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The Phantom Juggernaut

"Ravenwood" Novelette



The ghostly car—without a driver—hurtled upon them.

by Frederick C. Davis

That weirdly spinning little mystery wheel of doom lured Ravenwood, stepson of mystery, and the despairing Mavis Lattimer, to hideous death beneath the crushing weight of a speeding car—without a living person in the driver's seat. And this terror-freighted horror vehicle outmatched Ravenwood's every strategy, so that his only hope was to use a cryptic parable of the East to trap the Phantom Juggernaut.

CHAPTER I
WHEELS OF HORROR

FREEZING fear fixed upon the seated man. His whitened fingers clutched the arms of the morocco chair. His terrified eyes widened as he listened. Only one sound disturbed the hush of the somberly lighted library. It was the noise made by something rolling across the floor—something the man in the chair could not yet see. Merely that, yet it paralyzed Martin Machray with cold dismay, weighted his sagging shoulders with the despair of a doomed man.

It appeared in the subdued glow of the lamp—the rolling thing. As though propelled by some invisible power of evil, it trailed into the spacious room from the dim hallway. Its gentle but somehow ominous noise continuing, it progressed slowly across the polished wood toward Machray. It was a small wooden wheel, no larger in diameter than a silver dollar and only half an inch thick, yet it struck rigid terror into the heart of the man who breathlessly watched it approach.

It looked old, that little wheel. Its deep brown color seemed to be the seasoning of the ages. It was worn and scarred, as though it had been rolling like this through many centuries. And its rim was stained with splotches and streaks of crimson—with the color of blood. The scarlet marks seemed to proclaim that its progress was inexorable, that in its ruthless advance through time it had crushed the life fluid from any creature caught in its path. It was rolling, rolling toward the horrified man in the chair.

He feared it as he feared death itself. He dreaded its relentless approach as greatly as though it were a doomful engine taller than himself, weighing tons. The man watching the wheel was a great industrialist, whose world-wide travels had confronted him with dangers

in many distant lands, yet the tiny wheel, insinuating itself upon him, filled him with the most abject heartquake he had ever known.

His terror held him in an agony of motionlessness as he watched the wheel roll slowly and more slowly until, near his feet, it stopped. He wrenched himself up from the chair, avoiding the wheel as though it were a reptile poised to strike. He hurried into the hallway, his haunted eyes searching the amber gloom. There was no sound, no presence that might have launched the little wheel upon its fateful path. It seemed to have materialized out of nothingness with awesome portent.

A step in the library quickly turned Martin Machray. He saw a quiet-mannered young man entering from the garden, through the French windows. This was Victor Stevens, his personal secretary. Stevens stopped short at sight of Machray's pallid face. His gaze turned to the little wheel on the floor. He strode toward it, stooped to take it into his fingers. Hoarsely Machray blurted a protest:

“Don't! Don't touch it!”

Machray hurried back into the library as Stevens straightened with a worried frown. The gray-headed industrialist snatched up the telephone directory. He fingered down a column, found the number he sought, then spun the dial with feverish quickness. The terror in his eyes grew even sharper as his gaze drew back irresistibly to the mockingly enigmatic little wheel. When a voice spoke over the wire he said in a quavering rush:

“Ravenwood! I must speak with Ravenwood at once!”

“RAVENWOOD is out, sir,” the mundane manservant announced placidly. “I'm unable to say when he will return, sir. If there is any message—”

“Ask him to telephone Martin Machray the moment he comes back,” the strained voice on the wire implored. It added a

number. "It's vitally important. It's—a matter of life and death."

"Yes, sir," Sterling agreed imperturbably. "Very good, sir."

The door buzzer sounded as the manservant cradled the instrument. He turned from the teakwood desk, strode soundlessly across a modern living room decorated in impeccable taste. Sterling had long ago ceased endeavoring to understand the strangenesses which occurred in this richly furnished penthouse. He matter-of-factly discharged his duties as a gentleman's gentleman and asked no questions. When he opened the entrance his scrupulous stolidity remained unruffled, though the girl he saw on the sill looked at him imploringly, her eyes shining with panic.

Her lusciously red lips formed: "My name is Mavis Lattimer. Please ask Mr. Ravenwood if he will see me—immediately. I need his help desperately. I know it's late—I realize he's not a professional detective—but there's no one else who could possibly understand...."

"Ravenwood," Sterling repeated bluntly, "is out. I can't say where you might reach him, or when he will come back. I'll leave your name on his desk, and when he returns—"

"But then—then it may be too late!"

Mavis Lattimer's fingers entwined anxiously, her distress sharpened by the absence of the man whose aid she sought. Sterling offered her no reassurance. She nodded despairingly, turned away. As the manservant quietly closed the penthouse entrance, she stepped into a waiting elevator. During her descent to the street, her teeth pressed painfully into her lips, her greenish-blue eyes filled with tears. She hurried out to the coupe in which she had driven to Sussex Towers—hurried as though striving to escape an invisible, unknown danger.

Once behind the wheel, she drove rapidly. She watched the rear-view mirror

more intently than she watched the street. Her nerves drew tight as she angled into Sunset Boulevard. The shine of headlamps behind her reflected fearfully in her widened eyes. Each time a car passed her coupe, or swung away into one of the crossroads, a sigh of heartfelt relief broke from her dry throat. Now she was not far from her home. No other machine was following her. Hopefully she accelerated, her fear momentarily alleviated.

But immediately she uttered a horrified gasp. A new glare appeared behind her. A car was swinging into the boulevard from one of the side-roads. It rolled quickly through the shine of the intersection, clearly visible to the frightened girl. It was low-slung, streamlined, an unusually bright maroon. At once its speed quickened. It advanced with an angry roar, the shafts of its headlamps playing upon the girl's coupe like the baleful stare of a wrathful dragon.

This was what Mavis Lattimer feared—the wheeled thing that had lurched out of the darkness, that was chasing her now.

She thrust her accelerator pedal down to the floorboards. Her fingers twined white on the wheels as her car leaped. She tried to outdistance the maroon sedan, but she gained not an inch. With savage velocity it swept after her. Its swift pursuit hinted mad, purposeful tenacity. As it raced cyclonically through the gleam of the lamps standing along the curb of the boulevard, the girl gazed back hauntedly. Face whitened with terror, she saw the dread truth she had hoped not to see, felt that phantom death was plunging upon her.

For no driver was at the wheel of the hurtling maroon sedan....

THE girl flung her car along the broad, winding cement at the very limit of its speed. She could not doubt her eyes. The front seat of the maroon sedan was empty. No visible hand was guiding its terrific rush. Yet it swung from side to side of the pavement as she tried

to elude it. It followed her every move, the glare of its headlamps a trap she could not escape.

She swerved to the right, frantically hoping she might evade its uncanny pursuit by swinging into one of the cross-streets, but at once it shot forward, blocking her move. She wildly steered toward the opposite curb, but again it darted into her path. She could glimpse its steering wheel revolving, as though it was under the control of a vengeful ghost. It was driving her along the boulevard at a dangerously reckless pace—forcing her to a speed that promised a horribly violent accident.

The terrifying thought gripped the girl that this was its purpose—to kill her. This howling vehicle of doom, with no hand touching its steering wheel, evilly wished to crush her life away. It was a steel being alive with a maniacal fury, its murderous purpose to leave her broken and dead in the smashed remains of her own wrecked car. Of this Mavis Lattimer was coldly, overpoweringly certain as she strove to elude it—in vain.

It was rushing closer. It was swinging upon her, intent upon crowding her from the road. The wheeled projectile, with its driver's seat utterly empty, was trying to force her to swing off onto the rocky bank. Desperately she held her spinning tires on the very edge of the pavement until, a moment later, a little valley opened beside the road. Then, suddenly, gambling her life upon her skill, she sent her coupe leaping onto a green slope.

The car careened wildly. She twisted it away from an outcropping of rock. She shot it between two trees, which offered such narrow passage that her fenders crumpled. Swinging crazily, she saw that the maroon sedan was hurtling after her. It howled across the grass with its headlamp beams impaling her. She wrenched away, again diving behind a clump of trees. Fuming brakes stopped her. Springing from the seat, she flung herself into

the darkness.

Stumbling to her knees in the gloom, she heard a crashing concussion. Staring back, she saw the maroon sedan ramming into the side of her car. Broken metal screamed. The coupe jounced violently, slamming against the trees. The powerful bumper of the maroon sedan ripped it like a disemboweling sword. Then, as though realizing it had missed its human quarry, the sedan withdrew, snarling. The horrified girl watched it turn, still with no visible hand touching the steering-wheel—and watched it turn upon her.

Suddenly two sharp, cracking reports penetrated the roar of the sedan's engine. In the shadows of the little valley, two streaks of flame appeared, flashing from the muzzle of a gun. The bullets whizzed above the sedan's top. Like a startled animal, it stopped. Again, with an angry bellow of defeat, it backed. Suddenly it swerved away, jouncing over the slope, swinging toward the highway.

Its slashing beams struck the trimly garbed figure of a man with a gun in his hand. Mavis Lattimer saw him in one clear flash just before the sedan roared out of sight. Her gaze clung to him. She realized he had fired at the sedan and stopped its advance upon her, but she was bewildered by his presence. He was coming toward her now, running. He paused, returning his automatic to its shoulder holster, looking down at her, smiling gently.

"I am Ravenwood," he said.

RAVENWOOD gripped the girl's hand. He pulled her to her feet, urged her into a run at his side. He led her directly to a sleek roadster sitting at the edge of the boulevard. He hurried her into the seat, rounded at once to take the wheel. Quickly he U-turned. The roadster gathered speed with silken smoothness. Ravenwood, leaning forward, fixed his eyes upon a red gleam in the distance—the tail-light of the fleeing sedan.

Though he sent his roadster sweeping

after the maroon car at a dizzy speed, he was strangely calm. He kept his alert eyes, which were blue yet green yet gray, fixed on the scarlet beacon. He did not glance at the breathless, mystified girl, but he sensed that she was studying him wonderingly. Through the swish of the wind he said quietly:

‘You cannot understand how I happened along at just this moment. I do not fully understand it myself. It comes somehow out of the wisdom I am trying to attain by devoting my life to absorbing the philosophy of Yoga. I am of both the Eastern and the Western worlds, but I can never hope to grasp it fully. You see, the unknown is a challenge which I must meet. That is why I have become an investigator of mysteries. But do you not understand

The girl answered: “I went to your home tonight, hoping to find you, but—”

“I returned,” Ravenwood broke in, his gaze still following the crimson light of the speeding sedan, “just as you were leaving. I somehow knew you wished help. That’s why I followed you. You are afraid—for your life. You dread that modern Juggernaut driven by a phantom. It has already brought death to your family, and it may crush out the life of others. Hatred—hatred drives it. Yet—”

Ravenwood’s voice faded. The chase had turned abruptly into a side road. The red gleam vanished. Ravenwood decreased the speed of his roadster, offering no further explanation to the girl. He swung onto narrow pavement just in time to see the scarlet star disappear again. Alertly he pressed the brakes, sliding to the curb in front of a well-kept house. He gazed toward the garage at the rear—the garage into which he knew, somehow, the maroon sedan had slipped. No light was shining inside it. Its door was silently closing.

Ravenwood eased from his roadster. In the glow of his headlamps, Mavis Lattimer saw that he was strikingly handsome, firm-

limbed, quick as a panther in his movements. He came to her side, took her arm. They hurried together along the driveway that led to the garage. There Ravenwood brought her to a pause. They listened—heard nothing.

Ravenwood tried the latch of the big door. It was fastened. Promptly he brought from his pocket a pack of master keys which he always carried. The special implements soon found the secret of the lock. While the girl watched him wonderingly, Ravenwood brought a small torch from his pocket, gently opened the door. He shot a narrow beam into the darkness. As he stepped in with the girl, the light played upon a maroon sedan.

It was covered with dust. Ravenwood’s light showed him that its steering wheel, also lightly powdered, bore not the slightest mark. Both seats were empty, filmed with gray. Puzzled, Ravenwood stepped to the front of the car, placed his hand on the radiator. It was cold. Again looking into the car, he turned the key in the ignition lock, found that the ammeter registered no current. Gently he removed the cap from the fuel tank, then rocked the car. Not the faintest swishing sound resulted. The tank was dry

The girl blurted: “It can’t run—but it did. I know this is the car that chased me, because there’s no other just like it. A ghost drove it. A dead man was at the wheel—and he tried to kill me!”

Ravenwood was silent. His lids drooped over his chameleon eyes. He was listening. The girl caught no hint of the voice he heard, though it spoke clearly, resonantly within his mind. It came disembodied as if from an immeasurable distance, bringing to Ravenwood an awareness of peril.

“My son, at all times I am near unto thee. Direct thy sight into thy being, that thou mayest find me standing in thee, powerful, mighty, supreme Heed you this warning, my son. The wheel of Vishnu is stained with thee, blood of the dead. The ponderous mass of

the Juggernaut crushes out the lives of those in its path. Now the crimson wheels of the god's car are rolling upon you—upon you and the girl who stands fearful at your side—the heavy wheels of doom,”

CHAPTER II TERROR TRACKS

RAVENWOOD'S oddly changeable eyes turned upon Mavis Lattimer. Hers were full of anxious bewilderment. He scanned her face as though seeking a secret. Quietly he asked:

“What is the reason for this strange thing you believe? For your feeling that an unworldly being drove this car after you with the purpose of killing you? If a Phantom was at the wheel, it was the ghost of—whom?”

“The ghost of the boy—who drove this car—to his death.” The girl answered brokenly, “I know it sounds incredible, but what other explanation can there be? It *was* this car. It *did* try to—” She interrupted herself, striving for composure. “His name was Lloyd Rowell. He died as a result of an automobile accident, while he was driving this sedan. I know, because we were involved in it. We were cleared of the blame, but—”

“We?” Ravenwood inquired.

The girl said: “I’m—I’m trying to talk coherently.” Again she made a visible effort to compose herself. “Since my father died, when I was a baby, I’ve lived with my guardian’s family. He’s Martin Machray, the industrial chemist. About six weeks ago he and I and Ross Machray, his son, went for a drive in the country. Martin was at the wheel. Something happened—nobody knows quite what it was—but we had a serious accident. It was a head-on collision—with this car.”

Ravenwood, gazing curiously at the maroon sedan, saw no marks that an accident

might have left.

“None of us were badly hurt, but Lloyd Rowell—he was driving this sedan—was gravely injured. We rushed him to the hospital. At first the doctors thought he would survive. His family—they live here, not far from our home, though we had never met them—did everything possible for him. Lloyd was their favorite son and they loved him devotedly. This sedan was Lloyd’s special pride. His father, Wilson Rowell, immediately had the car repaired while the boy was still in the hospital. Then Lloyd had a sudden relapse and died. Out of reverence to his memory, this car has been left here ever since, untouched—but—tonight—”

“Does Wilson Rowell,” Ravenwood asked quietly, “blame Martin Machray for Lloyd’s death?”

“Yes.” The answer was a whisper. “He feels an intense bitterness toward us. He was almost insane with grief. Because, too, Mrs. Rowell suffered serious shock as a result of Lloyd’s death and—several weeks later—died. Lloyd—while he was delirious, during his last moment— cursed us horribly. He swore again and again to make us pay for his suffering. Now his ghost—driving this same car—”

The girl choked off. Ravenwood expectantly turned. He had heard a door open at the side of the house. His light, he surmised, and the girl’s husky voice, had revealed their presence to some one. Footfalls gritted in the gravel of the drive. Two men strode directly to the open door. One of them reached inside, snapped a switch. The glare shone upon Ravenwood and Mavis Lattimer, gleamed on the dusty maroon sedan.

The younger of the two men looked intently, compassionately at the girl. He bore a striking resemblance to the stockier, white-headed man at his side. Ravenwood did not need to be told that the older man was Wilson Rowell. Rowell’s eyes flashed with venomous

enmity for the girl. His cold fury, Ravenwood felt, was akin to that of a devout finding a shrine desecrated. His voice crackled with anger:

“Get out!” he commanded. “Get out at once!”

MAVIS hurried from the garage. Ravenwood saw her teary eyes linger on the younger man. He followed her toward his roadster and the younger Rowell in turn followed Ravenwood. As Ravenwood slipped under the wheel, with the girl huddling on the seat, he heard a soft exchange of words.

“I’m terribly sorry, Mavis. You mustn’t mind dad too much. He’s still horribly upset about Lloyd and mother. But why did you come here—why were you looking at Lloyd’s car?”

The girl answered: “I understand, Don. Your father hates us all. He always will. I don’t want it to stand between you and me, but there’s so little we can do. I can’t explain any further. Please—please don’t let your father hate us too much.”

From the driveway Wilson Rowell called with forbidding sharpness: “Don! I want you here!”

The young man turned away unwillingly, eyes despairing. The girl pressed her lips upon a sob. Ravenwood found it not difficult to understand the trying situation in which they found themselves. The collision, which had resulted in Lloyd Rowell’s death, had brought them together. The brother of the boy who had died, had fallen in love with the girl involved in the accident. A barrier of enmity separated them. Ravenwood, gliding the roadster away, saw Mavis Lattimer’s gaze linger yearningly on Donald Rowell.

Ravenwood urged quietly: “The rest?”

The girl gazed at him wonderingly, realizing he was driving directly toward her home, an address which he could not have learned in any normal way. She answered

softly:

“It has haunted us ever since—made us afraid. Just two weeks ago Martin and I, and Clare and Charles Machray, were out driving again. Clare and Charles were his daughter and son—the sister and brother of Ross Machray. It was at night. A car followed us. Martin stopped on River Road. We all got out to look at the view. Suddenly that car that had been following us—came ahead at a wild speed. It struck Clare and Charles. They were instantly killed. It happened so quickly—we were stunned—but I caught a glimpse of that car as it sped away. It was the maroon sedan belonging to Lloyd Rowell.”

The girl added in a ragged, haunted whisper: “And there was no one driving it—no one at the wheel.”

RAVENWOOD turned his roadster into the drive of the Machray estate. He had not spoken since the girl’s fearfully hushed statement. His chameleon eyes shining with an absorbed light, he helped her from the roadster, went with her to the entrance. It was opened by a young man who looked studious and worried. With a bow Ravenwood acknowledged his introduction to Victor Stevens.

A rumbling voice, speaking in the library, brought a wry smile to Ravenwood’s lips. He recognized it. He strode into the sumptuously furnished room, gazing at a chunky man whose deep-set eyes shone coldly with innate skepticism. He was Police Inspector Stagg. Ravenwood had had unpleasant encounters with him while working on earlier cases, so his immediate response at seeing Ravenwood was a scowl that blended into a guileful grin.

“Hello!” he said. “So we meet again, do we, Ravenwood—you and your far Eastern mysticism?” Stagg could not keep the sarcastic sting out of his voice. “Well, maybe you’re the right man for the case, after all.

This childish hocus pocus is scaring the wits out of Mr. Machray, but I don't see anything to get worried about. What do you make of this?"

He extended his broad palm. A small wooden wheel lay on it—a little wheel that looked aged and worn and stained. Ravenwood carefully took it into his tapered fingers. His eyes sharpened as though he were gazing past the reality, into the profundities of space. Saying nothing, he looked up. His gaze shifted piercingly from one to another of two men standing near the fireplace. The older stepped forward, his movements quick, his voice suggesting frayed nerves.

"I'm Martin Machray. This is my son, Ross. I must explain. This evening my ward—I see you've already met her—told me she'd decided to consult you. Later I telephoned you myself. When I couldn't reach you, I was so beside myself that I called the police. I believe you can find it, Ravenwood—the meaning of those little wheels."

"There have," Ravenwood asked, "been more than this one?"

"Four!" Machray blurted. "Each time it has been the same. They come from nowhere, rolling across the floor. Each is exactly like the others. I can't explain them—I only know they terrify me. It's uncanny the way they appear—and the stains on them—like blood—"

"The wheels of the god's car," Ravenwood said quietly. "Tiny reproductions of the wheels of the Juggernaut. The great, heavy vehicle which every year is drawn from the temple of Vishnu to Puri, carrying the sacred idol, celebrating the festival of Buddha's Tooth. Stained with blood because the devout sometimes hurl themselves under its massive wheels in a delirium of fanaticism. Nothing stops the progress of the god's car—they are crushed to death. The Juggernaut has become symbolical of death on wheels. And you fear it, Mr. Machray, with your whole

soul you dread it....Why?"

Silence followed Ravenwood's quiet words. No answer came from the wild-eyed Machray, but Ravenwood heard a voice. Again it was that disembodied tone which spoke out of the nothingness of empty distance. Again it brought him a warning that put a chill into his blood.

"Take heed, my son! Beware the wheels of Vishnu's cart that already are stained by pressed hearts of the dead. The heavy wheels are rolling upon you while you stand in the path of doom."

MARTIN MACHRAY broke the strained hush. "I have traveled all over the world, Ravenwood. I know of the Juggernaut. It means wheeled death—I realize it. A son and daughter of mine were killed by a hit-and-run driver a short while ago. It seemed an accident, but perhaps it was by design—murder. That must be the significance of the little wooden wheels." Machray's voice quaked with terror. "They are a message—a warning that I'll be killed the same way."

Ravenwood answered quietly, his weird eyes fixed upon Machray: "Yes. They are a token of death—of wheeled death waiting to claim you. But you are not so afraid of any modern substitute for the Juggernaut as you are afraid of the real one, the ancient one. See here, Mr. Machray. You wish my help, but you're holding something back. I cannot handle this case unless you tell me the truth—everything."

Machray's breath caught "Good heavens, isn't that enough—what I've already told you? There's nothing more. I have nothing to conceal. How could I possibly fear a ceremonial wagon thousands of miles from here, across the Pacific? It's something much closer—"

"It is close," Ravenwood broke in, "and yet it is thought of the real Juggernaut that fills you with dread. It is some vengeful

power striking out of the past. It has come up through many years." A sparkling light had appeared in his chameleon eyes. "What does this name mean to you, Mr. Machray—the name of—Quirke?"

Again Machray started. His drawn lips flexed. "Nothing!" he blurted. "I never knew anyone of that name. I don't understand this Ravenwood. I want reassurance from you, but instead—"

"Instead," Ravenwood said firmly, "I am withdrawing." He placed the little wooden wheel on the table with a gesture of finality. "There is a saying from the wise Orient which asks, Mr. Machray: 'Is he not a sage who neither anticipates deceit nor suspects bad faith in others, yet is prompt to detect them when they appear?' I am far from being a sage, but I'm sure you do realize the real significance of this little Juggernaut wheel. You choose not to reveal the truth. Very well, Mr. Machray. Good night."

Ravenwood strode from the silent room. He walked directly to the entrance. His reach for the knob was impeded by a hand that tightly took his arm. He looked around into a white, drawn face, into the anguished eyes of Mavis Lattimer.

PLEASE," the girl said. "There is no one else who can help us. We are all in danger. If we don't learn the secret behind the little wheels, others of us may get killed like Clare and Charles. You know an attempt was made on my own life tonight. I've been too shaken until now to think clearly. Of course, it can't be a ghost who has come back for vengeance. It's a living man—some one mad with hatred for us all."

"But," Ravenwood said softly, "it is not Wilson Rowell you suspect."

The girl's hand tightened on Ravenwood's arm. She stepped closer. She spoke in a lower tone that indicated that she did not wish to be overheard. "Don's father,"

she whispered, "is the last man I want to suspect. I realize Lloyd's death may have deranged him; that he might be striking back at us, but I don't think so. There's some one closer. I won't keep the truth from you, Ravenwood. I believe it's—Ross Machray."

Ravenwood looked through the arch into the library. The industrial chemist's son was still standing at the fireplace. His face was dark with taciturn anxiety. Ravenwood sensed at once that this young man, like his father, was concealing a secret which he dreaded might come to light. He had seemed relieved that Ravenwood had refused to continue with the investigation. The girl, in her lowered tone, went on:

"I've never trusted Ross. There's always been something strange about him—especially the past two or three months. Clare and Charles were both splendid sorts, very different from Ross. I've suspected him many times of concealing something, but now I'm sure of it—I know. There's something preying on his mind. There's a guilty look in his eyes when you catch him unawares. Once I asked Ross point-blank where he was at the time Charles and Clare were run down by the sedan. He lied. I know he lied!"

"You cannot think," Ravenwood asked in surprise, "that he deliberately killed his brother and sister by hitting them with a car that has a dead battery and no gasoline"

"Listen!" The girl's whisper became vehement. "Ross has always been a wastrel. I can tell by the way he acts when he's in trouble, when he needs money. He needs it now, desperately, but he's on a strict allowance. Do you want to know the rest? It's true that if Martin Machray should get killed now, the entire estate will go to Ross."

Ravenwood started, studying the gleam in the girl's eyes. As he remained silent, he heard once more the resonant, wise tone that spoke within his mind from afar. It came clearly, through the spaces of the night,

so that it might have been uttered by an invisible being whose invisible lips moved close to his ear. Enigmatically it said:

“My son, as rain breaks through an ill-thatched house, passion breaks through an unreflecting mind. There is no fire like passion, no shark like hatred, no snare like folly, no torrent like greed. Beware the blood-stained, wheels of Vishnu—the wheels of doom....”

A sound startled Ravenwood out of his puzzlement. It was the peculiar, continuous noise made by something rolling over a hard surface. It stopped the girl’s breath. It brought a dismayed exclamation wrenching from the lips of Martin Machray in the library. It hurried Machray into the hall, with Inspector Stagg at his heels. Subtly it grew louder as widened eyes sought the rolling thing.

It appeared out of the gloom—a tiny, wooden wheel. Slowly revolving, it passed along the hall. Like the others, it looked ancient and worn. Its rim was stained with the same dread crimson. It traveled with a certain relentless deliberation along its track of doom until, at last, it stopped and its sound vanished in silence.

Martin Machray’s eyes jerked up from the little wheel. Mavis Lattimer, turning away from it, uttered a gasp. They gazed in amazement into empty air. Ravenwood had soundlessly effaced himself.

CHAPTER III ORACLE’S WARNING

RAVENWOOD left his supercharged roadster near the marquee of Sussex Towers, the most exclusive apartment building in the metropolis. A special elevator whisked him thirty stores skyward, to the level of his penthouse. At the entrance he placed his hat and stick in the hands of the mundane

Sterling. He asked briskly, his strange eyes glinting:

“Sterling, have you ever heard of a ship named the Alexandra?”

“No, sir,” the manservant answered gravely. “Possibly it is quite a small ship, sir, connected with an obscure line.”

“The name,” Ravenwood went on, “sprang into my mind a moment ago, for some reason I don’t know. It has a meaning. I have a feeling the ship may be privately owned. You’re to find out about it, Sterling. Telephoning the various yacht clubs will give us the information we want, I’m sure. At once, Sterling!”

Quite unhurried, the manservant turned to the telephone with, “Very good, sir.”

Ravenwood strode to his desk, where the myriad lights of the metropolis twinkled beneath his window. From his pockets he removed a number of newspaper clippings. Returning from the Machray home, he had stopped into the office of the *Despatch*, where he spent most of an hour poring over dusty, bound volumes of back issues, probing into fat envelopes in the “morgue.” Eyes keenly thoughtful, he quickly reared his finds.

Several concerned the accident which had cost the life of Lloyd Rowell. Ravenwood found the facts precisely as Mavis Lattimer had stated them. Others detailed the shockingly violent deaths of Clare and Charles Machray. The police had declared a drunken hit-and-run driver responsible, though their search for the guilty party had yielded no results. Ravenwood remembered Mavis Lattimer’s insistence that Lloyd Rowell’s maroon sedan, without a driver at the wheel, had run them down. His super-senses could find no immediate answer to the puzzle of the modern, streamlined Juggernaut.

Among the clippings was a short biography of Martin Machray. It disclosed that Machray had built his fortune and reputation upon a process for annealing and hardening

copper. He had succeeded in developing a means of widening the field of usefulness of this plentiful metal. Industries had been built upon the Machray process, had paid the chemist enormous royalties. Ravenwood found fascination in the account, which surprised even himself. He mused:

“The Juggernaut—China—the ancient origin of copper working—”

The last item offered no evident connection with the others, yet Ravenwood sensed a hidden significance in it. This was not a clipping, but a photostat, for he had found the brief dispatch in a copy of the *Dispatch*, fifteen years old. It mentioned the name which had flashed into his mind so strangely from nowhere:

PACIFIC TYPHOON DAMAGES
SHIP, SWEEPS PASSENGER
INTO RAGING SEA

The freighter *Palestine*, caught in a hard blow off Wake Island last night, was seriously damaged by high seas. One passenger, Corwin Quirke, eleven years old, who was enroute from Shanghai to San Francisco alone, was swept overboard. The storm prevented an immediate search for the boy, but after it blew out, the ship circled for hours in hope of finding him or his body. It resumed its journey after making repairs, but without having found any sign of young Quirke. The young man, who had told ship's officers he had no immediate family, was given up for lost.

Ravenwood rose quietly from his desk. He walked along a hallway which led into the rear of the penthouse. He stepped to the door of a remote room, which no one else ever entered. He opened it quietly, was immediately enwrapped by a fragrant gloom. The bustling atmosphere of the modern world yielded here to a soul-easing peace that seemed to flood out of the ages and enwrap

him in the breath of mysterious India.

RAVENWOOD had known India as a boy, had reached a deeper understanding of its mysticism than usually rewarded the most sympathetic scholar. Born of an American father, who had delved unremittingly into the profundities of Oriental philosophies, and of an English mother, he had given himself up to its every mood. There, in that far-off land, strange forces had shaped his life. He recalled a scene still clear after a decade and a half—a vista of the mountainous crags of Burma, near the border of forbidden Tibet, where his father had, on a hunting trip, pitched camp. A stealthy watch had been set because tigers were prowling. The native guards had heard a sound on the trail, had lifted their guns. It was not a beast that had appeared, but a venerable pilgrim.

Here among the icy peaks there was no settlement within many miles, no shelter, no food, yet Ravenwood had beheld a hoary being walking with slow majesty, empty-handed, along the isolated trail. He had seemed old as the mountains rearing behind him, his eyes filled with the all-understanding wisdom of a sage.

Suddenly a tawny flash had appeared at the side of the trail. A husky warning had sounded: “Tiger!” A lithe, vicious beast had streaked from a rock cranny, toward the snowy-bearded man. Ravenwood's father had fired with lightning swiftness. The bullet had drilled into the beast in mid-air. The extended claws of the tiger had dropped within an inch of the old holy man's bare feet—claws which might otherwise have torn him to shreds. The ancient one had calmly paused. With a lifting of his luminous eyes, he had said in his native tongue:

“Always the Nameless One will guard you and your flesh.”

Then he had disappeared along the bleak trail as mysteriously as he had come.

The boy Ravenwood had not forgotten him. Years later, when the plague was sweeping death through the Burmese villages, he had seen both his father and mother die in an agony of fever, the same fateful night. During that horrible darkness he had felt the first flash of the strange power which had remained with him ever since. Within his mind a voice had spoken:

"I am coming, my son."

That night the Nameless One had returned, from nowhere, informed by some uncanny intelligence, with a speed that no known means of conveyance could explain, to fulfill his pledge of undying loyalty.

Year after year, under the oracular tutelage of the Nameless One, Ravenwood had striven to absorb the profound teachings of Yoga. He had made himself the devoted disciple of one whose every word and every glance, even whose silences, were suffused with the wisdom of untold ages. Ravenwood's impatient Western temperament, incompatible with the apathetic abstraction of the Oriental, forever prevented his complete success, but he had achieved strange powers rarely granted to any but the native faithful. Ravenwood was marked as a man apart by his ability to call upon forces inconceivable to his fellow men.

Upon his return to the United States, the old Yoga had faithfully accompanied him. Here, in his temple midway between heaven and earth, shut away from the modern metropolis, still steeped in the atmosphere of his homeland, the Nameless One continued to fulfill his pact of gratitude. Here he practiced the self-mortification of his ancient creed. Before Ravenwood now, part of the sweet-scented darkness that enveloped him, sat the hoary oracle.

IN the gloom the Nameless One was almost invisible. His white head was bowed, his snowy beard drifting across his thin shoulders. He was immobile, a living statue, except for

the glow in his omniscient eyes. They shone with absorbing understanding upon Ravenwood.

"Venerable seer," Ravenwood said quietly in the native tongue of the Nameless One, "I find my poor powers unequal to piercing the obscurities of the unknown. The veil of Maya is upon my eyes. I need the enlightenment of your wisdom. I beg you to bestow your vision upon me."

The voice of the Nameless One was like the breath of a soft wind stirring from the reaches of another realm. "My hearing is thy hearing, my son; hear thou with it. My sight is thy sight; see thou with it. I have ordained for thee, from the Tree of Wisdom, the holiest fruits."

Ravenwood felt a flow of understanding from the savant, whose untold years had been spent in a diversion of the senses from the external world and a concentration of the thought within. He gazed at the *Yantra* hanging beside the Nameless One—a diagram for worship, aiding the worshiper to achieve Atman, the eternal self—and felt the scope of his super-senses widening.

"Esteemed seer," he asked quietly, "what do you see?"

The Nameless One whispered: "Treachery. Treachery born of fierce hatred in the heart of one who feels himself grievously wronged. His enmity is like a coiled snake, waiting to strike, filled with a lust to destroy. Long years he has waited for vengeance—this man who lives, yet who is dead. For his hatred is so strong it reaches up from the grave, withering all it turns upon But a man is not just if he carry a matter by violence, my son."

Ravenwood observed: "I do not understand, sire. A man who is dead yet living—"

The Nameless One continued as though he had not heard: "It is a scene far away and many years past. Water laps about a

wharf at which a stately ship is made fast. Its name gleams brightly in the sun—*Alexandra*. Upon it coolies are at work, their backs bent under the burden of many cases they are bringing aboard the vessel. The young master of the ship watches them labor, gratified that his journey across the sea has borne fine fruit, for into these cases he has seen stored precious objects of art for which he searched long—vases of porcelain, statuettes priceless in their antiquity....”

Ravenwood listened entranced, striving to interpret the Nameless One’s revelations.

“Now the ship, its name of *Alexandra*, dark in the night, is breasting a calm sea. The young master, whose hair is black as a raven’s wing, proudly descends into the hold to inspect his cargo. It is only a few short hours now until he reaches his home port, where his father expectantly awaits him. To his dismay he finds one of the cases damaged. Concerned for the safety of the ancient vase he saw packed in it, he removes the lid. He finds, my son, not precious pottery, but small, heavy packets. One he tears open. From it comes a dark, fragrant juice—the juice of the poppy.”

“Opium!” Ravenwood exclaimed. “This man is not a smuggler, venerable sire?”

The Nameless One’s soft whisper continued undisturbed. “Eyes are upon him—sly eyes gleaming with hatred—but he does not know. Dismay strikes at his heart He opens another chest, then another. Into all of them he peers. In all of them he finds the same contraband—the juice of evil dreams. Some malicious magic has transformed his objects of art into this dangerous poison. He does not understand.

“But, laboriously, he carries the first chest up to the dark deck. He drops it over the rail. Working secretly, he descends and mounts again, each time bringing up one of the cases, each time consigning it to the waves. At last, in the dead of night, he

completes his trying task, feeling that no one has observed his actions, but eyes were upon him all the while—the eyes of one whose hatred is a deadly blight upon the family of the young master

“On the dark sea the boxes float. Far behind the ship they drift on the waves. The night covers them with secrecy, but the light of dawn is growing Now it fades, my son. There is no more. Knowledge is boundless, but the capacity of man is limited. Harken! The wheels of Vishnu are turning through the ages. The Juggernaut is thundering along its path of doom, crushing upon you. Take heed lest the heavy wheels trap you, my son!”

The savant’s voice whispered away. He sat with hoary head bowed. Fragrant silence filled the lofty temple. Ravenwood realized, though he was still puzzled, that the revelation of the Nameless One was at an end. Quietly, chilled by the warning that the wheels of death were turning upon him, he left the dark haven.

RAVENWOOD entered his library to find Sterling still occupied with the telephone, gravely asking questions concerning the ship *Alexandra*. He looked up, head wagging, signifying that he had not yet found the information his master wished. Ravenwood told him softly:

“Continue with it, Sterling And admit Mr. Machray at once.”

The sound of the door buzzer punctuated Ravenwood’s order. There had been no slightest sound to signal the approach of a caller, yet Ravenwood had anticipated the ring. Stolidly bewildered, the man-servant trod to the entrance. Ravenwood, returning to the clipping on his teakwood desk, heard quick footfalls. Without glancing up he said, with lips quirked:

“You have reconsidered, Mr. Machray. You realize that the terror will dog you to your death unless you speak the truth.”

Pasty-faced, swallowing hard, Martin Machray drew a chair close at Ravenwood's gesture. He sat tensely. His drawn lips worked with anguish as he spoke: "It's uncanny, Ravenwood, how you can know these things, but I realize I must make a clean breast of it. I lied when I said I don't know the name of Quirke. I'll explain what it means to me. But no one of that name can possibly be the instigator of this horrible thing. Listen!"

Machray leaned across the desk. "Almost eighteen years ago I went to China with Redmond Quirke. We were both just starting as commercial chemists, both ambitious. We roamed the districts of Yunnan and Szechwan, seeking a precious secret. In China, you know, copper was first worked. It was used there in the most remote periods. The old Chinese coppersmiths knew more about hardening and tempering pure copper than our modern scientists in their laboratories. The secret of their annealing process was what we sought.

"It was closely guarded. Though we knew it would mean untold millions once we learned it, we met obstacle after obstacle. The discouragements almost crushed us. Redmond Quirke completely lost heart. He considered our mission futile. He was worried for the safety of his young son, whom he had brought with him—a lad of eight or nine named Corwin Quirke. He and I made a bargain. I agreed to pay him a good sum, so that he might return home with his son, and in return he signed a paper stipulating that, should I later discover the Chinese secret of hardening copper, he could claim no rights to it."

"A fair contract," Ravenwood mused, "yet it engendered fierce hatred."

"Yes," Machray continued. "Before Redmond Quirke and his son Corwin had time to return to the coast, I succeeded in my purpose. Bandits were ravaging the villages. During one of their savage raids I found myself at the side of Chun Tze, an old, highly

skilled coppersmith. I saved him from death under a bandit's sword. In gratitude he whispered the secret to me. As you know, it brought me great riches, became the cornerstone of huge industries. And it poisoned the heart of Redmond Quirke."

"Because he believed," Ravenwood interposed, "that you had cheated him."

"He thought," Machray nodded, "that I had already learned the secret when we signed the agreement. He was convinced that I had tricked him out of a fortune. It was not chicanery on my part, but a twist of circumstances. Quirke dogged me, cursed me, threatened me, attempted to force me to reveal the secret. I tried to elude him. He kept searching for me. It was then, at Puri—the Juggernaut—"

"Death came to him," Ravenwood said softly, "under the wheels of the god's cart. Death—yet the man whose heart is steeped in vengeance is not dead...."

MACHRAY gazed at Ravenwood without understanding. He insisted: "Redmond Quirke died under the wheels of the Juggernaut—there is no possible doubt of it. It came about in this way. He was searching for me near Puri, at the time of the festival of Vishnu. He had with him some of the money I had paid him. His son Corwin was at his side. Evidently bandits had spied on him, had learned that he was carrying much money. Just as the huge cart of the idol bore down, they attacked him. The bandits stabbed him, rifled his pockets, then hurled him under the wheels...."

"Yet his hatred did not die that day," Ravenwood said.

Machray gestured in confusion. "His son fled. Later the boy found me, just about to embark. He shrieked curses at me. He believed I had hired the bandits to murder his father. He shouted that I'd cheated his father and him of great wealth. He swore he'd bring

punishment upon me, if it took all the rest of his life. The police dragged him away. I never saw him again. I heard nothing of him for several years. Then, at last, a short newspaper item—”

“Told you that while Corwin Quirke was following you to this country,” Ravenwood interposed, “he was swept into the sea by a storm, and lost. Yet—” Ravenwood was rising, his eyes shining with alarm. “Not even the typhoon was strong enough to quench the Quirke hatred.” Now Ravenwood was erect, face white, gazing into profound space. “Mr. Machray! Danger, these last few moments, has come closer to you. I cannot see it clearly, but it has entered your home. We must not waste a moment. We must go there at once. Come with me.”

He gripped the amazed Machray’s arm. Harrying to the door, he saw that Sterling was abandoning the telephone. Ravenwood gestured Machray into the vestibule, paused at his manservant’s side. Sterling said in a tone that Ravenwood’s caller could not hear:

“I have the information now, sir. The *Alexandra* is a private yacht. Its owner is Mr. Martin Machray.”

CHAPTER IV JUGGERNAUT FURY

RAVENWOOD’S roadster whizzed along the boulevard leading to the Machray home. Machray sat tightly erect, filled with bewildered dismay, while Ravenwood’s lids drooped over his chameleon eyes. The magnate said in a rush:

“But—with the Quirkes dead, both father and son, how can they possibly be responsible for this horrible thing? We must remember, Ravenwood, that some one else may know of what happened in China years ago. Some one else is using the little wheels as

a symbol to mislead us, to shift suspicion away from himself. I know this horrible thing is prompted by hatred and greed, but the Quirkes are dead....”

“Dead, yet living,” Ravenwood murmured, remembering the oracular revelations of the Nameless One. “A modern Juggernaut is endangering you—with no visible hand upon its guiding wheel—”

He broke off, swinging his roadster into the drive of the Machray estate. He saw, as he braked, a light sedan just stopping near the entrance. A burly man was alighting from it—Inspector Stagg. Neither Ravenwood nor Machray paused to greet the inspector. They hurried into the house. In the library they paused. It was empty. Machray called:

“Mavis! Ross! Victor!”

A maid came pattering from the rear of the house. She paused in the hall to explain worriedly: “Miss Mavis went out a little while ago, sir. She seemed in a great hurry. I think Mr. Victor is asleep in his room, and Mr. Ross, he went out too, a little while ago—”

The ringing of the telephone broke in. Machray turned at once to the instrument. Ravenwood, still filled with a sense of impending peril, stepped close to Machray’s side. He heard a voice, low and unfamiliar, carry over the wire. It said bluntly:

“Mr. Machray? This is the Bower Hospital calling. A Miss Mavis Lattimer was brought into the emergency room a few minutes ago. She has been injured in an automobile accident. Not seriously, but she is asking for you. If you will come at once, Mr. Machray—”

“Yes! At once!”

Machray turned from the instrument in a fever of anxiety. He started for the French windows. Ravenwood strode after him quickly, caught his arm, stopped him. “Wait!” Ravenwood warned. “Perhaps this is what I felt, but we can not be sure. I suspect it may be a trick. Before you go, take a moment to—”

Machray protested explosively: "Mavis is hurt! That's all I know. I'm going to her!"

He ran out. Ravenwood saw him hurrying toward the garage. Turning back, Ravenwood took up the telephone. He found the number of the Bower Hospital in the directory, immediately dialed it. He asked for, "Emergency desk," then, "I wish to check whether or not Miss Mavis Lattimer has just been entered. An accident case—"

A woman's voice interrupted: "No one by that name has been brought in."

Ravenwood's chameleon eyes flashed as he left the instrument. He hurried to the French windows, hearing the gritting of a car's gears. A coupe was speeding along the drive, Martin Machray at the wheel. Ravenwood called to him urgently, but he did not hear. Machray sent the car whining into the boulevard, accelerated swiftly in the direction of the hospital. At once Ravenwood hurried toward his roadster.

Suddenly he stopped short. He glimpsed another car speeding over the pavement, following Machray. It flashed past at a dizzy rate, but Ravenwood's sharp eyes photographed it. Its headlamps were glaring, its motor roaring. Its color was a peculiar maroon red. Before it vanished, sweeping after Machray with terrific speed, Ravenwood saw that its front seat was empty, that no visible hand was guiding it.

"The Juggernaut!"

WITH the fading roar of two engines in his ears, Ravenwood sprang to his roadster. He glimpsed Inspector Stagg turning from the entrance. The officer hurried to the side of Ravenwood's car. He asked a question that was lost in the snarl of the roadster's starter. Ravenwood gestured that he had no time to talk. The urgency of his manner alarmed Stagg. As he threw the car into gear the inspector mounted the running board. Ravenwood swept around the curve of the

drive with Stagg climbing in.

"What the devil!" the big man growled. "I have the report on Mavis Lattimer's car being found smashed up in the park. That connects somehow with Machray's son and daughter getting killed. If you know what's behind this, Ravenwood, you'll come across with it or get into plenty of hot water—"

The whipping of the wind stifled Stagg's grim threat. Ravenwood was tensed at the wheel. Gazing far along the curving boulevard, he saw the two cars traveling with the speed of a tornado. The maroon sedan was thundering close after Machray's coupe. The terrific pace of Machray's machine told Ravenwood that the magnate had recognized the trailing death car, was striving desperately to escape it. Powerful as Ravenwood's roadster was, he was forced to press it to the limit in order to gain, even slowly, on the others.

Suddenly the coupe swerved. Tilting perilously, it shot off the boulevard into the driveway of a rich estate. As it disappeared, the maroon sedan slowed. Still distant, Ravenwood saw the streamlined Juggernaut make a swift U-turn. Just as it completed reversing its direction, Machray's coupe darted out of the second gate on the big grounds. Machray had swiftly circled, now was traveling back toward his own home. The maroon sedan had anticipated his maneuver. Swiftly the chase continued in the opposite direction. The coupe howled toward Ravenwood with the death car hurtling close behind it.

Ravenwood swung into a crossroad, intent upon turning his roadster around. Stagg was clinging to the opposite door, staring at the wild chase. The coupe flashed past with Machray, who was desperately clenching the steering wheel. An instant later the maroon sedan leaped beyond Ravenwood's position. Again he caught a glimpse of its front seat—utterly empty. Guided as if by some uncanny

power, the heavy car cycloned after Machray.

Ravenwood spurred into the wake of the two catapulting machines. He knew that Machray was desperately trying to reach home. A wild swing carried the coupe into the drive of the Machray estate. Swerving recklessly, the maroon sedan pursued it onto the gravel. Both cars darted from sight. Ravenwood twisted the wheel to follow. Suddenly the wind carried a violent, crashing concussion—the shock of a rending collision.

Ravenwood shot into the drive. Rounding the house swiftly, he glimpsed the wreck. The coupe was lying on its side in front of the garage, its wheels spinning. It was a twisted mass of metal. Fumes were gushing from the engine, shrouding the debris. Ravenwood's brakes brought his roadster to a silken stop in the smoke. He leaped out, Stagg lumbering at his side, to peer through the burst door of the coupe at a huddled, bloody figure.

Martin Machray lay crumpled, eyes closed, body crushed—dead or alive, Ravenwood could not tell.

RAVENWOOD peered around, seeking the steel Juggernaut. It was not in sight, though crushed tracks on the grass revealed that it had plunged past the gardens, had swiftly sought shelter on the rolling grounds. He signaled Stagg back to his roadster as two servants ran breathlessly from the rear entrance of the house. He called to them:

“Take Mr. Machray inside at once. Telephone a doctor. Don't lose a second!”

Then he glimpsed the maroon sedan. Its lights were out. It was a vague black shadow flitting across the lawn. Like a huge, savage, stampeding beast it was rolling among the trees toward the boulevard. Ravenwood slipped behind the wheel of his roadster as it flashed from sight. He did not drive in its direction. With Stagg perched beside him he rounded at a dizzy speed to the gate. He swung onto the pavement and again glimpsed

the Juggernaut.

It was plunging toward the high, ivied picket fence that framed the Machray estate. The impact came as another shattering crash. Wood splintered before the rush of the death car. Broken pickets flew. The maroon sedan drove past the ragged rails, jouncing over the curb, swinging on the pavement. At once, with the speed of the wind, it fled lightless along the boulevard.

Ravenwood pressed his roadster after it at top speed, but the other car outdistanced him. It was a fading, flickering glitter in the glow of the standing lamps. It veered around other cars, rocking dangerously. Suddenly it disappeared. Ravenwood realized it had swung sharply into a crossroad. Fast as he dared travel, he swerved after it. His foot slapped to the brake pedal as he caught sight of the Rowell home.

He saw the broad door of the Rowell garage swinging shut upon thick darkness. His headlamps shafted upon it as he stopped his roadster in the driveway. It was just closing. Ravenwood heard the snap of a bolt sinking into its socket. He slid from the wheel with Stagg lurching through the opposite door. They hurried together toward the garage—but they stopped short.

A movement stirred the darkness at the side of the garage. Ravenwood glimpsed the black figure of a man running to the rear of the house. The light from a window struck across a white, terrified face. At once it vanished past the corner. There followed the slam of a closing entrance. Ravenwood remained where he was, a name blurting from his lips:

“Wilson Rowell!”

STAGG trotted grimly across the grass. Ravenwood, quietly following, watched him climb the back porch. His knuckles rapped the pane of the door. At once he gripped the knob, pushed in. Ravenwood followed him through

a kitchen, into a modest living room. There, two men were standing, their faces wan in the shine of a table lamp. One was Donald Rowell. The other, quaking with consternation, was the man whom Ravenwood and Stagg had seen flee from the garage.

Stagg gripped Wilson Rowell's arm. "I've got you cold!" the inspector blurted. "I saw you chasing Martin Machray. You ran him down—probably killed him. I know all the facts of this case. You're filled with some crazy idea of making the Machrays suffer because you believe they're responsible for the death of your son Lloyd."

The white-haired man blurted: "That's not true! I've done nothing wrong. I don't understand what happened. You think I was driving Lloyd's car just now, but I wasn't. I can't explain it, but I'll—I'll tell you everything I know."

Stagg growled: "Go ahead! Start talking!"

Wilson Rowell gestured entreatingly. "A short while ago I heard a motor start up, out there in the garage. It sounded just exactly as it did when Lloyd used to take the sedan out. It made me wonder. I looked out the window. I saw that the garage doors were standing open. Then I saw the sedan backing into the street—Lloyd's car. But—the front seat was empty. I swear to heaven there was no one at the wheel! Lloyd's—Lloyd's ghost—"

The inspector cut in: "Never mind trying to make me believe a spook was driving that car. I know better." He glared at Donald Rowell. "Did you see that, too?"

The young man answered: "I wasn't here. I hadn't come in yet. I came back just a few minutes ago, but dad wasn't here."

"I was outside," Wilson Rowell continued. "After Lloyd's sedan disappeared in the street, I went to the garage. His car was gone. I decided to stay there and watch—try to find out what was going on. I waited there in

the darkness. Then, just a minute ago, I saw the sedan come back. It shot into the garage. Still there was nobody—nobody handling the wheel. I was overwrought, thinking of Lloyd—terrified. I had to get away. I ran back into the house—and that's all I can tell you."

"That's not what I want," Stagg snarled. "I want the truth. You drove that sedan tonight. It's an insane plan for vengeance on the Machrays. What's more, I'm going to prove it. I have my own methods, Rowell. 'Give 'em enough rope'—that sums it up. You're not going to get away with this, because, sooner or later, you're going to trip yourself up. Now, listen—"

Ravenwood turned away quietly. He stepped from the rear entrance, strode to the garage. He found, as before, that the doors were locked. As before, he removed his pack of master keys from his pocket. The one he chose drew the bolt. He reached in, snapped the switch, stepped into a yellow glow. Pausing, he curiously studied the maroon sedan.

Its every detail was exactly as Ravenwood had seen it before. Dust filmed its color, its upholstery, its steering wheel. No human hand could have touched that wheel, Ravenwood knew, because it bore not the slightest disturbed mark. Again a turn of the ignition lock failed to make the ammeter register. Gently rocking the sedan, with the cap of the gasoline tank removed, Ravenwood reaffirmed his previous finding that there was no fuel.

Yet it was not standing in precisely the same position as when Ravenwood had inspected it earlier tonight. It had been moved—driven—guided upon a murderous mission by the hand of a vengeful phantom?

HIS chameleon eyes narrowed with thought, Ravenwood clicked out the lights, closed the door. He returned to the house. Entering the living room, he found the dogged Stagg still

confronting Wilson Rowell. Rowell was gripped by confused dismay. Stagg was declaring:

“All right. We’ll let it go at that for the time being. But I’m still on this case. Don’t forget it!”

Ravenwood left Rowell protesting innocence. He stepped into the adjoining room, turned to the telephone. The number he dialed was that of the Machray home. Mavis Lattimer’s voice answered, strained, trembling. At mention of Ravenwood’s name she blurted out in anguish:

“Martin’s condition is serious—to serious for him to be moved from the house unless an emergency arises. Dr. Blake is attending him. Mr. Ravenwood, Martin was tricked into going out on the road. I left the house because I wanted to see Don a few minutes—and we met downtown. Of course, the fake accident call was only a means of getting Martin into a car, so that—”

“Ross Machray,” Ravenwood broke in quietly, “is there at the house?”

“No.” It was a hushed word. “Victor hasn’t been able to locate him. I’m sure now, surer than ever, that there’s some awful secret in Ross’s mind. If Martin dies—”

“You’ve already told me,” Ravenwood said, “that it will mean an end to Ross’s small allowance, and give him, instead, a huge fortune. You’re quite right—he is hiding something. I must warn you not to take any chances, Miss Lattimer. Please stay there—I’m coming at once.”

Ravenwood left the instrument, to find Inspector Stagg moving to the front entrance, glaring accusingly at Wilson Rowell. The white-headed man had lapsed into abject speechlessness. Ravenwood followed Stagg from the house, returned to the wheel of his roadster. After Stagg completed an inspection of the maroon sedan, and joined him, Ravenwood turned into the boulevard. He drove quietly.

“Look here, Ravenwood,” Stagg growled. “I put no stock in this mystic hocus pocus of yours. I’m a practical, level-headed man. That’s why I make no bones about saying I’m suspicious of you. You’re holding something back. You’re working toward your own ends. Whatever your game is, Ravenwood, I’m warning you—it’s dangerous.”

“The proverb says, inspector,” Ravenwood observed, “that the wise man questions himself, the fool others.”

He smiled at Stagg’s indignant snort. Turning into the Machray drive, he noticed several cars drawn up near the entrance. A green cross on one of them marked it as a physician’s. The others, Ravenwood surmised, had been used by Mavis Lattimer and Ross Machray. As he strode into the house, he found the girl descending the stairs at the side of a trimly bearded man. Stagg at once confronted them.

“Mr. Machray must not be disturbed,” Dr. Blake said gravely. “A blood transfusion may be necessary. If it is, he must be removed to a hospital. A few hours will tell. It’s a fifty-fifty chance whether or not Mr. Machray will live.”

Ravenwood was gazing into the library. A sound of nervous movements had turned his eyes. He had seen Ross Machray moving about in evident agitation. At the physician’s last words, the injured man’s son had paused, eyes smouldering. He leveled a stony gaze at Ravenwood. Ravenwood did not move until Stagg and Dr. Blake had withdrawn into another room. Then, aware that Mavis Lattimer was watching him, he strode directly to Ross Machray.

“Now,” he said quietly, “the truth. We must turn the light upon it. You realize that you had better speak while there is still a chance that your father will survive. If he dies, your position will be far more serious. I am waiting—for the truth.”

Ross Machray snapped: "I don't know what you're talking about!"

"I mean," Ravenwood said quietly, "the truth about the opium—and about the man who saw you jettison your contraband cargo."

Young Machray jerked. His face grew ashen with dismay. Wordlessness held him. He stared stricken, so full of consternation, his eyes shining so fiercely, that Ravenwood knew with certainty he had struck the center of an obscured target.

CHAPTER V WHEELED VENGEANCE

ROSS MACHRAY blurted: "I have nothing to say!"

Ravenwood glanced about. Mavis Lattimer was standing in the doorway, her gaze accusingly fixed upon the young man's blanched face. Victor Stevens, who had quietly descended the stairs, was watching Ravenwood, frowning. Ravenwood's changeable eyes sharpened. He addressed Ross Machray pointedly:

"It is quite useless for you to try to evade the facts," he declared. "Not long ago you commanded your father's yacht, the *Alexandra*, on a trip to certain Oriental ports. He had entrusted to you the mission of acquiring a number of works of art to add to his collection, part of which decorates this room. On your return trip you discovered that the cases in the hold, instead of containing vases and statuettes, actually were full of—"

Ross Machray broke in: "All that is no concern of yours, Ravenwood."

"On the contrary," Ravenwood differed, "it's vital to the case. The truth has been preying on your mind. You have been desperate to conceal it. Your anxiety has been all the greater because some one saw you

jettison the contraband. Have you been buying that man's silence? Have you been driven to such great extremes by his demands that, in your need for money, you have even done—"

"*Murder*" was the word on Ravenwood lips. He did not utter it. A heavy step behind him warned that Inspector Stagg had come from the room across the hall. He saw Stagg's eyes blazing suspiciously. He began to turn away, abandoning his examination of Ross Machray, when Victor Stevens spoke. The personal secretary of the injured magnate said censoriously:

"Whatever you're driving at, sir, I must say I resent it. Ross Machray's father would not tolerate this suspicious attitude of yours. He wishes your help, not to have his son maligned. I'm sure he'd protest your questioning Ross in this way."

"Perhaps," Ravenwood murmured. "Perhaps."

He turned away. As he strode to the entrance, Inspector Stagg followed him. The officer's heavy hand fell on Ravenwood's arm. Scowling, his voice rumbling, Stagg said ominously:

"Now I know you're playing some game of your own, Ravenwood. You know how I work. I put all my cards on the table, and still I win every time. It's no news to you that I believe you're implicated in some crooked business. Whether there's anything in this crystal-gazing of yours or not, it gives you a neat setup for blackmail. If you've got something on somebody—if you're trying to bleed him—"

"Not a bad guess, inspector," Ravenwood answered quietly. "I think, too, that extortion is one piece in this jig-saw puzzle, but I assure you I'm not the perpetrator." He smiled into Stagg's adamant frown. "You're not convinced I'm entirely aboveboard, of course, but the truth will come out and—"

His smile faded as, glancing back

along the hallway, he saw Mavis Lattimer. She had drifted after him. Her eyes were worried, appealing. Ravenwood spoke to her softly:

“Take great care of yourself,” he warned. “From the first, you have been in danger. The phantom of the Juggernaut is still waiting for an opportunity to hurl it upon you. The wheels of death have not stopped turning.”

Then, as color faded from the girl’s face, and Inspector Stagg stared derisively, he stepped out into the darkness.

THE manservant opened the penthouse door. Ravenwood, striding in, said crisply, “Stand by, Sterling. I may need you.” He went to his desk, sat alertly, drew another newspaper clipping from his pocket. Again he had stopped in at the Despatch building to search the files. He had found a front page item, only several weeks old, which hinted the truth that Ross Machray had refused to divulge.

Its headline read, COAST GUARD CUTTER FINDS FLOATING OPIUM. The article gave the details of the discovery of a score of cases, adrift off the coast, each of which contained contraband narcotic. It advanced the theory that a smuggler, fearing exposure, had at the last moment abandoned his illegal cargo to the sea, before putting into port. It stated further that federal agents were endeavoring to trace the stuff and identify the vessel which had carried it. A high official of the customs service was quoted as saying that serious consequences awaited the guilty.

Ravenwood thought: “Ross Machray could not prove he was tricked—that other cases containing opium were substituted, without his knowledge, for those he thought held objects of art. He is at the mercy of the man who watched him heave the boxes overboard. He knows the federal investigation will never stop, that the shipping records will connect him with the abandoned opium any

time that man chooses to speak. He is buying that man’s silence. The purchase price is high—far higher than he can pay now—but if his father should die—”

A long while Ravenwood sat musing. Subtle associations were drawing the facts of the mystery into a single pattern of vengeful hatred. The destroying enmity was hidden, Ravenwood realized, by many clever deceits. He remembered Martin Machray’s opinion that some one was using the little wooden wheels as a blind to conceal the real purpose behind the intrigue. Wilson Rowell—Ross Machray—some other malefactor—the possibilities taunted Ravenwood. He remained immobile in his chair, lost in profound conjectures until, abruptly, he sprang up.

He hurried to the telephone. His flickering finger spun off the number of the Machray home. When Mavis Lattimer’s voice answered, he asked quickly: “What is it? What has happened? I feel that something serious has come up—”

The girl broke in anxiously: “I don’t understand how you could know, but Dr. Blake has decided Martin must have a blood transfusion at once. His condition is more critical than before. We are calling an ambulance now. I’m going to the hospital with Martin, as soon—”

“Put Ross Machray on the wire, Miss Lattimer,” Ravenwood interrupted, “immediately!” When young Machray’s surly tone sounded, he said imperatively: “You may choose not to follow my instructions if you wish, Mr. Machray, but I strongly advise you to do so. Be at the home of Wilson Rowell in fifteen minutes. It’s highly important. And no questions—simply go.”

Abruptly Ravenwood hung up. Filled with a strange urgency, which he could not himself fully understand, he called, “Sterling!” The crackle of his voice brought the manservant loping. He directed: “Your hat, at once—you’re coming with me.” He signaled

Sterling toward the elevator, turned to his desk, removed a Luger automatic from a drawer. He slid it into his hip pocket, stepped into the cab. The elevator swiftly descended.

Stepping to the sidewalk, Ravenwood paused. A voice spoke within his mind—the clear, disembodied tones of the Nameless One. Calm as it was, its terseness suggested immediate danger. It said:

“Harken to the sound of the wheel, my son! Observe the wheel of doom rolling closer and, closer upon you. See its blood-stained rim closing like a trap upon the unwary. The wheel of Vishnu grinds nearer and nearer.”

Then the voice vanished, leaving in Ravenwood’s ears the noise of something rolling. The ominous, continuous noise, scarcely audible, was rising from the cement pavement. Ravenwood stood still, watching the little wooden wheel as it spun out of the shadow. Old and worn and stained, it was traveling directly toward him like a symbol of approaching doom

RAVENWOOD swung his roadster to a stop in front of the home of Wilson Rowell. He had driven swiftly, filled with that same strange urgency. The wooden symbol of death was in his pocket. His fingers toyed with it as he strode to the entrance of the house. He did not knock. He opened the door, listened into dark silence, then directed the stolid Sterling:

“Wait here, in the hall.”

Ravenwood trod to a gloomy flight of stairs. Lights were shining on the second floor. Some one was moving about. Ravenwood climbed silently. He turned to a lighted doorway. In the bedroom beyond he saw Wilson Rowell clad in pajamas, preparing to retire. Ravenwood stepped in briskly. His entrance startled Rowell. He paused, his chameleon gaze intense upon Rowell’s paling face.

“I’m sorry for the necessity,” he said cryptically. “Later you will understand. It will

be far better if you don’t resist me. I have no wish to harm you, but—”

He gripped Rowell’s shoulders, forced him back. Deftly, swiftly, he upset Rowell’s balance. Rowell fell upon the bed. In two quick moves Ravenwood turned him face up. Ravenwood’s tight grip upon the thin wrist kept Rowell prone. With his free hand Ravenwood shook a pillow from its case. With the aid of his teeth he ripped the case into strips. He whipped the white bands around Rowell’s hand, bound it to a post of the bed. Rowell’s bewildered efforts could not overcome the dexterous strength of Ravenwood. When Ravenwood straightened, Rowell’s hands and feet were pinioned.

“The straps of the electric chair,” Ravenwood said grimly, “are far less comfortable. If you do not understand now exactly what I mean, you soon will.”

He turned, strode from the room, closed the door. The man on the bed immediately began an angry endeavor to free himself. He tugged at the linen bonds, grimacing with the strain. As he writhed, he gazed at the telephone on the bedside table. He strove to bring his hand close to it. He could not reach it, but he kept trying doggedly, unrelentingly, as he listened to Ravenwood’s footfalls on the stairs.

Ravenwood heard heels tapping the porch. He stepped past Sterling, gazed at an approaching shadow figure. It was Donald Rowell. Young Rowell’s car, a light sedan, was sitting at the curb. He had just returned, Ravenwood surmised, from a late mission. He paused, eyeing Ravenwood uncertainly. Ravenwood spoke incisively:

“I have an important task for you. Don’t question me now, but later you will learn its meaning. Drive to the Machray home at once. Don’t go inside. Merely watch the place without allowing yourself to be seen. Take note of everyone’s movements. You may see something vital to the case. Hurry!”

Donald Rowell did not speak. He hesitated in confusion but then turned. Ravenwood watched him stride to the little sedan. Its motor sang. It started away. As it swung into the boulevard, Ravenwood stepped back into the house. He eased into an attitude of waiting. Thoughtfully his iridescent eyes narrowed as his fingers played with the doomful wooden wheel in his pocket.

ANOTHER car glided to a stop in front of the Rowell home. Through the entrance pane Ravenwood watched Ross Machray alight from it. He stepped back as young Machray crossed the porch, holding the door open. Machray paused, frowning coldly, then went in without speaking. When he turned a surprised exclamation blurted from his lips. Ravenwood was leveling a Luger.

“Sterling,” Ravenwood directed tersely, “see if our visitor has a gun.”

The startled manservant made an awkward search of young Machray’s person. Its subject remained angrily silent. Sterling straightened in a moment, muttering: “He has not, sir.” Ravenwood nodded, signaling Sterling to his side. Carefully he placed the Luger in the manservant’s hand. He directed the dismayed Sterling:

“Keep it pointed at him. Consider him a dangerous character. Your orders are to keep him inside this house. As for you, Machray, I shouldn’t like to be in your predicament. You may not realize it, but you’re facing a test. The result may determine your life or death. Since you’re playing a game of silence, I’ll retaliate by declining to say more.”

Machray had paled. Ravenwood took his arm, guided him backward to a chair. He signaled Sterling into another that faced Machray. With the air of having completed an important preparation, he placed the telephone at Sterling’s elbow. Again he gave instructions to the manservant:

“Remember to keep him covered every

moment. Now notice. Through this window you can see the garage. If anyone should open the doors, you will be able to see it. You’re to watch for a car to appear—a maroon sedan. If it does, you are to telephone me immediately at the Machray home. This is the number.” With a gold pencil, Ravenwood wrote it on the memo pad, “Don’t fail to notify me, instantly, if the maroon sedan comes out.”

Sterling mundanely answered: “Very good, sir.”

When Ravenwood withdrew from the room, Ross Machray, the automatic in Sterling’s hand leveled at him, persisted in his grim silence. Ravenwood walked back to the garage. He paused, gazing at the adjoining dwellings. He noticed that a high hedge separated this property from the lawn of another house fronting on the next cross-street. The structure was dark. The rear of its garage, Ravenwood saw, was built against the rear of the Rowell’s. He stepped to the broad door, unlocked it, looked in.

The maroon sedan was sitting in its place, precisely as Ravenwood has seen it twice before.

Ravenwood fastened the door, turned away. He slipped into his roadster. With the motor purring, he started off. He was just turning into the boulevard when, instinctively, his foot moved to the brake pedal. He was startled by an unworldly tone speaking within his mind—the voice of the Nameless One carrying from afar. With omniscient wisdom, it brought an uncanny revelation to Ravenwood:

“My son, danger is arising in a room which you have left only a few moments past. The man whom you overpowered and bound is no longer helpless in his bonds. He has succeeded in reaching the instrument which stands beside his bed. Though he has not freed himself, he is able to send his voice beyond the walls of his prison. He speaks. He calls for aid. Help will come to him swiftly, my son.”

And to you—the wheels of Vishnu turn along their path of death, rolling closer and closer upon you.”

The unearthly warning of the Nameless One chilled Ravenwood, but the impatience of his Western temperament would not allow him to turn back or delay. He pressed the accelerator down hard. He drove rapidly toward the home that was blighted by the vengeance of the ghostly Juggernaut.

THICK, pre-dawn darkness was settling when Ravenwood ran into the driveway of the Machray estate. He swung aside to clear the way for the ambulance that was backed to the entrance. Its doors were standing wide. Ravenwood surmised that its attendants were even now preparing Martin Machray for the journey to the hospital. He paused on the porch, peering into the shadows, feeling that eyes were watching him.

They were, he knew, the eyes of Donald Rowell, who, following his orders, was watching the house from some hidden spot.

Ravenwood knocked, entered. He saw two white-coated internes carefully descending the stairs, carrying a litter on which an inert figure lay. Martin Machray's face was drawn with suffering, his eyes closed. The next hours, Ravenwood felt, must decide Martin Machray's fate—whether or not the magnate would succumb to the destructive hatred which propelled the phantom death car.

Mavis Lattimer and Dr. Blake descended the stairs behind the litter. The girl's anxiety was so great she gave Ravenwood scarcely more than a glance. The physician supervised the handling of his patient. Ravenwood watched while the litter was slid into the ambulance. Dr. Blake climbed in beside it with one of the attendants. The other interne assisted Mavis Lattimer to the driver's seat. He mounted to the wheel at the moment a bell purred inside the house.

Ravenwood's quick stride carried him to the telephone. The wire brought him a strained, gasping voice—that of Sterling. “Mr. Ravenwood—Mr. Ravenwood, at once!” it implored. At Ravenwood's tense “Speaking!” the manservant's words rushed:

“I did my best, sir, but—I was taken by surprise. Mr. Machray, sir. Suddenly, without the slightest warning, he flung himself on me. He pulled the gun out of my hand and knocked me down. When I was able to get to my feet, I saw him running out of the house, sir. He's gone—but it was only a moment ago. I called you immediately—” Then a choking sound came over the wire—blurted horror!

“Sterling!” Ravenwood snapped. “What the devil is happening there? Come out with it!”

“The garage, sir! The doors are open. I was so upset, sir, I didn't notice until this instant. The car is coming out of it now, sir—the maroon sedan. It is backing toward the street. Great Scott! It isn't possible, sir, but—there's no one at the wheel of that car, Mr. Ravenwood! No one at the wheel!”

CHAPTER VI JUGGERNAUT JUSTICE

RAVENWOOD quickly cradled the instrument. He strode rapidly to the entrance, a warning call on his lips. He had heard the engine of the ambulance starting. Now it was rolling along the drive, turning into the boulevard. Even as Ravenwood shouted, it swung at a quickening speed. It accelerated, bell clanging—a fading pulsation. Urgently Ravenwood started toward his roadster.

At that moment another car spurted into the driveway. Inspector Stagg was driving it. Gravel scattered as he swung around the circle. Eyes fierce, he ground out a command

that brought Ravenwood up short. Stagg sprang from the running board, reaching toward his hip pocket ominously. Ravenwood's protest was stifled by the inspector's crackling order: "Listen!"

The radio in the police car was twanging. Tuned to the headquarters wavelength, it brought a report that startled Ravenwood. "Special information, Inspector Stagg," it droned. "Car Forty-six has just reported from address of the flash of a few moments ago. The man you mentioned was found tied hand and foot in his bedroom. He declares the perpetrator is the suspect you named. Patrolmen have taken a prisoner, who says he is suspect's manservant. End of special information."

Stagg blurted: "This time you've got yourself into hot water, Ravenwood!" He dragged a pair of handcuffs from his pocket. "We've done plenty fast work on this angle. You've got a lot of explaining to do, and you're going to do it at headquarters. What's more, I'm not going to run any chances of your putting over a fast one. Hold out your hands."

Ravenwood did not comply. Chameleon eyes flashing, he turned abruptly from Stagg. His nerves were afire with a frustrated impulse to follow the ambulance, but he strode rapidly, without speaking, into the house. Startled, angered, Stagg trudged after him, Ravenwood paused, eyes narrowed, in the hallway, his gaze on the door of a closet. He turned to face Stagg, smiling tightly.

"I said, hold out your hands!"

This time Ravenwood's hands moved, but not as Stagg intended. His left shot to the knob of the closet. His right, as he jerked the door open, drove to a point just below Stagg's ear. It was a skilled, painless blow calculated to stun the inspector only a few moments. Stagg stumbled sideward, a bellow breaking from his lips. He dropped the handcuffs,

tottered into the closet. Instantly Ravenwood slapped the door shut, turned the key in the lock.

"Sorry, inspector," he said tersely. "Now, of all times, I couldn't allow you to hold me back."

As he stooped, Stagg's heavy fists began violently pounding the door. Ravenwood picked up the handcuffs, dropped them into his coat pocket. He ran out the entrance, ducked into his roadster. Its hot motor caught. He swung it rapidly to the gate. Then, swerving upon the boulevard, he opened the engine wide while the shafts of his headlamps sought the speeding ambulance.

THE interne at the wheel of the ambulance heard the powerful hum of an approaching car. The girl seated beside him listened with a terrified light shining in her eyes. Looking down, she saw a sleek, black hood sliding into view. A rush of relief filled her when she recognized the man at the wheel. Ravenwood shouted through the whipping of the wind:

"Stop! Draw to the side of the road!"

The startled driver obeyed. As the ambulance slowed, Ravenwood's roadster decelerated alongside. He slipped out, peering down, the boulevard. It was dark. There was no hint of a lurking monster of steel. He strode to the rear doors, opened them. To the bewildered physician he said tersely:

"Take my car, Dr. Blake. The two attendants are to go with you. I'll assume the responsibility of getting Mr. Machray to the hospital in time. There's no other way. Please don't argue—do as I say, at once; or you may all be killed!"

The imperative ring of his voice demanded obedience. The physician and the attendant climbed out. Dr. Blake's signal brought the white-coated driver from the wheel. Ravenwood, climbing up to take his place, paused with his eyes upon Mavis Lattimer. He directed:

“You’re to go with the doctor. The maroon sedan is somewhere on the road, waiting. You understand what that means. Mr. Machray’s condition demands that he reach the hospital as soon as possible, but if that sedan runs us down— Don’t you understand? Go with the doctor!”

The fearful girl forced out: “No. I know the risk, but I can’t leave Martin. If he doesn’t reach the hospital safely, I—I don’t care what happens to me. Don’t waste time trying to force me to get out. Please—please hurry.”

Ravenwood realized the futility of trying to break down the girl’s loyalty to her guardian. Grimly he slipped under the wheel. At his gesture Dr. Blake, in the roadster, started away. The two internes were crowded into the seat beside the doctor. Ravenwood allowed them to proceed. He started the ambulance at a brisk speed, letting the roadster gain, keeping his alert eyes on the rear-view mirror. Behind him the road was black and empty.

“With Mr. Machray as seriously injured as he is,” Ravenwood said into the rush of the wind, “a slight shock may cause his death. That’s what the driver of the sedan—ghost or man, whichever it may be—is counting on. Certainly we can’t engage in any pell-mell chase, with Mr. Machray’s life in the balance. There must be some other way. With your help, perhaps—”

Ravenwood broke off. Suddenly a glare had appeared in the mirror, headlamps were gleaming on the boulevard behind the ambulance. A car had darted out of a cross-road, was advancing at a wild speed. Again the glow of the street lamps revealed its color—a peculiar maroon, like freshly dried blood. The shine disclosed its front seat to be empty. The steering wheel was turning as if under the guidance of an invisible hand. With roaring velocity the phantom Juggernaut was advancing upon the ambulance.

THE girl was aware of its approach. With terror making her voice ragged, she urged: “Go faster! It’s catching up! It will force us off!” But Ravenwood toed the accelerator down only slightly. Narrowed eyes on the mirror, his mind worked upon a daring plan. As he watched the spectral car inching closer, closer, he heard again the uncanny warning of the Nameless One:

“Beware the wheels of Vishnu, my son!”

Grimly, while the girl watched in horror, Ravenwood kept the right tires of the ambulance running at the very edge of the pavement. The maroon sedan, its steering wheel turning under the touch of fingers which could not be seen, was crowding upon it. Little by little it was sliding toward the ambulance. Its inexorable purpose was plainly to force the car of mercy off the cement. Intently Ravenwood held the ambulance unswervingly to its course while a bank studded with craggy rocks blurred past.

He increased speed. The maroon sedan crept up. Ravenwood sensed that the beast of steel felt sure of its prey. Deliberately it was waiting to make the maneuver that would smash metal into metal—to make the thrust that would spell rending doom. Ravenwood felt the moment of its attack swiftly approaching, but he dared play the gamble of allowing the sedan to draw more fully alongside. Suddenly he ordered the speechless girl:

“Take the wheel!”

She fastened white hands upon it. Ravenwood slipped aside. He opened the door of the ambulance, leaned out into the flailing wind. His tempered muscles snapped him into a leap. He dived, arms and legs outspread, toward the top of the sedan. He struck, sprawled, the impact jarring the breath from his lungs. He clung as the wind lashed at him, seeing that now the maroon sedan was

viciously swinging into the side of the ambulance.

Steel scraped steel. The shock of the sedan's ramming move rocked the ambulance. The girl fought the wheel, striving with all her strength to keep the tires on the pavement. The right pair slurred off, clouding dust into a churning wake. Ravenwood felt the sedan drawing back, gathering its power for a stronger attack. Keeping his position precariously, he suddenly reached down to the handle of the sedan's left door.

He twisted it, opened the door, quickly thrust his arm inward. He was able to reach the steering wheel. Elbowing the door wider, he pulled himself in. He dropped heavily, heels striking the running board. Each move desperately swift, he raised, gripping the hand brake. Immediately he pulled it tight, feeling the knocking of the engine. Then he flung himself over the back of the front seat—toward eyes he saw gleaming in the gloom with horrible, insane hatred.

A powerful blow slammed to the side of Ravenwood's head. It spilled Ravenwood aside. He tensed up, aware that the sedan was careening-wildly as it slowed. The ambulance was now gaining by a safe distance. In the rear of the sedan the darkness was intense. A hand reached out of it, fastening upon Ravenwood's throat. His knuckles sped at a mark he could not see. Suddenly he was meeting the fury of a savage attack while the sedan veered crazily off the pavement.

Ravenwood delivered a telling blow that struck the point of a chin an instant before the sedan crunched into the bank. The car jounced violently, swerving, tilting. It lurched its right side, smashed over. Ravenwood was flung down. Immediately he pulled himself up, heaving out through the burst door. He dropped into dusty earth. Through the rear of the door he saw a hand hanging limply.

Quickly Ravenwood drew Stagg's handcuffs from his pocket. One circle he

clicked tight around the flaccid wrist. The other he locked fast on the rug-hanger fastened to the rear of the front seat. Then, straightening, he found headlamps glaring in his eyes—the lights of a swiftly approaching car.

INTUITIVELY Ravenwood knew Inspector Stagg was driving the approaching machine. The closed door could have offered no lasting obstacle to the officer's burly strength. With characteristic doggedness he had given Ravenwood chase. Ravenwood turned his back to the bright shafts. He saw that the ambulance had stopped a short distance away. He sprinted toward it.

As he clambered up to the wheel, the police machine whizzed closer. Ravenwood started up, hearing Stagg's voice bellow a command to stop. He ignored it, pressed the ambulance to a fast speed. His glance gave reassurance to the white-faced girl. His concern now was for the injured man on the stretcher. He sped toward the hospital, with Stagg relentlessly following in the police car

When Ravenwood drew the ambulance to a stop at the side of the hospital, Dr. Blake and the internes were waiting. Immediately they began the quick work of removing the litter on which Martin Machray lay. Ravenwood, watching, felt the grip of Inspector Stagg on his arm. He, in turn, ignoring the officer, gently touched the hand of Mavis Lattimer. He said softly:

"Somehow I feel that Martin Machray will speedily recover. He need never fear the Juggernaut again. Its wheels have turned their last. When he is resting quietly, I suggest that you return to your home. You'll find Donald Rowell somewhere nearby. The obstacle between you and him is already melting. You will soon find many happinesses

Stagg's snarl broke in: "You come with me, Ravenwood!"

Ravenwood smiled bitterly at the inspector. A supple flexing of his muscles detached Stagg's hand. He turned to his roadster. Stagg, growling angrily, kept at his side. When Ravenwood slipped behind the roadster's wheel, Stagg hit the seat beside him. As though absorbed with a new understanding, Ravenwood drove rapidly from the hospital.

He took a straighter though slower course, which led him into the boulevard close to the home of Wilson Rowell. Leaving his roadster in the drive, he looked through a window to find two radio patrolmen holding Sterling in custody. Rowell, now clad in a robe, was moving about angrily. Stagg, his curiosity now stronger than, his resentment, followed Ravenwood toward the garage. Ravenwood said firmly:

"I think Mr. Rowell will decide not to press charges against me, inspector, once he realizes why I bound him. It was simply to eliminate him as a suspect. The death car went into action while he was a prisoner. Obviously, it was none of his doing. Likewise, that car was not driven by a ghost. You see, though the battery of Lloyd Rowell's car is dead, though it hasn't a drop of fuel in the tank—it's no longer here."

Ravenwood stepped into the empty garage. Snapping the light, he gazed at the floor. Faint tracks were visible, leading from the spot where the maroon sedan had stood to the rear wall of the garage. Ravenwood stepped close to the wall, eyes narrowed. Abruptly he placed his hands upon it, pushed. A blurted exclamation broke from Stagg's throat.

The wall parted behind an upright support. Like twin doors, it swung away on concealed hinges. The opening revealed the space of the garage on the adjoining property which was backed up to Rowell's. The two garages were made a single shelter by the yielding of the wall. In a deep stall a car was

sitting. It was a maroon sedan, covered with dust.

"This," Ravenwood said, "is Lloyd Rowell's car. It has never been on the road since he died. Neither a human nor a ghost could have run it in its present condition. Another car, appearing to be exactly like it, was driven by a man—"

"Who?" Stagg broke in. "Where is he?"

"If you'd been less intent on jailing me, inspector," Ravenwood answered, "he would be in your custody now. I'll take you to him—the man who used the little replica wheels as a reminder of the big juggernaut of death in the far-off Orient.

RAVENWOOD returned to his roadster. Stagg climbed in as it started. When it swung smoothly into the boulevard, Ravenwood was smiling. He said quietly:

"So simply, inspector, the incredible resolves into the simple. Need I tell you how the ghost car was manipulated? Our man first built the concealed doors between the two garages. He obtained a car of the model of Lloyd Rowell's, had it painted the same color. He fitted it with auxiliary controls so that it could be driven, from the rear seat. Each time the process was the same.

"He opened the concealed doors. He ran Rowell's car into the other garage. He ran his into Rowell's space. He closed the secret doors, went into action. Returning, his simply reversed the process. Thus he gave the impression that Rowell's car was being driven by a vengeful ghost. In reality it was the plan of a man whose hatred was so strong—"

Stagg burst in: "Who the devil are you talking about?"

"One Corwin Quirke," Ravenwood answered as his roadster sped. "A man whose vengeance turned upon the whole Machray family. His intent was to destroy it as, he thought, wrongly, Machray destroyed his

father. He wanted to acquire the wealth he believed belonged to him instead of Martin Machray. He set about it with devilish shrewdness, not only to murder the Machrays, but to bleed untold sums from Ross Machray. The whole story, Stagg—you'll soon learn it."

Ravenwood was approaching the spot where the second maroon sedan had met disaster.

"You will learn how Corwin Quirke allowed himself to be believed dead, so that he could act secretly against the Machrays. He was lost overboard from a steamer in a Pacific storm but, of course, he did not actually die. Certainly some other ship picked him up. He managed to get close to the Machray family, always obsessed with his plan of revenge. His purpose is defeated now, inspector. I feel that in his despair he will confess! Now—"

Ravenwood was braking. He saw two other cars drawn to a stop beside the crushed maroon sedan. One was a police roadster. Two uniformed patrolmen were on the spot. The second was a private machine. In the shine of its headlamps an anxious-faced young man was standing. Immediately Ravenwood alighted, Ross Machray turned to him breathlessly.

"See here, Ravenwood! I couldn't allow you to hold me while my father was in

such serious condition. I'm on my way to the hospital now. I realize I'll have to tell the whole story, but I'm ready. I'll take the consequences, but—"

"You," Ravenwood said, "have nothing to fear. You should have realized long ago that the truth will protect you. Corwin Quirke will be forced to reveal how he tricked you." Ravenwood gestured to Stagg. "Your key will unlock the handcuffs, inspector. He is your prisoner."

Stagg was staring—staring at the young man who, pinioned by the steel bracelets, had crawled dazedly partway out of the car. Utter defeat clouded his bitter eyes. Victor Stevens' slumped shoulder testified that he realized his plan of destruction was at an end.

The voice of the Nameless One spoke quietly in the mind of Ravenwood as he stood in the gloom of dawn:

"A man is not just if he carries a matter by violence, my son. But he who distinguishes both right and wrong, who is learned and guides others, not by violence, but by being an intelligent guardian of the law, he is called just. Rightness at last, my son, has brought the vengeful wheels of Vishnu to a standstill."