

CITY OF FEAR

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I.

THE man in the dark suit was nervous. He drove slowly through the main business district of Western City. When he approached the block where the Prairie Savings Bank was located, his tension increased.

It was night, but the Prairie Savings Bank was open for business. On Tuesday nights the bank didn't close until 9 p.m., for the convenience of depositors. People were streaming in and out.

The man in the dark suit lowered his face over the wheel. His appearance made an odd contrast with his furtive behavior. He looked well-dressed and prosperous. He had gray hair and a clipped gray mustache. He looked like a man who occupied an important position in the affairs of Western City, a man who would have plenty of friends and acquaintances.

Perhaps that was why he was so careful to screen his face as he drove along through the lighted streets.

He parked, finally, a block away from the Prairie Savings Bank. He walked back, carrying a leather suitcase which he had taken from the rear of his car. The weight of the suitcase put no strain on his arm. Either it contained something extremely light, or the bag was empty.

Suddenly, the man with the gray mustache halted. A man and a woman were walking toward him. He ignored their smile of recognition. Turning abruptly, he vanished into a dark doorway that gave access to a cheap walk-up apartment.

The couple who had seen him were mystified.

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“Wasn't that Martin Black?” the woman said.

“It certainly was,” her husband replied. “What an odd way for him to behave! It makes me a little angry. It was a direct snub!”

“I don't think so,” his wife said. “He seemed frightened. I don't believe he wanted us to see him. I wonder what he's up to?”

Her husband laughed. He forgot his momentary anger.

“Martin Black? Don't be silly, my dear. He's one of the town's leading citizens! A pillar of the church!”

He continued in an amused tone as they walked onward.

“Probably he's hunting up more stamps for his collection. He's a nut on the subject. Perhaps he's located somebody in town with a rare stamp—and he's afraid that everybody he passes will guess what he's up to and rush to outbid him before he can buy the stamp for himself.”

The couple forgot about the whole trivial episode.

But there was nothing trivial about the expression on Martin Black's face, as he emerged presently from the dark hallway where he had secreted himself. His eyes burned with a hard triumphant gleam. He walked toward the savings bank.

But he didn't go all the way. At the corner, he turned quickly up the side street. Carrying his light suitcase, he continued around the block, making almost a complete circuit.

There was a side door to the savings bank, on the far street. It was a dingy-looking door, with neither number nor name on it. But it was heavily locked, and built of metal.

Martin Black knew exactly what lay behind that door. It gave entrance to the private office of Howard Nixon, president of the Prairie Savings Bank.

Black rang the push-bell two or three times. It looked like a prearranged signal. Nixon himself opened the door and admitted his visitor.

“Good evening, Martin. Come in! I've been expecting you.”

The door closed and was locked. An inner door that connected with the bank proper was also locked. Nixon stared curiously at his caller.

They were old friends, and he could speak frankly.

“What in the world is the reason for all this silly secrecy, Martin? I've been puzzled ever since you telephoned me. I'll be perfectly glad to protect any valuables you may wish to leave in my personal vault, but, frankly, your caution seems ridiculous.”

He took the suitcase which Black handed him. Its lightness surprised him.

“What the devil? The thing is empty!”

“Not empty,” Black said. His smile was taut.

“What's in it?”

“Stamps.”

Nixon swore. Black's zeal to protect a stamp collection annoyed him. He was well aware of the investment broker's fanatic ideas on the subject. But after all, stamps were only a hobby.

“People are after them,” Black insisted harshly. “Crooks! You know what collectors are. They'd be perfectly willing to hire thugs to—”

“You'll go crazy, Martin, if you're not careful,” Nixon murmured. “All right, I'll lock them in my private vault. No one will know they're here. Let's have a look at them.”

Black gave him the key to the suitcase. Nixon laid the bag flat on his desk. Black moved slightly backward. There was sweat on his forehead.

Nixon leaned forward, as he raised the suitcase lid. There were no stamps in the case. There was nothing in it!

“Why, this thing is empty, Martin!”

THOSE were the last words that Nixon ever uttered. Martin Black had risen to his toes, his hand lifted. He was gripping the thing he had slid slyly out from beneath his coat. It was a short bar of steel.

He brought the bludgeon down with all his strength on the skull of his victim.

It was a terrific blow. Nixon fell across the desk and slid inertly to the floor. The whole back of his skull had been crushed in.

The man who had slain the bank president stood still for nearly sixty seconds, getting a grip on his nerves. Then Black chuckled. It was a harsh, callous sound. He knelt quietly, and his gloved hands made a quick search of Howard Nixon's pockets.

He found a bunch of keys, and selected what he thought was the right one. Black placed it in a hole in a steel panel at the rear of the private office. The panel swung open.

A vault door was disclosed. The combination dial made Black's smile deepen sardonically. From his own pocket, he took a slip of paper. In two minutes the vault was opened by the murderer's gloved hands.

From the vault, Martin Black took a rich hoard of bonds. None of them were registered. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for police to trace them. Black packed them neatly in his bag.

Black tiptoed to the private door that gave access to the bank proper. It was locked, as he well knew, but he wanted to make sure.

He had asked Nixon over the telephone to lock that door before he arrived. He also warned Nixon not to mention his name or his intended visit. Nixon was the soul of honor. He could depend that the warning had been scrupulously obeyed.

He stared sneeringly down at his dead victim.

“You poor fool!”

Then he let himself quietly out to the side street. No one saw him leave. Hugging the shadows, Black made his way back around the block to the avenue where he had parked his car. The suitcase was heavy, now. It strained at his left shoulder. He kept his gloved right hand in his pocket.

There were two cars at the curb. The one Black had come in, and another one not far away. Martin Black had ignition keys for each. Without anyone noticing, he started the engines in both cars.

Obviously, he was not taking any chances. He got into his own car and placed the bag of loot on the floor near his feet.

Then he hesitated. It was almost as if he had lost his nerve at the end of a perfect crime. Twice he started to drive into traffic; twice he changed his mind.

Finally, he uttered a curt grunt and started his car. He picked a bad time. A bus was rumbling along the street in the opposite direction. It was traveling fast and hogging most of the street. Black swung too wide on his turnout.

There was a shrill squeaking of brakes, a shout of alarm from pedestrians on both sidewalks—then the two vehicles collided.

It was a sideswipe accident. The heavier bus threw the car slithering across the street against the curb. A tire exploded with a bang. The car toppled sideways. Black was thrown out the door, to the pavement. The leather bag fell with him.

People ran to his aid. But before anyone could get within a dozen feet of him, Black was on his feet, snarling. A gun leaped from his coat pocket.

“Keep away, damn you,” he shouted, “or I’ll shoot to kill!”

He was recognized. A voice cried out in shrill wonder.

“Mr. Black! What in the name of heaven—”

Black’s gun flamed. A bullet whizzed over the man’s head. There were shouts of horror. The crowd retreated.

Black’s free hand grabbed for his suitcase. The jar of the collision had forced open the lid of the bag. Some of its contents had scattered on the sidewalk.

People who were nearest saw the spilled bonds which Black was convulsively scooping back into his suitcase. They realized that something was badly wrong.

Black’s face looked insane, as he backed toward the second car at the curb, whose engine was softly purring. His face was twisted with rage.

“Don’t try to stop me, or I swear I’ll—”

His gun flamed. He fired over the heads of the crowd, driving them back in terror. Men yelled. Women fainted. It gave Black a chance to leap into his second car and put the idling engine into gear.

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The car shot away with a rasp of power. It whizzed past the stalled bus and roared down the avenue. In a moment, it skidded around a corner and vanished into darkness.

ON the sidewalk lay a couple of the bonds which the thief had dropped in his mad flight.

The confusion was terrific. The halted bus blocked traffic. The crowd surged into the street in a ferment of excitement. By the time a policeman arrived, the thief had made a clean getaway.

A dozen voices shouted at the cop, as he fought his way to a telephone.

“It was Martin Black!”

“He's gone insane!”

“He must have held up the Prairie Savings Bank!”

“He just made a getaway!”

The cop looked as if he were going crazy himself, but he grabbed the phone and sent in his amazing report to Western City police headquarters. Presently, the din of police and ambulance bells filled the street.

A police inspector raced down the block. He darted into the savings bank, with a squad of bluecoats at his heels. He found plenty of confusion—and more mystery. The people in the bank denied that there had been any holdup!

“Mr. Black wasn't in here at all tonight,” the grizzled special officer said. “If he had come in, I'd have recognized him. Besides, there's been no theft.”

“Where's Mr. Nixon?”

“In his private office.”

“Get him. I want a check-up. Those bonds came from somewhere!”

There was a rush of feet, then a scared employee returned.

“Mr. Nixon's private office is locked. He doesn't answer.”

“Break down his door, men!” the inspector snarled at his squad.

It was easier said than done. But finally the door fell inward and the police boiled into the room.

They recoiled in horror from the bleeding corpse. A quick glance showed that Nixon's private vault had been opened and that over a million dollars' worth of negotiable bonds had been stolen.

A pall of horror settled on everyone in the bank. It was inconceivable; mad! Martin Black had brutally murdered one of his best friends and committed a gigantic robbery.

A police net was promptly thrown around Western City, to head off the fugitive. There were only half a dozen roads that Black could take.

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All of them were blocked by swiftly-moving police cars. The net result was zero. Martin Black had vanished into thin air!

Neither of the two cars he had used belonged to him. A check-up of the license numbers showed that both had been rented. Two dealers from different parts of town identified Martin Black's photograph as the renter.

As a last resort, the police went to Black's home to search it. The door was opened by—Martin Black!

BLACK was calm, smiling, self-possessed. He denied any knowledge of the murder of Nixon and the theft of the bonds. He said he had just returned from a trip into the country, on private business of his own. He refused to discuss where he had gone or what he had done.

He was promptly arrested and jailed. From the jail, Black telephoned his personal attorney, Henry Stuart.

Stuart was not at home. But he was located presently, at a town about three hundred miles away, where he had gone to inspect some mining property for a client. He expressed unbelieving horror over the phone. He agreed to catch the first train back.

Stuart arrived shortly before midnight, and went at once to the jail. He had a long, private interview with the prisoner. When they emerged from the conference, Henry Stuart looked alarmed. But he kept his uneasiness from his client.

They were more than merely client and lawyer. They belonged to a circle of friends in which men like Roger Dodd and Peter Corcoran and the dead Howard Nixon were prominent.

Dodd was Western City's wealthiest contractor. Corcoran was its most influential politician. Stuart himself was wealthy, and a close friend of Black's. It seemed inconceivable that a man from that station in life could commit so callous a crime.

But Martin Black's private explanation to his lawyer was fantastic. He declared that he had gone to visit a man at a farmhouse. He described the man and the farmhouse.

Police hurried out in fast cars to check the alibi. They didn't find the man. They didn't even find the farmhouse. The spot where Martin Black said he had gone was an open field!

"I think I'd better have Dr. Altman examine him," Stuart told the police chief, in a worried tone.

Dr. Altman's examination made matters even more confused. He reported that Black was laboring under extreme excitement. But there was no indication of insanity.

The prisoner was indicted by the grand jury. He merely sealed his lips tighter. The car in which he had fled from the bank was found abandoned near the outskirts of Western City. No trace of the stolen bonds could be found.

Alice Gunther, the pretty niece of the prisoner, was no more successful than Stuart in making her uncle talk. He just sneered at her. She spoke wildly to a newspaper friend of hers about her belief in her uncle's innocence.

"If only The Shadow were here," she moaned. "The Shadow is the only person on earth who can clear my uncle! I'm going to try to send word to The Shadow. I'm going to beg him to help!"

The reporter printed the story in his paper. Wild rumors began to grow.

CHAPTER II. THE GOLD HAND.

LAMONT CRANSTON sat in the cocktail lounge of the Cobalt Club. He had a late-afternoon copy of the Daily Classic in his hand. A highball stood conveniently at his elbow.

There was news in the Daily Classic that interested Cranston. The paper contained a complete account of the sensational bank theft and murder that had rocked Western City to its foundations.

The story had been telegraphed to the Classic by its ace correspondent, Clyde Burke. Burke had been sent by plane to Western City to cover the developments of the case.

Cranston's interest, however, was not in the story of the crime, which had taken place a couple of days earlier. He had turned to another page. A smaller headline chronicled news of an entirely different character. The headline read:

ARRIVAL OF THE SHADOW RUMORED _____

Unknown Foe of Crime Reported in Western City to Investigate Bank Murder and Clear Black

Behind Cranston's spread newspaper sibilant laughter sounded faintly. His eyes glowed briefly with a piercing flame. Lamont Cranston was well aware that The Shadow was at this precise moment seated in the Cobalt Club in New York, sipping a highball.

Lamont Cranston was The Shadow!

Nobody realized Cranston's dangerous secret. Least of all Inspector Joe Cardona, of the New York police, who had promised to drop in at the club for a sociable chat with Cranston on his way downtown to headquarters.

Joe Cardona would have chuckled, had anyone suggested that this millionaire clubman, friend of the police commissioner, was in reality the black-robed avenger of crime, who had on so many occasions helped Joe to nab supercriminals too smart to be caught by ordinary police methods.

The Shadow absolved Clyde Burke from any part in that queer newspaper rumor. Clyde Burke was not a man who printed false facts. Besides, there was another reason why Burke would never disclose news of this sort.

Clyde Burke was one of The Shadow's agents.

Cranston finished his drink and rose quietly. He left the cocktail lounge and rode in the elevator to his suite upstairs.

Having bolted his door and drawn the shades, Cranston picked up his telephone. He called a number that was not listed in any directory. A crisp voice replied.

“Burbank speaking.”

Burbank was The Shadow's contact man. He was always on duty, day or night. The voice that spoke to Burbank bore no resemblance to Cranston's.

“Orders for Clyde Burke at Western City!”

The Shadow's voice issued the orders. There was a pause, then:

“Orders for Harry Vincent!”

When The Shadow had finished, Burbank said: “Orders acknowledged.”

“Repeat!”

Burbank obeyed. There would be no mistake. The words The Shadow had just uttered would be transmitted to Clyde Burke at the Palace Hotel in Western City, and to Harry Vincent at the Hotel Metrolite in New York. Vincent was another of The Shadow's agents, the oldest of them all in point of service.

LAMONT CRANSTON returned to the cocktail lounge. He found Inspector Cardona waiting impatiently for him. It was unusual for Joe to be excited. But his manner was grim, as he drew Cranston into a quiet corner.

“You'll probably laugh, Mr. Cranston, but something very queer happened a little while ago. A guy called me up, just before I left the Harlem precinct station to meet you. He told me he had a tip that would clear up a big New York murder.”

“What's so queer about that?”

“He said he was The Shadow.”

Cranston stiffened, but he managed to keep his composure.

“Nonsense, Joe! I don't believe there is any such person. It's probably a gag.”

“Well, I can tell you there is. The Shadow's helped me too many times. But that's not the point. Whoever it was, this guy was lying. It wasn't The Shadow at all.”

“Are you sure?”

“Certainly! This guy talked too much. The real Shadow never wastes a word. I put a tracer on the wire and sent a squad car racing to the drugstore where he phoned from—but the car got there too late. The clerk couldn't remember who had used the booth.”

Cardona relaxed, after getting the thing off his chest.

“Like you say, Mr. Cranston, it's probably a gag. I didn't consider it important enough to interrupt our cocktail date.”

Cranston's chuckle sounded natural and amused.

“Why not look into it, Joe? By jove, I'll go with you! I've been so bored, I didn't know what to do. Wait here. My hat and coat are in my room.”

Alone in the privacy of his suite, the amiable smile wiped away from Lamont Cranston's lips. He opened a wall panel near his desk and took out a bulky brief case. After a swift examination, he closed the case. A sibilant laugh escaped his lips.

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When he left his suite, he carried two automatics, though the bulge of the weapons was not perceptible under the loose drape of his topcoat. He also took the brief case.

Cranston had his own car brought around from a nearby garage. The two friends drove downtown to the address which had been given Cardona over the phone. Cranston continued to make light of the entire affair.

“The guy's final directions sounded silly,” Cardona admitted.

“What did he say?”

“He said: 'Don't look for the hand of The Shadow. Look for the shadow of the hand!'”

Cranston made no comment. But presently, he changed his tactics with Joe. Instead of making light of the affair, he began subtly to sell Cardona on the idea that the appointment might be dangerous. He pretended to be frightened. He did this with a particular plan in mind.

The address was a cheap tenement in a dingy West Side neighborhood. Cranston drove slowly past it.

Suddenly Cardona uttered a low cry.

“Look! The hand! Do you see it?”

He was pointing to a dentist's sign over the doorway of a brick building next to the tenement. The sign was a gilded hand. It pointed toward the entrance of a dentist's suite in the brick building.

But Cardona wasn't excited by the sign. Its shadow was what had made him gasp. A brilliant light above the sign threw a shadow on the sidewalk. It was the shadow of the hand!

The extended finger of the projected shadow pointed toward the cellar stairs of the tenement!

“Don't stop!” Cardona whispered. “Keep driving!”

His face was lowered, so that no one who might be watching could identify him. At the corner, he ordered Cranston to drive around the block. They halted outside a tenement in the rear of the suspected place.

Cardona ordered Cranston to remain in the car. But Cranston demurred. He insisted on accompanying Joe. His excuse was the brief case which he had brought with him. He said it contained valuable legal papers. He was afraid to remain alone in the car in such a tough neighborhood.

Grudgingly, Cardona agreed.

They hurried through a cellar, to the rear. They climbed a back fence in the darkness and approached the other tenement. Cardona entered first.

Standing in a far corner of the cellar was a motionless figure that drew a gasp from Cardona.

“The Shadow!”

They could see the glimmer of a white face that seemed to swim in the air. Above the face was a black slouch hat. Below it was the inky shape of a black cloak. The figure neither moved nor uttered a sound as Cardona advanced slowly, his police gun steady.

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Suddenly, Cardona cursed.

“A stupid gag!” he growled. “A joke!”

The thing was a dummy! What had seemed to be a glimmering face was a blank circle of cardboard, propped cleverly between the slouch hat and the suspended cloak.

A murderous voice cut savagely through the darkness.

“Get 'em up! Drop that gat!”

There were two thugs behind Cranston and Cardona. Both thugs were masked. Both had guns ready to spit flame. The thug who had snarled the warning spoke again.

“All right, Limpy!”

There was a shuffling step from the front of the cellar. Another masked thug moved into view, cutting off any escape to the front sidewalk.

“Back into that corner, both of you! We're going to hand you a dose of lead—and leave a gun propped near the sleeve of that dummy shadow! Nice, huh? Give the boys from homicide something to puzzle about when they find the bodies!”

Lamont Cranston began to plead for mercy in a terrified voice. But Cardona had no intention of submitting. He had heard the thug in front called Limpy. He had listened to his awkward shuffling step. That was the guy to take a chance on!

Joe whirled suddenly. His gun and Limpy's exploded at almost the same instant. But Limpy's bad foot threw him off balance. The bullet from Joe's gun thudded into his body and wrecked his aim. A slug whistled past Cardona's ducking head.

With a yell to Cranston, Joe flung himself flat. The cellar echoed with vicious gunfire. Cardona had his hands full with the other two thugs. He had to keep constantly on the move, to avoid a deadly reply to the telltale flame of his muzzle. He crawled zigzag fashion, trying to retreat.

Lamont Cranston wasn't any help. When Limpy fell, with a police bullet in his stomach, Cranston uttered a high-pitched scream. He raced past the fallen gunman. He crashed into a barrel in the darkness of the front-cellar compartment. There was a thud from his falling body; then silence.

Cardona had to fight it out alone now. He was in a suicidal spot. One of the masked men had succeeded in outflanking the desperately crawling Cardona. The other thug kept the rear exit closed off.

Joe was under a vicious crossfire. A bullet sliced pain across his hip. Another, from the opposite direction, nicked the lobe of his ear. Joe didn't return the fire.

There was a harmless click from his hot gun. He had emptied the weapon in his frenzied effort to protect the escape of Lamont Cranston!

There was a forward rush of feet. Joe tried to swing his clubbed gun. But something struck him on the temple and toppled him, dazed, to the concrete floor. A masked face leaned close above him. A hot muzzle pressed itself against the flesh behind Cardona's ear.

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There was a crash of gunfire.

But the bullet behind that crash didn't bore into the brain of Joe Cardona. It struck the bent figure of the crouched murderer. It came from a .45. It tunneled downward through the thug's chest and ripped out near the base of the spine. It left a hole the size of a man's palm.

A sibilant laugh made an eerie whisper in the darkness. The laughter came from black nothingness. The laughter of The Shadow! It was a mocking sound, as it whispered from a bewildering succession of spots in the darkness.

The single remaining thug was unable to flee. Every time he darted toward an exit, a slug drove him back.

“Surrender—or die!” a stern voice cried.

The thug made the wrong choice. He staked all on a frontal attack. He rushed forward behind stuttering streaks of flame.

The Shadow had intended to take him alive, but the battle was now life or death. The Shadow had no choice. He killed his man barely in time to escape death himself.

Cardona staggered dizzily to his feet. He snatched up the thug's fallen gun. He turned toward The Shadow—and found nothing. The Shadow had vanished!

CARDONA backed into a corner. The silence was profound. Finally, Joe's flashlight glowed. It disclosed nothing but the three dead men. Cardona hunted for the missing Cranston. He found him in a limp huddle on the floor, where he had run into an ash barrel in the dark.

Lamont Cranston was trembling when Cardona revived him.

“I must have been knocked out when I fell over the barrel,” he murmured. “Are you all right?”

Cardona nodded grimly in the light of his torch. He told of the miraculous appearance of The Shadow—the real Shadow. Cranston fumbled around the floor and found his brief case.

“Thank heaven, they didn't steal my legal papers,” he said.

There was a dim smile on his lips, that faded quickly. Cardona examined the bodies of the three thugs. When the masks were removed, he uttered a cry.

“Hey! What do you know? These guys are out-of-town hoods! I don't know Limpy, but these other two have records. They come from west of the Mississippi. The last report we had on them said they had run to cover in a place called Western City!”

Lamont Cranston didn't reply. He was silent, too, when the police arrived. He answered a few routine questions. Then he went back to his car and drove uptown to the Cobalt Club.

In the quiet of his soundproof suite, Lamont Cranston reached grimly for his telephone. The voice of Burbank replied.

“Orders for Rutledge Mann,” the voice of The Shadow intoned.

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Rutledge Mann was The Shadow's financial agent. He posed as an investment broker. But his office was merely a front for his real job—the service of The Shadow.

Tersely The Shadow ordered Rutledge Mann to check all the big New York hotels for any recent arrivals from Western City. The death of the three thugs had ended a promising lead. But obviously those thugs had a criminal boss.

The Shadow was still not sure whether the cellar attack was directed against Joe Cardona or himself. Cardona's date with Cranston at the Cobalt Club might or might not have been known. More investigation was necessary.

Presently, the phone rang. Burbank forwarded the report of Rutledge Mann. The only recent arrival from Western City was a man named Roger Dodd. Dodd was a wealthy contractor. He was staying at the Gilton Hotel. His business was apparently legitimate. He was in New York to raise funds for a new skyscraper he was erecting in Western City.

But The Shadow's laughter was ominous as he hung up the phone. He knew that this Roger Dodd was a friend of the Martin Black who had been arrested for an atrocious murder. Was the attack on Cranston a direct outcome of the rumor that The Shadow had interested himself in the Western City crime?

The Shadow decided to call on Mr. Dodd. His visit would be in the amiable role of Lamont Cranston.

CHAPTER III. MR. ROGER DODD.

ROGER DODD proved to be a polite, well-dressed gentleman, and a genial host.

He welcomed Lamont Cranston to his suite at the Hotel Gilton with a warm handclasp and a flattering greeting. Dodd seemed to be alone in the suite. At any rate, there was no sign of a servant.

"It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Mr. Cranston. I have often wanted to meet you. We have something in common, you and I."

"Really?" Cranston smiled at him.

"Yes. Hunting."

Cranston's interest quickened, but he concealed it. Dodd had emphasized the word "hunting" slightly.

"It must be quite a thrill to squeeze a trigger and bring down something you've trailed a long time," Dodd continued suavely. "I refer, of course, to your African exploits."

"Oh, yes. I've done quite a bit of that. And you?"

"Just in a small way. Nothing to match your skill. As a matter of fact, I sometimes fail and the er... animal gets away."

There was a slight hint of a rasp in his voice. But Cranston ignored it.

Roger Dodd didn't look much like a contractor, he had pale-blue eyes in a rather pallid face. He wore a closely-clipped brown beard and mustache. Had Cranston not known his occupation in advance, he might have guessed Dodd to be a prosperous society dentist, or perhaps a physician.

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The backs of the man's hands were not sunburned. Evidently when Dodd erected skyscrapers, he supervised the job from the interior of a comfortable office. He looked more like a student than a man of active affairs.

"I'd enjoy talking hunting with you indefinitely," Cranston murmured. "But, actually, I've come to talk business."

"I don't understand."

"Money, Mr. Dodd."

"I still don't understand."

"Your arrival in New York was reported to me by my financial agent. I understand that you're erecting a skyscraper in Western City, and that the work has been held up temporarily by lack of funds. You have a worth-while project and an excellent business rating. I have plenty of idle funds. Hence my visit to you tonight."

"I see." Roger Dodd toyed with a pencil. His pale, well-kept hands looked strong and muscular. "You mean you're interested in making a realty investment?"

"Precisely. As you know, safe investments are not exactly plentiful these days. I have confidence in you and in your integrity. I'd be willing to back your building project with a well-secured loan."

"Thank you," Dodd murmured. "I appreciate your confidence in me. But, unfortunately—"

His hand stopped toying with the pencil. Unconsciously, it tightened into a fist.

"My financial difficulty has already been taken care of. I've been down to Wall Street. I have made a very satisfactory arrangement."

He named a firm of private bankers. The name made Cranston's eyes gleam. Unless Dodd was lying, his credentials must be very good, indeed. The banking firm was one of the strictest and most conservative houses in the financial district.

"I'm sorry I made my proposition too late," Cranston said. "You come from a progressive section of the country. A section in which I'd like to increase my holdings. Western City must be an attractive town, from all I've heard."

"It is, Mr. Cranston. It has a growing population, magnificent roads. You ought really to see our straight four-lane highways. Speed, Mr. Cranston! And brains, too! Yes, we have our share of brains in Western City."

Cranston ignored the peculiar challenge in Dodd's tone. He changed the subject with quiet skill. He referred to the bank holdup and the arrest of Martin Black.

"Odd affair, that. Do you think the crime will scare capital away from Western City, as a result?"

"Your own offer to invest there is the best answer," Dodd replied. "The crime for which Martin Black was arrested was a horrible one. But I don't anticipate any further trouble—unless it's fomented by outsiders."

He didn't explain his last sentence, nor did Cranston ask him to. Cranston stuck to the subject of Martin Black.

“Do you think he's guilty?”

“I think he committed the crime, but I don't think he's guilty.”

“That's a strange remark.”

“It's a strange crime. When I say that poor Martin is not guilty, I mean that I think he's insane. There's no other reasonable explanation. As a friend of his, I'm going to insist on having him examined by the best psychiatrist I can find.

“I believe it would be a grave miscarriage of justice for a man to go to the electric chair for a deed that was so obviously done in a moment of madness.”

THE sneer in Dodd's tone was pronounced. He hated Martin Black! He hated him so much that it was impossible for him to hide it beneath those softly-spoken words. But Lamont Cranston was apparently more interested in a highball he was sipping.

“I suppose that Martin Black must have many good friends like yourself, eh?”

“Not many. I should say not more than three or four people could call themselves his intimate friends. But what we lack in numbers, we make up in influence—if you'll pardon my boast.”

“He's a friend of the new governor, I've heard.”

“Better than that. He's a friend of the man who made the governor's election possible. I refer to Peter Corcoran, who is the most powerful politician in our State. Then there's Henry Stuart, the lawyer who's defending Black.

“Stuart thought enough of poor Martin to travel more than two hundred miles in order to return to Western City the night that Black was arrested. Finally, there's myself.”

His teeth showed a wolfish smile:

“No, I wouldn't worry about Martin Black, if I were you. I can assure you he'll be well taken care of.”

He rose to his feet, and Cranston took the hint. But as he moved to the door, his eyes flicked sideways. He noticed that Roger Dodd's hat and coat were lying on a living-room chair in a dark corner of the room.

It was an odd way for a man as neatly dressed as Dodd to treat so expensive a garment. Dodd looked more like a man whose first thought on arriving home would be to place his coat carefully on a hanger.

Cranston suspected that this oversight was not mere chance. He took leave of his host and went down the corridor to the elevator. There were two shafts there, side by side. Cranston pressed the button on the left.

He waited until the indicator light glowed. Then he raced noiselessly to the end of the corridor and opened a fire door. He crouched out of sight, his eyes at the crack.

The elevator door opened. The operator glanced out. He saw no one and slammed the door. The car descended.

The moment the elevator door clanged shut, there was a click from another direction. Roger Dodd appeared

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in hat and coat. He raced down the corridor to the twin shafts. He thought that Cranston was innocently descending in the car on the left. His finger jammed against the other button.

In a moment, Dodd himself was on the way down. Cranston's hunch had been right. The sleek Mr. Dodd intended to trail his millionaire guest and see where he went!

Cranston had no objection. He had timed his departure perfectly. By the time Dodd arrived at the lobby exit, the distinguished-looking car of Lamont Cranston would be pulling away from the curb. The first cab in line was one piloted by a hackie named Moe Shrevnitz.

Moe was an agent of The Shadow. The Shadow had given Moe enough money to bribe his way without difficulty to the head of the hack line. Moe and the agent in Cranston's own car would make sure that the elegant Mr. Dodd had plenty of opportunity for a long chase around New York.

The coast was now clear for The Shadow.

WHEN he emerged from the stairway behind the fire door, a grim change had taken place in Cranston's appearance. A black slouch hat shaded his forehead. A black cloak covered him from chin to foot. Gloves of the same color shielded his hands.

All that was visible, as he glided noiselessly toward Dodd's suite, was the gleam of his eyes and the jut of his strongly beaked nose.

The Shadow was taking the offensive!

It was child's play for him to open the simple hotel lock with a shining instrument of chrome steel. He didn't harm the lock. He merely opened it with a slightly louder click than the usual key sound.

Rapidly, he searched Dodd's apartment. In the living room, he drew a blank. In the study, he found nothing to implicate Dodd in anything remotely criminal. The bedroom was just a normal bedroom.

The Shadow penetrated farther into the suite. He came to another room, that looked like an extra study. Its desk, however, was empty. So were the bookshelves. There was nothing else in the room, except a large closet. The Shadow opened it.

Instantly, he found himself in a fierce struggle that taxed every muscle in his body. A masked man had flung himself forward the moment The Shadow opened the closet door.

The man had a gun in his hand, but he didn't fire it. He struck savagely at The Shadow's head. Had the blow landed, it would have crushed The Shadow's skull. Even at the awkward angle it struck, it was hard enough to daze The Shadow and drop him to his knees momentarily.

The hat had fallen from The Shadow's head. The masked man leaned over and tried to rip away the upper edge of the concealing cloak from The Shadow's face. In his eagerness to clutch at the cloak, he missed a second easy chance to shoot his victim.

He was more interested in disclosing The Shadow's hidden identity, than in killing him!

However, the thug should have known better than to let his momentary advantage slip. The Shadow had recovered from the daze of the gun blow. He went into grim action. But he fought as silently as his foe.

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It was the thug who fired the first shot.

It made a terrific roar. The Shadow batted the weapon aside just before it sputtered flame. The two foes bounced apart. The thug had lost his nerve with the crashing echoes of that shot. He had all he wanted of The Shadow. He backed toward the open window, his gun blasting scarlet as he retreated.

Quickly, The Shadow threw himself aside on the floor. His own gun added to the din. But no bullet struck the masked man. The Shadow wanted to take this man alive.

He waited until the killer was crouched on the sill, before he leaped to his feet. He leaped when he heard a harmless click from the thug's hot weapon. The gun was empty!

The Shadow's leap and the killer's outward swing came almost simultaneously. There was a stone balcony in an angle of the building wall. It was more than five feet from where the masked killer crouched. He launched himself through the air as The Shadow grabbed at his legs.

The Shadow's clutch missed. The man made the desperate leap successfully. But his fingers slipped on the curved stone of the balcony ledge. He had turned his head at the last moment, fearful that The Shadow's reaching hand would grab him. That single miscalculation cost him his life.

He fell through empty air with a terrible shriek.

His scream was echoed by cries of horror from other windows. The noise of the shooting had brought hotel guests, staring across the enclosed court toward Dodd's apartment. They saw the failing body of the doomed thug dwindle to a mere dot. There was a sickening sound, like someone hitting a carpet with a club. Then silence.

The Shadow stood riveted at the window from whence the man had fallen.

A dozen pairs of eyes saw the black-cloaked figure. The screams of the witnesses redoubled. A man vanished back into his room, pawed swiftly into the drawer of a bureau, then leaped out with a small nickel-plated revolver. He sent a hail of bullets chipping at the stone of the sill opposite.

“The Shadow!”

Voices raised the cry. These misguided witnesses thought The Shadow was a cold-blooded killer. They were ready to swear they had seen him push a man to a horrible death thirty stories below. Some were already telephoning frantically. The hotel was in an uproar.

THE SHADOW fled from Dodd's apartment. He ran to the fire stairs, where he had left his leather brief case. When he emerged again he was carrying the case in a neatly-gloved hand. But the gloves weren't black. Nor were they worn by The Shadow.

Lamont Cranston waited for the arrival of the elevator, which he perceived was shooting swiftly up the shaft. He crouched against the corridor wall on the opposite side from the suite of Roger Dodd.

The door of the elevator clanged open. Two men sprang out. One was the house detective. The other was the operator. Neither of them had eyes for anything but Dodd's door. They ran toward it and the house dick pounded on the panel with his gun.

“Open up in there, or I'll shoot!” There was a sudden clang from the elevator behind their backs. Its door had

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slammed shut. By the time the startled house dick and the operator had turned, the elevator was already on the way down.

There was nothing in the empty corridor to indicate the identity of the man who had so neatly outwitted his pursuers.

The house dick raced back to the double shaft. He shoved his finger on the button of the second door. Long before he leaped into a car and descended, Cranston had reached the second floor.

It was a mezzanine level that surrounded the lobby itself. There were plenty of people there, but all of them were leaning over the mezzanine railing. They were attracted by the boiling confusion down in the open lobby.

Lamont Cranston walked quietly to a marble staircase. He descended from the mezzanine to an arcade lined with exclusive shops. He left by the arcade's rear entrance.

There were taxis outside, but Lamont Cranston ignored them. He mingled with the crowd on the sidewalk and melted discreetly down a subway entrance. It was seldom that Cranston patronized the subway, but this time an anonymous ride uptown to the Cobalt Club seemed both necessary and practical.

When he reached his suite, Lamont Cranston lay down on a couch and closed his eyes. He seemed to be fast asleep. But behind those closed eyes The Shadow's clever brain was deep in thought. The thoughts revolved around the personality of Roger Dodd.

It was a long time before Cranston stirred. He could hear newsboys shrieking extras out in the street. He descended and bought a paper. It was filled with an account of the outrage at the Gilton Hotel.

Roger Dodd had returned from what he described as a "short ride to see the sights." The police had been unable to learn anything from him. He denied any knowledge of the dead thug whose smashed body had been found in the hotel courtyard.

He was baffled, he said, by the appearance of The Shadow in his room and The Shadow's murder of the thug. The thug was too badly smashed to be identified.

The newspapers speculated wildly on the cause of the whole affair. The fact that Roger Dodd was from Western City and was a friend of Martin Black, made for sensational journalism. The paper reviewed the Martin Black case and capped it with a large headline: "IS THERE A CURSE ON WESTERN CITY?" The implication was that prominent residents of that town were being pursued by a fantastic doom.

The Shadow smiled, as he noted that Roger Dodd had been released by the New York police after routine questioning. Dodd announced he was leaving at once to take a plane back to Western City.

Lamont Cranston laid down the newspaper. He picked up his telephone and called a railroad terminal. He inquired about Pullman reservations for the following day.

From his lips came the sound of harsh, sibilant laughter.

CHAPTER IV. THE SAND CLUE.

IT was dark when the sleek streamlined train pulled into the railroad station at Western City.

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Not many people were visible on the platform. But a small group of observers near the waiting room watched the train eagerly as it drew to a halt. There were a half dozen of them. All were men.

They made a concerted rush toward Lamont Cranston as he stepped from the train. For a moment, he stiffened. Then he relaxed. He recognized the man who was leading the chase. It was Clyde Burke.

“Hello, Mr. Cranston!” Burke greeted. “We found out you were paying Western City a visit and came out to interview you. Did you have a pleasant journey?”

Cranston smiled and nodded. The reporters from the local papers allowed Clyde to do most of the talking. They were aware of Clyde's friendship with the famous New York millionaire. What they were not aware of was the fact that Clyde was one of The Shadow's most trusted agents.

“I met one of your business leaders in New York,” Cranston murmured. “He was kind enough to invite me to come here and look over the investment possibilities in your rapidly-growing city. I refer, of course, to Mr. Roger Dodd. If all goes well, I expect to invest at least a million dollars in various industrial holdings.”

Clyde kept the ball rolling on the topic of business. He didn't want any of the newshawks to refer to the bank crime that had alarmed Western City several days earlier. But it was impossible to keep the local reporters off the subject.

“Mr. Dodd is a close friend of Martin Black,” one of the newshawks suggested. “Has he spoken to you about the bank holdup and the murder of Howard Nixon?”

Cranston chuckled.

“No. And if he had, it would have been a complete waste of time. Crime is a subject on which I know absolutely nothing. I have no theories about Mr. Black's guilt or innocence. I came here to renew my acquaintance with Roger Dodd, and to make a few judicious investments.”

Clyde Burke ended the interview by closing his notebook and hurrying for a telephone. The other reporters chased after him. Cranston was following his porter toward the line of taxis, when he was again halted.

Two well-dressed men accosted him. Both were smiling. Cranston recognized one of them with a cry of well-simulated pleasure.

“Why, Mr. Dodd! This is nice of you! I hardly expected to be greeted in person.”

Dodd beamed.

“Why not? I got your telegram this afternoon. The least I could do is to meet you at the station.”

He introduced his companion. The man was Henry Stuart. He was the leading lawyer of Western City and the man who was defending Martin Black.

Stuart was of medium height and athletic appearance. He was probably the same age as the bearded Dodd, Cranston guessed, but he looked younger. His clean-shaven face was alert and friendly.

Cranston seized on Stuart's presence to turn the conversation to the bank crime. He mentioned his jovial reply to the reporters and chuckled. But Stuart looked grave, as the three men climbed into Dodd's sedan.

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“A devilishly embarrassing case for me, Mr. Cranston. Black is one of my best friends. I hate to admit it, but how can he be anything than guilty? As a lawyer—”

“Lawyers are too damned legal!” Dodd snapped. “I believe that poor Black went out of his mind temporarily, the night that outrage took place. I still think it's possible to save him.”

“I hope you're right,” Stuart sighed.

He grazed at Cranston.

“I even hope the question of bail can be arranged soon. After all, the entire murder charge against Black is circumstantial. No one saw him kill Nixon in the president's locked private office at the bank. When Black fired his gun at the crowd outside, he injured no one.”

Stuart looked troubled and unhappy. Much more so than the smiling Dodd.

“Let's talk of more pleasant things,” Dodd chuckled. “For instance, Mr. Cranston's immediate plans... I insist, Cranston, that during your stay in town you will live at my home.”

Cranston demurred. He had already made reservations at a leading hotel, he declared.

Dodd tried to insist. He went far beyond the normal protestations of a friend, before he gave up. But Cranston stuck to his decision. In the end, Dodd shrugged. He shook hands with Cranston in the hotel lobby, and so did Stuart. The two promised to see him soon.

They drove away, after promising to introduce Cranston to the leading citizens of Western City, including the politically important Peter Corcoran.

CRANSTON followed his luggage up to his suite. But as soon as he was alone, his amiable smile faded.

He stepped to his telephone and put in a long-distance call. He listened briefly to the hum of the wire. Then:

“Burbank speaking.”

“Report!” the voice of The Shadow rasped.

Burbank's report concerned the activities of Harry Vincent in Western City. There wasn't much to it. Harry had registered at a medium-priced hotel in an unpretentious section of town. He was lying low, waiting to receive definite instructions before he made a move.

“The password is Richard Belton,” Burbank said finally. “Vincent has been instructed not to leave his room tonight until contact has been made.”

“Dismissed!” The Shadow said, and hung up.

A moment later, he phoned again. This time, his voice was entirely different from either The Shadow or Lamont Cranston. It sounded crisp and nasal, the voice of a rather sporty gentleman.

Cranston phoned Vincent's hotel. He gave his name as Richard Belton and asked to be connected with Vincent's room. There was a short delay, then The Shadow received an unpleasant shock. Vincent was not in the hotel.

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“I’m sorry,” the clerk said, “but I’m positive he’s not in. There is no answer from his room. Just a moment... Yes, I was right. He left a few moments ago with a friend of his.”

“Thank you,” Cranston said.

There was worry in his eyes when he hung up. The absence of Harry Vincent had evil significance. Apparently, Harry had deliberately disobeyed the orders of The Shadow. But such an idea was ridiculous. In all the years of his service of The Shadow, Harry Vincent had never done such a thing.

If Vincent had left the hotel with a “friend,” he had gone unwillingly, in spite of any appearance to the contrary. He had been kidnapped!

To The Shadow, the answer seemed clear. An unknown criminal was copying The Shadow's own methods. Cranston had located Roger Dodd easily enough in New York, by canvassing the recent arrivals at the hotels. Evidently, someone in Western City had used the same simple method to point a suspicious finger at Vincent.

Cranston was peeling off his clothes as he thought of the peril to Harry. His new clothes matched the sporty quality of the voice he had used over the phone as Richard Belton. The suit he now wore was of extreme cut, with a belted back and a loud-checked pattern. His hair became jet-black and slightly greasy-looking. A black mustache matched the wig.

Cranston intended to pose as an advance agent for a traveling dance orchestra. He left his hotel quickly, but not through the front lobby door. He drove swiftly to Harry Vincent's shabbier hotel.

The clerk there said that Vincent had not yet returned. He described the visitor with whom Vincent had departed a short time earlier. The visitor was an old man with stooped shoulders and white hair. He had gone up to Vincent's room after talking over the house phone about a ring.

“He was wearing the ring,” the clerk said. “It certainly was a swell one, too. It was a fire opal.”

The Shadow concealed his rage and alarm. He knew now how Harry had been tricked. A fire opal was The Shadow's trade-mark. He used it to tip agents to his presence when he used an unfamiliar disguise.

The hotel clerk didn't notice that the dapper Richard Belton had turned a ring on his own finger, so that the gem was inside his palm. The stone was a girasol, a magnificent fire opal, the only one of its kind in the world.

Harry had fallen for an imitation! The Shadow pretended only slight disappointment at the absence of Vincent. For the benefit of any snoopers in the lobby, he had described himself as the advance man for a famous dance orchestra.

He said the band was going to be booked for an engagement in Western City. He repeated the name Richard Belton, and added that Harry was his assistant. He promised to return the following day.

After leaving the hotel, The Shadow walked only far enough to make sure that he wasn't being tailed. Then he ducked back. He went up a side street and located a dark alley that led to the hotel rear. The dapper figure of Richard Belton melted into the alley.

He never emerged into the rear courtyard.

The figure that did emerge was barely visible. Cloaked in black, The Shadow moved like a part of the

darkness itself.

A GLANCE showed The Shadow that the rear of the paved court was a blank brick wall. Above his head was the slanting line of fire–escape ladders at the back of the hotel. The bottom of the lowest ladder was not too high to reach by an upward leap.

The Shadow crouched for the effort.

He was standing thus when he heard the thud of racing feet behind him. He didn't turn to ward off the blackjack blow he knew was coming. With a quick heave, he launched himself upward and caught the iron rung of the dangling ladder.

His unseen assailant struck at empty air. The force of the murderous blow sent the thug staggering forward off balance. The Shadow let go his hold on the ladder rung. He dropped on the shoulders of his foe.

The shock sent both men sprawling to the pavement of the courtyard. A desperate battle began. A silent one, too. The thug wanted to make no noise that would draw attention. He tried viciously to club The Shadow's skull with the iron bar he still gripped.

The Shadow fought fiercely. He knew that Vincent was in desperate peril. The Shadow had to find a clue to his kidnapped agent's whereabouts—and find it without loss of time!

When he rose panting to his feet, the thug lay unconscious. A search of his pockets revealed nothing. The face of the killer was one not known to The Shadow. Evidently, he was a local mobster.

The Shadow bound his victim hand and foot with strong cords that appeared from beneath the black cloak. The cords were tied in a rather peculiar fashion. They joined the unconscious man's wrists and his bent knees. The cord also was wound tightly about the thug's throat.

It was an underworld device to keep a prisoner from attempting to free himself when he regained consciousness. Any struggle with those cleverly looped bonds would strangle the man to death.

The Shadow gagged his limp prisoner. He hid him from sight behind a pile of empty barrels that stood in a dark corner of the court. Then he leaped upward once more to the dangling lower ladder of the fire escape.

He knew where Vincent's room was. Burbank's report had imparted that vital information. The Shadow ascended the fire escape, ducking swiftly past rear rooms that were occupied. His black cloak helped his invisibility. He bided his time until the occupants of the lower rooms had their backs to the rear windows, before he flitted past the lighted panes.

His girasol cut through the pane of Harry's top–floor window. An instant later, The Shadow had the window open and was inside. He drew the shade over the hole in the glass.

Harry, of course, was gone. The empty room showed evidence of only a brief struggle. A small vase had been smashed on the floor. The rug was slightly rumpled.

In one corner was a small metal object. It had been trampled flat. Near it was something that looked like a tiny ball of yellowish dirt. When The Shadow touched it, the ball crumpled.

He examined the metal case first.

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It told him how Vincent had been forced to walk out. He had been drugged! The thing that had been trampled underfoot during the quick struggle of the kidnapper and his victim was a metal holder for a hypodermic needle!

The Shadow next turned his attention to the small bit of yellowish dirt.

He discovered it wasn't dirt. It was building sand. It had evidently fallen from the shoe of the "old man" during the struggle with Harry Vincent. The stuff had evidently been lodged in one of the tiny holes of a rubber heel. It had dropped out unnoticed.

To The Shadow, the sand clue meant that the kidnaper had come from some new building under construction. Into The Shadow's mind flashed a picture of the sleek Roger Dodd. Dodd was erecting a new skyscraper in Western City.

It was queer that each time Cranston met Dodd, an attempt against The Shadow followed instantly. It had happened in New York. It had happened now in Western City.

THE SHADOW descended swiftly to where he had left the captured thug. He wanted to question him, to make sure of his deduction concerning Dodd.

But the thug was no longer a helpless prisoner behind the row of empty barrels in the dark courtyard. Someone had slashed his bonds and released him.

There was no sign of either the prisoner or his rescuer.

The Shadow wasted a few seconds in a search of the dark pavement. He was rewarded by finding another clue, that made his eyes gleam. It was a torn piece of a business card, muddy with the print of a foot. There were tiny grains of building sand mixed with the mud.

The card was an advertisement for a bar-and-grill called the Peacock. The address of the place had vanished with the torn part of the card.

A moment later, The Shadow had vanished into the black alley that connected with the side street. He was there for more than ten minutes. Then a figure emerged on the sidewalk.

But not The Shadow. Nor was it the sporty gentleman who had described himself as Richard Belton. This time, the well-dressed figure of Lamont Cranston appeared. He walked to the front of the hotel and stopped at a parked taxicab.

He got in and asked to be taken to the Peacock. The driver nodded silently.

"Are you sure you know where it is?" Cranston murmured. "I'm in a hurry."

"Sure," the driver grinned. "There's only one Peacock in town. Can't miss it! It's on the corner near that new skyscraper-construction job. Some building! I guess you've heard of it, eh? Stranger here, aren't you?"

Cranston nodded. He tipped the hackie in advance and asked for speed. He knew exactly where Harry Vincent had been taken—but could he get there in time? The driver did his best, but halfway to the goal his engine suddenly coughed and quit. The cabby looked at his gas gauge and swore. The tank was empty.

"That's funny. I filled it up only a little while ago."

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He jumped out and looked at the tank. This time, his swearing really sounded terrific. The tank had been punctured by a sharp instrument. The gas had dripped out without being noticed.

Too late, Cranston remembered a sharp-eyed newsboy who had stared at him while he was talking to the hackie before he entered the cab. The newsboy had crossed the street behind the taxi.

He could easily have punctured the tank on orders from someone who wanted to delay the movements of a new arrival in Western City whose presence in town might mean trouble for a supercriminal.

Cranston had no time to debate mentally. He paid off his cabby and raced toward a nearby avenue to hunt another cab. He had a hard time finding one. The minutes flitted swiftly by.

HARRY VINCENT'S face was pale. Except for the flickering light from a charcoal fire in a metal brazier, he was in darkness. The fire made feeble gleams on Harry's pale face, and on three others.

Two of the men were armed. They looked like thugs. One was the crook who had been released from The Shadow's trap in the hotel alley.

The third figure at whom Harry glared was—The Shadow!

But Harry had discovered the deception. The fake Shadow talked too much. He had apparently rescued Harry from the clutches of the “old man.” He had taken him to this wind-swept upper floor of an unfinished skyscraper in order to question him.

But his questions betrayed the cloaked criminal. He was ignorant of too many facts about Harry that he should have known.

“If you're The Shadow,” Harry snapped, “you know all about who I am and why I'm here in Western City. Why did you kidnap me? Where's the building watchman? Why is he missing? This is Roger Dodd's new skyscraper project—and I believe that you're Roger Dodd!”

“Too bad—for you!” the cloaked figure snarled. “Make him talk, boys!”

Harry struggled. But a hand was clapped over his mouth. He was bound too tightly to resist. A red-hot bar was drawn out of the charcoal fire in the brazier. It sizzled against the flesh of Harry's chest.

“Talk!” the man in black snarled. “Who is The Shadow? Is he Lamont Cranston? Or is Cranston just what he seems—a damn fool, with too much money and no knowledge about crime?”

Harry tried to scream, but the hand over his mouth choked off his cries. Agony from the hot iron made his body quiver.

The iron was replaced in the fire. Again, it sizzled against the flesh exposed by Harry's opened shirt.

His voice sounded thick when the hand lifted from his mouth.

“Don't! I'll talk!”

The thugs stepped back. Harry tried to burst his bonds; in vain. He staggered and fell. A thug kicked him in the ribs. The second thug picked up the red-hot bar.

“Who is The Shadow?” the cloaked figure growled.

“Why not ask me?” replied a calm voice from the darkness.

The fake Shadow whirled. Eyes like twin flames were staring at him from the windy darkness high above the street.

The Shadow's criminal double was facing—The Shadow!

CHAPTER V. DEATH IN THE AIR.

THERE was a yell of rage. Criminals whirled to meet this deadly challenge from the darkness behind them. Hands fell away from the captive Harry Vincent. Harry's eyes were glazed with agony. He tried to take a blind, staggering step toward his deliverer.

Then his corded ankles tripped him. He fell forward, striking his head against the rough flooring.

Harry fainted.

The red-hot steel bar that had been used to torture Vincent was flung through the air by the thug who had been holding it. It whizzed straight at The Shadow's face. He ducked to the flooring and rolled behind a steel girder.

Bullets began to roar at The Shadow's improvised shield.

It was three against one. Two gunmen and a black-cloaked figure were grimly stalking The Shadow, each of them with twin guns that spit death.

The crooks separated. They closed in on the steel girder from different directions. They found The Shadow gone!

Laughter mocked them from the other side of the building's cluttered flooring.

Again the thugs took the offensive, advancing swiftly under cover of beams, overturned wheelbarrows and mortar vats. They had the advantage of numbers. They were satisfied that the odds in this deadly gunfight high above the level of the dark streets of Western City were in their favor.

The Shadow was satisfied, too!

He had drawn the killers away from the spot where Harry Vincent lay unconscious. The Shadow was afraid that a thug, noticing the limp figure of their tortured victim, might bend swiftly and send a slug crashing through the helpless Vincent's forehead.

But now, the hail of gunfire was out of range of the spot where Harry lay.

The Shadow tried to wing one of his foes. He didn't want to kill any of them, particularly the criminal who had robed himself in the spurious disguise of The Shadow himself.

But the master criminal was no longer visible. He had taken advantage of the tide of battle, to make a discreet retreat. The darkness had favored him. So had the fusillade of bullets from the guns of his two thugs.

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The Shadow had his hands full with those two gunmen. They advanced with sure-footed caution, taking advantage of every bit of cover. Their actions indicated that they were trained ironworkers, used to leaping dizzy gulfs high above the ground level. And they were well supplied with ammunition.

Step by step, The Shadow was forced to fall back. He was driven to the very edge of the structure. He teetered on a beam that had been only partly anchored. It swayed sideways under his weight. For an instant, it looked as if The Shadow were going to plunge downward to the street.

The sight drove all caution from the minds of the two killers. They ran recklessly out from cover, their guns flaming in an effort to blast The Shadow from his suicidal perch.

A bullet tugged the hat from his head. Another jerked the sleeve of his cloak. Then The Shadow was back on the steady floor boards, his propped gun firing at the nearest of his foes.

There was a yell as a heavy .45 slug tore through flesh and bone. The thug pitched backward as if he had been kicked by a mule. The Shadow rose to the attack. The sudden death of one of the killers had taken the courage out of his remaining pal.

He had seen The Shadow deliberately court suicide in order to lure his enemies into bullet range. The courage of that act showed the thug the caliber of the man he was trying to battle.

He fled toward the interior of the cluttered floor.

In the center was an open square. It was the shaft of the electric hoist that lifted materials to the upper floors of the half-finished skyscraper. Through the hole descended the greasy black cable of the hoist. The terrified thug flung himself toward it.

He heard The Shadow yell. The Shadow sensed the man's peril. But the thug mistook that cry. To him, it sounded like the vindictive shout of a man whose gun never missed.

The thug was a trained ironworker. He flung himself at the cable. His body slid through the black opening of the floor below.

But the thing The Shadow had feared would happen, did! The cable was thickly coated with grease. The man's leap had not been perfect. Terror had thrown him a bit too wide of the rigid cable. His gloved hands caught at the steel lifeline. But the swing of his body put a terrific strain on his slippery hands.

He was unable to check his descent. His twined legs flung themselves about the cable an instant too late. The terrific speed of his slide burned through the heavy gloves as if they were paper. For three stories, the doomed thug managed to maintain his agonized hold; then he let go.

His body hurtled downward through the empty well. A horrible faraway thump was dimly audible.

THE SHADOW rose to his feet. His face was grim, but there was no time to think about the terrible end of the man who had fallen.

Noise of gunfire in an empty building high above the street had already attracted attention. The wind that swept coldly through the open upper floors of the unfinished skyscraper brought the faint shouts of men and the shriller sound of police whistles.

An alarm had been telephoned in to Western City police headquarters. Bluecoats were whizzing at a reckless

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speed to the scene.

A moment later, The Shadow heard the sound he was listening for: the shrill wail of a police siren.

He was already bending over the body of the thug he had shot. A glance was all The Shadow needed. The .45 at close range had worked havoc. The thug was beyond all human aid. His lips were sealed forever.

Again, The Shadow's need to save his own life had brought him smack up against a blank wall of mystery. Both thugs were dead. The mysterious robed criminal who had dared to don the disguise of The Shadow himself, had vanished with sly skill at the very beginning of the fight.

With the approaching sound of a police siren shrieking in his ears, The Shadow raced back to where Harry Vincent lay.

Harry was still unconscious. The Shadow bent to sling him over one shoulder. As he did so, his sharp eyes noticed something beyond the range of the brazier in which the coal fire still blazed. It was a black tarpaulin.

There was something sinister about the shape of that covering. It hid something that lay rigidly beneath. The Shadow could see the bent outline of a twisted leg, the shape of a human arm.

He flung the covering aside.

A dead man lay underneath. One glance, and The Shadow knew who the corpse was. The dead man was the missing watchman, whose absence had allowed the fake Shadow and his two thugs to make so easy an entrance into the building with their captive. The watchman's metal badge was still pinned on his lapel. He had been shot to death with a single bullet.

Beside the body lay the gun that had slain the watchman.

The Shadow's breath hissed as he recognized that weapon. It was Harry Vincent's gun! One shot had been fired from it.

Instantly, the ugly perfection of the killer's plans became clear to The Shadow. Crooks had not been content to torture Harry to death. They had pinned the murder of the watchman on The Shadow's unconscious agent!

The Shadow knew that the missing bullet from Vincent's gun was the one which had tunneled through the body of the watchman. Harry, even if rescued, was still a marked man. The police would arrest him at his hotel the moment they examined the gun and recovered the slug. Vincent would be railroaded for a murder he had never committed!

The screech of the police siren was louder in The Shadow's ears. A car from Western City headquarters had halted in the street below the towering structure of the half-finished skyscraper. Cops were racing into the building behind the beams of bright flashlights.

They were beginning to climb the ladders that gave the only method of access to the upper floors. The stairways had not yet been installed. The lift was useless, because the engineer who operated it was home asleep and the mechanism covered and locked.

The delay gave The Shadow a grim opportunity.

A knife appeared from his pocket. With the skill of a surgeon, he probed with his blade, seeking the bullet

that was imbedded in a bone near the spine of the dead man.

It was work that The Shadow hated to do; but it was necessary work. If the rough surgery of The Shadow failed, it meant the death of Harry Vincent in the electric chair for a murder he had not committed!

The Shadow didn't recover the slug until the police were climbing the last ladder. He had only time to drop the bloody chunk of metal in his pocket and whirl. As he crouched above the ladder that led from below, he was outlined to the cops who were racing up the rungs with drawn guns.

They saw the black cloak and a bullet-perforated hat. They saw a white face peering down at them, with eyes like flame and a nose beaked like an eagle's. Yells echoed in the windy darkness.

“The Shadow!”

Bullets spat. The Shadow had to fling himself backward. But as he fell out of range of the hail of police lead, he managed to give a vigorous shove to the uprights of the ladder that projected above the hole in the unfinished flooring.

The ladder swayed outward from its support. It crashed. The cops on the rungs were flung headlong. While they sprawled on the floor below, The Shadow raced to where Harry Vincent lay unconscious.

In an instant, he had his inert agent slung over his shoulder like a sack of meal. The Shadow had nowhere to retreat now except up!

Up was where he went. Oblivious of the weight of the man he carried, he ascended with noiseless skill. There was nothing above his head now but the cold black sky, thickly powdered with stars. The only way down was the ladder which The Shadow had used.

The ladder was now blocked by police. It creaked with their weight as they ascended curiously, guns ready to blast flame.

The Shadow's eyes swerved to the edge of the top floor. He did what looked like a mad, suicidal thing. With his leather belt tied tightly around Vincent, to help anchor the unconscious agent across his left shoulder, The Shadow ran straight to the edge of nothingness.

He poised himself to leap outward!

But there was method in his madness, brains behind that seeming crazy decision.

A derrick was anchored at the edge of the topmost floor. It was used to swing girders in line. A cable led downward. But unlike the cable of the elevator hoist, this one was not a perpendicular line. It slanted inward two stories below the dizzy chasm where The Shadow stood.

He was able to reach it only by leaning desperately outward. He began to fall. But the momentum of his tipping body brought both his hands to the slanting cable. The tight leather belt kept Harry Vincent in place across The Shadow's shoulder. The two began to slide.

It took only a few horrible seconds. But The Shadow was bathed in cold sweat when his feet hit the wooden brace to which the slanting cable was attached on the floor below. His impetus threw him inward, not outward. He and Harry fell to the rough flooring.

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Their bodies made quite a thump, but the noise was covered by the shouting of the police on the top floor of the structure.

They had emerged beneath the cold starlight of the open sky. Their guns had jerked level, to spit death at The Shadow.

They found only emptiness.

It never occurred to them to look at the cable that slanted into the building two floors below. The thought that a man might slide to safety by that thin lifeline high above the pavement seemed incredible. Besides, there were plenty of places on the top floor where a fugitive might hide.

A cop guarded the hatchway at the top of the ladder. The others began to poke grimly among the masses of material and metal that cluttered the top floor. They moved warily, taking their time, expecting at any moment to hear the roaring blast of a hidden gun.

The Shadow utilized those precious moments to carry Vincent to the ground floor of the building. More police were entering from the street. But they didn't see the black wraith that melted toward the rear. The Shadow dropped into a back courtyard filled with heaps of debris from construction work.

As he did so, he ran almost headlong into a cop who was prowling around the dump heap with a drawn gun.

The sudden surprise of that grim encounter was all that saved The Shadow. Encumbered with the weight of Harry Vincent, he should have fallen an easy prey to the law. But the cop's frozen surprise was not shared by The Shadow.

The butt of Vincent's recovered gun hit the cop before he could shout an alarm. The cop toppled unconscious on a heap of discarded rubbish. The Shadow hated to slug a policeman, but there was no other recourse.

He melted in the darkness behind the building, and used his desperate leeway of time to revive Vincent.

Vincent's eyes opened. The gloved hand of The Shadow choked off his groan. His voice hissed with grim authority into the ear of his dazed agent.

That voice sobered Harry. He lay there quietly, listening attentively. Then he said in a low whisper:

“Orders understood.”

“Go!”

Harry rose to his feet, disappeared in the direction of the rear street. Then he hurried to the nearest avenue. It was one where a bus line carried travelers from the outskirts of Western City, to the business district.

All the excitement was behind Vincent now. The uproar in front of the skyscraper had drawn an enormous crowd of spectators. Harry boarded the bus without any trouble. His buttoned coat hid the burns on his chest.

MEANWHILE, the black-cloaked figure of The Shadow had changed to the dapper, well-dressed appearance of Lamont Cranston. Cranston made his way around the block, being careful not to show himself until he mingled with the running citizens who were hurrying to join the crowd in front of the skyscraper.

Cranston pushed through the crowd until he was well in front. His aristocratic bearing helped his progress.

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People muttered as he shoved, but no one objected too violently. He stopped at a point where he could hear the muttered talk of two policeman assigned to hold back the crowd.

It was grimly—revealing talk.

The police had found a black cloak and a slouch hat in the skyscraper.

A clever criminal had not taken any chances, thought The Shadow. He had planted his fake disguise where cops would find it.

“The watchman was killed by The Shadow,” one of the cops whispered to his partner. “But the murder gun is missing. And it's even crazier than that. The Shadow must have dug out the bullet that killed the watchman, before he fled. They found evidences of a rough surgery job—and the murder slug is missing!”

“That settles it,” the other cop muttered. “That stuff about The Shadow always helping the law is the bunk. He's a criminal! It's clear enough what he's been after. He's been trying to ruin Roger Dodd.”

Lamont Cranston pricked up his ears. He listened intently.

“The watchman's murder was a cover for an arson job,” the cop continued. “The basement is soaked with gasoline. The Shadow meant to burn the whole building down!”

“Why didn't he set it afire, then?”

“Maybe The Shadow didn't have time.”

Cranston smiled as he retreated through the crowd. He had a different theory than the cop. That gasoline had not been meant to be set afire. It was merely another device to make Dodd look like an innocent victim.

The only triumph for The Shadow was the rescue of Harry Vincent. He had saved Vincent's life and ruined a plot to frame him for murder. But even this triumph was really a defeat.

Harry's usefulness in Western City was now ended. The supercriminal in the black robe knew now that Vincent was an agent of The Shadow. That was why The Shadow had whispered grim orders to Harry before he had dismissed him.

Harry was obeying those orders at this very moment. He was to return to his hotel and check out. Then take the first train eastward, to New York.

The Shadow had started on the defensive. He still was on the defensive. But his identity was still a secret.

Lamont Cranston smiled. He thought of the sleek contractor, Roger Dodd. Dodd controlled that skyscraper where Harry Vincent had so narrowly escaped destruction. Was Roger Dodd, reputed friend of the arrested Martin Black, behind this carnival of crime and mystery?

The smile of The Shadow changed to grim, foreboding laughter.

CHAPTER VI. THE FAKE SHADOW.

THE eyes of the girl in the fur coat were swollen and puffy. She had been weeping. She started to press the bell-button of her apartment door, then suddenly remembered that her maid was not at home. She had given

her the evening off.

She fumbled in her bag for the key, and let herself in.

She was glad she had given Celeste the evening off. Celeste was a warmhearted Frenchwoman, and had been in her employ a long time. Celeste would be sympathetic. The girl in the fur coat couldn't bear that.

She took off her coat and hung it in the closet. The mirror on the closet door showed that the girl was very pretty. She had blue eyes and hair the color of ripe corn. The gown she was wearing left her shoulders and arms bare. Her skin was like cream.

“Don't be such a little fool!” she whispered at her reflection in the mirror. “You're doing the best you can. And weeping only makes you look silly!”

She felt better after that. She went to her dressing table and began to repair the ravages of her grief.

The girl's name was Alice Gunther. She was the niece of the imprisoned Martin Black. She was Black's only near relative.

Alice had just returned from a late-afternoon visit with her uncle at the Western City detention jail. Black had been curt and scornful. He told Alice to stop bothering him. His laugh was nasty when she begged him to co-operate more truthfully with Henry Stuart, his lawyer.

“The devil with Stuart!” he sneered. “Lawyers can't help me! I've got to depend on myself. I know exactly the nature of the mess I'm in—and I'm not worried. Let people think I'm crazy. They'll think differently before this thing is over!”

His jeering laugh echoed as Alice, weeping, walked from the cell corridor.

Alice Gunther shuddered as she recalled that cold mirth.

The bell of her apartment rang presently. She went to the door and opened it. A man was standing there, whom she recognized. He was tall, faultlessly dressed, with alert eyes in a calm, bearded face.

It was Roger Dodd.

“Where's Celeste?” he asked quickly.

“I gave my maid the evening off.”

“Good! That makes things more cozy. I've come to talk to you frankly about your uncle.”

Alice's eyes filled anew with tears. “I don't want any sympathy,” she said forlornly.

Roger Dodd patted her slim shoulder.

“Sit down. Let's talk sense. I know that Martin Black is innocent. So do you. The question is, who is responsible for the criminal mess he's now in?”

“I've thought about it until I've nearly gone crazy!”

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Dodd looked her straight in the eyes. There was almost a hypnotic quality in his gaze.

“Have you heard of what happened at the new skyscraper I'm erecting here in Western City?”

The girl nodded. She knew what Dodd was going to say. The papers had been full of wild charges against The Shadow.

“I don't believe The Shadow is a criminal,” Alice said. “I've read too much about his activities on the side of the law, to think that he murdered your construction watchman and killed two of your ironworkers. Besides, what were ironworkers doing there at night?”

“Heaven knows!” Dodd replied with a pious shrug. “But the testimony of the police seems conclusive. The Shadow was seen. He escaped from under the very noses of the police. His slouch hat and black cloak were found on the premises. And the evidence proves that he had planned arson.”

“Why should The Shadow persecute you?”

“I don't know. Why is Martin Black in jail on a charge of murder? I happen to be one of Black's best friends. Isn't it queer that crime should now turn toward me?”

THERE was a pause. Roger Dodd deftly brought the name of Lamont Cranston into the conversation. Cranston had made a visit to the jail where Martin Black was confined. It was supposed to be an inspection visit on the part of the prominent visitor to Western City.

“What about it?” Alice asked.

“Did it ever occur to you that Lamont Cranston might possibly be—The Shadow?”

Alice was shocked. She spoke scornfully, when she had regained her breath. But Dodd continued smoothly.

“Cranston claims he's here for financial investments. But he has made no move to invest, as yet. And here's something else I've discovered. Lamont Cranston was not at his hotel during the time those murders occurred on my construction job!”

“Be careful what you say about a man as important as Mr. Cranston,” Alice suggested. “You might lay yourself open to a slander suit.”

“I've mentioned this only to you,” Dodd replied. He paused, then shrugged. “Perhaps I'm unduly suspicious. Forget what I've just said. I've been under a terrific strain. Cranston is probably as innocent as I am.”

He rose, presently, to take his departure. At the door of the apartment, he paused. The bright, hypnotic look was back in his calm eyes.

“I hope I haven't prejudiced you against Cranston?”

“You haven't. Or The Shadow, either!”

Roger Dodd smiled. The smile deepened on his bearded lips after the door closed behind him.

Alice Gunther tried to put the whole tangle of suspicion and crime out of her mind. She went into her rear sitting room, with a popular novel. She had been reading less than ten minutes, when she heard a faint

swishing sound.

Alice looked up. Her glance moved toward the windowpane. Someone had tossed a handful of sand against the glass!

With a beating heart, Alice lifted the window. It was pitch-dark outside. Her apartment was on the second floor. Beyond her window was the slope of a small extension roof. But there was no human being visible in the darkness.

Alice started to close the window.

“Wait!”

A face loomed suddenly in the darkness of the shed roof. As Alice recoiled, a figure robed in black stepped noiselessly into the room. A black-gloved hand drew the shade.

“The Shadow!” Alice gasped.

Sibilant mirth echoed for a moment. Then The Shadow spoke.

“Have no fear, Miss Gunther. I come to help you, not to commit crime, as your friend Roger Dodd seems to suspect. I overheard everything Dodd said. Your loyalty to me is evidence of your intelligence. I have come with advice, and help.”

Had Harry Vincent or Clyde Burke been in that room, they would have leaped without hesitation at the throat of the robed intruder. He was not The Shadow! His voice was too harsh, too metallic. He talked too much. And his words were too flowery.

But Alice Gunther had no suspicion of the truth.

The fake Shadow had carried a heavy leather bag with him into the room. He pointed to it with a gloved finger.

“In this bag is the proof of my interest in you and your unfortunate uncle.”

He unlocked the bag. It was crammed with cash. He took out the packages of currency and laid them on Alice's table.

“What is this for?” Alice gasped.

“It's the means of saving your uncle's life.”

“I don't understand.”

“Martin Black is the victim of a conspiracy,” the fake Shadow intoned. “A master criminal is at work. His intent is to have Martin Black convicted for murder, to pay the penalty in the electric chair. Failing in that, he intends to murder your uncle.

“My plan is to have Black released quietly from jail. I want to send him away from Western City, to a spot where he will be out of reach of a criminal who is eager to have him dead!”

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It was a long-winded speech from a personage who never wasted a word, particularly under circumstances like this. But the girl's face was radiant with joy at the prospect of help from The Shadow.

“I will do whatever you ask.”

“Excellent!”

THE robed intruder explained his plan.

The money he had brought with him represented the sum demanded by the State for the release of Black on bail. Ordinarily, on a charge such as this, bail would not have been accepted. But the actual murder charge against Black was entirely circumstantial.

No one had actually seen him kill Howard Nixon in the locked private office of the Prairie Saving Bank. Moreover, the shots that Black had fired on the street had injured no one. He had fired over the heads of the terrified pedestrians.

There was another reason why bail for Black would be accepted. He had powerful friends, the fake Shadow explained. Roger Dodd had been moving heaven and earth to intercede for Black. So had Henry Stuart, the lawyer. Most important, Peter Corcoran, who was the most influential politician in the State, had spoken privately to the governor.

“Black can't raise the money himself,” the black-cloaked intruder said, solemnly. “His funds are now in the control of government agents, who are investigating his financial affairs. That is why I have brought this cash. I've drawn it in small amounts, through dummies I can trust. Take it. Use it—tonight!”

“But how?”

With a smirking chuckle, he told her. A judge was waiting for Alice Gunther in a spot where reporters could neither see nor overhear. The writ would be signed, and honored instantly at the jail. Martin Black would be spirited out a rear door. After that, his movements were up to him.

“Or rather, up to you, my dear,” the fake Shadow whispered. “Listen carefully. These are your secret orders—to be repeated by you to Martin Black. He has been told where to go when he leaves the jail. He'll telephone you from there. Tell him this!”

It was a mystifying order to the girl.

The Shadow wanted Martin Black to go to a certain railroad station on the outskirts of Western City. It was a place where through trains never stopped, except on signal. Black was to signal a limited and board it. Once aboard the train, Black was to walk through it, watching for the appearance of a friend.

“He'll know his friend when he sees him,” the black-robed visitor told Alice, with a harsh laugh. “It's someone Martin Black can trust. This friend will give him instructions where to leave the train and the exact house in another city where he is to hide.

“Absolute obedience on Black's part is necessary. Otherwise, I cannot guarantee to save his life. A supercriminal will reach him—and destroy him!”

Eagerly, the girl promised to obey. “One thing more: You will have an important task to do yourself.

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For reasons which I don't care to explain, I am interested tonight in the movements of Lamont Cranston.”

Alice gasped. “Surely you don't suspect him?”

“Tonight, Mr. Dodd told you that Lamont Cranston might be The Shadow. That statement is both false and silly. The Shadow is not a criminal. My mission here tonight proves that. But there is grave danger that Lamont Cranston—who is not The Shadow—may be working on the side of murder!”

“It sounds hideous!” Alice cried. “I've spoken to him. He's been very kind.”

“Hypocrisy!” the fake Shadow snarled. “Will you do as I say? Agree—or I shall withdraw from the case!”

“I agree,” Alice Gunther murmured.

“That is sensible,” the intruder returned. “Invite Lamont Cranston to come to see you, after you have arranged the matter of bail. Keep him here in your apartment during the vital time when Martin Black is racing to a small wayside station to board the limited.”

“Suppose Mr. Cranston refuses my invitation?”

“Tell him you want to discuss the bank murder. Pretend you've thought of some new idea that may be vital in proving your uncle's innocence. Cranston will come. Arrange a charming tête-à-tête dinner. Remember—the life of Martin Black may depend on your skill in keeping Cranston from learning of your uncle's train journey!”

The robed intruder closed his empty bag. He peered out, made certain that all was clear outside. The shade was lifted softly and the window raised. The black-robed figure vanished into the darkness behind the apartment building.

ALICE GUNTHER'S head was in a whirl. The whole episode seemed like a crazy nightmare. But the money The Shadow had left was in plain sight on her table. She raced into her dressing room and brought out a traveling bag. She packed the bundles of currency, and donned her hat and coat.

Alice left the house, confident that she was unseen.

But her movements were noted by a man trained for such emergencies. The man was Clyde Burke. He had been watching Alice's apartment house from a building across the street. He had a fast car parked in a convenient spot. By the time Alice Gunther was in her own car, Clyde was on the job, tailing her.

He knew how to keep a fugitive in sight without betraying his own presence. Alice made the task easier. She was too eager to keep her appointment with the bail judge, to think of pursuit.

Clyde Burke was unable to learn what took place in the house where Alice went. But he knew that her host was a prominent judge. He suspected a secret bail arrangement. His suspicion was justified when the girl drove swiftly to the Western City detention jail.

Clyde dashed to a telephone and made a low-voiced call. He reported everything he had learned. Then he took up a sheltered position, where he could watch the rear door of the jail without himself being seen.

He saw Martin Black emerge presently, muffled to the eyes. Black drove away in a car that had been left parked at the curb. He went to a small frame shack on the outskirts of Western City. This was the spot from

which Black had been ordered to telephone his niece.

Clyde Burke waited patiently outside the shack.

Meanwhile, a dark figure waited with equal patience outside the rear window of Alice Gunther's apartment. Clyde's report had warned the real Shadow of impending developments.

The Shadow saw Alice Gunther return to her apartment and wait nervously near her telephone.

Presently, the bell rang. Alice grabbed the instrument. Eagerly, the girl relayed instructions to her uncle about the train he was to take. She told him about the unknown friend who would meet him aboard the limited.

The Shadow heard every word Alice uttered. The moment she hung up, he faded.

He raced back by car to his suite at the hotel. The hotel was only a few blocks away, but the trip gave ample time for The Shadow to slip out of his black cloak and become again the dapper and innocent Lamont Cranston.

As he hurried into the lobby, the clerk smiled and beckoned.

"Oh, Mr. Cranston! A lady is on the telephone, inquiring for you. I was about to tell her you were not at the hotel, when you came in. The lady's name is Alice Gunther. Would you care to take the call?"

"Certainly," Cranston smiled.

Alice sounded sweet, but breathless. She invited Lamont Cranston to her apartment. Even if Cranston hadn't known what was in the wind, her eagerness would have put him on guard. Alice said that she wanted to discuss some new ideas about her uncle's arrest. She was arranging a private dinner for two. Would Mr. Cranston join her?

"I'll be delighted," Cranston replied.

There was flame in his eyes as he hung up.

CHAPTER VII. ABOARD THE LIMITED.

A CAR drove swiftly along a country road. Martin Black was behind the wheel. He was in a fever of impatience.

The road he was taking traversed a desolate, undeveloped section on the outskirts of Western City. On one side were open fields. On the other were the dark rails of a transcontinental railroad.

Presently, Black saw his goal. It was a small wayside station. It consisted of a tiny wooden waiting room and a platform alongside the local tracks. The station was dark. There were no lights on the outside platform.

The place was merely a flag station. It was a convenience for suburban travelers commuting back and forth from Western City. But the last local train had finished its evening run. There would be no more trains until the first commuters appeared in the morning.

This was where Martin Black intended to board the limited.

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His eagerness had made him arrive too early. Yet he found plenty to do. Nervously, he ran along the platform to its end and pulled the mechanism that set a stop signal. A red light glowed across the tracks of the main line.

Black felt better when he saw the signal. He went into the waiting room and searched it to make sure there was no one inside watching. He found only a couple of empty wooden benches and a stove.

Satisfied, Black went back to the platform. His glance kept alternating between his watch and the dark stretch of track. He was certain he was not being observed.

Yet he was observed! Clyde Burke was crouched within the small waiting room which Black had made sure was empty a few minutes earlier.

There was no mystery to Clyde's smart maneuver. He had parked his trailing car well out of sight of the station, had advanced the rest of the way on foot. Hidden in a clump of weeds, he had noted Black's search of the waiting room. The moment Black went out the front door to the platform, Clyde sneaked noiselessly in through the back.

He was not afraid of any further search. The time that elapsed before the arrival of the limited was growing shorter.

Presently, a vivid white headlight glowed far down the track. The rails began to hum. The limited came roaring into view along the main line. Black was afraid the train wouldn't stop. But the engineer had seen the signal. There was a hissing of air brakes. The long train shuddered to a halt.

A Pullman door opened. Black hurried across the rails to the center track and scrambled up the steps. In a moment, he was past the conductor and into the Pullman.

Before the steps could be blocked by the closing door, a second figure raced into view. It was Clyde Burke. He didn't emerge from the ramshackle waiting room of the local station until Martin Black had vanished aboard the train. But he made up for his delay by fast sprinting.

In an instant, Clyde was aboard the train, panting with exertion.

"Just about made it," the conductor grunted. "Why did you delay that way?"

"I thought I could buy my ticket inside the station," Clyde mumbled. "But the agent's window was closed. I want Pullman reservations. A single occupancy section."

"You'll have to see the Pullman conductor."

Clyde nodded. But he didn't go into the car where the unsuspecting Black had vanished. He crossed the platform and went into the Pullman ahead. He hunted up the Pullman conductor and made arrangements for a complete upper and lower.

Clyde had no idea how long he'd be on the train. He didn't want his movements restricted by having somebody sleeping in the upper berth. Hence his choice of a single occupancy section.

Having paid his fare to the first distant point that came into his mind, he walked back through the train. Black was not in the Pullman into which Clyde had seen him go. The Daily Classic reporter continued walking to the rear. He reached the club car before he saw his man.

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BLACK was obviously looking for someone. He gave Clyde an eager glance, that changed to disappointment. Clyde had interviewed Black only once at the jail in Western City and his face hadn't registered on Black's memory. He had no suspicion that Clyde had boarded the limited from the same spot he had.

Presently, Martin Black began to walk forward through the train. It was easy for Clyde to trail him, because other passengers were on the move. Some were on their way to the club car, others to the diner.

Black scanned each face that passed him.

Not all of the Pullmans were standard sleepers. One or two of them were compartment cars. Martin Black was halfway through the narrow aisle of one of them, when he halted abruptly. A compartment door had opened. A man emerged.

It was the bearded Roger Dodd!

Luckily, Clyde had dropped back. Dodd was facing his way, but he couldn't see him. Dodd gave Black a peculiar smile.

“Hello, Martin! What are you doing on this train?”

“I'm looking for a friend,” Black muttered.

“Really?”

“Yes. I'd like to talk to you about it.”

“All right. Come on in.”

The compartment door closed. Clyde hurried noiselessly along the aisle. It was impossible to hear what was going on, because of the roar of the train. Besides, Clyde dared not linger outside. It was too risky.

He tried the handle of the compartment on the right. The door was locked. But he had better luck on the left. A quick jerk showed him that the compartment was empty. Its occupant had probably been one of those people who had passed him on their way to the dining car.

Clyde locked the door on the inside. He was carrying a portable typewriter in a traveling case. At least, that's what it looked like. But when Clyde opened the case, an efficient listening device was disclosed.

Heavy batteries took up most of the case's interior. There was something that looked like a physician's stethoscope, except that it had ear-pieces that clamped over Clyde's head.

He placed the end of his “stethoscope” against the thin panel of the adjoining compartment. A rubber suction device held the gadget firmly in place against the panel. Within the circle of that rubber suction ring was a delicate microphone. It caught up instantly the sound of voices in Roger Dodd's compartment.

Dodd sounded angry.

“Are you seriously expecting me to believe this wild tale of yours?” he rasped. “You sound insane! I never expected to meet you. I didn't even know you had been released from jail.”

CITY OF FEAR

"I was told a friend would meet me," Black insisted. "You're the only friend I've seen on this whole train. You are my friend, I hope?"

"Of course!" Dodd sounded impatient.

"Then what is the message? Where am I to go?"

"To hell, as far as I know," Dodd growled.

His anger was increasing. To the listening Clyde Burke, it was anger that sounded forced and phony.

"Now look here, Martin. I've told you I know nothing about this hocus-pocus. Frankly, I don't want to be bothered. I've got troubles of my own. So if you won't talk sense, I'll have to ask you to leave me in peace."

"Why, damn you, how dare you talk to me like—"

"I'll talk any way I please! There's a limit to everything, even friendship. I've tried to help you ever since you were arrested. And what do I get out of it? Nothing but trouble! I'm sick and tired of you! Now, get out!"

Marlin Black's voice sounded stunned.

"So that's the way it is, eh? Well, I can talk, too! To other people besides you. To—"

"You try any funny business, and I'll kill you!" Dodd growled.

There were sounds of a brief scuffle. Clyde stiffened at his listening post, half expecting to have his ears blasted by a pistol shot. But the struggle ended almost as soon as it had begun.

Dodd laughed huskily.

"Sorry, Martin. I'm nervous. I didn't mean to insult you. Let's forget our quarrel. I know nothing of any secret message for you. There must be someone else on the train. Peter Corcoran, perhaps. Or Stuart, your lawyer. But it's certainly not me!"

"All right. Let it go at that. But remember this! If I don't find anyone on this train I know. I'll be back to see you!"

The compartment door opened. Martin Black walked quietly away. After a few moments of cautious waiting, Clyde emerged from his lurking place next door. He carried his listening device in its typewriter-like case. He congratulated himself that he had avoided discovery. But his optimism was not justified.

Dodd's compartment door had opened on a slight, crack. Watchful eyes noted the man who had just emerged from the adjoining compartment. Dodd recognized Clyde. His breath sucked in faintly, and he closed the door.

Presently, he reappeared. He made his way through the swaying train.

Clyde had gone into the Pullman washroom for a quick smoke. His nerves were at an excited pitch, as a result of what he had just heard. He wanted to digest the meaning of the strange interview between Black and the bearded Dodd.

He sat down on a comfortable couch, inhaling deeply from his cigarette. He didn't notice a hand slide quietly

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into view between the wall of the washroom and the curtain that shrouded its doorway.

Suddenly, the room lapsed into darkness!

With a startled oath, Clyde sprang to his feet. The next instant, an unseen figure sprang at him. Something struck Clyde on the head with terrific force. He was knocked unconscious.

The assailant tiptoed from his unconscious victim to the closed window of the washroom. He tried to lift the window. It was stuck too tightly to be moved. The man cursed softly. He wanted to get that window open and throw Clyde's limp body out on the tracks.

The train was thundering along at seventy miles an hour. Even if Clyde didn't bounce under the wheels and get cut to bloody ribbons, the crash of that impact to the roadbed at high speed would snap his spine and break every bone in his body.

Again, the killer strained at the window.

But suddenly he straightened, listening. Along the corridor outside he could hear slow, approaching footsteps. He recognized that shuffling pace. It was the Pullman porter.

The man who had struck down Clyde stepped back from the washroom window. He stood silently alongside the wall at the left side of the thick doorway curtains. He heard the porter halt outside, a mumble of astonishment on his lips.

“Washroom dark, huh? Wonder how come? Doggone light bulb musta burned out!”

The porter flicked the left half of the curtain aside and entered. While he was fumbling for the light switch, a noiseless figure vanished through the far side of the dangling curtain.

The escaping killer held his breath. His feet made no sound on the thick corridor rug. Inside the washroom, the porter was still mumbling as he felt for the switch.

To the porter's surprise, the washroom lights came on brilliantly.

The first thing he saw was Clyde's unconscious body. For a moment, the porter was paralyzed with horror. He thought Clyde was dead. With a strangled cry, he backed out into the corridor to yell for help.

He saw a well-dressed, bearded gentleman walking quietly toward him.

“What's the matter, porter?” Dodd asked softly. “Is anything wrong?”

His low voice and capable appearance ended the porter's panic. Instead of shouting an alarm, he whispered to Dodd what he had found. He led the way back into the curtained washroom.

ROGER DODD took complete charge. He glanced at the unconscious victim and said calmly:

“He's not dead. He's merely stunned. Some one struck him.”

The porter soaked towels in cold water. Dodd used them as compresses at Clyde's temples. Presently, Clyde revived.

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The blow that had knocked him out had been a hasty one, delivered in darkness. Clyde's only injury was a cut on his scalp.

“It must have been some one who saw me show my roll of bills when I paid the conductor,” Clyde said. He glanced at the bearded man. Aren't you Roger Dodd, of Western City?”

Dodd didn't seem bothered.

“Yes. Dodd is my name. And you're Clyde Burke, the newspaperman from New York, aren't you?”

Clyde nodded. He mentioned pointedly that he was investigating the Martin Black case. But Dodd blandly ignored the hint. He kept quiet about the fact that he knew Black was on the train.

The two men separated. Clyde announced that he was going to hunt up the conductor and report the attack. Actually, he wanted to get rid of Dodd, in order to send a quick story of the events aboard the train to *The Shadow*.

Clyde's method was simple. From a rack, he took a telegraph blank, wrote a coded message. Around the message he folded a twenty-dollar bill. He weighted the currency and the message with a piece of soap. Tight rubber bands held the telegraph blank and the twenty-dollar bill securely to the improvised weight.

Innocently, Clyde drifted to the enclosed platform space between two of the Pullmans.

He opened a side door. Clyde watched grimly, his face buffeted by a gale of wind. Presently, a station whisked into view. It was a small one, but a lighted window showed that a telegrapher was busy at his key.

Clyde's arm swung and hurled the missile. He aimed the throw in advance of the target. The noise of the speeding train covered the crash of glass, but Clyde saw the window break. He caught a vanishing glimpse of the telegrapher's lifting face, as the speed of the train whisked the station backward out of sight.

Closing the door, Clyde left the dark platform unobserved.

Meanwhile, Roger Dodd was being recognized again. A man had bumped into him in one of the rear cars, with a murmur of astonishment.

“Hello, Dodd! I didn't know you were aboard.”

“I have some business in St. Louis. And you?”

The man's face was both puzzled and annoyed.

“I hardly know why I'm on this train! A friend of mine sent me an urgent message. Told me to come to see him tonight. Very mysterious, and no explanation. But I have an important business deal pending with him, and I didn't dare to ignore the message. Perhaps my friend wants to close the deal.”

“Perhaps,” Dodd agreed smoothly, and excused himself.

The train roared onward. But presently its speed slackened. It came to an unexpected halt. The conductor and a few trainmen opened doors and dropped to the roadbed.

They found that the track ahead was blocked with several small boulders. The boulders had rolled down from

a rain-weakened bluff above the tracks.

It was a simple job to remove them. While the others were busy, one of the trainmen climbed the bluff to make sure there were no loose rocks to endanger following trains. He saw a stone fairly close to the edge of the bank. He bent over the tall weeds to shove it back.

A blackjack struck at him and crushed in his skull!

THE man who had struck that murderous blow was dressed in the uniform of a trainman. The moment he had killed his victim, he slid down the bank and rejoined the others. While they were still busy, he crawled under the train to the other side. A door was open. The fake trainman got aboard unseen.

So did four other men who had hidden near the track. They were garbed exactly like the killer.

There was an express car behind the locomotive and tender. Its side doors were sealed. The door that connected with the rest of the train was locked.

Five minutes after the train had started again, following its brief delay, the express car's rear door burst open. Five men piled into the car. All carried guns.

The two guards in the express car were paralyzed by the sudden attack. They had no time to go for their weapons. One of them tried to temporize.

"You're wasting your time, boys," he said. "There's nothing valuable here. Just a few express parcels."

"Yeah?" The leader of the mobsmen chuckled viciously. "You're a liar! You've got a shipment of gold for the Federal Reserve Bank in St. Louis. A million-dollar's worth! We're taking it over. Every damned nickel's worth!"

CHAPTER VIII. HONOR AMONG THIEVES.

THE two guards were brave men. They were outnumbered, but the thought of surrender never occurred to either of them. One of them dived across the car toward a sawed-off rifle. The other whipped out a pistol from his holster.

Both men died before they could pull a trigger. The reports of five bullets made almost a single echo. The guard with the pistol slumped to his knees and then pitched on his face. He was dead before he hit the floor.

The other guard, though badly wounded, was still conscious. Flat on the floor, he tried weakly to lift his rifle. A thug knocked the rifle barrel aside.

The thug's grin was devilish. He jammed the muzzle of his pistol behind the man's ear, sent a bullet crashing through his brain.

"O. K.!" the mobsmen's leader said. "Mike! Joe! You two know what to do with the engineer and fireman. Climb up forward in a hurry. Louie and Pete will help you make the kill."

He kept glancing anxiously at his watch. The holdup was evidently being carried out on an accurate time basis.

Four thugs vanished out the express car's front door to where the coal tender made a formless blot in the

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darkness of the night. The man with the watch waited. He expected no trouble from the engineer and fireman. Their dead bodies would go hurtling into the whizzing darkness before they knew what was happening.

But time was vital!

He began to curse as the minutes ticked by. But suddenly his face lifted with a wolfish grin. He was listening to the deep-throated whistle of the locomotive.

The engineer seemed to be playing with the whistle cord. There were three long blasts. Then three short ones. Then three more.

The nine whistle blasts seemed to amuse the leader of the train robbers.

“Nice!” he muttered.

Not many of the Pullman passengers in the long train heard or paid any attention to the whistle. Roger Dodd was one who did. His bearded face twisted into a taut smile.

It was Dodd's intention to leave the train. But he had purposely delayed his departure until after the delay caused by the rocks on the tracks. He wanted his presence aboard the train to be established after that brief stop to clear the track!

Dodd was again talking with the passenger who knew him, the man who had boarded the train because of a mysterious message from a business associate in a distant city. Dodd was friendly and talkative. That is, until he heard the sound of the whistle. Then he yawned, glanced at his watch, and shook hands.

He murmured something about glancing at a newspaper in the club car before he turned in to get some sleep. He got rid of his friend with deft ease.

To Dodd's relief, there was no sign of Martin Black in the club car. Nor of Clyde Burke.

Faced with the necessity of keeping an eye on two different suspects, Clyde had made an error in judgment. He was in a Pullman up front, keeping a watchful eye on Black.

In the club car, Roger Dodd watched his chance. When no one was watching, he slipped out the rear door to the observation platform.

The locomotive had been hitting a speed of seventy miles an hour. But following those whistle blasts, the speed of the train gradually slackened. It was not doing more than forty when Dodd climbed the brass observation railing.

The track behind the limited should have been empty. But it wasn't! A gasoline car—the type used by section hands—was chugging along at almost the same speed as the train. The moment Dodd's figure appeared, the gasoline car closed up the gap.

A thug stood crouched on the car, braced to stop the force of Dodd's leap.

“Ready?” he yelled.

“O. K.!” Dodd called back.

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Their voices were whipped away by the wind. Dodd jumped. For a moment, the two clutching men staggered dangerously. But Dodd retained his balance.

The gasoline car slackened its speed. The limited roared onward into the night. Presently, the car came to a switch. The thug who had aided Dodd leaped to the ground.

He moved the hand switch and the car chugged away on a spur. It had joined the main line from a similar spur miles backward in the darkness.

Dodd was no longer on the gasoline car. With leaping haste, he crossed the main line and vaulted a wire fence. On the other side was a well-paved highway. It stretched straight and empty along the flat prairie land that paralleled the tracks.

There was no traffic in sight, because the road followed the railway and went through no nearby big towns. Another factor in Dodd's strategy was the fact that the terminals of this new motor highway were still under construction. Only the middle section of the highway was open for traffic.

The smooth concrete was like a billiard table. Roger Dodd raced across it and dived into a thick growth of bushes.

MEANWHILE, criminal activity had not been idle aboard the roaring train. The locomotive had increased its speed. It was now in the hands of two experienced crooks.

The real engineer and firemen lay like bloody, sodden bundles in a drainage ditch many miles back. Highjackers were ready for the climax in the express car.

They had forced open the safe where the gold was kept. The gold was in bullion form, but it was easy enough to handle. Each bar was in an individual jute sack, tagged and numbered by the government for identification.

A transfer of gold ingots at a speed of seventy miles an hour seemed incredible. But that was what the crooks were now ready for.

One of them opened the express car's side door. The motor highway was disclosed, like a wide black ribbon in the darkness. It paralleled the track.

The road was empty.

But a faint hum from the darkness far behind indicated that something powerful was on the way. It was the steady hum of a motor. A racing car was attempting the dangerous feat of overhauling the roaring train.

Presently, the car became dimly visible. It was painted black. But it was like no ordinary car ever seen in Western City. It looked like a cross between a powerful pleasure vehicle and a bus. It was streamlined, except for something that looked like a machine-gun turret in the low roof of the body.

To draw swiftly alongside the express car, the automobile must have been traveling at a clip that was close to two hundred miles an hour! It was impossible to see who was at the wheel, but the driver handled his amazing vehicle with superb skill.

The vehicle's speed slackened. It matched its pace with the open door of the express car.

None of the passengers in the Pullmans was aware of what was happening. Shades had been drawn on the

windows. Berths had been made up for the night.

The holdup was a criminal work of genius!

It proceeded with smooth efficiency. From the turret in the streamlined roof of the automobile a hinged lid lifted. It locked into upright position, and two other hinged parts opened. The result was a three-sided scoop that left only the front of the turret open.

The yeggs in the express car aboard the train began picking up the jute sacks that contained the gold. It wasn't too tough a weight to handle. Each sack contained only one bar. The tied necks of the sacks afforded a strong grip.

One by one, the sacks were tossed across ten feet of darkness to the opened turret of the speeding automobile. Not one missed its target. Each sacked bar struck the steel scoop, rebounded, and vanished downward into the turret of the automobile.

For days, every one of these thugs had practiced with missiles of similar weight in the privacy of a country barn. They had tossed their trial missiles into a hopper exactly similar to the one now opposite them—over a measured distance equivalent to the gap between car and train.

A burst of harsh laughter from the thugs was the signal that the last gold bar had been successfully transferred.

They didn't wait to see what became of the automobile. Their orders were strict. The side door of the express car slid shut and was fixed with a counterfeit seal. The crooks moved at once to the rear.

Their next job was to uncouple the locomotive and express car from the rest of the train.

They did it while the train was still racing along at high speed. It wasn't a simple job, but neither was it an impossible one. Tools had been brought for the purpose. If the couplings refused to part by mechanical means, explosives were ready to blow the link to the rest of the train to smithereens.

One man crouched low and did the work, while two thugs braced his legs and hips to keep him from plunging to death.

There was a sudden jerk, a grinding noise—then the coupling parted.

The locomotive and the express car increased their speed. The rest of the train receded in the darkness.

There could be no immediate pursuit of the highjackers by trainmen. Nor would an alarm be spread, except after long delay. The breaking of the train had been accomplished in a desolate stretch of prairie land. Houses were sparse. Telephones were a luxury.

ALONG the dark highway the speeding automobile kept pace easily with the uncoupled locomotive and express car. The man at the wheel was the only person in the automobile.

He pulled a lever with his left hand and the steel scoops above the open turret folded together into a single plate. The plate hinged downward and covered the turret.

The driver peered briefly toward the railroad tracks. A calm, bearded face was disclosed. The driver was Roger Dodd! He tooted his horn as a signal that all was well.

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The automobile had been hitting seventy miles an hour. But the burst of speed that came from it now made its previous performance seem like nothing.

In an instant, it had left the express car behind and was abreast of the panting locomotive. It went faster and faster. Broad rubber tires, fat as the balloon tires on an airplane's landing gear, gripped the concrete road. The locomotive seemed to be sliding backward. And still the car drove faster!

Far ahead, the smooth highway suddenly made a turn to the right. It crossed the railroad tracks and continued on the other side.

The driver of the incredibly fast motor car was aware of this. He headed for the distant crossing with all the power in his machine. His speed rose to one hundred miles, to one hundred and fifty—to two hundred!

Then he cut his power. By the time he came to the crossing, he was still traveling at a fast clip. But not too fast for the turn. He swung his wheel.

Broad tires helped to ease the whistling strain. So did the heavy weight of the black car's armored body. Before the onrushing locomotive could reach the crossing, the car had cleared the tracks and was increasing its speed on the left side of the right of way.

Trees and bushes intervened between car and locomotive. The darkness and the thick shrubbery hid Roger Dodd's further progress. The two thugs who were piloting the locomotive didn't worry about that. They were still obeying Dodd's orders.

There remained only one last act in this perfect snatch of a million dollars in gold: the escape of the five thugs to the armored automobile and the division of the loot in a prearranged hiding spot.

The leader of the thugs was again glancing at his watch. Suddenly, he climbed to the coal car and fired three shots in the air. The crashing echoes were heard by the crook at the throttle. He began to slow down the locomotive.

It came to a grinding stop in the darkness. Just ahead of it loomed a spidery shape of steel and wood. It was a railroad trestle that spanned a deep gully. The trestle itself was of timber. The supports were steel. They stood ten feet deep in a stream that flowed through the bottom of the gully.

“O. K.!” the thug with the watch yelled to his pal at the throttle. “Take it halfway across! Be sure that the locomotive and the express car are both on the trestle before we scam!”

The thug at the throttle knew his business. Five criminals dropped to the catwalk in the middle of the trestle.

That trestle was mined! As soon as the five men ran to safety, trestle and locomotive and express car would be exploded into a ruin by a giant charge of dynamite!

The crook who had timed everything by his watch was the man selected to set off the charge.

But his hand never reached the electrical contact. Another hand did that. The gloved hand of the crafty Roger Dodd!

There was a terrific blaze of light. It seemed to dissolve locomotive and express car and trestle into nothingness for an instant. Then came a stunning, earth-shaking roar.

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Trestle girders gave way. Timbers shot skyward into a plume of greasy smoke. The locomotive pitched into space, dragging the coal tender and the express car after it. They hit the stream below with a tremendous splash.

Roger Dodd watched the tangled ruin from a spot where the automobile highway was in sight of the trestle gap. There was a greedy smirk on his bearded face. His hand had set off the premature death blast. He alone would share the loot!

DODD watched to make sure that none of his criminal dupes escaped death. Then, suddenly, the grin wiped from his bearded lips. He saw the figure of a human being feebly clawing itself from the stream below.

The figure moved with painful slowness. But the man was alive. He was dragging himself up the slope of the ravine, to where Roger Dodd waited in his car.

It wasn't the car in which the gold had been highjacked. This was no streamlined, turreted monster capable of two hundred miles an hour on a smooth highway. It was a sedan of popular make.

Dodd had made a quick change somewhere along the route he had taken, while shielded by dense undergrowth and shaggy trees. The loot and the crime vehicle were safely hidden in an underground garage known only to Roger Dodd.

Bearded Dodd waited grimly for the arrival of the only surviving thug.

The thug's face was smeared with blood. He had suffered a bad head injury. He could barely talk. But there was murderous hate in the eyes that glared at Roger Dodd.

“You damned double-crossing rat! You tried to kill us... all of us... so you could—”

“Sure,” Dodd grinned.

His gun was level, but he didn't fire it. He watched the agonized efforts of his dupe to lift a drooping weapon.

The wounded thug collapsed before he could pull the trigger. Dodd laughed viciously.

“You're dying, my friend! Too bad! You made a nice try, but your share of the gold is zero! You can carry that pleasant thought to hell with you! I'm going to drive over to Newtown and register at their best hotel, until all this fuss blows over. Then I'm going to wait for a nice dark night and do some more fast driving.

“When I'm through, a million dollars in gold will rest where I intended all along—right next to a million's worth of bonds stolen from the Prairie Savings Bank in Western City!”

“You're not Dodd at all,” the fainting thug got out. “You're Martin Black!”

“Yell it while you're dying,” Dodd sneered. “Tell it to the leaves in the trees. Good-bye! Give my regards to your pals, when you meet them in hell.”

He drove swiftly away. But the wounded thug didn't die! Hate kept him alive. He managed to stagger to his feet. Newtown was a long way off, but he didn't falter. Foot by foot, he covered the way. A mile passed. Another.

Emerging from a leafy clearing to another road, he sprawled headlong. But his collapse was not a real one.

The thug was copying the vicious tactics of his master. He had heard the sound of an approaching car.

He waited with closed eyes and an arm doubled beneath him. The driver stopped his car, leaped out and ran to help.

Then the thug's glaring eyes opened. His hidden hand jerked into view. A gun made a quick, snarling report in the darkness. The motorist fell to the pavement, shot through the stomach.

The thug stole the car. Staggering with weakness, he managed to get behind the wheel and start the automobile. The killing of an innocent stranger didn't bother him. All he could think of was the treacherous grin of the bearded Roger Dodd.

Newtown was the wounded mobbie's destination.

CHAPTER IX. A PERFECT CRIME.

LAMONT CRANSTON was having dinner with Alice Gunther in the privacy of her apartment.

Everything had been arranged by one of the best caterers in Western City. The food was excellent. The wines were well chosen. The meal was served by a maid provided by the caterer. When she was not serving, the maid remained discreetly out of sight.

Dessert had come and gone. Cranston held a match to Alice Gunther's cigarette. He murmured something that made her flush with pleasure.

"That's a nice compliment. You're a charming guest, Mr. Cranston."

"It's easy to be charming to a hostess as beautiful as yourself," he murmured.

He was not indulging in flattery. Alice's beauty was breathtaking tonight, She was wearing an evening gown that only a girl with a superb figure would have dared. It left her shoulders and arms bare, emphasized the loveliness of her slim, youthful body.

She laughed, and toyed with her cigarette.

Cranston noted that laugh. It was a shade too shrill to be natural. And she was laughing too often.

Alice Gunther was under a terrific mental strain. Cranston knew the reason. Her dinner invitation was a part of a bold plan to make sure that Lamont Cranston wasted time tonight.

Cranston had kept the date in spite of his knowledge. He was depending on Clyde Burke to find out what Martin Black was up to. He knew that Clyde had followed Black aboard the limited.

Clyde's message, hurled through the glass window of a telegrapher's office in a wayside railroad station, had been delivered to Lamont Cranston.

But the message only added to the mystery.

Money had been secretly raised to bail out Martin Black. Political pressure had been brought into play. There was no other explanation for the quick acceptance of bail and the prompt release of Black. The source of that bail money was still unknown to Cranston.

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He was unaware of the visit of the fake Shadow to Alice Gunther earlier in the evening.

But Clyde's message warned him that something dangerous was under way. The message had been forwarded from Cranston's hotel to Alice's apartment. He read it midway through the meal. He explained it was a tiresome business report, a matter connected with his investments.

“And now, it's your turn to talk,” he told Alice, smilingly. “You said you had some ideas that might explain the strange bank crime in which your uncle was involved.”

Alice nodded. But what she said was disappointing. It was merely a rehash of theories that had appeared in Western City newspapers. Her hesitant speech confirmed Cranston's suspicion that her promise of new evidence had been bait to attract him to her dinner table.

“Do you mind if I turn on the radio?” Cranston said quietly. “Concert music, played very low, makes a pleasant background. I won't tune it loud enough to be disturbing.”

She nodded, and he turned on the machine. He had a grim purpose in so doing, but it did not appear on his face. He returned to his chair. He seemed to be listening to Alice's soft voice and the softer background of concert music. Actually, he heard nothing.

His brain was concentrating on the meaning of the message which Clyde Burke had hurled from the speeding train.

There was plenty to think about. Black was on that train. So was Roger Dodd. Cranston was aware of the strange meeting between Dodd and Black. He knew of Dodd's angry denial that he had secret instructions for Black. Cranston also was aware of the attack on Clyde in the washroom of the Pullman.

To Lamont Cranston, these facts spelled danger. Crime seemed to be in the making. Clyde's presence on the train might not be enough to hinder criminal events. Cranston expected something startling to happen.

That was why he had tuned in the radio.

PRESENTLY, Cranston realized that the music had abruptly stopped. The sudden silence drew his attention to the loud-speaker. The silence endured only a few seconds. Then the voice of an announcer spoke excitedly.

“Attention, please! We're interrupting our regular program to broadcast an important news flash!”

Cranston darted to the radio, turned it up louder. The voice of the announcer filled the room. His words were sensational.

There had been a bad train wreck on the main line to St. Louis. A locomotive and tender had plunged from a dynamited trestle that spanned a lonely stream. An express car had gone over with the locomotive. But the rest of the train was safe. Thieves had uncoupled the Pullman a short time before the disaster had happened.

“Thieves?” Alice Gunther gasped.

Cranston said nothing.

The announcer's report continued. There had been a gigantic robbery. A million-dollar gold shipment, destined for the Federal Reserve Bank in St. Louis, had vanished! The seals were still intact on the doors of the wrecked express car, but the gold was not in the car.

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The express guards had been shot to death before the crash from the trestle. The thieves had apparently all perished, too. Four bodies, hopelessly mangled, had been discovered in the wreck.

“The disaster happened at a point close to the city of Newtown,” the announced concluded. “Passengers from the uncoupled train had been brought there for questioning. The bandits who robbed the train seemingly are the victims of—”

“No passengers hurt?” Alice gasped. “Thank God! My... my uncle is safe!”

“Your uncle?” Cranston echoed in apparent wonder. “I thought he was still in the custody of the police. Was he aboard that limited tonight?”

“Yes. I... I can't explain. He—”

“Get your hat and wrap,” Cranston said curtly. “My car is outside. We've got to drive quickly to Newtown. Your uncle may have been one of the four killed.”

It was not a true statement. Cranston knew from the news report that Black had suffered no injuries. His desire to get to the scene of the crime swiftly was based entirely on his hope of picking up some clue that might explain the extraordinary vanishing of a million-dollar gold shipment.

Alice was too terrified by the news to think clearly. She obeyed Cranston's order. In a few minutes, both were racing through the darkness in Cranston's speedy little car.

While he drove, Cranston forced the girl to divulge everything she knew concerning her uncle's strange release from jail and his trip on the limited. There was curt authority in Cranston's questions. Frightened, the girl told all she knew.

She told of the visit of “The Shadow” to her apartment soon after the friendly call of Roger Dodd.

“The Shadow wanted to save my uncle!” she gasped. “He raised the bail money. He made the arrangements to free my uncle from jail. I trusted The Shadow, because I can't believe that he's a criminal.”

“Your intuition is right,” Cranston said. “The Shadow is not a criminal. But you didn't see The Shadow tonight. You were victimized. That black-robed figure who came through your rear window was an impostor!”

Alice Gunther began to moan.

Cranston chose the highway that paralleled the railroad. He wanted to have a look at the dynamited trestle, and question the rescue posse. But there was nothing to learn. Cranston's identity as a famous millionaire from New York brought him respectful attention.

Facts, however, were impossible to uncover. The four dead thugs were crushed beyond all recognition. They were so mangled, that even the establishment of fingerprints was out of the question.

Cranston rejoined Alice Gunther in the car and continued to Newtown.

THEY found a scene of confusion at Newtown police headquarters. That was where the passengers from the uncoupled limited had been taken. They crowded anterooms and foyers. Their voices were excited. Cranston located Clyde Burke. He used Clyde to get him into an inner room where a half dozen passengers were being

questioned.

One of them was Martin Black. Another was a Western City business man whom Cranston had met casually during his stay in town. Black was bearing the brunt of the chief of police's examination.

“You've got a lot to explain, Black! How did you get out of jail tonight? What were you doing on that train? Is this another of your stunts like the bank robbery in Western City?”

Black protested his innocence. He pointed out that he could have had nothing to do with the thugs who had perished, he had been in the Pullman end of the train the whole time. He was still there after the locomotive and the express car had been uncoupled.

“Somebody got that gold! Where is it?” the police chief snarled.

“I don't know. The train stopped for five minutes because of some small boulders on the track. Maybe it was done then.”

“Impossible!” a conductor said. “There wasn't time enough.”

Martin Black shuddered. All he could do was to repeat his wild tale about how “The Shadow” had arranged bail for his release. He told of searching for a friend, who was to give him further instructions. He mentioned his interview with Roger Dodd.

“Get Dodd,” the police chief rasped to a cop. “Bring him in here.”

But there wasn't any Dodd among the excited passengers at police headquarters.

“That settles it! Dodd was the leader of that mob. He got the gold somehow, then double-crossed his pals!”

But the accusation didn't make sense. The business man who Cranston had noticed earlier was protesting.

“Dodd couldn't have done it. I talked to him in the club car. He was there the whole time.”

“He left that train during the five minutes it halted for the removal of stones from the track.”

“He didn't!” the business man said stubbornly. “I spoke to Mr. Dodd shortly after the train got under way again. He was still aboard. And the train was making seventy miles an hour!”

“Then where in the devil did he vanish?”

“I don't know.”

The reply made the police chief furious with rage. He faced a blank wall of mystery.

He tried to pierce that wall by questioning a subordinate who had just returned from the dynamited railroad trestle. The report he received didn't help a bit.

The limited had halted only once. That halt had been not more than five minutes. Trainmen had been out on the track. None had seen any thugs. But the chief of police knew that thugs had boarded the train at this point.

One of the train crew had been reported missing by the conductor. A carload of detectives had raced back to

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the place where the boulders had halted the train. On the top of a muddy cliff, they found the body of the missing trainman, his skull smashed in.

It was proof of how the highjackers had boarded the limited.

But what had become of the gold? It hadn't been strewn along the right of way. Detectives would have found traces of it. In the darkness, not all of those gold bars could have been picked up by other crooks, hurriedly searching for them.

Moreover, the seals on the side doors of the express car were still intact when the searching party reached the scene of the wreck. Where was the gold?

It made the police chief's head hurt.

His mind returned to the problem of the missing Roger Dodd. Dodd had not left the train when the highjackers had boarded it. He had vanished later. The testimony of a reputable witness proved that.

But how in the name of heaven could a man leave a limited that was roaring along steel rails at the speed of seventy miles an hour?

THE ring of a telephone cut through the profane worry of Newtown's chief of police. He grabbed the instrument. Then he stiffened. He waved a hand to halt all talk in the room.

The man on the wire was the clerk at Newtown's best hotel, the Hotel Grand. He sounded hoarse with terror.

"Help! Police! Get over here quick!"

"What's the matter?"

"Murder! A thug with a gun just forced his way into the hotel. He's wounded! His face is covered with blood! The hotel dick tried to stop him and he shot the dick down without mercy! He killed the elevator operator, too!"

"Where is he? Did he get away?"

"He's upstairs in the hotel. He demanded the room number of one of my guests here. I... I had to hand him my master key. He went up in the elevator, after he killed the operator."

"Who's the guest this thug is after?"

"He registered a little while ago. He went straight to his room. A tall man with a bearded face. His name is Roger Dodd."

"What?"

The police chief slammed down the receiver and raced for his car. Cops leaped into the car with him.

Lamont Cranston motioned to Clyde Burke. The Daily Classic reporter flung himself into Cranston's car. Cranston had moved close to the telephone the moment the chief of police had picked it up. The shrill terror in the clerk's voice at the Hotel Grand had permitted Cranston to hear every word uttered on the wire.

He sent his automobile hurtling after the police car.

In the lobby of the Hotel Grand, the night clerk was still crouched in terror behind his desk. In the lobby lay the body of the slain house dick. A trail of blood led across the floor to where the dead elevator operator's body had fallen.

The elevator had stopped at the fourth floor.

Police raced up the stairs, with Lamont Cranston and Clyde Burke at their heels. Roger Dodd's room was locked. From behind the panel came a snarling shriek.

“You dirty, double-crossing—”

Pistol shots cut into that muffled shriek. They sounded like the swift rat-tat of a machine gun.

Police flung themselves at the door. It burst inward. Bluecoats surged over the sill.

Roger Dodd lay dead on the floor, his body pierced with lead. The thug who had killed him was still savagely pulling the trigger on a gun that was now empty.

The bloodstained killer laughed feebly as police grabbed him.

CHAPTER X. ENTER MR. CORCORAN.

The police chief dropped to his knees beside the victim on the hotel-room floor. One glance, and he knew that Roger Dodd was beyond all human aid.

Six bullets had ripped into the body of the bearded contractor from Western City. The power of that fusillade of lead had blasted him into a huddled heap. One of the bullets had torn through his cheek and ripped out the back of his skull. The other five slugs had pierced vital organs.

Growling an impotent oath, the police chief sprang to his feet and darted toward the wounded killer. A cop was on either side of the disarmed thug. The chief spat an order. The cop on the left moved aside. The chief grabbed the killer's left arm.

The arm hung limply. It was broken. At the chief's clutch, the killer squealed with agony. But this was no time to be gentle. The voice of the police chief was like a steel file.

“Talk, or I'll tear this arm off you!”

The crook's blood-smearred face turned a ghastly gray. Sweat dripped into his staring eyes.

“Don't hurt me!” he gasped. “I'll talk!”

“Why did you trail Dodd here and shoot him to death?”

“Because he was a double-crossing louse! He wanted all the swag for himself! He waited until five of us—five damn fools who trusted him—were in the middle of the railroad trestle. Then he blew it up!”

“Wasn't Dodd with you when the trestle blew up?”

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“No. He left the train after we got aboard, before we uncoupled the locomotive and the express car. The guy who took the engineer's place at the throttle gave Dodd a whistle signal. Then Dodd jumped off the train.”

The police chief gasped.

“You mean that Dodd jumped off the limited while it was traveling at seventy miles an hour?”

“It wasn't going no seventy. We slowed down to around forty for a few minutes. None of the passengers noticed. We had a gasoline car trailing the limited. It switched onto the main line from a spur a few miles back. Dodd made his jump to the gas car from the train's observation platform. He had everything figured out. He was smart, blast him!”

Lamont Cranston listened, with blazing eyes. His mouth opened for a question, but he closed his lips without uttering a word. He didn't want to draw police attention to himself, he had entered the hotel room in his harmless role of a New York millionaire friend of Clyde Burke, the newspaper reporter. It was better strategy at this point to listen, and say nothing.

“What about the gold?” the police chief cried.

“Dodd hid it somewhere. I don't know where it is. After we dynamited the trestle, we were supposed to meet Dodd and divvy up the loot. But he blew us all up before we could get off the mined trestle. I was the only one to get away.”

The thug shuddered.

“The trestle explosion blew me into the water close to the shore. I got ashore and dragged myself to where Dodd was waiting. He jeered at me. He thought I was dying. Then he drove away to the hotel here in Newtown. But I followed the skunk! He'll be damned clever now if he gets his dead fingers on a dime of that missing gold!”

Ghastly laughter filled the room with ugly echoes. The police chief cut into the thug's mirth with a sharp question.

“How did you highjack the gold? We found seals on the express-car doors.”

“Phony,” the thug grinned. “The gold was gone before we reached the trestle. We got rid of it while the train was tearing along at full speed. Roger Dodd had this whole job figured out a long time in advance. We rehearsed every detail. It would have been impossible, except for Dodd's part of the stunt.”

“Dodd's part?”

“Yeah. He had a—”

The thug stopped talking suddenly. He had been standing with his face turned toward the window, with a cop on one side and the chief of police on the other. The thug's body suddenly crumpled.

As he fell, the cops saw that the whole front of his face had been caved in by a large-caliber bullet. There was an ugly hole in the pane of the window which the thug had been facing.

The crash of a rifle explosion echoed outside the hotel, as the thug pitched to the floor in a dead huddle. The bullet had come from across the dark street!

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QUICKLY, the police chief raced to the smashed pane, flung up the window. The building opposite was a four-story brick structure. All its floors were dark. So was the parapet of the roof.

The roof was on a direct line with the hotel room in which the thug was being questioned. Someone with a keen eye and a murderously accurate weapon had not wanted the thug to explain how Dodd had looted the train and gotten away with the gold shipment.

That someone was now dimly visible on the roof across the street!

The parapet at the front of the roof was about five feet high. It shielded the assassin's body from view. But for an instant, a pale face peered to observe the result of the rifle shot.

In the darkness, the face was a formless blur. It was impossible to identify it. But the hat which the unknown assassin was wearing brought yells of astonishment and rage from the police chief and the cops who crowded close to his shoulder at the open hotel window. It was a black slouch hat, with the brim tilted low over piercing eyes.

“The Shadow!”

Voices yelled that accusing cry. Bullets ripped across the darkness of the street toward the peering face. But there was no longer a target for police lead. The face had dropped quickly behind the shield of the stone parapet. The killer was fleeing.

Lamont Cranston was not one of those who cried: “The Shadow!” He alone knew that The Shadow had not committed the crime. The same disguised supercriminal who had paid a sly visit to the deluded Alice Gunther in the fake role of The Shadow was now protecting himself. He had ended the last chance of the police to find out what had become of the gold shipment!

Cranston and Clyde Burke raced down to the hotel lobby on the heels of the pursuing police. They crossed the street to the dark brick building. There was no sign of life inside. The front door was locked.

Police gunfire took care of the flimsy lock. The door was smashed open. Cops raced upstairs. Other cops darted through the ground-floor hallway and out to the rear.

Cranston stayed with the group that raced upstairs. They saw nothing on the way up but dark hallways and locked business quarters. Either the killer with the rifle had escaped by the rear—or he was still on the roof!

It took only an instant for police to pry open the roof scuttle. They spilled out into the chilly darkness.

The roof was empty.

There wasn't a place for a fugitive to hide. Except for the squat shape a chimney, the roof was bare and flat.

But the top rungs of a fire-escape ladder at the rear showed where the fugitive had probably fled.

A shout from down below confirmed this guess. A cop with a flashlight was gesturing fiercely for his comrades on the roof to descend. The beam of his torch explained his excitement.

In the muddy earth at the rear of the brick building the print of feet were clearly visible. The toes were more deeply indented than the heels. They were the prints of a running man.

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The assassin had fled by way of the rear yard, carrying his rifle with him.

That was what the police thought. But it was not the belief of Lamont Cranston. The killer had reached this roof in some other way, Cranston divined. Nor had he fled down those rear ladders. Footprints had been deliberately left in that soft earth below as a means to mislead pursuing cops.

The Shadow was certain of his shrewd deduction when he saw that there were two sets of prints in the glare of the police torch below. One line of prints led to the foot of the fire–escape ladder. They were alongside those hasty toe–marks that indicated later flight.

But there were no mud marks on any of the rungs of the ladders. The evidence was a fake. The killer had neither gone up nor gone down those steel ladders!

In the next moment, The Shadow was aware of what the killer had done. He noted that the building next door was not joined to the one on whose roof he now stood. A narrow alley separated the two structures. How could a murderer bridge that open gap?

The answer lay in the form of a heavily insulated cable that carried electric power from the rear of one building to the other. The cable sagged far more than it should have. The metal support that braced its far end was bent out of normal line. An unusual weight must have done that.

A killer had gone hand over hand along that heavy cable!

LAMONT CRANSTON raced down to the street, after motioning Clyde Burke to remain with the police. The cops were all out in the back, now. They were hunting, in vain, for some additional clue at the end of those faked footprints. Cranston had the street to himself.

He walked quietly toward the building across the other side of the alley. He noted it was a wholesale wine establishment. It was still open for business, although there was no sign of a clerk behind the counter in its dimly lighted interior.

Cranston didn't enter the wine shop. He stood out on the dark sidewalk, his eyes staring shrewdly toward its cellar entrance. It was the sort of cellar entrance with divided doors, that lie flat against the sidewalk when they are closed. But the doors were now open.

From the cellar below came the shuffle of feet. A man was climbing up to the street. He moved loudly and carelessly.

Cranston matched that with some carelessness of his own. Advancing quickly, he turned as if he were about to enter the wine shop. He managed to bump headlong into the man who suddenly appeared from the top of the cellar steps. Cranston almost knocked two cobwebbed wine bottles out of the man's grip.

The stranger muttered an impatient oath at Cranston's blundering awkwardness. Then his face suddenly lighted up in a broad smile of recognition.

“Why, Mr. Cranston! How do you do? This is a delightful surprise! What brings you to Newtown?”

He was a tall man, heavily built. Physically, he was about the same size as the dead Roger Dodd. His face, however, resembled Martin Black more than it did the bearded contractor. Like Black, this man had a clipped gray mustache over a firm, resolute mouth.

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It was Peter Corcoran, political boss of Western City, and a power behind the scenes through the whole state.

Cranston had met Corcoran once or twice. But Corcoran was not a particularly sociable man. He had talked with Cranston briefly about Black's unhappy predicament, during the two meetings arranged by Henry Stuart, who was Black's lawyer.

Corcoran had made no comment about Black's guilt or innocence. He had merely murmured something about help for a friend in trouble. He had promised to turn political wheels in order to assure Black's release on bail.

On Cranston's mental list of suspects, the name of Peter Corcoran was by no means the least. He smiled at the politician's cool query about Cranston's own presence in Newton.

"I came for the same reason that apparently drew you here, Mr. Corcoran. It was told in confidence that this little wine establishment is a remarkable place to buy rare old vintages. Am I right?"

Corcoran laughed. It was slow, pleasant mirth from a man who apparently enjoyed the good things of life.

"You certainly came to the proper place for wine. Look at these two beauties!" He held up his cobwebbed bottles. "I had to poke around in that dusty old cellar quite a while, before I located them."

His calm voice suddenly changed to a more excited pitch. Cranston thought the man's excitement was a bit overdone.

"What in the world is the matter here tonight? Is anything wrong? What are those police chasing around for?"

Cranston told him. Corcoran uttered a cry of dismay when he learned of Dodd's murder in the hotel. He said nothing about the thug who had been killed. Nor did he seem interested in the identity of the man who had fired a rifle shot from the parapet of the roof next door to the wine shop.

"This is terrible! What does it mean? There must be a curse on the prominent citizens of Western City! Excuse me. I've got to find out what happened to poor Roger Dodd."

He trotted across the street, the dusty wine bottles still under his arms. Cranston was puzzled at this abrupt retreat. He had expected Peter Corcoran to use some stratagem to remove Cranston himself from the vicinity of the wine cellar.

But nothing of the sort had happened. Corcoran didn't even glance back as he hurried into the hotel.

CRANSTON'S face wore a queer frown, as he descended quickly into the cellar of the wine shop. He had hoped to find a hidden rifle there. Now he began to wonder if this sleek Peter Corcoran wanted him to find the rifle!

It took a patient search. But Cranston was stubbornly sure of his ground. The first thing he found was a black slouch hat hidden behind a tier of empty wine casks.

It was an exact duplicate of the hat always worn by The Shadow when he donned his black robes. It was the hat the police had seen above the parapet of the roof next door!

Cranston folded up this grim clue to his own murder guilt. He stowed it away on his person. He had no intention of allowing this planted evidence to fall into the hands of the police. They had been misled plenty already by a wily supercriminal.

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The rifle was not easily located in the dimly-lit cellar. But presently Cranston found it. It had been hidden at the bottom of the dusty dumb-waiter shaft used to lift heavy consignments of liquor and wine to the shop above. The finding of the rifle again suggested a deliberate plant on the part of a cunning murderer.

There were many better spots where it could have been hidden. The rifle, as well as the slouch hat, was meant to be unearthed by the police.

Lamont Cranston took no chances. When he finally tucked the rifle away, it was in a place that even the murderer himself would have a difficult time locating. It lay flat under a flagstone covered with debris at the rear of the cellar.

The rifle pointed definitely to the guilt of a man who was now dead. Roger Dodd!

Initials, "R. D.," had been engraved in the stock. An attempt had apparently been made to burn away the initials with acid. But it had been a blundering job. Enough of the bottom of each initial remained to make their identification easy. The police were meant to link a dead Roger Dodd with The Shadow!

The Shadow suspected an amazing impersonation plot.

Martin Black's crazy bank alibi began to appear in a new light. Perhaps Black had told the truth about his appointment to meet someone at a nonexistent farmhouse the night the bank had been robbed.

A criminal skilled in disguise might have posed as Martin Black! Perhaps that was why he was so eager to have himself identified as Black both before and after he had entered the private office of the bank president.

Roger Dodd, too, was innocent, according to this theory. A fake Roger Dodd had engineered the amazing gold robbery from the speeding limited. But the Dodd who had been shot to death in the hotel at Newton was the real Dodd. He had been deliberately lured to a spot where a double-crossed thug would kill him.

Was the real criminal Peter Corcoran?

Cranston said nothing when he rejoined the police. He was very friendly with Corcoran. He remained close to his side and listened to everything the politician said. It was Corcoran who suggested that the police ought to search Dodd's home in Western City.

WHEN they reached Western City, Lamont Cranston managed to be present at that search.

Police axes broke down the wall of a concealed room. It looked like a private office that had been turned into a theatrical dressing room.

There was a mirror and a make-up table. There was a cupboard filled with materials for clever disguise. In a wardrobe were suits of clothing that made the police gasp. Each suit was an exact duplicate of the clothing worn by some of Western City's most prominent citizens.

Martin Black was one of these men. Another was Peter Corcoran. He cried out in shrill wonder when he saw a tailored copy of one of his own suits. A third potential victim was Henry Stuart, the lawyer who had undertaken the legal defense of Black.

The police accepted Dodd's guilt. They concluded that he had been killed before he could involve either Stuart or Corcoran in further crime. Also, they decided they had been mistaken about The Shadow being on the roof opposite the hotel. They figured the man with the rifle must have been one of Dodd's disappointed

mobsmen.

But there was a bad flaw in this solution. Neither the bonds from the savings bank nor the gold stolen from the limited were located in Roger Dodd's home.

Corcoran smoothly suggested a search of Dodd's other real-estate property in various parts of the town.

Lamont Cranston said nothing.

CHAPTER XI. TRICKY WORK.

LAMONT CRANSTON was in his hotel room at Western City.

A whole day had passed since his return with the police from Newtown. It was a day that had seemingly marked the end of an amazingly clever criminal.

Search of Roger Dodd's home had branded him with guilt. The finding of the disguises which had enabled Dodd to appear at various times in the roles of Martin Black, of Peter Corcoran, and the lawyer Henry Stuart as well, had satisfied the chief of police that Dodd had come to a well-merited end at the hands of a thug he had tried to double-cross.

The newspapers accepted the police view. They were filled with scareheads announcing the solution of the mystery.

There was only one fly in the ointment. Nobody yet knew how the stolen gold had been taken successfully from a train speeding at seventy miles an hour. No one had discovered where the loot was now hidden. The same mystery shrouded the whereabouts of the bonds that had been stolen from the savings bank.

Martin Black continued to refuse to talk. He claimed he knew nothing concerning Roger Dodd's villainy. He was questioned at police headquarters, and released on a continuation of his bail.

No attempt to leave the jurisdiction of the State could be proved against Black. Newtown was within the State limits, and it was for Newtown that Black had bought a ticket.

He had a complete alibi to prove his innocence of the train holdup. He had remained aboard the Pullman during the hijack. He had still been aboard the uncoupled end of the train when he and the rest of the passengers were brought to Newtown by hired buses.

Martin Black was enjoying a return to public favor.

But The Shadow was not enjoying this new, and even more tangled, state of affairs. In his darkened hotel room that night, he realized a grim truth. He had been on the defensive ever since his arrival in Western City. He had learned many things, but the dark core of the mystery was still unknown.

He sat thinking—and waiting! He understood now the psychology of the master criminal who was opposing him. That criminal specialized in direct attack.

Before this case was finished, The Shadow would again undoubtedly be placed on the defensive. That was why Lamont Cranston waited patiently in his darkened hotel room.

He was not surprised when the telephone bell rang suddenly. He answered it with a single noncommittal

word.

“Yes?”

“Clyde Burke talking. Reporting to The Shadow.”

The Shadow knew instantly that the man on the wire was not Clyde Burke.

No agent of The Shadow ever reported to him in person. Contacts were made through Burbank. Crooks had not yet learned this vital piece of information.

Cranston deliberately uttered a sibilant laugh.

“Present your message,” he intoned.

The telephone caller hesitated. He said he had information that he didn't want to divulge over the wire. Could he come to Cranston's room for a private conference? Cranston agreed.

Shortly after he had hung up the instrument on this crooked caller, The Shadow was in touch with Burbank. He ordered Burbank to contact Clyde. Presently, Burbank reported back. Clyde was not at his hotel. He had left earlier.

The Shadow realized the truth. The real Clyde Burke was undoubtedly on his way to Cranston's room. The Daily Classic reporter had probably been fooled by a fake message sent to him in the name of Cranston. A plot was under way. Not against Clyde, but against The Shadow!

THE SHADOW left his room, but not by the doorway. His door remained closed and locked. He wanted to see what might develop from a more accessible spot in the corridor outside his room.

Presently, the real Clyde Burke stepped out of the elevator and hurried to Cranston's door. He rapped sharply. Nothing happened.

Clyde was about to turn away in complete mystification, when there was a rush of feet. Two thugs appeared from a dark staircase. They attacked Clyde.

Had The Shadow been in his room, he undoubtedly would have heard the struggle. Crooks intended him to hear. But he didn't move from the closer spot where he had secreted himself.

He noticed that no attempt was made to kill Clyde, or to injure him seriously. Clyde was knocked out with a gun butt almost at the beginning of the struggle. The rest of the noise was made by the kidnapers.

They vanished down the stairwell with their unconscious victim. Cranston waited, then followed, as he knew the crooks were expecting him to do. He was rushing headlong into a trap baited by the captive figure of Clyde Burke. But The Shadow was entering that trap with wide-open eyes!

Cranston's car was parked outside the shadowy rear of the hotel. He saw Clyde tossed into a nearby machine by the two kidnapers. When the car raced away, Cranston followed in his own car.

The chase led to the north end of town, then out into the suburbs. The crooks drove their car straight toward a large and expensive estate, that The Shadow had little difficulty in recognizing in the darkness.

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It was the home of Western City's slickest politician: Peter Corcoran!

A tree-bordered drive led through the grounds toward the mansion. The kidnap car raced up the drive and vanished among the trees. But Cranston's car didn't follow. He continued past the gateway of the estate. He parked, and left his car.

Robed in black, seemingly part of the night itself, The Shadow entered the grounds on foot. Almost instantly, he was attacked by two thugs. Knives struck from the gloom beneath a huge oak that bordered the drive.

But The Shadow had seen the glint of naked steel. Twin guns leaped from concealment. He fired without hesitation. Not only his own life, but the life of the kidnapped Clyde, depended on The Shadow's aim.

He swerved backward as a sharp blade stabbed fiercely toward his throat. Had The Shadow been a shade less nimble in his movements, his throat would have been ripped wide open. He would have fallen to the dark earth with blood spouting from a severed jugular vein. But his backward swerve and the quick upthrust of his shoulder saved him.

The knife sliced across The Shadow's lifted shoulder. Its point ripped through the black cloak. The Shadow ducked like a prize fighter rolling away from a punch. His sudden recoil dropped him to one knee.

However, the killer thought that The Shadow was hurt. He leaned eagerly to finish a swift murder. It brought his bent leg within reach of The Shadow's outstretched hand.

A heave sent the killer plunging sideways to the ground. The Shadow whirled to confront the other thug.

There was no longer any second thug. The fellow had fled. The sound of his retreating feet could be heard dimly, as he raced up the dark winding drive that led through the trees toward the mansion of Peter Corcoran.

That queer flight of an unwounded thug had a sinister significance to The Shadow. Was his quick disappearance part of some new attack?

The Shadow had scant time to wonder. The thug whom he had sent sprawling to the ground had rolled to his knees with the swiftness of a cat. The knife was still gripped in the fellow's hand. But he had reversed his position. The blade lay with its pointed end flat against the thug's wrist. The flat handle was cupped by bunched fingers.

His hand swung to throw the knife.

There was no choice for The Shadow. He fired. His bullet made a crashing roar under the dark sweep of the thickly planted trees. The slug struck the killer squarely in the chest. The knife was leaving his hand when the shock of the bullet flung him backward. The weapon's point turned in midair and whizzed at The Shadow.

But its murderous accuracy had been deflected. The knife flew at an upward slant. It pierced The Shadow's hat and carried it ten feet backward. But The Shadow arose, unhurt.

He darted toward the fallen thug and bent over him. A single glance showed him that the man was dying. Eagerness to make sure of The Shadow's death had sealed the thug's doom.

When he had risen to his toes to give added power to the knife throw, he had lifted a vital spot of his body in line with The Shadow's bullet. The Shadow had meant to wound the man, and hold him for questioning later.

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The thug had practically committed suicide!

The Shadow recovered his lost hat. He drew the brim low over the piercing gleam of his eyes. He began to run cautiously up the drive toward the mansion of Peter Corcoran.

THERE was no sign of the second thug who had fled. The front of the mansion was dark. No sound within the house was audible. Evidently, the two shots which The Shadow had fired near the entrance of the grounds had been unheard by Corcoran. Or if they had, they had been mistaken for the backfire of a car speeding along the highway.

The Shadow rounded the mansion before he could see the light on the ground floor. The light came from an unshaded window near the rear. Moving silently, The Shadow approached the window. He peered in, taking care to reveal only a scant portion of his face at the corner of the lighted pane.

The first man he saw was Peter Corcoran. Corcoran was seated at a table talking to a man who The Shadow instantly recognized. It was Henry Stuart, the lawyer who had undertaken the legal defense of Martin Black after the bank robbery.

Stuart had evidently come to the home of the politician for a conference, for the two men were deep in serious talk. But their positions at the table were peculiar. Corcoran had taken a chair at a considerable distance from Stuart. The Shadow wondered why he didn't sit closer to his guest.

Suddenly, there was a cry from Stuart. He had glanced up. But he couldn't see The Shadow. He was facing the other way. Stuart's rigid gaze was turned toward the window on the opposite side of the study.

The face of the vanished thug was outlined against the pane. The thug had a gun. It was aimed straight at the cowering figure of Corcoran's guest.

Stuart screamed, and flung himself backward as the thug fired. The crash of the windowpane under the impact of a bullet came simultaneously with the fall of Stuart's overturned chair. The gunman's hasty bullet missed.

The lawyer rose groggily to his knees and tried to crawl behind the protection of a padded armchair. He was a perfect target for the thug. Corcoran seemed too dazed and terror-stricken to interfere. He sat like a frozen image.

The speed of The Shadow's defense was all that saved Stuart's life. Before the thug's second bullet could plow into the body of the terrified lawyer, the roar of The Shadow's gun spoke on the side of justice.

He fired across the room at the face that peered behind the window opposite. A second splintery hole marred the pane. The hands of the killer clawed suddenly at his throat. His face slipped out of sight below the level of vision.

Corcoran seemed suddenly to recover from his daze. With a bound, he was across the study and fumbling in a drawer of a cabinet in a far corner.

"The Shadow!" he shouted.

He whipped out the weapon and fired at the face of the black-cloaked crime-fighter who stood boldly outlined. The shot was too hastily fired. It missed. The next moment there was no target for Corcoran's gun. The Shadow had vanished into the darkness of the grounds.

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Peter Corcoran rushed to the window and peered out. He could see nothing. Behind him he heard the moans of the terrified Stuart. Corcoran abandoned any further effort to wing the vanished Shadow. He raced to the aid of his fallen friend.

“Are you hurt?”

Stuart shook his head. He rose shakily to his feet.

“There were two of them,” he whispered from chalky lips. “A gunman and—The Shadow!”

“They must have been in partnership,” Corcoran cried harshly.

“How can that be? The Shadow killed the gunman.”

“He didn't mean to. Both fired at you at almost the same moment. The Shadow's bullet went clear across the room and killed his own henchman. Wait! Let's see what happened to the fellow.”

Corcoran raced to the bullet-marked pane and lifted the window. There was a sigh in his voice when he drew in his head.

“Too bad. He's dead! The Shadow killed his own accomplice. I think we ought to call the police and get them on his trail as soon as possible.”

Stuart was staring at Corcoran, with a queer light in his eyes.

“Let the police wait a moment. What in Heaven's name do you think is back of this attack on me?”

“The attack was directed against both of us,” Corcoran rejoined.

He began to talk in a low, soothing voice to the frightened Stuart.

MEANWHILE, The Shadow had left the leafy darkness of the grounds that surrounded the mansion. But he was not in the distant road that led back toward Western City. The Shadow had changed his tactics from defense to offense.

He was at this very instant in the basement of Peter Corcoran's mansion!

The peril to Clyde Burke was the reason for this quick maneuver. Clyde, a kidnapped prisoner, had been taken through the grounds. There was no sign of him outside, or of the two thugs who had kidnapped him from Cranston's hotel in Western City. Therefore, Clyde must be bidden somewhere within Corcoran's mansion.

Four thugs had taken part in tonight's murderous exploit; of that, The Shadow was positive. The two gunmen with whom he had successfully exchanged bullets were not the two who had seized Clyde and raced away in a car with him.

An unlatched basement window answered the riddle of Clyde's quick disappearance. Footprints outside showed that two men had come and gone. The Shadow squirmed noiselessly into the basement.

It was spotlessly clean. A closed door at one end gave access to a game room. The other end contained an oil burner and various gadgets for controlling heat and moisture and temperature. The only other door in sight

seemed to lead to what looked like a storage bin.

Opening the door softly, The Shadow saw drums of fuel oil piled along the wall. But the metal drums didn't interest him.

On the floor was the unconscious body of Clyde Burke!

The Shadow didn't hesitate. He lifted Clyde in his arms and carried him into the game room. He laid his unconscious agent flat on his back on a billiard table. Then he glanced swiftly around.

Two things attracted his gaze immediately. He saw a small alarm clock on a shelf. He also noticed a fuse box on the wall of the game room.

He used both.

A piece of insulated wire from a dangling droplight made a quick connection between the alarm key in the back of the clock and one of the light fuses. The Shadow was careful to loosen the fuse so that it would turn easily on its screw threads. He was also careful to set the clock's alarm so that it would ring fairly soon.

The Shadow knew that when the alarm rang, the turning key would wind up the wire and unscrew the tightly-wrapped fuse from its connection in the wall panel. Darkness would descend on one side of the mansion, including the study of Peter Corcoran.

Five minutes later, the immaculately dressed figure of Lamont Cranston rang the front doorbell of the mansion. Corcoran himself answered the bell. He was amazed when he recognized his caller. He inquired in a puzzled tone what the New York millionaire was doing at his house at so late an hour.

Cranston matched Corcoran's astonishment. He had received a telephone message, he said, that Corcoran wanted to see him. Corcoran became frightened. He led the way into his study and explained what had happened there.

Stuart, too, had the jitters.

"Maybe Mr. Cranston is also marked for death," Stuart said, as he pointed to the bullet holes in the study window.

After Cranston had listened, he peered out the window at the thug whose body had been drilled by a bullet from The Shadow. He suggested the police. He didn't argue with Stuart's theory, that The Shadow and the dead thug had been working together. Seemingly, he accepted the idea that the thug's death had been an unlucky accident from the gun of a criminal Shadow.

Corcoran started toward the telephone. But before he could lift the receiver, the room was plunged into sudden darkness!

THERE was a moment of confusion. Then Corcoran struck a match. He lit a candle on a side table and restored some measure of light to the room. His voice remained calm.

"A fuse must have burned out. It's in the basement game room. Come on!"

They went downstairs behind the beam of an electric torch in Corcoran's hand. But it was impossible to get into the game room. The door was locked. The keys were on a hook inside. The damaged fuse, too, was in the

game room.

Cranston was watching Corcoran's face. The man looked absolutely petrified with amazement. Obviously, he hadn't expected to find the game room locked.

Stuart spoke thickly.

“Do you think that a... a killer might be in there?”

“Nonsense! Corcoran snapped. “Give me some help. We'll break down the door.”

Stuart tried to assist, but he wasn't of much assistance. In the end it was Cranston's stalwart shoulder that enabled Corcoran to burst the door from its fastenings.

When they entered, Cranston added his voice to the shrill yells that were uttered by his two companions. The sight of the unconscious Clyde Burke, lying flat on his back on a billiard table, seemed to unnerve both the politician and the lawyer.

Cranston watched them both. He was trying to detect a guilty glance toward the supply closet where Clyde Burke had been actually imprisoned. But neither Corcoran nor Stuart gave any indication that they were aware of the truth.

“The whole thing is a vicious conspiracy,” Corcoran snapped. “Kidnapers meant the police to find this reporter's body in my game room. The attack has turned against me!”

“And me, too,” Stuart whispered from pale lips. “If it had not been for The Shadow's bad aim, I'd have been killed, instead of that accomplice of his!”

There was no answer for a moment. Then Corcoran spoke sternly.

“This reign of terror and murder has gone far enough. I'm going to insist on a police conference, to get to the bottom of this. First it was Black, then Dodd. Now it's Stuart—and myself! Perhaps even you are a prospective victim, Mr. Cranston!”

“Perhaps,” Cranston said quietly.

CHAPTER XII. A FINAL CONFERENCE.

THE police chief of Western City looked serious.

He sat in his private conference room at headquarters. Facing other serious men. The only reporter present was Clyde Burke. But Clyde was not there as a news hawk.

Like the others who had been invited, Clyde was a victim of an unknown supercriminal who had turned the ordinary peaceful locality of Western City into a swamp of suspicion and terror. A couple of cops stood on guard outside the door of the conference room.

The police chief was making a final, grim effort to get hold of some forgotten bit of information, perhaps some vague recollection on the part of these victims, that might give him a lead to the unknown identity of Western City's genius of crime.

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Martin Black was present, pale but composed. His pretty niece, Alice Gunther, was at his side, patting his shoulder affectionately. On the other side of Black, his lawyer, Henry Stuart, mopped a perspiring face.

Lamont Cranston sat alongside Peter Corcoran. It was Corcoran who had insisted on this conference, after the criminal events which had occurred the night before at his suburban mansion.

“Mr. Black, have you anything to add to what you have already told the police?” the police chief snapped. He sounded tired and irritable. “I must say that through the whole series of crimes, you have said very little!”

“I’ve already told you all I know,” Black replied.

He was keeping his temper in check. He smiled wanly at his pretty niece. Alice Gunther was one person who had never ceased to reiterate her belief in Black’s innocence of the bank robbery.

“The night that the bank was robbed, I was not in town,” Black said quietly. “I had a private business conference with a man at a farmhouse. It was personal, and had nothing to do with crime. Therefore, I see no reason why I should discuss it.

“As head of the police force, you tell me that there was no man and no farmhouse when your men investigated. I can’t help that! The house was there when I kept my date. If it’s gone, I can only suggest that the house was portable and was taken away on a truck after I left.”

“You still don’t know who raised the cash bail for you the night the limited was robbed of its gold shipment?” the chief queried.

“I do not. My niece knows more than I about that.”

Alice Gunther spoke next. She had nothing new to report. She merely repeated her strange tale of the visit of “The Shadow” to her apartment, soon after Roger Dodd had called there.

“I trusted The Shadow,” she said, with a shudder. “But I’m afraid that after what happened last night at Mr. Corcoran’s home, it was a foolish thing to do. My uncle was deliberately lured aboard that train to meet Mr. Dodd—though why, I don’t know.”

“I don’t either,” the police chief muttered. “Unless it was to identify a fake Roger Dodd and throw suspicion on him. That would tie in with the later death of the real Dodd at the hotel in Newtown.

“It’s a hellish mess, but the attack last night on Stuart and Corcoran seems to prove that Dodd couldn’t have been The Shadow, as I thought.

“In other words, Dodd, as well as Black, was the victim of a criminal with a marvelous ability to assume the identity of any person he chooses. He must be a wizard at disguise, the way he’s been able to fool people!”

“Yet the disguises were found in Dodd’s own home,” Corcoran interposed. “Queer, eh?”

“Damned queer! Then there’s the business of the vanishing bonds and the missing gold. Gold transferred from a train that was racing at seventy miles an hour!”

“A fast car, perhaps?” Lamont Cranston asked mildly.

He received an amused and sarcastic smile from the police chief.

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“An impossibly fast car, you mean! Remember one thing: According to the testimony of the thug who was murdered by a rifle bullet from the roof opposite the hotel, the leader of the gang was waiting at the trestle when the stolen locomotive and pay car arrived.

“How could he do that, unless he drove a car that was capable of making two hundred miles an hour? Cars like that are possible. The trick has been done on the salt flats in Utah, or at Daytona Beach in Florida. But have you ever seen such a racing vehicle in Western City? It's fantastic!”

“You're probably right,” Cranston replied, with a faint smile. “My suggestion is silly and impossible.”

CRANSTON wasn't watching the police chief during this interchange. He was observing the faces of the others. But no one person looked directly at him. All seemed bored by Cranston's fast-car theory.

“Finally, there is the problem of the vanishing rifle that killed the thug in the hotel,” the chief of police resumed. “It's very funny that no trace of the rifle has been found. Funny, too, that a rifle was missing from the gun room in Roger Dodd's home.

“Dodd is dead. I believe now that he was innocent of that train robbery. The telegram we found in his pocket explains why Dodd was at the hotel. He was lured there by a fake message.

“But who lured him? And why does a dead and innocent Roger Dodd continue to look more guilty the deeper we delve into this tangle of mystery?”

“There's another, and even more remarkable, angle to all this,” Peter Corcoran said, dryly. “I refer to the fact that Lamont Cranston and Clyde Burke also seem to be victims of this growing conspiracy.

“Mr. Burke is a New York newspaperman, with neither friends nor enemies in Western City. He's here only to cover news for his paper. Cranston came only to make a few financial investments. Why should these two innocent strangers be dragged into the web of danger?”

Corcoran's shrewd eyes bored into Cranston's. Stuart, too, seemed puzzled. Evidently, Stuart hadn't thought of this angle to the affair. He started to ask Cranston a question. But the chief of police interrupted Stuart impatiently by questioning Clyde Burke.

“How about it, Mr. Burke? Can you think of any sane reason why you should receive a fake message to go to Cranston's hotel suite—so that thugs could kidnap and hide you in the cellar of Peter Corcoran's home?”

“Maybe I wasn't meant to be found there,” Clyde said slowly. “I don't believe the thugs who kidnapped me left me on that billiard table in the game room. I have a dim remembrance of them throwing me into the fuel closet of Corcoran's basement. Then I was slugged again.

“Besides, why should kidnapers first hide me, then draw attention to me by rigging up an alarm-clock device to disconnect one of the light fuses?”

“The Shadow might have done that!” Stuart cried eagerly. “Perhaps The Shadow is on the side of the law, after all! I thought he killed the thug at the window by mistake. But he could just as logically have been an enemy of the thug. After all, The Shadow's shot did save my life, you know!”

Corcoran laughed scornfully.

“It doesn't fit the pattern at all! Every time there's been trouble with death, The Shadow is mysteriously on the

scene—as a criminal! Remember the killings in Dodd's unfinished skyscraper? Remember the man with the rifle? In both cases, The Shadow was identified just before he pulled his clever vanishing act. And he was certainly present outside the window of my study last night.”

“But why did he kill Clyde Burke's kidnapers?” Stuart insisted. “The Shadow must have killed both thugs, because we found the body of the other one near the entrance to the grounds after the police arrived. If The Shadow is really a criminal, he acts rather insanely. Would a criminal rescue his victims and kill his own accomplices?”

“He might easily enough,” Corcoran rejoined, “if he wanted to protect his own identity and shut the mouths of his hired gunmen. Have you identified those two thugs, chief?”

The chief cleared his throat.

“No. Neither of them are local crooks. Our fingerprint records show no activities of theirs in this city or state. I've sent samples of their prints, however, to the F.B.I., in Washington. Perhaps in a few days—”

He sighed. No one said anything. The conference was sagging under the weight of its own futility. The silence became oppressive.

“I'll do the best I can, gentlemen,” the police chief finished lamely. “As we all agree, The Shadow is probably the criminal brain behind all this theft and murder. I've an idea we've heard the last of him, for the present. He's probably made his getaway.

“The big job now is to get on his trail and try to find out what he did with the two million in bonds and gold that he stole. My own hunch is that the trail will probably lead to New York. Somewhere in New York, if we're lucky, we'll uncover both The Shadow and the loot.”

Corcoran's face was scarlet with sudden anger.

“You'll have to do more than be lucky, chief, or I'll be talking to the mayor and demanding your resignation! For all I know, I may be on the spot as the next victim of your Shadow!

“In a few days, I'm leaving town to attend a big political reception in Dadeville. The governor-elect will be there. So will every important personage in the State. To say nothing of the fact that there'll be a king's ransom of jewels on display.”

“You think,” the police chief began nervously, “that there may be some danger of an attempt to hold up the guests at the reception and snatch their jewelry and money?”

“Snatch, nothing!” Corcoran roared. “I told you there would be a king's ransom in jewelry. During the reception for the new governor, there'll be a private exhibition of the gem collection of the Duchess of Limeford. Her father is giving the reception.”

There was a murmur at the news. Cranston looked astonished. Like Corcoran, he had been invited to the reception. But Cranston hadn't known until now that the famous Limeford gems would be on display.

The Duchess of Limeford was Marjorie Gatlin, daughter of the man at whose home the reception for the governor would take place. The jewels had been brought from England for safety during the war in Europe. After that one private display, they would be transported under guard to the theft-proof vaults of a bank in St. Louis.

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“I can't protect you, or anyone else, at Jacob Gatlin's home in Dadeville,” the Western City chief of police said. “It's out of my jurisdiction.”

For the first time since the conference had started, he looked relieved. But the smug smile faded from his lips, as Corcoran's retort.

“Arrest The Shadow before he tries a last million-dollar crime,” the politician rasped. “If you don't, I'll speak to the governor. I'll have you and the mayor tried on charges of incompetence. I'll kick you both out and reorganize the police department from top to bottom!”

“I've had enough of all this infernal crime! Besides, every moment that The Shadow remains at large, my own life may be in danger from that black-robed scoundrel!”

“Interesting, isn't it, that you should have mentioned the reception,” Cranston murmured. “I've been invited, too.”

“You have?” Peter Corcoran murmured.

“So have I,” Stuart said in a startled tone.

“And I also,” Martin Black cut in quietly. “That is, I haven't been officially invited. My niece, Alice, received the invitation. I'm going along with her as her escort. Odd, isn't it, how we all—”

“Very odd!” Corcoran rasped. “It looks like a set-up for more crime. I don't like it at all, gentlemen! It sounds exactly like—”

“The Shadow?” Cranston cut in smilingly. “Isn't that a bit farfetched? The Shadow may be an all-powerful crook, but he surely has nothing to do with the issuing of invitations to an exclusive social function. Unless The Shadow is working secretly with the Duchess of Limeford's social secretary.”

Stuart chuckled at so silly a notion. Even Martin Black looked faintly amused.

Nevertheless, the words of Corcoran had made a powerful impression on the police chief of Western City. He agreed to get in touch with the authorities at Dadeville and warn them of impending peril. He promised to send some of his best detectives to the reception, to act as unofficial observers and to provide additional help in the event of an emergency.

The conference ended on that final, hopeful note. Everyone present agreed that nothing more could be done.

LAMONT CRANSTON drove back to his hotel. As soon as he was alone in the privacy of his suite, he reached for the telephone. He murmured a number unlisted in any phone directory.

It was a number that was changed frequently, as occasion demanded. The crisp, faraway voice of The Shadow's contact man replied.

“Burbank speaking.”

To Burbank, a name was whispered by The Shadow: Miles Crofton. Miles Crofton was a skilled airplane pilot, and an agent of The Shadow.

Burbank repeated the orders concerning Crofton. When The Shadow hung up, he knew that within an hour a

fast plane would wing its swift way westward under cover of darkness. The plane would land at a small airport on the outskirts of St. Louis. It would be available for action either at Western City or at Dadeville.

The Shadow intended to take the offensive. He was convinced that a specially-built vehicle of tremendous speed had been used to transfer the stolen gold from the limited. If the supercriminal who had robbed the train was planning a further exploit at Dadeville, the speed car would undoubtedly be brought into use again.

This time, The Shadow intended to match speed for speed, power for power!

CHAPTER XIII. MEN AT WORK.

THE road was quite dark. It was well-paved, but rather narrow. The three-lane State highway which carried most of the through traffic was ten miles farther to the east.

But this narrow road had one advantage which the State highway lacked. It afforded a straight, easy route to the town of Dadeville.

At Dadeville, an important reception was scheduled for the evening at the home of Jacob Gatlin, whose daughter was the Duchess of Limeford.

A contractor's truck was parked at the side of the road. It was a closed truck, and only the driver was visible. The driver was asleep on his front seat.

The truck's wheels were muddy, as if the driver had recently emerged from a side lane about fifty feet to the rear. The lane, however, seemed a queer place for any car to traverse, especially a big truck like this. The lane was narrow and muddy. Bushes hemmed it in on both sides. It wound deeply through what seemed to be swampy woodland.

There was a sign at the lane's entrance, to discourage drivers: "DANGER! PROCEED AT YOUR OWN RISK!"

Just outside the lane, a man was standing. He wore a coat with upturned collar. The brim was drawn low on his forehead. It was impossible to see more than a faint outline of his face in the darkness. He was standing with his back toward the parked contractor's truck. He was staring along the regular highway.

Lenses of powerful night glasses were glued to his eyes.

He was watching the branch of a tree in which another man was perched. The man in the tree could see over the brow of a hill and along the highway for a considerable distance. He was watching for a car of distinctive foreign make.

Presently, he saw the twin glow of headlights. He stiffened, and sharpened the focus of his glasses. They were powerful enough to pierce the glare of distant headlights and identify the shape of the approaching car.

The man in the tree grunted with excitement. His free hand swung backward. He was holding a flashlight equipped with a reflector such as photographers use. The shield made the light invisible from in front when the man in the tree flashed a swift triple signal. But the signal was clear enough to his pal on the ground.

Quickly, the man darted toward the muddy lane. In a trice, the danger sign was whisked from its position. In its place went another sign, which the man snatched from concealment beneath a bed of dry leaves.

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This new sign read: "DETOUR!" An arrow pointed straight into the lane!

While the man in the overcoat was doing this, he was also lifting his voice in a warning shout.

The "sleeping" truck driver sprang from his seat. The rear doors of the truck flew open. Half a dozen men dressed in overalls piled out. They carried picks and shovels.

Two of them reached into the truck and hauled out a pair of wooden stanchions. The stanchions were placed on either side of the road. A long timber was laid crosswise above them. From the timber, a red lantern dangled on a nail.

It was the normal obstruction used by laborers on a road project.

The laborers got busy with their tools. The men with the picks swung their tools high, but their actions were purely bluff. Not a single pick dug into the smooth expanse of the well-paved highway.

Already, the motorist was slowing down. A few hundred yards up the road, he had passed a sign that read: "SLOW DOWN! MEN AT WORK!"

He didn't know that the sign had been in position barely a moment. Nor did he know that the man who had planted the sign was at present hiding not more than ten feet away, protected from view by dense shrubbery.

The car proceeded slowly to the highway obstruction. The car halted and the chauffeur stuck his head out. He didn't like the delay. He liked it even less when the foreman told him he'd have to back up and take the detour. He began to curse.

Then his passenger appeared. It was Peter Corcoran. He was mad clean through.

"Why can't we pass? I'm in a hurry. My name is Peter Corcoran. I'm on my way to an important political reception at Dadeville. Tell those fools to shove that obstruction aside!"

The foreman explained why the request was impossible.

"You could pass here, all right," he said, "but the whole roadbed is ripped up farther down the line. You can't possibly make it to Dadeville—unless you back up a bit and take that detour. The lane will put you back on the highway in about five miles. You won't lose more than fifteen minutes."

Corcoran fumed. Then he glanced at his watch.

"All right. We'll take the detour."

THE big car backed up under the sullen guidance of the chauffeur. Its headlights swung toward the mouth of the lane. The detour didn't look very good, but the sign was encouraging. And there were signs of recent wheel marks that indicated other motorists had passed through.

In a few minutes, the lights of the car faded in the thick growth of trees.

Two minutes after the car faded from sight, the man in the big overcoat laughed harshly. He spat out an order.

With his words, all the phony activity on the road ceased. Picks and shovels were tossed back into the contractor's truck. The timber obstruction followed them out of sight. So did the red lantern.

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The rear door of the covered truck closed, hiding the presence of the fake laborers. The driver climbed to his seat.

The man in the overcoat examined the road where the “work” had been going on. There was absolutely nothing wrong with the road's surface. Not a pick had marred it. It would be impossible for anyone to guess that a “construction job” had been so recently under way there.

“O. K.!” the leader of the gang snarled. “Scram!”

As he turned the truck, the driver was careful to leave no marks of wheels on the soft shoulder of the highway. He had parked at the edge of the concrete, thus leaving no clue to the presence of his halted truck. He returned toward Western City, leaving the man in the overcoat alone in the darkness.

Presently, the man was joined by his pal who had been in the tree. The pal carried the “SLOW DOWN! MEN AT WORK!” sign. With a grim chuckle, he handed it to his boss. The later kept it, as he walked to the entrance of the lane.

Reaching up to a tree trunk, he yanked down the fake detour sign. In its place he put the original sign, which had been removed to fool Peter Corcoran and his chauffeur. The sign now said once more: “DANGER! PROCEED AT YOUR OWN RISK!”

“Couldn't be sweeter, boss!” the thug from the tree said.

“Shut up!” his boss snarled. “The thing isn't over yet. You've still got a job. And don't miss—or you're liable to miss your own life!”

“I can handle my end,” the thug muttered.

He sounded cocky, but there was an undertone of fear in his voice. He faded into the underbrush without another word. For a moment his hidden progress was faintly audible; then all sound vanished.

The man in the overcoat began to run along the dark concrete highway at a brisk trot. He carried with him the fake signs. Choosing a place where a slight peeling of bark had been made on a white birch, he vanished into the woods.

Soon, there was an enormous clamor behind that leafy screen. The sound was that of a tremendous engine being warmed up. It made a loud racket; but the sound was brief. It died soon to a humming pur.

Boughs alongside the road began to quiver. They lifted slowly. A dark clearing was disclosed. The clearing seemed to be empty. It was only when the car moved that it became visible.

The car was painted black. It was streamlined for tremendous speed. The only break in the streamline was the snoutlike projection of a steel turret that rose from the roof of the car midway between the hood and the rear bumper. Its tires were the fat balloon type used on airplane undercarriages.

It was the amazing high-speed vehicle that had carried away the looted gold shipment from the limited!

In a moment the black vehicle was on the highway. Inside it were the fake road signs that had been carried out of sight by the man in the overcoat. The same man was behind the wheel.

He was not a particularly strong man, but it didn't take strength to manipulate the steering mechanism of that

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heavy vehicle. The wheel was so geared that a child could have swung it.

The car began to speed in the direction of Dadeville. It went faster—faster! There was no clashing of gears, no roar of power. But inside the driver's cowled seat, the instrument panel was recording an amazing acceleration.

Sixty miles an hour. Seventy-five. One hundred— It rose to one hundred and twenty-five and stayed there. No quiver came from the chassis. The noise of the engine remained a steady hum.

The car raced into darkness down the straight road with such enormous speed, that it seemed as if it had abruptly vanished from the face of the earth.

MEANWHILE, the foreign-make car of Peter Corcoran was having an increasingly difficult time as it tried to get through that muddy “detour” through a desolate section of woods.

The clay beneath its wheels changed to sticky mud. The car rocked and pitched. In the back seat, Corcoran cursed at having ever allowed himself to be persuaded to take this short cut.

“Can't we turn around?” he yelled to his chauffeur. “This thing gets worse instead of better. Turn around and go back to the highway. We'll take a chance on the construction work.”

“I can't turn around. It's too narrow and too dangerous. I might run into a dark gully or tear a tire apart on a stump.”

“Then back up!”

“I will if you order it,” the chauffeur said. “But I wouldn't advise it, sir. Backing up in a hell-hole like this is as dangerous as trying to swing off the lane and turn around. I hate to suggest it, sir, but I think we're going to have to keep moving ahead.”

There was a rasp in his voice. It was impossible to tell whether he was jittery, or if that rasp was a snarl of satisfaction.

The ground sloped lower. The jerking beams of the headlights showed swampy patches where water gurgled alongside the lane. The lane was planked underneath like a corduroy road in a logging camp. The planks were all that kept the automobile from bogging down in the lane itself.

Suddenly, a wooden bridge appeared ahead. It spanned a stream that wound from the underbrush and passed like a sluggish black snake beneath the road. The bridge was well braced, and protected by railings. But Corcoran's chauffeur took no chances. He rumbled over it in low gear, driving with careful skill.

His skill was in vain. The car was in the middle of the bridge, when there was a ripping crash. The whole center section of the bridge gave way, as the crossed timbers underneath let loose. The car fell with a sickening bounce into the muddy bed of the stream.

It was not much of a drop, but the impact was enough to snap one of the car's axles. It slid sideways, with muddy water lapping over its running boards.

Corcoran was unhurt. But his chauffeur had a nasty cut on his forehead, where he had pitched forward against the windshield.

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He cursed, until Corcoran grasped him grimly by the arm. The look in Corcoran's eyes made the chauffeur forget his own discomfort. He had been long enough in Corcoran's employ to obey any order when he saw that savage flame in the politician's eyes.

“We can't stay here,” Corcoran snarled. “I've got to get to Dadeville, and get there in a hurry! If I don't, certain—events—may not happen as I wish them to. Get back to the highway and stop the first car that passes.”

“But—”

“Get out, blast you,” Corcoran roared, “or I'll strangle you! Do you hear?”

The chauffeur couldn't help hearing. Corcoran was yelling with rage.

Gingerly, the chauffeur stepped into the muddy stream. His boots made a sucking sound when he tore them out of the mud. The smell of the mud made him gag. But he managed to haul himself up the bank to the unbroken end of the bridge.

“Has that bridge been tampered with?” Corcoran snarled from the bogged car. “Can you see any signs that the supports might have been sawed partly through?”

The chauffeur looked for a long time. When he spoke, finally, he sounded hesitant.

“I... I don't think so, sir. It looks more like an accident to me. My guess is that these ancient, rotted timbers—”

“You're either a fool or a liar!” Corcoran snarled. “Get going along that lane! Here, take my gun! Fire it, if you succeed in stopping a car on the highway. I'll join you when I hear the shot.”

The chauffeur's face was pale, as he leaned to take the gun from his employer. His position above the car was an insecure one. If he swayed, the pressure of his finger on the trigger would send flame spurting into the furious face of the politician below him. It would be an unfortunate accident. No jury would ever—

But the chauffeur forced the idea of murder out of his mind. He pulled himself back to the smashed edge of the bridge and shoved the gun into his pocket, with a shaking hand.

He began to hurry back along the winding lane.

He slowed down as he went. He didn't know that Corcoran had suddenly left the mired car. But Corcoran had!

THE politician stepped into the muddy creek, waded to the bank and pulled himself up as his chauffeur had. But he didn't follow his employee.

He disappeared into the bushes beyond the lane. He made little noise.

It was impossible to tell whether he was searching for some clue to the mystery of the ruined bridge, or if he was merely exploring the darkness for some other reason.

It was a long time before he reappeared again.

Meanwhile, Corcoran's chauffeur was nearing the paved highway at the end of the winding lane. He could see a vague patch of gray, where the woods ended. But he never reached the exit.

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Hands reached suddenly from the leaves. They were gloved hands. They clamped with cruel and murderous strength on the victim's throat.

The chauffeur had no warning of attack. He had heard no sound of footsteps. One moment he was staring hopefully toward the end of the lane; the next, he was struggling for his life.

He was hauled backward into the dense shrubbery. The fierceness of the struggle made a terrible sound. But there was no yell for help. The gloved hands on the throat of the strangling man never once relaxed their grip.

The chauffeur's squirming body relaxed. He was unconscious.

His assailant heaved him upward and tossed him over one shoulder. For a short while, the noise of stumbling feet was audible. It faded gradually.

Silence filled the lonely lane.

CHAPTER XIV. GEMS OF DOOM.

THE mansion of Jacob Gatlin was situated in parklike grounds a few miles beyond the town of Dadeville. It was a remote spot for a man who was one of the nation's biggest millionaires, and the father of a British duchess, to set up his establishment.

But Jacob Gatlin had been born in Dadeville. After he had amassed his huge fortune from mining and oil operations, his wife had induced him to move to New York. Gatlin, however, soon tired of the East.

After his wife died, and his daughter married the Duke of Limeford, the homesick Jacob Gatlin found nothing left to interest him.

He moved to Dadeville and built this huge Tudor mansion on the outskirts of the little western town where he had been born.

There was noise and excitement at the entrance to the grounds. The reception was already under way, but cars were still arriving. Headlights cut the darkness. Horns honked at the crowd of townspeople who had come out to gape at the notables.

Police were on duty—more than the usual number. A rumor swept through the crowd that something ugly was in the wind. People whispered that a threat had been made against the life of Gatlin's titled daughter.

Actually, nothing of the sort had occurred.

Within the mansion, the reception was proceeding pleasantly in an atmosphere of music and gaiety. The Duchess of Limeford stood at the head of the reception line, at her father's side, greeting the distinguished guests.

A newly-elected governor of the State was present. So was every bigwig in politics and business. The men were in white ties and tails. The gowns of the ladies flashed with jewels.

There was an undercurrent of eagerness to their talk. Everyone knew that as soon as the last guest arrived, the world-famous collection of Limeford gems would be thrown open for display.

The gems were in a small chamber off the main ballroom. Its doors were closed. A couple of plainclothes

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cops were inside. The glances of the guests kept straying toward that locked door.

Lamont Cranston, however, seemed completely uninterested in the treasure chamber. He was watching the guests. Or rather, he was watching for the belated entrance of a man who had not yet appeared at the reception.

The missing guest was Peter Corcoran.

Martin Black was present, looking paler and more reticent than ever. He was chatting curtly with his niece. His lips scarcely moved. Occasionally, his gaze shifted slyly toward Cranston.

Alice Gunther was not aware of her uncle's tension. She looked breathlessly beautiful in her evening gown. People stared at them, knowing that her uncle was at liberty tonight only because he had been released on bail.

The death of Roger Dodd after the train robbery had seemingly proved Black's innocence of the bank outrage. But he was still the subject of whispers and conjectures.

Henry Stuart, his lawyer, was nearby. Stuart kept away from Black as much as he could, too tactful to draw attention to Black's unpleasant legal position by talking with him.

Lamont Cranston joined Stuart presently. While they were talking, a servant came up with glasses of champagne on a serving tray. Stuart took one. Cranston declined.

After a while he left Stuart, and drifted over to Black and his lovely niece. Alice Gunther chatted pleasantly, but Black was not very sociable. He spoke in curt monosyllables. He seemed anxious to get rid of the New York millionaire.

Cranston was glad, suddenly, that things were happening this way, for he soon found urgent reasons to get away from the unpleasant Mr. Black.

He noticed that Henry Stuart was leaving the ballroom.

The lawyer was edging toward the staircase that led to the floor above. He looked very queer. He seemed to be trying to escape observation from the rest of the guests in the crowded ballroom.

Cranston waited until the lawyer had vanished slowly up the stairs. Then he followed, ascending as casually as Stuart had. At the top of the stairs, he could see no sign of Stuart. He spoke to a wooden-faced footman on duty in the richly-carpeted corridor.

“Didn't Mr. Stuart come up here a moment ago? I'm anxious to discuss some personal matters with him. Do you happen to know where he went?”

“Yes, sir. He's in the rear guest room, sir. I believe he's lying down.”

Cranston murmured a surprised comment.

“I don't think Mr. Stuart is quite well, sir,” the servant added. “He said he was feeling a bit rocky. Said he wanted to rest for a moment, before the gem collection was put on public display.”

“Thank you. I won't disturb him till later.”

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CRANSTON retreated. But he kept his eye on the servant at the top of the staircase. Presently, the fellow was summoned away by a superior. The moment he passed out of sight, Cranston again went up the stairs. Because of the constant movements of the guests below his absence was not noted.

He went down the hallway to the room which the servant had pointed out. But he didn't knock on the door. Dropping to one knee, he applied his gaze to the keyhole.

Stuart was lying on a couch. His eyes were closed.

The Shadow studied the lawyer's face intently. He wondered suddenly if the man on the couch was really Henry Stuart!

It seemed an insane speculation. But the keynote of the bank robbery and the theft of gold from the limited had been disguise. Was an unknown genius of crime already at work in the mansion of Jacob Gatlin, impersonating Henry Stuart? Why this sudden desire for sleep on the part of the usually active lawyer?

Cranston tried the door softly. It wasn't locked. He tiptoed toward the couch. He suspected that another face might be concealed behind the familiar countenance of Henry Stuart! A plastic mask, prepared by an expert in disguises and cunningly tinted to natural flesh tones, was by no means an impossibility.

Gently, Cranston touched the lawyer's cheek. His suspicion was wrong. He touched normal flesh. At the light touch, the eyes of the lawyer opened. He sat up, looking frightened. Then he swayed.

"What's the matter?" Cranston whispered.

"I... I don't know. I feel terrible!"

Stuart staggered to his feet. Cranston supported him.

"I think it was that glass of wine I drank. Five minutes after I drank it I began to feel sleepy. I... I think I've been drugged!"

It was harder for him to talk. His words sounded muffled and faraway.

"Call someone, quick! Call the police! I'm afraid that something... criminal... may be—"

His words blurred. He collapsed like a straw dummy. Cranston lowered the drugged lawyer to the couch. He leaned over him to twitch up an eyelid.

He never completed the gesture. Behind him, a quick foot thudded on the rug. Something struck Lamont Cranston on the back of the skull with terrific force. He pitched forward, unconscious.

IN the little anteroom, where the gem collection of the Duchess of Limeford awaited public inspections, all was quiet and serene. The noise of the reception filtered dimly through the locked door.

The two cops who were guarding the collection were having a boring time. One of them yawned.

"This is a hell of a way to spend an evening!"

"Yeah. I'm getting hungry. What time do we eat?"

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“Probably not before everybody else lines their stomachs, including the servants! If you ask me—”

There was no opportunity for his partner to ask him anything. A man clapped his hands twice. At least, that was what it sounded like.

The two guards reeled. One of them pitched headlong to the floor. The other caught at the back of a chair. Then the chair and the man went down.

In the forehead of each guard was an ugly hole. Both had been shot through the head. They had died instantly at the sound of that double handclap.

The man who had caused the sound appeared with catlike stealth. He stood over the bodies of the slain guards, his face frozen with murderous alertness. He was listening for any sound of alarm from behind the locked door that gave access to the reception room.

Outside noise had drowned the silenced shots and the collapse of the two murdered guards. The killer smirked at the two long-barreled weapons in his gloved hands. They were single-shot pistols. Both were equipped with silencers.

In an instant, they were stowed neatly away in a leather bag which the killer dragged from a closet.

Lamont Cranston would have had no trouble recognizing the face of the smirking assassin. Nor would any of the distinguished guests in the reception room beyond the locked door.

The man was Peter Corcoran!

From his leather bag, he took a black silk mask. When Corcoran donned it, only the gleam of his eyes was visible. His tails and his white tie made the rest of his costume indistinguishable from any of the other guests.

He tiptoed to the window, unlocked and raised it. Into the room came more men. Half a dozen of them. All were masked, like their leader. Two of them carried Tommy-guns. The others had automatics. None said a word. They had been well-rehearsed.

Corcoran himself looted the priceless collection of gems that had been brought from England by the Duchess of Limeford. Every sparkling piece went into the leather bag. The bag snapped shut.

“Ready?”

There was a murmur of assent from the armed thugs.

“Make the rest of this quick! If anybody squawks, or moves an inch—shoot to kill! Watch for cops. There're about six of them planted here in evening clothes. You can't go wrong, because the cops are wearing white carnations to distinguish them from the guests.”

Corcoran chuckled behind his mask.

“Jacob Gatlin didn't want any heiresses making monkeys of themselves by dancing with dressed-up cops. It's a break for us.”

He unlocked the door. Suddenly, he flung it wide. The raiders burst into the ballroom.

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THEIR guns and masked faces paralyzed everyone for an instant. Then a woman screamed. Her scream was the signal for death.

The masked thugs didn't waste a shot.

Every bullet found a victim. A half-dozen men in evening clothes crumpled to the floor before they could clutch at hidden holsters. Each of them wore a white carnation. The mob had picked off the police at the first blast.

The rest of the victims were cowed by a snarling order from the masked leader of the mob.

“Don't anyone move an inch! We've just killed six cops to show we mean business tonight! We'll kill sixty, if we have to! Hands up high! Faces to the wall—everybody!”

His orders were complied with. The two thugs with the Tommy-guns stayed where they were. The other mobsters darted toward the paralyzed victims. Necklaces were snatched. Bracelets and rings were grabbed. Watches, money—everything that could be easily stolen by experienced stickup artists, was tossed backward to the floor, to be picked up by the masked leader.

The loot went into the leather bag, to join the fabulous gems of the Duchess of Limeford.

A woman screamed as a priceless brooch was torn from her dress. It was snatched so brutally, that the thin evening gown was ripped apart. Her scream was her death warrant. A pistol roared. The woman dropped to the floor, a bullet in her spine.

This devilish murder of a helpless woman aroused the male victims to a frenzy of rage. Men whirled from the wall, where they had been standing stiffly with arms upraised. Some of them sprang toward the gunmen. Others leaped at the masked leader with the bag of loot.

They were met by a spray of lead. Tommy-guns had gone into action. Men pitched to the floor, dead, like soldiers cut down in a desperate frontal attack.

Jacob Gatlin and his daughter were wounded. The governor-elect of the State pitched to his knees, his mouth dripping blood. The gunmen backed up, snarling.

Then a bold thing happened. As the leader's head turned to scan the position of his mob, a man sprang forward with clutching hands. He caught hold of the leader's black silk mask. The mask was torn loose.

By the action, the identity of Peter Corcoran was exposed to everyone in the room!

The man who had unmasked Corcoran paid for his daring with his life. Having killed him, Corcoran backed away with his leather bag. He faded toward the jewel room where he had killed the two guards.

His partners tried to cover his retreat. But they found themselves facing a tough situation. Cops on duty outside had heard the snarl of gunfire. They poured into the house from the grounds. Taking cover wherever they could find it, the police began a vicious counterattack on the trapped thugs.

LAMONT CRANSTON recovered consciousness in the room upstairs to hear the sound of gunfire in his dazed ears.

For an instant, he couldn't remember what had happened. Then the ache in his skull and the sight of Henry

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Stuart staggering dazedly to his feet from the couch jogged Cranston's memory.

There was a faint, pungent smell in the air. On the floor, where Cranston had lain unconscious after he had been struck on the skull from behind, was something that made his eyes narrow.

There were a few tiny fragments of wafer-thin glass.

But Cranston had no time to ponder on the meaning of the pungent odor in the air or the glass on the floor. He knew from the roar of pistols below that death was lashing out at the guests in the ballroom.

He staggered to the door. The door was locked and the key missing. Stuart moaned. He was still sluggish. His bulging eyes glaring.

Cranston whipped out a gun. He fired at the lock, smashing it. A stern shout at Stuart roused the dazed lawyer. He added the strength of his shoulder to Cranston's. The weakened door burst open.

Quickly, Cranston pulled out another gun and shoved it into Stuart's hand. With his own gun ready for action, he raced to the head of the staircase.

He was just in time to witness the arrival of police from the grounds. A battle was under way between snarling thugs and the law. The edge was with the criminals. Their two Tommy-guns outpowered anything the cops could offer in reply.

Cranston and Stuart changed that situation in a flash. Their heavy .45 automatics began to speak from the top of the stairs. The crooks were taken by surprise. They whirled to meet this rear attack—and the cops dived forward.

Thugs began to crumple. One of the mobsters with a Tommy-gun pitched in a dead heap.

Cranston's gun ended any hope of a flight of the killers up the staircase. At his side, Henry Stuart matched Cranston's bravery. He was still wobbly on his feet, but whenever his automatic blasted, a criminal slumped.

In a few minutes, the battle was over.

Men ran to summon ambulances. Jacob Gatlin and his daughter were not badly wounded, but the governor-elect was desperately hurt. A bullet had drilled through his lungs. Blood dripped from his gasping mouth as he coughed.

Police hunted madly through the house for some trace of the vanished Peter Corcoran. But Corcoran was gone! He had made the most of the confusion that followed his cold-blooded murder of the man who had unmasked him.

The bag of loot had vanished with him. The entire collection of gems that belonged to the Duchess of Limeford had been successfully snatched!

At the height of the confusion, the front door of the mansion opened. A man stared silently for an instant at a ballroom that looked like a battlefield. He was breathing heavily.

But his voice was clear and distinct. It rasped like metal.

“What in the world has happened here? A riot?”

The man who stared so calmly from the front doorway was Peter Corcoran!

CHAPTER XV. SKY RAIDER.

CORCORAN'S face was streaked with dirt. Mud caked his shoes and stained his clothing. But his eyes were calm. A faint smile twisted his lips.

Men sprang toward him, the chief of the Dadeville police in the lead. He grabbed Corcoran fiercely by the arm, said:

“Do you think you can bluff your way out of murder and theft?”

“Get your stupid hands off me, you fool!”

In spite of his rage, the chief of police quailed. Peter Corcoran was the biggest political figure in the State. He had made and broken governors and senators. He seemed so sure of himself, that the chief became uneasy.

“You've accused me of murder and theft,” Corcoran sneered. “Can you prove it?”

The chief nodded grimly. He recounted everything that had happened in the mansion since the swift appearance of the masked raiders. He described the ripping of the mask from Corcoran's face, and the latter's successful flight with the Limeford jewels.

Corcoran barked with harsh laughter.

“I thought so! A frame-up! Somebody impersonated me! I'm not guilty, because I wasn't here. Not until I stepped through that front door, a moment ago. I've got a perfect alibi!”

He told of his adventure in a muddy lane miles away from Dadeville. With a sardonic grin, he glanced at the crusted mud on his evening clothes.

“How do you suppose I got this way, you fool? Do you think I go around wallowing in pigsties?”

“I don't suppose anything,” the chief replied. He was nettled by the politician's contempt. “I intend to check on the facts.”

He picked up a telephone, and was connected with the State police headquarters not far from Western City.

He talked at some length, then there was a long wait. Finally, the man at the other end of the wire returned. The chief listened tensely to what was said. When he hung up, he was tremendously excited.

He went back to where Corcoran waited sneeringly.

“You damned liar!” he rasped.

Corcoran tried to fling himself at the chief of police. The cops who stood on either side of him discouraged that.

The police chief reported what he had learned. It was a complete smash-up of Corcoran's alibi.

“The State highway patrol has examined the spot where you claim you were delayed. There is no evidence

that a construction gang was working at that point. You claim they were digging with picks and shovels. The concrete roadbed hasn't been touched! Furthermore, no repair crew was on duty tonight at any point along the highway. Traffic was never interrupted!"

Corcoran cursed. The chief of police cut him short.

"You lied about the sign at the head of the lane. It is not marked Detour. It's plainly marked: 'Danger! Proceed At Your Own Risk'! You had no excuse to go up that lane!"

Corcoran's teeth showed, as he said, "You found no smashed bridge and no mired car, I suppose?"

"They found the car, all right. But the testimony of the State police nails that lie about your disappearing chauffeur. He never drove that car into the lane! Some other henchman of yours did the job.

"You killed your real chauffeur to shut his mouth. We found his body—or rather, the State patrol did—at a spot miles away from where you claim he disappeared. Do you care to know where we did find his body?"

"I don't give a damn where—"

"Less than a mile from this mansion!"

"But—"

"Arrest this man!" the chief snarled. He had forgotten his awe of the politician.

Cops sprang at Corcoran and grabbed him. There was a fierce struggle. Guests at the reception stared in terrified wonder.

Lamont Cranston was not one of the staring spectators. The moment he had heard Corcoran's sneering alibi, Cranston had faded quietly. No one noticed his departure. He vanished along a dim corridor.

That was the end of Lamont Cranston.

IT was The Shadow who appeared presently at the doorway of a small sitting room. He was garbed in a black cloak. Black gloves shielded his hands. The brim of a slouch hat shaded the gleam of his eyes. He picked up a telephone.

The Shadow was ready to make his final move!

That move would, in turn, force a move on the part of a master criminal. The Shadow intended to frighten his unknown foe into headlong flight.

A calm voice on the wire replied to The Shadow's whispered call.

"Burbank speaking."

To Burbank, brief orders were given. Those orders would send a swift airplane winging upward into the black sky from a nearby airport. The plane would be piloted by Miles Crofton, agent of The Shadow.

Crofton knew exactly where to come. Flat pasture land not far from the mansion of Jacob Gatlin had been surveyed for just such a midnight emergency.

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The Shadow's laughter was soft, as he hung up; then it died in his throat. Behind him he heard a gasp. Whirling, he saw one of the house servants. The man had entered the room on a routine errand. He found himself facing—The Shadow!

That servant had courage. He sprang to the attack. With the move, he opened his mouth to emit a yell of warning to the police in the front of the house.

The scream was never uttered. A gloved hand caught the man by the throat. A fist thudded against his jaw. For an instant, the servant jerked rigid. Then he slid in an inert heap to the floor.

The Shadow fled soundlessly toward a rear staircase.

When he reappeared, he was on the second floor. He emerged on a small balcony, where the musicians had been stationed. The balcony overlooked the roily ballroom. The Shadow could see police and guests milling around the captive figure of Peter Corcoran. There were steel cuffs on Corcoran's wrists. He was snarling with rage.

The Shadow laughed!

His mirth cut like a knife through the confusion below. Every eye lifted toward the small balcony. They saw a black-robed figure, with eyes like flame.

Twin automatics were in The Shadow's gloved hands. The guns discouraged any attempt of startled police to grab for weapons. The voice of The Shadow uttered a single word:

“Attention!”

Through a hush of terror, he spoke. He made a startling statement. He declared that Peter Corcoran was innocent!

There were shouts of incredulity. The Shadow's clear voice silenced the interruption.

He asserted that he not only knew Corcoran was innocent—but that he knew also the identity of the real criminal, who had impersonated Corcoran and stolen the Limeford jewels!

“I know him!” the stern voice from the balcony rasped. “I shall now point him out!”

A GLOVED finger began to move. People below quailed as it seemed to point in their direction. At one side of the room, Henry Stuart was frozen with horror. His gaze was fastened on the pale face of Martin Black.

Black had moved away from his pretty niece. He was crouched against the wall, opposite Stuart.

Before the finger of The Shadow could halt, to indicate the guilty man, every light in the huge ballroom suddenly went out!

In the darkness, there were oaths and screams. There were thuds, as men tangled together and fists swung. Then one sound topped all the others. Someone unseen was fleeing out the darkened front door of the mansion!

Bullets from the invisible fugitive effectively halted pursuit.

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A dark figure sped across the grounds outside. A man vaulted a low stone wall. He vanished into shrubbery across a narrow road.

In an instant, a roar blasted the night. The roar changed to a steady hum of power. Bushes ripped aside. A car whirled into view, turning on the road as it appeared.

It was the black, turreted automobile in which the highjacked gold from the limited had been carried away.

The car raced up the narrow road with terrific speed. The road was a connecting link that joined a three-lane highway a few miles past the brow of an intervening hill. The driver had been over this route many times in a smaller car, by way of preparation. He drove without lights.

Meanwhile, The Shadow was not idle. A split-second after the lights went out, he was no longer on the musician's balcony. He raced to the back of the mansion, vanished through a rear window. But he didn't run through the grounds in the same direction taken by the fleeing criminal.

When The Shadow vaulted a stone wall, he was on the opposite side on the grounds. Five minutes later, he emerged on smooth pasture land. The field was well screened by a border planting of shaggy oaks. The Shadow flashed an electric torch three times. There was no reply from the darkness.

The field was empty!

With a piercing gaze, The Shadow lifted his face to the dark sky. A faint whining was audible. It grew into the roar of an airplane shrieking down for a quick landing.

The moment the ship landed, The Shadow was alongside. He leaped with frenzied haste into the cockpit.

No words were spoken. Miles Crofton knew exactly what to do. The ship raced along the dark turf and bounced upward into the air. It skimmed above the line of black oaks, missing their topmost branches by inches. Then it headed across the black sky in the direction of the broad highway beyond the hill.

Headphones were clamped over The Shadow's ears. The phones were attached to a compact high-powered radio set. The radio frequency was tuned to the wave length of the State police broadcast station. The Shadow listened.

Words of alarm were crackling through the ether. The criminal's amazing car had been seen! Its passing along the highway was marked by death and destruction. Heavily armored, it seemed to be easily controlled, also.

A few cars had been unable to get out of its way. These, the armored car had plowed into at terrific speed. Smaller vehicles had been hurled into ruin. Motorists lay dead and mangled.

The police radio continued to spurt words of warning.

Hasty barricades had been thrown up at crossroads to halt the fugitive. They had been smashed aside like straws. The armored car couldn't be stopped. A machine gun from its open turret sprayed death against any human being who dared to appear in its cometlike path.

The gun was handled by a thug who knew how to shoot. Evidently, the master criminal had foreseen an emergency such as this. He had left one of his gang with the car, to help clear the way to freedom with spraying lead.

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But a master criminal had not calculated on attack from the air. Nor had he thought of airplane speed!

THE big ship guided by Miles Crofton roared through the night. It had dropped to a low altitude. The road below raced backward at terrific speed. This plane could match every ounce of power the racing auto had!

Presently, Crofton saw the armored vehicle. The plane swooped to the attack like a hawk. The thug in the car's turret swung up his machine gun to meet the new threat. He was a dangerous foe. A quick storm of bullets forced the plane to veer upward with a shriek like a hurricane.

But it returned swiftly. The Shadow knew how to handle a rapid-firing weapon, too! He returned burst for burst. The advantage was now with the airplane, for it could maneuver in more directions than could the car.

Lead whistled toward the gunner in the car's turret. It snarled like the drumming of a hailstorm on a tin roof. The gunner swayed, dropped his trigger hold. For an instant, he lay half across the circular lip of the turret. Then his body slipped like a broken, crimson-smearred doll inside the steel opening.

The Shadow sent a burst of bullets against the cowled seat where the masked driver was crouched. It did no good. The car was too strongly armored.

The driver never slackened his mad speed. He had the road all to himself. The warning of the police radio alarm had whisked every other vehicle off the highway. The only impediments to freedom, except for the black shape of the pursuing airplane, were scattered groups of local police, who fired vainly from rifles as the chase roared past them.

At The Shadow's touch on Crofton's arm, the plane began to creep slowly ahead of the speeding car. The Shadow shelled the road in front of the fleeing car with grenades.

Their bursting explosions made small craters in the concrete. The car swerved past the holes with incredible skill. But no skill could match the threat of those exploding bombs. The car swerved too far to the left. The driver tried to recover—and failed!

With a tremendous crash, the heavy car skidded from the road.

It struck a drainage ditch and turned over. Then the plane lost sight of it, as powerful motors urged the ship on.

A swift banking turn brought the plane back. Miles Crofton cut the motors. The ship spiraled down out of the black sky. Its wheels touched the bumpy surface of a grassy field. It shuddered to a jarring halt.

Miles Crofton raced across the field after The Shadow. They reached the drainage ditch where the speed car had crashed. A bleeding figure had crawled from the car. There was a gun in his gloved hand. But the fugitive was badly hurt. The gun fell from limp fingers.

The Shadow leaned over to tear the mask from the master criminal.

“We've caught him,” Miles Crofton exulted. “Martin Black!”

“No! Not Black.” The Shadow's voice was like a murmur of doom. “Henry Stuart!”

His prediction was verified when the mask was ripped away. The face of the noted lawyer glared up at them!

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Swiftly, The Shadow examined a thin, barely noticeable scratch near the angle of Stuart's jaw. The scratch had not been caused by the auto wreck. It had been present on Stuart's face when he had apparently recovered consciousness in an upstairs room of Gatlin's mansion, with Lamont Cranston.

The Shadow knew what had caused that scratch. It had come from the fingernails of the man who had ripped the mask from "Peter Corcoran."

"Corcoran" had actually been Henry Stuart in disguise!

OTHER things had warned The Shadow of the amazing truth. The queer, pungent smell in the air of that upstairs room had been the faint reek of ammonia. The bits of powdered glass on the rug had confirmed this deduction.

Stuart had merely pretended to faint after his glass of champagne. A hidden henchman had knocked out The Shadow before he could lift one of Stuarts' eyelids and discover that the lawyer had not been drugged. Stuart had then donned the Corcoran disguise.

He sneaked downstairs by a secret stairway giving entrance to the jewel room, and committed the robbery. The snatch of the mask from his face had been prearranged with a confederate. After having been "exposed" as Corcoran, Stuart killed his trusting confederate and fled under cover of gunfire.

He had raced upstairs to where Cranston lay and revived him with a whiff of ammonia from a glass capsule. He pretended to recover his own senses at the same instant. Stuart was in a marvelous spot, pretending to shoot down his own gang at the side of The Shadow!

But all Stuart's cleverness was finished now. He had been ruined by a small scratch, the reek of ammonia and a few bits of powdered glass on a rug!

The Shadow knew that the "Martin Black" who had held up the bank, the "Roger Dodd" who had looted a speeding train—both were Stuart, profiting from his amazing knowledge of disguise! Stuart had also a perfect alibi in his speed car.

It enabled him to be three hundred miles away from the bank robbery when Black had telephoned for his aid as a lawyer!

He was also far from Newtown when the police telephoned him, to report the murder of Dodd at the hotel.

But Corcoran and Dodd and Black were not completely innocent. Earlier crimes had placed them at the mercy of the vengeful lawyer.

With a ghastly chuckle, Stuart confessed to The Shadow. The four men had been linked in many dishonest rackets. That was how they had amassed their money. But they had quarreled.

Stuart, their leader, had been forced to take a smaller cut on the graft. He agreed—and bided his time.

The three crime exploits were his grim answer to his former cronies. Each crime netted Stuart a million-dollar profit. Each crime pinned the blame on a man whom Stuart hated. His victims were afraid to talk. They had no proof. They knew nothing of Stuart's new speed car.

In the wrecked car The Shadow found the leather bag containing the Limeford jewels. He also found a map in the wounded man's wallet. It showed the location of an underground garage, where the speed ear was kept

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when it was not being used along deserted midnight highways.

With a snarl, Stuart confessed that the gold from the limited and the bonds from the bank were hidden in a steel vault in the underground garage.

“No use trying to kid you,” he jeered from pale lips, “The jig is up and I know it!”

He writhed suddenly; his eyes closed. But he was not dead. There was a slim chance that Henry Stuart might yet live to pay the penalty in the electric chair.

The Shadow straightened suddenly. Through the darkness came the distant wail of police sirens! The law was on its way to claim a master criminal who had defied The Shadow, and failed.

The Shadow didn't flee at the sound of those approaching sirens. He took his time to do something quite necessary.

When he bent finally over the unconscious criminal, he dropped a sheet of paper. On it, in the bold handwriting of The Shadow, was a complete summary of Stuart's crime. It explained the link that had bound Stuart earlier to his crooked graft partners, Black and Dodd and Corcoran.

When police cars shrieked to a halt, they found only the limp figures of Stuart and his dead machine-gunner.

High in the night sky, a plane was winging away. It was impossible to see the ship. Police eyes glared aloft, vainly.

Suddenly, there was a lull in the sound of the motor. In the brief silence, police looked at one another with awe. They couldn't swear to it, but all of them were sure they heard a faint, eerie whisper from the sky.

The triumphant laughter of The Shadow!

THE END.