

THE THREE BROTHERS

by Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. MILLIONS TO GAIN

DUSK was settling upon the New Jersey meadows. North of the Skyway, where glittering lights of automobiles formed a continuous two-way parade, lay spreading tracts of low wasteland, between two narrow rivers that seemed to have widened apart to shun that miserable terrain.

Man had conquered those meadows with crisscrossed railroad lines, where mammoth freight locomotives were chugging stolidly through the gloom, their whistles adding a mournful wail to the ghostly pall of dusk.

Rising like specters to greet the approaching night were huge buildings that bordered the railroad tracks. These were industrial plants, erected upon the barren meadows because such sites brought them close to transportation routes.

Largest of all such structures was the Jersey works of the Caxter Chemical Corporation. It stood, a miniature city in itself, between the elbow of a river and the junction of two rail lines. About it were yards filled with freight cars; on the river's fringe, a line of barges accounted for the raw materials that would later be shipped, as finished products, to many Eastern cities.

Once white, the Caxter buildings had become a grimy gray. Blocky, they formed a pyramid to the central structure in their midst. The only relief in their drab appearance was formed by a yellow mountain of sulphur

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piled against a building wall, plus a few sparkles of light that came from the windows of the central tower.

Those tiny lights, however, were important. The room that they illuminated was a remarkable contrast to the dingy outside scene. Under the soft glow of an ornate ceiling lamp, men were seated about a mahogany table in an office as elaborate as any that Wall Street could boast.

This was the private office of Gregg Caxter, president of the corporation; a man whose wealth was conservatively estimated at fifty million dollars. Gregg Caxter, himself, was presiding over the meeting; the men seated with him were directors of the chemical corporation.

Short of build, Gregg Caxter seemed most impressive when seated. He was a man of thirty-five; but his sallow, deep-lined face and thin, black hair gave him an older look. So did his eyes, for their coal-black glint carried an ambitious desire that indicated long and purposeful effort over a period of many years.

Gregg Caxter!

The very name meant power to the assembled directors. It meant more than that—tyranny almost, to two others who stood in the background; for they were merely employees, and they knew the driving force of Caxter's rule.

One man, pasty-faced and nervous, stood beside a table in the corner. On that table was a variety of articles: solid blocks of sulphur, the size of bricks; bottles of liquids, varying in color; a tiny metal tank, with a valve attachment at the top; finally, most curious of all, a small crate that contained a dozen guinea pigs, as stupid-looking as the crowd of directors.

The man who guarded these exhibits was Walters, one of the many secretaries who worked for Gregg Caxter. If he had a first name, he had probably forgotten it; for, like others close to Gregg Caxter, Walters was constantly addressed by his last name only.

Across the room, silent in his corner, was a tall, droopy-faced man who could actually boast a full name. He was Kirk Wydell, a consulting chemist. Though merely Wydell to Gregg Caxter, the chemist was important enough to be called Kirk by some of the lesser officials.

THE silence that gripped the sumptuous office was broken suddenly by the sharp tone of Gregg Caxter. His voice usually held a harsh tone; but on this occasion, it was tinged with a note of extreme annoyance. The listeners knew that G. C., as they termed him, was about to review a subject that he did not like.

“When family matters enter into business,” announced Gregg, “there is always trouble. That is why we are balked in our plans to build an Illinois plant duplicating this one. As you gentlemen know, I have two brothers”—there was a touch of contempt in Gregg's tone—“who hold the rights to certain basic patents used in our chemical processes.

“Even though I control this corporation, I cannot proceed to spend five million dollars without their permission. That was one of the wise provisions”—Gregg's voice showed sarcasm—“made by my father! He knew that Howard, my older brother, was a dreamer; that Philip, my younger brother, was a spendthrift. So he gave me this business, when he divided the estate among us.

“And yet”—Gregg shook his head—“my father was unwise enough to let them have a strangle hold on me. He thought that this business had reached its greatest growth. To curb my efforts to enlarge it, he specially provided that if I increased the capital stock of the Caxter Chemical Corporation, all rights to those patents would be lost.”

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Gregg concluded his statement with a hard pound of his fist; a stroke that made the mahogany table quiver. One of the directors finally gathered nerve enough to make a mild objection.

“You've told us this before, G. C.; but you also said that if your brothers grant permission, we can expand—”

“My brothers!” Gregg snarled the interruption. “How can we get anywhere with them? We sent Payson and Lloyd to see them. What happened? They talked to my brother Philip first, and that was the last we ever heard of them.

“I'll tell you what I think happened.” Gregg wagged his forefinger. “Philip bribed them. He paid them large sums, just to spite me; told them to go their way and get some fun out of life, instead of sticking in a stinky chemical plant. That's the way that fool Philip talks!”

Gregg sat back, his eyebrows pursed in a glower. The directors showed serious expressions. The odor of the room, pungent with chemical smells, proved that there might be some logic in the remarks that Gregg had attributed to Philip. But the directors, loyal to G. C. because they hoped for larger salaries, were very careful to show no sympathy toward Gregg's younger brother.

“Then we sent Tyburn,” recalled Gregg, harshly. “We told him to go to see Howard first. Tyburn ran into a different matter. Howard told him that things weren't right here; that the plant didn't have enough safety measures. He said that when such improvements were made, he would give his permission to anything.

“Tyburn left Howard and called on Philip, who said that it sounded all right to him. Philip had to agree, after what Howard had said. It's that ridiculous family situation again: Philip, the youngest brother, sides with Howard, the oldest. So we had to mark time and install new safety measures, just to please my precious brothers!”

The directors looked relieved. After a few moments, the one who had spoken previously remarked:

“That ought to settle it, G. C.; if you send Tyburn back to your brother Howard, to tell him that the safety measures have been adopted —”

“Tyburn can't go back,” snapped Gregg, sharply. “The first thing the fool did when he got here, was start an inspection tour of the plant. He walked right into a leak of hydrogen sulphide; not enough to bother anyone else, but it got him.”

“You mean, G. C., that Tyburn is... is dead?”

“Yes!” Gregg came to his feet, leaning his squatty form forward. “What's more, the news is out. Some reporter heard about it, and tomorrow everyone will know it! What's worse, they have taken a look at our pay rolls.

“They want to know about Payson and Lloyd, two men who are no longer working for us. What became of them? That is what the newspapers have asked us; and what could we answer? Only that we don't know where they are. You know what that means. The headlines will say that three men died here; not just one.”

DIRECTORS were exchanging furtive looks as Gregg settled back in his chair. Perhaps they were thinking that the newspaper theory actually accounted for the disappearances of Payson and Lloyd. Gregg's sharp eyes raked the group in challenging fashion. The directors stiffened.

“We must send another man to see my brothers,” announced Gregg, tersely. “He must talk to them—Howard

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in particular—before this scandal breaks. He must explain that Payson and Lloyd simply left us; that Tyburn's death was an accident, due to conditions that have been rectified.

“I have chosen Wydell for this mission”—Gregg turned and beckoned to the tall man in the corner—“because he is a man who knows the situation thoroughly. I have talked to him and he is willing to go through with it. Am I right, Wydell?”

Wydell had stepped toward the table. He cleared his throat with an apologetic cough, then said:

“Quite right, Mr. Caxter.”

“And the matters which I have mentioned,” prompted Gregg. “The fact that Payson and Lloyd left us; that Tyburn's death was accidental—do you agree with those statements?”

“Absolutely, sir!”

There was a buzz among the directors, with approving mention of “Good old G. C.,” which brought a smile to Gregg's sallow lips. In his plans for increasing his huge wealth, Gregg did not care if the directors had doubted his word until Wydell substantiated it. They were at last convinced; that fact satisfied him.

“You have your car here, Wydell?”

The chemist nodded, in response to Gregg's question.

“Then start at once,” Gregg ordered. “Drive to Pennbury and call Howard's house from there. He lives only a few miles from town; he might see you tonight. If not, stay at the Pennbury Inn and make an appointment as early as possible tomorrow.”

Wydell looked toward the table where Walters stood.

“Never mind the exhibits,” said Gregg. “It won't do to waste time showing Howard any products from the plant. He'll only want to see more, and I haven't assembled all that I wanted. It is better to take none than only half.”

Wydell nodded. He took his hat and coat, which were on a chair in the corner. Gregg waved him toward the door, voicing a harsh farewell:

“Good luck, Wydell!”

Gregg Caxter had risen, so the directors also stood. They saw the chunky corporation president look around; then heard him demand:

“Where's Walters?”

One of the directors had seen the secretary go into another office. Gregg gave a shrug, decided he didn't need Walters after all. The group left by the same doorway that Wydell had taken.

Hardly had Gregg Caxter, last to leave, closed the outer door behind him, when Walters peered in from the other office.

No longer was the pallid secretary nervous. His face was eager; its twitches were a gloat. He was holding a

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telephone, the receiver to his ear, waiting for a reply from a number that he had already called. As Walters listened, a voice came across the wire—a voice that he recognized.

Quickly, the secretary gave the details of all that had happened at the conference, concluding with the fact that Kirk Wydell had been sent to see Howard Caxter. When asked if Wydell was to visit Philip Caxter later, Walters answered in the affirmative.

Wydell, as Walters understood it, was to do exactly the same as Tyburn, the previous emissary who had called on the two brothers. After that, Wydell would return to the plant and report to Gregg Caxter. Finished with that explanation, Walters asked if there were any instructions.

Orders came across the wire; as he received them, Walters indulged in an evil grin. Any instructions pleased him, for he regarded all commands as moves against Gregg Caxter, the employer whose tyranny he hated.

Evil was afoot tonight, and Walters, the traitorous secretary, was pleased because he had been ordered to play a hand in it!

CHAPTER II. DEATH FROM THE CLIFF

BELOW the central building that housed Gregg Caxter's palatial offices, the ground was black, almost cavernous. Sheltering walls of the surrounding buildings produced narrow confines that seemed remote from the wide expanses of the outlying meadows.

Darkness had become complete in those lower crannies. Even the building walls could not be seen in the gloom. The ground, strewn with odd pieces of junk, was the sort where prowlers could easily stumble, unless they used a light; which, in turn, would normally reveal them quite as noticeably as any blunders in the dark.

There was a figure, however, that moved through those lower stretches with untraceable silence. The light that this observer used was a tiny torch; its thin, silvery beam was muffled, in part, by the folds of a black cloak.

Even against the gray of a building wall, his cloaked shoulders were obscure, as was his head, which was topped by a slouch hat. This unseen visitor to the Caxter Chemical domain was The Shadow.

Where crime threatened, The Shadow followed. A deadly foe to crooks, The Shadow possessed the uncanny faculty of ferreting out men who dealt in evil. His visit here told that he had come upon one of his accustomed missions.

The Shadow was not the only lurker in the darkness. There were others—mobbies from Manhattan, who had sneaked into the shelter of these grimy walls. Whatever their purpose, The Shadow intended to learn it and frustrate their plans. At this moment, as he moved about through obscure channels, he could have picked out the exact position of four men, thugs who had no knowledge of The Shadow's presence.

A shaft of light broke from a lower doorway in the central building. Gregg Caxter stepped into sight, accompanied by the departing directors. Shrouded in a sheltering corner, some fifty feet away, The Shadow was ready with muffled flashlight and drawn automatic to pick out any crooks who offered trouble.

No trouble came. Skulkers kept to their posts, while Gregg Caxter and his companions went to their parked cars. Soon, limousines were in motion, to take their passengers across the meadows in the direction of the Skyway, which offered the short route to Manhattan, by way of the Holland Tunnel.

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A flashlight was moving, off past a building. One man who had come from the tower offices was not leaving in a limousine. Perhaps he was the quarry sought by crooks. Gauging his own course by the flashlight's glow, The Shadow moved through darkness, following the lone man.

The fellow was Kirk Wydell. The Shadow saw the chemist's droopy face, when Wydell stepped into a shabby sedan and turned on the dome light. Wydell's car was parked in a space used by employees; a few other automobiles were nearby. Wydell didn't notice those other cars. He was busy consulting a road map.

The dome light went off before The Shadow could approach close enough to observe Wydell's road map. Headlamps and taillights glittered suddenly; by the glow of the latter, The Shadow saw that Wydell's car had New Jersey license plates. Moving away, to be out of sight when Wydell turned the car, The Shadow glanced upward to the tower.

Whether or not chance had inspired The Shadow's gaze, the result that he gained was important. The lights of the upper offices switched off. Immediately afterward, a flashlight began to blink. Its signals were all dots, indicating that the man above was flashing a number, not a name. By the time the second figure had been blinked, The Shadow knew what the signal indicated.

Someone in the suite of offices was giving the very number that The Shadow had seen upon Wydell's license plate!

THERE was a stir in the darkness, as soon as Wydell's car had swung about. Men were moving, none too guardedly, toward a long, low-built touring car parked in an obscure corner of the lot.

Wydell didn't notice them, for his car had swung away. But The Shadow knew their purpose. They were the hoodlums that he had watched; they had just received a tip-off to follow Wydell's car.

Rolling out through an open gateway, Wydell's sedan took a different direction than the limousines which had left a few minutes before. He was choosing a road that led northward to some through highway. Probably his destination was somewhere in New Jersey, not New York.

Hardly had Wydell's taillight bobbed from view beyond a railroad crossing, before the rakish touring car poked through the same gateway, to take up Wydell's trail. When the thug-manned vehicle had disappeared, another car joined the caravan. The third automobile was a high-speed roadster. Its driver was The Shadow.

For a few miles, The Shadow used precautions resembling those of the car ahead. When a through highway was reached, the trail required no great care. All that The Shadow had to do was keep the touring car in sight, while its driver checked on Wydell.

The course was northward; whether it continued in that direction, or veered to the west, was a matter of small consequence. Whichever way Wydell went, The Shadow intended to follow.

His plan came to a sudden obstacle a few miles farther north. The touring car made a sudden swing to the side of the highway; it was halted there when The Shadow drove past. Speeding around a bend, he saw no sign of Wydell's car ahead, so he chose a convenient spot of his own and pulled in there.

With lights extinguished, The Shadow waited. Soon, he saw the touring car roll by at moderate speed. Behind it came another machine, a coupe, that seemed, by its actions, to be following the thugs. Again The Shadow started his car, and became the third in line.

Then came another element of the unexpected. At a crossroad, the touring car swung eastward, taking the one

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direction that The Shadow had not foreseen. The coupe followed suit, proving The Shadow's impression that it was following the touring car. Apparently, Wydell was out of the picture, so The Shadow's only course was to trail the other cars and see what happened.

They were too far north to make a straight line for the George Washington Bridge, which offered a route into Manhattan. The cars were closer to the vicinity of Englewood, but if they kept to their present course, they would eventually reach the boulevard running along the Palisades above the Hudson River. There, again, would be a choice of direction; but once more, the unexpected occurred.

Just short of the boulevard, the two cars swung into a byway. Following them, The Shadow cut off his lights and picked the road by watching the two taillights ahead. The cars had come to a stop, apparently at a dead end, and were halted side by side.

Suddenly, the red glows vanished. Easing his car to the side of the road, The Shadow applied the brakes and cut off the low-throbbing motor. Easing to the road, he advanced on foot.

The growl of voices guided him straight to the two darkened cars. Men were standing between them, and as The Shadow pressed into the space, the flicker of a match revealed a rough, unshaven face.

The man with the match lighted a cigarette, then flicked away the flame. He was facing the open window of the coupe; The Shadow heard him address the car's driver.

"I'M Red Felgin," gruffed the man with the cigarette. "Your name is Walters, ain't it?"

"Yes." The voice from the coupe carried annoyance. "But you were supposed to tail the car that went out first. I flashed you the license number."

"Yeah, we know that. But the guy shook us."

"You can pick up the trail again. The man in the car is named Kirk Wydell. He's going to a place called Pennbury. If you cut west from here—"

Red Felgin interrupted with a guffaw. He must have nudged one of the men beside him, for a flashlight suddenly gleamed. It showed the pale face of Walters, half from the coupe window; then into the glow came a gun, gripped by Red's hairy fist.

"We ain't tailing Wydell," sneered Red. "We're taking you for a one-way ride! Get it, double-crosser?"

"But... but"—Walters was nervous in his stammer—"you're working for the same man that I am—"

"Sure! But he don't trust nobody that pulls a double cross. Get it? He used you while he needed you, but he don't need you any more! Shove over, Walters. I'm going to wheel your car."

It was apparent to The Shadow that two men of that assembled group could give real information regarding the big shot who ruled them. Those two were Red and Walters. The former was a notorious mob leader; the latter a traitor.

Both were crooked; if Red murdered Walters, as scheduled, the loss would not be great. But such a deed would end The Shadow's trail. This moment was the time to intervene.

A fierce laugh shivered the darkness between the two cars. There was a snarl from Red, as he wheeled away

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from the coupe. The thug who glimmered the flashlight upon Walters came about, hoping to spot The Shadow with the glow; for every startled crook knew that a challenge from the darkness, uttered with such weird mockery, could come only from the black-cloaked fighter that all mobland feared.

Red's gun barked. With its echoes, the gleam of the flashlight sliced mere space. The Shadow had vanished; like his shivery laugh, he seemed a thing of nothingness, until he bobbed up suddenly from the ground where he had flattened.

Flung forward in his dive, The Shadow was among the startled crooks. His gloved fist took Red's wrist, shoved the mob leader's gun hand upward. With his other hand, The Shadow brandished an automatic into the faces of Red's huddled followers before the crooks could scatter.

Then came the spurt of another revolver, from the coupe. Walters had grabbed a gun, had chosen the closest target: the skull of Red Felgin, just outside the window. The bullet settled the mob leader; he jounced sideways in The Shadow's clutch. With a gleeful snarl, Walters poked farther from the window. Quite impartial when it came to murder, the traitor wanted to take a shot at The Shadow.

With a quick swing of his gun fist, The Shadow bashed the revolver from his foeman's hand. Walters shrieked, as the heavy automatic mashed his fingers. Dropping behind the wheel, he shoved the coupe in gear, drove it forward through the detour barrier that made this road a temporary dead end.

The flashlight was gone. Thugs had scrambled into their car. One, trying to ward off The Shadow, took a slugging blow that dropped him in the rear of the touring car. A moment later, the hoodlums were away, leaving Red dead in the road behind them. They were as anxious as Walters to escape The Shadow.

Reaching his own car, The Shadow started in pursuit. He swung across a bumpy stretch of road, took a turn that led toward the boulevard. The cars that he pursued were still in sight, tearing for the highway. Then came the shriek of brakes. Too late to prevent catastrophe, they were the announcement of new tragedy.

Walters, slicing across the boulevard, had lost control of his coupe. The car struck a heavy rail that bordered the Palisades, but its momentum was too great for the barrier to withstand. Amid a splintering crash that drowned out other sound, the coupe catapulted through a shower of debris, to cross the brink of a cliff that offered a sheer drop of three hundred feet.

Like Red Felgin, Walters had found a deserved doom. Both men who held the key to crime were gone. Watching, The Shadow saw the thugs in the touring car escape disaster as they veered safely into the lighted boulevard. There was no need to pursue that car farther. Its small-fry occupants could tell nothing.

The Shadow's course lay elsewhere. From tonight's adventure, he had learned the name of Kirk Wydell, the man who had gone to the town of Pennbury, some thirty-odd miles northwest of Manhattan. There, perhaps, The Shadow could obtain further clues that he required.

With a grim, whispered laugh, The Shadow turned his car about. Thwarted by double death, he was choosing a new trail, hoping to solve the riddle of hidden crime.

CHAPTER III. TWO MEN AGREE

IT was late the next afternoon, when Kirk Wydell left the little Pennbury Inn and started his old sedan in the direction of Howard Caxter's estate. Last night, Wydell had telephoned too late to make an evening appointment; this morning, he had learned that Howard Caxter was busy and could not see him until afternoon.

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He had been told to await a call from the Caxter mansion, and it had not come until nearly five o'clock.

All day, Wydell had been making occasional long-distance calls to the Caxter chemical plant, where Gregg had been chafing away the business hours waiting to learn how Wydell made out with his brother Howard.

With every call, Wydell had been reminded that if he had any luck with Howard, he was to go straight to New York and seek an interview with the youngest brother, Philip.

Fortunately, Philip Caxter did not have Howard's habit of retiring early. As for Gregg, he could be a night owl when occasion demanded. He promised Wydell that he would remain at the plant, with the directors, until Wydell's return.

Several of Wydell's telephone calls had been overheard in their entirety by The Shadow, for he had taken an adjacent room at the Pennbury Inn. But The Shadow was no longer in the little hotel when Wydell started his drive to Howard's mansion. The Shadow had started ahead. Outside the big gate that led into the huge grounds, he watched Wydell's car roll through.

It was almost dusk. The Shadow, free from observation, began a short cut through the trees. Though he was traveling on foot, his route promised him access to the mansion soon after Wydell arrived there; for the driveway took a roundabout course to reach Howard's front door.

In fact, Wydell was rather amazed to find that he had driven a mile from the gateway before he reached the mansion. A building of magnificent proportions, Howard Caxter's home looked like a kingly palace, while its grounds, Wydell estimated, probably covered half a county. On sober reflection, Wydell decided that such circumstances should not cause surprise.

Old Theobald Caxter, father of the three brothers, had divided his wealth equally among them. Only a few years had passed since the father's death; hence Howard, also Philip, should each be worth about fifty million dollars, the same as their brother Gregg.

After ascending a flight of marble steps and passing great pillars of the same stone, Wydell reached the front door. He was admitted by a servant dressed in drab livery, then conducted through a great hall decorated with statuary. There were vast rooms on either side; finally, short steps of marble. At the top, they reached a small garden entirely inclosed with glass.

There was a tinkling fountain in the center, with a pool filled with fish as rare as the plants that stood beside the windows. There were stone benches among the plants, except at one side, where a door opened to an outer garden, and at the rear of the glass-walled room, where another door led to a wing of the immense house.

Above was a dome-shaped skylight, at present dark because of the dusk; but the indoor garden was illuminated by lamps set in corner pillars. The whole effect was one of indirect lighting, and the glow was as soft, as pleasant, as the gentle tinkle of the central fountain.

A slender man, dressed in dark gray, stood leaning on a cane, one hand extended in greeting to Wydell. A glance at the greeter's face told the visitor that he was meeting Howard Caxter. Though gaunt and thin-featured, with complexion tawny rather than sallow, the man had the keen eyes and firm lips that were characteristics of his second brother, Gregg.

"I expected Tyburn," spoke Howard, in a tone that was dry yet with none of the sarcasm that Gregg so frequently used. "That is why I postponed this appointment. I could not understand why Gregg had sent

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another man instead, until I learned”—he gestured toward a newspaper that lay on a stone bench—“that Tyburn died several days ago.”

“It was an accident,” assured Wydell. “I am positive of that, Mr. Caxter.”

Howard's eyes were searching, but not unkindly so. They seemed to sense that Wydell's statement was sincere.

“And these others?” questioned Howard. “What were their names”—he reached for the newspaper—“the two who have so strangely disappeared?”

“Payson and Lloyd,” supplied Wydell. “They went to see your brother, Philip, before they came here.”

“But they never came here—”

“That was because”—Wydell hesitated, then blurted—“because, according to G. C., Philip paid them to forget that they ever worked for the Caxter Chemical Corporation.”

Howard Caxter did not resent the statement. Instead, he delivered a laugh as musical as the tinkle of the fountain.

“That would be like Philip,” he said. “He has often wanted to pension off some of Gregg's employees. You will have a chance to meet Philip tonight, Mr. Wydell. After that, you can hurry back to G. C., as you term my brother Gregg. Come!” Turning, Howard pointed his cane to the door at the back of the garden. “We can chat more comfortably in my study.”

WHILE the two were passing through the doorway, there was a stir at the side of the garden. It came from the door that led outside. Into the inclosure glided The Shadow; he glanced about the indoor garden, then approached the door at the back.

The study door was slightly ajar. From the shelter of a semitropical plant, The Shadow got a partial view of the study, yet retained the advantage of concealment, should any servants chance to come into the garden from the main portion of the house.

The study was lavishly furnished, but done in excellent taste. Its walls were fitted with bookcases, all filled with handsomely bound volumes. One corner had a desk; there was a reading alcove at the rear of the room, with a door beyond it. A large table stood in the center of the room, and about it were large deep-cushioned chairs that looked unusually comfortable.

Howard had motioned Wydell to one of those chairs, and the guest was relaxed deep in the seat, his head reclining against the chair's cushioned back. Howard, however, was standing close to the central table; the light was such that he could see Wydell's face very clearly.

“I told Tyburn,” declared Howard, “that I objected to certain processes in use at Gregg's chemical plant. One was the practice of utilizing a dangerous gas like hydrogen sulphide in the manufacture of sulphuric acid. Tyburn claimed that the leakage was insufficient to cause death.”

“He was wrong,” returned Wydell, solemnly. “It was hydrogen sulphide that killed him when he was checking on the process.”

“So I understand. That makes the tragedy all the worse. Therefore I must know positively”—Howard was

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rapping the table with his knuckles —“if that process has been eliminated.”

“It has. We have already received large shipments of raw sulphur, to be used in future manufacture of acid.”

Studying Wydell's face, Howard decided that the chemist had told the truth. Then:

“I also understand,” he declared, “that Gregg is producing quantities of poison gas for the government.”

“Yes,” returned Wydell, his tone a bit uneasy. “But I assure you that every precaution has been taken. Improved valves are used for the tanks. I understand, too, that a government contract cannot well be ignored.”

“Perhaps not,” agreed Howard. “But what about gas masks, which really benefit mankind. Is Gregg equipped to manufacture them?”

Wydell shook his head.

“There lies the trouble,” declared Howard, slowly. “Let me express my views, Mr. Wydell, and I believe that you will understand. My father was a man with only one ambition: to acquire wealth. That trait, it seems, was passed along to Gregg.

“Wealth, to me, is something that should be used to aid humanity. I learned that lesson”—Howard's eyes took on a reflective gaze, his tone softened to a sentimental pitch—“from my tutor, Norman Selwood, as fine a man as ever lived!

“I was a weakling as a child. My father disliked my love for study, and therefore disliked me. He preferred Gregg, who had a flare for business; he cared for Philip, who was rugged and liked outdoor activities. Fairly enough, however, he gave us what he thought we preferred.

“I own this estate, where I can dwell as a recluse, with a huge income at my disposal. Gregg has the chemical plant and other businesses. Philip was given the great ranch in Wyoming, where he spends much of his time. But my father overlooked one fact.”

Howard was smiling, his expression showing fondness for his father's memory. Quite different, thought Wydell, from Gregg's contempt toward all that concerned his family. A contrast, too, the fact that Howard felt that family matters had a bearing on business; a thing that Gregg treated with annoyance.

“My studies,” said Howard, “included chemistry. I know more about that science than Gregg does, although the chemical plant is under his control. I have watched the industry's development, and it is my opinion that chemistry should be used to benefit humanity, rather than destroy it.

“That applies specifically in the case of poison gases. In my laboratory”—he gestured toward the door in the rear alcove—“I have made extensive experiments, not in destructive gases but in those which can neutralize the effects of poison. Compounds, Mr. Wydell, that would amaze a chemist like yourself!”

WYDELL'S gaze was pleased. He was hoping that Howard would take him to the laboratory. The eldest Caxter recognized his visitor's interest, but shook his head.

“Not today, Wydell,” he said. “Later, I should like to have you come here and aid me in my work. I think that it will be quite possible, because”—Howard's eyes had a gaze that seemed to picture some vision of the future—“here are my terms to Gregg.

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“If he will agree to manufacture chemicals for gas masks, or other neutralizing agents, in equal proportion to the poisonous compounds that he now supplies, I shall approve the construction of all the new plants he wants. My decision, I feel, is only fair to humanity. Do you agree, Wydell?”

The chemist nodded. His face was sober as he arose from his chair, to receive Howard's extended hand.

“More than fair,” said Wydell. “It's something that”—his voice was hesitant—“well, if I may say it, you're offering to go halfway, and that's something that G. C. won't do if he can help it! But in this case—”

“In this case,” interposed Howard, with his mild smile, “Gregg will have to go halfway in order to meet me. When you see my brother Philip, tell him exactly what I have said. I believe that Philip will agree with me, just as you have. So you, Wydell, will be the proper messenger to carry the decision back to Gregg.”

Shaking hands, Howard and Wydell approached the indoor garden. The Shadow was gone, through the side route, by the time they arrived. From the front of the huge mansion, he saw Wydell come out to his car and drive away.

Cutting through the woods, The Shadow reached his own car. Though he had witnessed an interesting interview, everything had been quiet here at Pennbury. No signs of crooks at the little inn, nor near the mansion owned by Howard Caxter.

Nevertheless, The Shadow had forebodings of danger that might strike later. Trouble for Kirk Wydell, perhaps when he called on Philip Caxter; possibly, later, when the messenger started the final stage of his journey, to meet Gregg Caxter at the chemical plant.

Two men, Payson and Lloyd, had disappeared; another, Tyburn, had died. All had gone, at the bidding of Gregg Caxter, to visit his two brothers. Wydell was the latest man to undertake that duty. Therefore, The Shadow regarded his case as a test.

Deep-laid crime could have played its part in the affairs of those three preceding messengers. The Shadow hoped to prevent such toils from enmeshing Kirk Wydell.

CHAPTER IV. PHILIP'S VISITOR

PHILIP CAXTER lived on the top floor of the exclusive Hotel Beaumont, where he received callers only in the evening. His visits to New York were comparatively rare, although he usually stayed at least a month whenever he came East. Old friends always flocked to see him, and since they liked to stay up all night, Philip usually did the same.

It wasn't easy, however, to see Philip Caxter. Anyone who could afford a suite that spread over half a floor and cost one hundred and twenty dollars a day was certainly entitled a protective barrier against the general public. Moreover, the Beaumont had recently been troubled by some minor robberies, hence its management was very much on the alert.

They were courteous, though, behind the desk at the Beaumont. Irene Selwood learned that much, when she inquired for Mr. Caxter. But she also discovered that the courtesy was a mere device to get rid of unknown callers.

“Sorry, Miss Selwood,” said the clerk, “but Mr. Caxter is not receiving callers this evening. You may use the house phone, if you wish, and speak with his secretary, Mr. Emro.”

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Irene used the house telephone; it was on the other side of the lobby. She talked to Emro, whose silky voice informed her that Mr. Caxter was not at home. The girl persisted:

“But I must talk with Mr. Caxter! With Mr. Philip Caxter—”

She was speaking into a dead telephone. Emro had hung up in the middle of her protest. Slamming the receiver angrily, Irene turned about and stumbled directly against a young man who had entered the lobby.

“I’m sorry,” Irene apologized. “But I... I—”

“You were trying to talk to Mr. Philip Caxter,” interposed the young man, smiling, “but not having much luck, I take it?”

Irene nodded.

“There’s a party going on in his suite,” informed the young man. “I’m due there. Come with me and I’ll help you crash the gate.”

In the elevator, Irene had a better look at her new acquaintance. The man looked a bit older than she had first supposed; she decided that he must be close to thirty. His face was handsome in a rugged way; the smile on his lips, though slight, was friendly. So were his eyes, despite their searching gaze.

Clad in tuxedo, the young man was going to a party, as he had said; but for the present, he was more interested in Irene, and with good reason.

The girl was unusually attractive. She was a brunette, with eyes that matched the deep brown of her hair. Her nose was exactly what a nose should be, especially when small and lovely lips lay just beneath it. Her chin had a perfect curve; and the flush of anger that had come to her soft cheek gave a final touch to her beauty—a loveliness so natural that Irene did not appear to realize that she possessed it.

The young man, it seemed, was welcome at the Caxter suite, for he had a key. When he unlocked the door, he bowed Irene across the threshold and into a living room where tuxedoed men and extravagantly gowned women were sipping cocktails.

Irene stopped short in embarrassment. Her street clothes seemed very much out of place amid such a throng. Everyone was looking toward the door, smiles upon their faces, which made it worse, until she realized that they were concerned not with her, but with the young man who accompanied her.

Then, just as she regained her calm, new confusion seized her when she heard a chorus of greeting:

“Hello, Phil!”

The young man was smiling broadly when Irene faced him, stammering:

“You’re... you’re Mr. Caxter?”

“Yes. And you are Miss Selwood. I heard you give your name to Emro. Suppose we go where it is quiet, and you can tell me why you came to see me.”

SHAKING off his friends, Philip conducted Irene into a room that was fitted out like an office. Near the French windows that lighted the room were two comfortable chairs, with a small table between them.

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Bowing Irene to one chair, Philip offered her a cigarette from an ebony box; as he flicked a lighter to supply a flame, he asked:

“How about a cocktail? Any choice?”

“None, thanks,” replied Irene. “But if you want one—”

“I’ll do without. I am more anxious to learn why a charming young lady like yourself finds it so imperative to see me.”

Irene puffed her cigarette and studied Philip carefully through a mild cloud of smoke. She was considering what he had said; whether it should be taken as a compliment to her, or as conceit on his own part. She wasn't sure; but she was finding that she liked Philip Caxter and was willing to give him the benefit of doubt.

“It's about my father,” said Irene. “His name is Norman Selwood. He came here today to see you.”

“Norman Selwood!” Prompt recollection flashed to Philip. “Of course! I should have remembered the name. He was my brother Howard's tutor, years ago.”

Irene nodded. Then: “Dad saw you—today?”

“No,” replied Philip. “I wasn't here. I'll call Emro”—he was pressing a button on an adjacent desk—“and find out what he knows.”

Emro entered. From hearing his voice previously, the secretary was just what Irene expected. He was dapper, smug of manner, yet shrewd. Irene could tell that from the quick dartings of the eyes that peered from beside Emro's pointed nose, the oily purr that came from his lips—a tone that had a servile touch when he spoke to his master, Philip.

“You summoned me, sir?”

Emro's unnecessary question was a stall. He was sizing up the situation, guessing that Irene must be the girl who had telephoned the suite a few minutes ago. He seemed to be watching, too, for any signal that Philip might give him. Perhaps one of Emro's duties was to dispose politely of any visitors, when they had begun to bore Philip.

Ignoring Emro's flashes, Philip introduced Irene to the secretary, then asked him if her father had called that afternoon. The oily man nodded.

“I talked to Mr. Selwood,” said Emro, “and made an appointment for him to see you tomorrow afternoon.”

“Why not tonight?” demanded Philip.

“Because of the party, sir,” replied Emro. “Perhaps I can reach him, though. He said that he intended to dine at the Faculty Club.”

“Try there,” suggested Philip.

Emro made the call from another room, evidently assuming that Philip preferred to be alone with Irene. The girl felt a shiver as Emro left. The fellow reminded her of snakes that she had seen on the Connecticut farm where she lived with her father. Philip, however, seemed quite unconcerned regarding Emro. As soon as he

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and Irene were alone, he asked:

“Why would your father come to see me?”

“I don't know,” returned Irene. “Except—”

She hesitated; then opened her purse and drew out some newspaper clippings, which she handed to Philip. They were from today's newspaper, and they bared the facts of death at the New Jersey plant of the Caxter Chemical Corporation.

“Father taught college for a good many years,” explained Irene. “This is his sabbatical year, and we have been living in Connecticut while he is writing a book on economics. Today, I returned from a visit in Boston earlier than dad could have expected.

“He wasn't at home, but on his desk I found a newspaper with these paragraphs marked. On a pad, he had written the name of this hotel, with its phone number and your name beneath. I asked the maid where dad had gone and she said to New York.”

PHILIP was running his fingers through his dark, wavy hair while he read the clippings. This seemed the first time that the news had come to his attention.

“All this is exaggeration!” he exclaimed. “I have met these men, Payson and Lloyd, and I can't see anything mysterious in their disappearance. I'll bet that Gregg fired them; that's all.”

“Why should he have done that?”

“Because they couldn't make me agree to what Gregg wanted,” explained Philip. “He is anxious to expand the business. Why should he? It's making more than enough money as it stands. Any of us—Howard, Gregg, myself—can buy anything we want.”

Irene wondered if the final words were boastful. She watched Philip read farther through the clipping. Then:

“I remember Tyburn, too,” Philip said. “He went to see Howard, instead of coming here. He ran into better luck than Payson and Lloyd. Howard agreed to let Gregg go ahead, provided that safety measures were first adopted at the plant.

“With that much gained, Tyburn came here later. About all I could do was say the same as Howard, because I had previously stated that I would guide my decision by his. As luck had it”—Philip's face was sober—“Tyburn died from the very cause that Howard feared: improper safety measures at the plant.”

From Philip's statements, Irene saw immediately that Tyburn's death had halted Gregg's plans. From that, she concluded that the newspaper reports, which were very caustic toward Gregg, did not reveal the correct story.

There was another clipping, which mentioned the death of Gregg's secretary, Walters, which Philip had not read; but when he spoke, Irene did not interrupt him.

“Your father,” Philip told Irene, “was probably alarmed by these reports. Perhaps he believes that Gregg is actually up to some dirty work. If so, he may have felt it his duty to talk to Howard and myself. Knowing how sensitive Howard is, and not having seen him for years, your father would naturally have decided to discuss the matter with me before taking it up with Howard.”

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Laying the clippings aside, Philip arose and stepped abruptly to the French windows. Swinging them wide, he gestured to a little balcony, beyond which lay the panorama of New York.

“A lovely view,” smiled Philip. “Let’s look at it, while we wait for Emro to return.”

From the balcony, with Philip beside her, Irene surveyed the glitter of Manhattan’s night. Thousands of tiny sparkles studded the blackness, while a ruddy ever-changing glow hung above the neon-lighted area of Times Square.

“It’s really marvelous!” said the girl. “Think what those lights represent: millions of people, some toiling, others at play—”

“And millions of dollars,” put in Philip, dryly. “Invested in those huge buildings, which block half the sky.”

Again, Irene sensed that there could be conceit in Philip’s tone. He had millions of dollars; she wouldn’t wonder if he would prefer to think in terms of wealth, rather than people.

“Why don’t you ask me to choose one of those buildings?” demanded Irene. “So you could buy it for me? You said, a while ago, that you could buy anything you wanted. Perhaps”—her tone was caustic—“you already own some of those buildings! A few dozen, maybe, of the biggest ones! But you wouldn’t care to spare one, would you?”

The flash of Irene’s eyes brought a smile to Philip’s lips. The girl was showing the spirit that he had seen before; but this time, it was directed straight at Philip, not at a telephone.

“If I owned all those buildings,” chuckled Philip, “I’d mow them down! I’d make this island like my ranch out in Wyoming, where people would have space to roam and really live. Those lights, of course, they’re pretty; but I’d supply others that they can’t match.

“I mean the stars. You ought to see them, Irene—the way they are out there in Wyoming. You think I like Broadway; that I’m fond of New York night life. You’re wrong. My friends like it; that’s all. When I’m in town, which isn’t very often, I find pleasure in watching my friends enjoy themselves.”

PHILIP had stepped farther out onto the balcony. Irene could not see his face, but his voice carried a warmth of sincerity. To the girl, it seemed that Philip Caxter had revealed his true self; that he was a man who would actually exchange all his wealth for the happiness that it could bring to others.

“Don’t think that I intend to squander all I own,” cautioned Philip. “It isn’t practical. It doesn’t take money to make real people happy. Sometimes I look down there”—he motioned toward the streets—“and watch as many as a thousand people, wondering just what each one wants. Wondering, too, how many would be really happy if they all found what they thought they wanted.”

Leaning on the rail, Irene was looking downward as Philip gestured. Her elbow slipped as she shifted it; instinctively, she gave a startled, frightened gasp. Philip, too, was startled; he acted in a fashion quite as natural.

His arm came swiftly around Irene’s shoulder; with an energy much greater than he could have intended, he swept the girl back from the rail.

It came so suddenly, that Irene could scarcely complete her gasp. Philip had drawn her almost to the French window; his strength and her light weight had brought her completely into his arms. Held in a protective

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clasp, the girl was gazing straight up into a face that showed more than mere concern.

Philip's eyes spoke his whole story. His silence added emphasis. Words, no matter how tender, could not have expressed his emotion. His eyes said that he cared for Irene more than he himself would have believed, only a few moments ago.

Irene, too, had eyes. Lovely eyes they were, for they carried a glow that was their own and not a chance reflection of Philip's gaze. For Irene Selwood, to her complete wonderment, was discovering that she loved Philip Caxter.

CHAPTER V. CRIME'S INTERLUDE

HAD Philip kissed Irene at that moment, he would have felt the touch of lips that were laden with warmth and sincerity, along with their loveliness. Yet a kiss, like words, belonged not to the present, but the future.

Their embrace, the meeting of their eyes, brought full understanding to both Philip and Irene. Motionless, they felt the scene about them fade. Instead of those lights against the lower sky, they could picture twinkles from above—as if the entire hotel had vanished, to leave them beneath the Western stars which Philip had described.

They had come, it seemed, from an abyss of the past to a time that they had both unknowingly awaited. The very facts of their chance meeting, the shortness of their talk together, made the discovery of their mutual love all the more impressive. The circumstance that had so suddenly brought them into each other's arms fitted as an incident in which fate had played a hand.

It wasn't the hand of fate, however, that was rapping at the office door. The knock was Emro's. Reluctantly, Philip released his arms from Irene's shoulders and touched her elbow with his fingertips as he turned her inside toward the chair that she had occupied before.

Philip, too, was seated, nonchalantly offering Irene a fresh cigarette, when he called for Emro to enter.

The overpolite secretary didn't appear to notice that Philip's tie was awry; that Irene was finding it difficult to light her unsteady cigarette. Emro simply announced that he had called the Faculty Club, to learn that Norman Selwood had dined there and left.

“Mr. Selwood is staying in New York,” stated Emro, “but they do not know at what hotel. He said that he would call at the club for any messages tomorrow evening.”

Philip turned to Irene, asked if she knew what hotel her father would choose. Irene shook her head; then said:

“I can see dad tomorrow, when he comes here. I'll stay over with Molly Graves. She's an old friend of mine; I always stop at her apartment when I come to New York.”

That settled, Philip was waving Emro toward the door, when the secretary supplied another announcement.

“A man named Wydell is here, sir. He says that your brother Gregg sent him to see you.”

“Tell him to drop in on Howard first,” suggested Philip, with a smile: “That seems to be the proper procedure.”

“He has already seen Mr. Howard,” informed Emro. “He gave that as one reason why he came here.”

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“Very well. Show him in.”

As Emro left, Philip noticed that Irene was picking up her purse and gloves.

“You mustn't go!” exclaimed Philip. “I'll only be a few minutes with this chap Wydell.”

“But if it's a business conference”—Irene looked troubled—“I oughtn't to stay here.”

“You don't have to,” smiled Philip. “At least, not in the room. Why not try the balcony again, provided”—his tone became serious—“that you stay away from the rail.”

IRENE agreed. She stepped out to the balcony, and Philip partially closed the French windows. For a few minutes, Irene stared at the skyline; but it seemed very artificial and uninteresting, when she recalled Philip's talk of Wyoming. She could hear voices from the office, and a sudden thought struck her.

It wouldn't be eavesdropping, if she looked in on the conference. Philip hadn't sent her out to the balcony to get rid of her. The idea had really been her own. Besides, she was going to marry Philip some day—the thought seemed very natural; as positive as the fact that the sun would rise tomorrow—and she certainly had a right to watch her future husband while he was in a business mood.

Turning about, Irene gazed through the wide crack between the halves of the French window.

She saw Philip Caxter behind his desk; facing him was Kirk Wydell. The tall, droopy-faced chemist looked a bit nervous; and Philip—much to Irene's pleasure—was doing his best to make the visitor feel at ease. Emro had brought them whiskey and soda; though Wydell had declined a drink, he was accepting a choice cigar that Philip offered him.

“So Howard has laid down new terms for brother Gregg,” remarked Philip, with a chuckle. “From what you tell me, Mr. Wydell, I approve of them.”

“You do?” questioned Wydell, eagerly. “Then I can tell G. C. that it all is settled?”

“Certainly! But I shall sign nothing until Howard does. According to these notations of yours”—Philip passed a paper across the desk to Wydell—“that will not come until Gregg has reorganized his plant. He will have to produce many things for which there is little sale and no profit. Which means, in my opinion, Mr. Wydell, that Gregg won't go through with it.”

Wydell looked rueful. Philip, stepping from behind the desk, clapped his hand upon the chemist's shoulder.

“If Gregg fires you,” said Philip, “come and see me. I've taken care of other men that Gregg discharged because they were getting too close to a pension age. The business needed 'new blood,' as he termed it. Probably Gregg had sucked all the old blood dry!”

“I'm not worried about my job,” expressed Wydell. “I'd just been hoping that I might have a chance to work with your brother Howard on some of his experiments to aid mankind.”

“You like Howard, I see.”

“Yes. I found him—well, very human.”

Philip nodded, while Wydell was seeking words to further express himself.

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“Howard is human,” said the youngest Caxter. “But whatever his virtues, he owes them to the training of one man. Years ago”—Philip’s tone became reminiscent—“Howard had a tutor; a man named Norman Selwood. One of the finest men, Wydell, that ever—”

BEYOND the French windows, Irene failed to hear the rest of Philip’s statement. She had withdrawn along the balcony, her face warm from the embarrassed flush that came to it. She was wondering if Philip had drawn her father’s name into the conversation on the chance that she was listening. Very possibly, he had.

Previously, Irene would have felt that Philip had done so to make an impression upon her. But she was sure that she had already learned to know him better; that his comments, if deliberately intended, were more logically a gentle rebuke, had she become an eavesdropper. She felt that she deserved to be embarrassed; and she could not be angry, if Philip thought the same.

The balcony extended to the window of another room, a smaller office, that connected with the one where Philip was. Chancing to glance through the window, Irene noticed an open door to the hotel corridor. The window was raised, offering a route that would enable her to leave the suite without Philip knowing it.

Irene was suddenly tempted to make her departure; to call Philip later and repay him for his rebuke. Even though justly given, such indirect reproof called for some retaliation. Perhaps it would be best to let Philip feel that she could be unreasonable if she chose.

With that thought, Irene started to climb through the window; yet she could not help but glance toward the door of Philip’s office, as she went.

Instantly, real terror gripped her.

The door to the other office was ajar. Against the shaft of light that came from Philip’s room, Irene saw a figure so unreal that her wits completely left her. It was the shape of a being cloaked in black, his head topped by a slouch hat.

He had sensed her arrival, for he whirled suddenly about, to meet Irene’s gaze. Yet all the girl could see beneath the hat brim were burning eyes. The rest of the intruder’s features were obscured, partly by the cloak collar, partly by the hat brim.

In sighting The Shadow, Irene didn’t realize that he, like herself, might be a friendly eavesdropper. Her unreasonable mood was gone, but she automatically seized upon another privilege, that belonged to every woman. From the window, Irene screamed, putting every ounce of lung power into the shriek.

With a sweeping move that seemed incredibly swift, The Shadow wheeled across the room, not in Irene’s direction but toward the outer door. From the space that he had left, Irene heard Philip’s excited shout. He was out of sight, like Wydell, for the connecting door was obscured by filing cabinets; but Irene knew, from the call, that Philip was on the way to aid her.

Her nerve returning, Irene sprang into the room. How she understood it, was something that she could not answer at the moment, but she was struck with the newer thought that the being in black was not an enemy. She hoped that if she could reach the corridor door ahead of Philip, she might be able to ward off conflict between him and The Shadow.

But battle was due, and Irene’s cry was the cause. It wasn’t Philip who brought the strife. Others were responsible—men who sprang in sight along the corridor, just as Irene arrived at the doorway.

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She heard The Shadow's warning hiss—a sibilant whisper, that she was too astonished to heed. From the corridor, he wheeled suddenly in upon her, one hand drawing an automatic. The gun was not meant for Irene. With his free hand, The Shadow propelled the girl deep into the darkened room, just as revolvers began to bark along the hall.

THE SHADOW returned that fire. There were howls from the corridor, as he drove out against his foemen. Irene, still on her feet, grabbed Philip as he came plunging from his office, with Wydell just behind him. Though her strength was frail compared to Philip's, Irene won through mad determination.

Flinging her arm across the open doorway, she managed to block him before he could force himself out into the fray.

Philip had a silver-mounted revolver, that he had evidently snatched from his desk drawer. He tried to get the gun past Irene's shoulder, but the determined girl prevented him. Turned toward the corridor, Irene saw The Shadow complete his fight, although Philip got but a partial view of the exciting struggle.

The Shadow had dropped three of his opponents; all were hard-faced, rough-clad men with the look of thugs. He was slugging down a fourth as he swung toward the half-opened door of an elevator. There was a clatter as the main door of Philip's suite went wide; Irene heard a shout that she recognized as Emro's; then, as The Shadow blazed a shot, the suite door slammed shut.

The shot was a warning, Irene realized, when she saw how timely it proved. Persons in the living room of Philip's suite would have met with harm, had they surged out. For the door of the elevator was slashing wide; from it came two new attackers, both with guns, who flung themselves upon The Shadow.

One looked like a house detective; the other was an elevator operator. They tried to fire as they came, but The Shadow handled them with amazing skill. Flinging the house dick with a swift jujitsu hold, he caromed the fellow from the opposite wall.

The elevator man, his aim blocked by the detective's body, was gawking from the doorway of the car, trying to spy The Shadow, when the cloaked fighter swung up beside him.

Guns slashed. The Shadow drove the operator's revolver back against the man's head. As the elevator man slumped, The Shadow whisked into the car and slammed the door behind him, the clang of the metal barrier cutting off the sudden tone of a triumphant laugh.

Irene relaxed. Battle was over, she thought. But as Philip bolted past her, she heard a snarl from somewhere along the corridor, saw a half-slumped thug prop himself on one arm and fire. Fortunately, the shot wasn't meant for Philip.

As Irene peered out into the corridor, she saw Emro hurry from the main doorway, to help his master disarm the crippled thugs, including the one who had fired that last bullet.

Other men, Philip's guests, were coming out to aid. Battle was over, and crooks had received their fill of it. The victory, which Irene had witnessed in total amazement, belonged to a lone fighter; that being in black, whose identity she knew, at least in part.

For Irene had heard it gasped by a vicious-faced thug who had received a bullet as he uttered the name:

“The Shadow!”

CHAPTER VI. DEATH'S NEXT STROKE

IT was quite remarkable, how rapidly order began to form from confusion. From her doorway, Irene saw other elevators arrive. Uniformed police stepped from them, along with a stocky man in plain clothes, who was evidently some sort of an official.

Philip Caxter, glancing about, saw Irene at the doorway, made a slight gesture with his hand. He wanted her to go back into his office, so she went there and closed the connecting door. She found Kirk Wydell sitting in his chair, and the droopy-faced chemist gave her a nervous glance of inquiry.

"It's all right," Irene assured him. "Mr. Caxter is talking with the police. I suppose"—she recalled something that she had read a few days ago—"that it was just another attempt at robbery; the sort that has been troubling them at this hotel."

Wydell looked relieved. He began to jot notes on his little list, and seeing him occupied, Irene decided not to introduce herself. Wydell probably supposed that she was one of the guests at Philip's party, which was just as well.

It wasn't very long before Philip came in by the door from the suite; though his face looked quite serious, he managed to give a smile. The reason for his smile was an interesting coincidence. The police, it seemed, had accepted the very theory that Irene had propounded to Wydell; namely, that the confusion had been caused by an attempted robbery.

"I have been talking to a police inspector named Cardona," said Philip. "It appears that some doubtful characters were observed in this vicinity, so Cardona came up here. Remembering the recent robberies, he phoned ahead and the management sent the house detective—a chap named Denbry—to investigate all floors.

"It was Denbry who mixed it with the thugs. Unfortunately"—Philip's smile was gone—"they got him at the finish. The last shot did it; the one that was fired while Emro and I were hurrying out into the hall."

Irene started to say something, then stopped herself. She knew that The Shadow had been the fighter who balked the crooks. Denbry, as she recalled it, had actually sided with them. Perhaps the house detective had made a mistake; at any rate, the crooks had later turned against him. Irene wanted to think all that over before saying more, even to Philip.

Wydell put a timid question:

"Does this mean that I shall have to remain here, Mr. Caxter; perhaps to be questioned by the police?"

"Not at all," assured Philip. "Inspector Cardona is satisfied that no one in this suite had any hand in the trouble. He says that anyone is free to leave here."

"I'm glad," murmured Wydell. "I know that G. C. is very anxious for me to report."

Philip smiled.

"Still faithful to Gregg," he said. "Well, Wydell, I hope Gregg sees the light, so you can work with Howard, as you want to do. Here, have a drink." He was pouring whiskey and soda. "It will steady you a bit before you leave."

WYDELL took only a few sips from the glass, then decided that he had to leave. Philip turned toward Irene,

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made soundless movement with his lips, meaning that he wanted her to remain; then he showed Wydell out through the short route to the corridor.

Irene expected Philip to return immediately, but it was several minutes before he came back. Pouring two drinks, he offered one to Irene; then asked, above his half-lifted glass:

“Why did you scream?”

“I... I don't know.” Irene glanced toward the window, as she spoke. “I suppose that I—well, I imagined something.”

“I have been talking with Inspector Cardona,” Philip said. “He has an odd theory regarding the trouble here; one that he doesn't care to have mentioned, but which I feel that I can tell to you. It involves a person called The Shadow.”

Irene let her eyes meet Philip's. There seemed no need to cover matters further.

“The Shadow, it seems,” resumed Philip, “is a chap who makes it tough for crooks. Cardona thinks that he may have been watching here, to prevent further robberies. The crooks thought they would spring a surprise; that's why they came. But The Shadow turned the tables on them.”

“He did,” declared Irene, solemnly. “I saw it.”

“Now we're getting somewhere,” smiled Philip. “I thought you must have seen The Shadow. Where was he?”

“In your outer office,” replied the girl. “I screamed before I realized that he had come in there to prepare for an attack. Just as I screamed, he went out into the corridor, and the shooting started.”

Irene did not add that she had first seen The Shadow peering into the office where Philip talked with Wydell. She wanted Philip to bring up that question himself; but he ignored it. Quite satisfied with Irene's explanation, he said:

“Emro is talking with Inspector Cardona, and I shall have to join them. I haven't told the inspector that you are here; and perhaps it is just as well. A lot of questions may be asked during our conference. It might be better—”

“For me to leave?” questioned Irene, as Philip hesitated. “I think you are quite right, Philip.”

“But I shall see you tomorrow,” insisted Philip, anxiously. “You must tell me where to reach you, Irene.”

“Of course!” Irene wrote a telephone number on a slip of paper. “Do you think”—her eyes had a pleasing twinkle—“that you could call me before lunch?”

“It's a date!” laughed Philip. “For lunch, with my apologies for forgetting to mention it. But there's something I have not forgotten—”

His arms had reached for Irene's; his sentence ended with the long-awaited kiss. Memories of trouble and tumult faded.

Again, it was a knock at the door that ended their brief embrace—a sharp rat-tat-tat, almost like a message.

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“It's Emro,” whispered Philip, as he lifted his head. “That rap means that someone is with him; probably Inspector Cardona. Good night, Irene!”

OUTSIDE the hotel, Irene called for a cab. One cut in from the street and promptly took her as a passenger. To Irene, the incident was unimportant; no more eventful than her trip through a corridor from which gun-fray victims had been removed, and the ride down in the elevator.

Never would she have guessed that the cab in which she was riding belonged to The Shadow; that its driver, Moe Shrevnitz, was one of that strange investigator's agents, instructed to keep tally on wherever Irene went. Moe had orders, too, to report Irene's final destination, that The Shadow might place other agents on watch.

Meanwhile, The Shadow had reached a parking lot a few blocks distant from the Hotel Beaumont. He stopped beside a coupe parked on the street outside the lot. The car was empty; entering it, The Shadow took the seat behind the wheel and waited. A minute later, a young man hurried into sight; clambering into the car, he was halted by the whispered word:

“Report!”

The arrival was another agent, Harry Vincent, posted here to keep track of Kirk Wydell, who had left his car in this parking lot. Harry should have trailed Wydell, if necessary, but he had missed his man.

“Somebody put Wydell's car out of kilter,” reported Harry. “He took a taxi, instead. I saw the cab go out, but didn't know that he was in it. One of the attendants heard him tell the cabby to take him to the Hudson Tubes.”

The coupe was in motion, swinging from the side street into an avenue, when Harry reported further:

“Wydell is going to Journal Square in Jersey City, but he hasn't enough cash for the taxi fare. That's why he's going to the nearest Tube station; probably Thirty-third Street.”

The Shadow did not drive to Thirty-third Street. He cut west, sped the coupe southward along an avenue where traffic was light. He was making for the Christopher Street Tube station, well south of Thirty-third.

There was a chance that Wydell had caught a Tube train just before it left; if so, The Shadow's only chance was to intercept it. Even that might be too late, for if Wydell's life should be threatened, danger might have struck when he left the parking lot. Crooks might be using a cab driver as a worker, just as The Shadow did. Nevertheless, the only plan at present was to intercept Wydell.

At Christopher Street, The Shadow performed a double action. He flung his hat and cloak to Harry with one hand, while he opened the car door with the other. He formed a long, limber figure as he bolted down into the Tube station, but his speed diminished when he neared the platform.

There, The Shadow appeared as a leisurely, well-dressed individual, whose face, hawkish in appearance, possessed a singular calm. To persons on the platform, he was simply another passenger awaiting a train to New Jersey. There were people, though, who would have deemed it odd to see him in this station.

The Shadow was guised as Lamont Cranston, a wealthy New York clubman, who invariably preferred his limousine to subway trains. The Cranston guise was one of The Shadow's favorites, for though there was a real Cranston, he was always out of town.

A RUMBLE brought a two-car train into sight. Short trains were customary at this hour, but, as usual, the two cars were crowded. Getting aboard, The Shadow found Kirk Wydell by the time the train had started

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from the station. The chemist was hanging to a strap near the center of the front car. The Shadow took the strap next to him.

As the train sped westward, The Shadow looked around him, studying faces close at hand, in the event that any might be prospective foemen. The passengers were a rather dreary lot; none among them had a thuggish look.

A few were looking up from their newspapers, but merely because the increased speed of the train was bringing them the pleasing information that they had passed the Manhattan portion of the journey. Rolling down the incline to the tube beneath the Hudson River, the train was making its fastest time.

The train's rumble had become hollow. Against his eardrums, The Shadow could feel the pressure that came at this low level. A half minute more would bring the train to the very depths of the tube, directly beneath the center of the river. Satisfied that he had only to watch Wydell, The Shadow turned his gaze toward the chemist.

He could no longer see the man's face. Wydell's head was sagging almost to his chest. The sway of the car had twisted his body full about. His hand was loosening upon the strap; before The Shadow could make a grab for Wydell's arm, the man's fingers yielded.

Pitched by the sway of the rolling train, Wydell's body took a grotesque tumble, almost from The Shadow's grasp. Jostling another passenger, who had lost his balance, the chemist's form sprawled weightily upon the floor amid the shrieks of startled persons who witnessed the sudden fall.

Rolling like dunnage in the bottom of a tossing boat, the fallen man settled face upward; his arms, spread wide beside him, stopped his further sway, but purely through inertia, for those arms were lifeless.

While the train roared onward through the depths beneath the river, Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow, was the first to stoop beside Wydell's form.

Though The Shadow's face remained immobile, horrified passengers sensed what he learned, as his long-fingered hands pressed Wydell's heart and pulse. Correctly, they interpreted the masklike visage of Lamont Cranston as one that was controlled by solemn thoughts.

Kirk Wydell was dead. Some dooming force had found him as its victim at the strangest of all moments. Death had come to Kirk Wydell while he was under the protection of The Shadow!

CHAPTER VII. CRIME'S FACTORS

IT was noon when Lamont Cranston strolled into the swanky Cobalt Club, where he had an appointment with New York's police commissioner, Ralph Weston. As the doorman greeted Cranston by name, a chunky, dark-haired man halted and turned about.

“You are Lamont Cranston?”

From the sharp, dark eyes, the set lines of the man's sallow face, The Shadow knew immediately who he was. The man bore considerable resemblance to both Howard and Philip Caxter, therefore must be the middle brother, Gregg.

Acknowledging himself to be Cranston, The Shadow waited while Gregg made his own introduction.

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“I want to thank you, Mr. Cranston,” said Gregg, warmly, “for all the trouble you went to, regarding poor Wydell. I understand that you spent most of this morning at the coroner's office in Jersey City.”

The Shadow nodded.

“And the verdict, I suppose”—Gregg's eyes were sharp—“was death through misadventure?”

“Heart failure,” stated The Shadow, in Cranston's casual tone. “Wydell had evidently overexerted himself, perhaps in rushing to catch the Hudson Tube train. He couldn't stand the strain of increased atmospheric pressure under the river.”

Gregg started to say something, then twitched his lips and tightened them. It was The Shadow's turn to bring up a question.

“From notes in Wydell's possession,” he remarked, “it was apparent that he had gone on some mission regarding the expansion of the Caxter Chemical Corporation. Am I correct?”

“Yes.” Gregg's tone was bitter. “But Wydell wasn't the first man we sent. We have been having many difficulties, the directors and myself. We need advice badly.”

“Why not call the minority stockholders into your next conference? They might be anxious to know the details.”

The idea struck Gregg as a good one. He stroked his chin as he thought it over.

“Howard and Philip are stockholders, of course,” he said, “but I can hardly expect either of them to accept the invitation. If I knew offhand who any of the smaller stockholders were—”

“I happen to be one”—Cranston's lips showed a slight smile—“and I can assure you that I shall be present, Mr. Caxter.”

Gregg looked highly pleased. He shook hands again and went his way, while The Shadow strolled downstairs to the grillroom, to find Commissioner Weston.

With the commissioner was Inspector Joe Cardona. The corner table where they sat was one of their favorite spots for unofficial conferences, whenever the commissioner happened to be at the Cobalt Club instead of his office, which was quite often.

They made an odd pair. Ralph Weston, a man of military bearing to the tips of his short-clipped, slightly pointed mustache, was a stickler for efficiency; whereas Joe Cardona, swarthy and poked-faced, liked hunches, with freedom of action in order to play them. Each, however, had some respect for the other's opinion, a fact that frequently brought results.

Both greeted Cranston. Weston chuckled over the fact that his wealthy friend had been riding in the Hudson Tubes on the one night when something exciting had happened there. For once, Cranston had forgotten to summon his limousine in from his New Jersey home, and had taken the Tube instead.

Cardona looked pleased, but for a different reason. He was glad that Cranston's testimony had set the place of Wydell's death as a spot past the center of the river, thus putting the case into the hands of the New Jersey authorities. Had it been classed as a Manhattan death, Commissioner Weston would probably be fussing about it, instead of attending to something more important.

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“We have been talking with Gregg Caxter,” said Weston to The Shadow. “Inspector Cardona has taken some interesting notes.” The commissioner turned to Cardona. “We are ready to hear your summary, inspector.”

“THE guy is nuts,” declared Joe, abruptly. “He says one thing, then he denies it. First, he talks about two fellows named Payson and Lloyd. Says they’ve gone away—he doesn’t know where—because his brother Philip pensioned them off, or something.”

“Very interesting,” asserted Weston, “and very unusual.”

“I’d have thought so, maybe,” retorted Cardona, “if I hadn’t met both those brothers. If I was working for a guy like this Gregg Caxter, I’d chuck my job in a hurry, and I wouldn’t have to be paid to do it! Philip is different; he’s a right guy.

“Just to talk to him for half an hour would make anybody sick at the idea of going back to Gregg. That is”—Cardona was remembering Wydell —“pretty near anybody.”

“We want a summary, Cardona,” snapped Weston, “not merely your personal opinions.”

“All right,” agreed the inspector. “Here’s the summary on Payson and Lloyd. Gregg wanted them to sell an idea to Philip. Philip wouldn’t listen. So they didn’t go back to the plant.”

“And so—”

“So what?” queried Cardona. “That covers it, don’t you think?”

Weston pondered a while, and decided that it did.

“Forget Payson and Lloyd,” suggested Cardona. “They’re red herons, or whatever they call those birds that keep walking across the path.”

“Red herrings,” corrected Weston.

“All right,” agreed Cardona, “red herrings.”

Privately, Cardona would have liked to debate the point. He knew that a herring was a fish, and couldn’t figure what one would be doing on a path. However, he had disposed of Parson and Lloyd, and that was more important than the matter of red herrings.

“Another guy, named Tyburn,” continued Joe, “goes to see both of Gregg’s brothers. After he gets back, gas knocks him off at the chemical works. Gregg, himself, admits that there was a leakage, more serious than they thought. So that makes the thing an accident.

“The same with that fellow Walters. A couple of nights ago, he gets started on a bender and drives himself off the Palisades. Gregg, himself, admits that Walters could have been digging into some of the fancy liquor that they keep for big boys, like the directors. So there’s another accident.”

Cardona might have considered the Walters case from a different angle, had he known of Red Felgin’s part in it. The Jersey police, however, had not found Red’s body. Mobbies had sneaked back and removed it, after The Shadow’s departure.

“Which brings us to Wydell,” concluded Cardona. “He goes on a trip, like Tyburn, and winds up with a heart

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attack. So Gregg comes to see us, admits the other deaths were accidents, and wants to make something out of Wydell's case. There's no sense to it, commissioner. The Jersey coroner says Wydell died from heart failure. Why doesn't Gregg Caxter talk to the coroner, instead of us?"

Weston thought a while before answering that question. Then, slowly, he declared:

"The fact remains that Kirk Wydell was calling on Philip Caxter at the time of the gun fray last night."

Cardona nodded.

"I've checked on that," he said. "I called up Philip's place and talked to that sour secretary of his, Louis Emro. He admits that Wydell was there at the time."

"Why didn't you find that out last night?"

"Because I didn't ask who was there," returned Joe. He had been ready for Weston's question. "I saw a lot of guests and asked if any of them had witnessed the shooting. Philip said no, only himself and Emro.

"Listen, commissioner—everybody was excited. There were guys in tuxedos stumbling over each other; dames with bare shoulders upsetting glasses on their dresses while they were yanking off rings and bracelets, trying to hide them under cushions before the mobbies could come in on them.

"I guess Wydell got pretty scared, too. Emro says he did. Down at the parking lot, I hear, he was so upset that he couldn't get his car started. He chased away in a cab, and made a rush for that Tube train. No wonder his ticker quit on him!"

CARDONA'S vivid description of the scene in Philip's suite was strong enough to carry his argument. Weston's slow nod became emphatic.

"We can class Wydell's death with the others," decided the commissioner. "Through a natural cause; brought on, perhaps, by a peculiar coincidence."

Cardona shot a slight grin at Cranston, who had been a silent, impassive listener to the discussion. Leaning back in his chair, the inspector crumpled one batch of notes and thrust them into a pocket. He brought out other sheets, that he regarded as important.

"I've gotten to the bottom of the Hotel Beaumont trouble," announced Cardona. "That house dick, Ray Denbry, was a phony. He'd been working with the gang that staged the robberies at the hotel. When they ran into trouble last night from The Shadow, they thought that Denbry had double-crossed them.

"That's why one guy, Jupe Luber, gave Denbry a bullet at the finish. The rest of them all agree on that, but as luck would have it, the ambulance was slow getting Jupe to the hospital and he cashed in. So we couldn't hear what Jupe had to say about it."

There were times when Commissioner Weston struck upon remarkable theories, based on facts. On this occasion, he built to a considerable height, from what Cardona told him.

"Could it be possible"—Weston's conservative trend caused him to speculate, as he voiced his theory—"that Denbry was taking orders from a man higher up; that Jupe perhaps knew it and was supposed to eliminate Denbry, in the emergency?"

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Cardona's answer was a grin. Weston saw it and glowered. Usually, such hunches came from Cardona, and it was the commissioner's policy to reject them. Irked by his slip, Weston promptly changed tone.

“Odd theories interest you, inspector,” he told Cardona, “so I thought I would test you with one. Since you apparently do not like it” —the commissioner's words had a touch of banter—“we shall forget it.”

Weston meant exactly what he said. He turned to Cranston, suggested that they have lunch together. That was a token that Weston needed Cardona no longer, so the inspector left. Cranston also departed a few minutes later, for it turned out that he had another luncheon engagement.

A soft laugh came from The Shadow's lips as he ascended the steps from the grillroom to the foyer. There was significance in the tone, for The Shadow recognized that Commissioner Weston had actually struck upon the truth, only to discard it.

The Shadow's own experience tallied with Weston's temporary theory.

Last night, Denbry had tried to aid the crooks in their fight with The Shadow. Not one of them could have regarded the crooked house detective as a double-crosser. Someone, unquestionably, had given Jupe the signal to dispose of Denbry in order to block the trail to a person higher up.

Gunmen had come to the hotel, not for robbery but to battle with The Shadow, should he appear upon the scene. They had taken their orders direct from Denbry. But the later order, putting Denbry on the spot because of his failure, could have come only from one of two men: either Philip Caxter or Louis Emro, the smug secretary who obeyed all of Philip orders with promptness and precision.

Events of last night enlarged the issue. The disappearances of Payson and Lloyd, the deaths of Tyburn and Wydell, like the doom of Walters, were the result of insidious design. Wherever chance had entered, it had not changed the outcome, as planned by a master schemer who dealt in wholesale death.

Though many threads to crime existed, their tangle was such that The Shadow intended to reserve all verdict until he had delved further into the affairs of the three Caxter brothers, whose varying purposes had an important bearing upon the facts of crime.

CHAPTER VIII. IRENE'S MESSAGE

THE SHADOW'S appointment was not an invitation; far from it. Upon leaving the Cobalt Club, he went to a very small, but expensive, restaurant famed for its French cuisine. The place was called the Cafe de l'Aiglon, and it consisted entirely of private dining booths.

One small booth was reserved entirely for Lamont Cranston, and soon he was lunching alone, faced by a variety of delicate edibles that included frogs' legs, snails, as well as some items of more ordinary diet.

Soon after the food was served, The Shadow provided an article that was not on the menu. From his pocket, he brought a small earphone, wrapped in a coil of insulated wire. There was a plug on the end of the wire, and he inserted it in a wall socket beneath the table.

The booths in the Cafe de l'Aiglon were fitted with those sockets, so that the telephones could be used by diners without need of leaving the table. The Shadow however, was using his special earphone to listen in on another booth, where Burbank—one of The Shadow's secret agents —had, earlier, plugged in a microphone while posing as an electrician.

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The distant booth had been reserved for two persons who intended to lunch at this cafe. Having learned of the reservation through other agents, The Shadow had sent Burbank ahead to arrange the communication system.

Though the expected patrons were due at half past one, they did not arrive until nearly an hour later. They had met, evidently, outside the cafe: Irene Selwood and Philip Caxter.

The girl seemed a trifle piqued as they passed Cranston's booth, and Philip was extremely apologetic. Once in their booth, they ordered lunch; then began a conversation.

Except for a slight interval, when a waiter came to Cranston's booth to take away cold snails he had not eaten and leave a hot filet mignon, The Shadow heard the chat between Philip and Irene. It did not take him long to learn what he had guessed the night before: that Philip and Irene were in love.

From that, The Shadow knew nearly all that Philip and Irene had talked about on the preceding evening before he had arrived, at the time of Wydell's appearance.

Then came a mention that brought other links to the night before.

"I read about poor Wydell," said Irene, soberly. "His death was— well, very sudden."

"And unexpected," added Philip.

Irene's eyes took on a steady gaze, which The Shadow could picture from the interval that passed, until she asked:

"Do you really think that Wydell died unexpectedly?"

"Why, of course!" exclaimed Philip. "Inspector Cardona thinks the same. Excitement probably caused the poor chap's heart attack."

"You talked to Inspector Cardona today?"

"Emro did. He told him that Wydell had been visiting me at the time of the gun fray."

There was another pause, marked by a hesitant expression on Irene's lips. Then the girl blurted the question:

"You rely on Emro a great deal, don't you, Philip?"

"Certainly," the man answered. "He is capable, efficient, and has been honest in all his dealings with me. If you don't like him"— Philip chuckled—"it may be because Emro prides himself on being disliked. It helps him in one of his most important duties: discouraging unwelcome visitors. I'm troubled a lot by that, you know."

Irene admitted the logic of the statement.

"Until Emro came with me," continued Philip, "I seldom had any time to myself. It was on my last trip East, six months ago—no; the trip before then—that Emro applied for a job as secretary. I tried him out; he suited me. So I have kept him ever since."

DROPPING the subject of Emro, Irene came back to the matter of Wydell.

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“Those clippings I showed you,” she reminded earnestly, “were considered important by my father. He believes—I am sure of it—that there was more than mere coincidence to those deaths.”

“We agreed, last night,” returned Philip, “that your father was probably mistaken.”

“We didn't agree. We merely decided that he might be mistaken. But that was before Wydell died.”

“Yes, that might make a difference.” Philip's tone was one of compromise. “But why let it worry us, Irene? We shall be seeing your father shortly, when he comes to the hotel.”

“What time is he coming there?”

“Soon after three o'clock, Emro said. Come to think of it, it's already three o'clock. I'd better call Emro.”

Philip summoned a waiter and ordered a telephone. Fortunately, the waiter found it more convenient to plug the cord into the socket in the next booth and carry the telephone from there.

As a result, the hidden microphone was not discovered. The Shadow overheard Philip talk to Emro, then explain to Irene ruefully:

“Your father called, and left. Emro tried to make him wait, but he wouldn't. Unfortunately, Emro didn't know where to reach me.”

“But where did dad go?” questioned Irene. “When is he coming back?”

“Emro doesn't know where he went,” returned Philip, “but he said he will be back early this evening. I'm very sorry, dear”—his hand stretched across the table and parted Irene's—“but it was just a bit of forgetfulness on my part. You can come to the hotel with me and wait until your father arrives again.”

Irene had a notion of her own.

“I am going to Molly's apartment,” she said firmly. “When dad calls on you, you can telephone me. Perhaps he would rather talk to you alone, regarding your brother Gregg. You will have time for the chat while I am on my way over.”

When they had finished lunch, Philip and Irene parted near the corner outside the Cafe de l'Aiglon. Lamont Cranston also left the restaurant, after handing a handsome tip to the waiter who had been so horrified at seeing him snub the famous snails. With strolling gait, The Shadow followed Philip toward the Hotel Beaumont.

Irene, it happened, had stepped into Moe Shrevnitz's cab, which had been waiting in a little-used hack stand near the Cafe de l'Aiglon. Once again, The Shadow was depending upon his agents to keep track of Irene, while he was busy elsewhere.

So far, all reports from the agents had been satisfactory. Irene had reached her destination safely the night before. No suspicious persons had been reported in the neighborhood of the apartment house where her chum, Molly Graves, lived on the third floor.

Everything was as quiet as ever when Irene again arrived at the apartment. Molly was out, for she had an office job and wouldn't be back until after five o'clock.

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Irene read a book until Molly returned; the only interruptions were when Philip called her, twice, to say that he was still waiting for her father and to tell Irene how much he loved her.

Irene was beginning to feel qualms on the last-named subject.

Not that she lost the effects of last night's thrill. On the contrary, the sudden burst of romance seemed more genuine than anything else she had ever experienced. She was worried only regarding Philip's ways.

She had meant to ask him, for instance, if his remarks to Wydell regarding her father had really been meant for her to hear. She had forgotten that, however, while she was discussing Emro. Philip's dependence on the sneaky secretary annoyed her; it made her wonder whether or not Philip was something of a double-dealer himself.

She didn't mention any of that to Molly; instead, she simply helped her chum prepare an early dinner. At six o'clock, there was another call from Philip; he was still waiting for her father. At seven, with dinner over, Irene was on the point of calling Philip herself, when there was a knock at the apartment door.

A man-sized telegraph messenger delivered a telegram for Irene. He didn't go through the formality of having her sign for the message, nor did he wait to learn if there would be a reply. He departed while Irene was reading the message.

Molly sensed, from Irene's expression, that the wire might have brought bad news. But Irene, in response to her friend's anxious query, simply gave a determined smile and shook her head.

"I'm leaving," she told Molly, "and I won't be back. If anyone telephones here, particularly Philip Caxter, just say that I have gone and that you don't know where I am."

CRUMPLING the telegram, Irene thrust it into her purse. It took her only a few minutes to pack her bag; then, hearing the telephone bell ring again, she waved good-by to Molly and made a rapid departure, without waiting to learn from whom the call came.

The street was dark outside the apartment house; Irene saw the dim lights of a cab parked a short distance away. She didn't recognize it as the same cab that had brought her here a few hours before, but it was.

In prompt style, Moe flashed the brighter lights and started the cab forward, hoping to take Irene as a passenger.

With that, things happened.

A rattletrap sedan that was seeking a parking space took a roaring lurch and veered, as if out of control, straight across Moe's path. No driver could have avoided that crash, not even the quick-witted Moe. His cab was swept across the sidewalk, to ram its bumper against the apartment house amid a clatter of ripping fenders that were ruined by the sideswipe.

From across the street, Harry Vincent jumped from his coupe; a moment later, he was dodging, diving for cover, as another car veered toward him. It seemed that the street had become alive with madcap drivers; except for a taximan, who suddenly backed to where Irene was standing in astonishment at the smashes that had crippled Moe's cab and ruined Harry's coupe.

"Let me have your suitcase, lady," suggested the driver of the timely cab. "Better hop in, and make it fast. I guess you don't want to be bothered, having to be a witness for a bunch of smashups, no more than I do."

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Irene agreed. As the driver received the suitcase, she jumped into the cab. It was in motion before she closed the door. Harry saw the cab depart and leaped into sight, giving a shout. He was answered by a gunshot from the sedan that had wrecked Moe's cab.

It might have gone badly for Harry, if Moe had not piled in upon the occupants of the sedan, bringing a monkey wrench as a handy weapon.

Taking hard–swung blows from a cabby that they thought was out of the fight was too much for the gun–yanking thugs. They scrambled from their car; before they could turn and aim at Moe, Harry had an automatic in his fist and was opening fire.

Hoodlums fled. Others jumped from the car that had rammed Harry's coupe and tried to cover the wild retreat. Moe, by that time, had picked up a revolver that one of the thugs had lost. He blasted shots that turned the flight into a rout.

Small–fry mobbies were scurrying like rats for the safety of alleyways. Some of them were nicked by bullets, and that was enough for the rest of the yellow crew.

With the street cleared, Moe hopped back into his cab, managed to extricate it from the wreckage of the sedan. He wheeled ahead in wobbly fashion, and Harry sprang aboard. They were past the corner by the time they heard the siren of a distant police patrol car.

Irene's cab had disappeared, its destination unknown. If crooks had flashed upon the scene, intending to harm the girl or abduct her, The Shadow's agents had certainly balked the surprise stroke in efficient and successful style.

But if the thrust had been made with the purpose of cutting off all trails to Irene Selwood—as could be possible—crime had scored again, despite The Shadow's plans to block it!

CHAPTER IX. THE MAN WHO KNEW

THE final telephone call that Irene had ignored was from Philip, to tell her that her father had arrived at the Hotel Beaumont. Seated in his office, with Norman Selwood at the opposite side of the desk, Philip Caxter indulged in a self–satisfied smile.

He hadn't told Selwood that he was calling Irene. It was just as well that he had avoided it. Mention of Irene could come later, after Selwood had discussed the subject that had brought him here. As for Irene herself, the fact that she had just left her friend's apartment did not perturb Philip. He had not expected that she would stay there much longer, with the time for Philip's meeting with her father almost at hand.

Emro was absent from the office. Always discreet, the secretary had merely ushered Selwood into the room where Philip awaited him, then had retired. But this meeting between Philip and Irene's father was observed by a witness: The Shadow.

This night, like the preceding evening, was mild. Philip had left the French windows partly open. Against the dark sky above the level of the glowing horizon, The Shadow could have been a part of night itself.

He had reached the balcony from a cornice just below, for Philip had double–locked the door that made a side entrance to the suite. Whether or not he had done so to preclude another visit from The Shadow, Philip had not stated.

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Studying Norman Selwood, Philip found him to be a very singular man.

Irene's father was about fifty years of age. He had the manner of a professor, and had an abstract way of stroking his chin and frowning his forehead. His face had a kindly, sensitive expression, but it was square-shaped, with the heavy jaw that indicated a man of action. Selwood was handsome; his grizzled hair bore traces of dark brown, very much the color of Irene's.

As Philip summed him, Selwood had been an athlete in his youth, but had combined physical ability with mental alacrity. It was that fact, probably, which had caused him to be chosen as Howard's tutor, a job which he had taken a few years before Philip had been born. Thinking back into the past, Philip recalled that his own age had been six years, when Selwood had left the Caxter employ.

Selwood had married shortly after that; but he had made occasional visits to his former pupil, Howard. On those visits, he had also met Gregg and Philip; which explained why Philip remembered him so well.

Curiously, however, Selwood acted uneasily in Philip's presence. He seemed a bit distressed to find the youngest Caxter so mature. Possibly he had intended to talk to Philip as man to boy, and was realizing that it was impossible. There was another factor, too:

Selwood, after nearly a year of seclusion as a writer, had lost touch with the outside world and found it a bit difficult to open conversation on a subject which he certainly regarded as a delicate one.

"I scarcely know how to begin," he told Philip, in a troubled tone. "You naturally wonder why I have come to see you—"

"Not at all," interposed Philip. "The newspapers have the answer. You are worried about the deaths of those chaps who worked for Gregg."

Selwood nodded, eagerly at first, then a trifle doubtfully.

"Might I ask," he questioned, "what opinion you hold regarding them?"

"They are mere coincidences," returned Philip. "However"—his tone became indulgent—"if you have some theory regarding them, I should be glad to hear it."

Selwood leaned back in his chair and folded his arms. Philip smiled; he saw where Irene had learned some of her mannerisms. Her father had plenty of determination, and could display it. Irene had inherited that trait.

"MR. CAXTER," said Selwood, abruptly, "or, as I prefer to call you, Philip, there is much that I feel you should know. I may be forced to state certain facts that will pain you; may incur your displeasure—"

"Let them come," interposed Philip, still smiling. "I'm ready."

"Very well." Selwood was watching Philip's face, as if he expected the smile to leave it soon. "I must begin by stating that your father, Theobald Caxter, was a man who lived for one desire alone: He wanted power. Power strong enough"—Selwood raised his clenched hand—"to hold the whole world in his fist!"

The smile faded from Philip's lips.

"I rather thought," said he, "that the governor was something of a milder sort."

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“You would have, for you were young,” agreed Selwood. “And when you grew up, your father had passed his prime. He wanted power, your father did, and he got it. But there was something else. He tried to stir that same desire in his sons.”

Philip was shaking his head. He never remembered any stirring efforts on his father's part. All he could recall were instances when his father had been indulgent.

“Hear me out,” insisted Selwood. “Your father tried to force that desire upon Howard, his eldest son. He took a puny weakling and tried to give him a Spartan training. It failed, largely because of your mother's intervention.”

This time, Philip nodded. He remembered that Howard had experienced a severe youth, racked by illnesses that had nearly cost his life. He knew, too, that Howard had been a subject of terrific contention between his parents. It was Selwood who had solved that difficulty.

Howard had been placed in the tutor's care as a compromise; and the beneficial results had been a source of great joy to the entire Caxter family, in later years.

“When I first met Howard,” resumed Selwood, his gaze fixed toward the wall beyond the desk, “I found him to be a pitiful child; detested by his father, pampered by his mother. He was neurotic, subject to fits of temper, of fright. At moments morbid, he would change to a creature imbued with hysterical delight.

“I trained him to govern himself. The first years were difficult; but later, he began to guide himself by my philosophy. He patterned his inclinations after mine. Still a youth, he idolized me. He became, in actual fact, the balanced sort of person that your father wanted for a son.”

Philip's eyes showed surprise. He knew that his father had always retained a certain contempt for Howard, hence this was a curious fact that Selwood had related. Noting Philip's baffled gaze, Selwood explained further.

“Your father never realized it,” he said. “Nor did Howard let him know it. He preferred to be independent, as your father was. He studied your father; copied what he, Howard, thought was worth while; rejected what he did not care for. I saw that, more and more, on every visit. I saw, too, what prevented any close association between your father, Theobald Caxter, and his son Howard.”

“You mean Gregg?”

“Exactly!” Selwood was nodding as he replied. “During those years when Howard had been under my tutelage, Gregg had taken the place of his elder brother. It was Gregg who received his father's training, who was pounded into becoming a future master of finance.

“Gregg satisfied your father. He didn't have to be handled tactfully; was allowed to see and learn things for himself. He was ruled by iron; he learned to drive others with the same rod. But he is powerful only because he was given fifty million dollars for a start.”

Selwood paused. His voice had risen; he was driving home indictments against Gregg, as though he detested the fellow. It was Philip who began to show uneasiness. He glanced at the little clock upon his desk, then said suddenly:

“Hold on! Before you get back to Gregg, suppose you finish with the Caxter family. Just where do I fit in?”

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The stern look left Selwood's eyes.

“You are all right, Philip,” he said. “Otherwise, I wouldn't be talking to you as I am. It is difficult to condemn a man's brother and expect to have him take it fairly, as you have.”

The Shadow saw Philip smile. Obviously, Philip was foreseeing no objection from Selwood when it came to the question of Irene's marriage.

“But you must not misunderstand me,” resumed Selwood. “I have explained how your brothers differed, solely to make you realize that where one is capable of doing great harm, the other, with all his faults—”

THERE was a knock at the door. Emro's tap, signifying something important. Philip called for the secretary to enter. The sallow aid bowed himself into the room, handed a yellow envelope to Norman Selwood.

“A telegram for you, sir. It was just delivered. I thought it might be important.”

Selwood opened the envelope, read the message. His teeth clicked tight, his eyes lifted, with a stare that seemed to bore through Philip. Crumpling the message mechanically, almost as Irene had done with her telegram, Selwood thrust the sheet of paper into his pocket.

“We have discussed matters far enough,” he said in a grating tone. “I am sorry, Mr. Caxter, but I can talk no further.”

“But I should like to hear more—”

“There will be no more.” Selwood had risen, was turning toward the door. “I hope, Mr. Caxter, that you will forget that I even came here!”

Philip reached the door ahead of Selwood. Blocking the way, he tried to force the visitor into a further statement. Philip's tone became unreasonable.

“You always did think a lot of Howard, didn't you?” he jabbed hotly. “Enough so, that you'd think anything mean of Gregg. Well, I'm for Howard, too, and I'm sorry I have Gregg for a brother. A few minutes ago, you had me on the good side of the fence, with Howard. Now, it looks as if I'm being shoved in Gregg's yard. I don't know what made you change your mind, but I don't like it!”

With a sudden show of strength, Selwood took Gregg's arm and shoved it aside. In cold, harsh tone he asserted:

“You are welcome to think anything you wish, Mr. Caxter. Henceforth, I shall keep all my opinions of your family entirely to myself!”

He stalked from the room. Philip and Emro heard the outer door slam behind him. But The Shadow was no longer near to witness the looks that Philip and Emro exchanged. From the moment that Selwood's departure had been certain, The Shadow dropped from the balcony to the ledge below.

WHEN Selwood reached the street, he saw a cab near the corner and started toward it. The cab pulled away, and Selwood had to look for another one on the side street. That delay enabled The Shadow to dart from a side door of the hotel and make a quick spurt across the darkened sidewalk, just as Selwood was settling into the cab.

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As the taxi pulled toward the avenue, Selwood saw the door swing wide, spied a figure of blackness entering, with warning whisper.

Knowing that some strange twist of circumstance had caused Selwood's sudden change of front, The Shadow was adopting a bold measure to learn the answer. Often, before, he had sprung in upon persons who were in the thick of difficulties; had won their confidence and given them real aid toward a solution of their problems.

If Selwood should talk, or show The Shadow that all-important telegram, chances were that the black-cloaked investigator would have the real key to hidden crime. This moment seemed the vital opportunity that The Shadow had awaited.

Instead, that instant very nearly marked The Shadow's finish.

With maddened nervous speed, Norman Selwood whipped an old-fashioned revolver from his overcoat pocket, jabbed the weapon straight for The Shadow's heart. Had the gun had a hair trigger, the tug of Selwood's finger would have meant The Shadow's death. But the shot didn't come with enough speed.

When the gun blasted, The Shadow was already recoiling in a long dive from the taxi's step, that carried him from the path of the knifing flame. The bullet sizzled inches wide of his cloaked shoulder, as The Shadow went sprawling to the middle of the avenue, the spot that the cab had reached.

As brakes shrieked from other cars, and loud cries came from the sidewalk, Selwood pressed the smoking revolver muzzle against the neck of the cab driver and told him to show immediate speed. Neither looked back to that corner where a cloaked figure lay limp and senseless almost beneath the wheels of brake-locked cars.

A crippled taxi had limped up to the crossing, just as The Shadow's sprawling form had been jounced from one car fender to another. From it sprang the driver and a passenger.

Brushing other men aside, they gathered up The Shadow and thrust him into the cab. Shouting that they would rush the victim to a hospital, they were away, the damaged cab making all the speed that its driver could give it.

Harry Vincent and Moe Shrevnitz, arriving at the Hotel Beaumont to report Irene's disappearance and be ready for further orders, had rendered a timely service to their chief. Whether The Shadow was alive or dead, they were carrying him from the public eye, that the mystery which shrouded him might remain unrevealed!

CHAPTER X. THE NEW EMISSARY

A CERTAIN physician in Manhattan, named Dr. Rupert Sayre, had a patient who was both valuable and troublesome. Valuable, because without that patient's frequent patronage, Sayre would not have been able to maintain his costly offices; troublesome, because the patient almost invariably went against Sayre's orders and advice.

The patient's name was Lamont Cranston. Sayre had treated him for bullet wounds, knife cuts, brain concussions, and numerous other accidental injuries. This time, Cranston was recuperating from an automobile smash.

It had happened three nights ago, and from the description of the accident Sayre knew that once again, Cranston's quick-witted behavior had served him in excellent stead.

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Cranston had been buffeted from one car to another; sprawling in front of one automobile, he would certainly have been crushed beneath its wheels, if he had not taken a quick roll in the opposite direction.

Nervy work, that; because another car had been ramming for the very spot that Cranston chose. But it had worked as Cranston hoped. He was just ahead of the first car's wheels when the second vehicle met it in head-on collision. A heavy thump of locking bumpers had knocked Cranston unconscious; but he had escaped serious injury.

Cranston had been brought to Sayre's wrapped in a black cloak, with a slouch hat to match. Whether that meant Lamont Cranston was The Shadow, or that The Shadow was Lamont Cranston, Dr. Sayre did not know. He had figured it one way, then the other; but had never finally made up his mind.

Sayre felt positive on one point only: that The Shadow, otherwise Cranston—or was he Cranston?—would never rest up for as long a period as Sayre thought best for him. There, again, Dr. Sayre found himself wrong, at last.

He had suggested that his patient rest at least two days, and here it was, near the end of the third day, with The Shadow still idling contentedly in the little hospital room that Sayre had specially provided for him.

True, The Shadow had received some telephone calls, from a man named Burbank. So Dr. Sayre decided that everything must be running smoothly with whatever campaign The Shadow had under way. In that verdict, Sayre was wrong again.

Matters were quite out of hand. The Shadow's agents had not gotten a trace of Irene Selwood, nor of her militant father, whose wild attack had brought grief to The Shadow. Whether Norman Selwood had joined his daughter somewhere, was impossible to guess. Their Connecticut cottage was closed; Harry Vincent learned that by a visit to the place.

So matters stood just as they had been. Each of the Selwoods had disappeared separately, the only common point in the two processes being that each had voluntarily dropped from sight immediately after receiving a telegram.

What those messages contained; whether the two wires were identical —those, again, were matters for sheer speculation.

Harry Vincent had done his best to get some clue from Philip Caxter. He had managed to become a guest at one of Philip's parties, but could report very little, except that Philip acted at times as though trying to forget something.

The smug secretary, Louis Emro, was not changed a bit from the description that Harry had of him from The Shadow. But there were times when Philip called Emro into conference privately; that policy, however, was usual with Philip.

Perhaps Philip had given up hope of seeing Irene again, until her father's unreasonable anger had cooled. Possibly he had heard from the girl, in some way or another. Whatever the situation, The Shadow had come to a very definite conclusion regarding both Irene and her father.

If real harm had befallen either of them, it would have struck on the night of their disappearance. Should they still be safe, they would probably remain so. The worst possible step would be to rush a hunt for them. Since both were concerned, to some extent, in affairs involving the three Caxter brothers, The Shadow's course was to await the right opportunity to move into those affairs himself.

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The opportunity was due this afternoon. That was why The Shadow had been content to rest in his present comfortable surroundings. The opportunity, it happened, was in the shape of a directors meeting, to be held at the New Jersey plant of the Caxter Chemical Corporation.

In accordance with Cranston's suggestion, Gregg Caxter had invited the lesser stockholders to the meeting.

AT half past three, Dr. Sayre was somewhat surprised—and rather relieved, too—when Cranston appeared, fully dressed, from the little hospital room. He was carrying a suitcase, which evidently contained his black cloak and hat, along with other accouterments.

Sayre had begun to worry over Cranston's long stay, and was therefore pleased because his patient had voluntarily decided to leave.

From Sayre's office, Cranston went to the Cobalt Club, where he ran into his friend Commissioner Weston. Remarking that he was going on a journey, as his suitcase indicated, Cranston cut off their chat and summoned his limousine.

Just before five o'clock, the big car joined a file of other expensive automobiles that were crossing the Jersey meadows to the chemical plant.

There were about twenty persons in Gregg's spacious tower office when the conference began. Except for Lamont Cranston, the minor stockholders made no better showing than the sheeplike directors. Most of the men who held shares of Caxter stock were old fossils who had refused to give up their small, but much-prized, holdings at a time when Theobald Caxter had tried to buy up all that were outstanding.

With ninety percent of the stock in his craw, Theobald had let the rest go. As matters stood today, his son Gregg owned sixty percent, Howard and Philip each fifteen, while the remaining ten percent belonged to the dozen men who had been invited to watch Gregg Caxter browbeat his board of directors.

Despite his domineering way, Gregg knew how to gloss over matters that he did not care to stress. He touched only lightly on the fact that there had been mysterious disappearances and deaths among the employees at his plant. He dwelt at greater length upon the fact that the company needed to expand, but that Howard and Philip were the obstacles.

“My plan is this,” declared Gregg, briskly, as if the whole idea were a new one, coming under serious consideration for the first time. “We must send some responsible person to talk with my brothers; to learn upon exactly what terms they will release full rights to the patents which they control.

“Let us allow that man a week, so that he may call to see them several times, if necessary. After that, if nothing has been accomplished, I personally”—Gregg twisted his lips wryly, as if he felt the thought distasteful—“shall see my brothers and settle matters with them.”

There were nods of approval, the usual murmurs that followed whatever Gregg said. Then the stooge directors, and even the fossilized stockholders, were astonished when one man put a pointblank objection to Gregg's plan.

“You speak of a responsible person,” remarked Lamont Cranston. “Just where are you going to find one, Mr. Caxter?”

Though Cranston's tone was even, his words, themselves, had a barb. The Shadow was bringing up the tender point that Gregg wanted to avoid: the fact that four men, all deemed responsible, had undertaken the mission

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and had not returned.

With the question, The Shadow had also sized up Gregg correctly, and was leaving everything wide open for a prompt retort. It came—the very response that The Shadow expected.

“Anyone here would be a responsible party,” snapped Gregg, gesturing toward the throng, “and that statement”—a shrewd gleam came to Gregg’s narrowing eyes—“includes you, Mr. Cranston.”

The Shadow delivered a slight smile, typical of Cranston, then let the expression fade. He asked suddenly:

“Do you actually mean that you want me—”

“To become our emissary?” inserted Gregg, promptly. “Certainly! As I recall it”—his eyes were narrowed again—“you were the gentleman who suggested that the stockholders be called into this conference. Therefore, I speak for all when I accept your offer to handle this undertaking.”

BEFORE Cranston could object that he had not made the offer, Gregg was motioning to the directors. They came to their feet and began to applaud, urging the old stockholders to do the same. In the midst of such acclaim, The Shadow could only bow, thereby sealing his acceptance.

“It would be best to see Howard first,” declared Gregg. “He lives near Pennbury, and if you go there tomorrow, Mr. Cranston—”

“Why not today?”

Gregg looked pleased. Apparently, Cranston intended to go through with the duty as soon as possible. But there was an objection, which Gregg voiced.

“It would take you about an hour and a half to drive to Pennbury, Mr. Cranston. By the time you arrived, Howard would be at dinner. His day, as I understand it, ends right then.”

Cranston pointed from the window, across the Skyway, to the hangars of Newark Airport, which glimmered against the sunset.

“I have a plane there,” he remarked. “I can fly to Pennbury in fifteen minutes. There is an airport very near your brother’s estate.”

“Excellent!” exclaimed Gregg. He rapped the table. “The meeting is adjourned, so that Mr. Cranston may start.”

While the others were filing from the room, Gregg drew Cranston to the large table near the window. The table still bore its crate of guinea pigs, the sulphur brick, the various tubes of liquids, and the little metal tank. Gregg began to pack them in a large box, with the exception of the guinea-pig crate.

There were a few more exhibits, which he added; all bore labels that explained them. Remembering some articles in another office, Gregg went to get them. When he came back, he found that Cranston had removed some objects from the box, to make more room.

“You put those in your suitcase?” queried Gregg, referring to the missing items, as he noted the suitcase on the table. “Be very careful; some of these are highly inflammable.”

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The Shadow thanked Gregg for the warning, and helped him pack the last packages in the box, which now had space for them. Gregg shouted for a secretary; a mouselike man appeared from another room.

The fellow had evidently replaced Walters, but he had certainly been in Gregg's employ for a long time, for he had the beaten look that Gregg invariably forced his employees to acquire.

With the pitiful secretary lugging box and suitcase, while Gregg kept admonishing him to be careful, they went out to the elevator. When the box and suitcase were in the car, The Shadow quietly told Gregg that he would need the man no longer.

“My chauffeur will help me with the luggage,” he said, in Cranston's style, “and in just about ten minutes, Mr. Caxter, you will see my plane leave the airport. Don't worry about the cargo. I shall be careful when I land at Pennbury.”

Gregg smiled his approval, as he thrust forward his hand in a farewell shake. When the elevator door had closed, Gregg kept staring at it while the car rumbled downward. Returning to his office, he stared from the window, watching Cranston's big car start off toward Newark Airport.

The chortle that came from Gregg's lips brought a startled look from his pint-sized secretary. The man had never before heard a chuckle so filled with ugliness, yet evidently tinged with pleasure.

Perhaps that evil cluck meant that Gregg Caxter at last was satisfied that he had sent an emissary—Lamont Cranston—who could treat with both Howard and Philip, bringing both of them to terms. Or, possibly—as the uncertain secretary thought—Gregg's venom, for some unknown reason, was actually meant for Cranston.

Whichever the case, The Shadow was embarking upon a mission fraught with hidden danger; a quest from which four men had failed to return. The Shadow had accepted it, despite the hazard, that he might solve the riddle of mysterious crime.

One fact was certain. When The Shadow returned—if he did return—he would hold the key to the whole insidious game.

CHAPTER XI. LINKS TO THE PAST

ARRIVING at Pennbury before Howard Caxter's dinner hour, The Shadow had no trouble in gaining admittance. Howard, it seemed, had heard of Lamont Cranston, and was quite willing to meet a man whom he regarded as a fellow millionaire.

But the visitor was not conducted to Howard's study. Instead, The Shadow found himself guided through huge hallways in the main portion of the house, until he arrived in a vast library.

Howard Caxter was there to greet him, more amiably, even, than he had received Wydell. Tonight, the gaunt man was dressed in a tuxedo, which made him appear thinner than when in normal day wear. At close range, however, The Shadow could tell that Howard's frail build was not the result of ill health.

The eldest Caxter had a strong handshake; his figure was wiry, not weak. Having heard Norman Selwood describe how Howard had developed from a puny youth into a mature man, The Shadow considered him in such terms. Taken accordingly, Howard could be classed as a man of sound physique.

As Selwood had also stated, brain counted with Howard. Though he had not learned the reason for Cranston's visit, his knowing smile told that he had guessed it.

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“You are welcome, Mr. Cranston,” greeted Howard, cordially, “although I can foresee that we shall have unpleasant business to discuss. You have come, no doubt, from my brother Gregg.”

“Not exactly,” was Cranston's quiet reply. “I happen to be a minor shareholder in the Caxter Chemical Corporation, which makes my situation more in common with yours.”

Howard's response was a hearty chuckle. Though he knew that no one individual outside the Caxter family held more than one percent of the chemical corporation stock, he knew that Cranston's argument was technically correct. Since Gregg controlled more than fifty percent of the corporation, the other Caxter brothers had no real voting power in the company.

Of course, there was the matter of the patents, which they held as a club over Gregg. But anyone—Cranston, for instance—might have been able, some way, to gain a similar advantage.

“I believe that we shall get along well together,” decided Howard, as he proffered a box of choice cigars. “Of course, I must insist that you have dinner with me, Mr. Cranston. Otherwise, we shall not find time to talk.”

“I should be glad to accept the invitation,” returned The Shadow, “if I did not feel that I would be out of place among the guests at a formal dinner party.”

“No, no,” insisted Howard. “There will be only one other guest besides yourself; a person who will overlook the fact that you are attired in business clothes.”

“Very well, then. I accept.”

While they puffed their cigars, Howard showed Cranston about the library, which contained a remarkable collection of rare books. At moments, Howard gazed toward the door, as though expecting someone; finally, just as dinner chimes sounded, he heard the approach of light footsteps.

“Here is our other guest,” announced Howard. “Come this way, Mr. Cranston, and I shall introduce you to Miss Selwood.”

IRENE stood in the doorway. She formed a lovely picture, a vision in silver lame, which glimmered with the sheen of moonlight. She could not have chosen a more attractive dinner gown for this setting, where oak-paneled walls and sparse lights provided a subdued background.

There was gladness in Irene's smile; her welcome, when she was introduced to Cranston, indicated that she was quite happy in these surroundings.

One question, at least, had been solved. The Shadow had learned where Irene had eventually gone, after her sudden disappearance. Perhaps his smile, the sort that a man like Cranston would give upon being introduced to so charming a girl as Irene, had something of the inscrutable in it. For, with The Shadow, discoveries such as this were apt to be the result of deduction, rather than coincidence.

If, however, Lamont Cranston had expected to meet Irene Selwood in this mansion, neither the girl nor Howard Caxter suspected it. Nor did they guess that his masklike features were restraining all expression of the elation that he felt.

The three dined in a large room, where wavering candlelight added a shimmer to Irene's silvery attire and brought occasional sparkles to her attractive brown eyes. Howard Caxter was a courteous host, and he did not forget Irene in the course of his conversation.

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“Miss Selwood is a very old friend of mine,” he told Cranston. “Not in years, of course, because she is delightfully young, but in my recollection. Her father”—his tone became serious—“is a man to whom I owe a debt that can never be repaid. He was my tutor, and my confidant, through the days of my troubled youth.

“As for Irene”—he beamed happily, as he looked at the girl—“if she would tell you her age, I could state the precise number of years that I have known her. I remember her as a baby, as a child, and now”—Howard drew a deep sigh—“I see her as a lovely woman, a credit to the man I most admire, her father!”

Howard Caxter raised his wineglass, as in a personal toast to Norman Selwood. Irene lowered her eyes, managed to smile away her momentary embarrassment. Then:

“I had a letter from father today,” she said. “He said that he will be here soon; perhaps within a week.”

Howard nodded. After a short pause, he questioned: “Has Philip written you?”

“No.” Irene pursed her lips. “I don't think he will. I've rather decided to forget Philip”—her tone lost its slightly formal trace— “until I have seen dad.”

“That might be wise,” agreed Howard, with an approving nod. “Of all the men I know, none is better qualified to give advice than your father.”

There was a lull in the conversation, which Howard ended when he turned to The Shadow.

“Miss Selwood refers to my brother Philip,” he said. “You will probably meet him later. He is full of youth, romance, and all the happy-go-lucky thoughts that go with it.”

“But wise enough,” suggested The Shadow, casually, “to abide by the decisions of his eldest brother.”

Howard chuckled.

“You must have talked a lot with Gregg,” he said. “It annoys him because Philip sides with me. But why not? Philip and I have no desire to amass more wealth, or power. At least, I have none; and Philip has never shown that inclination.

“We are proud of the Caxter name, of course. But should it ever evolve upon us to carry on, in place of Gregg, I would intrust all that in Philip's hands. Though he has ideals, Philip is closer to the world than I am.”

DINNER ended amid a parade of quiet, well-trained servants. Irene excused herself and retired to the library. Howard invited The Shadow to the study. A servant followed them, bringing the box and suitcase that the visitor had carried with him. On the way, Howard returned to a fact which had been mentioned in the dinner conversation.

“It is remarkable, Mr. Cranston, to learn that you arrived here so rapidly. If I were a few years younger, I believe that I would fly myself, as you do. But a mere plane flight, I understand, has none of the zest that comes with piloting your own ship.”

Agreeing that solo flying was one of his chief enjoyments, The Shadow paused to admire Howard's indoor garden. After that, they stepped into the study, where Howard crossed to a corner and turned on a floor light beside one of the large chairs.

“Sit here, Mr. Cranston,” he suggested. “You will be more comfortable than anywhere else. Put the luggage

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there, Pelton”—he was speaking to the servant—“and then you may leave us.”

Sinking deep into the heavy-cushioned chair, The Shadow relaxed until the servant had gone. Then, rousing from his reverie, he opened the box that stood beside the chair and passed the various exhibits to Howard Caxter. While Howard was placing them upon a table, The Shadow poked into his suitcase and brought out the few left-overs.

Howard nodded approvingly, as he handled the sulphur brick. It satisfied him on one point.

“This means,” he said, “that Gregg is using raw sulphur to produce sulphuric acid, instead of playing with a dangerous gas like hydrogen sulphide.”

He was interested, too, in the safety gas tank. He toyed with the valve, saw that it was foolproof. That satisfied Howard regarding the precautions that were being taken in the manufacture of poison gas, which Gregg still made because of government contracts.

The tubes of chemicals were also important. Among them were compounds to be used in gas masks, as Howard had requested. Nodding further, Howard came at last to a small box that Gregg had added to the list of exhibits. That box contained a ruddy substance that aroused Howard's delight.

“Red phosphorous!” he exclaimed. Then, reading a typewritten sheet that was with the box: “So Gregg has come to his senses at last. Mr. Cranston, my brother Gregg has committed one great crime—yes, I can honestly call it such—and that has been the manufacture of white phosphorous, for export.

“Used in simple things, like the manufacture of matches, white phosphorous can prove deadly to workers. Such practice is forbidden in this country; but it is still possible to employ white phosphorous for use in smoke screens laid by airplanes. Gregg has been shipping out white phosphorous, but has not specified its use in other countries.

“He has agreed”—Howard tapped the note—“to end that practice. Henceforth, he will export red phosphorous only. Being harmless, it can cause no human woe when used in items of commercial manufacture. That is good, very good!”

RISING, Howard motioned toward the alcove at the rear of the study. He opened the door; stepping through, they stood in a small hallway. The Shadow saw a flight of steps that led to a laboratory directly beneath the study.

Two chemists, attired in white, were at work at benches that bore shiny, polished equipment. In the ceiling of the windowless white-walled room was a hanging lamp with a waving bare flame of scintillating hues, that varied as The Shadow watched them.

“The lamp of progress,” declared Howard, solemnly. “In this laboratory of mine, we have no poison gases; no chemicals that can injure the human race. We devise and test nothing but substances of benefit. I have discovered ways”—his tone became a proud one—“of neutralizing the most harmful gases, rendering them null and void!

“Should Gregg agree—as I now feel sure he will—to manufacture such chemical compounds, I shall gladly agree to any expansion program of his business. The financial part is up to him; he knows that side of it. When you return to Gregg, tell him all that I have said. Mention my laboratory and its lamp of progress, and say that I hope it will be his guide as well as mine.”

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Conducting The Shadow back into the study, Howard pressed a button for a servant. When Pelton arrived, Howard had him carry the box and the suitcase down to the front door, ordering him to summon a limousine to take Mr. Cranston to the landing field.

Irene was not about when The Shadow shook hands with Howard at the front door. In Cranston's casual tone, The Shadow inquired:

“What shall I tell your brother Philip when I meet him?”

Howard Caxter smiled.

“Simply that you have seen me,” he declared, “and that I have decided upon my policy. When I have signed the agreements that Gregg sends me, I shall forward them to Philip. I feel confident that Philip will also sign them, thus completing the arrangements.”

With that assurance—the word that Gregg Caxter had so long awaited—Howard Caxter bowed his visitor out into the night.

CHAPTER XII. THE SECRET VISIT

SO far as his mission concerned Gregg Caxter, The Shadow had completed it. He had spent several hours with Howard Caxter and everything had gone with the greatest smoothness. That was not surprising, considering that Howard had been approached by persons previously—Tyburn and Wydell, for example—who had offered increasing concessions from Gregg.

In Lamont Cranston, Howard had met an emissary who talked his own language; one who was not under Gregg's rule. That, too, could have played a strong part in influencing Howard. But it did not fully satisfy The Shadow.

He, on his own part, had delved into certain matters that intrigued him. One, especially, was why Irene Selwood had gone to Howard's mansion, to await her father there.

Reaching the landing field, The Shadow let Howard's helpful chauffeur load the box and suitcase into the waiting plane, an autogiro. Stepping off into the darkness, The Shadow adjusted an aviator's helmet on his head. At the same time, he delivered a low, clear whisper that brought a man instantly to his side.

The waiting man was Miles Crofton, a pilot who worked for The Shadow. He had come here by car, after The Shadow had started his plane trip. Crofton also wore a goggled helmet; in the darkness, The Shadow gave him brief instructions.

It was Crofton, not The Shadow, who climbed aboard the ship. Just before he took off, the pilot opened the suitcase, removed a few boxes, then let the luggage piece drop from the far side of the plane.

The autogiro took off, leaving the blackness of the landing field beneath it. Members of the small ground crew went their way; Howard's chauffeur returned to the limousine and started back to the estate.

The final incident suited The Shadow to perfection. He wanted it supposed by everyone, particularly by Howard Caxter, that Lamont Cranston had taken off in the plane. For The Shadow was due to appear in a neighborhood where Cranston had been; and should he, by chance, be sighted, his chief wish would be to keep his double identity secret.

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Finding Crofton's parked car, The Shadow removed his hat and cloak from the suitcase, along with other needed items, then placed the bag in the car. That done, he started a roundabout route by foot, back in the direction of Howard's mansion.

Tonight, The Shadow's goal was not the side door that led into the tropical garden. He had found a better mode of entry. During that view of Howard's laboratory, The Shadow had noticed a doorway at the rear of the hall. It obviously opened to the ground in back of the wing, wherein the study and the laboratory were located.

Reaching Howard's premises, The Shadow used the utmost caution. On estates the size of this, the grounds were usually patrolled by watchmen late at night, and the hour was already well advanced.

There would still be a while before midnight; but that was quite late in this vicinity. The people of Pennbury went to bed early, and Howard Caxter, according to all reports, had acquired the same habit.

Moreover, there was a trickle of moonlight through the thin clouds that partly veiled the sky, and that forced The Shadow to choose a careful course sheltered by trees and shrubbery, whichever happened to be most convenient.

THE rear door, once reached, was not a difficult problem. It was locked, but not bolted. Probing the lock with a plierlike pick, The Shadow found the key and turned it. Inside the door, he locked it behind him, and stole along the hallway toward the steps that led down into the laboratory.

Men were still at work there, under the colorful flame that Howard had termed the "lamp of progress." Gliding a few steps downward, The Shadow observed that the lab was well fitted with large tanks, with varied markings. Each tank, of course, contained some different type of gas which Howard Caxter used in his experiments to benefit humanity.

Moving up to the ground-floor level, The Shadow saw a stairway that led to the second floor. He followed it, came upon a dividing passage that led through two catwalks, one on each side of the dome that topped the indoor garden. Reaching the main part of the mansion, The Shadow saw spreading hallways, dimly lighted.

He took the hall to the left, for the all-important reason that he heard footsteps coming from the passage on the right.

Despite his gliding skill, The Shadow must have become momentarily visible against an end window, with its pale block of moonlight, for he heard the footsteps stop. Then a low-pitched, but gruff, voice inquired:

"Who's there?"

Close against the wall, The Shadow tried the first door that he found. It was locked; rather than waste time with it, he eased to the next, to find it also locked. He was moving to a third door, when someone joined the man who had challenged him.

From his voice, the newcomer was Pelton, and he seemed to have authority over the first servant.

Flashlights blinked; the pair were coming along the hall. Rather than risk a scuffle that would make his visit known, The Shadow tried the third door. It opened at touch, with a noiseless sweep that The Shadow appreciated. Inside the room, which was lighted vaguely by a small lamp in a far corner, he closed the door and turned the key that he found in the lock.

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From beyond a partly closed door at the far side of the room, The Shadow heard the splash of water. Then, as he was choosing a darkened space along the opposite wall, there was a pounding at the door from the hall. The Shadow heard Pelton's voice, calling:

“Miss Selwood! Miss Selwood!”

Chance had brought The Shadow into Irene's bedroom. With the darkness that the wall afforded, his only policy was to remain where he was. Further events, as they developed, would shape The Shadow's plans.

Irene was stepping into the bathtub, when she heard the pounding from the hallway door. One foot dipped into the bath, she paused, caught the anxious tone of Pelton's voice as the servant called her name.

Stepping to a corner, Irene picked up a bathrobe and hurriedly slipped her right arm into its sleeve. The other sleeve was inside out, so she drew the robe across beneath her right arm and clamped it there with her elbow.

Pelton's knocks were louder, and would soon arouse the entire household. Without waiting to hunt for slippers, Irene opened the bathroom door and tripped out through the bedroom. She saw her reflection as she passed the mirror on the inside of the bathroom door and gave a light laugh.

Her bathrobe was ample coverage, as she wore it, but it reminded her of a Roman toga—the way she had it tightened on the right, with her left shoulder and arm bare. Using her right hand to keep the robe about her, Irene found difficulty in turning the door key left-handed. Finally, she managed it and opened the door halfway, to meet Pelton and the other servant.

“I'm sorry, Miss Selwood,” apologized Pelton. “I did not wish to disturb your bath, but may I ask, did you have this door locked?”

The question rather surprised Irene. Offhand, she wasn't sure that she had locked the door; but since the key was turned when she reached it, she naturally decided that she had been responsible.

“Why, yes,” declared Irene. Then, laughing: “I usually lock the door of my bedroom. Is anything the matter?”

“Nothing at all,” replied Pelton. He had been looking about the bedroom during those few moments. “We just weren't sure—that is, we thought someone was about. Good night, Miss Selwood.”

IRENE closed the door and locked it. Turning toward the bathroom, she was just beginning to relax her hold on the cumbersome and no-longer-needed robe, when she stopped stock-still, facing the oblong light that came from the connecting door.

A black-cloaked figure had stepped in front of that lighted background. Irene recognized the eyes that glittered from beneath the slouch hat. Her thoughts flashed back to that night at Philip's; but this time, Irene did not scream. Waiting, she heard a low, whispered voice cautioning her to silence. The tone gave her confidence that all was well.

Approaching, The Shadow motioned toward a chair near the window. Irene nodded, went to the chair and sat down. The spectral shape of The Shadow remained close beside a table; his voice, strangely sibilant, was too subdued to be heard outside the bedroom, yet entirely clear to Irene.

“Describe the message,” spoke The Shadow, “that caused you to come here.”

Half to her own surprise, Irene did not protest the summary command. There was something in the voice that

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called for trust, as well as obedience.

“It was a telegram,” the girl whispered, “from my father. He told me to take the next train for Pennbury; that Mr. Caxter, Howard Caxter, would expect me.”

“And you still have that message?”

“Yes.” Irene arose, reached for her handbag on the table. “Here it is.”

Finding the telegram wasn't easy, with one hand. Irene tried to bring her right hand into use, but the bathrobe began to slip from beneath her elbow and she had to pause, to readjust it.

Obligingly, The Shadow found the yellow envelope for her; he spread the crumpled telegram and read it by the doorway light.

“You have written your father?”

“Yes, and dad has replied. His letters, though, are very brief. They haven't told me about... about—”

“About Philip?”

Irene came straight up as she heard The Shadow's quiet statement. She had begun to regard this cloaked personage as an incredible being; now, she was convinced of it. Somehow, he had learned that she loved Philip, a fact which she had related only to her father, although she had hinted it to Howard.

It struck her suddenly that The Shadow might have come from her father; and therewith, her trust became absolute. Thinking swiftly, Irene tried to connect The Shadow with someone whom she had met. The first person she remembered was Lamont Cranston; momentarily, Irene smiled.

She pictured herself as she had been only a few hours ago, gowned in silver, meeting the immaculately attired Mr. Cranston. Here she was clad simply in a bathrobe, donned hurriedly, at that, talking with another visitor, The Shadow. A stranger quite different from Cranston; for The Shadow, garbed in cloak and hat, seemed a being of darkness come to life.

Keenly, though, Irene compared the two, wondering if Cranston could be The Shadow. Then she decided otherwise. The Shadow was taller, definitely, than Lamont Cranston. It didn't occur to Irene that the difference was due to her own lessening in height.

When she had met Cranston she had worn high-heeled silver slippers; at this moment, she was standing barefooted.

Then Irene found herself talking, breathlessly pouring words that she could not restrain. She was releasing the worry that she had hidden ever since she had arrived here, to a person who, she felt sure, could provide all answers.

“WHY did father wire me?” she asked. “He hasn't come here, as he said he would; his letters haven't explained. What does he know that... that may be dangerous? Why has he feared for me so much that he has sent me here, so that I can be safe from whom?”

“What terrible thing involves the Caxter family? I like Howard; he admires my father and is so ready to help me. I despise Gregg, though I have never met him; but I have heard so much about his mean ways. I... love

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Philip!” Irene's voice had a sob. “I really love him... but—”

Irene couldn't finish the sentence. New doubts had seized her, with the fear that the climax to all this mystery would bring sweeping disappointment. She felt the touch of The Shadow's hand upon her shoulder; its pressure was soothing. Then he was guiding her toward the broad window that overlooked the shrub-filled lawn, with the woods beyond.

“Those trees”—The Shadow pointed, as he whispered—“are where you are to watch for certain signals. With a light like this”—he blinked a tiny flashlight that glimmered green, then red, finally white— “according to the code that you will find inside the case. You can signal, also, toward the trees, should you find reason.

“Do not worry for the present. You are safe here and will be, until certain persons make dangerous moves. I have but one question: I must know the address to which you sent the letters that you have written to your father.”

Irene gave the address; it was in New York. Her tone was brave again, her hand firm, as she received the tiny flashlight that The Shadow pressed into her palm.

Then The Shadow took a step toward the corner, extinguished the room's lone light. With a sweep, he was back at the window and across the sill, to the outside wall!

Gasping astonishment, Irene reached the window. Both hands on the sill, she stared downward through the darkness. She thought she could see The Shadow, working his way to the ground by gripping the stony surface of the wall.

Minutes passed; a sudden tremor seized Irene. A flashlight—a watchman's torch—was sweeping from the corner of the house. The brilliant glow was playing along the ground.

Irene wasn't conscious of herself as she crouched to the level of the window sill, her knees against the folds of the robe, which had slipped to the floor ahead of her. She was thinking of The Shadow, fearing that he would be discovered.

The watchman's light sprayed the wall, swept along the shrubbery, cutting a wide path that faded into the dull moonlight near the hazy trees. That beam showed total blankness. The watchman continued on his way.

There was amazement in Irene's happy sob. It came with the realization that The Shadow, swifter than Irene could have imagined, had vanished moments ago into the confines of the night!

CHAPTER XIII. THE CHANGED SCENE

IT was late when The Shadow arrived back in New York, in Crofton's car. Too late to begin a search for Norman Selwood; for the address that Irene had given was an office, where her father either called for his mail or had it forwarded. Therefore, The Shadow postponed that hunt until the next day, for two very good reasons.

First, The Shadow was convinced, as he had told Irene, that everything would be safe so long as the present status continued. Again, The Shadow, remembering his own encounter with Norman Selwood, knew that the missing man, when located, would have to be approached with utmost care.

Perhaps, like his daughter, Selwood had merely become overexcited when first accosted by The Shadow, and would be less zealous when approached again. But that, in a sense, might make him more dangerous. If he

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still had his gun at hand, he might use it deliberately.

There were certainly reasons why Selwood did not want to talk with anyone. They might be learned from Selwood himself, or from the telegram that the man had received at Philip's. But Selwood, like his daughter, had probably retained the message that came to him. The only answer was to find Selwood, surprise him, and urge him to talk—under pressure, if necessary.

On the surface, Selwood might fit anywhere into the curious and sinister scheme of things that involved the Caxter brothers. Irene, of course, was ignorant of how her father stood.

Had The Shadow told her of Selwood's actions the other night, Irene might have lost faith in her father. Therefore, The Shadow had discreetly avoided mention of the startling episodes and had let the girl form the conclusion that he had already conferred with Selwood.

That was particularly appropriate, because The Shadow had delved deep beneath the surface. He had the real answer to the riddle, and felt sure that when other facts were learned, they would piece into the picture exactly as he visualized them. For The Shadow had tested out his theories and had proved them to his satisfaction.

One thing that pleased him was the dead guinea pig. It was delivered in a cardboard box punched with holes, and it came from one of his agents. To just what tests the guinea pig had been submitted, The Shadow alone knew.

Hitherto, the dead animal had not been brought to light; but it had become, particularly when dead, a most important actor in a strange, hidden drama.

BY mid-afternoon of the next day, The Shadow, aided by Moe Shrevnitz, in the latter's reconditioned cab, had successfully traced Norman Selwood. The office where Selwood's mail was delivered was occupied by a real-estate agent.

A special messenger had left that office carrying a letter, which he took to the New Tower Apartments, several blocks away. When the messenger had entered the elevator, The Shadow heard him tell the operator to take him to the twenty-sixth floor.

That happened to be the top floor of the New Tower, and it had only four apartments. From the remote location, it was logical that Selwood was occupying one of them, that the letter had been delivered to him. Further evidence came, when The Shadow noticed tough-looking characters loitering in the vicinity of the New Tower.

Mobbies like those had figured in many episodes. There had been a thuggish crew around the chemical works, that first evening; another, when Irene called on Philip; a third, when the girl had left New York. They had, at times, been ready to answer the beck of someone higher up; their work, too, had been to cover up certain matters.

Just why they were around the New Tower, the thugs alone knew; but The Shadow, in a guise different from Cranston's, didn't stop to ask them. He had his own answer; and, moreover, when the right time came—soon after dusk—those lurkers wouldn't be able even to glimpse him.

While that afternoon was waning, another man was keeping tabs on Gregg Caxter. The man intrusted to that duty was Clyde Burke, a reporter with the New York Classic. Actually, Clyde was an agent of The Shadow; and ever since the story had broken, regarding tragedy in the Caxter plant, Clyde had done his best for Gregg

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Caxter.

In fact, Clyde was the only reporter allowed on the premises, and one reason was because he never tried to hurry Gregg into an interview. This afternoon, Clyde was lounging in the vacant office where the directors usually assembled.

Gregg was very busy; he was having dinner in his private office and might not be able to talk to Clyde until eight o'clock. That didn't discourage the reporter; on the contrary, it pleased him. Clyde's real purpose here was to make sure that Gregg did not go elsewhere, for any sudden move by Gregg might ruin The Shadow's plans.

Just what those plans were, Clyde himself did not know. He understood that Harry Vincent had gone to Pennbury, to be on watch until The Shadow arrived there. Whatever Harry's vigil, there was some reason why it could not begin until dusk; hence The Shadow was anxious to keep matters exactly as they were for a while longer.

It was close to six o'clock; with gray gloom streaking the meadows, Clyde felt quite satisfied. Unfortunately, he could not hear what was being said in Gregg's private office, where the dark-haired chemical king was talking to his dull-witted secretary.

"No word from Cranston yet?" Gregg's eyes were narrowed shrewdly. "Don't you think that is odd, Brooks?"

"No, sir," replied the secretary, after some consideration. "I believe you said that you intended to give him a week for negotiations."

"I did. But his plane has not returned to Newark Airport."

"He might have flown elsewhere, sir."

Gregg smiled, his lips forming one of its contemptuous expressions. He said, sarcastically:

"Sometimes, Brooks, you become quite as profound as my lamented secretary Walters. I am anxious to know two things." Again his gaze was shrewd. "First, if Cranston called on my brother Howard; second, dependent on the first, if he visited Philip afterward."

That was all too deep for Brooks. Gregg suddenly changed the subject:

"Is that reporter, Burke, still out there?"

Brooks nodded. Gregg opened a door that revealed a spiral stairway.

"Keep him there," sneered Gregg, "as long as he is fool enough to stay. I'm going out to settle a few things for myself."

THE moment that the door closed behind Gregg Caxter, a serious factor had entered into The Shadow's well-laid plans. Two hours were due to pass before Clyde would learn that Gregg had gone, and that period might spell tragedy.

Yet, at that very moment, another development was under way, to threaten further, and perhaps more serious, disaster. The man who figured chiefly in the other occurrence was, ironically, Inspector Joe Cardona.

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In his office, Cardona was grumbling as he mulled over a batch of report sheets. Here he was, working late at headquarters, going around in circles. Joe was still thinking in terms of the frustrated robbery at the Hotel Beaumont. There was something he hadn't been able to learn about it.

Why, on the night after the shooting, with Denbry, the crooked house dick, already dead, had someone barged out of the side door of the Beaumont and started shooting from a taxicab?

Witnesses declared that the fleeing gunman had dropped someone who tried to jump into his cab. The victim had been hurled in front of other cars, and a second cab had taken him to a hospital. Suspecting homicide, Cardona had taken the easier way; he had tried to find out what had actually happened to the victim.

That trail had been an utter blank. Joe had squared it with the commissioner, who was vastly interested in the case, by claiming that maybe there hadn't been a victim. Perhaps, said Joe, the man who dived from the cab step had not been hurt at all. But there was no doubt that someone had fired a shot from the taxi, and it was Cardona's job to find out who the sharpshooter was.

Joe was ready to give the job up for the night, when a heavy knock sounded at the door. A brawny detective sergeant entered, dragging a scrawny, bleary-eyed taxi driver. The fellow, it seemed, had been hauled from his cab half drunk; about to be slated at a local precinct, he had pleaded to see Inspector Cardona.

"I gotta get out of this," the fellow pleaded to Joe, "or I'll lose my job an' the missus will murder me! Honest, it's the first time I ever boozed while I was drivin'—an' the cops grabbed me before I done any harm on account of it."

"A serious offense," began Cardona, gruffly. "I can't help you—"

"Maybe you'll square me"—the taxi man seemed quite sober in his eagerness—"if I tell you what gave me the jitters an' started me on the booze route to forget it."

Sagely, Cardona showed an expression of interest that made the cabby think his plea was granted.

"It happened outside the Hotel Beaumont," began the cabby, "when a guy jumped into my cab. We're wheelin' across the avenue, when this bimbo outs with a roscoe and tries to plug some gazebo that was on the steps—"

Cardona was on his feet. His eagerness to hear more made the informant continue:

"An' then the guy sticks the rod to the back of my neck an' tells me to drive like blazes! So I go off, hell bent, an' finally we wind up near a big apartment house, where the guy slips me a double sawbuck to keep my trap shut."

In proof, the cabby produced a twenty-dollar bill and unfolded it, as if that amount of money, in the hands of a taxi driver, would support any story.

"Why didn't you report this before?" demanded Cardona.

"Nobody was bumped, was they?" queried the cabby. "I didn't see nothin' in the papers about it. I wouldn't want the guy with the roscoe hoppin' in my hack again, would I—this time for real? He looked like a smart gazebo, the kind that wouldn't forget to lamp my name an' my mug from the license I've got showin' in the cab."

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Cardona nodded slowly, then made a provisional offer.

“I’ll get you off the slate,” he promised, “if you go on with the rest of your story.”

The cabby grinned. He did have more to tell.

“I felt better,” he said, “after the guy had climbed out. I sneaked around the block an’ seen him goin’ into the big apartment house. It’s called the New Tower, an’ the next day, when I was up near there, I chinned with the doorman.

“Seems like a guy named Norman Selwood has took an apartment up on the top floor. The tin–button guy that handles the door says Selwood is a doctor, or a professor, or somethin’ like that, an’ he looked it, from what I saw of him.”

Cardona reached for his hat, told the detective sergeant that he would be back in a few hours. The cabby began a protest.

“I started gettin’ the jeebies later, see? Seems like whenever I drive at night, I’m thinkin’ a guy’s goin’ to pop up with a gat. If I get an edge on, I forget it.”

“You can forget the whole thing,” Cardona informed him, “if I find out that this yarn of yours is on the level. Keep him here, Markham”—this was to the detective sergeant—“until you hear from me.”

OUTSIDE headquarters, Joe Cardona studied the darkening sky, then decided to have some dinner before embarking on his inspection trip of the New Tower Apartments. An hour’s delay, Joe decided, was something that wouldn’t matter. Besides, it would be darker then, and his arrival at the New Tower would be less conspicuous.

That hour’s postponement was a sort that could prove much more important than Cardona supposed. It was the one possible factor that might prevent the ace inspector from blundering into a case that actually belonged to The Shadow.

Since darkness was the time when The Shadow’s own move would begin, there was still a chance that the master sleuth might salvage some results from his own intended visit to Norman Selwood.

CHAPTER XIV. CROSSED PATHS

AT that same hour of six, Irene Selwood was having an early dinner with Howard Caxter. Meals were on no set schedule in the mansion; their time seemed governed by Howard’s whims. He always asked Irene, however, if the chosen time suited her, and the girl invariably agreed.

Dinner, though, was always a formal matter with Howard; a fact that Irene liked. It gave her a chance to wear the new and attractive gowns that her father had sent here for her. Tonight, she was clad in a black dinner dress, tastefully decorated with gold ornaments which glittered prettily in the candlelight.

Howard Caxter, ever thoughtful, had sent her a corsage of tea roses, that Pelton had plucked from the garden. Dressed as usual in his tuxedo, Howard seemed very pleased to be dining with so delightful a companion.

Thick darkness had settled outside the dining–room window by the time the meal was over. Irene had become silent; she was thinking of the wooded patch beyond the shrubs, where The Shadow had promised to be on vigil.

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Deciding that she did not want to stay in the library and read, Irene looked for some pretext whereby she could go to her bedroom and remain there during the evening. She noticed that Howard was wondering why she had lagged in conversation; so the girl made the most of it.

“I think I shall go upstairs and lie down awhile,” remarked Irene. She drew her hand across her forehead. “I’ve had a slight headache this afternoon.”

“You’re sure it is not severe?” asked Howard, anxiously. “Headaches can become serious, you know.”

“Not this one,” smiled Irene. She stroked back the hair from her forehead, as if to dispose of the imaginary ache. “It’s simply that I am tired. I’m just a bit”—she gave her shoulders a shivery shrug— “just a trifle out of sorts.”

The shrug was a mistaken gesture.

“My dear child!” exclaimed Howard. “You have a chill! You must do more than merely rest; you must go to bed, while I have Hilda prepare a hot lemonade and bring it up to you.”

Hilda happened to be the housekeeper, who came every day from Pennbury and did not leave the mansion until after dinner. She was a fluttery old soul, but exact when she followed orders. It would be as difficult to argue with Hilda as with Howard. There was nothing for Irene to do but smile gracefully and leave the dining room.

BY the time she had reached her bedroom, Irene was fuming. She didn’t feel ill; she wasn’t even tired, yet she was being sent to bed at seven o’clock, like a “dear child,” as Howard had described her.

Moonlight from above the trees was flooding the bedroom, and Irene hated the sight of the place.

She wanted to break up the furniture, but managed to resist that mad desire. She snatched the tea roses angrily and pricked her fingers in the attempt. She was about to throw the corsage on the floor, when she realized that the flowers, too, were actually Howard’s.

Irene put the roses in a vase, still realizing that, unless she cared to admit that she had lied, she would have to be undressed and in bed by the time Hilda arrived.

Irene’s clothes, at least, were her own. Savagely, she kicked away her shoes; tugging at her gown, she was glad that it tore when she pulled it furiously from her arms.

Her temper completely lost, Irene flung remaining garments right and left, until her supply was gone and she stood with hands clenched and trembling.

Mild moonlight seemed laughing at the girl, as its glow bathed her tense body. Hurling herself upon the bed, Irene buried her face and pounded the pillows with her fists, while her feet kicked the folded quilt. When her violence diminished, she still fumed mentally, until a sound suddenly brought back her senses.

It was a car, coming in by the driveway. Probably a car for Hilda, which meant that the housekeeper would be hurrying up here. Irene didn’t want to be found in her present state, with the clothes—strewn floor as evidence of her childish behavior. Bounding to the bureau, she found a pair of silk pajamas and wriggled into them.

Irene thanked the moonlight this time, as she rapidly gathered her scattered clothes, finding all but one lost stocking. Arranging the garments on a chair, she scrambled into bed just as Hilda knocked at the door.

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Entering, the housekeeper turned on a lamp.

“My, my!” clucked Hilda, as she brought the hot lemonade. “Your face is flushed; you have a fever!”

“I’m all right,” assured Irene, drawing up the covers tight and propping herself against the pillows that Hilda raised. “Don’t wait here, Hilda. Your car just drove in.”

The woman shook her head. Looking about, as if fearing hidden ears, she whispered to Irene in an awed tone:

“Do you know whose car that was? It belongs to a man that none of us thought would ever come here again. A spiteful man, who hates good Mr. Howard—yes, hates him because Mr. Howard is kind and treats poor people well. It’s Mr. Gregg who just drove in here, that’s who!”

HILDA went out, leaving Irene bolt-upright, staring toward the window. Though her fingers gripped the warm plate that held the hot lemonade glass, Irene was swept with a chill—this time, a real one—that seemed to freeze her from head to foot.

She wished again that she hadn’t stupidly talked herself into being sent to bed at this early hour. But she didn’t dare get dressed, for fear that Howard had told Hilda to remain. Should the housekeeper return and find Irene dressed, the woman might be foolish enough to make a worried report to Howard.

Then Gregg would learn that Irene was in the mansion; something that Howard, ordinarily, would not reveal. That secret must be kept at any cost, for if Gregg was her father’s archenemy, he would also be Irene’s worst foe.

Irene had come to regard Gregg as the presiding satan of a particular inferno known as the Caxter Chemical Works; not a bad analogy, considering Gregg’s slave-driving tactics and the sulphurous fumes that issued from his plant, to wither what scant foliage the Jersey meadows boasted.

Deciding that she would have to stay in bed, or close to it, Irene wondered if she could risk a reading lamp. That turned her thoughts to the little flashlight that The Shadow had given her.

Laying the lemonade glass on a chair, Irene hopped from bed and took the tiny torch from the bottom of her purse. Approaching the window, she blinked a cautious signal, a combination of red and green glimmers, which meant to stand by.

Instantly, the flash was answered from a spot somewhere in the trees. Irene’s relief was immediate. Taking a chair near the window, she waited, listening for sounds of Hilda but otherwise peaceful in mind. The Shadow had made good his promise to have aid ready at immediate notice.

Meanwhile, the meeting between Howard and Gregg was proving much less heated than Irene would have supposed. The two Caxters were on their way to Howard’s study; Gregg’s contempt was directed only at the tropical garden, which he considered as a useless adornment to the house.

The study pleased him better. Except for the big chairs and laden bookshelves, it looked something like an office. Gregg approved the chairs, after he had settled into the one where Howard placed him, because finding fault with comfort was something that Gregg never did. As for the books, they related to technical subjects, mostly chemistry, and were therefore useful.

Howard’s cigars were more expensive than those that Gregg handed around at directors’ meetings. Puffing one of the cigars, Gregg remarked casually:

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“A friend of mine dropped out to see you last night. Did he meet you, Howard?”

“If you mean Mr. Cranston,” returned Howard, “yes. He and I spent a very pleasant evening together.”

“Did you come to any solution to our difficulties?”

“Certainly! Cranston showed me the exhibits, and they were satisfactory. I specified terms which I considered reasonable. I supposed that you would have heard from Cranston, by this time.”

Gregg shook his head.

“Of course,” added Howard, “Cranston intended to see Philip. He stayed here rather late”—Howard was smiling—“at least, late as we consider it in Pennbury. He might have postponed visiting Philip until tonight.”

“Cranston didn't come back to Newark Airport,” declared Gregg. “Perhaps he landed somewhere else.”

Howard's eyes widened into an alarmed look. Suddenly, his voice became stern, as he reminded:

“Some of those materials he brought here were inflammable, Gregg. You should have warned Cranston not to carry them by plane.”

“Why didn't you warn him?” jabbed Gregg. “You saw the stuff, didn't you?”

“Of course!” Howard's tone was rueful. “I should have thought of it. But he mentioned the matter of the plane trip before he produced the exhibits. I didn't actually connect the two. You had better call up Cranston's home. At once, Gregg!”

OBLIGINGLY, Gregg took the telephone that Howard handed him. Connected with Cranston's New Jersey home, Gregg heard a servant state that the missing millionaire had not returned there. Nor had Cranston been heard from at the Cobalt Club.

“At the Cobalt Club?” Gregg faked his query. “Thank you.” Replacing the telephone on its stand, he coolly lied to Howard: “They have heard from Cranston at the Cobalt Club. Once in the air, I suppose he found the return flight to Newark too short and trivial.”

Howard nodded at the logical remark. He gave a relieved sigh, then said to Gregg:

“Since Cranston will probably see Philip tonight you can depend upon hearing from him tomorrow. If Philip's terms concur with mine, you can draw up the final agreements for our signatures.”

Gregg repressed a shrewd glance of triumph. He had handled the Cranston matter smoothly. This was the time to follow up that neat bit of work.

“I have brought the agreements,” said Gregg, producing a bundle of typewritten papers. “They allow for all that you have asked; possibly more. I understand”—Gregg was cautious, for he was repeating snatches from Wydell's notes and did not want the conversation to revert to the chemist's death—“that you expect us to manufacture humane compounds, along with the harmful gases that our present contracts call for.

“Very well, Howard”—Gregg passed the papers to his brother—“we shall do so. You've given me a grand idea! Why shouldn't chemicals for gas masks, compounds to neutralize poisons, be in great demand? There will be another war scare eventually, like the last one. That will be when I shall unload all these new products

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at a profit.”

Looking up from the papers, Howard made severe response:

“Not at a profit, Gregg!”

“I don't mean an exorbitant profit,” hastened Gregg. “Merely a normal one, Howard. Simply to defray costs and storage and bring in the usual interest, in return for principal invested. After all”—Gregg was up from his chair, spreading his arms—“you have never tried to interfere in my management of financial affairs, Howard.”

Chin in hand, Howard seemed to be contemplating the future of Gregg's new policy, foreseeing that manufacture of the beneficial products would be the first important step, regardless of what might follow.

“People don't profiteer nowadays,” insisted Gregg. “Our government contracts are down to the lowest possible margin. That's why we need to expand. We have to double the business to stay where we are.”

Howard read the agreements, then summoned Pelton and another servant. Taking a pen, the eldest Caxter solemnly signed, in triplicate, and handed the pen to Gregg. Affixing his own signature to the three papers, Gregg turned them over to the witnesses.

There was a blank space for Philip's signature; others for more witnesses. Extending his hand, Gregg received Howard's grip, and said:

“After Philip signs, I'll send your copy here. I thank you, Howard, and with this understanding, I hope that we shall forget any past disagreements.”

“We never disagreed,” said Howard, in a reflective tone. “Our tastes merely differed, Gregg.”

“You're right, Howard. By the way”—Gregg licked his dry lips— “you haven't anything in the way of a drink, have you?”

“Some Madeira,” replied Howard. “Pelton can bring it.”

Gregg's face went wry. He never had cared for wine, least of all Madeira. It was another demonstration of how Gregg's tastes and Howard's varied. Gathering together the witnessed papers, Gregg said good night, that he would have to hurry into New York. Whether he was more anxious to see Philip, or find a drink, he didn't state.

From her window, Irene saw Gregg's limousine swing out through the driveway. Irene had donned slippers and a satin lounging gown. Hilda would certainly rap after a while, to find out whether or not Irene had gone to sleep. That would give the girl time to be in bed, attired only in pajamas, should the housekeeper finally decide to enter.

Blinking the flashlight, Irene sent a colored signal telling that all danger, if any, was past. With Gregg's departure, she was sure that nothing serious could happen here tonight. Unfortunately, Irene did not realize certain consequences of Gregg's visit, that The Shadow would have foreseen.

Gregg's move, plus factors that The Shadow was already encountering in Manhattan, were capable of carrying crime's strife to any quarter; even to this isolated mansion, where all, at last, seemed serene.

CHAPTER XV. CRISSCROSSED CRIME

WATCHERS about the New Tower Apartments were not particularly conspicuous when The Shadow arrived there early in the evening, but they were shifting posts when he saw them. From all appearances, fresh members of some mob were relieving others of the crew.

One man, The Shadow noticed, had come from a drugstore, where he had probably made a telephone call. He buzzed something to another, then the two parted. After that, the watchers lurked very much in the background.

They had not identified The Shadow. That was certain, for two reasons. First, they had been on the move when he approached; second, they could not possibly have recognized him. He was wearing the bulky blue-gray uniform of the apartment-house doorman, with the large visor of a fancy cap pulled well down over his eyes.

Like the thugs who watched the place, the doormen worked in shifts, and their uniforms consisted only of the big coats, which they wore over ordinary blue serge suits. If one didn't show up at the right time—which wasn't unusual, as they worked on a tip basis only—the man on duty usually went to eat without waiting; then came back later and stayed around awhile.

Tonight, one doorman had gone to his favorite eating place, a combination lunch and bar. While there, he had received a note from his relief, a message sent by a taxi driver. It said that the other man was on the job, and that his friend, the cabby, would be glad to bring back the first doorman's so-called uniform.

The taxi driver was Moe. Receiving the coat and hat, he had met The Shadow around the corner and had given them to him. Patrolling thugs, used to the ways of the New Tower, had not been surprised when they saw a supposed doorman coming back from supper.

After a very few minutes on his temporary job, The Shadow saw the relieving doorman coming from the corner. The fellow had stayed too long in a poolroom, where the clock had stopped. One of The Shadow's agents had induced him to stay there, while The Shadow had been making the fake call to the lunchroom.

From the doorway, The Shadow gave an impatient gesture, signifying that the other man had better hurry and take over. Heading inside, he walked past a lobby clerk, through to a little storeroom near an inside stairway.

As he removed the doorman's coat, the folds of The Shadow's cloak slid downward. Pulling his slouch hat from beneath his cloak, The Shadow clamped it on his head with one hand, while he hung up the coat and cap with the other.

He was halfway up the stairs, lost in their gloom, when the relief doorman arrived and opened a second locker, to take out his own uniform.

On the fourth floor, where a large party was in progress, The Shadow bundled his cloak and hat over his arm. In tuxedo attire, wearing the visage of Cranston, The Shadow pressed the "up" button of an elevator and rode to the twenty-second floor. Many of the guests were from this apartment house; the elevator man didn't bother about any who were taking inside rides.

On the twenty-second floor, The Shadow again noticed something that he had particularly intended to observe, having earlier in the afternoon studied the floor plans of the New Tower.

Although there had been only four elevator doors in the lobby, there were five up here. The reason was that

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one of the cars was a service elevator and had its ground-floor entrance away from the lobby.

Opening to the side alley, that elevator offered a private route to any floor above; but The Shadow had avoided it for the very good reason that strolling thugs were keeping special watch on that side entrance.

THE four top floors of the apartment building were cut off by a heavy steel door and elevators never went up to them, except by special order, which had apparently applied in the case of the messenger who had brought the letter from the real-estate office. Those floors, a small tower in themselves, were not officially open for occupancy.

To reach the twenty-sixth floor, The Shadow had to take a dizzy outside route, up the wall itself; but except for the mental hazard of being high above the street, which did not bother The Shadow any more than it would have worried a steeplejack, the task was otherwise easy.

The twenty-second had a ledge wide enough to be a promenade, and each floor above was set a trifle in, giving a modified pyramid effect. Thus the climb was actually a series of four ten-foot stages, rendered all the easier because some architect—for reasons known only to architects—had added stone decorations to walls that could be closely admired only with the aid of a telescope.

Flattened on the cornice that ran just below the windows of the twenty-fourth floor, The Shadow began an inspection crawl that was actually the most precarious part of his trip. The ledge was narrower than the others; at the corners, the wind swept by with the fury of a half-gale.

Besides, there was the chance that he might be seen from some other building, when he came to spots that caught the reflection of Manhattan's glow.

In New York, reports of anyone hovering voluntarily on such a high brink could bring anything from police nets to baby blimps, to say nothing of towering fire ladders, all bent upon rescuing a life.

A window glowed just past a corner. Peering in, The Shadow saw a bedroom, which was empty. The window, apparently, was all one piece; a certain dullness of the pane indicated that it was of shatterproof glass. Windows farther along looked the same; but between the large ones, The Shadow saw the open window of a kitchenette.

It was high and very tiny; probably that was why it alone was ordinary. The window could supply ventilation to the entire apartment, without affording a route for the average human. Whoever had left that window unprotected had probably decided that only a midget would attempt to negotiate it.

The Shadow happened to know how small a space a human body requires for passage, provided a scientific procedure would be used. He needed to be above the window; and that was easily managed, thanks to a ledge that topped the highest floor.

Gaining the ledge, The Shadow took a pendulum swing and shoved his feet straight through the window. Turning as he slid, he took the space edgewise, his push carrying him past his hips.

Teetering there, half in, half out, The Shadow gradually added more to his lower weight, until gravity drew him farther. His arms were extended, as his head and shoulders went through; with his hands, he caught the sides of the window, to stay his speed.

That enabled another side twist, that landed The Shadow lightly upon his feet in the kitchenette, with the window about two feet above his head.

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NOTHING more than an alcove, that was dimly lighted by a glow from the apartment living room, the kitchenette served The Shadow as a suitable nook from which to make further observation.

Gliding forward, he saw a portion of the living room, noted a clock upon a mantel above a fireplace that contained an electric heater camouflaged as a log fire. The clock showed the hour of eight.

Before The Shadow had advanced more than a few feet, his keen ears caught a distant clang, that sounded like the closing of an elevator door. There was a sudden stir in the living room.

Reaching the archway that opened from the kitchenette, The Shadow saw Norman Selwood, risen from a chair, tensely facing a far door.

A key grated in the lock, turning from the other side. Selwood's hands went deep into his coat pockets. His back toward The Shadow, the grizzle-haired professor was watching the apartment door.

Shifting slightly to get an angle away from Selwood, The Shadow also watched. His thin-gloved hand was drawing an automatic from beneath his cloak.

The door swung inward. In from a dim hallway stepped a man with a drawn revolver in his fist. Though his face was distorted with fury, his dapper features were instantly recognizable. The intruder was Louis Emro, the smug secretary employed by Philip Caxter.

His snakish eyes fixed upon Selwood, Emro hissed accusing words. Selwood received them coolly, remaining absolutely motionless, though his figure seemed unusually rigid.

“So you tried a double cross,” snarled Emro. “You sneaked the word out, didn't you, to bring Cardona here? You didn't tell him enough, though, to get him past the crew outside.”

Linking past events, The Shadow suddenly understood the reason for the shift of the thuggish watchers outside the apartment house. Some member of the outfit must have spotted Joe Cardona near the place. Unfortunately, the police inspector had stayed away from the front door; otherwise The Shadow would have spied him.

Cardona, evidently, must have been around before The Shadow arrived in doorman's disguise. The crook who had telephoned had passed the word that brought Emro here, to handle matters. Philip's secretary had made a trip up to Selwood's lofty hide-away by the service elevator.

“Cardona is in the lobby,” sneered Emro, “but that isn't going to mean that you will see him, Selwood. He'll see you, right enough, but you won't be in shape to talk! Not after I—”

A stir from the kitchenette had caught Emro's eyes. His gaze shifting, the snaky man saw something that Selwood could not view—a black shape that edged forward, shoving a huge automatic ahead of it. The burn of The Shadow's eyes told Emro the rest. A crook of the first water, the fellow was confronted by the archavenger that all criminals feared.

WITH a wide lunge, Emro made for the hall. He was swift enough to elude The Shadow, but not through any laxity on the cloaked invader's part. It was Selwood who saved Emro.

Whipping his hand from his pocket, Selwood came out with his old-fashioned revolver and took a forward bounce that carried him directly in The Shadow's path of aim.

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Finger pausing on the trigger, The Shadow followed Selwood to the hall, through the door that Emro hadn't found time to close. Guns were thundering when The Shadow reached there. He saw Emro dart away from the elevator, blazing another shot as he went.

Selwood answered it. His bullet nicked Emro as the crook wheeled at the end of the hallway, against the background of a darkened window. A window that was quite unlike the solid ones in Selwood's apartment, as Emro immediately proved.

Firing a wild shot, Emro again flung himself backward, expecting to rebound from a solid wall. Selwood clipped him with another bullet; jolting, Emro's fling became a hurtle. As he hit the windowpane, it crackled. The shot that The Shadow added proved unnecessary. With the shattering of the window sash, Emro was gone.

Foiled in murder, Emro was taking a long plunge to his own doom. Reaching the window, Selwood saw the man's flipping body take a long bound from the last of the steplike cornices. Clearing the wide edge of the twenty-second floor, Emro was traveling a straightaway course that was to land him, crushed and shapeless, in the avenue below.

Thrusting away his automatic, The Shadow clamped one hand upon Selwood's shoulder, spoke whispered words that the man should have understood. Instead, Selwood whipped about in the same alarm that he had shown outside the Beaumont.

Frantically, he jabbed his gun toward the blackness that loomed upon him; but on this occasion Selwood, though speedier than before, was quite unable to pull the trigger.

The missile that struck with triphammer speed was The Shadow's gloved fist, its target Selwood's jaw. The revolver clattered to the floor as Selwood flattened. Scooping up the weapon, The Shadow hoisted Selwood and shoved him into the open elevator, where the man settled groggily.

Another door slashed open as The Shadow was closing his. The Shadow caught a quick glimpse of Joe Cardona, heard the inspector's angry shout as the elevator door went tight. The car was speeding downward; Cardona, back in his own elevator, was beginning a similar descent, not realizing that the outlets would be different.

At the bottom floor, The Shadow hauled Selwood to his feet, started him out into the alley. Men sprang suddenly in sight; they were met by The Shadow's challenging laugh, the tonguing fire of the automatic that he again had drawn.

Crooks scattered. Other shots burst from the alley's end. Cardona had summoned a squad, and his men had heard the fire. Amid the sudden rout of the surprised thugs, The Shadow dragged Selwood to the side street and pushed him into Moe's waiting cab.

As they rode away, leaving the battle to the police, The Shadow got in touch with Burbank, his contact man, by short-wave radio. Over the air came two recent reports: one from Clyde Burke, telling of Gregg Caxter's departure from the plant; the other, from Harry Vincent, mentioning the signals that Irene Selwood had flashed.

Ordering Moe to drive to the Hotel Beaumont, The Shadow gripped Selwood's shoulders and shook them. Fully aroused, Selwood nodded; he understood, at last, that The Shadow was a friend. Then The Shadow's whisper was telling facts which amazed his lone listener; voicing details which Selwood thought that he, alone, had known.

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Selwood was talking eagerly, soon afterward. This conference, hasty though it was, marked the beginning of an alliance that The Shadow had long desired.

For The Shadow, in his efforts to offset the harm done to his plans, was depending upon Norman Selwood as a vital factor in the rapid moves that lay ahead.

CHAPTER XVI. DEATH DISCOVERED

GREGG CAXTER had come into New York much more rapidly than The Shadow supposed. That was due to Gregg's capable chauffeur, who had whisked the car across a short cut to the George Washington Bridge, averaging a mile a minute over a distance of less than thirty miles.

Thanks to favorable traffic lights, the limousine had maintained a swift pace southward in Manhattan; and swinging through Central Park, the chauffeur had violated speed laws, confident that Gregg's importance would lead to no more than a rebuke from any traffic cop who might stop the car.

No such incident had occurred, with the result that Gregg Caxter had reached the Hotel Beaumont a few minutes after eight o'clock and was, at present, seated with his brother Philip in the room that the latter used as an office.

Though surprised by Gregg's unexpected visit, Philip extended his brother a cordial welcome. Apparently noticing Gregg's thirsty look, Philip pressed a button and ordered a servant to bring whiskey and soda.

Gregg helped himself to a large dose of the liquor and pressed the siphon of the soda bottle, to fill the remainder of the glass with charged water.

"I've been out to see Howard," announced Gregg, briskly, by way of explaining his visit here. "Had a nice chat with him. Sorry I hadn't sense enough to drop in to see him before."

Philip smiled, while he watched Gregg gulp a long drink. He had always been something of a neutral factor in the rivalry between his brothers. Visibly, his sympathies had inclined toward Howard rather than Gregg, but that had been a matter of policy.

Actually, Philip had a few things in common with both; though not enough to make him desire the comradeship of either. Regarding them as extreme types, he could understand why they had never gotten along together.

"Have another drink," suggested Philip, as Gregg finished the first. "Then tell me how you made out."

Gregg measured a drink, then cocked his head as he was pressing the soda siphon. He had a chance to dart a quick look at Philip, while asking:

"You tell me something first, Phil. Did a chap named Lamont Cranston try to get in touch with you last night?"

"No. Why?"

"Well, he was supposed to see you, after talking to Howard. However, I don't think it's important any longer."

Philip rang for the servant, while Gregg, slouched deep in a chair, was sipping his second drink slowly, keeping the glass on a convenient level with his lips.

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The servant appeared. He was a husky fellow, who might have been one of the cowpunchers from Philip's ranch.

"Hasn't Emro come back yet?" demanded Philip. "I told him not to stay any longer than was necessary."

The servant replied that Emro had not returned. Shrugging, Philip addressed the servant again:

"Maybe you would know something about it, Kelman. Did Emro mention a telephone call from a man named Cranston?"

"No, sir."

"All right. You may go." Philip was mixing himself a drink, with very little whiskey and a large amount of soda. "When Emro comes back, send him in here right away."

BY the time Kelman had gone, Gregg was laying papers on Philip's desk. Pointing triumphantly to the signatures, Gregg eased back into his chair and continued sipping his drink. He waited for Philip's comments. They came.

"So Howard came through in great style," declared Philip. "I'll bet that surprised you, Gregg."

"Why should it?" returned Gregg. "I gave him everything he wanted, and put a fence around it, too."

"Yes. Perhaps that is just the trouble. Maybe you gave him too much."

Gregg came angrily to his feet. Philip sat unperturbed; the smile that showed on his handsome face was one of shrewdness. Matched by his own tactics, Gregg curbed his sudden temper. Gulping what was left in his glass, he began to fill it again, in order to get new sidelong glances at Philip.

"You will want me to sign, too," stated Philip, "but I can't. I know that I practically agreed to do whatever Howard did, but this thing has to be ironclad. Your part of the contract is so heavy that you'll find a way to dump it overboard. By claiming that you have gone through with it to the best of your ability, you'll have us all wound up in legal technicalities, which will result in your getting everything. Howard and I will be out in the cold!"

Gregg shook his head over the top of his glass. "Howard didn't see it that way."

"He wouldn't," returned Philip. "Howard has lost all contact with the outside world. He lives alone, and never invites guests to his place."

"Don't be so sure of that," Gregg's eyes gleamed shrewdly, as he saw a chance to win a point. "Howard is much more sociable than you realize. He is entertaining a house guest at present."

"Whom? Some old fossil who likes to play chess?"

"No." Gregg toyed with his drink; then: "I didn't meet the guest," he admitted. "But I knew there was one, because Howard was all dressed up in a tuxedo, with a flower in his lapel. A man doesn't go to all that ceremony when he dines alone."

"Howard might."

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“Not in this case, Phil. I probably would have met the guest, but she happened to be a trifle ill.”

“She?”

Gregg nodded.

“My chauffeur was outside,” he related, “and he chatted with some fellow who arrived in a rattletrap car from Pennbury. The car had come for a woman who works for Howard as a housekeeper. When the housekeeper came out, my chauffeur heard her say—”

Gregg paused, lifted his glass a few inches and took a long swallow. He had aroused Philip's interest and wanted to keep it at a high pitch. During that interval, Philip was staring so intensely that he failed to notice a slight change in the room.

Streaky blackness was edging in along the floor. It came from the door to the connecting office, a door which had opened silently under the pressure of a skillful hand. The Shadow had arrived, alone, to look in upon impending events.

As yet, however, he did not suppose that Gregg had arrived. Away from The Shadow's range of vision, Gregg did not reveal his presence until he resumed his statement:

“The housekeeper said that she had to stay and see that the young lady was comfortably in bed, because the young lady had either a chill or a fever. While we were coming into town, my chauffeur told me what he had heard. He learned the girl's name, too, because the fellow that drove the rattletrap mentioned it. Her name”—Gregg paused—“her name was... was Miss... Miss Sel—”

THE sentence was not completed. Wavering dizzily, Gregg Caxter pitched forward; his glass, half emptied, flipped from his hand, broke as it struck Philip's desk and splashed its contents over the triplicate agreements.

When Gregg hit the floor, he coiled there under the steady gaze of Philip, who was leaning across the desk. The Shadow had shifted closer in, beside the filing cabinets, and would have been in plain view had Philip looked in his direction.

Instead, Philip swung out from behind the desk, stepped to the door that led to the living room, opened it and shouted for Kelman.

Utterly motionless, Gregg's figure was absurdly twisted in position—a fact which definitely proclaimed that The Shadow had arrived too late. Whatever the cause of Gregg's fate, it had struck, and could not be remedied. But Philip seemed to take a more casual view of the matter, when he returned with Kelman.

Drawn farther into cover, an automatic in his hand, The Shadow heard Philip tell the servant:

“My brother took too many drinks. He's passed out. He needs air, so let's get him to it.”

The servant suggested opening the French windows. Philip objected.

“We'd better get him downstairs,” he decided. “His car is somewhere about, and his chauffeur can take care of him. Mr. Gregg hasn't eaten dinner, that's why the drinks hit him so suddenly. I'm going downstairs anyway, because I have to start on a trip, right away. Come! There's no time to waste.”

Though Philip was raising heavily on his side, Kelman noted a deadness to Gregg's weight as they tried to lift

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the body. Panting, the servant spoke in awed tone:

“He's dead, Mr. Caxter! I'm... I'm sure of it!”

“Don't be squeamish, Kelman!” snapped Philip. “Keep steady and curb your imagination!”

“But if he is dead—”

“If he is dead, it's an accident. All the more reason to get him out of here. I can send you along in the car with Mr. Gregg's chauffeur. Mr. Gregg ought to be taken to his own physician. Maybe he has had attacks like this before.”

Kelman was balking. Philip knifed the words: “You'll see me through with this, or—”

If the statement had started as a threat, Philip did not complete it. The sound of a rapid knock drifted through from the door to the living room. Letting Gregg's body thump the floor, Philip shoved the servant toward the doorway.

“It's Emro,” he told the shaky servant. “Go and let him in. He has more nerve than you have, Kelman. Maybe when you see how well he helps me, you will wake up to yourself.”

Confident that his secretary had returned, Philip stepped behind the desk and finished the contents of his own glass. His hands were nervous, though, when he lighted a cigarette. Evidently, Philip was calculating rapidly, making quick plans to offset this unexpected episode.

Then, his cigarette lighter still flaming in his hand, Philip stiffened at the sound of a sudden commotion. Men were coming through the living room, pushing Kelman from their path. The first to enter Philip's office was a swarthy man of stocky build, who gripped a stubnosed revolver in his fist.

Recognizing Inspector Joe Cardona, Philip Caxter clutched the corners of his desk. For a moment, his eyes were frantic, seeking some mode of escape. He didn't note The Shadow during that wild glimpse about the room, for two members of Cardona's squad poked into sight, grasping revolvers that fascinated Philip's gaze.

Lowering his own gun, Cardona stooped beside Gregg's body. In exactly seven seconds he learned all he needed to know. Lifting his head, Cardona gave a nod to his men, to signify that Gregg Caxter was dead. Then Joe's icy gaze fastened upon Philip, whose own face went stony.

Death lay discovered by the law. Philip Caxter, trapped on his own premises, was about to be accused of a crime that, to Joe Cardona, had every sign of murder!

CHAPTER XVII. PHILIP'S FLIGHT

WHATEVER his opinions, Joe Cardona had a habit of keeping them to himself when occasion so demanded. Not only was Joe poker-faced, but he liked to hold his cards close to his chest. This was a time when Cardona felt that he held many trumps, but he wasn't going to play them too fast.

The more he could build against Philip, the stronger would be his accusation. There were reasons, too, why it was not wise to jump matters. Philip Caxter was wealthy and prominent, not the type of man who would ordinarily go into crime. To assert that he had killed a man, particularly his own brother, would produce nothing but contemptuous denials.

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Mention of a few other details might, however, weaken Philip's position. To get to those preliminaries, Cardona told his men to pocket their guns. Then, almost affably, Joe remarked:

“Sorry about this, Mr. Caxter. It looks like your brother has turned in his checks. While we're getting the doctor here, you might as well tell me what happened.”

Steadily, Philip gave the details and made them remarkably brief. Gregg, he said, had come to call on him, and had collapsed during a most friendly chat, after a few drinks.

Cardona eyed the bottles on Philip's desk. With a depreciating shake of his head, Philip declared:

“Nothing wrong with those, inspector. In fact”—he raised one hand and pointed—“that glass was mine. Probably Gregg wasn't in good physical shape; but I didn't know it.”

“He looked healthy to me,” commented Cardona, “when he was talking to the police commissioner the other day. How many drinks did he have?”

“Three,” replied Philip, “or rather, two and a half. I had one, but I think”—his eyes met Cardona's steadily—“that I would like another. Do you object?”

“No, no. Go right ahead.”

Philip mixed himself a drink and began to swallow it. There was still some whiskey in one bottle, soda in the other, so Cardona removed them from the desk, to serve as exhibits later. Joe was somewhat puzzled by Philip's demonstration, for it apparently ended the chance that Gregg had been poisoned.

Still, Cardona was thinking in terms that might include the seemingly impossible. He was right in the middle of a situation that Commissioner Weston had once begun to broach, but had later desisted. The death of Gregg Caxter was making Cardona recall such cases as those of Tyburn and Wydell.

Not only they, but two before them, had run into trouble after visiting Philip Caxter. The other two—Payson and Lloyd—had disappeared; but Tyburn and Wydell had died. Maybe the same had been intended for Gregg—death, after leaving here. But this time, the final event had occurred during the visit itself.

CARDONA was wondering what would have happened if Gregg had taken only two drinks, instead of three. Perhaps that would have worked out better for Philip, as it might have caused Gregg to succumb farther along the route.

Joe wondered, too, if Philip would ever have admitted that his brother Gregg had been here. He had not dodged the question with the others, because it had been known that they made him a visit.

Deciding to sound Philip out, Joe put the question: “Did a man named Cranston come here last night? Lamont Cranston?”

“No,” replied Philip. “An odd thing, inspector—Gregg asked me that same question.”

Cardona was not surprised. Echoes of the directors' meeting at the Caxter plant had reached Commissioner Weston. He knew that Cranston had set out as Gregg's emissary. Today, Weston had been annoyed because Cranston had not called him at the Cobalt Club regarding a dinner engagement for the coming Saturday.

“If you are thinking,” said Philip, suddenly, “that people have a way of disappearing, or dying, after they

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have called on me, I agree that it is very curious. There was one man that I sometimes wanted to ask about that matter, but, unfortunately, I never got around to it.”

“One man?” queried Cardona. “Who was he?”

“My brother Gregg,” replied Philip, quietly. “Apparently, one of his little schemes boomeranged. With his death, it may be that the others will always remain a riddle.”

Cardona had a comeback to that one: namely, that Gregg would have had no point in murdering himself, whatever peculiar motive might have influenced him with the others. But Cardona did not spring that argument. He had a better idea in mind. Looking about, Joe asked:

“Where's that secretary of yours—that chap Emro?”

“He went out a while ago,” replied Philip, “to buy some magazines. He should have returned by this time.”

“Sure he didn't go to talk to somebody?”

“He could have. In fact, Emro happens to be well acquainted with one of the manicurists here in the hotel.”

“I don't mean a dame. I mean, could he have gone to talk business, on your account. He handles a lot of things like that for you, doesn't he?”

Philip began to nod a slow admission, then steadied his gaze on Cardona. The inspector guessed what had flashed to Philip's mind. For the first time, Philip was beginning to wonder how Cardona had arrived here at such an unexpected moment.

“Did you ever hear”—Cardona was emphasizing every word—“of a man named Norman Selwood?”

Philip's lips came open, but he managed to suppress the ejaculation that he was about to voice. Then, leaning forward with intent expression, he asked quickly:

“Where is Selwood? What has happened to him?”

“Don't worry,” retorted Cardona. “Emro didn't get him. It was Selwood who bagged Emro, then got away from that trick apartment that could only be opened from the outside. Sure, Emro's mob was around the place, but my men were there, too, and we cleaned them up!

“There wasn't much left of Emro. He took a nose dive all the way to the street. But we found stuff in his pockets that told us who he was. This time, the mobbies talked, because they couldn't get out of it. They'd been taking orders straight from here, through Emro!

“Just the way a lot of others did, I guess; like the house dick, Denbry. So I came right over here, to ask you all about it. What do I find”—Cardona swept his hand toward Gregg's body—“but another souvenir! Two jobs tonight, both at the same time—so you sent Emro on one, and handled the other yourself!”

CARDONA'S hand was going to his pocket to bring out the gun, but Joe didn't hurry the move, because Philip had again become rigid, his eyes staring almost blankly. From Philip's lips came a question, almost mechanically:

“Where did Selwood go?”

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“You'll have to ask him,” returned Cardona. “He made a nice getaway, more power to him. Funny, how much a nervy guy can do when he gets started. He must have shook his gun right in the faces of those rats—”

Without realizing it, Cardona was giving Philip a sudden inspiration. As Joe's voice broke off, there was a clatter from the desk drawer; Philip's hand, with a sudden dip, had yanked out a revolver.

Spinning out from behind the desk, Philip covered Joe and the two detectives with a sweep of the gun muzzle before any of them, even Joe, could complete a draw.

“Stay where you are! I warn you!”

Philip was wheeling toward the filing cabinets. Cardona made a side shift; a gun spoke, muffled, from the inspector's pocket. The shot was too hasty; it merely burned a pathway through the cloth of Joe's best gray suit. But it threatened to start real damage. Cardona hadn't heeded the warning that Philip fully meant.

Just past the filing cabinet, Philip jabbed a return fire. Cardona was ducking, so were the detectives, as they tried to bring their guns into play. Intent upon escape at any cost, Philip's next shots would have been delivered with better aim, except for a startling intervention.

The blackness of the doorway came to life, wrapped Philip in its folds. Cardona, seeing the form of The Shadow materialize, not only dropped his own gun but grabbed the aiming hand of a detective and hurled the fellow against the other headquarters man, to end all chance that either would fire.

Back into the office reeled two grappling fighters, The Shadow looming high above Philip. His own gun raised, his opponent's warded aside, The Shadow seemed ready to deal the sledging blow that would lay Philip prone beside Gregg's body. The blaze of The Shadow's eyes showed triumph. His task, it seemed, was as good as accomplished.

Then came an unexpected turn. Philip gave a twist; the combatants staggered in the opposite direction, out through the room that connected with the corridor. Grabbing up his gun, Cardona followed, his men behind him. At the outer door, they saw The Shadow send Philip in a headlong dive. Sprawling in the corridor, Philip came to his feet and scrambled away.

Though victory seemed The Shadow's, the cloaked fighter did not follow it up. He was wavering groggily as Cardona and the others reached him. In dazed fashion, he lunged among them, apparently mistaking them for other enemies. His gun hand was swinging flabbily, as the three pushed him aside and took up the pursuit themselves.

Philip was gone when they reached the elevators, for Cardona had kept a car there, with an operator in attendance, and Philip had taken it over.

That was plausible enough, but there was real mystery in the fact that The Shadow had vanished when Cardona bounded back into the office, to make a phone call to the lobby. Joe was rather amazed, when he looked about and saw no sign of The Shadow.

Recuperating almost as soon as the pursuers had passed him, The Shadow had gone out by the window route. Only a few minutes later, he was leaving the side door that opened to the street. There, he saw the taillights of a cab, just as they twisted past a corner.

That taxi was carrying Philip Caxter. Wanted for the murder of his brother Gregg, Philip was getting away before the alarm was given. He was off to a destination that The Shadow could have named. Stepping into

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another cab, The Shadow told the driver to take him to Newark Airport.

One being, alone, could intercept Philip Caxter before he reached his goal. The laugh that whispered from the interior of the airport-bound cab was issued by the personage himself.

Strange, sinister, was that mirth—a repressed taunt from the lips of one who had solved crime's riddle: The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE LAST REFUGE

PHILIP CAXTER gazed furtively from his big car, as he parked it near the lonely mansion where his brother Howard lived. He had made a quick trip to Pennbury, after leaving the taxi at a garage where he kept his own cars. He had closed the trail well enough to get away from Manhattan, and the rest had been easy.

It was a little after ten o'clock; only a few dim lights showed from the windows of the great house. What Philip sought, however, were tokens of any new arrivals. A while ago, he had fancied that he heard the steady humming of a motor, but that had ended before he reached Howard's estate.

At present, all was silent, with clouds gathered across the moonlight. Leaving his car, Philip stumbled toward the mansion, then brought up suddenly, his hand gripping his pocketed gun, as a sweeping flashlight shafted toward him.

A minute later, he was talking to the watchman, who made a long patrolling trip about the house. The fellow was just finishing his inspection; upon learning who Philip was, he conducted the visitor to the front door.

Admitted to the house, Philip saw Howard coming from the library. Howard had discarded his tuxedo for a lounging jacket; he was carrying an opened book, that had only a few pages left to read.

Despite his interest in the book, he had been attracted to the front door by the unusual occurrence of a ring as late as ten o'clock.

"Philip, my boy!" Howard beamed, as he tossed the book to a chair and advanced with outstretched hand. "It's good to see you! But what has brought you here tonight? I thought you would be with Gregg."

"I want to see Irene," explained Philip, seriously. "I must see her, Howard!"

Howard discarded the reading glasses over which he had been peering.

"You've talked to her father?" he asked. "He told you that it would be all right to come here?"

"No. It was Gregg who told me—"

Howard interrupted with a grip on Philip's arm.

"Not Gregg!" he exclaimed, anxiously. "I did my best to keep him from learning, because Irene's father said—"

"It's all right, Howard," interposed Philip. "Don't worry. I'll tell you everything, later. But I must see Irene."

Nodding, Howard promptly led the way upstairs. He tapped several times at Irene's door, before the girl opened it. Still wearing slippers and satin lounging gown, Irene had been dozing in the chair by the window.

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She looked as if she had just come from bed, for she was adjusting the collar of the gown above her low-necked pajama jacket. Irene blinked twice, then exclaimed:

“Philip!”

She made a soft, silky bundle of loveliness as she nestled in Philip's arms. Her eyes were shining as she kissed him, and Philip, his worried expression gone, returned the kisses ardently. Smiling benignly, Howard nodded.

“I thought so,” he said. “Irene said that you two had met; that she liked you, Philip. Liked you very much, she said, which I knew might mean she loved you.”

Irene's eyes were steady on Philip's.

“You're troubled,” said the girl. “You're not going away?”

“No, indeed,” interposed Philip. “Not unless you go with me, Irene. But, first, there is much that I must tell you.”

Howard's gaze became serious.

“Irene was ill this evening. Perhaps she does not feel well enough to talk.”

“I'm feeling much, much better!” expressed Irene. “Really, it was just a headache, that went away after I had slept.”

Howard became reassured. He drew Philip by the arm.

“Suppose we go down to my study,” suggested Howard. “Irene can dress, then join us there.”

THEY were starting along the hallway, when Irene stopped suddenly inside her doorway. She didn't want to miss a conference that she felt sure would be important; and she would have to, if she took time to dress. She couldn't wear those ripped clothes on the chair, and it would take too long to assemble others.

Why, of all nights, had she chosen this one for a tantrum! She hated her own picture of herself, unclothed and furious, pounding away at pillows. She had never acted that way before, and she was sure she would never repeat that performance. However, that was not helping her present dilemma.

Struck with a sudden idea, Irene hurried out into the hall and overtook Howard and Philip.

“I'll come downstairs as I am,” she said. “Really, I'm wearing plenty”—she spread her lounging gown, showing the pajamas, and met Howard's troubled expression with a smile—“and the study is quite warm. I'm so glad to see you, dear”—Irene locked her arm in Philip's —“that I don't want to miss a minute with you!”

This time, it was Philip's face that changed. He had just begun to appreciate the idea of a short talk with Howard before Irene could join them. Nevertheless, Philip managed to shift back to his former resolve: that of letting Irene know everything that had happened.

When they reached the study, Philip accepted a glass of the Madeira that Gregg had rejected. Warmed by a few sips of the wine, he faced Howard and said:

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“Gregg is dead.”

Howard couldn't seem to believe it, while Irene also showed a startled amazement. Just as the girl was groping for an explanation of such tragedy, Howard expressed one.

“An accident?” he inquired, slowly. “While driving into New York?”

“No.” Philip was resolved to tell the worst. “He dropped dead in my suite at the Beaumont. The police came there and blamed me for it. I broke away before they arrested me. That's how I happen to be here.”

The way both listeners took the news was a source of great relief to Philip. Howard folded his arms, sat pondering, his face quite sympathetic. Irene reached from her deep chair, pressed Philip's dangling hand between her own. Philip's head turned from the high cushion where it rested, his weary eyes and murmuring lips expressing thanks for the comfort the girl gave him.

“All this can be straightened, Philip,” said Howard, finally, his very tone a reassurance. “No one could conceivably believe that you would harm Gregg. You saw him die?”

Philip nodded.

“The ordeal unnerved you, then,” affirmed Howard. “You became excited, as anyone would, under the circumstances. You must rest here where it is quiet, and let me handle matters.”

“You mean,” asked Philip, morosely, “that you will call the police?”

“Not tonight,” returned Howard. “I shall call my attorney—or yours, if you prefer. Let the police wait awhile, then find you here. It is not a crime for a man to visit his brother; nor for his brother to receive him.”

“That doesn't always apply,” returned Philip, ruefully. “It seems to have been a crime on my part, to receive Gregg. But I know this.” His tone was suddenly sharp. “If crime it was, Gregg caused it by visiting me!”

HOWARD looked puzzled. Irene, despite the fear that she had built regarding Gregg, shared Howard's perplexity.

“I know what you think,” said Philip. “The same as the police, you can't see why a man would commit a crime against himself. But suppose Gregg had come there to murder me—”

“He didn't try to kill me,” put in Howard.

“Because you signed the agreements,” explained Philip. “I wouldn't. I thought there was a catch to them. Suppose Gregg had dropped something in a glass—some poison expecting me to drink from it. Suppose that he had taken the wrong glass—”

Howard was shaking his head.

“Suppose, then, that he was up against it,” argued Philip. “That he planned suicide and was mean enough to want to blame his death on me. Again, you have to remember that I wouldn't sign, and that Gregg probably knew it.”

“Your theories are all right, Philip,” said Howard, reproof in his tone. “But remember; Gregg was our brother. I could not consider him a murderer; nor even a willing suicide. No more than I could believe that

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you would perform such deeds.”

“What about those deaths at the plant?” demanded Philip. “There was something in back of those, Howard.”

“Yes!” It was Irene who rallied to Philip. “There must have been! My father suspected something; and dad—well, he just isn't a man who will accept absurd theories—”

Irene was interrupted, not by either of the listeners but by a clatter of the door that connected with the tropical garden. Swinging in, that door disclosed a sight that brought Philip Caxter to his feet. His hand went for his gun—the worst move that he could have made. He was covered by an array of weapons: a revolver, a shotgun and a rifle.

Irene's quick wit prevented tragedy. She flung herself at Philip, protecting his body with her own. She caught his hand, almost by accident, for she didn't realize that he was drawing a revolver. Her real purpose was to block any bullets that the invaders fired. Seeing that, two of them dropped their weapons, sprang across the room and seized Philip.

Howard was helping them, for he saw their badges and knew it was the only sensible thing to do. But Irene, determined to protect the man she loved, struggled on. When they caught her, she twisted desperately; when her lounging gown tore, she twisted from it. Then someone caught her about the arms and settled her in a chair.

Seeing that Philip had subsided, Irene quieted. A man who wore a sheriff's badge politely handed her the remnants of her lounging gown, but Irene shook her head. The garment was ruined, and of no use. This was no formal affair, and she considered her pajamas ample.

So did the sheriff. He laid the torn dressing gown on a table and picked up his rifle, while his deputy was regaining the shotgun. The man who had entered with a revolver still held the weapon. Irene remembered that she had seen him once before, though she had only glimpsed him at the time.

He was Inspector Joe Cardona.

“WE traced you here, Caxter,” announced Cardona, facing the chair where Philip sat huddled. “You left a trail as wide as the New Jersey highway that we drove over getting here. Those agreements, signed by your brother Howard, made us figure you'd come here.”

Philip grunted a word that sounded like “clever.”

“We picked them off your desk,” added Joe, “and we called the sheriff out here. Technically, he's making the arrest. Maybe you'll fight extradition and all that, but it won't do you any good. I got a telephone call, after I reached Pennbury. They've found out how you murdered your brother Gregg!”

Philip's handsome face looked strained. Irene thought his expression quizzical, but Cardona considered it to be a trapped criminal's gaze.

“Carbon monoxide in the seltzer charger,” added Cardona. “Gregg sniffed a load of it, and it got him. Not enough to bother anybody that drank it; the stuff would go down like ordinary soda. But the medical examiner was smart enough to think of monoxide poison.

“As smart as you were, Caxter, when you charged that soda with a poison gas, instead of the usual carbon dioxide. Thought you'd fooled me when you took a drink yourself but you missed out. Here, sheriff”— Joe

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was hauling Philip to his feet—“slap those bracelets on him. He's your man!”

Irene didn't agree. If Philip was anyone's man, he was hers. She flung herself up from the chair, ready to start a new struggle, when she was halted by a single word, spoken in a voice she recognized.

“Wait!”

The tone came from the doorway. Turning with the others, Irene saw a man whose importance in this case had been temporarily forgotten.

The arrival was the girl's father, Norman Selwood!

CHAPTER XIX. CRIME'S ANSWER

THERE was no need for Norman Selwood to introduce himself to the few persons who did not know him. With a happy cry, Irene reached him. Burying her soft form in his arms, the girl began to sob on Selwood's shoulder.

Much though she loved Philip, Irene would not have displayed tears in his presence while he was dependent solely upon her help.

But with her father's arrival, the burden was gone. Irene knew that Norman Selwood could supply the missing facts that she had so vainly sought to guess. For a moment, she thought that no one else could possibly have filled in this emergency. Then she remembered one other: The Shadow.

This wasn't the time to ask her father regarding The Shadow. Her father was here to save Philip. Irene knew it, as surely as if Norman Selwood had already spoken the details. Shaking her head, the girl flicked away the tears; smiling, she nodded as her father pointed her back to the chair that she had left.

Howard Caxter had advanced. His hand was extended to his old tutor. Selwood received it, then turned to the others, as Howard told him who they were. Joe Cardona was particularly impressed by the new visitor.

“We've been looking for you, Mr. Selwood,” he said. “I'm plenty willing to listen to whatever you have to say, particularly”—he glanced toward Philip, who was clamped in the handcuffs—“since the sheriff has got the prisoner so he won't make any trouble.”

“Sit down, gentlemen,” invited Howard Caxter. “We can discuss this matter quietly—with some wine, if you wish it. I assure you”—his tone was dry—“that my Madeira contains no poisonous substance such as carbon monoxide.”

Irene took courage from Howard's tone. She felt that he didn't believe the charge that Cardona had made against Philip. She transferred her smile to Philip, who managed to return it. Then Irene looked toward her father.

Norman Selwood, alone, had remained standing, while the others had settled in cushioned chairs. He seemed to have retained his professor's attitude, and looked as though ready to address a class. Howard Caxter, seated in an obscure chair beyond the table, chuckled as he addressed Selwood:

“You are as alert as ever, Norman! Come; be seated. Relax, like the rest of us. This is all quite informal.”

Selwood finally took the chair that stood near him, but there was something stolid about his manner that held

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the closed room in a hush. Howard was leaning back, his face wreathed in a smile; Philip, though serious, had raised his head in an intent gaze.

Cardona, from his chair, was keeping a watchful eye on the prisoner, forgotten by the gawking sheriff and the deputy, who were watching Selwood.

Irene had doubled her knees up in the chair, lacing her hands gracefully in front of them. Philip should have looked her way at that moment, for the girl was more beautiful than ever.

The pink hue of her silk pajamas was as delicate as the shade of the tea roses that she had worn at dinner; but that color could not match the soft flush of the smooth neck that emerged above, or the lovely shoulder that peeped from the slightly tilted fringe of the pajama jacket.

Irene's face had color, her eyes a sparkle. She had fought in Philip's behalf, and was looking forward to his vindication. Her entire manner showed it; her lips, when they pursed slightly, were as eager as her eyes. Her hair, ruffled across her forehead, added a brown glow to the light that caught it, and with every tilt of her head, stray locks wavered delightfully.

"My story is a brief one," announced Norman Selwood, in a steady voice. "From the moment that I read of death at the Caxter Chemical Works, I suspected foul play; the motive behind it, a desire for power. I resolved to go to Philip Caxter and tell him of my suspicions."

"Which you did," blurted Philip. "And you were blaming it on Gregg, when—"

"One moment, Philip," inserted Selwood, severely: "You interrupted me that other night, and thereby failed to understand my inferences. I was cut short by the delivery of a message which I took to be a telegram; otherwise, I would have completed my story at that time.

"The telegram"—Selwood drew a yellow sheet from his pocket—"is obviously a fake, although I did not realize it at the time. It was prepared, in all probability, by Philip's secretary, Emro. Though it never came across the wire"—Irene noted a grimness to her father's tone—"the message, nevertheless, was real, and prepared because of an actual order.

"The pretended telegram threatened a terrible consequence, unless I went voluntarily to an apartment that was practically a prison and remained there. Tonight, Emro supposed that I had managed to communicate with the police. He came there to murder me. Having wounded him and seen him plunge through the hallway window, I no longer stayed there."

Rising from his chair, Selwood handed the telegram to Cardona, who read it. With each word, Joe's eyes appeared to open wider.

"This is from Howard Caxter!" exclaimed Cardona. "It says that he is holding your daughter as a hostage; that she will remain well and happy, provided you make no false step."

Stepping from his own chair, Howard took the yellow sheet and studied it in the light.

"Precisely as Norman said," he declared. "The telegram is a fake!"

"Yes and no," returned Selwood. "It was prepared by Emro, yes. But if you say that the message is fraudulent, I answer no. Emro prepared it at your order, Howard!"

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Amid a stunning silence, Irene's slippers feet slid from her chair. Plucking her father's sleeve, the girl exclaimed:

“I received a telegram—”

“Supposedly from me,” completed Selwood. “Another of Emro's concoctions, at the order of his real master, Howard Caxter! That false message brought you here to be in Howard's power. Not until you were actually on your journey, did Emro pass the other message to me.”

A hurt look showed on Howard's face.

“This is fantastic, Norman!” he said to Selwood. “Surely, by your own story, you never could have created such fabulous claims. You, a self-admitted prisoner.”

“I was,” conceded Selwood, coldly, “but I am speaking in behalf of a person who has pieced together the facts. An investigator called The Shadow. He reached me before Emro. He it was who brought me through the cordon of crooks outside. It was The Shadow, too, who sent me here, to place murder where it rightfully belongs!”

ONE man was instantly converted to Selwood's view. That man was Joe Cardona. He was realizing his own blunder of earlier this evening. He understood, at last, the secret of Selwood's remarkable departure.

Selwood was face to face with Howard.

“You wanted power!” denounced Selwood. “You hated Gregg, because he had usurped your rights as your father's eldest son. Under the veneer of kindness which I, your tutor, gave you, was a desire for evil, that I recognized but hoped would disappear.”

“You schemed to gain vast power through murder. You disposed of two men, Payson and Lloyd, who came here after they had seen Philip, to make the world believe that Philip had somehow disposed of them. When Tyburn and Wydell came here, you dealt in deeper strategy.

“You gassed them, Howard, with odorless fumes that would produce an aftereffect when they came in slight contact with other conditions. In Tyburn's case, you prepared him to succumb when he inhaled air that contained the merest percentage of hydrogen sulphide.

“The gas that you gave Wydell weakened him against any atmosphere that showed compression. You knew that he would have to travel by tube to New Jersey. Whether by train, or taxi through the Holland Tunnel, did not particularly matter.”

Howard smiled. To both Philip and Irene, viewing him in a new light, his expression seemed a smirk.

“Death gas is not one of my specialties,” he said to Selwood. “Since The Shadow knows everything, he should have told you that I experiment only with chemicals that neutralize poisons.”

“The Shadow told me,” returned Selwood, “that any man who devises ways to neutralize a poison, must have quantities of that very poison in his possession in order to test his experiments.”

Coldly emphatic, Selwood's words gave Howard his first jolt. As the gaunt man winced, his brother Philip added a denunciation. It was something that Selwood had reserved for later consideration, but it was all important to Philip, who gained his conclusion from the things that Selwood had revealed.

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“You killed Gregg, too!” exclaimed Philip. “You dosed him with some gas containing carbon monoxide. You had Emro put the same gas in my soda chargers. Only Gregg could suffer from it—”

“Proof!” roared Howard. “Any of you, all of you, prove these absurdities! Let The Shadow, whoever he is, offer proof!”

“The Shadow told me,” supplied Selwood, “to mention a man named Lamont Cranston. You gassed Cranston, too, quite differently from Wydell. The gas that Cranston inhaled was supposed to work when he reached a high altitude, for he was traveling by air.

“Fortunately, Cranston turned his ship over to a pilot. In it, he sent a guinea pig that he had brought from Gregg's plant. The guinea pig had inhaled the same gas. It died on the return trip, as Cranston would have, had he been piloting his plane.”

In a flash, Howard alone had the answer: Lamont Cranston was The Shadow. He foresaw that his keen visitor must have learned other facts; which was true, for at that moment Selwood supplied the very one that Howard feared.

“These chairs”—Selwood swept his hand around the circle of heavy-cushioned seats—“were hitherto loaded with gas, each holding its special sort. Those cushions are bellows; learning what each of your visitors intended to do, you placed him in the proper chair. You inhaled gas with the victim. You, of course, avoided the wrong conditions, afterward. To expose your crimes, Howard, we have only to examine the cushions—”

IN the midst of Selwood's revelation, Howard Caxter made a sideward leap, away from the throng. He knew that Selwood was speaking for The Shadow; that once the secret of the chairs had been discovered, all hope of bluff was gone.

Before a hand could stay him, Howard had reached the rear alcove. His hand tugged a cord into sight; ready to pull it, he cackled:

“Not a move, or all of you will die! Those chairs”—his tone was gleeful—“all contained gas tonight, mine included! I have only to admit another vapor, from the laboratory below this room, and death will be instant. There will not be time for you to reach the door.

“You think that I shall die with you”—Howard shifted, as he saw the others draw back, none daring a move—“but you are wrong! I have provided against that misfortune. Watch!”

His other hand had found a switch. He pressed it. A panel of thick glass sliced across the alcove; its dull transparency pronounced it bulletproof. Through that protecting plate, Howard Caxter surveyed his group of victims as if they were creatures beneath a microscope.

They pleased Howard; three in particular. His brother Philip, whom he detested, next to Gregg. His old tutor, Selwood, whose teachings Howard had rejected. Irene, so lovely that her life should be plucked, like one of the many flowers that Howard enjoyed, only because he could destroy them.

Irene produced the precise color that Howard Caxter wanted for the coming scene of destruction. Her horror was beautiful, her costume the very sort that Howard should have requested for this hideous occasion. Silk pajamas, pink like the tea roses; the garb seemed part of her.

No, not quite; for Irene was against the light, and Howard could see her shape through the filmy attire. He noticed the girl's body tremble. His hand tightened on the cord. He tugged at it.

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Only the loose end yanked. The portion above was gripped by another hand, that had reached in above Howard's fist. A gloved hand, its hue as black as the murderer's heart. Halted in his attempt to deliver his death, Howard thrust his face across his shoulder.

A pair of burning eyes were close to his.

The eyes of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XX. STROKE OF DOOM

THROUGHOUT that entire drama, The Shadow had been master of the scene. He had arrived ahead of Philip Caxter, landing in an autogiro near the woods of Howard's estate. The Shadow had entered through Irene's open window, at the moment when she had been meeting Philip in the upstairs hall.

Taking the catwalk past the dome of the indoor garden, The Shadow had reached the rear door of Howard's study, situated at the back of the alcove. During short intervals, he had been absent, but he had witnessed every important scene.

When Irene had flung herself in front of Philip, to save him from Cardona and the sheriff, The Shadow had been ready to intervene; but the girl's grit had accomplished all that was needed. The Shadow knew the route by which Howard Caxter would eventually come, so he had stayed there to met the murderer.

Met by The Shadow's boring gaze, Howard flattened back against the heavy plate of glass. He glared at the cord, which he had been unable to pull because of The Shadow's higher grasp. Then, to Howard's actual amazement, The Shadow's gloved hand calmly gave the cord a tug.

Like a madman, Howard Caxter wheeled about, to view his human specimens. They were seating themselves in the chairs, Irene like the rest. No gas was spurting to overwhelm them; with a sudden snarl, Howard realized why.

The Shadow had gone down to the laboratory, which purposely lacked workers tonight, and had cut off the feed pipe. His procedure with the cord had been his way of introducing himself to Howard Caxter—this time as The Shadow, not as Lamont Cranston.

No one beyond the glass noticed The Shadow tug the cord. Their gaze attracted by Howard's flounder, they did see the murderer's mouth go wide in what seemed a silent gasp. To The Shadow, that motion was a terrific shriek. Thrusting an automatic muzzle between Howard's eyes, The Shadow issued a fierce-toned command for silence.

Again, all seemed pantomime to the witnesses. They knew the difference when the door behind the alcove swung wide, to reveal the massed forms of Howard's servants, headed by Pelton. The servants had quarters in this wing of the house; they had heard Howard's maddened call and were here to aid him.

The Shadow frustrated that attempt in two ways. His hand plucked Howard's shoulder, whisked the murderer about and flung him, like a human battering-ram, against the arriving servants. Slashing his automatic along the wall, The Shadow struck the switch that controlled the glass barrier and slid the transparent wall wide.

Hurling himself into the midst of Howard's startled servants, The Shadow sprawled them left and right, while Cardona was hurrying through, followed by the deputy, Norman Selwood and, last, the sheriff. The reason that the sheriff came last, was because he was blocked by a very earnest young lady in pajamas, who insisted upon snatching his key ring from his vest pocket.

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With the sheriff gone, Irene proceeded to unlock Philip's handcuffs. That done, they both followed the route that the others had taken. They reached the rear hall, to find Pelton and the servants putting up the last remnants of a struggle. But The Shadow and Howard Caxter were gone.

Joe Cardona pointed to the laboratory steps. Philip joined him, as Joe started downward. The sound of gunfire halted them, but they were close enough to witness the scene below. The Shadow was shooting it out with Howard Caxter, in a strange setting.

KNOWING the laboratory by heart, Howard was taking advantage of every nook. Whenever he changed position, he grabbed some large piece of equipment, sent it wheeling in The Shadow's direction. Rubber-tired, those chunky things of metal were silent juggernauts, intended to crush their prey.

But The Shadow, a whirling blotch of black amid the glitter of chromium-plated tanks, was away from every rolling missile before it reached him.

He was picking vantage spots, chiefly workbenches, from which he stabbed an occasional shot toward Howard. Somehow, the murderer evaded those well-aimed efforts. Thin, amazing in his agility, Howard Caxter had luck with him; here, in his own preserves, he was the most difficult human target that The Shadow had ever encountered.

Joe Cardona tried to get in a few shots of his own. His revolver was no more effective than a cap pistol. He saw Howard bob up behind a bench, spread both hands, and thrust two squatty rolling tables toward The Shadow. When Joe fired, Howard was no longer in sight.

Philip was shouting a warning. It wasn't needed. The Shadow sidestepped one of the rolling objects, flung a metal stool beneath the wheels of the other, veering it toward the wall. Whirling away, he dropped behind an overturned bench, that served him as a barricade against Howard's next shot.

All through that fray, the flickering flame that Howard termed the "lamp of progress" was throwing a flickering glow upon the barriers. As colorful as the glass fragments of a kaleidoscope, the flame had partly aided, partly betrayed, moves of the two combatants. But there was nothing tricky in the way the light showed the progress of the rolling table that The Shadow had dodged.

There was a crash, as the heavy object struck a tall gas tank by the wall. The big cylinder overturned; its cap broke free as it hit the floor. That second crash was accompanied by a beastlike shriek from Howard Caxter.

Bounding from his own barricade, the murderer made a desperate attempt to clear The Shadow's bulwark and slash the cloaked fighter with an empty gun. Howard thought The Shadow's .45 was exhausted, too; but he was wrong. Flame spurted from a raised muzzle; jolted in midair, Howard spun to the floor.

That bullet had merely clipped him. The Shadow wanted the killer alive. Making a quick dash for the steps, The Shadow thought that Howard would rise and follow. Instead, the wounded man tried to scramble to the shelter of a closet; he tripped over one of the objects that he, himself, had flung, and sprawled a few feet short.

There was no time for The Shadow to return to him. Meeting Philip and Cardona, The Shadow was busy driving them upward to safety. Hurlled by gloved hands that swept them hard ahead, they realized what Howard's cry had meant. That tank had released an inflammable gas; in a very few seconds, it would fill the sunken laboratory.

That could mean nothing but disaster, thanks to the undying flame that burned openly in the lamp that hung from the laboratory ceiling.

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Philip shouted to Irene and her father. Joe Cardona yelled at the sheriff and the deputy. For a moment, all were confused; then they caught The Shadow's hissed command.

He was pointing to the rear door that led from the house. Driving ahead, he had it unlocked and was outside, when the surge arrived.

First, Norman Selwood and his daughter; then Pelton and the other prisoners, some handcuffed, others staggery, as Cardona, Philip, the sheriff and his deputy, propelled them out to safety. Ahead, all saw The Shadow's blinking flashlight, urging them farther from the house.

ALL were distant when the explosion came. It issued from the wall just back of the domed indoor garden, a blast that lifted mortar and stone apart like pasteboard. The wing of the mansion collapsed in one roaring puff; the main portion of the house was shattered all along its connecting wall.

New blasts followed; huge masses of green-hot vapors puffed toward the sky. Whenever those roaring gases jetted in through the shattered wall, they burst inside the main portion of the house. They must have penetrated everywhere, there to explode; for, like the deaths that Howard Caxter had delivered, they came in unexpected spots.

Irene saw her own room burst with vivid flame; then came a flash from windows several rooms beyond it. Next, the library shivered with temporary brilliance. The whole great house was going to absolute ruin.

Only the front wall stood intact amid the crackle of flames that followed the explosions. The central spot, where the study had been, was level with the ground. Beneath the flame that licked the tumbled debris lay the ashes of Howard Caxter. His mansion had become his pyre.

From the side lawn, Irene and two companions heard the sound of starting cars from the front driveway. Cardona and the local officials had promptly packed the prisoners into two cars and were taking them to the county jail. Off from behind the house came another roar. The Shadow's autogiro was in motion.

Accompanied by Harry Vincent, who had emerged from his hiding place among the trees, The Shadow was leaving the scene where he had conquered crime. Above the garish light from the burning mansion, three people saw the strange, wingless craft in which The Shadow had made his journey here. It vanished, finally, into the cloud-streaked sky.

Odd, that three persons should all imagine the same sound: the shivery tone of a parting laugh, mirthless, yet triumphant. Yet that strange tone had often been heard, or imagined, when The Shadow left a scene where he had brought victory to the side of justice.

They hoped, those listeners, that The Shadow's weird mockery would be heard again, by others, as token of completed rescue and vengeance justly delivered.

Then, solemnly, the three filed across the lawn, toward Philip's coupe, the one car which still remained, its position plain by the light from the flaming mansion. Irene began to hobble, as they reached the driveway. Philip was alarmed, thinking that she had been hurt. Smilingly, Irene explained that she had lost a slipper and was hopping on the other foot, to avoid the rough gavel.

Tucked between Philip and her father, Irene listened to their solemn talk, while the car was rolling along roads that looked strangely peaceful under the headlights. Together, they were clearing up the final points of Howard Caxter's crimes.

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“HE wanted Gregg dead,” said Philip, soberly. “The only way that Howard could manage it, was to bring Gregg to the house. Of course, that meant killing all the others—”

“Which was quite in keeping with his nature,” inserted Selwood. “He had a natural desire to murder. I could tell you many stories of his youthful cruelty, a habit which I gradually overcame. But we must let those rest with Howard.”

“But murder could be charged to him,” continued Philip, “unless he had someone to take the blame. No wonder, he tried to pin the crimes on me! If I had gone to the chair, all of our combined millions would have belonged to Howard.”

“I thought of that,” said Selwood. “But I didn’t understand how Howard had arranged it, until I learned that Emro was his tool. All Emro had to do was disappear; then, through him everything would have been traced back to you.”

“The mobs and all,” acknowledged Philip, “and though I would have known that Emro was somewhere in it, I never would have suspected Howard. I even blamed it on poor Gregg, after he was dead.”

There was silence with that reference. Yet all three knew that the death of Gregg Caxter had been no great loss to humanity. It was Gregg’s own folly, even trickery, that had carried him beyond the protection of The Shadow.

Philip’s next words were bitter.

“As the last of the Caxters,” he said, “I can’t say much for any of the tribe.”

“I can,” declared Irene. “What about you, father?”

“I agree,” said Selwood. “You and I have lost nothing from these tragedies.”

“Nothing,” returned Irene, “except all those new clothes you sent me.”

“But I sent none. Howard must have bought them.”

“Then I am glad that they are gone.”

The car was swinging into a side road. The sway brought Irene snugly close to Philip. The girl looked up, said:

“The Selwood family approves you, Mr. Philip Caxter!”

Glancing beside him, Philip wondered why he had ever boasted of the stars that shone in Wyoming. He was looking into two that seemed to shine much brighter than any he had ever before seen.

“Tell me,” suggested Irene, as she snuggled closer, “just how are you going to smuggle a young lady in pajamas into the great city of New York?”

“We’ll think about that later,” replied Philip. He was swinging into a road, where a sign pointed to the town of Pennbury. “At present, we are going to drop in on our friend the sheriff. He will be through with the prisoners by this time, and we’ll ask him to arrange something else.”

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“Just what?”

“A wedding! Don't you think that it would be real fun”—Philip's smile was one of happy anticipation—“to find yourself being married in—”

Philip was going to add “pink pajamas”; but didn't, because Irene's finger pressed his lips as her soft voice completed:

“New Jersey!”

THE END