

# **YOUNG MEN OF DEATH**

Maxwell Grant

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# YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

Maxwell Grant

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## CHAPTER I. DANGER IN CHICAGO

A COLD night wind from the lake had set Chicago to shivering. On fashionable Michigan Boulevard people turned up overcoat collars and walked briskly.

A bad night for slum dwellers. A worse night for bums who didn't have the price for even a cheap flop-house.

Some of the shivering bums were trying to keep warm under a bridge approach. It was a dead-end street where nobody but bums would congregate. The bridge approach took up most of the street. The sidewalks below the steel slant of the structure were lined with decayed tenements and cheap gin joints.

In the blackness under the bridge, small fires burned in a half a dozen trash cans. Bums crowded about them, toasting their hands. Occasionally a cop drifted past. But no cop stopped or asked questions.

This was not a healthy section for cops. Thugs found this a good neighborhood in which to drop conveniently out of sight. Unless a known criminal was wanted for a known crime, cops didn't go out of their way to stir up trouble.

The Shadow preferred to remain invisible, too. But for a different reason.

The Shadow was watching a certain grogshop. He expected a Chicago underworld character named Snuffy to

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enter that joint.

Invisible against the cold blackness of the bridge support, The Shadow waited. His black cloak muffled his face below his mouth. The brim of his slouch hat hid the gleam of watchful eyes.

The thought of Snuffy seemed to amuse The Shadow. Sibilant laughter came in a whisper from his hidden lips.

Snuffy was far from a big shot of crime. He was a jackal of the underworld, not a tiger. He ran errands, did favors for more dangerous crooks who found Snuffy's talents helpful. In Chicago police headquarters, Snuffy was listed as a pickpocket. He had another talent that the police didn't consider important. Snuffy was supposed to be "hot luck."

Criminals, especially big ones, are superstitious. Things went well for bigger crooks to whom Snuffy attached himself. The Shadow had learned this in a patient investigation of a score of criminal hang-outs.

The Shadow had been in Chicago several days. A master of disguise, he had penetrated crook dens without arousing suspicion. In Chicago, unknown derelicts were always dropping off freights. The Shadow seemed a harmless bum.

The accidental death of a young man had brought The Shadow to Chicago. The young man had fallen from a tower window of a Chicago skyscraper. His name was George Eldridge. He was a metallurgist employed by a large company. He had gone to a tower washroom, had lost his balance at an open window, had fallen to a horrible death far below.

The police report showed that George Eldridge suffered from dizzy spells. There was no reason to suspect anything more sinister than an accident. The facts were in a newspaper clipping under The Shadow's robe.

But the clipping concerning George Eldridge wasn't the only one in The Shadow's possession. There were two more. One was from an Atlanta newspaper. The other was from a paper in Boston.

Two other young men had met death in accidental plunges from high places. They had also been metallurgists, though not in the same company which had employed young Eldridge. All three had been recent college graduates; all three had been recommended as brilliant technicians.

From his sanctum in New York, The Shadow had sent agents nosing along what was by now a cold trail. The reports from his agents did not seem to justify The Shadow's suspicion. The three similar deaths in three different cities disclosed no apparent motive for murder.

Neither George Eldridge nor the other two victims had been engaged in any secret research. All three had been doing routine laboratory work in metallurgy of no especial importance.

Now, in the cold darkness of a Chicago slum, The Shadow's laughter indicated that a link existed between the death of George Eldridge and a minor pickpocket named Snuffy!

THE day after George Eldridge's death, Snuffy had begun spending money – lots of it. He paid off gambling debts. He spent freely in the company of a dance-hall girl named Irma. Snuffy had given this Irma an expensive gold watch he was wearing. The Shadow had been curious about that watch. It was a man's watch. Irma never wore it.

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The Shadow searched Irma's apartment in her absence. He was unable to find the watch. But he found a pawn ticket. He went to the pawnshop and redeemed the watch. Inside the back, a small photo of Snuffy had been pasted. The Shadow removed the photo. Engraved words were disclosed: "To George Eldridge, for proficiency in the Chemistry of Metals – Barham Institute of Technology."

At his hidden post below the bridge structure, The Shadow stiffened suddenly. He saw a beady-eyed little man slip quietly into the gin joint. It was Snuffy!

The Shadow made no move to follow his quarry. Another figure was due before The Shadow would be ready to put certain plans into execution.

The Shadow was waiting for Cliff Marsland.

Cliff was supposedly on the lam from the New York cops. He had managed to scrape up a friendship with Snuffy. Snuffy didn't know that Marsland had long since paid his debt to society and had gone straight. It suited both Marsland and The Shadow to keep up the illusion that Cliff was still an active criminal. Marsland was an agent of The Shadow.

A few minutes after Snuffy had faded, Marsland drifted into view. He moved into the darkness under the bridge approach. The shivering bums around the trash-can fires paid no attention to him.

Presently, in the blackness, he heard a softly uttered word:

"Report!"

The Shadow seemed to be part of the steel girder against which he stood. Marsland's report pleased him. Cliff had arranged to meet Snuffy tonight in the gin joint.

Cliff listened to sibilant instructions. A wallet passed from The Shadow to his agent. The wallet was bulky with currency. Most of the bills were of large denomination.

In addition to the money, there were three newspaper clippings. They described the "accidental" death of George Eldridge and the other two young metallurgists who had perished in Atlanta and Boston.

The Shadow vanished. Marsland remained where he was.

Presently, a grimy old bum lurched into view from the darkness under the bridge. He walked with shambling slowness to the joint where Snuffy had faded. As soon as the bum lurched inside Marsland glanced at the radium dial of his watch.

Ten minutes later he followed the trail of the bum.

Marsland had to brush past the disguised Shadow to reach Snuffy's table. A glass of gin and water was clutched in The Shadow's grimy hand. He seemed to be in a semi-drunken stupor.

Snuffy's ratlike eyes scanned Marsland keenly. He wasn't sure why Cliff had arranged this date. Cliff had been deliberately mysterious in his hints of "something in the wind" that might mean big dough.

"What's up, chief?" Snuffy whispered. He had a whining habit of calling bigger crooks "chief."

"Buy me a drink," Cliff growled.

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Snuffy nodded and bought drinks. His tight eyes got tighter. Marsland's previous hints of something promising didn't sound so important tonight. If Marsland was broke, there didn't seem much chance for the cunning Snuffy to wangle a kickback for himself. He scowled, let Marsland do the talking.

CLIFF seemed in no hurry to come to the point. Artfully he beat about the bush. He hinted vaguely that there was something going on in Chicago that looked to him like a juicy set-up.

"The trouble is," he muttered sourly, "I'm busted! Haven't got a dime! It took all my dough to get out of New York with a clean nose."

"So?"

"I got a proposition. If it works, there'll be dough enough for you and me to buy ourselves yachts."

Snuffy's tight eyes sparkled.

"What's the angle, Cliff?"

But Marsland shook his head. He was still spreading bait.

"I need one more guy to make my stunt work. Somebody really big. A guy with plenty of guts."

Snuffy rubbed his long nose.

"Where do I come in?"

"You know everybody in Chi. I figured you could give me a knockdown to some smart mobster. Some guy who wouldn't be afraid to tackle a risky job."

Snuffy shook his head.

"No soap. I'm only a two-spot in this town. I don't know no big shots."

"O.K. Skip it!" Marsland growled.

He started to get up from the table, but Snuffy halted him with a placating grin. He bought Cliff another drink.

"It's cold outside. Stick around. Why do you need a tough guy? Sounds like a highjack? Am I right?"

"I'll give you a hint," Marsland grinned. "Ever hear of a guy named George Eldridge?"

He busied himself with his drink. He pretended not to notice the swift grimace of surprise that twisted Snuffy's lips.

"Never heard of Eldridge," Snuffy muttered. "Who is he?"

"He fell out of a tower window in one of the big Loop skyscrapers. You know, got dizzy." Cliff's chuckle sounded nasty. "Too bad for the guy, huh?"

"How do we make money out of some dope who has an accident?"

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"Maybe it wasn't an accident!"

"Whaddye mean?"

"Suppose somebody pushed that guy Eldridge. Nice for him, huh? The cops closed up the case as an accident. If it was a bump, the guy that shoved Eldridge is sitting pretty."

Marsland grinned.

"But suppose a guy named Cliff Marsland smelled something funny? Suppose I could team up with a really tough mobster who knows Chicago? I think I could pull off a sweet blackmail job on somebody. But skip it, pal! I'm busted. And you don't know anybody!"

"Have another drink," Snuffy said in a choked voice.

Marsland reached for the bottle. He seemed oblivious to the presence of the sprawled bum at the adjoining table. The bum had risen dizzily to his feet. He headed for the door. As he passed Marsland's table he lurched, almost upsetting the drink that Cliff had just poured.

Marsland uttered a grunt of anger. He grappled with the bum, shook him fiercely. The exertion spun Cliff around with his back to Snuffy. The leather edge of a wallet stuck partly out of Marsland's hip pocket.

Snuffy took the bait. A clever pickpocket, he snaked the wallet loose, with one deft motion. By the time the bum had been thrown out, and Marsland was back at the table, the wily Snuffy was eager to make an excuse for a brief fade-out. He said he had to go to the men's room.

Aware that The Shadow's scheme had worked, Marsland nodded and turned to his drink.

THE room where Snuffy had faded wasn't the men's room. It was a tiny cubbyhole with nothing in it but a droplight and a phone. With eager fingers, Snuffy opened the wallet he had snatched. A quick inspection of its contents made his thin, jackal face turn pale.

Marsland had said he was broke – and there was more than a thousand dollars in his wallet!

But it was the three newspaper clippings that made Snuffy tremble. He dialed a number with careful speed. His whisper spat a warning over the wire.

"Listen, chief! There's hell to pay! A crook from New York named Marsland – you know the guy I was telling you about? – well, he's wise to the Eldridge job!"

"What!" The voice from the other end was like a whiplash.

"I'm tellin' you! I just snatched his wallet. He told me he was broke – and he's carryin' more than a grand in cash. He's got a clipping about the Eldridge accident. And that ain't all! He's got clippings about the guy in Atlanta and the guy in Boston!"

There was a soft oath in the receiver.

"Marsland, eh? So that's why he came to Chi!"

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"He's trying to muscle in on a highjack. He's been sounding me out to see if I know any big-shot crook to help him turn those newspaper clippings into a juicy bunch of blackmail."

Laughter rustled coldly over the wire.

"O.K. We'll fix Marsland up! Go back and tell him you just thought of someone who'd be a smart bet to team up with. Tell him you phoned and are trying to locate a guy. I'll need about a half-hour to get things set. And get that wallet back in Marsland's pocket before he begins feeling for it!"

"Yeah, yeah," Snuffy gasped.

He hung up hastily and went back to the table where Cliff Marsland was still innocently gulping liquor.

Snuffy grinned. Leaning over Cliff he whispered, "Good news, chief!" He whacked Cliff with friendly force on his shoulder.

It gave Snuffy a lightning chance to return the stolen wallet. Marsland, aware of what was going on, was forced to admire the deft skill of Snuffy.

"What do you mean – good news?" he grunted.

"I just thought of a guy. He'd be tops in a highjack proposition. I tried to get him at his hang-out, but he wasn't around. I left a message for him to call me back. Are you in a hurry?"

"No."

"Swell! We'll stick around. I oughta hear from my guy in about a half-hour."

"Who is he? Do I know him?"

Snuffy shook his head. "This ain't no place for mentionin' names. Take it easy, chief!"

A half-hour later the barkeep called across the room.

"Hey, Snuffy! Phone call! In the back room."

Snuffy faded. He was careful to talk only in monosyllables.

"Who? Yeah... O.K. Sure thing. You bet."

The whiplash voice at the other end of the wire wasn't so brief. There was murderous intensity in it.

"I've got everything set. We'll cook his goose – and we'll cook him, too! But not until I find out how he got so damned wise. You know the house over by the freight yard?"

"Yeah."

"Take him there! And don't grab any old taxi. Ask Carl to give you the one in the garage. I don't want to have to be bothered bumping a hack driver later on."



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"Sure," Snuffy said, and hung up. He had left the door of the back room open, to help Marsland keep on thinking that things were good. His grin when he returned to the table emphasized their good luck.

"All set. My pal says he'll lay a grand on the line if you show him a good proposition."

"Fair enough. Where is he?"

"He's waiting for us at the other side of town. Let's go."

Snuffy paid the liquor bill. He led the way up the dead-end street to the corner. Turning the corner, he went another block or two down the avenue.

There was a taxi at the curb and Marsland started to hail the sleepy driver. But Snuffy said no to that.

"I know a pal who'll drive us across town for nothing."

He entered a grimy garage that didn't seem to be doing much business. There was a taxi parked at the rear. A man named Carl slid obligingly behind the wheel when Snuffy said he had a little trip to make.

The man named Carl looked more like a thug than a mechanic. The taxi looked queer to Marsland, too. Its license number was almost illegible with grease and dirt. The photo in the identification rack had been badly torn.

But Marsland, obeying The Shadow's orders, made no complaint.

The ride was a long one. It took them to the outskirts of Chicago. It stopped on a deserted street lined with shabby dwellings. Most of them were empty.

Behind the houses, Marsland could hear the choof-choof of switch engines and the banging of freight couplings.

Marsland and Snuffy entered one of the dilapidated dwellings.

## CHAPTER II. DEATH JET

UNSEEN in the windy darkness, The Shadow watched Marsland and Snuffy fade into the house.

The Shadow had trailed the pair in the taxicab which Snuffy had been too cagey to hire. In that cab he bore no resemblance to the black-robed figure under the bridge approach, or to the shambling bum who had tussled briefly with Marsland in the gin joint.

The Shadow studied the row of houses on this dark, unfrequented street. Melting into a narrow alley, he transferred his attention to the rear.

He saw at once that a rear entry was impossible. The backs of the row of houses were flush with a stone retaining wall. Below the wall was a sunken freight yard many acres in extent. The Shadow could see the crimson and green glow of signal lights. Switch engines shuttled back and forth, making a hideous clamor.

The rear walls of those houses that backed on the railroad cut were blank brick. No windows showed.

The Shadow was eager to reach the roof level, but those vertical brick walls offered no chance for a foothold.

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The Shadow returned through the alley to the street. He had donned his black robe. Except for the gleam of deep-set eyes below the brim of his slouch hat, his face was as invisible as the rest of his figure against the dark background of the front entry he selected.

It was not the house into which Marsland had been led by Snuffy.

Skeleton keys moved deftly in and out of the rusted lock of a vestibule door. The door opened and closed without sound. The Shadow raced silently up a couple of flights of dusty stairs.

A moment later he was on the roof.

Hunched low to avoid silhouetting himself against the sky, The Shadow hurried across to the roof of the house that Cliff Marsland had entered. Noiseless leaps carried him across the narrow valleys that separated the houses.

He leaned from the roof coping, studied the set of a corner window that faced the street. A rope appeared from beneath the robe of The Shadow. It was light, pliable and strong.

It would have been simple for The Shadow to have slid from the roof coping to the sill of the top-floor window. But there were lights in some of the houses across the street. The Shadow chose a more secluded route by way of the alley wall.

He slid several feet down the rope. Dangling invisibly against the blackness of the alley wall, he hooked one toe around the brick corner of the building. His foot braced itself on the sill of the front window.

A black-garbed arm snaked into view. Fingers that were expert at jobs like his explored the window catch. A small-edged tool of tempered steel took care of the rusted catch. The window lifted gently.

Through the dark opening of the window moved a swift patch of blackness. The Shadow was inside!

He still retained his end of the dangling rope. Within the room, crouched below the sill of the window, he made certain quick motions with the rope. The tricky knot at the coping of the roof came apart. The Shadow drew in his dangling rope.

Tiptoeing through the dark room on the top floor, he opened a closed door. Below him lay a seemingly empty house. There was no sign of a light, no hint of a sound.

The Shadow advanced toward the black staircase.

MEANTIME, Snuffy hadn't wasted any time. He and Marsland climbed the stairs to the second floor behind the gleam of Snuffy's tiny electric torch.

Marsland's spine was cold with the knowledge that he was deliberately risking his life. But the risk was necessary. This was the only practical method of uncovering the identity of the boss for whom Snuffy worked.

Marsland hid his wariness under a careless growl.

"What kind of a joint is this? Dust and dirt! Are you sure this guy of yours has dough?"

Snuffy giggled.

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"Don't worry. My guy's got everything! In here, chief!"

He opened a dark door. Again Marsland saw only a dusty and empty room. But within this room was an inner door, also closed.

Snuffy opened the inner door. Instantly bright light streamed into Marsland's eyes.

The light came from a small room with no windows. It looked like a storeroom. Blinking, Marsland saw the taut face of a man.

It was a face that he recognized.

"Hello, Cliff," the man said.

Snuffy had remained a pace in the rear. His voice sounded strained.

"Hey! Do you guys know each other?"

Marsland had conquered his surprise. He put fake pleasure into his hoarse voice.

"Mike Vallon! I didn't know you were in Chi."

"I didn't know you were, either," Vallon said.

Mike Vallon had eyes like dull-blue chips of ice. Behind those unblinking eyes was a cold, shrewd brain. Marsland had met him once or twice in New York, but had never found out much about him. Vallon lived well, dressed well, always had ample funds. He had never faced a police line-up. Mike was the sort of crook who knew aldermen and judges. In hot weather he played golf in some cool mountain resort. In the winter he was apt to be seen on the beach at Florida.

There was a gun in his hand. Its muzzle pointed at Marsland. Mike Vallon had stopped smiling.

"I hear you got a proposition for a highjack."

Marsland didn't say anything.

"What made you think you could put the bee on me, you stupid louse?" Vallon continued in a soft, ugly whisper.

"You?" Marsland pretended amazement. "I didn't even know you were in Chicago. I just figured that Snuffy might put me in touch with somebody who could –"

"You liar! Do you think I'm a sap? Snuffy was dumb enough to fall for a dance-hall girl named Irma. He gave her a certain gold watch. Irma was greedy enough to pawn the watch."

"I don't get you," Marsland muttered.

"No? Who swiped that pawn ticket from Irma's apartment? Who got the watch out of hock? Why did you lie to Snuffy about being broke? Where did you get those newspaper clippings?"

"Clippings?" Marsland said.

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He tried to let his hand drop slightly toward his hip.

"Freeze, sucker!" Mike Vallon snarled.

There was death in his eyes.

"Get his rod, Snuffy!"

Snuffy obeyed. He was like an eager little ferret behind Marsland's frozen back.

"Put your hands behind you," Vallon ordered. "Slow! One at a time. Up in the small of your back. Up high – between your shoulder blades!"

He didn't give Snuffy any orders. They weren't necessary. In a moment Marsland's joined hands were tied viciously tight by the wily little pickpocket behind him.

"You know too much," Vallon told Marsland with a horrible little grin that barely pulled his lips away from his teeth. "I think we'll take you for a little freight ride. It'll be nicer if cops don't find your body here in Chicago. We'll let some hick cop out in the sticks have you. Or maybe we'll let the swamp snakes and mosquitoes find you first, and do a little work on your corpse!"

Laughter trickled through Vallon's teeth.

"You showed up at a nice convenient time, pal. I'm through with Chicago. I got a little job to take care of somewhere else. So tonight I'm heading West! On a fast freight."

Snuffy's chuckle echoed Vallon's.

"Where are we gonna toss him off, chief?"

"Nowhere!"

It was a crisp word that sounded with grim suddenness. It was followed by weird, menacing laughter.

SNUFFY had left the storeroom door open. Across the lighted door lay a black, projecting shadow. The projected shadow of a cloaked and invisible figure – a figure with twin .45's!

The shadow of The Shadow jerked swiftly forward. Gunfire hammered. But neither of the opposing bullets found a mark.

The gun of Mike Vallon missed the black-robed figure plunging toward the open doorway. The Shadow's heavier-calibered slug did not find a target in the swift-moving body of the killer. The Shadow had meant to wing Vallon, not to kill him.

His maneuver failed as Vallon darted behind Cliff Marsland.

At the same instant, Snuffy dropped to the floor. He stiffened like a man mortally wounded. But it was a cunning stratagem. Protected for a precious instant by the flaming stabs of gunfire that Mike Vallon spat over the helpless shoulder of Marsland, Snuffy kicked fiercely at the partly opened door.

The door slammed!

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A bolt clicked on the inside as the advancing body of The Shadow struck the barrier. Heedless of danger, The Shadow began a fierce assault on the lock.

But no bullets ripped through the panel to cut him down. A sinister silence prevailed in the windowless room on the other side of the locked barrier.

It was impossible to smash the door down. It was made of heavy oak. The .45s of The Shadow crashed again. Roaring streaks of scarlet ripped at the lock mechanism.

The wood around the lock split and splintered. The lock itself turned into a battered and shapeless hulk of metal. The butt of a .45 beat like a ram against that twisted lock. It was battered out of its anchorage in the wood.

The door burst violently open. A leap carried The Shadow across the threshold. Twisting as his feet touched the floor, he flung himself lithely aside.

Light still blazed in the inner room. But there was no sign of Snuffy and Mike Vallon. Nor of Cliff Marsland.

The room was completely empty!

The gleaming eyes of The Shadow scanned the empty floor. There was a sprinkle of scarlet drops on the dusty spot where the helpless Marsland had stood. He had been slugged on the head. Dragged somewhere through a secret exit.

But where?

The blood trail didn't lead to any of the four walls. The Shadow was faced with the swift and urgent task of locating the secret exit.

Marsland's life hung now by a slender thread. The Shadow knew that. He also knew that Marsland had imperiled his life because of his obedience to The Shadow's orders. Mike Vallon's complicity in the "accident" to George Eldridge was now proved.

The Shadow's swift energy indicated that he did not intend to let Marsland pay for that success with his life.

He devoted only a split-second scrutiny to the floor of the room. Eyes trained in the ways of crime told him that there was no trapdoor opening through that dusty expanse of floor. Somewhere in one of the walls was the route through which Marsland had been jerked from sight.

The butts of The Shadow's .45s tapped the walls in a swift drumbeat. One of them gave back a hollow echo – the clanging echo of hidden metal!

The Shadow's eyes peered. His scrutiny detected a slight blur in the dusty expanse of the wall. The mark of a hurried finger!

The deft fingers of The Shadow explored the same spot. Presently, he felt a slight depression in the wall's surface. He pressed.

A square opening appeared.

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IT was a vertical pit inside the wall. Peering downward, The Shadow could see nothing but blackness. He sent a ray of light into the pit from a tiny electric torch. The light did not add to his knowledge.

It showed nothing but emptiness and the metal rungs of a wall ladder that led to the bottom.

Swiftly The Shadow descended through the wall.

At the bottom he found another opening. This time the passage was horizontal. It led toward the rear of the house.

The Shadow divined at once where this horizontal passage led. He knew that it was very deep. He had estimated the depth while he was racing down the steel rungs of the vertical pit. He was now considerably below the street level of the house.

There was only one answer to the problem of where this deep, horizontal passage led. To the stone retaining wall of the freight yard! To the tangled area of tracks and switches where a fast freight was almost ready to leave for the West!

The Shadow crawled along the passage. He could see the exit opening now. He could see the twinkle of red and green lights in the darkness outside.

He tensed his muscles to move into the open. But before he could quit his earth tunnel, another sound made him stiffen. It was a sound that was barely audible. A slight click. It didn't come from the darkness of the open freight yard. It came from the horizontal tunnel behind The Shadow!

Twisting about in his confined position, The Shadow crawled backward. He didn't crawl as far as the vertical pit through which he had descended. That was no longer possible.

A barrier blocked off any possible return to the house. It was steel! It had dropped like a solid guillotine blade from a slitted recess in the roof of the horizontal passage.

The Shadow was cornered! He had now only one possible way to advance – through the opening in the stone retaining wall that led to the freight yard.

The Shadow peered cautiously from the exit hole. A single glance proved that his guess about the depth of the passage was correct. His face was barely two feet above the dark gleam of a railroad track. It was the track closest to the masonry wall of the freight yard.

A moment later The Shadow saw the switch engine. It was on the track closest to the wall. It was heading swiftly toward the spot where The Shadow's head projected.

His impulse was to jerk his head back and remain inside the wall passage until the locomotive roared past the opening.

But The Shadow noticed something else.

There was no headlight gleam along the track from the advancing switch engine. Its lights had been doused to avoid drawing the attention of other railroad men at other points in the freight yard.

The engineer at the throttle was not piloting this locomotive willingly!

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The Shadow could see the frightened blur of his pale face. A thug with a gun was giving the engineer orders. The reflection of the locomotive's banked fire gleamed for an instant on the barrel of a gun.

The brakes of the locomotive were beginning to grind and squeal. A moment later it came to a halt directly opposite the tunnel exit in the stone wall.

The thug with the gun snarled an order to the captive engineer. There was a roaring cloud of steam. It shot sideways, under pressure, from the exhaust of the steam box.

Live steam, as potent as the steam in a pressure cooker, filled every inch of the blocked-up passage from Vallon's house!

For five full minutes that horrible jet roared!

### CHAPTER III. FAST FREIGHT

THE SHADOW, hidden by darkness, uttered a grim whisper of mirth.

The Shadow was no longer in the death trap!

An instant before the switch engine had ground to a halt opposite the open tunnel end in the retaining wall, The Shadow had dropped headfirst to the tracks.

A swift wriggle had rolled him like a patch of blackness to the narrow space between the track and the wall. Belly flat against the ground, he crawled swiftly away from peril. The jet of live steam roared harmlessly above his flattened figure as he crawled onward.

Unseen, he climbed to the rear of the switch engine's coal tender.

He began to belly forward across the lumps of coal toward the figures of the engineer and the thug with the gun.

Soon he could see the face of the thug more clearly. The Shadow recognized him as a local Chicago criminal. His name was Pocky Bender. His nickname came from the ugly, pitted skin of his lantern jaws. He was a lone-wolf crook, on sale to the highest bidder. It was evident that Mike Vallon had met Pocky Bender's price.

Invisible against the coal in the tender, The Shadow waited. His motive in creeping closer to the gunman was not to capture Bender, but to protect the life of the captured engineer.

The Shadow's primary purpose was still to locate Vallon and Snuffy. Somewhere in the black wilderness of this freight yard, the two kidnapers held Cliff Marsland a prisoner. The Shadow knew that they were ready to head westward on a fast freight. He had heard Vallon chuckle boastfully about "a new job."

But there were many freights in the yards. The Shadow was depending on Pocky Bender to lead him to the right one before the lanterns of brakemen waved and the freight got under way.

For five full minutes The Shadow lay motionless, his .45s aimed at Pocky's back, in case the thug tried to murder the engineer of the switch locomotive.

Then the death roar of the steam ceased.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

"Back up, stupid!" Bender snarled.

The frightened engineer complied. The darkened locomotive backed twenty feet along the track. Bender's gun lifted. The black-gloved fingers of The Shadow tightened against his twin triggers. But almost in the same instant his pressure relaxed.

Pocky Bender had no intention of killing the engineer. He merely wanted to knock him unconscious. He had reversed his grip on the gun. The butt of it struck the engineer on the back of the head, stunning him.

The Shadow remained motionless. He waited for Bender to leap to the track and race across the yards to rejoin Vallon and Snuffy.

But Bender did no such thing. The moment he leaped to the track, he ran swiftly toward the tunnel in which he expected to see the steam-cooked corpse of The Shadow.

An oath of rage snarled from his thin lips as he peered through the opening in the stone wall. Instead of a sodden corpse robed in black, Pocky found only black emptiness.

He ran back to the motionless switch engine, climbed up to the cab. His hand reached for the whistle lanyard. The whistle shrieked four times – a short blast, two longs, another short.

Pocky was sending a signal to hidden pals. A signal of failure. Vallon and Snuffy knew now that their double trap had lost one of its victims. The Shadow was still at large!

AN instant later Pocky Bender was again in flight. This time, The Shadow changed from a passive watcher to an active trailer.

Pocky seemed to know the tangled wilderness of track and switches like a book. Ducking the gleam of signal and switch lights, he headed deeper across the tracks.

Like a black phantom, The Shadow kept on the heels of the gunman.

But in a few minutes The Shadow realized that his plan to use Bender as a decoy was not going to work. The gunman was not heading toward any of the motionless freight trains lined up on dark tracks. His goal was the black, overhead shape of an enormous steel viaduct.

It was a viaduct that carried Chicago automobile traffic across the sunken area of the freight yards.

Avoiding the swift rush of an electric suburban train, Pocky Bender headed for one of the steel anchorage supports of the viaduct.

He began to climb upward like a monkey.

His intent was clear to The Shadow. Bender's job was done. He had been hired to get rid of The Shadow. The fact that his ugly little job of steam-cooking had resulted in failure didn't worry Pocky. He had been paid in advance.

The whereabouts of The Shadow was a more immediate worry to Bender. He was eager to make a pullout from danger and save his own skin. The Shadow on the loose was a different proposition from The Shadow penned up helplessly in a death trap.



## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

That was why Bender climbed his steel girder toward the viaduct level with such desperate urgency. Once on the viaduct sidewalk, he could hail a taxi and scoot swiftly back to the Chicago underworld. Let Vallon and Snuffy worry about The Shadow! Pocky Bender was heading for a safe rat hole where he could lie low for a while.

The Shadow had no intention of allowing Pocky to head back to town. Pocky was his only link to the whereabouts of his kidnapped agent.

The Shadow melted swiftly under the viaduct. Unseen, he began to climb a steel girder alongside the one that Pocky was so desperately climbing.

Midway up the vertical girders was a steel crossbeam. The Shadow reached it first. Still invisible to his quarry, he made a silent swing and gained to horizontal beam. He slid like a swift, black blot toward the spot where Pocky was approaching.

An instant later Pocky's ugly face lifted. His hands caught at the horizontal beam to swing himself upward.

"Surrender – or die!"

The words seemed to Pocky to rasp out of thin air. He could see nothing. Then he screamed.

A face had appeared on the black, overhead beam. A face with eyes that burned like flame!

"The Shadow!"

The gasp of Pocky Bender was muffled by a burst of sibilant laughter from The Shadow. Twin .45s motioned sternly for Pocky to continue his ascent.

But The Shadow didn't reckon on the terror that his appearance produced in the hearts of otherwise tough crooks.

Pocky Bender quailed. Terror gave him the courage that springs from absolute desperation. His hand that gripped the edge of the steel beam tightened. The other snatched at his hip, yanked out a gun.

Flame spat from the weapon. A slug cut viciously close to the peering face of The Shadow.

The echo of Bender's shot was drowned out by the roar of an electric train that sped below. The speed of the passenger train sent a gale of wind shrieking under the viaduct.

Hanging by one hand, trying to aim another shot at the beak-nosed face above him, Pocky Bender lost his grip. The hand on the beam edge slipped.

Aware of the gunman's peril, The Shadow bellied forward, flung down a supporting hand. But it was too late! The hand of The Shadow clutched only at empty air.

Below Pocky's plunging body lay a cradled network of wires. They were high-tension wires carrying the juice that fed those swift, electric passenger trains.

Pocky's body struck and bounced. His shoulders touched the wire. His desperately kicking feet touched the metal support pole within the glass insulators.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

There was a hideous sputter of purplish light. For an instant the body of the electrocuted gangster seemed to be incandescent with bluish brilliance. Then he crashed in a lifeless lump to the cinder bed alongside the railroad track below!

THE SHADOW remained motionless for an instant of horror. Then he descended rapidly to the ground below the viaduct.

The overhang of the steel viaduct had hidden the brief brilliance of the shorted electric current. People in the cars moving across the viaduct were unaware of the tragic drama that had just taken place below the level of their eyes.

The Shadow searched the burned body of the gunman. He found nothing to interest him. The whistle of a freight train on the other side of the yards reminded The Shadow that every second was precious.

His burning eyes surveyed the hopeless wilderness of darkness. He could see the green flick of switch lights, the brighter glow of yellow arc lights. It was hopeless to try to search every freight in this windy darkness.

The Shadow looked for something that offered a swifter chance for finding out what he wanted. Suddenly, his turning gaze halted. The brightly lit window of a signal tower!

The Shadow raced across the tracks toward a stilted structure where a lonely towerman sat with a bewildering array of polished lever handles. This was the man whose hand controlled the change of signal lights from red to green. This was the man who would know which of the freights in this vast acreage of tracks was due to leave almost instantly for a destination west of Chicago!

A steel ladder led aloft to the door of the signal tower. The dispatcher saw nothing, heard nothing until the crisp voice of The Shadow reached his ear.

"Steady!"

The man whirled – then stiffened with upraised hands. His face grew pale as he saw the hawk-beaked nose, the flame-like eyes of the intruder with the level .45s.

He was a brave man, this tower-man. Instinctively, his hand swung toward his telephone to send a warning over the wire concerning what he conceived to be a holdup.

"No!"

The monosyllable halted the frightened hand that had edged toward the phone. The Shadow's voice asked a swift question. It was a question concerning the destination of the freights about to leave the yards in the next few minutes.

"How many?" The Shadow rasped.

"Two."

"Where bound?"

"One to New Orleans. One to St. Louis."

"St. Louis freight. Which track?" The Shadow prodded.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

The man didn't want to tell. Loyal to his job, he closed his lips.

The Shadow didn't force him to speak. The sidelong glance of the towerman had told The Shadow where to find the information he sought. One of his .45s disappeared. His free hand darted toward the tower wall where the signalman had glanced.

There was a hook there with a series of yellow dispatch sheets impaled on it. The Shadow tore the sheets loose. For a swift instant, his gaze scanned the contents of those sheets.

The facts he sought leaped at him from one of the papers: Train 8247, Destination: St. Louis. Contents: freight.

Another fact brought a sibilant laugh from the taut lips of The Shadow. It was a through freight with only one stop en route. The stop was at a place called Truxton.

"Truxton?" The Shadow said to the captive towerman. "Why stop at Truxton? Explain!"

Words came unwillingly from the man's pale lips. Truxton was a small town midway between Chicago and St. Louis. It had no value to the railroad except as a junction point for rail traffic north and south. The fast freight for St. Louis stopped there merely for the necessary servicing on so long a trip.

"Track number?" The Shadow asked.

"Thirty-eight."

"When?"

"Four minutes," the towerman faltered. His face was gray and strained under the menace of The Shadow's guns.

"Set signal properly in four minutes!"

THE minutes seemed to crawl like an eternity. Sweat glistened on the forehead of the towerman. His hunted eyes kept veering toward the telephone.

Two minutes... three –

"Set signal! Green!" The Shadow whispered above the barrels of his guns.

The towerman obeyed. Through the darkness of the yards, on Track 38, a red disk of light blinked abruptly to green. Signal lanterns began to make circling clots of yellow in the gloom.

The long freight shuddered. Its whistle blew a steady hoot for departure.

The Shadow laughed.

A swift leap took him past the frozen figure of the towerman. His hand reached for the telephone instrument on the wall. A terrific jerk ripped the phone loose from its connection. He tossed the phone to the floor, its useless wire dangling.

Then he backed swiftly to the door of the tower.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

At the same instant the train dispatcher dived for the drawer of a high-legged table beyond the rows of polished lever handles. He grabbed for a hidden gun.

The Shadow had already melted out the doorway to the topmost rung of the steel ladder that led to the ground. He raced down the ladder to a point midway between the tower room and the dark earth below.

Then he sprang swiftly aside from the ladder!

He was just in time to escape a fusillade of bullets that roared from the doorway of the tower room above his head.

The towerman realized, too late, that he was emptying his gun at the rungs of an empty ladder. He ducked back into the room above. Then the glow of an electric torch began to throw a swiftly moving oval of light on the ground below.

The light disclosed nothing. The black-clad figure of The Shadow was already thirty feet away. Hidden by the darkness, he was making a desperate sprint in the direction of Track 38.

His breath sobbed in his throat with the effort he was making. He leaped over tracks, spun around the end of a long string of empties. Then he was conscious of a gale of cold wind, and the black, formless blur of swiftly moving box cars.

They were going fast, but The Shadow dared not hesitate. Every instant that passed, the train was picking up additional speed. Only three cars were left now. Only two...

The Shadow leaped upward.

His outstretched hand caught at the pale glimmer of a steel rung. The force of his jump and the speed of the train banged him against the box car with terrific impact.

He felt agony in his shoulder socket, a wrench like flame in his wrist.

But he held on!

Both hands had a grip now. The Shadow began to climb. He wriggled over the edge of the car's slanting roof, crept to the catwalk.

Already the freight yard had been left behind. A snaky network of dangling ropes hit The Shadow in the face. He ducked. The next moment he was roaring through the blackness of a tunnel, half-choked with clouds of soft-coal smoke from the locomotive far ahead.

The roar of the tunnel ceased. He straightened.

He began the slow, irksome task of creeping ahead in the icy wind, trying to locate the car in which Mike Vallon and Snuffy were hidden with the kidnapped Marsland.

It was a dangerous task as well as a slow one. By hanging from the roof of each car and using a flashlight, The Shadow was able to examine the seals on the side doors below.

He was looking for evidence of tampering.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

The wind, roaring along the exposed freight roofs, was like a polar blast. The fingers of The Shadow began to get numb. But he stuck grimly to his difficult task. Four cars... eight... a dozen –

No sign yet of an open side door. Or a closed one whose seal showed evidence of having been broken.

The tiny glow of The Shadow's electric torch winked monotonously ahead from car to car. Suddenly, he doused his torch.

Ahead, he had seen a similar brief glow. He watched. Then he saw it again. A man was crouched in plain sight on one of the catwalks a few cars in front. He looked like a brakie.

The next instant The Shadow felt again the soft lash of dangling cords that betokened the approach of a low-roofed tunnel.

The Shadow ducked.

The freight roared into smoky blackness. It was a long tunnel. When The Shadow saw open sky again he was grimy with soot, half-blinded with coal cinders.

He rose to his feet and stared ahead. The man with the light was gone!

### **CHAPTER IV. REEFER AMBUSH**

CROUCHED against the blast of cold wind that roared viciously across the top of the speeding freight, The Shadow waited.

Brakies didn't customarily carry torches. Their usual equipment for the long tour along the car roofs was a hurricane lantern. Nor did brakies duck so magically from sight when their presence was discovered!

The Shadow remembered the signal that Pocky Bender had made with the whistle cord of the switch engine, back in the yards of Chicago. That signal had informed crooks of a dangerous situation.

Mike Vallon and Snuffy were aware that The Shadow had escaped from being cooked to death in a bath of living steam. Knowing he was still alive, Vallon and Snuffy had undoubtedly kept a sharp watch as the fast freight pulled out from the yards.

They had probably spotted the dark-robed figure that had made an almost suicidal leap to board the speeding freight.

Afraid to risk a frontal battle with this supreme enemy of crime, killers were trying to lure The Shadow into an ambush by allowing him to see the brief, telltale flash of that light four cars ahead!

Having hesitated long enough to keep up the pretense of not being sure in his own mind what the light might mean, The Shadow began a forward advance.

The nature of the ambush was clear to him the moment he reached the fourth car ahead. It was a refrigerator car!

Laughter whispered from The Shadow's lips. The icy wind whipped away the sound of his grim mirth. Leaving the comparative safety of the catwalk along the center of the roof, The Shadow repeated the tactics he had used on the cars he had already investigated.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

He crawled across the slope of the roof to the edge.

It was a dangerous perch. The freight was making terrific speed. Wind bellied out The Shadow's black cloak like a sail. The gale made it hard to hold on.

The Shadow leaned daringly. One gloved hand was tight over the topmost rung of a ladder. The other gripped his flashlight. He pressed its button, sent a thin beam of brilliance toward the side door of the refrigerator car.

Behind his seemingly inattentive body, a square section of the roof began to lift gently under the pressure of a man hidden below!

There were four of these square trapdoors in the roof of the car. One was at each corner. They were the entrances to the ice compartments of the refrigerator car. Below each was a steel-wire cage into which big chunks of ice were tumbled by the service crew to keep the car contents properly iced for a big trip.

Hobos called them "reefers."

When a refrigerator car was traveling empty, a reefer made an ideal hiding place from the eyes of patrolling brakies.

Behind the dangling figure of The Shadow, the reefer lid was now open. A murderous figure began to crawl silently toward the edge of the roof.

Suddenly, the man sprang. Both hands shoved fiercely at The Shadow to hurl him headlong to death.

The shove failed. The apparently careless hand-hold of The Shadow had been carefully arranged. His outstretched feet were braced securely against the housing of a brake wheel.

But so savage was the onslaught of the killer that for an instant The Shadow was almost torn loose from his dangerous perch. He whirled, kicked strongly with one of his feet. The thug staggered back, fell. The next instant The Shadow was diving relentlessly on his foe.

Behind him, he saw a ratlike face, a long nose, eyes aglitter with hate.

The man was Snuffy!

BUT Snuffy was no longer the ordinary little pickpocket with whom Cliff Marsland had scraped an acquaintance in the slums of Chicago. Terror had turned him into a jungle beast.

He writhed from The Shadow's clutch. Sharp teeth bit savagely into The Shadow's wrist, drawing blood.

Snuffy staggered to his feet. A gun glittered in his claw-like hand. Crouched low like a beast at bay, he tried to cut down his black-robed foe with a spurt of lead.

The Shadow prevented that with a forward leap that started at the instant that Snuffy drew his weapon.

His twist brought a howl of pain from the smaller man. The gun clattered to the roof of the refrigerator car, bounced off into darkness. The Shadow forced Snuffy to his knees on the narrow catwalk.

"Surrender!" his voice rasped.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

An instant later The Shadow was rolling on the catwalk with his frantic foe. Mad with terror, Snuffy meant to kill or be killed.

His clutch at The Shadow's legs toppled his robed adversary. He fought with his hands, with teeth, with wild, spasmodic kicks of his heavy-shod feet.

The Shadow had a double task. He had to defend himself, and keep Snuffy from plunging blindly to his death before he could capture and question him.

The Shadow's foot skidded on the slippery roof of the car. He went to one knee, his back at the edge of roaring blackness.

Snuffy hurled himself at The Shadow like an avalanche. He kicked The Shadow in the stomach. Hands thrust at The Shadow's windpipe. The Shadow's body began to bend backward over the roof edge.

He didn't attempt to let go his grip on the roof to fight off the maddened crook. To do that was to topple to death. What The Shadow did was to duplicate the earlier tactics of Snuffy. One of his writhing legs doubled up. It shot forward like a battering-ram. The blow knocked the wind out of Snuffy.

Half-crazed with pain, Snuffy made a final rush. He tripped and fell forward, off balance. The Shadow risked his own life to make a desperate grab.

The cloth of Snuffy's jacket ripped through The Shadow's tight fingers. The crook shot headfirst into space above The Shadow's prone body.

There was no time for Snuffy to utter a single shriek. His plunging body struck the top of an earth embankment alongside the speeding train. For an instant it seemed to waver. There was a fifty-fifty chance for Snuffy to roll forward or back.

The luck of the damned rolled him backward toward the track. The suction of the icy gale whipped up by the freight's speed pulled the doomed little pickpocket under the wheels. There was a brief, horrible, crunch – then it was over!

The Shadow's eyes were bleak. His hand shot out toward a small oblong of white that fluttered on the car roof, pinned against the edge of the catwalk by the wind. The Shadow's fingers closed over it before the wind could whip it loose. It was a small, white envelope.

It had fallen from the pocket of Snuffy. The rip of the cloth that had defeated The Shadow's attempt to save Snuffy's life, had torn open Snuffy's pocket.

The Shadow made no attempt to examine this envelope he had so swiftly retrieved in the nick of time. His attention was wholly centered on the side door of the refrigerator car.

HANGING at the edge of the car roof, The Shadow saw that the side door had been slid quietly open. A snarling face was framed in the opening. A man with a gun was pressing the trigger to send a bullet crashing into the dangling, black-robed figure above him.

It was Mike Vallon!

A stab of scarlet streaked toward The Shadow.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

It was death that failed to find its target. The wind-whipped cloak of The Shadow took the impact. A hole appeared in the cloak close to The Shadow's braced stomach.

This time, it was The Shadow's turn to fire!

His swiftly drawn .45 spat a heavy slug before Mike Vallon could press his trigger a second time. Unlike Vallon, The Shadow didn't fire to kill. His aimed shot was meant to disable and disarm.

There was a shrill, wind-blown howl from Vallon as The Shadow's slug hit the mark. The gun seemed to leap miraculously from Vallon's grip under the impact of The Shadow's bullet. He sprang back out of sight into the car.

The Shadow was on the move, too!

Hurling himself swiftly across the car's roof, The Shadow reached the open trapdoor of the reefer where Snuffy had hidden earlier.

He dropped feet-first into the steel-wire inclosure.

He was now inside the refrigerator car, but he was still unable to get effectively at Vallon. The steel-wire ice cage was tough, impossible to cut without special tools.

Vallon had lost his gun, but he still had a desperate ace in the hole. He flung himself flat to the floor of the empty car as the twin .45s of The Shadow menaced him.

The dazed body of a man lay on the floor where Vallon made his quick dive. The captive was hauled roughly to his feet as Vallon rose.

It was Cliff Marsland!

Cliff's hands were still tied in a tight knot behind the small of his back. Blood had caked on his forehead and temple where he had been slugged earlier by the butt of Vallon's gun. He reeled and almost fell as he was dragged upright, but the grim clutch of the crook behind him steadied his human shield.

Vallon uttered a cackling laugh. It sounded devilish.

He began to back toward the open side door of the refrigerator car, keeping the dazed Marsland between his own body and the aimed .45s of The Shadow.

His intent was obvious. A strange, new sound had changed the monotonous rhythm of the flying wheels of the freight train. It was a hollow and empty sound: Whoomp – whoomp – whoomp!

The Shadow knew the meaning of that sound.

The train was racing over a high trestle!

Unable to cut down Vallon without putting a bullet through the flesh of Cliff Marsland, The Shadow saw Vallon's hand streak from his pocket with something that glittered.

It was a knife.



## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

Crouched in the open, side doorway of the car behind his human shield, Mike Vallon slashed twice with his knife. The blade sliced through the flesh of Marsland's wrists.

Blood spurted in a crimson jet.

Penned inside the reefer cage, The Shadow knew that Vallon intended to hurl his bleeding victim into the black, scarcely visible river below the trestle over which the freight was speeding.

Horror twisted the heart of The Shadow.

He clawed fiercely at the wire network of the reefer. He went up the inside of his cage like a black-clad monkey. A swift, flat dive carried him out to the roof of the car – just as Marsland's bleeding figure was flung outward into empty darkness.

Mike Vallon had given The Shadow a bitter choice.

THE SHADOW didn't hesitate. Marsland's life was at stake. A brave and obedient agent, he had calmly taken the risk of death in order to carry out orders given him by The Shadow himself.

The Shadow left the roof of the freight in a long, outward dive!

His body missed by a hairbreadth one of the steel supports of the trestle's overhead structure. He fell like a plummet into blackness, his body turning into a stiffly controlled dive the moment he dropped clear of the bridge.

He struck the water with a knifelike stab.

It was like striking a solid substance. Pain ripped along his body. He could hear a vast, thunderous roar of bubbles as he shot irresistibly downward into the icy water of the stream.

His hands twisted upward, he tried to arch his body with every atom of his will, in order to avoid miring himself in the mud of the river's bed.

He could feel the mud, clinging and oozy, as it tried to engulf his body. But his thrashing legs and arms forced him free of the fatal embrace. He ascended to the surface with bursting lungs.

The cold, dry air in his lungs was like wine. One deep breath cleared his eyes of pain, renewed the strength in his battered body.

He looked across the dark surface of the water, searching for the body of Marsland. He could see no sign of his unconscious agent.

The Shadow dived. He sank deep, exploring the muddy bottom in wide, desperate circles. Four times he submerged before his fingers reached and held on to a sodden bundle.

It seemed like years before he rose to the surface with the mud-smeared body of Marsland. Actually, scarcely more than two minutes had elapsed since Marsland's plunge and the rescuing dive of The Shadow.

A few swift strokes pulled Marsland to the shore of the stream. In the blackness of a wild and deserted swamp region, The Shadow worked swiftly.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

His first concern was Marsland's slashed wrists. One of them had not been badly cut by the hasty knife of Mike Vallon. But an artery had been severed in the other. Blood pumped in bright-red jets from the gash.

The Shadow fixed a hasty tourniquet with ripped pieces of his black robe. He knotted the cloth strips tight. He used two or three, tightened them until they bit deeply into the flesh above Marsland's wrist, leaving his hand and fingers pale and waxen-looking. The Shadow tightened the tourniquet immovably with a small piece of wood.

When he had finished, the crimson jet of arterial blood had subsided to almost nothing.

The Shadow turned Marsland on his face. Squatting astride him, he worked swiftly with artificial respiration.

Presently, he heard a sigh. It was a sound almost inaudible, but it was followed by stronger breathing. Marsland began to groan. It was pleasant to drown after a certain point. Marsland, still unconscious, was fighting dully not to be brought back to life!

The Shadow worked tenaciously. Soon Marsland was past danger. His eyes flicked open. They were glassy. But he tried to smile. He had recognized his black-robed rescuer. Weakly he tried to stagger to his feet.

HE wasn't able to stand. The Shadow lifted him over one shoulder, steadied his weight. He carried his wounded agent toward the only possible route out of this deserted and black wilderness of mud and water and weeds.

The railroad embankment!

By the time The Shadow reached the track roadbed, he was weary with the weight of his burden. But he had no time to delay. A glance at Marsland's face proved that Marsland had lost a considerable amount of blood. His face was waxen, almost bluish.

He needed something important as soon as it could be administered. A blood transfusion!

But where? And how?

The Shadow laid Marsland gently alongside the track. He raced onward into the darkness. He went a half mile, a mile, before he found what he sought – the bare, unpainted shape of a wooden shack alongside the right of way.

It was the shanty of a section foreman. The door was locked, but The Shadow broke it down with a chunk of rock. Inside was a telephone. The Shadow put through a swift call to the nearest town.

His voice sounded rough and untutored, the voice of a hobo. When the call was completed, his appearance also changed to that of a hobo. His black robe was buried out of sight in a mud hole.

When the gasoline handcar finally arrived from town, the men aboard it saw what they believed to be a couple of tramps, one of them badly slashed.

One of the rescuers had a gun. He was a deputy sheriff.

The Shadow told a gruff story of a fight in a box car among hobos. He told how he had leaped overboard to rescue a slashed pal. His story sounded fishy. The deputy with the gun put him under arrest.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

The Shadow made no protest. It was the price he had to pay for getting Marsland to a hospital.

It was a bitter price, too, for The Shadow knew now that Mike Vallon had pulled a cunning deception. Vallon was not heading for St. Louis. The small envelope that had fallen from Snuffy's torn pocket had made the trickery clear.

The Shadow had had time to examine that envelope. In it was a railroad ticket. The ticket was a first-class fare between Truxton – and New York!

The answer was clear! The moment the fast freight to St. Louis halted at Truxton for servicing, Vallon intended to leave it. The "next job" he had boasted about was not out West, but in New York!

The Shadow, under arrest as a hobo, was doomed to waste a full day before he could follow!

Dawn was beginning to break over the trees when The Shadow was locked in the cell of a small town jail. For The Shadow, such a jail would be easy to crack – but not before nightfall.

Twelve hours to wait! And even then The Shadow would be still west of Chicago, hundreds of miles from Manhattan!

But there was one thing that gave him grim satisfaction. He had learned from the jailer that Marsland had been given a prompt blood transfusion at the hospital. His "tramp pal" was now out of danger.

The Shadow grunted, pretended to doze in his cell. He waited patiently for darkness to fall.

Meanwhile, aboard a comfortable passenger train, a man with a taut smile on his lips was speeding from Truxton to New York.

Mike Vallon's plans had worked out perfectly. He figured that both Marsland and The Shadow were dead. Even if by some miracle of luck, they weren't – what did it matter? Let The Shadow chase onward to St. Louis! Let him hunt there all he liked!

Vallon's grin widened as he thought about three "accidents." In Atlanta, in Boston, in Chicago! The "accident" gag was about worn out. Vallon had a hunch that The Shadow suspected they were a cloak for a systematic chain of murders.

"O.K., pal," Vallon said to himself. "Figure 'em out as murders! See what good it will do you!"

He thought about the set-up with satisfaction as the comfortable, streamlined coach sped smoothly eastward.

"If The Shadow wants to investigate murder, I'll hand him a honey this time! I know just the guy in Manhattan who can make anything look like murder – Chip Ricco!"

Something far trickier than The Shadow yet realized was under way. It was a conspiracy to test even the powers of The Shadow!

## CHAPTER V. HEADQUARTERS SNATCH

THE car had not been parked at the curb very long.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

It was late afternoon in New York. The short winter day was rapidly dwindling into dusk. In the office buildings and shops of Manhattan, lights were shining. But the street where the car was parked was gray and quiet.

Two men were in the car. One was Mike Vallon. Alongside him lounged a dark–featured, chunky individual named Chip Ricco.

Ricco's specialty was sudden death. The tool of his trade was secreted in the back of the car. It was a sleek, well–kept machine gun.

Mike Vallon kept his gaze on the front of a house diagonally opposite. It was a boardinghouse. Nice people lived there, mostly respectable young men with good jobs nearby. Vallon grinned because he expected one of these young men to arrive home soon.

But Ricco looked glum. An expert with the machine gun, he couldn't understand why Vallon didn't want him to blaze away the moment the young man showed.

"I don't get this," he growled. "It don't make sense."

"Keep your shirt on," Vallon snapped.

"But why pay out good dough if you don't want the sap blasted?" Ricco persisted.

"Quit thinking about it. Keep your mind on the dough I promised you."

"Dough's O.K.," Ricco muttered. "Only I still can't see –"

"Pipe down!" Vallon said. "Here he comes!"

A young man had just turned the corner from the avenue. He was well–dressed, pleasant–looking. He walked down the shadowy gray street at a pace that seemed a little faster than normal. As he passed beneath a sidewalk light, his face showed clearly for an instant.

Vallon's eyes gleamed as he caught that brief glimpse of the man's face. There was worry in it. The young man was afraid of something.

He didn't glance toward the blur of the parked car diagonally across the street from his boardinghouse. His worried eyes kept flicking backward across his shoulder as if he expected someone might be following him.

He hurried nervously into the boardinghouse entry, let himself in with a key.

"Sit tight," Vallon told Ricco. "Don't do nothing! I'll be back in a little while."

He faded slyly across the street and vanished down a narrow alley a few doors from the boardinghouse where the young man had gone.

Fifteen minutes later, Mike Vallon reappeared. The grin on his thin lips was more pronounced.

"A cinch," he chuckled. "The sap is gonna do exactly what I figured he'd do. He's going down to the precinct station to apply for a pistol permit. I heard him tell the landlady."

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Chip Ricco lost his air of disgust. He started to slide with alacrity to the back of the car where his machine gun lay hidden. Vallon detained him by a tight clutch at his shoulder.

"Wait! I want to make sure that you don't pull a boner. Tell me the set-up."

"We're going to get to the cop house the same time this guy does. I let fly with everything in the gun. When I get done, the front of that cop house will look like Swiss cheese."

"What about the guy?" Vallon said.

Ricco scowled.

"You're making it tough for me, pal! I'm used to hitting people I aim at. It ain't easy to miss.

"You got to miss! I don't want that guy touched!"

"O.K., O.K.! I promised, didn't I?"

The stolen car faded as quietly as it arrived. It sped through the deepening dusk of Manhattan.

SHORTLY after it had left, the frightened young man reappeared from the boardinghouse. He looked up and down the street, then walked rapidly away.

His goal was a police station several blocks away. When he saw the green lamps outside the precinct station, some of his nervous haste left him. He drew a deep breath and turned in toward the entrance.

He failed to see the car. It didn't move fast. It came on with almost leisurely slowness.

Suddenly, the car accelerated. Mike Vallon, behind the wheel, ducked his head low. A peak cap, drawn low on his forehead, helped to hide the vague glimmer of his face. Chip Ricco, in the back, was also an old hand at keeping a hat low and a coat collar high.

The muzzle of the machine gun projected from the car's rear window. Suddenly, the quiet dusk was shattered by the staccato roar of gunfire.

Scarlet streaks spat toward the figure of the young man on the front steps of the precinct station. Lead whistled past him. He flung himself desperately to the ground. His body rolled grotesquely down the steps under the lash of that hail of lead.

For several seconds, the snarling inferno of death hammered. Glass shattered in the window of the police station. Inside, a desk lieutenant flung himself flat as slugs whined like bees across the spot where his head and shoulders had just been showing. The front door was scarred and pitted with holes.

The young man outside lay flat on his face, rigid with the fear of death. Not a bullet had touched him.

"Swell!" Vallon whispered between locked teeth. "The dope didn't see a thing! Down on the floor, Ricco! Get out of sight!"

The car got out of sight, too. It raced onward to the corner, shrieked around it into the avenue. A block to the north, the car's tires shrieked again. A perfect skid took it at top speed into another side street.

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Its speed increased on the longer stretch toward the next avenue.

Far behind it, startled cops were pounding out the front door of the precinct station. They vaulted over the figure of the young man who lay on his face. They acted swiftly, but valuable time was lost. Not more than sixty seconds, perhaps. But seconds were valuable.

By the time a startled chauffeur had jammed on his brakes and allowed the cops to commandeer his vehicle, the murder car had a neat start. It was easy to follow. The snarl of its motor had drawn the attention of dozens of pedestrians to its swift getaway. Voices shouted to the cops on the pursuing vehicle. Fingers pointed out the trail.

Soon the fleeing car was seen. But it was no longer in motion. It had halted with a wild screech of locked brakes on an avenue corner, well to the west of the police station.

On that corner was the kiosk entrance to a subway. The two men in the car had already leaped out swiftly and headed down into the subway.

Cops scattered to plug up the rat holes through which criminal rats might escape. Bluecoats with drawn guns guarded the sidewalk exits. Others raced underground.

It was an express station with a busy mezzanine level, where the change booths were located. Other stairways led to the platforms where uptown and downtown trains came in, both express and local.

In the crowded flurry of the late afternoon rush hour, no one had seen anything of two wildly fleeing gunmen. This was not strange, for Vallon and Ricco had taken their time once they had dived underground.

An uptown local had halted at one island platform, a downtown express at another. Police stopped both trains from departing, ordered the doors closed and locked. Other cops rushed in and out the gloomy passageway of the station itself.

Ricco and Vallon did not see any of this. They had figured their getaway neatly. They didn't give a damn about the loss of the machine gun in the stolen car. There were no prints on it, no way to trace the discarded weapon. Chip Ricco had made grimly sure of that beforehand.

He followed Vallon through a lighted entrance on the local platform. It was the underground entrance to a busy department store. Shoppers, trying to make last-minute purchases before the closing gong, made an excellent screen. The two fugitives walked upstairs to the street level, crossed to a side exit on another street, got into an empty cab parked there for just that purpose.

They faded quietly into the dusk. A nice job, perfect in every detail. No one had seen their faces; no one in the department store had heard the clamor out in the busy avenue.

Mike Vallon's grin was wolfish. He patted the dark-complexioned Ricco on the shoulder. Not a single slug from that roaring blast of death had touched the frightened young man outside the police station!

"Swell work, keed!" Vallon chuckled.

THE frightened young man was no longer prone on the sidewalk. Helped to his feet by a bluecoat, he staggered weakly into the police station. To the desk lieutenant, he told a gasping story that did not make things much clearer.

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"My name is Marvin Hobson. I don't know who they were, or why they tried to kill me. This is the third time attempts have been made on my life. Twice before this, I was almost killed!"

His voice rose shrilly.

"Why should criminals be after me? I have no enemies. I never did anything to bother anybody. I have a good job. I live in a quiet boardinghouse—"

"Where do you work?"

"At the Bellinger Metal Corp. I'm a metallurgist."

"Hm—m—m." The desk lieutenant's eyes narrowed. "Any special work? Anything secret or important?"

"No, sir. I've only been out of college a short time. I do routine research work. The idea that anyone should be after some secret process I might have discovered, is silly."

His voice had steadied. It carried conviction.

"Why did you come to the precinct station this afternoon?"

"I wanted to apply for a pistol permit. To protect myself from further attacks."

"And you didn't see who those guys were in the murder car?"

"No, sir. The minute the shooting began, I flung myself flat on my face. I don't even know what the car looked like."

The desk lieutenant scratched his nose. This was a tough one. He picked up his phone and called headquarters. He spoke to Inspector Cardona.

Evidently Cardona's comments about the gun raid on a police station were bitter. The lieutenant's bronzed face turned brick-red. But he kept his voice under control.

"O.K., inspector. I'll send him down to headquarters for you to question."

Twenty minutes later, Marvin Hobson was in the big, well-lighted office of Joe Cardona. Inspector Cardona was the biggest ace in the police department. He was short, thickset, swarthy – and a smart, experienced cop. He had come up the hard way, through the ranks. He had cracked many a tough mystery, but this one made his forehead crease with puzzlement.

There was no handle to anything! No apparent reason why underworld killers should want to cut down this good-looking young Marvin Hobson.

Cardona made Hobson repeat everything he had told the precinct lieutenant. He added a lot more questions of his own. But at the end, he was no wiser than when he had started.

"You can see, inspector, why I wanted to apply for a pistol permit," Hobson whispered bleakly. "May I have one?"

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"Yeah. That is –" Cardona hesitated again, like a dog looking for a bone that had been mislaid. "You're absolutely sure that you have never been in trouble before? Never been arrested? Never consorted in any way with criminals?"

"No, sir. I've only been six months out of college. I graduated from Barham Institute. I was recommended for my job with the Bellinger Metals Corp. by Professor Durkin. He will vouch for me. I was honor man in my class."

"O.K." Cardona picked up his phone and spoke briefly. When he hung up, he nodded to Hobson.

"Sergeant Walsh will take care of your application. Go up to Fingerprint – on the next floor. You understand, a pistol–permit application takes a few days to put through. We'll have to take your fingerprints, check our files, send a copy of the prints on to Washington to be checked there against records from every police department in the country. If there is nothing wrong with your record, you'll get the gun permit."

"Thank you," Hobson said.

He went up to the print bureau on the floor above. There, Sergeant Walsh, a round–faced cop with a humorous Irish twinkle in his eyes, handed Hobson an application, then took two sets of his prints.

Feeling a lot better, Marvin Hobson left the gray stone building to return to his boardinghouse. It was much darker outside. He looked at his watch. He was too late for the dinner hour at his boardinghouse. His landlady was strict about things like that.

Hobson sighed, went into a nearby restaurant and ordered dinner.

MEANWHILE, in the fingerprint bureau, Sergeant Walsh yawned. It had been a long day. Walsh was tired and hungry. He felt too lazy to get up and compare the new prints with the records in the files.

He began to hunt for the big envelope into which the mail for the Washington Print Bureau went each day.

Before he could find it, the door opened hesitantly. A smiling face peered. An apologetic voice said softly, "Shine 'em up, pleeze, sarge?" The man was an Italian.

Walsh glanced at his dusty shoes, nodded. The shoe–shine man got to work with polish and brushes. Walsh noticed that he wasn't the usual man who circulated daily through the corridors and offices of the big building.

"Where's Tony?" He smiled. "Gettin' married or something?"

"No, sir, you betcha. Tony is seeck today."

"What's the matter with him. Too much spaghetti?"

The shoe–shine man grinned. "Yeah. Too mooch. Make his belly hurt. Make him get pills, stay home. I'm his brudder. How you like the shine, huh?"

It was a good job. Walsh yawned, got to his feet, felt in his pocket for change.

Before he could sort out a dime and a nickel tip, he uttered a grunt of annoyance. His good nature vanished as he saw Tony's brother walk toward an open drawer of one of the fingerprint files that Walsh had forgotten to



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close on an earlier inspection that day. The shoe-shine man began idly to pull out record cards.

"Hey! Let that alone! That stuff is confidential! Ain't you got no sense?"

The man apologized. He retreated with cringing haste, leaned down to pick up his shine box, which he had left on the floor alongside Walsh's desk.

Walsh went over to the open file, straightened out the records which the man had so clumsily dislodged.

By the time he had finished, Tony's brother and the shine box were gone. Walsh picked up the print records that Marvin Hobson had made.

Walsh filed one, dropped the other into the Washington envelope. He was entirely innocent of the fact that a wily trick had been successfully pulled off by the brother of the sick Tony.

The prints in Walsh's possession were not the same ones that Marvin Hobson had made!

Hobson's prints were at this very instant leaving police headquarters inside the battered shine box of a cunning crook!

## CHAPTER VI. MURDER MAGIC

MARVIN HOBSON didn't eat out often. The fact that he had missed dinner at his boardinghouse tonight was not his fault. He decided to soothe his jangled nerves by a little harmless dissipation.

He selected a good restaurant, ordered an expensive meal. The service was excellent, the music pleasant. By the time Hobson emerged into the cold darkness, he felt considerably more at ease.

He went to a downtown movie theater and saw a good picture. It was past eleven when he returned to his boardinghouse.

He smiled at the worried face of his landlady.

"I was uneasy about you," she said. "It isn't like you to break your routine about meals. Did you arrange to get your pistol permit?"

He nodded. "It will take a day or two, Sergeant Walsh told me at headquarters."

He told his landlady about the dangerous experience he had managed to come through with a whole skin. She shuddered. But Hobson's pleasant evening had robbed him of some of his earlier fear.

"I don't think I'll be troubled again. Whoever those thugs were, they'll be afraid to show their faces for several days. Perhaps the publicity about me, that is sure to appear in tomorrow's papers, will help make things easier. Those thugs will discover that they've been after the wrong man. I'm sure there's a mistake in identity somewhere. It's ridiculous to think that any criminals would have a motive of any kind for killin' me."

"Maybe it has something to do with your work," the landlady said.

"Not a chance. That's even more far-fetched. I do the most routine work imaginable. All I've been working on is zinc. Can you imagine a metal less exciting than zinc? Now if I was an expert on rubber or tin!"

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He laughed, and turned toward the staircase.

"Good night. I hope there's a good breakfast in the morning. I've got to catch up on that meal I missed tonight."

His room was on the top floor – a nice, high-ceilinged chamber at the rear. He liked to work at night. Sometimes he did a lot of typing. It was nice to know that the room opposite his was unoccupied; that the man in the room below was deaf enough not to be bothered by the click of typing on the nights when Hobson worked.

He opened his bedroom door and felt for the light switch. Then he stiffened. Something cold and rigid jammed into the flesh at the back of his neck.

It was the muzzle of a gun.

"Keep quiet, sucker!" a menacing voice whispered. "Shut that door!"

The command about the door was addressed to a second hidden intruder. The door closed softly. The key turned in the lock.

"O.K.! Turn on the light!"

A dim light glowed on the night stand alongside Marvin Hobson's bed. His eyes blinked. Then, suddenly, he grew rigid with terror.

His bed was occupied by another man. A dead man!

The wide-open eyes of that corpse were horrible to contemplate. But the appearance of the dead man's head was even more horrible. He had been battered to death. His face was a bloody smear. There was dried blood on the pillow where his head rested. There were more blood streaks on the sheets.

Hobson's face turned toward the two intruders who had captured him. He didn't know either of them. He was unaware that the swarthy little man with the aimed pistol was Chip Ricco, the killer who had earlier that evening emptied a machine gun at him in front of the police station. He had no suspicion that the grinning Mike Vallon had driven the car.

He said in a tremulous whisper, "Don't kill me!"

"Shut up!" Vallon rasped. "Keep that trap of yours buttoned tight. Get out of your clothes! Strip!"

Hobson obeyed. The gun muzzle of Ricco remained steadily on him while he disrobed.

"Now, put these on!"

Hobson picked up the garments that lay on the floor. He wondered if they belonged to the dead man on the bed. The dead man had already been dressed in a pair of Hobson's own pajamas.

Mike Vallon stripped a ring off the finger of one of Hobson's upraised hands. He slid it over a finger of the blood-smeared corpse in the bed.

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Then he tiptoed behind the helpless figure of the captive young metallurgist. His voice was an ugly whisper to Ricco.

"Keep your rod on him! If he so much as burps – let him have it through the belly!"

Hobson didn't know what to expect next. What he felt was a sharp pain in his neck. Vallon had driven home the point of a hollow needle. The plunger of the hypodermic shot a powerful drug into a pierced vein.

Hobson quivered, but he was afraid to move. He stood there watching the pitiless face of the gunman in front of him. Then, suddenly, he saw nothing. The drug had taken effect with swift power. Hobson's sight faded. He pitched sideways, unconscious.

His toppling figure didn't hit the floor. Mike Vallon caught him, eased him to the rug. The light in the room went out. Only one thing was dimly visible in the darkness – the faintly illuminated hands of a small alarm clock.

Vallon and Ricco seemed in no hurry to do anything else. In the darkness, they waited. The hands of the clock moved slowly. Midnight passed. One o'clock. Two o'clock. Three o'clock.

Marvin Hobson groaned faintly. A palm slapped viciously over his mouth, suppressing the slight sound.

"He's coming out of it," Ricco's voice whispered.

"Give him a little more time," Vallon replied. "We want him to be able to walk. Keep your hand over his mouth. If he tries to let out a yelp – bat him on the skull!"

"O.K.!"

Hobson's head was whirling. But through the pain and nausea that were the after-effects of the drug, he heard those ugly whispers. He remained perfectly still, afraid, almost, to breathe.

Presently, the pressure over his mouth was withdrawn.

"Up on your feet, monkey!" Vallon snapped. "Don't move until you're told!"

THE night lamp glowed faintly on the table close to Hobson's bed. The dead man with the battered face was still lying there in Hobson's pajamas. On his dead finger was the ring that had been taken from the young metallurgist. Hobson's clothes were hung neatly across the chair alongside the bed.

Hobson shuddered. It was like looking at his own murdered corpse.

He saw that his rear window – the one that opened on a fire escape – was open from the bottom. He expected to be ordered to climb out that window and down the fire-escape ladder.

But instead, Vallon opened the door that led to the hallway of the boardinghouse, after first dousing the dim light in the death room.

The hallway outside was dark and empty. The clock with the radium dial showed that the time was almost half past three in the morning. Not a sound came from the sleeping house.

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A vicious nudge from a gun muzzle forced Hobson out of the room and into the hail. He was conducted silently to a staircase that led aloft. He realized now that he was being kidnapped by way of the roof.

The roof door was locked on the inside by a heavy, metal staple in a hook. The sight of that staple and hook seemed to amuse Mike Vallon. He opened the door carefully, leaving no prints. Ricco forced their captive out into the chilly darkness on the roof.

Vallon attended swiftly to the roof door, while Ricco kept his gun on the kidnapped man. Using a sheet of heavy cardboard which he had hidden behind the roof door, Vallon did a trick with that simple lock arrangement.

He fixed the hook delicately at balance before he closed the roof door. He closed the door with cringing care, so as not to disturb the balanced shaft of the upraised hook on the inside. Then, he slid his sheet of stiff cardboard through the crack between the door edge and the door frame. There was just enough space to manipulate the edge of the cardboard.

Vallon gave his cardboard a sudden, quick thrust. The poised hook fell. Vallon tried the door with his gloved hand, then he cursed. The hook had fallen crookedly. It hadn't dropped into the staple. The door was still unlocked.

He tried again. This time, the maneuver was successful. The delicately poised hook, dislodged by the stiff edge of the inserted cardboard, fell accurately into the staple on the inside.

Vallon tried the door with a grin. It refused to budge. It was tightly locked now – on the inside!

A snarl from Ricco forced the shivering Hobson to walk quietly across the line of roof-tops. It was a row of attached houses, so there was no difficulty reaching a roof entrance farther along the block.

Hobson was forced downstairs, at pistol point, into what appeared to be an untenanted and empty dwelling. He was taken to the ground floor and out the back door.

An opening in a rear fence led to an alley beyond the back yard of the empty dwelling. Beyond the alley was a place that looked like a paved loading area for trucks.

A truck was waiting there. It was a covered vehicle.

A shove sent Hobson staggering against the open rear of the truck. Before he could recover, the gun in the hand of Ricco dealt him a vicious blow on the skull. Again Hobson collapsed.

His sagging body was caught expertly, jammed headfirst inside the truck. Ricco sprang inside, grabbed at the limply projecting legs of the kidnapped man, hauled them out of sight.

Presently the engine of the truck awoke faint echoes. The truck moved out of the loading area in the lee of a small warehouse. It faded into darkness.

A cunning crime had been completely successful. It was a crime protected and hidden at every point of deception.

Vallon's chuckle indicated that he did not expect the police to do very much about penetrating the deception that cloaked the "murder" of Marvin Hobson.

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He was right.

Only The Shadow could unravel this cunning mystery – which was but a single link in a whole chain of crimes forged by a super-criminal for whom Mike Vallon was only a lieutenant.

But The Shadow was still miles away from New York. Having broken out of a small-town jail, he had wasted precious hours getting to Chicago and arranging a reservation aboard a plane for New York.

Worse than that, The Shadow had no knowledge yet of what had just taken place!

IT was chilly and gray when the big transport plane winged out of the early-morning sky. It settled gently on the level runway at LaGuardia Field. The clock on the administration building showed that the time was a little before seven.

Most of the passengers were army men. But one of them was a civilian. An important civilian, judging by the way the airfield reporter stopped to interview him.

"Nothing to say," Lamont Cranston smiled. "Merely a routine business trip to Chicago."

He walked through the exit gate with a quick, athletic stride. Cranston was a man of both wealth and social standing. A world traveler and a famous big-game hunter, Cranston had not left the public eye because of the war. He had undertaken several important business tasks for the government. It was not unusual for him to come and go by plane, even in these days of priorities.

The Shadow found this prominence of Lamont Cranston convenient. For Lamont Cranston was The Shadow! It was one of the many roles The Shadow used when occasion warranted.

Beyond the exit gate from the airport, a pretty, dark-haired girl was waiting. Her eyes glowed when she saw the tall, erect figure of Cranston emerge.

"Hello, Lamont. I received your message from Chicago. Did you have a nice trip?"

"Excellent," Cranston murmured. Then his eyes narrowed slightly. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to cancel our plans to have breakfast together, Margo."

She didn't make any comment. Margo Lane had known Cranston a long time. Like him, she was a well-known socialite, often seen in his company. But there was something she knew that was not known to many other people in or out of New York.

She was aware that Cranston and The Shadow were an identical personage!

It was a subject never discussed openly between them.

"I wonder if you'd mind doing me a little favor, Margo?" Cranston continued. "Aren't you a fairly good friend of Jimmy Bellinger?"

"Of course. Why? Would you like to meet him, Lamont?"

"Not Jimmy. His older brother – Marcus Bellinger. The head of the Bellinger Metals Corp."

Cranston paused. His smile was dim.

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"You see, Marcus happens to own a collection of weapons that is fairly important. I've never had the pleasure of seeing that collection. I'd prefer not to ask openly to see it. So if you were to meet Jimmy, say, at cocktails somewhere late this afternoon, and I happened along –"

Margo nodded.

"Five o'clock at the Ritz. Jimmy and I are old friends. I think I can arrange it."

She got into her car and drove away. The Shadow waited a moment or two, then went back into the administration building at the airport.

HE entered a soundproof phone booth and called a number unlisted in any telephone directory. A crisp voice replied:

"Burbank speaking."

Burbank was The Shadow's contact man. It was his duty to receive and transmit messages from The Shadow and his agents.

The Shadow voiced a request.

"Report desired from Vincent."

Harry Vincent hid the fact that he was an agent of The Shadow by posing as an unassuming young man in a suite at the Hotel Metrolite. Orders from The Shadow had already sent Harry to a small college town in Massachusetts.

Burbank relayed interesting information from him.

The three young metallurgists who had suffered such strange "accidents" in Boston, in Atlanta and in Chicago, had all been graduates of the college Vincent had visited. Three of them had been recommended as brilliant prospects to the Bellinger Metals Corp. Others had been recommended to various other chemical and metal companies through the United States.

The victims in Atlanta and Chicago had worked for Marcus Bellinger. A third was employed by Bellinger in New York.

"His name and address?" The Shadow asked.

Burbank supplied the information. The man in New York was named Marvin Hobson. Burbank also gave the address of the quiet Manhattan boardinghouse where Hobson lived.

He added a final fact that made the eyes of The Shadow gleam.

Of the seven young men who had been sent by their colleges to various companies for brilliance in metal and chemical research, three had been recommended to Marcus by the professor under whom they had studied, Professor Humphrey Durkin. Harry Vincent had been unable to contact this Professor Durkin.

Durkin, a man of eccentric habits, had suddenly applied for sick leave from the institute. He had left on what he called "a curative and pleasure trip." He had left no forwarding address. The date of Durkin's disappearance brought a whisper of sibilant mirth from the lips of The Shadow. Durkin had dropped out of

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sight just about the time the first young man had plunged so tragically to an accidental death in Atlanta.

"Report from Clyde Burke," The Shadow intoned.

Burke was a star reporter on the Daily Classic. It was a convenient cloak for more important activities in the service of The Shadow. The Shadow, knowing from the boastful remark of Mike Vallon that "a new job" was contemplated, knowing that Vallon had slyly covered his tracks to get to New York secretly, had sent instructions to Clyde Burke via Burbank to keep his eyes open for anything unusual in the way of underworld news.

Burke's news was startling. The Shadow learned for the first time of the strange machine-gun attack on a young metallurgist at the very entrance to a police station. He learned that the attack had failed, that the young man had applied for a pistol permit to defend himself against unknown enemies.

The name of Marvin Hobson brought a gleam to the eyes of The Shadow.

The Shadow was eager to talk to Inspector Cardona and to Sergeant Walsh of the fingerprint bureau, in his harmless guise of Lamont Cranston. But the time for direct interference was not yet ripe.

He decided to phone Commissioner Weston. Weston and Lamont Cranston were old friends. It would be easier to pry essential facts out of Weston under the screen of a friendly breakfast date. Cranston often breakfasted with the police commissioner when he arrived early from an out-of-town trip.

He phoned Weston's home, spoke blandly to the servant who answered the ring.

He received a prompt shock.

"The commissioner isn't at home, sir," the servant replied. "He left a few minutes ago to investigate a murder which was just discovered by police."

"Murder?"

"Yes, sir. A young man named Hobson, I believe. He didn't appear for breakfast this morning at the boardinghouse where he lives. His landlady investigated, found him dead in his bed. Someone got into his room last night and battered his skull in."

For a second, The Shadow was silent. Then, his voice softer than silk, he spoke over the wire.

"I see," he said. "Thank you."

## CHAPTER VII. CARDBOARD CLUE

THE quiet street where Marvin Hobson's boardinghouse was located had turned into a noisy maelstrom of cars and people by the time a taxicab brought The Shadow to the scene.

Almost the first thing The Shadow saw was the long, black limousine of Police Commissioner Weston. The cop guarding the front door was Weston's personal chauffeur. The Shadow, in his role of Lamont Cranston, was well known to the man.

"Hello, Baxter," he said smilingly. "Do you happen to know if the commissioner has eaten breakfast yet?"

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Baxter grinned.

"Hello, Mr. Cranston. No, he hadda skip breakfast – and he didn't like it much, either. Did he have a date with you, sir?"

"More or less," Cranston said. "Would it be all right for me to go inside and speak to him?"

Baxter nodded. The Shadow, as Cranston, had a habit of turning up unexpectedly at scenes like this.

He found Weston upstairs in the bedroom where a murdered man lay in a blood-smeared bed. The Shadow masked his grim interest in the scene under the guise of a surprised stare. To Weston he murmured a polite subterfuge. He had arrived at the airport too early for breakfast. He had hoped that Weston would join him for a pleasant get-together over bacon and eggs.

Weston looked harried.

"Sorry, Lamont. This thing is nasty." He gestured toward the corpse on the bed. "This fellow Hobson had applied for police protection. Unless we solve this case quickly and arrest the killer – the newspapers will give the department hell!"

It was Cranston's cue to leave. But he didn't. He stood back out of the way while police specialists from Homicide went over the death room with a fine-tooth comb. Print men dusted every inch of the place with powder. A plain-clothes man climbed through the open window from the fire escape. His scowling face showed unmistakably that he had been no more successful than his colleagues.

Cardona, backing up, bumped into Cranston. He stopped frowning, shook hands hurriedly.

"Was the window open when you got here?" Cranston asked.

"Yeah. The room is exactly the way the landlady found it. Door locked. Key missing. Window open. One of those simple crime jobs that are always tough to solve."

Under Cranston's sympathetic prodding, Joe Cardona aired his theory of the murder set-up.

"The killer climbed the fire escape from the rear alley and got into the window. Looks like he slugged Hobson with a hammer. Haven't found a trace yet of the murder weapon. The killer was smart enough to carry it away. Not a damned clue in the room."

Cranston seemed not too interested. "Did you examine the roof?"

"Yeah. No soap! The roof door is locked on the inside. No prints there, either."

"Has the medical examiner been here?"

"Yeah. He says Hobson was killed around eleven o'clock last night. Probably a few minutes after he said good-night to his landlady and went upstairs. The thing looks like a revenge job to me. Maybe Hobson was mixed up with some woman. But the landlady says he never went out with girls. I tell you, Mr. Cranston, this thing is a headache!"

Cranston drew Cardona's attention to the badly battered condition of the dead man's head and face.



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"Queer how the killer disfigured him, eh, what?"

"That is queer!" Cardona admitted.

He kept staring at the corpse while the idea, planted by The Shadow, worked in his mind. Suddenly, Cardona smacked a fist against his palm.

"Hey, maybe this guy in the bed ain't Hobson at all! It wouldn't be the first time in crime history that a guy with a mutilated face turned out to be someone else. Carey! Hey – Carey!"

CAREY was one of the print specialists. He came away from the framework of the open bedroom window.

"Hop down to headquarters," Cardona ordered. "Late yesterday afternoon, this fellow Hobson applied for a pistol permit. I sent him up to Sergeant Walsh. Walsh took his prints. Get down there and bring me those prints. I got a hunch!"

The Shadow drifted into the background, waited calmly. He still gave the impression of a well-dressed society idler who was hoping against hope that Commissioner Weston would presently join him for a delayed breakfast somewhere.

Helped by a department siren, Carey made the trip to headquarters and back in quick time. He took prints of the dead man's fingers. He compared those prints with the record of Marvin Hobson which he had brought back with him.

"Well?" Cardona snapped.

Carey shook his head.

"Sorry to ruin your theory, inspector," he said. "The corpse in the bed is Hobson! The prints are identical. We're going to have to go back to where we started. Find out who hated Hobson and why. Look for a woman, maybe. Look for some shady deal in money."

Carey suddenly grinned a little.

"What's so damned funny about it?" Cardona snapped.

"Sorry, inspector. I wasn't thinking about the murder. I was thinking about Sergeant Walsh. Your sudden call for them prints had Walsh scared for a minute. He couldn't find 'em. He couldn't remember where he had put 'em."

"Why not?"

"Well, it seems that right after Hobson left yesterday, Walsh had his shoes shined. He got to kiddin' with the shoe-shine guy and forgot all about the print records. He remembered shoving one set in the envelope for Washington, but he couldn't remember where he had put the other set. He finally found it in a desk drawer."

The Shadow listened in to this little discussion. As Cranston, he made what sounded like a feeble joke.

"Perhaps in the interest of crime detection, it might not be a bad idea to bar Tony from headquarters," he chuckled. "Seriously, I hope you forgive Tony. He's given many an excellent shine when I visited the commissioner."

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"It wasn't Tony," Carey said. "Walsh told me that Tony was home with a belly-ache from too much spaghetti. This guy was Tony's brother."

The small talk about shoe shines annoyed Cardona. He uttered an exasperated oath.

"Cut out the gab. Let's get back to something more important. There's gotta be a lead here somewhere! You men get busy. Dig me up something!"

The Shadow's eyes held a grim light. Unlike Cardona, he didn't believe that the conversation about Tony's sudden illness was mere small talk. He drifted toward the doorway where Commissioner Weston stood. He shook hands with Weston, made a polite excuse.

"Sorry to have bothered you. I'll see you later. Perhaps we can breakfast together some other time."

He left the room, headed toward the street. But the moment he was out of observation, he changed his direction. Presently, in the dimness of the staircase that led to the roof, The Shadow examined the locked door that led outside.

He found that, actually, the door was not locked. It was hooked. The hook rested securely in a stout staple.

The Shadow saw something else that brought a sibilant whisper of mirth from him. The roof door didn't fit any too well into its frame. There was a long crack from top to bottom.

Opening the door with gloved hands, The Shadow slipped out into the chilly wind on the open roof.

Presently, he bent and picked up something. He was not surprised at what he found. It was a sheet of stiff cardboard, bent a little at one corner.

The Shadow adjusted the hook delicately on the inside of the roof door, then he closed the door. Through the crack, he could see the poised silhouette of the hook. He inserted his thin cardboard sheet through the crack, moved it carefully. Suddenly, there was a quick motion of his wrist.

The Shadow removed the cardboard, tested the closed roof. The door was now immovable.

His simple trick had "locked" it on the inside!

To The Shadow, certain facts now became clear. Hobson's murderer had entered the boardinghouse through the roof door, not through the window downstairs. He had entered the house early, probably while the boarders below were at supper downstairs. When Hobson had entered his room after bidding good-night to his landlady – he had probably found the killer waiting for him!

Only Hobson had not been killed! To The Shadow, this was still an assumption. But he remembered the odd news about Sergeant Walsh and the substitute shoe-shine man. He thought of the horribly battered face of the dead man in the bed.

Cardona's complacent acceptance of the fingerprint "evidence" was not shared by The Shadow. He thought grimly of the accidents that had happened to smart young metallurgists in Atlanta, in Boston, in Chicago. All those accidents had one thing in common. The men had fallen from high places. Their bodies had been badly mutilated.

The coincidence was too much to be credible.

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In The Shadow's brain the word "murder" faded. Another word took its place tentatively: "Kidnapping."

The Shadow advanced across the long line of roofs. Before he had entered the boardinghouse, a keen glance up and down the street had apprised him of a fact. One of the houses in the row was empty. A "To Let" sign swung in the cold breeze outside.

The Shadow entered this house from above. Its roof door was hooked on the inside, but The Shadow had no trouble getting in. He repeated his trick with the cardboard. A swift upward jerk knocked the hook out of the staple.

The Shadow descended through an empty dwelling, whose windows were all screened by black shades.

He found nothing to justify his suspicions until he descended to the cellar. Then his harsh laughter made an ominous echo in the dusty, concrete-floored area.

The dust had been recently disturbed in one of the cellar corners. It hadn't been swept; it had been washed! The reason this dark corner had been washed was apparent at once. Blood, even fresh blood, is a difficult thing to get rid of completely. Some of it had spattered.

There were tiny brownish drops on the wall that had escaped the eye of the man who had tried to erase the evidence of murder.

Opening the door of the cellar furnace, The Shadow saw unmistakable evidence that clothing had recently been burned there. Reaching delicately into the cold fire pot, The Shadow was able to lift out something that made his eyes gleam.

It was the charred handle of a hammer.

From the furnace ash pit, The Shadow raked out the final link in his chain of circumstantial evidence. It was a fire-scorched chunk of metal. The head of the hammer!

The Shadow whispered a name: "Mike Vallon!"

Vallon had shrewdly changed his tactics. Accidents had become too risky a deception to hide a series of kidnappings. The presence of The Shadow in Chicago had proved that to Vallon. Guessing that The Shadow suspected murder, Vallon was deliberately encouraging him to keep right on suspecting murder!

Vallon wanted the police to believe Hobson was dead. Believing this, they would never start hunting for a kidnapped Hobson!

The Shadow added his final link of circumstantial evidence by making a telephone call after he had slipped out of the vacant dwelling.

The voice of The Shadow went over the wire in the husky, good-natured tones of Sergeant Walsh of the fingerprint bureau. He called the home of Tony, the prosperous little shoe-shine man who had made a paying business out of his visits to police headquarters and the neighboring office buildings.

"How's Tony getting along? I hear he had a belly-ache from eating too much spaghetti."

Tony's wife didn't echo the good-natured laugh of The Shadow.

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"Tony didn't get no belly-ache from no spaghetti, sarge! Doctor say someone play dirty trick on him. Give him something bad – make him vomit, make-a his belly hurt. How you know he was sick?"

"His brother told me. His brother shined my shoes yesterday."

There was impatience in the woman's voice. "You must be make-a mistake, sarge. Tony ain't got no brother."

"No kiddin'? Well, give Tony my regards. Tell him I hope he gets well soon."

The Shadow hung up. The time for action was at hand!

Marvin Hobson and the victim in Chicago had both been employed by the Bellinger Metals Corp. The Shadow had learned that Marcus Bellinger had returned only a day or so earlier from a business trip to Chicago.

The Shadow's next move would be to investigate Marcus Bellinger.

He would take advantage of the friendship of Margo Lane with young Jimmy Bellinger, to gain a closer contact with Jimmy's cold, phenomenally successful older brother.

### CHAPTER VIII. SOCIAL CALL

MARGO LANE was one of the most attractive girls in the New York social register. Whenever there was a charity fashion show or, in fact, any social function, she was always in demand.

This afternoon she seemed lovelier than ever. Jimmy Bellinger was delighted at his luck in being able to date her. They sat together in the cocktail lounge at the Ritz, and Jimmy was conscious of admiring eyes from the adjoining tables.

Suddenly, Margo saw a glum look creep into Jimmy Bellinger's eyes. The shadow of a man fell across their softly lighted table.

Margo turned, uttered a murmur of well-assumed surprise.

"Why, Lamont! This is delightful! I never expected to see you here! Have you met Mr. Bellinger?"

Cranston and Jimmy shook hands. As Lamont Cranston, The Shadow was a master of well-bred charm. His pleasant manner drove away the tiny frown from Jimmy's eyes. Jimmy felt his quick jealousy fade.

He was the one who finally overrode Cranston's polite reluctance to join them.

"Nonsense," Jimmy cried. "A pleasure to have you dine with us, sir. Waiter! Another chair!"

More cocktails were brought. Soon, all three were in animated conversation.

Jimmy Bellinger was flattered by the presence of so important a personage at his table. He didn't mind it when Margo turned the talk to some of Cranston's exploits as a world traveler and a hunter of big game. Soon the conversation veered to Cranston's collection of weapons.

Cranston shrugged.

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"Just a modest affair," he murmured. "I've been lucky enough to gather a few decent pieces. But I don't think my name ought to be mentioned as a collector of weapons in the same breath with the name of your brother, Mr. Bellinger."

"Marcus has a pretty darn good collection," Jimmy admitted. "I never understood why he ever went in for them, to tell you the truth. Marcus is a businessman. Seems like an expensive hobby. Half the time Marcus never goes near his gun room."

"I'd give my right arm to be permitted to see those weapons," Cranston said.

He looked so politely envious that Margo and Jimmy joined in an amused laugh.

"Why can't you?" Jimmy demanded. His face was a bit flushed from his three cocktails. "Surely, you know my brother."

"I've never met him," Cranston said.

"There's no time like the present. If you'd like to see Marcus' gun collection, there's no law against my introducing you to him."

Margo protested lightly.

"Your brother would probably be annoyed at so informal a visit."

"Nonsense! Marcus would be delighted."

He called the waiter, paid the check. A taxi whisked them away from the Ritz to an imposing, private dwelling just east of Fifth Avenue in the Eighties. Jimmy was in high spirits.

To the dignified servant who opened the door, he cried gayly, "Greetings, Pitman! Tell Marcus there are visitors on hand who are aching in every bone to look at his famous collection of weapons. Tell him I'm here with Mr. Cranston and Miss Lane!"

There was a queer flick in Pitman's eyes. But he was a well-trained servant. Also, he was used to the abrupt arrivals and departures of the irrepressible younger brother of his employer. He conducted the trio to a reception room and vanished upstairs.

PRESENTLY, Marcus Bellinger descended. There was a smile on his face, but it was thin, The Shadow noted. Marcus was not overjoyed at the intrusion. It became apparent that he was not eager to show his collection.

He pointed out the lateness of the hour, their probable desire to have dinner soon. Besides, his collection was rather large. It would take considerable time – Jimmy cheerfully overrode all obstacles. He exclaimed, "We'll just cover the high spots, Marcus! Onward to the gun room!"

The gun room was on the second floor, beyond the doorway of a magnificent study. Cranston caught a glimpse of the study as they passed. It was a story and a half, with a balcony circling the upper portion. Cranston tried to linger for a moment, but Marcus Bellinger hurried them along to the gun room.

His manner seemed more urgent. The Shadow caught him glancing toward a clock on the wall. It was apparent that Marcus was eager to get rid of his uninvited guests as soon as possible. The Shadow wondered

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if the elder Bellinger expected someone else – someone whose visit he preferred to keep discreetly quiet.

The gun room looked splendid under the glow of bright vapor lamps. But Marcus seemed dissatisfied. He summoned Pitman, gave the servant a brusque order.

"The room looks positively dingy, Pitman! Let in a little daylight. Raise those front shades halfway to the top. Thank you."

It seemed an odd request. There was no need for daylight. In fact, dusk had already fallen in the quiet street outside.

To the keen mind of The Shadow, the queer shade-raising seemed a little like a signal of some kind!

But The Shadow hid his suspicion beneath the bland exterior of Lamont Cranston. He examined some of the rarer weapons in the collection of Marcus. He made intelligent comments that showed he knew the value of the antique pieces he handled with such deft skill.

Jimmy Bellinger and Margo remained in the background. Weapons had small interest for Jimmy. He was a playboy, more at ease in the frivolous world of night clubs and cocktail lounges. He and Margo chatted idly. Presently, Margo spoke about what Cranston wanted her to.

She led the talk to the strange murder of Marvin Hobson.

It was easy, because the front page of every newspaper in New York was black with the details of the crime. Hobson had been an employee of Marcus. The cold-eyed head of the Bellinger Metals Corp. found it impossible to ignore the conversation.

He belittled Hobson's death.

"Certainly the young man's employment as a metallurgist in my company has no bearing on the mystery," he declared. "It's annoying to be bothered by reporters on so silly a matter. A fellow named Clyde Burke, from the Daily Classic, has pestered the life out of me. He was asking me about another young man named Eldridge, who was killed accidentally in Chicago. It seemed Eldridge worked in my Chicago branch."

He tried to change the subject. He was annoyed when Jimmy innocently revealed the fact that Marcus had made a hurried trip to Chicago several days earlier.

"Purely a routine business trip," he said. "I simply refuse to believe that the deaths of Hobson and Eldridge might be part of some plot against the Bellinger Metals Corp. Hobson and Eldridge were only two of several bright young men recommended to me by Professor Durkin. Others were recommended to different companies by other colleges. The whole thing is stupid. It will probably turn out Hobson jilted some girl!"

THE SHADOW made no comment. He concentrated on the task of prolonging his visit. More and more Marcus' desire to get rid of his visitors was becoming apparent.

Margo, obeying a signal from The Shadow, kept Jimmy on the subject of Professor Durkin.

"An eccentric guy," Jimmy said with a chuckle. "I used to study under him. Would you believe it – I was considered a few years ago a brilliant young prospect as a metallurgist. Marcus was terribly hurt when I decided I didn't want to slave in laboratories while I could have a good time."

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Jimmy continued to ramble on.

"You see, mother left me plenty of money. I'm lazy, I'll admit. It's more fun to be a playboy. Besides, that guy Durkin is a whack! He used to do nutty things in the classroom. Did you know that he had a breakdown once and had to go to a sanitarium?"

Jimmy laughed jovially.

"Maybe it's just as well I turned out to be a playboy instead of a bright young metallurgist. Durkin might have recommended me. Maybe when I told Professor Durkin no soap on a career of science – I saved my life!"

He said it as a careless joke. But Marcus didn't think it was a joke. He uttered a sharp exclamation of anger.

"I don't enjoy your humor, James. Professor Durkin has been an honored educator too long to be made the butt of a questionable joke."

There was abrupt silence for a moment. Jimmy was embarrassed. He shrugged and apologized.

"I was just kidding. Durkin's really a harmless old guy. I'm sorry."

Cranston picked up another weapon from its dust-proof case. But his attention was not on the gun. He noticed that Marcus had drifted casually toward a small desk in a corner of the gun room. His back was toward Cranston.

Marcus was sliding something into a drawer of the desk.

Before he could close the drawer, The Shadow was at his elbow. He saw that the thing Marcus Bellinger had tried to hide was a photograph.

"What an interesting face!" Cranston murmured. "Who is it?"

"I was getting it out to show you," Marcus lied hastily. "It's a photograph of Professor Durkin – undoubtedly one of the finest teachers of metal technology in the entire country."

The Shadow studied the photograph. It was a benevolent face, but there was a hardness around the lips, a pinched expression about the nose. His eyes held a bright glitter, even in the picture.

The Shadow was an expert in reading character. He decided that Professor Durkin would be a formidable antagonist if the opposition of someone else became annoying to him.

Meanwhile, Marcus Bellinger was again noting the clock.

"Didn't you say, Jimmy, that you were planning to have dinner with your friends?"

"I did," Jimmy replied with a grin. "Margo, I insist that you and Mr. Cranston be my guests for the rest of the evening. We'll have dinner wherever you suggest. After that, we'll take in a musical show. I recommend 'The Lady Said Yes' at the Imperial Theater. I can get box seats without any trouble. After that – who knows? An exclusive little night club? What do you say?"

Margo's laughter was like silver bells.

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"I guess it will have to be 'The Lady Says Yes,'" she said. "Shall we, Lamont?"

"Sounds pleasant."

"Then we had better get started," Jimmy said.

On the sidewalk outside, he whistled for a cab. He was in high spirits, apparently, but Cranston noticed that the morose look that had clouded his eyes earlier in the cocktail lounge had returned.

Cranston divined the cause for that frown, but he ignored it for a moment. Turning carelessly on the sidewalk, he allowed his gaze to drift toward the front windows of Marcus Bellinger's home. The shades in the lighted gun room were still lifted. No one was visible there.

But there was a slight movement at a draped window to the left of the gun room. A face was peering cautiously, to make sure that all three of the recent visitors to the house were getting into the taxicab, to leave together.

The Shadow caught a lightning glimpse of the sharp profile of Marcus Bellinger!

He didn't betray his knowledge that he had noted anything. He stepped into the taxicab with Jimmy Bellinger and Margo. He waited until the cab had turned into Fifth Avenue before he spoke.

There was an amused expression on his lips. He said jokingly, "You look a little glum, Jimmy. Did you know that I have the gift of second sight?"

Margo laughed. Jimmy didn't.

"A fortune-teller, eh? Do you want me to cross your palm with silver?"

"Better than that," Cranston chuckled. "I'm going to make a bet that I think will win me twenty dollars."

"What's the bet?"

"I can tell you exactly why you are glum. I can also tell you how to cure it. Twenty dollars if I'm right?"

"Go ahead."

"The reason you are glum," Cranston said, "is because you had hoped to spend the evening alone with Margo. Now you find an annoying personage named Lamont Cranston present to turn a pleasant twosome into an annoying threesome. Correct?"

"Correct," Jimmy grinned.

"Now for the cure! It happens that I have an appointment elsewhere. Consequently, I've got to leave you and Margo at the next corner. Are you cured?"

"And how!" Jimmy said. He drew out his wallet, handed Cranston a twenty-dollar bill. "You're a soothsayer and a gentleman! I never lost a bet more cheerfully in my life!"

The taxi halted. Cranston got out, tipped his hat, watched Margo and Jimmy speed away.



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AS soon as they were out of sight, Cranston began to walk slowly along the sidewalk. Soon another cab approached. Cranston got in when the driver hailed him.

The driver of the cab was a hacker named Moe Shrevnitz. He enjoyed the reputation of being one of the smartest taxi drivers in Manhattan. But he had a far more useful purpose in driving that cab.

Moe Shrevnitz was an agent of The Shadow!

In Moe's cab, Lamont Cranston ceased to exist. When the cab stopped presently in the late afternoon dusk, The Shadow emerged.

He had returned to the rear of the Bellinger mansion. His black cloak and low-drawn, slouch hat made him seem part of the darkness.

A narrow alley led to a high board fence. On the other side of that fence, The Shadow approached a lighted window. It was the kitchen window of the Bellinger home. Inside, a man was visible. Pitman, the butler of Marcus, was busily cleaning silver.

Alongside the lighted window was a dark one. This window led to the pantry. The Shadow used a sharp cutting tool to remove the pane. He entered without the knowledge of the butler in the adjoining room.

The pantry seemed like a hopeless cul-de-sac for The Shadow to choose for an invasion. Its only door led into the kitchen, where Pitman sat with his cutlery and silver polish.

But The Shadow was patient. He didn't expect Pitman to remain indefinitely in the kitchen.

Presently, he heard a ring from the front doorbell. Pitman heard it, too. He rose, hurried through the house to answer the ring.

He had hardly faded before The Shadow was on the move. A swift advance took him through the kitchen, into the dimmer expanse of a long corridor.

Like a moving patch of blackness, he glided to the foot of the ornate front staircase. From where he stood, he had a partial glimpse of the front door.

A man was standing in the entry. He looked like a workman. He was carrying a stout leather satchel.

"Phone company repair man," he said crisply. "I understand there's something wrong with a phone."

"Quite so," Pitman said. "This way, sir."

The man stepped forward into the vestibule light. For an instant his features were clearly revealed.

The telephone repair man was – Mike Vallon!

## CHAPTER IX. VICIOUS CIRCLE

By the time Pitman had conducted Vallon to the foot of the staircase, The Shadow was no longer visible.

He had faded swiftly aloft.

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In the dim hallway above, The Shadow was busy at an urgent task. It was a task that required a sharp knife and steady fingers.

The Shadow risked discovery to do it properly. But when he faded deeper into the gloom of the upper corridor, an inaudible twitch of laughter in his throat testified that he was satisfied.

"A gentleman from the telephone company, sir," Pitman announced at the door of the study. He turned, started down the stairs.

The next instant there was a terrific crash in the dimness of the upper hall.

Startled, Pitman whirled about. His cry of alarm was echoed within the study. Bellinger rushed into view, followed by Vallon.

"What happened?" Bellinger cried.

"I don't know, sir," Pitman gasped. He pointed tremulously toward the corridor wall. "I think one of the wall paintings has fallen, sir."

Marcus Bellinger bent over the fallen picture. He noted that the antique gold cord that had parted was badly frayed. The Shadow had done a nice job with his knife.

Pitman's face was still pale. He was staring, not at the fallen picture, but at the telephone man. In Vallon's grasp was a grim-looking .38. He chuckled as Pitman recoiled.

"Don't get excited. Nobody's going to get shot. I just didn't know what was going on. I'm a collection man for the company as well as a repair man. So I carry a gun. I just thought I'd play safe."

He shoved the gun into his pocket, followed Bellinger back into the study. This time, the door was locked on the inside.

The Shadow, unknown to either man, was also inside the high-ceilinged study!

Profiting by their scrutiny of the fallen painting in the dark corridor, The Shadow had gained his goal unseen.

A swift advance carried him up the softly carpeted staircase that led to the balcony. His earlier visit in the role of Cranston had apprised The Shadow of the possibilities of that balcony as a hiding place.

The wall behind the mahogany rail was lined with tiers of books. From the railing itself hung ancient parchment maps. It was the work of an instant for The Shadow to gain his aerial perch and crouch low behind one of those parchment maps.

"You shouldn't have flashed that gun, you fool!" Marcus snarled. "I don't want Pitman getting any wrong ideas."

"Don't worry," Vallon said. "I never saw a butler yet that wasn't a dope."

He laid his leather valise on the top of a polished table.

"What was the idea of making me wait? It's cold outside! Why did you give me the shade signal?"

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"I had to," Bellinger replied. "My brother made an ill-timed visit. He brought a couple of people to look over my collection of arms."

"Who were they?" Vallon rasped.

"Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane. You wouldn't know them." There was a sneer in Marcus Bellinger's smooth voice. "Cranston is a society man. Miss Lane is also in the social register. I had quite a job getting rid of them."

Vallon grunted. "Let's not waste time talking about a couple of society dopes. I'm here for the payoff. How about dough?"

Bellinger turned toward the wall. He pivoted a Florentine cabinet. Behind it was a small recess. In the recess was a safe.

Bellinger spun the dial swiftly, opened the safe. He began to take out a number of packets.

The Shadow, watching from his hidden post on the balcony, drew in his breath in astonishment. Each of those packets was a tight bundle of currency. There were many packets – and the topmost bill in each one was of large denomination. It seemed like a terrific amount of money to pay Vallon – even on the assumption that the money was a payoff for criminal services rendered.

Vallon didn't seem to be impressed by the amount. He packed the money swiftly inside his satchel. Before he was finished, the satchel was crammed. He had to work hard at the bag to force it shut, and lock it.

"O.K.," he grunted. "I don't want to hang around here any longer than I have to. I guess that suits you, too, eh? Unlock the door. Call your dumb butler, and I'll be on my way."

The Shadow was disappointed. He had hoped to hear more. But it was obvious that he was doomed not hear anything else.

He crept noiselessly along the balcony. But not toward the staircase that led to the study below. His goal this time was a small stained-glass window at the far end of the balcony.

He reached it just as Vallon and Bellinger paused to unlock the study door. The balcony window operated on a pivot. Opening the catch, The Shadow pushed gently.

He slid from the balcony to a stone sill outside. Then the stained-glass window pivoted back. It didn't close completely, because The Shadow was afraid to risk the telltale click that the latch might make.

In the darkness outside the window, The Shadow prepared to make a daring descent.

He was hanging at full length from a narrow, stone sill. Below his dangling feet, the smooth wall of the house offered no chance for a foothold. But the eyes of The Shadow had already surveyed his dark surroundings. He had spotted the one chance to get to the ground without too much delay.

It was a risky trick.

Several feet to his left was the perpendicular shape of a copper drainpipe. It led from the ornamental cornice of the roof to the well-kept turf in the rear of the mansion.

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Inching his cold hands to one end of the stone sill, The Shadow began to swing. His legs flew out like twin pendulums.

His feet tried to hook about the copper drainpipe. His first try was a failure. The recoiling swing of The Shadow's body almost tore his icy hands loose from the stone window ledge above his head. But his nerves were strong, and his muscles well-trained.

He held on!

Again, he repeated his daring maneuver. This time, his outflung feet hooked around the drainpipe. He was helped by the fact that a semicircular metal support rod held the pipe close to the wall at this point. His toes hooked like the toes of an aerial performer at the circus.

The Shadow breathed deeply. He was now bridged between the sill and the pipe.

Suddenly, he shoved at the sill with a mighty push. As his body flung free from the sill into space, he used his leg and stomach muscles to keep it stiffened. His straining torso moved toward the vertical pipe, where his legs were anchored lower down.

It was like some of the ladder stunts The Shadow performed daily in the gymnasium where, as Lamont Cranston, he kept himself in shape. But there was no mat underneath to break his fall in case of a miscue!

Not once, however, did the thought of peril cross The Shadow's mind. All he was conscious of was the need to reach the ground below quickly, so as to get to the street in time to keep tabs on the sly Mike Vallon.

The Shadow was determined to find out the destination of that leather satchel packed with money from the safe of Marcus Bellinger!

The feet of The Shadow touched the dark turf below the drainpipe. Crouching low, to avoid being silhouetted against the light from the kitchen window where Pitman had resumed his silver-polishing job, The Shadow faded through the tradesmen's alley to the street in front.

He glided across the street, melted into the shadowy expanse of house fronts on the other side.

A MOMENT later Mike Vallon emerged from the front door of the Bellinger mansion. He walked toward Madison Avenue.

The Shadow trailed him.

A taxicab was parked near the corner. Vallon glanced toward it, but he couldn't see the driver's face. The driver was hunched low over the wheel, fast asleep.

Vallon didn't get in the cab. There was a drugstore on the corner and Vallon went toward it. He seemed to be trying to make up his mind. While he hesitated, the unseen figure of The Shadow entered the parked taxicab. Inside the cab, The Shadow vanished. In his place appeared the elegant figure of Lamont Cranston.

The driver paid no attention to this use of his cab. He was Moe Shrevnitz, waiting there on orders received earlier from The Shadow.

The Shadow headed swiftly for the side door of the drugstore in his role of Cranston. He divined that Vallon was hesitating about a phone call. He wanted to get inside the store before Vallon did. It was a small

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drugstore, not one of the big chain places. There would probably be only one phone booth in the store.

He was correct. The Shadow moved from the side door to the booth a moment before Mike Vallon appeared from the avenue doorway.

Knowing that Vallon had never seen him as Lamont Cranston, The Shadow didn't mind showing himself. He pretended to be getting a wrong number. Before Vallon could leave, Cranston flung open the door of the booth with an exclamation of annoyance. He began to leaf through the Manhattan directory, hinting for the number he had apparently failed to get correctly the first time.

Vallon went into the booth, dialed a number. To him, the appearance of Lamont Cranston represented no threat of danger. But he played safe. He pretended to be calling a girl friend.

"Hello, Marie? How's tricks? You're darned right I want to see you, babe! Listen!"

He glanced out the glass door of the booth. Cranston was still busily leafing through the phone directory.

"I just got paid, babe! Nice, huh? Yeah, I have tonight off. I thought we might get together. How about a date, honey?"

He waited a minute. Then:

"Swell! I'll meet you at the Ninety-sixth Street entrance to Central park in a half-hour. Got it? Ninety-sixth and Fifth. So long, sweetheart!"

He came out of the booth, his gaze still alertly on Cranston. But Cranston paid no attention. Hurrying past the crook into the booth, Cranston dropped a nickel, pretended to dial a new number. He deliberately dialed the number of a big department store which he knew would be closed for the night.

He said to a non-existent voice, "Hello? I thought I'd never get you. I kept getting the wrong number!"

Vallon, satisfied, hurried out of the drugstore, his hand gripping his heavy money satchel. The Shadow made no effort to follow him. As soon as he was certain that the coast was clear, The Shadow went around the corner and again entered the parked taxicab of Moe Shrevnitz.

His voice intoned an order.

"Twenty-minute delay. Drive around in neighborhood of East Ninety-sixth Street. In twenty minutes proceed through Central Park. Use Ninety-sixth Street transverse cut. Additional orders later."

Moe acknowledged the order. The cab moved away from the curb. Twenty minutes later, it weaved into Fifth Avenue traffic, halted for a turn at Ninety-sixth Street. Here was a paved, cross-town street that carried cross traffic through the park by way of a sunken cut.

The moment the light changed to green, Moe sent his cab racing westward.

BUT his speed was deceptive. As soon as the cab reached a quiet spot it slowed. The black-garbed figure of The Shadow sprang out. It melted against the blackness of the stone wall of the transverse cut. The cab raced onward, empty.

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Swiftly The Shadow climbed the steep wall of the cut. It was not a hard task for him. The wall was built of rough stones that projected in an irregular pattern from their base of cement.

In a few moments The Shadow was atop the wall. He crawled through the protection of dark shrubbery.

He was now inside the park itself. He headed through the thick bushes toward the Ninety-sixth Street entrance. The entrance at this point led directly into the park. The Shadow watched with sharp eyes from his covert of bushes just beyond the ornamental metal railing.

Soon, he saw a figure approach, carrying a heavy leather satchel. Mike Vallon glanced keenly about. A moment later he was approached by another figure.

It was a man whose appearance brought a gleam of interest to the watchful eyes of The Shadow. Under his breath, The Shadow whispered a name:

"Chip Ricco!"

He was well aware of the ugly proficiency of Ricco with a machine gun. In The Shadow's private rogues' gallery at his sanctum, there was an excellent photo of Ricco. Now he was consorting with Vallon – staring at the leather satchel in Vallon's grasp with a greedy eye.

The Shadow recalled the machine-gun assault outside a police station the afternoon Marvin Hobson was found "murdered" in bed at his boardinghouse. Ugly facts began to fall into a definite pattern in The Shadow's mind.

He trailed Vallon and Ricco, paralleling them through the underbrush as they walked deeper into the park. They selected a bench on a deserted stretch of pathway. When they finally seated themselves in the darkness, it was at a spot where they had an uninterrupted view of the path for many yards in each direction.

But they failed to inspect the dense shrubbery behind the bench. Screened by the leafy tangle, The Shadow became an interested spectator of the interview between Vallon and Ricco.

Vallon unlocked his satchel, handed Ricco a single packet from the contents. Ricco's eyes bulged at the sight of so much money.

He said greedily, "Cripes, that stuff you got in there ain't hay, pal! How much have you got?"

"None of your damned business," Vallon snarled. "I'm paying what you contracted for, ain't I? Then take it, and scram!"

"I just wondered where the rest of it was going."

"Quit wondering," Vallon told him in an ugly rasp. "I might get the idea you were figuring on a high-jack."

Ricco hastily denied any such intent. He seemed a little afraid of the truculent Vallon. After a little more talk, he got up from his bench. He faded stealthily into the darkness with his payoff.

Vallon waited ten minutes or so. Then he, too, got up. He headed back toward Fifth Avenue with the locked satchel. The Shadow kept him in sight from behind his screen of tangled park shrubbery.

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As soon as Vallon reached Fifth Avenue, he looked about him for a taxicab. While he was looking, The Shadow crossed the avenue a block to the north. He slipped quickly into the waiting taxi of Moe Shrevnitz. Moe, obeying orders, had returned through the park transverse cut as soon as he reached Central Park West.

The taxi trail of Mike Vallon was not a long one. Vallon's cab turned into a cross-town street and stopped. It was a street lined with shops and stores.

The Shadow's eyes gleamed as he saw the sign above the store that Mike Vallon entered with his satchel. It was a telegraph office. The Shadow didn't follow Vallon inside. Vallon had already seen him as Cranston in the drugstore.

In the role of Cranston, The Shadow waited in the doorway of a shop. Moe Shrevnitz, parked nearby, had orders to pick Vallon up, if possible, when he again emerged from the telegraph office.

There was no satchel in Vallon's possession when he returned to the sidewalk. He headed along the street at a leisurely pace. Cranston heard Moe's persuasive voice:

"Taxi, sir?"

But he didn't turn to see if Moe's appeal was successful. Keeping his face averted, Cranston faded into the telegraph office. He walked to the counter, pretended to compose a message on a telegram blank.

His gaze, however, moved across the counter toward a rack close by. On the rack was the satchel that Vallon had crammed with money from Marcus Bellinger's safe. There was a delivery tag attached to it.

The Shadow was close enough to be able to read the writing on the tag.

It showed that the bag was destined to be delivered to a city address by messenger service at ten o'clock on the following morning.

The sight of the address made The Shadow blink. But he knew he couldn't be mistaken when he saw the printed name of the addressee.

It was – Marcus Bellinger!

The money paid by Bellinger to Mike Vallon was completing a vicious circle. It was going back to the home of the man who had paid it out!

## CHAPTER X. DOUBLE DANGER

IN a small, furnished Manhattan apartment a thin man with glittering eyes was preparing to make a phone call. The man was Humphrey Durkin, professor of the chair of applied metallurgy at Barnham Institute.

His trip to New York had been made in secrecy. Ordinarily, he stopped at a hotel when he traveled on leave. But this time he had chosen a furnished apartment. He had rented it under an alias. His name on a hotel register would have brought reporters to interview him for a science story. Durkin didn't want interviews. He had a grim reason for keeping out of sight.

As he turned to his telephone, Durkin's grin was taut. A name formed on his lips: "Henry Strode."

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Henry Strode had once been a star pupil of Professor Durkin's at the institute. There had been others like him. Two more names passed through Durkin's mind: Eldridge and Hobson. Many promising students had been recommended to various companies by various universities. But the three that Durkin was thinking about had all been recommended by himself.

They had been employed by Marcus Bellinger of the Bellinger Metals Corp!

A year ago, Henry Strode had vanished. His disappearance had occurred long before the unfortunate accident of Eldridge and the unexplained murder of Hobson. Not a word concerning Strode's sudden dropping from sight had ever appeared in the newspapers. This fact seemed to amuse Durkin. His grim chuckle deepened.

Durkin's trip to New York was directly connected with the peculiar events that had involved his star pupils. So was the phone call he was now about to make. He had looked up the name Bellinger in his phone book. But not Marcus Bellinger.

Durkin's phone call was for Marcus' younger brother, the happy-go-lucky playboy – Jimmy!

He drew a blank. The hallman at the expensive building where Jimmy maintained an ornate suite on an upper floor reported that Jimmy was not at home this evening.

"His line does not answer, sir. Sorry."

"That's quite all right," Durkin murmured. "It wasn't important."

That was a lie. The gleam in Durkin's eyes testified to the fact that the answer he had received was important. Durkin had found out what he wanted to know.

But he was not yet ready to take advantage of that knowledge. He had one additional call to make. This time he phoned Marcus Bellinger.

He took precautions to hide his identity. His voice changed to a husky quality. He pitched it lower than his usual tones.

"Hello? This is Harvey Delburn, a friend of Jimmy's. I've just phoned his apartment and found he's not at home. I wonder if you happen to know his whereabouts tonight?"

"Delburn?" Marcus said slowly. "I don't believe Jimmy ever mentioned you to me."

"Probably not. I've been in Canada. I'm going back early tomorrow. That's why I'm so eager to see him tonight."

He waited, his eyes bright. Then his taut body relaxed.

"You'll find him at the Imperial Theater," Bellinger said. "He went to see 'The Lady Said Yes.' With Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane. I believe he has a box."

"Margo?" Durkin said. "Dear Margo Lane! It will be so nice to see her again."

He had never heard of Margo, but he lied smoothly. He added a few polite words, then hung up with a nervous click. He was satisfied he had pulled the wool over Bellinger's eyes.



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He picked up a paper-wrapped parcel that looked like a framed picture. Then he hurried from the apartment.

But Durkin had made a bad guess. Marcus Bellinger was no fool. He had not been hoodwinked. Durkin's nervous eagerness to get on the trail of Jimmy had betrayed him. He forgot to keep his disguised voice under control.

Marcus Bellinger had met Durkin many times. They were supposedly good friends. Marcus had helped to endow the chair of applied metallurgy at Barham Institute. He was aware of the true identity of his phone-caller by the time he hung up his instrument.

For a moment or two he stood absolutely still, his mouth drawn in a tight line. Then he uttered a softly spoken oath. He turned to a carved desk, opened a drawer. A gun slipped into his hand. He jammed the weapon in his pocket and donned coat and hat.

He left his home quietly, without the knowledge of Pitman.

MEANWHILE, Professor Durkin was driving swiftly through the cold darkness of Manhattan. He headed for the Imperial Theater.

The show was well under way, but Durkin bought a ticket. He didn't go near the usher at the head of the darkened aisle. Dodging the usher, he sneaked upward to the balcony. Aided by the darkness in the theater, he was able to move quietly toward a corridor that led to the boxes on the right.

He found no sign of his quarry. Again he made a careful prowl through darkness. This time, his glance through a tiny gap of drawn velvet curtains showed him Jimmy Bellinger and a very lovely brunette companion. Durkin figured the girl was Margo. There was no sign of Lamont Cranston.

But Durkin didn't worry about that. Jimmy was the one he was after! He retreated through the black corridor that led from the box. He was gone several minutes. Then once more his fingers parted the rear curtains of the box.

Durkin waited to attract the attention of Jimmy. He was successful. After a while, Jimmy's head turned. He saw a pale face peering through the dark gap in the velvet. To his amazement, he recognized Professor Durkin.

He caught only the briefest glimpse. Durkin vanished instantly. Jimmy hesitated. Margo, turning toward him, whispered, "What's the matter, Jimmy?"

"Nothing," he muttered. "Do you mind excusing me a moment? I'll be right back." He didn't mention to her what he had seen.

Margo had noticed that peering face, too, but she didn't make any comment.

Jimmy rose softly and left the box. Margo, warned earlier by The Shadow, remained where she was.

The brief delay had given Durkin a chance to vanish in the black corridor. Jimmy moved stealthily along, hunting for him. A frown on his good-looking face testified to his puzzlement at the strange actions of a man he had not even known was in New York.

Absorbed by the puzzle, Jimmy failed to notice in the dark that the door of the corridor washroom was slightly ajar. As he passed it, he heard a slight sound. But his turn was too late.

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Something struck him heavily on the skull, stunning him. His toppling body was grasped, dragged noiselessly into the washroom.

Swiftly, Durkin searched his unconscious victim. He ignored Jimmy's wallet, crammed with currency. What his trembling fingers sought after were keys!

He found them on a leather key pad in Jimmy's pocket. He detached one of the keys from the pad. Its shape and size told Durkin that it was an apartment key. It dropped into his pocket. He replaced it on Jimmy's key pad with another.

The fake key looked enough like the stolen one to make prompt detection of a switch difficult. Most latchkeys looked alike. Durkin choked down a nervous gasp of triumph as he tiptoed from the washroom into the black corridor.

Unless Jimmy hurried home and tried the fake key in his lock, he would scarcely be aware of the switch that had been made while he lay unconscious. That meant precious time for Durkin.

At the end of the corridor was a dim, red light. It showed the location of a side exit from the theater. Durkin pushed the door slightly ajar, slipped invisibly through. He was on the metal platform of a flight of stairs that led downward to an exit alley.

The cold wind made him shiver, but there was grim warmth at his heart. He darted down the metal steps, sneaked swiftly from the alley, hurried back to where he had left his parked car.

Soon he was driving across town to the apartment building where Jimmy Bellinger lived.

AGAIN Durkin took advantage of an alley. This time, it was a paved tradesmen's entrance to the swanky apartment building. Durkin gained the basement of the building, sneaked through empty silence to the service elevator.

The service elevator rested at the basement level. It was empty, its door open. But Durkin was too cautious to risk using the elevator. He used the fire stairs that led upward around the service shaft.

He was aware, now, of the floor on which Jimmy's suite was located. A glance at the typewritten directory for the convenience of delivery clerks had apprised him of this.

Durkin didn't try to use his stolen key on the service door of Jimmy's apartment. He knew his victim would hardly carry a kitchen key about with him. Sneaking through the service hallway, he opened a metal door.

It was unlocked and opened easily. This was the fire door that connected the service hail with the main corridor.

The flat package that Durkin had brought with him was still in his possession. He leaned it gently against the wall, opened Jimmy's door with the stolen key.

Once inside, he was careful about lights. He turned on only one, a dim lamp in a corner of the living room, that was shielded from the shaded windows by the projecting end of a bookcase.

Durkin didn't waste time in the living room. He headed swiftly for Jimmy's bedchamber, carrying his flat package with him.

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Unwrapping it, he disclosed that it was a framed photograph of two young men. One was Jimmy Bellinger. He and another young man were grouped together in a college picture. Both wore caps and gowns. Jimmy's arm rested on his companion's shoulder. Both were smiling into the camera.

It was evidently a college picture taken shortly before Jimmy's graduation from Barham. The indoor background suggested that Jimmy and his friend had been roommates.

Professor Durkin hung the picture on the wall of the bedchamber. Having hung it, he darted back to the living room. He began what looked like a destructive and crazy search.

He smashed chairs, ripped up the rug, yanked a drawer from a desk, scattered its contents helter-skelter over the floor. He even ripped and pulled down a length of picture molding that ran along the upper edge of the living-room wall.

There was a wall safe in the corner. Durkin made crooked scratches on it with a pocketknife. Everything he did seemed to be a hurried effort to distract attention from the picture he had hung on the bedroom wall.

He was so busy that he failed to hear a faint click from the foyer of the empty apartment. His first warning of danger was a harsh snarl behind him:

"Stick 'em up!"

A gun was aimed steadily at the startled Durkin. It was in the hand of a man whose face was completely hidden by a mask.

"Back up!" the intruder rasped. "Over in the corner. Keep your hands high!"

Durkin's face went chalk-white. He began to whine, to plead for his life. The masked man chuckled. He stepped closer.

But professor Durkin was a sly and ruthless foe. His fear was faked. He pretended to stagger as he backed toward the wall.

His foot suddenly shot out in a vicious kick. The kick missed its target, otherwise the masked man would have fallen in writhing agony to the floor. But it carried enough power to topple the masked man backward to one knee.

Durkin dived at him like a thunder bolt. A smash of his fist caught the masked man on the jaw. The gun slipped from his grasp. Durkin was unable to grab the weapon, but his furious sweep sent the gun skittering across the rug out of reach.

His hand clawed toward the masked man's throat, caught a double grip. He began to squeeze with terrific pressure.

The masked man twisted on the floor. Durkin squatted above him like a hunched ape, throttling him with remorseless pressure.

A horrible gurgle came from the masked man's throat. His legs jerked with convulsive fury.

It was purely an instinctive kick, but luck served him well.

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His kick struck the leg of a fragile table. The table overturned. A heavy urn crashed. Bent over his victim, Durkin failed to see the urn topple. It struck him on the head, dazing him.

The masked man felt the fingers on his throat loosen. He tore them away with a fierce clutch. Whirling, he dived sideways on hands and knees for the gun he had lost.

He was unable to do more than get his hands on the barrel before Durkin was on him like a clawing animal. But this time the gun remained in the masked man's grasp. He whirled it like a club at the skull of the man bending over him. The butt struck Durkin back of the ear, pitching him in a quivering heap.

Before he could writhe upward, the masked man struck again. This time, Durkin stopped writhing. He lay in a sodden heap on the floor, knocked completely out.

The masked man gasped an oath. For an instant his gun pointed downward at his foe. But he didn't pull the trigger. A warning whisper inside him told him that the roar of gunfire, even in a soundproofed apartment, might bring what he dared not risk: outside interference.

He vaulted over the limp figure of Durkin on the floor and ran toward the safe in the corner. It was obvious that the masked man knew more about that safe than Durkin did. He squatted on his heels, spun the combination dial with sure knowledge.

The safe's door opened. The masked man searched the interior. But he apparently failed to find anything that interested him. With a harsh grunt, he put back everything he had examined. He closed the safe, relocked it.

A groan made the masked man halt his fruitless search. Durkin was beginning to recover consciousness. The masked man dared not wait any longer. He didn't want to risk recognition. Nor did he want to kill Durkin.

Stealth and flight were more important to the masked man.

He fled silently from the apartment before Durkin's eyes opened. A swift race took him through the same service corridor that Durkin had used earlier. He melted from the dark basement of the apartment house to the tradesmen's alley.

When he reached the head of the alley, the masked man stopped briefly. His hand lifted. A swift jerk pulled the mask from his face. He stepped quietly to the street beyond the alley.

There was a street light nearby. It showed the pale face of the man who had fought Durkin so savagely in Jimmy Bellinger's apartment.

It was – Marcus Bellinger!

His identity was not as secret as he supposed. Marcus Bellinger's sly withdrawal from the alley was noted by another man. A hidden watcher observed the face of the president of the Bellinger Metals Corp.

Harry Vincent was watching there on the orders of The Shadow!

Vincent hesitated. He wasn't quite sure what to do. He had seen Professor Durkin enter first. He had seen Marcus Bellinger follow, after masking himself cautiously in the alley's mouth.

Vincent knew that Durkin was still inside the building.

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For an instant, he debated. Follow Marcus or wait for the appearance of Durkin? Vincent made a quick decision. He began to move through the darkness on the trail of the fading Marcus Bellinger.

The light touch of a hand restrained Vincent.

"No!"

The whisper was almost inaudible. It came from blackness. The blaze of quiet eyes stared into Vincent's. A hawk-beaked nose was dimly visible under the brim of a slouch hat.

The Shadow ordered Vincent to wait where he was. The next instant, The Shadow was gone.

He had vanished soundlessly into the basement of the apartment building.

### **CHAPTER XI. THE RIDDLE OF HENRY STRODE**

FOR the third time this evening, a stealthy figure ascended the service stairway that led aloft to the apartment of Jimmy Bellinger.

Unlike Durkin and Marcus Bellinger, The Shadow did not stop at Jimmy's floor. He continued up one more flight of the boxed-in, steel staircase. He melted from sight on the landing above.

The Shadow was aware that Professor Durkin was still inside Jimmy's apartment. He waited.

Soon, he heard stealthy footfalls. A figure glided to the service staircase, began to descend. Remembering the photograph he had seen in the home of Marcus Bellinger, The Shadow had no difficulty identifying Durkin.

The Shadow allowed Durkin to fade unchallenged. Harry Vincent could be depended upon to tail Durkin from the alley below and report later.

The Shadow turned his attention to the apartment of Jimmy Bellinger. Skeleton keys took a little time, but soon the door yielded. The Shadow surveyed the disordered condition of the living room.

He knew that a fight had taken place in this room. But a fight would not have torn down a length of picture molding from the upper wall. Nor would it have produced scratches around the lock of the steel safe in the corner.

A search had been made!

The Shadow didn't attempt to crack the locked safe in the corner. He was not deceived by the set-up. A scrutiny of the living room and its disordered contents told The Shadow that the search had been a phony one!

If phony, there could only be one answer. The disorder of the living room was meant to hide some other purpose.

The Shadow's laughter made a sibilant whisper. He glided through every room in the suite, his eyes missing nothing.

His inspection ended in the bed chamber. His glance turned toward a picture that hung on Jimmy's wall. Two things told The Shadow that this picture had been recently hung. Its subject matter didn't match the rest of the

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decorations. Every other picture was either a sporting or a theatrical print in an expensive frame. This picture had a cheap frame. The spot where it hung ruined the symmetry of the other pictures.

The Shadow didn't try to guess at the meaning of this photograph of Jimmy Bellinger and an unknown college friend, both in cap and gown.

He was still on the hunt for clues. He glided from the bedchamber to the dining room, passed onward to a small and compact kitchen.

Here he discovered something else. It didn't seem like an important find. It was merely a pile of delivery records for milk and rolls. But those crumpled paper slips told The Shadow something interesting.

The record showed gaps in the delivery service. Every couple of weeks Jimmy Bellinger was apparently away from his Manhattan apartment – for three and four days at a time.

The Shadow uttered a sibilant laugh of satisfaction. He didn't remain any longer. Leaving as stealthily as he had entered, he glided down the fire stairs to the basement, faded from the dark alley.

His parked car was nearby. He drove through darkness toward the brighter neighborhood of Manhattan's theatrical section.

MEANWHILE, Margo Lane was waiting in worried silence in an upper box at the Imperial Theater. The comedy on the lighted stage held no interest for her. She was disturbed about the strange absence of Jimmy Bellinger.

When Jimmy had sneaked so abruptly from the box, he had told her he would return in a moment.

Margo wondered what Jimmy and Durkin were up to. Margo had pretended to Jimmy that she hadn't seen Durkin's peering face. But she had been quick to recognize him. Like Cranston, she had taken a good look at the photo of Durkin in the home of Marcus Bellinger.

Margo rose quietly. She parted the black, velvet drapes at the rear of the box and sneaked through.

In the dark corridor she didn't notice that the door of a washroom was slightly ajar. She moved past it, her gaze attracted by the dim, red glow of an exit light. The exit door was partly open. Margo slipped onto the chilly outdoor platform of an exit staircase.

She suspected that a conference was taking place between Jimmy Bellinger and Durkin in the dim alley below. She was eager to overhear it. She glided silently downward.

Suddenly, she felt a light touch on her shoulder. Sibilant laughter reassured her. Her gasp of alarm died in her throat before it was uttered.

"Wait!" The Shadow whispered.

He was formless in the darkness. Only the glimmer of his face showed. The brim of his slouch hat screened the quiet flame of deep-set eyes.

"Report!"

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Margo told what had happened in the theater. The Shadow showed no surprise. He leaned closer. From his lips came low-toned orders. Margo repeated them to show she understood.

She turned, went back into the theater.

The upper box was still empty. Margo waited, no longer worried. Presently, she heard steps from the corridor behind the velvet drapes.

A moment later, Jimmy appeared. There was a streak of blood on his pale face. He looked groggy.

Margo uttered a low exclamation. Jimmy, quieted her.

"It's nothing serious. I ran into a little trouble."

He told her a smooth story. He had been held up by an unknown assailant hidden in a dark washroom. He denied seeing the face of his attacker. He minimized the whole thing. He wasn't badly hurt. Not a thing had been stolen.

"Probably a sneak thief," Jimmy whispered. "He was scared off before he could rob me."

Margo withstood Jimmy's scrutiny well. Obeying The Shadow's orders, she expressed concern over his condition. She asked if he didn't want to take her home.

Jimmy agreed at once.

They left the theater, took a taxi to Margo's apartment. Margo, waiting on the sidewalk, heard Jimmy's order to the taxi driver as the cab left the curb.

He gave the hacker his own address.

But Jimmy's loud voice was purely for the ears of Margo. A block from her house, he changed his order to the hacker. He murmured the address of Marcus Bellinger.

PITMAN answered the doorbell. He looked amazed as he recognized the late caller. His amazement grew as he noted the lump on Jimmy's head, the dried blood on the matted hair above his ear. But Pitman, trained to wooden composure, said nothing.

He admitted Jimmy, then summoned Marcus.

Marcus Bellinger wasn't as calm as the well-trained Pitman. His mouth jerked unpleasantly as he recognized his younger brother.

"What the devil happened to you? If you've been in some drunken brawl, I am not going to intercede again. I'm tired of helping you out of scrapes. Why did you come here tonight? It's most inconvenient."

"I came here because I'm scared," Jimmy said quietly. "Something damned queer happened to me tonight."

He told about the assault on him at the theater. He denied catching any glimpse of his attacker, repeated his theory that the man was a foot-pad who had been frightened off before he could steal anything. Jimmy proved this by showing his brother his stuffed wallet.

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But there was one thing Jimmy didn't tell. In the taxicab, Jimmy had learned something ominous. His latchkey had been stolen! Jimmy wasn't deceived by the fake key that Durkin had inserted on his key pad.

In his haste, Durkin had replaced the key pad in the wrong pocket. A careful examination of it disclosed to Jimmy that a cunning switch in keys had been made. His own key was worn; the fake one was brand new.

He was wondering about Durkin's motive for the theft when a voice behind him made him stiffen.

"Why, James! Dear boy, this is a delightful surprise! How are you?"

Turning, Jimmy found himself gazing into the blandly smiling countenance of Professor Durkin.

"I didn't know you were in town," Jimmy managed to say.

"Just for a short time. I'm on leave from the institute. Haven't been well. Thought I'd take a little vacation. Both curative and – er – educational."

"Are you staying overnight?"

"Marcus insisted on it when I dropped in to pay my respects." Durkin stepped closer. He blinked suddenly.

"Good heavens, James, what has happened? Have you been hurt?"

Jimmy laughed carelessly. He had recovered his composure. He told Durkin the same vague yarn he had told his brother. Durkin was sympathetic. Marcus summoned Pitman. He ordered a glass of sherry for his brother.

The whole thing was like a vicious comedy. A comedy of fake and hypocrisy between three smiling gentlemen.

Jimmy Bellinger knew grimly the Professor Durkin had slugged him. But he pretended innocence.

Durkin was aware that Jimmy had recognized his peering face at the velvet curtains in the rear of the theater box. He had intended him to!

MARCUS BELLINGER was under no illusions, either. He had caught Durkin making a frantic search of the living room of Jimmy's apartment only a short time earlier. But the advantage was with Marcus. He had worn a mask. He was certain that Durkin was ignorant of his role of masked burglar.

Not the slightest strain showed in their polite conversation. The talk brought out a fact that made Jimmy avert his face slightly, to hide a quick glint in his eyes.

Professor Durkin was planning to leave New York tomorrow!

"A shame, isn't it?" Durkin murmured. "I have to attend a regional conference of teachers in Boston. However, I expect to enjoy it. Several interesting papers on the chemical aspects of metallurgy are scheduled to be read."

Marcus Bellinger lit a cigar. His hand trembled slightly as he threw away the match.

"Teachers aren't the only slaves," he murmured. "Tomorrow, I'm off myself. We've taken on a new contract at my Opelina plant. I've got to look over the facilities and discuss output with my branch superintendent."



## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

"Opelina?" Professor Durkin's voice was playful. "What an odd name! Where in the world is Opelina located, Marcus?"

"In Alabama. I have a zinc plant there."

Jimmy Bellinger set down his sherry glass. He seemed suddenly amused.

"You can have your zinc and your educational conferences, gentlemen. I can think of something a lot better. For instance, a trout stream and an excellent guide. Wood smoke – a canoe – a chance to use a rifle on something bigger than a rabbit."

"Surely, you're not planning on a hunting trip?" Durkin said softly. "Dear boy, your head! You've been hurt!"

Jimmy laughed.

"I'm not letting a little thing like a lump keep me away from a date in the Adirondacks. I'm leaving about noon tomorrow. Do you mind if I sleep late, Marcus?"

Marcus Bellinger was asking Durkin to spend the night. The professor accepted.

Then he looked at Jimmy.

"Not at all." Marcus toyed with his cigar. "Since none of us, as far as I know, has to leave early, why don't we sleep late and enjoy a leisurely breakfast? What time would suit you?"

No one answered him.

"How about ten o'clock?" Marcus asked.

No one objected.

Soon afterward they retired to their bedrooms. Jimmy had his own room here. Durkin was given another. Professor Durkin was careful to lock his door. Having done this, he pulled down the shades on the windows. He examined a small envelope he took from his wallet.

The envelope contained a ticket. It was a ticket, not to Boston, but to a point considerably more distant and in an entirely different direction.

The town printed on that ticket was the same one that Durkin had joked about so mildly when Marcus Bellinger had mentioned it earlier that evening.

Opelina, Alabama!

Durkin chuckled. The glitter in his eyes was very bright. He poured himself a drink of ice water from a silver carafe on his night table. He fell asleep quickly. Once asleep, he never moved.

Durkin wasn't the only cunning man in this house. The water he had drunk was drugged! The lock on his door wasn't as formidable a bar as he had supposed.

Presently, the door opened slightly. A figure crept into the room. The intruder glided noiselessly past Durkin's bed. He examined the wallet in the inner pocket of the drugged sleeper's coat.

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The intruder left as quietly as he had entered.

DARKNESS filled another chamber in another part of Manhattan. But it was not the darkness of night. Morning was bright outside. But in this secret room, unguessed at by police or crooks, darkness was the hallmark of secrecy.

Laughter whispered. A tiny blue light glowed like a star. Then a brighter light disclosed the polished sheen of a desk. At that desk a black-robed figure sat.

The Shadow was in his sanctum! Tapering fingers held a framed photograph. It was the picture The Shadow had removed from the wall of Jimmy Bellinger's apartment. His laughter held an ominous note as he studied the faces of the two young men in cap and gown.

He laid the picture aside, picked up a sheet of blank paper. On the paper, The Shadow wrote a man's name:

"Henry Strode."

A report from Rutledge Mann had told The Shadow interesting things about this Henry Strode. Rutledge Mann was The Shadow's financial and legal expert. He was smart at uncovering a devious trail.

Henry Strode had graduated from Barham Institute. He was the roommate and closest friend of Jimmy Bellinger. Both had been students in the science classes of Professor Durkin. But their paths had parted after they left college. Jimmy, with his mother's inheritance, began the careless life of a playboy. Strode took a job with Marcus Bellinger as a metallurgical chemist.

Strode was brilliant. He made a number of discoveries, all of which were patented. That was where the rub came in. They were patented under the name of the Bellinger Metals Corp.

Strode objected to this. He felt he was being cheated. He demanded a share in the profits, but Marcus Bellinger refused. There was a bitter quarrel. Strode resigned. The quarrel and his resignation had occurred almost a year ago.

Strode had never been seen since!

Another fact in the report from Rutledge Mann drew a whisper of grim laughter from the lips of The Shadow. At the time of his disappearance, Henry Strode had been employed at the Opelina plant of the Bellinger Metals Corp.!

The Shadow turned to other reports.

Moe Shrevnitz reported that Mike Vallon had gone to Pennsylvania Station and had apparently skipped town.

From Harry Vincent, The Shadow learned that Jimmy Bellinger and Professor Durkin had both been overnight guests at the home of Marcus.

The Shadow rose from his desk. From a polished cabinet in the dimness of his sanctum, he produced a large, flat volume. It was an atlas. The Shadow opened to a map of Alabama. His gaze concentrated on the town of Opelina.

Near the tiny dot that showed the location of Opelina was a crosshatched area on the map. It looked like a desolate region. Tiny letters showed it was called the Coosahachie Swamp.

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A reference book soon added to The Shadow's knowledge about that swamp. It was a region of mud, quicksand and mosquitoes. Water moccasins and other poisonous snakes filled its unexplored area. The Coosahachie Swamp was unexplored because of evil legends.

Years earlier, it had been a haven for Choctaw Indians. Here was reputed to dwell the evil Manitou of the Choctaws. Poor whites and Negroes avoided the swamp as a dangerous place. Its tangled center was as unknown today as it had been in the ancient days of the Choctaws.

The Shadow's sibilant laughter indicated that he expected to find in that desolate swamp an answer to cunning crime.

But he had a more immediate task to perform.

Very soon – at ten o'clock this very morning – a messenger was due to arrive at the home of Marcus Bellinger with a locked money satchel.

The Shadow intended to find out who was waiting to receive that satchel!

The light above his sanctum desk went out suddenly. Darkness filled the room. There was no sound to indicate that The Shadow had moved from his desk. But the desk and the room was now empty.

The Shadow had left his sanctum!

## CHAPTER XII. THE MAN WITH GLOVES

MARCUS BELLINGER was not overjoyed to see the elegant and dapper figure of Lamont Cranston in his reception room. He made no bones about concealing his annoyance. He said:

"How do you do, Mr. Cranston? I'm flattered at so prompt a return visit, but I'm afraid you've come at an exceedingly awkward time."

Cranston noted that Bellinger was wearing dressing robe and slippers. "I had no idea you were so late a riser, Mr. Bellinger," he said. "I thought perhaps you could spare a few minutes before you left for your office."

The head of the Bellinger Metals Corp. continued uninterested. But Cranston's polite stare at his dressing gown and slippers brought a grudging explanation from him.

"I don't usually sleep so late. I have overnight guests. My brother Jimmy stayed last night. So did a friend of mine. I believe you saw his picture the last time you were here. Professor Durkin."

"Ah!" Cranston showed warm interest. "I've never had the pleasure of meeting him. Perhaps –"

"Some other time, I'm afraid," Bellinger replied. "Matter of fact, I suspect that my brother and Professor Durkin are still asleep. Nice of you to have called."

He moved toward the door. His hand lifted toward a bell cord to summon Pitman. But The Shadow had no intention of being brushed off that easily.

He held out a package he had brought with him.

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"I've brought something about which I'd like to have your opinion. I'm not sure of its intrinsic worth. As an arms expert, you can clear up my doubts concerning the genuineness of this collector's item."

He opened the package, showed the "item." Bellinger forgot his haste to get rid of his unwelcome visitor. His eyes shone with the fanatical gleam of a collector.

"Gad! What a beauty!" he exclaimed.

It was a Mexican pistol of antique workmanship and design. The weighted butt was incrustated with silver tracery. It looked like a piece from the private armory of some ancient Mexican grandee. Lamont Cranston had paid a terrific price for it. He had long since authenticated its value as a genuine antique piece.

But to Bellinger, he pretended otherwise. He pointed to the hammer and the trigger guard.

"Do you think it might be a partially restored piece?"

Marcus Bellinger hesitated. He looked closely at it. "Hard to tell without a magnifying glass," he muttered.

"I'd appreciate a judgment on it from you," Cranston insisted politely. "If you could spare a couple of minutes —"

"Very well," Bellinger said. "Come to my study."

But in the high-ceilinged study, he looked in vain for the glass he had expected to find on his desk. "Wait just a moment. I believe I left the confounded glass in my bedroom." He left the study with a quick step, closing the door behind him.

Alone, The Shadow glanced at his watch. The hands were nearing ten o'clock. He had no intention of waiting in the balconied study while an event of supreme importance took place at the front door downstairs.

The Shadow moved softly toward the study door. He was reaching to turn the knob gently when a slight noise became audible on the other side of the door. It was a brief click.

It was followed by the patter of stealthy feet racing away!

The Shadow tried the door. It was immovable. Someone had turned the lock knob on the outside, imprisoning Cranston in the ornate study!

THE reply of The Shadow to that challenge from an unknown criminal was prompt. Whirling, he raced up the carpeted staircase to the study's balcony.

This time he was not interested in hiding behind the parchment maps that hung from the balcony railing. He darted to the pivoted, stained-glass window, through which he had made a quick fade on the evening when Mike Vallon had visited Bellinger in the role of a telephone repair man.

Hanging from the narrow stone window sill outside, The Shadow repeated his swing to the copper drainpipe. He descended the pipe swiftly, eager to gain the street in front of the house.

He was grimly aware that within a few minutes a messenger from a telegraph office was due to deliver a leather satchel crammed with cash that had come originally from Marcus' own safe!

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

The moment The Shadow's dangling feet touched the turf at the rear of the mansion, he whirled. Bent low, he sped unseen through the tradesmen's alley that connected with the front sidewalk.

Moving quietly down the sidewalk, Lamont Cranston crossed the street near Madison Avenue. He returned on the opposite side, taking advantage of a doorway that gave him a partial view of the vestibule of Marcus Bellinger's home.

To approach any closer would have been perilous. Eyes were undoubtedly watching the street from one of the discreetly shaded windows on the ground floor. The Shadow didn't care to tip his hand at this juncture.

Presently, he saw what he had anticipated. A uniformed messenger boy approached the house from Fifth Avenue. In his hand was a heavy leather satchel.

The Shadow waited.

Within the Bellinger mansion everything was quiet. The only person visible on the ground floor was Pitman. Pitman was arranging the dining-room table for a delayed breakfast. He spaced the silverware and the crystal glasses with deft accuracy. His fingers improved the fresh flower centerpiece in the middle of a spotless damask covering.

He turned to go back to the pantry.

It was at this moment that Pitman heard the front doorbell ring.

He turned at once. Instead of proceeding back to the pantry, he left the dining room through a side door, started through the dim lower hall toward the front entry.

A hanging drape twitched slightly as Pitman passed. A figure stepped soundlessly from concealment directly in the rear of the unsuspecting servant.

The figure wore gloves as a precaution against the risk of fingerprints. In his gloved grasp was a heavy bronze candlestick. He struck savagely with his improvised club at the skull of Pitman.

Pitman collapsed without a groan. He had neither heard nor seen his assailant.

The man caught the limp body of the butler by the shoulder. He dragged him, with heels dangling, to a sheltered spot at the rear of the staircase that led aloft from ground floor.

In another second the attacker was hurrying softly through the corridor toward the front door. He reached it before the messenger boy could ring the bell a second time.

The door opened on a brief crack.

A politely urgent voice said: "What is it, please?"

"Satchel for Mr. Bellinger, sir."

"Very well. I'll take it."

A hand emerged, took the satchel, swung it deftly inside the door.

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"Sign here," the messenger said.

Again a hand emerged. It steadied the receipt pad against the frame of the vestibule door. A stub of pencil, borrowed from the boy, scrawled the name of Marcus Bellinger on the receipt form.

"Thank you," the polite voice said. "Here's something for your trouble. Good-day."

A dollar bill changed hands with swift speed. The door closed almost before the messenger could snatch at his generous tip. But the boy didn't care. His eyes were wide with delight as he headed toward Fifth Avenue.

A buck was a sweet tip. It was all he thought of. The averted face of the man who had signed for the satchel was something he had failed entirely to notice.

Across the street, The Shadow had seen scarcely more than the messenger. The vestibule door had hidden the face of the man who had taken the money satchel. The Shadow had seen only the swift appearance of two hands and part of a sleeve.

But the hands themselves brought a swift gleam to The Shadow's eyes. They were not bare hands. Gloves were buttoned tightly on both of them.

The Shadow quitted his watching post. He faded quietly toward Madison Avenue, recrossed the street, and then headed back. He flitted swiftly through the tradesmen's alley.

He knew he had a tough stunt ahead of him. The copper pipe would be twice as hard to mount as it had been to descend. And every second was precious!

The Shadow began to climb.

THE polite man with the gloves wasn't wasting time, either! The moment the front door clicked softly shut he was on the move.

He darted swiftly toward the rear of the ground floor with the heavy satchel tight in his grasp. Not far from the butler's pantry was a hinged panel in the wall. It was a clothes chute. Soiled linen from the dining table was dropped down this chute to the laundry room in the basement.

The gloved crook dropped his satchel down the chute. It landed in darkness on a pile of linen. Its fall made only a slight thud.

The moment the money bag left the grasp of the crook, he whirled about. He knew there was small chance of the satchel being discovered in the next hour or so. It would be easy to smuggle it out as soon as things quieted down.

He raced for the front staircase. No one saw him mount the stairs or flit through a corridor along the second floor. His goal was a small reading room lined with books.

All the windows in this room were supposed to be locked. One of them wasn't. It was the window nearest to an adjoining bedroom.

Opening it swiftly, the man bellied out to the sill. He closed the window before he swayed perilously to the left. His gloved hands caught a grip of the outer casing. His feet moved across to the adjoining sill.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

Soon he was indoors again. This time – in his own bedroom!

He locked the bedroom window on the inside. He tiptoed to his closed door and tried it. It was locked on the outside – as he well knew, having attended to that himself before he had slugged Pitman.

Panting, the man rested for a few minutes on the edge of his bed to recover his breath. Then he uttered a shrill chuckle of delight. Perfect! Not a single miscue!

He walked to his locked bedroom door, began to rattle the knob vigorously.

He cried in a loud tone of surprise and exasperation: "Here! What's this? Who has locked me in my room?"

His exasperated tone rose to an angry cry. He began to pound vigorously on the inner panel of his immovable door.

The pounding aloft was heard dimly by a very groggy man downstairs. Pitman was recovering consciousness. He found himself lying in a disheveled heap back of the slant of the front staircase, with a large and aching lump at the back of his head.

His hand touched his head and came away damp with blood.

Dizzily, he remembered what had occurred. He had heard the front doorbell ring, had started to answer it, then, as he passed a heavy drape, something had hit him. Pitman groaned. He staggered to his feet. Someone had struck him down. A burglar!

Still badly fuddled, Pitman staggered to the front vestibule. He flung the door wide open. There was no one outside.

The door itself showed no signs of a forced entry. What had happened – Pitman wondered. He held his throbbing head, retreated unsteadily to the foot of the staircase. He sat down weakly on the lowest step.

Again the queer banging upstairs roused him. This time the noise came from different directions. More than one man was pounding upstairs. What in the name of Heaven was going on?

He tottered upstairs, ran to a closed bedroom door on the second floor. Some of the banging was going on inside this door. Pitman tried to open it, found it was locked on the outside.

He turned the key with trembling fingers. The rush of an angry man almost bowled Pitman over. It was Marcus Bellinger!

"PITMAN, what the devil is the meaning of –"

His cry dwindled as he caught sight of the bloody smear on the forehead of his butler.

"A burglar, sir," Pitman gasped. "He struck me down! He must have locked you in. He must have locked the others in, too."

The banging from other locked bedrooms brought Marcus racing to the help of his imprisoned guests. In turn, Professor Durkin and Jimmy Bellinger were released from their bedrooms.

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There was a wild babble of talk among them. Nothing was clear except that Pitman had been attacked while the others were locked in their rooms.

Then Marcus Bellinger uttered a delayed cry of remembrance.

"Lamont Cranston! I forgot all about him!"

"Cranston?" Jimmy echoed.

He looked puzzled. So did Professor Durkin.

Marcus explained about the visit of Cranston shortly before the strange attack on Pitman by a burglar. The three men looked at one another. Nothing was said openly concerning any suspicion of Cranston's presence. But the three turned as one and hurried to the high-ceilinged study where Marcus had left Cranston a few minutes earlier.

To their surprise, they found the study door locked. When they flung the door open Lamont Cranston stared out at them with a puzzled smile.

"I say! This is a bit strange! Is it customary to lock people up when they call to see you?"

Marcus Bellinger explained huskily about the attack on Pitman by an unknown sneak thief who apparently fled without stealing anything.

Cranston could offer no better answer to the mystery than any of the others. He gave a thin chuckle.

"Thank Heaven," he said, "the beggar didn't get his hands on my antique pistol! I'm glad it was in the study here with me while the scoundrel was prowling about."

He picked up the weapon from the desk where he had laid it. Again, he asked Marcus Bellinger for an opinion on its authenticity.

It seemed impossible to get rid of Cranston without answering his request. Marcus took the weapon hurriedly, looked at it.

"Genuine," he said. "No doubt of it." His frown added without words: "Now will you kindly get the hell out of here and stop bothering us?"

But The Shadow wasn't finished yet. He said in the slow drawl of Lamont Cranston: "I'm not satisfied about the gun's weight. It seems lighter than genuine Mexican. Would you heft it, please?"

Marcus hefted it briefly. "Genuine," he growled.

With a smile, Cranston offered the gun to the other two men. Durkin hefted it solemnly, said nothing. Jimmy Bellinger did the same.

"Thank you," Cranston murmured. "Sorry to have bothered you." He moved toward the door. He had found out exactly the information he had come for!

In hefting the gun, the sleeve of each of the three men had slid a trifle upward, exposing the flesh on the inside wrist. On the wrists of two of those men, the skin was white and unmarred. But on the third the sharp



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eyes of The Shadow noticed a tiny red indentation, a slight pressure mark.

He knew what had caused that mark. Afraid of leaving fingerprints on the candlestick with which he had struck down Pitman, the man had donned gloves. The tight pressure of the glove button had left its telltale mark.

The Shadow knew the identity of a master criminal! But the polite smile on the face of Lamont Cranston gave no hint of that knowledge.

Late that afternoon, a plane took off gracefully from LaGuardia Field. Lamont Cranston was aboard. It headed southward for Atlanta. There, Cranston had made arrangements to change to a Birmingham plane.

But Birmingham wasn't destined to be journey's end for The Shadow. Crime was nearing an ugly showdown. Deep in the mysterious heart of the Coosahachie Swamp in Alabama, lay the final answer to a riddle of death!

### CHAPTER XIII. SWAMP RAT

A CYPRESS tree lifted its branches skyward at the muddy edge of the Coosahachie Swamp. The trunk of the cypress was rooted in water. Beyond was a dense tangle of shrubbery. The warm sun of Alabama didn't penetrate into this leafy morass. There was a dank, almost cold smell in the dimness.

The Shadow climbed the cypress. His figure was a dark blot against the misshapen branches. At the spot where he rested, a crooked branch made a convenient fork. Below was the muddy water out of which the tree grew. The Shadow had tested the depth of that water. It was deep enough.

A .45 appeared from beneath the black robe of The Shadow. He braced the gun lightly in the fork of the branches. Its hammer was drawn back by a tight cord. The cord was tied about the gun's butt. This tension cord held the hammer at full cock.

From the tension cord, another cord dangled. A long one. It reached almost to the water below. It was thin and grayish. Its core was a train of black powder!

The Shadow descended from the tree. He was careful to stand on a tussock of grass, to avoid leaving a telltale footprint in the mud that edged the water. Sibilant laughter whispered at his lips.

A spark at the end of that dangling fuse would climb steadily. When it burned through the tension cord on the lightly propped gun, the full-cocked hammer would be released. A bullet would be discharged.

Other things would happen. The explosion of the weapon would cause a violent recoil. The gun would bounce backward from its twig support. The muddy water below the cypress would swallow it from sight.

The Shadow touched a spark to the fuse. He watched it begin to eat slowly upward. Then he retreated swiftly. Soon, he was on firmer clay ground.

Keeping out of sight, The Shadow bellied through the hot underbrush. He moved parallel with the edge of the swamp. Soon he parted a thick clump of bush. In front of him was a rutted, red clay road. It was one of the few that led to the desolate region of the Coosahachie.

It ended at a bayou at the swamp's edge.

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Watching, The Shadow saw a man in a boat. It looked like an ancient skiff, but it was equipped with an outboard motor. The man wore shabby overalls. He was fishing with a bamboo pole. He sat motionless, almost asleep.

His name was Rance Klatt. He was a local swamp character who earned a precarious living by fishing and trapping. His miserable shack was not far from where his boat drifted. It was built on piles sunk in the muddy bottom of the bayou.

The Shadow was aware that the sleepy pose of Rance Klatt was a fake. So was his fishing. The hook on his line was unbaited. Not once in a full hour had Rance Klatt jerked up his motionless line to examine it.

His real job was to keep an eye out for strangers!

Crouched out of sight, The Shadow removed his black cloak. He was almost ready to go swimming! Suddenly, he heard the sound. Klatt heard it, too – the barking roar of a gun from a spot beyond the far curve of the bayou.

That unexpected pistol shot ended Rance Klatt's pretense of sleep. His empty fishing line jerked out of the water. A whirl brought his hand to the outboard motor of the skiff. The starting cord woke the engine to a swift roar.

The boat began to head out of the bayou.

KLATT'S boat had hardly faded from sight when The Shadow left his covert. Leaping outward from a rock, to avoid leaving a muddy print, he made a flat dive into shallow water. He swam toward the unpainted shack that rose like a gaunt box on piles from the surface of swamp water.

A cleated ladder led aloft to a sort of rough balcony that circled two shabby rooms inside. The Shadow, knowing that every second was vital, made his search swift.

One of the rooms was an unkempt kitchen. The Shadow spent no time there. In the other room, Klatt's bedroom, he looked for signs to guide him.

The Shadow had a photographic eye. Significant details made an instant impression on his brain. There was a piece of shabby carpet on the floor, close to one of the walls.

The Shadow noticed the carpet because it was not lying loosely as a piece of carpet normally would. It was tacked down at its four corners.

The Shadow dropped to his knees. He forced out the tacks, lifted the shabby carpet. Laughter bubbled grimly when he saw the floor boards under that concealing rag of carpet. They were brand-new. They had been fitted into the floor much more recently than the dingy boards that surrounded them.

The Shadow found a small trapdoor. Lifting it, he uncovered a hidden recess below.

The first object he lifted out was a paper packet. It was a bundle of currency. The Shadow leafed through it, totaling it swiftly. The amount was two thousand dollars.

The Shadow's laughter deepened as he recognized the narrow paper tape that held the packet together. This was one of the packets of money that had passed from Marcus Bellinger's safe to Mike Vallon – and from Mike Vallon to a cunning super-criminal who had slugged Pitman so viciously.

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Many things were clear now. Mike Vallon wasn't the only crook to be paid off – or Chip Ricco, either! Klatt and probably dozens of other swamp rats like him were on the pay roll of crime!

Other objects emerged from Rance Klatt's hiding place: a bottle of chloroform; adhesive tape in a thick roll; two pairs of handcuffs, with the keys to unlock them.

The Shadow whispered the names of victims: Marvin Hobson, who had been "murdered"; George Eldridge, who had "died" in an accidental plunge from a skyscraper tower; a young man in Boston; a young man in Atlanta –

All of them brilliant young metallurgists. Some of them employed by Marcus Bellinger. A few of them recommended by the glittering-eyed Professor Durkin!

The Shadow replaced the evidence swiftly, and retacked the carpet. He descended the cleated ladder, swam noiselessly back to the shore.

He had hardly vanished before the approaching roar of an outboard motor became louder. Rance Klatt was returning from a fruitless search of the muddy outskirts of the swamp. There was a scowl on his swarthy visage. He had found nothing.

He cut off his outboard, allowed the boat to drift gently near the spot where he had been on guard earlier.

The Shadow retreated. He crawled along the tangled border of the road, past a spot where a sharp bend made observation by Klatt impossible.

The Shadow could hurry faster now. He went onward almost a mile. From a bushy covert, he brought into view a hidden automobile. It was red with dust, its tires badly worn. It looked like most of the cars in this sparsely settled region of rural Alabama.

The Shadow's appearance had changed by the time the car was ready to start. In his place appeared a stoop-shouldered, nearsighted man who wore silver-rimmed glasses. His clothing was black broadcloth. A master of disguise, The Shadow had assumed an innocent personality for a grim game of deception.

HE drove boldly down the red clay road to the edge of the Coosahachie. Parking his car at the shore of the muddy bayou, he waved toward the man in the outboard skiff.

Rance Klatt poled his boat shoreward, stepped out on a flat rock. "Howdy. Whut ye want?"

"I'd like to hire you. I'm prepared to pay well. Five dollars."

"Hire me? Whut fur?"

The Shadow explained. He was a professor of biology, on a vacation leave from his college in Georgia. He had often heard of the Coosahachie Swamp, but had never visited it. He was eager to collect specimens of reptile and bird life.

Klatt didn't reply for a moment. His beady eyes were cold. Suddenly, he grinned. He had a cunning expression.

He began to ask questions. "I s'pose the college folks sent you here? They know you came here, huh?"

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"No. I'm on a vacation. I left no forwarding address."

"Won't your wife git worried, mister?"

"I am not married. I live alone on the campus."

"Hm–m–m – Have you found a place to live hereabouts?"

"Not yet. I was so eager to explore the Coosahachie that I didn't stop to make any housing arrangements. Nobody knows I'm here. Perhaps you could recommend a nice place where I could rest."

"Yeah," Klatt said. "I'll find you a nice place to rest."

His teeth showed. He knew a place where the old guy could rest – forever!

"I reckon I'll guide you," Klatt said.

"Excellent!"

The Shadow handed over five dollars.

The outboard boat began to chug across the darkening waters of the bayou. Soon the water was almost black from the shadow of leafy and overhanging branches.

"Can we go right into the heart of the swamp?" The Shadow asked in his thin, counterfeit voice.

Rance Klatt shook his head.

"Reckon ye hain't heerd much about this swamp, mister. This is old Injun country. The Choctaws lived here. Their Manitou – you know, evil spirit – well, he lived right plumb in the center. Nobody hereabouts would dare to try to git in there! A few people tried – and ain't none ever seen 'em since. The Coosahachie is sure 'nuff haunted!"

The Shadow argued gently in his role of professor. He tried to point out the foolishness of superstition. Klatt scowled.

"Ever hear of water moccasins? Or swamp adders? One bite an you're a gone coon! No, siree! I'll guide you around the bayous and the cricks along the edge, but nowhere else. Besides, they ain't no way to git deeper inside. The Coosahachie is a jungle o' water an' mud an' brush."

The boat chugged in and out of a dim network of creeks and ponds. Klatt eyed his passenger narrowly. Presently, he gave a slight turn with his rudder. The boat approached a thickly grown bank in a long slant. Klatt didn't seem to be aware of this. He watched the opposite side of the water until the boat grounded softly on a shelving bank of mud.

A grunt of fake disgust came from Klatt.

"Doggone! Sit still, mister. I'll push off with an oar!"

His exertion was clumsy. The oar slipped. Its end tangled with the thick growth of bushes on the bank. For a moment, the bushes parted. The Shadow uttered a murmur of interest.

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A PATH was disclosed – a narrow, winding path that led like a brown thread deeper into the swamp.

The Shadow stepped from the grounded skiff. He pulled the bushes aside again. "Where does this path lead?" he asked.

"Doggone if I know," Rance Klatt said. "Must be an old Injun trail. Never seen it before."

He was lying. The Shadow knew that Klatt's clumsy movement with the oar that had revealed the hidden path had been done deliberately. But Klatt kept up his pretense of fear.

Finally, after a long discussion and the promise of five dollars more, Klatt agreed to guide The Shadow as far as the path led.

Klatt led the way. It was a tight, winding trail. The underbrush made progress difficult. But Klatt pushed steadily ahead.

Soon the dry path changed to a mud trail. Water squished under their feet. A coral snake whipped out of sight. Klatt recoiled with a nasty grin.

"I don't like this here place," he said.

But he kept going on. Faster. He moved with jerky haste, as if afraid his companion might want to stop. The path dipped presently. Water overflowed it from the roots of thickly interlaced bushes. It was a shallow pool. There was no reason not to cross it.

The Shadow was on his guard when Klatt suddenly stopped and turned about.

The next instant, Rance Klatt dived at his companion!

It was done with murderous swiftness. Muscular hands caught The Shadow about the thighs, lifted him in a giant heave. The Shadow was hurled forward.

Forewarned, he was ready for treachery. His hand caught the cablelike thickness of a dangling vine. He held on, spoiling Klatt's attempt to hurl him headlong. His other hand caught at Klatt's throat, tightening on the killer's windpipe.

There was a gasping howl from Klatt. Then the two foes fell to the path in a writhing tangle. It was bitter, ruthless fighting, with fists, teeth and boot heels. The Shadow missed death by a fraction of an inch as his head jerked aside from a murderous kick.

So desperate was the onslaught, that The Shadow was unable to draw one of his hidden .45s. But Klatt was no better off. He got a gun partly out, then a paralyzing blow forced him to drop it. The Shadow kicked the mud-splattered weapon out of sight into the green tangle that bordered the path.

It was man against man now – and Rance Klatt was like steel springs. Blood poured down The Shadow's battered face. His sight was growing dim. Klatt sensed that his bull-like fury was weakening his foe. He tore himself loose from The Shadow's grasp, swung his knotted fist backward for a knockout blow.

It was never delivered. The Shadow used Klatt's own wrestling tactics. Ducking swiftly downward, The Shadow dropped both hands lower. They tightened about the thighs of the swamp guide.

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The Shadow's back was toward the shallow pool of water in the path ahead. One of his hands shifted its anchorage like a flash. He straightened. Klatt flew over his head like a wildly gyrating bundle.

There was a splash as he hit the shallow pool. Then there was a scream of terror that set the teeth of The Shadow on edge. Klatt had staggered to his feet. He was trying to drag himself from the water, his face pale with horror.

FOR an instant, The Shadow didn't understand the man's frenzy. Then he saw that Klatt's legs were engulfed to the knees. He was sinking fast. It wasn't the water that terrified him, but the sleek, oily death that lay beneath the water's shallow surface.

Quicksand!

Before The Shadow could leap to the assistance of the screaming killer, Klatt was waist-deep. He hadn't been able to tear out either of his sand-sucked feet. Now he was half engulfed! Foam appeared at the edge of his writhing lips.

"Help!" he screamed.

The Shadow tried to help him. It was impossible. Klatt had fallen into the very center of the quagmire. There was no way for The Shadow to grasp him and still maintain a safe purchase on solid earth.

The Shadow tried to anchor himself to a muddy root and clutch at Klatt with an extended hand. Useless! The sand that had already sucked the doomed man shoulder-deep was ruthless in its swift pull.

The Shadow was unable to budge the shrieking victim.

He was up to his neck now. His chin – his mouth – A ripple of water cut off his cry. For a moment, the top of his head was still visible in the shallow pool. Then the writhing bed of quicksand slid into oily smoothness beneath the glimmer of the dark water.

The Shadow stood rigid for a moment. He had done all he could to save Klatt. Fate had intervened.

His jaw tightened. He didn't retreat. He swung upward and around the treacherous surface of the death pool, using the knotted vines as ropes.

He continued onward.

It was a vain journey. After long minutes of struggle, The Shadow came upon a dense screen of underbrush across the path. He pushed the green tangle aside.

He was staring with sweating weariness at the same creek from which he had started!

Nearby was Rance Klatt's empty boat, pulled up on a mud bank. The Shadow had completed a circle on a crooked path that led nowhere. He had survived a cunning death trap that had probably accounted for other meddling strangers.

But The Shadow was no nearer the heart of the sinister Coosahachie Swamp than when he had started!

## CHAPTER XIV. HEART OF DARKNESS.

THE bow of Rance Klatt's boat rested on the mud flat where Klatt's cunning rudder twist had grounded it earlier. The Shadow bent and braced his feet to shove the craft off.

The bow of the motorized skiff was blunt and heavy. It was hard to dislodge.

The Shadow studied that blunt bow. It was boxed in to hold a bait well. There was water in the wooden well and a few live minnows. But neither the water nor the minnows accounted for the unusual weight of the bow.

The whole front of the craft was boxed in. It seemed a reckless waste of space in so small a boat.

Flame glinted in the eyes of The Shadow. His laughter made a sibilant whisper under the dark leaves that overhung the mud flat.

He got down on hands and knees in the bottom of the craft, peered underneath the front thwart. Soon he discovered a panel that could be removed. Tiny hinges at the panel's bottom showed him where to apply pressure. The panel swung open from the top.

Hidden objects were disclosed.

The first thing The Shadow drew out was a pair of heavy rubber wading boots. They were the sort that came high on the thighs, almost to a man's middle – an invaluable help for swamp travel through this trackless waste of mud and jungle and shallow streams.

The Shadow laid the boots aside. Deepening laughter indicated his satisfaction as he withdrew a much heavier object. It was a stout knapsack. Leather straps indicated that the knapsack was to be worn over a man's shoulders. From an opening in its buttoned top, a strange, whip-like length of flexible metal protruded.

Seeing it, The Shadow knew the value of his find. The thin metal rod was a "whip" antenna. The knapsack contained a portable radio set!

The Shadow removed the receiver. It was compact, beautifully made. The kilocycle marks on the dial showed it to be a short-wave set. The Shadow was unable to move the dial to tune the instrument. The set was "frozen" to receive only on a single channel in the short-wave band.

Under the set were the batteries that had made the knapsack so heavy. There were also a pair of headphones in a cloth pocket.

The Shadow donned the knapsack. It fitted snugly between his shoulder blades. Over his head projected the whiplike length of antenna. He listened in his headphones for the crackle of a wireless signal.

He heard nothing.

However, he hadn't expected to hear anything yet. The purpose of the outfit was clear to him. The time for action had arrived.

He started the outboard motor holding his speed low, to soften the snarl of the powerful engine with which the skiff was equipped. The Shadow began a tour of the network of creeks and bayous that wound in a crazy pattern through the dimness of the thick-leafed jungle.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

He had a compass, and he consulted it frequently. But he used it for a peculiar reason. He was anxious not to penetrate any deeper into the unknown heart of the Coosahachie! He was deliberately circling the outskirts of the swamp.

The headphones remained on his ears. He listened intently every inch of the way. After a long time, he heard what he expected.

The sharp crackle of a wireless signal!

It was brief. Just a Morse-code signal. Two dashes – three dots – two more dashes. It was repeated endlessly.

The Shadow was listening to a directed radio beam from a central sending point in the heart of the swamp!

He beached the boat, shoved it out of sight under a trailing screen of bushes. He donned the high wading boots.

He began to move inward toward the heart of mystery, guided by that constant, warning crackle in his ears. The moment he deviated too far to left or right, the code signal ceased.

The Shadow continued to use his compass as a check on the radio beam. The going was tough. But natural obstacles no longer mattered. Mud sloughs, tangled walls of thorns and vines that were impassable without the sharp blade of a machete, The Shadow detoured around them all – returning always to the crackling signal of the radio beam.

He was aware that someone was ahead of him. Unless this were so, why was there any need of the guiding beam? Somewhere ahead a criminal equipped like The Shadow was hurrying to a secret goal.

The moment the master criminal reached his goal, the guiding signals would cease! Knowledge of this spurred The Shadow to faster exertions.

Soon he revised his theory about the unknown man ahead of him. Not one man, but two! Perhaps three!

Footprints showed unmistakably at spongy spots that two men were ahead. The footprints of one of the men were deeply sunk. He was carrying a burden. The nature of that burden became clear when The Shadow scrutinized the spots where the burden had been laid aside in order to rest the man who carried it.

The burden was a man. A man was being carried. A prisoner!

Deep already in the trackless swamp, The Shadow uttered a burst of harsh laughter. But almost instantly, as though that sibilant mirth had been overheard, the code signal in The Shadow's ears abruptly ceased.

The directed radio beam was silent. The men ahead had reached their hidden goal!

To The Shadow, that challenge was only a spur to renewed effort. He no longer needed the beam as a guide. Constant checking and rechecking with his compass had told him the exact line of direction along which his enemies had proceeded with their prisoner.

But the going was now infinitely tougher.



## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

Detours took longer. Once The Shadow had made them, it took longer to satisfy himself that he had returned to his proper line of advance.

He was spattered with mud halfway up his thighs. His face was a crisscross of oozing scarlet from the sharp spurs of briars and thorns. Gnats surrounded his head in dark, whirling clouds. Their bite was like a needle point of flame. And always his eyes were wary for the ominous writhing of snakes in his path.

Water moccasins were everywhere. The Shadow caught glimpses of swamp adders, and a strange crimson-banded reptile he was unfamiliar with. Once or twice he heard the unmistakable sound of dried peas being shaken in a gourd – a rattlesnake!

It was darker when he came to a sudden rise of ground. Matted ferns underneath The Shadow's black-slimed boots made him slip, as he forged ahead. The late afternoon had changed the depths of the Coosahachie to a premature dusk. It was getting harder to see.

Soon, The Shadow halted. Ahead of him was an impassable wall of tangled shrubbery. He tried to detour. Impossible! There was no point at which the thorn-studded barrier could be forced.

His search took a long time. It told him something new. This barricade of vines and thorns and interlaced shrubbery was not a natural growth. It was man-made!

The Shadow proved it by completing a circle back to the spot where he had started. A circular wall of green! What was inside?

THE SHADOW dropped to his knees. He used his electric torch sparingly to investigate the inside of that tall man-made barrier. Something within the hedge made him glad that he hadn't tried a reckless plunge through.

Thin wires ran through the center of the hedge. They were close together in horizontal strands. No one could pass through those closely hung wires without touching a strand.

The Shadow suspected a cunning electrical alarm.

He retreated into the swamp's dimness, allowed his gaze to move aloft. Tall trees grew everywhere. A few of them were lightning-blasted. Most of them were thick and well-leafed.

The Shadow selected a tree, climbed it carefully after removing his clumsy rubber boots. He found that it was impossible to get over the hedge by crawling along a projecting branch. None of the branches projected properly. A cunning criminal had taken no chances on a blundering stranger crossing his electrically protected hedge by an overhead route.

The Shadow, however, was no blundering stranger. He crawled to the outer end of a strong branch. He gauged the distance from his high perch to the branch of another tree just inside the death hedge.

There was a desperately wide gap between the two trees, but The Shadow decided he could make it. He saw that the branch he wanted to reach was at a considerably lower height than the one on which he now rested.

This other branch was festooned with vines. There were more thick branches just below it.

The Shadow leaped. His black-clad figure hurtled outward and down. The impetus of his desperate leap carried him toward his goal. His hands clutched fiercely, caught at the limb toward which he had aimed – slipped!

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

He fell!

But in the same second that The Shadow fell, his fingers tightened about a stout vine. It broke the force of his fall. As the vine tore loose from his grasp, The Shadow's plunging body fell athwart a thick branch below.

Legs and arms anchored him for a desperate instant. Then his hands again caught a tight purchase. This time, he fell no farther.

He was inside the hedge now! He descended to dark-green turf that was barely visible in a kind of hushed twilight. He walked slowly forward across a large, circular clearing – and ran his forehead into something invisible.

A wall of solid concrete!

The Shadow realized why he had been unable to notice that solid wall. It was painted dark green – the same hue as the surrounding shrubbery and the spongy turf underfoot.

The concrete wall was the side of the building. Its four sides were alike. No doors. No sign of windows. Just a blind, concrete building erected in the heart of a trackless and legend-protected swamp!

Nor was any portion of the sky visible above this hidden clearing. The trees nearest the building had been utilized for purposes of camouflage. Their tops had been drawn downward with ropes. They screened the clearing from above.

Neither the building nor the clearing could ever be detected by an aerial survey.

The Shadow used a tree to climb to the roof of the concrete structure. It was flat. No sign of any entrance that might lead below. But there was something projecting from the roof that made the Shadow's eyes gleam.

A directional antenna! Pivoted at the base so that it could be swung toward any point of the compass!

No wonder no paths were needed through the Coosahachie! Every point of the compass was an open path to a master criminal, once he had donned earphones and heard the harsh buzz of his radio signal!

Unable to find any entrance to the building, The Shadow used guile to open a way. Flitting like a black phantom through the clearing, he selected a tree close to the one where he had made his daring leap over the high hedge.

This other tree was dead for half its length. Lightning had blasted it. The Shadow snapped off a dead branch. It was heavy enough for his purpose. He flung it downward toward the hedge below.

It crashed through the interlaced network of thorns and vines. It fell across the thin wires inside the tangled barrier.

The result was immediate. The clang of a bell!

It was dim, barely audible. It came from within the green-painted, concrete structure. But The Shadow had sharp ears. He knew that an alarm had been sounded.

He was no longer aloft in the gaunt branches of the dead tree. Close to the ground, a part of the darkness, The Shadow waited.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

He watched the building grimly. Nothing happened. No opening appeared in those sinister blank walls.

When the sudden movement came, it was in the grassy floor of the clearing a few feet from the building itself!

A SQUARE of turf lifted from the ground. Just below this cunningly camouflaged trapdoor in the earth ahead, a steel slab lifted. A man emerged from an underground tunnel.

The Shadow did not recognize him. He had a seamed, unshaven face with sullen eyes. A swamp rat like Rance Klatt. Another of the crooked natives of the Coosahachie region on the pay roll of crime!

Behind this thug, another head appeared. This time, The Shadow saw a scoundrel he knew. Vallon!

A gun jutted from Vallon's fist. He stared toward the barrier hedge from which the alarm had sounded. He was too wary to leave the open exit of the tunnel unguarded. His voice snarled an order to the thug.

"Look things over! Watch yourself! If you see anything move – shoot fast!"

The thug crawled through the darkness toward the hedge. There was a long silence. It was broken finally by an oath of disgust from the thug. He had found the dead branch that had crashed from above. It was still lying athwart the wire it had broken.

"False alarm!" the thug called.

He yelled to Vallon what had happened. Vallon's chuckle was as cold as an icicle.

"O.K.! Get back on the job. I gotta make a report in a hurry. The boss is jittery."

Vallon's head descended into the square tunnel opening. The thug hurried across the clearing in order to follow. He never reached his goal.

Black-gloved hands clamped from behind on his windpipe.

Startled, the thug tried to cry out. The yell was choked, unborn, in his throat. He fought viciously. The Shadow tripped him, fell like a blot of darkness above his body. Gloved hands at the crook's throat continued their relentless pressure.

Soon the galvanic kicks of the strangling man ceased. He lay silent and inert.

The Shadow rose, lifted him, carried him to a covert of bushes. Bound and gagged, the thug could be of no use to himself or to Vallon when he recovered.

The Shadow's cloaked figure dropped noiselessly through the square opening in the ground. The trapdoor lowered quietly. The Shadow proceeded through the blackness of the earth passage.

He saw no sign of Mike Vallon. Vallon was evidently as jittery as his unknown boss. He had raced swiftly back through the tunnel, taking it for granted that the thug would follow.

The tunnel ended in a concrete corridor within the building. The corridor was empty. Dim ceiling bulbs made a dull glow.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

At the end of the corridor, a door stood partly open. The Shadow could hear the quick, harsh voice of Vallon. A soundless advance enabled The Shadow to peer within.

Vallon was at a desk, talking over a speaking tube. He was explaining about the cause of the alarm bell.

"An accident, boss. A dead limb dropped. Wind blew it down on the wires. Jed Skane made sure. He's back at his post. I'm going to the power room to keep watch!"

He rose. The Shadow had no chance to retreat down the lighted corridor. He tensed for quick action. But, luckily, Vallon headed in another direction. He opened an inner door, vanished from sight.

PRESENTLY, The Shadow's black-clad figure glided through the room where Vallon had reported. He melted through the inner doorway. The Shadow began a cautious scouting tour.

It was not easy to decide where to go. Corridors branched in many directions. Evidently a considerable portion of this sinister building lay underground.

Occasionally, the hollow footfall of a patrolling thug made The Shadow duck swiftly, fade down a branching passage. But he persisted grimly in his advance along what he knew to be a main corridor. He stopped at many doors and listened, but he entered none.

Behind each of those doors where he listened, he heard only silence.

The Shadow was on the trail of sound! He had not forgotten Vallon's remark about the power room. The Shadow was on the hunt for the steady hum of electrical machinery.

Presently, he heard it. Through the smooth steel of a closed door, the hum was unmistakable. Gently, The Shadow turned the knob. The door was not locked. It opened slowly.

The Shadow was peering into a high-ceilinged room. He could see the smooth sheen of an electric generator. A dynamo filled the air with a steady thrum. Nearby were the spinning blades of a machine that looked like an oil-driven turbine. The Shadow had penetrated to the power room of the swamp stronghold!

There was no sign of Mike Vallon. Puzzled, The Shadow glided across the room. He was passing the turbine when something dropped on the back of his gloved hand. It felt like a droplet of water. But it left a crimson stain.

Blood!

The Shadow glanced upward. Over his head was a metal platform like the grating in a ship's engine room. A steel ladder gave access to it from the floor of the power room. Another ladder led still higher to what looked like an emergency door set high in the spotless wall near the ceiling.

As The Shadow's gaze jerked aloft, he saw a crouched figure bound suddenly into view across the metal grating. A hidden man leaped toward the rungs of the upper ladder. He climbed with the swift agility of a monkey to the door set high in the wall.

For a moment the man's face was visible, twisted with fear. Then he vanished through the upper door. But not before The Shadow had seen who it was.

Marcus Bellinger!

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

An instant later, The Shadow had mounted to the steel grating from which Marcus had fled.

The sodden bundle of a man lay huddled there. Mike Vallon! Blood spurted from a deep knife wound in his back. He had been killed by a savage knife thrust from the rear.

The Shadow paused only long enough to make sure that Vallon was dead. Then he raced up the higher ladder. The upper wall doorway admitted him to a long corridor.

There was no sign of the fugitive head of the Bellinger Metals Corp. But this dimly-lit corridor was the only possible direction in which he could have fled.

The Shadow followed warily, his feet soundless on the hard composition floor. He found that the corridor branched in two directions at its end. A shorter hallway ran at right angles to a blank wall at either end.

There were two closed doors in the center of each branching hall.

The Shadow chose the door at the left. A glimmer of bright light shone through the keyhole. Crouching in silence, The Shadow applied his eye.

He was staring into the interior of what was obviously a small but perfectly equipped laboratory!

Under a bright droplight, a man sat at a desk. His face was pale and gaunt. There was a feverish glint in his sunken eyes. He looked half-starved, terrified.

It was Marvin Hobson, the brilliant young metallurgist who had been so cunningly "killed" in a New York boardinghouse.

Laughter twitched the muscles of The Shadow's throat.

He began the delicate task of noiselessly picking the lock of that chrome steel door.

### **CHAPTER XV. HOUSE OF TERROR**

THE presence of The Shadow outside the laboratory was not audible to Hobson. Nor was it heard in an adjoining chamber.

This chamber lay behind the second door that The Shadow had not yet investigated. Thick rugs covered the floor. Expensive paintings hung on the walls. There was a large fireplace at one end.

A fireplace in a house without a chimney was a strange object indeed. But the masked criminal who owned this house wasn't looking toward the fireplace. His gaze was directed toward a couch.

A man lay helplessly bound there. A gag covered his mouth. Unable to move, his wide-open eyes peered upward in rigid terror.

The prisoner was Professor Durkin!

The masked man seemed to enjoy Durkin's fright. But he said nothing. Turning, he crossed the room toward a side wall. He removed a small painting, disclosing what looked like a peculiar window.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

The window was circular. It was made of dull, grayish glass with tiny horizontal ridges. Completely opaque, it allowed the masked man no glimpse of what lay beyond.

But the touch of a button changed this. Light glowed in the heart of that thick, circular window.

The masked man was able to see clearly into the laboratory where Marvin Hobson sat in hopeless despair at a desk littered with chemical equations.

Hobson turned his head as he saw the circular pane glow. He was unable, however, to see the masked face. The window allowed only one-way vision. To Hobson, it was like a gleaming mirror.

He heard a cold monosyllable: "Well?"

Hobson was close to hysteria. His voice cracked shrilly.

"It can't be done! God knows I've tried."

"Try again!" the masked man snarled. "The time grows short."

Hobson moaned.

"Even Strode couldn't do it! The formula is mathematically possible. But not practically. The combination is too unstable. The metals refuse to combine."

"Strode swore they'd combine. He proved it to me."

Marvin Hobson's tortured voice rose to a shout.

"If Strode was so damned smart, why did you kill him?"

"I don't like to share wealth with other people," the hidden voice purred.

"Listen – for God's sake! The formula won't work!"

"It's got to work! You've been supplied with every element that Strode said was necessary. He proved that when all those elements and alloys were properly combined with a little zinc, it could be turned into a metal exactly equivalent to tin! Do you hear me, you fool? Tin! Our most precious metal of war! The whole tin supply in Asia gobbled up by the Japs! And I have the formula to make it – out of a chemical amalgam with zinc – which is available in the United States, and even though it's a critical metal, the small amount of it needed for this purpose would certainly be given priority!"

"It can't be done," Hobson cried in despair.

"Return to your room!" the ugly voice whispered.

The circular glass became dull as the light faded. Hobson sat slumped in despair. Suddenly, he heard a faint sound of mirth. He turned – to confront new terror!

A black-robed figure had appeared silently in the laboratory. Hobson saw a grim, beak-nosed face, covered to the lips. The brim of a black slouch hat dimmed the flame-like gleam of steady eyes.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

The Shadow leaped silently. His gloved hand cut off Hobson's cry. Held in an iron grip, Marvin Hobson found himself listening to a quiet whisper.

It was a whisper that promised safety. It breathed courage and confidence. Slowly, the fear ebbed from Hobson. He realized that The Shadow was not an enemy, but a friend.

The Shadow surveyed the laboratory with experienced eyes. He saw chemical retorts, the bulky shape of an electric furnace. His gaze moved to the desk where Hobson had sat.

Over the desk, neatly framed, was a chemical and metallurgical formula.

The Shadow asked swift questions of the kidnapped man. While he listened, he studied with keen understanding the chicken marks of the formula that had been perfected by Henry Strode.

The Shadow knew before Hobson explained what the trouble was. Strode's combination of metals and chemicals and alloys was theoretically possible according to the laws of chemistry and mathematics. But it was not commercially possible. The combinations were too unstable, the reactions too delicate.

The Shadow's laughter was no more than a silent ripple of his throat muscles. His gloved finger pointed inquiringly toward a closed inner door of the laboratory.

Hobson whispered that the tiny room beyond was his living quarters.

"Wait there."

As soon as the inner door closed, The Shadow began to glide silently through the laboratory in the opposite direction.

ON the other side of the laboratory wall, a masked criminal was again bending over the couch where the trussed figure of Professor Durkin lay. He loosened some of the strands that bound Durkin's ankles. He forced him to rise.

Durkin was able to take slow, awkward steps forward in the grasp of his captor. He was led toward the fireplace.

"I'm going to show you what happens to scientists who are not intelligent," the masked criminal muttered.

His gloved hand moved. The fireplace swung slowly aside. An opening in the wall was disclosed.

Leaning against a sort of balcony rail, Durkin found himself looking into a small room several feet below where he stood. It was empty. A door that led to it was closed.

Durkin's frightened eyes glued themselves on that door, but it didn't open. The thing that opened was the floor of the room!

A deep black pit was disclosed. The beam of a flashlight in the grasp of the masked criminal showed the trembling Durkin what lay below.

He could see the buttery, blue-black sheen of swamp mud. A nauseous smell drifted upward to his nostrils. The pit was sunk through the center of the house to the level of the swamp. In that mud were uneasy writhings.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

Snakes!

Durkin recognized those dimly slithering shapes. Swamp adders! Water moccasins! Writhing shapes with lidless eyes!

The black pit vanished as the floor of the death room became solid again.

"You shall be the next candidate to try my little zinc experiment," the masked man chuckled. "Just to make sure you understand, I shall now show you the penalty for stupidity."

This time, it was the door of the death room that opened. Through it came the blind, staggering figure of Marvin Hobson! He had no choice. The roar of live steam had driven him through that door.

It was now locked behind him. "Die!" the masked man grated. His hand moved toward a switch to drop Hobson into the pit. Before he could touch it, his hand quivered. Behind him a burst of harsh laughter was making eerie echoes!

The criminal whirled. A gun gleamed in his grasp. He aimed it convulsively at the black-garbed figure of The Shadow.

There were twin .45s in The Shadow's hands. One of them spat a roaring streak of scarlet.

A heavy slug blasted the crook's gun. The masked man staggered from that terrific impact. Blood dripped from his fingers. He swayed, half paralyzed.

From the helpless figure of Marvin Hobson in the death room below the fireplace opening, came a fierce yell.

"Kill him! He's Marcus Bellinger!"

The Shadow was lunging swiftly forward.

"Not Marcus! Blackmailer, thief, murderer – James Bellinger!"

The Shadow's rip at the concealing mask proved his words.

THE good-looking face of the playboy younger brother of Marcus was revealed. Twisted with rage and fear, it was a face hard to recognize. Jimmy was no longer the suave young socialite who had been so smoothly innocent in the presence of Margo Lane and Lamont Cranston.

He staggered backward against the railing of the death chamber below. For an instant, he seemed to be toppling across the rail to the spot where Hobson was penned.

But Jimmy was a cunning scoundrel. He rolled sideways from The Shadow's clutch. His head butted savagely at The Shadow's midriff.

The trick failed, but the impact forced The Shadow back. At the same instant, Jimmy Bellinger's hand whipped from his pocket. He struck in womanish fashion at The Shadow's face – with his open palm. A fragile glass object in Jimmy's palm smashed with a brittle tinkle.

Only a desperate, upward jerk of his head saved The Shadow's sight. Acid splashed against his nose and mouth. The agony of it ate like flame against his flesh.



## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

The Shadow reeled. Before he could recover, Professor Durkin's fettered body plunged against him, sending him crashing to the floor. The wily Jimmy had used Durkin as a battering-ram.

It gave Jimmy Bellinger the vicious instant he needed. His hand flashed to the switch that controlled the hinged floor of the room below the fireplace balcony.

The floor vanished from beneath the feet of the unfortunate Marvin Hobson. With a scream, he tumbled headlong into blackness!

Jimmy Bellinger raced toward freedom. The door to the corridor was open. But he met an unexpected barrier. A human barrier!

A man had appeared from a hiding place beyond that open door. Brother against brother, now! Marcus Bellinger!

The Shadow was unable to interfere in that desperate battle. From beneath his black robe, a coiled length of rope had jerked. He fastened it to the balcony rail above the death pit. The Shadow slid swiftly down the rope!

The darkness of the pit's bottom turned suddenly bright from the beam of The Shadow's electric torch. In his other hand jutted the snout of a .45.

His feet were mired in shiny clay, but he made a desperate grab for the fallen Hobson. Hobson lay crouched against the wall of the pit, kicking with spasmodic terror at the writhing bodies of snakes.

An adder struck at Hobson's shoe. Its fangs bit harmlessly at the thick leather sole.

The roar of The Shadow's .45 dissolved the snake's head into bleeding paste.

He clutched at Hobson, dragged him upright from the mud. The torch passed from The Shadow's hand. Hobson held it with quivering horror while the gun of The Shadow crashed again and again.

Writhing snakes struck blindly. There were too many of them to kill all.

But the feet of The Shadow had lifted suddenly from the nauseous floor of mud at the pit's bottom. With him rose the terrified figure of Hobson.

Hobson had dropped the torch. His arms clung tightly to The Shadow. The Shadow moved jerkily up the taut rope. Hand over hand, carefully – quick clutches – tight holds –

It was desperately hard. Hobson's weight was like lead. He was too far gone with terror to hold to the rope himself.

Sweat poured down The Shadow's face. His chin was aflame from the agony of raw acid. But his gloved hands never ceased their grim clutches on the rope. Upward – an inch at a time –

A gasp from Hobson was the only sound when The Shadow pushed him to safety. The Shadow uttered no word.

Professor Durkin lay fettered and helpless where he had been flung viciously by Jimmy Bellinger.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

Marcus lay in the corridor doorway. Blood oozed from a bullet wound. Jimmy had shot his way to freedom.

The Shadow pursued. There was only one direction to go – through the single, long corridor that led to an upper doorway high in the spotless wall of the power room!

By the time The Shadow appeared in the upper doorway, Jimmy Bellinger was halfway down the steel ladder to the grating of the metal platform.

He descended with the snarling speed of a jungle ape. His mad zeal to escape robbed him of all sanity. He forgot about his wounded hand from which blood dripped crimson as he clutched at the rungs of the ladder.

He had been hurt more badly than he realized. Dimness swirled before his eyes. His wounded hand slipped – caught blindly for another grip – missed!

With a shriek, Jimmy Bellinger fell.

His body struck the metal railing of the platform. It bounced outward, struck the smooth housing of the generator. Then, like a sodden bundle of flesh, it fell to a sickening doom.

The whirling blades of the turbine took it.

The Shadow watching from above, turned his face away from the sight. There was nothing he could do. Crime had met its inevitable end.

THE SHADOW returned to the chamber above. He found that Marcus Bellinger was not mortally wounded. Professor Durkin was gently released from his bonds by the black-robed foe of crime. Hobson, aware that all danger was past, began to babble hysterically.

The Shadow's curt voice halted hysteria. His questions brought answers from men no longer menaced by horrors.

Marcus Bellinger had wrongly suspected Durkin of the disappearance of Henry Strode and all the others. He had mistakenly thought that Durkin was Mike Vallon's secret boss. The money that Marcus had paid out to Vallon from his own safe had been blackmail money!

"I had a secret I dared not permit to become known," Marcus said slowly. "It concerns a woman. It's something I can't talk about. But I'd have spent my last penny to keep a fine woman's name from scandal."

Marcus was amazed to learn from The Shadow that the blackmail money had actually come back to his own home. The Shadow made grim facts clearer.

Jimmy, a playboy and spendthrift, had used blackmail for the funds he needed to build and operate the laboratory in the hidden heart of the Coosahachie. Knowing that Marcus didn't suspect him, Jimmy planned to pick up the last blackmail payment at Marcus' home. He chose ten in the morning because Marcus normally would have been at his office at that time.

But Jimmy had a more cunning reason for his money stunt. Knowing that The Shadow was investigating things, Jimmy hoped to pin the burden of guilt on Marcus if anything went wrong. He almost overreached himself that morning in Manhattan! Jimmy hadn't expected a late breakfast and the presence in the house of both Durkin and his brother Marcus. But he had been wily enough to carry it off – or so he had thought.

## YOUNG MEN OF DEATH

Professor Durkin had been somewhat closer to the truth than Marcus.

"I suspected Jimmy might be guilty," he gasped. "I knew his ugly potentialities for evil from my observation of him in college. Under his innocent exterior, Jimmy Bellinger was a devil! But I thought that he and Henry Strode were in cahoots for crime. That was why I planted the college photo in Jimmy's bedroom. I wanted to force Jimmy into the open by letting him know I suspected what he was up to. I thought he might lead me to Strode if I scared him. You see, I thought Strode was still alive."

"No!" The Shadow's reply was grim. "Dead! Like the other victims."

He explained curtly. After Strode had quarreled with Marcus Bellinger about a share in the profits of his inventions, he went secretly to his friend Jimmy. Strode hoped Jimmy would finance him, based on a new secret about which he had told nobody. Jimmy Bellinger learned, for the first time, that there was a chance to produce domestic tin from a combination of zinc and various other metals and alloys.

Scenting a billion-dollar profit, Jimmy secretly backed Strode. He waited until Strode assured him the formula worked. Then he killed him and took over himself. A brilliant student when he was in college, Jimmy figured he would perfect the discovery as his own. But he couldn't make the formula work!

It was then that the sinister "accidents" to bright young metallurgists commenced.

The laughter of The Shadow signified that the menace to innocent victims was now ended. Professor Durkin, attempting a task too difficult for anyone but The Shadow, had been captured by Jimmy Bellinger and brought to the swamp as a prisoner. Marcus, trailing Durkin to Alabama, had also managed to get through the swamp.

The work of The Shadow alone had averted disaster!

The formula of Henry Strode would be turned over to the government for more detailed experimentation. In the hands of the government, it would some day be perfected to practical use.

The Shadow faded to the radio room of Jimmy Bellinger's stronghold, to summon official help. Soon the trackless heart of the Coosahachie would swarm with investigating police.

When they arrived, The Shadow would be gone!

Hidden by darkness, The Shadow would vanish until some fresh challenge from crime brought him back to battle for justice and the law.

THE END