

ACT I

Scene I. The Trial

A courtroom seen from an angle. To the left of the stage, the Judge's bench. In front it, two tables: one for the D.A. and his assistant, another for the accused and his attorney. Behind them, another table, for the members of the Press. To the right of the Judge's bench, the witnesses' stand and a door leading to the Judge's chambers. To the left of the Judge's bench, against the back, the Jury's box and another door, for the Jury and the accused. To the right, two rows of chairs, divided by a central alley, for the public, which enters from the far right, and a large window.

Melvil and Bobby Paddock are seated at the table for the accused, with their attorneys, Messrs. Davis and Morgan. Melvil is somberly handsome and elegantly dressed; Bobby, dressed more casually, has a cheery and bright face. Arizona Jack, dressed as a cowboy, is seated in the front row with Helen and Margaret Dodler. Jim and Sam are seated further back amongst the public. They wear exactly the same clothes as Melvil and Bobby, to whom they must bear the greatest possible resemblance. They hold their coats folded over their knees. Three policemen stand guard, watching Melvil and Bobby. The journalists are scribbling their notes at their tables. The trial has just begun.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY: *(standing, continuing his speech)* Such, Gentlemen of the Jury, is the man who appears before you today. Always searching for a dupe or a victim. Thanks to his strange powers of seduction, he beguiles the friendship of some and the confidence of others. He has used all kinds of disguises; changed his name and appearance as easily as his domicile. He moves with extreme ease from the most luxurious hotels to the most sordid of dives where crooks and rogues gather. A single word will suffice to fully enlighten you as to his character: this so-called Mr. Melvil, this formidable malefactor, is as intelligent as he is audacious—

MELVIL: *(haughty and ironic)* You overwhelm me—

D.A.: —He deserves to be called by his alias: The King of Crime—Fantômas!

(The Judge is taken by a fit of coughing.)

BOBBY: *(low to Morgan)* The Judge's got a fine cold.

D.A.: This is the third time that this man has fallen into the hands of the Law. Arrested for burglary eight years ago, he escaped prison by corrupting two of his guards. The following year, he robbed and killed the banker Wilson, and was caught again. However, when the police van arrived at its destination, the murderer was no longer inside—but the body of the policeman charged with watching him was! Finally, only last month, Melvil and his accomplice, Bobby Paddock, *(Bobby bows slightly)* at night scaled the wall of the home of Miss Helen Dodler, entered her room and carried her off. But they were arrested by the most celebrated of detectives, Nick Carter—

BOBBY: *(low)* Ah, that brute!

D.A.: –Who then tied them up and turned them over to the police. This time, all precautions have been taken. The bandits have been unable to escape, and we expect you will do them good and prompt justice. *(To the Judge)* May Your Honor be kind enough to call the first witness?

JUDGE: Bailiff! *(A new fit of coughing)*

BOBBY: It breaks my heart to hear him cough like that.

JUDGE: *(after he stops coughing)* Bailiff—call the first witness for the Prosecution.

BAILIFF: *(calling)* Miss Helen Dodler!

HELEN: *(rising)* I'm here!

MARGARET: *(excited, restraining her)* No, don't go, Helen, don't go!

HELEN: But I have to, Auntie!

MARGARET: I don't want you to leave me!

(Laughter in the audience.)

HELEN: Look, Auntie, this is ridiculous.

MARGARET: I don't want you to go near those bandits—that monster with a human face.

(More laughter. The Judge bangs a small silver gavel for the noise to cease.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Silence, down there!

BAILIFF: *(going to Margaret)* Don't be afraid for your niece, Mrs...

MARGARET: *(correcting him)* "Miss," if you please! *(To Helen)* Be careful, Helen! Don't go near him! Walk around him!

BAILIFF: Come, Miss Dodler.

(Helen follows the Bailiff, who escorts her to the witness box. As she passes near Melvil, he rises and bows to her respectfully.)

JIM: *(low to Sam)* Say, Catherine isn't here.

SAM: *(scanning the public)* No, I don't see her.

JIM: *(low)* I wish she were here!

JUDGE: Miss Dodler, do you swear to tell the truth, all the truth and nothing but the truth?

BAILIFF: (*presenting Helen with a book which he holds in his hands*) Swear on the Bible.

HELEN: I swear it. (*The Bailiff returns to his table.*)

D.A.: Please sit down, Miss Dodler, and answer the questions I am going to ask you. Your name is Helen Dodler, and you live with your aunt, Miss Margaret Dodler, in a house located on 5th Avenue?

HELEN: Yes, sir.

D.A.: You're an orphan. Your fortune, which is said to be considerable, is administered by your godfather, Mr. Harry Pelham, an old friend of your father?

HELEN: Yes, sir.

D.A.: How often do you see Mr. Pelham?

HELEN: I haven't seen him since he settled in France, in Normandy, seven or eight years ago. But we write each other frequently and he's promised to be present at my marriage.

D.A.: You are engaged?

HELEN: Yes, sir.

D.A.: Do you know the accused, Mr. Melvil, here present?

HELEN: I knew him under the name of Robert Huntington.

D.A.: (*pointing to Melvil*) But he's actually the same man? You are certain of it?

HELEN: Absolutely certain.

D.A.: How long have you known him?

HELEN: Around a year, on and off. I spent a few weeks in Boston at the home of one of my friends. The day after my return to New York, I saw Mr. Huntington for the first time, when he came to take tea with us. During my absence, he was introduced to my Aunt Margaret, whom he had met at a charity ball.

D.A.: Did he come to your home often?

HELEN: Once or twice a week at first, then his visits became more frequent.

D.A.: What was his attitude toward you?

HELEN: Oh, very correct! Mr. Huntington showed himself very friendly and showed me great consideration; his conversation was most brilliant, his wit most amusing. And I confess that, at first, I was very happy with this new friendship.

D.A.: And then?

HELEN: And then—not so much.

D.A.: May I ask you why?

HELEN: (*a bit embarrassed*) Because Mr. Huntington, who had seemed until then more particularly occupied with my aunt—

MARGARET: (*protesting*) For goodness' sakes! That's untrue! That's untrue! Such a scoundrel—

(*Laughter in the auditorium.*)

BOBBY: The old maid's getting mad. (*laughs*)

MARGARET: (*hearing him, furious*) Old maid!

BOBBY: She's mad because she wasn't the one being carried off!

(*More laughter.*)

MARGARET: Look, Helen, you know it's untrue. You cannot believe—this, this malefactor! Never! How dare you say such a thing!

HELEN: But, Auntie, I swore to tell the truth.

(*More laughter. The Judge bangs his gavel.*)

BAILIFF: Silence!

HELEN: Anyway, I soon noticed that Mr. Huntington made himself more officious—very officious indeed—in my regard. His attentions multiplied, his gallantry accentuated; in short, he became annoying. One day, I was forced to remind him bluntly that I was engaged and his out-of-place insistence offended me. He bowed, without saying a word in reply; then, he withdrew and completely ceased his visits.

D.A.: You didn't see him again?

HELEN: No, sir.

D.A.: Until the night of January 14? What happened to you on that night?

HELEN: Oh, I remember very little about it. I was sleeping; I was suddenly awakened by the light of a lantern shining in my face. I wanted to scream, but someone placed a kerchief soaked in chloroform over my face, and I lost consciousness. When I came to, I was stretched out in the salon, surrounded by my aunt, a doctor and my maid, who apprised me of the odious kidnapping attempt of which I had almost been the victim—and from which I escaped, thanks to the cleverness and courage of Mr. Nick Carter.

D.A.: You didn't see the face of the man holding the lantern?

HELEN: I didn't see any faces. Everything appeared to me in a flash of light. Only later did I learn of Mr. Huntington's guilt.

D.A.: It surprised you?

HELEN: It pained me deeply.

D.A.: Do you know his accomplice, Bobby Paddock?

HELEN: No, I don't know him.

BOBBY: (*gallantly*) The sorrow is all mine.

D.A.: Thank you, Miss Dodler. (*To Davis*) Mr. Davis, does the Defense desire to question this witness?

DAVIS: I do! I will first ask the charming witness—

MELVIL: (*rude, authoritative*) Shut up!

DAVIS: Why—?

MELVIL: I do not allow you to question Miss Dodler.

DAVIS: Pardon me! I am responsible for your defense, and my duty as an attorney—

MELVIL: Enough!

DAVIS: (*sitting down*) Fine! As you please! So much the worse for you.

JUDGE: You can step down, Miss Dodler.

MARGARET: Come, Helen, let's leave. Let's get out of this awful place. It's stifling.

(*Margaret leaves through the door at the right. More laughter. The Judge raps his gavel again.*)

BAILIFF: Silence!

JUDGE: Bailiff— (*He has another fit of coughing.*)

BOBBY: You've got a nasty cold, Your Honor.

JUDGE: Bailiff, call the next witness.

BAILIFF: (*calling*) Mr. Nicholas Carter.

(*Curiosity among the public.*)

ARIZONA JACK: I don't see my friend Nick Carter.

BAILIFF: (*calling louder*) Mr. Nicholas Carter!

(Nick enters from the right, followed by Chick and Patsy.)

NICK: I'm here!

(Exclamations from the audience. They press around him and all rise to see him.)

JIM: There he is!

ARIZONA JACK: *(letting out an echoing yell)* Whoop! Hello, friend!

NICK: *(shaking his hand)* Hello, Jack! Calm down! Don't shout so loud.

SAM: *(low to Jim)* The dirty rat! Ah! If I had him alone in some dark place—

JIM: *(low)* You wouldn't get very far. It's he who'd have the best of you.

(Chick and Patsy sit next to Arizona Jack. Nick has reached the witness' stand.)

ARIZONA JACK: Hello, Chick! Hello, old Patsy! How's it going?

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet down there, cowboy!

NICK: *(to the Judge)* Will Your Honor please excuse me for arriving a bit late?

JUDGE: You're not late at all, sir; you are very punctual. You've arrived at the exact moment when we need you! Will you be so kind as to take the oath? Do you swear to tell the truth, all the truth and nothing but the truth?

NICK: *(placing his hand on the Bible that the Bailiff presents to him)* I do!

(The Bailiff returns to his seat.)

JIM: *(low to Sam)* Catherine's still not here!

D.A.: *(to Nick)* Sit down, Mr. Carter and, for the record, tell us your name and your profession.

DAVIS: *(rising, to the Judge)* Pardon me, Your Honor. By addressing such a question to a man as well-known as the witness, the Prosecution hopes that the name of the illustrious Nick Carter will raise enthusiastic acclamations and prejudice the Jury against my clients...

D.A.: Not at all! It's the law!

DAVIS: *(ironic)* —But far be it from us to oppose such a declaration! To the contrary, we willingly stipulate that we completely share the opinion of the District Attorney, and with him, we proclaim that Mr. Carter is the most celebrated, the most astonishing detective in the entire world. He's marvelously gifted man, brave to the extreme, whose reputation is unassailable.

NICK: *(smiling)* That's too much! That's too much!

DAVIS: And we sincerely admire his exploits, that we do not hesitate to qualify as legendary, since they appear to exalt fiction more than reality.

NICK: How flowery!

DAVIS: In short, we recognize Mr. Carter as one of the glories of our age and country.