

THE VAMPIRE MURDERS

by Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. HOUSE OF HORROR

LIKE an image from a dream, the old house loomed against the moonlit sky—a bulky pile of ancient stone and ornate woodwork that blended into a massive monster ready to gorge on the hapless visitor who dared to venture into its clutch.

It seemed a living thing, this isolated mansion that bore the name of Haldrew Hall. Perhaps the drifting clouds that filtered the moonlight were responsible for that illusion of life; possibly the faint, flickering glow from the ground-floor windows was the cause.

Whichever the case, Harry Vincent felt a sensation of grim horror as he viewed the place.

He'd expected something of that sort from Haldrew Hall, but the house outdid the descriptions that Harry had heard of it. The contrast of its squatty bulk and the higher turrets penciled against the wavering moonlight, captivated the eye and held it. Harry was riveted as he watched the building blotted out in darkness as a thicker cloud crossed the moon; yet even then he could trace the outline of the hideous mansion.

Harry wondered whether his memory was overworking itself. The house was gone, save for the dull flickers

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that represented its windows. But, no, the image was returning, along with the passage of the cloud. Haldrew Hall was still there in all of its monstrosity.

It was then that the voice spoke, close to Harry's elbow. It said:

“Two bucks, bud, and you're welcome to ride back to town as part of the deal.”

Harry turned to the driver of the rattletrap car that had brought him to these premises. He forced a laugh that sounded lighter than it really was.

“I'm staying here,” decided Harry. “How about driving in through the gate and up to the place?”

“Sorry.” The fellow seemed to mean it. “It's bad luck going through that gate. I said I'd bring you this far, but no farther. Maybe it won't be bad luck for you—”

Harry opened the door of the car and reached for his bag. The driver tried to explain himself.

“What I mean is—” He hesitated. “Well, you're one of the Haldrew relations, ain't you?”

“I'm supposed to be,” returned Harry. “A distant relation.”

“That's what they all are,” informed the driver. “Old Giles Haldrew didn't have no close kinfolk, excepting his brother Varney and maybe the old lady who's been living in the house. I mean the rest of them, like you, that have come here the last few days. They've all stayed and no bad luck has hit them yet. Maybe it's because they've got some Haldrew in them.”

Apparently, a true Haldrew was supposed to show it bluntly, so Harry performed in proper style by handing the man his two dollars and turning abruptly toward the gate. Bag in one hand, the other reaching to the gate, Harry turned to watch the car pull away. Alone, he forced another laugh to stir his own courage. It was a laugh that failed.

A groan came in answer; a tone so gruesome that Harry dropped the bag and leaped away, shoving his hand to the pocket where he carried his gun. If the car hadn't already been bumping away along the rough road, Harry would have finished his leap inside it and taken advantage of the round-trip offer. But the car was gone and the groan had ended, so Harry steadied. Waiting tensely, he listened for the groan again. When it came, Harry's laugh was genuine.

The grating sound had issued from the iron gate that blocked the grass-covered driveway into Haldrew Hall. The wind was stirring the gate upon its rusted hinges, which were giving those grim sounds in protest. It was just another of the features that went with Haldrew Hall.

Groping for the suitcase, Harry found it; pulling the gate a trifle wider, he entered, and walked along the driveway to the Hall.

ONE thing kept drumming through Harry's mind. The fellow who had brought him out here had modified the bad-luck statement by saying it might not apply to the Haldrew relatives. If such were the case, Harry could find small comfort. For he, of all recent visitors to Haldrew Hall, was traveling under false colors.

Harry Vincent had never heard of the Haldrew family or their weird mansion until a week ago.

The Haldrew clan had leaped into the limelight with the death of old Giles Haldrew, a death so sudden that it

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might have produced question, if Giles hadn't been exactly ninety-three years of age. The other thing unusual in the case of Giles Haldrew was his legacy.

His estate was to be divided equally among all relatives who would undergo the ordeal of living in Haldrew Hall for the term of one month. Those who failed to fulfill that provision would be disqualified. So the clan was assembling, because tomorrow would be the last day when any claimant could put in an appearance.

Now this peculiar arrangement had intrigued a certain person known as The Shadow. As an individual, The Shadow was far more mysterious than any Haldrew; in fact, he could outmatch the Hall itself. It was The Shadow's business to hunt down crime, and the Haldrew case interested him. Not so much the sudden death of Giles, but the status of the relatives who intended to stay in Haldrew Hall, was the thing that most concerned The Shadow.

The Shadow had uncovered a most vital point. Almost anyone could be related to the Haldrew family. For a person to present himself as such and live there for a month, would be fair enough. If his claim of relationship wouldn't stand the test, he simply wouldn't participate in the division of the estate when it was settled later.

So The Shadow had delegated Harry Vincent, his most trusted agent, to reside as inside man in Haldrew Hall.

In his suitcase Harry had a very elaborate pedigree, that linked him to the Haldrew family by dint of several generations back. There was a weak link in the chain, but Harry wasn't supposed to know it. The Haldrew lawyers could find that for themselves when they traced the thing back.

For the present, Harry Vincent was ostensibly a Haldrew, and the point would satisfy everyone—except Harry himself.

For with every step, Harry was coming closer to Haldrew Hall and the forbidding mansion loomed more ominous than ever. If a curse did dwell within Haldrew Hall, ready to engulf persons who defied it, that malediction would rest most heavily upon Harry Vincent as an impostor.

Legally, Harry had nothing to fear; but he felt the distinct impression that he was entering a domain that had a law unto itself. Such was the spell cast by Haldrew Hall!

There was no moonlight under the deep porte-cochere that covered the steps to the front door. The space was like the confines of a cavern, where ghoulish hands might stretch forth and clasp the unwary visitor. Harry's only solace was the crunch of gravel beneath his feet, a sound so encouraging that he kept on walking so that he would still hear it.

Then the thud of his footfalls on the wooden steps produced the same urge to continue. Reaching the front door, Harry groped nervously, found an iron knocker and banged it. The clang had an echo he didn't like; nevertheless, it was better than no sound at all. So Harry banged again and again, until the door suddenly opened.

THE man who admitted Harry was a most peculiar character. He was obviously a servant, for he wore a faded jacket that looked like a footman's livery and his stiff shirt was topped with a wing-tipped collar and a stringy necktie.

In a way, he looked young, for he was spry and limber; but his face had a haggard expression that indicated years. The face was lined, too, quite heavily, but Harry attributed that to the candlelight, which was the only form of illumination in the hallway.

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It was difficult to tell whether the servant regarded Harry as a welcome visitor or an unwanted stranger. The flickery light created its own changes of expression upon the man's strained features. At moments, the face was quizzical; then it became suspicious. And all the while, the man remained silent, as if expecting Harry to declare himself.

The deadlock was broken by a crackly voice that issued from a side room. It came with a sharp call:

“Who is it, Throck? Another of my relatives?”

Harry found his own voice in a reply that he gave to Throck. Nudging his thumb toward the direction of the voice, Harry said to the servant:

“Tell him my name is Vincent. I've come here to present my credentials as a member of the Haldrew family.”

The candlelight turned Throck's expression into a glare that faded as the servant turned about. Then, before Throck could relay the announcement, a figure stalked into sight. Harry Vincent stood stock-still to eye one of the strangest men that he had ever seen.

He didn't even have to guess who the person was. Common sense told Harry that this must be Varney Haldrew, brother of the late Giles.

At first sight, Varney Haldrew appeared to be a tall man. This was due to two factors: first, he was quite thin; second, he wore a plain black suit, that added to the slim effect and hence increased the illusion of height. The term “gaunt” applied to Varney but didn't do him justice. Rather, he had an emaciated appearance, though he seemed to be in perfect health.

On his hands Varney wore gray gloves, which he did not bother to remove. He simply greeted Harry with a bow, gave a tight-lipped smile and spoke through his teeth:

“Greetings, Mr. Vincent. You will excuse Throck. He is hardly the ideal servant. You see”—Varney laid a hand on Throck's shoulder— “the Haldrew family has always had a Throck in its employ. My brother Giles could never have died happily without a Throck around. So he found one, the last of a fading line—like the Haldrew's.”

Then, while Harry could only nod, the gaunt man motioned for Throck to take the suitcase. That done, there was another bow from Varney as he supplied the unnecessary introduction:

“I am Varney Haldrew.”

With that, Varney raised a gray-gloved hand and beckoned. Throck went one direction with the suitcase, while Harry followed Varney the other way. Though Varney's back was turned, Harry still could picture the man's cadaverous face, and the recollection brought shudders. If Harry had ever met a man who was anything but human, Varney Haldrew fulfilled the definition.

His welcome could not be termed such. Everything about it was false, from the plaster-cast smile to the puppet gestures of his gray-gloved hands. His stride was mechanical as he led the way through a room where more candles cast a wavering glow in long streaks across the floor.

Beyond was another door, and from it Harry could hear voices. For a moment he was pleased; then amid the voices came a querulous tone that was sharp, almost angry.

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At sound of it, Varney paused. He turned to face Harry, and those thin lips parted in a smile that showed long white teeth. From Varney's eyes flashed a metallic glint that flickered with the shiver of the candles. Through those same teeth came the tone that Harry had heard before: Varney's voice, modulated to a degree where it was a hiss, rather than a crackle.

“I shall introduce you to some of your distant relations, Mr. Vincent,” spoke Varney. “Excuse me”—the lips tightened in a smile— “I should say our relations. I am quite sure that you will like them.”

HARRY wasn't sure at all. In a few minutes of acquaintance with Varney Haldrew he had become quite positive that he would not like anything that appealed to the gaunt man. But there was this about Varney: he left a proviso with everything he said. He hadn't stated that he liked the visiting relatives; he had said that Harry would. That, at least, was some comfort.

As Varney finished his pronouncement, the candlelight did more than waver. Flames leaped; then died; some of the wicks were actually snuffed out, as though the hissed breath of Varney had reached them. More startling was the shiver that shook the entire house.

For the moment, Harry's knees knocked together as the tremor reached them. He'd bargained for a lot, Harry had, as he often did in the service of The Shadow, but he hadn't expected to meet a man like Varney Haldrew, whose mere voice could quake a mansion!

Then the illusion ended. It was only the wind, presaging a storm, that had chased the clouds ahead of it. A sudden gust, sweeping around the old house, battering the creaky walls and pressing the ancient beams that supported Haldrew Hall.

The whole thing ended with the parting of the brief gale, and there stood Varney, opening a door to its full width and bowing Harry through to a room that seemed brilliant in contrast to the gloom that had marked the path to it.

Returning a bow, Harry favored Varney with a smile that he knew couldn't be worse than the ones he had received, and therewith stepped across the threshold to meet his new relations.

CHAPTER II. CALLING ALL SHADOWS

THE room that Harry entered was a living room. Its cheery glow came from a large fireplace where flame from big logs drowned out the candlelight. There were three people in the room and Harry was glad to see them, for he'd formed the rapid, and correct, impression that they couldn't be worse than Varney.

The first man that Harry noted was the one who had been snarling rather angrily, and he wasn't a bad specimen at all. He was playing pinochle with the other two and the game annoyed him. Turning as Harry entered, the man showed a roundish face topped by a bald head. He had a cigar sticking from the side of his mouth, and he removed it with his right hand, then transferred it to his left, so that he could shake hands with Harry in response to Varney's introduction.

The bald man was George Frenton, and his connection with the Haldrew family was about as roundabout as Harry's, except that it probably had no weak links. Frenton's handshake was flabby at first, but it tightened under Harry's grip. Very obviously, Frenton didn't like Haldrew Hall any more than Harry did and was only too glad to welcome a new visitor to this house of horror.

Turning from Frenton, Harry saw the other men and they impressed him even more. Both were young, but they formed a marked contrast. One chap had dark hair, deep-set eyes, and a square-jawed face. The other,

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who looked taller, was light haired, with clear blue eyes and a long face that was definitely genial.

Both gave Harry a friendly handshake as Varney introduced them, but with the introduction, Harry received a surprise.

Varney introduced the dark-haired man as Cedric Armand, the blond type chap as Warren Armand. When Harry stared, wondering why they were so different, both men laughed.

“We aren't brothers,” remarked Cedric. “We're just cousins. Second cousins, at that.”

“And this is the first time we ever met,” added Warren. “Our great-grandmother happened to be a Haldrew. She married a man named Armand.”

From the doorway, Varney Haldrew supplied a testy statement.

“We are all Haldrews here,” he said. “It is unfortunate that you two should be related on the Armand side of your family. By the way, Mr. Vincent, just what is your connection with the Haldrew family?”

“It's all in the suitcase,” returned Harry. “If you can find Throck and have him bring it here, I'll give you my credentials.”

Varney departed on the quest, and the Armands invited Harry to join the pinochle game, which had begun to bore Frenton, the steady loser. So Harry sat down at the card table, and the Armand cousins promptly initiated him into the situation at Haldrew Hall.

“Don't let Varney worry you,” said Cedric. “He's just sore because the whole works wasn't handed to him. Haldrew Hall has passed from father to son, right along. Giles Haldrew didn't have a son, so Varney thought he'd get the place as younger brother. Only he didn't.”

“And by younger brother,” added Warren, “we mean younger brother; Varney is twenty-five years younger than old Giles. Imagine that!”

“What gripes Varney most,” continued Cedric, “is that the estate doesn't amount to much. It includes this house and several thousand dollars. For all I care, Varney can have the whole of it. I'm just sticking around as a sporting proposition.”

“Same with me,” asserted the other Armand. “You know, I feel something like a piker.” Warren paused to gaze frankly at Harry, who was arranging his pinochle hand. “Why should I bother about a few thousand dollars of Haldrew money when I have a real fortune coming from the Armand family?”

It was Cedric who answered Warren's question. The dark-haired man spoke with a chuckle.

“You'll earn whatever you get,” observed Cedric, “if you stay around this mausoleum for a month. That's my philosophy, Warren, and anyway, I could use a few thousand dollars. But let's forget finance and get back to pinochle.”

THE card game and the cheering warmth of the great fireplace did much to nullify the chills that Harry had experienced when approaching Haldrew Hall. The indulgent way in which the Armand cousins spoke of Varney indicated that the cadaverous man was just part of the setting, when one became accustomed to him.

From their conversation, Harry took it that the Armands had been here a few days, but before he could put

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inquiries on the subject, Varney returned, Throck following with the suitcase.

Harry opened the bag, brought out an imposing envelope and handed it to Varney, who dismissed Throck. The pinochle game resumed, and amid the crackle of the fire Harry could hear the crunch of paper as Varney studied the family tree that had been compiled for Harry's benefit. Meanwhile, Harry kept glancing occasionally at Frenton, who was interested in other matters.

Moving around the room, the pudgy man was muttering to himself while he tapped his knuckles against the oak-paneled wainscoting, ran his fingers along the edge of the thick mantelpiece, and stopped to eye the heavy-framed portraits that hung in the room. When Frenton knelt to raise the edge of a rug, Harry gave puzzled glances from one Armand to another.

"Don't let Frenton worry you," undertoned Cedric. "We thought at first that he was tapping for secret panels, but he couldn't be, or he'd have found some by this time. They're probably as thick as rat holes around this old house."

"Frenton is just appraising the premises," added Warren. At that moment, Frenton was fingering a heavy candelabrum and stroking a velvet curtain that hung beside a window. "He expects the house to be sold and wants to make sure we get the right price for everything. Old Giles Haldrew didn't have anywhere near the amount of money that people expected. What he did leave won't go very far, when divided among six persons."

"Seven persons," corrected Cedric. "You forgot to include Vincent."

Looking about, Harry counted Varney, Frenton, two Armands and himself, which made only five. He inquired who the other two might be.

"Sabbatha Haldrew is one," stated Cedric. "She's Varney's niece, but she's older than he is. Old Sabbatha has always lived at Haldrew Hall."

"The other is Gail Merwin," put in Warren. "Just a distant connection, like we are. She arrived this afternoon. Had a long trip getting here, so she turned in early."

Varney had finished rustling Harry's family tree. Apparently the documents satisfied him, for he returned them to the envelope and approached Harry quite affably. Laying a hand on Harry's shoulder, he suggested dryly:

"You must be tired from your trip, Mr. Vincent. Come; I shall show you to your apartment."

Odd how that crackly voice blended with the fire! Yet Harry had the distinct impression that Varney's hand would have been icy, but for the glove that covered it. That was the point about Varney Haldrew: with all his pretense, there wasn't an ounce of warmth in him. Meeting the man's fishlike stare, Harry wondered if he were actually a creature of flesh and blood.

Fish eyes! And fish had blood. Odd, again, how the word "blood" rung through Harry's brain and seemed to flash itself in crimson letters against the firelight!

For a moment, Harry thought of rejoining the Armands at the card table. It was then too late. Frenton had slipped into Harry's place, as if the mere suggestion of leaving this warm room horrified him. So Harry simply nodded to Varney and pocketed the big envelope.

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Then, stealing his hand into his coat pocket, Harry felt a cold sensation that pleased him. It was his gun again, a protection against whatever might occur in this old house.

So Harry thought—but as yet he had not experienced the things that could happen in Haldrew Hall!

VARNEY led the way from the big living room, out through another hall. There, lights were very dim and every door that Harry passed looked ominous. A corner produced a short passage to a brief flight of stairs that were laden with thick gloom. Varney paused to pluck a three-socket candlestick from a table, and he used it to light the way.

Up that short flight, through another passage, then more steps. Another turn, a longer staircase to a landing, and by that time, Harry was completely lost. Haldrew Hall was a labyrinth, not only because of its many passages but due to the half floors, which seemed to be its chief feature of architecture. Remembering the view from outside, Harry recalled the irregular arrangement of the windows and now understood their reason.

Varney was threading the way deep into the house, pausing so that Harry wouldn't stumble when they came to steps. They reached a door which was ajar and there Varney entered, setting the candlestick upon an old-fashioned washstand.

Harry saw his bag lying on an old sofa in the corner. Across the room was a large bed that looked a hundred years old.

“I hope this room pleases you,” spoke Varney. “It is small, but you can see we have many guests—”

“Quite all right,” put in Harry. “I don't mind being cramped.”

Varney didn't notice Harry's sarcasm. The room was anything but cramped. If Varney considered this a small room, Harry could picture others in the house as mammoth apartments. What Harry wanted right now was to get rid of Varney, and that proved easy, for the gaunt man took care of it himself by bowing right out the door.

Coolly, Harry waited, expecting that Varney might return—which he did.

The door creaked on its hinges as Varney's face popped into sight. Harry supposed that Varney's excuse would be that he needed the candles to light his way to his own apartment. But that wasn't it.

“I meant to remind you of something,” remarked Varney. “It isn't advisable to move about this house at night. The place is large and you might lose your way. Besides, the many steps are dangerous to strangers—even though they may be welcome guests.”

Varney closed the door and departed; of the latter, Harry was sure, for he could hear the strange man's footsteps creaking along the old hallway. The footfalls faded as Varney turned a corner, proving what Harry already suspected: that this queer resident of Haldrew Hall could pick his way with catlike precision in the dark. But Varney's words remained in Harry's ears long after the footsteps had departed.

“Dangerous to strangers!”

That phrase, picked from Varney's statements, seemed to sum up Haldrew Hall. It was the sort of place that could be dangerous in more ways than one. It might have pitfalls other than those short steps along the gloomy passages. But Harry wasn't worried by Varney's admonition.

Snuffing the candles, Harry groped his way to a window that he found by the dim moonlight. Producing a

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small flashlight, he pressed it close to the pane and blinked a signal. Waiting, Harry heard the wind whip around the ancient building, producing new shudders within. He flicked the light again and was suddenly startled by a flash which responded.

A flash that lighted distant sky, outlining the woods that surrounded Haldrew Hall. Then the dull roar of faraway thunder that denoted an approaching storm. Tensely, Harry waited for several minutes. After another flash of lightning and its dull thunder, he blinked his signal again.

This time—an answer!

It came from the fringe of the trees, a responding flashlight that blinked a coded question that Harry understood. With that, the shrouding pall of Haldrew Hall seemed to lift. Whatever the menace of the mansion, Harry was contacting a friend who could offset it.

Those answers to Harry's signal denoted the presence of his chief, The Shadow!

Though Harry Vincent couldn't lay a finger on anything actually wrong in Haldrew Hall, he felt that danger must exist. He had known that The Shadow would arrive after his agent was ensconced in the mansion, and Harry was indeed glad that his chief had appeared so soon. For this was one time—above all times—when Harry felt it necessary to put in a quick call for The Shadow.

Calling The Shadow!

Calling all shadows, would be the better term. For Haldrew Hall had its own shadows, born of the past and ready to control the future, unless a stronger hand than theirs should intervene!

CHAPTER III. THE FIGURE IN BLACK

THE SHADOW'S delay in answering Harry's flashes was due simply to the fact that he had been circling the grounds. Close by the gloom of heavy tree boughs, a low, strange laugh stirred the darkness as The Shadow, fully cloaked in black, caught the import of Harry's rapid signals.

Apparently, Haldrew Hall had given Harry the creeps, to the point where he felt that only The Shadow could analyze the situation. Harry was calling for closer contact, so The Shadow queried how he wanted to arrange it.

At his window, Harry pondered; recalling the longest flight of steps, he remembered they were on the other side of the house, and that he had passed windows on the way up to the landing. It would be easy for The Shadow to pick those specific windows. If anything, brief lightning flashes would aid, rather than hinder, when The Shadow approached the house.

So Harry coded the facts about the stairway and its windows, whereupon The Shadow signed off.

Extinguishing his flashlight, Harry stole from the room. He felt his way along the passage, one hand against the wall. As he advanced each foot, he tested the floor to make sure he wasn't at a flight of steps. The floor boards creaked, but only lightly, and their sounds were absorbed by the grind of beams and the rattle of shutters as the wind kept rising around Haldrew Hall.

It seemed a very easy task, getting to the stairway on the other side of the house before The Shadow could arrive on his roundabout trip. Easy at first, but gradually it proved complicated.

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As passages took Harry from one level to another, he discovered two things: first, that he was going farther down than he expected; again, that none of the passages took him to the other side of the building.

Realizing that he'd lost his way, Harry risked the flashlight and finally worked his way out of the maze. But he didn't come out where he expected. Instead of reaching the landing of what might be termed the second floor, Harry found himself about ground-floor level, or slightly above it.

The passage from which Harry emerged showed steps that went down toward the living room, where Frenton and the Armands were still at their card game. Picking an opposite channel, Harry pocketed the flashlight and groped his way to the spot he wanted—the longer flight of upward stairs.

By this time, The Shadow had certainly circled the house. Harry could picture his black-cloaked figure under the ivy-clad wall beneath those telltale windows that marched at an upward angle beside the flight of stairs.

Indeed, as Harry caught the rattle of a window higher up, he was quite sure that The Shadow had already scaled to it. Knowing that Harry was on the second floor, The Shadow would naturally come up, outside, rather than have his agent risk a creaky trip down the stairs.

But Harry happened to be at the bottom instead of the top, so he had to risk the trip anyway. It was the easiest part of his journey, for the fleeting moonlight cast a spotty glow through the narrow windows and showed the path ahead.

Noting the first window as he passed it, Harry saw another reason why The Shadow would have chosen a window higher up. Those on the stairway itself were too narrow for anyone to squeeze through.

Almost at the stair top, Harry paused, gripped with complete elation. On the landing, close by the wider window, was a figure in black. He'd guessed right, Harry had, for the shrouded visitor was turned about, looking toward the few steps that made an upward angle from the landing. This was The Shadow, watching for Harry's arrival from the second floor.

Reaching from the steps, Harry gripped the cloak that dangled from the figure's shoulders and started to voice the whispered word, 'Chief!', but the word never left Harry's throat. At Harry's grip, the figure wheeled and a play of moonlight flickered upon its face.

Harry went limp with horror.

This wasn't his chief, The Shadow!

The face that the pale light showed was almost a living skull, a leering thing with vicious, ugly teeth, and eyes that were lost within their sockets. True, the moonlight, was playing tricks, but even that couldn't transform The Shadow into a grisly creature wandering from its tomb!

Poor light could not offset the sense of touch, and the stuff that Harry gripped was not The Shadow's cloak. It was of different texture, a dry, thin cloth like linen, that could have torn beneath Harry's fingers if they hadn't loosened. For the draping cloth was torn already, as he could see when the ghastly figure finished its turn toward him.

Not a cloak, that draped blackness from the narrow shoulders that wore it, but a shroud!

Then, for final proof, came hands that shot from the tattered garment, to take Harry's throat in their fierce grip. Thin hands, bony of structure, like the fingers of a living skeleton!

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IT was fortunate for Harry that he was on the stairs. As he struck at the gripping hands and recoiled with all his might, he gained his freedom largely because he fell as he wrenched away. Even those hands of death couldn't stop a backward fling that was half a plunge.

Spinning on the steps, Harry lost sight of the gruesome creature that had seized him, only to release its hold rather than take the tumble down the stairs. That plunge being the immediate menace, Harry tried to catch himself and succeeded, though not without difficulty.

Harry's first grab was for the banister on the inside of the stairway. The old rail gave under his weight and would have fallen to a hall below, carrying Harry with it, if he hadn't still been spinning.

Across the stairs, Harry's next frantic snatch found one of the narrow windows, which was flapping inward under the power of the stormy wind.

There, Harry caught himself and came full about.

He was looking right up to the landing, less than a dozen steps above, but he couldn't see the creature that had attached him; at least, not while the fading moonlight afforded the only view. But there was something else that gave Harry a real picture of the present situation: another of those lightning flashes, more vivid than before.

By it, Harry saw the shrouded menace. The glare showed that the monstrosity had turned away, as though eager to avoid further strife with Harry. No sign of the face that had looked much like a skull, nor of those skeleton hands. Only the shroud was visible about the crouched shoulders, and it was a shroud indeed!

Black in the darkness, it was greenish in the lightning flash, a color that came from the mold of many years. And Harry saw plainly the long, torn tatters that the moonlight had shown to lesser degree.

Sight of the thing in flight changed Harry's attitude completely. He'd surprised that menace of bone and tatters quite as much as it had startled him. Ghoul, vampire, whatever it might be, the creature had sought to master Harry and had failed. It was Harry's turn to attack, and he rallied to the cause. With a shout, he started an upward lunge.

Odd, how other shouts came sooner than echoes should have. Odd to Harry, at least, though he would have understood had he stopped to reason. The calls were from the downstairs living room, where the men at the card table had heard Harry's clatter on the stairway.

But Harry's own shout wasn't a call for help. It was his challenge to the shrouded vampire, the bony menace of Haldrew Hall. He intended that his lunge would end only when he had the creature in his grip.

The lunge ended sooner. Quite as startling as Harry's first encounter with the vampire was the clutch that came from nowhere to halt his upward drive. Like a trip hammer, something came up from the very steps themselves, took Harry's ankle and yanked it from under him. Harry was out of the grip an instant later, but his lunge was spoiled. Instead of reaching the landing with his feet, he caught it with his hands.

So thorough was Harry's urge to overtake the shrouded menace up above, that he failed to realize how mysterious was the thing that stopped him. But his chase was ended when he sprawled on the top steps, with only his head and shoulders on the landing. All he could do was make a wild reach with his hands, hoping to grab the ankles of the departing vampire in the manner some unknown hand had snatched his own.

Lucky indeed was Harry's spill. He'd failed to snare the vampire; it was gone. But he'd failed, likewise, to put

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himself in the path of something else. Something that whirred downward from the steps that formed a right angle to the second floor.

It whizzed above Harry's head and shoulders, thudded hard into the wall just below the sill of the landing window. And Harry, sensing doom from the whine, flattened instantly, shoving himself lower down the stairs, his quest for the vampire forgotten.

THUNDER rolled, the result of the distant lightning flash, and with it, new lights appeared. Not the feeble return of moonlight, nor another streak of lightning, but the glow of candles brought by several hands.

Candles that gleamed from the floor above, where Harry heard the voices of two women, one excited, the other very calm. More flickers of candle flame came from the bottom of the stairs, where the Armands had arrived with candelabra snatched hastily from the living-room mantel.

Long were the streaks those candles cast, but their light showed everything quite plainly. Everything, yet with it nothing that resembled a human form, living or dead, other than Harry himself. Half seated on the top step, Harry looked about the landing, to find that the shroud-clad vampire had totally disappeared, despite the fact that people with burning candles had closed in from both directions.

But there was something to prove that Harry's adventure wasn't just imagination. When he looked toward the wide window on the landing, he saw the souvenir that was buried deep in the woodwork just below the sill. The thing was an antique knife, driven halfway to its hilt!

This at least would support Harry's story, should people be inclined to doubt it. But the person to whom Harry wished to tell it was not among those present. Harry's contact with The Shadow was definitely postponed until they could meet without witnesses. How soon that would be, Harry did not know, but there was something that encouraged him.

Amid a dying sigh of wind that circled the old mansion, Harry fancied that he heard an echoed whisper that mirthed a sibilant laugh: The Shadow's promise that he, strange master of darkness, would take a hand in solving the weird riddle of Haldrew Hall, after mere humans like Harry and the rest had finished their speculations on the subject of a roving vampire that had vanished without a rattle of its bones!

CHAPTER IV. STROKE OF MIDNIGHT

ON his feet, Harry nodded to Cedric and Warren as they came up the stairs carrying the candelabra and pouring questions as to what had happened. Harry simply stated that he had decided to return downstairs, but had lost his way. After that logical beginning, he added:

“And... then it happened!”

“So that was all!” exclaimed Cedric. “Well, we're glad you didn't tumble too far down the stairs. By the way, Vincent, let me introduce you to some more of the family.”

Cedric turned to the short steps leading up to the second floor, bowed politely and said:

“Miss Sabbatha Haldrew, this is a remote cousin, Mr. Harry Vincent.”

For a moment, a shock gripped Harry. Framed against the candlelight above, he saw a face that reminded him too much of the shrouded skeleton that he had encountered so shortly before. Then, as Sabbatha came down the steps and extended her hand, the illusion was dispelled. Like the moonlight, flickering candle flame could

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give a face a hollow look at first glance.

Seen at closer range, when the candles had ended their waver, Sabbatha's features looked old and withered, but they could not be termed a living skull. They resembled the features of Sabbatha's uncle, Varney, except that Sabbatha was appreciably older, but with it more human.

Her smile wasn't as tight-lipped as Varney's and her handclasp had warmth, though Harry noted that its grip was bony. However, Sabbatha wasn't wearing a tattered shroud. She was attired in a heavy dressing gown that resembled an old-fashioned quilt.

Then Cedric was introducing the other lady from the stairs as Miss Gail Merwin. She was the one who had spoken in an excited tone, for the candle that she carried was trembling in her left hand as she extended her right to Harry. But even the fluctuation of the flame could not mar the beauty that belonged to Gail.

Harry wondered why the Armands hadn't mentioned that Gail was so lovely, but he didn't wonder long. As Cedric took the candlestick from her hand, Warren steadied the girl's arm. It was very plain that each young man was trying to win her favor, and having recognized each other as a rival, they hadn't cared to stir Harry's interest in Gail. Two rivals were enough, without a third.

But Gail, it seemed, was finding an interest in Harry, and a pressing one. Her voice was anxious as she queried:

“Tell me, Mr. Vincent—what happened then? Didn't I understand you to say that there was something more?”

As Harry nodded, Gail gave a sudden gasp. Harry caught her hand when she turned about, and both Cedric and Warren were prompt to steady the girl from what seemed an imaginary fright. But it wasn't imagination on Gail's part. She had heard the creak of a door above the stairs. All were looking that way as the door swung wide, to show Throck, the haggard servant.

Throck was in shirt sleeves, though he was carrying a drab coat that he wore when he served as butler. Behind him was a long, steep stairway that led up to the servants' quarters, for Harry could hear worried voices buzzing from far above.

Then came a crackly voice from along the hallway, accompanied by the approach of a double candlestick. The tone was Varney's.

“Come, Throck!” spoke Varney testily. “This is no way for you to appear. Put on your coat, man!”

“Sorry, sir,” returned Throck. Sliding into his livery, he gestured up the steep stairs. “The servants were startled by what happened here, so I hurried down.”

Varney turned a fish-eyed look toward the landing.

“And what did happen here?” queried Varney. “My room is a long way off, you know, in the other wing of the house. I wouldn't have known about this commotion if I hadn't glanced outdoors and seen candles up and down the stairway windows.”

Gail and the Armands looked to Harry for an explanation. Before he could resume his story, old Sabbatha intervened. Her candlestick extended forward, she was studying Harry's face. With a dry chuckle, she turned to Varney and stated solemnly:

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“Mr. Vincent met the vampire.”

THERE was another gasp from Gail. Like Sabbatha, Gail was wearing a dressing robe, but it wasn't a chunk of an old-fashioned quilt. Gail's robe was a flimsy thing, of about the same texture as the pink nightgown that peered from beneath it.

But at mention of a vampire, the girl clutched the dressing robe and carried it tight about her throat, while she threw frantic looks from Sabbatha to Varney.

The cold-eyed stares that the two gave each other were quite too much for Gail. She shied away and tripped at the stair top, where one of her high-heeled slippers left her foot and went tumbling down. Gail would have followed it, if hands hadn't grasped her. Cedric and Warren drew her back to the landing in safety.

Another hand had lunged to Gail's rescue. Varney's hand, but it stopped short, encountering Harry's on the way. Almost accidental, but not quite, that intervention of Harry's. With it, he felt Varney's clasp for the first time, and noted that the cadaverous man was still wearing his gray gloves. But the grip that Varney promptly relaxed stayed long enough for Harry to sense a bony pressure through the glove.

Frenton was coming up the stairs, bringing Gail's slipper. He'd stayed behind when the Armand cousins had rushed from the living room, but he hadn't liked it, staying alone there. So he joined the group, to find attention again centered on Harry, who was glancing at Gail again to make sure that she had steadied. Gail having calmed, Harry spoke deliberately.

“Yes, I did see something on the landing,” Harry declared. “It may have been my imagination, but I thought it looked like a skeleton wearing a shroud!”

There was a short, cackly laugh from old Sabbatha, as she stared hard at Varney. Then, in a voice so solemn that it carried shudders, Sabbath declared:

“It is long since the vampire has fed!”

Gail couldn't restrain a nervous sob, whereupon Varney glared hard at Sabbatha and declared crisply that he had heard enough of her silly talk. Turning to Harry, Varney inquired:

“And what became of the thing my niece terms a 'vampire'?”

“It was here one minute,” returned Harry, “and the next it was gone. Just where, I wouldn't know.” He turned, stared at the window and saw, to his surprise, that it was firmly locked. “I suppose it may just have been my imagination.”

“A bad thing, imagination.” Varney's tone hissed through his teeth, across Harry's shoulder. “I warned you, Vincent, against leaving your room. You see the result; you have alarmed everyone—over nothing!”

Harry's knee was close to the window ledge and it nudged something just beneath. Turning, Harry pressed Varney aside and retorted:

“Over nothing? You should have waited until I finished my story. I suppose you call this—nothing!”

Stepping aside, Harry gestured beneath the window sill. The candles gleamed full upon the glistening knife that was buried in the woodwork.

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For a moment, Harry saw a puzzled look flit across Varney's face, but it could have been a pretense. Sabbatha, too, was staring wonderingly at the knife, when Throck bounded down the steps from the second floor and wrenched the blade from the woodwork.

"It's the knife that Mr. Giles mislaid!" exclaimed Throck. "Months ago, he mentioned it, but we never could find it. You should remember, Mr. Varney. You were here at the time."

"I remember," spoke Sabbatha, as Varney shook his head. "I remember much that you forget, Varney. This house is more mine than yours, because I have always lived here, which you have not. Unless—"

With that word, Sabbatha stopped. Varney had taken the knife from Throck, to examine it. Finishing with the blade, he gave the knife a flip, from the point, to catch it by the handle with the other hand. In the motion, Varney let the knife turn over twice, and it finished with its sharp point only an inch from Sabbatha's breast.

For a moment, old Sabbatha's face took on the pallor of a skull, even her eyes seeming to recede. Drawing back, she found her voice, and spoke without a quiver:

"Yes, Varney, you would stoop to murder, too! You would kill those who might prevent you from molesting your other victims. But I warn you, death can never silence me, should I choose to speak! I, too, am a Haldrew of the direct line.

"I would never lie idle in my grave, letting murder go unavenged!"

THE words were like a knell, as though Sabbatha, not Varney, carried the threat that the other feared.

Drawing her quilted gown about her, Sabbatha turned and stalked back to her room, leaving a strange silence amid the wavy candlelight. It was Varney who ended the tension, with a laugh that had an indulgent note.

"She lives in the past, poor Sabbatha," said Varney. "The distant past, dating even before her time. To Sabbatha, legends have become reality." Turning to Throck, Varney added the question: "Where does this knife belong?"

"In the library, sir," said Throck. "If you wish, I can take it there."

Shaking his head, Varney produced a batch of heavy keys and turned downstairs. He paused to remark that no one had reason to fear a repetition of the previous disturbance, because he would have Throck patrol the premises for the remainder of the night.

To that, Throck protested that he would be helpless without a weapon, should he encounter enemies armed with knives. A rise of wind accompanied Throck's protest, and the gust flapped the narrow window halfway down the stairs.

Looking first at the window, Varney glanced up to the landing, as though wondering whether someone could have flung the knife along that path. Then:

"You are right, Throck," declared Varney. "Come with me to the library, and I shall find the old revolver that Giles Haldrew once used. You can carry it to protect our guests."

Cedric and Warren saw Gail to her room, while Frenton went downstairs. So Harry started for his own room, on the chance that he might contact The Shadow there. He was just stepping into a passage when a door opened behind him. Turning, Harry saw old Sabbatha, holding a candle in her hand, beckoning with the other.

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“Be careful, young man,” warned Sabbatha. “Those who see the vampire once may meet him again. Tonight, you met him before his appointed hour of midnight. Always the vampire is abroad at the stroke of twelve!”

Across Sabbatha's shoulder, Harry saw into the room and observed a clock that registered five minutes of twelve. Starting back to his room, he saw Throck coming up the stairs, carrying an old-fashioned revolver. Hand in pocket, Harry gripped his own gun, glad it was a modern automatic rather than an antiquated weapon. He watched from his passage, noting Cedric and Warren go downstairs, as Throck took over patrol duty for the night.

Opening his own door, Harry was greeted by a flare of light. It was only another blaze of lightning, and he was used to it by this time. In a way, it proved useful, for it gave Harry, a full view of his room and showed him that The Shadow had not arrived there. For the glare was brilliant, very much so, since an accompanying peal of thunder told that the storm was almost overhead.

The storm broke with the thunderclap. Against Harry's window came the rattle, not of rain but hail, its furious pelt threatening to smash the pane. Another flash of lightning showed every detail of broad lawns and etched the bordering trees against the sky beyond, while the mansion caught the mighty rumble of the thunder, transferring the quakes to its own walls.

Shuddering within itself, Haldrew Hall was a fit place for the horror that followed, like a pronouncement of the fatal hour that Old Sabbatha had predicted—the stroke of midnight, when the vampire chose to rove! But it wasn't the toll of a clock that marked the meeting of the hands upon the dial.

Instead, there came a long, anguished shriek from somewhere on this very floor, a scream so rending that it increased the chill of the frigid air brought by the driving hail. And Harry, his mind racing with thoughts of rescue, found himself frozen in his tracks. For that cry told of terror personified.

It was as if a thrust of doom had already found its mark, in defiance of The Shadow, that unwanted visitor who had come here to prevent it!

CHAPTER V. VAMPIRE TRAIL

SO suddenly that he couldn't understand it, Harry found himself dashing through a maze of passages in the direction of the scream. Then his thoughts rang home as he realized what had produced his locomotion.

Old Sabbatha had promised something of this sort, confiding her views to Harry alone. Maybe she was faking the vampire stuff! If so, Harry was determined to prove it, and such was the idea that spurred him on his way.

The scream wasn't from the direction of Sabbatha's room; but naturally she'd have prowled first, should she be playing the vampire. So Harry was making straight for the scream as it came, repeated, to his ears.

As he turned a corner, a lucky lightning flash saved him from ramming into a short flight of three upward steps, for the glare revealed the hazard. Clearing the steps in a single bound, Harry saw a door ahead of him.

It was the door he wanted!

That door could only be Gail's room, for Harry now realized that he had gone in that direction. Therefore it was Gail who had shrieked, and the reason was all too plain. Her door was slightly ajar, and with the finish of the lightning flash Harry saw the shape that was crouched outside.

The figure of the vanished vampire, a huddled mass of black!

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Real or fake, the thing was after Gail Merwin, and Harry wasn't going to let it disappear again. He'd given the vampire an edge previously, when he had mistaken the creature for The Shadow. This time Harry wasn't making the same mistake.

He lunged with all speed, straight for the door. The sudden return of darkness was for the better. It meant that Harry could find the vampire before it could possibly disappear.

Completing his spring, Harry tangled with the living mass. Two surprises came at once. The first was the spin the figure gave, the hard grip it pressed upon Harry, a clutch that was anything but bony. The other surprise arrived from a passage on the left.

It was the sweep of three candles, mounted on a triple stick, behind them the determined face of Throck, and in his other hand the glimmer of the old revolver that the servant carried!

Throck was here to slay the vampire—with bullets! All he'd have to do would be to fire at the swirl of blackness that tangled with Harry, who was plainly visible in the candlelight.

Obviously, Harry was fighting something tangible, hence Throck's course was plain. The one danger was that the servant would prove overly eager; if the whirl didn't stop soon enough, he'd blast away regardless. Which meant that Harry would take his share of slugs!

Before Harry could shout a warning, his antagonist saw the threat that Throck supplied. Gloved hands didn't grab for Harry's throat; they fooled him this time, by catching him in a crosswise grip from hip to shoulder. Just as Throck side-stepped to take quick aim, Harry's opponent pitched him headlong toward the muzzle of the servant's gun!

Only a miracle could have saved Harry then. Throck's trigger finger was starting pressure, and he hadn't time to shift aim far enough to miss the figure of Harry as it came hurtling at him: Throck had a target—the wrong one! But the seemingly impossible was still a factor in this house where anything could happen. Harry's stagger became a drop, just as Throck's gun roared.

Going down into space, Harry could feel the scorch of gun flame as it seared above his head. The whole hallway echoed with the roar of the old gun's blast. But the bullet, like the fiery tongue that sent it, missed Harry by inches. The roar was still sounding in his ears as he struck solid floor, a few feet below the level of the passage.

Another of the mansion's quirks! Previously, Harry had met with separate flights of steps that went either down or up. This was the first time that he had encountered both together, with only a trifling space between.

The passage along which Throck had come was not a level stretch of floor. Between the servant and the door of Gail's room lay an unseen pitfall in the form of three steps down, a double pace between, and three steps up again. It was into that gap that Harry had plunged just as the old gun roared!

In missing the target he didn't want, Throck lost the one he sought. His angry grunt proved that the vampire—or whatever else it might be—had profited by flinging Harry. The creature was gone, but it didn't take Throck long to guess where.

There was another cry from Gail's room, more a plaintive, gaspy wail than a scream like those that she had so recently issued. Springing down two steps, Throck took a long jump over Harry and up the other side, to reach Gail's door.

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Coming to his feet, Harry followed, recognizing that the vampire could only have fled through Gail's room, the place from which it must have come earlier.

ACROSS the threshold, Throck halted, his candle flames dwarfed in the midst of a very large room. He swept the candelabrum back and forth as though scouring the apartment, and Harry was close enough behind him to take in the entire scene.

This was a room far larger than Harry's, and much more ornate. Its ceiling was low, it had a large bay window jutting from its finely carved walls, and at one side was a huge, empty fireplace that formed a built-in section. The walls themselves were blank panels, except for one that bore a full-length portrait.

For the moment, Harry thought the portrait to be an actual person, most probably the missing vampire. Then, noting that Throck ignored that portion of the wall, he realized that the life-sized figure was a picture. Like Throck, Harry looked across the room to a massive, ornamental bed that seemed as ancient as the room itself.

Beside the bed was Gail Merwin, half on the floor but with her arms resting on the bedstead. She was still wearing her thin dressing robe, but it hung from one arm only. Her other hand was pressed to her throat, but it carried no folds of the robe. Gail was gripping her throat because it hurt.

Nevertheless, her gasps were plain. They came in the form of words, as she lifted her bare arm and pointed across the room. Brief words, detached phrases, yet expressive:

“The vampire... he was here... he left and then came back... he went out... through there—”

The spot to which Gail pointed was the bay window. As Throck started over to examine it, the window swung inward from the wind, much as the one on the stairs had flapped. Throck's gleaming candles were greeted by a display of scintillating colors, reflections from the casement glass.

It was then that Harry saw the make-up of the window. It wasn't plain, like the one in his room. It had many sections, all of stained glass.

Reaching the bay window, Throck turned and handed the triple candlestick to Harry. By then, others were pounding into the room. Both Cedric and Warren Armand had arrived. One helped Gail to her feet, while the other lifted the loose sleeve of the dressing robe so that she could slide her arm into it.

The girl was repeating her story; after hearing it, Cedric and Warren gave brief data of their own.

“We knew it must be you, Gail,” declared Cedric. “We didn't lose a moment, but it's a long way up here, you know.”

“Frenton started with us,” added Warren, “but he stopped off to hammer at the library door. We wanted Varney to know that something was wrong.”

“If Varney doesn't already know it,” put in Cedric. “Which is possible, considering the time he's taking to get here!”

“I don't notice old Sabbathath around,” observed Warren. “She's been acting mighty suspicious herself.”

At that moment, Sabbathath appeared, bearing a candlestick shaped like a trident. She advanced toward the bay window and handed her batch of lights to Harry, while she joined Throck.

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Hailstones crunched under the feet of both Throck and Sabbatha as they peered from the window. But the pelting storm had gone. Only a cold drizzle continued, and amid it came the blink of distant lightning. Sabbatha turned to Throck triumphantly.

“Did you see it?” she inquired. “The great bat, clinging to the wall? The vampire, I tell you, and his name is—”

Sabbatha didn't finish. Throck was shaking his head. So she drew the servant closer to the window, and they watched the darkness intently until the lightning flickered again.

“There, Throck!”

At Sabbatha's words, Throck thrust his revolver through the window and blazed shots along the house wall. His fire was blind, and having almost exhausted the revolver, he could only wait for another blink of lightning. When one came, Throck triumphantly gestured toward the outdoors, but Sabbatha only shook her head.

“No, Throck,” she said. “What you see is only ivy that the storm has loosened. The great bat is gone. No bullets could harm a vampire; at least, not the sort of bullets that are in your gun. He will return among us—soon!”

Throck gave a quick grunt. He jabbed his gun through the window and fired one shot, but the rest of his trigger tugs produced nothing but the clatter from empty chambers. What Throck had seen and aimed at was something very audible. It was a car that made itself known by the roar of its motor, as it sped from somewhere near the house, out through the driveway past the old gate.

At least, vampires didn't travel by car; of that, Harry felt certain. But his belief that the missing vampire might have gone elsewhere was stymied by voices that came suddenly from the doorway of the room. There stood George Frenton—and with him, Varney Haldrew!

A strange stare registered on Sabbatha's features as she saw her uncle. Varney had returned much sooner than she expected. Though she still linked him with the mammoth bat that had folded against the house wall, she was wondering how he could have reached the library so soon, there to answer Frenton's summons.

RETURNING to his bedroom, Harry took his gun from his pocket and placed it beneath the pillow. He hadn't waited to hear the rest of Gail's disconnected story, for he knew she would tell it more clearly in the morning. What Harry wanted to make sure of was that he wouldn't have a vampire visitor of his own before this long night ended. So he stepped over to the door and bolted it.

A sound made Harry turn. It came from somewhere near the bed, and he thought that blackness crossed the window. Springing for the pillow, he thrust his hand beneath it, only to find that his automatic was gone!

And then a hand was gripping Harry's arm, a whispered tone was speaking in his ear. The grip was The Shadow's; likewise the voice, as it said:

“Report!”

Harry reported. First, the episode of the stairs, which he tried to clear up as he went along. One thing puzzled him very badly, so he mentioned it. Harry couldn't understand what had gripped him on the stairway when he lunged up to grab the vampire for the second time.

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“I tripped you,” explained The Shadow calmly. “I was outside one of the little windows. It was too narrow to enter, but I thrust my hand through to stop your foolhardy dash for the figure on the landing.”

“I was foolish,” conceded Harry. “I should have known that Varney would duck out somewhere. I’d say he was the vampire, all right, and I guess that landing is tricked. But the knife—”

“It could have been thrown by either of two persons,” inserted The Shadow. “By Sabbatha, who was the first to appear on the second floor, or by Throck, who had that very convenient stairway to the servants’ quarters.

“As for Gail’s experience, I heard her screams and was the first to arrive outside her door. Unfortunately, Vincent, you arrived a few moments later and mistook me for the vampire. I didn’t have time to identify myself, not with Throck coming with a gun quite ready for business.

“So I pitched you where you’d be out of harm, and I took the only way to avoid Throck’s bullets—the route through Gail’s room to the window. She’d seen the vampire when she screamed, but he’d gone by the time I came through. So she mistook me for him—as you did, Vincent.”

Enlightenment struck Harry.

“Then you were the big bat that Sabbatha saw on the outside wall?”

“Exactly!” answered The Shadow. “I was taking a short route here. I made it between the lightning flashes, while Throck was doing his wild shooting.”

“So Varney could still be the vampire,” gritted Harry. “While we were looking for you, chief, he’d have had plenty of time to get down through a double wall and into the library.”

They were standing by the moonlit window, and Harry could plainly see The Shadow’s hawkish silhouette beneath the slouch hat that topped it. Harry watched The Shadow nod.

“Varney is the logical candidate for the vampire,” agreed The Shadow, “but his basic purpose is harmless. Otherwise, he would have turned to meet you, Vincent, when you made that foolish lunge up to the landing, the second time.

“Similarly, Varney did nothing but frighten Gail in her room, though he had time to do her serious harm, especially when you delayed my rescue. The one bad feature of this vampire business lies in the things it sponsors. People who fear the vampire may do insane things, once the creature of their dread appears.”

Remembering Sabbatha, Harry nodded. He could testify, too, that Throck had gone rather berserk under strain, but that statement wasn’t necessary, for The Shadow had been witness to the fact. Instead, Harry swung back to the question that still balked him.

“Just what is Varney’s game?” Harry demanded. “Is he crazy?”

“Crazy enough,” returned The Shadow, with a whispered laugh. “Just sufficiently crazy to know that if he puts others in an even worse mental state, they will abandon their claims to the Haldrew fortune by refusing to reside in this queer house.”

VERY logical, that answer. Logical, because Varney would profit by the scare he threw into other people. Not that the profit would be overlarge, in a monetary sense, for Giles Haldrew hadn’t left much wealth to his heirs. But it would mean that Varney might become the sole owner of Haldrew Hall, which was something

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that he seemed to desire more than money.

Reasoning one step more, Harry felt all menace fade. He realized that Varney, working along that line, wouldn't want murder to happen. To scare customers away was legitimate; to kill them could only mean trouble, spoiling the very thing that Varney wanted—the peace and security of Haldrew Hall, all for his own.

So it would be a case of matching wits with Varney Haldrew, in a tricky game where death was taboo. Tricky, because it tended toward a danger line where doom might accidentally strike; but knowing the circumstances, Harry could do much to offset such a possibility.

Turning, Harry started to mention it to The Shadow, only to find that he was alone.

Whether The Shadow had left through the door, or gone by the window, Harry did not know. His cloaked chief had staged one of those fade-outs that even Varney couldn't match, while playing the vampire in a house that was filled with tricks, all known to Varney Haldrew.

Again Harry sensed the illusion of a departing laugh, and this time its whispery semblance pleased him. The Shadow was leaving it to Harry Vincent to handle happenings in Haldrew Hall—a large assignment, yet one that Harry felt fully equipped to cover. It had taken The Shadow to steer Harry straight, and the cloaked investigator would certainly be ready to help out in a pinch.

Otherwise, the job would be Harry's own, and he didn't intend to let it get out of hand. Not for a moment did Harry Vincent surmise that matters would soon be sliding far from reach, not only beyond his own, but past the control of The Shadow!

CHAPTER VI. THE DAY BETWEEN

IN the morning, Harry found a message from The Shadow. It was an envelope that Harry opened, and the writing of the message disappeared as soon as Harry had read its lines, which were in a simple code that The Shadow's agents could translate rapidly.

It was always that way with The Shadow's special messages. They were written in an ink of vivid blue, and if they fell into the wrong hands they would vanish before anyone had time to decode them. This particular note hadn't a chance of falling into the wrong hands.

Harry found it under his pillow, along with the gun that The Shadow had left there before departure. Naturally, the first thing Harry reached for was his gun, so he couldn't miss the note. It told him that his chief had spent a few hours roaming through Haldrew Hall, looking for secret ins and outs that had not been hard to find. The message added that Harry would hear from The Shadow again, before nightfall.

So Harry took his own look around Haldrew Hall, and by daylight found it a most interesting place. There was just one fault: the atmosphere kept lulling Harry into a sense of false security that he knew he should avoid.

First, the inhabitants of the mansion—certain of them—were by no means as ominous or strange as they had seemed the night before. By daylight, Varney appeared quite affable, and obligingly agreed to show Harry all around the house. Throck, too, was helpful, for he came along when they made the trip. Old Sabbatha showed up with a pleasant smile, too, while Harry was being taken on the rounds.

The reason why the house was so sprawly was because its various owners, through many generations, had added whatever they saw fit, and in keeping with that custom had neglected the portions of the house they did

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not like. But Varney, in his own emphatic way, was pleased with every section of Haldrew Hall and spoke of the future day when it would be restored in its entirety.

Varney began his tour with the cellar, which was large and filled with many compartments and bins, none very interesting. The main feature of the cellar was the family crypt, located beneath what had been the rear of the original mansion. Old though it was, the crypt looked quite new, for its floor was composed of thick concrete.

“My brother Giles installed this concrete floor,” remarked Varney, rubbing his smooth, bony chin. “I can’t understand, though, why he made it so solid and heavy. Do you, Throck?”

The servant shook his head.

“I was away at the time,” continued Varney. “Otherwise, I would have recommended a more ornamental floor. Something of flagstone, for example. I wonder”—again Varney was speculative as he turned to Throck—“did Giles order the workmen to pour concrete into those old gaps left by the coffins?”

Again, the servant professed ignorance. He stated that the crypt had been remodeled prior to the final illness that had resulted in the death of Giles Haldrew. Being well and with very little to occupy his time, Giles had handled most of the details personally.

Varney’s mention of the coffins caught Harry’s interest. He asked what had become of them. With a tight smile, Varney pointed to the end of the crypt, where rows of urns stood on shelves.

“My ancestors,” explained Varney. “Those urns contain their ashes. The crypt was becoming overcrowded, so Giles decided to cremate all of their remains.”

Under the shelves Harry saw a coffin that looked quite new. He asked Varney if Giles had reserved it as his own, whereat Varney smiled again.

“Giles was cremated, too,” he declared. “You will find his urn among those on the shelves. The coffin happens to be mine. When I die, I shall be buried in it, because I do not agree with the cremation theory.

“Too bad about all this concrete”—Varney shook his head as he stared at the solid floor—“because I shall have to break up some of it to receive my coffin. I have specified in my will that I am to be buried in a coffin which must be preserved intact. Something that other members of the family should have remembered to insert in their own wills.”

Throck supplied a reminder at that moment.

“You are forgetting your great-uncle Roderick, sir,” declared the servant. “His will was very specific. Mr. Giles said so, quite often.”

“There was no mention of a coffin in Roderick’s will,” returned Varney. “His case was quite different from my own... Come, Vincent; there is no use staying around this musty crypt, while the candles burn themselves out.”

ON the ground floor, Sabbatha joined the parade and listened while Varney explained the points of interest. Sabbatha was not particularly interested in the library, to which Varney had the key. When she suggested that Varney leave the library open, he shook his head.

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“It contains too many rare volumes,” he explained. “We cannot afford to risk losing items from a fine collection by letting too many people handle the books.”

They were looking in the library as Varney spoke, and Harry saw many shelves of books, along with an ornate writing desk, some reading tables, and old-fashioned cabinets which looked as though they might contain some family records.

The room had a fireplace, where embers were glowing, for Varney had spent most of the chilly night in the library—or so he had said.

Harry wondered if Varney had started that fire before Gail had encountered the vampire, a point which he intended to couple with further observation elsewhere.

For the present, Sabbatha was still disputing the subject of the books—so vehemently, that Harry began to suspect that the old lady, rather than her younger uncle Varney, might be trying to distract attention from the more important phase of the scene; namely, the fireplace.

“Some of those bookcases are locked,” remarked Sabbatha. “They contain the really important volumes. There are closets, too”—she was pointing as she spoke—“and you could store special books in them. You have the keys, Varney, and unless you are using the closets for something more important—”

Varney cut off the harangue by gesturing the party from the library and slamming the door emphatically. He turned the key and led the way toward a staircase. Following, Harry began to count off paces to himself, only to have Sabbatha interrupt him. She was speaking to Harry, but her words were loud enough for Varney to overhear.

“I suppose that Varney told you about Roderick,” remarked Sabbatha. “Next, you must ask him to show you Roderick.”

Harry stopped counting at twenty, turned to stare at Sabbatha in surprise.

“But Roderick is dead—”

“Of course,” continued Sabbatha placidly. “Roderick is one Haldrew who is really dead. All the more reason why you should see him. As a member of the family, it is your privilege to meet Roderick Haldrew.”

There was a jangle of keys as Varney detached one from the heavy ring he carried. Handing the key to Sabbatha, Varney declared crisply:

“This unlocks the library, Sabbatha. You may go there, if you wish. I merely ask that you do not admit too many strangers.”

“There are no strangers here,” retorted Sabbatha. “We are all Haldrews, even though some are distant cousins.”

“Then tell them to keep their distance from the rare books,” decided Varney. “You may remind them that the library has already been appraised and its volumes listed, so if any books are taken, the catalogue will show it. I shall regard you as responsible, Sabbatha.”

Taking the key, the old lady turned back to the library, but she threw a triumphant glance from her shoulder.

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“Remember, Varney—Mr. Vincent is to meet Roderick.”

“He shall see him, Sabbathath.”

Harry counted, “Thirty—one, thirty—two—” and then noted the number of steps that he ascended. A turn of a passage, a count to fifteen, and some more steps up. Again a passage, and as they walked along it, Varney confided:

“Sabbathath has a mania on the Roderick subject. As I said last night, she dwells in the past. To her, forgotten Haldrews are living beings who people this old mansion. She regards Roderick as her ideal. You will understand shortly.”

The smug smile that crossed Varney's face did not quite convince Harry. Nevertheless, he resolved to wait and see if he did understand. Meanwhile, they were taking another flight of steps near the very front of the house, and there Harry noted a most peculiar arrangement.

Last night, he'd encountered short steps going down, with others promptly going up, making the gap wherein The Shadow had tossed Harry so he would escape Throck's gunfire.

Here was the arrangement in reverse. Six steps upward, with a rail that terminated in a fancy newel post; a few paces across the hall; then six steps down the other side, decorated with a post and rail that matched those of the first flight. The arrangement was much like a turnstile, and Harry paused on the hump to look around!

To the rear was a passage that went into another, but at the front of the hall Harry saw a high step leading to a massive door, which bore a huge padlock.

Throck was turning in that direction, when Varney stopped him with a gripping hand. The same gray gloves were on those hands of Varney, and in the daylight Harry fancied he could see considerable slack inside them.

“We are not going to the storeroom, Throck,” declared Varney. “I didn't bring the key. In fact, I have mislaid it. But, after all, there is nothing in the storeroom.”

VARNEY was drawing Harry down the opposite steps, but those fingers in Varney's glove didn't grip Harry's arm. Instead, Varney was linking his forearm under Harry's elbow, while he explained, most casually, why there was no need to visit the storeroom.

“It is unsafe,” declared Varney. “That portion of the house was allowed to decay because of somebody's whim. The roof leaks, chunks of the ceiling have fallen, and even the walls are apt to crumble. So we use it only as a storeroom for things of little value.”

Naturally, Harry didn't believe Varney's claim. But he decided to forget the locked room for the time. Harry was counting paces again, here along the second floor, to tally them with his measurements below.

At last they reached Gail's room, where Harry gave up counting, much disappointed. His figures did not check. Gail's room wasn't over the library, as Harry had thought.

By day, the room was anything but sinister. Sunlight, seeping through the varicolored window panes, threw rare tints across the polished floor, casting iridescent beams upon the single portrait that adorned the wall close by the fireplace.

Varney bowed and made a sweeping gesture, as he announced:

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“Meet Roderick Haldrew!”

Harry studied the portrait. It showed a handsome man, whose face was stern almost to the point of accusation. Lifelike indeed was the painting, particularly when the shifts of colored sunlight streaked it, adding a glow to its fixed eyes and playing a half smile across the lips. That visage had a gripping power which was difficult to shake, but the spell ended the moment that Harry turned away.

Or—did it end?

Perhaps it was even stronger! The magnetism of the portrait still existed, but it repelled instead of attracting, once a person no longer viewed it. For the life of him, Harry couldn't pick up nerve to stare at the painted face of Roderick again. Probably the phobia would pass if he stayed in this room long enough, but Varney was already moving toward the door, suggesting that Harry come along.

Only briefly did Harry pause to glance at the great built-in fireplace. No longer was it empty; it was filled with logs, supported by kindling, with paper underneath. Noting Harry's glance. Varney remarked that the room had chilled Gail, the night before, hence he had ordered Throck to build a fire here.

Harry turned away. As he did, there was a sharp noise from the fireplace. Swinging, Harry flung himself half across the room to avoid a darting thrust of blackness that came from the fireplace.

There was a flash of ugly, greenish eyes, and Harry's brain flooded with all the horrible lore of vampires. A moment later, the illusion was dispelled.

The thing was a normal creature—a large black cat that had been sleeping behind the logs in the fireplace. As the cat streaked out through the door it sent back a protesting snarl, and Varney turned reprovingly to Throck.

“My niece, Sabbathath, regards that cat as a special pet,” declared Varney. “You must remember, Throck, that it likes dark places. Be careful when you build fires in the future. We wouldn't want Sabbathath's pet to come to any harm.”

Throck stared, quite puzzled, as though the cat's preference for fireplaces was a quirk that the creature had never before exhibited. Meanwhile, Harry decided to show his nonchalance, while following Varney to the door.

“So the cat belongs to Miss Sabbathath,” remarked Harry. “What does she call it, Varney?”

“Its name?” Varney paused, as though trying to remember. Then, almost absently, he added: “Oh, yes—I'd really forgotten. Sabbathath calls the cat Roderick.”

With that, Varney tightened his lips into one of those cryptic smiles that had bothered Harry ever since his arrival at Haldrew Hall.

CHAPTER VII. NEW ARRIVALS

THE rest of Harry's tour included the servants' quarters on the third floor of the mansion, plus another special feature that Varney remembered. The special feature was a pigeon cote located on the roof, its heavy cages well stocked with birds.

“Carrier pigeons,” explained Varney. “Having no telephone here, we use our own method of communication. Always the Haldrews have kept carrier pigeons. If you should be going on a trip, Vincent, and wished to send

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me word when you intended to return, you could take a carrier along with you.”

“But I forgot!” Varney seemed in a forgetful mood today. “You won't be going away from Haldrew Hall—not for a month.”

Returning indoors, Varney bolted the trapdoor leading to the roof, remarking that he didn't want Roderick to get at the birds. By Roderick, Varney meant Sabbathath's cat, not the Haldrew ancestor whose portrait bore the accusing eyes. Odd that he should now refer to the cat as Roderick, when he'd forgotten the creature's name before—if he had forgotten it!

But everything was odd about Varney Haldrew, and Harry was beginning to mistrust Varney more than ever, particularly where the Roderick business was concerned. At least, Harry had gained a lot of facts and figures, though none of them seemed to make sense. He was sure, though, that The Shadow could make something of them.

Unquestionably, The Shadow had roved the old house between midnight and dawn, the time of his departure. He'd probably learned all that Harry had—and more. For one thing, The Shadow might have looked into Varney's own room, which was near the rear of the second floor.

They'd passed it, Harry and Varney, but Varney hadn't stopped to unlock it. He termed his own room unimportant—like the padlocked room at the front of the house!

Downstairs, Harry found the other guests lunching on the veranda. He saw the other servants: a chef and two maids, all a scared-looking lot who hadn't appreciated last night's excitement. But the guests were taking it quite calmly, particularly Gail Merwin. She was chatting with George Frenton, who had evidently monopolized her all the morning, despite the Armand cousins.

Those two were at the other side of the veranda, so Harry joined them. His look of query brought smiles from both.

“We're humoring Frenton,” Cedric confided. “He's playing the big, bold hero, so we're going to let him show himself up.”

“When night comes,” explained Warren. “That's when the going gets tough around this queer old place.”

“Frenton is working on the theory that two frightened people can give each other courage,” added Cedric, “but we don't think it will work out.”

“Not at all,” agreed Warren. “The scare will just go double. Like spades in pinochle.”

Cedric shook his head, remarking that Frenton was a very poor pinochle player. But Warren returned to the subject of Gail, stating that she was his only reason for going through with the ordeal at Haldrew Hall.

“I'll tell you how I feel about it, Vincent,” asserted Warren frankly. “Gail needs whatever money she can get from the Haldrew estate. If Varney or Sabbathath—whichever is faking this vampire nonsense—manages to scare off Frenton, or you, for that matter, so much the better.”

“But Warren won't be scared away,” put in Cedric, “and neither will I. Not until dawn of the very last day. Then we'll both get the jitters—our own bit of fakery—and go dashing from the house. So Gail will get our share of the money—see?”

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Very obviously, the Armands meant it. They could afford to be big-hearted with the meager Haldrew fortune, considering they were both heirs to a much vaster sum from the Armand family. Having come to their agreement, they were sounding Harry out, to get his impartial opinion.

“I’m staying, too,” declared Harry. “But I don’t have any wealthy relatives of another branch. Whatever I earn by staying a month at Haldrew Hall, I intend to keep. Of course”—Harry gave a smile—“if I can throw a scare into Varney and Sabbath, they might weaken like Frenton, which would mean that much more for Gail and myself.”

HARRY’S smile brought laughs from both Cedric and Warren. The idea of anyone scaring Varney or Sabbath, here in the house that had hatched them, was something really funny.

The Armands were still chuckling over Harry’s jest when a car pulled in through the creaky gate. Then, everyone became serious.

The car was the same one that had brought Harry to Haldrew Hall, and it had the same local driver. Evidently he didn’t mind coming through the gate by daylight, particularly when his passenger was paying him five dollars instead of two.

The passenger was a tall man, stoop-shouldered and with a thin, serious face. Evidently another Haldrew heir, for he showed a distinct family resemblance.

Reaching the veranda, the newcomer introduced himself, turning first to Varney, who was seated on the porch, then to Sabbath, who was peering from a doorway.

“I am Dr. Simon Clabb,” he declared importantly. “Directly related to the Haldrew family, as I can prove. I have come to stay a month; as provided in the will of Giles Haldrew.”

George Frenton left the corner where he and Gail were seated. Crossing the porch, the pudgy man extended his hand to Clabb.

“Glad to meet you, doctor,” expressed Frenton cheerfully. “Well, you arrived in time. Tonight is the deadline.”

Clabb gave a sharp stare around the group. Then, in blunt tone, he retorted:

“Last night seemed more of a deadline to me.”

Faces were puzzled, so Clabb explained.

“I drove through the gate in my own car,” he declared. “I’d intended to garage it in the town, but this local taxi man wouldn’t bring me all the way to the Hall by night. Anyway, I arrived in the midst of lightning, thunder and hail, but they were very mild. Yes, very mild, compared to the screams and gunfire that were coming from the house. I preferred the friendly outdoor elements. I drove back to town and stayed at the hotel.”

Clabb’s story explained the mystery car that had sped away the night before, right after the disappearance of the vampire. Nevertheless, it left a big question mark in Harry’s mind, particularly when he studied Dr. Clabb.

It was possible that Clabb had played the vampire; that his yarn was an alibi. Maybe the same thought occurred to others. However, they all shook hands with Clabb, except Varney, who merely bowed, as he

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usually did.

Invited to have some lunch, Clabb accepted. Harry was about to pick up his own plate, when a hand plucked his arm. A very mild hand, belonging to the local taxi man.

“I brought your bags, Mr. Vincent,” the fellow said. “The ones your friend told me you'd forgotten.”

By Harry's “friend” the fellow didn't mean Clabb. It was obvious, therefore, that he could only mean The Shadow, who must have met him in another guise, down in the town.

So Harry went to the car to get the bags, which were in the car trunk. As Harry took them, the taxi man gave him a wise grin. No words were needed.

The bags looked like normal suitcases, but Harry could see air holes in their ends. From those openings came the coo of pigeons, one in each bag. Therewith, Harry knew that The Shadow must have made a thorough trip through Haldrew Hall, even finding the pigeon cote on the roof.

Harry's chief had therewith decided to put the carrier–pigeon system in reverse, by supplying his agent with a pair of able birds that could take messages from Haldrew Hall, just as Varney's pigeons were trained to bring dispatches to the place.

There was a note with the bags and the taxi man gave it to Harry, who tipped him a few dollars in return. Then, as the car was going out through the gate, Harry took the bags in by a side door of the house and up to his room.

The note, coded and in fading ink, stated that The Shadow would arrive again tonight. Meanwhile, if Harry had any report, he could send it by carrier pigeon. So Harry sat down and wrote things out. Attaching the message to a pigeon, he released the bird from his window, watched it circle Haldrew Hall and finally fly off in a straight line.

Deep in the closet, Harry stowed the two bags: one empty, the other with its pigeon. Remembering an item in his report concerning a cat named Roderick, Harry probed the closet to make sure the black animal wasn't there. Satisfied, he closed the closet door and bolted it.

On the way downstairs, Harry thought of the other Roderick, whose portrait hung in Gail's room. He wondered just what Sabbatha had meant when she told Varney that Harry ought to meet Roderick. Had she meant Roderick Haldrew in picture form, or the cat that she had named after him?

Undecided as to the answer, Harry began to think that there must be another, and a deeper, one. The reason: Sabbatha's insistence on the Roderick question had caused Varney to hand over the library key, merely to get rid of her!

LATER in the afternoon, Harry found a brief chance to chat with Gail. He expressed the opinion that last night couldn't be regarded as a sample of those to come. Gail nodded, for she really believed the statement—though Harry, himself, did not.

“I'm not afraid,” assured Gail bravely. “I stood the test last night, and it will take more than a fake vampire to scare me in the future! It was horrid, though”—she shuddered lightly—“the way that creature appeared right beside the bed and stretched its hands toward my throat. No wonder I shrieked!”

Gail pressed her hands to her throat as she finished, and her shudder increased, only to cease. Her smile

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returned, proving that her courage was genuine.

“I’ll be all right,” Gail assured. “You see, I’m not sleeping in that room tonight. The room doesn’t matter.” Her forehead showed a frown. “In fact, it’s the best room in the house! The trouble is the picture—the one that stares!”

“You mean Roderick?” queried Harry absently.

“Roderick!” exclaimed Gail. “Why, I thought he was Sabbath’s cat!”

Harry explained that there were two Rodericks, the original bearing the surname of Haldrew, though for all Harry knew, Sabbath might have bestowed the family title upon Roderick, the cat.

So Harry and Gail had their merry little laugh and went their respective ways for the remainder of the afternoon. But as the afternoon waned, with dusk foreboding the approach of night, Harry felt his merry mood decline.

Haldrew Hall was no place for gaiety, not with the forbidding menace that dwelt within it. That this coming night would bring new and more ominous manifestations, Harry was quite certain. So certain, that he felt his courage would have failed him, but for a single hope that buoyed it.

That hope was the coming arrival of The Shadow!

CHAPTER VIII. SABBATH’S DISCOVERY

AGAIN, moonlight flickered over Haldrew Hall. A weird glow, pale at moments, spotty at others, at times brilliant. A light that was at the mercy of fantastic clouds that seemed like monsters creeping through the sky, living shapes prepared to reach down and engulf the queer old mansion.

From his window, Harry Vincent watched the brooding heavens and felt the gusts of winds that were equally wayward, varying from mild breeze to sudden squall. At intervals, he blinked his flashlight, hoping The Shadow might be on hand to pick up the signal and answer it.

Weird was the shape that flitted across the cloud-shadowed lawn, like some gigantic night creature that had detached itself from the bordering trees. As it passed the veranda it spread into the semblance of a mammoth bat, its wings carrying it to the mansion wall. There those wings folded and the thing moved upward, clinging to the wall itself.

From his window, Harry heard squidgy sounds that would have shaken the sanity of most people. But to Harry, the sucking noise was music. It didn’t mean an unearthly foe, rising from the night. It signified a friend—The Shadow!

Over the sill came Harry’s black-cloaked chief. From hands and feet, The Shadow removed the suction cups which he had used to scale the wall. Four concave disks, well-oiled to gain a grip; with them, The Shadow could climb the side of a precipice. When he removed them, they packed into a compact nest, which he stowed beneath his cloak.

When, within the window, this master of the night delivered a low-whispered laugh of greeting that brought worlds of reassurance to Harry.

The Shadow had received Harry’s brief report, but he wanted further details, so the agent gave them. Harry

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told how his suspicions had shifted somewhat to Sabbatha, and even to a newcomer, Dr. Clabb. But The Shadow preferred to deal in fundamentals.

“Varney is still our chief candidate for the vampire,” he declared. “I inspected the house thoroughly last night. There is a secret opening in the wall of the landing, through which he could have easily gone. As for his arrival in Gail's room, that was even easier. He probably came straight up from the library, from one fireplace to the other.”

“But Gail's old room isn't over the library,” objected Harry. “I paced measurements today; they were quite a bit off.”

“You missed count,” The Shadow replied, “because Varney and Throck distracted you. The proof was Sabbatha's cat. It must have gotten into the secret chimney. The fire in the library smoked it out, and it arrived in the room where the portrait hangs!”

The statement convinced Harry. His chance to check it came when The Shadow suggested that he go downstairs and chat with the other guests. So Harry complied, and did the pacing on the way. The Shadow was right; the measurements from the portrait room tallied exactly with those to the library, the stairs being the mid-point.

Passing the library, Harry reached the living room and found the Armand cousins in earnest conversation with Dr. Clabb. Frenton was in a corner and when Harry asked him about Gail, Frenton said she'd gone to her room. So Harry strolled over to hear what Clabb had to say.

IF the doctor's face showed color, it was only because he was standing where he could catch the ruddy glow of the living-room fireplace. For Clabb's complexion was pasty, an evident fact every time the fire dwindled. It was definitely a Haldrew type, the sort that automatically became skullish when in gloom.

“While on the veranda, just now,” Clabb was confiding to the Armands, “I saw a thing that looked like a gigantic bat, folding against the wall. It fits with what you've told me.”

“Another of Varney's tricks!” laughed Cedric. “You notice he isn't around, don't you?”

“He's trying to scare us away from here,” added Warren. “We found that out last night, doctor.”

Clabb gave a smile that looked quite lipless when the firelight struck it.

“For one thing,” argued Cedric, “Varney can't drive Sabbatha nuts. She's that way already!”

“Maybe the same goes with Varney,” suggested Warren. “If he wasn't crazy, he wouldn't be staging the vampire stuff.”

“I like your theories, gentlemen,” assured Clabb. “If we can prove those two insane, we can call upon the law to remove them to an institution. Which will eliminate two candidates for the estate and end the vampire folly.”

The idea appealed to Cedric and Warren. They wanted suggestions how to go about it. Clabb declared that the best way would be to humor both Varney and Sabbatha. That could be done by expressing belief in vampires. So Clabb began to catalogue the subject for their benefit; whereupon, Harry was suddenly startled when someone plucked his sleeve.

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It was only Frenton.

“Let's get out of here,” undertoned Frenton. “This stuff gives me the creeps! So bad that I don't even want to be alone! Let's get some air, Vincent.”

Harry agreed, and they started from the living room. But they didn't reach the veranda. In the hallway, they met old Sabbatha, who was carrying Roderick, the cat, under one arm. With her other hand she gave a bony-fingered beckon toward the library.

Frenton must have agreed with Clabb's plan of humoring Sabbatha, for he looked inquiringly at Harry, who nodded. So they went into the library, with Sabbatha, who parked Roderick on a cushion and picked an old, thick book from a high shelf. Tapping the book, Sabbatha gave a tight smile.

“Perhaps you have wondered where Varney got his name,” remarked Sabbatha. “I shall tell you. He was named after this book, a very popular novel of a hundred years ago.”

Opening the musty leather cover, Sabbatha displayed the title of the book. It was:

VARNEY THE VAMPIRE

or

The Feast of Blood

Gesturing the men to chairs, Sabbatha turned to the first chapter and began to read in a slow monotone:

“The solemn notes of the old cathedral clock have announced midnight... the air is thick and heavy... a strange deathlike stillness pervades all nature. A faint peal of thunder now comes from far off—”

Sabbatha's words were accompanied by the moan of rising wind about the old house. As she came to the “peal of thunder,” Frenton sprang from his chair, thinking he heard one. Harry drew him back. It was only a shutter, thumped by the wind.

“What is that?” continued Sabbatha, reading from the book. “It is hail... yes, a hailstorm has burst over the city. Hail, rain, wind— it was, in very truth, an awful night!”

Frenton's grip tightened on Harry's arms. His words came in a hoarse whisper:

“Listen, Vincent! She is describing last night!”

IGNORING Frenton's interruption, Sabbatha read on, her voice still maintaining its monotone, accompanied by the obbligate of the whining wind.

“There is an antique chamber in an ancient house,” read Sabbatha. “Curious and quaint carvings adorn the walls, and the large chimney piece is a curiosity of itself. The ceiling is low and a large bay window, from roof to floor, looks to the west. The window is latticed and filled with curiously painted glass and rich stained pieces which send in a strange, yet beautiful light—”

The room where Gail had slept! Described to the dot in this volume a hundred years old! Harry glanced at Frenton, saw the pudgy man staring upward as though his bulging eyes could view the very room in question!

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“There is but one portrait in that room,'” continued Sabbatha, “'although the walls seem paneled for the express purpose of containing a series of pictures. The portrait is that of a young man, with a pale face, a stately brow, and a strange expression about the eyes, which no one cared to look on twice.'”

Roderick's portrait! The chills were Harry's now, for the picture had given him the exact effect that the book so perfectly described!

And now Sabbatha was reading aloud about a stately bed of carved wood, hung with heavy silken—and—damask furnishings—which could have been the very bed in the portrait room. She was reading of hail that dashed on the old bay window like a discharge of mimic musketry.

Next, how the bed in the old chamber was occupied by “a creature formed in all fashions of loveliness—a girl young and beautiful as a spring morning”—which, though a long way of getting to the point, could certainly represent Gail Merwin.

There was more of such description, archaic yet expressive. The hail and wind continued; the elements “uproared” according to the book. But the girl, who had “endured much fatigue” did not awaken until a flash of lightning streamed across the bay window. At that point, Sabbatha read steadily:

“'A shriek bursts from the lips of the young girl—'”

Something close to a shriek came from Frenton's lips. He stifled it as Harry nudged him with an elbow. Frenton sank back, mopping his forehead, only to stare anew as Sabbatha declaimed:

“'A tall figure is standing on the ledge immediately outside the window. It is its fingernails upon the glass that produce the sound so like the hail! Intense fear paralyzed the girl—'”

A clatter interrupted. It came from the window of the library, a rattle like that of a clawlike hand—or hail, such as the hail of the night before. Maybe the girl in the story had been paralyzed, for Frenton certainly was. Harry caught him as he was rolling from his chair.

Roderick, the cat, gave a vicious snarl. Sabbatha closed the book and stepped to the window. Harry, somewhat petrified himself, relaxed as the old lady declared testily:

“It's Throck, tossing gravel from the driveway to attract attention. He always does when he locks himself out.”

Throck must have pelted the living-room window, too, for there were voices from the hall, among them Cedric's, saying that he would go to the door. Warren and Clabb appeared outside the library and saw Harry trying to help Frenton up to his chair. They came in to aid, while old Sabbatha looked on, a slight sneer registered on her lips.

“Better get him up to his room,” suggested Harry. Then, to curb Sabbatha's triumph: “I have to stay here and listen to the rest that Miss Sabbatha wants to tell me.”

Clutching for Harry's arm, Frenton found Warren's instead. He moaned something that only Warren heard. Giving him a pat on the back, Warren said:

“All right, old man. We'll do whatever you want!”

Like an actual old man, Frenton moved in palsied fashion between Warren and Clabb, who started him out through the hall and upstairs. He was still muttering weakly and Warren was still nodding, when Harry saw

them turn the corner. Then:

“Read me some more,” said Harry to Sabbatha. “I rather enjoyed it.”

“I am fatigued,” replied Sabbatha, handing Harry the book. “Read for yourself, if you wish. The figure at the window was Varney the Vampire.” Her lips formed a cryptic smile. “Yes, a fiend called Varney the Vampire, the namesake of Varney Haldrew!”

Harry was putting away the book, when Warren came downstairs and stepped into the library to tell Harry that Frenton wanted to see him. He added that Harry could find Frenton in a room on the east side of the house, second from the front corner. Warren mentioned, too, that Frenton had recuperated from his shock, but that Dr. Clabb was still attending him.

“Frenton feels pretty silly over it,” remarked Warren. “So I promised him we wouldn't mention it to anyone else.”

Harry was on his way upstairs, when he saw Cedric returning from the front door with Throck. The only person totally unaccounted for was Varney, which made Harry think again about the century-old novel from which Sabbatha had read. He wanted to tell The Shadow about Varney's namesake, the Vampire.

But The Shadow was no longer in Harry's room, so after a brief pause there, Harry went along to see Frenton.

CHAPTER IX. SECRET OF THE CRYPT

IF Harry had lingered downstairs a short while longer, he might have spotted Varney Haldrew. The gaunt man appeared very suddenly in the library, stepping out from the fireplace, where only ashes remained from the fire kindled earlier in the day.

Roderick, the cat, deserted by his mistress, raised his head and gave Varney a very savage snarl, at which Varney bared his teeth until they looked like fangs and snarled back.

When Roderick was unimpressed, Varney gave quick, short kicks toward the cat and the ashes from his shoes sprinkled Roderick's glossy black coat. Jumping from its low cushion, the cat scooted out through the doorway to the hall, shedding ashes as it went.

Varney laughed as he turned away. His eyes fell upon the bookshelf where the “Vampire” novel stood out an inch from the other volumes. Snatching at the book, Varney was about to throw it in the fireplace, but changed his mind. Instead, he left the book where it was. Opening a locked bookcase, he pulled out volumes, one by one, shaking each in turn.

Loose papers fluttered from some of the books. They weren't detached pages; they were sheets of note paper that bore writing in a large but scrawly hand. Sorting through them, Varney suddenly decided to dispose of the whole lot. He struck a match, applied it to the papers, and tossed them in the fireplace to burn.

As the small blaze died, blackness encroached with considerable measure into the room where only candlelight gleamed. It was living blackness, that of a cloaked figure, its head topped by a slouch hat. Amazingly, the figure blended with the gloom beside a bookcase—as only the form of The Shadow could!

Odd that Varney should choose that occasion to masquerade in similar attire! Nevertheless, he did; for he went to a closet, unlocked it with a key from his ring, and brought out a thing much like a black cloak, except that it was in tatters. The garment was the shroud that Harry had gripped the night before, mistaking it for

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The Shadow's cloak.

When Varney spread the shroud around his shoulders and drew it close to his neck, his face, in contrast to the black, appeared excessively white—almost the true death color of a skull. Lips parting, Varney showed teeth that added to the death's-head illusion. Rubbing his gray-gloved hands together, he produced a crackle from the bony fingers within.

He was indeed Varney the Vampire, a modern version of the creature portrayed in fiction a hundred years ago!

Stalking from the library, Varney was swallowed by the gloom of the hall. Close behind him followed his rival in black, a being fuller of form, yet stealthier than the pretended vampire. The Shadow was taking up Varney's trail!

The soft thud of a door told the route that Varney had taken. That door led down into the cellar, but The Shadow was not the only person who had heard it close. Into The Shadow's path stepped another man, who had just come down a flight of stairs: Dr. Simon Clabb!

Tilting his head, Clabb listened. His face, though bony, had neither the pallor nor the leer of Varney's. Harry had been far off, in his conjecture that Clabb could have played the vampire. In stride, too, Clabb was deficient for the part.

He opened the cellar door clumsily, blundered at the stair top; but finally showed sense enough to wait a while, rather than have Varney hear him from below.

Since Clabb blocked The Shadow's route, the cloaked investigator had to wait, too. At last, both proceeded, Clabb descending the stairs and The Shadow keeping close behind him. Moonlight had returned and was trickling through the barred cellar windows, so Clabb managed to find his way along.

The thing that guided Clabb was a groan. At first, it startled him, but he recognized it as coming from a door. So he approached cautiously and found the door in question. The moonlight showed it plainly—the door of the old crypt that Harry had seen that afternoon!

FROM beyond the door came sharp tap-taps of someone striking the floor with a blunt instrument. Clabb listened for several minutes, The Shadow watching him quite closely; then the doctor tried the door. Its hinges protested, so loudly that Clabb desisted. Instantly, the tapping ceased within the crypt.

A few more minutes passed. Then Clabb, blunt and determined, wrested the door wide. As he did, an echoing thud came from within the crypt. Clabb dropped back from the threshold, almost into the hands of The Shadow, who drew away promptly. Then, lighting a match, the doctor thrust it ahead of him and ventured straight into the crypt itself.

Nervy, this chap Clabb. He proved it further when he found a multiple candlestick on a shelf among the urns. Lighting the row of candles, Clabb looked about. He didn't see The Shadow in the doorway, for the black-cloaked watcher was part of the blackness there. What Clabb did notice was the coffin—the casket belonging to Varney—just below the shelf.

Remembering the thud he'd heard before, Clabb stooped and raised the coffin lid. Perhaps his nerves were too stout to crack, but they certainly bent badly. Peeling back, Clabb gave The Shadow a full view of the lid-raised casket, and the reason for Clabb's horror was plain.

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Within the coffin lay a ghastly sight. It was the figure of Varney, attired in the black and ragged shroud. Varney's bloodless face had all the pallor of a corpse, and his eyes were cold, seemingly sightless, in their fixed upward bulge. If ever a figure represented death in all its fullness, that waxlike form of Varney Haldrew met the qualification!

Swishing away from the doorway, The Shadow was just in time to avoid Clabb coming out. For the calm-faced doctor wasn't the sort to freeze, as Frenton had when hearing of Varney the Vampire. Clabb wanted to get clear of this living—or dead!—counterpart of the creature fictionized a hundred years before.

Clabb showed some presence of mind, for he wheeled to slam the door after he passed it. So hard was the slam that it jarred through the crypt, and the lid of Varney's coffin responded with a muffled thud. The breeze from the door must have extinguished the candle flames, for there was a flicker beneath the door crack and the light was gone.

Catching himself, Clabb gave a long grunt that ended when he finished the breath. Then at a sound from behind him, the man was full about, staring hard into the moonlight at a face that was closing in upon him. A face so like Varney's, that he thought the creature had passed him and was coming back!

Clabb staggered against the door of the crypt, rattling it hard. But The Shadow had recognized the approaching face. It was Sabbath's.

Clabb recognized the old lady's voice when she spoke, and her tone, hollow though it was, suited him better than Varney's. Clabb steadied; then nodded as Sabbath queried:

“You saw Varney in his coffin?”

Clabb's nod produced a happy but insidious cackle from Sabbath, whose tone began to ramble.

“I have seen him there often,” said Sabbath. “Varney prefers to sleep in his coffin, because he belongs to the Undead. Vampires run in our family among the direct descendants of the Haldrews. I suspect that all of them have been vampires, except Roderick.

“That is why his portrait hangs alone in the great bedroom. Others feared to place theirs there, because of Roderick's accusing eyes. He was a scourge to vampires, Roderick was. Poor Giles, the last of us to die, feared that he, too, was cursed, so he ordered all bodies in the crypt to be cremated, like his own.

“Only one Haldrew had no fear of the After Death. He was Roderick, who despised the others more than they hated him. Ask Varney to show you Roderick—”

Sabbath halted. Clabb was turning to see if he could clamp the door of the vault shut. Finding no clamp, he was muttering something about hammer and nails.

“No door can seal the Undead,” declared Sabbath solemnly. “Even now, Varney may have left his coffin. He could be filtering through that door as vampires do. Ah! I see him—those flecks of black—”

She was pointing into the moonlight and Clabb was following her stare. The flecks of black were there, though they could have been no more than moonbeams sifted by fleecy clouds and split by window bars. Turning, Sabbath kept her finger moving onward, and exclaimed triumphantly:

“I was right! Varney has passed us! Look—he has materialized upon the stairs and is moving up them. Gliding in his shroud!”

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SABBATHA'S tone was so convincing, that Clabb nodded. Catching himself, he decided to continue humoring her, in keeping with his stated policy.

But it happened that Sabbatha did see something in the dark, for her eyes were as sharp as those of her pet cat. What she saw was The Shadow, who had chosen that moment for a silent trip to the stairs!

So there was The Shadow leaving the cellar, with Sabbatha actually on his trail, mistaking him for Varney, and Clabb following along, just as an added complication. Reaching the ground-floor hall, The Shadow moved more swiftly, but Sabbatha noted a flicker of candles as he passed them and drew Clabb along.

Finding the library open, The Shadow side-stepped into it, whereupon sharp-eyed Sabbatha saw that the next batch of candles didn't flicker. So she followed him into the library, with Clabb in tow. By then, The Shadow was past the end of a bookcase and motionless in gloom, confident that Sabbatha wouldn't see him under such conditions.

“Varney is here,” said Sabbatha, sniffing the air. “No... perhaps he has gone. But he has been burning papers. Yes, I detect the odor. Burned papers in the fireplace!”

Clabb studied the fireplace ashes and nodded.

“Whose papers does Varney burn?” queried Clabb. “His own?”

“No.” Sabbatha shook her head. “He burns those that belonged to Giles. Every paper he can ever find! That's Varney's way.”

Clabb's eyes gleamed with interest. He suggested that they look for more of Giles' papers. The pair moved away from the fireplace and The Shadow promptly edged toward it. By entering there, he could reach the room above while Sabbatha and Clabb were making their useless search.

Something black scudded in through the door. It was Roderick, the cat, and Sabbatha stowed her pet on a cushion while Clabb closed the door. The cat stared toward the fireplace and snarled, so The Shadow paused. He didn't want Roderick's namesake traveling through secret passages with him.

So The Shadow waited for the cat to settle itself, and meanwhile, he watched Sabbatha and Clabb probe through desk drawers and bookshelves, hunting for old papers. The Shadow could count the evening fairly successful, so far. He'd witnessed a new phase of Varney's vampire act, and he'd learned that Varney had a penchant for disposing of certain papers.

If Varney would only repose in his coffin for a while, all would be well. On the chance that Varney would, The Shadow bided his time in blackness beside the fireplace. Even if Varney did move, the consequences could hardly be serious.

For The Shadow had come to the conclusion that the hazards of Haldrew Hall were mental, not physical. Usually, such conjectures on The Shadow's part were thorough and correct.

Not tonight. This was a time when death was on the move!

CHAPTER X. DEATH FROM THE DEAD

ALL this while, Harry Vincent was in the room where George Frenton hoped to sleep, helping the jittery man unpack some bags and doing his best to ease the fellow's fears. Frenton's excited mind was hopping to so

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many things that it was hard to keep him on a track.

First, Frenton talked about his heart. It wasn't very strong—not so strong as it should be. He'd told Clabb about it when the doctor gave him some pills, but Clabb had stated that they were only a mild sedative. They couldn't hurt Frenton's heart.

While he talked, Frenton swallowed two more of the pills. He did so only when Harry assured him that he'd stay in the room, too. Frenton wanted sleep; he needed it, but he wasn't going to sleep unless somebody was with him. Not while vampires were around.

After taking the pills, Frenton began to thank Harry some more. He liked Harry and appreciated his friendship. He liked the Armands, too, particularly Warren, who'd helped him upstairs and had brought his bags to this room. Clabb was all right, too, though Frenton hadn't liked him at first.

Trouble with Clabb, he reminded Frenton of Varney. Mention of Varney brought up vampires, and there Frenton was really off in a cloud of mental dust.

“D'you know,” he said, “I thought Gail Merwin was silly last night? Having a little nightmare and talking about vampires! She talked serious today, though, but all I did was humor her—the way Clabb says we ought to do with Varney and Sabbath.”

“Gail wanted to get out of that room. Best room in the house, still she didn't want it. Silly, I thought. But she wouldn't change her mind. Said she didn't like the picture of Roderick. Asked if I minded it, and I said no. So she asked if I'd swap rooms with her—”

Frenton's head was drooping as he spoke. Clabb's pills were putting him to sleep. Harry helped him to get his coat off, and Frenton awoke with a start, to ask:

“What was I saying?”

“You were talking about Gail,” replied Harry. “You said she wanted to swap rooms. She told me that somebody else would have the room with the portrait. Evidently you didn't take it. So who did?”

Frenton was dozing again. Sliding out of his suspenders, he muttered:

“What's that, Vincent?”

“I asked, who took the room with the portrait?”

“Room with the portrait?” Frenton's head was tilting to his shoulder. “Oh, yes! Warren Armand. It's his room now.”

Harry smiled. Evidently Warren had slipped one past Cedric. Very neat on Warren's part, helping a lady in distress. No wonder Warren hadn't mentioned it. He and Cedric had left Gail to Frenton today, so she could get tired of the pudgy man's company and become more interested in theirs.

But somewhere along the line, Warren must have casually arranged the switch of rooms, gaining Gail's special gratitude by the act. Warren would thus be one up on Cedric when their rivalry for Gail's favor resumed.

Frenton was waking up again and getting clumsily into bed. He was back on the vampire subject, stressing it

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in full.

“Read some books on vampires,” said Frenton. “Not like the story old Sabbatha was reading to us, but kind of scientific stuff. Says they can turn into wolves.”

“And bats,” reminded Harry. “Clabb thought he saw one tonight.”

Frenton being in the mood to discuss vampires, it was Harry's policy to exhaust the subject, so the fellow would forget it.

“They sleep in coffins,” continued Frenton, shoving his arms into his pajama sleeves. “But they don't like garlic. What they do like is to bite you at the throat.”

He shoved his hand to his ample neck as he slid into bed. Leaning back upon the pillow, Frenton looked into the candlelight and queried:

“Did you notice it, Vincent?”

“Notice what?”

“Gail's neck, today. Two tiny red spots. Saw 'em in the sunlight. Maybe the vampire bit her!”

Harry hadn't noticed such marks on Gail's throat, though she had raised her hand to her neck a few times.

“I'll get some garlic tomorrow,” remarked Harry, “and Gail can wear it for a necklace. I'll get you a bigger one, Frenton, though I think I might have to use onions. Do they bother vampires, too?”

Frenton gave a drowsy laugh. The sleeping pills were taking a better hold on him.

“Vampires can't cross running water,” he continued. “But they can change into fog. That's how they get in and out of places. Creep right under doors, through the cracks. Then, when they're inside, they turn into themselves.”

Frenton propped his head wearily upon his elbow in a last effort to carry on the conversation. There it stayed, while the fellow's eyes took on an odd look that Harry had seen before. Pulling his other arm from the bedclothes, Frenton pointed and gasped:

“Look!”

The finger pointed to a door at the front of the bedroom, one which looked as though it connected with the room ahead. From beneath that door was oozing a mist that formed a rising wraith in the candlelight!

A STARTLING sight—vampirism brought to a grim reality! Matters had been weird enough the night before, but this was a slow-motion form of menace that couldn't be offset. There was no way for Harry to grab that trickling mist as he had gripped Varney's shroud on the landing.

You couldn't fight a whitish vapor. But it had a power of its own. The foggy visitant was becoming more than a trickle, it was a swirling cloud approaching Frenton's bed. He was clutching at his throat as though he wished he had a garlic necklace.

“Do something, Vincent!” Frenton gulped. “Something... quick—”

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Frenton was badly numbed. The sleeping dose held him so that he couldn't wriggle from the bed. He was acting in jolty spasms, rising, sagging back, flipping his hands toward Harry then clamping them to his neck again.

“Take it easy, Frenton,” said Harry. Somewhat numbed himself, his tone sounded cool. “I'll find whatever is beyond that door!”

Shoving through the waist-high vapor, Harry tried the door, only to find it locked. He heard a soft hiss that might have come from a vampire, but Harry preferred to connect it with some gadget that was feeding the mist under the door.

“I'll go around to the other room,” decided Harry. “It will only take me a couple of minutes, Frenton.”

Frenton nodded.

“Close the door behind you,” he added. “I don't want to have to watch two places. I'll yell if things get worse.”

By the door he wanted closed, Frenton meant the one to the hallway, so Harry went out through it. Before closing the portal, he drew his automatic and let Frenton see it. The man gave a pleased nod; then sank back on his pillow and stared at the ceiling, trying to ignore the whitish vapor that was still expanding.

Hurrying along the hall, Harry found the other room, yanked its door open and entered with drawn flashlight. He was aiming his gun, too, for the connecting door to Frenton's room. What Harry saw made him halt amazed.

He saw—nothing!

That white fog was coming from this room—at least, it had to be— and yet it wasn't! In the midst of that blank discovery, Harry was overwhelmed by the irrational belief that such things as vampires could exist, and he tried to reason matters from that standpoint.

Like Frenton, he'd heard tales of vampires coming under doors in the form of fog, but he never had thought about what they might look like on the other side of the door, while in the midst of their invading process.

Here, Harry was seeing the other side of the door, the vampire's point of departure. Maybe he was the first man on record to watch a vampire taking off on a deadly excursion.

And Harry was finding a total absence of evidence, a thing which left him thoroughly bewildered.

Then came the startling thought that perhaps the vampire had already materialized beyond the door! That granted, it might be a solid creature—like Varney in his shroud—taking Frenton in its blood-sucking clutch!

This was no time to debate the real and the unreal. Madly, Harry tore from the front room. He gave a shout for Frenton to hear, but received no answer. What came was another figure from the opposite end of the hallway: Throck, calling to know what was the matter.

“The vampire!” Harry shouted. “He's in Frenton's room, grabbing at him!”

With that, Harry threw the door open. What he saw was in keeping with the best of vampire traditions. There was plenty of white fog in the room, a whole thick layer of it, bed high, covering Frenton like a misty blanket. And out of that fog, black amid whiteness, was the materialized figure of Varney Haldrew, his

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fingers groping for Frenton's throat as he crouched, half stooped, beside the bed!

That is, Harry took the figure to be Varney's, though he wouldn't have testified on oath. For the face that looked Harry's way showed only bloodshot eyes above the half-raised, shrouded arm. The rest of the face was pale, like a skull. Whether the creature's hands were bones of a skeleton, or human hands covered with Varney's gray gloves, Harry couldn't have sworn, for they were in the mist.

WHOEVER, whatever the creature in the shroud, it materialized in full the instant it saw Harry. With a bound, it went straight for a pair of French windows on the far side of the room, smashed them open with a single crash, to reach an outer balcony.

Harry was after it, swinging his gun, hoping to snare the thing alive. But Throck, coming in from the hall, was too excited to waste time with a chase.

The servant let rip with the old revolver, and Harry dropped back as he heard bullets sizzle by. Those shots skimmed off into thin air, for the vampire had turned the corner of the outside balcony at the moment Throck aimed.

And with that insidious shape went the remnants of the whitish cloud, sucked in a mass by a gust of wind that stormed by the mansion, plucking the house air into its vacuum. Wisps of the foggy vapor still remained as Throck bounded through to the balcony, where he began firing along the roof—at nothing!

But those wisps were leaving, too, as Harry turned toward the bed to speak to Frenton, who had rolled almost to the floor, tangled in the bedclothes as if they were a winding sheet. He'd made a struggle, Frenton had, but it was feeble and short-lived.

For Harry, as he stared at the glazed eyes of the upturned face, was sure, beyond argument, that Frenton was very, very dead!

CHAPTER XI. MISSING: ONE VAMPIRE

WHEN The Shadow heard the gunfire, he was coming from the fireplace in the portrait room, having finally slipped by Roderick, the cat, while the latter was sleeping. There was no fire in the upstairs fireplace, and it was so huge that circling the unlighted logs and kindling was a comparatively easy matter.

But The Shadow wasted no more time when he heard Throck's gun begin to blast, somewhere on the second floor. Springing from the fireplace, he sped past the austere portrait of the original Roderick and made straight for the door. In the rush, there was a slight mishap: The Shadow's foot caught a projecting log and rolled it from the fireplace after him.

That clatter, hard upon the muffled gunfire, awoke the person who was dozing in the great carved bed. The present occupant of the stately couch was no "creature of loveliness" whose "neck and bosom would have formed a study for the rarest sculptor," according to the fervid descriptions from the book of "Varney the Vampire." This room no longer belonged to Gail Merwin.

Tonight, this room of oaken floor was occupied by Warren Armand, and he came from the bed of walnut wood with a powerful leap. In the kaleidoscopic glitter from the stained-glass windows, Warren saw the sweeping figure of The Shadow, but in a form of half illusion.

Those panes were of many shades, hence the moonlight, insufficient because of obscuring clouds, produced a remarkable trick. Its effect was visible only through the lighter-tinted panes, whereas the darker hues blocked

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the glow.

Thus The Shadow, as Warren viewed him, came up to all the lore of vampires. He wasn't a lot of blackish specks, the way Sabbatha had described him; he was something more startling—a living patchwork quilt that seemed composed of disconnected sections.

Geometric figures, all of black, yet glossed with colorful effects of carmine, orange, bistre, olive, azure, and all the lighter shades of various colors. Where the light was maroon, or purple, or even a dark green, The Shadow didn't show!

Snatching at a coat that hung on a chair beside the bed, Warren grabbed a revolver and lunged after The Shadow. The fantasy of patchwork-tinted blackness was through the door before Warren could aim his gun, but there seemed a chance to overtake him in the hall.

Whatever Warren's chance, it was thoroughly ruined before he reached the door. Like a chunk of patchwork left behind, a green-tinted sector of glossy black changed to light blue beneath Warren's feet and tripped him during the transformation.

Warren's hearty shout drowned the screech of Roderick, the cat, which was scudding from fireplace to door. Sabbatha's pet had followed The Shadow from the library despite the cloaked prowler's efforts to elude the creature.

Now the cat was gone and Warren, hitting the floor with a thump, was staring up at the portrait of the original Roderick, which gave him a flickery smile as it studied him with eyes of different hues that were tinted by separate panes of the stained-glass window.

Finding Frenton's room. The Shadow saw Harry looking at the man who lay beside the bed. Throck was on the balcony reloading his revolver, bawling that the vampire had gone across the roof. Other persons were coming up the stairs in haste: Clabb and Sabbatha, calling to learn about the trouble. Following them came Cedric's voice; he was on his way from the library.

Then there was a call from Gail, who had come from her new room; an answer from Warren, who was on his feet and in the hall. Amid those calls, The Shadow spoke whispered words to Harry, who nodded, glad that his chief was on hand.

Then, as people were arriving, The Shadow whisked out to the balcony, intending to go along the roof edge in the direction opposite Throck's gaze.

THROCK heard the calls too, and turned around just as The Shadow arrived. With a savage shout, the haggard servant aimed his reloaded gun straight for The Shadow, mistaking him for the vampire, mysteriously returned.

Catching Throck's wrist, The Shadow drove the fellow's gun hand upward and the revolver chattered in the air. But as they reeled together, The Shadow and Throck, they came half through the French windows.

Harry wasn't the only person who saw them. Clabb and Sabbatha saw all of the struggle; Cedric was in time to witness half of it; while Warren and Gail caught the finish—which was the most graphic part. By then, the rough-and-ready grapple had gone The Shadow's way, and he climaxed it by smothering Throck into submission.

No vampire could have done it better. Throck was in the doorway, whereas The Shadow had wheeled to the

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balcony. What the witnesses saw was a man-sized thing of blackness that spread its cloak like a pair of great bat wings, enveloping Throck completely in the folds.

Throck sagged, and for the moment it looked as though his fate would be comparable to Frenton's.

Only Harry knew the truth—that Frenton had met one foe, Throck another. But Harry couldn't stop the surge of men who lunged for The Shadow: Clabb first, next Cedric, and finally Warren; while old Sabbatha held a candelabrum high to guide them, the flames from the wicks adding an insane gleam to her old eyes.

With an opening swish of the cloak that looked like wings, The Shadow was gone, while men were blundering across Throck as the servant clambered up from the doorway. They glimpsed The Shadow on the roof and Cedric produced a gun, along with Warren's. But when they fired at the spot where The Shadow faded, he was gone. Moonlight, gleaming suddenly, showed only the bare, paintless shingles of the roof!

The Shadow had swung beneath the eaves. There, in deep darkness, he had hooked one arm across a projecting beam and was putting on the suction cups. He looked back to the balcony, saw Cedric and Warren staring all about. At moments, they saw fantastic things along the wall and probed with shots; but all they clipped was rustling ivy.

With the two turned the other way, The Shadow moved off along his part of the wall, where there was no ivy. He was just swinging a corner when Throck glimpsed him, for the servant's eyes were very good in darkness.

But Throck didn't matter; nothing but clicks came from his antique gun. He'd unloaded it with those shots in the air. The Shadow had counted six of them while the revolver was spouting in volcanic fashion.

Turning at Throck's cry, Cedric and Warren saw only a blank house corner, so didn't waste their last few shots. Throck was emphatic, though, in stating that he'd seen the vampire disappear in that direction, and Clabb gave a corroborating nod.

Thus was the way paved for a most astounding mystery to follow. At the doorway, Harry could see the men on the balcony plainly, because Sabbatha was beside him with the candelabrum. He observed the nods and heard Sabbatha state profoundly:

“It was Varney that they saw. Varney Haldrew, the vampire of our generation, not his namesake of a century gone—”

And then, two hands that had a bony press within their padded surface were resting on the shoulders of Harry and Sabbatha, moving them apart. Harry wheeled and Sabbatha, stepping back, raised the candles into the room. Others spun from the balcony, while Gail made a half shriek from the hallway door.

Standing there, an inquiring expression upon his smug face, was the gaunt man who hoped some day to own this mansion—Varney Haldrew!

NO longer did Varney wear the shroud that Harry had seen upon his shoulders. He was attired in his usual dark suit, and he appeared quite unperturbed. If anything, Varney's manner was curious. His voice had a cackle, rather than a hiss, as he inquired what had happened.

To Harry, of course, the only mystery was how Varney had arrived here—though he might have gone past Gail, who was standing half within the door. To the others, who had mistaken The Shadow for the vampire and supposed him to be Varney, the only absentee, the thing was quite incredible. For only a few seconds had intervened between The Shadow's vanish and Varney's arrival!

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It was Harry who answered Varney's queries, with a silent nudge toward the bed where Frenton lay. Varney stepped toward the prone man, but Clabb pressed him aside. Stooping beside Frenton, the physician made a brief examination, then declared that Frenton was dead.

Varney looked truly unhappy when he heard the news. His expression didn't change when Clabb decided that Frenton had died from heart failure, induced by some new shock that had followed his earlier fright. The others credited Clabb's verdict, and nodded further when Harry and Throck told their story in detail.

They were still puzzled about Varney, though from the way they eyed him, most of them—even Throck—were coming to the opinion that Varney must have gone from the roof, or outside wall, sooner than they supposed. So interested were they in Varney, that they forgot Frenton's body.

Harry noticed it, particularly the neck. There, at Frenton's throat, he saw two tiny reddish marks, like pin pricks—evidence of a vampire's bite! Swinging toward Gail, Harry looked for the token that Frenton himself had described.

Yes, Gail bore the same marks, very faintly! She'd unwittingly let the collar of her dressing gown slip down and Harry viewed the tiny pink stabs by the light of Sabbath's candelabrum!

Taking charge of matters, Clabb gestured the others from the room. Then, boldly, the physician put the challenge that was in every mind. Turning to Varney, Clabb demanded:

“Where were you when this happened?”

“In the library,” returned Varney crisply, “studying some old tomes. I shall return there now.”

Clabb exchanged looks with Sabbath. The doctor could not dispute Varney's claim. If he did, Sabbath would argue that they had both followed Varney to the library, which would only complicate matters. So Clabb closed the room and departed with the rest.

Varney went to the library, the others to the living room, where Cedric picked up some cards with which he had been playing solitaire and suggested another game instead.

Two persons were absent: Clabb and Sabbath. They had gone to the cellar. There, The Shadow, moving from the darkness of the stairs, saw them enter the crypt and find Varney's coffin empty, lacking even the tattered shroud!

Not being where he could witness Varney's arrival in Frenton's room, The Shadow had naturally gone directly to the crypt to look for Varney. The Shadow was on his way upstairs when Clabb and Sabbath passed him. So The Shadow continued up the stairs; hearing voices from the living room, he kept on to the second floor.

There, darkness swallowed him; gloom that was stirred by a whispered laugh. Grim mirth, suited to The Shadow's coming quest for evidence that would prove all facts concerning the missing vampire of Haldrew Hall!

CHAPTER XII. STRANGE VERDICTS

IN the morning, Harry Vincent wrote out a detailed report of all that had happened the night before. Too long a report to send by carrier pigeon, so he decided to condense it. He had not been able to contact The Shadow during the night, though he'd been sure his chief was still around.

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Everybody had stayed in the living room all night. Clabb had returned there, and even Sabbatha and Varney had favored the group with their company, at intervals, while Throck, patrolling the house, had reported in every half hour. So Harry had to stay with the group—or else excite their suspicion.

Harry's work on the condensation was interrupted by the arrival of the coroner. It was Throck who summoned Harry, and when he left the room, Harry closed the closet door to make sure that Roderick, the cat, wouldn't find the carrier pigeon.

In the hallway, Harry passed Varney, who gave him a cryptic smile and said that he would join him soon.

The coroner was a big-browed man, who listened seriously to Clabb's opinion on Frenton's death. When Harry supplied the vampire story, the coroner just grunted. He asked for the key to the connecting room and Throck went to find Varney, who finally appeared with the big ring of keys. The unlocking of the connecting door produced a surprise for Harry.

The door didn't lead to the front room. It opened into a small closet. On the other side of the closet was another door which did connect with the front room. Varney unlocked it and went through, the others following him.

Thus was the riddle partially solved—the question of how smoky fog had appeared in Frenton's room without coming from a visible source. Harry had looked into the front room, mistaking its closet door for the one that opened into Frenton's.

The vapor had issued from the closet; that was all. It had oozed into Frenton's room because there was a wide crack under that particular door, whereas the one to the front room was backed by an innocent-looking stretch of weather-stripping.

All this had the elements of a set-up, but there was no sign as to what had caused the smoke. The closet was quite empty; its floor boards, old and with cracks between them, had no marks to indicate the attachment of a special fixture. But the smoke could have come from the closet, so Harry felt he still was sane.

So far, Harry hadn't emphasized the story too strongly. He'd just said that he and Frenton had noticed a mist coming under the door and that he'd gone to the front room to investigate. On his return, he'd seen someone in a tattered shroud, stooped beside Frenton's body. Someone who had fled the room, carrying the fog with him.

Naturally, Harry couldn't be too specific, since he didn't want to involve The Shadow, who had been mistaken for the vampire later. He let Throck proceed with testimony, and in giving it, the servant practically omitted reference to the whitish fog. He'd noticed some vapor, yes, but Frenton thought it was nothing more than tobacco smoke.

When the coroner asked if Harry and Frenton had been smoking, Harry nodded—because they had been.

At that moment, Varney turned directly to Dr. Clabb and asked, in a bold tone:

“You are sure that Frenton's death was due to heart failure?”

This was Clabb's chance to turn the tables on Varney. Instead, Clabb stuck to his original verdict. The reason, Harry suddenly recognized, was due to a cold, almost triumphant glitter in Varney's gaze. Then the same eyes were turning Harry's way.

“And you, Vincent” demanded Varney. “Would you prefer to attribute it to an imaginary creature created

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from a fog which Throck did not even see? A thing which evaporated into night when Throck seized it?"

There was a warning glance from Clabb; one that Harry didn't need, for he'd noted Varney's gloat, too. It was Varney who had turned the tables!

In Clabb's case, Varney had one winning card. Clabb had attended Frenton after the fellow's first fright, and had given him sleeping pills. An autopsy might produce traces of that dosage, which wouldn't look good for Clabb.

As a second trump, Varney had Harry on a spot. For Harry had been the last person in the room with Frenton while the victim was still alive. Like Clabb, Harry was in a position where anything he said might prove a boomerang. Therefore, Harry was glad that he hadn't committed himself too far. And now, he kept silent.

HERE, Throck came helpfully to the rescue. He said that it had been foggy early the previous evening, when he was outdoors. Maybe the French windows had let some mist trickle through. It could have been the wind that blew them open later.

Both Clabb and Harry understood why Throck was saying this. The servant had looked toward Varney, too. He must have decided that Varney had another card up his sleeve—for Throck.

"I think this matter solves itself," declared Varney crisply. "George Frenton was overstrained, following one heart attack. He thought he saw things, and magnified them. Naturally, that influenced Vincent, who was with him, and he passed on the scare to Throck.

"Much seems to happen in this old house, yet none of it is tangible. So I withdraw my doubts, Dr. Clabb. You may settle the case with the coroner, and afterward I shall make due arrangements for Frenton's funeral."

The hard-headed coroner preferred the heart-failure verdict, but decided to talk to other people before making it official. He went down to the living room and found Gail there with the Armand cousins. Their testimony proved perfect. It proved that everybody was imagining things, which therefore covered Frenton's case all the better.

Gail related her own experience in the portrait room, two nights before: how she'd seen a lot of blackness beside the bed, only to have it vanish from the window, after an interval during which she'd practically fainted. Imagination, probably, but it had certainly scared her.

"I can substantiate that," put in Warren Armand. "You see, I moved to the portrait room last night. When I wakened, I thought I saw a black creature, too, but it was all in pieces. I went after it and one of the pieces tripped me!

"No, I'm not crazy"—Warren's long face widened in a smile, his blue eyes twinkled—"because there's the thing that did it." He pointed across the living room to a window seat. "Miss Sabbath's black cat!"

The green-eyed culprit didn't like the attention that came his way. Hopping from the window seat, Roderick started from the room, to be met by Sabbath in the hall. She picked up the cat and went her way, while Clabb explained to the coroner that he had been with Sabbath, at the time of Frenton's death and that there would be no need to question her. Remembering how Varney had tripped his story, Clabb didn't want similar trouble with Sabbath.

Cedric Armand gave final testimony. His statement was brief: he'd been playing solitaire in the living room, when he heard the commotion and ran upstairs. Like Gail and Warren, Cedric had seen Throck grabbing for

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something on the balcony, but it had turned out to be thin air.

The coroner called it a day and went back to town, taking Frenton's body with him. Both Clabb and Varney accompanied him on the trip, but Harry was one of the volunteers who carried Frenton's body to the car. On the way, he noted the dead man's throat; it had swollen slightly, and there were no traces of the two pink points that Harry had seen the night before.

Three cars, altogether, had come from town, and in one Harry saw his friend the taxi driver, who tossed him a square package that rattled. Later, when Harry opened the little bundle, he found that it contained a bird-food mixture, especially suited for pigeons. With it was wrapped a note from The Shadow, telling Harry to expect him at dusk.

AT dusk, Clabb and Varney returned from town, and Harry was watching them walk from the gate where the taxi man left them, when he caught The Shadow's whisper. His chief had entered the Hall and come directly to Harry's room.

Motioning Harry along, The Shadow took him to the landing where Varney had disappeared two nights before. There, The Shadow undertoned:

“Meet me in the room where Frenton died.”

Harry turned to reply, only to find The Shadow gone!

Twilight from the landing window was sufficient to prove that Harry's black-cloaked chief had duplicated Varney's original vanishment. So Harry followed instructions by going up the short steps from the landing, turning through a forward hall with a zigzag angle, that finally brought him into the room where Frenton had died.

There, by the gleam of freshly lighted candles, Harry saw The Shadow again. He had arrived here first!

It couldn't be a masquerader. The Shadow had removed his slouch hat and dropped his cloak collar. Harry saw a hawkish face, the profile of Lamont Cranston, whose personality The Shadow adopted in everyday life.

Noting Harry's bewilderment, The Shadow gave a typical Cranston smile. Stepping to the back of the room, he gripped the baseboard and slid a section upward. A portion of the wall went up into the ceiling, revealing a waist-high gap beneath the raised baseboard. Through that space, Harry saw the stairway landing.

So that was it!

Varney's first vanish had been through this very room; no wonder, therefore, that he had used it for later trickery. The twists in the hallway made it difficult to realize that this room backed against the landing.

Through the hidden connection, Varney had first popped in on Frenton; later, he had returned, to confound witnesses who supposed him to be the vampire faker, which he was!

Having revealed that trick, The Shadow snuffed out the candles. He used a flashlight to probe the closet whence the smoke had come, calling Harry's attention to the cracks in the floor.

Then they went downstairs, turning through an obscure passage to a side door from the house. But they didn't go outside. Instead, The Shadow opened the door of a little room that happened to be directly under the connecting closet on the floor above.

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Lots of things were stored in this room. So many, that Harry wondered about a certain padlocked room that Varney had described as a storeroom. Why another storeroom when so many things were here? Harry left that question for later debate, because The Shadow was calling his attention to a certain item.

The thing was a vacuum cleaner of the latest type. In a sense, it was a portable air-conditioner, for the vacuum hose sucked the air into a tank that was equipped with a container filled with liquid that was supposed to cleanse the air. There was plenty of hose coiled in the room and The Shadow began to fit it to the machine.

Soon he had the whole thing reconstructed, with a hose running right up to the cracked ceiling—a hose that terminated in a wide suction sweeper supposed to pick up dust. But when The Shadow started the cleaner working, Harry saw that it operated in reverse.

Buzzing softly, the machine was sucking in air which carried through the hose and out the wide sweeper, which remained glued to the ceiling cracks because of the sucking force of the air that left it!

On a shelf was a large bottle of ammonia. In a corner a smaller bottle lay empty. The Shadow defined its former contents as spirits of salts, which meant hydrochloric acid.

“Very simple,” he told Harry. “The acid and ammonia, combined in that cleanser tank, produced a smoke which was carried up through the flooring. You saw the fumes emerging from the connecting closet, and they passed as whitish fog—a vampire mist!”

The Shadow turned off the vacuum and the clinging pipe dropped down. Noting a cord that ran from the machine to a floor plug, Harry exclaimed:

“Why, the house is wired for electricity!”

“To this room only,” explained The Shadow. “Evidently Giles Haldrew started to put in the improvement, then changed his mind. In so doing, he was only copying a predecessor, because the house is also piped for gas—to this room only.”

STRIKING a match, The Shadow carried it to a corner and applied the flame to a gas jet, which promptly ignited and burned steadily. Finding a length of thin hose, The Shadow stretched it like a long tape measure, one end toward the gas jet, the other toward the vacuum-cleaner tank.

“The acid-ammonia combination is comparatively harmless,” remarked The Shadow. “Certainly its mere smoke could not prove fatal. But if this hose had run from gas jet to vacuum cleaner—”

He paused, letting Harry form the obvious conclusion.

“The gas would have gone through, too!” exclaimed Harry. “A whole flood of it, along with the phony smoke. That's what killed Frenton; he was in the low bed, beneath its level! When Varney crashed through the French windows, the gas went out with the smoke!”

The Shadow nodded. The rest, too, was obvious. Assuming that the smoke fumes had already been exhausted, Varney had only to return to the storeroom and turn off the smooth-running motor, that could not be heard outside its present confines. Detaching the gas hose from the jet was an even simpler proposition.

While Harry still pondered on the matter, The Shadow conducted him from the storeroom to the library, which was lighted but deserted. From a corner of the fireplace, The Shadow carefully drew a piece of burned

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paper and held it to the candlelight.

On it, Harry could read traces of written words. He made out two. They were “sure” and “crypt.”

Then came The Shadow's low tone, close to Harry's ear.

“Keep watch on Varney,” The Shadow ordered. “Matters went beyond what he intended last night; of that, I am certain. There may be a lull of several days as a result. Should anything develop meanwhile, send a message by the remaining pigeon.

“Likewise, signal at dusk each evening, in case of my early return. Should emergency arise, aid is close at hand. I have stationed Burke in the town; he will contact you on his own, if he finds suitable opportunity. Meanwhile, learn all you can.”

By Burke, The Shadow meant another agent, named Clyde Burke, who worked as a newspaper reporter. A good man, and a logical one to be staying in the town near the Haldrew mansion, since Frenton's death would naturally interest the New York newspapers. So Harry's tone was pleased, when he turned to The Shadow and declared:

“Instructions received.”

With that, Harry's face was blank. The Shadow had disappeared again! Then Harry saw the fireplace and his smile returned. His chief had taken the secret route up to the room where Roderick's portrait hung as a rebuke to all other Haldrews.

In fact, Harry could fancy that he heard the whisper of a parting laugh from the depths of the library fireplace—The Shadow's token of acknowledgment that Harry, for once, had guessed right!

CHAPTER XIII. THE PADLOCKED ROOM

THE next few days passed quietly at Haldrew Hall. Even the nights were calm, serene, with everyone very friendly. Occasionally, someone remarked about “poor Frenton,” and the memory of the departed guest served to keep the remainder in closer comradeship.

Varney had arranged Frenton's funeral and the body had been cremated, in keeping with the present custom of the Haldrew family. Such an arrangement had met with the full approval of Dr. Clabb, who didn't want an autopsy, for reasons of his own. So Frenton's ashes were in an urn down in the family crypt.

Behind all this lay a sinister suggestion; one that gripped Harry Vincent, who had studied vampire lore. Harry knew the traditions of vampires; how they were supposed to be the Undead, who rose from their graves and feasted on the blood of living humans. There was a way of dealing with vampires; the system was to drive stakes through their hearts and chop off their heads. But in the books on vampires in the Haldrew library—amazing how many such volumes Harry found there!—it appeared that cremation was the method more extensively used, being far more efficient, though less picturesque, than the stake and head-chopping business.

Reading through such books, Harry could picture old Giles Haldrew pouring over them and deciding to end the vampire's curse of the Haldrew family. So he'd ordered himself cremated, and had applied the rule to all the bodies in the family crypt, proving that Giles was a man of judgment, even where superstitions were concerned.

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From the superstitious angle, there was still Varney Haldrew. From the way old Sabbatha talked, one would suppose that Varney was a bona fide sample of the Undead. She hinted that he'd really died some years ago, and had returned to Haldrew Hall as a vampire. But Harry laughed that off, though he was glad to note that the tiny red spots no longer showed on the throat of Gail Merwin.

But now a certain tenseness had grown. It dated from the hour when Frenton's ashes were stowed in the crypt. Somewhat personally relieved because Frenton's case was closed, Harry could understand why others—particularly Varney and Clabb—felt even more so. As a result, Harry recognized that they were resuming their individual plans.

Analyzing Varney was comparatively easy. Varney simply wanted to scare the daylights out of people at nighttime. He'd frightened Gail one night, Frenton the next, because they were where he could conveniently fake his vampire tricks. The stunt of the illuminating gas, along with the smoke, could be logically explained, because such gas had a way of making heads swim and therefore should have aided Varney's vampire act.

The trouble was those pills that Clabb had given Frenton. They'd lowered his resistance, leaving him in a partial stupor, unable to get above the bed level where the gas was thick.

Since Harry had reasoned that fact out, he was sure The Shadow recognized it, too. For The Shadow had remarked that Varney had overstepped himself. However, Varney was now free to go on with his regular act, including the byplay of the coffin sleep which he was using to worry Sabbatha. Today, Varney was doing some snooping around the house, which Harry didn't like.

Dr. Clabb was getting tightlipped, too, except when he talked with old Sabbatha. This didn't quite fit with Clabb's policy, considering that he wanted to pronounce both Varney and Sabbatha as insane. He wasn't talking to Varney at all, and in Sabbatha's case there were never any witnesses to Clabb's conferences with the old lady, so what Clabb was finding out could hardly help his case.

Unless he'd changed plans, which Harry believed he had. Clabb had taken a special interest in the cellar crypt, and after his chats with Sabbatha, he talked about the Haldrew estate, wondering just how much cash old Giles had really been worth. He talked on this subject to the Armands, but they weren't interested.

For Cedric and Warren still regarded their sojourn in Haldrew Hall as a lark. Their money would come from the Armand family, and they bragged about it.

As for Gail Merwin, she was sticking it out partly for the few thousand she would gain, and partly to show that her nerve could last as long as anybody else's. Which left only Throck, the servant, as a factor—and his case was the simplest of all. He was continuing his patrol duty, every night, in his usual systematic fashion.

It was largely on account of Varney and Clabb that Harry decided to send the pigeon, to inform The Shadow that things were getting tense again. He delayed the message only because he hoped he could overhear a chat between Clabb and Sabbatha.

The chance came late in the afternoon, when Harry was passing the library. He heard the voices of Clabb and Sabbatha, so he listened in the gloomy hall outside the door.

Clabb was questioning Sabbatha about the crypt. Harry heard Sabbatha say that her uncle Giles had intended to pave it with flagstone, but had finally decided on concrete. When Clabb asked why, Sabbatha said that maybe Throck would know, because Giles had left the hiring of the workmen to him.

In fact, Sabbatha was very vague about the whole thing—so vague, that she switched the subject to the

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padlocked room on the second floor, a thing which roused Clabb's interest. When he said he'd like to look into the room, Sabbatha told him he'd have to first find the key, on top of which she added a very cackly laugh.

As he went upstairs, Harry glimpsed Varney. The gaunt man was coming from the portrait room, which Warren still used as a bedroom. It struck Harry that Varney could have been using the fireplace route; if so, he might have heard what Clabb and Sabbatha had discussed.

Harry was pondering over that as he continued to his own room, and in his concentration didn't observe that Varney saw him going by. Otherwise, Harry might have been prepared for the odd things that were to happen.

Using pencil and thin paper, Harry inscribed a brief note. No need for vanishing ink, since this message was going direct. Anyway, the paper was too thin to take properly the special fluid that The Shadow and his agents preferred in their correspondence.

Harry simply stated things in brief: that Varney was back in form; Clabb acting oddly; the locked room a factor that Harry would investigate immediately.

Attaching the note to the pigeon, Harry released the bird from his window.

The pigeon circled off into the haze of early dusk and Harry promptly forgot it. He should have watched; in fact, would have, had the light been better. Harry's negligence on that point prevented him from observing something rather phenomenal. After its circling tactics, the pigeon failed to take off in a straight line.

Instead, it wound up on the roof of Haldrew Hall!

A little bell dinged from the pigeon cote as Harry's pigeon went through a wicket. Gray-gloved hands reached in from the other side and plucked up the bird. A few moments later, Varney Haldrew was chuckling over Harry's note. Varney's gloat increased as he eyed a special coop which contained an extra bird.

That extra pigeon was Harry's! Varney was a better snooper than Roderick, the cat. Varney the Vampire could unbolt doors, and he had done just that with the door of Harry's closet. Finding a carrier pigeon there, he had replaced it with one of his own!

Fortunately, Harry's note was too brief to give Varney any inkling about The Shadow. Its reference to Varney meant very little; the mention of Clabb, not much more. But it did tell that Harry was going to the padlocked room, and Varney's lips spread to show their sharp teeth when the man who played the vampire read that information.

Stealing down from the pigeon cote, Varney took the passage to that very room. He paused to avoid Throck when the servant patrolled past, for it was dusk now, and the time when Throck took up his vigil. Then, hearing footsteps coming cautiously, Varney moved ahead in silent style. He was gone when Harry reached one set of steps that led up to the passage.

Harry paused, sure that he had heard someone over beyond the other steps. He moved slightly, thought he heard an opposite stir, so waited. This happened twice; then Harry's attention was diverted by sounds from his own side of the hump. Deciding that his nerves were tricking him, Harry gripped the banister and sneaked up to the top.

Here he came into a shaft of dimming light that was furnished by a skylight in the ceiling. Harry had forgotten the skylight; otherwise, he'd have waited until a little later. Still, the glow was very vague; it barely

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showed the newel posts on either side of the hall. Ahead, Harry could see dim whiteness that marked the padlocked door, so he decided to get that far before anyone could arrive to notice him.

Odd, what thoughts one could have in stealing to so strange a goal! Step by step, with sneaky stride, Harry could picture himself as a replica of Varney, the very man whose methods he so disliked! If so, all the better, for it was smart to offset a system by duplicating it. Since he wasn't wearing a shroud, Harry simply tightened his coat collar and stalked ahead.

As he neared the whitened door, he thought he saw it move. To make sure it wasn't an illusion, Harry stopped short and stared intently. Yes, the door was moving, but at the wrong side!

Approaching foot by foot, Harry was convinced of the strange, slow motion. He had one hand ready with a flashlight; in the other was his automatic, equally prepared for emergency.

There was no illusion to the thing that happened next. As for an emergency, it was the sort that a gun couldn't offset. A floor board creaked under foot; Harry heard a peculiar click from a spot just short of the door.

With that, the hallway floor dropped and Harry went scooting down an angled sliding board into depths of blackness!

HARRY gave an instinctive yell as he slid. He pawed wildly with his hands, and his eyes turned upward as he took the drop. In that last moment, Harry could have sworn that the door of the padlocked room was wide, with Varney standing in the doorway, attired in the same old shroud, leering downward with an expression much like that of a grinning skull!

Then the floor closed upward above Harry's head, and his plunge came to an abrupt finish as he landed on a stony floor. It was a real drop, close to twenty feet, and it should have crumpled Harry completely; but it didn't. He'd started with a slide rather than a pitch, and he'd learned to brace himself for sudden landings.

Nevertheless, Harry took a very severe jolt. He was groggy as he staggered to his feet.

So shaken was Harry that he forgot both his gun and his flashlight, which had hit the floor beside him. Through his dazed mind was running the thought that whoever had dropped him here might come to find him, so his major problem was to escape the present trap.

Staggering about, Harry found himself in what seemed to be an empty coal bin, and he found the edge of a door, only to discover that it was bolted from the other side. Floundering, Harry beat at the wooden surface, and suddenly it gave. He reeled through, into the arms of a man who had drawn the bolt from the other side.

Expecting just such an enemy, Harry hurled himself upon the man, who twisted away in wiry style. Catching his adversary by an arm, Harry tried another grapple in the cellar's gloom, thinking he could drive his foe against a wall. But the wiry man was too quick for such tactics. He recoiled right to the wall and let his fist jab straight, as he braced.

The fist met Harry squarely in the jaw and the punch was just too much. With a last stagger, Harry Vincent folded to the floor and sprawled, limp and helpless, at the feet of his unknown captor!

CHAPTER XIV. MURDER IN THE MAKING

THE thing that awakened Harry was a chill that ran along his entire spine. Eyes opening, Harry wondered why he felt that odd sensation; then he thought he had the answer. An answer so alarming that Harry came

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bounding to his feet, more anxious to leave this place than anywhere else that he had ever been.

He was in the Haldrew burial crypt, lying right in front of the coffin reserved for Varney! Burning candles showed the entire scene, including the shelves of urns that had so lately been augmented by the one containing Frenton's ashes!

Harry didn't stop to reason that it was the cold floor that had chilled him. He couldn't have been scared earlier by his presence in the crypt, because he hadn't seen his surroundings until he opened his eyes.

Madly, Harry made for the door, to find it bolted. He thought the bolt was on the other side, because the light was dim, here by the door. So Harry dropped back, intending to drive shoulder first at the door, when a wiry grip and a familiar voice stopped him.

Turning, Harry saw his fellow agent, Clyde Burke. The newspaper reporter had a hat tilted down over one eye, and with his free hand he waved a two-fingered greeting. Harry steadied and began to rub his head, whereupon Clyde offered him a cigarette. As the two started their smoke, Clyde explained.

Clyde was a chap who dealt in deadlines. Today had been the deadline for the carrier pigeon. Even though reporters weren't welcome at Haldrew Hall, he'd learned a lot around the town, and had played up the story of Frenton's death purely from the heart-failure angle.

Frenton's funeral, the fact he had been cremated, added some zest to the story. To Clyde, it meant something very special: namely, the very things that Harry had noted.

Operations would be resumed at Haldrew Hall, now that there wasn't a chance of an autopsy on Frenton's body. It was Clyde's business to contact Harry if possible, and when the pigeon didn't show up at the place where Clyde expected it, he'd stretched his reporter's privilege to the limit by making a trip to Haldrew Hall.

"The taxi jockey wouldn't bring me past the gate," explained Clyde, "and it's just as well he didn't. I strolled up and found the door open, so I walked right in. I knew the layout of the place, because the chief gave me a plan of it."

Harry nodded, still rubbing his head; then he inquired:

"How did you get down to the cellar?"

"By accident," replied Clyde. "First, I looked into the living room and saw the Merwin girl talking to one of the Armand cousins. Cedric, I guess—kind of handsome, with dark hair."

Harry nodded that the description fitted Cedric.

"Well, Cedric was talking box-car figures," continued Clyde. "Telling Gail the Haldrew dough was small change compared to what's coming from the Armand side. You know—the 'come flee with me, you beautiful creature, and we'll live happily afterward forever.'"

"No wonder Cedric is handing out that line," remarked Harry, with an attempt at a smile. "Warren stole a march on him by taking the portrait room that Gail didn't like. But go on, Clyde."

"I went on," said Clyde, "past the library, where I had to duck, because old Sabbatha was coming, with that cat the chief mentioned, the feline with the magic eye. So I grabbed the first door handy and it took me to the cellar. I'd hardly closed the door before I heard something crash, off in a coal bin."

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Harry's smile increased. He'd been the "something." So it was Clyde who had come to find out what everything was all about! With Harry wanting to put up a blind fight after Clyde released him, Clyde's only way to quiet him had been with a timely punch.

"But why did you bring me in here?" asked Harry.

"I figured it would be cool," replied Clyde, "which it was. And secluded—it was that, too. What's more, it looked like a stronghold in case of a fight. Which reminds me—here's your gun and your flashlight. Most of all, though, I wanted to see if anybody snooped around."

"Did anybody?"

"Yes, but I don't know who he was—or rather who they were. The first guy came down like he expected to find you in the bin. When he didn't, he went upstairs again. Then the other chap showed up and took a peek. But he may have come down to the cellar because he spotted the first gent roving around."

HARRY pondered as to whom the mysterious visitors might have been. Clyde supplied a negative hint by remembering that he'd seen someone on the veranda, when he arrived—a pacing man, noticeable chiefly by a glow of his cigar. Harry decided that the man in question must have been Dr. Clabb, which left Varney and Throck as the logical visitors to the cellar.

Only one person was left, Warren Armand, and Harry excluded him on the ground that Warren didn't know enough about the old house to go about springing traps.

"I thought I saw Varney when I took the tumble," declared Harry. "He was wearing his vampire getup. What's more, Clyde, I sent the pigeon, so it's funny it didn't reach you."

"Maybe I started from town too soon—"

"Possibly," interposed Harry. "But if you didn't, it looks as though Varney's hand was behind it. Maybe he has power over pigeons. From the stuff I've been reading lately, I'd say that Varney turned himself into a big bat and overtook the bird on the fly!"

Harry spoke so seriously that he had to finish with a smile to assure Clyde that he wasn't falling for the vampire legends. Looking at his watch, Clyde decided he ought to be getting back to town, since he had bribed the local taxi man to stick around outside the grounds at a distance of a fifth of mile, as registered by the odometer. So Harry suggested that Clyde go up first.

Clyde did so, with Harry waiting at the foot of the stairs, ready to rush to the reporter's aid. No help was needed, for Clyde managed to sneak outdoors. But Harry waited a few minutes longer before making his own trip up—and those few minutes brought on new happenings.

The door at the top of the stairs opened suddenly and figures appeared there. Dropping back, Harry sneaked to the crypt, thinking it was the one place where the visitors wouldn't come.

Unfortunately, that was where they did come, holding candles ahead of them: Harry couldn't see their faces or identify their conversation, but he needed a hiding place.

So he took one: Varney's coffin!

He regretted it a soon as he was within, for the sensation was gruesome. At least there was a way to keep the

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lid open by wedging the muzzle of the automatic in its cracks, and that provided a second feature to Harry's benefit: his ability to use the weapon in a pinch. The cold steel of the gun actually felt warm, when compared with the chill of the crypt!

Entering, the arrivals lighted the candles that Harry had snuffed out after he and Clyde left. The added light showed who they were and, to his fresh amazement, Harry discerned that they were a pair that he had considered quite at odds: Varney Haldrew and his aged niece, Sabbatha!

It was soon evident that they still weren't any too friendly, this trip to the crypt being for the purpose of thrashing out some matters privately. As they moved about, Harry mistook one for the other, because Sabbatha was wearing an old-fashioned cape that looked something like Varney's favorite shroud.

Harry kept forgetting that Varney wasn't wearing the shroud at present, hence the mistake about the cape, which Sabbatha kept tightening around her neck. It soon developed that she'd brought the cape purely because she knew the crypt would prove cold.

"Of course I come here," said Varney to Sabbatha, "but not to sleep in my coffin! Why, you must be crazy to think that I would do that!"

There was something baiting in Varney's tone. He knew that Sabbatha had seen him in the coffin. The best way he could add to Sabbatha's surety on that point, was to deny it. Sabbatha responded in her own cagy style.

"Then why do you come here, Varney?"

"To prepare my grave," replied Varney solemnly. "I do not intend to be cremated. Giles thought he would force me to it, by making this concrete floor so there would be no place for my coffin. But I shall thwart Giles—"

"Why not do it as Roderick did?" interrupted Sabbath. "No one has ever disturbed Roderick!"

"You have talked too much about Roderick!" said Varney angrily. "You must stop it, Sabbatha!"

Coolly, Sabbatha stared at the concrete floor and Harry, looking from the coffin, noted that she eyed a spot where the stonework had been chipped.

"So!" exclaimed Sabbatha, "That is where your grave is to be!"

With a nod, Varney produced a pickax from behind the door and delivered a few strokes to the concrete, as though testing its thickness. Then, tossing the tool aside, he bowed Sabbatha through the door and followed her.

"You should be fully satisfied now," Varney said, as he drew the door shut. "So I expect you to say no more about this crypt, or the padlocked room on the second floor."

Carefully, Harry emerged from the coffin and went upstairs himself. He reached his own room; then went on to the third floor and emerged on the roof. He was looking in the pigeon cote, but the coo of birds didn't tell him much. He produced his flashlight, but before he could use it, a hand stopped him.

A hand with a grip that was truly startling, until Harry recognized it as the grip of his chief, The Shadow!

HAVING contacted Clyde at the car, The Shadow knew most of what had happened. Harry reported how

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Varney and Sabbathath had made their own little trip to the crypt and, meanwhile, The Shadow probed into the pigeon pens.

He suddenly opened a door; a pigeon whirred out and sped off into the night: Harry's pigeon. The Shadow gave a whispered laugh. Then:

“I shall go to the crypt,” The Shadow informed. “Meanwhile, Vincent, keep check on everyone and inform me of any developments.”

Harry's teeth began to chatter at mention of the crypt; not from the memory of his stay in Varney's coffin, but because he was still cold from the chilly cellar air. So The Shadow advised him to begin his observations in the living room, where the big fire would warm him.

When they went downstairs, The Shadow and his agent parted, one bound for the crypt, the other for the living room.

In parting, The Shadow summed up briefly his reason for visiting the crypt. He was probing deep into the real riddle of Haldrew Hall. There could be a double reason for Varney's choice of the coffin as his favorite couch. His long stays in the crypt did more than sell old Sabbathath on the vampire idea. Those sojourns enabled Varney to watch and see who else entered!

Between times, Varney could work with the pickax upon the concrete floor—as witness the tappings The Shadow had heard some nights ago— but Varney had lessened that activity, because people were checking on it.

Varney's talk to Sabbathath, overheard by Harry, was obviously meant to throw people off the real scent. Just crazy enough, for instance, to impress Dr. Clabb, should Sabbathath inform him that Varney had merely been picking a spot for his own future grave.

Yes, Varney was craftily playing on Clabb's belief that all true Haldrews were insane. But The Shadow did not hold that view; he was looking for a deeper answer. And The Shadow confided a point to Harry: the question as to whether Clabb still held to the insanity theory. But the vital point was to check on Varney when he made his next trip to the crypt, and The Shadow intended to handle that angle personally.

Compared to which, Harry's part seemed small, even though it involved several people. So when The Shadow faded with the darkness of the cellar stairs, Harry strolled toward the living room, thinking that about all he'd have to do would be to warm himself by the living room fire.

Harry's job was to prove more important than even he or his chief supposed. New murder was in the making, here in Haldrew Hall. Not to The Shadow, lurking in the dank crypt, but to Harry Vincent, comfortably established in the cheery living room, would the key to crime first become apparent!

CHAPTER XV. THE KEY TO CRIME

EVERYONE was in the living room when Harry arrived there. It was near dinner time and the whole clan usually assembled at that hour. But Varney never dined with the rest. When they went to the big dining room, he continued upstairs, where Throck took him a tray.

Harry had mentioned this point to The Shadow, and it added to the fact that Varney used his dinner hour for visits to the crypt. An hour, incidentally, when he could best get in his work with the pickax, since sounds from the crypt could not reach the remote dining room.

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This evening, Sabbatha was deliberately baiting Varney. She was talking of the stew the chef had prepared, a tasty dish flavored with garlic. At the mention of the final word, Varney turned with an angry glare, whereat Sabbatha furnished a deep alto laugh.

“Don't worry, Varney,” she said. “There will be no garlic in your portion. There never is”—she paused to stroke the black cat on the cushion beside her—“because Roderick detests garlic, too.”

Harry smiled. Varney and the cat had at least one thing in common: their mutual detest for garlic. But Harry's smile ended when he saw the sharp look that Dr. Clabb gave Varney and Sabbatha, with a side glance to include the cat. Suddenly, the depth of Sabbatha's remark shot home to Harry—as it had to Clabb.

Sabbatha was going beyond the inference that Varney, as a vampire, would shy from garlic. She was intimating that he also shunned all human food. Varney's tray went upstairs at dinner time and came down empty; but likewise—as Harry now remembered—Roderick, the cat, also disappeared at dinner time! Spry before dinner, the cat seemed drowsy afterward, which meant that Varney might be feeding him meals that Varney personally didn't want!

Gradually, Varney's glare disappeared and his lips moved in a smile. Except that the smile was ugly, betraying a slight clamp of Varney's teeth. Turning, Varney left the living room abruptly, while Sabbatha murmured soothingly to the black cat, remarking how sleek and fat it had become. Then Varney returned, bringing a meerschaum pipe and a shabby tobacco pouch.

Shrewdly, Sabbatha watched the inexpert way in which Varney shook tobacco into the pipe. Harry noticed that the tobacco flakes were very dry. Then Sabbatha, remarked:

“I didn't know you smoked, Varney.”

“I haven't for years,” returned Varney crisply. “This pipe and pouch belonged to my brother Giles. I remember”—Varney reflected as he clumsily tamped the tobacco into the pipe—“that Giles always smoked before dinner when the odor of the cooking annoyed him.”

Sabbatha threw a triumphant look at Clabb, as though to say that Giles had detested garlic, too. Meeting Clabb's eye, Varney handed him the tobacco pouch.

“You smoke a pipe, doctor,” reminded Varney. “Perhaps you would like to try the tobacco which my brother Giles liked. I am no judge of brands, but Giles always spoke of this tobacco very highly.”

Clabb started to put the tobacco pouch into his pocket. As he did, he halted, and an odd gleam showed in his eye. Clabb covered it with a cough as Varney blew tobacco smoke his way. The smoking mixture preferred by Giles had become so dry it crinkled when aflame and its burning smell was very strong.

In fact, several puffs at the pipe seemed to affect Varney. He laid the pipe aside and said that he was going upstairs to await his dinner.

As soon as Varney left, Sabbatha arose and started to the library. In the hall, she tossed the cat ahead of her, telling it to run upstairs and await its dinner. Roderick scudded off as though he fully understood.

THE Armand cousins had witnessed the scene, and now they began to chuckle over it. Cedric and Warren were frequently together lately, though at times, as if by mutual consent, they strolled the house separately, always to meet again in the living room. They were buoying themselves by the exchange of humorous remarks, but their witticisms had begun to reach a rather grisly level.

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“Did old Sabbatha dish it!” laughed Cedric. “She’s using the dinner–table angle to prove that Varney is a ghoul!”

“Not a ghoul,” interjected Warren. “A ghoul is something else again. Sabbatha thinks Varney is a vampire.”

Cedric shrugged, as though the difference didn’t matter.

“A ghoul is a living creature that feeds on the dead,” defined Warren, in a calloused tone, “whereas a vampire is a dead thing that preys upon the living.”

The comparison gave Cedric a chance for a repellent jest. He sprang it as though he’d made a wonderful discovery.

“What if a ghoul met a vampire!” exclaimed Cedric. “Say, would that be fun! They’d gobble each other right up!”

“Like a couple of Kilkenny cats,” agreed Warren. “But the cat fight would be a better one to watch.”

“Maybe Roderick is a Kilkenny,” suggested Cedric. “Let’s see if we can find another like him—”

“And match them in the crypt,” put in Warren, “with old Varney upright in his coffin, acting as judge!”

Gail Merwin rose from her corner, shuddered despite the room’s warmth, and pressed her hand to her head. Harry caught her as she wobbled in a half faint and guided her to the veranda. When the fresh breeze whipped her face, Gail steadied, and sank gratefully to the porch chair that Harry drew toward her.

“Thanks so much,” toned Gail. “The room was so hot... and the tobacco smoke—”

“Don’t dodge the question,” interposed Harry. “What really sickened you was that exchange of wisecracks between Cedric and Warren. Why not admit it?”

“I admit it,” nodded Gail. “They’ve talked that way so much, lately. It’s bad enough, having people like Varney and Sabbatha around. I don’t see why Cedric and Warren have to act so.”

“They’re worried,” declared Harry, “and they’re trying to laugh it off.”

Gail’s very lovely face twisted itself into a definite grimace, which proved she didn’t agree.

“They’re not worried,” she argued. “They’re calloused, both of them—the most selfish pair of men I’ve ever met! Why, what do they talk about when they aren’t making their vicious jokes? Only about the Armand fortune that they’re going to divide when their uncle Somebody–or–other dies off!

“We’re just poor relations belonging to a family on the wrong side of the tracks. Cheap people, willing to snatch a few pennies that old Giles Haldrew left us. But Cedric and Warren would like to see us weaken, so they can take the Haldrew money themselves and continue their lark, by squandering it!

“I know, because they’ve each talked to me as if they’d like to spend the money on me, according to their ideas—which are both the same!”

To Harry, this was a new phase of the rivalry that Cedric and Warren had shown over Gail. The girl’s tone was so firm with indignation, that Harry knew she must have learned the truth. He soothed Gail by inquiring,

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calmly:

“How long have you known this?”

“Ever since the day they let Frenton monopolize me,” replied Gail. “I didn't care much for Frenton, but he was better than Cedric and Warren together. He did one thing which made me feel really grateful. You know the room I originally had; the one with the portrait of Roderick Haldrew—”

Harry gestured an interruption. Cedric and Warren had appeared at the door to make their apologies, which they did in a style that Harry now recognized as part of their individual sham. Gail smiled sweetly and said she'd forgive them and would come indoors shortly.

As the two went back into the house, Harry followed, at Gail's nod. She wanted him to check further on the selfish ways of Cedric and Warren.

What Harry checked on was something far more vital.

As the Armands entered the living room, with Harry in the hallway behind them, Dr. Clabb turned suddenly from a table. He'd been examining the old tobacco pouch and was trying to stuff it back in his pocket, so the Armands wouldn't see.

He lost half of the tobacco, and in his haste dropped something else, that clattered. Sheepishly, he picked it up; then, with a shrug, he said:

“It's only an old key that was in the tobacco pouch. Varney must have overlooked it.”

From the steady stares that Cedric and Warren turned on Clabb, Harry knew that they were thinking of the same thing he was—the padlocked room. Clabb met their mutual gaze and said:

“All right, this looks like a padlock key. I was going to go up and try it. Who wants to come along?”

“I might,” returned Cedric, “if you'll let me take first look into the room.”

“I was going to say the same,” put in Warren, “but since Cedric called first, he wins. Or maybe you don't, Cedric”—Warren grinned at his cousin—“because while you're upstairs, I can resume negotiations with Gail.”

Cedric seemed satisfied. He turned to talk to Clabb, who suggested that they postpone the trip until after dinner. Meanwhile, Warren started out through the hall, so Harry slipped into the library and closed the door to let him pass. As he turned about, a cracked voice startled him. It was Sabbath's, from a corner by a bookcase.

“Well, Mr. Vincent?”

“I just came in to find a book,” returned Harry. “You know the one—the novel about Varney the Vampire. I wanted to read more of it.”

“The book is gone,” declared Sabbath. “It disappeared most mysteriously. Only half an hour ago, I saw it on the shelf... and now —”

She pointed to the gap on the shelf, and Harry had the uneasy feeling that Varney might be watching from the fireplace. But that was unimportant for the present; the thing now was to contact The Shadow and tell him

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that Clabb and Cedric were going to the padlocked room.

No longer uneasy about hidden eyes, Harry suddenly wondered if Varney, too, had started for the second-floor room, which he seemed able to enter despite the padlock!

Opening the door of the library, Harry drew back momentarily when he glimpsed Throck crossing a hall. Politely, he bowed to old Sabbatha as a way to stall for time. Then, with Throck gone, Harry went out into the hall and moved to the living room to learn how Clabb and Cedric were making out.

They'd already made out. They had left the living room, going past the study while Harry and Sabbatha were discussing the missing book. Apparently they'd decided not to wait until after dinner before visiting the padlocked room. They'd gone to try the key.

A key to crime!

For Harry was seized by the recollection of his own experience outside that locked room when the floor had dropped, plunging him to the cellar. Luckily, he'd survived the fall, but others might not fare as he had. Sudden death was again a menace in Haldrew Hall, with no time to inform The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVI. FOUND: A MURDERER

TAKING two steps at a time, Harry was coming to the second floor, shouting a warning for men ahead to hear. He reached the steps that formed a stile across the hallway leading to the padlocked room, but this time, Harry was coming from the other side. It was pitch-dark on the little steps, but the skylight formed a dim square, guiding Harry to his destination.

A stumble, and Harry hit the floor with both elbows, which was all the better, for he didn't intend to go along the hall himself. Twisting as he fell, he saw the men he wanted: Cedric and Clabb. They were at the padlocked door and the floor on which they stood was solid, so far.

Clabb was holding a double candlestick, while Cedric was working at the padlock. A click and the lock snapped open, just as Harry shouted:

“Back here, Clabb! Get back here—and haul Cedric with you! You're right over a trapdoor that may drop you!”

Clabb started toward Harry. The way he thrust the candles ahead of him caused them to throw a long, grotesque glare that included Harry's half-prone figure. What helped the illusion was the fact that Clabb also raised the candles, and in going higher they gave the effect that he was springing to safety on his own account. In fact, Harry thought that Clabb was halfway along the hall in what seemed a single bound.

Harry was wrong. Clabb wasn't clear of the trap. He'd slowed himself by making a grab for Cedric, in keeping with Harry's admonition. Enough of a gesture so that Clabb could say later that he'd done his best in Cedric's case.

Such testimony was to remain unspoken.

Another click, more muffled than the padlock, and Harry saw the hinged floor drop. The edge that fell was the one at the door of the room, right under Cedric's feet. But Cedric didn't tumble the way that Harry had. Cedric wasn't handicapped by a padlocked door ahead of him. The door was open; he'd unlocked it!

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Cedric was shoving the door inward at the moment of Clabb's wide, backhand grab. He'd put one foot on the step into the mystery room; his other foot did drop, but only as far as his knee. Then, with a wild, forward sprawl, Cedric freed himself from the pitfall and stumbled into the safety of the room, banging his knee on the step as he rolled through.

Clabb's sprawl was wilder by far, and in a different direction. The pasty-faced physician was taking the "medicine" that Harry had received that afternoon. Unable to quite clear the trap, he grabbed at its hinged side and missed. If he'd only thought to drop the candlestick, he might have caught himself with the other hand. But Clabb lost the candlestick too late.

The flaming tapers flew high across Clabb's shoulder as the hinged floor sent him down the sliding board. Clabb wasn't sliding on his back; he was turned around, clawing at the floor as he left it.

In the last moment of light, Harry saw Clabb's disappearing face, so skullish a countenance that it could have been a vampire's. But such creatures didn't spring their own traps to plunge themselves into oblivion!

A bad fall, Clabb's. Harry knew it from the way the face skewed from sight, with Clabb's leering mouth voicing a scream as the floor came slapping up. The trapdoor was in place, and like a horrendous echo came a muffled crash from below, telling that Clabb had met the solid floor of the forgotten coal bin.

Cedric was gasping something from the door of the now-open room. What it was, Harry couldn't make out. From somewhere on the little stairs—those opposite the flight that Harry had used—came scuffles like footsteps, which Harry thought denoted a departure in the darkness. For everything was inky along this hall and the stepped passages that led to it. There was practically no moon tonight and the skylight was just the dimmest sort of blob.

Nevertheless, Harry forgot Cedric at thought of another person who might know more about Clabb's unlucky plunge.

SPRINGING across the hall, Harry went down the other side of the hump, grabbing for whomever might be there. He missed his footing in the dark, and landed grabbing nothing. But there was a scurry of footsteps somewhere, of that Harry was sure.

So sure, that he piled to his feet and made another lunge that started blind, only to end in sudden light. The light of candles that came waving into view around a corner of the passage. Five flickering flames from a candelabrum in the left hand of Throck, the patrolling servant!

It was like a clever trick, the appearance of those lights from nowhere. But candles weren't like flashlights that could be turned on and off in a twinkling. Harry would have wondered if Throck had appeared so soon with one candle suddenly lighted. Five of them merely multiplied the mystery that much more.

Recognizing Harry, Throck followed when The Shadow's agent beckoned. Up the steps to the hump, there Throck stopped short, holding the lights ahead of him. The servant's eyes followed along the floor, to the doorway where Cedric stood, looking very small against the great mass of grotesque blackness that his own body blocked from the candlelight.

"Don't come this way!" warned Cedric. "You may go through the floor, the way Clabb did! Thanks for that yell you gave us, Vincent. If I hadn't heard it, I'd have gone the same route as Clabb."

Throck was negotiating the hall. At the halfway mark, he tested the floor gingerly and found it solid. Cedric tried it with his own foot, gripping the doorway as he did. Lifting up to the step, he motioned Throck back,

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telling him to stay with Harry. Cedric was sure he could clear the danger stretch.

He did it. Cedric's system was a long, running spring, his hands going ahead of him, so that, if the floor caved, his momentum would carry him past the danger zone. He was ready to make the very sort of grab in which Clabb had failed, but it wasn't necessary. The floor didn't yield under Cedric's weight. Finishing his rush, he panted to Harry and Throck:

“Let's get downstairs and see what happened to Clabb!”

ALREADY, aid was on its way to Simon Clabb. The cellar had a watchful occupant—The Shadow. He was in the crypt but he had the door ajar, because he was still awaiting Varney. Instead of hearing the footsteps he expected, The Shadow caught the sounds of Clabb's crash in the coal bin, recognizing exactly what it meant.

It wasn't likely that the clatter represented Harry, for The Shadow's agent seldom fell into the same trap twice. But whoever it was, he needed help, being another victim of some machination. So The Shadow started from the crypt.

On the way, the cloaked investigator heard footsteps from the stairs. Stepping to side—darkness, he saw Varney coming with a brace of candles. He was in a hurry, Varney, or he wouldn't have made so much noise. The reason was that Varney, like The Shadow, was making for the fatal coal bin, as if he, too, had heard the smash of someone landing there.

The Shadow gave Varney precedence, but followed the gaunt man far enough to gain a new vantage spot in a side niche near the bolted bin. By then, more footfalls were clattering from the ground floor. The Shadow saw a larger flood of candlelight and heard the accompanying voices of Harry and Throck. After that came Cedric's, calling to someone else.

By the time the three reached the bin, Varney had opened it. Shown by the candles, Varney was quite his solemn self, wearing his usual sedate clothes. Nothing of the vampire getup in his appearance; indeed, his face looked very sad, in a human way, as he pointed to the crumpled form of Clabb.

The doctor's fall had finished in an utter crackup. All the luck that went with Harry's plunge seemed reversed in Clabb's case. He must have twisted backward during the drop, striking on head and shoulders with a somersault that had bent his legs beneath him. As Cedric remarked, in his hard-boiled style, Clabb looked as though he'd invented a new form of pretzel and had decided to model it.

More voices sounded at that moment. Warren and Gail had arrived from the veranda, where they had heard Cedric's call. Not to be outdone by Cedric, Warren took a look at the body and declared that Clabb was dead all over. He stepped aside so that Gail could see the smashed figure, but she preferred to step back in response to a gesture from Harry.

It was Varney's attitude that impressed Harry most forcibly. Varney seemed quite appalled by Clabb's sudden death. He turned a reproving gaze upon the rest, and The Shadow, from his vantage point, could observe an air of accusation on Varney's gaunt features. Lips parting, Varney suddenly hissed suspicion:

“Where is Sabbathath?”

Gail stated that she had seen Sabbathath in the library while going past. So Varney turned his deep-set eyes on Throck, glared at the servant and queried:

“How did this happen?”

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“I don't know, sir,” replied Throck. “Apparently, Dr. Clabb was entering the padlocked room.”

“I was entering it,” put in Cedric, “with a key that Clabb found in the tobacco pouch.”

“The pouch you gave him, Varney,” reminded Warren. “I'd say there was murder behind this ugly job!”

Slowly, solemnly, Varney nodded. He turned and walked toward the stairs, grimly inviting the others to follow. They moved in puzzled procession, while The Shadow trailed behind them. Ascending the stairway, Varney spoke back:

“I shall show you the murderer, the terrible creature responsible for every evil that has befallen Haldrew Hall!”

They thought he meant Sabbathath—all except The Shadow, who sensed a deeper significance in Varney's words. The others were disillusioned when they found Sabbathath in the hallway above. Instead of accusing her of Clabb's death, Varney merely beckoned with a gray-gloved hand and said:

“Come with us, Sabbathath!”

Old Sabbathath's cackles were gleeful as she pressed along beside her cryptic uncle. Her words weren't a query; they were an exclamation:

“They are going to meet Roderick!”

Varney's nod puzzled the procession all the more. What a portrait, or a cat might have to do with Clabb's death, was a riddle. It wasn't to the portrait room that Varney led them; instead, he went straight to the padlocked door that Cedric had opened, crossing the deadly floor so boldly that the group couldn't refuse to follow.

It couldn't be the portrait, so it would have to be the cat. Thus thought Harry, though he still held doubt.

Last to follow along the hall, The Shadow looked in from the step of the open door and saw, not a storeroom but an ancient bedroom, furnished in antique style. Across the musty chamber, Varney stopped before a door; holding a candlestick at arm's length, he turned the doorknob and pronounced:

“Meet Roderick Haldrew!”

WITH the words, Varney pulled the door wide. From the closet lunged a creature that was a man-sized medley of black and white.

A skull face, with dark, hollow eye sockets; the bony frame of a skeleton draped in a tattered jet-black shroud.

A rattle sounded as the horrible relic flung its bony hands ahead of it like living claws, guided by eye sockets that could see. For those hands were aiming straight for necks among the group that stampeded at the fearful sight.

Such was Roderick Haldrew, an actual skeleton in the family closet—a creature whose descendant, Varney, was accusing of murder! A thing fantastic, yet horribly real to those who were in the path of Roderick's bony lunge!

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Momentarily, the sepulchral shape wavered; then, as the maddened group parted, the skeleton clattered to the floor and heaped there, tangled in its shroud, twisted more crazily than the body of Clabb, the man defined—by Varney—as Roderick's latest victim.

As the clash of bones faded into echoes, a low-toned laugh sounded from the door. Grim, mirthless, it was heard only by its author, The Shadow, and the nearest member of the group, Harry Vincent. Strange affairs always produced that sibilant tone from The Shadow's lips.

If ever an event deserved The Shadow's laugh, it was this—Varney's disclosure of Roderick's skeleton, with the claim that the rattling bone pile was the source of all evil in Haldrew Hall!

CHAPTER XVII. DEATH'S VERDICT

FOUND, a murderer: Roderick Haldrew!

The thing was crazy, fantastic and utterly preposterous. At the same time, it was the most amazing tale that had yet come out of Haldrew Hall. By daylight, it seemed as weird as under the gleams of wavering candles, and such a story, once made public, could not pass unnoticed.

When the coroner came to investigate Clabb's death, he brought reporters with him, and all of Varney's protests were of no avail. The coroner's only concession was to have the local sheriff place deputies around the grounds to keep hordes of people from tramping everywhere.

For the news that Haldrew Hall possessed an actual family skeleton accused of murder, brought hundreds of cars that parked in thick ranks, while their occupants thronged along the old picket fence to peer through its iron bars at the mansion.

Among the privileged visitors admitted through the gate was a gentleman named Lamont Cranston, who carried a letter of introduction from the police commissioner of New York City. Always interested in the bizarre, Cranston had prevailed upon his friend, the commissioner, to appoint him as a special representative in studying the crime angle of this case.

Certain types of crime produced epidemics, and if family skeletons were to pop out of closets killing people everywhere, it would be wise to know the sidelights of the first case on record. Of course, Cranston—otherwise The Shadow—already had the sidelights in this instance, but he didn't mention that point to the commissioner.

In the old front room that had once belonged to Roderick Haldrew, Varney Haldrew told the ghastly history of the skeleton to an interested group of reporters, who included Clyde Burke. Cranston was present in the background, watching both Varney and Sabbathath, who were here to support Varney's story. The door of the closet was closed, the skeleton inside it.

“He was a strange person, Roderick Haldrew,” declared Varney solemnly. “He despised all others of our clan, for a very singular reason.”

“He knew them to be vampires!” inserted Sabbathath in a weird cackle. “Undead creatures that stalked by night—”

“Enough, Sabbathath!” interrupted Varney. “Roderick's reason was his own viciousness. He had the evil eye, the symbol of his black heart! It was he who started the vampire rumor!”

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“And hung his portrait in the great room,” chortled Sabbatha, “so that others would fear to haunt their own there. For they were vampires, all, and Roderick knew it!”

Varney tried a new tack.

“You must not mind my niece,” he said indulgently. “She suffers from delusions, as Dr. Clabb commented more than once. He advised her removal to an institution, but I objected. Of course, Clabb was sound in his opinions—”

Halting for Sabbatha's benefit, Varney watched her subside. Crazy or not, Sabbatha wasn't going to jeopardize her claim on the estate. Then Varney, having practically defined Sabbatha as insane, proceeded to make statements that should have reared the same doubts regarding himself—except that his story was so straightforward and connected that it left listeners half believing it.

“Roderick was afflicted with the vampire notion,” asserted Varney. “He collected volumes on the subject and they became part of our family library. Roderick was afraid to be buried in the crypt, terming it the 'Abode of the Undead.' He said that the Haldrew family should have a skeleton in its closet as a matter, not of shame, but pride.

“So he provided in his will that his skeleton should always occupy the closet of this room, attired in its ragged shroud. Also that his portrait should always hang in the master bedroom above the old library. Those terms were faithfully observed. The portrait is hanging in the master bedroom, and Roderick's skeleton is—here!”

WITH a long reach, Varney opened the door and Roderick's bones duplicated their lunge of the night before, while reporters went helter-skelter to avoid the clutch of long-boned hands that finally flattened beneath the sprawled skeleton when it struck the floor.

At Varney's invitation, they gingerly gathered Roderick up and placed him in the closet again, where Varney extended a hand to prevent the skeleton from toppling.

Cranston saw the reporters grasp the secret of the skeleton's lifelike lunge. The closet was narrow, hardly more than a cupboard, and the width of the skeleton's hips made it necessary to double the bony arms up to the shoulders. The bones were wired together and the closet was so shallow that when the door opened, Roderick toppled forward, his hands flying ahead of him.

What was more, the bottom of the closet was above floor level, to make the thrust a long one. Clyde asked if Roderick had designed the closet to his measure, and Varney nodded.

“The records say that he did,” declared Varney. “Undoubtedly, Roderick hoped to frighten anyone who found him here. But I have wondered often”—Varney's eyes took a distant, watery stare—“if this sham were not designed to cover the real truth: that there are times when Roderick's bones roam around in their shroud!”

Before anyone could begin to laugh, Varney was pressing his argument home. He talked of a shrouded, bony creature that others—not Varney himself—had seen on these premises: the thing that had frightened Frenton to death; that must have lured Clabb to doom. Most ingeniously, Varney was turning the skeleton story into his own alibi, and his side glances at Sabbatha left the old lady speechless.

To dispute Varney's argument, which he cunningly attributed to the testimony of others, Sabbatha would have to present an equally exaggerated claim: namely, that Varney was a vampire. To back her assertions, she would have only her own evidence to present. Both theories were so weird that they would reflect upon the

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sanity of the person who claimed to have seen a roving creature—skeleton or vampire—at large in Haldrew Hall.

Varney was safe. Not he, but others, had seen the thing which might be the shrouded bones of Roderick, imbued with life. But with Clabb dead, only Sabbatha could testify that she had seen the living Varney, shrouded as though dead, within his coffin! So Varney's triumph stood complete, except for the potential testimony of a witness who was present, but did not speak—The Shadow!

It wouldn't do for The Shadow, as Cranston, to mention what he knew about Varney's actual eccentricities. He intended to disclose such facts when he again became The Shadow. And then, not by mere testimony but through a disclosure of Varney's very methods, when Varney again played the vampire to shock Sabbatha!

Varney closed the closet to keep Roderick where he belonged. The group stopped by the door of the room to see if it connected with the trapdoor in the hallway, which it didn't. Cranston noted that the door hinges shifted slightly, indicating weak or shortened pins, but he did not comment on the fact.

The trap in the floor was very old, so old that Varney attributed it to Roderick, though it wasn't mentioned in the family records. Its loose end rested on narrow projections of metal fastened to a wooden joist, just below the door sill. The joist had wooden pins attaching its ends to narrow beams that ran lengthwise on each side of the hall.

Apparently, a shift of weight would release the trap, though tests failed to produce the result. Nevertheless, the joist creaked under pressure, so the theory stood that Clabb must have accidentally released the trap.

A good theory, because there was no other. There wasn't any trick catch at the loose end of the trap. As for the other end, its hinges were old-fashioned, but solid, with no sign of any special attachment.

Apparently, Roderick had simply fixed the hallway in this form, many years before, to await the time when some unfortunate Haldrew heir would knock it loose and go to doom. He'd provided great springs, too, that brought the trapped floor up to place, and they were still good, but equally free from any trick contrivance.

Last to come along the hall, Cranston paused at the hump between the newel posts and waited until the rest had gone. Descending by the other stairs, he transferred some of his weight to the creaky banister so people wouldn't hear his footsteps on the steps. Continuing in something of The Shadow's gliding style, Cranston arrived on the side porch, where he met Clyde and Harry.

A PERFECT spot for a meeting in broad daylight! No other occupants of Haldrew Hall were there, because they didn't want to be seen by the curiosity seekers who swarmed against the picket fence. But those same curious people were too far away to hear anything that was said by the three persons who strolled the veranda.

In a calm tone, Cranston gave his present summary of the existing situation, including the Roderick angle.

That Varney played the vampire was still evident, with the added point that he used the skeleton's shroud, getting it from Roderick's room without benefit of key, because the door could be easily opened from the hinge side. Varney's methods of scaring Gail and Frenton still stood, as The Shadow had previously defined them.

“Last night,” came Cranston's steady tone, “Varney used a different tack with Clabb. Knowing that Clabb had heard about the missing key from Sabbatha, Varney planted it where Clabb would find it. He hoped that Clabb would go berserk from an encounter with Roderick's skeleton. Even if Clabb hadn't, Varney would still have won a point.

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“It was time to introduce the skeleton story, as Varney did today. Something to take minds from the vampire role that Varney had been overplaying in his effort to shake Sabbath. Varney did not want Frenton to die”—Cranston's tone, though even, was strongly positive— “nor did he wish to dispose of Clabb. Both deaths hurt the game on which Varney has so strongly banked.”

Cranston's verdict fitted the very one on which the coroner and sheriff had agreed: death through misadventure, in the case of Clabb as well as that of Frenton. But there was something in Cranston's tone that told more. His verdict, though it agreed with the law's, applied only to Varney Haldrew—no one else.

“Tonight the vampire may walk again”—Cranston's smile was slightly speculative—“unless we prefer to think that the skeleton parades these premises. Whichever the case, we shall learn the facts—of murder!”

Strange how that final word kept ringing through Harry's brain after Cranston and Clyde had gone! Whatever the facts, he knew that The Shadow alone could reveal them!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE SHADOW'S TURN

NIGHT again, but a different sort of night than any that Harry Vincent had previously experienced at Haldrew Hall. This night, the outlying grounds were peopled, not by phantoms but by living persons. Little lights played along the picket fence, but they were not the blue flames of the will-o'-the-wisp.

They were flashlights handled by the deputies, who were still here to see that curiosity snatchers didn't enter the grounds and take down Haldrew Hall piece by piece.

The evening was chill, and from his window Harry saw the deputies starting bonfires, not only to keep warm but to make their patrol easier. For a sullen sky held over Haldrew Hall and the lights on the ground were the only ones to work by. Nevertheless, there were black gaps between the bonfires, and Harry knew that The Shadow could easily, pass through them to reach the house.

Proof of such came in the form of The Shadow himself. Easing in through Harry's window, he discarded the suction cups and suggested that they move downstairs. Their course led to the cellar door, which The Shadow opened and edged Harry through. Guiding his agent to the bottom, then over to the crypt, The Shadow whispered one word: “Listen!”

Tap—tap—tap—the sounds of Varney's pickax! Inching the crypt door open, The Shadow revealed a candlelit scene with Varney feverishly hacking at the concrete floor. Varney, without Roderick's shroud that he used for the vampire act.

Drawing Harry back to the stairs and up to the top, The Shadow inquired:

“What would you make of it, Vincent?”

“Varney is after something,” began Harry. “He's in a hurry to get it. I guess because he figures that he won't be able to scare us out, the way he hoped.”

The Shadow's approving laugh told that Harry's guess was quite correct. Something in the tone reminded Harry of the time when The Shadow had showed him those charred papers from the library fireplace. Harry remembered the word “crypt,” but it was obvious. The other word was the one that puzzled him. He spoke it; half aloud:

“Sure—”

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“Only the end of a word,” undertoned The Shadow. “The full word was 'treasure.' That is why Varney burned the paper.”

To Harry, the whole mystery of Haldrew Hall seemed to crack wide open. All along, he'd been rejecting the obvious, though Harry wasn't alone in that. It suddenly drove home to him that just one man had been on the right track: Dr. Simon Clabb!

Except, of course, The Shadow!

In whispered tone, The Shadow was reminding Harry how Clabb had wondered at the small amount of money left by old Giles Haldrew. Eccentric, like all his family, Giles had also been reputed to be much wealthier than statistics showed. Coupled with those points was the peculiar proviso in his will, dividing the estate only among those who would stay a month in the mansion.

“Perhaps Giles wished to remove the family curse,” suggested The Shadow. “Or he could have decided that only those with the temerity to face it would deserve a share of great wealth. Whoever gains this house will also own whatever is buried beneath the concrete floor of the crypt.”

How perfectly it fitted! Old Giles had removed the family coffins in order to plant his wealth. He'd left little clues on papers, tucked in odd books, that would eventually reveal the existence of the cash that he had buried. Papers that he'd expected would remain unfound for months to come—only to have Varney discover them too soon!

Having destroyed the evidence, Varney naturally began his vampire campaign to win the mansion by default on the part of the others. Failing that, he'd resumed a more direct system: that of going after the buried wealth—a thing he'd started, only to postpone.

IT wasn't often that Harry made suggestions to The Shadow. This time, he couldn't resist one. Gesturing downward toward the crypt, Harry queried:

“How about it, chief? Why not go down and have it out with Varney? Say, you could chill him right to an icicle!”

The Shadow's responding laugh came sinister, as though he were testing out the very plan that Harry supposed. But that weird touch of repressed mirth was not a prelude meant for Varney. Ending the whispery laugh, The Shadow stated:

“There is still the murderer.”

Harry stared into the trickle of light that came from the stairway door. He didn't understand.

“Let us assume that someone else knows of the buried wealth,” suggested The Shadow. “To go one better, he would have to dispose of Varney.”

Another simple analysis, but the sort that Harry never would have struck upon. The mere idea of anyone menacing Varney was a blocker in itself. Once considered, however, it fitted the puzzle perfectly. Right back to that first night, on the landing, when the knife had whirred into the woodwork. A blade meant for Varney, not for Harry!

“The rest should be very simple,” spoke The Shadow. “Unfortunately, there are missing links. Perhaps, Vincent, they lie in your report.”

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Maybe they did. Harry wondered about those reports himself. He felt that they lacked a lot. If somebody had purposely slain Frenton and Clabb—well, Harry simply couldn't understand who or how, with Varney out of the running.

“Tonight, I shall play the vampire,” declared The Shadow. “Whoever seeks Varney's life will attempt to take mine by mistake. I am sure that there has been more than one mistake in Haldrew Hall.”

Harry hoped that his chief didn't refer back to those same reports, nor to Harry's slip with the carrier pigeon. And that trip through the trapdoor outside Roderick's room still bothered Harry, particularly after he'd seen what the same kind of ride had done to Clabb.

It seemed that The Shadow was quite immune to mistakes. At this very moment, he avoided one. With quick, uncanny precision, he whisked Harry from the cellar door, into the hallway of the ground floor, blotting the opening of the door with his cloak. Then into a side passage.

The Shadow was concealing Harry from the lights of candles that came weirdly from the cellar stairs, carried by that man of velvety step, Varney Haldrew.

If anybody happened to be gunning for Varney, Harry was inclined to wish them luck, along with a permanent open season on vampires, real or false. For Varney's face behind the candlelight had all the death-white pallor that belonged to Roderick's skull.

If murder didn't belong in Varney's calendar, it wasn't because he was disinclined. He'd kill to get the wealth he wanted, just as he'd avoided murder, so far, because it wasn't good policy.

Snuffing the candles, Varney continued to the library and looked in to see old Sabbatha. The Shadow drew Harry along, then conveniently blocked the doorway with blackness, giving his agent a view across his shoulder. Sabbatha was seated at a table, but she wasn't reading. She was preening herself in front of a mirror that she'd brought from her boudoir.

Varney gave an unpleasant snarl, at which Sabbatha turned. If her smile was supposed to be sweet, she'd been deceiving herself in the mirror.

“I have come to warn you, Sabbatha,” sneered Varney. “You have played the fool too long. Now that the vampire rumor is ended, confine your worries to Roderick's skeleton, not to me!”

“Look from this window, Varney!” Sabbatha pointed with a withered hand. “See the blue lights that flicker! This is the eve when vampires roam!”

“Those are flashlights,” retorted Varney. “This happens to be the twentieth century, Sabbatha!”

Sabbatha's cackle rose as she pointed to the bonfires.

“Those are the need-fires!” she announced. “Kindled by the peasantry to ward off the vampire evil! Can you deny that those are flames, Varney?”

Unable to dispute the bonfires, Varney lost his temper. As Sabbatha turned to her mirror, he clapped one of his gloved hands on her shoulder. She turned with a sharp cry. To Harry, The Shadow whispered:

“Watch!”

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PRESSING one hand against the other, Varney turned something beneath his glove. Harry saw the bulge of a ring beneath the glove, and understood. A ring with needle points—the thing Varney used, through the glove, to jab those vampire marks that Harry had seen on the throats of Gail and Frenton!

And then, as Sabbatha turned to the mirror, another strange thing happened. Her eyes went wide as she stared into the glass. Anyone but Sabbatha would have revealed horror in that gaze; her expression indicated pleasure. Varney's face was just across her shoulder, but she couldn't see it in the looking glass!

“Your reflection, Varney!” cackled Sabbatha. “Where is it? Can you deny that you are a vampire now?”

Grabbing the mirror, Varney smashed it, then strode to the door, glaring back at Sabbatha, across his shoulder.

“Vampires give no reflections!” Sabbatha was in high glee. “Nor do they cast shadows. Where is your shadow, Varney?”

Varney had no shadow. It was absorbed by a living Shadow just outside the door. Against that blackness, Varney's actual shadow could not be seen. Then The Shadow was deep in the hall, hiding Harry beyond him, and Varney was striding for a stairway with Sabbatha following, not just with cackles but with herself.

“Varney the Vampire! You tell me to live in the present—you, who belong to the past! I shall hound you, Varney, until I prove that Roderick was right!”

Then both were gone, Varney up the stairs and Sabbatha off into the house. The Shadow drew Harry into the library and picked up a piece of the smashed mirror. Harry saw that its glass was slightly concave.

“Another of Varney's tricks,” explained The Shadow. “No reflection will show in a concave mirror beyond several feet. He furnished this mirror to Sabbatha just to convince her that he was a vampire. Now, when he is dropping the game, he slipped back into it.”

They waited, with the library door almost shut. Finally, The Shadow beckoned Harry. Through the crack, they saw Varney returning to the cellar, equipped with the tattered shroud. He had borrowed it from the skeleton of Roderick.

“He is going to hack at the floor again,” explained The Shadow, “but he can't forget Sabbatha. That's why he went to get the shroud. If she visits the crypt, he will have to play dead in his coffin.”

If ever a game had boomeranged, it was Varney's; that, at least, was something of a satisfaction. However, he'd proven that his policy was anything but murder; otherwise, he wouldn't have restrained himself in Sabbatha's case. It was plain that Varney still intended to humor his niece, should she disturb his digging in the crypt.

And now, The Shadow was moving forth. With Varney accounted for, The Shadow was free to play the vampire. A dangerous role, considering that a murderer was awaiting a suitable opportunity to dispose legitimately of Varney, the man whose role The Shadow was to imitate. Only when Varney roved, would the killer attempt a stroke, and roving was to be The Shadow's business.

Watching his black-cloaked chief fade into the darkened hallway, Harry was somewhat reassured by a whispered laugh. This wasn't the first weird excursion that The Shadow had undertaken without having its results recoil. But this was Haldrew Hall, where anything might happen.

Something was to happen, quite within the scope of Harry's fears. For once, The Shadow was to be on the

receiving end of a thrust that he directed toward an unknown monster of murder!

It was The Shadow's turn—for trouble!

CHAPTER XIX. THE VAMPIRE'S FATE

NEVER in all his career had The Shadow fared upon a mission so incredible as this—yet, withal, so certain of result. He wanted a murderer and he was to find one, by a simple process of elimination. He was giving a killer the very chance the latter wanted. The Shadow's only problem was to find the needed setting.

Moving about the ground floor, The Shadow peered into the living room and saw Gail reading a book, alone. Returning to the library, he found the antique dagger that had once skimmed over Harry's head. The Shadow laid the ancient weapon on a reading table, then left the library.

He saw Harry going to the living room, stopped him and spoke brief instructions. While Harry nodded, The Shadow was gone.

Entering the living room, Harry reproved Gail for reading by the firelight, which was very fickle in its flickers. He suggested that she go to the library and try one of the reading tables, where candles were fixed exactly as required.

When Gail agreed, Harry conducted her to an ideal table, lighted the candles for her, and then left. The ideal table was the one where the dirk lay.

Meanwhile, The Shadow had reached the second floor. He paused in darkness to let Throck go by, the servant being on his usual rounds. Throck knocked first at the portrait room, and received a response from Warren Armand. Farther down the hall, Throck checked with Cedric Armand in the latter's room. Throck next went up to the servants' quarters, which suited The Shadow perfectly.

Stopping at Sabbath's door, The Shadow drew a black glove from his hand and clicked his fingernails against the woodwork. As the door opened, he drew back from the light; all that Sabbath could see was the glow of burning eyes amid blackness. She heard a hiss from that direction, and in his turn The Shadow received a snarl from Roderick's namesake, for the black cat was with Sabbath.

“Hello, Varney!” clucked Sabbath. “I was sure you would call to see me—as the vampire that you are! So—you have given up pretense at last.”

Sabbath saw a vague beckon from the darkness. She tossed the cat to a cushion, where it spat fiercely, and picked up a dark shawl that was lying on a chair. Wrapping the shawl about her shoulders, Sabbath, announced:

“Certainly, Varney. I shall be glad to go to the crypt. But it is chilly there for humans like myself, though you may not have noticed it. Come! Lead the way.”

The Shadow led the way, not to the crypt but to the library. There, Harry was standing at a bookshelf, sidling glances toward the door. The game to come was cruel, but it had to be. The Shadow gave a sudden hiss. Harry drew his gun, while Gail turned from the reading table.

Two figures went rigid. Harry's act was a fake; Gail's seemed real. His hand ending a flip, Harry's fingers lost the gun and it bounced across the floor to the door, where Sabbath was behind The Shadow. Then, as the cloaked figure moved toward Gail, Harry gasped to Sabbath:

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“The vampire... stop him... quickly!”

The Shadow's hand swept across the row of candles, extinguishing them. Gail's hand, sliding across the table, was on the handle of the knife. But it wasn't Gail's turn yet—it was Sabbath's.

With a quick stoop, the old lady picked up Harry's gun. At that moment, Gail gave a startled shriek and flung herself away from The Shadow's looming hands.

Harry's part was tough. He was urging Sabbath to fire, at the same time ready to stop her if she did. The chance for murder was perfect, should Sabbath be so inclined. Gail's fright, Harry's encouragement, marked both as future witnesses to a plea of justifiable homicide. But Sabbath passed up the opportunity.

She returned the gun to Harry with one hand; she used the other to tap The Shadow's shoulder. Sabbath was becoming quite annoyed.

“Enough, Varney!” she exclaimed. “Go! Rest in your tomb! Obey, or I shall summon the peasants, with torches kindled from the need-fires, to drive you from this house forever!”

THE SHADOW lunged about, thrusting Sabbath toward the door, much to her surprise. Harry sprang in with the gun and was caught in a forearm lock that reeled him toward Gail, whose convulsive hand had tightened on the dagger handle. As The Shadow imitated Varney's cackled gloat, Harry panted to Gail:

“Stab him... between the shoulders... he's getting my gun—”

Gail's hand rose half a dozen inches, then flapped open, letting the knife clatter to the desk. Even to save a friend's life, she hadn't the nerve to wield the dagger. Like Sabbath, Gail had proven that she wasn't murder-minded, even when the stroke was justifiable. The knife's clatter was The Shadow's cue for exit; wheeling away from Harry, he was gone by the fireplace route.

The Shadow had made Gail's test a brief one, and she stood it well. Though intense, it wasn't nearly so great an ordeal as one forced upon her by Varney that night when he'd entered the portrait room during the storm.

Harry reached Gail, telling her that the menace was over. He drew her to the door, where Sabbath took her to the living room. Sabbath was defining Varney as a mere nuisance, and such calmness soothed Gail's fright.

In the portrait room, Warren was opening the door when he heard a clatter from the fireplace. Amid a movement of dead logs, a black figure issued forth. Reflections of the bonfires, cleaving the tinted windowpanes, gave only a vague outline of the singular creature that voiced a challenge at Warren.

Harry, coming up the stairs by the long route, arrived with a shout, to find Warren with a half-drawn gun.

“It's Varney!” exclaimed Harry, “He's gone berserk! He has a dagger! Shoot before he uses it!”

The Shadow did have a dagger, the one that Gail had dropped. He flashed it toward Warren, knowing that Harry would jog the fellow's gun arm in case he fired. But Warren didn't shoot; instead he let his gun drop into his pocket and pushed Harry from the room, preventing him from firing his own gun.

Hauling the door shut, Warren laughed when the knife winged into the woodwork. He saw the point that jutted through; tested it with his fingertip and said that it reminded him of Varney's teeth.

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Cedric was hurrying up from another passage. As Harry shouted to him, The Shadow yanked open the door, grabbed Warren and spun him in a rapid whirl. Amazed by Varney's strength, Warren couldn't even flail his arms before he was spinning headlong, clear to the bay window.

Cedric saw Warren's sudden disappearance, witnessed another lunge of blackness that overwhelmed Harry, whose gun went off behind his own ear. The Shadow was present long enough for Cedric to draw and aim; but Cedric only performed the first phase of the action.

Instead of firing at The Shadow, who still represented Varney, Cedric sprang to Harry and dragged him to his feet. Cedric was wagging his gun as though loath to use it, even on the defensive.

Amid Cedric's prolonged hesitation, The Shadow skirted off through a side passage, thus removing the Varney menace from this sector. Individually, Warren and Cedric Armand had proven that they were not gunning for Varney Haldrew, which left only one candidate for the office of would-be murderer: Throck.

Having figured the servant all along, The Shadow had left him until last. Elimination of the other possibilities gave The Shadow freedom to deal with Throck without Harry's co-operation. He wanted to test Throck fairly, just to clinch the case, but if the servant tried a quick kill, The Shadow would be ready.

Doubly prepared, The Shadow. Reaching the landing, he paused to peel the glove from his left hand. From a small, rounded box with double lids, he produced two dabs of different pastes: one for his thumb, the other for the tip of his second finger. These ointments were a special cure for overzeal on the part of The Shadow's enemies.

The Shadow knew that Throck must have heard Harry's shot. Moreover, Harry was following it up with a dash toward the landing, shouting as though murder had already taken place. Purposely, The Shadow clattered down the stairs; hearing Throck coming his way, he wheeled to a side door, where a pair of candles gave just enough light to show him as a shrouded form.

Still the replica of Varney, The Shadow extended his hand, the left one, as Throck rounded the corner, aiming the old revolver ahead of him.

Harsh was the hiss The Shadow delivered. It was Varney's at his best—or worst. It cued Harry to another desperate shout from the landing, a call which Cedric and Warren echoed in their raised pitch of excitement. It brought a cry from Gail, in the living room; but hers came quite late.

Already, Throck's finger was acting on the gun trigger; but The Shadow was even quicker with his snap of thumb and forefinger. The sudden report that people heard was not from Throck's gun. The chemical pastes provided it—a burst of smoke and flame accompanying the roar that exploded only a few feet from Throck's face! (Note: Because The Shadow's explosive powder used in this instance is too dangerous for anyone but the most experienced to use, we do not reveal the nature of its formula, so that the inexperienced might not attempt this experiment and thereby suffer harm.—Maxwell Grant.)

Startled, dazzled, the servant reeled away, losing his grip on his unfired revolver, which spun by the trigger guard and lopped from his grasp. Then, blindly, savagely, Throck hurled himself upon the fighter he mistook for Varney. He came squarely against The Shadow's gun muzzle, but the cloaked fighter didn't fire.

He should have.

WHEN Throck rushed The Shadow against the door, it gave. Somersaulting backward down a short flight of outer steps, The Shadow managed to double Throck over by driving his feet against the fellow. But Throck's

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yell, his gesture as he tumbled, brought other men The Shadow's way.

They were deputies, who saw the cloaked fighter by the light of a bonfire and weren't slow about hauling out their guns.

Finding his feet, The Shadow made a quick dive for darkness, reversed his path across the glow and sped for farther cover. His tricky zigzag coaxed shots the wrong direction, but The Shadow's own route was a wrong one, too. He was heading away from the house, off toward the fence. Searching flashlights spoiled black stretches that he wanted, but he finally tricked the converging deputies by an unexpected drive right through the heart of a bonfire!

Flames scattered and the dazzle of flying sparks blinded pursuers better than the darkness. Somewhere beyond that strewn blaze that he'd kicked away from him, The Shadow was in gloom again, making a wide circuit that would bring him back to Haldrew Hall.

But The Shadow had, meanwhile, lost his chance to trap the murderous servant, Throck. Thus had The Shadow's plan recoiled.

“Death to the vampire!” Such was the cry that shivered the chilly air, and The Shadow, anxious to preserve Varney from a vampire's fate, was finding the hazard as his own!

CHAPTER XX. CRYPT OF DEATH

IF Throck had stopped when and where he sprawled, Harry Vincent might have helped redeem the situation. He could have grabbed the servant and suppressed him, letting explanation wait until later. But Throck didn't stop. It was he who raised the yell of vampire, putting the pack on the trail he thought was Varney's.

Ignorant on the question of hunting vampires, the deputies took Throck's instructions. He said to use firebrands and bullets; that if one failed, the other wouldn't. So the men grabbed sticks of burning wood, which became huge torches when whipped by the air as the hunters ran. As good as flashlights, the brands widened the chase, much to The Shadow's inconvenience.

Goading on the pursuers, Throck was confident that they would settle his problem for him—the problem of Varney. The deputies would try bullets first, and they would prove effective with the false vampire. It hadn't occurred to Throck that he was engineering a chase after someone other than Varney!

Oddly, it happened that Varney's plight was far worse than if he had been in The Shadow's place!

Within the mansion, Harry was standing with Cedric and Warren Armand, when they heard a firm tone behind them, pronouncing one word:

“Come!”

It was Sabbatha, still wearing her black shawl. She gave a deprecating smile when they said they were watching the chase after Varney. Sabbatha declared that vampires knew no human limitations; that even now the pursuit was over. Black specks in the flicker of the torches—such was Varney, and in that form he was filtering through the walls of the mansion to reach his favorite abode, the crypt.

Confident that The Shadow had by this time slipped his pursuers, though not by a process of dematerialization, Harry gave a nod to humor Sabbatha. Cedric and Warren decided to go to the crypt, too, if only to prove that Varney hadn't arrived there. Gail would have followed, but Sabbatha sternly told her to

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remain where she was. Sabbatha led the others down to the cellar, and as they neared the crypt, they heard the muffled tap–tap of Varney's pick.

The Armands halted, staring at each other, but Harry followed Sabbatha. When she reached the door, the tapping stopped abruptly and was followed by a slight thud. Entering, Sabbatha lighted the candles and Harry observed that their wicks were smoldering, proof that they had just been snuffed. When Sabbatha ordered Harry to raise the coffin lid, he obeyed.

Within lay Varney, stiffened in the tattered shroud. His gloved hands were folded; his emaciated face held all its skullish quality, except for the glaze of his staring eyes. Slowly, Cedric and Warren stepped in from the doorway, to stare in absolute bewilderment. Varney's return amazed them, until Cedric suggested that the figure might be a dummy, with which Warren concurred.

Sabbatha lifted her arms from beneath the black shawl. In one hand she had held a cleaver; in the other, a long, sharp–pointed wooden stake. A fanatical gleam was in her eyes.

“We must rid the world of this monster!” declared Sabbatha. “Strike off his head and drive this stake through his heart! The order is mine; the duty, yours!”

She swung the cleaver into Cedric's hand, thrust the stake in Warren's. Though they liked gruesome jests, the cousins hesitated. Turning to Harry, Sabbatha told him to draw his gun and force them to the task. By then, the Armands were back in form.

“Certainly we'll do it, Sabbatha,” assured Cedric, “Give Warren a mallet, if you can find one.”

“Nothing to it,” added Warren, “It's just like cracking up a dummy!”

Sabbatha had found the mallet and was handing it to Warren, who, like Cedric, still thought the shape of Varney was a waxlike imitation. But Harry knew otherwise, though he couldn't state why. Suddenly following Sabbatha's suggestion, he drew his automatic and wagged it from Cedric to Warren.

“Hold it!” ordered Harry. “We can't go through with this, just yet. We ought”—he groped for a reason, then added—“we ought to make it unanimous.”

With whippet speed, Sabbatha snatched the gun from Harry's hand and covered him instead of the Armand cousins. In a hiss much like Varney's, she declared that it was unanimous. And Harry, threatened by the muzzle of his own gun, was watching Cedric and Warren turn to begin their ruthless task!

CANDLE flame wavered, producing a flicker in Varney's eyes. Apparently Varney was half in a trance; his effort to play the vampire role in this emergency was so strong, that he failed to see the threat that loomed above him. Or, equally logical, Varney might believe that the Armands would never perform their hideous assignment.

Varney didn't know that they supposed him, at this moment, to be at large somewhere outside the mansion!

Harry's forehead chilled from the sweaty beads that reached it. Still, he persisted in his argument.

“To be unanimous,” he told Sabbatha, “we must have Gail's vote. She is one of us.”

Slowly, Sabbatha turned toward the door. Then, changing method, she backed in that direction, keeping Harry covered with the gun. She would get Gail—yes, on the promise that the others would not leave their

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posts. They gave her that assurance; still, she was suspicious.

The door groaned under Sabbatha's touch; it widened, showing the gaping blackness of the cellar, but she kept the gun leveled. Then, with a hiss as sharp as Varney's, she asserted:

“I have awaited this chance for years! Why should I be cheated of it now? Cheated by fools, who deserve nothing! I shall not summon Gail. Let her remain in ignorance of the secret that this crypt contains!”

With those words, Cedric and Warren grew strained. They swung to the coffin with cleaver and stake. Still determined to balk Sabbatha without revealing The Shadow's part, Harry made a wild but timely lunge toward the door. Driving low, he was beneath the level of the gun when Sabbatha pulled the trigger.

She'd thrust the muzzle upward for that first shot; now, before she could lower it for another, an echo answered from the cellar.

Sabbatha sprawled as Harry reached her. He grabbed the gun as it clattered from her hand. Coming up, he expected to see The Shadow, and for once the thought was amplified by horror. For The Shadow would never have done this to Sabbatha; he'd have trusted Harry to complete the drive. The Shadow must have mistaken Sabbatha for Varney!

Sabbatha's black shawl resembled a shroud against the candlelight. Her hiss was identical with Varney's. And the words she uttered had been fraught with double meaning. Sabbatha's long-awaited chance, her fear of being cheated, the secret of the crypt—all those applied to buried wealth as much as to the figure of a vampire in its coffin!

A smoking gun came into the light and with it, a familiar face. Not the features of Cranston, beneath a slouch hat, but the haggard countenance of Throck!

He'd returned to the mansion first. Behind him was Gail; she'd told him where the others had gone. Coming to the crypt, Throck had found his opportunity—so he thought. Another chance to dispose of Varney while the latter was playing the vampire; a chance like those that Throck had previously missed!

Sabbatha's dying face was gazing upward. Her dry lips gave a gloating smile. It was her own tone, higher than Varney's, that cackled to Throck:

“You wanted to kill Varney! I learned it tonight. I was cheating you, too, Throck. I have won”—she gave a gasp—“better than I hoped! You will pay... for this crime... and Varney will join the dead... where he belongs—”

As Sabbatha finished her last gasp, there was a clatter from the coffin. Varney was flinging himself at Throck: he'd heard Sabbatha's accusation. The servant aimed and Harry sprang to stop him, only to see Throck reel back into solid blackness. The Shadow had returned; he was handling Throck again!

THE cold revolver was spouting in air, its shots harmless. Cedric and Warren were clutching Varney. It all would have ended there if those cousins hadn't both decided at the same moment that a gun was needed. Each leaving Varney to the other, they reached for their revolvers and Varney was away.

Away with a tremendous lunge for Throck's writhing form, right into the path of that last upward bullet the servant fired. A freakish, suicidal thing, that act of Varney's that foiled The Shadow's work in his behalf. All for the sake of clamping his hands on Throck's throat, a privilege that The Shadow let Varney gain, for there was no clutch left in the hands of a man whose heart had received a bullet.

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No clutch was needed. Varney's hands just jabbed. A shriek came from Throck as The Shadow whipped him away. Rolling into the light, Throck showed the throat at which he clawed. Needle points had dug deep from Varney's glove, tearing deep gashes that showed streaks of purple—the dye of a virulent poison contained in the ring, that showed when the glove slipped from Varney's scrawny, bony hand.

Fear, perhaps, of Sabbath's attempting the deed she had designed, was Varney's reason for adding venom to those hollow needles. Another reason why he had lain complacently in his coffin: he'd been ready to deliver swifter doom than others could with cleaver and stake!

Already, Throck was growing purple. No one had to tell him that his remaining moments were few. While The Shadow watched from darkness, Harry and the others grouped about Throck. Seeing their faces in the light, he muttered:

“The money... I took it. All packed in my room. I fixed this floor... with concrete. Varney... I had to kill him. Tried with the knife... on the landing. The gun... in Frenton's room. Thought it was Varney that dropped... through the hall. The old post... on the left... look out—”

And with that warning to the living, Throck, the unfaithful servant, joined the dead who bore the name of Haldrew, the last of the long, strange line that had dwelt in Haldrew Hall!

CHAPTER XXI. PIECED MURDER

THE money that old Giles Haldrew had buried was found deep in Throck's trunk and it totaled nearly eighty thousand dollars, which was about four times the amount of the known estate, including Haldrew Hall, which was hardly salable property. Thus, in all, it came to about one hundred thousand dollars, which even the Armands wouldn't sneeze at.

They talked cash, only. Twenty-five thousand each if they stayed out their month at Haldrew Hall; for the terms of the will still stood. Such talk rather pained Gail Merwin, who was grieved by the tragedies she'd witnessed.

It annoyed Harry Vincent for another reason. When the time came for him to repudiate his own claim, Cedric and Warren would be in for a split three ways, instead of four.

The Armand cousins had dropped their sham completely. They were going to get what was coming to them, in full. Harry ruefully wished that it would be something else than cash. And each passing hour annoyed him more and more.

The Shadow had disappeared before the arrival of the sheriff, whose investigation hadn't taken long. Four witnesses to Throck's verbal confession were enough, and Varney's wearing of Roderick's shroud was fitting proof to the testimony that he had been lying in his coffin, playing vampire. The poison ring was another exhibit in this strange run of crime and countercrime.

So, at midnight, only two visitors remained with the occupants of Haldrew Hall. One was Lamont Cranston, who had still been at his hotel; the other, Clyde Burke, the only reporter who hadn't chased back to New York with his story. From their respective angles they were inquiring into various matters, helping to piece the chain of murder.

They talked of Varney; how heavily he'd played the vampire stunt to rid the house of rival claimants. The tricks of the house had been uncovered: the panel from the landing; the fireplace that opened into the portrait room; the set-up with the vacuum cleaner that had piped artificial smoke into Frenton's room, with some

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illuminating gas to sweeten it.

So much for Varney's efforts, his switch of the carrier pigeons being a mere side issue, like his trips to Roderick's room to get the shroud, though that was to produce a later angle. A clever idea, using that shroud, so that Varney could blame things on the skeleton! After all, a roving skeleton was no more outlandish than a vampire!

Then Throck.

He'd switched the order for the flooring of the crypt from flagstone to concrete, so as to give Varney—or anyone else—a hard time digging for the treasure that wasn't there. In his last illness, old Giles had left many things to Throck, which was probably how the servant had learned about the buried wealth.

Naturally, Throck had thought to dispose of Varney, the man who had guessed the treasure business and kept it for himself; but in so doing the servant had needed to play a careful game. He wanted to spend the wealth that he had taken, free from the threat of the electric chair.

What better way than to kill Varney in the course of duty, which Varney himself had assigned to Throck? So that had been Throck's way all through—with one exception. He'd tried to drop Varney through the hallway floor during one of Varney's trips to Roderick's room, but had dropped someone else instead.

Of course, the sheriff had taken that to mean Clabb. But he hadn't wasted time looking for a mechanism in a trap that had been so thoroughly studied earlier. Throck's mention of a post at the left didn't quite make sense to the sheriff. He considered Throck's confession sufficient for the present.

Obviously, Varney hadn't known that Throck was out to get him. He might even have attributed the tossed knife to Sabbath. Throck's gunwork looked like the simple pursuance of the servant's duties. Varney had expected it and, accordingly, escaped it.

And now, as Cranston, the criminologist, compared notes with Burke, the reporter, a question came up. It was Cranston who asked it, as he flashed a side glance at Harry.

“How could Throck have mistaken Clabb for Varney outside of Roderick's room, when there were two men at the padlocked door?”

Cedric Armand gave a puzzled frown. He had been the other man. Then came Harry's prompt explanation.

“The mistake was earlier,” said Harry. “Throck thought I was Varney and sent me through the trap, but I landed uninjured. That's why I knew the hall was dangerous.”

A GLANCE from Cranston and Clyde suggested they take another look at the upstairs hall. They all went up, Warren and Gail included, and while the rest were moving forward carefully, Cranston leaned idly against the newel post, at the top end of the banister beside the left stairway to the hump.

There was a click from near Roderick's door, and Harry, testing the trap with one foot, found that it gave. Then all present were studying a mechanism as ingenious as it was old-fashioned.

The newel post was simply a huge lever. It connected with a lengthwise beam that ran all the way along beside the hallway floor. The beam terminated in the joist below Roderick's door. Pull the newel post and it pushed the beam, which in turn shoved the joists. Receding beneath the door, the joist let the trap drop.

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No visible mechanism needed, not even at the middle of the hall, where hinges and spring were attached to a solid cross beam. Merely a form of remote control of a century ago, or whenever old Roderick had flourished. But the secret of the trapdoor had been uncovered some time ago—perhaps by Varney, certainly by Throck.

“Well, that settles everything,” declared Gail. “I only wish I still didn't have to stay in this old house. But I suppose I'll have to keep up with the Armands!”

She glanced at Cedric, then Warren, giving each an equally bitter look; then turned to Harry, expecting him to escort her downstairs. Cranston suggested that they wait a little longer.

“There's still a question in my mind,” remarked Cranston. “It's about Varney. I still can't understand why he piped that gas to Frenton when he didn't want to kill him.”

“There's nothing to prove he did pipe the gas,” put in Cedric. “All we found was a gas pipe and a hose. Those may not have been used. I'd say that Frenton did die of fright.”

“I'd say the same,” added Warren. “I had quite a scare myself, the first time Varney popped out of the fireplace in the portrait room. He scared me as much as he did Gail.”

Noting that Gail still didn't like Warren's mere mention of her name, and likewise classed him in Cedric's undesirable category, Cranston remarked:

“It was nice of Warren to exchange rooms with you, Miss Merwin, before that second night.”

“Warren didn't give me his room,” snapped Gail. “It was Frenton who so kindly took the portrait room.”

“Then why didn't he stay there?”

“I suppose he weakened, too.”

Cranston turned to Warren, remarking that he and Frenton must have switched rooms later. Warren said yes, and when Cranston asked why, Harry had the reason in a trice.

“On account of the book Sabbathath read!” he exclaimed. “Varney the Vampire—it had Frenton woozy! Say, Warren”—Harry turned—“that room where you and Clabb took Frenton must have been yours at the time.”

“Yes, it was,” admitted Warren, “Frenton said he was too scared to stay in the portrait room. So I took it and let him have mine.”

Cranston left it to Clyde to snatch up that point. The reporter didn't miss.

“That means somebody tried to give you the gas,” Clyde told Warren. “Somebody who thought you were still in there. Not Varney, though. He was trying to scare everybody without killing anybody.”

Cranston began checking details with Clyde. He came to one name, that of Cedric Armand.

“How was the game of solitaire going?” queried Cranston casually. “I mean that time when the gas was flowing up to the room where Warren didn't happen to be!”

Cedric's face went very white. He didn't reply, but a little gasp came from Gail. If Haldrews had clashed among each other over the matter of their pitiful thousands, how much more plausible it was that one Armand

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would try to eliminate a rival claimant to that vast fortune that the cousins expected in the future!

Yes, Cranston's point had driven home to Gail, which was exactly what he wanted. For his next question was one that Gail alone could answer; or, at least, was the only person who would answer it truthfully.

“You were on the veranda,” Cranston reminded Gail, “at the time you heard of Clabb's fall to the cellar. Warren was with you. How long had he been there?”

“Why, he'd just joined me—”

GAIL stopped as she saw Cranston turn inquiringly to Warren, whose face suddenly rivaled Cedric's pallor. As though discussing a matter of passing interest, Cranston remarked:

“You chaps were pretty capable snoopers, too. I take it, Cedric, that you saw Varney rigging the smoke stunt up to Warren's room. And you, Warren, must have been watching Throck when he dropped Vincent through the hallway trap.”

Turning to go down the stairs, Cranston left the rest to solve itself, which it did. Cedric had seen his chance to add the gas hose to Varney's smoke machine. He'd hoped to murder Warren, but had slain Frenton instead.

And Warren had guessed the hand behind it. That was why he had used the trick he learned from watching Throck. The trick of dropping someone through the hallway trap. He'd been beside the newel post on the left when Harry came up the steps on the right, yelling a warning. Warren had pulled the post, hoping to drop Cedric, but Clabb had gone instead!

A laugh whispered from darkness. Cranston had become The Shadow, ready for whatever was to happen next. As The Shadow, he could add another point, proving the murderous rivalry between the Armands. Only this evening, each had drawn an unnecessary gun while handling Varney Haldrew.

Unnecessary for Varney, but needed for something else—a shot at each other! Each wanted to kill his rival and blame it on Varney's struggle, but both had the same idea at the same moment, and it hadn't worked for either. They hadn't wanted to act like Kilkenny cats; not then.

At present, they no longer cared. They whipped out guns and drove for each other. Each was intent upon making a break from the present scene, but each thought that the other would try to stop him.

Down the hall they reeled, slugging with their guns, until they were banging against Roderick's door, as if to rouse him from his skeleton sleep.

Others were peering from the steps on the right. Only The Shadow was on the hump, ready with two leveled automatics in case the battling cousins called their rivalry quits and decided to murder persons who knew the truth about them. Looking up, Gail saw The Shadow—and wondered.

Here was a being of blackness different from Varney, though she had mistaken him for the man who played the vampire. He was on the side of right, The Shadow. Calm, motionless as a statue, he was waiting to see that justice took its course.

It did when blackness suddenly lashed.

For a moment, it looked as though The Shadow had thrust a gun hand forward; then Gail saw that the blackness was beyond him. Glossy blackness that sprang with a frenzied snarl, as though angered by the

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battlers who were disturbing its namesake's permanent slumber by battering against his door.

Roderick, the cat!

Sabbatha's overfed pet bounded from the steps on the left, up to a vantage spot, the newel post of the banister! The post swayed backward, but Roderick's claws dug tight. Then, before The Shadow could flip the cat from its perch, Roderick's weight had pulled the creaky lever.

In the midst of their slugging struggle, the Armand cousins dropped from sight, guns popping as they went, half-locked in a frantic embrace that was twisting them in a fall as bad as Clabb's, down to the stone-floored cellar.

Up came the muffled crash, pronouncing the double doom of the men who had manipulated murder, the real killers of Haldrew Hall.

Roderick didn't hear the finish of his timely work; frightened by the clatter of the trap, the cat had bounded off through the house. But Gail still saw The Shadow.

His cloaked form faded into blackness as Gail watched. Back trailed a departing laugh, solemn as a knell, pronouncing The Shadow's triumph over men of murder whose designs he had uncovered beneath an outer shell of crime.

Strange were the echoes of that mirth. Echoes that etched themselves on Gail's memory, eradicating the horrors of the past. No longer would Gail Merwin meet with an ordeal in this mansion during the weeks that would make her sole heir to Haldrew Hall.

Such was the import of The Shadow's parting laugh, a token that told his justice would prevail!

THE END