

DEATH'S HARLEQUIN

Maxwell Grant

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DEATH'S HARLEQUIN

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. THE TRAIL OF NUMBER ONE

A PLEASANT-FACED, mustached young man stood on one of the quiet streets of Washington, staring cautiously ahead.

It was a cold winter night in the nation's capital, and few people were abroad. The young man had halted at a spot well beyond the rays of the nearest street lamp.

A block away a taxicab had halted in front of a swanky apartment building. A woman alighted and dismissed her hackman. She was dressed in a gorgeous evening wrap with a furred hood, lifted partly over her blond hair. She walked with leisurely grace into the building.

The man who was watching her was not deceived by this maneuver. He expected the girl to emerge again without much delay. He had never seen her before tonight, but that did not lessen his suspicion that the girl in the furred wrap was a criminal a paid spy in a powerful international organization financed from abroad.

He had seen the blonde meet another woman who was definitely a suspect. He had trailed her taxi in an apparently aimless journey through the dark streets of Washington. Her present halt, he was convinced, was merely for the purpose of throwing any possible pursuer off the trail.

The name of this man was Vic Marquette. Few people in Washington knew his real business, Vic Marquette was an ace in the United States Secret Service, now temporarily working for the F.B.I.

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His loitering figure became tense as he saw the blonde in the furred wrap emerge again from the apartment building. She didn't walk very far, before a taxicab swerved suddenly into the curb. The woman got in and the cab sprang away. An instant later, Vic himself was on the move.

He hurried to the corner. A small, dark-colored sedan curved from the side street into the avenue. Vic eased his lithe body inside with a quick slam of the door.

He gave no orders to the man behind the wheel. None were needed. The driver was an expert on tailing jobs like this one. The taxi's goal was evidently in the business district of Washington. Vic Marquette's dark sedan was merely an atom in a stream of moving vehicles under the blaze of neon lights and electric signs.

"O.K.!" Vic ordered suddenly. "Wait here!"

The blonde's taxi had parked in front of one of the most fashionable beauty shops in Washington. Vic stared at the sign with a twinge of excitement: MADAME ALYCE. It was a place where ordinary people were never quite able to secure an appointment.

It looked now as if it might be a clearing house for treachery in the heart of the nation.

The blonde disappeared inside. Vic had to be content with his cold vigil in front of a nearby store window.

THE blonde's reception in the beauty shop was cordial. A pretty girl behind a desk smiled and pressed a button.

"Good evening, Miss Purdy. Madame Alyce will see you in just a moment."

The girl slipped off her heavy wrap. She was gorgeously beautiful. Her low-cut and backless evening gown was shimmering silver. So were the pointed tips of her slippers. Even her fingernails were silver.

Madame Alyce appeared presently from the rear of the shop. She was a plump, smiling woman with a voice that sounded thin, almost childish. But there was nothing childish about her narrow, rather Oriental eyes. A steady coolness seemed to lurk in them as she greeted Miss Purdy.

She led the favored client past curtained booths where other customers were undergoing beauty treatments. There was no curtain at the end booth where Madame Alyce conducted the blonde in the silver evening gown. A door closed discreetly behind them. It locked automatically. No voices could be heard outside after the door closed. The room was soundproof.

"You're late," Madame Alyce said.

"I'm sorry. Precautions take time."

"Precautions need not interfere with punctuality," Madame Alyce said grimly.

Her dark, almond-shaped eyes suddenly were like the glare of ice.

"Tonight you are being highly honored. You are to transmit an important code message to Number One. You will understand how important it is when I tell you that death has been decreed for two enemies tonight. Sit down, my dear."

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Jane Purdy shivered as she obeyed, although the room was almost tropical in its warmth. Madame Alyce turned toward a side table and her deft fingers selected certain tools of her beauty trade. She worked with slow care, while the blonde submitted with patient obedience. The task took a long time. When it was finished, Jane looked exactly the same as when she had entered.

However, that was only an illusion.

The blond spy left the beauty shop. She didn't take another cab. She walked in a deliberate effort to find out if she was being followed. Her fear was realized. A hand dropped lightly on her shoulder.

Turning, she saw the lean face of Vic Marquette. He pointed to a dark sedan that waited quietly at the curb.

"Get in."

"What does this mean?"

"I think you know." There was a brief flash of Vic's badge.

The blonde laughed suddenly. She obeyed without any further fuss. Neither she nor Vic said another word on the swift drive to F.B.I. headquarters.

But in the quiet, brilliantly-lighted room where she was taken, Jane Purdy said plenty. The gray-haired man behind the desk gave Vic a worried stare. A civil suit for false arrest was not to his liking. It might ruin careful preliminary work already accomplished. But Vic Marquette smiled.

"I don't think she'll cause us any trouble. I'm certain she's carrying a message of some kind."

"Very well."

The gray-haired man pressed a button. A matron appeared. She led Jane Purdy into a windowless room and searched her to the skin.

The search was disappointing. She found nothing. Jane Purdy was allowed to dress and was conducted back to the room where Vic and his chief waited.

Quickly, the matron made her report. Miss Purdy heard Vic reprimanded by his superior. She was allowed to go after receiving an apology.

Her triumph was complete when she discovered that no further attempt was made to follow her. She had fooled two of the shrewdest undercover men in Washington!

WHEN Jane Purdy returned to her apartment a small suite on the top floor of a fashionable building she did an apparently senseless thing. Removing her silver evening gown, she took a white silk swim suit from the closet and donned it in place of her wispy pink undergarment.

It seemed a ridiculous change to make in the dead of winter, but there was no smile on Jane Purdy's lips. Swiftly, she produced a more sinister object: a slitted white mask. With the mask in place and a rubber bathing cap over her blond hair, her identity was completely hidden.

All that was visible in the mirror was an extraordinarily beautiful woman in a skimpy swim suit.

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Jane Purdy's laughter rippled. She placed the mask, the cap and a pair of rubber bathing shoes in her handbag. Once more, she donned her evening gown. The swim suit, however, remained on her body beneath the gown. She was now ready to leave the apartment, and she reached for her furred wrap.

A cautious knocking on the door interrupted her. Her face paled.

"Who is it? she whispered.

"Walter!" The voice sounded softly urgent. "Hurry up, sweet! I don't want to be seen!"

An instant later, Jane Purdy unlocked the door and a man in evening clothes slipped into the room. It was evident that his arrival held no terror for the girl. The pallor on her face was replaced with a flush of delight. The man caught her in his arms and held her in a long embrace.

"I love you," he said. "I couldn't stay away. I had to see you!"

At first glance, he seemed a young and good-looking man. But there was weakness about his mouth, a shiftiness in his eyes. His face was beginning to show the telltale marks of dissipation and easy living.

His name was Walter Roscoe. In Washington society he was known as a playboy who had plenty of money and didn't mind spending it. That had been true for several years, but it was true no longer. Every penny of the wealth he had inherited was now spent. For the past year, Roscoe's easy money had been rolling in from a more sinister source. Blackmail!

Jane Purdy knew it and didn't care. She was in love with him. Occasionally, she even helped him with his blackmail schemes.

Crook working with crook! There was nothing strange about that.

But love had made Jane Purdy do something that had placed her life in frightful danger. She had disclosed to Roscoe the nature of her own employment.

Walter Roscoe knew that Jane was an important cog in the organization of the superspy who was working to cripple America!

Roscoe's greedy mind saw at once the opportunity for profit. The biggest blackmail chance of his life beckoned to him. He planned to use Jane to further his own daring scheme.

Tonight he was ready to disclose his hand. His love-making was merely a screen to mask his greed and make the girl obedient to his will. He saw a million dollars ready to be plucked if he could persuade Jane Purdy that she could betray her unknown chief without danger to herself.

"You shouldn't have come here tonight," Jane whispered. "I've got to leave at once."

"Are you going to him?"

"Yes."

"With a secret message from Madame Alyce?"

Jane didn't reply. Even her lips were pale at his careless mention of a forbidden name.

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Walter Roscoe laughed. There was meaning in that laugh a reassurance that the girl felt instantly.

"Suppose I tell you," Roscoe whispered, "that you and I can make a half million apiece, without the slightest risk."

"How?"

"By letting me see the message you're carrying tonight to Number One."

"Walter, you're mad! He'd find out and kill us without mercy!"

"He can't find out. I know too much about him. More, perhaps, than you think."

"Impossible!" she gasped. "I work for him. I carry his messages. I've seen him face to face. And yet I know nothin'!"

Her voice was tremulous.

"As far as I can tell, Number One employs only women. Five of them, including myself. None of us have the slightest idea of his identity. I don't even know the other four women when they stand beside me at Number One's headquarters. I tell you, it's hopeless to trick him," Jane said.

"Not if his real identity is known," Walter Roscoe replied.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. I know who Number One is! I haven't been idle since you first told me the nature of the racket you were in. If you don't believe me, I can tell you where the swimming pool is and what's under it!"

JANE'S face was still as white as chalk, but there was a new expression dawning in her hard, lovely eyes. Greed was beginning to replace fear. She knew her lover was an experienced blackmailer. A half share in a million dollars was a powerful lure.

"Who is Number One?" she whispered.

"If I told you his name, you'd think I was crazy! He's the last person in Washington you'd suspect. I know exactly what he's after. If I get hold of it, he'll be forced to buy it back at my price. And there'll be no danger of his harming us, because I can turn him over to the police any time I choose."

Roscoe's arms tightened about Jane Purdy. He kissed her. His voice deepened persuasively.

"Report to him tonight as usual. Leave the rest to me. Darling, will you do it?"

Her voice was barely audible. "Yes."

Walter Roscoe uttered a laugh of delight.

"Good girl! I knew I could depend on you. We've won, darling we've won!"

"On the contrary," a soft voice said, very gently, "I'm afraid you've lost!"

CHAPTER II. THE LITTLE FACES

WITH an oath, Walter Roscoe whirled. His hand snatched at a concealed gun. But he didn't draw it. He stood frozen, staring empty-handed at the dreadful figure that had emerged from a shadowy corner of the dimly lighted room.

The muzzle of a rather queer weapon pointed steadily at the frightened blackmailer. It looked like a tear-gas pistol. It was held in a hand that was gloved in shiny black satin

Jane Purdy's mouth hung wide open in the paralysis of terror. She seemed unable to breathe as she stared at the soft-spoken figure that she knew only as Number One.

His figure suggested a deliberate and ghastly mockery. It was like death jeering at life. From the white starched ruff at his throat to the white pompons at the tips of his black slippers, the man was dressed like a Harlequin.

He wore a shapeless, wide-sleeved smock of black satin with huge and ridiculously ornamental white buttons. The trousers, too, were black satin, and so floppy and wide that it was impossible to tell whether they covered the lean, muscular legs of a man or the more shapely limbs of a woman.

His voice, too, was sexless. A timid man might have uttered those softly spoken words of warning, or a woman with a smooth contralto voice.

But there was nothing feminine about the pale, yellowish face that seemed to shine faintly with the glimmer of decay.

It was the face of a man long since dead! Roscoe, staring at it in frozen terror, could think only of an Egyptian mummy. The thin lips were drawn away from skull-like teeth. The cheeks were sunken and leathery. Dank black hair lay matted thinly on a baldish scalp the color of old parchment.

A living corpse in the costume of a gay Harlequin! With a wide-muzzled gun. And a jeering laugh that made the silence in the room crawl with menace.

Roscoe took a slow step backward. His voice was hoarse.

"What do you want?"

"Your death, Mr. Roscoe."

"You don't dare kill me! I know who you are! I've already made protective arrangements to —"

"So have I," Number One interrupted in his soft murmur. "But before I carry them out, I'd like to hear you tell Miss Purdy what my real name is. I don't believe you know. But I'll give you your chance to prove I'm wrong. Tell her, please."

Roscoe turned toward the girl, playing for time. Treacherous to the core, he saw a chance to save his life at the expense of Jane. Instead of speaking, his hands jerked swiftly. One of them seized Jane and tried to swing her in front of him like a shield. The other lifted with the lightning glint of a gun.

His defense failed. Jane recoiled with a scream. Maddened by the knowledge that he was sacrificing her life

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to save his own, the girl's desperate shove sent Roscoe staggering off balance. Before he could fire a single shot, the trigger of Number One's gun squeezed remorselessly.

There was no explosion. Instead of a bullet, a quick puff of brownish vapor spat in a tiny cloud. For the fraction of a second it enveloped Roscoe's head, was drawn into his mouth and nostrils. Then the brownish vapor was gone.

But already it had done its work.

Roscoe's pistol fell to the floor. His knees buckled. The powerful gas brought him tumbling to the floor, unconscious.

JANE PURDY was still unharmed. She dropped to her knees and began to beg for her life.

"I didn't mean to betray you!. He forced me into it. Don't kill me! I'll be your slave I'll do anything you ask _"

But Number One was unmoved by the plea. A gloved hand twisted in the girl's blond hair and lifted her upward. Again the trigger of his strange weapon jerked.

Number One stepped away from the puff of brownish vapor and watched Jane Purdy collapse. She was not dead, but unconscious.

It was her silvered fingernails that interested the corpselike intruder in the Harlequin suit. Producing a tiny bottle from Jane's handbag, Number One dissolved swiftly the coating of silver that covered the girl's long, tapering nails.

The result was startling. On each of the nails, except two, a tiny face had been drawn with what looked like indelible black ink. The two other nails held initials.

Eight faces and two initials from the alphabet formed what was evidently a code. A cunning message that had escaped even the keen, resourceful search of the Secret Service matron at F.B.I. headquarters.

The tiny pictured heads were crude. They were the sort a child might draw. But with the aid of a code book, Number One had no difficulty deciphering the message.

Jane Purdy had carried her own death warrant from the beauty shop! For the message read:

This girl is traitor. Advise immediate death. V. M. Suspicious.

"V. M.," of course, was Vic Marquette. Number One didn't care about him. He had a profound contempt for the government Secret Service. They hadn't even been able to prevent his own personal vengeance on a traitorous agent.

Very carefully, he removed the indelible marks from Jane's unconscious fingers. He used a greenish paste that dissolved the queer markings and left the nails smooth and natural.

Number One was now ready for a horrible and cold-blooded double murder. But he had no intention of letting the Washington police suspect murder when they found the remains of his two victims.

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The spy picked up a short steel bar from the shadowy corner where he had waited unseen for his victims. It was not an ordinary bar. The steel was covered with a soft layer of black felt.

A single blow of this soundless weapon killed Jane Purdy. It struck an inch or two below the base of her skull and broke her spine. Walter Roscoe died in the same swift fashion as he lay in a drugged sprawl on the floor. It was the most cowardly kind of murder, but the shrill giggle from the thin lips of Number One showed that he enjoyed it.

He moved with catlike strides to the telephone and called a private number not listed in the Washington directory. Vic Marquette would have been interested in that number. It was a wire that led to a soundproof room in the fashionable beauty shop run by Madame Alyce.

The voice of Number One uttered a crisply brief message: "Special order! Admit no more preferred customers until further notice!"

His voice was metallic, utterly unlike the one which Jane Purdy and Walter Roscoe had heard. Evidently Number One was a master of tone control.

Swiftly, he consulted a notebook, then called a second number. There was a bit of bargaining, talk of money for carting away of bodies. The reply the spy received was evidently satisfactory. He replaced the instrument with a throaty chuckle.

He stared, still chuckling, at his reflection in a mirror. The black satin Harlequin costume with its huge buttons and ridiculous pompons on the tips of his slippers made the spy chief seem like a ghastly travesty of death. But it was a travesty that was make-believe. He proved it by placing both hands at the side of his head and slowly lifting his head upward from his shoulders!

The whole counterfeit head was a masterpiece of plastic art. It fitted over Number One's flesh-and-blood head like a helmet. The white ruff of the clown suit at the spy's throat effectively hid the lower edge of the strange disguise.

As he lifted the helmet, the line of his real chin and jaw began to appear. But he was a man of infinite caution. Even in a silent room with only two corpses as witnesses, Number One was unwilling to reveal his hidden identity. His left hand jutted with a quick motion and snapped off the electric switch. He finished his unmasking in darkness.

A moment later, he was tiptoeing softly from the top-floor apartment.

With him went the steel bar encased in felt. He took also the handbag of the dead Jane, the one that contained her mask, her bathing cap and the rubber bathing shoes. He didn't attempt to recover the silken swim suit that was still on the girl's dead body beneath her silver evening gown. Time was pressing!

Number One didn't descend. He slid past the feeble glow of a red exit bulb, and ascended the steel-inclosed fire stairs that led to the roof.

AFTER ten minutes, a second figure appeared in the top-floor corridor. It was impossible to know whether the man had descended from the roof or had made the long, weary climb by stairs from the street level. The only clue was the fact that he was panting heavily.

He pressed the button of the service elevator several times in what was evidently a signal to someone below. The elevator began to rise.

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The face of the man who had given the signal was strong and clean-shaven. with rather full-shaped lips. His eyes stared straight ahead without blinking. He wore a gray overcoat, a gray fedora, and there were gray gloves on his hands.

He was a figure well known in Washington society, by reason of his political and social activities. His name was Mike Porter. He was a lobbyist, hired by the numerous industrial firms who wanted to present their views on legislation to the congressmen who framed the laws. Mike Porter's creep, cordial voice and cheery laugh were well known and well liked at social receptions and in the marble corridors of the Capitol.

But there was nothing cordial about the way he greeted the men who stepped slyly from the service elevator. His snarling query was husky with tension.

"O.K. downstairs, Blackie?"

"Yeah. We got the car all ready. Any time me and Slim can make a cool grand apiece ditchin' a coupla stiff's, we're right on time."

Blackie looked like an ex-pug. He was a thick, hammered-down sort of man, with wide shoulders and practically no neck below his bullet head. His nose had once been broken and it made his breath hiss softly when he breathed.

Slim was tall and gangling, had a protruding Adam's apple.

Mike Porter led the pair along the corridor to the death apartment. Quickly the two thugs shouldered the bodies of Jane Purdy and Walter Roscoe, took them to the service elevator and descended.

The bodies were put in the back of Roscoe's own sedan. The car was driven out of Washington, through the suburbs. On a lonely road, whiskey was sprinkled over the corpses. The three men got out. The car was set in gear, the hand throttle pulled down.

Quickly, the sedan burst through a frail fence, disappeared over an embankment. There came a rending, splitting sound as the car crashed on boulders in the bottom of a dry creek bed.

Just a couple of gay drunks on a joy ride! That would be the impression when the bodies were found.

An unknown superspy had stacked the cards to cover a cunning crime. More crime was planned. The peace and safety of the United States were about to receive their greatest attack in years.

But there was the one fact on which neither the spy nor his criminal satellites had counted. High in the black sky, midway between New York and Washington, a transport plane roared.

Aboard that plane was a quiet-faced man who was flying to Washington to arrange the details of a pleasant vacation trip with gun and rod in the Rockies. He was completely unaware of impending crime; but events would soon draw him into the midst of a murderous intrigue fomented by a warlike foreign dictator.

Mike Porter would have been less complaisant when he returned to Washington, had he known the true identity of that quiet gentleman flying swiftly toward the nation's capital.

It was The Shadow!

CHAPTER III. THE MILITARY CLUE

AN hour or so after the crash of the car containing the dead bodies of Jane Purdy and Walter Roscoe, a plane skimmed earthward from the black sky and landed at the Washington airport.

Lamont Cranston emerged with the other passengers. He was given prompt and courteous attention. Officials recognized him as a prominent millionaire, a well-known sportsman and traveler.

However, none of the attendants had any idea that the name and reputation of Lamont Cranston cloaked the personality of The Shadow. Many people, of course, had heard of The Shadow, knew of his grim and unrelenting warfare against organized crime. But only a few desperate criminals had ever discovered the secret of who he really was. These few had died swiftly in battle, before they could tip off their pals in the underworld.

The Shadow remained, as always, an unknown creature of darkness.

An airport official greeted Lamont Cranston as the millionaire passed the administration building on his way to a taxicab.

"Good evening, Mr. Cranston. A pleasure to see you in Washington again. Are you planning to remain long?"

"Just a day or so. I'm on my way West to do a little hunting in the Rockies. I thought I'd stop off and pick up some information about the best place to visit at this time of the year."

"The department of the interior should be able to help you."

Cranston nodded.

"That's what I thought. I'm planning to confer with Mr. Jim Whelan. I wrote him I was coming."

"Whelan?" the official echoed. "I wondered what brought him here so late at night. He's waiting outside now."

Cranston was pleased. He hadn't wired the time of his arrival ahead, and had not expected Whelan to take the trouble to drive out to meet him.

But Jim Whelan's greeting puzzled Cranston.

"Hello! Mighty glad to see you, old man! Hadn't the faintest idea you were due here tonight. Thought you'd arrive later in the week."

"That's funny," Cranston said. "They told me you were waiting for me."

Whelan shook his head. There was a frown on his face and an uneasy glint in his eyes that interested the observant Cranston. Ordinarily a talkative man, Whelan was almost taciturn tonight. He was both puzzled and angry, Cranston noticed. His guess was that Whelan had come to meet someone else, someone who had failed to arrive at the airport.

Whelan's annoyed comment proved the truth of Cranston's guess.

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"I can't understand it," he fumed. "I had a wire earlier this evening from Colonel Standish, asking me to meet him here. Yet there's no sign of him. You'd expect an army officer to be punctual. Damned annoying!"

He choked down his anger and remembered that he was scarcely being polite to his friend Cranston. With a wave of his arm, he dismissed Colonel Standish from his mind.

"Let's get back to town. I have my car here. Shall I drop you at your hotel, or would you like to stop at my apartment and have a highball with me?"

Cranston smiled.

"A highball sounds fine, provided you're in a mood to talk hunting and fishing with me."

"I'm always willing to talk on that subject," Whelan declared, wistfully. "Wish I could go along with you. It's tough to be chained to a government desk."

WHELAN sent his car skimming swiftly along the smooth highway toward downtown Washington. He did most of the talking and Cranston listened.

Cranston was still mildly interested in the strange behavior of Colonel Standish. He had met Standish several times and knew him to be a man of precise habits. It wasn't like him to send a telegram to a friend and then ignore it.

"Tell you what," Jim Whelan said suddenly, as the car raced smoothly along. "Why don't we kill two birds with one stone? I've collected all the information you asked me to, in order to help you arrange the best sort of hunting trip possible at this time of the year. The stuff is in my desk at the office. Why don't we stop off there, pick up the reports, and have something concrete to talk about over our highballs at my apartment?"

It suited Cranston, and it was so decided.

Fifteen minutes later, Whelan halted his big sedan in front of the darkened department of interior building. A sleepy night operator rode the two men aloft to an upper floor. The corridor was dark except for the ground glass panel of one door, behind which a bright light was burning.

Whelan grinned. "My secretary's working tonight on some rush stuff."

He kept chattering cheerfully in his talkative way until he turned the knob of his office door. Then he uttered a quick gasp.

"That's queer!"

"What do you mean?" Cranston asked.

"The door's locked! It shouldn't be. Not while my secretary is working. She never locks it until she leaves."

He raised his voice.

"Miss Daley! Are you in there? Are you all right?"

There was no reply. Cranston, listening keenly, heard a faint scraping sound followed by complete silence. Then the ground-glass panel of the door went black as someone inside turned out the light.

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"Quick!" Cranston ordered. "Unlock that door, Jim!"

Whelan fumbled for his key ring, turned the lock swiftly. Cranston shoved him aside and flung the door open. In the darkness, a furtive figure was racing toward the rear exit from the office.

Cranston was unarmed, but he didn't hesitate. He darted at the escaping intruder. He couldn't see his foe, but he was conscious at once that he was at grips with a powerful and desperate man. His outthrust hand clawed at the fellow's shoulder and chest. Something ripped loose in his grip, then he was hurled violently backward against the edge of a desk.

Before he could recover, the butt of a gun swung viciously against his skull. The darkness was all that saved The Shadow from a smashed head. The blow, awkwardly delivered, skidded against The Shadow's hunched shoulder.

As he struggled to his feet, he could hear the echoing footfalls of the fleeing intruder and the shrill, frightened oath of Whelan as he fumbled hastily to find the light switch.

The lights came on just as The Shadow gained his feet. One glance at the open rear doorway of the office and The Shadow flung himself flat to the floor, knocking Whelan headlong beside him with a sweep of his arm. He had seen the glint of a gun barrel, held in a white-gloved hand, at the edge of the door casing.

Flame spat inward with a thin, scarlet streak. A bullet whizzed above the two friends on the floor and thudded into a desk.

Then the murderous intruder was gone.

The Shadow pursued, risking instant death for a chance to get a glimpse of the burglar's face. He failed. All he saw was the bright stab of pistol flame and the roar of shots echoing along the deserted rear corridor. The fleeing figure slammed a door behind him and vanished.

The next instant, Whelan appeared in the rear corridor. He had found his own gun in the drawer of his desk. The Shadow snatched the weapon from him and ran toward the closed door at the end of the hall.

"Come out," he ordered, "or I'll shoot!"

No answer reached his ears except a queer receding echo that seemed to rise from far below. The Shadow sprang at the door and flung it open. The noise he had heard was the distant echo of feet racing down the steps of an inclosed staircase.

The Shadow raced swiftly downward. But by the time he reached the bottom and threw open a small metal door that opened on a rear street, his quarry was gone. All that remained was the echoing roar of an automobile that had fled out of sight in the darkness.

THE blazing excitement faded from The Shadow's eyes. In an instant he became again Lamont Cranston, a wealthy idler unused to crime or to violence. By the time the wildly excited Jim Whelan arrived panting at the foot of the stairs, it would be hard to say which of the two men seemed more unnerved by their unexpected brush with death.

Whelan's shrill comments on the efficient escape of the burglar proved what Cranston had already suspected: The crook was someone familiar with the inside plan of the building. The staircase down which he had fled was, according to Whelan, one used only by government workers. The general public never used that rear

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corridor.

Cranston and Whelan hurried back up the stairs. The floor of Whelan's office was a mess of scattered papers and documents, but the burglar's search had been centered on only one object. That was the desk ordinarily occupied by Whelan's secretary, Miss Daley. It only added to the grim perplexity of the mystery.

Where was Whelan's missing secretary? And why had her desk been the only spot that had been ransacked?

Whelan searched through the rifled desk looking vaguely for the answer to the riddle. While he was thus occupied, Lamont Cranston bent toward the floor near the spot where he had first grappled with the gunman. He remembered how he had clutched at a shoulder and chest. He knew he had torn something loose.

That something, he was certain, was a pin of some kind, for his finger was still scratched and bleeding from a sharp point that had ripped across the skin.

He found the object he was looking for at the very edge of the office rug, close to the wall. He palmed it quickly and slipped it into his pocket. A single glance had told him what it was.

It was a small band of rainbow colors, one color merging into another. The pin at the back was badly bent and the clasp broken. The object itself was a military decoration, one that was worn only by officers in the United States army!

Instantly, Cranston thought of something that happened earlier that night at the Washington airport. A telegram had been sent to Jim Whelan by Colonel Henry Standish. Whelan had gone there, only to find he had been misled.

At first, Cranston dismissed the happening as trivial, a misunderstanding of some sort. Now, he was convinced that behind the affair of the false telegram, desperate and criminal plans were afoot. The telegram must have been a deliberate lure to get Whelan away from his office.

Coupled with the military clue torn from a vanished burglar, it looked like a damning indictment of Colonel Standish. Lamont Cranston didn't discuss his thoughts with Whelan. The latter, having found nothing in his secretary's desk to explain the burglary or the disappearance of Miss Daley, was about to phone the police.

The sudden arrival of a visitor at the office stayed his trembling hand. It was Vic Marquette. Cranston knew him, too, having met Vic socially many times in Washington.

But Vic was completely unaware that the dapper Lamont Cranston and The Shadow were one and the same personality. Often, Vic had been helped on difficult cases by The Shadow. Not once, however, had he ever learned the truth about the black-cloaked figure who emerged from darkness to aid the law, only to vanish when crime was defeated.

VIC'S story was an alarming one. Pledging his two listeners to secrecy, he told of his vain efforts to trap a beautiful woman spy named Jane Purdy. She had managed to avoid arrest, only to meet a more horrible fate.

Her dead body, together with that of a man named Walter Roscoe, had been found in an automobile wreck. Their necks had been broken in a plunge over an embankment. The coroner's verdict was accidental death as the result of a drunken joy ride.

But Vic Marquette didn't believe that. He suspected murder. And there was a further grotesque touch to the mystery that had him completely baffled. The dead Jane Purdy was wearing a white silk swim suit under her

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evening gown.

"It seems utterly insane," Vic growled. "People don't go swimming in the dead of winter! I know there was some sinister reason for it, but I haven't yet been able to find the tiniest sort of explanation."

"How did you know there had been trouble here in Whelan's office?" Cranston asked quietly.

Vic explained. As soon as he learned of the tragic "accident," he had rushed to the apartment of Jane Purdy. He found it in wild disorder. Someone had preceded him there. Every inch of the place had been searched.

The same was true of Walter Roscoe's apartment. An unknown searcher had ransacked every room and left it strewn with broken furniture and scattered papers. But Vic's visit had two concrete results. He found in a torn letter confirmation of his belief that Jane Purdy and Walter Roscoe were lovers. And he discovered a link that sent him racing to the government office of Jim Whelan.

"A link to me?" Whelan gasped.

Vic showed him a small photograph of a gorgeously beautiful blonde. "This is Jane Purdy. Do you know her?"

Whelan's jaws sagged with amazement.

"Why it's my missing secretary! Miss Daley! I've never seen her look so lovely, dressed so beautifully! What does it all mean?"

"It means that in her spare time, your Miss Daley has been working as a spy for an unknown criminal who is after some vital secret of the United States."

"But what could she hope to find here?" Whelan asked. "There are no secrets here. My job is concerned only with forestry and the preservation of our national parks. Why should she be murdered? And why should a burglar search her desk?"

"I don't know," Vic said grimly. "And I have a hunch it's going to be tough finding out." He gave a brief laugh. "I'd give a million right now, for a chance to talk five minutes with the only man in America who could help me."

"Who's that?"

"The Shadow," Vic said.

Lamont Cranston's face remained impassive. He said nothing.

Vic turned suddenly to the telephone. He had heard from Whelan about the peculiar telegram he had received from Colonel Standish, a telegram that had made it easy for a burglar to ransack Whelan's empty office. Vic called Colonel Standish's home and spoke to him.

When he hung up, he shrugged.

Standish denied he had sent the telegram. He had been away from Washington, but he hadn't returned in a commercial transport. He had flown in an army plane and had landed at the army field. He branded the telegram as a fake. Apparently, crooks had used Colonel Standish to victimize Whelan and lure him from his

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office.

Lamont Cranston wondered. He said nothing of the clue in his overcoat pocket the clue that pointed to a military man. He and Whelan promised absolute secrecy to Vic about the strange events that had happened.

CRANSTON went in a taxicab to his hotel, registered and spoke to a few people he knew in the lobby. Then he ascended to his private suite.

Alone under the shaded lights of a comfortable sitting room, he reached into his overcoat pocket to examine the military decoration he had torn from the chest of an unknown burglar.

His hand emerged empty. The clue was gone.

For a long instant, Lamont Cranston stood perfectly still. Then a crimson glow began to burn in the depths of his eyes. His lips tightened. The whole expression of his face had changed. The easy-going kindness of Lamont Cranston was now gone.

The Shadow had been challenged. He was accepting that challenge.

He stepped soundlessly to his telephone, put in a call for a private New York number. Soon a distant voice said quietly:

"Burbank speaking."

Burbank was The Shadow's trusted contact man. His job was to receive and transmit orders to all The Shadow's agents. He received one now.

"Notify Harry Vincent immediate emergency. Order him to fly to Washington at once. Hotel reservation will be waiting for him at airport. Repeat orders."

Burbank's unemotional voice obeyed.

"That is all."

The connection was broken. The Shadow's laugh was like the clink of chilled steel. Vic Marquette's plea for help was not going to be ignored.

CHAPTER IV. THE PIT

EARLY the following evening, Lamont Cranston drove a rented car with deft skill through the heavy traffic of downtown Washington. Jim Whelan, his friend from the department of the interior, rode with him.

Colonel Henry Standish was giving a reception and dance. Whelan was one of those who had been invited. Through him, Lamont Cranston had successfully wangled an invitation for himself. Whelan had no idea how grimly anxious The Shadow was to get inside the home of this important army officer.

Whelan, unlike The Shadow, accepted Colonel Standish's innocence in the affair of the fake telegram. That suited The Shadow. It left him free to act tonight in any way that circumstances warranted, without disclosing his real mission or his personality.

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Colonel Standish's home was a stately dwelling set well back from the sidewalk on a fashionable thoroughfare. There was a lawn in front and landscaped grounds to the sides and rear, giving the effect of a miniature park.

Cranston halted his car at the curb, and a uniformed servant took the car and drove it off to a special parking area farther down the side street.

As they entered the house, The Shadow noted the figure of an inconspicuous young man loitering idly on the sidewalk next door to Standish's home. The man was Harry Vincent.

Vincent was there by the orders of The Shadow. He carried a leather briefcase, the contents of which he was in ignorance. The briefcase had come to him by special messenger at his hotel room. He had also received explicit orders from The Shadow. He could be depended on to carry out those orders.

He paid no attention to the dapper Cranston and his companion. Harry was waiting for an opportunity to slip unseen to the dark grounds in the rear of the Standish home.

Inside the colonel's house, Cranston and Whelan were caught up in a whirl of music and gaiety. The huge living room on the ground floor had been converted into a ballroom. An orchestra played lively music and the floor was filled with dancers.

Cranston got rid of Whelan as soon as he could. He stood quietly apart, watching with apparently idle eyes the throng of well-dressed men and women.

Colonel Standish was in dress uniform, an imposing man with iron-gray hair and aristocratic bearing. He was talking with a stunningly beautiful girl who Cranston knew was his daughter, Evelyn Standish.

Her laughter was loud. The Shadow could sense tension in her. She kept turning away from her father, greeting people. Each time she did so, her eyes swept the room as though searching anxiously for someone she couldn't see.

Cranston spoke a few polite words to Evelyn and her father. When he bowed and departed across the room, there was satisfaction in the depths of his eyes. He had just made sure of something. One of Colonel Standish's decorations was missing. He was not wearing the rainbow-colored service bar to which his service in the army entitled him.

Was this merely a coincidence? Cranston was not ready as yet to answer that question. His attention moved toward other personages in the room.

Vic Marquette was there, looking bored and harmless in his role of a government clerk. He made no effort to speak to Cranston, and Cranston took the hint and left him alone. Vic had his eye on a man who had already been introduced to Cranston as Mike Porter, well known in Washington as a lobbyist for important industrial clients.

Porter was dancing with a slim and pretty debutante named Miriam Hudson. Dark, stormy eyes watched the pair vanish among the moving throng of dancers. Those eyes belonged to Clarita Rondo. They were jet black and vivid with rage.

Clarita was not as voluptuously lovely as Miriam Hudson. Her bosom was flat and boyish. She had the lean, tigerish grace of a professional dancer, Cranston decided. He found an opportunity to ask Jim Whelan about her, and discovered that his guess was correct.

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Clarita Rondo was an Argentine who had made a tremendous hit as a dancer at the exclusive and expensive Bandbox, the most popular night club in Washington. She had come to the reception tonight as Mike Porter's guest. According to the gossipy Whelan, Clarita and Porter had become inseparable companions of late. He took her everywhere. They were rumored to be in love.

It didn't look much like love to Cranston. There had been veiled hate in the jet-black eyes of the lovely Argentine, as she watched Porter dance away with Miriam Hudson. It was Miriam Hudson who had roused her anger.

When Porter returned presently, Clarita gave him a smile that was almost abject with devotion. It was all very curious, Cranston thought.

A MOMENT later, The Shadow saw a tall, handsome young man dressed in the uniform of a lieutenant of artillery. This was Roy Standish, the son of Colonel Standish. The sight of him brought a quick beat of excitement to Cranston's heart.

Like his father, Roy appeared nervous and ill at ease. His hand kept straying unconsciously to the front of his tunic. His service decoration was missing!

Father and son! Was one trying to protect the other, in an effort to cover up the consequences of a desperate burglary? And if so, which had been the burglar in Whelan's office the night before?

It was Roy for whom Evelyn Standish's frightened gaze had been hunting earlier. As soon as she saw her brother, she left her escort and hurried toward him. After a whispered conversation, Roy left her and began to dance with Clarita Rondo.

Cranston wondered if Vic Marquette had witnessed the little incident, but Vic was busy talking to a servant who had beckoned him. Cranston's sharp ears heard the servant tell Vic that Colonel Standish wished to see him at once in his ground-floor study at the rear.

The servant lifted a curtain aside and Vic vanished down a hallway. After a moment, the servant followed. He was a surly-looking fellow, with a dark, sallow skin and high cheek bones.

Cranston decided to find out what was going on behind the gaiety of this fashionable reception. From the moment he had entered the colonel's house he was conscious of worry, anger, fear.

As soon as he was able, he parted the curtains and slipped quietly from the ballroom. Walking quickly down a corridor, he came to the room where the servant had told Vic to go. As he stood outside the door, he heard a faint groan.

He knocked instantly and opened the door.

There was no sign of Vic. Only the colonel was there. He was standing close by the window and his lips were quivering. Watching his pale face and frightened eyes, Cranston wondered if Standish himself had uttered that low-toned groan.

"Sorry to intrude," Cranston apologized smilingly. "I thought I'd find Mr. Marquette here. One of your servants said that he'd come back here for a moment, and I thought —"

Colonel Standish shook his head. His voice was steady. He had regained complete control of himself.

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"You must be mistaken. I didn't send for Marquette. Matter of fact, I've been here alone. You'll probably find your friend in the ballroom."

Cranston excused his intrusion and left. But his senses had not been idle while he talked to Standish. He had noted the colonel's position by the window. The "groan" could easily have been caused by the abrupt closing of that window.

There was a smudge of dirt on the fingers of Standish's white military gloves. And he had kept shuffling one foot slightly while he talked to Cranston. Cranston wondered grimly if the shuffle had anything to do with the fact that the colonel's foot rested on the edge of a loose scatter rug.

Cranston did not return to the ballroom. He hid himself in an angle of the dark corridor. A moment later, Standish left the study and darted noiselessly toward the foot of a flight of stairs, raced upward.

Cranston made no effort to follow him. He reentered the empty rear study and closed the door. A quick glance at the window and he saw that the catch was unlocked. Gloved fingers had smeared the light coating of dust on the metal mechanism. But there was an even grimmer clue under the edge of the scatter rug which the colonel's feet had been so slyly hitching forward.

Blood! Two or three smudged drops that were fresh and sticky to The Shadow's touch. It was evident at once what had happened. Vic Marquette had been silently struck down and kidnapped!

IN an instant, The Shadow had the window open and had dropped to the ground. Crouched low, he examined the dark turf.

It was cut up and disturbed by the marks of many footprints. The Shadow deduced that more than one man had participated in the attack on Vic. But it wasn't until he began to follow the trail toward the rear of the grounds that he became convinced of the actual number of Vic's assailants.

Two men. One of them had passed Vic's unconscious body through the window to the other. Then both had carried him away in stumbling haste. The footprints proved that.

A rear corner of the Standish mansion threw a patch of blackness in the gloom. Lamont Cranston entered that darkness, but he did not emerge. The figure that stepped silently into view was black-robed and formless. Black gloves covered his lean fingers. The brim of a slouch hat left only the burning gleam of his eyes visible.

Harry Vincent had obeyed orders, had left a certain briefcase exactly as he had been ordered. Harry himself was nowhere to be seen, but to The Shadow that meant good news. Harry had witnessed the kidnapping from his post on the ground and was gathering information to be relayed to The Shadow as soon as he had time to report.

The Shadow's cloaked figure vaulted a rear fence like a moving patch of blackness.

The footprint trail of Vic's abductors ended near the back door of a house that had been obviously untenanted for a long time. Broad tire marks in the circular driveway showed where a truck had waited to receive the victim.

The Shadow waited, too.

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After a while, a car drove into the driveway from the street beyond. It rolled slowly and without lights. Harry Vincent was behind the wheel. He had no idea where The Shadow was, until a calm voice spoke a single low-toned command behind him.

"Report!"

The Shadow was already in the rear seat of Harry's sedan. Sitting there, he was invisible except for the faint glimmer of eyes and nose beneath the brim of his slouch hat.

Harry Vincent spoke rapidly, omitting everything but the most important facts for the guidance of The Shadow.

Vic Marquette had been abducted in a small covered truck by two thugs. A third thug drove. Unable to interfere without risking the instant death of the government agent, Harry had remained out of sight. As soon as the truck rolled, however, he followed in his own car. The trail had led to a garage in a slum district on the other side of Washington, close to the railroad yards.

Quickly, The Shadow ordered Vincent to drive to the place.

Harry obeyed. During that swift race across town, he finished his report. The garage, he stated, was empty except for the truck the crooks had used. Harry had entered through a rear window and had searched the building. There was no trace of Vic or his abductors.

The Shadow's laughter sounded dim and remote. His keen mind was already grappling with the mystery of the quick disappearance of Vic.

The garage where Vincent presently stopped the car was on a dark street facing railroad freight sidings. A high board fence closed off the railroad property.

Under The Shadow's orders, Harry Vincent repeated the maneuver he had made earlier. He circled through the darkness to the brick rear of the garage, entered cautiously through a back window whose pane he had already removed with a diamond cutter.

A moment later, he unlocked the garage doors from the inside and the car was rolled into the crooks' hangout.

No motor sounds betrayed the two investigators. The Shadow had killed the engine. There was a slight incline from the street and the car was easily pushed inward. The Shadow's gloved hands closed and locked the garage doors without any betraying noise.

LIGHTS in the ceiling showed the garage empty, except for the abandoned kidnap truck. There was a grilled elevator shaft for the raising of automobiles to the upper floors. The elevator itself stood with its gate open at the level of the ground floor.

The Shadow ignored the elevator for the present. Leaving Harry on guard with drawn gun, he climbed dusty stairs in the rear and surveyed the upper floors. There were two of them. The Shadow soon found that his agent was right. There was no trace of Vic, at least aloft.

The Shadow glided noiselessly back to where Harry waited. He noted that the stairs ended at the street level of the building. The only communication with the basement was by the elevator. The Shadow examined the car carefully, discovered a few queer facts.

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There was a side door that apparently had no sensible purpose. It faced the unbroken grille of the shaft. In the floor of the elevator was a small trapdoor that opened easily, giving a view of the dark pit below.

The pit ended quite normally at the basement level, but there was a peculiarity about it that attracted the attention of The Shadow immediately. Something like a straight narrow line seemed to bisect the bottom of the pit from side to side.

The final clue The Shadow noted was the roof of the elevator. It was made of wood instead of metal. And the wood was painted a queer dusty gray that made it resemble concrete.

In the silence, The Shadow's laugh made a rustling whisper. He divined the only possible meaning to this odd combination of clues. Harry was already at his side in the motionless elevator. Harry's hand reached toward the control to lower the elevator to the basement.

But The Shadow halted his assistant with a warning gesture. He didn't want any betraying sound to be heard from the clank of machinery. Bending, he lifted the trapdoor in the bottom of the elevator, squirmed through and caught hold of the steel cable.

Slowly, he slid down its greasy length

As his feet touched the bottom of the shaft, his suspended weight caused a queer thing to happen. The dark line he had seen was a crack between two horizontal doors. They opened downward without sound, disclosing the real bottom of the pit. It extended ten feet or so below the level of the basement.

The Shadow slid to the bottom. A moment later, Harry joined him.

Walls were solid, but The Shadow suspected a secret panel somewhere. He examined the shaft on the side where the extra door in the elevator would have faced. He knew now the secret of the crooks' clever fade-out with their prisoner.

When the elevator descended below the fake basement level, its roof would be flush with the basement floor. The painted concrete effect would make the roof of a hidden elevator look exactly like the real flooring of the shaft.

The Shadow listened for some betraying sound beyond the square walls of the secret pit.

A sound came, but from a totally unexpected source. Someone was unlocking the doors of the garage at the street entrance!

An instant later, a car rolled in and the doors slammed. Feet approached the elevator poised ominously in the shaft above the heads of The Shadow and Harry Vincent. With a clank of machinery, the car began to descend.

The Shadow threw himself flat in a desperate effort to avoid being crushed to death. Vincent did the same. But almost as they did so, the danger of crushing was miraculously averted. The elevator halted. The trapdoor in the floor lifted swiftly, a head peered downward.

"I thought so!" a harsh voice snarled.

Before The Shadow could roll to his knees and aim his gun upward, the gun of the man above made a faint clicking sound. It was a queer weapon with a wide-mouthed barrel. Vapor spat from it in a dark, brownish

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cloud and rolled down the shaft like greasy smoke. Vincent reeled and fell. The Shadow collapsed beside him on his face.

Silence followed. The brown vapor evaporated swiftly. It was followed by the appearance of the man above. He squirmed through the trapdoor and slid down the cable toward his victims.

It was impossible to guess at his real identity. He was dressed in garage coveralls. A white silk mask hid his face. And on his head, like a white concealing blur, was a woman's bathing cap.

Number One had not taken any chances of betraying his grim identity, even to the thugs who worked for him. He had seen Vincent's car in the garage above and had suspected peril.

He had not only captured Vic Marquette, the government's ace Secret Service man, but fate had handed him an even greater gift Harry Vincent and The Shadow lay sprawled and helpless under his gloating eyes!

CHAPTER V. WHITE ORCHIDS

EVELYN STANDISH was frightened. But not a trace of the fear that flooded her heart showed on her lovely face as she moved gracefully about the Standish ballroom.

Her thoughts were centered on the handsome, uniformed figure of her father. She was unable to see him. His absence sent a flood of relief through Evelyn. Her purpose was not to find Colonel Standish, but to avoid him. She had an uneasy feeling that he had sensed it. He had hovered near her all evening.

It was her brother that Evelyn wished to talk to. Roy was standing quietly near the refreshment table, his steady glance urging her to come over. But Evelyn's slight frown was a message of caution.

A tall, wooden-faced man in servants' dress stood in a doorway. This was Noble, the colonel's butler.

"Have you seen my father?" Evelyn asked him.

"I believe the colonel went upstairs for a few moments," Noble said. "Shall I tell him you wish to talk with him?"

"No. It doesn't matter. I'll see him later."

Evelyn turned and went toward the refreshment table where her brother waited. She drank a glass of punch that Roy offered her, and then the two drifted away together.

"Dad's upstairs," she whispered.

"Good! This fellow Vic Marquette seems to be missing, too."

"Marquette?" Evelyn was surprised at the intensity in her brother's tone. "Why are you worried about Marquette? He's merely a harmless government clerk."

"Don't you believe it! I happen to know that he's a Secret Service agent, one of the best in Washington. We've got to be careful."

He glanced toward the doorway where Noble had been standing. The butler was now gone. Roy vanished

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discreetly through the curtained exit. A moment later, Evelyn followed him.

They met in a dim alcove where they had complete privacy. Evelyn's low murmur was jerky;

"Did you know that Walter Roscoe is dead?"

"Yes." Roy shrugged grimly. "I heard about it this afternoon. The police seem to be trying to cover it up. But I don't think the letters have been found. In fact, I know the police haven't got them or the newspapers."

The letters to which Roy referred had been written to Roscoe by his sister Evelyn. She had told Roy the whole foolish story only a week earlier, when Roscoe had dropped his gentleman's mask and demanded blackmail.

Evelyn had fallen desperately in love with the playboy. Or she had thought so, anyway. She had written him letters that would embarrass and humiliate her, if they were printed in the newspapers.

Roscoe had threatened to sell them unless he was paid a large sum of money for their return. It was an impossible demand to comply with. Evelyn's allowance was small. Roy's salary as a lieutenant wasn't much larger. And the blackmailer's price was enormous.

Now Roscoe was dead and someone else had seized the compromising letters. This was the alarming news that Roy told his terrified sister.

"I'm afraid the death of Walter Roscoe has only increased our difficulties," Roy muttered harshly. "The theft of those letters may have been a deliberate trick to force you into a criminal conspiracy against our own country!"

Evelyn gasped. "I I don't understand."

Roy's jaw was like rock.

"Father now has in his possession," Roy told her in a low murmur, "a secret army map of the United States coast defenses. It shows gun emplacements, emergency air fields, radio and power units everything a foreign nation needs for a successful invasion. That map is here in this house! Father brought it here last night, after a secret conference with the president and the secretary of war at the president's fishing camp in Maryland."

"But –"

"Don't you see? If spies have stolen those letters you wrote to Roscoe, it isn't because they want blackmail. They want that defense map! They know you and I haven't any large sum of money. The price they will ask to save your reputation will be the delivery of that map!"

Evelyn's face lifted proudly.

"Do they think for a moment that I'd betray my country, even at the risk of ruining my own personal life?"

"It's grimmer than that," Roy said. "If blackmail fails, they'll try murder. They'd kill you and me without hesitation. They might even murder father!"

Evelyn swayed, her face like chalk. "What am I to do?"

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"Nothing. You keep out of it. Leave it to me."

"I won't let you risk your life, Roy. If any danger is to be faced, I insist that I –"

EVELYN stopped talking abruptly. Someone was coming down the hall. Roy began to chuckle mildly and relate some idle bit of gossip. Evelyn took the cue.

Noble passed by with a quick glance at the pair. Their faces were still pale, but if the butler saw anything amiss, it didn't show in his countenance.

Roy went back to the ballroom, leaving Evelyn shaken and upset. By her own personal folly, she had risked her father's life. She had placed her loyal brother in a spot where treason to his country seemed the only way to protect his sister's good name.

Evelyn shivered. She went slowly to the ladies' powder room to freshen up and conceal the haggard tension about her eyes.

The room was crowded. Clarita Rondo was there. So was Miriam Hudson. The air was filled with cigarette smoke and careless laughter. Evelyn was gayer than any of them as she used lipstick and powder.

But when she returned to the chromium shelf where she had left her beaded bag, she made an alarming discovery. Her bag had been closed when she laid it down. It was open now.

Inside was a folded slip of paper. Evelyn read it:

If you want letters back, stand in front of tapestry, south end

of ballroom and light cigarette at wrong end. Signal will be white

orchid. Pick it up and obey further directions.

Evelyn glanced about the powder room. Most of the beautifully gowned women had already left. Any of them could have written the note.

She went back to the ballroom with a beating heart, watched the south wall where an enormous tapestry hung. She walked deliberately to the spot and stood with her back to the wall piece.

Opening her evening bag, she took out a cigarette, held it extended in one hand while she pretended to fumble for a match pad. Almost instantly, a man approached. It was Mike Porter. His smile was pleasant and friendly as he offered her the flame of his silver lighter. But before the flame could touch the tobacco, Porter's cheery laugh boomed.

"Wait a minute! You've got the wrong end in your mouth. I hope you're not planning to smoke the cork tip!"

Evelyn laughed too. Her voice was unsteady, as she said, "How silly of me!"

Porter grinned. A moment later, he excused himself and drifted away. Evelyn stood there uncertainly. The message in her handbag had told her to pick up an orchid. How could she pick it up if it wasn't first dropped?

Looking around, Evelyn noticed that a woman near the double doors of the man corridor was leaving the party. Noble, the butler, was helping her to adjust her wrap. Evelyn saw that it was Miriam Hudson. The

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debutante was wearing a spray of white orchids!

She halted at the street entry and beckoned smilingly to Evelyn. Noble was already opening the door.

"It's been a lovely party, my dear," Miriam said. "Sorry I have to leave so soon. Give your father my very best regards."

As she stepped outside into the chilly darkness, the pin that held her corsage caught against the door jamb. Her orchids fell to the floor. Noble picked them up, but Miriam Hudson seemed unconscious of her loss. She was hurrying across the sidewalk to where her car was parked.

Noble started to follow her, but Evelyn took the orchids quickly from his outstretched hand.

"I'll go," she said. "I forgot something I wanted to ask her."

Miriam Hudson looked puzzled as Evelyn hurried to the curb, shivering in her thin evening gown.

"Your orchids. You dropped them!"

"So I did. It doesn't matter. I was through with them anyway."

"May I keep them?"

"Of course!"

"Is that all you have to say?" Evelyn persisted.

"What else is there to say? Good night, dear."

She stepped coolly into her limousine and slammed the door.

EVELYN stood there, watching the sleek car purr away through the darkness. But as she waited uncertainly, holding the expensive flowers, a taxicab slid quickly abreast of her and halted. The hackman threw open his door and gestured for her to enter.

"Hurry it up, lady!" he growled.

Evelyn didn't like his appearance; he looked more like a mobster than a licensed cab driver. But she had gone too far now to hesitate. She got into the cab. It whizzed promptly away with her.

The ride was a brief one. It ended in the downtown business district of Washington. Evelyn was surprised when she saw the place to which she had been taken. She had been here many times before. It was the swanky beauty shop run by Madame Alyce.

The hackman escorted her to the door, a concealed gun ready for trouble. But the hour was late and no pedestrians passed.

Madame Alyce herself greeted Evelyn. Locking the street door, she led the girl through the empty shop to a soundproof room at the rear. It was the same room where the unfortunate Jane Purdy had received her last fatal code message for Number One.

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Madame Alyce wasted no time. She spoke curtly.

"Your presence here proves that you're desperately anxious to recover certain letters which you wrote to the late Walter Roscoe. You can have them back, if you're willing to pay the price."

"How much?" Evelyn faltered. "I haven't much money, but –"

"I don't want money," Madame Alyce said coolly. "My terms are really very simple. All you have to do is to accept a gift from me and promise to obey certain orders when you get them later on."

"A gift?"

"Yes. Do you agree?"

Evelyn Standish nodded. Madame Alyce took a small package from a drawer of her desk and opened it. The contents of that package amazed Evelyn. She found herself staring at a white silk swim suit, a bathing cap, a silk mask with slitted eye holes, and a pair of rubber-soled beach shoes.

In spite of her fear, Evelyn smiled at the ridiculousness of such a gift in the middle of winter. But there was no smile on the taut lips of Madame Alyce. She rewrapped the parcel and handed it to her visitor.

"Take this and return home. Say nothing to anyone. Hide it until you're told when and where to use it. If you obey, the letters you so foolishly wrote to Walter Roscoe will be returned to you. That is all for tonight."

In a daze, Evelyn found herself escorted out to the waiting taxicab. The ugly-faced hackman drove her silently back to the Standish home. But she didn't enter by the front door. She was afraid of meeting her brother Roy. Evelyn didn't want to have to explain the desperate thing she had done tonight. So she entered by a side door, using a small passkey.

Roy Standish was waiting just inside the entry. He had seen her leave the party, and suspecting danger, had waited here at the side door for her return.

ROY'S eyes were stern as he gazed at the package his sister was carrying. He had no intention of allowing Evelyn to take any risks with a murderous spy gang because of her desire not to involve him in a mess of her own making. He demanded to see what was in the package.

Evelyn refused.

"If you don't trust me," Roy muttered swiftly, "I'll take matters into my own hands!"

"What do you mean?"

He didn't reply. With his handsome face set in stubborn lines, he left his sister abruptly. She heard him talking quietly to a man beyond the shadow of the staircase, then both men moved out of earshot.

Clutching the parcel to her breast, Evelyn fled silently to the staircase. She hurried upstairs, more determined than ever to keep Roy out of peril.

Madame Alyce's grim gift she hid in her room. Then she returned to the ballroom.

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Apparently, no one but Roy and the butler had noticed her queer absence from the party. She knew that Noble, trained to discretion, would never open his mouth. Roy, she felt, she could handle as soon as she got a chance to talk calmly to him.

Smilingly, she allowed a man to circle her waist and take her into the dance. It was the talkative Jim Whelan. She was glad Whelan had asked her to dance, rather than some younger and more observant man. Whelan was so busy paying her long-winded compliments that he did not notice her repressed fright.

The Shadow would not have been fooled. But at this particular moment, The Shadow was miles away on the other side of Washington. He was fighting desperately to save his life, and that of Harry Vincent and Vic Marquette, from an unknown master of crime whom Evelyn Standish had just agreed to serve!

CHAPTER VI. ALIBI FOR MURDER

THE SHADOW was lying face downward at the foot of a cunningly camouflaged elevator pit in an empty garage. Harry Vincent lay alongside him. A strong whiff of brownish vapor from the gun of a master spy had dropped them in a senseless heap.

Their assailant stood over them, chuckling in a metallic murmur.

He had never seen Vincent before. But he recognized the black cloak and slouch hat of The Shadow. Luck had played very prettily into his hands. By spreading a net for Vic Marquette, he had bagged the most dangerous single enemy of crime in the world The Shadow himself!

He lifted The Shadow's head and peered at his face. The scrutiny told him nothing. Long practice in controlling his facial muscles enabled The Shadow to appear quite differently from the dapper gentleman who called himself Lamont Cranston.

But The Shadow was not actually unconscious. He had apparently crumpled as helplessly as Vincent. But his bent arm was cushioned under his face. He had pressed his mouth and nose tightly against this quickly improvised mask. It would have availed him nothing against the reek of the brownish gas, except for one circumstance. The gas was highly volatile, owing to its peculiar ingredients. It had evaporated almost instantly.

The spy turned, chuckling, toward the side of the pit. The motion exposed his back to attack, but The Shadow never moved. To go into action now would be to doom the life of the captured Vic Marquette.

So The Shadow waited.

A panel opened presently in the side of the pit. Two men peered. They were the hard, pitiless faces of professional killers. But when they saw the black-robed captive, both gunmen uttered a yell of fear.

"The Shadow!"

"Pick him up, Lou," the masked man said harshly. "Carl, you take care of the other one!"

The Shadow and Vincent were carried through the dark opening in the shaft to a lighted room that had been hollowed out beneath the real cellar of the garage. Its floor was stone. The gunman named Carl threw The Shadow headlong with a jarring bump.

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The Shadow allowed his body to fall limply, ignoring the pain of the impact. Lying alongside the unconscious figure of Harry Vincent, he was able to peer past Vincent's hunched shoulder without betraying himself.

He saw the unconscious figure of Vic Marquette tied tightly in a chair. Vic's head hung forward on his chest. It was easy to tell why he had fainted. On his bared feet were the ugly marks of burns. He had been systematically tortured until unconsciousness had mercifully blotted out his senses.

"Did he talk?" the masked spy snarled.

"Not a damn word!" Carl replied. "He bit his lips until they bled, and said nothing."

"The guy is tough," Lou chimed in. "Maybe we better wake him up and hand him some more. Or we might try some of the same stuff on The Shadow!"

"We haven't time," the spy muttered. "I've got to get back where I came from, before my absence is noticed. I want them killed and dropped out of sight all three of them. Get busy!"

Both thugs obeyed. Lou's keen knife slashed Vic Marquette's bonds, letting him pitch to the floor. Carl was already rolling an empty metal cask to the center of the room. He picked up Vic and jammed him upright into the cask.

Lou busied himself at the side of a shallow mixing vat. Into it he poured sand and cement and slaked the mixture with water. Working rapidly, he seized a shovel and began to dump the stuff into the barrel, around the unconscious Vic. Carl helped him.

WHILE they worked, The Shadow kept his hidden gaze on the figure of their leader. It was impossible to see the man's head or face. The silk mask and the bathing cap prevented that. The garage coveralls he wore hid his clothing underneath. But there were things impossible to hide that the keen eyes of The Shadow instantly noted.

For instance, the man's shoes. They were expensive patent-leather dancing pumps. No man would wear such flimsy footgear on a cold wintry night, unless he had raced at top speed from a social affair. The shoes suggested to The Shadow that beneath the bulky coveralls were evening clothes.

Was the unknown spy a hypocritical guest at the colonel's reception?

To that question The Shadow added another one that was infinitely more daring. Was the masked criminal Colonel Henry Standish himself?

The gloved hands of the spy chief gave The Shadow this disturbing clue. They were white gloves, although the palms of them were stained and blackened by the grease from the elevator cable down which the spy had slid. Civilians at a formal party did not wear white gloves. But an army officer would.

Colonel Standish had been in the very room where Marquette had been slugged. He had then disappeared. He could easily have followed his victim to the garage. The clothing under those bulky coveralls might very well be an army uniform.

It was a logical link to the fake telegram which had lured good-natured Jim Whelan away from his office at the department of the interior. The burglar who had rifled the desk of Whelan's crooked secretary had been an army officer. But what loot was he after? As yet, The Shadow had no answer.

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But he sensed treason. If the unknown spy and Colonel Standish were the same personality, it meant that some vital secret of the United States was at stake.

Thugs had been working busily while The Shadow made these lightning deductions. Vic Marquette's body was encased in wet, slimy concrete inside the metal cask. The stuff was like a wet ripple below the level of his unconscious lips. It would harden swiftly to rock. The Shadow guessed what would happen then.

But he was unable as yet to risk a move. Criminal eyes watched his limp body on the floor with hawklike suspicion. Even unconscious, he was a menace that kept their nerves on edge.

The metallic voice of the masked spy crackled suddenly.

"Hurry it up! We'll load the barrels on that covered truck upstairs. It's only a short drive to the Potomac River. You boys know where the water is deepest. You've been there before."

Carl nodded. Lou uttered a curt grunt. The two thugs heaved up Harry Vincent and thrust him feet first into the second cask. The masked chief kept his gaze on The Shadow.

The Shadow tensed. He was ready for an upward leap at the slightest opportunity.

That opportunity came soon. The stolid Carl dropped his shovel and turned to open a fresh bag of cement. He asked a question concerning the safest route to be taken to the Potomac River. The masked chief's profile turned briefly as he answered.

The Shadow's body launched itself upward in a slanting leap. His shoulders struck the startled spy behind the knees, toppling him with a powerful heave.

Quickly, The Shadow seized the shovel which Carl had dropped when he turned toward the sack of cement. He ducked a blow from Lou's dripping spade that would have split his skull had it landed.

The Shadow didn't hesitate. He was fighting for his life, and the lives of two others. It was kill, or be killed! The steel edge of his shovel struck the murderous Lou squarely against the back of the neck. It snapped his spine.

As Lou collapsed, The Shadow pivoted. The masked man was still on hands and knees, clutching at something concealed beneath the slit in his coveralls. But Carl, the second thug, had already drawn an automatic pistol.

He swung its muzzle viciously toward The Shadow. His finger pressed the trigger. Flame spat in a vivid streak.

The Shadow used his shovel with the sure skill of a soldier in bayonet combat. He had swung its edge as a weapon of offense. Now, he used its flat side in an instinctive parry against death.

There was a loud spannung as Carl's bullet struck the flat blade. It was deflected toward the wall, where it buried itself. Before Carl could fire again, The Shadow shoved his improvised weapon forward in a stroke that any soldier would have recognized instantly as the "long point" in bayonet attack. It caught Carl just above the chin, smashing in his teeth and dropping him in a moaning huddle to the floor.

The Shadow grabbed Carl's gun. Before he could fire it, the masked spy had leveled a queer, wide-muzzled weapon which he had whipped from beneath his bulky garment. There was a faint plop. A gush of brownish

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gas swirled in a funnel-like cloud about The Shadow's head.

He threw himself desperately backward, knowing the lethal swiftness of that poisonous vapor. The spy fled through the panel that led to the lower pit of the elevator shaft. Dazed from the few brownish tendrils of poison gas that had seeped into his panting lungs, The Shadow was unable to hinder that escape.

His first coherent thought was the life and safety of Harry Vincent and Vic Marquette. He upset the metal casks and dragged the men out. The fresh cement had not yet hardened. They were filthy with the sticky stuff, but both were still breathing.

The Shadow had no time to revive them. He scribbled a hasty note on a sheet of paper and jammed the message into Harry's fingers. The message read:

Revive Vic. Say nothing to police. Tell Vic to return as soon

as possible to Standish home. Await further orders at hotel.

The Shadow raced toward the pit of the elevator shaft. The pit was empty. The vibrating length of the elevator cable showed the route the fleeing spy had taken.

Hand over hand, The Shadow climbed up the same slippery cable. When he reached the garage floor, he found the double doors that led to the street were wide open. But the truck and Vincent's sedan were still there. The spy had fled in his own car, the same one in which he had sneaked away from the Standish home.

The Shadow was certain of this. His grim laughter rasped as he saw a discarded garment lying on the floor. It was the suit of coveralls that had hidden the actual garments of the criminal. He was racing back to a fashionable ball to protect his alibi.

The Shadow slid behind the wheel of the sedan, drove out of the garage and headed for the empty house in the rear of the Standish mansion. The spy had undoubtedly left that way. He would return in the same manner. The Shadow hoped to nail him before he could make good on his alibi.

When The Shadow arrived, he saw no sign of a living creature as he vaulted the fence that separated the two houses. But an instant later, the desperately wriggling legs of a man were visible. They vanished through the side window of the Standish home, the same one through which Vic Marquette had been kidnapped.

The Shadow paused for an instant in the darkness of the ground. His hand probed in the shrubbery and recovered his empty briefcase. He raced with it to the window.

Climbing noiselessly into the room, he tiptoed across. The halfway outside was dimly lit. No one was there, but the curtain that closed off the hall from the ballroom was still quivering slightly. The fugitive had stepped through; to mingle innocently with the guests.

THE SHADOW didn't follow at once. Rapidly, he stripped black gloves from his lean fingers. His cloak and slouch had were discarded. The entire disguise was crammed into the briefcase, which he quickly concealed in a dark angle beneath the back of the staircase.

It was Lamont Cranston who pushed the curtain aside and walked quietly into the ballroom. Glancing quietly about the room, he saw the very man who might unwittingly give him the vital information he needed. He walked up behind Jim Whelan and clapped him jovially on the shoulder.

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Whelan turned with a smile. "Hello, Cranston! I was just beginning to wonder where you were."

"I was looking for Colonel Standish," Cranston said easily. "I thought I'd pay my respects before we left. Have you seen him?"

"He was here just a moment ago," Whelan said. "He came in and went out again. Perhaps his daughter can tell us where he is."

"It doesn't matter."

Cranston dissuaded the well-meaning Whelan from dragging him over to talk to Evelyn Standish. Her brother Roy held far more interest for him. But Roy was nowhere to be seen.

Cranston paused to talk politely with Mike Porter. The lobbyist was friendly, but his smile seemed strained. And his breathing was uneven, as though he were slightly out of breath. Porter himself drew joking attention to it.

"I must be getting old," he said. "I've been dancing more than I should tonight, and I'm beginning to feel it."

Cranston wondered. Porter's body looked fit. There wasn't a quiver in the hand that lifted a cigarette calmly to his lips.

A tiny bit of white thread on one of those fingers drew the attention of The Shadow. He thought of the gloves that had been worn by the masked spy. The thread on Porter's finger might easily have come from the inside of a white glove.

The Shadow had suspected either Colonel Standish or his grim-faced son. But the spy could just as easily have been Mike Porter, cunningly wearing white gloves in an effort to pin the guilt on a military man.

Lamont Cranston had no time to speculate further.

There was a sudden hoarse shout from the curtained doorway at the foot of the stairs. A man came rushing into the ballroom. His face was contorted; he knocked the dancers to right and left as he advanced.

It was Colonel Henry Standish!

He raised his arms in a commanding gesture. Cranston noticed both hands were bare.

"Stop the music!" Standish shouted.

In the sudden hush that followed, he tried to talk. But his face was ghastly. He uttered a shrill, choking sound, then he pitched forward on his face in a faint.

CHAPTER VII. EYES IN DARKNESS

EVERY eye in the crowded ballroom was drawn in horrified amazement to the unconscious figure of Colonel Standish. Lamont Cranston alone retained his presence of mind. He was the only one in the room who saw the colonel's son suddenly appear from the staircase corridor.

Roy Standish had evidently expected trouble. His face was as white as paper even before he stared toward the

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crumpled figure of his father. Evelyn Standish was already on her knees beside the colonel. Roy joined her, thrusting aside the excited onlookers that impeded him.

A voice cried, "What on earth happened to him?"

Evelyn raised a tragic, tear-stained face.

"I don't know," she gasped. "He never fainted before in his life! He –"

Roy's crisp voice interrupted her. There was a whiplash in it that silenced Evelyn. His hard glance was bright with an unspoken warning for her to hold her tongue.

"It's not really unusual," Roy said calmly. "Colonel Standish's heart has been bothering him. There's nothing to be alarmed about. See – he's beginning to recover."

The colonel's eyes were opening slowly. He gasped, tried to speak. But Roy laid a gentle finger across his lips.

"Move back, everyone! Give him air! I'm sorry to have to break up the party, but I know you'll forgive me if I suggest that it will be better for father if all of you will leave as soon as you can."

There was a sympathetic murmur. People began to withdraw. Hats and coats were hurriedly handed out by Noble. He listened deferentially to the shocked words of sympathy from the departing guests, but there was a spark in the depths of his placid eyes. It was the only way that the butler ever permitted himself to smile.

Jim Whelan had stuck close to Cranston's elbow in the midst of all this hubbub. But in the press of people at the cloakroom, he lost sight of Cranston for a few minutes. Looking for him he was informed by the butler that Cranston had departed.

Noble was quite sincere in what he said. He had seen Cranston moving sedately through the crowd toward the street door a few moments earlier. But the statement he made to Jim Whelan was incorrect.

Lamont Cranston was still inside the Standish mansion.

He had doubled cleverly back from the front door, shielded from the butler's observation by the confusion that attended the departure of so many people at once. Gaining the corridor back of the curtain without being seen, he darted at once to the dark angle beneath the staircase, where he had left his briefcase. Quickly, he donned cloak, hat and gloves of black.

An instant later, The Shadow was ascending the stairs with noiseless stealth. He didn't have to waste precious time deciding which of these upstairs rooms to investigate. All the rooms that opened upon the hall were dark except one. The door of this latter room was wide open. Bright light streamed into the hall.

Through that patch of brightness The Shadow flitted. A brief glance showed him that the room was empty. Keen eyes circled the chamber, taking in every detail of the room.

It was obviously Colonel Standish's private study. His photograph was on a desk in the corner. An oil painting of him in uniform hung on one of the walls. There was a closet, an ornamental screen in front of a wide fireplace, a bay window overlooking the dark grounds below.

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The window and the oil painting were the two things that immediately interested The Shadow. The window was open from the bottom, allowing a draft of freezing air to blow into the room.

To The Shadow, that opened window didn't seem normal. A man sitting at the desk would have his back directly in the current of cold wind. The Shadow's first deduction was that the window had been opened by an intruder from the outside.

But the oil painting was the first thing he examined. He was certain that it had been very recently disturbed. It didn't hang properly. One corner was tilted a bit higher than the other.

Lifting it aside, The Shadow discovered the reason. The painting was not on the wall merely for ornamentation. Back of it was a tiny safe.

The safe had been smashed open. Its door hung on a twisted hinge.

AN ordinary detective would have assumed instantly that a burglar had profited by the dance being held downstairs. The open window helped to prove that. But The Shadow's conclusion was quite different.

To him, the theft of whatever had been stolen from the wall safe looked like an inside job. In spite of the wrenched steel door of the safe, its lock had not been broken! Someone with a knowledge of the combination had opened the door. The smashing had occurred afterward. a trick to fool the police.

The open window, too, was mere camouflage. A burglar could easily have escaped across the sill and descended to the grounds below, using the tough vines that covered the side of the house. But there were no marks on the sill. The tiny beam of The Shadow's flashlight proved that the vines outside had not been disturbed by the descending weight of a thief.

The crime was an inside job!

Colonel Standish could easily have faked the burglary himself, using his dramatic swoon in the ballroom as an alibi to cover his guilt. The colonel's son was also a suspect. Both Roy and his father had been away from the ballroom at the time the safe must have been opened.

And Mike Porter what of him? Was this crime the answer to Porter's queer shortness of breath when he had told Lamont Cranston that he guessed he was getting old?

A sudden ring of the downstairs doorbell spurred The Shadow to greater speed. Voices were talking below, but the murmurs were indistinguishable. The Shadow completed his search of the room.

He opened the closet door. Instantly, he sprang backward. The figure of a man lurched grimly at him from inside the closet!

The Shadow's hand closed on the man's throat. But he held his grip for only an instant. There was no fight in that hidden foe. His forward lurch was the helpless motion of a lifeless body.

Someone had killed him and jammed him upright inside the narrow closet. Staring at the contorted face of the corpse, The Shadow drew a hissing breath of understanding. He recognized that sullen scoundrel. So would Vic Marquette, if he had been present.

From below came the loud sound of voices. People were moving toward the staircase. Unless The Shadow acted swiftly, he was trapped in a burglarized room, with a dead man to explain.

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With quick movement, he snapped off the room lights. Turning, he glided through the darkness to where the body of the dead man lay. Swiftly, he dragged it across the room. There was a faint rustle, a thump then silence.

THE ring of the doorbell a few moments earlier had been the announcement of the arrival of Vic Marquette.

The Shadow's message had warned Vic to expect trouble in the Standish mansion; and the tableau he found proved it. All the guests were gone. Colonel Standish, white-faced, lay on a sofa. Roy and Evelyn were watching him with wary eyes.

Vic's arrival loosed the colonel's tongue. He gasped out the misfortune that had come to him. His private safe had been robbed. An important army map that had been intrusted to his care had been stolen. It was a map that contained the key to every inch of coast defense on the Atlantic from Maine to Florida!

Vic's jaw was grim as he snapped a question at Noble, the butler. "Where are the other servants? Bring them here."

He learned, to his surprise, that Noble and a woman cook were the only servants employed regularly by Colonel Standish. Swiftly, Vic explained what had happened to him earlier in the evening. He told of the attack that had been made on him, followed by his kidnapping. He described the servant who had lured him to that unseen attack.

Noble uttered an exclamation.

"It must have been Parker! He was an extra man, hired only for this evening. I haven't been able to find him. He left without even waiting for his pay."

"Did you send Parker to tell me to see you?" Marquette asked Standish.

The colonel's reply was slow. "Of course not!"

Evelyn glanced at Roy for a swift instance. Roy avoided her glance. Vic appeared not to notice; but his tone became a shade grimmer.

"Let's go upstairs. I want to see that safe."

Reaching the study, Vic switched on the lights and examined the safe and the open window. He made the same deductions The Shadow had, but he didn't disclose his suspicion that the theft was an inside job. He examined the empty closet and found nothing.

It was Roy Standish who walked suddenly to the screen that closed off the fireplace. Jerking it aside, he uttered a cry of horror. A dead man was lying sprawled in the opening of the fireplace.

Noble echoed Roy's cry. "It's Parker! He's been murdered!"

Vic Marquette recognized the sullen face of the servant. It confirmed Vic's suspicion of an inside job. But it deepened the mystery of the strange burglary. Were there two crooks in the spy conspiracy? Had someone used Parker as a stooge, and then killed him to shut his mouth forever?

Vic dragged Parker's body away from the fireplace, gave orders it was not to be touched. He made a search of the room, then ordered everyone downstairs. Vic went with them. He wanted to phone for aid.

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When the room was emptied, The Shadow appeared from down the chimney. He had wedged himself in it, to overhear the conversation.

The Shadow made for the window, stepped through and started lowering himself on the vines clinging to the house wall.

Gaining the ground unseen, he made his way toward the front of the Standish mansion. Hidden there, he watched the arrival of more visitors. Vic had sent an urgent call. Secret Service men had answered that call. This was a case in which the police would play no part. The disappearance of the coast-defense map must be kept out of the newspapers. Too much was at stake.

ROY and Evelyn Standish conferred with these quiet investigators upstairs. After a while they were dismissed, told to wait below. That suited both of them. It gave them opportunity for a whispered talk together.

In a faltering voice, Evelyn accused her brother of stealing the map. Roy gulped. It was impossible to lie to Evelyn. And besides, he needed her help. He admitted sullenly that he had faked a burglary and stolen the map.

Evelyn flung a hand over her mouth to choke back a cry of terror. "You're lying! You're trying to protect someone someone who killed Parker to cover his tracks."

Roy guessed the dreadful thought that had risen in her tortured mind. She suspected her own father of the crime!

"It wasn't the... the person you think," Roy said, tonelessly. "I did it. But I didn't commit murder. I don't know who killed Parker. He wasn't there when I cracked the safe."

"Why did you do it?" Evelyn moaned.

"Because I don't intend to have your life ruined. Where did you go tonight when you slipped away from the party? Tell me the truth, or I'll go upstairs right now and confess to Vic Marquette that I stole the map!"

His threat opened her sealed lips. She told Roy everything that had happened on her visit to the beauty shop of Madame Alyce. He nodded grimly.

"We'll go through with it," he said, in a savage undertone. "But I'll deliver the map to the spies!"

"I won't let you. It's treason! I'd rather sacrifice –"

Roy's haggard lips began to smile strangely. It was impossible to tell if he were speaking the truth, or merely reassuring his terrified sister.

"I have a plan which I think may fool the spy gang. Where's your handbag? I want to see the note that ordered you to pick up the white orchids."

Evelyn's bag was on a nearby table. She opened it with trembling fingers, half expecting the note to be gone

It was! But the mystery was deeper than ever. Another note had been left in place of the first. Tucked inside this second note was a blank visiting card. Someone had gained access to Evelyn's unwatched bag during the excitement that had followed the collapse of Colonel Standish.

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Roy snatched the blank card from his sister's icy fingers and turned it over. There was no name engraved on the other side, but something infinitely more sinister. It was a crude drawing of a face. It looked like the thing a child might draw. Roy stared at it with a hissing intake of breath.

Evelyn stifled a hysterical laugh of wonder. She had no idea of the meaning of this strange symbol. She didn't know that a series of those tiny faces had been the death warrant for the beautiful Jane Purdy.

The note that accompanied the card read as follows:

Report alone ten a.m. tomorrow at Women's Athletic Club. Bring your gift and the map. Present card at door to woman who will cough twice. Failure to obey will mean death.

Roy Standish uttered an oath of dismay. Like Evelyn, he realized instantly that his plan to deliver the map himself had been nullified by a cunning criminal. The Women's Athletic Club was a swanky organization patronized exclusively by women. No man was allowed inside the door. All attendants were female.

Evelyn had not been given her "gift" of a silken bathing suit as an idle gesture. A crimson spy chief expected her to keep a rendezvous at a spot where she could expect no help from her brother.

She and Roy stared at each other. Neither of them noticed the window behind them. It had been lifted an imperceptible half inch from the bottom. Outside that narrow opening a pair of burning eyes were peering. An instant later, they were gone.

The Shadow had completed his business at the mansion of Colonel Henry Standish. The threads of treachery and deceit were beginning to form a preliminary pattern in his calm mind.

He was ready for a shrewd move against a powerful foe!

CHAPTER VIII. DELAYED DOOM

A FEW minutes before ten o'clock the next morning, a car parked at the curb diagonally across from the entrance of the Women's Athletic Club.

The car was driven by Evelyn Standish. Roy Standish was with her, but he was not readily visible from the doorway of the club. He sat well back on the rear seat. He wore a suit of dark civilian clothes. The brim of his felt hat was drawn low on his forehead. Evelyn didn't turn when she spoke to him. But one arm stretched lazily across the top of the front seat and the hand extended itself rearward.

"I'm ready, Roy. Let me have the first envelope."

Nervously, Roy slid two brown envelopes from an inside pocket. Neither was sealed. He opened them and examined their contents. Each was a jagged half of a military map of the eastern seaboard of the United States. Together, they told a coherent story of the army's defense plans in case of a foreign invasion from across the Atlantic. Separately, they were meaningless.

Only when both edges were joined could the true purport of the map be understood.

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Roy Standish intended to force an unknown spy to return Evelyn's letters, which the spy had stolen from the body of the murderous blackmailer, Walter Roscoe.

Roy's reasoning was simple. If the spy wanted the complete map, he would have to hand over the letters when Evelyn brought him the first half of the army document. Having received the blackmail letters Evelyn would return immediately with the second half of the map. A note to this effect was to go with the first half.

"Are you sure this map is obsolete?" Evelyn whispered.

"Of course!" Roy's tone was hurried. "This map was replaced by a new one brought back by dad from his secret meeting with the secretary of war and the president. The two halves in these brown envelopes would do an enemy power no good."

"But you told me you stole the real map, too," Evelyn persisted. "Why was it necessary to do that? Couldn't you have left it in the safe and spared dad the worry and terror of thinking it's gone?"

Roy's laugh was harshly impatient.

"I had to take both, you little fool! Don't you see? If only the obsolete map was stolen, there would have been no alarm. The spies, listening for rumors of a mysterious theft, would have heard none. They'd have suspected trickery. Now, they won't."

"Where have you hidden the real map?"

"I won't tell you," Roy said curtly. "If you knew where it was hidden, you'd be exposed to even more danger than you are now. You'll have to trust me."

Evelyn shivered. But she accepted her brother's reassurance. She took one of the brown envelopes from him and placed it in her handbag.

A MOMENT later, Evelyn was hurrying across the street, entering the stone portal of the Women's Athletic Club. As she crossed the threshold, a woman attendant smiled cheerfully.

"Are you a regular member, miss?"

"No, but I –"

Evelyn fumbled in her handbag for the queer entry card that had been given her. As she did so a second woman attendant coughed placidly. Twice!

Black eyes stared at Evelyn from a starchy, expressionless face. This second attendant seemed to be a superior of the first.

She said quietly. "Miss Standish is a new member. I shall take care of her."

Her hand reached suddenly and took the card from Evelyn. She palmed it so that the crudely drawn face could not be seen by the other employee.

"This way, please."

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Evelyn followed her guide past the gymnasium to a rear corridor. The elevator operator was also a woman. She rode Evelyn and her silent guide to the basement.

The swimming pool, in the basement, was a huge, white-tiled enclosure thronged with bathers. Staring at the frankly revealing bathing suits of the club members, Evelyn could understand why no man was ever permitted to set foot inside the street portal. But not one of the suits she was seeing was white silk.

She was led past a row of dressing rooms, tiny enclosures with curtained doorways. Almost at the edge of the tiled pool were five larger rooms that had an aisle all to themselves. Evelyn's woman guide unlocked what looked like a stout metal door and motioned her to enter.

The room was large and unexpectedly pleasant. There was a rug on the floor. At one end was a tall mirror. There was a couch and a comfortable armchair. A small wardrobe contained hangers.

In the center of the room was a table on which rested something that looked like a small comptometer, except that it had only two buttons to press. One was red, the other white.

"When you're ready," the woman said in a low voice, "press the red button. When you've finished your interview, press the white button. That's all."

She turned and left. Evelyn drew the bolt of the door, locking it on the inside. An instant later, she heard a click on the outside. There were two locks. Evelyn couldn't leave now, even if she wished to.

Slipping off her clothing, she donned the costume that had been given her by Madame Alyce. She squirmed into the tight little swim suit, thrust her bare feet into the rubber-soled slippers. The bathing cap covered her hair completely. The silk mask did the same for her face.

Staring at herself in the tall mirror, she realized that no one could possibly recognize her.

Evelyn slid the flat brown envelope into the bosom of her swim suit. Walking quickly to the table, she pressed the red button.

There was no sound, no apparent result whatever. But when she turned toward the mirror, there wasn't any mirror! It had dropped vertically into a recessed slot in the floor.

Where the mirror had stood, a doorway was revealed. Steps led downward in a steep slant.

Evelyn began to descend. The mirror behind her lifted instantly, blotting out the doorway through which she had just passed. Filled with awe, she went down nearly thirty steps.

She guessed the amazing truth. She was descending a secret route to some unknown spot directly beneath the tiled swimming pool in the basement of the athletic club!

THE passage became level. A sudden rosy glow suffused the blank wall at the end. She stepped through an opening into a gorgeously appointed chamber.

Diffused light filled it like sunshine, although there were no windows. Drowsy music from a concealed radio made soft sounds. There were expensive oil paintings on the wall. Shelves were lined with books. It looked like the library of a millionaire's home.

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Five comfortable chairs faced a desk which stood against the wall where the music sounded. The desk was empty. But the five chairs drew Evelyn's gasping attention.

In four of them sat the most beautiful women Evelyn had ever seen. Their figures were garbed in the same skimpy bathing costume she herself wore. She wondered if one of the four could be Mike Porter's girl friend, Clarita Rondo; or Miriam Hudson, perhaps.

Masked eyes stared at her, but no word was spoken. Evelyn took the empty fifth chair.

Instantly, the music that floated through the air changed. It became harshly discordant, like a shrill chant of death. Then it ceased. The light blinked out into utter darkness. When it glowed again, Number One was seated behind the desk that faced the five chairs.

Evelyn's heart quailed as she stared at the dreadful figure. The contrast of the black satin Harlequin suit with the yellow, mummified face above a starched white ruff was like ghastly mockery. Number One laughed dryly, as if the mockery amused him. When he spoke it was in a soft, womanish tone.

"Thank you all for coming. I have bad news and good news. One of you lovely ladies was foolish enough to attempt treachery. It was necessary for me to kill her. But your number still remains five. The charming young lady in the fifth chair replaces a dead traitor.

"My business today is with this fifth servant. I summoned the rest of you here merely to repeat a solemn warning. The price of disobedience is death!"

His voice was womanish no longer. His metallic shout hung in the quiet air of the chamber like the notes of a brazen trumpet.

"You may go now all except Number Five. You will be told in the usual manner when to assemble again."

Like automatons, Evelyn's four companions rose. They moved toward the blank wall through which Evelyn had entered. As they approached it, four large rectangular patches of light glowed like pale rose on the wall. Each was the shape of a door.

The doors opened. Each of the four women stepped through a different exit. Then the rose glow on the wall faded.

Evelyn was left alone in the room, facing a corpse-like killer dressed in a Harlequin outfit.

"Come here, my dear." Number One's voice was gentle.

As she walked slowly toward the desk, terrified, Evelyn saw his scrutiny pass over her like a malignant flame. His murmur changed suddenly to the crackle of ice.

"Give me the envelope you brought!"

She drew it slowly from the tight bosom of her swim suit. Her heart was hammering with fright. Would Roy's note that accompanied the mutilated map enrage Number One to the pitch of murder?

Number One opened the envelope. Then he became dreadfully quiet. His gaze at the terrified Evelyn was like flint. She gritted her teeth to keep from fainting.

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"I see," Number One said finally. "Very clever! Your brother, of course, suggested this?"

Evelyn denied it wildly. She tried to take the blame on herself. A quick gesture silenced her.

"I accept the bargain," Number One said suddenly. Evelyn was conscious of mockery she couldn't understand. "Your letters will be returned before you leave this building. Take them out to the car in which your brother is waiting."

Evelyn's startled gasp at the exactness of his knowledge appeared to amuse Number One. The thin, mummyish lips writhed away from his teeth in a skull-like grin.

"It's my business to know everything and to take full advantage of that knowledge. As soon as you hand Roy the blackmail letters, he will give you the second envelope. Return here with it immediately. The woman to whom you showed your entry card will be instructed to admit you a second time. Now go!"

His black satin arm extended itself in a pointing gesture. Evelyn's eyes followed that gesture and she saw a rectangular rose glow leap on the wall at the end of the room. This time, only one door was outlined.

AS she stepped through the lighted opening, Evelyn glanced back. Number One was watching her with the cold rigidity of a corpse. Then, abruptly, the glow faded. All Evelyn could see was a blank wall behind her, ahead the narrow passage that led to steep steps.

Climbing them with frightened haste, she reached the rear of her dressing room. The vertical mirror dropped to admit her. Then it rose again. She had a queer feeling that she had just passed through an unreal nightmare.

But the package on the table was no dream. It was a collection of letters, held together with a stout rubber band. With trembling fingers, Evelyn examined the letters. They were the ones she had written to the suave blackmailer, Walter Roscoe. She counted them. None was missing.

Swiftly, she ripped off her rubber bathing cap, tossed her slitted mask to the floor, writhed out of the swim suit.

Like a soft vision of loveliness, she darted to the wardrobe and hastily donned her street attire. The skimpy disguise she had worn took up little room in her handbag. On top of it she crammed the package of love letters.

Her gaze turned toward the queer little comptometer machine on the table, with its red and its white button. She pressed the white one.

Footsteps sounded outside. There was a click as the outside lock turned. Evelyn had already released the inner bolt. The placid-faced woman attendant hardly glanced at her.

"This way, please."

They passed the swimming pool, still crowded with bathers. Evelyn noticed instantly a woman poised gracefully on a springboard. It was Clarita Rondo. She hadn't been visible the first time Evelyn had passed the pool. Nor had Miriam Hudson, who was standing idly nearby.

Neither of them, however, wore the white silk swim suits that Evelyn half expected to see. They both looked as sleek as seals in jet-black suits that clung to their bodies.

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A few minutes later, Evelyn Standish emerged into the sunlight of the street. Roy's car was still parked across from the club's entrance. He was just getting into the car. He had evidently left it for a few moments to stretch his legs.

Evelyn hurried over, certain that her movements were not under observation. But she was mistaken! Harry Vincent had seen her appear. Leaning idly against a brick wall, he watched her get into Roy's car and hand him a package of letters.

There was a brief delay, then Roy handed his sister a brown envelope which she placed in her handbag.

Harry was there by the orders of The Shadow. He knew exactly what was expected of him. As Evelyn recrossed the street, he moved from the curb to pass her. A sharp knife was palmed in his hand. He intended to jostle Evelyn, slash the bag loose from her grasp and make a swift getaway with the brown envelope.

Harry brushed close to the girl in the middle of the street. But before he could slash at Evelyn's dangling handbag, his plans were changed in the twinkling of an eye.

Death came roaring like a juggernaut at Harry and the startled girl. A swift car, that had seemingly appeared from nowhere, raced thunderously at them both in a murderous effort to run them down!

CHAPTER IX. THE BROWN ENVELOPE

EVELYN STANDISH screamed. She stood petrified with terror in the path of the onrushing murder car. Instinctively, Harry Vincent's hand shot out, grabbed her by the shoulder. The motion pivoted him, turning his face toward the killer's car.

He knew in that split-second of peril that the man behind the wheel was a deliberate murderer. Harry's clutch at Evelyn made them both stagger aside. The driver of the car twisted his wheel slightly. The car rushed straight at the two victims.

It was a black sedan. The face of the man who drove it was not easily identified. The peak of a cheap cap was drawn low on his forehead. The upturned collar of an overcoat covered his ears and shielded the lower half of his face. Harry had a dazed impression of a bony blank-looking face, with a thin, jutting nose.

Harry twisted his body between the girl and the roaring sedan, threw her headlong. It wasn't enough. Evelyn's terrified arms had wound themselves blindly about Harry's neck. The two plunged sideways together.

Almost instantly, the car struck them.

But Harry's prompt action averted death. The spinning front tires of the car missed their murderous aim. They failed to crush the two victims, as the killer had intended. What struck Harry's hunched shoulder was the whizzing blur of the car's left fender.

The next instant, Harry and Evelyn flew headlong through the air, landing in a tangled heap on the pavement. But the blow had been a glancing one. The intended victims had been thrown clear out of the path of the car.

As they rolled over and over, there was a shrill roar of power from the fleeing sedan. The hit-and-run murderer was making his escape.

Harry's aching body writhed to its knees. He tried to perceive the license numbers but the plate had been

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smearred with dirt. All he could see was that the plate was a District of Columbia license. Above it was a tiny plaque, something that looked like a small bronze shield.

In a moment, the street was a bedlam of sound. The thing had happened so fast that it had paralyzed spectators. Now, they began to run forward.

But no one approached Harry. Already up on his feet, he was obviously not badly hurt. Evelyn Standish lay face downward on the pavement. People dropped to their knees beside her. Gentle hands turned her over.

One of them was Roy Standish. Roy had watched the swift attempt on his sister's life from his own parked sedan. He had sat there as if incapable of motion. It was only when pedestrians raced out into the street that Roy went to the aid of his unconscious sister.

The excitement left Harry Vincent unobserved for a precious instant. He crouched swiftly downward toward the handbag that the girl had dropped. There was a brown envelope in that bag, that Harry had been ordered by The Shadow to get. Shielding the bag below his crouched body, Harry started to open it.

Then his eyes bulged. Someone else been ahead of him. The bag had been slashed by a sharp knife. The brown envelope was gone!

But Harry found something else that made his heart beat with excitement. His fingers clutched a tiny white card, on which was drawn a crude face. It looked like a child's drawing, but Harry suspected a sinister purpose behind that card. He slipped it deftly into his pocket before anyone noticed him.

HARRY moved quickly through the excited throng, assuring any who spoke to him that he had escaped serious injury and was all right. His gaze swept the throng, seeking a man with jet-black hair and a broken nose. Harry had caught only a momentary glimpse of the man, but he was certain the fellow was a thief.

The man had been the first spectator to rush to the assistance of Evelyn. He had been shoved aside by the rush of people who followed. Harry remembered distinctly that the fellow had paused for a lightning instant at the spot where Evelyn's handbag lay.

His hand was the only one that could possibly have slashed the handbag and stolen the brown envelope.

But where had he vanished so quickly? Harry's shrewd glance could find no present trace of him. The thought of the murder car drove the black-haired man temporarily from Harry's mind.

He recalled the tiny bronze shield he had seen above the smeared license plate. He knew now what it was. An army shield! the war department emblem affixed to cars owned by important army officers.

The thought staggered Vincent by its grim implication. Was Colonel Standish the driver of the murder car? Had he made a vicious attempt to kill his own daughter? Harry's answer was no. But it was an answer that did not absolve the colonel of guilt. The car was his. Harry had seen it in the Standish garage the night before and remembered it.

He was ready to make a shrewd guess as to the identity of the hired killer behind the wheel. He was certain the chauffeur was Noble, the hawk-nosed, wooden-faced butler of Colonel Standish.

The next instant, Harry Vincent saw the black-haired man who had robbed Evelyn's fallen handbag. He came out of a nearby doorway, where he had vanished during the height of the commotion. The crowd of spectators was breaking up. An ambulance had come and gone, taking away the still unconscious figure of Evelyn

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Standish. Her brother rode off in the ambulance with her.

The black-haired man who had come casually from a doorway was staring along the sidewalk in the direction of the Women's Athletic Club. His gaze seemed to be directed toward a car parked at the curb opposite the building next door to the club. The car was empty.

But a moment later, a heavy-set man emerged from the office building that adjoined the athletic club. The man was Mike Porter. He entered the car, but made no effort to start it. Obviously, he was waiting for someone.

The black-haired man began to move toward Porter's car. Harry was certain he was a thug in the pay of Porter. But he was unable to identify him. Nor was he absolutely certain that the brown envelope was in the fellow's pocket.

Had Vincent known the truth, he would have darted into the nearest phone booth to report to The Shadow and summon help. The name of that well-dressed thug was Blackie. He was one of the two crooks who had helped Mike Porter to dispose of the dead bodies of Jane Purdy and Walter Roscoe.

Blackie didn't confer with Porter, as Vincent anticipated. He stopped suddenly, his sly gaze veering to the stone portals of the Women's Athletic Club. An extraordinarily pretty girl was hurrying down the steps from the club entrance. She went straight to Porter's parked car, a smile on her lovely red lips.

It was Clarita Rondo, Porter's girl friend from the Club Bandbox. Evidently, the two had a luncheon date.

The car's gears rasped, it pulled away. But not before Porter passed a signal to Blackie. His lazily extended arm pointed casually backward toward the watching thug. Two fingers stretched upward. Then the car drove smoothly away.

Blackie knew what the signal meant. Porter was ordering him to wait until two o'clock. The transfer of the brown envelope was to be deferred until after Porter's luncheon with Clarita. The place, too, was clear to Blackie.

In the absence of any specific instructions, business between Porter and his henchmen was always transacted in the building next door to the Women's Athletic Club. Porter had rented an office on one of the lower floors.

BLACKIE turned on his heel and went away in the opposite direction to that taken by the car of his employer. Harry Vincent followed him.

The tailing job continued for several blocks on foot. Presently, Blackie entered the ground-floor doorway of a cheap rooming house. He vanished swiftly without a backward glance. It looked like a spot where he could hole up in a furnished room.

Harry waited a few seconds, to give Blackie a chance to climb the stairs; then he hurried in after him. He was eager to find out before it was too late on which floor the crook had his room.

Caution would have served Vincent better than haste. As he entered the hallway, he discovered that the light had been turned out. A plunging figure sprang murderously at Harry from the darkness.

Blackie had not been fooled by the tailing job. He was ready for trouble with a keen-bladed knife!

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The point of the knife ripped at Harry's throat. All that saved him was his own startled recoil when he had perceived that the hallway was in darkness. He went to one knee and Blackie, with a grunt of murderous triumph, stabbed downward with the knife.

His wrist was caught in an iron grasp. Harry's flop had been done purposely. He knew he had to disarm the killer swiftly or feel the sharp agony of a knife deep in his vitals!

His quick heave sent Blackie flying over his bent head. The thug struck the stairway post and rebounded. The knife fell from his bruised hand.

Blackie was up like a flash; his heavy shoe swung backward in a vicious kick. Harry jerked to one side, but not far enough. He felt a crashing impact against his stomach. He dropped to the floor, temporarily paralyzed. Footsteps raced away. The vestibule door slammed. By the time Harry's muscles reacted and he was able to stagger out to the sidewalk, there was no sign of Blackie.

The brown envelope had vanished with him. Harry gritted his jaw obstinately. He had made a bad blunder, but there was still a chance to redeem himself, in an entirely different direction.

He decided to make a quick trip to the mansion of Colonel Standish.

A FEW blocks away, Blackie was entering a dingy-looking bar and grill. It was in a slum neighborhood, and its customers were a rather tough-looking lot. Blackie had some time to kill before meeting Mike Porter at two o'clock, and the thought a few drinks would help while away the time.

Blackie's mistake was in flashing a big roll of bills in payment of drinks. It caused the bartender to go into a reflective mood; then he gave an imperceptible signal to one of the thuggish customers, who immediately departed.

When Blackie finally left the barroom, he felt the glow of liquor, but he wasn't drunk. A cab was parked at the curb outside and he got in, gave the driver the address of the office building next door to the Women's Athletic Club.

The hackman looked sleepy, but deep in his eyes was a murderous, avaricious look. His cab had made a quick run from the other side of town, after a hurry call from the barfly the bartender had signaled.

Blackie relaxed on the rear seat with closed eyes. Things were going well with him. He had earned one big split of dough and he was about to earn another. He didn't know what was in the brown envelope he was taking to Mike Porter, and he didn't care. Dough was all that interested Blackie.

When the taxi finally stopped, a gun appeared in the hackman's right hand. Its muzzle pointed back toward the startled Blackie, who had come out of his doze. It continued to point as the driver slipped from behind the wheel and circled to the rear door of the cab.

He had picked a perfect spot for a hijack. It was a deserted, dead-end street. The high board fence of a lumber yard threw deep shadow on the sidewalk. A gate in the fence was ajar and the cabby his name was Fred indicated it with a quick gesture.

"Come outa the cab with your hands up! We got a date inside the lumber yard, pal!"

Blackie was no coward, but the gun made him cautious. He decided to play drunk. He stumbled out onto the running board, threw up a drunken arm to steady himself. But his wavering hand rested on the taxi's open

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door for only the instant it took to close it into a hard fist.

He swung that fist with a short, choppy uppercut against the chin of the leering hackman. It lifted the gunman clear off his heels and drove him backward to the sidewalk.

Blackie's own body pivoted with the blow. As he turned, he crouched with a quick tensing of his muscles. His own gun leaped into his hand from a concealed holster. He fired with almost a single gesture.

It was a hasty shot, one that was aimed too high. The slug whined above the head of the now-kneeling hackman and thudded through the fence of the deserted lumber yard. The next instant, Blackie uttered a shrill scream of agony. Unbearable pain ripped through his body.

A bullet from Fred's gun had smashed his kneecap. Blackie went down like a felled tree, writhing and rolling on the sidewalk.

Fred darted forward, his gun ready for the finishing shot. He waited till his writhing victim rolled stomach upward, then he sent a slug tearing through the soft vitals of his screaming foe.

That second explosive roar ended Blackie's shrieks. He died instantly.

THE hackman bent over Blackie and began a hasty search of his pockets. The first thing he found was the brown envelope which Blackie had stolen from the handbag of Evelyn Standish.

The envelope meant nothing to the killer. It had no address on it. Fred tossed it away.

His greedy fingers explored other pockets of his victim and he found what he was after. The thick roll of currency which Blackie had been foolish enough to display in the bar and grill was swiftly transferred to the hackman's own pocket.

He sprang toward his taxicab, jumped in and, turning the cab, started off.

An instant later, a cop who had heard the shots rounded the angle of the lumber-yard fence. As he did so he came directly abreast of the fleeing cab. His gun swung toward the fleeing driver. But before he could fire, the cab veered slightly and flame spat at the bluecoat.

The bullet from Fred's gun dropped the cop in midstride and sent him sliding forward on his face. The policeman never moved. He was a young rookie, inexperienced in gun fights. He had paid for that inexperience with his life.

By the time other policemen arrived on the scene, the taxicab was gone without trace.

For a long time, the neighborhood was in turmoil. After a while, a patrol wagon took the bodies of Blackie and the policeman to the precinct station. Gradually the crowd of morbid people dispersed. Once more, the street lapsed into quiet.

Later, a postman turned the corner and went to a mailbox not far from where Blackie's body had fallen. He was a mail collector and he opened the box and stuffed the letters it contained into his mail pouch. Suddenly, he bent and stared at the ground.

In the shadow under the mail box lay a brown envelope. It was the same one that the murderous taxi driver had tossed aside in his search for Blackie's bank roll.

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The letter carrier picked it up. There was no address on the envelope. But in the upper left-hand corner was a printed line or two to identify where the letter had come from. It was marked "DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR. BUREAU OF NATIONAL PARKS." It was one of the envelopes stolen from the office of Jim Whelan by the unknown burglar who had ransacked the desk of Whelan's murdered secretary.

No postage was affixed, but none was necessary. The letter was stamped with the usual government frank.

The postman concluded that it had been dropped by mistake by a careless clerk. He shoved it into his mail bag along with the others.

Fate was closing a vicious circle with an ironic gesture. This time, the brown envelope was in honest hands!

CHAPTER X. MASTER AND MAN

HARRY VINCENT didn't waste a second of delay as soon as he realized that Blackie had eluded him and had made a quick getaway from the vestibule of the slum rooming house.

To search the surrounding neighborhood for the slick, well-dressed thug would take time. And just now, time was precious.

Harry was convinced that the car which had run down Evelyn Standish was the dark-colored sedan that belonged to her own father. He was less certain of the identity of the driver. But the thought persisted firmly in his mind that the chauffeur was probably Noble. If this were true, it linked the colonel and his wooden-faced butler to the very heart of a murderous spy intrigue.

The colonel's sedan held the answer to the riddle. Harry decided to hurry to the Standish mansion and have a quick look at that car. If his theory was correct, the sedan's engine should be still hot from its wild race across town. And there ought to be a perceptible dent in the left fender, where Harry's hunched shoulder had been struck by the speeding car.

He hurried to the corner and halted a taxi. It wasn't long before the cab approached the imposing neighborhood where Colonel Standish lived. Harry wondered how the colonel could afford to maintain so princely a dwelling on the relatively small pay of an army officer. But for the present, the colonel's sedan was the all-important clue.

A block away from his goal, Harry paid off his taxi driver. Had it been night, Harry would have sneaked through the deserted property in the rear and vaulted the back fence. But in the broad daylight of early afternoon, that wouldn't do.

A grocer's light delivery truck parked midway down the block suggested a simpler and more effective method. The truck was empty. Harry had just seen the driver disappear into the service entrance of a nearby house with a heavy delivery basket on his arm.

In an instant, Harry was up on the seat of the truck. He took off his hat and tousled his hair. He laid his overcoat neatly inside the truck, shivering as the cold winter wind blew icily in his face. That, however, was just what he wanted. His tousled hair and his reddened hands and face would draw attention away from his well cut suit.

He stepped on the gas and drove coolly through the Standish driveway to the rear of the mansion. His heart leaped as he saw that the door of the garage was open. The dark sedan was parked outside. If Noble had

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driven it, a sudden summons from the house must have interrupted him before he could put the car away.

Picking up a basket of groceries, Harry descended from the truck. He noticed at once the United States army bronze shield above a very soiled license plate. The front left fender was dented. Harry laid a bare hand on the hood of the car and jerked it swiftly away. The engine under that hood was still hot!

He heard a sudden sound behind him and stepped quickly away.

The rear door of the Standish home had opened. Noble was peering out suspiciously. His voice was a harsh rasp.

"What are you doing at that car?"

Whistling cheerfully, Harry approached the kitchen door and calmly attempted to walk in. Noble glared at him.

"Wait a minute. There's some mistake. I didn't order any groceries." Noble seemed to be laboring under terrific tension. But he restrained his anger.

"O.K., chief." Harry pretended to examine an order blank in the basket. "Right you are! I got the right number, but the wrong street."

He backed out, and the butler slammed the door in his face.

But Harry grinned. He knew why the butler was so unnerved, so eager to get rid of him. Someone had been ringing the front doorbell during their conversation. Someone who seemed to be in an important hurry to get in.

Harry's guess was that it might be Colonel Standish. He intended to find out at once. He was able to do this because while talking with the butler, and screened by the heavy grocery basket, his left hand had rested casually against the edge of the open door. Like most kitchen doors, its lock was an automatic one. It could be left on or off to suit the convenience of the cook or butler.

The lock was regulated by a small metal button on the door. Harry's shielded finger pressed the button. When Noble slammed the door, it closed with the usual click, but didn't lock.

Noble, of course, didn't realize this.

DROPPING the grocery basket, Harry turned the knob of the back door gently. He opened it to a tiny crack and peered. The kitchen was empty. Noble had raced away to answer that ring of the front doorbell.

Harry darted into a dim butler's pantry. Noble had left the inner door ajar, opening onto the front hallway. It gave Vincent a chance to press himself into a dark corner and stare down the length of a long corridor.

He saw at once the reason for Noble's extraordinary haste. The butler had two things to accomplish in a brief space of time. His race to the front door was not for the purpose of opening it. Instead, he clapped his eye to what was evidently a camouflaged peephole.

Harry heard Noble draw a deep breath and back swiftly away. The butler ran to the foot of the broad staircase. A noiseless figure stepped from the bottom of the stairs to meet him.

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It was Colonel Standish. He was fully dressed in his army uniform. He seemed to be badly frightened. His lips twitched, his face was the color of clay. He spoke rapidly into the inclined ear of his servant.

What he said sounded like a mere hiss of warning. The words he uttered were completely inaudible at the distance where Harry lurked in the dark pantry.

But Noble understood. He nodded, and said urgently: "All right! But hurry, sir!"

Colonel Standish whirled back toward the staircase. He raced noiselessly aloft.

The front doorbell was still ringing. Only a few seconds had elapsed, but Noble let the time deliberately lengthen. Vincent guessed that the sly butler was giving his employer time to prepare for an emergency.

Finally, Noble opened the door. His voice was silky, full of deft apologies for the delay. A man stopped into view with an annoyed grunt. It was Vic Marquette.

He asked to speak with Colonel Standish at once. Noble had expected that. He was ready with a smooth reply.

"I'm sorry, sir. I'm afraid it's quite impossible. The colonel is in bed, resting quietly by the orders of his physician. He had a recent heart shock, as you know. Unless your visit is tremendously important —"

"It is," Vic said curtly. "His daughter has been in a serious accident. She was knocked down by a hit-and-run automobile. She was taken to the hospital, and her brother went with her in the ambulance. We just got a news flash about it at headquarters."

Noble gave a cry of a well-simulated surprise. He began to ask numerous questions, his gaze flicking toward the stairs. Harry guessed that the servant was playing for time, in order to give his employer the opportunity to peel off his uniform and hop into bed in the role of a tired invalid.

Harry was sure of it when he heard a faint tinkle of a bell from somewhere upstairs.

"Perhaps I'd better not bother the colonel," Vic said. "I'll come back later."

"No, no!" Noble's whole attitude had changed. "He's awake now. That bell you heard came from his room. He's ringing for a glass of water. I think you'd better go up and see him."

His hand reached out, took Vic's hat and overcoat. Then he motioned Vic to go upstairs.

The moment the Secret Service man vanished from sight, Noble's sly fingers began a swift search of every pocket in Vic's overcoat. It was a grimly efficient search, one that overlooked nothing. Noble even spread the coat out and examined every inch of the silk lining, on a hunt for a secret pocket. But it was a vain hunt.

The butler's low-toned oath was a snarl of disappointment and rage. He whirled, turned toward the staircase, then changed his mind. With swift strides, he returned toward the pantry where Harry Vincent had been an interested spectator of the happenings in the front hall.

Harry had already made good a perfect retreat. When Noble came outside to put the sedan in the garage, Vincent was parking his borrowed delivery truck at the same spot from which he had taken it. In a moment, he donned his overcoat and pulled his hat over his tousled hair. Gray gloves covered his wind-reddened hands. Fortunately, the truck's regular driver had not yet returned. So Harry had no explanations to make.

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Vincent had made a bad botch of his pursuit of Blackie and the brown envelope. But he had learned much of interest in the home of Colonel Standish. He had located the would-be murder car. He had direct eyewitness proof that Noble was no ordinary butler, but a camouflaged crook.

All this information would be relayed to The Shadow.

A SINGLE dim light cast an eerie glow in the quiet privacy of a room in a Washington hotel. The room had a corridor door, but that door was locked and never opened. It was part of a suite hired by Lamont Cranston during his brief stay in Washington.

Cranston's public comings and goings had nothing to do with this room. Access to it was gained by a connecting door from an inner bedroom. There was a special lock on the connecting door, installed at Cranston's own request. The same applied to the door that opened into the corridor.

This was the temporary sanctum of The Shadow, set up for a grim purpose in the heart of the nation's capital.

It was night outside the drawn shades, but a deeper night seemed to brood in the silent room. The silence was broken suddenly by the sibilant laughter of The Shadow. His strong profile was visible as he bent over the polished desk at which he sat. His hand was penning a name a woman's name on a blank sheet of paper:

Evelyn Standish

He stared at it, while the light overhead sent jagged streaks of color from a ring on the third finger of The Shadow's left hand. In the ring was set an enormous girasol a rare type of fire opal which had no counterpart in the world.

Harry Vincent would have recognized that costly stone. So would many other trusted agents of The Shadow. It was The Shadow's symbol.

The Shadow's gaze remained on the paper where he had written the name of Evelyn Standish. The paper now was completely blank. The ink had faded as though it had never been written.

This was symbolic of The Shadow's own belief. He knew that Evelyn Standish had been tangled in the heart of a criminal conspiracy against the safety of the United States. But he was convinced of her innocence.

Harry Vincent's report had made many things clear. The Shadow knew now that there were two brown envelopes, not one. The first had been delivered to someone inside the swanky Women's Athletic Club. The second had been stolen by a black-haired thug, after the unsuccessful attempt to kill Colonel Standish's daughter by a speeding sedan.

The Shadow suspected blackmail as the basis of Evelyn's risky behavior. That was the lure that had brought her to the very brink of death. The bundle of letters she had brought out to her brother Roy was evidently the price agreed upon for her handing over the military map.

The fact that there were two brown envelopes suggested that Evelyn had tried to protect herself in this exchange of goods. The map had been cut in half! The second half was the one which had been stolen under the very nose of Harry Vincent.

But who had tried to kill the girl? And why? The logical answer sounded incredible. The Shadow hinted at that answer by writing two more names on the blank sheet of paper:

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Colonel Henry Standish

Noble

Noble had driven the death car. That much was certain. But why should a crooked butler in the service of a traitorous army officer attempt to kill that officer's own daughter? Was Standish an unnatural enemy of his own flesh and blood? The Shadow considered him grimly in the role of a cunning criminal who chose to call himself Number One.

Standish as Number One didn't quite make sense. It would mean that he had encouraged Roy and Evelyn to steal the army map, and then forced them to turn it back to him in the unknown role of master spy. It would mean that Standish was the mysterious burglar in uniform who had searched the apartment and the office desk of Jane Purdy and had seized the blackmail letters that threatened the security of his daughter's reputation.

The Shadow leaned forward and wrote a third name under the two others which had not yet faded from the paper:

Roy Standish

Roy seemed a more likely bet in the role of the uniformed thief. All his subsequent actions were peculiar. He had failed to pursue his sister's attempted assassin. He had encouraged her to risk death by meeting the spy. Was his queer behavior proof that Roy wanted his sister killed?

There was no indication to what The Shadow thought as he stared at Roy's name. His grim laughter made a rustling sound. There was no amusement in it.

THE girasol sent jagged gleams of purple and green and crimson as the lean hand of The Shadow inscribed more names on his list. A man and two women, linked by the bonds of some unguessed relationship:

Clarita Rondo

Mike Porter

Miriam Hudson

Porter had emerged by a peculiar coincidence from the building next door to the athletic club. Porter could easily be Number One. A secret passage between the two buildings would allow him ample opportunity to drop his disguise and appear as Mike Porter, jovial friend of numerous congressmen and government officials in his capacity of lobbyist for big industrial firms.

Harry Vincent's report definitely established that the black-haired thug was a henchman of Porter. But what was the status of Clarita and Miriam?

The Shadow's attention riveted on Colonel Standish himself. The colonel was the focal point of the whole mystery. Certain facts about his private life were not yet clear. The Shadow determined to act at once in that direction. But not openly, as The Shadow, but as Lamont Cranston.

Jim Whelan offered a perfect approach. Whelan knew Colonel Standish as well as any person in Washington. Like all talkative men, Whelan had an ear for gossip. Lamont Cranston decided to pump him over a sociable highball or two.

CHAPTER XI. THE CLUB BANDBOX

JIM WHELAN'S apartment was a comfortable bachelor's suite in a respectable old building. He smiled with quick pleasure when his servant conducted Lamont Cranston into his cheerful little sitting room.

Books lined the walls. The ceiling was of beamed oak. A ruddy log blaze crackled in a wide fireplace. It was an inviting and homelike spot to be in on a cold and blustery winter night.

But Whelan didn't seem to be taking advantage of it. He was dressed in black tie and dinner clothes. His servant was holding Whelan's derby and overcoat.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Cranston said. "I should have phoned. I just dropped in on the spur of the moment. Had nothing particular in mind, except perhaps a drink or two and some good, lazy talk.

"Nothing I'd like better," Whelan said, wistfully. "But unfortunately, I've got to go out tonight."

"Don't tell me you're going to another reception," Cranston said jokingly. "Two in one week would be a world's record for you. I thought you were Washington's greatest stay-at-home."

"I am," Whelan said. "But tonight I've got to take in a night club."

"You!" Cranston's smile became a laugh. The thought of the sober-minded Jim Whelan in the noisy glare of a night club was amusing. "I might join you in a little dissipation. Where were you thinking of going?"

"The Club Bandbox," Whelan muttered. He seemed ill at ease. "They tell me there's a dancer there who does a particularly beautiful ballet number called 'The Moth and the Flame'."

"I've heard of her." Cranston's voice remained casual. "I believe she's an Argentine Clarita Rondo."

Whelan had turned so that his face was not visible to Sanders, his servant. He gave Cranston a quick, appealing look. He was mutely begging Cranston to stay. Cranston took the cue.

"Why don't we have a drink before you go?" he asked.

"The very thing!" Whelan replied.

Sanders laid his master's coat and hat aside and left to prepare the drinks. Cranston spoke softly as soon as the door closed.

"You seem almost afraid of your servant. Don't you trust him?"

"I don't know. He's been acting very queer of late."

"Why don't you fire him?"

Whelan shrugged.

"I'm probably wrong about him. Anyway, Sanders isn't important. Something serious happened today! Can I talk to you in confidence? Will you give me your word not to repeat anything I tell you?"

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Cranston agreed.

"I received a letter today at my office," Whelan said in a low tone. "There was no address on it except the printed return address in the upper left-hand corner. It was one of the envelopes used in my own department. I opened it casually, thinking its return was an error caused by a clerk's carelessness in omitting the address. Inside it I found this!"

He took a flat brown envelope from the pocket of his dinner jacket. Opening it, he showed Cranston a mutilated half of a document whose existence the keen brain of The Shadow had already deduced. But there was no change in the lazy drawl of Lamont Cranston.

"Looks like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle. What is it?"

"A military map," Whelan whispered huskily. "I'm not up on these matters, but I'll swear this is a part of a map showing the coast-line defense of the entire Atlantic seaboard. Someone has cut it in half in such a fashion that this particular half doesn't show much."

Cranston whistled softly. "Why do you suppose the unaddressed envelope was dropped in a mailbox?"

"I don't know. But I know where this brown envelope came from. You remember the burglary in my office the other night the one Vic Marquette ordered us to keep quiet about?"

"Of course."

"I checked on the supplies in Miss Daly's desk. A dozen of her envelopes were stolen by the thief. This must be one of them."

"Surely you're not planning to take it to a night club?" Cranston asked, his voice puzzled.

"I want to get rid of it. I tried to get in touch with Vic Marquette, but they told me at headquarters that he was spending this evening at the Club Bandbox. Why the devil should a Secret Service man waste his time there?"

Cranston could have told the frightened Whelan, but he didn't. His guess was that Vic was keeping tabs on the dark-eyed Clarita and possibly her boy friend, Mike Porter.

CRANSTON sipped slowly at the drink Sanders had brought in. Cleverly, he directed the conversation to another topic.

He began to talk about Colonel Standish, expressed feeling for the colonel's unfortunate heart attack. He remarked about the unusual beauty of the Standish mansion, wondered how an army officer could afford a home of that sort on army pay.

Jim Whelan rose to the bait. Under the stimulus of the highball his talkative tongue began to wag. Almost the first thing he said startled Cranston.

Colonel Standish, Whelan declared, was not the father of Roy and Evelyn.

"Not their father?" Cranston repeated slowly.

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"No. He's their stepfather, although few people in Washington remember; not even Roy and Evelyn, I guess. The mother remarried shortly after they were born. She died a year or so later. If the colonel has no money to speak of, you can be sure his two stepchildren have. When they reach twenty-five, each of them will come into a million apiece."

Whelan elaborated. The colonel's dead wife had been an heiress. At her death the whole estate passed to the two children in the form of a trust fund. All the colonel got was a small income during the rest of his lifetime. Together with his army pay, this modest income enabled him to maintain the house in which he now lived.

"Suppose Evelyn and Roy should die in the meantime?" Lamont Cranston asked.

"If they did, it would be lucky for the colonel if you can call such a misfortune lucky. The colonel, if he should survive Roy and Evelyn, would inherit the entire estate both their shares."

"Hardly likely," Cranston murmured.

But there was a glint in the depths of his eyes. An important question that interested him was now answered. He had wondered why a father would want to deliberately murder his own child. First, because the father was not a father at all. Second, because he stood to profit from the death of Roy and Evelyn to the tune of two million dollars.

Cranston finished his drink and rose to his feet.

"I think you had better get that brown envelope to Vic Marquette without delay," he said shortly. "If you like, I'll go with you to the Club Bandbox."

"I was hoping you'd say that," Whelan replied, with a sigh of relief. "I'm worried to death! I'll be glad when we find Vic Marquette and hand it over to him."

BUT finding Vic Marquette was not so easy. He was not in the Club Bandbox when they arrived. Whelan left a message for him at the desk and the manager, a shrewd-faced, long-nosed man whom Cranston glanced at sharply, promised to send Mr. Marquette to their table the moment he came in.

As the two friends turned to follow the head waiter to their table, a bit of by-play occurred which completely escaped the attention of Jim Whelan. But Cranston, on the alert, observed the brief happening out of the corner of his eye.

A shapely blond cigarette girl had drifted close to the desk of the nightclub manager. The manager's face had turned briefly in the direction of Jim Whelan's back. The nod he gave was barely noticeable. But the blond cigarette girl was far from blind. She acknowledged the signal with a slow blink of her eyes.

Cranston and Whelan were given a table near the rear of the club, not far from the swinging doors of the pantry. It seemed hard to get a waiter. Most of them hurried by, oblivious to Whelan's efforts to attract their notice.

The Shadow wondered if Mike Porter had anything to do with this peculiar delay in service.

Porter was seated at a nearby table with an exceedingly pretty girl. She had dark hair, dark eyes and a skin like cream. She looked faintly like Clarita Rondo. Evidently, Porter's taste in women ran to the Spanish type.

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He was paying the girl flattering attention. But occasionally his eyes strayed. Once only once they swerved briefly toward the table where Whelan and Cranston sat. If Porter recognized two of his fellow guests at the recent reception of Colonel Standish, he failed to show it.

He seemed a lot more interested in the blond cigarette girl. She had come to Whelan's table and was persistently trying to sell Whelan some of her wares.

Whelan was embarrassed. To get rid of her, he bought a pack of cigarettes. He gave her a dollar bill from a wallet he drew from his inside Tuxedo pocket. She didn't return any change.

"Thank you, handsome," she said, softly.

She leaned even closer, kissed him with a mischievous smile.

Cranston, however, was not deceived. He knew why the cigarette girl had insisted on making a sale. To pay for the cigarettes, Whelan had to open his coat and produce his wallet. But it was not the wallet in which the girl was interested. She had swayed close in order to catch a glimpse of the pocket from which the wallet had been taken.

An edge of brown paper was distinctly visible. It was the top of the brown envelope which Whelan had brought to the night club to turn over to Vic Marquette.

THE SHADOW watched the seminude back of the cigarette-girl as she moved away. She brushed close to a waiter as she passed him. Words spurted briefly from the corner of her smiling mouth.

The same waiter came almost instantly to Whelan's table, with an apology for the delay in service. They ordered drinks and he brought them.

Cranston studied Whelan, wondering what trick would be tried to get hold of his brown envelope. It wouldn't be dope, he decided. A Micky Finn was a crude device, one that would attract too much attention to the victim. Besides, the waiter or the cigarette girl would be afraid to make a grab for the brown envelope if Whelan slumped forward unconscious at his table. Too many eyes were watching, including Cranston's.

The Shadow didn't warn Whelan of the true situation. He wanted the theft attempt to be made. He was convinced that Porter was behind the whole stratagem. He waited for a move.

It came in a moment or two. The same waiter who had brought Cranston's and Whelan's drinks was now bending over the table where Mike Porter and his lovely companion were sitting. They were deciding on the entree for their meal. They argued smilingly over the way the sauce should be prepared.

Porter rose suddenly to his feet.

"There's only one perfect way to cook that dish," he told his girl friend. "If you'll excuse me, I'd like to confer with the chef. If he mixes the sauce the way I want it, I promise that you'll never order it any other style! I'll be back in a moment."

His tall figure vanished through the swinging pantry doors. The Shadow noticed that a rather tough-looking waiter stood close to the kitchen exit, as though on guard. Evidently, the hard-faced waiter was anxious to keep patrons out of the kitchen. But he offered no objection to Mike Porter as the latter hurried out of sight.

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A faint gasp from Jim Whelan drew Cranston's gaze back to his companion. Whelan's face was very pale. He looked sick and unhappy. He was clutching the table with both hands; his whisper meant only for Cranston's ears.

"I'm ashamed of myself; but you'll have to excuse me. I feel as sick as a dog. Had too many drinks tonight. That last one upset my stomach. Where's the washroom?"

Cranston pointed it out. He hid his concern. The crooks, as he anticipated, had used a very simple device. A small amount of any of a dozen mild drugs could produce that sudden nausea of Jim Whelan's stomach. And there was no fuss. People at other tables were unaware of trouble as Cranston helped his stumbling friend to his feet.

Whelan hurried off to the washroom. Cranston finished his drink which held no disturbing ingredient and then started to follow Whelan. He was halted by the pleasantest sort of an obstacle. The blond cigarette girl bumped into him. She lost her balance and flung shapely arms about his neck. The warmth of her figure crushed against him.

But Cranston was as smart as she was. He freed himself deftly. He even used the collision as a means to test out the intentions of the tough waiter posted at the pantry door. Pretending drunkenness, he attempted to enter. A beefy arm shot out in front of him, barring his way toward the kitchen.

"Sorry, pal. No guests allowed inside."

Cranston wasn't surprised. With a hiccup, he changed his apparently dazed course and headed for the washroom. It was in a small alcove, its doorway invisible from the floor of the night club. Cranston pushed open the door and instantly stood stock-still.

The washroom was pitch dark. Someone had turned off the lights. There was no sound from the darkness.

Cranston drew a tiny palm gun from his clothing and slid inward along the tiled surface of the wall. His groping hand found the light switch and pushed it. The washroom was flooded with light.

It was empty.

An open window in the rear wall suggested that Jim Whelan might have taken a hasty sneak to what seemed to be an inclosed rear court in the back of the night club. But The Shadow didn't believe that. Whelan had been too sick for acrobatics. He was in no condition to climb through that small window.

The Shadow darted toward the door of a small storage closet and threw it open. The limp figure of a man pitched helplessly forward into his arms.

It was Jim Whelan.

He had been struck a blow on the back of the skull. His head had a lump the size of an egg. He was out cold.

LAMONT CRANSTON took a swift look at the inside pocket of Whelan's rumpled Tuxedo. The brown envelope was gone!

To The Shadow, the answer was obvious. The open window was merely part of a circuitous route taken by the cunning Mike Porter. Ducking through the pantry and kitchen, Porter had slipped through a side door into the courtyard, had wriggled through the washroom window and was waiting in darkness inside the washroom

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when Whelan stumbled in.

The Shadow raced to the window and squeezed through. The drop was a short one. He crossed a paced area entirely surrounded by blank brick walls.

The kitchen of the night club was on the right side of the court. A closed door showed how Mike Porter could easily have made his criminal approach from the kitchen. It was an excellent way for Porter to pull a theft and get back to his table without spoiling his alibi.

Cranston found the kitchen door unlocked. He threw it open, but he didn't get very far. A man in a cook's cap was standing there with an ugly-looking bread knife in his hand.

"Hey, you! Where do you think you're going? You can't come in here!" Cranston gave a drunken hiccup and retreated. The kitchen door slammed and was locked. But he had seen all he wanted. A furtive figure in evening clothes was visible at the far end of the kitchen, hurrying through the pantry.

Mike Porter was fast, but not fast enough!

Cranston raced back to the washroom window and climbed through. He found that Whelan was beginning to recover consciousness. As his eyes fluttered open, realization came to him of what had happened. His hand jerked to his empty inside pocket. His mouth flew open to emit a sharp cry of dismay.

Cranston bent over him, his voice a warning whisper.

"Don't make a sound. It's all right. You haven't lost a thing!"

His hand showed the dazed Whelan something he had jerked momentarily from his own pocket. It was the brown envelope for which Mike Porter had made such a desperate attempt at robbery.

"I suspected trouble," Cranston's low voice said. "When I helped you to your feet at the table after you became sick, I took the liberty of picking your pocket and safeguarding this little document."

The letter vanished instantly from sight, for the keen ears of The Shadow had detected the furtive steps of a man outside the washroom. The next instant, a hard-faced man shoved in.

It was the tough waiter who had been standing guard at the pantry door. He took one look at the sprawled Whelan and the figure of Lamont Cranston bending over him. He stepped closer, gripping a short blackjack in his muscular fist.

"A holdup, eh? I thought I heard something funny going on in here!"

"You heard nothing, you liar," Cranston said softly. "Stand back, or you'll get hurt!"

"Yeah?" He advanced with a catlike rush, swinging his blackjack in an ugly arc.

But his attack didn't take place. It was halted by a totally unexpected intrusion. A man had stepped quietly into the washroom. His face was grim. There was a gun in his steady hand.

It was the one man Cranston wanted to see: Vic Marquette!

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THE waiter tried to ease out of trouble by a shrill denunciation of Lamont Cranston. He accused him of slugging Whelan and attempting to rob him. But Vic Marquette shut him up in short order.

"That's enough out of you! I happen to know your police record. These two gentlemen are friends. If anyone slugged Mr. Whelan, it was you! Get those hands up!"

But Cranston shook his head warningly. His signal indicated to Vic that he didn't want a scene or an arrest. Vic took the hint, although there was puzzlement in his sharp eyes. He ordered the sluggish waiter to beat it, and the fellow obeyed with alacrity.

In the silence that followed, Cranston showed Vic the brown envelope he had protected from theft. Vic's face tightened as he saw the jagged edges of the half-map that had come so oddly to Jim Whelan through the mail.

"It's a part of the coast defense map, stolen from Colonel Standish!" Vic gasped. "How did you get hold of it?"

Cranston told him briefly. Whelan had recovered his wits. The three men left the washroom and went quietly back to their table, where Cranston paid the bill. Mike Porter gave them a swift glance as they passed him; but his face was expressionless.

The cigarette girl was at the front desk talking with the night-club manager. His swarthy face was dark with rage. But they both summoned up a smile for the departing trio.

It amused Cranston to discover that his overcoat had been searched by the cloakroom girl. Her sullen demeanor indicated that she had drawn a blank.

A taxicab was at the curb outside but Vic Marquette ignored it. He slid behind the wheel of his own car, motioning Cranston and Whelan to get in with him.

He drove swiftly to F.B.I. headquarters.

CHAPTER XII. CLARITA UNMASKS

THERE was tension in the brilliantly lighted conference room on one of the upper floors at F.B.I. headquarters. It had no connection with the public corridor outside.

Vic Marquette had no trouble, however, conducting Lamont Cranston and Jim Whelan to this private chamber. He used a password outside a small green-painted door at the end of an alley. A uniformed guard at a peephole opened the heavy door, using an electrical button to swing the barrier on its massive hinges. He closed it in the same way.

There was a short corridor on the ground floor leading to a single door. Behind that door was an automatic electric elevator. Vic ushered his two companions into the elevator and pressed a control button. In a few moments, all three were facing the gray-haired official who was Vic's temporary chief in the department.

There were quick explanations, to which the chief nodded with ill-concealed impatience. He knew Jim Whelan. He was also familiar with the name and the reputation of Cranston, the millionaire sportsman from New York.

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The chief already knew the facts concerning the abortive attempt at robbery in the Club Bandbox. Vic had parked briefly during his swift ride toward headquarters and had telephoned in a terse report.

Vic now took a brown envelope from his pocket and handed it to his chief. The gray-haired man uttered a cry of satisfaction as he opened the envelope. He examined the document that had been cut into so queer a saw-tooth pattern.

"It's half of the coast defense map for which we've been searching! It means that the spy for whom it was intended has slipped up on his plans. Without this half, the part he already has is useless."

"I'm afraid it's not quite that simple, sir," Vic said slowly.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm sorry to say that this piece of paper we've found is worthless."

"What?"

The gray-haired man was staring at Vic. So was Lamont Cranston. Jim Whelan appeared to be completely stunned by the swift pace of events in which he had been so suddenly entangled.

Vic explained in a voice that sounded tired.

"There were two maps stolen from the safe in Colonel Standish's study. One of them was an old one, an obsolete plan of defense that has since been abandoned by the army and the air corps. The other was the 1939 plan, based on the present situation in Europe. It was approved only this week by the general staff and the president. I hate to say it, but the new map is still missing. The piece of paper in your hand is worthless!"

"Are you certain?"

"Yes, sir. I paid a visit to Colonel Standish this afternoon. He's still in bed, suffering from the shock of his loss. It was he himself who told me there were actually two maps stolen from his safe."

"Why in Heaven's name didn't he say so before?" the chief cried.

"That's exactly what I asked him. He went all to pieces. He's really quite a sick man. He told me that he's been in a daze since the robbery. He thought he had made things clear, but evidently he's been too overwrought to think clearly. He's under the care of a doctor now. I didn't stay long at his bedside."

Lamont Cranston, who had received, as The Shadow, an exact report from Harry Vincent concerning the colonel's "illness," made no comment. A faint tightening of his lips was the only indication of his annoyance at the way in which a smart agent like Vic Marquette had allowed himself to be hoodwinked.

"The real map is quite easily distinguished from the old one," Vic went on. "The corners of the document all four of them are marked with heavy blue ink. It's a dye that cannot be obliterated without destroying the paper. It's part of the fiber."

He pointed to the half-map which had come so strangely through the mail to Jim Whelan; the one which Mike Porter had vainly tried to steal.

"There are two corners on this fragment. Neither of them are damaged, and neither has the blue dye."

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CRANSTON asked a quiet question about the dead servant who had been found lying in the fireplace of Colonel Standish's study. He was able to do so because part of the facts concerning the crime had been printed in the Washington newspapers.

According to the story released by the papers, two burglars had tried to rifle the safe and the colonel had killed one. The news story emphasized the fact that nothing of value had been taken.

"We were unable to find a thing from the corpse," Vic admitted. "The fingerprints showed that he had never been arrested before. His real identity remains a mystery. We ran into a blank wall at the employment agency where the man was hired to help out that evening. His name wasn't Parker at all. We found the real Parker in a hospital, with a fractured skull. Someone slugged him that night on his way to the Standish mansion."

"What about the mail box where this brown envelope was collected?" Cranston asked, in an apologetic tone that masked his keen interest. "Have you spoken to the letter carrier on the route?"

"Yes. And that's damned funny, too! The letter wasn't dropped in the box. It was lying on the ground underneath. The postman just picked it up and took it along. My guess is that the murdered man must have dropped it just before the taxi driver killed him."

"Huh?" Jim Whelan looked startled. All this was news to him. "What murder?"

Vic explained the events outside a deserted lumber yard, that had taken the lives of a thug named Blackie and a rookie policeman.

"We haven't been able to find out much about this Blackie, either," Vic admitted sourly. "He had a crook's reputation, but he's never been connected with any known gang. Always had plenty of money and no apparent means of livelihood.

"The police picked him up on suspicion several times during the past year, but were never able to pin anything on him. Another blank wall! It's the most puzzling case I have ever tackled."

The gleam in Lamont Cranston's eyes deepened. The Shadow was not as completely baffled as Vic, in the matter of Blackie's criminal connections. He knew positively that Blackie's unknown boss was the sleek, well-dressed Mike Porter.

But was Porter the secret master spy, Number One? That was the unanswered question that brought flame to the seemingly mild eyes of Lamont Cranston.

"Mr. Cranston, both you and Whelan will, of course, keep all this confidential!" the chief said. "I'm going to assign a guard to watch you, Mr. Whelan. You have already been attacked once; and I don't want another corpse on my hands. You too, Mr. Cranston."

But Cranston shook his head smilingly.

"It won't be necessary. I've had all the danger I care for. I'm checking out of Washington either late tonight or early tomorrow morning. I'll feel much safer shooting big game in the Rockies than risking my life here in Washington."

It was a sudden decision, but one that had grim purpose behind it. Lamont Cranston was due to fade from the picture as a result of showing his hand at the Club Bandbox. But The Shadow would remain.

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The time to strike at a master foeman was almost at hand. The Shadow was ready to take the final move!

NOT very far from F.B.I. headquarters stood a hospital. A light burned in one of the private rooms. Evelyn Standish had been transferred here from the accident ward, after her hit-and-run injuries.

Evelyn was in no particular danger. Harry Vincent's alert rescue of the girl had cushioned the blow struck her by the hit-and-run car. She was suffering mostly from shock and excitement. The few bruises and cuts she had received were negligible. Nevertheless, her lovely face was pale.

"Better stay here a few days longer, to give your nerves a chance to relax," her physician advised her. "You've had a bad shock."

Evelyn hesitated. She stared questioningly toward her brother. Roy was smiling at the doctor, relieved at the fact that his sister had escaped serious injury. But he managed to turn slightly and to give Evelyn a faint nod. She took the hint.

"Of course, I'll stay," she murmured. "I do feel rather weak."

The doctor bowed and left. The moment the door closed behind the physician, the smile left Roy's lips.

"You've got to get out of this place tonight!" he whispered. "We're in a terrible spot, both of us!"

His words were urgent. So were Evelyn's.

"What became of the second brown envelope?" she breathed.

"It was stolen by someone when you dropped your handbag after the accident."

His lips trembled on that final word. He knew the "accident" had been a deliberate attempt at murder. So did Evelyn.

Their clever plan to deceive Number One had gone awry at the last moment. The blackmail letters had been recovered and destroyed. But Number One had only half the fake coast defense map. He would suspect a double cross. And there was a worse danger than that hanging over Evelyn's head.

Number One must already have discovered that the document the colonel's daughter had given him was bogus part of a defense map that was obsolete and out of date!

Evelyn knew that Roy had secreted the real map somewhere in the Standish home. She was now terrified for Roy's safety, as well as her own. He had steadfastly refused to tell her where the exact hiding place of the real map was.

"You leave the map to me," he said grimly. "Your job is to get out of this hospital and meet me outside. We can still outwit Number One, if we work fast. I've got a plan that will protect you and save the map, too!"

SWIFTLY, Roy explained. His plan was for Evelyn to slip out of the hospital and meet him at his car, parked a block or two away. He set the time at eleven o'clock. By that time, Roy would have the map ready to turn over to his sister. Driving swiftly to Baltimore, he'd place her on a train bound for New York.

"New York?" Evelyn echoed.

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"Yes. You can take a room at a cheap hotel under an assumed name. The map can be placed in a safe-deposit box, under a still different name. No one will suspect a thing. And I'll be here in Washington, to act as a lure for the spies and keep them busy on false leads, until the police trap them and round them up."

Evelyn objected. "That leaves you and dad in peril."

"Don't worry about us," Roy replied evenly. There was a strange glitter in his smiling eyes. "We can take care of ourselves."

"But how can I sneak out of the hospital? I'd be stopped before I reach the door."

"Not if you wear the disguise I've brought," Roy assured her.

He opened a suitcase he had brought to her private room. It held a nurse's complete outfit of clothing.

"Eleven o'clock is the deadline," he whispered eagerly, more tense than Evelyn had ever seen him. "Put on this costume. They change nurses at that hour. You won't be noticed. Use the stairs instead of the elevator. Walk two blocks north and I'll be parked in my car, waiting for you. Can I count on you?"

"Yes!"

Roy drew a swift breath of relief. He bent and kissed his sister with a queer intensity. His glance avoided hers. Then he was gone, leaving the suitcase hidden beneath her bed.

He drove straight to the Standish home, let himself carefully in with a passkey, using the side door. There was no sign of his father, or of the butler, Noble. Roy went upstairs with infinite caution.

The map he was after was hidden on the top floor. He didn't need a light. He knew exactly where to go, which board in the floor to lift. Moving quietly through the blackness of the room, he bent over the loose board and lifted it with trembling fingers.

IN the hospital room, Evelyn Standish divided her attention between the hands of the clock and the tiny crack of her partly opened door. The time was two minutes to eleven. A few feet down the hall she could see the desk of the nurse in charge of the floor. The nurse was busily filling in a daily report

With the soft chiming of eleven from a clock somewhere in the building, Evelyn made her move to leave the hospital. And she was successful. To anyone who might have glanced at her, she was just another nurse going off duty.

But Evelyn's heart was in her throat. Roy was depending on her cooperation. She mustn't fail him!

The icy night air outside revived her. It cut like a knife. She was conscious that under the blue cape and the white uniform, she was attired only in a thin silk nightgown. She had been afraid to don her clothing underneath, for fear someone might glance in her wardrobe closet before she left and notice that her garments were missing.

She turned the corner and hurried two blocks north toward where a sedan was parked at a dark curb. Roy opened the door and she slid in swiftly beside him. The car purred away from the curb. Evelyn uttered a gasp of relief.

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But her joy at the ease of her escape from the hospital was short-lived. A single glance at the chalk-white face of her brother told her that something had gone badly wrong with their plans.

"Roy! What's the matter?"

His voice was a harsh croak of despair. "The map is gone. The real one. It's been stolen! I went to the place where I had hidden it. It wasn't there."

"Are you sure? Perhaps in your hurry, you –"

"It's no use," Roy groaned. "The space where I had it hidden was just large enough to hold the flat envelope which contained the real map. Someone must have seen me hide it."

"But who? No one could possibly get in the house without the knowledge of Noble or" she choked over the last word "or dad."

Roy didn't reply. He pulled into the curb and parked again.

"What... what are we to do?" Evelyn whispered.

Roy's laughter was hollow.

"You might just as well go back to the hospital. You're no longer in any danger of death. Nor am I. In an effort to be smart, I've betrayed my country and let a spy get hold of exactly what he wanted! That's a pleasant thought, isn't it?"

His voice hardened. "I've still got an idea that I want to work out by myself. I'm driving home alone!"

There was a ghastly silence. Evelyn stared at her brother with a dawning look of terror in her eyes. A horrible thought, that had plagued her ever since the automobile accident, returned with numbing force.

"Roy! Do you suspect that dad –"

"You're mad!" he replied, roughly. But she saw instantly that her suspicion was reflected in her brother's stony eyes.

"I'm going with you," Evelyn said quietly.

"I'd rather handle this thing myself."

"Roy, did you please tell me the truth! did you examine the fender on dad's dark sedan?"

"Yes."

"Was it –"

"It was dented," Roy said hollowly. Evelyn sobbed with a dry, tearless agony that racked her slim body.

"We've come to the end, Roy! Start the car. I'm going with you."

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"You're damn right you've come to the end," a soft voice interrupted from behind them. "Number One thinks it's high time he had a final little interview with you!"

Roy Standish whirled from the wheel of his parked car. So did Evelyn. An automatic pistol was pointing steadily at them from a figure crouched on the floor of the car. The intruder had been concealed beneath a lap robe.

Dark eyes glared murderously over the barrel of the aimed gun. They were lovely eyes in a face that was serenely beautiful. The assailant was a woman, garbed in a gorgeous evening gown under an expensive furred wrap.

It was the shapely Spanish dancer from the Club Bandbox, Clarita Rondo!

CHAPTER XIII. THE HOUSE IN THE MUD

CAUGHT utterly by surprise, Roy Standish sat in stiffened silence staring at the night-club dancer like a bird hypnotized by a snake.

Clarita's loveliness of face and figure was definitely reptilian. Her tightly molded evening gown had a scaly, silvery glitter. Dark eyes gazed unblinkingly at her captives from a face so white with enameled make-up that it was like a milky mask. Clarita must have come straight from the Club Bandbox without pausing to change the make-up she used in her glittering dances.

Roy didn't utter a word. But Evelyn, after an instant of petrified terror, uttered a strange sob of joy.

"Thank Heaven!" she breathed.

For a moment of shocked horror, Roy thought that his sister was in league with the treacherous dancer. But Evelyn's swift whisper explained what she meant.

"Dad is not guilty! Oh, Roy, can't you see? This proves it!"

"How?" Roy muttered.

"He's never been to the Club Bandbox in his life. He doesn't know this woman. She's the girl friend of a man we hadn't even suspected."

"You mean Mike Porter?" Clarita sneered.

"Yes! Mike Porter is Number One!" Evelyn's faltering voice had hardened.

The accusation seemed to amuse Clarita. Laughter twitched her lips briefly like a frozen spasm.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that, my dear. Perhaps you were right the first time. And now, Lieutenant Standish, get this car moving. Be careful how you drive. You might frighten me, and when I'm frightened – I kill!"

"What are you going to do with us?"

"Number One will decide that."

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"He can't get away with it."

"No? When people know too much, Number One removes them. For further particulars, you might ask the late Jane Purdy and the late Walter Roscoe."

The car eased away from the curb under the nervous pressure of Roy's foot on the gas pedal. Clarita sat back in the shadow of the rear seat. She was invisible to the few pedestrians who hurried along the bleak sidewalk, their heads ducked low against the wind that blew icily in the darkness. Clarita's gun kept Roy and Evelyn under control.

"Turn left!" she snapped.

The car was soon out of the neighborhood of sleek apartment houses and towering government buildings. A railroad bridge was crossed. Streets became dirty and narrow. Tenements lined them on both sides.

This was a section of Washington which Harry Vincent would quickly have recognized. On one of these grimy buildings, a thug named Blackie had ambushed Harry, and made a quick escape.

"O.K. Slow up!" Clarita ordered suddenly.

Down near the corner was the neon sign of a cheap bar and grill. This was the bar from which the incautious Blackie had departed on a taxi ride that had ended in his death.

"Left turn," Clarita said sharply. "Drive in!"

Roy's glance shifted from the neon light of the bar and grill. He had slowed the car in front of a cheap garage. The door was open, but little could be seen inside. A dim night light over the doorway was the only illumination.

As Roy drove inside, he saw the back of a man through the open doorway of an office just inside the entrance. The man was poring over a greasy account book. He didn't even glance up as the sedan rumbled past the office and halted.

"Get out!" Clarita said.

Evelyn and her brother obeyed. They waited with upraised hands, under the menace of the dancer's gun. Someone in the rear of the garage was hammering busily with a tire iron.

Desperate, Roy raised his voice in a shrill cry: "Help! We're being held up! Murder!"

All that happened was the rasp of the garage door as it closed. The man from the front office had just attended quietly to that. The mechanic with the tire iron walked calmly into view from the shadowy rear and stood there, grinning faintly. He looked like a half-wit. He made no move to go to the aid of Roy and Evelyn.

"You try that yelp again," Clarita said viciously, "and I'll hand you a bullet. In a spot that won't kill you, but will hurt like the very devil!"

Her voice lifted clearly: "All right, Monty. Let's get started."

FOLLOWING the brief flick of her gaze, Roy saw a truck he hadn't noticed before. It stood parked against the dim side wall of the garage. It was an inclosed job, like a small moving van. There was no name painted

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on the truck. The numbers on the dingy license plate were barely readable.

Monty dropped into sight from the rear of the truck. He was a little man with a wrinkled, wizened face. In a fist fight, he'd have a poor chance for survival. But Roy, after one look at that pinched, evil face, knew that Monty was not the type that depended on bodily strength or fists. There was a bulge under his armpit that looked like the hidden outline of a gun.

Monty helped Clarita to herd the two prisoners into the covered truck. Clarita got inside, too, sitting comfortably in an armchair that Monty had thoughtfully provided for her.

"I don't want any more yelps out of either of you," she warned Roy and his sister. "If I have to shoot, Monty will cover it with a little fancy backfiring from his engine. Sorry there's only one chair. You can stand up or squat on the floor, I don't care which."

Monty closed the rear doors of the van and bolted them on the outside. He climbed to the driver's covered seat and started the engine.

A moment later, the garage doors opened and the truck rolled into a street that was almost deserted. Monty headed across Washington, and crossed the District line.

His speed increased as the concrete road stretched farther and farther out into the country. There wasn't much traffic. Stars burned like frosty specks in a black moonless sky.

Monty's goal was the marshy shore of Chesapeake Bay. The concrete highway gave way presently to a tarred surface. That in turn was replaced by a dirt lane, hardly wider than the rumbling truck. Swamp grass flanked it on either side. The stench of mud and stagnant water made Monty wrinkle his button nose with a grimace.

He didn't have much farther to go. This was a dead-end road that led to a fishermen's lonely settlement, long since abandoned.

The truck rumbled across a tottering log bridge that spanned a tidewater canal. It came to a halt at the rear of a dilapidated fishing hut. The hut stood at the very edge of Chesapeake Bay. Other huts had been there, but most of them had fallen to pieces.

To one side was a towering pile of oyster shells, like a black and smelly pyramid. On the other side the shore line dipped sharply in a curving mud bank. It was a graveyard for the hulks of abandoned barges. Most of them had sunk almost out of sight. Their bare ribs projected from the black ooze like the bones of dead dinosaurs.

This was the scene of decay and loneliness that met the startled eyes of Roy and Evelyn Standish when they stepped from the van under the watchful guns of Monty and Clarita.

They were herded into the back door of the hut. After a while, Monty came out alone. His job was done. He climbed back on the truck and drove off. The tail light vanished along the narrow swamp road. He had earned his dough and was anxious to get back to Washington. The stink of the Chesapeake mud was not to his liking.

SILENCE followed for nearly ten minutes. Then Clarita appeared alone from the hut's front door. There was a sagging porch outside, built at the water's edge, with steps that led to a small wooden jetty.

Clarita stayed on the porch. She had a large flashlight in her hand, and she pointed it outward across the black water of the bay. The light flashed nervously on and off, like the staccato signal of a telegrapher.

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There was no sign of a boat in the velvet blackness offshore. But the dancer's signal was instantly answered. She uttered a quick cry of satisfaction, then she went back into the hut.

A mile out in the bay, Mike Porter chuckled. But the man beside him merely grinned faintly. Long training in the service of wealthy employers had made this man's features wooden and impassive. He was Noble, the butler at the home of Colonel Standish.

He was crouched alongside Porter in the bow of a powerful speedboat, whose hull was the same black hue as the water on which it was lazily drifting.

"That does it!" Noble grunted. "It means that Clarita's ready for us to come ashore."

Porter didn't answer. He seemed half asleep. But there was a taut line of ridged muscle along the angle of his jaw that proved he was wide awake. Noble plucked irritably at his sleeve.

"What the hell are we waiting for? That signal is proof that everything is settled."

"Not quite!" Porter said, with a sudden grunt.

The grunt was caused by his quick turn and his quicker attack. He had whipped a short blackjack from his overcoat pocket. As he swung it upward, his left hand shoved Noble off balance, sending him plunging awkwardly to one knee.

Too late, Noble realized he was facing doom. He uttered a terrified scream, flung his arm upward to protect his head. But it didn't save him. It merely forced the murderous Porter to deliver two crushing blows instead of one.

The first blow smashed the wrist bone of the butler's lifted hand. The second landed on the back of Noble's skull with the ugly, ringing thud of a bat striking a fast baseball.

It caved in the back of the unfortunate butler's head. He fell face downward in the boat, as dead as if he had been struck by lightning.

Porter stood like a stark statue for a moment, staring at the fresh smear of blood on his taped weapon. Then, with a husky oath, he bent over the side of the craft and washed the blackjack clean. He wiped it dry on a piece of sacking and shoved it back into his overcoat pocket.

At once he became a dynamo of quick, purposeful energy. His treacherous murder of Noble was not a thing done on the spur of the moment. He had prepared cunningly both for the kill and the safe disposal of the body.

He tied the feet and hands of the corpse together, making a double loop of strong knots. He used flexible metal cable that might rest at the bottom of the bay, but wouldn't rust. To the cable he tied a leaden weight.

The weight was so heavy that Porter could barely roll his victim overboard. He nearly upset the drifting craft. But the splash of the body made a satisfying sound to him. The dead man sank rapidly. Porter knew that the heavy weight would jam the corpse deep into mud that was softer than butter.

No chance of Noble ever drifting back to the surface to puzzle the police or make things tough for Mike Porter.

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THE engine of the speedboat broke into a faint hum of power. The engine was carefully throttled down, but the boat moved shoreward at a fairly fast clip. It was an ideal craft for Mike Porter's purpose. It drew very little water. It could skim in close to shore over the shelving mud flats, where it would be hidden by reeds and swamp grass.

Porter shut off the engine as he neared his goal. Silently, the boat nosed into the bank, came to rest with a soft, sucking murmur. Porter's shoes sank ankle-deep in the black ooze, as he sprang over the bow; but he didn't mind that. In a few more moments he'd change these shoes and be comfortable enough.

He tiptoed past the graveyard of the beached barges, hurrying like a wraith toward the fisherman's hut where Clarita had flashed her signal light.

Unseen eyes watched him.

Close against the black ribs of one of these half-buried barges was a deeper patch of blackness. A figure was pressed against a decaying timber. Cloaked and silent, The Shadow watched the disappearing figure of Mike Porter. The brim of a dark slouch hat covered the gleam of his attentive eyes.

Sibilant laughter came briefly from between his taut lips. It was covered by the squishing sound of Porter's mud-clogged shoes and the faint lap of the tide along the oozy shore.

Lamont Cranston had checked out of his swanky hotel suite in downtown Washington earlier that night. But The Shadow remained!

He had witnessed the arrival of Roy and Evelyn Standish in the covered truck driven by the ugly-faced Monty. He had watched the stepson and stepdaughter of Colonel Standish being herded into what looked like a fisherman's bare hut under the menace of Clarita Rondo's gun.

The Shadow had not interfered. He had learned many facts in this dangerous undercover duel with a master spy. He was convinced of the identity of that spy. But final proof demanded patience. He expected the arrival of other victims.

Peering, The Shadow watched Mike Porter climb the sagging wooden steps that led from the jetty to the front porch of the fisherman's hut. Porter knocked on the closed front door, a knuckle-sound that was the exact counterpart of the signal that had been flashed out over the water by Clarita's electric torch.

It was answered by the appearance of Clarita herself. She asked Porter a single swift question.

"Did you get rid of Noble?"

"Yes. He's at the bottom of the bay."

Porter's laugh had no remorse in it. Clarita was laughing, too. With a sudden gesture, Porter swung the girl into a passionate embrace.

The Shadow, watching the quick love scene, made his eyes into grim slits. He knew Porter had just committed murder. Clarita had kidnapped two other victims. It was like watching the embrace of ghouls.

The two conspirators vanished into the hut. The Shadow moved instantly in a different direction, gliding through darkness toward the clearing behind the hut where the road across the marsh ended.

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He had barely secreted himself when the hum of an automobile became dimly audible. He couldn't see the car itself until it was almost in front of him. It had no lights. The motor was throttled to a faint murmur.

The driver backed the car out of sight among a tall clump of bushes. When he came into view again, he listened a moment, then apparently decided everything was O.K. His face was clearly distinct in the darkness as he passed the lurking figure of The Shadow.

It was Colonel Standish! But he looked more like a thug than a respectable army officer. He was wearing a suit of dark, baggy clothing. He moved with furtive steps toward the rear door of the hut and slid quietly inside.

THE SHADOW had no time to investigate the colonel's movements. A bright light had begun to shine across the marsh road from the mainland. Someone was following Colonel Standish's trail with swift urgency.

A moment later, the light winked out. But the pursuing car continued to advance at a dangerously swift pace along the narrow, bumpy road. It creaked across the log bridge over the tide canal, then came to a quick halt in the clearing.

There were two men in the car. Only one alighted. He bent close over the ground, studying the earth with the yellow ray of a small electric torch. In a moment, he found the broad tire marks of the colonel's sedan. Cautiously, he followed the trail to the concealing shrubbery. He came back after a moment, gave a low-toned summons to his companion.

"Hurry up! Give me a hand. I'll need you."

His voice identified him to The Shadow. He was Vic Marquette.

The man who crept to Vic's side didn't look as if he'd be of much help to anyone in an emergency. He was trembling, obviously dismayed at the thought of pursuing crooks to a dismal spot like this after midnight.

"Why don't we go back for more help?" he faltered.

"Impossible!" Vic replied. "There's no time. I was correct about the colonel. It's his car in those bushes!"

The rays of Vic's torch shone briefly on the face of his companion. It was Jim Whelan.

His hurried talk with Vic disclosed the reason for their presence at this bleak section of Chesapeake Bay. Vic had been assigned to guard Whelan from further trouble. A phone call from Standish's butler had drawn Whelan to the Standish home. Vic went with him, only to discover that the call had been a fake.

Noble was missing. Standish denied knowing anything about the phone call. But he acted so peculiarly, that Vic and Whelan waited in their car a block away, on the off chance that the colonel might be up to something.

He was! A few minutes later, Standish drove hurriedly away from his home in his dark sedan. Trailed by Vic and Whelan, he had driven to this lonely inlet of the Chesapeake.

The Shadow learned all this without disclosing his presence.

Vic had drawn two guns. He gave his flashlight and one of the guns to Whelan. He posted the trembling department-of-interior official at the bank of the tide canal that cut the marsh a few yards from the rear door

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of the hut.

"Wait here," he ordered in a tense whisper. "I'm going inside that hut. I may run into a hornet's nest. If I do, I'm coming out fast! Spot your light on the door, and shoot to kill if anyone pursues me."

Vic didn't wait any longer. He was afraid that if he lingered, Whelan would lose his nerve altogether. He tiptoed to the rear door of the hut and stepped inside the dark interior.

The Shadow had utilized the delay to creep closer to the side window of the hut. He could see Vic's blurred figure advancing stealthily through what looked like an empty rear room. Vic listened cautiously, then he stepped through a doorway into the front room.

The Shadow glided to the front window. But to his surprise, there was no sign of Vic. He had evidently heard some warning sound and retreated. But he was not in the rear room either, as The Shadow's quick glance through its dusty pane soon discovered.

Within the space of a split second, the Secret Service man had completely vanished!

IN an instant, The Shadow was darting toward the rear door of the shack. His hand was on the knob, when he stiffened and whirled. A faint sound was audible from the direction of the tide canal where Jim Whelan had been left on guard. It was a choking gasp. It was followed by a loud splash of water.

The Shadow's automatic glinted in his gloved hand as he raced swiftly toward the canal. Whelan was gone! Like Vic, he had vanished.

But unlike Vic, he had left clues behind to indicate what had happened. There were footprints in a confused pattern of struggle in the mud alongside the canal.

Flashing a light into the water, The Shadow saw Vic's gun and electric torch lying at the bottom. Whelan must have dropped them when he had been hurled violently into the canal. But where was he?

The water was only waist deep. It was clear enough to show no trace of a body. The Shadow believed in murder, but not magic. He lowered himself into the chilly water, and almost instantly made a discovery.

The canal was timbered on both sides, to prevent mud from sliding in and filling up the channel. A few feet from where Whelan had vanished after his choked cry, was a plank that didn't seem to fit evenly into the wooden bulkhead.

It came loose in the muscular clutch of The Shadow's gloved hands.

An oblong hole was disclosed. Reaching inside, The Shadow found it was the entrance to a concrete-lined tunnel. He didn't flash his torch, because he had no knowledge whether anyone was hidden farther up the tunnel.

Shrouded by utter darkness, he squeezed through the opening and began to crawl noiselessly along the horizontal passage. It led like a mole's crooked tunnel toward the fisherman's hut.

The Shadow was almost at grips with the unknown spy who called himself Number One!

CHAPTER XIV. DEATH UNDERGROUND

IT was slow, cramped work crawling along that narrow, concrete-lined tunnel that pierced the mud below the lonely marsh. It began to slant downward. The Shadow couldn't see an inch ahead in the darkness, but he used his sensitive hands to guide him. He discovered that the tunnel was not straight for more than ten feet at a stretch. It curved and twisted as it descended.

The Shadow divined the reason for such a queerly crooked passage. Light from the inner end of such a zigzag would be invisible at the exit hole in the wooden bulkhead of the tide canal.

He was correct. He saw the yellow radiance of light as he crawled noiselessly around the last turn. The light framed a square opening.

Flat on his belly, The Shadow waited. His gun was ready. Slowly, his eyes approached the edge of the opening. There was no enemy in sight. Arising, he stepped lithely through.

He was in a bare room that looked like a chamber hollowed out in the depths of the rock. The room was semicircular, except on the flat side where there were three doors.

Their surface looked like metal, a queer shiny alloy which The Shadow was unable to identify. He suspected that this metal might have peculiar properties.

He remained close to the exit of the tunnel. Suddenly, his ears warned him of peril. He heard a faint whirring sound from the passage he had just quitted. He threw himself downward and tried to wriggle back, but his head struck an immovable obstacle.

A metal barrier closed off The Shadow's retreat. It had dropped from a slotted recess in the curved roof of the tunnel. It fitted evenly, like the steel top of the cask.

Behind him, he heard a sound like a muffed chuckle. It came from one of the three doors. He was unable to determine which.

No attack followed. The Shadow waited, gun in hand, for a repetition of the sound. It came presently, this time a little louder. It wasn't a chuckle at all. It was a groan!

The Shadow had no choice of methods. He knew that in this present hazardous position, Number One held all the cards. Defense was impossible. The only safe procedure was to attack or at least try to force the issue, and profit from whatever break fate might provide.

With his gun level, The Shadow reached warily for the knob of the door on the right. It turned easily. The tiny room beyond the door was empty.

It looked like a prison wall, and was lined with the same unknown alloy of grayish steel that formed the composition of the door. There were no windows, and no sign of any other exit.

The middle cell was like the first empty.

But when The Shadow opened the final door on the left he saw the man who had groaned. He was lying in a limp huddle on the floor, bound hand and foot. There was a bloody smear on his forehead.

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It was Vic Marquette!

AS The Shadow bent over Vic, the cell door closed behind him. There was no sound of bolt or lock, but when The Shadow grasped the knob it turned loosely in his hand. It might just as well have not been there.

The Shadow had expected treachery. He had deliberately entered a trap, knowing that Vic's groan was Number One's lure to entice him. To avoid that lure would have been to condemn Vic to death.

In an instant, The Shadow's knife slashed Vic's bonds. He helped the Secret Service man to his feet. An extra gun appeared from beneath The Shadow's robe. Vic seemed to recover his nerve as he felt the heft of the heavy automatic.

Eagerly, he answered The Shadow's whispered queries.

Vic had been trapped within a few moments after he had tiptoed into the fisherman's hut. The rear room had been empty. He had gone through to the front, only to find the same bare emptiness. It puzzled him to find no attic and no cellar. He knew Colonel Standish had preceded him only a few moments earlier.

Vic found the answer when it was too late. The floor under his feet suddenly vanished. He fell like a plummet through pitch-darkness. His head struck a concrete floor, knocking him unconscious.

When he recovered, he was lying tightly bound in this steel-lined cell. No attempt had been made to gag him. His groans had attracted The Shadow.

The walls of the cell offered no hope of escape. Nor did the ceiling. Standing on Vic's shoulders, The Shadow attempted to find a hidden trapdoor; but his sensitive fingers failed to locate any trace of a break in the smooth of the ceiling.

Once more, he examined the door with the useless knob. The fact that Number One had vanished after binding Vic's ankle and wrists seemed to prove that escape was possible from this sealed cubicle. The gaze of the two captives moved over every inch of its inner surface.

As they stared intently, a peculiar thing happened behind them. A tiny two-inch circle began to glow faintly on the rear wall of the cell. It was like a dim rosy phosphorescence. Within that tiny circle, the tough steel of the wall became translucent.

A human eye peered.

The Shadow and Vic were unconscious of its brief surveillance. The rosy glow faded swiftly. When The Shadow turned from his vain inspection of the cell's door, the rear wall was the same dull gray it had been before.

Vic uttered a despairing oath.

But The Shadow was not yet ready to surrender. He began rapping softly at the side and rear walls. He tried the corners and the edges where floor and ceiling met. He continued his patient search for a way out.

MIKE PORTER didn't wait to watch The Shadow's grim investigation. It was Porter's eye that peered through the faint, rosy circle on the rear wall. He stood in a narrow corridor, grinning triumphantly at a dark-eyed girl whose shapely figure was enhanced by an evening gown.

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Clarita Rondo smiled at her lover.

It was she who had conducted Porter to this underground corridor. Her hand had operated the device that enabled him to peer through solid steel at the two victims in the cell.

Things had worked out perfectly. The capture of Vic Marquette had lured a most important victim to doom. The Shadow was ready for slaughter at Mike Porter's convenience.

Porter followed the silver-gowned night-club dancer down the corridor. Clarita seemed more familiar than Porter with the layout of this strange underground labyrinth beneath the muddy foundations of a decaying fisherman's hut.

The reason was simple: Mike Porter had never been here before.

He was relying on Clarita's infatuation to guide him to the heart of a murder rendezvous. He and The Shadow were animated by the same desire, though for grimly different reasons. Both sought the destruction of Number One.

The greed for wealth and power that had cost the life of the blackmailer, Walter Roscoe, was egging on Mike Porter. He had convinced Clarita that he was smart enough to kill Number One and take over the rich leadership of the spy gang.

"We'll wipe out The Shadow and Vic Marquette," he whispered gloatingly, in the girl's ear, "as soon as I slit Number One's throat. That leaves us in the clear, with only the colonel's son and daughter to get rid of."

Clarita nodded. Her lips uttered a warning that was almost inaudible.

"He's asleep now. He smokes hasheesh; can't go a day without the stuff. But he sleeps like a cat. Be careful not to make a sound!"

She reached the end of the corridor and pressed a button. A door opened soundlessly, admitting them to another corridor. This one was like the ornate foyer in the home of a wealthy man. Rugs covered the floor. Pictures and mirrors were on the walls. Other doors led to what seemed to be an extensive suite.

Mike Porter's eyes blinked as they stepped into a gorgeous living room. He was enough of a connoisseur to know that the three enormous oil paintings on the wall must have cost a small fortune. So, too, with the expensive furnishings and hangings. Europe and the Orient had been ransacked to decorate this underground mansion.

Number One was nowhere in sight.

Porter glanced inquiringly at Clarita. She nodded significantly toward the bedroom beyond. The hijacker advanced stealthily, his gun ready to spit death. But before he had taken more than three steps, a sudden command from the nightclub dancer halted him.

"Wait!"

Startled, Porter turned. Clarita Rondo was like a rigid statue of molten silver. There was a palm gun in her hand. Its muzzle was pointed straight at her lover.

"Drop that rod!" she grated.

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PORTER gasped. In turning, he had thrown himself off balance. His own gun was at a slant. For a second, he hesitated. He knew that a quick motion would bring his tilted barrel level, send a bullet crashing into the soft body of the dancer who had betrayed him. But there was death in Clarita's dark eyes. Her finger was cradled tightly at the trigger of the palm gun.

Porter's own fingers relaxed. His weapon dropped to the rug.

"Have you gone crazy?" he snarled.

"You'll find out how crazy I am, if you make a single move," Clarita rejoined in a harsh monotone. "Your goose is cooked, Mike! Hand over that map!"

"What map?"

"The one you stole from Colonel Standish's home."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I haven't any map. I tried to steal it at the night club, as you knew, but drew a blank."

"Don't try to kid me," Clarita snapped. "Whelan's map was an old one, and you know it. I want the real one, the one Roy Standish hid!"

Her bitter laughter stung him. He forgot everything except that he had made love to this dark-eyed girl and she had betrayed him.

Maddened, he sprang at the girl. His powerful hands clutched at her soft throat.

Clarita coolly withheld her fire until the last instant. Then her palm gun spat flame. It was point-blank range. The bullet caught Porter squarely in the forehead. As he swayed, a second bullet ripped into his open mouth and out his cheek.

He pitched heavily to the floor, with blood dripping from his torn cheek. But the bullet through his forehead was the one that had killed him. It had pierced his brain.

Clarita lowered her gun with a sobbing laugh. Her laugh was echoed by a ghastly figure that glided into the room the moment Porter collapsed.

"Excellent!" it said in a soft, womanish voice.

CHAPTER XV. THE FACE OF GUILT

IT was Number One! His yellowish mummy face gleamed like death incarnate above the white ruff of his black satin Harlequin suit.

"Search him for the map!"

Clarita obeyed. She dropped to silken knees beside the corpse. Her obedient fingers explored every pocket of the dead Mike Porter. But she found nothing. Porter had told the truth. He had no map.

An oath of disappointment echoed from the thin lips of Number One. He gave the dancer orders in a voice

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like the rasp of a steel file. There was nothing womanish about his tone when events displeased him.

"If Porter didn't have that map, it must be with one of the other prisoners. Torture them! Kill them! But find it!"

His waxen forehead glistened with sweat from the dank black hair that lay in matted streaks across his corpselike skull. He darted suddenly toward the corridor.

"I'll take care of the two fools in No. 3 cell. I've been waiting a long time for the pleasure of finishing Vic Marquette and The Shadow!"

A knife dropped into his palms from the wide black sleeve of his costume. It had a seven-inch blade, whetted to an edge as keen as a razor. He vanished with an ape-like trot down the corridor.

Clarita turned toward the door opposite the one where Mike Porter had been trapped and killed. She entered an adjoining chamber. Her eyes were glazed. She looked like a woman under a hypnotic spell, as she approached the helpless figures of three captives two men and a woman.

The victims were suspended on the smooth surface of the wall. Evelyn Standish was in the center. On her right was her brother Roy. To the left was Jim Whelan.

Tiny platforms, projecting from the wall, supported their weight. Behind each of them were two crossed timbers in the shape of a vertical X. The prisoners bodies were spread-eagled against the wall by ropes that tied their arms and feet to the tops and bottoms of the crossed timbers.

Evelyn was still wearing the nurse's uniform she had donned hurriedly over her nightgown when she had fled from the hospital. Her eyes were glazed with pain. The unnatural position in which she and her brother and Whelan were suspended made every bone and sinew in their bodies ache.

Jim Whelan began to scream shrilly. Clarita glared at him.

"You yellow dog! Where's that map?"

"I don't know. I haven't got it. Roy knows! Don't kill me Roy's the one!"

His terror drew an oath of disgust from Clarita. "If you aren't telling the truth, Heaven help you!"

She advanced with a tigerish sway of her hips. Her finger pressed a button. Instantly, the terrified body of Jim Whelan vanished through the wall. In the place where he had been was a gorgeous oil painting.

The explanation was a simple piece of mechanics. The panel of the wall where Whelan had hung was swung on a pivot. On the opposite side of each panel was an oil painting. At the touch of a button the panel had revolved completely, replacing the helpless body of Jim Whelan with the oil painting.

CLARITA'S dark eyes glared at Roy Standish. "Where is it the real map?"

"I don't know."

"You lie! You hid it in your own home."

"Someone stole it. It was gone when I went to find it."

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Clarita laughed harshly. "Maybe a little torture will loosen your tongue."

"You can torture me until doomsday," Roy gasped, "and it won't do you a bit of good!"

"I won't torture you," Clarita said. Her glance rested on the pale face of Roy's sister. "How would you like to watch your sister's agony?"

"Damn you!" Roy surged against his bonds. He was unable to break loose. He saw Clarita dart across the room.

She plugged something that looked like a curling iron into an electric outlet. She held it there until the metal end of the tool glowed cherry red. The hot smell of it made Evelyn's face shrink with horror.

Clarita clutched at the white collar of Evelyn's nurse costume. The material ripped, revealing the flesh of Evelyn's bared shoulder. It also revealed the fact that Evelyn was wearing only a silken nightgown beneath the nurse's uniform she had donned so hastily when she had fled from the hospital to meet Roy.

Clarita laughed with cruel anticipation.

"First, we'll try just a little hint of pain," she whispered.

The point of the red-hot iron touched smooth flesh. It was a light touch, but Evelyn screamed piercingly. When the iron came away, there was a raw place on her shoulder the size of a dime. Her body quivered in agony.

"Talk fast! Where did Roy hide that map?"

"I don't know! I... don't know!"

"Evelyn's telling the truth!" Roy shouted. "She never saw the real map."

"Is that all either of you have to say?"

Again Roy strained silently at his bonds. The veins at his temple were like twisted cords, but he remained immovable.

"We'll have to try a little more torture," Clarita panted.

Her dark eyes looked mad. She had worked herself to a pitch of insane, sadistic fury. Her hand reached out, ripped apart the frail lace that edged the bosom of Evelyn's nightgown. The hot iron darted forward.

IN a closed steel cell, The Shadow was kneeling. His body was stiff with fatigue, but there was flame in his deep-set eyes. He had found at last the thing he had been seeking.

Behind him, Vic Marquette watched, scarcely daring to breathe.

The Shadow's gloved fingers had widened a tiny crack between the edge of the floor and the base of the rear wall. He had located this spot after a nerve-racking search of every square inch of his prison. The crack opened wider under the pressure of a steady pull. The Shadow was able to feel a sort of grooved slot at the base of the crack.

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He lifted it and Vic choked off a gasp.

The rear wall of the cell was rising! It moved upward almost of its own volition. No sound was audible. Evidently, a greased counterweight was geared to the lifting mechanism.

The Shadow had discovered the secret of how Number One had escaped from a locked cell after he had entered to tie up the unconscious body of Vic Marquette.

Now, the two investigators found themselves in a dimly lighted, blank-walled corridor. The Shadow had no clue to guide him with sure certainty to right or left. Both ends of the passage looked exactly alike.

A shrill scream of terror whipped away The Shadow's uncertainty. It was the cry of a woman, quivering with agony. It came from the left end of the corridor.

Almost before the shuddering echoes of that scream died, The Shadow was in swift motion. His rubber-soled shoes made no sound. Vic Marquette raced noiselessly at his heels.

The Shadow's fingers opened an automatic door. He glided into a richly carpeted foyer, crossed a thick rug that hid the sound of his footfalls. Light streamed through an opening beyond. Vic followed The Shadow into an enormous living room.

The first thing Vic's incredulous eyes saw was the dead body of Mike Porter. It halted him with dazed wonder. But The Shadow was not surprised at the evidence of treachery. He was already aware that Porter was not Number One. He had anticipated that Clarita would lead the sleek hijacker into a trap.

Quickly, The Shadow whirled toward a narrow door that gave access to an adjoining room. As he threw it wide open, a scream of despairing agony made the hair rise on Vic Marquette's scalp. He darted in at The Shadow's heels.

He was just in time to see the red-hot branding iron in the merciless grasp of the maddened Clarita. The dancer had ripped away the nightgown from the quivering shoulder of Evelyn Standish, was jabbing forward the hot iron.

Vic's yell interrupted the attack. Clarita dropped the implement of torture, whirled with the speed of a tigress. She was standing on a table, to which she had climbed to bring herself in line with her suspended victims. In a split second, she had leaped to the floor and was crouched there, a gun glittering in her hand.

The Shadow had withheld his fire for fear of hitting one of the victims behind the dancer. Both Roy and Evelyn Standish were in the line of fire. But no such consideration stopped Clarita. Her pistol flamed at the cloaked figure of The Shadow.

Only his own agility saved him. His knees dropped him into a vertical crouch below the rip of the bullet. With almost the same movement, he flung himself aside. Vic, forgotten for a precious instant, had a grim chance to go into action. His gun roared explosively.

But, unnerved by the swiftness of events, Vic fired too fast and too high. He saw his wasted bullet flick plaster from the wall.

Then, to his utter satisfaction, he realized that blood was oozing from a round hole in Clarita's forehead. Neither Vic nor The Shadow had fired that second shot. Its roar was covered by the echo of Vic's own gun. Someone at the doorway behind them had killed Clarita, by trying to kill The Shadow!

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THE SHADOW had already whirled. The intruder was revealed like a shape of ghastly horror in the living-room doorway. It was Number One! His mummy face gleamed yellow with hate above the starched ruff of his black satin Harlequin suit.

The Shadow fired.

A blundering motion on Vic's part saved the spy's life. The Secret Service man's turning shoulder knocked The Shadow off his balance at the precise instant his gun barked. Number One threw himself flat like a scuttling crab. Then he was on his feet again, racing away from peril.

He fled down an unlighted corridor. A door slammed. An instant later, The Shadow reached it and his gloved hand was wrenching fearlessly at the knob. He was unable to budge the barrier.

Vic started to throw his weight against the door, but The Shadow restrained him with a curt command.

The Shadow's gun roared at the lock. He motioned toward Marquette. Vic's shoulder lunge finished the destruction of the weakened barrier. It toppled inward with a rending crash, spilling Vic and The Shadow to the floor.

They were just in time to see the wriggle of black satin legs vanishing through a narrow trapdoor in the ceiling. The Shadow sprang to the top of a low table and caught at the disappearing legs. A quick clutch, and the figure of Number One crashed heavily to the floor.

He rolled over, stunned, his masked face glaring upward like the yellow, waxen features of a corpse.

Vic Marquette jerked the figure to its dazed feet. A gun muzzle dug with grim emphasis into the velvet-covered spine. The spy was shoved swiftly along the narrow corridor, back to the room where Clarita Rondo lay stone-dead near the helplessly suspended figure of Roy and Evelyn Standish.

The Shadow's keen eyes noted a peculiar thing. Alongside Evelyn and Roy on the wall, was a gorgeous oil painting. It was the only one in the room. Its size was the exact duplicate of the panels to which Roy and his sister were tied. Under the painting was a button. The Shadow pressed it.

Instantly, the painting vanished. In its place appeared the trussed body of Jim Whelan. Pivoted back into view, he screamed with terror as he saw the masked figure of Number One. Then the cry died in his throat, as he realized that the spy had been captured by The Shadow and Vic Marquette.

The Shadow whispered something to Vic. The Secret Service man clutched at the spy. He lifted Number One's head straight upward from his white-ruffed shoulders. The head was a plastic helmet. Its removal disclosed a human face, whose identity came as a stunning surprise to Vic.

His cry was echoed by the scream of Evelyn Standish. Vic's yell was one of startled wonder. But Evelyn's was a shriek of horror. Her trussed body on the wall panel sagged into unconsciousness.

She had seen the face of her own stepfather, Colonel Henry Standish!

CHAPTER XVI. TRAITOR'S END

THE unmasking of Colonel Standish stilled every sound in the room. The silence that followed Evelyn's shriek of horror was profound. She hung limply in her tight bonds on the wall, mercifully unconscious.

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Roy's eyes glared at his stepfather with an expression of hate and loathing. Jim Whelan's jaw hung open in ludicrous amazement.

Vic had done a good job of stripping away the Harlequin disguise. Standish was revealed in the civilian's rumpled suit he had worn when he tiptoed into the rear entrance of the fisherman's hut.

"Guilty as hell!" Vic cried.

Standish tried to speak. All he could utter was an unintelligible croaking sound.

"A traitor coiled in the flag of his own country!" Vic continued, every word a hard pellet. "A trusted officer in the United States army. Murderer and thief! Torturer of his own innocent daughter –"

The grim indictment broke the seal of Standish's paralyzed throat.

"I'm innocent!" he shrieked.

He glared past Vic at The Shadow, as though trying to convince that ominously silent figure with the piercing eyes. The Shadow made no comment. The faint sound of mirthless laughter filled the room with whispering echoes.

The gloved hand of The Shadow pointed at the waxen helmet and black satin costume that lay in a heap on the floor.

"Explain!"

Colonel Standish's trembling lips steadied. When he finally spoke; his words were barely audible. He tried to pack each word with persuasive sincerity. Listening, Vic Marquette smiled bleakly.

Standish was using Vic's method of capture as a means of explaining his own.

He declared he had found the fisherman's hut empty when he had tiptoed in. A trapdoor in the dark floor beneath his feet had opened suddenly without warning, spilling him headlong into blackness. The impact had knocked Standish unconscious.

That was all he remembered until he awoke to find himself dressed in the garb of Number One, with the thunder of The Shadow's gun smashing the lock of the door. Terrified, he had tried to flee.

"Why try to escape if you were innocent?" Vic snapped.

"I knew I could never hope to prove it."

"What brought you here in the first place?"

"I was trailing Noble. He's my butler. I suspected him and I searched his papers. He's the man you want! Noble is Number One!"

Vic chuckled harshly. The Shadow had told him many things before they had escaped from the steel cell where Vic had been trapped. He knew that Noble was a pawn, a henchman of Mike Porter. He was aware that Porter had killed Noble to get rid of him.

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The colonel wilted, as he heard Vic's calm voice recite these facts. His hunted eyes glanced toward the open door. But he was afraid to chance the gun of The Shadow.

The Shadow bent his head slightly; his lips whispered briefly at Vic's ear. The word "map" was distinctly audible, but nothing else could be heard. Vic nodded.

"Search him," The Shadow ordered.

Standish tried to duck as the Secret Service man sprang at him. But Vic's hands were like steel hooks. He anchored his captive and held him motionless. With his free hand, he made a rapid and efficient search.

He found no trace of the vanished map the real one, that had been given to Colonel Standish for safekeeping by the secretary of war.

Vic's snarl of disappointment and disgust was well done. The Shadow's whisper had prepared him. The Shadow knew that no map would be found on the colonel's body.

IGNORING the scuffling figures of the two men, The Shadow turned away. He walked with a quick stride toward the three helpless prisoners who were still suspended on the wall. The Shadow had made no effort to release them, although Evelyn still sagged unconscious from the cords that bound her to the X-shaped timbers behind her.

There was purpose behind the Shadow's apparent lack of humanity. He was playing a clever game. He stood before Roy Standish. An envelope appeared suddenly from beneath his cloak Roy's eyes bulged as he saw it.

"Do you recognize this envelope?" The Shadow asked.

"Yes, yes! It's the one –"

The Shadow took a folded document from the envelope. It had not been clipped or defaced. It was a complete map of the Atlantic coast defenses of the United States. On each of the four corners were indelible blue lines that dyed the fiber of the paper, could never be eradicated without destroying the paper itself.

Roy gave a choked cry.

"It's the map I stole from dad's safe! The one I hid in my own room to keep from falling into the hands of spies. Who stole it?"

"I did!"

The Shadow's words rang out with clipped clarity. He made no effort to free Roy. Other words followed that calm confession of theft on the part of The Shadow. Everyone in the room now knew what had actually happened.

The Shadow had stolen the real map, to use as a decoy for the capture of Number One. His plan had succeeded. Staring straight at the pale face of Roy, he spoke a final sentence.

"I know the true identity of Number One!"

He turned and replaced the map in its envelope, laid the envelope carelessly on the table where the dead Clarita had stood to torture Evelyn with a hot iron. His gaze flicked for the merest instant toward the dead

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face of the dancer.

In that instant, things happened with the speed of lightning. There was a startled yell from Vic Marquette. Colonel Standish had torn loose from Vic's grasp with a sudden effort. His fist landed on Vic's jaw, dropped him in a stunned huddle on the floor.

The Shadow seemed paralyzed by the quick attack.

Colonel Standish hurdled Vic's body and raced for the door. As he brushed against the wall, his hand stabbed outward. His goal was the switch that controlled the lights in the ceiling.

Darkness blotted the room.

Through that darkness, the rush of Colonel Standish's feet dwindled. He was pursued by The Shadow. Vic Marquette, too, was on his feet again, swearing excitedly at the top of his lungs. He raced after the Shadow in an effort to head off the fugitive colonel. His shouts faded down the corridor.

The room they had quitted lapsed into silence. For thirty seconds or so, the darkness was as quiet as a tomb. Then there was a faint squeak. It came from the wall.

The quick breathing of a man was audible. An unseen figure was tiptoeing across the chamber. It moved toward the table where The Shadow had left the envelope with the vital war secrets of America's defense.

There was a faint gasp, the sound of fumbling hands reaching across the table

Lights blazed brilliantly in the room.

The figure at the table was revealed in that pitiless illumination. The envelope was clutched in one hand, a gun gleamed in the other. The waxen helmet and the black satin disguise of Number One still lay on the floor where Vic had tossed them after stripping Colonel Standish.

But Number One had miraculously returned. He was wearing a duplicate of Colonel Standish's garb!

His yellowish mummy face gleamed above the white ruff of a Harlequin suit. Sweat glistened on his corpse-like forehead. He whirled toward the sound of mocking laughter that came from a corner of the room.

The Shadow stood there, armed and alert, staring at the master criminal he had tricked. In the doorway were two other motionless figures Vic Marquette and Colonel Standish. Both held guns.

THE colonel's flight had been a clever ruse. Vic, obeying certain orders of The Shadow, had whispered instructions to Colonel Standish while The Shadow diverted attention from them by his conversation with Roy concerning the map.

A trap had been laid. Number One had taken the bait.

His pistol flamed at The Shadow. The slug roared into the wall. The Shadow, poised on the balls of his feet, had flung himself swiftly aside from the stab of flame. He dropped to his knees as his gun spoke.

Number One staggered. But he had the cold vitality of a snake. The Shadow, unwilling to kill him, had aimed at his left shoulder. It didn't bring him down. The map fell from stiffened fingers, but the spy chief still gripped the gun in his right hand. It pumped lead, as he raced straight toward the two men who blocked his

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escape through the doorway.

Colonel Standish swayed and fell, with blood smearing his chin. Vic saw the muzzle of the spy's weapon loom as big as a house, as Number One sprang toward him. Barely a foot separated the two men. The spy's finger tightened on his trigger. So did Vic's.

It was life or death, and Vic knew it. The crashing echo of gunfire almost split his eardrums. He felt a burning wind lash like a hurricane across his scalp. Reeling against the door jamb, he steadied himself for a second shot.

It wasn't necessary.

Vic's slug had ripped through the chest of the satin-garbed criminal. Number One pitched backward from the impact of the heavy bullet. His stumble saved Vic's life. A half inch lower aim, and the bullet that had clipped through Vic's hair would have buried itself in the center of his forehead.

Vic stared down at the limp figure on the floor. The Shadow had darted to Colonel Standish's assistance. The colonel was not badly hurt. His bloody chin came from a shallow gouge that had ripped open his cheek.

He gasped weakly: "I'm... I'm all right. Who... who is this –"

It was a question that Vic, too, was trying dazedly to ask. He stared at the wall of the smoke-filled room. Three oil paintings were suspended at the spots where the trussed victims of Number One had hung.

Vic darted toward the control button to reverse the panels, but the hand of The Shadow restrained him. He pointed toward the wounded figure of Number One. He pronounced with slow certainty a name.

It was a name that made Vic cry out in wonder. He didn't believe it. Not until he had ripped away the waxen headpiece, was he convinced of the accuracy of The Shadow's calm prediction.

The face at which he stared was that of Jim Whelan!

IT was almost impossible to recognize the familiar face of the crooked government official. The vague, timid look was gone. His eyes were stony with hate and despair. All his fake gentleness, his pretense of harmless innocence all had vanished with the realization that he had been caught red-handed and the game was up.

The Shadow revolved the oil paintings on the wall. Roy and his sister swung back into view. But the third panel, where Jim Whelan had been, was empty.

The Shadow showed Vic how the trick had been done. The bonds of Roy and Evelyn were thick strands of white cord. Those of Whelan's were black. Vic tugged at one and it lengthened in his hand. Rubber! The difference in color had attracted The Shadow's attention the instant he had sprung into the torture chamber to save Evelyn from the attack of Clarita.

It was a bad mistake of Number One, almost as bad as the mistake he had made at the canal behind the fisherman's shack.

The Shadow explained, after he had released Roy Standish and his sister. He had known before he entered the tunnel outside that the disappearance of Jim Whelan was deliberate. The marks of struggle on the soft mud at the edge of the canal proved that. One man had made that confused pattern of prints.

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Having faked the marks of struggle, Whelan had tossed his gun and flashlight into the canal, had groaned, then had slid like a rat through the tunnel, confident The Shadow would follow the trail to doom.

The ease with which The Shadow had found the loose plank in the canal bulkhead was another significant clue in the long link of events that had made him suspect Whelan almost from the very beginning.

Colonel Standish's face was grim with relief, as he listened to The Shadow's calm murmur. His arm was protectingly around Evelyn. Roy's tight grip of affection on his stepfather's hand brought tears to the colonel's eyes. Out of danger and death, he had recovered the love and trust of his children.

The colonel had never sent that airport telegram to Whelan. Whelan had engineered it, to pin suspicion on the man he planned to rob. Roy was the military thief of Whelan's office, a break that helped Number One to involve the son as well as the father. Whelan had found Evelyn's love letters when he killed Jane Purdy and the blackmailing Walter Roscoe. It gave him an added hold on Roy.

Mike Porter had entered the case as a hijacker. He made love to Clarita and tried to use her. Noble was a henchman of his, in the household of Colonel Standish. It was Noble and Mike Porter who had engineered the automobile hit-and-run murder attempt on Evelyn's life. They used the colonel's own car, driven by the butler. Colonel Standish knew nothing of this.

But Whelan's clever stunt was his trip to the night club with Lamont Cranston. He had found out by this time that the half map he had received from Evelyn was obsolete and useless. The trick of fate that brought him the second half through the mail enabled Whelan to prove something he suspected that Mike Porter was trying to double-cross him, with the help of Clarita, and take his place as Number One in a profitable spy ring.

The tremendous extent of Whelan's profits from the spy racket was revealed when The Shadow opened a steel vault with keys taken from the pocket of the wounded criminal. But the stacks of currency didn't interest The Shadow as much as certain other things. He found Number One's code book.

In it was a record of ownership to the Women's Athletic Club, where Whelan had contacted his women agents beneath a swanky swimming pool. The secret of Madame Alyce's beauty shop was also revealed.

It was enough to send Vic Marquette racing to the living room of this strange underground mansion, where he had seen a telephone. In a moment, he was connected with F.B.I. headquarters. He poured out a quick, excited report to a gray-haired man who sat with tired eyes in a remote room of that distant building.

Long before Vic finished his report, the Federal dragnet was working. Agents leaped into cars. The moan of police sirens screamed through the darkness of the nation's capital. It was the beginning of the biggest spy cleanup in the history of America.

BUT The Shadow took no part in all this. When Vic raced back from the telephone, The Shadow was gone.

No one had seen him leave. The others thought he had accompanied Vic to the telephone. They could tell the disappointed Secret Service man nothing. Vic's chance to thank The Shadow for the solution of the mystery was gone forever.

The Shadow wanted no thanks. His work was done. He had saved his country from treachery. He had exposed a spy who had used a government job to cloak his own evil designs.

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Under the chilly stars that twinkled above the muddy shore line of Chesapeake Bay, a black-cloaked figure dwindled through the darkness. An echo of sibilant laughter died in the wail of the wind.

The Shadow was returning to darkness and obscurity. He would remain unseen until some new and dangerous enemy of the law arose to challenge his power.

THE END