

# **THE BLACKMAIL KING**

Maxwell Grant

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## CHAPTER I. A QUESTION OF TERMS

IT looked like an ordinary desk lamp. It consisted of a little wooden stand and an incandescent bulb of forty-watt intensity, topped by a small shade. There, the resemblance ended. One thing was missing: the lamp cord.

Homer Fengram lifted the lamp from the desk and chuckled like a pleased child. His chuckle had a basso boom, and his childish glee was also incongruous. For Homer Fengram, portly man of millions, usually had the serious manner that befitted the successful financier. It was odd to see a boyish smile spread across his heavy-jowled face.

With a long reach, Fengram passed the glowing lamp across the desk to the calm-faced visitor who sat on the other side.

"It's not a trick, Cranston," boomed Fengram. "Most tricks are done with wires. This lamp" – the portly man chuckled anew – "has no wires."

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Lamont Cranston took the lamp and studied it from every angle. His face showed no amazement, but Fengram was sure that it was masking such a sentiment. It was simply a habit with Cranston never to register surprise upon his immobile features. Watching his visitor, Fengram suggested:

"Take it apart."

Cranston removed the shade, then started to unscrew the bulb from its socket. His fingers revealed the surprise that his face restrained. They expected the bulb to be hot; hence they still hesitated, even when they found it cool.

Like an ordinary bulb, this one extinguished itself when removed from the socket, and when Cranston inverted the lamp stand, out dropped the source of the illumination – a tiny dry-cell battery of the sort used in pencil-sized flashlights!

Cranston's interest returned to the light bulb as the only explanation for such phenomenal illumination from so small an electric supply. Extinguished, the bulb looked dark, but Cranston's probing eyes distinguished its contents to be a gelatinous substance. The bulb, moreover, was heavy, when he weighed it in his hand.

"It is called 'Infralux,'" explained Fengram, beaming across the desk. "'Bottled light' would be a good commercial term for it. Light without heat, on a scale that passes belief. Imagine its possibilities, Cranston!"

The possibilities required little imagination. Cranston was thinking more in terms of the invention itself. Someone had evidently solved the riddle of the firefly's glow, and produced a synthetic substance giving the same result on a large scale.

The need of a slight electric current, supplied by a tiny flashlight battery, to put the glow in operation, was too minor a detail to impede in any way the invention's success.

His eyes turning to Fengram, Cranston put his first question:

"Who invented it?"

"Some obscure experimenter," replied Fengram. "His name is Dana Mycroft, I believe. But the man who developed it is Giles Brett."

"Head of the Brett Research Corp.?"

"The same." Catching a slight flash of Cranston's eyes, Fengram shook his head. "No, no, Cranston. You mustn't believe those rumors about Brett. Those photoelectric bomb detonators that he developed for the government are quite practical. He had some unforeseen difficulties with them; nothing more."

Cranston nodded, as though he took Fengram's word for it. The financier returned to the subject of the Infralux bulb. It had cost Brett a mere twenty-five thousand dollars, Fengram declared, and Fengram had offered him a quarter million for it. The deal was to be closed this very afternoon.

"It is now half past four," declared Fengram, stroking his double chin. "In exactly one hour, Giles Brett will be in his office, back from Washington. I have here" – Fengram drew a slip of paper from his desk drawer – "a certified check for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, that I shall take to him."

"I should like you to come with me, Cranston, and witness the transaction. Meanwhile, allow me to detail the plans that I have made for financing the Infralux Co., which will be the newest of the dozen corporations

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under my control. When I have finished, I am quite sure that you will become the first purchaser of stock in the new corporation."

THERE was nothing of the high-pressure salesman in Homer Fengram. He was actually offering Lamont Cranston a chance to come in on the ground floor. For Fengram had the Midas touch in all his undertakings. His present companies, a dozen of them, were paying good dividends to lucky stockholders.

In fact, if Fengram had a fault, it was his ability to make too much money. With emphasis on national defense, several of his companies were taxed to their limit of capacity. All that Cranston needed to do was look around and see proof of Fengram's affluence.

Fengram's office, wherein the chat was taking place, was located in his palatial mansion, that occupied a quarter of a block of choice Manhattan real estate. The house, alone, required two dozen servants, in addition to Fengram's secretaries.

Downstairs were rooms containing enough famous paintings to furnish an art gallery; other rooms held curios, jewels and statuettes that would have done credit to the Metropolitan Museum.

Having spent vast sums upon such collections, Fengram was only anxious to buy more. In his opinion, this was the time to make such purchases, for many persons were selling their treasures at low prices. A few years from now, values would be up again, according to Fengram, who was usually right in everything he claimed.

On one statement, Fengram was wrong.

He said that Giles Brett would not be back from Washington until half past five. Actually, Brett had already returned to New York, but he had not yet notified Fengram that he was in town. Brett happened to have too many other matters on his mind.

TALL, stoop-shouldered, with a worried expression upon his long, thin face, Giles Brett was pacing from one office to another in the suite where his research corporation was located.

A dozen employees, busy at their desks, were carefully avoiding his silent wrath. When they saw him turn to the door of the connecting laboratory, they breathed relief, but only temporarily.

Brett's attention was suddenly attracted by the loud opening of the outer door. In from the elevator stormed a scrawny man, whose face was thinner than Brett's and whose white hair formed a shocky banner.

Seeing Brett, the scrawny man raised a thin, withered fist and shook it for the benefit of all witnesses.

"I am Dana Mycroft!" he piped in a high tone. "I demand my rights! I sold a priceless invention to Giles Brett \_"

"And I am Giles Brett!" interjected Brett in a harsh tone. "If you have business with me, Mycroft, it is private."

"Private!" screeched Mycroft, still wagging his fist. "You made it public, Brett, when you offered my invention, Infralux, to Homer Fengram for a quarter million! Look at this!" He waved a copy of a daily picture tabloid. "Read what Three O'Clock has to say!"

"Whatever Three O'Clock says, is wrong," sneered Brett. "It prints everything backward in hope of starting a controversy. I didn't offer Infralux to Fengram. He offered to buy it from me."

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"For a quarter million?"

"The figure, surprisingly, is correct. But I haven't sold the invention yet, Mycroft."

"And when you do –"

"You will be taken care of in a proper fashion, Mycroft. I have never yet dealt unfairly with anyone."

Mycroft screeched a laugh and thumbed through the pages of the picture newspaper, which he flaunted anew under Brett's nose.

"What do you call this?" he cackled. "Your deal with the government, Brett! Those faulty detonators that you sold them!"

Brett turned to a pair of husky clerks who had drawn close. He gestured them toward Mycroft, and ordered bluntly:

"Throw him out!"

They threw Mycroft out. An elevator door gulped wide to receive him. Before the door could close, Mycroft high-pitched his parting threat:

"I've given you your last warning, Brett! I have another way to deal with you! I have friends –"

The clang of the elevator door started Mycroft on a twenty-story journey to the ground floor. Employees were glued to their work as Brett paced past them and entered the laboratory. Two technicians greeted him with pleased looks.

"Well, Craig," questioned Brett, "what about the detonator?"

"Martin and I have tested it, sir," replied Craig, gesturing toward his assistant. "I believe that we have corrected the trouble."

"You should have been with me today," snapped Brett bitterly. "One of our shells blew up another anti-aircraft gun at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds."

Leaving the technicians staring at each other, Brett strode through a connecting door into his private office. On his desk, he found a letter in a plain envelope. In one corner it bore the word: "Personal."

Ripping the letter open, Brett read its contents. He picked up a telephone and ordered the operator to connect him with his lawyer. Getting the connection, Brett spoke:

"Another of those letters, Kemball... Yes, demanding the same sum. I'm to expect a call at five o'clock, as usual. Of course, it's Mycroft. He was just here making another of his crazy threats... No, I hadn't found the letter then... Naturally, he was trying to find out if I'd read it –"

"Worry about Mycroft? Why should I? It's that friend of his who bothers me... Yes, the one with the smooth voice who always calls up at five o'clock... Certainly, I'll talk to him and sound him out. Only, this time, it really has me worried –"

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FINISHING his call to Kemball, Giles Brett stared at the letter. It was very simple, and specific. It stated that unless he paid over the sum of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, evidence would be made public to ruin him.

It was blackmail, of course, and this wasn't the first letter of the sort. Hitherto, Brett had turned them over to Kemball. This letter, however, was different.

It carried a final note in its last sentence. There, Brett read the words: "You have waited long enough; at five o'clock, we shall give you proof." Fingering the letter, Brett wondered. What could these hounds mean by proof?

Bitterly, he wished that he had held on to Mycroft and made the fellow tell more about his friends. Unfortunately, Mycroft hadn't delivered that bit of warning until the elevator door was closing.

Picking up the telephone, Brett called his switchboard operator, to say that he expected an important call at five o'clock and wanted it put through to his office without question as to the caller's name. That done, Brett began to look over other correspondence that had accumulated during the day.

Very shortly, a strange thing happened. It occurred in an outer office, where the switchboard operator, momentarily idle, was talking to a clerk.

"You know how fussy old Brett is," confided the switchboard girl. "Well, what does he do but say: 'Put the call through at five, without question.' It doesn't make sense – or does it? Maybe it does, considering how old Brett goes popping around everywhere, looking over people's shoulders –"

The clerk was making gestures. The operator halted and looked over her shoulder, to meet the stony gaze of her employer, Giles Brett. She saw lips form a disapproving sneer; then, while the girl was still trying to find words, Brett turned away in his sudden style and stalked toward his office.

"I didn't know he'd come out!" the girl panted to the clerk. "I hope he won't fire me!"

"It's all right," the clerk assured. "He's gone back into his office."

The clerk was wrong. Brett had not gone back into his office.

Giles Brett was still in his office!

## CHAPTER II. DOUBLE TROUBLE

PUSHING the stack of letters aside, Giles Brett came back to the first one that he had opened. He read its last sentence; then, in a sneering tone, he spoke aloud:

"The proof!"

To Brett, the threat was empty. His misadventures with the bomb detonator were no fault of his own. It was common knowledge, however, that Brett's device had failed, and on that basis, professional blackmailers were trying to shake him down, inspired, no doubt, by Mycroft, after the inventor's own measures had failed.

For Mycroft's open demands were definitely unjustifiable, considering that he had sold his invention outright, with full knowledge of the extent to which Brett might develop Infralux. In a fair sense, Brett considered the finished product his own.

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This letter bothered Brett, however, more than his sneer denoted. Something in the word "proof" rankled him, because it carried a tangible note. Then, as if in answer to a query, came a voice which might have been an echo to Brett's own.

"The proof is here, Mr. Brett," said the voice. "I am the proof!"

Brett stared across the desk. His eyes opened wide as he saw the person opposite him, and the other man's did the same. Even to their milk-gray color, they matched Brett's eyes. When Brett's lips gave a twitch, the other man duplicated it as faithfully as though he were a reflection gazing from a mirror.

For, in face, voice, manner, and even attire, this man who had entered unannounced was Brett's double!

Blinking, as though he didn't believe it, Brett freed himself from part of the illusion. At least, his double did not copy his blinks; instead, the long-faced visitor relaxed, and delivered one of the contemptuous smiles that were Brett's wont. Obliging, he waved his hand, and said in a voice quite like Brett's own:

"Turn on some lights, so you can see me better."

Brett reached for a desk lamp and twisted its bulb tight; then did the same with a lamp on the other side of the desk. He'd hardly finished before he realized that he had used two of the Infralux lamps that he kept as samples. The fact pleased Brett's visitor all the more.

"A good idea, Brett," he stated, "to use your special lighting system. I like those new lights. I've seen them before. Not quite so good as these –"

"You mean Mycroft's!" interrupted Brett. "Who are you, anyway?"

"I am you, Brett!"

Coming upright from his chair, Brett glared at the smirking man across the desk. His attitude was so pugnacious, that his double lost something of his calm.

"At least, I have been mistaken for you," corrected the double. "My own name happens to be Jay Doban. I am fortunate in two ways: I resemble you very closely, and I was once a character actor, which enables me to play the part to perfection. Now, Brett, to our business."

DOBAN drew an envelope from his pocket and took some photographs from it, spreading them on the desk for Brett's examination. One photograph showed Brett shaking hands with a blocky, fat-faced man whose dark face had a blunt look. Another showed him seated at a table with the same individual.

"Why, that's the man they recently indicted for Fifth Column activities!" exclaimed Brett.

"Exactly!" agreed Doban. "I had no trouble meeting him. In the presence of witnesses, by the way."

Brett's eyes went narrow.

"You mean you introduced yourself as me?"

"Exactly," said Doban again. "Suppose, Brett, that the F.B.I. should receive copies of these photographs and begin to look into your recent past. For a man handling government contracts – faulty ones, by the way – your position would be serious. Here are some other pictures –"



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Doban stopped, as he laid another envelope on the desk. He'd spoken his piece as far as he could. Brett was storming about the room in a fashion that a caged lion would have envied.

As Brett fumed, the telephone rang. Brett pounced for it, to hear the five-o'clock call that he expected. It came in the smooth voice he recognized, though he did not know its owner.

"Are you convinced, Brett?" the voice inquired. "We told you that we would give you proof. It is right in front of you, Brett."

Brett's reply was incoherent. He was glaring across the desk as he tried to talk. Sight of Doban accounted for his lack of words.

"It's so simple, Brett," the speaker continued. "Sell the rights to Infralux and pay the money over to us. We'll give you the negatives of those photographs, and a signed statement from Doban."

Brett found his voice.

"For a quarter million?" he stormed. "Never!"

"You've heard the terms," the voice intoned. "You have no other choice. Mycroft has left it entirely to us."

Brett started to slam the telephone back on its stand. Doban stopped him. Coolly, Brett's double spoke to the unknown caller in a tone precisely like Brett's own:

"He's convinced. I'll close the deal for you, Cleeve."

Doban was hanging up, when he saw a change in Brett's glare. For the moment, Doban was nonplused. He'd made a bad slip, but he was quick to correct it.

"Cleeve is the name," said Doban. "Cleeve Rayland, to save you the bother of checking on it. I've worked for him before, but not often. He needed some special service in this case."

"I warn you!" stormed Brett. "This is blackmail!"

"What else would you call it, Brett?"

Brett didn't know what else. It was his turn to be nonplused. Then, rallying, he asserted:

"You can't get away with it, Doban!"

"Brett to you, Brett," retorted Doban. "I've already gotten away with it. How do you suppose I walked into this office, past all the clerks who are supposed to keep people out? Only by passing as you so perfectly, that there wasn't a chance for argument."

The statement was quite a convincer. Brett took on the air of a trapped man. He stalked over to the window and stared down into the dusk, as though contemplating a twenty-floor leap as his next move.

Then, raising his head, he caught his reflection in the darkened window, and blinked when he saw two faces mirrored side by side. Wheeling, Brett found Doban right at his shoulder.

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"You won't jump, Brett," sneered Doban. "You'll pay! After all, what have you to lose? Only the twenty-five thousand that you originally paid Mycroft. You gypped him out of the rest, you know. So Rayland and I are collecting it for him."

BRETT became canny, as he walked to his desk. Stopping there, he turned to argue. He hadn't closed a deal on Infralux, as yet. True, he had been offered a quarter million by a financier named Homer Fengram, but it was his intention to hold out for a much larger sum; perhaps not to sell at all, but to market Infralux himself.

Such argument had no effect on Doban. He simply shook his head and stated that Brett had heard the final terms.

Under the light of the glowing Infralux lamps, Brett studied Doban closer. He was realizing that this man was nothing but a stooge, working for the real blackmailer, Cleeve Rayland. It couldn't be otherwise, Brett reasoned. Doban had been chosen for his job simply because he was Brett's double. He was an actor, too, but there his ability ended.

If smart, Doban would be handling this game himself, instead of working for someone else. Remembering Doban's previous slip, Brett decided to test him to the full. As preliminary, he laid his hand upon the telephone.

"Suppose I call some people in here," suggested Brett, "and let them see us both together, Doban. This blackmail business would be all off."

"Not at all," spoke Doban, as though Brett's words were a cue. "I would say that you had tried to bribe me to commit perjury; to swear that the person in those photographs was myself, and not you."

A good argument, but Doban put it in a glib way. It was evidently Rayland's idea, not his own. Brett's face firmed, and he watched to see if Doban's did the same. It did, but only superficially.

There was a difference between these two who looked alike. Brett was a man of determination; his double was not. It was all that Brett wanted to know.

"I'm going to make that test, Doban," said Brett decisively, "with the police as judges. We'll ask them to give us their famous third degree, and we shall see who cracks first!"

The words filled Doban with horror. This was getting beyond his depth. Madly, the fellow sprang for the telephone and snatched Brett's hand from it. Then, as Brett shoved him toward a corner, Doban pulled a revolver.

"Don't touch that telephone, Brett!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "If you do, I'll shoot! You'll stay right here, just as you are, until I've gone."

Brett didn't touch the telephone. Instead, he moved closer to Doban, speaking sarcastically as he approached.

"You'd shoot me, Doban?" Brett queried. "And spoil the whole pretty game? Why, I'm the one man you can't afford to kill! Rayland didn't think of that, did he, when he framed this thing for Mycroft?"

"No closer, Brett!" Doban was backing desperately to a corner. "I'll shoot, if there's no other way!"

Brett came closer, with a charge so sudden that it bewildered Doban. He hadn't an idea that Brett could be so agile. Brett caught Doban's hand before the fellow could pull the trigger, and shoved the revolver upward.

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Brett's hold was not merely powerful; it was tricky. He bent Doban down to one knee, twisting him until his head was bowed and tilted.

All the while, Doban was trying to bring the gun down from the upright position and turn it toward Brett's body, but the grip on Doban's hand was torturing, numbing. Doban's fingers tightened under Brett's clutch.

And then –

The revolver spoke, its report muffled. Doban's body sagged down in Brett's grasp. Brett found himself looking downward at a face which still could have been his own, but its imitative expressions were frozen into a final grimace.

The reason was the ugly hole that the revolver shot had blasted in Doban's temple. One bullet had put an end to Brett's double.

Yet the trouble still remained.

IT dawned on Brett, as he gazed, rigid, that Doban was a greater menace dead than alive. The very story of bribery that Doban had threatened to relate might occur to the police. They would have but one man to question: Brett himself.

Could his story hold?

Hardly, considering that the police could well regard this as a case of murder. The photographs wouldn't help, whether Brett kept them or destroyed them. The letter on Brett's desk was merely a typewritten sheet that Brett could have typed as a bluff, to back his story.

The thought struck Brett that his lot might have been better had the bullet found him, instead of Doban.

The idea was an inspiration.

Dropping beside Doban's body, Brett went through the dead man's pockets, taking whatever he found. He began stuffing the contents of his own pockets into Doban's, and was busily at it when the phone bell rang. Brett completed his task before he answered. When he spoke, his voice was strained.

The call was from his switchboard operator, announcing two visitors: Homer Fengram and a friend named Lamont Cranston.

"Call Craig," said Brett slowly. "Have him show them in. And wait! Tell Craig to bring Martin with him. There may be some technical points to discuss. I shall need them both."

Scooping up the photographs and the letter, Brett turned, not toward the door to the outer offices, but to the one that led into the laboratory. It was latched from his side, and he turned the knob slowly, carefully. He was peering through a crack when the two technicians went out from the lab, through a door to the outer offices.

Sliding into the laboratory, Giles Brett took a last look at the huddled duplicate of himself in the far corner of his private office. The click of the door latch marked Brett's departure from the strange scene of death.

## CHAPTER III. WAYS IN THE DUSK

THE two technicians were prompt in escorting the visitors to Brett's office. Craig knocked, and when he received no answer, he opened the door as a matter of course.

Fengram entered first, and the lamps on the desk immediately attracted his attention. He was pointing them out to Cranston, when he saw his companion gaze beyond.

Then, with a stride that was swift but easy, Cranston walked to the corner, and the others hurried along, excitedly, when they saw the object that attracted him. Cranston was first to stoop beside the huddled body of Doban. He looked up at the others and pronounced the word:

"Dead!"

Cranston didn't have to inquire the dead man's identity. Craig and Martin were already babbling Brett's name, and Fengram was nodding recognition. Fengram's first words expressed the obvious, as to the cause of death.

"It's suicide!" he exclaimed. "Unless –"

He turned to the technicians and asked if Brett had mentioned anything about his trip to Washington. Grimly, the men nodded, and told of the new failure at the proving ground.

"Another faulty detonator!"

"But we told Mr. Brett we'd located the trouble!"

While the technicians were thus expressing themselves, Cranston stepped over to the corner door. As he opened it, Fengram joined him.

The technicians were on hand when the visitors looked into the laboratory, and both explained that they had been in that very room when Brett summoned them. No one could possibly have come in through the laboratory, cornered Brett and murdered him in less than a single minute.

The men were honest on that point; so honest, that they released the fact that the laboratory formed a route between Brett's private office and the corridor without the necessity of going through the outer offices.

Across the lab, Cranston saw the far door that served as an exit. Instead of going to it, he took the word of the technicians and stepped back into Brett's own office.

"We must inform the switchboard operator," Cranston said quietly to Fengram, "and any of the other employees who are still here. We can then summon the police."

Fengram nodded, and Cranston stepped toward the outer office. Already, employees were crowding in, the switchboard girl among them. A few swift paces and Cranston could have prevented them from viewing the gruesome scene, but his step wasn't as quick as before.

Brought by the sound of excited voices, the employees were through the door before Cranston reached them.

There was a shriek from the switchboard girl when she saw the body. Hysterically, she cried that she "should have known." There was "something different in Mr. Brett's voice" when he had called the board. One of the clerks was wavering, his face very white. Briskly, Cranston said to Fengram:

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"Look after matters here. I'll find a doctor."

Through the outer offices, Cranston looked along the corridor as he rang the elevator bell. He saw the door from the laboratory; it was marked: "Private." Farther along was another door, quite as important in Cranston's estimate. It said: "Fire Exit."

An empty elevator arrived. Without a word to the operator, Cranston entered it and began a rapid trip to the ground floor, with no stops, since most of the people in the building had started out at five o'clock, half an hour earlier. In that trip, Cranston hoped that he could make up for a few minutes of delay.

Those few minutes were the time that it would have taken a man to slide out through the laboratory and down the fire tower, the logical path for a man who had framed a nearly-perfect scene of imitation suicide. For in Cranston's opinion, this case had elements that might better fit with murder.

CRANSTON'S opinion coincided with The Shadow's.

Famed master mind who hunted men of crime, The Shadow, in public life, posed as Lamont Cranston, wealthy New York clubman. It was a guise that helped in many ways.

Not merely did it give him an introduction among the upper crust upon whom brainy criminals so often preyed; but, as Cranston, The Shadow was a great friend of New York's police commissioner, Ralph Weston.

Often, The Shadow formed his own conclusions after learning the law's opinion, but he was equally adept at uncovering crime on his own. When he encountered a surprise case, like the supposed death of Giles Brett, at practically the moment of its occurrence, The Shadow never failed to follow immediate clues.

Here, he had three things to work with.

First, Brett's body; second, the possible exit through the laboratory; third, the switchboard operator's mention of Brett's unnatural voice. Those added up to something with The Shadow, though, curiously, he was using minus factors with the plus.

It wasn't Brett's body, and the voice had been Brett's own. On both those points, The Shadow was, so far, wrong, though the two minus factors, in a sense, made a plus. His strongest hunch, though, was correct:

A man had made an exit through the lab, after neatly drawing away the two technicians who would otherwise have seen him pass. The man's identity was something to be determined.

Reaching the ground floor, Cranston hurried his stride to a side door, which he knew must be close to the alley exit from the fire tower. He had made up for lost time, because he saw the man he wanted.

A cab had stopped right at the alley, and a stoop-shouldered man was getting into it. It was hardly coincidence that the stooped man had waved a cab to that particular spot.

Unfortunately, the man's face wasn't visible. He was partly into the cab when Cranston spied him, and the street was thick with dusk. Important, however, was the fact that the cab started away very rapidly, as though its passenger had ordered a hurried departure.

There were other cabs near the building, and Cranston could easily have taken the first in line. Instead, he gave a slight gesture of his arm and a cruising taxi wheeled in from the corner, to pick up this fare that the other cabbies hadn't even noticed.

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There was a great honking of horns that suppressed indignant oaths from all along the hack line. The other cabbies were mad because the cruiser chiseled in.

They didn't know that the cab actually belonged to the man who had summoned it; that it was cruising this vicinity on the lookout for his call. Moe Shrevnitz, the driver of that cab, was in The Shadow's permanent employ; and there was a reason why his chief wanted Moe's cab.

Not only did Shrevvy snap to the trail of the cab that went ahead, in a style that indicated he would overtake it; the cab also provided The Shadow with some very useful appliances.

Sliding out a drawer beneath the rear seat, the passenger produced garments of black: a cloak and a slouch hat. Enveloped in that garb, the personality of Cranston was submerged. A low, whispered laugh announced that the passenger had become The Shadow.

For added emphasis, the mystery man in black planted a brace of .45 automatics beneath his cloak. Those could prove forcible persuaders in dealing with an escaping murderer.

The raucous honk of taxi horns back by the building seemed but a minor matter, something that The Shadow had often encountered before. On this occasion, however, they had covered up a very vital fact. The Shadow's cab wasn't the only car that took up the trail of Giles Brett.

From within a sedan parked across the street, watching men saw Brett spring into his cab and got a good look at his face. They knew that his hurry had significance. Their car was moving when Cranston sprang into Moe's cab, and they saw him, too.

Then, as Moe's cab sputtered ahead, the sedan gave a roar that The Shadow would certainly have heard, but for the blare of protesting cab horns.

As Moe swung the corner, The Shadow's rearward glance showed nothing but a flow of traffic, released by a green light. The sedan gave no indication that it, too, was on the trail. Had the trail itself been a long one, The Shadow would have observed the pursuing sedan; but matters broke within the next few blocks.

CAUGHT by a traffic light, Brett's cab was forced to stop. The Shadow spoke to Moe and his driver slackened speed. The Shadow was ordering Moe to ease up beside the cab ahead, in innocent fashion.

Obscured by darkness, The Shadow intended to take a preliminary look at the fugitive in the cab ahead. Corner lights offered an excellent opportunity, and The Shadow was on the verge of a most remarkable discovery – that of a murdered man in flight from the scene of his own death.

There were others, however, who, for reasons of their own, did not want The Shadow to gain that look. They were the men in the sedan, and the driver of the following car took advantage of Moe's slackened gait.

A thing unleashed, the sedan whipped past The Shadow's cab and cut in front of it to force it to the curb. Moe might have countered that action, had the turn not been so sudden. It happened so close to the halted cab ahead, that the sedan overdid the swerve.

Jogging to the curb, then cutting sharply the other way, Moe expected to spurt behind the sedan. Instead, he came smack into its path.

The collision was terrific. The sedan actually lifted the cab into the air. Revolving sideward, the cab presented a peculiar sight: its rear doors jarred open and flapped like wings, only to fold again as the cab

landed upside down and leaned against a building wall.

The sedan stopped, intact. From its interior sprang four men, apparently concerned with the accident their car had caused. They were hurrying to the cab as though to assist its occupants.

Assistance wasn't in their minds. These men were bent on twofold murder, under the guise of aid.

Above the scene, a traffic light flicked green.

### CHAPTER IV. DEATH DEFINED

BOUNDING across the blackened curb, three murderous men reached the overturned cab. The fourth man tripped in the patchy darkness, sprawled, and swore about it; but the others didn't wait, nor listen. They were yanking doors open, front and back, to get at driver and passenger.

The driver came out first. Moe was very groggy, but the men who dragged him out intended to make him groggier still. They'd have swung their drawn guns hard to his skull the moment that they hauled him out, if Moe hadn't been upside down, like the cab.

He managed to kick at his assailants, and they tattooed a bastinado on the soles of his shoes. That settled him enough so that two of them could start to roll him over.

The other pair were reaching into the back seat. One was the fellow who had tripped at the curb. He was muttering about his spill and gesturing back at the curb itself, when something turned his mumble into a shout.

Patchy blackness was materializing, a shape sprouting from cement. Weirdly vague, it was coming up from the curb and blocking off lights across the way. To the man who saw that grotesque form, it could mean one thing only. His shout named the menace:

"The Shadow!"

A gun throated in the darkness. With the jab of flame came simultaneous sounds: the clang of metal as the bullet ricocheted from the inverted cab step; the duller plunk as the metal slug bashed the house wall as a finish to its bounce. Hard with the echoes of the gun came a shivery laugh.

Both sounded as if The Shadow planned them, but he hadn't. His real idea was a surprise attack. Hard-sledged blows could have settled Moe's assailants silently, while the other two were probing the rear of the cab for the passenger who wasn't there.

Those wide-flapping doors had marked The Shadow's own departure from the cab while it was in midair. He'd simply dropped from the one on the lower side, and let the cab roll on.

Spotted, The Shadow was forced to change his tactics. His shot was purposely wide. The men he had to stop first were the pair about to put the slug on Moe, and he couldn't risk too close a shot, with the cabby in their clutches.

However, the one shot served its purpose. Thuggish captors dropped Moe from his horizontal position, to give battle to The Shadow.

Crooks found advantage in their disadvantage.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

Almost upon them, The Shadow had them cooped up. Otherwise, they would have dropped away, shooting back at their black-clad foe. If they'd tried that, their move would have been the equivalent of suicide. With two guns drawn, The Shadow could have clipped them in the midst of their diving aim.

Instead, the four men surged with one accord. Bullets weren't the antidote for such a drive. The Shadow let his opponents use them, to no avail. As they fired, he lunged, low and hard, and the shots whizzed a foot above him.

Then, taking his opponents as buffers, The Shadow came up among them, flinging his taunting challenge in their ears, driving the message through their skulls with the weighted heft of bludgeoned guns.

Crooks reeled and staggered off toward the sedan, giving their backs as easy targets – with one exception. Their leader clung to The Shadow, clutching with a lucky grip that he had obtained. Together, a rangy man of crime and his cloaked antagonist spun out to the center of the street.

They whirled into the gleam of headlights, beneath a traffic light turned red. They halted, locked, and The Shadow, with one gun stowed beneath his cloak, used his free hand to take his opponent's throat. He saw the man's face, clear in the headlights, ruddied by the glow from above. It wasn't the face of an ordinary thug.

Sleek, sallow, sharply pointed, those features betokened smoothness. The Shadow recognized the visage. It belonged to a man who was smart at finding loopholes in the law. It was the face of a confidence man named Cleeve Rayland.

BEFORE The Shadow could follow up his discovery, the light about him moved. Cleeve's face had turned a sickly green, but the change of the traffic light wasn't the reason why his followers had started the sedan. They were desperate, anxious to eliminate The Shadow at any cost.

The concentrating of the headlights was accompanied by the sedan's roar. The driver intended to smash The Shadow, even if it meant the end of Cleeve, too.

In the rear, two men with guns were prepared to snipe The Shadow if he reeled from the car's path. They hadn't the regard for Cleeve that The Shadow held for Moe. Two figures would be a bigger target than one, with a fifty-fifty chance of bagging The Shadow.

Only there weren't two figures.

Instead of taking Cleeve with him, The Shadow shoved the head crook toward the lights. Across the curb, with a long dive into darkness, The Shadow rolled into the shelter of basement steps, already reached by Moe, who was rising to throw a car jack at the lurching sedan.

But the lurch ended with a jolt. The driver jammed the brakes when he saw Cleeve, alone, in his path.

The gunners in back didn't get the chance they wanted to clip The Shadow. They heard a laugh that mocked their frustrated scheme. They were ready to spring from their car and again become targets in the open, when Cleeve, as before, put an end to their suicidal folly.

Staggering squarely against the radiator of the sedan, Cleeve made a lucky lurch up to the bumper and bawled for the driver to give it the gas. The driver did.

The sedan whipped around the corner, with Cleeve hanging to the front, almost before The Shadow could aim from his shelter. As he followed with his gun, intending to clip the driver, a pair of house steps came across



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The Shadow's path of aim.

Drawing Moe with him, The Shadow sprang to the sidewalk; then halted. He was about to urge Moe back to the cab, when he realized that it was useless. Generally, Moe was ready to resume pursuit, but not with a cab turned turtle.

Stopping briefly at the cab, The Shadow took off his cloak and hat and pulled the drawer from beneath the rear seat. Packing the black garments with the guns, he put the drawer in right side up, just the opposite of its usual way, in relation to the cab. Then, leaving Moe to explain the accident to the first patrol car that arrived, The Shadow walked away as Cranston.

Plenty of people had reached the twentieth floor of the building housing Brett's office when Lamont Cranston reappeared there. He didn't have to resume his hunt for a physician, because a police surgeon was on hand. So was Commissioner Weston; brisk of action, he had taken over proceedings. With the commissioner was a swarthy, stocky man – his ace inspector, Joe Cardona.

Brett's death wasn't hard to analyze, in Weston's opinion. It was plain, everyday suicide.

A dozen people not only identified the dead man as their employer, Giles Brett; they also testified that he, alone, had gone into his private office during the afternoon. In and out in his usual style, the technicians had seen him enter from the laboratory, while the switchboard operator and a clerk had seen him later, during a brief visit to the outer offices.

No one could possibly have entered through the lab and left again, with murder in between, during the brief time the technicians were absent.

As for the switchboard operator's mention of Brett's strange voice, she'd altered her ideas, now that her hysterics were ended. She described Brett's voice as "strained," which was a definite help to the suicide theory.

Such matters established, Commissioner Weston turned to Inspector Cardona.

"Another hunch gone wrong," said Weston in a pleased tone. "I wouldn't rely upon them in the future, inspector."

Cardona grunted a half-hearted agreement. Weston went out to the switchboard to call Brett's lawyer and notify him of his client's death. Fengram and others followed the commissioner, leaving Cardona quite alone – so he thought.

Perhaps it was the atmosphere of the place; possibly the thing was just coincidence. Whichever it was, Cardona, thinking of Weston's summary, grunted two words aloud as he stood at Brett's desk. They were the same two words that Brett had uttered earlier:

"The proof!"

"Of what, inspector?" came a quiet query. "Of Brett's suicide?"

CARDONA looked up, startled; then nodded when he saw Cranston. Knowing that Cranston and Weston didn't always agree on theories, Cardona spoke frankly.

"I had a hunch it was murder," said Joe, "but the commissioner says that all the proof shows suicide."

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"A very curious suicide," observed Cranston. "Coming just when Brett was ready to close a quarter-million-dollar deal."

"Say – that's something!"

Cardona was starting to the outer office. Cranston, shaking his head, restrained him.

"I wouldn't revive the hunch business. I'd play it on my own."

"Just how?"

Cranston gazed about the office as though searching for nooks. There were some dark spaces, quite removed from the glowing desk lamps.

"Brett came in here twice," observed Cranston musingly, "but no one saw him go out between those times."

"Because nobody happened to notice him," returned Cardona. "That part is simple, Mr. Cranston."

"Very simple," Cranston agreed. "If Brett could step out unnoticed, somebody else might have stepped in the same way."

"And hidden here!" exclaimed Cardona. "Then if he'd murdered Brett and answered that switchboard call himself, he could have pulled the technicians out of the lab to clear the path. Say, if the commissioner saw it that way –"

"He won't. I'd look for traces of the man, inspector, before pushing the theory further."

Cardona didn't understand immediately. Cranston pointed to the telephone.

"Fingerprints," he said. "There, and elsewhere. Take impressions of Brett's at the morgue, and check them with any you find. Particularly those on the telephone, to find if someone other than Brett used it."

Cardona's grin was as emphatic as his nod. But Cranston, strolling nonchalantly away, was thinking even farther. He was thinking in the manner of *The Shadow*.

How Brett could have stepped from his office and someone else stepped in, unnoticed, was really quite a problem. Chances of one were very slight; of both, practically nil. Yet someone other than Brett had been in the office. Of that, *The Shadow* was sure.

Pausing idly at the switchboard, Cranston learned that the commissioner had talked to Brett's lawyer.

Horrified by his client's death, the attorney was coming to the office; but first he wanted to gather some data that might have a bearing on Brett's suicide.

It would take him awhile, so the commissioner had decided to wait. Weston mentioned that the lawyer's name was Blaine Kemball.

Cranston decided not to wait. Strolling to the elevator, he indulged in a low-whispered laugh, an echo of *The Shadow's* mirth. Death stood defined as suicide, but Cardona was working on the hunch that it was murder.

The Shadow, alone, had gained the curious impression that the death of Giles Brett might belong in a classification all its own.

## CHAPTER V. DEAD AND GONE

A VERY solemn, weary-faced man was delving meticulously among the papers in a big filing cabinet. He was Blaine Kemball, the attorney, and he was in his apartment, where he kept most of his private papers, especially those which pertained to such matters as blackmail that concerned his clients.

Finding some papers that he wanted, Kemball turned to his desk and laid them on a pile. He gave a sad sigh – that of a man who had completed an unsavory task.

A voice spoke, dryly:

"You might include these, Kemball."

The backward paces that Kemball took brought him to a seated position on the bottom drawer of the filing cabinet, which was still open. Kemball didn't believe in ghosts, but he was viewing the real article, so he thought, in the person of Giles Brett.

"I'm alive, Kemball," Brett assured. "In fact, I'm a lot shakier than you are. I saw myself lying dead, while you only heard about it!"

Kemball stared, as he thought of this new riddle. Brett explained the matter of his double. He showed the lawyer the evidence that backed it: the photographs of Doban in the wrong company. The final letter from Rayland added a convincing touch.

"I didn't want to kill Doban," declared Brett. "In fact, I didn't. He killed himself. But I'd have a tough time proving it to anyone but you."

"Or Sandra," reminded Kemball. "Either way, it will be a shock to her."

Sandra was Brett's daughter, and he evidently understood her moods better than Kemball did, for Brett shook his head.

"I called Sandra," he said, "and she is coming over here. I told her it was a confidential matter, that we could explain when she arrived. Only one thing worries me about Sandra. She will want to help, with what I have in mind. I can't let her."

During the next few minutes, Brett discussed the matter of his flight from his own office. He told how a car crash at a street intersection had almost spoiled his escape, because the driver of his cab had wanted to wait.

Fortunately, the traffic light had gone green at the right moment, and the green of a five-dollar bill had further convinced the cabby that it was unwise to linger.

Brett had just completed that anecdote when Sandra arrived.

Brett's daughter was a most attractive girl. She was tall, like her father, but not overly so, and her graceful poise offset her height. Where Brett's long face carried determination in its chin, Sandra's oval features showed the same trait in her eyes.

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They were brown, a perfect match for her hair, and the lips beneath her shapely nose were wise in their smile, yet free of the bitter corner droop that Brett so often displayed.

"I have something important to tell you, Sandra," declared Brett seriously. "I want you to take a trip South, alone."

"That's a relief," said Sandra, as she opened a cigarette case. "I thought you'd be going that way, with a few years stop-off in the Atlanta penitentiary, after I heard that radio flash about what happened down at Aberdeen this afternoon."

"If they had only waited for the improved detonator," groaned Brett. Then, turning to Kemball: "Make a note on that. Have the technicians go to Washington and explain the matter."

"Hadn't you better go, Dad?" inquired Sandra. "They'll want to talk to you, won't they?"

"I can't go," replied Brett, with a grim smile. "I happen to be dead, Sandra!"

The girl looked at Kemball, who nodded; whereupon the whole story came out by degrees.

THERE was one point that Kemball noted. Though Brett mentioned Doban by name, he avoided the subject of Rayland. As he explained it to Sandra, Doban had been working for Mycroft, though others were probably involved.

"You have yourself to blame, Dad," observed Sandra, philosophically. "You know how good inventors are at hatching out weird ideas, particularly whacky chaps like Mycroft. Why didn't you settle with him for half of what you were going to get from Fengram?"

"Because I didn't intend to sell Infralux to Fengram," snapped Brett. "At least, not unless he came through for a half million, and maybe more. I'd have given Mycroft far more than he asked."

"You really would have?"

At Sandra's question, Brett turned to Kemball and spoke wearily.

"Even my own daughter doubts me," he said. "What chance would I have if I made this whole mess public?"

"I'm not talking about the mess," put in Sandra stoutly. "Kill off a regiment of Dobans, if you want. I'm talking about Mycroft. Just why would you have given him his share, and more?"

"Because I'm no fool," asserted Brett. "Inventors have ideas. The better you treat them, the more they bring you. That has always been my policy, and Mycroft ought to know it. But a man who has spent half his life chasing fireflies to find out why they light, isn't apt to rationalize other subjects."

"Enough, Dad," assured Sandra. "I'm both sorry and convinced. Now, why am I to go South?"

Therewith, Brett revealed his plan. It sounded so bizarre, that both his daughter and his lawyer were inclined to place him in Mycroft's class, until they realized that his reasons were based on the inventor's probable moves.

It was Brett's idea to remain dead, so far as the public was concerned, and use his status as an advantage to bring Mycroft to a reasonable state of mind. As a dead man, Brett could not be reached, nor harmed; at least,

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not by further threats of blackmail.

"Of course, there is one danger," pursued Brett. "Mycroft and his associates" – his glance at Kemball showed he meant Rayland – "will know that I am alive when Doban does not return to their fold. So they will be looking for me." Brett chuckled. "Trying to find a dead man!"

"And if they find you?" queried Sandra.

"They won't," assured Brett. "But they might find you, Sandra. That's why I want you to be far away."

"And you'll be here looking for Mycroft's men –"

"Exactly! While they are hunting for you, around some of those night clubs where you spend your early mornings. When I find Mycroft, or any others, I'll force them into signing statements as to their game. Perhaps" – Brett gestured to the desk – "I'll get the negatives of those pictures."

It sounded well to Sandra, except as concerned her own part. Brett had to explain that men who played at blackmail would not hesitate at kidnapping to insure their game. If they should abduct Sandra, they could threaten Brett anew, promising her release only if he came back into circulation and took undue blame for Doban's death, along with paying over the money that the blackmailers demanded.

Furthermore, Sandra, as heiress to Brett's fortune, might be due for additional trouble. If crooks could reach her and prove that Brett was still alive, they might force a deal on the threat of the murder charge alone. Brett voiced that angle; then modified it.

"They wouldn't get far with that," he decided. "Not with you, Sandra. But it might prove a complication. So you must go South."

"How far South"

"To one of the Florida keys. You will be off on a fishing trip; in fact, you've already started on one. Kemball simply won't know where or how to reach you, until after this business has all been settled."

Sandra nodded.

"I shall go home and pack."

Her father gave a grim smile. He turned to Kemball and asked for the reserve fund. Kemball opened the safe and brought out a stack of currency that totaled ten thousand dollars. Taking five thousand of the money, Brett sorted it into two heaps; gave one to Sandra and kept the other for himself.

"That will tide us over," he told Sandra. Then, to Kemball: "Call a cab, so that Sandra can go to the station. There is a train in an hour."

"You think of everything, Dad," mused Sandra. "Of absolutely everything –"

HER remark ended in a smile, that was still faintly present when the cab arrived. Brett decided to go along to the station, so they left together, after Kemball peered out through a darkened window to make sure that all was clear.

Another cab arrived a few minutes later, and Kemball, packing his papers, decided to take it himself.

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The second cab came just too late to witness the departure of Brett's taxi. It already had a passenger, for it happened to be Moe's cab, on its wheels again. The passenger was Lamont Cranston, and he was drawing out the drawer beneath the back seat when Kemball appeared from the apartment house.

The Shadow had to do some quick work with his cloak and hat, for they dumped, instead of coming right to hand. Moe had forgotten that the drawer was in upside down. Nevertheless, The Shadow gathered the black garb, and was out through the far door as Kemball stepped into the near one.

From darkness, The Shadow heard Kemball order Moe to take him to Brett's office. He noticed that Kemball was carrying some papers, so The Shadow decided to drop in on the commissioner later and learn what Kemball had to say.

However, the lawyer was not carrying the file that he had originally arranged. Any talk of a blackmail threat against Brett was completely out of Kemball's mind.

Bizarre though Brett's scheme was, Kemball approved it under the circumstances, particularly since Brett had solved the problem of Sandra's safety. But Kemball, in admiring Brett's craft, forgot that Sandra had inherited most of it. So, for that matter, did Brett; or, at the least, he was lulled.

At the Pennsylvania Station, Sandra bought her ticket herself, so that her father wouldn't be noticed and possibly recognized. They reached the train and Sandra went on board. She looked from the window of her compartment, as the train pulled out, and waved a reassuring good-by.

Alone, Sandra opened the ticket; so far, she had kept it carefully folded in half.

The half that Brett hadn't seen was the return portion. True to her promise, she was going South, but she didn't intend to stay there. Brett was dead, and Sandra was gone; but he was really alive, and she was coming back.

All of which added up to coming problems for The Shadow, in his search for an answer to the death that was neither suicide nor murder!

## CHAPTER VI. THE SHADOW'S PROOF

ON the third evening after the supposed suicide of Giles Brett, Inspector Joe Cardona stopped in at the Cobalt Club. Joe wasn't a member of that high-hat organization, but he often came there to see Commissioner Weston, who actually belonged.

Tonight, Cardona didn't want to talk to the commissioner. He had stopped to see Lamont Cranston. So Joe was armed with a lot of reports that he was sure would keep the commissioner busy.

The reports dealt with many cases, but didn't include the one that was really in Cardona's mind: namely, the Brett suicide.

It wasn't long before Weston was deep in the report sheets, and Cardona, catching Cranston's eye, made a gesture which The Shadow had been awaiting. They stepped from the table where Weston sat, and outside the doorway, Cardona thrust an envelope into Cranston's hand.

"Fingerprints," said Cardona tersely. "I thought you'd like to see them."

"They're hardly in my line, inspector."

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"Maybe not, Mr. Cranston," conceded Cardona, "but they've got me beat. I found fingerprints of one man all over the place."

"Brett's, of course."

"No, they weren't Brett's. His were only traceable in a few spots. I've checked everybody who worked for him; easy enough, because the employees were all fingerprinted by a bonding company. None of their marks was in Brett's office."

"Naturally not, inspector," smiled Cranston, "since it was Brett's private office and he kept people out."

"Then who was the guy who pawed all over the place?" Cardona demanded. "You take a look at those photostats I've given you, Mr. Cranston, and read the list that goes with them. I even found them on the window blinds, and on a pill bottle in Brett's desk drawer."

Cranston nodded his willingness to co-operate. He was turning to rejoin Weston, when Cardona stopped him.

"I thought of Kemball," said the inspector. "Being Brett's lawyer, he was in the office a lot. But I found a few prints that tallied with Kemball's. He had his prints recorded, along with a lot of other lawyers, one time when they were encouraging people to set an example toward law enforcement."

"The prints aren't Kemball's. And listen, Mr. Cranston: I sent copies down to Washington and the F.B.I. put them through that sorting machine of theirs. These mystery prints are not on record. My last chance is that they belong to that crackpot inventor, Mycroft. I'm going to find him, if I have to take this town apart!"

The prints couldn't be Mycroft's. Of that, The Shadow was reasonably certain. The one man who would have found it most difficult to reach Brett's sacred preserves was Mycroft, inasmuch as bouncers were always on the lookout for the eccentric inventor.

Nor would Mycroft have found good reason to hang around Brett's office. The issue between them was clear-cut, and Mycroft had all the documents necessary to prove that he was the originator of Infralux.

Of course, The Shadow recognized that Mycroft might have placed the prints, but certainly not on the day of Brett's sudden death. Should the case prove to be murder, with Mycroft on the giving end, the inventor couldn't have sneaked into the private office until shortly before the crime. He'd neither have had the time nor inclination to clutter the place with fingerprints.

No need of expressing such opinions to Cardona. Quite the contrary, for The Shadow wanted Joe's man hunt to proceed. Mycroft was essential to this bizarre case, in one way or another, and his importance was considerably amplified by the fact that he had crawled off into some hole where he couldn't be found. Maybe Mycroft didn't want to be questioned about the open threats that he had made to Brett.

If the law could track down Mycroft, so much the better. It would save The Shadow the trouble of a needle-in-a-haystack hunt, and also keep the police otherwise occupied while The Shadow pursued a search of his own.

The man that The Shadow specially wanted to locate was Cleeve Rayland, his chief antagonist during the affray of the overturned cab.

LEAVING the club, Cranston became The Shadow. He went directly to his sanctum – a black-walled room in an old building hidden away in the heart of Manhattan. There, The Shadow kept his copious records, and at

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once he made reference to a very special file.

It contained the fingerprints of unworthies like Cleeve Rayland – men of the half world between the underworld and the upper strata of society. Blackmailers like Rayland didn't give the law much opportunity to gather their fingerprints, but The Shadow had privately acquired quite a collection.

Cleeve's prints were in the file. They failed to match the numerous photostats that The Shadow, as Cranston, had received from Cardona. Studying the mystery prints, The Shadow gave a deep, reflective laugh.

Bizarre though it was, almost bordering on the incredible, The Shadow decided that the fingerprints belonged to Giles Brett.

Not the Brett found dead in the office, whose finger impressions Cardona had taken at Cranston's suggestion. There was another Brett: the real one, still alive.

Prints from so many places in the office should logically be Brett's; and the idea was balanced by the fact that Cardona had found so very few impressions traceable to the dead man who had been identified as Brett.

The Shadow's theory fitted perfectly with the past. It told why Brett had been seen entering his private office twice. Two Bretts would account for it, and also explain why one had only to leave by the laboratory route after the death of the other.

As for the future, it offered definite possibilities, too. Brett, hiding out, would be as difficult to find as Mycroft, and a direct search for him would not be good policy, as he might leave town in the pinch.

In The Shadow's estimate, Cleeve Rayland was still the man to find as a link between Mycroft and Brett. Reaching for earphones, The Shadow put in a call to his contact man, Burbank, to learn how certain persons were faring with a special task.

To a degree, The Shadow had previously sensed the present situation, and had put capable secret agents in places where they might obtain direct leads to Cleeve Rayland.

LIKE Mycroft, Rayland was in hiding, and at this very hour the pair were comparing notes, for their hideaway was one and the same.

Far from where The Shadow's sanctum was located, their nest was a very snug one, specially arranged for men of such different interests as Mycroft and Rayland.

The place was an apartment in what had once been a private house in a rather pretentious row. The front room was deep, and made an excellent living room as long as its occupants kept well back from the windows. There were bedrooms: one for Mycroft, another for Rayland; a third where a stolid man named Tilroy bunked.

Tilroy was literally the cook and bottle washer. He prepared the meals that were served in the kitchen–dINETTE; between times, he stayed with Mycroft in a rear room that the inventor used as an experimental laboratory. That was where Tilroy washed the bottles, for Mycroft spent most of his time in mixing chemical concoctions and pouring them back in the sink.

A member of the confidence group, Tilroy had often fronted as a butler or steward, hence was useful in his present capacity. There were others, too, who came in and out, but they weren't steady boarders. If need be, they slept on couches in the living room, or shared Tilroy's quarters, but most of the time they were at large.



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This evening, Mycroft was fussing about the lab engaged in some new creation that might rival Infralux, when Rayland joined him. Hearing the door open, Mycroft gestured Rayland to a chair beside a window with a drawn shade.

Sniffing the atmosphere, Rayland spoke to Tilroy, who was washing bottles at the sink.

"Stinks worse than ever, Til," said Rayland. "Better clear the air for us."

Tilroy stepped toward the window, and Rayland shoved him away, toward a door at the rear of the lab.

"Don't open the window!" Rayland's purr became a knifing rasp. "The smell will carry in next door. Let it out by the back stairs."

Opening a door in the rear wall, Tilroy revealed a closet that had no floor. A short ladder ran down through, reaching the curve of a forgotten stairway that had been closed off when the house was made into apartments. In looking the place over, Rayland had discovered the existence of the back stairway, and had later tapped it.

As a ventilating device, the shaft proved its worth. The atmosphere cleared rapidly.

"Some of the boys are here," Rayland told Mycroft. "I'm going out with them on something important."

Mycroft gestured Tilroy away from a shelf which held a stack of square wooden boxes. Then, peering at Rayland over the tops of his eyeglasses, the inventor queried:

"Why haven't you gone out before?"

"On account of the other night," returned Rayland, in a tone of buzz-saw sharpness. "I was covering up for you, after I learned that you'd slid out of here. That's when I ran into a guy called The Shadow, who got too good a look at me."

"You didn't have to cover up for me," objected Mycroft. "I only went to Brett's office –"

"And a swell time you picked for it!" interrupted Rayland. "Just when I was all set for the payoff. I'd talked to Brett, and all I had to do was wait until he made the sale to Fengram. And then – well, you know what happened."

From a corner, Rayland picked up a discarded newspaper and flourished it in front of Mycroft. The journal carried a front-page photograph of Brett, with a story of his supposed suicide. Lower down, Rayland found Mycroft's name and pointed it out.

"If you'd only let me handle it!" asserted Rayland. "I was doing swell, Mycroft, until you bungled things by going to Brett's office. It worried Brett, and it put me in a jam with The Shadow."

"But you weren't getting results fast enough," returned Mycroft. "I told you that Brett was clever enough to be prepared for anything. He doesn't have to be alive for his plans to progress. That lawyer of his, named Kemball –"

"Forget Brett," inserted Rayland, "and Kemball, for the time being. The job is to find Brett's daughter." Reaching, Rayland picked up a later newspaper that carried Sandra's picture. "That fishing trip of hers – some place where they can't reach her – is fishy itself. I'm going to find that dame, even if I have to put the heat on Kemball –"

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

AN interruption came from a telephone in a corner of the lab. Tilroy grabbed the telephone, but Rayland took it from his hands. His conversation was brief, but eager. Hanging up, he turned to Mycroft.

"One of my men spotted the girl!" exclaimed Rayland. "Sandra Brett, big as life, making the rounds of the night spots, as usual! Lucky the boys can look in at those joints, even if I can't. You know what this means, Mycroft. If we grab Sandra, we can make her go through with the deal, just as we planned with Brett."

Mycroft's eyes took on a gleam that first pleased Rayland; then worried him.

"You sit tight, right here," warned Rayland. "This is one place where the cops won't find you, Mycroft."

The inventor's answer was a cackle.

"Safe here? My own secret laboratory is far harder to find than this."

"I know," humored Rayland, "but this one is better. You have friends here, like myself; and Tilroy to help you. He's going to stay right here with you, Mycroft, like he should have done the other day."

Rayland left, closing the door behind him. They heard him speak to a man who was waiting in the living room. Then the apartment door sent back a muffled slam.

Tilroy, who was washing a thin-necked, heavy-bodied glass jar, paused to glance at Mycroft. The inventor gave a shrug.

"Don't worry, Tilroy," he said. "You won't have to bother about me. I shall busy myself with my new experiments. But first" – his tone became annoyed – "let me show you the proper way of washing that jar."

Taking the tall container, Mycroft filled it with water and then inverted it above the sink. He repeated the rinsing process, then held the glass jar inverted in front of an electric light.

Mycroft's left hand was gripping the jar's heavy base. His right, lower down, clutched the lip. Raising the jar still higher, he said:

"You see, Tilroy? This will just about do."

It did very well. As Tilroy gazed, Mycroft gripped the neck of the jar tightly, took a backward pace, and let his right hand fly back.

Startled, Tilroy thrust forward warding hands; too late. Mycroft swung the heavy jar like a cudgel, past Tilroy's guard, straight to the fellow's head.

The jar cracked when it struck, and Tilroy did an impersonation of a rolling log. After watching his helper hit the floor, Mycroft gave a sad glance at the jar and tossed it into the sink, where it fell apart in chunks.

Then, instead of taking Rayland's route, Mycroft opened the closet door and descended spryly through the gaping floor. His cackled laugh came back, unheard by Tilroy, who was lying senseless.

Cleeve Rayland was ready to defy The Shadow, and move abroad this evening.

The same applied to Dana Mycroft.

## CHAPTER VII. MEETINGS BY NIGHT

THE SHADOW'S agents were also on the move.

Always, The Shadow chose those best suited to the work at hand. For one, he had picked Harry Vincent, a keen young man who looked both gentlemanly and prosperous. Well familiar with Manhattan night clubs, Harry was frequenting them in a natural style.

He was looking for Cleeve Rayland, though he didn't expect to find him. Cleeve was something of an "in and outer," the sort who would show up quite frequently for a while; then remain unheard from for weeks. He'd been an inner last week; this week, he was an outer.

Harry knew why. Cleeve was ducking The Shadow. But it didn't mean that all Cleeve's friends would do the same. They might know where Cleeve could be found. The trouble was to pick out Cleeve's friends. Harry was doing it entirely by deduction.

He was watching persons who didn't look shrewd enough to be working con games on their own, nor dumb enough to be rated in the sucker class.

There was a man hanging around the bar where Harry was at present, who seemed to fit the proper classification. The fellow was sleek, yet tough; friendly, yet wary of eye. He looked like a small edition of Cleeve Rayland, which caused Harry to recall that specialists in the big con games were apt to imitate their head man.

Blackmail, of course, was Cleeve's real business, but his crew was much like a con mob. The sleek man under Harry's observation looked like a first-class spotter. He was watching everyone who came in and out of the night club, and he was close to the telephone, too. It was from that source that the result came.

When the telephone rang, the sleek man answered it; speaking low, close to the mouthpiece, he didn't bother to close the door of the booth. A neat system, since it made the call look unimportant; but it had one flaw. The confines of the phone booth focused the man's voice and carried its tone to Harry.

Like a whisper coming through a megaphone, Harry caught the words:

"I get it, Cleeve. Outside the Red Barn... I'll be there inside ten minutes –"

As soon as the sleek man had gone, Harry used the telephone himself. He called Burbank and informed him that Cleeve Rayland was calling a gathering of the clan near the Red Barn, a side-street night club not far from Harry's present location.

Harry was sure that the "Cleeve" mentioned must be Rayland; otherwise, the meeting would have been scheduled in the nitery, rather than outside it.

Harry waited a few minutes for a return call from Burbank, bringing instructions from The Shadow.

MEANWHILE, developments were happening at the Red Barn, itself, though not the sort that Cleeve Rayland anticipated.

A girl was entering the little night club; she was a brunette whose choice of evening wear was exactly suited to the place: just formal enough to indicate that she expected someone to meet her, yet not too conspicuous to attract attention.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

The girl's name was Margo Lane, but she didn't have a date this evening. Like Harry Vincent, she was working for The Shadow. Her manner of expecting someone was purely a pretense that enabled her to look around. Also like Harry, Margo was searching for Cleeve Rayland, hoping to find him through his associates.

Margo had just finished a tour of the fancier night spots, only to abandon them in favor of Class B places like the Red Barn. Maybe Cleeve's pals didn't go in for the chichi of the niftier clubs. The Red Barn, with its sawdust floor and rustic bar, could be more to their liking. In fact, as Margo entered, she was jostled by a Tuxedoed man who was on his way out.

He stopped, tugged at his hat, and said: "Pardon, lady," in a tone too apologetic to suit his hard-faced exterior.

When gentry of his ilk went courteous, it showed they weren't anxious to attract too much attention. This chap was in a hurry, that was all. Too much of a hurry for Margo to catch up with him. So she looked around to learn what caused his haste.

At a corner of the bar, Margo saw Sandra Brett.

This was a threefold surprise. Sandra, back in New York, was No. 1. The second puzzle was the fact that Sandra was visiting night clubs so soon after her father's death. Finally, the Red Barn wasn't one of Sandra's usual havens. She preferred the swank spots.

Sandra was talking to a broad-shouldered young man who wore evening clothes. Approaching, Margo identified him as Ferdy Brythe, sometimes known as the Bull. Something of a man about town, Ferdy had been invited out of the better places, due to his habit of tossing things about.

Furniture didn't matter; Ferdy had enough money to pay for whatever he broke. Lately, however, he had been tossing waiters, which was more serious, because other customers approved it and joined in when bouncers tried to throw Ferdy out.

Having learned that he could start a riot at will, Ferdy had acquired a superhuman complex. Hence the proprietors of his favorite night clubs saw to it that he went out as soon as he came in.

Finding Ferdy in bush-league surroundings didn't surprise Margo, nor was his quiet mood a thing at which to wonder. He was creating confidence around the Red Barn, meanwhile singling out waiters for future reference. Sandra's guile, however, was causing Ferdy to forget the waiters.

"Sure, I'll go places with you, Sandra," agreed Ferdy. He banged his glass for another drink. "I'd like to see anybody bother you! I'd shove 'em! But who's going to bother you?"

Sandra gave one of her very special smiles.

"Am I so unattractive, Ferdy?"

"I don't mean that," Ferdy rejoined. "What I mean is that you've found your way around right along. What gives you the idea you can't any more?"

"I've become something of a celebrity," said Sandra in a regretful tone, "and I'm worth a lot of money since my father died. People have begun to point me out, Ferdy. I don't like it."

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

"Of course not!" Ferdy gulped the drink that the bartender shoved him. "Sorry about your father, Sandra. Guess you need somebody to look out for you. Here he is."

Ferdy dented his shirt front with one fist, then brandished the clenched hand at the barkeep, as though planning to throw a few punches his way just for practice. When the bartender gave an instinctive duck, Ferdy grunted.

"Softies around here, Sandra. Let's go to a tougher joint. Might as well work from the bottom up."

Margo stepped up between the pair and laid a hand on a shoulder of each.

"Hello, Sandra," she said, "and you, too, Bull. How about buying a friend a drink? The next will be on me."

FERDY ordered the drink, while Margo, chatting with Sandra, noticed the other girl's attire. Contrasted to Margo's tasteful green, Sandra's purple gown fairly shouted.

One thing, Sandra wasn't overdressed, for the gown didn't begin until halfway down her back. Her bare arms were conspicuous because of the glittering bracelets that adorned them, and when she stretched her hands, Margo saw the sparkle of diamonds.

All this show was certainly unlike Sandra, and it didn't seem sensible, considering the apprehensions that she had expressed to Ferdy; but Margo understood. Sandra wanted to attract attention. She hoped that certain persons would find her.

It all had something to do with her father, and she was anxious to finish the business. Anticipating trouble in the process, Sandra was enlisting Ferdy as a personal bodyguard.

"I have to make a phone call," said Margo. "I'll be back by the time the drink is ready."

She crossed the floor to a telephone booth. Immediately, Sandra turned to the man beside her.

"My wrap, Ferdy."

"But what about Margo's drink?"

"She will take care of it. Let's go somewhere else."

"But we ought to be polite –"

"Like softies?"

Ferdy bristled at the impeachment. He found Sandra's wrap, helped her on with it, and paid the barkeeper, telling him to leave the drink that remained. Then Ferdy piloted Sandra around the dance floor, toward the outer door.

The busy signal had forestalled Margo's phone call. She was dropping a nickel for another try when she saw her two friends leave.

Sliding from the booth, Margo started after them, wondering whether she ought to kibitz again, or merely trail along and run into the pair later.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

As Margo reached the door, she saw Ferdy and Sandra get into a cab and close the door behind them; hence, the only course was to trail them. The doorman was turning to call another cab, when Margo saw one parked some distance ahead, and her heart bounced gladly.

It was Moe Shrevnitz's cab; evidently, he had seen Margo enter the Red Barn, and had parked conveniently close.

With Shrevvy as a driver, Margo could follow the trail indefinitely. Telling the doorman that she didn't need a cab, she hurried along the street, passing cars that intervened between her and Moe's cab.

The last car in the row was a coupe, and Margo cut quite close to it to shorten her path to the cab. She didn't notice that the door of the coupe was easing open.

Suddenly, that door flung frontward, right into Margo's path. Half stumbling against it, Margo tried to turn and dart away. A man stretched from the car, caught Margo's neck deftly and brought her backward with a neat jolt that took her breath away.

Landing deep in the seat, Margo couldn't even scream, for her abductor had an arm around her neck, while he started the car with his other hand.

Margo's kicks and writhing efforts were suppressed by the door, as it slammed shut when the coupe spurted from the curb. Then, as Margo slid downward to the floor, thus worming from her captor's clutch, the man didn't make the mistake of groping after her.

Instead, he darted his hand to his pocket, produced a gun and planted its muzzle against the girl's neck. Margo gave a horrified gasp; calculating where her face was, the man slid the gun beneath her chin and practically pried her up to the seat.

No use arguing with a gun, thought Margo, nor with a man who handled one so neatly. As though the touch of the cold metal had frozen her, Margo sat stock-still, staring straight ahead, not uttering a word.

Who this captor was; where he was taking her, were very worrisome questions. The answers to both questions were coming very soon.

They were to be a real surprise for Margo Lane.

### CHAPTER VIII. THE ONLY CHANCE

HARRY VINCENT swung a corner, straightened his car along the street, and put his gun into his pocket. At the same time, he spoke in reassuring tone:

"Don't jump, Margo. I'm going to need you with me."

Margo's hand dropped from the door handle. Her grim expression changed to indignation, as she voiced:

"Why, you big lug, Harry, trying a stunt like that! You're worse than Ferdy, the Bull!"

Harry smiled.

"You mean Ferdy Brythe?" he inquired. "The chap who took the cab with Sandra Brett?"

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

"Yes. I was going to have Shrevvy follow them."

"That's what I thought," said Harry. "It's why I had to grab you, Margo. Things are going to happen, fast. So I started them in the same style."

Margo didn't understand, until Harry pointed ahead; then she saw that a sedan intervened between Harry's car and the cab that had left the Red Barn.

"Cleeve Rayland and his crew," Harry explained. "They were waiting outside. One of them must have spotted Sandra, and called the rest."

Remembering the man she had met coming out, Margo mentioned him and received a nod from Harry. Then Margo began a question:

"But I still don't understand why I couldn't take Shrevvy's cab –"

"It is waiting for The Shadow," interposed Harry. "Burbank told me it would be. We didn't know you were at the Red Barn, Margo. Very probably, Burbank saved time by ordering Shrevvy to the Red Barn, to wait there for his next instructions.

"If you'd climbed into the cab, Moe would have snapped away like a hair trigger the moment you said 'Go.' You'd both have made a mistake without knowing it. I was afraid to call to you, because I saw the sedan across the way. So I grabbed you, instead. Nobody saw or heard."

Margo agreed, quite mollified to learn that Harry's system wasn't a mere prank. Then her attention centered on matters ahead. It was really a serious situation – Sandra and her boy friend, Ferdy, being pursued by the capable crew that Rayland had mustered.

If trouble began, Harry would have to do his share toward stopping it, with Margo as his aid. Well away from the Red Barn, they couldn't count upon The Shadow.

Harry inquired if Margo had her gun, and she produced the weapon – a small automatic, which she kept deep in her handbag. Harry slid his hand to his pocket again, tightening his grip on his own gun. His comment was brief.

"Trouble is due."

It came, hard upon Harry's words. They were about ten blocks from the Red Barn and Sandra's cab was slowing to take a corner. The sedan lunged, much as it had the night when it spilled Moe's cab, but its present tactics were different.

Instead of trying to shove a cab off the street, the sedan took to the sidewalk itself. Clipping the corner, it thrust across the path of the cab.

Brakes shrieked fiercely. The cab skewed full about, and the sedan did the same. They were pointing at each other, veering wide, sideswiping, and almost locking, all in rapid succession.

As the cars halted, two men sprang from the sedan: Cleeve and one companion. Sandra and Ferdy came tumbling out of the cab, while the scared driver dropped behind the wheel.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

In his urge to reach the cab, Cleeve was jumps ahead of his companion, and before the other man could catch up, Cleeve, alone, was meeting the menace that surged toward him.

THE menace was Ferdy, heaving his full bulk, with his fists flying ahead of him. Margo gave an eager exclamation:

"Watch the Bull."

Harry watched. It didn't take long. As Ferdy drove a heavy fist at Cleeve, the crook slid under it, so close, that Margo wondered why the punch hadn't landed. The fist that really found a mark was Cleeve's. It came up short and hard, to clip Ferdy's chin. With one sock, Cleeve personally disposed of Sandra's much-touted bodyguard.

Then, with Ferdy leaning back against the cab, his chin perched in his hand, Cleeve and his arriving pal grabbed Sandra, to drag her back to the sedan. They were tangling the evening wrap about her head, stopping her attempts at outcry. Sandra's arms were flashing their diamonds, as she tried to clutch her assailants and found thin air instead.

From the sedan, Cleeve's two reserves were aiming revolvers, ready to down Ferdy and the cabby if either tried to rescue Sandra.

Ferdy was coming to his feet. In a moment, he'd be gathering himself for another charge. Like Ferdy, the effort would prove short-lived. Those guns that pointed from the sedan meant business, even though Ferdy did not see them.

Grimly, Harry told Margo:

"Here goes!"

He'd been letting the coupe coast; now, he pushed the accelerator to its limit. The car whizzed forward, almost at the two men who were dragging Sandra. They ducked toward the cab, carrying the girl with them, which was what Harry wanted. That accomplished, he veered his coupe toward the sedan.

Not expecting the daring thrust, the reserves hadn't time to shoot before Harry smacked their car amidships. Revolvers spoke upward as the sedan landed on its side, temporarily trapping the two men in it.

Shoving Margo out through the door on her side, Harry took the one beside the wheel and sprang back to deal with Cleeve. Turned toward the coupe, Cleeve dropped Sandra and pulled a gun to aim at Harry.

Cleeve was clever. He side-stepped to use Sandra as a shield. Harry countered, but it wasn't enough. Cleeve could have found him with the first shot, if Margo hadn't intervened.

Her gun only had the bark of a Pomeranian, but its bullets could sting. Cleeve knew it when he heard the first shots whistle past. Ducking wildly, he inadvertently put himself in the path of Harry's fire, when Ferdy spoiled it by barging into things.

First, Ferdy took the thug who still clutched Sandra, gave the fellow a swing that landed him headlong against the side of Harry's car. Then the human bull roared after Cleeve, threatening reprisal for the crook's earlier success.



## THE BLACKMAIL KING

For the moment, both Harry and Margo had to rely on Ferdy. His charge looked capable, and he should certainly have profited by his previous encounter with Cleeve.

Instead, Ferdy waded right straight in, figuring that luck had been Cleeve's way before. The leader of the kidnap crew proved that technique was the real element. He came under Ferdy's guard again and landed a second bash against the Bull's sore chin. Back first, Ferdy thwacked the sidewalk, and Cleeve grabbed Sandra again.

They whirled around the front of Harry's car in a dance macabre that was mostly the flash of Sandra's purple dress. Neither Harry nor Margo could fire at the human whirligig, so they bided their time, thinking that they soon would have opportunity.

Instead, the advantage went the other way. As Cleeve and Sandra revolved against the spilled sedan; Harry shouted a warning to Margo. Too late.

Two men were poking out from the window of the wrecked sedan. Both had guns, and they were picking Harry and Margo as their targets. They intended to finish off the pair who had wrecked them, and were in a position to do it.

All that stayed them for the moment was Harry's quick fire, which made the marksmen duck warily and send return shots wide.

The shelter of the cab might help, but Harry knew that Margo needed it, too. He jabbed shots as he pointed her to cover, and followed on his own, so that he could shield her if any bullets hammered too close.

It was a losing fight, but with the possibility of safety, and afterward the hope of rescuing Sandra by an onslaught from the new base. But the shooting crooks had the edge, and needed only a bit more advantage to turn their fire into slaughter.

It was inevitable that they should get their chance. A blunder was due in their favor. Not from Harry or Margo. From Ferdy. He was back again.

Groggy, the would-be bodyguard mistook all men for enemies. He saw two persons coming toward him: Margo first, then Harry. Thinking, in his groggy way, that the girl was Sandra and the man Cleeve, in pursuit, Ferdy lurched in to halt matters.

Margo saw him grab for Harry and halted her own flight to aid. Then all three were tangled, spilling to the street.

As Cleeve pinned Sandra against the overturned sedan, the gunners in the wrecked car took straight aim at the helpless, tumbled group in the foreground.

Avalanches, cyclones and earthquakes were unknown in Manhattan. Anyone of those might have helped the situation enough to prevent the murderous marksmen from delivering intended death. None of the natural catastrophes arrived. But the human form that did appear carried the elements of all three.

He arrived in a speeding cab, that fighter who laughed crooks into fear. The top of the cab was down, and his shape emerged from it like a symbol of sudden death upon the move. For the fighter's shape was black, from cloak to slouch hat.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

Along with his challenging mirth came the chatter of two guns that, even from long range, were whistling bullets past the ears of frozen marksmen.

Instantly, the scene on the paving blanked from the minds of Cleeve Rayland and his cronies. Switching their aim from helpless human prey, they pointed their revolvers toward their new and elusive target and yanked at triggers with all their might.

Crime's superfoe was at hand, taking the full brunt of battle for his own. He was here, The Shadow!

### CHAPTER IX. THE LONG RIDE

THE SHADOW'S cab did some tricky things under Moe's able guidance. The cloaked fighter was in a position where he couldn't dodge, so Moe performed the gyrations for him.

Swerving, the cab performed a complete turn in the crossing, its short wheel base serving it well. All the while, it seemed to revolve around The Shadow, whose guns didn't miss a single beat in their steady cadence.

One marksman flopped from the door of the sedan and struck the sidewalk beyond it. The other scrambled after him, flinging away a useless, empty gun. A third, the man flung earlier by Ferdy, was spilled by a bullet that caught him in the leg.

Only Cleeve was shooting, as he clung to Sandra with his other hand. But Sandra was tired of playing the human shield.

She wrenched hard and dragged Cleeve after her. He grabbed for the purple dress, and Sandra let him take it by twisting right out of it.

Shielded only by the flimsy gown and the evening wrap that was hanging to his own shoulders, Cleeve flung the garments aside and sprang into the cab that had brought Sandra to this spot. The driver had deserted the cab, and Cleeve jumped behind the wheel to find the motor running.

Sandra, meanwhile, was gathering up the purple gown and the wrap that went with it. Only Harry's quick grab saved her from the cab's swing, as Cleeve hurled the vehicle along the street.

Taking to the sidewalk, the cab missed the barrier formed by Harry's coupe and the demolished sedan. The junk pile also intervened between Cleeve and The Shadow.

Wounded crooks managed to cling to the borrowed cab, and Cleeve wheeled it away, carrying his helpers with him. Barring cars delayed pursuit, so The Shadow did not undertake it.

Out of his own cab, he thrust Sandra inside it while she was struggling into the remnants of the purple gown. Giving a quick order to Harry, The Shadow followed Sandra into the cab, and Moe sped off by another street.

It was all a logical progression. First, The Shadow had scattered the criminal foemen; next, he was taking Sandra away from the scene, since she was the subject of contention. He was depending upon Harry and Margo to go their way together.

As for Ferdy, The Shadow wanted him left right where he was. Somebody had to give a garbled account of all that had happened, and Ferdy was the perfect candidate.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

Police cars were whining to the scene. The Shadow's keen ears had heard them; hence his actions. Harry was back at the wheel of the coupe, with Margo in beside him. Then came trouble. The starter worked, but the motor didn't respond.

"Flooded or something," decided Harry. "Look, Margo" – he pointed across the street – "you can duck through that passage. I can meet you later."

"At the Bronze Slipper," suggested Margo. "I can get there by subway. See you later, Harry."

Leaving the car, Margo reached the space between the buildings, while Harry made another try with the starter. This time, it worked, and he decided to get as far as he could before abandoning his car.

Backing, Harry heard a clatter as his bumper ripped away the step of the ruined sedan. Then, at the corner, Harry took the same route as The Shadow.

IT was good judgment.

The police cars that arrived wheeled in from three directions, but not the one in which Harry departed. Piling out, the men in blue uniforms found Ferdy and began to quiz him. His testimony followed the incoherent line that The Shadow had expected.

On one thing, Ferdy was sure.

Crooks, a whole horde of them, had abducted Sandra Brett. The mention of the girl's last name made the cops alert. They asked if Sandra was Brett's daughter, and Ferdy said yes. The officers wanted to hear more, so Ferdy provided it, in haywire fashion.

He and Sandra had started from the Red Barn to another night club, the nearest they could find. That was true, too. In fact, it was why The Shadow had reached the scene of crime so soon. He took it that Ferdy and Sandra would be making another stop, after Moe told him that Brett's daughter was in the other cab.

But Ferdy was all wrong from that point on. He claimed that there had been three cars loaded with mobsters; that half a dozen had landed on him at once. He remembered disposing of all but one, who swung a punch while the rest were holding Ferdy's arms. He'd settled the fellow, though, Ferdy had, and taken on a fresh half dozen. Again, one man had landed a hard blow home, but it hadn't settled Ferdy.

His endurance had them at a total loss. Fleeing, they resorted to gunfire as they went. They must have been punch-drunk after meeting Ferdy, because they couldn't shoot straight. Sandra had stayed in the cab, as Ferdy insisted, but the crooks had taken it, too, while he wasn't looking.

The odd part about Ferdy's story was the way it clicked. The cops actually believed it, but cut it in half. Learning that Ferdy was the chap who had been banging up night clubs, using the personnel to damage the furniture, they conceded that he might have given five or six thugs a lot of trouble.

They wanted to know more about Sandra; particularly, the direction in which her captors had taken her. Ferdy couldn't supply that information, and his admission that he didn't know every detail gave further credence to his tale of personal heroism.

The cabby who had brought Ferdy and Sandra to the scene of strife came crawling from safety halfway down the block, and gave his hectic version of the battle. It didn't nullify Ferdy's exaggerated testimony.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

The scared cabby had heard smashing, shooting, and seen the departure of some vehicles, his own among them. He supported Ferdy's statistics. Thereupon, the police set out to find two cabs – the stolen one and another that had followed it. The cabby told them the direction in which the vehicles had gone.

HURRYING to their quest, the police unwittingly passed up a witness more reliable than the pair that they had questioned. She was only a block away, moving cautiously from doorway to doorway along an almost deserted street. The witness in question was Margo Lane.

She didn't want the police to find her until she could concoct a story which would somehow jibe with Ferdy's, and not having heard his story, Margo had to use her imagination. It was a double process, for she had to think in terms of Ferdy's imagination, too, which required quite a stretch.

The longer Margo waited, the better; of that, she felt certain. She could claim that she had come this direction in another cab, and had deserted it when she heard the shooting start.

She'd have to put on the old hysteria act, but that wouldn't be difficult. The longer she waited, the less the police would connect her with the case, if they found her at all.

Eluding discovery entirely was the thing on which Margo banked the most. Reaching the subway wouldn't be as easy as she thought, for arriving police cars blocked her off from it.

Margo's chief concern, however, was for Harry. She had an impression that she had heard his car starting as she dashed through the alley. She hoped he was away; but maybe he was boxed in, too.

A police car whined across the nearest corner. It was coming to the scene of battle, but Margo heard its siren continue in a trailing shriek. Evidently, other patrol cars were starting on a hunt, and it was following after them. Margo's path looked clear at last.

Coming out from a doorway, she started toward the corner, only to halt as a rattle came from the street behind her.

Dropping away from the glow of street lamps, Margo flattened against a house wall as a coupe clattered past and pulled up beside the curb, in a darkened spot of its own. Margo gave a glad gasp. So Harry was safe, though his car was damaged, judging from the bangy sounds.

Just like Harry, to remember Margo's plight and come around this way to give her a lift. He'd probably seen her as he went by, for she thought she caught sight of his hand, beckoning from the car window. Margo hurried over; as she did, the car door opened.

"You're all right, Harry?"

Quick, gripping hands cut, off Margo's query, as they had done back at the Red Barn. This time, Margo didn't struggle as she was hauled into the car. She could understand Harry's abrupt style.

He might have seen searchers in the offing; whether crooks or police, it didn't matter for the present. His main idea would be to get Margo away as rapidly as the damaged car would allow. So Margo relaxed under the arm that girdled her neck.

The car was off again, gathering speed despite the rattly noises from its motor. Why Harry still persisted in choking her, Margo couldn't understand. Maybe he was tense, excited, for he was putting too much power in the strangle hold.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

Unable to speak, Margo clutched the pressing arm and wrenched it from her neck. A hand clapped across her mouth, and she fought it off, expressing:

"Don't be silly, Harry!" Purposely, Margo kept her tone low. "I haven't gone crazy. I'm not going to yell."

The hand darted to a coat pocket, and Margo did not try to stop it. If Harry wanted to draw a gun, it didn't matter. Maybe he liked to play silly games, though he'd never shown that tendency in the past. Margo gave a whimsical laugh and looked at her companion.

Her laughing stopped.

THE man wasn't Harry. He was a scrawny, elderly man, whose pinched face had quick beady eyes that darted at Margo across the tops of old-fashioned glasses. His hand was quick, too, for it had drawn a revolver and was pressing the muzzle against Margo. The man's nervous face marked him as a fanatic who might let a gun trigger get the better of him.

So Margo sank against the door, lifting her hands and breathing that she wasn't going to put up further fight. Handling the car deftly with one hand, her captor voiced a pleased cackle.

"Nobody can outwit Dana Mycroft," he boasted. "You've heard of me, haven't you?"

Margo nodded, while the shrewd eyes probed her face. So Mycroft, the dark horse, had come along in the wake of Cleeve's murderers. Working around the edges, he had bagged a prisoner after they fled. This was his car, not Harry's as Margo was now beginning to understand.

What a fool she'd been to mistake the clattering motor of an old rattletrap for a damaged engine in Harry's car! If she'd only looked at this coupe, she'd have known it wasn't Harry's.

If there had been any rhyme or reason in letting Mycroft trap her, Margo could have forgiven herself. So far, however, she felt that she'd engineered a total loss.

Then came the words that salvaged the situation. It was Mycroft who uttered them.

"You thought you could get away from us," he said gleefully. "But you didn't! So I'm taking you for a nice long ride, to a place where we can talk matters over, Miss Brett!"

Mycroft had mistaken Margo for Sandra!

So that was why he was so intent upon her capture! He thought he was succeeding where Cleeve Rayland had failed.

With those words from Mycroft, Margo's situation was transformed from a stupid predicament into a colorful adventure. Though it might provide added hazards, she felt that they would be worth it.

This ride would lead to crime's headquarters; not to some way stop on the road. There, posing as Sandra, Margo could probe into matters and gain facts for The Shadow. She could foresee complications, and bad ones, but the game intrigued her.

Relaxing, Margo smiled pleasantly at Mycroft, who gave a cackle in return. Her captor's tone wasn't pleasant. It didn't promise happy things to come. Nevertheless, Margo retained her outward smile, even though she needed an inward grip to curb her dread.

One thought enabled Margo to show calm. She was sure that The Shadow would learn of her capture, and eventually find her, though how, when, and where, she hadn't an idea.

Margo hoped that The Shadow wouldn't find her too late!

### CHAPTER X. THE NEEDED TRAIL

THE SHADOW, at that moment, wasn't thinking of Margo Lane. He was entirely engaged with Sandra Brett.

At first, Sandra's confusion at finding herself with The Shadow was as great as Margo's upon encountering Mycroft. But Sandra had soon learned that her companion was a friend, not a foe, just as Margo had experienced the reverse.

Clad in the remains of a tattered evening gown and a bedraggled wrap, Sandra was riding in Moe's cab, listening to the words of her black-cloaked rescuer.

The Shadow's tone, a calm, expressive whisper, bore no resemblance to Cranston's. The variance in speech was necessary, for, though Sandra had only occasionally met Cranston in the past, she was going to see more of him in the future. Hence, The Shadow was carefully avoiding anything that might betray his dual identity.

While he spoke, Sandra noted that he was keeping an eye on the cab driver, who was following a rapid, but rather peculiar, course.

Whenever the cab approached a brightly lighted street, the driver shied from it, or crossed in a hurry. He was cocking his head, too, listening for the wails of police sirens, and whenever he noted them, he veered in another direction.

There were times when The Shadow corrected the driver's course with brief instructions, but usually he let the man decide for himself. All the while, however, The Shadow was quizzing Sandra in an intelligible fashion.

There was this about The Shadow's questions: they were more like statements than queries. Indeed, they carried a command that made Sandra answer them spontaneously.

"So you are Sandra Brett," The Shadow said, "and these men are your father's enemies."

"Yes," replied Sandra. "They are probably working for Dana Mycroft."

"The inventor of Infralux –"

"Yes. Mycroft wanted more money. He depended upon these friends of his –"

"To blackmail your father," interposed The Shadow, when Sandra hesitated. "They wanted a quarter of a million dollars."

Sandra stared.

"Why... how –"

"Blackmailers always demand all they can get," explained The Shadow. "In this case, they knew the sum that would be available, if your father sold Infralux to Homer Fengram. Cleeve Rayland simply timed his threat."

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

"Cleeve Rayland?"

The name was new to Sandra; her question showed it. She didn't realize that The Shadow had brought up the name to learn if she had previously heard it.

"Rayland managed the actual blackmail," explained The Shadow. Then, in the casual way that was actually a probe, he added: "If your father knew Rayland's name, he should have mentioned it to you."

Sandra showed the momentary hesitation that The Shadow expected.

"But... but my father is dead. Tonight – well, they were just trying to blackmail me into accepting the terms that he refused."

"Kidnapping is a poor way of blackmail," observed The Shadow. "If they preferred it, they would have tried it in your father's case."

"I suppose my case is unusual."

"Not so unusual as your father's. It is seldom that we hear of a dead man who is still alive."

Sandra couldn't keep up the pretense any longer. Convinced that The Shadow knew all, she exclaimed:

"You must have heard about Doban!"

"I should like to know more about him," expressed The Shadow. "Proceed."

SANDRA related the story of Brett's double as she had heard it from her father. She explained that Brett had sent her from New York so that he could conduct a secret search for Mycroft.

From that, The Shadow took it that Brett knew about Rayland, though he hadn't mentioned the man to Sandra. Brett would certainly have needed a lead more easily found than Mycroft, before embarking on so difficult a quest.

That possibility was another reason why Rayland had taken to hiding. Perhaps he was dodging Brett, as well as The Shadow. Certainly, Rayland knew that Brett was still alive, because Doban hadn't returned. Only, Rayland couldn't have known it at first. The Shadow was thinking back to a very pointed clue, which had backed his theory regarding Brett's having a double.

It was really the point that had fixed The Shadow's conclusion. It might have put Cardona on the right track, had Joe known about it. The point was that Rayland had sent someone else in to see Brett, and had waited outside – an odd situation, considering that he was the real blackmail expert. But why hadn't Rayland pursued Brett when he came out, instead of his double?

Reflection on the answer brought a laugh from The Shadow's lips. Rayland had mistaken Brett for Doban; Sandra's testimony simply backed The Shadow's supposition. Seeing Cranston on the trail of "Doban," Rayland had supposed that the imposture was detected; hence, had sped to intercept the man he thought was trailing his stooge.

All the while, people up in the office were bemoaning the death of "Brett," with Rayland, below, in absolute ignorance of the reversed tragedy!

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

What a chance Rayland had missed!

Had he grabbed the genuine Brett, the game would have been in the bag. No wonder Rayland had gone to vicious extremes this evening in his attempt to capture Sandra. His earlier mistake was still rankling in his mind.

Misunderstanding The Shadow's reflective laugh, Sandra thought it might concern Brett directly. She inquired anxiously:

"You've found my father?"

"Only his fingerprints," The Shadow rejoined. "They were all over his private office, and they did not match the dead man's. That fact formed the basis of my investigation. I, too, expect to find Mycroft through Rayland."

The Shadow's eyes fixed straight ahead, and Sandra realized that they were trailing another cab, the very one which she and Ferdy had taken from the Red Barn.

At first, it seemed miraculous that The Shadow's cab should have come upon the trail amid the many streets of Manhattan; then the explanation dawned.

Prompted by The Shadow, Moe, the cabby, had simply used natural tactics in getting away from the area of battle. Dodging bright streets, shying away from the shrieks of police cars, relying on The Shadow's advice, whenever a choice was doubtful, Moe had automatically copied the very system that Cleeve was using in the fugitive cab.

It was like "follow the leader" played in the dark, using the instinct of the hounded, plus reason, in a few instances.

Success was the result, and the best part of it was the fact that Cleeve could hardly guess that Moe's cab was on his trail. For a long while he hadn't been followed at all, and would therefore suppose that he had left The Shadow too far behind even to hope of overhauling him.

Still, Cleeve was playing crafty, because of the possibility that police cars might cut his path. He was taking an irregular course, that certainly wasn't a direct route back to his hide-away, wherever that might be.

So Moe did the same, staying well enough behind. It wasn't a rapid pursuit, for Cleeve was avoiding speed.

DURING the trailing process, The Shadow spoke further to Sandra.

"You must drop from sight again," he told her. "If there is any girl that you can specially trust; particularly one who already knows of your return –"

He put a pause at the end of the statement, and Sandra responded eagerly, with the very name that The Shadow wanted to hear.

"Margo Lane!" Sandra exclaimed. "I saw her at the Red Barn."

Apparently The Shadow had never heard of Margo. He asked if Sandra happened to know where Margo lived, and Sandra did.



## THE BLACKMAIL KING

When Cleeve's cab swerved suddenly from the street and entered a small all-night garage, The Shadow told Moe to stop and wait. He added a few words that Sandra did not hear.

Then, to Sandra, The Shadow said:

"I have instructed the driver to call Miss Lane. Wait here, while I settle some business up ahead."

Sandra knew well enough what the business was. Lone-handed, The Shadow intended to corral Cleeve's crew. Not a formidable task, for The Shadow, considering that two of the crooks were already wounded, and the other pair didn't expect him. But it seemed highly dangerous to Sandra.

She was thrilled, yet fearful, as she saw the cloaked champion glide toward the garage; then quite amazed as the moving figure suddenly blotted itself into receiving darkness.

Sandra could no longer wonder why The Shadow had flung such terror into the black hearts of the murderous crew. She confidently expected to hear new bursts of gunfire, and see the stragglers come reeling out from the garage where The Shadow sought them. Any fighter who could travel in such ghostly fashion was indeed a foeman to be feared.

Before The Shadow reached his goal, an interruption came. Moe was back; shoving his hand into the front seat, the cabby jabbed a lever and made the headlights blink rapidly.

The Shadow must have caught the signal, for he reappeared suddenly from an unexpected direction. Sandra saw Moe spring over to meet him. They were too far away, however, for the girl to catch their conversation.

During the few minutes of The Shadow's preliminary approach to the garage, Moe had put through the call to Burbank, and had waited for a return call. It had come, with important news: Margo was missing.

Harry Vincent had already informed Burbank where she was to be, but in calling the place, the contact man couldn't locate her. She hadn't been stopped by the police, for Burbank had been picking up short-wave radio calls that contained no mention of Margo or anyone resembling her.

He was calling Harry, telling him where he could find The Shadow, to give a fuller report.

The Shadow returned to the cab with Moe. He told Sandra that Margo wasn't at her apartment, but that Moe had explained that a friend was coming to see her and the manager had agreed to admit Sandra. Apparently, Margo had a standing arrangement with the management covering the arrival of friends like Sandra.

The cab would take Sandra to her destination; she would hear from The Shadow later. Until then, he wanted her promise that she would stay in the apartment. Sandra gave it.

As the cab departed, Sandra saw The Shadow merging with the darkness near the garage. She thought that he was resuming his delayed invasion; but her guess was wrong.

THE SHADOW was using new tactics. He couldn't chance haphazard battle if crooks held Margo hostage. She hadn't been brought along by Cleeve's crew; of that, The Shadow was certain when he scaled a low wall and peered through a tiny window into the garage.

He could see Cleeve and the other thugs in a corner of the place, helping the cripples bandage their wounds. The cab was farther away, and its open door showed it to be empty. But there was an old sedan at hand, and Cleeve's Co. evidently intended to transfer to it.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

Maybe some cover-up men had gabbed Margo. If so, she would probably show up at Rayland's headquarters. If The Shadow smashed the window and opened fire into the garage, crooks would scatter, and one might luckily get to a telephone.

What might happen to Margo, while The Shadow was hunting high and wide for the hide-out, could prove just too bad.

But for the factor that Margo Lane presented, The Shadow could best trap Cleeve Rayland and leave Dana Mycroft without friends. Clipped of such, Mycroft couldn't very well track down either of the Bretts.

Good reasoning by The Shadow, but it was out. His only policy was to revert to the trailing game.

The Shadow was away from the window, waiting near the door of the garage, ready to take a ride on Cleeve's bumper if it proved necessary. He was banking on a better way, however, and it came along in the shape of Harry's car.

The moment the coupe poked cautiously around the corner, The Shadow gave signal flashes with a tiny flashlight, which alternated red and green. He coaxed Harry to the spot he wanted, then boarded the car.

Half a minute later, Cleeve Rayland and his repaired followers came rolling out in their emergency car. They were sure their transfer had been unnoticed.

Looking along the street, they didn't see a taxicab resembling one they had noticed during the last stages of their ride to the garage. They spied a darkened coupe parked among other cars, but never connected it with the one that they thought was wrecked along with their original sedan.

Confident that he and his men were safe, Cleeve Rayland didn't waste much time with roundabout methods. He did a little zigzagging as a matter of habit, and kept to an easy speed, through policy. But it was plain that his next destination was to be a place far more important than the garage where he had made the emergency stopover.

It was plain both to The Shadow and his agent, Harry Vincent. For they were bearing hard upon the trail, Harry glued to the wheel, with eyes straight ahead, while his chief, with drawn automatic, was watching from the window on the right.

Crooks weren't going to elude The Shadow. If they guessed that he was after them and tried to outspurt him, his big gun would drill their vulnerable gas tank and abruptly end their flight. But The Shadow was hoping to avoid such action.

Rather, he hoped that the men ahead would lead him where new rescue would be needed: to the place where Margo Lane, a prisoner, was counting faithfully upon The Shadow's aid!

### **CHAPTER XI. TRAILS CLOSE**

FOUR men formed a serious group in the office where Homer Fengram conducted his financial transactions. One conference, between Fengram and the attorney, Blaine Kemball, had ended abruptly when the other men arrived.

The others were Inspector Joe Cardona and Ferdy Brythe. They had phoned Kemball's apartment and learned that he was at Fengram's; hence, they had come directly to the financier's mansion. There, Cardona's news of Sandra's abduction struck like a bombshell.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

"Impossible, inspector!" exclaimed Fengram. "Why, Mr. Kemball has just assured me that Miss Brett is in Florida."

"I thought she was," assured Kemball. "Only –"

"Thought she was!" chided Fengram in basso rumble. "You said you talked to her by long distance, only an hour ago."

"It was she who made the call," said Kemball weakly. "Perhaps she deceived me –"

Sandra had deceived Kemball, but not in the way the lawyer meant. He thought she had gone to Florida and stayed there. His talk of a long-distance call was simply part of the pretense.

Looking at Kemball, Fengram saw that the lawyer was giving him some sort of double talk, and Fengram's broad face stiffened, even to his double chin. Then Cardona, inadvertently, helped Kemball out of his predicament.

"Sandra Brett is here in New York," declared Cardona in a positive tone. "She foresaw some trouble and asked Ferdy Brythe to look out for her. The trouble hit and Brythe did his best, but it wasn't enough. Four men piled into him at once."

"Eight men," corrected Ferdy.

Cardona gave a sideward look. He remembered that Ferdy had first numbered his assailants as a round dozen.

"Make it six," bargained Joe. Then, to the others: "Anyway, the girl has been kidnapped and we'll have to do something about it."

"We?" inquired Kemball, with a despairing shrug. "It seems as though the job is yours, inspector."

"You can help," Cardona told Kemball. "Get back to your apartment and stay there. If Miss Brett was lucky enough to get away, she'll probably come to your place."

"And if her captors pursue her?"

"They'll strike it tough. I've ordered a squad up to your apartment house. You'll have to identify yourself to get through. As for you, Mr. Fengram" – Cardona swung to the portly financier – "you can help, too."

"Willingly, inspector. Tell me how."

"Stay here," said Joe, "and if Miss Brett calls Kemball, he can tell her to come here. That bunch might try to head her off if she made for Kemball's, or even tried to get to police headquarters. They won't expect to find her in this area."

Fengram nodded; meanwhile, Cardona turned to see Kemball lingering at the door. He wanted to know why the lawyer waited. Fengram interrupted, by calling from the desk:

"Don't wait, Kemball. We can't discuss the Infralux matter any further until Miss Brett is found. I still want to buy the rights, but there is no hurry."

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

"It isn't that," returned Kemball. He looked straight at Cardona. "What I want to know is this: what are you going to do, inspector?"

"That happens to be my business," snapped Joe. "Just the same, I'll tell you. I'm going to find Mycroft, the man in back of all this. Does that satisfy you, Kemball?"

Kemball admitted that it did. As soon as the lawyer had gone, Cardona turned to Fengram and said:

"There's just a chance that I might find Mycroft soon. I've been looking for the fellow, and have several leads to persons answering his description. I've listed about thirty places where he might be, in six different areas."

From his pocket, Joe drew a map, unfolded it and showed the circles that he had marked. "I'm going to start with this one and try the houses that might have hide-aways. That will take about an hour; then I'll visit the next area."

Pocketing the map, Cardona turned to Ferdy:

"Come on, Brythe."

Ferdy tried to rise, but couldn't. He'd found a bottle of rare brandy on Fengram's sideboard and had sampled the half pint that it contained. Noting the empty bottle, Fengram smiled dourly.

"Let him stay here, inspector. I'll have the servants help him down to the wine cellar, where it's cool and comfortable. He'll still be there when you get back."

The sarcasm didn't etch itself on Ferdy. He started thanking Fengram in a maudlin way, and Cardona, convinced that Ferdy would prove more of a handicap than a help, hurried out to rejoin his squad, while the servants were assisting Ferdy to the happy hunting ground downstairs.

FAR different from Fengram's luxurious office was the room where Margo Lane found herself. She had reached it by a trip up what seemed to be a secret stairway, with a ladder climb at the top.

Dana Mycroft was following her, croaking threats if she didn't hurry, and Margo made a final scramble into the room above her.

She was startled at sight of a waiting figure that had the blundering look and expressionless scowl of a Frankenstein monster. The fact that the man was standing in a smelly laboratory, crowded with bottles and boxes, was enough to make it seem that he had been hatched from test tubes.

The man's face was a deathly white; his forehead was girded by a blood-soaked towel. He snarled when he saw Margo and shoved himself forward, hands extended, as though he planned to seize and throttle her.

The fellow wavered, however, before he had advanced halfway, and Mycroft, crawling up through the closet floor, pressed between and pushed the gory man into the chair by the shaded window.

"This is Tilroy," croaked Mycroft. "His condition represents the folly of blind obedience to a misguided master. He is Rayland's servant, not mine. His duty was to keep me here while Rayland captured you, Miss Brett.

"You see how badly Rayland miscalculated. I reversed both situations. I kept Tilroy here, and I trapped you. Now, let us see, Miss Brett: where were we? Ah, yes. We were discussing my invention, Infralux. Let me

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

show you something."

He fumbled among the boxes. Margo noticed that he was very careful with one, as he laid it in the corner. Coming to another, he brought out a fair-sized electric bulb, then a large flashlight. He screwed the bulb into the flashlight. The bulging bulb began to glow, rather feebly.

"More than could be expected from flashlight batteries," declared Mycroft. "Still, it is not enough. I admit that it had to be developed. But did you ever hear what they said of Edison's first incandescent? No? They termed it a firefly in a fish bowl.

"It was improved, of course, and Edison shared both credit and cash. That is what I ask with Infralux. Your father developed it more rapidly than I could have. I can show you some of his later lamps." He looked about, then shook his head. "No, they are in my own laboratory, not this one.

"However, Brett denied me my share!" Mycroft's eyes took on a crazed glare. "He became stubborn; heedless of my warnings. It preyed upon him, though he would not admit it. Trouble with government contracts worried his guilty conscience. He reached the point where he could think of only one recourse: suicide!"

It wasn't easy, playing Sandra's part at this point. Though Margo knew some of the facts regarding Brett, she wondered two things: first, how much Sandra really knew; second, what Mycroft expected Sandra to know. So Margo compromised by lowering her eyes in sorrowful fashion and murmuring:

"Poor Dad!"

Mycroft eyed her closely. Margo could almost feel his probing glare, as he stooped to get a better view of her face. Passing seconds brought Margo to the breaking point; but she was suddenly saved when the telephone bell rang.

Tilroy tried to come from his chair to answer it, but Mycroft pressed him back. Still watching Margo, the inventor lifted the telephone and croaked:

"Hello. Hello –"

He wasn't getting an answer from the other end. His eyes moved from Margo to the telephone and back again, as though suspecting her of trying some trick. Then, angrily, Mycroft slapped the receiver on the hook and spoke to Margo.

"What happened to your father was entirely his own making," Mycroft insisted. "What may happen to you will be the same. It is in your power, Miss Brett, to give me proper amends."

Margo met that statement steadily, with the question:

"Just how?"

"Homer Fengram wants to purchase Infralux," explained Mycroft, "and he knows nothing whatever of this business. Simply call your attorney and have him draw up the proper papers. When they are signed and delivered, and the payment forwarded to me, you will be freed."

"But I shall have to sign the papers."

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

"I hardly think so," objected Mycroft. "I am sure that Kemball can manage it. Perhaps your father authorized him to handle such transactions. Who knows – he might be able to produce contracts bearing the signature of Giles Brett."

Pausing, Mycroft rubbed his hands, then added: "Your father always had a way of looking far ahead."

MYCROFT was definitely trying to get Margo to commit herself, yet avoiding any direct mention of the fact that Brett still lived. Margo decided that Mycroft had concluded that Sandra would yield that fact herself, whereat he could express surprise.

As Sandra's proxy, Margo thought it best to disappoint him. She knew, from The Shadow's statements, that there was blackmail in the game, so she led around to it.

"There were certain things my father expected," declared Margo. "Just what they were, I am not quite sure. If they are to be included in the deal –"

Margo went no further. At that moment, the door of the laboratory opened and a man appeared. His face was sallow, sharply pointed, yet glossy. Margo didn't have to ask who he was. Cleeve Rayland had returned.

His stare was evidence that he didn't know who Margo was; but that wasn't much help. He would certainly know that she wasn't Sandra Brett, when introductions came.

Margo wasn't all that puzzled Cleeve. He saw the revolver in Mycroft's hand, the bandage around Tilroy's head. He stepped to the center of the improvised laboratory, and other men poked their faces through the doorway.

"What sort of mockery is this?" demanded Cleeve. "How did the dame get in here, and what happened to Tilroy? Why did you drag out the old horse pistol, Mycroft? Who's going to hurt you?"

Mycroft became gleeful. He looked to the doorway, saw the bandages that Cleeve's men wore; then gestured toward Tilroy.

"Look at them!" he exclaimed. "Then talk about me getting hurt! I can explain Tilroy's case. He became obstinate and tried to keep me here. Did your men try to keep you somewhere, Rayland?"

Cleeve only eyed Mycroft more coldly.

"So you've been out," he snarled raspily. "I told you I didn't need your help!"

"As it turned out," retorted Mycroft, "you did! I was the one who captured Sandra Brett."

"Sandra Brett!" exclaimed Cleeve. He looked about. "Where is she?"

"Allow me to introduce you," said Mycroft, gesturing to Margo. "Mr. Rayland, meet Miss Brett."

The hush that fell was one that Margo hoped she would never experience again. Cleeve's eyes left Mycroft and focused upon Margo, with an appraisal that made her squirm. Then came Cleeve's emphatic tone:

"This isn't Sandra Brett!"

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

Those words were icy. They sounded like a death sentence, that could only be stayed if Cleeve Rayland decided to play a higher tribunal and reverse his verdict. He was probably wondering how much Margo knew, or had learned. If that didn't prove too much, he might let Margo live, on the strength of other merits.

"Croaking dames is foolish business," asserted Cleeve, his hand stopping on the gun in his coat pocket. "I'm against it, provided they listen to what's good for them. This one doesn't look half bad. She might listen, unless –"

It was Mycroft who inserted sharply:

"Unless what?"

"Unless," said Cleeve, "she's working for The Shadow. Where did you find her, Mycroft?"

"About a block from where the shooting happened," began the inventor. "That's why I thought she was Sandra Brett –"

Cleeve's sudden glower was telling that the death sentence stood. So was his hand, as it swung from his pocket, the gun clenched in it.

BY then, Margo was no longer petrified. The moment that Cleeve telegraphed his purpose, she made a spring for the door of the closet.

Her direction took Cleeve unawares. He didn't know that Mycroft had brought Margo in by the back route. What was more, Cleeve didn't want to start a lot of shooting in the hide-out. His gun hand was swinging above the level of a normal aim as he sprang forward. He intended to slug Margo with it.

Mycroft provided Margo with a momentary break. His thoughts had taken the same channel as Rayland's, with one difference.

The inventor preferred gunfire as a quicker way of death. He didn't care about noise or its consequences. He wanted to get in the first shot, with his antiquated revolver. He sprang, too, and jostled Cleeve aside.

It was all like a wild dream to Margo. She grabbed for the closet door and it came flying open, though she didn't seem to touch it. She saw the blackness representing the short shaft to the stairway, plunged for it recklessly, intending to take the hard fall and the jolt that it would bring.

Crazily, the matter of the door was repeated. Margo was jolted as she began her dive, not as she finished it. She bounced right back into the lab, off at an angle, to a corner of the room.

She heard the blast of Mycroft's gun, and a clank as Cleeve smacked the other weapon with his own to prevent the give-away shot, that came anyway.

Wildest of all was the laugh that accompanied the wide shot. Certainly, it was the largest figment of Margo's imagination, probably because it was the thing she had hoped for so ardently: the laugh of The Shadow, taunting men of crime.

It couldn't be real, but it proved so, and as Margo gazed from the corner where she had somersaulted, the whole truth drove home. She hadn't grabbed the closet door. Someone had hurled it wide from the other side. The darkness of the closet floor wasn't space; it was solid substance.

Margo's spill wasn't a bounce. She had been flung by that same living mass of blackness that was turning itself into a cloaked shape as it drove for Mycroft and Rayland.

Trails were closed. Into this den of death had come the master who sought the end of crime. His arrival was from the very route that crooks had reserved for exit, should they be hard pressed. The pressure was hard, at present, for it was in their midst.

He was here, the challenger who asked no quarter from murderers, and offered none.

The Shadow!

### CHAPTER XII. DEATH OUT OF HAND

THINGS happened in a whirling fashion that Margo could scarcely grasp. She felt as Ferdy must have when the earlier fight had spun around him, except that Margo was sensible enough to stay right where she was. The impacts that she witnessed explained themselves, but only after they occurred.

The blast of a gun, the clang of metal, came in quick succession. Margo thought for the moment that Mycroft had fired again; that Rayland had tried to stop him. But the smoke that she was seeing was coiling from The Shadow's automatic.

Rayland was reeling, his own weapon drooping, and Mycroft was gunless, clutching one scrawny hand with the other.

The Shadow had taken Rayland first, beating the fellow to the shot. It was The Shadow's .45, guided as it recoiled, that thwacked the old-style six-gun from Mycroft's fist. The thoughts flashed to Margo rapidly, while smoke was curling lazily.

Smoke that remained where The Shadow no longer was. The smoke was white; his garb was black. No wonder that tiny curl caught the eye, while the larger figure vanished.

Gone, The Shadow was, from between the staggering form of Cleeve and the huddled figure of Mycroft.

Gone from under the startled eyes of Cleeve's men, as they surged in from the doorway.

They'd blundered against one another, all trying to be first, because each thought that Cleeve was softening The Shadow with a preliminary shot. They were doubly wrong; it was Cleeve who took the first bullet – from The Shadow. The entering men were forced to dodge him as he reeled their way, another point that assisted The Shadow's amazing disappearance.

Mobsters had overrun their target.

The Shadow was around them, surging in from a new angle. He was wielding two guns, but he wasn't aiming them. They were being used as cudgels, for he knew that a silent, slugging attack would enable him to hew men down before others realized that he was upon them.

Yet, Margo heard a shot.

It wasn't in this room; it was distant; muffled, and repeated. With it, she was sure she heard a splintering sound, as of someone ripping through a door. Odd, the way those sounds mixed in with other things closer at hand.



## THE BLACKMAIL KING

One such thing was the hoarse shout from beside the window. It was Tilroy who gave it, as he saw The Shadow piling upon his pals. Tilroy was tugging for a gun, but his hand was stuck in his pocket.

He was still the blundering monster, which, in a sense Mycroft had created. Tilroy couldn't quite forget the crash of the hydrometer jar upon his head.

The Shadow was in among Cleeve's men, but they were turned about. Three in all, they were grabbing for the black-clad fighter, stopping his down-sweeping guns. One .45 crashed through and flattened a foeman; then, with Tilroy plunging straight into things, his gun finally drawn and poked ahead of him, The Shadow made a rapid whirl.

Margo saw Tilroy's gun stab into blackness three times in succession. She saw the collapse that followed. The Shadow should have landed with a dumpy thud; instead, he clattered.

Rather, it wasn't The Shadow who clattered; the things that fell were boxes from the other corner. The Shadow was away when Tilroy started shooting; like Margo, the fellow had supposed that he still was there.

This time, the very men that Tilroy had warned were the ones who were shouting the location of the menace. They saw The Shadow twisting in Margo's direction, and they sprang after him. The scene was blotted in front of Margo's eyes; the blackness that clouded it was the whirl of The Shadow's cloak.

She heard two gunshots and the blackness swished away. She saw the crooks, and feared that they had won. But their guns weren't smoking; they were sagging. Two shots had found them before they could even fire.

Yet only one of those shots could have been The Shadow's, for he had cloaked a gun and was aiming a single automatic when Margo spied him again. The curious thing was the fact that the other gun that Margo saw was in the hand of Cleeve Rayland. He certainly couldn't have been fool enough to aid The Shadow by dropping one of his own men.

Cleeve hadn't done it.

Before he could fire, the two guns spoke anew, and Cleeve's wasn't either one of them. One shot hit Cleeve's wrist and made him drop the weapon that he had obtained: Mycroft's ancient revolver. The other shot must have skimmed Cleeve's shoulder, from the grotesque shrug he gave as he slipped to the floor.

Then Margo saw the second marksman who had joined The Shadow's cause.

Harry Vincent was standing in the doorway from the living room. The Shadow had sent him in by the front way. Those muffled shots, the splintering accompaniment, were Harry's way of dealing with the door of the apartment in order to get through and give his chief a helping hand.

WITH the rest crippled in the rapid fray, The Shadow and Harry were confronted by two foemen only: Mycroft and Tilroy. Confronted was hardly the term, considering that Mycroft was ducking for a deep corner and Tilroy was standing stupidly, with an empty gun.

But when The Shadow drove in Mycroft's direction, Tilroy lunged between. Harry aimed for the fellow, but didn't fire, because The Shadow was almost in the path.

Taking Tilroy, The Shadow sent him hard against the closet door, knocking it shut. Losing his gun on the way, Tilroy clutched his bandaged head to save it from another thump. His shoulder took the jolt from the door, but at that, Tilroy looked groggy when he rolled upon the floor.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

An unnatural alliance, Mycroft and Tilroy, considering the feud between them, and it produced unnatural results. Thanks to Tilroy, Mycroft found what he wanted in the corner.

He snatched the object from the box that Margo had seen him handle so carefully awhile before. Almost under the muzzle of The Shadow's gun, the inventor turned and brandished the thing he held.

"Take care!" cackled Mycroft. "If I even drop this bomb, it will be the end of us all!"

It looked as though Mycroft couldn't help but drop it. The bomb was the size and shape of a baseball, possibly a trifle larger, and its surface had a slippery appearance. The inventor's hand showed a palsied shake, the result of his excitement, and his scrawny fingers did not provide a satisfactory grip.

From the floor, Cleeve Rayland and two wounded men were howling for Mycroft not to toss the bomb. Their babble awakened the stunned man who had taken a hard blow from The Shadow's gun.

Tilroy, too, stared horrified from the spot where he had landed. Shouts wouldn't have stopped Mycroft's toss. It took The Shadow's laugh to halt him.

Strangely sardonic, the laugh intrigued Mycroft. It carried an indifferent tone, as though The Shadow welcomed any adventure and would consider death a novelty. The mirth had a touch of mockery, indicating that Mycroft's effort would surely fail. The inventor caught that note and wondered at it.

"Toss the bomb, Mycroft," spoke The Shadow in a tone of command. "Learn for yourself that it is nothing but a dud! I should like to see your face when you make that discovery!"

Mycroft's fingers gained a better grip. He knew that The Shadow's statement was a bluff; therefore, he wanted to enjoy the situation longer. What was more, The Shadow had spoken an order, and Mycroft wasn't in a mood for taking any. There was something else that entered the inventor's half-crazed mind. He expressed it.

"So, Shadow," he said, "you are not afraid to die. You and I are alike, upon that one score. After all, why should a man die when he is not afraid?"

"An excellent question," The Shadow replied. "Perhaps you can provide the answer, Mycroft."

The inventor made a wary forward pace. Staring past The Shadow, he noted the open door to the living room and said:

"If we were sure of no further intrusion –"

"Close the door, Vincent," The Shadow told Harry. "I am sure we shall all appreciate what Mycroft has to tell us."

Margo watched Harry close the door. There was a moment when he could have slid through. Perhaps, from the living room, Harry could have threatened Mycroft, giving The Shadow and Margo a long-shot chance to follow.

Of a certainty, the move would have preserved Harry's own life. But Harry was the type who preferred to take the long shots himself. Margo's eyes lighted with admiration as Harry coolly blocked off his own escape by closing the door and leaning his back against it.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

With a chuckle, Mycroft condescended to discuss his theories on death. Hardly had he started to speak, when the telephone jangled.

Mycroft didn't answer it; his glare, the way he gestured the bomb, warned others to pay no attention to the interruption.

"Those who do not fear death, prepare for it," stated Mycroft. "Everywhere I go, I prepare. I made this bomb when I first came here. I had it with me when I visited Brett. I could have used it that day" – Mycroft's eyes lighted at the recollection – "but I restrained myself. Wisely, too. This bomb proved unnecessary."

Mycroft's cackle was expressive. The Shadow's keen eyes probed the inventor's face, interpreting what lay in the mind behind it. The telephone stopped ringing, and from the floor, Cleeve Rayland groaned.

His wounds were serious, painful; but his tone told something else. It told that Cleeve feared death.

"Bah!" exclaimed Mycroft in disgust. "Why should I do favors for those who do not welcome them? Like you, Shadow, I am ready to die. So is that friend of yours by the door. But these others –"

MYCROFT shook his head. With a half turn toward the corner, he actually appeared ready to put the bomb back into the box and surrender to The Shadow. Suddenly, he was around again, more rabid than ever, his hand raised higher.

"You thought I meant it, Shadow!" he exulted. "You thought I was going to let you live! Fool that you are, I shall show you what I intend!" He shifted toward the closet door. "I shall toss this bomb one direction, and fling myself in the other. You shall die, Shadow; not I!"

"Wrong, Mycroft!" The Shadow's gun muzzle fixed on the inventor's heart. "Another step, and I shall fire! You still desire life; long enough to know that I have died. You can't gain the triumph that you want. A bullet will prove swifter than your throw."

Mycroft calculated, craftily, but remained stock–still as he did so. Watching, Margo saw that The Shadow was inching forward, but he wasn't nearly close enough to snatch the bomb away from Mycroft.

"Throw the bomb," urged The Shadow. "Be the first to die. Unless you would rather watch a while and see Rayland die by degrees. He has a start on all of us."

A groan came from Cleeve, and the other thugs echoed it, with one exception. It was then that both Margo and Harry saw the factor upon which The Shadow depended. There was one man in the crooked aggregation who had played a back–and–forth game with Mycroft. That man was Tilroy.

He'd sided with Mycroft a short while before, and now regretted it. Tilroy was on hands and knees, almost behind Mycroft. Coming slowly up, he was steadying himself to reach both hands for the bomb.

Tilroy's expression showed that if he obtained the deadly globe, he certainly wouldn't throw it. He'd prefer to surrender, on the chance that he, only a minor hand in crime, would find amnesty from The Shadow.

Looking The Shadow's way, Tilroy saw an approving glint from burning eyes. It was enough. On his feet, Tilroy began the last stage of his cautious reach.

Too tense to notice anything else, Harry Vincent did not hear the footsteps that approached guardedly outside the living–room door. If they had paused a few seconds longer, Tilroy would have held the bomb and The

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

Shadow could have taken over. But the new invaders did not wait.

Shoulders hit the door from the other side. It hurled inward, flattening Harry ahead of it. On the threshold stood Inspector Joe Cardona, a detective sergeant with him, and other men behind. Both Cardona and the sergeant were brandishing revolvers.

Dana Mycroft galvanized into action. His laugh pitched high, and so did his scrawny hand. His quick side step carried him away from Tilroy, whose frantic grab missed the bomb by a foot.

The Shadow was flinging forward, shoving his own hand at Mycroft's. His effort to seize the deadly missile failed by inches.

The man who wanted to deliver death was sending it on its way despite The Shadow's utmost effort.

Mycroft threw the bomb. The question of life or death was no longer in his hand – nor in The Shadow's!

### CHAPTER XIII. THE MAN WHO LIVED

HORRENDOUS was that moment, with every detail registered like a scene from a slow-motion picture. From her corner, Margo saw those details vividly. Mycroft's hand and its forward fling, with fingers opening wide; the short stop that it made as The Shadow's fist clamped the wrist below.

Amazing speed, on The Shadow's part, but it had failed a few inches from its mark. The bomb was in the air, and Mycroft's effort was complete. True, his hand had twisted and taken a jolt, as he made the throw. Odd, the way the bomb had squeezed from those fingers that looked so much like claws.

A freak of chance – or had The Shadow managed it, as the only possibility within his reach?

The thing itself was more important than the answer. The bomb wasn't coming with a hard, straight throw. It was scaling, flipped high, almost grazing the ceiling. It was dropping into Margo's corner.

Half on her feet, Margo flattened against the wall. She could hear Harry shouting, like some baseball fan to a fielder backed against the fence.

And then the bomb arrived.

Margo caught it, wondering whether the jar against her soft hands would explode it, yet not caring, since death seemed destined. It didn't explode; it was still in her hands, and she was juggling it.

Despairingly, she knew that she had to hold it – and did so, more than momentarily. But, as the importance of her catch came home to her, she clutched the slippery sphere too tightly and it started to slither away.

Two other pairs of hands were upon Margo's before she could lose her prize. The Shadow's from one side, Harry's from the other. They took it and almost juggled it between them. Then The Shadow had the thing one-handed, and was at the window.

With a whip of his free hand, he brought an automatic from beneath his cloak, gave a slash that ripped the shade and smashed pane and sash beyond it.

Guns were talking through the room, but The Shadow totally ignored them. He gave the bomb the easiest of flips – a drop more than a toss. Margo saw it disappear beyond the window sill.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

The Shadow wheeled about, gun in hand. But the blast that came wasn't from his automatic. It sounded from the little courtyard between this house and the next, a roar that shook the building, sending men from their feet.

There were crashes of a dozen other windows; the smash of falling masonry. No doubt about the power of Mycroft's homemade bomb.

The shooting was a duel between the invading police and the crooks who were crawling on the floor. During the excitement of Margo's catch and The Shadow's disposal of the bomb, Cleeve Rayland had shouted for his men to get busy.

Their guns were near; they hadn't dared to reach for them during the tense time when The Shadow and Mycroft had been holding each other at bay. They regained their guns, Cleeve and his men, but did no damage with them.

Cardona and his squad outshot the opposition from the very start, which wasn't startling, considering that the police were ready with drawn guns, while crooks were grabbing for theirs. Besides, Joe and his men weren't operating under any mental hazard in connection with the bomb.

For all they knew, Mycroft and Margo were simply playing catch, with The Shadow as an umpire. The gun duel was practically over when the quake of the explosion staggered all contestants. Cardona and his men came right back to their feet, but the crooks never found theirs.

Though belated in their fire, men of crime were too earnest to be treated leniently. They were literally riddled by police bullets, fired at close range. Even Tilroy had succumbed to the barrage, for he had switched sides once more; this time, the last.

The Shadow by the window, Harry and Margo in a corner, were clear from the path of fire – and so was another.

Dana Mycroft hadn't even thought of picking up his old horse pistol after Cleeve Rayland dropped it.

SEEING his bomb caught was a shock to Mycroft. Watching it sail out through the window was an added disappointment. Given life when he had made up his mind to death, the scrawny inventor decided to hang on to what he had. Alive, he wanted to be at large; so he took the route that promised freedom.

Mycroft yanked open the closet door and jumped.

Cardona saw him go, and looked again. Joe thought The Shadow had the copyright on such strange disappearances. But Mycroft's vanish wasn't any mystery, when Cardona reached the closet and found that it had no floor.

Shouting for his men to follow, the inspector used the ladder as a more sensible means of descent. Indeed, judging from the ardor of Mycroft's plunge, Cardona thought surely that the fanatic had broken his neck leaping into what looked like a bottomless pit.

When Joe reached bottom, only a dozen rungs below, he decided to speed his pursuit. His flashlight showed a stairway, and Mycroft's footsteps were clattering back from some distance farther down. Unhurt, the inventor was gaining a considerable lead.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

To a man, the members of Cardona's squad followed their leader. They were only five in all, and they might have to scatter to round up Mycroft. With crooks dead, there was no use remaining in the laboratory.

The police should have wondered why The Shadow did not follow them to aid in this important chase, but they didn't. They regarded the ways of The Shadow as inscrutable.

The Shadow had good reasons for remaining.

He couldn't have reached the rear street ahead of the police, for they had found the direct exit and were blocking it in their rush. Either they would capture Mycroft before The Shadow could aid, or the pursuit would prove useless.

Mycroft happened to be Cardona's quarry, half a reason for The Shadow to leave the chase to the police inspector. The other half of that reason was lying on the floor, in the person of Cleeve Rayland, the man sought by The Shadow.

Of all the men who might have talked, Cleeve alone remained. He'd taken more bullets than the rest, but his stamina was stronger. Curious, how men who feared to die could forget their dread when they thought they had a chance of killing someone else.

Why they should want to kill at all, was a riddle in itself, but they did. Rats who quailed at sight of Mycroft's bomb had cast aside discretion in their battle with the police. The odds had been against them, but they hadn't recognized that fact.

So all were dead – except Cleeve Rayland.

He was dying, too, and his eyes were seeing darkness. But Cleeve knew that the blotting blackness, looming close to him, was the figure of The Shadow. Though he could tell more than his dead companions could have, Cleeve was, in the same proportion, determined to conceal the facts at his disposal.

Urged by desire for defiance, Cleeve was half on his feet, glazed eyes fixed on The Shadow, lips inserting raspy words between their coughs.

"Try... to find Mycroft," spoke Cleeve. "You'll never...do it... Shadow!"

"Finding Mycroft will be unnecessary," The Shadow told Cleeve. "You still have time to speak, and you will."

That whisper, the burn of the eyes above The Shadows hidden lips, took strong effect on Cleeve. In his dying condition, Cleeve's only logical fear was of death itself; but the force of The Shadow's utterance threw Cleeve's reason out of gear. The Shadow's laugh had a haunting echo, as though it promised to follow Cleeve across the approaching divide.

Sagging against the table which supported him, the faltering blackmailer opened his mouth to speak. He acted as though he knew the question that was coming, and was ready to answer it. Then Cleeve's dilemma was postponed by the same interruption that had occurred twice before.

IT was the sudden tingling of the telephone bell.

Margo remembered it during the time when she had been on her own, playing the hoax that she was Sandra Brett, for the benefit of Mycroft.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

To Harry's mind sprang the recollection of the unanswered call that had come while Mycroft was threatening with the bomb.

Whatever the meaning of that call, The Shadow seemed to understand it. His laugh was weirdly significant as he stepped forward, reaching for the telephone.

Cleeve Rayland was nearer, and he snapped to surprising action. His twist was convulsive; aided by the direction in which he leaned, the dying crook slapped his hands upon the telephone and whipped it from The Shadow's approaching grasp.

"Hello –" Cleeve's effort was a cough. "Hello... This is Cleeve... They got me –"

He was falling as he forced out the words, which was why The Shadow couldn't quite snatch the telephone. As Cleeve struck the floor, his failing hands were too wobbly to replace the receiver on the hook, and The Shadow plucked the telephone from his grasp.

But before The Shadow could even get the receiver to his ear, there was a click from the other end. Harry and Margo heard it; knew that the call was finished.

From the floor, Cleeve spoke again, his fingers plucking space as though still feeling the telephone.

"They got me... So long, Mycroft... Good luck."

It wasn't good luck for Cleeve Rayland. Those words were his last. The blackmailer was dead when The Shadow stooped above him. Harry and Margo exchanged undertoned comments.

"Mycroft must have given Cardona the slip," said Harry. "He'd be just nery enough to call back and see how Cleeve made out."

"Too nery, perhaps," returned Margo. "Let's hope that they trapped him, wherever he stopped off."

The Shadow was beckoning to his agents. They went out by the ladder route, and found Harry's car.

There were no sounds of police cars; evidently, the trail had led afar. Margo was describing Mycroft's rattletrap coupe, and Harry circled about, hoping to spy it somewhere, but there wasn't any sign of it. Mycroft must have traveled far, too.

Meanwhile, The Shadow was questioning Margo regarding her adventures, and she related them in minute detail. She was pleased to hear that Sandra was quite safe. The Shadow explained that he had sent Sandra to Margo's apartment; he detailed instructions, to which Margo listened intently.

It would be all right for Margo to tell Sandra about the other events – such as Margo's own capture. It would establish a further understanding between them.

Margo could say, too, that she had seen The Shadow, and therewith advise Sandra to follow any advice he gave. Perhaps he would advise both girls to rely upon a friend named Lamont Cranston, if occasion called.

The Shadow made that statement as he was stepping from the coupe. Both Harry and Margo heard his whispered laugh; saw him merge with darkness. It wasn't until they rounded the next corner that Harry realized they were near the Cobalt Club.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

Very probably, The Shadow intended to drop in on his friend, Commissioner Weston. That, however, was The Shadow's business. Harry's job was to take Margo back to her apartment; so he did.

IN the Cobalt Club, Commissioner Weston was quite pleased when his friend Cranston arrived. Weston had a lot to tell, for he had just heard from Cardona.

The Brett case was in the news again, for the dead man's daughter had disappeared. The police had found the man who had abducted her: Dana Mycroft. But the vindictive inventor had slipped them.

"We don't know where Mycroft went," declared Weston ruefully. "Apparently, he has hide-aways all over town. A batch of crooks were working with him, led by a blackmailer named Cleeve Rayland. We trapped them in one of Mycroft's hide-aways."

"And the girl wasn't with them?"

"No, Cranston, she wasn't," replied Weston. "They must have left her somewhere else, and returned to join Mycroft. The Shadow had found them when Inspector Cardona arrived."

"Not unusual," said Cranston, with a smile. "The Shadow finding criminals, I mean. But how did Cardona discover the place?"

"He had a lead to Mycroft," Weston explained. "He was searching that particular neighborhood, when he heard the sound of guns, and investigated. Unfortunately, Mycroft escaped. I tell you, Cranston, we must find Mycroft. Wherever he has gone, we may be sure that the Brett girl is a prisoner in the same place."

Strolling from the club, Cranston summoned a limousine from across the street. In that car, only ten minutes before, he had stowed away the black cloak and hat that concealed his identity under the guise of The Shadow.

But the leisurely Mr. Cranston did not resume his sable-hued garb. Instead, he told the chauffeur to drive him home.

No need to worry over the abduction of Sandra Brett. A person who went somewhere voluntarily could not be classed as abducted. The Shadow knew exactly where he could find Sandra, any time he wanted. She would be with Margo Lane.

The person that The Shadow wanted to find was Dana Mycroft, the man who had lived after others died. Hunting for Mycroft would be too long a process.

Easier, by far, to let Mycroft declare himself, which he would, in one way or another, very soon. For Mycroft, wherever he was hiding, would certainly keep tabs on the news. He would learn, to his utter amazement, that he had really kidnapped Sandra Brett – a fact that would puzzle the half-crazed inventor to no small measure.

Knowing that Margo wasn't Sandra, Mycroft's confusion would be all the greater, matched only by his indignation. He'd feel that a move would be necessary, and almost any move that Mycroft might make would prove unwise on his part.

Once Mycroft moved, The Shadow would find him. With Mycroft found, the Brett case would be cleared.

The Shadow knew!



## CHAPTER XIV. THE SHADOW'S ADVICE

LATE the next afternoon, Lamont Cranston stopped in to see Homer Fengram. He did so in response to a call from Fengram relating to the Infralux proposition.

Fengram wanted Cranston to meet Kemball, the attorney who represented Sandra Brett, the missing girl whose disappearance had caused an even greater furor than her father's suicide.

As he was entering Fengram's massive mansion, Cranston observed that he was going to meet more people than Kemball. Parked on the street outside was an official police car belonging to Commissioner Weston. The Shadow was quite sure that Inspector Cardona would also be present, and the surmise proved correct.

They were all in Fengram's office, but their subject did not concern Infralux. Weston was seeking advice from Fengram as Brett's friend, and from Kemball as the dead man's lawyer.

"Surely, you can help us find Mycroft!" exclaimed the commissioner. "You both know the fellow."

"I know of him," said Fengram, "but I have never met him. His business was with Brett, not with me.

"I am in the same position," put in Kemball. "Where he could be, I have no idea. I only wish I did have."

Of the two, Fengram was more himself, and with good reason. He wasn't under the same handicap as Kemball. He hadn't met the real Brett, alive and in right mind, after the tragedy which had disposed of the double, Doban. Kemball had, and the secret preyed upon him.

To Weston and Cardona, Kemball's nervousness was natural. Any lawyer would be worried, losing clients one by one. But The Shadow, very casual in his guise of Cranston, knew exactly why Kemball was troubled.

Finding that neither Fengram nor Kemball could help, Weston turned abruptly to Cardona.

"It's up to you, inspector," declared Weston. "You found Mycroft once, by following what clues you had. Maybe some of those other leads will help you trace his new hiding place. Go after them."

Cardona gave a halfhearted nod. He wasn't at all sure that his other leads would help. Weston was disregarding a factor much more important than Cardona dared to admit.

It wasn't Cardona who had found Mycroft the night before; it was The Shadow. Except for the betraying gunfire, Cardona would have passed up the house where Mycroft was hiding.

Naturally, Cardona hadn't emphasized that point to the commissioner. Joe had to take credit for something, to discount his shortcomings in letting Mycroft escape. But he wasn't very enthusiastic over future prospects, for he didn't want Weston to expect too much. So Cardona made a suggestion.

"While I'm hunting for Mycroft," he said, turning from Weston to the others, "I'd like you to keep us posted, Kemball, on anything that comes your way."

"Nothing came my way last night," returned Kemball. "I sat around hoping to hear from Sandra, and not a thing happened. How I'm to hear from her when she is a prisoner, is something I don't understand."

"You might hear from Mycroft," stated Cardona. "Kidnapers usually try to collect a ransom, and you're the only person in a position to arrange one."

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

WESTON was still nodding approvingly when he left with Cardona. Idling about as Cranston, The Shadow observed that Fengram was also deeply impressed by Cardona's opinion. Looking at Kemball, Fengram queried:

"Suppose you do hear from Mycroft? What will you tell him, Kemball?"

"I'll offer to meet his demands," said Kemball glumly. "I suppose there is no other way."

"His demands will involve a quarter of a million dollars. Can you convince him that you can pay it?"

"Not unless I can assure him that the Infralux deal is closed. But that won't be possible, unless I have the signed papers."

The Shadow noted that Kemball didn't specify who would sign the papers. Fengram, naturally, overlooked the point. He came back to the subject of cash.

"I want Infralux," he declared decisively. "But I cannot deal with Mycroft. It would be illegal. However, Kemball, you may keep me in mind, whatever happens. If you need a quarter million, I shall provide it, on your guarantee that Infralux will become my property."

Kemball gave a helpless shrug.

"I'm in no position to make any guarantee."

"Should you be," returned Fengram, "my offer stands. The best I can do is leave it that way, Kemball."

When Kemball had gone, Fengram returned to the subject of Infralux. He picked up the lamp on his table, lighted it by twisting the bulb, and passed it to The Shadow.

"A wonderful thing, Cranston!" said Fengram. "I wish I could afford to develop it, should I acquire it. A quarter million is the most I can afford, at present. Of course, I would expect a substantial interest in Infralux if it became my sole possession. However, others will reap much of the profit."

Cranston's expression showed a slight trace of the quizzical.

"Your factories are booming, Fengram," he remarked. "Why not use their profits to further Infralux yourself?"

Fengram shook his head. He drew a batch of blueprints from a desk drawer and spread them for Cranston to see.

"These are enlargements of my factories," he explained. "They will cost as much as I can afford; perhaps more."

"Why not postpone them?"

"And hold up defense projects?"

"The government will grant you loans."

Fengram gave a droopy smile that produced a sag in his double chin.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

"You are behind the times, Cranston," he said. "In the old days, when a man made heavy profits, he kept them. Such does not apply today, where government projects are concerned. I have made my profits, of course, but I have carefully accounted for every dollar.

"The money is in trust. It belongs to the government, in return for the privileges granted me. It must go into new plants and new equipment, as part of the agreement. Let me simplify the matter, Cranston, by showing you some figures."

Fengram reached to another drawer; then hesitated. "You will keep these confidential? I have your word for it?"

The Shadow nodded. Fengram produced a financial report and handed it across the desk. He watched Cranston skim through the figures and pause upon the total. Then:

"According to these," came Cranston's conclusion, "your present available assets, reckoned in cash, total a half million."

"Precisely," declared Fengram. "You will note that the sum is divided in two shares."

Cranston nodded.

"One share already pledged to plant expansion," he said, referring to the figures. "The other, available for your own use."

"Which means the purchase of Infralux," declared Fengram, "if my offer is accepted. It would be taken up immediately if negotiations had not struck these hopeless snags. First, Brett's suicide; then his daughter's abduction. Well, Cranston, I shall have to wait."

Fengram settled himself back in his chair. "Yes, wait, the same as you and others to whom I may offer stock in Infralux, when I acquire it –" He stopped on the final word; shook his head in doubtful fashion, and added: "If ever!"

LEAVING Fengram's, The Shadow went to Margo's apartment. He announced his name, and was admitted. Strolling into the living room in Cranston's style, he found Margo with Sandra.

Though Margo was quite at ease, Sandra looked worried when she was introduced. It was a moment for Cranston to feign surprise, and he did, turning to Margo with a most amazed glance.

"Stay right in that stuffed shirt of yours, Lamont," said Margo. "Don't grab the telephone and call your playmate, the police commissioner. This is Sandra Brett, in person! Nobody kidnapped her, so you aren't honor bound to tell the world."

Sandra was relieved when Cranston's surprise faded and his lips traced a smile.

"Margo is right, Mr. Cranston," declared Sandra. "I'm only pretending that I've been abducted."

"Abducted, darling," corrected Margo. "Let me give the harrowing details. If Lamont doesn't believe me, you can back my statements. He'll believe me, though, considering how consistently I believe everything he tells me!"

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

Cranston believed the whole story when he heard it. Margo had to insist, however, that The Shadow was really as remarkable a person as she claimed. Cranston was inclined to think that she exaggerated the prowess of the unknown personage in black.

There, Sandra rallied to Margo's support. According to Sandra, Margo had not told half how wonderful The Shadow was.

"I believe you, Miss Brett," acknowledged Cranston, with a bow. "I only hope that you may some day describe me in such glowing terms."

"I might," assured Sandra, "if you could tell us what to do next. It seems that The Shadow is busy hunting for Mycroft. He asked if Margo had a friend whose advice she could trust, and she said yes. It happened that she had you in mind."

It didn't look as though Cranston could supply advice, when he first began to ponder on the question. By degrees, however, he came to a decision.

"Your father is still alive," he said to Sandra. "At least, we have that for a starting point."

"Alive, yes," agreed Sandra, "but no one is supposed to know it. Everyone thinks he's dead, just as everyone thinks I have been kidnapped."

"Everyone?"

"Everyone except ourselves and Mycroft. One moment, though. Blaine Kemball knows that father is alive. He's dad's attorney."

"And yours, of course, since your father is reputedly dead."

"Why, yes. I suppose so, Mr. Cranston."

Still in the style of Cranston, The Shadow smiled his decision. As he did, he arose and turned toward the door.

"We have an appointment," he said, "with a gentleman who does not know it. I refer to Blaine Kemball. Suppose we go to see him."

The idea rather flustered Sandra. She turned to Margo and received a nod from the other girl. Outvoted two to one; Sandra decided there was no other choice.

Muffled in a short fur coat from Margo's wardrobe, Sandra accompanied her friends downstairs and entered Cranston's limousine with them.

They were nearing Kemball's apartment house when Sandra expressed her final doubt.

"Remember, Mr. Cranston," she said. "I'm going to see Kemball on your advice. But if it doesn't work out —"

"I shall be responsible."

The calm tone reassured Sandra, though she didn't realize why. She would have understood, had she known that Cranston's advice came straight from a mysterious personage who called himself The Shadow!

## CHAPTER XV. A MATTER OF HUNCHES

THERE were police outside Kemball's apartment house when the limousine arrived there, but Cranston handled them in his inimitable style. Alighting first, he introduced himself and asked if his friend, the police commissioner, had stopped by.

Mention of Weston's name was enough to keep the hearers occupied. During the interim, Margo entered the apartment house with Sandra, and Cranston joined them inside.

Brett had already amazed Kemball by returning from the dead. Seeing Sandra with the visitors who entered his apartment, the attorney was flabbergasted anew. Still, this surprise entry of a kidnap victim could be explained more readily than the previous marvel. Kemball took it with his chin in hand, his elbow on the desk in front of him.

"All right," he said. "What really happened?"

They told him, and Kemball, like Cranston, believed all the details except those that concerned The Shadow. Cranston assured him that though Margo and Sandra exaggerated the prowess of their black-clad friend, the story was reasonable. He recalled that Inspector Cardona had met The Shadow, too.

Remembering Cardona's details of Mycroft's hide-away, Kemball finally nodded.

"You are my client, Miss Brett," he said to Sandra. "Your wishes will be kept confidential. However, you will have to express them."

Puzzled, Sandra tuned to Cranston. She hoped he could suggest the next step, and he did.

"We want to know where Giles Brett is at present," said Cranston. "Perhaps you can tell us, Kemball."

"I wish I could," declared Kemball. "But I haven't an idea. Sandra remembers what his plan was. He intended to play dead, completely so, until he could expose the blackmail plot in its entirety."

"He knew about Cleeve Rayland?"

"Yes, though he didn't tell Sandra. He was afraid she would come back and look for Rayland."

Sandra smiled.

"I did come back," she said, "and I let Rayland find me. I knew that someone would be looking for me, even though I hadn't an idea who the person might be."

Cranston brought the subject back to its origin. He asked if Kemball expected to hear from Brett.

"Sooner or later," said Kemball. "He will certainly communicate with me, if he can't find Mycroft. I would say that it would be later."

"I think sooner," interposed Cranston. "The newspapers are filled with accounts of Sandra's disappearance."

"Of course!" exclaimed Kemball. "I hadn't taken that into calculation. Yes, I should hear from Brett shortly, and when he asks me about Sandra –"

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"You will tell him nothing," inserted Cranston. "You will merely insist upon knowing where you can reach him, should you receive any information."

Kemball's expression showed that he was baffled. Cranston explained that Brett might have already made some progress in his search for Mycroft; that to hinder it would be a mistake. Certainly, Brett would be all the more eager, if he thought that Sandra was still missing.

"Mycroft is still dangerous," Cranston declared. "You can't afford to put Brett's life in jeopardy, Kemball. There is also the little matter of his vindication, before he can officially return to life."

Kemball nodded his acknowledgment to those points, but Cranston's next proposition rather floored him.

"And now," said Cranston, with a gesture to the telephone, "call Fengram and invite him over here. We are going to tell him the truth about Brett."

WHATEVER his reasons for bringing Fengram into the conference, The Shadow wouldn't give them unless Kemball complied; nor would he proceed with other suggestions, as alternatives.

Kemball finally left it up to Sandra, since she was his client, and she stated that she would be guided by Cranston's decisions. Of course, Sandra was really thinking back to her meeting with The Shadow, the night before, remembering that he had advised her to co-operate with any friend that Margo might introduce.

So Kemball called Fengram, merely stating that he wished to see him privately.

Within twenty minutes, the financier arrived. He'd never met Sandra, but he had seen her photographs and thought he recognized her. Quizzically, he turned from Cranston to Kemball and saw both nod.

"Yes, this is Sandra Brett," declared Kemball. "She wasn't kidnapped after all."

"What excellent news!" Fengram exclaimed. "We must inform the police commissioner at once."

"One moment, Fengram," put in Cranston quietly. "Commissioner Weston is a friend of mine. I like to do favors for my friends without them knowing it. The best turn I could do Weston, at this moment, is to conceal the fact of Sandra's return."

"But it would be obstructing justice –"

"On the contrary, it will further it. The police expect to hear from Dana Mycroft, don't they?"

"Of course," replied Fengram. "They expect that he will call Kemball and demand a ransom –"

Fengram halted as Cranston gave a slight smile.

"A ransom for whom?" queried Cranston. "Not for Sandra, because Mycroft did not kidnap her. As matters stand, the only way to make Mycroft declare himself is to keep him believing that he is wanted for a crime he did not commit. He will try to clear himself on that score, to relieve the intensity of the hunt now in progress for him."

It was sound sense. Fengram asked whether Cranston thought that Mycroft would call Kemball, or communicate with the police directly. Cranston dismissed the question as being impossible to decide when a man with Mycroft's quirks was involved.

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He was certain about Brett, however. Brett would surely call Kemball. Fengram began to nod, saying that a man would naturally call his own lawyer; then, suddenly, Fengram's broad face went blank.

"Brett," he exclaimed. "Why, Brett is dead."

Among them, the others explained that Brett was still alive, and Fengram's face went blanker and blanker. The business of a double named Doban, the fingerprints which Sandra said The Shadow had mentioned, all sounded like a fantasy.

At last, Fengram sank heavily in his chair, convinced. Then, in a really puzzled tone, he queried:

"And when you do hear from Brett – what then?"

Kemball looked to Cranston for the answer.

"He will be worried about Sandra, of course," said Cranston, "so Kemball will let him think that she is still missing. Naturally, Brett will state where he can be reached, and will wait there. Kemball will inform us, Fengram, and we can go to see Brett, singly or together.

"The fact that such men as ourselves believe his story about Doban's death, will restore much of the confidence that Brett has lost. If he is willing to let us help him, we can relieve his worries about Sandra. She'll be available, of course, if needed."

Sandra nodded. "I'll be right here –"

SHE was to change that opinion, very promptly. There was a rap at the door, delivered by Kemball's servant. Approaching the door, Kemball asked the reason for the summons. When he heard it, he turned with a worried expression.

"Inspector Cardona is here," he said. "I should have known that he would arrive. He wants to be right on hand, in case Mycroft calls. I don't know why he came so soon, though."

"It's probably my fault," vouchsafed Cranston. "I told the police downstairs that I expected the commissioner, and they probably called Cardona, to ask him if anything special was wanted."

Sandra showed traces of alarm.

"I can't stay here!" she exclaimed. "But where shall I go? I'll want to know as soon as we hear from Dad."

"You and Margo can go with Mr. Fengram," decided Cranston. "As soon as Mr. Kemball hears from your father, he will call there. As for myself" – Cranston turned to Kemball – "you can call me at the Cobalt Club. I shall be in and out, so if I'm not there, simply leave word for me to call you back."

There was another detail to be handled – that of leaving without meeting Cardona. Cranston covered that, very simply. He went out first and found Cardona in the living room, with the two anxious-faced cops standing at the door. He beckoned them all into Kemball's kitchen, and gave them some confidential facts.

"I think the commissioner is planning a check-up," said Cranston. "A surprise visit to make sure that you're on your toes. He'll want to know who has been in and out. You can tell him, of course, that both Fengram and I were here – and add a little surprise of your own."

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"Tell him that we were negotiating for Infralux, that new light that Brett developed. With Brett dead, and his daughter kidnapped, Kemball is the only person who can sell the invention. Tell the commissioner that's the way you figured it. You'll be right."

The cops were very appreciative, but Cardona gave a worried glance toward the window as he heard a car outside. He reached the window, but couldn't see the street because a corner of the building intervened.

"It's only Fengram's car leaving," stated Cranston. He didn't add that the car was taking Sandra, too, as one of its extra passengers. "By the way, inspector, there's something I'd like to discuss with you."

Obligingly, Cardona waited until after the cops had gone back to their posts.

"It's about your hunches," said Cranston. "They've been working very well."

"I don't think so, Mr. Cranston."

"Why, what about last night?" Cranston's tone carried surprise. "Didn't you put your hand right in the hat and come out with a rabbit? I mean the way you found that hideaway where Mycroft and those blackmailers were."

"The Shadow found it," returned Cardona. "Between you and me, Mr. Cranston, I'd have gone right by it."

"But you were in the right neighborhood."

"That was only luck. Look here."

Cardona produced his map and spread it on the kitchen table. He showed Cranston the several areas where he thought Mycroft might have been. Bringing out some reports, Cardona let Cranston read them. They covered the statements of persons who thought they had seen someone like Mycroft.

"They're all alike," grumbled Cardona. "Right now, I need a hunch. I'd like to know which of those areas, if any, is the real bet. Last night, I simply took the first in line, and happened to hit."

"You've placed men in all these areas?"

"Only on the outskirts," returned Cardona. "I can't afford to scare Mycroft. Not while there's a chance he might call Kemball, demanding a ransom for the Brett girl. But that's your hunch, Mr. Cranston. Not mine."

The Shadow nodded in Cranston's idle style. But his nod didn't cover a past hunch; it referred to a present one.

READING Cardona's dope sheets, The Shadow was actually winnowing through them, noting the dates when the supposed Mycroft had been seen in certain places.

One area particularly interested him. It was an East Side neighborhood, where local folk, gifted with shrewdness, were apt to be right in their observations. They'd seen a man resembling Mycroft a few weeks ago, but not since. Probably Cardona would have laughed, had Cranston mentioned that sector as the prime choice. The Shadow did not laugh.

Margo had mentioned Mycroft's remark concerning another laboratory. Since Mycroft had no official lab, it would have to be a hidden one. His appearances in the vicinity of that hiding place would naturally have



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terminated abruptly when Mycroft went to dwell with Cleeve Rayland. When forced to rapid flight, as he had been last night, Mycroft would necessarily have headed for his old base.

It was The Shadow, not Cardona, who thus gleaned a hunch from the data at the disposal of both. With a shrug, The Shadow folded the sheets and map, giving them back to Cardona. Verbally, the casual Mr. Cranston agreed that finding Mycroft would be a job.

He meant for Cardona; not for himself. Rather than wait for Mycroft to declare himself, The Shadow hoped to find the missing inventor. The arrangements that The Shadow had made for contacting Brett, and keeping him where certain visitors could reach him, would crack one aspect of the case. By finding Mycroft and getting the inventor's full confession, the rest would fall apart.

Such a conclusion was, in itself, a hunch – one that brought a softly whispered laugh from the disguised lips of Cranston, as he started on his quest. A good hunch, too, with little chance that it would go astray.

Little chances, sometimes, prove to be the largest. It was so in this instance. For once, The Shadow did not foresee that the very strength of his conclusions could threaten total disaster to his cause!

### CHAPTER XVI. MANHATTAN MAN HUNT

WITHIN two miles of the area that The Shadow was scouring in search of Mycroft, a man muffled in an overcoat was walking with stoop-shouldered gait. Under his arm he held a newspaper, that he had bought by the simple expedient of dropping three cents on a stand outside a cigar store.

From the way the man muffled his face, he didn't want it to be seen, which was curious, considering that no one would recognize him for the person he really was. No one could mistake the living for the dead; therefore, he had little need to worry.

The man was Giles Brett.

Nevertheless, he was worried.

Reaching a basement entry, Brett unlocked it, and did the same with an inner door that led to an old storeroom. The place was squalid, furnished only with a cot and an old table that had a soap box as a prop in place of one missing leg.

There was a lamp on the table, and Brett tightened the bulb, to illuminate the windowless room with the glow of Infralux.

His face haggard, Brett scanned the newspaper. Its headlines glared with the news that Sandra was still missing. Brett's groan told that his daughter's disappearance was the great cause of his misery.

Flinging the newspaper on the cot, Brett debated briefly. Then, tightening his coat again, he left his squalid abode.

This time, he actually entered the cigar store, sidled into a telephone booth, and called Kemball. Recognizing the lawyer's voice, Brett undertoned:

"It's Brett! What have you heard about Sandra?"

There was a pause; then Kemball's voice, a bit forced. The lawyer asked:

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"Where can I reach you?"

Brett didn't want to tell him. Sharply, Kemball ended the hesitation with the words:

"Come! I can promise nothing unless I know where to find you."

In a low tone, Brett gave the address, and explained about the cellar room. Then Kemball supplied a statement that left his client rather baffled.

"Very well," said Kemball, his tone quite irked. "I shall expect another call from you, in about an hour, though I would like to see you sooner."

The connection cut off and Brett walked from the phone booth, forgetting, at first, to muffle his face. Then, making up for the deficiency, he paced back to his hovel, wondering what Kemball meant by saying he would expect another call in an hour, but would like to see Brett sooner.

At last, Brett decided that Kemball meant he'd see him within an hour, or expect another call. Kemball had a way of sometimes phrasing things backward. Maybe it was his legal mind.

There was a better explanation, sitting right in Kemball's office. The explanation was Inspector Joe Cardona.

DURING the brief telephone chat, Cardona's eyes were fixed on Kemball, and the lawyer knew why. Therefore, Kemball had embellished the call with a bit of bluff.

As soon as Kemball laid down the telephone, Cardona announced:

"That call was from Mycroft!"

Kemball nodded. It was his only choice. He couldn't say the call was from his dead client Brett.

"Too bad he wouldn't tell you his address, Kemball."

"I think he will when he calls again," declared Kemball. "That is" – the lawyer was hasty – "if he calls again. I didn't like the sudden way he hung up."

One bluff, at least, had worked. Kemball's next problem was to stage another. He suggested that they forget the telephone, since Mycroft was settled for an hour, at least. Nodding, Cardona decided to go downstairs and talk to the cops on duty.

Hardly out of the door, Cardona had a sudden hunch that Mycroft might come to Kemball's in person, instead of calling again. He thought he'd better warn the lawyer, since Mycroft was unquestionably dangerous. Cardona stepped back into the room.

"Say, Mr. Kemball –"

Joe cut short. Kemball was looking up, startled – from the telephone!

Guiltily, the lawyer clamped the phone on the stand; then, with the realization that he was discovered, he lifted it again and nervously started to dial.

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Cardona stood stolidly watching him, but didn't catch the shrewd expression that came suddenly to the lawyer's lips. He thought Kemball's fumbles with the dial were nervous ones.

Actually, Kemball was changing the call. He'd just gotten a connection with Fengram, when Cardona entered. Having cut that call, Kemball was supplying a substitute.

"Well?" queried Cardona.

"Why, hello, inspector!" exclaimed Kemball, looking up. "I'm just calling the Cobalt Club, to tell Cranston about Mycroft. I thought he could inform the commissioner and save you the trouble."

Cardona couldn't parry that one. Getting the club, Kemball asked for Cranston and found that he wasn't there. So Kemball said he would like to speak to Commissioner Weston. Finding that Weston was also absent, Kemball simply hung up the phone and shrugged.

Cardona left, but Kemball ignored the telephone: He wasn't taking any chances until he was sure that Joe hadn't stopped outside the door.

What, bothered Kemball most was the possibility that Fengram would call back to find out if the interrupted call was from Kemball. It would be bad if Fengram did, for Cardona might bob in again. Still, Kemball felt that he could swing another bluff.

As he waited, no call came. Kemball gradually relaxed, waiting the moment when he could try a call himself.

THE interrupted ringing had been heard at Fengram's. It wasn't the first call that Fengram had received since leaving Kemball's.

Half a dozen times Fengram had left the luxurious library where he was chatting with Margo and Sandra, to answer a ringing bell. Fengram always received business calls in the evening and he disposed of them all quite promptly.

This call, however, was a mystery. Fengram mentioned that fact when he returned. He'd lifted the receiver and there had been no answer. Musingly, he presumed that it might be Kemball. But he decided not to call back.

Keenly, Fengram suspected the truth: that Kemball had been forced to cut off the call because of Cardona's presence. He expressed that reason to the girls.

Very soon, the telephone summoned Fengram again, and he gave a knowing nod when he went in to answer it. He left the door ajar, as he had before, but the girls couldn't hear his voice, at first. Fengram always began his phone calls in a calm manner, but his voice boomed louder as he continued. This time, it ran true to form.

One reason was that he appeared at the door of the library, carrying the phone on its long extension cord. His hand over the mouthpiece, Fengram smiled at the tense girls and told them:

"Not Kemball yet. This is Cranston."

Then, into the telephone, Fengram queried:

"Excuse the interruption, but tell me: did you try to get me a few minutes ago?"

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The reply was evidently in the negative, for Fengram turned toward Margo and Sandra and shook his head to indicate that Cranston hadn't made the interrupted call.

Then Fengram was talking into the telephone in his heavy tone. His words carried emphatic agreement.

"I quite agree," said Fengram. "Yes, this Infralux business is responsible for the trouble. If I hadn't offered a quarter million for the invention, it wouldn't have loomed so large in everyone's mind... Yes, it did make Brett look unreasonable, his wanting so much for himself –

"Quite right. We can't go on letting people think Sandra was kidnapped, when she wasn't... Suppose I meet you over at Kemball's... No, that's right – we can't talk if the police are there... A good idea! I'll meet you in half an hour; outside, of course. If I'm delayed, it's because I'm waiting to hear from Kemball –

"Yes, I think that other call was from him... If it was, he'll call again as soon as he can. I'll tell you what he has to say, when I see you –"

Hanging up, Fengram held the telephone, expecting Kemball's ring. In the meantime, he interpreted other developments, referring to the call he had just finished.

"Cranston thinks we can crack the thing from the Infralux angle," stated Fengram. "Sandra can reappear, saying she wasn't kidnapped at all, and offer to divide the proceeds of Infralux with Mycroft. That will bring him out of hiding."

"But I can't sell Infralux," put in Sandra, "while my father is still alive."

"Of course not," acknowledged Fengram. "So part of the deal will be for Mycroft to exonerate your father in the case of Doban's death."

"But Mycroft will commit himself!"

"Not necessarily. Cranston thinks the real blame belonged to Cleeve Rayland. If such is the case, Mycroft's position may be something like your father's. I'm going to meet Cranston outside the Cobalt Club, when he gets back there, and go over these new angles."

NEW angles! To Margo, there could be only one. The Shadow must have located Dana Mycroft. Perhaps he'd decided to humor the inventor, which, considering Mycroft's crazed way, would be a plausible policy.

Proving crime against Mycroft would be difficult, lacking Cleeve and the other dead blackmailers as witnesses. Besides, Mycroft might escape conviction, on an insanity plea.

Margo decided not to bother with complexities. She knew The Shadow's way of switching plans; she remembered that such changes invariably brought results. So she let it go at that, particularly as the telephone was ringing again.

Fengram didn't have to go far to answer. The phone was right in his hands, and by then, the eager girls were at the doorway, practically listening with him when he lifted the receiver.

It was Kemball, reporting that he had heard from Brett. He gave the address where the pretended dead man was in hiding. He cut off abruptly, saying that he didn't want Cardona to discover him making the call.

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"No chance to tell him the new angle," expressed Fengram to the girls. "I'll take my car and drive over past the Cobalt Club. If I find Cranston, I'll take him along, and we can save our discussion until we see your father, Sandra."

Sandra nodded, but Margo questioned:

"What if Lamont isn't outside the club?"

"I'll go and see Brett," replied Fengram. "Kemball says he's very worried, so we ought to get there shortly. Try the Cobalt Club in half an hour, Margo, and tell them Cranston may be waiting for someone outside. If he is, you can tell him that I've gone on to see Brett, and will be waiting for him."

As soon as Fengram left, Margo tried the club, anyway, on the chance that Cranston might be inside. He wasn't, so Margo decided to wait a while. Though she didn't mention it to Sandra, Margo had a very satisfied feeling that The Shadow was about to top one triumph with another.

Through The Shadow's foresight, Giles Brett had openly revealed where he was located. But it would take The Shadow, in person, to bring Dana Mycroft back into circulation.

To Margo, the fact that Cranston wasn't at the Cobalt Club stood as perfect proof that he was progressing with his single-handed venture.

Margo was right. The Shadow, at that moment, was very close to his intended goal. But Margo didn't realize the reverse consequences that The Shadow's discovery of Mycroft might produce.

Nor did The Shadow!

### CHAPTER XVII. THE SHORT TRAIL

IT was very dark on the little roof, and the ledge, though ample, was none too wide. It was the only way to the little room among the eaves, a cubicle poked into the connecting corner of two old-fashioned houses – an architect's nightmare of the previous century.

Originally, the cubicle had belonged to the other house, which had now become the shabbiest of apartments. The Shadow had tried the other house first, only to find the final way blocked off by a solid wall.

Probably the high-perched room had been condemned as dangerous. Whatever the case, the only way to reach it was by the roof route from the other building.

There was this about Mycroft's own private hide-away, which he called his laboratory: he had chosen it too well. Had it been an ordinary room, tucked off as it was, it might have baffled an exhaustive search. But its outward construction had disclosed it immediately to The Shadow.

From the street, there was one angle right up between the buildings, that gave a perfect view of the cubicle. The crazy piece of architecture had just the appeal that a man of Mycroft's eccentricity would relish.

In approaching the roof dwelling, The Shadow was gaining absolute evidence that it belonged to Mycroft. The Shadow's sense of smell was his guide.

Though not a chink of light, nor the slightest sound, filtered out from the shuttered window, the odor of Mycroft's inevitable chemicals were apparent. He was back at his experiments, and he didn't have Tilroy as a

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bottle-washer to keep down the aroma.

Up the short slope to Mycroft's window, The Shadow inserted the muzzle of an automatic between the down-tilted slats of one shutter. He levered the slats upward, for they were all connected.

Silent, at first, was The Shadow's action; then it did not matter. He saw Mycroft in the tiny room, at a workbench opposite, distributing the contents of a beaker into test tubes that were set in a rack.

Had Mycroft turned at the sound of the shutter's rattle, he would have seen the muzzle of an automatic covering him and heard The Shadow's commanding voice assuring him that resistance would prove folly.

However, noting that Mycroft hadn't heard the noise, The Shadow proceeded farther.

He gripped the other half of the shutter, drew it open, and produced a gun with his other hand, before cloaking the first. Easier than transferring a gun from one hand to the other, and a better process, considering that Mycroft might have turned at the moment of the transfer.

Since Mycroft didn't turn, The Shadow opened the original half of the shutter and squeezed into the room.

There was another window, in the far corner, lower and larger than the one The Shadow entered. It had a drawn blind, and might prove to be another exit. So The Shadow moved across to it, partly to cover it, partly to get a better angle at Mycroft.

As The Shadow placed himself, Mycroft turned.

The effect of The Shadow watching him in silence was more overwhelming to Mycroft than if he had heard a challenging whisper. The inventor paused in his work and let both hands slide upward, while his opening mouth assumed the shape of a balanced egg.

"We meet again, Mycroft." The Shadow's tone was whispered, but lacked a sinister touch. "We have certain matters to discuss, that we postponed the previous time."

So far, The Shadow was proceeding in the manner that Margo had assumed he would use with a man like Mycroft. Certainly, the inventor was a composite individual, whose feud with Brett was based upon what Mycroft considered his rights.

Whether Mycroft had hatched the blackmail scheme himself, or simply let Rayland handle it, was a question. Only one of several questions that The Shadow intended to put.

It was difficult, however, to deal with Mycroft on any terms, including, probably, those of his own making. This situation certainly wasn't one that Mycroft wanted. His expression – craft mingled with anger – proved that he would try any trick that might occur to his eccentric mind.

The first thing that Mycroft tried was a slump, which he accompanied with a pitiful wince.

The Shadow saw that Mycroft's sag was taking one withery hand beneath the workbench. Anticipating one of the inventor's very effective bombs, The Shadow stopped him with a gesture of the automatic. Then, with a glide so swift that Mycroft had hardly time to jerk away, The Shadow was between the inventor and the workbench, plucking the black object that Mycroft had tried to reach.

The black object was a telephone.

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Mycroft cackled happily, as though he had scored a triumph over The Shadow.

"Fooled you, Shadow!" he clucked. "Once again, I fooled you! Would you like to find my nest egg, the bomb that I have here? It's ready to hatch, if you wish. Over there!"

Starting to point to one corner, where there were several boxes, Mycroft cannily changed direction and indicated a corner where boxes were few. The Shadow wasn't particularly interested in the bomb question. Rather, he noted the feint that Mycroft made.

The inventor was shifting toward a window, and it happened to be the one that The Shadow had used. Mycroft was giving away the fact that it was his only exit.

As long as Mycroft held hope, he would display defiance. The Shadow knew, because he had dealt with those of this ilk before. So The Shadow moved along with Mycroft, his glide so easy that the inventor didn't recognize its purpose until he found himself half turned about, staring at the cloaked visitor between himself and the exit window!

It was quite a shock to Mycroft. He looked actually ready to wilt. Then, with the effect of an electric shock, his defiance returned on a grandiose scale. Tilting his head back, Mycroft laughed long and happily. Out of his mirth came words.

"So you hold me helpless!" Mycroft's merriment increased. "I am a man without friends. You think so, don't you, Mr. Shadow?"

The Shadow's own thought was more important than Mycroft's words. The Shadow's thought was this:

Why had Mycroft chosen this particular moment to change his tune?

Mycroft's manner became convulsive. It was a minute before he could stave his mirth and speak again.

"You were sure," continued the inventor, "that you had wiped out all my friends when you disposed of Cleeve and his band. Weren't you?"

Again, The Shadow's own thought welled up in his mind:

Why was Mycroft stalling with his laugh?

"You think I wonder how you found me here," rasped Mycroft, "as though I supposed that this place could never be discovered. I discovered it myself, did I not? Therefore, I knew that another could do the same. My security lay in my choice of neighborhood, not in the selection of this dwelling.

"Once near, seeking my whereabouts, you would logically find me. You, my foe, were lucky to be in this vicinity. But a friend would approach only at my request –"

THIS time, The Shadow's mental flash was a burst of interruption. Previous questions, like new ones, were answered all at once. The Shadow's back was to the window; that was why Mycroft changed tune.

The inventor was stalling because he expected a friend. In turn, that friend would be looking for the cubicle from the one spot on the street where it was visible. He would be waiting to receive a signal from Mycroft.

As a signal, Mycroft would show him The Shadow!

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The window was open, as The Shadow had left it. Like a weird banner, The Shadow's cloaked figure was visible, a perfect target from that spot across the street. But that was not all.

Coupled with his intuition, The Shadow had the amazing faculty of projecting his attention to remote spots, even when things close by were trying to divert him to the full.

Instinctive, that ability. It proved its worth at this vital moment. The Shadow's thoughts were drowning Mycroft's chatter; and those concentrated thoughts were focused on the place in mind. As distinctly as though he had been down across the street, The Shadow heard the sound that carried up from that particular spot.

It was the smooth purr of a motor, cut to the idling pitch that denoted a pausing car!

Instantly, The Shadow gave himself a long, forward pitch – not in Mycroft's direction, for the inventor was boxed in a corner, but in a straight line from the window, almost to the workbench where Mycroft kept the telephone.

The sharp report that sounded from the street seemed timed to The Shadow's dive, but it actually came after the black-cloaked fighter had begun his fling.

With the report came a sizzling whine from a revolver bullet that skimmed the window sill, sliced the rear brim of The Shadow's slouch hat and buried itself deep in the ceiling.

A well-aimed shot, supplied with all the venom that the distant marksman could provide, but too late to find The Shadow, whose inspired lurch, made with the speed of thought, could not be overtaken by the fastest trigger finger!

High glee told that Mycroft believed the shot had clipped The Shadow; unless sure the cloaked fighter had been wounded, the inventor wouldn't have used the measures he did. The Shadow was down, and Mycroft thought he could keep him there.

Grabbing things as he found them, he flung the objects at The Shadow: chairs, workbench, even lamps containing bulbs of Mycroft's cherished Infralux.

Coming to his feet, The Shadow was dodging the flying things, unable to insert an accurate shot had he wanted. He preferred to cut through the flying barrage and take Mycroft alive.

He was cutting the inventor off from the window; at the same time, The Shadow was keeping clear of that dangerous frame, where his reappearance would produce another revolver shot.

It was a question of putting Mycroft in a corner, and The Shadow recalled the secondary incident, wherein Mycroft had hesitated before pointing to the corner where he claimed his bomb was stored. He'd pointed to the many boxes first; then to the few. So The Shadow made a long, cross dash and twisted about.

Driven to a frantic dive, Mycroft landed on hands and knees in the corner that held the few boxes.

Like the lashing head of a poisonous snake, Mycroft's hand swooped among the boxes and whipped out again.

It held the bomb!



## THE BLACKMAIL KING

Wilder than ever rang the crazy laugh. Mycroft had really fooled The Shadow! He'd pointed out the place where he kept the bomb, confident that The Shadow would not believe that it was there.

WAGGING the bomb as an antidote to The Shadow's gun, Mycroft was dancing to the window. He spun as he reached it, slapped his free hand upon the sill and made an agile vault out to the slope.

As he disappeared, Mycroft flipped the bomb back over the sill – so short a toss, that even with a headlong slide, The Shadow, a dozen feet away, could not have caught the missile that was dropping in the room.

The Shadow did not try to catch it. As Mycroft slid from sight, The Shadow was diving the other way, toward a window of his own, the shaded one in the far corner of the room. He took it, shoulder first, cleaving the sash ahead of him, not caring what lay beyond or below.

The bomb's burst drowned the echoes of the shattering sash and the clatter of its glass. The concussion gushed flame from the window with a roaring drive that seemed to hurl The Shadow ahead of them.

In the redness that momentarily banished the night, he was a flying shape that looked destined for an endless trip down into engulfing darkness.

In fact, darkness did swallow The Shadow, and as its shroud received him, he struck. Though short, the fall was numbing, but he managed to clutch a strip of metal and save himself from a backward roll into a deeper pit. Then, in the dimness about him, The Shadow made out where he was.

His surge through the air had carried him across a narrow courtyard well, not much wider than an air shaft. He had struck on the edge of a long, sloping gable belonging to the next door house. This edge was nearly a floor below Mycroft's cubicle, and another oddity of architecture that someone must have strained hard to create.

Perhaps the architect had possessed the gift of prophecy. Certainly, this awkward gable could only have served one sensible purpose in its whole decadent history – that of receiving a fugitive from an explosion that was to happen fifty years after the house had been built!

Getting back from the gable wasn't difficult; not after The Shadow had tested the rain gutter and found it secure enough. These peculiar-designed roofs ran into each other at several places.

Within a few minutes, The Shadow was approaching Mycroft's cubicle, to find it a complete wreck.

The window was gone, and half the wall with it, which made entry quite simple. Crossing to the other window, The Shadow found it in the same state. Through the smoke that obscured him, he saw the twinkle of taillights making for the corner.

Catlike, Mycroft had found his own ledge and descended to join his friend below. Together, they were making another getaway.

Only one thing in the room was intact. The telephone, resting on the floor, had been buried by debris, but was uninjured. Plucking it from where it lay, The Shadow dialed Kemball's number. He heard the lawyer's voice, nervous, hesitant.

"You've heard from Brett!" The Shadow spoke in Cranston's tone. "Come, Kemball. Give me his address."

"I... I can't –"

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

"It's imperative!" Cranston's voice would brook no argument. "Mycroft is on the loose! I must reach Brett!"

"Mycroft!"

In uttering the name, Kemball loosed his own tongue. He babbled Brett's secret address without stating whose it was. Over the phone, The Shadow heard another voice: Cardona's.

"So it's Mycroft," Joe was saying, "and you've just told somebody where to find him. I'll handle this from now on, Kemball!"

The Shadow hung up and turned to the outer window. His black-cloaked figure weaved through smoke of grimy gray and blended with the blackness of the ledge that gave him a route below.

As The Shadow faded, his laugh trailed back, to linger amid the ruins of Mycroft's cubicle – a token that The Shadow was still on the trail of the man who had dwelt in that singular abode!

### CHAPTER XVIII. DEATH INTERVENES

HOMER FENGRAM tried the door of Brett's basement and found it unlocked. He groped his way to the storeroom and knocked cautiously. Brett's voice responded, strained:

"It's you, Kemball?"

"It's Fengram. Don't worry. Kemball sent me here. I'll tell you all about it."

The name "Fengram" was a password in itself. Anyone wanting to buy Infralux as badly as he did, could certainly be trusted by the owner of the invention. Admitting Fengram, Brett shook hands eagerly and said:

"I'd have called you long before this, Fengram, but I thought I ought to talk to Kemball first. That was impossible, since I was keeping away from Kemball until I could find Mycroft."

Fengram gave an understanding nod.

"And how have you been faring, Brett?"

"In my hunt for Mycroft?" Brett shook his head. "Horribly! I've been wondering whether he would find me first. The fellow prowls like a cat, and is as dangerous as a snake! Mycroft is one man, at least, who knows that I'm alive. He is also one who wishes I were really dead, and would do his best to fulfill the wish."

"Mycroft can never find you here, Brett."

With that assurance, Fengram motioned Brett to the cot, where Brett sat down, obviously relieved at having company. Fengram closed the door; but did not lock it. Brett queried eagerly:

"Kemball is coming?"

"No," replied Fengram. "I am expecting Lamont Cranston. The man who came with me to your office the day you killed Doban."

Suspicion started to Brett's eyes when Fengram mentioned a comparative stranger such as Cranston. With the reference to Doban, the expression changed to a wince. Warily, Brett leaned back against the wall.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

"I'll have to face it, Fengram," said Brett, "so it doesn't matter who comes here. I'm willing to tell the truth about Doban. Kemball believed me; you've believed me."

"Kemball is your attorney and I am your friend," returned Fengram. "A jury might doubt you. Cleeve Rayland and others of his crowd are dead; they cannot be questioned as witnesses."

Remembering his own set-to with Doban, Brett nodded. The case had certainly narrowed down.

"It all depends on Mycroft," admitted Brett. Then, his worried air returning: "And Mycroft has Sandra a prisoner. What of that, Fengram? Has Kemball heard from Mycroft?"

Fengram shook his head.

"Sandra is safe –"

"What makes you think that, Fengram?"

It was necessary for Fengram to hesitate before answering the question. He couldn't say that Sandra was safe, at his own home. Cranston had warned against such policy. Fengram knew, too, from Brett's mood, that the living dead man would lose interest in his own case if he heard his daughter was no longer in jeopardy.

"Mycroft cannot afford to injure Sandra," decided Fengram sagely. "He wants to make terms with you, Brett, and she is the only means. Suppose you made it public that you would deal openly with Mycroft; giving him a proper share – according to his ideas – in the profits from Infralux."

"I'd do it," agreed Brett. "Look at the plight I'm in. Technically, I've lost my own life" – his tone was bitter – "and I've placed Sandra at the mercy of a fanatic. I intended to develop Infralux myself, but it would be folly to attempt it. If your offer still stands, I'll take it, and give half the payment to Mycroft."

"He couldn't doubt me after that, and with the cash at hand, he'd be a bigger fool than he is, if he refused. If I tried to go ahead with Infralux, I'd have Mycroft on my neck all the time. But how can we arrange the transaction, Fengram, if I am dead?"

Fengram smiled, as he drew the contracts from his pocket. He laid them on the battered table.

"Sign these," said Fengram. "I shall deliver them to Kemball. He will have them witnessed by certain persons. They will be dated back before your supposed death. You can still remain out of sight, until matters clear."

THE contracts covered the sale of Infralux to Fengram for the stipulated sum of \$250,000. Fengram produced another sheet of paper – a typewritten order for Kemball to deliver an unspecified amount to Mycroft, in return for all services.

Brett signed the sales contracts in duplicate. In the order, he inserted the sum to be paid to Mycroft: \$125,000. He signed the order, also, and gave a serene smile.

"Those services of Mycroft's," chuckled Brett, "will include delivery of all the trumped-up evidence against me, with sworn testimony regarding the blackmail scheme. Mycroft can easily protect himself; Kemball will show him how. He can blame it all on Rayland, and I am willing to support such facts."

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

Nodding, Fengram produced the certified check for a quarter million dollars. It, too, was dated in the past. Brett indorsed it and was about to give it back to Fengram, when the latter shook his head.

"Why not keep it, Brett?" he inquired. "Along with the order for Kemball to pay Mycroft. You may be able to see Kemball shortly; if not, you can mail the check and the order to him. They are yours, Brett, not mine."

"You will see Kemball earlier," Brett replied. "I'd rather have you deliver them –"

There were footsteps from the passage. Brett halted, alarmed. Fengram gave a reassuring smile.

"It's Cranston," he said. "Excellent! We can have him sign these papers as a witness."

The door opened – but it wasn't Cranston who appeared. Brett's gaze froze, half with doubt, half with alarm, at sight of Dana Mycroft. As shabby and eccentric as ever, Mycroft had a dangerous, unreasonable look. Leaving the papers in Brett's hand, Fengram stepped forward, inserting his portly form as a buffer.

"Come, Mycroft," he began. "This meeting is in your interest –" Mycroft tugged a hand from his coat pocket and jostled Fengram aside. Whipping his other hand into sight, he produced a revolver and brandished it in Brett's direction.

"So I've found you, Brett!" sneered Mycroft. "Playing dead, sending others to trick me and trap me! First a girl, who pretended she was your daughter; then a man who called himself The Shadow. And now I find you here with Fengram. Are you conspiring with him, too? Or are you duping him as you did me?"

"We're conspiring to give you a half share an Infralux," retorted Brett. "And as for duping Fengram, I'm simply selling him the invention for the price he offered. He has the contracts – and here is the certified check, with an order authorizing payment of your share."

With a quick approach, Mycroft snatched the check and the other paper from Brett's hand. His cackly laugh was long. Brett was moving forward in an indignant manner.

"You give me half!" jeered Mycroft. "I shall take all, because of the trouble you caused me! You can do with nothing, Brett. You are dead! Do your hear? Dead! Try to dispute me, and I shall make you so in fact!"

MYCROFT was pressing the gun toward Brett, expecting his rival to sink back to the cot; but Brett did nothing of the sort. He had demonstrated his contempt for guns in Doban's case, and the menace of this moment caused him to perform true to style.

With a hand thrust toward the papers, which caused Mycroft to twist away, Brett suddenly changed direction and grabbed for the gun instead. Then Brett, rangy and powerful, was pressing the scrawny inventor back across the room, while Mycroft, wiry and agile, was trying to wrest his gun hand free.

Fengram was springing into it, bellowing for both to quit their folly. He was reaching to his pocket for a gun, but hadn't pulled his hand out when he was caught in the struggle. Fengram's bulk forced the others to a corner; there, Brett gained the grip he wanted: the same that he had used with Doban.

Mycroft's squirms failed. He went down to one knee, turning his face upward with a venomous glare. Brett's hand was performing swift torture, forcing Mycroft's gun straight up toward the man's bent chest. Mycroft, at least, was able to jerk to one side, lunging against Fengram.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

It looked as though Mycroft might get free, and Brett was swinging in to clamp him with his other hand, when the thing happened.

A shot sounded, dully, muffled by Mycroft's chest. The inventor slumped; as Brett halted, horrified, relaxing his hold, it was Fengram who caught the scrawny, staggering figure. Brett heard the thud as the death gun hit the floor; saw Fengram guiding Mycroft across the room, toward the cot.

There, Mycroft became a dead weight that carried Fengram downward. With a shake of his head, Fengram rose and turned to Brett, whose eyes were fixed upon the glittering weapon that lay smoking upon the floor.

"It happened like it did with Doban," said Brett slowly. "You saw it, Fengram."

"I saw it."

Brett looked across the room, noted Mycroft's sprawled position on the cot. Brett hesitated; then asked:

"Is he dead?"

Fengram nodded. A heavy silence seemed to cloud the room. Again, death had intervened in the affairs of Giles Brett, to bury him still deeper in the grave that was supposedly his, but which he had never occupied!

### CHAPTER XIX. FACTS REVEALED

HOMER FENGRAM remained quite cool. He picked up the gun and wiped it with a handkerchief, remarking that it might have Brett's fingerprints upon it. Then, holding the gun barrel with the cloth, Fengram approached Mycroft's body and pressed the handle of the weapon into the clutch of the dead man's scrawny hand.

Giles Brett gasped the question: "What are you doing, Fengram?"

"Making it look like what it was," replied Fengram. "A case of suicide."

"But... but it wasn't exactly suicide."

"Your death was, Brett," returned Fengram. "By your death, I mean Doban's."

A sudden hope flickered in Brett's eyes.

"You mean... they'll think that Mycroft –"

"Yes," said Fengram. "They will suppose that he committed suicide, and that this was his hide-out. The police have been looking for Mycroft. He's wanted – remember?"

Alarm shot to Brett's face.

"Sandra!" he exclaimed. "Only Mycroft could tell us where she is!"

"Mycroft didn't kidnap Sandra," spoke Fengram. "You heard what he said. I've been trying to tell you that; Sandra is safe, but I wasn't at liberty to give you the details, just yet."

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

With that start, Fengram had no other course but to give the details. He told how Cranston had suggested that they keep Mycroft guessing. Brett saw the purpose clearly enough, but he realized how it could have influenced Mycroft.

"No wonder Mycroft was desperate," said Brett musingly. "He must have gone the limit to find me tonight. Still" – he shook his head – "Doban was desperate, too."

"If you had only gone a little slower, Brett," reproved Fengram. "Or if I had been a trifle faster! I tried to get my gun out" – he tapped his pocket – "but I didn't have time. I think that I could have cowed Mycroft."

"Yes, it's too bad this thing happened. People ought to believe that the same thing would happen twice over –"

"But they won't, Brett. You must face the situation. You will have to remain dead permanently."

Brett gave a shrug. He'd practically resigned himself to such a future. Mycroft's death simply was the deciding factor. On the floor, Brett found the check and the order to Kemball. He handed the check to Fengram, and said simply:

"Give this to Sandra."

Then, about to tear up the order, Brett handed it to Fengram, too.

"I'd like her to see this when you tell her the story, Fengram. She will know that I tried to deal fairly with Mycroft. She can give his share to charity, if she wishes. Leave it up to her."

Fengram nodded. The hush had deepened in this room of death. Seemingly, gloom had filtered in from the half-opened door, to dull the glow of the Infralux lamp that shone from the old table. The pall worried Brett, and he showed it.

"Suppose this doesn't stand as suicide?" asked Brett. "What then?"

"You'll have to meet that problem, if it comes," replied Fengram.

"It won't be my problem," argued Brett. "I'm dead. But if anyone saw you come here this evening, you'll have a lot to explain."

FENGRAM'S face went worried in its turn, and Brett's burden lightened. Going to the table, Brett wrote several lines on a sheet of paper and handed it to Fengram.

"That covers it," declared Brett. "The simple statement that I killed Mycroft in self-defense. Produce it, if you are questioned. I'll see that you can reach me, wherever I am."

"And where will that be?"

Brett shrugged. He hadn't the least idea. His worry was returning, and Fengram promptly curbed it. He told Brett to take his car, which was parked outside, and drive to a New Jersey airport, where Fengram always kept a plane.

"I'll phone the pilot," said Fengram, "and tell him to expect a friend of mine. You can hop to some Caribbean country, Brett, and get these worries off your chest. Sandra can come there and see you, later."

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

Brett brightened, though the room seemed duller, as he was turning toward the door. He wondered what had happened to the Infralux, and Fengram evidently had the same thought, for they both turned together.

A whispered laugh greeted them, and, for the moment, both were transfixed. They thought the strange tone had come from the dead man, Mycroft!

Their eyes dispelled the illusion that had tricked their ears. The dimming of the light was explained. Unheard, a figure had entered this room while the two men were engaged in their discussion of Brett's future. The figure had moved toward Mycroft's body; then turned in the direction of the table.

The intruder was cloaked in black. His sleeve had intervened in front of the Infralux lamp, which was shining dimly through it.

To Brett, the arrival of this living specter was a thing horrendous. But Brett, now used to playing dead, wasn't the sort who could believe in ghosts. He made a sudden lunge for the being in black, before Fengram could halt him.

Fengram blurted:

"It's The Shadow! He is our friend!"

The words didn't carry weight with Brett. He'd heard of The Shadow from Mycroft, among the other accusations that the inventor had flung. Moreover, The Shadow was aiming a gun in Brett's direction, and it produced the inevitable result.

Daring and hot-headed at sight of a menacing weapon, Brett showed that sad experience had not cured him of the habit that had twice meant death to other men.

He lunged for The Shadow and gripped the automatic. Brett threw the old trick hold and The Shadow partially sagged to the floor. His laugh had a tone of understanding, that Fengram recognized, though Brett didn't.

Arriving too late to witness Mycroft's death, The Shadow had heard it described as the duplicate of Doban's. He wanted to test the powerful way in which Brett handled men who threatened him.

Half the test was sufficient. It convinced The Shadow. The half finished, The Shadow replied with reverse pressure that carried a twist quite new to Brett.

Stopped halfway, Brett took a sideward sprawl and rolled over on the floor. The Shadow still held the automatic and was moving it, gesturing for Brett to rise. Weakly, Brett came to his feet. He remembered Fengram's voicing that The Shadow was a friend.

"You've heard it all," said Brett, facing the burn of eyes beneath the hat brim. "Everything is true. The evidence is against me; that's why I want to leave the country."

Fengram put in a plea for Brett. He began:

"There is no other way –"

THE SHADOW'S strange laugh silenced Fengram. Like Brett, the portly man stood awed. They waited during a few minutes that seemed unending time. They were still wondering, when footsteps approached

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

outside the door.

They wondered, because they didn't hear the sound, although The Shadow did. His laugh drowned the noise of the approach. It was like a welcome.

The man who heard it, heeded it.

As the door swung open, The Shadow gestured. Brett and Fengram turned around to meet Inspector Cardona. He had two detectives with him; they stopped short in the doorway, amazed by the strange scene, but Cardona advanced.

Noting a turn of The Shadow's head, Cardona looked to the cot and saw Mycroft's body. Stooping above it, Cardona gave a knowing nod.

"Suicide!"

The Shadow's laugh throbbed. Cardona looked up startled; for the first time, he saw Brett's face clearly. Sight of a dead man, alive and active, actually made Joe quail, even though The Shadow, who, in Cardona's opinion, feared neither the living nor the dead, was standing in full control.

Gradually, the truth struck home to Cardona; but he didn't have to start a quiz.

Voluntarily, Brett poured out his story, the ring of conviction in it. The Doban instance struck Cardona as clear-cut, provided Brett could produce some further proof of the blackmail attempt. The fact that Cleeve Rayland, blackmailer de luxe, had shown his hand so plainly, later, was a great help to Brett's cause.

But when the story turned to Mycroft, Cardona's doubts were plain.

Hunches or no hunches, tests or no tests – when the same type of death was repeated, the accident factor vanished. It would never pass as self-defense. A smart prosecutor could maintain that Brett's first experience, with Doban, had given him the idea of turning his tricky self-defense into a means of murder.

Cardona plucked the death gun from Mycroft's dead hand. He swung to Brett:

"This was Mycroft's gun?"

Brett nodded.

"You have one of your own?"

"No," said Brett. "I have no gun. Fengram brought one, but had no time to draw it before Mycroft entered."

Fengram produced the gun, remarking that he had a permit to carry it. He was about to hand back the revolver, when The Shadow commented:

"I would examine the chambers, inspector."

Thinking The Shadow meant the death gun, Cardona cracked it open, to find that two shells had been fired. He was puzzled over the fact, when he heard The Shadow's low laugh and the statement:

"The other gun, inspector."



Cardona opened Fengram's gun, then shrugged:

"It isn't even loaded," said Cardona. "But this gun that Mycroft carried has two bullets missing. He must have fired a shot earlier."

"Are you sure, inspector, that the gun belonged to Mycroft –"

The Shadow did not complete the statement. At that moment, Fengram made a grab. Ignoring the empty gun that he said was his, Fengram snatched the one that supposedly belonged to Mycroft. He was slapping it shut, wheeling toward the door, when The Shadow's laugh halted him where he was.

The burn of eyes above the leveled muzzle of an automatic were a threat that could not be ignored. The partly loaded revolver dangling from his fingers, Fengram tilted into the clutches of Cardona's two detectives.

Like a prisoner before a bar of justice, Homer Fengram was awaiting the verdict of The Shadow!

### CHAPTER XX. THE FINAL EVIDENCE

THE SHADOW was summing up a strange case, the most amazing that his listeners had ever heard – a story which, if true, cleared Giles Brett of everything except the death of his double, Doban, and exonerated him in that instance.

The basic facts were already known. A group of blackmailers, handling thuggery as a side line, had been operating under Cleeve Rayland, with Brett as their hapless target. Reputedly, Dana Mycroft had inspired them; but that was the point The Shadow disputed.

It made sense to Cardona. Mycroft had impressed him as eccentric enough to be more of a dupe than a master mind. Joe hoped that The Shadow could add the convincers, which The Shadow did. His facts were largely circumstantial, but they pyramided to a higher peak.

"By a curious coincidence," declared The Shadow, his sinister whisper matched by the accusation in his eyes, "the blackmail scheme that culminated in Doban's visit was scheduled just ahead of your trip to Brett's office, Fengram.

"Only a coincidence, you would say" – The Shadow's gesture halted Fengram's objection – "but there were other facts with it, that seemed unimportant at the time. Though the business was confidential, you had let it slip out. You delayed your visit to Brett's on the pretext that he had not returned from Washington.

"Finally, Fengram, you gave the impression that Brett wanted to sell you Infralux, whereas he did not intend to dispose of the invention. But he would have, willingly, had he not tangled with Doban.

"Your friend Cranston" – The Shadow spoke dryly, but impersonally – "would have witnessed a very prompt transaction between you and Brett, had matters worked as intended."

Disregarding Fengram's contemptuous stare, The Shadow proceeded. He described Mycroft's part; how the inventor had tried to deal directly with Brett.

Later, believing Brett dead, Mycroft had been willing that his friends, like Cleeve, seize Sandra and make her come to terms; for it was a direct system, too. At no time had Cleeve taken orders from Mycroft; nor had he told the inventor about Doban.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

The scene in the first hide-away was the crux.

There, Mycroft had mentioned an "unnecessary bomb" that he had taken to Brett's: a plain inference that he believed Brett to be dead. Three times, during the hectic scene, the telephone bell had rung, but not for Mycroft. It was Cleeve, dying, who had eventually answered it and warned the caller off.

That call had been a message to the blackmail crew, telling them that the police were on their way. It could only have been made by someone who knew where the search was to be. Fengram was such a man.

That statement from The Shadow rang home to Cardona. He remembered that he had shown his map to Fengram just before Ferdy Brythe was banished to the wine cellar. This was circumstantial evidence, narrowed to a sharp, prodding point. Looking at Fengram, Cardona saw the accused man wince.

With blackmailers dead, and Mycroft in hiding, Fengram's game had struck a snag. One, however, that left him quite secure, with Brett still in an unenviable plight. Still, Fengram hoped that he could buy Infralux from Brett, and regain the full purchase price as his own.

He no longer had Cleeve as a go-between; but if he could swing the game himself, there would be no payments for services, nor any witnesses to ever give the game away.

"I found a way to make you show your hand, Fengram," declared The Shadow. "Through others, I arranged that Sandra should remain kidnapped; and that even Brett should not be told. You were brought into the conference and a perfect opportunity given you to be the first to visit Brett, when he was heard from. Sandra was intrusted to you, to encourage further your coming action.

"Your course was obvious. You could come here and lay your cards out plain, telling Brett that you – not Mycroft held his daughter as a hostage. Brett's status as a dead man made him helpless. Only you could have granted him return to life, along with Sandra's freedom. Brett would have signed over Infralux without question."

Fengram threw a look at Brett, as though to say it hadn't happened that way and therefore must be a false assumption on The Shadow's part. But Brett's expressive glare gave Fengram no encouragement. Again, The Shadow laughed.

"One thing alone could have changed your scheme, Brett," affirmed The Shadow. "Almost at the final hour, you heard from Mycroft. He thought you were the man who could help him with his problem: that of being hunted for a kidnapping that had not been committed."

THE SHADOW had scored a perfect hit. Had Margo and Sandra been present, they could have poured out testimony that they were to give later. That call which Fengram said came from Cranston was actually Mycroft's call. After a few preliminaries, Fengram had raised his voice and done some excellent fakery. He was to meet Mycroft outside the cubicle hide-away; not Cranston outside the Cobalt Club.

"I reached Mycroft's first," declared The Shadow. "You spotted me at the window and fired, which accounts for the first bullet missing from the gun now weighing heavily on your fingers. Mycroft bombed the place and then joined you, reporting that I was dead. But I saw your car when it left – the same car that is outside this place at present!"

Fengram's fingers were twitching on the death gun. One of the detectives noticed the weapon and took it from him.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

"By then," continued The Shadow, "you and Mycroft were comrades in crime. Your new, and far more clever, scheme looked sure. You gave Mycroft an empty gun and told him to wait until you had made a deal with Brett. He was then to enter and demand all for himself. You promised him all, very probably, on the ground that you considered him the real owner of Infralux.

"Mycroft ran to form, and so did Brett. He pulled the same trick that he did with Doban. You joined the fray, and with your loaded gun fired the second bullet, Fengram, just before I arrived.

"I saw you flip the death gun to the floor, and pluck away the empty when you dragged Mycroft to the cot. You shoved the empty back into your pocket while you were turned away from Brett."

The whole story fitted, and with it was The Shadow's claim as actual witness to the aftermath of murder. One final touch was needed. The Shadow supplied it.

"Your next step was to be simplicity itself," The Shadow told Fengram. "With Brett fully duped, and self-banished, you had only to show Sandra his confession regarding Mycroft's death. You wouldn't have had to threaten her into returning the tainted money.

"The charity suggestion was perfect. She would have given you all, not just Mycroft's half, and left the donation to your good self. It would have gone to a charity named Homer Fengram, the man who begrudged the excess profits that the government would not let him keep.

"You knew that Infralux was worth the quarter million you offered, and more. Still, you wanted a quarter million in cash. There was your motive, Fengram – the greatest motive that causes fools to think they can make crime pay: the motive of greed!"

Fengram still was greedy; not for the cash he could no longer get, but for the freedom that would enable him to travel far and live in luxury on other sums at his disposal. The method he used to attempt that freedom was sudden and desperate, yet effective.

Wrenching back between the detectives, he twisted through the doorway. Foolishly, they clung to him, frustrating The Shadow's aim.

Breaking loose in the passage, Fengram managed to grab the death gun as he fled. The Shadow led the pursuit, only to find it blocked when Fengram passed the outer door and flung the clamp on the old boardings. By the time The Shadow smashed through, Fengram's car was gone.

Moe's cab was in the offing. The Shadow sprang into it and sped away. Hurrying to a police car with Cardona, Brett told about the plane that Fengram had waiting in New Jersey. Cardona ordered a detective to phone ahead, while they took to the chase.

PROBABLY Fengram knew where they would go. He didn't head for the airport; instead, he arrived at his own great mansion. Easing from his car, he entered normally, so as not to attract attention outside.

Upstairs, Fengram found Sandra waiting in the library. He gave her a broad smile.

Stepping into the office, Fengram opened a large safe. He heard Sandra calling from the door, asking if he had found her father. Fengram called back that he had. He said all was well; that Brett wanted him to bring some papers.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

From the safe, Fengram took a satchel, loaded it with bundles of cash and a packet of envelopes. Coming out, he drew his revolver. A smile writhed his lips, as he declared:

"And now, Sandra –"

The girl stared at the gun muzzle. Vindictive to the last, Fengram was prepared to murder the girl, that Brett might find no joy in exoneration.

But there were other gun muzzles in the picture, nudging Fengram from each side. Margo Lane held one; she had been hidden in the office, watching Fengram. Harry Vincent gripped the other, having arrived from outside at Margo's call.

Like Cardona, The Shadow had phoned ahead, but to the right place.

Sandra sprang away before Fengram could lose his surprise. Remembering his previous break, the murderer tried another. He sprang away from the muzzles that pressed him. Twisting across the library, he was shooting back wildly, bellowing for his servants to aid him.

Harry and Margo clipped him, but their shots didn't stop him. They saw Fengram reach the grand stairway and start down; they couldn't follow, for servants intercepted them.

Catching himself on the head of the stairs, Fengram waved the gun in one hand and clutched the precious satchel in the other. He was booming a sarcastic farewell, when an interruption voiced from below. Shakily, Fengram halted, and aimed for the dread sound. He saw blackness, but there was too much of it in the dim lower hall.

Fengram couldn't shoot a living laugh – which, at the moment, was the sole token of The Shadow. Fengram tried, with his last bullet, and failed. As his gun spoke, another blasted from below. Its fiery tongue was far wide of the spot where Fengram aimed.

Jolted by The Shadow's shot, Fengram reared to full height, still gripping his gun in a posture that looked defiant. From the front door came a deluge of bullets, dispatched by entering men in uniform. Fengram took that hail; his hands lost their hold on gun and satchel.

With a long series of awkward bounces, Fengram reached the bottom of the stairs, to flatten, dead, at the feet of Commissioner Weston, who had entered with the police squad. Weston, too, had heard from The Shadow.

So did Sandra. From the library door, she saw the black-cloaked figure that ascended the stairway with rapid stride. Plucking Fengram's satchel, The Shadow opened it, and handed the girl the packet of envelopes that lay above the money.

In Sandra's hands lay all the blackmail papers, from facts to photographs, that constituted the threat against her father.

Turned over to Giles Brett, they would serve in his favor, not as evidence against him, now that crime's truth was proclaimed. Those pictures of Doban's would justify Brett's claim of self-defense in the death of a man engaged in crime.

Eyes dimmed with grateful tears, Sandra Brett looked for The Shadow. Perhaps the teary blur was why he disappeared so suddenly. All that Sandra saw was the waver of curtains hanging from a doorway leading outside to a porch.

## THE BLACKMAIL KING

Those curtains seemed to clutch and hold the laugh that floated back, as though loath to relinquish the farewell mirth of The Shadow. Echoes, as they faded, carried a trailing note of triumph that no ear could fail to understand.

It marked The Shadow's conquest over crime!

THE END