

MASTER OF DEATH

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. THE MAN WHO SMILED

"STOP beyond the corner, driver."

The taximan swerved toward the curb as he crossed Sixty-sixth Street and stopped free of the Broadway traffic. The passenger, leaning forward with his face beside the window, smiled as the cab halted at the designated spot beyond the corner.

Opening the door, the man alighted and paid the driver. He was still wearing his smile. The taxi driver noted it in the dim light, and gazed askance at the sallow face. There was something about the passenger's smile which the driver did not like.

As the man pocketed his change, the driver pulled the cab from the curb and glanced back. His ex-passenger was still standing by the corner, waiting for the flow of traffic to cease.

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Even from the distance, the taximan fancied that he could see the ugly leer upon the fellow's face. The driver shrugged his shoulders, and let the cab roll on. After all, the man had been just another passenger; yet even this hard-boiled jehu felt a sense of relief to know that he was rid of this fare.

BACK on the corner of Sixty-sixth Street, the smiling man stepped from the curb. A red light had stopped traffic. The man strolled across the wide thoroughfare, turned toward the nearby avenue, and walked along until he reached the portals of an unpretentious hotel.

An illuminated sign proclaimed the identity of the establishment: Hotel Garonne. The strolling man entered the lobby and followed an inconspicuous course to an obscure grill room.

There, he approached a secluded booth, and sat down at the table. An owlish-faced man, seated opposite, looked up from a menu, then nodded nervously as he recognized the arrival.

The sallow-faced man no longer wore his leering smile. Without it, his visage showed no evil trace. There was a certain briskness in the arrival's manner, and he addressed the waiting man with a quick, low-toned greeting.

"Hello, Clussig," he said. "I'm glad to see that you arrived on time."

"I try to keep my appointments, Veldon," returned the owlish individual, as he peered seriously through large-glassed spectacles. "You said that it was urgent – that I must be here promptly at seven thirty. So I came a bit ahead of time."

Veldon nodded. A waiter was approaching, so the sallow-faced man picked up a menu and gave his order. The waiter nodded to Clussig, and the bespectacled man pointed out items on the bill of fare.

As soon as the waiter had departed, Veldon again turned his attention to his companion. He drew a folded newspaper from his pocket, and slapped it on the table.

"What's the idea of this?" he demanded sharply. "I told you to keep out of print, yet you go ahead and give this interview."

Clussig grinned sheepishly as he looked at the headline. The heavy-typed words were terse and commanding of interest. Veldon snorted as he read them aloud:

Research Expert Predicts Era of Electrical Wizardry

"If that's a wise thing to put in print, I can't see it."

"There's nothing harmful in the article," protested Clussig. "I merely told the reporter that many of the long-predicted electrical developments were already perfected, and would soon be introduced to the public. I said nothing of my own improvements; in fact, I did not even mention the matter of rays –"

"Not in this interview," interposed Veldon. "But what about the next one? Don't you realize what you've done? You've put the name of Merle Clussig into the news. Some smart reporter will start to pump you, and you'll give away the fact that you are associated with Eric Veldon."

"No! No!" returned Clussig. "I'll never do that, Veldon. I understand the need for secrecy."

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"Yes?" Veldon eyed his companion coldly. "Well, Clussig, I can read between the lines of this newspaper story, and I don't like it. I know your purpose. Why try to deceive me?"

CLUSSIG became nervous. His whole manner showed that Veldon had made a pointed remark. Clussig gazed away while the waiter stepped up with the first course. Then he caught Veldon's steady stare, and became ill at ease.

"Let's be frank about this," suggested Veldon. "I know your trouble, Clussig. You're becoming impatient. You want results. Am I right?"

"Yes," admitted Clussig. "Veldon, I've placed a lot of confidence in you. I gave you all my uncompleted electrical inventions – any improvements on X-ray apparatus – my development of the heat-ray tube – the screens which I devised to prevent the injurious effects of such rays –"

"And I attended to the proper mechanical construction," interposed Veldon calmly. "Not only have I kept your devices secret; I have arranged for their promotion. You were broke; I have given you sufficient money to live comfortably. What more do you ask?"

"I want results!" blurted Clussig. "My devices are worth a large amount of money. Why should their promotion be delayed longer? You promised results."

"So," said Eric Veldon, in a sarcastic tone, "you decided to force the issue. You deliberately thrust yourself into print, knowing that a campaign of that sort would gradually bring you into the limelight."

"Why not?" questioned Merle Clussig nervously. "You have kept me buried too long, Veldon. You have my inventions; you are negotiating with some wealthy person who is willing to back them. Why should I be kept in the background? Why?"

Eric Veldon waited patiently while the waiter changed the dishes. The sallow man was gazing sternly at Clussig; and the bespectacled inventor saw the faint traces of a saturnine smile that appeared upon Veldon's lips.

Clussig sensed that he had invoked the promoter's complete displeasure. He was apprehensive, for he feared an outburst. Veldon, however, showed no further trace of anger; on the contrary, his manner became disarming.

"You must not be anxious," purred Veldon. "Remember, Clussig, that the mere perfection of an invention or mechanical device does not assure the reaping of a monetary harvest. Effective promotion is accomplished only by waiting for the psychological time.

"I have been paying you what constitutes a retainer's fee. I have been exercising an option on your inventions. I have not told you the identity of the man with whom I am dealing, nor have I named you to him.

"I have promoted other inventions in the past. I intend to handle new ones in the future. I am the important link between the inventor – who thinks oddly in ideas – and the financier – whose trend is commercial. Direct contact between you and the man of wealth would be disastrous, at present."

VELDON paused emphatically when he had completed his statement. Clussig found himself nodding unconsciously. The inventor was forced to agree with Veldon's persuasive words. Nevertheless, he put forth one last feeble protest.

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"I understand," he said, "but I cannot forget that you have been telling me this same story for many, many weeks. I have been constantly looking forward to a satisfactory completion of negotiations, yet the final result still seems to be distant. Inactivity and obscurity have long been troubling me. That is why I took advantage of an opportunity to assert myself."

"Very fortunately," returned Veldon smoothly, "you have kept the cat in the bag. You have talked only of your past experience with no mention of your present activities. That is why I called you and arranged this important appointment. I see how your little newspaper story can be turned to great advantage."

"How?" Clussig was agog.

"By suiting it to circumstances," replied Veldon. "By a real coincidence, I have arrived at a point in my negotiations which will enable me to introduce you to the man who intends to finance your improved rays and screens."

"When?"

"Tomorrow night."

"Who is he?"

"I shall tell you then. There is, however, one proviso. You must work with me to create the impression that I wish to give the financier with whom we shall deal. There must be no false step between now and tomorrow night."

"I understand."

"You must understand in full," asserted Veldon. "You must follow my instructions to the letter. First, I want you to prepare a complete outline of your past activities."

"I can do that tonight."

"Exactly. At the same time, I want you to avoid all communication with newspaper reporters."

"That will be easy."

"I can count upon you for such actions?" questioned Veldon, in a serious tone.

"Absolutely," Clussig assured. "I shall go directly to my apartment when I leave here. There, in my little study, I shall prepare a complete and accurate account of all my previous experience."

"And if reporters call?"

"I shall be out. I promise you that, Veldon. It is easily arranged at my apartment house. I shall leave word downstairs that I am out."

"Very good," approved Veldon. "I am relying upon you, Clussig, for everything is now at stake. I intend to visit our financier this evening, and to arrange tomorrow night's interview. But I warn you, he is a keen man; if he should gain any notion that you were talkative, he would shy away from the investment. Secrecy, Clussig! It is essential!"

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Clussig nodded wisely as he peered through his thick lenses. He was finishing his meal, and he arose to leave, apparently impressed by Veldon's plea for careful action and restraint. Veldon stopped Clussig's departure with a wave of his hand.

Glancing idly at his watch, the promoter began to speak in an easy, genial tone. He talked with the air of a suave salesman. His purring words brought a glimmer of enthusiasm to Clussig's dull eyes.

VELDON was painting a picture of wealth and fame – a brilliant rainbow which lay just beyond the horizon. To Clussig, the portrayal was fascinating. During his months of dealing with Veldon, Clussig had constantly been swayed by promises, backed with small advances of cash. Never before, however, had Veldon been so convincing.

Once again, the promoter glanced at his watch. The timepiece registered a few minutes before nine. Pocketing the watch, Veldon arose and extended his hand to Clussig.

"Tomorrow night," he remarked, "I shall meet you here at seven o'clock. You will have the complete outline of your past creations ready for me?"

"Certainly," returned the inventor. "I shall go directly to my apartment and work upon it there."

"As for money," purred Veldon, "if you need some now" – the inventor paused as he drew forth a roll of bills, then replaced the cash in his pocket – "ah, well, why should we worry about that until tomorrow? The deal will be settled then. Wealth will be yours – with whatever advance you may require. Let us postpone negotiations until that time."

"Gladly," exclaimed Clussig.

The two men walked from the grill room. Clussig, shoulders stooped, but head erect, displayed an eagerness which was uncurbed. Veldon, speaking softly, still talked suavely of the immediate future.

At the portals of the hotel Garonne, the two men parted. Clussig, after another handshake, scuffled along the avenue, his footsteps turned toward the side street, which led to his apartment house, nearly a mile away. Veldon, alone, watched the departing inventor.

It was then that the evil smile again displayed itself upon the promoter's lips. A sneering chuckle came from Eric Veldon's lips. Turning, the sallow-faced man went back into the hotel, and entered an obscure telephone booth.

Veldon's watch was dangling from his fingers. The hands upon the dial now denoted the hour of nine. A low chuckle ended as Veldon raised the telephone receiver; but the promoter's smile still remained.

Despite the expressions of friendliness which he had given, Eric Veldon, now unobserved, showed plainly that enmity was the dominating factor in his mind. The malice which was evident in his expression foreboded no good for Merle Clussig.

Indeed, Eric Veldon had all the semblance of an evil plotter, who possessed complete confidence in his ability to complete the vile scheme which dominated his brain.

CHAPTER II. A TRAVELER RETURNS

NINE o'clock – the same evening, but the scene was a mansion in New Jersey.

The chimes of an antique clock were ringing forth the hour from the mantelpiece above the fireplace, in a sumptuous living room. As the clear tones ceased, the doorbell rang. A uniformed servant leaped to his feet and hurried to answer it.

Opening the front door, the servant stepped back to admit an expected visitor. Into the light stepped a tall man, whose face was momentarily obscured until he had removed his hat and handed it to the waiting servant.

"Good evening, Mr. Cranston," said the uniformed man, making a bow.

"Good evening, Richards," replied the arrival. "Has everything gone well during my absence?"

"Yes, sir," said the servant. "It will be much better, though, now that you have returned, sir."

"I am glad to hear you express that thought, Richards. Here is Stanley. Help him with the luggage."

The servant stepped forward to assist a uniformed chauffeur who was entering with a pair of heavy bags.

As each man started upstairs, Cranston strolled across the hallway, entered the living room, and seated himself in a comfortable chair. He smiled as he heard the distant tones that were passing between Richards and Stanley. He knew that they were talking about this homecoming.

Whenever Lamont Cranston returned to his New Jersey mansion, his arrival constituted an important event in the affairs of the large household. Lamont Cranston, multi-millionaire and globetrotter, always maintained his pretentious establishment even during his absence.

His departures and returns were invariably unexpected. Tonight had been no exception. A telegram received by Richards, the valet, had caused Stanley, the chauffeur, to set out for the Newark airport with just time enough to meet the millionaire traveler with the limousine.

LAMONT CRANSTON, in appearance, was quite as remarkable a character as his habits would indicate. He was tall and well proportioned. His hands, though slender and supple, possessed a latent strength in their long, well-formed fingers.

The most remarkable phase of the millionaire's appearance, however, was the distinctive countenance which Lamont Cranston possessed. His face was immobile; its features, as though molded by a sculptor's skill, held a firm, unchanging expression that rendered them almost masklike.

The dominating characteristic was an aquiline nose below a strong, high forehead. From the sides of this hawklike beak peered eyes that were stern and unflinching. Lamont Cranston's countenance was more than impassive; it was inflexible.

While Cranston sat motionless, enjoying the environment of his luxurious living room, Richards appeared from upstairs, bringing a large envelope. The valet approached the millionaire and placed the letter in Cranston's waiting hand. The valet bowed and retired.

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While the clock on the mantel ticked away its minutes, Lamont Cranston opened the envelope. From it, he drew forth folded sheets of paper. These bore blue–inked notes in what appeared to be a code. Cranston read them rapidly; when he had finished each note, the writing disappeared from the paper word by word.

With the notes was a newspaper clipping. This was the same item that Eric Veldon had discussed with Merle Clussig in the Hotel Garonne. It referred to the inventor's interview concerning the dawning era of electrical wizardry.

A soft, whispered laugh came from Lamont Cranston's chiseled lips. Like Eric Veldon, the millionaire was able to read between the lines. He could tell that Clussig's interview had been given with the definite purpose of creating interest; yet with the definite intention of concealing something more important and specific than the generalities which were mentioned.

The laugh which had been uttered; the keenness which had been displayed – these were indications of a personality which differed from that of the idle, blase millionaire. These were the revelations of a well–concealed identity. This personage who called himself Lamont Cranston was actually The Shadow!

The sighing laugh died. Only the ticking of the clock could be heard. The long hand marked the exact time as seven minutes after nine.

Lamont Cranston arose from his chair. His tall figure threw a long, grotesque silhouette across the thickly carpeted floor. Swiftly, this transformed being passed through a door, and entered a small darkened room. He picked up a telephone.

The quiet, almost lazy tones of Lamont Cranston gave the number. Brief silence followed. Then came a moderated voice from the other end of the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

No longer did the voice of Lamont Cranston occur. It was the whisper of The Shadow which responded to Burbank's immediate announcement of identity:

"Instructions to Burke." The Shadow's tones were weird, delivered in a peculiar tone, which no one could have counterfeited. "Go immediately to the home of Merle Clussig, inventor. Request an interview concerning electrical inventions. Burke to represent himself as Classic reporter."

"Instructions received," was Burbank's reply.

The receiver clicked. The Shadow laid the telephone aside. He stood in total darkness, as though his present identity craved such somber surroundings.

Quick, deductive thoughts were passing through that acute brain. The Shadow, master of mystery, had returned from one of his strange journeys. During his absence, his agents in New York had been on watch for the unusual. That was their duty, whenever The Shadow was away.

RUTLEDGE MANN, a man who posed as an investment broker, but who served as agent for The Shadow, had spied the unusual clipping which pertained to Merle Clussig. He had forwarded it – with reports from other agents of The Shadow – to Lamont Cranston's home.

The fact that The Shadow had displayed a prompt interest in the clipping was proof of Mann's capable service. Divining that Merle Clussig's interview might be a sincere effort to attract public notice, The Shadow

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had lost no time in action. He had called Burbank, his hidden contact man.

Burbank, in turn, would notify Clyde Burke, reporter on the New York Classic, to form immediate touch with Merle Clussig. Clyde Burke, in his capacity as news gatherer, was an active and useful agent of The Shadow.

A soft laugh sounded in the darkness. That laugh was expressive of The Shadow's thoughts. A master of darkness who fought constantly with crime, The Shadow possessed the uncanny capability of sensing when matters were amiss.

Rutledge Mann had probably clipped that news paragraph because he knew The Shadow wanted all facts concerning new scientific developments. But The Shadow had seen more in the clipping than Mann could possibly have supposed.

The guarded mirth ended. The Shadow stepped from darkness. He entered the living room. He was no longer The Shadow. He was Lamont Cranston, multi-millionaire, who found life a bore save when he was traveling abroad.

Richards was at the door of the drawing room, near the hallway. The valet saw his master approaching. He stared in surprise as Cranston spoke to him.

"I am going out, Richards," declared the millionaire. "Tell Stanley to bring the limousine to the door. I intend to run into New York."

"Yes, sir," gasped Richards. "But you have just arrived home, sir" – the valet was staring at the clock – "just ten minutes ago, sir –"

"I know," interposed Cranston calmly. "But I have some matters to which I must attend. I am going to New York."

While Richards hurried away to give the order to Stanley, Lamont Cranston entered a closet in the hall. He drew a small key from his pocket. He unlocked a panel that was practically invisible at the end of the closet. From this hiding place he drew out a brief case.

Just after Cranston emerged from the closet, Richards returned through the front door to announce that Stanley was ready with the limousine. Cranston walked from the house, entered the car, and was driven away. Richards went back into the house, shaking his head.

THE valet could not understand the master. He could appreciate Lamont Cranston's love for travel; but this habit of coming home unexpectedly, and leaving with such swiftness, was something which Richards had never been able to fathom.

There was another fact which perplexed the valet. He sometimes felt that Lamont Cranston must be two beings. There was a quiet, lazy Lamont Cranston, who kept his affairs to himself, but who never displayed rapidity of action. There was a thoughtful, taciturn Lamont Cranston – as impassive as the first – who seemed to respond to sudden inclinations.

In his term of service, Richards had noted that the old Mr. Cranston – whom he remembered from long ago – was invariably the same. The new Mr. Cranston, however, had a way of gazing at people with eyes that sparkled as though imbued with sudden light. This was the Cranston who had returned tonight, and who had so characteristically decided to make a quick trip to Manhattan.

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Two men – yet both one. That was the decision which held Richards.

The valet had gained only an inkling of the truth. Actually, there were two masters whom he served. One was really Lamont Cranston. The other – a personage who calmly took his place when the real Lamont Cranston was absent on a world tour – was The Shadow.

At present, the real Lamont Cranston was in Abyssinia. The pretender was in his place, living in his home, posing as the millionaire. He it was who had gone away for a short trip by plane, to return tonight. He it was who had just departed in the limousine with Stanley. The false Lamont Cranston – an impersonator so capable that his assumed identity had never been suspected – was The Shadow.

The clock on Lamont Cranston's mantel was chiming the quarter hour. In the brief space of fifteen minutes, The Shadow had entered the mansion, and had again departed. He had answered the call of the mysterious. His keen intuition had gained an inkling of some hidden motive which savored of impending crime.

The limousine in which the false Lamont Cranston had set forth was rolling along a side road that led to a New Jersey highway. Immersed in the darkness of the rear seat, The Shadow was contemplating what lay ahead.

Clyde Burke would soon be at Merle Clussig's. There the reporter would talk long with the inventor. Before the interview was ended, The Shadow would be there to view the situation.

Perhaps this night's episode would be productive; possibly it would offer nothing. Yet The Shadow had an uncanny ability to scent the unusual. He had spotted it tonight, through the newspaper clipping received from Rutledge Mann.

Long white hands opened the brief case which lay by The Shadow's side. Deft fingers drew forth the folds of a black garment. The spreading edges of a black cloak moved through the darkness. The flattened shape of a slouch hat was fitted to a head. Hands gripped the cold steel of two automatics, and slid the weapons beneath the surface of the cloak.

The features of Lamont Cranston were obscured. The millionaire had vanished. In his place was an invisible being who could move with the silence of falling night. When the limousine reached Manhattan, that amazing form would glide forth into darkness.

The Shadow was playing the part that had become himself. Cloaked in blackness, shrouded in mystery, he was ready for the adventure which lay ahead. He had assumed his own identity.

He was The Shadow!

CHAPTER III. DEATH UNOBSERVED

IT was seventeen minutes past nine when Merle Clussig entered the lobby of his apartment building. The inventor had walked swiftly for a while after leaving Eric Veldon, then the pace had tired him, and he had continued at a slower gait.

This apartment house – the Starleigh – was an antiquated place, which had fallen into second-class ways. The lobby was fitted with chairs which were cheap and uncomfortable; only one of the two elevators was in operation. All the guests who resided beneath the fourth floor preferred the stairway to the elevator.

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There was a little booth in the corner, where an operator took incoming calls. The service was none too good, for the girl at the switchboard also performed secretarial duties in the apartment office, which adjoined the lobby. However, when Clussig entered, the young lady was at the switchboard.

The girl observed Clussig's approach. Before the inventor had a chance to speak, she referred to a scrawled list of pencil marks, and offered information.

"There was a call for you, Mr. Clussig," she said. "I rang your apartment, but there was no answer."

"How long ago was the call?" inquired Clussig anxiously.

"It came in at seven o'clock," replied the girl.

"Who was it?" asked the inventor.

"It was a man calling," returned the operator, "but he left no name or message. He asked me to ring your apartment, which I did. He said he might call later."

"Was it a newspaper reporter?" Clussig's tone was apprehensive.

"I don't think so," said the girl, with a smile. "Were you expecting one?"

"One!" exclaimed Clussig. "More than one. Several, perhaps. It is very important that no reporters should see me tonight. Do you understand? None at all."

"I'm sure that this man could not have been a newspaper reporter. Suppose he calls again. Will you be in your apartment?"

"I shall be there. But tell all reporters that I am out. If that man calls, find out who he is, and notify me. I can tell you whether or not I want to see him."

"Mr. Clussig is out," said the operator emphatically, as she marked the words on a slip of paper.

"So far as newspaper reporters are concerned," added Clussig.

The inventor started up the stairs. The girl watched him. A perplexed look appeared upon her face.

In all his term of residence at the Starleigh, Merle Clussig had scarcely spoken more than a dozen words to the operator. The girl had not read the newspaper interview which Clussig had given. Hence she was at a loss to know why the man had suddenly turned to statements regarding newspaper reporters.

MERLE CLUSSIG, as he climbed the stairs, was apprehensive. The inventor had gained a peculiar state of mind. Eric Veldon's insistence upon the maintenance of silence seemed well advised, yet there had been something in the promoter's manner that now caused Clussig worryment.

In reviewing his engagement with Veldon, Clussig saw where he had committed certain errors. First, he should have insisted upon learning the identity of the financier with whom Veldon had opened negotiations. Second, he should have insisted upon money from Veldon when the promoter had been on the point of offering it.

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Suppose something should go amiss tomorrow night! Veldon might then declare all negotiations ended. That would mean no more money, and Clussig was dependent upon the funds which he had been receiving from Veldon.

This thought was alarming. Clussig was grumbling to himself as he reached the third floor, and paused to puff after the steep and tiring climb. Clussig turned toward the short corridor at the left. It terminated in a turn; at right angles was the long passage which led to the inventor's apartment.

Merle Clussig gaped. He stared perplexedly through his thick-glassed spectacles.

Coming directly toward him was one of the oddest men whom he had ever seen. This individual was short and stocky; his clothes were plain, He had the heavy hands of a brute; his face was coarse, and the most conspicuous feature was a heavy, protruding jaw that bore pocklike scars.

Yet the man's expression was more startling than his physiognomy. His eyes were dull; they were staring straight ahead. The color of his face was an unnatural white. The waxen countenance gave the man the appearance of a living corpse.

Moreover, this stranger's stride was mechanical. His body, though erect, was leaning forward. To Clussig, the man seemed a human gorilla, with powerful hands ready to grip the throat of any who might block his path.

For a moment, the inventor was paralyzed; then, responding to an instinctive desire for flight, he turned and sidled along the corridor at the right. Glancing over his shoulder as he neared the angle in the passage, Clussig saw the apelike man enter the doorway that led to the staircase. He waited until he was sure that the intruder had descended. Then, with furtive footsteps, Clussig hurried to his own apartment.

Once he had reached his little living room, Clussig shuddered. He felt safe behind the locked door; nevertheless, the recollection of that corpse-like fellow in the hall was something that troubled him.

Clussig was positive that he had never seen the man previously. Perhaps he was a new tenant who had only recently taken an apartment on this floor. The thought brought a new shudder. Clussig did not relish this proximity to such a murderous-looking brute.

The inventor went into a small room that adjoined the outer portion of his apartment. He turned on the light, and breathed a sigh of relief.

It seemed good to be back here – back in this little chamber where he could forget the outside world, and devote himself to a sincere review of his long experience in the development of electrical appliances.

THE room was by no means orderly. Its furniture consisted of a large desk, three broken-down bookcases, and a few chairs. Papers were scattered over the floor. A wastebasket was overturned beneath the desk.

Yet Clussig liked this disarray. He closed the door and bolted it. He raised the shade of the single window, stared out into the blackness of the courtyard, and smiled.

The window was barred. This was customary with all the court rooms of the Starleigh, where trouble had been experienced with tenants throwing objects into the court. The bars crisscrossed to form a sort of grating.

Clussig lowered the shade. He liked the bolted door and the barred window. They gave him the feeling of a recluse. He was ready, now, to work.

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The inventor went to a small closet found a stack of notebooks, and brought them to the desk. He picked up a sheet of paper, and thrust it into the roller of an antiquated portable typewriter. He began to tick the keys intermittently, referring to a notebook as he proceeded.

MINUTES went by. Merle Clussig did not sense the passage of time. He was wrapped in the details of his present work, yet at moments he paused to consider a medley of thoughts that persisted in his brain.

Eric Veldon, suave and convincing – somehow, Clussig doubted the man's sincerity. He felt that he would like to talk to Veldon here; yet that would be impossible, for the promoter had no headquarters where he could be reached.

Merle Clussig recalled how he had met Eric Veldon. The promoter had found him working on electrical inventions. Clussig had been trying to obtain funds to keep on with his little workshop. X-rays of great intensity, heat tubes of remarkable power; these had been the dangerous devices with which Clussig had dealt. Because of the danger involved, Clussig had developed his screening devices.

The means which he had adopted to prevent injurious results without decreasing the intensity of the rays, had been Clussig's greater work – so the inventor believed. Eric Veldon had voiced the same opinion. The promoter, himself an expert in the field of scientific research, had insisted upon experimenting with Clussig's devices.

Veldon claimed to have a laboratory. Where was it? Clussig did not know. Veldon stated that he had put across other inventions. What were they?

Clussig could not answer. He knew only that Veldon was able to tap some source of ready money, cash which had come in most handily.

Worked almost to death, wearied and in need of rest, Clussig had gained temporary respite through his association with Eric Veldon. He had taken this apartment, and had led a life free from worldly care. Lately, restlessness had begun to dominate the inventor's mind. With it had come a mistrust of Eric Veldon.

Was the promoter a thief – one who stole inventive ideas in return for mere subsistence? Clussig felt sure that there were other men depending upon Veldon to market their inventions. Were they experiencing the same delay?

Veldon had been talking with a backer. Was he deceiving the moneyed man also? – Clussig wondered.

He began to make new notations. Veldon had promised an interview tomorrow night. Clussig decided that it would be best to make an impression when he met the promoter's wealthy client.

Then came a new disturbing thought. That fellow in the hallway! What had he been doing here?

Within the little room, Clussig began to feel a horror of the waxlike face that he had seen. He wondered if it would be best to inquire who the man might be. The inventor decided to find out. He stopped his work, leaned down beside the desk, and reached for the telephone which was standing on the floor.

A peculiar dizziness came over Merle Clussig. With his left hand, the inventor gripped the edge of the desk. With his right he fumbled for the telephone. His fingers became listless. As they touched the metal instrument, they clutched weakly.

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Clussig's left hand gave way. The inventor lost all grip. Tumbling heavily from his chair, he crumpled to the floor.

New minutes went by. Merle Clussig did not move. His body had become a pitiful figure. His face was ghastly. Over it was creeping a gruesome darkness. In this room, alone and undisturbed, the inventor had fallen victim to a horrible fate.

Unobserved, unable to cry for help, this man had been struck down by some insidious force that had lost no time in accomplishing its nefarious end.

Merle Clussig was dead!

CHAPTER IV. THE SHADOW SEES

WHILE Merle Clussig, alone and unobserved was experiencing the prelude to death, Fate was playing its tricky hand in the whole affair. Clussig himself had signed his death warrant when he had told the telephone operator to admit no reporters to his apartment.

Down in the lobby of the Starleigh, a visitor was waiting to see Merle Clussig. Clyde Burke, reporter from the New York Classic, had arrived less than five minutes after the inventor had gone upstairs.

Seated in one of the uncomfortable lobby chairs, Clyde was puzzling over certain incidents which had attended his arrival here. At the Classic office, the reporter had received a telephone call from Burbank. He had been instructed to look up Merle Clussig and obtain an interview.

Clyde was a reporter who could exert the privilege of choosing his own assignments. He had left the Classic office promptly. He had arrived at the Starleigh in a taxicab. Something had occurred immediately.

Approaching the apartment house, Clyde had observed a man coming out. The fellow had walked along with a peculiar gait. Clyde had seen his face beneath the light of a street lamp. The sight of that countenance had caused the reporter to stop in wondering amazement.

As a police reporter, Clyde had come openly in contact with certain persons of the underworld. As an agent of The Shadow, Clyde had also encountered such individuals on other occasions. Clyde seldom forgot a face, and, this one was familiar to him. That square jaw, with its pock-marked chin, was the sign of recognition.

"Spud" Jagron, small-time racketeer, who had disappeared some time ago – he was the man whom Clyde Burke saw upon the street. Spud, Clyde recalled, had incurred the enmity of more influential racketeers, and it was generally believed that he had paid the price of indiscretion.

Nevertheless, as Clyde had seen the man pass around the corner of the apartment building, he felt more convinced that the fellow was Spud Jagron. He decided that the racketeer must be laying low, living in an obscure apartment at the Starleigh.

IN the lobby of the apartment house, Clyde had encountered his second surprise when he had approached the little booth where the switchboard operator was stationed.

In response to his inquiry for Merle Clussig, the girl had asked if Clyde was a reporter. When Clyde had answered in the affirmative, naming the Classic as the journal for which he worked, the operator had stated that Mr. Clussig was not at home.

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Instead of leaving, Clyde had decided to wait a while. Time had rolled along. No one had come in or gone out. The reporter had become impatient. His thoughts had been directed more toward Spud Jagron than to Merle Clussig; now, with ten o'clock approaching, Clyde had decided that it was useless to waste further time.

The reporter approached the operator's booth. The girl looked up and spoke sharply.

"I told you that Mr. Clussig was out," she stated. "I do not know when he will return. Probably not tonight."

"No?" inquired Clyde, as he noted the girl's tone. "I had an idea that he would be here. Would you mind ringing his telephone to make sure that he is out?"

"I know that he is out," asserted the girl.

"How do you know that?" quizzed Clyde.

"Because he told me so," said the operator. "He told me that he was going out – that he would be out –"

"So far as reporters were concerned?" interposed Clyde.

The girl became impatient. She stared at Clyde Burke, and the reporter met her gaze with a smile.

"I understand," he said. "I should have known it in the first place. Mr. Clussig told you not to ring his telephone – which means that he is out – if any reporter called. Is that it?"

"I have my instructions," snapped the girl. "That's enough."

"Did Mr. Clussig give any reason for his action?" queried Clyde. "Did he state why he did not wish to see reporters?"

"No," admitted the operator.

"That makes it different," asserted Clyde. "I have an idea why Mr. Clussig might not want to see reporters. He wishes to avoid an interview. I came here for a different purpose. I have a business proposal which might interest him. Signed articles, under his own name. It is to his advantage to see me."

The operator hesitated. Clyde became convincing in manner.

"Suppose," he suggested, "that you call Mr. Clussig. Simply tell him that Mr. Burke is here, and would like to speak to him. Mention that I came from the Classic, but do not refer to me as a reporter."

"If I call him," declared the girl, "will you agree to leave in case he decides not to see you?"

"Yes," replied Clyde.

"All right," said the operator.

The girl plugged the switchboard, and rang Clussig's apartment. There was no answer. Again she rang; still no reply. She looked toward Clyde in perplexity.

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"He must be there," said the operator. "He said positively that he would be in. That is, except to reporters. He is an odd sort of a man. I – I wonder if anything could have happened –"

"To Mr. Clussig?"

"Yes. I am sure that he did not go out. There was a stranger who came down the stairs just after Mr. Clussig went up. A terrible-looking man – his face was ghastly. I wondered what he was doing here."

"Did Mr. Clussig seem apprehensive when he went upstairs?"

"Yes," decided the operator, nodding. "He seemed quite worried. He is not answering my ring. Do you think –"

Clyde Burke was prompt. He saw a sure way of reaching Merle Clussig. He responded with a wise nod of his head, and turned the operator's thought into a definite suggestion.

"It would be best," he declared, "to learn if Mr. Clussig is in his apartment."

THE operator left the booth and went to the office. She returned with a man in shabby uniform, evidently an attendant who served as both janitor and elevator man. She was explaining the situation. The janitor beckoned to Clyde Burke. He conducted the reporter to the elevator. They ascended to the third floor.

The janitor rapped on the door of Clussig's apartment. When no response was received, he unlocked the door with a pass-key.

They found Clussig's living room deserted. The janitor knocked heavily at the inner door. There was no response. The door refused to budge when the janitor tried it.

"He's in there," asserted the janitor. "It's bolted from the other side. Say – this guy Clussig is a queer duck. Maybe something's the matter with him. I don't want to call a copper, but I guess I'll have to."

"How about a detective?" questioned Clyde.

"That's better," decided the janitor. "Come on."

He led the way across the hall to a deserted apartment. He called the operator and told her to get detective headquarters. The janitor then handed the telephone to Clyde Burke.

The reporter heard a voice from the other end. He recognized the tones of Joe Cardona, ace detective of the New York force.

"Hello, Joe," volunteered Clyde. "This is Burke, of the Classic. Up at the Starleigh Apartments to interview an inventor named Clussig. He's locked in his room, and won't reply. Something may be wrong!"

Clyde hung up the receiver and turned to the janitor. The reporter nodded.

"Detective Cardona will be here right away," he said. "In the meantime, let's bang again. Maybe we can get some answer."

It was not long before Joe Cardona arrived. The detective was not alone. There were two men with him – one, another detective, the other a police surgeon. This was proof of Joe Cardona's confidence in Clyde

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Burke's judgment. The detective knew that when the Classic reporter scented trouble, it was likely to exist.

"In that room?" queried Cardona, pointing to the locked door.

"Yes," returned Clyde. "Bolted from the other side."

Cardona looked carefully about him, to study the situation before he proceeded. He drew a blackjack from his pocket, and dealt a vicious blow against the panel of the door, just above the knob. He repeated the action. The panel cracked; then broke. Cardona thrust his hand through the opening, drew the bolt, and swung the door inward. He held out a restraining hand as the others crowded forward.

MERLE CLUSSIG'S body was in full view. The inventor's face was turned toward the door. It had a blackened appearance. There was no question: Clussig was dead.

After a short pause, Cardona strode into the room and went directly to the window. He raised the shade; then, noting that the sash was locked, he smashed the glass to admit a current of fresh air without disturbing the condition of the window frame itself.

The police surgeon approached the body. He did not stoop over it until he was assured that the air in the room had cleared. Then he began an examination.

He turned to Detective Joe Cardona.

"Carbon-monoxide poisoning," he declared.

"You mean from the door and window being closed?" asked the detective. "The air supply giving out?"

"No," returned the surgeon. "This is not a case of death by suffocation, produced simply by the exhaustion of oxygen in the air. Carbon monoxide gas has been admitted to this room."

"I've handled garage suicides," returned Cardona, "but they have always been due to the exhaust from the engine. What is there around here that could do it?"

"I do not know," admitted the surgeon. "This room is just about air-tight. The carbon monoxide must have risen from the floor, until it overcame this victim."

"If it's been piped in here," declared Cardona grimly, "we'll find out how."

Leaving his assistant in charge, Cardona went down to the lobby. Clyde Burke accompanied him. There, the detective called headquarters for more men. Clyde went to call the Classic office. Instead, he telephoned Burbank. He reported what had happened.

It was when Clyde was returning across the lobby that he saw something which made him stop short.

The stairway beside the elevator was dimly lighted. Projecting from its edge was a streak of blackness that lay along the floor. Although that patch was motionless, Clyde knew its meaning. It indicated the presence of an unseen being.

The Shadow had arrived!

"Burke!"

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Cardona was calling from beside the switchboard booth. Clyde moved in answer to the detective's bidding. He found Joe talking to the operator.

"This girl," announced Cardona, "states that a man came down the stairs and went out after Clussig had gone up. She describes him as short and stocky – about my build – and says that he had a big, heavy jaw that looked scarred. You came in a few minutes afterward. Did you see any man who answered the description she has given?"

"I did," returned Clyde. "I saw the man outside here. I thought I recognized him."

"Who?" queried Cardona.

"Do you remember Spud Jagron?" asked Clyde. "The small-fry racketeer who got out of a couple of jams, and thought he was a big shot?"

Clyde paused. Cardona, smiling sourly, was shaking his head. Evidently he doubted Clyde's recognition.

"Guess again, Burke," said the detective. "Spud Jagron took the bump. I got it straight from three different stool pigeons. Some real big shot sent him for a ride. He never came back."

"Maybe I was wrong, Joe. I thought I recognized Jagron, though."

"I don't blame you, Burke. The girl's description sounds a lot like Jagron. But Jagron got his a good while ago. No doubt about it.

"We've got a good tip, though. There's lots of boys on the force who know Jagron's mug, and if they're out to find a guy that looks like him, they'll have a good start."

Cardona strode toward the elevator. Clyde followed. The reporter's eye swung toward the stairway. Clyde saw the streak of blackness fading as it drew away. He knew that The Shadow had heard.

THE wheezy elevator was slow in its ascent. There was trouble opening the door. When Cardona and Clyde stepped out on the third floor, the reporter knew that there had been ample time for any one to come up by foot.

Instinctively, Clyde looked toward the opening to the stairway. Again, he saw a projecting blotch of black.

The Shadow was here!

When Cardona reached the room where Clussig's body lay, he began a careful study of the place. He closed the door to the little room, and noted that the barrier came against a raised strip on the door sill. No one could possibly have inserted any device beneath that door.

Cardona examined the window. The lock was strong. Through the broken pane, the detective tested the bars. They did not yield.

Cardona strode from the inner room and examined the outer door of the apartment. Its lock was in good order. As the detective returned to the center of the living room, Clyde looked beyond him to the hall.

There, the reporter saw an unnatural patch of blackness – almost a silhouette that rested against the wall. Again, the reporter, secret agent of The Shadow, knew that his chief was close at hand.

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Cardona's swarthy face was grim. The detective looked at Clyde Burke and spoke.

"Here's the story," he declared. "Clussig came into his apartment. Someone could have entered, but it's obvious that Clussig found the place empty. He went into the inner room and bolted the door. He began to work at the desk. He died from carbon-monoxide poisoning.

"That gas couldn't have been there when Clussig came in. It generated while he was here. Somebody arranged it. There's only one answer. The gas must have been piped into the place. Wait until my men arrive. We'll find out."

It was not long before the detectives appeared. Their arrival was preceded by a distant clang of the elevator door. Clyde Burke knew well that The Shadow would glide from the outer door when he heard that noise. The sleuths, when they reported to Cardona, said nothing of having seen any one.

"We're going to go through this little room," explained Cardona. "Take everything apart – all the books come down – but it all goes back like you found it. Get going."

Clussig's body was removed. Clyde Burke watched the work that followed.

Detective Cardona had the status of an acting inspector. He performed his work with unfailing method. In the course of one hour, detectives had completely dismantled the room. All the objects moved had been replaced. Nothing had been neglected. Even the desk, at Cardona's order, had been taken apart. Yet Cardona stood dejected as he surveyed the reconstructed scene.

"We haven't found a thing," he said, as he shook his head. "All we've learned is that there was no possible way for that deadly gas to get in here. It beats me, Burke."

The ace detective went over by the desk, and moved a few notebooks to the correct position in which they first had been. As he stepped back, he noted the wastebasket standing beneath the desk.

He tipped it on its side, pointing inward at an angle – the way it had been when he had first seen it.

"That's all," decided Cardona. "I'm coming back here, Burke, to look for clues. But I've missed the one thing I was sure must be here – either jets or a tank. How that carbon monoxide entered this place is a mystery."

Motioning to his crew, Cardona led the way from the apartment, after closing the inner door and bolting it by reaching through the panel. He locked the outer door, and the squad followed the chief. Clyde Burke went with the detectives.

The reporter threw a sidelong glance toward the dim blind end of the hall behind him. There he fancied that he once again saw a formation of preternatural blackness – the indication of a hidden, spectral shape.

Mystery had surrounded the death of Merle Clussig. Clyde Burke had watched the thorough search for hidden gas jets. Like Detective Cardona, the reporter was baffled. Yet Clyde knew one fact that Cardona did not.

All during this exhaustive search, hidden eyes had been watching. Where clues could escape the cleverest of detectives, they could not elude the keen eyes of that supersleuth known as The Shadow.

The apartment of death was empty. It had been rearranged in its original condition. The Shadow had seen the work; now it would be The Shadow's turn to institute his own investigation.

Crime had struck tonight. Clyde Burke was confident that The Shadow, emerging from blackness, would find a starting point to war against the insidious brain which had so amazingly designed the death of Merle Clussig!

CHAPTER V. THE SHADOW'S DISCOVERY

SHORTLY after Clyde Burke had departed with the detectives, a shape moved at the end of the corridor outside of Merle Clussig's apartment. The tall figure of The Shadow came in view. It seemed to emerge from darkness like a materialized form. Even in the light, The Shadow's appearance savored of the incredible.

A being clad completely in black; one whose visage was invisible beneath the brim of a slouch hat; a personage whose hands were incased in gloves of inky hue – The Shadow appeared only as a mass of darkness shaped to human form.

The black cloak swished as its wearer advanced. A lining of deep crimson flashed momentarily. The Shadow stopped before the door of the apartment; metal clicked as his hand pressed a pick into the lock. The door opened. The black form glided through. The door closed.

Within the apartment of death, The Shadow produced a small flashlight. A bright spot of illumination – a flickering disk of silver-dollar size – pointed the way toward the room where Merle Clussig had died.

The Shadow's hand crept through the broken panel and drew back the bolt. A few moments later, this mysterious investigator stood within the second room.

The light, flickering intermittently, traveled throughout the room. Sharp eyes peered from darkness, studying the various spots where the detectives had made their search. The brilliant rays centered upon the desk; they showed the chair in which Merle Clussig had been seated when he had met his doom.

With a brief inspection, The Shadow had observed that Cardona's search had been a thorough one. Had special pipes or hose apparatus been responsible for the injection of the deadly gas, the detectives would certainly have discovered it. Until the mode of gaseous influx had been ascertained, there could be no beginning of a clew.

The Shadow's purpose was to solve this problem, to learn whether the plotters of Merle Clussig's death were merely clever contrivers at concealment or ingenious persons who had discovered some baffling method of releasing carbon monoxide.

The flashlight continued to glimmer in the region of the desk. Cardona had dismantled that piece of furniture. He had discovered nothing within it. In such action, the detective had unwittingly followed the course of reasoning which The Shadow now was taking.

The closer the outlet to the victim, the more surely and more rapidly would the deadly gas accomplish its effect. With this fact in view, The Shadow began a methodical examination of the spot where Clussig had been.

The tiny light shone on the telephone; it passed to the surface of the desk, then to the chair; finally, it flickered beneath the desk. It revealed the overturned wastebasket. A black-gloved hand came into the sphere of light. The Shadow drew the wastebasket from beneath the desk.

The wastebasket was of metal construction. It was an ordinary trash container, with no possibility of special compartments. Empty, the basket showed solid walls.

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The keen eyes, as they viewed those metal sides, spied something which Joe Cardona had completely failed to notice. The walls of the basket were marked with a blackish stain.

The eyes of The Shadow studied the evidence that lay before them. It was impossible to believe that an open-topped wastebasket could have contained a quantity of free carbon monoxide. There was nothing which could have retained the deadly gas. Yet the soft laugh which came from the hidden lips above the light was one that indicated a sudden understanding.

The flashlight disappeared. The wastebasket clicked as an invisible hand replaced it beneath the desk. A slight swish was the only sound which marked the passage of The Shadow from the room.

What had The Shadow learned that would prove of value? Only The Shadow knew. His keen brain had gained a clear inkling to the method whereby Merle Clussig had been so effectively murdered. The aftermath was to come.

SOME time later, a click sounded in a darkened room. A bluish light shone upon the polished surface of a table. The hands of The Shadow – no longer gloved – appeared beneath the light. Upon the third finger of the left hand glimmered a mysterious gem of deep, color-changing sparkles.

This stone, a fire opal of unique value, was the symbol of The Shadow. It was a rare jewel known as a girasol – the only adornment which The Shadow carried.

The hands of The Shadow were living things of detached action as they moved upon the table. Long fingers produced a pen and wrote in ink of vivid blue upon a sheet of paper. The Shadow's thoughts appeared in terse inscriptions – words which faded after they had been written and observed.

Methodically, The Shadow was tracing the course by which Merle Clussig had been slain. His statements emphasized the fact that a death trap had been laid for the electrical wizard. Someone – a stranger who had departed – had placed a sure snare for Clussig; and so effectively had the work been done that no clew had remained for the police.

The hand of The Shadow wrote a name: the one which Clyde Burke had given to Joe Cardona. It was that of Spud Jagron, the ex-racketeer who the detective had stated was dead. A soft laugh came from The Shadow's lips as the name vanished.

Joe Cardona was acquainted with affairs of the underworld, yet The Shadow knew well that the star detective was not always correct in his final assumptions. The Shadow had overheard the conversation between Cardona, Burke, and the switchboard operator. He had his own way of learning what had taken place in gangdom.

With quick strokes, The Shadow prepared a coded note. As the ink dried, his hands folded the sheet of paper and placed it in an envelope. With another pen – one that inscribed a less vivid blue – The Shadow wrote the name:

Clifford Marsland

The envelope contained a message which would disappear after its recipient had perused it. It was a note to Cliff Marsland, The Shadow's agent who operated in the bad lands. Through Cliff, a capable worker who was accepted by criminals as one of their ilk, The Shadow would learn the details of Spud Jagron's fate.

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The second note which The Shadow prepared was to Clyde Burke. It did not mention Spud Jagron's name. Instead, it set forth definite assignments which the reporter, through his connection with the Classic, was to undertake.

Once again, The Shadow had gone a step beyond Joe Cardona. The detective had left Clussig's apartment with thoughts of hidden pipes and mechanical artifices. The Shadow was going directly to the cause. His instructions to Clyde Burke ordered the reporter to look up data concerning experiments which had been made with carbon monoxide gas.

The Shadow knew that he was dealing with a supermind who relied upon more than mere mechanical means. Clussig's death, by carbon monoxide, meant that someone acquainted with the possibilities of that gas had chosen it to deal death.

Any schemer might well have pumped a lethal flow into a closed room, but one who placed the gaseous substance without the aid of mechanical contrivances must surely possess an advanced knowledge of the chemical qualities of carbon monoxide itself.

Why had Merle Clussig sought publicity? Why had he been slain? How had he been lulled to a sense of security when a nefarious scheme of death already threatened him?

These were questions which now confronted The Shadow. The master of deduction was still working in the dark. He had divined that some discontent was rankling Clussig prior to the stroke of death, yet no clew existed to its cause.

What part had been played by the stranger whom Clyde Burke had recognized as Spud Jagron? The Shadow suspected that the man had placed the snare. Yet the whole plot savored of a scheming brain behind it. The mystery of a supposedly dead gangster being in the vicinity of a death trap also showed the presence of a supermind of crime.

THE SHADOW'S laugh sounded hollow beyond the circled range of light. There were problems involved that made Merle Clussig's death appear as but a single incident. The Shadow knew that this obscure inventor could be no more than a link in a longer chain.

Where inventions were concerned, supercriminals could rise high by acquiring them. In all of his weird wars with crime, The Shadow had encountered the most amazing situations when he had dealt with scientific plotters. Murderous gangsters were men who could be met with bullets, but subtle perpetrators of unknown purpose were ones who must be met with varied measures.

Tonight, The Shadow stood upon the threshold of startling adventures. Well did he know that new and unexpected developments were to be anticipated, that the players in this drama of life and death had so far been but partially revealed.

The demise of Merle Clussig was but the prelude to insidious situations that would soon develop. Strategy would prove essential, swiftness of action would be a necessity. New deaths might occur before The Shadow could intervene; yet once the master had gained the key to the threatening power, he could prevent the run of future crime.

The hands of The Shadow raised the two addressed envelopes and placed them in a larger one. Upon this wrapper, The Shadow inscribed the name and address of Rutledge Mann.

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Through the contact agent, the messages to Cliff Marsland and Clyde Burke would be delivered in the morning.

The blue light clicked out. The laugh of The Shadow sounded in the darkness. It bore no mockery; it carried no mirth. That laugh was a grim note of mysterious knowledge – a sound that indicated a struggle of the future. Eerie tones echoed from the black-walled rooms of The Shadow's sanctum. Uncanny reverberations died; then came silence. The room was empty.

NOT long afterward, Stanley, Lamont Cranston's chauffeur, was startled to hear his employer's voice speaking from the rear seat of the limousine. The car was parked on a side street near Times Square. Stanley, watching those who were passing by, had neither seen nor heard his master enter the automobile.

"Drive back to New Jersey, Stanley," were the words of Lamont Cranston.

The chauffeur detected a wearied note. Evidently Lamont Cranston had found nothing of interest in Manhattan. So Stanley thought.

Little did he suppose that he was chauffeur for The Shadow – that tonight his master had alone gained the clew to a crime which would excite New Yorkers on the morrow, when they read Clyde Burke's journalistic account of its baffling details!

CHAPTER VI. VELDON SMILES AGAIN

ERIC VELDON was seated in the corner booth of the Garonne grill room. It was exactly twenty-four hours since he had dined with Merle Clussig. Singularly, Veldon was keeping his appointment with the dead inventor.

A newspaper lay in front of the promoter. It contained another story relating to Merle Clussig; tonight, however, the inventor's name was emblazoned in front-page headlines. The death of Merle Clussig had created a sensation in the daily journals.

An evil smile crept over Veldon's lips. The promoter seemed to take a cynical joy in the report that he was reading. Only once did his malicious leer fade. That was when he noted the statement that a man had been seen leaving the Starleigh Apartments shortly after Clussig had arrived there.

The fact that the police believed the intruder might be identified with the underworld seemed to displease Veldon. The sneering lips regained their smile, however, when Veldon finished the brief account. There was no mention of any name in connection with the man who had been seen at the apartment building.

A footstep sounded on the stone floor. Veldon looked up to see a sober-faced individual standing beside his table. Lessening his smile, Veldon motioned to the other man to sit down. The arrival obeyed. He took the same seat which Merle Clussig had occupied the night before.

"Good evening, Dustin," greeted Veldon. "I am glad to see that you are on time. I have an important matter to discuss with you."

"So I supposed," returned the other man. "You seemed very serious when you telephoned me this afternoon."

Veldon laid the newspaper aside. He noted that his companion looked toward the printed sheet. Veldon studied Dustin warily. He suspected that an odd thought was in the man's mind. He put his opinion to the test.

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"You have read about the Clussig case?" quizzed Veldon.

"Yes," nodded Dustin. "I don't like it."

"I don't blame you," responded Veldon. "It shows that someone may have struck upon one of Wycroft Dustin's original ideas."

"One of my ideas?" echoed Dustin.

"Yes," replied Veldon suavely. "You recall that dry ice which you manufactured with carbon monoxide?"

"That was your idea, Veldon!" exclaimed Dustin. "I would never have thought of it if it had not been for your suggestion!"

"You performed the experiment," reminded Veldon. "After all, you deserve credit for the innovation. It is one of your own contributions to chemical research."

WYCROFT DUSTIN'S face grew stern. This man was different from Merle Clussig. He seemed more businesslike than the dead inventor, although his face bore the placidity of a typical experimenter.

"There is no use in arguing it, Veldon," asserted Dustin. "You talked with me regarding my experiments in neutralizing the effects of carbon monoxide. You suggested that it might be possible to make dry ice – which contains harmless carbon dioxide – with a deadly gas, namely carbon monoxide.

"I developed the idea purely to have carbon monoxide available for my neutralizing experiments. My new dry ice was successful – too much so. Its evaporation produced a much greater quantity of carbon monoxide than I had anticipated. I never repeated the experiment. I gave you the formula, however."

"So you did," declared Veldon thoughtfully. "I had forgotten that fact. Do you know, Dustin, this Clussig death could have been brought about by that medium?"

"Certainly," returned Dustin seriously. "The newspaper reports alarmed me. It would have been quite possible for that unknown visitor to Clussig's apartment house to have left a quantity of dry ice containing carbon monoxide. I read the news account only a few hours ago. I had thought about informing the police of my conclusion."

"Very inadvisable," asserted Veldon.

"So I decided," admitted Dustin. "I realized that I was actually the experimenter who had produced a deadly form of dry ice. I feared that the police might connect me with this unfortunate death. I have been wondering, Veldon" – Dustin's tone became almost apologetic – "if you had ever met this man Clussig."

"I never heard of him before," said Veldon, with a shake of his head.

"I am glad to hear that," remarked Dustin, in a relieved tone. "I knew that you promoted various forms of inventions; I thought possibly that you might have been acquainted with Clussig."

There was a short pause, while Veldon again shook his head. Then Dustin spoke again in an apprehensive tone.

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"You have always been interested," he said, "in my dangerous discoveries. The sedative gas which produces harmful effects; the powder which causes lethal vapor; this dry ice with carbon monoxide – you have the formulas for all –"

"Forget them," interposed Veldon. "What I want, Dustin, is the opportunity to promote your neutralizer. Imagine the money to be made if every garage used it to offset carbon monoxide from exhaust pipes. I could get big business men interested in such a product."

"I am looking forward to results," returned Dustin, becoming enthusiastic. "My tests with palladium chloride have been improved to make a more effective measurement of carbon monoxide when it exists in the atmosphere of a room. But so far as a neutralizing agent is concerned, I have not accomplished all that I intended."

"I have followed the old method used in purifying the air of an oversurge of carbon dioxide, namely by the use of sodium peroxide, which has the absorbent property which gives off an equivalent amount of pure oxygen. Carbon monoxide, however, is insidious. Its neutralization must be accomplished with a certainty –"

"I understand," interrupted Veldon. "However, I am interested in learning exactly what you have accomplished. I believe that I can undertake a profitable promotion. Would it be possible, Dustin, for you to make a special experiment this evening?"

"For what purpose?"

"To ascertain, by careful measurement, the exact results which you have gained in neutralization of carbon monoxide."

"I can do that," nodded Dustin. "You understand, Veldon, that I have been prompted by two plans. One is to eliminate carbon monoxide by the replacement of an equivalent amount of pure oxygen. The other is to surcharge carbon monoxide with an additional supply of oxygen, thus producing carbon dioxide, which, lacking the poisonous qualities, would prove harmless unless it occurred in a large amount."

"Give me all your results," decided Veldon, "after you have made definite experiments tonight. You can return to your laboratory this evening?"

"Certainly," said Dustin. "I have a man there at present. The place will be open."

"Good," said Veldon.

THE discussion was forgotten as the two men ordered their dinner. Wycroft Dustin was completely ignorant of the fact that Eric Veldon had dined here with Merle Clussig on the preceding evening. There was a strange similarity in the two occasions. On each, Veldon had acted as the host; he had also suggested special work for his guest to perform during the evening.

Strangely, Dustin's conversation again reverted to Merle Clussig. The chemical experimenter, as he ate his meal, began to talk of the dead inventor. The cause of Clussig's death was preying on his mind.

"I should notify the police," Dustin told Veldon. "I really feel that it is my duty. Suppose that the carbon monoxide ice had been planted in that room, Veldon! It evaporates as rapidly as ice formed from carbon dioxide. I can picture it in my mind. Ice formed of carbon monoxide – hidden in that room, giving off its terrible vapor!"

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"Perhaps you are right, Dustin," said Veldon. "However, the thought is not a pleasant one. Suppose we forget it until tomorrow night. You can meet me here for dinner. We can then discuss your tests. After that, we can take up the matter of Clussig's unfortunate death."

"I note that the detectives searched for gas pipes," persisted Dustin. "They found none, Veldon. That makes me feel positive that someone has duplicated my experiments. Just think of it! The dry ice could have been carried in a compact rubber container –"

"You seem to have a plotting mind," chuckled Veldon. "You must not forget your calling, Dustin. You are an experimenter, not a detective – or" – Veldon paused, and a smile flickered on his lips – "a criminal."

Dustin was startled by the final words. The suggestion added to his worryment. He wanted to make a protest at Veldon's artful remark. He realized that he, Wycroft Dustin, had actually produced a substance which could be used by criminals for the perpetration of a baffling crime.

Silence persisted as the men continued eating. Dustin was still worried. Veldon adopted a saturnine expression which did not allay the chemist's anxiety. When the meal was ended, Dustin stalked gloomily from the grill room with Veldon beside him. They parted outside the hotel.

"You are going directly to your laboratory," reminded Veldon.

"Yes," promised Dustin. "I shall meet you here tomorrow evening."

The men shook hands. Wycroft Dustin entered a cab and gave a destination to the driver. Eric Veldon retired to the quiet lobby of the hotel. There, the sallow-faced promoter entered a telephone booth and made a call. When he again appeared in the lobby, his face was gleaming with its evil smile.

As on the night before, Eric Veldon had adopted the countenance of a fiend. Twenty-four hours had elapsed since his hideous smile had presaged doom for Merle Clussig. Tonight, that same smile boded disaster for Wycroft Dustin!

CHAPTER VII. THE SHADOW LEARNS

A SINGLE light was shining in a square-walled room. Its rays were reflected by glistening walls of shining black. Even the floor had the appearance of polished ebony; the furnishings of the room were all of the same inky hue.

Standing in this room, so motionless that he seemed to be a part of the somber setting, was the Shadow. Garbed in his habitual black, he formed a sable-hued statue. It was not until his gloved hands appeared from the folds of his black cloak that The Shadow became an object of life.

The gloves which The Shadow wore were formed of thick rubber. The master investigator was in his private laboratory. Before him, on a jet-black table, rested a polished black box. The Shadow opened this object. The action revealed what appeared to be a block of ice.

Vapor ascended in a curling smoke. A tiny heater was located close beside the box. Attached to it was a thermometer. Simulating the temperature that had existed in Merle Clussig's apartment, The Shadow was watching the evaporative effect of a cake of dry ice.

This amazing investigator had struck upon the truth. The dry ice which he was using was of the harmless variety, being of the usual carbon dioxide formation. But through his observation of its effects, The Shadow

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was learning what must have happened in Merle Clussig's room, where carbon monoxide crystals had without any doubt been used.

The vapor from the box was showing a heavy emission of gas. In proportion, a wastebasket filled with dry ice of deadly formation could easily have produced Merle Clussig's death. The Shadow was putting his theory to the test.

A light glimmered on the wall. The Shadow reached forward and picked up a pair of ear phones, objects which had lain almost invisibly upon the black-surfaced table. The Shadow spoke in a low, weird whisper. A familiar voice came over the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

"Report."

"Word from Burke. He has located an experimenter in the chemical neutralization of carbon monoxide."

"His name."

"Wycroft Dustin."

"Telephone."

"Apparently unlisted. It will be in my file of unlisted numbers."

The Shadow's whisper became a sinister sound. The black-clad speaker was giving Burbank definite instructions. This work ended, The Shadow replaced the ear phones on the table. The light went out. With his gloved hands, The Shadow raised the black box to watch the effects of the evaporation.

Definitely, The Shadow was getting to the cause of Merle Clussig's death. He had made a tremendous step in deduction; yet even his remarkable intuition had not brought him past the present conclusion.

MERLE CLUSSIG had been murdered by that deadly gas, carbon monoxide. Through its release, from concentrated form in the shape of dry ice, the subtle death had been accomplished. Only a capable experimenter could have prepared the killing substance.

The direct evidence, however, pointed to some chemist as being the deviser of the means by which Clussig had been slain. Wycroft Dustin, through Clyde Burke's inquiries, had been spotted as the possible experimenter.

Still, the evidence did not go beyond Dustin, should he prove to be the man. There was nothing as yet to prove Eric Veldon's connection with the monoxide case.

Thus Wycroft Dustin could logically be picked as a man responsible for Merle Clussig's death – but not as a man whose own life was now being threatened. When The Shadow dealt with subtle murderers, he wove a perfect mesh about them. At present, his study of dry-ice evaporation was a necessary step; hence he was intrusting other work to Burbank while he concluded this important experiment.

Time passed. The bulb glistened on the wall. The Shadow's eyes turned from the box, where the dry ice had nearly completed its process of evaporation. The black-clad experimenter picked up the ear phones and spoke. Burbank answered.

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"Call to Wycroft Dustin," came Burbank's quiet tones. "His laboratory is open. His assistant is there. He expects Dustin in an hour. I have given him the return number."

The Shadow placed the ear phones on the table. The light went out. For long, tense moments, The Shadow stood in concentrated thought.

Burbank had called Wycroft Dustin's laboratory. He had left a return number. That number was a booth in the Grand Central Station. Located at a nearby spot, Burbank would be watching the booth. A ring there would indicate that Wycroft Dustin had returned to his laboratory, and had called the number given his assistant.

Burbank would not answer the call. No one would answer it. Calls to public phone booths in a large terminal invariably went unanswered. Burbank, however, would instantly notify The Shadow that Dustin had returned to his laboratory.

Should Dustin, by any chance, choose to look up the number which had been given his assistant, he would gain no clue whatever to Burbank's location. The Shadow had used this subterfuge in the past. It invariably worked to perfection.

The Shadow, however, was not thinking of Burbank's arrangement. His keen brain was responding to a new clue. His thoughts were passing beyond Wycroft Dustin as a perpetrator of crime. The Shadow was drawing a distinct parallel between Wycroft Dustin, now living, and Merle Clussig, who was now dead.

Clussig had been an inventor. Dustin was an experimenter. Last night, Clussig had gone to his apartment to draw up a list of his past inventions. Tonight, Dustin was returning to his laboratory, presumably to engage in work.

Was there a connection between these similar courses? The Shadow saw one. He sensed the possibility of a new crime that might be impending. When The Shadow gained such inklings, he resorted to one definite method – swift action.

THE rubber gloves slid from the long white hands that wore them. The girasol glittered on The Shadow's finger. Sharp eyes, that shone vividly as the gem, stared toward the tiny bulb upon the wall as The Shadow donned another pair of gloves.

With a swift motion, The Shadow swept toward the end of the little laboratory. His tall form made a contrasting splotch of blackness as it moved along the polished floor. The Shadow's hand pressed a switch. The room was plunged into Stygian darkness.

The echoes of a grim laugh sighed within the room. The element of mirth was lacking, yet there was a strange tone in the sibilant utterance.

The Shadow, in his report from Burbank, had received a statement of where Wycroft Dublin's laboratory was located. The assistant had expected his employer back in an hour. There was time for The Shadow to reach that destination first.

Until a few minutes ago, The Shadow had been seeking for a man engaged in crime. His purpose had changed. His intuitive brain had paralleled two cases. The Shadow's mission was to prevent another stroke of crime.

Although he had gained no clue to the hidden perpetrator of evil, The Shadow knew that another victim was entering the subtle toils of a murderer.

Merle Clussig had died; the jaws of doom were opening for Wycroft Dustin!

CHAPTER VIII. DEATH WINS AGAIN

A TAXICAB pulled up in front of an old building near Tenth Avenue. Wycroft Dustin alighted, paid the driver, and entered a doorway that showed in the side of a dingy wall. The chemist ascended a flight of gloomy stairs and reached the top.

Here the scene changed. The ground floor of the building was a dilapidated place; the second story was modern and well equipped. Wycroft Dustin had chosen this spot for his experimental laboratory; he had spared no expense in planning it to suit his needs.

In the first room which he entered, Dustin encountered a peaked-faced little man clad in a white coat. This was Garfield, Dustin's assistant. The aid looked up in surprise when he saw his employer.

"I had not expected you so soon, Mr. Dustin," said Garfield. "You told me that you would not return until after half past nine."

"I changed my plan, Garfield," replied the chemist. "Has anything occurred during my short absence from the laboratory?"

The assistant glanced at a large clock on the wall. It registered half past eight. Garfield nodded thoughtfully.

"There was a telephone call," he said. "Not more than ten minutes ago."

"From whom?"

"I do not know, sir. The man who called left a return number, and wanted you to call immediately upon your arrival."

"Call him, Garfield. When you get the number, summon me and I shall speak to the person. Was there anything else?"

"Nothing important, sir. A man came to collect those old beakers and bottles. I helped him pack them in the inner laboratory. An odd-looking chap, Mr. Dustin; he gave me the creeps. A funny-jawed face and stary eyes –"

"Never mind the details, Garfield," said Dustin. "Call the telephone number. I am starting work in the inner laboratory."

The chemist walked through a doorway and came to a bench in the inner room. The bench was located in a sort of alcove; electric incandescents projected from three walls and the ceiling. Wycroft Dustin turned on the lights one by one. Two bulbs refused to glimmer. Dustin merely ignored them. The illumination was more than sufficient.

This was Wycroft Dustin's chosen spot. At this bench, he conducted all his final experiments and tests. Dustin was exacting in all his methods, and he had adapted this alcove to his use chiefly because it offered the best place for complete illumination.

THE brilliant bulbs produced considerable heat. Dustin did not mind that fact. He was used to it. He stood in a glare that rivaled the Kleig lights in a motion-picture studio.

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Equipment for the final tests lay close at hand. Wycroft Dustin, as he began to set up apparatus, recalled that he had worked here once in Eric Veldon's presence, and that the promoter had expressed his admiration for the excellent arrangements.

All that Dustin now needed were compressed gas tanks that he kept in a side room. Garfield could bring them later; at present there were preliminary details that required attention.

Dustin arranged a row of hydrometer tubes; he examined a vaporizing device, and found it clogged. While he worked to clear this piece of apparatus, Garfield entered the room.

"I have called the number, sir," informed the assistant. "There is no reply."

"Try it later on," ordered Dustin.

Garfield departed. Dustin finished his work with the vaporizer. The chemist felt annoyed. Garfield should not have allowed the piece of apparatus to remain in a clogged state. The assistant had evidently been lax in one of his appointed details of inspection.

Wycroft Dustin mopped his forehead; it was becoming quite warm, here in the alcove. The chemist looked at the brilliant incandescents, and turned out two of the offending lights. Thus made four blank bulbs altogether.

Dustin wondered at the heat. He had never been troubled by it before. With four lights out, however, he should experience no further trouble.

As the chemist reached for a beaker, his hand wavered. Dustin gripped the edge of the bench. He had been here no more than ten minutes, yet the heat from the accustomed lights had suddenly reached mammoth proportions. Dustin's brain began to burn.

The man became incapable of action. He wobbled as he clung to the bench. He felt his hands slipping. He reached out wildly and knocked two glass containers to the floor. The crash of the breaking jars brought Garfield on the run.

"What's the matter, sir!" exclaimed the assistant. "What has happened to you!"

Dustin's form was slowly sinking. Garfield appeared ludicrous as he attempted to support the heavy weight of his crumpling employer. The effort was too great; Dustin, leaning upon Garfield, caused the assistant to stagger backward.

Together, they moved away from the alcove. Out in the center of the room, Dustin collapsed completely, and slipped from Garfield's grasp.

The little assistant stared into his employer's face. Dustin's eyes were staring. His face was dripping with beads of perspiration. His lips were dry and parched. They moved weakly.

"Water!" he gasped. "Water! Bring it –"

Garfield bustled away and returned with a glass of water which he placed to Dustin's lips. The chemist choked as he gulped the fluid.

"More!" he gasped.

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Garfield brought up another glassful. Dustin trembled as he tried to seize the tumbler. Half of the liquid contents poured over the chemist's face. Dustin sank prone upon the stone floor of the laboratory. He panted fiercely and stared with glassy eyes.

"You are ill, Mr. Dustin!" cried Garfield.

The chemist offered no reply. His breath was coming in long, wheezy groans.

Realizing that he could do nothing further to aid his stricken chief, Garfield hurried to the outer room and seized the telephone.

When Wycroft Dustin had chosen this building for his laboratory, he had made arrangements with a physician who lived only a few blocks away. The doctor was prepared to render emergency service, should an accident occur in the laboratory.

Garfield was calling the physician. He received a prompt response across the wire. Quickly, he told the medical man that Wycroft Dustin had met with an accident. The doctor promised to come at once.

Garfield went back to Wycroft Dustin's side. He did all that he could to aid his stricken employer. He shoved a rolled-up burlap bag beneath the chemist's head. Dustin seemed in a terrible state of agony. His dry lips formed a single word, which he repeated soundlessly.

"Burning," he gasped. "Burning – burning –"

Each minute increased the man's misery. It seemed to Garfield that he could feel a tremendous heat that emanated from Dustin's body.

The assistant brought a new supply of water. Dustin was too weak to even reach for it. The pupils of his eyes were dilated. He was staring toward the ceiling as though picturing strange and terrible fantasies.

FOOTSTEPS made Garfield turn. He recognized the physician whom he had summoned. The doctor had arrived promptly. He knelt beside Dustin, and placed his hand upon the man's forehead. With an expression of amazement, the physician stared at Garfield.

"This is beyond belief!" he exclaimed. "I never experienced a case of such terrific fever –"

A hoarse scream came from Wycroft Dustin's lips. Vainly, the stricken man clawed at the stone floor. With a mighty effort, he raised his body from the floor. He stared at the men beside him, as though his wild eyes pictured them as demons. Then, with a spasm of agony, Dustin sprawled his body sidewise, and crashed to the floor. He did not move again.

The physician was bending over the chemist's body. Garfield, weakly and anxiously watching, put forth a question.

"Is that – is it a good sign, doctor?" asked the assistant. "Do you think we can get him to a hospital?"

The physician raised his head and looked at the assistant.

"There is nothing we can do," he declared. "The man is dead."

"Dead!" cried Garfield.

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The physician's face was serious. Garfield's expression showed intense amazement. While the two men who had witnessed death faced each other, neither thought of turning toward the door. Hence they did not see the strange phenomenon that occurred at that spot.

A figure had appeared at the open doorway. Tall, black, and spectral, it had arrived at the moment of Garfield's cry. Had either the assistant or the physician seen that form, they would have taken it for a ghoulish monster from another world, come to view the passing of a human life.

Silently, The Shadow had reached his destination. He had sought to prevent the death of Wycroft Dustin. He came in time to witness the death of the man whom he had arrived to save.

Fate had tricked The Shadow. Wycroft Dustin had returned an hour early; he had stepped into the insidious trap which had been arranged for his doom.

The stone-floored laboratory; the kneeling men beside the inert form of the dead chemist; the brilliant lights shining from the little alcove which housed the workbench – these were the sights which The Shadow viewed.

The cloaked form stood motionless. Keen eyes surveyed the scene. No laugh came from hidden lips. Grimly, The Shadow sought an explanation of Wycroft Dustin's sudden and unfortunate demise.

When the physician arose and beckoned to Garfield to follow to the outer room, the spectral shape of The Shadow no longer stood on guard. The master of darkness had stepped away from view. Yet his presence still gave its sign.

A long splotch of blackness projected upon the floor of the outer room, coming from the doorway that led to the dingy stairs. The physician was using the telephone to call the police. The law would study the strange death of Wycroft Dustin.

After that, The Shadow's turn would come. As in the case of Merle Clussig, The Shadow would seek for methods too subtle for Joe Cardona to detect.

CHAPTER IX. CLEWS ARE LINKED

DETECTIVE JOE CARDONA had arrived on the job. He was standing in Wycroft Dustin's inner laboratory, turning his attention from the dead man to the living persons with whom he was speaking.

"What is your opinion, Doctor Gregory?" questioned the detective, turning to the physician who had seen Dustin die.

"Dustin died from a fever," returned the doctor. "It was the most extraordinary case that I have ever witnessed. I had no opportunity to take his temperature. The symptoms, however, were obvious."

A police surgeon who had arrived with Cardona voiced his agreement with Doctor Gregory's statement. The detective appeared puzzled.

"It looks like a case of natural death," he decided.

"Natural, yes," said Doctor Gregory, "but almost beyond belief. Unless Dustin already had an extraordinarily high temperature when he came into the laboratory, I cannot understand how it increased to such intensity within so short a space of time."

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"You saw him come in," said Cardona to Garfield. "Did he seem ill at the time?"

"No," replied the assistant. "He seemed a trifle annoyed, that was all. I was telling him about the junkman coming to get old bottles and beakers. I began to describe the fellow, and Mr. Dustin cut me short."

Cardona, like Dustin, appeared to have no interest in the matter of the man who had come for bottles. The detective was eyeing the alcove with its range of brilliant lights. He walked in that direction, and stood beside the workbench.

"It's hot here," was his comment. "Do you think that all of these lights could have had an effect on Dustin?"

"Not unless his temperature was already high," returned Doctor Gregory. "The excessive heat could have added to his discomfort. It could not have produced a fever."

"Mr. Dustin turned out two of the bulbs," remarked Garfield. "Two were already burned out, and I had not replaced them because it was seldom that Mr. Dustin used all the lights."

Joe Cardona clicked the individual switches of the different incandescents. As Garfield had stated, two were burned out. Cardona extinguished one of the illuminated bulbs, and produced a handkerchief which he used on his hand, while he removed the incandescent from the socket.

The detective walked from the warm alcove, and placed the bulb on a table. He saw that it was an ordinary article. The detective shook his head as he turned to the men about him.

"I shall make a report of Dustin's death," he stated. "I think it would be advisable to take the body to the morgue. From what you have said, Doctor Gregory, regarding the intensity of the man's fever and the sudden death it produced, I shall make a study of Dustin's past activities. It might be possible that this fever was put into his system before he came here tonight."

"That is quite possible," agreed Doctor Gregory.

Wycroft Dustin's body was removed. The bright lights were extinguished. Garfield turned a switch in the outer room which plunged the entire laboratory in darkness. The men departed.

Joe Cardona had rejected any theory of death dealt in the laboratory.

SILENCE remained. Then came a faint swishing sound. Someone was in the laboratory. A form was coming from a small side room that adjoined the outer chamber. A tiny light flickered.

The Shadow had been stationed within hearing distance during the entire police investigation. His turn had arrived. He was going over the ground which Joe Cardona had rejected. The flickering disk of light approached the alcove.

A soft laugh whispered in the gloom. Even in the act of approach, The Shadow had made a discovery. It lay within the confines of the alcove.

One incandescent in the three-sided row was set at the edge of the alcove. It was least conspicuous of all. It could be seen only from within the alcove itself. This was one of the burned-out incandescents. Here, in darkness, it produced a strange phenomenon.

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Through the frosted surface of the bulb glowed the dim rays of a bluish light. The Shadow's torch threw a steady flicker. The dull glow of the incandescent was no longer apparent. The Shadow's light, however, revealed another fact.

Running down the inner corner of the alcove was a thin wire, visible only when viewed under the sharp light of the torch. This passed beneath the workbench, into a wooden box. The open top of the box showed only cotton waste and crumpled pieces of paper.

The Shadow's light went out. The dead incandescent still showed its faint bluish glow. The hands of The Shadow drew the box from the alcove. The dull glimmer of the incandescent vanished. The Shadow's light showed the cause; the removal of the box had disconnected that tiny wire which ran up to the row of lights.

Another matter manifested itself beneath the probing flashlight. The removal of the box had broken a connecting cord between the box and a floor plug under the bench. The cord remained, adhering to the wall socket.

The flashlight glimmered on the waste material in the box. The Shadow's free hand removed the crumpled paper and the mass of cotton. Embedded in this useless material was a square electrical transformer, constructed of black-painted metal.

The Shadow laughed. He knew the answer. He could reconstruct exactly what had happened. A man had come to collect old bottles and beakers. That man had brought some boxes with him. Garfield had aided him to pack up the junk.

Garfield, however, had not been watchful. The supposed junkman had accomplished a purpose other than the collection of old bottles.

During convenient moments, probably when Garfield had unthinkingly gone to the outer laboratory to look for more old bottles, the insidious visitor had placed this special box beneath the workbench.

He had plugged its projecting cord into the wall socket. He had run its special wire up to the row of incandescents. He had inserted what appeared to be a burned-out bulb in the end of the row.

Rising, The Shadow turned his flash-light's rays upon the incandescent which was now dead. He unscrewed the bulb from its socket. The little wire dropped, almost unnoticeably, to the floor.

Again, The Shadow laughed.

This was ingenious. The mere removal of a box of waste; the simple act of unscrewing a burned-out incandescent – these were sufficient to destroy all evidence. Only a small piece of wire would remain upon the floor. Waste and bulb would be thrown away. Nothing could remain to show the cause of Wycroft Dustin's death.

The Shadow's flashlight flickered across the laboratory. It disappeared altogether. From then on, The Shadow's course was invisible. When next his presence became apparent, it was in the room which he had left earlier in the evening – the black-walled laboratory.

THE light switch clicked to reveal The Shadow in his garb of sable hue. Upon the table, The Shadow placed two objects; one was the transformer which he had removed from the box of waste; the other was a small package wrapped within a broad strip of rubber.

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Donning his rubber gloves, The Shadow unwrapped this and produced the incandescent which he had taken from Dustin's alcove.

Swift preparations followed. Soon the bulb was resting in an upright socket; to this was attached the transformer. The Shadow screwed the bulb in place.

There was no sign of activity until the black-gloved hand pressed the light switch of the room. Darkness came; with it, the bluish-violet glow within the incandescent.

On came The Shadow's flashlight. A hammer poised above the incandescent. A short, quick stroke. The glass was shattered. The bluish glow remained. It came, not from the bulb itself, but from a short tube that was within the frosted glass of the incandescent.

The Shadow detached the transformer. While his flashlight still focused its rays upon the discovered tube, The Shadow's laugh crept fantastically through the darkened laboratory. The weird investigator had learned the final details.

The tube within the bulb was the creation of some highly inventive mind – an intensified emanator of a fever-producing ray. Its like was already known to science, but this heat-causing apparatus was obviously of greater power than any which had been previously produced.

Glowing within what appeared to be a dead incandescent, emitting its powerful rays through the aid of the transformer, this tube had brought death to Wycroft Dustin. The chemist, standing steadily within its unscreened range, had succumbed to its terrific force.

Who had developed this ray?

The Shadow knew. Merle Clussig must be the man responsible. Clussig had died, through the use of dry ice containing carbon monoxide, a deadly substance designed by Wycroft Dustin. Each victim had unwittingly been responsible for the other's death!

Some unknown schemer had played one against the other. No trace of his evil identity had been left. Merle Clussig could have revealed his name; so could have Wycroft Dustin. These men were dead, and the fruits of their inventive and research genius belong to the plotter who had designed their doom!

What other secrets had been gained by this murderer? That question could not be answered until The Shadow had gained the key to the unknown's identity. Well did The Shadow know that neither the plotter nor his agent – the tool who bore a remarkable likeness to Spud Jagron – would return to the scenes of crime.

The overturned wastebasket at Clussig's; the trash-buried transformer, and the burned-out incandescent – these were clues which Joe Cardona had failed to discover. The murderer, however, had not reckoned with The Shadow. The master of crime detection had found the clues and had linked them!

THE SHADOW'S laboratory was empty. A light now glimmered in the sanctum. Bluish rays upon a shining-topped table – white hands with their sparkling girasol sending back its vivid flashes. The Shadow's fingers were inscribing inked thoughts.

How had the murderer formed contact with Merle Clussig and Wycroft Dustin? There was only one logical answer.

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He had unquestionably offered them possibilities for financial gain through the development of their inventions. Both had intrusted him with their devices. By eliminating both parties, he had gained all usage for himself.

What promises had he made? Promotion was the answer. This unknown individual was undoubtedly a man with recognized financial contacts. Possibly he had previously brought gain to inventors and research specialists.

The Shadow's hand was writing swiftly. Coded words appeared in vivid blue. Before the drying ink could vanish, the hands closed the note and sealed it, in an envelope. Upon this, The Shadow inscribed the name and address of Rutledge Mann.

Cliff Marsland was already searching the underworld for clues to the disappearance of Spuds Jagron. Tomorrow, Rutledge Mann would begin an investigation in The Shadow's service. Where Cliff was working by stealth and cunning, Mann would be open in his methods.

As an investment broker, with a wide range of activity, he would offer opportunities for those who might be interested in the purchase of newly developed inventions. Through this course, Mann would learn the identity of financiers most likely to seek such offerings.

The Shadow had correctly visioned a triangle of circumstance. Merle Clussig and Wycroft Dustin represented two points; the third was some man of money who they believed was ready to capitalize the results of their ability.

Somewhere within that triangle lay the hidden murderer. He had slain the two creators who knew his identity, but the moneyed man with whom he had negotiated had evidently not been touched. Perhaps that man's life was also threatened; perhaps not. At any rate, The Shadow sought the financier – through him to learn the identity of the superslayer.

With the aid of his capable agents, The Shadow was reaching out to avenge past crime, and to prevent the stroke of greater evil that might lay ahead. It was The Shadow's aim to thwart a dangerous crook before the villain could launch a fierce campaign of terror.

To date, The Shadow had not encountered Eric Veldon; yet the master of darkness was directly on the trail of the man with the fiendish smile. Eventually, their paths would meet. The Shadow had linked the clues that were leading to that meeting!

CHAPTER X. THE FIRST REPORT

TO the underworld, The Shadow was known as a lone wolf who battled crime. None had an inkling to his methods. There were those who had sought to thwart The Shadow. They no longer lived.

The eyes of The Shadow were always focused upon affairs in gangdom. So uncanny was The Shadow's ability to learn the facts of impending crime that it was generally conceded that The Shadow visited the bad lands himself whenever the occasion demanded.

Thus mobsters were constantly on the lookout for The Shadow. Reward and fame awaited the skulking gunman who could terminate the career of this terrible being who was called The Shadow.

The Shadow, however, was ever elusive. He never appeared until crime was due to break. Then he arrived, conquered and departed.

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No one in the bad lands had ever solved the full secret of The Shadow's strategy. There were times when the master sleuth prowled the underworld at random, but those times were few. While crime was latent in gangland, The Shadow devoted his attention to other matters.

How, then, did he gain an inkling of approaching deeds of desperate crime? Mobsters did not know. Those who did know were The Shadow and his agents. For The Shadow, as a preliminary to his own operations, frequently sent trusted men on errands in the underworld.

Of the Shadow's agents, the one most suited to gangland investigation was Clifford Marsland. This man had had a picturesque career.

Cliff had served time in Sing Sing for a crime which he had not committed. Only The Shadow knew that fact. He had taken Cliff into his service. Cliff, in turn, had preserved his own reputation among crooks. He was known as a killer – a free lance mobster of enviable repute.

Cliff Marsland always had a bank roll. He never appeared anxious to throw in his lot with the mob leaders who wanted his services. Cliff knew the big shots; he gave deliberate consideration whenever he was offered a lieutenantcy.

This was proof of The Shadow's strategy. The stool pigeons whom the police employed as agents were skulking small-fry, easily spotted if they tried to learn too much. But Cliff Marsland, the man who spied for The Shadow, was recognized as a superior type of crook. Whenever he was absent from the haunts of gangland, it was presumed that he was pulling some big job. Cliff always returned with plenty of money in pocket.

ON the night after Wycroft Dustin's strange death, Cliff Marsland was present at a gangster hang-out known as the Black Ship. This was the third successive visit that he had made to that notorious dive. Two nights ago, Cliff had dropped in from nowhere. Last night, he had arrived a second time. Apparently, his only purpose was the renewal of old acquaintances.

Seated at a corner table in the Black Ship, Cliff was spied by a scrawny, hunch-shouldered mobster who chanced to enter. The fellow came sidling in Cliff's direction and his mealy mouth formed an ugly smile as he seated himself opposite. Cliff Marsland, calm-faced and stolid in demeanor, gave a slight nod as he recognized this old acquaintance.

"Hello, Punks," said Cliff.

"Hello, Cliff," returned the mealy-mouthed gangster. "Where you been keepin' yourself?"

"Out of town," replied Cliff in a noncommittal tone.

This was the regular form of greeting that Cliff had given to other old acquaintances. Every time a mobster had accosted him, he had let the fellow do the talking. This particular denizen of the underworld, "Punks" Gumbert, was no different from many of the others with whom Cliff had exchanged brief words.

"Ain't seen you often since we was out of the Big House," asserted Punks. "Guess you've been doin' like I have – playin' a close game."

Cliff nodded. Punks Gumbert had been in Sing Sing during Cliff's term of residence at that institution.

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"I ain't askin' none of your business," continued Punks, "because it's your business – not mine. But I ain't got no reason to keep mum on my own layout. I'm runnin' with Duke Scurley, an' it's a great racket."

Cliff had heard of "Duke" Scurley. The man was a former mobster who had turned to racketeering. Scurley had a mob, and Punks Gumbert was evidently a typical henchman.

"If you ain't doin' nothin'," resumed Punks, in a friendly tone, "I can square you in with Duke Scurley."

Cliff gave no sign of being interested in the offer. He did, however, make a comment which brought a grin from Punks Gumbert.

"Short-handed?" questioned Cliff. "What does that mean – is the racket spreading out or have some of the gang taken the bump?"

"Both," responded Punks. "Say, you figure things quick, Cliff. You know how the rackets work. Once in a while some guys get theirs."

"From the bulls?" questioned Cliff calmly.

"Naw," Punks shook his head, "You don't think I'd be in the graft if there was trouble with the bulls, do you? I don't want to go back up the river."

"So I thought."

"There's wise guys that mooch in every racket, Cliff. That is, guys that think they're wise – until they bump up with Duke Scurley. He shows 'em different."

Cliff shrugged his shoulders. The gesture indicated that he was not interested in the affairs of Duke Scurley.

The action made Punks Gumbert more anxious to explain himself.

"Duke's all right," asserted the gangster. "He don't take nobody for a ride, except the guys that have tried to double-cross him. I could tell you how Duke works."

"The same as every one else, probably."

PUNKS GUMBERT leered. He looked about him to make sure that no one was listening. Leaning across the table, he spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"Listen, Cliff," were his words. "Duke Scurley ain't no slouch. He's a wise bimbo. When he puts 'em on the spot, they just slide out. Savvy?"

"They all slide out anyway," commented Cliff.

"Not like Duke does it," retorted Punks. "Say – he don't leave no corpses layin' around on dump heaps. Where they go – well, Duke's the guy that knows. Listen – maybe you've heard about a few smart gazebos who went for rides and never came back. But you don't know what's become of 'em."

"No." Cliff's manner became derisive. "What are you doing, Punks? Handing me riddles?"

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"I ain't kiddin', Cliff," protested Punks. "You've heard of Sailor Cook, ain't you? He went for a ride, didn't he? Did they ever find him full of lead? You bet they didn't. I'll tell you another guy's name, too. Spud Jagron. Did you ever hear of him?"

Cliff had. His purpose here in the underworld was to gain traces of Spud Jagron. The Shadow's agent, however, gave no sign of interest in the name. Cliff nodded slowly, as though the mention of Spud Jagron had brought up dim recollections.

"Duke Scurley took both of them guys for a ride," declared Punks. "I was with him. I seen what happened to them. That's why I know how wise Duke is."

"What does he use?" snorted Cliff. "Gold-plated bullets? To make them feel good when they're going out?"

"He don't do nothin' to 'em!" returned Punks, triumphantly. "He leaves that for some other guy. He takes 'em for a ride all right; but he drops 'em off and some other bimbo picks 'em up to do the dirty work."

"Taking chances, isn't he."

"Have they come back? None of 'em. Listen, Cliff. Duke has got a racket that has me buffaloed. He gets rid of them eggs that he doesn't want – and that ain't all of it. I'm puttin' you wise because I know you. Duke Scurley get's a grand for every one of them guys he gets rid of."

"Have you gone goofy, Punks?" questioned Cliff. "I didn't know you played the loop joints. Let's see your arm – I want to look for needle points."

"Think I'm kiddin' you?" laughed Punks. "Well, I ain't. I've told you the lay. Listen to the rest of it. I'm in right with Duke Scurley, see? One night, I hear him gettin' a phone call. Says O.K. to somethin' – and wants to know about the dough."

"After that, we grab Sailor Cook and take him for a ride. We got him tied and gagged. Duke drives way uptown somewhere – I don't know where the place is, because I'm in the back seat shovin' a gat into Sailor's ribs."

"We pull up by a little alleyway, outside of an old empty house. We dump Sailor in the alley. We go out and wait. After about five minutes, Duke takes a look. Says O.K. We ride away."

"You know what happened? Somebody grabbed Sailor Cook and took him out the other end of the alley."

"We done the same thing with Spud Jagron. And there's other smart wisenheimers that have gone the same route. A grand, Duke Scurley gets, for each of 'em – for gettin' rid of guys he don't want."

"A cheap racket," commented Cliff.

"That ain't Duke's racket," protested Punks. "That's just a side line. Say – Duke needs a good guy like you for his mob. Stick along with me, Cliff – you're my pal, see? I'll get you in the money – and if you don't believe this story I've been handin' you, come along and see it for yourself."

"What is Duke's regular racket?" quizzed Cliff.

"A protective association," explained Punks. "You know the idea. He shakes down warehouse owners. If they don't come across with dough, we raid their vans. The trouble is, guys like Sailor Cook and Spud Jagron get

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the idea of startin' a racket on their own. When Duke sees that, he gets rid of 'em. Savvy?"

Cliff Marsland considered. He gave no sign of being interested in Punks Gumbert's proposal. Yet he made no refusal of the offer; and that fact caused Punks to become urgent. The mealy-mouthed gangster began an account of racketeering operations. He pointed out soft ways to make money.

"Get with Duke Scurley," advised Punks. "I'll put you wise to the way to work with him. You'll be in soft, Cliff, I'm tellin' you –"

"All right," decided Cliff. "When do you want to take me to see Duke?"

"Tomorrow night," returned Punks.

"All set," said Cliff, rising from the table. "I'll meet you here, Punks."

THE scrawny gangster grinned as Cliff departed. Punks Gumbert saw a prosperous future. It would fix him well with Duke Scurley to bring in so capable a worker as Cliff Marsland. Moreover, with Cliff as his pal, Punks would gain higher status in Duke's outfit.

Punks, in reviewing his conversation with Cliff, thought that the most important phase had been the conclusion. Punks, in his description of what had happened to Spud Jagron, had been merely endeavoring to excite Cliff Marsland's interest.

To Cliff, however, the preliminary discussion had decided his plan of action. Cliff had come to the Black Ship on three successive nights, hoping for some break that would give him a clew to how Spud Jagron had been bumped off. He had gained the break – and with it the knowledge that Spud Jagron might still be alive!

If so, where was Spud Jagron now? The gangster with the scarred jaw had not been seen in the underworld. Police and gangsters, alike, believed him dead. There was mystery here – and the key to it lay through contact with Duke Scurley.

Cliff Marsland had read the accounts of two deaths; he knew that the police regarded Merle Clussig's end as murder and that strange circumstances shrouded the demise of Dustin.

Cliff knew nothing of what The Shadow might have learned. At the same time, he realized that somehow, Spud Jagron must be connected with one or both cases.

The situation seemed incredible. How could Spud Jagron still be alive – and yet not seeking vengeance against Duke Scurley, who had taken him for a one-way ride?

Was Sailor Cook also living?

The answers were unfathomable to Cliff, but they would not be to The Shadow. Cliff Marsland's report would weld another link in the chain which was being formed to reach the source of strange crime.

Cliff knew well what his next instructions would be: to join with Duke Scurley and to learn the spot where the gang leader took his victims.

With a thousand dollars waiting for each gangster that he delivered, Duke Scurley would soon send another victim along the route which the others had followed. Cliff Marsland, as Duke's underling, could gain insight into what had happened to Spud Jagron. That, Cliff felt sure, would lead to someone higher up – the crime

master whom The Shadow sought!

The deaths of Merle Clussig and Wycroft Dustin were linked with the strange fate of Spud Jagron. That was something which Cliff Marsland knew must be true – something which hitherto, only The Shadow had known!

CHAPTER XI. A STRANGE VISIT

THE SHADOW was in his sanctum. Before him, on the illuminated table, lay a report from Cliff Marsland. One day had elapsed since Cliff's meeting with Punks Gumbert. During that time, Cliff had communicated with The Shadow and had received orders in return. This message was the assurance that tonight Cliff would certainly meet Duke Scurley, the racketeer who had put Spud Jagron on the spot.

Another report appeared between The Shadow's hands. This was from Rutledge Mann. The investment broker had followed instructions, but so far had received no replies to his attempt to interest financiers in new inventive products.

There was grimness in the whispered laugh that came from The Shadow's unseen lips. The Shadow knew that he was dealing with a master plotter – a man who moved with convincing precision. Merle Clussig – Wycroft Dustin – both had known the identity of the supercrook; both had died.

Would Duke Scurley also prove a blind clew? The future alone would tell. It was probable that the unknown plotter behind the game of insidious murder had been cagy in his dealings with Duke Scurley.

Much depended upon Rutledge Mann. If the investment broker could discover a financier linked in any way with either Merle Clussig or Wycroft Dustin, a definite step would be taken.

Again, The Shadow laughed. His weird mirth betokened a further thought. The unknown plotter had duped both Clussig and Dustin, because they possessed scientific skill which he required. Were there other persons, of similar ability whose services had also been turned to usage?

The Shadow was seeking to uncover such persons. A new report appeared as evidence of that fact. This was from Clyde Burke. The reporter had been accumulating all the data that could be gained through the Classic office. His lists, however, were apparently of no importance.

A typewritten column gave the names of various men whose scientific accomplishments were recognized. Columned beside these were the particular branches of work which these individuals had performed. It was not in the lists themselves that The Shadow gained the thought which inspired his next action. It was in the lack of data that he found the inspiration.

Across the bottom of the typewritten sheet, he wrote two words in ink:

Medical Developments.

The words dried, then faded.

Their meaning was plain. In his quest for data which might be useful to The Shadow, Clyde Burke had uncovered news of no scientific devices which might be used in crime; also, however, he had produced no information referring to recent developments in medical science.

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Ear phones appeared. A tiny light flickered from darkness. Burbank's voice quickly responded as The Shadow spoke.

"Instructions to Burke," ordered The Shadow. "Obtain names of all physicians who have produced new methods or theories. Report complete data as soon as obtained."

Darkness pervaded the sanctum. When this order had been accomplished, The Shadow would have at his disposal the final details that would enable him to eliminate all possible fields wherein the hand of the master plotter might be found.

Somewhere in Manhattan, isolated from discovery, might be a third dupe who shared the knowledge which Merle Clussig and Wycroft Dustin had possessed, namely, the ability to point out the evil man whom The Shadow sought! Until the last possibility had been eliminated, The Shadow would seek for such an individual.

EVEN while The Shadow's keen brain was working on this problem, definite proof of his theory existed in another section of Manhattan. A tall, dark-haired man with furrowed brow was nervously pacing back and forth within the confines of a sumptuous living room.

A phone bell jingled. The tall man strode to a table and picked up the receiver. He spoke in short, brusque terms:

"This is Doctor Joseph Barratini," were his words. "Who?... Oh. Yes. You say Doctor Rupert Sayre is waiting downstairs?... Very good. Tell him to come up immediately."

Doctor Barratini hung up the receiver and walked over to the window. From this room, high up in a mammoth Manhattan apartment building, he could see the myriad lights of the vast city. Something in the scene made him shudder, as though he feared hidden places among those lights.

There was a knock at the outer door. Barratini steadied himself with an effort. His face became composed. He strode across the room and opened the door to admit a serious-faced young man who gave a friendly nod and extended his hand.

This was Doctor Rupert Sayre.

Barratini invited his guest to sit down. Cigars were lighted; the visitor looked quizzically toward his host.

There was a reason for Doctor Sayre's attitude. Although he had gained an enviable reputation as a practicing surgeon, Rupert Sayre was far younger than Joseph Barratini. He wondered why he had been called here at Barratini's urgent request.

The older man seemed to understand the other's mental question. Yet Joseph Barratini was loath to speak. He arose from his chair, strolled to the window and peered out toward the lights of the city, while Rupert Sayre wondered. At length, Barratini swung and gazed steadily toward the young physician before him.

"Sayre," he said, in a thick voice, "I called you here this evening to discuss a matter which is of vital importance to my welfare. It involves a question which cannot be considered purely from an ethical standpoint.

"I want to talk to you. I want to ask your advice as a friend. Let us forget that we are medical men – except for the fact that you may understand certain impulses that guided me under unusual circumstances. So I have

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your confidence?"

Barratini's tone, more than his words, caused Sayre to nod his head. It was evident that the elder physician was troubled. His frank statement was one which Sayre could not follow by refusal.

Barratini seemed relieved. He sat down.

"You know my reputation," began Doctor Barratini. "Despite the fact that ill fortune has followed me throughout my medical career, I have gained international fame through my accomplishments in brain surgery.

"I made a fortune during the regime of the Russian czar. I lost it when the empire fell. A refugee, I found a suitable abode in Spain. There I gained new wealth until the monarchy ended and King Alphonso went into exile. A royalist by necessity – for my practice depended upon the support of the nobility – I was forced to flee the country. I went to South America; finally, I reached New York."

RUPERT SAYRE had heard the story of Joseph Barratini's misfortunes. To him, this international surgeon was a man who deserved admiration. Barratini, with his knowledge of medical science, had always found his services in high demand and had always managed to recoup his losses.

"In the course of my travels," resumed Barratini, "I found varied customs in different lands. I saw specimens of our race who could scarcely be classed as higher types than gorillas. I learned to hold contempt for individuals of brutish caliber – the type which constitutes the average American criminal.

"Here in New York, where freedom of speech is prevalent, I advanced a theory which I long had held: namely, that brain surgery performed upon criminals would be justified by its results. Others had advocated the same practice; yet my recommendation was greeted with disapproval. Americans, it seems, are governed by a maudlin sentiment, even where science is concerned."

Rupert Sayre smiled. He knew of Barratini's statements, of the furor they had created in limited surgical circles. There had been antagonism toward Barratini; he had been advised to keep his suggestion to himself. Under this protest, he had refrained from further discussion of the subject.

"One man, however," resumed Barratini, "appeared interested in my suggestions. It was due to his reactions that I became involved in the strange circumstances which now entangle me in their mesh."

"A physician?" questioned Sayre.

"No," replied Barratini, lowering his tone. "The man's name is Eric Veldon. He is a promoter of scientific inventions."

"I never heard of him."

"Probably not. Veldon is very secretive in all his actions. He is something of a scientist and an experimenter. His knowledge of medicine – and surgery – is surprising."

"Veldon took to your theories?"

"Yes, He came here to my apartment. He talked persuasively. He stated that he had taken in a criminal who had been seriously injured; that an operation upon the man would be necessary. He asked if I would perform it."

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"And you agreed?"

"No. I simply agreed to visit the injured man. Veldon insisted that I wear a blindfold while I rode in his car, I agreed, purely because of my curiosity. I have always enjoyed adventure; and I could understand why Veldon wanted to keep the subject's hiding place a secret. That, Sayre, was the beginning of the network which has entangled me."

Barratini arose from his chair. He drew long puffs on his cigar as he paced the room. He wore the expression of a man who feared he had said too much; then, observing Sayre's sympathetic countenance, Barratini paused to resume his story.

"WE arrived at an isolated house," he stated. "I believe that it is somewhere on Long Island. That is all I know. I took no instruments for a surgical operation. It was to be an examination – that was all."

"Imagine, Sayre, my amazement when I reached Veldon's unknown place. He took me into a completely fitted operating room. There, bound to a table, was the criminal. The man was uninjured, Sayre! He was in a perfect state of health!"

"Veldon had deceived you!" exclaimed Sayre.

"Exactly," resumed Barratini. "That was not all. He proceeded to threaten me. He drew a revolver and a fierce expression of malice appeared upon his face. He told me that he had listened to my theories – he repeated many of my statements word for word. He ordered me to operate – or die."

"For what purpose?"

"To reduce the criminal to the state of a mere human mechanism – to perform the miracles which I believed were possible through brain surgery. I was called upon to remold a brain to its primitive state."

"You refused?"

"That was impossible. Veldon could have killed me. I saw that I must accede to his demands. Then, Sayre a deep interest seized me. I was willing to proceed, that I might test the proof of my theories. I regret the desire – exceedingly – yet the circumstances offered me no choice. I performed the operation. Veldon drove me, blindfolded, back to New York in my car."

"And after that?"

Sayre's question had a marked effect upon Barratini. The tall physician slumped into his chair and pressed his hands against his forehead.

"Sayre," he whispered, "I heard nothing for two weeks. Then, one evening, there was a rap upon my door. I opened it. Imagine my amazement to see the very man upon whom I had operated!"

"The criminal?"

"Yes, but a criminal no longer. An automaton – a figure who moved with grim, mechanical determination, a creature who approached me with staring eyes. The man gave me an envelope. I opened it. Within, I found one thousand dollars."

"Payment from Veldon."

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"Yes. But the man remained. He looked at me with steady eyes and said one word: 'Come.' I shrugged my shoulders. The staring man produced a revolver. He would have shot me where I stood had I not promptly obeyed his order.

"I accompanied this transformed crook to the street. There the human automaton pointed to a large automobile. I entered. The door shut. I could not open it. I could not see through the windows. Sayre, I was a prisoner!"

"Amazing!" exclaimed Sayre.

"That is not all," resumed Barratini. "The car started. I knew that the automaton was at the wheel. I found a light and illuminated the interior of the car. When the journey ended, the door opened and I found myself at Veldon's house. He was awaiting me. He wore his vicious smile. He told me that there was a new task. Another operation."

"Another criminal?"

"Yes. I performed the operation. The first man drove me home. Two weeks passed. Then came an unexpected visitor – the second man.

"Imagine it, Sayre – to see this living proof of how effective my skill had been – a criminal, possessing all his intuition and instinct, but lacking all initiative other than that supplied by his master, Eric Veldon!"

"Incredible!" gasped Sayre.

"That was not the end," said Barratini in a weary tone. "More operations followed. Always the same procedure. Each subject appeared in person, bearing my payment, to summon me to a new task. I was afraid to disobey. I feared Veldon's enmity. Now, Sayre, I have reached a terrible dilemma."

"Has Veldon made new demands?"

"No, but I have come to a fearful realization." Barratini paused. He picked up a newspaper. "I have read of two strange deaths. An electrical experimenter named Clussig has been murdered. A chemist named Dustin died mysteriously. Can these deaths be the work of Eric Veldon?"

"Possibly," admitted Rupert Sayre. "From what you have told me, the man must possess fiendish traits."

"He is a fiend," asserted Barratini. "I must learn the location of his hiding place. Sayre, I am counting on you to help me –"

Barratini's low whisper died on his lips. The black-haired physician stared at his companion with bulging eyes. Rupert Sayre heard the cause of Barratini's alarm. Someone was knocking at the door. Raps were coming in steady, rhythmic beats.

"It is the summons!" whispered Barratini. "Another victim has come to Eric Veldon's abode. Help me, Sayre! Help me!"

CHAPTER XII. A TRAP CLOSES

THERE was a pause in the rapping at the door. Then came heavy thuds, repeated with a stern, impatient stroke. Joseph Barratini turned to Rupert Sayre. The older man's face was aghast.

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"Answer it!" whispered Sayre. "Answer it – after I have hidden."

Springing to his feet, the young physician moved hurriedly toward a door at the side of the living room. Doctor Barratini, trembling, gripped his arms and followed.

"What shall I do?" he questioned hopelessly.

"Go with him," ordered Sayre. "My car is out front. I shall follow. After you have returned we can discuss what to do."

A look of elation appeared upon Barratini's face. He clasped Sayre's hand; then turned toward the door where the heavy rapping was continuing its ceaseless beat.

"Just a moment!" called Barratini. "Just a moment, outside there!"

Reaching the door, Barratini paused long enough to see that Rupert Sayre was out of sight. The black-haired surgeon opened the door and stepped back.

A thin, cadaverous man stalked into the room. With swinging hand, he closed the door behind him and approached Barratini with an ugly, steady gaze.

Rupert Sayre, eyeing the situation through the crevice of the side door, was horrified by the ghastly scene. To the young physician, this exceeded the description which Barratini had given him.

The arrival was unquestionably the final criminal upon whom the famous surgeon had operated. There was recognition in Barratini's eye, and Sayre could see him shrinking away from the corpse-like visitor.

This creature was a monster – and Barratini might well be the one who had created him. Fear and remorse were registered upon the eminent surgeon's face, and Sayre could see his body tremble. For a moment, the young doctor was ready to spring forth and grapple with the hideous visitor; then, like an automatic figure, the man stopped, and his threatening gestures ended. Drawing a hand from his pocket, he thrust an envelope toward Doctor Barratini.

The surgeon received the envelope. He faltered as he opened it. Crisp bank notes came forth in Barratini's hands. The physician sidled across the room and inserted the money in a table drawer. The cadaverous man stalked slowly after him. Barratini turned to face this vigilant automaton who was dogging his footsteps.

"Come!"

The ugly creature uttered the summons in a harsh voice. His hand again moved toward his pocket. Sayre could see that whatever the brain-riddled criminal had lost in initiative, he had gained in purpose, under the direction of Eric Veldon, the fiend who had sent him here.

Joseph Barratini smiled weakly. He bowed as he picked up his hat from a chair. Accompanied by the summoner, he walked deliberately from the apartment. At the door, however, he paused, to throw a desperate glance toward the door where Rupert Sayre was hidden.

As soon as the outer door had closed behind Joseph Barratini and the corpse-like man, Rupert Sayre sprang from his hiding place. The young physician realized the need for caution. He knew that this transformed man who accompanied Doctor Barratini was evidently under definite instructions. It would be wise not to excite suspicion. The monster might be dangerous, if he saw any one coming to interfere with Barratini's departure.

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The corridor was empty when Sayre reached it. The moving dial above an elevator door showed that Barratini and his conductor were descending. Sayre rang the bell. Another elevator stopped a few moments later. Sayre reached the lobby just in time to see Barratini and the mechanical man passing through the revolving door. The young physician hurried on their trail, carefully keeping them within sight.

On the sidewalk, Sayre saw the automaton usher Barratini into a large limousine. The door closed. The man climbed to the driver's seat. Sayre hurried across the street, and gained his coupe. The limousine was moving as he started the motor. Sayre took up the chase.

The limousine threaded a devious route. Obviously the driver had instructions to totally bewilder the passenger's sense of direction. The strange pursuit reached an avenue. Traveling in the rear Sayre followed a course toward upper Manhattan. Time and again, the limousine stopped before a traffic light. Policemen were available; yet Sayre dared not call them. He remembered his promise to Barratini.

The young physician realised, as he drove along, that Eric Veldon must indeed be a dangerous man with whom to deal. It was probably that he wanted Barratini to perform another operation. If so, it would be best to let this adventure reach its natural conclusion. The more that Sayre could learn, the better could he aid Barratini to bring Veldon to justice.

The young physician did not approve of Barratini's forced operations; nevertheless, he respected the eminent international surgeon, and did not feel himself qualified to offer criticism. He had promised to aid Barratini as a friend. He intended to do so.

Furthermore, Sayre could appreciate the mental condition of Doctor Joseph Barratini. He fancied that a ride in that darkened limousine, piloted by a cadaverous chauffeur who had been resurrected from a life of crime, could be anything but cheerful. Thoughts of the gruesome monster who had summoned the old physician made Rupert Sayre shudder.

THE whole chase seemed mechanical, an incredible occurrence in the midst of teeming Manhattan. Sayre found himself staring straight ahead as he kept his gaze steadily upon the moving limousine. It was with an effort that he managed to turn his head to note the part of Manhattan that he was traveling. The strange chase had just reached the upper end of Central Park.

On through a maze of streets. The limousine was again following an eccentric course. At last, it swerved into a side street and ran past a row of old, dilapidated houses. Sayre slowed the speed of his coupe. He eased the car along until the limousine had turned a corner.

Reaching the corner, Sayre noted that the limousine had stopped a short way up the block. With a quick twist of the wheel, the young physician kept straight ahead. He brought his car to a quick stop, and prepared to reverse it. Then another thought struck him.

Was this the end of the trail? Barratini had said something about a deserted house. The surgeon had mentioned a spot probably on Long Island. Perhaps he had been mistaken.

Sayre decided to investigate. He turned off the ignition switch, and extinguished the lights on his coupe. Pocketing the key, he left the car and approached the corner. He could still see the tail light of the limousine.

The street was very dark. Rupert Sayre felt sure that he could reach the limousine undetected. He moved along the silent building walls until he had reached the large car. He could see through the side window of the front seat. The car was empty. The cadaverous driver had evidently left to report.

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Cautiously, Sayre reached the side of the limousine. He listened intently to make sure that no one was near by. He placed his hand upon the handle of the rear door. He noted, as he stared at the glass, that it reflected only blackness. It looked like an ordinary car window, except upon close inspection; then Sayre realized that it was opaque.

Sayre hesitated. He knew from what Barratini had said, that the door would not open from the inside. If the knob should function from the outside, however, it would be possible to effect Barratini's release, should the surgeon now desire to escape. Sayre resolved to try. At least he could assure his friend that he was on the trail, and also give him the location of the neighborhood which they had reached.

The knob turned. The door opened. A sharp gasp came from Rupert Sayre's lips. A flood of illumination came from the interior of the limousine.

Had that been all that Sayre saw, the young physician would quickly have closed the door. But there was something else which made Rupert Sayre stand motionless.

Doctor Joseph Barratini still occupied the interior of the limousine. But the light which came from the ceiling showed a complete change in the surgeon's appearance.

Sprawled upon the cushions of the rear seat, Barratini was staring straight upward. His hat had fallen from his head. His black hair, disheveled, was strewn downward upon his ashen face.

A TRAINED physician, Rupert Sayre forgot all other than the stricken man who lay before his eyes. He leaped into the car and bent over Doctor Barratini's body. He realized rapidly that the celebrated surgeon was dead.

Then came a sound from the sidewalk. Sayre turned quickly, but too late. In the glare of the dome light, he caught a glimpse of the leering, cadaverous face of the man who had summoned Joseph Barratini to his death. Sayre made a leap for the door. It slammed before he could reach it.

Rupert Sayre, like Joseph Barratini, was in a black-walled prison. Vainly, the young physician shouted and beat at the surrounding glass. The limousine began to move. Sayre realized that his cries could not be heard; that this shatter-proof glass would resist every effort that he applied to break it.

The limousine swung around a corner. Barratini's body came toppling along the seat. Sayre was jolted down beside it. He gave his attention to the form of the dead physician and found that his first surmise was correct. Barratini was stone dead.

What had killed him? Stark terror came over Rupert Sayre. The mysterious force – whatever it might be – that had slain Barratini could still be present in the car! Would he, Rupert Sayre, become a victim also?

As the thought flashed through his mind, Sayre began to experience an unaccountable dizziness. Joseph Barratini's body went slumping to the floor. Rupert Sayre made no effort to stop it. The light was dimming before his eyes. A whirling sensation possessed him. The limousine seemed to be climbing tremendous mountains; then sinking into limitless depths.

Rupert Sayre sank gasping upon the seat. His listless body began to respond to the rolls of the big car. His staring eyes were livid until the lids closed over them. Rupert Sayre's breathing became a painful, mechanical process.

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Two victims lay within the rear of the limousine. One was Joseph Barratini, dead; the other was Rupert Sayre, unconscious. These two physicians, who had so recently discussed the insidious schemes of Eric Veldon, had paid the penalty for their attempt to pry into the evil devices of that master plotter.

MILES passed. The limousine came to a stop. The door opened. The light from the inner dome showed a gravelly driveway. Then, into that zone of illumination, came a face.

It was not the cadaverous visage of the human automaton who had summoned Doctor Joseph Barratini; it was the evil countenance of a personage more terrible than that man who looked like a living corpse.

Eric Veldon, the man who plotted murder, was surveying the bodies that lay within the limousine. Joseph Barratini, dead, came under his leering inspection. Rupert Sayre, alive, but in complete stupor, also commanded Eric Veldon's attention.

The fiend's lips formed a snarling smile. Stepping back from the open door, Veldon uttered a short command. Two men, moving with the mechanical stride of automatic figures, stepped forth from the darkness. They lifted the dead form of Joseph Barratini and carried it away.

A few minutes later, they returned. They raised Rupert Sayre's limp body and bore it into darkness. Eric Veldon's evil face surveyed the emptiness. The smile still showed upon the plotter's lips, as Eric Veldon extinguished the light within the limousine.

Another man had died – another whom Eric Veldon had used as a dupe – another who could have revealed the identity of this living fiend.

Doctor Joseph Barratini, like Merle Clussig and Wycroft Dustin, was no longer of use to Eric Veldon. Death was the final award that the superfiend had given him.

Rupert Sayre still lived. What fate awaited the young physician? That rested, at present, in the hands of Eric Veldon, to whom human lives were trifles!

CHAPTER XIII. WORD TO THE SHADOW

Two days had elapsed since the eventful evening when Doctor Joseph Barratini had died and Doctor Rupert Sayre had fallen into the toils of Eric Veldon. The evanishment of the two prominent physicians had become Manhattan's newest mystery.

In an office situated high in the towering Badger Building, a chubby-faced man was busy at his desk. The great buildings of upper New York formed an amazing sky line when viewed from the window by the man's side; but this lethargic, slow-moving individual paid no attention to the scene without. He was entirely occupied with a newspaper, clipping long paragraphs from it.

A stack of items formed a little pile upon the desk. The chubby-faced man slipped them together and inserted them in an envelope. Just as he was about to seal this, there was a rap at the door. In response to the man's query, the voice of the stenographer announced that a visitor was outside.

The lethargic individual showed unusual haste as he dumped the bulky newspapers into a wastebasket and laid the envelope at the side of the desk. He arose from his chair and opened the door into the outer office. A tall, bluff-faced man arose to meet him.

"You are Mr. Rutledge Mann?" inquired the stranger.

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"Yes," acknowledged the chubby-faced man.

"I am Holbrook Edkins," explained the visitor.

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed Mann. "The gentleman who is interested in inventive investments. Come in, Mr. Edkins. Come in."

Seated in the inner office, Edkins looked quizzically at the investment broker. He expected to hear Mann begin a sales talk. On the contrary, the investment broker opened conversation along a different trend. He seemed anxious to learn something about Edkins.

"You have made previous investments of this nature?" inquired Mann. "Specifically, have you ever financed inventions which offered definite possibilities?"

"A rather unusual question," laughed Edkins. "I hardly see what that has to do with the present matter."

"A great deal," explained Mann, seriously. "You must understand, Mr. Edkins, that I usually deal in gilt-edged securities. I would not recommend my present proposition to any one who is unfamiliar with the risks incurred in purchasing rights to new inventions."

"Very fair of you," agreed Edkins. "However, Mr. Mann, I can satisfy your apprehensions upon that point. I have already successfully invested money in various inventions."

"This one," announced Mann, "relates to certain X-ray devices which may revolutionize the present appliances used in hospitals. I have already interested one client –"

The investment broker stopped short. Holbrook Edkins was offering an interruption. Mann's statements had apparently aroused his entire interest.

"X-rays?" queried the prospective investor. "Can you be more specific, sir? I am very much interested in developments of that sort."

"Ah! You have already investigated that field?"

"I have received recommendations of certain X-ray appliances."

"Indeed," said Mann. "I did not know that other investment brokers were offering such propositions."

"This did not come through a broker," explained Edkins. "In fact, I am not at liberty to state the complete details. I can explain the situation in a few words, however."

"I am worth more than a million dollars, Mr. Mann. I made my money through wise choice in the development of useful inventions. I formed contact with certain promoters who had access to different inventions. Through one of these men, I recently learned of a new and practical X-ray device. I have advanced money toward its completion."

"Naturally, I am interested in any other device of the sort. I cannot name the promoter with whom I have been talking. Nevertheless, I should like to consider the merits of any device which might duplicate, or parallel, the effects which this promoter promised."

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"VERY fair," decided Mann. "I think, Mr. Edkins, that it would be wise for you to meet my first client – the one who has already expressed an interest in the new proposition."

"Who is he?"

"A gentleman named Lamont Cranston. A multi-millionaire who lives in New Jersey."

"I have heard of him. A great traveler, is he not? A member of the Cobalt Club?"

"Yes. Mr. Cranston holds an option for one half of the new stock issue. I would prefer to have you talk with him. He is investing in the X-ray – not promoting it. He understands its merits. His enviable reputation..."

"I should be glad to meet Mr. Cranston," interposed Edkins. "Very glad. I have heard that he has been highly successful in unusual investments. Your suggestion is a good one, Mr. Mann. When can this meeting be arranged?"

"Mr. Cranston will be in New York this evening," returned Mann. "Will you be at home, Mr. Edkins?"

"Certainly," said the millionaire, "Could you arrange to have Mr. Cranston call at my residence?"

"I shall telephone the Cobalt Club," assured Mann, "and have him communicate with you, Mr. Edkins."

The interview ended, Rutledge Mann returned to his desk and began to prepare a report. His role of investment broker was ended. He was acting as The Shadow's agent.

Sealing his report in another envelope, Mann picked up the one that contained the clippings and sealed it, also. He noted by his watch that it was nearly five o'clock.

The investment broker took a cab to Twenty-third Street. He entered a dingy building and went to an upper floor. He stopped before a deserted office, where a dirty, cobwebbed glass panel bore the name:

B. Jonas

Mann deposited his envelopes into a small chute. He left the building. The slot that allowed the passage of messages into an empty office constituted The Shadow's letter box. All data deposited there reached The Shadow himself. No one had ever been seen to enter or leave the locked office; but Mann knew well that The Shadow had ready access to the place.

LESS than one hour after Rutledge Mann had visited the office on Twenty-third Street, a light clicked in a darkened room. Within the confines of his sanctum, The Shadow placed two envelopes upon his table. His long fingers opened the first; out fell the clippings which Rutledge Mann had accumulated.

The Shadow studied these items swiftly. They related to the new and baffling mystery, the disappearance of Doctors Barratini and Sayre. They included a statement regarding the discovery of Rupert Sayre's coupe, upon an obscure street in the northern section of Manhattan.

The Shadow's hands produced a large map of New York City. While the girasol glittered beneath the bluish light, keen eyes surveyed the chart and a long finger marked the spot where the coupe had been found.

Again, The Shadow had recognized the insidious hand of the fiendish enemy whom he was seeking, but whose identity he had not yet learned.

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A typewritten paper fell upon the table. It was a later list from Clyde Burke; in it appeared the name of Doctor Joseph Barratini, the noted brain surgeon. This data had been gained too late. Burke had learned of the eminent physician's presence in New York on the morning after Barratini's strange disappearance.

The Shadow's laugh was grim. In all his career, the master of detection had never encountered a more stubborn foeman than this hidden fiend who struck with superskill.

An abandoned coupe in northern Manhattan; that was the only clue. No trail led on from there. It was known that Doctor Sayre had called upon Doctor Barratini in the latter's apartment. It was assumed that the two had gone out together.

The Shadow had not been idle. He had been to the spot where Sayre's car had been discovered. He had noted an alleyway off the silent street. That place jibed with the description that Punks Gumbert had given to Cliff Marsland.

The Shadow was relying upon his agent in the underworld. Cliff was with Duke Scurley's gang. When the word came to put some new victim on the spot, Cliff would learn the exact locality where gagged gangsters had been turned over to other hands.

Would that be the same alleyway as the one near the corner where Sayre's car had been found? The Shadow believed it was. His keen study of the maze of crime showed a new link between the disappearance of the two physicians and the deaths of Merle Clussig and Wycroft Dustin.

In the face of circumstances, however, The Shadow was playing a waiting game. Whatever the fate of Joseph Barratini or Rupert Sayre, the best way to meet the superfiend was when he moved once more. That time would come when a new summons arrived for Duke Scurley, the gang leader.

THE fingers opened the second envelope. In carefully coded writing appeared the report of Rutledge Mann's interview with Holbrook Edkins.

The paper remained motionless in The Shadow's hands. Its vivid writing – inscribed in the disappearing ink which characterized all messages between The Shadow and his agents – vanished word by word.

Ear phones clicked across the table. Burbank's voice came over the wires as a tiny light bulb announced the connection. The Shadow's whisper gave important instructions to the hidden contact agent. Burbank announced his understanding.

The bluish light went out as The Shadow clicked the switch above the shade which surrounded it. A peal of strident mirth reechoed through the total darkness of the sanctum. The Shadow's mockery rang forth with a sinister tone that announced the turn of battle.

In Rutledge Mann's message, The Shadow had grasped the key. He had found the final link. The chain was completed. Tonight, as Lamont Cranston, he would learn the identity of the supercrook behind the crime.

Word to The Shadow – word that proved the keenness of The Shadow's methods – word that rewarded the patience which the black-garbed investigator had shown in his difficult campaign against an enemy whose ways were deep and subtle.

Such word had come from Rutledge Mann. The investment broker, by following The Shadow's instructions, had uncovered the financier whom The Shadow sought – the innocent person who, The Shadow knew, must exist as a pawn in the game which the concealed foe was playing.

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Tonight, Holbrook Edkins would receive a guest. He would talk to Lamont Cranston, multi-millionaire, regarding the merits of electrical inventions. Edkins had said but little to Rutledge Mann. He would say much to Lamont Cranston, for he would be dealing with The Shadow – not the master's agent.

Weird echoes took up the cry of the taunting laugh as it broke into a sibilant spasm of merriment. Sobbing ghouls seemed to hurl back their answer from limitless corridors of space that were shrouded in the gloom. When the last dying jibe had ended, deep silence reigned throughout the black-walled sanctum.

The Shadow, master of vengeance, had departed. Tonight, his hand would stretch forth to grasp a hidden murderer and end the long regime of unrequited crime.

CHAPTER XIV. MILLIONAIRES MEET

HOLBROOK EDKINS lived in an old brownstone house among the Nineties. From the outside, the place was unpretentious; within, it was sumptuously furnished. The millionaire had altered the ancient mansion to suit his requirements.

The downstairs living room contained a gorgeous array of ornate furniture of Louis Quinze style. Edkins, as he walked among a galaxy of fragile, gilded chairs, looked like the proverbial bull amid a collection of chinaware.

A doorbell rang dully. Edkins glanced at his watch. It showed nine o'clock. This was the hour for which he had set his appointment with Lamont Cranston, through a call to the Cobalt Club. A plainly dressed manservant entered the room and spoke to the millionaire.

"Mr. Lamont Cranston is calling, sir.

"Show him in!" exclaimed Edkins.

A few moments later, Holbrook Edkins was shaking hands with Lamont Cranston. The host invited his guest to take a chair; the servant appeared with a box of imported cigars. Meanwhile, both men took a mental survey of each other.

Lamont Cranston's keen eyes summarized Holbrook Edkins in rapid fashion. Edkins, tall and overweight, was evidently a man who enjoyed comfort rather than luxury. He was some fifty years of age, a trifle bald, and inclined toward paunchy cheeks and double chin. While Edkins appeared to be a man who might have his own peculiar prejudice, his countenance betokened a natural friendliness and honesty.

When Edkins looked toward his visitor, he was quick to observe that Lamont Cranston was a most extraordinary man. Tall, lithe, and attired in a black suit, Cranston presented a somber appearance which was increased by the calmness of his face.

Holbrook Edkins had never seen so immobile a countenance. Cranston's hawklike nose, his sharp, penetrating eyes – these were features that impressed Edkins immediately.

IT was Edkins who opened the conversation. The bluff-faced man felt a trifle ill at ease. He decided that it might be the formal environment of the austere living room. He made a suggestion to his visitor.

"Suppose we go up to my den," he said. "That's where I like to talk business. This showroom is my wife's idea. She likes fancy furniture. It makes me feel uncomfortable."

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Cranston responded to the suggestion. He followed Edkins up the stairs. They reached an isolated room and entered the little apartment which Edkins called his den.

The place was not tidy, but it appeared comfortable. Edkins motioned Cranston to a large armchair.

"I understand you have invested in a new X-ray invention," said Edkins. "I was talking with your broker, Rutledge Mann. A good chap, Mann."

"I have made no investment," returned Cranston. "I merely hold an option for a part interest in the device, pending its promotion. I did not care to finance it entirely upon my own."

"So Mann informed me," remarked Edkins, chewing the end of his cigar. "Have you seen the device, Mr. Cranston? Do you know exactly what it will accomplish?"

"No," replied the calm-faced visitor. "The terms of my option are entirely dependent upon my final satisfaction. I merely took Mann's word for it that the invention has reached a satisfactory stage of development."

Holbrook Edkins made no immediate reply. Cigar smoke was becoming thick in the little room. Edkins coughed, walked over to the fireplace, and drew back the screen. He threw the half-consumed perfecto into the pile of ashes. He opened a box that lay upon a table and produced a cigarette.

"If you prefer these," he remarked, "help yourself. I occasionally find cigar smoke too heavy."

"Does my smoke annoy you?" questioned Cranston.

"Not at all; not at all," assured Edkins. "There are other cigars if you want them. Or cigarettes, as you prefer. Regarding the X-ray, Mr. Cranston, I am anxious to learn more."

"You are familiar with X-ray developments?"

Cranston's question was a direct one. It came just as Edkins was lighting his cigarette at an electric lighter. Edkins looked sharply toward his guest. He caught the steady expression of Cranston's eyes. He hesitated on the point of saying, "No."

"I am somewhat familiar with electrical appliances," declared Edkins. "In fact, I have financed the development of certain successful inventions. On a moderate scale, you understand."

"Hence you are interested in a larger proposition."

"Exactly. I would like to be sure of its merits, however."

"I hold the same opinion," announced Cranston quietly. "That is why I wanted this discussion with you. I am anxious to consider the proposition from the investor's angle. So I am particularly desirous of learning whether or not there are other X-ray devices in the course of development."

Edkins puffed his cigarette thoughtfully. There had been no question in Cranston's tone, but those steady, penetrating eyes were demanding in their glance. Edkins had finished no more than half of his cigarette; nevertheless, he went to the fireplace, pulled back the screen, and nervously tossed the butt into the ashes. Immediately afterward, he took another cigarette from the box and lighted it.

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ALL the while, Cranston remained silent. The visitor was evidently awaiting some comment from Edkins. The host was considering what he should say. At length, he spoke cautiously.

"I understand your apprehensions," he said. "It would be unwise to invest in some device that might be quickly superseded. That has been my problem for several months."

"Regarding X-ray devices?"

Cranston's question was calmly interposed yet its tone was now apparent. Holbrook Edkins realized that he had said exactly what he had not intended to discuss so soon. He had intimated that he had already been considering the possibilities of an X-ray device.

"Not exactly," he said, hoping to correct the error. "I have been concerned more with a screening device – a contrivance to counteract the injurious effects of X-rays of high intensity."

"Necessary, I suppose," rejoined Cranston, "with improved X-rays of greater power than those now used."

"Yes." Holbrook Edkins paused suddenly. He threw his second cigarette into the fireplace. He turned to meet Cranston's steady gaze. He could not tell whether or not those eyes were challenging.

Edkins recalled that he had mentioned negotiations with a promoter during his conversation with Rutledge Mann. Had Mann passed that fact to Cranston? Whatever the case, Edkins had just admitted an interest in pending X-ray developments. He realized that Cranston, though silent in his inquiries, was gradually forcing him to bring up the subject.

"I have had dealings," asserted Edkins, suddenly, "with a promoter whose name I have promised not to reveal. He has shown me models of X-ray machines which are already developed. He represents the inventor. I have made several substantial cash advances."

"Indeed," remarked Cranston quietly. "Then, Mr. Edkins, you are probably not interested in the invention which I have promised to finance. Under the circumstances –"

"No, no!" exclaimed Edkins, as he saw his guest rising to leave. "I am intensely interested, Mr. Cranston. It would be most unfortunate if either one of us should be investing money to a futile purpose."

"Events will show that," decided Cranston in his easy tone. "I have no desire, Mr. Edkins, to cause you financial loss. Nevertheless, I feel that my position is more desirable than yours. I am dealing with a legitimate specialist in investments. Rutledge Mann has no desire to conceal his name. You, however, are concerned with a wild-cat promoter who prefers to keep under cover. I cannot compliment you on your choice, Mr. Edkins; however, I wish you all possible success."

There was a sting to Cranston's words. They made Holbrook Edkins uncomfortable. Mechanically, Edkins gripped the hand which his visitor extended. Then, as Cranston turned toward the door, the bluff-faced man bounded forward.

"Wait!" he exclaimed. "We must talk this over. Perhaps I have made a serious mistake. I may need your advice, Mr. Cranston. You have opened my eyes."

"Any one," returned Cranston quietly, "makes a mistake in dealing with a person who prefers to keep his identity secret. Naturally, I do not ask you to abrogate any agreement which you have made with this unknown individual. I prefer to terminate our own negotiations."

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"Let me talk to you," pleaded Edkins. "I want you to hear the circumstances, then give me your fair opinion. This means much to me, Mr. Cranston!"

WITH a slight smile, the visitor consented to remain. Holbrook Edkins nervously lighted a fresh cigarette. Then, in an eager voice, he began his story.

"This man," he said, "offered me an opportunity to invest in a patented invention which seemed good. I did so – more than two years ago – and made money. He repeated with a similar offer, one year ago. It, too, resulted in financial gain.

"Finally, this promoter offered me a new proposition. In this very room – in fact, Vel—" Edkins caught himself. "This promoter was seated in the very chair which you are occupying. He gave me the details of an X-ray which he claimed would revolutionize all existing appliances.

"I agreed to the preliminary financing. It was his job to coax along the inventor – whom I have never met. Matters have been progressing nicely, but slowly. The promoter has visited me occasionally; in fact, I expect to hear from him either tonight or tomorrow. Meanwhile, I learned of the invention which Rutledge Mann is placing on the market."

"I understand," rejoined Cranston. "Nevertheless, your story does not change the circumstances. I still feel that you are making a mistake in dealing with so speculative a promoter."

"The man is convincing," declared Edkins. "He has other inventors on his private list. He states that he will pyramid each enterprise, until the final one, financed by money which I have accumulated, will exceed all others."

"Why does he not propose them now?"

"Because I am the only person who has shown the willingness to invest in what he terms futuristic enterprises. My capital is somewhat limited. If I could pool my resources with other men of vision –"

Edkins paused suddenly as he caught the gleam which appeared in Cranston's brilliant eyes. The bluff-faced man did not know that his visitor's expression was a feigned one. Edkins thought that Cranston had given a sign of intense interest in the proposition which was now being discussed.

"Perhaps," ventured Edkins, "you might be interested in such enterprises, Mr. Cranston. Would you like to meet the promoter whom I have just mentioned?"

"Scarcely," returned Cranston in a languid tone, his feigned interest suddenly waning. "I am not accustomed, Mr. Edkins, to holding conference with persons without knowing their names before I meet them."

"I can tell you this man's name," assured Edkins, "provided that you will not mention it to any other person. You understand, of course, that my negotiations have all been secret. If I have your assurance –"

Cranston appeared reluctant; then, with an air of indifference, he nodded slowly. Edkins took the sign as one of agreement. In his anxiety to impress Cranston, he gave the information.

"The promoter's name," he announced, "is Eric Veldon. Beyond that, I know nothing concerning him. There is no place where he can be located. I expect to hear from him; when I do, I shall tell him that you would like to meet him."

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"No," responded Cranston, in a steady tone. "That will not be necessary. I should not like to disappoint you, if something prevented me from the meeting. Suppose, Mr. Edkins, that you merely arrange to have Eric Veldon call to see you. Then send me word of the meeting time. I shall be here if possible. Let my arrival be his first knowledge of my interest in the matter."

Holbrook Edkins acknowledged the wisdom of Cranston's decision. The bluff-faced millionaire tossed his consumed cigarette in the fireplace. As he turned to speak again, there was a rap at the door. The servant entered to announce that Mr. Cranston was wanted on the telephone.

EDKINS accompanied Lamont Cranston downstairs. He heard his guest conduct a short conversation. The words were meaningless; evidently Cranston was receiving some message. This proved to be the case.

"I must go back to the Cobalt Club," announced Cranston, as he hung up the receiver. "I have just received a call regarding an important appointment which I have been expecting for some time. I shall hear from you, Mr. Edkins, after you have talked with Eric Veldon."

"Promptly," assured Edkins.

After a parting handshake, Cranston left by the front door. Holbrook Edkins watched him enter a trim coupe. He saw the car drive away. But Edkins did not observe what occurred within the automobile.

In the darkness of the coupe, Lamont Cranston underwent a quick transformation. His hand drew a mass of black cloth from an opened bag upon the seat. The folds of a dark cloak spread over his seated form. A broad-brimmed slouch hat settled upon his head. Heavy automatics went beneath his cloak.

Only the eyes of Lamont Cranston remained visible. They were the keen eyes which Holbrook Edkins had noted; but, from the darkness, they burned with vivid light as they gazed along the street ahead.

Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow. A weird laugh rippled from his unseen lips. Tonight, The Shadow had learned the identity of the man whom he sought – Eric Veldon, the superfiend who dealt in murder.

More than that, The Shadow had received a message which promised quick activity. He was starting on a mission which might lead him to the hidden lair of the very enemy whose name he now knew!

The coupe traveled swiftly as it reached an avenue. The firm hands of The Shadow were upon the wheel. The eyes of The Shadow glowed as they looked ahead. The Shadow's creepy whisper again formed its sibilant laugh!

CHAPTER XV. MINIONS OF THE FIEND

AT the moment when Lamont Cranston was leaving the home of Holbrook Edkins, Cliff Marsland, agent of The Shadow, was entering the side door of an old garage in northern Manhattan. Tonight, Cliff expected important developments.

He had come to this spot with Punks Gumbert. Cliff and the mealy-mouthed gangster were to meet Duke Scurley in the garage, which served as a rendezvous for the racketeer's mob.

Fortunately, they had arrived ahead of Duke and his gang. That had given Cliff time to saunter out to a cigar store and buy a pack of cigarettes. At the store, he had also telephoned to Burbank.

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Cliff was thinking of the call that he had made. He had been able to inform Burbank of but one potent fact: Duke Scurley intended to put someone on the spot. The mob – with Cliff as a member – was going out from the rendezvous. They would pick up some victim and take the unfortunate man for a ride which would end, without doubt, at the spot where Duke Scurley deposited all his victims.

Where was the place? Cliff had not yet been able to learn. He knew that Burbank would relay his message to The Shadow, but Cliff felt the information would be of doubtful value. Before The Shadow could reach this old garage, the mob would be on its way.

This unfortunate situation was due to Punks Gumbert. The scrawny gangster had said nothing about the evening's work until he and Cliff had neared the rendezvous. It was the first time that Cliff had heard of the garage as a meeting place.

All that Cliff could hope for was a break that might enable him to trace the course from the garage to the final destination, and there pick up some clew that might prove useful to The Shadow.

Hazy forms showed within the garage when Cliff entered. Duke Scurley and his gangsters had arrived. A growled voice spoke from a corner. Cliff recognized Scurley's tones and approached.

"Hello, Marsland," greeted Duke. "Come over here. I want to talk with you."

Cliff joined the racketeer. Duke Scurley was a big, heavy fellow, whose huge bulk was easily recognized, although his face was not visible to Marsland.

"We're going on a big job," said Duke, in a low tone. "Out to get a guy that thinks he's wise. Punks tells me you handle a gat better than any one else in the crew. Got a rod all set?"

"Two of them," returned Cliff.

"Good," declared Duke. "We're going to grab this phony when he don't expect it, see? That's why I'm counting on whether you're ready on the job. Let's see you pull the rods."

Cliff responded. In quick fashion, he produced both his automatics and thrust their barrels toward Duke Scurley. The big racketeer laughed approvingly.

"Say," he remarked. "You handle them guns tike they were .22s, instead of .45s. Boy! What gats! You're the first bird I've had in my outfit that carried smoke wagons the size of them. Let's see one."

Cliff lowered one automatic. He handed the other to Duke Scurley. The racketeer weighted it, turned the barrel toward Cliff Marsland; then, with a quick jab, thrust the muzzle against the body of The Shadow's agent.

"Drop that other rod!" he ordered. "Drop it! You're the guy we're going to get!"

CLIFF'S response was a quick twist that carried him away from the gun which Duke Scurley held. At the same time, Cliff swung his right hand upward to open fire on the astonished racketeer. He would have turned the tables on Duke Scurley, but for the actions of two members of the mob.

These ruffians had edged forward while Cliff's back had been toward them. They fell upon Cliff, and gripped his arm. Cliff's hand went up as his finger pressed the trigger. The bullet shot within three inches of Duke Scurley's head. Then Cliff, the automatic wrenched from his hand, went down beneath the two men who had

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attacked him.

Other mobsters added the weight of numbers. While Duke Scurley cursed, Cliff was stretched upon the floor and belts were fastened about his arms and legs. Punks Gumbert, joining the others, supplied a gag which prevented Cliff from making any outcry.

The circling beam of a flashlight showed Cliff Marsland helpless. Duke Scurley, speaking from above, spat oaths as he derided the man who had been so suddenly taken prisoner.

"Thought you'd pull a fast one, eh?" he demanded. "Well, you slipped, smart guy! I thought there was something phony when you joined up with my mob. You ain't an ordinary gorilla like the rest of the crew.

"I put the clamps to Punks Gumbert, see? Asked him what the idea was – bringing you into the outfit. He figured you thought it was fun to put guys on the spot. Told me he'd said something to you about the way we do it.

"So I figured we'd show you. We've got rid of double-crossers before this, and you looked like another good one. Maybe you've been wondering about what happens to the guys we take for a ride. Well, you're going to find out."

Chuckling harshly, Duke ordered his men to put Cliff into an old touring car. The mobsters set forth. There were half a dozen in the crew, and they had a battered sedan in addition to the tottering car. Both automobiles pulled out of the garage on their trip of death.

Cliff Marsland, flattened on the floor of the touring car, accepted his lot grimly. He realized that he had overplayed his game. This was the result. Duke Scurley had chosen him as the victim for whom someone would pay a thousand dollars.

Cliff knew that he would learn the destination where he passed to other hands. He realized, also, that his journey would not end there. The fate that lay beyond! Speculation on that subject was not enjoyable.

Worst of all, Cliff felt sure that he could expect no aid. He had fallen into a simple trap. Instead of being present to see an unknown victim sent on his mysterious way, he himself was going, without any possibility of getting further word to The Shadow.

Cliff had assured Burbank that all would be well. When he had made the telephone call, Cliff had held no doubt about that fact. These altered circumstances had proven totally unexpected. Yet, with it all, Cliff Marsland retained his nerve.

Danger was part of The Shadow's service. Often, in the past, Cliff had gained miraculous escapes. Yet he had never lulled himself with the thought that all adventures would have a happy outcome. In fact, Cliff had always resigned himself to an adventurous career with violent death as its inevitable termination.

THE touring car was swerving corners. Duke Scurley himself was driving it. The sedan was following in the rear. The gang leader was taking a roundabout course to the junction point where he would pass Cliff Marsland into hands more terrible than his own.

Cliff had no idea of which way the car was heading. He felt sure that they were still in northern Manhattan and that the transfer place would not be far away. That surmise proved to be correct. The touring car slackened its speed as it struck a narrow street.

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The swerve threw Cliff's chin against the footrest on the floor. It was a brutal blow; the gangsters laughed as they saw their victim take the bump. To Cliff Marsland, however, the jolt meant good fortune. It gave him the chance he wanted. As he moved his head from the spot where it had struck, he felt the gag loosen between his teeth.

Working grimly, Cliff forced the bandage down upon his chin. He was afraid to tug at the straps which bound him; such action might be noted by the gangsters.

As the touring car came to a stop, Cliff gripped the gag between his teeth so that its looseness would not be observed.

The mobsters clambered from the touring car. They carried Cliff Marsland along the sidewalk and deposited him in a narrow alleyway. One of the gangsters added a derisive kick as an afterthought. He turned to follow his companion.

"Cheese it!" Cliff heard the first mobster whisper. "There's a car just pulled up – see it? – Over there near the corner."

"Some guy parking," came the reply. "He's got the lights out. Come on – we'll sneak back with Duke."

Evidently Duke Scurley had also noticed the car. Cliff heard the gang leader's growl at the end of the alley.

Duke was giving instructions to his men.

"Punks has sneaked over to see who's in the car," he stated. "Wait till he gets back. We'll scam after we're sure everything's O.K."

Tense silence followed. Then Cliff heard someone slouch up through the darkness. He heard a voice – Punks Gumbert was reporting in a low tone.

"Say, Duke!" The scrawny mobster's tone was awed. "There ain't nobody in that car! Honest, there ain't!"

"Are you goofy?" questioned Duke. "No guy could have got out of there. You started off before the car was stopped."

A sudden elation seized Cliff Marsland. He knew the situation. The person who had come in that car was The Shadow!

In the midst of his sudden exhilaration, a rapid succession of thoughts gave Cliff an understanding that he had not gained before. This was the neighborhood in which Doctor Rupert Sayre's car had been discovered. The Shadow had linked it with Cliff's own report of an abandoned district where Duke Scurley stowed his victims.

The Shadow had come after receiving word from Burbank!

New ideas swept through Cliff's brain. The Shadow was here to see what happened to the man whom Duke Scurley left. The Shadow had not learned that Cliff Marsland, his own agent, was the victim. Hence The Shadow was not here to wage war with Duke Scurley's mob; he was here to watch after they had departed!

"We'll slide along," came Duke's new growl. "That guy must have gone in some house before you got up there, Punks."

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Cliff Marsland grinned. When Duke and his crew departed, The Shadow would arrive. Cliff knew, that the phantom figure was close at hand, unseen by the watching mobsters. As soon as Duke was gone, Cliff could whisper out his plight. The Shadow would hear.

"Come on," decided Duke. "Back to the car. Let's scam away from this place."

FOOTSTEPS sounded as the gangsters moved away. Cliff listened for The Shadow's approach; he also waited for the cars to start away, figuring that The Shadow would be cautious until they had departed.

Then, of a sudden, two men arrived. Coming like vultures, they swooped upon Cliff's body and raised it from the alleyway. Cliff realized instantly who this pair must be. They were the mysterious men who carried away Duke Scurley's victims!

There was no time for waiting now. Duke and his men were at the cars; The Shadow was advancing somewhere close at hand; in the interim, Cliff would be gone and The Shadow would be none the wiser.

"Help!" shouted Cliff. "This is Marsland – Cliff Marsland! They've got me..."

A loud oath came from beyond the alley. Duke Scurley had been loitering by the car. Cliff's cry was bringing him before The Shadow!

"Help –"

Cliff's final shout ended. A hand clapped a saturated cloth to Cliff's nostrils. A powerful anesthetic took immediate effect. Amid a whirlwind of scattered ideas. Cliff heard distant shouts. He felt himself being rushed down the alley by the men who bore him.

The minions of the fiend were carrying away their victim. Cliff Marsland, agent of The Shadow, was being swept away from the spot where he had hoped for aid. Eric Veldon's mechanical men were performing the order of their evil chief.

CHAPTER XVI. MOBSTERS FIGHT

DUKE SCURLEY believed in action. Cliff Marsland's cry had brought the gun leader on the run. As Duke hurried toward the end of the alley, he clicked the button of his flashlight and turned a broad beam of light upon the building wall. In response, the gangsters who had reached the parked cars shot on the headlights to illuminate the scene ahead.

Duke had drawn a revolver. He had one purpose: to slay Cliff Marsland where he lay; then to remove the body with all haste. Duke was ready for the deed the moment he reached the corner of the building. He did not know that Eric Veldon's minions had seized The Shadow's agent. He raised his hand to fire a quick shot the moment that he spied Cliff's form.

A sharp cry came from the touring car. Responding, Duke Scurley swung his flashlight away from the alley. As the beam glared upon the wall of the next building, Duke saw the object which had caused the cry.

Before him, like a sinister specter of the night, stood a tall form garbed in black. A mammoth being in that light, The Shadow was revealed as an unexpected antagonist.

It was Punks Gumbert who had spied the phantom shape. Approaching the alleyway, The Shadow had hastened forward to beat Duke Scurley to the goal. The lights of the touring car had brought the master of

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darkness into view.

Swiftly did The Shadow act. Had he concentrated upon his nearest antagonist, Duke Scurley, all would have been ill. The Shadow, however, whirled in the direction from which the warning cry had come. Punks Gumbert, leaning from the right side of the touring car, was leveling a revolver.

A huge automatic spoke. Its shot came from The Shadow's hand. Punks Gumbert's warning had sounded his own doom. The marksmanship of The Shadow proved its accuracy before the scrawny mobster could respond. Punks Gumbert tumbled from the touring car. His mealy mouth coughed bloody gasps. The rat who had betrayed Cliff Marsland breathed no longer.

Another fighter might have concentrated his fire upon the touring car. Not so The Shadow. Again, his strategy proved its merit. Punks Gumbert's sudden end had brought a momentary lapse from that direction. Amid the lull, The Shadow swerved. Duke Scurley was his next objective.

The racketeer's gun was up. Duke's finger was on the trigger. Just as that finger pressed, the tall form of The Shadow dwindled. Duke's bullet, aimed for The Shadow's glittering eyes, went high. Its hot lead singed the top of The Shadow's slouch hat.

A mocking laugh resounded; with it came a loud report from two feet above the sidewalk. Duke Scurley staggered with the sound of The Shadow's automatic. The master's aim had reached the racketeer's heart.

The gangsters in the touring car were stunned. They recognized this phantom fighter. The terrible results of The Shadow's opening fire brought in them the desire for flight. Punks Gumbert, then Duke Scurley – those redoubtable marksmen had fallen, each from a single bullet!

SO far as the witnessing mobsters were concerned, the path to the alleyway was clear. It was the ignorance of other gangsters that kept The Shadow from his objective.

The men from the sedan were piling forth. They had seen Duke Scurley fall. They had not seen the shape beyond their leader. With one accord, they leaped to the sidewalk. Dashing past the touring car, they headed for the alley, firing wildly as they came.

Crouched against the wall, The Shadow held his fire. His foemen had not seen him. They were firing pot shots in the dark. The men in the touring car – the only ones who knew the situation, arose to draw their guns, encouraged by the fact that there was no response. They did not know The Shadow's strategy.

Just as the gangsters from the sedan came on a line with the touring car, The Shadow raised his automatics. Two muzzles blazed with full force as The Shadow pressed the triggers. He was aiming straight for the advancers; his bullets, like an enfilade, were also directed toward the touring car!

The Shadow had replaced his sharpshooting tactics with a veritable barrage. He was meeting a mass attack, pouring a leaden deluge into the ranks of the attackers, with every odd bullet sweeping on to the massed men in the touring car!

Amazing strategy! One man from the sedan fell before the others realized the presence of their enemy. Hot lead ripped through the running ranks. Snarling mobsters sprawled upon the sidewalk. Gun-aiming men sank helpless in the touring car.

One gangster dropped his revolver and leaped to the wheel. The bullet from an automatic shattered the windshield. It found its lodging place in the driver's breast. The mobsman slumped behind the wheel.

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Those who had fallen on the sidewalk thought no longer of return to the sedan. Two were still capable of motion. Wounded by The Shadow's bullets, they rose and staggered to the touring car. They tumbled in among a crew of groaning victims who had learned The Shadow's wrath.

One man had gained the wheel. Alone unscathed, he shot the car forward. As the automobile passed the spot where The Shadow loomed, a wounded man arose from the back and with a tense, almost dying, effort leveled his revolver straight toward the black-garbed avenger.

The Shadow's automatic spoke. Not toward the man who held the gun, but toward the driver of the car. The automobile swerved as the driver cried aloud. It headed for the opposite curb. The gun-raising gangster fired. His shot went wide. The bullet thudded against the wall above The Shadow's head.

The man who had fired made no further effort. All his strength had been spent in that last attempt to down the dread fighter whose name meant terror to the underworld. The touring car jolted along the curb; one mobster fell out as the machine bounded back into the street.

The wounded driver, although sinking fast, managed to step upon the accelerator. With wobbly, serpentine course, the car of beaten gangsters shot ahead until it came to a crashing stop beyond the next corner.

The echoes of the shots had ceased. A peal of mocking laughter had replaced them. The tiny ray of a sharp-disked flashlight glimmered in the alleyway. The Shadow had gained the spot he sought. His torch revealed nothingness!

Out went the light. A phantom shape traveled swiftly through the alley to the street at the other end. Again the quest was in vain. The minions of the fiend had profited by the delay of battle. With Cliff Marsland in their grasp, they had departed, leaving no trail for The Shadow!

Even then, the master of darkness was not beaten. He glided back to the street where the battle had been fought. Swiftly, he gained his coupe. Headlights showed brilliantly. The car shot forward and turned the corner.

Though his start might be a blind one, The Shadow intended to take up the trail of those captors who had wrested his agent from their grasp. Relying only upon intuition, The Shadow was seeking a trail that might lead him to Cliff Marsland's rescue.

IT was another unforeseen occurrence that blocked The Shadow's plan. The shrill note of a siren came to the pursuer's ears. Straight up the street swept a car with glaring headlights, not more than a block distant. Police had heard the sound of firing. They were rushing to the scene.

The Shadow swung the wheel of the coupe. The trim, low-balanced car responded. It swerved through a narrow thoroughfare that showed suddenly before the headlights. With roaring motor, The Shadow took this avenue to avoid a fruitless encounter with the arriving minions of the law.

More sirens. The Shadow knew the reason. This district of Manhattan had been heavily patrolled since the disappearance of Joseph Barratini and Rupert Sayre. With cunning and skill, The Shadow picked a course which lead him through the network of streets. His coupe passed beyond the district into which the officers had swarmed.

Along the street where the gangster cars had been, policemen found the relics of The Shadow's battle. Duke Scurley lay dead at the entrance of the alley. Punks Gumbert was an inert form. Other mobsters were sprawled in pools of blood.

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In the touring car, some men were moving, others were not. The driver, crippled by The Shadow's final bullet, was slumped beneath the wheel, his right hand extending through the broken windshield.

Gang warfare. That was the answer. The policemen who surveyed the riddled touring car were convinced that this smashing result could have been accomplished only by a barrage of bullets from a dozen gangster guns. Orders went out to stop all large cars that might appear to contain a squad of desperadoes.

THE trim coupe was rolling easily along an avenue, headed southward in Manhattan. Unscathed, his car untouched, The Shadow was returning from the conflict. His keen eyes were steady as they watched the traffic ahead.

A soft laugh came from The Shadow's lips. Partly a tone of triumph, partly a note of regret, that laugh portrayed The Shadow's thoughts.

The master of darkness had proven his skill tonight. Single-handed, he had brought disaster to a complete mob of snarling ruffians who had deserved all that they had received.

Yet in his fight, The Shadow, in dealing with superior numbers, had been unable to accomplish the task which he had sought. He had heard Cliff Marsland's cry for aid. He had realized, on the instant, the dilemma which had fallen upon his agent.

Chance had played against The Shadow. Cliff Marsland had fallen into the hands of the enemy. He was in the power of the superfiend; all chance of tracing him tonight was ended. Yet The Shadow's sibilant laugh denoted confidence.

Cliff Marsland was still alive. Perhaps fate would play the other way in return for its unwarranted trickery. For The Shadow asked no long delay. He had learned the identity of his master enemy.

By tomorrow night, The Shadow would be face to face with Eric Veldon, the murderous fiend who toyed with human life. If Clifford Marsland still were living then, The Shadow would surely save him.

Through Holbrook Edkins, The Shadow would reach Eric Veldon. That thought was prophetic. Yet before it would be realized, The Shadow was once again to learn the treachery of fate!

CHAPTER XVII. THE LIVING SKELETON

HEAVY tires crunched on a gravel driveway. A big limousine came to a stop before an isolated house. Two men moved through the darkness. They carried a limp body into the building. Laboring footsteps echoed with mechanical beat through the gloomy corridors.

The solemn tread died away. Cliff Marsland, agent of The Shadow, had reached the end of his journey. His captors were bringing him within the portals of Eric Veldon's mansion of mystery.

In an upstairs room, a young man was listening to the sounds that betokened Cliff's arrival. Calm, yet serious-faced, Doctor Rupert Sayre accepted the rhythmic footsteps as proof that another prisoner had arrived.

The room in which Sayre dwelt was not uncomfortable. On the contrary, the young surgeon had found many items provided for his comfort. He was a prisoner, in a high-walled room where daylight penetrated only through an inaccessible skylight. But the burden of confinement seemed less at night.

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On this particular evening, Sayre was smoking his favorite pipe, which had been in his pocket at the time of his capture, and the illuminated room was actually a homelike abode.

Rupert Sayre had awakened in his room. Between his discovery of Joseph Barratini's dead body and the awakening, there had been a complete lapse. Sayre knew that he had been under the influence of some soporific vapor. He did not know how long its effects might have held.

In one corner of the room stood a pedestal which held two instruments. One was like a stock ticker, with its paper ribbon; the other was a small typewriter which had only capital letters. Sayre had first noticed the device when it had ticked a message; he had recognized it as a teletype apparatus.

Brief instructions had imprinted themselves upon the paper ribbon. Some operator, probably in a distant portion of the house, had warned Sayre to make no effort to escape.

The physician had typed back that he would obey the injunction. That had been the beginning of a routine. A corpselike man had stalked mechanically into Sayre's room, bringing food. Since then, new provisions had been furnished.

Yet Sayre knew that this captivity could not go on indefinitely. He wondered why his life had been spared. He sensed that he would soon learn. Tonight, he had heard an automobile set forth; he had heard it return. Was that a sign that Eric Veldon contemplated plans which might involve Sayre's welfare?

WHILE the young physician pondered on this question, the teletype began to tick. Puffing his pipe, Sayre strolled to the corner and began to read the words that appeared upon the paper tape.

"I AM READY TO CONFER WITH YOU," read Sayre. "ARE YOU WILLING TO OBEY THE CONDITIONS WHICH I IMPOSE?"

"YES," typed the physician.

"MY SERVANT, ALPHA, WILL CONDUCT YOU TO THE MEETING PLACE," came the next words. "BE READY TO ACCOMPANY HIM."

"I AM READY," replied Sayre.

No further message appeared upon the tape. Sayre knocked the ashes from his pipe and sat down to await the coming of Eric Veldon's servant. Shortly afterward, the door opened. A human automaton entered.

This man was tall and his features seemed to be molded of a pliable substance. In fact, his face, lifeless in expression, looked like a mass of manila-tinted wax. The man's eyes, though steady, were expressionless. This human machine stared directly at the young surgeon. The molded lips formed a single word:

"Come."

Sayre arose. The creature stood aside to let him pass. A hand rose like a semaphore signal to point the way along a corridor. Sayre came to the head of a gloomy stairway. He stopped short. Another corpselike figure was standing there. This one was short; the face of the living automaton was of a criminal type. Sayre noted a heavy, pock-scarred jaw.

The man's arm swung up and pointed toward the stairs. Sayre could hear the approaching beat of footsteps. Alpha, the automaton who had summoned him, was following. Sayre went down the stairs. There, a few feet

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beyond the last step, he encountered a cadaverous creature that stood like a lifeless sentinel.

Sayre recognized the monstrosity who had come to Joseph Barratini's apartment. The human automaton pointed to a corridor that led to the left. Sayre took that path until he found the way blocked by still another living corpse. This one raised a hand to stop his progress.

Alpha arrived and uttered a single, unintelligible word. The last of the sentinels stalked away, with slow, monotonous footbeats. Like echoes, came the sound of other steps. Sayre knew that the men who had guided him were also tramping away from their appointed spots. The physician stood with only Alpha beside him.

The sides of this corridor were paneled. Sayre heard a slight whirring sound. He looked just in time to see a panel slide open. He turned toward Alpha. The mechanical man raised his hand and pointed through the opening.

"Enter," he spoke, in a dull tone.

SAYRE went into the room. He found himself in a small chamber with dark-paneled walls. There was a table near one end of the room; in front of it was a chair that faced the wall.

On the table, Sayre spied a large frame with dark glass. These objects were barely distinguishable in the gloomy, indirect light of the room.

"Wait," ordered Alpha, pointing to the chair.

Rupert Sayre sat down. He faced the dark glass. He heard Alpha tramp away. He caught the sound of the closing panel. He was alone.

A hidden mechanism began to thrum. The lights in the room went out. Total blackness prevented Sayre from observing anything that happened until a glow began to penetrate the dark glass of the frame. Suddenly, the glow burst into an aura of radiant, violet light. Rupert Sayre gasped in utter amazement.

Framed in the space before him, within reach save for the blocking glass, was a terrifying object. A living skeleton, its upper ribs in view, was facing him from the other side of the table. Sayre found himself staring into the eyeless sockets of a skull that grinned monstrous teeth.

This was no illusion. The creature was real. Yet Sayre was quick to recognize the truth. He was looking at the skeleton of a living man. These bones were visible instead of flesh because the person was within the focus of an X-ray machine of extraordinary power. The dark glass formed a screen of fluoroscopic particles which made the scene possible.

Skeleton hands appeared. Bony arms rested their elbows on the table beyond the screen. The jaws of the skull moved. Words seemed to grate from the lipless mouth.

"You are Doctor Rupert Sayre," said the skeleton.

"I am," replied the physician.

"I am the master here," asserted the skeleton. "Do you know my name?"

Sayre was prompt with his reply. He suspected that this bony frame was Eric Veldon, the man whom Joseph Barratini had mentioned; but Sayre was wise enough not to reveal his suspicion.

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"No," he declared.

"That is good," announced the skeleton. "Tell me. How did you come to follow Doctor Barratini?"

Sayre made a quick decision. He felt that a partial revelation of the truth would enable him to cover up the facts which he did not wish to tell. Tersely and in methodical fashion, he offered his explanation.

"I was calling on Doctor Barratini," he said. "Someone rapped at the door of the apartment, Doctor Barratini became alarmed. He asked if I had my car available. I told him yes. He put me in another room and told me to follow the man who drove him away.

"An odd-looking fellow entered. He gave money to Doctor Barratini, who then went out with him. I saw them enter a limousine. I followed in my machine. When the limousine stopped, I alighted. I opened the door and found Doctor Barratini dead..."

The skeleton interrupted with a grating laugh. There was no need for Sayre to continue. The young physician calmly awaited the fate that his bony captor might pronounce.

"You are a surgeon," announced the living skeleton. "Your work is known to me. I learned your identity through cards upon your person. I have work for you to perform. Chance has given you an opportunity."

RUPERT SAYRE shuddered at the harsh tones of the skeleton's voice. He knew well that this was Eric Veldon. He felt that he could foretell what the fiend intended to propose. He, Rupert Sayre, would be requested to take up the work which Doctor Joseph Barratini, dead, could no longer perform.

"I have servants," declared the skeleton, "who serve me well. These minions were once criminals. Doctor Barratini performed operations upon their brains. The men have preserved their natural capabilities, but they no longer remember their pasts. They act mechanically but efficiently.

"Their old names have been forgotten. They are designated by Greek letters. The servant who brought you here was Alpha. He was the first of Doctor Barratini's subjects.

"Unfortunately, Doctor Barratini and I disagreed. He felt that his operations should be for the benefit of the subjects; that these former criminals could be allowed to take new places in society.

"I decided otherwise. It was necessary for me to eliminate Doctor Barratini. I chose the method which he would least suspect. I summoned him apparently to perform another operation. My minion obeyed two instructions: first, he released a quantity of lethal gas into the interior of the limousine; second, he stopped at a familiar spot to meet another minion who was stationed there.

"I wanted to be sure that Barratini was not followed. You appeared; you stepped into the limousine. My minions brought you along with Barratini.

"The admission of air into the limousine had thinned the gas. You were overcome by the effects, but you did not die. I, naturally, was interested when I learned your identity. I had intended to attempt any future brain operations myself. It has now occurred to me that you can serve in the capacity of operating surgeon."

The skeleton ceased speaking. Rupert Sayre stared. He was in an incredible situation. He was facing a man whose features he could never recognize. As a means of disguise, Eric Veldon had chosen the amazing course of appearing as a skeleton.

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Suddenly, Sayre realized that the man was awaiting his reply to the proposal.

"Suppose," suggested Sayre, "that I refuse –"

The grating laugh of the skeleton interrupted. Harsh words came from the grinning teeth.

"You have this choice," announced the fiend. "You may operate upon the subjects whom I provide; or you may pass that privilege on to me. Should I be forced to play the part of surgeon, you, Doctor Sayre, will be my first experimental case."

The thought was gruesome. Sayre thought of the human automata who paraded the gloom of this horrible house. The young surgeon faltered at the idea of reducing other human beings to that mechanical state; but more terrible was the alternative of becoming one himself!

"I await your decision," came the discordant voice of the skeleton.

"There is only one possible choice," remarked Rupert Sayre. "That is to perform as operating surgeon. After all, these men are criminals. I ask only that you provide me with subjects of that type."

A laugh came from the living skull. Eric Veldon had evidently expected this answer. He was pleased by Rupert Sayre's attitude. He did not know that young surgeon was working for a delay. Sayre was discreet enough to feign indifference to the fate of the subjects whom Veldon might provide.

"Your request will be granted," announced the skeleton. "I choose criminals only. They are easy to obtain. Their minds are better suited to my needs.

"You, Doctor Sayre, shall provide me with a host of mechanical men. All will be factors in my schemes. At my beck, they will aid me in whatever purpose I may choose. They will not turn from crime. They will commit new crimes in obedience to my mandates. Deprived of past memory, free from their individual initiative, they will do as I command!"

With these words, the skeleton began to disappear. The bony form was wiped out by degrees, darkness moving upward until the entire figure was gone. A few minutes passed; dim lights glowed within the room. The man who had spoken with Doctor Rupert Sayre was no longer present.

THE physician realized what had caused this evanishment. The panel in the wall, just beyond the screen, must be capable of sliding up and down. The X-ray machine was behind it. The panel, probably coated with lead on its farther side, could stop the revealing rays.

Eric Veldon had come into the darkened room through some secret entrance. He had taken a chair beyond the table. He had dropped the panel to come within the focus of the rays. Another operation had raised the panel slowly, to end the interview. Veldon had departed.

With Merle Clussig's powerful X-ray machine; with the improved screening that the inventor had devised to prevent injurious effects, Eric Veldon had accomplished the seemingly miraculous.

Even to Doctor Rupert Sayre, whose knowledge of X-rays gave him an inkling to the method employed, the appearance of the living skeleton had resembled a fantastic nightmare.

The slide panel of the room came open. A new worry swept through Rupert Sayre's brain. There, at the opening, was Alpha. The servant had come to summon him to a new adventure. The odd, mechanical creature

was beckoning.

"Come!" was the word that Alpha uttered.

Rupert Sayre arose, trying to repress the feeling that he could not overcome. He knew that he had made an agreement with Eric Veldon. He sensed that the fiend was ready to put him to the test!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE COUNTERPLOT

RUPERT SAYRE was not mistaken in his apprehensions. Alpha, the taciturn servant, was leading him to another portion of the building. Instead of starting back by the corridor through which Sayre had come, Alpha, with a beckoning motion, drew the physician toward the farther end of the long corridor.

Alpha opened a door. Sayre entered. The servant closed the door. Sayre stood alone in a little anteroom. Beyond this, a door stood ajar. It was obvious that the physician was to advance alone.

The moment that he pushed open the door, Sayre stopped short. He had not expected the scene that lay before him, even though Doctor Barratini's account had forewarned him of what might be seen here.

Sayre was at the threshold of a brightly lighted operating room. Two figures garbed in white were standing on either side of a wheeled table. The physician recognized them as a pair of Veldon's stolid, mechanical-moving men. Upon the table was the prostrate form of a young man.

This was the result of Sayre's pact with the living skeleton! The surgeon had expressed his willingness to operate upon criminals. One had already been provided! The recollection of the returning car and the rhythmic pound of feet flashed through Rupert Sayre's mind. Eric Veldon's minions had been returning with another victim!

The situation was grotesque. Former criminals, reduced to primitive, steady-moving machines, served Eric Veldon as their master. With their intelligence brought to a mere instinctive level, they went forth to bring in others of their ilk that the fiendish controller might have new servants in his retinue.

The two minions stepped aside as Rupert Sayre approached the table. The physician bent above the outstretched man. He gained a puzzled frown as he surveyed the face of Clifford Marsland.

Cliff was still under the influence of the anesthetic which Veldon's henchmen had used to stifle his outcry. In repose, Cliff's face had lost some of the harshness which it usually displayed. When dealing with mobsters, pretending to be one of their ilk, Cliff always played a hard-boiled part.

Rupert Sayre had felt a keen reluctance even in faking consent to perform an operation under Eric Veldon's auspices. Had the surgeon found a tough-faced crook awaiting him, he might have fought against his inner feelings, knowing that his own future welfare would be at stake. When he viewed Cliff Marsland's clean-cut countenance, Rupert Sayre experienced a surging antagonism toward Eric Veldon. The physician became set in his determination to cause a definite delay.

THE sound of a ticker attracted Sayre's attention. Turning, the physician saw a pedestal close by. It resembled the teletype apparatus in the room where Sayre had been kept a prisoner. Going to the pedestal, Sayre saw letters forming on the tape.

"PROCEED WITH THE OPERATION," were the words he read. "I AM WATCHING YOU."

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In response, Sayre boldly stretched out his hands to the little typewriter and printed his objection to the order of the fiend.

"THIS MAN," the physician typed, "DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE A CRIMINAL. HIS CASE IS NOT IN OUR AGREEMENT."

"YOU ARE MISTAKEN," came the ticker reply. "I KNOW THE MAN'S HISTORY. HE IS A CROOK WHO DOUBLE-CROSSED HIS PALS. PROCEED."

Sayre walked back to the operating table. He made a brief examination. He solemnly returned to the typewriter.

"THE MAN HAS SLIGHT INJURIES," was the message he dispatched. "HE HAS BEEN GIVEN TOO MUCH ANESTHETIC. AN OPERATION MAY CAUSE HIS DEATH."

"PROCEED," came the words on the tape. "REGARD THIS CASE AS AN EXPERIMENT. OTHER SUBJECTS ARE AVAILABLE."

In the face of this order, Rupert Sayre gained a sudden inspiration. He knew that Eric Veldon, whom he had seen as a living skeleton, was a man who had small regard for human life. At the same time, Sayre also knew that Veldon was anxious to assemble the most capable of human machines. The physician resolved to make an appeal along this line – following a course that would make him appear to be in harmony with Veldon's wishes.

"THE MAN IS AN EXCELLENT SUBJECT," typed Sayre. "HE IS MORE SUITABLE THAN ANY WHOM YOU NOW HAVE. IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO RISK HIS LIFE WHEN A DELAYED OPERATION WOULD MEAN SUCCESS. HE IS TOO GOOD A SUBJECT TO LOSE."

There was a pause; then came methodical words from Veldon – statements that made Rupert Sayre smile inwardly.

"YOUR ADVICE SHOWS FORESIGHT," printed the ticker. "I COMPLIMENT YOU UPON IT. HOW LONG A DELAY DO YOU CONSIDER NECESSARY?"

Sayre pondered. He wanted to make the time as long as possible, yet he did not care to arouse Veldon's suspicion. After a thoughtful pause, he typed out:

"FORTY-EIGHT HOURS."

"AGREED," came the response on the tape.

That was all. Rupert Sayre stood beside the teletype apparatus, wondering what would happen next. Cliff Marsland was moving weakly.

Turning, Sayre saw the young man's eyes open. The physician stared directly into Cliff's face; even in his groggy state, Cliff sensed that the surgeon was a friend.

Cliff's lips moved. They made no intelligible sound and Rupert Sayre was ignoble to reply, knowing that Eric Veldon might still be watching from some hidden loophole. The physician, however, gave a slight nod, which served as a silent answer to whatever question Cliff might be asking.

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Then came footsteps. Sayre turned to see Alpha entering the room. The servant beckoned to the physician and pointed toward the door.

As Sayre prepared to leave, Alpha gave a guttural word and the other two mechanical men picked up Cliff Marsland's body to carry it away.

With Alpha at his heels, Sayre paced through the long corridor and ascended the stairs. He walked directly to his own room and entered. Alpha followed. Framed within the doorway, the minion watched until the physician had taken his chair. Then he prepared to close the door.

INSTANTLY, Rupert Sayre responded to a new inspiration. Impulsively, he raised his hand and uttered a command of his own. He looked directly at Alpha as he spoke.

"Wait!" was the physician's order.

For the first time, the automaton showed a definite return of human initiative. The power of the word seemed to have a marked effect. His own eyes meeting those of Rupert Sayre, the minion seemed to yield to the physician's superior intelligence.

"Close the door."

Sayre uttered the words in a slow, steady tone. Without hesitation, Alpha obeyed. Not once did the waxen-faced henchman take his eyes from Sayre.

In a trice, Sayre decided that this must be the system which Eric Veldon used in controlling the brain-dulled henchmen.

The surgeon was well acquainted with the methods which Doctor Barratini had advocated. With brains reduced to primitive activity, it would be possible to remold them. This was exactly what Eric Veldon had been doing; but he had made no effort to obliterate the criminal instinct. Instead, he had turned it to his own usage.

Did Alpha recognize Rupert Sayre as a master? The physician believed he did. Sayre beckoned. Alpha approached. Again, Sayre gained an important thought.

Alpha was evidently the first of the henchmen whom Veldon had obtained. In all probability, his intelligence had returned in a fuller measure. He had reached the stage where he served almost as Veldon's lieutenant. Sayre decided to test the man's response to suggestions.

"Tell me your name," he ordered, being careful to phrase the sentence as a command, not as a question.

"Alpha," said the motionless minion.

"That is your new name," declared Sayre. "Tell me the old name – the one you had before you came here."

"I do not remember it."

This was encouraging. The man must have some recollection of the past. If it could be stimulated, Alpha might be turned into rebellion against the domination of Rupert Sayre.

"I am your master," asserted Sayre solemnly.

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"Yes," returned Alpha.

"There is another man," said Sayre, cautiously, "who has called himself master."

"Yes."

"Tell me his name."

"I do not know his name."

The monotone of the man's reply convinced Rupert Sayre that there was a wide gap between Eric Veldon and all his henchmen – even this chief lieutenant. It was probable that Alpha and the others responded to orders but hesitated when they were questioned. Holding this theory, Sayre was sure that no word of this episode would return to Eric Veldon.

"Tonight," said Sayre calmly, "I saw a man who is a prisoner here. Remember, Alpha, I am your master. I wish to see that prisoner. Take me to him."

The human automaton hesitated. Sayre wondered what medley of thoughts could be passing through that befuddled, primitive thinking brain. He repeated the order.

"Take me to the man."

As Sayre arose from his chair, Alpha turned and stalked toward the hall. The physician followed. The automaton stopped before a door farther down the corridor. He opened it. Boldly, Sayre entered.

He found Cliff Marsland seated in a chair. The room was a counterpart of the one which Sayre occupied. Alpha stood within the doorway. Sayre was afraid to dismiss him. Instead, he ordered him to close the door and remain where he stood. Alpha obeyed.

Taking a chair, Sayre seated himself by Cliff. The Shadow's agent seemed weak, but he had regained some of his mental alertness. Sayre lost no time in opening the conversation.

"MY name is Doctor Rupert Sayre," he explained, in a low tone, talking rapidly so as to elude Alpha's comprehension. "I am a prisoner here. I am anxious to escape. I have made some progress with this jailer. He brought me here; perhaps we can escape."

"Let's hope so," nodded Cliff. "My name is Marsland. A gang of mobsters took me for a ride. I landed here."

"Were you one of the crew?" questioned Sayre.

"They thought I was a crook," admitted Cliff. Then, seeing Sayre's puzzled expression, he added: "I was looking into their affairs."

"A detective?"

"No." Cliff was deliberate. "A private investigator. Working on a special case."

"Good," said Sayre. "I can rely upon you. Would you advise our making a break for it right now?"

"Is that fellow" – Cliff nodded toward Alpha – "the only one whom you have lined up?"

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"Yes," admitted Sayre, "and I don't know just how valuable he will prove to be. He may balk –"

Cliff shook his head.

"Hold it," he said. "Wait until we're sure of ourselves. If we're up against it, we can make a break. But if this fellow balks – and with all the others –"

"You're right," agreed the doctor. "These men, Marsland, are nothing more than machines. Their brains have been altered. They obey commands to the letter. They are criminals, who have come under the control of a master fiend."

"His name?"

Rupert Sayre leaned close to Cliff's ear before he pronounced the name of the master plotter. He was afraid that Alpha might hear the utterance.

"Eric Veldon," whispered the physician.

"His purpose?" asked Cliff.

"So far as you are concerned," said Sayre, gravely, "he is anxious to have you join his crew of minions. He ordered me to perform the necessary operation upon your brain."

"And you refused?"

"I gained a delay of forty–eight hours. That means, Marsland, that we must act before that time has expired."

Cliff Marsland smiled. In a firm voice, he gave Rupert Sayre new assurance.

"Do not think," he said, "that our capture will be forgotten. Forty–eight hours is ample time. We shall be rescued within that period."

"By the police?" questioned Sayre.

"Perhaps," rejoined Cliff. "But the one who will come to our aid has a power all his own. I cannot give his name. I can only assure you that he will find some way to this place. He will learn the name of the fiend who has imprisoned us. He will find some clew that will bring him here."

Cliff's tone was so convincing that Sayre nodded in instinctive understanding. The physician realized suddenly that it would be unwise to prolong this meeting. He arose and turned toward the door.

"I am returning," he said to Alpha.

As the servant conducted him to his own apartment, Doctor Sayre felt a new hope. He had talked with Marsland, his fellow prisoner. The man's positive conviction that aid was coming made the future seem somewhat brightened.

At the same time, Rupert Sayre was determined to continue his experiments with Alpha. He believed that he could gradually turn the minion's dawning intelligence into complete obedience.

Back in his room, Cliff Marsland, too, was elated. The short conference with Doctor Sayre had given him proof that he had, at least, two more days to live. Within that space of time, The Shadow would be here!

Cliff Marsland had never lost firm confidence in The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIX. THE TRAIL BEGINS

CLIFF MARSLAND had tremendous confidence in The Shadow; that confidence was based upon the amazing feats which The Shadow had accomplished in the past. Had Cliff, however, analyzed the difficulties of his own situation, he would have held grave apprehensions regarding the fate that awaited him.

The crux of The Shadow's effort had come with that single-handed fight which he had waged with Duke Scurley's mob. The Shadow had wiped out the gangsters, but he had been forced to lose the great opportunity of trailing Eric Veldon's minions to their lair.

Thus handicapped, The Shadow was playing the one trump card that remained – a close watch over the affairs of Holbrook Edkins. The millionaire had assured Lamont Cranston that word would come from Eric Veldon and that he would arrange an appointment without telling the promoter that a stranger would be present. The Shadow was staking much upon that meeting.

In the meantime, there was the chance that Veldon, calling in person on Edkins, could be trailed. Hence, when evening again came to Manhattan, a pair of keen, observant eyes were keeping close watch upon the front of the house where Holbrook Edkins lived. The Shadow, himself, was on watch.

With darkness forming a gloomy shroud, a stealthy figure moved toward the house. The Shadow reached the blackness of a side area. His tall form poised beside the wall. Reaching upward through the darkness, The Shadow gained a high bay window.

The lock yielded under silent pressure. The sash lifted. Unseen, unheard, The Shadow entered the gilded living room.

Here, The Shadow had a vantage point. The room was unlighted. Edkins was evidently upstairs. If a visitor arrived, if Edkins decided to go out, The Shadow would quickly learn the fact. As yet, there had been no indication of communication between Veldon and Edkins.

It was not The Shadow's usual role to play a waiting part, particularly when circumstances had placed one of his agents in a precarious situation. Yet it was chance, alone, that had tricked The Shadow; and tonight, The Shadow was playing for the turn. His keen analysis of Eric Veldon's methods had given him positive assurance that a move could be expected from the enemy.

Merle Clussig – Wycroft Dustin – Joseph Barratini – those three had held a definite association with Eric Veldon, whose name The Shadow had so recently learned. Two of those men had died; the third had disappeared. That was proof that Veldon had kept close contact with them.

It was inconceivable that Veldon would omit the precaution of keeping in touch with Holbrook Edkins, the millionaire with whom he had conducted important negotiations.

A CLOCK struck eight. Scarcely had its chimes ceased before a ringing sound came from the hall. It was the telephone. The Shadow listened. A servant answered; then went upstairs. The heavy footsteps of Holbrook Edkins sounded.

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The Shadow moved through the darkness of the living room. His keen eyes peered between a hanging curtain and a doorframe. The hidden being heard each word that Holbrook Edkins uttered.

"Hello," began the millionaire. "Ah! Veldon! I am glad to hear from you... Yes, I expected a call last night – certainly tonight... You should come to see me, yes. It is not usual for you to telephone..."

"I must see you, Veldon... Tonight, positively... It concerns the financial arrangements... No, no. Do not misunderstand me. I am not impatient. I have larger ideas... New capital... Others interested..."

"You disapprove?" Edkins voiced doubt. "You may have your reasons, Veldon, but do not forget that my money is concerned... No, I have made no agreement with any other person... Certainly, Veldon, I shall keep your confidence... Well, yes – I have been looking for someone else to put up additional capital –"

The Shadow's eyes were glistening. Was Edkins about to name Lamont Cranston? It did not matter, so long as Veldon's interest was aroused; yet the less that Edkins said from now on, the better.

"I have done nothing final," Edkins was saying. "Nevertheless, I see complications – other inventions that may nullify the ones that you are developing... Surely, Veldon. That is fair enough... Yes, I shall remain at home this evening... Alone... Until you arrive. About ten o'clock? Earlier perhaps? Very good. Very good."

The call was concluded. Holbrook Edkins went upstairs. The hallway was empty. Apparently, the millionaire would abide by his agreement and call no one until after Eric Veldon had arrived.

It was The Shadow's turn for action now.

Coming from the curtain, The Shadow loomed in spectral shape as he approached the telephone and raised the receiver. His quiet tones were confined to the mouthpiece as he gave the number that he wanted. Burbank responded from the other end.

A short call followed, The Shadow's words being no more than hollow whispers in the deserted hall. Then the tall figure moved away and merged with the darkness beyond the curtain.

Several minutes elapsed. The telephone bell rang again. The servant answered and went upstairs to summon Edkins. The Shadow watched as the millionaire spoke into the telephone.

"What's that?" questioned Edkins. "Mr. Cranston, you say?... Is he there?... Oh, I understand now... Coming here... Later in the evening... There must be some mistake. I did not call him at the Cobalt Club... Is there anywhere that I might reach him now? No? Very well."

Edkins half turned as he laid the telephone aside. The Shadow's eyes were watching him. The puzzled expression which played upon the big man's bluff features were as plain as print on an opened page.

HOLBROOK EDKINS was pondering upon the mistake which was to bring Lamont Cranston here tonight. Evidently someone had called Cranston at the Cobalt Club; Cranston had supposed it to be Edkins inviting him to this house and had told a secretary to call up Edkins and verify the appointment he had made.

This meant complications, but they were clearing as Edkins considered them. Lamont Cranston was anxious to meet Eric Veldon. Holbrook Edkins had suggested such a meeting. It was to be arranged informally.

Circumstances now made the meeting possible. If Cranston should arrive before Veldon, Edkins could introduce Veldon to the multi-millionaire. If Veldon came first, Cranston could be introduced to the

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promoter.

A smile appeared upon the bluff face. Holbrook Edkins seemed pleased. He had not intended to call Cranston until after he had talked over the matter with Veldon, but with matters attending to themselves it would be quite an idea to have the two meet apparently by accident.

It was after eight o'clock. Eric Veldon might arrive any time before ten. Holbrook Edkins decided to remain downstairs. This thought struck him when he was on the fourth step. He turned toward the living room.

The Shadow, meanwhile, was gliding into darkness. His eyes, peering toward the hall, saw Edkins approach. With a soft swish of his black cloak, The Shadow swung over the window sill. His deft hand lowered the sash with a single noiseless motion.

When Edkins pressed the switch to illuminate the living room, the eyes were no longer at the window. The Shadow had gone into the outer darkness.

Fifteen minutes passed. An invisible sentinel kept watch outside of the Edkins residence. The Shadow was deliberately delaying the visit of Lamont Cranston until Eric Veldon should arrive.

A coupe pulled up across the street. Its lights went out, then on, then off the second time.

A simple signal. The Shadow glided noiselessly to the side of the car. His hand thrust an object through the crevice of the window. The driver looked up suddenly as a piece of paper fluttered to his lap.

On came the dash light. The features of Clyde Burke, New York Classic reporter, appeared in the fringe of illumination. Clyde had come here to wait instructions, responding to a call which he had received from Burbank. He unfolded the sheet of paper. It contained a brief inked note, in The Shadow's code:

Prepare to follow first car that stops at house opposite.

Obey the whispered signal.

The writing faded. Clyde extinguished the dash light and waited in darkness. He knew that some important trail was to be followed. If all went well, The Shadow would follow it himself. Clyde, however, would be there in case of emergency.

Another fifteen minutes. A limousine drew up in front of the house. Its lights went dim. Just as that flicker occurred, Clyde fancied that he saw a batlike shape move toward the wall of the Edkins house. Clyde could not see who stepped from the limousine. The Shadow – for he had merged with the front of the house – did see.

It was not Eric Veldon who alighted. The Shadow knew that fact, although he had never seen the master fiend. The person who alighted was a stocky individual who stalked up the steps with the regular motion of an automatic figure.

The Shadow glided to the side of the house. He reached the bay window. Lifting his body, he pressed the sash of the window three inches upward. Peering through the narrow space, he saw the servant entering to speak to Holbrook Edkins.

"The man has come for the antique clock, sir," said the servant. "You know the one, sir – it was delivered here by mistake, and they promised to call for it."

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"Oh, yes," recalled Edkins. "Of course. It is on the mantelpiece in my den. Show him up to get it."

The servant pointed out the way to a man who appeared in the hall. Holbrook Edkins caught only a flash of the fellow's face. He was startled by the fixed, waxen expression. Footsteps tramped on the stairs.

Edkins lighted a cigarette. He was thinking of the clock. It had been delivered here; some time ago – on the occasion of Eric Veldon's last visit. There had been no return address. A telephone call had come, stating the mistake. A man had promised to come for it.

Eric Veldon, Edkins remembered, had admired the old clock, and had set it on the mantelpiece. Edkins, who seldom disturbed the arrangements of his den, had left it there.

A few minutes passed. Thumping footsteps resounded from the stairs. Clock in arms, the messenger was departing. Edkins strolled to the hall to see the fellow out. Again, he noted the cadaverous physiognomy of the messenger.

The Shadow's eyes disappeared from the window. As the man with the clock stumped from the house, a fleeting figure passed across the street. Just as the limousine was about to move forward, Clyde Burke, at the wheel of the coupe, heard a single whispered word, so sinister in tone that he could not tell from what spot it had been uttered.

"Follow!"

The street was a one-way thoroughfare. The limousine moved ahead. Clyde Burke eased off to follow the trail. A clever driver, a keen observer because of his newspaper experience, Clyde had a simple task of keeping the pliable coupe on the track of the cumbersome limousine.

Eric Veldon had not yet arrived. Had the murderer come and departed, The Shadow himself would have taken up the trail. But The Shadow had recognized that this mechanical-moving visitor must be no more than a minion of the superfiend. He had dispatched his agent on the trail. He, himself, had a task before him that kept him here at the house.

The trail had begun. One of Veldon's automatic henchmen was returning to the lair. The purpose of his visit was as yet unknown, but it was obvious to The Shadow that the driver of the limousine was unprotected against followers, because of the simplicity of his errand.

While Clyde Burke followed on the trail, The Shadow's figure blended amid blackness, underwent a change. It came to view upon the front steps of the house, but it was the shape of The Shadow no more.

A tall man, dressed in evening clothes, was ringing the doorbell at the residence. Lamont Cranston had arrived to call upon Holbrook Edkins. He had – for an important purpose – arranged his visit ahead of Eric Veldon.

CHAPTER XX. CRANSTON EXPLAINS

A SERVANT opened the front door to admit Lamont Cranston. As he heard the visitor's name, he bowed and ushered the multi-millionaire toward the stairs.

"Mr. Edkins has just gone up to his den, sir," was the announcement. "He asked that you come up there upon your arrival."

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"I know the way," remarked Cranston quietly.

With incredible swiftness, the tall man ascended the steps. There seemed to be no effort in his pace, yet he covered the distance in a few scant seconds.

The door of the den was ajar. Cranston entered so suddenly that Holbrook Edkins, standing by the fireplace, turned with an expression of alarm.

Edkins smiled as he recognized his visitor. Holding his half-smoked Cigarette in his left hand, he extended his right to Cranston. After the handshake, Cranston quietly seated himself in an easy-chair, while Edkins remained standing.

"This visit is a surprise," remarked Edkins, "and a welcome one. I had not expected you, Mr. Cranston. It is most fortunate. I am expecting Eric Veldon – the promoter whose name you agreed not to reveal."

"Indeed," returned Cranston. "I understood that you called me at the Cobalt Club. They said that Mr. Edkins had asked me to drop in this evening."

"No," said Edkins, "I did not call."

"It must have been old Hoskins," remarked Cranston. "He's been bothering me for some time. He insists that I must see his collection of Malay weapons. He claims to have picked them up in the East. I doubt it. I am glad that I came here instead."

"The sentiment is mutual," laughed Edkins.

All during the conversation, Cranston's sparkling eyes had been studying the setting of the room. There was vacancy on the mantelpiece where the clock had been. Nothing else, however, seemed out of place. Cranston had retained a photographic impression of this den.

As Holbrook Edkins was taking a last long draw on his cigarette, Cranston's steely gaze went directly beyond the heavy form of the bluff-faced millionaire. It was then that Cranston acted in a swift, yet natural, manner – so timely that Edkins never noticed it.

AN open box of cigarettes was lying on the table at Cranston's left. Long white fingers – upon one of which shone a sparkling fire opal, plucked a cigarette from the box. Cranston, his eyes upon Edkins, arose at the same moment. With two long, easy strides, he stepped toward his host just as Edkins drew back the screen from the fireplace to toss his finished cigarette butt into the ashes.

Cranston's cigarette was in his mouth. His left hand shot forward. Its swift motion came to a gentle stop as it caught Edkins by the right wrist, just as the big man was about to release the cigarette from his grasp.

The motion of Cranston's right hand explained the action. Easily, his right fingers took the lighted butt from Edkins. Cranston used the glowing end to light his own cigarette.

"Thanks," he said, with a quiet smile, as he turned back toward his chair.

To Edkins the occurrence was purely incidental. The big man did not notice that Cranston, after obtaining his light, extinguished the cigarette butt in an ash stand, instead of tossing it into the fireplace. Throwing cigarettes among the ashes was simply a habit with Edkins; his visitors did not always duplicate it. Edkins took a fresh cigarette, and ignited it with the electric lighter.

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"The mantelpiece looks empty," remarked Cranston, in a thoughtful tone.

"Yes," laughed Edkins. "A man called for an old clock that had been sent here by mistake. He took it out just before you came in."

"The absence of smoke stains on your mantelpiece is interesting," said Cranston, in an idle tone. "I take it that the fireplace does not smoke."

"I burn a fire there about once a year," explained Edkins. "That's why there are no smoke marks on the mantelpiece."

"Those ashes are from the last fire?" queried Cranston, in surprise.

"Yes," laughed Edkins. "Four months ago."

"Odd," said Cranston. "Those ashes have a smoothness that is unusual. Did your servant rake them?"

Cranston laid his cigarette aside and stepped forward to the fireplace. Edkins was rather puzzled as he watched his visitor remove the screen. Cranston, staring toward the ashes, held up his hand, as a sign for Edkins to stand back.

"What is it?" exclaimed Edkins.

Cranston moved backward. He grasped his host's right wrist, restraining the hand in which Edkins held his freshly lighted cigarette.

"Do you notice those silvery flakes among the ashes?" inquired Cranston. "You can see them – when the screen is out of the way."

Edkins did see the sparkle. He was more perplexed than before.

"What do they mean?" he inquired.

"We shall find out," asserted Cranston quietly. "I have seen granulations of that sort before. Come out to the hallway. Watch from there."

Cranston picked up his cigarette and led the way. In the hall, he closed the door until it was but slightly ajar. Holding, his cigarette between thumb and forefinger, he flicked it toward the fireplace with expert precision. While the tiny object was still in the air, Cranston pulled the door tightly shut.

A MOMENT'S silence. Then, from beyond the barrier came a sighing, explosive puff – a gigantic sob that resembled a discharge of a photographer's flash powder. Edkins, alarmed, leaped toward the door. Cranston held him.

"Keep away!" Cranston's tone was commanding. "Back – to the stairway!"

As Edkins moved bulkily to the safety spot, Cranston turned the knob and pulled the door open. He sprang swiftly to the point where Edkins stood. The interior of the den was revealed.

The room was filled with a settling cloud of thick green smoke. The cloudy vapor had penetrated every crevice of the den. The walls were smudged with blackish streaks.

"Downstairs," suggested Cranston. "We're away from the danger zone, but it's best to be farther off until the gas has cleared away."

"What – what is it?" stammered Edkins.

"Poison gas," announced Cranston abruptly. "I know a lot about it – through my war experience. It was a trap set to kill you, Edkins. One cigarette into that powder which lay in the ashes – that would have been all."

"A trap – to – to kill me?"

"Apparently," remarked Cranston dryly. "You would do best to call the police at once."

Holbrook Edkins picked up the telephone. Bewildered thoughts ran through his brain. He mentioned a subject that disturbed him.

"When Eric Veldon arrives," he said, "he will wonder why the police are here –"

"You mean if Eric Veldon arrives," returned Cranston, with a quiet smile. "The possibility, however, is remote. Eric Veldon has already come and gone – by proxy. He, himself, will not visit this house tonight!"

Holbrook Edkins did not understand. Dully, he called detective headquarters. Confused thoughts still dominated his mind. Amid them, he realized that he owed his life to Lamont Cranston's amazing observation.

CHAPTER XXI. CARDONA'S TURN

DETECTIVE JOE CARDONA stood in the room where death had failed. The greenish gas had long since settled. Only black-streaked walls and sooty fixtures remained as evidence of the tragedy that might have been.

With the detective were Holbrook Edkins and Lamont Cranston. The story had been told. It was Cranston, now, who was adding pointed comments.

"I noted the ashes accidentally," he said. "I had seen powdered preparations which produced deadly gases. I suspected that this might be one. After the test, another thought occurred to me – namely, that this man, Eric Veldon, might have been involved."

"Do you know anything about Veldon?" questioned Cardona.

"No," said Cranston smoothly. "I have never met him. But when Mr. Edkins first told me about Veldon, and stated that he was a man who played between inventors and financiers, I suspected that the fellow might be a crook."

"Swindlers are seldom murderers," remarked Cardona sagely.

"I am probably mistaken," admitted Cranston, in an absent-minded tone. "Perhaps, the circumstances startled me. I jumped to a fantastic conclusion, probably induced – ah, now I have it – by something that I read in the papers.

"You see, Mr. Edkins and I had been talking about X-ray inventions – electrical appliances. The blackened marks upon the walls brought up the suggestion of carbon monoxide. I remembered something about an electrical inventor, killed by carbon-monoxide poison –"

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As Cranston's subtle suggestion ended, Joe Cardona's face lighted with sudden understanding. Before the detective could speak, however, Cranston added another thought.

"X-rays," he remarked, "generate terrific heat. I read another odd item in the newspaper about a chemist – a man experienced in the study of deadly gases – who died from a strange, burning fever –"

This time Cardona's interruption came. The detective brought one fist against the open palm of his other hand, as he saw a connection which he had not previously noted.

"Merle Clussig!" he cried. "Wycroft Dustin! Say – do you think this bird Veldon knew those men?"

"Clussig?" questioned Cranston, as though the name meant nothing. "Dustin?"

"Yes," exclaimed Cardona. "They were the two whom you read about in the newspapers."

"I didn't recall the names," said Cranston. "The only name I remembered recently was that of a physician – a Doctor Barratini –"

"Maybe he was mixed in it, too!" blurted Cardona. "Look here, Mr. Edkins" – he turned to the bluff-faced millionaire – "can you tell me anything about this Veldon? Where he lives? What he does?"

"He is a promoter," said Edkins. "But I never knew where he made his home. I never had correspondence with him."

"Are you sure?"

"We can look through my file of recent letters."

"Good," decided Cardona. "Get them out."

A SERVANT came into the room. He announced that there was a call for Mr. Cranston from the Cobalt Club. While Edkins was talking with Cardona, Cranston sauntered downstairs. He spoke quietly over the telephone. Burbank's voice answered.

"Report from Burke," informed the contact agent. "He followed the car to its destination. Old mansion, at Turnerdale, Long Island. Burley Road, west of Graypoint Highway."

No one was in the lower hall. From his pocket, Lamont Cranston produced a printed calling card. It bore the name:

ERIC VELDON.

With a pencil, Cranston scrawled the address that Burbank had given him. Pocketing the card, he strolled upstairs and joined Edkins and Cardona. The detective was going through a pile of papers, which included letters, paid bills, and other memoranda.

A bill slipped from Cardona's hand. It fluttered to the floor. Cranston's hand dropped to his vest pocket. Cranston stooped to pick up the bill. Cardona was a moment late; he did not see the card that was neatly clipped between Cranston's first two fingers.

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As he placed the bill upon the stack of papers, Cranston made another dexterous manipulation. He did not drop the card directly beneath the bill; instead, he inserted it farther down in the stack of papers.

"I have received an urgent call from the club," he remarked. "I must run down there; I can return later, if I am needed."

"That's all right," agreed Cardona. "I'll call you there, Mr. Cranston, if it proves necessary."

Cranston shook hands with Edkins, and left the den. His footsteps died on the stairs. Cardona, with Edkins staring over his shoulder, kept on through the stack of papers. A cry came unexpectedly from the detective. Edkins looked at the card which the sleuth had discovered.

"Here it is!" exclaimed Cardona. "Say – this is a find! Veldon's own card – with his address on it!"

"I don't remember him giving it to me," said Edkins, in a puzzled tone. "I wonder if it's the place he lives –"

"I'm finding out!" asserted Cardona. "It's all I want. I'm starting with a raiding squad. That fellow sent another man in here tonight – the one who planted the powder when he took the clock. Maybe there's a bunch to deal with. We'll show them, if they're still on deck when we get there!"

TEN minutes later, a siren sounded in the street in front of the house. Joe Cardona hurried down the steps to join four men in a police car. The siren shrieked again, as the automobile shot on its way.

Joe Cardona and his men were heading for the spot on Long Island. Their car whirled rapidly through the streets of Manhattan, heading toward an East River bridge. It passed the traffic areas, and shot along a clear highway.

Joe Cardona was following the trail. He was going to give combat to Eric Veldon, the murderer.

Yet, with all its swiftness, the police car did not overtake a powerful coupe that was burning up the road ahead.

Slashing onward at a ninety-mile clip, his firm hands gripping the wheel of his low-built car, was an intrepid driver who was certain to beat the police to their destination. Unseen in the darkness of his car, the only sign which this personage gave of his presence was a mocking laugh that sounded clearly above the roar of the motor.

Preceding Joe Cardona to the quest was the strange being who had secretly given the detective the information that he needed – the one who had actually learned the location of Eric Veldon's abode of horror.

The Shadow, swift and formidable, was speeding onward to begin the final battle with the superfiend. It was Cardona's turn tonight; but it was The Shadow who had called the turn!

CHAPTER XXII. WITHIN THE WALLS

"ALPHA" – Doctor Rupert Sayre was speaking firmly – "bring in the prisoner."

Stolidly, Eric Veldon's chief automaton obeyed. He went from the room where Sayre was located. He returned two minutes later, with Cliff Marsland.

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"Alpha," said Sayre, as the waxen-faced servitor stared solemnly, "you are one of us. With us, you will go from here. Do you understand?"

"Yes," replied the man.

"His intelligence is increasing," explained Sayre to Cliff. "I have stimulated it. He is ours. We can count upon him."

"We are unarmed," reminded Cliff.

"Alpha has a revolver," asserted Sayre. "I can get it from him. You will be the one to use it."

"Get it now," suggested Cliff.

"No." Sayre shook his head. "We must be ready to return to our rooms if the odds appear impossible. Alpha will produce the gun when I demand it. Let's move out and see how things look."

Cautiously, the two men went out into the corridor. Alpha followed at Sayre's back. The trio stopped when they reached the head of the stairs. They could hear the rhythmic beat of a steady pacing sentinel. One of Veldon's mechanical men was on duty on the floor below.

"Listen," whispered Cliff.

New footbeats sounded. Another sentinel had joined the first. Cliff shook his head.

"We'd better wait," he decided. "We don't know the way out. That's the trouble. We can't fight if we're trapped. Veldon might show up."

"Agreed," said Sayre, although his tone was reluctant.

The men did not immediately return to their rooms. They waited, sure that they were safe from observation. Alpha stood stolidly beside them. He was obedient to Rupert Sayre.

BACK in the room which the three had left, a strange phenomenon occurred. A black mass seemed to spread upon the floor, as though projected from some outer sphere. It was a flat shape, yet it seemed imbued with life. The reason for it soon developed.

The skylight lifted in the top of the gloomily lighted room. Outer night pressed inward. The splotch upon the floor moved grotesquely. Then, from the skylight, a long form developed. A figure hung momentarily; it dropped with feline agility. Huddled from the fall, it rose again.

The Shadow, tall and sinister, had arrived within Eric Veldon's terrible domain! Garbed in black cloak and hat, a fantastic being whose long body cast a quadruple silhouette, the master of darkness stood supreme.

Swiftly and silently, The Shadow reached the open door. His peering eyes looked down the hallway. He saw the three men standing at the stairs. He waited while minutes seemed to move in slow procession.

The rhythmic tramp of feet continued from below. The three men, Cliff Marsland, Rupert Sayre, and the creature called Alpha, still remained on vigil. Two – Cliff and the physician – were hoping for the break they wanted. Alpha remained at Sayre's command.

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The monotony was like the strange quiet that comes before a breaking whirlwind. The Shadow, his eyes burning as they watched, was expecting imminent results. The tension broke, of a sudden, as a new sound came from the floor below. Someone was pounding at an outer door! A muffled cry was heard. Then came a blow, as something smashed against the barrier. Cliff Marsland uttered a prompt exclamation at the sound of the noise.

"Detectives!" he said to Sayre. "They have found this place!"

Footbeats ended below. Guttural cries came from Eric Veldon's minions. The instinctively guided automatic men were starting to meet what seemed to be a mass attack.

The Shadow's long right arm extended from the room. His hand gripped an automatic. The weapon covered Alpha. The action was timely. A bell was ringing from below. In response to the alarm, Alpha's loyalty had turned.

With a brisk motion, the man whipped out his revolver. He turned the gun toward Cliff Marsland and Rupert Sayre as he backed away from the men whom he had been set to guard. The Shadow's finger was upon the trigger, but it did not move.

Cliff Marsland had seen Alpha's action. With a savage leap, he fell upon the man and hurled him to the floor. Alpha's gun clattered away. Rupert Sayre seized it.

"Cover the stairs!" ordered Cliff. "Look out for trouble from below. I'll hold this man; we'll need him later!"

"He was responding to the old impulse," exclaimed Sayre. "Keep him there. We must not kill him unless he makes trouble. He had turned to aid us."

Alpha had ceased struggling. Under Cliff Marsland's powerful attack, he had been rendered helpless. The Shadow watched while Cliff Marsland dragged the man to the nearest room. Sayre, realizing the wisdom of being out of sight, followed, covering Alpha as they went along.

RESOUNDING blows of battering-ram force were breaking down the door below. The Shadow, moving with swiftness, now that the corridor was cleared, hastened to the stairway and descended. He reached the floor below just at the crucial moment.

A huge outer door came crashing forward. With it, Joe Cardona and his detectives hurtled into view. With guns in hands, they faced a menace which they had not expected. Hastily, they raised their revolvers to fire.

Lined across the wide lower corridor were Eric Veldon's minions. Like statues, these one-time criminals had been waiting stolidly for the breaking of the door. Each monstrous creature held a pair of revolvers. As the detectives came in sight, the instinctive reactions of these killers took effect.

Tried detectives against transformed mobsmen. Brave men of the law against sullen, automatic minions who did not fear to die. Shots burst forth as both sides fired, but with that opening attack came roaring bursts of flame from another quarter.

The Shadow, a brace of automatics in his hands, was aiding the cause of Joe Cardona. Timely aid, for the detectives had plunged headlong into the path of fire. As The Shadow's automatics barked, Veldon's minions swung instinctively to meet the fire from the rear. Though gangsters once – rats who would then have feared The Shadow – they did not recognize him now.

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But with that fatal motion, the minions of the fiend were doomed. Their fire had been turned; only one of Cardona's men had been wounded. Detectives blazed from one direction. The Shadow, elevated on the stairs, fired downward from the other.

Shooting deliberately, Eric Veldon's men began to fall. They did not crumple; they uttered no cries of pain. Instead, they stood staring in their tracks. Rigid, they plunged dead upon the floor.

The Shadow was retiring. Dumfounded detectives, excited by the battle, were riddling the fallen minions with lead. The sight was uncanny; forms that seemed corpselike more than human had dropped like tenpins. Cardona and his men were coming through.

At the head of the stairs, The Shadow merged with the darkness of a side corridor. Footsteps sounded. Joe Cardona reached the top of the stairs. He saw a man awaiting him at the door of a lighted room. It was Doctor Rupert Sayre, calling the detective onward.

The raiding squad reached the room. Doctor Sayre declared his identity. He pointed to Cliff Marsland, who now had the revolver, and was guarding Alpha, a prisoner.

"This is Marsland," explained Sayre. "He was brought here as a victim. He and I were planning to escape."

"And this man?" quizzed Cardona, as he indicated Alpha.

"One of Veldon's henchmen," said Sayre. "The only intelligent one. He was aiding us to escape when the attack began. We feared trouble from him, and Marsland overpowered him. He is the one man we need. He is the one who can tell us where to find Eric Veldon."

Cliff Marsland had released Alpha. The dull-faced man was standing on his feet. Rupert Sayre was attending to the wound of the one detective who had been clipped in the fray.

Facing Alpha, Joe Cardona began his quiz of Veldon's minion. Alpha, with eyes steady and staring, answered each question that the detective gave him.

CHAPTER XXIII. FIEND VERSUS SHADOW

"YOUR name?" inquired Cardona.

"Alpha," responded the corpselike man.

"Eric Veldon is your master?" quizzed the detective.

"He is my master," responded Alpha, pointing to Rupert Sayre.

"Where is the one who was your master?" put in Sayre, to aid Cardona's quiz.

"He is away."

"When will he return?" asked Cardona.

"Soon," declared Alpha.

"Show us where he will be," ordered Cardona.

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Steadily, Alpha walked forward. The detectives followed as the man mechanically led the way to the floor below. He stopped before a panel in the wall.

"Is this the place?" demanded Cardona.

"Yes," said Alpha, staring at the panel he had pointed out.

"Open the panel," commanded Cardona.

"I cannot," said the man in his deliberate tones. "Only my old master can open it. From within."

Doctor Sayre had arrived with the wounded detective. He nodded as he heard Alpha's statement.

"Veldon's room is somewhere near," he asserted. "He has an X-ray device that makes him look like a living skeleton. If we wait –"

"Quiet, every one," whispered Cardona, with a nod. Then, to Alpha: "Does your master summon you here?"

"Yes." Alpha's eyes were staring wide open. "Soon. He will summon me."

The group moved back as Alpha approached the panel and stood in listening attitude. Cliff Marsland and Rupert Sayre were as tense as the detectives.

"I think the panel will open," whispered the surgeon. "We can go in then – and wait until the lights go out. The skeleton will then appear. It will not be invulnerable. By shooting from the sides of the screen –"

"Keep ready," decided Cardona.

A full minute passed. Suddenly, as Alpha stood staring, the panel slid open. Cliff Marsland gripped the minion's arms. Quickly, the detectives entered the dim room. Cliff and Sayre followed, with Alpha. The minion was completely subdued.

The lights went out. Only a slight flicker of dull illumination came from the corridor, for the panel was still open. Then came the bright glow beyond the screen on the table. The skeleton came into view. Doctor Sayre gave a gasp of elation. He realized that from the skeleton's seat, one could not see who was in the room!

"Get him, men!"

The command came from Joe Cardona. With it, the detective fired. Shots burst from the sides of the room. The skeleton toppled and disappeared as it fell beneath the table.

"Find a light switch!" ordered Cardona.

A DETECTIVE discovered one with the aid of a flashlight. Another found another switch. Both pressed. One switch brought illumination to the room; the other caused the radiant light to vanish from the farther wall. The second switch had raised the leaded panel covering the front section of the X-ray projector.

A cry of amazement came as Cardona rounded the end of the table. Upon the floor, instead of a human body, lay the crumpled figure of an actual skeleton!

Click!

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All eyes turned toward the exit. The panel had shut. With it came the knowledge of a trap. In the confusion, Alpha, the minion supposedly turned to aid the law, had gone from the room!

"Tick – tick – tick –"

A teletype was working in the corner. Doctor Sayre sprang to it and began to read the ribbon. Cardona joined him; so did Cliff Marsland. The detectives stared about them, ready with their revolvers, but seeing no one at which to shoot.

This message came along the ribbon:

"YOU ARE TRAPPED. YOU WILL DIE. LIKE CLUSSIG, LIKE DUSTIN. LIKE BARRATINI. LIKE EDKINS. I AM ERIC VELDON. I AM ALSO ALPHA. AS ONE OF MY HENCHMEN I FURTHERED COMMUNICATION BETWEEN MY PRISONERS TO LEARN HOW MUCH THEY KNEW. I OPENED THE PANEL BY STEPPING ON THE SECRET SPRING IN THE FLOOR. I PLAYED THE PART OF ONE OF MY OWN MINIONS. IT ENABLED ME TO KEEP CONTACT WITH THE OTHERS. THE SKELETON WHICH YOU SHOT IS THAT OF JOSEPH BARRATINI. I DESTROYED THE FLESH AND USED THE SKELETON AS A FAKE DEVICE. IT WAS BEHIND THE SCREEN WHEN YOU ENTERED. YOU COULD NOT SEE IT THROUGH THE SCREEN UNTIL THE RAYS APPEARED. YOU ARE FOOLS. PREPARE TO DIE WHEN I RELEASE THE DEADLY GAS."

The ticking ceased. The doomed men looked at one another. They realized that the extinguishing of the dull light and the appearance of the rays had been automatic. They were truly due to die. Somewhere, they could picture Eric Veldon, the superfiend, ready to release poison gas through jets that lined the walls of this terrible room!

The mental image was correct. Outside, by a small panel which he had opened in the side of the corridor, stood Eric Veldon. From his face, the fiend had clawed away the waxy substance which he had used to make himself look like one of his automata.

The evil smile was upon Eric Veldon's features. His left hand was raised to draw the heavy cord which would loose a vast volume of poison gas. In his right hand – the precaution seemed unnecessary – the murderer held a revolver which he had picked from behind the little panel.

Murder dominated Veldon's mind. He would slay these enemies; after that, he could travel away at will. With his mechanical equipment packed within the dark–screened limousine, hidden by the special glass which Merle Clussig had devised, he could go where he chose, and set up a new home of crime.

His knowledge of Barratini's methods would serve him in the accumulation of another horde of henchmen. All these ideas of an evil future swept through Veldon's crime–mad brain. It was some fleeting fancy, only, that caused him to stare along the corridor as his hand prepared to draw the fatal cord.

ERIC VELDON'S evil leer became a fixture on his bloated lips. There, framed in dull light at the end of the corridor, stood an enemy whom he had not yet met. A tall, sinister being clad entirely in black, was staring toward him with eyes that blazed like living coals.

The Shadow!

Eric Veldon had heard of this weird enemy of crime. The Shadow had come to stop his evil deed! The Shadow would fail! A fierce hiss came from Veldon's lips as he leveled his revolver toward the phantom figure and placed his finger to the trigger.

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A mighty roar burst forth – not from Veldon's gun, but from an automatic in The Shadow's hand. With that shot, Eric Veldon staggered. His revolver fell from his grasp. With a defiant effort, the fiend clutched the cord, hoping that it would draw as he fell. Again The Shadow's automatic burst its thunderous report.

The shot struck Veldon's left wrist. Numbed fingers opened. The cord swung back and forth within the little niche which contained it. A ghastly scream came from Veldon's smile–frozen lips. The superfiend sprawled dead within the corridor.

With silent tread, The Shadow advanced. He stood above the body of Eric Veldon. His small–rayed flashlight played upon the features of the dead man. For the first time, The Shadow had seen Eric Veldon's countenance. The man who had eluded him while living, could not escape him when dead.

The Shadow turned. He strode to the end of the corridor, to the spot where the hidden panel made an entrance to the room where Eric Veldon had played his role of living skeleton. With sweeping stride, The Shadow found the secret release in the floor. He pressed it.

The panel opened. Startled cries came from within. Seconds intervened; then the deluge burst forth as Joe Cardona and his detectives rushed to safety, followed by Doctor Rupert Sayre and Cliff Marsland.

They found Eric Veldon's body. Dead, the fiend was as hideous as in life. The cord, still swinging, marked his vain attempt to slay the men who had battled him. But there was no sign of the mysterious avenger who had ended the monster's vile career.

The Shadow, mysterious, had vanished. Cliff Marsland, alone, knew that it was he who had played the part of rescuer. Joe Cardona, wise but taciturn, suspected the same fact. The ace detective had seen evidence of The Shadow's prowess in the past.

A TRIM coupe was speeding toward Manhattan. Sweeping along the broad highway, it was far, far in advance of the men who were also due to return to New York. As the automobile whirled along a lonely highway, a strident peal of mirth burst forth from its interior.

The Shadow, triumphant, was crying forth his victory in tones of strident mockery. That laugh, uncanny in the chill night air, marked the final touch to the battle of justice against evil.

Eric Veldon, murderer and fiend extraordinary, was dead. The Shadow's hand had again brought vengeance to an evil wretch who had deserved his miserable end.

Fiend versus Shadow. That had been the climax. The Shadow had gained the triumph.

THE END