

HAPPY DEATH DAY

Maxwell Grant

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HAPPY DEATH DAY

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I

THERE are families, who, once proud and haughty, genteel and honorable, withdraw too much from the world. They become so over conscious of the dignity of their line that they lose sight of honor and dignity and a transmutation takes place. Stiff-necked hatred of any one who is not part of their line, takes the place of what once was but a sort of smiling pride of family.

Such a family there was in one of the suburbs of Chicago. And in that family, in an old house on the side of a knoll that overlooked the majesty of Lake Michigan, the line had petered out. The blood, watered down by generation after generation of courtship and marriage, all within the circumscribed group that custom had decreed was the only group that mattered, turned sour, curdled, till the virtues that they so espoused became vices...

Ugly vices that had led to mutual distrusts and hatreds... that had caused festering sores that dug deep below the surface. Sores that no one but the family ever saw, sores that had once, two years ago, come to the surface!

With cataclysmic horror, the discreet, the genteel family found its name smeared over the brawling headlines of every tabloid in the country, for, when the sore had erupted, death followed!

Murder! Murder in the Lively family! Somehow, to most of them, the horror was more in the headlines than in the killing. And what headlines! For the murder had been a bizarre one with outre overtones. A man, Eugene Lively, had been shot. He had died almost instantly from that shot. But despite the fact that his body had begun to stiffen in rigor, an hour later, the murdered body was shot again!

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"Dead Man Killed!" That had been the tenor of the headlines. "Maniac Runs Amok In Old Gold Coast Family!" How many variations had been run on that theme!

Then too there were other peculiar circumstances; the killer had struck not an hour after the whole family had moved into a brand new, most modern house. They had left behind them the dank and dismal relic of the eighteen-eighties that had housed them for so long. They were about to begin a new life in new surroundings. The new house, the last word in modern architecture, had been furnished in as forward thinking a way as it had been designed. And in that new house with all the trimmings of the "brave new world," death had struck!

They had caught a man; one of the Livelys it was, too. They put him in jail at first, but after they had heard the irrelevancies of his testimony, no jury would send him to a death cell. Instead he was placed in an asylum. Foster Lively, in a lunatic asylum. That had been another bitter pill for the fanatic family pride to stomach.

Bastille Day, July 14. That had been the day on which the murder had occurred and now, two years later to the day, a note went through the channels of the U. S. Postal Service.

It had been addressed to the matriarch of the family, old Grandmother Lively. It read in part... "Happy Deathday! Will see you soon... and when I do... you will no longer see! You have called me maniac and such I have become. You will do well to fear me!" The note was signed with pathetic braggadocio, "The Maniac."

The old woman, stern, and strong with an inner strength of some kind that burned and yet did not consume, read the note, shrugged and passed it to her grandson.

"Here, Alfie." Her smile was bitter and withdrawn. She knew Alfie for what he was. A youthful weakling.

He read it slowly. Then he reread it faster this time with dawning comprehension and horror in his eyes. He crumpled the note.

"This is serious! I'm going to call the police!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind! We have had our last contact with those rascallions!" Her voice was low, but it held conviction. "You will not communicate with them. This is a family matter and we will deal with it. In the first place, he is safely behind bars. Any threats he may make are idle. I do not doubt that he hates us with a bitter and unremitting hatred. In some ways I cannot find it in myself to blame him too much. He feels the family has let him down!"

"B-b-but," Alfie stammered, "suppose he escapes!"

"Tosh! How could he possibly? I have been to that asylum. It is no Bedlam, but it is a well constructed and intelligently run place. No, Foster will never escape until death carries him from one cell to another! Now forget it!"

Alfie nodded in humble obedience. But he was frightened and as a fearful rat will summon a last desperate surge of courage and decision, just so, Alfie was determined this one time, to go counter to his grandmother's wishes. He ran his hands through his thinning blond hair.

Her voice was sharp. "Alfie! How many times must I ask you not to do that?"

His hands jumped away from his hair guiltily. He looked at her in his near sighted way and pretended to be giving her his full attention as she spoke of the gathering she expected that evening. But, behind his lackluster pale blue eyes, his mind was busy. Who could he call on? Not the police... she was right about that...

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A name flashed across his mind. At first he rejected it. Somehow in the house which they had returned to after the tragedy in the new house, the name that had entered his mind seemed brash, new, anachronistic.

But the name was persistent. There was no one else to whom he could turn. He would call him and take his grandmother's wrath when it came. It was too important that something be done and quickly.

He glanced around the room and as he did so his resolution weakened. He eyed the dark heavy drapes, the solid mahogany furniture, the incredible variety of knick-knacks and dust collectors that were spread around the gloomy old room. No he couldn't... But then, as though projected by some unseen force, a face appeared in his consciousness. He had met him at a reception in New York... a gentleman who amused himself by dabbling in matters criminological... what was that man's name? Cranston! Lamont Cranston!

He had exquisite manners, not even the old lady would be able to quibble about that...

It took quite a while. First there was the question of the long distance operator getting Cranston's address, then the wait for the lines to be clear... Alfie was nervous. He was warm and getting warmer. He was nervous about flouting his grandmother's wishes. He was nervous about that threatening note... And it was the end of summer. It got quite hot in Chicago... But adding all these factors together still didn't account for the warmth that Alfie felt.

He twiddled a pencil nervously as he waited. It was getting hotter. Sweat gathered on his brow and ran down the side of his face. He shook his head impatiently as he finally heard the operator say, "Chicago calling New York"... there, the connection was complete.

Holding the phone a little way from his ear, he rubbed the gathered sweat away. He heard the click at the other end of the wire and a girl's voice he did not recognize, answered.

"Is Mr. Cranston there?"

"I'm sorry. He's not. May I take a message?" the girl asked.

This was the one thing that he had not thought of... Cranston not there... what was he to do? He looked away from the phone and gasped in horror. He knew now why he was so warm!

Smoke was curling in under the door. The walls seemed to be giving off heat. Suddenly, a flare of flame roared through and the door was gone.

Alfie gasped into the phone, "My name's Alfred Lively... in Chicago... we need help... Cranston knows me! Tell him there's a murderous maniac on the loose! My god... The heat... Fire!"

His voice had trailed off into a high-pitched squeak. He dropped the phone and pulling the smoking drapes to one side, looked out the window. He was one flight up. He slammed the window up and stepped out onto a gabled roof that led out about six feet.

He ran to the edge and getting down on all fours grasped the edge and lowered himself down. It was but a couple of feet from that position to the ground.

All around him, out on the lawn were other members of his family. His grandmother, face lighted up by the infernal glow from the fast burning house said, "We couldn't imagine where you were. We called you but there was no answer."

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Alfie watching the blaze with frightened eyes said, "I was phoning. You know that room is almost soundproof."

"Was, not is," his grandmother said dryly.

The top of the old house was aflame now. In the distance they could hear the faint wail of approaching fire engines. It was impossible for them to do much. The house was too far gone.

Alfie looked around at the people who covered the lawn. They looked like part of a Dali landscape with the red of the flames, and the impeccable lawn around them spotted with white, iron animals. Deers, dogs, indescribably badly sculpted, they were part and parcel of the Lively estate and as such had been kept in position.

His mother, wild-eyed, hair flying, looked like a witch, he thought sourly. Good old Eugenia, you could depend on her to rise to a situation. She was working herself up to hysterics if he knew the signs. And he did, only too well.

His sister, Toni, was watching with a smile of derision. She seemed to find the sorry spectacle possessed of an infinitely humorous quality. Her blond hair, combed and brushed till it gleamed in the fire's light, was a casque of loveliness that framed her piquant features.

The servants made a back-drop behind his family. Somehow they seemed more solid than did his people, more human, as though they had been made from a sturdier mold.

The only one missing the fun, he thought satirically, was Danny Downs, his dead father's brother. Uncle Danny... he'd gone downtown to the "Loop" earlier that day to pass some time with his old cronies. Idly, fleetingly, Alfie envied his uncle. His "common" uncle as the family called him. The black sheep of the domain. Black sheep he might well be, but he certainly got a lot more fun out of life than the rest of them put together. There was another missing, Uncle Harry but Alfie knew where he was...

The fire seemed to be getting angrier. Great roars of sound came from the dying house now. The fire had made some kind of a thoroughfare for itself and a back draft was aiding the destruction of the funeral pyre that was the ancestral home of the Lively's.

The fire engines clanged up the long winding private road that ran like a mad snake from the gate to the house. The roof with all its gables was falling in. The firemen looked at it and made a sort of resigned unanimous shrug. There was not much they could be expected to do.

Alfie looked from the house to the fire engines and his mind conjured up a laughing, maniacal face. The madman who had shot Alfie's father, shot him twice, once while he breathed and once long after his lungs had stopped ever moving again, must be behind this pyromaniacal blaze. That was Alfie's thought as his grandmother walked to his side.

"Not a word about that..." her voice trailed off but her tone was meaningful.

He shook his head no. "I won't say anything."

He would not say another word. But all his hopes were pinned on the broad shoulders of one man. Lamont Cranston!

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Any one of the elegantly trimmed shrubs might hide a skulking figure, brain warped by confinement in a cell. Warped brain, warped even further by the two years that had penned him away from society.

A shadow made real by the flickering despairing flames of the gutted house seemed momentarily implicit with life. Alfie stared at the shadow with bulging eyes! Was the deadly figure of Foster there? Could even a maniac have the fearlessness to lurk so near the center of attention?

He breathed a sigh of relief, it was a shadow, nothing more. That was one shadow that could not harm him. But night would bring a thousand more and every one might hold the crouching figure of a murderous mind, cankered and sadistic!

He hoped Cranston would get there soon... Otherwise...

CHAPTER II

IN New York, that muffled cry for help was passed along a certain series of patterns. The person who had answered the phone was but an employee of a service. A telephone answering service that took care of your calls for a nominal fee. They recorded the relevant parts of the conversation and then repeated them to you at your request.

It was a wonderful time and money saver for harassed business men, for doctors out on call, for people who could not afford a full-time secretary.

All calls that came in for Lamont Cranston went through a special service. Instead of the operator merely jotting down the time of the call and the name of the person calling as well as their business, there was a little more to it when Cranston's number was rung. A dictaphone was switched on by the operator who never heard the details of the conversation. When the light on her board re-lit, she pulled the plug and then turned the dictaphone off.

None of the girls knew this, but at odd times through the day, Burbank, whom they considered just part of the furnishings, a supervisor of some sort, would re-play the record.

Burbank, one of The Shadow's oldest and most reliable aides, had a lightning-swift mind. He it was who gathered together slight stray bits of rumor; the slightest deviation from the normal, and Burbank's brain would swing into action like the finely made machine it was.

He correlated the data, weighed it up, and if he thought it warranted The Shadow's attention, he made a breakdown of the relevant facts and sent them along to his mentor.

The Shadow had come to regard Burbank's opinions as being practically infallible. If some sixth sense of Burbank's led him to wonder, it was The Shadow who went out and dug around. Some of The Shadow's most fantastic successes had been the result of his following up some seemingly irrelevant odds and ends that Burbank had passed along.

Burbank listened to the recording of Alfred Lively's voice. The urgency was unmistakable. So it was, that a long-distance call to California was made.

The call caught The Shadow just as he was tying together the last clues of the case of the "Blackest Mail." Burbank's call, mentioning the fact that Lively had phoned Lamont Cranston led The Shadow to doff his cape and as Cranston to get aboard a plane that took him from sunny California to hot and steaming Chicago.

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He leaned back in the cab that was whizzing up Michigan Boulevard and looked at the six-lane highway. He had little or no information. Therefore his mind was in neutral.

He fanned himself with his ever-present briefcase and wondered idly how it was possible that all the water in Lake Michigan did not cool off the air at least a trifle.

The cabbie said, "If one more guy asks, 'Is it hot enough for you?' I'm going to flatten him, so help me!"

"It must be pretty hot sitting over the engine the way you have to," said Cranston sympathetically.

The cabbie weaved in and out of the traffic for a while and then, evidently only because of the sympathy in Cranston's voice, for he had said nothing when Cranston gave him the address, said, "Do you know what you're letting yourself in for out there?"

"Letting myself in for? What do you mean?"

"That address... there ain't nothing out there but a real estate development that never developed!"

"I am sure of the address; I checked at the airport."

"Then you are going to that house. Brrr... gives me the chills even in this weather!"

The cabbie looked honestly distressed at the prospect. "You know what happened out there a couple of years ago, don't you?"

"I have heard some rumors," Cranston said.

"I thought the family closed the joint down after the murder."

"If they did, they have reopened it."

The cabbie snapped his fingers. "I got it! On accounta the housing shortage... I betcha they had to move back to that house when their old dump burned down to the ground!"

Cranston sighed. So Burbank had smelled out trouble again. That frenzied phone conversation, so short and unilluminating, had meant more to Burbank than it would have to most ears.

The cab drove on into the north. The stockyards, the "Loop," the business section of Chicago was left far behind. They were in the swanky section of town now, and going further up all the time.

They passed lovely homes, beautifully kept, landscaped within an inch of their lives. The meter on the cab ticked along like an animated cash register. The section was less built up now. They were past even the lordly homes with the many-acred grounds around them.

The cab drove off the main highway into a less traveled road. This road led to one that had never felt concrete. It was gravel. That road gave out and far ahead, on a little rise, Cranston could see a tiny house. Made small by the distance, it was perfect. Like a gem, the wilderness that surrounded it made a perfect backdrop for it. It seemed more like a stage-set than reality.

The designer had used taste, the most modern materials, long walls of solid glass that welcomed light, instead of shutting it out in fear, the way old houses did. The roof, broad and low, was set at a slight slant. Eaves

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projecting out had a purpose that Cranston recognized. They had been designed so that in summer, the rays of the sun were shut out and kept the house cool. In winter the same design allowed for the different angle of the sun so that it had full entry.

The cabbie was impressed. He whistled in admiration. "Chee, what a dump! Looks like somethin' out of a movie about the future!"

It did indeed. It looked like what it was, a design for living that made a home a flexible thing, instead of crowding people into a box helter-skelter.

He vocalized what Cranston was thinking. "It seems worse, don't it, when you figure that a killing had to happen there?"

"Yes," Cranston thought, murder belongs in old houses, ugly houses, not in a thing like this where there should only be beauty, serenity and purposeful living.

The cab stopped in front of the door that faced the road. Cranston paid the sizable bill and increased it by a thumping good tip. The cabbie grinned his thanks and was gone as the door opened.

"I say! This is a pleasant surprise, Cranston old man! I knew you were in Chicago and hoped you'd be able to get out to see us! Come in! I'm being butler while Darrel has a case of nerves. He's getting to be pretty much of an old-timer you know. Butling is aging him fast."

Alfie was talking fast and loud. It was obvious that he wanted Cranston to play up to his lead.

"To tell you the truth, I'm imposing on you. I was in a hot, stuffy hotel room and then I remembered your invitation," Cranston smiled.

A crotchety old voice interrupted. "Alfie! Don't stand there in the doorway. Invite your company in!"

Alfie bit his lip but obeyed. He guided Cranston into a room that gave even Cranston pause. Designed as a unit for the functional house that it was part of, it now looked like something from a nightmare. For, instead of the plastic and foam rubber furniture that the glass-walled room cried out for, it was stuffed any old way, helter-skelter, jam packed full of Victorian horse-hair monstrosities.

Perched on a straight backed wooden chair, the elderly Mrs. Lively sat and knitted. Her hands, half-mittened in crocheted net, she looked as anachronistic as a long boat on a Flying Fortress. She nodded at the introduction and her eyes took in Cranston's face with a searching scrutiny that would have upset a lesser man. He stood quietly while her eyes probed him.

Her nod was some kind of inner acceptance for she said, "Won't you join us in some tea, Mr. Cranston?"

His soul revolted at tea in that weather, but it was seemingly an accolade of acceptance so he murmured politely that he'd be delighted.

"You see us at our worst, Mr. Cranston," she said. "It seems there are no decent houses to be bought, or rented, due to conditions... Therefore we have been forced to take refuge in this abomination of my dead son's! But believe me, as soon as it is possible, we will again be where we belong. In a house that is made with a decent regard for a person's sensibilities." She glared at the glass wall that made one side of the room.

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Of course, she had been the one to so badly mix–furnish the house. She had probably thrown the furniture that belonged in this room down into the cellar.

A silent maid placed the tea things on a dollied, fretworked table to one side of the matriarch.

Mrs. Lively looked them over and nodded. "Call the rest of the family, please, Katrine."

While they waited she made and poured the tea with a punctilious regard for all the amenities of tea making.

Alfie cleared his throat and said, "Lamont, let's..."

"I see no reason," said Mrs. LiveLy, "why you should take such an undue familiarity with Mr. Cranston!" She glared at Alfie, who moved his lips silently for a second and then gritted his teeth together. Wouldn't she ever realize that he was twenty–seven, not seven? But he gained solace in thinking of his bravery in calling Cranston. If she knew why he was there!

There was a short silence broken by the entry of the family.

Cranston filed the faces away in his photographic memory. Eugenia, flighty, forty and all that it connoted. Toni, somewhere in her twenties, more than pretty, but sullen and with a strange expression around her eyes.

"You may be seated, Mr. Cranston. Toni never seems to light anywhere long enough to sit!"

The tea things were passed round and Cranston, balancing a teacup in its saucer on one knee, nibbled at a petit four as the talk, deliberately light and non–consequential, eddied around him.

Making conversation he said, "I've been out on the Coast for a while. I'm afraid the climate there has undone me. I was not prepared for this..." His gesture took in the all–pervading heat.

"You were on the Coast!" Eugenia leaned forward till one of her double chins was wabbling and said breathlessly, "Then you must have seen Mustapha Ali!"

Cranston blinked and considered. Must have seen Mustapha Ali? In some vague nook in the back of his mind he remembered the name. He was trying to place it as she bumbled on, "Isn't he the most wonderful thing? His interpretations of the "Vedanta" opened a whole new field to me... It was as though I had been looking at a lily bud... never seeing what its ultimate beauty could be..."

"And then Mustapha showed me the way and the lily bud forced its way up through the muck, reached the air, and opened its petals to the light!"

She made gestures to show the lily forcing its way through mud and up into the light.

Cranston had remembered now. Ali was one of the ten thousand cultists who homed out in the salubrious west. Eugenia seemed determined to guide him through a whole course in "Vedanta." She chattered on like a waterfall on a quiet night.

Toni said, "Mother, must you?" Her voice was crisp, incisive and uncivil.

The waterfall stopped, suddenly dammed. A silence descended and Cranston was wondering what to say to break it when he saw that the elderly Mrs. Lively was listening, head cocked like an aged setter.

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The sound that had caught her attention was that of a door slamming. Mrs. Lively nodded her head to herself.

Aside from the door's sound, there was no other slightest disturbance till suddenly, right outside the door of the room they were in, a course, jovial voice roared, "Hi, look! Hi, look... it's just about to start! The big show with more freaks collected under one roof than at any other time, in any other clime! Hi look... Hi, look..."

There was a measured cadence to the voice, like that of a carnival barker haranguing an unresponsive audience. It went on, "This mammoth aggregation of unparalleled wonders is to be seen for ten cents... one dime, the tenth part of a dollar, step right up... it won't break you, but it can't make you! So step right up to the counter, ladeez and gents and buy a ticket for..."

Mrs. Lively was out of her chair and at the door. She opened it with repressed fury. "Come in and stop that caterwauling, Danny Downs!"

He stepped into the room looking as out of place with his meaty good looks and loud-checked suit as a three-headed calf. His face was rosy and cheerful. He winked at Cranston and said, "Hi, stranger, how'd you let yourself get corralled in here on a hot day? Place to stay is in a nice dark, cool barroom!"

His grin was so infectious that a likable quality seemed to exude from his pores, thought Alfie. If he only could be more like Uncle Danny instead of...

Danny Downs refused the proffered drink of tea and said, "None of that slop for me. Rusts a man's tubes, I always say."

"Yes, don't you!" Toni Downs eyed her uncle with badly concealed dislike.

Alfie said, "Well, now you've met all of us." He grinned shyly. "All the Lively's and the Downs."

"Not quite all," boomed Danny. "Don't forget Foster... and old Uncle Harry... everybody seems to want to forget Foster and really to forget Harry!" He shook his head in horror at such unnaturalness.

Foster, Cranston knew, was the one who had been incarcerated in the asylum, but who was Uncle Harry?

The room was quiet for a moment and then Danny, grinning, dropped a bombshell. He threw a tabloid out on the table where they all could see it.

Screaming headlines proclaimed, "Maniac On The Loose!"

The subheads read, "Foster Downs, Mad Killer, Breaks Out!"

The heat seemed to be sucked out of the room as though by a giant vacuum cleaner. Fear horripilated down Alfie's spine. He saw the dateline on the paper. It was yesterday's. Foster had been out from behind the bars! It had been he who had set fire to the old house! Death was on the loose and none could know where its clammy hand would fall!

"You should all read some other papers besides that stuffy sheet you get. They never have any news till it's dead!"

The word "dead" hung in the room as though suspended there by an invisible hand.

CHAPTER III

LAMONT CRANSTON was washing up for dinner. He had no change of clothes with him and was regretting it; wishing that he could don fresh linen, as he heard a muffled knock on his door.

He long-legged his way to the door, subconsciously aware of the fact that the sun's setting had cooled off the air a trifle.

Alfred was at the door. He said, "May I come in?"

"Surely. I was hoping you would. I'm not too sure I have the various relationships of the family straight in my mind. Clear them up for me, will you?"

"Well..." Alfie marshaled his facts. "Harriet Lively is my grandmother, you know that. She had one son, my father. He was... shot... by Foster, you know."

"So I've been told. Go ahead, please."

"And one daughter, who was my father's twin. My grandfather found it amusing to name the twins Eugene, that was my dad, and Eugenia... that Toni's mother. Foster is Toni's brother."

"What about their father, Mr. Downs?"

"He's here one day and not the next. Says he can't stand my grandmother." Alfie's voice showed how he wished he had enough courage not to be intimidated by the matriarch. "He's been away most of the summer. Probably be popping in any day now."

"And Uncle Danny?"

Alfie grinned. "Just call him the black sheep. He's Downs' brother."

"That clears up everything but..." Cranston paused and Alfie answered the unspoken question.

"The black sheep mentioned another uncle... Harry. You are curious about him?"

Cranston nodded.

"Follow me." Alfie turned on his heel and walked out of the room.

He led Cranston through the house to a small and inconspicuous door. "He's a little peculiar. Don't pay too much attention to Harry. He's really all right, once you get to know him."

The door opened into another of the magnificent rooms that the architect had made with precision and regard. The room was still magnificent, but the contents were at first sight a little baffling.

A bright light hung down from the ceiling over a primitive sort of turning wheel. A man sat turning the wheel with one foot. He held an abrasive cloth with the other. He was polishing a big disc of glass.

"Harry, I want you to meet a friend of mine, Lamont Cranston. This is Harry Parker."

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Harry stood up. He was stoop shouldered and ascetic looking. He held out his left for Cranston to shake. His right hand had darted into his pocket as the door had opened.

"Fine looking glass you have there." Cranston's voice was full of admiration.

"The best." Harry grinned in childish delight. "Like to see my old glass?"

At Cranston's nod, Harry scuttled over to a wooden chest and opened it, revealing a home-made, but good-looking telescope.

"How many power?" asked Cranston.

"Fifteen." Harry was full of pride. "Made every part of it myself. But this new one is really going to be a beauty. It's going to be even better than the one..." His face wrinkled up ludicrously. He was ready to cry.

Alfie said quickly, "The last one he made was destroyed in the fire yesterday.

"I had just finished it," said the pathetic creature. "And I know that 'scope would have been the one to prove all my theories! Why did the house have to burn down... why? Why?"

Alfie patted Harry on the shoulder and signaled for Cranston to leave. Harry, not thinking, took his right hand out of his pocket with a handkerchief in it. He wiped his eyes and all saw what he had been self-conscious about. His right hand was small. The size of a baby's. It was a perfect ten-month-old child's hand. Perfect but for a web of flesh that joined the fingers together, duck fashion.

Cranston watched Alfie close the door.

"You see why grandmother doesn't like to have Harry around too much. He eats alone."

"Luckily for him, he was away from the house yesterday when it burned down. The chauffeur took him in to town to buy some parts for his 'scope."

"But I thought he said he built them from scratch?"

Alfie shrugged. "We pretend he does. All he really does is buy the parts and put them together. I've lost count of how many he's built. He gets one all set, takes one look at the moon, has a good cry and then starts to build another."

"Why does the sight of the moon affect him that way?"

"Ummm...Well..." Alfie looked embarrassed and uncomfortable. "You see, he wasn't too far off till Foster got bad. Harry idealized Foster because Foster was good-looking. When Foster started to go, he got the idea that he could see people on the moon. I think he was just teasing Harry. But he'd look through a telescope and describe all the things he saw on the moon, lovely women, the animals... Oh, he had it all worked out. But he'd never let Harry look through his telescope!"

"I see."

"Just before my father... was... you know, Harry tried to grab the 'scope out of Foster's hands and Foster got in a fury and broke it over Harry's head. It was quite messy..."

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"And ever since that, the poor soul has been trying to make a tube with which to see what Foster saw."

They were near the dining room. As the clear voices came out, Cranston thought, on the surface, a normal dinner party like any one, anywhere in the country... but underneath...

THE food had been good and well served. Vichyssoise, ice cold and delicate. Some iced fish mousse, a salad with an exquisite dressing, and some baked Alaska for dessert. It was the perfect light meal for the end of a muggy day.

Cranston toyed with his demi-tasse and listened to Toni. He had finally found something to which she was responsive. All her coldness and barriers were down. She was saying, "Toulouse Lautrec, I am just too passionately fond of..." She giggled and said, "Never end your sentences with a preposition."

Cranston smiled in return and said, "Remember the little boy who said, 'Why did you bring that book I didn't want to be read from out of up for?'"

She smiled. "That's the one to end them all. But about modern art..."

"Modern art!" Uncle Danny mimicked her tone. "Modern my eye! All it looks like to me is the signs we used to have out in front of the old 'ten-in-one' shouts! The belly signs! They were just as well done as those characters you drool over!"

Truthfully, Cranston in his heart of hearts agreed with Danny, but aloud he said, "Well, can you explain a nonobjective painter like Braque to me?"

Toni went right to it. The explanation served, if anything, to confuse Cranston even more than Braque's paintings did, but he listened attentively.

Danny Downs got up from the table, remembered to excuse himself only when glared at by Mrs. Lively and said, "Think I'll smoke a cigar out on the verandah, or the porch, or whatever you call that thing out there."

"It's a terrace and you know it, Daniel Downs." Mrs. Lively bit the words out as though they hurt her. She looked down at Cranston. "Toni, you've monopolized Mr. Cranston long enough. Won't you come down here, sir, and have a little brandy? Poor Mr. Lively always favored brandy. He said it made a bad dinner good and a good one superlative."

Cranston smiled his excuses to Toni and walked to the head of the table. Alfie scurried out of the chair next to his grandmother and pulled one into place for Cranston.

"I don't know what we shall do if our butler doesn't get up and around." She smiled when she said it.

"I'm not too bad a butler, am I?" Alfie smiled. "Maybe that's what I was cut out for... I've never found anything else at which I was worth a hoot!"

"No member of my family will ever..." Mrs. Lively saw that Alfie was teasing her and stopped. She smiled a little and said, "Mr. Cranston, what do you think of the situation in Europe? Is it as messy as the papers would have it appear?"

Cranston realized that his reputation as a world traveler had preceded him. He answered the question thoughtfully. While he spoke he was watching Toni who was at the other end of the room. She had had three drinks to his one during dinner and was drinking even more now.

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Eugenia, Toni's mother, had been very quiet all evening. She was sitting at the table now looking off into space with some degree of concentration.

Toni called down, "If you're wondering about mother, she's having a period of silence! In tune with the infinite and all that!"

Eugenia pretended not to hear her daughter but a deep flush came up her neck that gave her away. She looked off into space more determinedly than ever.

Mrs. Lively was saying, "Since my beautiful, beautiful old house burned down, I have realized that the world is in a ferment. Somehow, inside those doors which I have known so long, the world seemed a different place. An older, more graceful one with different values. But this..." she looked around the modern dining room, "this barn of a place makes me realize that the world does move."

Cranston nodded and then froze. Something was amiss. Danny ran into the room. He was chasing something that might have been a bird, but wasn't. It was white, about the size of a robin.

It fluttered through the air in little swoops just ahead of Daniel Downs' questing hands.

"It came through the air outside... I can't imagine what it is!" Downs' face, normally red, was livid. He chased the thing with purpose. With that obstinate perverseness of inanimate objects it skittered along just out of his reach.

The room was quiet but for his stertorous breathing. Cranston scowled. It should have been a humorous sight. A fat, middle-aged man chasing a... a... what was it? It looked like a paper airplane. One of those toys that bored children fold up out of a sheet of note paper.

Danny Downs clapped triumphant hands together. He had caught the object and now that it was still, it could be seen that it was as Cranston had thought, a toy paper airplane.

What was there in that to cause the entire room to wait with bated breath as Downs unfolded the paper? The childish, simple foolishness of it, in a place and at a time when there were no children for miles? Perhaps that was it, although Cranston thought there was a deeper significance to the fear that hung in the room like a palpable thing.

Downs turned, if anything, a shade whiter as he finally unfolded the paper. With an attempt at his usual bluff heartiness he said, "Fun and games, eh? Look at this, will you?" He placed the unfolded paper in front of Mrs. Lively. Cranston read it with her. His eyes raced over the paper.

It said and the letters of the message were scrawling up hill and down dale, each letter larger or smaller than the one that preceded it: "How'd you like my fire sale? That was just to give you an idea of what a jolly Deathday you're going to have!"

Cranston just had time to see the scrawled letters that spelled out Foster Downs' name when Mrs. Lively crumpled up the paper into a ball.

"If one of you are doing this in order to give me a heart attack, let me tell you that my heart is a healthy organ indeed!"

Alfie gasped, "Grandmother! How can you think such a thing! It's obvious that Foster has done this. He escaped just as he said he would. He set fire to the house and now... now he's waiting out there in the dark..."

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waiting... to kill one of us! But who? Who?"

That was but one of the many questions that demanded answering... and there was but one person who could answer them! The Shadow! No mocking laugh proclaimed his presence but he was there!

Ready... waiting...

CHAPTER IV

OUT on the velvety lawn that surrounded the modern house, a fleeting, vagrant shadow, blacker, more round than the real shadows, moved cautiously from the cover of one shrub to the cover of the next.

It was time and past time for The Shadow, Master of Darkness, to prove his contention that the "weed of crime bears bitter fruit"...

The dinner party at the Lively house had become more and more unlike its name. It had been as unlively as any pall-bearer could ask.

Toni had explained the horror that had hung in the air. The toy paper airplane, that had been one of Foster's little habits. It was his method of communicating with the family when he was in a manic depressive slough of despond and had had no desire for conversation.

The Shadow, moving as soundlessly as fur rubbing on fur, paced his careful way towards the fence that divided the estate from the huge undeveloped area that surrounded it. He moved with purpose. There was one thing that cried aloud for investigation and before dawn The Shadow was determined to get an answer to a nagging question that had sprung full blown into his active brain.

In a window, where the shades were drawn, the lights out, a restless man paced the floor. From time to time, he took a quick look out the window. He peeked through the curtains and surveyed the lawn that stretched beyond.

It was Alfie, and he was in the throes of insomnia. Then, and this put the finishing touch to his mood, he saw, at the very edge of the lawn, a movement... a figure, dark as the night and insubstantial as a fleeting cloud, a figure that to Alfie's inflamed brain could only be that of the skulking maniac of whom he lived in terror!

It was childish and he knew it. But he leaped into bed, and shivering in the grip of an ague of fear, he pulled the covers up over his head and lay there in shaking expectation that any moment might be his end.

The calm, quiet passage of time did nothing to ease the fear that gripped him like a giant talon. He waited, and his imagination made the slightest squeak of the boards of the house the footsteps of a killer, approaching ever closer... closer...

Beyond the bushes, The Shadow paused and reconnoitered. Was that whisper of sound over there a person... or... no, it was some small wild animal emboldened by the night.

He had quite a walk ahead of him and as he strode along, he hoped that Shrevvie would make good time in his trip from California. By tomorrow or the next day at the latest, Shrevvie should be in Chicago. He was driving a borrowed cab, and if The Shadow knew him, he would try to get some kind of paying fare to cover the expenses of the trip.

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The night air was considerably and healthfully cooler. The breezes coming in from the Lake were making the evening pleasant. It helped The Shadow's thought processes to be out on a night like this, with nature clearing the cobwebs from his brain.

As he walked along he ran over the meager store of facts that had appeared to date. Foster Downs, out of the asylum on a rampage of motiveless murder? That didn't seem too likely. More probably in The Shadow's experience was some kind of mercenary mechanism. The Shadow decided to have the conditions of Mrs. Lively's will examined. The meaning of the fire at the old house warranted some probing. It was the blackened remains of the mansion that The Shadow was heading towards.

He smiled as he saw the white iron deer that were spread out over the formal lawn. The dogs, the deer, the little figure of a Negro dressed as a jockey with his iron hands held out for the reins of a carriage that would never stop there again all made a picture of the eighties that was in a way pathetic when seen in combination with the stretching fingers of ruined stone that stretched upward in the night.

The fire had been as complete as any The Shadow had ever seen. He stepped knee-deep into ashes and ruin as he walked out towards what had been the center of the house. Occasional stretches of masonry made barricades to his progress. He vaulted them as effortlessly as he would have a gymnasium horse.

He knew that the firemen had gone over the ground with a fine-tooth comb searching for some incendiary device. That was part of the pattern of their work, they did it as automatically as they responded to a fire alarm. There was certainly no slightest odor of gasoline or kerosene... but then none of the papers had mentioned anything about that. Certainly some keen reporter would have played it up if there had been the slightest indication thereof.

He ran some of the ash through his fingers carefully straining it. Then, when the moon, flickering through a warhead of clouds, spotlighted a section of the wreckage, he looked it over carefully. He strained the area with his eyes, just as he had used his fingers. Perhaps it was luck, more likely it was that extra-sensory perception that every good man-hunter owns, for flickering like something alive, he saw what looked like a jewel.

Brushing aside the ashes and detritus that had covered all but the tiny eye, he found a semi-circular piece of glass. Its edges were beveled. It was six inches in diameter, it sparkled in the vagrant moonlight.

The Shadow's eyes sparkled too, for here he had found the first thread that was to lead him through the labyrinth of the spider web that was being woven around the members of the accursed family.

The low rollicking laugh of The Shadow rolled out. No reason to keep it low now. There were no ears but his own for miles around. His laugh, implicit with humor, had an undertone of savagery to it, for now The Shadow knew at least one thing that would put the clamps on the murderous pyromaniac!

THE state road, broad and level, made a white ribbon that stretched as far as the eye could see. Off the road, at an angle, a roadside inn, neon lights flickering their message of spurious cheer to any wanderers, made a spot on the purity of the road.

Telephone wires led off from the main poles to a pole set near the inn. The Shadow, tracing the wires to their end, nodded in gratitude. It was essential that he phone and it was impossible to phone from the Lively house, for this was a call that had to have no eavesdropping ears in the neighborhood.

The juke box, blaring both lights and sound, was playing a jazz recording. There was a clique of bar hangers-on at one end of the room. The phone booth, set by itself, was in shadow. None of the drinkers at the bar saw that the shadows momentarily darkened. No one heard the nickels and quarters drop into the box. The

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Shadow left the door ajar so that the automatic light set in the ceiling of the booth would not flash on. He spoke in a whisper that the long-distance operator could hear but that did not sound above the blare of the juke box.

The time was just right. The Shadow knew that his agent Burbank was on duty alone in the telephone answering service. That is, alone in the cubby hole where The Shadow's private, unlisted line flicked out a warning signal on the P.B.I. board.

Burbank's welcome tones answered The Shadow's whisper. The conversation was hurried but to the point. The Shadow wanted Harry Vincent to fly out to Chicago and he wanted to know if Burbank had heard from Shrevvie.

Shrevvie had checked with New York when he went through Salt Lake City. That was fine, it meant that he'd be in Chicago the next day. Even the stoical Burbank gawped in surprise when The Shadow asked that Harry Vincent bring an Old Farmer's Almanac along with him, as well as the weather reports for the last four years.

The Shadow smiled at the surprise in Burbank's voice and said that it wouldn't be necessary to bring thirteen hundred weather reports, all he was interested in were the reports on four specific days.

That accomplished, The Shadow was gone from the inn as quietly and as unobserved as he had come. Not a patron of the bar knew of the stranger who had been there for a moment, only to vanish into the darkness that was his natural habitat.

The juke box's blare even covered the faintest echo of the murmuring laugh that remained for a split second after The Shadow's physical presence was gone.

ALONE in his room, Lamont Cranston looked at himself in the mirror that covered an entire wall and smiled at his reflection. Alfie had lent him a pair of pajamas and there was a slight discrepancy in their builds. Cranston, while the same height as Alfie, was big boned, his body covered with slabs of hard muscle. From the size of the pajamas, no muscle had ever had the nerve to cover one of Alfie's blue-blooded veins.

Turning the lights out, Cranston got into bed. With that light out, all was darkness in the entire house. When Cranston fell asleep the rest of the house was deep in slumber... all but one.

Alfie, still under the covers, turned and tossed and prayed that day would come and dispel the fears that kept him wide-eyed.

Danny Downs turned in his bed, but he was sound asleep. A pleased smile flickered across his broad, pleasant face.

He was dreaming that he was again with a carnival and even in his sleep, his lips moved as he gave the carny spiel.

Nightmare horrors made sleep a mockery to Toni. She was sleeping, head buried in her pillow, covers pulled up. Her nightmare was a recurrent one. One to which she could never accustom herself. In her dreams she became a thing of terror...a Jekyll and Hyde thing that ravened for blood... that demanded the slaking of a horrid thirst.

Uncle Harry, a vacuous smile on his slack lips, asleep in his room, far away from the others, was in seventh heaven. He was dreaming of the moon. He was on it and a weird and wonderful fairyland it was. He leaped through the air, released by the difference in gravity between earth and her satellite. Ahead of him, deep in a

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crater, a moon–woman waited, coy and lovely.

Sleeping the light sleep of the very old, the matriarch of the household, the guardian of the purse strings, moved restlessly under her variety of comforters. Her window was closed tight. No night air for her. She knew the dangers... the miasmas that the night held. In her sleep, she was reliving the events of the day. She had just come to the part where the little paper airplane was wafted in through the window.

She chased it desperately as though it held all happiness in it. But as she chased it, the airplane grew and grew... it gradually darkened till the white was dyed deepest black... then slowly, the form changed and the airplane became a ravening bat that swooped in circles that became smaller and smaller. She opened her mouth to scream but in her dream no sound came from her paralyzed vocal cords. She strained in an agony of terror as the bat came closer. Its little red eyes were staring at her. The horror became more horrible when a bizarre anthropomorphic change began. The bat's face was becoming human.

She tore at the bedclothes in her sleep and wakened just as the bat had completed its metamorphosis. She wakened with the sight still branded on her eyeballs. Her lips moved. She had recognized who the bat had become. She looked out into the darkness and said, "It was Foster... the bat became Foster."

It was long before she could compose herself for sleep again.

Eugenia? Daughter of the matriarch, mother of Toni? She slept like a cow. No flickering thoughts went through her brain. She was dreaming, of course, as all dream, but her dream had to do with a broad meadow on which too–white, unreal lambs, leaped and gamboled.

There was one, not too far away, who lay awake making no pretense of sleep. His thoughts were grim, heavy. Over and over he had reached one conclusion. The whole thing was untenable. Something would have to be done! Harriet Lively must die... and quickly! He thought over all the plans he had made for her demise and came back to one... the same one that he always came back to. Poison! That was the ticket! His lips curved grimly in the darkness.

And then, just before dawn, in that hour when all human resistance is at lowest ebb, they all slept... fevered imaginations cooled in the saving power of deep sleep. All was quiet and still.

But a decision had been made. There was to be another death. And that death had to be soon... or never.

The sun came up and then vanished, hidden behind black thunderclouds that soon fulfilled their promise. Rain cascaded down in rushing torrents. Tens of tons of gallons, enough to wash the earth. Enough to wash away every stain but one... blood. Blood still stained the earth and no power could wipe it out but one. The Shadow!

But this was no time for the appearance of that impersonal figure of darkness and retribution. Instead Lamont Cranston, looking crisp and cool as though dressed anew and not, as was the case, in travel–stained clothes, stepped towards the breakfast room.

He stopped a moment and looked out at the rain. He was the last one down. He could hear the babel of voices of the family coming out from the room. For just a moment he wanted to be alone to map out his day's program. But it was not to be. Toni, looking delightful, as though she had just come out of a beauty parlor, spotted him and waved to him to join the group at table.

Harry evidently was allowed at the table at this meal. He sat next to Eugenia and played with his silver. Mrs. Lively was not in evidence. Instead, Alfie sat at the head of the table next to Danny Downs and mimicking his grandmother, waved Cranston to his seat. "A beautiful morning, is it not, Mr. Cranston?" He said it playfully,

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imitating his grandmother's tone and actions.

"I shan't say anything about it's being good only for ducks, so relax." Cranston smiled as he attacked his food.

"You seem to have had a good night's sleep," Toni said a trifle enviously to Cranston.

"I did indeed." The food was as good in its way as the dinner had been the night before. Cranston attacked it with a will and let Danny carry on the conversation.

He was not one to shilly-shally. He said, "How long are we gonna let the old bat keep us from getting the cops here?"

"Oh no. Not that!" Eugenia sounded shocked. "No police... not again! Besides what would they be able to do?"

"Able to do? They could give us a twenty-four-hour guard to keep us from getting our bloody throats cut!" Danny barked at Eugenia.

"Oh, don't exaggerate. After all, Foster wouldn't do that!"

"You mean that little housewarming we had doesn't count?" It was Alfie who asked this.

"Tosh! It was probably..." Eugenia sought for inspiration and found it. "I know, it was spontaneous combustion!" She folded her hands in her lap as she made this extraordinary pronouncement.

"Spontaneous my foot!" Danny gulped down the last of his coffee, burnt his mouth, muffled a curse and stomped away from the table.

He paused at the door, turned and said, "You all know me. I'm no crepe-hanger! But I'm scared and I don't mind telling you that! Remember..." He paused, went on after a moment: "... remember I was the one that found Gene dead with the two bullets in him!"

He left on that, leaving another heavy pall of silence. Alfie turned white at this reference to his father's death. Finally he said, "Danny's right! I'm going to get out of here and I don't care what she says! I'm not going to stay here and die like dad!"

Toni's voice, heavy with sarcasm murmured, "How delightful. Just take the first train out, dear. Get a ticket to far away. And when you do, tell me how to buy a ticket without any money and I'll get one too!"

That was it. That was the rope which tied all these malcontents under one roof. Mrs. Lively had brought them up in such a way that they had no professions. No means of livelihood, and then, she bound them to her with a real silver cord.

Cranston thought, it's no wonder that murder stalks this family. It's an ideal breeding ground for evil passions!

CHAPTER V

THE front door slammed open and a heavy, hearty voice yelled out, "Hi! Who's home? Come on... welcome the traveler!"

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Eugenia Downs was on her feet. Her hand on her bosom in a coyly affected gesture that was distressing in a woman of her years.

She said, "It's his voice! My dear, dear husband!" She ran from the breakfast room.

Cranston raised his eyebrows in inquiry. Alfie gestured at Toni who didn't look too happy. "It's her father. The wanderer."

"If he'd only take me with him on some of his excursions I think it all wouldn't seem so bad!" Toni looked sulkier than ever.

"You know very well that the tiny income he inherited won't stretch that far!" Alfie was quick in defense of his uncle.

Danny, arm around his brother's shoulder, swaggered into the room. Eugenia clung to the other side of the big, stout man, dressed in conservative banker's clothes. His nose was his most outstanding feature. It was a huge blocky thing that looked like a blob of clay thrown on by an errant child. His small eyes were made smaller by the size of his nose. Otherwise, in a bluff, businesslike way, he matched his brother Danny.

"Mr. Downs," Alfie made the introduction, "this is Mr. Cranston. Lamont Cranston."

"Glad to meet you, sir. It's a pleasure to see a new face in this palace of mournful pleasures!" He had a quick grin like Danny's but it seemed to flash on and off as though controlled by a button. The smile never reached his small, active eyes.

"Where's the Battle Hymn of the Republic?" he asked.

"She's coming down. I heard her leave her room." Toni smiled a wan smile at her farther. "How are you, big shot?"

"Not too good, not too bad. Can't complain."

"You'd better not! Where have you been this time?" Mrs. Lively was appareled in a dress which looked exactly like the rusty brown bombazine she'd worn the day before. Cranston, looking at her, realized that in all probability she had a dressmaker make a dozen or so of a pattern and let it go at that. But Mrs. Lively was speaking snappishly.

"Timbuktu? Port Said?" She wasn't as annoyed as she was pretending to be.

"Now, Harriet, you know I don't go to unromantic places like those. No, I've been down in New Orleans, gathering material for my novel." He explained this parenthetically to Cranston.

"Dad, do you have to go through that routine?" Toni turned to Cranston. "You know, he's been writing this novel for ten years. It's just his excuse for getting out for a change of scenery."

Her father flushed a trifle. But evidently he was used to her outspokenness for he shrugged it off and said to Cranston, "Wonderful place. Ever been there? I was living in the Vieux Carrel."

Cranston who had been in New Orleans in the summer and knew of the mosquitoes which plagued the town at that time, wondered why anyone who didn't have to would live there at that time. But he nodded to the question and answered, "Yes, it is a town I go to when my nerves are jangled. Life moves so slowly there that

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it relaxes you from the inside out."

"You mean you get upset?" Alfie sounded as if he didn't believe it.

Cranston smiled, "It doesn't happen very often but there are times when all of us have to get away and just sit, for a time. It helps to evacuate yourself, I find."

One of the servants passed by in the hall carrying Mr. Downs' luggage. Downs called out, "Leave that small suitcase here, please." He spoke to Cranston. "I brought back some pernod. It helps to make some wonderful hot-weather drinks. Just the tiniest dash for flavor's sake. Soon as things get settled a little more, I'll whip up a Sazarac."

The rain made everything clammy to the touch. As the day wore on, a long cool drink sounded like a good idea to everyone. Downs made good his promise and poured out a cocktail shaker full of drinks.

He even prevailed on Mrs. Lively to join them. She looked at the drink with foreboding and said, "I don't like this drinking in the afternoon!"

"Pish tosh," Downs laughed at her. "It's just what we need."

Alfie set himself out to entertain Cranston. He sat next to him and talked extravagantly and at great length about the people who'd been at the party at which he had met Cranston the first time.

Cranston sipped his drink and listened to Alfie with half an ear. He was looking around the room. All of them had had a second drink. Mrs. Lively still held her first drink. She had barely sipped it.

She caught his eyes and said, "I can't see how you all can drink this slop. A good wine, or a fine brandy, yes. But this!" Her grimace was indicative of contempt.

Cranston had drunk better Sazaracs in his time, but he drank his with an eye on the way the liquor was hitting all of them. It had relaxed their taut nerves to a great degree. There had been a long whispered conference between Uncle Danny and his brother which had evidently brought Downs up to date on the happenings, for some of the good humor seemed to go out of him after the talk.

Toni was at the piano rippling a slender thread of melody from something of Chopin's. Her fingers suddenly crashed out a discord. She was watching her grandmother and her hands seemed to realize something was amiss before her head did. For she didn't scream until after she had crashed her hands in dissonance.

The crashing sound took Cranston's attention away from Alfie and in the direction of Toni's gaze. Mrs. Lively, face contorted, was slowly slipping over sideways. There was something slow and grand about it, like a ship going down.

He leaped from his seat and caught her before she hit the floor. Her eyes were glazed. He felt for her pulse. It was weak, thready. Her breath was rasping and harsh.

"Call a doctor, fast!" he said. Then, after a moment's thought he added, "Someone go to the kitchen and get milk... mustard... hurry!"

It was touch and go. In the bedroom Cranston forced the emetic down between the blue lips which were clenched together as though to prevent any outcry, any show of emotion. Her eyes were wide open, staring. They seemed to see something which she did not wish to credit.

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Cranston leaned down as she finally murmured between tight lips, "The bat... the bat... It is..."

Then the emetic worked.

It was all of half an hour before a doctor could get out to the house. He hurried into the bedroom, a bustling, self-important little man.

He felt Mrs. Lively's pulse, looked at her eyes, put a stethoscope to her heart and said, "Hmmmmm."

Cranston didn't find this very informative. He said, "I gave her an emetic. It seemed to help. Do you think she's strong enough for a stomach pump?"

The doctor looked around in annoyance. "Are you a doctor, sir?"

Cranston shook his head no.

"Then, since you aren't, suppose you leave these decisions to me."

Alfie, framed in the doorway was furious. "Why, how dare you? If it hadn't been for Cranston, I don't think she'd have lived till you got here!"

The doctor's wave of his hand took in the mustard, the white of egg, the hot milk, that Cranston had commandeered from the kitchen. He said, "You mean these elementary measures? Ummmm. Yes, I suppose they helped. However..."

Toni who had come up behind Alfie said, "However what? Are you going to do anything or stand and argue and brumph? Will she live? Can you tell?"

The doctor paced back and forth in the room with his hands behind his back. He seemed deep in thought. Toni felt an impulse to shake him. He was so self-important, so small!

"I imagine with my care, she may pull through, yes. However, I'd like to be alone with her now, please."

He shoed them out of the room looking like a farmer's wife chasing chickens.

"What an exasperating man!" Toni was still furious.

"He's just trying to make himself seem more important than he is." Alfie patted Toni on the shoulder.

Cranston nodded in agreement. "Just because he has a disagreeable personality doesn't mean he's not a good doctor. We'd better go to the others."

Eugenia, practically hysterical, dabbed at her eyes with a long, trailing chiffon handkerchief. "Will... will poor, dear mother... will she... live?"

"I have every reason to think so," said Cranston. "But not because the murderer didn't try hard! If she had finished her drink she'd have been dead before she hit the floor."

"You mean," Downs looked ill, "that her drink was poisoned?"

"Of course. Don't be simple-minded, Dad, it doesn't become you," Toni snapped.

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"But that means... look, I made her drink. It looks as if I did it!" At that second, a scream staccatoed at their eardrums. It came from the end of the house where the kitchen was located.

They made a serried row as all of them ran in pursuit of Cranston who had led the way from the room. In the spotless modern kitchen, equipped with every possible device to make the householder's job an easy one, an old, stout cook sat on a chair with her apron over her face. She was rocking back and forth as she emitted the screams that had brought them running.

Toni went to her and said, "Sadie, stop that! Stop it this instant! What's wrong?"

The cook lowered the apron a trifle, looked up in fear that relaxed a bit as she recognized Toni and pointed to the bare enamel that covered the work bench. On the center of the glistening surface, there lay a folded paper airplane.

Her fingers trembled as she pointed at it. "I don't know... I don't know how long that's been there. I was busy out back... I come back and started to peel some things... It wasn't till I went for a towel that I saw it there! You know what it means? I read the papers... I know he's loose... I remember when he used to fly them things at me all the time... Miss Toni... I can't stay now. He'll kill me... just like he's gonna kill all the rest of you!"

Her trembling finger pointed them out one at a time. She repeated, "Like he's gonna kill all of you!"

"There, there," said Toni in the soothing voice one would use to a frightened child. "He won't hurt you. He always liked you!"

Cranston unfolded the note. The handwriting was the same as the one he'd seen the night before, badly formed letters, the sentences that ran up and down senselessly like a roller coaster.

This note was short. It said with ugly, concise brutality, "Happy Death Day, Dear Harriet!"

"You see!" said Uncle Danny. "He's not infallible! He probably threw that in after he somehow doctored the drinks." Danny turned to his brother. "Did you leave the glasses anywhere? You made the drinks out here and came in acting as butler. I remember that!"

Mr. Downs looked thoughtful. "I wish I could say I had left them alone just so as to clear myself... but I don't remember... Wait! I did! I know I did!"

His face cleared. "I left the tray right there under the window for a moment. After all my trouble, I had forgotten to get the pernod. I left everything there while I went to my suitcase and got the pernod."

"Did anyone see you there?" Cranston asked.

The cook who had subsided a bit nodded. "I did, sir. I saw him at his suitcase from one of the other rooms. I wondered what he was doing... that's the only reason I remember it."

Downs looked so relieved that Cranston waited for the same question to form in their minds that was in his. How had the killer known what glass Mrs. Lively would take? If the note hadn't been addressed to her, then one could assume that the killer was being wanton, willing that anyone who took the fatal glass should die. But the note pointed at Harriet Lively as the victim.

Toni saw it first. She looked from her father to her uncle, then to Cranston. Her broad lovely forehead was furrowed in thought. She said, "But..."

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Alfie got it then. He butted in. "But how could Foster have known which glass grandmother would take?" He shuddered as he said, "But... he wouldn't care... he wouldn't mind which one of us died."

"No! Don't you see?" Toni said. "Don't you see that the letter says that it will be grandmother?"

Eugenia who had been quiet and frightened, in the background, really frightened now, dabbed at her mouth with her handkerchief, and said, "I know that. Just as Foster did... you know it too, you others in the family, but you've forgotten!"

Her husband turned and said irately, "Well, speak up. Don't act like a Delphic oracle! How could he have known?"

The cook brightened visibly and said, "Oh, I know too. I'll get it and show you!" She bustled out of the room.

"The glass... all those glasses are from an old set," Eugenia explained while they waited for the cook to return.

Cranston had noticed the lovely old rock crystal of which the glasses had been cut.

"The cook, not this one, the one before her, chipped one of the set. Mother wouldn't allow us to throw it away because that would have broken up the set. So she always insisted on being given the glass herself! She said she knew where the crack was and avoided it!"

The cook came back with the glass. Now, with the knowledge Eugenia had just uttered, Cranston could see the tiny chip. It was in the rim. That chip to the killer had been a guide, an arrow to carry death to a predestined receiver!

All of them in the kitchen started nervously, for from nowhere, a faint ghost of a laugh echoed away and was gone as quickly as it had come!

One of the pieces of the deadly jig-saw puzzle had fallen into place. The Shadow knew! The Shadow had seen through the phantasmagoria that was blinding the others. He saw through it to the other side, to where a murderer was. He knew just where to put his hand on the killer!

CHAPTER VI

BUT this was not the time for that dread figure of the night whose very name struck fear to the hearts of the most ruthless killers to appear.

Instead, Lamont Cranston, leaning negligently against the wall, looked out the window at the pouring rain and said, "Surely that doctor should be finished with his examination by now."

At that, they could hear the rapid patter of the doctor's feet as he rustled towards them.

"I am going directly to the police. I don't care what she says! The idea! Trying to bribe me! Of all things! What does she think I am, a charlatan? A quack?"

Toni slipped by the indignant doctor and went to her grandmother. The doctor was still spluttering as he put his raincoat on. "The idea. The very audacity of the woman!"

"I gather," said Uncle Danny dryly, "that the patient is feeling better."

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"Yes," the doctor answered. "Well enough to insult me!"

He stuck his chest out like a pouter pigeon and seemed all set to carry on again, but Mr. Downs interrupted. Feeling his blobby nose, he said quietly, "Come, come now, doctor, she's an old woman who's just had a dreadful shock. Let's be a little charitable. She's used to getting her own way. When she can't get it by intimidation, why she's positive she can by using money."

The doctor deflated a little. "I can see your point. She's a strong old lady. Has insides like a forty-year-old. Otherwise, I'd be making a post mortem instead of prescribing palliatives for her. But she must not be excited in any way! She must have absolute calm!"

"But you are the very one who is making that impossible, doctor." Eugenia looked strangely like her mother as she continued. "After all the one thing that will excite her the most is having some flat-footed morons stomping around here! We can't have the police, not yet. Please! I know what I am saying. If she ever finds them here in the house she'll have a stroke!"

"Well..."

Eugenia returned to the attack. She had seen the man's hesitation. "I assure you that measures will be taken and as soon as you think she's strong enough, you can call the police!"

Downs looked at his wife in amazement. This evidently was a side of her character with which he was not familiar. Here was the woman she would have been if she had not been so dominated by her mother. Downs rather admired her.

The doctor, looking a little brow-beaten, said again, "Well... I don't know. My duty is clear... and yet, I owe a duty to my patient."

Eugenia watched him making up his mind and her fingers twined the chiffon handkerchief into a crumpled mass.

Cranston thought, the family's fear of the police was almost psychopathic as some of the happenings in the house itself.

The doctor snapped his fingers in decision. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. When I get home I'll write out a report of my conclusions and file it away. As soon as Mrs. Lively is up and around I shall take it to the police and explain the reason for my delay."

He beamed at them in a sudden access of good feeling. He knew that he was doing them a favor and evidently rather liked the position he was in, of having the famous and fabulously rich Livelys indebted to him.

As he left, Alfie said to Cranston, "Not a nice man, not at all."

"You know he was quite right. You should have the police here."

"Don't you think that's what I want most desperately?" Alfie's face contorted in fear. "But... we can't go counter to grandmother's wishes. We can't..." His voice was full of despair. The fact that Cranston had been there and even so, the poison had appeared, had shaken his faith in Lamont Cranston. Now there seemed nowhere to turn at all. If only he had the courage to run away... ship out... leave for some distant romantic port. But even while he considered this, he knew he'd never do it. He was too soft... too frightened, too used to an easy life, to servitors, to good food, fine clothes. He was fastened to his grandmother's apron strings.

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Cranston had watched the changes of expression go over Alfie's weak face and could read them as if the lad had spoken aloud. For lad he seemed. There was little of manhood in him despite his years.

By nightfall, the rain had ceased. The atmosphere, buoyant, fresh, clean, lifted up Mrs. Lively so much that she was almost her old self. Instead of lording it at the head of the table, she was holding court in her bedroom.

Even the court jester was there, Uncle Harry, horribly uncomfortable, moving his tiny hand inside his suit pocket, bent over, miserable. He sat on a tiny spindling chair to one side of the matriarch.

The others were spread around the room in varying postures. None of them were too comfortable. Cranston had made himself as inconspicuous as possible in the shadows of the heavy ugly drapes that fell from ceiling to floor. The old brass bed, even more of an eyesore in this beautifully proportioned room than it had been in any other room of its existence, seemed to set the keynote of the proceedings.

This was a new side of Mrs. Lively to Cranston, but not to her family evidently, for they set their faces and took it. She was propped up in bed, a jacket around her sparse shoulders, her hair in a mob cap that covered all her old head.

"It is embarrassing for me to have to say this in front of a stranger." She glanced at Cranston through heavy-lidded eyes, and went on. "But said it must be. All of you know me and know that my word is something that I do not idly break. If one word of today's happenings reaches outside these walls..." she raised her voice so the servants grouped in the hall could hear her, "I shall disinherit the lot of you! I have an unsigned will all made out, as you no doubt are aware. That will leaves every cent I possess to charity!"

Her voice was gritty, harsh, the experience of the afternoon had made it sore and she was straining it by speaking now. Nevertheless, she continued, "You, my loved ones," there was no love in her voice, "are my favorite form of charity, only because I truly believe that charity begins at home. But... if you flout my wishes in this, the consequences will be disastrous to all of you, who have waited so long and impatiently for me to die!"

The expression in her eyes was hideous, reptilian. She was getting a warped kind of pleasure out of this showing of power. Her voice rose, "Now get out! All of you, leave me in peace!"

Cranston, because of his position, was the last to leave the room. Her voice, weaker now, gentle by comparison, spoke. "Mr. Cranston, you must think me a dreadful person."

He did, but he assumed a false smile as she went on, "I haven't even thanked you for your quick-wittedness. I have no doubt that before any of my 'loving' family thought of the measures you used, I should have been dead."

He said something polite and she went on. "I am dreadfully tired. Thank you again, and good night. You seem very sure of yourself. I would like to have a talk with you on the morrow."

As he closed the door, her eyes were already closing in sleep. Only her indomitable will had kept her awake at all. She was heavily dosed with sleeping pills by the doctor.

Cranston sighed as he left the room. All that energy, that will, what a force for good it might have been if she hadn't become cranky and warped by power. Or perhaps it wasn't the power, perhaps the inward quirk in her was the result of the same factors that had led to the insanity of Foster, to the peculiarities of Uncle Harry... to all the things that were wrong with the old, old family.

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There seemed to be an impalpable wall around all normal, real functions in this house. No one loved as other people did. Even Toni, who held her mother in contempt, treated her father as though he were an unwelcome house guest.

It was a strange house made more strange by the surroundings. The loveliness of the house, the thought which had gone into its design, all were being used in opposition to the design of the house. It was a house for living and it had become a house for dying!

This had been the house where Eugene, Eugenia's twin brother, had been killed. Cranston wanted more information about that murder. Harry Vincent was the man for the job. He'd be in Chicago on the morrow, give him a couple of hours in a newspaper morgue, a couple more to have a beer or two with some reporters, and Cranston would have more information than the prosecuting attorney had had at the trial which had placed Foster Downs in the insane asylum!

A state wide search was on for the escaped lunatic, that Cranston knew. He was positive, too, that the search was especially stringent right around the house, for the police were not the stupid oafs that old Mrs. Lively thought them. They knew that the man would head back to his own family.

Out there, Lamont Cranston looked through the window at the rain washed and now quickly drying lawn; out there police, state and city, were punctiliously drag-netting every road, searching, asking questions, tracking down the progress of the escaped man.

He sighed again. All this wealth, all these people, tied to one another, tied inextricably with fastenings of money, to the matriarch who had a will of iron.

CHAPTER VII

DINNER came and passed uneventfully, but all of them had the feeling that it was the calm before the storm, that even more ominous things were to happen before the evil that hung over the house was finally exorcised.

Lamont Cranston made his excuses and went to town. He was driven by the quiet chauffeur in the station wagon. Cranston had said that he meant to pick up some clothes. But that was not the prime reason for his going, nor was that the reason that his brief case lay across his lap. He meant to contact his agent, Harry Vincent. Events were moving faster and faster. Part of the ugly plot was coming apart, showing the grinning face of the design that lay under the surface.

At the Loop, pausing only momentarily to look at Chicago's equivalent of New York's Broadway, Cranston made his way to the hotel where he knew that Vincent waited.

A dark alley off the brightly lighted thoroughfare made a perfect dressing room. The brief case open, Cranston pulled the zipper of the central compartment open. The black cape of The Shadow fluffed out and expanded. Cranston's hat went into the case, and the black slouch hat of The Shadow went on his head. The case whipped under The Shadow's cape, and a figure of darkness and night blended with the blackness of the shadows.

IN Room 303, Harry Vincent lay back on the bed and considered the ceiling. He was marshaling the facts he had gathered. On a taboret next to the bed, lay the Farmer's Almanac and the weather reports that The Shadow had requested.

His window, wide open to take advantage of any fleeting wind, had curtains that hung down to the floor. They

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fluttered in a motion only slightly more pronounced than the motion that had occupied them all evening.

Vincent leaned over the edge of the bed to reach for the Farmer's Almanac. He smothered a gasp of surprise. You'd think he'd be used to those baffling entrances of The Shadow, but somehow time did not make him more accustomed to them. The Shadow was next to his bed calmly reading the Almanac.

The harsh overhead light illuminated the high bridge of his strong, hawklike nose. His eyes were busy on the type in front of him. A vagrant light flickered on the girasol in the ring on his finger as he turned the pages rapidly.

"Hello." Vincent smiled.

"Glad you got here. I need some more information."

"Well, first let me tell you what I dug up this afternoon. Foster Downs, the guy who broke out of his padded cell the other day, has quite a history. He was in quite a lot of hot water with the cops all during his youth. His grandmother's money and influence helped him out and covered up for him. But most of the dirt came out at the trial. It weighed heavily against him.

"His past history did more to send him away than the actual evidence that the prosecution dug up. The facts, as far as I could find out, were these. He was known to be whacky, he said that he went to his Uncle Gene's new house, never having seen it before. The entrance and he was quite heated about this he said, was facing the south. He went in, and found his uncle dead. The gun was clasped in his uncle's hand.

"It was proved, as you no doubt know, that Gene Lively had been dead about an hour, when a second shot was fired into his head. Only a moron or a lunatic could have claimed that an hour-dead corpse picked up a gun and shot himself."

"Foster Downs insisted that the entrance of the house was to the south?"

"Over and over again, despite the fact that the house faces north."

"Yes, it does. I've seen the house in question."

"You see how weak the case was against him. There was really nothing conclusive except the absurdity of his testimony. The jury felt that only a madman could have told such a story and acted accordingly."

"I see." The Shadow knew only too well how often a jury acted on things that had no relevance to the case in hand. There were a thousand such instances, trials where it was brought out that a man's way of life was different from his neighbors, therefore, because of something that the jury found freakish in his behavior pattern, the accused was jailed, not because of the evidence about the crime.

Of course, Foster's testimony was outre, that business about the position of the house and the gun in the long-dead man's hand...

The Shadow gave his aide a rapid resume that brought him up to date on what had been transpiring out at the Lively place.

"I see. What do I do next?" Harry Vincent asked.

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"Starting at the insane asylum, check on the search that the police are making for Foster Downs. Check carefully, a lot depends on what you find!"

A knock at the door interrupted them. The Shadow eased back into the shadows behind the curtains. Vincent opened the door cautiously.

The Shadow, waiting, smiled at the hoarse, cracked voice that said, "Howdja do! Long time no see. I don't know from no' about what cooks!"

It was Shrevvie who walked into the room, a broad grin splitting his face in half.

Harry Vincent was shaking his hand. "We have a visitor, Shrevvie."

The Shadow stepped out into the light. Shrevvie's grin was back in place. "Hi!"

The Shadow nodded a hello, and asked, "Did the cab stand the trip?"

"It's better than ever. All broke in nice. Ready for action, Shadow."

"Stand by for plenty of action. I'll be down presently."

A few last minute instructions to Harry Vincent and The Shadow was gone. He took the Almanac as well as the weather reports with him. He left a badly puzzled man behind him. Vincent could not tie any of the loose ends together. He could not see what the reports had to do with the escape of a pyromaniac, a madman on the loose, ready to kill all who stood before him.

In the cab, Shrevvie heaved a sigh of relief. It was good to be back in harness, especially with Vincent in the background. Shrevvie had missed him when he and The Shadow were out on the West Coast.

He wondered when The Shadow would join him. As usual, he jumped when a quiet voice from the back of the cab said, "Let's go!"

He hadn't heard The Shadow enter the cab. He cut away from the curb out in front of the hotel that housed Vincent.

The Shadow gave him the name of the hotel where his clothes were. It was Lamont Cranston who stepped out of the cab. Minutes later, he was back with a small suitcase.

"Head for Diversey Street. I'll tell you when to cut off."

The cab drove quietly through the traffic. At a whispered direction, Shrevvie cut off. Lamont Cranston stepped out of the cab and before he paced away to the waiting station wagon, whispered to Shrevvie, "Head out north... follow this station wagon. When we go into the house, park the cab where it won't be seen and wait for me!"

Back at the Lively house, Alfie sighed with relief when he saw the tall figure of Cranston step into the house carrying a suit case. Cranston was his last hope. He had even feared while Cranston was gone that maybe he might never come back... that the crimes were too much even for that redoubtable expert.

"Anything new?"

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Alfie shook his head in answer to Cranston's question. From the living room, a man's voice raised in song was caroling out the seventeenth verse of "Down In the Valley."

"Uncle Danny seems to have recovered his spirits." Cranston smiled.

Alfie nodded. He led the way to the room. The family, minus Mrs. Lively, was seated there, rapidly getting on each other's nerves. Danny continued singing although no one was listening to him.

Eugenia was saying, "In your next incarnation I am sure you will appear as a bull frog, Danny!" The words were humorous, but her expression was not.

Danny broke off in the middle of a verse to say, "And you, my dear, dear Eugenia? Little Egypt in a ten cent carny?"

His brother rasped, "That will be enough of that, Danny!" Mr. Downs was chewing a big cigar into a soggy unappetizing mess.

There was no sign of Uncle Harry. Toni sat at the piano playing a sort of obligatio to the words of the older people.

Alfie said, "This is the first time this evening that all of us have been together. First one would wander off and then another, so I never had a chance to talk to all of you at once."

They all looked at him incuriously. It was to be seen in their expressions that nothing Alfie could say could possibly be of much interest to anyone. But they waited politely for him to have his say.

It was not to be. A scream tore through the fabric of the silence like a hangnail on silk. It rasped and tore at their already strung-up nerves. Eugenia let out a squawk that made no sense.

This time the killer had taken no chances. Mrs. Lively was dead. Her maid had found her when she came in to see if the old woman wanted anything more before bed.

A knife projected from her thin chest. All fire, all expression gone, her face was older, infinitely older and sadder than it had been in life.

"Somebody didn't take much chance of her changing her will," Mr. Downs said around the stub of his cigar. His fingers were making a pulp of his blobby nose.

"How dare you!" His wife turned on him and lashed out, full of a fire that was strange to her. Eugenia's face again looked like her mother's. "Foster wouldn't have been concerned with a thing like that... he just hated her... deeply, with an abiding and terrible hate!"

"Now, now finally we can call in the police! Thank God!" Alfie's voice was weak with relief. He was so relieved that for a while his emotions didn't have time to grapple with the death of his grandmother.

"They've got to guard us day and night! A twenty-four-hour guard till Foster is back in a straitjacket where he belongs!"

All of them nodded in agreement with Alfie's words.

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But it was Cranston that stepped away to the phone and called the police. That done he looked them all over. One of them harbored a dreadful secret... and Cranston could not move till that secret had come to light. He had to depend on the police and on Harry Vincent for that!

The knife that had put a period to all the sentences of command that had filled the old lady's mouth, came from the kitchen. It was a characterless, wooden-handled meat knife. Any one could have taken it.

The police, when they came, were brusque but efficient. From the hall, Cranston and Alfie watched them as they went about their business. The finger print man dusted his gray aluminum powder around with a lavish hand. The photographer seemed not to have heard that there was a shortage of flash bulbs. He shot the corpse from every conceivable angle.

Then, and only then, after the medical examiner had been and gone, did the police ask for some testimony.

They were gathered in the grotesque living room, made grotesque by the old fashioned overstuffed furniture that crowded the room. All of them, some sitting, some standing, showed the strain they were under in their haggard faces. Even Toni's fresh good looks looked smudged, the way a charcoal sketch looks when an impatient artist rubs his hand over it.

The man from Homicide was definitely not going to brook any nonsense. He was a square-jawed, blue-chinned man with a hard glint in his eyes. But his voice, when he spoke, was surprising. It was high pitched.

"There's been some funny business going on around here. We're not quite as stupid as some of you taxpayers seem to think we are. You should realize that ever since Foster Downs broke out, this place has been under surveillance."

Alfie looked a little more relieved, but then as he remembered his dead grandmother, he looked frightened again. Surveillance hadn't saved her!

"To date, and I am giving away no secrets when I say this, we have found no trace of Foster." He cleared his throat and the strange high voice went on. "We've checked on most of you." He looked at Uncle Danny. "You were in a barroom down near Diversey Street at the precise time that the old house was torched off.

"One of you, I don't see him here, was also in downtown Chicago when the fire broke out. He was buying some kind of telescope gadget. Your chauffeur was with him acting as nursemaid."

The phone was ringing. The door opened and one of the maids poked her head in the door and asked, "Are you Donohue?"

The detective nodded and rose from his chair. They listened, all of them eavesdropping shamelessly. But his words told them nothing. His face was even more set when he came back into the room.

"With every free cop in Chicago on the lookout, Foster Downs has been found by a sixteen-year-old delivery boy. He stopped to fix a flat, about two hundred yards from the insane asylum in a little copse of woods. He found Foster."

No one breathed. Lamont Cranston was tense. Was his hypothesis correct? It was, for Donohue went on, "Foster Downs never set fire to the old house. He never killed his grandmother. In fact, I don't think he did very much at all after he escaped! He's been dead for the last couple of days! As near as the M.E. can make out, he was shot about an hour after he broke out!"

CHAPTER VIII

IT was too shocking a development for instant comprehension. They all sat and stood in their places with their faces slack and unbelieving.

Cranston, looking at them, knew that to one person this had come as no surprise. Perhaps the person had not expected it as quickly as this, but they had known that some time sooner or later, the murder would out, as murder has an uncanny habit of doing.

Mr. Downs, his small eyes shifting around the circle of faces, said, "Then, that means..."

Donohue nodded. "It means that in all probability the killer of Foster Downs and Mrs. Lively is here with us in this room." Donohue looked from Toni's face, which was blank and uncomprehending, to Alfie's, where one fear was giving way to another, deeper fear.

Uncle Danny, face white, was wiping cold beads of sweat off his forehead. He said, "This is a situation to end all situations. Here we been going around looking under the beds for a lunatic and all the while the lunatic was right here, helping us look under the beds!"

Eugenia drew away from her husband. She gasped, "This means that one of us may be the one..." She was tearing her handkerchief into fine strips. Each time she tore at the cloth, Alfie jumped.

"Any of you," asked Donohue and his voice was even higher, "know what the terms of Mrs. Lively's will are?"

"No secret about it," Alfie said, "any time she had a difference of opinion with any of us, she'd read it to us and then threaten to change it!"

Toni said dully, "All of her money is to be evenly divided between us. If any of us predeceases any other, the shares get bigger. That is, the money is to be divided, after certain bequests to the servants and a couple of her pet charities."

Donohue whistled. "The money to be divvied... and the more that die off, the bigger the pot is. That's nothing but an invitation to murder!"

"Yes, isn't it?" asked Cranston, speaking for the first time. "It was typical of her malice though..."

"Bah... there's no need for all that! There's more than enough to keep each of us happy, now that the old harpy isn't around to control it and us!" Danny said.

Eugenia spoke sharply to her husband. "Can't you make him stop talking about her that way? She's barely dead and he's..."

"You know blasted well that I talked that way to her face! Stop making with the cracks, dear sister-in-law. I don't think the copper needs any help from you!"

"If it will help any," said Cranston, "I think I am safe in saying that the killer of Eugene Lively two years ago is also the killer that you want for the murder of Mrs. Lively!"

Donohue did a double take. "What?" He chewed it over in his mind for a while, then said, "But... Foster

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Downs killed Eugene Lively! The court said so!"

Cranston shrugged his shoulders. "The court may well have said so, but they were wrong. Foster Downs was sent to the insane asylum by a shrewd, canny plotter, a killer who was patient... who waited till the time was ripe for the next step in a deep-laid plan! Foster's escape was what set the wheel in motion for the next kill!"

Donohue peered at Cranston shrewdly and finally said, "Who are you? Your face is familiar."

"It should be," Alfie leaped in to the defense of his hero. "That's Lamont Cranston!"

"I've heard of you. And if even half of what I've heard is the truth, I'll give some thought to what you've said!" Donohue turned to Alfie.

Mr. Downs, jamming a cigar, a new one, into his mouth, cursed himself. If anyone ever found out about the poison... He'd thought that out so well... stayed up nights planning it. He realized that Cranston was staring at him with a steady and calculating eye. He pulled himself together. Why had he lied about being in New Orleans? That would be so easy to disprove. He'd been in Chicago. The last night before he came home he'd stopped at a tourist home not ten miles away. He had wanted that night to get his plan in order.

Wiping his wet forehead with an equally wet hand, he forced himself to look calm and interested as Donohue questioned Alfie.

"I want," the homicide man said, "all the details on that fire. When I understand that, I have an idea things will be a lot clearer!"

"I can't give you too much information about that. I was on the phone, I felt it getting hotter and hotter. I finally realized the house was on fire and made my escape through the window and down to the ground. When I got there, everyone but Uncle Harry and Uncle Danny were there," said Alfie.

"Who's Uncle Harry?"

"Someone asking for me?" asked the gentle, sweet voice of Harry. He peeked into the room with a huge cop behind him. The cop spoke.

"I found him puttering with some screwy looking junk. I figured you'd want to see him."

"You 'figgered' right. So this is Uncle Harry." Donohue looked at the pathetic little man for a moment and then asked, "Where does he fit into the scheme of things?"

Behind Harry's back, Danny Downs put his finger to his forehead and whirled it in the universal gesture that intimated madness. Donohue, who saw the gesture, nodded.

Harry drew himself up proudly. "I, sir, am an astronomer of note! When I have finished my present task, my name will go thundering down the ages along with the famous men of science who have preceded me."

"I see," said Donohue.

Harry, having had his say, proceeded to make himself as inconspicuous as possible.

It was getting late. Donohue glanced at his watch. "I don't have to tell you that none of you are to leave the house tonight. You are all here and are going to stay here till this mess is straightened out!"

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If the family only wasn't what it was, he'd have had a Black Maria at the door and herded them down to the station where he could really keep an eye on them. But that was out of the question. He knew that as soon as the door closed on him, some one of the family would be on the phone making the wires hot, calling a judge or some other politician in high places, complaining about his high-handed treatment of them.

It was Eugenia who did it. As the door slammed she went to the phone. Toni called after her, "Mother, what are you doing?"

"I'm going to show that ignoramus with whom he is dealing! I shall call Judge Caulkins and tell him what I think of this treatment! The very idea of making us prisoners in our own house."

It was amazing to watch the transformation that was coming over her. If there were anything to the idea of reincarnation it would seem that Eugenia was becoming her dead mother. Cranston was musing about this as Alfie stepped close to him and whispered, "Can I talk to you?"

The question made Cranston wonder what it had been that Mrs. Lively had meant to talk to him about on that morrow, that for her would never come. He had had an idea at the time of the poisoning attempt that the old lady had known who was behind it. Perhaps that was what she had meant to tell him.

Alfie whispered, "It's rather difficult to get poison without leaving a trail, isn't it?"

So Alfie was on the same thought trail. Cranston nodded.

"If any of us had wanted to get poison it would be easy to track it down. None of us have been out of Chicago for quite awhile except..." Alfie nodded in the direction of Mr Downs' broad back.

"He travels around all the time. It would be easy to pick it up in some out of the way place. And, now we know that Foster was not alive when the poisoning took place. After all, Downs was the one that made the drinks. We don't know but what he knew about the chipped glass, poisoned it, and then left that airplane note as a throw off!"

Cranston looked at Alfie. He was more of a man than in all the time Cranston had known him. There was a new bearing about him. Frightened he might be, but this was a normal fright of a merciless killer. Evidently the thing that had given him the real horrors was the idea of lunatic vengeance striking haphazardly, like lightning, no one knew where.

"Doesn't it add up?" Alfie asked.

"It seems to make a sensible pattern, but it is far from proof." Cranston patted him on the shoulder, for after all, he had thought the thing out carefully. Glancing out the window made Cranston think of Shrevvie, waiting somewhere out in the darkness. Waiting for a passenger. A passenger shrouded in blackness like the night. A passenger who alone of all the people involved, could see straight through the skeins of tragedy to the hand that was weaving the patterns of violence. The shrewd and canny killer whose mind functioned like a killing cash register, calmly ticking off each death as a potential profit!

That passenger would be The Shadow, ready to do violence to the evil plans of the canny killer! A whisper of a laugh lost itself in the shadows as Cranston left Alfie to go to his room. That laugh, although no one heard it, was that of the dauntless duelist with death, The Master of Darkness, The Shadow!

CHAPTER IX

THE fear–inspiring silhouette of The Shadow spread itself for a split second under the still darker shadow of a tree. There, not far ahead, was the waiting cab. The Shadow had evaded the vigilance of the police guard as though they were not there.

In the cab, Shrevvie sat with the radio turned down low. A staccato–voiced announcer was barking, "The biggest man hunt in the history of this town came to an end tonight, when a delivery boy, completely by chance, stumbled across the body of the man everyone has been searching for. Foster Downs has been found! Dead!"

"Turn it off, Shrevvie, that's old news!" The Shadow's whisper came from the rear of the car.

Shrevvie switched the dial off before he realized that again he had not heard The Shadow arrive. "De Shadow know, huh?" he asked.

There was no answer save the nod of the black–shrouded head in the rear of the cab. The Shadow directed Shrevvie to drive to the fire–gutted wreck of the old Lively home.

Even the steel nerves of the murderer must have been strained by the discovery of the body so quickly, and when strain entered, men made mistakes. They began to worry about back trails, they had a tendency to make more perfect, things which had formerly seemed perfect.

The Shadow was banking on this.

He had Shrevvie park the cab down the road and made his way alone and silently towards the wreck of the house. But for the piece of glass which The Shadow had found in the ruins, there was nothing to give away a diabolical plan. The Shadow had an idea the murderer would want reassurance about the fire!

Prepared as The Shadow was for any eventuality, still the attack was so sudden, so furious, that he was caught off balance. He had been making his way through the gutted house, carefully picking his way so that no slightest sound would herald his coming.

But a chance shadow, some warning, reached the killer who had indeed been going through the wreckage, searching for that which The Shadow had already found!

With this killer, to think was to act. He saw the fleeting movement, and knowing himself alone in a war against all mankind, because he had put himself outside the pale of human relations, he struck downwards with all his force, using the piece of rubble he had been examining as a black jack.

With skull cracking force it descended. The Shadow, caught off guard, barely had time to put an arm up when the concrete rubble struck with all the force of an irate hand and arm!

The blow, hitting the muscular side of The Shadow's arm, almost paralyzed that member. The Shadow grunted as he swung away.

The night was dark, clouds covering the light of the moon. The silent fierce battle raged over the remains of the house, that were as unstable and dangerous as a battle field. The Shadow, arm hanging useless at his side, swung with all his force with his left arm. His hard fist scraped along the side of the man's jaw, throwing him backwards. The rubble bounced out of his hand as he landed with bone crushing force against the side of a

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partition that stuck up like an accusing finger.

Striving to maintain his footing on the uneven ground, The Shadow leaped forward. The man recovered in time to push a straight arm directly into The Shadow. It caught him in the solar plexus, and drove the breath out of his lungs in a huge swoosh. It left him for a dizzy second gasping for breath. The man grabbed a huge length of girder and lifting it overhead started a swing downwards. The girder was so heavy it was awkward and clumsy. The Shadow side stepped it at the last moment and drove an iron fist into the stomach that bore down on him. The man was staggered by the force of his own attempt.

It was a weird, an eerie struggle there in the fire-blackened remains of the old house. The shadows that gathered around the struggling figures were no more quiet than the men. But for an occasional deep breath there was silence as they, close together now, swung at each other with all their strength.

It was a tough fight and The Shadow had his hands full. He was winning, slowly, but winning as he must in order to stay alive. Suddenly, shockingly, in the silence of the night, a shot sounded. It was so loud that both men paused, neither moved for a second. The murderer, quick on his feet, took advantage of the pause. Putting his hands up on an outcropping of girder, he vaulted over it and away.

In the dark, The Shadow paused, there was no point in giving chase. The Shadow knew, as he had known for some time, who the killer was. There was time and to spare to face him.

At the moment the shot was of more vital importance. The Shadow had an idea what it might connote and if he was right, it was important that he do something about it!

The sound of frantic feet pattered close by, followed by other, heavier feet. There was the sound of a short-lived scuffle, then a heavy voice said triumphantly, "Thought ye could get away from me, eh? Well, I been trailing ye since ye came out of the house, ye scut! Now stand still and let me take a look at ye!"

There was a tiny click as a flashlight was turned on. The heavy voice said, "I thought ye'd given me the slip just about ten minutes ago when ye whiffled in here so fast. Now believe me, if you try to run away again, I'll use me .38 on ye and this time I won't fire in the air!"

The Shadow, hidden in a deep black, formless blob, was within arm's reach. The searchlight spotlighted the frightened face of Uncle Harry. He looked even more pathetic than usual as he simpered in the light. "Now that you have caught me, perhaps you'll help me find what I've been looking for!"

"Help ye, why ye scut! I ought to bring ye down to the fish tank and give ye a goin' over! Instead of that... I'll take ye back and tuck you in yer little bed. What was it ye was after lookin' for?"

"Why, for parts of my telescope that were not destroyed in the fire. If I don't find them I am afraid I am never going to see the moon and I must... I simply must..."

The cop shook Harry the way a terrier would worry a rabbit and said, "Git along wid ye before I forget me manners and hustle ye with the tip of me toe!" He snorted, "Moon!"

The anxious little voice of Harry sounded even more pathetic compared to the robust healthiness of the policeman's as he said, "But you don't understand, anyone can see the moon. The telescope I am building will let you see the people on the moon. The men and women, their children, the animals... everything, every detail of lunar life!"

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The cop looked confused for a moment and then said, "Ye had me going. Ye said that so calm—like that I almost believed ye! Now git along wid ye and save the fairy tales!"

The Shadow waited till the strange twosome had walked a distance away and then, thoughtfully, walked back the way he had come, towards the cab.

Once in it, he said, "Harry Vincent's hotel."

"Sure thing. Dis burg is quite a town, ain't it? Dat lake, everything along it. Dose people what live in dem houses, its like living in a summer resort. Dey come home from work on the el, change into a bathin' suit, walk a half a block and in dey go! What a racket!"

The Shadow let Shrevvie ramble on. He knew the whole set up, knew how each thing had been done. How and with what diabolical cleverness the killer had operated... but proof... that was another thing. That was up to The Shadow and Harry Vincent to produce.

IN Room 303, Harry Vincent was preparing for bed. He yawned, his eyes closing as he stretched his arms. When he opened his eyes, his mentor was there, standing in front of him.

He cut the yawn off midway and said, "Things are starting to pop, aren't they?"

The Shadow nodded. "They're going to pop even faster now! I want you to look up two things for me. I want the names of the architects who built the modern home that the family is living in now, and I would like to see a copy of the will that Mrs. Lively left."

"Will do," said Vincent. "Any rush on it?"

"Yes. For I may be able to forestall another death if I can get the information I need quickly enough. The killer has a long list... but that list is getting shorter and shorter."

"Oh, I almost forgot. Burbank said when I left New York that the sooner you finished up here the better. He's got one of his hunches again. He's smelled some deviltry afoot that he thinks you ought to investigate."

The Shadow smiled, his saturnine face lighting up. His profile was hawk-like in the strength of chiseled granite that it showed. "Crime takes no holiday, does it?"

A wave of a hand and The Shadow was gone. Vincent yawned again, this time finishing it in luxurious style. He got under the covers and as he fell off to sleep he worried about a few things that he could not make relevant. The Almanac, the weather reports, and now the name of the architects. He didn't give a thought to the will... that was obvious... but the architects... that puzzled him.

Back in the Lively home, The Shadow had given way to Lamont Cranston. He was in his own pajamas tonight and he appreciated it. As he flicked off the light he felt a twinge of pain in his arm where he had been hit. It was easing up a little. It would probably be all stiff on the morrow. But the murderer, what of his bruises? How was he going to explain them?

A smile curved his lips as he dropped off to sleep. Tomorrow would wind up this case. It had to, for two reasons; one, to forestall any further murders, and two, because Burbank was having another hunch!

Sleep that night was a short-lived affair. About three o'clock in the morning the sound of some kind of rumpus woke Cranston. Every door in the house was opening.

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The house was in forment!

Out in the hall, slipping a bathrobe about himself, Cranston paused. A light snapped on. It came from the kitchen. He ran to it. Danny Downs, his face purple, was feeling a bruise on his face. He reeled.

"Somebody came up to me in the dark. I came in here for a snack because I couldn't get to sleep, and just as I reached for the refrigerator door, somebody clouted the tar out of me."

Down the hall, the sound of more tumult broke out. Uncle Harry staggered from his room. His face was bruised and he was holding his arms around his stomach.

Danny and Cranston ran to him. He said slowly, "Someone came into my room before and hit me. It hurt. I couldn't move, I was all tangled up in the bedclothes. Do you think someone is trying to steal my telescope?"

Danny and Cranston looked at each other and then with one thought ran to Mr. Downs' room. He had a separate room from his wife. They opened the door and Danny flipped on the ceiling light. Lying on the floor, face all bruised, was Mr. Downs, a lump on his forehead. His breathing was regular but shallow.

Cranston got some water and was throwing it into Downs' face when a figure, hand to jaw, stumbled into the room. It was the quiet man, the chauffeur. His jaw was bruised and he was in pain.

He grunted, "Who put the slug on me? What goes on here?"

Cranston looked from Harry who stood in the doorway, to the chauffeur, to Danny's bruised face and thence down to Downs' bruises.

The murderer had answered Cranston's question and quickly. If you want to hide a tree, the classic place to hide it is in a forest! The killer, knowing he could not hide his bruises, had supplied a forest of them!

As if this would protect him! Cranston smiled in a curious and forbidding way. He said, "Go to sleep now. Nothing else will happen tonight. I guarantee that! Try to get to sleep, all of you will need it to repair your damages."

Alone again, in the darkness of his room, Cranston smiled. If the murderer had been able to hear the sound that emanated from the figure on the bed, fear would have stricken him just as he had sent icy fingers of fear along other people's spines. For low, and chilling, there came the whisper of The Shadow's laugh...

CHAPTER X

IT was a curious circle that sat at the breakfast table. Toni, eyes sparkling, looked from bruised face to bruised face. She looked at the black eyes, the blue marks on the men's chins, and then said to Alfie, "How'd you miss the Donnybrook?"

Alfie looked at the men and said, "I don't quite know. Cranston and I seem to be the only ones that weren't involved in the fracas."

"I don't get it. I don't get any part of it." This was from Downs who was fingering the lump on the top of his head. "What went on anyhow?"

Cranston remained silent. Danny, fingering his bruise, said, "Your guess is as good as mine. Somebody went

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on a tear, that's all I know! Whoever it was, even whaled the tar out of the chauffeur!"

"It hurt, and it still hurts," wailed Uncle Harry. "I've never been so frightened in my life! I was sound asleep and then, with the covers drawn up over me, someone hit me again and again!"

"If anything else happens I think I shall have a nervous breakdown." Eugenia looked all ready for one. Her raddled face, eyes blue-circled, double chins flaccid, was defeated and depressed looking.

"Take it easy, mother." Toni for some reason seemed quite chipper. "It'll all come out in the wash, now that the police are in charge. Of that I am sure!"

Donohue, coming into the room unheralded, wished he could be as sure. He was unshaven and his eyes were red rimmed. He had been up working all night and he was cranky... feeling mean and ready to explode.

"I hope you're happy now that I've been raked over the coals. I don't know what good you expected it to do, but I got my orders to handle you with kid gloves!" His high voice was irascible.

They all looked at Eugenia, who tried to look virtuous about the whole thing. "I see no reason why we should be ridden over rough shod! I just want you to be sure and stay in your place!"

"Lady, my place may be the back room of a pool parlor, but my job is to rid your house of a killer. Some people make a living by exterminating insects. This happens to be my job and I try to perform it as well as is humanly possible!"

Cranston felt sorry for the homicide man. The case was not an easy one and Eugenia's attitude was just making it that much harder.

Donohue, part of his grievance off his chest, had finally taken in the battered faces of the men. "What's been going on? My men reported some kind of a disturbance last night, but I had no idea there was a free-for-all! Who won?"

"It was a draw," said Danny and he smiled as he saw how surprised Donohue was. "Someone decided they didn't like the way we wear our faces, so we all got a beating. But I've had worse in a carnny when the 'Hey Rube' call went out."

Donohue scratched his pate. It was just one more bit that would have to be put in place before he could get back to town, where he belonged, taking care of hoodlums. He saw Cranston leave the room and hoped that the tall man had known what he was talking about the preceding evening when he had said that the killer was also responsible for the two year old death of Eugene Lively. How that was possible was beyond Donohue at the moment.

Cranston, out in the hall, sat down at the phone. His eyes were wary, careful that no eavesdropper could sneak up on him. He dialed Vincent's number.

"Hello?" his voice was soft.

"Hi, is this... Oh, I get it, you can't talk. Okay, I'll do the jabbering. I got the names of the architects, they are O'Brien and Swenson. Two young fellows. That job on the house was their first big job."

Cautiously, first making sure that there was no one around, Cranston asked, "Can you get hold of them and bring them out here?"

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"Impossible," was the disappointing answer. "They were drafted right after they finished the house. They're due for discharge in a short while. But at the moment, they're somewhere in Japan in the army of occupation."

"I see." If Cranston had had a plan blasted, his tone did not reveal it. "What about the..." His voice dropped even lower, "the will?"

"Bad luck, there too. The lawyer is bringing it out to the house tonight. He's going to read it then. In the meantime, he's out somewhere and he has the will along with him. No chance of my being able to cop a glance at it."

"Tonight, eh? That will do, satisfactorily." Cranston paused, then said, "If you can, see if you can find the blueprint of the house. Go through the O'Brien and Swenson files. I am almost sure of my facts, but some substantiation would help."

"Right you are." Vincent rang off.

Cranston walked away from the phone. The killer had the best luck in the world. Everything at the time had worked out right for him. Luck, and the fact that his swift-moving brain had capitalized on the slimmest break that came his way. Musing, Cranston walked back into the room where Donohue was gradually becoming apoplectic. He had been interrogating Eugenia and he was becoming snarled up in theosophical answers that baffled him.

He was saying, "Now let me get this straight. You say that there is no such thing as good or evil, that both are different sides of the same coin?"

Eugenia nodded, "Very well put."

"And because of this belief of yours, it doesn't matter to you whether or not we catch the killer?"

"Precisely!"

"But can't you see that if everyone felt that way that the world would..." Donohue stopped. He felt as if he had been banging his head against a stone wall.

"If everyone felt as we do, there would be no crime." Eugenia smiled brightly. The discussion was making her feel better.

Uncle Danny did a little tap step off in one corner. He hummed. "Oh, the dance they do..."

Donohue turned to him and said biting, "I'm glad you can find something amusing in all this!"

"Oh, I'm just more used to it. It used to affect me the way it does you... but no more. You can go nuts if you let that sort of thing upset you!"

"I remember," said Uncle Danny, "the bearded lady in one of the sideshows that I worked in, she thought along the same lines that Eugenia does. A midget who was in love with her used to argue with her hours on end. One night he couldn't stand it any more and hung himself with one of her stockings. It was a dreadful tragedy."

"You mean the midget died?" asked Toni.

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"No, his weight made a run in the only pair of stockings the bearded lady had. Got her all upset, she seemed to feel a little differently about good and evil after that. She hated the midget!"

"Really, Danny!" Eugenia was scornful. "Do you expect me to believe that?"

"Shouldn't be hard for you to, after some of the things you swallow!" Danny grinned, happy now that he had annoyed his sister-in-law.

"Could we have just a little less gay chit-chat?" Donohue asked in a poisonous tone. "In case you have forgotten, there is a small matter of a fire... and a murder or two to be solved!"

Cranston cleared his throat. "I think I may be able to help you with the fire, that is, if you want me to interfere."

"Why not? Maybe your interference will be a help!" Donohue glared at the others.

"Suppose," suggested Cranston, "we all go to Uncle Harry's room."

Donohue seemed surprised at the idea but followed Cranston's lead. They all crowded in on the little man who was busily engaged in polishing his lens.

"Before I start explaining my idea, do you have a family album or perhaps just a snapshot of the old house?"

Alfie nodded and left the room. He was back almost immediately with a plush-bound book about eighteen inches long. It was an old fashioned photograph album. He leafed through the heavy black cardboard pages and finally pointed out a picture.

It showed the old house in all its faded glory, the eaves projecting from the roof, the gables, the tiny windows set in the gables on the slanting roof of the house.

Cranston pointed to one of the gables. "The attic, did any of you use it for anything?"

Alfie looked at his relatives before replying. They all looked thoughtful. Alfie said after thinking, "No, I don't believe anyone went up there in years. There was nothing much there, just old trunks full of discarded clothes. We'd have a masquerade occasionally and use some of the costumes. But there was no other reason to go up, was there?"

Eugenia said, "No. No indeed. It was dusty and hot up in the attic. No one in his right mind would spend any time there."

This was pretty much what Cranston had figured. It was true of most houses of that type. "First, get that attic clearly in your mind." He pointed to one of the tiny windows set in a gable. "Without that, our pyromaniac could not have rigged his deadly device.

"There were, because of the telescopic investigations of both Foster and of Uncle Harry, a variety of lenses in the house. It was not too complicated to rig up a burning glass so that the rays of the sun coming in through the window would concentrate on some dry old clothes and set fire to them!"

Donohue said suddenly, "Boy, if this doesn't make me feel like a dope. Gross, in his encyclopedia on Crime and Criminology, mentions that set-up!"

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Cranston nodded. "Yes, Gross even mentions the further subtlety that the person used, but something went wrong. The idea was for the person behind the fire to be far away with a safe alibi for the time when the house was set on fire.

"To do that, the pyromaniac went over the positions of the sun and set the glass in such a position that only on July thirteenth, a year ago, would the sun be in the proper position!"

"A year ago?" asked Alfie, looking puzzled. "But the fire only took place..."

Toni said, "July thirteenth? But the fire took place on the fourteenth. On the day that Foster escaped from that place he was in!"

"I have checked on the thirteenth of July a year ago and, as I thought, it rained that day!" Cranston, remembering the weather reports, smiled. The person who had rigged the device had checked on those days too. Rain on that day was unexpected. Only once in four years had it rained on that day, and that was a year ago.

"Because of the rain, the time device lay quiescent, waiting for another time, before it set the flames to wrecking the house."

"But I still don't see why it set fire to the house on the fourteenth," said Toni. "I see how it was set up and all that but..."

"That was out of the pyromaniac's control. Because of the procession of the equinoxes, the day when the sun was in the proper place was put forward a day and a fraction. I am sure that our astronomer, here, would be able to figure out precisely how long it took." Cranston smiled at Uncle Harry.

Eugenia was looking at her husband, Downs. He was tormenting his nose into a new succession of malt formations. "How diabolical! The person who set the glass could be anywhere on the face of the earth when the fire broke out! It supplied a perfect... what is the word?"

"Alibi!" said Donohue, and he too was looking at Downs.

"Do you have any questions about all this?" Cranston asked Donohue.

Donohue shifting his gaze to a lens that lay on the table near Harry said, "The set-up, as you picture it, would take a person who knew a little about lenses and about the sun, would it not?"

Cranston nodded. "A little, not too much. After all, you can experiment with different lenses to find which will set fire at what distance! There have been times when a goldfish bowl, set in a window, has acted as a concentration point for the rays of the sun and set fire to drapes nearby. It doesn't require any special apparatus."

"Do you have any proof of your idea?"

Cranston, thinking of the fire-blackened piece of glass The Shadow had found in the wreckage of the old house, said, "Yes, at the proper time the evidence will appear."

There was a silence. Cranston said, "As a matter of fact, the evidence even has a set of perfect fingerprints on it!"

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"Do you know whose fingerprints they are?" gasped Donohue.

Cranston nodded. "Yes. Although they haven't been verified, I am fairly positive as to whose were the fingers that left their traces."

They all stared at Cranston. He had spoken so positively that no one even thought of doubting him.

"Well?" asked Donohue. "Whose are they?"

"I am positive that the prints are those of the dead man. Of Foster Downs!"

That was a crushing blow to Donohue. Here was the dead man popping right back into a case that Donohue had been so sure could not be complicated by the dead lunatic!

CHAPTER XI

BEFORE Donohue had a chance to collect his reeling thoughts, the phone in the hall rang. It was for him.

"Hello?" His mind wasn't on it.

The voice on the other end of the line said, "Hold onto your hat, Donohue, a package just came in by special messenger. And do you know what was in it?"

"I'm in no mood for guessing games. Spill it!"

"I open the package, see, and inside is a hunk of glass. The edges of it are charred like it had been in a fire, see?"

Donohue nodded his head to the phone dumbly.

"Yeah, I see."

"And with the hunk of glass, which looks like a magnifying glass, is a little note. It says, 'Would suggest you compare the prints on this with those of the dead man, Foster Downs!'"

Donohue's only answer was, "Huh?"

"Now this is really gonna knock your hat off! Guess who signed the note?"

"Who?" Donohue was past all surprise now.

"It's signed, 'The Shadow'!"

"The Shadow..." So The Shadow was taking a helping hand in this mess. He was grateful for that.

"Hey, Donohue!" squawked the phone in his ear, "you still there?"

"Yeah, I'm still here."

"I thought maybe you went away. What do you think of all this?"

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"What do I think? I think you ought to check the prints with Downs!"

"Do you think I'm a dope? Of course I did. And The Shadow as usual is right! The prints match!"

"I see. Thanks for calling, Garrity." Donohue set the phone back in its hook slowly, trying to make head or tail out of this new development. If Foster Downs had set the fire trap... But he was in an asylum... He must have set the trap before he was taken to the booby hatch. Sure, that was it. But why?

Donohue asked Cranston that when he saw him come out of Uncle Harry's room.

"Why did he set the fire trap? I think you're losing track of the time sequence. Remember that when Foster set this device up, he thought they were all going to move into the lovely new home which Eugene had had built! I think in Foster's crazy, muddled mind he was anxious to wipe out all memory of the old house which must have had unhappy memories for him. He spent his childhood there!"

"Then he didn't mean to make a potential death trap out of the fire! He thought the house would be deserted by then! I see..."

There was a pause and then Donohue said, "But if he thought that, he wouldn't then have gone out and killed Eugene, the guy who was responsible for moving the family to new surroundings!"

"My point, precisely. Whatever kind of a brain condition Foster had, it was not a murderous one. He was maladjusted, unhappy, what we have a habit of calling a 'screwball', but from what I have found out about his youthful escapades, there was nothing of the killer in his make-up!"

"But... if he didn't kill Eugene, why did he give that crazy testimony of his, about the dead man shooting himself and the house being in an impossible position? Or was that just his craziness?"

"I don't think that when he gave that testimony he was any crazier than you or I! I think that within limits he was telling the truth as he thought he saw it! That is the crux of this whole mad scheme! The fact that the killer made the poor sick brain of a lunatic see what wasn't so! There is the strength of the killer's plan and the weakness!"

"Whew..." Donohue looked impressed. "Then, if you can straighten that all out, why we'll have a real lead to the one who killed the old lady!"

"Yes. I think we shall have to convict the killer on that old crime, for the killing of Mrs. Lively was of the genus 'perfect crime'. There is about it that quality of improvisation, grabbing the opportunity as it occurs, that makes for a perfect crime!"

"I know what you mean, follow a guy into a dark alley, beat his brains out with a hunk of iron and we have a real job ever catching you. Get fancy, use a poisoned dart in a time device, and ten chances out of ten, you'll get tripped up in your own complexity!"

Cranston nodded. That had been his experience too. The killer, taking a chance, had stolen a knife from the kitchen, and being careful about fingerprints, had gone to the old lady's room, waited till she was alone and... that was that. How to prove who was where at what time? At the time of the murder all the people in the house had been wandering around in and out of the various rooms. It was an impossible crime to solve. But that two-year-old crime...

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Voices were raised behind Cranston and Donohue. Mr. Downs' nerves were on edge. He was yelling, "Eugenie! Stop looking at me that way! I know what you're thinking, but it isn't so!"

"I said nothing!" Eugenia's voice was low, but it held a world of meaning. "Even you can't keep me from thinking what I think."

Donohue looked at Cranston. "Let them beef... But first what about those notes that everyone thought were coming from Foster Downs?"

"That is one of the most curious elements in the case. The surface motivation is obvious. The killer wanted us to think that Foster was on the loose. His whole plan of attack was to blame the death of Mrs. Lively on Foster... but..."

"It was easy to forge them. Those irregular letters... the whole insane way that Foster really wrote, was easy to mimic!" said Donohue. "'But' what?"

"It was so easy to imitate that there were not one, but two people who forged the notes and folded the paper into little airplanes!"

Toni was acting as mediator. They heard her trying to calm her angry parents down. Cranston said, "Looks like we better step in before there's more trouble."

"I never saw such a place for trouble in my life," muttered Donohue, following Cranston.

The room was electric with strain. Mr. Downs, jaw muscles clenching under his skin like angry worms, was facing his wife. It seemed to be taking all his self control to keep from smashing her.

Toni was at his side, holding onto his tense arm. "Dad, don't! Mother, stop! Can't you see this is doing no good!"

Eugenia said in a soft purr, "I find myself feeling a little like Danny's bearded lady. I find myself becoming conscious of the difference between good and evil. All I can see is evil."

Downs' arm, even with Toni dragging on it, started to rise. His face was white with anger. "Let go of me," he said, his voice rough with passion. "Can't you see she's trying to railroad me!"

Danny leaped from his slouching position and helped Toni to drag the furious man away from his wife. "Sit right there, I'll go get you a drink. If I ever saw a guy that needed one, you're it!"

Eugenia walked slowly away from her husband but even the way she held her back showed the repulsion she felt towards him.

Donohue said, "All of you better relax." He looked at Alfie, who was sitting white-faced and withdrawn, to one side of the room. "You too, son, stop eating your guts and take a deep breath."

"I'll try to... but this whole thing seems to be getting more and more horrible. I thought when we found out that Foster was dead that the horror would go away... but it's getting worse and worse. One of us here is the murderer... I can't stand much more."

"Getting excited isn't going to help, son," said Donohue roughly but in a kindly voice. "No use in winding up in that padded cell that Foster just left empty."

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Toni giggled hysterically. "Maybe that's a solution for the housing shortage... maybe we all ought to go to the insane asylum."

Cranston slapped her in the face. It sounded like a pistol shot but it served its purpose. She stopped giggling and finally gasped, "Thanks, I guess I needed that... But, oh dear... Please, Mr. Cranston, Donohue, do something... I can't take much more, either!"

"Perhaps, since a wise man once said 'Confession is good for the soul' it would help to clear the air a little, if Mr. Downs spoke up!"

Downs, who had been sitting with his face away from them all, said, "What? What do you mean by that crack? Are you all against me? Isn't there any mercy here?"

Donohue stepped to Downs' side and looked down coldly while Downs returned to his nervous habit of making a pulp of his nose. "If you're smart you'll do what Mr. Cranston suggests." Donohue wondered what this meant. Was Downs the one? Cranston stood and stared down at the man. His face was haggard. The blue bruises stood out like beacons against the ghastly whiteness of his face.

There was silence, utter and complete. Downs looked up at Cranston. If he expected to find mercy there, he was due to be disappointed, for Cranston's face was set in harsh lines. He stared deep into Downs' small eyes.

It was a battle of nerves and one that Cranston was bound to win; Downs was on the ragged edge, every prop had been knocked out from under him.

Toni looked at her father with disgust strong in her set features. Alfie gazed at his uncle with loathing. Could it be that this craven figure was the killer from whom Alfie had been cowering? Alfie felt shame, at himself, at his cowardice, go through him...

"Speak up, man!" Cranston's voice was sharp with command. "I know that you bought the poison! I know that you took it out of your suitcase along with the pernod! You had that note, forged by yourself, that you pretended had come from Foster, in your hand when you put the poison in the cracked glass! You didn't take any chances of the wrong person getting that glass! You served the drinks! You held the tray out in such a way that the chipped glass was the only one that Mrs. Lively could reach!"

A shudder ran through Downs' body. It was an ugly sight to see a grown man break down. A sob wracked its way from this thick body. He looked up with tears of self-pity running down his ruined face.

"You're right! You must be the devil, for no one saw me! But I did... I did it! I brought the poison back with me from out of town. I was so sure no one would ever be able to trace it to me!"

Cranston breathed a little sigh of relief. A lot of his reconstruction had been guess work. He had known that Downs was the poisoner, but the description of the scene had been made up out of whole cloth.

Donohue, looking disgusted at the sight of Downs' tears, took a pair of handcuffs out of his pocket. He walked to Downs' side. Mrs. Downs, Eugenia, screamed and pointed with a shaking finger at her craven husband. "I knew it... I knew he did it! He was talking in his sleep last night. He kept saying 'poison' over and over! Take the dirty killer away!" She broke down then.

HAPPY DEATH DAY

CHAPTER XII

"KILLER?" said Cranston questioningly. "I said nothing about killing. He poisoned Mrs. Lively, but it was an abortive attempt as you all know! He's not the killer!"

Donohue said as he put the "cuffs" on the sobbing man, "Well, killer or not, it's a little illegal to go around poisoning people. If nobody minds, I'd like to send him downtown. It'll quiet the newspapers down a bit."

For a moment all the people in the room sat quietly, looking at each other out of the corners of their eyes. If Downs was not the real killer, then...

"Hello! Oh what are you doing? That looks like fun!" Uncle Harry looked sincerely interested in the shining handcuffs that linked Mr. Downs to Donohue. "Can I try them on?"

"Cut it out, will you? You give me the creeps!" Donohue sounded annoyed at Harry's request.

Toni said, "Come here, Harry. Sit by me."

"Oh, may I?" Harry sat down next to Toni on the piano stool. He snuggled up close to her like a child. "I like you, Toni." He sniggered.

She drew away from him a bit and said, "Just sit still, Harry, and be a good boy."

It was horrible to see an adult acting like a child. He sulked at the rebuff like a ten-year-old who's had a prize toy taken away.

Donohue took Downs into another room where a police secretary waited. "This guy," Donohue said, "wants to do a little talking."

Downs repeated his confession to the stenographer who took it down verbatim.

"Just put your 'John Hancock' there, and we'll have you downtown in a jiffy." Donohue was a little more gay than he had been in quite a time. The reporters would have a holiday with this development. And, more importantly, it would give him a breathing spell till the whole case was solved. Somehow he had all the confidence in the world in Cranston. Then added to Cranston, there was the vague but comforting figure of The Shadow lurking somewhere in the background. He had helped once and, if Donohue knew The Shadow, he would help again.

Donohue took the end of the cuff off his wrist and transferred it to a uniformed policeman who had been waiting outside the house.

"Take this guy down to headquarters and book him for attempted murder. Print him and then tell any reporters who want any more dirt, that I'll be downtown later and give it all to them!"

The policeman yanked on the cuff and Downs, completely dispirited, followed. As the door began to close, Donohue called out, "If you let him get away I'll rip every one of your buttons off and make you eat them!"

The policeman grinned and said, "Forget it. I don't want any indigestion. He's as safe as if he was in a cell right now!"

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Back in the living room, Cranston was looking at his watch. "What time," he asked, "do you expect the lawyer to arrive?"

"Lawyer?" asked Alfie stupidly, events had been moving too fast for him. He was all confused. "What lawyer?"

"Old man Best. You know, Alfie, to read grandma's will! Snap out of it!" Toni had a grip on herself now.

"Oh, that," Alfie nodded. It all seemed far away and long ago. He wondered if perhaps the old lady's money was accursed. He wished he had the moral courage to refuse his inheritance and go out on his own. It had been the money that had caused all this. It was accursed. He wouldn't touch it not a penny of it. He straightened up his narrow shoulders in sudden resolution.

"I want all of you to hear this," he said and his voice was really happy for the first time in his adult life. "You can all divide my share up between you. I don't want my portion!"

Eugenia said, "Stop acting like a child, Alfie. Of course you'll take your share!"

Uncle Danny looked at Alfie speculatively. This was a new development.

"Good for you, Alfie!" Toni's voice sounded encouraging. "I think I know why!"

"It wouldn't be to throw suspicion off yourself, would it?" Donohue's voice was grim.

"Suspicion? Why..." Alfie's mouth hung open with surprise. "Suspicion of what?"

"The motive behind all this is money." Donohue said this didactically. In his years of experience, there were but a few motives for murder. One was passion, one revenge, but strongest of all was money. "If you figure you can pull a big scene and refuse the money, you throw suspicion off yourself and then, you can always change your mind and reconsider your decision later. It takes quite a time to probate a will!"

All of the newly gained manhood went out of Alfie. His shoulders slumped. He looked the weakling that his grandmother had made of him. "I don't know what to say... I..." He relapsed into silence.

Toni left Harry and went to Alfie. She put her arms around him. She glared at Donohue. "You big oaf! Why don't you catch your killer and leave Alfie alone? Why he wouldn't harm a fly!"

"There's lots of guys wouldn't harm a fly because there's no dough—re—mi in it, but they'll knock off plenty of guys for a buck!"

Toni looked to Cranston for some kind of backing. Cranston was staring off into space. He said, "I still haven't found out when your lawyer, Mr. Best, is due to arrive."

"Oh, about eight o'clock, Mr. Cranston." Eugenia vouchsafed the information.

Eight o'clock. He might be able to get the nine-thirty plane for New York, Cranston thought. Aloud he said, "If I may say so, I think some food is in order. All of you have been under a terrific emotional strain. You may not be hungry, but I think..."

An angry knock came at the door. The cook bustled out of the kitchen and answered. The little doctor, as pompous and self-important looking as ever, stomped in. He said, "I must say! Really! The idea! Really!"

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"Who's that?" Donohue gestured with his head at the doctor.

"He's the one we called in when grandmother was poisoned," Alfie answered.

The little doctor stomped right up in front of Donohue and asked, "Are you the police?"

"I'm one of them."

The doctor reached into his pocket and with a large flourish drew out an envelope. "These, these people," he said, as if it were a nasty word, "promised to let me know when Mrs. Lively was well enough for me to give certain information to you! She certainly should be up and around by now. I have been more than patient and they haven't seen fit to call me. Therefore, I give you this!"

Donohue repressed a grin. The little man reminded him of an angry penguin. "Ummm... I can understand why they didn't call you."

"And what, sir, do you mean by that?"

"Well, if they promised to call you when she was up and around, they'd never call you!"

"You mean? Oh, no, she couldn't have died from the poison! I'd stake my professional reputation on that. She got but the tiniest, most minimal dose!"

"No, the poison didn't get her... but about six inches of steel did the job!" Donohue was being deliberately shocking. The little man was too overbearing, it was too much of a temptation to stick a pin in his pomposity.

He deflated in a very satisfactory fashion. His chest, which had been poked out, relaxed and reappeared below his belt. He looked fat, and old and tired. "How dreadful!" He gulped and then said, "That poor old lady..."

"While you're here, doctor," Cranston's voice was properly respectful, "could you give us any information on amnesia caused by a slight concussion of the brain?"

The doctor was only too anxious to change the subject. Particularly when it gave him a chance to strut his stuff. "Let me preface my remarks," he sounded as if he were delivering a lecture to some medical students, "by saying that in all the years I have been an active physician, I have never seen the so-called amnesiac of literary lore. I have never seen a person who had really completely forgotten a whole year or two of their lives. There were cases where, because of emotional strain, the brain set up a psychic block against remembering the details of some harrowing emotional strain. But, aside from that, I have never seen the type of amnesia that is beloved of writers.

"But I see that I have veered. Concussional amnesia. Yes!" He fidgeted and put his hands behind his back.

Donohue wondered what this was going to lead to. He felt like a hunter being led through a jungle by some professional guide. Cranston was that guide, leading him through a morass of human jungle of emotions and motivations.

"I have seen quite a bit of that. You see it in a lot of automobile wrecks. The person who is driving has his head snapped forward against the steering wheel, thus giving a concussion. Those people have a trauma that may extend back an hour."

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Cranston nodded as the doctor went on. These were twice-told facts to Cranston but he wanted the homicide man to get the picture from a medical authority.

"These people, suffering from this slight concussion, present a classical picture of amnesia. They ask the usual questions when they come to in the hospital... Where am I? What happened? Where's my car?"

What in the name of the seven toes of Beelzebub did this have to do with the Lively case, Donohue wondered.

"Questioning of them leads to finding out that sometimes they don't even remember getting into their car, or if they do, they remember driving down a road that is quite a distance from the one that the accident occurred on.

"There are quite a few authorities where you can check on this data. There's no reason for taking my word for it." The doctor smirked in pretended humility.

"Offhand I would suggest your looking on about page 86 in re: post traumatic amnesia. The volume I would recommend is 'Injuries of Skull, Brain and Spinal Cord' by Samuel Brock, M.D. It is as thorough on the subject of retrograde amnesia as any authority I know!"

"That certainly should serve the purpose, doctor. Thank you very much." Cranston was amused by the bewilderment on Donohue's face. Of course, it wasn't fair. Donohue probably didn't remember a broken vase... but Vincent had dug up the information...

They had taken Cranston's advice. The cook was bustling around preparing a snack. Cranston took a quick look in the living room. They were all there. Donohue and the doctor were talking animatedly.

Now was the time. Cranston hurried to his room. His briefcase opened quickly. The cape and hat of menace to every evil heart came out of its confinement.

It was time, and past time, for The Shadow to set the last tiny cogwheel in motion.

Habited from head to foot in the soft black hat and cape that was seemingly more black than any other black, The Shadow paused to look at himself in the mirrored wall.

He smiled at his reflection. The barest whisper of sound, that eerie warning sound that had spelled finis to the plans of so many villainous minds, rolled out in the room. The door closed and The Shadow was gone...

CHAPTER XIII

IT was becoming dark out. The Shadow moving silently, the way only he could, tip-toed through the dark hall. None of the servants had gotten around to putting the lights out. It was well, it made his progress that much easier. That door... it must lead down... downstairs where The Shadow meant to do that which would end a merciless and mercenary menace.

The door opened as though stirred by the smallest, most vagrant breeze. It closed as quietly. The Shadow was gone from the hall. The closed door cut off the sound of voices that had filled the hall.

The steps going down to the cellar were broad and level, part and parcel of the sensible functional designing of the whole house.

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Risking a tiny flicker of light from his flashlight, The Shadow glanced around the cellar. The furnace, the barrels, evidently for oil to heat the house. Somewhere, unless The Shadow was more wrong than it was his habit to be, there should be some sign of what he was seeking...

Out on the road that led to the Lively home, an antiquated old Rolls Royce, looking as out of place as a horse and carriage, rolled along. It was high off the road, high wheeled; the chauffeur sat out in front exposed to the weather. In the back, the high cab of the car was spacious enough for a gentleman to enter without removing his beaver.

That was Mr. Best's reason for keeping the car. Not that he ever wore a high hat, but if he ever did, he wanted to be prepared. In a big manila envelope, covered with sealing wax, Mrs. Lively's will reposed. He held it tightly.

He was smoking a long, thin, Philippine cheroot. As always, when he smoked one of them, he smiled to himself with satisfaction. They were every bit as good as the finest Havana cigars, but the mode was away from them. Therefore they were much cheaper than the more highly prized products of Havana.

Mr. Best, as always, thought "a penny saved is a penny earned." In the course of a year he probably saved all of three dollars by this little economy.

He looked through the sparkingly clean windows of the car. There, not far ahead, its entrance facing him as he came from the North, was that modern abomination that Eugene had caused to have built. Mr. Best thought that probably death was a little harsh for a man who built such a house, but not much too harsh. Give him a house like the one he lived in, it was quite a bit like the one that burned down, he thought with a start. Good Lord, what would he ever do if his house burned down?

Go and live at his club. That was the answer. He certainly would not be caught dead in a house like the one that his car was driving him to.

It lay about two hundred yards ahead now.

Thoughts of death reminded him of the purpose of his visit. What a pity, for a fine old woman like Mrs. Lively to die in such an undignified way. Not that she was really so old, he thought, catching himself up. He looked at himself in the rear view mirror. After all, he and she had been pretty much an age and look at him, he was in the prime of life.

In the front seat his chauffeur caught the old man looking in the mirror and wondered if vanity ever left a person. Here was this old goat, long overdue at the cemetery, sitting in the back there, primping like a schoolboy getting ready for a sofa date.

The chauffeur sighed and braked the car to a halt in front of the house which was their destination. He leaped out of the car, ran around and opened the door for the old lawyer to get out.

He couldn't make it unaided, the chauffeur had to help him out and hand him his cane, but never for an instant did the lawyer release his grip on the sealing-waxed envelope that held the will.

He walked painfully across the entrance and using his cane as a pointer pressed the bell with its ferrule. He heard pattering feet come towards the door. He took a deep breath. This was going to be quite a painful affair. As he grew older, he got to hate the business of reading wills to the avid inheritors more and more.

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He knew the expressions and every greedy look in every eye. It was like seeing the same play a hundred and fifty times too often.

His old seamed face creased into a nasty grin as an idea struck him. It was still there when Toni opened the door. She wondered what the old man was leering at, but dismissed the idea as the grin faded and Mr. Best said, "How do you do, my dear. Sorry to have to come on such a sorry errand."

Down in the stygian darkness of the cellar, The Shadow had been successful. He had found a dynamo from which the house's wiring fed off.

He looked the dynamo over carefully, flicking his pocket flash on and off. It had its lens covered with adhesive tape. Only a tiny cross of open space was left and a needle of light shone through this.

This lever was for the complete circuit. This cut off to the back of the house. This heavy lead probably covered the kitchen. Everything accounted for, and yet, there was an extra throw-off lever. It had a circuit breaker in circuit instead of a fuse as did the other leads.

This had to be it. The Shadow threw the lever. He waited. Nothing happened at first. There was a dial next to the lever that evidently controlled a rheostat.

The Shadow, laughing, turned the rheostat way to the right. That done, he went back up the stairs. His laugh echoed back and forth in the pitch-black cellar.

In the living room, Eugenia, a new chiffon handkerchief rapidly sharing the fate that had fallen to the last one, was ripping it into shreds.

Uncle Danny, sitting next to Harry, had his arm thrown around Harry's shoulders companionably. Harry asked, "Gee, do you think there'll be enough money for me to carry on my research?"

Danny nodded. He looked over at Toni who sat at Alfie's side. Alfie was staring in fascination at the old lawyer, Mr. Best.

He sat, cane leaning against his chair, envelope in his lap.

"I wonder what's keeping that detective person," asked Eugenia querulously. "I don't see why we should have to wait at his every whim."

"Now, Genia, you know the phone call was for him. I can understand his wanting to be in on this." Danny smiled at Eugenia reassuringly.

"I wonder where Lamont is." This was uppermost in Alfie's mind.

"He probably went to freshen up," Toni said.

Danny nodded. "Yeah, I saw him going into his room."

There was a sound outside the door, it opened and Cranston came in. He smiled a greeting and sat in a chair near the window. He had overheard Donohue talking on the phone and didn't like what he had heard.

The clumping sound of heavy, slow feet was next. The door opened again. Donohue came in. "We've been outsmarted again! That was a call from headquarters. Mr. Downs never got there... nor did my cop!"

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His face grim, Donohue said, teeth gritted together, "Somehow, someone here smuggled a gun to Downs! He cracked my man over the head with it..."

"Did he get away?" asked Eugenia.

"Uh huh." There was a curious glint in Donohue's eyes.

"How did he get free of the handcuffs?" asked Cranston.

"Uh," there was a slight pause, Donohue was evidently thinking of something else. "Luckily I gave the cop my keys, otherwise I suppose Downs would have shot himself free. As it is my man will be all right but for a headache..."

"This is all very interesting," said the dry, brittle voice of Mr. Best, "but time is going by. It is almost past my bedtime now. May I proceed?"

Everyone relapsed into quietness. Even Donohue, who a moment before had seemed anxious to say something to Cranston, shut up.

The only sound was that of the heavy manila paper of the envelope tearing and the sudden sharp pops of the sealing wax as it broke loose. Mr. Best glanced up from his task and looked at his circle of watchers. Yes, there were those expressions again. He sighed and ripped the final fastenings free.

"What about the servants?" he asked.

"Good heavens," said Eugenia, "I forgot them... just a minute, please."

Out in the hall she called them all together, from the sick butler, whom Cranston had not yet seen, to the maid, cook, the bruised-faced chauffeur. There was a whispered colloquy in which she asked them to stand just outside the door as there was no more room in the living room. They nodded understandingly.

Eugenia hurried back into the living room.

"Now then," said the old man briskly, "dum to dum... hum... you're not interested in all this... that I, Harriet Lively, being of sound mind and..." He brumpled a bit more before he said, "Ah, now we're getting to the meat. I do give and bequeath to my faithful maid, Annie Bechdolt, who has taken better care of me than my whole family, the sum of ten thousand dollars!"

There was a sudden commotion out in the hall. Annie had fainted. It took a bit of persuasion to bring her around again. When she regained consciousness again she looked up at the ring of faces and said, "What happened?"

"You fainted when you heard that grandmother left you ten thousand dollars!" Toni explained.

Annie promptly fainted again, leaving the servants to bring her around again, the family returned to the living room. Mr. Best took up the thread of his reading as calmly as though nothing had happened.

"To my cook, an exquisite artisan, I leave the same amount, ten thousand dollars, in grateful appreciation of her cooking."

The cook looked overcome but didn't faint.

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The reading went on, the butler shared in the same bequest. The chauffeur who had not worked for the family as long as the other servants received five thousand dollars, but he looked quite gratified. His black eye wrinkling up, he said, "Wow! Five grand... am I gonna tie one on! Nobody'll see me for six months!"

Mr. Best looked over the top of his pince-nez disapprovingly. He cleared his throat. "This is part of the will over which I had a great deal of trouble with Mrs. Lively."

They looked at him curiously. He had put the will down. He removed his glasses and whipping out a huge old-fashioned handkerchief from his pocket, proceeded to clean his glasses as he spoke.

"You see, aside from this house, which cannot be mortgaged because banks are a little suspicious about the resale value of a 'modern' home, because they have no facts and figures on them..."

He paused again, put his glasses back on and replaced his folded handkerchief in his pocket. "As I say, aside from this house, and the bequests, which Mrs. Lively insisted should be paid first, there is no estate!"

HE waited brightly for someone to say something, but no one spoke. He finally said, "I don't know whether you understand me or not. For the past five years Mrs. Lively has been living off her principal, not the interest. I warned her that this was fatal but she said that her investments were not bringing in enough to live in the style to which she was accustomed, and since she didn't figure she was going to live too long, she was perfectly prepared to spend her principle and leave nothing.

"She seemed quite determined to 'teach all of you a lesson!'"

Toni broke the silence with another hysterical outburst. She laughed and pointed her finger at Alfie, "And you," she giggled, "were willing to give up your share of... nothing." She laid her head back and laughed. "Oh, it's too wonderful... she controlled all of us because of her wealth and she had no wealth! The servants are better off than we are!"

This time Cranston let her finish her outburst. He figured that she deserved it. This was one development that he had not foreseen. It had nothing to do with the solution of the case, but this had turned to bitter ashes what the killer had expected to be the golden rewards of his crime!

CHAPTER XIV

ALL their plans, the whole pattern of their existence was torn to shreds in that instant. Alfie, Toni, brought up in the coddled lap of luxury, secure in the knowledge that time would bring them a reward for the years of servitude to the crotchety old lady...

Eugenia, Danny, past their prime, completely dependent for the comfort of their declining years, cast adrift penniless. And Uncle Harry... not quite up to par, how could he exist in a competitive world?

Even Mr. Downs, who was probably figuring on some of the estate to pay his way in court... how was he to hire a lawyer now?

Cranston and Donohue exchanged glances full of meaning. It was necessary to feel sorry for these people, even though they were not particularly nice humans, it was not good to see all the props knocked out from under anyone.

The old lawyer stood up. His feeble hand grasped his cane. He prepared to depart. Then, and only then,

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Eugenia said what the old man had been waiting for them to put into words.

Her voice high, shrill, she said, "Wait, don't leave now, Mr. Best This is infamous! I shall not take it lying down! That will it can't hold up in any fair court of law! Why, all that money that the servants are to get! If we had that, we'd have enough to struggle on... but this way..."

Best nodded his old head wisely. This was inevitable. He'd seen it happen so often. He sighed. Were there no new patterns?

"As a friend, my dear, I should not advise you to sue. I don't think you stand a chance. Mrs. Lively was in the best of health, both mental and physical, when she made that testament.

"As a lawyer, I suppose I should advise you to sue. For believe me, in such a suit, the only winners will be the lawyers! Besides, it will be a long and very expensive case. Where would you get the money?"

That seemed to be an even more shocking realization. Evidently Eugenie had not yet faced up to the reality of her pauperdom. It was a difficult readjustment.

In his corner of the room, Alfie was feeling better and better. The decision had been taken out of his hands. There was nothing to it but to get up and out and make his own way. Perhaps this whole tangled mess would turn out for the best after all...

Toni wondered how many of the eligible young men whom she knew, the ones who had been putting on a big rush act, would be as anxious, now that her dowry had vanished... not many, she foresaw in her realistic way.

Uncle Harry giggled a little and said, "Is the fun over now? May I go back to my room? I think maybe tonight will be the night!"

As he passed through the door, the cook put a rounded hand on his arm and said gently, "Don't you worry, you poor dear... as long as I have a roof over my head, you'll be taken care of."

Donohue compared this with Eugenie's attitude to the servants and he grimaced. He took his handkerchief from his pocket to mop his sweating brow. As he did so, the other members of the family walked by him. They evidently wanted to think things out alone. He didn't blame them. The old lawyer was speaking to Lamont Cranston.

Something dropped out of Donohue's pocket, dragged out by his handkerchief. The tiny tinkle caught Cranston's instant attention. He looked over in time to see Donohue pick up a tiny key and replace it in his pocket. An intriguing chain of possibilities ran through Cranston's mind.

Mr. Best said, "And if I can help in any way, I want you to be sure and call on me. I shall be only too willing to do all I can!"

Cranston nodded absentmindedly. It was curious the way Best had chosen him to speak to, as though he were the head of the family... but of course everyone was so disorganized... it wasn't too surprising.

Donohue walked over to Cranston and Best. He said, "That was a real sock below the belt! You could see it caught all of them unprepared!"

Best said, "It did, indeed. I truly did my feeble best to dissuade Mrs. Lively from her course, but she was adamant."

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"The word might well have been coined with her in mind," agreed Cranston.

Then at the very point in time when Cranston said the word "mind" there happened that which was to bring the whole case to a close! A startled masculine voice somewhere outside the house roared, "What the – ??"

There was a crash of glass and a thump.

Uncle Danny yelled, "Hey, come here, you guys, will you?"

They raced into his room. It had been his window that crashed. Glass lay in splintered shards on the floor. A rock was the cause of the thump. Danny held a crumpled piece of paper in his hand. From its curved shape it had evidently been around the stone.

He held the paper out for them to see. "What do you make of this?"

The note read, "I will be avenged!"

Donohue groaned, "Now what goes on?"

"Don't you think it may be Mr. Downs?"

Mr. Best looked aggrieved. He certainly had no idea that he would get involved in the muddled affairs of the Lively family.

"You said he got away from your man!" said Danny. "Blast it, why couldn't that butter-fingered fool have held onto him. Now who knows what my brother may do. His mind may have snapped under the strain!"

"Not another lunatic! I don't think I could stand that!" This was from Toni, who had walked into the room unobserved.

"You'd better brush some of that glass off yourself," Cranston warned Danny.

He looked down. There were fine splinters of glass sticking out of the front of his vest. He brushed at them carefully, saying, "Gee, that was closer than I thought. I was standing at the window when I heard my brother's voice roar, 'What the?' I stepped back and the rock followed me. I didn't know it had done this."

He continued picking the glass splinters out of the cloth as Mr. Best said, "Well, if you will pardon me, it's long past an old man's bedtime." And he was an old man, he realized it now. He was frightened and tired and there was only one place in the world he wanted to be at the moment, and that was deep in his own bed.

Leaning heavily on his cane he walked from the room.

Donohue looked at the note carefully. He said, "Be careful going out, my men are all around the place. Identify yourself."

"I will."

As Mr. Best made his careful, slow way towards the front door, Donohue gestured for Cranston to follow him out of the room. When they had left Toni and her uncle behind them he said in a low whisper, "Isn't it about time you told me what all that rigamarole with the doctor was about?"

HAPPY DEATH DAY

"Yes, I suppose it is past time. If you will step in here..." Cranston pitched his voice higher, "Toni, can you come here a moment?"

She came into the living room with them.

"You saw Eugene Lively after his death, did you not?"

"Yes, but must we talk about that now? I'm so tired..."

"I am sorry but if you are willing to put up with some additional fatigue now we can end this whole bizarre affair tonight."

"In that case, fire away."

"The newspapers at the time of Eugene's death just mentioned casually that a shattered vase lay out in the hall. Do you know anything about that?"

"I just barely remember that such was the case. It was a lovely old thing that Uncle Gene had picked up somewhere. Despite its antiquity it fitted in well with the modern decor."

"You saw his body?"

She nodded. "He was seated at the desk over there. You couldn't notice the shot that killed him. It was through his heart but he was slumped over the desk with his elbows on it as though thinking."

She paused as he pictured the disquieting scene. "But the second shot through his forehead... anyone could see that!" She shuddered again.

Subconsciously Donohue heard the front door close behind the old lawyer. If there was going to be any rough stuff, he was glad the old man had left.

But before Toni could continue with her reconstruction of the details of the two-year-old murder, they heard a disturbance. The front door reopened and they heard again the little tap, tap of Mr. Best's cane.

He was hurrying, there was no doubt of that. As fast as his old leg muscles could carry him. He walked, almost running, towards their door. Before he was fully inside the door he gasped, "Has... my mind... am I losing my senses? Am I a dotard?"

Donohue looked at him wonderingly.

"I can't understand it." Best spoke in a trembling voice that quavered with the force of his emotion.

"I could have sworn that when I came into the house, it faced north... but now... it's facing south! I feel as insane as that poor boy Foster did, when he gave his testimony in court!"

Donohue looked at Best. Had the old boy gone out of his mind? Only one way to find out!

Donohue ran to the door and opened it. He stood there gawping. He knew just how the old man had felt. The house was facing the South! There was no doubting it!

HAPPY DEATH DAY

Outside, in the dark, one of the police walked slowly back and forth. He was facing away from the house with his hands behind his back, deep in thought.

Not wanting one of his men to see how disturbed he was, after all, there was discipline to consider, he turned and fled back to the room where Lamont Cranston was reassuring the old man.

He and Toni had forced the old lawyer to sit down. Toni was holding a brandy inhaler to his lips. He was too frightened. He just sat and shook his head. He muttered, "I've seen it happen to other old men, intimate friends of mine... but never hallucinations. They just seemed to get a little childish as they went into their dotage. But I... I feel crazy!"

"If it makes you feel any better, so do I!" This from the stalwart Donohue, pride of the homicide squad.

"I'm sorry it had to be Mr. Best who made the discovery. But now you all know how Foster Downs must have felt when he gave his despairing testimony in court... and no one believed him!"

Cranston, jaw set in the firm line that gave his real character away, went on, "Toni, did Gene tell any of you of the plans for this house?"

"No, not a word. He was getting a big kick out of the whole thing. He acted as if it was a Christmas present and he wanted the whole place to be a complete surprise to all of us. It was... the first time we saw it was when he was dead..."

"Where did he get the money to build it?"

"He was really Grandmother's favorite. She gave him a free hand with money on the construction. She regretted it the first time she saw the house, but by then, as he had probably figured, it was too late. He never knew how late..."

It was just about the way Cranston had figured. He said, "Along with all the other elements of modern design that Eugene had incorporated in the house, this was set up as a sun house!"

The phrase did not seem to mean anything to them so he went on, "Lately, for the last ten years or so, experiments have been conducted, especially right out here in the University of Chicago, with various designs that take advantage of the sun's rays. One design is that of the eaves of this house. You may have noticed that they are arranged in such a way as to keep out the sun in the summer and let it in in the winter.

"The young forward-looking architects that Eugene hired went the next logical step. They made a sun worshiper out of the house!"

They all looked puzzled.

"In sunnier climates, like that of California, they have set up houses like this one, which are dependent on solar energy. Huge mirrors concentrate the rays of the sun and are in turn used to make steam. That steam is then used to run a dynamo which again in turn supplies energy with which to revolve the house!"

"The revolving house then turns so as to always be facing the sun. The sun pours in through the glass wall of the living room keeping it warm even in the cold weather."

"That certainly wouldn't work out here in Chicago," chuckled Donohue. "Not with our winters!"

HAPPY DEATH DAY

Cranston agreed. "Right. Solar energy machines have not yet been made efficient enough to turn a house here. But, the architects took care of that by cutting out the solar energy and using a regular electric motor to rotate the house!"

Mr. Best heaved a sigh of relief. It sounded mad to him; the very idea of a house that was not static, was repugnant to him, but he was beginning to think that his own sanity was safe.

"Luckily, for our very lucky killer, this house was not energized by solar power; for if it were, the solar engines are so arranged as to turn the house only one complete revolution in twenty-four hours. Because of the motor set-up, here, such was not the case!"

They sat and tried to visualize the modus operandi of the house. Donohue was finding it tough going. "I don't quite get it. Do you mean this whole house is made like a merry-go-round?"

"That's a little extreme, but it's close to the idea behind it."

"But why have we never noticed anything that would lead us to think of such a thing?" Toni asked, eyebrows wrinkled in thought.

"Two years!" was Cranston's answer. "If you had come to live here as was originally planned, Eugene would have told you of the arrangement, showed it to you for that matter. But, after his death, the house sat here, alone, out in this real estate development that never continued, and dirt and silt gathered. It covered all signs of the mechanism around the bottom of the house. Even when new, the house is landscaped in such a way as to hide its secret except from close scrutiny!"

"The servants?" asked Mr. Best astutely.

"I don't know, of course, quite why they never commented on the arrangement down in the cellar, but there is nothing there to notice particularly. All of you know that you have an accessory dynamo for use in case the regular lighting system goes out. I imagine the servants just assumed the mechanism for turning the house was part of the dynamo set-up."

"That could well be the answer," agreed Toni. "People only see what they expect to see."

Mr. Best harking back to the feeling of insecurity he had felt a while back said, "How terribly poor Foster must have suffered when no one would believe his testimony about the position of the house!"

"That's something, Cranston," said Donohue. "How come the architects didn't come forward and testify at the trial? Why didn't the workmen come forward? There couldn't have been a conspiracy of silence amongst all those people!"

"No, that would have been out of the question. About the workmen... they didn't say anything for the very good reason that none of them knew all about the mechanism. The young architects, trying out their brand new idea, were secretive about it. They probably used different workmen for the difficult manual labor and then put the final finishing touches in themselves.

"They must have wanted to show the whole house in a monster surprise unveiling that would have assured them plenty of publicity."

"But why didn't they speak up? What sealed their mouths? I can understand their secrecy but why..."

HAPPY DEATH DAY

"Oh, there was a good reason for their not saying anything!" Cranston smiled. "One of the best reasons in the world!"

"What could possibly be the reason? They sound like rats to me!" Donohue was irate.

"No, they are not rats. Quite the contrary. The reason they did not come forward and testify was because they did not know they were needed. I doubt if even now they know what happened in their beautiful house!

"You see, they were drafted and were away somewhere fighting the war by the time the house was completed!

"The workmen finished up long after they'd finished their basic training! They were somewhere overseas when the murder occurred!"

"Good grief!" Donohue mopped his forehead again. Every card had dropped in place for the killer. Every advantage had been his.

But that was before Lamont Cranston and that other, darker side of his self had appeared on the scene. Without the ever-hovering presence of The Shadow, the murderer might have gone on to the vicious end of his cycle of killing!

On the lawn outside the house, a cop's voice was raised in sharp command. "Stop! Stop or I'll shoot!"

Despite the presence of Toni, Mr. Best and Donohue, Cranston who stood near the window, laughed. Their attention was diverted, was on the scene outside the window. Therefore they had no way of knowing where the jubilant, triumphant, rolling laugh of The Shadow came from. They shivered as they heard it, for it had an uncanny effect on all people both evil and good. There was a mockery to the sound of it that was menacing, even to an unsullied conscience.

It made men hurry to examine their doings for some flaw.

CHAPTER XV

THE excitement, seen through the window which framed the scene like a proscenium in a theatre, occupied every eye. No one saw Lamont Cranston leave the room.

No one saw Cranston enter his room and certainly not an eye saw a dark silhouette that seemed to float through the window and leave the house.

Out on the lawn, an excited policeman struggling to pull out his gun which was caught in his holster, yelled, "Don't make me shoot you!"

The unheeding figure of a man, crouched over, indecipherable in the gloom of the trees and bushes at the perimeter of the lawn, ran on.

Donohue yelled, "You flatfooted ape, get him!"

The gun finally came from the reluctant holster and the cop fired a random shot. It missed, but its sound set up thundering echoes. Under the cover of the sound, invisible in the dark, a more active minion of law and order ran across the lawn and into the bushes in pursuit of the crouching man.

HAPPY DEATH DAY

The Shadow paused to listen. Ahead and to the right, that was where the soft scuffle of feet on fallen leaves revealed the progress of the man who was fleeing the Lively home.

Back in the living room Mr. Best said to Toni, "I feel all unstrung, my dear. You would think that the police would at least be able to recapture a man. If they are stupid enough to allow him to escape you would think they'd try to regain face by at least grabbing him when he comes back to throw notes in through the window! My!"

He gulped, "Who knows what he may have in mind. All he wanted is lost, but... he may not know of the provisions of the will!"

"Wouldn't it be hideous if Mr. Downs were to kill one of us, not knowing that there is no money? Somehow, that would be even more bitterly ironic than all the rest of this terror!"

Alfie came in as Toni finished speaking. "What's happened?"

"You remember Donohue said that Downs had escaped?" asked Mr. Best. "Well, he's on the loose out there, somewhere in the protection of the blackness of the night! No one can tell what thoughts he's having, what plans he's making... but I have an idea that none of them are pleasant!"

The noise and tumult had even aroused Uncle Harry from his work. "Where's Uncle Danny? I can't find him!"

Alfie glanced at Toni and all the old fear was back in his face. "You don't think that Downs has killed his brother, do you?"

"In our family, dear, I find nothing too improbable!" Toni grimaced and turned and looked out the window again. There was nothing to see. All was still. Donohue and the policeman had gone into the underbrush, into the shadows.

IN the dark, flecked by vague patterns of light that came down from a feeble moon only to be broken into little bits by leaves and tree tops, The Shadow heard the blundering approach of Donohue and his aide. He hoped they wouldn't frighten his quarry away. There, they were going the wrong way. The little sounds which had been guiding The Shadow had ceased. The man was standing still, waiting to see where the police were going.

The Shadow could picture the wild thoughts that must be racing through the fleeing man's mind. Escape or sell himself as dearly as possible, that must be the far from even tenor of his thoughts.

What did the man have to lose? Nothing but his life and that had been forfeit for a long, long time.

The barest, slightest crunch of a foot on some dry underbrush caught The Shadow's attention. All his thought now was focused in his ears. Like a primitive man, he was using his ears as a weapon. Using them to help him trail down the man who crouched over, gun in hand, was making his slow cautious way through the underbrush towards the road.

Once on that road, The Shadow imagined there might well be a car parked, waiting to aid the man in his desperate plight. Once in the car, it might be a long drawn out process to recapture him.

The Shadow was determined not to allow that to happen!

HAPPY DEATH DAY

The police were even further away now. They were going in diametrically opposed direction to where their quarry was.

Some sixth sense seemed to have warned the man that someone was trailing him, or else he was just being over-cautious, over-careful, because of the position he was in. He made the slightest of sounds, sounds that other ears but The Shadow's might never have heard. They were so small, that they might well have been the pattering of some tiny woods animal, a rabbit, or a skunk.

The Shadow thought that was apposite and a grim smile covered his harsh face. The black cape swooped out behind him, as sacrificing a little of the silence, he made haste towards the source of the sounds. His cape made little rustling sounds as it brushed against twigs and the rough bark of an old tree.

The man who was so cautiously making his way towards the road and what he hoped to be the first step to safety began to move faster. It was like a scene out of one of those old hilarious Keystone comedies, where the motion at first slow, then a little faster, gradually accelerated, till all, pursued and pursuer, were racing at more than top speed.

But there was no element of humor here. It was a dreadful sight. A man, guilty of the sin of Cain, ran to escape from the consequences of that brand that scarred his forehead, although none but he could know of the brand he wore.

He was more frightened now. His heart beat like an abused and overstrained motor. His breathing was short, it came in gasps that shook him to his toes.

His finger tight on the trigger of the death-dealing gun he carried, tightened still more as the activity behind him became louder and louder still!

He paused behind the cover of a broad tree. He waited, finger tensed till the gun was set like a hair trigger. The slightest increase in pressure and death would pour out like a flood of flame.

As the sounds suddenly ceased, he reconsidered. A shot? The sound would bring the police like bees to honey. There were but six shots in his gun. He determined to make every one count. He had never gotten a break, he thought, and now, in his last minutes on earth, he was determined to be merciless. He'd go out in a burst of glory! His lips drew back in a hideous simulacrum of a smile that had no humor in it, but held all cruelty in the world in its arched and grinning semi-circle.

What was that?

His every muscle tense, he froze. The sound was ahead of him, about six feet away. Even in this flickering and uneven light he could not miss. He strained his eyes to bring them into focus.

A black splotch, blacker even than the shadows that hugged the bases of the trees, sank to the ground, like a man throwing himself on his face to escape a withering burst of bullets.

He did not hesitate. Sighting the gun, his finger tensed that last necessary millimeter! The sound of the shot blasted through the quiet of the night like an explosion of T.N.T.!

The equivalent of five city blocks away, Donohue stopped stock-still in his tracks. Even here the gun shot was terrifically loud because of its barking contrast with the silence.

HAPPY DEATH DAY

He and the policeman, in complete silence, ran in the direction of the shot. Who in the world could the fleeing man have shot at, Donohue wondered.

In the utter and complete silence that had followed the blast of the gun, The Shadow, capeless, threw himself forward at the kneeling figure that held a gun from which smoke still curled.

The Shadow had waited a moment after he spotted the figure he was seeking and realizing the menace of a jittery finger on a cocked gun, he had flung his cape from him like a toreador teasing an irate bull!

The flickering movement had caught the man's eye and he had fired. He was far from defenseless, the gun still stood steady in his grasp, and his finger was tightening on the trigger for another shot, when The Shadow, like an avenging fury, leaped at his back!

He was smart, no denying that. The second he felt the weight on his back he realized that he had been fooled. As the grasping hands of The Shadow tightened on his throat and the weight of The Shadow's body threw him off balance, he fell to his knees and with a quick move of his neck, sent The Shadow spinning through the air over his head. It was done as casually as a well trained wrestler breaks out of a hold.

The Shadow sprawled forward on his knees. Momentarily he expected a bullet to smash into his unprotected back, so, almost before he landed, he was spinning, turning in a desperate effort to reach the cover of a nearby tree.

As he was rolling, presenting a difficult shot in the uneven light, the man fired again. The bullet winged through the cloth of The Shadow's suit and buried itself deep in the ground.

Before the man could fire again, The Shadow was behind the tree. In one motion, he was on his knees and his hands were loaded with guns.

Then started an eerie duel!

It was like something that might have happened when America was young. A man in the forest, and another hidden behind a tree. Indian and white, or white against white. It was a scene that had occurred too often in the past.

The Shadow, safely behind his tree, had to risk that protection in order to snap a shot at his antagonist. He knew well that the slightest part of him that appeared behind the tree would be in the unenviable position of a clay pigeon in a skeet shoot!

The man had wasted no time in shielding himself behind a tree of his own.

It was curious. Each of them took exactly the same length of time to arrive at a conclusion. With each of them, to think was to act. At precisely the same instant, two hands appeared from cover. Another split second and two heads appeared from behind the trees.

Angry eyes stared into cool calculating ones. There was a startled pause as they stared at each other. Then, and this too was simultaneous, they fired!

The two shots sounded as one. The heavy, relaxed in death form of one of the men crumpled to the ground, breaking small twigs in its downfall.

HAPPY DEATH DAY

Then there was a complete silence, broken only by the hurrying feet of Donohue and the cop. They stood still, looking at the dead man.

Donohue looked around to see who had been the corpse's antagonist. There was no one. There was no sound. Then, completely out of place in the forest, there came the low, mocking laugh of the master of men, the triumphant laugh of The Shadow!

Long after the jubilant, menacing laugh had faded, they waited stock–still.

But that was all. Just the laugh and then, silence. Donohue finally said, "If it hadn't been for The Shadow, this guy would have been safely on his way for who knows where."

They looked down at the dead man. "Well, you take his feet, I'll take his head. We may as well get him back to the house. He's been there often enough before."

In his room, in the silent house, Lamont Cranston placed the brief case under his arm as he left his room. He didn't want to have to waste any time now. When this was finished, there was still that plane.

He walked out into the living room. In it, were Mr. Best, agonizedly wringing his hands, Alfie and Toni. They looked up at his entrance. He gestured to his brief case and the suit case which he had brought along. "I wanted to be ready for my departure."

"But, you can't leave now! Didn't you hear all those shots?" Alfie looked unbelievably into Cranston's face.

"Shots?" Cranston inquired. "I believe I did hear some sound. I must have assumed it was merely an auto backfiring."

"You won't leave till Mr. Donohue comes back, will you?" asked Toni.

"Please, please, don't, Mr. Cranston," Eugenia added her voice to that of the younger people. She looked distraught, as well she might.

"That shouldn't be long." Cranston nodded his head towards the door through which they could now hear men walking up the flag–stoned walk.

It opened and Donohue, the cop helping him with his burden, entered. The cop was making heavy weather of it. He was sweating with strain.

He said, "This ain't a nice sight for ladies to see, sir."

But Cranston had foreseen that and had forced Eugenia and Toni back into the living room. He followed them to make sure that they wouldn't come out again. Once they were out of sight, Donohue completed his task. He laid the body down on a divan near the entrance of the house. "I want to talk some things over with Cranston. Call them in and tell them the killer has been caught."

As he joined the others Eugenia was saying, "So they caught him and shot him. Well, I suppose it's just as well this way, I would not have liked appearing in court at my husband's trial."

Cranston made his voice low, "But, my dear, I am afraid you will still have to testify! You can't testify against your husband, but you may be needed for corroboration."

HAPPY DEATH DAY

All of them, including Donohue, looked at him in surprise.

"Wait a minute! What do you mean by that?" Donohue's voice went a register higher. "How do you know that Downs will have to stand trial?"

Cranston smiled. "You know, I might have believed that fairy tale of yours about Downs escaping if you hadn't dropped your handcuff key shortly after you told your little story! It was obvious, was it not, that if you still had your key, then Downs could not very well have escaped! He's in jail right now, isn't he?"

"Bob but... you didn't see the face of the man out in the hall! How could you be sure that it wasn't Downs?"

"Obviously, it couldn't be because as I have said over and over, Downs was an attempted murderer, but not a successful one! No, that dead man can only be one man. The killer who was behind all the murders that have taken place!"

CHAPTER XVI

"AND that one man," asked Donohue curious to see how well Cranston had deduced, "was?"

"Good old Uncle Danny!" Cranston made a bitter face at the adjectives.

"Oh no..." wailed Toni.

Alfie gasped, "Not he. He was so fond of Eugene. He liked Foster so much... Why, he didn't even kow-tow to grandmother the way the rest of us did!"

"He never even seemed very interested in money. He always said as long as he had a roof over his head and three square meals a day, that he had nothing to worry about." Eugenia seemed more shocked at this duplicity than she had been at her husband's.

"Pose, all part of his pose of a gay, hail-fellow-well-met." Cranston looked at his watch. Not much time left. "You should all have realized, as soon as his alibi for the fire was revealed as a fake, that he was the only one in town and free to kill!"

"That's right, isn't it," said Donohue making a face at himself. "The very thing that cleared him of setting the fire was the thing that should have made it obvious that he was the one that killed Foster Downs."

"Your saying that he was fond of Foster, at least on the surface, explains one point that had puzzled me. When Foster's plans were made to escape from the asylum, he must have written to good old Uncle Danny asking him for help.

"Danny was outside the asylum waiting for Foster. Foster escaped from the asylum and walked right into his murderer's hands... and the death that was in those hands.

"Foster planned his escape to coincide with the lens setting fire to the old house, because it appealed to him as just! I suppose two kinds of release were symbolized. But Danny used the accident of his being away from the house at the time of the fire to cover himself with innocence."

"That rock that came through the window before?" Donohue asked.

HAPPY DEATH DAY

"Remember that cry in the dark just before it?"

They all nodded.

"You can imagine what Danny must have felt. He was all set to run away. He knew, now that the will had been read, that his killings had been worthless. That he would never benefit from them. He was afraid. His plot had become too complicated. It was starting to unravel. He dropped out the window and found..."

"That the last piece of his plan had come into view!" said Donohue. "He saw that the house had been turned around. That must have been a belt in the gut!"

"So much so that he cried out involuntarily. But he was fast. He realized that his cry had been heard, that we would all come running. He scrawled that note, threw it through the window and crawled back in himself, getting more glass stuck in himself than he could have by the window shattering from the rock!"

"I wondered why you looked at him so closely," said Donohue.

Cranston glanced at his watch again. "We'll have to speed this up..." He started towards the door.

Donohue grabbed at his arm like a drowning man at the classical piece of straw.

"Whoa... wait... there's a few things..."

Cranston paused.

"Let me get the sequence straight in my mind. Danny killed Eugene two years ago, then when Foster broke out, he killed him. Finally, he stabbed Mrs. Lively."

"Right... and before we go back to that old killing, what was your motive in pretending that Mr. Downs, our unsuccessful poisoner, had escaped?" Cranston thought he knew why, but wanted to be sure.

"That was a funny one, you know someone did pass a gun to Downs as he was being taken away! It was, we know now, given him by Danny. Who probably hoped that either of two things would happen. Either Downs would commit suicide which would make him look like the guilty one and get the pressure off Danny, or that he would try to escape. If he got away all right, it would still make him look like the killer."

"I figured that," said Cranston quietly.

"My man, who took Downs away, called me and told me that Downs had pulled a gun and tried to force my man to open the cuffs. As you were quick enough to spot. I hadn't given him the key. Frankly, I forgot to. But all that to one side, as I heard about the gun, which by the way, my man took away without any trouble, I wondered what would happen if our killer thought that Downs had made a successful break. As it turned out, Downs admitted that it was his brother who slipped him the gun.

"But that was my first indication that Danny was really involved. I wasn't too sure even at that, for, after all, they were brothers and it might have been some sort of fraternal feeling that made Danny give his brother the gun."

"Fraternal feeling?" Eugenia laughed. "What rot! They hated each other!"

HAPPY DEATH DAY

There was another of the many silences that somehow were part of this case to Cranston. There had been so much hate under the sun face, so much restraint, that the silences were inevitable. The real feelings of the people involved had been like an iceberg. The surface friendliness was the top one tenth that projects into view.

"About the first murder. You see now how Danny was able to make Foster's testimony about the position of the house seem insane. Well, the other part of his plan, by accident became part of the same horrible frame-up that he concocted for the man whose friend he had pretended to be."

Cranston looked around the room. In his mind he visualized the scene as it must have happened. It was unpleasant.

"Don't tell me that now," Donohue's voice was mildly sarcastic, "we're going to find out about those questions you asked the little medico?"

"Yes." Cranston was grim looking Alfie wondered what thoughts were tightening Lamont's lips. They found out when Cranston said, "Bear in mind that this is just my reconstruction of what I think happened, but it seems to me that it is the only hypothesis that covers all the factors."

Donohue thought that Cranston's merest guess was valid as far as he, Donohue, was concerned.

"Danny had made up his mind that Eugene was to be the first one to die. His motive, of course, was to increase the eventual amount of money that was to be divided up between the heirs to the estate. He knew that to kill Mrs. Lively, his real prey, first, would be stupid. In the first place the money would be split too many ways, in the second place it was too obvious.

"Then too, a clever part of his scheme was not to kill off too many of you!" Cranston's eyes were kind as he looked at the pathetic few that remained of the family.

"At all points he wanted enough people left to spread the suspicion, once he had killed his real objective, Mrs. Lively."

Two kills before the real one, before he killed the woman whom he thought was leaving a vast estate. Yes. The killer had been canny, thought Donohue.

"You'll have to picture the scene. And remember that if Danny had had the time to remove the shards of broken vase, this first murder of his would have been as perfect as was his killing of Mrs. Lively. It had that same quality of improvisation.

"Danny and Eugene were alone in the house. Eugene was probably very happy about the completion of this house.

"Danny was there as the first of the family... the rest of you were to come over later, were you not?"

Toni and Alfie nodded.

"Eugene sat at the desk and across the room, walking step by step nearer and nearer, came his killer. This was Danny's first killing and that's always the hardest. He had spent time working himself up to it. He was even, perhaps, a little nervous."

They could see the scene, a false smile on Danny's face, Eugene busy at his desk with something.

HAPPY DEATH DAY

"And then, at the closest possible range, the gun came out of Danny's pocket, he leaned over pretending to be looking at something on the desk. That was the time. He pulled the trigger and walked away.

"One part of his plan was finished. I can't know what his first plan was, whether he hid the gun intending it to look like some burglar had done the deed, or whether it was supposed to be suicide, that we'll never know.

"The second part of his plan was for him to have an alibi. After all, he was alone in the house with Eugene, everyone knew he was there. He had to have an alibi. He planned a simple one. He meant to have it look as though he'd been hit on the head with a vase, either by Eugene, if it was supposed to be suicide, or by the burglar, if that was the plan.

"He went out in the hall... by the way, what sort of a finish did the broken vase have?"

"Sort of pebbly," said Toni after a moment's thought.

"That's right," Eugenia agreed.

Alfie nodded. He, too, remembered that.

"Then that made his task even easier. He didn't have to worry about leaving finger prints. He held the vase at arm's length overhead... and..."

Cranston paused. They could all picture that too. Danny holding the vase above his head and dropping it.

"You see what he planned. He was to be found unconscious in the hall. Eugene dead in the other room. He didn't mind a real crack in the head. It was a small fee for the kind of stakes he thought he was playing for."

"But what happened? What went wrong?" Donohue asked.

"Everything, for his plan's sake! No one came. You others must have been late in arriving!"

Alfie was amazed at the truth of Cranston's deductions. They had been late. So late that Foster had gone on ahead of the rest of them.

"Grandmother was fussing, picking things to take. It seemed to go on forever." Toni could remember that only too well.

"You can imagine the spot that left the killer in. No one came by and found him. Instead... he came to of his own volition... and now we come to the questions I asked the doctor.

"Danny of course had never rehearsed that blow on the head. How could he? He thought he had a hard head because of carnival fights he had been in. It was hard, too, for he might have fractured his skull. Instead, he got a concussion!"

Donohue remembered a phrase the doctor had used, 'retrograde amnesia.' So that had been it!

"I can see dawning comprehension," Cranston smiled at Donohue. "You see what happened? He came to, but the concussion had given him an amnesia that extended back before the killing!"

"You mean," gasped Alfie, "he didn't remember that he had killed a man?"

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"Correct. Part of it may have been a subconscious guilt feeling that helped him forget. But just the concussion alone, as the doctor pointed out, would be enough.

"You must see that the only thing that had been occupying his mind was the planned killing. That was the only thought in his mind. He got up from the floor, still in a daze, got the gun, walked into the living room, and..."

"Shot a dead man!" Toni breathed.

Cranston nodded. "But this blasted all his plans, for just after the shot rang out, the door bell rang and in came Foster."

"Whew, what a spot!"

"Dazed or not, he had sharp wits and something that Foster said about the position of the house must have set his new plan in motion. He knew of the revolving apparatus, that was probably the first thing that Eugene told him, full of pride of the house as he must have been!

"Danny, of course, knew of Foster's mental state. He let him go in and find the dead man. Then, he sent him in to town to bring help."

"And as soon as poor Foster left, he set the engine going and reversed the position of the house!" Toni said bitterly.

"By that time his sharp wits were probably going at full blast. He realized what he had done... The double shooting. He calmly proceeded to use it in his testimony so that while seeming to be sympathetic to Foster he really kept arousing the doubts of the jury about Foster's sanity and about the insanity of the killing of a dead man!"

CHAPTER XVII

CRANSTON was at the door with his hand on the knob. His brief case under one arm, the suitcase at his feet, he waved a good-bye.

"Wait, Lamont, please, we haven't thanked you!" Alfie was pathetic.

"More important than thanks, how did you know all these things?" Donohue was grateful for the information, but he could not see how Cranston could have dug it all up.

"A friend of mine told me a lot of it," said Cranston, a self-deprecatory smile on his lips. He turned the knob.

"A friend?" asked Donohue. But while he asked, he knew who the friend was. It could only be one person!

"The friend is a person whose slogan is... 'The Shadow Knows!'"

The door closed behind Cranston.

Alfie turned to Toni. "The Shadow! But how preposterous! What did he have to do with all this?"

Donohue, on his feet now, said, "Nothing much, nothing but everything!" He smiled grimly, thinking of the

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murderer's body lying on the couch in the hall. If it hadn't been for The Shadow...

It must be about time for the Medical Examiner to arrive. Donohue knew that he couldn't leave until the M.E. made out the forms, so he sat down again, and ran through the whole muddled case in his mind while he waited.

Alfie, hand thrown protectingly around Toni, said, "Now that it's all over and I feel like a real man instead of a fool, I suppose, in a way, I can take the credit for the solution!"

Toni grinned at him. It was nice to see him this way. "You solved it?" She teased him. Somehow she knew that this new Alfie would stay. No more cowardice and vacillation.

"Oh no, not that, but if I hadn't had the courage of desperation and phoned to Lamont Cranston for help I hate to think of what might have happened."

Donohue nodded in agreement. Without The Shadow, and Cranston, Danny Downs might well have gotten away with murder triple murder.

Outside the house, quite a way down the road, Cranston leaped into Shrevvie's cab.

"I thought you was never gonna show!" Shrevvie was aggrieved. "We just got time to make that plane!"

"Good, don't spare the horses!"

The cab swung around and drove past the Lively home. As they drove by it rapidly, Cranston could see the gleaming end of a telescope, a small one stuck out of one of the windows.

He thought, poor Uncle Harry. If only Danny's delusions had been as mild! Perhaps some day Harry would see that which he wanted to see so desperately.

The clean night air swept through Lamont Cranston's nostrils. He inhaled deeply, getting rid of the last lingering vestiges of the evil that had crawled through that house, cursed by a vile, ambitious, cunning brain.

That was the real curse, thought Cranston, nothing of superstition about it... just the evil that men's passions wrought. But as long as evil walked the earth there was one man and one alone to fight it, to exorcise it... The Shadow!

And he was continuing his never ending battle against those forces. Ahead, lay what? First the plane, a trip to New York to find out what that extra sense of Burbank's had smelled out and then, once again, The Shadow would throw down the gauntlet to crime and criminals. Had the criminals heard that low laugh that emanated from the back of Shrevvie's cab, they might have paused in their machinations, but, as always, they had no warning. The Shadow would descend on them like the master man hunter he was, unheralded and alone...

The cab droned on through the velvety blackness of the night.

THE END