neglecting his work—like in not reinsuring my stock. Though I believe that was deliberate."

"Perhaps," the Phantom nodded. "At any rate Stelling made very certain to kill Sylvester quickly. It's true that Sylvester did reach for some sort of a missile to throw, but I believe that Stelling intended killing him anyway."

"I got the same impression," Gregg said. "That killer took mighty careful aim and put that slug where it would do its work fast. Is this going to wash you up, Hagen?"

"No, fortunately," Hagen replied. "I
had upwards of a hundred and fifty thousand in gems in that safe which Sylvester must have left unlocked for those crooks. But even Sylvester didn't know that ever since all these robberies, I've made it a point to hide a lot of valuable gems elsewhere on the premises. I can make the grade. I'm on the brink of ruin but I'll pull out."

"Good," the Phantom said. "You might give Inspector Gregg a list of the stuff they took. Just so a check can be made, though I doubt any of it will turn up."

Gregg said, "Phantom, what on earth do you suppose they do with the loot?"

The Phantom shrugged. "I think if I knew that I'd have no trouble finding the men who direct these crimes, Inspector. Good night. I'll drop in on you, Mr. Hagen."

"Any time," Hagen smiled. "We three should be great friends seeing we faced death together."

The Phantom left Police Headquarters and taxied to a garage not far from the apartment house where he lived as Richard Curtis Van Loan. He asked for, and was given, a car which was kept in that garage under a false name and turned over to whoever could show the papers for it.

He drove the car to within half a block of the Club Peacock where this whole affair had started, in-so-far as the Phantom was concerned. He wondered about Martha Omley and risked a call to the hospital. Martha was much better, they reported.

The Phantom entered the Club Peacock and was given a secluded table, which was what he wanted. He realized he hadn't eaten in a long time and ordered food which could be prepared quickly. At any moment he might have to leave.

For already, in the few moments he'd been there, he was spotting women who openly flaunted fortunes in gems. There was some kind of a party going on at ringside and the jewels rivaled the synthetics set in the glittering tail of the peacock backdrop behind the stage.

Dell Folen, the all-night disc jockey, was on hand carrying a recording apparatus and getting the party guests to speak into the mike. Folen would later select the recorded words made by the more famous of the people and play them over the air after midnight.

WHILE the Phantom tackled the steak and potatoes, he studied the rest of the crowd, seeking the fingerman who had the class and polish sufficient to get into places of this kind without being suspected.

As Richard Curtis Van Loan, the Phantom made it a habit to know as many people as possible and most of those present tonight were at least faintly familiar to him. He noticed no one table hopping for a better look at jeweled throats or wrists. Perhaps, he reasoned, there were no jobs planned for tonight. Stelling and the others might be too busy getting over their temporary defeats of the afternoon.

Two middle-aged people, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Sanborn, bowed to the orchestra leader's announcement of their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. Apparently Mrs. Sanborn's gift had been the blazing bracelet which she showed proudly to friends. There were other gems just as valuable around her throat, pinned to her evening gown and encircling her fingers. No amount of publicity nor warnings of danger seemed to have much effect. Gems were made to be worn and the women were determined to wear them.

Of all the guests, the diamonds of Mrs. Sanborn seemed to be the largest and most numerous. The Phantom decided upon that and idled over his dessert and coffee. When he saw Sanborn signal for his check, the Phantom quickly paid his own and hurried out of the club. He reached his car, drove it around the block and was pulled in to the curb when the Sanborns emerged.

The doorman brought up their sedan and in a few moments they were driving away. The Phantom waited until he was certain they could not be trailed. Then he followed them. They were heading across town to the West Side and
stuck closely to a wide cross artery. The Phantom took a chance, left the trail and circled the block at a fast clip. He picked up the Sanborn car again and now he was positive that it could not have been followed.

He didn’t relax his vigilance however, and never thought of abandoning his unobtrusive protection for these people. Sanborn pulled to the curb in front of a white brick front private residence. It was one of those places that are anything but ostentatious from the outside, and within have as many rooms as a country manor house. Sanborn got out of the car, went around it and opened the door for his wife. He helped her out as the Phantom stopped around the next corner and hurried back.

The Sanborns reached the brick steps which led upwards to their front door. At that instant the two men appeared. They’d been hidden in the basement entrance of the house next door and they came silently and fast. Each man held a gun.

The Phantom hastily backed into a doorway. He saw that the Sanborns had raised their hands and were meekly surrendering the gems. The stickup man who took them had even put his gun away. The other man, holding a revolver rather carelessly, didn’t know it but he was looming big in the sights of the Phantom’s automatic. If he raised that revolver to shoot, he’d be a dead man.

Again the Phantom had to risk the loss of the stolen gems. Until he was able to get a line on how they were disposed of by these crooks, he could make little progress. He did reflect somewhat bitterly on the fact that while he’d spotted no fingerman in the cafe, someone had tipped off these crooks and done it fast.

Now the pair were backing away, warn-

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THE Phantom was prepared for this quick escape too. He reached his own car and took up the chase. Four blocks north, the two stickup men abandoned the sedan and climbed into a cheaper car waiting for them. The Phantom followed that car at a distance, perfering to risk losing them to being spotted.

They were heading downtown now, obeying every traffic light and attracting no attention. Finally they turned a corner, went completely around the block and then stopped in front of an old office building. The Phantom felt the first thrill of success. He knew this building. Attorney Iselin had his office here.

The pair entered the building and the Phantom headed toward it. Passing the car they’d left at the curb, he heard its radio playing softly.

The lobby which the pair had entered was dark. Not even a weak bulb was lit and that became the Phantom’s tipoff. This was a trap. Those two hoodlums knew he’d been on their trail. They’d deliberately led him here and were waiting for him to enter.

He turned on his heel and ran lightly to the corner, turned it and hurried along the side street wall of the building until he came to the service entrance. Here he found the door locked but a priceless, adjustable key, fashioned by a Swiss genius at master keys, soon determined the nature of the lock, was easily adjusted by the Phantom and the bolt turned back.

He drew his gun as he moved into the dark silence of the basement.
CHAPTER XIV
DANCE ON AIR

DARKNESS compelled the Phantom to use the pencil flash he carried and when he located the stairway he climbed it slowly, testing each step before putting his weight on it. At the top was a plain wooden door which he guessed would lead into the lobby. He grasped the knob hard, turned it firmly and pushed the door open a crack. He released the knob slowly, making no noise at all.

No light came through the tiny crack and for this he was grateful. He opened the door further, praying its hinges wouldn’t squeal an alarm. Then he heard a hoarse whisper from well down the lobby.

“Hey, Matty, I think he beat it.”

The answer came from a man so close to the Phantom that he jumped in surprise.

This man said, “We’ll wait a couple of more minutes. What I’m scared of is he went for the cops.”

“I think he’s waiting outside,” the other called back in a hoarse whisper. “The Phantom never waits for cops to show.”

There was a moment or two of eerie silence. The man near the front of the lobby heard what sounded like a choked off gasp. He tensed, gun ready. The Phantom hadn’t been able to prevent that choked off gasp. One hand had covered the holdup man’s mouth and with his other arm the Phantom had yanked the man’s head back while he drove a knee hard into the small of his back.

The Phantom knew how to silence a man and keep him that way for minutes at a time. When he eased his victim to the floor, the crook was unconscious.

“Matty!” the other man whispered. “Hey, Matty!”

The Phantom answered in a hoarse voice that was a good imitation of Matty’s. “Come back here. There’s something wrong. We’re going out the back way.”

“Yeah,” the other man began running toward the Phantom. “I don’t like this at all.”

He saw the stretched out form of Matty too late. A fist came out of the darkness and hit him behind the left ear. The blow was meant to paralyze him and it did. He dropped his gun and fell across the form of his partner in crime.

Working fast now, the Phantom searched both men. He didn’t find the stolen gems. He used their belts and ties to bind them and did a thorough job of it. Then he gagged them, made sure they were able to breathe and hurried to the stairway.

He went up the stairs softly but fast. At the fourth floor he stopped to listen before entering the corridor. The glass upper half of Iselin’s door was yellow with light.

The Phantom, gun ready, threw that [Turn page]
door wide open. He stepped cautiously into the small waiting room and then did a sprint into the private office. Iselin was there, but not in a position to resist or alibi himself. He was hanging from the old fashioned overhead light fixture and life had left his body.

The Phantom made certain of that before he dialed Police Headquarters and asked Inspector Gregg to come down here at once. He searched the office without moving anything and then went through the dead man’s pockets. There were no jewels.

He rode the night elevator, which was self-operated, to the lobby floor, made certain his prisoners were still there and then went out to their car. He searched it completely, and frowned. He hadn’t seen them make a stop, except here, and they’d been out of his sight only a matter of a few seconds at a time. Unless they had passed the stolen loot to an accomplice during one of those few and brief instances, they either knew of an excellent hiding place or—someone else had been in the building to accept the jewels—Someone who had managed to get clear.

INSPECTOR GREGG rolled up with the small army of police which invariably checks murders. Each detective was busy pinning his badge to his coat lapel. Even Gregg sported a new one.

The Phantom said, “Iselin is up there, hanging from the chandelier. He’s been dead for at least half an hour, I should judge. There was a stickup, just as I expected. The crooks are tied up inside the building.”

“Good,” Gregg approved. “Maybe this time we can return the loot.”

“I’m afraid not, Inspector. It’s gone—and don’t ask me where or how. When I didn’t find it on them I figured they came here to pass it to Iselin and he had the stuff—but Iselin must have been dead when these two stickup artists arrived.”

“But why did they come here, of all places?” Gregg asked. “Unless they wanted to do business with Iselin and didn’t know he was dead.”

“Those two men never went above the lobby floor,” the Phantom said. “Somehow they made contact with a man who keeps pretty well hidden, a man who takes the gems and gets clear.”

“Well, let’s see what they have to say for themselves,” Gregg suggested. “I’ll start work on Iselin’s death later. Funny thing, I thought about him tonight.”

“Yes?” The Phantom made the word a question, wholly unexpecting the answer that came.

“Yep. When Iselin pleaded Kip Bartram guilty, I went to see an old lady whom I’d had guarded. You may recall that she was with that socialite chap, Van Loan.”

“I—do recall,” the Phantom said.

“Well, with Kip agreeing to take the rap, I figured there was no longer any need to keep a guard around Martha Omley and she didn’t seem to mind either. After all, if any threats were made against her and Van Loan, they were automatically wiped out when Kip pleaded guilty.”

The Phantom stood there, in the reflected light of several police flashlights, and broke into a cold sweat. Gregg was busy examining the pair of crooks and changing the necktie ropes around their wrists for handcuffs.

Gregg had withdrawn the guard around Martha Omley. Perhaps that was why Kip had pleaded guilty, why Iselin had been able to persuade him to accept the penalty. Kip had been acting under orders. There had been no surrender in his tone when he was being led away, passing close by Richard Curtis Van Loan.

Gregg said, “This pair are still out. Okay, boys, haul them to my office. They see nobody, make no phone calls. For the time being you can hold them on suspicion of murder.”

Gregg stepped aside while the pair were carried out. “Think they’ll talk, Phantom?” he asked.

“No. I don’t think any of the gang will talk, because they are too well protected by the man who leads them. I believe he rules through a combination of fear and benevolence.”
“Maybe,” Gregg conceded. “Well, let’s go up and see about Iselin. It looks like Kip Bartram is going to need a new lawyer, eh, Phantom?”

“Yes,” the Phantom replied. “Inspector, you don’t need me up there. I’ve told you all I know. I want to check around and try to locate the man to whom the jewels were passed. This isn’t the first time the actual stickup men were caught without the loot on them.”

“Whatsoever you want,” Gregg said. “I’ll try to make that pair talk. Maybe you’ll drop in later, eh?”

“I’ll be there,” the Phantom said. “You might have Mr. and Mrs. Sanborn, of West Clark Street, take a look at your prisoners. I’m sure they’ll identify them.”

Gregg frowned slightly as the Phantom hurried away. He wondered why this mysterious crime fighter was in such a rush. Gregg shrugged and went to the elevator. He also had work to do.

The Phantom moved rapidly to where he’d parked his car. He drove uptown at a fast clip. There was a crimson glow in the sky above the tower of Frank Havens’ newspaper building. It was a signal that the Phantom was urgently wanted by Havens. That red light was never turned on except in an emergency.

The Phantom rolled to the curb, sought the nearest telephone in a tobacco store and dialed Havens’ home. The publisher answered the phone.

“I saw the light,” the Phantom said crisply.

HAVENS let go with a long sigh of relief. As always he took no chances on the phone being tapped or the presence of hidden dictaphones picking up everything he said.

“I’ll drop in on you,” he said. “Something has happened that you should know.”

The Phantom hung up, drove to within three blocks of his penthouse apartment and entered it by his private door. The elevator whisked him upwards. He turned on no lights until he was inside the hidden dressing-room. There, behind the closed door, he snapped on lights and hastily removed the disguise he was wearing.

In a matter of moments, he was Richard Curtis Van Loan, immaculately turned out in tuxedo and black homburg. Dressed, he mused, for death. Because he knew now why Kip Bartram had pleaded guilty and why Iselin had been retained as his attorney. Apparently it had been a scheme to remove the cause for menace over Martha Omley, roll Inspector Gregg and Van Loan into a sense of security. It had worked with Gregg too.

He’d fallen hard for the trick and removed the guard.

Finding Martha Omley wouldn’t be a difficult matter for a smart crook, and being unguarded, she could be murdered or kidnapped quite easily. Martha had spunk and stamina but not enough to put up any kind of a real fight against the odds they’d send out on the job.

Iselin had been chosen to stage the stunt because he was already under suspicion. But Iselin had been clever too, and had to be killed. Though why the two footpads who robbed the Sanborns had been ordered to Iselin’s office building was something the Phantom couldn’t fathom.

He did realize, however, that by going to all this work and necessary risk, the band of crooks revealed one significant thing.

Kip Bartram was either too valuable to be thrown away—or he knew far too much.

Freeing him wouldn’t be hard now. He could demand a new attorney, who would insist that Iselin had misled Bartram and that Bartram now changed his plea to not guilty. Without Martha and Van Loan to testify, there’d be only a weak case. Of course, Bert Hagen had identified Bartram but his word alone, would hardly be sufficient. All the loose ends were coming together now, but they were forming a web which threatened to engulf and trap Van Loan.

He couldn’t sit around and wait for Frank Havens to show. He’d have to see him later.
CHAPTER XV

LOCKED ROOM

USING the private elevator, Richard Curtis Van Loan made his way to the side door of the building, went out to the street and hurried away. At the corner he hailed a cab, had himself driven a dozen blocks off. He paid the driver, hailed another cab and gave the address of his apartment.

It pulled up and he got out. He saw no one hanging around. Paying off the driver, Van Loan walked slowly into the lobby. Almost at once someone stepped up behind him.

"Just keep on going, chum," a voice said. "That's a gun you feel nudging your ribs. We're headed for your apartment."

Van Loan turned his head slowly, the rest of his body remaining rigid. He saw the man who'd pulled this act before. The man who'd had the gorilla-like killer named Buster with him.

"Now look," Van began to protest. "I—"


Van Loan walked to the night elevator and stepped in. When the door closed, the thug openly displayed his gun. Van Loan sent the car upwards, to the top floor. In a few seconds they were inside his apartment.

Van Loan faced the thug squarely. "There must be some mistake," he argued. "That man I was warned not to testify against—well, he pleaded guilty. If he admits his crime it makes no difference whether or not Mrs. Omley or I testify against him."

"Maybe," the thug grinned crookedly, "he'll change his mind about taking the rap. You sit down there by the 'phone and call the hospital. The one where you parked the old lady."

"Oh, no you don't."

"She is going to stay hidden. You can do what you like to me, but I won't obey."

"Chum," the gun said, "you got more spunk than I figured. All I want you to do is call the hospital and ask about the old lady. You'll find she ain't there. We knew where she was. Room Four-Oh-Nine at the Riverview Hospital."

Van sat down slowly and reached for the 'phone. He dialed the hospital number from memory and asked that someone go to Mrs. Omley's room at once. There was a long wait during which the gunman helped himself to several cigarettes and examined, without apparent appreciation, the Corots and Van Dykes on the walls.

A man who identified himself as a doctor, spoke over the 'phone. "Mr. Van Loan, we can't account for it. Mrs. Omley is not in her room."

"Thank you," Van said softly. He hung up, leaned back and regarded the crook somewhat nervously. He said, "Well, you were right. What does it mean?"

"Remember that bruiser named Buster? The one you took apart? Well, he took Mrs. Omley. She's safe—so far. And she'll stay that way if you don't make any trouble and just come along with me."

"Why?" Van demanded.

"Our friend in the clink wants out. If you and the old lady don't testify, there won't be any case. It's as easy as that."

"What happens to us then?" Van wanted to know.

"We'll make you comfortable until Bram is free and has a chance to leave so he'll never be caught again. After that you and the old lady are of no use to us, so you can go. It won't take long."

Van Loan seemed to make up his mind. "Very well, there is nothing I can do but obey."

"Now you're showing a lot of sense." The gunman nodded. "It would be just too bad if Buster had to go to work on the old lady. That guy has no idea how strong he is. I don't think she'd live very long."

"Then get me there," Van Loan begged in sudden terror.

"Sure. Only first you sit down and write a letter. Say you heard the old
lady took a powder out of the hospital, that you met her, and you're taking her home. Address it to that newspaper guy who is such a friend of yours."

"Whatever you say," Van Loan groaned. He went over to a desk and rapidly wrote the letter. The gunman scanned it before he let Van seal the envelope. Then he took the letter and when they were in the lobby, the gunman personally dropped it into the mailbox. It seemed that he had made himself very familiar with the premises while he waited for Van Loan. The mail slot was in a very unobtrusive place, hidden behind some tall ferns, yet he went straight to it.

"Let's go," he told Van. "I got a car outside."

This time the ride wasn't very long and never departed from the city proper. Downtown, below the numbered streets, they stopped before a modern apartment building. The lobby was clean and neat. People walked in and out of it, using the automatic elevators at the far end of the lobby. They were people of average type.

Van's captor waited until they were able to use one of the cars without company. He pushed the button to the tenth floor. There he took Van's elbow and piloted him along a corridor. Several of the apartment doors were open, showing empty rooms.

The crook said, "Take a good look into them apartments," he offered. "We got the whole floor, pal. We rented every room and we stalled the management by saying the families we expected are due any day."

"Well, what does it mean?" Van Loan asked.

"Just this. You can yell your head off and there won't be anybody to hear you."

Van sighed. "You think of everything. But if neither Mrs. Omley nor myself is harmed, I don't think we'll try to get away or make any disturbance. For myself, I want to keep on living. For Mrs. Omley—well, she has a zest for life as strong as any of us."

"Sure," the thug said. "Keep on thinking that way and we'll all be happy."

He rapped smartly on the panels of a door at the end of the hall. It was a signal of some kind for the door was quickly unlocked. Van walked into a modestly furnished apartment and looked first for Martha. She wasn't there and he began to worry.

Buster was present however, and the sight of Van Loan made him growl. Buster wouldn't forget the licking he'd taken at the hands of this lean man, for a long time.

"In that room," Van's captor said. "Buster, unlock it."

The huge man fumbled in his pocket, found a key and opened the door. He stepped aside and Van saw Martha Omley seated in a chair, staring out of the window. He began hurrying toward her.

Suddenly his shoulder was seized, he was spun around and a fist as big as a grapefruit hit him a glancing blow on the cheek. He was hurled into the room by the force of the punch. Buster stood there, laughing at him and rubbing his knuckles in glee.

"That," he promised, "is just a taste."

He closed the door and locked it. Martha had risen to her feet as Van came flying into the room. She still wore bandages, but she could speak.

"Van." She took his arm. "Van, are you hurt?"

He shook his head. "I'm all right, Martha. This is a sorry predicament."

She laughed a little. "The police guard left. I fell asleep and the next thing I knew, I was being carried by that giant out there. The one who struck you. There was a fire-escape outside my window and here I am."

Van went to the window and looked out. This apartment had been well chosen. Across a narrow court was a solid blank wall, probably of a fireproof storage warehouse.

"What are we going to do, Van?" Martha asked. "I'm not fool enough to think they'll just keep us here indefinitely. After all, if we're freed, that man who
robbed me will only be picked up again.”

“I don’t know what to do,” Van replied and it was an honest answer, for even while thinking as the Phantom did under such circumstances, he saw no way out.

“Do you think they’ll kill us, Van?”

He turned, startled at the question. “No,” he answered hastily. “No, I’m sure they won’t do that. No reason.”

“Which means you’re pretty sure they will kill us,” Martha said softly. “Van, we won’t just sit here and let them get away with it.”

He paced back and forth. Once he lay flat and put his ear against a bare part of the floor. He heard nothing from the apartment below and decided they’d probably leased that too. Without much question this was the headquarters of the mob. But where was the leader? The man whose brains had originated the scheme for all this robbery and whose greed had now carried it to the ultimate limits of crime—into murder?

Martha instinctively let him alone, not breaking into his thoughts with unnecessary questions or foolish conversation. Van kept pacing the floor and slowly an idea took shape. One which would have to be handled with a great deal of tact, for a slip might give away his dual identity. He walked over to the door and banged hard on it.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PHANTOM’S TRICK

ISTS clenched and ready, Buster opened the door, grinning hugely. Van backed away from him. He wasn’t afraid of this giant, but as Richard Curtis Van Loan he wasn’t supposed to show the belligerence of the Phantom Detective.

“Wait a minute,” Van said nervously. “I want to talk—to make a deal. Where is the man who brought me here?”

Buster said, “Hey, Ronnie! The cluck wants to make a deal. Shall I bust him one?”

Ronnie, the tall crook, stepped into the room. He didn’t seem especially interested. Van Loan began to talk, urgently, pleading his cause with the man.

“You know I’m wealthy. I’ve got plenty of money. I could make it worth your while to let me go. After all—you can’t profit very much from stealing jewels and kidnapping people. I can give you money—in a legal way so you won’t be breaking any laws.”

“But we let you go?” Ronnie smirked. “Of course. I can’t negotiate such sums of money while I’m locked up here.”

“If they must have a hostage,” Martha called from her chair near the window, “they can hold me. Personally, I think you’re being very foolish, Van.”

“It’s not foolish to buy your life,” Van insisted. “How could money be spent more wisely than that? I’ll talk in the thousands. The high thousands.”

Ronnie rubbed his chin. “Keep at it, chum,” he suggested. “But first figure out how we can lay our hands on the dough without you leaving here. Otherwise—nothing doing.”

“But I can’t trust you to release us after you have the money,” Van protested.

“You can’t, but you will,” Ronnie said. “Funny, I never figured on a deal like this.”

“You’ll make fifty times what you can get out of stealing jewels,” Van insisted again.

Ronnie gave him a sharp glance. “You said that before, chum. Get this: any deal with you would be just a sideline. Our take in lifting gems is more than five guys like you could be worth.”

Van’s enthusiasm seemed dampened somewhat. “I—I suppose so. When I reason it out—remember what you took from Mrs. Omley—and from Muriel Havens.”

“Muriel Havens?” Ronnie seized Van Loan’s arm and shoved him against the wall. “What do you know about the Havens’ job?”

“Why—nothing. Nothing at all.” Van tried to pull free. “It’s just that—that—”
“Van happens to be one of Muriel Havens’ best friends,” Martha Omley broke in. “If she was robbed, she’d tell him all about it, just as a matter of course.”

Ronnie let go of Van. “Why didn’t you say so then?”

“I didn’t have a chance,” Van Loan replied. “As I was saying, I may have underestimated you and your profits. I know that Muriel’s necklace was worth nearly thirty thousand dollars, the bracelet half as much, I think. I do know what the ear-rings cost. I bought them myself. You’d be surprised how much diamonds with a distinct bluish cast to them are worth.”

“Earrings?” Ronnie mused. “Diamond earrings?”

“Look here,” Van went on, “I’ll negotiate a separate deal for them. They happen to have a certain historical value too. I’ll pay you seventy thousand dollars for them. After all, I had to pay almost twice that much.”

“Seventy grand for earrings worth twice as much as that?” Ronnie cried. “What are you trying to take us for?”

“Well, I happen to know what I paid for them,” Van Loan said stiffly. “They are not only priceless as gems, but a collector’s item as well. There was a certain Pharaoh’s princess who first wore them.”

Ronnie cut him off sharply. “Now let me get this straight. Muriel Havens was wearing those earrings the night she was robbed? You’re sure?”

“Why, quite positive,” Van said. “As a matter of fact, Muriel recalled their being stolen quite vividly because the thief took them beneath a light and exclaimed over them—over their beauty. According to Muriel, this thief mentioned something about knowing whom they’d look good on.”

Ronnie swung on his heel, walked out of the room and motioned Buster to lock the door. The moment the key had turned, Van tiptoed to the door and placed his ear against the panels. He could hear Ronnie giving orders.

“We were buncoed by either Bill Tierney or Otto Arden. They never turned in no earrings and from what that guy says, they were worth more than all the rest of the stuff put together.”

Someone said, “Yeah, I always claimed you can’t ring married guys into this kind of a racket. It was Bill Tierney. His wife’s a nice lookin’ doll and Bill liked to dress her up real pretty. He took the earrings to her.”

Ronnie said, “Okay, you go tell both of those dames to come here. Right away! If they squawk, tell ’em the big boss is here and they better step on it if they want their dough to keep coming regular.”

“I’ll make it good and strong,” the other crook vowed. “Maybe I oughta use the ’phone, huh?”

“Outside some place. Just get them here fast. If they’re holding out on them earrings, so help me, I’ll tell the boss both of ’em ought to be taken care of for good.”

Van moved away from the door. Martha gave him a glance full of curiosity. “Now what was all that for?” she asked.

Van smiled nervously. “I simply tried to buy them off, that’s all. We can’t fight our way out, Martha.”

“You’re thinking of me,” she said. “I saw you act when those men robbed me. I know you’re not a coward. I also know what a handicap it must be to have me on your mind.”

“Stop talking like that,” Van begged. “We’re not dead yet.”

“They will kill us,” Martha said. “I heard enough to know they’ve resorted to murder already and killing us won’t make much difference to them.”

Van said, “Maybe by offering enough money, I can persuade them to let us go.”

She nodded. “I can’t see any other way. You can add what I’ve got to whatever you want to offer them. And you might as well start the negotiations right now.”

“No,” he said. “It’s better if we wait. Let that crook think it over. He might want to deal with us just by himself so he can have it all. That’s what I’m hoping for.”
Martha gave him a shrewed glance. "Van, I can't help but think you're stalling for some reason though I'll be switched if I know what it could be. No one knows where we are. This was a perfect kidnap job."

Van went to the window and looked out on the blank brick wall. He only hoped that the crooks in the other room weren't as clever as Martha. Because he was stalling and he had set up a plan through which they might be saved. It might not work, but there was nothing else.

He glanced at his watch and went over to Martha's side. "In a few minutes I'm going to start taking this place apart. They'll send in a man mountain who has a particular dislike for me because I once bested him in a fight."

"I thought he looked murder when you were brought in," Martha said. "He's the man who carried me out of the hospital?"

"Yes, and I can take him again. Then, maybe, I can tackle the others."

"I thought you were going to try and buy your way out," Martha protested.

"If this fails, yes."

Martha wagged her head. "I still think you know more than you're telling me. Let's see if I can find something to use as a club."

Van heard a shrill voice in the room next door. He pressed an ear against the panels. It was the voice of Bill Tierney's wife. He waited another five minutes and then Cleo Arden was brought in. Both women expressed their ideas about the whole affair.

Cleo said, "Otto didn't give me any earrings. He didn't come to see me that night at all. You know what happened to him."

Ronnie tried to soothe her. "Cleo, you're being well taken care of and you'll never want for anything again. Otto was killed by a guy who wanted to muscle in on us. But there was a pair of earrings taken that night—from the Havens girl. Somewhere they vanished and we figured Otto might have slipped them to you."

"How?" Cleo demanded. "He didn't show up at my place and you know it."

"He could have mailed them," Ronnie said. "He had enough experience to do that."

"But he didn't," Cleo protested. "They'd have arrived by now. I'm not holding out."

Ronnie said, "Okay, okay. Maybe Bill Tierney got himself a few ideas."

"I didn't see any earrings," his widow said shrilly. "All I know is Bill got killed and I need dough. And I'm not getting it the way it should come through."

Van stepped back from the door a pace, doubled both fists and began smashing them against the door. He yelled as loud as he could, adding some hard kicks that made the door rattle.

He turned his head. "Martha," he said, "start dumping things out of the window. Anything and everything. Chairs—tables—make it sound like an earthquake."

"Now," Martha said, "you're talking. I'm sick of just sitting here."

She went to work in a lusty fashion. Van kept smashing at the door until it opened and Buster came in like a tackle who alone can win the game.

His big fist rammed against Van Loan's chest. It was a cruel blow—a lucky punch—and it sent Van flying backwards. He had a glimpse of Cleo Arden and Bill Tierney's widow, regarding the whole thing with amazement.

Buster saw Martha toss a chair through the window and went for her. Before his huge hands could reach the old lady, Van made a lunge at him, wound arms around the big man's legs and pulled him down. He swarmed over Buster, smashing short punches.

But this was a mistake, for Buster was better at wrestling than at fighting. Those two deadly strong arms encircled Van Loan and began to squeeze. The arms let go for a second, then found a grip around Van's chest while Buster's thick legs circled Van's middle. Now the squeezing really began.

Van had his arms free, at least. He hammered at Buster's chin, but the
punches were too short to be really effective. He smashed at the big man's nose and drew blood, but that didn't work either.

Van had been carefully trained in the art of self-defense. As the Phantom Detective, he'd also learned every trick in rough and tumble fighting. Buster could kill him with his pressure, break his ribs, rupture his internal organs. And he was strong enough to maintain this grip.

But Van knew that all men have a weak point. He had to take advantage of his knowledge quickly or it would be too late. Van reached up and pried one of Buster's fingers out of that locking grip. He bent the finger back and increased the pressure. Buster screamed as it reached the breaking point. His arms relaxed and Van breathed in his first full breath of air in more than a minute. Van bent the finger again, gave a mighty heave and sent Buster rolling over until Van was straddling him.

Buster's legs were still squeezing, but Van was free of those arms and able now to really swing his punches. He landed one against Buster's jaws, saw the big man's eyes glaze. Van began pumping blows at that chin and with each one he yowled at the top of his lungs.

RONNIE was circling him now. The two women had drawn back in alarm. The other crooks were moving forward. Ronnie drew a gun, held it by the barrel and came closer.

Martha had nothing except the straight backed chair left, but she threw this into Ronnie's path and he stumbled over it. He kicked it aside, but that wasted fraction of a moment was enough to make all the difference.

Van felt Buster's leg grip relax. He was up quickly. Before Ronnie could swing the gun, Van hit him just over the heart. As Ronnie doubled up in pain, Van charged through the door, straight at the three thugs who were waiting. He chopped a blow at one of them, grabbed a bottle placed on a table and hurled it through the window. He scooped up the glasses and threw them at the door of the apartment.

One man landed on his back, arm circling Van's throat. Van bent over quickly, his hands reached up, secured a grip on the attacker's hair and with a mighty heave he pulled the man up and over until he struck the apartment door with a crash that almost broke it down.

The two women had enough of this. They opened the door and ran out. Van tried to reach the door too. There was a shot. The bullet zipped past his head and went on through the door panel. Van froze where he was and then slowly raised both hands.

Ronnie, puffing badly and his face twisted in pain, held his gun ready. So did the other thugs and they hemmed Van in. He turned around carefully. Buster was coming out of the other room, mopping at his face with a handkerchief already bloody. There was the light of murder in his eyes.

Ronnie said, "Buster, take him. Take him good! We might as well get this over with—now."

CHAPTER XVII

BOOK OF CODES

LOOKING over the shoulders of the advancing men, Van saw Martha coming toward them. She couldn't do much, but she wasn't going to cower in some corner until they were ready to turn on her.

Then there was a sudden pounding on the door. Ronnie's eyes showed alarm. He signaled for quiet. The same person pounded again.

"Hey—in there. What's going on? This is the law!"

"It's murder!" Van yelled. "They're going to murder us."

Ronnie raised the gun. Van said quickly, "You'll burn if you shoot me. You can't get away. There's no other way out except the door and the police have it blocked."

THE DEADLY DIAMONDS

65
“Open that door or we’ll shoot the lock off,” the same man called from the hallway.

Van jumped nimbly aside. Ronnie bit his lips. His men were retreating, and once near the window, they began throwing their guns out. Ronnie jerked his head nervously. The only man in the room whose intentness of purpose wasn’t going to be swerved by any police, was the gigantic Buster who kept right on coming.

Buster was directly in line with the door when the police opened fire. Buster screamed, spun around as the slugs hit him. Then he went down in a heap. That seemed to settle it. Ronnie threw his gun away.

Van called, “I’m opening the door. They’ve surrendered. Don’t shoot!”

He turned the key, pulled the door open and four detectives entered carefully. Behind them, his red hair awry, was Steve Huston, the crime reporter for Havens’ newspaper. Huston was the man whom the Phantom had assigned to watch and follow Cleo Arden.

“Holy smokes,” Huston gasped. “That’s Van Loan. Sergeant, he’s the guy who identified some of those jewel robbers.”

Van said, “These men are part of the same gang.” He included all of them in a wave of his arm. “They kidnapped Mrs. Omley, who is also a witness. They said they were only trying to keep us from testifying against Kip Bartram, but I think they were going to murder us.”

Steve Huston had always regarded Richard Curtis Van Loan with amused toleration, but when he looked around the rooms, a new respect came into his eyes.

Van said, “As soon as Mrs. Omley and I were certain we had no chance, we started making all the fuss we could. Especially when we heard someone come into the apartment. There were two women who ran out.”

Huston said, “Yes, we know. Don’t worry about them. Look, I think Mrs. Omley should go back to the hospital.”

“Oh, you do,” Martha said. “Well, I’m not going to any hospital. Van, take me to my hotel.”

He took her arm gently. “Of course. If I’m not wanted here any longer.”

A detective sergeant said, “Huston identified you, Mr. Van Loan, and we know all about you and Mrs. Omley testifying against Kip Bartram. You may go, but as soon as you get Mrs. Omley home and safe, you’d better call Inspector Gregg. He may want to see you.”

“I’ll do that,” Van promised. He led Martha out to the elevators. On the street he hailed a taxi and then settled back as it headed east toward the hotel where Martha lived temporarily.

She said, “Van, you’re quite remarkable. If those men didn’t have guns, I think you could have whipped the lot of them.”


The cab stopped at the hotel and Van Loan saw Martha to the elevator. Then he went to the phones in the lobby and entered a booth. He called Inspector Gregg and told him what happened, making it seem as if the detectives had merely happened to show up at an opportune moment.

“You don’t have to come down here now, Mr. Van Loan,” Gregg said. “But Kip Bartram is certainly going to be shocked when he hears the news. Drop in tomorrow, whenever you have time.”

Van thanked him and taxied to his own apartment building. In the privacy of his tower suite, he rapidly applied the disguise in which he was known as the Phantom Detective. He changed clothes, strapped on a gun and felt much better with the weight of it under his arm.

Operating as Richard Curtis Van Loan was dangerous, not only because he couldn’t be expected to act or resist an attack with the fighting the Phantom might display, but there was always a chance that someone might suspect he was more than just a society playboy.

The Phantom swiftly reviewed these series of events as he dressed. He felt
that he was about ready now to move in on a man who directed crime and murder for the sake of acquiring a fortune in gems.

His first visit was to Police Headquarters where he arranged to see Kip Bartram. Inspector Gregg sent for the thief and while they waited his arrival, Gregg told the Phantom about Van Loan.

"We got five more members of the mob," he chortled. "They're not saying much, yet, but I've got me an idea this whole set-up is weakening. Putting a snatch on Van Loan and Mrs. Omley was the act of desperate men. They had to keep Kip quiet."

"And I wonder why?" the Phantom mused. "If the others don't know the identity of their leader, why should Kip know it? We figured out that Iselin was sent here to defend Kip and took full advantage of the situation to try and make Kip tell where he'd hidden the stolen jewels. But Iselin wasn't the leader of the gem thieves."

"He didn't commit suicide either," Gregg said. "His death was just a clumsy attempt to make it look like suicide. He was murdered—and that means he found out too much."

The Phantom nodded. "Iselin was close to the Underworld, with some excellent connections. This gang was composed of ordinary thugs for the most part and when men like that join a mob, it can't be kept a secret."

"But why did those two stickup men go to Iselin's building right after they swiped the jewels off the Sanborn couple?"

"I don't know, unless they were ordered there to throw suspicion on Iselin and perhaps help to build up the suicide theory they hoped you'd fall for."

"I thought of that," Gregg said, "but tell me this, Phantom. You witnessed the stickup. You trailed those buzzards all the way down here. Iselin had been dead for an hour maybe, but certainly he was alive when those two guys started their robbery plans. They didn't contact anybody or you'd have known that. Yet they came down here, miles from the scene of the robbery. How did they know?"

The Phantom said, "I'm not sure yet. There is one way."

The door opened and a detective brought Kip Bartram into the room. Gregg told him to sit down. The Phantom studied Kip for a moment.

He said, "Bartram, tonight Van Loan and that woman from whom you stole those gems, were kidnaped. They were going to be held, or maybe murdered, so you could change your plea back to Not Guilty and perhaps get away with it."

"I don't know a thing about that," Kip said. "All I know is the lawyer talked me into sayin' I was guilty and he said he'd cop a light sentence for me. That was the bunk. I didn't do it."

"Van Loan and Mrs. Omley were able to get away," the Phantom went on. "Ronnie, Buster and several other men are now locked up. Tomorrow you'll be brought before a judge who will be told what happened to the witnesses against you. Bartram, you won't live as long as the sentence they'll hang on you."

Bartram had slowly gone pale as he listened. It penetrated his skull that he didn't have a chance. He bit his lip until a thin stream of blood ran down across his chin.

The detective who brought Bartram into the office, stepped up to Inspector Gregg's desk and placed on it several sheets of paper. They were covered with apparently meaningless groups of letters.

The detective said, "When we went to Bartram's cell for him, he tried to destroy these, Inspector. I don't know what they are, but I brought them along."

"Well?" Gregg demanded of the crook. "What are they?"

"Nothing. Just some doodling. A guy has to pass the time away," Bartram said sullenly.

The Phantom picked up one of the papers. He said, "Hm. This is code. Do you always spend your time fooling around with code, Bartram?"

"It kills time," Bartram said. "Don't
mean anything."

"I see. Well, Bartram, you may go back
to your cell now. We don’t need you any
more. Not unless you want to make a full
and complete confession as to why you are
so valuable to this gang that they’d risk
kidnapping and murder to get you off."

"I tell you I don’t know a thing," Bar-
tram cried.

"When you want to tell us about the
code that is used to make contact with
every member of the gang, Inspector
Gregg and I will be glad to see you again."

Still protesting, Bartram was led to the
door. Gregg said, "Sergeant, on your way
back, take Kip around to see those mugs
who were hauled in for snatching Van
Loan and Mrs. Omley. Let him see for
himself we’re not lying."

When the door closed, Gregg said,
"Phantom, do you think Bartram fur-
nished a code for this gang?"

"They operate through a code," the
Phantom said. "Bartram did rig the code
for these crooks and that is what makes
him so valuable. I don’t believe he knows
who heads the mob, but if he ever spilled
the code, we could round up the whole
gang."

"Maybe he will," Gregg said hopefully.
"I don’t care whether he does or not,
Inspector. Because there are others who
do know and I think they’ll tell me. I’ve
found out how this racket is worked and
—although I need more proof—I think I
know who set it up and operated it."

Gregg nodded. "I had an idea you knew.
Edmund Ward, isn’t it? Sure, the guy
who served time for swiping gems. He
met a lot of crooks in stir and had plenty
of time to think out a scheme like this.
Should we pick him up?"

"Oh, no!" the Phantom said hastily.
"I’ve a couple of tricks of my own to pull.
If they work, we’ll have the whole gang,
including the man who stayed in the back-
ground."

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CHAPTER XVIII

Fake Murder

NOTICING this rather unobtru-
usive looking man approaching,
Steve Huston began to whistle.
Then he saw the man tug at
the lobe of his ear. It was a
simple signal which served to
identify the Phantom when he
was in a disguise which Huston didn’t
know.

"How is it going, Steve?" the Phantom
asked.

Huston pointed with his chin at the
building across the street. "Well, some-
things did happen though what it meant
I don’t know. Cleo Arden left in a hurry,
went to this downtown apartment house
and pretty soon there was a big row. It
turned out that the cops have been watch-
ing friend Cleo too, and another widow
of a guy who was connected with the
mob."

"Yes, I know," the Phantom said. "You
and the police heard the racket after you
followed the two women there and dis-
covered that the apartment held Van
Loan and Mrs. Omley, both of whom had
been snatched."

"I suppose Gregg told you," Huston
nodded. "We let the women go. I came
back here and Cleo is still in her apart-
ment, but she has been steaming. She
owed a little rent and we talked the
management into telling her they’d ac-
cept no checks until after her husband’s
estate was cleared. They’ve cut off her
’phone now; her mail has been acci-
dentially delayed. She was ordered to
vacate her place right away because the
management didn’t want the kind of pub-
licity that the widow of a murdered crook
would bring. It’s really been tough. I
find myself almost feeling sorry for the
dame."

"Well, don’t," the Phantom said. "Be-
cause if Otto Arden went crooked, she
helped to persuade him—so she could live
this life of luxury. Steve, it’s time to put
the final phase of our trick into motion."
"Sure, Phantom; anything you say," Steve agreed.

"Blunder into her apartment and demand an interview. Say photographers are on the way. Tell her you're going to play the story up big and the only way she can avoid getting all this publicity is by running away."

Huston nodded. "She'd hate publicity and it costs dough to run away. So maybe she'd go to this big shot and demand some."

"That's what I'm hoping," the Phantom said. "Of course I'll be waiting to shadow her, but you'll be out of it temporarily after revealing yourself to her. There is another very important job for you."

"Name it," Huston said promptly.

"You know the gang held up Bert Hagen's place and murdered Hank Sylvester, one of Hagen's employees. I want to know a great deal about the dead Mr. Sylvester. Find out if he was in need of money, if he was in the habit of associating with crooks. If he was beginning to slip mentally. Find out if his memory was any good for one thing. He lived at the Montmartre Hotel and you can probably get some of your information there."

"I'll have it as soon as possible," Huston said. "Where will I meet you?"

"Join Inspector Gregg. When this thing breaks, I'll let him know and you can be in at the kill."

Huston nodded. "Okay, Phantom. I'll start work on Cleo Arden right now. If she is going to scare, she ought to come flying out in a matter of minutes."

The Phantom drew back into the shadows of the doorway. His car was parked around the corner.

He was ready for the showdown, if it was to come now.

No more than twenty minutes went by before he saw Cleo Arden storm out of the lobby door and angrily wave a cab from the feed line. When it pulled away, the Phantom picked up the trail a block further on. Cleo Arden had the driver stop while she went into a store and made a 'phone call. She seemed somewhat mollified when she came out again.

The taxi proceeded downtown for several blocks, then crossed to Ninth Avenue and pulled up at the corner of 48th. There it stayed for ten minutes but Cleo didn't get out.

The Phantom felt more than satisfied that his plans were working when he saw Stelling appear. The rather handsome and intelligent crook who seemed high in the ranks of this gang, entered the taxi and it started downtown again.

The Phantom betrayed no surprise when it stopped not far from the home of Edmund Ward, the ex-convict jeweler. He let Cleo and Stelling enter, gave them a couple of minutes and then went in.

He reached Ward's floor, the fourth, and checked apartment numbers along the long corridors. There was a muffled scream from the one furthest down the hall and the Phantom broke into a run. He saw that it was Ward's door, but found that it was locked. Without hesitation he put a shoulder against the door and pushed. It gave a little under this pressure indicating it wasn't a very stout door. He drew back and hurled himself at it.

The upper panel cracked enough so that he was able to knock a good size chunk out and reach through it to get at the latch. The screaming and struggling were louder than ever, apparently from behind another closed door and nobody had heard the noise the Phantom made in breaking in.

He crossed a living room very fast, pulled open the door to the bedroom and saw a weird sight. Edmund Ward was tugging at Cleo's arm, trying to pull her back, while Stelling had her lifted and pushed halfway through the window.

Ward turned his head and saw the Phantom. He gave a yelp and charged. The Phantom met him squarely, drove the man back into a corner. Cleo's scream reached a high pitch and then seemed to die out. The Phantom looked around. She was gone!
Stelling, gun in hand, was running toward the door. The Phantom tried to go after him but Ward swung, missed and fell on the Phantom to wrap both arms around him.

The Phantom thrust Ward away for the length of an arm. Then he hammered one solid punch that dropped Ward. The Phantom raced to the window. Hardly believing it possible, he heard moans from Cleo. He drew his flashlight, leaned out and threw the beam down.

Cleo lay on the rough tarred roof of a terrace one story below. She'd fallen only a few feet and she was already trying to get up.

The Phantom sped out of the apartment, made certain that Stelling had escaped and then ran down one flight of stairs to the terrace apartment where Cleo had fallen. He brought the tenants to the door with his insistent ringing of the doorbell and showed them his sergeant's badge, a replacement of the one the thugs had taken away from him.

He explained as he hurried out to the terrace. Cleo was swinging down off the roof and he helped her. She was scratched, bruised, her ankle was sprained and she was burning with rage.

The Phantom led her to the corridor, supporting her as she limped along. Back in Ward's apartment, he made her comfortable in a chair. He examined Ward, who was slowly coming out of it.

He said, "Cleo, I'm the Phantom Detective. I think you'd like to talk to me now."

"You're darned right I'll talk," she said. "That guy—" her finger was pointed at Ward, "—is the big shot. He's the man who ordered Otto's death. He killed him right in front of this place."

"Are you positive?" the Phantom asked.

"I knew one man to contact," she explained. "They told Otto I'd be taken care of if anything happened to him and I was holding them to that promise. Things got tough so I called Stelling. He told me he'd bring me to the big guy and he took me here. Next thing I knew, they were trying to shove me out of the window."

WARD was sitting up and groaning. The Phantom went over to him and helped him to a chair. He showed Ward his jeweled badge and the ex-con recognized it at once.

"All right," he said, "I'm licked before I start and I know it. I wanted to muscle my way into this jewel theft racket because it looked good. I had friends and I sent out the word. Then a couple of punks were shot down in front of here and I got scared. I figured the racket boys were going to use me for a sap."

"Listen to him," Cleo cried. "He's the big boy. Stelling told me so on our way here. He tried to kill me, didn't he?"

"I tried to keep Stelling from killing you," Ward protested.

"That's the truth," the Phantom said. "All this happened so fast that you had no chance to say much, Ward. Am I right?"

"Stelling got her in here and it began," Ward told them. "I still don't know what it was all about."

"Well, I do," the Phantom said. "Stelling knew Cleo wouldn't be killed by that short fall. He didn't want her to be killed. He wanted her to live—to say that Ward helped push her out of the window. She couldn't see what was actually happening and you can tell she really believed you were the head of this racket as Stelling insisted."

"Well, isn't he?" Cleo demanded.

"No," the Phantom said. "But the racket has been just about smashed and the leader of it knows this. He wants to pull out but needs time. And if he found it possible to pin the blame on someone else, like a jeweler who already served time for stealing gems, then he might not have to pull out at all."

Cleo tried to get up, but her ankle pained her too much. "Well, you tell me who the guy is," she shouted, "and I'll see there's not enough left of him."

The Phantom picked up the telephone. "You're both going to be locked up. Perhaps not for long, but at least long enough to let Stelling and his boss think we fell for the trick."
You can count on my help,” Ward said.
“I expected I could,” the Phantom said sternly. “Especially since you’ve been trying to horn in on this racket.”
The Phantom called Inspector Gregg and then sat down to wait.

CHAPTER XIX
BROADCASTS OF CRIME

REACHING Headquarters, the Phantom explained to Gregg.
“So you were wrong,” he said, “about Ward being the head of the mob. He only wanted to be.”

“Then who?” Gregg asked.
“I’m going along with you, playing in the dark, Phantom. I’ve released enough to newspapers so they can broadcast the fact that we’ve landed the leader of the jewel thief gang. That’s to lull the real leader, I know, but when do we get him?”

“Very soon. First though, there are other members of the gang. Some even in distant cities who will have to be rounded up later. But we can land all the local ones.”

“Just how?” Gregg asked.
“We’ll have them all come to us. Walk straight into a nice little trap and spring it so fast they won’t know what hit them.”
“And then?” Gregg asked.
The Phantom smiled coldly. “We’ll round up our head man and confront him with so much evidence he’ll be sunk from the moment you put cuffs on his wrists.”

Steve Huston came to Gregg’s office before the Phantom could set his trap. Huston had a few things to report.
“I checked on this Hank Sylvester, like you said, Phantom. He was well on in years and smart as a whip. Honest, too. Had a nice bank balance and added to it every payday.”

“That doesn’t stack up with what Bert Hagen told us,” Gregg cried. “Hagen claims Sylvester was slipping so much he forgot to insure the jewels this gang swiped from Hagen’s office.”

“Maybe.” Huston shrugged. “But Sylvester held the West Side Club chess championship, which is no proof he was a dope.”

“But Hagen said—” Gregg began.
The Phantom arose. “Inspector, we’ve got to wind this up. First of all, plant at least twenty well armed men around the Carmody Street entrance to the Hotel Hanover. Tell them to quietly pick up every man who starts casing the place. I’ll see that every crook in this outfit goes there.”

Gregg gave the necessary orders, dropped the ‘phone back on its cradle and looked at the Phantom expectantly. The Phantom walked toward the door.
“We’re going night clubbing, Inspector. You’ll like the show we’re going to see tonight.”

“Try and leave me out,” Gregg grumbled.

They used Steve Huston’s car and drove straight to the Club Peacock. As they got out, Gregg said, “Say, this is the place that Van Loan and Mrs. Omley attended before they were stuck up.”

“Yes,” the Phantom said, “and they weren’t the only ones. Just follow me. And Inspector, you might be ready for trouble.”

The Phantom walked through the bar, straight toward the glassed in broadcasting booth where Dell Folen sat before his mike, announcing the next record. The Phantom opened the door and Folen looked up, startled and angry.

The Phantom said, “Folen, make very sure the mike isn’t cut in on the record pick up. This game is over, do you understand? You’ve acted as a fi gmerman, selecting victims with fortunes in jewelry on them, for the last time.”

Folen gulped. “I don’t know what you mean!”

“Stop it,” the Phantom interrupted. “Your one chance of getting any clemency lies in how you co-operate with us. This is Inspector Gregg. You’re all washed up.”

“What do you want me to do?” Folen
wiped sweat off his face.

"You were given some sort of a code. Perhaps compiled from the names of the phonograph records you play, perhaps from certain words used in your chatter. It makes no difference so long as you use that code and tell every crook listening that a million dollars in gems is heading for the Carmody Street entrance of the Hotel Hanover."

Folen shuddered. "They'll kill me!"

"There won't be one of them left to harm anyone," the Phantom said. "And you might find a more sympathetic judge and D. A. if you help."

"What else can I do?" Folen asked helplessly. "It's all in the chatter. I can code the message in three minutes—while another platter plays. But you got to protect me. They made me do this. They said if I didn't, I'd be killed."

"Just prepare the message," the Phantom said.

FIVE minutes later Folen's voice droned on and on. Habitual listeners might have thought he was a trifle tired tonight. But five pairs of armed jewel thieves gave it no thought. Over their car radios came the code they were waiting for. Came the orders which sent all of them straight into the waiting arms of Inspector Gregg's police trap.

Folen was turned over to a detective who was summoned and then the Phantom led Gregg and Huston to the Cafe Alphonse where Roger Courtney dispensed the same music and chatter as Dell Folen. Also the same code.

He saw the trio coming, recognized their purpose and tried to get at a gun. Before he could remove it from a drawer in his desk, the Phantom's fingers gripped his wrist with paralyzing force. Gregg pulled the gun free and slipped it into his pocket. Then he draped handcuffs on Courtney's wrists.

The Phantom said, "Dell Folen is on his way to a cell. He co-operated with us and it may help him. How about you, Courtney?"

The disc jockey suddenly seized the mike and opened his mouth to shout an alarm. The Phantom's fist clipped him on the point of the jaw. Courtney lolled unconscious in his chair.

Gregg hauled him out of it and the Phantom sat down at the controls. He did no talking between records, just kept playing one after another while he searched the desk and finally located the code. It was simple but clever enough not to be noticed in the incessant chatter of these all night disc jockeys. Carefully now, the Phantom prepared a message.

He turned to Inspector Gregg. "We're ready for the last act," he said. "Have Hagen go to his office and wait there. Meet me in front of the place. If Hagen tries to get away, grab him."

"Is Hagen our man?" Gregg asked.

"He is," the Phantom said, "and I'm going to prove it—right in front of his own eyes."

Gregg summoned a detective who'd been waiting, and Roger Courtney was taken away. The Phantom stopped the next record and began talking. His voice was exactly like Courtney's, his subject matter just as trivial and light.

After thirty minutes of this he figured that Gregg and Hagen were in the jeweler's office. The Phantom then chattered into the mike, but this time he was delivering a coded message to Alan Stelling, who had murdered Sylvester and seemed to be the first lieutenant of the man who headed the outfit.

The Phantom repeated the message and then put on more records. He had the night club manager supply someone to keep playing the discs and then, with Steve Huston, the Phantom hurried from the club.

"Just what did you tell this guy Stelling?" Huston asked.

"That things were breaking up fast. That Hagen was afraid to make any moves and that Stelling was to go fetch all of the gems—fast."

Huston frowned. "I don't see how that will convict anybody but Stelling, and it's Bert Hagen you're really after."
THE DEADLY DIAMONDS

The Phantom said, "The way that Stelling will do this, will make even Hagen realize he's lost. Come on. We'll have to move fast. I'll do some explaining on our way to Hagen's office."

Huston drove and the Phantom quietly related what he had discovered. "First of all," he said, "there had to be some way by which the actual stickup men and house robbers could know when and where to strike. That meant a fingerman. I looked for one in various clubs, but there didn't seem to be anyone. Then I began wondering about those two disc jockeys and the means they had at their fingertips of notifying crooks when something good came along. Folen and Courtney would check on who had enough jewels to make a stickup worthwhile, identify the people, find where they lived and broadcast the tip-off to the waiting crooks."

"But what about all the house robberies in the suburbs?" Huston asked.

"Those disc jockeys had another advantage, Steve. People kept calling them on the 'phone so if other people casing suburban homes or fingerin' victims in other clubs, wanted their tips broadcast, they simply called either one of our disc jockeys. It was as easy as that. I suspected it, but when I found that Kip Bertram was interested in codes, I knew the answer."

"And Iselin was on the level?" Huston asked.

SLOWLY the Phantom shook his head. "Iselin was a lawyer with rather unscrupulous methods, but he wasn't openly dishonest. He had so many underworld contacts that he must have found a hint of this vast scheme, dug deeper into it and been murdered because he went too far. They even framed him by sending him information about Muriel Havens' stolen jewelry before the theft was made public."

"And then two of the stickup men were ordered to his building to throw suspicion on him?"

"Partly. There was a more compelling reason. The murderer happened to be in that building and wanted the crooks to leave their loot there for him. He got away before I arrived, of course."

"But I understood," Huston protested, "that none of the actual thieves came into contact with the leader. He stayed in the background."

"That's true. In more than one instance I collared the crooks soon after their stickups," the Phantom explained. "They had no chance to pass the loot to anyone else so they had to have planted it somewhere."

"But where?" Huston asked.

"With Uncle Sam. They merely dropped the stuff into a mail box. A certain mailbox, to be sure. I doubt the gems were in a package, addressed and had stamps affixed. I believe Hagen possessed a key to any mailbox and all he did was unlock them, take out the gems and walk quietly away."

"Why were Bill Tierney and Otto Arden murdered?" Huston asked.

"I was too close to them. And they were foolish enough to 'phone Stelling and tell him so. Under orders Stelling sent them to the vicinity of Ward's place. I don't know who shot them down—Stelling or Hagen—but we'll find that out quickly enough. Ward was an excellent man to pin suspicion on and they went all out to build him up."

Huston pulled up before the building which housed Bert Hagen's wholesale jewelry place. Gregg came out of the shadows and joined them. The Phantom quickly repeated what he had told Steve Huston.

"And Hagen actually had himself robbed?" Gregg marvelled.

"Twice, Inspector. Kip took his rubies. That was only to give Hagen a chance to be in on the investigation and perhaps learn what was going on. He would have changed his identification of Kip later. The second stickup was for two reasons. First, he had to get rid of Sylvester and if he was murdered in a holdup, there would be no suspicion against Hagen."
“And the other reason?” Gregg asked.

“Hagen was afraid Sylvester might have told someone he knew Hagen’s place was full of stolen loot. If a raid was made, Hagen didn’t want the stuff found. So he pretended to have himself robbed. But when he claimed Sylvester had forgotten to renew the insurance, he gave himself away. Sylvester wasn’t the type to forget such an important thing and since Hagen’s supposed losses were stolen gems, they couldn’t be covered by insurance. He’d have to list them for coverage and he couldn’t.”

“Then Sylvester wasn’t either a crook or a man whose wits were slipping?” Gregg asked.

“Hardly. Sylvester found some of the stolen gems and perhaps thought he recognized them. So he took one out to a jeweler to make sure. When that jeweler went to call the police, Sylvester was sure and got out of there. I suppose he wanted to be fair about it and ask Hagen for an explanation. Hagen stalled him, somehow, and then had him killed.”

Gregg shook his head. “What a set-up! Hagen had the gems stolen and in his own plant, had his workmen fashion them into new designs. Then his salesmen peddled them all over the country as new merchandise. No wonder none of the jewels were ever found.”

The Phantom nodded. “That’s about it, Inspector.”

“Look here,” Gregg said. “Was that execution scene involving you and me and Hagen a rigged affair?”

“In a way,” the Phantom explained. “Hagen was to die last. They mentioned that. Of course, after we were dead, Hagen would have taken command. He even tried to warn his men to be careful—that I was the Phantom. Another thing happened which made me strongly suspect Hagen.”

Plainly the inspector was puzzled.

“What was that, Phantom?” Gregg asked.

“When the stickup and murder of Sylvester happened, the office was supposed to be closed for business. Because there is always a fortune in gems in these offices like Hagen’s, special measures are always taken to insure against crooks getting in. The place is taped and wired as completely as any bank. Yet the bandits got in without raising any alarm. Hagen fixed the alarm system so it wouldn’t work—or told those bandits how to do it.”

Gregg said, “Well, let’s go in and get him.”

“Not yet,” the Phantom said. “Stelling opened the vault the day of the stickup. Sylvester had locked it as part of his duties though Hagen insisted it couldn’t have been. Stelling is on his way here—to loot that safe because of the code broadcasts I sent out. When he comes, he’ll prove he can enter this highly protected office at will and that he does have the combination to the vault.”

“But Hagen is in there,” Gregg said. “Won’t he stop him?”

“Sure he will,” the Phantom replied. “And things ought to happen.”

“We’ll be there too,” Huston said. His eyes sparkled in anticipation.

They remained in the car another five minutes before Stelling came briskly down the street and without hesitation turned into the building entrance. They gave him a few seconds and then flung open the door. Stelling had left the main office door open in his haste and he was already at the safe, nervously twisting the combination knob.

Hagen stepped out of his darkened office with a gun in his fist and a deep scowl on his face. Stelling was pulling the vault door open when he heard the steps behind him. The crook whirled, his hand going toward his pocket.

Hagen shouted, “You double-crossing traitor!”

Then they both saw the Phantom. Hagen’s gun moved to cover him and the Phantom fired a single shot. Stelling raced in a zig-zag course across the office and straight into Steve Huston who stepped out from beside a tall filing cabinet.

Huston closed with the man before he could get his gun free. Stelling was driven
back against the walls and methodically cut down until he was sufficiently battered to make disarming him an easy job. Inspector Gregg tossed a pair of handcuffs at Huston who promptly applied them to Stelling.

Meanwhile, Hagen had realized that he was in a trap. He looked from the slowly advancing Phantom, to Inspector Gregg. With a wild yell he whirled and raced back into his private office where he thought he would have more of a chance to defend himself.

The Phantom was at his heels. Hagen tried to bring the gun to bear and had it chopped out of his hand by a hard fist. Then the Phantom threw his own weapon aside and advanced on Hagen. In his mind was the memory of the victims who had been beaten and robbed because of this man’s avidity. He lash out at Hagen.

Twice the leader of these crooks looped hard punches that really stung but they took none of the steam out of the Phantom’s blows. Two short punches to the jaw, rocked Hagen back. The Phantom moved in fast with a long right to the middle.

As Hagen doubled up, his chin was sticking out.

There was a cracking sound that made even Inspector Gregg wince, and then Hagen went down. Hard and completely out.

“I think that does it,” the Phantom was breathing fast. “Stelling robbed the safe the first time, as I told you he had. He just now proved that he knew the combination and knew how to enter this well wired office without raising an alarm. Hagen provided all that information.”

“He’s all done,” Gregg said. “Out in the other room Stelling is already spilling the whole story to Steve because he thinks Hagen double-crossed him somehow.”

The Phantom looked down at the faintly groaning Hagen. “The perfect jewel thief,” the Phantom said dryly. “The man with sufficient capital and brains to swing a deal like this. If he’d applied as much energy in conducting his business honestly, he’d have made all the money he wanted. But that would have entailed too much work. It would have taken too long. All crooks reason that way. Fast money and easy money. There’s no such thing. If would-be crooks realized this, there would be much less crime in the world.”

He watched Hagen and Stelling finally taken away. The Phantom saw Steve Huston rush to prepare his story for the next edition.

Along deserted streets, the Phantom walked slowly back to his penthouse apartment.

He’d be on the prowl again soon. Behind some of those lighted windows along his route, perhaps, men were planning and scheming. Hoping to get that elusive fast money. Easy money. And when they came into the open with their violence and crime, the Phantom would be waiting for them.

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CHAPTER I
THE LIVING DEAD

FEW people believe that a telephone has a soul, but Jerry Grant of the Globe was one of those. Take like now. The way his phone shrilled, he could sense it meant trouble. He could have sworn it and therefore wasn't surprised when a somewhat weak voice spoke to him with all the anger at the caller's command.

"How many people must I talk to be-

Perhaps the Great Industrialist Wasn't Really

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fore I get action?” the voice demanded. “Are you the man who writes that beastly obituary column?”

“Uh-uh,” Grant denied it. “That’s routine stuff. I only write one when it’s about the death of an important man.”

“Well—what do you think I am?” the weak voice demanded.

“Look,” Grant said, “if the name was spelled wrong or the funeral time in error,

*Dead at All—but then, Who Was Being Buried?*
THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

call the obit desk and make your beef there!"

"I did—and they told me to call you. And snickered at me."

"Okay," Grant said. "What is it?"

"My name is Peter Burgess. Does that mean anything to you?"

Grant winced. "Sure it does. It means I'm talking to a ghost. Where are you, Mr. Burgess—up or down? Heaven or the other place?"

The voice quavered in fury. "So you're laughing too. Very well. We'll soon see who laughs the last chorus. I'm Burgess and I can prove it and I'm not dead—quite yet."

Grant had an odd feeling come over him. Caution, his brain told him. Play it safe. See the goof. Maybe make a good story of it. There was always a slim chance he'd been wrong.

"All right, Mr. Burgess," he said. "I'll see you. Wherever and whenever you like."

"That's better. Much better," Burgess said. "I'm in the lobby of the Elkin Hotel. I'll be waiting, but not long. I haven't much time."

"Just a minute," Grant said. "What do you look like? How will I know you?"

"Idiot," came the prompt reply. "You printed my picture often enough in your newspaper. Can't you people ever learn to think? I—or wait. I've changed. Yes, undoubtedly I've changed. I'll look for you and so how will I know you?"

"I'm five feet ten, kind of skinny," Grant said. "Black hair—oh, what's the sense to all this? I'll be carrying a newspaper rolled up tight like a club. And I'll be there in ten minutes or less."

"You'd better be," the caller said stiffly and banged up in Grant's ear. Grant was half tempted to disregard the whole thing, but that sense of caution came into play again. Also his reporter's instinct for digging up any kind of a story was beginning to seethe.

JERRY GRANT went to the circulation department and secured a day-old paper with the front page obit of Peter Burgess. There was a picture of the industrialist heading the two column story. Not too recent a picture, because Burgess had gone into virtual seclusion for a couple of years. But it would serve.

Grant drove his own car to the hotel, walked into the lobby and kept slapping his thigh with the rolled up newspaper. Almost at once he saw a gaunt, hollow cheeked and gray-haired man arise from a chair in one of the more remote corners of the lobby.

Grant took a good look at him, then unrolled the paper and studied the picture of Peter Burgess. He pursed his lips in a noiseless whistle. There was a big difference in weight and fullness of face, but this man certainly had the forehead, eyes and nose of Burgess. He was a good impostor so far as resemblance was concerned.

The man walked slowly and weakly, as if his legs were going to cave in under him at any moment. He turned and walked beside Grant.

"Go over to that corner where I was waiting. It's dark there and quiet. I don't want to be seen until I know what this is all about."

Grant sat down on a divan beside the man and studied him carefully. He had an idea he was looking at a walking corpse. At a man who was wasting away.

"Well," the man snapped, "I'm Peter Burgess and I'm not dead. Yet you printed that insane column in your blasted paper saying I died yesterday."

"Look," Grant said carefully, "Peter Burgess is dead. Get this—he was an industrialist worth, I think, about ten million."

"Fifty million. That's what my enterprises are worth," the man said. "Who in blazes told you I was dead?"

"Who? Everybody, I guess. The undertaker phoned in the first tip."

"The ghoul! Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Do?" Grant frowned. "Not a thing. Burgess is dead and you're a faker. What did you expect to get out of this, anyway?"

"Faker, am I? Very well, young man. If you want to be foolish too, it's none of
my affair. I'm going to the police for help."

"You mean that, don't you?" Grant said slowly. "Tell me, have you any way of identifying yourself?"

"A thousand ways. A hundred thousand ways."

"Show me some papers, for instance," Grant urged.

The man reached for his inside coat pocket, hesitated and smiled wanly. "No, I haven't any papers. Except those which identify me as Thomas Galloway. I've been living under that name for almost a year."

Grant arose. "So long, Mr. Galloway. I'll see you in an asylum or in jail."

The thin, scrawny hand plucked at his sleeve. The thin face grew somber, the eyes pleading. "Young man, sit down. I tell you I can prove this, but I'd rather not do it in a way that will create too much publicity."

Grant sat down again. "Pop, I could almost believe you. You're a sick man, aren't you?"

"I'm a dead man and I don't have to refer to that obituary column. I'm dying of cancer. I've only a few days left. Would I try a crazy stunt like this to get money? Or fame as a crackpot? I tell you I am Burgess. Suppose we go to my house. I'll prove my identity there."

"All right," Grant agreed. "You may be a liar, but you're an interesting one. My car is outside. Burgess lived on an estate, I believe, alone except for a nurse."

"I know that. I wanted to be alone. But we're wasting time and I haven't much of that left. Take my arm, young man. Sometimes I feel as if I'm about to take my last step."

Grant could well believe that. He led the old man to where his car was parked and put him in the front seat. Moments later they were heading out of town, to the secluded location of the Burgess estate.

"Pop—if you really are Peter Burgess," Grant said, "then the dead man is a fraud. How come you didn't wise up before now?"

"I've been abroad. To Vienna. A Doc-

tor Von Osten there was recommended to me by a friend. This Von Osten was supposed to have devised a new method of treating carcinoma of the pancreas. That's what I've got. He treated me with his blasted nostrums. All they did was relieve the pain and make me think maybe he was helping. The man is as much a fake as this corpse they claim is mine."

"And you went to Vienna under an assumed name?" Grant queried, his eyes never leaving the road.

"Of course I did. When I first became aware—from Dr. Tabor, who was my physician here—that I had an incurable cancer, I went into retirement. Why? Because I control an industrial empire and if word got around that I was dying, there'd be the devil to pay. Stockholders would get panicky. It's happened many times. And that's why I used the name of Galloway. I left things in charge of my general manager, Willis Ashley, and he covered up for me."

"Pop, your story is logical even if you did make it up," was what Grant said.

"It's the truth," the old man insisted. "Wait, you'll see."

They reached the gates to the estate, found them closed and the old man got out of the car, tottered over to them and took a set of keys from his pocket. In a moment the gates swung wide and Grant blinked slightly.

He also had keys which let them through the front door. The house was empty and silent. A big place, filled with incredibly expensive furniture shipped here from all parts of the world.

The old man climbed the wide and winding staircase by hanging onto the banister. It was clear that sheer determination kept him going more than mere strength. He led Grant into a book lined study, went around behind a huge desk and sat down in the high backed chair.

"It's pleasant to be here again," he said. "Seems like fifty years since I left. I'm sure of one thing, my young friend. I wanted to come home to die—and I did."

Grant shook his head. "Look, you're already dead as far as I'm concerned. So far all you've shown me is a few keys to
prove you're Peter Burgess."

The old man smiled a little. "I'd forgotten, in the comfort of getting back here among the things I love. All right! Walk to that further wall, where there's only paneling and no book shelves. Go ahead!"

Grant shrugged and obeyed. The old man spoke. "There's a carved dragon's head—that's it. Grasp it firmly, pull it out hard and twist to the right."

Grant exhaled sharply when a five-foot-high section of the paneling slid back and revealed the icy front of a chrome steel vault. The old man chuckled.

"Nobody knows of the existence of that vault. Not another soul except me and the people who installed it and they're not around these parts. You will notice that I have no papers in my hand to read from. Dial twenty-one right, eighteen left... Now eleven right, four left. Right to thirty-four. It's open."

Grant swung the heavy door back. "On the top shelf is an album," the old man went on. "Family portraits. I'm the last of my line. I've never married. Open the album. On the first page is written the data about my grandfather. His name was Ira. He was born in 1820. He died in 1885—in May. Next is my father. Born Alfred, in January 1850. Died in 1901—September. Now look at the portraits. The first is an old daguerreotype of a man with a fat face and big whiskers."

Grant pursed his lips. He put the album back, took down a faded, leather-covered book which had 'Diary' lettered on the cover in gold.

"Tell me something in this," he suggested.

The old man frowned. "That's very old. 1888, I think. I was a young squirt. But wait! Look under May 20th. You'll find an entry about how much I was in love with a girl named Richardson—and beat that name if you can. Never heard any female own it since."

Grant read the entry. He put the book back, closed the vault and locked it. He slid the panel back into place, walked over to the desk and extended his hand.

"I'm glad to know you, Mr. Peter Burgess," he said.
Grant took a closer look at the girl in the black dress and wondered who she was. Burgess had indicated he had no kin, so who could this mourner be?

The undertaker was making himself seen as much as possible and Grant sidled up to him at an opportune moment.

"I'm Grant, from the Globe," he said. The undertaker's hand shot out. "Mr. Grant, that was an excellent obituary you wrote. Excellent!"

"I'm glad you liked it," Grant said. "Look, I'm doing a series of feature stories on Burgess. His career, you know. Can I ask you a few questions?"

"Of course. Any way I can help. Naturally, there will be a mention of my business."

"Sure," Grant replied. "Who was the attending physician?"

"Why, I think a Doctor Milliken. Yes, that was the name on the death certificate."

"What did Burgess die of?" Grant persisted. The undertaker shook his head. "You'll have to ask the relatives for that. I'm not at liberty—"

"For a big mention of your place?" Grant urged.

"I see. You're a clever man at bribing people, Mr. Grant. Shall we say someone else told you it was cancer of the pancreas?"

"Someone else," Grant nodded. "Maybe that good-looking girl in black who stands at the receiving line."

"Well—no. Not unless you could get her to really say so. She's Mrs. Burgess."

"Who?" Grant gasped. The undertaker smiled. One of those professional smiles. "Only a few people know that Burgess married his nurse several months ago. It wasn't any love affair, of course. The poor chap had been dying for a long time. But he wanted to repay her, I suppose. So he married her."

"Well, that's very interesting," Grant said. He almost added that it would interest Burgess too. There was no longer any doubt in his mind which of these men was the fraud. He had every faith in the living Peter Burgess. There was some scheme afoot. A clever one too, and it needed investigating. The story which might come out of it would be worth any amount of trouble, and even danger.

Grant circulated around a bit more, listening to people tell about the change in Burgess. Talk about how he'd withdrawn from the world. Now, they all knew why.

Grant took the elevator downstairs, hurried around to where the car was parked and got in beside Burgess. The old man was having a fit of coughing and when he used his handkerchief there was blood on it.

"Look, maybe I better get you to a doctor," Grant asked.

"It won't be of the slightest use," Burgess said. "Tell me, who are they burying?"

"You—according to everybody I saw. And the most grieved of all is the nurse you married because you wanted to do something for the poor kid."

Burgess' jaws snapped shut. "So, we have it now. This is a plot to take over my estate. Pure and simple! They found out I was abroad, didn't think I'd ever come back. They fired my male nurse. I'll bet they even changed doctors!"

"Your death certificate was signed by a Doctor Milliken. Oh yes, you died of a cancer of the pancreas."

"Really?" Burgess gaped. "The same thing that I actually have? They were most careful, weren't they? Grant, what are you going to do about this?"

"First, take you back to the hotel where we met and put you to bed. Then I'm going to check on your widow and anyone connected with her. Oh yes, your manager, Willis Ashley, was there and I think he was honestly mourning you. He looked more sombre than the undertaker."

B URGESS chuckled slightly. "Ashley is all right. Only man I ever completely trusted, and even with him I've fixed it so he can never rule the empire I created. I wanted that empire ruled by the people who deserved to run it. The
people who work for me. Others build impressive monuments to their memory. I want what I created to be my monument. And the people who helped me build it, be the owners."

"Let's get practical," Grant suggested. "Who knew you went abroad?"

"Only Ashley. It was arranged so he would lend the impression I was still here, in this country. They must have tricked him, too."

"I see. Ashley sent you to this doctor in Vienna?"

"The only mistake he ever made in giving me advice, young man. That doctor was an expensive quack."

"Were you in contact with Ashley at all?"

"No. I didn't dare. Things were arranged so he could handle anything that came up. Now, don't go suspecting him. He can't gain a dime out of this. The way I fixed things, his present salary will go on. He'll serve the people to whom I've left this business."

"I'm glad to know that, because I may need his help," Grant said. "All right—let's get you to bed."

"A good idea," Burgess sighed. "Only thing that blasted foreign doctor told me that was the truth was the fact that I'd be dead in two weeks' time. You'll have to hurry this."

"I'll do all I can," Grant said.

He checked the old man into the hotel, put him to bed and made him comfortable. He carried up his suitcases and put them away. Then he sat down for a moment.

"Mr. Burgess, what about fingerprints? Were yours ever taken for any reason at all?"

"No," Burgess said. "No—never."

"We could have settled this fast if they were on file," Grant said. "I'll be back as quickly as possible."

In the lobby, he called his office and arranged to meet Mike Brophy, a photographer, at the funeral parlor. Brophy was the kind of a guy who'd shoot a picture of anything and anybody no matter how loud the protests and wails were.

"Do this fast, Mike." Grant said. "Drift in, get a good spot and shoot a pic of the widow. She's a blond honey, in black. Nice copy on any film. Once you got it, get out of there."

"Sure, Jerry." Brophy pushed a wad of gum against the building wall, adjusted his camera case over his shoulder and went in. Grant gave him a moment before he followed and he was just in time to see Brophy move into position, raise the camera and the flash bulb startled everyone.

Grant only watched the girl in black. He didn't miss the anguish that took the place of astonishment when the flash bulb went off. He saw her look appealingly toward the back of the room. Grant swung around, but he couldn't tell whom she looked at.

Ashley was red-faced and stroking her arm gently, trying to assure her that everything was all right. She wasn't having any of it. Grant had never seen anyone who wanted her picture taken less than that girl.

Brophy had disappeared. Grant drifted out of the room and went to the elevator. It was on the same floor, with the operator sitting inside it reading a newspaper.

"Did you just take a fellow down?" Grant asked. "I mean a man with a camera—case over his shoulder?"

"Took him up—not down," the operator said. "Haven't made a trip in five minutes. Good too—my feet are killin' me!"

"Thanks," Grant said, and started looking. It took ten minutes to find Brophy and another five to wake him up. He lay in one of the unused rooms, behind a row of folding chairs. His camera was beside him, thoroughly smashed and Brophy had a bad lump on the back of his head.

He oriented himself fast enough. Like all photographers, he was lens happy and the first thing he looked for was his camera. He saw it and began to curse in a low, steady monotone.

Grant said, "When you get through swearing at the guy who did that, you might tell me who he was and both of us will knock his block off."
MOURNFULLY, Mike Brophy groaned and patted his head. "Who? How do I know who? I figured that dame didn’t want I should take her pic so I also figured if I left by the elevator they might nail me downstairs. That’s why I went looking for the stairway."

"Nice work," Grant said sadly. "Now we have to do it all over again."

"You mean I gotta get slugged again? For what, Jerry? For what, I’d like to know?"

"For a picture, you sap. What else?"

"But pal, we got her pic. Think I been a newspaper lensman for sixteen years without learning a couple of tricks. Soon as I got outa that room, I pulled the plate and stuck it in one of them big Chinese vases in the hall. I put in a fresh plate—Jerry, where you headin’?"

Grant slowed up when he reached the hallway. There was a very husky looking, beetle browed young man lounging near the elevator. The glance he gave Grant was full of open meaning. Grant stepped into the car.

As he passed the tall man, he noticed that his right hand was bleeding slightly around the knuckles. Grant also knew that Brophy would be following him in a second. When the operator started to close the door, Grant checked him.

Suddenly the tall young man gave a startled gasp and began moving fast down the hall. He’d seen Brophy and, in turn, been seen. Brophy had recognized trouble, guessed the set-up and was drawing the man off.

Grant dug his arm to the shoulder pit in three of the huge Chinese vases before he found the plate. He darted into the elevator and didn’t breathe again until he was safe in his car. He waited for Brophy, who came out of the alley and in a big rush.

Grant dropped Brophy at the newspaper office with instructions to develop the shot, have it printed in every edition due on the stands in the next twenty-four hours and have it radio-photoed to syndicates all over the country with a request that it be printed.

Then he drove back to the hotel, made his way to the room where he had left Burgess and let himself in. One look told the grim story. That Vienna doctor had been right. This time Peter Burgess really was dead!

CHAPTER III

INDIGNANT WIDOW

T SEEMED to Jerry Grant, as if he’d stepped into a vacuum. Without the real Burgess, he couldn’t get any answers. But the death had to be reported so he called a hospital. Pretty soon he showed the faked papers which Burgess carried and allowed everyone to believe that the dead man was named Thomas Galloway.

Grant explained that he barely knew him, but the man had acted ill so he got him this room. Nobody suspected him. He was, in fact, known to practically everybody who checked on the case. There would be an autopsy. They’d try to find his folks. That this was Peter Burgess, who had ruled an empire, never occurred to anyone. Burgess had died the day before.

Grant recalled the two suitcases which he had stowed away in the clothes closet. He fetched them out, found both unlocked and opened them. They were filled with clothing, none of it marked in any way. The only thing that drew his interest was an envelope containing an unused ticket for passage from Genoa to New York on the SS Italia. Why hadn’t Burgess used it?

Grant rummaged some more and his next find was the stub of an overseas plane ticket. By the date on it, Burgess had changed his mind about sailing and taken a plane instead. Grant thought he knew why. Burgess had wanted to die on his own soil. The ship was too slow. Against a race with death it would have lost.

He put the tickets into a hotel envelope, addressed it to himself at the newspaper office and bought a stamp in the lobby.
Then he dropped the envelope into the nearest mail box.

This done he decided it was time to call his City Editor. Grant merely identified himself when the tirade broke loose.

"Jerry," the editor shouted, "when you get yourself in a mess, you might warn us that some of it is going to overflow here. Listen—the whole legal talent of the Burgess estate is putting pressure on us to hold up the pic you had taken of Mrs. Burgess."

"Then hold it," Grant said. "Don't print it locally, but if it happens to be radiophonied all over the rest of the country, they won't find out about it until tomorrow."

"If you'll give me some idea what this is all about!"

"Sure," Grant chuckled. "It's about a dead man who wasn't dead when he was supposed to be—but is now. Tell you what. I'll go see Mrs. Burgess and try to soothe her sorely injured feelings."

"Jerry, you keep away from her. You're liable to draw down a lawsuit!"

"So long," Grant laughed.

"Jerry—so help me, I'll fire you—" the editor warned.

"I'm not even slightly scared," Grant replied. "You won't fire a man with the best story you've printed in ten years. Be seeing you."

Grant went to where his car was parked and drove it straight to the Burgess estate. He figured they'd be home by now and he found the house lighted up. He rang the bell and the husky, beetle-browed young man he'd seen at the funeral home, let him in.

For one scant instant Grant had an idea he was going to be socked. That husky man recognized Grant instantly and his lips drew back in a snarl.

"I'm Grant of the Globe," Grant said. "My editor sent me to see Mrs. Burgess. About that picture we took of her."

"You bring the negative with you?" the man demanded.

Grant shrugged. "I'm just a messenger boy. But my message is for Mrs. Burgess and nobody else."

The young man seemed to be hesitating, torn between the idea of smearing this reporter or letting him in to see what he would do. The final decision was taken out of his hands when the alleged Mrs. Burgess, still in black, and Willis Ashley hurried into the reception hall.

Grant walked by the husky man and bowed slightly in the direction of Mrs. Burgess. "My name is Grant," he said. "The City Editor of the Globe sent me. To apologize and to explain."

WILLIS ASHLEY did the talking. "Explain? How can you explain so rudely taking a photograph under such conditions?"

"I didn't take it," Grant said. "But the Globe is sorry. If you say the word, the picture will not be printed, the negative will be returned to you."

"I think that would be best," Mrs. Burgess remarked.

"But Mrs. Burgess," Grant went on, "you understand that as the widow of Peter Burgess you are news. Big news. You're going to get publicity and if you make it tough for the boys, they won't be so kind to you."

Ashley horned in. "That sounds like a threat, or some form of mild blackmail. However, if you give us the negative, we shall be quite satisfied."

"It'll be here in the morning," Grant said, "provided Mrs. Burgess gives me an exclusive story right now."

The husky young man made growling noises in his throat. Ashley glared, but Mrs. Burgess had half a smile on her unrouged lips.

"I think perhaps, we'd better submit," she told the others. "I might as well face it because if Mr. Grant doesn't get the story, someone else will and it might as well be correct."

"Good," Grant answered. He nodded happily and followed her into the living room. Ashley stood near the door. The husky young man had disappeared somewhere. Grant sat down across from Mrs. Burgess and half consciously admired the trim ankles and calves she displayed.
"I became Mr. Burgess' nurse when his male attendant quit," she began. "I liked Mr. Burgess and I did all I could to make him comfortable. There was nothing else which could be done for him. He was a dying man and he knew it."

"Yes," Grant nodded. "I know that."

"Living here with him, taking care of him, I came to like him. And he, in turn liked me. We were friends. He told me that his estate holdings were tremendous and that he would die without an heir. Everything he had accumulated would be sold out—divided up. He preferred that things remain intact and if I was his wife before he died, I could carry out his wishes after he had gone."

"Just a business arrangement," Grant said.

"Say it was an arrangement between friends. Believe me, Mr. Grant, there was nothing romantic about it. He was an old man and very, very ill."

"Okay," Grant said. "Now let's make this interesting. Tell me about yourself."

She gave him a wan smile. "There is so little to tell. I have no one. I lived alone in a rooming house and worked in a hospital. That's how this came about. Mr. Ashley was a patient at the hospital for a few days and he knew Mr. Burgess needed a nurse—"

"Burgess told me to get him a good nurse," Ashley said from the doorway. "The man who had taken care of him walked out."

Grant nodded in understanding. He gazed for a moment at a gigantic diamond ring on the wedding ring finger of the alleged Mrs. Burgess. He shook his head slowly from side to side.

"Just a little tip," he said. "That rock is worth a fortune and a lot of people must have noticed it at the funeral home. Take my advice and lock it in the house vault as soon as you can. There have been a lot of robberies in this area lately."

She rotated the ring slowly. "There is no house vault," she replied. "But I shall take care that it is safely hidden. And thank you, Mr. Grant."

"Glad to do the favor." This was more proof. The real Peter Burgess would have told his wife about the hidden vault. "Thanks for the interview and I can promise you this. The Globe will not print your picture, though it would sell a lot of copy."

She smiled again. "Yes, I realize that the widow of a man as fabulous as Mr. Burgess does make interesting reading."

"I don't mean that," Grant said. "We could run your picture and say your name is Suzy Jones and it would still sell copy. It's that kind of a face, Mrs. Burgess."

For a moment her eyes sparkled. Then she lowered the lids and looked down at her clasped hands. She didn't look up when Grant walked out. Ashley said nothing but followed him to the front door. The husky young man wasn't around.

"Mr. Ashley, what happened to beetle-brow?" Grant asked.

"That's quite enough," Ashley warned. "He happens to be Otto Cullen, Mrs. Burgess' cousin."

Grant pursed his lips, walked out and went to where he'd left his car. He had a strange feeling that he was in trouble. That an invisible net was being woven around him and it would snap shut at a moment favorable to those who manipulated it.

HE WATCHED the rear view mirror as he drove back to town, but if he was being followed, he couldn't spot the car. Grant drove to his own two-room hotel suite, took off his coat and sat down in a chair near the window. He had some thinking to do.

The death of the real Burgess had made the revelation of the whole plot a difficult thing. From what he knew, Burgess had gone to Vienna on the advice of Willis Ashley. He'd been treated by a certain Von Osten, whom Burgess termed a quack. Then he'd left for home.

Apparently, he meant to have traveled by boat, realized time was limited and took a plane instead. That brought him home before he was expected and placed him squarely in the middle of events he wasn't supposed to know anything about.
COMPLICATING the affair was the widow of the fake Burgess. The man who had taken Burgess’ place on the estate, lived as Burgess and died as him. In making that girl the heir, the disposition of a huge estate had been changed. Burgess had meant it to become the property of the people who worked in his great industrial plants.

Now it would become the property of his widow, but Grant couldn’t make up his mind about her. She was winsomely pretty, apparently had something to hide because she went to extremes to keep her picture from being published. But, no matter what the circumstances, Grant found he couldn’t put her down as a smart crook. He’d seen too many of them and Mrs. Burgess didn’t conform.

There was that beetlEbrowed young man named Otto Cullen who was supposed to be her cousin. Perhaps he engineered this thing and hoped to profit from it. But even more prominently on display was Willis Ashley. The one thing against his having a part in this affair was lack of motive.

He stood to gain nothing, perhaps even lose what he already had. Burgess had made it plain that Ashley would go on in his present capacity. That meant practically a partnership in the vast mills and the same income. What else could Ashley be after—and how did he hope to get it? The fact that the property would now become Mrs. Burgess’ didn’t insure Ashley even staying on in his present capacity.

And yet, Grant realized, it was Ashley who had sent Burgess away. Ashley who had brought the nurse to the house and made the arrangements to get rid of the male attendant who couldn’t be deceived. Ashley had also handled the funeral and in that way vouched for the fact that it really was an emaciated, almost strange looking Peter Burgess who was being buried, but it was Peter Burgess.

There had been a change of doctors from a man named Tabor to one named Milliken. That in itself meant little. Perhaps Tabor could identify the corpse in the funeral parlor as a fake—and perhaps not. Dr. Milliken, if called in to treat a man introduced to him as Peter Burgess, would have accepted the patient in full honesty. If Milliken had conferred with Dr. Tabor, his diagnosis would have been the same as Tabor’s and in that way no suspicion would have been raised.

Grant looked up Tabor’s phone number, dialed and found the phone had been disconnected. That meant another lead blocked.

Then Grant had a happier idea. Dr. Von Osten, in faraway Vienna could hold the secret. It was worth the expense of a transatlantic phone call and Grant put one through. He had to wait more than an hour and then he heard a soft voiced man speaking in good English.

“Doctor Von Osten?” Grant asked.

“Yes—this is Von Osten,” the voice replied.

“You don’t sound like him,” Grant said curtly.

“I tell you this is Doctor Von Osten,” the voice insisted.

“All right,” Grant said. “You know who this is. I’m calling from New York.”

Von Osten was tricked there. Grant knew he’d have noticed the difference in voices, but if he himself was told his voice sounded strange, he would assume the connection had something to do with it.

“Do you understand now Doctor?” Grant went on.

“Yes—quite,” Von Osten replied. “I might add that your voice too, is unfamiliar, but then, who else knows our little secret, eh?”

“That’s right,” Grant said. “Have you heard anything from him?”

“From whom?” Van Osten demanded cautiously. “Name the man.”

Grant put a measure of irritation in his voice. “Galloway, of course.”

“Good—now I know it is you,” Von Osten said. “Galloway left here three days ago to make the boat. It will take eight days for the voyage and he cannot survive more than four days. When he reaches port he will be dead.”

“You are positive?” Grant asked.

“I am a physician. I treated him and
kept him under constant observation, did I not? I was to see that he did not leave my sanitarium until his time was very limited. I have done my part. As I told you when I called you last week."

"Good," Grant said.

"Why are you calling me again?" the voice from Vienna asked.

"I was worried. Wanted to make certain there'd been no slips," Grant said. He was praying that Von Osten would mention the name of the man he believed to be calling. But Grant's luck ran out there. Von Osten murmured some polite phrase and hung up.

As Grant slowly replaced the receiver, he knew it had boiled down to either Otto Cullen or Willis Ashley, for Von Osten had talked to a man before, not a woman. An idea was taking shape in Grant's mind. He got up, swung into his coat and opened the door.

A fist came out of nowhere and hit him squarely on the tip of the jaw. He went hurtling back, tripped and fell heavily. He rose to one elbow, blinking and fighting off the blackness caused by that anesthetic fist. Then, slowly, his eyes began to focus and he saw Otto Cullen standing over him, feet planted far apart, fists doubled and those beetled brows drawn down in a dark scowl.

"Get up," Cullen said softly, "or I'll kick your face in as you lie there."

CHAPTER IV

A Motive in Millions

PAINFULLY, Grant arose. He backed up a little and Cullen moved to keep close. "You were talking to somebody on the phone," Cullen said. "Who was it?"

"My office," Grant answered uneasily. "If it happens to be any of your business."

"You were talking to someone else. I heard enough to know that. Come through, Grant, or your talking days—to anyone—are over."

Grant glanced quickly to right and left, took another backward step and let Cullen close in fast. As Cullen was in mid-step, Grant hooked him. It was a hard, straight blow that buried a fist deep in Cullen's middle. It surprised the man and jolted him in such pain that he doubled up. Grant brought down a clubbed fist to the back of Cullen's neck. That sent him reeling to one side and Grant's next punch missed.

Cullen straightened up as Grant started a rush. Grant ran full into a left hook, ducked a right swing and bored in fast. They were even matched, with Cullen's weight as the only advantage. The fight moved from one corner to another.

Grant kept working on Cullen's already sore midsection. Whenever he could, he slammed him across the back of the neck. Hitting Cullen on the chin seemed to have little effect and Grant suddenly realized that this man had been trained in the ring.

One of Cullen's roundhouse punches was bound to connect sooner or later and when it did, Grant knew he was going down. When that happened, he'd probably be killed. Cullen was in a killing mood.

Then the phone began to clamor. Cullen suddenly dropped his fists, turned and sprinted for the door. Grant followed him, but when he reached the corridor, the big man had vanished. Apparently he'd selected a fire-escape stairway for his exit and Grant knew he'd have little chance to overtake him.

He went back to his rooms, closed the door and answered the phone. He told the manager that the noise was already stopped. Then he went into the bathroom to check on his bruises.

They weren't too bad and he was making plans to settle this thing and write his story about it. First of all he needed evidence. He had to prove that the man in the funeral home was a fraud and the real Peter Burgess lay in the morgue, waiting to be claimed as Thomas Galloway.

Grant left the hotel somewhat cautiously, sure he was going to be trailed. He
drew to the apartment residence of Dr. Milliken, who had signed the death certificate. As he pulled up to the curb, at this early morning hour, he saw another car stop two blocks behind him. Nobody got out. Grant thought, rather grimly, that when the occupant of that car discovered he was seeing Dr. Milliken, something was going to happen.

Milliken had already gone to bed and was none too cheerful about this one A.M. visit until Grant mentioned the name of Burgess.

Milliken was old, bald and shrewd. If a reporter was asking questions about the death of an important man, the police would be soon following and Milliken began to parry and defend himself.

“Yes, I signed the Burgess death certificate,” he said. “Doctor Tabor was the original physician in charge. When he was sent to one of Burgess’ plantations in South America I was called in to take over.”

“So Tabor is in South America,” Grant murmured. “On a Burgess plantation. That’s very interesting. Go on, Doctor Milliken!”

“I naturally had consultations with Tabor about Burgess. Our diagnoses agreed. It was an inoperable carcinoma. All I could do was make Burgess’ last days as easy as possible.”

“Did you know Burgess before you took over the case, Doctor?”

“I’d only heard of him—as who hadn’t? What are you driving at, Grant?”

“I’m not sure—yet. Tell me, did you expect Burgess to die so soon?”

“Well, we aren’t infallible prophets, Mr. Grant. I did expect Burgess to die within a month or two. I was a little surprised when he went so quickly day before yesterday.”

“Was there an autopsy?” Grant demanded.

“Why should there have been? The man died a perfectly natural death. Everyone expected it.”

Grant arose. “Thanks, Doctor. Just hold that curiosity of yours a little longer. I’ll let you know what this is all about as soon as I’m certain myself.”

QUICKLY, Grant reached the street. He saw that the other car wasn’t in sight. He had an idea that the next step would be taken by whoever was behind the scheme. Grant drove back to his hotel. There were two phone messages in his mail box. One was to call Mrs. Burgess immediately and the other to contact his city editor.

Grant phoned Mrs. Burgess first. She answered so quickly that she must have been waiting close by the phone.

“Mr. Grant, something has come up,” she said. “Something rather terrible. I can’t rely on anyone here and I need your help. Desperately.”

“I’ll be there in half an hour,” Grant promised. “I’m leaving right now.”

He depressed the cradle a moment and then dialed his newspaper. The city editor wanted an explanation in full. “I haven’t time,” Grant said. “Anyway you’ll have to edit my copy and you’ll know all about it then.”

“You’re cooking up something big,” the editor said. “We radio-phonied the picture of Mrs. Burgess all over the country, but we didn’t have to wait until they were printed to get a lead. A reporter in St. Louis recognized her face. She’s Clara Lowen, a nurse who fed her patient poison. Either by mistake or by carelessness or maybe both. She vanished and everybody has wondered what happened to her. She’s news, Jerry. Big news and we’re going to print it.”

“Not until morning,” Grant protested quickly. “That’s only a tenth of the story. Give me a couple of hours. Right now I’m heading for the Burgess estate. Mrs. Burgess wants to see me.”

“Okay, Jerry. Watch it now. She killed one man and she might try to knock you off to keep her secret.”

Grant hung up. There were things he could do to track down and expose this mystery, but he had an idea his work was about finished. The stage was being set at the Burgess place right now.

Mrs. Burgess let him in and there seemed to be no one else around. She led him into the big living room and sat down opposite him.
“Mr. Grant,” she began, “there’s something wrong. You wouldn’t be prowling around if there wasn’t and Otto wouldn’t be acting the way he is.”

“Don’t you know what’s wrong?” Grant asked casually.

“Why should I?” she gasped.

“You’re in it up to your pretty chin,” Grant observed. He still couldn’t figure her out. She was either an exceptionally perfect actress or she was innocent.

“Suppose you tell me what I’m into,” she suggested, but there was a tenseness around her mouth.

“You’re Clara Lowen,” Grant told her.

She bit her lip then and for a moment he thought she’d break down. “I knew that someday, Mr. Grant, a secret like mine can’t be kept. Yes, I am Clara Lowen. That’s why I was afraid to have my picture printed. Yes, I gave a poisonous mixture to a patient three years ago. It was an accident, not my fault at all. But I couldn’t face it and I ran away.”

“What’s Otto Cullen to you?” Grant went on. “And don’t tell me he’s your cousin.”

“He was an orderly in the hospital where it happened. We met, quite by chance, and he made me take him in. Now you know the truth. What are you going to do about it? Because I’m the widow of Peter Burgess, are you going to crucify me?”

Grant sighed deeply. “You’re not the widow of Peter Burgess,” he said quietly. “The man you married was a phony.”

She jumped to her feet, ashen faced. Her lips started to move, but she had no chance to utter a word. Otto Cullen and Willis Ashley had silently entered the room. Both of them held guns.

“Sit down, Clara,” Otto ordered briskly. “Grant—put your hands on the arms of that chair and keep them in sight. I’d as soon blast you off the earth as not.”

“Hello, Otto,” Grant said without emotion. “Ashley, you don’t seem very happy. Is this doublecross getting too much to bear?”

Ashley came forward fast, gun levelled. “I ought to blow your brains out,” he said. “How much do you know?”

Grant laughed at him. “Ashley, I know the whole crooked deal. I know you persuaded Peter Burgess to go to Vienna and place himself in the hands of a doctor you paid off to keep Burgess there until he was going to die. Meanwhile Otto here, working as a hospital orderly, watched for a patient with no relatives and a disease similar to the one Burgess had. Finding such a man wasn’t too difficult.”

“Ashley, I’m going to kill him,” Otto said.

Ashley waved his empty hand at the younger man. “Patience, Otto. He came here alone. We know that. He hasn’t gone to the police. He’s just bluffing. We can dispose of him later.”

“Do you want me to go on?” Grant asked casually.

“By all means,” Ashley replied. “If you don’t, I shall have Otto pistol-whip you until you do.”

“Otto plays too rough,” Grant said. “I’ll talk. You hoped that Burgess would die in Vienna, still under the identity he had assumed. It would have been easy then. But he started for home.”

“If you think you will use Burgess against me,” Ashley said, “you’re very wrong. He isn’t coming back.”

At THIS Grant smiled. “He’s already back, Ashley,” he said easily. “He arrived in time to read his own obituary and he contacted me. He didn’t travel by ship. He didn’t think he had enough time. He took a plane.”

Ashley stepped back. “Otto—do whatever is necessary to make Grant tell us where he has hidden Burgess.”

Grant shook his head quickly. “Hold it, Otto. Right now Burgess is in the morgue. That cancer finally killed him. I did not identify him as Burgess.”

“We can check on that,” Ashley said. “What are you after, Grant? Money?”

“Only the truth. Was Clara mixed up in this—knowing what it was all about?”

Clara moved past Otto quickly. “Grant, I did not know. I had no idea!” Otto slugged her with the heel of his hand and she fell onto the divan.

“That’s one I owe you, Otto.” Grant
smiled. "But you helped Clara answer my question anyway. What happens now?"

"Take him to the basement, Otto," Ashley said. "Dispose of him."

"You can't," Clara sobbed. "You wouldn't. Not murder—"

Ashley laughed. "Who are you to talk about killing a man, Clara? We'll swear you were in this and with your history, who will disbelieve us? Of course that only applies if you go to the police. All right, Otto. Get busy."

Grant didn't move. "You forgot something, Ashley," he said. "You forgot that you murdered the fake Peter Burgess because you didn't dare wait any longer. You forgot that I already talked to Doctor Milliken whose suspicions are aroused. He's going to look that corpse over pretty carefully. But—I have an answer for you."

"It had better be a good one," Ashley raged. "A very good one, because we can kill Milliken too if necessary."

"You'll have to cut me in," Grant remarked dryly.

"If you have a solution, we shall," Ashley replied, much too quickly.

"Good. I can claim the body of the real Peter Burgess. I was with him when he died. I sent him to the morgue. I can get him out. If we could have his body sent to the same funeral parlor and, by some means, exchange his body for that of the fake Peter Burgess—"

"It sounds good, Ashley," Otto said.

"Sure it does," Ashley insisted. "Very well. But Grant, we'll be with you every second. Understand that. And we'll start at once."

"What's the hurry?" Grant relaxed. "Clara—get me a good stiff drink, will you?"

She didn't move until Otto gestured toward her. "You heard him. Get the drink and get me one too."

"We might as well all have a drink," Grant said. "We need it. And Clara, don't spike the alcohol with anything like—well the stuff you handed the guy in St. Louis."

She flushed a deep red, but went out of the room. Her footsteps stopped abruptly just beyond the door. Grant had an idea she was still listening.

"Well boys, we're all in it now," Grant said. "We need Clara, of course, up to a certain point. Burgess left his holdings to his employees, but his widow will have first claim. Maybe she even gets it all. Did you arrange that, Ashley?"

"It's all taken care of," Ashley shrugged. "A new will that'll never be considered anything but genuine. Burgess, the sentimental fool, would have given away that empire. Where would I have been then?"

"I get it." Grant hoped that Clara was listening. "Clara would control the estate and she'd be under your thumb. You could threaten to expose her—perhaps have her accused of murder. Even compel her to sign over a controlling interest and perhaps arrange for an accidental death."

"You're thinking too far into the future," Ashley remarked laconically.

"Well, she can't squawk anyway," Grant insisted. "And she's easily gotten rid of. Just watch out that she doesn't slip you boys a mickey."

Ashley demanded more facts, about what Burgess had said. Grant told him, even pointed out some of Ashley's mistakes.

"You know, when Doctor Von Osten phoned you from Vienna, a record of that call was made. If Von Osten was checked on and talked, that call would back up his story."

"Von Osten has been paid. He is content," Ashley said.

NOW Clara entered with a tray of drinks. She went first to Grant and when he reached for one glass, she casually moved the tray a trifle until his fingers closed around another glass. Otto and Ashley took the others.

Grant held his glass up. "To us—and the millions that Burgess left. Enough for all—eh, Ashley?"

"Of course." Ashley smiled with his mouth. His eyes were grim and cold. They finished the drinks quickly. Grant toyed with his empty glass.

"Naturally," he said, "you boys are go-
ing to kill me as soon as I help switch the real Burgess for the fake. Just as you will murder Clara, when she has served her purpose.”

“Now Grant,” Ashley objected, “you said there was enough for all!”

“Not your kind, Ashley. You don’t share with anybody. But this time I think you’ll soon meet Burgess and he’ll be laughing at you.”

“What do you mean by that?” Ashley shouted.

“Look at the bottom of your glass,” Grant said. “Clara’s an expert at this sort of thing. She heard us say she could be disposed of. And Clara slipped you and Otto an extra jolt!”

Otto saw the white powder that appeared as the last dregs of alcohol evaporated. He screamed. Ashley added his voice to the din. He swung toward Clara and that was when Grant leaped.

He rabbit punched Ashley into unconsciousness with one blow, wrested the gun from him and when Otto recovered from his initial fright at being poisoned, Grant had Ashley’s gun trained on him. While Otto pleaded for an antidote, for any kind of help, Grant moved around behind him and used the gun butt.

Then he sat down at the phone, called his office and told the story. He gave an unqualified statement that Clara was innocent and that she was going back to face the charges against her in St. Louis.

When he hung up, Clara was smiling, as if the gift of smiling had just returned to her.

“Clara, what did you slip them?” Grant asked.

Her smile became a soft laugh. “Only a bit of baking powder from the kitchen. I knew you were honest, stalling to save your life and telling me mine was forfeit unless I did something. While they had their guns, we were helpless. I suddenly realized you were trying to tell me to make them believe they had been poisoned. It took me a long time to figure it out. I am very stupid.”

“You’re anything but that,” Grant told her. “Except for one thing. Running away only got you into a deeper mess.”

“I’m going back,” she said. “Willingly and gladly. I am not guilty of any crime. I’m not afraid any longer.”

Otto was beginning to stir. Grant clutched him with the gun butt and then glanced at Clara again.

“You know, I’m going back with you. To see that you get a break. That is, if you want me to.”

“You know that I do,” was what she said. And her eyes said even more.

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NO BARKING DOG
By ROGER DEE

At six o'clock I drew the shade on the massive glass-paneled street door, a regular chore in my daily routine which told the world that the shop of Joseph Thurber, Jeweler, was closed for the day. Ordinarily I despised that routine as junior clerk, but today I lingered a moment, relishing the thought that with the drawing of that shade I was through forever with Thurber and with Melvin Sanders, Thurber's senior clerk.

I went back down the long display room feeling like a prisoner just pardoned. I felt like laughing at the sparkling display of gems in their brightly lighted cases, knowing that the really valuable pieces would ordinarily have been locked in the
safety vault an hour ago.

But tonight they were not in the safety vault. Instead, the cream of Thurber’s extensive stock was rolled into a soft chamois polishing cloth and tucked snugly into a brown leather brief case that lay in the top drawer of my desk. Thirty minutes more and I would be gone, taking with me a hundred thousand dollars in gems as the payoff to a coup I had spent a month in planning.

For a month I had copied Mel Sanders’ habit of taking home a brief case full of account work to do at night. I would even have aped Mel’s boot-licking interest in Thurber’s hobby, which was the raising of blooded dogs, if it would have made my scheme easier or more foolproof.

The care I had put into planning every detail was paying off now. Tonight I would take my brief case out with me as usual, but I wouldn’t go home this time to my drab furnished room. Instead I would drive to the airport, where I would abandon my car and take a non-stop plane—under an assumed name—to Atlanta. From Atlanta, changing names again, I would jump to New Orleans, and from there, using still another alias, to Miami.

From Miami I would make Havana, where I had connections that would put me under cover for good. The Thurber gems would be broken up into unidentifiable singles and floated on the market a few at a time, and their proceeds would keep me in blondes and bourbon for many years.

I went casually into the office I shared jointly with Sanders and took the brief case out of my desk. I had placed it on the desk and was shrugging into my topcoat when the buzzer on my desk rang and Thurber’s voice rasped through the annunciatior box.

“Come into my office, Mallory,” it ordered. “I want to see you before you go.”

I wanted to refuse point-blank, but I couldn’t afford a row tonight, of all nights. I finished pulling on the topcoat and went out, curling my lip at Mel’s brief case, packed with work to take home and waiting for him on his desk.

I was putting on my hat when I met Mel himself in the doorway.

We met head-on, a jarring unexpected collision that staggered me and sent Mel’s slighter figure spinning aside. He staggered about clumsily, I heard the grating crunch of breaking glass. I almost smiled when I saw that the fool had stepped on his own glasses.

He stood there peering stupidly at me, blinking pale near-sighted eyes, his scanty hair tousled from the collision and his receding chin quivering with anger. He made such a picture of frustration, with his thin sallow face twitching and his desk-rounded shoulders drooping in dejection, that I almost roared.

Instead I said: “Sorry, old man. I was putting on my hat and didn’t see you.”

He blundered past me into our office as I entered Thurber’s, and when I looked back I saw him reaching uncertainly at the rack for his hat and coat.

Thurber sat scowling behind his wide polished desk, a pompous old fool with the soul of a process server and the ego of a three-star general. The fat red face over his double chins had a purplish, apoplectic tinge, and he wore a clipped white mustache and twinkling pince-nez. He was the type who would have worn pince-nez whether he needed glasses or not, just for the effect they created.

And, as usual, all he wanted was another opportunity to rake me over the coals.

“Mrs. Steiner called today about her necklace,” he said accusingly when I came in, hat in hand. “You should have had that clasp repaired yesterday, Mallory. Your negligence is growing inexcusable.”

I apologized, careful not to meet his eye because I was afraid he might sense the horse laugh I was holding back. He’d have had a stroke if he had known I delayed that repair job purposely, to prevent delivery of that necklace to Mrs. Steiner. It was packed in my brief case at the moment, a perfectly matched string.
of flawless pearls, and when I skipped for Havana it would go with me.

"It won't happen again, Mr. Thurber," I promised. I was trying to edge my way out when Mel Sanders paused at the door, blinking owlishly without his glasses.

"I'll have your Princess Sekhmet ready tonight if you'd care to stop by for her, Mr. Thurber," he said. His pale eyes slid away from mine sheepishly, because he knew how I felt about his constant apple-polishing. This Princess Sekhmet was Thurber's latest mutt, a rare breed out of Egypt, so Mel had told me, and Mel had been keeping her while Thurber was away on a weekend trip.

"Good," Thurber said, ignoring me. "I'll bring along the latest edition of the Harrison Kennel Record, the one I told you about yesterday. You'll be at home by seven?"

"Certainly, Mr. Thurber," Sanders said eagerly. "It's been a pleasure to keep the Basenji for you, really it has. She's certainly a little princess."

"Glad you like her," Thurber cut in, dismissing him. "I'll see that you get one of the pups when they arrive."

He turned back to me when Mel scurried off, the good nature going out of his fat red face.

"That's all for you too, Mallory," he snapped. "But see that it doesn't happen again, or it will be your last error!"

I went out, chuckling to myself at the thought of how his face would look next morning when he found the Steiner necklace gone, along with the rest of his choicest stock.

I was still grinning when I went into the office Mel and I shared, but the grin froze stiffly on my face when I saw Mel's brief case still lying on his desk, exactly where it had been when I went out. I whirled to my own desk, and the cold hand of fear gripped at my stomach when I saw that my own bag was gone.

Mel Sanders, half blind without his glasses, had taken the wrong brief case.

I went out of the office at a dead run, the door slamming behind me just as Melvin's car, a five-year-old coupe, dis-appeared into the press of through-street traffic.

I shot my own car away from the curb with a roar and shriek of protesting tires, knowing that everything depended now on my catching him before he got away completely. It was that or else—once he opened that brief case my goose was cooked, and my dream of Havana would vanish like a puff of smoke in the wind.

I caught sight of Sanders' car again within three blocks, and was gaining rapidly on him when the signal changed and the traffic cop stopped me. He kept me there three or four minutes bawling me out for going so fast.

The delay put Mel at home ahead of me, but there was still a chance that I might reach him before he opened the brief case. After all, it was six-fifteen now, and he was expecting Thurber at seven sharp. Mel wouldn't try to unpack his work and get anything done before the great man arrived.

I was in a jitter of indecision by this time, but I knew I couldn't afford another delay, and I kept my speed down. It was six-thirty-five when I pulled into the long horseshoe-shaped drive that led up to Sanders' house from the dark, silent street. Mel's coupe was parked in front of the house, and the first floor was lighted when I got out.

A light snapped on upstairs as I hurried toward the porch steps, Mel's brief case in my hand.

I leaned hard on the bell push. There was an answering scurry of feet, and through the glass side-panel by the door I saw the Basenji dog, dashing down the second-floor stairway at the end of the hall.

It was an odd-looking mutt, a small terrier-sized female with a sleek short coat of chestnut-brown hair and a face corrugated with wrinkles like a bloodhound's. It had a tightly curled tail, tipped with white like its muzzle and feet, and it was as clean and neat as an old maid's pet cat.

Then Melvin Sanders came down the stairway. His sallow face was surprised
and annoyed when he let me in.

“You took my brief case by mistake, Mel,” I said, trying to sound hearty and unhurried. “I thought I’d drop around and correct the error because we’ve both got work that needs doing tonight.”

He nodded, the surprise going out of his face. “I must have grabbed the wrong one when you were in Mr. Thurber’s office,” he said. “I don’t see very well without my glasses, you know.”

He shut the door behind me. “Wait here a minute. I’ll go up and get it.”

He was already at the top of the stairway, the little ring-tailed dog at his heels, when it occurred to me that I ought to be with him when he got my bag, to make certain he didn’t open it. It would be just like him to look inside to see what kind of work I was taking home.

I went up the stairs three at a time, but I was too late. I found him standing in the center of his upstairs bedroom, holding the open brief case in his hands and staring, horrified, at its contents.

“You thief!” he yelled at me when I came in. “You’ve got the Steiner pearls!”

I lunged for the brief case, and he dropped it and staggered back across the room. I saw the look on his face then and let the brief case go, knowing that I couldn’t let him go now. He’d have the police on my heels before I was out of sight.

I hit him, a long glancing blow on the shoulder that slammed him against the half-opened door of a closet. He clung briefly to the door for support. Then suddenly he darted a hand into the closet and brought out the last thing I would have suspected Mel Sanders of owning—a shotgun.

I didn’t give him time to use it. He had the slide back to throw a shell into the firing chamber when I hit him again, a smashing hook to the middle that made him drop the gun and clasp both hands to his stomach.

I followed up, fists cocked and ready, and Sanders, suddenly wild with panic, rushed out at me, fists flailing like a schoolboy’s.

He burst past me and was halfway to the stairhead when I caught him. I had made up my mind already that I had to kill him, and I did it now—quickly and simply.

I shoved down his fending hands and hit him at the nape of his scrawny neck with the rigid edge of my right hand, a short chopping blow with the full weight of my arm and shoulder behind it. His neck snapped with a crack like the breaking of a dead stick, and he sprawled headlong down the stairway, bringing up halfway to the lower hallway with his head doubled forward under him at an impossible angle.

I went down and felt his pulse to make sure, and dropped his bony wrist when there was no faintest flicker of life. Something moved on the stairway above me then, and I sprang up to see the little brown dog staring down at me, her wrinkled face almost human with its intent curiosity.

I brushed off my knees, thinking fast. I had no course now but to take the brief case that held the stones and go, wiping off the front door handle and the bell push and hoping that no one would be the wiser. I could still follow my original plan—given enough start, the murder would not hamper my escape even if it could be traced to me.

GOING back to Sander’s bedroom, I got my brief case and then went outside to my car, stepping gingerly over Sanders’ limp body as I hurried down the stairway. The dog tried to go out with me, but I shoved her back with my foot and shut her in.

I was packing the brief case into the dash compartment of my car when the lights of another automobile speared through the darkness of the street below, slowing to angle into the driveway up to Sanders’ house.

I didn’t have to wait and see to know that it was Thurber, showing up punctually at seven o’clock as he had promised.

I thought fast, faster than I had ever thought possible, and I was moving be-
fore the car below had pulled off the street. I slammed the car door and ran
top the porch steps, throwing my shoulder
against the door with a force that smashed
the flimsy lock out of its socket, and stagg-
ered into the hallway inside.
A moment later I was calling police
headquarters, and by the time Thurber's
car had braked to a stop outside I had
all the loose ends neatly tied up and ac-
counted for. I went out to meet Thurber
as he came up the porch steps, going into
my act the instant his startled eyes found
the shattered door.
"Mel's dead!" I gasped. "Accident—fell
on the stairway."
Thurber took command of the situa-
tion with his usual arrogant promptness.
"Pull yourself together, man!" he or-
dered. "Stop shaking and jabbering like
an idiot, and tell me what's happened."
"Wait," I said weakly, and sat down on
the top porch step with my face buried
in my hands. "I've called—the police.
They'll be here in a few minutes. Maybe
I'll be able to think clearer, then."
He didn't like being stalled off, but one
look at Mel Sanders' crumpled body on
the stairway was enough to drive the
power out of his fat face and make him
wait, satisfied or not, for the police.
The police, a lieutenant of detectives
and two plainclothes men from the nearest
precinct station, were on the spot within
ten minutes. I told them what had hap-
pened, and the story I gave, considering
the few minutes I had needed to think it
up, was a masterpiece.
"Poor Mel left his brief case at the
office and took mine by mistake," I said.
I found his bag after he had gone, and
drove it out to him because I felt partly
responsible for the error. I had broken
his glasses a few minutes before, by ac-
cident. He's short-sighted, or he wouldn't
have made such a blunder. Besides that
I needed my work, and I knew he needed
the papers he had packed in his own brief
case."
I stopped long enough to light a ciga-
rette with fingers that shook deliberately.
"I got here about fifteen minutes ago,
just ahead of Mr. Thurber. I rang the
bell, and was surprised when Mel didn't
answer, because both first and second
floors were lighted. Then I heard the dog
barking and howling inside, and I knew
something had happened to Mel, or he'd
have quieted the pup.
"I looked through the side panel of
the door, then, and saw Mel lying on the
stairway just as he is now. The door was
locked, so I broke it down and went in.
The dog must have been trying to at-
tract attention for some time, because she
stopped barking as soon as I came in, and
hasn't made a sound since.
"I'm sure it was accidental, Lieutenant.
I checked every door and window after
I called you, but none of them had been
disturbed, and there was no one else in
the house. His neck was broken, wasn't
it?"
The lieutenant nodded sympathetically.
"It happens every day," he said. "More
people are killed on stairways than on
battlefields, Mr. Mallory. We'll have to
make a thorough checkup, of course, but
it's only for the record. It's accidental,
open and shut."
I caught old Thurber's eye then, and
felt a sudden chill of fear. He was star-
ing at me incredulously, his fat face white
with the shock of horrified understand-
ing.
"Mallory is lying, Lieutenant," he said
sharply. "I think he killed Melvin Sand-
ers, and that he trumped up this story
on the spur of the moment to clear him-
self of suspicion. I demand a complete
investigation before he is released."

The lieutenant turned a wary eye upon
me. "We'll do just that, Mr. Thurber," he
said. To one of the detectives he said:
"We've already checked the house, Wal-
ters. You go out and search Mallory's
car. And if you miss so much as a ciga-
rette ash I'll have you in beat harness
before the week is out."
I set myself for the break, knowing
with a chilling certainty what would hap-
pen when my brief case was turned up. A
hundred thousand dollars' worth of stolen
NO BARKING DOG

jewels in my car and a corpse on the stairway above me added up to robbery and murder, an inescapable trap that must send me straight to the death house.

Walters was halfway to the front door when I made my play. I leaped sidewise against the other plainclothes man, sending him crashing into the lieutenant, and in the confusion that followed instantly I broke for the door behind Walters.

He wheeled at the sudden sound of threshing bodies, and I saw too late the blue glint of his service revolver swinging up. I tried to halt my rush, to sidestep that swinging barrel, but I was too late. I felt the cold metal crash against my temple, and then I was plunging down into a star-shot blackness that had no bottom...

I came to with the cold feel of handcuffs on my wrists and the roughness of the hall carpet under my aching head. The room swam drunkenly before my eyes, and it was a long moment before I could make out the men standing over me.

"You were dead right, Mr. Thurber," the lieutenant was saying. He held my brief case in his hands, and his voice was puzzled. "He's guilty; there's no doubting it now. But what tipped you off to him, in the first place?"

"The dog," Thurber said. His pince-nez gleamed under the hall lights, and his clipped white mustache quivered importantly. "I knew at once that he was lying when he said his attention was attracted by the Princess' barking. The other inferences followed logically."

"But why shouldn't the mutt bark?" the lieutenant demanded. "They always do, around a stiff."

"Not this Basenji breed," Thurber said. He snapped his fingers at the dog, which wagged its curly tail eagerly. "Speak, Princess!"

The dog made a faint strangled sound, halfway between a whimper and a bleat, and that was all.

"That's why the Basenji is becoming so popular nowadays as a house dog," Thurber said smugly. "And it is also why I knew that Mallory was lying—the Basenji can't bark!"

The Crime Ratio

A REPORT of the Department of Justice reveals that in two of our most populated states, New York and Pennsylvania, the crime ratio is lowest in the nation: 6 per 1,000 persons in New York, and 7.8 per 1,000 in Pennsylvania.

Federal Bureau of Investigation authorities remark that, on the whole, crime during the past decade has been on the upswing in rural rather than in urban districts. They attribute this to three principal factors: poorer educational facilities, poorer and less numerous recreational activities and inadequate or inferior police enforcement.

Crime has increased almost fifty per cent since the end of the war. Most prominent in the increase has been "aggravated assault." Thefts of all kinds have been more frequent and so has criminal homicide.

Offenders are younger than before the war but of equal economic status and intellectual stature. Violence leads in the South and some of the Western states, while premeditated crimes are more common in the North and Central states.

—Simpson M. Ritter
By AMELIA REYNOLDS LONG

THE MAN WHO VANISHED

As Stephen leaned over the door of the roadster, the urn toppled.

To show how an Egyptian curse can actually make a man disappear, Steve Carter must make himself—invisible!

IT WAS one of those things that didn't make sense. District Attorney Jefferson Carter pointed this out to the round-faced little man across the desk from him.

"So you want a modern policeman to protect you from a three-thousand-year-old curse," he summarized. "Come now, Mr. Wade, isn't that a little ridiculous?"

Benjamin Wade, dealer in Egyptian antiquities, removed his English bowler from one knee and placed it on the other. "I realize it must sound ridiculous to you, Mr. Carter," he said primly, "but I assure
you it is nothing of the sort to me.

"As I've already explained to you," he fixed his eyes upon his hat, as though he had a prepared speech written on the brim, "I arrived in this country from Egypt two days ago, bringing with me this sacred amulet, a figurine of the cat-goddess, Bast. It is an object not only of great intrinsic value—it is carved of solid amethyst—but of such antiquity as to be almost priceless. I am on my way to deliver it to Mr. Matthew Raymond, who resides in this county."

Jeff Carter merely nodded. Matthew Raymond, retired industrialist and amateur Egyptologist, was well known to him both personally and by reputation. The reputation hadn't always been so savory, however.

"Since my arrival in town a few hours ago," Wade continued, "I have learned that Mr. Raymond's estate is about an hour's ride from here and can be reached only by an out-of-the-way mountain road. I would be deeply appreciative if a police officer were to accompany me and stay with me until the amulet has been safely delivered into Mr. Raymond's hands."

"I see," Jeff said, and honestly believed that he did. "Afraid an attempt will be made to steal the amulet?"

"No, no." The little man shook his head vigorously. "It's not theft I fear. He attempted to drag his squeaky voice down to a more impressive level. "It's something more difficult to explain—and to guard against. There is an inscription in Egyptian hieroglyphics carved on the base of the amulet, which predicts that if the tomb of the dead with whom it was buried is desecrated, retribution shall descend within the space of one moon upon whoever shall come into possession of the amulet, and the land of his birth shall know him no more."

"Surely you don't believe such rubbish!"

"I'm afraid I have reason to." Wade's chubby face was grave. "The amulet was discovered in the tomb of a priestess of Bast, which was opened shortly before the outbreak of the late war. Exactly one month—lunar month, that is—after its removal, the archeologist who had discovered the tomb died."

"Coincidence," the district attorney declared.

Wade neither agreed nor disagreed. "I'll not attempt to trace its entire career since then," he continued, "although there are at least six similar 'coincidences' on record. Instead, I'll skip to the time it was acquired by my Cairo representative. A month to the day after it came into his possession, he was stricken with a mysterious malady. When I left Cairo to return to this country, all hope had been given up for his recovery."

The little man paused, then added significantly, "Today it is exactly one month since the amulet passed into my hands."

In spite of his professed skepticism, Jeff Carter experienced an unpleasant tingling of the nerves. "So you want a police escort to prevent anything from happening to you," he observed with a smile that was a shade forced. "Very well, you shall have it—although I warn you, my men aren't trained to cope with the supernatural." He flipped the switch on the inter-office communication system. "Brooke, see whether Sergeant Forbes is downstairs," he directed his secretary.

When the stolid, six-foot detective-sergeant arrived, Jeff didn't go into detail regarding his assignment. "Forbes," he said merely, "Mr. Wade is taking a valuable art object to Mr. Matthew Raymond in the northern part of the county. You know, of course, how to get there. He's asked for official protection. I want you to drive up there with him, and stay close to him until this object has been delivered."

The big sergeant nodded. "Expectin' somebody to try to snatch it, Mr. Wade?" he inquired, glancing at the little man.

"Not exactly, Sergeant." Wade was studying his hat again. "To tell you the truth, I don't know myself what I do expect. You see, I—that is—"

"It's a tricky piece of road up that mountain, Forbes, so watch your driving,"
the district attorney broke in before his visitor could finish. No point in giving the sergeant the impression that he was conveying a lunatic. "You’d better start right away, or as soon as Mr. Wade picks up his luggage."

"I have no luggage," Wade intervened. "And I’ve got the amulet here with me." He picked up a bulky, leather briefcase that had been resting on the floor beside his chair. "Would you care to see it?"

"No, thanks," Jeff said hurriedly, and then was annoyed with himself for his haste. It was too much like acknowledging credence of the whole fantastic rigmarole.

Wade smiled understandingly. "Perhaps you’re wise," he said.

At dinner Jeff Carter repeated the story of Mr. Wade and his amulet to his younger brother, Stephen, who received the tale with delight.

"Man, that’s some story!" Stephen exclaimed. "You don’t suppose anything could happen, do you, Jeff?"

"Not being the sort of romantic idiot you are, I don’t," the district attorney replied dryly. "I suspect the little fusspot made up the whole thing as an excuse to get what he wanted."

"I didn’t mean what you’re thinking," Stephen said. "But didn’t it strike you as odd he shouldn’t have felt the need of a bodyguard until today?"

"He explained that. Today was the day the curse was supposed to strike."

"I thought you didn’t believe in the curse," Stephen remarked slyly. "But in any case, if he arrived in this country two days ago, why didn’t he deliver the amulet to Raymond at once, and beat the deadline by—"

The ringing of the telephone interrupted him. "I’ll get it," he said, rising, and hurried from the room.

Left alone, Jeff clipped and lighted his after-dinner cigar. But he failed to enjoy it. His brother’s observations had crystalized a nebulous uneasiness he had felt ever since his conversation with the little importer a few hours earlier. Had the man actually been in danger? If so, why hadn’t he been frank about the nature of it? Why invent that fantastic story?

The sound of Stephen’s returning footsteps cut across his thoughts. "Well," he demanded as his brother appeared in the doorway, "who was it?"

"It was Forbes calling from Matt Raymond’s place." Suppressed excitement was in Stephen Carter voice and manner, "Wade and his amulet have disappeared."

**HOURS** later, Sergeant Forbes showed by his manner that he was furious. "I tell you, Mr. Carter, the whole thing’s haywire!" he declared. He had the dazed air of a man who finds himself confronted by a situation which is paradoxically an impossibility and an actuality. Jefferson Carter and his brother Steve, of course, had come out to Matthew Raymond’s mountain home.

"Tell me the whole thing from the beginning," Jeff directed.

The sergeant began obediently: "First, Wade asks to go to his room here to unpack his briefcase. Hugh Raymond, Matt Raymond’s son, takes him upstairs, Matt goes into that big room he calls his museum, and I sit down here in the lounge to wait for Wade to come back.

"I’d been sittin’ here maybe ten minutes, when a tall, skinny guy came down the stairs. I found out afterwards his name’s Petrie, and that Raymond’s brought him and another guy named Burbank here to get their opinion of this amulet. They wanted to be sure before he agrees to pay Wade any fancy price for it. Petrie asks me if I’m Wade. I’m explainin’ who I am, when all of a sudden Wade lets out a wild yell from somewhere upstairs. Petrie and I fly up, with Raymond, who’d heard the yell, too, only a jump behind.

"Halfway down the upper hall we spy a door standin’ open, so we run in there. In the middle of the floor are Wade’s clothes, but he ain’t in them. The briefcase he’d been carryin’ is layin’ open on the table, but there ain’t anything in it, either."

"And that’s all?" The district attorney was incredulous.

"All except that we’ve looked high and low for this Wade character without find-"
'in' a trace of him. Think we ought to notify homicide?"

Jeff shook his head. "There's nothing so far to indicate murder. Wade may have left voluntarily."

"Without his clothes?" Forbes asked reprovingly, while Stephen chuckled.

"Where are Raymond and his son?" Jeff inquired. "And this Petrie you mentioned? I'd like to talk to them, then I want to have a look at the room where Wade disappeared."

"You can do both at the same time," the sergeant told him. "They're up there now, along with this other guy, Burbank, who drove up in a car while we were searchin' the grounds."

He turned toward the stairs. The district attorney and Stephen followed.

In a room midway down the second floor hall, they found four men standing in a rough circle around something on the floor. All had their hands thrust into their trousers pockets, as if to restrain themselves from touching anything. Matthew Raymond, who had been standing with his broad back to the door, turned around.

"Hello, Carter," he said. "What do you make of—" He broke off as he caught sight of Stephen, whose deductive talents he had profited by before. "Steve!" he exclaimed, his fleshy face folding itself into a relieved smile. "I'm mighty glad you came along! Think you can crack this mystery?"

"I reckon so," Stephen answered. "These 'impossible' cases are generally the easiest, because they're not cluttered up with false leads."

The fat man's expression sobered. "This one doesn't seem to have a lead of any kind," he said. "It's as if Wade dissolved into thin air." He stopped, startled by the implication of his own words. For an instant an invisible presence, alien and evil, seemed to hang suspended upon the atmosphere of the room. Then he recovered himself and introduced his companions, the cadaverous Petrie and the short, stoutish man, Walter Burbank.

"Sergeant Forbes has given me an outline of what's happened," Jeff said. He walked to the object on the floor, which was a pile of men's clothing. "Hat, coat, shirt, tie, and trousers." He enumerated the garments as he picked them up one at a time. "Yes, these are the clothes Wade was wearing when he came to my office."

"What! No underclothes?" Stephen inquired.

Hamilton Petrie shot him a look as though he suspected him of facetiousness. "Apparently the murderer didn't have time completely to strip the body," he commented.

"Murderer!" Burbank yelped. His squat, round body fairly quivered upon his pipe-stem legs, while his short beard bristled with outrage. "Who said it was murder?"

"Nobody has—yet," Jeff answered. "But it's a possibility we may have to consider." He tossed the clothes upon the table beside the empty briefcase. "Suppose you all tell me where you were at the time he cried out."

Matt Raymond spoke first. "I was in the museum, waiting for him to come down," he said. "As soon as I heard him yell, I ran out and up the stairs. Petrie and Sergeant Forbes were just ahead of me."

"That's so," Petrie affirmed. "I was in the lounge, talking to the sergeant, when the scream came. We ran up together, and I remember hearing Mr. Raymond's footsteps just behind us."

"You didn't see anyone in the upper hall?"

"No."

"Was there time for anybody to have run along the hall and down the back stairs?" Stephen put in.

"Not without our seeing him. We were up here within two or three seconds after Wade cried out."

Jeff Carter spoke to Hugh Raymond, who up to this time had remained unobstrusively in the background: "Where were you at the time?"

"I wasn't in the house," Hugh answered.
"After I'd taken Wade up here, I went outside to watch for Mr. Burbank."

"Why were you in such a hurry to see Burbank?" Sergeant Forbes slipped in the question.

"I wasn't in a hurry." Hugh blinked behind his thick-lensed spectacles. "Mr. Burbank was supposed to have driven to the station to meet Mr. Wade, but had evidently missed him. I wanted to tell him Wade had got here all right."

Jeff turned to Walter Burbank, who was caressing his beard with the thoughtful air of a man attempting to work out a perplexing problem. "Forbes tells me you didn't get back until after Wade had disappeared," he said. "Did you pass anybody along the road as you were driving up?"

Burbank shook his shaggy head. "I did not," he declared, "although it's possible Wade could have reached the bus line at the foot of the mountain before I turned off the main highway."

The district attorney spoke to the sergeant: "How long after Wade disappeared did Mr. Burbank get here, Forbes?"

The sergeant scratched his ear. "It couldn't have been more than a quarter of an hour," he said finally. "Maybe not quite that long."

"And it's a good two and a half miles to the bus line," Jeff reflected. "He couldn't have covered the distance in under half an hour. I'm afraid your suggestion's out, Mr. Burbank." He addressed Matt Raymond again: "Any other way he could have gone?"

"None whatever!" the fat man replied. "The road ends here, and there's not so much as a footpath leading off in any other direction."

The district attorney frowned. "If he couldn't have left, then he must still be here," he pointed out.

"That's the worst part of it, Mr. Carter, he's not," the sergeant protested. "We've looked."

"Look again," Jeff commanded waspishly. "He's got to be here somewhere, either in the house or around the grounds."

But a second search revealed nothing, or at least nothing that seemed to be even remotely connected with Wade and his amulet. What it did reveal, unearthed by Sergeant Forbes under a clump of junipers outside the window to Matt Raymond's study, was a woman's corset.

Stephen viewed it with delight. "Who around here wears that? You, Mr. Raymond?" He glanced speculatively at the fat man's enormous paunch.

"Not guilty," Raymond laughed good naturedly. "It'd take two like that to go around me."

"It's plain Wade isn't here, yet equally plain he couldn't have got away," Hamilton Petrie observed. There was mocking challenge in his voice. "So what do we do next?"

"I'm going to have his description sent out over the teletype," the district attorney declared. "If he did manage to leave without being seen, we can find out how he did it once the police have picked him up."

Stephen lounged against the corner of Matthew Raymond's big desk and listened while his brother relayed the details of Benjamin Wade's description over the telephone to the state police sergeant at the other end:

"About fifty years old, slightly under medium height, weight around a hundred and forty, black hair streaked with gray, gray eyes. Clean shaven, ruddy complexion, chubby face, horn-rimmed glasses. I don't want him charged with anything, just held for questioning—if he's found alive."

"So you've decided it was murder after all?" Stephen inquired as the district attorney replaced the phone.

Jeff frowned at the telephone. "It's almost got to be," he replied. "That wild yell Forbes says he let out points to violence of some kind. Yet blast it all!" He took an impatient turn or two up and down the floor. "Murder's even more out of the question than voluntary disappearance. According to the testimony of three people, there was nobody within fifty feet of him at the time he cried out."
"Makes you wonder whether there may not be something to that curse story."
"The curse had nothing to do with it," Jeff declared vehemently.
"On the contrary, the curse had a lot to do with it."
"What d’ye mean?" The district attorney stopped his pacing.
"Come along outside," Stephen said without answering his brother’s question.
"I want to test an idea."
Dusk had begun to creep up the mountainside as they emerged from the house. Stephen paused beside the district attorney’s car to procure a flashlight, then, with Jeff beside him, he continued on to where the drive blended into the dirt road. He kept the beam of the flashlight trained upon the ground in front of him as he advanced.
"What are you looking for?" Jeff asked curiously.
"Tire tracks."
"So that’s how he got away without meeting Burbank on the road—he had a car waiting for him! Why didn’t I think of that?" Jeff sounded annoyed with himself. "Goes to show how muddled a man can become with all this talk about Egyptian curses. Yet hold on, Steve. We still can’t explain how he got out of that room upstairs."
"That’s the simplest part of the whole thing," Stephen said airily. He stopped and focussed the beam of the flashlight on a place along the side of the road.
"Here’s what we’re looking for."
The imprints of a set of automobile tires showed up plainly in the dust. They continued along the road for a distance of about a hundred feet, then turned off behind a screen of sumac bushes into a small, grassy bay formed by an irregularity in the side of the mountain. There they ended.
"Wrong after all," Jeff muttered disgustedly. "The car turned here and drove back to the house. Wade couldn’t have got away in it."
"I never said he did," Stephen told him.
The district attorney was outraged. "Then what the devil," he demanded, "have the tire tracks got to do with his disappearance?"
"They prove what did happen to him," his brother replied. He switched off the flashlight. "You go back to the house, Jeff, and get everybody together while I attend to another little matter," he directed. "Then I’ll be along and pull the rabbit out of the hat."

He moved off through the semi-gloom toward the three cars—the sergeant’s, Walter Burbank’s, and the district attorney’s, which stood parked in the drive where it swept past the broad porch at the side of the house. Jeff looked after him, hesitated, then with a resigned shrug, continued on alone to the front door.
On the roof of the porch was a sun deck, around three sides of which ran a low parapet. A heavy stone urn rested on each of its front corners. The right hand one was immediately above the car beside which Stephen stopped.

As he leaned over the low door of the roadster, something in the shapeless mass of shadow behind the urn moved. It pressed against the carved side of the urn, which began to lean slowly forward. For a long-drawn second it teetered upon the edge of the parapet; then it toppled forward!

THE SOUND of the crash reached Jeff Carter as he was mounting the stairs in search of Matt Raymond and the others. For the space of a skipped heartbeat he stood petrified, then he whirled, came down the half dozen steps in a single leap, and raced toward the front door.

As he jerked it open and hurtled through it, he found himself temporarily blinded by the darkness. Then, as his eyes became adjusted to it, he saw that the hood of the middle car in the drive had been crushed by a large, heavy object that was wedged between the supports on either side of the smashed windshield.
"Steve!" he shouted. "Where are you? Are you all right?"
"I’m fine," Stephen answered, emerging from behind the partially wrecked auto-
mobile. He was carrying a small object in his hand, which he thrust into his coat pocket as he approached. "A miss is as good as a mile, and he missed me by a good six inches. Tell you inside what happened." He slipped his arm through his brother’s and guided him back into the house.

They found Matt Raymond and his son in the lounge, and Sergeant Forbes in the act of galloping down the stairs. Petrie and Burbank descended more leisurely behind him.

"What went on outside?" the fat man demanded. "Hugh and I were in the museum when we heard a crash."

Stephen explained about the fallen urn. There were exclamations of surprise and concern from the two Raymonds, Burbank, and the district attorney, and a raised eyebrow from the inscrutable Petrie that could have expressed any of a number of things.

"But what made it fall, Mr. Stephen?" Sergeant Forbes demanded. "Did it—was it—?"

"You mean, did it slip or was it pushed?" Stephen interpreted. "I’m not sure, Forbes." He glanced around the rough semicircle of men. "How many of you know about the curse that’s supposed to go along with the amulet?"

"I did," Matt Raymond answered, while the unconscious nods of Petrie and Burbank indicated that they, too, had heard the story. "Wade told me about it in a letter. Something about death striking down whoever had the amulet one month after it had come into his possession."

"‘And the land of his birth shall know him no more.’" Stephen quoted the words of the curse with slow solemnity. "Today it was exactly one month since Wade obtained possession of it."

Petrie gave a supercilious laugh. "Really, Carter!" he protested. "You’re not suggesting that superstitious nonsense had anything to do with—" He let the sentence trail away unfinished, as though he considered the idea unworthy of expression.

"It had a lot to do with it," Stephen replied. "Suggestion, Mr. Petrie, is a powerful thing. If you’ll all wait here a minute, I’ll show you what became of Benjamin Wade and his amulet."

He crossed the lounge and ran lightly up the stairs, where he was instantly swallowed up by the black shadows at their head. The four men left behind glanced uncertainly at one another.

"What’s he up to, Carter?" Matt Raymond asked. Jeff shook his head to indicate he was as much in the dark as any of them. After that, no one spoke.

Seconds dragged into minutes, and Stephen didn’t return. At last Matt Raymond could stand the strain of waiting no longer.

"I don’t like the look of this!" he exclaimed. "Steve said he’d be gone only a minute, but he’s been up there close to ten. We’ve had one man disappear today."

At that precise instant, interruption came. "Jeff! Forbes!" It was Stephen’s voice, high-keyed with alarm. "Qui—"

The last word was choked off in an agonized groan.

Forbes was the first up the stairs, but Jeff was practically abreast of him as they reached the upper hall. The others were barely a step behind when they crowded through the open doorway of the room that had been assigned to Benjamin Wade. In the middle of the floor lay Stephen’s coat, but of Stephen himself there was no trace.

Jeff Carter darted forward and picked up the coat. "What the devil!" he muttered. His eyes moved from it to the four corners of the room. "Steve! Where are you?" His voice rose to a shout.

To his own surprise, he received an answer: "Here I am, Jeff. Down in the lounge."

Stephen was sitting in one of the leather armchairs when his brother and the others returned to the room they had left empty only a minute before. He looked up at them with his most beguiling grin.

"Think the curse had got me, Jeff?" he inquired.

"Never mind what I thought." Relief
at finding him safe changed Jeff’s apprehension to annoyance. “How did you do it?”

“Same as Wade did. Simply walked down the stairs.”

“Then why didn’t we see you?” Sergeant Forbes demanded.

“Because I didn’t come down until after you’d all gone up,” Stephen explained. “I wasn’t in Wade’s room when I yelled, but in the one at the head of the stairs. After you’d run past it to the room where you’d expected to find me and were all standing around gaping at my coat, which I’d left behind to keep you busy for a few seconds, I came down here.”

“So that’s how it was worked!” Walter Burbank gave a hitch to the knees of his badly wrinkled trousers as he reseated himself. “But how did Wade get away from the house without my passing him on the road?”

“I’ll come to that in a minute,” Stephen promised. “But first—” He thrust his hand into his trousers pocket and brought out a tiny figurine in the form of a cat, which sent out gleams of purple fire as the lamplight touched its beautifully carved surface. Although only a single man in his audience had ever set eyes on it before, there was no one among them who didn’t recognize it for what it was—the missing amulet.

“Holy jumping Jupiter!” Matt Raymond was staring at it with greedy eyes. “Where did you find it, Steve?”

“I found it,” Stephen replied, “under the cushion of one of the cars out there in the drive, just before the urn fell.” He placed the amulet on the table beside him. “And now we come to what actually happened to Benjamin Wade, and the motive behind it all.”

He had their undivided attention as he continued:

“The motive, of course, was the theft of the amulet. But the thief hit upon the novel idea of concealing that fact behind the apparent disappearance of its owner. I’ve shown you how Wade was able to leave his room without being seen by any of you. But he couldn’t have got away from the house without being seen by Mr. Burbank as he drove up the only road that leads here. And since he couldn’t have done it, it follows that he didn’t.”

“You mean he’s still here?” Matt Raymond glared around as though expecting to see the missing man materialize out of the shadows.

“Of course he is,” Stephen affirmed. “But not as Benjamin Wade. That personality was a disguise. The man who used it is in this room now, and if you’ll all have patience for another minute, I’ll point him out to you.”

“First, what was Wade’s description? About fifty years old, slightly under medium height, weight around a hundred and forty pounds, black hair streaked with gray, gray eyes, clean shaven, ruddy complexion, chubby face, and wearing horn-rimmed glasses. Most of these points we can strike out as obvious parts of the disguise. Only two of them, the height and the color of the eyes, had to be a part of the real man.

“But the man who masqueraded as Benjamin Wade had to have one other qualification. He had to be somebody who was never present when Wade was. Both Mr. Raymond and his son were—while Mr. Petrie, although he was never actually in the room with Wade, was here talking to Sergeant Forbes when Wade cried out from upstairs. But Mr. Burbank, according to everybody’s story, had driven to town to meet Wade.”

DIRECTLY, Stephen Carter, now addressed the short, stoutish man. “But you never drove to town to meet anybody; Burbank. Instead, you parked your car behind a brush screen along the road, and continued on foot to the bus line. After you’d reached town by bus, you had your beard shaved off, assumed the Wade disguise, and went around to see Jeff with that song and dance about the curse, which was to serve as a nice piece of misdirection after ‘Mr. Wade’ had disappeared.

“Then you came back here with Sergeant Forbes, changed back into your own clothes which you’d been carrying in that
big briefcase, and worked the vanishing trick I demonstrated. Next you walked calmly out of the house and down the road to where you’d left your car, and hid the amulet in it. After waiting about ten minutes, you drove back here as though you were just returning from town.

“You did all this—establishing the Wade personality before unimpeachable witness—to make it look as if Wade and the amulet had disappeared at a time when you had an alibi. You didn’t dare let it be known that Wade’s real disappearance had occurred immediately after his arrival in New York, for fear somebody would turn up the fact that you had been in New York at that time.”

“Utter nonsense!” Burbank had the air of a man who would have considered himself affronted if the charges being made against him had not been beneath his contempt. “It’s quite true, I was in New York recently,” he glared at Stephen as though he suspected that this had been a lucky guess, as it actually had been, “but I did not meet Wade there or rob him of his amulet. Neither did I do here any of the ridiculous things you accuse me of. Why, it would have been impossible for me to have masqueraded as Wade! In the first place, my weight is considerably more than a hundred and forty pounds, and in the second, I am still wearing my beard.”

Stephen turned to his brother. “How did you judge Wade’s apparent weight, Jeff?” he asked. “By his size, didn’t you? Well, give Burbank something to pull in that corporation of his, and he’d look at least thirty pounds lighter.”

“The corset!” Sergeant Forbes breathed in sudden enlightenment.

“Exactly,” Stephan affirmed. “As for the beard, it’s the simplest thing in the world to put on a false one—which is what you did, Burbank.”

He made an unexpected lunge at Walter Burbank’s face.

When his hand came away, it brought with it the beard.

“Good Lord!” Jeff gasped incredulously as he found himself staring into the chubby countenance of the man he had known as Benjamin Wade.

“Burbank! What the devil!” Matt Raymond’s mountain of flesh was quivering with indignation as he glared at the other man. “What’s the meaning of this?”

Walter Burbank rubbed his smarting chin, to which a few wisps of artificial hair still adhered. “I can explain,” he replied, attempting to gather the tattered shreds of his dignity around him, “although there’s nothing so difficult of explanation as a practical joke that has misfired. I’ve committed no actual crime. The worst I’m guilty of is making myself appear humiliatingly ridiculous.”

“You’ve done more that that, Burbank,” Jeff Carter said gravely. “You’ve been found in unexplained possession of Wade’s property. That will be enough to hold you on until an investigation can be made. And I suspect,” he took a step toward the now thoroughly frightened man, while Sergeant Forbes closed in silently and purposefully from the rear, “that once we’ve checked with the New York police, the charge will be—as Mr. Petrie suggested—murder.”

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GIANT DETECTIVE ANNUAL

Now on Sale — Get Your Copy Today! Only 25c Everywhere!
As if by magic, a
dead killer returns to
haunt Detective Joe Preston!

CAPTAIN WILL CONRAD, of Homicide, tapped the police photo and said, "You thought you saw him, Joe. A million guys look like a million other guys."

"Yeah, I know," Preston agreed. "But I saw Bernell, Cap. You don't forget a man who soldiered in your outfit for two years. I saw him!"

"He see you?"

"I don't know, but I don't think so. He was walking along Carleton and I was on the Vine bus. Just one good look, then a truck got in between. But it was Bernell, all right."

Conrad carefully centered the photo on his desk. He said, "Let's go back to what we do know, Joe. Bernell was serving life for a brawl killing four years ago."

"I know, Cap. Lad by the name of Mullins. He was in our squad, too."
The Homicide chief stiffened a little. “Yeah?” he echoed. “I didn’t know that. Maybe a grudge brawl, eh?”

Joe Preston nodded. “Nothing else,” he said. “Bernell was no good the first time he saw light of day. He tried to jump the draft and it went snafu. He was in our outfit when we sailed for Africa. In Italy he was in the same squad I was. A yellow streak down his back. One night on a nasty job, he tried to run out on us. We caught him and kind of worked him over some. He screamed he’d get the seven of us some day.”

“You sort of do know him,” Conrad murmured.

Preston’s lips tightened. “Well enough,” he said. “Two nights later, the lieutenant got a bullet in the back. Nobody could say who did it. Coming back on the ship, Jack Allen vanished overboard one night. He was one of our squad. Four years ago Mullins, another one, was killed in a brawl. That leaves four of us.”

Captain Conrad shook his head. “But Bernell’s dead!” he said. “He and five others broke out of Danvers prison a year ago. The guards and State Troopers finally hauled them up in a barn twelve miles away. The convicts tried to shoot it out with guns they’d got hold of. Only, there were full gasoline drums stored in that farmer’s barn and the trooper guns touched it off. The six of them were burned to crisps. Charred corpses. Six of them and six broke out. Bernell’s dead, Joe!”

“Maybe not, Cap.”

The Homicide chief took a deep breath. He said softly, “Look, Joe, I like you. You came to town and joined us a couple of years ago, and you’ve done fine. Detective first-grade in two years. Not bad. Only don’t get me mad, son.”

Preston looked at him and smiled slowly. “Guess I’ll have to take that chance, Cap,” he said. “Try this for size. Six of them crushed out of Danvers, but only five of them died in the barn blaze. The sixth one was somebody who helped engineer the job from the outside. How’d they get those guns—from the prison?”

“No. They must have got them outside.”

Preston spread his hands palms up. “See what I mean, Cap?”

Captain Conrad filled in a couple of minutes thinking. He frowned at Joe Preston.

“Bernell didn’t run with the pack, huh?” he grunted finally.

“Could be,” the other replied. “Never knew him to when he could make things easier on his own.”

Conrad sighed and stood up. “Okay, Joe, I won’t get mad,” he said. “I’ll even put it on the teletype and the prow ln radio. But just a quick gander at a face doesn’t—”

The jangle of the phone stopped him. Conrad took the call and Preston watched his eyes go wide and then narrow. The Homicide chief grunted he got it, and hung up.

“Other business,” he said to Preston. “Man found full of slugs out on the Marvin Road. Let’s go.”

The spot was on a lonely woods-flanked stretch about five miles outside of town. Darkness had fallen, but the lights from a couple of prow cars and from half a dozen cars belonging to people with a sense of morbid curiosity, illuminated the place like high noon. The prow boys were keeping the bug-eyed ones at a distance.

The medical examiner was already there. He straightened and turned as Conrad and Preston came up. He shrugged at their questions.

“Five slugs from a thirty-eight,” he said. “Anyone could have done it. The body’s been here twelve hours, and maybe more. Cart him back any time and I’ll go over him in detail.”

“Thanks, Doc,” Conrad said, and squatted down beside the dead man.

He was on his face behind some bushes. There was a cluster of five holes in his topcoat just a little below dead-center of the shoulder blades.

A six-inch circle of the cloth was stiff with dried blood.
Gingerly, Conrad rolled him over on his back.

The face, looking about thirty-two years old and clean-shaven, was not nice to see. The man had died with the terror of all hell in his soul. It still showed in his death-stiffened features and in his eyes, half turned up under the lids.

The Homicide chief studied the stricken face a couple of moments, and then went systematically through the pockets. There was plenty of identification to show the man was Ralph G. Hicks, an electrician, and a resident of the city for several years.

Conrad studied the mess of stuff in silence and then stood up and started asking questions. He didn’t get any answers that helped much. Sergeants Landon and Singer of Prowl Car 9 had driven by, when Singer thought he saw a man’s foot sticking out from behind the bushes. They had stopped and come over and found the body. Once certain the man was dead, they had radioed it in. That was all.

Captain Conrad turned over the dead man’s belongings to Sergeant Landon. He issued precise orders to visit every house and gas station both ways on Marvin Road and pick up any information available on cars that had passed along the road from midnight last night until eight that morning.

BACK in the car, Conrad said to Preston, “You heard Doc, Joe? Any one of the five could have done it. We got a crazy guy to find.”

Preston’s lips were back tight against his teeth.

“We got Bernell to find, Cap,” he said. “Ralph Hicks saved my life at Anzio. One of the sweetest lads I ever knew. I didn’t even know he lived here.”

“Good grief, Joe!” Conrad blurted in amazement.

“Yeah! Ralph was in our squad, too. Four gone, three left.”

Conrad drove a mile with his own thoughts.

“And you’re one of the three,” he grunted finally. “And maybe he did see you on that Vine bus. Or maybe knew you’re in this town, now.”

Conrad banged the wheel.

“It’s crazy!” he snorted. “Seven, eight years afterward? A guy would forget about it!”

Preston shook his head.

“Not Bernell, Cap,” he said. “We really worked him over. And a couple of other times later, too. He hasn’t forgotten.”

“Bernell’s dead!” the Captain insisted. “Maybe. I’ll play it he’s alive, Cap. Safer.”

The Homicide chief drove another mile mulling things over. “All right,” he said. “Take it over. It’s your oyster. And just in case you’re right, watch it.”

Joe Preston’s smile was thin and mirthless. He said, “If Bernell knows I’m in this town he knows I’ll watch it. But constant!”

Conrad started to speak and let it slide. They were in the residential section now.

“Let me off at Hicks’ house, Cap,” Preston said. “Somebody’s got to tell his wife. Maybe Ralph would like me to.”

Conrad nodded absently. “Yes, no doubt,” he said. “And then what?”

Preston stared through the windshield and slowly kneaded the knuckles of his fingers.

“Find Bernell,” he said presently.

“If Bernell’s around,” Conrad murmured. Then quickly, “Any special plans, Joe?”

Preston shrugged. “Just one,” he said. “Make him come to me. I knew Bernell inside out once, and I don’t think he’s changed. He may or may not know I’m in this town. I’m going to play it that he doesn’t.”

The Homicide chief grunted. “He certainly knew Hicks lived in this town,” he said. “Why not you?”

“Because I’ve jumped from spot to spot since I got out of the service,” Preston replied. “Hicks had been here for years. His address is undoubtedly on file with the Vets Administration, and the Legion. You can always get in touch with old buddies by writing to those outfits. I’m guessing that’s how he found out where Mullins
and Hicks were located. Maybe Danny Fallon and Chick Manners, the other two in the squad. But not me. I jumped around too much for any permanent address."

"And so?" Conrad echoed.

"Let me out this next corner, Cap," Preston said.

Conrad slowed the police car and pulled into the curb. Joe Preston got out, closed the door and looked back in at his chief.

"If he doesn't know," he said slowly, "it'll be a surprise for him. I want to play this my way. That all right with you?"

"Depends," Conrad frowned. "Better tell me a little more."

"Can't," Preston shook his head. "It's still just a half idea." He hesitated a moment. "And just one more thing, Cap. I don't guarantee to bring him in alive."

Captain Conrad stared at him hard, then grimaced, and shifted gears.

"These ears of mine," he growled, "did not hear a word you said, Joe. Probably not important. I'll give you two days. So long."

Some time later that night Joe Preston walked into the Daily Courier building and took the elevator to the city-desk room. The memory of Mrs. Ralph Hicks' grief-distorted face was still fresh in his mind and his heart was filled with cold, relentless fury.

Paul Dayton, night city editor, was one of the first friends Preston had made after coming to Newton City.

Dayton looked up from some copy and grinned warmly as Preston entered the room.

"Hiya, Joe! Don't tell me you've cleaned up the Hicks' killing? Heard you went out there with Conrad. Who did it? My boys can't get a thing on it."

Preston sat down, took a cigarette from a pack on the desk and lighted up.

"I have a story to tell, Paul," he said quietly. "And then a favor to ask."

"Shoot!" the editor said quickly.

Preston grinned thinly and shook his head. "Not so fast, pal," he said. "Let's make a deal—a story for a favor."

"What favor?"

The detective shook his head again. "Not that I don't love you dearly, chum," he said, "but this is very important. A story, and then the favor for certain."

Dayton scowled, absentely deleted a couple of words with his blue pencil and tossed the pencil on the desk.

"Here I go again," he grunted. "Okay. It's a deal, Joe."

Preston leaned forward and began to talk quietly. When he had finished he had told Dayton of the squad in Italy, of Bernell, and the lieutenant, and Allen, and Mullins, and the prison break, and lastly Ralph Hicks.

The editor's face was on fire with excitement. He could hardly get the words out of his mouth as he grabbed for a phone.

"Holy smoke, what a yarn!" he gasped. "I'll spread it all over page one!"

Preston caught the hand reaching for the phone and pinned it to the desk top.

"No, Paul. The deal, remember? The favor?"

Dayton grimaced and slowly pulled his hand free. He leaned back in his chair and scowled at Preston.

"Okay, let's have it," he said.

"Run the story just as your reporters have written it up," the detective said. "But I'll dictate to you a paragraph or two to run along near the end of it. Only what I dictate to you. Not a word of what I've just told you."

"Why not, Joe? What's the gimmick?"

The detective pursed his lips and studied his fingernails. He looked up at Dayton and shrugged.

"Call it 'man bait'," he said, "and let it go at that. You ready to take it down?"

The editor sighed and reached for his pencil. "I make the screwiest deals!" he muttered.

* * * * *

The first thing Joe Preston did the next morning after getting out of bed was to go to the door of his modest three-room apartment and get the morning copy of the Daily Courier in the hall outside. He
took it back to a chair in the living room, sat down and smoothed it out. The murder of Ralph Hicks had earned itself a column on the front page.

The detective ran through the lead paragraphs quickly, and turned to the carryover on an inside page before he found what he wanted. Three paragraphs that read:

An interesting light was thrown on this mysterious killing by Detective Joe Preston, who lives in Apt. 4D at 1786 Hollis Avenue. Speaking unofficially Detective Preston stated he was convinced that the murder was committed by one Julio Bernell, who was reported to have been burned to death along with five other convicts during a Danvers Prison break a year ago.

To quote Detective Preston, "I feel certain that Bernell was not one of those six charred corpses, and that he is alive today. Bernell was in my squad in Italy, and all of us considered him to be the yellowest rat ever to be drafted into the army. Repeatedly he tried to run out when a dangerous assignment was given us. We caught him and beat him up for his cowardice, but it did no good. So completely yellow, and rotten, and useless was Bernell that on three occasions when he tried to make a cringing, sniveling surrender to the Nazis they forced him back to our lines at rifle point. Even they didn't want him.

"Not only a complete coward and a disgrace to the human race, Bernell had a twisted brain that could grasp nothing but thoughts of revenge for the just treatment he had received at the hands of his buddies. He swore that some day he would 'get' us all. To date, four members of that squad have met death. Three of them mysteriously. The very fact that Ralph Hicks was shot five times in the back is proof enough for me that it was Bernell. No matter how great his advantage, Bernell would never dare meet a man face to face and kill him."

WHEN Preston had finished reading, he let the newspaper slip from his fingers. For a long time he sat staring at the window, at the fire escape just outside, and on across the rooftops of the low buildings that lined the street on that side.

Slowly, little by little, a clammy coldness came to his hands and goose pimples crawled up and down the back of his neck. In his heart, though, the cold, relentless fury mounted, and presently his hands felt normal again and the goose pimples crawled away.

A couple of minutes later he got out of the chair and showered and shaved and dressed. He walked down to the ground floor and out the back way. He circled around three blocks and entered a small corner restaurant. A table by the fly-specked window gave him a fair view of the front of his apartment building.

He spent an hour and a half eating his breakfast and keeping an eye on his apartment. Nobody entered the building to rouse his interest, but three times an ordinary-looking sedan with out-of-State plates passed down the street and slowed to a crawl each time it came abreast of the apartment.

Preston caught and memorized the license number easily, and the urge to go into instant action was strong within him. In the matter of a few minutes he could get the name and address of the owner of that car. Better than that, he could lay in wait for the fourth time it rolled by and find things out for himself in person.

Both thoughts he considered, and firmly rejected. He was playing it his way and his way did not include getting in touch with police headquarters. And he would not risk finding things out for himself just in case the driver of that car was not Bernell. How did he know but what Bernell might have a stooge or two in town to do legwork for him?

The three-time showing of the sedan seemed to make one thing certain, however. It was that the rat was smelling at the bait in the trap. One Julio Bernell had apparently read the Daily Courier that morning.

With that one pleasing thought in mind, Preston left the restaurant and took a cab to the really crummy section of town. For practically the rest of the day he nosed around in the dens and cheap dives, seeking information, if any.

There was none. Bernell was keeping himself strictly undercover. Nobody had heard his name even spoken, let alone seen anyone of his description.

When darkness had settled down over the city, Preston returned to his apartment via the rear entry as he had left it that morning. When he opened his apartment door, his service gun was in his hand and he was hugging the hall wall. He
slipped in and dropped to the floor a split-second after he flipped up the light switch.

He got up feeling a little foolish, but relieved. Still with his gun in his hand, he made a detailed tour of the small apartment. He found nothing; particularly, no evidence of a visitor during his absence.

Eventually satisfied, he holstered the gun and made himself comfortable for a quiet evening at home. He listened to the fights on the radio and to a couple of quiz shows. Every so often he got up and walked by the front windows of the room. His heart was in his throat each time, but he forced himself to do it.

There was no bark of a gun, no tinkle of broken window glass, nor any white-hot, leaden wasp stinging his flesh. Frankly he did not expect any, but it was a relief just the same.

After listening to the eleven-o'clock news, Preston switched off the radio and started to make ready for bed. When he was in his pajamas he walked by the front windows once more, so that anybody down in the street below could get a look. Then he started switching off the lights.

He raised the bottom half of the window that looked out onto the fire escape. As he did he was tempted to stick his head out and take a look down. Instead, he turned away and walked into his bedroom.

He hung his holstered gun over the back of the chair next to his bed. That done, he went over to the bureau and pulled open the bottom drawer. A couple of minutes later he slid into bed, jerked the chain of the bedside lamp, and pulled the covers up around his chin.

Then it began! Eons and eons of slow, heart-squeezing waiting. His watch on the bed table and the clock out in the living room ticked by the seconds louder and louder. A clammy sweat oozed out all over his body, and it became almost unbearably hot under the blankets. It took all the will-power he could muster not to hurl back the covers and just lie there in his pajamas.

Savagely he fought back the urge and endured the torture. When a clock somewhere bonged two, his nerves were on edge and he was ready to scream. A billion and one thoughts and doubts assailed his brains until they felt scrambled.

Was he wasting his time? Would the trap work? Would the rat go all out for the tempting bait? Countless little voices screamed that he was crazy. That Bernell had left town right after murdering poor Ralph Hicks. That Bernell hadn’t even read that special bit in the Courier. There wasn’t any Julio Bernell!

Over and over again the crazy unsure, uncertain thoughts. And in between, more mysterious noises inside and outside the apartment than he believed possible. Each new one stiffened him under the covers and fired his imagination to new heights. The sound of the distant clock tolling three came to him as though from the living room. How long? How much longer?

Suddenly he heard it. Or perhaps it was that thing called a sixth-sense going to bat for him. Either way, he knew for a certainty that he was no longer alone in the apartment. His heart seemed to skip a beat and his skin to crawl from the ends of his toes to his scalp.

For a brief second he stared hard into the darkness, and then deliberately closed his eyes. He mumbled a couple of sounds and started breathing heavily through his mouth. He wondered if his face was as marked from his fear as was his heart.

It seemed he couldn’t play possum an instant longer. Then a switch clicked faintly and his bedroom was flooded with light.

Preston groaned, turned his head from side to side a couple of times, and then sleepily opened his eyes. He blinked as though to rid them of the blur of deep sleep, but he could see plain enough.

A man stood some ten feet from the bed, near the wall switch. There was a gun in his hand, a twisted smile on his swarthy face, and a glitter of fanatical hatred in his dark eyes. Save for a little more flesh on his jowls and around his
middle, eight years had not changed Julio Bernell at all.

"Preston the cop, huh? I always figured you'd become a Grade-A rat, given time. A stinking cop, no less! This was really worth waiting for!"

Preston didn't say anything. He blinked sleepily again and then slowly let recognition show in his face. As he did, he slid his eyes over to his holstered gun hanging on the back of the chair. Bernell's chuckle was like sandpaper on cement.

"Go ahead, Preston!" he jeered. "You always thought you were pretty sharp with a gun. Go ahead! Grab for it!"

THE DETECTIVE drew down one corner of his mouth in a grimace and gave a faint shake of his head.

"So you didn't burn in that prison break?" he muttered. "I did call the turn on Ralph Hicks' killing."

Bernell's face seemed to screw up in knotted wrinkles, so intense was the hatred within him.

"That vermin!" he spat out. "Me yellow, huh? You shoulda seen him, Preston. On his knees and babbling about his poor, darling wife! But you! You're getting it in the face, like you said in that rag I wouldn't do."

"What about that Danvers Prison thing, Bernell?" Preston asked, as evenly as he could.

"Nothing about it, that's what!" the reply whipped at him. "The fella that helped went with them. I was just smart. Yeah, a guy officially dead is pegging you out, chum. Like with mirrors. A laugh, ain't it? Go on, grab for your gun, copper!"

Preston stared at the gun trained dead on him.

"The lieutenant and Jack Allen on the boat coming home?" he murmured. "Just for the record, I mean."

Bernell laughed hard, but the gun in his hand remained steady as a rock.

"What record, stupid?" he finally said. "But I get what you mean. Yeah, both of them. And if a couple of lads hadn't come by, nobody would have been wiser about Mullins, either. Hicks I fixed yesterday."

Today I find you're in this town. That leaves just Fallon and Manners. I know where they are and I'll square with them, don't worry!"

The man stopped to laugh again. He made a little gesture with his free hand.

"And get it, copper!" he exclaimed. "A dead man doing it! Ain't that a scream, huh?"

Joe Preston lay very still, but under the covers every part of him seemed ready to explode in little pieces. He took a short breath and fixed his eyes on Bernell's trigger finger.

"We should have shot you eight years ago, Bernell," he said tightly. "Shot you, or shoved you in front of a tank. But we couldn't, because we were men. Not yellow, sniveling, crawling vermin like you! But I swear to heaven that had I known then, I would have killed you with my bare hands! And know something, Bernell? I don't think I'd have been tried for it. They'd have given me a medal. That's what we thought of you, Bernell, from the company commander on down. A no-good yellow snake that even the Nazis wouldn't bother shooting!"

The silence that followed Preston's burst of words was broken by Bernell's hoarse breathing. His swarthy face had gone dead-white and then crimson from the flames of hatred burning within him. His eyes seemed to sink back into his head, his lower lip quivered and a drop or two of spittle ran down his chin. He opened his mouth and a stream of vile profanity came pouring forth.

Joe Preston didn't hear it. He was conscious only of Bernell's trigger finger. He saw it start to tighten, and in that same instant there was a sharp sound from beneath the bed blankets.

Perhaps Bernell heard it and perhaps he didn't. At any rate, a tiny hole appeared as though by magic squarely between his eyes. And as he fell over backward, his unfired gun still in his hand, a single drop of blood began to ooze out of that tiny hole.

Before Bernell hit the floor, Joe Preston was out of bed and on his feet. One
good look, though, was all he needed. The revenge-twisted brain of Julio Bernell would never function again. He had died for the second, and final, time.

Preston licked his lips and dragged air into his lungs. He said in a tight whisper, “For those you got, and those you didn’t!”

As the words came from his lips, he stared down at the gun in his own hand. It was a little Luger twenty-five he had taken out of the bureau drawer and carried to bed with him. The squad lieutenant had taken it from a Nazi officer and carried it around as a souvenir. It had been on him the night he’d been shot in the back.

Preston had seen it in the mud when they found the lieutenant at dawn. He’d put it into his own pocket, and kept it ever since. Like one of those crazy twists of fate, a gun owned by Bernell’s first victim had spat one of its own bullets into his brain eight years later.

Joe Preston stood very still, as though listening to voices long gone.

Then he turned and went into the living room and took the phone receiver off the hook.

“Get me Homicide at Police Headquarters,” he said presently. “Yes, Homicide! There’s been a shooting. Hurry it up, sister!”

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From a Criminologist’s Notebook

C Hasing an escaped murderer for 22 months, Scotland Yard detectives finally spotted him in front of a London police station. He was so intent on reading a wanted notice about himself that he never saw the two detectives close in on him.

Re cently the police of Dayton, Ohio, were searching for a swindler whose sense of humor they failed to appreciate. This slick article was signing his bogus checks with the monicker "William Moneymaker."

Irritated by a scratching sound that woke him from sleep, a Meadville, Pennsylvania, hous holder reached for a club and swung at what he thought was an obtrusive mouse. Then he put on the light to check—and found a well-beamed burglar.

M any city jails are still a part of the local city hall. The reason for this is that back in the old days towns and villages couldn’t afford two separate buildings, and so generally employed a part of the town hall as a jail. This often remained as a custom after the necessity for it was over.

E liminated elsewhere, the pillory is now used only in Liberia. It was used in this country as late as 1905 in Delaware. Most of the other states, like most European countries, abandoned it around 1840. When used, the pillory was employed principally to punish short weight bakers, common scolds, roisterers, and writers who incurred royal displeasure.
Steve tried to conquer his amazement enough to think clearly

Hangman's Knot

By O. B. Myers

It was obviously suicide—yet anything but obvious!

The door opened directly from the street. It had a plain panel of plate glass on which was neatly lettered, Wister & Hoyt, Real Estate & Insurance. It swung open so slowly and softly that Steve Hoyt, seated at the second desk, would have noticed nothing except for a slight increase in the volume of traffic noise.

He raised his head to see a man poised uncertainly in the doorway. The man's appearance, his expression, his whole manner bespoke weakness and indecision, as if he were being driven by forces be-
yond his control.

He was of medium height, but his thin, stooped shoulders made him seem taller than he really was. A topcoat, unbuttoned, hung on his gaunt frame, which was crowned by a soft hat with the brim turned up all around. The coat and the suit beneath it were clean and neat, but gave the impression of being much mended.

Steve nodded, but did not rise. This didn’t look like big business. At the nod, the man seemed to gather some inner force of determination.

He closed the door and crossed the small office to rest one hand on the corner of Steve’s desk.

“You handle the company, United States Life?”

Steve jerked his head toward a certificate on the wall. “That’s right. What can I do for you?”

Steve was already guessing the answer. A loan.

The man fumbled in his inner pocket. He brought out a large envelope from which he took a life insurance policy, and unfolded the heavy, creased paper. His hands, Steve saw, were soft and white, and the veins at the wrists were near the surface.

“I want to make a change in my policy.”

His voice was low, but sharp, and as tense as a steel wire. He spread the open policy on the desk, and his fingers jabbed at a paragraph on the second page. “Right here,” he said, and Steve, without reading the fine print, recognized the location of the suicide clause.

“Yes. That says that payment will not be made if you commit suicide within the first two years. When did you buy this policy?”

STEVE flipped back to the first page.

He saw that it was written on the life of Walter Andrew Froman, in favor of his wife, Enid Froman, as beneficiary, and that it was dated June 5, 1933. The face value was $10,000, with double indemnity for accidental death. He flipped the page again.

“That clause does not apply, now,” he said.

“Yes, I understand. But I wish it to apply, now.”

Steve was puzzled. “How do you mean?”

“I want you to write an additional paragraph, saying that the policy is void, and the insurance will not be paid, if I commit suicide now, or at any time.”

It took a moment for this to sink in. Steve stared dumbly. “But—but why?”

“Never mind the reasons.” Froman’s gaunt features stiffened into a rigid mask of determination. “Do it. I will sign it.”

Steve tried to conquer his amazement enough to think clearly. The big companies were chary of any changes in the standard form of policy which might admit of greater liability. This alteration, however, was obviously all to the advantage of the company. “My secretary is out to lunch,” he said slowly. “If you will wait—oh, here she is now.”

Anne McGuire tripped in, piquant as a breath of spring. While she hung up her coat and made dabs with a powder puff, Steve studied the fine print intently. Then he stood by her desk, the policy in his hand, and dictated slowly and evenly.

“Make about four copies—no, five,” he told her. “Right away.”

He returned to his own desk. Curiosity was gnawing at him stronger than ever, but one look at Froman’s frigid, pale yellow eyes told him that questions would be futile. The typewriter clacked furiously. Steve offered a cigarette which was silently refused. Before he had finished his own Anne laid the sheets by his elbow.

He pushed one carbon toward the other man and read scrupulously through the original. The wording, so far as he could tell, was all right. When he looked up, Froman had already plucked the pen out of his desk set and was signing the first copy.

“Before it’s effective,” Steve told him, “this will have to be countersigned by an officer of the company. That’s a rule.”

“You do not have authority to sign, yourself?”
Steve hesitated. "In a case like this, I don't know."

"Can't you find out?"

Steve reached for the phone, called the New York office, and asked for Mr. Galloway. He turned back to Froman.

"He's out to lunch. I'll have to call him later."

Froman finished signing all five copies. The last carbon he folded and put in his pocket, with the policy.

"Just for information," he explained. He rose. "You will know about signing this afternoon? If you will and are authorized to sign, phone me at Billings 4-8600, and I will come back. I must go to work, now."

Steve scribbled the number on his memo pad, with a feeling that it was vaguely familiar. By the time he looked up, his caller was gliding out of the door as silently and mysteriously as he had entered ten minutes before.

Steve scratched his head in bewilderment. He had been in the insurance business for ten years, but he had never heard of such a fantastic request. He tried to conceive of a reason for it. A man of extremely nervous temperament, practically a psychopathic case, being afraid that he was going to commit suicide, might arrange for his wife to be left penniless in order to curb the urge of doing away with himself. Or, on the other hand, should he intend committing suicide, he might deliberately arrange to leave his wife penniless, if he hated her.

But no, thought Steve. In that case he could simply change the name of the beneficiary to someone else. Why throw away the $10,000 after paying premiums for fifteen years? Either way it was fantastic. Froman hardly looked like a psychopath. But then, psychopaths never did. You couldn't tell. He had certainly been nervous, ill at ease.

Galloway was equally puzzled when Steve reached him about two o'clock and described the circumstances.

"For the love of little glass apples!" he exclaimed. "What's the idea behind that?"

"Search me," replied Steve. "Maybe he's nuts. I wouldn't know. But how can we lose?"

"We can't. I'm not sure whether you've got the authority or not, but go ahead and sign anyway, as long as he has. I'll check with the home office and let you know. I never heard of such a thing!"

Steve hung up and proceeded to sign the four remaining copies. He glanced at his memo pad and lifted the telephone from its cradle. Then he dropped it back in place.

BILLINGS 4-8600. He suddenly realized why that number was familiar. That was the bank, the County National, over on Elm Street. Froman must work in the bank, then.

He called over to his partner, Art Wister, who had returned from lunch some time earlier.

"We got a deposit to make, Art?"

"Yes, there's a couple checks. Anne's going over pretty soon."

"I'll take 'em along, myself," said Steve. He got up and reached for his hat. "I've got to go in the bank anyway, on another matter. Two birds with one stone, you know."

"I hope one of 'em has lots of white meat," said Art, grinning, "because I know where to get the cold bottle to go with it."

"You would," grunted Steve.

He waited while the secretary stamped endorsements and made out deposit slips. Then into the same envelope he tucked the four countersigned copies of the clause to be added to Froman's policy.

He walked three blocks up Main, and as soon as he turned the corner on Elm he knew that something unusual was going on. There was always a clutter of parked cars in front of the bank, especially just before three o'clock, but today the clutter was thicker than ever.

A long, black truck with a closed panel body was slanted in to the curb between two sedans. Two coupes were double-parked, almost blocking traffic in the narrow street. Both of them had powerful
spotlights mounted on the roof and sirens on the fender.

The bank was on the ground floor of the Bevens Building with one entrance directly from the street and another from the building lobby. In the lobby door a uniformed cop was monotonously exhorting people to “Move along, folks, move along!” But the more he exhorted the more they seemed inclined to linger. They seemed to be trying to stare curiously into the lobby behind him.

“Where you goin’, my friend?”

The officer stopped Steve with a light hand on his arm.

“Business in the bank.”

“Use the other door, will you, please?”

Steve obeyed. The interior of the bank was less crowded than usual, and was charged with an atmosphere of repressed tension. Instead of being seated at their desks behind the waist-high partition, doing business, the several officers were clustered in a group under a window, talking in low tones. A stenographer with pale cheeks sat staring fixedly at a blank sheet of paper in a typewriter.

The teller behind the grille did not acknowledge Steve’s greeting, but went through his routine motions with eyes lowered, and then gave Steve back the wrong copy of the deposit slip. When this had been corrected, Steve spoke casually.

“I’d like to see Mr. Froman a minute. Is he around?”

The teller stared wide-eyed, as if he had just heard a ghost. “You—you want to see Mr. Froman!”

“Yes. He works here, doesn’t he?”

The teller collected himself with an effort. “One moment, please.”

He slipped out of the back of his cage and walked rapidly away. Steve waited with his elbow on the shelf. He saw the teller approach the group by the window. He said something and all four heads turned to peer in Steve’s direction. Then a tall, angular man detached himself from the group and crossed the floor toward Steve.

“Did you ask for—oh, it’s Steve Hoyt!”

“Yes. How are you, Mr. Oliver?” Oliver was the vice-president who had originally booked the account of Wister & Hoyt. “Isn’t Froman here? Walter Froman? He gave me this phone number.”

“Why, yes. Yes, that is, he was here.”

The banker glanced nervously toward the side door opening into the lobby, where another uniformed policeman stood rigidly.

Steve was puzzled. “Was here? What do you mean?”

Oliver lowered his voice to a tense murmur. “Walter Froman killed himself half an hour ago.”

Steve could only gape in shocked astonishment.

“In the men’s room,” went on the vice-president. “We don’t know much about it yet, but—oh, there’s Sergeant Boley now.”

He led Steve across the floor to the lobby entrance.

JUST as they reached the open doorway, a grim procession was passing toward the street. A short man with glasses made way for four others who carried between them a long wicker basket. The contents were covered with a crumpled length of coarse sheeting, but anyone could guess what lay there, silent and motionless. The cop at the street door ordered the crowd back brusquely.

“All right, break it up! One side, now! You’ll read all about it in your newspapers tomorrow morning. Break it up!”

The basket slid into the back of the long, dark truck. The doors slammed shut with a jar. The starter whirred.

A short, stocky man who had been watching from a point in front of the elevator shafts now recognized Oliver and came over.

“No luck with the pulmotor,” he informed the banker bluntly. “He’d been up there too long.”

Oliver drew him inside, asking, “How did it happen?”

The short man was dressed in a pepper-and-salt suit and a plain gray fedora. His features were sharply chiseled without being distinguished, but his gray eyes were
keenly alert. Before answering the question, he gave Steve a level stare.

"Who is this gentleman?"

"Oh! Steve Hoyt. This is Sergeant Boley."

Steve nodded acknowledgment of the introduction.

"He just came in, asking for Walter Froman," went on Oliver. "Steve is in the insurance business. You know—Wister & Hoyt."

"Oh, yes." The detective sergeant somehow gave the impression, behind his calm, that he was filing every scrap of information away for future reference. "Well, it's too late to sell him any insurance, now. He's entirely too dead."

He turned to the banker. "From what your people tell us, he walked out of the bank about one-thirty. No one noticed him go, particularly. He must have walked right into the men's room and hanged himself in one of the private cubicles with his necktie. He simply made a slip noose around his neck with one end and knotted the other end around a pipe overhead. Then he probably stepped off the toilet seat and strangled to death. The door of the cubicle was shut but not locked, but nobody noticed anything wrong until the porter found him and cut him down. That was after two o'clock."

He drew something out of his side pocket and held it extended on his hand, where it hung limply. It was something less than half a necktie, the narrow end cleanly severed by a knife.

"That's the piece that was still tied to the pipe."

Oliver recoiled as from a snake, his cheeks like putty. The detective returned the lethal instrument to his pocket.

The police were permitting traffic through the outer lobby now, but still, for a time, guarding the rest rooms. Many of the people who entered or emerged from the elevators paused to peer curiously into the bank, or to ask each other questions. Rumor of the tragedy was evidently spreading swiftly.

Steve noticed a tall, dark man in a homburg hat and dark overcoat with a sleek velvet collar. He had been among the crowd outside on the sidewalk before, Steve recalled. Now he was standing in the lobby. His appearance was dignified and impressive, at least on the surface. This impression he enhanced by glancing at his watch and looking about him importantly, as if the confusion had caused him to miss an engagement. He stood close enough to the open door to overhear their conversation, if he was listening.

"But—but why should he do such a thing?" faltered Oliver.

"That is something," said the detective evenly, "that maybe you can find out more about than we can."

The banker was plainly disturbed. "There is nothing wrong with his accounts, as far as we know," he said quickly. "And there was an audit only a week ago. Froman has been with us fifteen years, but he was only a clerk, not a cashier. He didn't have access to any currency. However, I have called the state bank examiners, and they are sending up a special man. If there is any shortage we'll know it before the end of the afternoon."

Sergeant Boley nodded gravely. "You'll let me know?"

"Yes, of course. But in the meantime, I hope that there will be no publicity even suggesting such a thing. There is nothing worse for a bank than the merest hint of a defalcation, and it doesn't take much to start a run, you know."

"We'll be careful with the reporters," agreed the sergeant. "Meanwhile, we'll have to get hold of his wife."

"I've only met her once in my life," said Oliver hastily. He foresaw a most unpleasant task. "I'm deeply sorry for her, naturally, but I hardly feel that I'm the one to break the news."

SERGEANT BOLEY shrugged. Such things were all in his line of work, but he obviously would have been glad of the banker's moral support.

"I'll take care of it. I'll have to bring
her down to the funeral parlor to make family identification and to take care of personal effects. Do you have her address?"

Oliver called to a secretary behind the grating. She came to an unoccupied teller's window, and the two men moved that way. Steve took advantage of the moment to sidle toward the door. Just before he got out of earshot, he heard the girl say, "Four-fifteen Chestnut Street."

He walked back slowly toward his own office in a half daze of bewilderment and uncertainty. Why hadn't he opened his mouth and told the detective what he knew about Walter Froman? He hardly knew. Partly because of the stunning impact of the unexpected, no doubt. But something else had restrained him.

Steve Hoyt had sold life insurance for a good many years. Like other insurance salesmen, he avowed fervently that his product was mankind's greatest boon to the bereaved widow and family. But unlike some, he believed thoroughly in what he sold, and was wholly sincere in pointing out the destitution and tragedy that was relieved by the opportune arrival of an insurance check.

Yet here was a case where his argument was going to fall down. Froman's widow was going to get no check. Through a fantastic combination of circumstances, she was going to be left penniless at the most tragic moment of her life. The fact that Steve could not explain those circumstances did not alter his conviction that a horrible injustice was being perpetrated.

He realized that if he kept still, nothing of the kind would happen. Without possession or knowledge of the signed and countersigned clauses, which were in his pocket, the company would pay. In his conversation with Galloway, he had not mentioned Froman's name, merely referring to him anonymously as "a policy holder." Knowing nothing further, the home office would honor the policy.

Yet this only posed another problem—his loyalty to the company. He had worked long and faithfully for this concern. He was supposed to be their representative, to protect their interests. If he knew of some situation which would save the company ten thousand dollars, it was certainly his duty to speak up.

He pondered these matters for the rest of the afternoon without arriving at any conclusion. He ate a late dinner in the Graystone Grill, sitting in a corner by himself. At eight o'clock he was still dawdling indecisively over his second cup of coffee.

Finally, with a shrug, he asked for his check. He was doing a lot of worrying about Froman's widow whom he had never even seen. He would go and call on Mrs. Froman. It was his duty, in any event, and perhaps her conduct or attitude might furnish some clue which would assist him to come to a decision.

He got his car from the parking lot behind the office and drove out into the suburbs. Chestnut Street slanted along a side hill that steepened abruptly as it reached the four-hundred block. It was a neighborhood of small homes set on sloping, meager plots, far enough from the business district to be difficult of access, yet not far enough to be in the country. Many had no garages; these breadwinners evidently used the Maple Avenue bus.

No. 415 was the third of three identical bungalows, all obviously built to the same floor plan and sheathed in the same weather-beaten creosote shingles. Beyond it was a vacant lot, overgrown with weeds and scrappy, half-size trees. There was a faint light behind the drapes in the front room, he noted, but none in the rear.

His footsteps thumped on the narrow veranda, and when he thumbed the bell he heard a faint shrill from inside.

There was a considerable pause before the door opened. When it did, all Steve could make out at first was the blurred silhouette of a big, broad-shouldered man standing there.

"Mrs. Froman?" asked Steve.

"She is not seeing visitors," was the blunt reply.

"One moment," said Steve, sensing that the door was about to close in his face.
"I know about her husband. But I'm from the insurance company that carries a policy on his life."

There was a brief pause. "Oh, yes!" The man's voice, which had been harsh and hostile, now smoothed out in welcome. "Come in, won't you? Here, let me take your hat."

"It's all right, I'll hang it here," murmured Steve.

There was no light in the small, crowded foyer, but by the glow that filtered through portieres from the room on his right he made out a heavy-framed mirror with brass hooks on either side. As he balanced his hat on one of the hooks he noticed, without registering its significance at the moment, that the hook below held a pearl-gray homburg and a dark overcoat with a velvet collar.

He stepped through the portieres into the living room behind the other man who turned to face him under a branched chandelier. Steve saw prominent, rather heavy features, glossy dark hair that was turning iron-gray at the temples, and black, bushy eyebrows. He also saw, in the alert dark eyes beneath those brows, a sudden flash of recognition, which faded as quickly as it had appeared. It was that flash of recognition which prodded Steve's own memory.

"Didn't I see you this afternoon at the bank?" he asked. "Or rather, in the lobby of the building?"

"You must be mistaken," was the quick reply. "I wasn't there today. Perhaps it was yesterday."

The eyes were opaque now, the tone flat, final.

Steve was a businessman, not a detective. His mental processes were not concerned with crime or its solution, so that he did not interpret everything for its possible bearing on criminal activity. This statement caused him, consequently, not so much suspicion as surprise and wonder.

He had a good memory for faces and was positive that this was the man who had been standing in the lobby while he was talking with Mr. Oliver. His memory was reinforced by the coat and hat hanging outside. In that fact there was nothing significant—but why should the fellow deny it? Like anyone who has been flatly contradicted, Steve felt somewhat resentful and on his guard.

"You are a relative?" Steve asked.

"Oh, no. Just an old friend of the family. My name is Hangate. Bernard Hangate. I have occasionally been helpful to Mrs. Froman in matters of, er—financial advice. I am merely trying to relieve her of details, at the moment. Now about the insurance—you were saying?"

At that phrase about 'financial advice' Steve stiffened a little. He knew well that widows with a lump sum thrown in their laps, and paralyzed with grief, were only too often the prey of sharp swindlers and so-called investment counselors. Could it be that such a financial wolf was on the heels of this one already?

"Walter Froman carried a ten-thousand dollar policy with us," he said coolly. "In the normal course of events, that will be payable immediately. But it will be necessary for me to see Mrs. Froman. Since she is the beneficiary, she must give me—"

He halted as Hangate's head turned.

With hardly a sound the woman of whom they were speaking had appeared in an open doorway at the rear. The room behind her was dark, yet she did not blink in the light. Steve jumped to the quick conclusion that these two had been sitting together in the living room, and that she had withdrawn when he rang the bell.

"Here is the policy, Bernie," she said in a low, husky voice. "He had it in his pocket, I don't know why. The police gave it to me this afternoon, with his watch and other things."

Steve eyed her without appearing to stare. She was not as young as she had once been, nor as pretty, but she still had a good figure and plenty of gleaming blonde hair that had not started to turn gray. At the moment that hair was somewhat disheveled, her eyes were hollow and red-rimmed from weeping, and her
lower lip trembled visibly.

"Ah, yes," murmured Hangate. He took from her hand the long, oversize envelope and scanned the name on the outside. "This is what you're looking for, isn't it? You give her a receipt, I suppose?"

"Yes. I have receipt forms with me." Steve dug in his pocket. Then he spoke directly to Mrs. Froman.

"Have you any idea what caused your husband to do what he did?"

She sucked in her breath. "No. It was a terrible shock."

"Had he ever spoken of killing himself?"

She shook her head. "Never. He gave me no sign of such a thing. Oh, he had his troubles, of course. But I had no idea there was anything that would make him—make him take his life."

Once started, she talked freely, as people often do when emotionally overwrought. She spoke of their married life together, their ambitions, difficulties, disappointments, and fears. Walter, she said, had worked hard from his youth, on a meager salary, but always hoped for a break in fortune. It had not come.

"We had an opportunity recently to make a very profitable investment." She glanced sideways at Hangate, perhaps inadvertently. "Walter opposed it in our discussions. But he hadn't the capital required anyway, so his opposition may have been based on his own disappointment. He had seemed worried lately, perhaps more than usual. But I can't imagine him killing himself."

Steve felt sympathy for her as she described their trials.

"There may have been something in his past, I don't know. There was a period of six months or so, just before we were married, that he never spoke of. It may be—"

"Now, now, Enid," interrupted Hangate. He crossed to her side and pressed her hand indulgently. "It's no use. You're only working yourself up. What has happened, has happened. We must accept it and make the best of it. At least, this insurance will iron out your financial worries for a while. Let's see, now."

He turned to Steve. "You'll want the number of the policy for your receipt, won't you?"

He drew the policy out of the envelope and started to unfold it. A slip of paper drifted to the floor.

"What's this?" asked Hangate. He picked up the paper.

Steve saw that this would force the decision that was troubling him. Once the existence of Froman's suicide clause was known to others, it would be impossible to hide it. In spite of his sympathy for Enid Froman, he had just about made up his mind anyway to speak. Illicit subterfuge, concealing the truth, was too foreign to his nature.

"It is a special clause added to his policy," said Steve quietly, "which he executed and signed only today."

Hangate read it through. He clutched his cheek, muttered, "Great Scott!" and read it again. He was plainly thunderstruck.

"But this—this is incredible!" He turned to the woman. "Enid, he must have hated you like poison!"

She gasped. "What! What do you mean?"

He thrust the sheet of paper at her. She took it and began to read. Her lips moved silently and the blood left her face.

"This means—this means that I get nothing?"

"No!" cried Hangate. His voice, originally suave and courteous, had risen until it was almost a shout. "Wait a minute! That's not legal. Any change in a policy like that has to be countersigned by the company as well as by the policy holder. It's no good!"

"I have the other four copies," Steve informed him, drawing them from his pocket. "They have been countersigned by me, as representative of the company. I had gone to the bank to give him one, only to discover what had happened."

Hangate's eyes narrowed cunningly. He seemed to be thinking fast.

By this time Enid Froman had read the
typed phrase a second time and absorbed its significance. Her face twisted, and tears rolling down, made smutty paths through her rouge.

"He hated me!" she moaned. "Oh, Walter, why? Why did you hate me so? I can't believe it, and yet—yes! It must be true! That tie! That awful green necktie!"

She saw Steve staring at her in bewilderment.

"The one he used," she sobbed. "I saw it there, half of it. He never owned a tie like that, because he knew how much I detest green."

"Now, now, Enid," broke in Hangate sharply.

"He must have just bought it today," she continued brokenly, "just to show me how he hated me. Oh, I don't understand—"

"All right, Enid!" Hangate shut her off abruptly. His manner had again become brusque and alert. "Control yourself, for heaven's sakes! Perhaps we can straighten this out."

Steve's mind was in a whirl. A man buying a new necktie to kill himself with? That was the last fantastic touch. It was simply incredible. So incredible that suddenly his suspicions were aroused.

What if someone else had bought that necktie for that gruesome purpose? Not for suicide, but for murder? That would explain some of this puzzle. After going to the trouble of arranging a change in his policy, Froman would hardly have committed suicide before learning that the clause was effective. But someone else, unaware of the change, could have killed him.

But who? The beneficiary, his widow? Enid was obviously incapable of the crime, either emotionally or physically. Who else stood to gain? Who else had been at the bank that afternoon?

STEVE was so entangled in these speculations that he was answering Hangate's sharp questions almost absentminded.

"You signed the other copies of that clause, only today?"

"That's right. After Mr. Froman had left."

"And you have not yet sent a copy to the company?"

"No, not yet. I was waiting—"

Steve stopped himself at that point, but it was too late. Although he could not quite reconstruct all the details, he was sure now that he stood in the presence of a murderer. And his own ticklish position dawned on him ominously. If those four copies were concealed or destroyed, and if he were silenced, the widow would collect, after all. And Hangate's 'financial advice' would come into play.

"I'll ride in town with you, if you don't mind." Hangate's tone was again suave, but commanding. "Just to see that everything is taken care of properly, you know. Enid, you had better lie down. Don't see anyone. Don't talk to a soul, no matter who, until I get back. I won't be long. Shall we go, Mr. Hoyt?"

A premonition of peril made the small of Steve's back damp and cold. But he had no choice of action. Hangate was guiding him adroitly toward the hall, handing him his hat.

Steve had just time to give Enid Froman one brief look. In it he tried to concentrate the message: he killed your husband! But she gave no sign of comprehension.

Standing beneath the chandelier, her face had the look of wet putty. Her eyes were round and blank, and her tongue seemed to be petrified, as if she were in a trance.

Then Steve and Hangate were walking down the cinder path side by side. They crossed the street and climbed into the coupe. Steve was feeling for the starter when Hangate spoke.

"Don't turn the car around."

Steve turned his head abruptly. The other man's hand, in his coat pocket, rammed something into Steve's ribs.

"That's a gun," he explained cryptically, and his voice was now cold and harsh. "It will blow your inwards all over these nice seat covers if I pull the trigger. I'm telling you what to do. Don't turn.
Drive straight ahead."

"But where are we going? What do you want?"

"Chestnut Street ends at an abandoned quarry about a mile out. You'll find out when we get there. Go ahead."

With the gun against his side, Steve pressed the starter. At the same instant the door of the bungalow flew open. Enid Froman had recovered her voice, and at least some of her wits. She had apparently just begun to realize some of the awful truth.

"Bernie!" she called. "Mr. Hoyt! Come back! I want to ask—"

"Go on!" grated Hangate. He cursed savagely. "Drive! What are you waiting for?"

Steve let in the clutch. The coupe leaped ahead. As it moved off, he was dimly aware of movement on his left and of a crackling sound, as if someone were crashing through underbrush. He guessed that Enid Froman had fainted and fallen off the porch.

"Faster!" ordered Hangate. "Step on it! Where do you think we're going, to a funeral?"

Then he laughed mirthlessly, deep in his throat.

Chestnut Street curved past the last houses and climbed the hill. It became both steeper and rougher, and they bounced drunkenly, but the man with the gun urged him on. Steve glanced once in the mirror, but could see only the scattered lights of the town.

The road became a mere pair of cart tracks. Rounding a rocky shoulder, it ended abruptly before a dilapidated shack and the framework that had once supported a derrick. Just beyond the shack was the lip of a bluff that fell away to the bottom of the shallow, unused quarry pit, hidden in a lake of darkness.

"Leave the engine running," commanded Hangate. "Get out."

The gun had come out of the pocket into the open now, and it covered him relentlessly as he slid from under the wheel. Hangate followed to stand at his side.

"Give me those papers."

"What are you going to do then?"

"Never mind," growled Hangate savagely. "Give me the policy and those blasted suicide clauses—four of them. Quick!"

Steve moved as slowly as he could, but in the face of that pistol he couldn't stall long. It was easy to guess what was coming next. In the morning, or perhaps not for several mornings, his body would be found on the rocks at the bottom of the quarry. It would be too late then for explanations.

The envelope was in his hand when he heard the drum of a motor. The fact that his own engine was running had prevented his hearing it sooner. A car was approaching, driving without lights. "What's that?" cried Steve, turning his head.

Hangate snatched the papers from his hand. In the same instant the car, a dark-hued sedan, rounded the shoulder of rock and slid its wheels to a halt. The doors on both sides flew open, and two men jumped out. One of them shouted a command.

Hangate wheeled and started to run. A police positive cracked once and the bullet sang venomously overhead. Steve ducked and spun on his heel. He saw Hangate halt, turn back. Then the pistol in his hand blazed several times in rapid succession.

Steve, diving for Hangate's knees, felt hot lead tear a searing path across one shoulder blade. His outstretched fingers grabbed cloth. Hangate side-stepped quickly, but in the wrong direction. Steve, flat on his face, heard shoe leather grate on loose pebbles. Then he heard a blood-curdling scream of terror.

He looked up just in time to see Hangate, losing his balance, topple over the edge of the bluff. The scream ceased abruptly, but its echo seemed to hang in the air for a long time.

Steve rolled onto his side and found himself looking up into the square face of Sergeant Boley.
"The necktie!" he gasped. "It wasn't Froman's necktie! Find out who bought it! It was used to murder him! He never had—"

At that point Steve slipped into unconsciousness.

The next he saw of Sergeant Boley was four days later, when the detective came to visit him in the hospital.

"Hangate is conscious," he told Steve. "But his spine was broken on the rocks and he'll be a permanent cripple. He'd almost prefer the chair, so he's given us a full confession. In nineteen thirty-two he and another crook named Moffett ran a loan shark office in Detroit. Froman was their front clerk. The D.A. closed them up and got convictions for usury and embezzlement against the two partners. Froman wasn't in on the dirt. In fact, he testified against them."

"But he never told the bank about that," guessed Steve. [Turn page]
“No. He covered up that part of his past when he got the bank job. Then Hangate reappeared about three weeks ago. He was selling phony oil stock and convinced Mrs. Froman that it was a prime investment. She had no money except what her husband earned, which wasn’t much. So Hangate brought pressure on Froman. Pick ten thousand out of the till at the bank and buy this stock, or else. The else was the threat to expose his past to his employers which would of course have cost him his job.”

“But Froman wouldn’t do it?”

“He refused to touch a cent,” Boley went on, nodding. “His books have been checked again and they’re all okay. But the threat was driving him crazy. He was actually afraid it would drive him to suicide. And he knew that if he did kill himself, Enid would get his insurance and would promptly turn it over to Hangate for worthless stock.”

“But he could have changed the policy to have the money paid monthly instead of in a lump sum,” pointed out Steve.

“In his state of mind, he probably never thought of that. And he wanted to check his own impulse to suicide, more than anything else. He probably meant to tell Hangate what he had done. But Hangate was greedy. He couldn’t wait. So he appeared in the lobby, and catching Froman’s eye, gestured for him to come out.

“Froman dared not refuse. Under the pretext of talking things over again, Hangate led him into the men’s room. There he strangled him with a new green tie he had bought in Pell’s that morning. When Froman was dead Hangate hoisted him up and tied the free end to a pipe. Then he carefully took off Froman’s own tie, to make it look like suicide.”

“Enid Froman knew it wasn’t her husband’s tie.”

“Yes, she told us at the funeral parlor that he must have bought it that very day. That seemed queer. Why would a man buy a new necktie to kill himself with? We were suspicious, without knowing just what to be suspicious of. But we decided to watch the house. I was hidden in the bushes in the lot next door, with my car around the corner, when you went in. And I was there when you came out.”

“Lucky for me!” grinned Steve.

“Mrs. Froman was practically incoherent, but she gave us some hints. So we took off after you two, and—you know the rest,” Sergeant Boley concluded.

Steve nodded thoughtfully. “It was murder, not suicide. That means his widow will collect, after all. Double for accidental death, too. Twenty thousand dollars! Well, I guess she’s got it coming to her. She’s had a pretty rough life. But I hope she doesn’t fall into the hands of another shark like Hangate!”

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THE PHANTOM SPEAKS
(Continued from page 9)

in FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM by this time. We are glad to welcome you into our organization, and hope you will enjoy many more Phantom Detective stories.

Our next note comes from a bit nearer home, and from a youngster who is just becoming acquainted with the Phantom Detective. Let’s hear from Jimmy Botte.

Dear Phantom: I am a boy of 13, and a new mystery fan. I just started reading mystery magazines last summer. A couple of years ago I read one of your magazines about a murder on some river. Mr. Frank Havens or Muriel found a body. One of the villains was a character called Ravac. I didn’t think I could make heads or tails of it, and decided THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE was too much for me. But when I saw your summer issue with “Murder Set to Music,” on the stands, I decided to give it another try. I read it and enjoyed it. Neither The Black Ball of Death” or “The Tall Tomb” came up to “Murder Set to Music,” but I’m your fan for life.

—Jimmy Botte, 3010 New Natchez Lane, Nashville, Tenn.

Thanks for your note, Jimmy, and your appraisal of the various stories. The story you refer to as your original acquaintance with the Phantom Detective was “The Crooked Mile River Murders,” published in our January, 1948, issue. The villain’s name was indeed Louis Ravac. The story had to do with smuggling, and perhaps this was a bit too complicated for you at that time. Now that you feel that you can handle The Phantom Detective stories in your stride, we certainly hope they will bring you a great deal of pleasure in the future.

Our next letter is from out Jersey way.

Dear Phantom: I’ve just read the Winter issue of THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE and noticed the announcement about becoming a member of FRIENDS OF THE PHANTOM. I don’t know whether anyone my age is welcome. I am 28. I’ve been a reader of THE PHANTOM DETECIVE for quite a long time, and I have always enjoyed the stories very much. The only thing I’ve found wrong is that they don’t come out more often. Thanks for insisting on no serials, as I really hate continued stories, as it may be necessary to miss an issue, then it’s just too bad if you’re in the middle of a story. I feel badly enough when I miss a complete Phantom story. I am a stranger in the East and would be glad to have other young women my age who are also Phantom fans write to me. Thank you for a fine magazine, it really contains the most en-
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joyable stories I’ve ever read.—Mrs. Mary Kolb, 16 South Street, Newark, N. J.

Well, Mary, why wouldn’t we want young ladies of 28 in our club? We’re certainly more than glad to welcome you. Our membership lists are open to anyone from 8 to 108, and if we have anyone older or younger we’d be glad to make an exception and include them, too.

The next letter that comes up would seem to indicate that we owe an apology to a young man out Canada way. In our Winter 1950 issue we published a letter from Ardell Layne of Cardston, Alberta, and jumped to the inaccurate conclusion that Mr. Layne was Miss Layne. We are glad to publish his new letter.

Dear Phantom: I see from the addition you put with my letter that you think I am a girl, but as I am a boy that is very wrong. I suppose there are a lot of girls with that name but there are also a lot of boys with that name and I hope that you will make the right guess the next time one of them comes along with a name that could be either a boy or a girl. I don’t suppose you can be blamed for making the mistake, as other people have mistaken my name as a girl’s name when I wrote them as I did to you.

—Ardell Layne, Cardston, Alberta.

We’re sorry the mistake was made, Ardell, and I suppose a detective should have known better, but then there just weren’t enough clues. We frequently find the same mistake made with names like Marion, Evelyn, Joyce and a few others. Thanks for calling the matter to our attention.

Our next letter, from Joseph Thomas, contains an interesting comment. He writes:

Dear Phantom: I have been reading your stories faithfully for sixteen years, and I can honestly say that I have enjoyed them immensely. My one suggestion is that I would like to see you married to Frank Havens’ sweet daughter Muriel; for the simple reason that you could then raise a son who would later be qualified to follow in the footsteps of his great, adventurous father. I don’t think marrying Muriel and

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—Joseph Thomas, 202 South Second Street,
Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Thanks for your suggestion, Joe, there are
some things to be said both in favor of such
an arrangement, and against it. There is no
doubt but what the life of a person like The
Phantom Detective is one that is constantly
in jeopardy, and there is always a possibility
that a crime fighter will be called upon to
sacrifice his life in his work. With such a
set-up, the question of romance and marriage
is one that has a good many angles that do
not often occur to the average person going
about his everyday life. We appreciate your
thought in the matter, however.

It’s a real pleasure to get these letters and
cards from our good readers, and we are
always glad to have both criticism and com-
pliments, as well as suggestions for the future
of the PHANTOM DETECTIVE. Send along your post cards or
letters and you may feel assured that they
will receive every consideration. Address
them to The Editor, THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16,
N. Y. Thanks, everybody—glad to have you
with us.

See you all in the next issue!

THE PHANTOM

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