

MURDER GENIUS

Maxwell Grant

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MURDER GENIUS

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CHAPTER I. A PERFECT CRIME

ON the secluded beach of a privately owned tropic island in the Bermudas, an incredibly ugly middle-aged man was dictating correspondence to a dazzlingly beautiful girl. A young man was stretched lazily on the sand a few feet away.

The young man was pretending to watch the pink coral sand he was sifting idly through his bronzed fingers. Actually, he was staring at the girl. Whenever their glances met, she flushed faintly.

They were in love, those two. They were trying to conceal it from the ugly-faced man who kept so calmly dictating letters on the subject of business and finance.

The younger man's name was Howard Paxton. He was a British scientist, an authority on tropical fish and coral formations. He had been invited to the island as a guest and had fallen promptly in love with Millicent Whitney, the lovely secretary of his millionaire host.

The host's name was Benedict Stark. He was one of the richest men in America. The private yacht that had brought him from New York lay at anchor in a secluded cove nearby. This island in the warm tropics was only one of a dozen places at Stark's disposal whenever he decided to mix work with play.

Stark was grimly suspicious that young Paxton was in love with Millicent. That didn't bother him. The thing that enraged Stark under the mask of his indifference was the fact that Millicent loved Paxton. Stark had trained this girl carefully. He paid her a tremendous salary. He had no intention of losing her to a lovesick

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young Britisher.

Stark was merely waiting for proof of his suspicions. When he had that proof, he would solve his problem with a cold-blooded and carefully planned murder!

Benedict Stark was a supercriminal! Wealth and social position protected him from discovery. The police of New York would have clapped into a lunatic asylum anyone who accused Stark of crime.

But The Shadow knew!

The Shadow, in the past, had engaged in a titanic struggle with an unknown criminal who called himself the Prince of Evil. The Shadow had won that struggle. He had saved an innocent boy and girl from a maze of intrigue and murder. (Note: See "Prince of Evil," Vol. XXXIII, No. 4.) But the most dangerous foe in the history of The Shadow's career had escaped capture. The Prince of Evil had vanished!

With him had vanished Rutledge Mann, one of The Shadow's secret agents.

Mann had been kidnapped. He was being held a helpless prisoner in some unknown rat-hole in New York, while the vicious thugs of a master criminal worked slow torture on him, to force him to reveal the secrets of The Shadow's organization for suppressing crime.

The very day that Rutledge Mann had vanished, Benedict Stark had sailed in his palatial yacht for his private island in the Bermudas. The Shadow was certain that Stark and the Prince of Evil were the same man! But he had no shred of proof.

Perhaps it was the thought of this that crinkled the corners of Stark's lips in a cruel and fleeting smile.

Millicent, his lovely secretary, had no knowledge of Stark's real personality. Nor did young Howard Paxton. Stark was icily amused by the fact that the British scientist had fallen in love with Millicent. He would remove this threat to his comfort and convenience as soon as he made certain that his suspicions were true.

Once again, he would experience the supreme thrill of murder!

Benedict Stark's bathing suit emphasized his physical ugliness. His body was barrel-chested, like a gorilla's. A malformation at birth had made one of his arms shorter than the other. His head was enormously large on a short neck. He had a jutting lower lip and eyes like bright marbles.

Behind those gleaming eyes was a magnificently trained brain. It was his cunning brain that made Benedict Stark so dangerous.

Suddenly, Stark's eyes narrowed. He glanced up the length of the private beach.

An unkempt figure was shambling along the sand. He carried in one hand a string of freshly caught tropical fish. He was unshaven and barefooted. His only garment was a pair of tattered overalls. He looked more like a scarecrow than a man.

STARK clipped out an oath of anger as he saw the trespasser. He sprang from his beach chair, his powerful fist clenched.

"Of all the infernal impudence! What do you mean by coming ashore on my private property? Get out damn you, before I —"

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Millicent was aware of her millionaire employer's ugly temper. She was afraid he might injure a simple-minded fisherman who meant no harm.

"It's only Portuguese Joe. I've seen his sailboat often in the cove. The poor devil wants to sell us some fresh fish."

Paxton, who looked disgusted at Stark's show of temper, added quietly: "Very nice fish, too, by Jove."

Portuguese Joe's teeth gleamed in a friendly grin. "Catch heem thees morning. You want to buy heem, eh?"

"I want you to get off my island and take your damned fish with you!" Stark roared.

Joe was so frightened by his unexpected reception that he stood rooted in his barefooted tracks on the sand. With a bound, Benedict Stark sprang toward him. He snatched the string of fish from Joe's hand and tossed them with a splash into the sea.

The next moment, he had Joe's arm in a tight hold. He twisted the arm cruelly behind the fisherman's back.

Portuguese Joe uttered a shrill cry of pain. A docile man, he made no effort to fight back. He dropped to his knees, writhing with the agony of Stark's torturing clutch.

Millicent's gasp of concern brought young Paxton to his feet. He cried:

"Stop it, Stark! Are you mad? You'll break his arm!"

"I'll break his blasted neck, if he doesn't keep off my property!" Stark snarled.

His face was flushed. But it was a faked display of temper. Inwardly, Stark was cool, had full control of himself. He was using this show of anger for a very definite purpose. It told him things.

He noted that Paxton's arm had slipped reassuringly around the waist of the trembling Millicent. Millicent made no effort to avoid that protective embrace. These two were in love, damn them!

Benedict Stark hauled his whimpering victim to his feet and started him up the beach with a brutal kick.

"Get back to your scarecrow boat and don't let me catch you here again!"

He waited until Portuguese Joe's boat faded around a green headland. Then he drew a deep breath.

"I'm sorry I lost my temper. I really didn't have any intention of breaking the fool's arm. I just wanted to teach him a lesson. Please accept my apologies. Are you ready for more dictation, Millicent?"

She nodded, and picked up her dropped notebook from the sand. Stark sat back in his canopy-covered chair and began to dictate as if nothing had happened. He reached for his highball glass on a nearby beach table and sipped it with slow relish.

Paxton, thoroughly disgusted, made a polite excuse to leave.

"See you later," he said, his eyes lingering on Millicent. "I think I'll stroll up the beach and examine some coral specimens I spotted yesterday."

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His tall figure moved off toward a jutting headland that came almost down to the blue glitter of the sea. He vanished from sight.

A crafty expression crept into Benedict Stark's eyes. He continued dictating for ten minutes longer. Then he stopped.

"That'll be all for a while," he told Millicent. "I've got a business problem that requires a little thought. Suppose you amuse yourself on the beach a half-hour or so. I'll call you when I need you."

STARK sat back and closed his eyes. Millicent walked slowly away, as if she had no particular interest except to kill time. But Stark noticed under watchful eyelids that his beautiful secretary moved toward the same headland behind which Howard Paxton had vanished a few minutes earlier.

Stark followed her, presently, moving with infinite precaution.

He didn't walk along the pink sand. On that sand Paxton and Millicent had left a double line of footprints. Stark did not intend to betray, his surveillance by making a third set of prints.

He veered close to the shore line of the island, stepping on smooth stones that left no betraying sign.

When he reached the headland, he dropped flat on his stomach. He crawled behind a bush that grew at the foot of the seaward slope. Peering through its thorny branches, Stark was able to get a good look at Millicent and Paxton without himself being seen.

The good-looking young British scientist had evidently waited for Millicent to follow him. They were standing close together in the warm sunlight, talking earnestly. Suddenly, Paxton took the girl in his arms and kissed her. She made no effort to resist him.

Stark's breath hissed in his throat. He had seen all he needed to know. He crawled backward from the bush. Silently, he retreated along the boulders to his canopy-covered beach chair.

He sat down and mixed himself a tall highball, cooling it with ice cubes from a silver vacuum jar. There was a devilish look on his face, but it faded swiftly. Stark was used to concealing his feelings, even when he was alone.

He stared at the white foam of the breaking waves at the edge of the beach. Part of the beach at this point was fenced in with an enclosure of steel mesh. It made sea bathing safer. Sharks were not uncommon in these waters.

Farther out on the surface of the cove, Stark saw a quick movement for an instant. It was a black, triangular fin. It left a thin streak of foam on the surface, then it vanished.

Stark uttered a brief laugh. It was an unpleasant sound, as cold as the clink of the ice cubes in the frosted highball glass.

That black fin of a shark fitted in very nicely with the plans of Benedict Stark!

STARK'S mansion stood on a green knoll in the center of the island. It was surrounded by gorgeous tropical gardens. It was high enough to afford a glimpse of Stark's yacht, at anchor far out in the cove.

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A cool, steady trade wind blew in from the sea. It made the house and gardens a pleasant place for a millionaire to take his ease.

But Stark's face looked strained as he sat, late that afternoon, in his high-ceilinged bedroom. He could hear the steady click of a typewriter from somewhere in the back of the house. The sound came from a room equipped as an office.

Purposely, Stark had given Millicent plenty of work to keep her busy in that office. Howard Paxton was somewhere on the beach, still hunting for coral specimens.

Stark stared at two typewritten notes that lay on the small desk at which he was sitting. Both notes were unsigned. Both were identical in their wording. They read as follows:

DARLING: I've got to see you tonight. It's terribly important.

I'll wait for you at the usual place. Don't fail to meet me.

The "usual place" to which the notes referred was a tiny stretch of beach almost entirely screened from the land side by a dense growth of palms. Benedict Stark was aware that Millicent and Paxton used this spot for some of their secret meetings.

Millicent was afraid of Stark's anger if he learned that she was planning to marry Paxton and leave his employ. She had become more and more afraid of her strange employer in these last few months. But she had no idea that a spying employee of Stark's had already discovered her romantic secret.

The spy was Millicent's personal maid, Marie. The press of a button would summon Marie from Millicent's room. But Stark waited until he performed an important task.

Using two specimen signatures as a guide, he signed the names of Millicent and Paxton to the identical notes he had prepared. It was a clever job of forgery. Each of the victims would think that the other desired a meeting that evening.

The only danger was to keep them apart beforehand, lest they discover the trick. Stark intended to take care of that part himself.

He pressed a button on his desk. After a while, Marie entered the room. She was a rather pretty French girl, with dark hair and sharp black eyes. Stark explained in a low voice what he wanted done. Marie nodded. She slipped the two forged notes into her bosom.

Marie had long since wormed her way into Millicent's confidence. Millicent herself had already given Marie one or two love messages to take to Paxton. That made the deception easier to accomplish.

Benedict Stark chuckled, as he dressed leisurely for dinner.

During the meal in the ornate dining room, he could tell from the flushed faces of Paxton and his secretary that Marie had performed her part of the scheme perfectly. Paxton was nervous and restive. So was Millicent. But they had no chance to talk alone. Stark saw to that.

"Will you need me for any typing tonight?" Millicent asked, toward the close of the meal.

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"Unfortunately, yes," Stark replied. His tone was bland. "There are one or two things I want to get out. You can type them in your own room, if you like. It's cooler there."

"Thank you."

Stark could see relief flood the girl's face. He knew what Millicent was thinking. It would be an easy matter later on for her to leave through her bedroom window to keep the tryst with young Paxton. Stark meant her to leave that way!

An hour later, Stark stepped to the cool darkness of a balcony outside his own window. He tiptoed silently along the balcony toward the window of Paxton's room. He had no fear of discovery. He had watched Paxton leave the house shortly after dinner.

Stark remained in the Englishman's room only a few moments. When he reappeared, he had stolen what he had gone in for – Paxton's bathing suit.

With the bathing suit stuffed under his coat, Stark lowered himself from the shadowy balcony. He dropped noiselessly to the turf below. Then he melted across the dim gardens and vanished into the tropic night.

IN a tiny glade near the water's edge, Howard Paxton waited impatiently for Millicent.

He had begged her to marry him, but up to now she had been afraid to incur the millionaire's wrath by announcing her engagement to Paxton. Perhaps she had finally made up her mind. That might be the reason for her urgent note.

Suddenly, Paxton heard a light step in the shrubbery. He turned with a quick cry of delight.

"Millicent! Darling! Is that you?"

Impatiently, he parted the branches and reached forward to take the girl he loved into his arms. His eagerness cost him his life.

A heavy weapon crashed against Paxton's head. It was a fearful blow. It crushed his skull like an eggshell. He fell bleeding to the ground.

When the murderer bent over his victim in the darkness, Paxton was dead!

The killer moved with terrific speed. He drew off Paxton's coat and wadded it under his smashed skull to sop up the blood. Then he stripped the dead man's body. He made a neat bundle of the clothing and shoes, weighted it with a chunk of heavy coral.

A moment later he disappeared through the bushes.

When the killer returned, he came by water in a motorboat. He beached the craft on the sandy shore and leaped out. Hurrying to a nearby thicket, he propped a sheet of paper in a thorny opening among the branches. The paper made a white blur in the gloom. Millicent couldn't miss it when she arrived later to keep her date with Paxton.

The killer chuckled as he read it. It was a cold-blooded and cruel forgery, the sort of thing that appealed to his instinct for evil.

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Turning away from the planted message in the bush, the killer continued his swift plan to cover up a brutal crime. He dressed Paxton's stripped body in the dead man's own bathing suit. He placed the corpse and the weighted bundle of clothes in the motorboat.

A moment later, the boat headed out across the blackness of the water. As the boat slowed, the killer got rid of the weighted bundle of the dead Englishman's clothes. The blood-smeared murder weapon followed.

The disposal of the telltale clues made two quick splashes. Leaning over the gunwale of the slowly moving boat, the killer watched the dark surface of the water. Suddenly, he saw a ripple. A black fin cut the water in a lazy circle about the boat. A shark had been attracted by the splashes!

The final act in a cowardly murder was now almost ready.

A chuckle came from the killer. He knew that Millicent would say nothing about the sheet of paper she would find in the bush. She'd be too heartbroken and humiliated by its contents. Stark would get hold of it later and destroy it.

If any talk arose about Paxton's absence, the fact that his bathing suit was missing from his room would indicate that the Englishman had been rash enough to go for a night swim in shark-infested waters.

A killer had enjoyed a supreme thrill without any danger to himself. He had committed a perfect crime!

The motorboat slipped stealthily through the darkness toward deeper water. Behind it, like a tiny black sail cutting the surface, moved the triangular fin of a shark.

CHAPTER II. A CRUEL DECEPTION

THE sleek, seaworthy yacht of Benedict Stark lay at anchor near the outer rim of the cove. No light glowed from any of its portholes. But there was a faint spot of illumination from the window of a deck-house near the stern of the vessel. This was the wireless room.

The fact that wireless activity was going on aboard the anchored yacht was of great interest to Portuguese Joe.

The tattered fisherman's blunt-nosed little sailboat was an invisible speck on the dark water, not too far from the yacht.

Night after night, Portuguese Joe had dropped anchor here. His daylight fishing was merely a blind. He was interested in listening to certain coded wireless messages that came to Stark's yacht at the same hour every night on a directed radio beam from Florida.

Portuguese Joe was The Shadow!

He sat crouched below the dark rail of his craft, with a pair of earphones clamped over his head. He was listening to every dot and dash that came whizzing through the ether to the wireless room aboard Stark's yacht. His keen ears missed nothing.

The fishing boat's sail was as black as the hull that lay like a dark patch on the water. A secret panel had been opened. Within that panel was a powerful radio receiving set. Huge storage batteries made The Shadow's problem of listening to those elusive dots and dashes an easy one.

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He was no longer a ragged scarecrow. A black robe covered him from throat to foot. A slouch hat shaded his burning eyes. There was no timidity in those eyes.

The Shadow had endured torture from the ugly-tempered Stark earlier that afternoon in the role of Portuguese Joe, merely because it did not suit him to betray his real identity too soon. He had come secretly to this tropic island on a tremendously important mission.

He hoped to get some definite clue to the fate of Rutledge Mann!

Rutledge Mann was one of The Shadow's trusted agents. He had come within a hairbreadth of proving that Benedict Stark and an unknown supercriminal who called himself the Price of Evil were one and the same individual.

But Mann had failed almost at the moment of triumph. He had been seized and kidnapped. Somewhere in New York he lay a helpless prisoner, doomed to torture and death unless he betrayed the secrets of The Shadow's organization.

Mann had vanished the same day that Benedict Stark had sailed in his yacht for a short vacation on his private island in the Bermuda group. It was like Stark to postpone Mann's death. He loved cruelty. And it flattered his vanity to live in tropic luxury while a doomed prisoner waited in terror for his return to New York.

The Shadow realized grimly that unless he moved swiftly to locate and rescue Mann, his loyal agent would die!

Suddenly, The Shadow stiffened. Another coded message was coming over the radio that linked Stark's yacht to some unknown sender in Florida. The Shadow's hand moved steadily with a pencil. He jotted down disconnected words as he listened to the scrambled dots and dashes in his headphones.

The fact that the message was in code didn't worry him. The Shadow was one of the world's foremost authorities on cryptograms. He had found the code a relatively simple one to crack. His worry arose from the decoded messages themselves.

So far, they had all been legitimate. Some were reports on business transactions. Others were acknowledgments of orders to buy and sell in Wall Street. Nothing unusual or sinister.

Tonight, however, The Shadow's aerial fishing landed a puzzling prize. All the other messages had been unsigned. This one ended with a man's name; somebody named Clifton. The communication read as follows:

Serious trouble has developed about Andrew Marshall. He intends

to exercise the option in his contract with the Herndale bank.

Insists upon paying off bank and assuming complete control of
business. See no way to persuade Marshall except by strong
measures. Advise you to return at once!

CLIFTON

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The Shadow had no time to ponder the meaning of this strange warning to Stark. Another message was coming through. The Shadow's calm hand trembled as he decoded it. It began with two initials: "R. M."

Rutledge Mann! The Shadow guessed it before he set down the rest of the grim radio flash. It was a brutal confirmation of his worst fears concerning his missing agent:

R. M. is very weak. Still refuses to talk, despite daily
torture. Suggest you return to New York at once to question
him personally before he dies.

As though conscious that The Shadow might somehow be listening, the mysterious radio sender in Florida ended his nightly report. The steady hum of the radio ended.

With a quick gesture, The Shadow removed the headphones. He closed the panel in the fishing boat that guarded the secret of his powerful receiving set. He sat up, stretching his cramped muscles.

It was then that he heard the faint cry.

IT was a very faint cry. It seemed to come from a tiny indentation on the wooded shore of the island. It was not repeated.

The Shadow picked up a pair of binoculars. He stared steadily at the distant spot from which that brief cry had come. He could see nothing.

He laid down the night glasses and busied himself with the homemade anchor that moored his clumsy sailing boat. It was a chunk of coral tied to a stout rope, the sort of thing most fitted to the shiftless role of Portuguese Joe.

When the dripping rock was safely on board, The Shadow let his boat drift in the light breeze. Again he used his glasses.

This time he could see something moving. It left the shore from the spot where he had heard that faint cry. It seemed to be a motorboat judging from its low hum. Its engine was well muffled.

The Shadow bent every effort to intercept the mysterious craft. It was hopeless. The breeze over the black cove was so light it was almost a calm. And the fishing boat was sluggish in a light air. The Shadow tacked. Desperately he tried to find a capful of wind for his sail.

He had only one consolation. The man in the motorboat had no suspicion that he was under observation from a distance. The Shadow was able to see him now through the powerful lenses of his binoculars.

He was unable to identify the man. A cloth mask covered his head like a helmet. Glittering eyes gleamed through narrow slits in the mask. They were staring at the body of a dead man.

Even across the distance that separated the two boats The Shadow was able to recognize the corpse. It was Howard Paxton. He had been horribly murdered. The skull was crushed in.

The Shadow saw the killer throw the weighted bundle of Paxton's clothes overboard. He wondered why the murderer had dressed the victim in a bathing suit. Then he tensed.

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The masked man had produced a knife. He began to slash at the bare flesh of the dead man's legs and arms. Blood oozed from the victim. With his legs and arms a red smear he was picked up by the killer and poised over the gunwale of the motorboat.

A circling shark's fin was visible a few yards away from the boat.

No opportunity was presented The Shadow for gunfire. The distance was too great.

He knew that the moment he removed his gaze from the lenses of his binoculars the far-off boat with its killer and corpse would merge with the blackness of the water. And the echo of a useless pistol shot would advertise the presence of a witness to the masked murderer.

Besides, Paxton was already dead.

Helpless to interfere, The Shadow saw a plume of distant spray as the body struck the water. A moment later there was a swirl as the exposed fin of the shark vanished.

The engine of the motorboat made a faint hum. The craft wheeled about in a tight circle and headed back toward the island. It was gone presently, like an evil dream behind a jutting headland.

A name glowed like flame in the mind of The Shadow. Benedict Stark! And yet the situation was exactly as it had always been. No proof. Long before The Shadow could reach Stark's island mansion the millionaire whom The Shadow suspected of being the Prince of Evil would be suavely at ease in his own home!

The Shadow's only chance to pin the proof of murder on a master criminal was to examine the spot on the shore line where Paxton had uttered his brief cry. It was there that the murder had occurred. Perhaps some damaging bit of evidence had been overlooked by the masked killer.

Grimly, The Shadow pointed the blunt bow of the sailboat toward the shore. The sail flapped limply in the light breeze. The boat moved with maddening slowness.

MILICENT'S heart was thumping excitedly as she tiptoed to the open window at the rear of her room in the Stark mansion. The typing assignment Stark had given her was finished. Millicent was free to keep her tryst with the man she loved.

It was easy to descend to the ground. A thick tropical vine offered a convenient ladder. Millicent vanished without a sound into the underbrush beyond the rear of the lawn.

The note from Paxton, which her maid, Marie, had smuggled to her shortly before dinner, was tucked under the bodice of her gown, close to her beating heart. She had no suspicion that Marie was a spy or that the message was a forgery. She anticipated the happiest moment of her life.

Millicent sped eagerly along the tiny path that led to the palm-enclosed clearing, near the shore.

But she was dismayed when she arrived. The clearing was empty.

For an instant, Millicent felt a quick stab of dread. She remembered Paxton's strange nervousness that afternoon. He had hinted vaguely at danger. He had told her that he didn't want to expose her to any unpleasantness.

Then why had he sent for her tonight? And where was he?

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Millicent was pondering these questions when she saw the white gleam of a paper propped in the thorny branches of a bush. Eagerly, she seized the message that had been slyly left there for her to see. She read it with unbelieving horror:

DEAR MILLICENT: Tonight I intended to explain, but I didn't have the courage to face you. I had no idea that you'd take my little flirtation so seriously. Darling, I'm sorry, but I'm already married. I have a wife in England. I'm leaving the island at once. Please forgive me – and forget I ever lived.

HOWARD PAXTON

A moan came from Millicent's lips. Every sentence in that message was like a knife in her heart. It explained Paxton's nervousness earlier that afternoon. It explained why he had asked Millicent to come here tonight – and why he had fled like a coward, leaving her to take the bitter blow alone.

Scarcely realizing what she was doing, Millicent folded the fake confession and slipped it into her bosom. The agony she felt was too deep for tears. She felt dead inside. She left the clearing and started back toward the mansion, moving with the slow stiffness of a sleepwalker.

She had suffered a cruel blow, but she had plenty of courage. By the time she had reached the rear of the house, she had regained a measure of self-control. She climbed the vines to her room and undressed in the cool darkness.

Before she got into bed she folded Paxton's last message into a tiny square and laid it in a place where it would always be available to her – and to no one else.

She wanted to keep that message as a tragic reminder of her own folly. Never again would she put her trust in the kisses of a good-looking young man.

Millicent didn't realize it, but in hiding that note so securely, she was putting a cunning murderer in dire peril!

She had not been in bed very long, when there came a knock at her door. She sat up, puzzled by this unexpected visitor at so late an hour.

"Who is it, please?"

"It is I – Benedict Stark. May I see you, please? I've just made a rather important decision."

"Just a minute."

Millicent donned her dressing gown and slippers. Stark smiled suavely as he entered.

"Nothing to worry about, my dear," he said smoothly. "The only annoyance my decision will cause you is lack of sleep. I'll send Marie in to help you dress and pack your belongings."

"But... I don't understand –"

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"I've decided to leave the island, at once. As soon as we can board my yacht and get under way, we're starting for New York."

"Has anything serious happened?" Millicent faltered.

"A couple of business deals require my personal supervision in New York," Stark replied. A grin twisted his thick lips for an instant. "There are two men to whom I am especially anxious to devote a little attention. Please be ready to leave as soon as possible."

STARK left the room with a quick stride. Marie came in almost immediately.

She helped Millicent to pack. She was very efficient. Nothing that went into the bags and traveling cases of Stark's pretty secretary escaped Marie's attention. Her slim fingers dipped innocently in and out of the pockets of every one of Millicent's garments.

Marie was looking for the forged message that supposedly had come from Paxton, which Millicent had already hidden. She knew that Millicent had not destroyed it. Marie had trailed her unsuspecting mistress to the clearing. She had seen Millicent tuck the paper into her bosom and return swiftly to her room.

But Marie had no luck with her search.

An hour later, she was forced to confess failure to Stark. The two stood together on the deck of the slowly moving yacht. Dawn had not yet risen in the east. The yacht passed like a gray ghost through the inlet that connected the cove with the open sea.

"Are you sure Millicent didn't destroy the note?" Stark whispered under his breath.

"Positive! I'll search again as soon as I get an opportunity. I'll find it!"

"Take your time, and be careful."

He uttered a faint oath as Marie slipped away through the shadowy gray of the deck. That missing note was damnably important! Stark had made a bad blunder in his zeal to kill Paxton and mislead Millicent.

He had left his fingerprints on the note!

There had been no way to avoid doing, so. It was impossible to make a plausible forgery with gloved hands. Stark had taken the risk, counting on the cleverness of Marie to get hold of the paper later. And now Marie reported failure.

Millicent had hidden the note so promptly and so well. Did she suspect him? – Stark wondered, uneasily. If she ever learned that Paxton had been murdered – and produced the forged note with Stark's fingerprints – Stark would then be doomed!

Instinctively, he thought of The Shadow. Then other names – more amusing names – came to his mind. Rutledge Mann, for instance. And a gentleman named Andrew Marshall.

One promised an opportunity for cruelty and murder; the other promised profit. Both were in New York. Every turn of the yacht's propeller brought them closer.

Benedict Stark's thick lips grinned.

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SHELDED by a projection of land, The Shadow watched the ghostly yacht of the millionaire pass from the gray mist of the inlet to the open sea.

The moment it was gone, The Shadow boarded the shabby sailboat of Portuguese Joe. He set his course for a well-hidden indentation in the shore line.

This was not the place where Paxton had been murdered. The Shadow had already exhaustively searched the spot. He had found nothing except footprints that showed Millicent had been there after the departure of the masked killer and his victim.

The Shadow had no knowledge of the forged note. He didn't yet understand how the actual murder had been engineered. Nor did he have time now for further investigation. His need at the moment was to return swiftly to New York.

He divined why Stark's yacht had departed so hastily before dawn. The two radio messages that The Shadow had intercepted provided a sinister answer. Stark had grim business with somebody named Andrew Marshall.

He also intended to torture and kill Rutledge Mann!

The only way The Shadow could save Mann was to trail Stark to the rat hole where The Shadow's kidnapped agent was being held a prisoner. To do that he had to arrive in New York before Stark's yacht.

The Shadow was prepared for such an emergency. In the sheltered cove where he headed the sailboat, a seaplane lay hidden from sight. It was in this plane that The Shadow had arrived at the island to assume the role of Portuguese Joe.

He scuttled the sailboat and sank it in deep water. Then he warmed up the seaplane and taxied from the cove.

Stark's departing yacht was already hull-down beneath the north horizon. But The Shadow took no chances. He headed southward, flying close to the water. When he had covered enough distance to satisfy himself, he climbed high into the early-morning sky and gunned his plane to terrific speed.

He headed for Florida. From there it would be an easy hop to New York in a commercial air liner.

In the innocent role of Lamont Cranston, The Shadow would be ready to move long before Stark's palatial yacht glided into New York harbor and anchored at Quarantine.

CHAPTER III. A GRIM STOWAWAY

THE press boat chugged across the busy expanse of New York's Upper Bay. It headed toward the Narrows, where the shore line of Brooklyn juts out toward Staten Island. Nearby was the Quarantine anchorage, where all incoming ships must halt for medical inspection.

A sleek white yacht was waiting there.

There were three men aboard the press boat but only one of them was a reporter. The reporter's name was Clyde Burke. He was coming out to interview Benedict Stark, who had just returned from a trip to his private island playground in the Bermudas.

Stark was not very hospitable to reporters. He usually allowed a single news-hawk to act as spokesman for the rest. Clyde Burke, of the Daily Classic, was New York's ace reporter. That was why he was on the press

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boat.

There was another, an unsuspected, reason why Clyde was coming out to interview Benedict Stark. Clyde was an agent of The Shadow!

He had received detailed instructions over the telephone from Burbank, who was The Shadow's contact man. Clyde was grimly aware of a number of things that were not yet known to police or public.

If it were humanly possible, Clyde intended to have a private talk with Millicent Whitney, the millionaire's private secretary.

Clyde paid little attention to the other two passengers aboard the press boat. One of them was a man named Bruce Clifton. He was a suburban bank president, in charge of one of the branch banks in the chain controlled by Stark. He had come to New York to discuss some financial matters with his millionaire employer.

The Shadow was the third member of the trio aboard the press boat. But it would be difficult to recognize him in the dapper personage of Lamont Cranston.

Cranston was well known as a millionaire society idler. His wealth and social prestige gave him the chance to meet Benedict Stark on an equal footing. He was coming out to the anchored yacht to greet Stark as a personal friend. He looked vapid and harmless.

But his keen glance missed nothing of the appearance of Bruce Clifton. Every characteristic of the suburban bank official was locked accurately away in the file index brain of The Shadow.

Clifton was like a well-dressed gray fox. His hair and eyebrows, his clothing, even his thin, pallid face, were grayish. He seemed timid, except for his eyes. They were bold eyes, with a faint glint like a sneer in their pale depths. It wasn't easy to detect that sneer. Bruce Clifton had a tricky habit of blinking his lids whenever he observed anyone studying him too closely.

Physically, he was active and muscular. When the press boat tied up alongside the anchored yacht, Clifton was the first to grasp the rope ladder and climb to the yacht's deck.

Stark was waiting there. It seemed to Lamont Cranston that a quick, warning glance passed between the two men. It was gone in an instant. Stark frowned at Clyde Burke's press card. Then he turned toward Cranston with a wide, genial smile.

"My dear Cranston! This is a delightful treat! I had no idea you were in New York. It was nice of you to come out and welcome me."

"I just returned a day or so ago from a hunting trip," Cranston said lazily.

"I trust you had good hunting?"

"Very good, indeed."

There was veiled challenge beneath this harmless interchange. These two smiling millionaires were grim foemen. Lamont Cranston was positive that Stark was a master criminal behind the shield of vast wealth, but he had no proof to back up that belief. Stark was in a similar predicament.

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He had begun to suspect that Lamont Cranston was The Shadow. But every time he tried to prove it, he ran into a blank wall that made his suspicion of Cranston seem utterly silly.

The advantage, however, now lay with Cranston. He was forcing events. His eyes gleamed when he saw that Millicent Whitney was on deck with her millionaire employer.

He wanted Millicent to be present when Clyde conducted his interview with Stark. Clyde had been well primed to explode a verbal bombshell for Millicent's benefit.

IT came at the close of the routine news interview.

"Too bad about young Howard Paxton," Clyde said. "I don't suppose you've heard of his death, Mr. Stark?"

"Death?" Stark echoed in a shocked tone. "Are you sure?"

"Paxton's body was washed ashore on your island the day after you sailed. We had the news by cable from Bermuda. The body was badly torn by sharks. It was dressed only in a bathing suit."

"How horrible!" Stark said. "I'm afraid I can guess what happened. Paxton was a strong, daring swimmer. A reckless one, too, apparently. I suppose he couldn't resist the lure of a moonlight swim, even in shark-infested waters."

"A shark didn't kill him," Clyde said. "Paxton was murdered! His skull was smashed in. The Bermuda police think that he was killed by some criminal and then thrown overboard."

Clyde's last statement was a cool falsehood. The Bermuda police knew nothing of Paxton's murder. His body had not been washed ashore. There had been no news cable. Clyde's knowledge of a shrewdly concealed crime came to him from Burbank, the contact man of The Shadow's organization.

Stark received the news without a quiver. But Clyde had expected that. He swung away from the poker face of the millionaire yachtsman and stared at Stark's pretty secretary.

Millicent's face was white with horror. For a moment, she swayed and seemed about to faint. Then she managed to get a grip on herself. To the deluded Millicent, Paxton was a faithless rascal, a man who had cruelly jilted her. But the thought of his violent death was horrifying.

"I'm sorry to hear that," she said, in a voice that was barely audible. "It will be a terrible blow for Mr. Paxton's wife in England. Has she been notified of the tragedy?"

"Wife?" Clyde said. "Paxton had no wife. He was unmarried."

"Are you sure?" Benedict Stark interposed hastily. "It seems to me that I heard Paxton mention that he had a wife in England."

Clyde shook his head. He was on safer ground now. He himself had cabled to England to find out all about the dead British scientist.

"He was a bachelor. He lived alone with his mother, when he was at home, in a small cottage in Surrey. It's queer that you and your secretary should both think he was married."

"Yes, isn't it?" Millicent gasped.

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She uttered a sound that was half laughter, half sob. She was fighting off an attack of hysteria. Clyde realized it instantly. He caught Millicent as she reeled. For a moment, she rested quivering in his arms, then she fought out of her grief and hysteria with a desperate effort.

Perhaps it was the grinding tone of Benedict Stark that helped restore her wits.

"Millicent's not well," Stark growled. "I'll take her to her cabin."

"I'm all right," Millicent faltered.

She proved it by standing upright and refusing Stark's assistance. His eyes were boring grimly into hers. She turned away and faced Clyde Burke.

"Naturally, the news of Mr. Paxton's death has upset me. We... we were quite good friends during the time that I knew him on the island. I... I can't imagine how I ever came to think that he was married. If you will excuse me, I'll go to my cabin."

"A good idea," Stark said, in a more suave tone. "You seem tired and overwrought. It will do you good to lie down, for a while."

His thick lips were curved in a complacent smile. But he would have been less reassured had he realized what was going on without his knowledge.

In turning, Millicent had moved so that she was facing Clyde. Her back was toward Stark and Bruce Clifton and Lamont Cranston. None of them was able to see the swift gesture she made toward the newspaper reporter.

Her clenched hand was held close to her bosom. She opened it suddenly and showed Clyde three extended fingers. Again she made that quick gesture. This time, only two fingers showed.

There was a beseeching look in Millicent's eyes. They cried silently but unmistakably: "Please! Come to me when you can. I've got to see you!"

Then she turned and left the deck, disappeared down the companionway to the aft cabins.

IT took Clyde only an instant to realize the meaning of the double signal Millicent had flashed to him with her extended fingers.

Three and two. Coupled with her quick departure for her own cabin, it could have only one meaning. It was the number of Millicent's cabin!

The number was probably thirty-two. Had it been five, Millicent would have merely opened her clenched hand once and showed him her four fingers and thumb. The double gesture meant the two digits of thirty-two.

Clyde decided to obey the summons of Stark's frightened secretary as soon as possible. He bade a courteous farewell to Stark. He moved toward the rope ladder that led to the press boat moored alongside the yacht.

"The Paxton case sounds quite mysterious," Stark said sneeringly. "I suppose a smart reporter like you will be catching the first boat to Bermuda, to solve it."

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"Not at all," Clyde rejoined. "I'm on a much bigger case right now. A New York mystery. I'm investigating the disappearance of an investment broker named Rutledge Mann. Perhaps you may have heard of him."

"I'm afraid I don't know the gentleman. What caused his disappearance? Was he kidnapped?"

"No one knows. He just vanished. If he was kidnapped for profit, the crooks are most peculiar. No ransom note was ever received. Strange, isn't it?"

Stark shrugged. He showed no interest in the conversation. If he was inwardly upset by the mention of Rutledge Mann, following so closely on the disclosure to Millicent that Paxton's last note to her had been a forgery, Stark didn't show it by the quiver of an eyelid. He was a man of iron nerve.

He yawned as Clyde descended the rope ladder to the press boat and vanished into its tiny cabin.

Clyde didn't remain in that cabin any longer than the time it took him to cross unseen to the other side of the craft. He was grimly determined to get back to the millionaire's yacht unobserved, and find out why Millicent was so anxious to see him alone.

Lowering himself over the far side of the press boat, he dropped quietly into the water. He swam toward the stern. Then he dived. By the time the press boat began its churning return to the Battery, Clyde had swum under water to a spot below the graceful overhang of the yacht's stern.

A dangling rope gave Clyde a handhold. He went up the rope hand over hand, like a dripping eel. There were no sailors in sight above the taffrail. The aft housing protected Clyde from the view of Stark and his visitors up forward.

In a moment, the Daily Classic reporter had ducked through a doorway and was softly descending an aft companionway to the lower deck.

He found Cabin 32 without any difficulty. But before he knocked on the door, he covered his wet tracks by using a bit of quick thinking.

There was a scrub pail and a mop near the corridor porthole. Clyde lowered the pail on its rope into the harbor water and brought it up full. He spilled the water on the floor of the corridor and soaked the mop.

If anyone noticed Clyde's wet trail on the floor, they would think it had been left by a clumsy sailor who had been doing some mopping.

Millicent opened her door the moment she heard Clyde's gentle knock. She closed the door behind him and locked it. Her face was deathly pale. She looked terrified.

But she was eager to talk. Clyde's lips tightened when he heard what she had to say. A quick chill ran through his blood.

The proof of a treacherous murder was in the keeping of this frightened girl. It was a proof that Millicent tremulously declared would pin the guilt of Paxton's murder on Benedict Stark!

She realized now that Paxton's last note to her had been a forged lie. A murderer had written it, to make Millicent think she had been jilted by a married man. Heartsick and humiliated, she had believed that lying note until a few moments ago. Now, she knew the truth.

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"I'm certain there are fingerprints on that note," she whispered to Clyde. "Poor Howard Paxton didn't make those prints. They were left by the murderer who wrote the note! I've got the paper safely hidden, but I'm afraid they'll find it. I want you to take it and —"

"Quick! Where is it? Let me have it!"

Suddenly, their quick whispering ceased. Someone was tiptoeing in the corridor outside the locked cabin door.

Clyde watched the knob. It turned slowly, as someone tested the door on the outside and found it locked.

Millicent plucked urgently at Clyde's arm. Silently she pointed toward an inner door. It led to Millicent's private bath. It was the only possible place to hide.

Clyde nodded. He began to retreat stealthily toward the bathroom.

THE person in the corridor outside was a sharp-eyed, dark-haired woman. It was Marie, the French maid whom Benedict Stark paid well to keep a watchful eye on his secretary.

Marie was doubly suspicious of Millicent since the yacht had left the tropics. The fact that Marie had not been able to find the note which Stark had forged enraged the sly maid.

Her suspicion was increased by the spilled water in the corridor. Marie knew instantly that no sailor could have been cleaning up with pail and mop. Stark's order about work of that sort were strict. All cleaning was done early in the morning, before the millionaire arose.

Marie climbed noiselessly to the aft deck. She saw the wet marks that the dripping Clyde had made between the rail and the companionway. She guessed that someone had swum around the stern and had gained the deck by climbing a dangling rope.

A dangerous intruder was aboard! He had already made contact with Millicent. He was locked with her inside her cabin!

Marie was no coward. She was as hard as nails in an emergency that required nerve and speed. A twitch lifted her skirt, displaying for an instant a pair of silken and shapely legs. Marie was wearing a garter gun.

She transferred the tiny and wicked-looking weapon to the pocket of her short jacket. Then, with a grim smile on her rouged lips, Marie hurried below to the locked cabin.

Her brisk knock brought Millicent to the door. Marie shoved instantly past the secretary and entered the room. She stood alertly, her sharp black eyes gazing about her.

"How dare you push into my room without being summoned?" Millicent said tensely. "What is the meaning of this?"

"I know what I'm doing! And I know what's going on. You've got a man hidden in this cabin!"

"You're crazy!"

"Not half as crazy as you are to think you can get away with it!"

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The gun flashed from Marie's pocket.

"Stand aside! If your unknown boy friend is smart, he'll come out of hiding with his hands up!"

She began a quick, cautious search. She examined the wardrobe closet, peered behind the dresser, took a quick look under the bed.

"You see?" Millicent said faintly. "There's no one here but me."

"I'll believe that after I've searched your bathroom."

Millicent gave a cry of simulated indignation. She sprang in front of the closed door, with outspread arms.

"This is unbearable! I demand that you leave at once! I'll summon Mr. Stark and have you discharged. Do you hear me?"

She was playing for time. She had no intention of calling for Stark, and Marie knew it. A few steps would have brought Millicent to the telephone that connected her with Stark's desk in his master cabin. But she remained where she stood, arms outstretched and face pale.

Marie darted suddenly at her. There was a quick tussle. Millicent was no match for the French maid. She was thrust aside. Marie flung open the door and entered with drawn gun.

There was no one in the bathroom!

The floor was wet. But so were the shower curtains. There was no way of proving that the wetness had not come from the shower which Millicent had taken earlier, while Marie herself was tidying her clothes in the cabin.

The enraged maid sprang to the bathroom porthole. She flung it open and peered out. She half expected to see the bobbing head of a male swimmer on the choppy surface of the harbor.

But all she could see was sunlight, a few circling gulls, and a long string of sand barges moving sluggishly behind a tug in the direction of Coney Island.

Marie uttered a most unladylike oath. She had expected to trap Clyde Burke. The reporter was the only man she could think of who could have sneaked into Millicent's cabin. Now, she was forced to stammer and apologize for her armed intrusion.

She began to feel frightened. Benedict Stark would be enraged when he learned how rashly his spy had behaved. He didn't want Millicent to realize that she was under surveillance of any kind.

Marie began to sing a different tune. She begged Millicent not to report her intrusion to Benedict Stark. She became abject, almost tearful.

Clyde Burke would have chuckled if he could have seen Marie's complete dismay.

BUT Clyde was a long way off by this time. He had used Millicent's delaying tactics to squirm out the extra-wide tropical porthole and swim under water toward the string of sand barges that Marie had noticed, a moment too late. Clyde was out of sight before the French maid's head popped into view.

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Rounding the last of the barges, Clyde hung on grimly to the tow until the barges veered close to the Brooklyn shore. Then he swam to a deserted dock and hauled himself from the river.

He broke into a watchman's deserted locker and exchanged his dripping clothes for dry garments. As soon as he could, Clyde got to a telephone where he could talk unobserved. He called a number unlisted in the New York telephone directory. A crisp voice replied:

"Burbank speaking."

Clyde made a full report of what had happened to him aboard the yacht of Benedict Stark. He told of the existence of a forged note with fingerprints on it that might be Stark's.

Unfortunately, the paper was still in the possession of Millicent. Clyde had not had time to get it. Without it, there was no proof to connect Stark with a brutal murder.

But Clyde grinned as he hung up the telephone. He had made a good start. Fresh facts had been uncovered.

Best of all, Lamont Cranston was still aboard the palatial yacht of Stark, the Prince of Evil. The Shadow himself was ready to move. Already, he was making a dangerous choice!

CHAPTER IV. THE WRONG SHADOW

EVENTS aboard Stark's yacht were beginning to develop exactly the way The Shadow hoped.

The medical inspection at Quarantine had been completed. The pilot was aboard, to take the yacht to its final anchorage up the Hudson. Yet Lamont Cranston made no move to leave on the press boat. He continued to talk lazily to his host and Bruce Clifton.

He saw a quick glance pass between Clifton and Stark. There was annoyance and apprehension in Clifton's eyes. Stark shook his head slightly in a faint negative.

Stark's glance rejected Clifton's mute appeal. Although no word had been spoken, The Shadow knew perfectly the meaning of the brief double look.

"Get rid of this fellow Cranston," Clifton had signaled. "I don't trust him."

"I prefer him to remain aboard," Stark's glance replied.

He turned smilingly toward Cranston.

"Why not stay on the yacht for the short trip up the Hudson to my final anchorage? I can promise you an excellent cocktail later on."

"Splendid!" Cranston replied.

"You'll have to excuse Mr. Clifton and myself for a few moments. We have a small banking problem to discuss. Very tiresome, but quite necessary. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. Mr. Clifton is the manager of your branch bank at Herndale, I understand?"

"Quite so," Clifton said.

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His gray eyebrows twitched. He seemed nervous. Stark linked arms with him and the two went below.

"I'll smoke a cigar," Cranston called after them, "and have a pleasant look at the Manhattan skyline while we're coming up the harbor."

But the moment the two men disappeared, all the vapid laziness went out of Cranston. He stepped forward with a quick, catlike bound.

His goal was a ventilator pipe amidships. Clyde Burke had passed close to that pipe earlier, while he was waiting to interview Benedict Stark. Clyde had carried a leather brief case when he first came aboard. He didn't have it when he left.

Cranston found the briefcase tucked snugly out of sight between the ventilator and a bulkhead wall. He carried it aft, where he couldn't be seen.

The yacht captain and the harbor pilot were up on the bridge with the quartermaster. The superstructure of the vessel made it impossible for them to see Cranston. No deck sailors were about at the moment.

Crouched near the rail, Lamont Cranston opened the leather brief case and withdrew its contents. He was holding the black cloak and slouch hat of The Shadow!

He didn't attempt to don the disguise. There was a reason for this. The hat was stitched securely to the cloak. Anticipating the emergency which now faced him, The Shadow had prepared well.

He picked up a small length of heavy chain from an open tool chest and dropped it into a pocket of the cloak. Carrying the weighted cloak and hat over one arm, The Shadow leaned over the rail.

A Staten Island ferry was plowing ponderously along half a mile away. The Shadow waited until the ferry's hoarse whistle blew. Then he dropped the empty brief case overboard. The echo of the whistle covered the sound of the splash.

An instant later, The Shadow himself was over the rail. But he had no intention of throwing himself overboard. His dangling feet found a secure resting place on a three-inch ornamental ledge that ran the entire length of the yacht's hull.

He was on the starboard side of the yacht and reasonably safe from discovery. All that was visible between him and the smoky Brooklyn shore was open water. The ferry and one or two other craft were well off to port.

The Shadow inched forward along his precarious ledge. By crouching down and holding his head low, he was able to pass unseen below the rims of the line of portholes.

Luck was with him. Had he made his bold attempt five minutes earlier, the sharp eyes of Marie would have discovered his presence. But Marie had already satisfied herself that her suspicions of Clyde Burke were groundless. She was now apologizing profusely to Millicent for her impertinent intrusion.

THE SHADOW had no trouble locating Stark's cabin. He could hear the voices of the two men coming through the circular opening above his bent head. He listened intently. The weighted black cloak with its stitched hat lay loosely over his left arm.

Clifton's sharp, querulous tone was loudest:

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"Of course, I kept your name out of it! I told Andrew Marshall it was a matter between him and the Herndale bank. I reminded Marshall that the bank had advanced him money when he needed it. I tried in a nice way to talk him out of exercising his option."

"What did Marshall say?" Stark growled.

"He reminded me that the option was part of the legal contract. He intends to pay off your loan in full and assume complete personal charge of the factory. He was quite angry when I insisted on the bank getting some of the fat profits. He said that he himself had built up the business, by working like a slave for five years.

"Strictly speaking, of course, Marshall is right. He has paid his interest promptly. Now, he is returning the entire principal you loaned him. The success of his factory is due entirely to Andrew Marshall."

Stark's laugh was like the rasp of steel.

"I loaned the fool the money for an amusing reason. I built Marshall up so that I could have the pleasure of breaking him after he made a success. I'm going to put him in the gutter, and take over his profitable factory lock, stock and barrel! Did you get tough with him, as I ordered?"

"I did. It was all a mistake. He told me to go to hell! I really believe he'd have kicked me bodily from his office, if I hadn't quickly changed my tune and pretended that he had misunderstood what I said."

Stark laughed again, with ugly emphasis.

"A spunky gentleman, eh? That's the kind of man I get the most pleasure out of crushing. Now stop fidgeting, and pay attention. I've got one or two things in my safe that will make my plan clearer."

There was a thud of footsteps as Stark crossed the cabin. On his precarious ledge below the porthole, The Shadow heard a metallic rasp as the massive door of Stark's safe swung open.

This was exactly what The Shadow wanted.

He jammed the black slouch hat on his head. The stitched cloak hung downward, almost completely obscuring Cranston's face except for the hawk nose and gleaming eyes. Deliberately, he allowed his shrouded face to appear briefly outside the circle of the open porthole.

He heard a shrill scream from Bruce Clifton:

"The Shadow!"

Clifton backed up in an agony of fear. But Benedict Stark was made of sterner stuff. He had dropped to one knee in front of the opened safe. His head whirled as he heard Clifton's cry. He saw the grim apparition.

With a bound, Stark was on his feet.

A gun leaped from his hip pocket into his hand. With almost a single motion, Stark leveled the weapon and fired through the porthole. Three scarlet flashes spat in swift succession.

The Shadow uttered a yell of mortal agony. His face vanished from Stark's sight. There was a heavy splash from the water that foamed alongside the speeding yacht.

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A moment later, the ugly visage of Benedict Stark thrust itself into view through the porthole. He uttered an oath of delight as he saw the black-clad body of The Shadow drifting astern, already partly submerged.

Stark didn't know that he was staring at a weighted cloak attached to the stitched brim of a hat. The balance between the natural buoyancy of the cloak and the weight of the chain in its pocket made a lifelike counterfeit of a slowly-sinking body.

Stark's face withdrew. His voice roared an urgent command to Bruce Clifton.

"Quick! Up on deck! I think I've done for The Shadow! I want to make sure."

THEIR feet raced away. The Shadow heard their hurried departure. He had been saved from discovery by two facts.

The first was the natural curve of the yacht's hull, which had partially screened him as he inched forward along his narrow ledge. The second – and most important – was the speed of the yacht itself. It made the drifting black bundle recede swiftly astern, thus drawing the grim gaze of Stark astern also.

Stark was completely deceived by a trick that depended solely on boldness and timing.

Quickly, The Shadow wriggled into the empty cabin. It was not a difficult task. The portholes of Stark's yacht had been built purposely oversize for tropic cruising.

The Shadow darted noiselessly to the open safe. He knew he had barely a few seconds to examine its contents. Like lightning, his fingers picked up and discarded several packets of papers. A quick glance sufficed for each.

Suddenly, he stiffened. He was staring at a familiar typed paragraph. It was a copy of the radio message concerning Rutledge Mann which The Shadow had intercepted in Bermuda in his role of Portuguese Joe. Below the top sheet of the packet were other sheets – earlier reports about The Shadow's kidnapped agent.

He scanned them with gleaming eyes. He hoped to find some clue to the actual whereabouts of Rutledge Mann. But he was disappointed. Each of the reports was like the others, merely a brief statement that Mann refused to talk and was growing steadily weaker under daily torture.

The Shadow dared not delay another second. He fled from the cabin. But he did not race up the stairs to the deck, as Clifton and Benedict Stark had done. He ran down a narrow corridor to a rear companionway. Climbing it, he slipped unseen into the deck lounge room near the stern.

Pausing only to rumple his hair, he emerged with blinking eyes into the sunshine as Lamont Cranston. He seemed very sleepy and very startled.

He recoiled with dazed surprise when he saw the gun in Benedict Stark's clenched hand.

"Good heavens, gentlemen! What has happened? I dropped off for a doze in the lounge. Then I heard shots – or I thought I did –"

Clifton and Stark were staring at Cranston with an expression of almost ludicrous amazement. Their thoughts were visible on their faces. They had suspected that The Shadow was Lamont Cranston. They had just seen the Shadow shot and drowned. And yet here was Cranston smiling sleepily at them, very much unhurt!

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Stark explained harshly what had happened. Cranston gasped.

"The Shadow? How could he have got on board? And what was he after? He sounds like a criminal. I always thought that The Shadow worked with the police, not against them."

"You thought wrong," Stark snapped. "He's not only a criminal – he's a dead criminal! And I've got a damned good idea how he managed to get aboard my yacht!"

A shrewd look flamed suddenly in Stark's eyes.

"Come with me, both of you, and I'll show you what I mean. I just remembered something that I should never have allowed myself to forget."

He raced along the deck on his short, muscular legs, followed by his two guests. His goal was the ventilator pipe where The Shadow had picked up a leather brief case earlier.

Stark gestured grimly to Clifton. "Look behind that pipe and tell me what you see."

Clifton obeyed. He was puzzled when he turned with empty hands to confront Stark.

"There's nothing behind the pipe. Just an empty space between the ventilator shaft and the bulkhead."

"Exactly!" Stark rasped. "It proves my point. I know now who The Shadow really is. He's a newspaperman who calls himself Clyde Burke! Burke is the man I shot, and Burke is The Shadow!"

"But... but Mr. Burke left the yacht long ago," Cranston said mildly. "He went away on the press boat."

"That's, right," Clifton agreed. "I myself saw him descend the rope ladder at quarantine."

"Maybe he did, but he managed to sneak back aboard my yacht. A good swimmer could pull a trick like that easily."

CLIFTON stared at Stark.

"I still don't understand what you are driving at. How does the fact that there is nothing behind your ventilator pipe prove that Clyde Burke was The Shadow?"

"Because there was something there when he first came aboard! A leather briefcase. I saw Burke drop it there before he started his newspaper interview with me. I wondered at the time, why he did it. Then, like a fool, I forgot all about it."

Stark's indrawn breath made his nostrils quiver.

"Clyde Burke had the robe and hat of The Shadow hidden in that brief case! When he sneaked back to my yacht, he donned the robe, threw the brief case overboard, and then made a suicidal attempt to get into my cabin and burglarize the safe."

Laughter grated unpleasantly from Stark.

"At any rate, he's dead now. Naturally, I'm sorry I killed him. But Clifton, you're a witness that The Shadow himself had a gun and tried to shoot first."

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Clifton agreed suavely to a fact that Lamont Cranston knew was a lie. The Shadow had drawn no gun. He had merely showed his shrouded face for an instant at a porthole. Benedict Stark had attempted to commit murder. The fact that he had failed was no fault of his.

The Shadow did not enlighten him to the real state of affairs. It would never do to let Stark know that, at this very instant, he was less than twelve inches away from the smiling and well-dressed figure of The Shadow himself!

Besides, Stark was getting fresh information from a new arrival. Marie had rushed into view on the deck. She had heard the shooting. Excitedly, she asked what had happened. When she was told, she uttered a shrill cry.

"Mon Dieu! The Shadow, eh? I can tell you who he was! He was Clyde Burke, that newspaperman from the Daily Classic."

"Are you sure?" Cranston asked.

"Positive, m'sieu'," Marie replied. "It was he who swam back to the yacht from the press boat. I saw his wet footprints on the deck. Who else could it be? All others on board are accounted for, no?"

Marie explained what had happened below. But she didn't tell the entire truth. She altered her story because of the presence of Clifton and Lamont Cranston.

She didn't want to disclose that Millicent had talked with Clyde inside her locked cabin. That was a piece of news which the sly Marie thought better to communicate privately to Stark.

She pretended that Clyde had entered Millicent's cabin during the latter's absence.

Unwittingly, Marie removed The Shadow's last worry. Marie's story informed him that Clyde had made a successful getaway.

He also knew that Clyde was in no danger as a result of Stark's present belief that he was The Shadow. Cranston would find an opportunity to send Clyde to visit Stark again in his role of reporter for the Daily Classic. The fact that Clyde was alive and unwounded would absolve him from suspicion of being The Shadow.

A new mystery would be handed the shrewd Benedict Stark. Had he really killed The Shadow? And if not, whom had he killed?

Cranston chuckled inwardly. He would give Benedict Stark plenty to think about.

Meanwhile the yacht had proceeded up the Hudson River to its anchorage off the 125th Street landing. Cranston waited for the cocktails which Stark had promised. But none seemed to be forthcoming.

Stark became restive. He seemed relieved, however, when the wireless man came into the cabin with a yellow envelope.

"Message for you, sir."

"Thank you."

Stark ripped open the envelope and glanced swiftly at the message it contained. He thrust the sheet back into his pocket and gave a short ejaculation of disgust.

"I'm sorry, Cranston. Our cocktail party is off. I've got to go ashore at once for an unexpected business appointment."

He spoke deftly, but The Shadow knew he was lying. The Prince of Evil had made the mistake of standing with his back to the mirror of his cabin sideboard when he had pretended to read the message. The paper he had scanned so hastily and crammed in his pocket was blank!

The Shadow divined the basis for Stark's hurry to get ashore. Rutledge Mann was still obstinate in the unknown rat hole where men had taken him after his kidnapping. Stark was eager to torture and question Rutledge Mann before he died!

By trailing Stark, The Shadow might be able to locate and save the life of a loyal agent.

A swift little tender from the yacht carried Lamont Cranston ashore in company with Stark and Clifton.

The Shadow's plans were still developing properly. His airplane arrival in New York had given him ample time to cover certain contingencies before the arrival of the yacht. He had known that Benedict Stark usually anchored off the 125th Street landing.

Everything now depended on the skill of a smart little taxi driver named Moe Shrevnitz, another secret agent of The Shadow.

CHAPTER V. A SLIPPERY FOE

THERE was a line of taxicabs outside the entrance of the 125th Street pier. Nearby was the pier of the Fort Lee ferry.

The cab of Moe Shrevnitz was second in line. There was nothing unusual in that. The unusual thing was that no matter how many fares appeared and drove away, Moe's cab remained second in line!

He had bribed his fellow hackers. He had explained his bribe with a plausible excuse. Moe hadn't driven over every inch of Manhattan's streets for nothing. He was smart.

Every time a fare drove away in the cab at the head of the line, a taxi from the rear rolled forward and swung in front of Moe. In this manner, Moe was able to keep his place and watch for the arrival of Benedict Stark.

He knew that legally he had no right to refuse a premature fare. This little trick saved him trouble and argument.

Moe was still second in line when he saw Benedict Stark appear from the street entrance of the 125th Street pier. Moe had expected Stark to be alone. But he saw that Stark had two companions with him. One was Lamont Cranston. The other man was Clifton, a complete stranger to Moe.

The trio moved toward the first taxi. But Moe was all set. A faint double toot of his horn tipped off the hacker in front. The first cab scooted promptly away.

Before Stark could think too much about it, Moe was out of his seat and had the door of his own taxi invitingly open.

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"Hop in, gents. Service with a smile!"

His grin was so cheerful that Cranston's chuckle seemed justified. Even Stark smiled faintly. All three got in.

"Where can I drop you gentlemen before I go on to keep my business appointment?" Stark asked.

Cranston turned toward Clifton.

"I'd be honored if you'd stop at the Cobalt Club and have a highball with me before you return to Herndale."

Clifton shook his head.

"I'd like to, but I won't have time. I can catch a train at the 125th Street station. Just drop me off when we get across town to Park Avenue."

Cranston didn't insist. But he was puzzled. He had suspected that Stark's intent as to bring Clifton along with him to whatever mysterious destination he had in mind. But such did not appear to be the case.

Clifton got out of the cab at Park Avenue, shook hands with Stark and Cranston and hurried through the door of the New York Central's uptown station.

Just before he vanished, Clifton glanced back. There was a thin smile on his gray, fox-like face. Cranston sensed mockery in that smile but he could find no explanation for it.

He had no time to speculate. The cab headed toward the Cobalt Club, to drop off Cranston. Again Cranston made his hospitable offer of a highball. But Stark refused. He too, had that strange smile on his lips when Cranston entered the swanky Cobalt Club, where he usually stayed when he happened to be in town.

Cranston had delayed a moment on the sidewalk, hoping he might hear what destination Stark mentioned to Moe. But Stark kept his mouth shut.

The Shadow, however, was not to be balked. Stark would have to tell Moe where to take him – and The Shadow knew he could depend on Moe to repeat that information almost immediately.

He ducked back to the sidewalk from the lobby of the Cobalt Club. The sidewalk was well crowded. Cranston's figure was effectively screened. He watched the corner where a red traffic light had temporarily halted Moe's cab.

Moe seemed to be amusing himself during the brief delay by idly playing with the brake pedal. His stoplight kept going on and off.

Cranston watched the ruddy flashes intently. Some seemed to be longer than others. Actually, Moe was using his stoplight to send the dots and dashes of the Morse Code.

Cranston watched the letters of a word take form:

M – A – M – M – O

That was all he caught. The word was never finished. The traffic light had changed to green. Moe, careful not to draw suspicion to himself by an unexplained delay, was off like a streak with the rest of the avenue traffic.

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But Cranston had caught the signal. Mammoth! That was the word. It could be nothing else. Stark had ordered Moe to drive him to the Mammoth Building at the corner of Lexington and Forty-second.

The Shadow hurried around the corner to a garage where a trim little car of his own was waiting. It was gassed and oiled and ready. It always was.

The Shadow was behind the wheel and away without a moment's delay. He sent the swift car heading toward the Mammoth Building. He was grimly eager to find out why a clever man like Benedict Stark had picked so public a place for his destination. It looked as if Stark were planning to switch cabs and ditch Moe.

The Shadow's lips tightened. He drove as fast as the law allowed.

MOE, on the contrary, drove his taxi as slowly as he dared. His game was to waste as much time as possible, in order to give Cranston an opportunity to get to the Mammoth Building.

He halted outside the Lexington Avenue entrance to the towering skyscraper. Stark paid his fare and added a generous tip. Then he vanished into the lobby.

Moe allowed his quarry thirty seconds; then he followed. If Stark was in the lobby, Moe intended to pause at the candy stand and buy a chocolate bar to explain his intrusion.

But there was no sign of Benedict Stark.

Either he had taken one of the elevators, or had hurried through the marble arcade that led to the Forty-second Street exit of the huge building. A glance at the electric indicator board showed Moe that Stark could not have taken an elevator. The tiny dots of moving light were all near the top of the indicator.

Stark must have ducked through the arcade.

Moe proved it with a quick dart through the marble corridor. Stark was outside on the sidewalk. He was summoning a battered-looking taxi. Moe, having seen all he wanted, beat a hasty retreat to his own cab on Lexington Avenue. A quick turn into Forty-second would put him right back on the tail of Stark.

But Moe discovered, to his horror, that a quick turn was impossible, because of the heavy traffic.

For a moment, Moe was paralyzed. Then he ran on foot to the corner, with the idea of signaling another cab – one already headed in the direction Stark's taxi was going.

He was spared, however, the indignity of spending his own money to ride in a taxi. As he watched Stark's hack speeding west through Forty-second Street, he became aware of another car not far behind it.

One glance, and Moe relaxed. He recognized the sedan of Lamont Cranston.

Cranston followed the fugitive cab through Forty-second Street and then south along Broadway. At Fourteenth Street the cab turned east and then went uptown again.

It was a strange and leisurely chase. The taxi driver ahead didn't act as if he suspected pursuit. He made no effort to twist and dodge through traffic. But he certainly did cover the town!

He seemed to have all the time in the world. He even drove Stark around Central Park. But he stopped at last. And the place where he stopped was the last spot in the world Cranston would have thought of.

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Grand Central Station!

Was Stark leaving town? Was Rutledge Mann being held a prisoner somewhere outside the city limits? The Shadow felt a surge of baffled amazement at the way things were turning out.

But complete wonder came to him when he saw the face of the man he had been trailing.

It wasn't Benedict Stark at all. It was someone whom Cranston had last seen far uptown.

Bruce Clifton!

Obviously, Clifton's stop at 125th Street had been merely a trick. He had taken no train. He must have driven swiftly downtown to the Mammoth Building, to cooperate with Stark.

Stark had not entered the cab which Moe had seen him hail. He had merely summoned it to the curb and pretended to enter. Clifton, already hidden inside, had led Cranston on a wild–goose chase while Stark vanished.

Evidently Clifton's job was now finished. Cranston trailed him across the marble rotunda of the terminal, saw him buy a ticket and enter the gate where the suburban train that served Herndale waited.

Clifton actually took the train. The Shadow waited until the gate was closed and the train departed. Then he went back to his sedan.

That finished Clifton – and left The Shadow temporarily stymied. It was further proof that in the person of Benedict Stark, The Shadow was fighting the brainiest rogue of his entire career.

The Shadow stopped at the first secluded telephone booth he could locate and put in a hurried call for Burbank, his trusted contact man. The Shadow was desperately trying to pick up the loose ends of a ruined web he had so carefully spun to trap a criminal.

He was no closer to Rutledge Mann, his kidnapped agent, than when he started!

But fate was at almost this very instant putting Moe Shrevnitz back on the trail.

SATISFIED that Lamont Cranston had intervened personally in the pursuit of Stark, Moe walked leisurely back into the lobby of the Mammoth Building to buy a pack of cigarettes.

Almost the first person he saw was Benedict Stark!

Stark had just stepped from an express elevator. He didn't notice Moe in the crowd. Moe, who was no fool, guessed at once what had happened.

Stark, having summoned a taxi under Moe's watchful eye, had calmly waited until Moe darted back to his own cab. Then Stark had reentered the Mammoth lobby from Forty–second Street. He had taken one of the elevators to the tower leaving Moe watching Cranston take off on a wild–goose chase.

This time Moe couldn't be fooled so easily.

He was probably the most efficient man in Manhattan, when it came to an automobile tail job. He followed Stark's taxi without betraying his grim surveillance. Unlike Cranston, Moe's tailing job was not a

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long-winded affair. The trail led straight downtown to the crooked streets of Greenwich Village.

Stark left his taxi at a busy corner and walked down a side street. He went into a cheap bar and grill and ordered a glass of beer. He stood near the front end of the bar, so that by turning his head slightly he could look out the window.

Moe watched all this from the doorway of a nearby grocery shop. Stark's interest seemed to be directed at a dingy brownstone dwelling directly across the street from the bar. The house appeared to be empty. Shades were drawn on all the windows. The glass panes were grimy with dirt.

Finishing his glass of beer, Stark ordered another. He seemed to be waiting deliberately. Perhaps he expected a signal from the deserted house across the street. But none came. Stark seemed content to wait indefinitely.

Moe hated to leave his quarry even for an instant. But he didn't want the responsibility of handling this important assignment alone. He was well aware that the rescue — perhaps the very life — of the kidnapped Rutledge Mann depended on what happened in the next few minutes.

Moe took a chance. He beat a hasty retreat to a telephone booth, called up Burbank and made a quick report. Then he went back to his post in the doorway of the grocery shop.

To his relief, he saw that Stark was still at the bar. For fifteen minutes, Moe lurked in his dark doorway, hoping for a break in this queer stalemate.

The break came without warning. It came, not from Stark but from a point directly behind Moe Shrevnitz.

A hand touched Moe's back. A voice hissed a single word in his ear:

"Dismissed!"

It was the sibilant whisper of The Shadow!

Moe was well trained. He left the doorway without a backward glance. Moving quietly along the sidewalk, he returned to where he had left his taxi. His job was finished. A power greater than his own had relieved him from a dangerous assignment.

It would be hard to recognize The Shadow in the shambling figure of the man who had taken Moe's place. He was white-haired and bleary-eyed. His clothes looked as if they had been fished from an ash barrel.

A tray was suspended from his neck by a piece of frayed rope. On the tray were pencils, shoelaces and a few sticks of chewing gum. It looked like the pitiful array of a vagabond street hawker.

Benedict Stark paid no attention to the old street vender when he finally emerged from the bar and grill. He walked to the far corner of the street. The Shadow was tempted to follow, but a sixth sense warned him to remain where he was. It was well he did.

Stark went no farther than the corner. He crossed the street to the opposite side, then returned in the direction of the dilapidated brownstone dwelling which The Shadow recognized from the description Moe Shrevnitz had given Burbank.

Stark entered the basement of the building. A few moments later, the old pencil merchant was at the same spot.

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THE SHADOW found the closed basement door easy to open. The lock was a primitive affair. The door opened without sound.

It was pitch-dark inside. Not a sound was audible. The Shadow listening intently, had a queer suspicion that Stark was no longer in the house.

His suspicion was increased by the feel of a cold draft of breeze against his cheek. The draft came from the rear. The back door seemed to be open.

The Shadow proved it by lighting an electric torch and following the trail of Stark's dusty prints on the unswept floor. The prints continued outside the opened rear door. The muddy back yard made them easy to follow. They led to a rear fence, beyond which was a narrow paved alley between the brick walls of two towering warehouses.

Muddy marks on the pavement suggested that Stark had scaled the fence and raced through the alley to the rear street. There was no sign of him. But he could easily have made a quick getaway in a taxi.

It looked as if the clever Stark had pulled another of his vanishing acts to throw any possible pursuer off the trail. But The Shadow was not so sure.

The Shadow usually obeyed his hunches. He returned to the basement of the shuttered and deserted house.

Painstakingly, he searched it from cellar to top floor. He was careful to make not the slightest sound. He moved from room to room with the soundless swirl of a ghost.

He could find no evidence that a human being had been in this dusty old dwelling for many months. The rooms were bare. There wasn't a stick of furniture. Moldy wall paper was beginning to peel from the dank walls. Every door was wide open.

The Shadow began to mistrust his strange hunch.

But the feeling of tension within him increased when he reached the top floor. Here he noticed something different. Not all the doors were open. One was closed. It was the only closed door The Shadow had seen in the entire house.

He tiptoed to the barrier. There was no keyhole, no way to see inside. Gently, he laid his hand on the panel, as he prepared to tackle the lock.

He received an unpleasant surprise as he touched the smooth door. It was cold and solid under his palm. The door was steel!

Listening carefully, The Shadow could detect no sound inside the sealed room. Was it empty like the others? He turned the knob slowly, so that its movement would be invisible to anyone lurking within the room. At once, he received his second surprise.

It was not a sealed room. The door was unlocked. It began to open under the feather-like pressure of The Shadow's hand on the knob.

The gun in The Shadow's left hand tightened. He peered cautiously through the door's slowly widening crack.

Suddenly, he stiffened, as if in pain.

A grim look crossed his face. With a quick gesture, The Shadow flung the unlocked steel door wide open.
The Shadow was staring at the face of Rutledge Mann!

CHAPTER VI. HOUSE OF HORROR

IT was a face from which all semblance of reason had fled. Mann's eyes were wide-open and glassy. His swollen tongue lolled from his mouth. Strange sounds babbled from his lips. He was delirious.

Every stitch of clothing had been stripped from his body.

His chest and ribs seemed to be almost one solid bruise. He had been tortured systematically and horribly. The sight of his fingernails brought a quick gasp of anger from The Shadow.

With a bound, The Shadow was across the threshold of the room. Rutledge Mann lay bound hand and foot on a cheap cot that stood against the wall. The Shadow slashed his bonds.

He bent swiftly to pick up his unconscious agent. But he didn't complete the gesture. Instinctively, his glance traveled backward toward the steel door of the room. He had heard no sound. But the door was no longer open.

The Shadow was a prisoner!

Twin automatics gleamed in his hands. He was no longer the old vagabond he had appeared to be on the sidewalk outside the mysterious brownstone dwelling. His deep-set eyes glowed with a terrible flame.

The walls, ceiling and floor of the chamber were of steel. There was a single closet. The Shadow flung open its door. The closet was empty.

Laughter filled the room with a sudden reverberation. It was impossible to tell where the mocking sound came from. It seemed to arise from many points at once. The mechanical quality of the laughter suggested that the sound was being reproduced electrically.

The Shadow stared at the peculiar knobs that studded the walls of the room.

They made a line around the four walls. They were about six inches apart, four feet or so from the level of the floor. Each was the size of a small doorknob. They seemed to be made of dull, unpolished silver.

Abruptly, the laughter ceased. For a second or two, there was silence. Then a voice spoke:

"Welcome to The Shadow!"

The challenging syllables of that greeting were metallic and inhuman. If Benedict Stark were talking from some point of vantage outside the room, he was talking through a disk filter that drained every bit of humanity out of his jeering voice.

"I need not tell you at this late date," the voice continued, "that you were deliberately lured to this house, Mr. Shadow. The possession of your kidnapped agent, Rutledge Mann, made a very satisfactory lure. Therefore, I used your own eagerness to —"

The Shadow whirled suddenly. He raced toward the drawn shade on the single window of the room.

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The top-floor room in which he was now a prisoner was at the front of the house. By whipping up the shade and smashing out the glass of the dirt-encrusted window, he might attract police attention.

But as the shade flew up at The Shadow's frenzied clutch, he knew how vain was his hope of signaling his plight to the outside world. He was facing solid steel!

There were two shades on the window. The steel plate was between the inner and outer shade. The outside shade hid the presence of the steel. There was no way to get at the window and smash the glass.

"Empty your guns!" the ominous voice rasped.

The Shadow ignored the order. While those weapons were in his hands, there was some slight shred of hope. His unknown captor would scarcely dare enter the steel-walled room and face the flaming muzzles of The Shadow. The marksmanship of The Shadow was too well known.

HOWEVER, The Shadow had no opportunity to test his aim. He was standing directly in front of one of those strange silver knobs in the wall. Without warning, blinding light leaped from the surface of the knob.

It was jagged, like a bolt of lightning. Actually, that's what it was – man-made lightning. The knobs on the opposite walls of the room formed spark gaps. The purple flash leaped across the room. It passed directly through the body of The Shadow!

It didn't kill. Some cunning manipulation of voltage and amperage robbed the electric flash of death. But it carried a stunning power.

The Shadow's body stiffened. He felt a surge of agony through every nerve and fiber. His tortured muscles tightened.

The spasm jerked the triggers of both his guns. Twin bullets roared at the floor.

For a second, the purple flash vanished. Then it crackled again. Off and on it flashed, at the will of The Shadow's unseen captor. Each time, the contracting fingers of The Shadow sent twin bullets flaming. When the current ceased finally and he was able to stagger erect, his guns were empty and useless. They slipped from his partly paralyzed fingers.

The voice laughed.

"Thank you! I could easily have killed you, but I prefer to keep you alive for a bit of questioning. Kindly pick up Rutledge Mann. Carry him into that closet which I noticed you examine a moment ago."

Again, The Shadow disobeyed. He had nothing to lose by trying, however vainly, to fight back at his unknown captor. He raced across the room to the locked steel door. He had a small instrument in his hand, capable of tackling any normal lock – if only he could find the lock!

He couldn't locate it. While he worked feverishly, laughter from somewhere mocked him.

The laughter increased as The Shadow backed up. The door was forcing him backward. The whole outer side of the room was closing in on him!

Rapidly, the square room became a rectangle. The space grew narrower and narrower. The Shadow found himself hemmed in close to the inert figure of Rutledge Mann.

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He picked up his helpless agent and stood at bay within the narrowing compass of those closing walls. Another ten seconds would crush the lives from both the prisoners.

But before the walls clanged together, The Shadow made a quick leap. The door of the closet toward which the voice had directed him, was wide open. With Mann in his arms, The Shadow sprang into the closet.

He barely made it in time.

The Shadow realized that he had been forced into an elevator. The entire closet began slowly to descend.

REACHING under his ragged vagabond's coat, The Shadow produced a tiny electric torch. Its thin, yellow beam illuminated the floor and walls of the closet. It seemed no different from an ordinary closet, except that it was built of steel. Also, there was a row of peculiar holes in the rear wall. They looked like small metallic knotholes.

The closet's slow descent enabled The Shadow to estimate the distance it was traveling. When it stopped, at last, he knew that he and Rutledge Mann had been carried down a straight shaft to a point well below the level of the basement.

A square opening appeared. There was blackness beyond the opening. The beam of the tiny torch was too feeble to tell The Shadow the nature of the peril he was facing.

"Step out!" the harsh voice of his foe ordered.

The Shadow stood rigid and still.

Then the water came. It spat in powerful jets from the small openings at the back of the closet. Steam came with the water. It was boiling hot. It cooked the flesh of the two victims wherever it splashed.

Racked with pain, The Shadow was forced to advance. The elevator door closed behind him. Staggering with the weight of Rutledge Mann, The Shadow advanced slowly through pitch-darkness.

"Halt!" the voice said grimly.

Light came with blinding suddenness. The Shadow found himself standing in the center of a steel cage. The bars of the cage were set too close together to afford any hope of escape. He laid Rutledge Mann gently on the metal floor of the grim enclosure.

For an instant, he feared the proximity of a wild beast. But he saw with a quick glance that, except for himself and Mann, the cage was empty.

THE SHADOW advanced toward the bars, then stopped abruptly. A gasp came from his lips.

He had heard a buzzing hum. It was accompanied by a peculiar odor. The Shadow's sniffing nostrils recognized that odor. It was the smell of ozone, the fresh, clean smell that comes after a violent thunderstorm.

A powerful electric current was knocking atoms of nascent oxygen out of the air. Only a high-tension current could do that trick.

"I see you have already guessed the nature of my weapon for keeping you safely within this cage," the voice jeered. "You're quite correct. The bars of the cage are charged with a tremendous amperage. The hum you

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hear comes from a powerful generator in the vault from which I am observing you. If you touch a bar of the cage, you'll be electrocuted. If you don't believe me, try it!"

The Shadow recoiled. His involuntary retreat took him a half dozen steps away from the unconscious figure of Rutledge Mann.

Instantly, a barred partition dropped between the two prisoners.

"I am now ready to hear your confession," the voice jeered. "I know that you are The Shadow! I've known it ever since a ragged old street vender followed Benedict Stark into this brownstone house. But who is The Shadow?"

The Shadow was silent.

"You are one of two men," the voice went on harshly. "Either you are Lamont Cranston – or you are a damned newspaperman who calls himself Clyde Burke. I suspect you are really Clyde Burke. But I intend to make sure. Confess!"

"You can't terrify me with threats."

"Perhaps you'll be more concerned when I tell you that only a complete confession of your real identity will save the life of Rutledge Mann. Keep silent – and you'll have the pleasure of seeing him roasted alive!"

There was triumph and cruelty in the hidden voice.

"Watch the floor of the other partition in the cage!"

The Shadow gasped. The steel plates under the unconscious body of Rutledge Mann were turning a faint pink. The Shadow's eyes were piercing flame as he watched. The color came from heat!

The pink was deepening to crimson. The smell of scorched flesh became horribly noticeable.

"Stop!"

The Shadow's cry was a hoarse shout. It was the shriek of a man who has reached the end of his self-control.

"I'll talk! I'll tell you everything you want to know. But don't kill Mann!"

The rose flush faded from the steel floor of the partition where Rutledge Mann lay.

"Confess!" the unseen voice snarled. "Are you Clyde Burke? I'll give you sixty seconds. I want to know the exact whereabouts of Burbank, your contact man. I also want to know the location of your sanctum."

The Shadow seemed unable to utter a coherent sound. His words were a terrified mumble. But behind the screen of a faked terror, his nimble brain was working. He knew that the electrified bars of the cage held unleashed death. To leap forward and try to wrench open the barred gate of the cage was suicide.

Electricity was the strength of his unseen foe.

But electricity was also the master criminal's most serious weakness! None knew better than The Shadow how quickly electricity could be attacked by a resolute man and transformed into nothingness.

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His keen eye had noted the trail of a wire that connected with the charged bars of the cage. The thickness of that wire where it joined the cage was uneven. Part of the insulation had been worn off.

The Shadow was still clutching in his hand the tiny electric torch that his unseen foe had not bothered to take from him. Both ends of the torch were metal.

The arm of The Shadow heaved suddenly forward. He hurled the torch at the bars. Every atom of skill in hand and wrist went into that desperate throw.

The flashlight struck a bar of the cage and the exposed end of the feed wire simultaneously. It formed a perfect short circuit. The high-tension current leaped through the easiest channel – the length of the electric torch.

There was a blinding crackle of light, like the snarling crash of an explosion. The torch melted.

The cage was plunged into instant darkness.

THROUGH that darkness The Shadow ran straight at the deadly bars. They were deadly no longer. The short circuit had burned out the generator in the hidden control chamber beyond the tunnel. The way to attack a master criminal was now open.

Quick hands of The Shadow wrenched the door of the cage open. He sprang along the tunnel. He could see nothing in the blackness. But his questing hands struck against a steel door that barred his way. Electricity had once held that door immovable. But now there was nothing to stop the frantic pursuit of The Shadow.

The door operated vertically. The Shadow got his fingers under the lower crack. A quick heave of arms and shoulders lifted the door on greased rollers. The Shadow raced into the hidden control room.

He could see the masked figure of his foe at the top of a wooden ladder. He was able to see him because the master criminal had wrenched open a trapdoor in the ceiling of the chamber. Daylight streamed downward.

But it wasn't the sight of daylight that drew a cry of anxiety from the pursuing Shadow. The red glimmer of a spark was creeping across a fuse on the floor. It moved fast along a powder trail. The Shadow's frenzied dive to the floor came too late for him to stop the race of that spark with his bare hands.

The spark disappeared into a tiny pipe-like conduit. Beyond the conduit were metal drums of gasoline.

Bullets thudded all about the sprawled form of The Shadow, as he flung himself vainly downward to avert the roar of a flaming explosion. None of those bullets struck its mark. The escaping criminal fired wildly in his haste to get away.

He wriggled through the trap-door above the ladder and was gone.

The Shadow made no effort to pursue. He was already returning at top speed along the length of the passage that led to the cage. In one of the compartments of that cage was the unconscious body of Rutledge Mann. Fast-flying seconds were all that separated Mann from eternity.

But The Shadow was using those seconds, too. A frantic heave scooped up Mann from the blackness of the cage floor. The Shadow ran like an arrow, scarcely conscious of the weight of his helpless agent.

He went up the ladder to the open trapdoor, thrust out Mann into daylight and scrambled after him.

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He found himself in the back yard of the brownstone house. The camouflaged exit explained how easily Benedict Stark could have fled through the back door of the house and then re-entered it. The Shadow had no proof that the masked criminal was the Prince of Evil, and no time to think about it.

He fled with his sagging agent through an opening in the fence and down a rear alley.

Stark – if he were the criminal – had made a complete getaway. The Shadow was not so fortunate. He ran almost headlong into a policeman.

The cop's jaw gaped as he saw the figure that confronted him. A ragged vagabond with dilapidated clothing and tousled white hair was carrying the bruised and bleeding body of a naked man!

The cop sprang forward.

"Down!" The Shadow shouted warningly. "Down on your face for your life!"

He had already dropped Mann and flung himself flat beside him. The roar of the explosion from the brownstone house at the rear of the alley sounded like the end of the world. Flaming gasoline erupted like a volcano. Chunks of timber and masonry flew like shrapnel.

The cop clapped a hand to his forehead. Blood streamed between his fingers and dyed his cheek. He staggered and collapsed. A fragment of stone had knocked him senseless.

Flames were already spouting from the ruined dwelling. The sprayed gasoline from the detonated drums was doing its work well.

A taxi driver who had just turned the corner from the avenue, halted his cab in amazed terror. The Shadow raced toward the stalled machine. He had no time to be gentle. The life of Rutledge Mann depended on swift speed.

The Shadow's fist knocked out the hackman with a single merciful blow. He shoved the unclothed and bleeding body of his unconscious agent in the cab and started the motor.

The taxi raced to the corner. It sped out of sight with a skid of increasing power. The savage suddenness of the explosion and fire had demoralized the neighborhood. The Shadow made a clean getaway.

He headed toward a certain doctor's office uptown. Rupert Sayre was a medico once befriended by The Shadow. It was there The Shadow himself would go, to recuperate from mobster wounds. Sayre would take care of Mann.

CHAPTER VII. ACCIDENT – OR MURDER?

MILICENT WHITNEY was frightened.

As she entered the drugstore on the corner near where she lived, she was conscious of cold terror. She felt that terror every time she thought of Benedict Stark.

She was convinced that Stark was planning to kill her as he had killed Howard Paxton.

Millicent was certain that Stark had murdered Paxton. In her possession was a folded paper that might rivet the guilt of the cowardly crime on Stark.

MURDER GENIUS

The folded scrap of paper was in Millicent's locket. Since the night of Paxton's death, the locket had not left her neck. She had intended to give the forged message to Clyde Burke the day he had sneaked into her cabin aboard Stark's yacht. But the intrusion of her maid Marie, had prevented that. Clyde had escaped from the yacht empty-handed.

Today, Millicent intended to see the Daily Classic reporter. That was why she had slipped furtively from the apartment provided for her by Stark. It was a golden opportunity to call up Clyde and arrange for a brief meeting.

The drug clerk noticed nothing of Millicent's tension. He was conscious only of the added flush in her cheeks.

He said smilingly: "What can I sell you?"

"Just two nickels for a dime, please. I'd like to make a phone call."

The glassed booths were at the inner corner of the store. None of them were occupied. Millicent congratulated herself that she had complete privacy. But she received a shock when she called the city room of the Daily Classic and asked for Clyde Burke.

He wasn't there. He wasn't even in town!

"He went to a town named Herndale on an assignment," the bored voice on the wire replied. "Any message for him? Who is this calling?"

"It doesn't matter who is calling," Millicent answered in a dead voice. "No message."

She hung up and left the booth. She had hoped to get rid of that dangerous paper in her possession. The task of guarding it was sapping her nerve.

She decided to try another method. It didn't matter whether she saw Clyde Burke personally or not. The main thing was to get the paper to him and have him investigate the fingerprints.

"I'd like a sheet of note paper, an envelope and a stamp, please," Millicent told the clerk.

She addressed the envelope to Clyde at the office of the Daily Classic. Folding the blank sheet of note paper, she bent over the desk, turning her back to the clerk. Her purpose was to take the forged message from her locket and fold it within the note paper. But she changed her purpose before her tremulous hand moved toward her bosom.

A woman with beady black eyes was waiting outside the drugstore.

The woman was Millicent's maid, Marie!

With a shudder, Millicent realized that Marie had followed her from the apartment, probably on the orders of Stark. To remove the clue now from her locket would be to lose it!

Calmly, she added a stamp to her envelope and sealed it. She walked quietly out to the sidewalk carrying the empty letter.

Marie greeted her with a suave smile. She explained that Benedict Stark had telephoned a moment after Millicent had left the apartment. He wanted to talk to his secretary on some important business.

MURDER GENIUS

"I 'appen to look out the window and see you 'urry toward the drugstore," Marie concluded smilingly. "I follow to tell you that Mr. Stark desires to speak with you. And here I am. Viola!"

With a polite gesture, she reached forward and took the sealed envelope from Millicent's hand.

"You wish it posted, no? I see a mailbox across the street. I shall save you the added trouble. Permit me."

MARIE crossed the street and mailed the letter. At least, it looked as if she had. She raised the flap of the box and made a gesture of dropping the missive inside.

But Millicent recognized the same technique she herself had used to hide what she was doing from the drug clerk. Marie's body bent so that her hand and arm was screened. She didn't turn until after the lid of the mailbox banged shut.

Millicent was certain that the empty envelope had been slyly dropped inside the bosom of Marie's dress. But she showed no trace of her knowledge. Nor did she betray her feelings when she returned to the apartment with Marie.

A glance told her that it had been searched anew during her brief absence. This was the fourth time in two days the place had been searched. A dozen articles that were slightly out of place proved that a search had taken place.

Marie couldn't have done it. She had been busy trailing Millicent to the drugstore.

Had Stark himself searched the apartment?

As though to verify the old adage, "Think of the devil —" the doorbell rang. Benedict Stark walked into the living room. He had a strange, menacing smile.

"You were out when I telephoned," he said. "I stopped on my way downtown to tell you what I want. I'm leaving in an hour or two for a small town up-State called Herndale. I shall need you as my secretary while I'm there. Have Marie pack your things. You, too, will come, Marie!"

"Oui," the maid replied.

Marie's eyes were downcast, but there was dark flame in them. She knew all about this unexpected trip! Satisfaction was apparent in her demeanor.

Millicent, however, was dismayed. Herndale was the name of the town where Clyde Burke had gone. Was there some sinister connection between Clyde's presence there and the sudden desire of Benedict Stark to follow him?

"Is — is your trip an important one?" Millicent faltered.

Her millionaire employer gave her a cool, appraising glance. He was smiling, but there was no mirth in his eyes.

"Everything I do is important," Benedict Stark said.

He turned on his heel without another word and left the apartment.

MURDER GENIUS

LATE that same afternoon, Clyde Burke walked out of the best hotel in Herndale and summoned a taxi-cab. "Marshall Machine Works," he told the driver.

Clyde didn't know the address of the factory, but in Herndale that didn't matter. Andrew Marshall's machine works was the biggest and most important industrial concern in town.

Clyde had found out plenty concerning it by chatting idly with the hotel clerk. The factory occupied a huge tract of land on the northern outskirts of Herndale. It employed over five thousand men, practically all the workmen in town. In five years it had transformed acres of unsightly dumps into a hive of industry.

Its well-paid workmen made the cash registers of the Herndale merchants tinkle merrily. There had never been a strike or a lockout at the plant.

According to the clerk at the hotel, the credit for all this belonged to one man alone – Andrew Marshall.

Clyde had no difficulty explaining his own presence in Herndale. He had arrived as the ace reporter of New York's biggest newspaper, the Daily Classic. His announced purpose was to write up Andrew Marshall as a successful factory owner.

Clyde had already written several articles on the Daily Classic feature page about self-made men in industry.

However, forewarned by The Shadow, there were certain facts that remained locked discreetly in Clyde's brain. For instance, the matter of a loan which Marshall had borrowed five years earlier from the bank of Bruce Clifton. Also a mysterious option which Marshall intended to exercise.

Clyde had received from Burbank a copy of the decoded radio message which The Shadow had intercepted on its way to the yacht of Benedict Stark in Bermuda.

That ominously-worded radio message had been important enough to bring Stark hurrying back on his yacht to New York. The Herndale bank which Bruce Clifton headed, was part of a financial chain owned by Stark.

But Clyde suspected that these two men were associated in more than a mere business capacity. Knowing what had already happened in New York, Clyde sensed a crime in the making.

He had little difficulty in getting to see Marshall in the latter's sunlit office on an upper floor of the factory. Marshall was pleased by Clyde's interest in the plant. He was a good-looking young man about thirty, with sandy hair and clear blue eyes.

He introduced Clyde to Larry Waldo, his superintendent. Waldo was a tall, keen-eyed man, not much older than Marshall. He took Clyde on a tour of the plant, showed him every nook and cranny of the place.

Clyde was amazed at the efficiency he saw. The workmen were cheerful. The place hummed with industry.

"Wait'll you see the stack of orders in the office upstairs," Waldo grinned. "Mister, we've got a business here!"

"How do you do it?"

Waldo's grin widened.

MURDER GENIUS

"The answer is a swell guy named Andrew Marshall. He's so darned decent, that you can't help working your head off for him. We have pensions and sick benefits and a bonus for employees. Now we're really going to town! Marshall is buying out an interest owned by Clifton's bank. From now on, the profits go one hundred percent to Marshall – and that means to all us workmen, too!"

Clyde went back to Marshall's office. But before he could interview him at any length, the phone bell rang. Smilingly, Marshall answered it. Then his friendly eyes hardened with an expression of cold anger.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Clifton. I've already told you my position. That option is legal and honest! You agreed to it when the bank advanced me the money five years ago. You've had your share in the profits. Now, I'm buying you out. I have a right to. Every penny of wealth in this business has been created by my own hard work!"

He sat there frowning, listening to the suave buzz from the other end of the wire. Suddenly, Marshall's frown faded. His mouth opened with an expression of amazement.

"What? What's that you said?"

There was more talk from Clifton. Finally, Marshall gave a relieved and pleasant laugh.

"I'm glad to hear you say that. That's fine! I knew you'd see my point when you thought it over. Of course, I'll be right over to see you! I'll bring the certified check with me."

He hung up with a chuckle of delight.

"If that doesn't beat all! Mr. Burke, you surely must have brought me luck. I thought I was in for some trouble with the Herndale bank, but it looks as if Bruce Clifton decided to pull in his horns."

"How do you mean?" Clyde asked.

ANDREW MARSHALL explained. A week earlier he had notified Clifton that he intended to buy out the bank's interest under the option clause in his contract, and assume complete ownership of the business. Clifton had been very angry. He had even made veiled threats.

"I was on the point of kicking him out of my office," Marshall said grimly. "Clifton changed his tune in a hurry, when he saw how I felt. He apologized, said I had misunderstood him. Now he calls up and says he's perfectly agreeable to the deal."

"Queer, that he should change so quickly," Clyde suggested.

"I guess I misunderstood him in the first place," Marshall said.

Clyde didn't comment on that. But in his memory, certain ugly words glowed like flame. They were words The Shadow had heard Benedict Stark utter in the cabin of his yacht in New York. A copy of that overheard conversation had been provided Clyde:

"I loaned the fool the money for an amusing reason. I built

Marshall up so that I could have the pleasure of breaking him

after he made a success. I'm going to put him in the gutter and

MURDER GENIUS

take over his profitable factory – lock, stock and barrel!"

Marshall rose from his chair and grabbed his hat.

"You'll have to excuse me. Can I drop you off in town?"

Clyde nodded. He rode with the young mill owner to the door of the Herndale bank. But Clyde didn't enter the bank. He shook hands with Marshall and went back to the hotel.

He was eager to report to The Shadow. But before he went upstairs to his room, Clyde received an unexpected surprise. The desk clerk had a note for him. It had been left by messenger. Clyde opened the sealed envelope in a deserted corner of the lobby. His eyes narrowed grimly.

The note was from Millicent Whitney.

This was the first knowledge Clyde had that Benedict Stark had already arrived in Herndale with his secretary. He read the note with swift interest:

You were out when I phoned earlier. I'm frightened! I'm sure that

"S" suspects I have fingerprint evidence concealed on my person.

I won't feel safe until I can hand it to you personally. Will

phone tonight and arrange meeting it I can get rid of Marie.

M.

Clyde burned Millicent's note in the privacy of his room. With the shades drawn, he sat and wrote a complete report, in code, of his activities since he had arrived in Herndale.

When he had finished, he opened his door and glanced out into the corridor. It was deserted.

With a light step, Clyde moved toward the closed door of the room that adjoined his. He slipped the report under the door, then returned quietly to his own room.

The man in the adjoining chamber was The Shadow!

Had Clyde opened that locked door and peered in, it would have been impossible for him to tell what identity The Shadow had assumed or what disguise he was wearing. Except for a single spot of white light, the room was in total darkness. The light focused only on the coded report which Clyde Burke had just delivered.

Sibilant laughter echoed eerily, as The Shadow read the final sentence of Clyde's decoded report:

Everything at present under control.

The Shadow wasn't so sure about that. Not being sure, he acted to make certain! His tiny light went out. The shade on the window lifted. Then the window itself was softly raised. A moment later, The Shadow was no longer in the room.

MURDER GENIUS

It was a rear room with a fire escape outside. The steel ladder led to a dark courtyard. Just beyond the courtyard was a parking area where the cars of hotel guests were kept free of charge.

The Shadow began to search stealthily for Clyde's car. He had been furnished earlier with a complete description of the car. It was a black coupe. It had been rented by Clyde from a local agency to serve his needs while he was in Herndale.

Presently, The Shadow located it. He moved quietly forward, making sure that he was not observed.

MEANWHILE, events had moved smoothly at the conference between Andrew Marshall and Bruce Clifton in the latter's office at the bank.

Clifton was suave and friendly. He accepted Marshall's certified check that paid off the bank's loan. He seemed unconcerned at the fact that the bank no longer would share in the growing profits of the factory.

The two men were shaking hands, when Clifton's phone rang. The call was for Andrew Marshall. When he answered it he heard the excited voice of his superintendent, Larry Waldo.

Waldo's news was sinister.

"Hurry back as fast as you can! There's been a bad accident! One of the machines went to pieces. Its operator has been seriously injured. I'm afraid he's dying!"

"I'll be right out!" Marshall gasped.

He flung down the receiver and raced for the door. Clifton looked startled.

"What's happened? Is something wrong at the plant?"

Marshall didn't answer. He was already out of the bank, flinging himself into his parked car at the curb. Clifton walked leisurely to the window and watched his visitor depart at breakneck speed.

The startled look faded from Clifton's fox-like face. He chuckled. It made a low-toned, nasty sound in the silence of the office.

Andrew Marshall had no knowledge of the speed he made or the route he took to get to the outskirts of town. The next thing he realized, he was pushing through a crowd of white-faced workmen on the plant floor. He could see the ugly jumble of a smashed machine.

Nearby was a pool of blood. A tarpaulin covered the stark outline of a man's sprawled body.

Larry Waldo laid a trembling hand on Marshall's shoulder.

"Dead?" Marshall asked.

"Yes. An accident. It couldn't be helped."

"Who was it?"

"Tim Ryan. One of the best workmen in the plant."

Waldo shoved Marshall gently through the crowd of stunned workmen. He led him upstairs to his private office. Waldo seemed as dazed as his white-faced employer. But the moment the door closed behind them he became grimly alert.

"I brought you up here so no one could overhear us. That tragedy downstairs was no accident!"

"What?" Marshall stared at his superintendent.

"The part in the machine that smashed was defective! I examined that machine myself scarcely three days ago. Every moving part, three days ago, was brand-new and in perfect working order!"

"But you just said the accident was caused by a defect," Marshall gasped dully.

"Someone substituted that faulty cradle bar. Tim Ryan didn't die because of negligence. He was murdered!"

CHAPTER VIII. A PERFECT FRAME

MILICENT WHITNEY was lying in bed in the sumptuous apartment provided for her and her maid Marie by her millionaire employer. Stark himself, was living at the country club during his stay in Herndale. He knew he could depend on the sly Marie to keep close watch on his secretary.

Millicent's eyes were closed. Her pretty forehead was wrapped in a bandage soaked with witch-hazel. She was pretending a headache. Actually, she almost had one. She had been driven almost crazy trying to figure some way to get rid of Marie.

Millicent wanted to meet Clyde Burke tonight. She was eager to turn over to the Daily Classic reporter the damning paper she still had concealed in her locket.

It was Marie herself who solved Millicent's problem. When she came into the darkened bedroom, she was helpful and sympathetic. She did her best to make Millicent comfortable. After a while, she asked a favor.

With a smile, Marie admitted she had picked up a boy friend in Herndale. He had asked her to go out with him tonight. Would it be convenient for Marie to take the evening off?

Millicent's heart jumped with delight. It was exactly what she wanted. But she gave her permission grudgingly. It would never do to raise any suspicion in the mind of her maid.

The moment Marie left the apartment, Millicent leaped out of bed. She raced in bare feet to her wardrobe closet and began to dress.

When she was completely clothed, she picked up her telephone and phoned Clyde Burke at his hotel. To her delight, he was in.

She told Clyde that the coast was clear.

Clyde agreed to come at once. He warned Millicent not to open her door for anyone but himself. He told her how he'd ring the bell when he arrived: two longs and three quick shorts.

Millicent drew a deep breath after she hung up the phone. Color came back into her pale cheeks.

MURDER GENIUS

But she would have been absolutely terrified, could she have glanced into a basement room of the apartment house in which she lived.

Three men and a woman were in that dimly lighted room. It was part of the basement quarters occupied by the janitor of the building. The janitor was one of the three men. The other two were professional criminals.

They were staring at the woman. Her ear had been glued to the receiver of a telephone.

The woman was Marie!

Every word that Millicent Whitney had uttered over the telephone line in the apartment upstairs had been heard by the sly maid.

The line had been tapped at the feed-box where the cables came in from the street. The tap ran directly to this phone in the apartment of the janitor. The janitor was crooked.

Marie's eyes gleamed like black mica when she hung up the receiver. She had been careful to wait until Millicent had finished her call to Clyde Burke and had broken the connection.

"What about it?" one of the thugs growled.

"Keep your shirt on, Snapper!" Marie rejoined. "I'm running this little party."

It was remarkable how little of her French accent remained. She sounded as tough as her companions.

"Who did the dame call up?" the second thug asked.

His name was Tony. Marie was more polite to him. For one thing, Tony was a killer. For another, he took dope.

"The girl called up Clyde Burke at his hotel," Marie said.

There was a snarl from the two thugs.

"The Shadow, eh?" Snapper cried.

"I'm not sure, but I think so. I've thought so ever since this Burke sneaked aboard Stark's yacht, pretending to be a newspaper reporter."

"What did Millicent tell him?"

"Plenty! The whole works." Marie's laughter sounded thin. "And that's exactly what you boys are gonna give dear little Millicent – the works!"

"You mean you're gonna croak her?" the janitor faltered.

Murder was new to him. He didn't like the thought of being implicated in a kill. His face looked greenish.

Snapper whirled swiftly and showed him the business end of a gun.

MURDER GENIUS

"Shut up! Disconnect that phone tap, and forget the rest. If I hear another peep out of you, you won't live to spend that easy dough you're makin'."

He gave Marie an edged smile, as he said:

"I'll take care of Clyde Burke. Can you and Tony handle the dame?"

"Yeah."

SNAPPER nodded, and left. Tony put on an expressman's cap and overalls. He walked to the rear of the basement. The service elevator was located there. There was also a trunk in a dark corner.

Tony's thick lips grinned. He placed the empty trunk on the service elevator and rode up with it.

He had no trouble getting into the kitchen of Millicent's apartment. Marie had already tampered with the rear lock. It opened without any difficulty.

Tony lifted the empty trunk quietly into the kitchen. He closed the door. There was no sound from the front of the apartment. It was a large one, with plenty of intervening rooms. Besides, Tony knew that Millicent's attention was riveted nervously on the front door.

Leaving the kitchen, Tony advanced with catlike stealth. He passed through a pantry and dining room. Advancing along a corridor, he reached a heavy set of velvet drapes. Beyond those drapes was the living room.

Moving them a hairbreadth, Tony peered. He licked his lips like a tiger watching its prey from a jungle covert.

Presently, Tony heard the front doorbell ring. Millicent heard it, too. Two longs and three quick shorts. Clyde's signal! Eagerly, she darted to the door and opened it.

She found herself staring at the tight-lipped face of Marie.

Millicent recoiled. She sensed death in the face of her faithless maid. Her mouth opened to emit a scream.

But before she could utter a sound, Marie had her hand across Millicent's lips. A shove threw the victim backward into the apartment. The door slammed shut.

Marie fought with tigerish strength. But Millicent was battling for her life and she knew it. She was getting the better of the maid, when Tony flung aside the velvet drapes.

His fist struck Millicent at the base of her neck. It was an awkwardly delivered blow over Marie's shoulder. It toppled all three of them in a heap. But only Marie and Tony sprang to their feet.

Millicent lay on the rug like a crumpled lily.

"Is she dead?" Marie gasped.

"Dead? No! Leave this to me."

MURDER GENIUS

Tony darted to the rear of the apartment, dragged in the empty trunk. When he raised the lid, he disclosed that the trunk was not quite empty. He took from it a horrible weapon.

It was an iron bar. Rubber had been wrapped around the bar, all except the few inches of metal that was used as a handle. The rubber had obviously come from the shoe of an automobile tire. The marks of the treads were clearly evident.

Marie flinched as she looked at it. But Tony's thick grin merely hardened. He picked up the unconscious victim and carried her into the bathroom. Then he came back and got the rubber-wrapped bar.

The bathroom door closed. Marie waited. She knew what was going to happen. She was criminal enough to want it to happen. She thought about the locket around Millicent's unconscious throat. Marie had plans about that locket – plans that didn't include Tony.

Through the closed door of the bathroom came the sound of a horrible thud. It was followed by others.

Marie continued to think about the paper in Millicent's locket. Her black eyes were shiny with greed.

CLYDE BURKE left his hotel without being observed. He had a hunch that an alibi for his movements might be valuable.

He located his rented coupe and drove quietly away from the parking area at the rear of the hotel.

He swung the car into the broad avenue that led to the fashionable apartment section of town where Millicent lived. A red light halted him before he had gone more than a block or two. He braked to a stop.

As he did so, a man appeared out of the darkness. He began to wipe off Clyde's windshield with a cloth. It was a bit of harmless graft that Clyde was used to in New York.

He reached mechanically into his trousers pocket to give the fellow a dime. He was so preoccupied with thoughts about Millicent that he failed to notice how well dressed this panhandling car-wiper really was.

It was only when Snapper opened the door that Clyde saw the gun. It was shielded under the flap of Snapper's coat. To Clyde, the muzzle of that gun looked as big as a cannon.

Snapper slid into the seat alongside Clyde.

"All right, sucker!" he snarled. "No squawk, or I'll dig holes through you! Get this bus moving. I'll tell you where to turn."

There was nothing to do but obey. Clyde was a brave man, but he was sensible enough not to commit suicide. He turned off the avenue when he was told to.

The black coupe drove west for a block or two. Then it swung again. This time, it was headed south. When the car reached the edge of town, Clyde hesitated.

"Straight ahead," Snapper ordered. "Take it slower. I got a present for you!"

His left hand fumbled at an inside pocket. He brought out a pint flask. He passed the flask to Clyde, made him drive with one hand. None of the few drivers who passed noticed what was going on. The car was well out in the country now. The road was deserted.

MURDER GENIUS

"Take a big drink," Snapper chuckled. "It's on me."

Clyde was forced to tilt the flask. It burned in his mouth like cheap rotgut. Before he could spit it out, Snapper jabbed his gun viciously into the pit of Clyde's stomach. Clyde gulped spasmodically and swallowed most of the liquor. The car swerved toward a deep ditch.

Instinctively, Clyde straightened the wheel.

"What's wrong, pal?" Snapper growled sardonically. "Don't you like my booze?"

Clyde could feel the stuff glowing inside him like fire. He was afraid the liquor was drugged. He found it hard to think clearly. The telephone poles of the country road danced like ghosts past his blurring vision. He thought dazedly that the car had stopped. He wasn't sure —

THE shiny look of greed was still in Marie's eyes when Tony opened the bathroom door. Tony's face was not pleasant to contemplate. There was a smear of blood on his cheek. His eyes were piggish with cruelty.

"All done, sister. Can you take it?

"I can take anything!"

"O.K. I'll lug her out, then I wash up."

He carried Millicent's body from the bathroom. He was careful to place his victim on a small scatter rug, to sop up the smear of blood. When he was ready, later, to place Millicent inside the trunk, Tony intended to wrap the body in the rug as an added protection.

He went back into the bathroom and busied himself with soap and water.

But Marie wasn't so calm. She bent swiftly over the dead body of her mistress. She was undisturbed by the horror of what she saw.

The rubber-wrapped bludgeon had broken both of Millicent's legs. One of her arms was broken, too. The blood that trickled to the scatter rug came from her open mouth. It indicated that Millicent had died from internal injuries. The blows that had ended her life had left an unmistakable pattern on her bruised flesh. The rubber around the iron bar had left the print of tire treads.

Millicent looked like the victim of a hit-and-run automobile driver!

But Marie had eyes only for the locket. She opened it swiftly and saw a folded scrap of paper. The paper was transferred in one lightning gesture to Marie's bosom. She had barely snapped the locket shut when Tony swaggered out of the bathroom.

"Did you search her?"

Marie pretended to shudder. "Do it yourself. I wouldn't touch her with a ten-foot pole!"

Tony swore when he found the locket empty.

"What the hell? There was supposed to be a hunk of paper in that thing. That's what the boss said."

MURDER GENIUS

"She must have already passed it to Clyde Burke," Marie said sullenly. "Get things moving. Do you want us all to fry for murder?"

For a second, Tony hesitated. He looked ugly and suspicious. Marie held her breath. She knew that if Tony suspected a double cross, he'd rip every stitch of clothes from her until he found the note. Then he'd hand her the same treatment he had given Millicent.

Luckily, the crooked janitor came sneaking into the murder apartment at this moment. The man was so scared when he saw the body that Tony chuckled. Tony forgot all about the locket.

"What are you shivering about, stupid? Gimme a hand with this trunk!"

The body was forced into the trunk and the lid closed.

"What kind of a car have you got?" Marie asked Tony.

"A black coupe. I rented it at the local agency. Why?"

"You fool! That's the same kind of car that Clyde Burke is driving around town."

"It's the only kind the agency rents. What's the diff? It ain't gonna make no trouble. Snapper and me have things figured too neat."

He swung toward the janitor.

"Come on, punk! Grab one end of this!"

They carried the trunk out the back door of the apartment and took it down to the cellar in the service elevator. Tony's expressman costume was an excellent bluff in case some of the tenants saw him. But no one witnessed the departure of the trunk to the rear of the building.

It was strapped on a rack at the back of the car. The janitor returned to his cellar apartment.

Upstairs, Marie coolly waited. She had her alibi ready. More important than that she had the forged message with Benedict Stark's fingerprints. She had no intention of letting go of it.

Tony drove his car swiftly out of town. His goal was a deserted spot along the country highway. He grinned when he saw another black coupe waiting there at the side of the road. Snapper had done a perfect job with his end of the conspiracy.

Clyde Burke was slumped inertly over the wheel. The drugged liquor had done its work well. There was not enough of the drug to make a doctor suspicious of the truth. Clyde looked and smelled like an ordinary drunk.

THE two thugs wasted no time. Tony dented Clyde's bumper with his iron bar. Snapper cracked the glass on one of the headlights. A smash of the bar peeled a sliver of wood off a nearby telephone pole as if Clyde's car had struck it a glancing blow before it had skidded to a stop.

Tony opened the murder trunk and lifted out Millicent's body. He dropped it in a crumpled heap in the road behind Clyde's car. While he worked swiftly, Snapper was equally busy.

MURDER GENIUS

He stuck a bloody fragment of Millicent's dress in the radiator grille near the cracked headlight. He crawled beneath Clyde's car and stuck another fragment or two in the transmission underneath.

It looked as if Millicent had been struck and dragged along by a drunken driver before her wedged body dropped in the road behind the car. The tire marks on her flesh made that the only logical explanation for the tragedy.

Tony entered his own car. Snapper leaped beside him.

"Which way are you going? Valley road?"

"Yeah. I'm takin' the valley road to the filling station. We'll phone the cops from there. I'll give 'em a description of a reckless drunk we passed on the road."

Snapper chuckled.

"He was cockeyed and driving in circles. We figured the guy might run into somebody. That's why we phoned the cops. Public-spirited, that's us!"

The car whizzed swiftly away. Behind the wheel of the stalled coupe at the side of the road Clyde hung inertly forward in a drunken stupor.

Crooks thought mistakenly, that Clyde Burke was The Shadow. They had acted with vicious thoroughness to strap him in the electric chair for murder.

Clyde was hopelessly framed!

CHAPTER IX. DEAD MAN'S CURVE

THE black coupe of the two fleeing killers vanished around a bend in the highway. In a few moments the echo of its distant hum died away.

The whiskey-drugged Clyde was mercifully unaware of his dreadful predicament. He saw and heard nothing. The lifting lid of the rumble seat at the rear of his black coupe did not register on his consciousness.

The lid lifted swiftly. A face appeared. It was a lean face with a hawk-like nose and deep-set burning eyes. The black-clad figure of The Shadow vaulted to the roadway.

The Shadow had not believed that final sentence in Clyde's report at the hotel: "Everything at present under control." He had stowed away in Clyde's car to protect his agent. He had not interfered during the ride from town because he never made a premature move without being in possession of all the facts.

Up to the time that Clyde's commandeered car had been joined by Tony's, The Shadow had mistakenly hoped that he might be able to save the life of Millicent Whitney. That hope was now blasted. Staring at the gruesome set-up that Snapper and Tony had left for the police, The Shadow's lips tightened. He could have pursued the fleeing killers. That would not, however, have saved Clyde. Cunning as well as courage was demanded by this tragic emergency.

Already, The Shadow had formulated a plan to clear Clyde of a vicious frame-up. He intended to place the blame of murder squarely where it belonged – on the criminal figures of Snapper and Tony.

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He raced back to where the crumpled body of Millicent Whitney lay in the road. Gently he lifted a thin gold chain from the girl's bruised throat. He opened her locket. It was empty.

The Shadow made a quick deduction – and as it happened a wrong one. He assumed that either Tony or Snapper had stolen the paper that contained Benedict Stark's fingerprints. He was not yet aware of the duplicity of the sly Marie.

Empty-handed he ran back to Clyde's car. But it was not easy to revive Clyde.

Grimly, The Shadow stuck to his task. Every minute was precious. He knew that it would not take much time for Snapper and his thuggish pal to reach their gas station hide-out in the valley beyond and telephone a warning of a drunken driver to the Herndale police.

Suddenly, The Shadow heard a sputtering hum down the road. The noise increased rapidly. It was the sound of a speeding motorcycle.

The Shadow darted to the side of the road. A thick growth of bushes concealed his black-clad figure. He watched the motorcycle driver swing into view around the bend.

The man was in uniform. A motorcycle cop. But evidently he had no knowledge of the tragedy into which he burst without warning. The thugs had not yet had time to telephone. The cop was on routine highway patrol.

He halted his machine with a gasp of horror. The cracked headlight of the coupe, the bloody fragment of clothing caught in the fender, told their own story. So did the scarred telephone pole.

Quickly, the cop ran to where Millicent lay and bent over her body. He never knew what hit him. The Shadow's fist struck from behind like a pile-driver.

By ordinary standards, it was a cowardly blow. But The Shadow was in a predicament where ordinary standards didn't count. Clyde was innocent. Murderers were uncaught! The motorcycle cop was an unwitting hindrance to justice.

The Shadow's scientifically delivered blow dropped the cop unconscious. He dragged the patrolman behind a screen of bushes and hid the motorcycle.

Then, with a bound, The Shadow was in Clyde's car. He shoved Clyde aside. The black coupe sprang into throbbing life. It sped away in the same direction taken by the fleeing thugs.

The Shadow had made no move to remove the faked evidence of Clyde's murder guilt. The cracked headlight, the torn fragments of bloody clothing, were part of his desperate scheme to rivet the guilt of murder on the real killers.

LIKE a black juggernaut, the car sped down the curving highway. The Shadow expected the road to split presently. He remembered the talk between Tony and Snapper concerning the valley fork. Five minutes of hard, reckless driving brought The Shadow to the intersection.

One fork swung to the left. It climbed to the crest of a chain of hills that hemmed in the valley. The other fork curved across the valley between the encircling hills.

There was no sign to show which road the crooks had taken. They had been careful not to leave any betraying tracks. The Shadow did exactly the opposite.

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Crowding on all the speed he could, The Shadow took the valley turn with a violence that made the car skid. His rubber left wide, telltale marks. It was a sure indication to the police who would soon race with screaming sirens to this point.

Across the valley The Shadow continued with unabated pace. He didn't slow until he saw in the distance what looked like a deserted filling station. He came abruptly to a halt. Then he turned his attention to Clyde.

He didn't use gentle measures to revive his inert agent. He seized Clyde by the hair and jerked his head erect. He slapped him hard across the face. It didn't work. Clyde merely mumbled.

The Shadow was cold with anxiety. He knew that by this time the thugs must have telephoned the police. Cars would be racing out from Herndale to head off a wildly driving drunk. Not many minutes would intervene before Millicent's body would be found.

Doubling up his fist, The Shadow drove it into Clyde's solar plexus. Coupled with the drugged whiskey in Clyde's stomach, it brought satisfactory results. The reporter's mouth flew open. His face turned greenish. Almost at once, he became violently sick.

The Shadow supported him until the sickness had passed. With it passed most of the drugged whiskey that Clyde had been forced to swallow. He was white-faced and trembling, but his head was clear. He proved that by the questions he shot at The Shadow.

His anxiety increased as he heard The Shadow's brief reply. But emergency steadied his nerves. He took the gun The Shadow handed him. The Shadow led the way forward on foot.

The filling station had long since gone bankrupt. Its pumps had been removed, its shack boarded up. In the rear was a larger building, that looked like a repair garage. It, too, was apparently deserted. But there were tire marks visible in front of the sealed door. A car had very recently been driven inside!

Noiselessly, The Shadow climbed to a spot below the sill of a small side window. Peering cautiously, he could see the black coupe in which the thugs had fled. He could also catch a glimpse of Tony and Snapper.

He waited quietly. He was depending on Clyde, whom he had stationed outside the closed front door.

Clyde yelled suddenly and beat with his fists on the locked barrier. At the sound, The Shadow wriggled through the small side window.

Tony and Snapper had drawn their guns at Clyde's unexpected challenge out front. Their heads swung toward the door. It gave The Shadow a chance to complete the most dangerous part of his attack. He squeezed swiftly through his small window and got one leg over the sill.

Then Snapper saw him. He fired wildly.

The Shadow, too, fired. He had no chance to hit Snapper. But the roar of his gun and the sight of his black-clad figure completely demoralized the crooks.

Their spraying bullets went wide of their living target. With a double yell of terror, they fled as The Shadow sprang down to the floor of the garage.

Their car screened the thugs' retreat. In an instant, Snapper had the rear door of the garage open. He fled for cover, ducking expertly behind trees and underbrush.

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Tony was tougher – and more stupid. He made the mistake of trying to shoot it out with The Shadow. One of his bullets nicked The Shadow's hat. Another brought a white-hot lash of pain across the flesh of The Shadow's thigh. But two bullets were all that Tony had an opportunity to fire.

With a snarl of pain, he dropped his gun and clutched at his chest. He spun weakly and pitched on his face. The Shadow darted forward. Tony was badly hurt, but still alive. He cursed weakly and tried to snatch upward at The Shadow's gun. Then he fainted.

CLYDE was already in the garage. Unable to find any trace of the fleeing Snapper, he had entered through the back door.

Under The Shadow's urgent order, Clyde unlocked the heavy front door. He raced down the road and drove his own car closer to the filling station. The moment he halted the machine, he worked with grim haste to remove his license plates.

The Shadow had already done the same with Tony's car inside the garage. He made a quick exchange. Clyde's license plates were fastened on Tony's car. The plates from the thug's coupe went on the blood-smeared and dented car of Clyde Burke.

The scheme of The Shadow had the simplicity of genius. Both cars were exactly alike. Both had been rented from the same agency in Herndale. Both were black coupes. But the car that had been so cunningly framed for the police to see now bore the license plates of the dying Tony!

The Shadow's plan went even further than that. He intended to hand over Tony to the police in the very car that had supposedly run down and killed Millicent Whitney!

Having made sure that his own plates were on Tony's undamaged car, Clyde Burke sprang behind the wheel of the stolen machine. The Shadow had told him exactly what to do. He raced with all the speed in his motor to the forked intersection at the beginning of the valley.

This time Clyde took the left fork. His coupe climbed the long grade to the crest of the hill that hemmed in the valley. He drove rapidly along the hill road. Occasionally, he could see the valley through the fringe of trees.

He had a definite goal in mind, a spot about a mile beyond where the filling station stood on the valley road.

Leaving his car at this point Clyde could see a sharp bend in the lower road at the foot of the steep wooded slope where he lay hidden.

There was no sign of The Shadow.

He was seated in Clyde's damaged car outside the filling station. He was waiting grimly for the police. He was certain that by this time they had reached the scene of the "drunken accident."

The Shadow was correct. Snapper's telephone call had reached Herndale headquarters. A police car had already arrived at the scene of the tragedy. They found the limp corpse of Millicent Whitney in the road. Tire marks showed where the murder car had skidded to a violent stop and had then fled.

Testimony of the motorcycle cop completed the false picture. His groans led to his discovery behind the bushes. He told how he had been slugged from behind. He had paid scant attention to the drunken driver. He couldn't describe what Clyde really looked like.

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But he did remember the car. Its color and make tallied exactly with the description the police had received over the telephone.

Leaving the dazed motorcycle cop to take charge of the body of Millicent, the police car roared in pursuit of the fleeing black coupe. It was an easy trail to follow. The skid marks that The Shadow had deliberately left at the intersection showed that the fleeing car had taken the valley fork.

As the police car roared in sight of the filling station its uniformed driver uttered a yell. He saw the murder car ahead, lurching away with increasing speed.

A hail of bullets whistled back from the fleeing coupe.

The hands of The Shadow fired those bullets. But it would have been hard to recognize him. The Shadow's head was bent low over the wheel. His black robe had been discarded. He was wearing Tony's cap.

Tony lay sprawled on the floor near The Shadow's feet. He was out of sight of the police. He was dead now from his bullet wound.

Faster and faster went The Shadow's car. Once or twice he almost skidded into a ditch on the turn. It was mad, reckless driving. But that was what The Shadow wanted the police to think. He had opened up more distance between himself and his pursuers. He was watching grimly for a sharper curve.

It came soon. The Shadow swung around it with a scream of tortured rubber. Deliberately, he made the car skid. He let it head with horrible impetus toward a deep ditch at the side of the road.

At the last instant, he jumped.

His wild leap carried him clear of the crashing car. He rolled head over heels, with his muscles relaxed and his face tucked close to his bent chest. He arose, gasping and bruised, but not seriously hurt.

The noise of the car's crash was like the roll of thunder. It smashed upside down in the ditch. Two of its wheels snapped off like toothpicks. The others were still spinning madly when the police car braked to a stop and horrified cops piled out.

They didn't see The Shadow. He had vanished into the ditch opposite to the one in which the coupe had crashed. This other ditch was on the mountain side of the road.

Bellying close to its muddy bottom, The Shadow retreated snake-like to the sharp bend of the road and around it.

SHIELDED from sight of the cops, The Shadow left the ditch and melted into the thick underbrush that covered the slope of the hill. He began to climb rapidly toward where Clyde Burke had been instructed to wait with Tony's car.

The police by this time had already discovered the maimed body of Tony. They dragged it from the wreckage of the coupe. They saw the bullet wound that had killed him. They assumed that it was a police bullet. It seemed logical that Tony had died in the act of driving, around the curve.

But mystery still faced the police. According to the testimony of the motorcycle cop, there must have been two men in the coupe. Otherwise, who could have slugged him?

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And the mysterious telephone information had mentioned the name of someone quite different from the thuggish Tony. The cops had been furnished with the name of Clyde Burke as the drunken driver!

Grimly, they started back to town.

Already, Clyde was in his hotel room. The delay of the police investigation after the crash had given him and The Shadow plenty of time to reach the hotel in Herndale and enter unseen by the fire escape outside The Shadow's rear window.

Clyde slipped down the hall to his own room. He was there when the police arrived.

He was politely amused by their gruff questioning. He became less amused at the accusation that he might be involved in a homicide. He took the cops down to the parking area in the rear of the hotel and showed them his black coupe.

The cops looked baffled. The car was obviously undamaged.

Clyde suggested smoothly that the confusion in the cops' minds must have arisen over the fact that his car and the dead Tony's were alike in color and make. Both, of course, had been rented from the same Herndale agency.

Clyde knew that when the police checked up on the license number, the man at the auto-rental agency would consult his records. Tony's plates on the murder car would rivet the guilt on the dead thug. Only the engine number would expose the trick of substitution.

The fact that both cars were the same make and color would make the investigation casual. After all, Tony had seemingly been killed by the cops themselves, escaping by the murder car.

"O.K.," the police captain said, finally. "But let me give you one warning. Stay here in Herndale until you get permission to leave. If I catch you trying to sneak anyway, I'll toss you in jail, alibi or no alibi!"

"Suits me," Clyde said curtly. "I haven't the faintest idea of quitting your lovely city."

There was a grim smile on his lips.

But there was no smile on the lips of The Shadow, in a darkened room nearby. Anger glowed in his eyes. He had smashed up an attempt to frame Clyde Burke for murder.

But in a larger sense, The Shadow had failed. The same thing always happened in any event linked with the mysterious figure of Benedict Stark.

A small success; a larger failure!

The Shadow seemed to be staring at something far outside the narrow confines of his quiet hotel room. He was recalling every pathetic detail of the dead Millicent Whitney as she lay like a dusty bundle on a public highway.

The strong jaw of The Shadow closed with a snap. He would yet deal with the Prince of Evil.

CHAPTER X. CROOKED EVIDENCE

ANDREW MARSHALL was holding a worried conference with Larry Waldo, his factory superintendent. They were in Marshall's private office on the upper floor of the building. Sunlight streamed in the windows and illuminated the comfortable room. But there was no comfort in Marshall's eyes.

His worry was reflected in the face of Larry Waldo.

"That cradle bar that killed Tim Ryan was defective," Waldo said in a low voice. "It looks like a straight case of factory negligence. But I give you my word that I examined that machine only three days ago. The cradle bar I looked at then was O.K. The worn part that killed Ryan was substituted by some dirty rat in this plant!"

"Who?" Marshall groaned.

"I don't know. I wish I did. How did you make out last night in your interview with Ryan's widow?"

"I offered her a check for ten thousand dollars – in addition to the regular death benefit she will receive. She refused it. She told me she had hired a lawyer. She intends to sue."

"Who's the lawyer?"

"Wilbur Stengel," Marshall said.

Waldo clipped out a brief oath.

"Stengel is Bruce Clifton's personal attorney! I'll bet that Clifton's bank is behind this mess, somehow! I was suspicious of him when he agreed so meekly to let you buy out the bank's interest in the factory – especially after the way he threatened trouble for you in the first place."

The annunciator on Marshall's desk buzzed. The voice of his secretary sounded from the outer office.

"Mrs. Ryan is here to see you, sir, with Mr. Stengel, her lawyer."

"Very well. Send them in."

Wilbur Stengel was a tall, sleek-looking man, with a thin strand of reddish hair combed carefully over the top of his bald head. He motioned Mrs. Ryan to a chair and took one himself. He spoke in an oily tone, with one eye on his client.

"A sad business, Mr. Marshall – killing a loyal employee because you were too mean and penurious to use first-class machinery."

Mrs. Ryan took her cue from the lawyer. She began to weep noisily. Her weeping changed to a tirade of abuse. Andrew Marshall did not interrupt her. He felt sorry for Mrs. Ryan. She was obviously under the domination of the foxy Stengel.

"I'm willing to do anything that's just," Marshall said.

"We'll let the law give us justice, if you don't object," Stengel murmured unpleasantly. "My purpose in coming here today is to serve you with papers in a civil suit for damages. We're demanding one hundred thousand dollars for principal negligence."

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"I've been neither negligent nor criminal. Sue and be damned!"

Stengel's sneer was as insulting as he could make it.

"I'm going to do more than sue. I intend also to have you indicted and brought to trial as an accessory to murder. Your infernal penny-pinching economy killed this poor woman's husband!"

It was more than Marshall's temper could stand. His anger had been rising. Now it exploded.

"Did Bruce Clifton tell you to do all this? He's your real client, isn't he? He threatened me with trouble once before, if I dared to exercise my option and buy out the bank's interest in my plant. I believe Clifton is back of this whole conspiracy! I believe that —"

Larry Waldo leaped to his feet. He tried to interrupt his employer's unwise words. But it was too late. Stengel, too, was on his feet. There was a look of bitter satisfaction in his shrewd eyes.

"Thank you, sir. Permit me to repeat those words so that they may be accurately remembered later."

He did so in a calm, biting tone. Then he swung toward Marshall's superintendent.

"Mr. Waldo, I'll call you as my witness later on against your own employer. I shall bring suit for slander on behalf of my good friend and valued client, Mr. Bruce Clifton. I have one more demand to make, then I'll bid you good morning."

"What do you want?" Waldo growled.

"I want permission to look at your machinery downstairs."

Waldo looked as if he wanted to refuse. But he glanced at Marshall and the latter nodded wearily.

STENGEL and Mrs. Ryan left the office and went downstairs. Stengel sent the widow out to his car to wait. He himself walked with a brisk, eager step into the machine room.

There was a sardonic glint in Stengel's eyes. He had trapped Andrew Marshall into wild charges that would be impossible to substantiate. The wily lawyers nostrils crinkled, as if he could already smell the odor of heavy damages — with a neat rake-off for himself.

But he hadn't finished yet with his tormented victim upstairs. The most cunning part of his plan remained to be put into execution.

Stengel took care to attract the attention of the shop foreman, a man named Charlie Paine. He did this by entering with an important bustle that drew the eyes of all the workmen toward him. He raised his hand in a commanding gesture.

"I want to talk to you workmen for a moment!"

Faces turned from busy machines. Some of the hand-operated drills ceased. The noisy hum slackened. In the semi-silence, Wilbur Stengel spoke curtly.

"You men all know that your friend, Tim Ryan, was killed by a worn-out machine that had no business to be in operation. Perhaps some of you can testify about how rotten the machinery in this shop really is. I want to

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talk to the more honest and truthful men among you and get some affidavits. I —"

He got no further. A bellow of outraged anger came from Charlie Paine, the shop foreman.

"Who the hell told you to butt in here? Get out before I kick you out!"

Stengel whirled.

"I have every right to be here. Mr. Marshall gave me permission."

"You're a liar!"

"No man can call me a liar!" Stengel shouted.

He sprang forward. Paine, who had his left hand stuffed with a sheaf of papers from the foreman's shack, backed up involuntarily. Stengel's fist landed on his jaw.

Paine staggered and went down. The papers in his grasp scattered in the draft from a big cooling fan. He sprang to his feet, his face purplish. He darted at the pugnacious lawyer.

But the battle was over almost before it had started. Cooler heads prevented trouble. A couple of workmen dragged Paine back. Others took care of Stengel.

Stengel's anger vanished promptly. He seemed eager to make peace. He apologized to Paine for his hasty blow.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that. You shouldn't have called me a liar. I merely told you the truth. Mr. Marshall gave me permission to enter this shop. If you don't believe me, telephone upstairs."

Charlie Paine muttered something. He began to pick up his scattered papers. Stengel helped him. Both men seemed embarrassed about their encounter.

The workmen looked amused. But there was one who didn't. He was an old, gray-haired man in faded blue denim. He was a handy man around the shop. His chief job was sweeping up refuse and putting back discarded tools in their proper places. He was too old for an active job at the machines.

But his eyes were curiously young. A nervous habit of blinking served to disguise that fact. No one knew very much about him. He had only been employed as a sweeper for the past few days.

The gray-haired old man was The Shadow!

He had watched the brief fight between Wilbur Stengel and Charlie Paine. To him the fight seemed a fake. Both men had overdone their rage. The Shadow suspected that the entire incident had been prearranged.

What was its purpose? The Shadow had no logical answer until he noticed the aftermath of the fight. He watched Stengel help Paine pick up his scattered papers.

He observed a curious tension between the two men the first time their hands touched. After that Stengel took less trouble helping to pick up the scattered order sheets. He seemed relieved and triumphant.

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The Shadow divined what had happened. Under cover of his apologetic behavior, Stengel had passed a paper to Paine. It was not one of the other sheets from the concrete floor. It was a paper that must have come slyly from Stengel's own pocket!

PAIN went promptly into his shack, to phone upstairs about the presence of Stengel on the plant floor. He emerged in a few minutes.

"Mr. Marshall says he gave you permission. He and Mr. Waldo are coming downstairs to find out what you want."

"I'll have plenty to tell them," Stengel said harshly.

He waited until Andrew Marshall and Larry Waldo appeared. To the superintendent he paid no attention whatever. But to Marshall he was grimly threatening.

"I've decided not to ask any of your workmen for affidavits. I've got all the proof of negligence I need. The factory department sent you a notice a month ago condemning that machine that killed Tim Ryan. You were ordered to replace it. You failed to do so."

"That's not true!" Marshall snapped. He turned to Waldo. "Did you ever receive any such notice Larry?"

"None. Wait. I'll prove it! I'll get my files."

Waldo hurried into the shack which was used to keep the records of both himself and the plant foreman. He brought out a folder of his official correspondence. Smilingly, he leafed it over. Then his smile froze to an unbelieving stare.

Under his eyes was a letter from the factory department dated a month earlier. It was a condemnation of Machine No. 12, the one which had killed Tim Ryan. The inspector certified that the cradle bar of No. 12 was defective. He ordered that it be replaced at once with a new one. He also condemned Boiler No. 5 as defective and dangerous.

"Well?" Stengel said jeeringly. "Do you still deny guilt?"

Larry Waldo turned toward Marshall. "I never saw this before. It's a fake!"

"If it is," Stengel murmured, "how does it happen that there's a carbon copy of that order in the factory department files at the County Hall of Records? That's where I went this morning. The record clerk there showed it to me. He's going to be a witness of mine at the trial!"

Waldo looked thunderstruck. His jaw hung open. He had nothing to say.

The Shadow watched, unnoticed by anyone. He was merely an old laborer leaning on a dusty broom. All eyes were riveted on Andrew Marshall.

For a moment, the factory owner seemed as paralyzed as his superintendent. Then he snapped out of his daze. He snatched the typewritten report from Larry Waldo and stared at it.

"I say this letter is a fake, and I'm going to prove it! It states here that Boiler No. 5 is defective and dangerous to operate. I happen to know that particular boiler is in first class condition right now."

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"Come on, Larry! Help me turn the twist valve and cut No. 5 off from the rest. I'm going to drain it and show you there's nothing wrong with it!"

He started across the floor. Waldo turned to follow his employer. But it was Charlie Paine whom the steady eyes of The Shadow watched.

Paine melted backward without any particular notice being taken of him. He moved toward a steel pillar that flanked one of the factory walls. He leaned against the pillar as if a little tired. So tired, in fact, that his body bent a little toward the floor.

The floor was painted black with creosote paint. The Shadow could see no trace of anything suspicious at the base of the pillar. But he sensed treachery.

He could see Stengel moving rather quickly toward where the foreman lounged with one foot advanced slightly in front of the other.

The Shadow didn't hesitate. He sprang across the shop in the direction of the unsuspecting Marshall. As he ran, he swung up his broom like a threatening weapon. He uttered a shrill yell.

Everyone in the shop heard that warning shout. It echoed above the buzz and clatter of machinery. Marshall turned with a startled look. He was barely ten feet from Boiler No. 5. He recoiled as he saw the old man with the savagely upraised broom. He took a backward step closer toward the boiler.

Before he could retreat any farther, The Shadow struck. The broom caught Marshall squarely on the chest and toppled him in a heap. As he fell, The Shadow threw himself flat alongside him.

THE next instant, there was a tremendous explosion from the boiler. Shattered metal flew over the heads of two prone men. A gush of steam roared outward in a billowing white cloud. It was live steam, more dangerous than the red heart of a hot fire!

The Shadow rolled backward, dragging Marshall with him.

One of The Shadow's hands was cruelly burned by the steam, but he paid no attention to the agony of his hurt. He flung himself savagely to his feet.

Through the white cloud that swirled in the air from the shattered boiler, he could see dimly the bent figure of Charlie Paine.

Paine, standing near the pillar, was slyly picking up something that he had detached from the toe of his shoe.

It was the end of a black wire.

The wire had been invisible because it was the same color as the painted floor. In an instant, Paine had the wire jammed into his pocket.

The nearby figure of the lawyer screened the crooked plant foreman from the eyes of the other workmen. Nor would they have probably noticed him under any circumstances. The place was in an uproar of excitement.

Quickly, The Shadow leaped forward to grab Charlie Paine. But before he could move or utter a sound, he himself was accused.

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Larry Waldo was the man who shouted at him.

Waldo, completely deceived, played into the hands of Paine and the wily Stengel.

"Grab that man with the broom!" he shouted. "He's the skunk who blew up that boiler! He knew it was going to explode. That's why he knocked down Marshall with the broom. He wanted to cripple the machine, but he was afraid of murder!"

He made a grim clutch at the retreating old man. But a blow of The Shadow's fist sent Waldo sprawling. He had no time to explain or to temporize.

Angry workmen had seen the powerful blow that dropped Waldo. They sensed that this "old man" was merely a convenient disguise for a younger and more powerful personage. To their confused minds, The Shadow's quick knockout of Waldo was further proof that he had tampered with the boiler and had nearly murdered Andrew Marshall.

They rushed at The Shadow.

His swiftly drawn gun held them off. One of his hands was so badly burned by steam that it was the color of raw meat. But there was no mistaking the threat of the drawn gun in the other.

He pumped a bullet over the head of the nearest workman. The man fell back, and the others retreated with him. But The Shadow knew that his advantage was a brief one. Men were sneaking around the back of the shop, trying to head the fugitive off from the window behind him.

The Shadow backed toward the window under the protection of his crashing gunfire. With a quick leap, he was up on the broad sill and swinging over it. He landed with a jarring thump on the ground.

He raced toward the only car he could see in the factory yard – the car of Wilbur Stengel. The widow of Tim Ryan still waited patiently in it for the return of her lawyer. She screamed and jumped out when she saw the grim figure advancing with the gun.

The Shadow took her place. Stengel, who had not expected to remain very long in the factory, had left his engine idling. Under The Shadow's foot, the car raced across the paved factory yard and out the gate. Before anyone could find another car to pursue, he was a vanishing dot on the highway that led to town.

He left that highway at the first opportunity, took a more devious route to the hotel. Long before he reached the hotel, he had abandoned Stengel's car and hailed a taxicab.

He was no longer an old man in a stained denim suit. The prosperous, middle-aged man who entered the hotel excited no comment from the clerk.

The Shadow hurried upstairs and packed his bag. He checked out without delay. An hour later, a man of entirely different appearance engaged a furnished apartment on the other side of town.

It was merely a temporary haven for The Shadow. He expected to take more permanent quarters, as soon as he had made the proper arrangements, in the swanky country club.

It was at the country club that Benedict Stark maintained his residence while he was in Herndale.

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The Shadow had found out plenty about the conspiracy that aimed at the profitable industrial plant of the Marshall Machine Works. He knew now that it centered about three men.

One of them was Bruce Clifton, of the Herndale bank. The second was Wilbur Stengel. The third was Charlie Paine, the crooked plant foreman.

But the name of Benedict Stark remained foremost in the mind of The Shadow. The Prince of Evil was the guiding genius behind all this terror and death. The Shadow was now ready to confront Stark and beat him at his own game – duplicity and guile!

But Stark would not see The Shadow. Once more he would meet a man whom he had never been able to analyze or understand – the dapper and foppish figure of Lamont Cranston.

CHAPTER XI. MARIE HAS AN IDEA

THE Herndale Country Club was one of the most luxurious places of its kind within a hundred miles of New York. It was located on the southern side of town, amid green lawns and rolling hills.

Golf was an excuse for the presence in Herndale of the suave Benedict Stark. An invitation tournament was soon to take place. Stark was entered. He had engaged a private suite in the membership hotel that adjoined the clubhouse.

Stark was in his suite now, talking in low, angry tones to Bruce Clifton. Clifton looked pale. His fright was what made Stark so angry.

"So you want to back out, eh? Quit like a cowardly poodle. Why?"

"Andrew Marshall is already ruined. He's facing a civil suit from Tim Ryan's widow. Criminal proceedings are under way to send him to jail for manslaughter. Stengel is also bringing suit for slander. What more do you want?"

"I want to blow up his damned factory," Stark said with slow fury. "I want to smash every brick and chunk of mortar in it to smithereens!"

"But why?"

"His workmen have remained loyal. Not one of them has quit. The agitators I hired report complete failure. And now we have proof that The Shadow himself is in Herndale, for the purpose of protecting Andrew Marshall."

"We can't destroy a man whom we don't know," Clifton faltered.

"I do know him!" Stark said triumphantly. "It's a matter of simple logic. If you weren't so chicken-hearted, you'd have figured it out, too. We know definitely that The Shadow was aboard my yacht when I anchored at Quarantine in New York harbor."

"Well?"

"There were only two persons he could have been: Lamont Cranston or Clyde Burke. The Shadow can't be Burke, because Clyde Burke was rescued from that automobile frame-up after Millicent's murder, by The Shadow himself! Therefore, The Shadow must be Lamont Cranston!"

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Stark chuckled.

"In that case The Shadow – or rather Lamont Cranston – was also the old workman who saved Marshall from the boiler blast. He fled from town before he could be shot down. He had a badly burned right hand from live steam. I'm going to New York and look up Cranston at once. If his hand is bandaged, I'll know what to do!"

Stark gave Clifton a lidded look that made the frightened bank president squirm.

"I'll know what to do with you, too, if you talk any more about quitting! You've got an appointment tonight with Charlie Paine. See him! Find out what he's done about that factory meeting hall."

"Very well," Clifton said.

Some of his courage was returning. He was cheered by the prospect of Stark's pinning the identity of The Shadow on Lamont Cranston.

He went down to the veranda with his millionaire employer. But they had barely reached it, when both men received an unpleasant and stunning surprise.

Almost the first face they saw was that of Lamont Cranston!

The millionaire sportsman and society idler was stepping from a magnificent limousine which had just driven up. The limousine was driven by Stanley, the private chauffeur of Cranston. There was a vapid smile on Cranston's lips.

"Stark, old man! This is a pleasure! Mr. Clifton, too! How are you both? Are you entered in the golf tournament?"

Clifton mumbled an assent. Stark was staring at Cranston's right hand.

"I'm in the tournament, too," Cranston declared. "I had Stanley drive me all the way from my New Jersey home, just to be here."

Stark was still silent. But the chagrin in his cold eyes was visible to the watchful Cranston. He knew why. Stark couldn't believe it when he saw that the right hand of the dapper millionaire was undamaged.

The hand was ungloved and apparently entirely normal. The most efficient physician in New York had seen to that. The burned flesh had been expertly treated with oils and unguents. It had been sprayed with a special solution to prevent infection. Then a zinc salve had been applied.

Over that went a thin coating of collodion. The job was finished with a dusting powder of natural tint. The powder had been treated with a fixative to prevent it from smearing or coming off.

Cranston was safe from detection, provided he did not try to use the burned hand.

BENEDICT STARK may have sensed something of the truth. At any rate, he stepped forward suddenly. Before Cranston could object, Stark seized his right hand and squeezed it vigorously in a handshake.

Agony shot through Cranston's arm. He grimaced painfully. But he turned the grimace into a grin which he hoped would pass inspection. He couldn't tell anything from Stark's manner. But he sensed danger from Stark's quick suggestion.

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"I'm going out to the first tee for a few practice drives. Why not come along and drive a few yourself?"

Cranston dared not refuse.

"A good idea," he said. "It will give me an opportunity to see what form I'm in."

But as he turned to accompany Stark to the first green, he gave Stanley a screened signal with his left hand. He held his thumb horizontal. His index finger touched the center of his thumb vertically. It formed an inverted "T." The "T" stood for telephone.

Cranston's employees had received that simple signal many times before, when unwelcome visitors had to be courteously gotten rid of.

Bruce Clifton excused himself. He drove back to town. Stark and Cranston walked across clipped lawns toward the first green.

Before they reached it, Stanley came running up. He was respectful but urgent. Mr. Cranston was wanted on the telephone. A long-distance call from New York. The operator was holding the line open.

Cranston uttered a murmur of disgust. He apologized and excused himself. Stark was affable enough at the interruption. But there was a cruel, cold glint in his narrowed eyes as he stared after the retreating back of Lamont Cranston.

"I wonder!" he whispered to himself. "By Heaven – I wonder!"

BRUCE CLIFTON was wondering, too. Clifton had been completely deceived by Cranston's clever use of plastic surgery. He was convinced that The Shadow could not possibly be Lamont Cranston. Then who was The Shadow?

Was it Clyde Burke, after all?

Fear returned to the gray, fox-like banker. He'd have sacrificed his right arm to be safely out of this whole criminal mess. But he dared not disobey now. He had given his word to Benedict Stark to go through with the job assigned to him.

He had to meet Charlie Paine, had to receive the report of the crooked plant foreman employed at the Marshall Machine Works.

Bruce Clifton was waiting for Paine. He was in a secret underground room of his mansion. The room was below the level of the cellar.

A locked door connected with a tunnel that gave access to the secret room from a spot in the rear of the grounds. Using it was not much of a risk to a visitor. The mansion was set back from the street amid landscaped shrubbery and trees.

A buzzer sounded presently. Clifton touched a button concealed under the edge of his desk. The tunnel door opened and closed again. But the smiling visitor wasn't Charlie Paine. Clifton was amazed to see a woman.

The woman was Marie, the sly French maid of the dead Millicent.

"Take it easy," she told Clifton, with an entire absence of French accent. "Nobody is going to bite you."

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There was nothing threatening about Marie. On the contrary. To Clifton, who had met her several times but had paid her scant attention, Marie seemed suddenly the most glamorous woman he had ever beheld.

She was wearing a gorgeous costume taken from the wardrobe of the dead Millicent. It molded her pliant figure with alluring emphasis. Perfume drifted into Clifton's nostrils as Marie glided close to him. She laid a hand on his. Her fingers clung for an instant.

"I've come to make you a proposition," Marie said.

"I can't see you now. I'm busy. You shouldn't have come here without an order from Stark or myself. I've got to see someone else on important business."

"I know, Charlie Paine. Forget him! He's small potatoes. I'm here to talk millions! For you and me – and nobody else!"

"What do you mean?"

"I'll talk plain. You're scared of Stark. You'd like to get out of this with a whole skin. You don't want any part of a mess in which The Shadow is interested. But you are more afraid of Stark!"

"I don't blame you, my friend. Stark is a devil on wheels! But even a devil can be beaten, if you know the right formula."

She leaned closer. Her hand Caressed Clifton's. He was not much of a ladies' man. He grinned foolishly.

"I know the right formula," Marie whispered in his ear. "I've brought it here to show you."

"You're crazy!" Clifton said huskily.

"I'm sane. You'd be the crazy one, to turn down my proposition."

"What is it?"

"We're in a spot, if the cops get wind of what's going on. But Benedict Stark is in the worst spot of all. Stark killed Howard Paxton on that private island of his in the Bermudas. He thought he had committed a perfect crime, but he didn't."

"He was fool enough to allow a double clue to his guilt to get out of his possession. That double clue can put Benedict Stark in the electric chair!"

"I don't believe it," Clifton said unsteadily.

"O.K. I'll show you the evidence."

Marie's gloves came out of her bag. They slipped slowly over her lovely fingers. She dipped one gloved hand into the bosom of her dress. It came out holding a folded piece of paper.

"It's a forgery that states Howard Paxton was married and had a wife in England. The forgery is good, but not good enough to escape detection if police get hold of this. Worse than that, the fingerprints of Benedict Stark are all over the paper! I know, because I've already brought out the latent prints and compared them with samples from Stark's own fingers."

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"If he knew this, he'd kill you!"

"Not the way I'm going to work it. If ever a man was ripe for blackmail, Stark is that man! I'm going to talk boldly to him, at the first opportunity. I'm going to demand a first payment of fifty grand.

"If Stark talks tough, I'll remind him very sweetly that the police have the note in a sealed envelope – and they, will have it! – with orders to open the envelope in the event of either your death or mine."

Marie smiled grimly. "How about it darling? You like?"

"Where do I come in?"

"You don't. Not openly. That's why this proposition should appeal to you. I take all the blame for blackmail and all the risk. Your name won't even be mentioned. But you will profit on an even basis with me. Fifty percent of one angle. A hundred percent of another."

"I don't get what you're driving at," Clifton murmured hoarsely.

THERE was a growing spark of greed in Clifton's eyes. The combination of perfect safety and a rich blackmail profit appealed to his cupidity.

Marie had mentioned fifty grand as the first demand. There would be others, of course, later. The take might easily run to more than a million dollars. It would last as long as Benedict Stark remained alive.

But the thought of Stark's rage made Clifton shudder.

"Let's have a drink apiece," Marie suggested smilingly. "Then I'll explain to you why we need each other."

They had a highball. Clifton's face was red as he said:

"Go ahead. I'm listening."

"First, you resign from the bank. Then you marry me. Then we go to some place like South America and live high for the rest of our lives. The one hundred percent I get out of it is the social recognition of being the wife of a retired banker.

"I've been a ladies' maid all my life. I want to step out and have important people kowtow to me. I also get fifty percent of the blackmail dough.

"I understand about the even split of the money," Clifton said. "But where does my one-hundred-percent angle come in that you spoke about?"

Marie stood staring at him with a strange gleam in her black eyes. Her beauty was like flame in the basement room.

"I told you I want to marry you. In addition to the money, you get a one-hundred-percent interest in me, my friend!"

Bruce Clifton's eyes closed. He could see hot tropic sun, green palms, lovely beaches, racetracks. He had been a dry-as-dust businessman all his life, with no time for anything but bank balances. Now, behind closed eyelids, he could see easy profits – and Marie!

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He could see her at swanky South American capitals as his glamorous wife. He could see her in a bathing suit, swimming alongside him in blue tropical water. His wife! A hundred percent his!

Clifton opened his eyes. He was dazed with happiness. But caution still remained.

"What about the blackmail evidence? Who keeps it?"

"You do, darling," Marie told him. "It will be proof that I trust you implicitly. Besides, I might have trouble getting the police to accept it in a sealed envelope, to be opened in the event of either of our deaths. They might ask questions. If the request is made by Bruce Clifton, the eminent banker of Herndale, it should be easier, no?"

"You're right," he said huskily. "I can handle that part of the scheme without trouble. It's a deal!"

Marie uttered a silvery laugh and moved into his arms. Clifton felt her lips on his.

She gave him the forged murder note that contained the fingerprints of Benedict Stark. Clifton handled it greedily in a handkerchief. He was satisfied now that Marie was on the level with him.

As a matter of fact, she was. She had to be, in order to use the police as her ace in the hole if Stark tried to get tough.

Marie left the secret basement room with a lithe step.

"I'll spring my blackmail demand on Stark the first opportunity I get," she promised. "Your name will not be mentioned. First, because I don't want my future husband worried. Second, because it's better to keep Stark guessing."

The tunnel door closed. Clifton stared at the paper in the handkerchief. It was worth literally a million dollars! He drew a deep breath of delight.

CHAPTER XII. THREE THOUSAND VICTIMS

ONLY one thing marred Bruce Clifton's feeling that Marie's visit to him with her blackmail proposition was the luckiest event in his whole life. That was Clifton's terror of Benedict Stark.

But even so, Clifton couldn't see how Stark could do a thing at this late stage of the game.

In the morning, Clifton would carry the blackmail evidence in a sealed envelope to Herndale police headquarters.

He was an influential man in town. He was friendly with the chief of police. He would ask the chief to guard the envelope in the department safe, with instructions not to open it until after his, Clifton's, death.

Until morning, the blackmail evidence would be safe enough in the tough little chrome-steel wall vault in Clifton's private study upstairs.

Only two men knew the combination to that safe. The other man was Stark. But Clifton knew the grim sort of business that was on Stark's mind for tonight.

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It was a business that would bring Stark to the neighborhood of the Marshall Machine Works on the other side of town. There wasn't a chance in a million that Stark would pay a visit to Clifton's home, much less go near the wall safe.

The fox-like banker grinned as he glanced toward a certain panel of his basement room. Behind that panel was a secret flight of stairs that led to his top-floor study. At the top of the stairs a sliding bookcase enabled the banker to bring furtive visitors to his study unseen by the house servants.

He moved swiftly toward the basement panel. But suddenly he stopped short! The buzzer of the tunnel door was making an insistent rasp.

Clifton's face paled. Benedict Stark! Who else could it be? With trembling hands, the banker hid the blackmail note in his wallet. Then he forced himself to open the tunnel door.

A man was there. But the sight of his visitor's face drew a sigh of relief from Clifton. It was Charlie Paine, the crooked shop foreman of the Marshall Machine Works. Clifton had forgotten all about him.

"What's the matter with you?" Paine said nervously. "Anyone would think you saw a ghost."

"Shut up and come inside! How did you make out?"

"Don't tell me to shut up!" Paine rejoined angrily.

Like Clifton, he was under terrific tension. The banker realized it at once. He calmed the shop foreman down with a few apologetic words.

"I'm sorry, Charlie. A big job always makes me jumpy. Did you have any trouble?"

"None," Paine said. "I've got the stuff planted and ready to explode. Enough of it to blow up the assembly hall and every man in it."

"How many men will that be?"

"As many fool workmen as can crowd in," Paine replied callously. "I should judge about three thousand. Serve 'em right! They're so loyal to Marshall it makes me sick! I tried to stir up strike trouble with a little whispering campaign about what a louse Marshall is – and almost had my head punched off!"

"I had to change my tune. I pretended to agree with their plan to hold a testimonial meeting for Marshall and that dumb superintendent of his." Paine's tone got more bitter. "I even had to chip in a buck of my own for the collection."

"What are they going to present to Marshall?"

"A diamond-studded watch. He and Larry Waldo can listen to it tick in hell, after that stuff I've planted under the platform goes off."

"Is Clyde Burke going to be there?" Clifton asked swiftly.

"Yeah. He'll be up on the platform with Marshall and Waldo. He's reporting the testimonial meeting for his New York paper. Why?"

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"Because he's the one I'm chiefly interested in seeing blown to bits. Clyde Burke is The Shadow!"

Paine gave a cry of astonishment. "Are you sure?"

"Dead sure! I thought at first that The Shadow might be Lamont Cranston. But Cranston is just what he looks – a dumb society idler with no more brains than his walking stick!"

CLIFTON'S contempt of Cranston bolstered up his own ego. He spoke in a crisper tone.

"Who's going to set off the blast? You?"

"Not me," Paine grinned. "I've got a honey of a scheme! One that will make you laugh. The guy who blows up the whole works will be Andrew Marshall himself!"

"How can you arrange that? It sounds like magic."

"Just electricity, that's all. Mixed with some smart thinking on my part. Marshall's gavel will do the trick."

"His gavel?"

"Sure! Marshall thinks he's going to make a speech of welcome to three thousand workmen, but he'll never get around to it. Before he makes the speech, there will be a program of music by the workmen's band. When the music ends, Marshall will rise and rap his gavel for silence – and then, blooie!"

Clifton was still puzzled.

"I can't see how you can connect up a gavel to a pile of explosive material under the speaker's platform. Won't Marshall see the connecting wire on the gavel the moment he picks it up?"

Charlie Paine laughed with sardonic amusement.

"Who said the wire was attached to the gavel? Leave the electrical stuff to me, pal, and stick to banking. The wire is attached to the wooden sounding block that Marshall hits on his desk. I suggested the sounding block myself, because you can't hear the gavel ten feet away if you just bang the top of the desk."

"But –"

"The wire runs from the sounding block down the leg of the desk to a hole in the speaker's platform. A hinged trapdoor that leads to the explosives is covered by the desk itself. The moment Marshall hits that sounding block a strong, lusty blow, he closes an electrical connection. The current sets off a detonating device under the platform."

Paine chuckled again.

"I adjusted the connection for a heavy gavel blow. I didn't want some sap tapping it beforehand for fun, and setting off a premature blast. Am I smart – or am I smart?"

There was no trace of pity in his face. Or in the tones of Clifton, as he congratulated the crooked foreman. Neither of them cared about the fact that three thousand loyal workmen, most of them with wives and families, would be blown to atoms in the same explosion that was rigged up to wipe out Marshall and Waldo and Clyde Burke.

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They grinned and shook hands. Charlie Paine departed as slyly as he had come, via the tunnel exit to the rear of the grounds.

After he had gone, Bruce Clifton rubbed his hands. Under the mistaken belief that Clyde Burke was The Shadow, he was delighted with the prospect of seeing him blown to bloody tatters.

But that wasn't why Clifton rubbed his hands. His mind came back to the sultry beauty of the shapely Marie. He and Marie were going to be married! In his wallet was the blackmail paper that would make both of them independently wealthy!

Bruce Clifton darted toward the panel that hid the flight of stairs connecting with his private study. On the way, he picked up a pair of gloves. He slid the panel open, began to climb stealthily.

WHEN Marie arrived at her apartment, she, too, was in high spirits. She opened the door and entered her dark living room, humming a gay tune. She turned on the lights.

Then she stood very still.

"Good evening, my dear," Benedict Stark said suavely.

He was sitting in a deep leather chair, with both legs crossed. There was a smile on his face. But it was a nasty smile, one twisted with menace.

Marie was startled. Then she regained her nerve. She had been looking for a chance to put the blackmail bee on Stark in a private conversation. Here it was!

She smiled insolently at her millionaire employer.

"Hello, Mr. Stark. Nice to see you."

"Did I give you permission to wear clothing that belonged to Millicent?"

"No, you didn't. But what difference does it make? Millicent is deader than a stuffed monkey. The clothes were gathering dust in her closet. I've got the sort of figure that flatters good clothes, if I do say so myself. So what's the diff?"

There was something about Marie's voice that made Stark's eyes narrow. He had never seen her in so insolent a mood. Or so daringly frank in her talk. His anger grew. He sprang to his feet.

"I told you not to leave this apartment! I expressly forbade it. What do you mean by disobeying me?"

"You want to know why, eh? All right, I'll tell you."

Her words spat like bullets.

"I'm sick of being cooped up here! I like to get around. I've got the stuff to get around. You may think I'm a hag, but there are other men who don't."

"Where were you? Whom were you with?"

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Marie hesitated. She was afraid she had said too much on the subject of men. She didn't want Stark to suspect that she had been to see Clifton. She was so afraid of Stark's shrewdness that she blinked her eyes, fearful he might read her mind.

When her eyes opened, she was master of her wits again.

"I was with a nice young man. You wouldn't know him. He was a tall college boy I met at a movie show. And don't ask me where he took me. That's personal, and none of your business."

To her delight, she saw that Stark was losing his temper. The angrier he got, the less dangerous he became to her. Her own brain felt as cold and sharp as a razor blade.

"I picked you out of the gutter in the first place!" Stark roared. "That's exactly where you're going back to! The gutter – where you belong! Do you hear?"

"I can't hear a thing, the way you're shouting. I'm not deaf! Besides I've got something to tell you!"

"Damn your impudence, I'll –"

"Shut up!" Marie shrilled. Her voice cut sharply through his. "I said I've got something to tell you!"

There was instant silence. Marie's whisper sounded like the slithering crawl of a snake through dry grass:

"Mr. Benedict Stark, you're a very lucky man. I've decided to save you from the electric chair!"

Stark's face went dead-white. Then it flooded with such a rush of crimson that he looked about to have an apoplectic stroke. It took a tremendous effort to control his rage. But he did. He even made his voice sound as silky as hers.

"That's very nice. I appreciate your courtesy. Why do you want to save me from the electric chair, Marie?"

"Because, my friend, you're going to pay me a nice piece of change for the favor."

"And how big a piece of change do you expect to get from me?"

She was eyeing him steadily.

"Oh, various amounts. We'll settle that from time to time. I'm putting the first bee on you tonight. You're stung for fifty grand!"

"What makes you think I'll let myself be stung?"

"Because you were fool enough to kill a man and leave yourself wide open. There's a certain forged note in existence that proves a murderer killed Howard Paxton in Bermuda. He then deluded Millicent Whitney into thinking that Paxton was a married man who had jilted her. Also, there are fingerprints on that forged murder note – the prints of Benedict Stark!"

"Ah! So you were the one who –"

"Wait. I've got more to tell you! Yes, I was the one who stole the note out of Millicent's locket. I've also got the exact details written down concerning the method and the manner of Millicent's murder. How she was

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killed in her apartment and then left in the road as a fake hit-and-run victim. At your personal orders!"

"And for keeping silent about this and other things, you want fifty grand, eh?"

"Don't be so modest! That's just the first payment. You're going to set me up like a queen before you're through! A million bucks would be a better guess."

BENEDICT STARK launched himself like a thunderbolt across the room. He crashed into Marie with a force that sent her staggering backward. She fell to a couch, her arm desperately protecting her throat, and Stark fell with her.

In his rage, he forgot about weapons. His gun remained in his pocket. All he needed were his ten fingers, to crush out the life of this double-crossing tool of his!

He grabbed at Marie's up-flung arm and tore it away from her throat. But before he could clutch at her windpipe, Marie screamed something that froze Stark's murderous lust. Enraged as he was, it reached the cold center of his intelligent brain.

He let go of her. "What did you say?"

"I said that if you want to take a sure road to the electric chair, kill me right now! Kill me – and burn!"

"What do you mean?"

"Use your head! Do you think I'd be crazy enough to walk in here and talk the way I did to you, without an ace in the hole? My ace is the forged murder note. The hole is the property safe in Herndale police headquarters.

"That's where the evidence is now! In a sealed envelope. The moment I die, for any reason whatever, the chief of police has orders to open that sealed envelope and read its contents."

Benedict Stark's face was gray. He gulped and said nothing.

"Get away from me," Marie snarled at him. "You're wrinkling my nice dress. And get those hands off from my throat. I use an expensive brand of dusting powder and you're smudging it."

Stark rose unsteadily to his feet. He seemed lifeless, except for a spark that lurked like a speck of hell-fire in the depths of his ugly eyes.

The spark grew as he recovered his composure. He began to smile slowly. His smile grew into a throaty chuckle. When he spoke at last, his words were bland.

"My dear, you're quite a woman. You represent the one serious mistake in judgment I ever made in my life. I thought you were a fool. I apologize. I want to say –"

"Say it with cash. That's all I'm interested in. Fifty grand! And don't be dope enough to try marking the bills."

"You shall have your first payment tomorrow morning. I know when I'm in a corner. While I'm in it, I'll pay."

"You'll be in it till you die, or your money runs out. When it comes to digging air-tight corners, I'm an expert."

"Are you sure, Marie, that you did that corner digging all by yourself? No partner to guide you and advise you?"

Marie's smile was bland with mockery. She'd have made an excellent poker player.

"I'm a lone wolf, when it comes to business, Mr. Stark. I keep my friends for my hours of leisure and relaxation."

Stark bowed. His face, too, was impossible to read.

"Good evening, Marie. You shall have fifty thousand dollars in the morning. In cash."

He turned and walked out of the apartment.

CHAPTER XIII. THE MAN IN THE TREE

MORE visitors had arrived at the home of Bruce Clifton. But the wily banker was not entertaining them. He was not even aware that they were in the vicinity.

They had not entered the house. They were hidden behind dark shrubbery on one side of the imposing-looking mansion. Luckily for them, they had arrived at the grounds a few minutes after the shrewd Charlie Paine had taken his departure. Otherwise, it might not have been so simple a matter to hide their presence.

The uninvited callers were Andrew Marshall and his factory superintendent, Larry Waldo.

Their car was parked on a nearby street. Their decision to spy on the home of Bruce Clifton was a sudden impulse. They had been on their way to the Marshall Machine Works. An event was taking place at the factory tonight that filled them both with pride.

Three thousand employees were holding a testimonial meeting to show their confidence in the man who had always paid them generous wages and treated them with decent consideration.

The attempt to ruin Andrew Marshall had been a boomerang, as far as his workmen were concerned.

Both Marshall and Waldo were convinced now that the conspiracy centered in the personage of a wily lawyer named Wilbur Stengel. But behind Stengel was Bruce Clifton!

The moment Marshall's car came in sight of the Clifton home, he had conceived a reckless idea. It might be worth the risk to attempt to gain entrance to Clifton's house and try a quick search. Something might be found that might connect the hypocritical banker with the trouble at the factory.

There was a tall elm tree not far from the bush behind which Marshall and Waldo lurked. The upper branches of the tree brushed close to the shaded window of an upper room. Marshall had been to that room once or twice on legitimate business. He knew it was Clifton's private study.

He whispered to Larry Waldo and the latter nodded. Waldo remained where he was. Marshall darted to the elm and swung himself upward among the lower branches. He began to climb.

Moving with swift care he soon reached a spot from where he could stare at the window of Clifton's study. The shade was not quite drawn all the way.

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There was a gap of two or three inches at the bottom. It allowed a narrow-framed view into the room. The study was lighted which made things a little easier for Marshall.

As far as he could determine, the room was empty. But he couldn't see the entire length of the study. The part that contained the study desk and the wall safe was out of sight. It was possible that Clifton was seated beyond the range of Marshall's vision.

Prudently Marshall decided to wait awhile before descending to report to Waldo.

It was well that he did. Clifton having gotten rid of Charlie Paine was now ascending the secret stairs from the room in the basement.

The first hint Marshall received that something unusual was going on was a slight movement of the bookcase that lined the wall at the end of the room he was able to see from his tree perch. A section of the bookcase began to move. It swung outward disclosing a dark opening in the wall.

Bruce Clifton emerged.

There was a grin on his thin foxy lips. His hands were gloved. He was carrying a folded paper in his grasp.

He hurried across the room. His movement carried him out of sight of Marshall.

Marshall sweated, wondering what the paper was and what Clifton was up to. He had no way of finding the answer.

After a minute or two the figure of Clifton returned past the rectangle of the lighted window below the shade. He had removed his gloves. He hurried to the bookcase at the wall and manipulated it. It swung open and closed.

Clifton vanished.

ANDREW MARSHALL had seen enough to make his heart beat with excitement. He descended the tree and rejoined his impatient superintendent. He told Larry Waldo what he had seen.

There was a swift conference, then the two men separated. Waldo, as before, remained behind the protection of dark shrubbery. Marshal scaled a hedge that surrounded the property and gained the sidewalk. He walked up the entrance drive and rang the bell at the front door.

A servant answered the summons. Marshall was smiling and courteous. He asked permission to speak with Mr. Clifton.

The servant was courteous too. But there was a grim gleam in his eyes. He had received strict orders earlier in the evening from his employer. Clifton didn't want to be bothered tonight with unwanted visitors.

"I'm sorry, sir" the butler said. "Mr. Clifton is not at home."

Marshall did not dispute the lie. He merely murmured a conventional expression of regret and turned away. But before the butler could close the door, Marshall halted him with a quick exclamation.

"I wonder if I might leave a message? It's rather important. Have you some paper and an envelope?"

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He stepped through the open doorway into the hallway of the house. The butler had no reason to object. He went into a small reception room and came out with a sheet of note paper and an envelope.

While he was gone, Marshall did the job that was his only reason for entering. He tiptoed to the door and pressed a small button under the lock. He was back near the console table before the butler returned.

He wrote a brief message about some trivial matter and sealed the envelope. He gave it to the butler.

"Will you leave this on Mr. Clifton's desk? Thank you. Good night."

As he left, the door clicked behind him. It sounded like a normal click. But the door has not locked. The button which Marshall had pressed prevented the lock from operating.

The butler suspected nothing. He started up the staircase with the phony letter. Marshall raced soundlessly through the darkness of the grounds to where Waldo waited.

Marshall didn't halt to speak to his superintendent. With a bound he was up in the lower branches of the elm. He climbed as fast as he could. He reached the branch opposite the window of Clifton's study.

He didn't see the butler enter the room by the door that led from the front hall. But he assumed that was what happened for in an instant the butler himself became visible.

The butler hadn't noticed that the shade was not completely drawn. A pebble from Marshall's hand struck Waldo on the head. It was a signal agreed upon beforehand – a signal that meant: "Get busy, fast!"

Waldo raced to the front door of the mansion. He opened the unlocked door and slipped inside. The butler was still upstairs on his phony errand. Waldo darted into a reception room and melted out of sight. He waited until the butler came down the stairs and went to the pantry at the rear.

Then Waldo tiptoed to the top floor.

He entered Clifton's study. Every nerve in his body was tense. The room was empty. But there was no telling when the banker would return via his secret staircase built into the wall behind the bookcase.

Waldo paid no attention to the bookcase. He was interested solely in what Clifton had done in the few moments he had been out of the range of vision of the watchful Marshall.

WALDO examined the banker's desk. He saw the sealed envelope that had been the means of getting rid of the butler. There were other papers on the desk but they didn't mean a thing. Waldo proved that by leafing rapidly through them. He also went through every drawer in the desk with no better luck.

What had become of the mysterious paper which Clifton had carried in gloved hands? And why gloved hands?

Larry Waldo straightened with a beating heart. The answer was elsewhere. He searched for some revealing trifle that might explain what had gone on.

A heavy chair was out of place. That was the trifle which Waldo noticed almost at once. He had no knowledge of the correct arrangement of furniture in this room, but the rug near the chair revealed definitely that the chair had been moved from its accustomed spot.

MURDER GENIUS

There were four dents in the soft rug that showed where the heavy chair normally stood.

The chair had been moved closer to the wall.

There was a tapestry on the wall. Shoes had left a faint dust mark on the brocaded seat of the chair. Waldo stepped upward as he was confident Clifton had done before him. He examined the tapestry.

It didn't swing outward from the wall, as he had hoped. He realized his first guess was wrong, when he saw that the tall back of the chair wouldn't permit the tapestry to swing in an arc. Clifton had used some other method to move the tapestry.

By jiggling at the hanging, Waldo soon discovered the correct answer to his problem. The tapestry hung from the molding near the ceiling. But it was not suspended on ordinary molding hooks. The hooks were on tiny rollers. When Waldo pulled gently, the whole tapestry moved sideways.

The dull sheen of chrome steel was disclosed. Larry Waldo gasped with satisfaction as he beheld a small wall safe.

His nervous glance surveyed the empty room behind him. He could hear no sound. He began to manipulate the dial on the safe.

It seemed like a foolish waste of time. An ordinary man could scarcely hope to unlock that dial by the combination of touch and sight and hearing. But Waldo was no ordinary man.

He had worked up from a bench at a lathe to be superintendent of the Marshall Machine Works because of his brains and his extraordinary mechanical ability. Waldo was a better master mechanic than any man who worked in the factory.

He had tackled mechanisms far more delicately adjusted than the tumblers of a small wall safe. His fingertips were as deft and efficient as those of a surgeon.

The only thing he was really worried about was the danger of an interruption before he had completed his ticklish job. That, however, was something Waldo could not control. He gritted his teeth and turned his entire attention to the problem of the safe.

He had no idea whether the task had taken two minutes or twenty, when at last he straightened his aching back. He pulled gently at the handle of the safe. It bent horizontally. The steel door opened.

A quick glance at the interior showed Waldo the usual untidy jumble of objects within a man's personal safe.

There was a jeweled cigarette case. Behind the case was a pile of check books, with only the stubs remaining. Under the check books were heavier account books. They filled up most of the room in the back of the safe.

Waldo removed the cigarette case and grabbed for the check stubs. He was looking for the evidence of irregular payments to people whose services Bruce Clifton might have hired for undercover jobs. But he couldn't find anything that seemed in the least compromising. If Clifton were a crook – as Waldo and Marshall were now positive he was – he was a smart crook!

The disappointed factory superintendent shoved the check stubs aside. He grabbed for the heavier account volumes.

MURDER GENIUS

But his grab was of brief duration. His head jerked nervously around. He had heard a faint sound like the distant creak of a man's shoe!

IT was enough to warn Larry Waldo that he had already dangerously overstayed his time. Swiftly, he rearranged the contents of the safe as he had found them. He closed the steel door softly and spun the combination dial.

It was only when he had leaped noiselessly from the chair to the soft rug that Waldo discovered he had made a silly blunder in his haste to get away.

He was still holding the jeweled cigarette case in his left hand. He had forgotten to shove the thing back in the safe before he closed and locked it.

He started to toss it on Clifton's desk. Then he changed his mind. If Clifton saw the cigarette case, he'd realize at once that someone had opened his safe. Waldo felt like a petty crook as he shoved the case into his own pocket. But it was the only sensible thing to do.

He tiptoed to the front hall. The sound he had heard was not repeated. It might have been made by the furtive butler, but Waldo was inclined to doubt that. It had seemed to come from the general direction of the bookcase at the other end of Clifton's study.

Waldo tiptoed cautiously down the main staircase of the dimly-lit mansion. He reached the hallway on the ground floor without being halted. His heart was pounding. He didn't want to be caught now at the end of a fruitless quest.

His nervousness betrayed him. He was careful enough to fix the button in the front door which Marshall had tampered with, so that it would lock properly when it closed. But he shut the door too hard. There was a distinct click!

The click was loud enough to be heard. It brought the suspicious butler running through the hall to see who was trying to get in. The Butler suspected an incoming burglar, not an outgoing one!

He found the door, however, closed and perfectly normal. He opened it and peered into the darkness. Larry Waldo had darted across the black lawn and made a swift dive behind a clump of bushes.

The butler saw nothing to alarm him. Shaking his head in puzzlement, he went back to his duties in the pantry.

Waldo rejoined Marshall. He reported failure in his search. The two men slipped unseen from the grounds and went back to their parked car. They were disappointed, but not too surprised. The search had been just a wild gamble.

On the way to the factory where the loyal employees were preparing a testimonial meeting for the popular Marshall, Waldo suddenly remembered the jeweled cigarette case he had been obliged by circumstances to steal.

He took it from his pocket. Marshall examined it with a flash of renewed hope. But the cigarette case was as barren of clues as the search of the safe had been.

It contained nothing but cigarettes.

Marshall broke open every one of the dried-out and stale cigarettes. All he found was tobacco. He took the disappointment more calmly than Larry Waldo.

"Forget it! Let's think of something more pleasant. When I think of those workmen waiting in the factory assembly hall to give public expression to their respect and confidence in me, I wouldn't trade places with any man on earth!"

There was pride in Marshall's tone. He had no suspicion of the ugly truth. A treacherous employee in the pay of a master criminal had mined the factory. Three thousand men were to be blown skyward in chunks of bleeding flesh, because Benedict Stark wanted the life of Andrew Marshall.

Worse than that, The Shadow himself knew nothing of this impending wholesale slaughter!

CHAPTER XIV. A NARROW ESCAPE

BRUCE CLIFTON descended from his top-floor study to the secret conference room beneath his basement.

Everything was ticking like a well-oiled clock. But Clifton couldn't sit still.

He was guiltily conscious of his blackmail pact with Marie. Sniffing, he thought he could detect the odor of Marie's perfume. Actually, there was no trace in the air of the scent she had used. But Clifton felt better after he lighted and puffed furiously on a big black cigar.

He stopped in front of a mirror and stared at his reflection. He noticed a tiny smear of lipstick at the corner of his mouth. Grinning, he rubbed it away with his handkerchief. Marie had trusted him with a million-dollar secret and had sealed the bargain with a kiss. It made the banker imagine that he was a man of devastating charm for the ladies.

He leered in the mirror.

"I'm not a bad-looking man for my age," he told himself, with a conceited smile.

He sat down and tried to relax. But he was up again like a coiled spring. The telephone in his basement retreat was ringing.

To Clifton's guilty conscience, the phone was a terrified reminder of Benedict Stark. He held the instrument with tremulous hands, almost afraid to unhook it.

"Hello?"

It wasn't Stark. The soft voice of Marie sounded in the pleased ear of the banker.

"Hello, darling!"

"You shouldn't telephone me," Clifton protested. "It's dangerous! It will be safer for both of us to have no communication of any kind until after —"

Marie's laughter sounded like the chime of silver bells. She was in high spirits.

"Everything is O.K. Job is done!"

MURDER GENIUS

"You mean that you have already seen – him?"

"Correct. Stark was waiting for me when I got back to my apartment. I put the bee on him right then. For fifty thousand bucks! And he caved, darling! He promised to come through with the dough tomorrow morning. In cash!"

Clifton felt a swift chill in his blood. "Does Stark suspect that I'm in it with you?"

"No. I told him it was my own idea. Your name was never mentioned."

Clifton drew a shuddering breath of relief. He knew that Marie was not lying. His own safety was essential to the success of her daring scheme. But caution drew a final warning from him.

"Be careful of tapped phone wires. Remember what happened to Millicent!"

"Don't worry, darling," Marie said. "I'm making this call from a pay station. We'll both be in twenty-five grand in the morning. And that's only a starter! Good night, darling. Pleasant dreams."

Clifton chuckled. In his mind's eye he could see the glamorous beauty of the shapely Marie. He didn't have to fall asleep to have pleasant dreams!

He hung up the phone, delighted at the way events were progressing. The thought of the impending doom of the workmen at the Marshall Machine Works never entered his consciousness. All he could think of was himself and Marie.

The rasping clamor of the buzzer on the door of the secret tunnel cut through his complacent thoughts. He expected no one. Who the devil could it be?

This time the visitor was Benedict Stark!

Clifton felt ready to faint at the unexpected visit of his dangerous employer. He mumbled a surprised greeting. He averted frightened eyes.

But Stark was not in an angry mood. He seemed pleased and cordial. His tone was bland.

"I just dropped in for a quick hello on my way to Marshall's factory. I'm delighted with the efficient way you have handled things. I want Charlie Paine taken care of with a bonus, after things quiet down. Pay him out of the special fund I have established."

"Very well."

Stark continued in the same congratulatory vein for another five minutes. Then he glanced at his watch.

"The time is getting close for the factory fireworks. I've got to go."

He moved toward the tunnel door. Clifton was never so glad in all his life to see anybody depart.

But Benedict Stark halted at the door. He turned suddenly. His eyes bored into the pale face of the banker.

"If you don't mind, I think I'll have a look at the last legal report from Stengel. How's he doing on those civil suits against Marshall?"

"Very well indeed," Clifton faltered.

"Where do you keep Stengel's confidential reports? In your study safe?"

Clifton felt dizziness swirl like a black curtain over his eyes.

"Yes, sir. But I hardly think you will have time to —"

"Nonsense! Let's go upstairs."

STARK turned smilingly toward the panel in the wall. With a nervous bound, Clifton got in front of his employer. Clifton himself opened the panel, disclosing the secret staircase in the wall. He was the first one to mount the steps. He walked slowly.

Terror bubbled like yeast in his mind. The thing Clifton had dreaded was happening!

Inside the safe which Stark so stubbornly insisted on inspecting was the blackmail paper which Marie had turned over to the treacherous banker. Anticipating no trouble, Clifton had put it in the safe. He had planned to carry it to police headquarters in a sealed envelope the next morning.

If Stark got his hands on the blackmail evidence, death for Clifton would follow like a bolt of lightning. Stark could kill safely, with the proof of his guilt at last in his own possession.

Clifton would have to palm that paper before Stark got his hands on it. That's why the wily banker had moved so swiftly to get in front of Stark and lead the way upstairs.

When Clifton mounted the chair in front of the tapestry, Stark made no objection. He didn't say a word until the banker had nervously twirled the combination dial and had released the lock. Then Stark uttered a single growling monosyllable:

"Wait!"

He plucked at Clifton's arm. It was a strong, muscular gesture. It jerked the banker down from his perch. Stark was smiling. It wasn't a nice smile. It matched the ugly rasp of his words.

"If you don't mind, I'll take a look at that safe myself!"

His short-legged body bounded upward to the chair. He turned the handle and opened the door of the safe. Clifton wanted to run for his life, but his paralyzed legs rooted him to the floor. He was almost dead with terror.

Then, suddenly, Clifton's eyes bulged with amazement.

He had hidden the blackmail evidence in a jeweled cigarette case. The cigarette case was not in the safe!

His gasp was so loudly uttered that Stark turned and stared at him.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"What are you scared about?"

"I can't get the thought of all those workmen at the factory out of my mind," Clifton muttered hastily. "Isn't there some way you could kill Marshall without blowing up three thousand poor devils of workmen?"

Stark grinned at Clifton with callous contempt.

"Chicken-hearted as usual, eh?"

He began to examine the contents of the safe. He looked over the stubs on the check books. He didn't pay any attention to the inked entries. His thumb merely rifled the edges. He glanced grimly between each separate stub.

Clifton knew what Stark was up to. Stark suspected the presence in Clifton's safe of the blackmail paper that had been stolen by Marie!

Having finished with the check stubs, Stark made a similar careful search of the account books. He looked between each page. He took out every object within the safe, cleaning it to its four bare walls.

He found nothing!

Slowly, the devilish grin faded from his lips.

"I owe you an apology, Clifton. You're a lucky man. I came here prepared to kill you! But you're going to continue living, it seems."

"Eh?" Clifton crammed all the innocence he could into that croaking murmur.

"Something was stolen from me. Something that I've got to get my hands on! I suspected that the thief had passed it to you. I was wrong. You're too white-livered to be mixed up in a double-crossing blackmail game."

"Blackmail?" Clifton faltered. "A double cross? Who was it?"

"That, my friend, doesn't matter," Stark said smoothly. "If you are really interested, keep watching the accident reports in the daily newspapers.

"Somebody is going to have an accident very soon. But I doubt it will attract much attention. It will be so ordinary an accident, that it will not merit more than a routine paragraph on an inside page."

Stark replaced the account books and the check stubs within the safe. He closed and locked the steel door.

"Good night."

He left Clifton's home with a cruel smile of anticipation. Stark had business at the Marshall Machine Works tonight that appealed to his criminal and perverted sense of humor.

Behind him he left a badly rattled man. Bruce Clifton had been literally snatched from the jaws of death. Someone had broken into his home and burglarized his safe. But who was the intruder?

CLIFTON rang the bell summoning his butler.

MURDER GENIUS

He pointed to several objects in the room, which he had deliberately disarranged before the butler arrived in answer to the ring. Clifton declared that an intruder had been in his home. He questioned the servant.

For the first time, Clifton learned that Andrew Marshall had rung the bell and entered downstairs, to leave a message when he was told that Clifton was not at home.

The butler turned over the papers on Clifton's disturbed desk. He picked up the sealed envelope Marshall had given him. It was hidden under some other papers.

Clifton read Marshall's message. It was trivial. It had no special significance. But Clifton didn't want to disclose his suspicion of Marshall to the butler. He pretended that the message in the envelope was important.

"Oh, yes! It was a matter I had completely forgotten about. I'm glad Marshall left it for me."

His tone became more casual.

"You didn't happen to hear anything, after Marshall left, did you? Could someone have sneaked into the house after you admitted Marshall on his legitimate errand?"

"Oh, no, sir! But a queer thing did happen, come to think of it."

The butler told about the peculiar click he had heard at the front door.

"I wouldn't even mention it, sir, except that you brought up the subject of burglars. I was at the front door barely a few seconds after I thought I heard the click. But the door was securely locked."

"Probably the sound you heard was a banging shutter," Clifton said smoothly. "Forget about it. Nothing of value has been taken. In fact, nothing at all has been taken."

But rage kindled in Clifton's fox-like eyes after he had dismissed his servant. He didn't need a blueprint to tell him what had occurred. Marshall, with the probable aid of Larry Waldo, had stolen the blackmail paper!

Marshall couldn't have done it alone. His entry downstairs was a trick to enable Waldo to sneak into the house in some undisclosed manner.

They had the jeweled cigarette case!

It was a frightful predicament for Clifton to be in. Marshall and Waldo would never realize what the case actually contained. It was too clever a hiding place. They might even throw the case away, in order to avoid incriminating themselves by keeping it.

The one thing on earth that promised wealth and love to the scheming banker had now become a football of fate! It was necessary to get hold of that cigarette case at once.

Bruce Clifton left his home as swiftly as he dared. He drove his car to a section of town where he could escape the risk of being seen by people who knew him. He entered a telephone booth and called the apartment of Marie.

To his relief, Marie was in. Clifton told her in a rapid whisper over the wire what had happened. He heard a gasp, followed by a most unladylike oath.

"Where are you now?" Marie snarled.

He told her.

"O.K. Drive four blocks north and park at the corner. Keep your engine running. I'll be there fast."

She was. Marie's face was veiled. There was nothing glamorous about her now. No one gave her a second glance as she walked up to Clifton's car. She got in beside him.

The car moved slowly off. Then its speed increased. It headed toward the town's northern suburbs, where the sprawling factory buildings of the Marshall Machine Works were located.

CHAPTER XV. BLIND JUSTICE

THE MARSHALL MACHINE WORKS occupied a large area. The plant comprised half a dozen buildings. Beyond the buildings were railroad sidings and loading platforms. They accommodated the numerous freight cars that brought in the steel that was manufactured into agricultural tools and other products.

All the factory buildings were dark except one. This was the largest in the group. Its upper floor was ablaze with light. It was here that the testimonial meeting of the workmen to express their loyalty to Andrew Marshall was being held.

Benedict Stark watched those lighted windows from an excellent point of vantage. He was on the roof of a small one-story shack nearby.

The shack was a field office used by Marshall when he was out in the grounds and away from his more luxurious plant office. The Prince of Evil had climbed unseen to its dark, flat roof. He was protected from observation by a small coping. The metal framework of a glass skylight was also a protection to his crouched body.

A pair of high-powered glasses were glued to Stark's eyes. They enabled him to keep close watch on the activities within the assembly hall.

He could hear the sound of brisk music from the workers' band. But sight, not sound, was what interested Stark. His glasses brought the platform in the assembly hall within close range of his vision.

He could see Andrew Marshall on that platform. Barry Waldo was there, too. So was the figure of Clyde Burke. Burke, in his capacity as reporter for the Daily Classic, was at the meeting to write an account of the unusual event for his newspaper.

The band music delayed the opening of the speeches. But Stark didn't mind that. He was enjoying a cruel anticipation of what he knew was doomed to happen in the next few minutes.

He could see a gavel lying carelessly on the desk near Marshall's hand. The sight of that gavel and the neat little sounding block alongside it brought a grin to Stark's thickish lips.

Suddenly, his grin vanished. Caution replaced pleasure. Stark had heard stealthy footsteps approaching the shack from the darkness of the grounds over toward the freight sidings.

Two people appeared presently. A man and a woman. Crouched low behind the coping of the shack roof, Stark was able to identify the pair. The man was Bruce Clifton. The woman was Marie.

MURDER GENIUS

Clifton tried the door of the field shack and found it unlocked. He and Marie entered. They turned on the light.

Stark took advantage of the brief delay to slide the skylight glass back an inch or so from the frame of metal, where it normally was closed tight. Lying flat on his stomach, with an eye at the edge of the small aperture, Stark was able to hear as well as see.

The very first words he heard brought a vicious gleam of comprehension to his face.

"We're ruined unless we can lay our hands on that cigarette case!" Clifton groaned. "We've got to get hold of the forged note with Stark's fingerprints on it, or our blackmail scheme isn't worth a nickel. Our lives, either!"

"Clam up!" Marie said.

She seemed annoyed at the banker's whining. Her voice sounded calm and logical.

"The chances are that Marshall has got the cigarette case. Even if Waldo stole it from your study safe, he must have turned it over to Marshall. My guess is that they came straight from your house to attend the meeting here."

"So what?"

"The cigarette case can only be in one of two places. Either it's in Marshall's pocket up there on the platform of the assembly hall, or he stopped first in this field office and left it in a drawer of his desk."

Marie laughed curtly.

"If Marshall kept it and is blown to pieces, we'll still have our blackmail hold on Stark. How is Stark ever to know the truth? All you have to do is to carry a sealed envelope to police headquarters in the morning, with a sheet of blank paper in it – and we're still sitting pretty!"

"Stark can't examine it. He'll pay us through the nose for what he thinks is in that envelope!"

"And if the evidence is here in Marshall's desk," Clifton added eagerly, "we're doubly safe!"

"Correct," Marie said.

WHILE she was talking, Marie had been going with rapid efficiency through the drawers of the desk. When she straightened with a satisfied exclamation, she was holding the cigarette case in her hand.

Marshall had already torn open and destroyed the stale cigarettes it contained. But the case itself was what interested Bruce Clifton. He took it eagerly from Marie.

Turning it over, he did something to the encrusted jewels that decorated one side of the case. A paper-thin layer of metal lifted. A secret compartment was disclosed.

Within that compartment was the folded blackmail paper!

Clifton didn't touch it. He snapped the case closed. He handed it to Marie and she slipped it down the bosom of her dress.

MURDER GENIUS

"That guarantees our lives," Clifford said hoarsely.

As a matter of fact, it placed both of them in the most horrible danger of death. Benedict Stark glared downward from his prone position on the dark roof of the shack. He began cautiously to lift himself. But he had hardly started to move when, with quick tension, he lowered himself flat again.

His glance had peered briefly over the edge of the roof coping. Below him was a figure crouched outside the rear window of the shack. The garb of that figure helped to conceal its presence. A black slouch hat and a black cloak made the silent eaves-dropper blend with the darkness of the night.

It was The Shadow!

Benedict Stark lay motionless on the roof, confident that The Shadow had not seen him. He was correct. The attention of The Shadow was concentrated on the two crooks within the shack itself.

For the first time, The Shadow had become aware that Clifton and Marie had secured possession of the proof that could send a master criminal to the electric chair.

It was proof that The Shadow had long tried to obtain. His eyes flamed at the prospect of ending forever the sinister career of Benedict Stark. But before the Shadow could move, fate chained him to his spot outside the window.

Another figure was entering the shack.

This time it was Charlie Paine. The crooked factory foreman grinned as he recognized Clifton and Marie.

"I thought I saw a dim light over here. What are you two doing here on the grounds?"

"Same as you," Clifton said huskily. "We came to see the fun. Is everything ready for the explosion?"

"Yeah. It won't be long now. The band is playing the last number. As soon as the music stops, Marshall will get up to rap for silence. He'll tap that wired sounding block with his cute little gavel, and then – bloopie!"

"Take my advice and take a seat farther back if you want to enjoy the show without danger. When that building goes up, there ain't gonna be no fooling about it!"

Paine started for the door. Marie's lips whispered something at Clifton's ear. The banker cringed, then nodded. He said something that drew the departing Paine into conversation.

Behind Paine, Marie lifted her dress for an instant. Then a knife gleamed in her hand.

She moved so fast that The Shadow had no time to interfere. A single bound brought Marie close to Paine. The blade of her knife plunged into his back. Paine whirled, uttered a coughing grunt and pitched to his knees.

He staggered upright and stumbled weakly through the doorway. Marie had yanked the knife out of Paine's back almost as fast as she had driven it in. She stooped to conceal its blood-drenched blade. There was a brief blur of silken legs as she replaced the knife in her garter scabbard.

Clifton was rooted with terror.

MURDER GENIUS

"We had to shut Paine's mouth to protect ourselves," Marie snarled. "I don't want anyone to know we were here tonight. Come on! Let's get outside and make sure the fool is dead."

The Shadow decided otherwise.

THE SHADOW had darted from his hiding place outside the rear window almost at the same instant that Marie had stabbed Paine. But he didn't enter the shack. He circled it to the front, racing at top sped.

Horror filled him with a chill like ice. But not because of Paine's death. Paine, The Shadow knew, was the cause of the murder of Tim Ryan in the first factory "accident."

Paine richly deserved to die. It was the thought of three thousand workmen in that lighted assembly hall on the top floor of the main plant building that spurred The Shadow to swift action.

He slammed the front door of the shack. It closed in the startled faces of Marie and Clifton as they raced to the threshold to pursue the mortally wounded Paine. A heavy metal bar snapped into its socket. A padlock clicked shut, imprisoning the guilty pair.

The Shadow reversed his tactics. He profited by the terror that rooted Marie and Clifton at sight of the dreaded black wraith that had confronted them so silently and hemmed them in. Before they could recover from their paralysis, The Shadow was back at the rear window of the shack.

Heavy steel shutters closed with a slam. The Shadow made sure that they were jammed tight. He fastened them securely on the outside. Then he raced through the darkness toward the main building.

His first duty was to save the lives of three thousand innocent workmen.

Not realizing that there was a flat skylight on the roof of the shack where he had imprisoned Clifton and Marie, The Shadow was confident he could return later and round them up for the murder of Paine.

One other essential fact was not present in the calculations of The Shadow. He had no knowledge that Benedict Stark was lying flattened, and invisible from below, on the roof of the field office.

But The Shadow realized too well that seconds were all that intervened before a tremendous explosion would blast thousands of men sky-high with the mangled bodies of Andrew Marshall and Clyde Burke.

The band music had stopped. The hum and talk of the audience was clearly audible as The Shadow raced boldly toward the doorway of the factory building. The workmen were clapping impatiently for the speeches to begin.

Marshall was rising to his feet, preparing to rap for silence with a heavy blow of his gavel!

The sight of the black robe of The Shadow drew a cry of amazement and anger from a small knot of men who were standing outside the door to the building.

Murderous events had already taken place at the factory. These men thought that The Shadow was a criminal, intent on breaking up the meeting with some fresh assault. They could see the gun in his black-gloved hand as he raced at them.

Most of them fell back. A couple of the more courageous tried to grapple with The Shadow. A blow from his left fist dropped one. The flat impact from his gun barrel sent the other staggering backward.

MURDER GENIUS

The Shadow had no time to be gentle with well-meaning opponents. He raced up the stairs to the top-floor hallway.

The rear door of the assembly hall was wide open. A knot of late-comers crowded it. Like those below, they cringed aside as they saw the armed figure in black.

Down the aisle of the assembly hall charged The Shadow. He could see the distant platform and the tall figure of Andrew Marshall. Marshall had risen to his feet. He had swung up his gavel, prepared to rap sharply for silence.

The Shadow shouted a warning at the top of his lungs.

"Drop that gavel! Don't strike the sounding block! The block is wired! Explosives are under the platform – under the desk where you are standing!"

His words went unheard. A terrific clamor filled the hall. The audience had seen the black-robed intruder. They saw the glint of the gun in his black-gloved hand.

All over the packed hall enraged men were on their feet. Chairs were overturned. With yells of rage, workmen raced toward the supposed gunman to disarm and capture him.

The Shadow halted. He paid no attention to the onrushing mob. His gaze was over their heads, riveted on the platform at the front of the hall. He saw the gavel swing downward toward the wired sounding block on the speaker's desk.

Marshall had already started to rap for silence when The Shadow entered the back door of the hall. He was unable to check the motion of his arm.

Besides, Marshall had not heard or understood The Shadow's warning. Clyde Burke had! But Clyde was too far away from Marshall to interfere.

The Shadow fired. A bullet from his flaming gun pierced the arm of Andrew Marshall. The plant owner reeled backward. The gavel fell from his fingers to the floor.

A GHASTLY holocaust of death had been averted. But the seeming gun attack on Marshall convinced the workmen that a hired killer had invaded a peaceful meeting. The Shadow was engulfed by fighting men. Fists swung at him. He was struck at, kicked.

The very numbers of his opponents was all that saved him. He fought free of the wildly surging mob. He backed up firing over their heads. It gave him a second's respite. He darted for a side door and ran down exit stairs.

Some of the workmen raced after him. Others rushed to the aid of the wounded Andrew Marshall. A scene of indescribable confusion was taking place on the platform.

Clyde Burke had thrown over the speaker's desk with a crash. Having heard The Shadow's warning above the uproar, Clyde knew what to do.

He had slashed the wire that he found attached to the sounding block. As the desk crashed, Clyde examined the floor over which it had stood. He located the square outline of a freshly cut trapdoor and lifted it. He dropped beneath the floor to the enclosed space below. Other men followed him.

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They saw the heaped-up pile of explosives. The end of the wire which Clyde had clipped led to a detonating device of fulminate of mercury.

Clyde's shrill voice explained. Belatedly, workmen began to realize that the bullet wound in Marshall's arm was an agency not of death, but of mercy!

The Shadow heard nothing of this. He was desperately eluding his pursuers in the darkness of the factory grounds. The blackness helped. But the thing that really saved him was the discovery of the stabbed and dying Paine by the pursuers from the meeting hall.

They halted, with shouts of horror. The Shadow made good his escape. Doubling swiftly, he raced back to the field shack where he had left the imprisoned Clifton and Marie. He unbarred the steel-shuttered window at the rear and leaped inside.

Bruce Clifton lay on the floor dead, shot through the temple!

A gun was clenched in his stiffening fingers. It was Clifton's own gun. On the floor nearby lay a scrawled note in Clifton's crabbed handwriting. It was a suicide note. In it, Clifton assumed the full blame for the criminal conspiracy that had been aimed at Andrew Marshall and his profitable machine works.

There was no sign of Marie. She had vanished.

The gaze of The Shadow lifted. He saw the open skylight in the roof. With a bound, he leaped to a chair and pulled himself upward. He saw the scraping marks of a man's shoes on the roof. He realized instantly what had happened. The Shadow wasn't the only eavesdropper tonight. Someone else had listened to Marie and Clifton.

That someone could only be the murder genius behind this cruel carnival of death, the Prince of Evil – Benedict Stark!

The Shadow followed swiftly on the trail of the kidnapped Marie. It was a trail easy to follow. Marie had been dragged across the grounds. Her dangling heels had left a double mark in the earth. She was either unconscious or already dead.

And in Benedict Stark's possession was the only piece of evidence on earth that could convict Stark for murder – the forged note with his fingerprints that linked him personally to the death of Howard Paxton in Bermuda!

Following the grisly trail, The Shadow crossed a line of freight tracks. He came to a siding where a freight locomotive and a long string of flatcars waited. The locomotive had full steam up. It had been ready to pull out to the main line, but the uproar at the plant had delayed its departure.

The engineer and fireman had leaped down from the cab. They had raced to where a crowd of workmen surrounded the dying Charlie Paine.

The Shadow saw a torn fragment of Marie's dress on the step of the locomotive cab. With a steady leap, he sprang upward. He flung open the door of the locomotive's firebox.

Heat steamed out in an intolerable wave. It was like staring into the hot mouth of a volcano. Flames roared like orange-and-yellow serpents. The Shadow blinked.

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But he saw something that wrenched a grim gasp from him before he slammed the firebox door.

In the very heart of the flames was a dissolving bundle of rags that had once been a woman! The terrific heat had powdered Marie's very bones. She had vanished in flame from the face of the earth.

And Benedict Stark was safe from punishment!

THE SHADOW knew that the murder evidence had undoubtedly been burned in the same fire that had dissolved the treacherous Marie to nothingness. Crime had begotten crime. But the master criminal, the murder genius himself, had escaped!

The Shadow felt a stab of despair as he threw his black robe and slouch hat in the molten inferno of the firebox. He melted into the gloom. A swift, circuitous path took him back to the assembly hall.

He entered it as the dapper Lamont Cranston.

His grim fears were realized. Charlie Paine had been carried back to the platform. He was dead now. But before he died, Paine had confessed.

He had implicated Bruce Clifton as the master mind behind the planned explosion. Clifton had paid Paine to cripple the factory machinery. Clifton was behind the hiring of Stengel, the lawyer, and the forgery of official orders from the factory department that made Tim Ryan's death seem like criminal negligence.

Paine was honest in that dying confession. He had never had any direct contact with Benedict Stark. Clifton was his boss. And now Clifton was already dead, a self-confessed suicide!

Lamont Cranston listened with baffled fury. He had saved Marshall and his factory. He had broken up a vicious conspiracy of murder. And yet he had failed to capture the most perverted genius of crime he had ever fought against – The Price of Evil.

A hand touched Cranston's arm.

"A terrible affair, wasn't it?" Stark murmured. "Apparently, the arrival of The shadow was all that prevented a most regrettable mass murder. Have a cigarette?"

He held out a jeweled case – the same one that Bruce Clifton had used to hide a dangerous blackmail paper. There was nothing in the case now but expensive cigarettes.

Benedict Stark was still not certain that this foppish clubman named Lamont Cranston was a polite mask for the dread figure of The Shadow. Each time Stark had tried to prove his suspicions, Cranston had cleverly balked him.

This was a situation which had not changed.

The Shadow had solved a conspiracy, had protected innocent victims, had brought this case to a successful conclusion – only to see the murder genius himself slip through the fingers of justice.

Was it impossible to defeat Benedict Stark? Had The Shadow at last found a criminal foe who was too intelligent to be caught?

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Only the future would answer that question. But the fact that Benedict Stark still sneered at Lamont Cranston as a harmless fool, was the best augury of hope for the future!

THE END