

George Mann  
**Ghosts**  
Manhattan



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*of*  
**Manhattan**

A Tale of the Ghost



an imprint of **Prometheus Books**  
Amherst, NY

Published 2010 by Pyr®, an imprint of Prometheus Books

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14 13 12 11 10 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mann, George.

*Ghosts of Manhattan* / by George Mann.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-61614-194-3 (pbk.)

1. Manhattan (New York, N.Y.)—Fiction. I. Title.

PR6113 .A546G56 2010

823'.92—dc22

2009050133

Printed in the United States

To Lou Anders,  
*for boundless passion, enthusiasm, and friendship*

*I have no name.*

*I am the judgment that lives in the darkness, the spirit of the city wrought  
flesh and blood.*

*I was born of vengeance and I have no past. I am both protector and execu-  
tioner. I represent the lives of the helpless; those who will not or cannot help  
themselves. I show no mercy.*

*I exist only in the shadows. The alleyways and the rooftops are my domain.  
I feel the heartbeat of the city, like a slow, restless pulse; I flow unimpeded  
through its street map of veins.*

*I live to keep the city clean, to search out the impurities and deliver retri-  
bution.*

*I am Life and Death, Yin and Yang.*

*I have no name . . .*

*And I know where to find you.*

### DOWNTOWN MANHATTAN, NOVEMBER 1926

Something stirred in the shadows.

“Fat Ollie” Day flicked the stub of his cigarette toward the gutter, watching it spiral through the air like a tumbling star. It landed in a puddle of brackish rainwater and fizzed out with a gentle hiss. Nervously, he rested his sweaty palm on the butt of his pistol and edged forward, trying to see what had made the noise. It was too dark to make out anything other than the heaps of trash piled up against the walls of the alleyway, illuminated by the silvery beams of the car’s headlamps. The air was damp. Ollie thought it was going to rain.

Behind him, the car engine purred with a low growl. He’d left it running, ready for a quick getaway. Ollie had stoked it himself a few minutes earlier, shoveling black coal from the hopper into the small furnace at the rear of the vehicle, superheating the fluid in the water tank to build up a head of steam. It was a sleek model—one of the newer types—and Ollie couldn’t help grinning every time he ran his hands over its sweeping curves. Who said crime didn’t pay?

Now his smart gray suit was covered with coal dust and soot, but he knew after they’d finished the job they were doing, he could buy himself another. Heck, he could buy himself a whole wardrobe full if he had the inclination. The boss would see him right. The Roman knew how to look after his guys.

Inside the tall bank building to his left, the four men he’d ferried downtown in the motorcar were carrying out a heist—their third in a week—and once again he’d been left outside to guard the doors. It suited Ollie just fine; he’d never had a stomach for the dirty stuff.

Being on the periphery didn't worry him—as long as he still got his share of the proceeds.

There was another scuffing sound from up ahead, like a booted foot crunching on stone. Ollie felt the hairs on the back of his neck prickle with anxiety. The pressure valve on the vehicle gave an expectant whistle, as if in empathy, calling out a shrill warning to its driver. Ollie glanced back, but the car was just as he'd left it, the side doors hanging open like clamshells, waiting for the others to finish the job inside.

"Who's there?" He slid his pistol from its holster, easing it into his palm. "I'm warning you. Don't you mess with Ollie Day."

There was a sudden, jerky movement as a nearby heap of trash was disturbed, causing cardboard boxes to tumble noisily to the ground. Ollie swung his pistol round in a wide arc. His hand was shaking. He couldn't see anything in the gloom. Then more movement, to his right. Something crossed the beam of the headlamps. He spun on the spot, his finger almost squeezing the trigger of his pistol . . .

. . . And saw a black cat dart across the alley, scuttling away from the pile of boxes. Ollie let out a long, wheezing sigh of relief. "Hey, cat. You got Ollie all jumpy for a minute there." He slipped his pistol back into its holster, grinning to himself. "Man, I gotta learn to take it easy." He looked up.

Two pinpricks of red light had appeared, thirty feet further down the alleyway, hovering in the air at head height. Ollie stood silent for a moment, trying to figure out what was going on. For a minute he thought he was seeing things, and made to rub his eyes, but then the lights began to move, sweeping toward him through the gloom.

Footsteps running. Ragged breath. Ollie fumbled for his weapon, but he was already too late.

The man sprang at him from nearly ten feet away, hurtling through the air toward him like a panther, body coiled for an attack. Ollie caught only glimpses of his assailant as the man was crisscrossed by the headlamp beams: dressed fully in black, a long cape or trench coat whipping up around him, a fedora on his head. And those glowing red eyes, piercing in the darkness. Ollie thought they might bore right into him, then and there.

He got the gun loose just as his attacker came down on him, hard,

causing the weapon to fly from his hand and skitter across the ground toward the car. It clattered to a stop somewhere out of sight. The man was fast, and Ollie was hardly able to bring his hands up in defense before he was punched painfully in the gut and he doubled over, all of the air driven out of his lungs. The man grabbed a fistful of Ollie's collar and heaved him bodily into the air. Ollie tried desperately to kick out, or to cry for help, but was able only to offer an ineffectual whimper.

Before he knew what was happening, Ollie felt himself being flung backward. He sailed through the air, his limbs wheeling, and slammed down across the hood of the car. He felt the thin metal give way beneath his bulk. But he had no time to lament the damage to his precious vehicle. Pain blossomed in his shoulder. He realized that his arm had been crushed and was hanging limply by his side. The back of his head, too, felt like it was on fire, and he could sense a warm liquid—blood?—running down the side of his face. He emitted a heartfelt wail, just in time to see the grim face of his attacker looming over him.

The man was unshaven and unkempt. His eyes—his real eyes—were obscured by a pair of glowing goggles, strange red lights shining bright behind the lenses, transfixing the mob driver as he struggled to inch backward on the car's hood, to get away from this terrifying apparition of the night. He had nowhere to go. He was going to die. He squeezed his eyes shut, waiting for the fatal blow. Seconds passed. He peeled his eyelids open again.

The man was still hovering over him. After a moment, he spoke. His voice was gruff and filled with ire. "In there?" He gestured toward the set of double doors that the others were planning to use as their escape route from the bank.

Ollie nodded. He knew he was likely signing his own death warrant by giving them away, but all he could think about was getting free from this maniac, this . . . vigilante. He could taste blood. If the car would still drive . . .

The stranger grabbed the front of Ollie's jacket with both fists and hauled him into the air again. "Oh no. No, no, no . . ."

Turning, the man charged at the double doors, swinging Ollie in front of himself like a battering ram. Ollie's shoulder connected

painfully with the heavy wooden doors as they burst through, causing the hinges to splinter and the doors to cave inward with a huge crash.

Stars bloomed in his field of vision. His head spun. He couldn't remember what it was like not to feel numb with pain. He felt as if he was going to die, and realized that he probably was.

They were standing in the main lobby of the bank. The scene inside was one of utter chaos. Around thirty or forty civilians were scattered over the polished marble floor, lying prone on their bellies, their hands behind their heads, their distraught faces pressed to the ground. Another of the Roman's men was standing over them with a gun, keeping guard. Two further men were standing by the bank tellers as they stuffed cloth bags full of paper bills, and a fourth was up in the gallery overhead, surveying the scene below, a tommy gun clutched tightly in his hands.

A huge holographic statue of Pegasus dominated the lobby space, flickering ghostly blue as it reared up on its hind legs, its immense wings unfurled over the swathe of terrified civilians below. Above that, an enormous chandelier shimmered in the bright light.

Silence spread through the lobby as everyone turned at once to see who had burst through the doors in such a violent fashion. A woman screamed. The four mobsters offered Ollie and the other man a silent appraisal before raising their weapons.

Ollie was struggling to catch his breath. He couldn't feel his left arm anymore, and he didn't know if this was troubling or a blessed relief. He didn't have time to consider it any further before he found himself unceremoniously dumped against the wall.

"Stay there."

The man in black stepped forward, glancing from side to side. Ollie could see now that his billowing trench coat concealed a number of small contraptions, including what looked like the long barrel of a weapon under his right arm. Dazed, he watched the chaos erupt again before his eyes.

His attacker spread his arms wide, facing the rest of the Roman's men. "Time's up, gentlemen."

One of the mobsters opened fire. There was a series of loud reports as he emptied his chamber, yelling at the others to take the newcomer

down. The man in black seemed unconcerned by the spray of bullets, however, waiting as they thundered into the wall behind him, failing even to flinch as the mobster went wide with his shots, too hasty to take proper aim. Ollie watched in dismayed awe as the man gave a discreet flick of his right arm, causing the long brass barrel of the concealed weapon to spin up on a ratchet and click into place along the length of his forearm. It made a sound like a steel chain being dragged across a metal drum.

The man swung his arm around toward the crook who had fired on him and squeezed something in his palm. There was a quiet hiss of escaping air, and then he gave his reply. A storm of tiny steel *fléchettes* burst out from the end of the strange weapon, a rain of silver death, hailing down on the crook and shredding him as they impacted, bursting organs and flensing flesh from bone. It was over in a matter of seconds. The shattered body crumpled to the floor, gore and fragments of human matter pattering down around it in a wide arc. The teller who had been standing beside the felon dropped to the floor in a dead faint, the pile of cash in his hands billowing out to scatter all around him as he fell.

The vigilante didn't wait for the stutter of another gun. He rolled forward and left, moving with ease, and came up beside the holographic statue, his weapon at the ready. Another hail of *fléchettes* dropped the man in the gallery above, sending him tumbling over the rail, his face a mess of blood and broken bone fragments. He crashed to the marble with a sickening crunch, his limbs splayed at awkward angles.

The mobster guarding the civilians—who Ollie knew as Bobby Hendriks—wasn't taking any chances. He leapt forward, grappling with one of the women on the floor and dragging her to her feet. Looking panicked, the heavysset man pressed a knife to her throat, which gleamed in the bright electric light as he turned the blade back and forth, threatening to pull it across her soft, exposed flesh. The woman—a pretty blonde in a blue dress—looked terrified and froze rigid, trying not to move in case she somehow made the situation worse.

"I'll kill her! I'll kill her!" His voice was a gravelly bark.

The man in black flicked a glance at Hendriks, and then back at the other mobster guarding the tellers, who were still furiously emptying the cash drawers. He stepped toward Hendriks and the hostage.

Hendriks stepped back, mirroring the movement. He pressed the blade firmly against the woman's throat, drawing a tiny bead of blood. She wailed in pain and terror.

A shot went off. The man in black flinched as a bullet stroked his upper arm, tearing a rent in his clothing and drawing a line of bright blood on his skin. He turned on the gunman, but Ollie realized he wasn't able to get a clear bead due to the tellers. Instead, the man reached inside his trench coat and gave a sharp tug on a hidden cord.

There was a roaring sound, like the deep rumble of a distant explosion. Bright yellow flames shot out of two metal canisters strapped to the backs of the man's boots, scorching the floor. Ollie stared on, bewildered, as the stranger lifted entirely into the air, propelled by the bizarre jets, and shot across the lobby at speed, flitting over the prone civilians and swinging out above the mobster's head. He didn't even need to fire his weapon. Bringing his feet around in a sweeping movement, he introduced the searing flames to the gunman's face, who gave a gut-wrenching wail as his flesh bubbled and peeled in the intense heat. He dropped on the spot, still clutching his gun, hungry flames licking around his ears and collar.

The man in black reached inside his coat and pulled another cord. The flames spat and guttered out. He crashed to the floor, landing in a crouch on one knee. All eyes were on him. He climbed slowly to his feet and stood, regarding the last of the felons.

"I'll kill her! I'll kill her!" Hendriks was swinging the girl around as he looked for an escape route, edging away from this terrifying man who had come out of nowhere and murdered his companions. "I'll kill her! I'll kill her!"

When he spoke, the vigilante's voice was drenched in sorrow. "You already have."

Hendriks looked down at the girl in his arms. Sudden realization flashed on his face. His knife was half buried in the woman's throat, blood seeping down to drench the front of her dress, matting the fine hairs on his forearm. Shocked, he stumbled backward, allowing the

dead woman to slide to the floor, the knife still buried in her flesh. “Oh crap. Oh crap. I didn’t mean to do it. Hey, mister, I didn’t *mean* it! I just—”

There was a quiet *snick*. Something bright and metallic flashed through the air. Hendriks’s head toppled from his shoulders, the stump spouting blood in a dark, crimson fountain. The body pitched forward, dropping to the floor. The head rolled off to one side. Ollie glanced round to see a metal disk buried in the wall behind the body. He started to scramble to his feet.

All around, people were screaming, getting up off the floor, and rushing toward the exits. The massacre was over. Or at least Ollie hoped it was over. He needed to get to his car, fast.

The man in black stooped low over the body of the dead hostage. He seemed to be whispering an apology, but Ollie wasn’t quite able to hear over the noise of the crowd.

Ollie backed up, edging toward the burst double doors. His arm was hanging limp and useless by his side, he was sure his rib cage had been shattered, and he was still bleeding from the back of his skull. Even if he made it out of there alive, he’d never be the same again.

He saw the stranger’s red eyes lift and fix on him from across the lobby. He didn’t know what to do, didn’t dare turn and run or take his eyes off the stranger for a second. The man watched him for a moment, unmoving. Then in three or four graceful strides, he was on top of him. He grasped Ollie by the collar and the fat man whimpered as the vigilante leaned in close. He could feel the hot breath on his face, could smell the coffee and whisky it carried. Ollie’s heart was hammering hard in his chest. Was this how it was going to end?

“Today, you get to live.”

Ollie nearly fainted with relief. “I . . . I—”

“But you take a message to the Roman for me.”

Ollie nodded enthusiastically, and nearly swooned from the movement.

“You tell him he’s not welcome in this town anymore.”

The stranger dropped Ollie in a heap on the ground and then stepped over him, making slowly for the exit, his boots clicking loudly on the marble floor.