



*Wildly racing through the night, missing other cars by a breath, the visible car continued its pursuit of—what?*

# Invisible Death

*By Anthony Pelcher*



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Written by  
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THE inquest into the mysterious death of Darius Darrow, savant, inventor, recluse and eccentric, resembled a scientific convention. Men and women of high scientific attainment, and, in some instances, world fame, attended to hear first hand the strange, uncanny, unbelievable circumstances as hinted by the newspapers.

Mrs. Susan Darrow, the widow, was the paramount witness. She appeared a quaint figure as she took the stand. Tearful, yet alert, this little woman betrayed the intelligence that had made her one of the world's foremost chemists. She gave her age as fifty-eight, but if it had not been for her snowy hair she would have looked much younger. She was small but not frail, and had expressive blue eyes. She had a firm little nose and chin, and was garbed in black silk garments of a fashion evidently dating back a decade.

Although not modern in dress, her answers to questions regarding scientific and business affairs involved in the mysterious case, proved she was thoroughly abreast of the times in all other particulars.

"You believe your husband was murdered?" bluntly asked the examiner at one stage.

"That is my opinion," she said, then added: "It might have been some scientific accident, the nature of which I cannot fathom. We were confidential in all matters except my husband's work. He reserved the right to be secretive about the scientific problems on which he was working."

"Can you throw any light on a motive for such a crime?"

"The motive seems self-evident. He was working on an invention that he said would do away with war and would make the owner of the device a practical world dictator, should he choose to exercise such power. The device was completed. The murderer killed him to secure his device. That all seems plain enough."

"Was anything else of value taken?"

"We had nothing else of value about the place. I was never given to jewelry. The furnishings and equipment were undisturbed. It is quite evident, I think, that the thief was no ordinary petty burglar."

THE attorney interposed: "I believe we had better let Mrs. Darrow tell this story from the beginning in her own way. There are only two really important witnesses. Whatever she can remember to recite might be of value to the authorities. Now, Mrs. Darrow, how long had you lived at Brooknook? Begin there and just let your story unfold. Try to control your nerves and emotions."

"I am not emotional. I am not nervous," said the quaint little woman, bravely. "My heart hurts, that is all."

"The place was named by my father. We inherited it at his death, thirty years ago, and moved in. My two children were born and died there. At first we kept the servants and maintained all of the thirty-two rooms. But after the children were gone, we both gave ourselves over to study and we began to close one room after another, releasing the servants one by one."

"How many rooms do you occupy now?"

"We lived in three, a living-room, kitchen and bedroom. The two big parlors were turned into a laboratory. We both worked there. It was there my husband met his death at his work. Sometimes we worked together, sometimes independently. I did all my own housework, except the laundry, which I sent out. We had no visitors. We lived for each other and our work."

"Tell us about the rooms that were not occupied."

"We left them just as they always had been. I have not been in any of these rooms for twenty years. Once I looked into the little girl's room—my daughter's room. It was

dusty and cobwebby, but undisturbed by human hand. My husband peered in over my shoulder. I closed the door. We turned away in each other's arms."

HERE the little old woman fell to weeping softly into her lace handkerchief. Minutes lapsed as the court waited, respecting her grief.

"Were these rooms locked?" asked the attorney finally.

"No," said the widow, recovering, as she dabbed at her eyes. "We feared no one. All the rooms were closed, but not locked. The outside doors were seldom locked. We lived in our own world. For appearance sake we kept up the grounds. Peck, the gardener, kept the grounds, as you know. He called in outside help when necessary. This was his affair. We never bothered him. He lived probably a half mile up the road. The first of each month he would come for his pay. He was practically our only visitor.

"When it was necessary to see our attorney or other connections, Peck would drive us. At first he used to drive our horses. Ten years ago we pastured the horses for life and bought the small car. We seldom went out. We have no close friends and no relatives nearer than the Pacific coast. They are distant cousins. You see, we were rather alone in the world since the children went away—we never spoke of them as being dead."

Again the court was hushed. The coroner and the attorney took occasion to blow their noses rather violently.

"On May 27th, the day your husband died, what happened, as you re-remember it?" asked the attorney.

"We arose and had breakfast as usual. I was puttering about the rooms. My husband kissed me and started for the laboratory. I was in the kitchen. It was about ten o'clock when I finished in the kitchen and went into the living room which adjoins the laboratory. I had been rather fretted, something unusual for me. It seemed I dimly sensed

the presence of someone near me, someone I did not know, an outsider. I thought it was foolish of me and buckled up.

"But when I went into the living room, it seemed as if some invisible presence were following me. I could hear the low hum of my husband's device. The door of the laboratory was open. He called to me and said:

"Sue dear, it seems strange, but I made two models of this set and now I can find only one. You could not have misplaced the other by any chance, could you?"

"I assured him I knew nothing of it and he said, 'Hum-m, that's funny.' Then he went back into the library and closed the door. The humming continued. I was more annoyed than ever, but I did not want to bother my husband. Then a queer thing happened. I saw the door of the laboratory open and close, but I did not see anyone. The next instant, I heard my husband's outcry. It was more a groan than a scream.

"I rushed into the laboratory. My husband was lying by his slate-topped table. The device, I noticed, was gone. It was no bigger than a coffee-mill, I thought, as I bent over my husband. Strange how such a thought could have crowded in at such a time.

"My husband's head was bleeding. It was cut, a long gash over the ear, just below the bald spot. It must have been a frightful blow. I looked in his eyes. My nurse's and pharmaceutical course gave me knowledge which sent a chill to my heart. He was dead. I must have fainted.

"When I recovered I ran for Peck. I found him near the house, coming my way and holding his right eye.

"Something struck me,' he said. Then, seeing me so pale, he said, 'My God! Mrs. Darrow, what has happened?'

"Run for the doctor,' I said. When the doctor came he called the police and coroner. They told me not to disturb the body. Later they took it away, and the gardener told me—"

"Never mind what Peck told you," interrupted the attorney. "We will let him tell it. Is that all you can tell us about the death itself?"

But the widow was weeping now, so violently that the court ordered her excused.

THE gardener was called and took the stand displaying a big, black eye, which offered comedy relief to a pathetic situation.

"On the main road to the east," he began after preliminary questioning, "was a small car which had been parked there all morning. I noticed it because it had no license plates. It was visible from the inside of the grounds, but was hidden from the road by a hedge. It made me wonder because it was just inside our grounds.

"I had some very special red flags which I planted as a border back of pink geraniums. They were doing fine. I got them from the Fabrish seed house. There are no plants like Fabrish's—I wouldn't give a snap of my finger for all the other—"

"Just a minute," interrupted the attorney. He told the gardener to never mind the geraniums and flags, but to tell just what happened.

"Well, I was bending over the border bed when I heard sounds like someone running along the gravel path towards me. I heard a humming like a bumble bee and I jumped to my feet. Just then something hit me in the eye and knocked me down. Yes sir, knocked me plumb down, and—"

"Then what happened? Never mind the asides, the extras—tell us just the simple facts," instructed the attorney.

"Well, you won't believe it, but I heard the footsteps leave the road. The geraniums were badly trampled. I looked at the parked automobile and could hear the hum coming from there.

"The machine started and turned into the road—"

"Did you notice anyone at the wheel?"

"That's what you're not going to believe. There wasn't anybody in that auto at all. I didn't see anyone at any time. The auto started itself, and what is more, that auto only went about a hundred yards when it disappeared altogether—like that—like a flash."

"Did it turn off the road?"

"I didn't turn anywhere. It was in the middle of the road. It just disappeared right in the middle of the road. It started without a driver, it turned north without a driver, and went on by itself for about a hundred yards. Then it vanished in the middle of the road. Just dropped out of sight."

The court-room was hushed. The audience and court attaches were awe stricken and looked their incredulity.

"Do you mean to tell us that auto drove itself?" asked the court sternly.

THE witness was completely confused. The attorney came to his rescue, looked at the court, and said:

"He has told that same story a hundred times, and he will stick to it. It seems impossible, but has not Mrs. Darrow told us she heard this humming and saw nothing? With the purely perfunctory recitals of the doctor and the constabulary this court and the jury have heard all there is to hear. We have no more witnesses. That is all there is.

"The jury will have to decide from the evidence whether this case is accident or murder. The doctor and two experts have reported that the wound appeared to have been made by some blunt instrument, swung powerfully. The skull under the wound and back



of the ear was simply crushed. Death was instantaneous. It all happened in broad daylight."

After an hour's deliberation the jury decided the savant came to his death in his laboratory from a blow on the skull received in some manner unknown.

The crowd filed out, spiritedly discussing the unusual crime. In the crowd was Perkins Ferguson, known as "Old Perk," head of the Schefert Engineering Corporation, who paid royalty on some of the Darrow patents. With him was Damon Farnsworth, his first vice-president.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Farnsworth, biting into a black cigar.

"Damned weird, isn't it?" replied "Old Perk." "I have my own theory, however," he added, "but I am going to know a whole lot more about this case before I venture it." The pair climbed into Ferguson's car discussing the Darrow death case with furrowed brows.

WHAT might be termed an extraordinary meeting of the directors of the Schefert Engineering Corporation, was held a few days later in a big building in the financial district.

The rich furnishings of the directors' room indicated, better than Bradstreet's, the great wealth of the corporation. Uniformed pages stood at attention at each end of the long, mahogany table at which were seated the fourteen directors of the company. All were men of wealth, standing and engineering knowledge. The departed Darrow often had been summoned to such meetings, and at this one there was a hush because of his recent demise.

After a batch of preliminary business had been transacted, Ferguson arose and cleared his throat. The directors leaned forward in their chairs expectantly. The page boys

lost their mechanical attitude for the instant and fairly craned their necks around the bulks of the forms in front of them.

"The Darrow case has taken a sudden and sinister turn," said the president. "I have a letter. I will read it:

*Old Perk: Get wise to yourself. We are in a position to destroy you and all the potbellies in the Wall Street crowd. If you want to die of old age, remember what happened to Darrow and begin declaring us in on Wall Street dividends. If you do not you will follow Darrow in the same way.*

*"Our first demand is for \$100,000. Leave this amount in hundreds and fifties in the rubbish can at the corner of 50th Street and Broadway at 10 A. M. next Thursday. If you fail we will break your damned neck. Bring the police with you if you like.*

Invisible Death.

FERGUSON passed the letter around for inspection. It was painstakingly printed, evidently from the type in a rubber stamp set such as is sold in toy stores.

"I have decided," said Perkins at length, "to give this case to Walter Lees. He has never failed us in mechanical, chemical, or any form of scientific problem. I hope he will not fail in this. He will work independently of the police, who have requested that we keep the appointment at 50th Street and Broadway at the hour named. We will deposit a roll of newspapers, around which has been wrapped a fifty dollar bill and then we will stand by while the awaiting detectives do their duty."

"You do not think anyone is going to call for any supposed package of money at one of the most congested corners in the world in broad daylight?" asked a director at the end of the table.

"Why not?" asked Ferguson. "A seedy individual could pick a package from a rubbish bin at that corner without attracting the least attention."

"I guess you're right," agreed the doubting one.

"I know I'm right," said the president. And he usually was.

"I have already arranged to have Lees instructed in his work," Ferguson volunteered as a pause came in the buzz of conversation about the table. "Lees is young, but he is capable." There was general discussion of the strange case of Darius Darrow; the room filled with the blue haze of many cigars.

Suddenly a low, humming sound was heard in the room.

Papers on the directors' table were bunched as if by unseen hands, and thrown to the ceiling, from which they descended like flakes of snow and scattered about the room.

A book of minutes was torn from the hands of a secretary. It was raised and brought down on vice-president Farnsworth's head. A chair was pulled out from under another direction and he was deposited in an undignified heap on the floor.

Another director acted as though he had been tripped, and he fell on top of Farnsworth. Two big vases crashed to the floor in bits. Other decorative objects were scattered about.

The directors who had been hurtled to the floor stood up with expressions of comical surprise on their features. Their chairs catapulted into a far corner of the room, one after the other.

Startled expressions resounded from the group.

A small bookcase fell on its front with a crash of glass. Ferguson's cane jumped in the air and crashed a window pane.

The humming ceased suddenly.

THE room was a wreck. The assembled men stood aghast. They were simply nonplussed. Finally they phoned for the police.

After hearing the strange recital from so many highly reputable witnesses, a detective sergeant, who had responded to the call with others, reported to headquarters.

A uniformed police guard was sent to the place with instructions to remain on duty until relieved.

Ferguson sent for Walter Lees, the young engineer of whom he had spoken to the directorate. Assigned to the task of unraveling the Darrow death mystery, Lees ran true to form by getting busy at once. This was at midnight of the day of the surprising directors' meeting. Lees owned a big car; he piled into it and started for the scene of the crime.

Daybreak found him examining every inch of the road around the Darrow estate. Then he searched the hedge along the east road, where the phantom auto had disappeared after the crime. The brush along the opposite side of the thoroughfare was also gone over.

Passing autos had stopped to ask the meaning of his flashlight. Lees explained he had lost a pocketbook. It was as good an excuse as any and served to keep him from drawing a crowd. He found nothing to reward his long and painstaking efforts.

At seven A. M. he decided to interview the Darrow widow, and found her already up and about her kitchen, weeping softly as she worked.

She bade him be seated in the living room.

"No, I am not afraid to stay here alone," she said in reply to Lees' first question. "Whoever killed my husband did so to get possession of his second model. They had already stolen the first. I have thought since that they were afraid that the finding of the second model after his death would aid in their detection. For some reason they had to have both models."

She agreed to tell all she knew of the case. Lees listened to the long recital as already recorded at the coroner's inquest. By adroit questioning Lees gained just one new fact. Mrs. Darrow remembered that she had called her husband, just before he retired to his laboratory, to fix a towel hanger in the kitchen. "He found the pivot needed oiling," explained the widow. "That was all. He oiled it and went into the laboratory."

THE idea of one of the world's greatest mechanical engineers stopping his work to oil a towel hanger caused Lees to smile, but Mrs. Darrow did not smile.

"My husband was a genius at repairing about the house," she said, in all seriousness.

"I can imagine so," agreed Lees.

The conversation ceased. Lees sat for a few minutes with his head in his hands, thinking deeply. Finally he said:

"I am convinced that someone who was well aware of your husband's habits committed this crime. Do you believe, positively, that the gardener is above suspicion?"

"Oh, it couldn't have been Peck," insisted Mrs. Darrow. "I had seen him down near the gate from the window. He was too far from the house, and besides, he was devoted to us both."

"Then it was somebody from the neighborhood," said Lees.

"Maybe so," replied Mrs. Darrow, noncommittally.

"Who lives in the next house south?"

"That is towards the city," mused the widow. "There are no houses south on either side of the road for a little further than a mile, when you reach the town limits of Farsdale. The town line is about half-way between, and marks the southern end of this estate."

"Who lives in the first house to the north?"

"That is the cottage of Peck, the gardener."

"How near is the next house?"

"That was the parcel my father sold. It is about three acres, and in the center, or about the center, is the house built by Adolph Jouret, who bought the land. He lives there with his daughter. They built a magnificent place. The brook that traverses our grounds rises at a spring back of his house. Save for two West Indian servants, they are alone. The servants live in Farsdale and motor back and forth."

"WHAT do you know of this—what's his name?" queried Lees, who had assumed the role of examiner.

"Jouret? Very little. He is some sort of a circus man or showman, or was before he retired. He once had wealth, but my husband, some weeks ago, said that because of ill-advised investments he was not so well rated as formerly. I had the feeling that he might be forced to give up the place. I just felt that. I never heard it. I am so sorry because of the daughter. She is a beautiful girl, and seemed kindly, the one time I saw her. She was about twelve then. I do not like to say it, but she seemed a little dazed or slow witted, but really beautiful." Mrs. Darrow fell to smoothing out the folds in her house apron as Lees asked:

"When was the only time you saw her?"

"Ten years ago, about. Just after my father's death. They called on us. We did not care to continue the friendship, as Jouret seemed a little flamboyant—his circus nature, I suppose. Anyway, we were quiet folks, and there was no need of close association with neighbors.

"I remember," continued the widow, after a pause, "that Jouret, when he heard my husband was a scientist, simulated an interest in science. He did have a smattering knowledge of science, but he was plainly affected, so we decided to just let him drop. No ill-feeling. We just—well, we were not interested."

"You do not approve of circus people?"

"It is not that. Any honest work is honorable. It seems commendable to furnish amusement for the public. I know little about people of his profession but I am sure they are perfectly all right. It was Jouret, personally. He seemed noisy and insincere. The girl was nice. I loved her."

"That is all you know of the Jourets?"

"That is all."

"Mrs. Darrow, I wish to go through this house from attic to basement. Have you any objections?"

"None whatever. Make yourself free, but do not attach any significance to what appears to be a secret passageway and cave. My father was a biological chemist. He used to experiment much with small animals. He had a cave where he stored chemicals, and I believe you will find old chemicals stored down there now. I disturbed nothing."

The widow forced a smile to her lips. "Will you excuse me?" she concluded. "I am trying to carry on."

LEES, carrying a flashlight, began a systematic search of the premises. He made his way up a winding staircase, through dust and cobwebs to the attic. He found the top story filled with trunks and bits of furniture of a previous generation. All was in order, but dust-covered and cobwebby.

"Someone has been here before me," he said to himself, brushing a mist of cobwebs from his coat sleeves. "There is a path brushed through the spiderwebs." Turning his flashlight on the floor, he exclaimed:

"And here are footprints in the dust. Well I'll be—!"

Then, after some study, he mused:

"Of course there has been someone here. The killer of Darrow probably has been here to see what he could see. It was no great task. The doors were never locked. The footprints are of no value except to give me the size of his shoes."

He measured the footprints carefully. Then he went downstairs and phoned the measurements to a local shoe dealer, asking him to give him the trade size of shoes which would make such prints.

"They are number nines," decided the shoe dealer.

Lees then returned to resume his search in the rooms and corridors.

"Wonder if Jouret wears nines," he questioned himself. "But what if he does? I couldn't convict him on that score. However, it might help."

Then he fell to searching through the old trunks. He found old photographs, articles of apparel, knickknacks—grandmother's and grandfather's belongings all of them, and some children's clothes of the days when little boys wore ruffles about their necks and little girls' pantalettes reached to their ankles.

Carefully each article was replaced. He made his way down to the third and then the second floor. Through cobwebby corridors and bedchambers he searched, but found nothing further to aid his case.

In the unused rooms on the first floor he found an old spinning-wheel, candle moulds and utensils used in cooking in the days when housewives cooked over an open fire.

HE did not find the "secret" passageway until Mrs. Darrow came to his aid. Leading from the basement was a coal chute. This shoot was formed in a triangle with the point under a trap. It was man-high at the cellar opening and its floor was a slide for fuel. It had been in use, evidently, quite recently.



At the cellar wall of this chute, Mrs. Darrow pressed what appeared to be a knot in the old timber and pushed open a door.

A dank odor issued forth as the door was opened. Lees entered the passage and Mrs. Darrow returned upstairs.

Following the underground passageway, Lees came onto a cave about 14 by 14 feet in size with a ceiling and walls of arched brick. It had evidently been built before the days of cement construction.

A long bench and shelves with carboys and jars of chemicals were the only furnishings. Lees sounded all the walls, but found nothing further to interest him.

Lees returned to town at the urgent call of "Old Perk," who had arranged with great care to keep the appointment at 50th street and Broadway, where the decoy package was to be left. He had snipers in nearby windows. He had detectives, dressed in the gay garb of the habitues of the neighborhood, patrolling the corner, and he and his own guard parked an automobile, against all traffic rule, at the curb near the rubbish can.

An office boy sauntered up to the rubbish can, threw in the decoy package, and sauntered away.

A second later there was a low humming sound. The decoy package fairly jumped out of the rubbish can and disappeared in thin air.

The humming sound seemed to round the corner into 50th Street. Detectives followed on the jump. The humming approached an auto at the curb and the auto's self starter began to function. As the police stood near by, enough to have jumped into the auto, the whole machine, a big touring car, actually disappeared before their eyes.

Consternation is a mild word when used to describe the result.

ALL forces set to trap the extortionists gathered in a group, and in their surprise and disappointment began discussing the queer case in loud tones. A crowd was gathering which was blocking traffic.

"Old Perk" was the first to recover from his surprise.

"Get the hell out of this neighborhood," he yelled to his working forces. "All of you get down to my office!"

The working force dissolved and "Old Perk" drove away.

At "Old Perk's" office shortly afterward a conference of the defeated forces of the law and of science was held.

"Old Perk" stormed and raged and the detective captain in charge fumed and fussed, but nothing came of it all. One was as powerless as another. Finally the conference adjourned.

The next morning in the mail, Perkins Ferguson, president of Schefert Engineering Corporation, received a letter carefully printed in rubber type. It read:

*Thanks for the \$50 bill. You cheated us by \$99,950. This will never do. Don't be like that. You poor fools, you make us increase our demand. We double it. Leave \$200,000 for us on your desk and leave the desk unlocked. We will get it. Every time you ignore one of our demands, one of your number will die. Better take this matter seriously. Last warning.*

Invisible Death.

"Not another dime will they get out of me," mused Ferguson.

He started opening the rest of his mail.

A clerk entered and handed him a telegram. It read:

"Damon Farnsworth struck down at breakfast table. Family heard humming sound as he fell from his chair. Removed to Medical Center. Skull reported fractured. May die.

William Devins, Chief of Police, Larchmont."

Ferguson wildly seized the telephone. "Get me Farnsworth's house at Larchmont!" he shouted to his operator.

THE phone was answered by Jones, the butler.

"This is Ferguson."

An agitated voice replied:

"Ow sir, yes sir. It's true, sir. 'E was bleeding at the 'ead, sir. Something 'it 'im."

"Let me talk to Mrs. Farnsworth."

"They are at the 'ospital, sir."

"One of the boys."

"Both are at the 'ospital, sir."

"Do you think he will live?"

"An' 'ow could I say, sir?"

Ferguson called the Medical Center. They permitted him to talk to a doctor and a nurse. The nurse referred him to the doctor, who said:

"He is unconscious. There is a wicked fracture at the base of the brain. He was struck from the back—a club, I believe. He may die without regaining consciousness. I am hoping he will rally and that he will be all right."

Ferguson ordered his car and, with Lees at his heels, jumped in the tonneau. He heard a humming sound back of him. He looked back and saw nothing. Both he and Lees were too impressed for words.

"Step on it," Ferguson ordered the chauffeur. "Drive us to the Medical Center."

At the world's largest group of hospitals, Ferguson's worst fears were confirmed. The patient was reported sinking.

FERGUSON, giant of Wall Street, was a low spirited man as he drove back down town to his office. With Lees he passed through the outer offices, buzzing with business and the click of typewriters. Not a head was raised from a desk or machine. It was a well-drilled force.

Into his private sanctum he walked or rather dragged himself, and wearily he sat down. He pushed a pile of papers from him and ran his hand over his hot brow.

Blood pounded at his temples.

For the first time in his life he faced a situation which was too deep for his understanding.

Over and over again he reviewed the uncanny events as Lees sat awaiting orders.

"I cannot have them killing off my friends like that," he mused finally.

He called a clerk.

"Go to the bank and get \$200,000 in fifties and one hundreds," he commanded.

When the clerk returned with the money he laid the package on his desk and left the desk open. "This might appear cowardly, but it will give us time," he said. Lees did not offer an opinion.

Ferguson drew a personal note for \$200,000 and sent it to the Schefert Corporation's attorneys. This amount represented a large part of Ferguson's personal assets, not involved with any company with which he was connected. He told Lees to go about his further investigations. Then he left the office and started for his home. "I'll bank my life Lees will have those crooks lined up within a week," he assured himself as he lolled in his auto, bound homeward. But his voice sounded hollow, and the blood still pounded at his temples.

REACHING home, he found a call from the western plant, at Chicago. He phoned the superintendent with a foreboding that all was not well.

"This you, Perk?" sounded the voice on the wire.

"Yes, what's up?"

"I had not intended bothering you with this, but in the light of all that has happened I guess you had better know that one of our engineers went stark mad out here about three weeks ago. He was a very brainy man but his reason snapped. He first appeared queer when he began talking of anarchy and cursing capitalists. Then one afternoon he struck a shop foreman down with a heavy wrench and rushed out of the plant. We have not seen him since. The police have been looking for him, but he is still at large."

"That explains a lot of things," said "Old Perk." "Tell the police to keep after him. We'll look for him here. File me a complete detailed report of the incident by telegraph," he instructed. Then he asked:

"How is the foreman? Badly hurt?"

"He dodged; it was a glancing blow. The foreman was back to work in a week. But he is nervous and has armed himself. We have put on extra guards."

"Good," commended Ferguson. "Don't hesitate to spend tolls to keep me advised of any developments."

An hour and a half later, Ferguson phoned the chief clerk in his offices:

"Go into my private office," he ordered, "and see if there is a package on my desk. It is a bank package."

The clerk returned in a few moments.

"There is no package on your desk, Mr. Ferguson."

"That is all I wanted to know," said Ferguson, and hung up the receiver.

Then Ferguson called up the Darrow home and tried to get in touch with Lees, but was unable to do so, as Mrs. Darrow said she had not seen him since he had been called back to the office.

THE reason Ferguson could not reach Lees was because Lees had decided to learn once and for all if Jouret wore number nine shoes. He had started for Jouret's in his own car. It was a beautiful country he was traversing, but he had no time to note that the tree branches almost met over his head and that his way was bordered with a profusion of wild flowers, displaying a rainbow of colors.

The house of Jouret, the retired circus performer, sat back far from the road, against the side of a beautiful hill, and was surrounded by poplars. The landscape was wilder and more natural than that of the Darrow place adjoining.

The door was opened by a Porto Rican boy. Lees lost no time. He said bluntly:

"Tell your master that a gentleman is here to see him on very particular business."

Jouret, himself, came back with the boy.

"What is it?" he asked, smiling a welcome.

"I am working on the case of the death of Mr. Darrow, your neighbor. I believed you might have seen something. I thought you might aid me."

JOURET betrayed no surprise.

"Come in," he said. He led the way to a large reception room and asked his visitor to be seated. He was the soul of affability. Short, husky and florid. His eyes large, black and staring. His hair black, quite long and curling upward at the ears. He was dressed in black, and he had the appearance of a big, fat crow.

"I am glad you came," he greeted his guest, "for I have far too few callers." He switched on a big electric bunch-light in the center of the room, for it was dusk.

"We have been told that you are a retired circus man," said Lees, in his usual frank manner.

"Not exactly," said Jouret. "I traveled on the continent, finally journeying to Australia and then to the States. I crossed the country from San Francisco and settled down here. I was known as 'Elias, the Great.' I had my own company and property. It was a magic show. It was not a circus, although we did carry two elephants, three camels, some ponies, snakes, and birds and smaller animals. That's where the circus report came from.

"When I retired I sold my stock to a circus. The newspapers regarded it as funny, and one of them printed a half page story with pictures about the public sale. It was very much exaggerated. They mentioned giraffes, hyenas, and a lot of other animals I never possessed. Odd, wasn't it, getting so much publicity after I was through needing it? However I never, in those days, dodged the limelight." Jouret ended his speech with a loud and hearty guffaw.

"I will call my daughter," Jouret appended. "She will be glad to meet you." He left the room.

Lees had taken occasion to note the size of Jouret's feet. They were small, almost effeminate. More likely fives or sixes than nines.

Soon Jouret returned with a girl in her early twenties. She was blond and radiantly beautiful.

DORIS JOURET bowed and smiled in a perfectly friendly manner. Lees noted that there was something about her eyes that made her appear dazed.

Jouret monopolized the conversation, giving no one a chance to edge in a word.

"This gentleman desires information in connection with the death of our neighbor Mr., or is it Dr., Darrow? I want you to assure him, as I will, that we have seen or noted nothing that could possibly throw light on the strange case."

The girl nodded, it seemed a little wearily, and Jouret was off on another conversational flight:

"I too am a man of scientific attainments," he chattered. "I am a biologist, toxicologist, doctor of medicine, a geologist, metalurgist, mineralogist, and somewhat of a mechanic and electrician. I have given long hours to the study of strange sciences in metaphysics, to which you men give too little attention. There are sciences which transcend any of this sphere. There is a higher astronomy. I neglected to say that I am an astronomer."

"Yes?" drawled Lees.

"Yes!" said Jouret emphatically.

The girl had adopted rather a theatrical pose, which disclosed considerable of her nether charms, and said nothing at all.

"When you find your man," volunteered Jouret, "you will find a madman." He said this ponderously and with a gesture meant evidently to be impressive.

"You believe a madman did it?" asked Lees, as Jouret paused, expecting a question.

"Undoubtedly. It was a paranoic with delusions of money, grandeur and a strongly developed homicidal mania. To me, that is the only sensible solution. I am quite sure that I am correct."

Lees arose to go and Jouret did not urge him to stay. He bowed Lees out and Doris bowed with him.

"She is a beautiful girl," mused Lees once he was outside.



Lees ran over in his mind the circumstances of his visit to Jouret. There was no doubt in his mind that Jouret's shoes were too small to be number nines, and he reasoned that that fact might tend to eliminate Jouret. But he was not satisfied.

"I am going to get some gas," he told himself, "and then I am going to get two private detectives to assist me, for I'm going right back there. For the first time in my life I am going to be a Peeping Tom.

"There is no moon. The poplars will give us a view of all three floors of that house, if they leave their blinds up enough, and three of us can watch all three floors at once."

He phoned Ferguson that he might be busy for days, joined his pair of operatives from the detective agency and for some time the three operated on a well conceived plan.

IT was probably a week later that Lees rendered a report to Perkins Ferguson, which for a time proved one of the strangest documents in the weird case. It read:

"You will probably think I am crazy, and for this reason I am having this report subscribed and sworn to, jointly and severally. With my two detectives I have seen Miss Jouret, the girl I told you about over the phone, in three places at one and the same time. Not once but twice this has happened.

"Looking through the windows of the Jouret place at night, we saw the girl on the first, second and third floor of the house. We believed this due to a clever arrangement of mirrors. But figure this out:

"The next day she drove a car to town. We followed. She got out at one theater and entered. She did not come back, that we could see, but the car drove off. There was no chauffeur, and we thought we had discovered the driverless auto, until we looked and saw Miss Jouret still at the wheel.

"She got out and entered another theater. She did not come back, but the car drove off with her still at the wheel. She entered a third theater after parking the car and this time the driver's seat and the tonneau was empty.

"Reverse the reel and you will see her coming out of three theaters and driving home. That is what happened. There must be three of her, all identical, but only one shows at a time. If it's some of Jouret's far-famed magic, I'll say he's some conjurer. The explanation is not yet forthcoming. We want to shadow Jouret, but he never goes anywhere. The girl has only been out the one time when she attended three matinees as described. Believe it or not.

"The next night we each—the two detectives and I—tried to steal a march on one another and called her up and asked her to go out. To our individual surprise, she agreed in each case. To our collective surprise, she kept all three dates on the same night. She walked through the trees in this vicinity with me. She also drove down the road in the auto with one of my detectives, and she went dancing with the other. She was in three places miles apart at one and the same time.

"We each brought her home within a half hour of the other and we are swearing to that. Either we are all hypnotized or else there are three identical Misses Jouret.

"Jouret himself treats us all wonderfully, gives us the run of the house, and tries to talk us to death."

THE strange document was subscribed by Lees and the two detectives and was held by Ferguson pending developments.

The next report from Lees read:

"I had a chance to prowl around the Jouret house a little while waiting for Miss Jouret to dress. I met her twice in my ramblings and a few minutes later she met me again, this time in a different costume.

"I got a chance to search the woods back of Jouret's house in the evening. I found a spot where the earth had been disturbed, and dug up a pair of shoes. They were number nines."

A fourth report from him read:

"We found the body of the crazed engineer. He had drowned himself in a lake. This eliminates him as a murder suspect."

TWO weeks passed with no new developments in the "Invisible Death" case except for the arrival of a letter demanding \$1,000,000 and threatening the life of Perkins Ferguson if the demand was ignored. It was ignored, and only served to spur Lees and his detectives on to decisive action.

They decided to rush the Jouret house and kidnap Jouret with the idea of holding him until he agreed to explain the presence of the number nine shoes buried back of his house.

A low moon hung over the poplars when Lees rang the Jouret front door bell. One detective was guarding a side door and the other a back door.

Suddenly Jouret was seen to jump from a second-story window. As he did, a car driven by one of his Porto Ricans came along the drive and he leaped into it. Lees, first to see Jouret, called his detectives. They came running. Their car was waiting in the road.

The Porto Rican was seen to jump from the Jouret car just as it started south towards New York.

Lees took up the race. Both cars had plenty of power, but the Jouret car suddenly disappeared as a low humming noise began to break the stillness of the night.

One of the detectives was at the wheel. Lees, as usual, was giving orders:

"Keep close to that hum. Never mind that you cannot see the car. It is there all right. If you can gain on it enough, drive right into it."

"Righto!" shouted the detective. "We're wise to him now."

The humming noise was taking on speed with every second. So was Lees' car. Soon Lees' car was making sixty miles an hour with the hum just ahead and barely audible.

Past traffic lights, over bridges and grade crossings the mad chase of the phantom continued.

Wildly racing through the night, missing other cars by a breath, the big, visible auto continued its pursuit of—what?

Careening, Lees' car rounded a curve, and, above the hum just ahead, they heard the shouted curses of their quarry. But he could not be seen. Lees could only see the road marked by his lights.

Mile after mile the wild, uncanny chase of the phantom continued.

SOON the lights of New York could be seen in the distance. The cars were forced to slow down somewhat. Suddenly there was a thundering crash ahead. A car was twisted in a mass of tangled wreckage.

Feminine and masculine shrieks blended as Lees' car piled up on the wrecked heap. A third car, becoming suddenly visible, rolled over and brought up at the edge of the road. From this car emerged the limping, cursing form of Jouret.

From the wreckage three painfully injured young men dragged and tore themselves. Then they leaped—ignoring their hurts—at the limping figure.

The fight was on. Jouret was heavy and powerful and proved an obstinate fighter, for he knew he was fighting for his life. He bit and clawed. He kicked with one uninjured leg and butted with his massive head.

Lees and his detectives were fighting with no respect for the rules. Lees managed to get his two hands on the bull-neck of Jouret just as one detective connected a duet of blows to the man's wind.

Lees' hands closed in a steely grip, and soon Jouret was limp and helpless.

They held him there. An ambulance arrived. A few minutes later a police auto with reserves came on the scene. The police shackled Jouret.

The car that had been hit by the phantom was a light sedan. It was occupied by two women. Their bodies were drawn from the wreckage. Both were dead—innocents sacrificed to the blood madness of a maniac.

Jouret was right about himself. He was a paranoic with a strongly developed homicidal mania.

In the wreckage was found a package containing \$200,000 and also two twisted and broken mechanisms. One of these was about the size of an ordinary kitchen coffee-mill, and the other slightly larger.

REGARDING these machines, Lees wrote in a report:

"While making a fourth search of Darrow's laboratory, I found the equations, specifications and what I believe to be the full plans for the last invention of the ingenious Darius Darrow.

"Many of the most astounding inventions and discoveries have resulted from theories which were laughed to scorn at the time they were advanced. Roebling's plans for the Brooklyn Bridge resulted in a meeting of the foremost engineers of the day. All agreed that the plans were built on a false premise. They argued that the bridge would fall of its own weight. Then they all had a good laugh. The bridge still stands.

"Watching smoke float over a hill from army camp fires caused an early French scientist to dream of filling a bag full of smoke and riding with it over the hill. The first balloon was the answer to this dream.

"James Watt is said to have gotten his idea for a steam engine from watching a lid on a tea-kettle dance under steam pressure.

"When Langley was flying his man-carrying kites the Wright brothers dreamed of hitching an engine and a propeller to a giant kite. The airplane was the result of these experiments.

"DARROW got his idea from watching a rapidly revolving wheel. He noticed that the spokes and rim blended into a blurred disc when a certain speed was reached. The entire wheel was practically invisible, under certain lighting conditions, when a higher speed was attained.

"Darrow went further and reached the conclusion that there was a rate of vibration that would produce invisibility. This was accepted in practically all engineering research plants, long before it was perfected by Darrow.

"The facts are that any rapidly vibrating object becomes more and more difficult to outline as its rate of vibration increases. All that was left for Darrow was to arrive at the exact mathematical time, tone, or rate of vibration producing invisibility and to construct a vibrator tuned to produce this condition.

"His first machine produced the vibrations of invisibility in a field with a three-foot radius in all directions. That is, it caused every solid object, within this atmospheric field, to vibrate at the rate, tone, or speed of invisibility. This machine was in no sense rotary. It departed from the original example of a revolving wheel and entered instead into general vibration in a given or measured field.

"The pulsations or vibrations of an ordinary automobile engine will cause every ounce of metal, or solid, in the automobile—including the driver—to vibrate at the same rate or momentum. This is a known fact, and it provided the basis for Darrow's experiments.

"DARROW built two machines. The first had a field with a radius of three feet on all sides. This was used by the killer in his murders. Jouret stole this machine first, thus paving his way for the second robbery.

"With the first machine in his possession, Jouret was able to commit the Darrow murder without being seen. He had to have the second and larger machine, however, to make his auto disappear. He stole the larger machine at the time of the Darrow murder, and with it he had his auto vanish, as the gardener testified.

"Both machines were hopelessly smashed in the wreck, but with Darrow's documents at hand, we might be able to construct another and a larger model. A machine built on the proper scale will make a plane or a battleship invisible and should, as Darrow said, make war against this country impossible.

"DIGGING into Jouret's history we found that the 'Misses Jouret' were one-cell triplets. Their mother, Mrs. Doris Nettleton, an English woman, was a member of Jouret's troupe, as was the father.

"The mother died at the birth of the triplets. The father died a few years later. The company was touring Australia at the time. Jouret and the father had the birth of only one baby recorded. She was named Doris, after the mother. The other girls also used this one name. They now have only one name among them until the court gives them individual names.

"Jouret never let but one girl be seen at a time. The reason was that he and the father had planned to use the girls, when grown, to create a surprising stage illusion. In

this illusion, one girl was to act as the earthly body and the other girls as the astral bodies of the same purported individual.

"The father died, and Jouret retired before he ever got around to staging the illusion. Jouret continued the deception, however, because it appealed to his showman's nature.

"The girls, at all times, were under the hypnotic control of Jouret, and, of course, knew nothing of his crazed intellect or crimes. Upon his arrest Jouret released the girls from the spell of years.

"The Misses Nettleton say that Jouret was always kind to them and was an ethical showman until his mind gave way.

"I told the triplets that I might find them employment with our concern, but they prefer to follow in the footsteps of their mother and father, and return to the stage."

Ferguson, quite his normal self once more, since Farnsworth was recovering slowly, twitted Lees about being in love with one of the triplets. Lees admitted they were most gorgeous blondes, but insisted he preferred one brunette.

"Then another thing," added Lees. "Any man who falls in love with one of the Nettleton triplets will never be sure just which one he fell in love with."