

# **SYNDICATE OF SIN**

Maxwell Grant

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# SYNDICATE OF SIN

Maxwell Grant

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## CHAPTER I. SNATCH EXPERTS

It wasn't a pleasant night for driving. The wind was cold. Drops of rain spattered occasionally on the windshield of the black sedan.

The two men in the car didn't seem to mind. The streets they drove through looked deserted. The threat of rain had driven most of the tenement dwellers indoors.

It was a set-up that suited Bobo and Sam. Unless they were dumb, there wouldn't be any trouble. The boss didn't want trouble tonight. He wanted two quick snatches.

"The first pickup ought to be a cinch," Bobo said, under his breath.

"Watch it!" Sam cautioned. "Here's the street."

The car turned a corner. A drugstore was there. A man was lounging in front of it.

The man on the corner recognized the black sedan. He remained where he was while the car rolled slowly down the street.

It halted presently. Bobo and Sam got out.

A few doors from the parked car was a shabby brick rooming house. It was a hangout for petty crooks.

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Bobo and Sam walked quietly up the front stoop. The vestibule door didn't give them any trouble. The hallway inside had just enough light from a dim ceiling bulb to pass an occasional tenement-house inspection.

The two snatch experts didn't monkey with the dim light. They faded behind the dark overhang of the stairs.

On the street corner, the man outside the drugstore had faded, too.

There was a coin phone box on the wall of the rooming-house hallway. In a moment, its bell began to ring.

A frowzy landlady in a soiled kimono came out of the rear room on the ground floor. She answered the call, then grunted.

"O. K. Hold the wire."

She waddled up the stairs and came down again, went back to her room. People in this house liked to have privacy when they took messages.

The man who came down the stairs a moment later was thin, pasty-faced. He moved with the silence of a cat. He picked up the hanging receiver and said: "Yeah?"

No one answered.

"Who's callin'?"

Again there was silence. With a smothered oath, the man slammed the receiver back on its hook. He started to turn.

The muzzle of a gun jammed against his spine.

"Take it easy, punk!" Bobo whispered.

Bobo had the gun. Sam stepped in front of the victim. He had a gun, too. His grin was menacing.

"Hello, Blinky," he said, "We're going places!"

Blinky didn't try to deny his identity. His left eyelid was twitching violently. Blinky had a nervous tic in his eye muscle that he couldn't control. It was what gave him his nickname.

"You boys must be makin' a mistake. I ain't done nothin'!"

"Shut up! Let's go."

They walked Blinky out the door and down the dark front stoop. It was a nice professional job—no haste, no gun showing.

Blinky and Sam got into the back seat of the sedan. Bobo drove. The car sped away.

The whole job had taken less than ten minutes.

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HALF an hour later, the same black sedan halted in a more impressive neighborhood. It was a street east of Central Park, in the Eighties. Not all the people who lived on this street were millionaires. But Ellery Cotswold was.

It was Cotswold's home that Bobo and Sam approached. A dignified butler answered the door.

"Mr. Cotswold home?" Sam asked.

The butler looked at the unsavory faces of the two callers.

"I'm afraid not," he said with icy politeness. He started to close the door.

"Don't give us that!" Bobo snarled.

As he spoke, he gave the butler a quick shove, toppling him backward into the vestibule. Sam hit him with a clubbed .38.

Bobo caught the unconscious body before it could hit the floor. Sam had already closed the street door.

They carried the butler into the foyer and shoved him out of sight. It was a gorgeous hallway, with a thick rug on the floor and priceless art objects everywhere. But the two snatch artists paid no attention to the display of wealth. They had a job to do.

They crept up the staircase to the second floor. They knew exactly where to find Cotswold's study. Their boss had been a visitor in Cotswold's palatial home more than once.

The study door was open. The thugs could see Cotswold at his desk. He was talking to Herbert Strang, his confidential secretary. Bobo and Sam waited patiently. They were in no hurry.

Cotswold's hands were trembling as he talked to Strang. He seemed to be nervous. Strang laughed reassuringly.

"It's all a pack of nonsense," he said. "You're foolish to worry about the smuggled Leonardo da Vinci painting."

"I wish I hadn't bought it," Cotswold replied faintly. "I was afraid it might get me into trouble. But I couldn't resist purchasing it. Lord, how some of the other collectors would envy me if they knew I had it! One of the most magnificent Da Vinci's in existence! Stolen from the Louvre Museum in Paris! I'll never give it up! I paid for it. I'll keep it!"

"Of course," Strang rejoined calmly. "The only man who knows you have it is the dealer you bought it from. And he's not going to blab. That anonymous threat you received doesn't mean a thing. Some crank, probably. All millionaires get crank threats like that."

"But I've had a second phone call," Cotswold said. "A voice warned me that precautions couldn't keep him from robbing me."

"Did the voice mention the Leonardo da Vinci painting? Did he accuse you of buying a smuggled masterpiece for your secret collection?"

"No, but –"

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"Then why worry?" Strang smiled.

It was at this moment that Cotswold's phone bell rang. The millionaire answered it.

"Hello?... Yes, this is Cotswold."

Cotswold didn't say any more. He seemed to be listening. His face became pale. When he finally replaced the phone, he did so blindly. Strang looked concerned.

"Who was it?"

"The same voice! Rasping, ugly. He... he boasted that he has already made his first theft from my home... in spite of all my precautions!"

"He's bluffing. What did he say he stole?"

"My Gutenberg Bible. One of the first books ever printed. He says it's gone. He's got it. He laughed at me, called me a fool!"

Strang shook his head calmly.

"Now I know the fellow is a crank. That Gutenberg Bible has not been stolen; I saw it in its special safe in your bedroom less than half an hour ago! I took it out myself and examined it. Wait! I'll prove it's still there by bringing it to you."

Strang got to his feet. He left the room.

But he never reached his millionaire employer's bedroom. The butt of a .38 struck at his skull. Strang collapsed without a sound. He was gagged and bound and dragged out of sight.

When Ellery Cotswold glanced up from his desk to greet his returning secretary, he found himself facing the guns of Bobo and Sam.

"A nice night for a ride, Mr. Cotswold," Bobo said.

"Let's go!" Sam growled.

Again, a quiet little party of three entered a black sedan.

The car moved away. There was no fuss, no confusion.

THE room was small. Its air smelled stale. There was an earthy odor, as if the room might be underground. There were no windows.

The only piece of furniture in the room was a bed. Two men were lying on the bed. They couldn't move because they were tightly bound. Gags covered their mouths. Their feet stuck out beyond the end of the bed. Both men's feet were bare.

Their faces expressionless, Bobo and Sam watched the prisoners.

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Suddenly, a hidden door opened. A man entered. He looked well-dressed, handsome. Cotswold's eyes bulged as he saw the man. He recognized him at once.

The visitor was Mark Kemper.

Mark Kemper was a clever young man who enjoyed considerable social prestige. Photographers were always snapping his picture in exclusive night clubs. Wealthy debutantes were flattered when he escorted them. Few people were aware that Kemper's pose as a society idler covered a vicious mode of earning a living.

Mark Kemper's real business was blackmail!

Cotswold was one of the people who knew. He knew because he was already in the toils of Kemper. He had paid out large sums without a murmur. Kemper was careful to bleed people who dared not complain to the police.

Kemper ignored the millionaire. He pointed toward the thug named Blinky.

"Remove his gag!"

Bobo obeyed. Kemper leaned over the twitching face of Blinky. He spoke quietly.

"Who's your boss—the big shot you work for? I want his name!"

"I don't know," Blinky gasped.

Kemper gestured grimly.

"Persuade him!"

It was Sam who did the persuading. He used a plumber's thick candle on the soles of Blinky's naked feet. He didn't confine his attention to the soles. Sam was an artist at torture. He applied the flame to Blinky's agonized toes and the tender flesh between them.

The screams of the petty crook filled the soundproof room with horrible echoes. Sweat poured down Blinky's face.

There was sweat on Cotswold's face, too. Rigid and helpless alongside the tortured crook, Cotswold had a taste of what might be in store for him.

The torture of Blinky didn't take long. When it was over, Kemper leaned over the moaning victim.

"Who's your boss?"

"I don't know. I never saw him. I just take orders."

"Shall I give him another dose?" Sam asked.

"Don't—for God's sake!" Blinky shrieked. "I'm tellin' the truth! If I knew, I'd squeal. I never set eyes on the boss of the racket!"

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"I believe you are telling the truth," Kemper said. "I didn't really expect a punk like you would know. But you were the only one in his mob I was able to get a line on."

He stepped back, made a sneering gesture to Bobo.

"Give him his reward for wasting my time."

Bobo leaned swiftly over the bed with his .38. He jammed the muzzle of his gun against Blinky's temple and shot him through the head.

Blood spattered over Cotswold's shrinking face. He was numb with terror—which was exactly the state of mind Kemper wanted him to be in.

Kemper himself removed the millionaire's gag. Cotswold was barely able to talk. He whimpered incoherently. Kemper's grin widened as he heard what Cotswold was trying to say.

"Yes. I know. You've always paid my blackmail demands without complaining. But tonight I'm after something a hell of a lot more important than blackmail! I happen to know that you recently purchased a famous Leonardo da Vinci masterpiece that was smuggled into America from the Louvre Museum in Paris. You paid someone nearly a half million dollars for it. Is that true?"

"It's true," Cotswold faltered. His face was the color of wet clay. "You can have it. I'll turn it over to you."

"I don't want the painting," Kemper said. "What I want is the name of the man you bought it from. A man who has a secret cache of stolen art that is so valuable that one painting sells for nearly a half million! That's a man I want to know. Tell me his name!"

"I can't," Cotswold gasped. "I met him only once. I never saw his face. He wore a mask."

"Where did you meet him?"

"I don't know. I was blindfolded. I drove somewhere in a car with a red-haired girl. She —"

"Where did you meet this girl?"

THERE was death in Kemper's harsh voice. Cotswold, with the blood of Blinky still warm on his face, stammered eagerly to tell all he knew. It wasn't much.

He had received a telephone tip to go to the Vanderpool Art Galleries on Madison Avenue. Obeying instructions, Cotswold had waited quietly in front of a painting called "The Bathers." He dropped his cigarette case and spilled cigarettes on the floor. A red-haired girl helped him pick them up. When she returned them, she added one of her own cigarettes to his.

"That was the agreed signal," Cotswold gasped. "When she left the gallery, I followed her. I got into her car and was blindfolded. The blindfold wasn't removed until I was in a large room facing a man in a mask. The room was filled with smuggled art. The masked man offered me the Leonardo da Vinci for half a million. I accepted. I never saw him again. The painting was delivered a few days later. That's all I know."

Kemper frowned.

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"The Vanderpool Galleries, eh? A very dignified and respectable place. A smart spot to contact prospective customers. Did you speak to either of the two owners of the Vanderpool Galleries while you were there? To Mr. Spooner? Or to Mr. Brand?"

"No," Cotswold said. "I spoke only to the red-haired girl. That's all I know. It's the truth!"

"I believe it is," Kemper sneered. "I'm sorry to have annoyed you, Bobo, will you kindly end Mr. Cotswold's annoyance?"

Again Bobo leaned over the bed. Cotswold screamed as he saw the glitter of the .38, but he was unable to jerk his head away from the barrel of the weapon.

There was an explosive roar. Blood spattered from the millionaire's skull. He died instantly.

Mark Kemper stared at the two corpses with unruffled composure.

He turned toward his two henchmen.

"You know where to dump these bodies. I want both of them left in the vacant lot alongside the alley which I described to you earlier. I want the police to find them. I want plenty of publicity. You understand?"

They nodded.

"I want the man from whom Cotswold bought the Da Vinci to realize that he faces danger. I want him to be scared! When you're planning to hijack a smart crook, the first thing you do is to let him know you're tougher than he is! He'll know how tough I am when he finds out what happened to one of his petty thugs—and one of his wealthiest customers."

"Suppose we run into trouble dumping the bodies?" Bobo asked.

"You won't. There will be plenty of protection. And now—get busy! Report to me when the job is finished."

Mark Kemper turned and left the room.

Fifteen minutes later, Bobo and Sam mounted to the seat of a small covered truck that was parked in an alley. Inside the truck were the bodies of Cotswold and Blinky.

The two thugs chuckled. They were both in high good humor.

Bobo stepped on the gas. As he did so he saw a furry streak move across the alley. It was a stray cat that had been dozing on the dark pavement.

"A buck I hit it," Bobo cried as he swung the wheel.

"A buck you don't," Sam grinned.

The truck lurched sideways. There was a sickening bump under the front tire.

Sam craned his neck and saw the cat's bloody carcass. Grinning, he handed his pal a dollar bill.

They laughed as the truck swung into a dark street and headed downtown. They thought it was very funny.

## CHAPTER II. DEATH RIDDLE

MARGO LANE and Lamont Cranston were driving home from an unusually successful party.

The charity entertainment that Cranston had sponsored tonight had been well patronized. Every penny of the profit would be used for recreation facilities for soldiers and sailors. Cranston had paid all the expenses out of his own pocket.

Margo was driving Cranston's sedan. There weren't many cars on the avenue at this late hour. It was fun to drive smoothly through the quiet darkness.

It was Cranston who first noticed the covered truck. The truck was proceeding at a slow pace. It was extra-careful about traffic lights.

"Looks as if the driver is determined not to get into any traffic trouble," Cranston said.

There was an odd inflection in Lamont Cranston's voice. He had stopped smiling. Margo wondered what the source of his interest was in that covered truck.

But she didn't ask any questions when Cranston suggested that she slow down in order to keep a half block or so behind the truck.

Margo was aware of a grim secret that few people knew. It was something that she and Cranston never discussed openly. The wealthy clubman whose expensive car she was driving was not one man, but two. Behind his public personality was another personage. A personage feared by criminals.

The Shadow!

Cloaked in mystery, The Shadow had many times conquered criminals who were too dangerous and clever for the ordinary methods of the police. On more than one occasion, Margo had experienced the thrill of helping The Shadow uphold the law.

She watched the truck ahead, but she didn't say anything. Soon she heard Cranston's voice at her ear.

"Pull up close when they stop."

The covered truck was stopping for a red light. It halted with exaggerated care, as if the driver were afraid he might overshoot the light and draw the attention of a policeman.

Peering sideways, Margo saw that there were two men in the truck. Both had tough, unpleasant faces.

Cranston seemed to observe nothing. But he saw a lot more than Margo. He recognized the men on the truck. Their photos were in the private rogues' gallery in The Shadow's sanctum. Mentally, The Shadow named both of them. The truck's driver was a killer named Bobo Shreb. The crook beside him was Sam Bindo.

There were no signs on the truck. It looked like a hired vehicle. But even if Sam and Bobo had hired it, there should have been painted on it the address of the place where it had been hired. There was nothing of the sort.

The license plate was badly rusted. The Shadow suspected it was not the plate issued for this particular truck. He wondered about the closed doors at the truck's rear, the brand-new padlock that kept those doors sealed.

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But chiefly The Shadow wondered about the left front tire.

It was smeared with a splash of crimson that The Shadow thought might be blood.

He waited until the light changed and the truck pulled ahead. Margo followed at a slow pace. Cranston's voice murmured quick orders at her ear. She wasn't surprised when she found herself suddenly alone in the front seat of the sedan.

Cranston had slid over the upholstered seat to the rear.

It was impossible to see what he was doing. But various sounds suggested that he was busy. He remained invisible when the covered truck ahead halted for another light.

He was invisible because he was no longer in the sedan!

The sedan didn't halt. With complete disregard of the law, Margo drove through the light at a fast clip. She kept her fast pace until she had almost covered the next block. Then, suddenly, Margo swerved and braked to the curb.

She didn't leave the sedan. She looked backward once, then remained behind the wheel.

None of this missed the attention of Bobo and Sam. An oath came from Bobo's tight lips.

"Is that dame up there wise to something?"

Sam's snarl was worried. "She's the same dame we saw at the last traffic light. There was a well-dressed guy with her. Where is he now?"

The "well-dressed guy" wasn't anywhere. Sam and Bobo looked in vain for him.

THE SHADOW was directly behind the truck!

He was taking advantage of Margo's tactics to examine the truck's padlocked doors.

His black cloak merged with the darkness. Eyes like flame were shielded by the brim of a black slouch hat. There was a thin steel implement in his gloved hands.

Laughter whispered as the padlock gave way to his practiced skill. The doors at the rear of the truck opened soundlessly. They closed just as quietly.

The Shadow was inside the covered truck!

Meanwhile, Margo continued to obey The Shadow's orders. She left the parked sedan, hurried into the corner apartment house outside which she had stopped.

"Maybe she lives there," Bobo muttered.

"I'm gonna make sure," Sam snarled. "Pull into the curb."

The truck drew up behind the empty sedan. Sam went into the apartment foyer. The only person in sight was a night clerk at a switchboard.

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"Has the lady gone upstairs?" Sam asked. "She dropped something out of her car a block up the avenue. I thought she oughta know about it."

"I'll notify her," the clerk said.

He plugged in and called upstairs. When he hung up, he smiled.

"She says thank you, but it was just an empty cigarette box."

"I thought it might be her purse. Who is she?"

"Susan Phelps," the clerk said.

It was the first name he could think of. He was able to think fast because there was a crisp twenty-dollar bribe in his pocket. He didn't tell Sam that the bill had been given him by a beautifully gowned girl, who had ducked out a side exit of the foyer.

Sam was satisfied. He went back to Bobo and the covered truck continued down the avenue.

A lot of time had been wasted—more than the two crooks realized. Margo Lane had utilized her time well. A taxi had driven her swiftly to a garage three or four blocks away. There she introduced herself, presented a brief note signed by Lamont Cranston.

She left swiftly in another car. The garage man congratulated himself on doing a favor for two such prominent society people as Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane.

Margo drove back to the avenue and turned south. Soon she caught sight of the covered truck. She was careful to keep well behind. The sedan she now drove was different in appearance from the one the crooks had suspected.

Margo had no trouble following the trail. She wondered what The Shadow was discovering inside the truck.

THE SHADOW'S find was gruesome. His fingers touched the stilled face of a corpse.

The stickiness of blood smeared his fingers. As he recoiled, he became aware that there was another limp figure alongside the one he had just touched. Again his probing hand touched a dead face.

Rising cautiously inside the dark vehicle, The Shadow made sure that there was no way for the criminals on the front seat to detect a light inside the truck.

He snapped on his cigarette lighter, used the tiny blue flame as a torch.

His eyes narrowed grimly as he saw the two dead men.

He recognized Ellery Cotswold at once. The other corpse he didn't know.

The clothing and appearance of the second dead man suggested that he might be a crook. Since The Shadow didn't know him, he was probably a petty crook. His identity could be verified later from The Shadow's crime files.

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Staring at these two oddly assorted corpses, The Shadow tried to fathom the link that connected them in death.

Both had been shot through the head. Their terror-twisted faces suggested that both had known they were doomed before they died. Their shoes and socks had been removed. The bare feet of the dead thug showed he had suffered flame torture before he was shot. Ellery Cotswold's feet had not been harmed.

No attempt had been made to hide the dead millionaire's identity. The labels in his clothing were all intact. His wallet with various identification papers had not been taken. The set-up suggested that the two thugs on the driver's seat expected the corpses to be quickly identified.

Sibilant laughter sounded in The Shadow's throat. His skill and intuition had taken advantage of fate to place himself in the midst of an incompleting crime.

His plan was simple. He intended to ride unseen to the spot where Bobo and Sam planned to dump the corpses.

The Shadow would make a grim swap. He would exchange two corpses for two living prisoners! Sam and Bobo would never return to their unknown boss. Instead, they would go to a scientific laboratory of The Shadow's.

There they would taste a little torture themselves. Not the kind they had meted out to their victims. This would be bloodless torture—inflicted with sound and light and color. Bobo and Sam could be made to talk! Once they talked, The Shadow would know how to plan his next move.

His eyes studied a small white card in his hand. He had taken it from the breast pocket of the dead Ellery Cotswold.

It was an engraved admission card to the Vanderpool Art Galleries.

The Shadow was tempted to think that chance had placed that card in Ellery Cotswold's pocket. But the theory of chance didn't satisfy The Shadow. Cotswold had no reason to carry an admission card to the Vanderpool Galleries. There was nothing there to interest him. Cotswold collected only old masters, art objects that were world famous. The Vanderpool Galleries dealt in modern art of a relatively inexpensive kind.

Why should the dead Cotswold carry an engraved invitation which the living Cotswold would normally never be interested in?

The Shadow slipped the card into his pocket. The flame of his cigarette lighter went out. He waited silently in the darkness of the covered truck.

He could feel the bump of roughly cobbled streets under the jouncing tires. He suspected that Bobo and Sam were heading into a shabby section of town.

Suddenly the truck slowed. It made a turn, then it backed up.

The Shadow opened the truck's rear doors. A swift glance told him it was time to vanish from his stowaway spot. The truck was backing along a deserted alley. To the right was the towering brick wall of a warehouse. To the left was a wooden fence separating the alley from what looked like a vacant lot.

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The Shadow took advantage of the slow movement of the backing truck to fix the rear doors exactly the way he had found them. The click of the closing padlock was barely audible. But Bobo heard it; he had ears like a cat.

With a whispered oath to Sam, he sprang from the halted truck and raced around to the rear. Sam circled from the other side. Both thugs had drawn their guns. Their faces were tense.

They found no sign of a foe.

"You must have imagined it," Sam whispered. "You getting jittery?"

"Jittery, hell! I heard something! It sounded like someone monkeying with the padlock."

SO close was The Shadow he could hear their quick breathing. But he remained invisible. His cloak merged with the blackness of a warehouse exit that opened on the alley. His tilted slouch hat screened his face.

He watched the two crooks unlock the padlock, saw them drag out one of the corpses.

Sam, who was the stronger of the two, slung the body of Ellery Cotswold over his shoulder and carried it down the alley. Bobo opened a door in the wooden fence that divided the alley from the vacant lot.

"Dump him where he'll be easily found," Bobo whispered. "That's the boss's orders."

Bobo waited. Presently, Sam returned empty-handed from the lot. The two thugs disposed of their second victim as they had the first.

But this time, The Shadow took a hand!

Bobo, waiting at the fence for his partner's return, had no warning of peril until he felt the pressure of The Shadow's gloved fingers on his throat. Strangled, he had no chance to cry out.

The plunge of a drugged needle into his throat relieved The Shadow of further worry.

Before The Shadow could reach the parked truck with his captive, the powerful drug was already taking effect. Bobo was shoved out of sight inside the darkness of the covered vehicle.

Whirling, The Shadow darted back. Hidden by the tilted barrier of the fence door, he waited for Sam to return.

Without suspicion, Sam closed the fence door. As it swung shut, the hidden figure of The Shadow was disclosed.

The thug recoiled with terror as he saw the black-cloaked figure of the supreme enemy of crime. He tried to clutch for his gun, tried to scream.

He was able to do neither. Sinewy hands that had put Bobo out of action now clamped just as tightly on Sam's windpipe.

Again a drugged needle plunged home. Sam's body sagged before The Shadow reached the truck. The second thug was tossed out of sight, alongside his pal. The padlock snapped, imprisoning the two captured crooks.

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All that remained now was to drive them swiftly to a scientific laboratory where The Shadow had ample resources to make stubborn criminals talk.

The Shadow darted between the truck and the dark brick wall of the warehouse. His goal was the cowled seat of the truck.

Suddenly, he halted. Over his head he heard a faint sound. The sound came from a dusty window directly above. Something dropped silently. It was a rope noose. It tightened swiftly about The Shadow's throat!

Strangling, he toppled backward. His back struck the alley pavement.

He began to writhe with the agony of death.

### CHAPTER III. GUN TRAP

A GLOATING face appeared at the warehouse window above The Shadow. The thug with the murder noose peered downward, keeping a tight grip on the rope.

The Shadow had rolled on his face. One hand was clawing feebly, the other was doubled underneath him. The killer at the window leaned out farther.

He was unaware that he was being fooled. The thrashing legs of The Shadow was only a simulation of death agony. The Shadow had rolled on his face purposely. His hidden hand was between the strangulation cord and his throat. He was in no danger from suffocation.

The killer had no knowledge of his own peril until, suddenly, The Shadow lurched to his knees. Then the frightened thug yelled. But it was too late. The Shadow's jerk at the rope pulled the thug over the sill.

He screamed as he tumbled headlong into the alley. He struck horribly on his head and shoulder against the stone pavement.

There was an ugly sound, like the snap of a dry stick. Then the body crumpled with a broken neck.

The Shadow didn't wait to see this. Knowing that there were criminal reinforcements in the warehouse, he raced toward the covered truck that contained his two prisoners.

As he did so flame spurted downward from another window. A bullet ripped through The Shadow's hat. Another tugged at his black cloak, left sharp pain from a flesh wound.

The Shadow made no attempt to fire back. He ducked around the parked truck toward the driver's seat.

His skill at retreat, however, availed him nothing. More gun streaks were cutting the darkness. Mobsters were attacking from a new position. They had raced suddenly into the alley from a side door of the warehouse. The Shadow was cut off from the truck.

His own .45s were in action, now. The need for secrecy was past.

A mobster pitched on his face. Another whirled, coughing, and collapsed. But more thugs were pouring out of the warehouse door.

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The Shadow was forced to give ground.

Ducking back and forth, he fought skillfully. The flame of his .45s seemed to spurt from two or three spots at once. The Shadow retreated toward the rear of the alley.

Fate offered him a chance for a getaway from overwhelming odds. The alley was not a blind one. It opened into a rear courtyard.

But an instant later, this last getaway to safety was suddenly closed.

A half dozen dark figures emerged from the warehouse rear. Bullets began to snarl at The Shadow from front and rear. Caught between two groups of mobsters, he was pocketed.

Blood dripped from a gash across the back of his hand. Sweat blinded him as he tried to keep two sets of attackers at bay.

It was a hopeless task, even for The Shadow. The gunmen at either end of the alley were slowly inching forward. The space in which The Shadow was hemmed was becoming smaller.

Suddenly, he screamed. He collapsed to the dark pavement.

Yells of delight came from the advancing mobsters. They advanced warily, fearing a trick. Bullets thudded toward the spot where The Shadow had fallen.

No reply came from The Shadow's guns.

There was a quick rush of feet. Crooks bent eagerly to make sure The Shadow's body was riddled with lead. They looked in vain. The dark pavement where The Shadow had fallen was empty.

The Shadow had vanished!

The stupefied thugs peered in every direction but the right one. Some of them scaled the fence, sent flashlights crisscrossing the lot. Others made sure that The Shadow had not dived out of sight beneath the parked truck. He had done neither. The Shadow had taken to the air!

SHIELDED by an angle of the dark wall of the warehouse, The Shadow was climbing a drainpipe that ran down the face of the building. The metal braces that supported the pipe aided him. He was helped also by the confusion below.

Two of the mobsters were leaping to the cowed seat of the truck. The thugs had no desire to let Bobo and Sam fall into the hands of the police. The truck sped swiftly from the alley. It raced away.

It was none too soon. The darkness was echoing to the shrill blast of police whistles. The roar of gunfire in the alley had been heard. Patrolmen were racing toward the warehouse. Squad cars, summoned by radio, were heading toward the scene from nearby points.

Invisible against the dark wall of the building, The Shadow leaned precariously out from the pipe. He made a grab for the sill of a warehouse window.

The muscles tightened in his arms. He chinned himself upward, anchored one knee on the sill.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

The next instant there was a fierce yell from the alley. The crouched silhouette of The Shadow had been seen. Crooks, warned by their leader, fired upward.

Bullets pock-marked the window with ugly holes. None of them found a target in the flesh of The Shadow. The angle of fire from below was too steep. Most of the death slugs drilled through the upper pane of the window.

With his fist protected by the bunched folds of his black cloak, The Shadow smashed in the lower pane. He dived inward. Flat on the floor, he rolled away from the revealing square of the window.

The darkness inside the cavernous building afforded a chance for a quick retreat. The Shadow had no further interest in battling thugs. He had come to achieve a definite purpose. That purpose was now impossible. Bobo and Sam, the two murder specialists The Shadow had intended to kidnap, had already been spirited away in the truck.

The Shadow began a quick retreat through the dark warehouse.

Suddenly, the darkness vanished. An overhead lamp glowed. It revealed The Shadow with pitiless clarity.

He flung himself flat as bullets spurted from a corridor opening. A thug in the opening had turned on the wall switch. The Shadow's .45 took care of him. The killer pitched sideways before he could fire again. But his place was taken by another thug.

The Shadow could hear the thump of feet racing up a staircase from below. The mobsters in the alley had re-entered the building. The odds against The Shadow were again changing to hopeless proportions!

The roar of one of his .45s held the mobsters back. He dived behind a pile of crates that flanked the wall. The Shadow's guns were empty now. But the thugs didn't know that.

They had a healthy respect for The Shadow's straight-shooting automatics. They took their time edging closer. They figured they had The Shadow cornered under a revealing light.

Their delay gave The Shadow a chance to reload his guns. Crouched behind a crate, he aimed upward above the edge.

The ceiling light was blown to pieces.

In the darkness, The Shadow ran toward the opposite side of the warehouse. Another staircase led upward and down. He took the upward route. With him he carried something that his sharp eyes had noted before he had blasted out the light. It was a coil of rope snatched from a hook on the warehouse wall.

The Shadow reached an upper floor before the baffled thugs guessed the direction of his flight. He lifted a dirt-crust window, stepped swiftly to its outer sill.

Below him was the stone pavement of a deep air shaft. The rope The Shadow had stolen was too short to permit him to slide safely to the ground. A drop from the rope's dangling end would be suicidal.

But the sibilant laughter of The Shadow's lips held a triumphant ring. He had not stepped to the warehouse sill without knowing clearly what lay beyond the deep air shift.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

There was a two-story brick building opposite. Its roof was more than a floor below the level of The Shadow's dangerous perch. By anchoring the rope and using it as a pendulum, The Shadow was ready to swing across.

He tightened his grip. With the rope twisted around both wrists, The Shadow kicked strongly against the side of the warehouse.

His body flew outward.

He tried to turn in midair so as to hook a leg over the cornice of the roof across the air shaft. But he failed by a hairbreadth. He swung dizzily backward, crashed against the warehouse wall.

It was a stunning shock. But The Shadow held on. Again he kicked with all the strength in his legs. This time, he anchored himself at the edge of the opposite roof.

The weight of his own body toppled him inward over the coping. He fell to the tarred surface of the roof.

He bellied close to the coping, in case mobster bullets came from the warehouse window he had just quitted. But no shots came. In the open warehouse window not a single thuggish face showed.

The turmoil in the street out front gave the answer. The neighborhood was no longer healthy for thugs. Police had arrived! The sirens of squad cars made a shrill wailing. Police were pouring into the warehouse from the alley where The Shadow had first been attacked.

The thugs had to beat a quick retreat.

THE race between thugs and police gave The Shadow his opportunity. He darted to a skylight in the center of the roof. The skylight was thick with dust. No light showed from below.

The Shadow assumed that this smaller building was some sort of annex to the warehouse across the air shaft.

He was wrong.

The moment he smashed the skylight glass and forced the frame upward, he heard a wild feminine shriek below.

A light flashed on. To his dismay, The Shadow saw a woman in a nightgown sitting up in bed. Her terrified screams warned every cop in the neighborhood that The Shadow was on the roof above her apartment.

The building was a cheap rooming house. The Shadow, pressed for time, had made an excusable blunder.

He tried to rectify the mistake. He ran to the rear of the roof. The first thing he saw was the grim face of a policeman in a paved courtyard. The roar of the cop's service gun sent The Shadow backward. The cop's whistle began to shrill.

Other cops ran to his aid.

The Shadow could hear them forcing a way into the lower floor of the rooming house. The sound of their shouts was like an echo of doom to the black-robed fugitive trapped on a roof:

"The Shadow!"

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

Soon the first of the bluecoats climbed upward into view from below. Others joined him.

They saw nothing. The Shadow was gone!

But a moment later, police bullets whizzed toward the chimney. The chimney was in a dark corner of the roof. At the edge of the chimney a darker blob of blackness was dimly visible. It was the cloak of the projecting brim of The Shadow's slouch hat.

They had guts, those cops. They rushed the chimney without thought of their peril.

But again they found no captive. The Shadow was not there! The thing that had fooled the cops was the empty cloak and hat of the fugitive.

The Shadow had left the roof. Vaulting the coping that faced the rear air shaft, he hung full-length for a terrible instant, feeling desperately for a foothold.

His luck matched his courage. He had to let go the roof edge to drop to the window sill of the top floor. But he managed to clutch a fresh hold before his precariously balanced body could topple backward to death.

He squirmed inward. A frowzy man in trousers and undershirt tried to grapple with The Shadow and yell a warning to the police at the same time. The Shadow's gloved fist took care of that with a single blow.

By the time an excited bluecoat found the slugged man in the undershirt, The Shadow was out of the rooming house.

He moved slowly through the turmoil. No longer garbed as The Shadow, he was undistinguishable from the other people who crowded the street. All eyes were staring upward at the roof where police flashlights were glowing as baffled cops continued their search.

The Shadow didn't look up. His gaze sought for the face of Margo Lane. He had given Margo explicit instructions before he had left her. He was confident that Margo had kept the trail left by Bobo and Sam.

His confidence in Margo was justified. She was parked in a traffic tangle a block away, apparently too confused to know what to do.

The Shadow ducked silently into the back of the sedan. He was there only briefly. By the time a police inspector approached the car with a curt order to move on, a well-dressed gentleman sat smiling in the front seat alongside Margo.

The inspector's harsh voice turned respectful when he recognized the pair.

"Good evening, Mr. Cranston. How are you, Miss Lane? Sorry you've got caught in this mess. You'd better back up as quickly as you can and drive out of this neighborhood. We've got a dangerous personage trapped. The Shadow!"

"Really?" Cranston's voice sounded vapid.

"He raided a warehouse tonight at the head of a mob of gunmen. He can't get away. We've got the whole neighborhood surrounded!"

The inspector turned, yelled sternly at a line of bluecoats.

"Let Mr. Cranston's car through!"

Margo stayed behind the wheel. Cranston didn't say anything as the sedan purred quietly uptown. It was only when Margo said goodnight that he finally spoke.

"How would you like to look at some pictures tomorrow?"

"You mean photographs?"

"I mean paintings: Art objects. At the Vanderpool Galleries on Madison Avenue."

The voice of The Shadow was calm. So was Margo's.

"I'd be delighted, Lamont," she said.

## CHAPTER IV. THE VANDERPOOL GALLERIES

ARTHUR SPOONER was badly frightened.

He sat reading a newspaper in his ornate office at the Vanderpool Art Galleries. The front page of the newspaper was black with headlines. Spooner wished he could talk with Harrison Brand, his partner, about those headlines. But Brand was late. What the devil was keeping him?

A worried thought added to Spooner's fright. Brand had suggested that it might be clever to drop in at police headquarters on his way to the galleries. Spooner had voiced the idea as too dangerous. They were sitting pretty. Why invite trouble?

Brand had smiled. A stubborn man! What if he went cockily into police headquarters—and said the wrong thing?

With a shudder, Spooner turned back to his newspaper. The bodies of Ellery Cotswold and a thug named Blinky had been found in a vacant lot. It was a mystery that had the police completely baffled.

What was the sinister link between a millionaire art collector and a petty thug? Why had both been shot through the head? Why had the thug's feet been tortured with flame?

Had The Shadow turned kidnaper and murderer?

The Shadow was suspected of the double crime. He had seemingly led a mob of crooks who had fought off the police. He had himself vanished from under the very noses of a cordon of bluecoats.

Spooner's hand trembled. He thought about someone else. Someone whom he never named openly, even in his private conversations with Brand. "Our... er... associate," was the way Spooner always put it.

Maybe it was wise to try another phone call. All Spooner's previous calls had been fruitless. Did it mean danger?

Spooner didn't like to think about that.

He jerked nervously as the door of the office opened. Then he drew a gasp of relief. The visitor was his

dapper partner, Harrison Brand.

Brand chuckled as he closed the door. He seemed pleased.

"Damn it, where have you been?" Spooner growled.

"I stopped at police headquarters. I had a chat with Inspector Cardona."

"You fool! Why not let well enough alone?"

"Don't be silly! I ran no risk. And I discovered some interesting facts. For instance, we can't possibly be implicated in the murder of Ellery Cotswold."

"Why not?"

"Because the police don't suspect a thing! They think that the only thing stolen from Cotswold's home was a Gutenberg Bible. No mention has been made of the smuggled Leonardo da Vinci that Cotswold bought secretly just before he was killed."

"What about Cotswold's secretary?"

"Mum as a clam. He'd be a fool to talk."

"Does he know who's back of the murder?"

"No more than we do. He says he never caught a glimpse of the thugs who slugged him before they kidnapped Cotswold. I believe him."

Spooner shivered. "Do you think The Shadow is responsible?"

"I don't know," Brand rasped. "But I do know this. Whoever killed Cotswold and Blinky, is after—us! Blinky was tortured because some cunning highjacker found out that he was a small cog in a billion-dollar racket. Thank heaven, Blinky didn't know enough to squeal. The same applies to Cotswold. If we can keep from getting scared, we're still O. K. Have you tried to get—you know—on the phone?"

"Nine times," Spooner said. "I'll try again."

He did. After a fruitless wait, he hung up.

"Still no answer! Maybe he's been killed. Maybe —"

Brand looked disgusted.

"Brace up! He's probably lying low until he finds out more about Cotswold's death. I'm going out into the gallery and play the genial host. Running a respectable art gallery has its formal side, you know."

WITH a suave smile, Brand departed. But the smile didn't remain on his lips. As he stepped from a small alcove outside the office and moved into the gallery, Brand's brow darkened.

He was staring at an exceedingly pretty girl.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

She was red-haired. Her figure was slim and shapely. She was expensively dressed and wore her clothes well. Ordinarily, her presence in the gallery would have met with Brand's approval. But today he most emphatically didn't want her around.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Brand said under his breath. "Haven't you got any sense?"

"I'm not taking orders from you!" the redhead rejoined.

"Don't you read the newspapers? Somebody murdered Ellery Cotswold in an effort to find out where he bought that smuggled Da Vinci. We're not doing any more business in stolen masterpieces until I'm certain that we run no risk of tipping our hand to some highjacker."

"That's up to you," the redhead retorted. "The man I work for has given me no orders to quit. Until he does, I'm going to continue to contact customers who give me the proper signal. If you've got a beef, don't tell it to me. Tell it to Mr. —"

Her tight voice changed suddenly. She became charming and amiable. She began to talk about trivial things.

Brand realized what was up when he saw a couple approaching across the room. The man was someone who didn't customarily visit the Vanderpool Galleries. The girl with him drew a catlike spark of jealousy from the eyes of the redhead. The redhead realized she was no longer the prettiest girl in the room.

Brand gave the new arrivals his blandest smile.

"Lamont Cranston!" he exclaimed. "And Miss Margo Lane! It isn't often we have the pleasure of welcoming you to our modest little gallery. I thought you were interested chiefly in old masters."

"I occasionally buy a modern," Cranston murmured. "Perhaps today I'll see something I like."

Brand subtly motioned the red-haired girl away. He had no desire to introduce her. But The Shadow refused to be balked. He had noticed the brief quarrel between the two. Deftly, he forced Brand to introduce her.

"Miss Peggy Dawson," Brand said hurriedly. "She's an art critic on an out-of-town newspaper."

His tone implied that Peggy Dawson was not worth much attention. But The Shadow had different ideas. The pressure of his fingers on Margo's wrist was a signal that he wanted her to keep an eye on the redhead. When Peggy Dawson drifted away, Margo excused herself also.

The Shadow continued to chat with Harrison Brand.

After a while, Brand moved off to greet a new visitor. This time, Lamont Cranston's eyebrows rose sharply.

The man was Mark Kemper.

Kemper was as socially prominent as Lamont Cranston. But in a different way. He was one of the shining lights of cafe society. The best table at the finest night clubs was always reserved for Mark Kemper. Swanky bars saw him often. A lavish spender, he contrived to be seen almost everywhere.

But never at an art gallery.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

The Shadow wondered what was behind this strange reversal of Mark Kemper's habits. There was reason for The Shadow's grim interest. The source of Kemper's wealth was extremely mysterious. The Shadow suspected that Mark Kemper's glib society front masked a well-hidden racket.

Blackmail!

Rutledge Mann, one of The Shadow's cleverest agents, had tried to trace Kemper's wealth back to its source. He had failed. The banks and trust companies where Kemper kept his money afforded no tangible clue. Mann's failure to uncover any information was significant to The Shadow. For Mann was versed in all sorts of financial and legal wizardry.

The only clue to Kemper's presence at the art gallery lay in his occasional side glance when he thought Cranston wasn't watching. Each time he glanced aside, it was always toward the same person.

Mark Kemper seemed interested in the red-haired Miss Dawson!

The Shadow didn't remain long beside Kemper. Murmuring a polite excuse, he drifted down the long expanse of the gallery.

His move brought him closer to the alcove beyond which was the private office where Spooner and Brand attended to their affairs.

The Shadow knew that Brand was not in the office. If Spooner had not yet arrived, The Shadow was going to take a quick look around.

Pausing near the entrance to the alcove, The Shadow examined an exquisitely carved nude statuette.

MEANWHILE, at the other end of the gallery, Margo Lane was idly reading an art catalogue. But she managed to keep an eye on the red-haired Peggy Dawson.

The redhead seemed to be tense. For a while, Margo was unable to understand the cause of her nervousness. Then she realized what it was.

Peggy Dawson was watching one of the paintings that was hung on the wall.

It was modern, like all the others. It was called "The Bathers." Its subject was a couple of draped nudes standing at the edge of a woodland pool. The flesh colors were poorly done. The artist was a comparative unknown.

Peggy Dawson never took her eyes off it, from the lounge on which she was sitting.

Finally, Margo began to understand. It wasn't the painting that interested the red-haired girl. It was the people who stopped in front of it.

Each time someone paused, Peggy Dawson seemed to stiffen visibly. It was obvious that she was ready to jump to her feet.

But she never did.

To Margo, there was only one deduction: The redhead was waiting for some sort of signal that had something to do with that particular painting. Since she became excited each time anyone stopped in front of the picture,

another fact seemed clear to Margo.

The redhead knew that somebody was going to pass a signal. But she didn't know who!

Margo waited grimly to see what was going to happen.

Meanwhile, The Shadow, in the role of Lamont Cranston, had finished his lengthy inspection of the carved statuette. Moving without haste, he stepped past the edge of a decorative screen.

The screen covered part of the alcove that led to the private office of Spooner and Brand. Once he was behind it, The Shadow was invisible to anyone in the gallery. He crept silently closer to the door of the office.

He noticed at once an odd thing. Someone inside the office was very anxious not to allow any sounds to be audible outside.

Spooner—or whoever it was in the office—was stealthily closing the transom above the door!

As The Shadow watched, he saw the opaque glass transom turn gently, until it was flush in its socket.

He moved on tiptoe toward the door. His gloved hand closed on the knob. Slowly it turned under his even pressure. The Shadow pushed inward. But the door remained immovable.

The Shadow pressed his ear against the panel. For a while, he could hear nothing but a low mumble. He knew there were two men inside the office, but he couldn't identify either voice.

Then, suddenly, he recognized the quick tones of Spooner. It sounded shrill, jittery with excitement.

"Are you sure that the police can't possibly connect us with the murder of Ellery Cotswold?"

The reply was inaudible.

The Shadow's eyes flamed. If he remained where he was, there was little chance he could hear enough to identify Spooner's unknown visitor. Furthermore, every second he remained in the alcove increased the risk that Brand or someone else would walk past the screen and catch him eavesdropping.

Deciding to take the bull by the horns, The Shadow rapped loudly on the door.

The faint mumble of voices inside the office ceased. For a few seconds, there was silence. Then:

"Who is it?"

It was Spooner's voice, strained, unnatural.

"Do you always lock your office door against good friends who drop in to say hello? This is Lamont Cranston. May I come in?"

"Of course!"

A key grated in the lock of the door. Spooner opened it.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Cranston. Delighted to see you!"

The Shadow walked quickly inside. His keen eyes missed no detail of the interior of the room. But he failed to see the thing he most wanted to see.

There was no sign of the mysterious visitor whose harsh whisper The Shadow had heard through the panel of a locked door.

Except for Lamont Cranston and the nervously smiling Spooner, the office was empty!

## CHAPTER V. THE RED-HAIRED GIRL

THE SHADOW pretended to be unconscious of the scrutiny that the flustered Spooner gave him. In his role of Lamont Cranston, he glanced about the office with assumed indifference. The office window was fastened tightly.

Spooner could scarcely have had time to allow his unknown visitor to make a window sneak, and then fasten the window again before he admitted Cranston. Besides, the window faced a busy street around the corner from Madison Avenue.

Spooner's mysterious caller must have vanished through a closed door at the left of the room. It was the only extra door.

"I hesitated about knocking," The Shadow said, in the polite murmur of Cranston. "I thought I heard you talking with someone. I didn't want to disturb you."

"You heard voices?" Spooner stammered. His lips twisted in a stiff smile. "Oh, I see what you mean. Frightful habit of mine! Rather silly, too. I was talking to myself. I always do when I'm busy over my accounts."

His tremulous hand gestured toward his desk. The Shadow accepted the explanation. He dropped the subject of the voices.

"I like that carved statuette you have out in the gallery, Spooner. The exquisite little nude on the marble pedestal."

"Of course," Spooner murmured. He was considerably more at ease. "I'm surprised that you're interested in that particular piece. It's modern, you know. I thought you collected only old masters, Mr. Cranston."

"Occasionally, I pick up a modern piece that strikes my fancy. That one does. Could you bring it in here? I may decide to purchase it."

Spooner hesitated. He was unwilling to leave Cranston alone in the office. But he was also eager to sell the statuette. The news of a sale to Cranston might attract a more desirable clientele to the Vanderpool Galleries. Lamont Cranston's judgment in art was famous.

"I'll be delighted to show it to you," Spooner finally said.

He left the office. He was gone only a brief time. But a brief time was all The Shadow needed.

A bound carried him across the room to the closet door. He found that it was equipped with a spring lock that fastened only on the other side. The closet door opened easily at The Shadow's quick turn of the knob.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

He was surprised when he peered in. It wasn't a closet at all! It was a private exit from Spooner's office.

A short corridor led to a narrow flight of dark stairs. The stairs led straight below without any turns.

Sibilant laughter rustled in The Shadow's throat as he realized the set-up. A door below probably opened directly on the side street. Spooner's unknown associate had calmly ducked into the busy traffic around the corner from Madison Avenue.

Having made this discovery, The Shadow wasted no further time. He closed the door softly. Again he moved swiftly across the deserted office.

This time, his goal was a bookcase. He stood close to a small table as he jerked a book from a shelf. There was a vase on the table. The Shadow let his elbow bump the vase as he removed the book.

The vase crashed to the floor. Cranston looked apologetic as he turned in time to see Spooner hurrying back into the office.

"Oh, I say! I'm sorry. Awkward of me! Of course, you'll allow me to pay for the broken vase."

Spooner put down the carved statuette he was carrying. The suspicious look faded from his face.

"Don't worry about it, Mr. Cranston," he said. "The vase was not particularly valuable. It was my own fault, placing it so close to the bookcase."

He didn't even glance toward the closed door at the opposite side of the room. The Shadow's stratagem had been successful.

Spooner began to point out the excellence of the statuette. The Shadow didn't haggle over the price. He was eager to be away. He reached in his pocket for his check book.

"A lovely piece," he said.

Privately, he had no use for the thing. But the check he drew was a cheap price to pay for the knowledge he had gained. There were not two partners in the ownership of the Vanderpool Galleries—but three! Spooner and Brand were only the respectable front; along with the other man, they made up a Syndicate of Sin!

The Shadow went back into the gallery. He saw that Margo Lane was still keeping an inconspicuous watch on the well-dressed Mark Kemper. The Shadow passed a signal that Margo understood. Her job was to stay where she was. The Shadow intended to leave alone.

His departure was made so casually, it attracted no attention.

A FEW minutes later, The Shadow turned the corner of Madison Avenue and strolled leisurely down the block.

The street-exit door whose existence he had deduced from above was alongside an empty shop whose window was covered with a thick, soapy coating. A "To Rent" sign hung in front of the store. A casual passerby might assume that the locked door led to a side entrance of the empty shop.

The Shadow kept moving. Out of the corner of his watchful eye, he had seen a man. The man was across the street in another doorway. His tension relaxed when Cranston continued past the door.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

Another fact had been added to The Shadow's growing collection of data. The man across the street was well dressed. But his face didn't match his attire. Mentally, The Shadow ticketed him correctly: a thug, who was in the money. A lookout to cover the retreat of Spooner's unknown associate.

Making for a phone booth in a nearby cigar store, The Shadow murmured a number unlisted in any city directory. A crisp voice replied:

"Burbank speaking."

Burbank was The Shadow's contact man. Through him, orders could be transmitted swiftly to any of The Shadow's secret agents. This time, The Shadow gave orders that concerned Moe Shrevnitz.

Moe was a taxi driver. He operated his own cab. Among his fellow hackers, Moe enjoyed a reputation for shrewdness and courage. But Moe's real job was something not known to even his closest friends.

Moe Shrevnitz was one of The Shadow's most trusted agents.

Ten minutes later, Moe's cab halted at the curb. He walked to the shabby door through which Spooner's unknown visitor had faded, began to rattle the knob.

Almost instantly, he was accosted by the well-dressed tough from across the street.

"Looking for someone?"

"Yeah. I had a phone call to pick up a fare. Can't seem to find any bell."

"You must have the number wrong. Nobody lives here."

Moe pretended puzzlement.

"That's funny. The party said to ring the bell at the first door east of Madison. Only, there ain't no bell."

The man grinned.

"Some of your taxi pals must have been kidding you. That door opens into that vacant store. Somebody played a dirty trick on you."

"Yeah?" Moe registered indignation. "And I bet I know just who the wise guy was! The dirty so-and-so! I'm going right back and pop him one in the nose!"

He climbed into his taxi and drove off. But he didn't drive far. Circling the block, Moe headed back to Madison Avenue. He picked a parking space not too far from the main entrance to the Vanderpool Galleries. Opening a tabloid newspaper, he waited.

He was confident that very soon he would have a fare. That fare would be Margo Lane.

The Shadow, out of sight on the side street, was not quite so sure that events would develop with the smoothness that Moe expected. He had made another discovery. The well-dressed tough guy who had talked to Moe Shrevnitz was doing a double job as a lookout. He was keeping an eye on a sedan parked at the corner of Madison Avenue. The sedan was empty.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

The Shadow had one important advantage over the well-dressed thug. He could see the thug, but the thug couldn't see The Shadow.

Obviously, the thing was going to be a waiting game. Whatever happened would probably develop from some event in the exhibition room of the Vanderpool Galleries. The Shadow would have to depend on Margo. He was confident she would handle her task well.

MARGO, however, was worried. Nothing seemed to be happening. The Shadow had warned her to pay sharp attention to Mark Kemper, and to the red-haired art critic who called herself Peggy Dawson.

Neither seemed to be in any hurry to leave the gallery. Kemper drifted from one painting to another with the air of a man who has all the time in the world. The redhead continued to sit opposite the painting called "The Bathers."

Presently, Margo saw Kemper stroll toward "The Bathers." He hadn't been smoking hitherto. But now Margo saw him take a silver cigarette case from his pocket.

He lit a cigarette, slipped the case back toward his pocket. He did so awkwardly. The case slipped from his fingers, fell to the floor. The lid flew open, scattering the cigarettes.

Peggy Dawson sprang at once to her feet. She hurried across the room, said:

"Let me help you."

"Thanks," Kemper smiled.

He held his case open. Peggy Dawson handed him back the cigarettes she had picked up. She did so quickly, but not too quickly to fool Margo.

Margo was close enough to see what the red-haired girl did.

She had returned four cigarettes to Kemper. Three of them had spilled from Kemper's silver case. The fourth had never been in his case.

Margo could tell from the tips. Kemper's all had straw tips. The extra one that Peggy Dawson slipped to him had a gold tip.

There was a quick interchange between the pair as Kemper put the case back in his pocket.

"I'm ready whenever you are," Mark Kemper said in a low tone.

"It was really no trouble at all to assist you," the redhead replied.

Her words were louder. They were intended for the ears of Margo. But Margo had heard Kemper's undertone. She knew that his remark, not Peggy's, was the important one. The extra cigarette that had been passed to Kemper by the red-haired girl was a signal.

Peggy drifted toward the gallery exit. She left quietly.

A few moments later, Mark Kemper departed.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

Margo waited until she was sure that they both had time to reach the street. It was a nerve-racking experience. Margo didn't want the pair to realize that she was on their heels. But neither did she want them to be gone when she reached Madison Avenue.

Luckily, she timed herself perfectly.

Neither Kemper nor the red-haired girl looked back. They walked rapidly toward the corner, where an empty sedan was parked.

Margo crossed Madison Avenue. She entered another car. It was the one in which she and Lamont Cranston had driven to the Vanderpool Galleries. Neither Kemper nor Peggy Dawson saw her.

Margo kept the motor idling. She was ready to make a quick start the moment the other two did.

But Mark Kemper and the redhead didn't seem to be in a hurry.

They stood alongside the parked car at the corner in what looked like an idle chat. Margo couldn't understand what they were waiting for.

The Shadow, still hidden from sight on the cross-town street, knew what the key to the delay was.

Kemper and the girl were waiting for the well-dressed lookout!

The tough guy had left his doorway. He was moving swiftly up the side street toward the car at the corner. The moment he came abreast of Kemper and the red-haired girl he pretended to see Peggy for the first time. He lifted his hat and smiled. Peggy Dawson smiled too. She introduced the hard-faced man to Kemper. They shook hands.

All three of them got into the sedan.

The Shadow noticed that neither of the men sat with Peggy. She took the wheel. Kemper and the tough gent sat in the back. It seemed an impolite way to travel. But The Shadow didn't wait to ponder about that.

He, too, was on the move, in his harmless role of Lamont Cranston. He headed for the taxicab of Moe Shrevnitz.

He had hardly entered the taxi, when Peggy Dawson and the two men drove off. They were followed by Margo Lane's car.

A block to the southward, the redhead swung west. So did Margo after a suitable interval.

MOE SHREVNITZ waited. He had received no order from The Shadow. The Shadow was watching for possible signs that Margo in turn might be trailed by some henchman of the tough lad in the expensive suit.

He saw no such signs.

At the quick command of The Shadow, Moe stepped on the gas. He drove only a few feet. Then he uttered a startled oath, and jammed on the brakes. The taxi banged to a halt.

The Shadow knew what was wrong, as well as Moe. He stared grimly at the rear tire of the taxi. It had been punctured with a sharp-bladed instrument. The tire was flat on the ground—useless!

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

The Shadow didn't echo Moe's oath. Action was more important than words. But there wasn't another taxicab in sight. Pursuit was for the moment impossible.

But indirect pursuit could still be swift!

Lamont Cranston hurried to a phone booth in the lobby of the Vanderpool Galleries building. He murmured a quick number. The familiar voice of Burbank replied.

To Burbank, The Shadow issued curt orders. His eyes were bleak. Unexpected defeat had been encountered.

That defeat must be changed to victory—if the life of Margo was to be protected! The Syndicate of Sin was at work!

### CHAPTER VI. A GIFT FOR TONY

MARK KEMPER lolled comfortably in the rear seat of the sedan driven by Peggy Dawson. He felt grim elation. His daring bluff had worked: The information that Kemper had forced from the frightened lips of Ellery Cotswold before murdering him had yielded a handsome dividend.

Kemper was being driven by unsuspecting crooks straight to the unknown headquarters of a shrewd criminal who had a billion-dollar cache of smuggled art.

Peggy Dawson was convinced that Mark Kemper was a wealthy customer for some of that smuggled art. So was the hard-faced man who rode so peaceably in the rear seat with Kemper.

Peggy had introduced the hard-faced man as Tony Maxwell.

Kemper knew the name was as phony as the man himself. The fellow, for all his careful tailoring, was a gunman. Kemper had detected the slight lump of a concealed weapon under Tony's armpit.

He knew he faced death if his pose as a wealthy collector was detected. But Kemper was no softie himself. He was prepared for risks. He was determined to find out the location of the house where the art loot was cached. He intended to see the face of the unknown criminal who used Spooner and Brand for a respectable front.

Once he knew both these things, Mark Kemper would be in a position to use the underworld shock troops he had assembled by the use of a liberal pay roll. Either Kemper would crash the art racket and force a sizable cut for himself—or the art racket would cease to be of any practical use to the three partners in crime who now fancied themselves so secure.

Mark Kemper was aware, from what Ellery Cotswold had told him under duress, that he would have to enter the smuggled art headquarters blindfolded. That didn't bother him. He had hidden resources at his command.

On the back seat of the sedan, he chatted confidently with Tony. He stuck to his role of a society playboy interested in stolen art.

But soon Kemper's elation vanished. The drive was taking a long time. The red-haired girl didn't seem to be in any hurry. She had already passed through some of the streets through which she was now driving.

Kemper's smile tightened a little. He began to complain about the delay.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

"Shut up!" Tony snarled.

Kemper's right hand moved imperceptibly toward his hip. But he masked the action by a petulant shrug of his shoulder. He put a fake whine in his voice.

"That's no way to talk," he protested. "If you don't care to do business with me, say so. I can't waste all day driving about town. I'd like to purchase a masterpiece of the sort I understand is available to people who are willing to pay the price. But I don't intend to be insulted as part of the bargain."

"Keep your shirt on, pal," Tony said. "Nobody is insulting you. We're a little worried, that's all... How do things look now, Peggy?"

"She's still there," Peggy snapped over her shoulder. "She's been tailing us ever since we left the Vanderpool Galleries. I can see her in the rear-vision mirror."

It was the first intimation to Kemper that his sneak from the Vanderpool Galleries had been observed. He started to turn around. Tony held him motionless with a quick clutch.

"Don't be a sap! We don't want the dame behind us to get wise!"

Kemper swallowed his wrath. He pretended a timidity he didn't feel.

"Perhaps we had better postpone my art purchase to some other time."

Tony grinned. He had teeth like a shark.

"Quit worrying, dope! We don't close up shop because of little things like nosy dames. I'll take care of the dame!"

He laughed. So did Peggy. Their amusement had a nasty ring.

"Do your stuff, Tony," the redhead said.

As she spoke, she swung the wheel. The sedan turned a corner. It made the turn at a good rate of speed. For a short time it was out of the vision of Margo Lane.

During that interval, two things happened: the redhead slowed the car quickly; Tony Maxwell opened the door and hopped out.

He vanished into the overhang of a doorway. It was nicely timed. Before Margo's car rounded the corner, Tony was out of sight.

MARGO was unaware that the fugitive car had slowed up. A new move served to divert her attention from the fact that one of the passengers in the back of the sedan had slipped out. The sedan was circling the block.

To Margo, it was proof that Peggy Dawson was close to her goal. The Shadow would not have taken such a thing for granted. But Margo thought the redhead was scouting the neighborhood before she halted.

She was puzzled when she saw that the sedan ahead was halting again at the same corner it had originally turned.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

Margo had to halt, too. A red traffic light was showing. Pedestrians began to cross the intersection.

One of the pedestrians was Tony. He veered when he approached the halted cars. As he caught Margo's eye, he lifted his hat and smiled. He called out genially, in assumed recognition.

"Hello! What are you doing downtown, Eleanor?"

At the same instant, he opened the car's front door. He slipped into the seat alongside Margo and banged the door shut. It was done with crafty speed. The few pedestrians who noticed didn't attach any importance to the incident.

Margo's face was pale. But she had no chance to cry out. Shielded by the body of Tony Maxwell was a wicked-looking gun. Its hidden muzzle jammed tight into Margo's ribs.

"Get going, sister!" Tony snarled.

The red light had changed to green. Impatient horns were honking from other cars behind Margo's. Unwittingly, they helped to make Tony's snatch a little easier.

Peggy Dawson chuckled as Margo's sedan vanished down the avenue. Peggy had already parked at the curb.

"Just relax," she told Mark Kemper. "We'll wait for Tony. He won't be long."

He wasn't. In little more than fifteen minutes, Tony appeared on the sidewalk. He climbed back into the seat next to Kemper.

"That's that!" Tony said. He glanced at Kemper. "You sure you want to do business, mister?"

"Of course!"

"O. K. Sit back a bit. Keep in the corner, way from the window. I'll have to blindfold you."

Kemper found it impossible to see through the bandage over his eyes. Tony knew his business.

The sedan got under way. More corners were turned. By the time the car halted, Kemper had no notion where he was. He guessed that the car had stopped in a protected alley, because Tony helped him from the machine with no attempt at concealment.

Kemper was guided up steps. A door opened and closed. Their footfalls echoed across a wooden floor. The air smelled stale and musty.

Tony removed the eye bandage. Mark Kemper saw that he was in what looked like a room of a deserted house.

The red-haired girl nodded to Tony.

"You take him to see the boss. I'll handle the dame you picked up."

Tony's teeth showed in a grin. "If you have trouble, let me know. I'm good at making dames talk."

"I'll teach her the alphabet," the redhead said grimly.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

She vanished through a rear door. Tony motioned to Mark Kemper, and led the way toward what looked like a private elevator.

Tony pressed a button and they ascended three floors. When the elevator door slid open they emerged into a bare and musty a room as the one they had quitted below.

But Kemper's heart gave a grim leap as he saw the man standing in the bare room to receive him. The man was masked.

"How do you do?" the masked man said. "I won't waste time in formalities. You are here to buy one of the world's art masterpieces, if you think that the price I ask is right. I'm here to sell it—and deliver it safely to you—if you meet my price. Is that correct?"

"Correct," Kemper said suavely.

The man's mask fitted his face and head like a cloth helmet. It was impossible to guess what his face might look like. His voice sounded hoarse. Obviously disguised.

"What have you got for sale?" Kemper asked.

The masked man stepped to a small filing cabinet that stood against the dusty wall of the empty room. It didn't belong there, Kemper guessed. It had been moved there only for the duration of the interview between buyer and seller.

"I don't want a description," Mark Kemper objected. "I want to see the paintings. How do I know they're genuine?"

"You'll have to take my word," the masked man said.

He showed Kemper a set of natural-color photographs. The sight of them made Kemper's mouth water. All were pictures of renowned paintings that had reposed in the famous museums of Europe before the Nazi invasion.

Kemper pointed out one that had vanished from the art museum in Antwerp.

"How much?"

"A quarter of a million dollars."

The masked man said it calmly. Just as calmly, Mark Kemper agreed to buy it at that price.

"Have you got it stored in this house? How long will it take you to deliver it?"

"Not here," the masked man said. "We've run into a little temporary trouble. Somebody who has gotten wind of something is trying to muscle in on me. To protect myself, I had to move my art collection elsewhere. Therefore, it will take a day or two longer to deliver it to you. Satisfactory?"

"When do I pay?" Kemper asked.

"After you receive the painting."

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

"That will be O. K."

The interview terminated as quickly as it had begun. Tony Maxwell, who had stood at Kemper's shoulder all through the brief discussion, nodded toward the elevator.

Kemper moved in that direction. He hadn't found out yet what he was really after, but he was almost ready for action. It was better, however, to accompany Tony down again to the bare room on the lower floor.

When they stepped from the elevator, Tony produced the blindfold bandage. Kemper bent his head. As he did so, his hand flashed from his coat. He whirled with uplifted arm.

Tony, cumbered with the eye bandage, was taken by surprise. The knife in Kemper's murderous grip plunged deep into the vitals of Tony Maxwell. He died without a sound.

Kemper eased the bleeding corpse to the floor. Then he sprang noiselessly back to the door of the elevator, ascended smoothly to the upper floor.

Tony's murder and the quick return of Mark Kemper had taken little time. When he stepped from the private elevator, however, his appearance showed that he had come prepared.

On his face was a mask. It was not to hide Kemper's identity, but to protect him from an unpleasant experience. The covering was made of rubber and metal. It looked like the old-fashioned type of gas mask used in World War I. Kemper had had it hidden on his person.

A short-barreled gun was cradled in Kemper's right hand. It, too, looked peculiar. The barrel was fat as well as short. It carried only a single cartridge. Kemper knew that one cartridge would be sufficient.

He laughed as he watched the surprise of the masked dealer in stolen art. The man was still in the bare room. The filing cabinet had disappeared. Evidently, he had moved it back to his secret office. His arms lifted unwillingly under the menace of Kemper's weapon.

"Get rid of that mask!" Kemper grated. "I want to know who you are. Let me see that mug of yours!"

"You damn fool! Do you think you can get away with this? You'll never walk out of this house alive!"

"No?" Kemper advanced menacingly. He was like a tiger stalking its prey.

MARGO'S face was twisted with pain. Sweat trickled down her colorless cheeks.

The boast of Peggy Dawson about her skill at making people talk was not an idle one. Every joint in Margo's tortured body ached. She had fainted twice. Twice the implacable redhead had revived her.

"Talk!" Peggy said harshly. "Someone told you to follow me from the Vanderpool Galleries. Who was it?"

Margo shuddered. She knew she was at the end of her physical resources. But the thought of betraying The Shadow was worse than the agony in her arms and legs.

"Who?" Peggy said again. "You came to the Vanderpool Galleries with Lamont Cranston. Is Cranston your boss?"

Margo shook her head weakly.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

"No," she gasped. "I used Cranston as an escort to avert suspicion from me."

"So you used Lamont Cranston as a cover-up, eh? All right! Who is the man who told you to get Cranston to take you to the Vanderpool Galleries today?"

Margo summed up her courage to aid her in a deception that would save Cranston's secret.

"I'll confess," she whispered. "I'm a police spy. I'm working for a man you've never suspected. My boss is Mark Kemper!"

"What!"

The redhead looked incredulous. Rage and doubt chased across her face. Before she could think too much about the fraudulent confession, Margo clinched it with a final lie.

"Mark Kemper is—The Shadow!"

Peggy Dawson uttered a shrill cry. She whirled toward the door of the room, her face stiff with apprehension. If Kemper was The Shadow, he had already penetrated to the heart of the art racket! He had gone up in the elevator with the unsuspecting Tony Maxwell!

Peggy raced for the room where the elevator shaft was located. The moment she entered it, all her doubts about the truth of Margo's faked confession left her.

Tony Maxwell lay dead in a pool of blood. A knife had been driven into his body up to the hilt.

The redhead whirled. She darted to a closetlike inclosure in which was a telephone. It was a phone that had no connection with any central office. The wire ran to a nearby building, where thugs who helped protect the art racket had their hangout.

A tunnel connected the criminal hangout with the building in which the raging Peggy was sounding the alarm.

Racing footsteps showed that Peggy Dawson's call had produced swift results. Half a dozen thugs came hurrying up wooden stairs from the cellar.

The lash of Peggy's voice apprised them of what had happened. The bleeding corpse of Tony Maxwell was further proof that peril had come to the center of the art gang's cunningly protected web.

Thugs followed Peggy into the elevator. The car rose silently in its shaft. No sound came from the cable. None came from the taut lips of the thugs. Guns gleamed in grim hands that knew how to use guns.

The elevator door slid open.

Kemper, armed and masked himself, was moving closer to the masked figure of his prisoner.

"Rip it off, damn you!" Kemper was snarling. "I want a good look at that mug of yours!"

As he heard the faint rustle of the opening elevator door, he whirled.

## CHAPTER VII. FUGITIVES FROM HELL

MARK KEMPER whirled to face the armed thugs pouring from the open door of the elevator. The attack on him was a complete surprise. For an instant, he was easy prey for the guns of the masked killers.

But the thugs, too, hadn't bargained on meeting so unusual a foe. The snouted rubber mask over Kemper's face warned of a more deadly danger than bullets. The stub-barreled gun in Kemper's grasp was something mobsters understood—or thought they did.

Tear gas!

Mobsters scattered to right and left. Wise in the way of murder, they dropped to the floor. Scarlet streaks spurted toward Mark Kemper.

But Kemper was quick with his own trigger. There was a muffled report. Suddenly the whole room seemed to reel and waver drunkenly. Smoke blotted out the brightness of the ceiling light. The smoke looked like dirty brown fog. It spread swiftly.

At the first whiff, mobsters began to scream and clutch at themselves. They didn't clutch at their eyes to ward off the peril of tear gas. Their hands clawed at their throats.

The brown fog was not tear gas! It was something new to these terrified thugs. A burning, brownish horror that seared their lungs like flame!

Some of them were toppling to the floor. Others were stumbling blindly to get back to the open door of the elevator. They were barely visible in the thick haze of death that filled the room.

Safe behind the protection of his rubber mask, Mark Kemper leaped toward the real object of his attack. He darted toward the wall where he had last seen the masked leader of this underworld wolf pack. He was anxious to take the boss of the art racket alive.

But Kemper's outstretched hand touched only the smoothness of the wall. He found no sign of his supreme enemy—the head of the Syndicate of Sin.

Kemper was no fool. The racket chief could not have reached the elevator. Death would have dropped him in his tracks. Only one way of retreat had been possible to him: through the wall itself.

Kemper turned on a small but powerful flashlight. The beam pierced the brown veil of poison gas. Its bright oval moved swiftly over the wall surface.

Kemper sought fiercely to locate the mechanism which a wily foe had used in order to pull a quick vanish act. He sought in vain.

An oath bubbled behind the snout of his grotesque head covering. Time was vital! Kemper didn't dare waste a precious second.

He turned from his hopeless task. The thought of one vanished enemy was replaced in his mind by the thought of another.

Peggy Dawson!

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

Kemper had seen her rush from the elevator with the first attack of the mobsters. She had vanished quickly in the confusion that followed the discharge of the gas cartridge. She hadn't raced to the side of her unknown employer. Kemper was certain of that.

Where had she gone?

Kemper made sure that the red-haired girl was no longer in the death room, by playing the bright oval of his torch over the huddled bodies on the floor. Every one of those dead victims was a thug. The smart redhead had pulled a sneak.

Kemper decided that she had fled somewhere below, but not in the elevator. It was still empty, its door wide open. Other means of a downstairs flight were probably available to Peggy.

Her capture would serve the same purpose as the capture of her vanished boss. The redhead could be made to talk!

KEMPER, sprang into the elevator and slammed the door. His finger pressed a button, the car began to descend.

As it descended, Kemper uttered an ugly chuckle. From his pocket he drew an oversized cartridge, reloaded his gas weapon with it.

He leaped swiftly from the elevator to the bare room on the ground floor. It was exactly the way he had last seen it. The only figure in sight was the stabbed corpse of Tony Maxwell.

A moment later, Kemper uttered a yell of exultation. He had sprung through a doorway that led to the rear. On the floor was the figure of a girl. The redhead had collapsed in a faint before she could reach freedom.

Kemper's torch threw revealing brilliance on the face of the prone girl. Then his yelp of delight changed to a snarl of rage. The unconscious girl was not the clever assistant to the racket boss.

It was Margo Lane!

Her hands and feet were tied. There was a gag over her mouth. Her dress had been ripped away from one shoulder, exposing the soft skin of shoulder and back. Horrible things had been done to the unconscious prisoner.

But Kemper felt no pity. He felt only a vicious sense of relief. Margo Lane was the girl who had trailed him from the Vanderpool Galleries. She knew too much! Her death would remove part of the threat to Kemper's fake role of a society playboy.

A knife jerked into his hand. Its blade was smeared with crimson. It was the same knife he had plunged into the body of Tony Maxwell.

It stabbed downward toward the soft bosom of Margo.

Then suddenly it veered. In mid-thrust, Mark Kemper had jerked nervously. An ominous sound had warned him of peril from the rear.

The stern laughter of The Shadow! The Shadow loomed black and barely visible in the doorway of the dark room. The Shadow's snarling mirth was a necessary substitute for the roar of his twin .45s.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

Kemper had seized the unconscious figure of Margo by the hair as he leaned over to stab her. He had dragged her partly upright. Margo was between Kemper and the muzzle of The Shadow's guns.

The Shadow moved into the room. He tried to circle his foe in order to line him up for a disabling shot that would not rip through Margo's flesh.

He found his task difficult.

Kemper was smart enough to use Margo as a shield. He took advantage of the swift maneuver for position to bring his deadly gas gun again into play.

There was a muffled explosion. Dark-brownish fumes swirled in a spreading cloud.

The Shadow staggered. He dropped to his knees. His twin .45s flamed, but none of his blindly aimed bullets hit the fleeing Kemper. The Shadow's mouth was closed. Wise in the ways of death, he had divined the horrible nature of the brown vapor that swirled like a smudge of soot in the windowless room.

The door slammed behind Kemper. A bolt clicked. The Shadow and Margo were trapped!

Quickly, The Shadow slashed Margo's bonds. She was still unconscious. The gag over her mouth offered a slight protection against death. Another slight protection was the fact that Margo's unconscious breathing was shallow, filling only the upper part of her lungs.

The Shadow lunged at the bolted door. It was a metal barrier. It failed to budge.

With swimming senses, The Shadow knew he was facing doom. But, fading as they were, The Shadow's senses were trained to a pitch of razor-sharp perception.

From the wall behind him, he heard a slight click.

The wall across the sealed room was opening. A figure sprang swiftly into view. Two figures! The one in front was Peggy Dawson. Behind her was the masked figure of the art-racket chief.

PEGGY screamed as she saw the black-cloaked figure of The Shadow lunging desperately toward her. Her scream warned the crook behind her. He was still framed in the wall opening. His hand clutched at Peggy, yanked her viciously backward.

As she tumbled with him through the wall opening, the panel began to close. Before it could shut tightly, The Shadow's guns were roaring. He aimed at neither the redhead nor her masked employer.

Heavy slugs ripped at the edges of the closing panel. They made splintering ruin. The mechanism that controlled the panel was smashed into uselessness.

But The Shadow wasn't able to follow up his advantage swiftly enough to lay hands on the vanishing fugitives within the wall. His only thought was for Margo. A way of escape was now open from the brown haze of death in the room wherein Margo lay.

Blindly, The Shadow scooped her into his arms. Barely able to see, his throat like raw beef, The Shadow flung himself and his burden through the smashed wall panel.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

No shots came from the darkness within the narrow passage. Flat on his face alongside Margo, The Shadow fought for his breath. The air was cleaner here. Margo was beginning to moan faintly. It was a sound that ended The Shadow's fear for her life. It galvanized him into action.

His torch leaped ahead of him down the narrow wall passage. It showed only emptiness. The red-haired girl and her masked employer had vanished behind a barrier farther along the passage.

The barrier was of steel. To get past it was impossible without proper tools. And it would take a long time, even with tools.

The Shadow chose a different route.

His flashlight showed a flight of narrow stairs at the opposite end of the passage. The stairs led upward. Unable to halt the escape of Peggy and her masked employer, The Shadow decided on a daring change of course.

Somewhere up those concealed stairs lay the heart of a murderous conspiracy. By remaining to investigate, The Shadow risked much. Margo knew it, too.

She was stronger now, staggering to her feet. Courageously, she pointed up the secret stairs; pressed forward with The Shadow.

The top of the stairs led to a small windowless room on the upper floor. The moment The Shadow caught a glimpse of that room his stern laughter held a note of victory. It was the room into which the art-racket chief had vanished so swiftly from the gas attack of Mark Kemper. Kemper had been unable to find it.

It was the headquarters of the art racket!

The Shadow soon realized this. His flaming eyes scanned the natural-color photographs in the same filing cabinet that had made the mouth of Mark Kemper water with greed.

Every one of those photographs was a reproduction of a world-famous masterpiece of art. All had been in European museums at the start of the war. They were now in the possession of a master criminal.

Kemper had failed to discover the identity of that master criminal. The Shadow had now succeeded! The proof of the racket chief's identity lay in a secret drawer of the massive desk in the room's center.

The Shadow's lips pronounced a name.

Richardson Jordan!

It was a name that brought surprise to the mind of The Shadow. Jordan was the last person in New York The Shadow would have suspected of crime. A member of the Cobalt Club, Jordan was on easy terms with Lamont Cranston. He enjoyed a spotless reputation for respectability.

So this was the secret of the silent partner of Spooner and Brand and head of the Syndicate of Sin!

Jordan had used the Vanderpool Galleries as a respectable clearing house for wealthy customers. He had done business with Ellery Cotswold and probably dozens of others.

The whole vicious racket was now laid bare.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

Margo's face was pale. She realized the importance of the discovery The Shadow had made. She started to utter a dazed remark, but the words were never uttered.

A TREMENDOUS explosion suddenly rocked the room. The whole house seemed to sway in the clutch of a hurricane. Margo was flung violently to the floor. She staggered upright, breathless and bruised.

The explosion came from somewhere below. It was followed by an unmistakable crackling. The acrid smell of smoke became noticeable.

An incendiary bomb had been planted by the fleeing Jordan. Aware that his hide-out was no longer of value, he had deliberately destroyed it by a time explosion.

The fact that the empty building was doomed to destruction was apparent to The Shadow a moment or two after that ear-shattering blast below.

Flames began to lick into the secret room from the wall passage. A sheet of mounting flame made the narrow staircase no longer passable.

The Shadow didn't hesitate. This secret room must have more than one exit. The movements of Jordan had made that fact clear.

Swiftly, The Shadow bent over the ornate desk of the racket boss. There was a row of buttons on the under side of the desk. He tested them all.

A cry from Margo soon made him turn. The wall beyond the desk was suddenly no longer solid. A square opening revealed an outer room.

It was the room where Kemper had fought off the attack of Jordan's thugs. The elevator door was still open. The cage stood flush with the floor.

Between the elevator and the wall lay the dead bodies of half a dozen gas-poisoned thugs. But the brownish fog that had killed them had slowly evaporated. The air was free of the taint of lethal gas.

However, the peril of death was closer now to Margo and The Shadow, rather than farther away. Flames were shooting in vivid orange sheets from the shaft of the elevator. The shaft acted as a gigantic draft. Flames mushroomed and licked at door and walls. Smoke made a choking, ever-thickening cloud.

The Shadow made no effort to try to enter the flaming elevator with Margo. Even if they could have survived a trip downward in that blazing car, the effort was impossible. Fire had already destroyed the electric mechanism of the lift.

The lower floors were a blazing hell. The top floor was already almost as bad. Breathing was difficult. Vision was blinded by dense smoke.

Clutching fiercely at the tottering figure of Margo, The Shadow fought his way toward the only possible chance for escape—the front windows of the house.

All these windows were tightly shuttered. The Shadow swung the butt of an automatic, smashed the metal fastenings of one of the shutters.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

As he worked, he could hear the wail of sirens in the street below. Fire apparatus was already on the scene. The throb of engines was mingled with the shouts of firemen who were swarming toward the doomed building with hoses and axes.

Their shouts changed to shriller yells when The Shadow smashed out the glass of the top-floor window. He swung outward to a narrow stone ledge. Turning gingerly on his perilous perch, he tried to pull Margo beside him.

The firemen hadn't expected to see a living being emerge from that blazing inferno high above. The house was supposedly empty and deserted. For years, all the dirty windows had been tightly shuttered.

Now, from a smashed top-floor window came the black-robed figure of The Shadow!

Policemen joined in the yell of astonishment on the cluttered street below. Police were there to hold back the enormous crowd attracted by the terrific blaze. When they saw The Shadow they saw a personage whom each one of them believed to be a criminal and a murderer!

The murders of Ellery Cotswold and Blinky had been placed squarely on the shoulders of The Shadow by the newspapers. His was the black-robed figure that cops had battled at the warehouse. The Shadow had slipped magically through their fingers. He had left behind him the bodies of two cops who had been cut down by mobster bullets.

The police were certain that it was The Shadow who had shot those two cops.

Their guns roared as they saw his dark figure clinging to a flaming ledge high above the street.

Bullets chipped at the narrow ledge. The Shadow writhed backward.

Margo, screened from the view of police and firemen below, tried to force her way outward to the ledge. She wanted to scream a disavowal of her companion's guilt. But The Shadow restrained her.

To appear at that flaming window was death!

THE SHADOW flung himself backward into the blazing inferno of the top floor. He wrapped his cloak about his head and Margo's. Coughing, barely able to breathe, he fought his way with Margo toward the shuttered windows at the rear. It was agonizing work. The cloak that covered their heads was ablaze in a dozen different places by the time The Shadow flung Margo to the floor at the base of a rear shutter.

He stamped the burning cloak out, knowing that another minute would see it ablaze again. His gun butt smashed at the window fastening. The crash of glass followed.

This time, The Shadow stood upright on the sill.

He was able to do so without the danger of police bullets. An extension far below cut his figure off from the sight of cops and firemen on the ground in the rear. Behind the doomed house, the blank brick wall of another building showed no windows. Firemen working from the rear had not yet had time to drag hoses to the roof of the brick building.

The Shadow rose to his full height on the blazing sill. He stretched desperately with upraised arms. Above his scorched and smoke-blackened face was the projection of a roof cornice. But it was fully a foot above the tips of his clutching fingers.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

The Shadow took a suicidal risk: he climbed.

There were uneven places between the bricks alongside the window. Time and weather had pitted the mortar between the lines of brick. It offered no sure foothold. But The Shadow had no choice. It was either dig his toes into the tiny crevices between those uneven rows of brick – or stay on the blazing sill and watch Margo burn to death!

The Shadow forgot everything in that hellish extremity except the brick wall and the beckoning edge of the roof cornice above. Sweat dripped into his eyes. He moved steadily, an inch at a time, like a fly on a cliff.

Up—Up—

Suddenly, his hands gripped the cornice. His feet kicked and heaved him upward. He bellied over the roof edge.

Margo, watching from the smoke-shrouded window sill below, saw his face a moment later. She saw it upside down.

The Shadow had anchored his legs over the cornice. Again his muscular arms stretched to the uttermost. This time, they stretched downward.

Margo stretched, too. Her groping hands touched The Shadow's. Fingers clamped tautly around Margo's wrists. She felt her body swing dizzily away from the sill.

Flames licked hotly at the spot she had just quitted. Dangling in midair, she hung in agonized suspense for what seemed centuries.

Then she was lying flat on her stomach, doubled over hot stone. The Shadow had dragged her somehow over the cornice edge. But he was unable to pull her inward. The strength had gone out of him.

Margo's own weight toppled her forward. She fell limply to the flat surface of the roof.

The Shadow clutched at her, dragged her to her feet. Stumbling, falling, reeling, they raced across one roof to another. The Shadow's flame-eaten black cloak was tossed aside. Back in the role of Lamont Cranston, he found an open scuttle that led to a steep stairway.

He and Margo descended to the upper hallway of a shabby apartment house. The hallway was jammed with excited and half-dressed people. They milled from open apartment doors with armfuls of valuables.

Firemen were clearing the house of these terrified tenants. They shouted at Cranston and Margo to flee to safety with the rest.

More firemen shouldered through the confusion. A throbbing line of hose went up the roof stairway. Margo and Lamont Cranston fled downward with the crowd of panic-stricken tenants.

Most of the dazed tenants huddled outside in the crowd. They stared at the flames shooting skyward from the adjoining house. It was a sight that held a grim and horrible beauty.

But Margo didn't stay to watch. Nor did Lamont Cranston.

## CHAPTER VIII. A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

THE room was black.

It was a blackness so intense that it produced the effect of nothingness. The size of the room, its location, were hidden effectively behind an impenetrable veil.

Silence accompanied the blackness.

No sounds from the outside ever entered the secret confines of this room, hidden somewhere in the heart of Manhattan.

It was the sanctum of The Shadow!

There came a sibilant burst of laughter.

The Shadow had entered his sanctum!

A moment later, a bluish light threw its brilliance downward on the polished surface of a desk. In that oval of light were revealed motionless hands.

The face of The Shadow was partly revealed as he leaned forward. Deep-set eyes seemed to hold an inner brilliance of their own. His hawklike nose betokened strength of character.

On one of The Shadow's fingers was a ring in which was set a magnificent jewel. It flashed with a dozen changing colors as the hand of The Shadow moved across the desk through the oval of light.

The stone was a girasol, known also as a fire opal, one of the rarest specimens of its kind in the world. The girasol was the hallmark of The Shadow. It was a means of identification when artful disguise changed the appearance of The Shadow to an identity unfamiliar to any of his agents.

The Shadow's hand was now holding a document. It was a real-estate ownership deed. The Shadow laughed as he examined the name on that deed.

Many hidden things were now known to him. He had learned much since the strange kidnapping and murder of Ellery Cotswold.

The Shadow was aware of the existence of a billion-dollar racket in the sale of smuggled art masterpieces to unscrupulous collectors. The secret head of that racket—that Syndicate of Sin—was a man named Richardson Jordan.

Except The Shadow, no one could possibly suspect Jordan. He seemed to have ample wealth for all his needs. He had practically retired from active business. He still maintained a small office downtown, but he merely dabbled nowadays at real estate as a sort of hobby.

The copy of the deed in The Shadow's possession seemed to exonerate Jordan of any guilt. The name of another man was recorded on the deed as the owner.

Arthur Spooner!

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

Laughter showed that The Shadow was not deceived. The deed was a fake. The presence of Spooner's name on the document was a piece of cunning falsehood.

Had Spooner actually owned the house that had been destroyed by flame, he never would have been stupid enough to leave such a dangerous link connecting himself with crime. Therefore, the name had been recorded on the deed without Spooner's knowledge. In case of trouble, Richardson Jordan intended to use Spooner as a scapegoat.

Replacing the phony deed where it had come from, The Shadow reviewed the trio of important facts.

The first was the actual set-up of the art-smuggling combine. Jordan was the chief. Arthur Spooner and Harrison Brand were silent partners, acting as a respectable front, doing a legitimate business as co-owners of the Vanderpool Galleries. Their job was to provide a place where wealthy art collectors could be contacted by the clever redhead, Peggy Dawson.

Second was the fact concerning the present whereabouts of the loot. The Shadow knew it had been moved from the dusty house where he and Margo had so narrowly escaped death. Jordan's destruction of the house at the moment of his flight showed that the art treasures had been shifted in time to a safer location. To find that location was a task for The Shadow.

The final fact in The Shadow's mental arrangement of the basic crime picture was Mark Kemper. Kemper, a sleek and clever society blackmailer, had learned of the art cache. He had abandoned blackmail for a more lucrative prize. Kemper was making a bold effort to muscle in on Jordan and his two associates.

But Kemper was still at a serious disadvantage. Unlike The Shadow, he was still in the dark concerning the identity of the masked leader of the art racket. For the moment, The Shadow could afford to disregard Kemper.

The Shadow's move would be against Jordan himself!

It would require careful timing. But The Shadow was confident that out of it would come the proof that would end the most lucrative criminal combine he had uncovered in years of battling to uphold the law.

THE blue light above The Shadow's desk went out. Darkness returned to the sanctum.

Silence, too. No sound attested to the fact that The Shadow was leaving.

Not long afterward, the figure of Lamont Cranston appeared on the street, entered a sedan parked at the curb. He drove uptown.

Margo Lane was waiting for him in a fashionable tea room. They chatted a while, then left. Margo had no notion where The Shadow planned to go, but she was used to his whims.

Cranston drove to an important skyscraper in the neighborhood of Radio City. He and Margo ascended in the elevator to an upper floor. They entered a modest office.

It didn't seem to be busy. Only one clerk was visible: a girl. It seemed an odd set-up to be located in a mid-town skyscraper where the rents were so exorbitant. But Lamont Cranston seemed to take the set-up for granted.

"Is Mr. Jordan in?" he inquired.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

"No, sir. He rarely visits the office. Did you have an appointment?"

Cranston smiled artlessly.

"I just dropped in on my way to the Cobalt Club. I have a little business deal I'd like to discuss with him. I hoped I might run into him here."

"Perhaps if you went to his home –"

"Not necessary," The Shadow said in the bored tones of Cranston. "I'll probably see him later at the Cobalt Club."

He didn't want the girl clerk telephoning Jordan's home. He preferred to arrive there unannounced. He and Margo made their departure.

On the way to Jordan's home, The Shadow leaned close to Margo. His lips moved quietly. The instructions were brief, but they left nothing vague. When he had finished, Margo knew exactly the nature of the task assigned to her.

Jordan's home was an imposing mansion in a wealthy and restricted neighborhood. Cranston's ring at the doorbell was answered by a butler.

He was a man unknown to The Shadow. On previous visits, Cranston had always been admitted by Hogue, a gray-haired old servant of the approved butler type. This fellow was a lot younger than Hogue. There was a watchful look in his eyes, a tight expression on his sullen lips.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cranston," he said, after The Shadow had introduced himself and Margo. He made no move to admit the visitors.

"Isn't Mr. Jordan at home?"

"No, sir. I'm afraid it will be impossible for anyone to see him in the near future. He has left the country on government business. He flew to South America on a diplomatic mission involving war commerce. A dollar-a-year man, you know."

The Shadow didn't like the gleam in the fellow's eyes. He knew the butler was lying. He decided on a bold stroke. He spoke in a deliberately arrogant manner in his role of Cranston.

"This is ridiculous! I have an important deal arranged with Jordan. I'm interested in buying up a block of real estate. Jordan agreed to handle the assembly of the plot. I saw him recently at the Cobalt Club. He agreed to act as my realty agent. In fact, Jordan told me to come to his home and work out the arrangements."

The butler scowled.

"That's too bad. Maybe it might be better for you to try someone else. Mr. Jordan won't be back for months."

He had the effrontery to start closing the door.

"Just a minute!" Cranston cried.

His tone carried a whiplash. The butler's scowl grew darker. But he didn't shut the door.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

"I don't know you," Cranston said sharply. "I've never seen you before. What has become of Hogue? Mr. Jordan told me he never intended to discharge Hogue. Why isn't he here?"

"How do I know?"

"Very well!" The Shadow registered suspicion as well as annoyance. "I'm convinced there is something badly wrong about this strange absence of Mr. Jordan. He would never have left for South America without notifying his friends. I consider myself one of his closest friends. I intend to check on this matter without delay."

He turned to Margo.

"Come, my dear. We'll go straight to police headquarters! I shall notify my good friend, Commissioner Ralph Weston, about the strange absence of Jordan. I shall also have the references of this impudent new butler looked into."

The butler's face changed. His sullenness altered swiftly to worry.

"Wait a minute," he muttered.

He gestured them awkwardly into the foyer. He turned and yelled in most unbutlerlike fashion up the broad staircase of the mansion.

"Mr. Snyder! Hey—Mr. Snyder! Will you come here a minute?"

PRESENTLY Mr. Snyder came down the staircase. He was Jordan's secretary. He had a fleshy face that held no expression. His eyes were the grayish color of lead. Ordinarily, they seemed half asleep. But they were grimly awake now.

Snyder darted a quick glance toward the uneasy butler, then toward Cranston. He became immediately friendly. He shook hands with Cranston, bowed formally to Margo.

"How do you do? Nice to see you both."

The butler explained the situation in a nasty tone.

"You'll have to excuse Rodney's lack of tact," Snyder said with prompt apology. "He's a new servant here. I'm sorry he annoyed you, Mr. Cranston... You may go, Rodney!"

His tone was severe. Rodney shrugged and departed. Snyder's manner became even more unctuous.

"There is no need to be alarmed about Mr. Jordan, sir. The butler told you the truth. Mr. Jordan left—ah—very unexpectedly to do some highly delicate government work in South America. Commerce relations, you know. Between the United States and our sister republics to the south."

The Shadow pretended to fume.

"It was impolite of him, to say the least. He's left my realty deal hanging in the air!"

"I'm terribly sorry. Perhaps I can help you. I handle practically all of Mr. Jordan's realty business. Won't you both accept my apologies and come upstairs to Mr. Jordan's study?"

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

This was exactly the invitation The Shadow had been angling for. He and Margo followed Snyder up the broad staircase to Jordan's study on the second floor.

On the way upstairs, behind the secretary's back, the lips of The Shadow found an opportunity to whisper at the ear of Margo.

She refused a cigarette from the attentive Snyder when they reached the study. Smiling, she moved carelessly about the room.

"Isn't this a lovely room? I'll just poke about and enjoy the furnishings and the bric-a-brac while you men discuss your boring business."

Snyder made no objection. But his fleshy face hardened. He looked as if he didn't much like Margo's careless wandering. He sat deliberately in a chair so placed that it gave him the opportunity to keep an eye on her.

Snyder found the business talk of Lamont Cranston vague in the extreme. Cranston didn't seem to know exactly what he wanted. Snyder yawned. Then he began to become impatient. More and more, he was sensible of the silent movements of Margo.

She seemed discreetly interested in everything in the study. Snyder saw her look at the dial of a safe behind a small screen. Margo deliberately moved the screen in order to peer at the safe.

Aware that Snyder had her under observation, she moved toward a small cabinet table with a locked drawer. With a naive gesture that would have been laughable if it had not been deliberately done, Margo used her body to screen a stealthy movement of her hand.

Snyder saw her try the locked drawer. He was convinced now that Margo's presence in the study masked a purpose on her part to do some snooping. He began to sweat with the desire to get rid of her and the stupid clubman she had brought with her in order to hide her real purpose.

With a yawn, The Shadow obliged Snyder by rising to his feet.

"I think I'll drop the whole real-estate deal until Mr. Jordan returns from South America," he said in Cranston's slow drawl. "Perhaps that would be the best solution. After all, Jordan and I are more used to each other's methods of business. You don't mind, do you, Mr. Snyder?"

"Not at all! A good idea."

The secretary was on his feet, pumping Lamont Cranston's hand. He bowed to Margo. He edged them to the study door and escorted them downstairs. His ring summoned the butler. He hurried upstairs again.

Margo knew what was worrying Snyder. He wanted to make sure that she hadn't walked off with anything. Snyder's quick leave-taking suited Margo. She had one last job to do for The Shadow.

It concerned the sullen butler.

As Rodney opened the street door, Margo pitched sideways with a muffled gasp. She was closer to Rodney than The Shadow. It was the butler who caught her and steadied her.

"I tripped on the edge of the rug," Margo smiled. "So awkward of me. I might easily have twisted my ankle."

"Are you all right?" Rodney scowled.

"Quite. Thank you for your assistance."

The door closed behind them. The catch clicked. But the door remained unlocked. This vital fact was unknown to Rodney.

The Shadow had taken advantage of Margo's brief mishap with the rug. As the butler sprang to steady her, The Shadow had leaned carelessly toward the side of the partly opened door.

He had deftly pressed a button in the shining metal. The button controlled the lock release. All that had to be done to re-enter the mansion of Richardson Jordan was simply to turn the loose outside knob and open the door.

On the sidewalk, the laughter of The Shadow held a note of grim amusement. The visit had produced suspicion in the minds of both Rodney and Snyder. But it was not Lamont Cranston who was suspected. Margo was the one who had drawn suspicion. She had done an excellent job.

The Shadow intended to re-enter that house within the next few minutes. Margo would accompany him. Again the burden of suspicion fell on her—freeing The Shadow for a most important task.

Act II of the investigation in the home of Richardson Jordan was about to start!

## CHAPTER IX. A SNEAK RAID

A SHORT time after the departure of Margo Lane and Lamont Cranston, they returned to the dignified front of Richardson Jordan's mansion. This time, they arrived on foot.

They attracted scant attention from the few passers-by on the sidewalk. The brief case that Cranston carried seemed a shade too large and a bit heavy to contain business papers. But that was a minor detail, one not easily noticed by people swiftly passing the house, intent on their own affairs.

The shades on the mansion's ground floor were all drawn. The Shadow was not worried about the possibility of watchful eyes behind those shades. Margo had not actually done anything to make the sly henchmen of Jordan look for a quick return visit.

All Margo had done was to behave suspiciously.

Besides, neither Snyder nor the sullen Rodney had discovered that the lock of the front door had been tampered with.

The door opened noiselessly at Cranston's touch. He and Margo stepped into the shadowy foyer.

The house was dim and silent. A quick preliminary survey informed The Shadow that Rodney was busy at the rear, in the servant's pantry. Snyder had gone upstairs a short while earlier. He was undoubtedly still there.

But not in Jordan's private study. Cranston had not failed to use his eyes on that earlier visit. He had noticed that open door of another room down the second-floor corridor from Jordan's study.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

This other room was smaller. It contained a desk, a typewriter, and all the other equipment that marked it as a room where a secretary might work. The Shadow assumed correctly that this small chamber was probably Snyder's.

In the dimness of the downstairs hall, Margo waited while Lamont Cranston faded briefly from sight. He was not absent for long. When he reappeared, the nattily dressed figure of the wealthy clubman had vanished. In its place was a more ominous personage.

The black cloak of The Shadow seemed to melt invisibly against the background of dark and formal draperies. Blazing eyes were screened by the tilted brim of a black slouch hat. Black gloves covered the hands of the supreme foe of crime.

The Shadow was now ready for more surprises against the clever Mr. Snyder!

He led the way up the soft covering that masked the sound of footfalls on the staircase. He carried the empty brief case in his gloved hands. Margo glided silently behind him.

At the top, The Shadow halted. Invisible except from below the stairs, he peered along the dim corridor of the second floor. His gaze penetrated past the partly opened door of Snyder's room.

He could hear the busy click of a typewriter. Part of a desk was visible. The sight of polished shoes and the lower half of two gray trouser legs showed that the man who was busy at the typing machine was Snyder himself.

The Shadow's gloved hands made a quick gesture. Obeying his silent order, Margo crept quickly past the exposed bit of corridor. She disappeared into the private study of Richardson Jordan.

The moment Margo was safely inside, The Shadow was on the move, too. He faded to a sheltered spot. He placed the empty brief case where it could be easily retrieved later. Then he vanished completely. For the present, there was nothing for The Shadow to do but wait.

MARGO behaved quite oddly for a girl who had taken such pains to enter Jordan's study unobserved.

The first thing she did was to drop her gloves into a deep crease of the soft cushion in an armchair. The second thing she did was clumsily to betray her presence in the room!

She did it by deliberately knocking a carved ivory cigarette box from a table to the floor. It made a noisy clatter. Margo remained where she was— close to the safe that she had scrutinized so suspiciously earlier.

She was still there when Snyder came rushing into the study. His face was taut and ugly. In his grasp was a .38 revolver.

Margo recoiled with a cry of alarm as she saw Snyder's gun. Her fright and confusion were well simulated. She gave every appearance of surprise and guilt.

"Don't shoot!" she gasped. "It's... it's only I!"

Snyder hesitated. His eyes were shining bits of mica. Then he recovered his poise. He slipped the gun back into his pocket. He asked a sneering question.

"May I ask, Miss Lane, to what fortunate chance we owe this unexpected return?"

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

He was pleased at having caught her in the act of a cunning search. He was more pleased by the fact that she had so awkwardly betrayed her presence before she had had a chance to search Jordan's study. But he showed only a polite sarcasm.

Margo helped things along by pretending to be trying to think up a quick alibi. She turned much too soon toward the armchair where she had hidden her gloves. She found them much too readily after she walked straight toward the chair.

"My gloves," she murmured breathlessly. "I forgot them when Lamont and I were here a few minutes ago. I told Lamont to wait in the car down the street. I came back to get them."

"I see," Snyder said dryly.

"When I came in, the house was quiet. I didn't want to disturb anybody. So I just walked up the stairs and... and I was looking for my gloves when... you heard me."

Margo smiled wanly.

"A silly thing to do, wasn't it? Why, I might have easily been shot for a burglar!"

Snyder licked his dry lips. He blinked away the savage gleam in his narrowed eyes.

"The gun was merely a precaution," he said. "Naturally, I wouldn't dream of firing a bullet into a charming society girl like Margo Lane."

He spat a sudden question to catch her off guard.

"How did you get in? I'm assuming, of course, that you didn't pick the lock of the front door!"

"Really, Mr. Snyder," Margo replied shakily. "It's not a joking matter! No, your front door was closed. But your butler couldn't have shut it sufficiently hard when we left earlier. The spring lock failed to catch. That's why I decided to look for my gloves by myself. I thought I could leave before my foolishness was discovered. I'm terribly sorry if I startled you!"

She retreated toward the hallway. Snyder didn't make any move to detain her. He went politely down the stairs with her. Snyder was not the kind of crook to tip his hand by an impulsive mistake. His quick glance at the lock mechanism of the front door told him nothing. The Shadow had already fixed the release button.

Margo left with smiling apologies. Snyder smiled, too, as he closed the front door. But his face twisted with rage the moment the door shut. An oath ripped from his lips.

"Rodney!... Damn that fool! Rodney!"

"Yes, boss!" The butler came on the run from the pantry in the rear. "Something wrong? What the hell's up?"

"Plenty!" Snyder snarled. "I was right about Margo Lane. She came here to spy! She took advantage of Cranston's presence to phony up the front door!"

"I don't get it."

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

"She sneaked back in again, dope! This time, she came alone. She must have fixed the snap lock on the way out before."

Rodney swore. He explained about Margo's "accident" when she had left earlier.

"That's when it was done," Snyder nodded. His face was bleak. "She pushed the release button in the lock while you were helping her, you sap!"

"Do you think this guy Cranston might be in on it, too?" the butler asked.

"No. Cranston is not the type. He's just a dumb socialite with plenty of dough and no brains."

Snyder frowned.

"From now on I want no more slip-ups. Keep in the front of the house. I'm going upstairs to make sure that everything is O. K. And listen, monkey! If you see anything queer—use a gun! Don't wait. Shoot! Understand?"

"Right," Rodney breathed.

SNYDER raced up the staircase, hurried into the private study of his vanished employer. He wasted no time. There was only one thing in the room that worried him. That was the safe in the corner behind the small screen.

But before Snyder approached the safe, he turned to another quarter. He picked up an ornamental lamp from a console table. The lamp had a hollow bottom in its base. A sliding piece of metal in a hidden groove disclosed a hollow receptacle in the lamp's base.

Snyder withdrew a small piece of folded paper.

Armed with the paper, he approached Jordan's safe. The combination was intricate. That was why it was necessary to keep it recorded on a hidden slip of paper.

It took a considerable time at the dial before the door of the safe finally slid open.

Snyder breathed a sigh of relief as he looked inside. He drew out a large portfolio. After a swift scrutiny of the contents of the portfolio, he replaced it and closed the massive safe. He returned the combination slip to its hiding place in the base of the ornamental lamp.

"O. K., babe!" Snyder muttered in a savage tone to the absent Margo. "Try it again sometime!"

"Only next time, take out life insurance before you try it! You'll need it!"

He left Jordan's study and returned to his own room down the corridor. For a while, there was silence. Then the uneven clack of his typewriter began again.

The black-robed figure of The Shadow emerged quietly from concealment. The Shadow had been an interested spectator of the actions of Snyder.

By again bearing the brunt of the secretary's suspicion, Margo had made the problem of The Shadow simple. All he had to do was to remove the combination slip from the base of the lamp and work patiently at the dial

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

of the safe.

The heavy safe door made no sound on its greased hinges as it swung ponderously open. The eyes of The Shadow blazed. He was examining the contents of the portfolio.

It was an important find.

There were various papers, all of them in code. At any rate, their meaning was not clear to The Shadow, although they seemed to be written in straightforward style. They were apparently orders concerning the sale and transfer of real estate. The Shadow made no effort to copy them. He knew they would be valueless without a cipher key.

Besides, the sight of a packet of checks made decoding unnecessary. The checks explained the nature of those "real-estate holdings" mentioned so innocently on the other sheets.

Each of those checks were marked on the back: "Partial payment on account, for real-estate service." Each was drawn to the order of Richardson Jordan. Each was signed by a man of wealth.

Grimly, The Shadow noted that everyone of the millionaires who had drawn checks to Jordan was an unscrupulous collector of art.

There was a memo pinned to the packet of checks. The Shadow knew that the typed memo had come from the typewriter that was now so busily clacking in Snyder's room down the dim corridor of the second floor.

The memo showed that the checks were ready to be forwarded to Jordan for his indorsement. Without it, they could not be deposited in one of the several banks mentioned in the memo.

But the address to which the checks were to be mailed for indorsement was not a Manhattan address!

It was a small town in New Jersey.

THE SHADOW divined that Jordan's new hide-out in New Jersey was not in the town mentioned in the memo. He based this deduction on the fact that the address bore a post-office box number. It indicated that someone would call in person for the mail.

The cunning Richardson Jordan had undoubtedly gone to earth in a well-protected spot in some lonely country setting. The sort of a spot where thugs with an expert knowledge of guns would have a better chance to repel another highjacking attempt on the part of Mark Kemper.

The picture of intrigue and crime of the Syndicate of Sin was becoming clearer. But The Shadow was the only one who had all the threads in his hand.

Mark Kemper, for instance, was unaware of the identity of the masked man he had raided in the deserted house where Tony Maxwell had been knifed to death. Jordan was unaware of the real identity of The Shadow.

A waiting game would probably take place for the next couple of days. While the opposing forces of crime waited, The Shadow intended to act. His first move would set the stage for his assault against Jordan.

First, The Shadow would put pressure on Jordan's outwardly respectable partners at the Vanderpool Galleries.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

Nor was the astute red-haired charmer, the clever Peggy Dawson, to be overlooked.

Silent laughter twisted the lips of The Shadow as he replaced the portfolio within the safe. He closed the heavy door noiselessly.

Creeping unseen from Jordan's study, he made the passage across the corridor to the staircase successfully. But he didn't descend the stairs. Stealthy sounds below told him that Rodney, the sullen butler whom Margo had tricked, was not going to be tricked a second time.

The Shadow retreated along the second-floor corridor. He took advantage of the somber hangings that formed a perfect background for his cloaked figure. He had regained his brief case. Its presence could not now warn Rodney or Snyder that there had been two second visitors in the house.

No trace of his presence had The Shadow left. There would be no reason for Snyder to warn Jordan in New Jersey that his new hide-out was now known to The Shadow.

He quitted the house with comparative ease. The butler's zeal to guard the front of the house from invasion made it simple for The Shadow to leave by the rear.

A door clicked softly. An alley that was designed for the comings and goings of tradesmen afforded a swift route to the street.

A few moments later, Lamont Cranston was greeting Margo with a polite smile. They drove sedately away.

Margo's bungling behavior had covered a highly important sneak raid by The Shadow! By so doing she had turned the threat of danger toward herself. But The Shadow had no intention of placing too many risks on the lovely shoulders of Margo Lane.

Margo was about to vanish completely from the sight of crooks!

## CHAPTER X. DOUBLE DOOM

THE SHADOW was not the only one preparing an unpleasant surprise for unsuspecting foes.

In a secluded section of New Jersey, well beyond the limits of a small and sleepy village, a winding lane nearly a mile in length led from a highway through a dense growth of pine and spruce.

At the end of that well-screened lane stood a house.

The house was in excellent repair, but no one ever seemed to occupy it. According to village rumors, the house was owned by someone in New York. No one knew the name of the owner. Secrecy had attended its purchase. The new owner had never visited it.

He was supposed to be something of an invalid.

Two days earlier, however, the mysterious owner had arrived secretly in the dead of night. With him came a rather attractive and shapely red-haired girl.

An hour or so later, a moving van had arrived.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

The truckmen who rode on the seat of the van seemed unusually tough-looking workmen. Other tough-looking men dropped to the ground when the sealed rear doors of the van were opened.

They carried a large consignment of crated material into the house. When the job was done, the van left as secretly as it had arrived. Long before dawn streaked the New Jersey hills, the van was back in New York.

"A very successful operation," Richardson Jordan chuckled.

He was talking to the red-haired Peggy Dawson. Both of them sat at ease in a well-furnished room within the isolated house.

Peggy blew out a cloud of perfumed cigarette smoke. She was pleased, too. But she watched her boss expectantly. Jordan had the air of a man meditating still further moves. His eyes were narrowed speculatively. He seemed to be sizing up his shapely companion. His silence made her a little restive.

"What's the set-up now?" she inquired.

"Excellent!" Jordan said. "Our fade-out was accomplished perfectly! Snyder and Rodney will take care of my alibi at the New York end. Kemper will have an impossible task picking up my trail. The Shadow, too, is blocked—assuming that he wasn't roasted to death after that incendiary bomb did its stuff. Spooner and Brand must be also tearing their hair right now, wondering where I vanished with the art loot."

His chuckle was nasty.

"You see, I very unfortunately neglected to inform my two respectable partners where I was going before I vanished."

"You mean you're freezing out Spooner and Brand?"

"Certainly," Jordan said. "Why do I need them? The Vanderpool Galleries isn't the only place where wealthy art collectors can be contacted. We'll simply arrange a new spot where millionaires who like to own world-famous paintings can be contacted. You and I will lie low until the mess stirred up by Mark Kemper quiets down. Then we'll begin all over again."

His laugh was icy:

"In the meantime, I've got three simple little murders to attend to."

Jordan sounded almost casual in his reference to murder. Peggy Dawson was casual, too.

"How are you going to do it without risk? I assume we are going to wipe out Spooner and Brand to avoid any annoyance later on, when we start business again. Kemper, too. Correct?"

"Quite correct. Our three murders will not get into the newspapers. The killings will take place right here, in this remote and lovely old house. But before we can commit murder, we first have to persuade our foolish victims to come here, eh?"

His smile widened. Peggy Dawson gave him a shrewd glance.

"You've got the whole scheme worked out perfectly, if I know you!" she murmured.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

"Listen, and learn. Then you can tell me what you think of my scheme."

Jordan reached for a decanter, poured himself a drink of whiskey.

"WE start with Spooner and Brand," he said. "Spooner is the weak sister, Brand is the resolute one. Both are suspicious devils. Each has never quite trusted the other. I have deliberately fostered that suspicion from time to time. I realized long ago that I might have to get rid of those respectable nuisances who do nothing, who run practically no risk—and yet collect a juicy cut every time I dispose of a painting.

"Spooner thinks that Brand enjoys special favor with me. Brand thinks the same thing about his partner."

"Each of them is a double-crossing rat in his heart!" the red-haired girl snapped.

"Exactly! That's the line I'm going to use to lure them both to their death. Spooner and Brand each have evidence in their possession that can incriminate and ruin the other. That was the way we arranged things when we set up the art deal. The partners insisted that each hold a check on the other to insure their mutual protection."

Jordan grinned.

"I'm going to persuade Spooner to swipe Brand's evidence. The same thing will happen to Brand. Then I'll lure them both separately out here. That, my sweet, will be that! Their deaths will leave me in the clear—except for Mark Kemper!"

His voice changed to a rasping snarl as he mentioned the name of the society blackmailer who had turned highjacker.

Peggy looked ugly, too. Tony Maxwell had been a special boyfriend of Peggy's. There had been more than business between Tony and the shapely red-haired girl. And Kemper had killed Tony with no more compunction than sticking a pig.

"Let me take care of Kemper!" Peggy said in a vicious tone.

"I thought you'd feel that way," Jordan said. "We'll use one of the Vanderpool partners—probably the timid Spooner—to lure Kemper here for slaughter. That will be easy, since Kemper still doesn't know who I am. He has never seen me without my mask. We'll persuade the sly Mr. Kemper that the unknown boss of the art racket is really Spooner!"

"But how?" Peggy cried.

"Easy! It's already been started. My former headquarters—the house that was burned to the ground—was registered in Spooner's name. Kemper's first move will be to look up the ownership of that house. The minute he figures that Spooner is the masked boss of the racket, he's my meat!"

Jordan took a sip of whiskey.

"The rest is up to you, Peggy."

"What do I do?"

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

"You will start the ball rolling. Your first task will be simple. I want a pass-key that will open the door of Spooner's apartment."

"And after that?"

Jordan leaned closer to the redhead. Her eyes gleamed as he unfolded more details of his plan. It was cunning, completely worked out to the tiniest detail.

It was a master plan for murder!

But a spark of worry grew in Peggy's eyes as she listened. The plan was dangerous in many ways. Particularly for Peggy. If she kept her nerve and used her wits, she ran no risk. But the slightest slip on her part, a bit of bad luck—

She shivered, remembering the black-cloaked figure of The Shadow. Jordan had assured her that The Shadow was probably one of the flame-blackened skeletons that had been raked out of the ashes of the burned house in Manhattan. But was that true?

Peggy Dawson wanted no part of The Shadow! For the first time in her criminal career, she hesitated, chilled by uneasy doubts.

"I don't like it," she said. "It's too risky!"

Jordan's quiet laugh made her flush.

"No profits without risks, my dear," he said. "It's up to you. I'm dealing you a hand. Take it or leave it. But remember this; we're not dealing in peanuts. You know the aggregate value of the stuff we've got crated inside this house. With Spooner and Brand out of the way— with Mark Kemper murdered, too— how many cuts will there be on the profit? By my arithmetic, I make it two! You and I! I'm offering you a half share of every dime we make from now on."

PEGGY DAWSON was silent for a while. The worry faded from her eyes as she studied the confident face of Jordan. She knew his capabilities for crime. She had heard the complete details of his scheme.

Greed replaced worry in her eyes. How could she fail, with a criminal genius like Richardson Jordan to back her up and guard against errors?

"It's a deal!" she cried at last.

She stuck out her slim hand. Jordan grasped it with a whisper of satisfaction.

They talked a while longer. They agreed it was best for Peggy to hurry back to New York at once, under cover of darkness.

She left Jordan sipping at his whiskey. She passed through the adjoining room and entered another.

The ceiling light in this second room had been turned on. Peggy Dawson was able to see every detail of its interior. She saw something that drew a loud cry from her. It was a cry of surprise and apprehension—and of rage.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

She sprang grimly forward into the room. She knew where the light switch was located. Peggy's prompt dive toward the wall brought her hand over the switch.

Instantly, the room was plunged into darkness.

Through that darkness Peggy Dawson leaped toward the opposite doorway. She slammed the door to prevent any escape. A moment later, a quick scuffle was grimly audible in the darkness.

The cry that Peggy had uttered brought swift help. At the sound, Jordan had leaped to his feet. A gun flashed into his hand. He ran at top speed to the redhead's assistance.

He found the room in total darkness. He could hear the faint sounds of a fierce struggle near the other door. He whirled toward the wall to grab for the light switch. Peggy's muffled voice halted him.

"Wait! Don't turn on the light! I've caught a woman! There may be someone else around!"

Jordan swung noiselessly toward the sound of the voice. The darkness cloaked his advance.

Suddenly, he heard a muffled scream. It was followed by a thud.

"Peggy! Are you all right?"

"O. K.," came her panting whisper.

Richardson Jordan sprang through the dark to her side.

MARK KEMPER was smiling expectantly.

He sat at ease in his penthouse suite, talking to a man who had not entered by the normal route used by Kemper's usual visitors.

This man was not a criminal. But his business relationship with Kemper was of such a nature that both found it advisable to keep their occasional meetings a secret.

"How did you make out, Wartig?" Kemper asked.

"Swell! No, trouble at all. A little dough covered my tracks nicely. Nobody is going to do any tracing of my movements this afternoon—or find out much from the people I used to help me."

"Did you dig up the dope?"

"Yes," Wartig said. "The man that owned that burned house was smart. But not smart enough. He destroyed the record of ownership in the books to which the public have access. But he forgot there are duplicate records kept. My dough opened the duplicate records to me. Guess who owned the house?"

Mark Kemper's chin jerked irritably. His nerves were on edge, in spite of his show of complacency.

"I don't want to answer riddles, I want a name!"

"All right, here's the name. Arthur Spooner!"

"What!"

For an instant, Mark Kemper was petrified with surprise. Then an unholy glee chased the irritation from his sharp eyes.

"Well, I'll be damned! Spooner, eh? The cunning rat! I should have guessed it myself. That timid pose of his was always a little too good to be true."

"What do I do now? Any orders?"

"Wait a minute. Let me think this thing over."

Kemper stared for a long while at the ferret face of his agent Wartig. But he didn't really notice him. Kemper was pondering plans in his agile mind. They began to take shape swiftly. Those plans involved Spooner.

"Our first job is to locate the whereabouts of the loot," Kemper murmured. He was talking to himself, rather than Wartig. "The loot must have been transferred somewhere else before the house was burned down. Otherwise, Spooner never would have been fool enough to touch off his incendiary bomb when he fled."

"Where do you imagine he has it hidden now?" Wartig asked.

Kemper ignored the question, went on thinking aloud.

"So Spooner is the masked big shot of the racket. He's the one the red-headed girl actually works with. They've successfully switched the loot. Spooner knows where. So does the redhead. Brand, too, maybe. But Brand doesn't matter for the moment."

Kemper's eyes closed. They remained closed for a long time. When they opened there was a cold glint in them.

"All right, Wartig. It won't be so tough a nut to crack, after all. Here is what I want done!"

Wartig listened, like a ferret listening to a fox.

"Pass the word to the boys that I want quick action. It's confidential work. There must be no rough stuff. If any fool messes things up with any slugging or gunplay—it will be just too bad for him! Understand?"

"Yeah."

"Put a watch on Spooner's apartment in the morning. When he leaves tomorrow for the Vanderpool Galleries, I want to know it. Keep your boys out of sight. But don't let Spooner leave his apartment without my knowing it. You can phone me here. Is all of that clear?"

"Sure! I can handle it."

"Fine! Now beat it and get things organized. Tomorrow morning the ball starts rolling. Before it stops rolling there'll be a nice bunch of loot in my lap. And Mr. Spooner won't mind it a bit. Because Mr. Spooner will be dead!"

Wartig grinned. It was swell to work for a smart boss! Nothing was ever left to chance. Wartig could almost feel the crisp rustle of dough in his own skinny palm. Even by the time a share of the loot trickled down to

him and the boys, it would still be a juicy hunk of change.

He left the penthouse as skillfully and invisibly as he had entered it.

Alone in his comfortable chair, Mark Kemper laughed. He could afford to wait serenely until tomorrow morning.

But Kemper, smart as he was, was unaware of something that would have worried him had he known.

Ugly events, set in motion in New Jersey, were already in the making.

Things were due to happen not only to Arthur Spooner, but to his partner Harrison Brand.

They were due to happen tonight! The Syndicate of Sin was at work!

## CHAPTER XI. ROGUE VS. ROGUE

HARRISON BRAND was not sleeping very soundly.

He kept rolling and tossing. Every time his eyes closed and he drifted into slumber, it was only for a short time. He had unpleasant things on his mind.

Brand wished he had a blueprint of what was going on in the mind of his partner, Spooner. Spooner had been acting peculiarly the past few days. He seemed slyly content with the fact that their all-important criminal associate, Richardson Jordan, had vanished into thin air, leaving no trace.

It was doubly queer, because Spooner had had a bad case of the jitters immediately after the mysterious murder of Ellery Cotswold. Spooner had tried in vain to get in touch with Jordan, to make sure that the cache of smuggled art was still unharmed. Then, suddenly, he had changed his tune. He had assured Brand he was satisfied with events.

"Everything is all right," Spooner had told Brand. "Jordan is probably lying low somewhere until the investigation of Cotswold's murder blows over. Our best stunt is to sit tight, too. A premature effort to locate and get in touch with him might spoil everything."

Brand didn't like the set-up at all. He suspected a double cross on the part of Spooner. The timidity of his partner seemed to him overdone. There was a sly brain behind Spooner's weak face!

So it happened that Brand, tossing unpleasantly in his bed, heard the doorbell ring. The sound made him jump swiftly from the bed. It was a quick, almost furtive sound. It was not repeated.

Brand yanked open a drawer of his night table, grabbed up a revolver. He had taken to keeping it close to his bed since the murder of Ellery Cotswold. It was fully loaded.

A glance at the electric clock on his dresser made Brand realize that the time was quite late. Far too late for the visit of anyone making a normal call on him.

He ran swiftly in his bare feet to the door. With the gun ready for action, Brand flung the apartment door open.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

He faced only emptiness. There was no one outside the door!

For an instant, Brand was puzzled. Then his taut glance dropped to the floor of the corridor just outside the door.

A package was lying there.

He stared at it, almost afraid to pick it up. It was wrapped in brown paper. There was no name or address on the outside of the parcel. Confusedly, Brand wondered if the thing might perhaps contain an infernal machine of some sort.

To think of such an unlikely thing was to return to common sense. The parcel was very small. It couldn't possibly contain a bomb. It was scarcely bigger than an envelope. Most likely the mysterious packet contained a message.

The thought of Richardson Jordan flashed through the mind of Brand. He quickly picked up the packet and hurried back into his apartment. Breaking the seal carefully, he examined the contents.

His guess was correct, he discovered. A message was inclosed in a small pasteboard box, the sort of box used by jewelers.

When Brand removed the folded message, something else dropped out. It was a ring, and obviously a very valuable one. The gem in the ring was held in an expensive platinum setting. It was a large sapphire. Not the ordinary type of sapphire, either.

This one had a peculiar glint in its depths, as Brand held it to the light. Lines like living bands of light radiated out into starlike points.

The gem was a magnificent star sapphire!

Harrison Brand recognized the ring and stone instantly. He had seen it many times on the finger of Richardson Jordan. Jordan had sent the ring with a message as a talisman.

Brand studied the note with grim eyes. He uttered a quick oath of understanding as he read the first sentence. Long before he finished, he felt a bitter joy.

The doubts and worries of Brand were now finished! From now on, he knew exactly how things stood.

"O. K., Mr. Spooner!" he whispered under his breath. "We'll keep on playing the game your way. Treachery and double-crossing is a game at which two can play!"

THE note made things clear. It explained for the first time to Brand the identity and the real purpose of Mark Kemper. Brand knew now that Kemper was a cunning highjacker, bent on crashing a billion-dollar racket and turning it to his own advantage.

Mark Kemper and Spooner were working in partnership. That was why Jordan had been forced to go into hiding. He had found out what Kemper and Spooner were up to. They intended to freeze out Brand, to find and kill Jordan—and then declare a new deal for the disposal of the stolen art. With a fifty-fifty split between themselves!

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

The note not only gave information to the enraged Brand; it had orders. He saw at once the orders were both desirable and urgent.

Jordan was asking Brand to go at once—tonight—to the Vanderpool Galleries. He wanted Brand to steal certain evidence from a Manila envelope in Spooner's private safe.

It was evidence that incriminated Brand. It had been part of the agreement between them when the art combine was first formed.

Now the set-up was hideously reversed. Spooner had made a secret deal with Kemper. If Brand could steal the evidence Spooner had against him, Brand, the whole double cross could be stymied at the start.

Spooner would be afraid to play ball with foxy Mark Kemper. Brand would hold the whip hand!

The note from Jordan ended as follows:

As soon as you have completed the job, I will send you word how to meet me at the new headquarters I have moved to. You will be pleased to know that the merchandise in which we are both interested accompanied me safely to this new retreat.

Brand grinned at the magnificent star sapphire ring that had come with the note. He slipped it into a safe place. Then he hurriedly dressed and left the apartment.

The Vanderpool Galleries were only a short distance from where Brand lived. He went there on foot.

He didn't enter the building by the ornate front entrance on Madison Avenue. His goal was a shabby door on the side street around the corner. It was the door formerly used by Jordan whenever it was necessary for him to hold a conference in the private office of the Vanderpool partners.

The other door at the top of the stairs—the one that was fastened by a powerful spring lock on the outside—offered no obstacle to Brand. He and Spooner had keys to it, as well as Jordan.

With a beating heart, Brand switched on a small light in the quiet office as soon as he had drawn all the shades.

He went to work swiftly on Spooner's private safe. It opened quickly. Jordan had inclosed the combination of the safe along with the note that accompanied the sapphire ring.

Brand had no trouble locating the Manila envelope.

With a chuckle of triumph, he busied himself for a while with the contents. Then he closed the door of the safe. He had been careful enough to wear gloves.

Let Spooner worry over who had opened the safe. Provided that Spooner was smart enough to look for the Manila envelope in the near future—

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

ARTHUR SPOONER wasn't doing much sleeping tonight, either. He was lying, fully dressed, on his bed. Like Brand, he had things on his mind.

He leaped suddenly from the bed as he heard a sound from his front door. It wasn't the ring of a bell, such as had awakened Brand. It was a more stealthy noise. Someone outside Spooner's front door was tinkering with the mechanism of the lock!

Spooner took no chances. He grabbed up a gun he had placed close to his bed for emergencies.

With the gun ready for action, he crept noiselessly to the front door. There was nothing timorous about Spooner now! Quite the reverse. He looked capable of murder as he threw open the door and pointed the gun muzzle over the threshold.

But he found no one there!

The unseen prowler had beat a hasty retreat. The fact that he was making a quick getaway was evident when Spooner glanced toward the arrow indicator in the dial above the closed doors of the elevator shaft.

The arrow was turning swiftly toward the numeral that marked the street floor of the apartment house.

A grim scrutiny of the lock of his apartment door showed Spooner what the prowler had been up to. There was an oily coating on the outside of the lock. Wax had been used.

The unknown visitor had been taking an impression of the lock!

Spooner didn't hesitate. He was already dressed. He had a gun ready for action. In spite of his timid affectations, Spooner was an excellent shot.

He raced for the fire doors that were just beyond the elevator shaft. If he made good time, there was a possibility that he might overtake the unknown prowler before he escaped from the building. Spooner, in the role of an outraged householder, would be perfectly justified in shooting the fellow.

He raced down the fire stairs with reckless leaps. But he reached the ground floor too late. The open doors of the motionless elevator showed that the burglar had already fled. The lobby was deserted.

Spooner saw no sign of the night hallman, who should have been on duty at his switchboard desk in a sheltered alcove of the lobby.

Returning hastily after a vain glance up and down the dark street outside, Spooner hunted for the missing switchboard man. It didn't take long to locate him. Groans came from behind a screen of potted palms at the other side of the lobby.

Spooner helped the hallman to his feet. There was a large lump at the side of his skull. Blood was slowly oozing through the matted hair. He looked pale and sick. But Spooner was in no mood to worry about the hallman's injury.

He was worried about himself!

He spat urgent questions at the fellow. In reply, he received not a single item of intelligent information. The hallman had been surprised by a masked man. Before he could spring from his chair, he had been dealt a savage blow on the head. That was all he remembered.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

He couldn't describe his assailant.

Spooner, although he didn't want to, had to admit that the burglar had made an attempt at the lock of his door upstairs. He had to admit this in order to explain his sudden appearance with a gun.

But he shut up the hallman grimly when the latter suggested calling the police.

"No! I don't want police."

"But he slugged me! He tried to break into your apartment. Don't you want the police to nab him?"

Spooner became very bland. He muttered something about unpleasant newspaper publicity. He also handed the hallman a bank note of a very generous denomination.

"Forget it. I'll notify the police myself, later. We don't want reporters and police nosing around. It would bother me. It might even cause you to lose your job for negligence."

"Maybe you're right, sir."

The hallman was dazed, both from the lump on his head and the size of the bill Spooner had given to him to insure discretion. He could be depended on to keep his mouth shut for a while.

SPOONER went back to his apartment. He had a good idea who that masked man was, he told himself.

Harrison Brand!

Certain that it was Brand, Spooner didn't want him to know that the attempt to take an impression of the apartment lock had attracted any suspicion on Spooner's part.

Spooner would casually mention the attack on the doorman downstairs when he saw Brand tomorrow at the Vanderpool Galleries. He would say nothing of the noise he had heard outside his own door. He knew how to handle Brand. He'd make Brand continue to think that he was not only timid, but stupid.

Meanwhile, it might be an excellent idea to check on Brand.

Spooner lifted his phone, dialed Brand's number. He listened calmly to the ringing at the other end of the wire.

Brand waited for nearly sixty seconds before he hung up. He had found out what he wanted: Brand was not at home. The identity of the cunning prowler at the lock of Spooner's door was now doubly certain.

A double-crossing rat!

Spooner sat down to think things over. He didn't waste much time coming to a decision. It was a decision that matched Spooner's foxy method of thought. The more he thought about it, the more satisfactory his scheme seemed.

Since Brand was now away from his apartment, there was no way he could check on the movements of Spooner by making a phone call. Brand would be too busy hurrying back home to perfect his own alibi in case of trouble.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

It was a golden opportunity for Spooner to make a swift visit to the Vanderpool Galleries.

If Brand was pulling a double cross, the best way to clip his wings would be to steal evidence that Spooner had turned over to him as a safeguard when the art racket was first formulated.

It would free Spooner from the power of his foxy partner. It would end the threat of treachery on the part of Brand!

Spooner left his apartment swiftly. He left by a rear exit, without advertising his departure to the hallman in the first floor lobby. Nearby was a garage in which he kept his car.

He drove through the quiet darkness toward the Vanderpool Galleries, slowing cautiously when he arrived in the vicinity of the Madison Avenue corner.

He was glad he had. Just as his car reached the corner, Spooner saw a dark figure emerge from the shabby exit door down the side street.

The figure was that of Brand!

Brand hurried east toward Park Avenue on foot. He didn't notice the car that was apparently parked overnight near the corner. Brand was too anxious to cloak his own getaway to pay much attention to the car in which Spooner sat huddled low behind the wheel.

A few minutes later, Spooner raced up the private staircase to the office of the Vanderpool Galleries. Thoroughly scared, he raced to Brand's private safe.

He had prepared for a contingency like this many weeks earlier. He knew the combination of the safe. But he was afraid he had arrived too late.

His heart leaped when he saw a fat Manila envelope.

Opening it with trembling hands, Spooner felt the crisp crackle of papers. But his gulp of relief changed to a grunt of rage when he drew out those papers and examined them.

All of them were blank! Brand had made off with the vital evidence that Spooner had hoped to get his own hands on.

Whirling, Spooner sprang toward the other safe—his own. Again he found a familiar Manila envelope, with the comfortable feel of stuffed papers within.

But this envelope too, had been tampered with. Nothing was in it but harmless blank papers.

Brand had made a clean sweep!

For five deadly minutes of black rage, Arthur Spooner fought against an almost irresistible impulse to drive swiftly to Brand's apartment and murder him on the spot.

He knew it was foolhardy, but the impulse was hard to smother. For years, Spooner had controlled a vicious temper that he masked under the guise of timidity. He was all the more eager to gratify his murder impulse because of those years of constant repression.

But common sense conquered the murder lust that raged in his blood.

Spooner decided to wait, to play a cunning game. He would pretend nothing was wrong. He would allow Brand to think he was not yet aware of the double theft.

And then—

## CHAPTER XII. TRIPLE PLAY

ON the following morning, a man stood lounging on a street corner, waiting for a bus.

He was spare-built, with beady eyes and a face that was razor-sharp. He looked like a well-dressed ferret.

Mr. Wartig had been in touch with various individuals whom he referred to as the "boys." Mark Kemper's orders had been accurately carried out. Several of the "boys" were on hand. None of them was visible, however.

Wartig was directing events.

The corner where he lounged was across from the apartment house where Arthur Spooner lived. Wartig watched busses come and go while he waited. No one noticed his presence. People were constantly climbing into busses and whizzing away. Except for Wartig, nobody remained on the spot for more than three or four minutes.

Spooner hadn't left the apartment building yet. One of the nice things about owning an art gallery was that you didn't have to rush off to work too soon.

It was a little past nine when Spooner finally appeared. Wartig left the corner and walked past a nearby doorway. He kept on walking toward a drugstore farther along the avenue. He seemed in no particular hurry.

But a signal had been passed.

A man emerged from the doorway. He trailed Spooner. Spooner walked east to a garage. The man who had followed him hung around long enough to observe Spooner drive out in his car. The trailer, made no effort to observe Spooner's further movements.

Another one of Wartig's "boys" had that job!

A second car followed Spooner's. It was driven by a crook who knew his business. He watched Spooner drive to a parking lot a couple of blocks east of the Vanderpool Galleries. He made sure that Spooner came back to the gallery. Then he headed for a telephone booth.

Wartig was waiting in the drugstore near Spooner's home. Inside it, at the rear, was a long line of phone booths. The thug who had trailed Spooner to the Vanderpool Galleries had the phone number of each of those booths. If one of them happened to be busy, he was prepared to call another.

Time was too precious a commodity this morning to be wasted!

Presently, one of the phone bells rang. Wartig sprang inside the empty booth and closed the door.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

The clerk behind the counter didn't attempt to answer the outside call. Wartig had already made a generous financial deal. The clerk would have a poor memory if anyone should inquire later about the phone call or the personal appearance of Mr. Wartig.

The message told Wartig that Spooner had reached his office. He was there now with his partner, Harrison Brand. For the present, the coast was clear, as far as Spooner's apartment was concerned.

Wartig relayed this information to the penthouse of Mark Kemper. He went back to the corner.

Presently, Kemper arrived. He came on foot. His car was parked nearby, with a smart driver behind the wheel.

Kemper had no trouble getting into Spooner's apartment house.

He entered by a rear door in the basement and used the service stairs. He climbed unseen to the floor below the one on which Spooner lived. Then he ducked through a fire door to the main corridor.

Another flight of stairs brought Kemper to the front door of Spooner's empty apartment.

He used a pass-key that fitted the lock.

A gleam in his cunning eyes, Kemper began a systematic search of the apartment. Convinced by the news that had been brought to him by Wartig the night before—that Spooner was the masked boss of the art racket—Kemper hoped to pick up information that might lead to the new hiding place of the loot. He searched with leisurely care, certain that he had all the time in the world.

But for once, the sly Kemper was making an error. His security in this search was only a fancied one. Kemper had not entered the building as secretly as he believed. Hidden eyes had watched him sneak through a rear basement door into the building.

A red-haired girl with a shapely figure was also interested in the apartment of Arthur Spooner.

The interview that had taken place in New Jersey between Richardson Jordan and Peggy Dawson was now beginning to bear fruit.

THE redhead didn't follow Kemper into the building. She had a telephone call to make first. The knowledge that Mark Kemper was now in Spooner's apartment was only one detail in a scheme that had been figured out by a master criminal.

Peggy Dawson telephoned Spooner at the Vanderpool Galleries. She smiled as she heard the precise, somewhat timid voice that Spooner customarily used on the phone. She identified herself quickly.

"This is Peggy Dawson. Be careful how you reply. I've got big news! Is Brand in the office with you?"

"Yes," Spooner said.

"Then just say yes and no. There's hell to pay! Jordan asked me to warn you. Jordan had to disappear and switch the loot to another hiding place because of the danger of a highjack. The highjacker is Mark Kemper. You understand me so far?"

"Yes," Spooner said.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

There was a brief delay. The girl could hear Spooner talking to someone else in the office.

"No, nothing important, Brand. Just a call from a friend."

His voice returned to the wire.

"Hello? Nice of you to phone me, darling. Of course I'd enjoy taking you out for cocktails this afternoon! I'll get in touch with you later."

"Is Brand suspicious?" Peggy asked over the wire.

"I'm not sure."

"I'll call back in about ten minutes. Get rid of him. Can you do it?"

"Yes," Spooner said. "Well, that certainly is fine, my dear. We'll make it the lounge at the Hotel Goliath about five this afternoon."

He hung up.

Brand said no more about the call. Warned by the note from Jordan, Brand was certain that Spooner and Kemper were working together to freeze him out of the art racket. But his success at stealing certain papers the preceding night soothed Brand's fears. If Spooner tried anything, he could blackmail him with those papers, force him to quit.

The best stunt was to pretend innocence. Later, Brand would make it his business to find out who the girl was that Spooner was meeting for cocktails at the Goliath. In the meantime, play dumb.

Brand went out in to the gallery to act the polite host, as usual, to people who were already beginning to arrive at the Vanderpool Galleries' modestly priced collection.

Soon after Brand left the office, Spooner's phone rang again.

"O. K.," Spooner told the redhead in a low tone. "He's out in the gallery. What's the news?"

"Bad! Brand has sold us out! He's made an undercover deal with Kemper! That's why Jordan is so anxious to see you. If we don't get together quickly and make counter-plans, Kemper and Brand will bump the three of us, grab the loot and split it between themselves fifty-fifty!"

Spooner uttered a low-toned oath. His rage made the red-haired girl at the other end of the wire smile. He was swallowing the bait like a hungry shark gulping down a minnow!

"Where is Jordan hiding now? How can I get in touch with him for a conference?"

"Easy," the redhead said. "One hour from now I shall be standing on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-seventh Street. The northwest corner. Drive by in your car and pick me up. We're going to have to take a trip into New Jersey. Can you shake Brand and get away?"

"Yes," Spooner whispered.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

She could hear greed in his voice. She could almost see the eager sweat beads on his forehead. She hung up with an exultant bang.

The trap was baited! One rat was ready to nibble. But the redhead's job was still unfinished. A double trap had been arranged by the wily Jordan in his secret conference with Peggy in New Jersey the night before.

There were two rats to be caught!

The second rat was the more dangerous. Mark Kemper would require more finesse than had been used to trick Spooner.

A slip-up, the smallest mistake, might mean death for the redhead. But she didn't hesitate. She headed swiftly for the apartment building where Spooner lived.

PEGGY went in by a back entrance, as Kemper had. Like him, she climbed to an upper floor, then ducked through a fire door to the main corridor. She walked to the door of Spooner's apartment and took a key from her purse.

It was a passkey that exactly fitted the lock.

The redhead's face was pale. She knew Kemper was inside the apartment. She had to face him and, more important, trick him! This was no time to turn back from peril.

The redhead had gone too far in the scheme worked out by Jordan to give way to an attack of nerves.

Her taut fingers unclenched. She inserted the key in the lock, turned it carelessly, making plenty of noise. She let the door bang against the inner wall.

Her heels clicked against the floor as she hurried, past the foyer into Arthur Spooner's living room.

"Arthur!" she called in a laughing tone. "Where are you, sweet?"

There was no answer. The silence from the bedroom was deadly.

"Hello, darling! It's Peggy! All dressed up to go. Are we ready for our cute little vanishing act?"

No answer came from the silent bedroom. Peggy walked quickly to the door and entered.

The room was empty. A good actress, the redhead registered prompt annoyance and petulance. As if speaking aloud to herself, she said:

"Arthur could at least have waited! He might have known I'd be a little late. Oh, well, thank goodness he told me where he'd be if I missed him. But I'm going to give him a piece of my mind when I see him!"

She started to leave the bedroom.

"Wait, sister!" a harsh voice snarled behind her back.

The redhead whirled. Mark Kemper had appeared swiftly from behind a heavy window drape. A gun made an ugly glitter in his hand. The gleam in his cold eyes was even uglier.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

"I'd rather have you give me a piece of your mind," Kemper growled.

The redhead stood watching him as if paralyzed.

"So you're Spooner's sweetheart, eh? A personal key to his apartment and everything!"

The girl was silent.

"What about this vanishing act, you just mentioned? Where are you and Spooner going?"

"I... I don't know!"

"You're lying! We'll see about getting a little truth."

He sprang forward. His hand caught her wrist. With a twist, he began to bend her arm upward. She squealed, but made no resistance. Kemper's eyes gleamed at the ease of his victory. He slipped his gun into his pocket, used both his hands to apply pressure on the redhead's arm.

"Where were you and Spooner going?"

"Wait! I'll talk! Please!"

"That's more sensible."

Kemper let go of her aching arm.

"I... I honestly don't know where Spooner is taking me," the redhead gasped. "He told me to meet him here. He said if he had already left the apartment when I arrived, I was to go... somewhere else, where he'd pick me up in a car. That's... all I know."

"The hell it is! What about those smuggled paintings?"

Her eyes blinked, as she asked, "How did you find out that Spooner is the masked boss of the racket?"

"Never mind about that! I know a hell of a lot more than you think! Spooner's goose is cooked. So is yours—if you don't spill what you know!"

The redhead allowed herself to sway dizzily toward her scowling captor.

"Don't kill me," she begged. "I can be a lot more valuable to you alive than dead."

Kemper became aware that this frightened girl had a lovely figure. A delicate scent of perfume drifted into his nostrils.

"Why can't we stop fighting and be... friends?" she whispered.

"Where were you going to meet Spooner?"

"Are we... friends? Take me in on your side! Cut me a split of the profits from the art loot, and I'll show you how to put the skids under Spooner!"

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

Kemper looked ugly.

"Please," she whimpered. "Don't think I'm trying to hold you up. I know when I'm licked! Spooner told me to meet him at Fifth Avenue and Forty-seventh Street. He's going to pick me up in his car. He's going to drive me to wherever he's got the loot concealed."

"If you're lying –"

"I'm not! I'm just trying to switch from a loser to a winner. Why not let me keep that appointment with Spooner? Why not follow the car after Spooner picks me up? He'll never suspect me of a double cross. You'll need me, if you want to keep Spooner in the dark. Otherwise, he'll never go near the place where the loot is cached."

Kemper thought it over. The redhead could see approval dawning in his eyes. She pressed her advantage.

"You won't be sorry," she whispered. "I've got brains. Courage, too. And I can be nice to people who are nice to me."

Kemper smiled. The icy look was gone from his eyes.

"I'm going to let you keep that date with Spooner at Fifth Avenue and Forty-seventh Street," he said. "But before you do, I've got a couple of phone calls to make."

UNAWARE of events at his apartment, Arthur Spooner was worried by a different matter. He was anxious to get away from the Vanderpool Galleries without exciting suspicion on the part of Brand.

To make his departure seem normal, he used a letter that had arrived in the mail that morning. The letter called for Spooner's presence at an auction house which had recently bought a consignment of art objects from the widow of a dead collector. An appraisal was needed. Spooner usually attended to tasks like this.

Brand nodded indifferently when his partner left.

But as soon as Spooner was out of sight, Brand got busy. The phone call that Spooner had received earlier had not fooled Brand. Brand intended to find out who had called his partner, and what had been said over the wire from the other end.

It was an easy matter to check. The switchboard clerk in the gallery was in the pay of Brand. She was able to tell him enough about the voice of the woman caller to identify her instantly in Brand's mind as Peggy Dawson.

Brand learned exactly what the redhead had told Spooner.

The news sent him hurrying back into the private office for his hat and coat. From a locked drawer of his desk, he took a loaded gun.

Brand's mouth was tight as he departed from the gallery to the street. He headed toward the junction of Fifth Avenue and Forty-seventh Street.

Spooner and Mark Kemper weren't the only criminal rats who had gobbled the bait arranged by the wily Mr. Jordan. Brand was hooked, too!

Where was The Shadow? The Shadow had shown himself nowhere. He had made no understandable move.

Was The Shadow aware of this criminal triple play, arranged by the head of the Syndicate of Sin?

### CHAPTER XIII. PUPPETS OF THE SHADOW

THERE was a simple reason for the invisibility of The Shadow at this important juncture of events. The Shadow was in his sanctum.

Certain of his agents had been busy at tasks assigned to them by The Shadow. Their reports were coming in fast to Burbank. Burbank was relaying them by wire to The Shadow.

"Message from Harry Vincent," the voice of Burbank intoned.

Harry Vincent was a smart young man who lived in a modest suite at the Hotel Metrolite. Confidential assignments to Harry were not likely to be muffed. In point of service, Harry was senior agent of the black-cloaked avenger of crime. He had been assigned to the task of keeping tabs on Spooner's apartment.

The Shadow listened to the report, relayed by Burbank.

"Spooner left apartment at nine-five. Drove away in car. Ten minutes later Kemper arrived, entered building from rear. Entered Spooner's apartment, using key. Shortly afterward, red-haired girl also entered with key. Both remained in apartment for considerable time. Left apartment together. Proceeded separately to Fifth Avenue and Forty-seventh Street.

"Red-haired girl now waiting on corner, as if expecting someone. Kemper also waiting, but out of sight. Is hidden inside covered truck parked near corner. End of report from Vincent."

The Shadow acknowledged the message. He did not break the connection. Other reports were due. Soon the voice of Burbank came back on the line.

"Message from Clyde Burke."

Burke was a star newspaper man. Fellow news hawks regarded him as the ace reporter on the Daily Classic. But they were unaware of Clyde Burke's most important activity. He was an ace agent in the service of The Shadow! He had been assigned to watch Brand.

The Shadow listened to Burbank's relay of the news from Clyde.

"Brand left apartment at quarter after nine. Went to Vanderpool Galleries. Was joined there by Spooner. Later, Spooner left the office alone. Got in car and drove in direction of Fifth Avenue. Did not follow Spooner because of assignment to watch Brand. Few moments after Spooner's departure, Brand also left Vanderpool Galleries. Started in direction of Fifth Avenue on foot. Was followed. Further report later."

The Shadow's sibilant laughter testified to the fact that he was not surprised by the news from his two agents. He waited. One more agent was still to be heard from.

Burbank's voice seemed to answer The Shadow's unspoken thought.

"Report from Moe Shrevnitz."

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

Moe was a taxi driver, perhaps the shrewdest of the hackers who guided taxicabs through the tangled traffic of the city. Moe had carried The Shadow on many an important journey. He was tough and resourceful, and he knew how to keep his mouth shut.

"Report!" The Shadow ordered.

"Taxicab has proceeded to spot assigned. Is parked and ready. That ends report from Shrevnitz."

It ended also the information The Shadow had been waiting for. Everything was proceeding quite smoothly. Crooks, who fancied themselves clever, had discounted the threat of The Shadow.

That was bad thinking. The fact that The Shadow was invisible did not mean that he was ignorant of hidden facts, or unable to act on knowledge which those facts had brought him.

"Dismissed," The Shadow intoned.

He hung up his earphones. The time for action had arrived.

The Shadow faded from his sanctum.

A PASSENGER stepped into a taxicab parked at a busy curb. The cab driver was Moe Shrevnitz. Moe had been pestered previously by a lot of would-be passengers. To all of them he had given the same stall. His cab was engaged.

Moe didn't try to stall the passenger who now stepped into his taxi. He knew he was about to carry The Shadow to some important rendezvous. But it was a secret that no one else would guess.

The well-dressed passenger was Lamont Cranston.

Sibilant laughter from the rear seat was the only indication that The Shadow and Cranston were different aspects of a single identity. Cranston leaned forward.

"Fifth Avenue and Forty-seventh Street," he directed.

Moe's cab shot away from the curb.

MEANWHILE, Harrison Brand had not been idle. He made surprisingly good time in spite of the fact that he was on foot.

Having reached Fifth Avenue, he proceeded briskly toward Forty-seventh Street. He had seen no sign of his partner, Spooner, but he was not worried at the prospect of arriving too late at the corner where he knew Spooner was heading in a car.

Spooner had left his car in a parking lot. Brand was aware of this. He also knew that it would take Spooner a little while to present his ticket and get the car out of the aisle where it was pocketed.

He intended to reach Forty-seventh Street before Spooner did.

Brand's hope was realized. When he reached the corner, he faded prudently from sight. Spooner's car was still nowhere visible. But the red-haired girl was waiting.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

She was standing idly on the northwest corner of Forty-seventh Street and Fifth Avenue, apparently more concerned by the contents of a shop window than anything else.

Brand grinned coldly. But his grin of satisfaction was based only on a partial knowledge of the situation.

He didn't pay any attention to a truck that was parked on Forty-seventh Street, not far from the corner. It was a small, covered truck of no particular interest. Actually, it contained the crafty figure of Mark Kemper!

A peephole in the side of the covered truck enabled Kemper to keep constant watch on the red-haired girl. He was now positive she had switched sides in the grim warfare between rival criminal bosses.

But Kemper was not leaving a thing to chance. If the redhead was lying about her date with Spooner—if she tried to pull a fast one—Kemper was ready to clip her wings. The tough driver of the covered truck wasn't the only henchman of Mark Kemper in the neighborhood.

Unaware of Kemper's presence, Brand looked around for a convenient taxi. He intended to follow the girl, in case she and Spooner left together in the latter's car.

But to his dismay, Brand saw no signs of a cab. The usually crowded taxi stand was empty.

While Brand was fuming, he saw a familiar sedan drive slowly along the opposite side of Fifth Avenue. Spooner had arrived to keep what he considered was a secret and cunningly contrived appointment.

Spooner slowed when he saw the red-haired girl. He pulled close to the curb. The girl spoke to him with a smile of pleased recognition. It was as though two friends had bumped into each other purely by chance.

Spooner quickly opened the door of his car. The redhead got in. The sedan turned the corner and went west along Forty-seventh Street at a tantalizing slow clip. It was tantalizing to Brand because he still had not found a taxi. He was so infuriated, that he failed to notice the covered truck had also got under way.

As quietly as the sedan left the scene, so did the truck that contained Mark Kemper.

To Kemper, everything was proceeding with perfect co-ordination. His suspicions concerning Peggy Dawson had now vanished. She had kept her promise. Spooner had shown up as she predicted. She and Spooner were about to lead him to the headquarters in New Jersey where the stolen art cache was located.

It didn't occur to Kemper—any more than it did to Spooner—that the red-haired girl was playing a shrewd game worked out by the smart brain of Richardson Jordan.

KEMPER and Spooner were both on their way by the time that Brand rushed heedlessly from concealment.

Brand had thrown caution to the winds because he had seen his bad luck change. A taxicab had driven suddenly into view. It carried a passenger, but the passenger was now alighting.

Lamont Cranston got out. He handed Moe Shrevnitz a bill, shook his head smilingly at the offer of change, and hurried into the doorway of a nearby building.

The Shadow did not want to delay the charging figure of Brand! It suited The Shadow perfectly for Brand to hire Moe's taxi. In fact, The Shadow had arranged his convenient arrival for just that purpose.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

Telephone calls from distant points were responsible for the fact that Brand had found all the regular taxicabs missing. The Shadow had left nothing to chance in a grim game of intrigue and murder.

Laughter rustled at his lips as he saw Brand depart in the taxi of his agent.

"Keep that sedan in sight!" Brand cried urgently to Moe.

He pointed toward Spooner's distant car.

"I'll make it worth your while. Here!"

He shoved a twenty-dollar bill into Moe's hand. Moe, of course, had no intention of losing the sedan. But he pretended worry in order to emphasize the fact that he was an honest cabby, with no personal motives in the chase.

"I don't mind a bonus, mister. But if there's anything crooked about this, count me and my cab out."

Brand's teeth ground together in rage as Moe slowed his pace slightly. He tried to smile persuasively.

"Don't be silly, driver. If you're a married man, you'll understand. That red-haired girl in the car ahead is my wife. She's been two-timing me with the fellow who's driving. I want to find out where they're going, so I can get divorce evidence. Help me out and I'll add more twenties to the one I just gave you. Is it a deal?"

"It's a deal," Moe said. "Leave it to me, chief. I'll hang onto them tighter than a tick to a woolly dog."

Moe grinned as the taxi shot across town. He was obeying the orders of The Shadow to the letter.

And Brand was bribing him to make sure that Moe carried out The Shadow's command!

The chase led up the west side of Manhattan all the way to Washington Heights. Moe began to suspect where the fugitive sedan was heading. He was certain when the car ahead turned west from upper Broadway through 181st Street.

The sedan was heading for the George Washington Bridge over the Hudson River into New Jersey.

It was easy for Moe to keep from being too conspicuous on the bridge. The tollgates were on the New Jersey side of the huge structure. Moe simply took it easy, allowed the sedan to reach one of the toll lanes. Then he crowded on speed and headed quickly for another lane. He was finished at his toll booth soon after Spooner resumed speed from the other.

The wide New Jersey highway was jammed with a lot of traffic. Moe could afford to take a deep breath and relax.

He was glad that he didn't have to figure out a way to send in a report of his progress to The Shadow. The Shadow had told Moe that no such report would be needed.

The Shadow knew where Spooner and the redhead were going. Knowing it, there was no need to receive any further information from Moe Shrevnitz about Brand.

It was like an axiom of geometry in The Shadow's calculations: "Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other!"

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

MOE'S relief and the grim delight of Brand were matched by the feelings of Spooner in the car ahead.

Spooner had fallen completely for the story told him by the tricky red-haired girl. Everything that had happened since a midnight prowler had tampered with Spooner's lock, confirmed the story the redhead had told him. It made sense when he considered it.

Brand was a double-crossing louse. He had sold out Jordan and Spooner by making a deal with Mark Kemper. Jordan, however, was too clever to be caught by such tactics. Through the redhead, he had warned Spooner. Now Spooner was heading for Jordan's secret hide-out in New Jersey to confer about protective measures. Only Spooner would know the new location of the loot. Only Spooner would share in future profits with Jordan.

Brand and his highjacking pal Kemper would be out in the cold!

At Spooner's side, the red-headed girl slyly built up this false picture in Spooner's mind. She was aware that Brand was on the trail of their car. She had worked to bring about that exact state of affairs.

Spooner was leading Brand into a trap. He was also leading Mark Kemper into the same trap!

Kemper was convinced that Spooner was the masked leader of the art racket. The girl intended him to keep on thinking so.

She felt grim elation when she finally murmured to Spooner to slow down the speed of the sedan.

Ahead of them was a tree-bordered lane that led away from the highway at right angles.

"Turn in there," the girl said. "The house is at the end of the lane."

It looked like a deserted spot. Certainly no place to suspect the presence of a hidden watcher.

But a man was watching carefully for the arrival of guests. A tough, thuggish-looking individual, he was high in the air, out of sight of any vehicle that might pass along the wooded lane.

He leaned from one of the topmost branches of a tree that bordered the entrance to the lane. A signal flashed from a mirror in his hand.

The signal was repeated from the other end of the lane. A second thug, high in the air like the first, passed along the news of the arrival of Spooner and the treacherous redhead.

But there was one item of news that was not flashed. It was not flashed because it was not known. The Shadow was a hidden spectator of this stealthy criminal activity surrounding the Syndicate of Sin!

He waited in a tangle of bushes close to the house where Richardson Jordan had established himself. The Shadow noted the arrival of the sedan that carried Spooner and the red-haired girl.

He watched them park. They didn't get out at once. They seemed to be having a careful discussion before entering the house.

The Shadow watched for quite a while. Then, suddenly, he moved from the thicket where he lay hidden. He had heard a sound from a different quarter. He suspected the probable cause of that faint noise.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

Quietly, he threaded a way through the tangle of bushes.

Soon The Shadow stopped. He waited. The sound was coming from a man crawling toward the house. The Shadow had placed himself directly in the path of the prowler.

His leap took the invader completely by surprise. The attack was over almost before it began. The black-gloved hands of The Shadow choked any possible cry from the victim into nothingness.

A gag was fitted swiftly over the captive's mouth. Cords bound his hands and feet. Then The Shadow stared calmly down at his prisoner.

It was Harrison Brand!

A FAINT signal sounded from The Shadow's lips. It was like the chirruping call of a cricket. It was echoed by a similar call.

Moe Shrevnitz appeared in the thicket a moment later.

Moe had parked his cab as Brand had bidden him. He had allowed Brand to precede him into the underbrush to gain a closer view of the parked sedan in front of Jordan's house.

Moe had been well aware that The Shadow would take care of Brand. He remained to guard the prisoner.

The Shadow again made a quick and noiseless fade-out. He knew that Brand was not the only spectator who was watching Spooner and the redhead in the parked sedan.

The covered truck in which Mark Kemper had hidden had also reached the scene. The truck was parked out of view. Kemper had left his truck for a closer spot. He was barely two dozen feet from the rear of Jordan's house.

Knowing this, The Shadow chose to abandon the redhead and Spooner in favor of a continued surveillance of Kemper. He guessed that the pair would soon leave the sedan and proceed to the rear of Jordan's house.

When that happened, The Shadow would have all three of them under surveillance.

Events happened in the pattern The Shadow had anticipated. Spooner and the redhead rounded the house on foot. They approached what looked like a blank rear wall.

The appearance of that wall was deceptive. An implement that looked like a long key, with an oddly shortened flange at the end, came out of the girl's handbag. With it, she opened a secret door.

Spooner, grinning, remained unaware of trickery. He thought the girl was loyal to Jordan, and therefore loyal to him.

Mark Kemper, hidden nearby, was equally deluded. He thought that Spooner was the boss of the art racket. Not knowing about Jordan, he had swallowed the redhead's promise—that she was betraying Spooner, and Spooner's loot, to his greedy fingers.

Kemper was certain of this when he saw what the girl did after the opening of the secret door.

She motioned Spooner inside. Almost as quickly, she followed him. But before she closed the door behind him, her hand made a swift motion.

The key to the secret door flew through the air. It landed in the clump of bushes where Mark Kemper waited.

Then the door closed.

## CHAPTER XIV. ENTER THE SHADOW

NO motion was visible in the clump of bushes close to the spot where the key had landed. Kemper was a cagey criminal. He was taking things easy until he was certain that the trickery of the redhead had not been noted by hostile forces.

Presently, the bushes wavered. A hand slid into view. Fingers closed on the key. Hand and key vanished.

A considerable delay followed.

The Shadow rightly interpreted that delay. Kemper was not foolish enough to take unnecessary chances. He was probably contacting a henchman in order to make certain that his escape from the house was safeguarded in case of sudden need.

The Shadow's interpretation was correct. Soon, Kemper stealthily emerged into view. He was followed by another figure.

It was the tough guy who had driven the covered truck. Having parked the truck out of sight, the thuggish driver was now available for other duties.

The two crooks conferred briefly outside the hidden rear door. Then Kemper used his key cautiously. The door swung open without sound.

The key changed hands. The thug who remained on guard outside slipped it into his pocket.

Kemper vanished inside the house.

The Shadow could have winged Kemper's lookout from the spot where he watched, but he wanted no crash of gunfire to be heard within the house. Secrecy and surprise were to be the twin weapons of The Shadow.

He began to belly along the ground toward the lookout, taking advantage of the screen of shrubbery.

But before The Shadow could crawl within striking distance of his foe, death struck at the thug from another quarter.

A knife whizzed through the air. Thrown by an experienced killer, it turned over once in flight. The point struck the startled lookout in the throat.

He crumpled backward, blood spurting from a severed artery.

The Shadow was unable to prevent that swift murder. It happened with lightning speed. It came from another thug who was unaware of the nearby presence of The Shadow.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

The murderer showed himself at the instant his thrown knife struck the henchman of Mark Kemper. He darted recklessly into view, convinced that he was safe from interference.

The knife was jerked from the throat of the gurgling victim. It plunged into the man's heart. When the killer straightened, a key was in his hand.

It was the third time this ill-fated key had changed hands. From the red-headed girl to Kemper. From Kemper to his henchman. Now it was held by the knife thrower.

It was destined to change hands for a fourth time!

The killer seized Kemper's thug by the coat collar, began to drag the corpse toward a sheltered spot.

The Shadow leaped forward in silent attack.

His black-robed figure confronted the murderer. The burning glare of deep-set eyes paralyzed the killer for an instant of superstitious terror. He fancied himself confronted by a black wraith from another world. Then he recovered his wits. From his throat came a snarled cry:

"The Shadow!"

It was the only sound he uttered. The butt of one of The Shadow's .45s struck him. The knees of the killer hinged. His legs gave way, tumbling him in a heap. He lay sprawled alongside the corpse of his dead victim.

The Shadow removed both figures from sight. Bushes closed over the corpse and the captive murderer.

The Shadow raced back toward the secret door of the house. The fatal key was now in the black-gloved hand of The Shadow.

MEANWHILE, the red-haired girl and Spooner had proceeded without interruption toward an inner room.

Spooner followed the girl unquestioningly. He was convinced that he was being led to the presence of Richardson Jordan, head of the Syndicate of Sin.

The pair entered a dim, book-lined room. It was a well-furnished library. Spooner had expected to meet Jordan here. But when he glanced eagerly about, he saw that the room was empty except for himself and Peggy Dawson.

He started to ask an impatient question. But the redhead shook her head warningly, a finger laid across her lips. She pointed toward a section of the wall bookcase. Spooner understood, or thought he did. Jordan had a secret chamber behind this decorous library. Casual visitors to the house would never divine its existence.

Eagerly, Spooner watched the girl manipulate one of the bookcase shelves. It took considerable time.

As the girl worked at the mechanism, she wrote down a series of words on a sheet of paper she had torn from the flyleaf of a book. She didn't explain why she had to do this. Her warning glance kept Spooner where he was, several feet away.

He was beginning to worry about these strange tactics on the part of his guide, when the bookcase slowly swung aside from the wall. A narrow opening was disclosed.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

The red-haired girl silently waved to Spooner to pass quickly through.

Through the aperture, he could see a room equipped like a study. A desk stood in the center of the floor. There were filing cabinets and business machines. "At last!" Spooner thought with delight. "The headquarters of Jordan!"

He passed through the gap in the wall. The girl followed him. But not before she had attended to another little treacherous job.

The sheet of paper upon which she had scrawled quick words as she worked at the mechanism of the bookcase, was transferred swiftly from her palm to another spot.

Spooner mistakenly assumed that the writing was necessary to the opening of the wall mechanism. It wasn't.

It was a message to Kemper!

The redhead stuck the slip of paper in a volume on the top shelf. It stuck out in such a way that it couldn't be overlooked. The moment she had done this, the girl slipped quietly out of sight. The bookcase swung shut behind her.

The library didn't remain empty long. Mark Kemper entered the room from the same direction Spooner and his red-haired guide had appeared. A taut grin was on his lips. He had a gun in his hand.

Kemper wasn't half as smart as he thought he was. He was still under the false impression that Spooner was the boss of the art racket. Kemper believed that Peggy Dawson had sold out Spooner in order to make a new tie-up with him.

He was more convinced of it than ever when he saw the slip of paper sticking from the end of a volume on the top shelf of the bookcase.

Ugly laughter twitched the muscle of Kemper's throat as he read what the girl had written. They were terse instructions on how to control the mechanism that opened the section of bookcases.

Using those directions, Kemper acted swiftly. As the bookcase swung silently ajar, he sprang close to the opening, his gun ready for trouble.

He saw the same desk that Spooner had seen earlier. But it was not vacant now. Spooner sat behind it. The red-haired Peggy Dawson stood close beside her victim. She was holding a gun on Spooner!

The sight of that grim tableau brought a snarl of delight from the lips of the hijacker. Secrecy was no longer necessary. The cunning redhead had delivered the real boss of the art racket into Kemper's hands at last!

SPOONER squealed in terror as he saw Mark Kemper spring into the room. But he was unable to stir. The muzzle of the redhead's gun menaced him with death if he moved an inch. Spooner's hands were elevated helplessly above his head.

Aware, too late, of a treacherous deal between Kemper and the redhead, he began to curse horribly.

"Where's the stuff?" Kemper snarled. "Talk fast—or I'll bury slugs in that soft belly of yours!"

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

"I don't know what you mean," Spooner faltered. "I don't know where the loot is. I came here expecting to find it. The redhead told me —"

"You lie!" Kemper rapped. "You know damned well where the stuff is! You were the masked man I tried to do business with in Manhattan. You burned down the house in New York after you had sneaked the paintings away beforehand. Now, you've got them hidden here! You're the boss of the racket, Spooner! You're— going to talk—or die!"

"You're crazy!" Spooner screamed. "Peggy lied to you! The boss is Richardson Jordan. This is his house, not mine. Peggy told me she was bringing me here to meet Jordan."

"Jordan?" Kemper's face was puzzled. He swung toward the red-haired girl. "Who does he mean? Jordan the millionaire? The retired real-estate man? That's a lot of rot!"

"Of course it is," the redhead said.

She saw the ominous swing of Kemper's gun muzzle. Kemper's finger was pressing tighter against the trigger. He was ready for murder.

The red-haired girl didn't want that.

"Wait!" she gasped. "Spooner is lying! But we don't want to kill him yet. We don't need him to tell us where the loot is hidden. I know!"

The cold glint of murder remained in Kemper's eyes.

"If you know where the stuff is, why worry about Spooner? Why not gun him right away?"

"Because I know a better way than gunfire. A slug in his body leaves us with a corpse on our hands. A corpse is a nuisance to dispose of. Sometimes police find it and make things tough. I've got a way to get rid of Spooner without leaving any corpse."

"How?"

"I'll show you."

She spat a shrill order at Spooner. "Up on your feet, sucker! Keep those hands high!"

Spooner was afraid to obey Peggy. But he was more afraid of the bloodless grin of Mark Kemper. He rose to his feet, his arms still elevated helplessly.

"Now, back up!" the redhead commanded. "Keep backing toward the wall behind that desk."

She followed him alertly with aimed gun. Spooner went backward, step by step, under her compulsion. Before he could reach the wall, he staggered. A scream burst from his lips as the floor gave way beneath him.

He fell headlong into darkness through a hinged trapdoor, that had dropped under his weight.

His scream was followed by silence. The trap had closed automatically the moment Spooner's body shot out of sight.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

"I'll show you, in a few moments, what becomes of his body," the redhead said, with grim composure. "But before we attend to that, there's something a lot more interesting that I want to show you. How would you like to have a look at a billion dollars' worth of art?"

It was a silly question to ask Mark Kemper. His eyes were greedy pin points.

His last doubt of Peggy Dawson's loyalty had vanished with the toppling body of Spooner. He followed her from the room through another exit. They descended narrow stairs to a lower floor.

She moved downward with an air of complete confidence. They followed a passage that led to a large central room.

Her laughter was edgy with triumph.

"Am I good—or am I good?" she challenged.

"You're a honey!" Mark Kemper told her thickly.

THE room was crammed with wooden cases that contained some of the world's most valuable art objects. The proof was evident from some of the cases. They had been broken open. Art objects stood on tables. The sight of them made Kemper snarl joyously.

Paintings lined all four sides of the room. They were curtained to prevent damage from dampness. They looked as decorous as if they stood in the storage room of some respectable art museum—instead of in the underground hangout of a master criminal.

"You're sure that you won't forget something?" the red-haired girl said slowly.

"What do you mean?"

"This stuff ain't hay! You promised me a fifty-fifty cut if we joined forces. I've done my job. What about you?"

"Fifty-fifty," Mark Kemper promised glibly. "Just you and I."

He didn't mean a word of it. He'd handled women before. Promise 'em anything! Dump 'em when you didn't need 'em any longer. Kemper was suave because he still needed Peggy. He'd kid her along until he had this treasure lode moved to a place where he really could control it.

In the meantime, the girl could be kidded with a few lousy dollars and some smooth talk.

Kemper took her in his arms. He kissed her. He was a past master at tricks like this. When he released her, the redhead seemed to be in a dither of delight.

"How did you get wise to the art stuff in the first place, Mark?" she asked.

"A cinch! I was in the blackmail racket. I had a lot of clever guys digging up dope for me. Some of them heard hints of this art combine. I got a line on Ellery Cotswold as one of your customers. The rest was easy."

Kemper chuckled. "I forced Cotswold to tell me about the contact arrangement at the Vanderpool Galleries. Then I had him killed, dumped in a vacant lot. I went to the Vanderpool Galleries, pulled the cigarette stunt

and contacted you. I didn't run any real risks, even after the murder of Cotswold. You see, I got a break from The Shadow!"

"The Shadow?"

The dread name seemed to unnerve Peggy. Her voice trembled.

"Sure," Kemper boasted. "The Shadow got wind of Cotswold's murder, in some way I haven't been able to discover. Anyhow, he showed up at the spot where my thugs dumped Cotswold's body. I had more thugs stationed in a warehouse nearby to take care of trouble. They tangled with The Shadow and there was plenty of gunplay.

"That was swell! Because when the cops came, my boys took it on the lam. The cops saw only The Shadow. They pinned the murder of Cotswold on him. And that suits me fine!"

Kemper's roving eyes glittered with greed. They moved along the curtained line of stolen paintings. Each one of them represented a future profit from some unscrupulous millionaire. He pointed toward the largest of the paintings.

"Which one is that?"

"The most valuable of the whole collection," the redhead whispered. "Cotswold, rich as he was, couldn't meet our price on that one. He didn't want to invest over a quarter of a million."

Kemper walked across, reached up and twitched aside the velvet drape. There was a frame behind the drape, but no painting.

A figure stood motionless within the empty frame.

Mark Kemper stood paralyzed as he saw a living black-cloaked figure with eyes that burned like flame.

The Shadow!

## CHAPTER XV. CRIME'S CONQUEROR

FOR an instant, Mark Kemper stood rooted in terror.

Then, with a scream, he flung himself backward from the silent menace of that black-garbed figure.

As the sleek highjacker darted backward, he clawed swiftly at his hip. His gun flashed swiftly from concealment. He flung the barrel upward, squeezing frantically at the trigger.

The Shadow was even swifter!

Aware of the capabilities of his foe, The Shadow had leaped forward almost at the instant that Kemper had twitched the hanging aside from the fake painting.

He sprang at the snarling highjacker with the force of a black avalanche. The gun that Kemper had flung horizontal didn't remain that way. Kemper's wrist continued its swift upward motion, forced by the pressure of The Shadow's strong grasp.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

The Shadow's gloved fingers were like steel bands. The muzzle of the glittering gun jerked slantingly upward toward the ceiling before Kemper's finger could yank at the trigger.

There was a spurt of flame and a loud report. A bullet smashed harmlessly into the ceiling.

The next instant, the gun was wrenched from the pain-racked hand of the crook. It fell to the floor.

The red-haired girl, darting close to the two foes, kicked the gun swiftly out of harm's way.

The Shadow didn't emulate Kemper's murderous try for a shot. The Shadow was not lusting for a quick kill. He wanted to take Kemper alive. The Shadow was the instrument of the law's vengeance. The law would take care of Kemper's punishment.

One of The Shadow's .45s swung swiftly. The butt struck Kemper on the skull. It was not a killing blow. It did not smash the skull of the trapped hijacker, but it produced the effect The Shadow wished.

Mark Kemper dropped to the floor. He lay in an inert heap while The Shadow put him beyond the reach of further action.

A length of strong cord appeared from beneath The Shadow's cloak. Bending, he worked swiftly. When he straightened, Mark Kemper was as helpless as a mummy.

The Shadow sprang toward the wall of the treasure chamber. He headed toward a spot at the far end of the windowless room. There was no painting at this spot. All that was visible was the many-colored sheen of a magnificent tapestry.

The Shadow drew the tapestry aside.

A hidden door was disclosed in the surface of the wall. The door was steel. But it did not hinder The Shadow. He had already been through that door earlier.

The Shadow knew every secret of this house of crime. He had known it for the past twenty-four hours!

The steel door in the wall opened. Racing back to the bound figure of Kemper, The Shadow dragged him forward.

Kemper had recovered consciousness. He mouthed oaths as he saw the pale face of the red-haired girl who had tricked him. He called Peggy Dawson unprintable names.

The Shadow dragged his prisoner over the threshold into the inner room. Peggy Dawson followed.

Three more prisoners were disclosed!

The sight of them choked the curses in Kemper's throat. His jaw hung open in slack wonder. He was beginning to understand the clean sweep that had been made by the master tactics of The Shadow.

One of the prisoners was Arthur Spooner. The Shadow had captured him after Spooner had plunged through a trapdoor from above into this snug prison chamber.

Alongside Spooner lay a man whom Kemper had refused to believe guilty of crime—even after Spooner had desperately tried to put the blame where it rightly belonged.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

The second prisoner was Richardson Jordan!

But it was the sight of the third captive that made Mark Kemper scream with fury. Too late, he realized the full extent of the trick that had been played on him.

He was staring at the tightly-trussed figure of Peggy Dawson!

Turning his head dazedly, Kemper blinked. At The Shadow's side stood a red-haired duplicate of the treacherous girl friend of Richardson Jordan, head of the Syndicate of Sin. She wore the same clothing. Her figure was equally alluring. To Kemper, it was like seeing the same girl with double vision.

The Shadow laughed. There was a triumphant note in his mirth. He spoke an order to the redhead at his side.

Her hand moved swiftly. The lovely red hair lifted easily from her head. Dark tresses were disclosed underneath. The wipe of a handkerchief removed certain cosmetics that had been prepared skillfully in The Shadow's laboratory.

The transformation left no doubt as to the identity of this clever girl who had risked her life courageously during every moment of her difficult role. She was—Margo Lane!

"EXPLAIN!" The Shadow said.

He wished helpless crooks to realize the completeness of the case against them. Margo complied.

Her role had begun twenty-four hours before. The conference in this New Jersey house between Peggy Dawson and Jordan had been overheard by The Shadow and Margo. When Peggy had surprised a figure in the house on her way out—the figure had been Margo, boldly visible at The Shadow's orders.

Anticipating an easy capture, Peggy had doused the lights and attacked Margo.

But The Shadow had taken an invisible part in that battle. When Jordan had rushed into the dark room, it had been Margo's voice which had lured him closer.

Jordan and his red-haired assistant had been nabbed that night. The plan Jordan had formulated to lure criminal enemies to their death had been carried out in its original form. But with one grim change.

It had been directed by The Shadow!

Mark Kemper now understood the bitter truth. Spooner was not the masked leader of the art conspiracy. The real leader was Richardson Jordan. The Shadow had used crooks to entrap crooks. Not one had escaped the net of the supreme foe of crime.

All of them would be turned over to the law as soon as The Shadow retrieved the last of his captives. Harrison Brand would complete the bag. Moe Shrevnitz was guarding Brand's trussed figure in a clump of shrubbery outside the house.

But The Shadow didn't leave at once to bring in the last prisoner. He utilized hidden mechanism to lift a square panel from the floor of the death chamber. The Shadow was still acting on knowledge he had learned twenty-four hours earlier!

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

The nature of the death trap was revealed by the opening floor panel. A vat of liquid was disclosed below. The hue of that liquid was beautiful. It was the pale greenish-blue of tropical sea water. But its lovely color was a mask for death in a most horrible form.

It was an acid that was highly volatile. Heated, it could produce an almost colorless vapor that would cause death in a few moments after it was inhaled into the lungs of helpless captives.

Mark Kemper, like the other captives, shuddered when he saw the acid vat. Then he managed to laugh harshly. He knew that The Shadow would never utilize that horrible weapon prepared by Jordan. Kemper thought he knew something else—that he himself was safe from the menace of the electric chair.

"You've got nothing on me," he told The Shadow. "All you can prove against me is a charge of attempted highjacking against other criminals. Even that charge won't stick. I'll simply pretend I was a wealthy collector of art, hoodwinked by Jordan's crooked gang."

"No!"

The Shadow's monosyllable was calm. Its tone brought renewed worry to Kemper. His foreboding was justified when The Shadow issued a command to Margo.

She disappeared, returned with a small cabinet that looked like a radio. It wasn't a radio, but a recording device.

"Play!" The Shadow ordered.

Sweating with dismay, Mark Kemper listened to the sound of his own voice. Once more, he heard himself boasting of how he had murdered Ellery Cotswold. Tricked by Margo, he had convicted himself of murder in his own tones. Every word he had uttered had been damningly recorded on the hidden recording instrument.

Mark Kemper's face turned the color of clay. He could almost feel the tight straps of the electric chair closing over his arms and legs. He moaned.

Unmoved, The Shadow ignored Kemper's cry. With a whispered command to Margo to watch the trussed captives, The Shadow glided swiftly from the room. Harrison Brand was the only crook lacking in the net. When Brand was brought to the room, police would be summoned to finish the case.

Hurrying to the clump of underbrush where he had left Brand tied up and helpless under the guard of Moe Shrevnitz, The Shadow received an unpleasant surprise.

Brand was still there. His bonds had not been tampered with. But he was no longer alive. A knife had plunged repeatedly into his bloodstained body. He had been murdered.

Moe Shrevnitz had vanished!

THE SHADOW hesitated for a split second. In that moment he retrieved valuable proof from the dead half-owner of the Vanderpool Galleries. From Brand's inner pocket The Shadow drew two oblong Manila envelopes. He knew what they were. The Shadow was aware of Brand's cunning theft at the art gallery office the night before.

The Manila envelopes contained legal criminal proof against both Brand and Spooner. Brand had not had time to dispose of his proof. He had been too eager to keep on the trail of Spooner.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

Armed with the two vital envelopes that would prevent Spooner from escaping punishment, The Shadow raced to the assistance of the vanished Moe Shrevnitz.

The trail was easy to follow. Moe had been struck down by an unknown assailant and dragged through the bushes. His dragged body had left unmistakable clues.

Crashing into the open, The Shadow suddenly saw the unconscious Moe and the snarling murderer. There was a gun roar, the whiz of a bullet. The Shadow ducked.

The killer's face was livid with rage. It was Snyder, the secretary of Richardson Jordan! Alarmed by the fact that he had not received his normal daily message from Jordan, Snyder had raced out to the house in New Jersey to investigate.

He laughed harshly. The Shadow held his fire. Snyder still held an ace. He was using the limp body of Moe as a shield against The Shadow's guns. Crouched low to the ground, Snyder retreated swiftly, dragging Moe between him and the muzzles of The Shadow's automatics.

He skirted the end of a deep pond. The Shadow changed his line of attack. He veered to attack the cunning Snyder from the flank.

Snyder realized his peril. He did the one vicious thing he knew would end The Shadow's relentless pursuit. He flung the unconscious Moe into the deep water. Then he turned and fled into the house.

The Shadow was faced by a bitter choice. He could either pursue the vanished Snyder; or save the drowning figure of his agent. It was a choice that could only be met by one answer: The Shadow veered toward the pond, dived headlong after the drowning figure of Moe.

Unconscious, Moe was already breathing water. His sinking body was a faint blur near the scummy bottom of the pool.

The Shadow seized him. A few swift strokes brought rescuer and rescued to the surface. Dumping Moe's body safely to the grass, The Shadow whirled, raced back into the house on the trail of the wily Snyder.

Again he received an unpleasant surprise. Snyder had utilized his time well.

In the tiny room beyond the treasure chamber of art, Margo Lane lay senseless on the floor. And one of the bound captives was no longer in the room.

Snyder had released the master criminal of the lot—Richardson Jordan!

An instant later, The Shadow realized the full extent of the cunning used by his enemies. The steel door that guarded the exit from the death chamber closed suddenly from the outside.

The Shadow rushed at it.

He understood the mechanism that controlled the door, but he was unable to utilize it. The mechanism had been jammed. The impregnable steel door refused to budge.

A tiny peephole opened like a sinister eye in the surface of the steel door. Jordan was peering into the sealed room. His voice was muffled by the steel barrier, but grim with triumph.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

He mocked The Shadow for winding up a perfect scheme—for Jordan!

"Brand is dead," he jeered. "Spooner and Kemper are doomed. So is Peggy Dawson. And, most pleasant of all—so is the charming Margo Lane and my dear dying friend, The Shadow!"

The peephole went blank in the steel surface of the door.

THE SHADOW turned to stare at the open panel in the floor that disclosed the greenish-blue liquid in the acid vat below.

He knew what was already happening. He was powerless to prevent it. The acid was beginning to bubble. Heat was being applied below the tank. The Shadow slammed down the panel.

But he knew it would do little good. The volatile gas, rising from the heated death brew below, would force itself through the cracks of the panel, would fill the air of the chamber with insidious poison.

No time to try to stuff those cracks. The senses of The Shadow were already beginning to swirl dizzily.

He flung himself at Margo. He slapped and buffeted her face. Under his brusque treatment, she came out of her faint. The Shadow pulled her to her feet, told her in swift words the peril that she faced.

To his warning he added a grim command that brought a gleam of hope to Margo's frightened eyes.

She darted to the center of the room and stood there. The Shadow's .45s roared upward. The lights in the room shattered to pieces and brought darkness.

In that darkness, The Shadow's hands grabbed Margo. He hoisted her atop his shoulders. Steadying her legs, he waited while she fumbled at the ceiling.

Above her head was the trapdoor through which, earlier, Spooner had tumbled through the floor into this death room below. Margo clawed fiercely. Peril gave her skill. The trapdoor lifted. Through the opening, Margo bellied to the floor of the room above.

The heavy desk where she had trapped Spooner earlier stood nearby. Margo dragged the desk closer to the opening. Lying flat, with her legs twisted around the legs of the heavy desk, she swung downward into the death chamber, her dangling hands reaching toward The Shadow.

He leaped upward, caught both her wrists.

The weight of his body almost tore the plucky girl loose from her anchorage; but she managed to hold her position. The Shadow pulled himself up her stiffened arms. His groping fingers clutched at the edge of the trapdoor opening.

A moment later, he was sprawled on the floor above alongside the panting Margo.

They had short respite. Crooks, warned by The Shadow's dousing of the lights below, were racing to cut off the final escape of doomed victims.

Guns flamed. Snyder and Jordan were at the doorway of the office. A bullet grazed the pale face of Margo. Another found a living target.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

It plowed through the flesh of The Shadow's left shoulder.

But The Shadow was firing, too. The .45 in his right hand sent flaming death toward his enemies. He aimed at Jordan to protect Margo's life and his own. It was a perfect shot, but it was nullified by Jordan's cold-blooded treachery.

The master criminal shoved Snyder reeling into the line of fire. The bullet that would have put Jordan out of action crashed into the body of Snyder.

Jordan fled.

After him went The Shadow. Blood dripped from The Shadow's wounded shoulder. But he still had one good arm—and one .45 that could shoot hard and straight.

Jordan feared that heavy-calibered gun. Cut off from any other escape route, he headed upward. The chase led to the top floor. A window smashed under the swift blow of Jordan's empty weapon. He wriggled over the sill, sprang across a narrow shaft to the slanting roof of an extension wing of the building.

The Shadow wanted to take his man alive. The Shadow was reeling from loss of blood from his drilled left shoulder, but he gave the cornered master criminal no respite. The Shadow leaped across the narrow chasm to the extension room.

He began to crawl slowly up the roof slant toward his crouched foe.

Jordan had seized a loose brick from the chimney edge. He leaned forward to brain The Shadow. His breath hissed with triumph as the weakened Shadow slumped in collapse on the steep surface of the roof.

The brick smashed downward toward The Shadow's skull. The blow never reached its goal. The unhurt hand of The Shadow caught Jordan's wrist.

Flat on his belly, The Shadow jerked with every atom of his strength. The pull yanked Jordan forward, sent him tumbling over The Shadow's flattened body.

Screaming, Jordan tried in vain to halt his outward plunge. He struck the edge of the roof's slant, bounced into empty air. His bubbling scream dwindled horribly.

There was a hideous thud from the ground below. Then silence.

The Shadow didn't give his own weakened body a chance to betray his unconquerable will. He leaped backward across the narrow chasm between the extension roof and the sill of the widow opposite.

He made it, with a one-handed grasp at the window casing like the clutch of a steel vise. Stumbling with pain, he raced downward through the house to the steel barrier of the chamber below.

MARGO, like a pale specter, joined The Shadow.

She helped him shut off the heat that was still making the death brew inside the acid vat bubble insidiously. She assisted The Shadow to undo the sabotage that had jammed the mechanism of the closed steel door.

But they didn't enter at once. Knowing the dreadful potentialities of the gas inside, they waited for it to dissipate.

## SYNDICATE OF SIN

A horrible sight greeted them when at last they entered.

Crooks had paid the penalty of crime. The faces of Mark Kemper, of Spooner, of the guilty Peggy Dawson were waxen with death. It had not been an easy death. Their mouths were twisted grotesquely. Jordan had done his vicious work well.

It was a clean sweep of vengeance, set in motion by the greed and treachery of the crooks themselves!

Jordan would no longer mock at the police. The leader of the Syndicate of Sin lay in a bloody huddle where he had fallen from the roof. Snyder, too, was dead, a victim to the cold-blooded treachery of his chief. Outside in a clump of blood-spattered bushes, lay the final member of this crime Syndicate of Sin—Harrison Brand.

The proof of Brand's guilt, as well as Spooner's, was in The Shadow's possession in the Manila envelopes.

The Shadow left the proof for the police to find. He left, also, a concisely written message that explained every cunning detail of a billion-dollar art conspiracy.

Art masterpieces of Europe, stolen by thieves and traitors from museums where they rightfully belonged, would be returned to their proper places after the Nazi scourge in Europe was wiped away.

With Margo at his side, The Shadow left the sinister house. Outside they found the dazed figure of Moe Shrevnitz. Moe was lying where The Shadow had left him after rescuing him from drowning. He staggered to his feet. The Shadow led the way to Moe's hidden taxicab.

The Shadow was wounded, but his serene eyes gave no indication of his silent suffering. He motioned to Margo to take the wheel of the taxi.

The cab headed for New York. There, at the private hospital maintained by The Shadow's friend, Dr. Rupert Sayre, The Shadow would recover his strength in secrecy. The gunshot wound in his shoulder would never be reported to police.

When his wound healed, The Shadow would once more emerge from silence and darkness, to battle future challenges from arrogant enemies of the law!

THE END