

Death Turrets

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. TOWERS OF DOOM.

THE big, high-powered roadster wallowed to a stop in the muddy parking space close by the little station of Sunnyside. A young man alighted beside the single track and picked his way to the rain-soaked station platform.

The rain was coming in a heavy drizzle; the clouds that caused it had turned late afternoon into a gathering dusk. There was just enough light to show the grin that appeared on the young man's sallow face when he saw the faded name painted on the station sign.

"Sunnyside." The name certainly wasn't an appropriate one. It must have been raining for a week in this vicinity. The stream that flowed under a little railway bridge was swollen to its limits. Huge puddles showed along the road, and some of the low fields looked like ponds.

The station waiting-room was gloomy and unoccupied, but warm. An open stove provided heat and gave a

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flickering light, which was needed, for the windows furnished very little daylight.

The young man looked for the ticket window. It was shut, but streaks of light showed through the cracks of the closed wicket.

Prolonged hammering at the ticket window brought no response. Raising his raincoat collar about his neck, the young man went out to the platform.

He peered into the lighted ticket office, but saw no one. Looking the other direction, he spied a building farther up the tracks.

It was evidently a freight office, for there was a box car on the siding beside it. There was a man there, in overalls, busy shifting some boxes.

The fellow looked up when the young man approached him. He gave a nod, then said:

"Howdy! What can I do for you?"

"Are you the ticket agent here?"

"Yep!"

"Telegraph operator, too?"

A nod. The young man smiled. He produced a telegram from his pocket and handed it to the agent. The man read the wire in the light of a lantern. It was addressed to Roderick Talroy, and the message read: AM AT FIVE TOWERS NEAR SUNNYSIDE STATION WILL SEE YOU

OLIVE

"Reckon you're Mr. Talroy," declared the ticket agent. "Yep, I sent this over the wire. It come down from Five Towers this morning."

"Did you see Olive?" inquired Talroy, eagerly. "Miss Huxton, the lady who sent it?"

"I didn't see no one," admitted the agent. "I was busy here, with some freight. It was just setting there by the ticket window, the wire was, with the money for it. It wasn't handwritten neither. It was done on a typewriter, like all the telegrams that come from Five Towers."

"Where is Five Towers?"

The station agent pointed through the drizzle. His finger indicated a wooded hill a few miles distant, so dark that even the trees were indistinguishable in shape. But above, visible despite their grayish resemblance to the rain, were turrets that poked above the trees.

"There's Five Towers," said the station agent. "The hill road goes right up to it. I can tell you this, too. There's a girl's been staying there. So I guess you'll be finding Miss Olive Huxton."

"Thanks." Talroy turned, then remembered: "By the way, I want to send a telegram of my own."

"I'll be right with you, Mr. Talroy."

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BACK in the gloomy station, Talroy found telegraph blanks in a box beside the ticket window. With a pencil, he scrawled a telegram, using lighted matches to see the blank. Talroy left the telegram on the counter, weighted with a half dollar. The agent could keep the change.

As he reached the platform, Talroy saw the agent approach. He told him about the telegram. The man nodded, but his head began to shake when he saw Talroy climb into the big roadster.

"A mighty heavy car you got there, Mr. Talroy. Maybe she won't make that gully bridge up by the entrance to Five Towers."

"Very dangerous, is it?"

"Well, the gully ain't deep. But the bridge ain't strong. There can't much happen to you, but you might get ditched deep."

The big roadster pulled away. Its headlights gleamed; they swung away as the car headed for the road. A flicker of light showed the doorway of the station, which overhanging eaves had held in thick darkness. The ticket agent blinked. In that momentary glimpse, he thought he saw the station door close.

Entering, the agent questioned sharply:

"Hello! Who's here?"

The only response was the crackle of wood from the stove. The agent shrugged his shoulders; crossed through the gloom of the waiting room. He saw Talroy's telegram lying on the counter, but did not pick it up. Instead, he unlocked the door to the ticket office. Once through, he closed the door behind him.

Some one moved from the darkened corner of the waiting room. With stealthy steps, a hunched man reached the ticket window. The light from the cracks showed hands that wore leather gloves. One lifted the half dollar; the other pulled away Talroy's telegram and crumpled it.

Fire crackles drowned the crunching of the paper, but the ticket agent could hear neither, beyond his closed wicket. The only evidence of an intruder was the fact that Talroy's telegram was gone. That clue, however, was quickly abolished.

From beneath a heavy overcoat, the leather-gloved fingers brought out another telegraph blank and laid it where the first had been. The half dollar settled in place with only the slightest clink. Hands drew away. The hunched figure turned, to start for the door.

The sudden opening of the ticket window made the muffled man stop his sneaky stride. He waited near the wall, while the agent took the telegram and the money through the window. As soon as the wicket snapped shut again, the intruder resumed his departure.

This time, the station agent was not in a position to see the door of the waiting room, when it closed tightly shut.

THE agent was scratching his head, though, when he read the message on the telegraph blank. It was addressed to Rufus Fant, in New York City. The message stated:

CAN BUY A MILLION DOLLAR INVENTION FOR TWENTY THOUSAND CASH STOP BRING THE MONEY TO FIVE TOWERS NEAR SUNNYSIDE

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The telegram had the name of Roderick Talroy at the end of it. Therefore, the agent took it to be the message that Talroy had left for prompt dispatch. But why was Talroy talking about inventions, when he had come here to meet a girl?

There was an inventor who lived up at Five Towers. The station agent knew that, so the telegram made sense. It dawned on the agent suddenly that the invention purchase might have had something to do with the telegram sent by Olive Huxton.

Yes, that was it. But it was funny, Talroy trying to kid the very man who had to tap the message over the wire.

There was another thing that puzzled the agent.

This telegram, like the morning one, was typed.

Talroy hadn't been carrying a typewriter when the agent saw him get back into the roadster. That brought another head-scratch, until the agent finally figured that Talroy might have had this typed telegram in his pocket, all the while.

That settled it. The station agent sent the wire. He filed the typewritten blank on a hook, directly over the wire that had been left at the station that morning. He was so satisfied with his answers, that he never thought to compare the two typewritten messages.

If he had, the station agent would have made a really puzzling discovery. Both messages—Olive Huxton's and Roderick Talroy's—had distinctive markings that showed they had been typed on the same typewriter.

Each of those wires was a false one, planted at Sunnyside station by the same hidden hand.

It was unfortunate that the station agent did not suspect the fraud. If he had, he could have called Five Towers, to warn Roderick Talroy after he arrived there. Nevertheless, the station agent had already done Roderick all the service that was needed.

He had warned Roderick about the weak bridge across the hill gully. If the young man had listened, he would have profited.

BUT Roderick Talroy had his own ideas of how to handle the matter of shaky bridges that bore signs warning against overweight.

If such bridges weren't too long or too high, you could whiz over them so fast that they never felt it. The gully bridge, it happened, was just the sort that Roderick thought was made to his order. He saw it as he took the final bend. No longer and no higher than a big culvert, that bridge, even if it did look flimsy.

Roderick shifted into high-speed second. His big car fairly sprang up the slippery grade to the bridge. Beyond, Roderick saw the gates of Five Towers, among the trees at the far side of a curve. Then big tires thudded the bridge. The gates, with the trees about them, seemed to do a rapid whirl.

The bridge was splintering under the weight of the big roadster! The car was doing a sideward twist into the gully, amid the crash of timbers. Quick in emergency, Roderick jammed the brakes and turned off the ignition key. The car landed at a crazy tilt. Chunks of rotten wood bounded from the raised top above Roderick's head.

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A few minutes later, the occupant crawled out, unhurt. From the gully bank, Roderick ruefully studied the roadster. One wheel had doubled under; the rear axle was bent. That car wouldn't be much use for a few days. Neither would the bridge.

By cracking up at that spot, Roderick Talroy had cut off future traffic between the railroad station and Five Towers.

The station was four miles back, but Five Towers was close at hand. Carrying a small suitcase, Roderick Talroy raised his collar against the rain. He walked through the mucky driveway that led between the gates. Five minutes through the darkened woods brought him to a clearing.

There, dim in the misty dusk, stood Five Towers. The building was old and sprawling. It looked as if some one had patterned it after his own idea of a French chateau, without ever having seen one. There were lights, though, in the windows, that made Five Towers look cheery.

Roderick Talroy smiled, confident that he would find a welcome there. So he would, but the welcome was to be of a most puzzling sort. As for the later consequences, if Roderick had even suspected them, he would have turned and left Five Towers far behind him.

The gray walls that loomed to receive the visitor were awaiting him as a victim. To Roderick Talroy, had he known it, those pinnacles against the sky were towers of doom!

CHAPTER II. DEATH AT THE TOWERS.

WHEN Roderick Talroy pounded at the big door of the gray building, a servant promptly opened it.

There was no grating of rusted bolts; the door was well-oiled, including the hinges. Nor was the servant a fossilized old fellow of the sort who went with a strange old house like this. He was a polite man, scarcely middle-aged, who admitted the visitor with a friendly bow.

The big hallway was well-lighted and furnished in somewhat modern style. To the left was the wide double door of a lighted living room. Roderick could hear the crackle of a fire; then came the patter of a girl's quick footsteps. A voice asked:

"Who is it, Titus?"

Roderick thought the girl was Olive Huxton; he promptly waved a greeting. His coat and hat must have looked familiar, for the girl started to give a pleased response. Suddenly, she halted, to stammer:

"Why-why-I thought--"

"You thought I was some one else," laughed Roderick, handing his hat and coat to Titus. "I happen to be Roderick Talroy. Probably Olive has spoken about me."

"Olive?" The girl was puzzled. "Olive who?"

"Olive Huxton," said Roderick. "She wired me to come here."

"Olive Huxton," repeated the girl, slowly. "There is no one of that name here. No, you must be mistaken. What was your name, again? Roderick Talroy?"

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Roderick nodded. The girl smiled; her lips indicated that she knew something, but she was emphatic as she repeated her headshake. However, she was cordial in her invitation when she suggested that Roderick come into the living room.

There was an elderly lady seated there, whose long face and suspicious eyes almost matched the expression of a moose head that hung above the mantel. As they approached, the girl said to Roderick:

"My name is Lucille Merrith, and this lady is also Miss Merrith. Aunt Augusta, I want you to meet Mr. Talroy."

Aunt Augusta gave a curt nod, as though she mistrusted the stranger. Lucille and Roderick sat down by the fire. The girl watched the logs crackle. Roderick could see a sparkle in her blue eyes, that seemed well-suited to the lightness of her hair. Lucille was trying not to smile. At last she managed it.

"You were engaged to Olive Huxton, weren't you?"

Lucille put the question soberly.

"Yes," replied Roderick. "How did you know? Did Olive tell you?" He hesitated, then glared angrily: "I guess she couldn't have, or you would know that our engagement was broken!"

"I know about that, too," declared Lucille. "I have read all about both of you, in the society columns. You are a very wealthy young man, but a notorious spendthrift. She, it is said, is wealthy and spoiled, also quite prankish."

"That's the dirt they've dished up," snapped Roderick. "It's true, all right, but it's none of their business! Wait a moment, though. Why did you particularly mention that Olive was prankish?"

"Because," replied Lucille, "she has brought you to a place where no one knows her, and where, I feel certain, she has never been."

LUCILLE'S words convinced Roderick. Angrily, he brought out the telegram. He showed it to Lucille, and the girl decided that Olive Huxton could have sent it from the Sunnyside station.

"She could have sent some one there, you know," said Lucille. "The ticket agent is never in his office. He just picks up whatever telegrams are waiting, and sends them."

Roderick already knew that. He decided that Lucille was right. Sheepishly, he was thinking of departure, when he happened to remember about his ditched car. Before he could tell Lucille about it, there was a ring at the front door. Lucille looked up gladly, as a stocky young man stepped into the room.

The arrival was a good-looking fellow, with a square-jawed face and darkish eyes that had a firm glitter. Lucille introduced him as George Brendaw, the owner of Five Towers. She did not explain why Roderick had arrived, and it proved unnecessary.

"I suppose that is your car down in the gully," said Brendaw, to Roderick. "Mighty sorry you had an accident. Not hurt, I hope?"

"Not at all," replied Roderick. "I hope, though, that I haven't inconvenienced traffic between here and town."

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"You've done that, all right," laughed Brendaw, "but it isn't your fault. The county should have fixed that bridge, long ago! I'm going to telephone Sheriff Cravlen about it.

"I had to leave my car below the bridge, but that won't matter. They'll haul your car down to town and have the bridge fixed in a day or so. You're welcome to stay here, Mr. Talroy."

Roderick could see that Brendaw meant it, so he accepted the invitation. He looked at Lucille. The girl thought that he was pleased because he would not have to tell others how he had been hoaxed. The girl nodded, indicating that she would keep the secret.

To himself, Roderick expressed the impression that he would profit by a few days stay here. He was through with Olive, for her prank, and, therefore, he was looking for some other girl. Lucille Merrith was eligible, if he could only get rid of that moose-faced aunt.

The fact that Lucille thought a lot of Brendaw meant nothing to Roderick Talroy. Nor did he care because he was accepting Brendaw's hospitality. One of Roderick's specialties was that of coaxing women away from other men. That was one of his bad qualities that Lucille hadn't read about in the newspapers.

Brendaw had gone from the living room. Aunt Augusta was reading Thackeray, with a pair of lorgnette reading glasses. Roderick made use of this opportunity to tell Lucille how little he really cared for Olive.

In fact, said Roderick, he hadn't intended to stay here, even if he did find Olive. He had wired New York from the station, telling his valet to expect him back at the apartment.

Roderick followed that by saying that he was glad his car had crashed at the bridge and he felt pretty sure that Lucille knew why. He was just about ready to tell her how lovely she looked when Titus announced that dinner was served.

THEY dined in a big dining room across the hall. There, they were joined by a tall, wiry man who wore a ruddy beard and mustache. His name was Robert Lenley, and he appeared to be about forty years old. Lenley, it developed, was the inventor that the station agent had mentioned. He had a workshop in the cellar, and he had been busy there all afternoon.

The inventor was evasive, when his work was mentioned. That, perhaps, was due to a visitor's presence. Roderick learned that Lucille and her Aunt Augusta had been guests at the Towers for less than a week.

Apparently, Aunt Augusta had money that she considered putting into one of Lenley's inventions. That was the reason why she and her niece were here.

One other detail interested Roderick. Above the mantel of the dining room hung a portrait of a glowering old man with flowing hair, bushy brows and wide chin. The eyes of the picture had something of the flash that Roderick had noticed in Brendaw's. Roderick supposed, logically enough, that George Brendaw was related to the man of the portrait.

When dinner ended, and the ladies departed; Brendaw proffered cigars. While the three men smoked, Lenley began to discuss scientific matters, chiefly for Roderick's benefit. The inventor seemed to be emphasizing the fact that he was a man educated in such matters; he was eyeing Roderick very narrowly, all the while.

George Brendaw finished his cigar and strolled from the dining room, remarking that he would be back later. Roderick, tired of Lenley's talk, was anxious to join Lucille. He told the inventor that he wanted to go to his room.

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Since Lenley was watching him when he reached the hall, Roderick asked Titus where the room was. The servant ushered him upstairs.

There was a long center hall on the second floor; it ran crosswise in the building. At each end was a corridor extending at right angles to the main one.

Titus took Roderick to the passage on the right. They turned toward the rear of the building and stopped at a door.

All the way along, Roderick had noticed few doors, and the reason was explained when Titus opened this one. The room was huge, three times as large as an ordinary bedroom; probably the others were all that size.

Roderick's suitcase was in the corner. As soon as Titus had gone, Roderick opened it and found a fresh shirt and necktie. He started to put them on, in front of a big, old-fashioned mirror, but the light was poor.

Roderick moved a floor lamp closer to the mirror. He noted that the room had no chandelier. It was lighted entirely by lamps connected to floor plugs, only the one lamp being on.

As a result, many spots in the huge room were dark, almost as gloomy as the waiting room down at the Sunnyside station. If one sneaked into this room, he could lurk very easily.

Roderick might have thought of that, if he had seen the odd closing of the waiting-room door, down at the station.

But it was the station agent, not Roderick, who had noticed that.

What Roderick did sense was a slight draft of air, that was followed by a noise like the closing of a door. It caused him to turn and look at the door, but he saw no one. The door was tight shut, although there was very little light near it. Like the station agent, Roderick voiced the question:

"Who's there?"

There was no response, except the wail of outside wind and the sudden increase of rain that slashed against the pane. A shutter slammed in some distant spot. A floor board creaked under Roderick's foot.

The two noises made him think that the door-closing noise had been something quite ordinary. Roderick turned to the mirror; leaned closer to it, to adjust his necktie.

There was a stir behind him. Something seemed to be creeping close. Eyes on the mirror, Roderick listened. Suddenly, his gaze was riveted. Over his shoulder stared a face with hard eyes, that met his own from the depth of the looking glass. There was evil in that face, even though Roderick could see little more of it than the ugly, glaring eyes.

WITH a wild gasp, Roderick sprang about, instinctively thrusting his hands to drive back that menacing horror. A hand jabbed up to meet him; Roderick did not see the glittering object that it held. As Roderick clawed for the attacker's throat, a finger pressed a trigger.

The revolver shot was muffled by the bodies of the two. The beat of the rain and the howl of the wind were factors that drowned the report. It seemed, in fact, to be lost in the hugeness of the remote bedroom to which Roderick had been assigned.

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Roderick's body spilled to the floor, stretched out in the lamplight. Turned partly upward, his chest showed a bloody mark upon the white front of the shirt that he had taken from the suitcase. The murderer stepped away from the light. Those ugly eyes studied the body from darkness.

That one bullet had found the heart of Roderick Talroy. There was no need for the murderer to use more. His hand reached for the lamp cord and tugged it. Darkness filled the room. There were creepy sounds as the murderer sneaked away. His departure was identical with that of the prowler who had been at the Sunnyside station.

The only sound that stirred the room of death was the banshee wail of the winds that lashed the gray walls of Five Towers. The whine was like the howl of ghoulish wraiths, welcoming the spirit of Roderick Talroy to the vast, invisible spaces of a world between.

CHAPTER III. MORE VISITORS.

DOWNSTAIRS, George Brendaw came in through the front door, his raincoat soaked, his hat pouring water from its brim. Lucille Merrith heard the "Whoosh!" that he uttered, and came from the living room.

"When did you go out, George?" she exclaimed. "I didn't hear you leave."

"About fifteen minutes ago," replied Brendaw, looking at a big grandfather's clock. "Where are Lenley and Talroy? I left them in the dining room."

"I'm still here," came Lenley's crisp tone, from the depths of the dining room. "Come in and get dried out. What was the idea, George, going out into such weather?"

George and Lucille joined Lenley. He was at the dining room table, working some formulas on sheets of paper that were strewn everywhere. George answered his bearded friend's question.

"I wanted to see how things were at the bridge," he explained, "but I didn't get that far. I thought I knew the way well enough without a flashlight, but it was too tough going through the woods. Where's Talroy, by the way?"

"He went up to his room," returned Lenley. "Titus showed him to it. That"—Lenley turned to Lucille—"was just before your Aunt Augusta went upstairs."

Titus arrived at that moment. The servant's face was anxious. He came in hurriedly from the hall.

"The side door, sir," he said to Lenley. "I'm sure some one was trying to enter there. I heard a noise at the latch."

Lenley was on his feet. He demanded:

"Is the door locked?"

"Yes, sir," said Titus, "with the key on the hook. But it is a very poor lock, as you know. I opened it and looked out. No one was there, but I am sure I saw a flashlight, toward the front of the house."

As if to prove the servant's statement, there came a sudden battering at the front door. Lenley grabbed Brendaw's arm.

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"Get me that gun of yours, George!"

"Nonsense!" laughed Brendaw. "See who it is, Titus." Then, to Lucille, he added: "Bob always gets excited when he worries about his inventions."

TITUS admitted a tall, long-jawed man of rugged build. He was elderly, but active, when he saw the group in the dining room, he came storming in there, carrying a big cane.

His muddy shoes left tracks all along the floor. A shock of white hair showed, when the arrival took off his wide-brimmed hat. Glaring, he surveyed the group, then demanded:

"Where is Roderick Talroy? I am his attorney, Rufus Fant."

"Mr. Talroy is here," returned Brendaw, coolly. "Tell us, Mr. Fant, were you the person who was trying to enter by the side door?"

Fant glowered. Brendaw had chosen the best way to handle a man of the lawyer's overbearing type. It took Fant a few seconds to manage a reply.

"I was," he admitted, in a lower growl. Then, angrily: "I have been floundering everywhere around here, trying to find the door! Bah! First, that station agent couldn't get me past the gully, in his car, because the bridge was down. I had to walk here, and look at the flashlight he gave me!"

Fant exhibited a flashlight so dim that it was a wonder Titus had caught a glimpse of it when the servant looked from the side door.

"All on account of that young fool, Roderick Talroy!" ejaculated Fant. "Bah! What does he know about buying an invention?"

Lenley's gaze narrowed. The bearded man was quick to take up the subject.

"I said nothing to Talroy about my invention," declared Lenley. "How did he find out about it?"

"Here's his telegram. Read it."

Lenley read the telegram. His bearded lips parted, his long teeth showed an ugly smile. The laugh that he gave was a harsh one.

"Twenty thousand dollars!" scoffed Lenley. "The nerve of Talroy, to think that I would sell at that price! Since you are his attorney, Mr. Fant, you can tell Talroy that—"

Lenley stopped. Fant was staring across the dining-room table. His eyes were riveted upon the portrait that hung there. His manner would have suited a man who viewed a ghost. Fant's cane dropped; his shaky hands clamped the table edge.

"Lionel Brendaw!" gasped the lawyer. "Like in life!"

It took effort for Fant to recover, but he managed it. With his recuperation, he showed a return of his former glare. His eyes looked toward George Brendaw. Fant pointed to the portrait.

"Are you related to Lionel Brendaw?"

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"I am," replied George. "My name is Brendaw. But the relationship was a remote one. He was my grandfather's second cousin, or something of the sort."

"Then this house—"

"Was where Lionel Brendaw died, one year ago. I happened to be his only living heir."

Fant's lips showed a testy expression. They were ugly. George Brendaw thrust out his chin as he watched the lawyer stare anew at the portrait. This time, Fant showed no shakiness.

"I once knew your remote second cousin," declared Fant. "Better, perhaps, than most persons did. If I—"

THERE were voices from the hall. Titus had admitted new arrivals. Their appearance interrupted possible trouble, for George Brendaw recognized one of the men and sprang forward to meet him.

"Hello, sheriff!" he greeted. "Glad to see you! I guess you know all of these people, except"—he turned abruptly and indicated Fant—"this is Mr. Fant. Rufus Fant, a New York attorney."

"My name is Amos Cravlen," said the sheriff, shaking hands with Fant. "Came up to see about that wrecked bridge. They say the fellow who owned the big roadster was up here."

Amos Cravlen was brawny; his ruggedness fitted a county sheriff. His hand had a powerful grip, as Fant could testify. The sheriff's squarish face, though, was a genial one.

He looked like a man who had won his present office through popularity. His face, however, had as hard a chin as George Brendaw boasted. His eyes, dark and cold, scanned every face steadily.

No one had to tell Sheriff Cravlen that he had walked in on the beginning of an argument. George Brendaw noted it, and decided to avoid trouble. He told Titus to go upstairs and ask Roderick Talroy to join them.

When Titus left, the sheriff turned to introduce the stranger who had come with him. Cravlen's companion was a tall personage, whose face was hawklike. There was something strangely impressive about those smileless lips. They added a masklike effect, and the clear eyes above the hawkish nose were gifted with a penetrating gaze.

"This is Mr. Kent Allard," stated the sheriff. "His name is one I won't forget, because I've heard it before. Mr. Allard is a famous explorer. He happened to drive up while I was at the bridge. He offered to bring me here."

"What's that?" exclaimed George Brendaw. "The bridge is repaired already?"

"No, indeed," returned the sheriff. "Mr. Allard happened to come through from the opposite direction, over the old road. The gully blocked him coming our way, but he could drive in through the gates."

"I was on the wrong road," remarked Allard, in a voice of remarkably even tone. "It was troublesome, coming through, but my difficulties ended those of Sheriff Cravlen."

"It sure helped," said the sheriff. "It's a long, muddy walk up from the gates. I was just starting out with my flashlight—"

The sheriff stopped. Titus had returned, and Cravlen was quick to see the servant's shakiness. Titus was gasping; he looked ready to fall, much like a runner after a long race. The sheriff steadied him.

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"I rapped at Mr. Talroy's door," panted Titus. "He—he didn't answer. So I opened the door. I saw—"

"What did you see?" demanded Brendaw. "Out with it, Titus."

"Mr. Talroy—on the floor—beside the big lamp—"

Titus had his face in his hands. The sheriff shoved him into a chair, beckoned to the others.

"We'll see for ourselves," snapped Cravlen. "Come along!"

THEY reached the bedroom, to find the door open. Talroy's body was in plain view, the bloodstained breast front gleaming in the light. The sheriff was the first to reach it. Seeing at once that Talroy was dead, he motioned the others back.

Three men—Brendaw, Lenley, Fant—formed a strained half circle as they stared at the prone form. Beyond them, almost in darkness, stood a fourth, Kent Allard. His keen eyes were on the faces of the living, not the dead.

For, in the murder of Roderick Talroy, Kent Allard had found a crime to solve. One that promised strange developments before the tall stranger left Five Towers. Across the floor stretched Allard's shadow, a streak of blackness that ended in a hawkish profile.

That silhouette was proof that its owner could delve deep into this mystery. Kent Allard was the master crime—hunter known as The Shadow.

CHAPTER IV. FACTS FROM THE PAST.

IT was a strained group that assembled in the big living room, with Sheriff Amos Cravlen in charge. Seated on the arm of a large chair, the sheriff pocketed the key to the bedroom, which he had locked, so no one could disturb Talroy's body.

The sheriff studied two telegrams. One was the message that Roderick Talroy had received that morning. It had been in the dead man's pocket. The other was the telegram that Rufus Fant had received, presumably from Roderick.

"Those telegrams are fakes," defined the lawyer, crisply. "Somebody in this house sent the first to bring Roderick here. The same person sent the second telegram, also, to lure me."

While he spoke, Fant fixed his eyes upon George Brendaw. That young man caught the inference, but said nothing. George was evidently trying to picture something more definitely in his mind. He was willing to let Fant talk.

Kent Allard noted George's expression. He also noticed Robert Lenley. The bearded inventor was restless, but at times he steadied, while his beady eyes surveyed the others. Sometimes, Lenley's gaze shifted toward Titus, who was standing, very white, beside the fireplace.

Lucille Merrith spoke suddenly. The girl had remained downstairs, during the discovery of the body. The subject of the telegrams was one with which she thought she might help.

"Roderick Talroy told me that he sent a telegram," said the girl, "but it wasn't one to Mr. Fant. He said that he

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wired his valet, to let him know that he would be in New York to-night—"

"But he added," put in George Brendaw, "that he was glad he couldn't go there, didn't he?"

"Yes," admitted Lucille, "but how did you know?"

George laughed at the girl's surprise.

"I saw what Talroy was after," he said. "I didn't know why he had landed here, but all he had on his mind was you, Lucille. I figured just what kind of talk he was giving, to make an impression.

Fant was listening, with his big head tilted.

"Hear that, sheriff?" demanded the lawyer. "I insist that you hold this man, George Brendaw, for murder, and the girl as a material witness! Brendaw admits a grudge against Talroy."

"You're crazy!" snapped George, "Do you think I'd murder a man just because he made a sap of himself? This is my house. I could have ordered Talroy out of it."

"But you didn't want to," parried Fant, "because your grudge goes farther back than to-night."

GEORGE BRENDAW looked blank. He didn't seem to know what Fant meant. At last, George turned to the sheriff, to state in a frank tone:

"I can't understand what Fant means. I never heard of Roderick Talroy before to-night. Nor, for that matter, did Miss Merrith—"

Fant was on his feet, voicing a triumphant shout that interrupted George's statement. His hand wagging emphatically, Fant was pointing toward Lucille. When he became coherent, Fant demanded:

"Is her name Merrith?"

"Of course it is," returned Lucille. She remembered suddenly that her name had not previously been mentioned to Fant. "Why do you ask?"

The lawyer did not answer the question directly. He turned to Cravlen with a request that he be allowed to make a statement without interruption. The sheriff was agreeable. Silence was tense, expressions puzzled, as Fant began his crisp announcement.

"A full twenty years ago," declared the lawyer, "Lionel Brendaw was accumulating a fortune, supplying war materials to the United States government. There"—Fant pointed dramatically across to the dining room—"hangs a portrait of Lionel Brendaw. This house, I understand, was once his.

"Old Lionel was a profiteer, and the government learned it. He was convicted and sent to prison for fifteen years. He tried to shift some of the blame to an innocent man, Artemus Talroy, on the claim that Talroy was his partner.

"I represented Artemus Talroy and cleared his name from blame. When Artemus Talroy died, some years later, I became the attorney for his estate. Artemus Talroy"—Fant shook his head sadly—"was Roderick's father."

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There was a profound silence. It seemed that Fant's statement had finished. George Brendaw leaned back in his chair, to give a hard, wise smile.

"I see the inference," declared George. "Mr. Fant thinks that I, as heir to Lionel Brendaw, would wish the death of Roderick Talroy, whose father was Lionel's enemy. A fine theory, sheriff, except for the fact that I never met my distant relative, Lionel Brendaw. I knew nothing about him, except that he left me this old house!"

Fant smiled narrowly, when he heard George's statement. The lawyer had not finished; he had purposely waited with his next surprise. Holding up his hand for silence, Fant added the next detail.

"The man who convicted Lionel Brendaw," declared Fant, "was an army officer, who acted as a special prosecutor. He was a colonel in the regular service, who died a few years ago. His name was William Merrith."

Fant paused abruptly. His gaze had shifted to Lucille. The girl's voice came with a gasp:

"My father!"

Fant nodded. The big lawyer was on his feet, his arms spread toward Sheriff Cravlen, as if that official represented a jury. Coolly, the attorney concluded his theory.

"George Brendaw, heir to Lionel," declared Fant, "has brought to his home, as unwitting guests, the two persons whose deaths he might logically desire. One, Roderick Talroy, has been murdered. The other, Lucille Merrith, is threatened. I ask you, sheriff, in behalf of justice and this girl's safety, to arrest George Brendaw!"

SHERIFF CRAVLEN stroked his chin.

Kent Allard saw him look at George, who sat stolid. Then the sheriff turned to Lucille. He seemed to feel that the girl could decide the matter, since she was the person whom Fant declared to be in danger.

"What do you say, Miss Merrith?" asked Cravlen. "Shall I arrest George Brendaw?"

Lucille's eyes met George's. The girl shook her head. In a firm, low tone, Lucille spoke a single word:

"No."

Rufus Fant began to clench the air with his fists. He was outraged because of Lucille's loyalty to George. Furiously, the lawyer tried to convince the girl. His voice was a bellow as he denounced:

"I tell you, George Brendaw is a rogue!"

A harsh contralto tone intervened from the hallway. Fant swung about. On the threshold stood Lucille's aunt, Augusta Merrith. Forgotten after the discovery of murder, Aunt Augusta had come downstairs to learn the cause of the commotion. She had listened to most of it from the hallway.

"Rufus Fant!" Augusta Merrith spoke the name with contempt. "A fine man to speak of justice! Colonel Merrith was my brother. He told me all about your defense of Artemus Talroy. In his opinion, you and your client were greater crooks than Lionel Brendaw!"

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"You were the ones that gorged the profits. That is why the government regained only a mere fraction of the huge funds that Lionel Brendaw accumulated. Bah! Where did the Talroy millions come from? I know, and you know. From those government contracts!

"My brother knew it. His greatest regret was his inability to prove it. Of three crooks, my brother convicted but one. If there is evil in this house"—the old lady wagged a bony finger—"I can name one man who is certainly concerned in it. That man is yourself: Rufus Fant!"

AUNT AUGUSTA'S accusation hit Fant like a bombshell. The glowering lawyer subsided to a chair, his hands trembling as they clutched his big cane. Fant had not been ready for this surprise. His very manner marked him as the crook that Augusta claimed he was.

There was a keen glow in the eyes of Kent Allard. Circumstances had taken the very turn that The Shadow wanted. He knew of those past facts that Augusta Merrith had reviewed. They were, indirectly, the reason for The Shadow's presence at Five Towers.

Lately, there had been some curious complications with certain estate funds managed by Rufus Fant. On that account, The Shadow had been keeping tabs on Fant's activities. To-day, the old attorney had suddenly left his office, in response to a telegram. The Shadow had learned that his destination was a place called "Five Towers."

Fant had gone by train. The Shadow, starting later, had driven by car, as Allard. Ordinarily, he should have arrived before Fant, but flooded roads had forced a roundabout route. That was why Allard's appearance had been a later one than Fant's.

The Shadow had not supposed that it would matter. He knew that Roderick Talroy was at Five Towers, for he had seen a copy of the telegram that Fant had received in New York. The telegram, however, had not given any inkling of threatened murder. In fact, its purport was quite the reverse.

Assuming that Fant was manipulating the Talroy estate as he had others, the logical assumption was that Fant did not want Roderick to get interested in the purchase of an invention. That might require the use of funds that Fant had intended to appropriate.

The discovery of Roderick's body, therefore, was a surprise, even to The Shadow.

During the chaos produced by discussion of the past, The Shadow concentrated upon the most important subject: the murder of Roderick Talroy. The eyes of Kent Allard were keen as they moved, unnoticed, about the circle. Some one in that group was the killer.

Who?

The Shadow still sought the answer. More facts would be needed before it could be found; facts concerning tonight, rather than the remote past, although those almost-forgotten events could definitely be concerned.

There were two men whose positions The Shadow balanced. They were George Brendaw and Rufus Fant.

The motive of vengeance was a strong one. Fant had built it strongly against George Brendaw. Fant could do it well, for he saw things from a crooked standpoint. The Shadow, himself, saw vengeance as a powerful factor; one which ordinarily would have been most acceptable.

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The fact that both Lucille Merrith and Roderick Talroy had come to this house was highly significant. Direct descendants of the honest prosecutor and the false partner of Lionel Brendaw, there was reason why old Lionel's heir might seek revenge upon them.

The question, though, was whether so remote a relation as George Brendaw would be interested in vengeance for Lionel's sake. It was doubtful, too, that he would choose his own abode for murder, particularly with the portrait of old Lionel in view on the dining-room wall, glaring its own desire for vengeance.

Unless George Brendaw proved to be a fanatic, the case against him was so exaggerated that it was doubtful.

AGAINST Rufus Fant stood more subtle facts. Lucille's Aunt Augusta had denounced Fant, but the lawyer could fight down those accusations. A government court had failed to establish them, so Fant had no real worry. What Fant really needed to cover was the fact that he was adept at robbing estates he represented.

If that came out, the case against Fant would soar. It was possible that he had found it necessary to murder Roderick Talroy, to cover up some shady work with that young man's fortune. If such were so, Fant would have chosen this house as a scene for murder, to throw suspicion upon George Brendaw.

The Shadow's brain weighed those possibilities. Meanwhile, his eyes fixed upon a third man, whose status seemed so clear that The Shadow wanted to know more about it. That man was the bearded inventor, Robert Lenley.

Despite his neutral position, Lenley was uneasy. He was covering himself well, but The Shadow, keen in his analysis, could see through Lenley's sham.

Crime at Five Towers was anchored far deeper than its surface showed. The Shadow was to see that proven, within these gray, stone walls.

CHAPTER V. DEATH'S SECOND TOLL.

RUFUS FANT was finally able to regain his self-control. The lawyer's glare showed contempt for Augusta Merrith as the elderly woman stepped firmly across the room and took the chair close to the moose head. Perhaps Fant noticed Augusta's resemblance to the moose, for his lips compressed into a depreciating smile.

"What the elder Miss Merrith has told us," declared Fant, "is a matter that substantiates my statements. Apparently, persons have labored under the delusion that Artemus Talroy was implicated in the same profiteering practices as Lionel Brendaw.

"That, I insist, would add to the motive of vengeance, not detract from it. It would account for a Brendaw murdering a Talroy, even more than an ordinary grudge. Therefore, sheriff, I again declare myself."

Fant paused. His eyes fixed firmly upon George Brendaw.

"Roderick Talroy," asserted Fant, "was murdered by some one who was lurking in this house!"

George Brendaw smiled.

"That eliminates me," he told the sheriff. "I was outside, trying to find my way down to the gates, at the time when young Talroy must have died."

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"A weak alibi," sneered Fant. "You could have entered the house from outside. Therefore, I insist that you be held under the same suspicion as all others who cannot prove their exact whereabouts."

"Good!" returned George. His smile showed that he had awaited Fant's suggestion. "That puts you under suspicion, too, Mr. Fant."

"I wasn't in this house—"

"You were outside, as close to it as I was. Lucille, Lenley, Titus—all heard your own admission that you were around by the side door."

Fant winced as the others corroborated. The lawyer tried to sputter a protest, but Sheriff Cravlen overruled it.

"If I hold George Brendaw," he told Fant, "I'll have to hold you, also, on this evidence. We'll see about the others."

THE sheriff questioned them. Since Titus had shown Roderick up to the bedroom, and was forced to admit himself the last person who had seen the victim alive, the sheriff decided to hold the servant.

Robert Lenley testified that he had remained in the dining room, working over pages of formulas. There was no one, however, who would say that they had seen him there, so Sheriff Cravlen classed him as another suspect. Lenley forced a smile to his bearded lips, as if to indicate his indifference.

Lucille said she had been in the living room, but her Aunt Augusta had gone upstairs soon after Titus had shown Roderick to his room. That left both Merriths with unsupported alibis. The sheriff said that he would have to hold them also.

After that, the sheriff turned to Allard, with the wry comment:

"Possibly I ought to request you to stay, too, Mr. Allard. After all, you were alone somewhere at the time Roderick Talroy died. But the time element makes it seem impossible that you could have left your car somewhere on the road, to come on foot through the woods, here to the house. You would have had to go back again, in addition."

All the others seemed willing to grant the sheriff's exception of Allard; even Fant was so inclined, although he looked as though he wanted to suspect every one possible. Allard, however, settled the matter himself.

He was willing to remain, he told Cravlen, on the chance that he might supply some slight testimony later, since he had been with the group when they found Roderick's body. The road was blocked; it would be impossible for him to continue his trip. Furthermore, his car, being on this side of the broken bridge, could be of use to the sheriff.

Cravlen was pleased at that offer. Moreover, the sheriff found another reason to have Allard here. Cravlen had just begun to realize that he had a lot of suspected persons on his hands, since he had added Lucille and her Aunt Augusta to the list. Cravlen would be needing deputies later, so he swore Allard in as one for a starter.

That done, the sheriff began a search for weapons. None of the suspects was carrying any, but George Brendaw admitted that he had a revolver in the house. He seemed to have forgotten the fact, until Lucille mentioned it.

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The girl remembered that Lenley had asked about the revolver at the time when Fant had begun his pounding at the front door.

GEORGE led the way to an obscure room on the ground floor. It lay behind the passage to the side door, and it was one room that had ceiling lights. George pressed a switch to show paneled walls that were covered with old spears, maces and other weapons of ancient warfare.

"Lionel's trophy room, I suppose," remarked George. "All this junk was here when we took over the house. Bob Lenley and I use it as an office."

There was a desk among the old furniture. Allard's eyes observed the case of a portable typewriter standing beyond it. There was a file cabinet also, a rather small one. George opened the lowest drawer on the right, remarking that the revolver was probably in there. Sheriff Cravlen found it.

The gun was a .38 of well-known make, a common type of weapon except for its handle, where the initials "G. B." were engraved. George remarked that he had brought the gun from California, that he had used it only a few times, to shoot at some weasels when they visited an old chicken coop in back of the house.

The gun was unloaded, but the sheriff found cartridges in a small box. Cracking the revolver open, he looked through the barrel. George had not bothered to clean it very well, after the last time that he had used it. The sheriff kept the gun and cartridges, along with the telegrams.

"Any more weapons?" he questioned.

George shook his head. So did Lenley. That brought a scoff from Rufus Fant. The lawyer pointed to the wall.

"What do you call those?" he demanded. "Aren't those spears weapons? And what about that big mace?"

George looked at the mace. It looked like a clumsy, overlarge ax head on the end of a long handle.

"That mace," expressed George, "wouldn't even be worth using to chop down a tree."

"It's a lethal weapon," insisted Fant. "I demand that you make a note of that, sheriff."

George leaned over and plucked up Fant's cane, which the lawyer had rested against the desk, while he looked at the revolver. He hefted the cane; found it heavy. He handed it to the sheriff.

"Make a note of this," suggested George. "It's heavy enough to batter out a man's brains. Put in your notebook that Mr. Fant carries a lethal weapon."

Fant snatched at the cane. George withdrew it. He looked toward the window, where the sweep of the rain was coming in a torrential burst.

"This deluge," said George, "has probably wiped out all traces of footprints on the ground. Still, sheriff, you might find some marks of Fant's cane. Why not look for them around the house?"

"Go ahead," snapped Fant. "I admitted that I walked around the house. Make the search, sheriff!"

UNDER the double insistence, Cravlen decided to make a brief search. He told Allard to remain in charge, and take the others into the living room if they wished to go there.

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Taking Titus along with a flashlight, Cravlen went out carrying the cane, to see if it fitted any marks outside the side door.

The trophy room was chilly. Lucille suggested the living room, so they went there. Soon, the sheriff returned, shaking water from his coat as he handed it to Titus.

"Hang these up," he told the servant.

"Then get Mr. Allard's hat and coat. Allard"—Cravlen swung to The Shadow—"I'd like you to drive down to the bridge. Bring back some of the men there—about three of them—for deputies.

"Send another to town in my car, to find that station agent. Have him bring the originals of those telegrams, if he's got them. If they were actually sent from Sunnyside, he may tell us something about them."

Fant had a testy question, that he found a chance to ask:

"What about the cane marks? Did you find any?"

"No," reported Cravlen. "They were washed out, if there were any."

"And where is my cane?"

"I must have left it in the trophy room," replied Cravlen. "Titus and I stopped there. That's where I started to take off my hat and coat. You can get the cane any time you want it. I'll bring it, if you don't want to go after it."

Cravlen was shivering; he tried to warm himself beside the fire. The cold rain had evidently penetrated his coat, for his clothes were damp and he showed the chill.

"How about some brandy, sheriff?" suggested George. "I have some upstairs. All right if I get it?"

The sheriff nodded. During that brief conversation, one man strolled from the room. The fellow was Lenley; the bearded inventor had been pacing just inside the doorway. Allard noticed Lenley meet Titus in the hall.

The inventor said something and the servant nodded. George had scarcely started upstairs before Titus arrived with Allard's hat and coat.

It was then that Cravlen noted Lenley's absence. Quickly, the sheriff demanded:

"Where's Lenley?"

"He went down to the laboratory, sir," replied Titus. "He told me to tell you that he would be there. If you wish me to get him—"

"I'll find him myself."

Titus was opening the front door. The sheriff motioned for Allard to start. As Allard walked out through the door, the sheriff was setting forth to look for Lenley. Alone, moving through the blustery darkness toward his coupé, Allard became an almost obliterated figure.

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A LOW laugh toned the windy gloom. It was the mirth of The Shadow. He welcomed these temporary circumstances, during which the sheriff lacked deputies. It had given Lenley an opportunity to show his hand. The bearded man was probably worried about something in the downstairs laboratory. It was best to let Lenley show himself as a suspicious character.

So had The Shadow decided. His decision was based upon keen observation, and usually The Shadow struck the right note in such matters. But tonight, as he drove away from the bleak walls of Five Towers, The Shadow was allowing too much leeway.

He had left an opportunity behind him; a chance to trap a murderer whose thought was further crime, rather than the covering of a previous deed.

Death was ready to take second toll. When The Shadow returned, the walls of Five Towers were to hold another victim.

CHAPTER VI. THE LETHAL WEAPON.

THE final move that set the stage for further murder took place after The Shadow had left the house. Had the supposed Kent Allard remained a few minutes longer, he would probably have delayed his departure on account of the added circumstance.

It was Rufus Fant who provided it. The irkish lawyer was in the living room with Lucille Merrith and her Aunt Augusta, alone with them, because Titus had not returned from the hall. Fant did not mind being with Lucille, even though she had not liked his accusations of George Brendaw.

The person who annoyed Fant was Augusta Merrith. Though she kept her lips tight shut, she stared at the lawyer, with eyes that glowered constantly. The glass-eyed moose was staring also, but Fant didn't mind it. He wished that it was Augusta's head that hung there, stuffed, above the mantel. He would rather have had the moose as a living companion with whom to contend.

Fant arose impatiently. He met Augusta's cold stare, then turned to Lucille. Testily, he told the girl:

"I am leaving for a few minutes. You will recall that the sheriff gave me permission to get my cane, before he told your enemy, young Brendaw, that he could go upstairs after brandy.

"So if the sheriff should return and ask questions, I trust that you will remind him that my case is different from Lenley's. That chap, I recall, went without permission."

Fant strode through the deep darkness of the hall. His long steps showed that he did not need his cane. When he reached the trophy room, Fant found the door open and the lights still on. His cane was resting upon the desk where the sheriff had left it.

Fant's dour grin showed that he was pleased to be alone a while. More than that, he was glad to have this private view of the trophy room. This was where old Lionel Brendaw had probably sulked during his last years. Broken by long years in prison, the profiteer had lacked the energy to seek revenge on the men who had outwitted him.

It was well for Lionel Brendaw that he had tried nothing. Fant had sewed matters up tightly for himself and Artemus Talroy. Revenge had waited for another generation. It was George Brendaw who had taken it out on Roderick Talroy.

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So, at least, Fant firmly believed. Others might have doubted Fant's accusations, but they could hardly have continued to do so, if they had viewed his actions in the trophy room.

Fant had closed the door behind him. He began an eager, breathless search through the drawers of the desk, in hope of turning up some evidence against George Brendaw.

FANT'S urge was twofold. He was thinking of his own safety. George's thirst for revenge was probably unquenched. It would be best to have the fellow behind bars as soon as possible. Moreover, the future was very rosy for Fant. With Roderick Talroy dead, there was no obstacle to Fant's handling the estate in his own fashion.

The greatest service that any one could have done Rufus Fant was that of murdering Roderick Talroy. But crime would have to be pinned on the right man, for Fant did not like it at all, being placed under even temporary suspicion.

It would be good, thought Fant, if George tried to murder Lucille Merrith, for that might give his game away very promptly. Fant hoped that George's schemes of vengeance would include the girl's moose-faced aunt. It would be most pleasant to have Aunt Augusta under the sod.

It occurred to Fant that by leaving the women in the living room, they might be alone when George returned there. Picturing George as a crazed fanatic, Fant half believed that the fellow would take the opportunity for a double killing.

Fant forgot how he himself stood in the matter. He was so eager as he rummaged through the desk, that he failed to feel the slight draft that went through the room. Likewise, he did not hear the barely-audible noise that sounded like a door latch.

Something stirred near Fant. There were creeps upon the floor. Oddly, Fant's first sensation that something was wrong proved to be an indirect one. The lawyer happened to glance up toward the wall, where the huge mace had hung. His eyes blinked beneath their heavy brows.

The mace was gone; some one had removed it from the wall!

The stir was close, behind Fant's back. The lawyer made a frenzied grab for his cane; turned about to deliver a slash with it. He was too late.

Looming upon him was a man whose face Fant recognized, in the moment of life that remained to him. Thick-gloved hands were above the attacker's forehead. They were gripping the handle of the mace.

The ax head glittered as it drove downward. Fant instinctively leaned back upon the desk, making a futile, frantic ward with his cane. The mace struck full upon the lawyer's skull. Constructed to hack through iron helmets, the weapon brought instant death when it clove a bare head.

Rufus Fant spilled from the table, a mass of gore. While his body still was settling on the floor, the murderer reached the wall switch and turned off the lights. There were creeps in the darkness; the snap of a latch. Then, utter silence.

FIVE minutes had ticked off by the big grandfather's clock when George Brendaw entered the living room, carrying a bottle of brandy. There was a wadded paper in the neck, serving as cork. George explained it to Lucille.

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"The corkscrew was too weak," said George. "I had to hack the cork out with a knife. I hope the sheriff appreciates all the trouble I had. Say— where is the sheriff?"

Lucille had no need to answer. Sheriff Cravlen came storming in from the hall, when he saw George, he demanded:

"Where is that fellow Lenley? I've been looking all over the cellar for him. Titus said he was in the laboratory."

"No wonder you didn't find him," returned George. "His lab is off in the far corner of the cellar, and the door is fitted tight, so the smells can't get out. That's why you couldn't see the light. Better send Titus for him."

Stepping to the hall, George called Titus. The servant appeared from the kitchen, bringing a trayload of freshly made coffee. Cravlen told him to leave the tray and find Lenley.

"That won't be necessary, sir," informed Titus. "I heard Mr. Lenley on the cellar stairs, when I came past. Here is a glass, sheriff, for your brandy."

Lenley joined them, all apology. He hadn't wanted to worry any one, he said, but he had left a mixture stewing over a Bunsen burner, before dinner. He had remembered that it needed attention; might have caused a fire if left too long.

The sheriff looked dubious. He was questioning Lenley further, when Allard arrived. With him were two men from the bridge. They brought the news that temporary timbers had been laid across the gully, so that a light car could pass. The station agent had been sent for, and would probably arrive shortly.

Sheriff Cravlen swore in the two men as deputies. Since Allard's expression was quizzical, Cravlen decided to explain matters to him. That was logical enough, since Allard was the equivalent of chief deputy.

"They've been playing hide and seek around here," growled Cravlen. "First, Brendaw goes upstairs, to get some brandy—"

"With your permission, sheriff," inserted George, with a smile. "Don't forget that detail."

"But at your own suggestion," retorted the sheriff. "I didn't ask for the brandy. Thanks just the same for it. But Lenley, here"—Cravlen eyed the bearded man—"decides to go downstairs to the laboratory. Which takes me on a wild—goose chase, without ever finding the place."

Titus began to say that he had offered to go after Lenley. That brought another tirade from the sheriff, this time directed at the servant.

"And where were you all this time?" demanded Cravlen. "In the kitchen, making coffee! You weren't told to do that."

"I thought, sir—"

"Don't think! Not unless I order it." Cravlen looked from person to person, as though the order was a general one. "If any one gets the wandering habit again, they'll answer to me! That goes for every one!"

ALLARD'S eyes had studied the group ahead of Cravlen's. He had detected Fant's absence, and was waiting for the sheriff to discern it. Cravlen's pause indicated that he had counted faces. Abruptly, the big sheriff

demanded:

"Where's Rufus Fant?"

"He went to get his cane," declared Augusta Merrith, in her dry contralto, "as you told him he could, sheriff. It was good riddance, his leaving Lucille and myself alone here. If any one in this house is a murderer, I would choose Rufus Fant!"

"How long ago did he leave?"

"Soon after you had gone downstairs."

The sheriff turned; he happened to look at Allard.

"You had time to drive down to the bridge and back," declared the sheriff. "That's given Fant a long while in that trophy room. He could be prying into things there. Come! We'll see."

Every one followed the sheriff through the hallway. Not only were they impelled by curiosity, but Cravlen's order had indicated that they were to stay together. The sheriff reached the trophy-room door and opened it. He stared into blackness.

"The light was on here," he remarked, "when I came in from the side door. Who turned it off?"

No one answered. Cravlen pressed the light switch. He stared; then bounded into the room with a hoarse exclamation. Others followed. George Brendaw stopped suddenly, to throw his arm across the doorway. He wanted to bar Lucille and her aunt from the sight.

Cravlen didn't have to pronounce the word "dead," when he saw Fant's gory body stretched by the desk. Nor was there any doubt as to the manner in which the lawyer had died. The murderer had left the huge mace beside the victim. Titus, shaky and mechanical, stooped to take up the big ax.

"Stand back!" roared the sheriff. He pushed Titus away. Lifting the mace with one hand, he planked it heavily upon the desk. "No one is to touch anything in this room without my order!"

Grimly, the sheriff reached to his hip, to draw a .38 that he carried in a holster. He held the gun while he looked around the group.

It took steel nerves to view that gruesome sight upon the floor, and the sheriff had them. But his expression told what others were thinking: that a killer who could deal such ugly death was far more formidable than had previously been supposed.

Cravlen's tight grip on his revolver was a warning that if any person made a false move, the sheriff would shoot. It told that he, too, was sensing the horror that must have possessed all the suspects. Sheriff Cravlen had seen many ugly sights in his time, but none as terrible as this.

Even the murderer could show strain at viewing his own handiwork. That was something that The Shadow considered, as he gazed from the sheriff's tense face to study the expressions of the others present.

"FANT must have known more than we supposed," announced Cravlen. "Perhaps he suspected what was coming to him. He even pointed out this mace. Fant was right when he termed it a lethal weapon. Fant could not have suspected everything, though, or he wouldn't have walked into it."

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"The murderer is in this room," denounced Cravlen. "We are taking no chances. All of you—except the deputies—are under arrest! You will be questioned later."

Allard's eyes had roved the room.

They saw George Brendaw, solemn at the doorway, his gaze riveted upon Fant's body. Beyond the door were Lucille and her aunt, shrunk back into the hall, their faces averted. Titus was at a corner of the desk, clinging there. His lips were moving, but the servant's eyes were almost completely shut.

Robert Lenley was staring at the sheriff. The bearded inventor apparently preferred to view a living visage, rather than the dead one on the floor. Outwardly, Lenley was calm. His beady eyes had a shrewd glint; they seemed to be watching for whatever the sheriff intended next.

Allard's own face was immobile. He watched Sheriff Cravlen relax; saw him shove the revolver back into its holster, assured that no one would attempt a break.

Looking toward the desk, Allard's eyes rested upon the heavy mace that had brought death to Rufus Fant. Those eyes showed a momentary glow.

The Shadow's keen brain had formed a singular theory concerning crime at Five Towers. If it proved the right conclusion, it would point directly to the murderer who had twice delivered death.

CHAPTER VII. THE MOVING SHADOW.

IT was a fear-tinged group that moved to the living room, in readiness for Cravlen's questions. The sheriff observed it, and showed good tact. Rather than proceed with a general third degree, he treated the suspects easily.

"I am not accusing any one," declared Cravlen. "Even though the culprit is with us, all the rest of you deserve consideration. I want prompt answers to my questions; that's the main thing."

Lucille and her aunt were seated to one side. Cravlen turned to them first, to ask:

"How does it happen that you ladies are here as guests?"

"That is easily answered," asserted Augusta Merrith. "Some time ago, Mr. Lenley wrote me regarding an invention that required financial aid. I was impressed by his letter. I asked him to call. He met us—my niece and myself—and he invited us here."

"To see the invention?"

"Of course! He has promised us a demonstration."

The sheriff stroked his chin. It was an unusual case, this one. Cravlen apparently did not know a great deal about how inventions were financed, but he suspected a catch. He turned to Allard for advice.

"Rather odd, don't you think?" questioned Cravlen, "Two people—particularly two women—coming out here to look at an invention?"

"That depends upon the invention," replied Allard, calmly. "Perhaps Mr. Lenley can enlighten us regarding

it."

Lenley did. His statement sounded earnest. His invention, he said, was a synthetic gasoline, that he had been keeping under cover. He feared that big oil companies would try to suppress it, and if he talked to certain types of business men, the news would leak.

That, he explained, was why he wrote to persons like Augusta Merrith. He brought them out here to see demonstrations of the synthetic fuel. He sold no stock; he merely wanted guarantees that they would be ready with funds when the product went on the market.

"I have fifty thousand dollars of my own money ready for it," asserted Lenley. "But I need a quarter million guaranteed. The only way to make a go with this new fuel is to start with a large-scale manufacture."

Whether or not Lenley's invention was a sound one, his scheme regarding it seemed fair enough. Augusta Merrith commented that Lenley had asked her for no money whatever. He had insisted, too, that she sign nothing until she had seen her attorney. But Lenley wanted her to know all about the proposition before she called a lawyer into it.

"How did you happen to hear of Miss Merrith?" questioned Cravlen. "What made you think that she would be interested?"

"Several other persons are already interested," replied Lenley. "They recommend others. One man—his name is Harold Barnes—wrote me, enclosing a list of prospects; Miss Merrith was one of them."

"Do you have that list?"

"Yes, with the letter. In the file cabinet."

CRAVLEN decided to look into that later. The heavy rain had lessened; outside, he could hear the rattling chug of an ancient motor. It meant that the station agent had arrived.

One of the deputies admitted the fellow. He had brought along another man, and they carried a load of shotguns, for the use of the deputies.

The station agent handed over the originals of the telegrams. As Cravlen showed them to Allard, the sheriff exclaimed:

"These are typewritten! That's unusual, isn't it?"

The station agent shook his head.

"Not with telegrams that come from Five Towers, it ain't. That covers the first one. Only it was funny about the second one. Talroy didn't have a typewriter with him. I figured, though, that he'd had the thing typed before."

Allard's eyes were comparing the two messages. He noted the fact that the typing was identical. Certain letters showed the same features; they were out of line to an exact degree. Before Allard could mention the fact, Cravlen's next exclamation showed that the sheriff had also marked it.

"These were done on the same machine," expressed Cravlen. "If one was typed at Five Towers, so was the other."

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"Probably neither was," put in Lenley, a smile showing from his beard. "I own the only typewriter here—an old portable. It has gone to town a couple of times, for repairs. I left it there a few days ago."

"It came back this morning, sir," said Titus, suddenly. "I placed it in the trophy room."

Lenley's eyes showed a glower toward the servant. Titus looked uneasy. Cravlen gave a short laugh—an emphatic one, that told he had caught the exchanged glances.

"I saw the typewriter myself," informed the sheriff. He turned to the two deputies. "It's in the trophy room. Bring it here."

The deputies didn't like to go to the trophy room, but they finally stiffened themselves for another look at Fant's body. They went, and came back with the typewriter. Lenley admitted that it was his machine, and George Brendaw also recognized it.

The sheriff tapped off some words on a sheet of paper. He compared them with the message that the station agent had supplied. The typing corresponded.

"More exhibits," declared Cravlen. "Come along, Lenley. You, too, Brendaw. I want to find that letter that came from the fellow you mentioned. What was his name, again?"

"Harold Barnes."

At the sheriff's suggestion, Allard went with them, armed with a shotgun. Cravlen kept his hand on the revolver that projected from his holster. Both Lenley and George entered the trophy room steadily.

Lenley opened the file cabinet; he found Barnes's letter under the file marked "B."

The letter was brief. It listed names and addresses in it, including that of Augusta Merrith. Cravlen gave a grunt, as he looked at the bottom of the letter.

"Humph," he uttered. "Not signed. Barnes simply typed his name. That might mean something—"

He stopped, his eyes narrowed. With a quick move, Cravlen pulled his revolver. He motioned George and Lenley out to the hall.

"Start back for the living room!" snapped Cravlen. "Keep them covered, Allard! This letter does mean something! A lot!"

WHEN they reached the living room, Cravlen had deputies take over. Eagerly, he showed the letter from the file cabinet. The discovery was indeed an important one.

"See that, Allard?" quizzed Cravlen. "Barnes's letter, like those fake telegrams, was done on Lenley's machine!"

Lenley's face had whitened. His beard covered his pallor somewhat, and it also hid the chewing motion that he gave to his lips. He regained composure quickly, for his voice was steady when he said:

"That doesn't prove that I typed any of them."

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"I didn't say it did," snapped Cravlen. "George Brendaw could have done it. Or maybe Titus. It's a sure thing that one of you did!"

"The letter came in the mail—"

"If it did, you could have sent it to yourself. Or one of the others could have mailed it to you."

Cravlen added the letter to the growing pile of exhibits. He had the telegrams received by Roderick Talroy and Fant, the original messages besides. Also Lenley's typewriter, and George Brendaw's revolver.

"Put these in the trophy room," he told a deputy, "along with that mace. It's an exhibit, too. The coroner can take the whole business when he comes for the bodies. This stuff wants to go to the county prosecutor."

The deputy took the box and brought back the key of the trophy room. Cravlen pondered all the while; when he received the key, he dangled it for a moment. Then he delivered a crisp summary.

"The Barnes letter and the telegrams," declared the sheriff, "show that some one in this house deliberately brought persons here, through faked measures. That person premeditated the murders of Roderick Talroy and Rufus Fant. The same person"—Cravlen was eyeing George, Lenley and Titus—"may seek the death of Augusta Merrith and her niece!"

TURNING abruptly, Cravlen faced the women. Lucille was white, but the girl's face showed bravery. Her aunt did not display the slightest tremor. That made Cravlen pause, as he regarded her.

He had expected Augusta Merrith to show alarm.

"Technically, I should still consider you a suspect, Miss Augusta," declared the sheriff. "You declared yourself very strongly against Rufus Fant. However, I am willing to term you merely a material witness, like your niece. Both of you must remain here, but you will be constantly guarded."

Cravlen told the station agent that he could return to town. Since he had a third man from the bridge, he was able to appoint one each for George, Lenley and Titus. He told the three deputies to march the suspects upstairs and lock them in their rooms.

When the deputies returned with the keys, Cravlen told Lucille and her aunt that they could retire. He sent one man upstairs to patrol the long halls. He told another to go outside and do sentry duty around the house, while the third was to remain in the living room.

"Suppose you get some sleep, Allard," suggested the sheriff. "I'm going to stay in charge and classify that evidence, along with my report. There's a long night ahead of us; so I'll call you and let you take over later."

Allard agreed. The sheriff told him to pick out any room he wanted, on the second floor. Going out to his coupé, Allard came back with a suitcase. The sheriff was at the telephone, calling the coroner. He gave a nod of approval when he saw Allard pick up a loaded shotgun, to take upstairs with him.

When he had found an empty room, Kent Allard placed the shotgun in a corner. Close by the glow of a floor lamp, he opened the suitcase. From it, he drew garments of black. Over his shoulders he draped the folds of a long, black cloak. He placed a slouch hat upon his head, and drew on thin black gloves.

Kent Allard had become a shrouded being, barely visible within the fringe of the lamplight's glow. A strange, sinister shape had appeared within that room; a creature of darkness that might have come from the outside

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air, where weird winds still sighed through the night.

The Shadow had taken on his famed guise. He was the mysterious being who could rove through gloom, unseen. There was proof, though, that The Shadow was human, and not the ghostlike creature that he appeared to be.

The proof came when those gloved hands brought a pair of .45 automatics from the suitcase and placed the weapons out of sight beneath the black cloak. The Shadow was preparing for some struggle that might be due this night.

A gloved hand pulled the lamp cord. Through darkness, The Shadow reached the hall. He stepped into gloomy silence. The patrolling deputy was in the corridor on the far side of the house. But even if he had been close, the fellow could not have seen that weird shape that glided black against the wall.

DESCENDING the stairs, The Shadow saw the sheriff, pacing the living room, making notations in his book.

Unseen, The Shadow moved through the vast ground floor, past the trophy room, to the side passage that led outdoors. He opened the simple lock with a noiseless, pliers-like tool; stepped through the door and locked it behind him.

Moonlight was struggling through the breaking clouds, but all was dark close to the house. The Shadow stood silent, while the outside deputy passed. Then, black and invisible, The Shadow began a circuit of his own, looking up toward the windows on the second floor.

Towers of doom loomed high above.

Below those cone-like turrets were many rooms, like those wherein murder had struck twice to-night. Somewhere in that house was a murderer; likewise, a person who might soon be marked for death.

Though The Shadow had vanished from within those portals, he had actually chosen a better vantage point. On outside watch, The Shadow was choosing the vital spot where he might enter to avert a killer's newest thrust.

CHAPTER VIII. SHOTS IN THE DARK.

LUCILLE MERRITH was very tired, but sleepless. A great hush seemed to fill her bedroom; she was sorry that the patter of the rain had ceased. It might have brought some lull to the aching thoughts that throbbed through her head.

This room had a connecting door: one that led into her aunt's bedroom. Aunt Augusta had gone to sleep long ago. Sometimes, Aunt Augusta snored, and Lucille would have welcomed those sonorous sounds to-night. Anything to relieve the drilling misery that dominated the girl's mind.

The only sounds that Lucille could hear were the footsteps of the deputy in the hall. But they came only at long-spaced intervals. The deputy had a lengthy route to cover—to the other side of the house and back.

To Lucille, death at Five Towers had struck like a grim, unreal monster. As she thought of events before to-night, it seemed impossible that such a peaceful setting could have turned to a scene of double horror.

Only a few weeks ago, Robert Lenley had first called on the Merriths. Lucille had read the man's letter, when

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it came to her aunt. His offer to come to their New York home and discuss his invention had seemed a fair one. When he had arrived, Lenley had impressed them both by the prospects of his synthetic gasoline.

Lucille could not recall a single instance in Lenley's disfavor. The inventor had frankly admitted that his fuel was still in the experimental state. He would not accept a dollar of any one else's money until he had used his own to manufacture the finished product.

Lenley had invited them to Five Towers. Lucille always went everywhere with her Aunt Augusta.

True, they had thought that the house was Lenley's, but he had not misrepresented that fact. When they met George Brendaw, Lucille and her aunt learned that the house was his. He had tried to sell it when he inherited it. There had been no buyers.

Then Lenley had come along. He rented the house and paid the main expenses, because it was an ideal place to have his laboratory. Not only was Five Towers remote, the building was equipped to receive the guests that Lenley constantly expected.

LUCILLE had liked George instantly. They had hiked together, while the weather was good. After that, George had made frequent trips to the village, but always in his car, because he said he did not want to be away long.

George had been coming back from town to-day, when Roderick Talroy had arrived. He had said so, and Lucille believed him.

The girl could not picture George as a man who would murder for revenge. She trusted his statement, that the affairs of old Lionel Brendaw meant nothing to him. He was Lionel's only heir, but as George himself had said, the relationship was distant.

In fairness to Lenley, Lucille could not put the blame on the inventor. He seemed a decent sort, and why should a man without a motive commit murder?

Lucille wondered if Lenley had a secret grudge against Roderick and Fant. That could explain matters, but if Lenley was trying to shift the blame to George, he could have done it quite well without bringing Lucille and her aunt here. Lucille could not picture Lenley as an enemy to herself or her Aunt Augusta.

That left only Titus. The servant had been hired by Lenley. But they had not worked in unison to-day. Lenley had been worried in his own way. Titus had shown the sort of distress that one would expect. Nevertheless, Titus, like Lenley, could be the murderer.

It must be either one or the other: Lenley or Titus. But Lucille felt sure that neither man would seek to harm her.

Dim moonlight was showing from the windows that seemed so distant from the bed. Lucille watched the trickling, silver glow. It meant that the rain was over; perhaps mystery would clear up, like the storm.

Wondering, Lucille tried to analyze why she felt so secure. The reason struck her suddenly.

It was because of Kent Allard.

Somehow, every time she looked at Allard, Lucille felt fear fade. His quiet manner was impressive. It seemed that no harm could come to any one while Allard was on hand. He had not arrived until after Roderick's

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death. He had been down at the bridge when Fant was slain.

If Allard had been in the house at either time, there would have been no murder. Lucille found her lips repeating the words: "No murder—"

The deputy's footsteps went past the door. The door itself was locked, like Aunt Augusta's. Each had the key on the inside. Yet, sentry and locks seemed small protection against horror of the sort that had struck Five Towers.

More fully than before, Lucille realized that Allard's presence in the house was the sole reason why she felt no terror.

SLOWLY, Lucille began to drowse. A slight noise awakened her. It was like a click, that might have come from the door. Perhaps the patrolling deputy had pressed it, to see if it happened to be locked.

It was too dark to see anything near the door, but Lucille began to fancy that she heard a creeping noise.

The sound seemed near the door, then away from it. Lucille strained, raised on her elbow. The creeps had stopped. She started to lie down, but heard them again. They were closer, but they were evasive.

Lucille raised up farther; as she stared toward the door, her white throat showed plain in the moonlight.

That whiteness proved a target. From beside the head of the bed, a figure swung suddenly upon Lucille. Hunched shoulders hid the face above them. Thick-gloved hands clamped hard upon Lucille's throat. The girl went back; her head struck the bedstead.

She could give no cry as she felt that intended death choke. Lucille was experiencing a new version of the same horror that had found Roderick Talroy and Fant.

Over the hunched shoulder, the girl's eyes saw the window. Vague moonlight could offer no hope. Even that was blotted with a suddenness. Then—Lucille was to realize it afterward—the girl saw blackness form a living shape.

In from the window came a surging figure, a silent avalanche that drove for the murderer.

How the killer knew it, Lucille never knew. His senses must have been strained to an amazing degree. He was quick enough, though, to know that his attack could not succeed. A foeman would be upon him before he could choke Lucille.

THRUSTING the girl away, the killer turned and met that living blackness head on. Lucille saw two fighters lock.

As they swayed, she saw the folds of a black cloak, that swished from her rescuer's shoulders. Holding her throat, Lucille stared, totally unable to scream.

The girl was witnessing a titanic battle. The Shadow had lost the advantage that he had expected. He was grappling with as desperate a foeman as he had ever encountered.

Their surge carried them to the inner darkness of the room. Heavy hands were at The Shadow's neck. He, in turn, was trying to gain a similar grip.

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Then came a double twist. The fighters locked like wrestlers. Clamped by arms that were rigid as metal, The Shadow could only hold his opponent even. Slowly, they shifted. Inch by inch, The Shadow gained a position that he wanted.

The murderer pressed harder as he felt The Shadow bend. That was the killer's mistake. He was doing what the cloaked fighter wanted. With a sudden snap, The Shadow came up, to launch his unsuspecting enemy with a long ju jitsu fling.

Had the lunge succeeded, the murderer would have lost the fray. Two strides were all The Shadow needed to give the proper impetus. But in those twisting sidesteps, The Shadow struck a big chair in the darkness.

He stumbled; the murderer spilled sideways to the floor. He landed on one knee, came at The Shadow, swinging a gun for the cloaked head.

The Shadow somersaulted from the chair, to take a long roll on the floor. He wanted to be well away if the killer fired, for gunshots were the only way to end this fight. The killer's opportunity came first.

No shots came from the murderer's gun. The Shadow's roll was elusive in the darkness, enough so to escape his enemy's aim. But there seemed a reason, also, why the murderer did not want to shoot. His one course was escape, and he made it, with amazing speed.

When The Shadow came up beneath a huge, wide table, he had a .45 in his fist. He stabbed shots, high, at angles, on the chance that he would clip the murderer. His fire, too, was to ward off any wild thrust that the fellow would make at Lucille.

The Shadow's bullets pinged the wall. The killer had made his exit without a second of wasted time.

LUCILLE could not see the finish of the struggle. She could not tell whether the shots were delivered by The Shadow or the murderer. Fearing that her rescuer was dead, Lucille added a long shriek to the echoes of The Shadow's gunfire. Then, bolt upright, she saw a shape appear at the window, to hover upon the sill.

It was the rescuer. Lucille realized that he was waiting until she turned on the light. She found a lamp cord and tugged it.

She could see The Shadow no better, but he knew that the girl was safe. He was sure, too, that the murderer had gone. Even then, The Shadow lingered. He had further purpose.

The door from the hall opened to admit the patrolling deputy, who had arrived on the run. Aunt Augusta arrived at the connecting door. Both saw something disappear outside the window. The old lady howled to the deputy.

He started in pursuit. He stopped at the window, staring below. He could not see The Shadow in the darkness of the wall. He thought he caught a strange laugh from below. This time, he spied a figure that moved momentarily through the moonlight.

An instant later, the shape was gone, into a path of darkness.

The deputy did not see that figure double back into the blackened shelter of the house. He thought that the fleeing form had headed for the corner of the old hen houses, some forty yards distant. The deputy fired one barrel of his shotgun; paused a few seconds and discharged the other.

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A few moments later, the downstairs deputy arrived on the run. He reached the window, but shook his head. He would be wasting shots at that range, he thought. Hardly had the fellow stepped back, before another arrival pounded in from the hall.

Sheriff Cravlen had arrived. The first deputy pointed and voiced:

"That's where he is—at the corner of the coops! He couldn't have slid out; I've been watching!"

Cravlen leveled his revolver and fired for the exact place indicated. Echoes rang back from the hen coop. The sheriff fired again, with the same cool accuracy. As he stood with smoking revolver, he heard the outside deputy shout from below. The third man had come around from the other side of the huge house.

"Find who's there," called the sheriff. "Better give him another load, at close range!"

The deputy approached; he fired one barrel of his shotgun, ripping more shingles from the hen coop. He had a powerful flashlight. He used it when he reached the spot where the men above thought a prowler had fallen. Sheriff Cravlen could see the shattered hen-coop wall from the upper window.

Like the deputies, the sheriff stared, puzzled. The ground by the wall was vacant. Cravlen shook his head, as he stepped back from the window. His elbow jostled some one who had arrived beside him.

The sheriff saw Kent Allard, attired in shoes, trousers and pajama jacket. Allard was carrying the shotgun that he had left in his room.

A FEW moments later, The Shadow was hearing the misconstrued details of his own disappearance, from the sheriff and the deputies. He listened, also, to Lucille's vague description of a ghost-like rescuer from the window, who had vanished after thrusting off a murderer.

It all seemed so incredible that Lucille would have termed it a dream, had it not been for her aching neck. Her throat showed the red marks of the thwarted murderer's gloved fingers. The girl's statements and that visible testimony roused the sheriff to new action.

"Somebody's loose in this house," asserted Cravlen. "Who it is, we'll find out. When we get that man, we'll have the murderer!"

Leaving the deputies to protect Lucille, the sheriff beckoned to Kent Allard. Together, they strode out into the hall, to visit the rooms where suspects were confined. In his fist, the sheriff carried the keys that had locked the doors. His face showed a grim expression that indicated that he expected to find his man.

Allard's lips were grim also, but their slight curve showed a smile. Of one fact, The Shadow was certain. During the time that it had taken The Shadow to circuit back into the house, the murderer had opportunity to cover his own trail as well.

The sheriff's present investigation was destined to produce no visible evidence that would lead to the identification of the thwarted killer.

CHAPTER IX. THE SHADOW'S VIGIL.

THERE was a commotion in the hallway when Allard and Cravlen reached there. A terrific hammering had begun; it ended with the splintering of wood. Through a smashed door came George Brendaw, carrying the

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shattered remnants of a chair.

George turned toward Lucille's room, to find Sheriff Cravlen blocking him. George flung down the broken chair; he started to shove the sheriff aside. Cravlen's hand went to his gun; the move halted George.

"Where's Lucille?" demanded George, hoarsely. "I heard the shots—I heard her scream—"

"We're taking care of her," interrupted Cravlen. "She's safe. But what's your idea, smashing up furniture and doors?"

Despite his anxiety, George grinned. Any doubt he had regarding Lucille's safety was stilled when George saw Allard. The tall stranger's calm silence was more effective than the sheriff's worded assurance.

"Who has a better right to smash things?" questioned George. "It's my house and my furniture!"

"But I'm in charge here," reminded Cravlen. "You were supposed to stay where I put you."

Cravlen began an examination of the door. He found that George had smashed the lock along with the woodwork. Cravlen turned to George.

"Maybe you had a reason to smash this door," remarked the sheriff. "If you'd put that lock out of commission a while ago, you'd have to cover it, wouldn't you?"

If Cravlen expected a direct reply, he was disappointed. For a few moments, George showed repressed anger; then coolly put a question of his own:

"May I talk to Lucille?"

Cravlen nodded. The deputies were still at the door of Lucille's room. Moreover, the sheriff wanted a chance to speak to Allard. Cravlen waited until George was out of earshot; then commented:

"It would have been easy for Brendaw to crack that lock. He might have had another key, for that matter. I gave that deputy too long a route to cover. It offered Brendaw a chance to sneak across the hall."

"Rather odd, though," remarked Allard, "that Miss Merrith did not have her door locked on the inside."

"That's so!" exclaimed the sheriff. "Say—we'd better look into that!"

THE sheriff hurried back to Lucille's room. George was talking to the girl; Cravlen interrupted to ask about the door. Lucille insisted that she had locked it.

Looking on the floor, Cravlen found the key. He swung the door half shut; noted a wide crack beneath.

"Somebody could have poked that through," said the sheriff, to Allard. "Then fished for it, and used it to unlock the door. Leaving it on the floor was a smart stunt. Unless—"

Cravlen snapped his fingers; gestured for Allard to follow him. At a jog, the sheriff hurried along the front corridor and reached a room on the other side of the house. He tried the door; found it locked. Cravlen pounded; there was no response.

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"Lenley's room," he told Allard. "Maybe he did the sneak. He may have gone out the window, like old Miss Merrith thought. If he did, he's lucky if he's back here yet."

Cravlen pounded harder. This time, there was a stir. A sleepy voice asked what was the trouble. The sheriff didn't wait to explain by words. He had the key to the door. He unlocked it and shouldered through.

Lenley was seated, half dressed, upon the edge of his bed. He rubbed his eyes when the sheriff turned on a lamp. Blinking, the bearded man looked at Cravlen and Allard.

"Why aren't you in bed?" quizzed Cravlen. "And what's the window doing, half up?"

"You didn't order me to bed," retorted Lenley. "I kept my clothes on because I felt uneasy. As for the window, you didn't say to keep it shut. The rain had stopped; I wanted fresh air."

Cravlen peered from the window. The moonlight showed heavy vines along the wall. Turning about, the sheriff demanded abruptly if Lenley had gone out by that window. The inventor shook his head.

"You wouldn't say so, if you had," decided Cravlen, sourly. "Funny business, though, you sleeping through a lot of gunfire that woke up George Brendaw."

Lenley opened his eyes as if astonished.

"What gunfire?"

"Skip it," returned Cravlen. "You're like Brendaw. Either you don't know anything, or you're too smart to talk. Come along, while we dig up Titus."

THE servant's room was at the remote end of the hall. They found Titus awake, and in a state of mild alarm. He said that he had heard the shots, but that was probably because he had not gone to sleep.

Titus had his window shut, and there were no vines outside it. Cravlen rummaged about the room, looking for keys, but found none.

Meanwhile, Lenley was asking what the trouble was all about. Cravlen did not answer until they started a procession toward Lucille's room. On the way, he gave Lenley a brief summary.

"Somebody got into Miss Lucille Merrith's room," said the sheriff. "Either by the door or the window. He fired some shots, and maybe he went out by the window. Miss Merrith is pretty shaky, but her aunt says she saw the fellow go. We couldn't locate him outside, though."

It was plain that Cravlen was somewhat puzzled. When they reached Lucille's room, he asked the girl some more questions. She answered vaguely.

Lucille could remember those choking hands; she thought she had seen some one at the window. There had been a struggle in the darkness, she thought, but it all seemed hazy.

The sheriff had been blunt with George and Lenley, but he was both courteous and patient when he talked to Lucille. George asked Lucille if she wanted some brandy. When the girl shook her head, the sheriff suggested coffee.

"That's nearer it," smiled Lucille. "What I would like is a cup of tea. I always drink tea instead of coffee."

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The sheriff sent Titus downstairs to prepare a cup of tea. As soon as the servant had gone, George spoke sarcastically.

"At least, you've taken the clamps off one of us," he said to the sheriff. "Titus, it seems, is allowed to go places unwatched. May I ask why Lenley and I are denied the privilege?"

"Because Titus was boxed where he couldn't get out," declared Cravlen. "I might as well put it straight, Brendaw. Suspicion lies between you and Lenley!"

George scowled. Cravlen turned to witness Lenley's reaction. The inventor let his bearded lips part in a gleaming smile.

"From the report you gave me, sheriff," said Lenley, "it seems that there was a mysterious invader who escaped by the window. Since that unknown party entered with intent to strangle Miss Merrith, we might presume that he was the murderer who struck twice tonight."

"That makes sense," put in George. "Let me add my comment, sheriff. I consider that you are overstepping your authority by holding Lenley and myself prisoners."

The sheriff chewed his lips. He was in a dilemma and he knew it. George pressed the cause further.

"Take your pick," he declared. "Lenley or myself. Arrest one of us for murder. Then we can send for a lawyer."

THE sheriff stroked his chin. He didn't relish the thought of giving up his authority until he had gone more into the case. He finally decided upon a compromise, just when Titus arrived with Lucille's tea.

"I'll be fair in this matter," decided Cravlen, gruffly. "Suppose I give you two the freedom of the house. Will you agree to stay in it?"

"Yes." George nodded. "I'm willing, if I'm regarded as a witness, rather than a suspect." He turned to Lenley. "How about it, Bob?"

"I'm agreeable," said Lenley.

"All right," declared Cravlen. "There is one other person, however, who has a say in the matter."

He turned to Lucille. The girl finished her tea and waited for the sheriff's question.

"Miss Merrith," said Cravlen, seriously, "a thrust was made against you. Therefore, you are the person who must be protected. I guarantee that you will be under the constant protection of myself or Mr. Allard. Is that satisfactory?"

Lucille was doubtful. She looked from the sheriff to Allard. Keen eyes met hers. The girl caught Allard's slight nod. That was sufficient. Lucille nodded to the sheriff. Cravlen turned to George and Lenley.

"May I suggest," said the sheriff, "that you gentlemen return to your rooms. This is a request, not an order. You are at liberty to leave the rooms whenever you choose."

Lenley turned promptly and went out into the hall. George hesitated, looking at Lucille. The girl smiled; motioned for him to go. George followed Lenley.

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Titus and the deputies departed. The last to leave were Cravlen and Allard. The sheriff left Lucille's door ajar. In the hallway, he spoke to Allard in an undertone.

"You keep watch," said the sheriff. "I'll go downstairs and complete my report, with these new details. When you get tired, send the deputy down to tell me. I'll take over."

In the darkness of her room, Lucille could again hear the footsteps of the patrolling deputy when he resumed his routine duty.

Stealing softly across the room, the girl peered through the partly opened door. In the lighted hallway, she saw Kent Allard seated in a chair, with folded arms.

His gaze turned toward the door, as if his ears had caught the almost noiseless tread of Lucille's thin slippers. The girl went back to bed. Slipping her dressing gown from her shoulders, she nestled her head deep in the pillows.

The whisper of the wind, the soft glow of the moonlight—both had taken on a lulling harmony. But Lucille knew that they were not responsible for the security that she felt. It was Allard's presence that made the girl know she was safe.

IN the hallway, The Shadow maintained the vigil that he had undertaken as Kent Allard. He remained silent, motionless, awaiting the dawn. To The Shadow, the coming day would bring new opportunity.

The Shadow knew why Sheriff Cravlen wanted to keep matters as they were. A murderer's work had not yet finished. Whoever the killer might be, that person would seek new opportunity to commit covered crime.

Meanwhile, the sheriff held the hope that past clues might point definitely to either George Brendaw or Robert Lenley. When the right time came, Cravlen would be able to accuse openly one or the other of murder.

Much though he had desired that opportunity, Cravlen had been forced to gain Lucille's consent to the risk that the girl faced. Cravlen had hoped for such consent; Allard had assured it for the sheriff.

That fact told that The Shadow, like Cravlen, was counting upon certain clues to serve him. Circumstances of death were so strange at Five Towers that Sheriff Cravlen could not be depended upon to name the murderer correctly. Should there be an error in the sheriff's findings, The Shadow would be present to rectify it.

The Shadow had met the murderer in the darkness of Lucille's room. In the brief struggle, he had gained no opportunity to view his heavy-gloved assailant. Nevertheless, The Shadow was confident that his case would be completed, before death again could strike at Five Towers.

In that expectation, The Shadow discounted a minor factor that was to prove a huge one. Though The Shadow intended to prevent it, murder was due again within these very walls.

Most curious of all, when that murder would come, The Shadow was to be the one person who would most welcome it!

CHAPTER X. OUTSIDE THE WALLS.

WHEN morning came, Kent Allard was still at his post. Amos Cravlen had finished his work in the trophy

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room and had gone into the living room to doze. Deputies had changed shifts, but none had awakened the sheriff. Allard had not called for him.

It was the loud ring of the front doorbell that awoke Cravlen. The sheriff blinked when he saw that it was daylight. He answered the door to find the coroner, accompanied by a new crew of deputies.

Cravlen put the new men in charge. He brought three of them upstairs with him, and there found Allard awaiting, apparently not at all tired by his all-night watch. The sheriff introduced the coroner to Allard, who went with them when they removed the body of Roderick Talroy.

Downstairs, the sheriff led the way to the trophy room. The remains of Rufus Fant were taken away. The coroner collected the evidence and took along a copy of Cravlen's full report.

Telegrams, like George's revolver, were boxed in with the portable typewriter. One of the coroner's assistants carried the bloody mace.

Titus was in the kitchen, making breakfast. Lucille and her aunt arrived downstairs to find the sheriff and Allard at the table. Soon, George and Lenley joined them. All during breakfast, a pair of deputies hovered just inside the dining room.

Cravlen had instructed them to keep constant guard over Lucille and her aunt.

The first to finish breakfast, Allard and Cravlen walked out into the hall. There, Allard remembered something.

"I must make a long-distance call," he said. "My broker expects instructions. Will it be all right to telephone from here?"

"Sure," replied Cravlen, "unless you want to come down to my office."

"I've been up all night, sheriff. It is time I had some sleep. So I prefer to stay here."

Allard made the call, while Cravlen sat near by. The sheriff heard references to certain stocks and their prices; that was all. He would have been amazed had he known all that the call told. Cravlen was to run into the results later, still without knowing that Allard had produced them.

The conversation contained coded statements, summoning a newspaper reporter named Clyde Burke—secretly, an agent of The Shadow—to the town of Northridge, which was where the sheriff was going. Northridge was the county seat, and lay a few miles west of the Sunnyside railroad station. Northridge was the "town" to which every one referred.

WHEN Allard's call was finished, the sheriff motioned him to a side door. They stepped out beside the wall of the huge house; there, Cravlen pointed to a second-floor window.

"Lenley's room," remarked Cravlen. "He could have climbed up there, Allard. Let's pace it around the house."

They took the walk and arrived beneath the windows of Lucille's bedroom. The distance was considerable, but that did not worry Cravlen. The sheriff remembered that it had been some time before they had gone to waken Lenley.

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Cravlen stared across the space to the hen house. He paced that distance, with Allard close beside him. The sheriff looked at the bullet-battered corner of the old chicken roost. He shook his head.

"My opinion," said Cravlen, "is that nobody could have come over this way. What do you think, Allard?"

Allard shrugged his shoulders. For the first time, he was showing signs of weariness from his night's watch. Cravlen saw him repress a yawn.

"You are probably right, sheriff," decided Allard. "I would say that Lenley did not come over this direction."

"You think it was Lenley then?" quizzed Cravlen. "Or do you mean it might not have been Lenley at all? In other words, was it Brendaw?"

Allard considered the possibilities. Despite his sleepiness, he seemed to be visualizing the two men. His keenness, though, was gone. His eyes were listless when he turned them toward the sheriff.

"George Brendaw wouldn't have needed to come outside," declared Cravlen. "What's more, he had a motive to commit those murders. That is, if you could call revenge a motive, but it's a tough one to prove."

A nod from Allard. It was a weary one.

"But that doesn't leave Lenley out," added the sheriff. "He acts like he's on the up and up, but there may be something phony about that invention of his. It's still a fifty-fifty proposition, between Brendaw and Lenley."

Cravlen's forehead was wrinkled in quizzical fashion, as he hopefully waited for Allard to supply an answer. With a tired smile, Allard reached into his vest pocket and brought out a gold coin made in the form of a good-luck piece.

"Heads for Brendaw," he remarked, "tails for Lenley. That's about the way it stands, sheriff."

"You're right," agreed Cravlen, grimly. "Go ahead; toss it. Maybe it will give us a starting guess."

Allard's thumb flipped the coin. It flashed on a high arc in the sunlight; struck the corner of the hen-house roof and bounded somewhere on the ground. The sheriff began to look for it. Allard stopped him.

"I can find it," he said. "You have too much to do, sheriff, to be wasting time here. All I am going to do to-day is sleep."

"All right," agreed Cravlen. "See you later, Allard. You can tell me then which way the coin fell. Only I hope, by that time, that I'll have the real answer."

WHEN Cravlen drove away from the front drive, he looked back to see Allard still looking for the coin. As he headed the car toward the gates, the sheriff muttered, half aloud:

"Heads or tails-Brendaw or Lenley. I wonder which it's going to be."

Had Sheriff Cravlen waited about twenty minutes longer, he would have had his answer. That length of time had passed before Allard suddenly arose from beside the corner of the hen house, to see the gold coin glinting from a spot just beyond.

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Even the coin had evaded an answer to the question. It had rolled between two boards that extended from the base of the hen house, and it was lying there, on edge.

Plucking up the coin, Allard's fingers let it slip into the vest pocket where it belonged. There was a dull clink as the coin settled there.

Soon afterward, Allard came into the house to find a group in the living room. Lucille was there, talking with George Brendaw and Lenley, while Aunt Augusta looked on without comment. Deputies were present, as the sheriff had ordered. Daylight seemed to dispel mystery from Five Towers. The conversation was something of an armistice.

Allard joined the group for a short while. Though he still appeared tired, he was actually noting the expressions of the others. It did not take him long to analyze how certain persons felt.

Lucille still had trust in George, and she showed it. Her eyes, though, were nervous when they looked in Lenley's direction. It was plain that Lucille regarded the inventor as the plotter who had slain twice, and who had sought her life. She felt safe, only because George was present.

Aunt Augusta, on the contrary, gave every indication that she was balancing matters the other way. She smiled whenever she looked toward Lenley, but her face became stern and mistrustful when she glanced at George.

As for the two suspects, they seemed as good friends as ever, but Allard could tell that they were playing a part. George's square-jawed face was set with determination; his eyes were firm in every look they gave.

Lenley's beard hid any facial expression, but his gaze was constantly a shrewd one.

Titus, at the doorway, was watching both, with a stare of admiration. Apparently, Titus had accepted the obvious conclusion that one of those two men was a crafty murderer; the other, a protector ready to stand between the killer and his prey. One man's pose could therefore be genuine; while the other's was merely a copy. Which was which, Titus could not tell.

That meant something to The Shadow. He had not forgotten that Titus had been brought to this house by Lenley. There was something known only to the inventor and the servant; of that, The Shadow was sure. Titus, it was evident, did not consider the hidden fact to be sufficient cause for Lenley to indulge in wholesale murder.

UPSTAIRS, Allard went to his room. Leaving the door ajar, he stretched out on the bed and went to sleep. His slumber, though steady, was a light one. A few hours later, he awakened almost instantly when the telephone began a distant jangle from downstairs.

Allard was at the stairway when a deputy answered the call. Some one was asking for the sheriff. The deputy was telling the caller to get in touch with the sheriff's office, when Allard intervened.

Knowing that Allard had been appointed chief deputy, the man turned the telephone over to him. Allard's conversation was quiet, toned directly into the mouthpiece. The deputy could scarcely catch a word that was said. When he finished, Allard hung up; turned to the deputy with the comment:

"A reporter from New York. I cut off his questions. If any others call, refer them to Sheriff Cravlen."

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Allard went upstairs to take another sleep. Unseen by the deputy, Allard's lips showed a thin smile. The reporter on the wire was Clyde Burke. He had arrived at the town of Northridge.

From Allard, Clyde had received brief instructions, telling him what he was supposed to do.

The Shadow had extended his investigation beyond the walls of Five Towers. He had performed one action on his own; he intended to let Clyde Burke do the rest. An agent of The Shadow, the reporter was qualified to dig up information that The Shadow wanted.

The facts that Clyde gained would be useful to his chief when night arrived. That was the time when The Shadow expected new moves from the murderer. Then, danger would lurk again within the walls of Five Towers. Danger for the others, not for The Shadow.

Such was The Shadow's actual opinion. Yet, circumstances were to confront him with a menace as great as any that had hovered within the gray, stone bulwarks of Five Towers.

CHAPTER XI. MISSING FACTS.

CLYDE BURKE was the only reporter to arrive at Northridge early that afternoon. He found the town a sprawling one, located along a single main street. The county courthouse occupied a small square at the end of the thoroughfare.

There, Clyde inquired for the sheriff. A few minutes later, he was introduced to Amos Cravlen.

The sheriff was not pleased to see the reporter, for he took Clyde's arrival to be the forerunner of a plague of news-hawks. So far, the news of double death at Five Towers had been kept to the country town of Northridge. On the way to the courthouse, however, Clyde had picked up plenty of information.

Realizing that, Cravlen wanted to know how Clyde had gotten the tip in New York. The reporter had an excellent explanation.

He had happened to go to Fant's office that morning, he said, and had heard that the lawyer was absent. There had been some mystery about it, but Clyde had learned that Fant had gone to a place called Sunnyside, near Northridge. So the reporter had come, seeking an exclusive story for the New York Classic.

Cravlen's manner became cordial.

"Since you're the only reporter on the job," said the sheriff, "maybe you'll be willing to play ball. I don't want a lot of hubbub around Five Towers—photographers and all that, until I've had a chance to track the case.

"Give me until to-night"—Cravlen was emphatic—"and maybe there won't be any mystery behind these deaths! Wait a minute, though, Burke." The sheriff's eyes became stern. "You haven't called Five Towers, have you?"

Clyde admitted that he had called from the station, thinking that Cravlen might be at the house. When he added that he had talked only to Allard, Cravlen nodded that it was all right. He took Clyde into an office and introduced him to the coroner and the county prosecutor.

BRIEFLY, Cravlen related the story of the murders and the attempt on Lucille's life. That finished, he pointed to the desk.

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"One man sent those telegrams," declared the sheriff. "That same party tampered with the gully bridge. He committed the murders, but he failed to injure Miss Merrith. Today, he has no chance to make another attempt.

"I feel confident that the murderer has no confederates. I cannot see how any other person would become involved in such a fantastic scheme of brutal death. We have narrowed it down to two persons, Burke. Either George Brendaw or Robert Lenley."

"What about that servant Titus?"

"He is clear," returned Cravlen. "I've just figured out something from statements that were given. Titus was at Five Towers when Roderick Talroy arrived there. So the servant could not have been down at the station, to dispose of Talroy's telegram."

Clyde agreed with Cravlen's one-man theory, and on the face of it, Titus was therefore eliminated. George Brendaw, though, had come in quite some time after Roderick arrived at the house.

Lenley, the evidence showed, had not appeared until dinner time. The inventor could have been out of the house, although he claimed that he had been busy in the cellar laboratory.

"The revenge motive makes it look bad for George Brendaw," asserted Cravlen, "but we can't bank on it while Lenley is a doubtful factor. I want to know more about that invention of his. Until I do, we've got to count him in the picture. I'm going to look into it this afternoon."

Clyde thought the idea a good one. The sheriff added that a ballistics expert was coming from New York to examine the bullet from Roderick's heart. The same man would also study the revolver that belonged to George. Cravlen pointed out the weapon; it lay on the prosecutor's desk.

"Brendaw admitted owning it," said the sheriff. "He couldn't help doing so. He showed it to a couple of us once before—a time we went up there to investigate gunfire, when he was shooting weasels. Besides, that .38 has his initials, G. B., on the handle."

Clyde asked if he could call the newspaper office by long distance, to tell them that there might be a story later. Cravlen agreed; he suggested that Clyde ask if the Classic had any facts on Lenley and the man's invention.

Clyde included that question when he made the call. He learned that there was nothing in the files.

"I don't know whether that's good or bad," grumbled Cravlen. "It still leaves Lenley doubtful. As for Brendaw, he could have that revenge motive, but he swears that old Lionel meant nothing to him. That's something I'd like to know more about."

The remark paved an opening for Clyde.

"Suppose I do some research here," suggested the reporter. "I've got the afternoon ahead of me. I might find something."

Cravlen gave his approval; he had no idea that the suggestion had actually come from Kent Allard. So Clyde left the prosecutor's office and began his task of learning what he could about the Brendaw family.

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THE job looked easy, but it wasn't. Clyde started with the county records—and promptly learned from a clerk that old documents had been destroyed by a fire some years previously. There was no way to learn whether old Lionel Brendaw had been born in the county, or whether he had ever married.

Inquiries around town brought little result. Some people remembered having seen the old man in the vicinity of Five Towers, but no one had ever talked to him. In the Northridge library, Clyde found an old genealogy book that gave him some ancient information.

It appeared that Lionel had been born near Northridge, and was the only son of his parents. His date of birth was 1870, and the book had been printed in 1885. It gave no further data regarding that branch of the Brendaw family.

Clyde traced other lines of the family, through other records and learned that George was exactly what he claimed to be: a distant relative of Lionel. Also, so far as the books showed, George was the only possible heir to the old man.

There were lawyers in town who had handled the Brendaw estate, and their information simply checked with what Clyde had gained. There was one idea, though, that others had apparently overlooked. Since Lionel had been born in the county, old files of the local newspaper might mention it.

Clyde went to the newspaper office. He found the file for 1870. Going through the yellowed pages, he uncovered exactly what he wanted. Lionel Brendaw had been born on July 7, of that year. With that start, Clyde continued through the files.

The reporter's search was accurate, despite its speed. Whenever the name Brendaw appeared on a page, it almost jumped in front of Clyde's eyes. Such references, however, were few. The local editor joined in the hunt, and he and Clyde made rapid progress through the years.

The newspaper was a weekly, and had only four pages to an issue. That helped, but results were small. The Brendaw references gave only passing mention of Lionel's parents.

Then came an odd discovery. In the file for 1893, Clyde struck a gap. One weekly issue of the newspaper was missing. The editor looked through his spectacles when Clyde mentioned the fact. He shook his head; examined the file closely.

"Looks like that number had been clipped out," drawled the editor. "Tsk, tsk! That's too bad! This is the only file in existence. A missing copy can never be replaced."

They resumed the search, and all the while, the thought was drilling through Clyde's brain that the missing issue had something to do with Lionel Brendaw. It was in a file three years later, that Clyde suddenly hit a clue.

An obscure item in an issue printed in July, 1896, mentioned that Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Brendaw had stopped at the Northridge House.

CLYDE kept that discovery to himself. He and the editor finished their search. Clyde was copying his notation from memory when he walked from the newspaper office. Just outside the door, he ran into Sheriff Cravlen.

"Hello, Burke," greeted the sheriff. "They said you were here. Come along; we're going up to Five Towers."

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As they turned from the door, Cravlen saw the paper in Clyde's hand. He questioned, in an undertone:

"Did you find out anything?"

Clyde would have preferred to keep his discovery exclusively for The Shadow, but that was impossible. He had made an open deal with the sheriff, and had to go through with it. He showed the paper to Cravlen as they were getting into the sheriff's car.

"What do you make of it?" asked Cravlen, as they started off through the gathering dusk. "I can't figure how old Lionel's being married could mean anything. Can you?"

Clyde shook his head. He decided, though, to mention the matter of the missing file, since the editor knew about it. It was Cravlen's turn to deliver a headshake.

"Those two points don't link," declared the sheriff. "If anybody clipped one issue because it mentioned Lionel Brendaw, the same person would have clipped the other."

The sheriff's words were logical; so Clyde let it go at that. In the back of his head, The shadow's agent had found an answer that did link. He was confident that no one could have gone through the files year by year, for the editor would have remembered it. But some one could have dropped in and taken a brief look at a single volume, to find a certain date.

That person could have picked the year of 1893, to cut out a number that listed a most important item: the marriage of Lionel Brendaw. It would have included the maiden name of old Lionel's bride. With county records burned, and that one newspaper issue destroyed, a vital fact of the past was forever gone.

The vandal who clipped the bound newspaper volume had never looked farther through the files. Therefore, Clyde had been the first person to uncover the all-important fact that Lionel Brendaw had once been married. That, at least, was certain, from the issue in 1896.

A clue for The Shadow, and a good one, Clyde hoped. In that surmise, Clyde was right.

The sheriff's car had passed the temporary bridge, and was moving through the woods that fringed the driveway. Ahead, Clyde gained his first glimpse of the grim stone walls of Five Towers.

With him, to those turrets of death, Clyde Burke was bringing the very fact that The Shadow wanted. Despite the accurate information that was no longer available, Clyde's indirect clue was all that his chief needed as a keystone to a well-completed theory.

Clyde, however, had not yet delivered that clue to The Shadow. Darkness was wrapping Five Towers, and with gloom, danger would stir there. If a murderer discovered what Clyde had guessed as well as learned, there would be a chance for death to rise again.

That chance might prevent Clyde from ever revealing his discovery to The Shadow.

CHAPTER XII. THE THRUST FORESEEN.

"WHATEVER you've learned, or whatever you've guessed, keep it to yourself. Remember, you'll be talking with a murderer."

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Sheriff Cravlen spoke those words to Clyde Burke as their car halted outside the front door of Five Towers. There was a grimness in the sheriff's tone that tuned with the ominous bulk of those gray, turret-topped walls.

The automobile and its passengers seemed dwarfed within the hush that fronted the great mansion. Their arrival was tinged with the same gloom that had marked Roderick Talroy's one visit to Five Towers.

Clyde understood. With darkness, last night's menace had returned. The sheriff knew it, and deemed the warning necessary. The facts that Clyde had learned to-day, sparse though they were, might be enough to put him under threat.

"I'll introduce you as a reporter," said the sheriff, as they rang the doorbell. "That's all they need to know. You'll get a look at both George Brendaw and Robert Lenley. Act like you didn't suspect either of them."

Some one was opening the big door. The sheriff had just time to add:

"I'll want your opinion afterward, Burke."

It was Titus who admitted them. They went into the living room and there met George Brendaw and Lenley, along with Lucille and her aunt.

The sheriff had hardly finished with his introduction of Clyde, when Kent Allard appeared from the stairway. The tall guest was just in time to hear George snap angrily to the sheriff:

"You say that Mr. Burke is a reporter? Why didn't you notify me before you brought him here?"

"I didn't consider it necessary," returned Cravlen. "Let me remind you again, Brendaw, that I am in full charge of this investigation!"

"Sure you are," agreed George. "That's why you're trying to bag all the cheap publicity you can get! I had an idea that you'd have the reporters flocking here as soon as you could manage it!"

Cravlen showed no anger. Coolly, he explained that Clyde had come there on his own; that there would be no others. The sheriff declared that he, himself, was anxious to avoid an influx of reporters and cameramen. He called upon Clyde to support the statement.

Clyde did. He recounted his own meeting with the sheriff and the annoyance which Cravlen had first shown. That mollified George. His face looked sulky, but he mumbled that he guessed it was all right for Burke to be here.

All the while, Lenley had listened to the argument with a smug air. The inventor seemed to relish the fact that George was under fire. Clyde noted Lenley and observed the contrast between him and George. The two, despite their friendship, were distinctly opposites in type.

George was blunt; Lenley, crafty. Clyde doubted that the bearded inventor would ever be foolish enough to lose his temper the way that George had. In that guess, Clyde was wrong. Lenley's turn was almost due.

It was Sheriff Cravlen who started the fireworks.

"I'M laying the cards on the table," announced Cravlen, to George and Lenley. "One of you fellows has a lot to answer for. It's a toss-up which. From the motive angle, it looks bad for you, Brendaw"—Cravlen held up

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his hand to interrupt a retort from George—"yes, it looks bad, unless—"

The sheriff stopped short. He swung to Lenley.

"Unless you've got something to cover," snapped Cravlen. "That's what I'm here to find out! We're going to take a look at that invention of yours, Lenley."

It was then that Lenley exploded.

"So that's why the reporter's here!" bawled the inventor. His eyes glared, showing large, white orbs. "You've stalled him on the murder story, by promising him something else! I have my rights, and I'll exert them!"

Lenley's teeth were gritted. They showed fierce between his opened lips as he clenched his fist in the sheriff's face.

"No one visits that laboratory," rasped Lenley. "That applies particularly to reporters."

Cravlen showed good judgment. He let Lenley's flare burn out; then, with an easy drawl, he suggested that Lenley calm himself.

"Burke hasn't concerned himself with your invention," the sheriff told Lenley. "He's spent his time on other matters, down in Northridge. Just looking up some old records—"

The sheriff checked himself abruptly. George was eyeing him steadily. Lenley's gaze was full of suspicion. Clyde noted both expressions and realized that they were catching Cravlen's slip. Clyde was relieved when Cravlen quickly covered the subject.

"Old facts about the town of Northridge," said Cravlen. "Background stuff for the story he expects to write later. That was it, wasn't it, Burke?"

Clyde nodded.

"I've got to have a good lead for my story," he said. "You know, the old line. Mystery striking a peaceful, obscure community. I want to be ahead of the rest of the news-chasers when they get here."

Both George and Lenley nodded, but Clyde wasn't at all sure that either fully believed him. The sheriff watched them sharply, and looked doubtful also. One pair of eyes, however, took in everything, and seemed to penetrate to the thoughts behind all faces.

Those eyes were Allard's.

No one was looking toward Kent Allard; hence nobody observed the keen glow that betokened the vision of The Shadow. Though he had not yet talked to Clyde since the reporter had delved into facts, The Shadow knew at once that Clyde had uncovered something.

With that knowledge, The Shadow gained a definite impression that the murderer also had some inkling of Clyde's purpose here.

Sheriff Cravlen was quickly back to his former subject: the matter of Lenley's invention. Cravlen's tone was easy; he was handling Lenley as nicely as he had done with George.

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"All I want to know is this," insisted Cravlen. "Does your invention work? If it does, you have nothing to cover. If not, I'll have to look into it further."

"It works," returned Lenley, testily, "but it doesn't come up to specifications. I have the fuel and can turn it out cheaper than gasoline, but it's short on results. That's why I'm working on new formulas. You can come down to the laboratory, sheriff, provided you don't bring this reporter."

Cravlen agreed to have Clyde stay in the living room. Lenley invited both George and Allard to accompany him. George had been there before, and Lenley evidently considered Allard as a possible investor in the new motor fuel.

The laboratory was in a remote part of the cellar, distant enough to explain the sheriff's failure to find it on the preceding night. It was located almost beneath the trophy room on the ground floor.

On the way, both George and Lenley apologized for their anger. They asked the sheriff a few more questions regarding Clyde Burke, but Cravlen put them off with brief replies.

IN the laboratory, Lenley pointed out long rows of bottles and a shelf of books that dealt with results of his chemical experiments. In a corner stood a mounted machine that was attached to a small gasoline motor. Lenley produced a large glass jar that contained a colorless liquid.

He poured some of the fuel into a tank. The odor that filled the lab was somewhat sweetish, entirely unlike gasoline. After priming the motor, Lenley cranked it. A few sputters; the motor began to throb. For a few minutes, it behaved in rhythmic fashion; then it began to skip.

Hurriedly, Lenley adjusted two valves, connected with pipes that came from a paneled partition at the side of the motor. The engine ran more smoothly.

"This is the vaporizer," explained Lenley, pointing to the upper pipe. "The other is the exhaust. I pipe all the fumes out of the house. The main trouble seems to be with the vaporizer."

There was a sputter as Lenley spoke. He made hasty adjustments of the upper valve. He was too late. The motor skipped badly and finally stopped. Lenley shrugged his shoulders.

"You see?" he said, "That's the trouble—I don't like to demonstrate the fuel until I have corrected it. I have proven, though, that the idea is not a fake."

Sheriff Cravlen admitted that much. They left the laboratory; as Lenley locked the door, Allard looked back. His eyes observed the interior of the partitioned room; his lips showed a smile. In his first visit to the lab, The Shadow had found what he expected.

Unlike the stone-walled cellar, the laboratory had wooden walls. That, in a way, made it uniform with the other portions of the house. Wooden wainscoting and panels were universal throughout Five Towers.

BACK in the living room, the sheriff announced that he was returning to town. He told Lucille and her Aunt Augusta to remain on the ground floor, under protection of Allard and the deputies. Cravlen promised that he would be back within a few hours, and he said it in a tone that indicated there might be something brewing when he returned.

"Meanwhile," added Cravlen, to George and Lenley, "you two can do as you please. I'd advise you, Brendaw"—Cravlen shot a wise look at Clyde—"to assemble certain documents, such as your title to this house

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and anything pertaining to your inheritance."

"I'll do that right now," remarked George. "The papers are in my desk, in the trophy room."

"As for you, Lenley," finished the sheriff, "We'll have another demonstration of your fuel later. Let's hope it will be a good one."

Lenley seemed to welcome the suggestion.

"I'll go back to the laboratory," he declared, "and work on the new formula. Is that satisfactory, sheriff?"

"All right," returned Cravlen. Then:

"Come on, Burke. We'll start for town." As they reached the hallway, the sheriff looked for Allard, but he had gone. Titus hadn't seen him depart, but thought that he had gone upstairs. Cravlen told Clyde to go out to the car; that he would be along as soon as he had located Allard.

Leaving the front door, Clyde saw George heading for the trophy room, while Lenley was starting in the direction of the cellar stairs. Lighting a cigarette, Clyde went out to Cravlen's darkened coupé.

The night was mild. Clyde sat by the opened window on the right, puffing his cigarette. The window by the driver's seat was open also. From that direction, Clyde heard a strange, sibilant whisper.

It was The Shadow's signal, calling for prompt response.

CLYDE shifted over behind the wheel. He had hardly reached his new position before the door on the left opened. A powerful hand caught Clyde's arm; drew the reporter forcibly from the car.

Clyde almost tumbled to the ground beside The Shadow. He heard the car door thump shut beside his shoulder.

Before Clyde could rise, The Shadow pressed him still lower. The voice that hissed in Clyde's ear was a command to make no move. Before Clyde could guess the reason, the answer came.

From somewhere on the darkened house front, a rifle spoke a sharp blast.

With that crackle came a bullet's whine, as a steel-jacketed slug whistled through the windows of the sheriff's coupé. Clyde heard an explosive pop as the bullet dug the turf beyond.

A second later, another report sounded from the house front.

A second bullet ricocheted from the ledge of the coupé's window. There was a third shot, with a whistling slug; a fourth that found the interior of the car. A fifth shot ended the volley; its bullet shattered the glass on the coupé's dashboard.

Some hidden marksman had used all the cartridges in one magazine load, to deliver that rapid-fire barrage. Had Clyde Burke been seated in the coupé, he would never have survived that well-placed fire.

Though he knew that death still menaced the occupants of Five Towers, Clyde had never guessed that the next thrust would be delivered toward himself.

Only The Shadow's foresight had saved Clyde Burke from doom.

CHAPTER XIII. PIECED EVIDENCE.

ECHOES seemed to crackle from the darkness of the house front when the swift barrage had ended. Huddled low beside the car step, Clyde felt no urge to seek a new position. He felt a distinct impression that the fire might be renewed if he made a move.

From the gloom beside him came The Shadow's whisper. It was a single word of command:

"Report!"

The Shadow's presence gave Clyde confidence. Crouched, the reporter told the details of his search through the old files of the Northridge newspaper. The Shadow put brief questions; his agent answered them.

The whole conversation took less than a minute. Before it had ended, the big house door was flung open; a pair of deputies stared toward the coupé. As Clyde completed his last statement, he heard The Shadow's order:

"Meet them!"

Clyde arose and rounded the back of the car. Big flashlights gleamed from the hands of the deputies; they showed Clyde on his way to the house steps. But the beams of light did not disclose The Shadow. Moving in the opposite direction, the cloaked being was already enshrouded in the gloom of the house wall.

The deputies that Clyde met on the house steps were the men from the living room. Before Clyde could answer their excited questions, Sheriff Cravlen came dashing from the house. As he neared, Cravlen demanded:

"Who fired those shots? Where did they come from?"

"Somewhere from the front of the house," returned Clyde, answering the second question first. "I don't know who fired them, but they were aimed at your car, sheriff."

"And you were in it? Lucky the shots weren't well aimed!"

Clyde shook his head. His expression was a sober one. With the ordeal past, Clyde felt a little dazed.

"They were aimed straight," he told the sheriff. "Only I rolled out in time. Through the door on the other side."

The deputies were starting down to look at the coupé, but Cravlen halted them. He ordered them back into the living room, to make sure that nothing happened to the women there. He and Clyde followed. At that moment, Kent Allard appeared from the kitchen, accompanied by Titus.

"Did you hear the shots?" demanded Cravlen. "Either of you?"

"I heard them," returned Allard, quietly. "Rifle shots, I would say. I went outside to look, and came in by the kitchen door. Titus states that he heard them, also, but they sounded muffled."

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Titus was nodding, but Cravlen paid no attention to the servant. He was thinking of others: George and Lenley.

Cravlen stared toward the back of the hallway; almost immediately, George appeared, coming from the direction of the trophy room. He looked surprised when he saw the group at the doorway.

"I thought you had gone, sheriff—"

"Never mind the bluff!" snapped the sheriff. "Where were you, Brendaw, when those shots were fired?"

"What shots?"

"The rifle shots!" Cravlen spoke angrily. "I suppose you are going to say that you didn't hear them."

"Sorry," retorted George, "but I didn't hear them. That is"—his own gaze was steady—"if there were any shots. What are you trying to do, sheriff? Trick me?"

CRAVLEN had no come-back. He sent Titus to the laboratory to summon Lenley, and ordered a deputy to go along for good measure. Meanwhile, the sheriff asked every one for more details regarding the gunfire. Testimony varied.

The downstairs deputies thought that the shots had come from somewhere inside the house. That was why they had been puzzled at first. Two others, who had been dozing upstairs, preparing for night duty, were sure that the barrage had been outside.

Three more, arrived from patrol duty outside, could declare only that the shots must have been from the front of the house, but they had no idea whether they were fired from a window, or the ground. The hazy statements brought a grumble from Cravlen.

"Lenley's the only man left," declared the sheriff. "He'll say the same as Brendaw—that he didn't hear the shots. Wait and see."

Cravlen was right. When Lenley arrived, he acted as surprised as George had. He was rather sly, though, in his final statement.

"The laboratory is deep in the cellar," reminded Lenley. "Far more remote than the trophy room."

Whether or not Lenley meant that for George's discomfort, he did not specify. George did not take the remark without retort. His tone was sarcastic, when he told Lenley:

"You're right, Bob. If I couldn't hear the shots; you couldn't. It didn't take me as long, though, to get here as it did to bring you from the laboratory."

The argument was the first discord that had occurred between George and Lenley. Apparently, their policy had been to give each other the benefit of the doubt.

Clyde took the rift as a good sign. It indicated that each man was beginning to shove suspicion on his friend. When an innocent man showed mistrust of a guilty one, results might follow.

The sheriff was quick to observe the strained situation. Watching both suspects, Cravlen announced:

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"Whoever fired those shots meant them for me. I'm going to get the man that tried that stunt! He thought I'd be out in the car by the time he got the rifle. I wasn't, but Burke was. It's just luck that Burke is still alive!"

George and Lenley had dropped their antagonism while the sheriff spoke. Each man congratulated Clyde on his lucky escape. Perhaps that was because both remembered that they had individually expressed disapproval of the reporter's arrival.

A tight smile suddenly displayed itself on the sheriff's lips. Though both George and Lenley disclaimed all knowledge of the rifle shots, there was something else to be considered. That was the weapon itself.

Cravlen ordered his deputies to search the house for it.

Briskly, Cravlen ordered George and Lenley into the living room, to remain there while the search was going on. He asked Allard to stay also. As they entered the living room, Clyde heard Cravlen tell Allard, in a low tone:

"Whoever it is, he may get shaky when the boys bring in the rifle. Be ready, if he gives himself away."

Clyde saw Allard nod.

WHAT Allard was thinking, though, was something that Clyde did not guess. The reporter did not know that Kent Allard was The Shadow.

Clyde thought merely that Allard's presence here was one reason why The Shadow had come to Five Towers. In the past, Allard had been places where The Shadow had appeared afterward.

The Shadow's real thought was that the deputies would never find the rifle that a murderer had used.

Those shots, The Shadow knew, had been intended for Clyde Burke, not for Sheriff Cravlen. From Clyde's report, The Shadow saw that the mere action of searching through the Northridge newspaper files was enough to make Clyde's life unsafe at Five Towers.

Sheriff Cravlen had mentioned that much to both George and Lenley. In a way, the sheriff's shift of conversation had been more expressive than if he had told further details.

It took the deputies half an hour to finish their search of the house and the grounds. They returned with the news that no rifle could be found. The sheriff looked baffled; at last, he turned on his heel.

"Come along, Burke," he said. "We're going back to town."

Titus was donging chimes that hung beside the dining-room door. George heard them and inquired, with mock politeness:

"Why not stay for dinner, sheriff? Both you and Mr. Burke? Perhaps some one will leave the rifle on the door step."

"Ah yes," added Lenley. "You must stay for dinner. I can promise you a better demonstration in the laboratory."

Cravlen glared at both his baiters.

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"I'll be back," he promised, "by nine o'clock. When I arrive, I may have an apology for one of you fellows, but not for the other. I won't need that rifle to find the man I want.

"Meanwhile, I'm taking no chances on any more pot shots. You hold every one here, Allard, until I've driven clear to the woods. As for you men"—this was to the deputies—"don't let Miss Merrith or her aunt out of your sight!"

WHEN Clyde and the sheriff went to the front door, Allard strolled there with them. He motioned Titus away, and opened the door for the departing pair. From his vantage point, Allard could look back to the living room, to watch persons there.

Outside, Cravlen paused to examine the coupé with a flashlight. Clyde heard the sheriff mutter under his breath as he inspected the damage that the bullets had done. They entered the car; looking back as they drove away, Clyde saw Allard, still at the door.

As he reached into his coat pocket for a cigarette, Clyde's fingers gripped something that crinkled. He realized instantly what it was: a note from The Shadow. Clyde thrust the envelope deeper in his pocket. He chatted with Cravlen as they rode along toward Northridge.

The sheriff still held to the opinion that some assassin—either George or Lenley—had meant those shots for him.

But Cravlen did not overlook the fact that Clyde had nearly been the victim of the barrage. He expressed concern over the reporter's safety.

"It was a close call for you, Burke," admitted Cravlen, "so I'd rather not have you go back to Five Towers too soon. Wait until after I go there again; because, on my next trip"—Cravlen spoke with grim confidence—"I'm going to make an arrest! All I need is just that much"—the sheriff snapped his fingers—"to shift it one way or the other. Either Brendaw or Lenley."

Clyde returned no comment. They were nearing Northridge when the sheriff struck upon another idea.

"You know, Burke," he said, "the way you were working over those old newspaper files makes me think that you could be a lot of help. Between now and nine o'clock, you might dig up more facts."

"I didn't get many," rejoined Clyde, ruefully. "What's more, I don't know where I could get any real dope on the Brendaw family. Old Lionel must have been a mystery in his day."

"They say he was. I wouldn't be surprised if the old fellow went out of the way to cover his own past. Particularly after he took that rap in a Federal prison. But I'm not thinking about Lionel Brendaw. I'm wondering about Five Towers."

"You mean the old house might have something to do with the recent murders?"

"Yes. It gives me the creeps, every time I go in there! I wouldn't be surprised to see old Lionel's ghost, or have his skeleton pop out of a closet."

CLYDE was impressed by the sheriff's words. The reporter had felt the odd chill of Five Towers. Cravlen was right; the place did seem spooky.

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"There're people in Northridge who might know something about Five Towers," declared Cravlen. "Maybe you could dig up some old pictures of the house, like it used to look, years ago. Whatever you could find out would be good for your story, anyway, and it might be some help to me."

Clyde expressed his willingness to make the inquiries. Another thought had struck him, one that he did not mention to Cravlen. Possibly, facts regarding Five Towers might produce others that related to Lionel Brendaw.

It was Clyde's hunch that the full truth of Lionel's past might lead to Robert Lenley. The inventor could have more reasons than he had stated, for choosing Five Towers as a residence.

The newspaper office was still open when they reached it. Cravlen suggested that Clyde drop off there and talk to the editor, who could tell him the right people to visit in search of information. The sheriff said that he would be at the courthouse until nearly nine, and that he would make arrangements for Clyde to come to Five Towers later.

Once inside the newspaper office, Clyde had his chance to read The Shadow's message, for the editor was in the press room. Clyde couldn't figure when or how The Shadow had placed that envelope in his pocket. Holding it low beneath the counter, Clyde opened the envelope.

Inside, he found a coded message, in a cipher that he could read without difficulty, for it was the regular code in which such messages came.

It was lucky, though, that Clyde was alone. The astonished look that came upon his face would have attracted instant notice from any observer. Clyde's eyes stared; his hands became numb, so that his fingers scarcely felt the paper they gripped.

The writing faded, as with all The Shadow's special messages. Clyde took a deep gasp; crumpled the paper and tossed it into a wastebasket. For the first time, he began to realize the depth of the game that The Shadow had encountered.

Pieced evidence told its story. If The Shadow was right—and Clyde's chief usually was—there would be new attempts at murder within the walls of Five Towers.

There was work for Clyde to do—a follow-up of the task that he had accomplished during the afternoon. Everything was right for it. The sheriff's suggestion that Clyde get facts about Five Towers left the reporter free to do the research that The Shadow wanted. Clyde was pleased to have the opportunity.

Some time after nine o'clock to-night, Clyde would see Cravlen again. He would know facts by then, that he could mention to the sheriff, but he might also have some private information for The Shadow. The person who would state those added facts would be The Shadow himself.

Clyde could foresee a huge surprise for all that were concerned with the strange events at Five Towers. Remembering the people whom he had met there, he could picture what their reactions would be. In one case, however, Clyde was wrong.

There was one person dwelling in the great house on the hill who would no longer be alive when mystery was broken.

Death was due again, and The Shadow would be unable to forestall it!

CHAPTER XIV. THE INSIDE PATH.

WHEN dinner ended at Five Towers, George Brendaw and his guests seemed tense, with one exception. Kent Allard, alone of those present, was unconcerned in manner. Though usually silent, Allard had provided most of the occasional conversation in the dining room.

That was natural, since Allard was the only one free from the murderous shroud that clung over the household. George Brendaw, like Robert Lenley, was a suspect who might prove to be a killer. Lucille Merrith and her Aunt Augusta were still prospective victims, should death strike anew.

They showed their thoughts, all of them, although they did their best to conceal it. One fact, however, was notable. Neither George nor Lenley had yielded ground to the other. Nothing in George's manner had caused Lucille's confidence to waver; Lenley, meanwhile, had kept himself in the good graces of Aunt Augusta.

Allard's gaze showed no suspicion of either man; none, at least, that could be detected. His expression was impassive; his eyes as unchanging as his masklike countenance. No one could possibly have determined the thoughts that were hidden by that hawklike face.

An innocent man, however, could feel confidence through Allard's presence. To a person steeped in crime, the case would be the opposite.

Lucille Merrith sensed it; that explained why the girl felt secure. She was confident that Allard would be more than a match for the ruthless murderer who had delivered death at Five Towers. Her own escape from doom was proof.

Lucille believed—through intuition alone—that Allard had somehow figured in her rescue. She was sure, too, that Allard would be ready for the killer's next thrust.

Those wild, useless rifle shots before dinner proved that the murderer preferred to stay under cover. Even though Lucille thought that the bullets had been intended for Sheriff Cravlen and not Clyde Burke, she was correct in her assumption that the murderer was afraid to risk an open attack.

Nevertheless, mystery still existed at Five Towers, and there was one face that seemed to gloat because of it. That face was not a living one; it was the portrait of old Lionel Brendaw, staring from the dining-room wall.

Every time she looked toward the painting, Lucille felt a shudder. There was venom in the portrait's gaze; it wore the very expression that would have suited Lionel Brendaw, had he lived to witness the murders of Roderick Talroy and Rufus Fant.

LUCILLE was glad when George told Titus to serve coffee in the living room. They went there, to sit beside the cheery fire. The servant arrived with a tray of coffee cups. With the percolator, he brought Lucille's usual cup of tea.

The only person who did not remain with the group was Kent Allard. He spoke to the deputies; told them to stay on duty. That order given, he went out by the front door. Lucille supposed that he was merely making a routine trip to see that all was well outside.

Allard's actions became unusual ones as soon as he had reached the outside darkness.

There were no deputies close to the front of the house. No one saw Allard's tall figure stoop beside a bushy

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spot close to the front wall. His hands produced a black cloak, and slid it over his shoulders. Then came a slouch hat; after that, black gloves.

There was moonlight, but it did not reveal the ground close to the house front. No longer Allard, The Shadow was invisible as he glided toward the lawn. He reached the very fringe of shrouding darkness; then looked up toward the high turrets of Five Towers.

The Shadow's keen eyes studied the darkened window panes that caught the moonlight's glow.

The Shadow was at the very spot where the sheriff's car had been parked. He was reconstructing the scene when those rifle bullets had blasted at the coupé. Unlike Clyde, The Shadow had not kept entirely under cover. He had peered from the rear of the car, to see the last spurts from the rifle muzzle.

There was a tiny window directly over the big front door, one that was almost hidden by the slanted roof above the porch. No one would have noticed that window, ordinarily, but it was the spot from which the rifle blasts had come.

The window, oddly, was below the level of the second floor. It did not belong to any room that The Shadow had noted inside the house.

Approaching, The Shadow reached the wall beside the porch and began a prompt ascent. Rough stones enabled him to crawl upward in beetle fashion until he reached the roof. Flat upon the slope, the cloaked form was unseen outside the little window. Gloved hands gained their grip.

The window was of a swinging type, clamped shut from inside, but The Shadow worked it open.

With a twist, the cloaked investigator worked through the narrow space and clamped the window shut. A tiny flashlight blinked, its rays muffled toward floor and walls. The Shadow was in a small, secret room, directly over the front entry.

There were steps that led up to a panel. The Shadow knew that they gave access to the second-floor hall. On each side were narrow passages that led through the house wall. Flashing his light along one, The Shadow saw a spiral staircase that led downward. It was a route to the ground floor.

In a corner of the tiny room stood a rifle: the weapon that the sheriff's deputies had been unable to find. This room was a lookout post from which a watcher could observe all who approached Five Towers. Moreover, it was a formidable pill-box, as a sniper had demonstrated to-night. Any one in the house could have reached this room from any spot in the house, and made a prompt departure.

THE SHADOW proved that when he followed one of the passages. The walls of Five Towers were a honeycomb, with spiral stairways at every buttress. From this inside path, the openings in secret panels were easy to locate. Stopping at intervals, The Shadow opened catches and slid back panels to look into different rooms.

He viewed his own room, George's, Lenley's, and finally came to Lucille's. While he looked from that panel, The Shadow delivered a whispered laugh. He saw the spot where he had struggled with the murderer. The killer had gained a quick outlet, much closer than the door.

It was obvious to The Shadow that the murderer's first action here had been to unlock the door of the room and place the key on the floor. That had not only given him the door as an optional exit; it had also produced a faulty explanation of the murderer's mode of entry.

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It had been the killer's intention to strangle Lucille and have people discover the unlocked door afterward. The murderer wanted no mystery of dead bodies in locked rooms. Such discoveries would have caused a search for secret panels.

Continuing through the wall, The Shadow looked into the room where Roderick Talroy had been murdered.

He descended a spiral stairway, chose a short route and came to another panel. He opened it.

This time, The Shadow viewed the trophy room, scene of the death of Rufus Fant. In each murder, the assassin had come upon a victim unaware, and had departed in absolute secrecy.

Changing course, The Shadow took a ground-floor passage and arrived at the kitchen. Here, a panel opened into an obscure alcove beside a cupboard. The kitchen light was on, but Titus was absent.

The Shadow made a brief inspection of the cupboard; then returned to the passage. At the end of it, he found a stairway that led down into the cellar.

Here, the labyrinth ended. There was a short passage to the right, leading to a cellar door that opened outside. The Shadow knew exactly where that door went; once he had located it. Outside, it was camouflaged to appear as a thick grated cellar window, identical in looks to many others.

Inside the cellar was another panel. The Shadow found that it possessed a secret catch. Probing, he discovered the catch and stepped into a small square room. In one corner stood a small printing press; in another, boxes stacked with papers. The Shadow pushed a light switch. The room was flooded with a brilliant glow.

With the boxes, The Shadow found engraved plates for printing bank notes of five- and ten-dollar denominations. Others were engraved for the manufacture of counterfeit stocks and bonds. There were printed samples of both money and securities in the boxes. They told their story as plainly as if they had spoken aloud.

THIS secret printing plant belonged to Robert Lenley. Counterfeiting was the inventor's real racket, and he handled it on a one-man scale. No wonder that Lenley made much of his invention and was actually trying to produce a synthetic motor fuel. It was the blind that covered his crooked enterprise.

Posing as a man of wealth, traveling many places, Lenley was able to unload the counterfeit stuff that he manufactured at Five Towers.

Examining the bank notes, The Shadow recognized them as difficult ones to detect. He had heard of this particular brand, bobbing up in unexpected places. As yet, government men had not even begun to guess where the phony money had originated.

Evidently, Lenley was one counterfeiter who played a wary game. The counterfeit securities indicated that he was planning to let the queer money rest for a while, and unload imitation stocks instead.

To The Shadow, this discovery was not startling. He had long since divined that Lenley had some criminal activities quite apart from the murders that had occurred at Five Towers. The key to The Shadow's deduction was Titus.

The servant had been brought here by Lenley in the first place. Last night, it had been evident that some understanding existed between Lenley and Titus.

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As The Shadow analyzed it, Titus played a very minor part. Any of Lenley's full-fledged associates must be persons located in large cities; crooks whom he visited on his trips. It was up to Titus to see that nothing happened during Lenley's absence. Titus probably knew of the counterfeiting game, but had not been told of the passages through the walls.

There was proof of that when The Shadow opened another panel and stepped into Lenley's laboratory. This would be the natural route known to Titus. There was no connection directly between the lab and any secret passage. That could be gained only from the printing room, a spot to which Titus might not have been admitted.

Titus was no murderer. Therefore, The Shadow could understand the servant's quandary, on the basis that Titus was unacquainted with the ancient passages. Titus, himself, could not guess how the murders had been so easily accomplished. Therefore, he was sticking with Lenley, in the belief that the counterfeiter might not be the killer.

A tight spot for Titus, but a tougher one for Lenley. Titus might weaken and blab the facts that he did know, if he became acquainted with more.

THE SHADOW had extinguished the light in the secret room; he was standing in the laboratory with the lights on there. Panels were closed; the lab's outer door was locked, the way that Lenley always kept it.

That was why The Shadow did not catch the footsteps that sounded in the cellar, until they were almost at the door.

Some one rapped. The Shadow remained motionless. He heard a strained voice outside the door. It was Titus speaking; the servant had seen the light beneath the door.

"Mr. Lenley!"

Stepping close to the door, The Shadow answered, his voice a perfect imitation of Lenley's smooth tone:

"Does some one want me, Titus?"

"No, sir," replied the servant. "It's just a message from Mr. Brendaw. He started upstairs, thinking you might be there, and he sent me down here, in case you were in the laboratory."

"What's on George's mind?"

"The sheriff telephoned," explained Titus, "He will be here in about one hour. He will want another test of your fuel."

The Shadow gave a chuckle that was exactly like Lenley's. Close to the door, he purred the answer:

"Very well, Titus. I shall be ready. Don't worry."

Titus went away. As the servant's footsteps faded, The Shadow gave another of Lenley's chuckles—one that would reassure Titus when he heard it. The Shadow was confident that the final tone would do much to keep Titus silent when he met the real Lenley. The more secure Titus felt, the better.

That chuckle, however, produced another result. Coming from The Shadow's own lips, it was loud enough to drown a different sound that occurred in the rear of the laboratory: the click of the panel that connected with

the secret printing room.

It was a slight change in the echo of his own imitative tone that told The Shadow that the panel had opened.

Swinging quickly from the door, The Shadow faced the rear of the laboratory. His hand went to his cloak to draw an automatic; then halted, short of the weapon.

Again, the tone of Lenley's chuckle sounded through the laboratory, but this time, the ugly chortle came from the inventor's own lips. At the open panel stood the bearded man, his eyes focused in a murderous glare.

On a level with Lenley's gritted teeth was his right hand. In its grip, a big revolver. His finger seemed itching to tug the trigger.

Lenley had staged some strategy of his own. He had taken the secret route to reach his laboratory. With his arrival, Lenley had found luck. He had opened the panel at the one moment that the noise could escape The Shadow's attention.

As a result, Lenley had gained an advantage that he relished. Here, far from all interference, the phony inventor had trapped The Shadow. Whatever his past career, this was one time when Robert Lenley planned cold murder.

The glare in Lenley's eyes spoke the words that his gloating lips found no need to utter:

"Death to The Shadow!"

CHAPTER XV. THE DEATH PIT.

THERE was one vantage that The Shadow always held when faced by a cool foeman of Lenley's sort. Scheming crooks knew of The Shadow's prowess in battle, but they had no information concerning the tactics he used when placed in a seemingly helpless position.

Lenley was not the first crook who had trapped The Shadow under circumstances such as these. There had been others, but they had not lived to describe what happened afterward.

To The Shadow, emergency demanded quick-formed strategy; he invariably used his wits more swiftly than the enemy. He was doing so upon this occasion, from the very instant when he saw that Lenley held the bulge.

In some instances The Shadow would have performed a sudden fade, whipping out a .45 as he shifted. He had given crooks the benefit of the first shot on more than one occasion, and they had missed.

Such tactics might have worked with Lenley, but the odds were bad. The laboratory was too well-lighted, the space near the door too cramped. That was one reason why The Shadow did not pull a gun.

There was another reason. The Shadow knew that Lenley preferred to postpone the death shot because of Titus. Revolver fire would bring the servant; Lenley would have a hard time explaining a new death to Titus, even if The Shadow happened to be the victim.

Lenley wanted to see the blame for murder shunted completely upon George Brendaw. That was possible, as long as Titus did not consider Lenley to be a killer.

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If Lenley should shoot The Shadow within the next few minutes, he would have to kill Titus when the fellow arrived. Otherwise the servant would waltz.

Titus was too valuable a man for Lenley to lose; he was counting upon the servant to support any fake story that might be necessary under later circumstances.

Lenley's preference, therefore, was to hold The Shadow helpless for a short while. Knowing it, The Shadow gave Lenley the opportunity to the full. Slowly, The Shadow let his hands move away from his body. He raised his cloaked arms, to render himself totally helpless.

That brought a grin from Lenley. The crook had an exaggerated idea of his own ability. He gloated, thinking that he had proven himself master over The Shadow.

Without knowing it, Lenley played squarely into The Shadow's hands. The ease of his capture gave Lenley a new idea.

The Shadow was yellow, thought Lenley; that made things just right. If he could draw The Shadow into the secret room, the job would be quick and certain. Gunshots would be completely muffled; Lenley could leave the body where it fell.

GAZING steadily, The Shadow could tell the crook's exact scheme. It happened that Lenley's move fitted with The Shadow's own plan. All that he wanted was a close-up opportunity to take Lenley off guard.

"Come straight ahead," ordered Lenley, "and keep your hands up. It'll be easier for you!"

Lenley lied; his own manner told it. Nevertheless, The Shadow advanced, his arms still higher, as though he trusted the counterfeiter's promise and wanted to curry good favor.

Lenley stepped to one side as The Shadow neared the open panel. The crook jammed his revolver muzzle against The Shadow's ribs and rasped a command to halt. He made no effort to frisk his prisoner, and the fact that Lenley did not bother to look for hidden guns told The Shadow exactly what to expect.

Lenley intended to deliver his death-shots as soon as The Shadow was past the open panel.

There was one triumph, however, that Lenley could not resist. With his free hand, the inventor whipped off The Shadow's slouch hat and scaled it through the opening into the secret room. With a snarl, he told The Shadow to face about. Sight of Allard's countenance produced a grin from Lenley.

"I thought you were a phony," sneered Lenley. "I had you labeled for a Fed, not for The Shadow. When I saw you go out to-night, I figured maybe you were coming here. That's why I went upstairs first, and doubled down through.

"Been doing a lot of snooping, haven't you? Well, you didn't find this gat that I had buried under the printing press!" Lenley nudged with the gun. "So that makes it even. I guess you didn't find anything that would do you any good."

"I found the rifle." The Shadow spoke in the calm tone of Allard. "The one in the lookout room, at the front of the house."

Lenley's eyes glittered. For the first time, they showed a nervousness. Then, with an attempt at unconcern, Lenley snapped:

Death Turrets

"Trying to bluff me? I'll look into it. We'll talk about it later. Move on through there, and get in the corner. I'm going to tie you up a while."

The last remark was Lenley's idea of a bluff. As The Shadow stepped into the darkened secret room, the crook reached for the panel. He released a catch, so that it would slide shut as soon as his free hand moved away.

His gun against The Shadow's back, Lenley intended to shove through and riddle the victim with bullets, the instant that the panel snapped in place.

LENLEY'S face betrayed his purpose, but The Shadow could not see the bearded man's eager glare. That did not matter to The Shadow; instead, it lulled Lenley. The Shadow was ready for a move that the crook did not suspect.

There was a ledge along the wall, at the spot below the panel, an upright base only a few inches high. Lenley expected The Shadow to step over it, and he did, with one foot. When his next step followed, The Shadow performed an artful trip, one so natural that Lenley never realized that it was faked.

Before the crook could trigger his gun. The Shadow had pitched forward in a long sprawl, away from the gun muzzle. His arms extended, his dive took him into the blackness of the secret room. The Shadow's head ducked forward. Darkness seemed to rise to envelop him within its folds.

A snarl from Lenley. The crook performed the very deed that The Shadow expected. Not guessing the ruse, Lenley thought that his best opportunity was to spring for The Shadow in the darkness; to shoot him before he could recover from his fall.

Just as The Shadow hit the floor, Lenley bounded through the opening, letting the panel ride shut.

The next thrust came as the panel clicked, closing both antagonists in pitch darkness. Lenley jabbed his gun downward and fired. His bullet bashed the concrete floor.

The Shadow had turned his sprawl into a sideward roll. He was no longer at the spot where Lenley had placed him. Then, before the crook could take new aim. The Shadow's feet swung together with a forward clip. One foot hooked Lenley's ankles; the other caught the crook's shins.

With a powerful scissors motion, The Shadow sprawled Lenley half across the room.

Before Lenley could recover, The Shadow rolled upon him. He wanted Lenley alive, with no more chance at gunfire. Uncannily, The Shadow found Lenley's right hand, its forefinger off the gun trigger. A moment later, he had the weapon out of the crook's grasp.

Lenley locked, fighting to regain the revolver. His strength was that of desperation. Sheer frenzy enabled Lenley to hurl back The Shadow's arm and lock with him in a furious grapple.

The fighters came to their feet beside the wall. All the while, Lenley managed to stave off the slugging blow that The Shadow wanted to deliver as settlement of the conflict.

FOR the moment, the fight seemed equal; then The Shadow gave ground. This was new strategy. He wanted Lenley to overtax himself, to bring about a situation in which The Shadow could gain a new jujutsu hold.

Death Turrets

With a hoarse gulp of hopeful triumph, Lenley drove The Shadow to a corner at the front of the room. The Shadow's shoulders hit the wall; there, they braced.

The Shadow's hand released Lenley's gun. The crook heard the revolver clatter to the floor. He felt The Shadow's shoulders shift downward, in a motion that Lenley mistook for a sag. The murderer clutched for The Shadow's throat. Two trip-hammer arms came up to block him. Then The Shadow's own fists had the grip they wanted. His body tightened.

Lenley took a long, spinning lunge that would have knocked him senseless had his head struck first. That was the way The Shadow intended it, but Lenley's dive carried him to the base of the printing press, where his shoulder took the brunt of the blow.

Lenley flattened with a groan. When he looked up, he saw the Shadow's flashlight blink from the front corner of the room.

The battle at that moment was The Shadow's. Victory was so certain that he stooped to pick up Lenley's gun. The flashlight gleamed upon Lenley's bearded face; the crook looked barely capable of motion. His right arm moved mechanically as it flopped toward the space beneath the press where Lenley had earlier picked out his revolver.

The Shadow remained motionless, still in the front corner. If Lenley had another gun, he would find no chance to use it. The moment his hand emerged from under the press, The Shadow could spring upon him.

But Lenley's hand did not have to come out. His fingers had found something else they wanted; a hidden lever. Lenley tugged it.

The effect was instantaneous. A square slab parted beneath The Shadow's feet. As he felt the floor give way, The Shadow shoved his hand for the front wall, to propel himself to safety. The wall split inward as his hand arrived. Its opening action was timed with the motion of the floor.

Two doorlike traps had swung together, and The Shadow's instinctive try for safety carried him into the double jaws of the trap. Forward, downward, he went, in the exact direction that Lenley had designed, into a lower sub-cellar that formed a space in the house wall.

LENLEY had provided that burial spot to receive unwanted visitors. That was why he had forced The Shadow to the front corner. He had hoped to leave his foeman groggy, while he sprang the trap. The Shadow had frustrated that purpose, but sheer luck had given the crook a better opportunity than the one that he had hoped to gain.

In the space of a mere second, The Shadow realized the danger that lay below and did his best to avoid it. His arms thrust outward to break his fall. They served, in part, for the drop was a short one, but The Shadow's head took a side jolt against a lower wall. The thump stunned him, a dozen feet below the cellar level.

Head tilted back, The Shadow reached mechanically for an automatic, in case Lenley followed, intending to shoot it out. Dimly, there came double sounds from above. The floor had swung up into place; the walls had locked tight shut. Weakly, The Shadow sank back against the slime-oozed wall.

It was a full minute before The Shadow's swimming senses could steady. Even then, he stumbled when he tried to rise. He gripped the wall; his fingers slipped from its surface. It would be a hard grind, working up from this pit.

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A few efforts made The Shadow pause to rest. He needed steadier senses before he could begin the task. Through The Shadow's brain throbbed the thought that he could eventually clamber to that split floor above and force it open. That done, he would be ready to meet Lenley in another fray.

But, with that drilling thought, The Shadow sensed another probability: that Lenley might not be content to merely leave him here a prisoner. If Lenley had some ingenious way of delivering death below, the odds would lie with the bearded inventor.

LENLEY had that way. Already, the murderer was making ready to use it. In the darkness of the secret room above, bearded lips gave a new gloat of triumph, as Lenley rose to his feet beside the printing press.

The springing of that trap was merely the first of Lenley's moves. There was another stroke to follow; one that Lenley had arranged when he first prepared that emergency snare.

Though he had never expected to receive The Shadow as a prisoner below, Lenley had designed a manner of quick doom that would be swift enough to frustrate the escape of even that formidable foe.

Five minutes was all that Lenley required to turn the prison cell into a pit of absolute doom. That period ended, no living creature could exist within those lower walls. Ready for his next action, Lenley could foresee but one possible result.

That would be the death of The Shadow. This trap was one that even The Shadow could not survive!

CHAPTER XVI. MURDER WINS AGAIN.

IT took Lenley a half minute of groping to find the panel that opened into the laboratory. When he found it, he slid the panel aside and sprang into the lighted room, letting the tricky barrier close behind him. Once in the lab Lenley's speed became feverish.

There was a satanic expression on the inventor's bearded face when his hurrying hands poured synthetic gasoline into the fuel tank that topped the motor. That done, Lenley made quick adjustments; gave a spin to the small crank. The motor began to sputter; the bearded man moved the throttle. The result was a steady rhythm.

From beneath a workbench, Lenley brought a huge monkey wrench. His leer was more evil than ever, as he approached the lower pipe that led into the wall. That was the exhaust pipe; Lenley had said that it led up through the ground. It did, when the line was tight, but when it leaked, the result was different.

Clamping the wrench around the casing of the pipe, Lenley gave a series of powerful tugs. The casing came clear; the bearded man loosened the inner pipe. That done, he twisted the casing just tight enough to enter the wall. He laid the big wrench on the table beside the mounted motor.

Lenley's face told the ugly deed that he had accomplished. The exhaust pipe led through the secret prison room. By loosening it, Lenley had caused the motor's deadly fumes to pour into the cell that held The Shadow.

Five minutes of that treatment would be sufficient. Lenley had long ago calculated the time required to fill the hidden cell with carbon monoxide. It would be death for The Shadow, the one person whose presence Lenley really feared.

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For a few moments, Lenley was satisfied; then a frown showed on his forehead. He tilted his head to listen for sounds from the prison room. Any that came were drowned by the purr of the motor.

Perhaps it was the heat of the engine that brought the beads of sweat to Lenley's forehead, but the thoughts in the crook's mind might have accomplished that result.

Lenley wasn't satisfied. Five minutes was a long time, when The Shadow was concerned. Lenley mopped his forehead; stared steadily at the motor. His soured lips spread in a new smile.

Reaching to the upper pipe, Lenley turned the valve with his fingers. The new adjustment of the vaporizer brought snorts from the motor, but it did not stall. Fumes would be thicker from that skipping engine. The Shadow's time of life was lessened.

BELOW, The Shadow recognized his plight.

The cloaked prisoner was on his feet. He had found his flashlight; was studying the confines of his narrow cell. The Shadow could scent the sweetish odor of the motor's fumes; he knew that with them came a heavy content of deadly carbon monoxide.

That murderous gas was heavier than air. Creeping up from the floor, it would bring sure death by the time it filled the cell. There was no way to stop it, for the top of the cell was equipped with a metal grating, its slats barely wide enough for fingers to enter.

The pipe was above that griddle, where The Shadow could not reach to plug the leak.

The grating ended against a solid metal beam. To the left was a space of smooth ceiling, split by a narrow crack. That was the trapdoor through which The Shadow had dropped. The Shadow saw a way to get at that exit. He began an operation that was almost superhuman.

Clutching the slippery wall, The Shadow actually clawed his way upward. He lost his hold near the top, and dropped back to the floor. Again, he made the attempt. This time, he managed to thrust out one hand and wedge his fingers into the grating.

Clinging with his powerful fingers, the prisoner swung his other hand to grip the grating.

The fumes were pouring from directly above The Shadow's head. Holding his breath, he clung to the grilled ceiling, swaying back and forth like a human pendulum. The strain of that test seemed too great for fingers to bear, but The Shadow did not fall. Instead, he performed a new move that was more phenomenal than the first.

Lowering one hand, he thrust it farther along the ceiling to seek a new hold. The other hand followed. Using his fingers as grippers, The Shadow was literally walking along the ceiling, to reach the closed trapdoor!

Lenley would have felt chills, could he have witnessed that scene. The Shadow was away from the range of the leaky pipe, to a spot where he could breathe freely. He still had a few minutes in which to effect his own rescue.

He was at the trapdoor. With one hand, he drew an automatic and thrust it upward. It took all his strength to wedge the gun into the crack, but The Shadow managed it. The halves of the ceiling pried slightly upward. The Shadow pressed his fingers between.

Death Turrets

It was then that his strength began to fail. Fingers were numb; they needed rest. Reluctantly, The Shadow took a deep breath; let himself drop to the floor. The gun remained in its wedged position, just as The Shadow wanted it for his next attempt.

Gloves off, The Shadow pressed his fingers, waiting until their strength returned. He had no way of gauging how long it would take the gas to come above his shoulders.

The Shadow could hear the jerky pumps of the motor; he knew that Lenley had set it to increase the flow of fumes. But The Shadow calculated that he had at least five minutes more. He resolved to wait that time.

THAT decision would have pleased Lenley, had the bearded man known of it. The Shadow had miscalculated. He was allowing the proper time for ordinary gasoline fumes to fill a prison of that size. Lenley's synthetic fuel, however, generated carbon monoxide in twice the quantity produced by ordinary gasoline.

At the precise moment when The Shadow started his rest, he had exactly two minutes more in which to live. Then death would envelop him so swiftly, suddenly that he would have no warning. The heavy carbon monoxide was an unseen monster, creeping up from all about.

That gas could do what hundreds of human enemies had failed to accomplish. It could bring a prompt end to The Shadow's career.

Lenley, leaning above the motor, was holding a watch in his left hand. His right forefinger marked the dial. The method of this murder appealed to Lenley's scheming mind. Two minutes more—The Shadow would be obliterated, without a trace. A cloaked corpse would lie, forgotten, in the secret prison room.

The Shadow's death would mean the disappearance of Kent Allard. That would mean mystery. Questions, too, but Lenley could answer them. Where was he at the time when Allard was last seen? Here in the laboratory, testing his synthetic fuel.

It was clever, very clever, for Lenley was expected to have his motor ready for a later demonstration. That would satisfy Sheriff Cravlen, when he started a quiz to learn what had become of Allard. His eyes on the watch dial, Lenley did not hear the slight click that sounded behind his back. The noise of the skipping motor was too great for him to detect other sounds. The crook was thinking of one detail necessary to cover the death of The Shadow, and thereby keep investigation away from the secret counterfeiting lair.

It would be best, decided Lenley, to tighten the exhaust pipe and the casing that surrounded it. That would dispose of the only clue in the laboratory. With only a little more than a minute to go, Lenley reached for the big monkey wrench.

His right hand found only the tabletop beside the motor. Puzzled, Lenley looked for the wrench. It was gone, vanished almost from his grasp.

Lenley, methodical in all he did, knew that he had placed the wrench at that spot. Its absence brought a startled scowl to the counterfeiter's bearded face. Instinctively, Lenley swung clear about from the table.

Looming straight for Lenley's face were a pair of big-gloved hands. One was thrusting for Lenley's throat; the other was lifting the monkey wrench. Beyond the hands, Lenley saw the face of the man who had entered by the panel from the counterfeiting room. That visage was murderous.

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THE horror that gripped Robert Lenley had been duplicated twice before within the walls of Five Towers. Once, when Roderick Talroy had felt that terror; again, when Rufus Fant had quivered with stark fear.

Wildly, Lenley tried to dodge the coming blow. He failed. The murderer's left hand sideswiped the inventor's neck. The right fist descended with the wrench. The blow cracked the side of Lenley's skull. The bearded crook slumped to the floor, senseless.

Too late to save his own life, Lenley unwittingly performed a service for another. The inventor's failure to put up a struggle was a factor that brought aid to The Shadow. The man who provided it was the murderer.

He was unacquainted with the fact that Lenley had trapped The Shadow in a prison cell where death was due within the next half minute.

The killer wanted to insure Lenley's death; for he knew that the inventor had recognized him. Moreover, the elimination of Lenley was part of the murderer's complete scheme. The killer had his own use for the fumes that were pumping through the exhaust pipe of Lenley's motor.

The lights of the laboratory showed only the murderer's back as the gloved invader crouched beside the wall. Clamping the monkey wrench to the exhaust, the murderer gave a powerful tug. The loosened casing ripped away and the detached pipe came with it. Twisted upward, the end of the pipe puffed its fumes into the killer's face.

Turning his head away, the murderer gave a gruff laugh. He planked the monkey wrench on the table beside the motor. He looked at Lenley's face, flat on the floor, turned toward the deadly fumes. It wouldn't take long for that gas to finish Lenley.

The murderer's job was done.

While the motor throbbed its message of doom, the killer turned to the rear panel. He found the catch; pressed it clumsily with his gloved fingers. With the panel opened, he stepped through to the darkness of Lenley's counterfeiting room. The panel slithered shut, muffling the noise of the motor. There was a shuffling sound in the darkness as the killer went through the far panel that led to the honeycombed passages in the walls of Five Towers.

AGAIN, brutal death had struck within the mansion of doom. New murder would bring a challenge to the law. Robert Lenley, though a crook in his own right, was not the killer who had slain Roderick Talroy and Rufus Fant.

The actual murderer had proven the inventor's innocence by doing away with Lenley.

With that stroke, the killer supposed that he had disposed of the last man who blocked the path to the completion of his crimes. He thought that he had come upon the inventor in the midst of an experiment with the synthetic fuel. Nothing in Lenley's actions had told the killer that the bearded crook was engaged in murder on his own.

A past master at the art of murder had slain a man who was on the verge of making his first kill. The murderer, in dealing new death, had put an end to Lenley's effort to take the life of The Shadow. Lenley, like Roderick and Fant, would never arise to accuse the man whose face he had seen in that moment of final terror.

Death Turrets

But there was one who would return, from a hidden cell where death had seemed a certainty. The Shadow, when he left the pit of doom, would bring more than accusation of the murderer.

The Shadow's return would carry vengeance for the deaths of innocent men. He, alone, was sure of the identity of the man who had murdered Roderick and Fant. The Shadow would be the first to learn that Lenley had died at the hands of the same killer.

Lenley's death would also be avenged, even though the crooked inventor had sought The Shadow's life. In dealing with a murderer, The Shadow would add Lenley's name to the list of victims. The death of Lenley would surely be one kill that the murderer would regret.

However much the murderer had regarded Lenley as an obstacle to his plans, he would find The Shadow a more formidable blocker. The Shadow, alone, could crack the murderer's game.

The killer's own deed had made that climax possible!

CHAPTER XVII. THE SHADOW WAITS.

LENLEY had been unaware of the killer's approach; the murderer, in turn, had known nothing of The Shadow's imprisonment in the death pit. Similarly, The Shadow had gained no knowledge of the shifted circumstances above. His first inkling came when he again essayed the task of reaching the trapdoor.

The Shadow waited the full time that he had calculated, then clutched his way up the slippery wall. As he gripped the grating with his fingers, he noticed that there was no hiss of fumes from the detached exhaust pipe.

The motor was still throbbing beyond the wall of the laboratory; therefore, The Shadow supposed that Lenley had himself cut off the escaping gas.

That could prove to be a bad mistake on Lenley's part. It made The Shadow think that he would have another chance to deal with the criminal inventor.

This time, The Shadow was able to handle the trapdoor before his fingers gave out. Through sustained effort, he forced his hands through the wedged opening and jammed one arm clear to the elbow. Holding that grip, he hunted for the catch that held the floor in place.

The Shadow found it—a boltlike fastening connected with a wire. It was fixed to prevent the floor from bulging downward; The Shadow had taken advantage of an opposite slack to work the trap slightly upward from below.

The present situation was one that called for utmost care. Release of the bolt would make the floor drop downward. A bad fall would sprawl The Shadow in the bottom of the pit, where the gas layer was still thick.

That was why The Shadow probed well with his arm before releasing the bolt. His hand gripped a solid section of floor. He was ready.

Coolly, The Shadow regained his dangling automatic, which was barely wedged between the spread sectors of the trap. He slid it beneath his cloak with his free hand. That same hand found the bolt and released it.

Instantly, the trapdoor gave under pressure of The Shadow's leaning weight. If he had still relied upon his

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former hold, he would have taken the plunge.

The one hand on the solid floor edge saved him. It was slipping as The Shadow's body swayed, but his other fist came through and added its grip. With all the strength that his arms possessed, The Shadow pulled himself upward.

The trapdoor helped him when he balanced himself in just the right position. Its tendency was to close upward, once pressure was off it.

The sections of the trapdoor were like tapering walls. They gave unequally, when The Shadow's body was between them, according to the side shifts of his shoulders; his weight was supported by the grip he had upon the solid floor. Hence the trapdoor's closing tendency provided enough friction to offset the slip of The Shadow's hands.

Hoisting his chin above the floor edge, The Shadow spread his elbows and retained a position as though staring into the darkness of Lenley's printing room.

Doubling his knees upward, The Shadow felt the trapdoor rise. It took just enough weight to relieve the deadening strain upon his arms. Long seconds passed as the cloaked prisoner regained his strength.

THE SHADOW lashed himself upward and forward with a titanic heave. As his elbows hoisted, his feet kicked downward. The trapdoor gave, but that did not matter. The Shadow had the impetus he needed, with the footwork providing the extra ounces.

With a half roll, The Shadow flattened upon the solid floor. As he lay there, drawing a long breath, the trapdoor came up in place. An automatic sliding of the bolt was the only signal that The Shadow wanted. Gratefully, he let shoulders and legs sag back to the trap that had become a solid floor.

The air of Lenley's counterfeiting lair seemed clear, compared with the fume-filled atmosphere of the pit. While he rested, The Shadow drew an automatic and held it ready. The motor was still snorting in the laboratory. At any minute, The Shadow still supposed, Lenley might come through the panel.

Since that did not occur, The Shadow resolved upon a prompt investigation. Coming to his feet, he found the panel. As he slid it open, he poked his automatic through.

As his nostrils breathed the sickening odor of gas, The Shadow's eyes saw Lenley. The bearded man lay below the sputtering motor, which was missing so badly that a few more coughs might halt it. Sight of the monkey wrench and the broken pipe instantly told The Shadow that Lenley had met with foul play.

A mirthless laugh toned from The Shadow's lips. Lenley, the intended murderer, was already dead. He had lain too long in those poisonous fumes. The Shadow could picture exactly how the crook had died. A practiced murderer had disposed of him, and The Shadow knew why.

In fact, The Shadow had foreseen that Lenley's life was in danger. He had proven his deduction when he found the counterfeiting den.

OF all persons in Five Towers, Lenley was the one most anxious to avoid trouble. The Shadow had sensed that from the start. For Lenley, Five Towers was the ideal spot to run his counterfeiting racket. The less attention directed to the place, the better.

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It was inconceivable that either Roderick Talroy or Rufus Fant could have pried into Lenley's secret during their brief stay in this old house. If Lucille Merrith had learned anything of Lenley's crooked game, she would have announced it.

Lenley, therefore, was the last person who could have desired murders of the sort that had occurred; the last, also, who would ever have attempted to take Lucille's life.

True, Lenley had tried to dispose of The Shadow, but he had attempted it in a secret place, through a snare.

Circumstances eliminated Lenley as the killer. The violent death of the inventor made it a case that every one could now recognize. When Sheriff Cravlen arrived at nine o'clock, he would no longer be confronted by the problem of two suspects. There would be only one toward whom the sheriff could possibly point an accusing finger.

That man was George Brendaw.

True, the evidence against George would be circumstantial. No one had seen him murder Roderick or Fant; nor had there been witnesses to Lenley's death. But the motive—that of vengeance—was the sort that would fit circumstantial evidence.

The murder of Lenley, the worst possible stroke for a man in George's position, would be explainable as soon as hidden facts were revealed. A man thirsting for revenge would stop at nothing. He would be crazed enough to dispose of any one who might be able to betray him. Lenley had been capable of shifting a heavy burden upon George. All that had restrained Lenley had been his own difficult position.

Lenley knew all about the secret passages that had served in the surprise murders. Once he could prove his own innocence, Lenley might have sprung that news. He had held off because of his counterfeiting work. But he would prefer to take a rap for that crookery, rather than be charged with murder. With all his mock friendliness toward George, Lenley had secretly branded the young man as the killer. He took it for granted, therefore, that George had uncovered the counterfeiting plant and knew that Lenley would be afraid to squeal. That was why Lenley had felt himself immune from a murderer's attack.

Lenley had guessed wrong.

That was something that The Shadow had no cause to regret.

THERE was another angle, however, to Lenley's death. It represented a thrust that would bring an end to a murderer's activity. Only a short while remained before this case would crack wide open. That meant the revival of a former menace.

Lucille Merrith was again in danger. Last night, The Shadow had thwarted the death thrust against Lucille. Since then, he had made it almost impossible for the girl to suffer harm. All the while, however, The Shadow had known that a later thrust would come. It could wait, as long as the law remained doubtful regarding the identity of the murderer.

But with Lenley out; with George the only suspect, Lucille's position was precarious. Her death was essential to the complete scheme of vengeance.

Lucille, at present, was under the protection of deputies who were vigilant. But they did not know the full depth of crime. Only The Shadow's presence could insure Lucille's complete safety.

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That was why The Shadow took the shortest route to reach the living room. He moved rapidly through the passage that led to the spiral stairs of the kitchen well. He ascended and listened at the panel. Hearing no sound, he opened the wall and stepped into the little alcove.

There, The Shadow waited. Titus had come back into the kitchen. The servant emptied the coffee percolator and the teapot. He placed a kettle on the stove to boil more hot water.

Refreshments would be required later, when the sheriff arrived, for George Brendaw insisted upon playing the part of host, despite the suspicion that was resting upon him.

Titus remained only a few minutes in the kitchen. As soon as the servant had gone, The Shadow stepped from the alcove. He opened the cupboard; whipped off his black cloak and rolled it up.

There were dishes on the lower shelves, along with bags of coffee and a small can of tea-balls. A higher shelf was out of reach and almost empty. The Shadow, taller than Titus, was able to stretch just high enough to flip his folded garments on the upper shelf, where the bundle rolled out of sight.

Again, The Shadow was Kent Allard. In that guise, he came out into the hall and approached the living room.

LUCILLE and her aunt were seated by the fireplace, with two deputies still on watch. Titus was standing stolidly in the corner, in case his services were needed.

Lucille gave a relieved smile when she saw Allard. She asked if all was well outside.

"Quite all right," assured Allard, in his calm tone. "None of the outside men reported any suspicious occurrences."

"But you were gone a long while, Mr. Allard—"

"Because the deputies are posted off by the woods. The sheriff's idea—and a good one. Prowlers would have to come through the woods to approach the house."

Lucille nodded. Her gaze told her thoughts. The girl was convinced that danger lay within Five Towers—not outside. She was glad that Allard had returned.

Allard's gaze roamed the room; his expression seemed to show mild surprise because George and Lenley were absent. Lucille expected him to inquire where they were, when George appeared suddenly from the hallway. He was carrying some papers in his hand.

"Hello, Allard!" he greeted. As he spoke, George's lips forced a smile. "Guess I'd better report to you, just as a formality. I've been in the trophy room, digging up all the papers that the sheriff wanted. Correspondence with lawyers, you know, regarding my inheritance."

George tossed the papers on the table; then remembered something.

"That's right!" he exclaimed. "You were out when the sheriff called on the telephone. He told me to have the papers all in order, and he asked me to remind Lenley that there would be an official test of the synthetic fuel."

Allard's gaze indicated that this was news to him. His tone was casual when he asked:

"So Lenley went down to the laboratory?"

"He was already there," replied George. "While I was looking upstairs for him, Titus went to the cellar and found him there."

That ended the subject. George took a chair beside Lucille and glanced at the clock. The time was ten minutes of nine.

"The sheriff ought to be here soon," remarked George, coolly. "He had to drive somewhere to get the coroner; then back to the courthouse for the prosecutor. They're all coming up here together."

George turned to Lucille. He smiled, as he added:

"That will mean more questions. For all of us."

"I don't mind," returned Lucille, seriously. "I only hope that they can solve those terrible murders."

"So do I," spoke George. "The sooner the better."

Augusta Merrith gave an audible "Humph!" that made George look in her direction. The elderly woman glared at George, without trying to hide her suspicion.

George smiled. He let his eyes glance upward, to compare the glowering moose head with the face of Aunt Augusta.

Kent Allard's gaze was fixed upon George Brendaw. Keen eyes observed the young man's expression. George seemed quite unconcerned regarding the future. He acted as if he had no idea that his fellow-suspect, Lenley, lay dead in the cellar laboratory.

That discovery would be coming soon.

Until then, The Shadow waited.

CHAPTER XVIII. MURDER REVEALED.

IT was nearly half past nine when the sheriff arrived. He came in a sedan, bringing three other men with him. One was the coroner; another, the county prosecutor. George Brendaw recognized both and greeted them, but the third of the sheriff's companions was a stranger.

Cravlen simply introduced him as Mr. Wright. George looked at Wright suspiciously, and decided that the man was not a reporter. Wright didn't have the appearance of a newspaper man.

Allard's eyes were watching George's expression keenly. The Shadow sensed what was in the young man's mind. The proof of it came after George had decided that Wright was welcome. His thoughts still on reporters, George asked the sheriff:

"What about that chap Burke? Where is he?"

"Still in town," replied Cravlen, gruffly. "He didn't seem to like it here at Five Towers. Apparently, he wasn't welcome."

Death Turrets

George's fists tightened.

"I'll admit I wasn't glad when Burke showed up," he told Cravlen. "But if you're insinuating that I had anything to do with those rifle shots, you're a mile wrong!"

The sheriff shook his head.

"No insinuations at all, Brendaw," he declared. "We haven't found the rifle yet. What's more"—Cravlen laughed indulgently—"the shots were meant for me, not Burke.

"But if you're willing"—the sheriff's tone was earnest—"I'd like to bring Burke up here. I think you owe him an invitation. After all, it's your house."

George smiled. He liked the way that Cravlen talked. He thought that the sheriff was becoming more reasonable; anxious for cooperation, rather than challenge. It was Allard who saw through Cravlen's disarming manner, observing much that George missed.

The sheriff was ready to spring a surprise. During his hours down in Northridge, he had been busy fitting evidence. The stranger, Wright, had been brought here for some purpose. There was a reason, too, why Cravlen wanted Clyde Burke to come.

However shrewd George Brendaw might have been in the past, he did not outwit Cravlen on this occasion. George told the sheriff that he could call the courthouse and invite Clyde up to Five Towers. Cravlen made the telephone call, and returned to state:

"Burke hadn't come in when we left. He's there now, though, and he's coming here in a taxi."

Cravlen was repressing a satisfied smile. The Shadow knew that Clyde must have mentioned pleasing news over the telephone. The sheriff seemed content to wait until the reporter arrived.

SINCE there was to be an interval, George Brendaw played the host in his usual polite manner.

"Coffee, Titus," he told the servant. Then, with a smile toward Lucille:

"Tea, of course, for Miss Merrith."

"Just a moment," interrupted Cravlen. "Where is Lenley?"

"Down in the laboratory," replied George. "He's been there ever since you telephoned."

The sheriff turned to Titus.

"Summon Lenley," he ordered, briskly. "You can make the coffee afterward."

As soon as Titus had gone, Cravlen faced George. For the first time, the sheriff was showing the hard-boiled manner that was part of his usual personality.

"Spades are spades," asserted Cravlen. "That's going to be the rule here, Brendaw. It's come to a showdown, and I thought you ought to know it."

"You mean between me and Bob Lenley?"

Death Turrets

"That's it, Brendaw. One or the other of you is putting up a big bluff. It's got to end to-night. I'm going to be tough with the fellow who's guilty, but the innocent man can consider me his best friend.

"Whoever is innocent—you or Lenley—can rest sure that I won't let the other fellow frame him. I'm telling that to you, and I'll give the same story to Lenley, as soon as he joins us."

Titus returned. The servant's face was worried. Allard was not the only person who noticed it. Titus had been stolid lately, ever since suspicion had been removed from him. But he no longer looked confident. It was with an effort that he spoke to Cravlen.

"I'm afraid something is wrong, sheriff," stated Titus. "Mr. Lenley doesn't answer. But he must be in the laboratory. I'm sure of that!"

"What makes you sure?" snapped Cravlen.

"I could see the light under the door," replied Titus. "But the door was locked. The way it was when I talked to Mr. Lenley before. But there was something else, sir—"

Titus hesitated. His puzzled eyes looked toward George. Allard could see a gleam of suspicion in the servant's eyes. Titus turned again to Cravlen.

"The motor must have been running," said the servant. "I could smell gas that came out under the door. But the motor is stopped. Mr. Lenley should surely have heard me when I knocked."

Cravlen was on his feet. He gestured to his companions.

"Come along," ordered the sheriff. "We're going down there. I want you with us, Allard, and we're taking you, too, Brendaw. We'll find out what's happened to Lenley."

WHEN they reached the laboratory, Cravlen pounded heavily on the locked door. Receiving no answer, he decided to smash the portal.

Titus brought a hatchet that was used for chopping kindling. Cravlen hacked an opening above the doorknob. Reaching through, the sheriff found the key and turned it.

The moment that Cravlen opened the door, fumes issued forth. Seeing Lenley sprawled by the motor, the sheriff ordered every one back. Grimly, he drew his revolver from his holster. He gave a glance toward George.

"Nobody moves until I give the word," snapped Cravlen. "That room's full of motor gas! We'll wait until it clears. It's got the whole cellar to absorb it."

At the end of five minutes, Cravlen entered the laboratory and beckoned the others to follow. He arrived beside Lenley's body, and shook his head when he saw the bulge of the bearded man's eyes.

"Gas, all right," decided Cravlen. "Look at that exhaust pipe, ripped loose! Well, Brendaw"—he turned and thrust out his hand to George—"I guess this clears you. Lenley couldn't stand the gaff. He took suicide as the only way out."

George's face was solemn.

Death Turrets

"Poor Bob," he said. "Maybe I shouldn't feel that way about it, but I did like the fellow. Why he went in for murder is something I cannot understand."

George turned to Titus.

"You can go upstairs," he told the servant. "Get the coffee ready. We'll need it, after this. You can tell Miss Lucille about Bob's suicide. And perhaps"—George's tone was bitter—"perhaps the news will interest her aunt, also. She may realize that she placed too much confidence in Lenley."

Titus started away. Sheriff Cravlen called after him.

"When Burke comes, send him down here!"

The next few minutes were given to the coroner. Methodically, that official made a survey of the scene, voicing his conclusions as he went along.

Suicide seemed the obvious verdict. A locked door; Lenley alone in the laboratory; death from the fumes of a running motor that he could have stopped whenever he chose.

This case was totally unlike the murders of Roderick Talroy and Rufus Fant. There, a murderer had found opportunity. Here, it seemed certain, only one man could have arranged death. That man was Lenley himself.

It was not until the coroner made a careful examination of the body that he found a flaw in the suicide theory. Turning Lenley's head, the coroner noticed that the lower side was blood-streaked. He beckoned to the prosecutor and the sheriff.

"That looks like somebody slugged Lenley!" exclaimed Cravlen. "He couldn't have given himself a wallop on the side of the skull. How do you account for it?"

It was George who provided the answer. He pointed to the motor on the table with the comment:

"Maybe Lenley struck it when he fell."

Sheriff Cravlen nodded. The explanation was plausible. He began to examine the top of the motor, moving along until he reached the end of the table nearest to the door. Cravlen shook his head.

"Nothing here." He looked along the table. "Say, coroner; take a look at that monkey wrench."

The coroner did. His eyes widened as he showed the wrench to the prosecutor. On the under side of the wrench was a clump of Lenley's hair, with a splash of blood.

Excitedly, the coroner brought the wrench to the sheriff. Allard saw the tightness that came to Cravlen's lips. A moment later, the sheriff swung to George.

"You'll tell me next," spoke Cravlen, "that Lenley slugged himself with this wrench."

"He must have," insisted George. "There's no other way it could have happened. Lenley was alone in here, with the door locked. Maybe he didn't have nerve enough to face the gas."

The sheriff snorted.

Death Turrets

"Do you know how carbon monoxide works?" he demanded. "You don't even feel it until it gets you. It's the easiest kind of death to take. If a man didn't have the nerve to stay with it, he wouldn't show guts enough to crack himself over the head with a monkey wrench.

"You're wrong, Brendaw. One hundred per cent wrong! Somebody came in here and clipped Lenley. How the fellow got in and out again—that's what we've got to learn. We'll find the answer to it, though—"

There were footsteps from the cellar. The sheriff turned to see Clyde Burke. There was one person, however, who gazed toward the door sooner than Cravlen. That person was Kent Allard.

His eyes were the first to meet Clyde's.

Instructions from The Shadow had told Clyde to rely upon Allard. Clyde was looking at Allard when Cravlen spoke. The reporter heard the sheriff's question:

"Did you learn anything, Burke? About this house?"

There was sudden understanding in Allard's eyes. Clyde saw Allard give an almost imperceptible nod. It meant that Clyde was to give the answer that the sheriff wanted, but to reserve other information for The Shadow.

"Yes." Clyde pulled some papers from his pocket as he spoke. "Here are some old plans of Five Towers. Take a look at them, sheriff."

GEORGE BRENDAW stared in strained fashion as he saw the sheriff look at the plans. They were faded, but they showed no special features at first glance.

It was when the sheriff came to the plan of the cellar that his lips voiced a sudden exclamation.

"This laboratory!" expressed Cravlen. "It was put here lately. Look! It's shorter than it should be!"

Cravlen still held the monkey wrench. Wheeling, he looked toward the rear wall, then made a bound in that direction. With a terrific stroke, he drove the wrench against the panel. Wood splintered, to show a gaping space beyond.

"That's where the murderer came through!" shouted the sheriff. "He came in here and slugged Lenley with this monkey wrench!"

Cravlen was waving the wrench, approaching George with it. His fierceness seemed a threat. It brought a reaction from George. Losing his head, the young man made a grab for the wrench, to snatch it from the sheriff's hand.

Letting the wrench go, Cravlen whipped quickly away, to yank his gun. George was swinging the wrench, but the sheriff was due to loose bullets from his .38 before the stroke came. Only half a second remained; in that brief period Kent Allard intervened.

His tall form flung itself between the desperate sheriff and the man whom he sought to slay. With one hand, Allard caught George's fist, to twist away the heavy monkey wrench. His other hand clamped Cravlen's gun wrist, gave it a quick bend upward.

Death Turrets

The sheriff's revolver roared; its bullet sizzled past Allard's ear. The monkey wrench scaled to the floor, but George's surge did not stop. He bowled Allard squarely upon Cravlen. The three sprawled to the floor beside the broken panel.

As Cravlen tried to aim his gun, George made a grab for it. Again, Allard's action ended a coming duel.

A long-fingered hand took the gun from the fists that gripped it. The same hand flung the .38 across the floor, where Clyde Burke snatched it. Out of the three-cornered brawl, Allard flung George squarely into the arms of the coroner and the prosecutor. They pinned him, while Clyde aimed the revolver. George subsided without further struggle.

Allard helped Cravlen to his feet. Red-faced, the sheriff spoke his thanks.

"Good work, Allard!" he blurted. "I'd have had to shoot Brendaw if it hadn't been for you. You're the man who will get the credit for taking him alive."

Seeing that George was helpless, Cravlen coolly received his revolver from Clyde. Thrusting the weapon into its holster, the sheriff made a stern announcement in the name of the law.

"George Brendaw, I arrest you, on the charge of murder!"

GEORGE received the accusation with fixed gaze. Jaw thrust out, he silently defied the sheriff to prove his statement. One thing was sure; George Brendaw intended to make no admission of guilt. The law would have to build its own case against him.

Just how Sheriff Cravlen intended to go at that task was still a question. But whether or not his evidence proved sufficient to condemn George Brendaw, it would still be incomplete.

Only The Shadow could reveal the full truth of murder at Five Towers, without the aid of the killer's own confession.

CHAPTER XIX. THE LAST THRUST.

THEY took George Brendaw to the living room, his wrists clamped with handcuffs.

Lucille gasped when she saw that George was a prisoner. The girl had heard the story of Lenley's suicide. She thought that the responsibility for crime had been proven against the inventor.

When fresh facts were told, Lucille stared in disbelief. She couldn't convince herself that George was guilty. Even Aunt Augusta's persuasion failed to influence her.

"It couldn't have been George," sobbed Lucille. "I'll never testify that he was the man who tried to strangle me. I don't know who the murderer was—but he wasn't George!"

Lucille's distress produced little effect. Sheriff Cravlen was busy accumulating new evidence. He had found Lenley's counterfeiting room. From there, the discovery of the secret passages had been a simple task.

Deputies were moving through the honeycombed walls of Five Towers, bringing back steady reports. When they reached the lookout room, they found the rifle and brought it to the sheriff. Cravlen turned it over to the coroner.

Death Turrets

"The game's up, Brendaw," announced Cravlen. "You might as well confess, and save yourself trouble."

George's face showed contempt.

"What does all that prove?" he demanded. "Why should the rifle be mine?"

"This is your house," retorted Cravlen. "You knew all about the secret passages."

George shook his head.

"Curiously," he said, "I didn't. It was Lenley who had the house put in shape. I suppose he found the passages, and wanted them for his own use. Naturally, he didn't tell me anything about them."

"Lenley had no occasion to commit murder," challenged Cravlen. "We've learned that much, now that we've uncovered his racket. There was only one possible motive, Brendaw. That was vengeance, and you had it."

"What did I care about old Lionel?" retorted George. "I've told you that all along. If you think I murdered any one, go ahead and prove it!"

"We will," promised Cravlen. "Sooner than you think, Brendaw."

THE sheriff opened a box that he had brought in his car. He began to assemble the exhibits. Halfway through the task, Cravlen paused to snap a surprise question at George.

"If you didn't kill Lenley," shot Cravlen, "who did?"

"Maybe Titus did," returned George, coolly, raising his cuffed hands to point at the servant. "Ask him."

Titus began a sincere protest. He knew that Lenley was engaged in crooked work, but what it was, Titus had never been told. His job was to see that all was well at Five Towers, while Lenley was away.

After murder started, Titus had suspected Lenley, but only for a short while. The bearded man had sworn that he was innocent.

"I believed Lenley," testified Titus. "So why should I have killed him? I knew nothing about those secret passages. I did not come to Five Towers until later."

"We believe you," assured Cravlen. "All we want you for is a witness. You couldn't have sent the telegrams, for one thing. You're safe enough, Titus. Don't let Brendaw worry you."

Titus looked relieved. George eyed him closely, then gave a shrug of his shoulders.

"I guess you're all right, Titus," he declared. "Go and get the coffee. We'll be needing it. The sheriff is going to have a long session, trying to prove me guilty."

"Not so long as you suppose," put in Cravlen. "We're going back to the beginning, Brendaw. The first thing I want is your fingerprints."

George raised his manacled hands and let the sheriff take the prints. The prosecutor promptly produced an envelope and brought out photographs of other prints. Cravlen compared them with George's. The sheriff chuckled.

Death Turrets

"They match!" he announced. "Compare them, prosecutor. Let the coroner see them." For the first time, George looked uneasy. Watching him, Allard saw the suspicious glint that came to the young man's eyes. Beside Allard stood Clyde Burke.

While all attention was on George and the sheriff, Clyde spoke in a low tone to Allard. The reporter slid a folded paper into Allard's hand. Fingers opened it; keen eyes noted the contents.

George, meanwhile, was becoming more restless. Craning his neck to look at the photographs, George demanded:

"Where did those fingerprint pictures come from?"

"From here." The sheriff produced George's revolver. He held it near the muzzle, so that the engraved handle dangled. "I was careful to wrap this handle. The coroner and I found fingerprints on it. They were yours, Brendaw!"

GEORGE eased back in his chair. He raised his head and gave a long laugh.

"Of course you'd find my fingerprints on my own gun," he retorted. "I was the only person who used it! I told you that myself."

"Then let me tell you something," said the sheriff. "If any one else—Lenley, for instance—had used that gun, his prints would have been on the handle, too."

"Not if he wiped them off—"

"But if he had, yours would have gone, too. And if he'd wrapped the handle and then grabbed it"—the sheriff made a clutching motion in the air—"your prints would have been smudged. I guess you'll admit, Brendaw, that you were the last person to use this revolver."

"Very well; I admit it."

George regretted that statement the moment that he saw the sheriff's reaction. A triumphant smile came to Cravlen's lips. Turning, the big man indicated Wright, the visitor who had said nothing since his arrival.

"Mr. Wright is from New York," announced Cravlen. "He is a ballistics expert. He made a study of the bullet that the coroner took from the body of Roderick Talroy. He also examined your gun, Brendaw. We shall hear what Mr. Wright discovered, early this evening."

Wright nodded. He reached in the exhibit box, brought out a bullet and a microscope. Adjusting the latter on the table, he held up the bullet and remarked:

"A bullet fired from Brendaw's revolver."

"That's right," agreed the sheriff. "We fired one cartridge to-night. Produce the other bullet, coroner."

The coroner brought out a small box. He held up the bullet that he took from the box, remarking that it was the one that had killed Roderick. Wright put the death bullet beneath the microscope. He waved his hand in invitation.

Death Turrets

"Any one is welcome to compare them," said the expert. "It is plain, even to an untrained observer, that the markings are identical. Of course, I can point out certain details that another might not notice. It is a certainty that the death bullet was fired from Brendaw's revolver."

THE statement seemed to daze George. He watched persons look through the microscope. He saw Titus come into the room and begin to pour the coffee.

Lucille was very pale; she didn't want to look through the microscope, even though her Aunt Augusta urged her. Titus asked the girl if she would like some tea. Lucille nodded weakly.

With others, Kent Allard looked through the microscope; then stepped away. He moved beside George's chair, but the prisoner did not realize that he was there. In a low, whispered tone, Allard spoke words that only George could hear.

The voice produced a strange effect. George stared more steadily than before; then came out of his daze with a jolt. He looked about, puzzled. Allard had stepped away.

To George, it seemed that those words had come from nowhere—a thought snatched from the void, so suddenly that it had sounded like an actual tone. His eyes steadied, straight toward Lucille. His lips half opened, George waited.

The sheriff turned and saw George's stare. Cravlen mistook it for a vacant look. Roughly, he shook the prisoner's shoulder, and half shouted:

"We had this evidence before we came here, Brendaw! The only question was whose fingerprints were on the gun. They might have been yours; they could have been Lenley's. That's why I said I'd give each of you an equal break. I wanted Lenley up here, so I could take his fingerprints along with yours.

"We knew that those prints would settle the question. They have. Maybe you used gloves when you handled the big mace and the monkey wrench. You must have wiped the rifle, because there are no prints on it. But you forgot with the revolver. You just put it back in the desk drawer and let it stay there.

"That's going to send you to the electric chair! Proof of one murder was all we needed. Come along, Brendaw. We're going down to the courthouse."

CRAVLEN yanked George to his feet. The action, like the sheriff's words, seemed to have no effect. Like Cravlen, others thought that George's brain was numbed. There was one exception: Kent Allard.

His steady eyes were watching George; they also saw Lucille. George was looking straight at the girl. She was trying bravely to meet his gaze, but she couldn't. Even Lucille was overwhelmed by the latest evidence.

She turned her head away. With trembling hand, she picked up the cup of tea that Titus had poured for her. Lucille raised the cup to her lips.

There was a move from Kent Allard. He was ready for a quick action, in case George Brendaw failed. But George did not falter. He wrenched away from Cravlen's grasp; gave a side shove with his arms that sent the big sheriff sprawling. With a leap, George covered the distance to Lucille.

The girl raised her head, startled. She saw George swing his handcuffed wrists straight toward her face.

Death Turrets

George's fists did not reach that mark. Instead, they struck the teacup. It went clattering from Lucille's hand, smashed by the weight of the handcuffs.

George stepped away, straight into the arms of two astonished deputies. When Sheriff Cravlen came up from the floor, he saw that George was again a captive.

George was pointing to the tray where the teapot stood. Coolly, he explained the purpose of his action.

"I have saved you more trouble, sheriff," declared George. "There was about to be another death that would need investigation. That tea is poisoned; it was intended for Miss Merrith. Perhaps it will lead you to the real murderer!"

The gasp that Lucille gave was a grateful one; not only because her own life was saved, but because she felt that George had somehow vindicated himself.

A sudden recollection struck the girl. She remembered that Kent Allard had been standing beside George; that he had said something to the prisoner.

Lucille looked for Allard. She met his gaze; she saw a strange glow. The eyes of The Shadow told Lucille that all was well. In that one instant, Lucille Merrith gained new confidence. Her last doubt faded. George Brendaw was not the murderer.

Though vengeance was the motive behind the deaths at Five Towers, the desire had not come from George Brendaw. If it had, George would have allowed Lucille to die; for he already stood incriminated for the murder of Roderick Talroy.

That was why Allard had let George vindicate himself. The move was the first step in The Shadow's plan to enmesh the actual killer who had slain within these walls.

Twisted evidence would no longer stand, after The Shadow revealed the truth. Through his own clues, the master-sleuth intended to disclose facts that were not included in the law's case against George Brendaw.

Even the real murderer did not know that the snare was due. That was something that only The Shadow knew.

CHAPTER XX. THE MAN OF VENGEANCE.

SHERIFF CRAVLEN'S first expression was one of doubt, regarding the poisoned tea. He denounced George's move as a trick to delay the law's action. The coroner, however, was a man who thought more of evidence than he did of arrests.

He lifted the lid of the teapot and took a long sniff. His trained nose detected an aroma that resembled bitter almonds.

"Poisoned," announced the coroner, seriously. "No doubt about it! One swallow would have meant instant death! Who prepared this tea?"

A deputy dragged Titus into the center of the room. The servant was quivering, as he pleaded his innocence. He swore that he had made the tea as always, using hot water and a tea ball. The sheriff ordered Titus to bring the tea balls. Deputies went along with the servant.

Death Turrets

Every tea ball, when opened, gave a strong almond odor. The whole batch had been loaded with poison. As soon as that was known, George Brendaw gave an opinion.

"Only Lucille drank tea," he said. "The killer failed to strangle her last night, so he tried this method to murder her. He must have planted the poisoned tea balls in place of the usual ones."

"That's obvious," snapped Cravlen, "but what does it prove? Nothing that we don't already know. You're the murderer, Brendaw! You knew, as well as any one else, that this was the best way to get rid of Miss Merrith."

"But I saved her life!"

"Sure! Because you were in a jam! You thought that you might get out of it by playing the hero. Instead, you put yourself in deeper. You shouted that the tea was poisoned. How did you know it?"

George looked weak. His own action had become new evidence against him. The coroner and the prosecutor were nodding their approval of the sheriff's accusation. George made a last protest.

"Some one told me," he said. "Some one here. He spoke to me, just before Lucille picked up the teacup. He said the tea was poisoned. That was the first I knew about it."

"Another excuse," scoffed Cravlen. "All right. Who told you? Maybe we can ask him some questions."

Lucille saw that George could not answer. She wanted to name Allard, but was afraid that she might put him in trouble. While Lucille hesitated, Allard himself stepped forward.

"I told George," he declared. "I suspected that the tea was poisoned, because I happened to notice a difference in the tag that went with the tea ball. It was a different color than the one that I saw at the dinner table."

ALLARD'S statement was incorrect. His real discovery of the poisoned tea had been made in the kitchen, when he was there as The Shadow. He had noticed that the can had been slightly moved between the time when he had gone to the laboratory and returned. Through closer inspection, The Shadow had detected the odor of the poison.

His statement about the tag, however, was a satisfactory one. Only one man could dispute it: that was the person who had substituted the poisoned tea for the ordinary. Being a murderer, that person would not produce an argument on the subject of the tags.

"It still doesn't help," insisted Cravlen. "I admire your judgment, Allard. If you think there's a chance of Brendaw's innocence, I'm willing to listen. But when you told him that the tea was poisoned, he would have known it himself."

"In fact"—Cravlen nodded as he spoke—"Brendaw realized that if he didn't stop Miss Merrith from drinking the tea, you would have. That's why he staged the hero stuff. We'll give Brendaw credit for being a quick thinker—but that's all. He had to be a quick thinker, to handle those murders the way he did."

Allard's lips produced a slight smile. "Rather odd," he remarked, "that a quick-thinking murderer should make the mistake of letting the law take over a death gun that bore his fingerprints."

"The best of them make mistakes," returned the sheriff. "Brendaw didn't think of fingerprints; that was all."

Death Turrets

"The murderer must have thought of them when he used the mace," parried Allard. "Also the rifle, and even the monkey wrench that he used to kill Lenley."

Reaching into his pocket, Allard produced the folded paper that Clyde Burke had given him. In a casual tone, he remarked:

"You came to a false conclusion this afternoon, sheriff. You thought that those rifle shots were meant for you. Instead, they were intended for Burke."

"For Burke?"

Cravlen's tone carried a puzzled echo. Allard nodded.

"Yes," he replied. "Do you remember telling us that Burke had been looking through some old newspaper files?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Burke has told me that he found one issue missing. It was the one that recorded the marriage of old Lionel Brendaw. At least, Burke supposes it was, because a later newspaper spoke of Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Brendaw."

Cravlen shrugged his shoulders.

"I can't see how that concerned the rifle shots," he declared. "George Brendaw would rather have killed me than Burke."

"Probably," agreed Allard, "if George had wanted to kill any one. But let us return to the fact that Lionel Brendaw was married. Wouldn't it be quite possible that Lionel had a son?"

"I suppose it would be—"

"And that son," interposed Allard, "would be more likely to seek vengeance than George, who was only a distant relation of Lionel?"

Cravlen stroked his chin. He nodded as he pictured the possibilities. Then, after further consideration, the sheriff shook his head.

"Good theory, Allard," he declared, "but too much supposition. We have no proof that Lionel Brendaw did have a son. George Brendaw is the only member of the family that we have ever heard about. And we have the evidence that George killed Roderick Talroy. Take another look at the bullets, Allard."

ALLARD stepped over toward the table, while Cravlen waited patiently. Instead of looking through the microscope, Allard plucked out the death bullet and held it to the light. He turned half away; no one saw the gleam in his eyes. Those were the burning eyes of The Shadow.

Allard's hands came together as he lowered them. He reached out his right hand, to give the bullet to Wright. He asked the expert to replace it beneath the microscope, for another comparison. Wright complied. He said that the bullets matched perfectly. Allard looked through the microscope, then beckoned to the sheriff. Standing beside Allard, Cravlen viewed the bullets.

Death Turrets

"You see?" said Cravlen, his eye to the microscope. "The markings are identical!"

Something thumped the table with a tiny, dull thud. Cravlen bobbed up from the microscope, to stare at a bullet that Allard had placed beside it.

"What's that?" growled the sheriff. "Where did that bullet come from?"

"You have seen it before," replied Allard, calmly. "It is the bullet that killed Roderick Talroy!"

"The one that you took from the microscope?"

"Yes. But I gave a different bullet back to Wright. He put it under the microscope—and both he and you identified it as the death bullet. Would you like to know where that bullet came from?"

Cravlen did not answer. His eyes were steady; his jaw set hard.

"It came from the corner of the hen house," declared Allard. "It was one of two bullets that you fired, sheriff! I dug out one, but left the other, so that the coroner could find it there, himself!"

THE words were enough for Cravlen. With a scowl, the sheriff wheeled away; he sped his hand for the revolver holster. Cravlen was quick, when it came to drawing a gun, but this time, his speed did not serve him. His holster was empty.

Allard's hand lifted from beside the table. In his fist, he gripped Cravlen's .38. With the precision of The Shadow, Allard covered Cravlen. Steady lips warned the sheriff not to make a move.

Cravlen's face was murderous. He had never suspected Allard's ruse. Gawking through the microscope, the sheriff had not felt the deft shift whereby Allard had disarmed him.

Speaking to the coroner, Allard reached out his free hand. He requested that the coroner hand him George's revolver. The tone, quiet though it was, carried an irresistible command.

One look at two faces—Allard's and Cravlen's—convinced every one that Allard was in the right. If ever a man's suppressed fury betrayed him, Cravlen's pent-up emotion was doing it at this minute.

Side by side, Allard held the two revolvers. There was hushed silence in the room. Then came Allard's voice, in monotone:

"George Brendaw owned a revolver, and Sheriff Cravlen saw it. Later, the sheriff purchased a gun of the same make and caliber. He carried that .38 with him. He used the weapon to murder Roderick Talroy. He came here later, representing the law.

"Using his authority, he seized George's gun. Later, he transferred the gun barrels, so that George's revolver would be accepted as the one that had been used in the murder of Roderick Talroy. It happened, however, that Cravlen was induced to fire two shots from his own revolver before he had opportunity to switch the barrels.

"The bullets prove that story. As for the motive behind Cravlen's murders, I have already stated it. To-night, Burke looked for information in new places. He sought facts regarding the Cravlen's, instead of the Brendaw's. He learned, from an old family record, that Matilda Cravlen was the wife of Lionel Brendaw; that their son, Amos—"

Allard's tone halted. The sheriff had slumped to a chair. His scowl was gone; his face showed a hunted look. The murderer's game was finished. He was ready to pour out his own confession.

Amos Cravlen, man of vengeance, had been vanquished by The Shadow!

CHAPTER XXI. A KILLER'S DOOM.

IN his conflict of emotions, Amos Cravlen showed no regret for the deaths that he had dealt. He was a man given to anger; he became sullen when defeated. But when he began his story, his tone showed proud contempt. His was the bitter tale of a life wherein the only inspiration had been revenge.

"Lionel Brendaw was my father," declared Cravlen. "My mother left him and took me with her. For years, I was taught to despise him; instead, I admired him. When he went to prison, that was proof that his whole life had been wrong. I figured it the opposite.

"When my mother died, I returned to Northridge. I had adopted her name; there were many Cravlen's in the old days, but few were left. I passed as a member of another branch of the family. I sought popularity and gained it—as a Cravlen. It would have been impossible for a Brendaw."

Cravlen saw Allard put the revolvers back in the exhibit box and clamp it shut. The tall accuser spoke to the prosecutor, who nodded.

The prosecutor had the handcuff keys. He unlocked George's wrists. Cravlen scowled; these bracelets would be his next. The sheriff went on with his mystery.

"I visited my father here," he declared. "He showed me the secret passages. I told him that I would some day use this house as a place of revenge. When he died, I let George inherit the place. I made secret visits here; from them, I formed my plans.

"I learned Lenley's game and let him go ahead with it. I used Lenley to bring the Merriths here, through a fake letter, suggesting that Augusta Merrith might invest in his invention. It was easy to get Roderick by faking a telegram from his girl. A crazy wire from Roderick was sure to bring Fant.

"I admit the murders. I pinned the goods on George, to fit the vengeance motive. I wanted the world to know that Lionel Brendaw was revenged! Lenley was an obstacle. Even those fingerprints might not have incriminated George, with Lenley alive. A jury might think that a crook like Lenley was smart enough to frame George. So I killed Lenley."

Cravlen looked about defiantly. He saw Allard speak to Clyde Burke; then stroll from the room. Cravlen met George's gaze. The former prisoner put a question:

"Why did you want to murder Lucille? Her father would have sent Fant and Talroy to jail, if he could have managed it."

"Would that have helped?" snapped Cravlen. "Merrith was the government prosecutor. That marked him, so far as I was concerned. I couldn't get him, so I passed it on to Lucille. As for you, I had to frame you, to cover myself."

Cravlen rose from his chair. He put his hands out toward the prosecutor, as if welcoming the handcuffs. But when the bracelets approached him, Cravlen showed a quick change of manner.

Death Turrets

From a sullen, disgruntled crook, he became the murderous battler that he had been before. He snatched the handcuffs from the prosecutor's grasp. Wheeling, he drove for the deputy who had charge of the rifle from the lookout room.

Cravlen whipped the handcuffs like a lash. The deputy dodged; warded the blow with his arm. An instant later, Cravlen had the rifle. He dived to a front corner of the room; turned about to cover a startled throng.

Deputies were caught flat-footed. Their hands came up helplessly. Viciously, Cravlen gave his ultimatum.

"I'm finishing the job I started!" He looked toward Lucille, then glared at George. "Two of you are going to die! You know who they are. If any more want to start something, they'll go out, too! I'm leaving through the front window"—Cravlen nudged his head in that direction—"and any one that starts after me may get plenty of trouble!

"You might give the job to Allard"—Cravlen looked toward the hall, hoping to glimpse his tall foeman—"because there's nobody I'd like better to meet than—"

A terrific crash interrupted Cravlen's challenge. The big front window smashed inward. From its blackened void came a sinister laugh that rang in Cravlen's ears. That tone had a weird chill, like the taunt of a vengeful ghost, arrived to confront a human enemy.

No one could have resisted that threat, least of all, a murderer like Cravlen.

The killer had heard the laugh of The Shadow.

CRAVLEN spun about with the rifle.

He saw gleaming eyes that shone from blackness. In them, the killer saw a glow he recognized. His brain at a hair-trigger pitch, Cravlen made the instant guess that this was Allard, cloaked in black.

The murderer did not quail at sight of The Shadow. He tugged the rifle trigger as he swung the muzzle toward the gleaming eyes. Cravlen was swinging to the right. The rifle barrel, long and unwieldy, was easily followed at that close range. The Shadow shifted to the left, with a speed that rivaled Cravlen's swing. The killer fired; his bullet whistled through blackness, where The Shadow had been. At the same instant, an automatic stabbed from the edge of the shattered window.

The blast from the .45 was lost amid the roar that echoed from the rifle. But the effects produced by the rival weapons were quite the reverse. Cravlen's shot missed; The Shadow's found its target. The murderous sheriff staggered backward, toward the center of the room.

The Shadow had gone. Cravlen's gun was slipping from his right shoulder, where The Shadow's bullet had lodged. In sheer rage, the killer remembered his threat against Lucille and George. He turned about, recovering from his stagger.

The Shadow's shot had finished Cravlen's chance to deliver evil. The killer's right hand still gripped the rifle trigger, but his fingers were numbed.

If Cravlen had held a revolver, witnesses would have seen his plight. His left hand, however, managed to keep the rifle leveled, even though he was unable to use it.

Death Turrets

The Shadow had delivered the murderer to the law, but the gun-yanking deputies were too excited to make the capture. They saw Cravlen as a threatening killer. They took no chances. Drawn revolvers spoke from every side.

Amos Cravlen sprawled upon his rifle, dead.

IT was a solemn group that sat there later, in that room where final death had struck. George was beside Lucille; Aunt Augusta was no longer antagonistic. Clyde Burke had remained at Five Towers as a guest.

Clyde had talked last with Kent Allard; he explained that the crime-solver had expressed his regret at making a hurried departure. It happened, so Clyde said, that Allard had stayed much longer than he originally intended.

Had Allard fired the shot from the window, to halt Cravlen's last attempt at murder? That, frankly, was a question that Clyde could not answer. He agreed that Allard might have inserted the timely stroke, although he had left ten minutes earlier.

Clyde did know that The Shadow had fired the needed bullet—but the reporter did not say so. The Shadow's hand had remained a hidden one throughout the episodes at Five Towers; so much so, that Clyde himself doubted that Allard was The Shadow.

However, The Shadow's revelations had come through Allard, and that was the basis upon which Clyde discussed them.

"Allard learned that Lenley had too much to hide," stated Clyde. "That was why he knew that he could not be the murderer. But he also had reasons that eliminated you, George."

"What were they?" queried George, in surprise.

"Granting that you wanted vengeance," replied Clyde, "you had chosen the worst place to attempt it. Deaths in this house put immediate suspicion upon you. Ordinarily, they would have made it impossible for you to attempt another move.

"Fant's death was Allard's clue. It should never have happened, coming from you—or from Lenley, for that matter. The attempt against Lucille was even greater proof of who the real murderer was. Even with secret exits to move through, no one could have risked such bold murder unless the scenes were set for it."

George nodded. He saw the logic of it. One person alone had been in a position to continue the chain of death. That man was Amos Cravlen. George remembered that Cravlen had brought in Fant's cane. Purposely, the sheriff had left it in the trophy room, so that Fant would go there.

Again, Cravlen had posted only one deputy on upstairs patrol, so that it would seem logical that either George or Lenley had managed to reach Lucille's room openly.

Cravlen had seen to it that George and Lenley were at large when Fant died.

When he had taken those pot shots at Clyde, the sheriff had first watched George go to the trophy room, while Lenley headed downstairs to the laboratory.

The sheriff's own telephone call had been an order for Lenley to prepare his fuel for a test; with it, Cravlen had told George to go over old correspondence.

Death Turrets

Yes, Cravlen had fixed it so that suspicion always rested upon others.

The sheriff's word had been law at Five Towers. He had calculated that it would be, before he began his campaign of murder.

The beginning had been when Cravlen used the typewriter that Lenley had left in the village; the simple act of entering the repair shop had enabled the sheriff to prepare the letter and the telegrams.

The finish had occurred here to-night, when George was working in the trophy room. By a secret arrival, Cravlen had not only slain Lenley, he had left the poisoned tea for Lucille.

THESE facts and many others had been analyzed by a superbeing whose counter-strokes had beaten a murderer's game. The spell of The Shadow's presence still seemed to hold its powerful sway within the walls of the old mansion where he had waited for Cravlen's final move.

That had come when the killer had located the secret passages, as if he had never known of their existence. Cravlen had even worked in Clyde as an aid to that discovery. Failing to murder the reporter at Five Towers, the sheriff had given him another task, hoping that he would forget the importance of the missing newspaper.

The Shadow had seen those details clearly; as plainly as he now saw the turrets of the Brendaw mansion, silhouetted against the moonlit sky.

Seated in his car, The Shadow was parked just off the driveway, under the shelter of the nearest trees. His eyes were fixed upon the mansion where doom's reign had ended with a killer's death.

The Shadow's contemplation ended. His foot pressed the starter. The motor throbbed; the powerful car rolled smoothly forward. Shining headlights shot their beam through the woods.

From the blackened interior of the coupé came the tone of a strange, weird laugh, that shivered its eerie message amid the trees.

The tail-light glimmered from sight, but the echoes of that trailing mirth seemed to linger in the glade.

Such was the tone that betokened the end of crime: the triumphant laugh of The Shadow.

THE END