

WASHINGTON CRIME

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. THE COURT-MARTIAL

A SOLEMN group of army officers sat at a long table in a somber-walled room. Beyond them, broad windows showed the dome of the Washington capitol against a dull gray sky. Dusk was approaching; with it, proceedings were drawing to a close. These officers were engaged in the most serious of all military matters, a court-martial.

The Judge Advocate, a portly man of captain's rank, arose to summarize the case. He paused; looked toward the door, where a uniformed soldier was standing at attention, armed with a rifle. That door was opening.

Catching the Judge Advocate's gesture, the soldier swung about, bringing his rifle to port arms. With crosswise gun, he stopped the entry of a tall personage from the hallway.

The arrival spoke a password. The soldier about-faced; brought his rifle to order arms. Facing the officers at the table, he used his left hand to give the rifle salute. The Judge Advocate advanced to meet the tall arrival, who handed him a folded message. The officer opened it.

The note was from the White House. It ordered that the bearer, Mr. Lamont Cranston, be admitted to the court-martial proceedings. The order bore the signature of the President of the United States.

The Judge Advocate bowed the visitor to a chair; tendered him a copy of the early court proceedings. Others

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observed Cranston and studied the face of this mysterious stranger who had come direct from the White House. They saw an impassive, masklike countenance, its expression strangely hawkish. The features of Lamont Cranston impressed them. All present knew that Lamont Cranston must be some one of importance. None, however, guessed his actual identity.

This stranger was The Shadow. Master investigator who could solve the greatest riddles of crime, he had been summoned to Washington to aid the government with the most vital problem that had ever concerned the defense of the nation. The whole case hinged on the proceedings of this court-martial, hence The Shadow had chosen to be present.

The Judge Advocate began a terse summary. Calm-faced in his guise of Cranston, The Shadow listened to the basic facts.

“YOU, Colonel Richard Follingsby”—the Judge Advocate looked toward a rawboned, thin-faced man, whose hands were tightly clasped—“stand accused of extreme negligence. You were entrusted with the keeping of the National Emergency Code, commonly known as the NEC. It was stolen from your apartment during your absence.”

Colonel Follingsby was drearily nodding his admission. The Judge Advocate turned to a bulky man in uniform, whose shoulders showed the two stars of a major general. The Shadow recognized the bulky officer as General Louis Darson, acting chief of staff.

“We would like your testimony, General Darson,” requested the Judge Advocate. “Kindly state just when and why you gave the NEC to Colonel Follingsby.”

General Darson arose; cleared his throat with a gruff, important cough.

“The war department has faced great problems,” he announced. “Every army post and naval base has reported attempts at espionage. Honolulu, the Canal Zone, Puerto Rico—from every quarter the reports have been the same. Arrests have been frequent. Evidence against the accused men has been difficult to obtain.

“One month ago, however, we were forced to the serious conclusion that every code commonly used in the military service was worthless. The navy had already discarded many of its codes as obsolete. The army was prepared to do the same. It was imperative that a master code be ready for immediate use in case of war.

“We had such a code. It was a comprehensive one, containing more than two hundred pages of typewritten symbols and key-words. That was the National Emergency Code, known to the service as the NEC. The only copy was in my possession.”

General Darson paused dramatically. His eyes went to the huddled figure of Colonel Follingsby, who seemed shrunken in his civilian attire. There was pity in Darson's gaze. Plainly, he felt sympathy for Follingsby.

“Years ago,” declared Darson, “I was a colonel in the Canal Zone. Follingsby was a lieutenant in my regiment. I came to Washington to take a staff position. Follingsby remained in the Zone; he rose to the rank of colonel.

“I knew that Follingsby was a capable student of codes. The master copy of the National Emergency Code required revision before it could be secretly printed. So I retired Colonel Follingsby from active service and had him come to Washington. He has been living here as a civilian.

“Three days ago, I had secret service men bring Follingsby to the war department. There, alone in my office,

I informed him of the master copy of the NEC, with instructions to revise it. I told him to await at his home; that the NEC would be delivered to him within an hour. Only Colonel Follingsby and myself could possibly have known that the code was in his possession. Four hours afterward, the colonel called me to state that the NEC had been stolen.”

Finishing bluntly, General Darson sat down. The Judge Advocate called upon Colonel Follingsby to testify. Rising shakily, the colonel spoke in a dull tone.

“I WAS taken to the war department in a taxicab,” said Follingsby. “It was driven by a secret service man. We went through an obscure doorway into a courtyard. I was conducted up a private stairway and found myself in the anteroom outside of General Darson's office.

“He told me about the National Emergency Code and said that I would receive it within an hour. The cab took me to my apartment. One hour later—at seven o'clock in the evening—a secret service man delivered the code at my apartment. He came there disguised as a postman and left the packet in my mail box.

“I worked on the code until nine o'clock. At that hour, I received a telephone call saying that my wife had been in an automobile accident and had been taken to a hospital at Alexandria, Virginia. I placed the code in a desk drawer and hurried to Alexandria by taxi. When I arrived there, I learned that the telephone call was false. When I returned to my apartment”—Follingsby wavered, choking as he spoke—“the National Emergency Code was gone. The drawer was locked, as I had left it; but when I opened the drawer, it was empty.”

The Judge Advocate reminded:

“You had visitors, Colonel Follingsby.”

“Yes,” replied the colonel. “Senator Ross Releston and Major Frederick Bryland called at half past six. I talked privately with Senator Releston, in my study, for about ten minutes. I should specify that the visitors arrived half an hour after I had returned from the war department. They were gone twenty minutes before I received the National Emergency Code.”

“You did not mention the NEC to Senator Releston?”

“Positively not. As for Major Bryland, I did not talk with him at all. He brought Senator Releston to see me; but Bryland remained alone in the living room, while I talked with the senator.”

The Judge Advocate turned to a square-jawed man with deep-set eyes. The man was attired in civilian clothes.

“Frederick Bryland,” droned the judge, “formerly a major in the United States army. Your testimony, please, Mr. Bryland.”

The term “Mr. Bryland” was significant. Bryland was a man of some wealth who had chosen an army career. An inventive genius, Bryland had produced some valuable military devices; but his career had ended when he criticized the government's plans for coast defenses. Bryland had resigned “for the good of the service”; but it was generally known that he had been almost forced to give up his commission. He had offended persons high in the war department.

To Follingsby and other line officers, Bryland's criticisms had been fair ones. Living in retirement at an old mansion near Fairfax, Virginia, Bryland continued his military work.

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Bryland's testimony was simple and emphatic. He had invented a new radio device for army planes. Because of past circumstances, he had taken the device to the navy department; and had been allowed to test the device on planes belonging to the marine corps.

Feeling that the war department might still be prejudiced against him, Bryland had gone to Senator Releston for advice. The senator had suggested that they visit various army officers, to ask if they would approve the tests. On the list was Colonel Follingsby. Bryland and Releston had merely stopped at his apartment on their way to the Army and Navy Club.

Senator Releston was the next witness. A man of rugged features, but mild expression, Releston was the symbol of dignity. His gray hair added to his appearance; and Releston spoke in a tone that showed sincerity. No man in all Washington possessed greater integrity than Senator Ross Releston.

The senator supported Bryland's testimony; he added that there had been no possible way of knowing that Colonel Follingsby was due to receive the National Emergency Code.

"Bryland and I were amazed, the next day," stated Releston, "when General Darson called us and asked us to visit his office. Bryland was enthusiastic, when he called me by telephone. He thought that the request pertained to his new invention. We went to the war department separately. There, General Darson gave us our first knowledge of the fact that Colonel Follingsby had received and lost the National Emergency Code."

THERE was a lull in the proceedings. Follingsby was finally called upon for further testimony. The trial officers, concerned chiefly with the question of Follingsby's negligence, wanted to know more about the colonel's actions at the time of the fake telephone call.

"I was confused," admitted Follingsby. "I knew that my wife was on a motor trip with the wives of some other officers. I actually started from my apartment, forgetting all about the National Emergency Code. Then I went back, put the code in the desk drawer and locked it there."

"You are sure of that?" came the stern question. "Did you actually remember to put away the code?"

"Yes," responded Follingsby. "I forgot other things in my haste. For instance, my gold-headed cane, given to me by my regiment in the Canal Zone. I must have left it in the taxicab, while riding to Alexandria—"

The Judge Advocate interrupted. The matter of the cane was irrelevant in his opinion. General Darson asked the privilege of a statement. It was allowed.

"Colonel Follingsby left his cane in my anteroom," explained the chief of staff. "It was similar to the one that my regiment gave me; but the initials on the gold heads were different. I never carry my cane while in uniform hence I did not discover Follingsby's cane until to-day. I shall have it returned to him."

Further questions were put to Colonel Follingsby; by the time they were answered, dusk had settled in the trial room. Glowing lights of Washington appeared beyond the windows; evening life was coming to the nation's capital.

The presiding officer rapped an order for adjournment. The strokes of the gavel made Colonel Follingsby shudder as if he had heard his death knell. He could foresee that when the court-martial assembled again, its first business would be the giving of a verdict.

That verdict would be guilty. Dismissal from the service would be Follingsby's disgrace. Yet that, alone, was not the full cause of the colonel's misery. Over Follingsby hung the terrible knowledge that he had been

responsible for an irreparable loss.

All that General Darson had stated was fact. Victimized by the vicious influence of conniving spies from foreign countries, the military defense of the United States was confronted by the most pressing situation in its history. Army and navy alike had relied upon the National Emergency Code to meet a crisis.

Should the NEC fall into the hands of the wrong foreign power, that nation might easily choose to declare war upon the United States. American forces would be paralyzed; for the National Emergency Code contained every intricate system that had been secretly devised for military use. National calamity—if it came—would be blamed solely upon Colonel Follingsby.

There were serious faces on the men who left that somber room. All knew that the fate of Colonel Follingsby was trivial; that the national welfare was the cause at stake. Subtly, the trial officers had sought to ferret out some chance clues that would lead to the recovery of the National Emergency Code. They were faced by the realization that they had utterly failed.

One listener, however had gained a vital fact. The Shadow's thin, masklike lips showed the slightest semblance of a smile. As witness to the court-martial proceedings, The Shadow had gained a fact that interested him.

Had he been called upon to name the man who had stolen the National Emergency Code, The Shadow could have done so. That, however, did not fit with The Shadow's policy.

Knowing the identity of the man who possessed the missing NEC, The Shadow was planning to regain the document intact. It was more important to secure those papers than to expose the criminal.

CHAPTER II. A THIEF'S THRUST

OUTSIDE the court-martial room, The Shadow shook hands with Senator Ross Releston. That was to be expected, because the senator had long known The Shadow as Lamont Cranston. In fact, The Shadow was quite sure that the senator was responsible for the president summoning him to Washington.

Though Senator Releston did not know that The Shadow traveled as Cranston, he had learned from experience that any facts given to Cranston eventually reached The Shadow. Since the recovery of the NEC was so vital to the whole country, it had been an urgent matter to get word to The Shadow.

The senator introduced his friend Cranston to ex-Major Frederick Bryland. The three entered the senator's limousine. The Shadow remarked that he was stopping at the Hotel Halcyon, but could spend a short while at Releston's hotel, the Barlingham. Bryland asked to be let off at a parking lot where he had left his coupe.

“It's after six o'clock,” remarked the former major. “I can reach Fairfax easily before seven. That will be in time for dinner. Of course, senator, I can stay in Washington, if you want to see me. I have a small apartment here, where I stay when the weather is bad.”

“I doubt that there will be any new developments,” returned Releston. “Call me from your home later, Bryland.”

Bryland dropped off at the parking lot. The limousine continued to the Barlingham. Soon, The Shadow and Releston were alone in the senator's extensive apartment. They chatted until a secretary appeared, bringing typed copies of the court-martial testimony, with the added proceedings of the afternoon. The Shadow put copies of the new pages with the ones that he had already received.

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“Those must go to The Shadow,” asserted Releston, as soon as they were again alone. “That is important, Cranston. I hope that he will learn something from the testimony, although it seems to offer no clue to the whereabouts of the NEC. If he does gain facts, there is something else that he should know. Agent F-3 is in Washington.”

The Shadow pretended to be puzzled. He knew whom Releston meant by Agent F-3; but as Cranston, it was better to appear ignorant.

“Agent F-3 is a member of the secret service,” explained Releston. “He is something of a mystery man, who spends his time abroad. To-day, I received word that Agent F-3 is in Washington. If The Shadow gains facts, he should cooperate with F-3.”

The senator wrote an address on a slip of paper and gave it to The Shadow. The address was that of a house on H Street.

“That address,” said Releston, “is where The Shadow can find Agent F-3.”

LEAVING Releston's, The Shadow went to the Hotel Halcyon. He had dinner in the dining room; after that, he stopped at the check room and obtained a small bag that he had left there. He went up to the fourth floor and entered the two-room suite that he had taken in the name of Lamont Cranston. Passing through the small living room, he left his bag in the bedroom.

Returning to the living room, The Shadow noted other bags; also the case of a portable typewriter. He had brought these with him when he had registered. During his absence they had been disturbed. The person who had gone through the luggage could have learned nothing. All evidence that proved The Shadow's actual identity was in the single bag that he had brought from the check room.

The Shadow looked across the living room. On the opposite side was the door to another bedroom, that could be added to the suite if three rooms were required. It was plain that the intruder could have come from that room.

Like The Shadow's bedroom, the other one probably had a doorway of its own to the hall. Picking locks would not have troubled the thief who had opened Follingsby's desk drawer.

The Shadow's portable typewriter was on a table. Tucked under the roller, The Shadow found a note typed on hotel stationery. It had been typed on The Shadow's own machine. The note stated:

Be wise. Leave Washington. Call Senator Releston. Inform him that neither you—nor any one connected with you—will continue to search for the NEC. Failure to heed this warning will mean death!

There was a telephone close by the entrance to The Shadow's bedroom. It had an extension cord of considerable length. The Shadow picked up the telephone, turned his back and jiggled the hook. He gave the number of Senator Releston's telephone.

Playing the part of Cranston, The Shadow paid no attention to the door on the far side of the living room. He paced nervously through the doorway of his own bedroom, carrying the telephone with him. He swung back toward the living room; stopped near the doorway and spoke quickly:

“Hello. Senator Releston's apartment?... This is Mr. Cranston... Yes, Lamont Cranston... Certainly, I wish to speak with the senator. Immediately! It is urgent...”

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While talking, The Shadow swung farther into the darkened bedroom. His voice told that he was not far beyond the connecting doorway; so did the taut extension cord to which the telephone was attached.

Ears heard The Shadow's voice; eyes saw the drawn cord. There was a result from the far corner of the living room.

The distant door connecting with the next suite opened. An angled figure came into view. Body crouched forward, but with shoulders erect, the intruder used a peculiar mode of stealth as he crept across the living room.

The lights of the living room revealed the approacher's face. The man from the next room was Frederick Bryland!

THE ex-major did not advance far. His position was a strategic one; near the middle of the room, he could go farther or retire as he chose. Bryland was waiting to hear the rest of The Shadow's conversation. His next move would depend upon what the supposed Cranston told Senator Releston.

There was a half-minute pause while Bryland waited; then the voice of Cranston, beyond the bedroom doorway. Bryland drew a big service revolver from his hip pocket, gestured the weapon forward.

"Hello, senator," he heard The Shadow say. "Yes, this is Cranston... Calling from my hotel... No, I do not intend to leave for New York. I have received a threat. A note, here in my room. One moment I shall read it to you..."

Bryland was crouched no longer. With a long, swift bound, he reached the doorway to the bedroom. Stopping short, he twisted toward the darkened spot where he was sure The Shadow stood. Even while he swung, Bryland opened fire with his big six-shooter.

Those shots were murderous. They showed the efficiency of Bryland's army training. While on the move, Bryland had estimated the exact limit of the field where The Shadow would be. He covered that narrowed space, seeking a hidden target, just as he had once picked out rebel snipers in the jungles of Nicaragua.

With each jab of his gun, Bryland moved his hand from left to right, so that each bullet found a path a half foot away from the one before. Of those six shots, one was certain to hit any human target that might be in the area.

The spurts of the revolver blinded Bryland momentarily. As he finished firing into the darkness, he listened, expecting the topple of a body to follow the barrage. Instead, the room was silent. Bryland's square-jawed face showed a puzzled expression. His deep set eyes blinked as they tried to penetrate the gloom.

Something was wrong, and Bryland knew it. Ignoring the fact that his shots must have been heard, the former officer found the bedroom light switch and pressed it.

As the glare filled the room, Bryland saw the telephone. It was five feet away, resting on a table. The receiver was on its hook. Lying on the floor was an opened suitcase; beyond it, Bryland saw the door that led from bedroom to hall.

The would-be murderer realized how he had been tricked. The Shadow had faked that call to Releston. In the bedroom he had placed the telephone on the table, to keep the extension cord taut and high. Still talking, The Shadow had gone to his suitcase, opened it and donned garments of black. Resuming his faked conversation, he had glided to the outer door, opening that barrier while he finished.

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Bryland had been unable to see The Shadow moving in the darkened bedroom. As for the sound of the voice—those words spoken in Cranston's style—the illusion had been perfect. Though he had changed his position, The Shadow had always kept the same distance away. His voice had come through the connecting doorway from wherever he stood; hence Bryland had noticed no change in its tone.

AS Bryland stood flat-footed beside the telephone, he heard a sound behind him. It was the door from the hallway to the living room. The Shadow was opening it, returning to intercept Bryland's path of escape.

Madly, Bryland sprang for the bedroom light switch, jabbed it just as The Shadow, in from the hall, turned off the lights in the living room.

Bryland, like The Shadow, had gained darkness; but The Shadow held the advantage. He was armed; Bryland had only an empty revolver. That thought drove Bryland berserk. With a savage snarl, the thwarted murderer pounded through to the living room, swinging his empty gun in hope that he could sledge The Shadow.

Figures clashed in the darkness. The barrel of a swinging automatic met the revolver handle and nearly clanged it from Bryland's hand. The crook grappled; suddenly broke free and made for the connecting door by which he had entered.

Bryland encountered a chair on the way. He stopped to grab it with one hand, to hurl it back toward The Shadow.

Against the window, Bryland and the chair formed an outline. The Shadow opened fire; but his shots were high. He aimed for the chair, not for Bryland. Bullets, sizzling from the mouth of a big automatic, splintered the chair back just above Bryland's hand.

That was enough for Bryland. Expecting shots in his own direction, the crook made a dive for the door of the adjoining suite, profiting by the short respite that The Shadow had given him. The Shadow fired again as Bryland went through the doorway; he gave the fleeing man no chance to close the door after him.

Cutting through the next room, Bryland reached the hallway just before The Shadow began to fire from the connecting door.

There was a fire tower at the end of the corridor. Again, luck seemed to be with Bryland. He was on the tower when he heard The Shadow reach the corridor. A single shot told that The Shadow was continuing his pursuit. Bryland headed down the tower.

The Shadow stopped at the top. He could hear the pound of Bryland's footsteps, as the thwarted murderer continued pell-mell. From an alleyway below came the roar of a starting motor. Bryland was driving to a car to make a get-away.

There were shouts from the fourth floor corridor. Hotel employees had reached The Shadow's suite. There were other calls from below. People in the street had heard the gunfire; also the start of Bryland's car. Roars of other motors told that a belated pursuit had begun.

DELIBERATELY, The Shadow descended the fire tower, which was temporarily forgotten. He reached the alleyway, moved through darkness for the front street. He saw a cab there, its driver craning to watch the cars that had started a chase around the block to try to pick up Bryland's trail. There were other persons on the sidewalk; but all were looking in the same direction, away from where The Shadow stood.

Calmly, The Shadow crossed the sidewalk. For a few seconds he was visible as a cloaked figure, his head

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topped by a slouch hat. Then his black shape blended with the darkness beside the taxicab. Opening the door, The Shadow stepped into the cab, thumped the door shut and spoke quietly to the driver.

Thinking that he had a passenger from the hotel, the driver nodded and settled back behind the wheel. The Shadow gave an address; the cab started its journey.

Again, The Shadow delivered a soft laugh. He was not disappointed by the escape of Frederick Bryland. In fact, The Shadow had deliberately aided it; and had delayed his early pursuit in order to bluff Bryland. He wanted Bryland to be free for the present; free, with the belief that his identity had not been learned.

The Shadow had managed that to perfection. Bryland had been in darkness most of the time. At no time had The Shadow glimpsed the ex-major's face; and Bryland knew it.

The Shadow's well-faked pursuit had made Bryland think that the cloaked fighter wanted to identify him. Therefore, Bryland would be positive that he had remained unknown. Yet The Shadow, without even glimpsing the intended murderer in the light, had known all along that the man was Bryland. There was only one person in Washington from whom The Shadow had expected either a threat or a surprise visit; and that man was Frederick Bryland.

From Follingsby's court-martial, The Shadow had brought evidence that Bryland was the thief who had taken the National Emergency Code. How he had gained that fact was something that The Shadow had kept to himself; but at present, he was on his way to reveal it to another person.

When he reached the house on H Street, The Shadow would be prepared to supply Agent F-3 with full details concerning the former army major, Frederick Bryland.

CHAPTER III. THE HOUSE ON H STREET

WHEN he reached the house on H Street, The Shadow alighted from the cab as Cranston. He was wearing his slouch hat, its brim twisted upward along one side to give it an ordinary appearance. Across one arm, he carried his cloak like a discarded overcoat. That seemed quite usual; for this was one of those surprisingly mild nights that frequently sandwich themselves into Washington's early winter.

The house was an old one; a type of residence seen throughout Washington. Other buildings like it had been converted into apartments; but this one had apparently been kept for occasional use by its owner. It looked as though it had just been reopened.

The Shadow rang the doorbell. A servant in livery admitted him to a vestibule, and eyed the visitor suspiciously. The Shadow quietly informed the servant that he had come from Senator Releston.

That was sufficient. The servant conducted The Shadow through a gloomy hallway, into a high parlor that was furnished with old-fashioned chairs and couches.

The Shadow placed his hat and cloak on a corner couch; took his seat near a fireplace where logs were crackling merrily. The fire was necessary to take the chill from this old house. Beneath the light of a crystal chandelier, The Shadow studied the surroundings and approved the methods of Agent F-3.

Few persons had ever heard of Agent F-3; but The Shadow knew much about him. His real name was James Murtrie; for years, he had served the United States government abroad. His job was to offset the efforts of foreign spies; to ferret out their nests and make them known to the government that unwittingly harbored them.

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It was probable that Murtrie, otherwise F-3, had heard much of The Shadow. Since both were working on the same case, this meeting would be a most opportune one. Moreover, there was one man to whom The Shadow could safely make his identity known. That man was Agent F-3.

While The Shadow was puffing a cigarette, in Cranston's leisurely style, curtains opened at a rear doorway of the room. Into the light stepped a man of medium height, whose face was one of the most striking that The Shadow had ever seen.

His features were almost triangular, when viewed full face. His forehead was wide; his cheeks tapered to a pointed chin. Dark eyes peered keenly from his narrowed lids; the lips beneath his thin nose formed a short, straight line. His flesh was smooth of texture, but pale almost to whiteness—a proof that the man spent most of his life indoors.

“I am Agent F-3,” declared the pale man, in a precise, short-clipped tone. Then, with a noticeable sparkle of his eyes: “You are The Shadow.”

THE SHADOW'S thin lips formed a smile. He knew that the pale man had noticed his folded cloak and slouch hat; something that the servant had failed to do.

“My name is James Murtrie,” added F-3. “May I ask yours?”

“For the present,” replied The Shadow, calmly, “I am Lamont Cranston. A friend of Senator Ross Releston.”

“I was informed that Senator Releston might contact a special investigator,” stated F-3. “That is why I suggested this meeting. It would have been unwise for me to appear at the court-martial. I am supposed to be in Paris; not in Washington. There is a certain man who knows that. His name is Hugo Creelon.”

The keen burn of The Shadow's eyes told F-3 that his visitor had recognized the name. The pale man leaned forward; spoke solemnly.

“Hugo Creelon is the most dangerous of all international spies,” he declared. “Creelon always protects himself; never makes an open move. His game is to purchase information stolen by others.”

“I have heard of Hugo Creelon,” returned The Shadow. “Unfortunately, I have never met him.”

“It might be unfortunate for Creelon, if you did meet him,” spoke F-3, grimly. “You can deal with crooks as we cannot. But Creelon is hard to find; he is so well hidden that I, alone, of all United States government agents, have even learned of his existence.

“Creelon's position is so strong, his contacts so high and so important, that I would find it difficult to make my fellow operatives believe that such a man existed! Only my long experience abroad has enabled me to recognize the menace of Hugo Creelon!”

The Shadow nodded. His own exploits had carried him to Europe, where he had discovered traces of the evasive Hugo Creelon. The notorious spy was a man who had no country; yet who always adopted one when he saw chances of shrewd espionage.

“I came to Washington,” added Agent F-3 in a low, emphatic tone, “because I am sure that Hugo Creelon is here. He knows that the National Emergency Code is stolen. If Creelon can negotiate with the actual thief, he will buy the code intact. Wherever Creelon is, one thing is certain. We cannot reach him. He has powerful friends. He would deny his identity and no one could prove it.

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“Our only course, therefore, is to uncover the NEC before Creelon learns who stole it. We must find the thief before Creelon does. Once the two make contact”—the pale man spread his hands in a gesture of despair—“our cause will be lost!”

THE SHADOW was considering all that Agent F-3 had said. It fitted completely with The Shadow's own opinions. He knew that the NEC had been stolen by an opportunist, who knew its value but had found no chance to dispose of it. Foreign spies in Washington did not advertise in the classified section of the telephone directory.

The thief's hope was that some master of espionage, provided with unlimited funds, would somehow learn who held the National Emergency Code. Evidently, he credited foreign spies with greater shrewdness than that of secret service agents.

If Hugo Creelon happened to be in Washington, the thief's belief would be justified. The Shadow knew that Creelon was unexcelled in methods of espionage.

While The Shadow was still analyzing these prospects, Agent F-3 produced a typewritten copy of the court-martial proceedings. Thumbing through to the last pages, he remarked:

“These were delivered to me, a short while ago. They contained complete testimony up until the time of adjournment. I have scanned the testimony, hoping that it might give some shred of vital information. There is nothing of value.”

“The last pages contain a clue,” remarked The Shadow, calmly. “One that should be useful to us.”

“A clue to what?”

“To the identity of the man who stole the NEC.”

Agent F-3 bobbed upright in his chair. His expression showed amazement; then he laughed, without changing the straight line of his lips.

“You are jesting—”

The pale man's remark showed annoyance. It ended as he abruptly finished his sentence. He saw that The Shadow was intensely serious. Looking at the sheaf of papers, F-3 studied every line of the final testimony. He stroked his forehead; let his hand slide down to his pointed chin. He shook his head.

“I find nothing here,” he declared. “Nothing except a trivial mention of Colonel Follingsby's cane, which he thought he left in a taxicab; but which was found in General Darson's anteroom. That proves simply that Follingsby visited Darson, a fact that both admit.

“The cane cannot implicate Colonel Follingsby. It certainly casts no reflection upon General Darson. It could not possibly concern any other person.”

“It does concern another,” returned The Shadow, emphatically. “By properly analyzing the possibilities that the cane provides, we can place suspicion upon the thief who stole the NEC. The cane explains how that opportunist guessed that Colonel Follingsby held the National Emergency Code.”

AGENT F-3 cocked his head intently, confident that he was to hear important facts. The Shadow gave them.

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“To begin with,” he declared, “there were two canes. One belonged to Colonel Follingsby, who carried it because he wore civilian clothes. The other belonged to General Darson who seldom used it because he was in uniform.”

The Shadow paused as Agent F-3 glanced at the notes, to check on the mention of the second cane. When the pale man nodded, The Shadow resumed:

“The canes were similar. Both officers had received them while stationed in the Canal Zone. It was not surprising, therefore, that Colonel Follingsby, when he visited the war department, happened to walk out with General Darson's cane by mistake.”

Sudden anticipation dawned on the pale face of Agent F-3. Eagerly, the straight-lipped man listened to The Shadow's next statement:

“Senator Releston called on Colonel Follingsby,” resumed The Shadow. “With the senator was Frederick Bryland, an ex-major in the army. Bryland was alone for a short time, while Follingsby talked with Releston. Bryland saw the cane; chanced to examine it and saw—”

“Darson's initials!” broke in F-3. “He knew that Follingsby must have visited the chief of staff! Bryland knew enough about Follingsby to guess that he had been entrusted with the National Emergency Code!”

“Exactly,” smiled The Shadow. “Particularly because it was a known fact that Follingsby had revised army codes while stationed in the Canal Zone. That is why Bryland faked the call to draw away Follingsby. During the colonel's absence, Bryland entered and stole the code.”

“What about the general's cane?”

“Bryland poked it out of sight, so Follingsby would not find it when he hurried away. When Bryland stole the code, he took the cane. If it had been found at Follingsby's, it would have proven that Bryland had guessed that the colonel had visited the war department.”

After a pause, The Shadow added:

“Bryland knew that Darson would summon him. When he went to the war department, he took the cane with him. He simply placed it in the anteroom, along with the cane that Follingsby had left there.”

Agent F-3 showed complete admiration. The Shadow had accounted for Darson's finding of the cane. Even Follingsby had believed that he, himself, had left it in Darson's anteroom.

“Bryland probably arranged a telephonic hook-up,” remarked The Shadow, “to make calls from Washington, but fake them as coming from Virginia. I doubt that he had an accomplice, to handle that false call to Follingsby. An accomplice could not have served Bryland to-night.

“Bryland suspected that I knew too much. He tried to murder me at my hotel. I knew the attacker to be Bryland; his attempt was made at twenty minutes past eight. You will find that Bryland called Senator Releston, soon afterward; presumably from Fairfax, Virginia.”

AGENT F-3 picked up a telephone from a corner. He dialed Releston's number; announced himself as F-3. He held a brief conversation and hung up promptly.

“You are right,” the pale man told The Shadow. “Bryland called the senator at half past eight. The call came

from Fairfax. Bryland could not have reached there before nine o'clock. His call was an alibi, to serve him after Senator Releston learns of the trouble at your hotel."

With that agreement, the pale man stalked toward the fireplace; turned about to face The Shadow. Warming his hands behind him, Agent F-3 spoke in his choppy fashion:

"Your information is invaluable! The government's course is plain. Knowing Bryland to be the thief, he can be watched; then trapped, the moment that he tries to sell the code. At the same time, I see another possibility."

The pale man paused; for the first time, his lips formed an actual smile. Cannily, he suggested:

"Suppose that this information should reach Hugo Creelon. He would move to contact Frederick Bryland. Would the risk be too great?"

"Not for the government," replied The Shadow. "It would be too great for Creelon, however."

"You do not quite understand me. Suppose Creelon had the facts, without the secret service knowing them? Suppose no one moved to stop Creelon? What would his risk be then?"

"None at all."

"Exactly!" The pale man's smile broadened. "That is why I intend that Creelon shall know these facts. It is why I planned that he should obtain them. In fact, he has already gained your information and knows its value!"

Lips formed a demonish twist as the pale man added:

"I am Hugo Creelon!"

THE SHADOW was on his feet before the final statement came. His right hand was speeding beneath his coat, ready to whip out an automatic and cover the pretender who had called himself Agent F-3.

Creelon, his face livid in the firelight, had the leer of a triumphant satan. He did not make a move from his position. It was unnecessary.

Creelon's rising tone, the crackle of the fire logs, had drowned other sounds. Men had crept to the curtains that draped three doorways; they were piling through, swinging revolvers as they came.

The Shadow spun away, as he sought to aim for Creelon. He had met these odds before. One bullet for Creelon—the rest for the spy's followers. With quick shots, The Shadow could scatter the formidable horde. All that he wanted was a moment's opportunity—that he did not gain.

In his twist, The Shadow needed three feet more. The cramped space of the old parlor did not afford it. Wheeling from between two sets of driving men, he hoped to get Creelon before the rest arrived from the hallway door. That three-foot difference served the attackers.

Three huskies met The Shadow in one mutual surge; they pitched him forward, sprawling toward Creelon. The Shadow's aim was gone. Before he could whip his gun upward, six more fighters were upon him, three from each side.

Lost beneath a pile of gripping foemen, The Shadow could see Creelon leering from above. One hand over his head, The Shadow sledged hard with the other, trying to batter into the clear. His efforts ended when a slugging revolver glanced from his protecting wrist and clipped the side of his head. Half dazed, The Shadow sagged. Hands clutched his arms; gripped his throat.

Three seconds later, The Shadow was spread-eagled on the floor, sliding into unconsciousness from the pounding his head had received, choking from the clutches at his throat, paralyzed by the weight of a half a dozen foemen.

Framed above, the last sight that The Shadow could remember was the fire-tinted visage of Hugo Creelon, glaring with the evil glory of a conqueror who had overcome his greatest foe.

CHAPTER IV. WITHOUT A TRACE

SOON after The Shadow's encounter with Hugo Creelon, a stocky, mustached man arrived at the Hotel Barlingham and went up to Senator Releston's apartment. The senator immediately received the stocky man; his visitor was Vic Marquette, of the secret service.

The two had cooperated before, for Senator Releston had always been active in pushing investigations that pertained to government matters. To-night, however, Marquette looked disgruntled and Releston was prompt to notice it. He inquired as to the trouble. Marquette was hesitant for a few moments; then he spoke bluntly.

"It's about the NEC, senator," stated Vic. "The day after it turned out to be missing, you and I had a conference."

"Of course," returned Releston. "I promised you my cooperation, and I have given it."

"You told me that you would see that facts reached The Shadow."

"Which I have done, through giving them to his friend, Lamont Cranston. The president himself summoned Mr. Cranston to to-day's court-martial proceedings!"

Releston spoke with an emphasis that indicated he had gone through with his bargain. Marquette, however, was not satisfied. As bluntly as before, he declared:

"You agreed to something else, senator: You said that you would notify us regarding any conversation that you had with Cranston; where he would be in case we wished to contact him—"

Releston started an interruption, but Marquette was in no mood to hear it. Snappily, Vic added:

"You failed to do that, senator! I have just come from Washington police headquarters, where I learned of the attack made upon Cranston at the Hotel Halcyon!"

Senator Releston sat flabbergasted. Whatever he had intended to say was forgotten through his astonishment at this news. Realizing that he had dumfounded the senator, Marquette added the details.

"It happened at eight-twenty," declared the secret service operative. "Cranston had just gone up to his suite. The police learned that because he stopped at the check room to get a bag. The telephone operator also reported signals at the switchboard; some one clicking a telephone receiver. Then came the shots."

"The shots?"

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“Yes. From Cranston's suite. A regular barrage that ripped the bedroom wall! People heard the gunfire in the street; they reported that some one dashed from the fire tower and made off in a car that was parked in the alleyway. The car got away. Meanwhile, hotel employees reached the suite—”

“And found Cranston?”

Releston's question was filled with anxiety. It brought a grim headshake from Marquette.

“No,” declared Vic. “Cranston was gone. What happened to him is a mystery.”

SENATOR RELESTON showed relief. He regarded Lamont Cranston as a person under the protection of The Shadow. Cranston, alive, would surely be safe. Releston hastened to assure Marquette on that point, and he used a logical method.

“Cranston could not have been abducted,” asserted the senator. “The fact that the attempted assassin fled is proof that he could not have carried Cranston with him. It seems obvious that Cranston merely departed in order to avoid the delay that would be caused by talking to the police.”

Marquette apparently shared the senator's opinion; but Vic had something else on his mind and he expressed it.

“You've missed the important point, senator. Whoever tried to get Cranston unquestionably had something to do with the theft of the National Emergency Code. He either was the man who took it, or he's some one who wants it. If you had notified me that Cranston was at the Halcyon, I would have been there, too. We could have grabbed the man who tried to murder Cranston.”

Releston nodded his agreement. Again he started to make the statement that he had previously intended. Once more, Marquette interrupted him.

“You can still help us, senator,” declared Vic. “Tell me this: Who beside yourself met Cranston at the court-martial? That is, who saw him long enough to have suspected that he might have come from The Shadow?”

“No one,” replied Releston. Then, with sudden afterthought: “Wait, though! Frederick Bryland rode with us, in my limousine! He knew that Cranston was coming here!”

“Bryland, eh? The fellow who used to be an army major? He's not in too good standing, senator. Maybe he's mixed in the theft of the NEC. You gave him a clean slate on that visit to Follingsby's; but to-night makes it look bad—”

Senator Releston shook his head. He produced some memo pads from his desk and handed them to Marquette.

“I keep a record of all telephone calls,” said Releston, “including the time when they are received. Bryland called me to-night, at half past eight. There is the memo, Marquette.”

“That was ten minutes after the attack at the Halcyon—”

“But Bryland's call was from his home in Fairfax. A full half-hour's drive from Washington. It was unquestionably a Fairfax call. The operator interrupted twice while I was talking to Bryland. There was some trouble with the connection.”

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Though Vic Marquette was a keen investigator, he did not jump to the conclusion that The Shadow had formed regarding Bryland's methods. As in the case of the false call to Follingsby, Marquette was convinced. He did not link Bryland's inventive genius with the matter in question. The fact that Bryland could fake Virginia calls from his Washington apartment slipped Vic completely.

"That lets Bryland out," grumbled Marquette. "Lets him out completely! I guess that covers everything, senator."

"Not quite!"

THE senator's tone was stern. Marquette looked up to see that Releston had risen. Mildness was gone from the senator's rugged features. His expression was one of severe indignation.

"There is something else to settle, Marquette," announced Releston. "You have interrupted me twice when I have tried to speak of it. I refer to your accusation that I did not cooperate with the secret service. You owe me an apology on that score."

This time, Marquette showed amazement.

"I did not call you," asserted Releston, "because I received instructions to the contrary. Early to-day I received a telephone call, telling me to refer all special investigators to a certain man in your own department."

"Who made that call, senator?"

"Your man himself. One whose integrity could not be questioned. The call came from Agent F-3."

Marquette was on his feet, trying to find words. He heard Releston add:

"Agent F-3 told me that he was in Washington. Recalled here under special orders—"

"But he can't be!" blurted Vic. "Agent F-3 is dead!"

Releston stepped back, aghast. Marquette was prompt with further details.

"We received the news this morning," he explained. "A body in the Paris morgue—a corpse taken from the River Seine—was identified as that of James Murtrie, otherwise Agent F-3!"

Releston reached for the memo pad. From memory, he wrote the H Street address; handed the slip to Marquette, saying:

"This is the address the false F-3 gave me. I told Cranston that The Shadow was to go there."

"There's time to block that," asserted Marquette. "Let me have your telephone, senator."

TWENTY minutes later, creeping men were approaching the gloomy house on H Street. The old mansion stood completely dark, foreboding ill to all who entered. The invaders were not perturbed. Their number was too great; their authority too strong.

The squad consisted of a dozen secret service men, headed by Vic Marquette.

Craftily, the squad closed in. Expert hands tried doors and windows. Old woodwork splintered dully; a window came open. Vic Marquette went through, hoisted by a pair of husky operatives. Others joined the leader. Vic's flashlight blinked upon the warped floor boards. It showed a wide doorway, opening into a room that had once been a parlor.

Soon, an electric lantern gleamed through that square-walled room. It showed a scene of complete desertion. Though Vic stood in the very room where The Shadow had been overpowered, there was not a clue to show that the parlor had been occupied in years. Curtains had been removed with furniture. Even the embers and ashes were gone from the fireplace.

Vic Marquette considered the facts as he saw them. Some one had telephoned Senator Releston, posing as Agent F-3. The purpose had been to get a lead to The Shadow. Somehow, the poser had learned of Lamont Cranston, and had tried to assassinate The Shadow's friend.

Circumstances showed that the attempt had been unsuccessful. Therefore, Marquette pictured Cranston safely on his way to New York to contact The Shadow.

This deserted house, in Vic's opinion, was merely a blind. It had not even been visited by the fake Agent F-3, and probably would not be. Nevertheless, Marquette decided to leave a pair of operatives on duty. The Shadow, should he come here, would recognize that they were government men.

Marquette was convinced that the man who had telephoned Releston, calling himself F-3, was the actual thief of the National Emergency Code. That, however, furnished no enlightenment. Marquette had already rejected Bryland as the possible thief. Hence Marquette was doubly led astray. Not only was he wrong about Bryland, he did not even suspect the presence of Hugo Creelon in Washington.

Added to that was Vic's complete ignorance regarding the capture of The Shadow. It was Vic's belief that The Shadow would soon be heard from. He was counting on the master-sleuth to furnish clues to the missing code. Thus the secret service was at a standstill. There would not even be a move to rescue The Shadow, since his plight was unknown.

When Vic Marquette left the house on H Street, he saw a passing sedan roll by. It looked like any car that might have been traveling Washington street. Marquette did not know that sparkling eyes had viewed him from the car window. Nor did Marquette hear the low, insidious chuckle from the straight lips of the man who saw him.

The occupant of that sedan was Hugo Creelon.

Through with the house on H Street, the master-spy had ridden by to check on the arrival of the government men. Creelon was satisfied that the secret service had learned nothing. He was confident, too, that no suspicion rested on Frederick Bryland.

To-morrow, Creelon intended to contact the man who held the NEC; to gain the all-important code through shrewd bargaining with Bryland. For Creelon held no doubt regarding the ex-major's possession of the code.

Hugo Creelon had gained the information that he wanted from the best of sources. The facts had been supplied him by The Shadow.

CHAPTER V. THE SPY'S PLAN

IT was afternoon the next day when The Shadow awoke. He found himself in surroundings that he did not recognize, and he viewed them with a strange, listless effect.

The Shadow was attired as Cranston; he was seated in a large easy-chair in a corner of a compact, well-furnished room. To his right were windows, high up from the ground, for The Shadow could see the tops of trees against the dullish, clouded sky. To his left was a closed door that was the only entrance to the room.

This room was a combination living room and bedroom. A chunky, broad-shouldered man was raising a heavy folding bed. The Shadow watched the servant affix the bed to the paneled wall, then turn the panel about to swing the bed into a closet.

The man's actions were painfully slow. When he turned the panel, it revolved at a snail's pace. It seemed minutes before the bed was out of sight, with a blank wall in its place. More minutes while the chunky man was turning toward The Shadow's chair.

The Shadow saw an ugly, big-toothed face that wore a long scar on its left cheek. He recognized the features. The chunky, man was one of those with whom The Shadow had battled at the house on H Street.

A fangish grin spread itself upon the fellow's face. The ugly lips moved with a remarkable slowness, curling in such fantastic fashion that they seemed ready to halt at any moment. With deliberate stride, the husky servant approached The Shadow. As he came, he lifted each foot with a curious slowness; placed it down again with such peculiar motion that The Shadow wondered why he did not lose his balance.

Halfway toward The Shadow, the man swung toward the door, making the turn in slow-motion fashion like a figure in a news reel. As the man's eyes moved away, The Shadow saw a chance for attack. He gripped the arms of his chair; raised himself to begin fresh battle.

Oddly, The Shadow's action was even slower than that of the scar-faced man. The Shadow's finger took ages to clutch the chair arms, His rising body seemed weighted. His average speed had the semblance of a foot a minute. So slow was The Shadow's process that the servant had time to turn around again, despite the fact that the fellow's painful speed did not increase.

When The Shadow found his feet, the man was already facing him. As The Shadow tried to raise his arms, the other's right hand started in his direction. It was coming slowly, no more than an inch a second; but the speed was too great for The Shadow. Before he could ward off the slow-motion thrust, the man's hand was against his chest.

Mere pressure threw The Shadow off balance. He could feel his arms swinging wide, even though their motion was slower than a turtle's crawl. He was falling backward, lingering as if in a dream.

At last, the weary drop ended. The Shadow was back in his chair. Exhausted, he saw the servant again look toward the door. With a strained effort, The Shadow managed to inch his gaze in that direction.

The door was opening inward, in keeping with this slow-motion nightmare. The Shadow saw a man upon the threshold. He recognized Hugo Creelon. He watched the pale-faced spy deliberately move forward and start to close the door behind him.

THE lingering action continued. It could have been an hour, to The Shadow's stressed brain, before Creelon

finally reached the chair where The Shadow sat. Then came Creelon's words—long—drawn beyond description.

“You are helpless,” Creelon told his prisoner. “You need no bonds. You have seen the futility of trying to resist.”

Creelon's head turned slowly; his eyes at last faced the wide—shouldered servant.

“Food, Jarruth,” ordered Creelon, in his prolonged drawl. “Food for our guest.”

While Jarruth began a slow—footed departure, Creelon again turned toward The Shadow. By this time, The Shadow had guessed the answer to the riddle. He was doped; and he knew what drug had been used. Creelon had given him a dose of hashish.

The Shadow had witnessed the effect of that Oriental opiate when used upon others. To the hashish victim, every second seems a minute; every minute an hour. A day could be a year; a week an eternity.

With his brain swept by such fancy, The Shadow mistook rapid actions as slow ones. His own response was in accordance. Numbed by the drug, he could not have battled a midget. Creelon knew it, the prolonged chuckle that seemed to ooze from the spy's straight lips was a trickling, satisfied jeer.

“Perhaps you wonder why you are still alive,” said Creelon. “That is—if your mind can wonder at anything other than your plight. I shall tell you why you live. I may have further use for you.”

Creelon paused—only for a few seconds—but to The Shadow it seemed a space of minutes.

“You gave me information that I wanted,” resumed the spy, “but the prize is not yet in my possession. There is always a chance of some miscalculation. In my game, nothing can ever be taken for granted. Until my negotiations are completed, I shall hold you prisoner.

“Perhaps there may be occasion for you to exert your talents again in my service. Upon that possibility depends your hope for life. That is all.”

JARRUTH was returning, bringing a small tea wagon loaded with food. He wheeled it in front of The Shadow; placed a spoon in the prisoner's hand. The Shadow began to eat a bowl of hot soup.

The operation intrigued him. Each spoonful that he slowly removed taxed his full concentration. Lifting the weighted spoon was a difficult as a balancing act.

Each slow swallow of soup was welcome. It seemed to bring warmth and strength; steadiness that offset the hashish. Nevertheless, The Shadow was not deceived. He knew that the effect of the drug still held him. As Creelon had declared, The Shadow was helpless.

Wisely, the master—spy had foreseen that ordinary bonds could not hold The Shadow captive; and that formidable prison bars would be useless. Creelon had adopted a surer course. He had deprived The Shadow of physical power. Like a Philistine chieftain, Creelon looked upon The Shadow as a shorn Samson whom he could taunt and scorn.

Soup finished, The Shadow sank back wearied, but less under the influence of the hashish. He noted a perceptible increase in the speed of things about him. His own actions must have been more normal; for Creelon spoke in an undertone to Jarruth.

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The servant reached for a glass of greenish liquid, thrust it toward The Shadow's lips. It was coming slowly, but the result was inevitable. Jarruth's approaching hand, with all its fancied slowness, was speedier than the closing of The Shadow's lips. The glass reached The Shadow's mouth. Its pressure forced his head backward. He tasted the bitterish liquid; felt it gurgle as it reached his throat.

The Shadow's captors were relying upon this new dose of dope to keep him helpless for the remainder of the day. With a short laugh from his level lips, Hugo Creelon turned and stalked from the room. As he looked back from the doorway, the master-spy saw The Shadow slumping off balance, to be caught by the rough arm of Jarruth. Jarruth jolted the prisoner deep in the easy-chair, as Creelon closed the door.

Outside The Shadow's room, Creelon followed a short hallway that was blank on the right; but had two doorways on the left, with another straight ahead. He stopped as he saw a warning light blink from a bulb above the end door of the hall. Creelon opened the first door on the left. He stepped into a space that was like a darkened closet, but with a flight of steps. He closed the door behind him; pressed his way through curtains at the top of the steps.

Creelon was behind a sheet of plate glass. Through it, he could see the interior of a large reception room, furnished in ornate style, with heavily draped windows. The gilded furniture was conspicuous against the purple velvet of the curtains.

The spy watched the door from the hallway. It opened; a bespectacled man who looked like a secretary bowed a visitor into the room. The arrival was a woman, of definitely Spanish appearance. Her features were handsome, rather than beautiful; that was partly due to the haughtiness that seemed a part of her make-up.

It would have been impossible to guess the woman's age. She looked young; but her high-bridged nose, her straight cheeks and narrow lips were the types of features that would change but little with years.

The woman was clad in black, a color that well suited her, for it made her olive skin show light by contrast. Her eyes, sparkling in glance, were also black. So were her thin eyebrows and her hair. The woman was of the extreme brunette type that is found among the Castilian nobility of old Spain.

ALONE in the reception room, the dark-haired woman looked about curiously, as though suspecting eavesdroppers behind the heavy curtains. She glanced toward the glass in the wall of the room, but did not see Creelon beyond it. Seating herself, the visitor produced a black cigarette case that glistened like polished ebony. With slender fingers that showed long, red-tipped nails, she drew a satin-tipped cigarette from the case, applied a tiny platinum lighter and puffed long wreaths of smoke.

Creelon moved away from the big glass. He descended the steps, came out through the hall. Reaching the next door, he opened it and stepped into the reception room. The woman was looking in the direction when he entered. Her thin, ruddy lips formed a pleased smile.

With a bow, Creelon approached. The woman extended her hand; Creelon received it and bowed again. He took a chair directly in front of the plate glass, which showed his reflection from a gilded frame. The glass was an Argus mirror; on this side it appeared to be a silver surface, with no trace of transparency. It could be seen through on only one side; in this case, through the back.

"It is indeed a privilege," remarked Creelon, in purred tone, "to receive as visitor so celebrated a person as Senorita Nina Valencita, whose charm has captivated the capitals of all Europe."

"Not so great a privilege," returned Senorita Valencita, "as that of meeting Hugo Creelon, whose name and fame are held as a secret by only the chosen few."

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“Our methods differ,” declared Creelon. “Where you mask your intrigue by appearing openly, I keep both myself and my methods under cover. To you, seniorita, goes the greater credit for playing the more difficult game.”

Nina Valencita smiled as she puffed smoke toward the ceiling. Her eyes sparkled as she looked about.

“I admire your apartment, Mr. Creelon,” she said, “particularly because of its location. I have never enjoyed the privilege of secret residence in the embassy of so great a nation as—”

She paused, catching a slight warning motion from Creelon's usually straight lips. Nina responded with a wise smile. She decided to let Creelon talk.

“We can reserve further compliments,” remarked Creelon, dryly. “Our present business concerns us; I have an important task for you; provided that you can accomplish it without producing suspicion.”

“Why should I create suspicion?”

“Because of your previous operations in the field of espionage. Particularly those during the recent Spanish revolution.”

“Spain is supposed to be my native country,” smiled Nina. “It was only natural that I should have gone there, to join in the cause of the royalists.”

“You feel sure then, that you have not been watched in Washington?”

“Quite positive. My recent engagement to John Marthess, nephew of the late Senator Marthess, indicates that I prefer marrying money rather than acquire it by other means.”

CREELON nodded in slow, convinced fashion. His nod ended with a sudden expression of doubt.

“Since you are engaged to young Marthess,” he objected, “it might cause undue comment if you were seen with another man, even though the meeting might be a short one.”

Nina shook her head.

“Not at all,” she responded. “I have many friends in Washington. Moreover, Mr. Creelon, I understand when I should be discreet.”

“There is another objection. Do you intend to marry Marthess?”

Nina shook her head. Creelon actually smiled.

“I thought you did not,” he said. “That is why I sent for you. If you were marrying a man of wealth, you would have no need for money. But if you are merely engaged to a wealthy man, as an excuse for being in Washington, your status is excellent.”

Creelon paused to glance at his watch, which showed three o'clock.

“Within the next five hours,” said the master-spy, “I want you to locate a man named Frederick Bryland.”

“Formerly a major in the United States army,” added Nina, with her suave smile. “I have met Mr. Bryland.”

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“All the better. I can count upon you to find him. When you speak to Bryland, tell him who I am and where I may be reached.”

Nina Valencita gasped as she stared at Hugo Creelon. She could not believe the order. Hugo Creelon, the spy whose name was known only to the cleverest of his own profession; calling upon her to reveal his identity to a former army officer. Whether jest or madness, Nina could not understand it. Then came Creelon's brisk voice:

“Tell Bryland that I am prepared to purchase the National Emergency Code, technically known as the NEC. If he will bring it here, intact, there will be no quibble regarding the price.”

Enlightenment showed upon the sophisticated face of Nina Valencita; with it, amazed admiration. She was one of the few who had heard of the theft that had stirred official Washington. She had supposed that Hugo Creelon would be seeking possession of the NEC. But the extent of the superspy's espionage was far beyond her expectations.

Creelon had not only learned who held the NEC; he was living as an unofficial guest in the embassy of a foreign country. That meant that Creelon had already arranged for prompt disposal of the NEC, once he acquired it. That was in keeping with Creelon's usual system of safeguarding every move.

Creelon had risen; he was ushering Nina to the door. Near the portal the superspy remarked:

“Your fee for this slight service will be twenty thousand dollars. The same amount that you received for your dangerous journey to Madrid, not long ago.”

The statement showed that Creelon was a shrewd bargainer. His mention of the Madrid mission forced Nina to accept the present terms as satisfactory. The fact that the National Emergency Code was worth an immense fortune to Creelon was something aside from the present deal.

Nina spoke her acceptance. She knew that there were others in Washington whom Creelon could use as contact agents with Bryland. She knew also that the master-spy, superbly entrenched, could end her own game by a mere snap of his fingers.

Moreover, Nina had good reason to accept any offer that Creelon might give. Success on this mission could mean further service with the greatest of all international spies.

WHEN Nina had gone, Hugo Creelon returned to the room where he held The Shadow prisoner. Opening the door, he saw Jarruth seated by the window. The scar-faced servant grinned and motioned toward the easy-chair. Creelon saw The Shadow, slumped pitifully, his hands hanging limply to the floor.

“The dose was sufficient, Jarruth,” remarked Creelon. “It will do until after his next meal. Tell me when he awakens from his stupor. Then I shall determine his dinner hour. I would prefer it to be late.”

Jarruth did not question why Creelon had such preference; nevertheless, Creelon gave the answer.

“Perhaps we shall not have to use hashish again,” observed the spy, as he turned to step out into the hall. “If my work in Washington is completed, we can give this prisoner a more potent remedy. One that will provide a permanent sleep!”

With that, Creelon indulged in one of his rare smiles. The evil twist that came to his lips was significant. Hugo Creelon was convinced that it would be unnecessary to keep The Shadow alive after to-night.

CHAPTER VI. MARQUETTE'S TRAIL

AT dusk, that same day, Vic Marquette stopped to see Senator Ross Releston. The secret service man had nothing to report. Vic's hope was that Releston had heard something from either Cranston or The Shadow. Finding that matters stood unchanged, Marquette brought up an old theme.

"Somebody must have known that Follingsby had that code," insisted Vic. "It could have been Bryland. I'd like to satisfy myself about that fellow."

"Bryland could have known nothing," returned Releston. "Remember, Marquette, that I was with him when we visited Follingsby. Whatever Follingsby said, I heard. In fact, I heard more than Bryland. For a short while, Follingsby and I were chatting alone while Bryland was merely looking at curios that Follingsby had brought from Panama."

"And Follingsby said nothing about the war department—"

"Not a word. That is, nothing to indicate that he had been there. You are unjust, Marquette, to hold suspicions regarding Bryland."

"I'd like to get Bryland off my mind."

"That would be a simple matter. Go and see him. He is dining to-night at the Apollo Club, with a young lady named Martha Leeth."

"Congressman Leeth's daughter?"

"Yes. Bryland is a bachelor; and quite a ladies' man. He dropped in this afternoon and called Miss Leeth while he was here. That is how I happen to know where he will be to-night."

THE Apollo Club was Washington's newest night club, a bright spot that attracted patrons throughout the evening hours. The place was usually about half filled during the dinner period; the big crowds came later, about the time of the nine o'clock floor show. Hence Marquette did not expect much difficulty in locating Frederick Bryland.

There was one feature of the Apollo Club that Vic did not remember until he arrived there. Though the place had a huge dining room, it was also provided with smaller ones that adjoined the main one. In addition there was a bar, in a room by itself; also a cocktail lounge. Patrons preferred the smaller rooms during the dinner hour.

When Marquette inquired for Bryland, he was referred from one head waiter to another. When he reached the doorway of a smaller dining room, a page boy passed him and went to a corner table, where a man and a girl were seated. The man arose; Vic noted that he was straight-shouldered, square of jaw and with sharp, deep-set eyes. The man was Bryland; but Vic did not know him by sight.

As Bryland walked past, Marquette encountered the head waiter. When Vic inquired for Bryland, the fellow looked toward the corner table.

"Mr. Bryland was there a few moments ago, sir," he said. "Miss Leeth is still at the table; he will probably return shortly."

"I'll look for him," remarked Vic, remembering the man who had passed him. "I know him by sight."

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Finding Bryland was not so easy as Vic hoped. He looked into the barroom; thought he saw Bryland with a group of men, but was mistaken. It was when he passed the cocktail lounge that he suddenly spied the man. Marquette stopped just short of the door.

Bryland was seated at a table, talking to a woman dressed in black velvet. There was a simplicity about her attire that made it the more conspicuous, particularly as it showed her face to best advantage. Marquette saw an aristocratic profile; decided that the woman was Spanish. Vic recalled a photograph that he had seen of that profile.

An assistant manager was standing close at hand. Vic turned to him and inquired:

“The lady in the lounge, with Mr. Bryland. Isn't she Senorita Valencita?”

The manager nodded; then confided:

“Probably Mr. Bryland is an old friend. Senorita Valencita has many acquaintances in Washington.”

Marquette was thinking along another track. He stepped back as he saw Bryland and the woman rise and come toward the door. He caught a snatch of conversation:

“Then you will come there?” the woman was inquiring. “And bring—”

“Of course,” inserted Bryland. He had noted Vic from the corner of his eye. “You can rely upon me. After all”—Bryland's smile was well faked—“the matter is of little consequence!”

For a moment, Nina showed puzzlement; she covered the expression quickly.

“Of some importance to me,” she said, with a smile. “Enough to make it worth while asking you the favor. Good night, Mr. Bryland.”

As Bryland bowed, Nina turned back through the lounge. A moment later, Marquette heard a rustle beside him; turned to see Martha Leeth.

THE congressman's daughter made a complete contrast when compared with Nina Valencita. Martha Leeth was actually young; she was a pronounced blonde, with bright blue eyes. Her taffeta gown was a cascade of peacock-blue ruffles, which gave her a babyish look.

The indignation that she displayed was far from childlike, however. Martha had seen Nina and had summed the brunette with a glance. Martha was determined to show herself as much a woman of the world as the Spanish brunette, whom she instantly regarded as a rival for Bryland's affections.

“So that was your message,” snapped Martha. “I'm bringing mine, in person! Good-by!”

Martha turned about on a trim silver heel and started in the opposite direction. Bryland gripped her arm. He protested as he followed close beside the girl.

“It was nothing, Martha—merely an old acquaintance—a slight favor—”

Martha tried to draw away as they neared the outer door. Bryland said something about the unfinished dinner; Martha snapped back that she had signed the check, putting it on her father's account. Bryland stopped her by the cloak room.

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“Your wraps,” he said quietly. “Don't forget them, Martha.”

The girl waited impatiently while Bryland obtained the wraps. Smiling slightly, Bryland remarked:

“Let's forget it, Martha. It's nearly theater time. You know that I have tickets.”

“I'm going home,” returned the girl. “Straight home! If you care to call a cab, you can do so! If not, I shall call one myself!”

Bryland bowed; he conducted Martha out through the door. Several persons had stopped to witness the spat; Marquette stepped up beside them. He saw a cab pull up outside the club. Martha entered it and Bryland followed, despite her protest. The cab drove away with the pair inside.

Vic Marquette nodded to himself. He was glad that he had not met Bryland.

A better plan had come to Vic's mind.

Seeing Bryland with Nina Valencita and having knowledge she had acted as a spy for the Spanish royalists, Vic decided Bryland's knowing her was reason enough to make a search of his home for the NEC.

But first, Vic looked up Congressman Leeth's home telephone number. There was one thing Marquette wanted to find out; that was who had won the argument, Bryland or Martha.

Vic's bet was that Bryland had talked the girl into going to the theater. He hoped so, anyway; for he wanted Bryland to be placed for the next few hours. Marquette had his fingers crossed when he called the number.

No one answered the telephone. Evidently all were absent from the Leeth homestead. That explained why Martha might have listened to Bryland's protests. The prospect of an evening alone at home could easily have won the girl over.

Marquette dialed again to make sure. There was no response; so Vic put in calls to members of his squad.

WITHIN fifteen minutes, Vic and two carloads of operatives were ready for a speedy trip to Fairfax. Marquette had decided to make the first search at Bryland's Virginia mansion.

One man was standing on the curb. Marquette gave him special instructions about guarding Bryland's Washington home:

“Stay outside of Bryland's apartment house, Chandley. Don't stop him if he goes in; you might get the wrong man by mistake. Grab anybody, though, that comes out—anybody that you think might be Bryland.

“It's a cinch he didn't have the NEC on him when he left the Apollo Club. If he has it, it's one of two places; his home or his apartment. We won't give him a chance to take it away from either.”

The cars headed for the Arlington Memorial Bridge. As they neared the Potomac, Vic Marquette settled back in a rear seat, fully satisfied with the course that he had chosen. He was glad that he had not trailed Bryland. That trail, in Vic's opinion, would have been a mistake.

Vic did not know what opportunity he had missed. Actually, success was slipping from his grasp. The trail that the secret service man ignored would have opened remarkable paths. It would have taken Vic to a certain embassy in Washington; to a hidden lair within that embassy, where a master-spy dwelt in security.

More important, it would have carried Vic Marquette to the spot where The Shadow lay a prisoner, doped into helplessness, awaiting the doom that Hugo Creeland was ready to decree.

Vic Marquette was carrying a search order, on which his signature was scarcely dry. Without knowing it, Vic had signed another warrant, as plainly as if he had affixed his name to it.

That was the unwritten order for The Shadow's death. Vic Marquette, alone, could have provided The Shadow with outside aid. The Shadow would never receive the help that he desired.

CHAPTER VII. THROUGH THE GLASS

FREDERICK BRYLAND'S dinner hour had been planned as a pleasant one; but had resulted in a spat. The Shadow's dinner time was planned as a tragic jest.

Shortly after eight o'clock, Jarruth wheeled in the tea wagon, bringing a bowl of soup and a plate of more substantial food. He rolled it up to where The Shadow was seated, staring listlessly.

Hugo Creelon had heard from Nina Valencita. Frederick Bryland would arrive this very evening. Creelon had given the order for The Shadow's dinner. Afterward would come a dose more powerful than hashish.

Death by poison would be The Shadow's fate, as soon as Creelon commenced negotiations with Bryland.

Laboriously, The Shadow inserted spoon in soup, while Jarruth looked on jeeringly. Every spoonful was an effort, and Jarruth enjoyed it for a while. Then the sight tired him. The prisoner was more lethargic than at lunch time. Jarruth went out to prepare the dessert. He hoped that it would be a glass of poison.

When Jarruth was gone, a change took place. Perceptibly, The Shadow came to life. His motion was not swift—it still showed painful slowness. But his speed was much closer to normal.

The second dose of hashish had been less effective than the first. The Shadow, however, had not shown it. Once awake, he had pretended further sleep, during a period that seemed interminable. Every time his eyes had begun to open he had closed them, awaiting dusk. Jarruth had not reported the prisoner as awake until after six o'clock. Jarruth was wrong. The Shadow had aroused two hours before.

Swallowing a few more mouthfuls of the beneficial soup, The Shadow managed to push the tea wagon away. He tried to rise; he failed, but tried again. He succeeded. Wearily, his steps almost as slow as Jarruth's had appeared to be, The Shadow faltered forward.

Once he reeled; felt himself falling slowly. He caught a table and regained his balance. Resting, The Shadow realized that he possessed only one capability that could bring swift motion. That was the ease with which he could fall.

A sprawl might seem slow; but it would be as rapid as any drop that another man could produce. It was easy to topple off balance. It was upon that factor that The Shadow depended. The warmth of the soup was giving him a false sense of speeded motion; but he was wise enough not to rely upon it as real!

The Shadow reached the panel where the folding bed was hidden beyond. Gripping a solid wall, he leaned against the panel. It began a slow revolution. The Shadow tightened his grip on the wall; he shifted as the panel came around. He seemed shackled.

Though the panel's swing was prolonged, The Shadow could not guarantee that he would clear its path. Yet

he persisted; and with success. When the bed swung completely into place, The Shadow stood beyond it.

The Shadow raised his hand up to the catch that held the bed suspended. He lowered his hand; through sheer weight alone, it drew the catch. The bed was balanced. The Shadow edged his shoulder past it. He felt a pressure; he resisted with all his strength. Braced against one edge of the bed, The Shadow was holding it in place. For a man in his weakened condition, it was a Herculean task.

The Shadow watched the door of the room; held on for a long, tiring period. The door began to open—deliberately, but not so slowly as it had opened earlier in the day. Jarruth appeared; closed the door behind him. In his hand, the servant was carrying a glass of amber-tinted liquid.

Jarruth's ugly leer told that he had received the order that he wanted. The executioner was arriving with The Shadow's poison.

LOOKING toward the easy-chair, Jarruth showed a surprised scowl when he saw that the prisoner had left it. Wheeling so rapidly that the motion seemed fairly fast to The Shadow, Jarruth saw the tall figure by the folding bed. The Shadow, still disguised as Cranston, was on the far side.

Jarruth did exactly as The Shadow had hoped. The servant's actions came like clockwork. Putting a hand to his hip, Jarruth pulled a revolver and started menacingly toward the wearied prisoner.

The Shadow relaxed. His yield was instant. The weight of the big metal bed brushed him aside, sent him toppling to the floor. Though the fall seemed slow motion to The Shadow, he was actually hurtled from the path that the hinged bed followed.

Jarruth, starting for the prisoner, saw the metal Juggernaut arching down upon him. Once released, uncontrolled by a lowering hand, that mass of metal had weight combined with power. Jarruth ducked away to avoid it. The Shadow, going to the floor in a painful, slow-motion drive, witnessed the result.

The bed seemed to lower itself like a reluctant drawbridge while Jarruth did a curiously delayed turnabout. Slowly, the metal footboard of the bed opened out, reached Jarruth's head and tapped it a gentle blow. The sound, though, was sharp to The Shadow's ears.

To Jarruth, the bed's fall was sudden; swift. A surge of down-swinging metal; a crash that he could not escape. That was the last that The Shadow's jailer knew. The Shadow, alone, watched the finish.

He saw Jarruth's lazy sprawl, watched the revolver float from the man's grasp and do a rubbery bounce upon the floor. He saw the glass of amber fluid tilt; spill its contents as it settled gently and cracked from the feathery thud.

The bed had reached the floor. Its frame gave a jar above Jarruth's body. Only the bed quivered. Jarruth was motionless. Steadying himself against the lowered bed, The Shadow made his way back to the chair. Sinking there, he swallowed the last of the soup. Gripping bread, he stuffed it to his mouth; devoured it with all the swiftness that he could command.

Rising, The Shadow moved with crablike gait along the floor, to preserve his balance. Half crouched, he passed Jarruth's senseless form. He managed to stoop and pick up the revolver. Steadied, helped by the food that he had eaten, The Shadow reached the door. He paused beside a half-turned chair; on it he saw objects that were like old friends: his folded cloak, with the slouch hat upon it.

Slowly, The Shadow put on the black garments. Standing by the door, he took a look at Jarruth. It would be a

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while before the servant recovered; how long, The Shadow could not estimate. He was convinced, however, that he would have time to leave these premises before Jarruth awakened.

Escape was The Shadow's only policy. He was shaking the spell of the hashish; each slowly passing minute brought him an increase of strength. Nevertheless, he was in no condition for battle, nor would he be for an hour or more to come.

Tightening, The Shadow showed a flash of his old-time stealth as he opened the door and peered into the hallway. He saw the narrow corridor with its blank wall on the far side. The hall was deserted. Doorways to the left; another straight ahead—The Shadow picked the most distant barrier as the probable outlet.

KEEPING to the nearer door, The Shadow began a slow progress. He reached the first door; there he paused. Ahead, The Shadow saw a sudden signal, flickering above the end door. He knew that it might token some arrival. There was a chance that the door would open.

The light was sufficient to show The Shadow, even in his attire of black. He needed a spot with which to blend. The doorway at the left provided it. Shifting his weight, The Shadow edged from sight. He nearly lost his balance; to regain it, he gripped the knob of the closed door. His hand seemed to skid as the knob turned in his grasp.

A moment later, the door swung inward, its latch loosened by The Shadow's chance turn of the knob. Losing his hold, The Shadow took a sprawl into a space that seemed to be a closet. His mental faculties were somewhat regained; this spill did not have the long, delayed motion of the others, although it gave some impression of slowness.

Striving to halt the fall, The Shadow stumbled inward. The folds of a heavy curtain enveloped him. He sank to the floor.

His sprawl had been noiseless. Even Jarruth's revolver had made no thud, for it struck the curtain when it slipped from The Shadow's grasp. Looking back, The Shadow saw the light of the hall. Stretching, he reached for the door and pushed it shut, stopping its final close with his fingers.

Easing his hand away, The Shadow let the door go into place. The latch did not click; but the door was far enough shut to pass outside inspection.

Regaining the revolver in the blackness, The Shadow gripped the curtain and drew himself to his feet. He felt steps beneath him; realized that they had helped to break his tumble. Pressing the curtain aside, he crawled up the steps, guiding by a glow that came from above. Reaching the top, The Shadow saw the sheet of glass that formed the Argus mirror.

There was a ledge beneath it. Drawing himself to his feet, The Shadow steadied and looked through the glass, into the reception room. He recognized at once that his was a hidden observation post, for The Shadow had used these Argus mirrors before.

The reception room was empty. Its ornate furnishings, the heavy curtains, even the crackling fire on the hearth, reminded The Shadow of the house on H Street where he had first met Hugo Creelon. Once again, The Shadow was looking into the master-spy's lair; this time from Creelon's own observatory.

LUCK was at last with The Shadow. On this occasion, Creelon had failed to come to his lookout post to watch a visitor's arrival. The reason for the spy's absence became immediately apparent. The door from the hall opened; the bespectacled secretary bowed Frederick Bryland into the reception room.

As the ex–major seated himself, curtains spread on the far side of the room. Hugo Creelon appeared; against the blue of the curtains, the spy's pale face showed an expression of annoyance. Creelon had been elsewhere when Bryland's arrival had been signaled. He had not been able to reach the lookout post in time to take a preview of his visitor.

Bryland saw Creelon. The Shadow watched the thief arise to meet the spy. Low–toned words came to The Shadow's ears, in voices that he recognized: Bryland's smooth tone; Creelon's choppy mode of speech.

The lookout post was fitted with a loud–speaker, tuned down almost to a whisper. Creelon had equipped the spot for his own use and had ignored no detail. All that was said in the reception room could be heard by The Shadow.

There was no drawl to the voices. The only lingering hallucination that still afflicted The Shadow was a false sensation of a pause after each man spoke. That illusion told The Shadow that he must continue to make allowance for the effect of the hashish. His senses could gauge motion and sound almost normally, but his brain became dreamy during intervals between.

Whether or not he would be capable of swift action on his own was something that The Shadow would not know until occasion forced it. For the present, The Shadow preferred to postpone such a test. There would be a time for it later, when a real crisis arrived. Then—no matter what the risk—The Shadow would attempt action.

That time would come when Frederick Bryland delivered the National Emergency Code to Hugo Creelon. When the NEC changed hands, The Shadow would have his last opportunity to save the vital document.

CHAPTER VIII. CROOKS MAKE TERMS

NINA VALENCITA had performed her mission capably during her short interview with Frederick Bryland. From the moment that he met Hugo Creelon, Bryland showed no doubt regarding the character of the superspy.

Bryland's smile showed admiration; it was the tribute of one rogue to another. He spoke freely, easily, as he opened negotiations with Creelon.

“I had hoped that a worker of your caliber might be in Washington,” declared Bryland. “I counted on it when I took the NEC. I needed some one to whom I could sell it; keen enough, also, to learn that I possessed it.”

Creelon accepted the compliments with a bow. As the two sat down, Bryland's expression sobered.

“There is something important that I must ask you,” he said to Creelon. “I left no loophole through which the government agents could suspect me. How did you learn that I had the code?”

“Through Follingsby's cane,” replied Creelon. “Or rather, Darson's cane, that Follingsby was carrying by mistake.”

Bryland nodded approvingly; then winced.

“That was a weak point,” he admitted. “Therefore, it worries me. Perhaps some one else has guessed it—”

“Another did,” inserted Creelon. “He was the man whom you failed to kill. He gave me my information.”

“You mean Cranston! Was he one of your agents?”

“No. Cranston was the person whom you suspected him to be. He was The Shadow!”

Bryland gripped the arms of his chair; exclaimed, in startled fashion:

“If Cranston is The Shadow—”

“I said that Cranston was The Shadow,” reminded Creelon, coldly. “He will trouble us no longer, Bryland. I kept him alive only until I knew that you had arrived here.”

“The Shadow became your prisoner!”

Creelon nodded. Blandly, he told how he had posed as Agent F-3. From his own statement, he practically admitted that he had murdered the real F-3 in Paris. That did not shock Bryland. Instead, it brought a sparkle of evil approval from the ex-major's deep-set eyes.

FROM the Argus mirror, The Shadow could see a tightening of Creelon's straight lips. The master-spy was coming to the matter of business; but he was cagily avoiding mention of the NEC until he had sounded Creelon further.

“Nina Valencita came here after she saw you,” informed Creelon. “She said that a girl was with you at the Apollo Club; that the girl saw her and did not like it.”

Bryland grimaced; shrugged his shoulders.

“The girl was Martha Leeth,” he said. “The congressman's daughter. She made a scene, and it looked bad. There were people about.”

“Did they see Nina talking to you?”

“Yes. But I doubt that it mattered. Nina Valencita is well accepted in all Washington circles.”

Creelon arose; shook his head as he stepped toward the fire to warm his hands. Facing about, the spy looked toward Bryland. From the mirror, The Shadow could see the false ruddiness that came to Creelon's features. All that they needed was the evil smile; then the firelight would give them their satanic glow.

“I am not sure about Nina,” expressed Creelon, slowly, still preserving his straight-lipped pose. “She is reliable; otherwise I would not have employed her. But her status in Washington may be less established than I supposed. Her trip to Spain, during the revolution there, was the sort of expedition that would have placed her name on a doubtful list.

“I think that you should have an alibi to cover your meeting with Nina. Therefore, I have provided these. Nina wrote them hastily while she was here; but they will suffice. Particularly because she showed skill in writing love notes.”

Creelon produced a small packet of note papers. Bryland scanned them, he recognized the handwriting of Nina. He smiled as he read them; nodded approvingly.

“All back dated,” he remarked. “They certainly convey the impression that Nina was once in love with me. They go well with this note that she had delivered to me at the Apollo Club, saying that it was important for

me to see her.”

BRYLAND produced the note in question; showed it to Creelon and added it to the fake love letters. He started to put the batch in his inside pocket; stopped because of a sealed envelope that bulked there. The Shadow saw an avaricious sparkle in the eyes of Hugo Creelon. The spy knew that Bryland's big envelope could contain the NEC.

“I shall place these letters where they can be found,” asserted Bryland, “if any one—suspecting my meeting with Nina—should search my apartment. I shall have no trouble covering my visit here. Martha Leeth and I are supposedly at the theater this evening.”

“What about the girl?” quizzed Creelon. “Will she support your story?”

“She does not have to,” chuckled Bryland. “I took her home instead of to the theater. I purposely made her angrier than before. That put her in a tantrum. I told her that she was a snippy child, that I would telephone later, to receive her apology. She retorted that she would not answer the telephone, no matter how often it rang. The rest of the family is away. Calls to the Leeth home will therefore be ignored.”

Bryland was explaining the exact reason why Vic Marquette had called the Leeth house without result. Bryland's arrangement pleased Creelon. He waited to hear if the thief had more to say. Bryland's silence made it apparent that he had finished. Creelon spoke. He questioned:

“You obtained the NEC complete?”

“I did,” replied Bryland. “Exactly as I took it from Follingsby's apartment.”

“You have kept it intact?”

“Precisely as I found it.”

“You have made no copies of it?”

“None. Not only did I lack the time to do so; but I had no reason to make copies. I might add—needlessly, perhaps—that no one other than myself has even seen the NEC since I acquired it.”

Creelon eyed Bryland steadily; then questioned in choppy tone:

“What is your price?”

“One million dollars!”

Creelon did not flex a muscle when he heard Bryland's demand. He gave the price consideration; then snapped his answer:

“Too high!”

Bryland delivered an indulgent laugh; steadied his hands to rise from his chair.

“It is worth two million,” he told the spy. “You will probably receive more for it. I warn you, Creelon, that my offer will not be lowered.”

On his feet, Bryland placed his hand to his inside pocket, gripped the fat envelope and added:

“My next price will be one million two hundred thousand dollars. I consider that the danger of keeping the NEC should be worth the difference.”

CREELON remained immobile. Through the mirror, The Shadow watched the spy intently. Creelon looked almost ready to accept the million dollar terms. If he did, the NEC might change hands before The Shadow's eyes.

That would force the issue. The Shadow had steadied; he had already determined to undertake battle, if necessary, even against odds. The present seemed to offer The Shadow the sole opportunity that remained to him. He knew that he could reach the reception room, enter there and cover both Creelon and Bryland while they still stood together, their transaction uncompleted.

One against two. Small odds for The Shadow. He was weak, though; and these adversaries were men of the most dangerous sort. Balancing that, however, was a factor that could serve The Shadow. He could attack by surprise, startling both crooks by the sight of an enemy whom they believed already dead.

The Shadow drew back slowly from the plate glass; then paused. It was neither weariness nor uncertainty that halted him. His eyes fixed themselves first upon Creelon, then on Bryland. In each face, The Shadow saw something that enlightened him; yet which neither of the trading crooks noted in the other.

The lips of Hugo Creelon were beginning the insidious smile that could transform the spy's face into that of a Mephistopheles. The square-jawed features of Frederick Bryland had taken on a firmness that meant more than mere stubbornness.

For some reason, both were confident that the other would come to terms. Through The Shadow's brain flashed the double answer. He foresaw exactly what was due; he could tell the sort of trump cards that these crooks would play. That was why The Shadow made no farther move. He remained in his position behind the Argus mirror.

Creelon's features showed their satanic contour more plainly. Bryland noted it; saw the spy's hand move toward the wall. Still gripping his inside pocket with his left hand, Bryland shot his right toward his side pocket. His move was hopelessly late.

Creelon had buzzed a signal with a hidden button beside the fireplace. Purple curtains ripped from the walls of the reception room. In surged Creelon's crew of huskies.

Bryland had no chance against the inrush. He was unable to twist away as The Shadow had done, the night before. Attackers struck him in a solid mass; snatched his revolver from his fist before it was half from his pocket. They rolled him to the floor; pinned his arms behind him and hoisted him upright for Creelon to see.

Gloating, Creelon stepped forward; he plucked the big envelope that projected plainly from Bryland's inside pocket. Harshly, Creelon hissed:

“You fool! If you had named a reasonable price, I would have paid you! A million dollars! Bah! You will be content with nothing! You can have your life, because your death would be of no consequence to me.

“Go! Denounce me if you dare! Your statement that I hold the National Emergency Code will be a confession of your own theft. No one will believe that I, the guest of a great embassy, could be an international spy.”

The strong-arm squad was ready to drag Bryland away. Creelon restrained them. To complete his triumph, he wanted to flaunt the stolen NEC in the face of the tricked thief who had lost it. The envelope in Creelon's hands was a prize that Bryland could not hope to reclaim.

Nor could The Shadow gain it. He had passed his opportunity. Nevertheless, he waited behind the mirror. Creelon's elation might have changed to puzzlement had he seen The Shadow. The spy's look would have altered, too, had he bothered to look at Bryland, for the ex-major still showed a grim smile.

Creelon, however, was thinking of nothing but the envelope. He ripped it open; hissed his triumph as he tugged thick-folded papers from within. With hands that showed eagerness, Creelon spread the folds to gain his first gaze at the stolen NEC.

It was then that the master-spy stood rigid; his demoniac features soured. Even from the mirror, The Shadow could see the cause of Creelon's suppressed rage, for the firelight's glow showed the papers that Creelon held.

Frederick Bryland had tricked Hugo Creelon; the thief had made the spy overplay his game. The tight-packed papers from the envelopes were blanks! Bryland had not brought the precious NEC to Creelon's lair!

CHAPTER IX. THE WAY OUT

BRYLAND'S ruse had worked with Creelon, but not with The Shadow. Watching the events that had preceded the climax, The Shadow had pictured the surprise that was due, and with it, he gained new opinions of the two crooks.

Bryland, to date, had seemed more of an opportunist than a conniver. Creelon had more or less established himself as a master of intrigue. That situation was changed. Comparing the pair, The Shadow conceded that Bryland could be the more dangerous.

The ex-major was a lone worker; one who relied on his own wits. He would dare anything. His attack on The Shadow at the Hotel Halcyon had not been sheer madness. Bryland had calculated the consequences before making the attempt. He had pulled out of that jam neatly. He was ready to do the same in his present situation.

As for Creelon, it was plain that his international reputation was exaggerated. True, the spy could scheme; but only in a prearranged fashion, as he had done when he posed as Agent F-3. Creelon's tactics were like those of a prize fighter who telegraphs his punches. Any one expecting sharp work from Creelon, could be prepared for it.

That was where Bryland had held an advantage over The Shadow. Bryland had known that he was going to meet Creelon. If The Shadow had suspected that the supposed F-3 was actually Creelon, he could have handled the master-spy accordingly.

Creelon's real trumps were his precautions. The safe pose as F-3, his present residence in a foreign embassy; the constant support of a strong-arm crew, those were the factors that made the master-spy formidable.

His fists clutching a sheaf of blank papers, Creelon was faced with the problem of dealing anew with Bryland. The Shadow was convinced that the spy would not outsmart the ex-major. Bryland was cool enough to counter either craftiness or threats.

Creelon began with strategy. He managed to repress the demonish scowl that adorned his face. Straightening

his lips, he faced Bryland; then gave an imperious gesture. The huskies released the major; they slouched off through the curtains.

Creelon called back the fellow who had taken Bryland's gun. Holding the weapon by the barrel, Creelon began to tap his other palm with the gun handle.

“You are clever, major,” complimented Creelon, in a choppy tone. “I admire cleverness. Therefore, I shall give you another chance. Bring me the code. I shall pay you a half million for it.”

Bryland's retort was a head tilt; a laugh in Creelon's face. It showed his contempt for such a promise.

“Perhaps you would like the money first,” suggested Creelon. “Very well. Nina will bring it to you. She will receive the code in its place.”

A headshake from Bryland. The thief announced:

“The price is still a million dollars.”

“A million, then,” shrugged Creelon. “Let us forget this haggle over price. Notify me when and where you wish to meet Nina. She will be there.”

“It seems quite curious, Creelon,” observed Bryland, “that you would so willingly trust Senorita Valencita with so large a sum as a million dollars. What guarantee would I have that she would reach me?”

“Nina will be watched,” declared the spy. “My men are unsuspected in Washington. They will follow her; close in immediately, if she offers the slightest trouble—”

Creelon broke off. Bryland was eyeing him with a wise smile. As the spy chewed his stiffened lips, Bryland derided him.

“Your men will be close,” sneered the thief. “Close enough to seize Nina; therefore, close enough to capture me again, as they did to-night! It is too thin, Creelon! Suppose that I suggest the way that the exchange is to be made.”

Creelon's reply was a quick step backward. The spy gave a twist to Bryland's revolver; had the ex-major covered in an instant. As he confronted Bryland in that fashion, Creelon snarled: “I shall make the terms! You are helpless here! I shall hold you, while my men search your premises!”

“They will never find the place where the code is hidden.”

“You think not?” Creelon's glare was livid. “Suppose I worm it from you with torture, Bryland. I have done it with others, more stubborn than you.”

“Quite useless. I have placed the code where you cannot gain it. I took precautions before I came here. In fact, if I do not leave here within the next thirty minutes, the National Emergency Code may be destroyed!”

BRYLAND'S statement was emphatic. It impressed Creelon; made him wonder what measures Bryland had chosen. The spy pictured the NEC as hidden in some mechanical contrivance that contained a time-fuse, ready to burst with flame and consume the stolen document at a given hour.

The Shadow, however, was not deceived. He knew that Bryland was depending upon sheer bluff. Again, the

smooth thief was outguessing the master-spy. Bryland watched Creelon; waited until the proper moment, then spoke in persuasive tone.

“Why not be reasonable about this matter?” he queried. “You have gone at it wrongly, Creelon. You placed the burden upon me, instead of yourself. That was a mistake. I have the NEC. My position is dangerous. Therefore, I should be the one to make the deal.”

Creelon considered. He decided to listen further.

“We have settled on the price,” declared Bryland, briskly. “You run no risk in giving me the money. I would prefer to rid myself of the National Emergency Code. If I tried to keep it, you could easily block me from selling it elsewhere.”

“Quite true,” admitted Creelon, dryly. “Provided that you actually have the NEC. There is still a chance that you were merely smart enough to claim its ownership when Nina questioned you.”

This brought a smile from Bryland.

“We can both be safe, Creelon,” he remarked. “You have already negotiated with a certain foreign power; you are living here, at that nation's own legation. You have merely to arrange for that power to have a million dollars waiting elsewhere.”

“Elsewhere?”

“Yes. At its legation in another country, of my choice. Prove to me that the money will actually be there; that I shall have no difficulty obtaining it. I can then leave immediately for the designated place.”

“But the code—”

“Will be here in Washington. In a spot where you can easily obtain it. I shall advise you of the place after I begin my journey. If you do not find it intact, you can denounce me.”

The plan was reasonable. Creelon's own expression admitted the fact. Bryland, moreover, knew that he was safe; for he was forcing the embassy to take part in the deal. The thief felt sure that such a measure would protect him.

Creelon, however, saw one objection. The embassy would be in a hot spot, if forced to denounce Creelon should he fail to deliver the code. At the same time, he was figuring a way out of that difficulty.

“I think that matters can be arranged,” he decided. “I shall have to discuss it with certain persons here. Tomorrow night would probably be the earliest time for a decision.”

“That will be soon enough,” expressed Bryland. “I can assure you that the NEC will be safe until you need it.”

CREELON took the barrel of the revolver that he still held. He extended Bryland's weapon to its owner; pressed a button on the far side of the fireplace. The two rogues chatted until the secretary appeared. Creelon ordered him to conduct Bryland below. After the two had gone, Creelon went to an inner room.

That fact pleased The Shadow. It meant that Creelon would not immediately learn of the bad luck that Jarruth had encountered. There was still time for The Shadow to find a way out from this lair where he had been held

captive. It was imperative, too, that The Shadow take up Bryland's trail.

Moving from his place behind the glass, The Shadow reached the hallway door without trouble. Gripping Jarruth's gun, he stepped into the passage. The door of the prison room was still closed; Jarruth had not yet regained consciousness. The Shadow moved along the hallway and reached the end door.

He found at once that the barrier was formidable. Its lock could not be easily picked; moreover, The Shadow's cloak lacked the tools he needed. They had been in a special belt beneath his coat and Creelon had evidently taken the belt as a trophy. It would be folly to riddle the lock with bullets. Shots would bring Creelon's full squad of warriors.

The Shadow remembered the second button that Creelon had pressed. He moved to the door of the reception room, opened it slowly inward, listening as he did. Silence lay within. The Shadow entered.

The room was deserted; the firelight threw long, flickering streaks that showed The Shadow as a weird shape of blackness. The Argus mirror's silvery surface reflected the motion of the cloaked form that slowly crossed the room.

The Shadow had rallied enough to move in steady fashion, even though he could not exert himself to real swiftness. He stopped at the fireplace, rested a moment, then pressed the button. There was no responding tingle; the bell was probably some distance from this room. There was another sound, however, that The Shadow heard.

Footsteps were coming from another room. Creelon was returning. Departure was essential. The Shadow's straining ears caught the footsteps when they were still quite distant. They showed no hurry; hence there was time for The Shadow to reach the hall.

INSTEAD of heading straight for the hallway door, The Shadow followed the wall. His policy was a wise one; he was able to travel at nearly double his former speed. The swift effort made him stumble; the wall was close enough for him to regain his balance.

The Shadow reached the door, had it open before there was a stir from the purple curtains at the inner end of the reception room.

Stepping through the doorway, The Shadow faced about as he closed the barrier. His revolver was ready as the door inched shut. Creelon stepped into view; fortunately for his own welfare, the spy did not come farther; nor did he see the slow, final closing of the door. Creelon was stopping by the fireplace, attracted by its warmth.

The Shadow caught a last glimpse of the spy's triangular face, its forehead furrowed. Creelon was evidently giving further thought to Bryland's terms.

The Shadow turned toward the end door, where he expected the secretary to appear. It would be his move to intimidate the man from the embassy, the moment that the fellow arrived. Chances were that the secretary would appear before Creelon decided to come out into the hall.

There was another factor, however, that The Shadow had discounted. His first knowledge of it came when he stepped into the clear center of the hallway. The Shadow heard a creep behind him. He swung painfully about to see a husky figure taking a long leap in his direction.

The attacker was Jarruth. The servant had recuperated. Groggily, he had come from the prison room; he was

on his way to report to Creelon when he saw The Shadow. Jarruth's surge was inspired by two motives. One was hope for revenge; the other was his recollection of The Shadow's weakness.

Jarruth discounted his own grogginess; otherwise, he would not have made the rush. The Shadow was turned about, aiming with the revolver. His finger faltered on the trigger. Jarruth took that as evidence that The Shadow was as slow as before. He never realized that The Shadow wanted to avoid gunfire at this vital moment.

The Shadow went backward as Jarruth hit him. The servant drove him toward the far wall, with the power of a charging bull; The Shadow yielding ground as if he had been a figure of straw. He managed to keep his gun wrist from Jarruth's grasp; he tightened a bit as they neared the end door.

That was all; but it was enough. It swung Jarruth toward a corner, where he did not block the door.

The Shadow's gun hand was high. Jarruth clutched for the throat beneath the black cloak collar. The Shadow's shoulders went to the wall, they steadied there, as Jarruth tried to bounce the hatted head against the edge of the doorway. The Shadow's head bobbed sidewise, escaping the shock. His gun hand came downward.

Starting that blow, The Shadow relied on its sheer momentum. The stroke sledged to its destination. Jarruth took the bash on the side of his head. His face took on a grimace that it had shown when the folding bed floored him. Heavily, the husky slumped from The Shadow's grip.

AS Jarruth sprawled, The Shadow gave him a knee jolt that spilled him away from the end door. A moment later, there was a sound of a clicking latch. Before The Shadow could turn, the door opened in the other direction. A man stepped across the threshold.

It was the secretary, coming to answer a summons that he thought Creelon had given. The fellow stopped with a look of surprise as he saw Jarruth; then swung suddenly to face The Shadow. The shout that he gave was a harsh one; a far louder sound than the thump of Jarruth's body.

It was a warning that would be heard, that cry; and with it, the shouter showed his willingness for battle. The Shadow was still slower than he supposed; Jarruth had blundered clumsily in the fight, enough to give The Shadow the illusion that he had regained speed. The secretary came upon The Shadow with speed that seemed equal to a whippet's.

Caught in a quick grasp, The Shadow tried to shake off his new opponent. The fellow was wiry; he had more advantage than he expected. He felt The Shadow slipping beneath his clutch; but he did not know the full reason why.

The Shadow was risking everything to keep the door from closing. That portal would be his only outlet in the emergency that was to come.

The Shadow held the door; and in his effort in that one direction, he gained another advantage. His wiry opponent, becoming over-confident, forgot The Shadow's gun hand. It was up again, almost hanging in the air. The grip on The Shadow's wrist relaxed as his adversary sought a better hold.

Down came The Shadow's fist. The secretary dodged too late. The gun glanced his skull; toppled him against the door. There was no risk of a closing barrier; the fellow's slumped form blocked it.

The Shadow managed a swing back toward the hall. This time his trigger finger started to work, as he saw

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Creelon and a trio of powerful followers spring from the reception room.

The Shadow's shots were quicker, though actually unaimed. The spy and two of his men popped out of sight. The Shadow clipped the third as the husky tried to aim. The secretary heard the shots; tried to crawl for steps beyond the door. The Shadow saw the barrier swinging shut; he shouldered it open and went through.

Stumbling upon the crawling man, The Shadow rolled downward through darkness. He heard the door snap shut above. He reached a landing; disentangled himself from the jolted secretary. He saw another flight of steps and started downward.

A door opened at the bottom. A man in uniform stood there, looking upward. The Shadow gave a forward lunge, landed upon the embassy attendant and pitched him to the floor. He saw a short passage to his right; came to his feet and stumbled in that direction, as shouts came from above.

The Shadow had reached a side door. Struggling with the bolt, he used his last cartridges to send shots back along the little passage: a warning for the uniformed man to stay where he was. Footsteps were pounding the stairs. Creelon had sent his horde to reclaim The Shadow before the self-released prisoner could escape.

The bolt slid open. One more tug; the door was wide. The Shadow shoved out into the cold night air, pulling the door shut behind him. Hazily, he kept his footing, found a stone passageway past the embassy building and took it.

THE SHADOW came to a lighted street. He saw parked taxicabs along the curb. Hearing nothing behind him, he paused; then managed a slow glide across the sidewalk. He stepped aboard the first cab. The driver heard him enter. The Shadow gave the taxi man a destination.

As the cab pulled away, The Shadow looked back through the rear window. He saw the huge embassy building, silent but with many lighted windows. He recognized that embassy; knew why Creelon and his crew had not dared continue the chase outside its walls.

No one at that legation would care to have it known that the place housed the most celebrated of international spies.

Riding away, The Shadow was safe. Fresh air revived him; made him realize how much he had been slowed by the after effects of his long stupor. Because of that sluggishness, flight had been The Shadow's only possible game.

Thereby, The Shadow had won his latest conflict with Hugo Creelon. In the clear, he was on his way to deal with another adversary, Frederick Bryland.

The Shadow was confident that further recovery would make him fit to deal with his next foe.

CHAPTER X. THE FINISHED SEARCH

AT the very time of The Shadow's departure from the embassy, Frederick Bryland arrived at a modest apartment house in another part of Washington. Bryland was riding in a cab; from the window, he watched the long line of trees that stood between curb and sidewalk.

Bryland saw what he partly expected: a man who edged from sight when the cab pulled up. The ex-major had spotted Chandley, the watcher posted by Vic Marquette.

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The crook guessed that the man was a government agent. Nevertheless, he alighted coolly from the cab; took his time about paying the driver. If the watcher chose to accost him, Bryland had a passport ready, in the shape of the letters that Creelon had given him.

Still, Bryland was not anxious to flash those faked love notes too soon. He preferred to keep the secret service guessing. Hence, he was careful, as he approached the apartment house, to glance away from Chandley. The watcher failed to gain a good glimpse of Bryland's face.

When he reached his second-floor apartment, Bryland carefully lowered the window shades in darkness. He turned on a small corner light. Its glow showed the apartment to be a small one, simply furnished.

There was a desk in the corner of the living room another wall showed a large bookcase built in three sections, from the floor up to the low ceiling. There was also a door to a bedroom. Bryland did not open it, for he wanted to keep the light from the other room.

From his pocket, Bryland brought the notes that Nina had written. He studied the brief message that she had sent him at the Apollo Club; he shook his head and replaced it in his pocket. Opening a desk drawer, he took out an oblong security box, unlocked it and stowed the letters among some other papers. He locked the box; put it away again.

Bryland started to light a cigarette; changing his mind, he shook out the match flame and tossed the bit of wood into an otherwise empty wastebasket. Bryland was calculating further, picturing events that had taken place while he was visiting Creelon.

Picking up the telephone, Bryland called the Leeth home. There was no response to his dialed call.

Item by item, the crook sized the situation. He had been spotted while talking to Nina. The secret service was on the job, suspecting him as the possessor of the stolen NEC. He was believed to be at the theater with Martha, since the girl was answering no telephone calls.

It was not quite time for the show to be over. Therefore, secret service operatives were making the most of the interval. One was here; he had been watching for Bryland. Why only one?

Bryland chuckled as he gained the answer. A search was in progress at his house in Virginia. Another search would follow, here at his city apartment. It would probably come soon.

Bryland had already thought along this line when he put the letters in the security box. Satisfied that all was arranged, he looked about the apartment to see that it showed no signs of recent occupancy. As a matter of fact, the crook had not stayed here during the past week.

Bryland turned off the corner light; raised the dark window shades. Down on the tree-lined street, he saw an automobile nose to the curb with lights off. Men stepped from the car. They were the visitors whom Bryland expected. The crook was ready for his final move.

DOWNSTAIRS, Vic Marquette entered, followed by a group of operatives. Seeing no sign of Chandley, Vic started to the second floor. At the top of the stairs, he found the watcher. Chandley gave whispered report.

"There was a fellow came in here," he told Vic. "I don't know whether it was Bryland, or somebody who has another apartment. You said to let Bryland through; but not to pass him out."

Marquette nodded. He remembered his instructions.

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“That's why I came up here,” continued Chandley. “There's Bryland's door” —he thumbed along the hall—“and he may be in there; but I'm not sure. I didn't want to sneak too close. This is near enough to spot him if he comes out.”

Marquette spoke to another operative, ordered the man to summon the janitor and see if the latter had a passkey. Emphatically, Marquette undertoned:

“If Bryland is in there, his alibi is knocked! He shouldn't be back from the theater yet.”

“How about the place in Virginia?” queried Chandley. “Anything down there?”

“Not a thing,” replied Vic. “Only a couple of old servants who looked like they'd belonged to the family for a hundred years. They showed us all over the place, from wine cellar to garret. We saw a lot of Bryland's papers, scattered everywhere. The rest of the squad is going through them in detail. Looking over his workshop, too; but chances are they'll find nothing.”

The janitor arrived with the pass-key. Marquette advanced to Bryland's apartment, carefully unlocked the door, then entered with flashlight in hand. He found the light switch, turned it on.

Bryland's living room was empty. It showed no signs of recent occupancy. Bryland's policy of not lighting a cigarette had prevented the odor of tobacco, which would have been a give-away.

Looking about, Marquette saw the closed door of the bedroom. He pointed a pair of operatives in that direction.

A complete search of the small apartment showed no trace of Bryland. The windows were latched on the inside. The crook could not have used one for an exit. Therefore, Marquette was convinced that Chandley had seen some one other than Bryland.

“We'll give a look for the code,” decided Vic, briskly. “Go after those books, men, while I inspect the desk.”

THE agents brought out books in clusters, until the bookcase was bare. They knew that only a faked volume could hold so bulky a document as the National Emergency Code; so their search was a rapid one.

Marquette, meanwhile, had ransacked the desk, ending his search with the finding of the metal security box.

“This could hold something,” decided Marquette, tapping the box. “Before we crack it, though, let's make sure that everything else is jake. What about that bookcase? Is it solid?”

Operatives were tapping the framework of the bookshelves. All were thin; concealed compartments were impossible. Marquette was about to tell them to tap the back boards of the bookcase, when he saw that there were none. The shelves were merely slabs of wood, behind them, the papered wall of the living room.

Marquette reached between the shelves and rapped the wall. His knuckles struck solid plaster. He repeated the action with each section of the open bookcase, passing the upright wall supports between the three divisions. Everything was solid. Vic told the operatives to replace the books.

Examining the security box, Marquette saw that it had a good lock. He did not care to break it open if he could avoid it; for he had taken pains not to injure any of Bryland's belongings. Marquette remembered some odd keys that had been in one of the desk drawers. Perhaps Bryland had inadvertently left a duplicate key to the metal box.

Trying the keys, Marquette found one that fitted.

The lid of the box came open. Vic brought out batches of papers. The NEC was not among them; but the operatives noted a sudden expression of discovery that came upon Vic's face. They clustered close; Vic waved them aside while he began to read the letters that Nina had addressed to Bryland.

Slowly, Marquette's face soured; then, reluctantly, Vic grinned. He hurried to his fellow operatives.

"The joke's on me, boys," declared Marquette. "Here's the reason why that Valencita gal was anxious to get hold of Bryland. She had a crush on the guy, about a year ago. The dates on these letters show when it was.

"There's plenty of chili con carne in these letters. Those Spanish dames can handle a wicked pen when they get started. No wonder Nina was anxious to talk to Bryland! If these letters ever got to her fiance Marthess, the engagement would be off!"

Marquette glanced through the letters again; folded them and replaced them in the box.

"Bryland isn't a shake-down artist," he decided. "He wouldn't have left a loose key around, if he figured those letters were valuable. Souvenirs is all he kept them for. He has some notes from other girls along with them, including a few from Martha Leeth.

"They're dishwater, though, compared to what Nina can write! Well, from what I heard said at the Apollo Club, it appears that Bryland will be big-hearted and give the senorita's letters back to her. Whether he does or not isn't our business. We hit the wrong trail; that's all—"

PICKING up Bryland's telephone, Marquette called Fairfax. He talked with operatives there; learned that the search of Bryland's mansion had been finished, with no discovery of the missing code. That was the news that Marquette expected. He ordered his men to return to Washington.

Five minutes later, Marquette and his men were gone from Bryland's apartment. The letters, so wisely supplied by Creelon, had fixed matters right for Bryland. But the thief had shown smart headwork in his placement of those letters. Wisely, Bryland had kept out the message that Nina had sent him at the Apollo Club.

That message, though innocent in itself, would have been a bad one for Marquette to find. It would have proven that Bryland had come back to his apartment; and therefore was not at the theater with Martha Leeth.

Marquette, departing, was so sure that Chandley had mistaken some one for Bryland that he did not question the point further. Thereby, Vic Marquette lost the trail to another mystery; and an important one.

That mystery was the strange disappearance of Frederick Bryland from within the locked confines of his apartment.

CHAPTER XI. THE SHADOW'S TERMS

TWENTY minutes after Marquette's departure, a distant clock donged half past eleven. The single clang, floating through chill air, was like a signal. It brought a response within Bryland's apartment.

Half past eleven was the logical time that Bryland might be found back in his apartment, after an evening at the theater. The sound in Bryland's living room, however, was not that of an unlocking door.

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There was a click; but it came from an inner wall. Following it, there was a smooth rumble, a sound that denoted heavy motion, yet which was so muffled that it could not have been heard outside the door of the apartment.

There was a repetition of that barely audible rolling; then the click again. A figure crept through the living room, reached the door and listened there. Crossing the room, the man lowered the window shades; then turned on the corner light.

The glow from the desk revealed Frederick Bryland, his square-jawed face wearing a triumphant smile. The crook found the security box; also the key that Marquette had used. Bryland knew that his ruse had succeeded.

Satisfied that the secret service men were gone to stay, Bryland picked up the telephone and called Fairfax. He told a servant that he had stopped at his apartment; but would arrive home within the next hour.

From the servant, Bryland heard news of the search that had been made at the mansion. He expressed surprise; snorted angrily and hung up the receiver.

Ready to leave by the apartment door, Bryland reached for the lamp switch. As he did, he gained a peculiar sensation that he was being watched. Anxiously, the crook looked everywhere.

The room seemed empty; the lamp flung its glow to every corner except one beside the outer door. With a shrug, Bryland decided that he was imagining something. He reached again for the lamp switch.

As he pulled the switch, Bryland was startled by the result. Timed to the click of his switch there was another, from the main light switch just within the door. Bryland did not hear the other click; hence he was completely amazed by the consequence. As Bryland's lamp went out, the ceiling lights came on.

Wheeling about, Bryland blinked. He was dazzled by the light; he was overwhelmed by sheer desperation at this proof that he was not alone. Moreover, he was caught completely off guard. Though he instinctively reached for his revolver, Bryland stopped the move before he finished it. He knew that he was trapped.

STANDING at the door was the intruder who had so completely surprised the crook. Bryland's lips lost their smile; hard though they were, those lips trembled as Bryland's sullen, deep-set eyes spied the being who had tricked him.

The invader on the threshold was cloaked in black; his burning eyes focused from beneath the brim of a slouch hat.

All other features were obscured; but below the eyes loomed the muzzle of an automatic, gripped by a blackgloved fist. The Shadow, finding the secret service in charge at Bryland's, had taken time to fully equip himself. That done, he had come here to find Bryland in person.

Bryland's hands came upward. Sullenly, the crook stumbled forward from the desk. His foot hit the metal wastebasket, tipped it to the floor. From the basket rolled the match that Bryland had tossed there when he decided not to light his cigarette.

That sliver of wood, unnoticed by Marquette, had been discovered by The Shadow. Searching with a flashlight, The Shadow had taken the match as evidence of Bryland's earlier entry. The Shadow had waited in darkness, expecting Bryland's reappearance. From the moment that dull sounds had started from the inner wall, The Shadow had been prepared to dumbfound Bryland.

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The crook's confusion was twofold. Sight of The Shadow was startling in itself; it was incredible, in view of facts stated by Creelon. The master-spy had sworn that The Shadow was dead; and Creelon would have had no purpose in stating an untruth.

Bryland knew instantly that The Shadow must have eluded Creelon's toils. Such an escape was proof of amazing prowess. Added to that was Bryland's knowledge that The Shadow had been at Creelon's hide-out in the embassy. Bryland was willing to concede that The Shadow knew everything that had happened there.

Trapped by The Shadow, Bryland was in the position of a confessed thief. The Shadow had the crook marked as the possessor of the NEC. In addition, The Shadow had solved the secret of Bryland's disappearance from the apartment. Listening, within the apartment itself, the cloaked investigator had certainly guessed Bryland's place of concealment.

It was plain, too, The Shadow knew Bryland to be the would-be murderer who had visited the Hotel Halcyon. The whole situation was a discouraging one for Bryland.

MOST crooks, trapped thus by The Shadow, adopted one of two courses. They either went berserk and hurled themselves at the muzzle of The Shadow's gun, or they whined for mercy. Bryland was too wise to do one or the other. He knew that an attack would force The Shadow to use his automatic. He guessed that The Shadow would not be influenced by a sham plea for pity.

Cool despite his predicament, Bryland adopted measures of his own. He sat down at the desk, reached into his pocket and calmly produced the cigarette that he had foregone a while before. He was deliberate in his moves, to make it plain that he was not going after a gun. The Shadow watched the crook light the cigarette and puff it in complacent fashion.

The Shadow's only comment was a whispered laugh, a tone of low, significant mirth that temporarily jolted Bryland's poise. The crook lost his nonchalance; regained it only after an effort. The Shadow's laugh was a mocking challenge that foreboded ill.

Nevertheless, Bryland decided to talk.

"You're the winner," admitted the ex-major, bluntly. "I went the limit, and I've lost. I staked everything and I knew the possible consequence. So I'm due for whatever is coming to me."

Bryland looked glum for a few minutes; then shrugged his shoulders and added:

"I might as well be a sport about it. Not because I think you'll be easy on me. I don't ask that. I'm a crook, a traitor, and all the rest of it. But I've been a gentleman otherwise; and it won't hurt me to be decent once again."

Coming to his feet, Bryland chucked the cigarette into the wastebasket. He faced The Shadow and spoke in frank tone.

"I'll take my medicine," he concluded. "You know I have the NEC. You've learned enough to guess that I have it hidden here. In fairness, though, it was just by chance that I went crooked. When I saw Darson's cane at Follingsby's, I guessed that the colonel was going to revise the NEC. I took the opportunity to steal it.

"I tried to murder you to cover up. When Creelon made his offer, the only way was to take it. Creelon tried to snatch the code from me to-night"—Bryland was scowling at the recollection—"and he missed out. It's your turn; and since I'm to lose my prize, I'd rather see you get it than Creelon."

There was an earnestness to Bryland's statement. Shoulders erect, the traitor awaited The Shadow's decision. It came.

“Produce the code,” ordained The Shadow. “With it, give me a signed statement of your guilt!”

BRYLAND'S eyes lighted. The Shadow's words, though stern and sinister, gave future promise. As always, The Shadow's terms were unconditional. Nevertheless, they could mean much to Frederick Bryland.

The return of the NEC, intact, would clear Colonel Follingsby. It would prevent national disaster. Hugo Creelon would be left empty-handed.

Though The Shadow phrased no promise of leniency to Bryland, his demand for a signed confession was significant. Holding the confession, The Shadow could assure Bryland's future conduct. Further attempts at crime would be impossible for the ex-major.

Bryland understood all that. He recognized that The Shadow was putting him to the test. He could see why The Shadow would give clemency. Bryland, through his inventive ability, would be able to make amends to the government that he had betrayed.

Therefore, Bryland's move was one of acceptance. Without further word, the defeated thief faced about and stepped to the three-section bookcase that stood against the wall. Pressing his fingers beneath a high shelf, Bryland found the hidden spring.

There was a click; Bryland stepped away from the bookcase.

The result was a tribute to Bryland's skill at invention. The whole center section of the bookcase moved forward, bringing the solid wall with it. The upright wall posts were the supports that covered the joint of the sections.

The rumble from the moving bookcase was not caused by the motion of the wall behind it. Bookcase and wall section were mounted on thin supports of wedgelike steel; blades that ran between the cracks of the floor. The rollers, beneath the floor, were noiseless in operation.

The rumble was due to a hidden mechanism that Bryland had started. It was moving the wall section outward, with the consistent smoothness of an elevator mechanism. Bryland had converted the machinery of an electric lift to serve this special purpose.

The bookcase came six feet out from the wall before it stopped. The Shadow drew close to Bryland, motioned him into the space behind the bookcase. Bryland stepped ahead, entered a deep niche in the wall that had been his hiding place during Vic Marquette's inspection of the apartment.

This hiding place looked as though it had originally been a large closet that Bryland had ingeniously altered into a secret chamber. It was more than a hiding spot, however; it appeared to be a strong-room also.

At the rear of the deep recess was the bulking door of a heavy safe, almost six feet in height. Bryland had made the deep end of the closet into a vault.

BRYLAND paused; he faced The Shadow's gun muzzle, waiting for further orders. The Shadow pointed toward the safe. Bryland nodded; turned about and fingered the dial. Soon, he had the big door loose.

He drew it open, to show the interior of his vault. The space was shallow; at the rear were rows of metal

drawers that resembled safe–deposit boxes.

Every one of these metal lockers was labeled. Apparently, Bryland had designed them as safety vaults for the plans of his various inventions. That being the case, Bryland already had an excellent place for keeping the stolen NEC.

The Shadow expected Bryland to open one of the steel wall boxes. That was exactly what Bryland did.

The cornered crook turned a dial, swung a small door open. He reached his hand into the space beyond, where The Shadow saw stacked papers. So far, all was expected. What followed was a surprise, even for The Shadow. Bryland found a switch beneath the papers. He swung it. The steel rows of boxes underwent an amazing transformation. All those to Bryland's left were dummies. Two rows, from top to bottom, each formed the camouflaged surface of a steel half door.

One section swung inward, to the right; the next came outward, to the left. Shoulder first, Bryland went through the angled opening with a quick, oblique move that showed remarkable speed.

The NEC thief had timed everything to his own favor. His dive was calculated to outwit The Shadow. Bryland never glanced back over his shoulder. He would have been dismayed if he had done so.

Swift though Bryland's move was, The Shadow was ready for the lightning shift. His gun muzzle was swinging after Bryland before the crook could clear the tricky doors.

In one split–second, The Shadow had his chance to halt the bolting crook, as he had handled others quite as slippery as Bryland. A quick trigger tug was all The Shadow needed; but it did not come with its accustomed precision. The last effects of Creelon's hashish still prevailed. The Shadow's trigger finger made a momentary pause before it pulled.

The doors whipped shut as The Shadow fired. A bullet rammed the steel–faced barrier. Bryland was safe beyond; the doors had locked. Amid the echoes of his quick–timed shot, The Shadow knew that he had acted too late.

THE SHADOW had further chance of error. Had he sought to follow Bryland, he would have been trapped; perhaps doomed. The big steel safe door was swinging shut. Bryland was operating it with a switch beyond the inner wall.

Instantly, The Shadow wheeled away, divining what was to come. As the safe door ponderously closed, the outer wall that held the bookcase came sliding back to place. The Shadow had escaped the cramped space of the vault. He was about to be trapped in the spot that Bryland had formerly used as a hiding place.

The dive that The Shadow took was an angled one, like Bryland's; but The Shadow's destination was the living room. He reached it, hurling himself into a ball that he knew would bring security. The rumbling barrier was almost upon him as his shoulder hit the living room floor.

Rolling over like an acrobat, The Shadow kicked his legs clear of the slicing wall edge. The tumbling tactics were speedy enough to save him from disaster.

As The Shadow flattened on the floor, he heard the wall bash into position. The rumble of its machinery was ended; but from far below, The Shadow could hear a responding quiver that sounded like an echo. He knew that Bryland was completing his escape in a tiny, hidden elevator.

Frederick Bryland had rejected The Shadow's test. The thief preferred crime, with its offer of fortune, to the honest path that The Shadow would have permitted. Bryland still held the priceless NEC; and it was plain that the stolen code was hidden elsewhere than this double-walled apartment.

Amid the stillness of the living room, The Shadow's hidden lips delivered a sardonic laugh. The game was not yet ended. The Shadow's mirth was his answer to Bryland's new challenge.

CHAPTER XII. A GENTLEMAN BY DAY

A GENTLEMAN by day; a crook by night. Such had been the recent career of ex-Major Frederick Bryland. Wisely, Bryland intended to pursue that policy. His course began the next morning, when he sauntered from the front door of his old Virginia mansion.

Bryland had gone there directly after his escape from The Shadow. He had slept intermittently during the night, disturbed at times by the thought that The Shadow might have escaped from the double trap. Morning, however, had brought Bryland reassurance.

There had been no visit from The Shadow. That seemed sufficient proof that The Shadow had not slipped free from the apartment wall. The Shadow, still in the trap, must have died long ago.

Bryland had not only put all interior switches out of commission; from below, he had released a supply of asphyxiating gas. Some day— years from now, Bryland supposed—the apartment house would be torn down, and in its wall would be found a skeleton draped in the tattered shreds of a black cloak. But Bryland would not be around when that time came.

Driving from the mansion, Bryland looked back over his shoulder. He had always liked that old brick building, with its huge colonial pillars. The walls needed repairs; the pillars could be improved by white paint. Bryland had always wanted to accumulate sufficient wealth to properly restore the old family home. Soon he would have the required money, but it would not go for that purpose.

After to-day, Frederick Bryland would be a man without a country; but that did not perturb him. He would be traveling far, living high and handsome, with all the money that he wanted. Best of all, his crimes would remain undiscovered.

What if the government did suspect him of treachery? There would be no tangible proof that he had stolen the NEC. No one would uncover the skeleton in the wall of the apartment soon enough to pin the goods on Bryland.

A trip from Washington; a longer stay than he presumably planned; an offer to become a soldier of fortune in the pay of some South American republic— those would be Bryland's steps after he acquired his million.

Then, some day, he would strike it rich. He might find wealth in the Argentine, or Peru—anywhere, so long as the story was a likely one. The wealth would be his million dollars, brought to open view, amply protected by a sham explanation of how Bryland had acquired it.

THESE thoughts were flooding Bryland's mind as he headed into Washington. He had dismissed The Shadow from his memory. That was because Bryland, through his observation of The Shadow, was convinced that his cloaked foe always dealt in direct fashion.

Bryland remembered the Hotel Halcyon; Creelon's mention of the house on H Street; finally, the scene at Bryland's own apartment.

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The Shadow was through. Otherwise, he would have come to Fairfax to invade Bryland's mansion, in the darkness of last night. That was the way Bryland summed it. He was unacquainted with The Shadow's complete methods of strategy.

It never occurred to Bryland that The Shadow would find it preferable to let his enemies think him dead. There were reasons, however, why The Shadow had actually chosen to do so.

Most important of The Shadow's objectives was the recovery of the National Emergency Code. The Shadow knew that Bryland would have to inform Creelon where the NEC was hidden. When that news came, The Shadow would be ready to step back to life.

Rolling along at thirty miles an hour, Bryland looked into his mirror and noted an old truck following him. He thought nothing of it. Trucks were often on the road to Washington. But if Bryland had seen the driver of that truck, he might have suspected something.

Leaning over the wheel of the following vehicle was a hawk-faced driver, whose eyes were singularly like The Shadow's. Overalls and cap made him look like some farmer, driving up to Washington; but the driver was The Shadow, in person.

He had gone to Fairfax, but merely to watch the mansion, not to enter it. When Bryland had appeared, long after daylight, The Shadow had gone to the road, to enter this concealed truck and await the ex-major.

When he reached Washington, Bryland threaded his way to a large government building and parked his car outside an obscure door. Hardly had he entered, before a taxicab pulled up. From it stepped The Shadow. He had left his truck; and the overalls were with it.

The Shadow was wearing the street clothes that had been beneath the overalls. During the short cab ride, he had altered the contour of his face. Its hawkish look was gone. Bryland would not take that countenance for Cranston's; nor would he suspect that the eyes— purposely listless were The Shadow's.

The building that Bryland entered housed special offices of the navy department. The Shadow followed in through a corridor; saw offices where tired-faced clerks were at work. Bryland was starting up a pair of stairs. The Shadow took them later.

At the top, he saw an office that bore the name of Commander Howard Ronaldson. Bryland had gone in there.

The Shadow entered. He found a petty officer seated at a desk in a large anteroom. Without asking the visitor's name, the navy man simply announced:

“Commander Ronaldson is out. He may be back soon; but you will have to wait a while to see him. There is a caller waiting in his office.”

The Shadow knew that the caller must be Bryland; so he decided to wait. He sat down in a corner; eyed the doorway of Ronaldson's inner office.

SOON, the commander returned. He walked directly through to his office. As he opened the door, he saw Bryland. The Shadow heard his greeting:

“Hello, major! Nothing new for you. By George! It seems as though every day that I come to my office, I find you waiting here patiently. Sorry, but there has been no report on the radio tests.”

Bryland was standing just inside the door of the commander's big private office. The Shadow saw him shrug his shoulders; then inquire:

“What makes them delay so much down at Quantico?”

“We're all too busy with routine matters,” returned the commander. “We've been plagued by all sorts of complications lately. You know how it is, Bryland; everything that other departments are through with, they ship on me. This is the first week I've been able to take evenings off. They're still doing night work downstairs. Give me about ten days more, major, and I'll send an official order to resume the tests.”

“No hurry, commander,” smiled Bryland. “I may be taking a trip soon. It can wait until I come back.”

“I'm sorry that you made a useless trip here—”

“I was driving to Washington anyway. To see Senator Releston. I simply stopped here on my way.”

Bryland left. Ronaldson saw The Shadow. Like the petty officer, the commander made no inquiry as to the visitor's name, although The Shadow was ready with an answer. Instead, Ronaldson merely remarked, courteously but briskly:

“I am very busy. I can spare time for important matters. But if your business is of a minor sort, it would be better to see me next week. Provided it can wait.”

“It can,” replied The Shadow, in a dry tone. “I shall see you later, commander.”

As proof that he was busy, Ronaldson went directly to his desk, which The Shadow could see stacked high with papers. Off beyond, The Shadow could see a farther door, half opened. It was marked “File Room” and inside were file cabinets lined so close that there were only narrow passages between them.

The tops of the cabinets were stacked with huge heaps of papers. There would be plenty of work in that file room when helpers could be spared from downstairs. The Shadow could excuse Ronaldson's brusqueness.

LEAVING the navy department, The Shadow made no effort to regain Bryland's trail. He was confident that the crook would go to Releston's, as he had said. The trail could be picked up later, outside of Releston's hotel.

The Shadow was correct in that assumption. Soon after his departure from Ronaldson's office, Bryland was announced at the senator's. Ushered into the room that the senator used as office, Bryland found Releston and a stocky man awaiting him. The senator introduced Vic Marquette.

“Glad to meet you, Bryland,” announced Marquette. “I owe you an apology.”

“On account of your search at my home?” chuckled Bryland. “Don't mention it. I rather expected it.”

“Just why?”

“Because I supposed that the secret service would be playing every long-shot chance in an effort to find the NEC. I have an apartment here in Washington, as well as my home in Virginia. You are welcome to search the apartment also.”

“We searched it last night—”

Bryland laughed as though he enjoyed the news. He was watching Vic, though, to see if the operative suspected that he had been back at the apartment.

Apparently, Vic had not. However, he made other comment.

“We thought we had a trail,” he told Bryland. “That’s why we made the search. I happened to see you at the Apollo Club last night, major.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Bryland. “You witnessed my quarrel with Miss Leeth. But why did that cause you to suspect me?”

“I saw you talking to Nina Valencita.”

Bryland winced; started to say something, then shook his head.

“I can’t give you the details of that conversation,” he told Marquette. “But I can assure you that it was entirely a private matter.”

“I learned that,” rejoined Marquette. “I found the senorita’s letters at your apartment.”

“I hope that you left them there,” expressed Bryland, anxiously. “I promised Senorita Valencita that I would return them.”

“They are there,” assured Marquette. “They don’t come under the jurisdiction of our department.”

Bryland smiled sheepishly. Casually, he put his hand in his pocket and brought out the message that Nina had sent him the night before. He showed it to Marquette; then tore it up and tossed the pieces in a wastebasket.

“I expect to see the senorita to-night,” he remarked. “There is a ball at one of the embassies. I have forgotten just which one; and she mentioned that she will be there. I shall return her letters then.”

BRYLAND glanced at an appointment book, as if to recall the name of the embassy. He chatted a while with Releston and Marquette, remarking that he intended to make a trip, but mentioning no destination. Quite satisfied with the way that he had conducted himself, Bryland left the senator’s residence.

The crook did not know that he was followed after he went from the Hotel Barlingham. Bryland spent most of the afternoon at the Army and Navy Club; while there, he made a brief telephone call to Martha Leeth.

At the club, Bryland saw a stranger—a stoop-shouldered man whom he took for a retired officer. He did not identify him with the chance caller whom he had noticed in Commander Ronaldson’s office. The Shadow had made another change in make-up.

Bryland dined early, alone, at a Washington restaurant. He did not even look in the direction of The Shadow, who was there, once more unrecognizable. In fact, Bryland had no thoughts concerning The Shadow until after dinner. Then, Bryland went to his apartment.

The crook felt jittery while he was there, changing to his evening clothes. Not that Bryland held any remorse over the thought of a dead body that might be behind the bookcase wall. Bryland’s nervousness was due to the distinct impression that he was being watched. The feeling persisted, despite the fact that he stepped out into the hallway twice, to make sure that he was unobserved.

Bryland finally attributed the impression to his recollection of last night's events. Nevertheless, he refrained from opening the secret wall. He preferred to take it for granted that The Shadow lay dead behind that barrier. He did not care to make unnecessary moves while in his strained mood.

As soon as he was dressed, Bryland obtained the packet of letters that belonged to Nina and hastily left his apartment.

There was darkness on a hall stairway, not far from Bryland's door. The crook eyed the gloom as he passed; then went on his way. It was after Bryland had gone that the darkness stirred. From it emerged the cloaked figure of The Shadow.

He had watched Bryland through those final minutes, to make sure that the NEC thief did not investigate the secret strong-room. Bryland still believed The Shadow dead. The Shadow was therefore ready to pursue his present campaign of strategy.

The Shadow would be near when Frederick Bryland again dealt with Hugo Creelon.

CHAPTER XIII. THE EMBASSY BALL

WHEN Bryland arrived at the embassy, he was struck by the contrast which it presented, compared to the night before. Then, the massive structure had been like a frowning fortress; its few lighted windows scattered and forbidding. To-night, the building was a blaze of brilliance.

Uniformed attendants strutted along the sidewalk beneath a huge canopy, where lights glittered. Large automobiles were drawing up amid strings of taxicabs. Many of Washington's elite would be at to-night's function; for it was the chief event of this particular embassy.

Bryland was pleased that Congressman Leeth was absent from Washington; hence had not been included on the invitation list. Bryland had been anxious to avoid bringing Martha to the ball—a duty that he would certainly have been called on to perform, had the girl expected to be at the embassy.

As he passed the corner of the big building, Bryland glanced upward. He saw windows that lacked the brilliance of the others; but they were remote and inconspicuous. Another observer would have supposed them to be servant's quarters. Bryland knew that they marked the hidden apartment where Hugo Creeland dwelt as an exofficio guest.

There was a gala throng within the embassy. Uniforms were plentiful among the guests. So many foreign residents were present that the identity of the legation was lost; for its own official family was widely scattered. Too late for the grand march, Bryland took his station among the side of the dance floor and watched the procession, looking for Nina Valencita.

There were many ladies who acknowledged Bryland's smile, for he was well acquainted among the socialites of the capital; but Nina was not among them. Bryland decided that Nina would be among the later comers; and he idled out into the smoking room as the dancing started.

He knew that if he remained in the ballroom, he would be called upon as a dancing partner. Therefore, he did not return until the dance was almost ended. He made another departure before the next dance began.

IT was on his second return that Bryland saw Nina. The senorita had just arrived, escorted by a tall Spaniard in evening clothes. Nina was dressed in her habitual black. She and her escort were therefore conspicuous when they stepped to the dance floor. Bryland watched the sable-hued pair as they danced among the more

colorful whirl of dancers.

When the music ended, Nina spied Bryland. She spoke to her escort; Bryland saw the man nod. As they came toward him, Bryland joined them. Nina introduced her escort as the Count of Santurnia. (Note: See “The Gray Ghost,” *The Shadow Magazine*, Vol. XVII, No. 5.)

Bryland met the gaze of keen eyes that shone from a sharp-featured, olive-hued face. He saw white teeth glitter in a suave, but friendly smile. He was impressed by the grip that he received from the count's darkish, long-fingered hand.

Nina spoke to the count in Spanish. Bryland understood the words. The senorita was reminding the count that she had promised him the first dance only, and she was adding the impression that Bryland was to be her partner for the next.

The count bowed and stepped away. He saw some one across the dance floor and raised a hand in greeting. Again, Bryland saw sharp eyes sparkle. He did not like it. Eyes that glittered reminded him of *The Shadow's*.

Bryland drew Nina away from the throng; they stopped just beyond the corner of a cloak room, near the grand stairway. Nina spoke quickly, in an undertone.

“Creelon will see you,” she informed. “Wait here. Toyne—he is the secretary—will be here to conduct you.”

Bryland reached in his pocket for the letters. Nina smiled and nodded.

“Buenos,” she whispered. “It is good that you have brought them. If any one sees us, you can explain.”

“I have already explained,” returned Bryland, with a smile, recalling *Vic Marquette*. “Shall I tell Creelon that you will see him later?”

“Yes. Tell him that I was unfortunately detained. I shall explain later.”

“It was because of the count?”

“Yes. I never met him before. He arrived in Washington to-day. Being one of the old regime in Spain, he knew of me and called me by telephone. He spoke of the embassy ball; I had to allow him to escort me here.”

Bryland pondered.

“That's odd,” he remarked. “You would think that the count would first have gone to the Spanish legation.”

“Evidently he would not be welcomed there,” returned Nina. “He belongs to the wrong faction. Forget the matter, major. I must leave you.”

Tucking the letters in a pocket of her dress, Nina hurried back toward the ballroom. Bryland fished out a cigarette; began to puff it while he waited for Toyne. He could still recall those glittering eyes that belonged to the Count of Santurnia. With an irritated laugh, Bryland decided to forget them.

BRYLAND would not have made that decision had he seen beyond the corner of the cloak room. There, a tall figure was stooped forward, receiving a silk hat and a folded opera cloak. The personage was the Count of Santurnia. He had come here unnoticed by either Nina or Bryland.

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For some reason, the count returned the silk hat to the check room; but he kept the cloak. His eyes showed their strange glitter as they turned away. His lips took on a thin smile that would have meant much to Bryland had he seen it. That expression would have told Bryland why the count's face haunted him.

Except for its olive dye, a slight change in the make-up of the nose, and the downward curl that had previously marked those lips, the countenance of the Spanish count was that of Lamont Cranston. The hawkish expression seemed to return with the smile. It announced the Count of Santurnia to be The Shadow.

There was a reason why The Shadow relaxed the part that he was playing. Hurrying past him, The Shadow saw a bespectacled man, who was on his way to join Bryland. The arrival was Toyne, the secretary who had lost his tenacious grapple with The Shadow, the night before.

Music was beginning from the ballroom. No one saw the scene that occurred beyond the cloak room. There, Toyne led Bryland through an obscure door.

The Shadow followed; waited a moment after the door closed, then opened it. He stepped into a passage that was lighted; but Bryland and Toyne had passed a turn that lay ahead.

The Shadow spread his cloak. Dropping, it transformed itself into an elongated garment; from the loosening folds, he produced his slouch hat. Black gloves were inside the hat, tucked deep beneath the band. It required seconds only for The Shadow to put on these garments. He took up the path that the pair ahead had followed.

The Shadow came to another door. Past it, he saw the passage that he had taken to the side door during the last stretch of his faltering escape. There was no embassy attendant present. The Shadow knew that there would be none until after Bryland had gone.

Ahead were the stairs up to Creelon's hide-out. Bryland and Toyne were far ahead. The Shadow took the stairs.

When he reached the door that opened into Creelon's corridor, The Shadow stepped to one side. That door opened in his direction, which was exactly what he wanted.

As he waited, The Shadow could hear the rhythm of the orchestra in the ballroom, far below. Even in this remote spot, one could sense the gayety that pervaded the embassy. Only The Shadow knew the conspiracy that lurked beneath the sham of international friendliness.

In a short while, the doorknob clicked. The portal opened inward. The Shadow was out of sight behind the door when Toyne passed him in the gloom. The secretary let the door close and took to the stairs, not noticing the cloaked lurker who stood so close beside him.

It would have been unfortunate for Toyne if he had detected The Shadow. An automatic was ready to deliver its deadening thud upon the secretary's skull. The Shadow's uplifted hand was capable of driving down swift sledges to-night.

WHEN Toyne's footsteps had faded, The Shadow slowly opened the door – a simple matter from this side. He paused as he saw motion in the passage. A figure stepped from the door of the lookout room. It was Creelon. The master-spy had decided to take a preliminary view of Bryland to-night.

The Shadow waited until Creelon had entered the reception room; then made swift strides for the spy's own lookout spot. Reaching it, The Shadow heard the murmur of voices through the low-toned loud-speaker. A moment later, he was viewing Creelon and Bryland through the Argus mirror.

“Your terms have been met,” Creelon was affirming, in a precise tone. “The legation did not like the plan at first; but at last a way was arranged.”

The pale-faced spy produced a thin packet of papers. He opened them for Bryland's inspection.

“Here is the embassy's own statement,” declared Creelon, “with its seal. These other papers are securities, of no especial value. The letter, however, orders that they be redeemed for the sum of one million dollars.”

“I understand,” affirmed Bryland. “An important country—like the one that you temporarily represent—would not care to have it known that it defaulted on a promised payment.”

“Precisely,” declared Creelon. “You could make more than a million dollars' worth trouble with these. Therefore, you will receive the money demanded, unless—”

“Unless I fail to deliver the NEC,” supplied Bryland. “If I fail, I don't collect. The purchasers of the code will make trouble for me instead, no matter what the cost. After all, the NEC is not mentioned in this official document.”

Smiling, Bryland pocketed the papers and extended his hand to Creelon.

“All's fair in our game,” he told the spy. “No hard feelings because you tried to double-cross me, Creelon. By the way, The Shadow slipped you, didn't he?”

“Yes.” Creelon's lips were firmly straight as he replied. “I wanted to get word to you, Bryland.”

“That was unnecessary. The Shadow brought the news in person. So I disposed of him. I did not think as you once did—that I might have need of him, later.”

Creelon smiled at the quip. Such thrusts were the sort that he could relish.

His lips straightened promptly, however, as he inquired:

“What about the National Emergency Code? Where is it?”

“You will learn that to-night,” replied Bryland. He drew a slip of paper from his pocket and scrawled something upon it. “Follow these instructions. Don't worry”—Bryland chuckled as he noted Creelon's puzzlement—“because there's no reason to. I'm too anxious to cash in this million. It will be in the bag when you get the National Emergency Code; so you will hear from me. I prefer, though, to be out of your territory and Washington as well, before I reveal the hiding place.”

“Very well,” agreed Creelon. “By the way—what capital will be your destination? The embassy wants to be sure that funds are available.”

“Havana,” replied Bryland. “There is a steamship leaving Norfolk early in the morning. I am driving there tonight.”

THE SHADOW saw Creelon step toward the fireplace. He knew that the spy intended to summon Toyne. The time had come for a bold move. Leaving the lookout room, The Shadow made for the door at the end of the corridor.

The Shadow was banking upon high-pressure work with Toyne. The secretary was not one of Creelon's men;

he was merely a go-between from the embassy. The Shadow had handled Toyne under strained conditions the night before. This time, there would be no trouble.

With a gun muzzle between his ribs, the secretary would listen to reason. The Shadow would tell him to go to the reception room; to conduct Bryland without a word. All the while, The Shadow would be waiting, covering Toyne from the crack of the end door. Stationed beyond that door, The Shadow would be out of sight when Toyne and Bryland went past.

After that, The Shadow could follow Bryland. Whatever Toyne told Creelon would not matter. Bryland—still the sole person who knew where the NEC was hidden—would be The Shadow's game. The Shadow was positive, from all that he had seen and heard, that Creelon could not guess the whereabouts of the code without a further tip from Bryland.

Standing in a corner by the end door, The Shadow was prepared for Toyne's arrival. A few minutes more, his bold thrust would be complete. It was the sort of stroke that The Shadow had found successful in the past. It promised well upon this occasion.

Oddly, in this instance, events were to be in too well for The Shadow. Sometimes, good breaks at the start could bring trouble before the finish.

The next ten minutes were to prove that to The Shadow.

CHAPTER XIV. TRAILS THROUGH THE DARK

THE door from the stairway opened. Toyne stepped through and let it close behind him. That was when the breaks seemingly began.

Toyne did not see The Shadow. Coming from the dark stairway into the partial light of the passage, the secretary blinked through his spectacles; let his eyes roam directly past the figure in black.

Moreover, in closing the door, Toyne let it swing of its own weight. As the door came shut, The Shadow did not hear the click of its latch. Instead of pausing to jolt the door tighter, Toyne went along the passage toward the reception room.

The combination of circumstances caused The Shadow to make a quick change of plan. Since Toyne had not seen him, there was no reason to intimidate the secretary, because the door was unlatched. All that The Shadow had to do was step through to the stairway.

There were other factors, however, to which The Shadow gave prompt heed. Bryland would be coming through with Toyne. Perhaps the sharp-eyed crook would spot a lurking figure in the gloom beyond the door. The Shadow preferred to trail Bryland without the latter knowing it.

Moreover, since Toyne had failed to note that the door had not closed tightly, he would logically make the same error again. The Shadow saw a distinct advantage in that prospect. Promptly, he eased the door open, so softly that Toyne did not hear it. From beneath his cloak, he brought the first convenient piece of paper that he could find. It was a twenty-dollar bill that he carried in the vest pocket of his evening clothes.

Wadding the bill with his deft fingers, The Shadow thrust it into the deep latch-socket of the door frame. Pressed tightly, that wad was sure to prevent the closing of the latch. The door would be ready for quick exit when The Shadow needed it.

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Toyne had stepped into the reception room, closing the door behind him. Wheeling from the end door, The Shadow let it shut; then took swift, silent strides along the passage, to merge with the darkness of the doorway that led to the lookout post. He had just reached that vantage point when Toyne reappeared from the reception room, accompanied by Bryland.

THE SHADOW watched the pair go to the end of the passage. Toyne started to unlock the big door, and apparently noted that it gave easily, for he winced. Toyne had made that same mistake once before. He was anxious that Bryland would not notice it, for he imagined that the visitor would report the fact to Creelon.

Bryland, however, looked unconcerned. Toyne ushered the ex-major through.

Watching, The Shadow could see the door thump hard when Toyne closed it from the other side. The secretary thought that he had surely shut it this time. He was wrong. One second later, The Shadow was on his way along the passage, to take up pursuit.

From the moment that he reached the big door, The Shadow began to experience a change of luck.

First, the door did not open as he expected. The latch had partly engaged, despite the wadding. Toyne's thump had been a bit too emphatic. The Shadow had a cure for the door's obstinacy.

He knew that a hard shoulder jolt would loosen the trifling catch; but he had to wait a while before he delivered such treatment. He wanted Toyne and Bryland to be down the stairway; otherwise they would hear the door pound open.

That delay produced new trouble.

As The Shadow pressed his shoulder against the door, he heard a sound from the reception room. Whipping about, The Shadow swung to his darkened corner. He was just too late. An arriving man had seen him.

The fellow was Jarruth, The Shadow's old adversary. Creelon had remembered something that he wanted to tell Toyne. He had sent Jarruth to overtake the secretary.

Others of Creelon's men might have jumped back from The Shadow's view. Not Jarruth; he had a score to settle. Moreover, the scar-faced jailer remembered The Shadow as a sluggish fighter. That had been due to the hashish treatment; but Jarruth, overproud of his own ability, had underestimated the effect of the drug.

Hauling a new revolver from his pocket, Jarruth came forward with a roar. He intended to slug The Shadow, if he reached him in time. In a pinch, he could shoot the cloaked intruder.

The Shadow could easily have dropped Jarruth in his tracks; but that would have sounded an alarm too soon. The Shadow's purpose was still to trail Bryland. He took the best way to accomplish it.

SWINGING suddenly toward Jarruth, The Shadow performed a rapid whirl—about that made the husky gape. Stopping in confusion at sight of The Shadow's drive, Jarruth tried to take aim. The Shadow left him flatfooted.

The Shadow's charge became another dervish spin. Diving away from Jarruth, The Shadow hurtled hard for the heavy door at the passage end; hit the barrier squarely with his shoulder.

The door rammed open. As it swung, The Shadow stopped short; flourished an automatic muzzle in Jarruth's direction. The husky dodged clumsily; so badly that The Shadow could easily have clipped him.

Again, however, The Shadow saw no need to fire. He thrust his free hand to the socket of the door latch. His quick fingers tugged out the wadding.

In that move, The Shadow lost a half second; for the wadded bill was tight. When he freed it, Jarruth's awkward dive had ended. The fellow was taking aim again, too late; but he was moving forward.

The Shadow was through the doorway, slamming the barrier shut. Jarruth hit the door like a charging bull, rammed it open before the latch could snap home.

That meant battle for The Shadow.

Turned about, The Shadow caught Jarruth as he came through and swung hard for the fellow's skull. Jarruth's head bobbed luckily; he jammed his revolver muzzle for The Shadow.

With a side sweep, The Shadow hit the gun away, just as Jarruth fired. The revolver report raised booming echoes down the stairway.

The fighters locked, as Jarruth tried to ram The Shadow down the steps. The Shadow suddenly gave ground; caught Jarruth with a hard clutch. Together, they went headlong, crashing down the stairway to the bottom.

The Shadow took a risk in that long plunge; but the odds were definitely in his favor. Jarruth's weight, coupled with the clumsy power of his charge, were factors on which The Shadow counted.

Jarruth took the brunt of the landing at the bottom. His head and shoulders plowed hard against the wall below the steps. The Shadow's fall was broken; nevertheless, he was momentarily jarred as he flattened beneath Jarruth's settling bulk.

THE quick battle had ended in a surprising lull. Two figures lay motionless in the gloom. The only sounds that reached the spot were the strains of the "Blue Danube Waltz," supplied by the distant orchestra in the embassy ballroom.

The melody was interrupted by a clatter above. Men had reached the top of the stairs. Creelon was there with a squad of fighters. A flashlight beamed downward. It showed Jarruth's form moving upward, as though rising under its own power.

Creelon stepped back, thinking that all was well. A sharp cry sounded from one of his followers. The man, still staring downward, saw Jarruth roll aside. Gaping incredibly, the fellow spied The Shadow.

The cry was an alarm. Creelon, ready for anything, knew that Jarruth must have met The Shadow. The spy snarled an order. His men sprang forward to deliver death below.

The bars of the "Blue Danube" were interrupted by the staccato burst of The Shadow's automatic. Tonguing its flame upward, the .45 marked the closest of Creelon's henchman, the man with the light. That attacker sprawled. The flashlight left his hand and clattered down the steps, smashing its bulb on the way.

There was still light on the stairway, however. The Shadow's guns supplied it.

On his feet, handling a brace of automatics, The Shadow was loosing a direct barrage for the stair top. Only the spurting mouths of his guns were targets; they were the sort that Creelon's huskies did not want. While the master-spy cursed and threatened, his men dived back to join him in the safety of the upper passage.

The Shadow had gained the respite that he wanted, to take up Bryland's trail. Success on that mission depended upon how far Bryland had already traveled. It chanced that Bryland was still close at hand, as The Shadow learned immediately.

Another flashlight glimmered from the lower corridor. The gleam was Bryland's. He had stopped his departure. Focusing his light back to the bottom of the stairs, Bryland saw The Shadow and took prompt aim with a revolver.

It was partly Bryland's momentary amazement; partly the confidence that the ex-major gained, that served The Shadow in this crisis. Bryland was first astonished when he saw The Shadow alive; then sure of himself, when he believed that the cloaked battler was trapped.

Bryland's aim was as deliberate as if the ex-major had chosen target practice. He was set to drop The Shadow forever, with one straight shot.

The Shadow never looked toward Bryland. The gleam of the flashlight was all the warning that he needed. Diving as Bryland aimed, The Shadow flattened himself upon the stairway, past its corner. He was choosing the one spot that offered immediate security, thanks to the lull of gunfire from above.

Bryland fired. His shot was too late. Savagely, the NEC thief stabbed further bullets. They clipped the corner, but could not curve past it. An automatic spoke a sudden answer below the level of Bryland's fire. A bullet whistled past the crook's shoulder.

It was Bryland who was becoming the target; not The Shadow. Turning off his flashlight, the crook dived away. He was leaving The Shadow to Creelon and those above.

THE men upstairs realized their opportunity, for they had heard the blasts of Bryland's flank fire. Marksmen sprang to the stairs, aimed downward and fired savagely into the lower darkness. They waited, expecting groans from below. Instead, they heard the mocking challenge of a trailing, fading laugh.

The Shadow had followed Bryland at the moment the barrage began. The only result that crooks had gained was the death of Jarruth. The stunned man had been riddled by the bullets from the guns of his fellows.

Hard on the trail of Bryland, The Shadow could hear the clatter of pursuers coming down the stairs. Reaching the passage that led to the side door, The Shadow doubted that Bryland had taken it. That passage was too long.

Preferably, Bryland would have slid through to the main portion of the embassy, where Toyne awaited him. The Shadow headed in that direction.

The door swung open in front of him. A burst of music came with a loud swell. Ahead, The Shadow was blocked by a trio of attaches who had been summoned by Toyne. Their purpose was to drive The Shadow back, into the hands of Creelon's men.

Pounding with his automatics, The Shadow went through the cluster. He came out by the cloak room, with men clinging to his shoulders. Another batch of legation men piled upon him; clinched his arms and tried to heave him back into the passage. Some in evening clothes, others in uniform; all had arrived with spectacular swiftness at Toyne's summons.

The opposition was more sudden, more daring than The Shadow had anticipated. His hands still gripped his guns; but his fists were high. No chance to thin these unexpected fighters before they threw him back into the

darkness where death awaited.

There was an answer, though, to this dilemma. The stubborn grapple of the dozen attaches offered the solution.

They wanted to get The Shadow out of sight before his presence was known. They could not use guns within sight and hearing of the ballroom, without risking too much. The Shadow, however, had opportunity to do the very thing that his antagonists avoided.

The Shadow pressed the trigger of one upraised gun; then the other. His high shots were timed to a break in the music. The reports were heard near the doorway of the ballroom. Dancers stopped their waltz; looked toward the scene of battle, where The Shadow was completely hidden amid the horde of attackers.

Again, The Shadow fired. Women shrieked. Men sprang out into the great hall. Commotion was sweeping the ballroom, as more persons heard the sound of the volley. The music halted.

The Shadow delivered a last shot that was heard by every one. More guests were dashing to the scene of strife. More than half the attaches sprang away from The Shadow, hoping to halt the surge of arriving persons.

The Shadow broke loose from the remainder. It was no longer possible to keep him hidden. Secret intrigue was coming to light. The one danger that the embassy feared—open strife that would demand an explanation—had become The Shadow's threat.

SOME one was ready for the emergency. As a few despairing legation men made a grab for The Shadow, every light in the embassy went out. A key-man had pulled the master-switch, to blanket the scene in total darkness.

The bedlam that broke was terrific. None of the many guests knew what had happened. People were pouring for doors and windows. Only The Shadow, cornered by the cloak room, knew that grim attaches were still seeking an elusive fighter who had slipped them.

Stepping sidewise in the darkness, The Shadow blundered upon a man who uttered an ejaculation in English. Instantly, other persons had shouldered up. The Shadow grabbed the chance man who had come from the ballroom; stifled his next cry and spoke quickly in the foreign tongue that the attaches understood.

“I have him!” expressed The Shadow. “Quick! Get him out of sight! Through here—”

The Shadow was shoving the man into the cloak room. Three attaches aided him with his burden. The victim floundered, offering no resistance. The Shadow shifted away as the group went through the doorway. He heard the door slam shut.

Quickly, The Shadow followed the wall to the door of the passage that led to Creelon's. He heard the whispered news passing him. The prisoner had been taken. Creelon's men could go back to their own preserves.

Footsteps hurried away through the passage. The Shadow moved softly through the doorway; waited there, until he heard the door being locked behind him. Ten seconds more, The Shadow was on his way to the passage that led out through the side of the building.

When he reached the outdoors, the embassy was still dark; the orchestra was trying hopelessly to resume its

music, as a method to avert further panic. Cutting through to a rear street, The Shadow saw a car pulling from the curb. It was Bryland's. The Shadow had noted it while coming here in the cab with Nina.

The Shadow reached a taxi; there were several stationed in the rear street. Jumping in, he gave orders to the driver, telling him to follow the car ahead.

The Shadow's quiet tone impressed the taxi man. The fellow knew that something must have happened in the embassy, and decided that his passenger was a special officer, seeking a trail of a trouble-maker.

THE embassy lights came on as the cab pulled away. The sounds of confusion ended. The Shadow's whispered laugh told that he could visualize the next events that would occur there.

Gloves off, The Shadow produced a tiny tube of cold cream, to do away with the olive tint of his make-up and restore his usual visage, that of Cranston.

The panic had ended abruptly, back in the embassy ballroom. Lights, a sudden swell of music, the efforts of the attaches, combined to stop the tumult. The ground floor was huge; there had been few injuries. Members of the legation were explaining that a demented crank had started the trouble; that his gun had been taken away. Excited chatter died as the waltz was resumed.

In the closed cloak room, a trio of attaches were making profound apologies to a puffing man who sat sprawled in a chair, his evening clothes torn and askew. Indignantly, he was identifying himself as a guest who had come here with the party from the British legation.

The attaches were explaining that there had been an error. In the darkness, the guest had been mistaken for the intruder who had delivered the gunshots. They were sorry, very sorry. Full amends would be made for the error.

The space past the cloak room had cleared. The door to the passage opened; Toyne appeared, his face serious. He had carried the news of The Shadow's escape to Creelon.

Across the grand hall, Toyne saw Nina Valencita talking with others who still discussed the excitement that had disturbed the ball. Nina caught Toyne's signal. She joined the secretary.

Toyne conducted the senorita to Creelon's reception room. The master-spy was there alone, standing beside the fireplace, his face showing the evil-glow that the firelight alone could give it. Tersely, Creelon recounted what had happened.

Nina remembered the Count of Santurnia; realized at once how The Shadow had arrived here. Creelon showed displeasure when he learned how both Nina and Bryland had been duped. A moment later, the spy regained his composure.

"Bryland left by the front door, during the commotion," he told Nina. "We are certain of that. There is a chance, however, that The Shadow followed him. Wherever he is, Bryland must be found and warned!"

"I understand," returned Nina. "You are giving me the task. I shall enjoy it."

Nina Valencita was smiling when she left the reception room. From what Creelon had told her, the Spanish senorita had formed a prompt opinion regarding Bryland's next destination.

Confident that The Shadow had been delayed sufficiently to lose the trail, Nina believed that she would be

the first again to find Frederick Bryland.

CHAPTER XV. BLONDE AND BRUNETTE

THE SHADOW was finding Bryland's trail a slippery one. The crook knew the streets and avenues of Washington and was using them to good advantage. Where angled boulevards cut through, making mazes out of crisscrossed thoroughfares, Bryland performed sharp turns and cut-backs that bewildered the driver of The Shadow's cab.

The worst of the situation was that Bryland soon knew that he was followed. He picked an avenue where traffic lights were numerous and police in evidence. Keeping a full block ahead, he halted at red lights, leaving The Shadow's cab stopped a block behind.

Bryland knew that The Shadow could not risk going through the red, nor calling in the aid of the police. In either event, the delay would mean the loss of the trail. Hence, Bryland was willing to dawdle until he found a chance to shake The Shadow entirely.

The Shadow's cab stopped in traffic, alongside some other taxis parked at the curb. The light went green; the driver started ahead. Bryland kept one block's advantage. Soon The Shadow's cab stopped again when the light turned red. The driver leaned back in protest.

"There's no use tryin' to follow that guy," he growled. "He'll take us up and down the avenue, makin' monkeys out of us—"

The cabby stopped short. He was talking to vacancy. Street lights at this brilliant corner showed the interior of the cab deserted. On the rear seat was a five-dollar bill, the vanished passenger's payment.

The traffic light went green. The cabby heard horns toot behind him. He swung about, stalled his motor in his confusion. The light went red again. The chase was over, even if that cabby had wanted to pursue it alone.

ANOTHER cab had taken advantage of the green light. It was one that had been parked a few blocks back; and it carried the mysterious passenger whom the first driver had lost. The Shadow had made a speedy transfer of cabs, choosing a fresh vehicle that scarcely resembled the first one. That was not difficult in Washington.

The first cab had been a lumbering old taxi that looked its part. The Shadow's present conveyance resembled an ordinary sedan. The Shadow had designed the shift to mislead Bryland; and it worked. The crook, peering from his window, saw that the original cab was no longer behind him. He took the first right turn that offered.

From then on, Bryland's course was direct. He was watchful, still keeping tabs to make sure the cab did not bob up in back of him. He never suspected The Shadow's new cab. Hence, when Bryland made another turn from an angled avenue, The Shadow knew that the crook's trip was nearing its end. The Shadow ordered his driver to keep ahead and stop beyond the corner.

Looking along the street, The Shadow saw Bryland's car slow almost to a stop and enter a driveway. Paying his driver, The Shadow spoke in Cranston's calm tone, asking him if he could obtain a car for private hire. The driver said that he could arrange it.

Noting the number of the first house on the side street, The Shadow told the cabby to have the car sent there; that he would be ready for it later. There was convenient darkness near the corner curb. The Shadow stepped forth, blended with the gloom of a fence-topped brick wall and waited while the cab pulled away.

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Following the side street, The Shadow neared the driveway where Bryland had gone. Deep in from the street was a fair-sized, old-fashioned house. Its driveway ran beneath a porte-cochere, and Bryland's car was under that porchlike space.

There were lights at the house door; hence The Shadow preferred another route. He followed the drive a short way; took to the lawn and reached a side porch where lighted French windows showed.

Noiselessly scaling the porch, The Shadow looked into a fair-sized living room. It was empty; but a light showed from a heavy-curtained doorway at the rear. That was the likely place where Bryland would be. The French window gave under pressure. The Shadow opened it and entered through the doorlike space.

Immediately, he heard the sound of voices beyond the curtained doorway. Gliding ghostlike through the living room, The Shadow reached the curtains and peered through. He saw Bryland, seated in the corner of a book-walled room that formed a library.

Two other persons were present. One was a girl about twenty years of age, decidedly a blonde. The other was an old, withered servant, who blinked in confused fashion from a curtained doorway that led directly to the hall.

"I MEAN it, Parcher!" snapped the girl. "You are to usher Major Bryland from this house!"

"But, Miss Leeth—"

As Parcher stammered his protest, Bryland arose; placed his hand upon the girl's shoulder. She drew away angrily; her lips were trembling as she turned toward a bookcase.

"You may go, Parcher."

It was Bryland who gave the suave order. Parcher mumbled grateful thanks and hobbled out to the hall. Bryland stepped closer to Martha. The girl faced him suddenly, biting her lips.

"I just came from the ball," remarked Bryland. "I had to stop there. One can't ignore a foreign embassy's invitation."

"You left on my account?"

Martha's words showed sudden interest. Bryland replied in persuasive tone; his deep eyes were hypnotic:

"Of course, you silly girl! You know I love you."

"Was—was she at the embassy ball?"

"Senorita Valencita? I suppose so. She is probably expecting me to ask her for the next dance."

Martha gave a grateful sob. She entwined her arms about Bryland's shoulders. He kissed her forehead as she choked:

"You—you do love me, Frederick. I'm happy—proud—but I was jealous. I couldn't be otherwise—"

"We are going away together, Martha," soothed Bryland. "Just you and I, where we can have ourselves alone. I have longed for that to be possible. To-night, I am telling you that it really is to be. Our only obstacle is

gone. I shall have money, as much as we shall ever need.”

Martha's eyes were unbelieving. Bryland's smile reassured her.

“Only a few days longer, darling,” he declared. “Then you can join me in Havana. I am leaving Norfolk early in the morning. My wealth awaits me in Cuba. Our wealth, Martha. I shall write you where to meet me. One day by plane and you will be with me. We shall go everywhere, Martha. To Europe—the Orient—”

“Truly, Frederick?”

“I mean it, Martha!” Bryland felt that he had convinced the girl. He changed to a matter-of-fact tone. “There is something, though, that you must do for me.”

Drawing Martha to a settee, Bryland brought pencil and paper from his pocket. He was methodical; and his manner held the girl as effectively as his soothing measures. Martha seemed eager to learn Bryland's purpose as he carefully wrote a series of words.

“You remember that short-wave radio set I gave you?” queried Bryland. “The one with the mixer that I invented?”

“Of course,” laughed Martha. “I sent you messages over it. It is in the little room upstairs, just as you left it.”

“I want you to send this message. It will seem garbled to you; but the person who receives it will tune in as I instructed. You must send it at once, Martha. It will prove that my invention can succeed. It will mean the wealth that I have promised.”

RISING, Bryland gave Martha the paper; held out his arms for a last embrace. The Shadow, watching, knew the importance of the message. Coded amid the jumbled words was the information that Creelon wanted. Bryland had instructed the spy to tune in for the short-wave message.

Triumph seemed close for The Shadow. Once Bryland was gone, he could enter. The Shadow could block the sending of the message. He could convince Martha of its real purpose; he could solve the hidden content and learn the hiding place of the National Emergency Code.

Then came the event that balked The Shadow's hope. Martha supplied it with a sudden exclamation. Moving away from Bryland, she spoke her doubt of all that he had told her.

“You left the ball on my account!” expressed the girl, scornfully. “That was what you insisted, until I believed you. At last I have the truth! You want to leave for Norfolk. That was the reason why you did not remain at the embassy.

“And where are you going from Norfolk? To Havana, a city where Senorita Valencita would gladly go. And who could be the person who is to receive this message? Again, Senorita Valencita. And who can supply the money that you want? Probably Senorita—”

“Nonsense!” Bryland snapped the word as he seized Martha's shoulders. His shake silenced the girl. “Use reason, Martha. Why should I need to send a message to Nina?”

“To Nina!” retorted Martha. “Apparently you know her quite well, Frederick. You have admitted that the message is for her. Go; take it to her yourself!”

“The message is not for Senorita Valencita. If I could explain its real purpose, you would understand.”

“Explain it, then.”

“It is too serious a matter, Martha. I swear, though, that no woman is concerned.”

Bryland's tone carried a real earnestness. Martha weakened. Her eyes were solemnly expressive as they met Bryland's. Pleadingly, the girl declared:

“You must trust me, Frederick. Otherwise, we can never be happy. You know that I love you beyond my home—beyond my family—”

“Beyond your country?”

“Yes! Why not? Your life is to be my life!”

Calmly, Bryland took the paper from Martha's hand. In a low, deliberate tone, he explained:

“This message concerns the National Emergency Code. I possess it. I am selling it for a million dollars. Look; I shall show you how the key-words tell where the NEC is hidden. When you send this message, Martha—”

THE girl's audible gasp halted Bryland. The coldness of his treacherous words had broken his spell for her. Looking toward Martha, the crook no longer saw the trustful expression of an infatuated girl. He was met by the gaze of a patriot. Bryland had put the truth too bluntly. Martha had forgotten her foolish promise while he spoke.

Boldly, the girl was reaching for the paper; her lips were opened, to give a call for Parcher. Bryland blocked both moves as he stepped back; he whipped a revolver from his pocket and leveled it toward the girl. His snapped command halted Martha's outcry.

“Silence!” ordered Bryland. “If there is to be noise, I shall make it! You will come with me, or take the consequences!”

Sight of the gleaming gun riveted Martha. Trembling, the girl shrank back. Contemptuously, Bryland was ready to pull the trigger. He cared nothing for Martha Leeth, if she chose to obstruct his schemes. He was calculating between the consequences of murder and the difficulty of carrying Martha with him.

Murder was preferable. He could slay Martha; shoot Parcher when the servant came. Those deaths would close the trail. Martha's hopeless terror did not perturb Bryland. Again, he was ready to deliver death. It was a chilling sound that halted him.

A sinister laugh, at Bryland's very elbow. A whispered echo from the past; yet so real, so close, that it shivered the crook's eardrums. No one could have ignored that sardonic challenge. It carried a menace that could make the hearer forget all else. Instinctively, Bryland wheeled toward the front door of the room.

Five feet from him stood The Shadow. The mouth of an automatic yawned straight for Bryland's eyes. Frozen, the crook was totally helpless. In his turn, he had drawn his gun from Martha. He could no longer hold the girl's life as a counterthreat against The Shadow.

Martha saw The Shadow; his cloaked figure, his weird laugh made her shudder. The eyes that blazed from

above the gun muzzle changed her emotion; gave her sudden confidence. To Martha, those were the eyes of an avenger; foreboding doom to the traitor, Frederick Bryland.

The Shadow had heard all. He was here as a rescuer. Bryland was The Shadow's prize. Martha could pave the way for The Shadow's departure with the prisoner. Thinking of that, the girl looked toward the hallway door. She was ready to go there; to draw Parcher away, so that The Shadow's exit would be unwitnessed.

As her eyes saw the hallway curtain, Martha gave a spontaneous cry. A revolver was gleaming from those hangings, pointing inward, toward The Shadow. As Martha saw the aiming gun, the curtains parted. On the threshold stood a newcomer to this scene where death threatened.

The arrival was a woman in black, whose eyes displayed a vengeful gleam that outmatched Bryland's glare.

Nina Valencita had correctly guessed where she would find Bryland. She had gained her turn to settle scores with The Shadow.

CHAPTER XVI. THE NIGHT FLIGHT

MARTHA'S cry was timely. The Shadow had not suspected the catlike entry of Nina. He received the warning at the moment when he needed it; and his immediate move showed his strength in an emergency.

Had The Shadow copied Bryland's recent action—that of turning to meet a new menace—he would have been lost. Bryland had not yet dropped his gun. The ex-major could have covered The Shadow in an instant.

The Shadow did not give Bryland the opportunity; nor did he remain where Nina could find him with a bullet. It was too far back to his own curtains; but there was a nearer vantage point. The Shadow gained it, with an instantaneous shift.

Swinging forward, sidewise, he wheeled beyond Bryland, gauging the exact line between the major and the door. The Shadow seemed to pivot on his gun muzzle. Not for an instant did it lose its coverage of Bryland.

Nina, with all her venomous determination, was outwitted by The Shadow's quick swing. She never had a chance to fire. In fact, The Shadow's great risk had come when he slipped past the muzzle of Bryland's gun. Bryland might have clipped him in that moment; but Bryland, too, was outguessed.

The Shadow's shift had completely turned the tables. He still held Bryland covered. Close at hand, the crook was a shield past whom Nina could not fire. The greater space between Bryland and Nina made it possible for The Shadow to find a chance for angled aim toward the door where the senorita stood. Bryland, caught in the middle, was helpless.

It was Martha who raised a sudden complication. Inspired with bravery, the blonde sprang to action on her own. She had started toward Nina; she saw the brunette glare and drop back toward the hallway curtain. Not noticing The Shadow's move, Martha thought that Nina intended to fire.

Hoping to block the death shot, Martha made a long, hard leap for the wavering curtain. She wanted to grapple with Nina—tear the gun from the woman's grasp. That failing, the girl was willing to take the bullet that was intended for The Shadow.

Nina saw her coming. From the curtain, the black-gowned senorita aimed point-blank for Martha.

ONLY The Shadow could save the girl. The measure that he took was a swift one. Springing straight toward

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Bryland, The Shadow bowled the NEC thief to the floor. Landing headlong past the human shield, The Shadow came up with his gun. He took the one target that he could see – the gleaming gun that projected from the curtain, gripped by the veiled hand of Nina Valencita.

Martha was almost at the gun point. Nina wanted her at close range. In momentarily delaying her shot, the murderous brunette lost the opportunity. The Shadow's .45 spoke before she could press the revolver trigger. A sizzling slug found its gleaming target.

With a clang, the revolver leaped from the numbed hand of the hidden senorita. Martha saw the gun's bound; as it fell from the curtain, she dived for it. Nina came through from the other side. The two met in a sudden tussle, with the revolver as their prize. Coming to his feet, The Shadow saw Martha snatch the weapon.

The Shadow had time to deal with Bryland. He swung about, aiming for the ex-major. Bryland had retained his gun; but instead of pausing to fire, he was diving for the curtain to the living room. He had the gun in his right hand; his telltale message in his left. He wanted to get away with the paper intact.

Bryland tripped as The Shadow fired. The pitch was a lucky one. The crook went clear past the curtain; landed intact upon the floor beyond. He had hooked the curtain with his foot; the rod broke loose as Bryland sprawled.

The Shadow, starting in pursuit, was met by the downflood of the heavy drapes. He dodged back to escape the rod's descent. When he disentangled himself from the folds, he saw Bryland on his feet again. The thief was going through the doorway from the living room to the hall.

Glancing over his shoulder, The Shadow saw Martha with the revolver, starting after Nina. The senorita was hurrying out through the rear hall. Cutting after Bryland, The Shadow reached the hall just as the crook slammed the front door.

There was commotion from the back of the hall. Nina had suddenly turned, to hurl herself upon Martha. With clawing hands, Nina was trying to rip the revolver from the girl's grasp.

The Shadow fired. His shot was purposely high. It was enough for the Spanish woman. She sprang away through a small back door that led to a rear street. Martha reached the doorway; fired shots into the dark. They were wide; but they assured the senorita's flight. The Shadow knew that Nina was glad to escape. He was free to pursue Bryland.

THE rumble of Bryland's motor sounded from the porte-cochere. Forgetting the front door, The Shadow cut through the living room; out by the porch, then across the lawn. Bryland had reached the street; a low wall prevented shots at his tires. He was driving for the avenue—the direction that The Shadow wanted.

Reaching the wall, The Shadow vaulted it in time to see Bryland's coupe turn the corner. There was a sedan standing near there; its driver had jumped out, attracted by the sound of gunfire. He was hurrying to the front of his car, to observe Bryland's flight. That sedan was the automobile that The Shadow had ordered from the taxi-driver.

As he neared the car, The Shadow heard the throb of its idling motor. He wasted no time in introductions. He was behind the wheel of the sedan before the driver knew it. Stepping on the gas, The Shadow whisked past the fellow; left him shouting from the curb.

Another chase was on; and it took the direction that The Shadow expected. Avoiding streets that had traffic lights, Bryland was heading for the highway bridge across the Potomac. The coupe reached Seventeenth

Street, where the Washington Monument loomed from the left. Cutting southeastward, it arrived at the bridge.

Bryland made speed across the Potomac. His car was far swifter than the one The Shadow had acquired. Gaining ground all along, Bryland was well in the lead by Alexandria; but he risked no stop there. The Shadow sighted him going through the town, but could not overtake him.

Past Hunting Creek, Bryland was hurtling along the open highway. The tail-light of the coupe dwindled from The Shadow's view.

Nevertheless, The Shadow kept up the losing chase, willing, if necessary, to hound Bryland clear to Norfolk. With him, Bryland had that all-important message that he could not send without a stop. If he halted anywhere, the crook would be risking too much. If The Shadow could keep within five miles of the coupe, he would have a chance to balk Bryland.

Some miles below Alexandria, The Shadow passed the town of Dumfries. Less than two miles farther on, he came to Triangle, where a good road went off to the left. Half a mile farther along the main highway, The Shadow saw a filling station. His gasoline was low; evidently, he had been supposed to supply the fuel for this hired car.

The Shadow saw a double advantage in a stop. He pulled into the filling station.

Dropping his cloak and hat, The Shadow peered from the window while the attendant was filling the tank. His face was again the hawkish countenance of Cranston; his tone was casual and deliberate when he inquired if the service station man had seen any reckless speeder pass.

The service station man shook his head, puzzled. Only a few cars had passed during the last ten minutes. All had been going slow, for this stretch of road was newly repaired, and frequently patrolled. The news struck home to The Shadow.

When he left the filling station, The Shadow turned about and drove back toward Triangle. He came to the road that turned eastward; saw a large sign that he had noted before. Above its pointing arrow, it bore the word:

“QUANTICO”

Bryland had changed his destination. Wise enough to guess that The Shadow expected him to head for Norfolk, Bryland had dodged down the Quantico road. He was heading for the marine base, where he was recognized as a former army officer; and where, moreover, the news of his recent activities could not be known.

THREE miles brought The Shadow to the marine base. He pulled up at the gate; a uniformed marine called for his pass. Calmly, The Shadow stated that he had none. He announced that he had come to see the commanding officer. He gave his name as Lamont Cranston.

A second marine put in a telephone call to the C.O.; The Shadow waited, expecting to be admitted. He was ready to use Senator Releston as reference, in case of any red tape; but he doubted that he would be long delayed.

In fact, The Shadow's wait proved to be a short one; but it brought an unexpected consequence. The marine came from the telephone and approached the car, as if to pass its driver through. Hardly had the guard

reached The Shadow before tramping feet sounded from the darkness. Into the light by the gate marched a squad of marines headed by a sergeant.

The noncommissioned officer stepped on the running board. The squad of riflemen spread on each side of the sedan. In gruff tone, the sergeant addressed The Shadow as Mr. Cranston; informed him that he was under arrest. He ordered The Shadow to drive forward to headquarters, keeping his speed to that of the marching squad.

Two marines boarded the back seat, ready in case the technical prisoner offered trouble. Resistance was impossible. The Shadow's only course was to obey orders. Mechanically, he eased the sedan into low gear and drove it slowly ahead.

It was a long, slow route that the sergeant ordered. Ahead, The Shadow could see the lights of headquarters; but he looked elsewhere for a further explanation. He gained it when he observed the lights of the aviation field.

A plane was coming from its hangar. Two men were going aboard it. Though they were too distant to identify, The Shadow knew that one must be a marine officer; the other, Frederick Bryland.

The NEC thief had played his trump card. He had come to the Quantico field, believing that he could arrange a test of the plane in which he had installed his radio mixer. With the distance that Bryland had gained, plus The Shadow's short detour, the crook had found time to work his ruse.

Bryland was free, carrying the secret of where he had hidden the NEC. He had acquired a plane in which he could flee the country; and it was fitted with the necessary device for sending the message to Hugo Creelon.

To top his game, Bryland had left The Shadow a prisoner of the marines— unable to pursue; helpless to return to Washington to deal with Creelon.

Grimly, The Shadow saw the lights of the plane take to the runway, while a roaring motor seemed to whirl a parting mockery. That ship was rising to the sky when the sergeant halted The Shadow's car at the commanding officer's quarters.

Bryland's night flight had begun. It could mean the crook's escape; his gain of a million-dollar prize. Those results, however, seemed trivial. The fate of the NEC was the real matter at stake.

Soon, even The Shadow might find it impossible to regain the priceless National Emergency Code.

CHAPTER XVII. THE NEEDED CLUE

THE marines were courteous enough when The Shadow stepped from his car. He had pulled the sedan from the roadway; the sergeant made no objection when he pocketed the key. Nor was there any comment when The Shadow carried his folded cloak across his arm.

The slouch hat was within those folds. The cloak looked like attire that belonged with The Shadow's evening clothes. The marine sergeant made no attempt to frisk The Shadow. The calm-faced prisoner did not look like a person who packed a brace of automatics in tight-fitted, well-concealed holsters.

In fact, the sergeant was gruffly apologetic when he ushered The Shadow into the commanding officer's quarters. The noncom could not understand why he had been called upon to arrest so peaceable a visitor.

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The Shadow was conducted into a plainly furnished room where a portly officer was seated at the table. The commandant wore the silver oak leaves of a lieutenant colonel; and his name was Blake, as The Shadow saw by the plate on the door.

The C.O. arose to eye the prisoner; noting The Shadow's attire and peaceable appearance, he dismissed the sergeant and others of the squad. That left The Shadow alone with Blake and a corporal who was evidently the colonel's orderly. The corporal carried a ready service revolver in a visible holster.

"I presume that you would like an explanation, Mr. Cranston," began the commanding officer, briskly. "Therefore, I shall give one. It is not customary for us to detain civilians here at Quantico. Unfortunately, we are forced to do so in your case. Mr. Bryland brought us instructions to that effect."

The Shadow was about to speak, when Blake resumed:

"Bryland's tests are important. Too important for you to interfere with them. Technically, his radio mixer has become government property. He cannot be annoyed by wealthy civilians who are anxious to purchase it."

The Shadow saw the subtlety of Bryland's method. For the moment, his best course seemed to be the undermining of Bryland's status. If he could convince the C.O. of the ex-major's treachery, freedom would follow.

"I saw Bryland take off on a night flight," remarked The Shadow, deliberately. "Have you any objection to stating his destination?"

"Not at all." The C.O. smiled. "Bryland has no set destination. Lieutenant Collings, the pilot of the test plane, is entirely under Bryland's orders. If you care to listen, Mr. Cranston, you can hear Bryland's broadcasts. Turn on the receiving set, corporal."

THE orderly went to a radio cabinet that stood on a corner table. He adjusted a special dial that began to revolve in jerky, eccentric fashion. The Shadow knew that it was set to pause at given intervals.

From jumbled words, this receiver would extract coherent sentences spoken by Bryland. The same thing could be accomplished, less effectively, by properly timed manipulation of an ordinary radio set; but that would do only for short messages. It was the method, however, by which Hugo Creelon was to receive information regarding the whereabouts of the NEC.

Bryland had simply taken over the task that he had delegated to Martha. Direct from the test plane, the crook was prepared to broadcast the news that the spy wanted; and only Creelon would understand it.

Static whined from the radio set. From it came Bryland's voice, announcing a call signal. There was no time to lose. Though tense, The Shadow retained his deliberate tone as he spoke to Colonel Blake.

"May I suggest," he asked, "that you call Senator Ross Releston and tell him that you have detained me here?"

"It would do no good," returned the C.O., abruptly. "There is only one man, Mr. Cranston, who can order your release. He will not be here until the morning."

"Who is the man?"

"The officer who issued the order for your arrest. Commander Ronaldson, of the navy department."

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The statement explained why The Shadow's detention had been such a prompt one. Yet, when he remembered Bryland's interview with Ronaldson, The Shadow could not recall any mention of such an order. In fact, Ronaldson had been quite casual with Bryland.

It struck The Shadow instantly that Bryland could never have gained so important an order from the commander. The thing smacked of crookery on Bryland's part. Calmly, The Shadow inquired:

“May I see the order, colonel?”

Blake nodded, keeping his head inclined to listen for Bryland's broadcast. From his desk, he lifted a typewritten sheet of paper and handed it to The Shadow. The message consisted of jumbled words. Colonel Blake remarked, unnecessarily, that it was written in a navy instruction code.

“The order is not signed by Commander Ronaldson,” objected The Shadow. “Why do you regard it as official, colonel?”

“Because of the code number.” The C.O. referred to a small book on the desk. “The number is J 29 X.”

“X signifies an obsolete code—”

“Not exactly, Mr. Cranston. Simply one that has been discontinued. It would be unofficial in ordinary use; but coming from Commander Ronaldson—”

Blake stopped short, to listen to words from the radio. Bryland was announcing that he was ready for the first test; that he would first speak, then await a return call to learn if his message had been understandable.

“Coming from Commander Ronaldson,” completed the C.O., facing The Shadow, “the order is official. Commander Ronaldson has sole custody of the discontinued codes. They are in his file room. While I have never known him to use X instructions previously, he has that privilege. I must regard the order as official, even though it does not bear his signature.”

INSTANTLY, The Shadow gained a conclusion that might have come to any one in his position. Bryland had often been in Ronaldson's office when the commander was absent. During one of those times, the crook had entered the file room, to steal a copy of a forgotten instruction code—one of the X group that Ronaldson would never miss.

But there was more that The Shadow divined. He saw the answer to an unsolved riddle. Bryland had done more than steal Instruction Code J 29 X, memorize its simple symbols, destroy it and keep his acquired knowledge for later use.

The crook had left something in the file where the forgotten J 29 X belonged. That was where he had placed his million-dollar prize, the nation's National Emergency Code!

A quick dispatch to Creelon: “Ronaldson's File Room. J 29 X”—and the master-spy could acquire the NEC by a simple journey to a deserted, unwatched office in a building that remained open at night. Bryland had left the NEC in the safest place possible: among files that would not be touched for weeks to come.

There was a chance that The Shadow could convince Colonel Blake of the situation. Ten minutes of explanation might do it, with reference to Vic Marquette as well as to Senator Releston. But those ten minutes were suddenly becoming too important to waste in explanations.

Bryland's voice was speaking from the receiving set.

The words that the air-riding thief delivered were hopelessly garbled. They were broken, abruptly altered by the jerky spins of the receiving dial. Colonel Blake thought that Bryland's tuning was at fault, as the crook had said it might be. The C.O. was wrong in that supposition. The Shadow alone knew the real answer.

Bryland was broadcasting on a different eccentric; the one that he had told Creelon to tune by. Among his garbled words, he was giving the fateful message that told the hiding place of the National Emergency Code.

The Shadow did not need that information from either Bryland or Creelon. He had learned it through his own deduction. Through his brain was thrumming the thought: "Ronaldson's File Room. J 29 X"—as plainly as if he, like Creelon, could hear Bryland speaking the words.

WITH such thoughts came the urge for instant departure; one that would save the ten minutes that The Shadow wanted. That chance was at hand. Curiously, it was Bryland who had unwittingly provided it.

The broadcasting crook had garbled his comments so completely that Colonel Blake thought the fault must be mechanical. Forgetting his prisoner, the C.O. pointed to the receiving set; shouted angrily to the orderly:

"Adjust that dial, corporal! You must have failed to arrange it according to Mr. Bryland's instructions."

The corporal hopped to the receiving set. He compared the moving dial with a sheet of paper. Bryland's voice had ended; the corporal turned to the colonel to say:

"The adjustment is correct, sir—"

THE statement ended as the corporal stiffened; his eyes bulging wide. The commanding officer wheeled about to follow the orderly's gaze. Both saw a startling sight. Their prisoner, the calm Lamont Cranston, was gone. In his place was a being whose appearance was incredible.

The Shadow had whipped up his cloak and slouch hat. Donning those garments while eyes were turned away, he had become a being in black. He was sweeping toward the door, hoping to reach the corridor and gain the outer darkness beyond.

"Stop him!" bawled the C.O., grabbing for a desk drawer where he had a gun. "Bryland was right! He is dangerous!"

The corporal whipped out his service revolver. Quick on the draw, he had time to clip The Shadow before the latter could yank open the door. Knowing it, The Shadow changed tactics. Instead of grasping the doorknob, he pressed the light switch on the wall beside the doorway.

Instant blackness filled the room. The staccato barks of the corporal's revolver tongued flashes of flame toward the invisible door. Those shots would have found The Shadow, if he had retained his original objective; but The Shadow was elsewhere.

Wheeling away in the darkness, his motion drowned by the echoes of the corporal's revolver shots, The Shadow was making for the window. It was high, that window; it stood a full six feet above its low sill. Its drawn shade blocked light from outside. The Shadow was counting upon the window sash being as flimsy as the other woodwork in this office.

That was why The Shadow performed a daring move that momentarily revealed him. Whisking through the

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darkness, he took a long spring. His foot hit the window sill. Shoulder first, his arm high so that the cloak folds would protect him, The Shadow crashed the window with all his weight and power.

Glass clattered along with splintering wood and the ripping of the window blind. The whole frame went outward, carrying The Shadow with it.

The commanding officer and the corporal saw a cloaked shape against the dim outside light. As the corporal began to fire, The Shadow was gone. A thud from the ground below the window was token of his landing.

THE C.O. reached the shattered window with the corporal. Both had revolvers; Blake shouted for the prisoner to halt. From the darkness came an elusive, trailing laugh. Blake fired toward the spot where he thought it issued. So did the corporal. Their cartridges were no better than blanks. Hearers always guessed wrongly when they picked the source of The Shadow's laugh.

The shots from the window helped The Shadow, for they brought marines dashing into the commanding officer's quarters. Moreover, they drowned sounds by The Shadow's car, where a lone marine was standing at his post.

The Shadow was aboard the sedan; he had the key in the lock; the car in gear. He was pressing the starter before the guarding marine realized that the automobile had an occupant.

The machine whipped away, its gears whining like a traveling shell from a coast defense gun. Shouts and gunshots followed it; both were futile. The Shadow had studied the roadway during his slow ride to headquarters. He had seen a driveway that ran between a mess hall and a barracks building.

That was the route that he took. The sedan was beyond protecting walls before the marines could pick it with their rifles.

In the clear, the car in high, The Shadow reached the outer gate before the alarm had sounded. The guards had heard the gunfire, but did not know its cause. Their first knowledge of trouble came when they saw the furious approach of the sedan's lights.

Two uniformed men sprang out to give their challenge. They leaped away as the car lurched in their direction, threatening to ram the guardhouse. A yank of the wheel, The Shadow missed the building and hit the open road. The marines brought their rifles to their shoulders, still hoping to halt the fleeing car.

They were expert riflemen, both; they had drilled silhouette targets with rapid fire at a battle range of more than five hundred yards. Nevertheless, the marines missed The Shadow's car. He was timing his maneuvers to their shots.

The Shadow performed a high speed zigzag to the left of the road, just before the rifles belched. He skewed to the right again, then to the left. He stayed there, on the wrong side of the road, just as the marines fired final shots to the right, expecting him to swerve back.

Three seconds later, The Shadow was out of rapid-fire range. He whipped past a road bend, roared ahead toward Triangle. He was giving the old sedan its limit. The speedometer registered seventy-five. Not as good as the eighty-five that Bryland's coupe had shown; but fast enough to cover the thirty-odd miles to Washington in half an hour.

THE SHADOW counted upon slow action at Quantico; and with good reason. His arrest had been a technical matter, handled on government property. It would take a while for the marine commandant to convince the

Virginia authorities that the State police should take over a task that belonged to the marine corps.

Speed cops were The Shadow's main problem; and it was miles before he passed one, going in the opposite direction. The motor cycle officer halted, too late to check the sedan's license number. He began pursuit, from a long way behind.

Ahead were the lights of Alexandria. The Shadow slowed; took side streets and saw the State patrolman travel by.

The minutes lost in Alexandria were not to be regained; but The Shadow was almost back to schedule as he took the last stretch to Washington. The motor cycle cop was far ahead, still trying to catch up with a lost speeder. The Shadow kept his car at seventy.

Washington shone ahead, the glow of the Capitol building vying with the glare about the Washington Monument. The Shadow saw the light-reflecting waters of the Potomac. Off at an angle, he spied distant lights that marked the naval air base.

High in the air were thin beams of light, dropping downward. A plane was making a landing. The Shadow knew the identity of the men in the descending ship. Bryland had been informed by radio of The Shadow's escape. Still in good standing, the crook had ordered Lieutenant Collings to land him at Washington. Bryland had postponed his Havana flight until later.

With his message to Creelon, Bryland had ended that contact. In case of trouble from The Shadow, Bryland would have to meet it. That was why he had turned northward, hoping to overtake The Shadow's speeding car.

Bryland's plane had landed when The Shadow reached the Potomac bridge. A weird laugh sounded from The Shadow's lips. The Shadow had beaten Bryland in this chase. Yet The Shadow's laugh showed grimness, rather than triumph.

The game was not ended, even though Bryland had been outraced. There was still a chance that The Shadow might be too late to gain the NEC.

The Shadow was considering the other factor in this final episode. Coming minutes could bring a new meeting with Hugo Creelon.

CHAPTER XVIII. TRIPLE STRATEGY

ALL was quiet near the navy building when The Shadow arrived there. The side street was deserted; there were plenty of parking spaces farther along. The Shadow left his car near the next corner. He came back swiftly to the little doorway that meant the route to Commander Ronaldson's file room.

Blue lights were glowing from the high-set first floor windows; proof that night work was in progress there. The second floor was black. Access would be easy to the office where Bryland had hidden the National Emergency Code.

The Shadow entered the little-used door. He followed the first-floor corridor, past shut rooms where workers were busy. The only inside token that those rooms were occupied was the light that came from transoms.

No one was present to eye the eerie, gliding figure of The Shadow as the cloaked arrival took the stairway to the second floor. There was a dim light in the upper corridor. The Shadow passed it; in the fringe of darkness,

he came to Ronaldson's door.

The knob gave under pressure. The door was not locked; there was little reason why it should be. No one had ever suspected that a thief would seek obsolete and discarded papers, of no further importance to the navy department. The locking of the outer door downstairs was considered sufficient protection for these inner offices.

The Shadow stepped into the darkened anteroom. His opening of the outer door brought a flicker of light from the corridor; the momentary glow was reflected by the glass panel of Ronaldson's private office. Then The Shadow was moving through pitch blackness. He opened the glass-paneled door.

The inner office was as silent as The Shadow had expected it to be. He had seen no lights from the street, when he had glanced up to the windows of this room.

Noiselessly, The Shadow reached the file room, opened its door and edged through the darkness. Here, again, his route seemed sure. He had seen no lights that indicated persons in the file room.

Closing the door tight, The Shadow glimmered a tiny flashlight. He saw the identifying marks on file cabinets. He followed them, alphabetically; came to one marked "3" that stood against the side wall.

That wall was closer than The Shadow had supposed. On any other occasion, he would have paused to learn the reason. To-night, for once, The Shadow had found an urge that suppressed his natural bent toward calculating caution. Forgetting everything else, he slid the file cabinet open.

The flashlight showed that he had found the right drawer. Here were folders, each with the letter "J," followed by numbers; then the symbol "X." The folder "J 29 X" was thicker than the rest. From it, The Shadow produced a packet almost the size of a half-ream manuscript.

Placing the prize upon the opened drawer, The Shadow thumbed the pages beneath the tiny orb of the flashlight. A dozen seconds were all that he needed to recognize his find. The Shadow had acquired the National Emergency Code, intact.

SINCE Hugo Creelon was informed of this hiding place; since Frederick Bryland was already on the way here, The Shadow had but one policy. On his own, he could afford the risk of battle. But with the NEC at stake, departure was his only course. The code must reach the right hands before The Shadow took personal action against either of the crooks who had tried to murder him.

The Shadow's light went out. The drawer slithered shut. Clutching the clamped pages of the priceless NEC, The Shadow turned to start from the file room. He took three gliding strides; then paused.

There was motion in this room. Creeping sounds told that The Shadow was not alone. Listeners had heard his entry; watchers had seen the glimmers of his light. For the first time, The Shadow was conscious of those stealthy lurkers. He knew that they intended to block him before he reached the door.

Noiselessly, The Shadow halted; reversed his course to file cabinet 3. There was a corner space beyond that steel cabinet. The Shadow wedged himself there; still gripping the NEC with one hand, he drew an automatic with the other. Across the top of the cabinet, The Shadow leveled his .45 straight for the door.

Timed almost to The Shadow's aim, a click came from near the doorway. With it, blackness ended. Ceiling lights glowed throughout the file room. His hat brim shading his eyes from the sudden glare, The Shadow saw the challenger who had pressed the switch.

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Hugo Creelon was standing near the door, pointing a revolver toward the path along which he expected The Shadow. The spy's aim was out of line with The Shadow's position. It was The Shadow who held the bulge. His advantage, though, was offset by the fact that Creelon was not alone.

With the master-spy were three of his hard-faced followers, each armed like the leader. Spread through the file room, they were also covering The Shadow's supposed path. They blinked when they did not see The Shadow; but Creelon, staring in the direction of cabinet "J," gave a snarl of defiance.

The Shadow interrupted with a command that all could hear:

"One move, Creelon, will mean your death! One move, from either you or your men!"

CREELON'S pale face was straight-lipped; as frigid as if it had been made of marble. The spy saw the glow of The Shadow's eyes. He rasped an order to his men.

"Stand as you are! Hold your posts until I order otherwise!"

Creelon had accepted The Shadow's order until he could think it over. Meanwhile, The Shadow was recognizing how he had been mistaken before his entry here. The file room was smaller than The Shadow supposed; it did not extend as far as the outer wall of the building.

The black windows that The Shadow had seen next to Ronaldson's were those of other offices. Creelon had been searching the file room when The Shadow arrived.

One of the spy's men must have been at the stairway, to catch a lucky glimpse of the streak of blackness cast by The Shadow's approaching form. The fellow had reported to Creelon. Prompt as ever, the master-spy had transformed the file room into a snare.

As it now stood, the trapper was trapped; but Creelon's tightened lips showed that he was shaping a plan. Soon, the spy spoke. His words betokened trouble for The Shadow.

"You will be wise to hold your fire," declared Creelon. "Whether or not your first shot kills me, it will mean your certain doom! My men will riddle you, the moment that you begin!"

The threat was not idle. Creelon, alone, stood where he was an open target. That was at the wide space by the door. His men, like The Shadow, had the partial protection of file cabinets. The Shadow would have three difficult marks; Creelon's sharpshooters would all have only one.

Chances for survival were slim, and The Shadow recognized it. These were the shock troops of Creelon's squad. They were itching to train their guns upon The Shadow. If he dropped, they could come over their cabinets, to wing their shots through the opening of the corner space. In choosing the only spot that afforded temporary security, The Shadow had put himself in a fixed position.

Nevertheless, he felt that the odds were even. The Shadow's response to Creelon's threat was a low, intoned laugh that did not please the master-spy. It signified that the first shot would be sufficient to spell Creelon's finish, no matter what difficulties might follow for The Shadow.

Creelon promptly tried another tack.

"You will lose the NEC," he stated, choppily. "If we both die, one or more of my men will survive. They have their instructions. The NEC will reach the embassy."

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Creelon paused, confident that his statement had impressed The Shadow. Thinking the time right, the spy offered terms.

“Your life for mine,” he suggested. “Let me deliver the code at the embassy, then go my way. Your cause will not be lost. You may still be able to persuade the embassy that the National Emergency Code should not leave Washington.”

THE suggestion was subtle. Creelon indicated that the embassy would find difficulty in the removal of the NEC. The Shadow knew that such would not be the case. All had certainly been arranged beforehand; probably Creelon, himself, had been delegated to the task. The National Emergency Code would be lost if it once left The Shadow's control.

At the same time, The Shadow knew that immediate battle could not aid his cause. His position was very much as Creelon had classed it. Unless The Shadow could gain a sudden break, the game would end as Creelon said.

That break could come. It was already on its way. Such realization struck The Shadow. Instantly, he saw his course. It was to parley with Creelon; keep the spy lulled until the time arrived.

That could be done. Creelon would be pleased to hear The Shadow offer terms. Departure without gunfire was the spy's chief wish. He would prefer to have it remain unknown that he had even been to this file room.

“Your life for mine,” spoke The Shadow, repeating Creelon's own words. “That bargain is fair. The rest is not. You demand the National Emergency Code. In return, you offer nothing but a hopeless quest.

“Those were not the terms that you gave to Bryland. He promised you the NEC. He did not deliver it. I hold the prize you want, before your very eyes. You can have it, for a price.”

For a moment, Creelon's stare showed disbelief; then the spy's lips moved to form a smile. Creelon, crooked to the core, was one of those false philosophers who believed that all honesty would vanish under stress; that every human being could be bought.

“You will sell the code?” queried Creelon, eagerly. “For Bryland's price?”

“For Bryland's price,” agreed The Shadow, “but with one other proviso. A condition that will please you.”

Creelon waited, tensely. His men were straining their eyes toward The Shadow, intrigued by the cloaked avenger's offer to sell out. Only The Shadow was looking beyond Creelon, toward the door of the file room.

The Shadow expected that door to move. Until it did, he would have to continue his parley. Minutes might be required; but The Shadow was confident that he could hold Creelon's attention.

“WHEN we come to terms,” declared The Shadow, “past quarrels can be forgotten. But it is not my policy to ignore those who have sought my life.”

“I understand,” returned Creelon, bluntly. “I admit my fault. I was unwise.”

As Creelon spoke, The Shadow saw the expected happen. The knob of the door was turning. The Shadow knew what was due. He played his hand to the full.

“I refer to Bryland,” The Shadow told Creelon. “He tried to murder me; not once, but three times. His

payment must be canceled.”

“Fair enough,” laughed Creelon. “Your wish is already accomplished. Bryland was never to receive his million. The letter I gave him was a forgery, one that the embassy could repudiate. Bryland, the fool, is on his way to Havana, expecting wealth that he will never gain—”

The door clattered inward, its crash an interruption that made Creelon turn. In the entrance stood Bryland, his face scarlet with fury. In his fist, the crook held his service revolver, aimed for Creelon's heart.

Triple strategy had reached its climax. The Shadow, Creelon, Bryland—all had sprung their game. The Shadow's thrust had been the best.

By subtle tactics, The Shadow had turned men of crime against each other. He stood ready to profit by the result.

CHAPTER XIX. DIVIDED BATTLE

THE SHADOW had done more than count on Bryland's arrival. The lights above the Potomac had told him that the crook would be here; and from the moment that he encountered Creelon, The Shadow had known something else. He had seen clearly that Creelon did not expect Bryland's return to Washington. Creelon must have left the embassy quite soon after Bryland had sent his mixed radio, stating the hiding place of the NEC. It had been some minutes later before Bryland had learned what happened at Quantico.

While stalling for time here in the radio room, The Shadow had been considering the consequences that would follow Bryland's appearance. He knew that Bryland would join Creelon as a natural ally; and thereby strengthen the spy's position. Playing a long shot, The Shadow had worked to offset that prospect.

All along, The Shadow had known that Creelon would need but little urge to throw Bryland overboard. The Shadow had supplied the proper provocation, by making a pretense of terms. Stalling for Bryland's arrival, he had lured Creelon into expressing contempt for Bryland, within the ex-major's hearing.

Creelon, himself, had stepped up the game by revealing that he had tricked Bryland from beginning to end. All that came out at the very moment when The Shadow wanted it. Bryland's furious entry was the consequence.

From that instant, The Shadow ignored Hugo Creelon. He knew that the spy's fate was settled. The enemies that concerned The Shadow were Creelon's men. The Shadow's break had come. They were off guard, wheeling to aid Creelon; a task in which they were sure to be too late.

A revolver barked from the doorway. The gun was Bryland's, dispatching a bullet straight to Creelon's heart. Swept by unreasoning rage, Bryland's first deed was to finish the man who had double-crossed him.

Hard upon Bryland's gunburst came the thunder of The Shadow's automatic, aimed for Creelon's men. One went down as he tried to fire at Bryland. The others swung for The Shadow. A quick bullet clipped the first of the pair. The second man got off a hurried shot that ricocheted from the file cabinet at The Shadow's elbow. A stab from The Shadow's gun dropped the man before he could shoot again.

Above the crumpled body of Creelon, Frederick Bryland heard The Shadow's shots. Viciously, Bryland aimed for The Shadow; jabbed bullets with rare precision. The crook was out to reclaim the NEC; he wanted The Shadow's death.

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Bryland's bullets clanged steel. His position was the one that Creelon had originally held. From that angle, The Shadow was invulnerable. He had dropped behind the bulwark of file cabinet J.

Bryland stopped, a pair of unfired cartridges remaining in his revolver. With a sudden dart, the crook bolted through the doorway, off in new flight.

The Shadow came up from behind the file cabinet. He pulled the drawer open. Upon its stacked files, he dropped the bulky National Emergency Code.

OUT through the offices, The Shadow reached the corridor, hoping to overtake Bryland before the crook reached the stairs. The chase proved a short one. Bryland did not slip The Shadow this time. He was at the top of the stairs when The Shadow saw him. Bryland had halted there, to aim downward.

Footsteps were pounding upward on the stairway. Bryland intended to deal with the arrivals. There was a startled shout from below; a scurry as men dived for cover. Bryland was ready with the trigger when he heard a challenging laugh that had struck his ears before.

Bryland knew that taunt to be The Shadow's. He pivoted, bringing his gun to aim as he came about. His trigger finger loosed its first shot for the office door, where Bryland saw the black outline of The Shadow. That effort was too hasty. Bryland's bullet was a full inch wide. It splintered the woodwork of the door frame by The Shadow's shoulder.

Bryland's next slug was due a half second later. It seemed certain of its target, for the crook had completed his quick turnabout. Bryland was speedy with his trigger; but in those tense instants, his attempt seemed slow.

In the scant split-second between Bryland's trigger tugs, The Shadow inserted a blast of his own. His .45 tongued a message for Bryland; one that arrived as the crook fired.

The Shadow's slug was straight for Bryland's shoulder. The crook's gun arm jolted upward as it took the impact. The burst from Bryland's gun was tilted high. His last bullet sped past The Shadow's hat brim.

Perhaps it was a belated hope of flight; possibly Bryland remembered the enemies below. Whatever the cause, the crook spun toward the stairway as he staggered, and flourished his sagging gun downward. The revolver was empty. Bryland's numbed finger could not have snapped the trigger.

But that was unknown to the men toward whom the weapon pointed. They saw the glare of Bryland's eyes; the smoking muzzle of the gun, threatening further attempts to kill.

Two revolvers spoke from below. Well-aimed bullets withered the spinning crook. Toppling from the power of the fusillade, Bryland spilled toward the stairway. The weight of his outstretched gun hand seemed to carry him in a forward pitch. Headlong, the NEC thief tumbled downward, to sprawl dead at the feet of the marksmen who had finished him.

THE SHADOW headed toward the stairway. He heard excited voices that he recognized. He flattened into darkness against the corridor wall as two men dashed upward past him. One was Vic Marquette; the other, Commander Ronaldson. Both were explaining matters.

"Miss Leeth told me about Bryland," expressed Vic. "I sent orders to head him off in Norfolk. Later, I received a call from Senator Releston. He told me to come here—"

"On my account," broke in the commander. "Word from Quantico. Bryland gave them an order, in code J 29

X. There was trouble; they called me. Bryland had no right to anything from my file room.”

“And you called Senator Releston—”

“Because a prisoner at Quantico had mentioned him as the man who could explain regarding Bryland.”

The voices faded. The pair had reached the offices. They were going through, wondering what had become of the person who had fired the first shots at Bryland. The Shadow heard exclamations from the file room. Marquette and the commander had found Creelon's body; also the spy's trio of crippled, groaning men.

A moment later, there was a shout from Marquette. The commander had pointed to the opened file cabinet. There, Vic had spied the bound pages of the NEC, poised upon the extended drawer. In place of the worthless J 29 X, the government men had recovered the priceless code upon which the nation depended. The NEC had reached the proper hands.

DESCENDING the stairway, The Shadow stopped at the lower corridor. Workers were peering from their doorways, wondering at the cause of commotion. As they gaped, they heard the sudden roar of gunfire in the street. Heads popped from view. Doors slammed shut. The Shadow's route was clear.

Speeding out to the sidewalk, The Shadow saw a scene a block away. Men were tumbling from a halted automobile; others, from a different car, were covering them with Tommy guns and revolvers. Even at that distance, The Shadow could identify the groups.

The captured men were Creelon's reserves. Cruising past the navy building, they had been spotted by Marquette's arriving squad of operatives. The secret service men, equipped for action, had overhauled the last of the crooks and made them prisoners.

Striding through the darkness, The Shadow entered his car between the trees. His cloaked figure blended with the interior of the sedan. He started the car forward; his unseen lips delivered a long, departing laugh.

This time, the mirth carried its note of final triumph. Secret crime had been ended in Washington. Its perpetrators were dead; their game was lost. Whether or not that strident laugh reached the ears of Vic Marquette, it did not matter. Vic had already guessed to whom the real credit of victory was due.

The National Emergency Code was again the mainstay of the nation's defense. It had been regained through the prowess of The Shadow.

Back to his sanctum would The Shadow go, to ponder over the reports of his many agents—reports that would tell where crime was brewing. Thus would the Master of Crime meet “The Masked Headsman,” an international figure with a band of murderous cutthroats at his command. Millions in gems and priceless treasure was his goal—and only The Shadow stood as a barrier to it!

Even the aristocracy of Old Spain would be drawn into it, when “The Masked Headsman” challenged The Shadow!

THE END