

# **FREAK SHOW MURDERS**

Maxwell Grant

# Table of Contents

<u>FREAK SHOW MURDERS</u> .....	1
<u>Maxwell Grant</u> .....	1
<u>CHAPTER I</u> .....	1
<u>CHAPTER II</u> .....	5
<u>CHAPTER III</u> .....	8
<u>CHAPTER IV</u> .....	12
<u>CHAPTER V</u> .....	15
<u>CHAPTER VI</u> .....	18
<u>CHAPTER VII</u> .....	21
<u>CHAPTER VIII</u> .....	24
<u>CHAPTER IX</u> .....	27
<u>CHAPTER X</u> .....	30
<u>CHAPTER XI</u> .....	34
<u>CHAPTER XII</u> .....	37
<u>CHAPTER XIII</u> .....	40
<u>CHAPTER XIV</u> .....	43
<u>CHAPTER XV</u> .....	46
<u>CHAPTER XVI</u> .....	49
<u>CHAPTER XVII</u> .....	53
<u>CHAPTER XVIII</u> .....	55
<u>CHAPTER XIX</u> .....	58

# FREAK SHOW MURDERS

Maxwell Grant

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- [CHAPTER I](#)
  - [CHAPTER II](#)
  - [CHAPTER III](#)
  - [CHAPTER IV](#)
  - [CHAPTER V](#)
  - [CHAPTER VI](#)
  - [CHAPTER VII](#)
  - [CHAPTER VIII](#)
  - [CHAPTER IX](#)
  - [CHAPTER X](#)
  - [CHAPTER XI](#)
  - [CHAPTER XII](#)
  - [CHAPTER XIII](#)
  - [CHAPTER XIV](#)
  - [CHAPTER XV](#)
  - [CHAPTER XVI](#)
  - [CHAPTER XVII](#)
  - [CHAPTER XVIII](#)
  - [CHAPTER XIX](#)
- 

## CHAPTER I

JUST before he reached Treft's mansion, Steve Kilroy saw The Harlequin. Steve didn't realize it at the time, for his mind was on other matters; besides he'd never heard of The Harlequin, that curious criminal character who was later to be confused with Steve himself.

In fact, The Harlequin himself was confusing at first sight. Even in the glare from the headlights of Steve's car it was impossible to identify him as a human figure, for his costume formed a perfect camouflage in its present setting. Treft's curving driveway was flanked with magnolias and the blossoms of those trees produced a colorful weave with which The Harlequin blended. He simply seemed to shake himself loose from them and the glare of the lights as well, as Steve swung the car around the final bend and out from under the magnolia trees.

Steve laughed at what he thought was a brief illusion. Here was Treft's mansion looming large in the Carolina moonlight, which though somewhat clouded was bright enough to show the open lawn. The living thing that had scudded from the driveway must have been imaginary, otherwise Steve would have spotted it again.

So at least Steve thought, without considering the huge azalea beds that flanked the mansion. They, much more than the magnolias, were made to order as a background for the figure that Steve had actually seen. In

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

the moonlight the flowers formed a patchwork of black and white, but when the veering headlights swept them, they became a galaxy of purple, pink and crimson, with splotches of pure white. Where the bed was thickest, there were a few dabs of colors not common to azaleas, but Steve didn't picture them as belonging to a huddled figure, motionless in its harlequin costume.

More important to Steve Kilroy were the lighted windows in the corner of the mansion, just above the nearest flower bed. He was sure that they must represent the room where Milton Treft was waiting to discuss a sale that would conservatively involve a million dollars.

As he brought the car to the big pillars that fronted the mansion, Steve jammed the brakes in real alarm. This time there was no mistaking the figure that sprang into view; it was human and it carried a double-barreled shotgun. A moment later the muzzles were poking in through the car window and a gruff voice was demanding Steve's business in these parts.

Very gingerly, to show he wasn't reaching for a revolver, Steve dipped his thumb and forefinger into his vest pocket and brought out a coin about the size of a silver dollar. He held it in the dash-light so that the man with the shotgun could see the symbols stamped on it. One side bore a feather, the other the initials M. T.

The shotgun muzzles gave a nudge, indicating that Steve was to get out of his car and enter the mansion, instructions which the watchman amplified with his gruff tone. So Steve got out and went up the wooden steps between the pillars, where his footfalls must have announced his approach for the big front door opened as soon as he arrived. Confronted by a brawny servant who was wearing what appeared to be a butler's uniform, Steve showed his lucky coin and was immediately conducted toward the corner where he had seen the lighted windows.

Everything in this huge house seemed geared to clockwork precision, for as the butler opened a large door to usher Steve into a reception room, another door opened on the far side and a tall, gray-haired man stepped into sight. Obviously this was Milton Treft, coming from a smaller room in the corner of the house. As Treft saw the coin that Steve displayed, he gave a wave that dismissed the butler; then, with a gesture to the coin, Treft said in a blunt tone:

"Spin it."

Steve gave the coin a spin.

The result was very curious.

Impelled by the flip of Steve's thumb, the disk whirled upward as any coin would have, but it began to lose its impetus very rapidly. For a moment the coin seemed to hang in air; then it came turning lazily downward until it actually fluttered like a bit of paper. When Steve held out his hand he had to wait for the metal token to drift into it.

Treft smiled at the result. His eyes, keen and narrow, studied Steve's square-jawed, youthful face. Treft had expected Steve to be an older man, but the spinning of the coin had satisfied him. It would be easy enough to stamp a duplicate coin with the emblem of a feather and the initials M. T., but only one coin in all the world would behave in that tantalizing fashion. That coin happened to be the one that Steve was carrying to introduce himself to Treft.

"Well, Kilroy," said Treft, affably, "I take it that your company is satisfied."

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"They're satisfied on one thing," acknowledged Steve. "This alloy you term alumite is so much lighter than any known metal that it's a shame to even compare them."

"Does that mean they are interested in buying the formula?"

"It means they would be if you delivered enough alumite for them to give it the required tests."

Treft nodded as though he had received the very answer that he expected. Gesturing Steve to an easy chair, Treft stepped to the corner of the room and pointed out a life-sized bust that stood on a marble pedestal.

"An excellent bronze," remarked Treft. "It represents Absalom Pettigrew, the man who invented alumite, or I might say discovered it."

Steve raised his eyebrows.

"Is there a difference?"

"In this case, yes," replied Treft. "Pettigrew was a sculptor and he came across a process of inflating metal, which works only with a certain alloy. That is the real secret of alumite; it is an expanded substance, honeycombed with microscopic air pores which in no way reduce its tensile strength, because of their irregular arrangement."

As he finished, Treft lifted the bust from its pedestal and with a sudden fling sent it straight at Steve. Ducking involuntarily, Steve looked past his upraised hands to see the object practically drifting at him. Grabbing, he caught it and was amazed at its featherweight.

"Solid alumite," chuckled Treft. "Old Pettigrew gave it a bronze spray, as he did with the Twelve Hours."

"The Twelve Hours?"

"Twelve full-sized statues representing the hours of the day," explained Treft. "Being a sculptor, Pettigrew naturally turned his discovery to statuary. It remained for us to recognize its commercial possibilities."

"For us?"

"I mean myself and my associates. In my letter to your company I stated that I could supply a sufficient quantity of alumite for whatever tests might be demanded. I take it that you supposed I had the alumite here."

Steve nodded.

"I have purposely furthered that impression," continued Treft, with a smile, "even among my servants, in order to protect my fellow-investors, who own the statues that I have mentioned. I have the formula" – Treft's smile broadened – "but they have the alumite, that is, most of it."

Treft finished with a gesture to the bust that Steve was holding, to indicate that it represented his only supply of the priceless alloy. Then, folding his arms, Treft demanded in his blunt tone:

"Have I made my terms clear? If your company receives every ounce of alumite in existence and finds that it meets requirements, will they pay my price for the formula?"

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

Slowly, Steve nodded. Clamped between his hands, looking up at him with accusing eyes, was the bronze sprayed face of old Absalom Pettigrew, the real inventor of alumite, the substance in which his own likeness had been perpetuated. Somehow Steve had the sinking feeling that Milton Treft, along with his unnamed associates, had filched the old sculptor's discovery. Treft must have seen something in Steve's expression, for the tall man promptly met the situation.

"Poor Pettigrew is dead." Treft shook his head sadly. "Otherwise he would share in this good fortune. He left no relatives, more's the pity, or we would see to their future welfare. But we paid Pettigrew handsomely for his sculptures and he entrusted his formula to us, hoping we would use it to benefit the world of the future. You understand, of course."

Steve understood too well. First to benefit would be Treft and his associates to the tune of a million dollars. Next would be Steve's company, Associated Metallurgy, which would pay the million and promptly double its investment. An obscure inventor named Pettigrew would be forgotten, so far as profits were concerned.

"Since you will first receive all the alumite there is," reminded Treft, narrowly, "no one can dispute your claim to the formula, once you acquire it. We stand in back of our guarantee, to the full amount that Associated Metallurgy will pay. In fact I suggested that the clause be included in the contract."

Clever of Treft to put it that way. It was up to Steve to take it or leave it and if he left it some other company would probably buy alumite on his terms, since he held the formula that might be anybody's. Since Steve was working for the interests of Associated Metallurgy, his only choice was to take it.

"It's in the contract," said Steve, stiffly. "I have it right here in my pocket."

Steve couldn't reach in his pocket because he was burdened with the featherweight bust. He extended Pettigrew's image to Treft, but instead of taking it, the tall man stepped to the door in the far corner, beckoning for Steve to follow.

"Bring Pettigrew with you," said Treft, in a tone which Steve branded as mock sincerity. "It is too bad we cannot have the man himself as a witness to this transaction that he would certainly have approved. Right here in my study" – Treft was opening the door as he spoke – "I have all the letters from my associates along with the alumite formula."

"I shall give you the letters so that you can contact the men personally and obtain the twelve statues. As for the formula, I shall show it to you, but it will stay in my possession until your company requires it. I might add that it is the only copy of the formula in existence. That yellow envelope on my desk is worth exactly one million dollars!"

Dramatically Treft gestured toward the desk, turning as he did. At that moment, Steve was stepping through the doorway, so his gaze naturally swung in the same direction. But the sight that froze them both was not the envelope that Treft had just mentioned. In fact they didn't see the envelope at all.

What they did see was a leveled revolver, gripped in the fist of a man whose singular costume jogged Steve's memory with a startling flash.

It was all in one piece, that costume, the attire of a harlequin, made up of varicolored patchwork. Even the hand that held the gun was covered with a glove that formed an extension of the costume's sleeve. As for the intruder's face, it was completely hidden by a tight-fitting hood that came snugly below the wearer's chin, with only eye-slits as gaps in its patchwork surface.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

Through those slits peered eyes that reflected the light with stabs, but they were but samples of the flashes that The Harlequin would deliver. Without a word, without a flicker of his ugly, villainous gaze, The Harlequin swung his gun toward Milton Treft and fired twice, sending both bullets straight to the victim's heart.

### CHAPTER II

TO Steve Kilroy those two quick shots seemed widely spaced. The time between them was only that required for a second trigger pull, but the horror of the interval gave it intensity. Besides, Steve was watching Treft.

With the first shot, Treft rocked backward; then began a forward topple. The second bullet caught him before he could collapse and gave him another spasmodic jerk. To Steve, those involuntary motions were tokens of life, not death and the wild hope that this was all unreal produced in Steve's mind the prolonged effect of a waking dream.

Reality struck home when Treft's body curled to the floor and flattened in a distorted sprawl that no living man could have duplicated. As motionless as the bronze-dyed bust that he clutched in his already clammy hands, Steve stood staring downward at the human evidence of murder, gradually ceasing to wonder why Treft didn't rise and end the farce.

At least it seemed gradually, but the slow-motion was really the effect of Steve's sped-up brain. When he suddenly took Treft's death for granted, Steve looked for The Harlequin and saw him behind the desk, the gun still smoking in his hand. Odd, that gray wisp curling from the muzzle, for The Harlequin hadn't fired since that second shot which seemed so long ago.

Only it wasn't long ago.

With a surge, Steve's wit returned. All these happenings that were spreading themselves into the events of hours, shriveled suddenly into brief seconds. And with that return of reason Steve felt the impulse that if he dealt in seconds, he could pack them faster than the Harlequin had.

Driving straight for the desk, Steve expected to see The Harlequin behave in the slow, labored fashion that had dominated those previous sensations. Instead, The Harlequin whipped away from the desk with a speed that outdid Steve's drive. The Harlequin's objective was an open window in the side wall of the room, but he paused with his free hand on the sill and took quick aim across the desk.

When The Harlequin aimed, he fired.

Two gun-stabs, close together. This time Steve heard them in terms of rapid fire. With the reports came echoing clangs as Steve reeled back, wondering why he wasn't dead, like Treft. There was a reason, and a good one.

Alumite was taking its first test and meeting requirements. Pettigrew's bust, still clutched in Steve's arms, was the target of The Harlequin's too-perfect aim. It stopped the bullets and it stopped The Harlequin too.

As Steve staggered from the impact, the man at the window paused to clap his hand against the side of his tight-fitting costume. There, a bulge discernible amid the patchwork, represented the papers that he had taken from Treft's desk; letters, formula and all. But The Harlequin knew now that he was missing something; that bust, wavering so lightly between Steve's numbed hands, was certainly alumite and not the bronze it looked to be.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

With savage smoothness, The Harlequin sprang toward the desk again, so swift and lithe that he clearly intended to clear it in a leap. Urged by self-preservation, Steve hurled his only weapon, the alumite bust that had served him one good turn.

It served another.

Dodging the flying bust, The Harlequin fired wide. A moment later, Steve was at the desk, shoving it at his murderous foe. The Harlequin fired another shot off balance as he dropped back to the window and his eyes, tilted upward, saw the bust still in the air. It was slow-motion in reality, a detail which Steve had forgotten, the way that featherweight metal drifted, despite its bulk. But there was nothing slow about The Harlequin's response.

With one hand he flung his gun full force at Steve, who dropped back with a warding arm. No longer menaced by the desk, The Harlequin caught the bust with his free arm, then used his gun hand to vault the window-sill with a leap that cleared the azalea bed beyond. All in one lithe operation, the murderer was off into the night, carrying the alumite bust as a bonus.

What Steve had was The Harlequin's gun. Snatching it up, he was turning toward the window, when men came pounding through the door from the reception room. Looking around, Steve saw the husky butler followed by the watchman who bore the shotgun. Excitedly, Steve pointed to the window, but they didn't give him time to explain.

They had seen Treft's body. They had heard shots and they were finding Steve with the gun.

The butler grabbed Steve first. Together they went reeling toward the window. Oddly it wasn't any thought of escape that made Steve swing the struggle in that direction. His own plight seemed mild compared with the fact that The Harlequin was escaping, and he hoped that at the window, they might spot the fleeing murderer. But when the butler tried to haul Steve back, using his throat as a handle so he couldn't even talk, the folly of it maddened Steve.

Driving the heel of his hand right to the butler's chin, Steve sent the fellow back against the desk. Finding himself free, Steve vaulted the sill in The Harlequin's style, beckoning, for Treft's men to follow.

What followed was a big-throated blast from the shotgun. Fortunately Steve was below the window level when it came, but he remembered that the shotgun had two barrels. Rather than take chances with the second, Steve made for the magnolias and was flattening among them when the second blast came roaring from the window.

The tree boughs crackled overhead and amid a shower of withering blossoms, Steve decided not to wait until his pursuer reloaded. Besides, Steve wanted to find The Harlequin, so he took off down the driveway, which seemed the logical path that the murderer would have taken.

From then on, the real nightmare began.

Treft's premises were more amply guarded than Steve supposed and the gunfire from the mansion had roused all drowsing retainers. Dashing down the driveway, Steve saw flashlights glaring from a gateway through which he had driven on his way here. Turning, he fled back to the house, just as shotguns ripped; thanks to the curve of the driveway, the volley didn't reach him.

But there were other lights ahead and they meant gunners from the mansion, so Steve took to a side driveway that he fancied would lead him to a distant gate, which it would have, if he followed it. He didn't because he

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

saw other lights approaching him, so in desperation, Steve stumbled off among the trees, hoping he would arrive anywhere except among Tref't's men.

By then, Steve had lost all sense of direction. He was combining two policies; one, to keep going as fast as he could run or stumble; the other, to avoid all lights. As a result, his course became a swift but uncertain zigzag that must have turned him full about. For the lights seemed everywhere, blinking distantly through the trees, and Steve shied from them as if they were the shotguns that they represented.

There were shouts, too, that seemed to indicate some diabolical design on the part of Steve's misguided hunters. They were trying to box him somewhere and wherever it was, Steve didn't want to find the place. He remembered that Tref't's extensive estate was fenced with high iron pickets, because he had driven half way around it to reach the front road. Obviously Tref't's aggregation was trying to corner him somewhere between gates.

All Steve wanted was to find that fence. He didn't want a gate, because he was sure somebody would be there. Judging by the lights, Tref't's men were sufficient to replenish a regiment, unless Steve had been spotting the same searchers six times over. But if Steve found the fence, he'd be willing to scale it, pickets or no pickets.

Steve didn't find the fence.

Out of the range of lights, plunging between trees that he could see in the struggling moonlight, stumbling across rocks that the glow didn't show, Steve was still wondering where the fence was when his flight ended as suddenly as it had begun.

It ended when the ground gave under him.

There was horror in that plunge. It began with a black void that would have warned any other fugitive, but to Steve, whose fear was registered in terms of light, blackness was welcome and the deeper the better.

This blackness was really deep.

Steve was right out in it when the ground gave. In a sense, what happened was that Steve jumped clear of the ground and it came along to catch him. Next he was spilling downward at a sharp angle that he recognized as Carolina clay, because he had seen huge banks of it while driving along roads that bore signs reading: "Danger. Slides."

This was a slide and Steve was part of it. He was going over the equivalent of a waterfall in terms of soft, flowing earth. Already picturing himself as trapped, Steve felt like an insect sliding into one of those curious sand funnels provided by a more conniving species to receive unwary prey. All about the earth was stifling, for more of it was overtaking Steve, much like a torrent. Madly he was struggling to climb out of it and going down a dozen times as fast as he could climb.

Out of a rush that sounded like padded thunder, Steve heard a mournful blare from far away, approaching like a horn of judgment. In the midst of a repeated shriek, his plunge ended, much more happily than he had hoped.

Steve stopped with a jolt that at least was softened by the mass of clay that had preceded him. As he caught his breath, he was flung forward by the increasing mass that followed him and he landed harder, headlong. This time the jolt produced a terrific, clattering shock, that jarred Steve's nerves more than his body. Wiping clay from his mouth, he came to his hands and knees, then sagged back as the clang was repeated almost

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

overhead.

Something really shocked him that time, something that caused him to recoil as if he had clasped a slimy snake. It was something that he did clasp, as cold and hard as steel, because it was. Dropping back into the subsiding clay, Steve clapped his hand to his chest, glad that he still had it. A slow, hard grinding sound, creeping in front of him, made him realize that instinct, plus luck, were still factors in his favor.

This was a railroad cut, away down below a high clay bank that flanked Treft's premises. The distant blare was a locomotive whistle, around a bend, announcing that a halted train was about to start. The jolting shock so close to Steve had been the clatter of couplings, taking up slack. The cold, hard steel that Steve had clutched was the near rail of the track underneath a car. The creeping, grind was a wheel, beginning an onward roll just after Steve had whipped his hand away.

Lying back against the clay, Steve could see the big black hulks of cars moving slowly and laboriously above him, like great stupid creatures that considered him too insignificant to notice. He had counted three of them when he realized that to ignore them wasn't the proper way to return their indifference.

Coming to his feet, Steve felt one leg bend under him, but he clamped his hands into the clay to gain additional support. One shoulder nearly buckled under the strain, but Steve fought off the stabs of pain until his weak leg could do its part. With the clay giving under foot, he was in danger of toppling forward, but he didn't care, not if he could time it to the ladder of a box-car.

Only there weren't any box-cars. Nothing but flats, with great shrouded shapes upon them, silent monsters being carried through the night. But flats had ladders, short ones, and Steve saw the glistening rungs he wanted. He grabbed with his good hand and as the ladder dragged him from the clay, he remembered that one foot could still serve him. Kicking for a toehold, Steve found it on the bottom rung and with a corkscrew motion rolled himself on top of the flat, glad that it wasn't a box-car which he never could have climbed

Crawling toward one of the shrouded monsters, Steve touched its skirt and recognized it as canvas. Probing further, he found the spokes of a wooden wheel. The thing was a wagon, braced with cleats so that it wouldn't roll. Satisfied that the cleats were solid, Steve crawled between the wheels and encountered something that yielded when he poked it.

Steve heard a hard, snoring breath that ended in a growled voice:

"Shove over, guy. Ain't there enough wagons to sleep under without crowding?"

Replying with an apologetic grunt, Steve let the jarring of the train roll him the other way. His numbed senses yielded all at once, under his sudden relief from strain and the knowledge that he had found the safety that he thought he could never gain.

Soon the musical clatter of the wheels was driving all other thoughts from Steve's tired brain, including his recollections of The Harlequin, that piebald creature of murder.

### CHAPTER III

LAMONT CRANSTON sat in a corner of Treft's reception room and listened idly to the reports concerning the murder of the mansion's owner.

Outside, the afternoon sky was darkened by heavy rain clouds that maintained an incessant drizzle, the continuation of a downpour that had begun the night before. In the room, the local coroner continued to

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

repeat the facts that Tref't's servants had recited.

Of the several strangers present, all were stockholders in Associated Metallurgy, the company that had delegated Steve Kilroy to negotiate with Milton Tref't regarding the purchase of a wonder-metal called alumite. Having missed their opportunity to acquire that important prize, these men were naturally interested in the case; at least all were except Cranston.

Outwardly, Cranston appeared bored, which led his companions to wonder why he had come all the way from New York over a matter which didn't interest him. It began to strike them that Cranston had another reason; perhaps he felt slighted because the directors of Associated Metallurgy had not informed him beforehand of their intention to purchase alumite.

Cranston didn't feel slighted on that point; he was regretful. If he had been notified of this deal in advance, Tref't wouldn't have been murdered, for Cranston would have come here ahead of Steve Kilroy, not as himself, but as another personality known as The Shadow. Therefore Cranston's present purpose was to rectify an oversight on the part of others and he was bored because the investigation had stalled.

The stalling point was Steve Kilroy. Sheer weight of evidence caused the directors of Associated Metallurgy to yield to the local opinion that Steve was the murderer. To Cranston, such a theory was nonsense. In his mind's eye, he could picture an unknown factor in the case, though he had never met nor heard of the piebald criminal who by his costume deserved the name "The Harlequin."

There came an end to the coroner's report and with it, Cranston's indolence lessened, though his tone was still somewhat bored when he inquired:

"Tell me, coroner, what was the motive behind this murder?"

"Robbery, suh!" returned the coroner. "Downright robbery. Downright and outright."

"Robbery of what?"

"Of Mr. Tref't's strong-room in the cellar. It's clean empty, bare as a parcel of burnt-out timber land."

"What was taken from it?"

"Whatever Mr. Tref't kept there. Nobody would have an empty room under lock and key with a dozen servants guarding it. I guess we all agree on that."

Everyone nodded except Cranston. His indifference had gradually faded and he was ready to dispute the point.

"An active chap, this Kilroy," commented Cranston. "In the course of staging a complete disappearance, he unlocked the strong room, took whatever was in it, and locked the door again. Where were the keys, by the way?"

"They were on Mr. Tref't," replied the coroner. "But you aren't allowing for the proper facts, Mr. Cranston. The robbery was done beforehand by accomplices."

"So Kilroy's accomplices were seen last night?"

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"Not last night, suh, but previous. That was why Mr. Trefth had put new men on duty. Suspicious characters were seen about these premises a few nights ago, soon after Mr. Trefth had written to your company in New York."

"Then Kilroy's murder of Trefth was just a cover-up?"

"A good way to put it, allowing for the circumstances."

"Suppose we allow for something else." Rising from his chair, Cranston was strolling over to the table where the coroner had spread a map. "Assuming that Trefth's strong room did contain something, the contents must have been bulky, weren't they?"

"That's hard to say," returned the coroner doubtfully. "It's not a question for snap judgment."

"I'm using your own logic, coroner. A man wouldn't lock an empty strong room, would he?"

"I've already agreed on that point."

"Good. Nor would the same man use a large strong room to store small objects?"

"Seems most unlikely, I do admit."

"The strong room is a large one, isn't it?"

"Right large. Biggest room in the cellar, I reckon."

"Then there's your answer, coroner. The robbers must have stolen at least a truck-load of goods."

The coroner swelled as though he had personally completed the deductive argument. Immediately, the men from New York chimed in with supporting opinions. Cranston's term "truck-load" fitted with the thing that Trefth had promised to deliver, a large supply of alumite. Bulky, it would have required a large store room; light, it could have been easily carried from the house to wherever the truck was waiting.

Cranston let all these opinions gather and establish themselves, without betraying that he didn't share them. Exacting in every detail, Cranston still held to the premise that the locked store room must be considered empty all along, until proven otherwise, just as Steve Kilroy should be regarded innocent unless actual facts of his guilt could be established.

Through frequent analysis, Cranston had long since learned that circumstantial evidence was a product found in clusters; that one false fact was often paralleled by others. Cracking one would throw doubt on another; hence to prove that robbery hadn't happened would be the right step toward selling the idea that Steve Kilroy might not be the murderer. Certainly the part didn't fit the young but well-trusted legal representative of Associated Metallurgy

"So the robbers must have trucked the goods away," remarked Cranston, as soon as comment had subsided. "Very well, coroner, perhaps you can show me the road they would have followed."

Rubbing his chin, the coroner began to run his finger here and there upon the map, muttering that the rains had been right heavy lately and that the clay roads would have mired even a light truck. He was considering the better highways, when Cranston added:

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"Remember, coroner, these prowlers were seen. It follows that their truck would also have been seen or heard if it came too close to this house."

That caused a change in the coroner's calculations, forcing his finger to range wider on the map. Little dots worried him, marks representing the gates in Treft's very extensive fence, until suddenly the coroner brought his finger to a line that looked like an endless centipede, running within a quarter mile of the mansion.

"They railroaded the goods!" exclaimed the coroner. "That's what the varmints did. Put the stuff right on a freight that was waiting while the crew went ahead to look for landslides. They stop right here in the cut on Monday nights, which was when the prowlers was about!"

"Only on Mondays?" inquired Cranston.

"Mondays and Thursdays," replied the coroner. "That's when the freights run southbound. They come north Tuesdays and Fridays, so they stop further below. Last night was Wednesday, the day there isn't any freight."

"You're getting results, coroner," complimented Cranston. "Perhaps you ought to inform the sheriff."

The coroner had a dash of nonchalance. He demonstrated it by turning over his coat lapel. On the under side was a glistening badge that bore the word "Sheriff." That reminder of his double capacity put his mind on a new trend. His finger formed a large circle on the map.

"We've covered all this area hunting for Kilroy," declared the coroner–sheriff. "Been working innard, fixing to miss nothing. He couldn't have got outside the circle ahead of us, not without his car and we've took care of that. The deputies came back through the railroad cut and they searched the caverns down by Blue Creek.

"Kilroy must know this locality to be dodging us still and that proves his accomplices must have told him, since he was never hereabouts afore. Looks like we've narrowed it down to Big Mud Swamp as the only place he could be hiding and if the water moccasins haven't done him in already, our blood–hounds will.

"We found the gun he threw away after killing Treft and we'll be keeping it for evidence. Funny thing, his chucking that and hanging onto the little statue that he must have stole off that stand there in the corner, considering, that nobody else could have took it."

Fully devoted to his duty as county sheriff, the erstwhile coroner was tracing marks on the map while the visitors from New York looked on. Being responsible for having sent Steve Kilroy here, they too were interested in the capture of the man who had so completely betrayed their trust; again with one exception.

The exception was Lamont Cranston. Imbued with a new theory or at least the possibilities of one, Cranston was strolling out from the reception room and through the hallway to the front door. A waiting deputy saw him pass but did not challenge him, because he recognized him as one of the New York delegation.

Besides, there was complete complacency on the handsome though hawklike features of Mr. Cranston, a calm that masked the keen thoughts of the brain behind it. Stepping into a car, Cranston drove down the rain–soaked driveway without for an instant relaxing the immobility of his expression.

There was something prophetic in that poker–faced demeanor. It told that Lamont Cranston might soon become his other self, The Shadow.

## CHAPTER IV

THE Sorber Greater Shows hauled into Hilldale with its personnel in a mood as sullen as the dripping skies. Whenever the Sorber Show hauled in anywhere, it did it in a big way, for this carnival was one of the largest in the business. Its long train carried about every item of equipment imaginable in the outdoor show business.

Two dozen flats were loaded with menagerie cages, concession booths, sections of portable Ferris wheels, carousels and other standard attractions, with wagons in which to haul them from the siding to the lot. The roughnecks who handled the unloading were bunked under the canvas-covered wagons and they had been staying there all day because of the inclement weather.

It was bad enough for those really outdoor men, but they minded it less than the more privileged passengers who rode in the rear cars, where they slept in berths and drawing rooms. The roughnecks didn't share in the "take" when the carnival was doing business, whereas these folk did, except for a few lesser freaks who were working on straight salary.

One and all, they were chiding Pop Sorber, the red-faced, bull-headed manager of the show who had drunk himself out of ownership into the purely vocal portion of a silent partnership in which someone else kept quiet and took the big share of the profits.

The only graft that Pop controlled in full was the concession car used as a diner when meals were due, but otherwise served as a moth-eaten Monte Carlo where grifters who swindled the outdoor public would indulge in such indoor sports as roulette, faro, and chuck-a-luck, equipment which Pop had salvaged from a gambling boat back in the days when people talked of ocean shores in terms of a seven-mile limit.

Everybody lost when they played Pop's games, but they didn't ordinarily blame him for it. This trip the carnival folk had occasion to grouse because instead of unpacking in the morning, they had been traveling all day with nothing to do but toss away more money and the fault was definitely Pop's.

Drago, the sword swallower, told it all in a few words when he angrily flung the last of his chips at the roulette wheel that Pop Sorber was personally operating

"Keep 'em!" snarled Drago. "You're chiseler enough to deserve 'em. Picking up a little side money for yourself by canceling a date in one town and hauling us a hundred and fifty miles to another."

"It wasn't my fault," argued Pop, as he gathered the chips so he could spin the wheel. "How did I know that Kid Klaudey was going to muff the fix in Newtown and send us on to Hilldale?"

"It's your business to know." This came from Benzone, the knife-thrower, as he stacked some chips for a four-number play. "Kid Klaudey is only the advance man."

"That gives me an idea," put in Panchini, the tattooed man. "What this show needs is a new advance man."

"Kid Klaudey is all right," exploded Pop as he spun the wheel and tossed the ball. "Best advance agent in the business. Answer that one."

The answer came just as the ball was clattering into a pocket. It was Pythias who gave it.

"What this outfit really needs," announced Pythias, "is a new manager."

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

Pop Sorber turned angrily toward Pythias, bringing his big fists to a clench. As suddenly he relaxed, though his face showed a wince. He couldn't even be sure that Pythias had made the pointed comment. It might have been his twin brother, Damon. The two looked alike and spoke alike. They were always together and always had been, for they were the Inseparable Twins.

Siamese Twins, some people called them, but they preferred the title "Inseparable" because they weren't natives of Siam like the original twins that Barnum had first introduced to the American public. They sat on two chairs close together; Damon and Pythias, because they themselves were very close. Damon had a right hip, Pythias a left hip, and they shared a middle hip from which they both sprouted.

Otherwise the Inseparable Twins were normal and rather handsome with their dark eyes and tawny faces. When one grinned so did the other, in a very disarming style which they demonstrated at present for Pop's benefit. As an added gag, Damon reached across to look at his brother's wrist watch while Pythias used his right hand to pluck another timepiece from Damon's vest pocket. Double-checking the time, the pair chimed in a voice that sounded like one:

"This must be Hilldale."

The other freaks began to rise and the Inseparable Twins followed. They managed it quite readily and each buttoned his portion of the curious double coat that came together in a joined waist. Their companions, meanwhile, were following up the smart suggestion that one Inseparable had given.

"To get a new manager," observed Drago, "you'd have to talk to the real owner."

"Whoever he is," argued Benzzone, "or if you could find him, if you knew."

"I'd say he was Kid Klaudey," put in Panchini. "If the Kid is as smart as Pop gives him credit, he ought to have saved enough dough to buy up this freight-load of wreckage."

Gathering in the chips that he had won on the final spin, Pop Sorber neither denied nor admitted the impeachment. He simply maintained his stout defense of Klaudey.

"The Kid is all right," claimed Pop. "It wasn't his fault that the fix was queered. The tins smelled out the hype guys too quick, that was all. So we had to move along."

Freely interpreted, Pop's statement meant that the "fix," or license, had been denied the carnival in Newtown, because the "tins," otherwise local police, had discovered that the show was carrying "hype guys," who in more cumbersome parlance were termed short-change artists. Specialists in the hype were very helpful toward increasing a carnival's gross receipts, especially on a final night, since they worked on a percentage; but they were very much taboo in every town where the show played.

In planting blame on the hype workers, Pop Sorber was more than usually clever. The hype crew rated almost as low as the roughnecks, hence were ordinarily denied the privilege of the concession car. But the bad weather had reminded Pop that hypes weren't as hardy as roughnecks, so he had invited them in from the flats where they usually traveled. As a result, the hype crew was present to receive any criticism that the regular troupe cared to offer.

Immediately, Pop was forgotten amid the epithets that such worthies as Drago, Benzzone and Panchini supplied to a motley huddle of men seated on benches at the front of the car. When Alhambra, the snake queen, added a few of her favorite comments, even the cigar smoke began to turn pale. The whole car became a turmoil, with even the midgets jumping on benches and piping shrill threats at the unwelcome guests, who

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

decided they'd better decamp before Benzone began pitching knives.

There was a door at the front of the car and through it they went, followed by the jeers of the throng, who ridiculed the fact that one of the hype men limped in what they thought was a fake play for pity.

The limp was genuine enough, for it belonged to Steve Kilroy, who was glad enough to get out before anyone took a good look at his face. Not being a roughneck, Steve had accepted Pop's invitation to the hype workers, but learning who his companions were, Steve was pleased to be back on the flat-cars where he could switch over to the tougher but more honest clan that also rode there.

The train was switching while Steve did. It was swinging onto a siding amid a thick dusk studded with a few meager lights which represented the town limits of Hilldale. As soon as it stopped, Steve dropped off and limped along with the men who were scheduled to unload. There wasn't much to learn, for most of the roughnecks were irregulars, who simply took what they were told and placed it where someone pointed.

At least there was to be no extra haul, for the carnival lot was right beside the railroad tracks. For the present, however, the only lights were lanterns, until the electricians could rig wires from the power plant that occupied a box-car at the front of the train. That process was delayed while a switch engine shifted most of the train to a more distant siding.

Along with the emptied flats went one that was covered with a long, irregularly humped canvas that included both ends of the car itself. Steve didn't notice that the flat-car was a special job, considerably larger than the rest. He took it for granted that the canvas covered some extra equipment that wasn't going to be unloaded.

Steve's next sight of the oversized flat-car came when he was in the middle of the sidetrack. A big hand thwacked him in the middle of the back, lifting him right across the rail, while a voice bellowed in his ear:

"Watch yourself, roughneck! Here comes Walla-Walla!" What was coming was the flat-car, shoved by the switcher. Steve saw a lantern waving frantically from the end of it, so close he thought the flame was going to sear his nose; then he landed on his back, clear of the track, beside the man who had hooked him there.

The man was Pop Sorber, and he went on about his business as though saving the life of a roughneck was a take it or leave it proposition, according to whether he happened to be close enough to have a hand in it. Coming to his feet, Steve found himself behind the panting switcher, which had braked to a sharp stop and was about to unhook from the flat-car. Finding his game leg no further impaired by Pop's heroic tactics, Steve limped toward the flat-car just as the switcher backed away.

It was then that Steve found out what Walla-Walla was. In fact he would have been looking Walla-Walla right in the eye if he'd had a ten-foot ladder to help him.

The canvas covering had been removed from the flat-car and perched in open sight was something that even the Carolina rains couldn't have washed into Hilldale. Walla-Walla was a fifty-foot whale, riding high and dry on top of the special flat-car.

Whoever had stuffed the creature deserved credit for the job, because the whale looked almost alive. In fact it still quivered slightly from its sudden trip to the siding, and as the drizzle began to fleck its heavy hide, the thing gave more of the impression that it had just emerged from the briny ocean.

After this, Steve Kilroy could say that he had seen everything – almost. He was just beginning to laugh away his troubles at the expense of Walla-Walla, when the thought of that "almost" really hit him. There was one thing that Steve hadn't seen so far while riding along with the Sorber Greater Shows, but hoped he would

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

before this journey ended.

The thing in question was a harlequin–garbed figure that Steve had encountered the night before; or rather, which had encountered him. All day Steve had been looking for someone who answered to that general description among the members of the Sorber troupe.

So far Steve hadn't been able to lay suspicion upon anyone in particular, but he had hopes that he soon would. For Steve had come to the firm conclusion that his accidental escape from Treft's premises had taken him along a route that murderer had chosen in advance and with design.

It was too much luck to have found the carnival train waiting when it was so badly needed. The thing had all the ear–marks of a planted situation that had played a final part in a design for death. All Steve wanted to meet was the man whose hand lay behind it:

The Harlequin.

### CHAPTER V

THE lounge car of the Carolina Special was a marked contrast to the tawdry concession car of Sorber's carnival train, had anyone cared to make the comparison. Few persons would have, for the passengers on the Special, fastest train on the line, weren't the sort who would be shifting from a deluxe limited to a train that rated barely better than a slow freight.

Nevertheless, two of those passengers were greatly interested in the question of the carnival train that had been so suddenly rerouted.

One passenger was Lamont Cranston, who was continuing his trip through the Carolinas. The other was a girl named Margo Lane, who had overtaken him by plane after receiving a long–distance call in New York.

"So that's the story, Margo," Cranston was saying. "Circumstantial evidence points to Steve Kilroy as a murderer, which is why I want to look for someone else."

Margo gave a frown that tucked itself into the front of her pompadour hair–do.

"But you said you were looking for Kilroy –"

"So I am," completed Cranston, "because I think he took the same route as the murderer. The one thing certain is that Kilroy couldn't have learned that a train was going past Treft's last night."

"Last night was Wednesday," objected Margo, "and you just said that trains only ran on that branch line on Mondays and Thursdays one way –"

"And Tuesdays and Fridays the other," added Cranston. "But this happened to be a carnival train that was using that branch to get to a place called Newtown."

"But we aren't going to Newtown –"

"And neither did the carnival train. It switched to Hilldale, which is why we're going there. Just relax and I'll tell you more."

Margo relaxed and listened.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"When the coroner was so sure that there was no Wednesday train," explained Cranston, "I decided to find out how right he was. I didn't look at a time-table, because it wouldn't have included freights anyway. Instead, I called the general traffic agent and let the railroad tell me. They said the Sorber Greater Shows had been routed by that branch on Wednesday night."

"The Greater Shows?" inquired Margo. "I thought this was just one carnival."

"With a carnival, Margo, each tent is a show."

"Then why don't they just call it the Sorber Shows?"

"Because every time they add another attraction such as a snake pit or a fat lady, the shows become greater. All carnivals are Greater Shows after their first week on the road."

Margo smiled at the digression, which wasn't as trivial as it seemed. According to experience, Margo felt quite confident that she was being decoyed into another of The Shadow's adventures, which would mean that she'd be learning carnival life before she finished, so the more she knew, the better.

"Whoever routed that trip had something else in mind," continued Cranston, "for there were better ways for the carnival to get to Newtown. So I called up Newtown to find out what happened when the carnival arrived there and I learned it didn't arrive."

"Then Newtown was a bluff!" exclaimed Margo, "so people wouldn't guess where the carnival was really going!"

"No, I think Newtown was originally planned. Something happened that made Sorber change his mind. He made some calls to Newtown while the train was lying over at Roderick Junction and an hour later the train was being routed to Hilldale. Carnivals have to make changes if they find they aren't wanted, which may have been the case in Newtown, but it doesn't explain Hilldale."

"You mean they aren't wanted in Hilldale either?"

"What's wanted in Hilldale is population. The place has only a few hundred inhabitants. No show could do any business there."

"Then there must be some other purpose!"

"You surprise me, Margo. Just for that remarkable bit of deduction" – Cranston was timing his smile to the blare of the locomotive's whistle – "I will let you go to the carnival yourself. The engineer is blowing for Hilldale, because I notified the conductor we were getting off there."

"You mean the place is just a flag-stop?"

"Not even that, for the Carolina Special. It took a telegram from the general passenger agent to arrange it."

"Of course. But while you're at the carnival, I'm going to inquire around and learn why it's in Hilldale."

Whatever the status of the Sorber Greater Shows, it brought life to Hilldale, as Margo Lane could testify from the moment she left Lamont Cranston at the little depot. The carnival lights outnumbered those of the town by at least a dozen to one, and the shouts of the barkers, the wheezy music of the carousel, produced a spirit of excitement that the little hamlet had never before known.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

The entire town was out, but still the lot was poorly filled, which fitted Cranston's estimate of the population. Not being used to carnivals, the Hilldalers were all in their best attire, as if holding a festival, which was a break for Margo. Her city clothes were fairly well-matched by the newest creations from the mail-order catalogs, so by staring wide-mouthed at the spielers and shying away from the game booths, she managed to pass as a local product.

Next to the Ferris Wheel, the tallest thing on the lot, was the High Striker, where brawny Hilldalers were invited to swing a sledgehammer at a springboard which sent a heavy weight scudding up a wire toward a big bell fifty feet above. The object was to ring the bell and the powerful gentleman who owned the High Striker could do it every time. But when the locals tried at a dime a swing with a dollar coming if they rang the bell, the results were nil. Always the weight fell short.

There must be a catch to the thing, Margo decided. The boys from Hilldale packed enough beef to duplicate the stunt. So while other witnesses shook their heads and termed it "just bad luck," Margo tried to find the thing that made it fail, but couldn't.

The thing was Steve Kilroy. He was learning the carnival business fast and in a way that suited him. After dodging a few odd jobs from other concessionaires, this one had appealed to Steve. He was standing thirty feet away from the High Striker in a spot that was quite dark, leaning against one of the guy wires that held up the big fifty-foot standard.

That guy wire happened to be a continuation of the one that formed the runway for the weight. When Steve leaned back heartily, he drew the runway wire taut, so the weight would sail up to the bell whenever the owner of the High Striker swung the sledge. When the locals tried it, Steve relaxed and so did the wire. The weight couldn't make the grade because it wobbled the loose wire until the vibration stopped it. The harder you hit, the worse you were.

It was nice for Steve because the High Striker man had told him not to let people notice him. That was just what Steve wanted, no notice, for he had seen an evening newspaper, tossed off from the Carolina Limited, bearing one of his old photographs under the caption "Wanted Murderer." But Steve was noticing other people, very thoroughly and warily.

One of them was Margo Lane.

The more he looked, the more Steve classed the brunette as non-Hilldale. She was trying to spot the gaff on the High Striker, which was enough, but she also lacked the naive unconcern of the local femininity. She sensed she was being watched and began to glance in Steve's direction, so he turned his attention elsewhere.

When Steve looked again, the brunette was gone. Margo had remembered that Lamont wanted her to cover the entire show ground.

Across from the High Striker was the Ten-In-One Show, the largest tent on the lot. On the bally platform that centered its broad front was Pop Sorber, blandly revealing his identity with the whimsical remark that he wasn't to be mistaken for one of his own freaks. They were all inside awaiting his introduction, and for the price of one dime, ten cents, anyone could see them all and listen to the educational lectures that went with them.

Margo spent a dime and entered.

In most such shows, the freaks were on open exhibition in their pits and on their platforms, but Pop Sorber preferred it different, being a showman of his own school. With him, each human exhibit was an artiste, as he

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

declared when he came in to give the lectures. All that the spectators saw were curtains, which Pop drew open, each in turn.

Along the line, Margo and a few dozen other spendthrifts were introduced to Drago, who swallowed his swords and took a bow. Alhambra was next, in a pit of snakes, while Benzene rated as the third attraction, throwing knives at a girl called Juanita. The man who was all tattoo, Panchini, was revealed in his full glory, while the fifth attraction, seated on a platform, proved to be Damon and Pythias, the Inseparable Twins.

They spoke together, bowed together, lived together, both as one. In chairs that were set at an angle to give the spectators a complete "perspective," as Pop termed it. Instead of closing the curtain on the Inseparable Twins, Pop prolonged his lecture, hoping that his listeners would tire and depart before discovering that the five-freak show hadn't lived up to the advertised requirements of a "Ten-In-One."

Across from the "big show" Steve was watching the tent where Pop Sorber was killing time inside. Steve was watching for Margo, not having seen her elsewhere. He wanted another look at the city girl when she came out, for she was the only person on the lot whose presence bothered him. As he stared toward the big tent, Steve saw a moving bulge of canvas close to the ground, and grinned because he thought some kid was sneaking into Sorber's prize show.

Suddenly, Steve's eyes narrowed. Instead of sneaking in, somebody was sneaking out, in the form of a figure that preferred darkness and kept to it, clear to the edge of the carnival lot where some cars were parked. Just when that figure was sliding into the front seat of a car, it came into the chance glow of a strongly reflected light.

Steve's breath came with a zing like the hiss of the weight that traveled the High Striker wire. Something dinged through his head like the tone of the big bell at the top. He took a quick look at the starting car and the direction it was going. Out past the entrance to the lot, a couple of men were getting into a truck that was pointed the same way. That was enough for Steve.

The big shouldered grifter who operated the High Striker was making a fresh spiel, telling how easy it was to ring the bell. He took a swing with the sledge and the weight whooped up the wire, to slacken at the half-way mark and drop with an ignominious plop. Angrily, he swung again and the weight did another fluke, which made the villagers laugh.

The grifter didn't laugh. He glared at the guy wire wishing he could heave the sledge and wake up the stooge who should have been tightening the gaff. But it wouldn't have been any use; the man who did the leaning act was no longer there.

Steve Kilroy had seen The Harlequin!

## CHAPTER VI

HALF a mile ahead, two headlights gave a quick flicker off among some trees. The truck driver didn't notice it nor did the man beside him, for they were busy discussing carnivals and using the term "gyps" to define all persons connected with them.

The truck was hauling one of those very gyps in the person of Steve Kilroy, who was perched on the rear and hanging from one side. It was Steve who spotted the tricky headlights and marked them as belonging to the car that The Harlequin had borrowed from the parking lot.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

It seemed that the truck never would complete that last half mile, but when it had, Steve saw what he expected. Off from the highway veered a winding dirt road which The Harlequin's car must have followed. As the truck swung the other way, Steve dropped off the back and took to the dirt.

Alone amid the croak of Carolina crickets, Steve found the setting much more to his liking than last night's. It was the sort that would have ordinarily supplied the shivers, for the darkness was complete and the sigh of the wind through the overhanging pines was as ghostly as the spray that slapped from the drizzle-weighted tree boughs, like the flick of a water-soaked shroud. Moving along the road, Steve could hear the tree trunks groan and creak while his coat was plucked by spooky hands, which proved to be only protruding branches. Yet all this was welcome in contrast to Steve's recent nightmare in a background of magnolias and moonlight.

The darker it became, the better Steve liked it. In this blackout he could be the hunter instead of the prey. Steve's only problem was how to overtake a car that had already left him five minutes behind. That called for reason, instead of dumb plodding through the mud of an old road.

For one thing, the road had veered off from the highway half way up a grade, which indicated that it probably curved around the side of the hill. Steve recognized this hill because he had noticed it right after the carnival pulled into town, before dusk blanketed the landscape. It was a large hill, but shaped like a broad nob, with a low ridge off beyond it. From that, Steve conjectured that the road could not lead very far beyond the hill itself.

Therefore a short cut was in order. The hiking couldn't be any worse among the trees than along this mucky road. Steve's leg had limbered from the exercise he'd gained in helping unload the flat-cars, so he clambered off through the brush, guiding himself by the sloping ground on the basis that the longer he kept going up, the sooner he'd be going down the other side of the hill. The ground was soggy, but it gave a suction grip that counteracted the slippery pine needles. Stones were the main thing to avoid, at least so Steve thought, until he tripped over one and landed on a few dozen all at once.

The few dozen formed a section of an old stone wall, something of a rarity in these parts, where rail fences were still the fashion. What was more the stone wall was in good repair, as Steve discovered when he examined it with a dull flashlight that he had borrowed from a concession booth that he had helped set up.

A stone wall indicated that there must be a house on the other side of it, so the question was: Which was the other side? To gain the answer, Steve climbed the wall and used his flashlight to pick a course along the top, occasionally halting to peer among the trees on either side. At last he gained a glimmer in the form of a light that filtered through the pines from some distance to the left.

Dropping from the wall, Steve headed for the lights. The ground became level and the trees thinned, until Steve found himself in the open, with the wind whistling by. Ahead lay the light and from its position, several feet above the ground, Steve recognized that it must come from the cracks of some shuttered window, even though he couldn't see the house itself.

Steve became somewhat acquainted with the house before he even saw it. As he approached, the wind became a furious medley of swirls and eddies, producing heavy gusts that were offset by areas of absolute calm. This could only be due to a large, irregularly shaped house, and Steve came to the conclusion that he must be close to a pretentious mansion such as Treft's.

Either Steve's eyes became accustomed to the thick gloom, or some moonlight managed to creep through the heavy clouds, enough to produce a trace of visibility, for the house gradually disclosed itself like something materializing from a dream. It grew like a weird monster, so misshapen that Steve actually shied away until he had turned a corner that blotted out the chink of light that seemed too much like an evil, observing eye.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

The building looked big enough to cover half an acre, though Steve soon chopped down that exaggerated estimate. Nevertheless, it was huge and as old-fashioned as it was grotesque. The building was a sprawly thing, three stories high, with wings and els that stretched everywhere like monstrous arms. Even now, two of those huge limbs seemed about to enclose Steve in a pincers grip.

The structure was built entirely of wood as were the verandas that surrounded it. Steve didn't see the verandas until he stumbled over the steps of one. It was as if a chunk of wall had reached out and tripped him, for Steve couldn't understand why these steps should be far from the house. That was, he couldn't understand until he felt the surface of the veranda and recognized it for what it was; after which Steve felt more comfortable.

Next, Steve was sneaking along the veranda itself, not worrying about its creaks because the wind was producing a dozen similar sounds to drown his footfalls. Reaching the wall, Steve felt his way along past an inner corner and decided that if he continued this type of navigation he would eventually come to the window where the light was, probably around the next corner or the one after that.

What Steve reached first was a big front door. Something creaked a warning from directly overhead and Steve dropped back in alarm. The flashlight being his only weapon, he pointed it upward. Then he was moving the light slowly from left to right, tracing the words along the creaking thing, which happened to be an old sign hanging on rusty hooks. The sign had two lines, in faded paint, which said:

HAPPY HILL HOUSE

JUDSON TALBOY PROP.

Just an old summer hotel, bearing the ravages of time, and beginning to show them badly. Whether Judson Talboy had similarly met the march of years was another question, but one that could be answered by going indoors. Certainly someone was in the place; the light indicated that much. Whether the present resident was the proprietor or simply some caretaker, Steve could learn when he talked to him.

Steve had sufficient reason for making entry, forcible or otherwise, considering that The Harlequin had come this way. For through Steve's mind was pounding the constant theme that Talboy must be one of the men mentioned by Tref, an owner of certain statuary molded by a defunct sculptor named Pettigrew from an alloy called alumite.

The trouble was to get indoors.

Trying the front door, Steve found that it had been barricaded for the duration, which probably meant the duration of the hotel itself. To go around the corner and crack the lighted window wasn't a good plan, because it might bring the wrong kind of welcome, such as a blast from a shotgun. What gave Steve an idea was a steady "clack-clack" that kept coming from somewhere up above.

It must be a loose shutter on the second floor in the general direction that Steve wanted to go. So Steve guided himself toward the sound, listening intently as he went, until he walked right off the end of the veranda. As he spilled, Steve grabbed badly at the wall, hoping to clutch something, which by luck he did.

What Steve caught was a mass of ivy, so strong that it halted his fall. As he hung there, Steve heard the shutter bang again, and he gave a low laugh that lost itself amid the wail of the wind. Since this ivy was strong enough to hold him, it would serve perfectly as a ladder. Acting on the thought, Steve worked his way upward and reached out just in time to keep the shutter from thwacking his head as a capricious puff of wind blew from the wrong direction.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

Swinging around the shutter, Steve found the window-sill. He could hear the rattle of the flimsy window-sash and when Steve tried it, he found that it yielded to his touch. Opening the window, Steve wormed inside and as a matter of course slid the sash down to its original position.

Right then, Steve was looking out through the window. Things were clearing more than ever, for the wind was really thinning the clouds. Away down front, Steve could see the pillars of an old gray gate, forming the terminals of the long stone wall.

Curious blackness streaked the gray, then evaporated with the glide of fading smoke. But in that brief moment, either Steve's eyes or his strained imagination gave the passing blot a human shape. Some stalker was approaching this old hotel and might soon be seeking an entry too.

Instantly, Steve was impressed with the importance of finding the person who lived here, and at once. It was up to Steve to warn that person of the menace that was on its way. For Steve held the notion that the gliding figure from the distant gate could be none other than that specialist in murder, The Harlequin.

The notion was wrong. Even in the flickery moonlight, Steve would have recognized the patchwork of the killer's piebald costume. It wasn't The Harlequin who was moving up from the old gateway.

Steve Kilroy had seen The Shadow!

## CHAPTER VII

OLD Judson Talboy was muttering to himself as he thumbed through the pages of a week-old newspaper, which was lying on the hotel desk in front of him. Beside the newspaper was the hotel register, wide open, its pages blank. Across what formed an alcove of the main lobby was an easy chair beside a pot-bellied stove, its pine-knot fire banked. In the chair sat the hotel's only steady guest, a huge black cat.

This was a temporary lobby which had been partitioned off from the rest in order to conserve heat. Thus it formed a sort of room and it was from this room that Steve Kilroy had seen the chink of light. The illumination was provided by some old-time kerosene burners known as student lamps. One was on the desk, just above a pile of newspapers that were stacked irregularly on the floor. Another was on a table near a row of wooden boxes filled with excelsior from which poked specimens of old crockery, matching some plates and dishes already unpacked upon the table.

The vague light did not favor the features of Judson Talboy. His face, unpleasant enough at first sight, would have driven away customers the longer they saw it, had there been any customers at this hotel. For there was a conniving squint in Talboy's eyes; his sharp features denoted the scheming mind behind them; while the pasty hue of his tight-drawn, bloodless face gave the impression of a man who had starved his conscience to the point where he had begun to show the result physically.

Evidently Talboy knew all this, for he was bragging openly about it, to a listener who couldn't talk back and probably didn't care, namely the black cat.

"They call me a fool, Snowball," crackled Talboy, still thumbing through the paper. "A fool for living here in a hotel that does no business, those fools in Hilldale who can't realize that their town is just as dead as this hotel.

"They can't even realize what this property would be worth if I improved it. Their minds can't grasp that far ahead, for when I tell them, they just laugh and ask where I am going to get the money to begin with."

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

Pausing, Talboy raised one hand and gestured his thumb across his shoulder to a door that bore the word: "Office." Then, a sneer in his tone, the dry-faced man continued:

"If I told them the money was in there, they would laugh. If I showed them those four statues of Pettigrew's they would think it all the funnier. So why should I mention that I own a quarter share in alumite, the million-dollar metal?"

"I don't think Milton Treft likes it, Snowball" – Talboy's cackle showed that the thought pleased him – "but he can't do anything about it. When he sells alumite, as he may have done already, he will have to deliver all there is of it in order to stifle any rival claims."

Talboy was busy now, with a pencil, making notations in figures on one blank sheet of the register. He was calculating the profits that the Happy Hill House could produce if revived with an endowment of a quarter million. Talboy's figures were going on the page that bore tomorrow's date, but it didn't matter. He always used the register as a scratch pad, knowing there would be no guests.

Perhaps not tomorrow, but there would be one tonight and maybe more. There was a pen and inkwell on the far side of the big register book. A hand took the pen, dipped it in the ink, and wrote a name across the sheet that bore the current date.

Talboy must have heard the scratch of the pen, for his face became a trifle baffled. He was used to hearing things round this decrepit hotel, but to have ghosts register was a new experience. Talboy stared the moment that the hand had moved away. In fresh ink he saw the name:

The Harlequin.

With that, Talboy looked up. He saw the same figure that had confronted Treft, a limber man clad in a garb as tight-fitting as a jersey, but as fanciful as a Mardi Gras costume. Colorful even to the patch work hood that covered his face so smoothly, The Harlequin was ready to do business with another man who had inherited a piece of Pettigrew's invention.

Ugly eyes glistened through the hood-slits. Their menace was strengthened by the glisten of a revolver muzzle just beneath them. The Harlequin said nothing, but his free hand spoke for him. It pointed to the door marked "Office" and the gesture commanded: "Open it."

Shakily, Talboy turned with hands at shoulder level. He lowered one to a shelf beside the door and in palsied fashion produced a bunch of keys. He swayed as he tried to fit the key into the lock and to steady himself he gripped the shelf with his other hand. At last he managed to get the key in place and turn it. The door creaked as he drew it open, half hiding the hand that clutched the shelf.

The creak from the office door drowned the more distant groan from a stairway that led down into this alcove. The stairs were just beyond a hallway through which The Harlequin had arrived without Talboy's notice. At present, neither Talboy nor The Harlequin were conscious of the new arrival from the second floor: Steve Kilroy

At a turn on a small landing, Steve had just reached the right position for a long lunge down the last half dozen steps, when things happened very fast.

There was a sharp click from Talboy's hidden hand. His shakes ended, the old hotel-owner was twisting with whippet speed, bringing an old-fashioned pistol that he had snagged from the shelf. The click was the cocking of the gun and Talboy's finger, already on the trigger, was set to beat The Harlequin to the shot, no

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

matter how quickly the piebald intruder responded.

It happened that The Harlequin wasn't in a responsive mood. Such wasn't his method.

Having seen The Harlequin in action at Treft's, Steve should have known it. Talboy was a different case, because he was totally ignorant of The Harlequin's way. Wasting time was something The Harlequin avoided; he made it his business to kill at the first convenient moment.

He'd given Talboy time to unlock the door and had also allowed him to open it. Beyond the gaping doorway, The Harlequin had seen what he wanted, not an office, but a storeroom, stocked with life-sized statues showing a dull silver glimmer through the nicks in their coating of bronze paint.

Having thus uncovered Talboy's treasure, The Harlequin wanted no more of the man himself. It was as easy to dispose of a victim by shooting him in the back, so The Harlequin was beginning the process at the moment of Talboy's spin. Swift though it was, the old man's rapid turn couldn't beat a trigger finger that was already delivering a squeeze.

The first shot literally hooked Talboy in the side and gave his spin a jounce. The next caught him close to the heart and staggered him backward against the shelf. As his elbow struck, Talboy's gun went off, but it was pointed high and wide. All it did was punch the ceiling over the stove and during the deluge of plaster that followed, The Harlequin stabbed a third shot that finished Talboy.

Pinned against the shelf by the recoil of his own gun, Talboy took The Harlequin's final bullet squarely in the heart and pitched forward to the desk, to sprawl with arms extended. Steve saw that sequel as he finished his spring from the stairs and drove fists forward for The Harlequin.

Then Steve himself was flying in what seemed every known direction.

One pair of hands flung him into another which in turn pitched him headlong toward the stove. Steve would have smashed skull first against the ironware, if the big chair hadn't intervened. Steve somersaulted and the chair did the same, while out of the whirl came Snowball, no longer a black cat but a white one, thanks to the plaster dust that had covered him.

As he landed, Steve saw the men who had flung him. They were the truckers who had obligingly but unwittingly brought him to this place that was miscalled Happy Hill. Working for The Harlequin, they must have doubled around by another road to rejoin their leader.

Again The Harlequin's hands were as busy as those of a radio director giving cues from a sound-proof control room. One hand was pointing the truckers into the room where the statues were. The other was turning its gun toward the top of the overturned chair, waiting for Steve to dumbly crawl up from behind it.

Steve would have done it promptly, if he'd been able. Without knowing it, he was gaining a few more moments of life purely because his sprawl had dazed him. Meanwhile, The Harlequin was waiting patiently for his human target to set itself as he wanted it. This was to be murder on the same cold basis.

His daze ending, Steve came up, gripping the chair to help. He saw The Harlequin and halted; remembering Treft's desk, Steve thought he could use Snowball's chair to some advantage, then realized that he couldn't. Steve straightened for a lunge; then faltered.

Steve was through.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

That thought really smashed home. It came with a crash resembling a wholesale breakage of glass and woodwork, followed by a whining blast of wind. It was as if all outdoors had come launching through to gather and carry away Steve's spirit when The Harlequin released it with bullets.

It was the window that had smashed and the wind was actually whizzing through. But something surged ahead of it, in the shape of grotesque blackness which might have been a demon-bearing segment of the inky night itself.

Steve didn't see the shape that came, but The Harlequin did. With a quick sidestep, The Harlequin turned savagely to deal with a new avenger who dealt in justice instead of evil. As a man of murder, The Harlequin must have known what was represented by the blackness that became a cloaked shape with eyes that burned from beneath the brim of a slouch hat.

Bigger, more formidable than The Harlequin's bright revolver was the dull, gun-metal automatic that jutted from the gloved fist of The Shadow!

### CHAPTER VIII

PRESENT company was much too fast for Steve Kilroy. If he'd known it, he could have helped matters by staying out of them; but Steve didn't know, and nobody had time to tell him,

Guns were talking very suddenly, one with sharp jabs and the other with a mightier blast. Steve mistook those short-paced shots for hasty marksmanship, not realizing that these were fighters who could parry as well as thrust with their guns. It was more like a duel with rapiers, the way The Harlequin and The Shadow tried to force each other to a mis-step, or lay a shot that would disturb his adversary's aim on the next try.

Such technique had never occurred to Steve, hence from the moment that he glimpsed The Shadow, he took it that this stranger needed aid. For Steve had not forgotten that The Harlequin held two aces in the hole, those fake truckmen who were in the office picking up the statues. Unless The Shadow could settle The Harlequin before that pair returned, this fight would be as good as over, with victory on the wrong side. So when The Harlequin made a sudden dart toward the bulging stove, Steve took it upon himself to stop him.

It was just what The Harlequin wanted.

The shot that the mottled murderer had just fired was his third and last, for The Harlequin hadn't forgotten the three that he had used in dispatching Talboy, even though Steve had. The Harlequin knew that he couldn't reach the stove, so he had hoaxed Steve into serving as a substitute. The Shadow almost had to waste a shot as Steve came lunging past the stove right into the path of the aiming automatic. At least the cloaked marksman managed to restrain his trigger finger while he diverted his aim, but before he could bring his gun to bear again, The Harlequin had locked with Steve and was keeping him toward the center of the room.

He was wiry, this Harlequin, and his quick feints with the revolver kept Steve dodging as they grappled. He still didn't realize that this fighter was out of ammunition and couldn't risk slugging down the man who was serving him as a human shield. Nor did Steve guess that The Harlequin was taking him in the direction that they seemed to reel by chance, namely toward the desk where Talboy's body still lay sprawled.

They hit that counter with a jolt that sent the dead man spilling toward the door beyond it. A deft twist from The Harlequin and Steve was full about, again blocking The Shadow as the latter finished a rapid flank maneuver which he'd hoped would give him an angle of fire at The Harlequin. By then, the thing that Steve so feared was happening; the men from the disguised store room were coming out, attracted by the gunfire.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

Each was bringing a life-sized statue. These were bronze-coated maidens representing two of the twelve hours. They were so light that one man could have carried all four, but they had to be brought singly to be gotten through the door. Seeing The Shadow, the first of the statue-bearers hurled his burden and with the same move dropped behind the hotel desk.

The statue came flying through the air like a spinning blimp and as The Shadow knocked it away, he saw another sailing at him. By the time he brushed the second missile aside, the men who chucked them were going back for more. The Harlequin meanwhile had decided on a better bludgeon; suddenly dropping his yielding tactics, he showed surprising strength by hurling Steve forward, straight at The Shadow.

They met headlong close beside the stove and as Steve twisted away, hoping to turn on The Harlequin, the man in motley launched right past him and reached The Shadow. Guns clanged as the two fighters swung them and Steve pitched back into the fray, just as another brace of statues came tandem fashion through the air. There wasn't much weight to those lovely Hours, but they were jolting nevertheless. Along with Steve's mad lunge, they helped the result.

The whole melee crashed into the stove and overturned it. The weight of the iron pot-belly cracked Snowball's chair into kindling, which caught fire from a shower of burning pine-knots. Darting away, The Harlequin pointed toward The Shadow and the men who had thrown the statues made a lunge at the fighter in black. Again Steve was tangled in a brawl where he was more hindrance than help.

Slugging blows from gun barrels; sharp reports from muzzles were the last of Steve's sensations for a while. The swinging guns reached his head, but the shots didn't harm him, for by then The Shadow was slugging back at the heavy-handed pair, saving bullets for The Harlequin, who knew it. That was why The Harlequin had taken to a certain corner, where a lamp was burning on a shelf above some boxes loaded with crockery. With a sweep, The Harlequin dumped the lamp into the nearest box and with the crash of dishes, a pile of excelsior ignited, shooting flames up to the ceiling.

While the groggy truckers were dropping away from The Shadow's swings, The Harlequin reached the desk and overturned the other lamp, crashing it beside the stack of newspapers, which he kicked into the spreading flames. Remembering how Pettigrew's bust had shielded Steve at Treft's, The Harlequin grabbed up one of Talboy's statues to stave off The Shadow's shots. Coming to another, he grabbed it with a rapid stoop, and protected by a double armful, The Harlequin was on his way through a broad door leading out through the old main lobby.

There and then, The Shadow made his only mistake, which was excusable since he was unfamiliar with the results of similar tests involving alumite. Wheeling over toward the desk, The Shadow gained the proper angle to follow The Harlequin with bullets and gave him all that were left in his automatic. It was just another test for alumite.

The statues took the gunfire as The Harlequin turned toward it and when the bombardment ended the mottled murderer was again on his way. So were the two truckers, going out the other door, each with a statue, but they didn't stop to ward off bullets. They preferred to make fast time during the interval when The Shadow ignored them.

Immediate pursuit was impossible because of Steve who was too weak to reach his feet. There was no stopping the flames that The Harlequin had started, the excelsior boxes were not only in full blaze, they had spread their fire to the old drapes along the windows. The burning newspapers had started the dried wood of the hotel desk and that blaze was licking at the paneled walls. Along with all this, the coals from the overturned stove had turned the grass rug into a field of flame that was turning other furnishings into a pyre like Snowball's chair. Since Talboy was no longer alive to want the old hotel that nobody else did, The

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

Shadow concentrated on getting Steve out of the place.

Snowball went darting out through the hallway ahead of them as The Shadow kept Steve to his feet and piloted him along. Outdoors, the tang of the wind revived Steve as its drizzle lashed his face and he showed a brief return to form when he heard a car go spurting down a driveway. That car meant The Harlequin, the murderer whose score was still unsettled and the thought brought Steve erect, with both hands clenched. But when he tried to stagger forward, he would have fallen, if The Shadow hadn't caught him.

A whispered voice steadied Steve as it spoke close to his ear. It carried command, rather than query, though it was asking what Steve knew about The Harlequin's helpers. Steve found himself muttering a reply:

"They've got a truck – it came around the other way – maybe they'll be using the back road –"

That was enough for The Shadow, who seemed to know where the back road was. Dragging Steve along, he reached a stone wall and followed it. There wasn't any trouble finding the stone wall, because by now a whole wing of the Happy Hill House was afire, lighting up the entire woods.

They could hear the truck starting from further down the road and Steve's numbed thoughts grasped the idea that they were on their way to intercept it. At least The Shadow was, as Steve found out when his cloaked companion left him half-slumped on a steep bank where the wall ended. Just below was the road, hewn in the side of the hill, making a sharp turn along the brink of what Steve took to be a cliff.

The Shadow couldn't have chosen a better place to halt a pair of men who were wanted as accomplices in murder. Stepping out past the center of the bend, he was where the headlights would disclose him the moment that they took the curve, to say nothing of the greater glare that was creeping to the road as the rising conflagration devoured the old hotel.

And the truck was already on its way. Steve could hear the roar of its approaching motor; a few moments later, he saw its lights come slacking past the curve of the embankment. Next, Steve expected to hear the screech of brakes, but they didn't come. Instead, the motor's roar increased.

Horrified, Steve saw what the driver intended. The fellow had seen The Shadow and was giving the truck the gun. Like a massed thunderbolt, its whole bulk seemed to lift for the black-cloaked shape that barred the road, with such speed that Steve thought The Shadow was doomed. At almost the last moment, The Shadow twisted toward the inner edge of the curve, but the truck was already veering to crush him against the bank.

What Steve didn't estimate was the difficulty of swinging a truck that sharply at the speed the vehicle was going. The driver didn't estimate it either.

The truck lifted to its outer wheels before it reached The Shadow. It didn't pause there long enough for the driver to begin to right it. Over it went, crashing the saplings that lined the brink beyond, striking a big tree that turned it really askew. The rear wheels clung in some curious fashion as they struck the road together and Steve was looking right through the open bank, as if viewing a scene through the tunnel.

Rising flames showed everything. There weren't any statues in the truck, which meant that they must have packed them in The Harlequin's car, which Steve remembered was an old convertible. The truck was empty except for two men who were flouncing about on the front seat as though they intended to scramble back through and out the rear.

It didn't occur to Steve that the truck was still moving; not forward, but in teeter fashion. He was a bit puzzled when he saw the rear wheels come upward, spinning to the very angle where he had been looking through the

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

back. Then Steve was looking at a lot of broken saplings, grotesque in the glare from the holocaust. There wasn't any truck; nothing but a cliff edge.

From somewhere far below came a muffled crash. The monstrous crackle of the fire absorbed the echoes of that clatter. Then Steve felt The Shadow's firm grip on his arm; heard a calm, commanding voice telling him to come along. Once down the embankment, Steve found himself turning in the direction of Hilldale, his cloaked friend still guiding him.

The Shadow too had seen the empty truck and knew that the side issue of the stolen alumite had become a portion of the major quest, the finding of The Harlequin!

### CHAPTER IX

ONE day was enough in Hilldale. The carnival was tearing down and packing aboard the flats in the light of a dreary dawn, which to Steve Kilroy would have represented the conclusion of a very impossible nightmare, if he hadn't seen the fire-scarred side of Happy Hill, which had been intact the evening before.

What made it seem a nightmare was the way that it had tapered off. Steve had been nearly blotto when he'd reached the carnival lot after a trip through woods and fields to avoid the people coming up to the fire. The Shadow had guided him not only to the carnival, but into a bunk car where the privileged characters slept. There he had said things that Steve was now trying to remember as he stared from a window of the concession car.

He'd remembered enough to come in here when he woke up, but there was something he was supposed to tell Pop Sorber. Still trying to recall it, Steve felt a heavy hand pound his shoulder and he looked up to see the carnival owner in person.

"Who are you?" demanded Sorber. "The new geek?"

That was it. Steve remembered now. The Shadow had told him to introduce himself as the new geek.

"Yeah," replied Steve. "Kid Klaudey sent me. I got in last night too late to work. The Kid said you needed some good freaks."

"We need any freaks," snapped Pop. "Last night the home guard was penny counting. The chumps thought they ought to be getting ten attractions in the Ten-in-One because I told them so on the bally. I counted the Twins as two, but that only made six "

"So what?" This came from Drago, who was eating breakfast at a table. "Customers don't count in a dump like Hilldale. They're always minches instead of live ones. Why bother what happens when you play a bloomer?"

"Because they'll all be bloomers," retorted Pop, "the way Kid Klaudey is messing up the route. We don't even know where our next stand is going to be."

"So you're starting us on a dukie run," sneered Alhambra, from across the aisle. "An all day ride to nowhere. Why hop from Hilldale if you don't know where you're going? One bloomer is better than a pair."

"We'll know when the Kid wires again," said Pop. Turning to Steve he gestured to the chair beside Drago. "Sit down there, geek, and get acquainted with Drago. He swallows swords and maybe he'll teach you the dodge in case you get tired eating snakes."

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"Don't insult the guy," put in Alhambra, with a gesture toward Steve. "I can tell he ain't no glommer that bites their heads off. The Bosco act is what they call Mid-Victorian, which means its distasteful to us present-day artistes like it is to audiences."

"What audiences?" This came from the Inseparable Twins, who were opposite Alhambra. "You mean the six thistle-chins who showed up last night?"

Which of the Inseparables had spoken was a puzzle to Steve. He was staring at Damon and Pythias, natty in their double-waisted check suit, when Alhambra plucked his sleeve and invited him to join her at breakfast.

"Sit down and scoff," said the snake queen. "I can see you appreciate reptiles like I do. There ain't much call for male snake charmers, so an honest guy like you has to play the geek and make out he's a wild-man while he works the worm. What did you say your name was?"

"Ajax," replied Steve, grabbing the first alphabetical thought that came along. "You're right, Alhambra, I don't eat snakes. What I'd like is an order of ham and eggs over."

"You'll get it." Alhambra turned to the kitchen and shrilled: "Another usual for Ajax."

"An odd name for a snake handler," said either Damon or Pythias. "Ajax was the man who defied the lightning."

"And if you don't think we do," retorted Alhambra, "get into the pit with those rattlers. The poison's out of them, but the stingers ain't. They're living hypodermics. Lookit."

Alhambra bared her brawny arm to show Steve some red marks that looked like needle jabs. He gave a professional nod as though to say that such trophies were all in the day's work. Fearing that the Twins would expect him to match Alhambra's scars, Steve turned to Pop Sorber.

"Did Kid Klaudey send any other acts?" queried Steve. "He said he was hoping a few more would show up."

That was a safe line, because it was almost a repetition of what Pop himself had said. With a shake of his head, Pop replied:

"No, but I'm rigging a couple myself. Using a roughneck to play a cigarette fiend and I'm going to put in the old Spidora. Somebody must have busted the mirror in the old one, but I wired the Kid to ship a metal job to the next stand."

"Who's going to play Spidora," queried Alhambra, "now that Juanita has graduated to getting knives pitched at her? Or does she want her old job back before Benzone gets careless like he always does when he gets tired of old faces?"

Words started to pour from Benzone and Juanita who were at a table with Panchini. Pop bawled for quiet, then answered Alhambra's first question for the benefit of everybody generally.

"We're taking on a local dame," announced Pop. "She was watching the High Striker last night and the guy that runs the big finger figured she'd make a good femme shill. You know the way the townies want to show off with the sledge when a doll gets interested.

"Anyway, she was listening, because she wanted to get out of Hilldale. After the fire she was more than anxious. I guess maybe she figured the yokels would think she started it to throw some excitement into the

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

burg. Only the binger guy was sore because his gaff worker blew and made him look worse than the suckers.

"That's when I came along and when I found the binger guy passing up Hilldale's best, I remembered the Spidora. Maybe the dame won't show" – Pop looked anxiously toward the door as he heard a whistle from the locomotive – "but if she does, the Spidora job is hers."

The performers began to laugh at Pop's anxiety over what they termed a "tourist," which meant anyone who joined the show simply to get away from somewhere. Drago remarked that Pop must have seen the girl in the dark spot near the High Striker, because Hilldale was the sort of place that didn't have a face in a townload. The only person who didn't join the laugh was Steve Kilroy. He happened to remember a certain girl who was too good for Hilldale, though Steve doubted that she really belonged there.

Steve didn't have to picture the face that he remembered because the door opened and it appeared. One glance of recognition was enough for Steve; then, figuring that the girl might be looking expressly for him, he showed a sudden interest in the ham end eggs that a waiter was planting in front of him. All Steve did was listen while the regular freaks gawked at Margo Lane.

The Sorber Greater Shows had really found a new attraction. Old Pop himself was somewhat flabbergasted by the prize that he had drawn, for his critics were right when they insisted that his eyes were none too sharp around the dimmer sectors of the carnival lot. It simply happened that Pop had reversed his usual form in picking this recruit, for Margo exceeded all expectations, Pop's included.

At least Pop could swell to the occasion, for he bowed in his most grandiose style as he introduced the newcomer as Miss Lane. That itself was a distinction in this circle where such titles were unknown and it made Margo uncomfortable at the start. Fortunately the carnival train was getting under way and as it switched from the siding to the main track, Margo was pitched to an empty chair beside Panchini, who caught her with a tattooed arm. When Margo gave the human picture gallery a grateful smile, she was rewarded with one from Juanita on the other side of the table.

Juanita could get along with any girl who smiled at anyone except Benzzone, so the ice was broken. Alhambra, the only other lady in the troupe, had an eye that was geared to business rather than jealousy. Only the Inseparable Twins had failed to get a look at the new brunette, because their backs were toward the door and they found it too difficult to turn around. So they chimed in unison:

"What say, Alhambra? Does she belong with the outfit?"

"I'll say she's with it!" Lowering her voice to a confidential tone, Alhambra included Steve in her little circle. "Say, old Pop is a dope to waste her on a Spidora, where only her face shows. I'll have her doubling as Marina the Mermaid at our next stand.

"Remember that big blond wig that went with the Godiva costume before the show got pinched? I'll trim it to shoulder length and nobody will recognize the brunette that was looking at them from the Spidora platform. The mermaid costume is kicking around somewhere only we never had anybody who could fit it. Pop hit the daily double in Hilldale; he came up with two acts instead of one."

An hour out of Hilldale, Margo was as well-acquainted as Steve with their new friends in the carnival troupe. The only acquaintance they hadn't made was their own, because Steve had studiously avoided it. Knowing that such policy couldn't continue, Steve took an opportunity to settle it. Picking his moment, he met Margo alone, as they were going between cars.

"I'm Ajax," announced Steve. "I don't think we've been formerly introduced."

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"We still aren't," rejoined Margo. "Or do you think so, Mr. Kilroy?"

Watching one of Steve's hands clutch the vestibule door, Margo was fascinated by the way the other crept toward her. Steve didn't like to do it, but common sense was impelling him to chuck the girl from the moving train and hope she would break her neck.

"You've been trailing me all right," gruffed Steve. "Smart of Associated Metallurgy to hire a girl detective. I don't suppose you'd listen to reason, though."

"I might," acknowledged Margo, "and so might you if you knew what I was supposed to give you."

"To give me?"

Steve's tone was just surprised enough to warrant Margo's bold opportunity. Opening her hand bag she started to reach for a letter Steve saw there and ended by producing a gun. Steve's hands stopped their moves when the muzzle pressed toward him. As he lifted his arms, he said wearily:

"Alright, take me in. You win."

"Keep it." Reaching, Margo pressed the .32 into Steve's nearest hand. "If you'd been carrying this last night, you would have been a better help to a mutual friend of ours. The two of you might even have stopped The Harlequin."

A moment later, Margo had gone into the car ahead and Steve was staring dumbly at the automatic in his hand, almost expecting it to turn into one of Alhambra's snakes. When it didn't, Steve pocketed the gun with his first grin in two days.

Margo Lane was "with it" alright. That was the way they put it when you belonged to a carnival troupe, but this girl belonged to something bigger, as did Steve. They both belonged to a cause that would have to win because it stood for justice.

They were with The Shadow.

## CHAPTER X

DURING the next four days the Sorber Greater Shows played to better business, which was a help, though not the sort Steve Kilroy wanted. He was looking forward to a stand like Hilldale where it would be obvious that some crooked business was afoot since otherwise the carnival would have no reason to play there. Then The Harlequin might show himself again, perhaps to his undoing.

When Steve expressed this opinion to Margo, she didn't entirely agree. It was an hour before show time and the carnival was on location in the outskirts of a prosperous Kentucky city, but Steve and Margo were wise enough not to be holding their conference on the carnival lot. They were walking over by a railroad siding, nearly a mile away.

"We'll do good business here in Titustown," Steve was saying. "It's what they call another red one, but I prefer bloomers."

"I don't see why," objected Margo.

"The show is North, isn't it?"

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"What has that to do with it?"

"Only that it's getting off its proper route, which is enough. It must have been too long a hop to the place where The Harlequin wants to go next, so we're making it in short ones."

It was logical enough to Steve, but this business of The Harlequin being real master of the show was something that griped him considerably.

"Pop Sorber is just a figurehead," gruffed Steve, "and a mutton-head, if you want my full opinion. I wish I knew who really owned the outfit."

"Have you tried to find out?"

"Yes, and I wind up by having people ask me. I can't even learn if Pop is taking orders from his silent partner, who may be as innocent as Pop or as guilty."

"But somebody must be giving the orders," argued Margo, "otherwise we wouldn't be skipping around the way we are."

"The bookings come in from Kid Klaudey," explained Steve. "Maybe he's doing just what Pop says he is, grabbing whatever stands he can, now that the route has gone haywire. It's a case of filling in until the Fairs open, and Pop says the Kid is doing better than he'd hoped."

They dropped the conversation as they reached an elongated tent that covered the whole end of a railway siding. One of the hype artists was sitting behind a high ticket booth, making short change for any customers who were foolish enough to come this far to view a solitary attraction. Since a few townspeople were around, Steve made a pretense, of laying money on the stand; raising two fingers, he added the confidential password:

"Shill."

Steve received two tickets free, with a nod of thanks from the hyper in the booth. Not many people with the outfit would walk this far just to stimulate business for Walla-Walla, the only show that was going badly. A couple of shills could always start up trade, so while Steve and Margo were going in the tent, the outside man began his spiel about the "magnificent sixty-foot whale, carried at huge expense on its own special car, the first of its kind ever west of the Allegheny Mountains."

Steve caught that last line through the canvas and repeated it to Margo as they walked up the runway to the temporary wooden platform that flanked the whale-bearing flat-car.

"Walla-Walla sure gets around," chuckled Steve. "He's always west, north, east or south of somewhere that no other whale was ever seen before. He certainly can travel."

"I'm not so sure he can." Margo gave a quick frown as she looked along the platform; then, seeing no one, she undertoned: "There's one place he can't travel, Steve. That's between this siding and the carnival lot."

"Of course he can't. He has to stay on the flat-car."

"But he's the biggest attraction with the outfit, isn't he?"

"If the location is right. The chumps do go for Walla-Walla, provided the carnival lot is right alongside. Only here in Titustown, the best Kid Klaudey could do was pick a spot a mile away."

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

Steve was beginning to talk too loud. Margo gave a soft pedal gesture as they were circling past the whale's tail. Fortunately there were no listeners on the far platform, either; nevertheless, Margo restrained her tone when she questioned:

"Shouldn't the Kid have passed up this town, just on that account?"

The answer shot right home to Steve. The Sorber Greater Shows could not be classed as "greater," not with Walla–Walla, greatest of them all, relegated to a cold spot clear out of shouting distance. Knowing Pop's pride in the great stuffed whale, Kid Klaudey would have booked a bloomer rather than a red one in which Walla–Walla couldn't share.

"This is it," affirmed Steve, in a low, steady tone. "Titustown, The Harlequin's next stop." From his vest pocket, Steve brought the alumite disk and flipped it "He's after another quota of this stuff, from the man who has it."

"Somebody like Talboy," nodded Margo, "who won't want to give it up."

"And won't talk about it," added Steve. "Maybe the public thinks that Talboy died in a fire some truckers started, before they drove drunk off a cliff, but that doesn't apply to the two men who still own alumite."

"You're sure there are only two more?"

"Maybe I'm just guessing, but Treft spoke of twelve statues and there were four at Talboy's. That would leave four each to two other partners."

Margo's nod meant more than Steve realized. She was simply confirming his estimate with one that The Shadow had made.

"If I'd only seen that list at Treft's!" muttered Steve. "We'd know who the other partners were. I don't blame them for keeping mum, because they know somebody is out to get them. They probably think I'm the man, worse luck."

Steve was repeating things he'd told Margo before, which she in turn had sent along to The Shadow. Probably Steve realized the latter fact, for he queried suddenly:

"Does our friend have any theory?"

"None that we haven't covered," replied Margo, with a head–shake. "Where he is, I don't even know, but it's our job to spot The Harlequin."

"Or find those stolen statues," added Steve. "Unless The Harlequin buried them somewhere, they must be with the show. But we've looked everywhere for them."

"The Harlequin will soon be after another quota," predicted Margo, "so the thing to do is find him instead. Here's Pop's set–up for tonight, so let's check over it."

Margo brought out a list of the sideshow freaks in what was to be the order of their appearance. She showed it to Steve near the shelter of Walla–Walla's big left lip, with one of the whale's tiny glass eyes peering over their shoulders. The list read:

Drago, the Sword Swallower

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

Alhambra, the Snake Queen

Nicco, the Cigarette Fiend

Spidora, the Spider Girl

Benzone, the Knife Thrower

Panchini, the Tattooed Man

Marina, the Mermaid

Zeno, the Electrical Wizard

Ajax, the Wild Man

Damon and Pythias, Inseparable Twins

"Cross us out for a start," suggested Steve. "That chops three off the list. Then eliminate the other newcomers."

"Nicco for one," checked Margo. "He's just a roughneck that Pop is using until he can buy a fake genuine Egyptian mummy. Zeno, for another; he only joined up yesterday."

"The droopy chap," defined Steve. "From the looks he gave me, I thought he was going to heave some volts from one of his machines."

"That's just it," laughed Margo. "As Ajax, you're supposed to be the fellow who catches lightning, only you don't. It was the billing the electrical wizard wanted."

"So that was it! Well, he's Zeno now. Let's get on to the regulars."

Margo checked off Alhambra, who couldn't possibly be The Harlequin. Next, she put a mark beside Benzone.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Steve. "You can't eliminate him yet –"

"That's only for Juanita," interrupted Margo. She ran the pencil to the bottom of the list and added: "We can mark off these – or this, as you might call them."

The quip brought an approving grin from Steve. Margo was referring to Damon and Pythias. Of the old guard, they were most certainly ineligible, even more than Alhambra, since neither of the Inseparables could navigate singly. Since most of the list was gone, Margo emphasized those that remained by underlining their names. The candidates for the title of Harlequin consisted briefly of Drago, Benzone and Panchini.

"We'll watch them," assured Steve. "Now let's get back to the lot. It's almost show time."

Outside the whale tent they ran into Pop Sorber who was coming over from the siding where the carnival train had been shunted. When he saw his two wandering artistes, Pop gave them a suspicious stare and demanded:

"What brings you over here?"

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"Shilling for Walla–Walla," responded Steve. "We thought maybe he needed it."

"So he does," acknowledged Pop, his face turning solemn. "Best exhibit I ever had, that whale. I don't like to see him run a bad score, even though it ain't his fault. Nice of you to remember Walla–Walla."

Margo could have sworn that Pop was almost tearful, especially when he rubbed his eyes. Pop covered that action by bringing out a telegram, which he read and then put in his pocket. Steve asked blandly if the Kid had switched the route again, but Pop shook his head.

"The wire's about a load of spots and stripes," explained Pop. "A couple of zoomen are bringing them in to join up with the menagerie. We'll be looking for 'em tonight."

Pop finished with a gesture toward a topless touring car that was standing beside the track.

"Hop in that jalop," he invited. "I'll haul you over to the lot. The crimps have been getting me" – he slapped his hip and gave a rheumatic twinge – "so I had to hire this breezer for getting to and from. Any time you want to shill for Walla–Walla, just ask for a ride."

The lights of the carnival blinked a greeting along with the jangle of the carousel, but neither Steve nor Margo felt merry when Pop pulled up behind the Ten–In–One. Somehow, this night seemed very grim, as though the baleful influence of The Harlequin had begun to set another scene of crime.

Wherever that scene might be, Steve and Margo were hoping that The Shadow would arrive there first!

## CHAPTER XI

POP SORBER turned from the pit where Alhambra had finished taunting the rattlers, and raised the curtain upon Nicco, the cigarette fiend. Reclining on an army cot was a tall, languid figure that represented the last stage of human wreckage. Any roughneck could play the fiend, because it was largely a matter of make–up, but this recruit was doing a good job.

His hair was disheveled over his listless, but contorted face which was well plastered with yellow grease paint. The same jaundiced dye covered his bare arms and was thickest on the hand that held a cigarette above an ash–tray that overflowed with smoldering stumps.

Funny how this act still fetched them. It belonged back in the Nineties, when cigarettes were an obnoxious novelty, linked with fantastic tales of what happened to unfortunates who smoked a pack a day. They turned yellow and stayed so, living on a diet of nicotine that sustained them instead of food, for their systems were saturated.

Old Pop was telling the same old tale, but making it a dozen packs instead of one. It was a great build, but it needed a pay–off, so Pop had one for the benefit of the few smart spectators. As a conclusion he hitched a suction cup to the wrist of the languid fiend, and ran a connecting hose into a glass jar, which he promptly covered with a lid. The wise boys stared as smoke began to fill the jar, presumably arriving from the fiend's over–saturated system.

Raising the lid, Pop let the smoke teem from the jar. Dropping the curtain, he nudged the army cot and awoke the drowsy stooge.

"Okay, roughie," said Pop. "Get out and shill for the joints until the next show. Don't forget to load the jar for the smoke stunt. A couple of drops of spirits of salts in the lid and a dose of ammonia in the jar. Not too much

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

ammonia though or they'll smell it."

Emerging from between the curtains, Pop stepped over to the next platform and solemnly drew the drapes that disclosed the spider girl.

"There she is, folks," spieled Pop. "Poor Spidora, one of Nature's most unfortunate creations. She lives, she breathes, she talks like you and me, but her life is spent in weaving webs like the fine specimen she has just completed. The head of a girl with the body of a spider. Unbelievable but true, because seeing is believing.

"Ask any questions and she will answer them, but don't throw peanuts or candy because she don't like 'em. Her diet consists solely of insects, like that of any spider and she spins her web to trap them. Spidora, half-human, half insect, the celebrated, one and only spider girl."

The spectators were looking at a monstrous spider that had the charming head of Margo Lane. The thing was perched in the center of a web that looked like strands of rough tarred rope arranged in crude geometric pattern. On her part, Margo was summing the spectators and finding, to her amazement that they, like previous audiences, were swallowing all that Pop said. A few feeble questions came from the throng and after Margo answered them, Pop dropped the curtain.

With that, Margo pulled her head down through the spider web behind the slanted metal mirror on which she had been lying at an upward angle. The web itself slanted from the lower front of the platform to the upper back. The mirror came up from the lower back and met the web in the center.

Looking right through the web, people saw the mirror, but its reflection of the floor was mistaken for the upright wall at the back of the platform, because both were covered with the same sort of cloth. The reason why Pop had argued against throwing peanuts and candy was because such goodies were apt to go between the strands of the web and bounce from the metal mirror, which was chromium plated and too expensive to be mistreated.

The old Spidora had contained a glass mirror which someone had cracked with a stone, so Pop was taking no chances with this one. Of course metal could stand almost anything, but bouncing missiles would also give the trick away, which was also something to be avoided.

While Pop was introducing Benzzone, who in turn began chucking knives at Juanita, Margo hurried behind the intervening platforms and reached the back of the mermaid pit. There she met Steve, who was something strictly unrecognizable in his geek costume. Steve was gotten up in a black jersey with a cave man costume covering it, and fashioned from snake skins. He was working in black-face with a shock of bushy hair which had the head of a knife extending from one side, the point from the other. The two were connected by a metal-loop, the sort used with ear-phones, which ran under the wig, and the general idea was that this geek was so brainless that his captors had chucked a knife right through his skull without reducing his mentality.

Steve's arms were entwined in a couple of live bull snakes borrowed from Alhambra. They were playful fellows, these constrictors, and they added much to the act. But Steve was thinking in terms much more virulent than reptiles.

"As soon as Benzzone finishes," reminded Steve, "Panchini will be on. I'll keep watching right through his act and yours, but when Zeno starts bussing the electric gaffs, I'll have to get set in my snake pit. Get it?"

Margo "got it" with a nod.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"It's up to you to keep check then," added Steve. "Whatever happens, let me know. I'll be free as soon as Pop moves on to the Twins."

With another nod, Margo slipped through the curtain that backed the mermaid pit. There was another curtain in front and through it, Margo could hear Pop introducing Panchini, the Living Art Gallery. Benzzone must have been in fine fettle and something of a hurry with the knives. It usually took him longer to surround Juanita with the flying blades.

In the solitude of the pit, Margo changed to the mermaid costume, which was an achievement in itself. The costume consisted of three items: a wig, a sack and a prayer. The wig was simple, but the sack was hanging in the corner of the pit where it had to be managed neatly, or not at all, which was why the prayer was needed.

Kicking off her slippers, Margo perched on the corner of the pit, worked her arms from the sleeves of her dressing gown and aimed her feet straight for the fancy sack, which was all covered with silvery fish-scales and hung from two straps that kept it wide open. Thus poised, she slid right into the mermaid costume, filling it as she landed on a mat of artificial seaweed in the corner of the pit. Slipping her arms through the straps, Margo picked up the wig from a papier-mache rock and covered her head with the blonde contrivance.

With her feet jammed tight in the tail of the scaly costume, Margo had to flounder on hands and elbows to the center of the pit, where she arranged her false tresses to cover the top hem of the mermaid's swim suit. When Pop opened the curtain, no one recognized that this girl who was half-fish was the same who had been half-spider.

Marina gave them a bland, blonde stare, quite different from the sad-eyed gaze of dark-haired Spidora.

Swallowing Pop's mermaid spiel, the chumps went along to Zeno's platform, to watch the electrical wizard ignite burners with sparks from his fingers and light a blue bulb with a current running through his body. Zeno used a lot of second-hand equipment that buzzed with high voltage but didn't carry enough amperage to jolt a flea circus.

Meanwhile, her Marina act finished, Margo was trying to work out of the mermaid costume when she heard a snorty backfire from behind the tent. Recognizing it as Pop's breezer, Margo thrust her head through the backdrop of the pit, just in time to see Steve race from his geek pit in his wild-man get-up. A dive under the canvas gave Steve a good look at the topless car as it wheeled from the lot.

With that glance, Steve saw that the driver was wearing the mottled costume of The Harlequin!

What Steve wanted was another car, but before he could even look for one, a hand was gripping him. Hearing a voice that spoke in whispered command, Steve recognized this strange personage whose arrival was more sudden than The Harlequin's departure.

The Shadow!

Piloted by his cloaked friend, Steve found himself racing across the lot to a low-built roadster beside a road. Next they were in the car and The Shadow, starting a motor that amazed Steve by its silence, was picking up the tail-lights of The Harlequin's rattletrap.

A gloved hand flung Steve a light-weight overcoat to cover his geek costume. Ripping off the woolly wig and the fake knife that went with it, Steve mopped his face with a big handkerchief that he found in the coat pocket.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

He was going where he could show himself as Steve Kilroy, on a mission that could produce his vindication. With The Shadow, Steve was riding to the trapping of The Harlequin!

Back in the Ten-In-One, Pop Sorber was raising the curtain on an empty geek pit. Staring, Pop wondered what had become of Ajax until he recalled that all geeks were unreliable. As the crowd pressed toward the rail, Pop waved them on the platform and opened the curtains to introduce the Inseparable Twins.

Seated in a curtained booth at a slight angle toward their audience, these identical characters delivered a mutual bow and spoke in a tone of perfect unison:

"Good evening, ladies and gentle men. We are Damon and Pythias, the Inseparable Twins, who look alike, live alike, and even think alike."

The Twins were going through their act, Damon bringing out a cigarette with his right hand and lighting it with his left, while Pythias copied the action in reverse. They had rehearsed this with a routine of similar stunts that Margo liked to watch. But at present, the girl who played the separate parts of Spidora and Marina wasn't where she could view the Twins.

From the side of her pit, Margo was peering through a curtain, watching the electrical wizard who called himself Zeno. Ordinarily Zeno had an indifferent air, right to his droopy mustache, but at present he was very alert, as he stared toward the geek pit that Pop Sorber had passed by.

Zeno at least was noting the absence of Ajax the wild-man, otherwise Steve Kilroy. In chasing off to solve the riddle of The Harlequin, Steve had tossed what might become a boomerang. If crime occurred in Titustown tonight, it would be unfortunate if its trail led back to the Sorber Greater Shows.

For one man's absence had been noted at a crucial time and might be used against them. That man was Steve Kilroy, under suspicion of murder!

## CHAPTER XII

THIS was about the shortest trail that The Shadow had ever followed. Instead of leading into Titustown or totally away, it stayed right among the outskirts where the carnival was located.

A few turns left and right, a brief spurt up a wooded hill; then, before The Shadow had given the other car the leeway that he would have allowed a hooker fish, the trail was practically over.

Whipping from the road, The Harlequin piloted his borrowed car in between a pair of pillars and along a curving drive which reminded Steve Kilroy of two previous places combined. The estate was much like Tref't's, while the terrain had the hilly effect of Talboy's neighborhood.

Ahead loomed the lighted bulk of a sizable mansion, which at least was close to civilization and reasonably well inhabited. From the glowing windows it was apparent that a party was in progress, probably attended by a social set that would have thought carnivals beneath their notice.

Along the curve of the driveway were several parked cars, all pretentious in appearance. The Harlequin's borrowed wreck seemed embarrassed by such snooty company, for it took a sudden dart through a break in the line to reach what appeared to be a service driveway leading around to the rear of the mansion.

Instead of following, The Shadow swung his fastidious roadster right up to the portico of the big residence and nudged Steve out ahead of him. Then, with long strides, this master of all situations was striding up the

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

front steps with the astonished ex-geek at his heels.

That was just the beginning of Steve's astonishment.

As The Shadow rang the bell, the front door opened and disclosed a servant. But The Shadow was no longer in sight; he had disposed of his hat and cloak while Steve was still struggling into the light coat that his friend had handed him. Instead of The Shadow, Steve saw a tall, leisurely gentleman in evening clothes, whose face, hawkish in profile, had a mask-like expression that represented utter calm.

As he extended a calling card with one hand, the calm-faced gentleman motioned Steve back with the other, while he announced in a steady, even tone:

"I must see your master at once. The matter is urgent."

"Does Mr. Mogridge expect you?" the servant inquired. "He is entertaining guests this evening —"

The servant caught himself, biting his tongue in apology. Having gained a good view of the caller, he realized that Mr. Mogridge could hardly have expected a more immaculate guest. With a hasty glance at the card, the flunky said in abject tone:

"Very well, Mr. Cranston. I shall notify Mr. Mogridge that you are here."

Crossing a hallway, the servant approached a curving marble stairway, which led down to the side of the house where the hill sloped away. With a quick sweep of Cranston's hand, Steve found himself drawn through the open front door; then, feeling much like an interloper, he was propelled across the hallway toward the stairway.

Passing a curtained doorway, Steve could hear the chatter of voices in what must have been a large reception room beyond, but before he could dwell further on that subject, he was on the marble stairway. Hearing a rustling sound behind him, Steve looked across his shoulder and saw that his companion had again become The Shadow.

The servant was returning when they reached the bottom of the stairway. With one stride, The Shadow was ahead of Steve, sweeping him back around the bend of the ornate marble banister. Not only did The Shadow follow; he went rigid before the servant saw him. Hurrying past the cloaked figure, the servant never even saw it, so anxious was he to return upstairs and usher Mr. Cranston down.

It was as if The Shadow had gone completely invisible through his sheer skill at rendering himself immobile when the moment demanded.

Then they were on their way again, The Shadow and Steve Kilroy, straight to a door from which the servant had come. Seemingly, the door opened at The Shadow's gesture, though Steve realized that his amazing companion must have given the knob a silent turn.

In a lavishly furnished room stood three men, looking at a group of four statues, which Steve recognized as the second quartet of missing hours. The three men were wearing evening clothes and the portly one in the middle was evidently Mogridge, for he was showing the statues to the others. As Mogridge paused to light a fat cigar, one of his friends addressed him as "George" and inquired if the statues were for sale.

"Those bronzes?" lied Mogridge. "For sale? I should say not! Careful, don't tip them. They are very heavy and might hurt you if they fell. They represent the Four Seasons and there are no others that can compare

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

with them as works of real sculpture."

For complete fabrication of facts, George Mogridge was a genius. Just what his game was, Steve couldn't understand, but since The Shadow was listening, it seemed good policy to do the same.

"I'm sending them to an art museum," continued Mogridge, "as a gift from the George Mogridge Foundation. I can't name the museum yet, because you know how those people are. They have to trace into the history and origin of rare art treasures in order to classify them.

"They'll find these to be all that's represented. Early Italian renaissance, that's what they are. A big Italian nobleman smuggled them out ten years ago, when he was on the wrong side of things in Italy. Sold them to me privately, he did, and now I can make the matter public."

Mogridge was making himself a bigger liar than the banners that advertised Pop Sorber's side-show, but Steve was catching the purpose of it all. Mogridge wasn't letting anybody know that these statues were alumite, the wonder alloy that had crept into the news with Steve's name linked to it. So far the public knew little about alumite, except that a quantity of the stuff had disappeared, presumably from Tref't's mansion at the time of his death.

Nor did Mogridge want the public to learn more; at least not until he could conclude a transaction with Associated Metallurgy, all to be done very quietly. As for mentioning an obscure inventor named Pettigrew, who might be entitled to a piece of the profits, that was the last thing Mogridge wanted; hence his yarn about the origin of the statues.

"Money isn't everything," continued Mogridge, as though it were something to brag about. "To me it means no more than that" – he gave a snap of his stubby fingers – "and anyway, I'm making out right well with my business here in Titustown. More contracts than I know what to do with.

"So why should I try to make profit on these statues? I'll let the museum have them and if they don't like using my name, I'll make the gift anonymous. Anyway, I'm shipping them out tonight, so I thought you'd like to see them before they went away. Now if you'll excuse me, gentlemen, I'll have to see about the crates before the expressmen arrive."

Though he didn't know it, Mogridge was explaining everything for the benefit of two unseen listeners.

The Shadow and Steve Kilroy. They knew he was adding the possibility that the gifts might be anonymous. Those statues weren't going to show up anywhere in their present form. Mogridge intended to have them melted down and recast into nice bright bars resembling aluminum, which would be a fraction of that metal's weight.

As for getting the statues out of here, Mogridge had an added purpose. He wasn't taking chances with murderers that might be at large. He was probably thinking in terms of one specific man: Steve Kilroy. With the statues shipped to some unknown destination, nobody like Steve could afford to be too quick with a gun when dealing with a part owner in alumite.

The Shadow pressed Steve back to a darkened corner as Mogridge bowed his friends out through the door. Quite naturally Mogridge wanted to be alone so that he could personally crate the lightweight statues without revealing that they were something else than bronze. So Mogridge waited at the door until his friends were up the stairs; then, with a dry chortle, the pudgy man stepped back into his treasure room.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

It was then that The Shadow pressed Steve forward – at the same time forcing his hand into his coat pocket. Steve had forgotten the gun that Margo gave him, for there wasn't anywhere to hide it on the geek costume. But The Shadow had provided for that oversight by planting another automatic in the pocket of the coat that Steve now wore.

"Be yourself," undertoned The Shadow. "The self that Mogridge thinks you are, because that will make him talk. Remember, there's another man whose name we must learn. After Mogridge talks, you can tell him about The Harlequin."

There was a significance in The Shadow's pronunciation of that name, a point that Steve instantly caught. Steve Kilroy wouldn't have to bother about a piebald masquerader, even though that costumed murderer was somewhere close at hand.

The Harlequin was to be The Shadow's problem; or in a sense the proposition would be the other way about!

### CHAPTER XIII

GEORGE MOGRIDGE turned around like an animated puppet, with horror growing on the pudgy face that showed between his rising, spreading hands. Footfalls had made him turn and in turning he had seen the pointed gun that accompanied them. Right behind the .38 was a face that Mogridge recognized despite the traces of burnt cork that still smudged it.

Mogridge had seen a photograph of this man, Steve Kilroy. A suspected murderer in the eyes of the law. Steve was certainly a real one in the mind of George Mogridge. The pudgy man clearly showed it.

It wasn't hard to play this part, much though Steve detested it. Probably the difference was Mogridge, for it pleased Steve to watch the smug man lose his gloss and become a cross between a frightened rabbit and the snarling rat he really was. There had been something of the gentleman in Treft, while Talboy at worst, had proved himself a miserly old dotard, but Mogridge was the sort who wanted all for one and none for anybody else.

So Steve handled it all quite calmly.

"I've come for the alumite," he told Mogridge in a cold tone. "Not for myself but for the company I represent. After all, there was a contract that Treft should have signed but didn't."

Mogridge licked his dry, quivering lips and tried to nod.

"Don't ask questions." Steve made his voice hard. "What happened to Treft was his business – and mine. The same applied to Talboy. I couldn't find time to make a deal with him. Just let's say I wasn't prepared for what happened."

Steve rather liked his choice of words. He was telling the strict truth, not for a moment admitting himself a murderer, but his language was couched neatly enough to imply that he was actually a killer. Such was certainly the thought that gripped Mogridge.

"I – I understand," stammered the portly man. "If you want – if you will say what you want – I'll, well I'll play ball. Take the statues – all of them – they're yours."

"All of them?"

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"My four – and those you took from Talboy. I don't own the rest. You'll have to get them for yourself."

Steve let his gun relax. Mogridge's arms came downward, hesitating. This was better than The Harlequin's way of playing it; that of shooting first and talking afterward. But The Harlequin was a murderer, whereas Steve wasn't. Rather a jolt, that thought, and it gave Steve a nervous chill. He didn't like this business for it was the sort that could gain a grip on one. Somehow mere sight of Mogridge gave Steve's trigger finger the itch and made him realize how murder, the worst of crimes, could be committed under a momentary impulse.

It would be best to get to business, and fast.

"Those other statues sound easy," sneered Steve, "but this business is getting tougher the farther it goes. If I'd been a little later, you'd have shipped your alumite before I got here. Maybe the next guy has shipped his already."

Mogridge shook his head, wagging his tongue with it as he licked his lips.

"I don't think he has," said Mogridge. "Maybe though I could find out."

"That would help," agreed Steve, "provided he has all the rest."

"He's the only other man," returned Mogridge. "You took Treft's lists, so you ought to know."

"I do know," bluffed Steve, "but suppose the guy is laying for me? What good are the statues I've already got if something happens to me then?"

Though he didn't know it, Steve had weakened his whole game. Being new to all this, it was only to be expected. The Shadow saw the change as he watched from the darkness of his doorway, but it rather pleased him. It showed that Steve was not responsive to the criminal urge that frequently gripped men who found their first chance to act big with a gun. Steve was therefore the sort who could enlist in future campaigns and so far as this one was concerned, Steve was still getting to the goal that The Shadow wanted.

All The Shadow needed was the name of the fourth man who owned a piece of alumite. Once he knew that name he could close this case regardless of The Harlequin's further plans, if any. But there was a cagey look in Mogridge's beady eyes that signified that Steve's persuasion might not prove enough.

It signified more, which even The Shadow did not recognize at the distance where he was.

Behind Mogridge was a double door, against which he was backed. It had a heavy wrought-iron handle, close by one of Mogridge's lowering elbows. From beyond that door, the pudgy man heard footsteps descending a stone stairway and he took them for those of the expressmen, arriving early. The door was latched from Mogridge's side, but he had only to wait until a hand began to try it.

That happened almost instantly. Quickly, Mogridge jabbed his elbow downward to release the handle; with the action he was precipitated away from Steve by the swing of the door itself. In fact, Mogridge didn't have time to try a dive, so hard and suddenly did the door bang open.

The brawny shoulders of two husky men had provided the impetus, but they weren't the first to come through, any more than they were the expressmen that Mogridge expected. What came through was The Harlequin, complete in motley regalia, to the shining revolver which did his talking for him.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

As usual The Harlequin was ready to deliver instant murder and his target for tonight was Mogridge. There were elements, however, that disturbed his system: the first was the fact that Mogridge was half-blocked by the door that had flung him; the second, that Steve was present with a challenging gun.

All the urge that Steve had restrained with Mogridge, returned the moment he saw The Harlequin. Neither Treft nor Talboy had received an ounce of mercy from this mottled killer and Steve remembered it. Only recently Steve had been making friends with snakes and finding them pleasant company by the simple expedient of contrasting them with The Harlequin. Confronted by the human snake in motley, Steve didn't lose an instant.

Before The Harlequin could swing his revolver, Steve had him covered with the automatic and was tugging the trigger with a quick repeat that should have withered the merciless murderer.

Only The Harlequin didn't wither.

Not a single spurt came from Steve's gun. Its cartridge slide was empty. The Shadow had given Steve a dead gun on the chance that he might have lost his head if Mogridge tried to jump it. But the weapon that had cowed Mogridge was useless with The Harlequin, especially now that Steve had betrayed its status.

Steve heard the first sound that had come from The Harlequin's patchwork-coated lips. It was a wordless sneer, much like a reptile's hiss, had a snake been able to express triumph. Steve first, then Mogridge; such was the new order of The Harlequin's immediate plan. Rooted, Steve saw the revolver barrel glint as the muzzle came swinging right between his eyes.

Something thundered from the left.

A third element was in it: The Shadow.

He spoke with an automatic while The Harlequin's gun was still on the swing toward Steve. Beating the Harlequin to the shot was one achievement, but even reaching him was a greater task, considering his position. The luck of the fanciful killer seemed a permanent possession and tonight it was still running true to form.

In starting first toward Mogridge, then swinging to attack Steve, the man of many colors had found the one and only blind spot in The Shadow's range of aim. Only the fringes of his costume were visible past Steve's shoulder and the door edge. All The Shadow had was a hairline target.

Steve could feel the breeze from the slugs that almost skimmed his cheek. The Harlequin, too, must have sensed their graze, for he dropped back to a huddle that became an immediate twirl. His gun swung with him, unfired, thanks to The Shadow's well-placed intervention. In a thrice The Harlequin had known that he couldn't afford to shoot down Steve and leave himself an open target to The Shadow's fire.

Like the flickering colors in a kaleidoscope, The Harlequin was away, still on the twirl. He jabbed a quick shot for The Shadow and another for Steve, during moments of that spin, but both were bad. For The Shadow was guessing, a full jump ahead, and more. He wasn't at the spot where The Harlequin aimed first; instead, The Shadow was lunging in Steve's direction. Reaching Steve ahead of the second shot, the cloaked fighter flung him beyond the door beside Mogridge and completed a quick dive of his own, to shoot back at the mottled marksman who had twice missed.

With one sweeping arm, The Harlequin caught the first of Mogridge's bronze-tinted statues and lifted it with a high-pitched fling toward the doorway where The Shadow wheeled. The trick had worked before and The

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

Harlequin had improved it, this business of slinging life-sized missiles through the air.

On to another statue, The Harlequin was making the rounds of all four while The Shadow, coming under them, kept warding away the bulky bludgeons in an effort to aim at the man who hurled them. Striking past The Shadow, the statues slid through the wide doorway, where The Harlequin's two helpers gathered them in double armfuls and started up the stone stairs that led outdoors.

The Harlequin's own objective was the doorway leading to the marble staircase, but he wasn't the first to get there. Mogridge was ahead of him, coming from an angle that was unobstructed by the flying statuary. Steve was close behind, expecting Mogridge to grab The Harlequin, but such thoughts were far from the pudgy man's mind. Keeping right through, Mogridge reached the stairway and took its polished steps a pair at a time.

Close after him, The Harlequin tried to clip Mogridge on the marble stairs. From the doorway, The Shadow could have balked it with a gun-shot if Steve hadn't flung in ahead of him. Steve could slug with his own gun, even though it wouldn't shoot, so he began by swinging for a broad patch of yellow above The Harlequin's left eye.

Warding the blow, the mottled man clouted back. Then he and Steve were half-tangled in a running fight as they dashed up those same stairs where Mogridge was puffing ahead. Behind them came The Shadow, looking for an opening in the variegated whirl that included Steve with The Harlequin, but the curve of the stairs and the constant change of level made it too risky to shoot for the diamond-shaped blue patch that marked The Harlequin's heart.

The Shadow was banking on future opportunity. Upstairs, the broad hall would provide an open battleground, with the front door serving as a bottleneck beyond it. There The Shadow could settle this fray in his most effective style.

There was just one factor that could halt The Shadow's settlement of this important score; namely, luck.

It was still with The Harlequin.

## CHAPTER XIV

UPSTAIRS the house was in commotion when Mogridge came racing across the big hallway. Sight of the portly man fleeing from what was logically his own stronghold, was rather amazing to the three friends who had been with him downstairs so shortly before.

They had heard muffled gunfire from below, but hadn't recognized it for what it was. Now they knew and so did a dozen other guests, who were coming from the reception room. The evidence in the case was twofold; it consisted of Steve Kilroy and The Harlequin, who were breaking apart at the top of the stairs.

The Harlequin was clear of Steve and anxious for a few more shots at Mogridge, whose death was needed as an essential feature of The Harlequin's entire scheme. As for Steve, his urge to prevent the deed made him look as savage as The Harlequin, perhaps more so, for enough of his wild man's costume showed to give him an outlandish look.

Mogridge's friends didn't waste time arguing cases. They simply pitched en masse upon the two arrivals from below and boxed them in a rear corner of the hallway while Mogridge was making good his escape through the front door. The Shadow halted short of the milling throng to watch what happened to The Harlequin.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

This sortie should have suppressed the mottled murderer, for he was practically out of sight beneath the hands that clutched him. He still had his gun, but to use it would be folly, for if The Harlequin had crippled one or two of these attackers, the enraged remainder would have torn him limb from limb. As it was, they intended to rip away his patchwork costume, beginning with the tight hood that hid his face. All seemed through for The Harlequin, when suddenly the group about him was flung apart by the opening slash of a door in the hallway corner.

It was much the way that Mogridge had been flung in the treasure room, only this time the men who hurled the door so hurriedly didn't happen to be The Harlequin's helpers. They were a pair of Mogridge's own servants, dashing up to report that the wrong trucks were out back, manned by huskies who were stealing the bronze statuary.

One look at the intruders had terrified the servants. Men who could heave heavy statues with one hand were too dangerous to meet in ordinary combat. The servants wanted help, and plenty.

They were giving help, and plenty, to The Harlequin. Freed by the sudden slash of the door, he broke away from hands that were too late to clutch him, dived between the servants who were shouting the bad news, and was on his way to join the truckmen whose strength had been so highly exaggerated.

Again the pack was after The Harlequin, and Steve was carried with the rush. On the basis that the longer way might prove the speedier, The Shadow went out through the front door and circled the house. The trucks were off at an angle from the building, which gave The Shadow a quick, though fairly distant view of things.

On one truck were two big cages, completely filling the vehicle. The next truck had only a single cage, with an open space in front of it, and it was in the space that the truckers, four altogether, had just placed the statues. Further away was Mogridge, over near the open car that had brought The Harlequin here. When Mogridge saw The Harlequin come dashing from the house, with a pack of men in pursuit, he yelled to his friends and pointed toward the truck that held the statues.

Hearing Mogridge's shout, The Harlequin looked and saw him. On the fly, the piebald fugitive fired his last few shots, but they were wild. They were enough for Mogridge, though, for he dived into Pop's breezer and started its motor, hoping to get away from The Harlequin, who without stopping, made a great leap to the top of the double-caged truck.

Before any of Mogridge's friends could overtake him, The Harlequin unleashed his biggest surprise to date.

Up came the doors of the cages and out came a surge of what Pop had termed "spots and stripes." The spots were leopards, the stripes tigers, and they roared a hungry welcome that scattered Mogridge's friends. The big cats were a wild lot that meant business which The Shadow fortunately managed to render unfinished.

The jungle tribe was met by what they must have mistaken for a black panther, springing up from the ground among them. Before any of the snarling beasts discovered anything human about the cloaked whirl that had come from nowhere, The Shadow revealed what he was. He did it with uptilted guns, spurting shots right past the noses of the spots and stripes that almost surrounded him.

This did for the tigers and leopards what they had done for Mogridge's friends. With howls the big beasts scattered so fast that they ran right past some of the men who were trying to get away from them. Having routed The Harlequin's pets, The Shadow turned to look for the most vicious killer of the lot, The Harlequin himself.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

He had reached the second truck and was starting away in it, without waiting for his followers. Waiting for them would have been hardly worth while, considering that they had scattered along with Mogridge's friends. As for Mogridge, he was off in the breezer, wheeling the old car out the driveway as fast as the thing could go. Mogridge knew that The Harlequin would be after him; in fact, the pursuit was already beginning despite The Shadow.

The shots that The Shadow fired after the departing truck were deflected either by the top bar of the cage or the pile of statues beyond it. Away with his booty, The Harlequin was still hoping to add Mogridge to the list of deceased shareholders trading in alumite.

Either The Harlequin didn't know or just forgot that The Shadow had arrived here in a very speedy car, which was available out front. Rounding a corner of the mansion, The Shadow beckoned Steve from a flower bed where he had dived to escape the rain of jungle cats. Hopping into the car, they sped after the truck before it had done more than clear the driveway.

Again, the trail was short.

In less than a mile The Harlequin saw he didn't have a chance to catch Mogridge before the roadster would overtake him. In fact, the roadster was almost upon the truck when The Harlequin played another cute trick. Veering the big truck through an opening in an old brick wall, The Harlequin jounced it over a high curb that bounced the cage clear of the vehicle. Landing caticornered in the space, the cage tipped open and released a clutter of very nasty jaguars that came teeming for the halting roadster.

The Shadow gave the gunshot treatment that had scattered cats before, so there wasn't any trouble from the jaguars. But the cage was a different matter, for it properly blocked traffic. Off beyond, the truck was ploughing through a coal-yard, with the statues rattling in back. That was the last that The Shadow and Steve were to see of it for a while.

Backing away, The Shadow took a trip around the coal-yard, only to find that it was built along the railroad track, offering no convenient thoroughfare. Finding a road that crossed the tracks, The Shadow made a long but rapid detour beyond the carnival train, which was dark like the whale tent, the latter having closed for lack of business. Another road looped The Shadow across the tracks back toward the carnival lot and it was then that Steve suddenly pointed out the missing truck.

It had come through the back of the coal-yard and skirted along the tracks on the near side, to the rough road over which Pop Sorber had brought Steve and Margo that afternoon. Not only was The Harlequin getting back to the carnival where he unquestionably belonged; he hadn't been away from it long enough to be really missed.

Much had happened up at Mogridge's mansion, but the action had been very fast. The whole thing couldn't have taken more than half an hour, including the trip to and from there. It had started just after Margo had finished the mermaid act, which normally left about twenty minutes more of show. Zeno had done his number and though Steve wasn't around to play the geek, Pop Sorber had probably filled in longer with the Inseparable Twins.

Allowing five minutes for the tent to clear, Pop should right now be appearing on the bally stand to plug the next performance. That was when most of the available acts were supposed to join him. There were some of course that couldn't, but Steve was the sort that could. Knowing it, he started to tell The Shadow, who spoke a few instructions and swung the car across the field.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

Just as Pop was bawling "Bally!" Steve came hopping from between two concession tents, behind which The Shadow had dropped him. Steve was Ajax again, with his knife-bearing wig, and black face restored thanks to a cork that The Shadow had provided in the other pocket of the overcoat.

Some performers were coming out to the ballyhoo stand. One was Zeno and the drab electrical wizard spotted Steve's return. So did Alhambra, who looked worried over the peculiar absence of Ajax the geek. Juanita wasn't at all concerned about Steve; she was looking elsewhere for somebody else.

Glancing into the big tent, Steve saw Margo peering from beside the Spidora platform. When she turned, she gave a gesture that Steve caught, signifying that someone had just ducked into the tent, but where he had gone, Margo didn't know. At best she had merely glimpsed The Harlequin upon his return.

Another man was giving Steve a steady eye. This was Drago, coming from the curtain of the first platform. Drago was bringing his swords to flash them from the bally stand, but those sharp eyes of his were already flashing suspicion in Steve's direction.

So Steve went into a wild man pantomime as he climbed the bally platform, hoping his recent absence wouldn't be mentioned, even though it had been noticed. The riddle of The Harlequin was something that time would have to answer.

Not time alone, but time and The Shadow, whose presence with the Sorber Greater Shows was the real factor that restored Steve Kilroy's confidence.

## CHAPTER XV

THAT one night stand in Titustown was a subject of much controversy that continued after the carnival entrained the next day. The controversy involved the local authorities and delayed the departure by several hours, much to the worriment of Steve Kilroy.

The facts were very simple – to a point. Somebody had stolen four bronze statues from the home of George Mogridge and released a horde of wild beasts that were still being rounded up. Four menagerie men who had brought the animals were being held as accomplices in the robbery.

What had happened to the statues afterward was the mystery. They could have been dumped – in a coal yard through which the truck had gone, although it would seem that other accomplices would be needed there to help remove the statues from the truck that carried them.

For nobody knew that the bulky statues weighed hardly a dozen pounds apiece; that was, nobody who cared to tell.

The zoomen answered the fewest number of questions possible, on the advice of a local lawyer. They admitted that they had been bringing animals to the Sorber Shows, but said they had received a phone call at the town where they stopped for supper, telling them to come to Mogridge's house instead. There a man in a garb of many colors had met them, handing out large wads of currency for a special hauling job he'd wanted done. They'd removed the statues partly at his order, partly because of his threatening gun.

Who The Harlequin was, where he had gone and why, what he had done with the statues, were questions that his bribed helpers couldn't answer.

After thoroughly searching the coal-yard to the limits of its scanty coal-piles, the local police gave the carnival a thorough going-over, considering the limited number of places in which such large objects as the

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

statues could have been concealed. They did this while the show was "tearing down" and before it was loaded, they searched the "possum bellies" or storage compartments under the railway cars.

Though the statues remained untraced, the mystery would have doubled if the police had known that four similar statues had been stolen earlier along the carnival route. It seemed impossible enough as it was.

Fortunately the police didn't have time to quiz even a fraction of the personnel, so nobody recognized Steve Kilroy. It was lucky for him that the light weight of the statues wasn't mentioned, because it kept all minds away from alumite, a word which in itself would have caused a look for Steve's face among the carnival folk.

The one man who did get grilled was Pop Sorber and he bellowed his way right through it. Pop admitted it might have been his car that arrived at Mogridge's, but he'd never seen that chunk of semi-wreckage before he came to Titustown. It would be just like some "clem" as Pop liked to call a local product, to run off with his car. Clems were always trying to pin things on carnies.

Pop personally had a perfect alibi during the period of The Harlequin's activity and he was sure no member of the outfit would have taken a chance on borrowing the owner's car. Pop was strict on such points as every carnival owner should be, but he didn't lessen his importance by letting out the fact that the Sorber Greater Shows had ceased to be his except in name.

And this carried weight because George Mogridge hadn't been seen after making off in Pop's hired car. That in itself confused the issue. First, Mogridge was the man who should have pressed the charges against the menagerie truckers; again, he could actually be accused of stealing Pop's car. So the police let Pop's dignity over-ride them and the train pulled out of Titustown with all hands aboard.

In the cook car, Steve was holding an undertoned conversation with Margo while the other performers busied themselves by gesturing through the windows at the local chumps who were watching the gilly train depart. What Steve wanted were a few brief details he hadn't been able to ask last night.

"How good a look did you get at The Harlequin?" queried Steve. "I mean when he got back last night?"

"None at all," returned Margo, ruefully. "It was dark where he came in; all I saw was the bulge the tent gave."

"Which way did he go?"

"Under a platform. That was the last I saw of him."

Steve stroked his chin and looked across the car. There he picked out the logical candidates.

"I'll give Drago first benefit," decided Steve. "He was showing up with his swords right after you gave me the signal. Still, he might be —"

"I'd pick Benzone," put in Margo. "Only first I'd like to talk to Juanita and find out how long she was looking around for him."

"That would be a help. Anyway, it leaves Panchini as a suspect."

"And that gives me an idea, Steve. Have you any theory as to why The Harlequin wears that costume?"

"Yes, and a good one. It made swell camouflage at Tref't's. If I hadn't mixed him with a lot of azaleas, The Harlequin never would have started his run of crimes."

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

Margo looked a trifle disappointed. Then:

"I was only thinking it was the right costume for Panchini. If they'd started to tear it off him last night, those tattoo marks would have matched it and therefore might not have been noticed."

"Not a bad theory," conceded Steve. "You'd better tell it to The Shadow when you see him again."

By then Pop Sorber was stamping into the car, his face still purple from his bluster with the police. Puffing in a fashion that would have done justice to Walla–Walla during the whale's lifetime, Pop turned suddenly to Steve and roared:

"Well, geek, where were you last night?"

"Out getting my act together," returned Steve coolly, "not doubling as The Harlequin or whatever they call him."

"Getting your act together? What act?"

"I should say Alhambra's act. There was a hole in the back of the geek pit and the bulls did a sneak through it. What good is a geek act without snakes?"

Pop gave a defiant snort.

"If you rounded up those bull–snakes in half an hour, you're a better guy than I am. Once those worms scam, they stay scrambled."

"Ask Alhambra if they do."

If Steve had managed one thing during his carnival career, it had been to work into the ample graces of the snake queen. She'd practically given him an instruction sheet when she lent him the bull–snakes and Alhambra rallied promptly to Steve's cause.

"They're suckers for a bowl of milk, bulls are," said Alhambra. "Guess that's how you coaxed 'em back, wasn't it, Ajax?"

Steve nodded quite professionally and the subject would have ended there if Juanita hadn't suddenly broken loose with the demand:

"Keep at it, Pop. Keep right on asking people where they were between those shows. Ask Benzone, for instance."

Benzone took a clutch on a table knife as though he would have thrown it if the point had been sharp.

"Shut up, Juanita!" snapped Benzone. "Who wants to know, anyway?"

"I'll tell you." Juanita looked around the group and suddenly stopped on Margo, who met her with a puzzled stare, at which Juanita sneered: "Alright Spidora, or Marina, both or whichever you are – maybe you'd like to know!"

Before she realized it, Margo nodded. Juanita came to her feet swinging the handiest thing available, which happened to be an empty cream pitcher.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"So you'd like to know!" she shrieked. "You of all people in this outfit –"

Alhambra swung a big hand that smacked down Juanita and Benzone took the pitcher away from her.

Screaming, Juanita put up such a fight that Benzone had to drag her out of the car, which struck Steve as an excellent way for the knife thrower to avoid the very questioning that Juanita had suggested. Alhambra closed the issue with smiling comment to Margo.

"Don't let it worry you, dearie. They always feel that way about Benzone. He gets fed with chucking the shivs at one dame and starts looking for another. Juanita would be jealous of me if I was eighty pounds lighter."

"I didn't even talk to Benzone last night," declared Margo. "Why I've hardly even seen him."

"You've hardly seen anybody," put in Damon, unless it was Pythias. "You haven't had time."

"How could she have time?" asked the other Twin. "She's always busy switching from Spidora to Marina and back again."

"That makes her a double act like us."

"Too bad she isn't a pair of Inseparables. A spider girl with mermaid twin would be something." There were two silent listeners to all this banter and Steve gave note to them both. One was Panchini, the Living Picture Gallery, whose penchant for bright colors could well have induced him to adopt another costume than his habitual tattoo marks. The other was Zeno, the Electrical Wizard, who rated as an absolute opposite, since he of all men present, could not be The Harlequin.

Having given Zeno that clean bill, Steve mentally admitted that two others shared the same whitewash. They were Damon and Pythias, for Margo had seen them on their platform both at Hilldale and Titustown, at precise times when The Harlequin had been at large.

Who was The Harlequin?

That question pounded through Steve's brain with the mechanical hum–drum of the wheels until it seemed to rack his thoughts apart. Then, as relief, the clattering question changed to another equally important yet quite as mysterious.

It involved a much needed personage whose presence on the train Steve did not doubt, but still could not explain. This was the question: Where was The Shadow?

## CHAPTER XVI

IN three days the Sorber Greater Shows had worked well North to a prosperous community called Marlboro. Long hops these, all "dukies" in sawdust parlance, which meant there was too much daytime travel. When the performers groused about it, Pop Sorber sympathized, blaming it all on Kid Klaudey. Since the advance man never was around to explain himself, he made a good scapegoat.

Among other things, the Kid hadn't shipped the Egyptian mummy that was to replace Nicco, the Cigarette Fiend. So Pop had been forced to promote Nicco to the status of an actual freak and let him travel in the concession car with the rest. It left the show one roughneck short, when all stake drivers and tent pitchers were really needed on their job, but Pop was solaced by the fact that Nicco constantly tossed his meager earnings on the roulette board.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

Moreover, Marlboro was to mark the end of these long, troublesome jumps, according to the latest telegrams exchanged between Pop and the Kid. This was revealed by Pop himself when he assembled the freaks in the Ten-In-One, just after the roughnecks had finished putting up the tent.

"This ought to be a red one," announced Pop, "but it won't be, because we were late getting in. No chance to plaster the town with the proper billing, or anything. If we do any biz it will be because the clemms have been passing around the news by word of mouth, telling each other that a carnival is in town.

"If it wasn't that we've booked some Fairs, I'd be for making a home-run to winter quarters. Only Kid Klaudey has promised to do better; says he'll be in tonight with the rest of the route all fixed. And anyway, we'll get one break in this burg. Look over there and you'll see why."

By "over there" Pop meant across the railroad tracks, which the freaks could see through the open front of the tent. Brilliant lights revealed a large industrial plant that was working overtime.

"The Marlboro Dye Works," explained Pop. "The shift changes in another hour and it's pay-day. You can bet those chumps will be over here with all they've got, begging us to take it, which we will. We'll run this as a two-bit show tonight."

Something else was visible from the Ten-In-One. Shrouding a choice railroad siding, right by the crossing from the dye works, was the big tent that housed Walla-Walla. If ever the whale was in a position to do business in keeping with its own magnitude, it was right here in Marlboro.

"I'm going over and talk for Walla-Walla," announced Pop. "He needs a good outside man. Besides, I want to get those hypers off the front. Those cake cutters have been working it too strong and if they start short changing customers on the way in, there's likely to be trouble.

"We can't afford having a 'Hey Rube' before the chumps are really on the lot, so I'll handle Walla-Walla personally. We'll let the joints have a play with the p.c. wheels and flashers, because the guys that run them have been squawking lately. Then I'll get back here to start the bally."

Steve and Margo had been "with it" long enough to know what Pop meant by the "p.c. wheels" and "flashers." He was referring first to the gambling wheels that dispensed blankets and other prizes on a strict percentage basis which worked heavily against the suckers. The "flashers" were a more modern variation of the same, gambling devices that flashed lights of different colors, the award depending on which light remained illuminated after the mechanism halted.

"Stay where you belong," was Pop's departing admonition. "Otherwise the clemms will be rubbering through the front and thinking they've seen enough to save their two-bits. If I start packing 'em fast with Walla-Walla, I'll hop to the white wagon and park the moola; then I'll be over here. So be ready in case I start yelling for a bally."

The freaks had hardly gone behind scenes, before Steve overtook Margo in back of the Spidora platform. As yet, Steve hadn't put on his geek make-up, nor did he intend to do so. Steve was ready to play a sudden hunch that had just occurred to him.

"This is it," assured Steve. "Pop gave it away when he said our troubles end with Marlboro. This must be the place where the last man is."

"You mean Pop is in it?" exclaimed Margo.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"Somebody has been shunting this show all over the map," returned Steve. "That crack Pop just made was either very smart or very dumb. In either case it means the blow-off."

"Then The Harlequin will move tonight! But where?"

Steve answered the question by thumbing toward the front curtain of the Spidora platform.

"Over to that big dye works," he assured. "It's owned by a man named Winston Glendenning, who lives right in the place. I heard them talking about him when we hit town. He's the biggest man in Marlboro."

"Big enough to be interested in alumite!"

"That's right. I'm going over and have a talk with him, before The Harlequin gets there."

"But Steve!" Margo's tone showed real anxiety. "You're supposed to wait until we hear from The Shadow. I told you that the day after we left Titustown."

"I would wait if we had time. But can't you see what's happened, Margo? Whether he meant it or not, Pop Sorber has played right into The Harlequin's hands."

"I don't see how."

"By giving us this hour's breather. If it wasn't for that, The Harlequin would wait until after the last show before taking a crack at Glendenning. As it stands, The Harlequin can do the job early and finish it up fast."

Margo had to admit the logic of that one. Her forehead pursed, she was wondering how the situation could be best be handled. Having his own idea, Steve provided the answer.

"As soon as I leave," said Steve, "start checking on the different acts. Find out which one is gone and we'll have the evidence –"

Steve broke off. Something evidently was already in progress. Both he and Margo could hear a stir from the wall of the tent, beyond the back of the Spidora platform. Together, they took a quick look through the backdrop in time to see the canvas rustling back in place.

"There he goes," undertoned Steve grimly, "and I'm on my way, too. Don't forget the check-up."

Hardly had the canvas dropped behind Steve, before Margo experienced a sudden shiver. Nervously, she tightened her dressing gown, charging off the shudder to the slight chill in the air. It shouldn't be fear of The Harlequin, because he had just left the Ten-In-One; but as she started her tour, Margo realized that the mere thought of that mottled murderer was enough to produce the creeps.

There was no use going beyond the mermaid pit. Neither of the Inseparable Twins could possibly be The Harlequin and Zeno was a newcomer. Besides, he had been in sight, like the Twins, the last time The Harlequin was at large. Margo could hear the buzz of electrical apparatus and therefore was further sure that Zeno was at present on his platform.

So Margo decided to work from the beginning, taking the cast in the order of their appearance. Going to the first platform, she peered through the back and saw Drago cleaning the rifle that he used for his feature number, letting its recoil send a sword down into his gullet.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

That eliminated Drago, as the recoil trick would probably do some day, in a more emphatic fashion.

Passing Alhambra's pit, Margo came to Nicco's platform. Being tense, her wits were sharp and a new realization struck her. Nicco was still an unknown factor, though Margo hadn't mentioned it the last time she reported to The Shadow in a darkened vestibule of the circus train.

Nicco could have played The Harlequin while traveling as a roughneck. That night in Titustown, the cigarette fiend had left his platform early. Nicco could be The Harlequin!

Peering through the rear curtain, Margo looked for Nicco, but didn't see him. Instead, she saw an upright box that looked much like a coffin. Boldly, Margo climbed to the platform, opened the front of the box, and nearly jumped out through the front curtain before she realized that the occupant of the coffin wasn't alive.

It was the fake mummy, a rubberized job aged in a clay pit that had given the real mahogany hue to its composition features. Since his successor had arrived unexpectedly, Nicco had simply quit his job and gone back to working as a roughneck.

Or had he?

What an alibi this could be! Margo was thinking it over as she went along the line and she had passed Benzzone's platform before she realized it. Right then, she noticed that the buzzing wasn't coming from Zeno's department. It was beyond Panchini's curtain, so Margo took a cautious look through.

Panchini was using his tattoo machine, doing a heart and initial job on the brawny arm of the local freight agent. A couple of waiting customers were watching the operation with their sleeves rolled up. Panchini did a lot of tattoo work in his spare time and it was at present helpful. It eliminated him as The Harlequin.

Margo's thoughts were reverting to the new factor, Nicco, when she remembered Benzzone. Turning back to his platform, she climbed the steps and opened the curtains. All she saw was the back of the knife rack, but as she stepped forward, Margo heard a stir too late.

From a curtain, a hand caught the neck of her dressing gown and dragged it downward. Next, the sharp point of a very cold knife pressed squarely in the middle of Margo's bare back. With it came the equally icy voice of Juanita.

"He didn't show up, did he?" queried Juanita. "So you dropped around to find out why. Thought you were next in line as the knife target, didn't you? Well you are, right now!"

Margo's spine was sending shudders all through her, which pleased Juanita immensely. This was worse than a meeting with The Harlequin, for Margo realized that Benzzone's jealous assistant wouldn't begin to listen to any explanations. Perhaps Benzzone was The Harlequin and Juanita didn't know it, but that didn't help Margo.

What did help was Juanita's own mood. Having trapped Margo so easily, she curbed her urge to knife this fancied rival. Turning Margo about, Juanita marched her down the steps at the knife point and back to the Spidora platform. There she shoved Margo up the steps behind the metal mirror and ordered her to thrust her head through, which Margo did.

Folding Margo's arms in back of her, Juanita pulled the ends of the sleeves crosswise in strait-jacket fashion. She drove the knife through the cuff of one sleeve, pinning it to the wooden frame at the side of the narrow exhibit. Producing another blade, Juanita nailed the opposite sleeve to the other side of the frame.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"You'll stay put," jeered Juanita. "When you've finished your act, Miss Spidora, I'll let you loose, so you can double as Marina, as usual. Meanwhile you can keep thinking about forgetting a guy named Benzone."

With that, Juanita departed, leaving Margo to a totally different train of thought, which did, however, include Benzone, along with another character called Nicco. One or the other must certainly be The Harlequin, the murderer who was on the loose again.

Margo Lane could only hope that Steve Kilroy would fare better when he met The Harlequin than Margo herself had fared while trying to trace the absent killer!

## CHAPTER XVII

THE HARLEQUIN was really on the move.

Steve suspected it while he circled the carnival lot, for he had glimpsed a skulky figure slinking well ahead. He was sure of it after he had crossed the railroad track.

He'd lost sight of the furtive shape somewhere near the whale tent, which Pop Sorber was about to open. But while he was doing some slinking on his own, Steve spotted his man again, coming from the other side of Walla-Walla's domain. This time there wasn't room for doubt.

The lights from a signal tower disclosed The Harlequin in his mottled regalia, its hues distorted somewhat by the colored lights, yet plain enough to be recognized. The Harlequin was starting on a circuit of the dye works, probably hoping to find a secret way inside.

Steve decided to beat him at the game. The method was simple; all Steve did was walk boldly through the main gate. Stopping at an office window, he said that he had come to talk to Mr. Glendenning.

Maybe Steve had heard something The Harlequin hadn't; or perhaps he believed what The Harlequin didn't. In dealing with visitors, Winston Glendenning made it a practice to keep an open door. If you asked to see him, you generally gained the privilege, if you looked all right.

Not being in his geek outfit, Steve was presentable enough. The man in the office simply thumbed to a stairway and Steve went right up. When he reached a door marked "President" he opened it and walked in. There he found Glendenning seated at big desk.

The dye manufacturer was an impressive looking man, like his office. Glendenning needed a big desk because he was big and his mind ran to large things, including the huge vault behind him. Hearing Steve enter, Glendenning leaned back in his chair, folded his arms and gave the visitor a narrow stare from beneath his heavy eyebrows. Then, without a flicker of his rugged, square-jawed face, Glendenning boomed:

"Well, Kilroy, what is your proposition?"

So this was it – a trap. Smart of Glendenning to be waiting for a man whose picture he had seen.

Steve's hands tightened on the edges of his coat pockets, while he wished he'd had sense enough to draw his gun before he entered. Still, Glendenning was apparently willing to listen.

"It's simple enough." Steve's voice felt shaky as he found it. "I want to complete that deal for Associated Metallurgy. It was – well, interrupted when I was talking with Tref't."

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"I see." Glendenning nodded solemnly. "You mean interrupted by The Harlequin?"

"That's right. He killed Treft and ran off with Pettigrew's bust."

"And he killed Talboy, too?"

"Yes, and took the statues. Get me straight, Mr. Glendenning, the Pettigrew angle is none of my business. Who really owns alumite is something for other people to decide –"

Glendenning interrupted by spreading his arms and waving his hands.

"I've made my money," he declared. "Some people might want more – for instance, Mogridge – but I think I can win my point with him. Whoever stole the statues can't make use of them while I still have four, in there."

With a back gesture of his hand, Glendenning indicated the big vault and Steve noticed that its door was ajar. Resuming, Glendenning said seriously:

"But we want the other statues back. What's more, we want the papers that belonged to Treft. You must know how important they are. I assume that Treft let you read them."

Steve shook his head.

"I didn't even get a look at them –"

It was the wrong thing to say. Glendenning had been waiting for it, like a cat ready to pounce on a mouse. His big fist came forward and pounded the desk.

"That condemns you, Kilroy!" stormed Glendenning. "If Treft didn't show you the papers, The Harlequin must have, otherwise you wouldn't have known enough to come here. You are working together, you and that masquerader!"

"I only played a hunch!" began Steve, hotly. "I was traveling with the carnival –"

"And so was The Harlequin," put in Glendenning. "Rather a coincidence wasn't it?"

Glendenning was reaching for a button on his desk, but Steve was faster. His hand was coming from his pocket where it had instinctively picked up the gun, during the last stages of that heated conversation. How he came to have the weapon so quickly, Steve really didn't know, but he was sure that tonight it was loaded. That fact momentarily restrained him, but it wouldn't have mattered.

Before Steve could even aim his gun, he was covered. The door of Glendenning's vault was shoving wide, and there stood Mogridge, with a leveled revolver. Steve was smart enough to drop his automatic before the pudgy man could start to shoot.

"Another coincidence," chortled Glendenning, "or is it? Logical, wasn't it, that Mogridge should come and tell me what had happened? I gave him advice; I told him we should be honest with ourselves. That was the first step toward being honest with you. Only you failed to meet the test."

In the vault, Steve could see the last four statues, the property of Winston Glendenning. He could only wish he'd met this man before, since Glendenning's claim to honesty was unquestionably genuine. In fact, the door

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

look spreading over the face of George Mogridge seemed to back that thought, for Mogridge was one who hadn't intended to come clean on the alumite deal. Steve only wished that he could have talked to Glendenning first.

Right then, Steve learned the full reason for Mogridge's expression.

The gun was dropping from the pudgy hand as Mogridge's beady eyes stared past the desk. Glendenning's gaze went frozen next, but Steve didn't have to turn around. Into view stepped the cause of it all: The Harlequin.

The mottled masquerader held his usual gun and it gave him mastery of the situation. But he wasn't quick with the trigger on this occasion, for the simple reason that it wasn't necessary. Moreover, The Harlequin was breaking his usual policy of silence, though the voice that came from his masked face bore the forced note of a disguised tone.

"Murder should sometimes be quiet," sneered The Harlequin, "particularly when it also provides mystery. Since you three have gotten together, I shall leave you that way. At The Harlequin's gesture, four men shoved forward. Steve recognized them as short-changers who traveled with the Sorber Greater Shows. Apparently The Harlequin had enlisted these clip merchants for the blow-off, which after all was their particular specialty. Each of the hype men helped himself to a statue from the vault and Steve, despite the tension, noted that they were not at all surprised by the featherweight quality of the metal.

Then The Harlequin moved forward, his gun forming a small but steady circle among the three helpless men who stood with upraised hands. He backed them into the vault and as a final thought, reached deftly into Steve's vest pocket and drew out the curious coin that bore the imprint of a feather with the initials M. T., the last scrap of alumite that The Harlequin needed to establish ownership of the wonder-metal, through the rule of possession.

Things went black before Steve's eyes. If only The Harlequin had forgotten that disk! But this fiend forgot nothing. No one could ever dispute his claim to alumite for there would be no loose samples in existence, nor anyone alive to even tell the story.

Strange how that blackness weaved itself before Steve's gaze, like some hallucination from the past. If only it would surge from the doorway where Steve fancied he saw it, and materialize into the cloaked shape of The Shadow!

Steve Kilroy should have thought of that before, at the time when he had so impetuously played a hunch without waiting to find The Shadow and inform him. This time the blackness didn't surge; instead, a great blob of gloom swallowed Steve completely, along with Glendenning and Mogridge.

That absolute darkness came with a clang as the vault door swung shut, impelled by the hand of The Harlequin. The mottled master of murder was locking three victims in an air-tight cell that he had destined as their tomb!

## CHAPTER XVIII

POP SORBER opened the little safe in the "white wagon" as he termed the office car, and helped himself to enough rolls of coins to fill his pockets. There had been a lull of ticket-selling at the whale-tent, because customers were leaving to go over to the dye works and begin the night shift.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

They'd plug the show, those customers, and there would be a flood of clem's the moment the present shift was off, which was why Pop had come over here to deposit some bills and pick up change instead.

It did Pop good to realize how the hypers would be missing out tonight. He was chuckling to himself as he turned to close the safe, when a voice spoke from behind him:

"Hold it a minute, Pop."

Turning, Pop saw Kid Klaudey, the advance man who had been giving him so much trouble. His usual dapper self, the Kid was giving Pop a smooth-faced smile from under a modified ten-gallon hat.

"So it's you!" gruffed Pop. "Time you showed up, Kid. What a run-around you've handed us. I'll take that up later, though, because right now I'm going over to talk for Walla-Walla."

"Leave that to the hypers." The Kid pushed his foot into the safe door before Pop could close it. "There's something I want that you have here; those telegrams I sent you."

Fists clenched, Pop turned purple-faced.

"For what? Say –"

"You don't have to say it, Pop," grinned the Kid. "I've been working for The Harlequin and those telegrams are the give away. That's why I want them."

With a roar, Pop started forward with his fist, only to come up short as a gun poked across the Kid's shoulder. There, right behind his stooge, stood The Harlequin. Following his new system, the piebald threat withheld his fire, on the basis that he was going to get what he wanted first.

"Bring out the telegrams," The Harlequin told the Kid. "See if they're all there."

Fists still clenched, Pop faced The Harlequin until Klaudey had completed the job. With a nod, the Kid said:

"They're all here. I've weeded out the ones we want. By the way, Pop, you're talking to one of the partners who really owns this show."

The Kid gestured toward The Harlequin as he spoke and an odd light came to Pop's blank face.

"That's right," laughed the Kid. "When I dug up dough from a couple of angels, I was double-crossing you, Pop. This show was wanted for a very special reason –"

The Harlequin interrupted with a shove of his gun. He didn't waste time with explanations that were unnecessary. He was through with Pop Sorber and a trigger squeeze would certify it; a fast squeeze, too, on the Kid's account, for Pop, oblivious to The Harlequin's threat, was winding up to swing his fist at Klaudey.

Things happened with a whirl.

As The Harlequin's gun spat, its shot went upward, for he was lifted right off his feet by blackness that swooped in from behind him. In that same moment, the Kid tried to ward Pop's punch, half laughing, thinking it wouldn't arrive and that it didn't pack weight.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

The punch landed when The Harlequin's shot missed and the weight it carried drove Kid Klaudey right through the little partition of the office car, crumpling him unconscious. The weight to Pop's punch happened to be a roll of nickels done up in a tight, hard bundle.

Always luck for The Harlequin.

Wheeling away from the blackness that had spoiled his aim, The Harlequin saw The Shadow. Diving away, the mottled murderer should have been stopped just before The Shadow fired, but the thing that should have blocked him was no longer there. It was the partition that Kid Klaudey had demolished and The Harlequin went through it headlong, ahead of The Shadow's gun-burst.

The hypers over by the whale show saw The Harlequin come diving headlong from the office car, then turn and shoot wildly back at a cloaked pursuer. Next, The Harlequin was dodging in and out among some wagons in a mad effort to start a safe dash toward the Ten-In-One, clear across the carnival lot.

Pulling guns, the hype crew began shooting but they were short in dealing lead just as they were with silver. All they received in return were spare shots from The Shadow, which sent them sprawling when they scattered.

Sounds of that wild gunfire reached the Ten-In-One, above the bedlam of the carousel and other rides. Instantly a curtain popped open on a platform and out sprang Zeno, the Electrical Wizard. Flashing a badge, he gestured to some people out front and waved a gun at the line of exhibits in the Ten-In-One.

"Pull up those curtains!" shouted Zeno. "I want to see what acts are missing I'm from the F.B.I. and this is official."

Before anybody could respond, one missing act showed up on its own. Steve Kilroy came bounding into the tent, though not in the attire of Ajax. Steve gave a quick wave of greeting as he came toward Zeno.

"Hello, Kilroy," said the man with the mustache. "My name is Vic Marquette. I guess The Shadow told you."

"I'll say he did," returned Steve. "He just let me out of a vault over in the dye works, right after The Harlequin had put three of us in there to die."

Marquette gave a nod. He knew the ways of The Shadow. People were starting to pull the curtains, so Marquette told Steve to watch.

"Don't worry about Nicco," said Vic. "That's the part The Shadow was playing so he could travel along. We want to see who else is missing."

The curtains were coming open. One showed Margo as Spidora, quite unmoved by all the excitement. Another revealed something equally extraordinary; on his platform, Benzone was against the knife rack, with blades around him so thick that he couldn't move. Turning her head, Margo saw that sight and understood. Juanita must have fixed Benzone that way, so he wouldn't go stepping out.

But that meant that Benzone couldn't be The Harlequin and with Nicco now eliminated, there was no choice left.

Not knowing that Margo had already tabbed Drago and Panchini, neither Steve nor Marquette were aware of what Margo now knew. They were sure of only one thing, that The Harlequin must be missing.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

"Make it fast," suggested Steve. "The Harlequin must be on his way here. That shooting has stopped."

"Up with those other curtains!" bawled Marquette. "We want to see who isn't here – Drago or Panchini!"

Before a hand could pull a rope, a mottled figure darted out from beside the mermaid pit. It was The Harlequin, intent on stopping those curtains, but how he had gotten here so suddenly, and from the wrong direction, was a riddle that only Margo could have answered.

For Margo alone was staring from the tent toward where a similar figure all in patchwork, was starting a dive around to the back!

One Harlequin was covering the absence of another.

Before Margo could shout the fact, The Harlequin turned in her direction. A big gun thundered from among the concession booths and The Harlequin, the one in the tent proper, made a quick dive as The Shadow appeared. Steve and Marquette were shooting now, but Margo didn't wait. With an effort, she slid down through the mirror, ripping the sleeves of the binding dressing gown.

Madly, The Harlequin stabbed shots Spidora's way, too late. Bullets couldn't crash the tilted mirror for it was metal and deflected the slugs. Seeing that his effort had failed, The Harlequin yanked loose as Steve and Marquette fell upon him. Out of their hands, he dived under the side wall of the tent ahead of The Shadow's fire.

The Shadow didn't follow. The last of the curtains had been raised, revealing Drago, Panchini, and the Inseparable Twins. All these freaks were motionless, watching, while The Shadow stalked along the line. At the very last booth The Shadow turned back; then, from beneath his elbow dispatched a surprise shot. Poking her face from the mermaid pit, Margo Lane could literally feel her expression go blank, when she witnessed The Shadow's target.

The Shadow had made what seemed an impossible choice in picking out The Harlequin. His shot was aimed at the platform where Margo saw Damon and Pythias, the Inseparable Twins!

## CHAPTER XIX

TO all intents The Shadow had ignored Damon and was shooting for Pythias, who sat beyond his brother. But the shot itself revealed that the cloaked marksman had a deeper purpose. Instead of finding a human target, the bullet produced a crash of glass.

The old mirror that had once belonged with the Spidora illusion!

There it was, set at an angle beside the chair on which Damon was seated. Until this moment, that mirror had reflected both Damon and his chair to give the impression of two men seated side by side.

No wonder the actions of those twins had been so identical on those occasions when they did their pantomime, while The Harlequin was at large. One had been covering for the other, every time. As long as Damon or Pythias was seated flush against the mirror, his double would be present too.

Present, yet absent!

Twins, these men, but not of the Siamese variety. Their talk of linked hips was pure bunk. All that connected them were the special suits they wore as one, whenever they appeared in public or traveled on the carnival

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

train.

As the Inseparable Twins, this pair was practically above suspicion, but they had topped the game with the mirror trick. Each was a man who could be seen two places at once. He could be The Harlequin and on the move, while he was also one half of a pair of Inseparable Twins, thanks to his brother's reflection!

The Shadow had called that turn tonight.

In trapping one Twin over at the office car, The Shadow had forced the other into action. As a final point in the game, the Twins had to keep throwing suspicion on someone else. Some of the freaks were still suspects and the lifting of the curtains would have spoiled that situation, if The Harlequin had been seen running all around the carnival lot at that self-same time.

So the Twin on the platform had slipped into a duplicate costume and made a quick appearance as The Harlequin. He was the one who had eventually ducked out the side of the tent, while his brother, momentarily seen by Margo, had been getting around to the back to come in and take his place.

The returned Twin was now in his chair doubling for his brother along with himself, but The Shadow had broken the spell – with the mirror – before the second of the fake Inseparables could stage a return of his own.

It happened to be Damon, now in the chair. When he saw the vacancy of the gaping mirror, Damon leaped to his feet, flinging the chair at The Shadow. Dodging the chair, The Shadow fired at Damon's diving figure as it went from the side of the platform, but now another chair was sailing through, and its arrival spoiled The Shadow's aim.

Pythias was back, in Harlequin costume. He had flung the extra chair through the space where the mirror used to be. Having given his brother a head-start, Pythias dived out the back of the tent and both Twins were on the loose.

Both Twins – both Harlequins.

For Damon had snatched up his discarded costume and once outside the tent was slipping into it, all in a single maneuver. They knew, those Twins, that a horde of pursuers would soon be after them, headed by The Shadow, so they played their last quick trick.

As they dived separately between convenient concession tents, each twin raised the old reliable cry:

"Hey, rube!"

It was the carnival war shout and it brought results. Grifters jumped from their grind stores, bringing clubs and other persuaders. Crews came running from the carousel, the whip, and the Ferris wheel. Other carnies snatched rifles from the shooting galleries, ready to take a hand in trouble.

All that trouble seemed to be coming from the Ten-In-One, so the two factions met outside the big tent. The freaks were trying to explain things, but getting nowhere, so it was all adding up in favor of the Twin Harlequins. As usual, however, that pair hadn't reckoned with The Shadow.

Again, The Shadow was taking the long way around, out through the back of the tent instead of the front. Steve and Marquette were following him, confident that he would overtake The Harlequins before they found a car. But the mottled murderers weren't heading for the parking lot. They were going in the general direction

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

of the whale tent, raising their cry of "Hey rube!"

That was enough to start a bigger brawl. The workers were coming over from the dye works and in an angry mood, for they'd just been given a pep talk by their rescued president, Winston Glendenning. When the dye-house gang charged for The Harlequins, the carnival hands, knowing nothing about the mottled murderers, came into the fray full tilt.

The fight surged away from the whale tent with Pop Sorber following and waving his hands, shouting for everybody to lay off. Off beyond, the Twins had disappeared somewhere along the railroad tracks while The Shadow, much to the puzzlement of Steve and Vic, was pointing to the whale tent. Then The Shadow, too, had disappeared and his two aids, having no other choice, went in to have a look at Walla-Walla.

Several hype men were in the tent, a few of them wounded. When they saw Steve and Vic arrive with guns, the hypes began climbing over Walla-Walla. Going after them, Steve and Vic were also playing whale tag, when there came a huge rumble, a snort and a jolt.

It wasn't Walla-Walla coming to life. The thing was a switch engine that had bashed through the end of the tent and was picking up the flat-car with an automatic coupling. Then the switcher was steaming out again to the right of way and the tent, its props knocked loose, was collapsing like a wrecked blimp.

Where they were going, or why, neither Steve nor Vic could tell, for they were busily slugging the short change operators and tossing them off along the right of way for other people to pick up. Like Kid Klaudey, who had hired them, these small-time crooks would have a lot to tell, perhaps enough to produce a new trail to The Harlequins

Steve and Vic were on the trail right then.

The former Ajax and the erstwhile Zeno were reminded of their fellow freaks when shots began to ricochet from the horny flanks of Walla-Walla. Hanging onto the ridge of the whale's back, Steve pointed to where the fire came from, and saw why it was wild.

From each window of the switching engine peered the face of a Harlequin, with a gun. They had chosen the switcher for their getaway, but why they had burdened themselves with the whale car was a mystery, unless it had happened by coupling the thing accidentally.

Certain it was that the Twins didn't want fellow travelers, but the men in question felt the opposite. Using Walla-Walla's big head as a shield, Steve and Vic worked to the general vicinity of the whale's neck and slid in opposite directions. Then they were right on the catwalks of the stubby locomotive, crouching forward to begin their drive.

Shots had been wild because of the switcher's constant jounce. At present, the steel baby was going berserk for it was taking the curves of the main line at a speed never intended for anything that belonged in the yards. Walla-Walla was beginning to roll the way he had wallowed on the sand-bar where he had been trapped years before. But Steve and Vic were taking too much for granted. As they lunged toward The Harlequins, the going became too rocky; the attackers suddenly found themselves clinging to the locomotive, while the masked men at the windows were steadying for close-range shots that would be sure-fire despite the bouncing of the locomotive.

Two guns stabbed and with the shots, the marksmen disappeared. Something had picked The Harlequins right out of the windows, just before they fired. The shots had missed the men outside and they were working on again, in time to see what had saved them.

## FREAK SHOW MURDERS

There, in the switcher's cab was The Shadow. He'd been riding with The Harlequins right from the start, letting them exhaust their gunfire. They had few shots left, but not enough to down this cloaked attacker who had taken them by complete surprise. It was a melee of motley, the way The Shadow slapped the pair about, literally beating one down with the other, while he preserved his footing in the very center of the cab.

A gun stabbed sharply and Steve saw its flame knife from the hand of one Harlequin to the body of the other. Meant for The Shadow, that shot had found the wrong target. Damon and Pythias had become a Cain and Abel, though, for once a Harlequin had fired a death shot that was not intended.

One figure slumped and slid dead from the cab. The living Harlequin hurled himself insanely on The Shadow, who gave a sudden twist and faded right from sight. The lunge carried the second Harlequin along the path that his brother had taken, right out of the cab, but he departed with a scream that was singularly prolonged.

The trailing shriek came as the switcher rattled over a high trestle and hit the curve beyond. It died far back and below, lost in the roar of the speeding locomotive. The Harlequins, whose lives had been spent in dealing death, were united in the state to which they had so wantonly consigned their victims.

The Shadow was still on board the switcher. His blackout hadn't been a tumble. His vanish had seemed sudden against the background of the switcher's coal pile, that was all. And now he was stopping the racing locomotive, just about in time, for its wheels seemed to settle, like those of the flat-car, when the halt came. The strain was too much for Walla-Walla. The big whale pitched headlong over the curve and came to a dry landing on a rim of rocks.

The Shadow was pointing toward the prone leviathan. Wondering, Steve Kilroy dropped to the ground and waited for Vic Marquette. They reached the place where Walla-Walla had come to a sudden stop, chin first. There they saw the answer to the thing that had puzzled them most.

They knew now why The Harlequins had taken Walla-Walla on the wild ride which had proven their own one-way trip. The whale was mouthing statues, along with a batch that had already jounced from his huge gullet. Carrying such bulky loot had been a Jonah job for The Harlequins, so they had solved it in the most sensible way.

They had let Walla-Walla be their treasure chest, the container of their priceless alumite, including the last four statues that the hype men had helped carry tonight. Only The Shadow had guessed that game, yet his reasoning, now that the facts were known, was quite obvious.

The only thing big enough to carry the statues had been Walla-Walla. No wonder The Shadow had known where the Harlequin Twins would go!

From the panting switcher came a singular laugh that reached the ears of the two men who were reclaiming the rare metal discovered by Absalom Pettigrew. It carried a mirthless note, for it was a knell of doom, deserved and delivered.

That weird tone spelled The Shadow's triumph over the strangest adversaries of his whole career, those Twins who had formed a double genius of crime, their brains like their deeds combined in the murderous creation of their own evil fancy: The Harlequin!

THE END