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"His servant found him wrapped around the instrument with that terrible look on his face."



WHISPERING DEATH

by John Impola

COLD sweat broke out on the brow of the city editor of the *Seattle Evening Herald* as he stared at the notice which he had just picked out of the copy basket on his desk. It read:

WHISPERING DEATH desires that the *Herald* cease all mention of his activities. You know what it means to disobey!

Instead of a signature a red zigzag line crossed the bottom of the sheet.

Paul Whitrock knew. Three times within the past week men had been found dead, horror written indelibly on their faces, hands clapped over their ears as if to ward off some hideous sound, bodies that had stiffened in their writhing. And this same death faced him, if he chose to continue to devote the headlines to the Whispering Death's murders.

Whitrock realized that the unceasing publicity which had been given these murders had been annoying the Death, and that this politely

worded note was his way of ending the annoyance. No doubt, he reasoned, the other papers of the city would receive similar notices.

Not a single clue had been unearthed by frantic police officials; not a trace which might lead to the capture of the criminal who threatened the lives of any within his reach. A wave of terror, nationwide in its extent, seemed imminent.

The telephone bell jangled near the desk, rudely jerking the editor out of the reverie into which he had fallen. Almost automatically he reached for the instrument, picked up the receiver, and said "city desk" into the transmitter.

The semi-hysterical voice of Chet Mason, city editor of the *Morning Tribune*, came over the wire. "Say, Paul," it quavered, "have you seen the gag notice sent out by the Death? I just got it in with my copy, although heaven knows how it got there."

Whitrock tried to sympathize, but the other editor rushed right on. "And he says if we don't shut up he'll turn that sound loose in this office!" Mason's voice ended in an upward wail.

So he had been right about the Death's warnings to the other papers. He started to reassure the *Tribune* editor without feeling a whit of self-assurance himself, but again Mason interrupted.

"But Paul," he quavered, "what are we going to do? If we don't print the news we get fired, and if we do we get killed."

Whitrock said nothing, and his opinion of Mason, never exceptionally high, sank still lower. Mason, he decided, was a baby, to be thus frightened by a threat. But 'way down in his heart, he admitted to himself that he "wasn't so darned sure he wasn't scared too." He hung up.

The door of the editorial rooms banged open and Tom Tennant, chief of detectives, rushed in. He was a large man, and towered over the editor as he unburdened his thoughts in as short a time as possible.

"What's this Mason told me—that the Death is trying to gag the press? I came over here rather than to the *Tribune* office, because Mason is crying out loud, scared to death. What's the dope?"

Whitrock's gray eyes appraised the detective, mutely wondering whether it was safe to tell all he knew. He decided it was, although sometimes, for the interests of his paper, he retained information from the detective. Finally he spoke.

"Yes, it's all straight enough," he said. "But just a minute, until I give the story to a reporter, and then I'll tell you what I know."

He turned and spoke to one of the men in the office. "Here's a note which the Whispering Death left in the copy basket a little while ago. Write it up for the home edition, will you?"

The reporter nodded and turned away.

"Oh, Ted!" Whitrock had an afterthought. The reporter turned. "If you don't want to write that story, I'll do it myself."

The reporter grinned and sat down at his typewriter, as though in derision of the Death and his threat.

TENNANT waited patiently for ten minutes while the editor cleared up the copy for the next edition. He was accustomed to Whitrock's habits, and knew that to interrupt him when he was working was not liked.

Finally the editor sent the copy boy scampering off with the last of the copy and turned to the detective. "Yes, Chet called up just before you came and nearly flooded me with tears over the phone. He's all worried about being killed." He grinned.

"So am I," laughed the detective, "but I'm not broadcasting it to all the world." Then he became serious. "Well, what did he say to you?"

"He said 'Shut up'."

"Just that?"

"Words to that effect. And he added that we know what to expect if we don't obey. Well, we know!" Whitrock was grim, and his square chin set itself as for a physical encounter. "Any new cases?" he asked.

"Yeh! You know old Kinkaid, the old tightwad who hates everyone, including himself? Well, the Death got him last night."

"Old Kinkaid?" Whitrock was incredulous. "Why did the Death pick on him? Why, he was so mean it was a kindness to kill him."

"I know it," returned the other. "But listen! Guess how it was done."

"Don't know. In the usual way, I suppose."

"No, by telephone! His servant found him all wrapped around the instrument, with that terrible look on his face, *hands tight over his ears*. He had a devil of a time to get the receiver out of the old man's hand."

"But Tom," snapped the newspaperman, "he can control the city in a day by using the telephone."

"Don't I know it! But Paul, I think I've got a solution. You said once that you knew a professor up at the university who was a wizard on sound."

"Sure—old Professor Lathrop, in the physics department."

"Maybe you could get him to arrange a wave trap or some sort of attachment which would make these phones safe. It's a cinch we need something like that!"

"That's a good idea, Tom!" Whitrock was enthusiastic. "I'll drop in on him as soon as I go off duty. I live out that way, you know."

"Good!" Tennant glanced at his watch. "Wow! I've got to go. You see this prof and I'll drop around in the morning and hear what he has to say."

He turned at the door. "Oh, say," he said, "don't say anything about old Kinkaid yet. I want to work in peace for today."

"All right," agreed the editor, "but give us the break when you're ready."

"Sure!" said Tennant, and swung out the door.

PAUL WHITROCK was busy—watching a girl. Not that he did this habitually, for he had scarcely known any one of the opposite sex, except in his work, since he had been graduated from college six years before. And now, at twenty-seven, he caught himself looking at a girl. He was puzzled, and a little ashamed of himself, but he watched the dainty movements of the girl just the same. And he had a queer little feeling of elation as he did it.

Her name was Murvia Murray—at least that was what Professor Lathrop had called her when he introduced his assistant to the newspaperman. "Murvia." He liked the name. And her hair was golden, and her throat

was so white behind the jet black of the beads she wore . . .

"—and so," rambled the professor, his attitude reminiscent, "I gave fifteen failures in that class that year—"

Paul was annoyed. Confound old Lathrop anyway! He seemed so irrelevant alongside the—well, the slim white fingers and the twirl of a pleated skirt as the girl moved here and there in filing away examination papers. Once she stopped, and glanced in his direction. He got a glimpse of blue—intensely blue—eyes, and he immediately wanted to see them again.

"—and do you remember what grade I gave you that quarter, Paul?" the professor continued. Paul was deep in a problem, wondering if that dimple always appeared when she smiled. Then it came dimly to his consciousness that Lathrop had asked a question.

"Yes, I'm quite sure of it," he said vaguely. The professor continued his discourse, plunging into new fields, and neither he nor the newspaperman realized the incongruity of the answer.

Whitrock wondered if she liked canoeing, horseback riding, camping, and it tickled him to think that she probably would. And he liked the way her hair was bobbed in back, so that when she turned her head quickly it rose up and then settled easily back into place.

"—and so," dragged on the professor. "I almost invented this Whispering Death sound myself." Paul felt exasperated, but wait—what was it that Lathrop had said: that he had nearly invented the sound himself? He faced the professor sharply.

"Do you mean to say that you've been trying to invent that heathenish sound yourself?" he asked vehemently.

"Surely." Lathrop stretched himself in his chair. "You see, Paul, if that sound were put to proper use by

any government as powerful as ours, it would be the means of effecting world peace."

"How?" The newspaperman was interested, but doubtful.

"Well, given a nation that would not try to dominate the world with it, then such a nation could force the others into peace. Now do you see why I've striven to develop the idea?"

Whitrock had an inspiration. "Say," he said suddenly, "if you know so much about the death sound, maybe you know how to prevent its use."

The professor shook his head. "No, I don't," he said slowly, "since it penetrates through almost any kind of protection which the ears can be given. That's one of its chief values: there is no available defense. But if you care to listen I can give you an idea how it developed, and maybe you can better understand what the Death is. You are familiar enough with radios to know the squealing sound produced by certain ways of tuning?"

Whitrock nodded.

"And you know that by tuning this way the sound can be made higher and higher until you cease to hear it? Well, that sound doesn't stop simply because you can't hear it. The average human ear can handle up to 30,000 vibrations per second.

"Several years ago," he continued, "some German scientists discovered that by producing these sound waves to the frequency of from 100,000 to 110,000 per second, they could kill fish and rodents with the sound. Then they calculated that if they could increase this frequency to about 200,000, they could destroy human life with the sound.

"I began work at once, and without difficulty produced the frequency necessary to destroy life in the rats and fish, but when it came to producing sounds of higher frequency

I was blocked. And there I was when this criminal began his work."

Whitrock was disturbed. Somehow he didn't like the tone of the professor's voice; it seemed as though Lathrop was secretly laughing at him, that he was no longer the same light-hearted, sincere old Lathrop he had known in college. He downed the thought, but it troubled him nevertheless.

Suddenly he remembered his mission to Lathrop's office, and asked, "Suppose that this sound could be transmitted over the telephone; would there be any way of stopping it?"

Lathrop shook his head. "No, because all the diaphragms in existing phones are sensitive enough to respond to the sound. But I really doubt that the Whispering Death will try that. Phone calls are too easy to trace."

Paul started to tell the professor what had already happened, but the suspicion or unnamed doubt of a moment before made him pause. He decided to say nothing, since Lathrop had already given him the information he wanted. But he didn't like that leering look in the professor's eyes at all. He looked at his watch, and rose to go.

"Well, Paul," Lathrop said, "if there is anything I can do to assist in getting the Whispering Death, just call on me at any time." And again Paul had the impression that he was the object of the professor's silent laughter.

HE TURNED into the hallway, and nearly collided with the girl, Lathrop's assistant, emerging from another door, which, Paul knew, led into the assistant's room. She smiled as he came forward, hat in hand.

"Leaving so soon?" she asked. The dimple mocked him, but he liked it. "Ordinarily when Professor Lathrop gets a friend in there he keeps him until morning."

Paul grinned. "He couldn't have kept me with a gun. I've got much work to do tomorrow."

They walked down the hall and left the building by a side door. She turned to a walk which led to the street-car line.

"Please," there was entreaty in his voice, "won't you let me take you home in my car? It's right here."

She dimpled adorably, and mischievously. "Ordinarily I don't accept rides from strange men," she protested.

"We've been introduced, haven't we?"

"Yes, but that doesn't mean I know you very well."

"Well," and he was parrying her thrust, "I don't know you very well either, so we're both of us taking a chance."

She laughed merrily, and proceeded with him to his coupé. He helped her in, tucked a robe about her, and took the wheel. She appraised him gravely while he started the motor and swung away from the curb, then lowered her eyes as he turned to her.

"Are you in any particular hurry to go home?" he queried.

"No. Why?"

"Because I think we might enjoy Lakeside Boulevard tonight. Want to?"

"I'd love to——" She smuggled down comfortably in her corner of the seat.

He drove rapidly across the campus and swung on to the boulevard that skirted the lake. Then he drove more slowly, and half turned so that he could see her face. She had laid her books on the far side, and so now she was close to him.

"I was surprized when I found out tonight that Lathrop had a girl for his assistant. He usually chooses men, doesn't he?" Then he kicked himself mentally for being personal. But to his relief, she appeared not to notice it.

"Yes, he does," she said, "but I

became interested in this high frequency sound of his when I was a senior last year, and so he arranged that I win the fellowship in this department. But he maintains that I have become quite valuable to him."

"I can see an excellent reason for that," said Paul. She chose not to recognize the compliment.

"But now I suppose he'll choose someone else for next year, because this Whispering Death discovered the sound before he did, and he seems to be doing everything he can to forget that he had anything to do with it."

Whitrock started at her direct mention of the Death. Somehow that had been so remote from his thoughts since he had left the campus.

"But why were you interested in the sound?" he asked.

"Mostly to get the fellowship, at first." She smiled wistfully. "You see, Father met some reverses, and that meant no more school for me unless I did something. So I did this. But I'm really interested now, and I regret that Professor Lathrop has given up interest in the sound."

"He seemed very much interested when he talked about it to me," said Whitrock.

"I'm afraid he did that for your special benefit, then," she said. "But the work that has been done on the sound in that laboratory in the past three weeks I've done myself."

"You!" Paul was amazed.

"Yes. You see, I've decided that if I can discover it myself I can work out the way to prevent it; that is, so that I may protect all these people from getting murdered by the Death."

"You're working on it now?"

"Yes, but I haven't dared tell him about it because he has been very irritable lately, and speaks to me in dreadful language. I suppose, though, I'll have to stand it, at least until June, when I get my master's degree."

The car came to an upward grade, and Paul leaned forward to shift gears. In doing so, he touched her hand, felt for an instant the velvety smoothness of the skin, and then, almost shamefacedly, shifted to the lower gear and sat upright.

He picked up the thread of their conversation awkwardly. "Then you know quite a bit about the sound yourself?"

She smiled. "I wouldn't care to boast about it, but I think I know as much about it as he does, plus what I've learned in these last three weeks myself."

"What is that?"

"I found some apparatus which he had constructed, and I put it together again. If the experiment works, as I think it will, I'll have discovered the sound myself!"

Whitrock gasped. The idea that this chit of a girl could be so close to discovering what the old master of physics had failed to find seemed impossible.

"You're sure?" he asked incredulously.

"I will be tomorrow afternoon. I'm going to try it on a rabbit, and if he dies, then I will have discovered the secret of the Whispering Death." She hung her head for a moment, and Paul thought he heard her sigh.

"You seem sad about it," he ventured.

"Not about discovering the sound, but—well, the rabbit is a special pet of mine, and it's hard to sacrifice him, and—really, I—I can't even afford to get guinea-pigs, and they're what I really need for the experiment."

Paul wondered what he should do under the circumstances; then the solution struck him. "Please," he said, "mightn't I help? Can't you let me bring the pigs and come over to watch the experiment?" He was eager. "I'm awfully interested."

She pondered the question a moment, then nodded. "I suppose I shouldn't, but I'd do anything to save

my bunny." She smiled her gratitude. Then, "My, but it must be late! I didn't realize how time must have passed. What time is it?"

Whitrock glanced at his watch. "Not quite one o'clock," he said hopefully.

"I must go home. Mother won't be worried, because I often work late, but I've got to be rested for tomorrow, when the experiment takes place."

He agreed, and swung the car around toward a street leading into the section of the city from which they had come.

A few minutes' drive brought them to her home, a quiet cottage-like structure on a little side street. He helped her from the car, and escorted her to the door. She fitted the key to the lock; then, instead of turning it and opening the door, she turned to him.

"Thank you so much for the drive and for volunteering the guinea-pigs. The drive helped a lot, because I didn't know until this afternoon that I had even a chance to discover the sound, and I was pretty much excited when I met you in the hall."

"And then I'm coming out to the campus tomorrow afternoon?" Paul reassured himself.

"Yes," she said, "at three, in my room, the one from which you saw me come out tonight."

He nodded. Then she turned to go in, had a thought, and turned again to him.

"Please, I wasn't eavesdropping, but I heard Professor Lathrop say that telephones couldn't be protected against the death sound. He must not have been thinking, because a thick diaphragm in the receiver wouldn't respond to the rapid vibrations and would make the sound ineffective."

"By Jove, you're right! I'll call the telephone company in the morning and have the diaphragms installed

at once. You see, there has already been one case of telephone killing."

"Not really!" She was aghast. "Then it's all the more important that you do it."

He pursued the thought. "Why?" he asked.

"Because," she said softly, as she stood just within the door, her face shining in the half-light of the street lamp, "because I don't want anything like that to interfere with your coming out to the campus tomorrow, Paul."

WHITROCK was up to his ears in work the next morning when Tennant strode in, bristling with news. Again he waited until the editor had finished the rush news, and then broke out:

"The Death got another one last night. Got a man down in the slums, broke, ragged, and wretched. That's the fourth or fifth time he's killed someone who was of no possible harm to anyone except himself. Confound it, it begins to look as though this Whispering Death were trying to kill off all the miserable people in Seattle. Most of his victims are miserable either because they are extremely rich or extremely poverty-stricken."

The detective stopped from lack of breath, and the editor inserted a question. "Then you've found no motive in the Kinkaid case?" Somehow Whitrock felt that Tennant was being left behind in the chase for the Whispering Death. What Murvia had told him the night before seemed of supreme importance.

He paused abruptly in his thoughts.

Murvia. What right had he to call her that, even in his thoughts? Well, after all, hadn't she called him Paul?

Tennant was rambling on with the details of the Kinkaid case.

"—and no possible motive; that is, a reasonable one. All his affairs were straight to a dot, nothing miss-

ing and nobody, so far as I know, wanted to kill him. Why the Death mixed into it is more than I can understand."

Whitrock broke in. "Are you ready to release the news about Kinkaid?"

"Oh, sure! Go ahead when you're ready. I can't find out anything about it, and the public may as well have the news." Paul made a notation on his story sheet, then spoke again:

"I found a way to prevent the Death's using the telephone. The telephone company just supplied me with a heavier diaphragm for my receiver here." He unscrewed the receiver and showed the disk to the detective.

The other nodded. "I'll get some, too," he said.

Whitrock evaded the detective's next question regarding what he had found out about the death sound. "Old Lathrop said that nothing could be done—that the sound penetrates almost any kind of protection. And he explained to me what the sound was. He knows all about it, because he tried to invent it himself."

The telephone bell rang imperiously. Whitrock answered it, to hear a steely voice come over the wire:

"Is that you, Whitrock?"

"Yes." Paul was puzzled.

"*Hear this!*" A deep rumbling sound came to the editor's ear. A peculiar vibrant quality in it made the sound almost pleasant, like an opiate to the nerves—soothing, thrilling, compelling the hearer to continue listening. In response to the feeling, Paul unconsciously pressed the receiver closer and closer to his ear. Then through the sound came the same steel-cold voice:

"*This is the Whispering Death! It holds you! You can't get away! Feel it? Feel it? The higher the sound the closer you are to death! You have disobeyed and this is the penalty!*"

The sound grew shriller and shriller; it began to pain the editor's ears, but he pressed the receiver tighter to his ear. He stiffened in his chair, his face twisted and writhed torturously, his arm began to encircle his head—to protect his ears—

Tennant, who had been looking elsewhere, whirled about and took in the situation at a glance. A single bound carried him to the editor's side; he jerked the telephone away from Whitrock, jerked the cord in two, and threw the instrument far across the room, virtually tearing the receiver from the ear of the editor. Whitrock fell forward to the floor, unconscious.

Tennant reached the water cooler with a bound, picked it up, and, returning, emptied its contents on the editor. Whitrock gasped, rose to his knees, but would have fallen again had not one of the reporters caught him as he went down. . . .

WHEN Whitrock recovered consciousness he was lying, fully dressed, on the bed in his apartment. Tennant was standing anxiously near the bed, watching for the first sign of returning intelligence on Whitrock's face. He sighed with relief when the newspaperman opened his eyes.

"Gosh, Paul! I thought you had gone under, but that new diaphragm in the receiver saved you. The phone operator heard the sound, too, but she died. We don't know whether she was listening in, or whether the sound just carried over on the switchboard. Man! You don't know how lucky you are."

Paul looked around the apartment, still dazed. In a sort of detached manner he realized that he had heard the Whispering Death and that he had survived it. His thoughts were clearing up too slowly to satisfy him. Suddenly he sat up.

"What time is it?" he snapped.

"Oh, about two o'clock," answered the detective, leisurely.

"I'm going out," declared the editor as he started toward the door. "Where's my car?"

"It's outside, but you're not going anywhere in it." The detective looked adamant.

"But I've got a date!"

"I don't care what you've got, you're not going out!"

"Oh, all right." Paul sat down in an easy chair. "I guess you're—right—I feel a little dizzy." He teetered in his chair. Tennant propped him up, and ran into the kitchenette to get some water.

As soon as Tennant was out of sight, the editor walked quietly to the door and slipped out. He ran down the hall to the door, spotted his car in front of the building, and, reaching it in a few leaps, got his emergency keys from the lining of the roof of the car.

The coupé started with a jerk, just as Tennant dashed wildly out of the door, intent on stopping the editor. Whitrock paid no attention, but, disregarding speed laws, drove rapidly to an address at which, he had ascertained in the morning, he could obtain the guinea-pigs.

It was a matter of moments until Paul was speeding back to the city again, headed for the campus. He drew up behind the physics building just as the three o'clock bell was ringing, ending the previous hour's classes. Students, hurrying home from their classes, stared curiously at the young man who, bearing a large box under his arm, ran down the hall to the sound department.

Murvia smiled at him as she opened the door in response to his knock, but he saw the seriousness which she felt under the smile. "H'lo," she said. "You're just in time. I've got it all ready to try the experiment."

Murvia had given her hand to him when he entered, and he suddenly became conscious that he was still holding it, and that his grip on it

was not gentle. He glanced at her, but her eyes were lowered. Then she extracted her fingers from his grip slowly, and turned to the apparatus.

It consisted of a remade radio cabinet, with the top opened and laid back. Paul got an impression of a great number of cogs, gears and wheels. Attached to the table was a large crank, which turned a sprocket wheel on the cabinet.

She turned her attention to the box which he had brought, and exclaimed, "Oh, you brought two of them! I'm so glad, because it makes the experiment so much more certain." He placed one of the tiny animals in the sound-proof box which adjoined the radio cabinet, and, acting under instructions from Murvia, closed the cover and sealed it air-tight.

"You see," she said, "there's air enough in there for him to live until after we've admitted the sound into the chamber, and if the experiment works he won't suffer anyway. Besides, we must protect ourselves against the sound." Paul remembered his experience of the morning, but decided to tell her nothing about it yet.

She explained about the crank. "Professor Lathrop has a large electric motor which would have turned the machine very well, and I know he isn't using it just now. But this morning when I asked for it, he was very angry and swore at me, and then when I started to go into his laboratory, he chased me out of the office. So I suppose I'll have to ask you to turn the crank." She was apologetic.

"I'll do it gladly," he said, and grasped the crank. "All ready?"

"Whenever you are." Her eyes were shining with excitement, but she displayed no signs of nervousness.

Whitrock began to turn the crank, slowly, because he found it heavy.

Evidently he was setting in motion a heavy flywheel of some kind, necessary to attain a high speed to create the lethal sounds. Under his efforts, the machine turned faster and faster.

A dull roar came through the thicknesses of the box, and Paul recognized with a start the same silky smoothness, the irresistibility, of the sound which he heard in the morning. But as the sound gradually became higher and higher, it faded away until the only evidence of the creation of the Whispering Death sound was Paul's efforts and a sort of slithering whisper, coming very faintly to their ears.

Murvia raised her hand, and the newspaperman stopped turning, but the momentum of the machine carried the crank around and around with it, gradually slowing down.

The dull roar came back into evidence, getting lower and lower. Finally the crank turned no more, and Murvia signaled to Paul to open the sound chamber. "I can't," she explained simply.

He loosened the thumb-screws which held the cover down, turned it up, and looked inside. The animal was quite dead, all tied up in a grotesque knot on the bottom of the chamber. It resembled the human bodies left by the Whispering Death, for its tiny paws were holding the pointed ears down, warding off the sound.

He turned to the girl, but she had already seen what the results had been. The thrill of success shone in her eyes, and she smiled faintly. "It—it's worked, Paul," she said.

"Murvia!" The name came from him almost naturally, and she smiled at its use. "Murvia! It's a success, and you've won the first step to saving the country from the threat of the Whispering Death!"

"I know it, and I think I'm the happiest person alive for that reason," she whispered. She raised her frank blue eyes to his, and he dwelt

in their glory. Surely, he thought, blue eyes like that had never existed before.

"Shall we make sure with the other animal?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes, but I'll get Professor Lathrop to watch it. I'm sure he'll be pleased. She turned to the door to the laboratory, and, finding it locked, ran into the professor's office, Whitrock following close behind. She tried that door to the laboratory, and it swung open. She looked inside, and started back.

SEATED at his desk was the aged professor, and on that desk was practically the duplicate of the apparatus with which Murvia had a moment before discovered the death sound. When she opened the door, he was busy placing a telephone into the sound chamber of the apparatus, a cynical smile curling his lips into an evil grimace.

He looked up to see Murvia standing amazed at the door, and a look of a cornered beast came to his features, twisting them into a bitter expression of suspicion and deathly hatred. In an instant he had reached the girl, and, seizing her in a tentacle-like grip, had dragged her inside the room, desperately trying to close the door behind her. But Whitrock, who had been standing behind the girl, whirled and put his foot forward so as to prevent the closing of the door; then, with an almost superhuman effort, he wrenched the door from the hands of Lathrop. He plunged headlong into the laboratory, and the door slammed in his wake.

He looked up to find that the professor had released the girl and jumped to the side of his instrument, grasping in one hand the handle of an electric switch. One glance from the newspaperman sufficed to tell him that a large electric motor was belted to the apparatus. Another

glance showed him unerringly that Lathrop was insane.

The professor laughed—a long, taunting, jeering laugh. Paul stepped in front of Murvia as though to shield her, but the action drove the maniac into further bursts of jeering laughter.

"Yes, sure," he chortled, "get in front of her, as if that will do either of you any good! The Whispering Death penetrates everything, and *I am the Whispering Death!*"

Paul saw that it was out of the question to reason with Lathrop, and began looking around for ways to escape. He was interrupted by the taunting laugh.

"You can't get away this time, Whitrock," the maniac sneered. "You got away this morning, else you wouldn't be here, but you'll be dead when you leave this room, because I'm going to kill us all. Only the three of us know about the Whispering Death's secret, and in a minute I'm going to close this switch. The motor will turn over the machine to make the death sound, and we'll all die together."

Paul looked at Murvia, over his shoulder. She was strangely calm, but her eyes were wide. He put his hand back, and she slipped her tiny fingers into his palm trustingly. He turned to Lathrop again just as the maniac began to speak:

"Yes, that's what you get for interfering with other people's affairs," he chattered shrilly. "Just as I got around to making all the unhappy people in the world happy, you break in and force me to end it all. Well, you'll die with me!

"No, no, no," he continued in spite of the newspaperman's attempted protest. "I know what you're going to say—that you will arrange for me to escape if I let you go, but no, no, *NO!*"

"The greatest boon to mankind since the world began," he rambled on, "dies with me tonight. The rich

who were so rich that they were miserable, and the poor who were so poor that they were miserable—all of them I've made happy with the Whispering Death. And they're happier dead, they are, they are!

"Four years I struggled to invent the sound waves, and then a few weeks ago I found it. And I was going to give it to the government—but what if I had? They would have conquered the world, and everybody would have been more miserable. So I began to make people happy myself.

"I carried it around in a grip, and when I found miserable people I let them hear the sound, and they became happy. And it was fun, fun, fun! Then the newspapers began to make a row, and I laid my Death notices where they would be found, and they didn't stop. And I decided to make you, Whitrock, an example. But you escaped! You won't again!"

Lack of breath forced the maniac to cease his tirade for a moment, and Whitrock began to consider ways of preventing the professor's throwing the switch. Suddenly, when the situation looked most gloomy, Paul noticed that the maniac had a telephone headset on his head, and that the loose end of the cord dangled at his knees. Simultaneously Whitrock realized that the sockets for plugging them were still on the old radio cabinet from which the professor had fashioned his death-sound apparatus. Perhaps—Paul became hopeful—perhaps to plug in the headset would cut out the sound chamber, which corresponded to the loud speaker on the radio. At any rate, it was the only hope, Paul realized. But it might be too late.

The insane man was holding up a watch. "See that second hand on that watch?" he questioned.

Whitrock nodded, although he couldn't see the hand.

"Well, in ten seconds I'm going to close this switch and then we'll

all be dead, and happy! I'll count, and when I say 'ten,' then good-bye."

Paul looked grim, and squeezed Murvia's hand reassuringly, but the firm pressure of her hand showed that she had given up hope. Hastily Paul looked around for something which he might insert into the socket to cut out the sound. He found nothing, but to plug in the earphones which the maniac was wearing would cause him to hear the sound, and kill him.

"One! Two! Three!"

"Maybe," thought Paul, "I can keep the switch open!"

"Four! Five!"

Paul stiffened, and a determined look came into his eyes. The professor looked gleeful, utterly happy.

"Six! Seven!"

Paul looked desperately around for something else to plug in. He didn't want to kill Lathrop like that.

"Eight! Nine! Ten!"

Lathrop closed the switch with a jerk of his hand, and simultaneously with the whiz of the electric motor there came to their ears the dull roar of the Whispering Death. The insane man settled back in his chair, secure in the thought that all was over.

Instantly Paul was upon him, and grasping the metal plug on the end of the earphone cord, fought to put it into the socket on the cabinet. Maybe, he thought, he could cut out the sound, and then tear the phones from Lathrop's head in time to save him too. The switch was out of reach.

The maniac fought hard, and the pain in Paul's ears became intense. Swiftly the tone of the Whispering Death was becoming higher and higher, threatening at any time to reach that point where it would snuff out their lives.

One final desperate lunge netted Whitrock nothing. The insane man fought like a lion at bay. Paul felt

himself becoming dizzy, and lashed out wildly with his fists at Lathrop. The old man sank under the blows, and the newspaperman, as though it were his last act alive, put the plug into the socket.

The Whispering Death sound stopped instantly, and Paul, recovering quickly, endeavored to wrest the headset from the ears of Lathrop. Then he whirled and opened the switch.

But the Whispering Death had come to Professor Lathrop. Already the stiffening arms encircled his head, clamping the earphones tight

against the organs, and fight as Paul would, he could not tear the receivers away. The man who had been Professor Lathrop writhed for a moment, his features twisted into a horrible grimace; then he fell back on the table. The grimace seemed a frozen picture of the maniacal laughter with which he had taunted them a few moments before.

Paul turned to the girl, and she came toward him slowly.

"Murvia!" he said uncertainly.

Her eyes were soft, and warm.

"Paul!" she said.

His arms closed around her.